

Family Root and Intrigues

As Told by

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun OON



Compiled By: Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun

September 16, 2024

A Book of The Root and Times of
Senator M. A. E. Onunkun OON
from Oral Transmission



Dedication

To our dear father,

Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON

And our dear brother,

Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun, MBBS

Of blessed memory.

Driving along in Ilutitun one bright, dry day in the 1990s, I saw my uncle, High Chief John Ọ̀lẹ̀julaún Onunkun, aka “Baba Jòǹnú”. So, I stopped and got out of the car to greet him. He inquired: “Bòǹyí kẹ?” With a slight chuckle, I replied: “Bòǹyí gha, Baba”. Baba Jòǹnú laughed, too. To Baba Jòǹnú, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was always “Bòǹyí” (lingo for “Boy”). As I drove off, bemused, I wondered what Baba Jòǹnú would call me, as he still saw my father as “Bòǹyí”. I smiled and zoomed off.

— *Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun*

Disclaimer

This is a compilation based primarily on the underlisted interviews of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun over a 12-year period.

- Series of video interviews conducted by Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun and Mr Dipo Jemirifo in 2012
- Series of video interviews conducted by Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun in 2014
- Series of telephone interviews conducted by Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun in 2024

The interviews focused on the Onunkun family history, which had been orally transmitted down through the generations to Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, finally documented here for posterity.

This work, intended as a family genealogical record, is further enhanced by the experiences and recollections of some of the children of Senator Michael Atijosan

Emmanuel Onunkun interviewed.

Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was a trusted authority, well versed in these matters, and the sources we interviewed are trusted members of the community. We tried to verify the information published in this book to the extent possible.

Nevertheless, we provide no guarantees for the accuracy of the information transmitted to us orally or otherwise by the different sources we used.

This work does not indicate that the Compiler believes in the legends and mysterious aspects of the historical accounts passed down to us.

The Compiler and people interviewed here severally and jointly accept no responsibility or liability of any kind for use of the information in this book.

ORIKI ÒKÚNNÚHÌ ... LÚMÙRÈ (EULOGY)

ỌMA LÚMÙRÈ ỌPỌN

ỌMA ẸKỌN

ỌMA ẸKỌN TÍ Ò JOLÓKO

ỌMA ÒGBÓJÚ ẸKỌN ÌYÉ RIN MÁJÚ

ỌMA ẸKỌN

ỌMA LÚMÙRÈ ÌYÉ LÙ AGOGO UDE

ỌTỌN ỌMA LÚMÙRÈ ÌYÉ LÙ AGOGO UDE

ỌNOJÀ ÌYÉ LÒ AŞỌ FUNFUN GHENE-GHENE

ỌNE ÌYÉ GBÉ ÀGBÁN LÉRÍ JÓ

ỌTỌN LÚMÙRÈ ÌYÉ E JE IYÁN ÀNÁ

ỌMA ẸKỌN ABOJÚ YÀÁN-YÀÁN

ỌMA MÁJÙWÀ L'ÁPÁRÍ

ỌMA JÀGBÒLÉGÚN

ỌMA JÍBÚLÙ ÀGBÀ YÈLÚ ÌYÉ PA ẸYE ỌKÈN TỌRE

ỌMA ÈHÌMỌNỌRÈN

ỌMA ÒKÚNNÚHÌ

ỌMA REBÙJÀ GBÚÀ AKATA GBÚNÁLÉRÍ

Ó F'ÀÌJÍWÈN GBÓGHÓ ORÍ HAN

ỌMA ỌBÁYÀNMUWÀ ẸLÉYÀN MEJÌ

OLÍDÌ YÉ GHÀN ỌMA

Table 1: Onunkun's Paternal Oriki: With Diacritics

ORIKI JOOLA / NENUWA N'ODE (EULOGY)

ỌMỌ JÓÒLÁ, ÒÒŞÀ UGBÒ
ÒÒŞÀ UGBÒ LÉGHE
ỌMA GÚNNUGÚN, ABORÍ KOYÉ
ỌMA AMÙKÀLÀ NÙRÓGÓ NÍDÍ
ỌMA LÓKÀ AFÈRÌ GWỌGWỌ SORÒ
ÈRÌ GWỌGWỌ YÍ Ẹ MÚ SORÒ NỌKÁ, Ẹ MÚ GHÀN ỌNẸ
ỌMA OLÚWẸN RÙWẸN, ÒGBÒRÌ Ẹ RÙWẸN OGÚNGÚN
ỌMA AGBÚGBÈGBÈ LÉYÌN JÓ
ỌMA LÍHÀ ÀSO, ÀSO GBÓGÌDÌ
ỌMA OLÚSU ÀYÍTÌ 'GI
ỌMA OLÚSU ÀBÙSÉ ỌBẸ
ỌBẸ KÀN Y'Ó GHA N'ÚLÍ Ó D'ÒBÌBỌ
ỌMA ÈJÌJÀ JÀ DÍ ẸRUN ỌNÀ ỌGBÀ, Ẹ JẸ JA R'ÀYÈ LA MÚ'ŞU
ỌMA OLÓKO YÍ ÀTÍGHÒRO Ẹ TÍ RÁHÙN
ỌMA AMÁNÁ P'EHÌ, Ó TÁN N'ÉNÍ,
ỌMA SÈNỌGHỌ, ÀKỌBÍ JÓÒLÁ
ÒGÈ ỌMA ỌBA, ỌMA ỌBA Y'É GBẸDỌ DÁ YÀRÁ SÍ
ỌMA AYÉLÉMI FÁPẸTÚ, AGBÓWỌ OKÙN L'ÓBÌRẸN, ỌMA NÈNÚWÀ N'ÒDÈ
ỌMA OLÓGHÓ T'ỌPÁ ÒYÍNBO
ỌNÀ ÒŞÓÒRÓ ỌJÀ UFÈ, NÚBÒYÍ Ẹ TÍ MÚ OMIDAN GWẸẸRẸ ŞELÉ
JẸ GBẸDỌ MÚ TI WA PÀROKÒ GHÚN ỌLẸ
Ó D'ÒGÈ MÙÈN, IBA L'ỌMA LA JÍJÓ ỌMA

Table 2: Onunkun's Maternal Oriki: With Diacritics

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Mr Emmanuel Àdùnbí Olówógboyè, you have been a great help in helping us obtain the Òkúnnúhì / Lúmùrè family eulogy. For this, we are immensely grateful. We also thank Chief Fredrick Sátidé Onunkun, aka Baba Love, for his input in clarifying the story of the woman—his mother—who died at Oko Líhà but woke up many hours later, while being carried to Ilutitun for burial. She amazingly went on to live more than 30 years before she eventually died. And, of course, we thank Messrs Sojí Olálùdé, Ìbùkún Onukun and Olórunjùnḡ Lincoln Onukun for their input in helping us clarify some of the names that came up in the course of the documentation of this oral family history passed down by our father, and his fathers before him.

Dr Major Morèniké Ọmóyíwọlá Aláká (Nee Onunkun) did the important and tedious work of linking the Compiler of this Onunkun Family historical piece with people on the ground, who could verify some of the accounts in the book. You were also the anchor through whom we obtained both the paternal and maternal family eulogies of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun in both text and audio formats, so that we are able to apply diacritics in order to bring the words to life. Thank you, Sis, for your tireless efforts

towards completing this project that was very close to our dear father's heart.

We also acknowledge the input of Dr Olúbùnmi Peter Onunkun for writing the Preface and for sharing one of his cherished memories of our father's soft sides—his love for his children. Dr Olúbùnmi Peter Onunkun's eagle eyes in spotting and correcting some of the typographical errors in this book during his review is also much appreciated.

For his experiences, for example, while Managing our father's Piggery farm in the early 1970s, and for sharing his recollections of his early years with our father, we thank our big brother, Mr Sylvester Ẹniafẹ Fọlórúnşọ Onunkun.

I thank my dear wife, Margaret Olúfúnkẹ Onunkun, for her encouragement and support, and for gladly bearing with me as I 'stole' some family time to finish this compilation that was close to the heart of her beloved father-in-law.

To others, like Dr Ìfẹ Ìşéyẹmí, who kindly revised the first draft of this book, we say: "Thank you". And, we thank Mr Adémólá Victor Ọwátẹ for helping to clarify some Ìkálẹ expressions.

To be sure, our greatest thanks go to our Father in the heavens, Jehovah, who is the source of our very lives and every good and perfect gift bestowed upon us. We also posthumously thank our earthly father, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON, for granting us the time to be interviewed about our family background and his life history, and for having been a positive driving force in our lives.

Preface

THIS BOOK IS NOT FOR SALE. But we will appreciate and acknowledge voluntary donations to:

ONUNKUN MEMORIAL FOUNDATION¹

An Education Charity in Remembrance of:

Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON.

Electronic copy of this book is also freely downloadable from:

<http://www.maeonunkun.com/>

This piece of work tracks the genealogical root of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON, as handed down orally by him, all the way back to one of the primary progenitors of the Òṣòrò people, namely Jàgbòlégún, son of the Lúmùrè of Àyèká by an Ìkòyà princess, named Mábùlé. We begin with a brief history of ‘the making of the Ìkálè people’, as primarily descended from Benin, the paramount king, the Àbòdì, being a son of Ọba Esigie of Benin. This work also touches on other roots of Ìkálè people, such as Ilé-Ifè, Àkókó, etc. But, the primary focus of this work is on how the Òṣòrò people emerged from this tapestry of peoples who, at different times, came to occupy the area in the south-southwestern part of Nigeria known today as Ìkálè land, and how Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun’s ancestry is

⁰(1). **Bank Name: UBA;**
Account Name: SENATOR M. A. E. ONUNKUN FAMILY;
Account Number: 2339533602.

connected to this history.

While this work does not in any way cover the history of the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, in our interviews of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, he touched on some interesting aspects of the history of Yorùbá people, including the fact that the current dynasty in Benin descended from a Yorùbá prince, Òrànmiyàn, and more. Aside from the history, we record some of the information we gleaned about the geography of Nigeria, as determined at the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885. How many of us had been troubled by the task of having to draw the map of Nigeria with its squiggly boundaries in school! We learned the reason the map is the way it is in the course of our interview, which we document here.

This record of the generations old oral history handed down to us by Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON reveals the complicated intrigues woven decades, even centuries, ago in the tussles for power by different members of the same extended family. It touches on the self-interest and envy of the ancient Ìkòyà people toward the sons of Mábùlé; the pernicious hostility of the ancient people of Ọlòtò to the dispossessed, roving sons of Mábùlé and their caravan; the cynical hatred of Jíbùlù by his older half-brother, Monógbè—the 2nd Rebùjà of Òṣóòró—born out of envy of the younger man’s prosperity, culminating in a dramatic curse and unending disputes over succession to the Rebùjà throne; the intrigues concocted by Lúbókùn, Négwó, and others. This book reveals much about the root of the Onunkun family in particular, and the Òṣóòró people in general.

In the early years of the 20th century, amidst significant political strife and

manipulation, Mr. Babáyemí emerged as a staunch advocate for the Anglican Church's vision of unity and strength. His support for the initiative of Rebùjà Ikúyìnminù, aimed at consolidating scattered Òṣòóró family villages into a bigger town that would be strong enough to resist the oppressive regime of Négwó, was instrumental to shaping the town of Ìlútitun and the broader community dynamics of the time. In the complex narrative of the life and times of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, this account explores a tumultuous period marked by familial strife and village conflicts. Through personal tragedies and accusations of witchcraft, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's journey reflects broader themes of power tussles and societal change during the early years of the 20th century in Nigeria.

This biography describes the period following the turbulent reign of Négwó, especially as the Baálè, the machinations of Baálè to Ọlójà conversions, following the 1925 'Order in Council' from The London Office, and his eventual death and the subsequent appointment of Cornelius Adéoyè as the Rebùjà of Òṣòóró. This period was characterised by major challenges and controversies that fired up the smouldering wick of disputes over succession and highlighted the complex interaction among tradition, politics and personal fortune/misfortune in the history of the Òṣòóró kingdom.

This biography digs out the intricate and historical Onunkun family tree and reveals the complexities and dynamics that shaped the lineage of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun. By focusing on important figures such as Àdúwò, Òkúnnúhì and Ọbámúwàhàn, this biography uncovers the interconnecting of tradition, inheritance and personal choices that have profoundly influenced the family's evolution. The biography also explores the intricate and often tumultuous

personal life of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, whose relationships and marriages portray the complexities of familial and social dynamics in traditional polygamous settings. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun’s marriage to Jọjọ, a petite divorcee who had a daughter from a previous marriage, and his subsequent marriages to several other women, reflect a system of cultural and personal intersections. The biography also reveals the interconnectedness of his family with influential local figures, including the lineage of his second wife from the Nẹnuwà of Odè-Omi, the oddity of his first three wives being related, and the impact of his marriages on his own progeny.

The biography then shifts focus to the early life of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, affectionately tagged “The Boy Mike”, whose upbringing in a cohesive agrarian community shaped his future. His mother Ayelemi’s resilience and her eventual acceptance of the necessity of formal education for her son was a significant landmark that facilitated, not only the personal evolution of The Boy Mike, but also highlighted the broader socio-cultural transitions of the time, as he embarked on an educational journey that contrasted sharply with the conventional agrarian lifestyle of his early years.

This narrative traces the early years of The Boy Mike, capturing his journey from his rural upbringing in Oko Líhà to his enrollment in school at Ìlútitun in 1934. Before he began his formal education, The Boy Mike accompanied his parents to the West African Episcopal Church, where his father served as “Bàbá Ìjọ” (meaning “Father of the Congregation”). Upon his enrolment in school, he was baptised and given the name Michael, marking his initiation into the Anglican faith. The narrative follows The Boy Mike’s transition from living with his sister to walking daily to school from his parents’ home, along-

side his formative experiences with his favourite older half-brother Ómúlétí, who taught him traditional skills such as setting traps and hunting. Through these accounts, we see how The Boy Mike's childhood was shaped by the people around him, the local customs and the challenges of rural life.

The biography describes a remarkable period of transformation and struggle, marked by the challenging experiences of The Boy Mike, as well as the broader socio-economic context of the 1940s in Nigeria. The narrative begins with a detailed account of the tuition fees structure at Native Authority (NA) School, Ìlútítun during the 1930s and 1940s, with emphasis on the financial challenges faced by families in providing education for their children. This book takes us on a journey through the educational choices and challenges faced by families in Ilutitun during the 1930s and 1940s. It explores the reasons behind the popularity of NA School, Ilutitun, which offered a more affordable alternative to the mission schools. The tuition structure, which charged fees on a monthly basis and only for the months students attended, made education slightly more accessible, though still out of reach for many poor families. This sets the stage for understanding the subsequent difficulties and tribulations of The Boy Mike, whose educational journey was both influenced by, and reflective of, the economic constraints of the time. The stories of individuals like the Adéníjis, Victoria Adékúṣolá Onunkun and the experiences of students vying for scholarships add a personal touch, highlighting the impact of these decisions on their lives. These narratives reveal the role of financial considerations, familial connections and educational opportunities in shaping the destinies of many in this era.

The Boy Mike grappled with serious challenges in the course of his educa-

tional and career pursuits in the 1940s. He had a brief time at Abéòkúta Grammar School under the stern guidance of Rev. Ransome Kútì, but was forced to exit due to financial constraints. The narrative portrays the difficult choices that many young Nigerians faced during that era. It reveals how education was an unattainable luxury for most families, often requiring community financial support. Despite these obstacles, The Boy Mike's journey reflects the determination and resilience needed to forge a path forward, even when circumstances were less than favourable.

As the story progresses, readers are introduced to the decisions The Boy Mike made after leaving school. His reluctance to follow the expected path of becoming a teacher, combined with his ambition to seek opportunities in Lagos, paints a vivid picture of his drive for independence and self-fulfilment. His experiences, from working as a pupil-teacher to his eventual move to Lagos, highlight the struggles and triumphs of a young man determined to carve his own path in life. These stories not only provide a glimpse into the personal life of The Boy Mike but also offer a broader understanding of the societal pressures and economic realities of the time.

The journey of The Boy Mike, as chronicled in this account, is a testament to the resilience and ambition that marked his early life. Arriving in Lagos with little more than determination, he quickly immersed himself in the challenging world of job searching and job hopping, navigating a series of roles that ranged from barman to apprentice shipmate, all the while relentlessly pursuing his education simultaneously. His ability to speak proper English, a skill honed in the strict educational environment of Ìkálẹ̀, distinguished him in a city where pidgin English was the norm. This ability not only opened

doors for him but also led to opportunities that many could only dream of in the Nigeria of the 1940s and 1950s. His story illustrates the relentless drive of a young man who, despite the physical and social challenges he faced, was determined to carve out a successful career for himself.

This biography describes the transitions of The Boy Mike from a humble village teacher to a city worker as barman, apprentice shipmate, bookkeeper, clerk; a young man grappling with the realities of the workplace and excelling in his undertakings. His encounters with both Nigerian and expatriate supervisors, his struggle with the strenuous demands of his apprenticeship, and his unwavering commitment to self-improvement through education paint a vivid picture of the complexities of early career development in colonial Nigeria. The Boy Mike's experiences reflect the broader societal and economic dynamics of the time and offer insights into the challenges and opportunities that shaped the lives of young Nigerians in their quest for better livelihoods.

The narrative explores the formative middle years of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, fondly referred to as "The Man Mike." This period of his life, as compiled in this family documentary, marks a significant chapter in his journey, characterised by his deep commitment to public service and his unyielding dedication to his community. This is seen in his decision to leave a promising career at John Holt to serve his people in the Local Government Service, especially his crucial role in the administration and development of the Okitipupa Divisional Council. He subsequently played crucial roles in the administration and development of other Councils in the old Western Region / State and the old Ondo State. These years of his life were instrumental in shaping his legacy. The Man Mike's transition from a

young man working in Lagos to a respected public figure who held various important roles in the old Western Region and beyond reflects his unwavering resolve to make a meaningful impact on his society.

The Man Mike's middle years —from his early days as a Council Clerk to his later roles as a Council Secretary / Council Manager across several District Councils—was marked by several challenges and triumphs. We examine his influence on local governance, including his efforts to ensure fair representation and his direct involvement in critical events such as the 1957 tax agitation. The narrative also touches upon his continuous pursuit of excellence through further education, his navigation through the complexities of the Nigerian Civil War, and his dedication to his family amidst his demanding career. Through these accounts, readers will gain a deeper understanding of the man behind the title, his values and the significant contributions he made during these crucial years of his life.

This biography chronicles a transformative period in the administrative and political life of M. A. E. Onunkun. Beginning with his adept handling of the Àgbèkòyà Tax crisis in 1969, we witness his strategic application of “Tax Collection by Proxy”, a method reminiscent of ancient Roman practices in their colonies. His tenure saw numerous transfers and relocations, each presenting its own set of challenges, from navigating the waterways of Ìlàjẹ District Council to resolving long-standing disputes in Ìdànrè. His reputation as a conflict resolver par excellence becomes evident as he is repeatedly tasked with mediating in the most complicated of local governance issues.

Transitioning from local governance to the national political arena, M. A. E.

Onunkun's journey to the Nigerian Senate in 1979 is testament to his unwavering commitment to public service. Despite the trappings of high office, he remained grounded, as exemplified by his modest lifestyle choices. His adherence to pre-election agreements, even when presented with opportunities for personal advancement, further attests to a character rooted in integrity and honour. The remaining parts of this narrative offer a detailed account of his significant achievements and experiences, and paint a vivid portrait of a man dedicated to the service of his community and nation.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was a man whose story is interwoven with the threads of dedication, resilience and a firm commitment to his passions. While many might equate success with wealth, Senator Onunkun's legacy is defined not by riches but by the profound impact he made through his simple, yet purposeful life. Known for his frugality and contentment, he deployed his resources into endeavours that reflected his true interests, particularly his love for building houses. From his humble beginnings to the construction of his first house in 1952, Senator Onunkun's journey in architecture reflects his hands-on or practical approach and relentless work ethic. His life was marked by a consistent engagement in building projects that spanned over six decades, each structure embodying his sweat, tears, dedication and the deep satisfaction he derived from this lifelong passion.

The narrative also highlights Senator Onunkun's ventures beyond construction, revealing his entrepreneurial spirit. His involvement in various businesses, from a pioneering piggery and poultry farm to vehicle sales and a thriving distributorship, showcases a man of diverse interests and relentless drive. These endeavours, often pursued alongside his public service career,

not only supplemented his income but also contributed to the economic development of his community. Senator Onunkun's story is enriched by his collaborative efforts with his family, particularly one of his wives, Mrs. Victoria Adékùṣàlá Onunkun, whose partnership in business played a crucial role in their shared successes. This account also touches upon his dedication to education, both in his own personal pursuit of knowledge and in ensuring his children received the *formal* education he was unable to complete. Through this exploration of Senator Onunkun's life, readers are invited to reflect on the values of perseverance, simplicity and contentment, the significance of family support and the lasting impact of a life lived with purpose and integrity.

In conclusion, this biography of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON offers a profound exploration of his life, interweaving personal experiences with broader historical and social developments. It provides a detailed account of his familial roots, early struggles and the enduring legacy he has created through his commitment to public service, community development and personal endeavours. Through the meticulous recording of his life's journey, this work not only celebrates the achievements and contributions of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun but also reflects on the values and principles that have guided him throughout his remarkable life and career.

— Written by: Dr Olubunmi Peter Onunkun

— Edited by: Dr Temitope Jos Onunkun

Yorùbá / Ìkálẹ̀ Pronunciation Primer

Yoruba, the language spoken mainly by the people in the southwestern region of Nigeria has many dialects with many commonalities. The dialects are comparable to the English twangs spoken in the UK, US, Canada, South Africa, Australia, even in different parts of the UK, like Scotland, Ireland, London, Liverpool, etc. Ikale is one of the dialects of Yoruba Language.

We hope the reader is familiar with the music/sound notes:

| *do* | *re* | *mi* | *fa* | *so* | *la* | *ti* | *do* |

Discounting the pitch of these universal notes, we actually have only three basic sounds, namely:

| *do* | *re* | *mi* |

All sounds, hence most pronunciations, in Yoruba/Ikale language are based on these three notes.

To help understand how to pronounce Yoruba words, the reader also needs to understand the Yoruba vowels, because they sound differently from similar vowels in English language, and there are two of these vowels that are unwritten in English language, though the sounds exist also in the English language. The Yoruba vowels are:

| *a* | *e* | *ẹ* | *i* | *o* | *ọ* | *u* |

There are also a few special consonants, which we will discuss later, that go with vowels to determine the pronunciation of Yoruba words.

In Table 3, we show the readers, with examples, how to pronounce the vowels.

| Yoruba Vowel | Sound Diacritics | Universal Sound Note | Word example |
|--------------|------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| a | á | As in <i>fa</i> | a in “Okitipupa” |
| e | é | As in <i>re</i> | e in “Ode-Aye” |
| ẹ | ẹ́ | As in ‘e’ in “Red” | e in “Ikale” |
| i | í | As in <i>mi</i> | i in “Okitipupa” |
| o | ó | As in <i>do</i> | o in “Okitipupa” |
| ọ | ọ́ | As in <i>so</i> | o in “Ore” |
| u | ú | As in ‘oo’ in “boot” | u in “Okitipupa” |

Table 3: Pronunciation of Yoruba Vowels

The three basic sounds “| *do* | *re* | *mi* |” are combined with the vowels to indicate the sounds of the corresponding vowels in pronunciation. These sounds are denoted by diacritics, ie, accents above and/or beneath the vowels.

We present the diacritics corresponding to these basic sounds in Table 4.

Aside from the vowels we have just introduced, there are some sounds denoted with special characters involving special consonants or a combination of consonants. These and corresponding examples in English and Yoruba languages are listed below:

| Sound Note | Diacritics | Written as |
|------------|------------|--------------------|
| <i>do</i> | ` | à, è, è ì, ò, ò ù |
| <i>re</i> | NONE | a, e, e i, o, o, u |
| <i>mi</i> | ´ | á, é, é í, ó, ó ú |

Table 4: Pronunciation of Yoruba Vowels with the aid of Diacritics

“**Ṣ**” → Sounds like “Sh” in English language

Yoruba Examples: Ṣínà, Fọláṣadé, etc.

“**gb**” → Sounds like “gb” in Rugby in English

Yoruba Examples: Igbótako, Ìgbókòdá, etc.

The following special combination of consonants does not exist in mainstream Yoruba language, but it does occur in Ikale language.

“**gh**” → Sounds like “gh” in Ghee, except that the sound of the ‘h’ is more pronounced than the ‘g’

Ikale Examples: Gha, etc.

Further Examples on How To Pronounce Yoruba Words

Yorùbá is pronounced “re –do –mí”

Ìkálẹ̀ is pronounced “do –mi –do”

Igbótako is pronounced “re –mi –re –re”

Ìgbókòdá is pronounced “do –mi –do –mí”



Figure 1: Faces of Senator M A E Onunkun 2012, 2014, 2022

Chapter 1

ROOTS

Our father, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun of Ọ̀dògbó Lúmùrè dynasty of Ìgò Quarters, Ilutitun, Ọ̀ṣóòró was born on 30 September 1925. He was a prominent son of High Chief (Ìjámà) Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun by his second wife, Ayelemi (daughter of Fápẹ̀tù, son Nẹ̀núwà, son of Sẹ̀nóghò). High Chief Emmanuel Obamuwahan Onunkun, was the son of Pàsán Líjòkà, son of Ọ̀kúnnúhì, son of Èyìnmonòrẹ̀n, son of Jíbúlù (brother of Monógbè), son of Majùwà, son of Jàgbòlégún, son of the Lúmùrè of Àyèká. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was often called “M. A.” or “Mike” by his contemporaries, like the late Lawyer J. A. Kuye of Kuye Street Okitipupa.

1.1 Pre Benin and Bits of Nigerian Geography

It is well-known that the Èdó people of Nigeria were initially ruled by the Ọ̀gìsos, which meant “rulers of the sky”, and their kingdom, named after the first Ọ̀gìso, Ìgòdò, was called Ìgòdòmígòdò. There are scant and diverse oral accounts about the era of the Ọ̀gìsos. But, a common thread in many of the

oral accounts is that the corruption and decadence of the ruling elite, or the kingmakers (i.e., ‘Uzama’) and the last Ògìso, Owodo, caused the people to rebel and overthrow the dynasty. Sequel to this, the Èdó kingdom fractured, with different rival warlords laying claim to different parts of the kingdom. Fearing anarchy and complete disintegration of their kingdom, the Edo people beseeched their powerful neighbour, the King of Ilé Ifè, Odùduwà, who was renowned as an astute organiser and administrator, for help. Odùduwà sent his mighty warrior son, Prince Òrànmiyàn¹, to restore peace to the Èdó kingdom. After suppressing the rival Èdó warlords, Prince Òrànmiyàn appointed his son, Eweka as their king, or Òba. Thus began the succession of the dynasty of Yoruba Òbas over the Èdó people down to this day, with Eweka I. The 17th Òba in that lineage is Òba Esigie, the progenitor of the paramount ruler of the Ìkálẹ̀ people, as discussed in 1.2.

1.1.1 The Battle for Nikki and The Berlin Conference

There are diverse legends as to the origin of the Yoruba tribe as a branch of one Kisra, who some believe was driven out of Mecca by Mohammed around the time of the birth of Islam. Some scholars, however, hold that this is an anachronism, born from later influence of Islam on the Yoruba people. Others hold that Kisra was from Egypt. This latter legend holds that there was an upheaval in Egypt and Kisra was pushed out, so he settled in Sudan for a long time, and had a large family there. Another crisis later occurred in Sudan, and Kisra and his family moved further south to Sub-Saharan Africa. This is the version Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun claimed one Professor Anene taught his class in 1958/59 at the Nigerian College of

¹Òrànmiyàn had earlier established Òyó Ilé in Kàtúngà and appointed his son, Àjàkà, as its king

Arts, Science and Technology, Ibadan, aka ‘Nigerian College’, when he was on the Advanced Local Government Training course. According to him, the three primary sons of Kisra were Nikki, Kiama and Bambusa. Nikki is said to be the progenitor of the Yoruba speaking stock in Benin Republic today.

While there appears to be a consensus that Lámurúdù was the father of Odùduwà, who is the father of the Yoruba speaking stock in Nigeria, there is no such consensus on who the father of Lámurúdù was. Some hold that the father of Lámurúdù was Kisra. But, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun believed, from what he was taught in the Nigerian College, that the father of Lámurúdù was Nikki. He went on to narrate a story he described as: ‘*The Race for Nikki*’, centuries after the establishment of a Yoruba civilisation in Nikki.

He continued that the Europeans, for example the Portuguese, have been trading with African civilisations, like the Benin Kingdom, as far back as the time of Queen Elizabeth I of England and Ireland in the 16th century C. E. But, the shift from trade relations to exploitation and colonisation by European powers began in the second half of the 19th century C. E., the infamous ‘*Scramble for Africa*’. During this period, it was said that France sent one Decroix to sign a treaty of protection with the king of Nikki. Two or three months after, Britain got to know about this French move, so London despatched Captain Fredrick Lugard to rush to Nikki to beat the French to getting a treaty with the king of Nikki².

²Captain Fredrick Lugard was the same person who later became Lord Frederick Lugard, raised to the peerage in 1928, and the first Governor General of Nigeria, after the Southern and Northern Protectorates of Nigeria were merged into one in January 1914. He served as Governor and Governor General from 1912 to 1919.

Now, the king of Nikki was said to be blind and always sat in the recesses of the palace, while his head servant received visitors on his behalf in the front room. When Captain Frederick Lugard got to Nikki, he head straight to the palace, saw the head servant dressed in regal attire, signed a protectorate treaty with him and returned to London. London then published in their newspapers that they had Nikki. Meanwhile, Decroix had not yet arrived at the King's palace. He was going through the villages, investigating about the king of Nikki. He, thus, found out that the king of Nikki was blind. When Decroix got to the palace, he met the head servant, who also told him that he was the king. But Decroix replied: "No, you are not the king. I will give you presents, but take me to the real king." So, the 'pretender' took Decroix to the real king, the blind one, who signed a treaty of protection, friendship and colonisation with France. Afterward, Decroix returned to France, and the French government announced that they had Nikki. Britain and France were on the brink of war on this '*Race for Nikki*'. So they took the matter, along with other disputes in the infamous '*Scramble for Africa*' to the Berlin Conference of 1884 — November 1884 to February 1885.

1.1.2 Bits of Nigerian Geography

On bits of the geography of Nigeria narrated in a 2012 video interview of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, he quoted a British Colonial Officer (Civil Servant), named Barton, in his book, entitled: "The Geography of Nigeria", as saying: "The Yorubas inhabit a large area of country in the South Western part of Nigeria, including the colony of Lagos and the provinces of Ijebu, Ondo, Abeokuta, Oyo and Ilorin." Senator Michael

Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun added that the original seat of the Old Òyó Kingdom, Kàtúngà, was situated to the north of Ìlòrin. But, the marauding forces of Fulani Jihadists, under Alimi, came down from Sokoto, sacked Kàtúngà, Ìlòrin and its dependent villages, and drove the Òyó people out to establish an emirate in Ìlòrin, under the suzerainty of the Emir of Sokoto. Fleeing down southwards, some of the of the Òyó people stopped to establish new settlements, including the present day city of Òyó, founded by Aláàfin³ Àtìbà. Further down south still, some came to the present day site of Ìbàdàn, which was the home of the Ègbá people, and pushed the Ègbá people out to their present day location in Abéòkúta. This led to long and fierce, drawn-out wars between the Òyó people of Ìbàdàn and the Ègbá people of Abéòkúta.

Centuries later, by the time of ‘the scramble for Africa’ and the carving up of Africa, like pizza on a platter, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun said that Ìbàdàn people was fighting on 5 fronts, and they could not be defeated, for they were fearsome warriors! They were fighting the Ìjàyès, the Ègbás, the Íjébús, the ‘Èkìtì Parapò’, and Ìlòrin people. He added that at one point, a coalition of the Ègbás and the Íjébús blocked the road to Lagos in order to prevent the Ìbàdàn people from gaining access to the Portuguese gun traders in Lagos, for the Portuguese traders did not venture into the hinterland. Undeterred, the Ìbàdàn people cut another road through Ìkòròdú to Lagos, to maintain their military supply lines. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun cited and recommended the book: “A History of the Yorubas” by Samuel Johnson, which he read nearly 30 years earlier, having borrowed it from his friend, Dr Kànjika—an Indian Medical Doctor who worked for many years in Okitipupa. Asked whether this was the famed En-

³The title ‘Aláàfin’, taken by Òyó kings, translates to ‘Owner of the Palace’.

glish writer, Dr Samuel Johnson, he said: "No, this was the Nigerian Samuel Johnson, a brilliant Ọyọ man on letters, versed in the history of the Yorubas.

Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun then added a tidbit about the English Dr Samuel Johnson. He said he was working on a book⁴, but had no means to publish it. So he approached the Earl of Chesterfield for patronage, but he was rebuffed by the wealthy and powerful aristocrat, for Samuel Johnson was "a nobody", a commoner! Then after struggling for years, he managed to get the book published, after which the Earl wrote to him offering his congratulations and assistance. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun said Dr Samuel Johnson wrote a scathing letter back to the Earl of Chesterfield, saying: "... [*He*] *Is not a patron, my lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached ground, encumbers him with help.*" The rest of the letter, as found online, reads: "*The notice which you have been pleased to take of my labours, had it been early, had been kind: but it has been delayed till I am indifferent and cannot enjoy it; till I am solitary and cannot impart it; till I am known and do not want it.*"

Back to the Berlin Conference and the geography of Nigeria, Senator Michael Atijosan Onunkun said the dispute over Nikki was resolved in favour of France, and the region formerly known as Dahomey was ceded to France. Cameroon was ceded to Germany, while Nigeria went to Britain. But there was a problem. Britain had treaty of protection with an enclave named Victoria in Cameroon, while Germany had a treaty with the Àmàpetu of Màhín, an Ìlàjẹ kingdom in the province of Ondo in Nigeria. To resolve this, both

⁴The landmark book is 'A Dictionary of the English Language', published on 15 April 1755, regarded as one of the most influential dictionaries in the history of the English language.

sides agreed to swap, so the British relinquished Victoria in Cameroon for Māhín in Nigeria.



Figure 1.1: Nigeria's Squiggly Boundary

It is noteworthy that there is hardly any straight line on the Nigerian border. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun pointed out that there was a reason for that. He said that the committee tasked at the Berlin Conference with carving the boundaries decided from the outset not to allow the boundary to split a town or village into two different countries. Hence, carving up northwards from the Gulf of Guinea in the South, if the boundary hits a village, they would bend it to the left, giving the town or village to Nigeria, then when it hits the next town or village, they would bend the boundary to the right, giving it to Dahomey (now Republic of Benin). They applied the same rule in the east, in determining the boundary between Nigeria and Cameroon. This is the reason the border zig-zags between Nigeria and its neighbours, as seen in Figure 1.1.

1.2 The Distant Roots of The Ìkálẹ̀ people

It is well-known that the Ìkálẹ̀ people came primarily from Benin, though some came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀, Àkókó and other places. The paramount king of the Ìkálẹ̀ people is the Àbòdì, based at Ìkọ̀yà. The first Àbòdì was a son of Ọba⁵ Esigie of Benin, the 17th Ọba of Benin, who reigned over 500 years ago over a vast territory bordering Onitsha in the East, to Lagos in the West. Ọba Esigie was the son of Ozolua, son of Ewuare the Great (reigned 1440-1473) who first established bilateral trade relations between the Portuguese and the Benin Empire. Before becoming the Ọba, Ọba Esigie was Prince Osawe, son of the beautiful and powerful Queen Idia, who became the face of the FESTAC '77 Icon. Ọba Esigie was said to be the first Ọba of Benin to have learned to speak Portuguese.

The story goes that Ọba Esigie had many wives, but his first children were all females, and the race was on to have a son, the heir to the throne. In time, one wife had a son, Jabàdó, in the morning, while most people were away in their farms, hence the king could not be notified immediately. In the evening of the same day, another wife had a son, Òrhógbùà, and the king was promptly informed. The king then declared Òrhógbùà his heir apparent. Later, news came to the king that another wife gave birth to a son earlier in the morning. However, the king could no longer change his earlier declaration of the younger son as his heir, so he gave order to hide away the older son, ie, “bò ódì”, which translates to “cover away” or “hide away”. Hence came the byname Àbòdì for the child, Jabàdó, from “A bò ódì”, which roughly translates to “one hidden away”.

⁵Ọba in Yorùbá language is the generic word for 'king'. It is also used as a title, as in: 'King So-and-so'.

There was a mighty Benin Army General, named Àhílẹ̀, who was very powerful and instrumental to many of the successes of the Benin Empire in wars. The king did not feel too comfortable having the General ‘in his backyard’, as it were. So he told him to move Westwards, and settle anywhere he felt comfortable, and that whenever his services were required, he would send for him. Following this, Àhílẹ̀ moved Westward out of Benin, and eventually settled with his men in the area around the town of Àkótógbò.

Later on, the king had the crisis of the two princes born on the same day on his hands. He wasn’t too pleased to have the two of them continue to grow up together in the palace. In order to avert rivalry, which could, in time, result in a bloodbath between the two princes, Oba Esigie decided that the child, Jabàdó, whose birth was reported to him late, had to move out of Benin, leaving only the Crown Prince Òrhógbùà in the City. So he gave Jabàdó the paraphernalia that authorised him to go to the West Side of the River Òwẹ̀nà, where General Àhílẹ̀ resided, to rule over the people there.

Thus, Jabàdó moved and ruled over the area where Àhílẹ̀ and his men resided. However, Jabàdó was a restless man, and he did not stay long in the place. In time, he moved around a lot. He and his descendants stayed in many places, such as Àtíjẹ̀rẹ̀, Umọ̀rọ̀n, near Ondo, Odè-Omi in Ìjẹ̀bú Waterside, Òdelúwò, near Iju-Odò, etc, until his descendants finally settled down in the present day location at Ìkọ̀yà. It was said that at one point Àbòdì Jabàdó even settled near Pepe River, close to Òde-Ìrèlè. Hence, the river used to be called Pepe Àbòdì. Legend has it that one of his daughters drowned in the Pepe river, and he cursed the river so that it thinned out. He then moved

away from the area, and since that time, it is believed that no Àbòdì must cast his eyes on the river.

The Ìkálẹ̀ people emigrated from their various root locations at different times. And they moved around the land quite a bit before they finally settled down in their respective present day locations. For example, the Ìdèpẹ̀ people moved from Àkótógbò—their original homestead—to their present day location, Òkìtìpupa. The Ọlótò people used to be situated near the present day Akínloyè Estate in Òkìtìpupa before they moved away to their present day location. Said Senator M. A. E. Onunkun: “There is a river near Akínloyè Estate that is called ‘Omi Ọlótò’ [ie, River Ọlótò], because the Ọlótò people used to live beside the river.” There is no question that the Àkótógbò people came from Benin, for, down to the present day, the natives of Àkótógbò speak both Ìkálẹ̀ and Benin languages. The Òde-Aye people also came from Benin, but at a different time—not the same time as the Àbòdì. The Ọbágbèrumẹ̀ of Igbódìgò was a cousin of Àbòdì Jabàdó, and he also came at a different time to settle in Ìkálẹ̀. It was said that the Àbòdì used to go visit him at Igbódìgò, so they must have been very close.

1.2.1 The Òṣóòró Connection

There was an Ìkọ̀yà princess named Mábúlẹ̀. The Àbòdì gave her in marriage to the Ọba of Àyẹkà, ie, the Lúmùrẹ̀ of Àyẹkà. Mábúlẹ̀ produced one son—her firstborn child—for the Lúmùrẹ̀ of Àyẹkà. This son was named Jàgbòlẹ̀gún. Thereafter, Mábúlẹ̀ left the Lúmùrẹ̀ of Àyẹkà to go marry another Ọba, the Ọba of Ujòsun, near Àkótógbò. There she also produced one son, another prince. Not yet done, Mábúlẹ̀ moved on to marry a third Ọba, the Olú of

Orófun, where she again produced one son. Thus, three princes of three different domains issued from her loins. Finally done, Mábúlé left the Olú of Orófun and returned to Ìkòyà, to live with her father, the Àbòdì of Ìkálè land, and she never remarried after that. At that time, the people of Ìkòyà were residing in the village now known as Àbùsòrò, which was called “Ìkòyà Kékeré”, meaning ‘Little Ìkòyà’. It was later that the people of Ìkòyà moved to their present day location. Figure 1.2 shows the family tree with Àbòdì as root and the three sons of Princess Mábúlé as leaves.

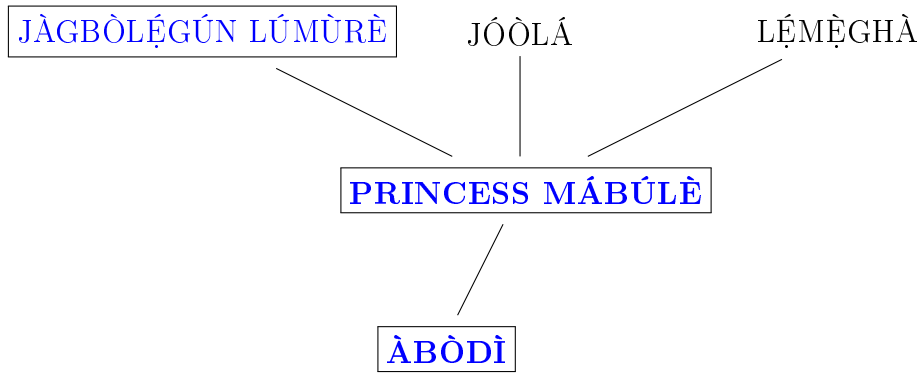


Figure 1.2: Àbòdì to Jàgbòlégún Family Tree

Eventually, Mábúlé’s three sons came to join her at Ìkòyà. At the time, Ìkòyà people were few in number. But, the three sons of Mábúlé were prosperous and powerful, with many wives and many children. In time, Jàgbòlégún, who was a mighty warrior, was made the Kọgun (short for ‘Akọgun’, which literally translates to ‘*Manly man of war*’). He essentially became the ‘Army General’ and head of the army of Ìkòyà. Customarily, during the Èrùn festival, it was the Kọgun who was tasked with leading a team of men to the river Olúwa at Okitipupa on foot, cross the river to the other side to draw some water into an earthenware vessel at a shrine there. Only the Kọgun

was authorised to go into the bush to visit and worship at the shrine and draw the water, while the others wait for him at the river bank. The oracle being worshipped at the shrine was named “Olúwa Èrì”, and the Kogun was its Chief Priest. The earthenware vessel was then carried on the head by a young boy/man who had never had any sexual relation with a girl/woman. As they walked back to folk chants, the carrier must not hit his toes on anything on the road, nor must he trip, speak to anyone, stop to rest on the way, or look behind him all the way back to Ìkòyà. The stuff carried on the head is called Ògígí in the lingo, and it seems to have a life of its own, for it appears to possess and control the person carrying it.

1.2.2 Ancient Ìkòyà Treachery

Now, as the children of Mábùlé were prospering, multiplying and getting stronger in Ìkòyà, the people there grew increasingly envious of them. They drew the conclusion that this woman, Mábùlé, must be a witch, for, what else, in their view, could account for the reason her children were prospering, while theirs were not? So, they conspired to kill Mábùlé, but they were afraid of her children and would not dare carry out their plans especially while her mighty son, Jàgbòlégún, was in town. And, as the Kogun, the only time he was certain to leave the town was when he had to go to worship at the shrine on the other side of the Olúwa River. So, they conspired to kill Mábùlé on this day that Jàgbòlégún would not be in town, and get rid of Jàgbòlégún, as well. On that fateful day, as Jàgbòlégún went alone into the jungle to worship at the shrine, the conspirators who ferried him across the river left with the only canoe, hurried back to Ìkòyà and killed Jàgbòlégún’s mother, Mábùlé. They imagined that Jàgbòlégún would perish in the jungle

where they had abandoned him. At this time, the king who was the father of Mábúlé had died, and another king was ruling in his place as the Àbòdì of Ìkálẹ̀ land.

When Jàgbòlẹ̀gún returned from the shrine to the riverbank, he was surprised at not seeing any of the troupe that ferried him across the Olúwa river. Neither could he see the canoe they used to cross the river. So he began to chant and sing in praise of the oracle he had gone to worship on the other side of the river. Suddenly, he saw what appeared to be a big log of wood across the river. Tentatively, he put one foot on it to see if it was firm, and it was. So, using a small stick for balance, he walked across to the other bank of the river, the Okitipupa side. On stepping ashore, he looked back, and what appeared to be a log of wood turned. Lo and behold, it was a huge python! So, he jumped, but then, the python disappeared into the river. Believing that the oracle he had gone to worship must have sent the python to provide escape from almost certain death for him, Jàgbòlẹ̀gún burst out in song and chants in praise of the oracle. After some time, he turned and hurried back on foot to Ìkọ̀yà, as the sun had already set.

When Jàgbòlẹ̀gún arrived at Ìkọ̀yà in the middle of the night, he went straight to the place called Ọ̀wá, where the king and the High Chiefs often held their meetings. To his surprise, the door was locked and people were inside, so he knocked on the door. Voices from inside asked who was at the door, and he replied that it was him, Kọ̀gun Jàgbòlẹ̀gún. There were gasps from the room, and he could hear hurried movements and hushed voices. He again repeated that it was him, Kọ̀gun Jàgbòlẹ̀gún, and requested they open the door for him. He sensed the panic among the people in the room, as they

kept making excuses that they could not open the door for him. Certain they were hiding something from him, he kicked down the door and stepped into the room. Before him in the middle of the room laid the macabre sight of his murdered mother, with her stomach cut open and stuffed with some fetish portions. it was a ritual murder!

1.2.3 Exodus from Ìkọ̀yà to Ọ̀lọ̀tò

It was then that it dawned on Jàgbòlégún that the reason they left him to die on the other side of the river was so they could kill his mother, for they dared not do that in his presence. Which man would dare skin a live tiger? The men in the room huddled together far from him, swords and machetes drawn, thinking that Jàgbòlégún would fight them to avenge the killing of his mother. But, Jàgbòlégún said to them: “My mother was your daughter and you could do whatever you like with her, and you have. But, this night, my brothers and I, our wives and our children are leaving this place.” He walked out, roused his brothers and their families to pack up their things, that they were leaving Ìkọ̀yà Kékeré.

Early the next morning, all 79 of them left Ìkọ̀yà Kékeré with their possessions. They stopped on the banks of Lóghó-lọ̀ma River, near the present day town of Ìkọ̀yà, and tarried for 7 days. They were expecting that the people of Ìkọ̀yà would repent and come beg them to return. While they camped there, they noticed that hunters from Ìkọ̀yà Kékeré used to come at night to hunt in the area, so they knew that the people of Ìkọ̀yà knew their whereabouts, and had ample chance to sue for peace. But they did not. Jàgbòlégún now said to his people: “Now, it is clear that these people do not want us in their

midst.” So he rallied them, they broke camp and moved farther away from Ìkòyà Kékeré until they arrived at Ọlótò village.

Now, Ọlótò and Òde-Aye are the only two towns in Ìkálẹ̀ with two ruling houses, or dynasties. In Òde-Aye, rulership changes between the Lápòòkí and the Hálú families, whereas in Ọlótò, rulership flips between the Ọlótò and Olùrà dynasties. By the time Jàgbòlégún and his troupe arrived in Ọlótò, the ruling dynasty was the Olùrà. Before they arrived there, though, the Olùrà had reportedly consulted the Ifá oracle for divination. What appeared to him was ‘Ogbògí’. Ogbògí says: “You must beware of strangers. You must be careful of what you do, lest they take over your kingdom.” About 3 or 4 days later, Jàgbòlégún and his 79 strong family arrived at Ọlótò. Now, as the Kọgun of Ìkòyà, Jàgbòlégún was very well known to the Ọbas in Ìkálẹ̀. Jàgbòlégún and his family went to the Olùrà, explained what Ìkòyà people did to them, and pleaded with the Olùrà to let them stay. The Olùrà gave them some houses to stay the night, that they would talk the following day. Later that day, the people of the community came to the Olùrà and said:

“Olùrà, what are you doing? Have you forgotten what the oracle told you about being wary of strangers?”

The Olùrà replied: “This is Kọgun, an Ìkálẹ̀ Chieftain, not a stranger. They can join us here.”

“Join us?” questioned the people in disbelief, adding: “These people are more numerous than us. They will take over our land.”

To this, the Olùrà said: “What can I do? I can’t turn them away!”

The people replied: “We know what we will do. We will certainly not accommodate them.” At that, they exited from the presence of the Olùrà.

1.2.4 Rejection at Ọlọ̀tò

When night fell, the people of Ọlọ̀tò went with masquerades to the houses Jàgbòlégún and his family were staying, torched the houses. Roused in the middle of the night by the crackling fire and heat, the people inside the houses ran helter-skelter! It was about 3 or 4 days later that they were able to reassemble themselves. Fortunately, none of them died in the fire. They counted their losses and moved away from Ọlọ̀tò. They stopped at a place outside the realm of the Olùrà, where they felt they could settle down. Jàgbòlégún, who himself was an Ifá priest, consulted his oracle and asked: “Will we prosper if we stayed here?” The oracle answered that they will prosper alright, but promptly added: “The land will ‘eat’ your wives and your children”. That is, their wives and children would be dying in the land if they put down roots there. So they pleaded with the oracle not to allow the land to ‘eat’ their wives and children while they stayed there temporarily until they could find a good land to move to.

1.2.5 In Search of A Settlement

The firstborn son of Jàgbòlégún was Májùwà, a skilled hunter. While going around in the land in search of game animals, aka ‘bush meat’, he came to a well-watered land that was very flat, and seemed good. So, he reported this

to his father, that he felt it was a good land where they could settle. The father then asked him to go back there and bring some of the soil from the land, in order to find out from the oracle if the land would be auspicious for them. Májùwà went back and brought some of the soil in the land back to his father. His father put some of the soil on the oracle and inquired whether the land would prosper them, their wives and their children. The oracle said: “Go there and settle in the land. You will prosper and your children will live. You will be popular and wealthy, but all the money you make you will squander on troubles.”

1.2.6 Settlement in Moríbodó

Then, Jàgbòlégún said to his people. “Get up, let us go and possess the land and settle there. *‘We will prosper, our children will live, we will make money, we will squander our money on trouble....’* What is money meant for, if not for trouble? Let us make money and squander it!” So, they got up and moved to the new place. When they arrived there, Jàgbòlégún sent a message to the Àbòdì, saying: “Morúbodó ò”, which translates to: “I found a place to settle down.” He sent the same message to the Olùrà of Ọlótò, too. Thus, the place came to be called: “Moríbodó Ọ̀sòóró”, or Ọ̀de Ọ̀sòóró. When Jàgbòlégún and his family arrived there, they met some hunters, about three of them, who came down from Ọ̀kè Àgbè, Àkókó to hunt. They would come there, stay for months to hunt, dry the meat to preserve them, and walk back to Ọ̀kè Àgbè — a distance of about 250 kilometres on modern roads, and probably longer on bush paths back then. So Jàgbòlégún asked them to stay and reside in the land with his family. The descendants of those hunters are the Àkókó family in Ilutitun down to this day.



Figure 1.3: Faces of Senator M A E Onunkun during 2012 Video Interview

Chapter 2

Worship, War and Governance

Having settled in the land, Jàgbòlégún now thought: “What god shall we worship in this land?” He then decided that they would worship “Olúwa Èrì”, whose High Priest he was at Ìkòyà Kékeré. People of Òde-Aye, for example, worshipped the river god “Olúwa Mobì” because they used to live at Mobì, on the upper banks of the Olúwa river, before they moved to their present location. Now, Moríbodó is nowhere near the Olúwa river, so it felt like a misnomer to be worshipping the god of that river, “Olúwa Èrì”. But there is another story behind that..., *‘The Legend of Èrì’*.

2.1 The Legend of Èrì

There was a beautiful Ìkòyà princess, named Èrì, who was to be married to the Hálú of Òde-Aye, while the people of Òde-Aye were resident at Mobì by the Olúwa River. She was further beautifully adorned for her groom, decked in beads and cowrie shells from head to toe. Having walked her to the banks of the Olúwa river, near Okitipupa, she was being conducted with music ac-

companiment on the river by canoe to Mobì. Suddenly, the boat capsized, and all in the boat swam ashore, but the bride, Èrí, was nowhere to be found. Legend has it that the river god, attracted by her beauty and decoration, had taken her for himself to their world under the river. The people went to tell the Hálú what had happened. The Hálú, a powerful mystic himself, felt slighted and angry. He asked to be taken to the spot in the river where the canoe capsized. On being taken there, he dived into the river, and a huge and protracted fight ensued between the Hálú and the river god. Eventually, the river god relinquished his hold of Hálú's bride, Èrí, but she could no longer speak, but only grunt like the river gods and goddesses. She also had both of her fists clenched tight.

The Hálú took Èrí to his base at Mobì, and tried to deliver her from bondage to the river god. They tried to open her clenched fists, but could not. Later, Èrí motioned with signs that they should bring her a gourd calabash with cover. They brought it, and she opened her clenched fists and dropped the objects in her clenched fists into the calabash and covered it up. She continued to sit as a sentinel by the calabash and would not let anyone take the calabash away from her presence. But, she remained dumb and could only grunt. After trying, in vain, for 8 or 10 years to heal her, the frustrated Hálú took Èrí and the calabash, with the objects inside it, to the Àbòdì in Ìkòyà, and apologised that he had failed to deliver his daughter from bondage to the Olúwa river god.

Èrí was then housed at the Qwá as the sentinel to the calabash. Year in, year out, the people of Ìkòyà began to worship the river god who took Èrí, and had proved more powerful than the other oracles who had failed to release

Èrí from bondage to that river god. This god they named “Olúwa Èrí¹”, since the name of the river is Olúwa river. Once every year, the Kogun would lead a select team of men from Ìkòyà to the shrine of this oracle on the other side of the Olúwa river, to appease the god and bring back some of the water, as described earlier, for some ritual at Ìkòyà.

2.1.1 The Search for a god Heats Up

Having found a place to settle down, Jàgbòlégún and his men came to the conclusion that it was Olúwa Èrí they should worship, considering that Kogun Jàgbòlégún was its High Priest, moreso as they also believed that it was this god who provided escape for Kogun when the people of Ìkòyà left him to die on the other side of the river. But, then, the paraphernalia of the worship of Olúwa Èrí, including the sacred objects in the closed calabash watched over by Èrí was in Ìkòyà. So, Jàgbòlégún volunteered to go to Ìkòyà at night and take possession of those objects.

Jàgbòlégún, the manly man of war, sneaked into Ìkòyà at night, and got to the Qwá, where the objects were kept with Èrí as its guard, unnoticed. To his surprise, Èrí was wide awake, though late at night. Regardless, he tried to take the calabash, but the calabash was stuck to the ground. He tried again and again, but he could not dislodge the calabash. He then tried to open the calabash in order to take the objects inside, but tried as he did, he could not open the calabash lid. So, Jàgbòlégún took his machete, cut off the head of Èrí and sprinkled her blood on and around the calabash. Thereafter, he was

¹The people of Òde-Aye called this same river god “Olúwa Mobì”, as they were sited at Mobì on the banks of the Olúwa river at the time. Similarly, the people of Òde-Ìrèlè, who originally migrated from Ìlájẹ, were worshipping ‘Malòkun’.

able to lift up and open the calabash. He then took the sacred objects in the calabash, left the empty calabash and returned to his base at Moríbodó, aka Òde Òṣòrò. This led to a spate of fierce and bitter wars between the people of Ìkọ̀yà and the people of Òṣòrò.

2.2 War Strategy

During the wars that ensued, a couple of times Jàgbòlégún and his men would repel and drive back the people of Ìkọ̀yà who had come to attack them. Afterward, the people of Òṣòrò would return to their base in Moríbodó. The people of Ìkọ̀yà would then come on the attack again and again. Finally, the hunters from Òkè Àgbè, Àkókó, who were residing with Jàgbòlégún and his men, told them that this was not the way to execute warfare. Their advice was that after pushing the enemy back, they should hold the ground, rather than return to their base in Moríbodó. Hence, the next time the Ìkọ̀yà people came on the attack, Jàgbòlégún and his men fought them off and pushed them back again. But this time, they held their ground, as advised by the Àkókó hunters. When the Ìkọ̀yà people approached again, they were coming on the expectation that they would engage with the Òṣòrò people at Moríbodó, but the Òṣòrò people who had held their ground from the previous battle ambushed the Ìkọ̀yà people. The rout was great, and the people of Ìkọ̀yà fled the battle.

Back in those days, the kings used to lead their men into battle, and the Àbòdì was no exception. As the Ìkọ̀yà people were fleeing, the Àbòdì fell into a ditch, with his crown on his head. When some young Ìkọ̀yà men flee-

ing the battle saw him, they cut some leaves to cover over him, so that the chasing army would not find and kill the king. Thus, the Àbòdì was saved from almost certain humiliation and death at the hands of the Òṣòrò people. After that incident, the Ìkọ̀yà people seldom attacked the Òṣòrò people again, and the Òṣòrò people held on to the ground they had taken, thereby extending their territory.

2.3 Institution of Governance

After this major victory over the people of Ìkọ̀yà, Jàgbòlégún again exhorted the hunters from Àkókó to stay with them and make the new found land their home for good. On how to govern this new settlement, Jàgbòlégún asked if the Àkókó hunters, who were seasoned travellers, could take him and some of his lieutenants to the Ọba of Benin. They agreed, and took Jàgbòlégún and his men to Benin to see the Ọba. Jàgbòlégún related to the king how badly the people of Ìkọ̀yà had treated them, though they tried to be friendly with them. They also asked the king for advice on what titles they could take in their new found land, and how they were to administer the place.

The Ọba of Benin then noted that the Òṣòrò people went from being friends with the Ìkọ̀yà people to being enemies. So, he said the title he would assign the person who would be the overall head of the Òṣòrò people was Rebùjà', which is short for Eré bí ùjà'. This, when translated, means: 'friendly play beget quarrel'. This loosely means 'friendship turned into enmity'. This title would be a constant reminder of what led to the founding of this new community. The Ọba of Benin also gave them three additional primary

Chieftaincy titles to be assumed by three other prominent men who would assist the Rebùjà in administering the affairs of the place. The three other titles, in order of seniority following the Rebùjà, who is the Number 1 citizen, are:

2. Lísà;
3. Petu;
4. Ojọmọ

After receiving the titles and paraphernalia of office — proof of recognition and appointment by the Oba of Benin — Jàgbòlégún and his men returned home rejoicing. When they arrived back in Òṣòrò, they convened a meeting. It was unanimously agreed that the most senior title, Rebùjà, should be reserved for Jàgbòlégún and his descendants of the Lúmùrè clan, he being their leader so far, and the first son of Mábùlé — the Ìkọyà princess who had one son each for three different kings, and was later brutally murdered by her own people of Ìkọyà. The second most senior title, Lísà, was assigned to the second son of Mábùlé, who was a prince of Ujọsun. Descended from this prince is the Jòlálá family of Òṣòrò, where the mother of Senator Michael Atijosan Onunkun hailed from. Customarily, the third highest title in a land is assigned to foreigners. So, it was decided that the third highest title, Petu, would be assigned to the family of the Àkókó hunters who were foreigners-turned-natives in their midst. Their descendants are the Àkókó family of Ilutitun today. The fourth title, Ojọmọ, was then given to the family of the youngest son of Mábùlé, a prince of Orófun. These are the Lémèghà family of Òṣòrò today.

The decisions taken at that inaugural meeting was pleasing to all. However, Jàgbòlégún declined the offer for him to become the overall king, the Rebùjà. He reasoned that he was too old, and suggested that they make his firstborn son, Májùwà—the mighty hunter who found the location during one of his hunting trips—the Rebùjà. But the people tried to dissuade him, saying: “How could your son be the ‘Head Chief’ when you are still alive, and you his subject?” Such a thing was unheard of in Ìkálẹ̀ land, for customarily, the son only becomes king after the death of his father. But Jàgbòlégún insisted that it did not matter, and he prevailed on them. So, the people made Májùwà the first Ọlọjà (king)—the first Rebùjà of Ọṣòóró. This, while his father was still alive and with the blessing of his father. To show his unalloyed blessings and support, his father, Jàgbòlégún, was the first to approach the newly installed king, and removing his hat, he prostrated before Májùwà and hailed: “Oorí ò!”, which translates to “The Head!” Thereafter, other prominent ones and all the people approached Májùwà, the Rebùjà, and hailed: “Oorí ò!”

As this was an unprecedented thing in Ikálẹ̀ land, the people said Ọṣòóró had done something which was strange, and they composed a song, which says in part:

| | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Olú ée níba | A King doesn't have a father |
| Olú ée níba | A King doesn't have a father |
| Májùwà nàtàpárígho | Májùwà has a 'head' |
| Májùwà ó ṣàkókó níba | Májùwà was the first to have a father |

2.3.1 Intrigues and The Curse of Jíbùlù

Jàgbòlégún and his son, Rebùjà Májùwà, both lived many years after these events, and the people enjoyed peace and prosperity. In time, Jàgbòlégún died, and some time afterward, his son, the Rebùjà also died. Now, Rebùjà Májùwà had many wives, sons and daughters. His firstborn son was named Monógbè. His second son, born by another wife, was Jíbùlù. And his third born son, born by the same mother as Monógbè, was named Jagbédò. After the death of the Rebùjà, his firstborn son, Monógbè, was ordained to sit on the throne of his father thereby becoming the second Rebùjà of Òsòòró. Figure 2.1 is a graphic depicting the family tree with Jàgbòlégún as the root, and the three principal sons of Rebùjà Májùwà as leaves. We highlight Jíbùlù in red because a curse attributed to him is believed to have had lasting effects on his descendants.

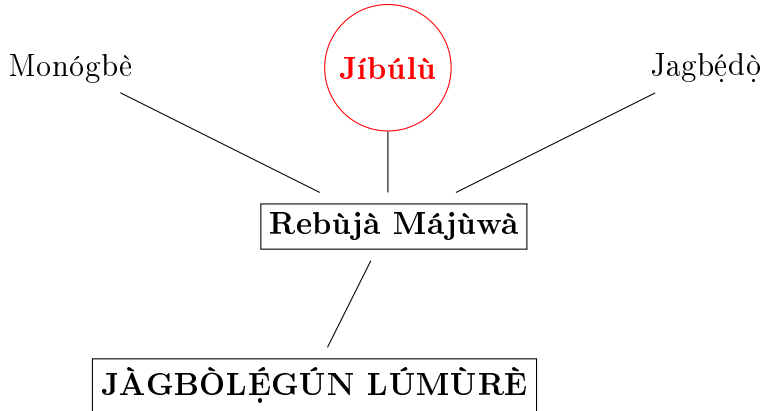


Figure 2.1: Jàgbòlégún to Jíbùlù et al

History has it that Monógbè was a poor man, but his younger brother Jíbùlù was a wealthy hunter who had many wives, children and assets. In addition Monógbè had only one son, and some daughters. Unbeknownst to Jíbùlù, Monógbè envied him and was suspicious that Jíbùlù could be eying the posi-

tion of the Rebùjà occupied by Monógbè. At that time all the people of Ìkálè revered and feared the Ọba of Benin. He was the supreme ruler in the whole region and only he had the power to sentence people to death. Whenever anyone was taken to Benin back then, it was almost certainly death for the person. So, Monógbè, wielding his influence as the Rebùjà, wove a malicious conspiracy against Jíbùlù and sent a false, bad report about him to the Ọba of Benin. The Ọba of Benin then sent three of his emissaries to go bring Jíbùlù down to Benin.

It so happened that while out hunting one day, Jíbùlù chanced upon the emissaries from Benin as they got near the village. They had been on the road for more than 2/3 months. He stopped to greet them and inquired about their reason for coming this far away from Benin. They told him the Rebùjà had reported a troublemaker in his kingdom to the Ọba of Benin and they had been sent to bring him in. Jíbùlù asked about their wellbeing, and remarked that they must be hungry. The men acknowledged that they were very, very hungry. So, Jíbùlù gave the visitors the small animal he had killed earlier that day, and gave them directions to the village. He told them to have it cooked for them to eat when they get there. They thanked him and went on their way. When the men got to Moríbodó, , aka Ode Òṣòdó, they told the Rebùjà how they met one man on their way, who gave them the small animal to eat when they arrive at their destination. So the animal was prepared for them and they ate and were satisfied.

Later in the day, when everyone had returned from their farms, the king summoned his court and the people, including the unsuspecting Jíbùlù, and they settled down for the business of the day. The emissaries asked the king

who the troublemaker in his domain was. The court officials, who were not in on the king's malicious scheme to get rid of his younger brother, were shocked and disturbed when the Rebùjà pointed at Jíbùlù. It was now the turn of the emissaries of the Ọba of Benin to be surprised at learning that the alleged troublemaker was the hunter they met on their way into the village. They asked Jíbùlù: "Were you not the man we met on our way, who gave us directions to the village and the small animal we had just eaten?" Jíbùlù answered that it was him, and added that he did not know what he had done to his brother that caused his brother to request for him to be taken to Benin, to almost certain death. The emissaries wondered: "How could this kindly man, who showed kindness even to strangers—hospitality—be the evil character painted by the Rebùjà to the Ọba of Benin?"

Jíbùlù was understandably flabbergasted and troubled. So were the people. Thankfully, the people came to the aid of Jíbùlù and said to the emissaries of the Ọba of Benin: "Ukú ée jeun ọṅẹ̀ jì tún pa ọṅẹ̀", which translates to: "Death does not eat a person's food and still kill the person". The emissaries agreed that they had eaten from this man's hand, hence they could not rightly take him to Benin to be killed. So they returned empty-handed. Afterward, Jíbùlù went to his brother, the Rebùjà, and asked: "What happened? What did I do to annoy you? It was God who gave me my wealth, my many wives and children, and domestic animals.... I didn't steal yours. Neither did I debar you in any way from acquiring these things." Jíbùlù continued: "Is it because of this Chieftaincy?" He then swore by an oracle that he would never take up the Rebùjà Chieftaincy, and that none of his children will either. He swore that if he or any of his children did, they would suffer and die!

When the second Rebùjà, Monógbè, died, Jíbùlù, who was the heir apparent

to the throne, refused to accept the Rebùjà Chieftaincy, out of regard for the curse he had placed on himself and his descendants—the curse of Jíbùlù—in order to reassure his suspicious brother, Monógbè. Jíbùlù then asked that the next person to him in line, his younger brother Jagbédò, be made the Rebùjà. At this point in the stream of time, the kings were resident at Òde Òṣòdró, from where they ruled. However, as the people were growing in population, and many of them were farmers, the land in Moribodó, aka Òde Òṣòdró, was not sufficient for them all. So, some families began to move further out from Òde Òṣòdró, to establish small satellite farming communities 5, 10 miles away. But they would return, from time to time, to Òde Òṣòdró for important events and occasions. In time, the farming village founded by Monógbè’s lineage became known as “Egure Ọlójà”, ie, “Village of the king”, moreso as others from his mother’s branch also became the Rebùjà. Many of those satellite family farming villages exist down to this day. After Jagbédò died, the next Rebùjà of Òṣòdró—the fourth Rebùjà—was his son, Akínbóyèwá. He also ruled at Òde Òṣòdró.

2.3.1.1 Descendants of Jíbùlù

Jíbùlù was blessed with many sons and daughters. The most prominent among the sons of Jíbùlù were four, namely:

1. Èhìnmónórèn, the eldest;
2. Ọdòfin Fìlò;
3. Sèjà;
4. Lúbókùn, the youngest

Of all the children of Jíbùlù, the youngest, Lúbókùn, was the wealthiest. He had many wives and children and domestic animals and all. In time, he moved out of Òde Òṣòdó in search of arable land for himself and his large family. Lúbókùn got to a vast area where many trees called “Ûtako” grew and flourished in the wild. So he settled his family there and called the place “Ugbó Ûtako”, which translates to: “Forest of Ûtako trees”. In time, the name “Ugbó Ûtako” morphed into “Ugbótako”, which today is known as “Igbótako”. Within a short time, Igbótako became the most prominent and most sophisticated, of the satellite family farming villages that spiralled out of Òde Òṣòdó, and became an established town in its own right.

Èhìnmónòrèn, being the eldest son of Jíbùlù, settled in the Ìgò Àdúwò area near Òde Òṣòdó. He did not move far away like his younger brothers and their families. For a long time, because of the curse of Jíbùlù, none of the children of Jíbùlù showed interest in becoming the Ọlójà, the Rebùjà of Òṣòdó. They left that Chieftaincy as the preserve of Monógbè’s lineage, i.e., the people of Egure Ọlójà. But that was about to change. The first descendant of Jíbùlù who, in defiance of ‘*the curse of Jíbùlù*’, sought to become the Rebùjà of Òṣòdó was Lúbókùn, the founder of Igbótako and the progenitor of the Lúbókùn ruling house of today.

The family tree from the root of Jàgbòlégún up to Èhìnmónòrèn et alia as leaves is depicted here in Figure 2.2. The lineage to Èhìnmónòrèn, who is the great great grandfather of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, is highlighted in blue.

When the fourth Rebùjà, Akínbóyèwá, died, it was expected that the next

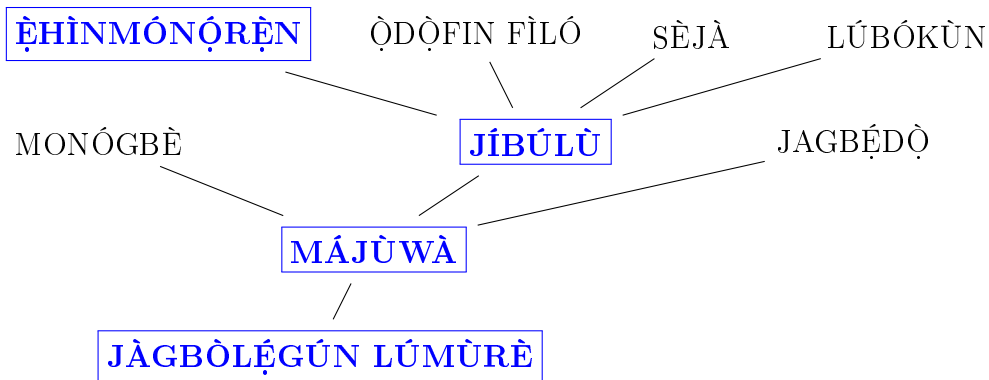


Figure 2.2: Jàgbòlẹ̀gún Lúmùrẹ̀ to Èhìnmónórẹ̀n et alia

Rebùjà was to be his son, Bámidó, from Egunre Ọlójà. But then, Lúbókùn expressed his desire to challenge for the title of the Rebùjà of Ọ̀ṣóòró . His older brothers were alarmed. They reminded Lúbókùn of the curse their father, Jíbùlù, had placed on any of his descendants who ventured to take up the Rebùjà Chieftaincy. That, it would appear, was the least of Lúbókùn's worries.

The Ọba of Benin was the suzerain, the supreme ruler, over the whole area, hence Lúbókùn knew that no one would dare to challenge the Ọba of Benin, if the mighty Ọba was on his side. As he was very wealthy, Lúbókùn thought up an ingenious intrigue to get the Ọba of Benin on his side. It so happened that two of Lúbókùn's many cows had calves, one each, on the same day. He took one of the cows and one of the calves and other stuff, and travelled to seek audience with the Ọba of Benin. It was said that it took him six months to get to Benin.

When Lúbókùn got to Benin, and was finally ushered into the presence of the Ọba of Benin, he said that he had come from a far away village to offer some

presents to the Ọba. Lúbókùn, reportedly, said that he had been informed by his father and father's fathers that it was taboo for a cow to have two calves at the same time, and that if by some freak of nature this happened, the cow and one of the calves must be taken to the Ọba of Benin. Hence, he had been on the road for the past six months in order to bring this cow among his herd, who had two calves on the same day, and one of the calves to the Ọba.

The Ọba of Benin was impressed and clearly pleased with this mock loyalty. So, he asked Lúbókùn: "What do you want me to do for you?" Lúbókùn replied that he wanted to become the Ọlójà of his village but his brothers said that he could not, because of a curse placed by their father, etc. At that, the Ọba of Benin gave Lúbókùn all the paraphernalia of kingship and said: "Go! If any of your brothers challenge you, let me know, and I will behead them!"

Lúbókùn returned home feeling chuffed, happy and victorious. He declared that he had been appointed the Ọlójà by the Ọba of Benin. Of course, no one dared to defy the Ọba of Benin by challenging Lúbókùn. That was how Lúbókùn became the fifth Rebùjà of Ọ̀ṣóòró, and the first from the lineage of Jíbúlù, son of Májùwà, son of Jàgbòlégún.

However, three months later, Lúbókùn was stricken with leprosy! As was customary, regardless of who a person was, no leper was permitted to live in the community. So his sons built a hut for him on the outskirts of Iju-Odo, a neighbouring village, which predated Igbótako. Three years later, it was reported that Lúbókùn succumbed to his illness and died.

Thus, the people believe that Lúbókùn suffered and died because he defied “*the curse of Jíbùlù*”, his father, by the oracle. According to that belief, Lúbókùn was the first casualty of “*the curse of Jíbùlù*”, but he would not be the last. It was customary to bury recognised kings of Òṣòdró in Òde Òṣòdró. Having a king buried with his forefathers in Òde Òṣòdró was akin to burial in “the valley of kings” in ancient Egypt. The remains of Lúbókùn was never brought to Òde Òṣòdró for burial. For this reason, some schools of thought discount Lúbókùn as one of the kings of the people.

2.3.1.2 Back to Egure Ọlójà

After the demise of Lúbókùn, Bámidó of Egure Ọlójà became the sixth (fifth, if Lúbókùn is discounted) Rebùjà of Òṣòdró. After him, Ikúdámoró, also of Egure Ọlójà, became the seventh (sixth, if Lúbókùn is discounted) Rebùjà of Òṣòdró. In time, Ikudamoro also died, leaving the position of the Rebuja of Òṣòdró up for grabs. The name of the firstborn son of Lúbókùn was Ogungbemi. In time, Ògúngbè mí also begat a son. As was customary back then, when a child was born, the Ifá oracle was often consulted to ask what name to give the child, and to divine what the future holds for the child, especially when the child was a boy. Following the direction of the Ifá oracle, this son of Ògúngbè mí was named after the late Ọlójà, Bámidó of Egure Ọlójà. The child was named Bámidó Ọmóghèhìn. This child grew up and later became father to a son, named David Négwó. David Négwó later grew up to become an astute and crafty statesman, who would weave some of the most incredible intrigues in the land, and arguably had the most damning impact on the people of Òṣòdró.

2.3.1.3 The Challenge of Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn

After the death of Ikúdámoró, Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn aspired to become the next Ọlójà, the eighth, (seventh, if Lúbókùn is discounted) Rebuja of Ọ̀ṣòdó. Again, his brothers raised the spectre of “the curse of Jíbùlù”, and reminded Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn of what befell his grandfather, Lúbókùn. But he dismissed all the remonstrations of his brothers, saying if they felt they were not entitled to the kingship, then they were not, but not him. He reasoned that all the descendants of Lúmùrè via Jàgbòlégún were entitled to the kingship established at the founding of the Ọ̀ṣòdó kingdom. And, technically, he was correct!

Following this, the vast majority of the Ọ̀ṣòdó people had Ikúyìnminù of Egure Ọlójà installed as the successor Rebuja of Ọ̀ṣòdó, while the people of Igbotako appointed Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn as the Rebùjà of Ọ̀ṣòdó. This dispute was so serious that it came to the attention of the British Governor of Nigeria in Lagos. The Governor was informed that this could lead to internecine war between the contesting communities. So, the Governor sent one Captain Swarger (spelling uncertain), one of his lieutenants, also British, to go investigate the matter.

Back then there was no road from Lagos to Ìkálẹ̀, so the Captain and his men had to travel on water through the creeks and tributaries that empty into the Atlantic ocean. The journey took them days, until they came to a village named Olúkọkọ, on the banks of a river, near Ọlótọ, and also near Ìgò—the farm settlement of the family of Èhinmónòrẹ̀n, son of Jíbùlù. Messengers were then sent out to invite the contending parties to come meet ‘the Whiteman’ there.

First to arrive were the Ikúyìnminù faction, from Òde Òṣòró, as they were much closer to the rendezvous point. ‘The Whiteman’, it was said, was observing as the men scantily clad in wrappers or loin coverings were arriving and taking their seats, likely wondering who ‘these bushmen’ were. Then came the Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn faction, with Bańídó, who led them in, well-dressed and decked to impress! The people of Igbótako were more civilised at the time. The Captain was impressed and felt: “surely this was the rightful king”.

But when the pro tem court started and evidence and witnesses were presented, it quickly dawned on the Governor’s representative that the outwardly unassuming and unimpressive Ikúyìnminù was the rightful heir to the throne of the Rebùjà of Òṣòró. So, he made his judgement, fairly, in favour of Ikúyìnminù. Captain Swarger, however, noted that he could see that Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn was an influential member of the society, so he asked if there was another prominent position that he could be given. It then transpired that the position of Ọjọmọ—which was ordinarily reserved for the family of Lẹ̀mẹ̀ghà, who descended from the third and youngest son of Mábùlé, her son to the king of Orófun—was vacant. Captain Swarger then said: “Give it to him”. There and then, Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn was made the Ọjọmọ. Both sides were happy with the judgements, and they went back to their homes rejoicing. Trouble was thus averted in the land, and the challenge of Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn put down.

Thus, Bámidó Ọmóghẹ̀hìn became Bámidó Ọjọmọ. He was the first descendant of Lúmùrè to cross family lines to assume a title reserved for another

lineage of the four primary branches of Òṣòdó kingdom. As Lúmùrè is a very large family, others of the Lumure family have also taken up the other primary positions reserved for other lineages. However, no one from any of the three other primary branches had ever crossed family lines to take up the post of the Rebùjà of Òṣòdó, reserved only for the sons of Jàgbòlégún Lúmùrè.

2.3.2 Further British Intervention

Although Bámidó Omóghèhìn was happy at being made the Ojomo of Òṣòdó, his son, David Nègwó, was not happy, as he coveted the Rebùjà throne. Not long after Ikúyìnminù became the undisputed Rebùjà, the British restructured the governance of the area. They created the position of Baálè, which was nonexistent in Ìkálè until that time. The British also created Courts, and made the Baálè the President of the Court in each jurisdiction, granting them warrants to arrest, try, fine, or jail anyone who threatens the social order, peace and security of the area.

In Òṣòdó, the British made David Nègwó the Baálè. In Òde-Aye, they made Déèkú—the father of Rear Admiral Àdúwò—the Baálè. In Òde-Ìrèlè, they made Lèbí—the grandfather of the late Chief Lèbí, former Principal of Methodist High School Okitipupa—the Baálè. In Sàbomè, they made the Òtò of Sàbomè the Baálè. In Ìdèpé (Okitipupa), Akínnúbi was made the Baálè. Similar structures were put in place in other Ìkálè communities.

At that time, there were no Councils and legislative houses in Nigeria. Orders, referred to as “Order in Council”, used to come from London, via what was called “The London House” to the Governor of Nigeria. The Governor

would then pass the orders down through the British Regional “Resident Officers” (aka ‘Resident’) to the British Divisional “District Officers” (aka ‘DO’), on through interpreters to the Baálẹ̀ in each area to the people. Because the Baálẹ̀ wielded a lot of authority—able to fine or jail anyone in the community, including the Ọ́lọ́jà—people feared the Baálẹ̀ more than they did the Ọ́lọ́jà. The Ọ́lọ́jàs were effectively reduced to only performing ceremonial traditional duties.

2.3.3 “The Tyranny of Negwo” — M. A. E. Onunkun

During the period David Nẹ̀gwó, commonly known simply as Nẹ̀gwó, was the Baálẹ̀ of Ọ̀sọ̀dó, the people of Ọ̀sọ̀dó were subjected to what Senator M A E Onunkun described as “The tyranny of Nẹ̀gwó”. Most of the Ọ̀sọ̀dó people at this time, before the founding of Ilutitun, were dwelling in their small family farming villages², over 20 of them, and Nẹ̀gwó would allegedly use Divide-and-Rule to pitch one village against the other. Igbótako, which was Nẹ̀gwó’s base, was the largest and most civilised of the satellite villages of the Ọ̀sọ̀dó people at the time. Nẹ̀gwó would, reportedly, draw close to one village one minute in order to victimise another, and vice versa. Because of this, Rebùjà Ikúyìnminù encouraged the people of the various villages to come together to form a larger town that would rival Igbótako, and hopefully make it difficult for Nẹ̀gwó to play one village against the other in order to exploit and oppress them. Nẹ̀gwó was, understandably, bitterly opposed to the founding of such a town.

With the British came the influence of the Church of England, which brought

²Some of the family farming villages, which exist down to this day, are: Egure-Ọ́lọ́jà, Ìgò Adúwọ̀, Ọ̀kẹ̀rìsà, Iju-Odò, Iju-Ọ̀kẹ̀, Ùrà, Àgírífán, Şògbón, Oko Líhà, Ìládó, etc.

the Anglican profession of Christianity to Nigeria. In the early 1900s, the Òṣòòró people started to imbibe this new profession of faith. It was said that one of the early itinerant Catechists in the area was one Mr Babáyẹmí, who from his base in Ìtẹ̀bú Manùwà, used to go to conduct Sunday services at different Òṣòòró villages. Mr Babáyẹmí, reportedly, later relocated to Ìgò Àdúwò village, which was more central to the satellite Òṣòòró villages than Ìtẹ̀bú Manùwà was. Working for the interests of the Anglican Church, it was reported that Mr Babáyẹmí supported the initiative of Rebùjà Ikúyìnminù, for the families scattered in different villages to come together to form a town that would be big and strong enough to resist the tyranny of Nẹ́gwó.

Even some relatives of Nẹ́gwó, i.e., descendants of Lúbókùn, such as the Àgírífán and Ṣògbán people, from Igbótako joined other Òṣòòró family villages to settle in Ìlútitun. For example, the Ṣògbón and Àgírífán people are Lúbókùn, yet some of them joined in establishing Ìlútitun. This is the reason both families exist in Igbótako as well as in Ìlútitun today. Despite all Nẹ́gwó's malicious efforts, the town of Ìlútitun was founded in 1920, during the reign of Ikúyìnminù as Ọlọjà, the Rebùjà of Òṣòòró. The Ebenezer Anglican Church founded in Ìlútitun around the same time has seen various developments and transformations. It is today the Cathedral and Headquarters of the Anglican Diocese on the Coast. For most of his life, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was a member of this Church community, although he was not a member of the Church before he started school.

As Senator M. A. E. Onunkun puts it: "The Tyranny of Nẹ́gwó", was not limited to the villages of Òṣòòró. It extended to Ìkọyà, which was under his jurisdiction as the Baálẹ̀. In 1920, the position of the Àbòdì became va-

cant, as the latest Àbòdì, Adétúwò the First, had died. Àbòdì Adéşùgbà, the Àbòdì who ruled and died before Adétúwò the First became the Àbòdì, had a son named Ìtíolú, born to him by a wife he took from Igbótako. This woman, Ìtíolú's mother, and Négwó's father, Bámidó Ọmóghèhìn, were begotten by the same father, Ògúngbè mí (son of Lúbókùn) and born by the same mother. Hence, Négwó and Ìtíolú were first cousins. After Àbòdì Adétúwò the First died, the people of Ìkọyà made Àjànà the successor Àbòdì.

When Négwó heard this development, he retorted: "Àjànà...! Who is Àjànà?" He went straight to the DO and reported that the people of Ìkọyà had played foul; they had defied the law and installed a dangerous man who was a killer of twins as the Àbòdì. Having got the policemen he requested, Négwó went to Ìkọyà, arrested Àjànà and some principal men of Ìkọyà. He subsequently got them banished from the town, and had them sent into exile. At the time, it was the Provincial Court, headed by the Resident, that could send people into exile. The Resident was White British and did not know a word of the language of the people. And, the people were 100% unlettered, so they could not speak a word of English. As told by Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, Négwó had the official Interpreters in his pocket, as he regularly sent them presents, thereby making them beholden to him. So, whenever the Resident asked the people: "Guilty or not guilty?" and the people responded "Not guilty" in Ìkálẹ̀ language, the Interpreters would say to the Resident that the people had pleaded "Guilty." Open and shut case!

The people were often baffled at Négwó's infamous successes at using the legal structures of the day to suppress the people. Hence, the only conclusion they could draw was that the man was a witch with magical powers with

which he bewitched ‘the Whiteman’ to judge in his favour. Hence, the fear of Négwó covered the land like the thick cloud of a rainy day in July. It wasn’t until decades later, when educated locals gained access to the Archives, that they saw the deceit of the Interpreters, as the records show that the people always pleaded guilty to Négwó’s allegations, which was never the case.

Two weeks after having successfully removed Àjànà and prominent Ìkòyà chiefs from the scene, Négwó sent for his cousin, Ìtíolú, who at the time was a poor hunter in one of the villages near Igbótako, as he had moved to Igbótako with his mother. On the arrival of Ìtíolú, Négwó said to him: “Have you not heard that Àbòdì is dead? Do you not know it’s the turn of your family? And you stayed in the bush chasing animals?” Ìtíolú responded: “Have I got any clothes to wear?” In strong, unequivocal, commanding tone, Négwó barked: “Go have a bath and wash yourself thoroughly! Then, come take these clothes and lavender oil³. Get dressed, we are going to Ìkòyà!” He then gave him some clothes, including the heavy, traditional ‘Aṣo Ẹtù’, usually worn only by royalty and wealthy people. Mr Adébíyí Akínfòsilè⁴ once told Senator M. A. E. Onunkun that he was in the group that followed Négwó and Ìtíolú to Ìkòyà that day in 1920.

At the sight of Négwó and his troupe⁵ approaching Ìkòyà, the call went out:

³Lavender oil was a very popular perfumed oil that used to be called ‘lòfíndà’ in the lingo. Over time all perfumed oils came to be called lòfíndà.

⁴Mr Adébíyí Akínfòsilè was the older brother to Chief Olú Akínfòsilè, after whom the road from Igbótako to the Ọrẹ-Şágámù express road was named. Chief Olú Akínfòsilè was the Minister of Communications in the second cabinet appointed after Tafawa Balewa officially dissolved Parliament on 8 December 1964.

⁵Negwo used to move around with an entourage, which included people who used to carry him while sat in his hammock chair, his lieutenants, supporters and policemen. So his arrival anywhere was never unnoticed.

“Négwó is coming! Négwó is coming!” And the people made a dash for the bushes, worried that Négwó was coming to take some of them away again. He called out to them that they should not run away, and added that he had come to ‘eat and play..., dance and celebrate with them’, not to quarrel with them. Disconcerted and apprehensive, they stopped running away from him. On gathering the people together, Négwó asked: “Are you afraid of me?” Still discomfited, unsure how to respond, the people answered: “No”. With a smug look and a tinge of sarcasm Négwó then quipped: “Why, then, were you running away from me?” No one dared to respond. Négwó had Ìtíolú stand in their midst in the kingly garment given him by Négwó, and he asked the people: “Do you know this man standing in your midst?” They were not sure, so he told them: “This is Ìtíolú, the son of the late Àbòdì Adèsùgbà your king before Àbòdì Adétúwò the First, who had just died.” Négwó then barked: “Bring out the crown and place it on his head, for, he is your new king, the Àbòdì!” Thus, on that day in 1920, Négwó, the Baálè, imposed Ìtíolú on the people of Ìkòyà as their king.

2.3.3.1 Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun’s Negwo Encounter

Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was a powerful man, who had his own village, where he lived with his family. Many years later, he would become the father of M. A. E. Onunkun. Before M. A. E. Onunkun was born, likely sometime before the 1920s, M. A. E. Onunkun’s would-be mother was seriously ill. So, she left her husband’s village where she was living and returned to her family in order that they could help care for her. Having lost a number of children in death, which she and many others attributed to the malicious effects of witchcraft, she only had 2 living children at this stage. The oldest was a boy, who was old enough to climb palm trees to harvest palm fruits.

He was probably a teenager already. The younger child was a girl. M. A. E. Onunkun's would-be mother left both children with her mother-in-law, i.e., the mother of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, as others in the village used to do.

On one fateful day, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's mother, Ûlúóyí, prepared a different soup for the 2 children that M. A. E. Onunkun's would-be mother left with her. When she served them food with the soup one afternoon, the girl, Adébèkọn⁶, looked at the soup and did not feel comfortable eating it. When Adébèkọn complained that the soup was 'black' and that she couldn't eat it, her older brother chastised her, saying: "Your mother is ill, and you have someone else give you food, and you complain it's black? You will just starve!" Undeterred, Adébèkọn refused to eat the soup, but her older brother ate it. Shortly afterward he started to vomit blood. The people around sent for his father, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, who was in his farm. He rushed down, and despite applying different medicinal portions and remedies he had at home the boy died.

Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was so upset, he accused his mother of deliberately killing the boy, and that she was a witch. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's older sister and first child of their mother sprang to her mother's defence saying how could her brother accuse their mother of deliberately killing his son and of being a witch? Their mother kept saying: "*This is the soup ò, this is the soup Onunkun said I used to kill his son ò*", but she did not taste the soup herself. However, her first daughter touched the soup, tasted it and remarked that it didn't taste right. A younger woman—sister to one

⁶More on this girl child later in Section 3.2

Isaiah, both children of Ọyòọma and grandchildren of Ọbáyànmuwà—who had been betrothed to a man who wanted to marry her was pounding yam in the compound when she heard the furore in the wake of the death of the boy. Not pleased that Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun accused his mother of deliberately killing his son and of being a witch, this lady also touched the soup and licked her finger to prove that there was no problem with the soup. Shortly afterward, the two women also died, making three people dead in the village in one afternoon, from partaking of the soup!

Emmanuel Obamuwahan Onunkun then said: "*It's enough! You are a dangerous woman! I'm leaving this village for you. But, you this woman, never let me see your face again, else I will kill you myself!*" With that, Emmanuel Obamuwahan Onunkun left Oko Liha and went further out North East, towards Ode-Aye, to found a new village of his own.

Even at that, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's mother remained adamant that her son had wronged her by accusing her of being a witch. So, she went to Nẹgwó, who was the Baálẹ at the time, to report that her son, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, accused her on being a witch. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's immediate older sister, named Asùhì, went with her to testify against her brother, that he indeed wrongly accused their mother of having deliberately killed his son and of being a witch.

To this, Nẹgwó said: "*I have been hearing about this Onunkun, acting as he liked in the village. Who does he think he is? I will send him to prison!*" So, Nẹgwó sent for Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun to be brought to court. In court, his sister testified against him that he called their mother a witch.

Despite his best explanations about what happened, Nègwó said: “*How could you accuse your mother, who did not kill you as a child, of being a witch?*” With that, he gave him an impossible fine of £60! During the 2014 video interview, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun remarked: “In today’s money, that was more than ₦10m!”

Failure to pay the fine meant serving time in prison, which was Nègwó’s ploy. And, serving time in prison back in those days was a huge reproach and stigma. To avoid that, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun had to borrow money to pay the fine, and he entered into ‘slavery’ for nearly 5 years to pay back the money. This double jeopardy so angered him that he swore never to have anything to do with his sister, Asùhì, and his mother again. He forbade them from ever approaching him, on pain of death, that he would take their heads off if they ever dared. **It was in the new village he went to found, near Òde-Aye, that Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was born in September 1925⁷.** Ditto many of his siblings, including his immediate older sister, Ọláyẹmí.

In time, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun began to flourish in his new village, as his land was very productive. This news got to his relatives in Oko-Líhà, including his mother. One day, while working in his farm, near his extensive yam barn, he saw an old woman approaching his village from the distance. As the woman got nearer, he realised that it was his mother. Angry, he shouted out:

⁷Ayelemi was one of the wives in the family preparing to escort Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun’s oldest daughter, Ọmónusànbí, as a new bride to her husband’s house, as custom dictated. But, on the morning of the day they were to go, she gave birth to Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, hence she couldn’t go with the other women.

“What are you looking for here, woman?”

His mother replied: “Go and get your cutlass or gun to kill me. I am starving in my village. You are my son. I will rather you kill me than let hunger kill me. So, go get your gun or cutlass ò!”

Taken aback by her response, and in a softer tone, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun asked: “Can you carry some yams?”

“Yes, I can”, replied his mother.

“Okay, take as many yams as you can carry, but never come back to my village again ò!”

His mother responded: “When I finish eating these yams, I will come back again ò. I cannot allow myself to starve to death.”

True to her word, she kept coming back again and again until her death. And, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun would even send her some yams from time to time in order to stop her coming near him to kill his children, as he was apprehensive she would do, now that he had started flourishing again, and produced more children, after the setback caused by his mother and Négwó’s outrageous fine.

2.3.4 Baálè to Ọlójà Conversion Intrigues

The British later conducted an investigation, and found that in the traditional structure, the Ọlójàs were the ones whom the people actually looked up to for direction. The Baálès were extraneous to the society. Following that investigation, an ‘Order in Council’ came from the London Office in 1925, directing that the position of the Baálès be de-recognised, and the Ọlójàs put in Court in place of them.

When the Baálès learned about the 1925 Order in Council, designed to take powers over the courts away from the Baálès and grant them to the Ọlójàs, there began a scramble by the Baálès, by hook or crook, to become Ọlójàs. Of all the Baálès in Ìkálè at the time, only Lèbí did not become an Ọlójà, because he died before his Ọlójà, the Olófun of Òde-Ìrèlè. The position of the Ọlójà at Òde Aye was vacant, and it so happened that Dèèkú was from one of the ruling houses, so he transitioned from Baálè to Ọlójà. In Ìdèpé, the position of the Ọlójà was vacant, too, so Akínnúbi⁸ worked his way around the corridors of the DO to become the Ọlójà—the Jẹgun of Ìdèpé—although he was only related to the ruling house via his mother. The Ọlójà of Igbódìgò also died around this time, and his brother who was the Baálè converted to the Ọlójà. But, the Rebùjà of Òşóòró, Ikúyìnminù, who saw off the challenge of Nẹgwó’s father, Bámidó Ọmọgbèhìn, to the seat of Ọlójà, and who was instrumental to the founding of Ìlútítun five years earlier, was not in a hurry to die and vacate the post of the Ọlójà. Furthermore, Ikúyìnminù had the backing of most of the people of Òşóòró and the Ìjámà (kingmakers).

⁸Senator M A E Onunkun said it is forbidden for the Jẹgun of Ìdèpé to eat dogs. He added that Akínnúbi was from a family that eats dogs, hence ordinarily should not have been the Jẹgun of Ìdèpé. He added that Akínnúbi could not go to the shrine when he was Ọlójà because he had eaten dogs.

Négwó, for his part, was not a man known for patience and a waiting attitude. Further, he had his own supporters, too, especially in Igbótako. He also had an Ace—he knew ‘the Whiteman’! He knew how to work his way around the corridors of power in the DO’s office, as he was friendly with the Interpreters and Court Clerks. In the centuries and years leading up to the 1920s, twin babies were viewed as aberrations and killed in infancy in Ìkálẹ̀ land and many other Yorùbá sub-tribes as well as other Nigerian tribes. Birthing twins was a dangerous thing in many parts of Nigeria during this period, for, not only were the twins endangered—often killed or abandoned in jungles to die—but their mothers were also ostracised in the society⁹. Although this heinous infanticide had been abolished by the British, it was still being secretly practised in some places in the 1920s.

So, Négwó fabricated an allegation that Ọlójà, Ikúyìnminù, and the Ìjámàs were still killing twins¹⁰ in Òṣòrò. Subsequently, the Ìjámà, as a body, was proscribed, and Ikúyìnminù and many prominent members of the Ìjámà echelon, like Àdúwò, were exiled¹¹ to Onitsha. Some of them never returned to their homeland, as they died there in exile. Some of them later returned to Òṣòrò, though, when the authorities found out the charges against them

⁹Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said, when he was working with the Council at Ìkọ̀yà in the 1950s, he was shown a woman who was the first twin allowed to live in the whole of Ìkálẹ̀ land.

¹⁰Giving birth to twins was considered an aberration and bad omen that could bring calamity upon society in many Nigerian tribes up until the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mary Slessor, a Scottish missionary in Nigeria, was credited to be one of the influential figures who worked for the abolition of this heinous custom towards the end of the 19th century. In Yoruba land, twins went from being viewed as a curse to being viewed as a supernatural blessing, even a ‘worshipped’ oracle, described in the language as: ‘Òrìṣà Ìbejì’.

¹¹At that time, ‘exiling to a distant land’ was an extreme form of punishment, as there were no prisons in many places. Exiled individuals were housed with some natives in the land of exile.

were unfounded. To the chagrin of Négwó, Ikúyìnminù was restored to his rightful position as the Ọlójà, the Rebùjà of Òṣòrò. The “Intelligence Report” later written by the DO, Mr C I Gavin, in 1934 absolved the Ìjámàs, and they were restored. The DO wrote of the Ìjámàs: “They are part of the administration of the District.”

Négwó was a clever, cunning, calculating and well-connected man, not known for being a quitter, ever relentless in having his way. Négwó was certainly unhappy with the turn of events that led to Ikúyìnminù being restored to the position of the Ọlójà. Not long after that, it was reported to the Rebùjà that one man from Iju-Odò, who was a supporter of Négwó, had been found dead on the bush path near the Rebùjà’s village. It was taboo for the Rebùjà to see a corpse. So the Rebùjà sent to the man’s family, telling them what he heard, and directed them to come take the body for burial. Moses Onunkun, the firstborn son of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun’s father, reportedly, said he saw the corpse while on an errand for his father, and people had to cut another path through the bush to skirt around the body.

When the report of the suspicious death of the man got to Négwó, he was said to have paid Rebùjà Ikúyìnminù a visit where he feigned sympathy with the Rebùjà. When Négwó mentioned the matter, the Rebùjà explained that he did not know anything about the death of the man, and that when he heard about it, he sent a message to the man’s family to come take the corpse¹². When Négwó intimated that this was a very serious problem, the Rebùjà pleaded with him to keep it quiet. Armed with this information, Négwó went to report that Ikúyìnminù had sent people to go kill the man.

¹²It is taboo for the Rebùjà to see a corpse

This time Négwó arranged to have Ikúyìnminù exiled to Ilèṣà. Why Ilèṣà? It was said that Négwó's mother was a slave girl from Ilèṣà. It was believed that Négwó had Ikúyìnminù placed in the house of one of his mother's relatives, where Ikúyìnminù was subsequently poisoned. And the man died. The year was 1928. This was the reason for the deep bitterness between Igbótako people and Ìlútitun people.

After the death of Rebùjà Ikúyìnminù, Négwó declared that he wanted to become the Ọlójà, but the Ìlútitun people were dead against this. Even so, no one dared to challenge Négwó, for fear that he would kill them. So, they went to bring Négwó's nephew, Cornelius Adéoyè, who was a student in Lagos at the time, reasoning that Négwó would not kill his own nephew. This is the connection between Négwó and Cornelius Adéoyè. Ògúngbè mí, the firstborn son on Lúbókùn begat Bámidó Ọmóghèhin (Ọjọmọ) who begat Négwó. The same Ògúngbè mí also begat Ládókùn, who begat Àkàngbá, of the same level as Négwó in the Lúbókùn pedigree. Àkàngbá then became father to Cornelius Adéoyè.

Thus, in 1928, Cornelius Adéoyè was installed as the Rebùjà of Òṣóòró in 'Ìlútitun, while the people of Igbótako installed Négwó as the Rebùjà of Òṣóòró in Igbótako. To resolve the impasse and avert war between the people, the DO directed that the Àbòdì mediate in the matter. This was Àbòdì Ìtíolú, Négwó's first cousin, who Négwó had imposed on the people of Ìkọyà, and had been propping up. Who, other than Négwó, would the Àbòdì side with? It was said that Àbòdì Ìtíolú suggested that the younger man, Adéoyè, step down and allow the older Négwó to be the Rebùjà. After Négwó might have died, then Adéoyè would become the next Rebùjà. Thereafter, the ti-

tle would rotate between Igbótako and Ìlútítun. In the interim, Cornelius Adéoyè was *unofficially* given the title of Baálè, for, the official Baálè title had been derecognised by the British Colonial Government. Thus, circa October 1928, David Nègwó became the undisputed Ọlójà, the 8th Rebùjà of Òṣòòró.

About three months after Nègwó became the Rebùjà of Òṣòòró, he was stricken by Stricture of the urinary tract, which perhaps resulted from some severe sexually transmitted disease. He was moved from one treatment place to another, all to no avail. He was said to have been in severe pain, and it was reported that maggots were coming out of his body. Eventually, the powerful and feared Nègwó—loved by some, despised by many—died on 29 March 1931¹³. The Òṣòòró people believed, and some probably still do, that Nègwó succumbed to “the curse of Jíbúlù”, his great great grandfather, even as his great grandfather, Lúbókùn is belived to have done. Nègwó was the second person believed to have become a victim of “the curse of Jíbúlù”. The man Nègwó was so hated and despised by Ìkálè people in general, Òṣòòró people in particular, that even decades after his reign of fear people often referred to him as: “Nègwó ’lú ẹ”, which transliterates to “One who destroys his hometown”.

During the stormy years of what Senator M. A. E. Onunkun described as: “The Tyranny of Nègwó”, many Òṣòòró people fled the region and established villages in regions outside the sphere of influence of the Baálè, Nègwó. Some of them are found today in neighbouring Ìlàjẹ villages, and some even found in Ogun State, following the Exodus of people from the Nègwó-dominated

¹³Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was about 5½ years old when Nègwó died. He said he did not know Nègwó in person, but he knew Nègwó’s mother in person, as she outlived Nègwó.

region. Allegedly, when Ìlútitun was to be founded, Ọlọjà Ikúyìnminù made efforts to bring these dispersed Òṣòòró people back home, but many of them chose to stay away for fear of coming under the yoke of Négwó again.

2.3.5 After the Storm and Intrigues of Négwó

After the death of Négwó, Cornelius Adéoyè was installed unopposed by anyone from any of the many quarters of the Òṣòòró kingdom. They performed all the rites and rituals of coronation as king for Cornelius Adéoyè, as required by tradition. All seemed well; people began to try to rebuild the bridges broken during the reign of Négwó, especially as Baálè. But, then, Cornelius Adéoyè was also a descendant of Lúbókùn, the first man believed to have been struck down for defying the oracle used by Jíbúlù to swear and curse that neither he, nor any of his descendants, will ever take up the Rebùjà title. About a year after becoming the Rebùjà, Cornelius Adéoyè suddenly lost sight in both eyes. This caused many of the people to be concerned, for, what community would want their king to be blind!

So the people summoned all the Ifá priests, herbalists and soothsayers they knew for help. It was said that one of them pointed out that the king's sudden blindness was caused by a curse before an oracle by one of the king's ancestors a long, long time ago. The panacea? The people were asked to seek out the oldest living son of the first son of the man who placed the curse, take a cow with them to the site of the oracle to offer a sacrifice of appeasement. So, they sought out the oldest living son of Èhìnmónórèn. But no one living knew the exact site the said oracle was located, all they knew was that it was at Òde Òṣòòró, the original homestead of the Òṣòòró people.

So, they went to Òde Òṣòrò and offered the sacrifice as directed. The story goes that a week later, Rebùjà Cornelius Adéoyè amazingly regained his sight.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun went on to narrate that after this early scare, Ọlójà Cornelius Adéoyè went on to rule for 18 years as the Rebùjà of Òṣòrò until his death in 1950. The story goes that, shortly before his death, the Rebùjà fell into a pit latrine, and according to the belief of people back then, evil spirits dwell in pit latrines, and anyone who fell into them rarely lived long thereafter, unless certain rituals were performed. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun added that he met a man from Abeokuta in 1958, while in the Nigerian College, who said water must never be used to clean the body of such an individual immediately afterwards, but rather a lamb or goat must be slaughtered and its blood be used to clean the person from head to toe before water could be used to clean the individual. As the story goes, Ọlójà Adéoyè fell ill shortly after this incident and never recovered, but died shortly afterwards. So, many of the people believe(d) that Ọlójà Cornelius Adéoyè was the third victim of “the curse of Jíbùlù”, since he was also a descendant of Jíbùlù from the lineage Lúbókùn. As we will detail later in Section 4.1, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun knew Ọlójà Adéoyè very well, as he actually lived in the Ọlójà’s house during his early school years with one of the Ọlójà’s wives who was his older sister and mother figure.

After the death of Ọlójà Cornelius Adéoyè, M. A. E. Onunkun was one of the instruments that put Júbà on the throne as the Rebùjà of Òṣòrò. Leading up to that, there arose yet another fierce dispute between the people of Igbótako and the people of Ìlútítun on who was to become the next Rebùjà of Òṣòrò. The people of Igbótako contended that since Cornelius Adéoyè was

a native of Ìlútitun, the next Rebùjà should come from Igbótako. Igbótako people were relying on a letter allegedly written by Àbòdì Ìtíolú to the DO in 1928, after judging between Nẹgwó and Adéoyè. (*The mode of address of letters back then was “My good friend,” “Your good friend,” rather than “Dear Sir,” “Yours sincerely,” etc.*) The letter (or its substance), from to Senator M A E Onunkun’s recollection, reads:

“My good friend,

The problem of Rebùjà title in Òşóòró has been settled by me. Now, Nẹgwó will be the Oloja. When Nẹgwó dies, Adéoyè will succeed him. Subsequently, the title will rotate between Igbótako and Ìlútitun....”

Your good friend,

Àbòdì X

At this time, 1952, M. A. E. Onunkun was the Council Clerk in charge of Chieftaincy affairs in Orísun Mèta District Council, based at Ìkòyà. He requested to see the said archived document on which the people of Igbótako based their claim. On being presented with the document, he found out that it was fraught with errors. For one thing, the document was not signed by anyone. To the contrary, someone wrote: “Àbòdì”, not even the name of Àbòdì Ìtíolú, on the document, and for signature, put an “X” in front of the title. M. A. E. Onunkun reckoned that the said document was written by an elderly Ìjẹbú man who used to be the Secretary to Àbòdì Ìtíolú. M. A. E. Onunkun knew the man, when he took up the Council Clerk job in 1952. In addition, M. A. E. Onunkun questioned the fact that the names of the

disputing parties that the Àbòdì allegedly mediated between in 1928 on the Rebùjà Chieftaincy dispute were not indicated on the document, neither was any witness named, thereby making the document not worth the paper it was written on.

Perhaps the strongest argument of M. A. E. Onunkun, that destroyed the said recommendation of Àbòdì Ìtíolú that the Rebùjà title be rotated between Igbótako and Ìlútitun was that the Rebùjà title is “a Ruling House Chieftaincy”, rather than a “Non-ruling House Chieftaincy”. He went on to explain that “a Ruling House Chieftaincy” rotates between Ruling House families, not between towns. In a 2012 video interview, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun gave the title of “Olúbàdàn of Ìbàdàn” as an example of a “Non-ruling House Chieftaincy”, which is attained by elevation, not by family of birth. He added that anyone—even a non-native of Ìbàdàn—can become the Olúbàdàn of Ìbàdàn. But, such is not the case with Ruling House Chieftaincies.

In Òṣòrò, there are four Ruling House families—Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n, Ọ̀dọ̀fin Fìlọ̀, Sẹ̀jà and Lúbókùn. Only one of the ruling houses, Lúbókùn, exists in Igbótako, whereas all four exist in Ìlútitun. For example, although Adéoyè was from Ìlútitun, he was of the Lúbókùn Ruling House. So, if it was to be rotated to Igbótako, that would invariably mean that another member of the Lúbókùn Ruling House would succeed Adéoyè of the same Ruling House. Hence, M. A. E. Onunkun argued that it was customarily wrong to rotate the Rebùjà title between Ìlútitun and Igbótako, as Àbòdì Ìtíolú allegedly suggested in arbitration between Nẹ̀gwó and Adéoyè in 1928. The DO and the Resident upheld M. A. E. Onunkun’s arguments, and Daniel Ikúṣìkà Júbà of

the Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n Ruling House became the successor Rebùjà to Cornelius Adéoyè in 1952.

Of course, Daniel Ikúṣìkà Júbà of the Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n Ruling House himself was also a descendant of Jíbùlù, hence believed to be susceptible to ‘The curse of Jíbùlù’, placed at Òde-Òṣóòró upon himself and any of his would-be descendants who would ever take up the Rebùjà Chieftaincy title. However, the Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n clan, being the firstborn son of Jíbùlù were the ones who did the mandated rituals to rescind ‘The curse of Jíbùlù’ on Rebùjà Cornelius Adéoyè, when he lost his eyesight during his second reign year. This, the people believed, was why he was able to reign for 18 years. So, the Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n clan did the same rituals for Rebùjà Daniel Ikúṣìkà Júbà. Even so, he only ruled for about 16 years before he died. Allegedly, he was coming from a latrine when he had a stroke, and died not long afterwards.

The current Ọlọ̀jà, the Rebùjà of Òṣóòró, Ọba Shadrach Gbádébọ̀ Bájowà, Lúbókùn IV, is from Igbótako, hence from the Lúbókùn Ruling House. As told by Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, he was the only one who refused to perform any coronation ritual when he ascended the throne in 1977¹⁴. And, he alone appears to have escaped “The curse of Jíbùlù”. This begs the question: Was “The curse of Jíbùlù” really the issue? As at today, there are only three First Class Ọbas in Ìkálẹ̀ land, listed in no particular order, namely:

1. The Rebùjà of Òṣóòró
2. The Jẹgun of Ìdèpé
3. The Àbòdì of Ìkálẹ̀

¹⁴Ọba Shadrack Gbádébọ̀ Bájowà, is the longest serving monarch in Ìkálẹ̀ land, and probably in the whole of Ondo State.

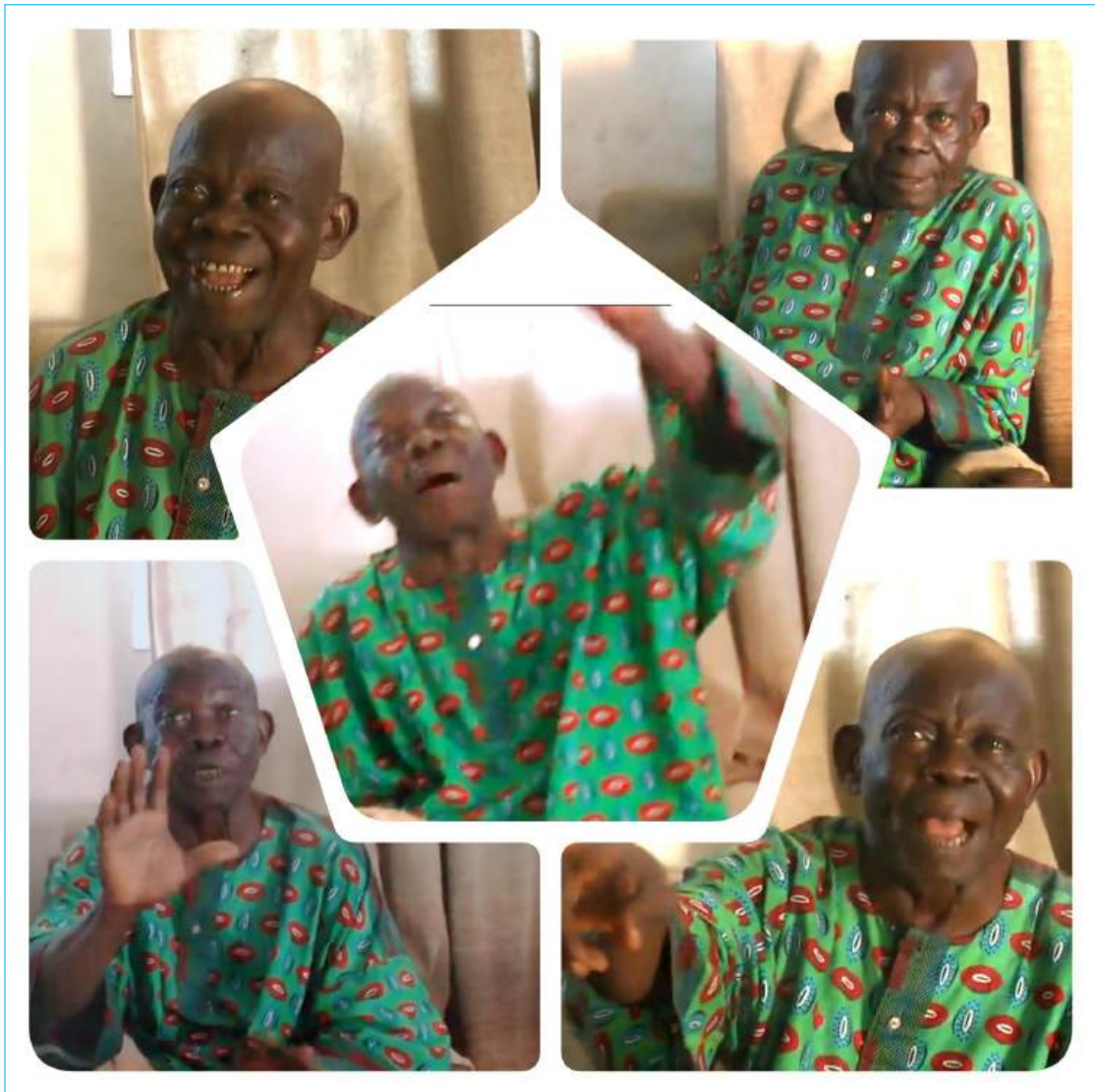


Figure 2.3: Faces of Senator M A E Onunkun during 2014 Video Interview

Chapter 3

The Onunkun Connection

Four generations before M. A. E. Onunkun, his great great grandfather, Èhìnmónórẹ̀n, begat many sons and daughters. The firstborn son of Èhìnmónórẹ̀n is Àdúwọ̀, after whom he begat Okùnnúhì, his second son. For reasons that will soon become obvious later in this section, we will focus here on these two principal sons Èhìnmónórẹ̀n. At this point in the stream of time, the people were still living in Òde-Òşóòró.

In Figure 3, we depict the family tree beginning with Májùwà as root up to Àdúwọ̀ and Okùnnúhì as leaves.

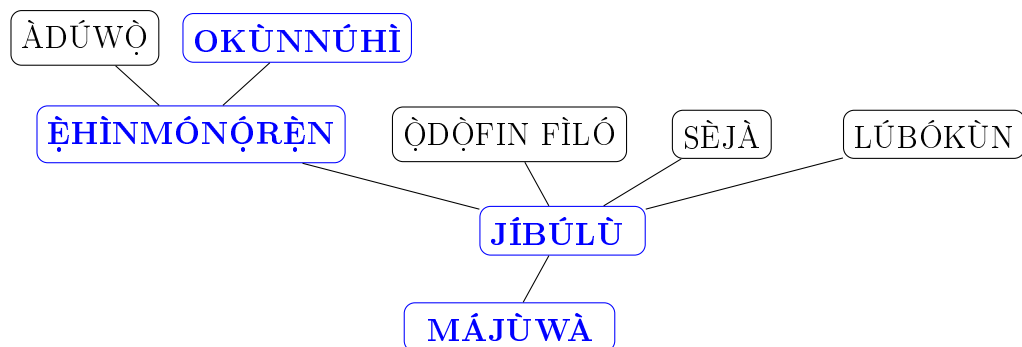


Figure 3.1: Majuwa to Okunnuhi Family Tree

The third of the four principal sons of Jíbúlù, Sèjà, got married to Ọbáyànmuwà. Sèjà had 9 children by Ọbáyànmuwà but only one, a man named Oyèbùlé, survived. Then, Seja died. Customarily, Lúbókùn was the closest younger relative next in line to perform brother-in-law marriage with the late Sèjà's wife, Ọbáyànmuwà. But Lúbókùn was very wealthy, had many wives and children, and could not be bothered. It then fell to Sèjà's oldest nephew, who was Àdúwò—firstborn son of Sèjà's oldest brother, Èhìnmọ̀nọ̀rẹ̀n—to take Ọbáyànmuwà as wife. So, Ọbáyànmuwà was bequeathed to her late husband's nephew, Àdúwò.

3.1 The Àdúwò / Ọbáyànmuwà Impasse

Like Lúbókùn, Àdúwò was also a wealthy man with many wives and children, and a chieftain. Àdúwò refused to go to Sèjà's house to conjugate with Ọbáyànmuwà, as he reckoned that would be beneath him, a wealthy chieftain in the community. Àdúwò requested Ọbáyànmuwà to move into his own house. However, Ọbáyànmuwà refused to leave her late husband's house, because she was 'senior¹' to all of Àdúwò's wives, and would not move into the Àdúwò household to become a 'junior wife' to them. Her argument was that she was one of the wives in the family (Ìyàwó ilé) who went to ask for the hands of Àdúwò's wives in marriage, hence 'senior' to them in the customary family pecking order. Stalemate!

At this, the next in line, Okùnnúhì, approached Ọbáyànmuwà and told her

¹In a polygamous household, the wife first brought into the household is considered 'Senior' to the ones later brought into the household, in the customary family pecking order, regardless of who is older in age. And 'Junior wives' are required to respect, obey and serve 'Senior wives'.

not to mind his arrogant older brother, Àdúwò. Okùnnúhì told Ọbáyànmuwà that he would not mind coming to meet her in her late husband's house to conjugate with her in accordance with the customary brother-in-law arrangement. In response, Ọbáyànmuwà asked Okùnnúhì to go get the authorisation from his family. Okùnnúhì then took the matter to the family, and to resolve the Àdúwò/Ọbáyànmuwà stalemate, the family formally bequeathed Ọbáyànmuwà to Okùnnúhì.

This dialogue then ensued between Okùnnúhì and Ọbáyànmuwà:

“Before I do anything with you, I have a problem, which you have to help me solve”, said Ọbáyànmuwà.

Okùnnúhì replied: “What is the problem?”

Ọbáyànmuwà quipped: “You know my problem now! I had 9 children, and only one survived. That's my problem!”

So, Okùnnúhì, who himself was a soothsayer, Ifá oracle priest and herbalist (Babaláwo) told Ọbáyànmuwà that he would help her solve the problem. He then summoned two other fellow Ifá priests to join forces to divine the solution to Ọbáyànmuwà's problem. When the three got together and consulted the Ifá oracle, they announced to Ọbáyànmuwà:

“Your 8 dead children will come back.”

Ọbáyànmuwà laughed and questioned: “How can my 8 dead children come back?”

The triad of Ifá priests told her that she would give birth to 8 more children

in place of the 8 who died. Afterward, Okùnnúhì used the légédé plant to make a herbal portion to stop the perennial incidents of Ọbáyànmuwà’s children dying in infancy. Subsequently, Ọbáyànmuwà later had 8 more children, this time for Okùnnúhì, and they all survived into adulthood. This is the reason all the descendants of Okùnnúhì by Ọbáyànmuwà were forbidden from eating, even touching, légédé. This was the Okùnnúhì who became father to Pàsán Líjòkà, his second son by Ọbáyànmuwà. The first son of Okùnnúhì by Ọbáyànmuwà was Ògúngbèmí the father of Lámílo, who grew up to become a Herbalist and Ifá priest (Babaláwo), like his father. More on Ògúngbèmí the father of Lámílo later in Section 3.2.3.

The names of the children of Okùnnúhì by Ọbáyànmuwà are:

1. Ògúngbèmí the father of Lámílo, who begat Mitábà;
2. Pàsán Líjòkà, who begat many children, including Ọbájàláyé (the father of Táyò), Emmanuel Ménónùnkun, who later came to be called Onùnkun, etc. Emmanuel Onunkun in turn begat many sons and daughters, including Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun;
3. Àdàrè, who became father to Ayéjèn, Adéníji Senior, Abraham Akínşòto and others. Adéníji Senior begat many sons and daughters, including Magnus Sanya Adéníji, Ayò Adéníji—the late owner of Jewell De Olivis, one of the biggest Jewellers in Africa at one point;
4. Akínríbodó, who was so powerful, he was given the moniker: ‘Òdídímàdè a pa bí ẹlẹtẹ!’, which translates to “‘The Sulky One’ who kills like locusts!” Akínríbodó became father to Adéwẹnlẹ, Màyàán, and Àtómòrè. Àtómòrè then begat Aaron Akínşẹyẹ, who is the father of Chief I O

Akínṣẹ̀yẹ, Former Commissioner IV, Ondo State Local Government Commission, Akure;

5. Three daughters, one of whom was named Ûléyè. Ûléyè later got married off to an Òde Erinjẹ man for whom she gave birth to a girl child, who we later came to know and refer to as Iye Ìdòwú, a lovable Traditional Physiotherapist who lived at Eretolu Street, Okitipupa in the 1970s. And
6. Oyòṣoma², the 8th and last child, a son, aka Baba Lótín, because he later took the chieftaincy title 'Lótín Àlàwò'. He was said to have lived to a very ripe old age before he died. He was a very tall man.

All of the children of Okùnnúhì by Ọbáyànmuwà lived to a ripe old age, and the sons all became powerful members of the Ìjámà Council of Chiefs.

3.2 Down To The Boy Mike

In time, Pàsán Líjòkà took Ûlúóyí as his wife. His fourth child by Ûlúóyí was High Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, who subsequently became father to The Boy Mike, who later became Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel (MAE) Onunkun. Around the time of the birth of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, his father, Pàsán Líjòkà, was let down by some friends he trusted. Hence, he originally named his son 'Mẹnónùnkun', which translates to: 'I have no friend'. The name later morphed to 'Onunkun', which simply means 'Friend'. An alternative spelling by some descendants of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun is 'Onukun', but this does not capture the correct pronunciation of the name. The name Onunkun is so rare and

²The name 'Oyòṣoma' translates to: "The joy of [having] children"

unique that none of us have ever encountered anyone bearing the name who is not descended from Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun. The second son of Pàsán Líjòkà by Ûlúóyí was Ọlájù, often shortened ‘Lájù’. Lájù was originally married to Ọyẹ. More on Lájù and Ọyẹ later.

Pàsán Líjòkà had many children by many wives. We list below the names of Pàsán Líjòkà’s children by his wife, Ûlúóyí, in order of seniority by age.

1. Gbanẹ —a woman
2. Ọbájáláyé —a man
3. Ọlájù —a man
4. Asùhì —a woman
5. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun —a man
6. Mátòrò —a woman

3.2.1 The Lopping-off of Mátòrò

When M. A. E. Onunkun came home on leave from Ilẹ̀sà in 1962, he was informed that Mátòrò had died at Ayédé. The family had hired a vehicle that they were going there to take her body back home for burial. M. A. E. Onunkun’s older half-brother, Thompson Nẹjọ, invited him to go with them, but he declined, saying: “Mátòrò had NINE grown children at Ayédé and only ONE of them was a woman. Three or four of them had even built their own houses at Ayédé. And you want to go take their mother’s body forcibly? Count me out!” The family went, and found that the children had buried their mother, Mátòrò, before the family arrived there in their attempt

to prevent them from taking their mother's body back to Ìlútitun.

So the family attempted to exhume the body, and they were well and truly beaten up by the children of Mátòrò. The family fought back valiantly, too, as they went there, ready for a fight. The Police arrested them all for public affray, and charged them to court. The children of Mátòrò were found culpable and roundly blamed for burying their mother before her relatives arrived, and for fighting their mother's relatives, rather than pleading with them. The court held that what the relatives of Mátòrò did was the customary way of showing that their mother was from an influential family who cared about her. Following this, the extended Pàsán L'ijòkà family lopped-off the line descended from Mátòrò from the extended family tree.

The family tree in Figure 3.2 depicts the grandsons of Okùnnúhì and Ọbáyànmúwà via Pàsán L'ijòkà by his wife, Ûlúóyí.

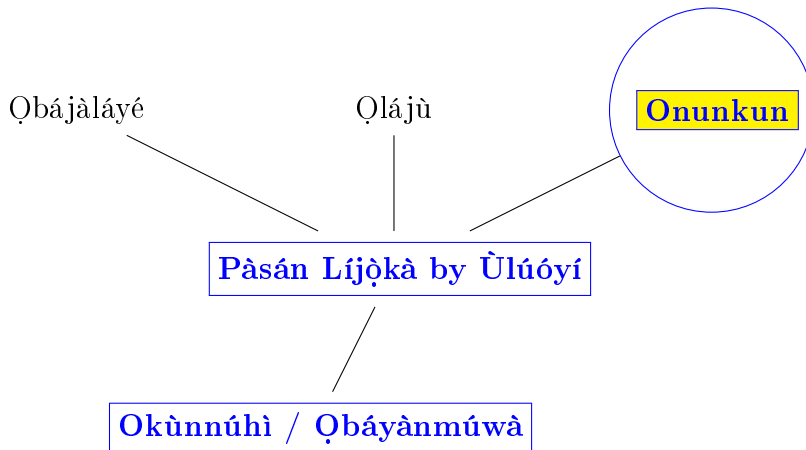


Figure 3.2: Family Tree from Okùnnúhì/Ọbáyànmúwà to Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun et al

3.2.2 Back Down To The Boy Mike

The Boy Mike was one of only three of his parents' children who lived long enough to become parents themselves. His mother's name is Ayelemi (abridged from 'Ayé èè lémi'), nee Fápẹ̀tù. The Boy Mike did not even know some of his mother's children, as they died long before he was born. One of them was a boy given the mean name 'Olè', which means 'Thief'. He was so-named because some boys born before him had died in infancy, hence he was believed to be a reincarnate of them—an 'Àbíké', i.e., 'a reincarnate child', according to Yoruba lore. This boy was followed by a girl child, Adébẹ̀kọ̀n, aka 'Màmá Dẹ̀bẹ̀kọ̀n'. But, this boy³ died in his teenage years, long before The Boy Mike was born. A number of children born after Màmá Dẹ̀bẹ̀kọ̀n also died in infancy. Then came another girl child named Ọ̀láyẹ̀mí, aka 'Màmá Láyẹ̀'. Màmá Láyẹ̀ was the immediate older sister, and favourite sister, to The Boy Mike.

The Boy Mike was in reality his mother's 10th child, but he only knew 2 of his older siblings, the remaining 7 older siblings having died long before he was born. After The Boy Mike, came a girl child, named Mẹ̀ghọ̀ma⁴ —a pretty light-complexioned girl. Ayelemi felt that, because of her light skin, she would not be suited for work in the farm. So, when Mẹ̀ghọ̀ma was about 10 years old, Ayelemi arranged for her to go learn the Tailoring trade. Before she could start the training, however, she suddenly dropped dead.

Another younger sibling that The Boy Mike knew was another girl child,

³More about the manner of this boy's death is contained in Section [2.3.3.1](#).

⁴The name 'Mẹ̀ghọ̀ma' translates to: "I don't forbid children"; a name which shows that the parents had struggled to have children.

Mofẹ́ọlá. But, she also died before she turned 10. Hence, although these two died young, The Boy Mike knew them very well. But The Boy Mike did not know his mother’s youngest child, the 13th, as that one was born in the village when he was a pupil living at Ìlútítun, and the baby did not last more than a day. So, although his mother had 13 children altogether, only 3 of them lived long enough to marry and have children of their own. And, as it has turned out, the only son—The Boy Mike—lived the longest, having lived to a ripe old age of 98 years, 7 months, 15 days. The family tree in Figure 3.3 depicts the great grandchildren of Okùnnúhì and Ọbáyànmúwà via Pàsán Líjòkà by his wife, Ûlúóyí, through Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun and his wife Ayelemi, who lived long enough to become parents themselves.

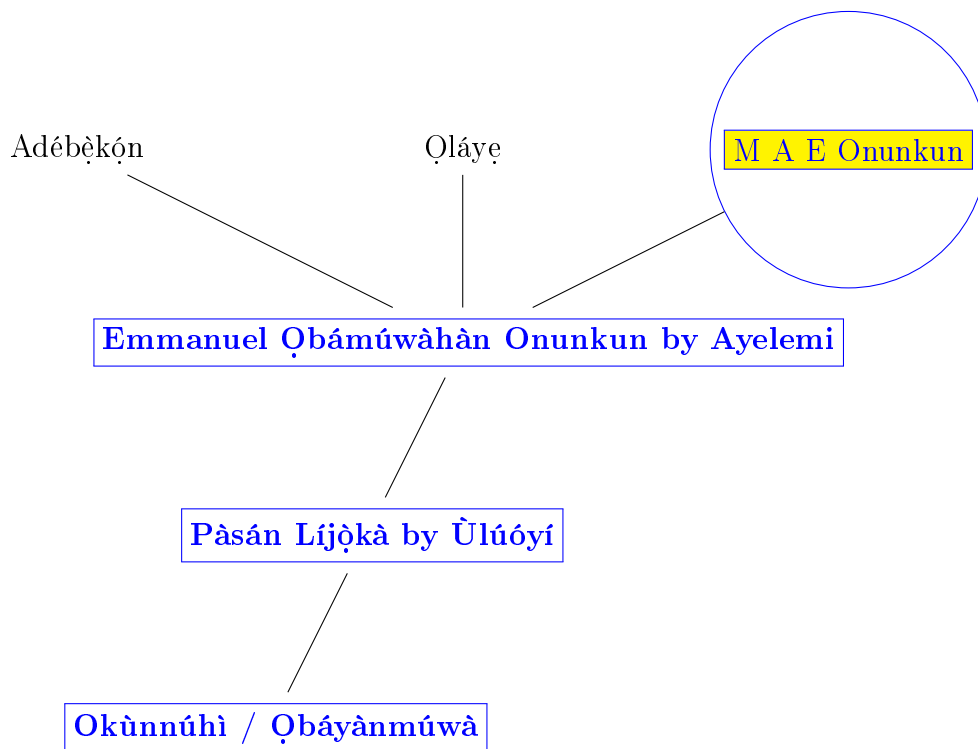


Figure 3.3: Family Tree from Okùnnúhì/Ọbáyànmúwà to Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun et al

3.2.2.1 The Chicken That “Sent The Boy Mike To School”

The Boy Mike knew his grand uncle Baba Lótín and his wife known as Màmá Láàrá, who became mother to Baba Isaiah, who was also very tall like his father. The Boy Mike later learned that, at his birth, Màmá Láàrá, who very much loved The Boy Mike’s mother, Ayelemi, had the dialogue in Table 3.1 with Ayelemi:

| Màmá Láàrá and Ayelemi Dialogue | |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| Ìkálè Dialect | English Translation |
| Màmá Láàrá: “Èè, ’Yelemi wo bì?” | “Hey, ’Yelemi, you had a baby?” |
| Ayelemi: “Mo bí.” | “I gave birth.” |
| Màmá Láàrá: “Wá gbé Adiyẹ kàn tọ hun” | “Come get a chicken to rear for him.” |

Table 3.1: Dialogue at the Birth of The Boy Mike

Following the dialogue in Table 3.1, Màmá Láàrá gave a chicken to Ayelemi to rear for The Boy Mike. The custom then was that if an individual gave chicken to another person to rear, when the chicken laid eggs and hatched them, the giver would get half of the hatchlings, while the other half belonged to the person who cared for the chicken. At the 2014 video interview of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, he said: “*That chicken was what sent me to school.*” How did he mean?

Ayelemi used to sell some of the chicken hatchlings and was keeping the the

money, until it amounted to 2 Shillings 6 Pence (aka, ‘2 and 6’) in old British Colonial money. Then, one day, Ayelemi was going to the market at Ìlútítun, and she met some people coming from Iju-Òkè side, already past Iju-Odò, to the same market. Some of the men were caught by tax collectors, and were being taken to the court at Ìlútítun. Their wives were carrying all sorts of things to sell in order to pay the tax their husbands owed. Ayelemi saw a woman selling a she-goat, and negotiated with the woman for ‘2 and 6’. So, she bought the she-goat for The Boy Mike to rear, using the savings from the sale of The Boy Mike’s chickens. Some prudent mother!

Ayelemi brought the she-goat back to Oko Líhà for The Boy Mike, who named her ‘Láleú’. He cared for the goat as his pet, and would feed her from any food he ate, including fish. The goat got so used to being fed cooked food by her Master, The Boy Mike, that she would not eat grass, raw cassava, yam, or any uncooked food. The first time ‘Láleú’ had kids, she had two. Then, followed by four! She was a prolific she-goat. It was the money Ayelemi saved up from the sale of some of the kids of the goat, Láleú, and her kids’ kids, that Ayelemi used in paying for The Boy Mike’s tuition, as detailed later in Section 4.1.1. It all started with the chicken Màmá Láàrá gave Ayelemi at the birth of The Boy Mike to rear for him, i.e., The Boy Mike.

In time, Láleú grew old and could no longer produce kids. But, she was still being kept by Ayelemi for The Boy Mike. People in the village kept saying to Ayelemi: “*Sell this goat..., you cannot slaughter it for food, as it’s like your child*”. After much pressure, she took Láleú to Ìlútítun market to sell. A woman who came from Ìkòyà to the market bought the goat and took it away with her. The next day, they found Láleú back in the village at Oko

Líhà. Dismayed, Ayelemi took the goat back to the market the following market day⁵. Ayelemi saw the woman who bought the goat the previous market day, and asked her if the goat broke away from her on the way to Ìkòyà. She said, no, they actually took the goat to Ìkòyà, but before they knew what was happening, it was gone in a flash!

Dismayed that the goat could come back to Oko Líhà from Ìkòyà, via Ìlútítun — a distance of over 8 miles, with no direct route — Ayelemi gave the woman the money she paid for the goat and took Láleú back with her to Oko Líhà. She reasoned that she would allow her to spend her last years at the village and bury her when she died. But, then, Ayelemi was pressured again and again by people at Oko Líhà to sell the goat, that it would be a waste to simply let her die and bury her. She eventually caved in and took the goat to the market again, and sold it to the same woman who bought it at first. The story goes that the goat was slaughtered shortly after having been taken to Ìkòyà again, in order to prevent her from escaping back to Oko Líhà.

3.2.3 The Extended Family

The Boy Mike was born into a large polygamous family. His father, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, had six wives and many children by them. Hence, The Boy Mike had many half-brothers and half-sisters. Ayelemi was the first woman courted by Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun. At that time, she was living with her mother, who was married to a man of the influential Ọbọlọ family of Ìkòyà, and most people presumed that she was his biological daughter. During courtship, however, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun

⁵Market days were usually held on 5-day cycles.

learned that Ayelemi's father was in fact Fápètù of one of the Òṣòóró villages, Òkèrìṣà, while her mother was from Àgírìfán, another Òṣòóró village. Hence, he was bounced backward and forward between Ìkòyà, Òkèrìṣà, and Àgírìfán, making the courtship take a long time. Exasperated by the delay, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun went to take another woman, a pretty petit divorcee, named: Jòṣṣò. Hence, Jòṣṣò became Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's first wife, while Ayelemi ended up as his second wife. Jòṣṣò had, in fact, given birth to a daughter, Jófẹ, to her previous husband before marrying Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun

According to Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, his maternal grandmother was from Àgírìfán, one of the Òṣòóró villages, which predated the founding of Ìlútítun. The area the Àgírìfán sub-tribe used to live and farm was near Ìkòyà, hence they had close contact with the people of Ìkòyà. It was there that a man of the influential Ọbólọ family of Ìkòyà saw his maternal grandmother—a beautiful spinster—and put down *consideration* to have her hand in marriage. Before this man of the Ọbólọ family of Ìkòyà could complete the customary rites and marry her, though, the young lady caught the eye of a travelling musician, Fápètù. It was said that this Fápètù was a handsome young man, but also a much feared man in the area. The story goes that, if upset, he could go into a village and start fighting everyone there with machete, cutting and slashing anyone in his path! One thing led to another, and she was impregnated by Fápètù.

When the man of the Ọbólọ family of Ìkòyà learned that the young woman betrothed to him had been impregnated by none other than the feared Fápètù, he chose not to make a fuss, accepted the woman into his house and allowed

her to have her child before consummating his marriage to her. In time, the woman had a girl child, Ayelemi—the first biological child of Fápètù—who later became the mother of The Boy Mike. Thus, Ayelemi was born and brought up at Ìkòyà, and she even thought she was the daughter of the man of the Ọ̀bọ̀lọ̀ family of Ìkòyà, her mother's husband. Hence, it was at Ìkòyà that Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun saw the pretty, petite girl, Ayelemi, and proposed to her, thinking she was a native of Ìkòyà.

The oldest of Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun's children was the first son of his first wife, Jòjò. This son was named Moses Èpèdùrè Onunkun, known generally to all as 'Baba Mòs'. Baba Mòs was a petit man in physical stature, like his mother, but he had a big heart—a heart of gold. The name 'Èpèdùrè' translates to: 'Curse becomes blessing'. Why that name?

Family history has it that Ọ̀gúngbè mí the father of Lámílo detested Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun, son of his younger brother, Pàsán Lijoka, so much that he would often rain down abuse and curses on the young Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun. So, when he became a man, and a father, Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun aptly named his firstborn son Èpèdùrè in order to have his own back on his uncle Ọ̀gúngbè mí the father of Lámílo. In effect, he was by that name saying to his uncle: "*In your face! Your curses were ineffectual!*" In time, this son, Baba Mòs, grew up to become Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun's right-hand-man. He was the one who used to accompany his father virtually everywhere—including to Ìjámà meetings.

It was said that one evening, a wife of Baba Mòs died at Oko-Líhà. Her name was Juliana Adéwòlùrè Onunkun. As it was late in the evening, the

body could not be taken to Ìlútitun for burial that night. The next morning, arrangements were made to build a coffin, and the body prepared for burial. In the early afternoon of the next day, the body was being transported on foot by a funeral cortège of relatives to Ìlútitun. Shortly before they arrived at the junction to Iju-Odò, the young men who served as pallbearers noticed movement inside the coffin, dropped the coffin and ran. The older men in the funeral cortège approached and opened the coffin. Lo and behold, Juliana Adéwòlúrẹ Onukun had awoken, and she sat up after the coffin was opened. She eventually went on to live many decades after this incident before she finally died at a ripe old age.

The children of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onukun by Jọjọ are:

1. Moses Èpèdùre, aka ‘Baba Mọs’
2. Màmá Ọmanusànbí, which transliterates to ‘There is no choosing of one’s child’. She was the grandmother of Bágbè
3. Solomon, the grandfather of Lawyer Daniel Onukun
4. Màmá Ọnọkànekọnlé, which transliterates to ‘A single person does not fill a house’
5. John Ọlẹjulaún, which translates to ‘It’s no good amassing wealth for a lazy child’. He was known to most as ‘Baba Jọónú.
6. Ómúlétí, aka Baba Òdùdù. More on Baba Òdùdù later in Section [4.1.1](#)

The third wife of M. A. E. Onukun’s father, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onukun, was Ọyẹ. Ọyẹ was married to Ọlájù, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn

Onunkun’s older brother. But, Ọlájù died two or three months after marrying Ọyẹ̀, without having any child by Ọyẹ̀, hence it fell to Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun—the only younger brother to Ọlájù—to perform brother-in-law marriage with Ọyẹ̀. He initially declined, saying what was he going to do with the wife of his older brother who died shortly after marrying her? His oldest brother, Ọbájàláyé, pleaded with him that he, as the older brother to Ọlájù could not take Ọyẹ̀. Rather, it was only the younger brother, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, who could take her. But, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun refused, and Ọbájàláyé had to keep Ọyẹ̀ in his house for 4 years before he could persuade Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun to take her. Finally, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun agreed to take Ọyẹ̀ as his third wife. Here is the list of the children of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun by Ọyẹ̀.

1. Allen Ewéjé, aka ‘Baba Allen’
2. Màmá Látan. She got married to an Ìdèpé man who used to live at Òde-Aye, named Ọgẹn, some of whose children were Jehovah’s Witnesses
3. Thomson Néjọ
4. Zechariah — the Jehovah’s Witness who used to live at Ìkọyà
5. Tanímòwò

Although Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun’s first three wives came from three different places —Òde-Aye, Ìkọyà and Olówu-Odò, a village near Ìjẹbú Waterside—he later noticed after many years that all three of them would often exclaim: “Me ghò ọ Jólá Ọ̀sà Ugbò!” That is, they would all say they forbid something in the name of one ancestor, Jólá, who was the second of the three sons of Mábùlé, who left Ìkọyà and later founded Ọ̀sòóró. Hence,

it dawned on him that all three women were related. This made him very unhappy, as it meant that if he should die, none of his older children could ‘inherit’ any of his wives. So, he went to Erékìtì to take a fourth wife, who was certainly not related to the first three.

The fourth wife of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was named Kósùyà, short for ‘Ikú ọ̀sùyà’, which translates to: ‘Death has made a wrong turn’. The first child of Kósùyà for Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was a girl child, named Ògún, who was affectionately called ‘Àntí Ògún’ by Senator M. A. E. Onunkun. The children of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun by Kósùyà are:

1. Ògún (female);
2. Ọnẹ̀ghínṅẹ⁶;
3. Wíwòlókùn, which transliterates to “Looking is all that is left”;
4. Ùlúoyí⁷ Békú;
5. Leah;
6. Stephen Ọmọsolúyì.

The fifth wife of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was Fájúítẹ, which translates to “the ‘Ifá oracle’ has prevented me from humiliation”. Fájúítẹ was from Àgírífán. It turned out that Fájúítẹ was also related to Ayelemi’s mother. Fájúítẹ did not stay married to Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun for long. She ‘*ran away*’ to marry Emmanuel Obamuwahan Onunkun’s younger cousin,

⁶Ọnẹ̀ghínṅẹ is short for ‘Ọnẹ̀ yó nẹ̀ èè ghín ọnẹ̀’, which translates, with respect to children, to: ‘The one who has does not give them out to others.’

⁷which translates to “The town has ‘turned’, i.e., ‘changed’”

Júbà, who was a Court Clerk at the time, but later became the 10th Rebùjà of Òṣòóró. Now, shortly after leaving Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, Fájítẹ became mother to a son who came to be named: Mobólórundúró. The name ‘Mobólórundúró’ translates to: ‘I Stand with God’. It was said that Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun claimed that Fájítẹ was pregnant before she left him for his younger cousin, Júbà, but Fájítẹ said she wasn’t. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun chose to accept the woman’s word, rather than contest the paternity of the child with Júbà. This child, from Senator M A E Onunkun’s recollection, was the only child Fájítẹ allegedly had for Júbà

And the sixth wife of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was Mábọ, likely short for Ọmọbọwálẹ. Mábọ was said to be initially married to the king of Igbó-Égunrín, before becoming the sixth wife of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun. Her first child for Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was a girl child named Bánjókó, which is short for Bámijóòkó. This translates to: ‘reside with me’. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun had the underlisted children by his sixth wife, Ọmọbọwálẹ:

1. Bánjókó;
2. Ọlórunjunẹ⁸ Lincoln Onukun, aka ‘Finish ẹ’;
3. Mopínre, which translates to “My portion is ‘good’”;
4. Abíódún⁹ Onukun aka ‘Senator’;
5. Ògún (Male, was an auto mechanic in his heyday);

⁸Ọlórunjunẹ translates to “God is greater than oneself”.

⁹Abíódún means “born at a festival, e.g., Christmas, New Year, etc.”

After the death of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, his son, John Ọlẹ́júlàún Onunkun inherited Ọmọ̀bọ̀wálé as his wife, and had a son by her.

As told by Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, it was as if his father, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, had a timetable he was following in the pattern of the age difference between his children by different wives, especially the ones close to his age. He noted, for example, that the first daughter of Kósùyà, who he affectionately called “Àntí Ọ̀gún”, was 9 months older than his immediate older sister, Ọláyẹmí, Ayelemi’s second child to survive long enough to have children of her own. Next, Kósùyà’s second daughter, Ọnẹ̀ghínne, was 9 months older than him, i.e., Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, the last child of Ayelemi to survive long enough to beget his own children. In turn, Kósùyà’s third daughter, Wíwòlókùn, was 9 months older than Mẹ̀ghòma, i.e., Senator M. A. E. Onunkun’s immediate younger sister who died before she turned 10. Mẹ̀ghòma, for her part, was 9 months older than Zechariah, the Jehovah’s Witness, who was the second to last son of Ọ̀yẹ̀. So the pattern continued.

Figure 3.4 depicts the paternal age hierarchy of Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun’s children who lived to have children of their own. At the top of the figure, in rectangular boxes are the names of the wives who bore children for Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, five, discounting Fájítẹ̀, whose only child was disputed. The higher the name of the individual in Figure 3.4, the older the person. Notice that, by age of children, Ayelemi comes third, as two of the third wife, Ọ̀yẹ̀’s, children were older than Ayelemi’s first surviving daughter, Adébẹ̀kọ̀n, although Ayelemi was the second wife. This was because many of Ayelemi’s older children died in infancy. The oldest of Ayelemi’s children who died was only a little younger than Jọ̀ọ̀jọ’s first son,

Moses. It was said that the boy and Moses used to climb trees together.

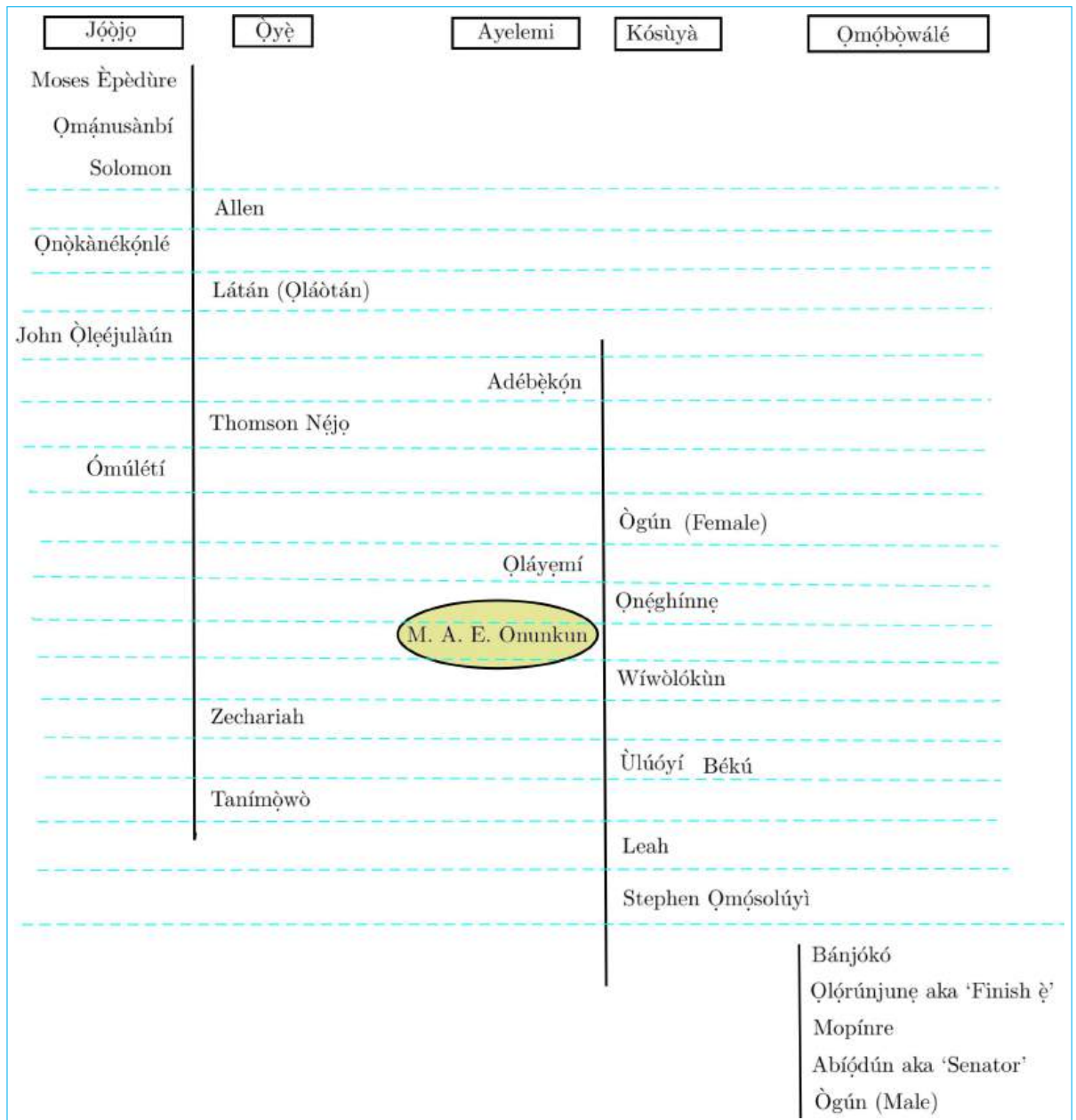


Figure 3.4: Paternal Age Hierarchy

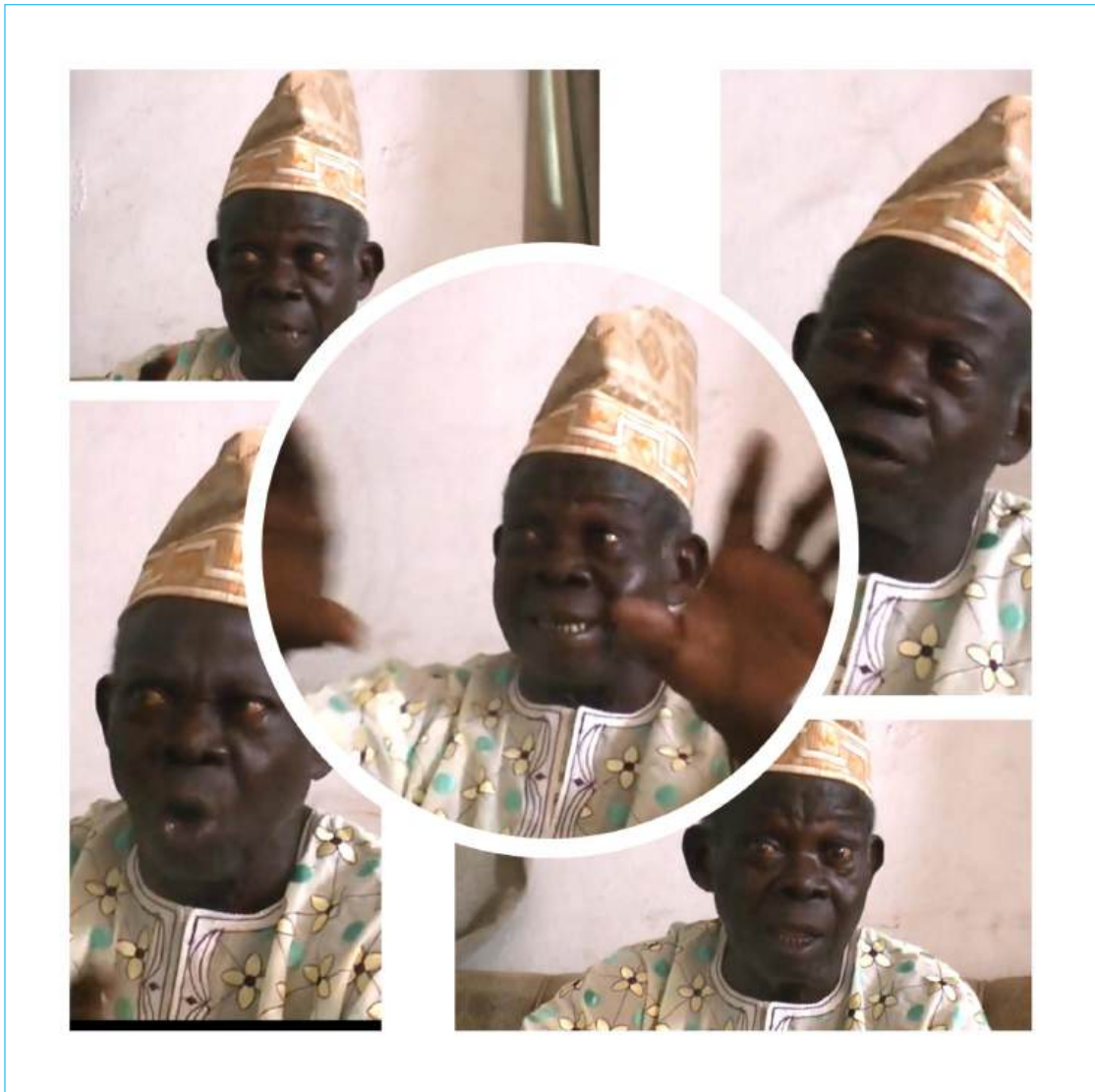


Figure 3.5: Senator M A E Onunkun in 2012 Video Interview

Chapter 4

The Boy Mike

In this chapter, we present the story of the early life and times of Senator Michael Atijosan Onunkun, The Boy Mike.

4.1 Early Years and Education

Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, with his large household had his own farming village, named “Okò Lhá”, not far from Iju-Odò, slightly to the North East of Iju-Odò. The family would customarily go to Ilutitun on the cyclical fortnightly weekends called Ọsẹ-Ìpàdé (i.e., ‘Meeting Weekend’), on which occasions they got to mingle with other families from other satellite Ọṣòóró farming villages. Ilutitun used to be a bustling hive of activities, bubbling over with life, like a carnival, during those meeting weekends.

At the birth of Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun on 30 September 1925, his parents consulted the Ifá Oracle, and were informed that the boy was a reincarnate of his mother’s late father, Fápẹ̀tù. Hence, Yeleme would address the child “Bàmi”, ie, “My father”, while Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun

would call him “Ana mi”, which translates to “My (father) in-law”, and he treated the child with deference, as he would his late father-in-law. The child’s contemporaries called him “Màíkì”, which is the local lingo for “Mike”. But, because his older siblings were much older than him, they all called him: “Bòḡyí”. Yes, he was their “Boy”, their baby brother! Even decades later, when Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun had already become a father, grandfather and Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, his older siblings who were still alive as recently as the 1990s, like Baba Jòḡnú, still called him Bòḡyí. To them, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun was always their Bòḡyí..., “The Boy”! He never outgrew that moniker!

The Boy Mike’s mother, Ayelemi (often abbreviated ’Yélémi’), was petit and slight in stature. Yet, she was a strong, hardworking and prudent. Ayelemi was so hardy, tireless and inured to menial farm work that her fingers were bent inwards from holding the machete for long hours day in, day out. People around would say: “Yelemi, wo ṣuṣé, ṣuṣé, ọwó ẹ dẹ ká má ’pékun!”. This translates to: “Yelemi, you work, work, and your fingers are bent to machete”. But then, she would say: “Nòó fẹ bá mi bẹ oko nùgbo mé nọma ’kònṛẹn?”, which translates to: “Who will help me fell the trees in my farm when I have no male child?” She used to do by herself work that only men were capable of doing in the farms back then. People would look around whenever they came to her farm and exclaim: “Ah, ’Yelemi, wo gbé yàgbá, wo gbe kòòró, wo kẹton tìí! This translates to “Ah, ’Yelemi, you single-handedly set up a vertical yam tubers storage barn and stack the yams!” (See example vertical yam tubers barn in Figure 4.1.) And, they would add: “This is the work of men!” And she would say: “Do I have men to do it for me? So, I have to do it for myself!” Ayelemi was the most prosperous of the wives of High

Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, and she would often lend people, including her husband and her son-in-law, Ọlọjà Adéoyè, money. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun commented that he doubted if his father ever repaid his mother all the money she lent him, as he was able to easily sweet-talk her into parting with her money, as men back then often did.



Figure 4.1: Vertical Yam Tubers Storage Barn

For the first 8, going on 9 years of his life, The Boy Mike lived at home with his parents at Oko Líhà. Life then was pretty basic and rural. He would often go to the farm with his mother, who progressively taught him how to carry out basic household and farming tasks. As a mother who had lost 7 children, many of whom were boys, in death in their infancy and teenage years, Ayelemi never allowed The Boy Mike to climb any tree, or engage in

any activity she considered dangerous. Hence, unlike other boys his age, who were able to climb palm trees and other trees, The Boy Mike never learned how to climb trees. However, his mother trained him how to make heaps to plant yams, starting with a few, and then increasing them over time. Then, one day, his mother gave him 20 or 30 yam cuttings in a basket, for him to plant. “Gbùrù, gbùrù, gbùrù, I had made the heaps and planted the yams”, said Senator M. A. E. Onunkun. Then his mother gave him more, and more, and still more yam cuttings to plant, and he kept on making the heaps and planting them. At that end of day, his mother took a count and realised that The Boy Mike had made over 200 heaps, which was a sign of a child maturing, back in those days. His mother rejoiced and declared to others in the village: “My son has made 200 heaps o! My son has made 200 heaps o!” That evening, Ayelemi prepared a special dinner of pounded yam, and The Boy Mike ate to satisfaction.

The Boy Mike had an older cousin, whom he used to call “B’ra Wollem”, local lingo for “Brother William”. B’ra Wollem was old enough to be The Boy Mike’s father, for, he was even older than Baba Mos, The Boy Mike’s oldest half-brother! B’ra Wollem had gone to Lagos to learn Tailoring, perhaps in the early 1920s. When he came home in 1931, he visited his uncle, High Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, at Oko Líhà village. It was then that he saw all the kids running around the village, none going to school. So, he questioned his uncle on the reason he was not sending the children to school, as people in other places had started to do. By pure chance or providence, The Boy Mike was 5, going on 6 years old. His older half-brothers were much older, and some were already young men, in 1931—much too old to be enrolled in elementary school. So, The Boy Mike was the only son who

fell within, or rather was approaching, school age at the time.

High Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun believed so much in the advice of his ‘Lagosian’ nephew, B’ra Wollem, that he called Ayelemi and told her that he would be sending The Boy Mike to school when he comes of age. Ayelemi was at first strongly opposed to the idea, saying: “You know I have only one son, and you want to send him to school? Who will be helping me in the farm?” Over time, though, High Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun was able to convince Ayelemi to agree with his decision to send her only son, The Boy Mike, to school. Having been persuaded to see the benefits of her son becoming an “Akòwé”, ie, a ‘literate worker’, Ayelemi, against the conventional wisdom and advice of her contemporaries to have the male child help work the Land, determined that her only son, The Boy Mike, would go to school, and not end up ‘on the farm’ like his older siblings, as his father had motivated.

4.1.1 The Boy Mike Goes To School

When The Boy Mike was old enough for his left hand to go over his upright head, and the fingers cover his right ear, he was enrolled in school by his father. The year was 1934, and The Boy Mike was 8, going on 9 years old. The District Officer (DO) of Okitipupa Division at the time was an Englishman named Owen V. Lee, who was also The Manager of the School. His father paid his tuition fees in Infant 1 and Infant 2, and tired out. So, in her determination, his mother picked up where his father left off and paid his tuition fees from Standard 1 to Standard 5. When The Boy Mike got to Standard 6, however, his father chipped in a bit with the payment of his tuition fees,

so that it would not be said that Ayelemi was the one who single-handedly sponsored The Boy Mike's education.



Figure 4.2: Chief Johnson Abòsèdè Kúbóyè's picture taken from the cover of his funeral programme

Up until the enrolment of The Boy Mike in school in 1934, he used to go with his parents from Oko Líhà to occasionally attend the West African Episcopal

Church in Ìlútitun, where his father was the “Baba Ìjọ”, which literally translates to “Father of the congregation”. The West African Episcopal Church is what later absorbed into the Methodist Church of Nigeria. At the point of enrolment, the School Headmaster, Chief Johnson Abósèdé Kúbóyè, Figure 4.2, asked what his name was. So, he gave his name as Atijosan Emmanuel, as his father was known simply by his first name and addressed as: “Emmanu”, short for Emmanuel, and The Boy Mike’s only name to date was Àtijosàn. The Headmaster then asked what his Baptismal name was. The Boy Mike told the Headmaster that he had none, as he had not been baptised. Since Baptism was essential to be enrolled in school at the time, he was taken to the Ebenezer¹ Anglican Church, Ìlútitun, baptised and given the baptismal name ‘Michael’. Thus, since that fateful day in January 1934, The Boy Mike had become “an Anglican”, though he had no clue what that involved! And, he would occasionally, attend the Ebenezer Anglican Church, Ìlútitun. During his schooling, and young adult years, The Boy Mike used the name Michael Atijosan Emmanuel. Hence, this is the name on his certificates. Later, however, he added his father’s native name, ‘Onunkun’, thereby becoming Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun.

Thus, the Boy Mike attended Native Administration (NA) School, Ilutitun. After completing 2 years of Infant School, he went on to complete 6 years of Standard School Education in December² 1941, aged 16. By the time The Boy Mike started infant school in 1934, he initially lived with his older cousin, “B’ra Wollem”, who was a Tailor at Ìlútitun. But later in the year, his oldest

¹Ebenezer Anglican Church, Ìlútitun is now called: ‘The Cathedral Church of Ebenezer, Ìlútitun’

²Academic year was January to December in Nigeria until it was changed in 1973 to September to June.

sister, Màmà Dèbèkòn, got married to the reigning Ọlọjà of Òṣòóró, Cornelius Adeoye—the 9th Rebùjà of Òṣòóró—who later died in 1950. Hence, his mother took The Boy Mike to live with his older sister, Màmà Dèbèkòn, at the Ọlọjà Adéoyè palace in Ilutitun, because his parents felt that, as a foundation pupil at Native Administration (NA) School, Ilutitun in 1934 and 1935, he was too young to walk daily from Oko Líhà to school in Ilutitun. Later, when he was old and strong enough, though, The Boy Mike moved back in with his parents, and walked to school daily from their Oko Líhà village.

Aside from Chief Johnson Abòsèdè Kúbóyè, other teachers who made a significant impact on the formative education of The Boy Mike were Chief Ayélá, Chief Oyèdélé, and of course Rueben Akíndélé, who later became the Ọlọjà, Jẹgun of Ìdèpé, Okitipupa. All the teachers were impressed by The Boy Mike's academic aptitude, and his classmates used to call him a wizard. Years later, when The Boy Mike could not proceed on Higher Education due to lack of funds, his teachers expressed their sympathy.

Màmá Dèbèkòn was a dried/smoked fish seller, hence a typical day in the life of The Boy Mike involved helping with the household chores in the morning, going to school between 8:00 am and 2:00 pm, and then hawking dried fish around the town in the evening, after school. When the young boy moved back to Oko Líhà, though, his typical daily routine changed to what it was before he started school. His favourite older half-brother while growing up was Ómúlèti, aka Baba Òdùdú, who was the youngest of his mother's children. They developed their close bond when The Boy Mike was a toddler and infected with a hideous yaws skin disease all over his body. While working in

the farm, his mother would leave him in the farm tent locally called ‘Ahéré’. This is the tent where the farm workers usually go to rest from the hot sun and to have their lunch. The Boy Mike’s other older brothers and sisters would avoid him, and would rather look for some other shade where they could rest up and have their lunch. It was said that Ómúlétì was the only one who would always come into the farm tent, play with The Boy Mike and carry him around. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said in a 2014 video interview that he literally grew up in Ómúlétì’s arms.

As a result, The Boy Mike grew up closer to Ómúlétì, who was called his ‘Master’ by everyone in the village. And, The Boy Mike indeed viewed Ómúlétì as his master, because as he was growing up, it was he who taught him how to hunt and set traps—especially the one called ‘È̀bìtì’ in the local lingo—to catch and kill small bush animals and birds. The Boy Mike’s Master, Ómúlétì, taught him so well that by the time he started school, he was renowned as the best at setting ‘È̀bìtì’ trap in the village!

Another trap Ómúlétì also taught The Boy Mike was known as ‘Apèdíamá’ (an archery kind of contraption for killing birds and small rodents, but with the bow fixed to the ground). Most birds do not see at night, so many of them tend to roost on trees near the village at dusk. In the daytime, the young boys would cut paths through the bush to the base of the trees where the birds used to roost. Then, they would build their Apèdíamá under their target trees. They would then make arrows from the hard bark of rafia and palm tree branches. After nightfall, around 7pm or 7:30pm, they would quietly go to the location of their Apèdíamá. The Boy Mike was the one carrying the quiver that holds the arrows and the pouch where their killed game birds

and small animals would be kept, behind his Master, Ómúlèti. His Master would then pull the Apèdímá into a taut position, after which The Boy Mike would pass him an arrow. His Master would take aim and shoot the arrow into the tree above. Sometimes, the arrow would pin 2 or 3 birds together in one shot! Bonanza! They could also use the contraption to shoot small rodents on the ground, and it would pin the rodent to the ground on the spot. Some days, his Master could kill 10 or 15 birds, and he would give him 3 or 4 and take the remainder home for his mother. This was a regular source of protein for the people back then.

Hence, whenever The Boy Mike returned to the village from Ìlútitun, e.g., on school holidays, his daily routine involved following his Master around and hunting small wild animals, which was a welcome relief from hawking dried fish after school at Ìlútitun. Of course, he would also go work the land with his mother, from time to time. Sometimes, he would go visit his uncle, Adéníji Senior — the father of Sànyà Magnus Adéníji et alia — at Okitipupa during his school holidays. On a visit to Uncle Ayòdélé Adéníji in his London home, circa 2006, he told the Compiler how he used to look forward to The Boy Mike's visits to their home in the prime area of the Okitipupa, formerly known as 'Òkè Òyìnbó'³. Uncle Ayòdélé Adéníji said his father was fond of The Boy Mike because he was a bright and respectful kid, and would often encourage his own children to emulate their cousin from Ìlútitun, The Boy Mike.

However, around the year 1939, when his sister, Màmá Dèbèkòn, had her oldest daughter, Téníbí, (aka Àntí Téníbí, now Mrs Ògúntìmèhìn), Ayelemi

³Òkè Òyìnbó translates to 'Whiteman's Hill', and was so named because it was the posh area of town where White people used to reside in the Colonial era.

had built a small house, attached to the side of her older brother's house in Àgírífán quarters, Ìlútítun, and moved there from Oko Líhà. So, The Boy Mike moved with his mother out of Oko Líhà back to Ìlútítun, but this time to live with his mother, not with his older sister, Màmá Dèbèkòn. The saying: "Like mother, like daughter" was certainly true in the case of The Boy Mike's oldest sister, Màmá Dèbèkòn. She, too, was very hard-working, prudent and strong as an ox! In time, she also, built her own small house, near the house The Boy Mike built at Ìlútítun in 1952. (More on this later.)

At the time The Boy Mike started schooling, NA School, Ilutitun was the only government-run school in the whole of Okitipupa Division. The nearest other Government run school was at Ondo. The other schools in the area were Mission Schools, run by religious organisations like the Catholic, Anglican, and Episcopal churches. Most of the Mission Schools did not provide education up to Standard 6 level, hence, some who started in those schools in Okitipupa Division later came to NA School, Ilutitun to study up to Standard 6 level. However, St John's Catholic School, Okitipupa used to provide education up to Standard 6 level. For example, when The Boy Mike's cousin, Sànyà Magnus Adéníji, lost his father in death, circa 1941, he had just started Standard 6 at St John's Catholic School, Okitipupa, but he was taken to NA School, Ilutitun to finish his Standard 6 education, due to financial constraints. Hence, he and The Boy Mike were classmates for one year at NA School, Ilutitun.

Of the 40 who started Infant 1 together in 1934, only 7 of them completed Standard 6 in normal time by December 1941. Along the way, some dropped down, some dropped out of school completely, while some sadly died. One

of those who died was a very brilliant child, named Tóbisán. The 7 who completed Standard 6 in normal time in 1941 included Adédèjì, who later went on to become the Headmaster of a Secondary Modern School; a brilliant Urhobo kid named Peter Johnson, who used to come to Ìlútítun daily from Ìkòyà with his 5 siblings, and The Boy Mike.

One reason NA School, Ilutitun was the school of choice for many people back then was because it was far cheaper than the Mission Schools. Also, the Mission Schools charged tuition fees per term, whereas NA School, Ilutitun charged tuition fees per month, and the pupils only paid for the 10 months they actually spent in school, not for the 2 months School holidays. Hence, tuition fees at NA School, Ilutitun was more affordable, albeit still out of reach of many poor parents. Furthermore, while NA School, Ilutitun ran an 8-year calendar, with Infant 1, Infant 2, followed by Standards 1 to 6, the Mission Schools ran a 9-year calendar, which involved Infants 1 to 3, followed by Standards 1 to 6. So, parents had 1 year less of tuition fees to pay for pupils sent to NA School, Ilutitun, as against pupils sent to Mission Schools. The payment structure, per month, at NA School, Ilutitun back then is presented in Table 4.1.

The Boy Mike was also a classmate at NA School, Ilutitun, to a brilliant and beautiful girl—Victoria Adékúọlá Ọwátẹ́—who later became one of his wives, Mrs Victoria Adékúọlá Onunkun, aka ‘Màmá Ẹniafẹ́’, ‘Màmá Nurse’ and ‘Màmá Ọdẹkù’. She started her education at Central School⁴, Iju-Odò, a Mission School, where she did Infants 1 to 3, and Standards 1 to 4. She was later taken to NA School, Ilutitun by her father because the Headmas-

⁴Central School, Iju-Odò used to be at the site of today’s Manuwa Memorial Grammar School, Iju-Odò, the first Secondary School in Okitipupa Division, founded in 1954.

NA SCHOOL, ILUTITUN TUITION FEES STRUCTURE BY YEAR

| School Year | Monthly Tuition Fees |
|-------------|-----------------------------------|
| Infant 1 | 3 Pence |
| Infant 2 | 4 Pence |
| Standard 1 | 6 Pence |
| Standard 2 | 9 Pence |
| Standard 3 | 1 Shilling |
| Standard 4 | 1 Shilling, 3 Pence (aka 1 and 3) |
| Standard 5 | 1 Shilling, 6 Pence (aka 1 and 6) |
| Standard 6 | 2 Shillings |

Table 4.1: Monthly Tuition Fees at NA School Ilutitun (1930s and 1940s)

ter at NA School, Ilutitun was married to her father's baby sister, Theresa Fèyísolá Kúbóyè, aka 'Mother Grace'. Màmá Ẹniafé, currently 98 years old and counting, is the eldest child of High Chief Isaac Ẹbíétán Ọwáté, who

happened to have become an Ìjámà⁵ (Kingmaker) on the same day as The Boy Mike's father —High Chief Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun. In December 1943, the then Victoria Adékúọlá Ọwátẹ became the joint second formally trained, qualified Nurse / Midwife in the whole of Ìkálẹ and Ìlàjẹ region. Màmá Ẹniafé, as we grew up to know her as, was renowned for her circumcision skills; skills, which she put to good use for over 60 years without a single complication. During this time, she had the rare privilege of having circumcised 3 generations of boys in some families.

4.1.2 Council Scholarship Application

While in Standard 6, The Boy Mike, along with 5 other boys across Okitipupa Division were tested and shortlisted for scholarship to Secondary School. Most of the candidates were from Ọşóòró, one was from Ọde-Ìrèlẹ, but none from Ìdèpẹ (Okitipupa). The Boy Mike applied through Ọlójà

⁵High Chiefs Isaac Ẹbiétán Ọwátẹ and Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun both got initiated into the Ìjámà Council of chiefs in 1953, under the reign of Daniel Ikúşìkà Júbà. Isaac Ẹbiétán Ọwátẹ stayed in Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's house at Ìlútitun for 9 days—the period required for the initiation and installation process—to save him the trouble of going back and forth to Igbótako daily. Before that, both were members of the courts in Igbótako and Ìlútitun respectively. Back then, said Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, no one under the age of 60 or 70 was initiated into the Ìjámà Council. He added that the Ìjámà is a fraternity of fathers of the community, who serve as guardians of the people, and look out for one another. He said that if an Ìjámà gave 3 Pence to his son to go buy a keg of palm wine, upon returning, the father would ask the child if he met anyone on the way home with the palm wine. If one of the people the child met on the way was an Ìjámà, the father would ask the child whether he offered him a drink from the wine. If the child said "No", the father would send the boy back to the man's house to offer him a drink before he would drink of whatever was left of the wine. A second example given to show the brotherhood of the Ìjámàs is that if an Ìjámà was walking by and saw a young man on a tall palm tree, harvesting the fruits, he would ask the young man who his father was. If the father was a member of the Ìjámà Council, the man would not continue on his way, until the young man had finished what he was doing and safely descended from the palm tree. Afterward, the Ìjámà would continue on his way, having seen to it that his fellow Ìjámà's son was safe.

Adéoyè, and his mother paid 15 Shillings to facilitate his application. At the Council meeting sitting at Ìkòyà, the shortlisted pupils were all interviewed by the Ọlójàs, who were the decision makers at the Council. Ọlójà Akínnúbi, the then Jẹgun of Ìdèpé, donned a wide-brimmed felt bowler hat. Most of the time that all the candidates were being interviewed, he kept quiet and was looking at the ground, uninterested. Then, after the interviews, he asked: “Where are the candidates from Ìdèpé here?” Taken aback, Ọlójà Adéoyè quipped: “These were the most brilliant pupils whose parents could not afford to pay for their Secondary School education. Perhaps the parents of the pupils from Ìdèpé are too rich to bother to apply. Or, perhaps their wards are not brilliant enough to pass the test. Are we to go beg them to apply? Are we to consider for scholarship people who did not apply?” To this, Ọlójà Akínnúbi sighed “Hmm!” and kept quiet.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said that Ọlójà Adéoyè was the only one partially educated among the Ọlójàs back then, having completed Standard 4 Education, adding that he was able to “speak a smattering of English”. So, the other Ọlójàs respected him. But, it would appear that the older, astute Ọlójà Akínnúbi had more gravitas among the other Ọlójàs than Ọlójà Adéoyè, for, when the Council went into the Consulting Room, the former somehow prevailed on the other Ọlójàs to frustrate all the candidates, because there was none among them from Ìdèpé. Hence, none of the 6 shortlisted candidates was given scholarship that year. Understandably, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said that he disliked Ọlójà Akínnúbi at the time for that action, which negatively impacted his life. As it would turn out over a decade after that incident, Ọlójà Akínnúbi became M. A. E. Onunkun’s in-law, being an uncle to M. A. E. Onunkun’s wife, Victoria Adekuola Onunkun, on her mother’s side.

Victoria Adekuola Onunkun, as a spinster, even lived in the Ọlójà Akínnúbi household in 1942, while teaching at Okitipupa before proceeding to Akure to train as a Midwife / Nurse in 1943.

4.1.3 Post Standard School Education

Nevertheless, after completing Standard 6 education in December 1941, in the following month, January 1942, The Boy Mike secured admission into Abẹ̀òkúta Grammar School, where Fela Anikulapo Kuti's father, Rev Israel Ọládòtun Ransome-Kuti, was the School Principal. Whenever the Principal addressed the students, they were taught to respond with decorum, saying: "Yes, Principal." Unfortunately, The Boy Mike lasted less than 2 months in the school, as his mother could not afford the tuition and boarding school fees. So, he was sent away from school. Education was so expensive back then that, oftentimes, whole communities had to contribute funds to train a single child in school! Although the closest Secondary School to Ìkálẹ̀ land at the time was Ondo Boys High School, most Ìkálẹ̀ people were wary and scared of Ondo⁶ people, hence not many pupils would apply to Ondo Boys High School.

4.1.4 One More Day in NA School, Ilutitun

Having been forced to drop out of Secondary School, Senator MAE Onunkun, in his own words, said The Boy Mike wanted to go to Lagos to work, rather than become a teacher like his contemporaries. But his parents had other

⁶In retrospect, Ìkálẹ̀ people probably felt intimidated by Ondo people who were their 'more civilised neighbour' at the time.

ideas. They wanted him to become a teacher—a profession many people took great pride in. When The Boy Mike said he did not like to become a teacher, his mother knew that he was still upset that she was unable to train him at Secondary School level. She went to his Old School to explain to his former Headmaster, Chief Johnson Abòsède Kúbóyè, that she was at her limit, yet The Boy Mike was adamant that he did not want to teach, like his contemporaries. She pleaded with the Headmaster to help persuade The Boy Mike.

So it was, that, about 6 months after he had passed out of NA School Ilutitun, his former Headmaster summoned him to school, called an assembly of all the pupils, paraded him before them and asked if they recognised the boy stood before them. The pupils responded: “*Yes, Sir, we know him. He’s our Senior and one of the 1st Set of this school.*” The Headmaster continued: “*I know the mother of this boy very well. She’s very hardworking, and she’s the one who trained him, after his father paid for 2 years and stopped. Just because he could not go to Secondary School, because his mother had no money, he refused to go teach, and sat at home doing nothing, making his mother unhappy.*” The Headmaster then had The Boy Mike spread-eagled

in the school assembly, and gave him six lashes of the whip on the backside⁷. Afterwards, ‘this boy’ was well and truly persuaded to work as a teacher!

Just imagine, this incident occurred months after The Boy Mike had passed out of the School, and obtained his certificate! Certificates were issued in the presence of invited parents on the very day the pupils finished school; their last day of school. The certificates were signed by 3 people, namely:

1. The Headmaster, Chief Johnson Abòsède Kúbóyè;
2. The District Officer, Mr Owen V. Lee (The Manager of the School);
and
3. Mr J. G. Spear, The Education Officer, Benin and Ondo Provinces⁸,
based in Benin.

4.2 Life as a Worker

Smarting from the whipping of his backside at the School Assembly, The Boy Mike was given a recommendation letter to Rev. Soares at Igbóégunrín, for

⁷The first time the Compiler heard this story was in 1978, when the current Ábòdì, HRH Oba Aláyélúwà George Babatúndé Fádúyilé, Adégún II, was the Vice Principal of Methodist High School, Okitipupa, and late Chief Obáfèmi Oláyéye was the Principal. The Compiler and another classmate, Shadrack Adú (aka ‘Colonial Mentality’) were adjudged to have caused some disruption in the school and they were to be flogged 6 strokes of the cane at the school assembly. They both refused the punishment on the grounds that they were judged without being asked their own side of what actually happened. They were subsequently suspended from school and each asked to return with his father. The following day, to the Compiler’s consternation, his father went to school with him and told the Vice Principal this story of him being flogged in the school assembly 6 months after leaving school! He then insisted that the Compiler be flogged right there in his presence. And that was what happened, followed by a further punishment to uproot a short palm tree (òpèkètè) behind one of the classroom blocks. 1978, yes..., feels like only yesterday!

⁸Benin and Ondo Provinces are now 4 States—Edo, Delta, Ondo, and Ekiti States.

employment as a Pupil Teacher. Thus, at the age of 16, going on 17, The Boy Mike reluctantly started out as a Pupil Teacher in 1942 at West African Episcopal School, Agéríge, but was later transferred to Òréràrà near Erínjẹ. His monthly salary was 9 Shillings in old Colonial currency. The Boy Mike returned home in December 1942, sullen. This was when he learned that his immediate older sister, Ọláyẹmí had recently put to bed with her firstborn son, named Olú, aka ‘Ajasco’. His mother soon noticed that The Boy Mike was not happy in his teaching job and was still determined to go to Lagos to work. So, she asked one of her nephews, Zechariah Ayégbèlọ, to take The Boy Mike to Lagos to stay with Mr J. Z. Kúyẹ of , the Goldsmith, who was a family friend and in-law. So, The Boy Mike resigned after teaching for nearly a year, and went to Lagos in January 1943 to pursue his dreams.

4.2.1 The Boy Mike In Lagos

Like many people who went to Lagos from Ìkálẹ̀ back then, The Boy Mike initially stayed with Mr J. Z. Kúyẹ⁹, who at the time was living at Sawyer Street, very close to Tinubu Square in the heart of Lagos. At the time, The Boy Mike did not know anywhere in Lagos, but his younger cousin, Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji who was an Apprentice Goldsmith with Mr J. Z. Kúyẹ, knew Lagos inside out. Figure 4.3 shows The Boy Mike and Ayòdélé Adéníji, aged. Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji had moved with his mother, who was from Abèòkúta, to Lagos at the age of 11 after his father died. And, as his older half-sister (Nee Ọlá Adéníji) was married to Mr J. Z. Kúyẹ, he was living with them while learning Goldsmithing—a trade which would in time take him to Hatton Garden in London, the renowned world headquarters of Goldsmithing.

⁹The Boy Mike lived with Mr J. Z. Kuye for about two weeks, before securing the ‘Bachelor’s Quarters’ of a man from Ilutitun, where he stayed for a while longer.



Figure 4.3: Aged Senator M. A. E. Onunkun and Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji

Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji¹⁰ later built his own enduring jewellery business, Jewell De Olivis, which at one time was one of the biggest jewellery businesses in Africa. Meanwhile, all three were young boys in 1940s Lagos.

¹⁰The story of how Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji stowed away in a ship in 1948 in his determination to get to Hatton Garden, London is the stuff of movies! He and his friend, who both stowed away were caught while the ship was still on the West African coast, and were nearly thrown overboard to certain death. By divine providence, it seemed, they were dropped off in Sierra Leone. Years later, he legally obtained the papers to travel to London to fulfil his dream of honing his Goldsmithing skills at Hatton Garden.

4.2.1.1 Sànyà And The Burma Boys

When The Boy Mike arrived at J. Z. Kuye's house in Lagos in 1943, he did not meet Sànyà Magnus Adéníji—Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji's immediate older brother, and age-mate/classmate of The Boy Mike—there. He later learned that Sànyà Magnus Adéníji had left the place and had no fixed address. He had been hanging out with a group of waifs, called 'Burma Boys'¹¹, who used to take the European naval shipmates to hotels, bars and other interesting places in Lagos for money. Some of them would often steal from the Europeans, too. This was during World War II, and Lagos was crawling with many European ships and naval shipmates.

There was a huge cavernous flood drain pipe near the Cathedral Church of Christ (Anglican), Marina Road, Lagos Island, overlooking the Lagos Lagoon. The huge drain pipe, with cars, trucks and other heavy goods vehicles (HGVs) passing over it, channelled all the run-off water in the Tinubu Square and other areas of Lagos Island into the Lagoon. The Burma Boys, including Sànyà Magnus Adéníji, were squatting in the shanty area around that huge flood drain. Sometimes, when he saw The Boy Mike and Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji, he would take them to a bukateria¹² and buy food for them, but at other times, he would throw stones at them, and drive them away. Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji was not happy about the path his older brother was pursuing, so he went to inform his mother's relatives in Abeokuta.

¹¹The 'Burma Boys' were the precursors of the street boys called 'Area Boys' in Lagos today.

¹²A bukateria, aka 'buka' in Nigerian lingo is an inexpensive and casual restaurant in a makeshift structure, typically selling food that is prepared in advance, although some have cooking facilities at the back.

The story goes that they gave Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji a charm that once he gets near and touched Sànyà Magnus Adéníji, he would leave the gang he was with, and follow him back home. And, so it happened, reportedly. But, as Sànyà Magnus Adéníji did not feel comfortable living with his older half-sister, Aunty Ọlá, at her husband's house, he enlisted to join the military in 1944. He was later demobilised in 1946, after World War II had ended. Sànyà Magnus Adéníji later became an accomplished and wealthy businessman and hotelier in Lagos and Okitipupa. The military and other veterans even came to Ilutitun to give him full military honours at his funeral.....

4.2.1.2 Job Search and Job Hopping

The second day he arrived in Lagos, The Boy Mike was advised to write a job application. He wrote a bunch of them, and was taken by Ayò Adéníji, first, to Royal Hotel Lagos, near Carter Bridge. The Hotel was owned by one Whiteman named Mr W. G. Little. He also had another business, Tiger Tablewater Company, which was producing lemonade, ginger ale, and soda water. There were no Coca-Cola, 7UP, et cetera in Nigeria at the time. After The Boy Mike submitted his application for a job at Royal Hotel Lagos, Mr W. G. Little himself interviewed him. He was instantly impressed when he asked The Boy Mike questions in English and he replied in impeccable English, not the pidgin English he was accustomed to hearing from many people in Lagos. Of course, having been educated in Ìkálẹ̀ in the 1930s, where vernacular was prohibited in schools, and pidgin English was non-existent, he had to learn to speak proper English language. Mr W. G. Little was so impressed that he asked The Boy Mike to start work immediately as a Barman

on a monthly salary of 15 Shillings—a big rise from the 9 Shillings he was earning as a Pupil Teacher back home.

As The Boy Mike was able to speak *real* English with Mr W. G. Little and his wife, they both liked him a lot. Mr W. G. Little then suggested that it would be better for him to be working with his other company, Tiger Tablewater Company, rather than continue as a Barman in his hotel. So, he redeployed him to Tiger Tablewater Company, where he worked for about 2 or 3 months. Then, The Boy Mike saw an advert in the newspaper for young boys to work at the Nigerian Bureau of Publicity, set up by the Press. He applied and about 50 candidates were invited for a written test. After the written test, 3 were shortlisted, and The Boy Mike and another young boy from the Midwest¹³ area were eventually hired. The Boy Mike only worked with the Nigerian Bureau of Publicity for 4 days, as he was invited for interview at Kingsway Stores, to which he had earlier applied. He took permission, went to the interview. He was hired immediately by Kingsway Stores and placed on a salary of ‘£1, 10 Shillings’, i.e., ‘30 Shillings’, which was double what he was being paid at Royal Hotel Lagos and Tiger Tablewater Company! The Boy Mike started with Kingsway Stores as an Apprentice to a Salesman, one Mr Williams, who was a native of Ondo. On the same long Sales Counter was another Salesman who was an Ìkálẹ̀ man from Ọlótò, named Joseph Kúmúyì. But, because he was very short and smallish, he was called “Joe Òrenté”.

The Boy Mike worked at Kingsway Stores until December 1944, when he saw an advert by Eden Dempster Lines—the foremost shipping company in

¹³The Midwest encompassed the area that is today known as Edo and Delta States.

Nigeria at the time—for youngsters who wanted to learn skilled professions like platers, fitters, cabinetmakers, ship building, etc. At this time, The Boy Mike was just 19 years old and small in stature. Anyway, he put in an application and was invited for a written test. They were given three days to return for the test result. When they returned, three candidates from Ìkálẹ̀ passed the examination and were appointed as indentured apprentices¹⁴. The three were:

1. Philip Kúyẹ̀—“a very amiable decent gentleman”, said Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, who was the closest friend he had among the Kúyẹ̀s. He was employed as an Indentured Apprentice Cabinetmaker
2. Ògúnṣọ̀ Edward Kádé—A native of Ilutitun, who was the oldest of the three of them. The Boy Mike was the youngest.
3. The Boy Mike, employed as an Indentured Apprentice in the Platers Department — a proper Shipmate.

The Boy Mike found the platers work more difficult than he had anticipated, as it was strenuous and involved the handling and lifting of thick, heavy metal plates used in ship building. At the same time The Boy Mike was learning Bookkeeping in the evenings at a private school ran by one Mr Adébáyọ̀. The Chief Engineer and Head of the Platers Department was an elderly White man, Mr Andrews, who was highly experienced, highly skilled, strong and hard-working, despite his age. Mr Andrews liked The Boy Mike very much, and was concerned about his welfare. He would often ask “What’s a ‘small boy’ like you doing in the Platers Department? Can you carry these heavy

¹⁴Explained Senator M. A. E. Onunkun: An indentured apprentice is “an apprentice with agreement”, ie, during the apprenticeship, the employer agrees not to sack the apprentice, and the apprentice agrees not to leave the company. At the end of the apprenticeship, if the apprentice is bad, the employer will not employ the indentured apprentice.

metal plates?” The plates were indeed very heavy, some 1 inch (25mm) thick, others $\frac{3}{4}$ inch (16 mm) thick! So, Mr Andrews asked The Boy Mike to work in the office, writing the Tallies, and doing other administrative work, rather than continue in the workshop.

One day, Mr Andrews came into the office and found The Boy Mike snoozing at his desk. So, he tapped on the desk, and asked quizzically:

“Why are you sleeping? Did you not sleep at night?”

“I’m sorry, Sir”, replied the ruffled Boy Mike, adding: “I read late into the night, Sir.”

Concerned, Mr Andrews said: “Reading? Reading? At this age? When do you go to sleep?”

The Boy Mike replied: “I go to bed sometimes by 11pm, Sir.”

Shocked, Mr Andrews exclaimed: “Ah! You shouldn’t do it! You will lose your eyesight when you grow old! Under 20 years of age... , sleep at 11pm? You should go to bed by 8 or 8:30 pm!”

The Boy Mike said: “Sir, I didn’t acquire much education. I am studying to get some professional certificates.”

“I did not say you should not read”, clarified Mr Andrews, adding: “What I am saying is that you should go to bed no later than 9pm.”

The Boy Mike thanked Mr Andrews, and tried to abide by his advice to go to bed early, but couldn't, because of his drive to get as much education as he could in order to develop himself. Not long after that event, Mr Andrews went on leave for 3 or 4 weeks.

Now, some of the other boys in the Platers Department were jealous of The Boy Mike because Mr Andrews liked him, hence The Boy Mike working in the office was having it easier than them. So, they would sarcastically say to him: "You come to learn a trade and you sit in the office. You better come to the field! You better come and learn the thing in the workshop!" Even so, The Boy Mike felt there was some truth in what they were saying that he would not be able to learn the trade by working in the office, so he was persuaded to refuse to continue to work in the office. Hence, when Mr Andrews returned from leave, The Boy Mike told him that he wanted to be redeployed to the workshop, so that he could begin to learn the Plater's job he signed up for. Mr Andrews tried to talk him out of it, but The Boy Mike insisted on going to the workshop. So, Mr Andrews redeployed him to the workshop.

No sooner had The Boy Mike returned to the workshop than the boys made him the Assistant Secretary to the Trade Union, because of his fluent mastery of the English language. But, what had he talked himself into, going to the workshop! It was hard work like he had never done before! In his own words, it was "carry this, carry this....," back-breaking work! And, he could not tell Mr Andrews that he wanted to go back to the office. There was no escape door there. Knowing fully well there was no way he could do this hard

work for 5 years, he became very difficult and unmanageable to the White Supervisors, to the delight of the Nigerian apprentices.

On one occasion, The Boy Mike was tasked with cutting a metal plate to size using a punching and shearing machine. While trying to fulfil the assignment, the shearing machine went astray and damaged the plate. Then one Mr Birrell—a South African White man—who used to view black people like they did in South Africa started screaming at The Boy Mike and insulting him that he had been an apprentice for six months¹⁵ and didn't know anything. He was a Foreman, junior to Mr Andrews. The Boy Mike apologised and explained that it was a genuine mistake, but he kept on running the Boy Mike down. So, The Boy Mike cautioned him, saying: "Sir, I'm not in South Africa, you know. This is Nigeria ò." That made him even more mad.

The Boy Mike became so difficult and ungovernable to the White Supervisors there also because of the way they were treating black people, that sometimes he would be sent away on 2 weeks suspension without pay, and sometimes three weeks. Although he became a thorn on the sides of the White people there, he discovered that the black people loved him and were goading him on. But, then, he realised that he was the one losing pay whenever he was suspended, not his cheerleaders. One day, Mr Birrell reported The Boy Mike to Mr Glen Deene, who was the General Manager. He was an imposing figure, very tall, huge and broad. When The Boy Mike appeared before Mr Glen Deene, he angrily said he heard that The Boy Mike had abused Mr Birrell. The Boy Mike responded: "Sorry, Sir. Mr Birrell abused me and said I am a Bushman. He said I am stupid and didn't know anything. And I

¹⁵Most of those six months, The Boy Mike had been in the Office, pushing paper.

told him I'm not stupid and that this is Nigeria, not South Africa." At that, Mr Glen Deene became hot with anger, and gave The Boy Mike a 2 weeks suspension, without pay.

One day, The Boy Mike got so fed up he simply left and never returned to work at Eden Dempster Line. Although this was a breach of the indentured apprenticeship agreement, no one bothered to look for him. It was like 'good riddance', yes, relief to the Company that he left of his own volition! Meanwhile, he did a little bit of Bookkeeping and Accountancy at City & Guilds level, but he never pursued it to an Advanced level, because the job took too much of his time. At the time, two other people from Ìkálẹ̀—both junior to The Boy Mike at NA School, Ìlútítun, albeit older—were also doing the same Bookkeeping and Accountancy course. They were Thomson Ìyama from Àgírífán, Ilutitun, and Lìjòfi¹⁶ from Egure Ọlójà, Ilutitun. With that training, The Boy Mike applied for the position of Bookkeeper with Issa A. Williams General Merchants. Mr Issa A. Willimas, a very rich Merchant, was the father of Fatai Williams, who later became the Chief Justice of Nigeria.

The man Issa A. Williams liked The Boy Mike very much because of his diligence. He was a very nice man, a Muslim of the Ahmadiyya sect. He had many sons, and only 2 daughters at the time. One of the daughters got impregnated in school, and was working under The Boy Mike as a Clerk. The second daughter, who was in Higher Secondary School (HSC), and doing well in school sadly died suddenly, and the father was devastated. The girl was buried in a coffin, unlike the custom of other Muslim sects. The Boy Mike worked with Issa A. Williams General Merchants in 1946 and 1947.

¹⁶They both later became Bank Managers.

It was while working here that his mother, Ayelemi, died on 19 April 1947¹⁷. The Boy Mike received a telegram that simply said: “Mother died.” Before she died, however, The Boy Mike had an unexplainable encounter. One night in early April 1947, The Boy Mike and Festus Lúmowó, a native of Aráròmí Òbù who had been his friend since 1942, were on the bus going from Òke Sún à to downtown Lagos. As they were traveling, Festus said he wanted to stop to see one man, so they both got off the bus and entered the house where the man lived. They found the man, who turned out to be a fortune teller, in a tiny dingy room, with a flickering lamp in the room. The Boy Mike sat on the only chair in the room and Festus sat on the tiny bed beside the man.

After exchanging greetings, Festus was talking to the man, but the man asked Festus who The Boy Mike was. Festus told him that The Boy Mike was his friend. The man now turned to The Boy Mike and said:

“You, my friend, will get a call from home shortly, asking you to come down because someone had died.”

The Boy Mike said: “Me? Is the person my mother?¹⁸”

The man looked under his bed and said: “I can see the corpse here, it’s not your mother.”

The Boy Mike then asked: “Is it my father?”

¹⁷There was an eclipse of the sun by the moon in 1947.

¹⁸He first asked about my mother because he was closer to his mother.

Again, the man looked under the bed and said: “No, it’s not your father.”

The Boy Mike then replied: “In that case, there is no one who could die at home and they would send for me, for, I am the least among my father’s children!”

The man looked under his bed again, and said he was sure someone would die at home and they would come to call The Boy Mike, for he could see the dead body right there underneath his bed. They later left the man, but The Boy Mike was not particularly worried, since the man had said the person he foresaw would die was neither his mother, nor his father.

However, the third day after that chance encounter, a trader from back home came to Lagos to buy stuff, and came to tell The Boy Mike that his mother was seriously ill. Immediately, his mind went back to what the man had said. So, he asked if his mother had died, but the trader from home said she hadn’t. So, The Boy Mike went to Kingsway Chemists and bought some drugs, vitamins and blood tonic, and the next day took them home to his mother. His mother was seriously ill indeed, and unable to walk unaided. But, The Boy Mike’s immediate older sister, ’Láye, was there caring for her.

His mother was upset at seeing that The Boy Mike came home from Lagos. Concerned, she said: “Why did you come home when you know I only have few children? Do you want them to kill you? I don’t want to weep over the death of another child!” But, The Boy Mike reassured her that no one would kill him, and said: “How could I hear that you are ill and not come see you?” His mother then told him that ’Dèbèkòn had not come to see her, despite

knowing she was unwell. She then told The Boy Mike to please take good care of his sister, 'Láye, as she had been by her side althrough. This was one of the reasons The Boy Mike loved and cared for 'Láye more. Together, 'Láye and The Boy Mike took her outside the house and gave her a bath. At his mother's insistence, The Boy Mike returned to Lagos on the third day.

Now, his mother had lent money to many people, and was concerned that, in the event of her death, her children would not be bold enough to go collect the money from the debtors. So she sent that they all paid their debts, else she would ask that she be taken down to their house in order to die there. This scared them, and they all paid up. Afterward, The Boy Mike's mother apportioned all the money and explained to 'Láye how the money was to be discharged to cover her funeral. She left £15 to be used to buy a cow to be slaughtered for the guests at her funeral, and she asked 'Láye not to trouble The Boy Mike to come home, if she died, but to keep a handsome sum of £5 for him. So it was that Ayelemi, in effect, verbally wrote her own will and paid for her own funeral before she died. 'Láye told The Boy Mike all these, when he came home months later, but added that they had added the £5 his mother left for him to the money they spent for the funeral. The Boy Mike told her not to worry about that, and returned to Lagos.

Then, in late 1947, The Boy Mike joined John Holt, where he was initially employed as a Learner Clerk. He rose rapidly from Learner Clerk to Full Clerk, to Third Class Clerk, and Second Class Clerk by 1951. John Holt used to call their branches 'Ventures', for example, they had 'Ibadan Venture', 'Kano Venture', 'Abeokuta Venture', 'Port-Harcourt Venture' etc. At a point, The Boy Mike was in charge of all their debits. One day, he sat down

to write debit notes to the Ventures from 8am, and was so engrossed in the work that the next time he looked up, it was 12pm! Unknown to him, one of the Managers, Mr Lincoln, was observing him right from his office across the General open office. He called The Boy Mike into his office, commended him and gave him a promotion immediately. In fact, The Boy Mike, now a budding Man, was later allowed to head a Department within John Holt.

When The Man Mike joined the Shipping Department of John Holt, the Freight Officer was a brilliant and vocal man, named Eríkitóla. Mr Eríkitóla was the Secretary to the Labour Union, and a relentless thorn on the sides of the predominantly White Management. To silent him, the Establishment gave him a Promotion and transferred him out of the Head Office, to go head one of their haberdasher stores. This left the post of Freight Officer vacant for some time. Although there were 2 or 3 other staff in the Shipping Department who were more educated than The Man Mike, to everyone's surprise, it was The Boy Mike who was made the Freight Officer after Mr Eríkitóla was transferred out. The Management was more interested in aptitude and performance than in educational qualifications. There was another Manager, a White woman, who was in charge of all correspondences. No black worker was allowed to write for the company. Each Section Head would draft whatever message they felt needed to be written to the Ventures and other external bodies, take it to the woman, who would correct, vet it and send it to the typing pool for typing.

After seeing three or four letters drafted by The Man Mike, with nothing for her to correct, she authorised that his subsequent letters be taken straight from his desk to the Typing Pool and brought to her to sign afterwards. This

exception was only granted to The Man Mike, and it made even his ‘Seniors’ respect him a lot. The Head of the Typing Pool then was an elderly Ghanaian, Mr Paign, and The Man Mike’s friend who advised him to apply to John Holt in the first place, Mr Festus Lúmowó, was a Typist there. Mr Festus Lúmowó was 1 year older than The Man Mike, but they were very close, and many of us later got to know him as a very kind man and friend of our father.

Then, in 1951, some of our people from Ìkálẹ̀ came to Lagos and said they looked at the Council back home, and saw there were no Ìkálẹ̀ there, other than those who could not read and write, and were only engaged in low cadre jobs. Rather it was people from Òwò, Ondó and other places who were running the place. They encouraged the Ìkálẹ̀ people in Lagos who were literate to come take up Councils positions back home. Thus, the Lagos chapter of the life of the Boy Mike, now The Man Mike was about to end. The Man Mike remarked that, throughout his working life, he had never failed to secure any job he had applied for. Rather, it was he who was hopping from one job to another, once he perceived a better offer or prospect with a new job.



Figure 4.4: Senator M A E Onunkun, Daughter and Grandchildren

Chapter 5

The Man Mike: The Middle Years

In this chapter, we present the story of the life and times of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, The Man Mike, during the period the Compiler of this family documentary termed The Man Mike's middle Years.

5.1 Council / Local Government Service

Following the advice of some concerned Ìkálẹ̀ people that there were no Ìkálẹ̀ people in senior local Council positions back home, The Man Mike resigned from John Holt and returned home in December 1951 in order to apply and interview for the position of Federal Native Administration Council Clerk. At this time, 'The Boy Mike had become a man'—a father—having got married to his first wife, Felicia Olúfúnmiláyò¹, nee Mèdáhùnsi, a pretty petite lady, in 1949. They met and got married while The Boy Mike was working in Lagos. High Chief Ọláyéye, who worked with the famous B J Matthews—the

¹The maiden, Felicia Olúfúnmiláyò Mèdáhùnsi, was living in Lagos with her oldest brother, Mr Macaulay Mèdáhùnsi, who was also an older 'brother' to Mr Albert Olówu, both from Ìlútitun, when The Boy Mike met her.

British Resident in Ondo Province in the 1930s and 1940s—was a prominent member of the panel that interviewed The Man Mike for the Council Clerk position. High Chief Ọláyéye was impressed and pleased with The Man Mike’s performance, giving him the confidence that the job was his.

As the bureaucratic process dragged for a while, however, and as he couldn’t just sit around idle, The Man Mike acquired a piece of land at Iju-Odò, near present day Manùwà Memorial Grammar School, and cultivated coffee there. Finally, his employment as Council Clerk² was officially confirmed by the Resident Officer of Ondo Province, effective 20 May 1952. Thus began his two-decade long career in Local Government Service all across the old Western Region, old Western State and old Ondo State. As Council Clerk, he was in charge of the day-to-day administration of the Council. He was also in charge of District and Appeal Court cases³ from lower Courts in Ìlútitun, Ig-bótako, Òkìtìpupa, Òde-Aye, Òde-Ìrèlè, Ìyànsàn, etc. All the Ọlójàs in Ìkálè Central District would also come to Ìkòyà to hold their meetings, which The Man Mike facilitated.

Back in 1952, the Òkìtìpupa Divisional Council was comprised of three sub-units, or Districts, namely:

1. The Ìkálè Central District Council, which sat at Ìkòyà;
2. The Ìlàjẹ District Council, which sat at Àtìjẹrẹ, and
3. Èsẹ-Odò District Council, which sat at Ìgbékẹbọ.

²At that time, the position was not called Council Secretary, but Council Clerk.

³In retrospect, that was tremendous power concentrated in the hands of one man. Had such a man been a self-serving egomaniac, he could have easily abused such power and exploited the people. Thankfully, The Man Mike was not that kind of person.

In 1955, however, there was a reorganisation of the Native Administration Council structure in Òkìtìpupa Divisional Council. This resulted in the Ìkálẹ̀ Central District Council being split into three separate units, namely:

1. Ìkálẹ̀ Orísun Mẹ̀ta District Council, Ìkọ̀yà, which comprised of Ìkọ̀yà, Òṣóòró (Ìlútítun, Igbótako, etc), and Ọ̀lọ̀tò;
2. Ìkálẹ̀ Ìdàpọ̀ Mẹ̀ta District Council, Òde-Ìrèlẹ̀, which comprised of Òde-Ìrèlẹ̀, Àjàgbà, Ìyànsàn and Ọ̀mẹ̀; and
3. Ìkálẹ̀ Ìdàpọ̀ Máraún District Council, headquartered in Òkìtìpupa. This is comprised of Òkìtìpupa, Òde-Aye, Erinje, Àyèká Igbódigò, and Ìgò-dan Lísà

“Although some Ìkálẹ̀ people try to deny it” today, said Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, “When they first came from Benin, The Àbòdì was the most senior Prince, followed by the Ọ̀tọ̀ of Ọ̀mẹ̀”. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun explained that, when the White man first got Ìkálẹ̀ in the 19th century C. E., it was only the Àbòdì they recognised. Reportedly, they got to Òde-Aye first, and they were directed to Ìkọ̀’ya. Sequel to that, the Àbòdì was the only Ọ̀ba who was placed on a salary, and given staff of office by the White man. The Àbòdì was placed on a salary of £360 per annum (£30 per month). M. A. E. Onunkun was instrumental to the placement of other Ọ̀bas and Ọ̀lojas in Ìkálẹ̀ on salaries, after he took up the Council Clerk, and later Council Secretary, job in the 1950s.

5.1.1 The Tax Agitation

As part of the restructuring of the Native Administration Councils in Ondo Province, the government passed a law in 1956 that made education free. To

accomplish this, the government wanted to build more schools and employ more teachers. To fund this scheme, however, the government decided that the local Councils should fund the payment of the Teachers in the Native Administration schools in their district. So, the Councils were heavily levied by higher Provincial authorities. The only way the Councils could raise sufficient fund to meet this demand was to raise taxes. Hence, beginning January 1957, the tax for an adult male in Òkìtìpupa Division was raised from ‘£1, 10 Shillings’ to ‘£3, 2 Shillings, 6 Pence’, aka ‘3 pounds, 2 and 6’—more than double the previous year’s tax.

This ired the people of Òkìtìpupa division, and there was an uproar and agitation against the payment of taxes. For a while, the people refused to pay the taxes, and took the matter to court. As The Man Mike was the one who represented the Council in Court, he was seen as ‘*the face of the Government*’, hence he was the prime target of the agitation—the person the agitators wanted to kill—more so after the Court in Benin ruled against the people on 2 December 1957. The Man Mike was only 32 years old at the time, and already in the eye of such deadly storm.

5.1.2 Further Training and Transfers

From October 1958 to July 1959, The Man Mike attended the one-year course in Advanced Local Government Administration at the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, Ìbàdàn. The College later formed the nucleus of the University of Ifè, now Ọbáfẹmí Awólọwọ University, Ilé-Ifè. The course was the highest course in Local Government Administration at the time, aside from travelling overseas. The Man Mike was the first person

from Ìkálẹ̀ Division to come out with an ‘A’ Grade in the course. The following year, J A Kúyẹ⁴ also graduated from the course with an ‘A’ Grade. After successfully graduating from the Course in 1959, The Man Mike, M. A. E. Onunkun, was appointed as the Substantive Council Secretary⁵ of Ìkálẹ̀ Orísun Mèta District Council, Ìkòyà.

Then, on 9 May 1960, M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred from Ìkòyà to Ìjẹ̀sà Southern District Council, Ilẹ̀sà, where he served as the Council Secretary until early 1963. From Ilẹ̀sà, M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred to Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó, where he served as Council Secretary only for 4 or 5 months. At Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó, M. A. E. Onunkun had an inexplicable experience that he described as “marvelous”. At this time, his sons Ọ̀ládélé and Tẹ̀mítópẹ̀ were toddlers. Ọ̀ládélé, said M. A. E. Onunkun, used to have convulsions frequently, and once he started crying around 6pm, he won’t stop until around 6am the following day. This started when the family was at Ilẹ̀sà, and continued at Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó. M. A. E. Onunkun said on a chance discussion, his Senior Tax Officer informed him that he had the cure, and brought him a charred, powdered substance. He said to mix a bit of it with oil (Baby oil) rub it on the boy’s face shortly before the time he often started to cry, but not once he had started to cry. M. A. E. Onunkun said he did, as instructed, and incredibly, the boy stopped crying at nights and that was also the end of his frequent convulsions!

Following his short service at Ìjẹ̀bú-Igbó, M. A. E. Onunkun was back on the

⁴J A Kúyẹ̀ later trained as a lawyer in the United Kingdom, and returned to practice Law in Nigeria for many years until his death.

⁵The position of ‘Council Secretary’ was the newly created position for the Administrative head of the Council at the time.

road again, this time transferred to Ìgbàrà-Òkè in late 1963. At the time, Dr Ìjósé of Ìlútítun was the Principal of Ìgbàrà-Òkè Grammar School (founded in 1958), and an Ìlàjẹ man from Igbó-Égunrén, Inspector Dúrójayé⁶, was the Divisional Police Officer of the Police Station at Ìgbàrà-Òkè. Then, in 1965, M. A. E. Onunkun was back on the road, posted from Ìgbàrà-Òkè to Ilẹ-Olújí. At Ilẹ-Olújí M A E Onunkun and his growing family lived in a rented house next to River Eşinmù⁷.

5.1.3 The Nigerian Civil War Years

The Nigerian civil war broke out in 1967, with the nation fighting to prevent the then Eastern Region, which had unilaterally declared itself the Republic of Biafra, from breaking away. It was in this very year that M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred from Ilẹ-Olújí to Ìjẹbú Waterside Divisional Council, Abígi, as the Council Secretary. Because his third wife, Victoria Adékúọlá Onunkun, was working as the only Midwife at Ilẹ-Olújí at the time, M. A. E. Onunkun had to report alone at his new station, Ìjẹbú Waterside, leaving his family behind at Ilẹ-Olújí, until his wife's transfer to Ìjẹbú Waterside could be effected. So, he took with him his second son, Ayodele Onunkun, drove his trusted VW 'Beetle' car from Ilẹ-Olújí through Ondo, and Ore, on to Abígi. The talk on everyone's lips at the time was the Civil, which was raging close to Òrẹ. M. A. E. Onunkun was a Civil Defence Officer⁸ so he was allowed to drive through the Nigerian Army checkpoints along the road and arrived

⁶Decades later, Mr Durojaye served as the Commissioner of Police in Rivers State.

⁷River Eşinmù had a swamp that no one would dare enter at the time. One of M. A. E. Onunkun's younger sons, who had temper problems, had a habit of throwing her mother's plates and things into the swamp whenever he was angry..., until the day his mother beat 'the Devil in his heart' out, and he never dared that madness thereafter!

⁸All Council Secretaries at the time were Civil Defence Officers.

safely at his new station, Abígi. It would have resulted in instant death, though, if he had come across a Biafran Army checkpoint. Three days after he had gone through Òrè, he heard reports that Òrè—a strategic confluence town—had fallen to the Biafran soldiers. Thus, M. A. E. Onunkun could not travel back to Ilè-Olújí through Òrè on weekend to see his family, as he had planned. Aside from the risk of stray bullets, it would have been especially dangerous for him, as an official of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, and Civil Defence Officer, to travel through Òrè, which was then in rebel hands. So, for about a month, he and Ayodele Onunkun were cut off from the rest of the family.

Hence, M. A. E. Onunkun decided to drive from Abígi through Ìjèbú-Òde, Ìbàdàn, Ilé-Ifè, Ilèṣà, to Ilè-Olújí—what amounted to ‘an Israelite journey’, but a safer route—in order to spend the weekend with his family. M. A. E. Onunkun took this route a few times, until the tide of the war turned and the Biafran army beat a hasty retreat from Òrè back towards the East. It later transpired that the Biafran army had planned to head through Òkìtìpupa to Lagos to sack the city, which was the seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria at the time. But, the Nigerian Army rallied to head off the Biafran army in battle so bitter and bloody at Òrè and its environs, that the people coined the descriptive metaphor for a difficult situation, saying: “Ó le kú, ijà Òrè!”, which translates to: “It was deathly fierce, the battle for Òrè!”

Decades after the Nigerian Civil war, which ended in 1970, an abandoned destroyed locally fabricated Biafran armoured tank stood beside the old Òrè-Òkìtìpupa road..., a lone, deathly silent sentinel and testament to the deathly fierce battle for Òrè. Two of the bigger bridges on the road had been bombed

out, and people had to take a long detour round them. After the liberation of Òrẹ from the Biafran army, the first time M. A. E. Onunkun drove through the Òkìtìpupa-Òrẹ road, he saw the decapitated head of a white man displayed on the destroyed armoured tank by the road, at Fóríkù, a clear evidence that some mercenaries were fighting on the Biafran side to destabilise the country. At seeing the corpse of one of the white mercenaries by the roadside, Ayodele Onunkun, who was in the car with M. A. E. Onunkun, excitedly said: “Baba gh’o, Baba ghòó, Baba ghòó, Òyìnbó..., bàtà nẹhẹ ẹ”, which translates to: “Dad look, Dad look, White man..., shoes on his feet.” M. A. E. Onunkun told him not to look, and tried to drive away as quickly as possible.

5.1.3.1 Nẹnúwà of Odè

While serving as the Council Secretary at Ìjẹbù Waterside, M. A. E. Onunkun found out that a small town, named Odè-Omi, often shortened ‘Odè’, was part of the territory of the Council, and the title of the traditional ruler of the town was (and probably still is) Nẹnúwà. Then, M. A. E. Onunkun recalled that a line from his maternal family eulogy, which his mother used to poetically recount to him, reads: “... Ọma Nẹnúwà n’Odè...” So, he seized the opportunity to go see this king, the Nẹnúwà of Odè, to see if he could fill him in on what his mother meant by that line. The king was a much older man. After greeting the King with the customary decorum accorded kings, he asked the king if he understood what his mother meant by that line.

The king then asked what the name of his mother’s father was. He told him that his name was Fápẹtù. “Ah!” said the king, and he went into a

monologue of eulogies, adding: “Your mother was descended from a ‘terrible’ [i.e., ‘fearsome’] warrior from Odè, who went on a military campaign with a canoe, got lost and never returned to Odè.” The king added that they thought he had died, as they later found his war canoe, which was currently being held in the town as a revered icon of the great warrior. The Nènúwà of Odè was so much more pleased now that he had come to know that the Council Secretary sitting in front of him was, in fact, descended from the Royal line of Odè. He said, if M. A. E. Onunkun wanted to, anytime the seat of the Nènúwà is vacant, he could actually lay claim to it. He then told M. A. E. Onunkun the story of the first Nènúwà, their joint ancestor. Hold on to your seat!

A long time ago, there were 3 brothers, princes, born of the same father and mother. They set out by boat from Odè-Omi in search of greener pastures—each in his own boat. In time, they arrived at a location where the River Agan was very wide, so they stopped by the river to spend the night there. They met a Soothsayer/Fortune-teller there, and the man asked them for a goat for sacrifice in their behalf. They gave him the goat, and after doing some rituals, he slaughtered the goat and asked them to cook and finish eating it that night. Before it got too dark, the two older brothers sent their youngest brother to go look for wood that they could use to build a tent for them to spend the night. So, he went away to look for wood, as directed by his older brothers. Before he returned, however, they had finished cooking the goat, and eaten it all, save for the head of the goat.

When the youngest brother returned, obviously starving, he asked for what was left of the goat for him to eat. The older brothers mischievously re-

sponded: “Oh, sorry, we had eaten it all, save for the head of the goat, which is in the cauldron.” The youngest brother then took the bony head of the goat and ate it. Shortly afterwards, the Soothsayer/Fortune-teller returned and saw that they had finished eating the goat. He asked who among them ate the head of the goat. The two older brothers responded that it was the youngest brother who ate the head of the goat. To this, the Soothsayer/Fortune-teller said: “Your youngest brother will become your head. Henceforth, you must not see one another face-to-face ever again!”

Addressing the youngest brother, the Soothsayer/Fortune-teller said: “You, go to the east and never return to your original home”. He went eastward in his boat and later founded Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde, and became it’s ruler, the Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bù-Òde. To the oldest brother, the Soothsayer/Fortune-teller said: “You, go back to where you have come from.” So, he returned to Odè-Omi and became it’s ruler, the Nẹ̀núwà of Odè-Omi. To the middle brother, the Soothsayer/Fortune-teller said: “You stay here!” So he remained there on the banks of the River Agan, and named the settlement he founded there “Ìwòpín”. This transliterates to: “[We] see, divide (or separate)”, since it was there that the three brothers were to see one another for the last time, separate and never see one another again. The middle brother became the Líkẹ̀n of Ìwòpín.

It then happened that both Ìwòpín and Odè-Omi were put together in one Council, Ìjẹ̀bù Waterside District Council. And, this required that the rulers of both towns, along with the rulers of other towns in the Council hold meetings, as they were members of the Council. To avert the problem of both kings seeing each other, the Líkẹ̀n of Ìwòpín would arrive in the Council

meeting room first, and sit facing the window, with his back to the room. The Nénúwà of Odè would come in later, and sit in the room. The Líkẹ̀n of Ìwòpín would only turn round when he had been informed that the Nénúwà had left the room. It was also said that whenever the Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode was to attend an event in the area, he would send advance messages to the Líkẹ̀n of Ìwòpín and the Nénúwà of Odè, informing them that he was coming there, and imploring them not to turn up at the event.

After telling M. A. E. Onunkun this story about the roots of these three kings, the Nénúwà of Odè, who was said to be very powerful in African Spiritualism, remarked that it was the other two, ie, the Líkẹ̀n of Ìwòpín and the Awùjalẹ̀ of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, who could not behold his face, lest they died. He added that he could see their faces, and nothing would happen to him, but they would be casualties. That was why, according to the Nénúwà of Odè, they were always taking all possible steps to ensure that they never behold his face. And, truly, when the Awùjalẹ̀ was attending an event during the time M. A. E. Onunkun was the Council Secretary, he sent the Nénúwà a sheep and other presents to request him not to attend the said event.

5.1.3.2 Further Transfers

Then in 1969, M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred from Ìjẹ̀bù Waterside District Council to Ìbàdàn to handle the Àgbẹ̀kọ̀yà Tax crisis. On meeting with the stakeholders, he suggested that they adopt the principle of '*Tax Collection by Proxy*'—the Tax collection methodology used in Ondo Province. This involved getting the local people to collect taxes, and giving them 3 pence on every £1 they collected. At the end of the month, the amount of

tax each of them collected was collated, and their rebate paid them in bulk. The Àgbèkòyà and all the 6 Councils in Ìbàdàn agreed to the suggestion, and the crisis was resolved. This was, in effect, a method of subcontracting tax collection to the local people, like the millenia-old tax collection system that the Romans employed in Israel and other territories they ruled over.

After serving 9 months as Council Secretary at Ìbàdàn, M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred in early 1970 to Ìlàjẹ District Council, which used to sit at Àtíjèrẹ. Since, this was a riverine area and he had to travel around there by boat, he sold his car, and moved to Àtíjèrẹ. It was around this time, 1969/1970 that M. A. E. Onunkun decided to settle his growing family down at Òkítìpupa, so that the frequent relocations would not adversely affect the education of his children, many of who had started school at the time. Subsequently, M. A. E. Onunkun would usually travel to his station on Sundays, and return religiously to his family at Òkítìpupa on Friday evenings. He certainly wracked up a lot of mileage, doing that!

5.1.4 In The Wake of The Civil War

M. A. E. Onunkun was serving as Council Secretary at Ìlàjẹ District Council when the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970. He served there until 1971. He was transferred to Òkítìpupa Divisional Council as the Council Secretary around the middle of 1971. Back on land, as it were, he bought his first Peugeot 404 saloon car, registered WAB, as Ìkálẹ was still in the old Western State of Nigeria, and no vehicle registration number was assigned to Okitipupa at the time. Like his previous VW 'Beetle' cars, this new Peugeot 404 was a Right Hand Drive car. Then, in 1973, Nigeria changed from Right

Hand Drive to Left Hand Drive. Around the same time, still part of the old Western State, Okitipupa was assigned the Vehicle Registration number WOK. Hence M. A. E. Onunkun put his old car up for sale and bought another rugged Peugeot 404, his second, in early 1974 but this one was a Left Hand Drive car registered WOK. At the creation of the old Ondo State later in 1976, he changed the Vehicle Registration number to OD3550T, and this was the '*signature* car' he used into the late 1980s. Everyone in town knew him with this car. In fact, the life story of M. A. E. Onunkun would be incomplete without a mention of him with his rugged 'never say die' Peugeot 404 saloon car, OD 3550T!

Also, in 1973, there was another reorganisation of the local governance structure. The old Western State adopted the French pattern of local Governance, and changed the nomenclature from Council Secretaries to Council Managers. M. A. E. Onunkun was made a Council Manager in 1973 and subsequently transferred to Ìkòlẹ̀ Èkìtì, tasked with merging three Councils—Oyẹ̀ Council, Ìkòlẹ̀ Council and Òmùò Provisional Authority—into one, namely: Èkìtì North Divisional Council, headquartered at Ìkòlẹ̀ Èkìtì.

M. A. E. Onunkun's bosses at Ìbàdàn had noted his prodigious conflict resolution skills, and would often transfer him to trouble spots within the old Western Region and old Western State, to reconcile disputing parties. It was for this reason that he was transferred in 1974 from Èkìtì North Divisional Council, Ìkòlẹ̀ Èkìtì, to Ìdànrẹ̀ Divisional Council to replace the Council Manager there, one Mr Aina. There had been a festering dispute with respect to the appointment of a new King over Ìdànrẹ̀ after the previous king died. The dispute had been going on for over 5 years, and about 6 or 7 Council Man-

agers and a number of District Officers (DOs) have tried and failed to resolve the dispute. M. A. E. Onunkun's DO at Èkìtì North Divisional Council was opposed to that transfer. So, against M. A. E. Onunkun's advice, he went to Ìbàdàn, to lobby that M. A. E. Onunkun not be transferred, as he was the most experienced Council Manager he had worked with. But, he was sent back from Ìbàdàn, and told: *'He must go. That man is the only one in the region who could handle the difficult situation at Ìdànrè'*. So, M. A. E. Onunkun left Ìkòlè Èkìtì for Ìdànrè around September / October 1974.

In August 1976, 3 days after the current Ọba—the Ọwá of Ìdànrè, Ọba Fredrick Aròlòyè—had been installed, M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred to Ọwò Local Government. Reorganisation of the States in the Federal Republic of Nigeria took place in 1976, and three States, namely: Ondo, Ogun and Oyo were carved out of the Old Western Region/Western State. Then, Group Captain Ita David Ikpeme was appointed as the Governor of the newly created Ondo State, which included the present Èkìtì State, with Àkùré as the State Capital.

From Ọwò M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred to Ìkéré Èkìtì Local Government, and from Ìkéré Èkìtì again to Òkìtìpupa, but this time renamed Ìkálè Local Government, comprising of Òkìtìpupa, Ìkòyà, Ọşòrò, Erékìtì, Ìrèlè, Àjàgbà, etc. This was early in 1977. In one of his video interviews, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said that General Bájowà went to tell Governor Ikpeme that the Ìlútìtun man, his uncle, newly transferred to head Ìkálè Local Government would not allow his (i.e., General Bájowà's) brother to become the Rebùjà of Ọşòrò, which was being disputed between his brother from Igbótako and another man from Ìlútìtun. It was then that M. A. E. Onunkun

was transferred to Ìfẹ̀sowápò Local Government, initially headquartered at Òrẹ̀, but the Council Office was later moved to Òdìgbó.

It was while he was nearing the end of his career in Local Government Service at Ìfẹ̀sowápò Local Government, and the Second Republic was about to be born, that people in the now 8 Local Government areas where he had served came to ask him in 1978 to come represent them as the Senator for Ondo South Senatorial District. So it was that Mr M. A. E. Onunkun took voluntary retirement from his position as the Secretary of Ìfẹ̀sowápò Local Government in December 1978. Now, M. A. E. Onunkun was on the brink of becoming Senator M. A. E. Onunkun. It is interesting to note that his salary as a Local Government Secretary in 1978 was more than his salary as a Senator in 1979.

5.2 Baba Senator

From 1 October 1979, Mr Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun became Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun served in the Second Republic, between 1979 and 1983. He was in a number of Senatorial Committees, including the Local Government Committee, where he contributed to legislation on local government reforms. The seat of the Nigerian Government at the time was Lagos, where the National Assembly was situated at Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos Island. The Senators were initially temporarily housed in FESTAC Village, but later housed in the Federal Government Housing Estate, Victoria Island, popularly known as “1004”.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was a down-to-earth man, who was always in touch with his roots. He did not allow his privilege of serving in the Nigerian Senate to corrupt him, or make him feel big-headed. He would readily interact with anyone, regardless of their social and/or educational status. For years, while in the Senate, he continued to drive his trusted Peugeot 404 Saloon car, vehicle registration number OD3550T, despite pressure from people around him that, as a Senator, he should be driving a Mercedes-Benz. Eventually, circa 1981, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun obtained a car loan to buy a Peugeot 504 GL. The car loan was deducted monthly from his salary, until it was fully paid off, as his payslip as a Senator, which he recently showed the Compiler during his 2014 video interview, showed. He even remarked that his salary as a Senator then was less than what he used to earn as a Level 16 Council Secretary before he went into the Senate in 1979.

The Ondo South Senatorial District he represented at the time comprised of 4 Local Government areas, namely: Ìkálẹ̀ Local Government; Ìlájẹ̀/Ẹ̀sẹ̀-Odò Local Government; Ìfẹ̀sowápọ̀ Local Government; and Ondo Local Government. The arrangement within the Unity Party of Nigeria in the Region, leading up to the election in 1979, was that M. A. E. Onunkun from the Ìkálẹ̀ and Ìlájẹ̀/Ẹ̀sẹ̀-Odò block would represent the Senatorial District in the 1979-1983 session, while another candidate from the Ìfẹ̀sowápọ̀ and Ondo block would go in 1983, and this rotational scheme would be followed going forward.

As the 1983 election approached, however, many Senators were going for a Second Term, and Professor Òpékẹ̀ from Ilẹ̀-Olújí, which was of the Ìfẹ̀sowápọ̀

and Ondo axis, approached Senator M. A. E. Onunkun to ask if he wanted to go for a Second Term, promising to support him, if he so desired. But, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun informed Professor Òpékè that he would stick with the pre-1979 Election agreement to rotate. He therefore lent his support to Professor Òpékè, who went on to win the Unity Party of Nigeria Senatorial Primaries ticket and went into the Senate in October 1983. However, that Senate Session lasted only a few months before the Second Republic was brought to a screeching halt by the Military intervention/coup on December 31, 1983, which brought Major General Muhammad Buhari to power.

5.3 M. A. E. Onunkun — The Builder

Contrary to what many people might think, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun has never been a rich man. He was a simple, astute, prudent and contented man, who was never given to ostentatious and expensive lifestyle. For clothing, he felt more comfortable in simple Guinea Brocade material and Ankara than in expensive Damask or Lace materials. And he was not given to parties and showy displays of wealth either. Rather, any little money he had, he ploughed into building construction—arguably one of his most enduring passions and pastimes.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun built his first house at Ìlútítun in 1952, though the building today looks so very different from that original house, as he had remodelled it several times since then. This was the house near the Nigerian Police Station at Ilutitun. He laid the foundation of that house in early 1952, after returning home from Lagos to apply and interview for the Coun-

cil Clerk position, during the hiatus before confirmation of his appointment by the Resident of Ondo Province. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said that he invited his father to offer his blessings at the laying of the foundation of the house, and his father was very pleased. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun later heard that his father remarked at an Ìjámà meeting that, if any Fortune-Teller had told him that Ayelemi's son would be the first of his children to build a house, he would have told the man to go throw his divination paraphernalia into the latrine. He, reportedly, mused: "*How could I have believed that Ayelemi, who had 13 children and only three survived..., how could I have believed that the youngest of her children would be the first among my children to build a house!*" Senator M. A. E. Onunkun's father—Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun—died two years later on 15 October 1954.

Incidentally, in her prime, Ayelemi had brought her two younger half-brothers, born to the man of the Ọbólọ family of Ìkọyà, to live with her at the family village, Oko Líhà. Their names, in order of age are Dẹrẹ and Sam Ọtú. They grew up at Oko Líhà, and it was Ayelemi who later facilitated their marriages. In time, her immediate younger brother, Dẹrẹ, even built a house at Ilutitun, where he lived. Before she died, Ayelemi said that all her life she had been carrying heavy loads on her head. Hence, she did not want to be buried in a cemetery with '*the load of a tombstone*' on her head for ever. She also insisted that she did not want to be buried inside Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's house either, because too many people had been buried there—about 15 people! Further, she was against being buried in the house of any of her younger brothers. Rather, her wish was that she be buried in the open space outside Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's house, so that her beloved son, The Boy Mike, would build a house on the site of

her burial later. She said to tell him to put a shop in the house, that anyone who sells anything in the shop would prosper. But, when M. A. E. Onunkun was building his first house at Ilutitun in 1952, he had completely forgotten this story told to him. Later, however, it came up in his mind in 1959, after he had completed his one-year course in Advanced Local Government and been appointed a substantive Council Secretary. So he proceeded to build a house at the site where his mother was buried, with her tomb in one of the bedrooms, without '*the load of a tombstone on her head*', obviously. He also had a big shop built into the house, facing the main road.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun's first house in Okitipupa, built in 1959, was a bungalow on Kuye Street, which he recently converted to a storey building. Several other houses followed in 1960, 1962, and the mid 1970s. Then, in the 1980s, he began the development of his estate at Àyèká Igbódigò, to which he recently added a new bungalow about 6 years ago. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun loved working hands-on with the artisans on his building sites, while building houses—arguably one of his most enduring passions and pastimes. On site in his heyday, a visitor would struggle to tell him from the bricklayers, as he was regularly lifting blocks, mixing concrete and mortar and 'serving' the bricklayers on site. He also got his older children involved on site at the height of his building projects in the 1970s and 1980s. So, quite literally, it was with sweat, tears and blood that he accomplished all the building projects that he embarked upon over the last 6 decades of his life! In fact, there was no decade between 1952 and 2024 that Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was not involved in some building construction work or another.

Recall the unfortunate incident of the deaths of three people by food poison-

ing of sort, including Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun's son by Ayelemi, at Oko-Líhà, which resulted in a big rift between Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun, on the one side, and his immediate older sister and their mother, on the other. In time, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun built a small house at Ìlútítun, and many of his siblings, who did not have a house in the town were later buried in the house. When his mother eventually died, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun decided that this woman he believed had killed many of his children with her witchcraft did not deserve to be buried inside the house. So, he had her buried outside the house, under the eaves, so that the rains and the run-off from the roof would continue to beat down on her in perpetuity.

Later in his old age, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun decided to unilaterally forgive his immediate older sister, Asùhì, who he had forbidden from seeing him for over 40 years. He said that he did not want his children and her children to be alienated from one another. So, he sent for her to prepare a meal for him to eat, as a sign that he had forgiven her. She happily obliged, and the rift between them was bridged. Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun then said that she should be buried in his house whenever she died, regardless of who died first between them. As it turned out, Emmanuel Ọbámúwàhàn Onunkun died before his immediate older sister, and was buried in the area where he used to have a raised earth bed ('Ìbàrà' in the local lingo) in the house, as he desired. When his sister died later, she was buried at his feet, as he willed. In all, at least 15 people were buried in the house.

In the late 1970s, when M. A. E. Onunkun decided to rebuild the house, which was originally built with mud walls, with cement blocks, he ensured that he

followed the existing walls in the original plan, lest he accidentally disturbed the bones of his ancestors. He joined some smaller rooms together into larger rooms, but still ensured that he followed the existing walls, where no bodies could have been buried. One of his last building projects in his twilight years was to again remodel and extend his father's house so that it could be used as the family meeting house. During this last renovation, he extended the house outward by about 10 feet on the side his paternal grandmother was allegedly buried under the run-off from the roof. He did this, so that the remains of the woman would come to be inside the house like the rest. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun remarked that, if only the dead could see, she would see that the son of the woman whose children she allegedly killed was the one who put a roof over her remains. But, then, he added that he believed that “the dead are conscious of nothing”, as the Bible says.

5.4 M. A. E. Onunkun — The Businessman

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun used to have secondary income streams. For example, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, while working as a Local Government Secretary, he had a Piggery and Poultry farm—the first of its kind in Ìkálẹ̀ land—on his site at Ọ̀tọ̀pọ̀rù, now Àyẹ̀ká Igbódìgò. Asked about the piggery business and why he stopped the business, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun said that it was actually a prosperous business. He said when he was working at Ìjẹ̀bù Waterside, Abígi, he sponsored an Ìkálẹ̀ man from Àyílà to go for a 6 months training in Animal Husbandry at a Government Piggery farm run by one Fashola, with the plan that he would be hired as to manage his farm. But, after finishing the course, the man did not stay long at M. A.

E. Onunkun's farm. M. A. E. Onunkun experienced the difficulties incidental to running a business on the side, while also working full-time. He did not have the time and energy to devote to the business—his vision—by himself, and the people he employed did not share his vision.

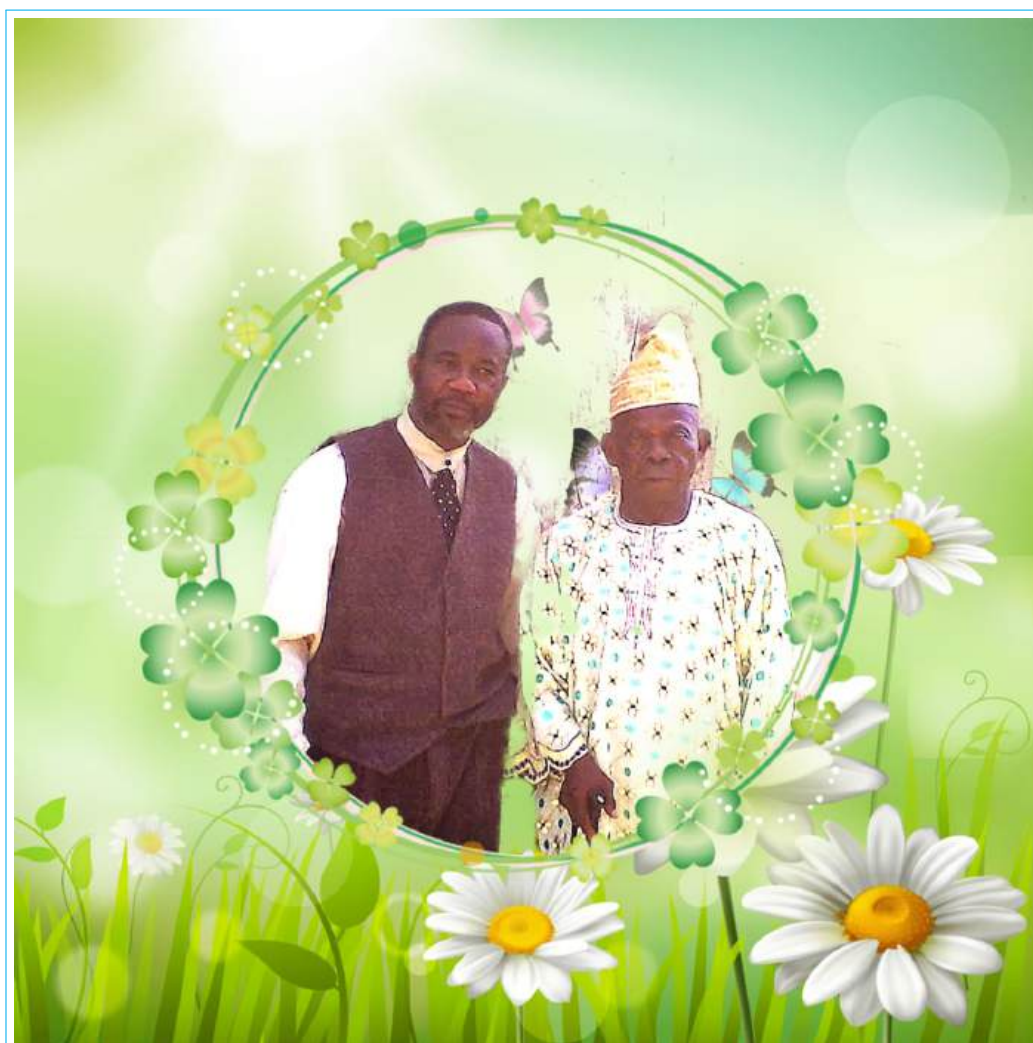


Figure 5.1: Senator M A E Onunkun and Firstborn, SEF Onunkun, in 2012

Eventually, his firstborn Son, Sylvester Èniafẹ̀ Fọ̀lọ̀rúnşọ̀ (aka SEF) Onunkun was put in charge of the day-to-day running of the farm, after completing his West African School Certificate Examination (O-Level) Schooling. But, he was advised by well-meaning people that, if he did not pursue Higher Education and continued as the father's Farm Manager, he would end up a slave to his younger siblings, who would later turn round and say that it's their father's business, not his. So, SEF Onunkun⁹ dust his books and returned to School, eventually becoming an Airplane Pilot and, later, an Airplane Technician. Figure 5.1 is a picture of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun and his firstborn son, SEF Onunkun, taken in 2012.

5.4.1 The Comfort Ọ̀mọ̀gẹ̀ Connection

The late Ìkálẹ̀ Àsíkò folk musician, Madam Comfort Ọ̀mọ̀gẹ̀, was a relative and contemporary of M. A. E. Onunkun. They used to argue on who of them was older. Madam Comfort Ọ̀mọ̀gẹ̀ was a vivacious, ebullient person, with an infectious and genuine personality, which used to light up anywhere she was. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, when M. A. E. Onunkun was running his Piggery, Poultry and goat farm at Àyẹ̀ká Igbódìgò, he also used to farm cassava on the part of the farm not built up, for use in supplementing the animal feed he used to buy for the animals. Comfort Ọ̀mọ̀gẹ̀ was one of the women he used to hire to work on the cassava farm, planting, weeding, etc. Of course, he had other staff taking care of the animals. M. A. E. Onunkun said whenever Comfort Ọ̀mọ̀gẹ̀ was working on the farm, she never stopped singing. She was a very good musician, but she had no one to sponsor her.

⁹Of all the children of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, SEF Onunkun is the only one who knew his paternal grandfather, Emmanuel Ọ̀bámúwàhàn Onunkun. He is also, the only one who spent some time living with the extended family at Oko-Lihà.

Then, when M. A. E. Onunkun was transferred in 1971 from Ìlàjẹ District Council to serve as the Council Secretary at Òkìtìpupa District Council, this time with headquarters in Òkìtìpupa, rather than Ìkòyà, he arranged for Comfort Ọmógè to be promoted at the Festival of Arts and Culture events of the Council. For about 3 years, he ensured that the Council invited her regularly to play her music, whenever there was occasion for it. The Council also sponsored her on Regional Arts shows, where her raw talents shone brightly, and she came into the limelight. This was how she was able to raise sufficient funds to buy her own musical equipment, circa 1973.

Like King Sunny Ade, Comfort Ọmógè was not merely a good singer, but she was also a good, unabashed dancer and entertainer. Late Comfort Ọmógè started a new genre of music somewhat more ‘highlife’ than the traditional Bírípó music of Ìkálẹ̀ people. Her songs were so popular that people far and wide, who did not even understand the Ìkálẹ̀ language in which she sang, loved her music, and would often sing along and dance to them. Her songs were regular fare on radio, and later, television in the 1970s and beyond. When Senator M. A. E. Onunkun’s daughter—Morènikẹ Ọmóyíwọ̀lá—wanted Comfort Ọmógè to provide the entertainment at her wedding party in 1987, the lovely lady kindly offered to provide her services free of charge. She only required that transportation, food and drinks be provided for her band. And what a bang the party was!

5.4.2 Closure of the Piggery, then Other Businesses

After SEF Onunkun returned to School for higher education, and M. A. E. Onunkun could not find any reliable person to run the farm for him, he started to wind the business gown by slaughtering the animals and selling off their meat. This site of the former animal farm is what he later converted to a residential estate, named: 'Onunkun Estate'. During that residential building project, he single-handedly bought 13 electricity poles, cables and accessories to extend electricity from the main Òkìtìpupa to Ìgbòkòdá road into the estate. This also benefited other properties in the area who, before then, had no electricity, as they could not afford the cost of extending the line from the main road to their properties.

Another secondary business Senator M. A. E. Onunkun engaged in was selling vehicles, some directly, others by hire purchase agreements. In the 1970s, for quick turnover, he sold some of the vehicles, like Toyota Dyna buses to late Chief Akínloyè, who then sold them on to commercial drivers on hire purchase contracts. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was the one who first introduced Mitsubishi L300 buses to the Ondo South area in the 1970s. Some of the commercial drivers who bought the early models of those buses complained about problems they were having with the steering ball joints. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun notified the manufacturers, who then sent out 2 South Korean technicians to come check the vehicles. They found out that the problem was caused by dust getting into the joints, as the vehicle was designed for tarred roads, whereas most of the roads around Okitipupa at that time were dusty dirt roads. So, Mitsubishi designed an improved cover for the ball joints in order to stop dust getting in.

Also in the 1970s, in a 50-50 partnership with one of his wives, Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun started a wholesale distributorship off-licence beer and soft drinks business, named: ‘Ayelemi Onunkun Enterprises’, in Okitipupa. The drinks they had distributorship on included Top lager beer, 33 lager beer, Vitamalt, and Coco-Cola, which they used to collect at Akure, and Trophy lager beer and Maltina, which they used to collect from Ilésà. They also had a Peugeot 404 Pick-up Van with tarpaulin—one of the first in Ìkálẹ̀ and Ìlàjẹ̀ area—for distributing drinks to retailers around Okitipupa and the hinterland. And, yes, the business also had a bicycle with carrier at the front that could hold 4 cartons of beer for distribution to nearby retailers, and a few employees.

As Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was working as a Local Government Secretary at this time, it fell on his business partner and wife, Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun, to run Ayelemi Onunkun Enterprises alongside her licensed Medicine Store business, which was one of the biggest in Okitipupa in the early to mid 1970s. She it was who would travel on different days every month with the Peugeot 404 Pick-up van, or bigger 6 ton Bedford lorries or 911 Mercedes-Benz lorries, to Akure and Ilésà to place orders by Bank Draft, and convey the goods to Okitipupa. Anyone who travelled on the rutted, narrow and winding old Okitipupa-Ore road would remember some of the deathtrap bridges with no side-guards around them. The long narrow bridge over Olúwa River was especially dangerous, as there was a steep incline on a bend just after the bridge, coming in from Ore, where trailer trucks, tankers and lorries would often break down. That stretch of the old road got even worse during the rainy seasons, as the clay road surface became more slippery, and vehicles, especially heavy goods vehicles, got stuck in mud.

In 1975, Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun's 13-year-old son, Tèmítópé, was the only one of the children of secondary school age who was a 'Day student', while attending the nearby Methodist High School, Okitipupa. Others were in Boarding school. So, he was introduced to Bookkeeping, and trained to use the trusted old Ready Reckoner—a precursor of electronic calculators—for computing sales. At this time, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was the Local Government Secretary at Ìdànrè / Ìfẹ̀dòrẹ̀ Local Government, and was always away at his work station during the week. It was around this time, November 1975, that Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun's 11-year-old son, Olúbùnmi, in boarding house at Methodist High School Okitipupa, contracted viral meningitis.

Sequel to this, Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun had to drop everything and go from hospital to hospital with Olúbùnmi—from the then General Hospital Okitipupa through the State Hospitals in Ondo and Akure, the University Teaching Hospitals in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Benin to different traditional treatment venues and faith-healing religious centres. Thus, it fell on the 13-year-old boy, Tèmítópé, to run his mother's Medicine Store business, and Ayelemi Onunkun Enterprises. Tèmítópé would take time off school to go with the van or truck driver to Ilẹ̀sà, on some days, to place orders for Trophy lager beer and Maltina. On other days, he would go with the truck or van driver to Àkúrẹ̀ to order and receive cartons/crates of Top lager beer, 33 lager beer, Star lager beer, Guilder, Vitamalt and Coca-Cola.

During this period, Tèmítópé also had to care for his 4-year-old baby brother,

Olúmídé, aka Ọ̀dẹ̀kù¹⁰, who had just started schooling at St Paul's (Junior) Anglican Primary School. In a recent discussion with Olúbùnmi, now Dr Olúbùnmi Peter Onunkun, he said that, at one point during his dreadful battle with meningitis, he and everyone around him thought that he was about to die. Olúbùnmi remarked that this was the first time he ever saw Senator M. A. E. Onunkun cry..., flustered and helpless. That was the soft side of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, The Man Mike! On his first discharge from the University of Benin Teaching Hospital, after having been in hospitals for months, Olúbùnmi expressed his desire to have a picture taken with his brothers. That picture, taken circa April 1976, is presented in Figure 5.2

Ayelemi Enterprises was still being run into the early 1980s, by which time, the business had a presence in Ilutitun as well as Okitipupa, its headquarters. When Senator M. A. E. Onunkun's second son, Mr Ayòdélé John Onunkun, was teaching at Comprehensive High School Ilutitun in 1980/1981, after completing his A-Levels, he helped to run the Ìlútítun wing of the business, before he proceeded to study at the University of Ifè, (now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ilé-Ifè) in late 1981.

In the last 30 years, or so, of his life, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun had been

¹⁰The bond of brotherly love between Tèmítópé and Ọ̀dẹ̀kù was forged on the red-hot coals of the severe tribulations we lived through in 1975 and 1976, in particular, and the immediate years after. Years later, in the mid 1980s, when Ọ̀dẹ̀kù turned out to be a very brilliant student at Stella Maris College, Okitipupa, but equally rascally, he often said to our mother: "Bòdá Tópé's flogging is not as painful as Bòdá Bùnmi's, whenever I misbehaved. But, I don't know why I fear upsetting Bòdá Tópé more." Well, I didn't know the reason at the time, too. But now I know that 'fear' was "the 'wholesome fear' of displeasing a brother you loved, and who loved you." You were my confidant, and were it not for your words of encouragement, literally 2 or 3 weeks before you died on 25 September 2024, that kept ringing in my ears, I probably would not have been motivated to do my PhD in Software Engineering. I so miss you still, my brother, my friend! Who would know you and not miss you?

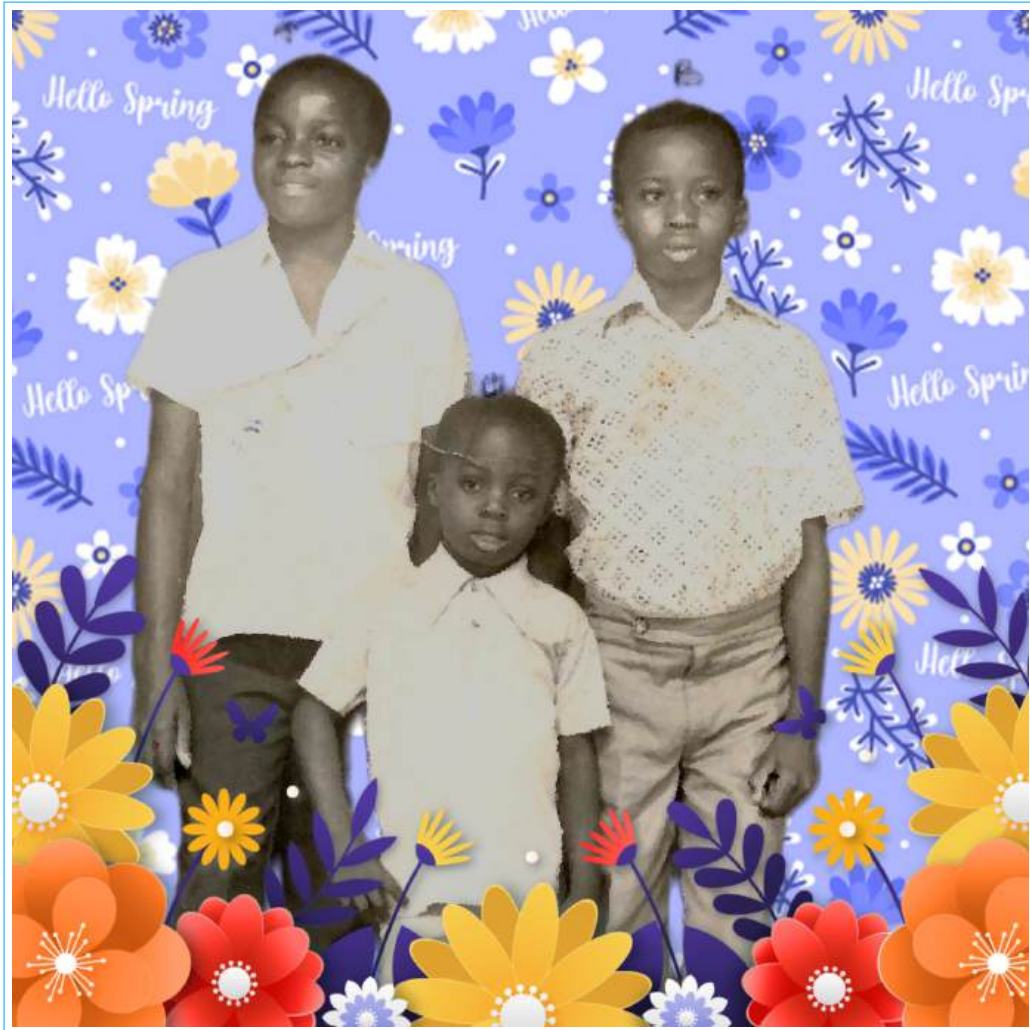


Figure 5.2: Olúbùnmi and brothers: Tèmitópé
and Olúmídé, circa April 1976

trading as a distributor of Elephant Cement in Okitipupa. He also ventured into the cement block making industry. His cement blocks were renowned for their extra strength, as he was producing markedly fewer blocks per bag of cement, compared to other block industries in the town. Even a bulldozer

would ‘sweat’ before it could pull down a house constructed with his blocks! The life story of Senator M. A. E. Onunkun is certainly not complete without mentioning his undying love affair with cement and construction.

5.5 M. A. E. Onunkun and Education

Although Senator M. A. E. Onunkun developed himself educationally and shone brighter than many of his contemporaries, a tinge of bitterness he had was that he was unable to complete his secondary school education at Abeokuta Grammar School, due to lack of funds. Consequently, he spared no expense when it came to the matter of his children’s education. He would rather go without, than have any of his children dismissed from school for lack of funds. Back in the 1970s, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun used to counsel his children to concentrate on their studies. He was quick to point out that he was not rich, and that he had put his little money into building construction and the education of his children. His usual refrain was: “*Your education is your inheritance.*” How true that proved to be! In his later years, he took pride in the academic accomplishments of his children. One of his children is a retired Pilot and Airplane Technician, one was a Medical Doctor, one an Architect turned Software Engineer, three PhD holders, some with Masters Degrees, etc. One of his grandchildren is also a Medical Doctor, and many of his grandchildren are Master’s Degree holders in their respective fields of study. Not bad for The Boy Mike, who was sent packing at Abèòkúta Grammar School in 1942 for lack of funds!

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was an avid reader of classical and historical

books. He was fluent in Latin, English, Yoruba, his native Ìkálẹ̀ dialect of the Yoruba Language and a smattering of Pidgin English. He could also speak the Urhobo language to a reasonable level. He was a walking library with an exceedingly sharp mind, who could quote verbatim, some 80 years later, the Shakespeare plays he read in the 1940s! He could recount Greek mythological accounts he read decades ago in ‘The Iliad’ and ‘The return of Odysseus from The High Olympus’, like he read those books recently. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun would rather he got a book as present than money. Additionally, he was versed in the history of many of the Yoruba sub-tribes—knowledge he acquired during his nearly 30 years in Local Government Service. He was also versed in British history, which he learned in school in his ‘Empire’ days, when Nigeria was a British Protectorate.

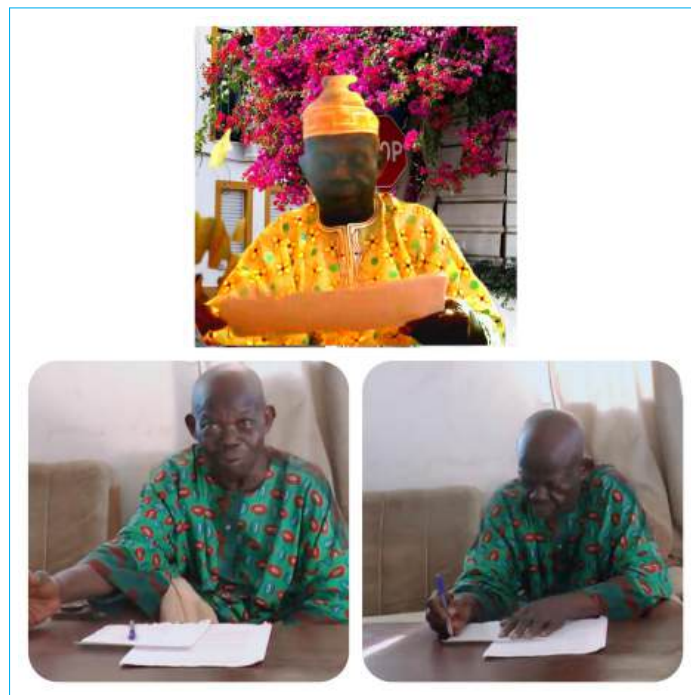


Figure 5.3: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun reading and writing without glasses

Amazingly, he had the rare blessing of being able to read and write without glasses well into his 90s, as depicted by the collage in Figure 5.3. And he only stopped driving himself around town in his huge Nissan Pathfinder when he was circa 95 years of age.

Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was a trigamist, and had children by 3 wives. Altogether, 13 of his children grew into adulthood, although he was only survived by 2 wives and 12 children. His youngest son by Mrs Victoria Adekuola Onunkun—the only one of his children who was a Medical Doctor, Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun—sadly passed away in death on 25 September 2004 at the tender age of 33, after a brief illness. Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun was the Chief Medical Officer at the State Hospital, Òrẹ̀, and the Medical Director of his erstwhile private hospital, M & V Hospital Òrẹ̀, which he aptly named after his father, Michael, and his mother, Victoria. (See Figures 5.4, 5.5, 5.6, and 5.7.)



Figure 5.4: Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun & Staff at M&V Hospital, Ore

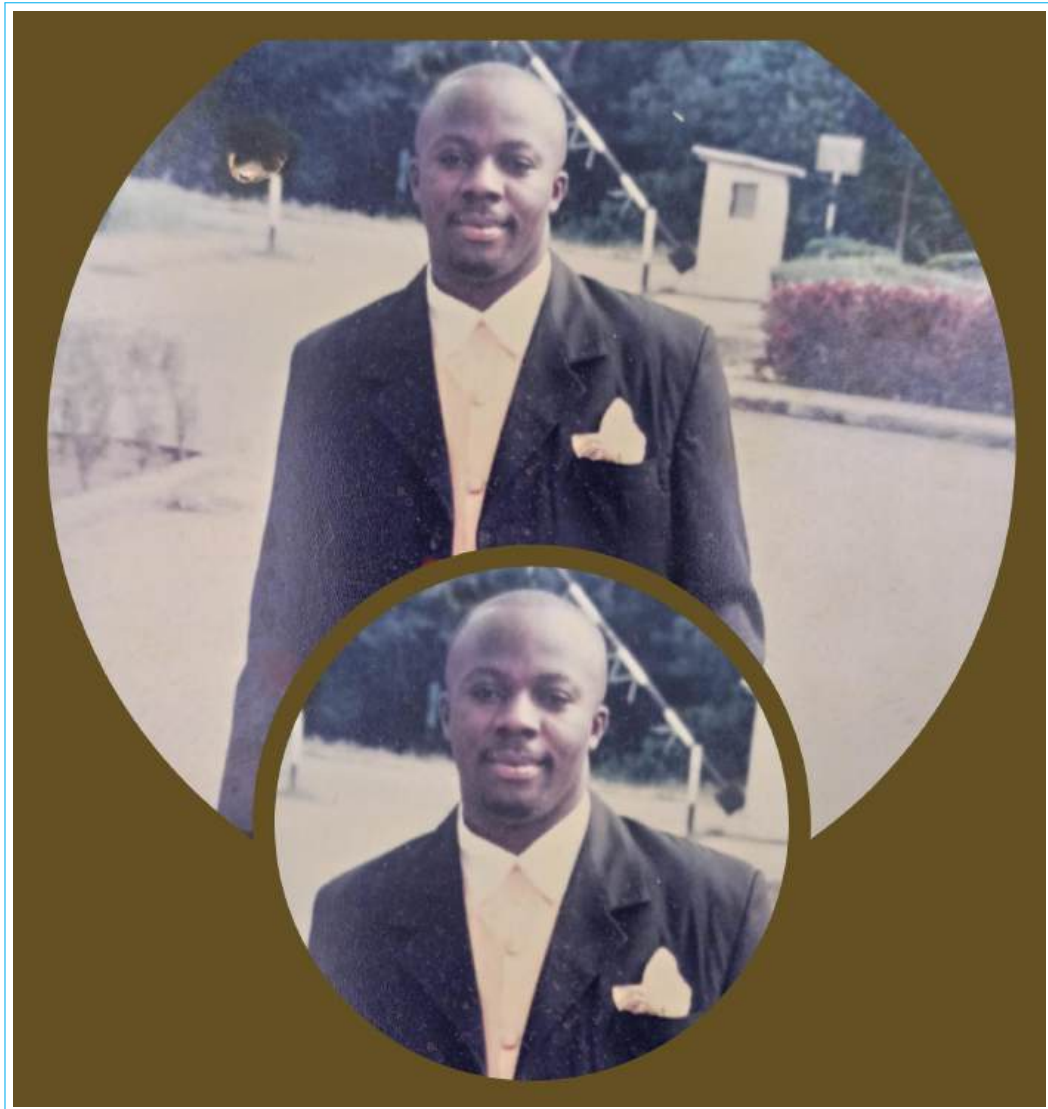


Figure 5.5: Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun at The State Hospital, Ondo

As a younger man, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun separated from his first wife in the early 1950s, and she initially took their son with her, as he was little. But, then, she left the son with her mother at Ìlútitun and went on to remarry. At that time, M. A. E. Onunkun was working as the Council Clerk of Ìkálè



Figure 5.6: Dr Olumide Olumuyiwa Onunkun taking his Hippocratic Oath

Central District Council, Ikoyi. He said, he tried a few times to go take his son from his maternal grandmother, but she would hide the boy from him, in her attempts to prevent him from taking his son. So, he came one day on a bicycle, saw the boy playing with other kids in the dust outside the maternal grandmother's house, picked him up, and left a message that they should



Figure 5.7: Dr Olúmídé Olúmúyíwá Onunkun at M & V Hospital, Òrè

tell her that Onunkun had come to take his son for a bicycle ride. That was how M. A. E. Onunkun, essentially, ‘kidnapped’ his own son from the boy’s maternal grandmother’s house and took him to Ìkòyà. Thus, SEF Onunkun started to live with his father, M. A. E. Onunkun, at Ìkòyà before his father

took his second wife¹¹, and shortly afterward, his third wife¹². For most of his life, these two wives were the only women in the life of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun, and they both survived him.

¹¹M. A. E. Onunkun's second wife was a maiden from Ọlọtò, named Adéyònlá Victoria, nee Ọlànúsi

¹²M. A. E. Onunkun's third wife was a divorcee from Igbótako, though native of Iju-Odò, named Victoria Adékúọlá, nee Ọwáté, his former classmatre at NA School, Ìlútitun.



Figure 5.8: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun in Radiance

Chapter 6

The Man Mike: The Twilight Years

On 20 December 2005, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun received a national honour, Order of the Niger (OON)—the second-highest civilian national honour in Nigeria—for his significant services to the Nation. He was decorated at the Federal Capital, Abuja, by the then President, Chief Olúşégún Ọ́básanjó GCFR. He was thereby granted the privilege to use the post-nominal letters ‘OON’. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was one of very few Ìkálẹ̀ people to have been thus honoured, by which he became Senator M. A. E. Onunkun OON.

While many of his contemporaries were content to take it easy in their twilight years, it was ‘Full steam ahead’ for Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, especially in the area of building construction. If he was not remodelling some of his older houses to make them more relevant, he was renovating others, or building new ones. In his twilight years, he also expended himself on giving back to the community that had supported him for so long. Thus, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun turned his attention to building houses for charitable causes .



Figure 6.1: Cheery on Lecture Theatre Building Site

In 2013, The Man Mike, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, built and donated a Guest House to the Cathedral Church of Ebenezer (Anglican) in his hometown, Ìlútitun. One of the last projects he embarked upon was a modest Lecture Theatre, which he built and donated to the Olusegun Agagu University of Science and Technology, Okitipupa, Ondo State, Nigeria in 2022. Despite his advanced age and frailty, he was on site, virtually every day, with the builders during the construction project! At the commissioning of the building, the late Governor Akeredolu commended Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, and joked that perhaps he should start another building project,

as he felt that Senator M. A. E. Onunkun’s physical presence and engagement every day on site probably contributed to his longevity. Figures 6.1 and 6.2 shows Senator M. A. E. Onunkun enjoying his passion for building construction well into his 90s, while building the Lecture Theatre he donated to University. Senator M. A. E. Onunkun was actually in the process of starting the building of a small hall to be used as a Computer Centre at his Old School, Local Authority Primary School, Ìlútítun (formally known as ‘Native Administration School, Ilutitun’) before he passed away.



Figure 6.2: Another Day on Lecture Theatre Building Site

During a brief visit to Nigeria in November 2015, Senator M. A. E. Onunkun

asked his son, Tèmítópé, to design a semi-detached three bedroom bungalow that he desired to build on the unused lawn tennis court in his estate. After doing the sketch, he asked him to help set the first course of block walls out, to make it easier for his bricklayers, under his direct supervision, to build the house to the plan Tèmítópé sketched for him. At Tèmítópé's visit to Nigeria the following year, 2016, lo and behold, The Man Mike The Builder had completed the house! The pictures taken during the setting out of the first course of block walls, and at his second son, Ayòdéélé John Onunkun's house, are shown in Figure 6.3 and Figure 6.4 in the **Picture Library** section.

Although he was dogged by some ailments incidental to old age, he was so blessed that up until the time of his death, he was able to read without glasses, though he struggled to write in his last few weeks. And, he was able to drive himself around town in his Nissan Pathfinder in his early to mid 90s. Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON breathed his last at 11:57pm on 15 May 2024 at the age of 98 years, 7 months, 15 days, having lived an exemplary life of simplicity and contentment. He was survived by two wives, 12 children, many grandchildren, and some great grandchildren.

This is the story of The Boy Mike, yes, Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun—his roots and the intrigues in the family, as narrated by him, and his life, as experienced by some of his children. What a man! Describing Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON, someone once said in Latin: “*Tanto Nomini Lumoni par Elogium*”, which when translated means: “*Of this great man, no praise is adequate.*”

How apropos to conclude this work on the genealogy and biography of Senator Michael Atijosan Emmanuel Onunkun OON than with his own words at an occasion in 2013, when he wrote:

"Can you not see the hand of God in my affairs?
Why not thank Him and rejoice with me...?
My life had been one of contentment, which is
God-given - I do not 'run' after anybody or anything
inordinately.
I am a man of moderate and tolerable ambition...."

PICTURE LIBRARY



Figure 6.3: Setting-out a Semi-Detached Bungalow at Onunkun Estate, November 2015



Figure 6.4: Setting-out a Semi-Detached Bungalow at Onunkun Estate, November 2015



Figure 6.5: Lecture Theatre Commissioning 01



Figure 6.6: Lecture Theatre Commissioning 02



Figure 6.7: Lecture Theatre Commissioning 03



Figure 6.8: Lecture Theatre Commissioning 04



Figure 6.9: Ebenezer Anglican Church Guest House Commissioning



Figure 6.10: Ebenezer Anglican Church Guest House Commissioning



Figure 6.11: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun OON in Full Flow during Interview



Figure 6.12: Ebenezer Anglican Church Guest House Commissioning

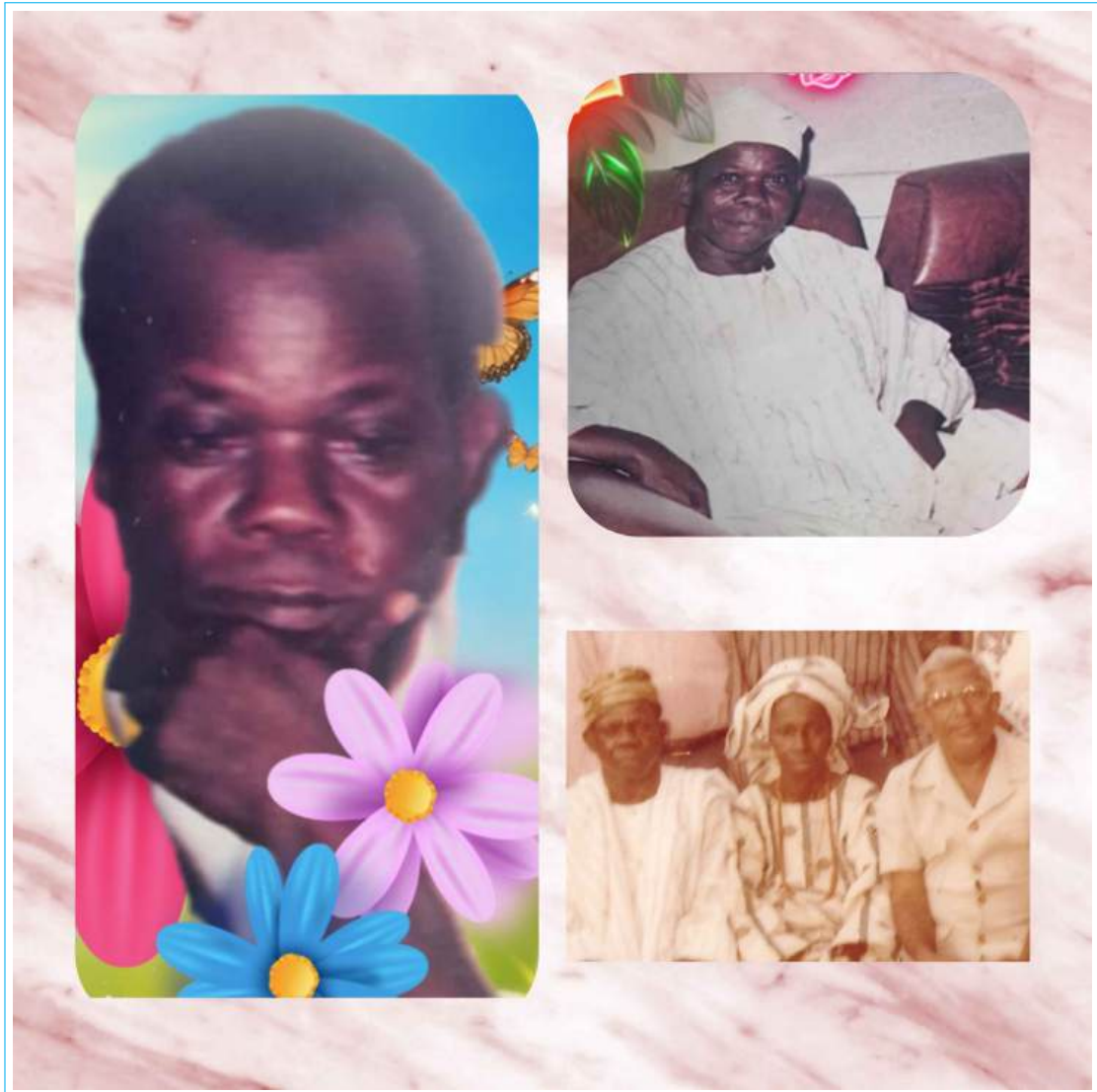


Figure 6.13: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, Wife and Dr Kanjika



Figure 6.14: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun, Wife, Dr Kanjika etc.



Figure 6.15: Dr Olumide Onunkun, Mum, Wife, M & V Hospital, Ore



Figure 6.16: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun OON in Full Flow during Interview

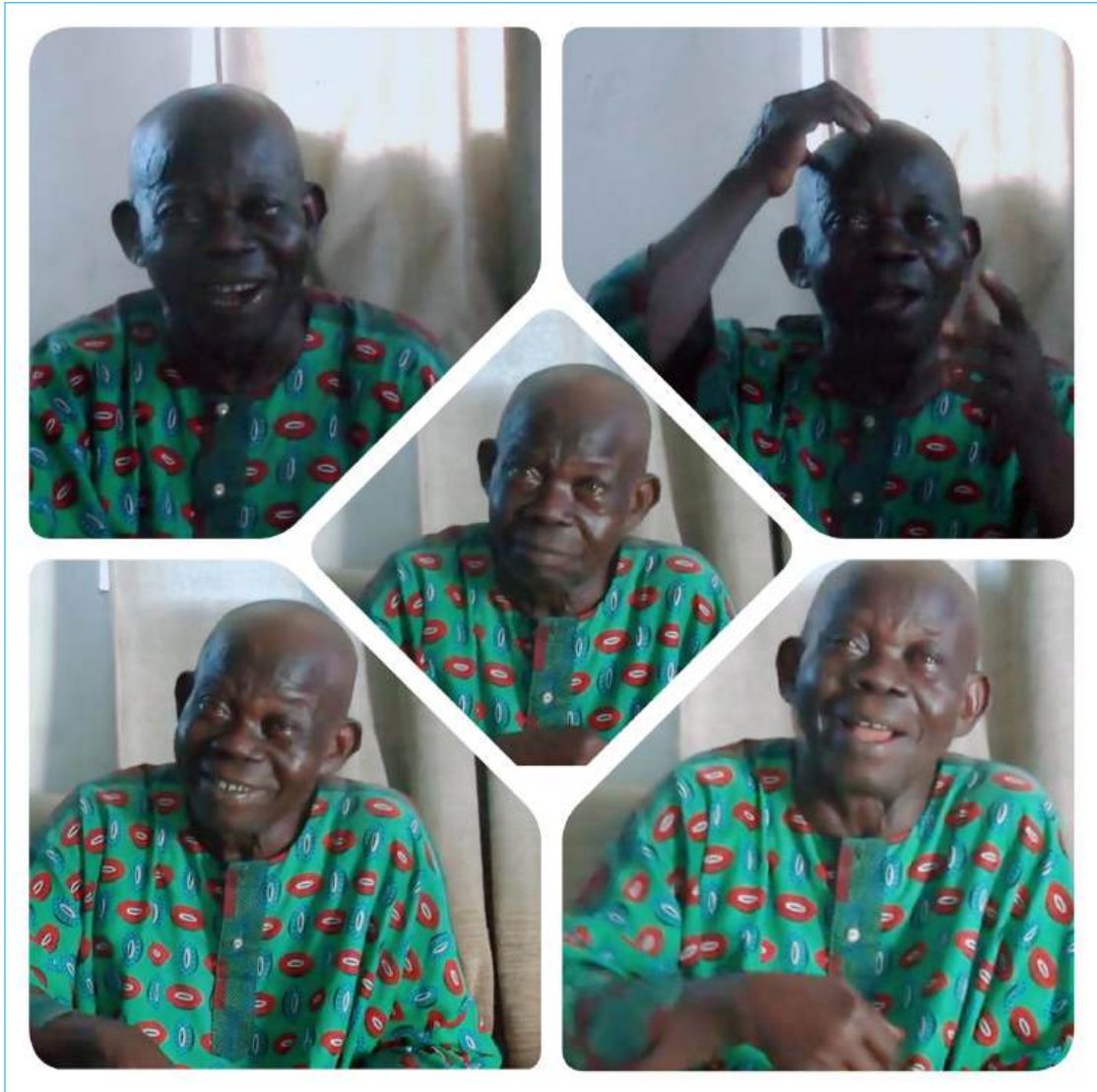


Figure 6.17: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun in Full Flow during Interview

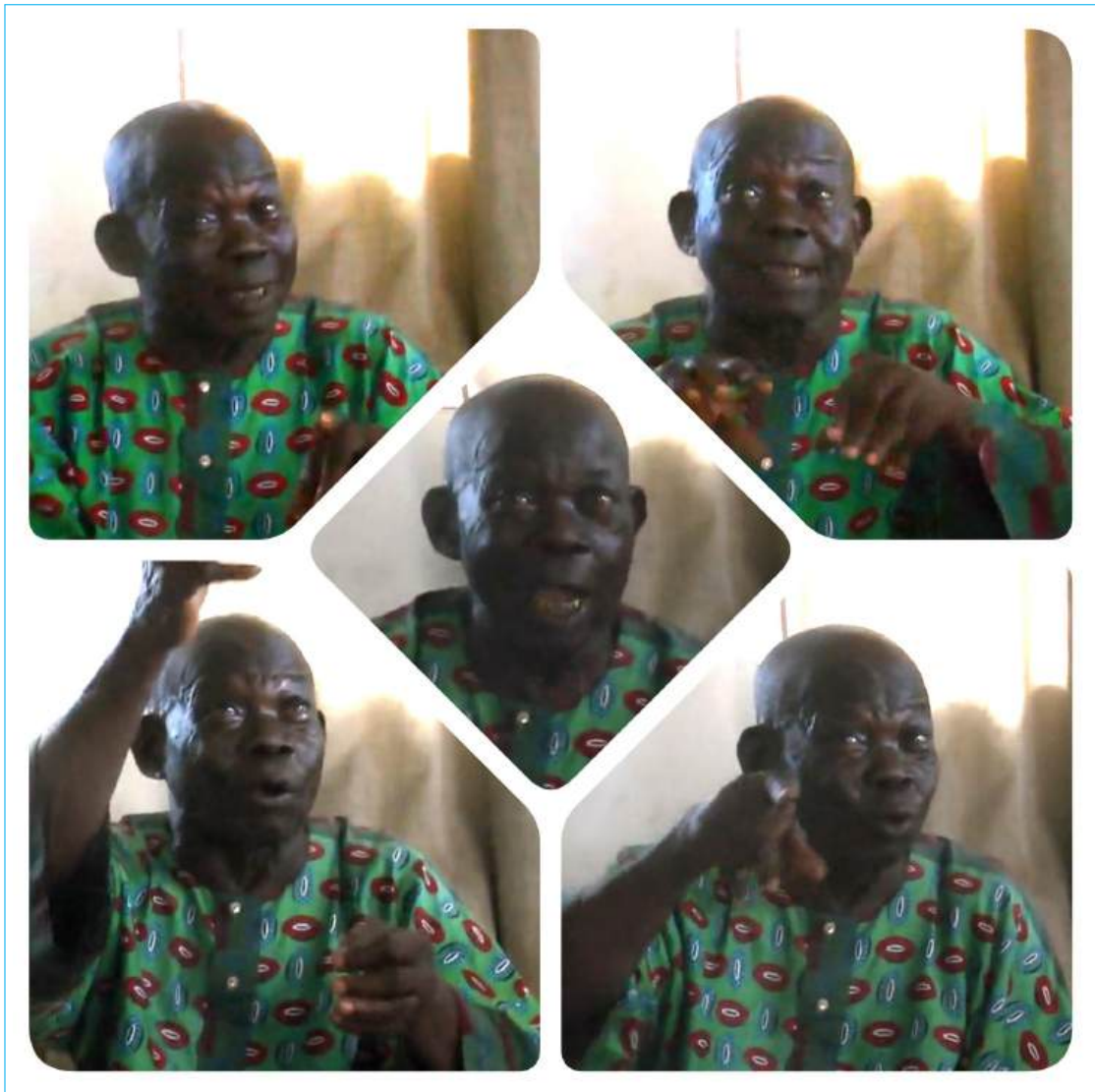


Figure 6.18: Senator M. A. E. Onunkun in Full Flow during Interview

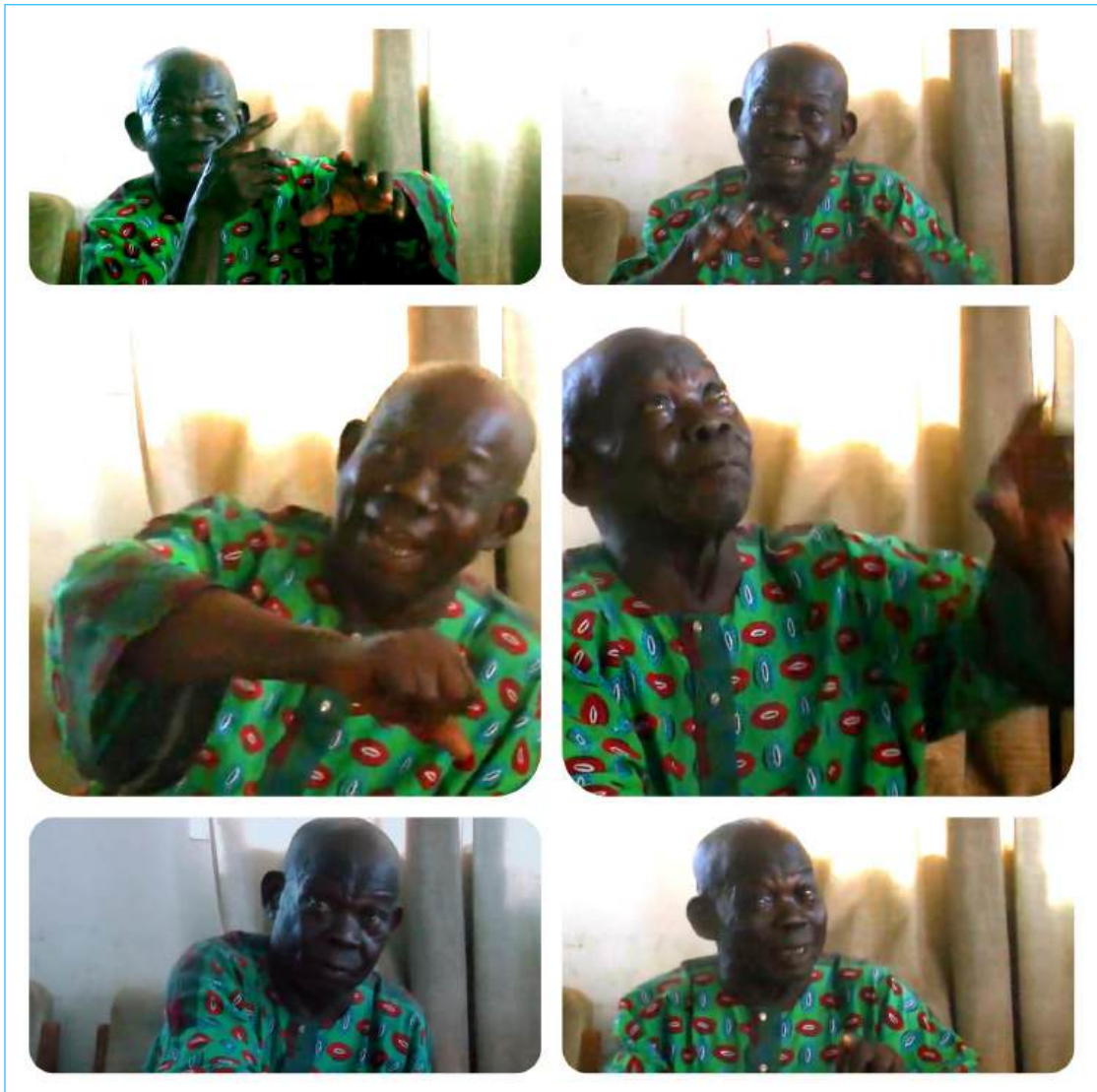


Figure 6.19: Senator M. A. E Onunkun in Full Flow during Interview

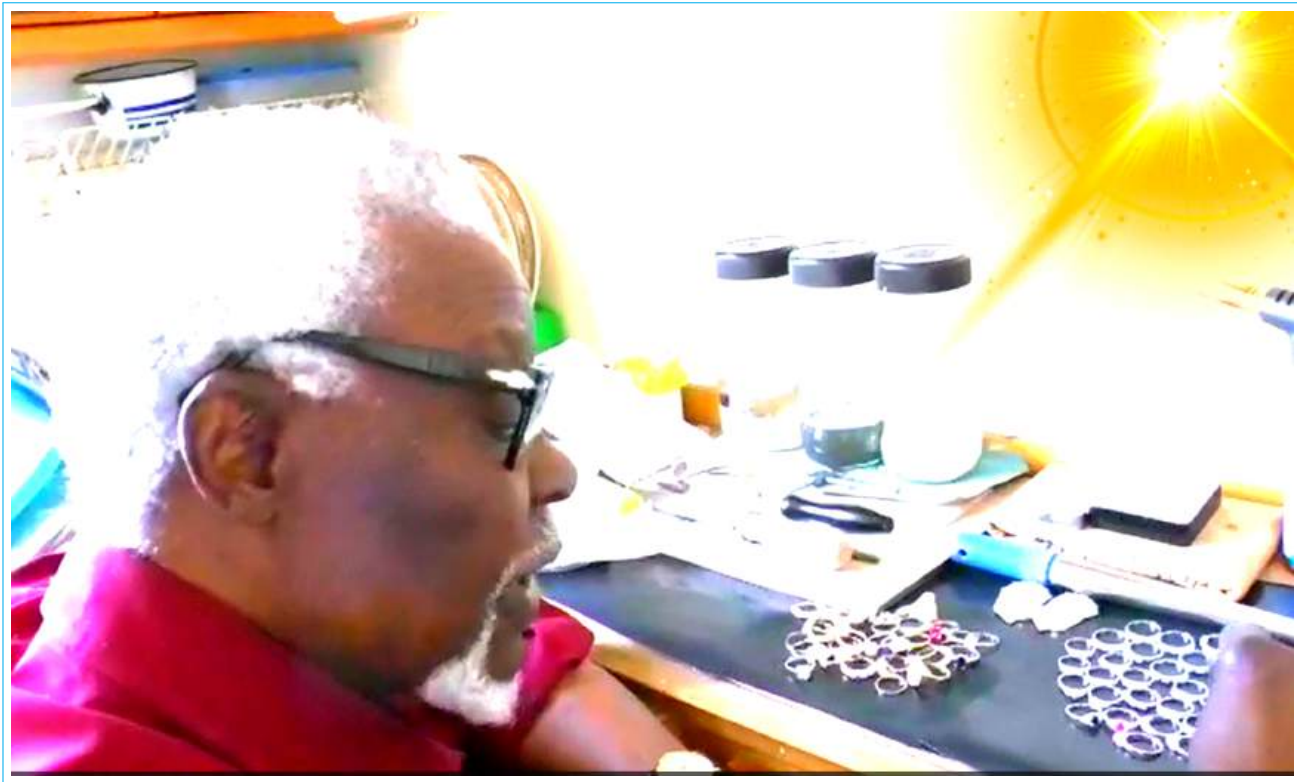


Figure 6.20: Uncle Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji still working, London, c. 2012



Figure 6.21: Uncle Augustus Ayòdélé Adéníji flanked by Tèmítópé Onunkun's kids @ Saltram Crescent, London, circa 2012



Figure 6.22: Medley of family pictures



Figure 6.23: Medley of family pictures

