

# Magun in Contemporary Yoruba Traditions

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## Abstract

This paper sets out to examine the contemporary thoughts of Yoruba on Magun, the Magic against adultery among the Yoruba. In this respect, the searchlight shall be beamed on Yoruba proverbs, incantations, poetry, songs, folklore, prayer, daily speech and Ifa corpus as anchored to magun.

## Introduction

Against arrays of contemporary issues bordering on politics, economics, medicine, education, etc., this paper makes a foray into Yoruba social cultural phenomenon-magun, a fidelity-enforcing device meant to prevent, expose or punish adultery of a paramour or the unfaithful spouse, or both. The mystical sex trap has been exhaustively dealt with in many works elsewhere (Rafiu, 2015, Adeleke, 2015, Fabarebo 1990, 1995, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000a, 2000b); thus, we will only focus here on the Yoruba traditions on Magun and not on its operation.

It has been stated in some quarters that the greatest snag in researching African Religion is its preliterate nature. However, even though the doctrine of the religion cannot be found in the form of sacred books, it is located in the whole of the African landscape, and it is written particularly in the heart of every African adherent. This claim is a truism in respect of magun. This no doubt has been responsible for the dearth of materials, information and documents on magun, up till date.

This bleak and demoralizing picture notwithstanding, it is heartening that information on African Traditional Religion is nonetheless siftable from the institutionalized devices for preserving and transmitting the beliefs and the practices. Thus, African religious facts are ingeniously embalmed in Art forms, Institutions and oral traditions (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:20).

Of these three sources, emphasis and interest are focused towards exposing the beliefs and thoughts of Yoruba on magun as preserved in their oral traditions. In this respect, this paper intends to pry into their proverbs, chants, incantations, curses, prayers, songs, daily speech, folklore and contemporary films, which are the veritable vehicles of the authentic beliefs of the people.

## **Proverbs**

The Yoruba are perhaps unmatched in Africa in the richness of proverbs in which all the beliefs of ancient wisdom and accumulated experience of most generations are condensed. "Proverbs are short sayings, full of sense which come into common and recognized use" (Ikenga-Metuh, 1987:12). They emanate from the people themselves and as such are a "true index of what a people regard as true, and are interpretative of their principles of life and conduct".

The quest for the peoples' assessment and appraisal of magun in their oral tradition begins with their proverbs. This painstaking attempt at discovering and gathering magun-anchored proverbs has been understandably difficult, simply because of the dreadful attributes of magun, which naturally douse the flames of proverbial creativity in this direction. Our effort however has not been in vain, as a bountiful harvest of few but significant proverbs has become our lot. The Yoruba say, magun, "idekun afowofa eda" "magun is a self-inflicted snare". The Yoruba believe that the victims of magun are never innocent and that it is either the victim is an adulterer, or a member of his family sets the trap on him, for one reason or another. In other words, even the seemingly innocent husband who has been eliminated by a wife's concubine is not at all innocent because he made himself to marry a promiscuous woman, on whose account, he meets his fate. This filial connection implicates the husband, in that he married a woman whose immorality caused his death.

An interesting proverb has it that "*A kii rojo pelu magun ka jare*" "A disputer in a case involving magun never wins". This is in reference to the popular conception of magun as an instant judge. In every case involving magun it is both a defender and judge, and it is usually the winner because the plaintiff would have been judged (killed) before the case is tabled for hearing. The complainant (victim) could infact have a case (where a man has been killed in a socially unapproved manner) but magun waits for no trial before delivering its judgement. Therefore, it is better to have no case with magun than to seek solace in justice.

*"Ajoje eyi, ajoje tohun, ajoje magun kii se fun pansaga obinrin"*. We ate this together, we shared that together, *ajoje magun* (a silent magun) food shared by a husband and wife, to kill any other man, besides the husband (in sexual congress with the wife) is never for the adulteress". In dealing with magun, one should critically examine ones own moral qualities before going into partnership. Failure to do this could lead to embarrassment and unnecessary loss of human lives. In the case of magun ajoje, only the husband could sexually cohabit with the wife without violent consequences because of the immunity given to him as a result of the shared magun food. Every other man who attempts to have sexual relations with the wife is death-bound. Thus, magun ajoje is never for a promiscuous woman, for she will become a death trap to men.

A proverb about magun defends chastity and good moral conduct by stating that, *"A kii gbe je, ka ma beru magun"*, we cannot be celibate and still fear magun. Only those who have a penchant for other people's wives need to fear being killed by magun. A sexually responsible man has no need for such fears, for indeed, *"only the guilty hearts are afraid, since they are the ones that need judges"*. The potency and virility of magun is exemplified in another Yoruba proverb which says, *"magun ki duro sara dake, abo ejo ki gbenu isa"* magun does not reside quietly in the human body (male body) as a sliced snake will not remain still in a hole. Unlike the female, the first contact of a man with magun is almost in every case entirely disastrous. Magun does not remain imperceptibly in the man's body. Even in the case of the silent magun, the power of the magun in the body of the paramour pushes him to do exactly what the magun forbids, so that its powers can be swiftly activated. Moreover, in the case of a silent magun, the innocent wife may die after seven days if she does not have sexual intercourse with her lover unless of course the husband removes it before then.

*"Ode a pamodo ni fosan wolu, bi eniyan ba pelede yo foru jade"*, it is the hunter of the wild pig that enters a town in broad day light with it, whoever kills a pig comes out in the night. It is only the husband of the woman whose concubine was killed by magun (placed by the husband) that could claim to be responsible for such death, because he enjoys the force of social approval, but a concubine who kills the legitimate husband of his lover dares not claim so publicly because he will be lynched.

## **Incantation**

At the risk of repetition or making tautological statements, only two incantations that accompany the rites of magun are included here. The spell is the verbal element and it is the activating principle that stirs the potency in magun, which is aimed at teleguiding the forces with one's design in mind.

Since the peculiarity of every magun determines its substances, rites and spell, incantations of magun are as diverse as there are different types of magun. Each typology in magun is represented by a set of incantations peculiar to it. It is the ultimate object of magun that determines the spell, which in turn indicates the direction of magun operation, all on the basis of homeopathic principle. All types of magun mentioned have their accompanying spells attached. The two types of spells or incantations mentioned above are presented below. In the Magun agbejeba the following spell is recited:

*It is the day the snail touches the salt that it must die, whoever fucks my wife must die the same day (Fabarebo, 1997).*

The Jakojapon magun insists on observance of certain taboo, the defilement of which naturally leads to death.

*It is forbidden to eat Cobra's gall bladder, whoever fucks my wife with me (name) has eaten gallbladder of cobra and must die (Fabarebo, 1997).*

There is a tint of imitative suggestion in these two spells. Since they are explosive magun, instantly triggered by sex with the woman, the paramour rarely survives. The spells of the magun make this disastrous end obvious even in the course of the rites.

### **Chants/Poetry (Ijala)**

Of all the sources of oral tradition investigated, these popular chants of the hunter (Ijala) records the least dividends in respect of magun. Of all the traditional specialists interviewed, only one herbalist, an Ijala expert, could remember an Ijala anchored on magun and the traditional reason for its employment:

*E ma dajo magun lebi, igba ti oko  
ndegbe, aya re si ndegboro. Oko  
npa eran, aya si tun npaniyan. Aya  
ode, a begbe rodo, Iku ti npa won  
re o. Aya ode a begbe rodo, aya  
agbe bi tuku, Aya Ode bi egbin*

## Translation

Don't condemn magun, because  
when the husband goes hunting in  
the forest, the wife also hunts for  
men in the city. The husband kills  
animals; the wife also kills human  
beings. The wife of a hunter with  
a smooth unblemished body,  
behold the death that kills them!  
The wife of a hunter with a  
smooth, unblemished body. The  
wife of a farmer as rough as a wild  
pig. The wife of a hunter as beautiful  
as egbin (antelope).

As expostulated in this chant, the use of magun at the very beginning could have been a traditional device by hunters who were often away at night hunting in the forests, leaving their beautiful wives at home to their devices. The hunter's wife is more beautiful than the farmer's wife because of lack of strenuous work. Strenuous work quickly ages the farmer's wife and makes her less presentable than the hunter's wife. Above all, the constant absence of the hunter from home at night makes his wife an easy target for solicited and unsolicited illicit sexual congress. Thus, the hunter learns to guard his wife with magun while he is away. Moreover, Yoruba hunters double as warriors. Warriors are prominent and influential men. They always marry the most beautiful damsel in the community. Beauty attracts men as light attract insects. Magun is the only insurance.

## Songs

Throughout this research work, in the field, try as we did, no magun song could be procured directly from the magun custodians. But this of course is not an indication that there are no magun songs; it can however be a pointer to the fact that they are few. Where we have failed, Elewude (1979:55) has succeeded with two lyrics:

*The death of the hunter is in his amour. A farmer's killer is nearhis mound of earth. A young man's destroyer is surely with a womangone astray.*

What this song is saying in essence is that in whatever one derives pleasure is where one's 'waterloo' lies. The woman is the 'Achilles heels' of the young men because of their hot, lusty blood, like studs which invariably pushes them into the arms of laced women, and in turn death.

The second song by Elewude clearly brought the efficacy of magun to the fore, the power which makes any contact with it extremely dreadful.

Straight to heaven is the destination.  
A man who has stumbled on magun  
has no more stakes with the world.  
Straight to heaven is the destination.

It is the adultery punishing magun that in fact sends shivers down the spines of men. This specie (particularly explosive) of magun in its wrath, fury and mystical clout has absorbed other types of magun. People tend to look at magun with fear and awe, though it is not every magun that kills.

## **Folklore**

This is another source of oral tradition. While many stories abound in respect of other facts and magic among the Yoruba, there is scarcely any reference to magun amidst these interesting stories, which to an extent could throw some light where pitch darkness exists in their thought patterns. However, the author succeeded in laying hands on some.

It is said that if a woman fastened with magun teso conceives, still very much under the aegis of the magun, the product of such pregnancy if a girl will be akiriboto ( a woman without vagina) and if a boy, akuko (an impotent).

One is hard put in fathoming the reason behind this folklore and the underlying philosophy behind the story. Magun teso is not a violent magun. If the story is fabricated to teach disdain for magun, one would naturally expect such story to have the violent or destructive magun as its object, not the mildest of all magun. Perhaps, the moral in it is the discouragement of the patronage of any kind of magun, weak or violent.

It is a popular belief among the Yoruba traditionalists that the sexual isolation of a woman gripped with magun teso can be side-tracked by picking off a twig from the thatched house (sexual rendezvous) where the woman will be sexually violated. The twig thus picked is used as a toothpick, hooked, as it were on the teeth of the paramour when the sexual act is about to be enacted. The man it is believed would have an unimpeded entrance into the woman's vagina in consequence of this hooked twig on his teeth.

Furthermore, a reversal of the traditional mating arrangement is believed also to make a teso-infected woman penetrable. The man's head lies where the woman's leg lie and vice versa. This makes the heads to lie in opposite directions while the copulation lasts.

## **Prayer**

Since the Yoruba are notoriously religious, with the influence of religion palpably felt in all the facets of life, prayer is understandably a medium where this religious notoriety is most noted. Praying is not confined to any space or time. Where a Yoruba is, is where his prayers are offered, particularly when such is propitious. Most prayers revolve around supplications to Deity to foreclose contact with disasters, catastrophes, plagues and unpleasant strikes by the divinities like Sango, Ogun, Ayelala, Sanponna and the horrors of magun.

He prays 'O ni rin pade magun o'. may you not encounter magun. This is an appeal to Olodumare to steer one's movements away from a magun-infested woman, path, seat or farm.

He says "magun o ni digbo lu o o". may you not be smitten by magun. This is also a prayer for the avoidance of magun's debilitating powers.

He constantly enthuses "Aye o nifi magun be o ja o" (May you not be fought with magun by people), an attestation to the fact that magun could be a punitive or retaliating weapon.

"O ni dagbere dele Danimo" (May your adulterous acts not take you as far as the house of 'Danimo'). Danimo is a Yoruba euphemism for magun regarded as the adulterer's nemesis. This is a prayer couched in warning against sexual promiscuity. 'Magun o ni wole to e wa o' (May you not be visited by magun), an allusion to the fact that an innocent sexually responsible man could still fall a victim of magun. If one's wife is a flirt with more than one concubine, the concubines could threaten each other over the woman. She could be charmed by any of them, with the hope of eliminating the other competing rival, with no thought for the husband. The legitimate husband could therefore fall as the unintended victim of the magun set for a different person. Thus, this prayer is constantly on the lips of those who realize that one's wife could be the source of one's death. These prayers are often said by elders to the young ones when they have done something to please the former.

## Daily Speech

If the preponderance of visibility of magun in Yoruba daily speech is something to go by, magun is certainly a controversial phenomenon to the Yoruba. There is no middle course in the people's attitude to magun as succinctly expressed in their fiery reactions to the question, do you support the use of magun? The people interviewed cut across herbalists, men and women. First the herbalist, Chief Ade Adetona. According to him, "there are seventeen types of killer magun. Magun helps to check the excesses of an unfaithful wife. Some women are sex machines and a curse to the marriage institution. It is the only weapon a poor man can use to get rid of a rich man who seduces his wife. Magun is a mere toy for genuine traditional healers. You can even bring a victim back to life. If you grip him, apply cold water in his temple and force him to take palm oil" (Memuletiwon, et al., 1992:9). Surprisingly magun records an advocate in an unexpected quarter – women. Mrs. Josephine Kawo (Francis, Y, 1992:9) says:

I strongly support the use of 'magun' on any unfaithful wife. I believe that a married man or woman should not be engaged in infidelity. And if you want to do this, then such a person should be prepared for the consequences. Anyone who commits such an offence definitely deserves 'magun'. If you are married you owe it a duty to be socially responsible and faithful.

But to Mr. Sesan Olupajimi, a very strong Christian

Magun is real but I believe every man should wait for justice from God. It is not good enough to take the law into your hands. As far as I am concerned, 'Magun' is an abuse of power. Even though the culprits deserve to be punished, this is not a corrective measure.

According to Chief Kekereawo, a herbalist:

Magun is not destructive; it is one of those minor charms we prepare to guard ourselves against those who may want to get us through our wives.

He continues his discourse on magun by offering a simple antidote for a victim of a crowing magun. The woman must urinate in the mouth of the victim, he says. On another magun, the locking magun, he says the magun is placed on the woman through a magun thread later tied to an axe-head struck tightly to a wood. The locked couple can only be released when the axe-head is unstuck from the wood (Ojudu, 1987:25).

From the foregoing, it is obviously clear that 'magun' potentials in Yorubaland are never in doubt. Those who for some reasons are still left closer to the original traditional concerns that sprung magun into existence rationalize its uses. While those whose traditional beliefs have been eroded by the corrosive effect of social change and Christian orientation acknowledge and condemn the destructive powers of magun. But only very few people, that is if they exist, ever doubt the arresting clout of magun on the adulterous.

## Contemporary Films

The propensity of the belief of Yoruba on magun has spurred actors and actresses into action in producing films on the subject. One of the films is titled *Magun: The Sex Trap*. This interesting, but academically worthless, film is built around a man, the son of a powerful diviner, who has a beautiful wife, whom he loves and suspects of unfaithfulness at the same time. The wife does not help the situation as she is very outgoing and keeps the company of flighty ladies as friends. But she is nevertheless faithful to the husband.

The husband with the help of his diviner-father concocted a magun device and affix it on his wife. Eventually the husband, thinking his wife's lovers have carried away the magun on her, copulates with her, only for him to die of the magun. The diviner-father was left to lament and regret the death of his only son through the magun put on the wife by the dead husband.

The film, though a fiction, is nevertheless based on hard cold facts. It is not unusual for a husband to die of the magun set by himself. The moral of the film preaches is that husbands should trust their wives implicitly. They should have unimpeachable grounds before charming their wives with magun. The abuse of magun has a way of back-firing.

In another film (Olaiya 1993, 1994) titled '*Kilo kan?*' (What next?) magun toletole was laced on the wife of a wealthy man by her lover, who wanted to kill the husband, in order to marry her. The magun makes the woman-victim to urinate and the man-victim to drink himself to death. The husband escaped being killed by a hair's breath. Another man became the fall-guy. The most recent of all these films was produced by Adebayo Faleti (2001) titled *Thunderbolt*.

## Ifa Corpus

There is a particular Ifa corpus-Odu Iwori meji that relates a story on two strange magun:

Boba ye, emi o ye. Yangi ile ki  
yele, Atari ki ye ero oja, oun lo  
difa fun olomo akoto akobi olodi  
pounre, awo omo winiwini, omo  
lokun seliade. Won senu koto won  
konrin awo. Koje ki nku nu, iye wa,  
ko ma je ku nu, ko maje njagan  
Barapetu, ko maje jagan,  
Barapetu.

### Translation

If he saves, I will be saved. The sand of the house is not a credit to the house. The forehead is not a credit to the market trader. He prognosticates for Olomo akoto the first bom of Olodi pounre. The peer of the son of winiwini (rain), a colleague of seli-ade. He opened his mouth, and sang the song of Ifa, he did not allow me to die uselessly, *iye wa* (Vagina) our mother did not allow me to die in vain. He did not allow me to be barren; Barapetu (Ifa) did not allow me to go barren, Barapetu.

This Odu wori-meji recounts the story of a man (Olomo akoto) and a woman (Iye wa) who were differently suffering from the effects of magun asese. The man is dying, and it is only by mating with a barren woman would he be released from the powers of the magun. The woman also in consequence of magun asese has become barren. It is only the sperm of a man dying of magun asese that could impregnate her. The two separately divined. And they separately executed the rituals prescribed. The two were brought to each other and they copulated and they were set free of the bondage of magun asese. The woman became pregnant and the man lived thereafter. This Odu iwori meji is a recital in praise of Ifa, for liberating them.

Furthermore, Yoruba traditional religion as copiously demonstrated in the teachings, doctrines, and precepts of Orunmila (Odu Corpus), which is the Yoruba holy scripture, vehemently insists that wives must be chaste and faithful. An adulterous woman is a murderer. According to Adewale (Abogunrin, 1986:70), Yoruba traditional religion denounces adultery along with other immoral behaviour.

Quoting Orunmila in Oyeku Palaba, Adewale writes:

*O pa 'le Oko: O Pa 'le Oko  
O Pa 'le ale; O pa 'le ale  
O poko tan, O pa 'le tan,'  
O wa le ree Pa 'ra re sorun jigbunjingbun  
Oun lo di 'fa fun pansaga  
Ti se eni iku.*

That is:

She destroyed the husband's house. She destroyed the husband's house. She destroyed the lover's house. Having killed husband and the concubine. She went and killed herself in the distant hell. Prognosticated for the adulterous woman. Who is murderous, Adewale (Abogunrin; 1986:70ff).

In this verse, Ifa warns against adultery and calls for a pure chaste relation between husband and wife and their neighbors. This Ifa corpus particularly lambasts the adulterous woman as a murderer. A promiscuous wife is an ethical murderer, not necessarily killing men with arrows or gun, but with her culpable acts in sexual complicity. It is the magun usually set on the body of the lecherous wife which actually does the killing of the husband or the wife's paramour. An adulteress willingly lends herself, though unknowingly as a courier, an agent of magun, an emissary of death for her husband (when the magun is set by the lover) or her paramour (when it is the husband who charms her with magun). In both cases she is a killer. Her unfaithfulness renders her morally guilty as a murderer. A faithful wife, dotting only on her husband, will never constitute danger to anybody. But an adulterous wife is a two edged-sword and depending on who is wielding the weapon (when enchanted with magun) can conveniently eliminate either the husband or the concubine.

## Conclusion

In this paper, we have just taken the advice of Ojoade (1984) that information about sex, humour, folklore, comedy, and satire are more acceptable to the human psyche than murder, war, accident, holocaust, earthquake and genocide. It was meant to treat magun in a lighter mood, rather than celebrating its monstrous capacity to destroy.

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