

**ALÁJQBÍ: REVISITING THE SPIRIT OF KINSHIP ON MISSION OF REWARD AND  
PUNISHMENT AMONG YORUBA PEOPLE OF NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*Alájobí is a strong belief system among Yoruba people. It is the spirit of kinship which plays prominent roles among these people. Several studies have examined kinship systems in African societies but did not pay special attention to the roles of kinship in reward and punishment. This study, therefore, investigated the opinions of Yoruba people on efficiency of Alájobí (spirit of kinship) to reward or punish members of kinship group.*

*The study adopted survey design. Data were collected through qualitative method. This involved thirty – four indepth interviews conducted in Ado – Odo, Ketu – Adie Owe and Edu communities of Ogun State in Nigeria. The socio – bio data of the respondents were presented and analysed, using percentage. The responses of the participants on Alájobí were also presented in charts with percentage distributions of their responses.*

*Fifty – two percent of the respondents were female; 76.5% of them were Christians; 85.3% of them were married; 52.9% of them were holders of Bachelor degrees; and 85.3% of them were indigenes of Ogun State. 79.4% of the respondents affirmed that Yoruba people still strongly believe in Alájobí; 52.9% of them agreed that Alájobí is strongly efficient in rewarding good deeds and 38.2% concurred that it is strongly efficient in punishing evil deeds. Blood ties or bonds among the kinship members, constant references making to Alájobí and its efficacy to punish offenders were the reasons given for its strong belief system among Yoruba*

*people. Majority of respondents agreed that Alájòbí rewards people who do good to their kinsmen/kinswomen and that those rewards would even be extended to their children. The respondents also agreed that Alájòbí is very efficient in punishing people who do evils to other members of kinship group. Sudden death, madness, poverty and strange diseases were cited as examples of such punishment. People should not play down the role of Alájòbí to reward and to punish. It operates as a pay back, a just administration of rewards and punishment. It is not a barbaric belief system. Yoruba parents should be teaching their children the Yoruba cultural values and belief systems for preservation and transmission of Yoruba culture from generation to generation.*

*Finally, further studies on Alájòbí and other Yoruba belief systems and the documentation of such studies for academic and cultural preservation should be of paramount interest to us.*

**Key words:** kinship; family; Alájòbí; Yoruba reward; punishment.

### **Introduction**

Alájòbí (the Spirit of Kinship) is a powerful belief system among Yoruba people. The belief system rests upon the popular saying that ‘blood is thicker’ than water and that ‘the cord of kinship’ is very hard to cut asunder. Hence, no Yoruba man or woman would take with levity, anything or matter that has to do with kinship.

Kinship among Yoruba people is so strong a cultural and social value that a spirit is believed to be associated with it, controlling and directing the affairs, both physically and spiritually. This spirit is called “Alájòbí”, while the gathering or relationships which exist among the members of the same kinship is called “Molebí”. Hence, Alájòbí (Spirit of Kinship) is a spirit, directing and controlling the physical and spiritual affairs among Molebí (Members of the Kinship).

Alájòbí (the spirit of kinship) itself, is a collective spiritual gathering of the departed souls of the ancestors of a particular lineage. This collective spiritual gathering of the departed souls is strongly believed to be spiritually active in directing and controlling the life affairs of their living children. These departed souls watch over the doings of their off-springs and reward or punish them according to their deeds. Hence, Alájòbí is a source of reward or punishment to the living members of a kinship group, depending on their deeds, especially, towards other members of the same kinship group. Therefore, Alájòbí is a spiritual agent of reward and punishment to members of a particular kinship group. We explain in this paper, the opinions of some sampled Yoruba people on Alájòbí as spiritual agent of reward and punishment. Empirical approach is employed in this ethnographical study. Hence, the study is purely scientific.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The tide of Westernization has swept away many cultural values and belief systems of African people. The belief system of Yoruba people on Alájòbí is among those cultural values and belief systems so affected by such tide of westernization. The foundation of Alájòbí is solely built on extended family system which is applicable to other African societies. However, the western culture of nuclear family and other forms of western culture have weakened the belief system of Alájòbí among Yoruba people of Nigeria.

Furthermore, it is very difficult to ascertain that these people still believe in Alájòbí and its spiritual efficacy to reward or punish members of the same kinship group according to their deeds. Finally, the available literature on kinship among Yoruba people does not address the kinship as agent of reward or punishment. We conducted this study, therefore, to investigate whether Yoruba people still believe in Alájòbí (spirit of kinship) and its efficacy to reward or punish. The study filled the gap neglected in the literature in this particular area.

### **Research Questions**

The following are the research questions posed by this study:

- 1 Do Yoruba people still believe in Alájòbí?
- 2 Is Alájòbí still efficient in rewarding kinship members who do well to others?
- 3 Is Alájòbí still efficient in punishing kinship members who do evils to others?

### **Objectives of the Study**

The under listed are the objectives of the study achieved by this study:

- 1 To investigate whether Yoruba people still believe in Alájòbí

- 2 To find out whether Alájobí is still efficient in rewarding kinship members who do well to others
- 3 To investigate whether Alájobí is still efficient in punishing kinship members who did evils to others.

### **Justification of the Study**

It is quite imperative to revisit the effects of westernization on the African belief systems in order to discover ways to revitalize and rejuvenate them. Therefore, we conducted this study to achieve this in respect of Alájobí. Furthermore, the study would add to the pool of studies in area of kinship system in African societies and among Yoruba people in particular.

### **Scope of the Study**

Yoruba people are predominant in the South-Western part of Nigeria. Some of them can be found in Mid-Western (now part of South – South part of Nigeria), in North – Central part e.g. in Kwara and Kogi States of Nigeria and present day Republic of Benin. The belief system of Alájobí is found among the entire Yoruba race. However, as a result of lack of fund, time and accessibility, the study was restricted only to Ogun State in South – Western part of Nigeria. For convenience, Igbesa area in Ado- Odo/Otta Local Government area of Ogun State was selected for the study.

### **Literature Review**

Kinship belief system is an important cultural value among all the African societies. It is a basis upon which most African societies solidly rest. The Thesaurus English Dictionary (2012) in Siband et.al (2014) defines kinship as a close connection marked by community of interest or similarity in nature or character as well as relatedness or connection by blood or marriage or adoption. Kinship is members that are related by blood or marriage or function that provides basic instrumental and expressive functions to its members (Belgrave, 2005).

Granskog (1997) defines kinship as a principle of social organization based on a network of relations created by genealogical connections and social ties modeled on the natural relations of genealogical parenthood (sex and reproduction). Kinship, according to Johnson (1999) is a relationship that is established by blood ties or biogenetic substances and those by marriage. It is a group marked with consanguine and affinal relationship between blood and marital relatives (Molla, 2003).

Kinship can be thought of according to Aying (n.d) as consisting of vertical relationships between generations (descent); the links between brothers and sisters (siblingship) and links by and through marriage (affinity).

African societies build kinship alliances and relationships through unilineal parentage system, which is through both the male (patrilineal) and or female (matrilineal) line (Nnaocha, 2013). According to Beatie (1999), privileged relationship often found between men and their mother's brothers in societies where membership in patrilineally organized groups is important which is due to an extension of the warm, friendly feeling that a man has for his mother, or her siblings. Hence, matrilineage also forms an integral part of kinship. However, in recent sociology, conceptions of kinship have disjoined from the marriage assumption (Butler, 2002). This is because kinship involves metaphors of shared substances like blood, milk, gene and soul (Granskog, 1997) not the affinity of marriage.

Kinship, according to Brown et.al (2002) made up of several generations and includes multiple adults in multiple roles. Kinship is based on respect for elders: reverence for ancestors and on the extended family cultures (Okoro – Kingsley, 2010). Kinship comprises all the living persons and also includes dead persons (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Kinship relationship in Africa is not only among humans but among human and nature as well as sacred (Fashola, 2014)

In African societies, kinship is an important phenomenon which occupies an important position in determining and shaping human behaviours and social groups. (Nnaocha, 2013). Africans are known worldwide for their sense of kinship which is a relationship with its meaning not in precepts but in a life lived in common (Kanu, 2014). Kinship relationships are emphasized in African societies through the working power of their ancestors through sacrifices. Hence, sacrifices are made mostly by male members of kinship group as a means of cleansing and recognition of the potent power and submissions to the spirit that seek to control and protect the members. It is through sacrifices that kinship members seek to experience family peace, fruitfulness and good will (Asu and Omono, 2012). The point of interest in African practice of kinship is that it is at the root of their culture and it goes beyond the immediate nuclear family or extended family, to the entire community (Fashola, 2014).

Kinship system in Africa survives because of patriotism. African tribesmen have sense of patriotism: they are proud to be members of their tribe and they consider it superior to other tribes. (Evans-Pritchard, 1940). Interpersonal obligations also plays important role. Interpersonal obligations are guided by value as well as social validation of kinship ties (Levine, 1987). It also survives on the contribution of individual endowments. Hence, the social significance of kinship is solidarity, which would create a society where everyone would relate and contribute to the well-being of the other (Kanu, 2014). There is sense of responsibility to one's blood that is the members of the kinship that one belongs to. Hence, kinship is deeper in performance of personal obligations and responsibilities than fictive kin. Fictive kins are usually defined as those people to whom one considers himself to be related but who are not related by blood or marriage (Johnson, 1999). They are those members of the family who are not related biologically; not related through marriage but who feel and function like family (Belgrave, 2005).

Kinship performs several roles and serves many purposes in African societies. Kinship, for instance, defines the obligations, rights and boundaries of interactions among the members of a self-recognizing group (Kanu, 2014). It is a social mechanism of connecting and sharing with others. It is based on the belief that humans need other humans to be truly human. Kinship keeps the African societies alive by the constant activities of peoples (Fashola, 2014). Kinship serves as a social vehicle of responding to adversity (Brown et. al, 2002). It is a source of support through gift in either cash and or in kind which is an obligation to the distressed or needy (Nnaocha, 2013)

Kinship is a controller of social relationships among African people and there are different kinship terms to make known the different kinship kinds of relationship between persons. Knowing the kind of kinship relationship that holds one with the other is of paramount importance (Kanu, 2014). Hence, according to Sommer and Lupapula (2012), there are kinship terms that are used to negotiate status relationship among interlocutors in a verbal encounter such as greeting.

Kinship defines relationship, respect, solidarity and mutual obligation (Moua, 2003). In kinship, there is responsibility to support the children and the widows. Widows were supported to help children grow up within the extended family system where the entire kin would have the advantage to continue socializing the children according to their way of life (Nyambella, 2004). Moua (2003) argues that kinship system is the most important basic education for children to learn and gain an understanding. Coe et.al (2015) opine that kinship helps to protect, nurture and teach children. It is a source of protection, nurturing, guidance and education until child reaches mental, emotional and physical maturity. In kinship, child learns skills necessary for survival.

Madukwe and Madukwe (2010) emphasized that when member of kinship village is bereaved, others are always there to comfort the person, contribute money to help take care of burial expenses, support in domestic work and child care. Hence, in kinship, a man is born into a support network (Luke and Munshi, 2006). There is a high degree of cooperation between members of the same household (family) and lineage (kinship community) as explained by Kyalo (2012). Kinship is collective, rather than as individuals, and that this collective view is expressed as share concern and responsibility for the well-being of others (Mbiti, 1969) in Hall (2007). Hence, Africans, through kinship, are united so that what is done to one of their members is done to all (Kyalo, 2012)

Ayling (n.d) opines that kinship is a solution to the facts of birth, copulation and death. Kinship determines the out- law of incest, enactment of rules of marriage rites and rights of the natives at the kindred level (Nnaocha, 2013). Kinship provides social legitimacy through the rule of exogamy (Moua, 2003). Kinship also serves as mechanism of peace and stability. Kinship makes finding peace and conflict management possible from the structures that are laid down by the people so that they become active participants in finding lasting solutions to violence. Principle of using intermediaries within kinship in conflict management is common to most African societies i.e. using Cousins, Aunts and Uncles as mediators, are common in African Societies (Sibanda et.al, 2014). Brown et.al (2002) opine that kinship also serves as a channel of care and treatment of abused and neglected youths.

Madukwe and Madukwe(2010) argued that in African legal system and conflict resolution, violation of laws is not treated with levity and such is punished by gods through taking and placing of curse. This is done to restore peace and order in kinship community. Hence, kingship serves as a legal system and conflict manager. Beatie (1999) also affirmed a similar opinion in using sanction. According to Beatie (1999), sanction is a reaction on the part of a society or a considerable number of its members to a mode of behaviour which is thereby approved or disapproved. It can be positive (reward) or negative (punishment) which is a breach of rule by the whole community kinship or its recognized representatives, or injured party, with popular approval. The functions of kinship as explained are made possible as a result of blood ties shared by

the kinship members, the everyday interactions shared by them and the closer fraternity among them (Nnaocha, 2013).

However, migration and urbanization have destroyed what kinsmen/kinswomen have in communities that unite them together. Oppong (n.d) argued that since households of migrants are perforce relatively isolated from kin, traditional patterns of kinship behaviour cannot continue to operate in their entirety. These ties with kin have been seen as forming an ego centred network rather than a corporate group.

The epochal event of slavery also affected the kinship system in African societies. Slavery created unstable family unit resulted in lasting damage to the African family system. During slavery, biological family unit was not sacred. Children were sold from their biological parents and male and female partners were kept from legal unions. There was separation of man and woman partners from each other and from their children (Belgrave, 2005). Despite the challenges, the kinship system in African societies still remains.

### **Methodology applied in the study**

This ethnographic study adopted survey design. It involved the collection of information from a sample of individuals through their responses to questions. (Schutt, 2004). Qualitative approach was used, although the socio-bio data of the respondents were presented quantitatively (percentage and charts). The areas of study were sampled through convenience sampling method under non-probability sampling technique. These included: Ado-Odo community, Ketu-Adie Owe community and Edu community, all in Ado-Odo/Otta Local Government area of Ogun state, Nigeria. The study population comprised all adults living in these communities. However, because all the instances cannot be studied, samples were taken from the study population.

The study samples involved thirty-four (34) respondents. Convenience sampling method was also used to select them. Convenience samples are relatively inexpensive. It reduced the cost in forms of money and time (Adler and Clark, 1999).

The study used in-depth interview to gather the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and the information and data pertinent to Alájobí (Spirit of kinship). The in-depth- interview involved questions on the belief of the respondents on Alájobí, their opinions on whether it still rewards kinsmen/kinswomen who do good to other kinship members and whether Alájobí still punishes erring kinship members who do evils to other kinship members.

For the method of analysis, percentage and charts were used to analyse the socio-bio data of the respondents generated from the interview schedules. Content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data gathered during the interview. The data were interpreted through the content of ethnographical belief system which shapes the belief of the respondents on Alájobí (spirit of kinship) within the context of Yoruba culture.

In area of ethical issue, the consent of all the participants was obtained before the commencement of the study. The information and data supplied were kept confidential and only used for the purpose of this study. The anonymity principle was strictly followed. The identities of the participants were not disclosed and the data and information were interpreted and explained in aggregate without making reference to any identity of the participants.

### **Data presentation, Analysis and Interpretation**

#### **Preamble**

This section contains the presentation of data, analysis and interpretation. Data collated were presented, analysed and interpreted within the context of ethnographic belief system of Yoruba people on Alájobí.

The socio-bio data of the respondents were firstly analysed before analysing the subject matters on Alájobí. The content analyses of the subject matters on Alájobí were done objective by objective as stated in the study.

#### **Socio-Bio Data of the Respondents**

This section deals with the analyses of socio-bio data of the respondents. Variables like sex, age, religion, marital status, educational qualification, family type and state of origin were examined. The table below shows the analyses.

Table 4:1 Socio – Bio Data of the Respondents (N = 34)

	Variable	Frequency	Percentage
1	<b>Sex</b>		
	Male	16	47.1
	Female	18	52.9
2	<b>Age</b>		
	20 – 24	4	11.8
	30 – 34	7	20.6
	35 – 39	6	17.6
	40 – 44	7	20.6
	45 – 49	5	14.7
	50 – 54	3	8.8
	55 and above	2	5.9
3	<b>Religion</b>		
	Christianity	26	76.5
	Islam	7	20.6
	Traditional Religion	1	2.9
4	<b>Marital Status</b>		
	Married	29	85.3
	Single	5	14.7
5	<b>Education Qualification</b>		
	NCE	5	14.7
	Bachelor Degrees	18	52.9
	Master Degrees	7	20.6
	Postgraduate Diplomas	4	11.8
6	<b>Types of Family Born into</b>		
	Nuclear Family	22	64.7
	Extended Family	12	35.3
7	<b>State of Origin</b>		
	Ogun State	29	85.3
	Lagos State	2	5.9
	Kwara State	1	2.9
	Osun State	1	2.9
	Oyo State	1	2.9

**Source: Researcher’s Survey, 2017.**

The above table shows the variables considered in the socio-bio data of the respondents, their frequencies and percentages. The first variable considered was the sex of the respondents. The analyses showed that 47.1% of the respondents were male; while 52.9% were female. Hence, more female participated in the study than male.

The age variable was also considered in the study. The analyses from the table showed that 11.8% of the respondents were between 20 years and 24 years; 20.6% were between 30 years and 34 years; 17.6% were between 35 years and 39 years; 20.6% were between 40 years and 44 years; 14.7% were between 45 years and 49 years; 8.8% were between 50 years and 54 years and 5.9% were 55 years and above.

The respondents between 30 years and 34 years and those between 40 years and 44 years have the highest percentage (20.6%). All the respondents cut across various age ranges as shown in the table. The respondents were matured enough to understand the content and context of the study.

Religions of the respondents were also considered. The analyses showed that 76.5% of the respondents were Christians; 20.6% were Muslims and 2.9% were adherents of traditional religion. The results of the analyses showed that majority of our respondents were Christians. The study areas (Ado-Odo Community, Ketu – Adie Owe Community and Edu Community) were not far away from Badagry which was the community through which Christianity came into Nigeria. Hence, many of the communities around Badagry axis (areas of the study included) were Christian dominated communities. Therefore, majority of the respondents that were Christians was not least expected.

The marital statuses of the respondents were also taken into consideration. The analyses showed that 85.3% of respondent were married; while 14.7% were single (not married). Hence, majority of the respondents who participated in the study was married.

Next on the table was the educational qualification of the respondents. It can be deduced from the analyses that 14.7% of respondents were holders of National Certificate in Education (NCE); 52.9% were holders of bachelor degrees from various fields; 20.6% were holders of Master degree and 11.8% were holders of postgraduate diplomas. It can be inferred from the analyses that majority of respondents were bachelor degree holders.

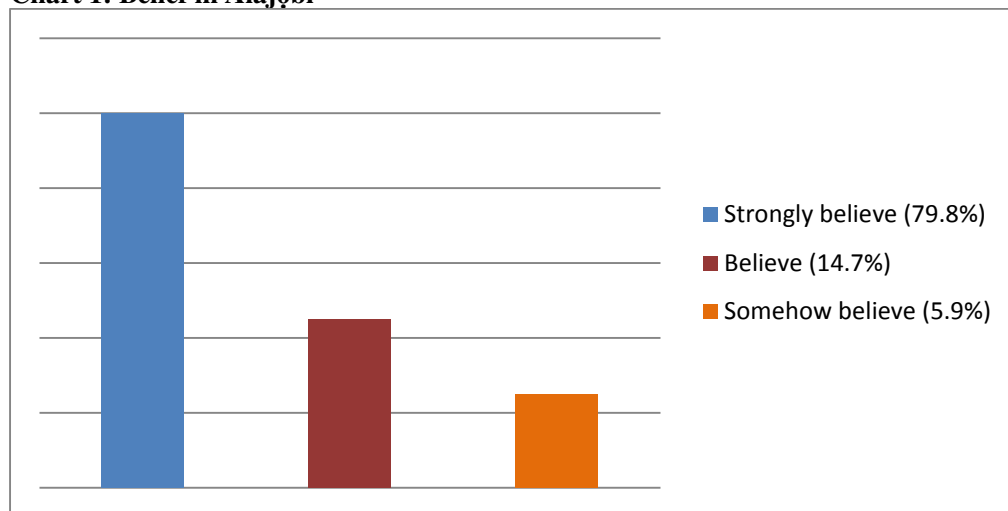
The types of the family respondents were born into or where they were brought up was also considered. The analyses showed that 64.7% of the respondents were born or brought up in nuclear family; while 35.3% were born or brought up in extended family. African societies were not familiar with nuclear family. Nuclear family is alien to African societies where kinship and extended family systems are practiced. The higher percentage (64.7%) of the respondents that claimed that they were born into or brought up in nuclear family was an indication of the effect of western culture on African societies. Nuclear family is practiced in western countries not in African Societies where kinship and extended family systems are cherished.

Finally, the states of origin of the respondents were also considered in the study. Our analyses showed that 85.3% of respondents were Ogun State indigenes; 5.9% were Lagos State indigenes while 2.9% each came from Kwara State, Ogun State and Oyo State respectively. Our areas of study were located in Ogun State, hence it was not least expected that majority of the respondents would come from Ogun State as clearly shown in the analyses.

### **Yoruba Belief in Alájobí**

The first objective of the study was to investigate whether Yoruba people still believe in Alájobí or they do not believe. The analyses of the responses are represented in the chart below:

**Chart 1: Belief in Alájobí**



Source: Researchers' Survey, 2017.

The chart above shows that 79.4% of the respondents strongly believe that Yoruba people still believe in Alájobí; 14.7% of them believe and 5.9% somehow believe. All the respondents believe at varying degrees. We conclude, therefore, that Yoruba people still believe in Alájobí as the spirit of kinship. We gathered data from the interview conducted on belief system of Alájobí among Yoruba people, whether such is still believed among these people. Some of the excerpts from the interviews conducted are presented below:

*The Yoruba believe that, since people in the kinship group are related by blood, they must not betray themselves and if they do, nemesis from Alájobí will catch up against them.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu -Adie Owe1/2017.*

*The Yoruba people believe that if anyone among the family betrays another member, the blood that binds them together will bring curse upon the betrayer.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado- Odo 7/2017.*

*I strongly believe in Alájobí because it has a strong reflection of blood relation. Alájobí works actively to ensure that people have serious concern about their family ties and to instill fear in family members not to do evil.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 5/2017*

It can be inferred from the excerpts above that the reason the Yoruba still believe in Alájobí is tied around the blood bonds among the members of the same family or kinship group. Blood is believed to be thicker

than water. Blood among Yoruba people are more than the biological values it serves. It is a spiritual bond which connected members of the same kinship groups together. In Yoruba communities, as long as blood bond exists among members of the same kinship groups, such members are spiritual connected together. According to Johnson (1999), kinship is a relationship that is established by blood ties or bio-genetic substances. Hence, Yoruba people believe in Alájobí as long as blood ties exist among the members of the same family and kinship group.

Another reason Yoruba people still believe in Alájobí was that people in the communities always make reference to Alájobí as spirit of kinship. Constant references to it instill fear in people and strengthen their belief in Alájobí. The excerpts below attested to this:

*I still believe in Alájobí because I always hear people making references to Alájobí whenever issues regarding kinship arise.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Edu 8/2017.*

*I still strongly believe in Alájobí because my families strongly believe in it and they have their strong evidences of believing and saying things that have to do with Alájobí.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu-Adie Owe 8/2017.*

*I am a strong believer in Alájobí because while I was growing up, I used to hear my grandmother always saying "Alájobí a gbe o" meaning that Alájobí would reward or bless such person that has done good at that point in time to any of her siblings. Hence, such person is appreciated through Alájobí praises. However, if a member of the family does something bad which affects the other member, it is always said that "Alájobí a da o" which means that spirit of kinship will definitely judge such person for the bad he/she has done.*

*IDI/Male/Muslim/Ketu-Adie Owe 3/2017.*

The excerpts from the above showed that Alájobí belief system is a common phenomenon among Yoruba people. The fact that people at the family and kinship levels always make references to it clearly showed that they still strongly believe in it. It is an important phenomenon which occupies an important position in determining and shaping human behaviour and social groups (Nnaocha, 2013). Yoruba like other African societies are known for their sense of kinship. This kinship is a relationship with its meaning not in precepts but in a life lives in common (Kanu, 2014).

Finally, the efficacy of Alájobí in punishing erring kinship members is another reason Yoruba people still believe in it. The excerpts below supported the view:

*Yoruba kinsmen still believe in Alájobí because alleged members of kinship group used to fear to swear by Alájobí*

*IDI/Male/Muslim/Ado-Odo 3 /2017.*

*Yoruba belief in Alájobí because it rewards those that do good and it also punishes those that do evils. It casts spell on persons that do evil.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 11/2017*

*Alájobí exists because if Alájobí is used to cast spell on someone for doing wrong to members of his/her kinship group, although it may take time, but the spell would always work on him/her. It is like a law of Karma or retribution*

*IDI/Female/ Christianity /Ado-Odo 9/2017.*

*In any Yoruba society, if anyone does wrong or bad to his/her kin; Alájobí is invoked to punish him/her. It would definitely come to pass (punishment). And if person does well, and Alájobí is used to praise and bless him/her, he/she would definitely be favoured by Alájobí.*

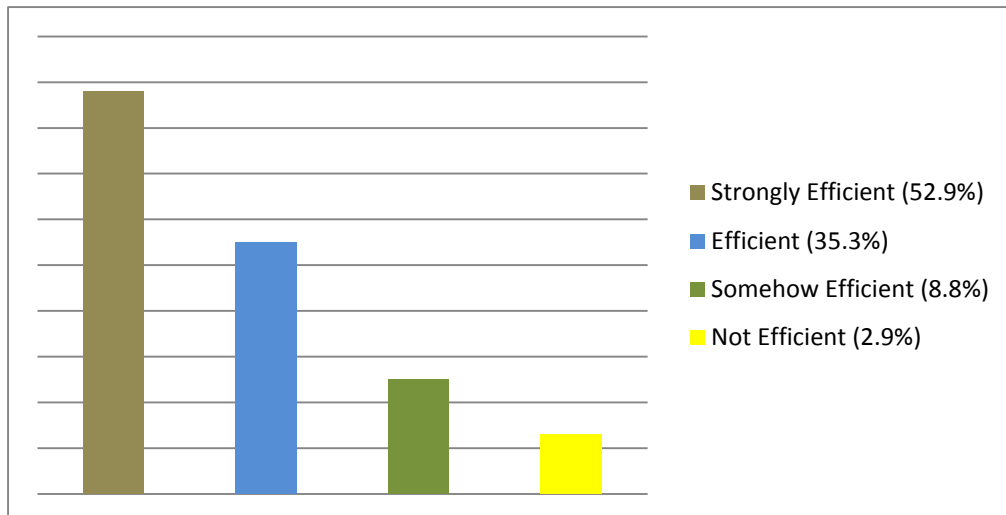
*IDI/Male/Islam/Edu 4/2017.*

Critical analyses of the above excerpts showed that the efficacy that Alájobí has in rewarding and punishing was the reason the respondents' belief that it does exist and that Yoruba people still believe in this spirit of kinship. The excerpts showed comments on reward and punishment as reason Alájobí belief system still remain vibrant among Yoruba people. It is a source of sanction for approval or disapproval of behaviour. Kinship (Alájobí) is a means through which a breach of rule is sanctioned by the community kinship or its recognized representatives, or injured party (Beatis, 1999)

#### **Alájobí (spirit of kinship) as Agent of Reward.**

The second objective was to find out whether Alájobí is still efficient in rewarding kinship members who do well to other members or is not efficient. The chart below shows the responses of the participants on this.

Charts 2: Efficiency of Alájobí as Agent of Reward



Source: Researchers' Survey, 2017.

The chart above depicts the responses of the participants on whether Alájobí is still efficient in rewarding kinship members who do well to other members or it is not efficient in rewarding them. From the analyses, 52.9% of respondents affirmed that Alájobí is strongly efficient in rewarding kinship members who do well to other members. The analyses also showed that 35.3% of the respondents believed that Alájobí is efficient in rewarding the kinship members who do well; 8.8% of the respondents said it is somehow efficient; while 2.9% said it is not efficient. Majority of the respondents affirmed that Alájobí is efficient in rewarding kind and generous kinship members who do well to other members of their kinship group.

We sampled some of the excerpts from the interviews to attest that people still believe that Alájobí is still capable and efficient in rewarding kind and generous kinship members. We present some of the excerpts below to confirm this:

*Alájobí does well to any member of the family who has been faithful, and stands firm on the truth of their ancestors. For instance, on the issue of sales and re-sales of land which is prominent in our area, someone may want to stand on truth to avoid the wrath of Alájobí and attracts its blessing.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado- Odo 5/2017.*

*Any kinsman or kinswoman who does well to others is always supported when he or she needs the support of other kinship members. This shows that Alájobí is efficient in rewarding kinsman/kinswoman who does well to other members of his/her kinship group.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Ketu -Adie Owe 3/2017.*

*A man who holds an enviable position in Lagos State government is a member of my kinship group. He made sure he fixed most of the youth in the family into good positions in government and labour market. At last the entire members of our kinship group recommended him for a chieftaincy title of our extended family.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Edu 3/2017.*

*When my father was alive, he was a philanthropist, and this made every member of his extended family to love him and give him due respect. When he died, he was given a befitting burial and funeral ceremony by the entire members of the family.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu Adie-owe 6/2017.*

The study also discovered that kind and generous members of kinship group are not the only ones rewarded, on many occasions, their children were also rewarded by the spirit of kinship (Alájobí). We present the excerpts below to support this view:

*The Alájobí rewards whoever does well to his/her kinship group. His/her children will be favoured wherever they find themselves*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado- Odo 7/2017*

*A good deed always comes around to the doer. Such person who does well to the kinship members will be recognized in the family. Even his/her children will be favoured later in life.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu -Adie – Owe 5/2017*

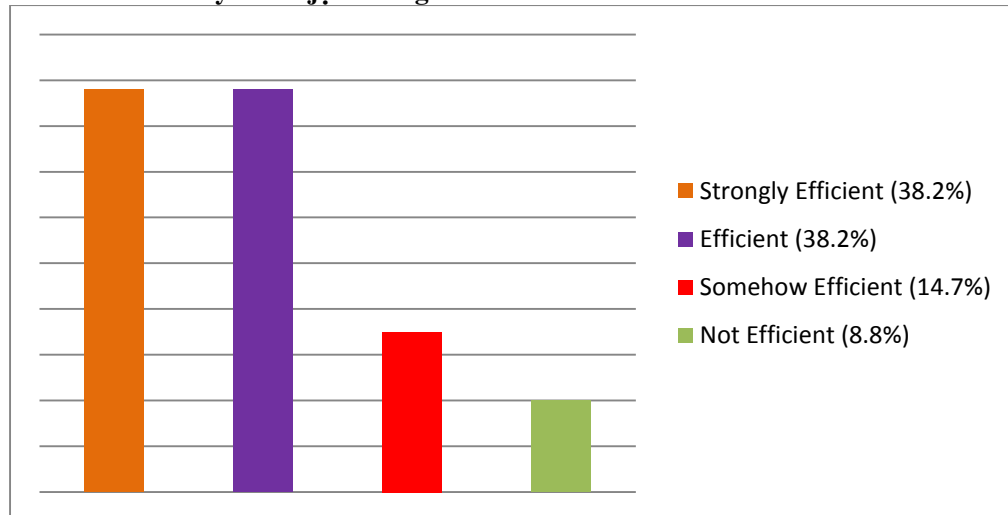
The summary of all the analyses is that Alájobí is an agent that rewards good deeds within the kinship group. Members of the kinship group were believed to be rewarded by Alájobí if they do well to other members. Moreover, such rewards can even extend to their children as captured from the above excerpts. Alájobí is a powerful force or spirit of reward. Kinship serves many good purposes among African societies. Kinship is

a channel of responding to adversity (Brown et al, 2002). It is a fountain of support by giving gifts in cash and or kind which is a kinship duty to the distressed or needy among members (Nnaocha, 2013). Any member who does this kinship duty faithfully would be adequately rewarded as explained in the excerpts. It is the responsibility of Alájòbí (spirit of kinship) to bless and favour such members.

### **Alájòbí (spirit of kinship) as Agent of Punishment**

The third objective of study is to investigate whether Alájòbí is still efficient in punishing kinship member who does evil to other kinship member or it is not efficient to do so. The chart below represents the responses of the participants in the study:

**Chart 3 Efficiency of Alájòbí as Agent of Punishment**



Source: Researchers' Survey, 2017.

The analyses from the above chart showed that 38.2% of the respondents believed that Alájòbí is strongly efficient in punishing erring kinship members. Another 38.2% also believed in its efficiency; while 14.7% said it is somehow efficient. However, 8.8% affirmed that it (Alájòbí) is not efficient in punishing kinship members who do evil to other kinship member.

We extracted some excerpts from the interviews to attest that Alájòbí is still efficient and active in punishing kinship members who do evils to other members of the kinship group.

The excerpts below attested to this:

*There was a man in my family who was given Oluwo (chief priest) title. However, because of this title and the power attached to it, he started selling plots of land of the other members of the family. He was called to order by the elders in the family but did not hearken to their voices. He was eventually disgraced by Alájòbí. He was demoted by the entire community and his title given to other person.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Edu 3/2017.*

*It is true. Alájòbí is still active in punishing unfaithfulness of one kinsman to other kinsmen. For instance a group of hunters from the same extended family went to the bush to kill animals (hunting expedition). One of them killed an animal but lied to his kinship members that he missed the gun target of the animal and kept the animal, hoping to take the animal after hunting expedition. He was made to swear by Alájòbí. To say the least, the man could not make it back home. He died during the expedition.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Ado-Odo 3/2017*

*There was a cousin of mine who duped my older brother in a very painful manner. Although, my brother let go but the man faced the bad consequence of this.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu Adie-Owe 6/2017*

*There was a man who intended to poison his nephew but at the end it was his son who ate the poisoned food.*

*IDI/Female/Christianity/Ketu Adie-Owe 8/2017*

We inferred from the above excerpts that Alájòbí really punishes members of kinship group who do evils to other members. It may be in form of public shame or public humiliation like demotion and disgrace as

reflected in the first excerpt or death of the offender or his/her child as reflected in the second and third excerpt respectively. In order to support the death penalty respondents had this to say:

*Alájobí when it is offended, can cause one to die prematurely  
IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 14/2017.*

However, the punishment may vary from one family or kinship group to another. An excerpt below buttressed this view:

*The punishment varies. It depends on what is operating in each family/kinship group. In some family whoever does the evil may run mad. In some the evil doer may start losing his/her children or be inflicted with strange disease  
IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 7/2017*

In another view, it may be abject penury or hindrance of prosperity that would be the punishment as explained in the excerpt below:

*There is clear evidence that Alájobí punishes offences. Members of the family who are unfaithful or disloyal to the laid down rules of the family may have their prosperity hindered by Alájobí.  
IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 5/2017.*

In some instances, Alájobí may be invoked to clear a case of allegation. The suspect may be entreated to confess his/her evil deed, but he/she refuses, Alájobí may be invoked. An excerpt below illustrated how such is done:

*Kinsman/Kinswoman that is alleged may be entreated to confess. However, if he/she refuses, Alájobí's curse is invoked on the person at the market or family square. After invocation, Kolanut and black pot are broken signifying how the life of the offender will be broken and destroyed by Alájobí.  
IDI/Male/Christian/Edu 5/2017.*

In some families, the alleged offenders in the families may be taken to Oju Orori (the grave yard of the family ancestor). A small quantity of the sand is taken from the grave and put in a calabash. Some water is poured into it and the alleged offenders are made to swear their innocence in the matters. They would be asked to drink the water. If such alleged members are not innocent, Alájobí is immediately in force to punish them. Such allegations may include: poisoning, adultery, and stealing as explained by Madukwe and Madukwe (2010). Such oath taking or invocation of curse is usually done by a person of a higher status than the offender (Madukwe and Madukwe, 2010). In some occasions, the offence may be serious witchcraft against other member of kinship group or using other member of kinship group for money ritual as explained in the study of Apter (2012).

Yoruba people believe in efficacy of Alájobí in punishing wrong doings within the kinship group. They also believe that friend who betrays other friend would also be punished by spirit of covenant. Hence there is a popular proverbial warning in Yoruba society which goes thus:

*"Ile dida ni pa ore. Alájobí ni pa iyekan eni to ba se bi". Meaning:*

*"Spirit of covenant would kill a friend that betrays other friend. Alájobí (spirit of kinship) who kill a kinsman/kinswoman who does evil to other member of his/her kinship group"*

Hence, Alájobí is not taken with levity when it comes to its invocation to punish erring kinship member.

We requested our interviewees to give their personal opinions on Alájobí. We extracted their comments and presented some of them below as excerpts to reveal what their opinions were on Alájobí:

*I grew up to know about the existence of Alájobí. It is a blood bond that binds members of a family or kinship group together. I have never witnessed any incidence whereby Alájobí revolted but with what people around me used to say, I know that Yoruba believed strongly in its rewarding and punishing efficacy.*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ketu Adie-Owe 1/2017.*

*Alájobí is a stronghold that brings every member of the same family together. It promotes peace, love, unity and joy in the family. The family see themselves in one accord; assist one another in business, education and in all spheres of life. If Alájobí is used to curse somebody it may be difficult (if not for the grace of God and repentant heart) for such person to progress in life. The role of Alájobí cannot be ruled out in Yoruba land*

*IDI/Female/Christian/Ado-Odo 5/2017*

*I so much believe in Alájobí because the spirit behind Alájobí is very strong and efficient. It is the background of every Yoruba person. According to a Legend Bob Marley, he sang in one of his songs*

*that: 'If you remember your history or background, you would definitely know where you are coming from.*

*IDI/Male/Muslim/Edu 9/2017*

*The issue of Alájobí in Yoruba land is a thing that is worth keeping because of the benefits or advantages therein. it is a blood relationship that needs to be generously kept.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Edu 3/2017.*

In the first excerpts above, the interviewee re-instated her belief in Alájobí because of the experiences she had heard from other people around her. These experiences, convincingly, made her to believe strongly in Alájobí. Hence, Alájobí can be said, to exist truly, and strongly believed by Yoruba people.

The second excerpt showed that Alájobí is not only agent of reward and punishment but a spirit which promotes and ensures peace, love, unity and joy among the family/kinship group. It is a spirit which promotes accord and assistance among the kinship members.

The analyses from the third excerpt showed that the interviewee believe that Alájobí is a strong spirit and very efficient. According to him, it is a background of every Yoruba person. It is a spirit which constantly reminds them where they wereborn.

Finally, the fourth excerpt showed that Alájobí is a thing that is worthy of being kept from generation to generation. The interviewee was of the opinion that it has many merits and advantages which called for its keeping from generation to generation.

We conclude, therefore, that Alájobí is still widely believed and cherished in Yoruba land because of its values and functions as stipulated in the excerpts.

### **The Effect of Western Culture on Alájobí**

Like any other aspect of Yoruba belief system, Alájobí has been greatly affected by the influence of the western culture. Nuclear family is gradually replacing the typical large extended family which culminated into kinship group. The western culture of individualism has weakened the spirit of collectivism and communalism known with African societies. We extracted some excerpts from the interviews conducted to show that westernization and civilization have negatively impacted the operation of Alájobí in Yoruba land. Some of the excerpts are stated below to support this view:

*Due to civilization, the real culture of Alájobí seems to be fading out. But a greater percentage of Yoruba people still believe in Alájobí.*

*IDI/Male/Christianity/Ado- Odo 6/ 2017.*

*Due to the fact that our culture is no more respected, western civilization has influenced tremendously aspects of our culture and belief system, Alájobí included.*

*IDI/Male/Christian/Ketu Adie- Owe 2/2017.*

Critical examination of the above excerpts showed that westernization has really affected the belief system of Yoruba people on Alájobí and other aspects of Yoruba culture. Many do not believe again in Yoruba cultural values and belief systems. However, we have some communities in Yoruba society which still believe strongly in Alájobí or other cultural values and belief system, in spite of the influences of Western culture,

An excerpt below buttressed this view:

*In Ado-Odo Community, the influence of Western culture is not deeply rooted. As a result kinship bonding is still strong*

*IDI/Male/Christianity/Ado- Odo 1/2017*

Hence, there are still some communities in Yoruba land where Western culture has not taken its toll on traditional belief and values system. For instance, migration and urbanization formed part of western culture and this has made kinsmen/kinwomen isolated from themselves from traditional patterns of kinship behaviour (Oppong, n. d)

## **Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation**

### **Preamble**

This section deals with summary, conclusion and recommendation based on the findings in this study.

### **Summary of the findings**

The findings from the study really showed that Yoruba people still widely believe in Alájobí as spirit of kinship. The analyses showed that 79.4% of the respondents strongly believe in Alájobí. The excerpts from

the study also attested to the strong belief in Alájobí. The belief in blood bond which exists among the members of kinship group was cited as a prominent reason. In as much as the blood ties still exist, Alájobí still exists. Another reason why Alájobí is still believed strongly in Yoruba land is that of the constant references that are made to it in course of discussion, argument or praising. Constant references to it instill fear in people and strengthen their belief in Alájobí. Finally, the efficacy of Alájobí to reward good deeds and punish evil deeds is another reason fueling many Yoruba people's belief in this spirit of kinship. We also discovered in the study that 52.9% of the respondents affirmed that Alájobí is strongly efficient in rewarding good deeds. 35.3% also affirmed its efficiency in rewarding and blessing those members of kinship groups who do well to others. Many instances were cited in the excerpts to support this. Some of the interviewees were even of the opinion that such rewards or blessing would even be the portions of the children of such well-wishers. The rewards and blessings would follow such persons to their graves.

The findings also showed that Yoruba people still believe in efficacy of Alájobí to punish evil doers in the kinship system. 38.2% of the respondents said it is strongly efficient in punishing evil doers; while another 38.2% said it is efficient. We conclude, therefore, that Alájobí is very efficient in punishing evil doings in the family/ kinship group. Many excerpts were presented and analysed to support this view. Some of the punishments mentioned in the excerpts were: sudden or premature death, madness, poverty and strange sickness or disease. Interviewees' experiences really showed the efficacy of Alájobí as agent of punishment. The judgment from Alájobí would be determined by the deeds of the individuals in the kinship group. Hence, it is a very common saying in Yoruba land when a kinship member has done well to others to hear:

“Alájobí yoo gbe o”. Meaning that Alájobí (spirit of kinship) would reward/bless you. On the other hand, if it is an evil that such member has done to another kinship member, people would say “Alájobí yoo da fun o”. Meaning that Alájobí (spirit of kinship) would judge you (punish) according to the evil you have done.

Alájobí still forms part of the Yoruba kinship belief system. People still believe strongly in it and it is a belief system that should be encouraged from generation to generation. Although, western culture has affected the belief of some Yoruba people in Alájobí but a very large number of people still hold a very firm belief in this spirit of kinship especially in areas of reward and punishment as discovered in this study.

### **Conclusion**

We conclude, therefore, that from the findings in this study, the Alájobí belief system is still active and vibrant in Yoruba belief system. We also conclude that Yoruba people still have a very strong belief in its efficacy to reward and punish accordingly. It does not matter, the effects of western culture on this belief system. Alájobí is always there to reward people and punish people, depending on their deeds to their fellow kinship people.

### **Recommendation**

We recommend in this study that Yoruba people should not play down the efficacy of Alájobí to reward and to punish, as a result of cultural contacts with the western countries. Alájobí is still vibrant and efficient in rewarding and punishing people as it can be clearly understood in this study. Secondly, Alájobí operates as a pay back. It operates as an agent of nemesis and very “faithful” in its administration of justice. Hence, it should not be seen as a barbaric belief system. Thirdly, we recommend that Yoruba parents should be teaching their children, the Yoruba cultural values and belief systems. (Alájobí included). This would ensure the preservation and transmission of Yoruba culture from generation to generation. Finally, we recommend further studies on Alájobí and other cultural belief systems among Yoruba people and the documentation of such for academic and cultural preservation from generation to generation. We cannot afford to watch our culture and belief systems go into extinction.

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