

## EXCLUDED VOICES IN NIGERIA MEDICAL SPACE: CHIEF JACOB SABOYEGA ODULATE AND THE ALABUKUN MEDICINE

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### Abstract:

In the face of colonial European medical practitioners and the involvement of Christian missionaries in the development of Nigeria's medical space, the survival involvement of Nigerians in this field during this period can be considered 'ground-breaking.' The identity of Nigerians in the medical space can be attributed to the colonial perspective on Nigeria's indigenous medical practices, processes and drugs as backward, coupled with the limited medical literacy available to Nigerians during this period. However, during this critical time, Chief Jacob Saboyega Odulate – a reputable pharmacist, is one of the excluded voices who contributed to Nigeria's medical space through indigenous knowledge and Western methods to contribute to Nigeria's health and medical space. Chief Jacob Odulate established the Alabukun Pharmaceutical industry around 1918 to produce pharmaceutical products under the trademark of Alabunkun Mentholine (a soothing balm) and Alabukun A.P.C (now Alabunkun Powder), among others. Apart from the indigenous trademark, two important themes are important in the study of Chief Jacob Odulate and Alabukun Pharmaceutical in Nigeria's medical space. One, Alabukun pharmaceutical drugs have existed since 1918 till the contemporary period of over a century (105 years); second, Alabukun has received wide acceptance among Nigerians and beyond. The study historicises the contribution of Chief Jacob Odulate and the Alabukun pharmaceutical industry. The article relies on secondary data sources.

**Keywords:** Alabukun, Chief Saboyega Odulate, Medicine, Nigeria, Pharmaceutical Industry

## Introduction

Colonial Nigeria's medical and pharmaceutical space has always been contentious, especially from the Eurocentric conceptualisation of Nigeria's socio-economic past.<sup>1</sup> The underpinning of these Eurocentric perspectives has always emphasised the fact that Nigerian societies were primitive, backward, and not able to engineer any significant growth or contribute to mainstream civilisation. These positions placed pre-colonial Nigeria's existing socio-economic growth, knowledge and discoveries within the mainstream underdevelopment thesis. However, African scholars have continually, through knowledge decolonisation, discredited these perspectives to highlight that Nigeria, before the advent of British colonialism, was organised and developed, if not in the Western sense. Drawing from this decolonisation process, African scholars have continuously dug into the past (centuries before colonial rule) to elicit rich medical and pharmaceutical practices that served Nigerian societies before the advent of colonial rule, during colonialism and even after the independence. As Nigeria's pre-colonial medical and pharmaceutical history and identity cannot be underestimated, the impact of colonialism on the growth and development of Nigeria's medical space and pharmaceutical enterprise cannot be underestimated.

The advent of Christian missionaries, Western education and colonial government contributed immensely to Nigeria's growth and development of Western medical practices and pharmaceutical industry. Despite the disparities between West African traditional medicine and colonial medical practices and drugs, some early Nigerian doctors and pharmacists during the colonial period blended bits of knowledge from both fields to advance medical practices. These early Nigerian doctors include Akinsiku Leigh-Sodiye (1892), Obadiah Johnson (1884) and Dr.

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<sup>1</sup> For more see Schram Ralph, *A history of the Nigerian health services* (Ibadan University Press, 1971).; Adeloje Adelola, Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa. *Medical History*, 18, no. 3, (1974): 275–93.; Patton Adell, *Physicians, Colonial Racism, and Diaspora in West Africa* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996).; Hardiman David, 'Introduction,' in David Hardiman, ed., *Healing Bodies, Saving Souls: Medical Missions in Asia and Africa* (Amsterdam, New York: Rodopi BV, 2006).; Mackintosh Maureen, Banda Geoffery, Tibandebage Paula and Wamae Watu, *Making Medicines in Africa the Political Economy of Industrializing for Local Health*, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).; Benjamin Breen, Sub-Saharan African Medicines. in Crawford, M.J. and Gabriel, J.M. (eds) *Drugs on the Page: Pharmacopoeias and Healing Knowledge in the Early Modern Atlantic World*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).; Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).; Fagite Damilola Dorcas, Managing Smallpox Outbreak: Colonial Authorities and Medical Policies in Southwestern Nigeria, 1903–1960, *West Bohemian Historical Review*, XII, no. 2, (2022): 141-158.

Sapara O. Oguntola, whose works and contributions have received significant attention.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the leagues of these medical practitioners whose contributions to Nigeria's medical space remain unquantifiable is Chief Saboyega Odulate. Hence, the paper examines the socio-medical history through a biographical lens by interrogating the contribution of Chief Saboyega Odulate and the Alabukun Pharmaceutical Industry, established in 1918, to modern medical practices in Nigeria.

The article is divided into five sections apart from the introduction and conclusion. The next sub-topic provides a theoretical background on biographical and pedagogical discourse. This is followed by a background on medical practitioners in colonial Nigeria's medical space. The assessment of Chief Jacob Saboyega Odulate in the Nigeria medical space subsequently follows this. The next section examines the establishment of the Alabukun pharmaceutical industry in Nigeria. Lastly, a thorough assessment is made to evaluate the reflection of Alabukun, which has been sustained for over a century. The article adopts historical methodology and relies on secondary sources from textbooks, peer-reviewed journals, internet documents, and newspapers to gather adequate data on Chief Saboyega Odulate and the Alabukun medicine in Nigeria.

### **Medical Practitioners in Colonial Nigeria Medical Space Before 1930**

The need to understand the nature and training of medicine and pharmaceutical industries in colonial Nigeria stems from Chief Jacob Odulate being a product of the colonial medicine and pharmaceutical system. Medicine and pharmaceutical space in pre-colonial Nigeria before the advent of British colonialism was not void. As part of the Nigerian civilisation process, various ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria had an established system of producing medicine through herbs and medical practices coordinated by professionals.<sup>3</sup> Traditional societies reacted to the scourges of diseases in various ways, some scientific, in the Western sense of the term, and some symbolic and magical.<sup>4</sup> Traditional practitioners used clay, plants, animal parts, or supernatural means (or combinations) to heal their patients. The traditional healers largely kept Nigerian

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<sup>2</sup> Ischie Elizabeth, *A History of Nigeria*, (London: Longman Group Limited, 1983): 296-299.

<sup>3</sup> Clapperton, Hugh, *Journal of a second expedition into the Interior of Africa*, (London, 1829).; Barth, Henry, *Travels and Discoveries in North and Central Africa*, (London, 1965).

<sup>4</sup> Dumett Raymond, 'The Campaign against Malaria and the Expansion of Scientific Medical and Sanitary Services in British West Africa, 1898–1910. *African Historical Studies*, 1, (1968): 153–97.; Curtin Philip, 'The End of the 'White Man's Grave'? Nineteenth-Century Mortality in West Africa', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21, (1990): 63.

medical knowledge through oral means carefully transferred from one generation to another. Early European explorers such as Clapperton and Barth noted in their documentation of travel across Yoruba land the importance of pre-colonial medicine and herbalism in their survival.<sup>5</sup>

Although studies about the connection between medicine and empire, especially in the West African sub-region, remain limited, their importance in the British overseas empire cannot be underestimated. The first exposure to the importance of medicines (drugs) as a tool of colonial expansion was the use of Quinine. The first phase of medicine in the colonial enterprise was the emergence of Quinine, which stemmed from the effect of the Nigerian environment and high mortality among the earliest Europeans, which led to the description of West African regions as “white man’s grave” – an extremely harsh and diseased environment.<sup>6</sup> The high mortality prevented the earliest European explorers and missionaries from penetrating the hinterland of Nigeria’s pre-colonial societies until the discovery of Quinine.<sup>7</sup> Due to the high death rate among Europeans, the British Army was required to supervise the selection of students for training at London's Kings College and Livingston Medical College and to train West Africans as doctors for services through the Church Missionary Society. <sup>8</sup>Among the early products of this training were William Davies (1858), Africanus Horton (1858), Nathaniel King (1874), Obadiah Johnson (1884), John Randle (1888), Orisadipe Obasa (1891) and Akinsiku Leigh-Sodipe (1892).<sup>9</sup> Some these trained doctors, Nathaniel King, served as a missionary doctor in Lagos, where he played a leading role in improving sanitation in the early 1880s.<sup>10</sup> Obasa led the Governor’s smallpox vaccination scheme in Lagos and Ekiti, his district of origin.<sup>11</sup> Some wrote books on tropical

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<sup>5</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. 276.

<sup>6</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. p.276.

<sup>7</sup> Adetiba, Ademola, and Msindo, Enocent. ‘Chiefs and Rural Health Services in South-Western Nigeria, c. 1920—c.1950s, *Social History of Medicine*. 35, no.2, (2022).

<sup>8</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. Pp. 277-78.

<sup>9</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. p. 278.

<sup>10</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. Pp. 282-90.

<sup>11</sup> Adetiba, Ademola, and Msindo, Enocent. ‘Chiefs and Rural Health Services in South-Western Nigeria, c. 1920—c.1950s. 593.

medicine, African therapeutics and natural medicine that informed early thinking on indigenous health systems. Others established private medical practices and dispensaries in Lagos.<sup>12</sup>

Apart from the training of early medical doctors, another phase of medicine in colonial Nigeria was the spread in terms of use. The spread and use of colonial medicine and medical practices occurred through various Christian missionaries, apart from the bible and prayer system offered by various missionaries that penetrated Nigeria's hinterland health services to areas where the colonial government had no effective presence.<sup>13</sup> The health services were basic and administered through Europeans with rudimentary medical knowledge or West African-trained medical doctors working under missionaries' bodies, substantially trained at the Livingston Medical College in London, founded in 1896.<sup>14</sup> Alongside the prayer and bible, European medicine and medical practices were evangelisation tools, which Etherington described as "from prayers to pills."<sup>15</sup> The Christian missionaries developed a system of modern drug distribution that operated extremely efficiently. The system was characterised by a steady supply of drugs and reasonable charges to patients. As a result, there was a consistently high demand for these services.<sup>16</sup>

The introduction of Western pharmaceutical practices in colonial Nigeria can be traced to Richard Zacchaeus Bailey (1829–1917), a locally trained dispenser who opened a retail pharmacy in Balogun Street, Lagos, in 1887. This is another aspect of colonial Nigerian medical practice before the 1920s.<sup>17</sup> The first Western drugstore in Nigeria was Bailey's Pharmacy.<sup>18</sup> In colonial Nigeria, Bailey introduced the world to colonial pharmaceutical techniques. After Bailey's judgment, several things happened in Nigeria's pharmaceutical industry. The First Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance was passed in 1887 to manage drug supplies and govern the colonial

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<sup>12</sup> The David Livingstone Medical College in London', *Journal of the American Medical Association*, XXI, 1893, p.938.

<sup>13</sup> Etherington Norman, *Missions and Empire*, Oxford, (2005): 280. Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 161.

<sup>14</sup> Carlson Dennis G., "Drug Supply Systems in West Africa; a historical overview with particular reference to Nigeria". *Pharmacy in History*, 24, (1982): 75.

<sup>15</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*. (Pharma-Chemical Service, Lagos, 1982): 2.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: 80.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: iv.

<sup>18</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalization in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 162.

pharmaceutical business by granting licenses to those permitted to offer Western medicines.<sup>19</sup> People who had received local training as “dispensers” and held a certificate from the Pharmaceutical Society of Great Britain (PSGB) were eligible for licenses.<sup>20</sup>

Dispensers in Nigeria received informal apprenticeship training from doctors with Western training, just like medical doctors did through missionary companies.<sup>21</sup> Since there was no dispensing school at the time and no lectures were offered, students chose the doctor they wanted to work as an apprentice for. They went to their home or business every morning, sometimes even residing with the master for some period.<sup>22</sup> The training of the dispensers was significantly less than that of chemists and druggists educated in Britain. The authorities did, however, evaluate the level of training required for employment in governmental organisations in 1899. After completing the course, students were forced to work at government hospitals and pharmacies for five years while being funded. Under the supervision of medical officials, candidates completed a three-year apprenticeship during which they were obliged to understand the ingredients of the current combinations, extracts, decoctions, pills and tablets.<sup>23</sup> The first group of native dispensers finished training in 1902 under the new arrangements. Emmanuel Caulcrick, a Nigerian-born dispenser who finished his apprenticeship with a British doctor, was the first to be recognised by the colonialists on September 1, 1902, for work in government institutions.<sup>24</sup> Dispensers were frequently left in control of the hospital for extended periods while the medical officer went on tour in the towns and hamlets after receiving their certification. They frequently function as hospital administrators, laboratory technicians, or anaesthetists.<sup>25</sup> They were allowed to launch their businesses after serving the government for five years; Caulcrick did this by opening a Western pharmacy in Lagos. Additionally, a revised Poisons and Pharmacy Ordinance was approved in 1902 to tighten existing pharmacy practice regulations and restrict the sale and distribution of poisons and medications.<sup>26</sup> The Chief Medical Officer was given control, and more

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<sup>19</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*.

<sup>20</sup> Adenika, B. Fred, *Pharmacy in Nigeria: Historical Glimpses from 1887 to 1997*. (Panpharm, Lagos, 1998): 16.

<sup>21</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 163.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: 1-3.

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: 7.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 164.

<sup>25</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 164.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: 61.

details regarding dispensers' training were provided. Through the 1920s and 1930s, pharmaceutical regulations and pharmacist training continued to advance. The Poisons and Pharmacy Ordinance and the pharmacists' certification process were passed in 1927.<sup>27</sup> At Yaba Higher College, the School of Pharmacy was established in 1926. A Board of Medical Examiners was established by the Ordinance, and in 1930, it was given the duty of teaching and examining “dispensers, chemists and druggists, and assistant medical officers” who worked for the government.<sup>28</sup>

The colonial government's efforts to build medical and health infrastructure, educate colonial residents and hire medical specialists from the metropolises to provide medical and health services for European officials and administrators led to the expansion of medical and pharmaceutical businesses in colonial Nigeria. Nigeria began to produce pharmacists at a level equivalent to that of the British chemist and druggist diploma after the establishment of a second pharmaceutical school in Zaria in 1930. However, it was forced to close again in 1940 due to a shortage of trained teachers.<sup>29</sup> The training of chemists and druggists continued during the colonial period through formal processes or apprenticeships. Chief Jacob Soboyega Odulate was a product of the apprenticeship system under Dr. Oguntola Sapara, one of the leading medical practitioners during the colonial period.

### **Chief Jacob Saboyega Odulate: A Biographical Sketch**

The realm of societal inquiry, which involves social entities, including races, clans, tribes, nations and families, exhibits a distinct cohort of exceptional individuals sometimes denoted as ‘great men’ whose significant contributions to society are indelible. Chief Saboyega Odulate is a powerful role model for his pivotal role in shaping societal and human progress in the medical field. Chief Saboyega Odulate's identity is a testament to a multifaceted legacy marked by an unwavering entrepreneurial spirit and courage, fervent activism, robust camaraderie, steadfast discipline and commitment to upholding standards of excellence in society.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Andrew Egboh, *History of Pharmacy in Nigeria: A Guide and Survey of the Past and Present, 1887–1980*: 15.

<sup>28</sup> Dawn Commission, “Chief Jacob Sogboyega Odulate” August 12, 2015. Available at <https://dawncommission.org/chief-jacob-sogboyega-odulate/> Accessed September 9, 2023.; Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 1.

<sup>29</sup> *The Hope*. Jacob Odulate, the man who invented Alabukun powder. Available at <https://www.thehopenewspaper.com/jacob-odulate-the-man-who-invented-alabukun-powder/>. May 24, 2020.

<sup>30</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*.

Chief Saboyega Odulate, alias “the blessed Jacob” or Alabukun, was born in 1884 in Ikorodu, Lagos, to the polygamous family of Pa Odulate. His ancestors were from the historical communities of Imota, Ikorodu and Sagamu.<sup>31</sup> Chief Saboyega’s mother, Magberele, traced her ancestry back to Chief Aina Odunkumade, the first Mosene Chief (Elewu Ala) of Ikorodu, who descended from the Senlu branch of the Renodu Royal Family in the nearby town of Imota.<sup>32</sup> Chief Aina Odunkumade held the chieftaincy title ‘*Mosene*,’ which denoted a wealthy figure dedicated to advancing community service, fostering development and safeguarding individual rights and liberties through the emancipation of slaves from their masters. His ancestors and heritage shaped Chief Saboyega Odulate’s upbringing in Ikorodu.<sup>33</sup>

Jacob Odulate grew up in a communal and polygamous family, where he learned valuable life lessons from siblings known for their hard work and values. Despite leaving formal education at twelve, he embarked on a self-education journey and eventually became an apprentice to Dr Oguntola Odunbaku Sapara (popularly known as Dr Sapara). In Yoruba cultural space, a popular saying goes, “*Okunrin ti ko bati ni iyawo, ko ti pe lounging*,” meaning an unmarried man is considered incomplete. Jacob Odulate, guided by his family and mentor, Dr. Sapara, in 1918, entered a new phase of his life by marrying Victoria Aina. His marital journal also coincided with his independence from Dr. Sapara and his journey into a pharmaceutical career.<sup>34</sup>

Jacob Odulate lived an impactful life involving community, national service and medical fields. His dedication resulted in the Alabukun brand’s long-term success, making it an important part of Nigeria’s medical history. Jacob Odulate was a prolific writer and activist in his community and national service. Jacob Odulate published pamphlets that educate individuals about the nature, uses and importance of drugs, which serve to enlighten the public about medications for various ailments. He also produced the Alabukun Almanac annually. The Almanac is a witness to the articulate view of Jacob Odulate’s political and activist views on life and the country. Some of his Almanac titled “United We Stand, Divide We Fall, and Africa Shall Rise Again are fundamental to contemporary African affairs.” He also published the Golden Precepts, which were writing of

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<sup>31</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of ‘Folake Solake’*: 2.

<sup>32</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of ‘Folake Solake’*: 4.

<sup>33</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of ‘Folake Solake’*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*. 163.



his literary and philosophical understandings and intellectual disposition of his literary talents. Some of the Golden Precepts include 'Be Constructive' 1923, 'Help Yourself O African' 1934, 'Selfless Service' 1938, 'The Post and Telegraph Office, Nigeria, the Modern Canaan, Centenary Poem of Blessed Jacob' 1930, and 'Put the Two Together' 1935.<sup>35</sup> His white horse charger characterised Jacob Odulate's dynamic life, 'Hope,' he was recognised through chieftaincy titles such as Odogunloye of Ikorodu and Lisa of Imota. His contributions to Nigeria's medical development continue to carry on his legacy. He died in 1962, aged 78, leaving an indelible mark on Nigerian medical history. Figure 1.1 below shows the owner of Alabukun medicine in Nigeria.

### **Chief Jacob Odulate and the Establishment of the Alabukun Pharmaceutical Industry**

Jacob Odulate was an inventor, essayist, pharmacist and business owner. His dedication resulted in the long-term success of the Alabukun brand, making it an important part of Nigerian medical history. Jacob Odulate's journey into the pharmaceutical profession started through his apprenticeship under Dr. Oguntola Sapara. In the colonial years, the medical and pharmaceutical profession could be learned through apprenticeship under the direct guidance of medical officers through which various phases involving the composition of mixtures, extracts, decoctions, pills, and tablets in use were learned and mastered.<sup>36</sup> As elicited by one of Jacob's Odulate daughters – Chief Folake Solanke, in her autobiography, claimed, "Papa (Jacob Odulate) destiny led him to Baba Sapara (Dr. Oguntola Sapara)," where he served as a medical assistant, acquired basic knowledge of pharmaceutical product and medical care of patients.

It is essential to remember that Dr Oguntola Sapara was one of the colourful pioneers of modern medicine from Nigeria.<sup>37</sup> Before departing for England in 1888 to enrol in St. Thomas's Hospital Medical School in London, Dr. Sapara worked as an unpaid assistant dispenser under Dr. J. W. Rowland at Colonial Hospital in Lagos.<sup>38</sup> After graduating with honours from midwifery, he left for Scotland in 1895. He received the Licentiate Fellowship of Physician and Surgeons (LFPS) of Glasgow, the Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians (LRCP) and the Licentiate of the

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<sup>35</sup> Obadare, Temitope O., and Adeyemi T. Adeyemo. "Lest we forget: Odunbaku Oguntona Sapara William (1895–1935) beyond the demystification of deity." *FEMS Microbiology Letters* 370 (2023): fnad106.

<sup>36</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*, 288.

<sup>37</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*, 288.

<sup>38</sup> Adeloye Adelola, *Some Early Nigerian Doctors and their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa*. 288-289.

Royal College of Surgeons (LRCS) of Edinburgh. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Institute of Health.<sup>39</sup> Sapara promptly returned to Lagos, where he was appointed an Assistant Colonial Surgeon in the medical department of the Lagos colony in January 1896. From that month until his retirement in January 1928, he worked without interruption at numerous stations. In all medical stations in Southern Nigeria, Dr. Oguntola Sapara made significant contributions to social and preventive medicine as well as the scientific study of herbal medicine. Certain individuals among his relatives hold his particular fascination with West African traditional medicine in the highest regard.<sup>40</sup> Dr. Sapara's vibrant knowledge in the medical field made many people search and receive train from him.

After Jacob Odulate's apprenticeship under Dr. Sapara, he established his pharmaceutical industry known as the Alabukun Patent Store in 1918. The alias Alabukun and Alabukun industry today results from the natural prowess, intellectual agility, creativity and perseverance in his will and process of inventing efficacious drugs, which were manufactured according to his entrepreneurial knowledge and skills gained from Dr. Sapara.<sup>42</sup> Jacob Odulate established the Alabukun Patent Medicine Supply Stores near Sapon Market, where he distributed his medicinal drugs and imported medications. Out of expansiveness, the pharmaceutical industry moved to a new edifice structure at Kemta Abeokuta (Opposite Abeokuta Tennis Club), near Sapon Market and the General Post Office, Abeokuta.<sup>43</sup> The building contained a one-story building and a chalet, a courtyard, stores and other facilities that housed and facilitated the medical production process, becoming the pharmaceutical industry's headquarters.<sup>44</sup>

Jacob Odulate pharmaceutical products include Alabukun Mentholine (a soothing Balm), Alabukun A.P.C (now Alabukun Powder), which is a medicinal force to be reckoned with today, the Elixir (Precursor for modern-day Viagra), Ose Abiwere (Medication for easy delivery used by pregnant women) Ogun Apooro (Medicinal neutraliser of poison), Ogun Akokoro (Medication for Dental Care).<sup>45</sup> His pharmaceutical medicine is a product of research into the use of local herbs

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<sup>39</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*, 8.

<sup>40</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*, 8-9.

<sup>42</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*, 9.

<sup>43</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*, 9.

<sup>44</sup> Anderson Stuart, *Pharmacy and Professionalisation in British Empire, 1780-1970*.

<sup>45</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 8.

and imported proprietary drugs from the English firm Ayrton Saunders & Co. of Liverpool, United Kingdom. This is evident in his confidence in putting a picture stamp on his product, which is still found on Alabukun powder today. This path led him to found his own pharmaceutical company, Alabukun, which reflected his belief in hard work's importance. His daring spirit and tenacity paved the way for him to contribute to Nigeria's pharmaceutical landscape significantly.

Alabukun products are known for their efficacy and potency. By the 1920s, drugs had penetrated the mainstream pharmaceutical service of the colonial period. During the colonial period, Alabukun products did not receive significant recognition given Odulate's use of herbal and traditional processes, which denied it such recognition. During the colonial period, in the records of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN), it was the Western pharmaceutical and dispensers stores such as the Nigerian Medicine Stores, Alban Pharmacy, Boots Pure Drugs, Kingsway Chemists, Paul & Paul Chemists, Commercial Medicine Stores, West African Drug Company etc. that were opened in the 1920s that formed the Association of Dispensers which was registered in 1927 under Section 22 of the Company Ordinance of 1922 that transformed to the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria (PSN) of today.<sup>46</sup> The Alabunkun industry was not listed and recognised despite the pioneering efforts of Jacob Odulate. The exclusion of Alabukun was deliberate because the drug was not anchored on the Western Pharmaceutical pattern when it started in 1918.

Despite the lack of official recognition from the colonial government, the drugs managed to infiltrate the mainstream pharmaceutical landscape during the colonial administration, and the drug became the most prescribed medication in local clinics in Ijebu, Abeokuta, Ikorodu and Lagos. It was widely used throughout the South Western geopolitical zone. Of all his products, Alabunkun Mentholine, Alabunkun Powder and the Alabunkun Elixir were the most popular.<sup>47</sup> Jacob Odulate's stamp of his photograph was applied to all his products as a trademark. The place of trademarks in service delivery during the colonial period cannot be over-emphasised. Trademarks are used to assure consumers that the businesses are responsible for any products or services bearing their trademark; they tend to take more pride in products. Trademarked companies

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<sup>46</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 8.

<sup>47</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 89.

often work harder to provide quality services and products to maintain a good reputation. The implication of putting his photo stamp on his products was that he was ready to take responsibility for the outcome of his drugs.

Jacob Odulate demonstrated commendable entrepreneurship ingenuity and ingenuity in earning funds and marketing his medicinal products. On the ground floor of his two-story building was a shop with a shop manager, Mr. Russel, where daily product sales are made, registered and closed after each day's sales. Jacob Odulate also operated a daily clinic where minor injuries and wounds were treated.<sup>48</sup> His adventurous spirit manifested in his marketing strategies as he travelled through the Nigerian railway to market his product in the north and east. As a medical practitioner, Jacob Odulate ran a daily clinic on the ground floor of his building complex where he attended to minor injuries and wounds, which he would clean with a kind of gentian violet disinfectant mixed with water, apply some medicated powder, lint, cotton wool and white bandage.<sup>49</sup> Although Jacob was not professionally trained and certified, Jacob Odulate exhibited high professionalism in his medical care. His clinic was well organised, and records of patients were well kept. Chief Folake Solanke described Jacob Odulate thus:

“Papa wore a white overall when attending to his patients in the clinic. The patients purchased cards on which their attendance was recorded. They would attend the clinic each morning to dress their wounds until completely healed. The cost of treatment was affordable because Papa regarded it as a service to the community, and many benefitted tremendously from the medical treatment received at the clinic. The treatment room was kept clinically clean to ensure high protection against infection”.<sup>50</sup>

The dedication of Papa Jacob Odulate was further described in an autobiography titled “In His Hands- The Autobiography of a Nigeria Village Boy.”<sup>51</sup> The Alabukun Industry and the Blessed Jacob were described thus:

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<sup>48</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 89.

<sup>49</sup> Afonja Biyi, *In His Hands- The Autobiography of a Nigeria Village Boy* (Statco Publishers, 2005).

<sup>50</sup> Afonja Biyi, *In His Hands- The Autobiography of a Nigeria Village Boy*.

<sup>51</sup> Edward-Ekpu Uwagbale, “The Untold 100-year old story of Nigeria’s first homegrown modern drug”. Quartz. December 16, 2018. Available at: <https://qz.com/africa/1461436/alabukuns-untold-story-of-a-successful-nigerian-business>. Accessed on September 9, 2023.

One big achievement of this maiden visit to Abeokuta was my taking back with me to the village some medicines that I purchased from our headmaster at the famous Alabukun Patent Medicine Stores, which was owned by Papa Odulate alias Alabukun otherwise known as Blessed Jacob. Any medicine not available at this store was available anywhere in Abeokuta. The store was housed in Papa Odulate's two-story building; next was his three-office story building. This was the tallest building ever seen and probably one of the tallest, if not the tallest, building in Abeokuta in 1948. The building stands today. Quite apart from attending to my headmaster's errands, I was curious to know the store of the Blessed Jacob for a rather unfortunate and sad reason. Papa Odulate lost his first son (Dawodu), a British-trained doctor, Dr. Albert Olukoya, in a ghastly motor accident on the same route I travelled to Abeokuta. The painful news of that most tragic accident reverberated throughout Egba land, if not throughout Nigeria. A young village schoolboy aspiring to be somebody could not but want to get as close as possible to a great family. Visiting Alabukun Patent Medicine Stores and meeting the Blessed Jacob behind the counter made a lasting impression on me.<sup>52</sup>

### **More Than a Century: The Resilience of Alabukun Medicine**

The legacy of Alabukun Medicine has endured and thrived for over a century, shaping the course of generations with its rich history and remarkable contributions. Jacob Odulate was sitting at his laboratory desk in 1918, surrounded by countless hours of research. During this time, he successfully developed a drug known as Alabukun APC. Jacob Odulate had no idea that his accomplishment would continue dominating Nigeria's medical space for over a century. Alabukun APC represents the power of indigenous knowledge and scientific exploration. Jacob Odulate's dedication to research and ability to synthesise a potent formula demonstrated his ingenuity but also the potential of local expertise in addressing medical and health challenges in Nigeria. This reflects the broader theme of self-sufficiency and the use of indigenous resources to improve healthcare systems. Alabukun Medicine's influence extends beyond its medicinal properties. The name "Alabukun" has historical and cultural significance, echoing the Nigerian people's

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<sup>52</sup> *TabletWise* "Alabukun Powder". Available at <https://www.tabletwise.net/nigeria/al-abukun-powder>. Accessed on September 12, 2023.

experiences and identity. Alabukun APC has become a symbol of resilience and heritage due to its connection to Yoruba cultural roots.

Jacob Odulate's formula was an ingenious combination of indigenous and foreign medicines that produced results that exceeded his initial expectations. A single packet of Alabukun APC contains "760 mg of acetylsalicylic acid and 60 mg of caffeine, for 820 mg".<sup>53</sup> This potent medicine is used to treat various medical conditions, including migraines, toothaches, and sore throats, as well as to prevent blood clots and manage neuralgias, myocardial infarctions, transluminal angioplasty, and ischemic attacks.<sup>54</sup> However, because of possible side effects, Alabukun APC is only available by prescription. Alabukun, like any medication, has side effects such as fluid retention-induced swelling, asthma, vomiting, nausea and vertigo. Surprisingly, Alabukun Powder significantly impacted the medical market since its introduction in 1918.

Despite the unfavourable colonial backdrop, the popularity of Alabukun Powder grew in Nigeria and beyond its borders. The product was in high demand in neighbouring countries such as Benin Republic, Togo, Cameroon, and Ghana.<sup>55</sup> Alabukun Powder is still exported to distant locations such as the United States, Brazil, Jamaica, Cuba and several European countries.<sup>56</sup> Chief Jacob Odulate's company, which produces Alabukun Powder, is still based in Sapon, Abeokuta, Ogun State. This company has shown remarkable resilience despite numerous challenges and adversities.<sup>57</sup>

Alabukun APC has become an easily accessible over-the-counter medication over the years. Its widespread use emphasises its importance in alleviating common ailments and discomforts, thereby contributing to the general well-being of the population. The affordability and familiarity of Alabukun APC have made it a household staple, reinforcing its role in shaping

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<sup>53</sup> Solomon Ojigbo 'Chief Jacob Odulate; Alchemist of the Famous Ababukun Powder November 6, 2018. Available at: <https://pharmanewsonline.com/chief-jacob-doulate-chemist-of-the-famous-alabukun-powder/>. Accessed on September 12, 2023.

<sup>54</sup> Ondo Connects New Era. "Untold Story of the Legendary Alabukun Powder And Its Maker." Available at: <http://www.ekimogundescendant.org/untold-story-of-the-legendary-alabukun-powder-and-its-maker-2/>. Accessed September 11, 2023.

<sup>55</sup> *Intelligence Polls*, 'Jacob Shogboyega Odulate and Alabukun Powder'. May 31, 2019. Available at: [https://web.facebook.com/177154696503815/photos/jacob-shogboyega-odulate-was-born-in-1884-to-the-polygamous-family-of-pa-odulate/299037617648855/?\\_rdc=1&\\_rdr](https://web.facebook.com/177154696503815/photos/jacob-shogboyega-odulate-was-born-in-1884-to-the-polygamous-family-of-pa-odulate/299037617648855/?_rdc=1&_rdr). Accessed on September 10, 2023.

<sup>56</sup> *The Hope*. Jacob Odulate, the man who invented Alabukun powder.

<sup>57</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'.*: 27.

healthcare practices in Nigeria.<sup>58</sup> Also, Alabukun medicine reflects the evolution of pharmaceutical regulation and healthcare practices. Its longevity has sparked debate about the appropriate balance of traditional remedies and modern medical advancements. As Nigeria's healthcare system evolves, the presence of Alabukun APC encourages discussions about integration, standardisation, and the preservation of valuable traditional knowledge.

The remarkable ingenuity and genuine commitment infused into Alabukun's creation can be attributed to its enduring resilience over the past century. The inventor, Jacob Odulate, was motivated by an exceptional desire to improve society's well-being rather than financial gain. Including his image as a seal on all of his medicinal products was a compelling testament to his sincerity. These moves sparked interest in the late 1918 Abeokuta community, prompting many to speculate on the significance of his portrait on the medication labels. In response to widespread interest, Jacob Odulate distributed a slew of pamphlets detailing the efficacy and potency of his remedies. Customers' trust and loyalty were strengthened as a result of this clever strategy. Unlike many modern brands, Alabukun took a different approach in its early years and invested significant resources and time in establishing brand loyalty through extensive advertising, promotions, marketing and sales efforts. Aggressive advertisement was not begun until the 1980s, coinciding with the emergence of the Structural Adjustment Programme that disrupted socio-economic fabrics. As a result, the brand's identity became inextricably linked to its founder's genuine intention and dedication to improving society's health.<sup>59</sup>

Alabukun's limited advertisement presence before the 1970s can be attributed to its ingredients, which made extensive commercials difficult to promote.<sup>60</sup> Because of its pharmaceutical nature, Alabukun's composition would have made it unsuitable for widespread advertisement. Also, because of the presence of certain ingredients, pharmacists may have advocated against its use, potentially jeopardising the product's market viability. Jacob Odulate's

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<sup>58</sup> *The Hope*. Jacob Odulate, the man who invented Alabukun powder.

<sup>59</sup> Edward-Ekpu Uwagbale, "The Nigerian Pharmacist Who Invented Alabukun Drug over 100 Years Ago". December 31, 2021. Available at: <https://www.studentvillage.com.ng/forums/topic/the-nigerian-pharmacist-who-invented-alabukun-drug-over-100-years-ago/> Accessed on September 9, 2023.

<sup>60</sup> Ayomide Tayo, "The story of the magic powder and the man who invented it" March 30, 2017. Available at: <https://www.pulse.ng/gist/alabukun-the-story-of-the-magic-powder-and-the-man-who-invented-it/k9z8lzt> Accessed on September 9, 2023.

distinct portrait, a trademark of his identity, distinguishes his product from his competitors. In a market that has become increasingly crowded over the years, the importance of this distinguishing feature and the resulting goodwill have proven invaluable assets. These factors have significantly strengthened the Alabukun brand's resilience.

In evaluating the drug's resilience for over a century, the effectiveness and strength of Alabukun are critical considerations. It's no longer a surprise that Alabukun Powder works inexorably fast. This medical breakthrough results from years of dedicated research and cutting-edge practices that combine indigenous and foreign medical approaches. Alabukun Powder treats many medical conditions, including migraines, toothaches, sore throats, blood clot prevention, neuralgias, myocardial infarctions, transluminal angioplasty, and ischemic attacks.<sup>61</sup> Its versatility makes it an all-encompassing solution, providing immediate relief for these medical issues, and its effectiveness and potency have remained consistent over time. Analysing the pharmacodynamics of Alabukun Powder reveals that its mechanism involves inhibiting platelet aggregation production and adenosine inhibition within the body. This action effectively reduces pain and improves respiration by stimulating the brain and the heart.<sup>62</sup>

Chief Jacob Odulate's meticulous record-keeping and comprehensive documentation of the drug's properties and ingredients significantly contributed to its long-term success. He was known as "Blessed Jacob" because he had a visionary outlook that extended beyond the present moment, allowing him to plan for the future proactively. Originally, he intended for his eldest son, a trained medical doctor, to carry on his legacy. However, fate intervened, taking his son too soon. Faced with this unexpected loss, Chief Odulate took a new approach, focusing on meticulous documentation of each component and chemical attribute of his medicines. This shift resulted from his realisation that preserving knowledge in writing could provide continuity. When he died, the executors of his will—Stella Olubukunola Odesanya, Jacobson Oladele Odulate, Olufolake Solanke, and Wilberforce Olusegun Odulate—officially authorised Segun Odulate to take over the Alabukun Family enterprise through written consent. This task was to be completed on behalf of

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<sup>61</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*: 26.

<sup>62</sup> Onyinyechi Iheanacho, "Alabukun powder and the untold story behind its success". June 7, 2020. Available at: <https://neptuneprime.com.ng/2020/06/alabukun-powder-and-the-untold-story-behind-its-success/> Accessed on September 9, 2023.



the twelve designated beneficiaries, with a predetermined monetary allocation.<sup>63</sup> Regarding management, Segun Odulate relied heavily on the extensive records his father had meticulously left behind. This enabled him to follow in his father's footsteps. The detailed records aided Segun's ability to maintain all aspects of the drugs.<sup>64</sup>

Furthermore, Segun Odulate's strategic re-organisation is largely responsible for the Alabukun family business's survival. Segun expertly navigated changing times as he assumed leadership, recognising the weighty responsibility of upholding his father's legacy. His ascension coincided with Nigeria's newfound independence, a period marked by increased medical centres and pharmaceutical industries, which led to increased competition. Segun undertook a transformative endeavour between 1972 and 1973 by redesigning the packaging and marketing of Alabukun powder. In this new environment, he launched an assertive and revolutionary campaign in Nigeria, with slogans like "Gbera nle ko dide" (Get Up and Go). This campaign's resounding success was palpable. Segun's leadership of the Alabukun family business was a ground-breaking move in Nigeria. The company was the first indigenous entity to cover entire walls of buildings and billboards with many advertisement posters. Under Segun Odulate's leadership, this daring and innovative approach allowed the company to survive and thrive in the face of new challenges and competitors.<sup>65</sup> Segun Odulate's public relations efforts were comprehensive and all-encompassing, encompassing various strategies, including promotional radio jingles.

Following Jacob Odulate's death, the Alabukun family's unity became the cornerstone of the company's survival and resilience. This unity was critical in shaping the strategic direction of the family and the business, a common thread in family businesses. The Alabukun family held two fundamental beliefs that influenced their strategic approach significantly. For starters, they regarded the company as a sacred institution that required unwavering protection. This conviction emphasised their determination to protect the company at all costs. Furthermore, the family's second core belief was to maintain the unity established by their late father. Despite the common challenges that threaten family business cohesion, the Alabukun family took a novel approach to

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<sup>63</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*.

<sup>64</sup> Ischie Elizabeth, *A History of Nigeria*.: 296.

<sup>65</sup> Folake Solake, *Reaching for the Stars: the autobiography of 'Folake Solake'*.

dealing with these issues, ultimately strengthening their commitment to continuity. The Alabukun family's pivotal insight was their shift in perspective. Rather than view the business as the sole glue that held the family together, they recognised the family as the true binder. This transformative perspective resulted in the creation of a vision that encouraged the family to engage in their collective well-being and take pride in their identity in various innovative ways. Segun Odulate's death in 2005 provided a poignant example of this approach.

The smooth transition of company management to Jacob Odulate's son, Olukoyejo Odulate, demonstrated the family's commitment to maintaining their unity as the cornerstone. This move demonstrated that their priority was to maintain familial cohesion, with the business serving as a vehicle to support this unity. It was a wise strategic decision. The Alabukun family's success story shows how prioritised family unity over business interests can result in resilience and continuity that sustained the Alabukun pharmaceutical business for over a century. Their journey exemplifies the power of reshaping traditional notions to forge a more solid, long-term path forward.

### **Conclusion**

Nigeria's medical history does not exist in a vacuum before the arrival of the British colonialists. The peoples of Nigeria, under different ethnic groups, had a developed medical space that was not considered scientific in the Western and colonial sense. Pre-colonial Nigeria pharmacopoeia was an amalgam of herbs, amulets and other ingredients. In the early colonisation phase, the Nigerian pharmacopoeia was shaped by the activities of Christian missionaries and the British colonialists through the civilising mission objectives and introduction of Western education. Given the importance of medicine and health in British colonial enterprise, the Christian missionaries and colonialists introduced Western medicine. Also, they began to train natives to change the landscape of pre-colonial medicine, which was considered primitive. One of the major outcomes of this development was the emergence of Western-trained medical doctors from metropolitan institutions. In addition to expanding the colonial medical pharmacopoeia, the early trained doctors trained more natives in medical practices through apprenticeship. Chief Jacob Odulate was a Nigerian native trained through apprenticeship under Dr. Oguntola Sapara. However, Chief Jacob Odulate represents one of the excluded voices in Nigeria's medical history in the documentation of individuals with landmark contributions to Nigeria's medical space. Chief

Jacob pioneered the Alabukun medicine in 1918. Although a product of apprenticeship, Chief Jacob was able to mix traditional and Western approaches to producing a medicine that has lasted over a century. The enduring impact of the Alabukun brand is now interwoven into the fabric of modern Nigerian medical history. The Alabukun Powder is displayed and sold in thousands of pharmacies, markets and roadside stalls throughout Nigeria.

## Appendix I

Chief Saboyega Odulate



## Appendix II

The old pictures of Alabukun-Jacob Products

