



**Knowledge,
Belief, and
Witchcraft**

*Analytic Experiments in
African Philosophy*

**Barry Hallen
and J. Olubi Sodipo**

*With a New Foreword by W. V. O. Quine
and a New Afterword by Barry Hallen*

Mestizo Spaces
Espaces Mélangés

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Foreword

I first met Dr Barry Hallen in 1974, when I was a consultant at the University of Ibadan in Nigeria, advising on the setting up of a Department of Philosophy. I had approached this assignment with a number of unresolved questions in mind. I had no doubt that any university should have a Department of Philosophy, but what kind of courses should it offer? I had already acted for three years as external examiner in philosophy in the University of Ife, where J.O. Sodipo was head of the department. I had become aware of the intellectual sterility that can set in when students reproduce by rote learning the views of Western philosophers without seeing the problems behind them, and, worse still, without appreciating that these might also be their own problems. Professor Sodipo was well aware of this, and he was involved in starting and editing the journal *Second Order*, which was designed to provide a forum for serious discussion of philosophy in an African context. He had already worked hard and successfully to build up a good department of philosophy at Ife, and to encourage an analytic and critical approach to the discipline.

I felt that there was a need for philosophers, whether African or expatriate, who were both competent in Western philosophy and had entered deeply into a traditional African belief system, who could see how similar problems might arise in the different contexts. These might then be able to help students from a traditional background to appreciate what the problems were, to articulate their own approach, and to compare it with the approaches of Western philosophers. I thought that the kinds of problems which might be treated in this way would be likely to be in ethics, political philosophy, and the philosophical psychology of the human person—I don't think I had sufficiently seen that they might be epistemological problems.

The philosopher I found in Nigeria who saw things in a similar way was Barry Hallen, then at the University of Lagos. He was realistically aware of how much work would need to be done. One must live for a considerable time in a local community, and get the confidence of the custodians of the traditional beliefs. In the case of the Yoruba, these were the *babaláwo* ('fathers of secrets') and the *oniṣṣṣin* ('masters of medicine'). He was able to move to the University of Ife, and undertake just such a long term project in Ekiti with Professor Sodipo's participation, encouragement and support.

Since then I have had continued contacts with Barry Hallen, both on subsequent visits to Nigeria and on his visits to England, and I have