

# YORÚBÁ IDENTITY and POWER POLITICS



Edited by  
Toyin Falola and Ann Genova

# **YORÙBÁ IDENTITY AND POWER POLITICS**



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*Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*  
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*Toyin Falola and Ann Genova*



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# IN MEMORIAM

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To Gbenga Adeboye (alias Funwontan),  
cultural creator



# CONTENTS

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List of Illustrations	ix
Introduction	1
<i>Toyin Falola and Ann Genova</i>	

## Part I: Writing Yorùbá

<b>1</b>	The Yorùbá Nation	29
	<i>Toyin Falola</i>	
<b>2</b>	Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress	49
	<i>Tunde M. Akinwumi</i>	
<b>3</b>	Diaries as Cultural and Intellectual Histories	74
	<i>Olufunke A. Adeboye</i>	
<b>4</b>	Historiography of Western Yorùbá Borderlands	96
	<i>R. T. Akinyele</i>	
<b>5</b>	The History of the Okun Yorùbá: Research Directions	111
	<i>Ann O'Hear</i>	
<b>6</b>	Ìlá Kingdom Revisited: Recent Archaeological Research at Ìlá-Yàrà	127
	<i>Aribidesi Usman</i>	
<b>7</b>	Early Ìjẹ̀bù History: An Analysis on Demographic Evolution and State Formation	145
	<i>Tunde Oduwoji</i>	

## Part II: Chiefs and Tradition

<b>8</b>	Power, Status, and Influence of Yorùbá Chiefs in Historical Perspective	161
	<i>Toyin Falola</i>	
<b>9</b>	Chieftaincy Structures, Communal Identity, and Decolonization in Yorùbáland	177
	<i>Olufemi Vaughan</i>	



<b>10</b>	Odogbolu Chieftaincy Dispute in Historical Perspective <i>Abolade Adeniji</i>	192
<b>11</b>	Yorùbá Nationalism and the Reshaping of Qbaship <i>Jean-Luc Martineau</i>	205

### **Part III: Identity and Modern Politics**

<b>12</b>	Approaching the Study of the Yorùbá Diaspora in Northern Nigeria <i>Rasheed Olaniji</i>	231
<b>13</b>	Yorùbá-Nigerians in Toronto: Transnational Practices and Experiences <i>Charles Temitope Adeyanju</i>	251
<b>14</b>	Yorùbá Factor in Nigerian Politics <i>Julius O. Adekunle</i>	273
<b>15</b>	Politics, Ethnicity, and the Struggle for Autonomy and Democracy <i>Funso Afolayan</i>	297
<b>16</b>	Petroleum and Ethno-Politics <i>Ann Genova</i>	316
<b>17</b>	Chief M. K. O. Abiola's Presidential Ambitions and Yorùbá Democratic Rights <i>Qlayiwola Abegunrin</i>	334
	Notes on the Contributors	353
	Index	357

# ILLUSTRATIONS

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## Figures

2.1	Yorùbá women's dress before the twelfth century	51
2.2	Yorùbá women's dress after the twelfth century	52
2.3	Yorùbá women's dress I	53
2.4	Yorùbá women's dress II	54
2.5	Select styles from the twentieth century	55
2.6	Select Arab-style trousers	56
2.7	Select Arab-style robes	59
2.8	Arab-Yorùbá dress I	60
2.9	Arab-Yorùbá dress II	61
2.10	Arab-Yorùbá dress III	62
2.11	Sapara	63
2.12	Ọ̀bàtálá's dress	65
2.13	Dress of Ọ̀bàtálá's votaries	67
2.14	Ọ̀ṣun's dress	69
6.4	Bedrock hollows	135
6.5	Decorated pottery pieces from Ìlá-Yàrà	137
7.1	Yorùbá dialect groups	147
12.1	Women herbalists at Yankura market, Kano	233
12.2	Akoko Descendants Union	239
12.3	Yorùbá community, Kano	245
12.4	Turban ceremony, Kano	246
12.5	Yorùbá community, Gumel	247

## Tables and Charts

10.1	Odogbolu homesteads	194
10.2	Salaries of the Native Administration	199
17.1	Results of June 12, 1993, presidential election	338

## **Maps**

6.1	Yorùbá sub-groups map	128
6.2	Ìgbómìnà groups and archaeological site map	129
6.3	Ìlá-Yàrà site map	133
16.1	Map of Ondó State	320

# INTRODUCTION

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Toyin Falola and Ann Genova

In 1897, Samuel Johnson wrote in the preface to his pioneer work, *The History of the Yorubas*, a significant statement:

Educated natives of Yorùbá are well acquainted with the history of England and with that of Rome and Greece, but of the history of their own country they know nothing whatever! This reproach it is one of the author's objects to remove.<sup>1</sup>

This declaration, made more than a century ago, touches on the very issue that has not only captured the feelings of African scholars, but has also become a quasi-anthem for professional historians among the educated Yorùbá elite in Nigeria. Reconstructing the history of the Yorùbá, however, has posed in many ways a rewarding but challenging endeavor. Faced with racial discrimination and false notions about what constitutes legitimate history, Yorùbá scholars have charged forward to reclaim their academic space. The result is an impressive array of written and oral traditions, telling narratives, and rich ethnographies that offer the world a better understanding of Yorùbá history, politics, and culture. But the task of reconstructing the history of the Yorùbá does not lie solely on the shoulders of those residing within the confines of the geographic space recognized as Yorùbáland. Since the early twentieth century, Yorùbá studies have gained international attention because of the ethnic group's rich culture, political strength, and riveting history.

The Yorùbá since time immemorial have occupied a region located in present-day southwestern Nigeria commonly referred to as *Yorùbáland*. In contemporary terms, Yorùbáland stretches across the states of Lagos, Ògún, Òyó, Oṣun, Ondó, Ekiti, and Kwara of Nigeria, and parts of the French-speaking Republics of Benin and Togo. To some, *Yorùbá* was derived from an ancient Hausa word, *Yarriba*, to indicate people from Òyó with whom they commercially and socially interacted.<sup>2</sup> Although we study the Yorùbá as a collective identity, Saburi Oladeni Biobaku reminds us that the Yorùbá may not have considered themselves a “single political entity” before the nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Most scholars accept that the Yorùbá are bound by a common language and origin myth regardless of whether the early Yorùbá described themselves in this manner or not.

According to Yorùbá mythology, six *òrìṣà* (gods) populated the world before humans. As the world expanded, the number of gods also increased. Over time,

an elaborate pantheon evolved, organized into a hierarchy with Ọ̀bàtálá as the number one god. Although there are variations on the story, it is generally believed that Olódùmar (God) chose Ọ̀bàtálá to carry out his demand to create Earth, which only consisted of water and void. God called on the òrìṣàs to make a sacrifice with two hundred sand grains and a five-legged cock. No sooner was the sacrifice concluded than the five-legged cock began to scatter the sand grains on the water. As a piece of grain touched water, the surface hardened, becoming land, ultimately succeeding in pushing the location of the sea and rivers to where they are today. God then created the first set of humans, numbering forty, and asked the òrìṣàs to leave heaven and reside on earth to guide them. Mythology and history have often combined in the ways the Yorùbá have presented themselves. And as a unified ethnic group through language and origin, the Yorùbá exhibited a strong presence in precolonial West Africa.

Based on archeological and linguistic evidence, the Yorùbá migrated to present-day Yorùbáland sometime between the eighth and eleventh centuries and established the town of Ọ̀yọ́, which became a flourishing city-state. By the sixteenth century, Ọ̀yọ́ had become the most powerful empire in present-day southern Nigeria, controlling trade routes north to Hausaland. The Ọ̀yọ́ Empire peaked in the eighteenth century, having expanded its territory over much of present-day Yorùbáland. In the second half of the eighteenth century, however, Ọ̀yọ́ faced the onslaught of a *jihad* from the north and the rise of Dahomey in the west, which weakened its power. Political frailty and a weak army decreased its ability to resist external changes. As a result of regional instability, a series of wars erupted among the Yorùbá. From this power shift, Ìbàdàn emerged as the new regional power in 1840 and remained an influential empire until the 1880s. The Yorùbá subgroups of Ègbá and Ìjẹ̀bú resisted Ìbàdàn, causing a sixteen-year war that began in 1877. At the onset of colonialism in the late nineteenth century, the British intervened and established peace in the region. Although colonialism dramatically changed the political and social landscape of the region, it did not lessen the cultural influence and social perseverance of the Yorùbá. This, in addition to a host of other factors, has made the Yorùbá an attractive subject for scholars to study.

In the words of a leading historian on the Yorùbá, “there is perhaps no other single African people who have commanded so much attention as the Yoruba.”<sup>4</sup> Studied because of their artistic intelligence, military prowess, cultural adaptability, ability to manage modernization processes, and the crucial role of their educated elite, the Yorùbá have earned their place in the academic spotlight.<sup>5</sup> A. I. Asiwaju writes that because of the strategic location of Yorùbáland, the Yorùbá benefit from interaction with their African neighbors. They enjoyed their linkage to the trade routes heading north across the Sahara and the sea, facilitating contact with the foreign traders.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, during the colonial period, the colonial administration lived within the Yorùbá area, thereby exposing the Yorùbá, more than other Nigerians, to both the positive and negative aspects of the colonial presence in Lagos.<sup>7</sup> In contemporary terms, the attraction also stems from the wealth of literature available on the Yorùbá, not to mention the variety

of volumes written by Yorùbá scholars. Contemporary scholars look at the large body of works written by Yorùbá scholars and conclude that the Yorùbá have established themselves as being “exceptionally prolific” among West Africans in their pursuit of written historical literature.<sup>8</sup> The combination of rich history and availability of sources have made the Yorùbá a relatively popular ethnic group to study within and outside Africa. But for scholars in the United States, there is an additional interest in understanding the Yorùbá.

Yorùbá culture represents a leading example of the African influence in the New World. Unique cultural practices—such as worshipping òrìṣàs—brought to the New World by slaves during the transatlantic slave trade have been clearly identified as Yorùbá. Today, people of African descent looking for an alternative to Western culture and a way of connecting to Africa in the Americas have also looked to Yorùbá culture as an expression of nationalism. To understand Yorùbá culture and religion, an understanding of the historical journey of the Yorùbá is crucial. For this reason, Yorùbá studies have gained popularity throughout institutions of higher education in the United States. Within the past few decades, more universities in the United States offer students a Yorùbá studies program. Unsurprisingly, this has created a demand for contemporary and accessible works on the Yorùbá. One of the best methods for presenting the Yorùbá has been through edited volumes, which allow for a range of perspectives and topics on the Yorùbá. But there are few such works, and herein is one of the reasons for assembling this volume on Yorùbá history and politics.

Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the study of the Yorùbá, this volume deliberately mimics the framework of Biobaku’s 1973 edited volume *Sources of Yoruba History*, but with a new, contemporary agenda.<sup>9</sup> Until the 1980s, Biobaku’s work represented the only edited volume on the sources of Yorùbá history, although the original intention was to make it into a three-volume project. Biobaku’s edited volume emerged from the hopeful Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme. Biobaku is considered a pioneer in the academic study of Yorùbá history. Although he spent the 1950s holding various political positions within the colonial government, his academic career, which began in the 1970s, is really where he gained his acclaim. In 1965, he was appointed the director of the Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme, which the Western Regional government launched in 1956. The goal of the project was to appoint a team of trained scholars (historians, anthropologists, archaeologists, and sociologists) to produce an “authentic history” of the Yorùbá spanning from the earliest times to the present.<sup>10</sup> Progress on the scheme waned; the director was overcommitted to his daily work and was losing full-time workers on the project. With the help of Robin Law as a full-time research assistant, the scheme produced the first volume.<sup>11</sup> Until the 1980s, it remained one of the most influential edited volumes on the Yorùbá.

In an attempt to expand on Biobaku’s work, two other scholars created edited volumes on the Yorùbá. G. O. Olusanya’s edited his volume, *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, in 1983 and Toyin Falola published his work in 1991. The volume by Olusanya is a collection of essays in honor of Biobaku’s sixtieth birthday

in the 1980s. It addresses the works of Biobaku intermixed with contemporary research projects.<sup>12</sup> In the 1990s, Falola edited a volume on various aspects of the Yorùbá entitled *Yoruba Historiography*.<sup>13</sup> Falola's edited volume presented itself as a follow-up to Biobaku's work, but with a "radical departure from Biobaku's collection," because many of Biobaku's tenets, such as the use of oral tradition and archaeology to reconstruct Yorùbá history, have become widely accepted forms of evidence.<sup>14</sup>

In the same vein as Biobaku's, we attempt to maintain the collective, interdisciplinary style of an edited volume. The expanse of topics, time frame, and cultural background of authors contributing to this volume are deliberate; they preserve the *Sources of Yoruba History* style of incorporating authors from leading universities in African studies around the world. Contributing to this volume from the University of Lagos—the home base of the Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme—are scholars such as Olufunke A. Adeboye, Tunde Oduwoji, and R. T. Akinyele. Rasheed Olaniyi and Abolade Adeniji contribute chapters from their positions at the eminent Nigerian institutions of Lagos State University and Bayero University. From universities in Europe, scholars such as Jean-Luc Martineau and Tunde M. Akinwumi offer their work to the volume. Finally, this book also includes works by scholars in North America such as Funşo Afọlayan, Aribidesi Usman, Ann O'Hear, Ann Genova, Charles Temitope Adeyanju, Olufemi Vaughan, Toyin Falola, and Olayiwola Abegunrin. We do not assume the daunting task of reconstructing a comprehensive history of the Yorùbá as Biobaku envisioned but, instead, offer contemporary essays on the Yorùbá as a contribution to the body of existing literature.

Two aspects, regrettably, have not been included, indicating that the current trends in Yorùbá studies still have not fully filled these historical gaps. Most notably, the lack of evidence written in Arabic remains. This is a problem scholars faced in the mid-twentieth century, one that has yet to be satisfactorily resolved. Also, as one scholar remarked in the early 1990s, the Yorùbá of Nigeria and present-day Benin are rarely discussed together. Because of a language split through colonialism (English in Nigeria and French in Benin), the Yorùbá of Dahomey receive significantly less scholarly attention.<sup>15</sup> Regrettably, works in this volume do not address the history and culture of the Yorùbá of Benin. Aside from these omissions, this volume covers a substantial amount of material on the Yorùbá to provide any reader with a solid understanding of Yorùbá history and politics.

The arrival of the twenty-first century has given temporal distance from events that took place in the mid-twentieth century, allowing scholars a better overview. As in every aspect of life, the arrival of the millennium has encouraged worldwide reflection of life and the future of the world in which we live. The state of Nigeria is no exception. The millennium represents a hopeful new era of democratic rule in Nigeria as well as an overdue goodbye to the turbulent twentieth century, which saw the onset and withdrawal of British colonial rule. Embracing this new period, we return to the important topics of history and politics.

The essays in this volume represent a wide range of disciplines that discuss Yorùbá history and politics within Nigeria and the Americas. Yorùbá history and politics are not new topics, but are in dire need of revision. In essence, discussions on the Yorùbá need to be brought into a contemporary setting. This volume seeks to do just that. It emphasizes that the Yorùbá are not static and that they continue to play an integral role in Nigeria's political and social history in the making. In essence, our goal for this volume was to collect contemporary essays on the most important aspects of Yorùbá history and politics, which include mixing old and new topics.

Each essay in this volume approaches the history and politics of the Yorùbá with an integration of century-old secondary sources as well as new oral or archaeological evidence. We hope to bring the Yorùbá into the present and highlight patterns of political and social transition. Several works within this volume explore areas of research using previously untapped sources. Many works in this volume, particularly those discussing contemporary politics, provide a much-needed synopsis of a complicated political history thus far. Also, several themes are presented in this volume indicating new directions and the future of Yorùbá scholarship. The volume is organized into discussions of written sources, traditional chiefs, and identity in modern politics. For purposes of discussing each essay within the volume, our introduction is organized into major themes, which include new directions on how we study the Yorùbá, modern Yorùbá politics and the Yorùbá migration, and the dynamic role of traditional chiefs.

## Writing Yorùbá

A major focal point for scholars studying the Yorùbá has been the fluctuating power of the Yorùbá in Nigeria's history. Since independence, it has been argued that the Yorùbá lost a great deal of their social and political influence within the country only to regain a small portion of it during the late 1990s. Over time, Yorùbá cultural and political traditions have become traditional relics and not a part of everyday life within modern Yorùbáland. In an effort to reclaim social and political space, scholars have devoted their work to reconstructing Yorùbá history. But the recoverability, as Biobaku reminds us, of Yorùbá history varies dramatically from time period to time period and subject to subject.<sup>16</sup> This fact, however, has not deterred scholars from applying new perspectives and methodologies to draw some, perhaps tentative, conclusions about aspects of the Yorùbá's history.

In this section, we trace the history of Yorùbá studies from the earliest works in the nineteenth century to the present, highlighting the trends within this historiography.<sup>17</sup> The history of written sources on the Yorùbá began roughly during the fifteenth century and continues today. The scholarship on the Yorùbá shifted from primarily amateur histories written by local inhabitants and European missionaries, explorers, and traders to academically trained historians within and outside Yorùbáland.



The height of local amateur history writing took place between the nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries, predating the establishment of universities in Nigeria and the development of academically trained scholars. Many of the oral traditions that contemporary academics use were first gathered by local historians. Written in English and Yorùbá, these works record oral traditions on the history and culture of select communities. The first of these written accounts within Africa comes from Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (ca. 1806–91) in the mid-nineteenth century. Crowther was of Ọ̀yọ́ origin residing in Sierra Leone. Crowther returned to Yorùbáland in 1845 after being enslaved and taken to Sierra Leone in 1822.<sup>18</sup> In 1853, Crowther wrote a study of the Yorùbá language in which he included a brief introduction to the history of the Yorùbá. To him, the Yorùbá history worth recording included accounts of the origin myth and the history of Ọ̀yọ́ from roughly 1780 to ca. 1840.<sup>19</sup> With the exception of Samuel Johnson, these local authors focused on specific towns and kingdoms because, as Law argues, they did not see their work as a contribution to reconstructing a Yorùbá “nation.”<sup>20</sup> This view, however, did not diminish the efforts during the nineteenth century by the educated Yorùbá to promote a movement of cultural nationalism, which included the defense of indigenous culture, religion, and history in the face of increasing racial discrimination by Europeans. For example, David Brown Vincent, who adopted the African name Mojola Agbebi (1860–1917), dedicated his work to the promotion of Yorùbá culture, language, and literature. He rejected the European way of life and encouraged traditional aspects of Yorùbá culture such as polygamy.<sup>21</sup>

Outside of Africa, the first European written accounts of the Yorùbá interior emerged largely in the mid-nineteenth century. They were written by missionaries from organizations such as the Christian Missionary Society and the Methodist Missionary Society. These works reached the literate public in Britain, and have been put to good use to record the Yorùbá’s past.<sup>22</sup>

Although we are able to highlight a few notable local histories, it is worth stating that many have fallen into obscurity because they were published privately or by small presses that no longer exist. These works captured oral traditions that, in many cases, are no longer available to historians as primary sources.<sup>23</sup> Thus, histories chronicled by local historians have taken on the importance of functioning as primary sources on the early periods. Contemporary scholars rely heavily on these sources because they give the closest Afro-centered interpretation written during the nineteenth century on this dramatic turn-of-the-century period.<sup>24</sup>

The nineteenth century is a major topic for scholars of the Yorùbá and represents the most studied period in Yorùbá history. This period has attracted so much attention because it represents an era of dramatic changes. By examining this period, many of the explanations for the twentieth century’s social and political arrangements reveal themselves. During the nineteenth century, the Yorùbá experienced war, migratory movement, and the onset of colonial rule. Also during this time the abolition of the slave trade was underway. As mentioned, this period also marked the penetration of European Christian missionaries.<sup>25</sup> Because this period has

been discussed so extensively elsewhere by European and African scholars, we did not hesitate to leave it to previous scholars, in order to allow space for discussion on the contemporary state of Yorùbá historiography.<sup>26</sup>

Of particular importance in contemporary works has been the critical examination of famed works of the nineteenth century as an inspiration for new areas of research. The most prominent example of nineteenth-century literature, Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*, has received the most scrutiny for his interpretation, perspective, and subject matter. At the end of the day, however, the work of this missionary, diplomat, and teacher has far from faded into disuse. Even today *History of the Yorubas* is still considered a "standard work" on the history of the Yorùbá to which contemporary scholars must refer. Thus, his interpretation of the early history of the Yorùbá for many years held sway, although his ideas have always been challenged. Of particular importance has been challenging his Òyó-centric focus. On the importance of the Òyó, Johnson writes:

The early history of the Yorùbá country is almost exclusively that of the Òyó division, the others being then too small and too insignificant to be of any import; but in later years this state of things has been somewhat reversed, the centre of interest and sphere of importance having moved southwards, especially since the arrival of Europeans on the coast.<sup>27</sup>

Johnson has been criticized for suggesting that the history of the Yorùbá was dominated by Òyó and Ìbàdàn. As a consequence, Johnson's work gave only a brief mention to the Yorùbá outside of Òyó. Funṣo Afọlayan states that Johnson gave the eastern Yorùbá only a "perfunctory mention."<sup>28</sup> Johnson's approach for years influenced subsequent authors to do the same. Historians using *History of the Yorubas* took Johnson's lead and offered only brief mentions of communities outside of Òyó. But, like other historians, Johnson's critics have not entirely rejected the book, and they still consider it one of the most informative and comprehensive works on the Yorùbá. Scholars of the twentieth century take Samuel Johnson's work as a point of departure and add their own research, insight, and methodology in producing an array of influential literature.

In writing *History of the Yorubas*, Johnson relied primarily on oral traditions (*ìtàn* in Yorùbá). Never written down, these stories play a unique role in Yorùbá society. This long-standing practice of transmitting history through storytelling has proved to be both useful and perplexing. Whereas Biobaku writes that historians could not ignore oral sources in reconstructing the history of people without an indigenous system of writing, he also recognizes the limitations of relying solely on this source. The pitfalls of using oral sources is that they are prone to the narrator's failing memory and the tendency to romanticize and exaggerate as well as turn leaders into almost mythical beings.<sup>29</sup> These views still hold currency, but contemporary scholars have found several areas of research where oral traditions are extremely useful. Within this volume, works by Tunde M. Akinwumi and Tunde Oduwoḽi use these sources to reconstruct early Yorùbá dress and the migration of the Ìjẹ̀bú, respectively.

In his essay, Akinwumi uses oral history such as the *Ifá* corpus, *itàn*, and *oríkì* (praise poems) to reconstruct Yorùbá dress history and culture before the twentieth century. By using family photo albums and eyewitness accounts, Akinwumi creates a clear picture of what the Yorùbá wore during this time and the significance of the dress based on sources compiled within Nigeria. His work represents an attempt to draw conclusions from Yorùbá sources complemented by European testimonies from the nineteenth century. Included in Akinwumi's study of dress are body manipulation (that is, scarification, body painting, and jewelry adornment) and hair designs. Integral to his, and other scholars, work is the rich clothing description provided by Samuel Johnson. Of particular importance to Akinwumi's work is Johnson's description of various gowns worn by the Yorùbá as he understood them in the nineteenth century. According to Johnson:

There are three sorts of gowns, the Suliya, Agbádá, and Girike. The Suliya is the smallest, plainest and lightest; always made of white materials, it reaches much below the knee, open on the sides, with the arm stretched the sleeve would reach as far as the wrist, but long and pointed below. The Agbádá is a larger form, always made of dyed or coloured stuff. It reaches as far as the ankles, much embroidered at the neck and breast, open at the sides, and quite covers the arms. The Girike is the largest and heaviest, it is like the Agbádá but more ample; it is much embroidered, reaching also as far as the ankles, and extends beyond the arms.<sup>30</sup>

Vivid descriptions such as Johnson's provide contemporary writers such as Akinwumi with a rich starting point on Yorùbá dress. Akinwumi concludes that Yorùbá dress indicates cultural beliefs and laws. For example, he uses the call for women to cover the breasts as a dress decision based on the *Ifá* corpus and uses an *oríkì* about an Òyó monarch to identify the clothing worn during war. The use of *oríkì* has increasingly become an acceptable form of evidence.<sup>31</sup> *Oríkì* is unique in that it takes an intimate understanding of the language and structure of an *oríkì* to be able to extract historical information. Karin Barber writes that *oríkìs* are difficult to follow because the corpus is a collection of disjointed pieces alluding to unrelated events. Barber best describes the usefulness and limitations of using *oríkì* as historical sources by stating that with "a careful reading, allowing for poetic conventions such as hyperbole and the use of set formulae, can yield nuggets of factual information."<sup>32</sup>

Although not discussed in Akinwumi's work, it is also important to point out that dress indicates a society's involvement and access to the trade of textiles, jewelry, and metals from which to create jewelry. A research venture such as this has long been considered difficult because it requires training in historical research as well as an intimate knowledge of Yorùbá oral history. Akinwumi's work represents an effective synthesis of Yorùbá oral history to clarify our understanding of Yorùbá textiles and art, language, and history.

Similarly, Oduwòbí uses the works of Johnson, D. O. Epega, and T. O. Ogunkoya to reconstruct the early history of the Ìjẹ̀bù people, a sublinguistic group of the Yorùbá.<sup>33</sup> Incorporating linguistics and oral history, Oduwòbí concludes that the earliest Ìjẹ̀bù speakers settled in their present area by the first

millennium A.D.<sup>34</sup> Furthermore, he writes that their satellite settlements united in the nineteenth century to “collectively ward off external aggression.” The Ijẹ̀bú have become a major focus of research in that they represent the uniqueness and differences of the Yorùbá. The Ijẹ̀bú represent a Yorùbá subgroup that would not fit into general discussions using the Ọ̀yọ́ as the model. The Ijẹ̀bú did not accept the Yorùbá title, emphasizing their distinctiveness. The Ijẹ̀bú do not represent a homogenous group that migrated together. Instead, they arrived to Ijẹ̀búland from places such as Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ondó.<sup>35</sup> Also, the Ijẹ̀bú resisted Ìbàdàn dominance in the region during the Yorùbá wars of the nineteenth century. Oduwọ̀bí’s work contributes to our understandings of early Yorùbá settlements and highlights the distinguishing features of the Ijẹ̀bú.

Adding to the discussion of Yorùbá settlements, Rasheed Olaniyi directs our attention to the Yorùbá living in Hausaland during the twentieth century. His work goes against the more popularly studied Hausa settlements in Yorùbáland. Drawn by economic opportunities, many Yorùbá traveled north in search of employment in trade and mining. He highlights the Yorùbá’s assimilation with the Hausa through language, religion, and trade, while maintaining a Yorùbá identity. He writes that Yorùbá women, in areas where seclusion of Muslim women was practiced, served as the intermediaries in conducting local trade. Yorùbá men carved out an economic niche in the technical services such as automobile repair. Projects such as Olaniyi’s are made possible by the contributions of scholars trained in Nigerian universities.

The advent of an educated class in Nigeria introduced a new group of scholars writing local histories. Works in this era include those written during decolonization and the first two decades of independence; thus, they are full of ideas on how to shape the new Nigeria. Much of the work on the Yorùbá came with the establishment of universities in Nigeria, which fostered the formation of Africa-centered research after World War II. In these academic settings, Nigerian scholars taught courses on African history based on their own research disseminated in locally published books and journals. The expansion of Yorùbá studies led to the creation of *Odù: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies* in 1955, published by the University of Ifẹ̀ (later renamed as Ọ̀bafẹ̀mi Awolọ̀wọ́ University) as a peer-reviewed journal serving as a forum for scholars of Yorùbá studies. By 1960, a strong Yorùbá studies program developed, more so than any other ethnic group in Africa. In the case of Nigeria, many attribute this to the fact that four of Nigeria’s notable universities are located within Yorùbáland, thus establishing the region as committed to academia.<sup>36</sup> Adiele E. Afigbo, however, views this as somewhat of a drawback for the fate of African studies. He argues that African studies have suffered from being regionalized because most African scholars write about the history and culture in their midst with only few scholars writing beyond their geographic and cultural comfort zone. To illustrate his point, he directs our attention to those in Nigeria who only work on the Yorùbá if they are Yorùbá.<sup>37</sup> The phenomenon of regionalization, though, has distinct positive and negative points. These works are coming from people with an intimate knowledge of cultural

practices and are physically located close to their sources, be they oral sources or archival materials. But increasingly, regionalization has taken on more of a geographic issue than an ethnic issue, as Afigbo has highlighted. The reconfiguration of states and the migration of peoples within Nigeria have made describing any one state as strictly Yorùbá no longer possible.

Increasingly, contemporary works on the Yorùbá use the categorization of politically sanctioned states within Yorùbáland. State formation in Nigeria has been a major feature in its nation-building process. In forming a federation, policymakers hoped to give some 250 ethnic groups better representation and better autonomy. After independence, policymakers divided the country into three regions (north, west, and east) inherited by its colonial predecessors. At the establishment of the First Republic (1963 to 1966), a fourth region, the midwest, was developed. In 1967, in the midst of a civil war, the military government divided the country into twelve states in an effort to better allocate federal revenues. A few years later, seven new states were created totaling nineteen in 1975. In 1996, the number of states was increased to thirty-six. Since the 1960s, Yorùbáland has gone from existing as one state to seven, making references to traditional Yorùbá states and ancient towns less relevant for contemporary discussions about the Yorùbá. A 1980 publication, when Nigeria comprised nineteen states, reveals this more contemporary form of categorization. In his introduction, J. S. Eades chose to organize his discussion of the Yorùbá by state.<sup>38</sup> By doing so, the history of the Yorùbá, in a sense, is written backward, moving from the present to the past. In this volume, the essay by Ann Genova illustrates how identifying oneself as a member of the Ondó State has begun to take precedence over identifying oneself as a member of the traditional Ondó subgroup of the Yorùbá. This new political categorization is likely to have a profound influence on how the history of the Yorùbá during late twentieth century is written. The real question, of course, is on how this will impact the political unity of Nigeria on a ground level. Academics always hope that their work will not only influence public perceptions, but also encourage the thinking and direction of research among scholars.

Several essays in this volume are centered around the hope of highlighting gaps within the academic literature on the Yorùbá. Many scholars who study and write about the Yorùbá historiography wonder whether their suggestions for new areas of research and approaches to analyzing an important region or event are carried through by other scholars or remain simply words on a page. Olufunke A. Adeboye suggests the use of diaries; Ann O'Hear and R. T. Akinyele suggest a new area of research. Adeboye emphasizes the usefulness and importance of diaries as a form of historical evidence. She writes that the diary-keeping culture in Yorùbáland emerged in the late nineteenth century. For reconstructing Yorùbá history, however, diaries from European missionaries, explorers, and colonial administrators are also useful. In Europe diary keeping became fashionable much earlier. Diaries from as early as the fifteenth century continue to be used by historians. She uses the diaries of Ladipo Solanke, Rev. (later Bishop) A. B. Akinyele, and Chief Akinpelu Obisesan as examples of the differing views on colonial rule

and cultural practices. Sources such as these illuminate new avenues of research for scholars. In many cases, however, the subject matter presents itself as a research opportunity leaving the scholar to unearth useful sources such as those Adeboye suggests.

Akinyele examines the literature that has been written on western Yorùbáland, which primarily consists of six subgroups living along the Nigeria/Benin international border. Although Johnson's work is hailed as the standard for Yorùbá history, Akinyele indicates that this region received little attention in Johnson's work, but that scholars such as A. I. Asiwaju have made significant contributions to the understanding of the Nigeria/Benin borderland.<sup>39</sup> He writes that part of the challenge for historians working within Nigeria has been the French language, physical environment, and the deliberate destruction of Yorùbá landmarks by the French in Benin.

O'Hear continues to show her strength in revealing to scholars new directions and sources to use.<sup>40</sup> O'Hear encourages young scholars to research the history of the Okun subgroup in northern Yorùbáland. What makes the Okun unique is their lack of the kingship institution so characteristic of other Yorùbá subgroups. Instead, the Okun are organized into small states. Additionally, the Okun do not recognize a pantheon of gods, but only venerate the major ones such as Ògún (god of iron) and Ifá (god of divination). These vital distinctions, says O'Hear, raise questions regarding the expansion of Yorùbá culture within the many subgroups. Those like O'Hear who suggest new avenues of research may find solace in the fact that their suggestions are taken seriously. For example, Funṣọ Afọlayan, in an historiographic essay published in 1991, highlighted a topic that had previously been ignored. In his argument that a major gap exists in the literature dealing with northern and eastern Yorùbá, he emphasized areas that needed to be developed:

The ramified impact of Oyo imperialism in the northeast will need to be fully researched. Why and how, for instance, were the Ìgbómìnà able to preserve their identity and survive as a socio-cultural entity despite over two centuries of full incorporation into the Oyo empire?<sup>41</sup>

Aribidesi Usman, in his chapter, addresses the precise question Afọlayan posed. Using a combination of oral history and archaeological evidence gathered in 2003, Usman reconstructs the early history of Ìlá in Oṣun State, where the Ìgbómìnà lived. Archaeologists working on the Ìlá-Yàrà site have unearthed ceramic pots, iron pieces, and cowries belonging to the Ìgbómìnà, a pre-nineteenth-century sociopolitical structure made up of Yorùbá ministates. He concludes that settlements in Ìgbómìnà existed prior to the fifteenth century, which represents the major period of migration for the Yorùbá. His use of archaeological evidence, aside from the topic he pursues, forges a new path.

In Yorùbáland, only a few areas, in the words of B. Agbaje-Williams, have been "subjected to the spade of archaeologists."<sup>42</sup> Until recently, Yorùbá archaeology

was dominated by the excavation and surveying of objects of art, which included statues and ceremonial artifacts primarily in Òyó and Ilé-Ife. Also, archaeological evidence was not used to reconstruct the past because for many years history meant the study of notable leaders and significant people in the past, which archaeology, as a field, cannot reliably discern. But, in the 1970s, Biobaku expressed hope when he wrote that archaeology's contribution to Yorùbá history will "ultimately be immense, though at the moment there is relatively little material available."<sup>43</sup> With the popularity of social history today, we see archaeology as a window into a society's material culture. Archaeology plays an important role in fleshing out general indications of the everyday life of a community. And, technology has advanced to more accurately date items and recognize the organic components in an artifact.

Recent scholarship has moved toward an affirmation of Yorùbá identity and a call for unification in the face of political and economic adversity within Nigeria. The feeling that the federal government has let them down has fostered a look inward for community-based unification. Also, recent work emphasizes moving research away from central Yorùbáland to the periphery.

Our discussion on the changing trends of Yorùbá historiography may imply that a wealth of literature already exists on the Yorùbá, but this can be misleading because in reality the historiography remains severely underdeveloped. Two reasons account for this. First, African history as an international discipline is still less than a hundred years old. Major universities all over the world—prestigious centers of innovative research—still do not have fully integrated programs of African studies available to their students. Second, research for scholars within the continent has become increasingly difficult. With economic and political instability, Africa's reputation in the international community has declined. The United States, for example, warns travelers about visiting and conducting research in countries such as Nigeria. African scholars also find it increasingly difficult to conduct research in the continent. Universities in Africa are facing a shortage in funding, which has affected the wages and available research grants of resident scholars. A lack of funding has altered the focus of research by academic historians from large to small scale, but has not abated the historian's academic curiosity. As a result, we have seen a rise during the past twenty years in the writing of contemporary local histories. These valuable sources record the local history of a community, giving a snapshot overview of the notable figures, administrative centers, and cultural practices. In some ways these works read more as ethnographic pieces than straight narratives. Thanks to modern technology, many of these contemporary works include color photographs of people and places.<sup>44</sup>

Overall, as it becomes increasingly difficult to travel and conduct fieldwork within the country, less contemporary literature on the Yorùbá is being developed. The paradox, of course, is that the more problems Africa faces, the more scholars recognize the need to conduct research and present the historical and political context that explains the contemporary situation. To understand the struggle Nigeria faces in uniting the different ethnic groups, scholars need to accurately

present the history of the region. For this reason, this volume includes several works on Yorùbá politics, with special attention paid to the sweeping changes of the Yorùbá chieftaincy since the nineteenth century.

## Traditional Yorùbá Chieftaincies

The complex role of the Yorùbá traditional chieftaincy system has been a widely studied topic. The period most studied, as mentioned, is the nineteenth century because many of the changes in this era stemmed from power shifts between Yorùbá kingdoms. In the context of traditional chieftaincies, this era includes major historical events such as the fall of the Òyó Empire and the eruption of the Yorùbá wars.

The study of traditional Yorùbá chieftaincies, however, has its complications. Within the discourse, scholars confront a variety of debates and write from a myriad of perspectives. The debates include the definition of *chief* and use of the vague temporal and culturally suggestive term *traditional*. Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime write that the title of chief is a colonial invention that either raised the status of those not of royal lineage or reduced that of kings mistakenly referred to as a chief.<sup>45</sup> The title of chief, for example, was applied to the *Aláàfin* of Òyó, who, in reality, presided over the vast Òyó Empire. More recently, the title of chief has been given to “commoners” deemed important to politics. For example, a lawyer was titled a chief to include him in the Western House of Chiefs in the 1950s.<sup>46</sup> Thus, the position of ruler is no longer based purely on kinship. Today the chieftaincy title is open to the intelligentsia and the politicians.<sup>47</sup> With the broadening definition of chief over time, the question over the true meaning and value of using the term *tradition* has been scrutinized. Toyin Falola has shown the ambiguity of tradition because it cannot always be pinned down to a specific time period. Furthermore, the transition from traditional to modern was not one clear leap, but moved more through shades of traditional and modern.<sup>48</sup> In short, when is the institution of chieftaincy no longer considered traditional? What we find frequently is that the term *traditional* suits intellectual agendas pursued by many scholars.

These traditional institutions, to some scholars, represent all that was pristine and perfect about Yorùbá society prior to the destructive arrival of the Europeans. Describing this institution as “representing all that was good, honorable, and memorable about Yorùbá culture and tradition” is not uncommon.<sup>49</sup> To describe the Yorùbá during this period as experiencing “peace, perfect peace and good government in Yorubaland until Yoruba involvement in the slave trade” can be misleading.<sup>50</sup> Ideas such as this provide a transparent glimpse into the author’s nationalist agenda, which, for better or worse, serves a political purpose and holds an important place in the Yorùbá historiography. Also in this nationalistic rubric is the implication that the Òyó Empire is the Yorùbá kingdom worthy of studying. Contemporary scholars argue that not only are there other Yorùbá groups worth



studying, but also that the Ọ̀yọ́ should not represent the political and cultural model with which other kingdoms should be compared. Works today emphasize looking at Yorùbá subgroups, emphasizing their differences and their uniqueness.<sup>51</sup> Various scholars continue to warn against applying the conceptual framework used for the Ọ̀yọ́ to study other areas of Yorùbáland.<sup>52</sup> In essence, Ọ̀yọ́ has become the standard on which traditional chieftaincies are based.

Of particular interest to historians is the structure and function of Yorùbá chieftaincies prior to British occupation. African politicians looking for a model for the modern state in the past look to this period in search of examples. Scholars also use this period to dispel myths about “stateless societies” inhabiting West Africa. To best understand the relationship of a traditional Yorùbá ruler and his people, without the taint of the colonial state, scholars look to the precolonial societies. Among other themes, the scholars want to know how the rulers established and maintained their power. Although the tendency is to take European models of monarchies and apply them to Africa, many scholars look at traditional chieftaincies more objectively.

Starting with our basic understanding and assumptions of power, scholars take ideas from leading theoretical thinkers such as Michael Foucault and James Harrington and compare them.<sup>53</sup> Foucault views power as existing between groups and, at the same time, is instilled in the individual or group identity itself. In applying discussions of power to traditional chieftaincies, scholars conclude that a chief’s power is extrinsic in that his legitimacy comes from their divine connection. Furthermore, the scholars examining the Yorùbá chiefs agree with Max Weber idea that a chief’s power is only legitimate when the community freely consents to it.<sup>54</sup> As James Harrington claims, *power* and *authority* are not always synonymous; we find this situation with a colonial-appointed Yorùbá chief during indirect rule who had the authority to demand taxes and labor, but lacked true power in the sense that power comes from its recognition by the people.

For limited analytical purposes, the notion of pan-Yorùbá during the period in which they may not have considered themselves as such is still and may always be useful. By speaking in a general tone about the period of traditional rulers until the onset of colonial rule, we can highlight the many similarities that existed. Based on this deposition, the typical Yorùbá chieftaincy system was applied over a town and its greater expanses forming a kingdom. As best described by Olufẹmi Vaughan in his book *Nigerian Chiefs*, the chieftaincy structure was a communal and ethnic-based institution.<sup>55</sup> At the top of this hierarchy is the *ọba* (chief/king), with a council of village heads called *baales*, and under this tier resides the heads of lineages.<sup>56</sup> The traditional institution of chieftaincy was based on the myth of the original founder of the state as a descendant of Odùduwà, the father of Yorùbá kings. Kings were regarded as *Alaṣẹ-ẹkeji Ọ̀rìṣà*, meaning “sovereign who is next to God,” indicating their sacred position.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Yorùbá kings were regarded for a time as superhumans and over time their position shifted to being humans blessed with divine authority.<sup>58</sup> Vaughan describes the power relations as consisting of competition between the king and a council of chiefs, so the kings cannot

be accurately described as absolute monarchs.<sup>59</sup> Much of this system of checks and balances comes from the procedure of choosing a king from a selection of candidates presented by royal lineage heads to a king-making council.<sup>60</sup> Aside from choosing a king, the council of chiefs aided the king in administering the kingdom.

The king and his council of chiefs controlled several important aspects crucial to the maintenance of a peaceful kingdom. They controlled the legislative and administrative aspects as well as the judicial and military branches. In his essay "Power, Status and Influence," Falola provides an overview of Yorùbá chiefs from the predynastic period to the present. He writes that when the Yorùbá organized into centralized states, two power structures emerged: the town government and the central administration. The difference between the two is that the town government resided over one town, and the central administration was a kingdom residing over many towns such as the kingdom of Òyó. The chiefs under the king were expected to collect taxes, tribute, and organize labor for public works projects and agricultural cultivation for the king.<sup>61</sup> While running a kingdom, town, or community, the *obas* also had a cultural and religious role to fulfill. Ganiyu Bello writes that chiefs represented for his subjects a symbol of all the positive traits that make up the Yorùbá tradition.<sup>62</sup> The role and position of *obas* have changed, particularly within the context of a modern state. Most important, however, their power has been modified.

Scholars studying Yorùbá chiefs seek to answer questions about how they have exercised and maintained power over time. The study of traditional chieftaincies in this volume is centered on four major themes involving the relationship between this traditional institution and its people, the educated Yorùbá elite, the colonial administration, and the modern state of Nigeria. Through these four relationships, the Yorùbá chieftaincy system is seen as not only an institution, but also as a significant aspect of Yorùbá politics whose position over time ranges from powerful to powerless. We look at the relationship between the people and their chiefs, highlighting the major issues that emerge. Our ability to effectively review such large expanses of time comes from the resilience and adaptability of such an institution. For those opposing the chieftaincy system in modern politics, it has been viewed as the traditional legacy that would not die. Much of this can be explained in the relationship between the chiefs and their people.

As discussed, the chiefs were expected to act in the veritable interests of their people. This also applied outside of the metropolitan center of the kingdom. The provincial towns and villages often existed as semi-autonomous political units who paid tribute to the king in exchange for protection. This system became particularly important during the nineteenth century with the major altering of power dynamics in Yorùbáland.<sup>63</sup> The greatest challenge in pinpointing the true relationship between the chiefs and his people is the lack of sources. Oral tradition tells of great leaders, unity, and triumph. These stories, often collected by those in power, reveal only the official side of the story. Resistance and resentment against a king have not been recorded unless in the context of a successful secession. To compound the

issue, traditional institutions such as the Yorùbá chieftaincy have been described by scholars with the intent of romanticizing or demonizing them.<sup>64</sup> In other words, as much as benevolence occurred, so may have despotism. For example, the kings acted under the influence of the powerful kinship groups whose goal was to maintain their land, authority, and wealth. These interests did not always represent the needs of the common people. This example highlights a cleavage between the administrative interests and those of the royal families. Scholars base much of their understanding on the traditional by looking at the colonial period, during which written documentation of chieftaincies developed and specific shifts in administration and practice were noted.

The British colonial system in Nigeria was based on the indirect rule system, where indigenous structures were preserved and utilized to meet the political and economic needs of the colonial administration. Thus, the British depended on the Yorùbá chieftaincy system to maintain peace, collect revenues, and gather laborers. Mahood Mamdani writes that upon their arrival, several “traditional systems” were in place, but that the Europeans chose one that most closely resembled the colonial practice of conquest and subjugation.<sup>65</sup> The impact of indirect rule on the Yorùbá chieftaincy structure was profound: legitimate chiefs were often disposed and replaced by those willing to work with the colonial administration. The relationship between the chiefs and their people became strained, and the structure of kingdoms and towns changed. One of the main roles of the chiefs during the colonial administration was to rule through the customary court system with other chiefs. Mamdani writes that this created a culture of decentralized despotism. The laws often went against traditional notions of property rights and social conduct, causing frustration among the people.

The onset of colonial rule also rearranged the precolonial political structures as Abolade Adeniji shows in the case of the Ìjẹ̀bù. Using the formation of Odogbolu town as an example, Adeniji illustrates that the onset of colonial rule caused satellite kingdoms of the Ọ̀yọ̀ to merge, creating a rivalry over who would become the head of the town. Using oral interviews and archival materials, Adeniji follows this leadership crisis until its conclusion in the 1980s. Previous works on the Ìjẹ̀bù support this claim. E. A. Ayandele concludes in his work written in the 1980s that the Ìjẹ̀bù collectively lost their independence:

Never again were they to be an isolated people; never again were they to be the sole directors of the affairs of their fatherland. Their era of splendid isolation disappeared, apparently for ever.<sup>66</sup>

Despite this dramatic change, however, the chieftaincy system remained an important Yorùbá institution. The chiefs remained as custodians of culture and religion, and many townspeople looking for guidance during the seemingly unpredictable period of colonial rule found comfort in their local chiefs.

Although the chieftaincy structure withstood the colonial experience, it became both a friend and an enemy of the educated elite. After World War II, the British

worked with African leaders toward self-government and the withdrawal of British rule. During this period of decolonization, Nigerians formed political parties in anticipation of a national election. This is not to say that political organization and anticolonial youth movements had not previously existed. Funds, mobility, and practical experience, however, limited the national exposure for ambitious young leaders. As Falola points out in his chapter on the Yorùbá nation, as a practical strategy, these political figures rallied support based on the notion of a pan-Yorùbá ideology. At the same time, these educated elites espoused the modernist view that an independent Nigeria should be run by them and not placed in the hands of traditional rulers. The creator of the Action Group, Chief Ọbafemi Awolọwọ, held this view. C. O. Ayodele writes that:

Awolowo realized the gross short-comings of the predominantly illiterate traditional authorities in the face of the complex and challenging administrative bureaucracy. To him, the remedy lies in charging the more suitable educated elites leaving the chiefs with ceremonial and ritual functions.<sup>67</sup>

At the same time, Awolọwọ recognized their crucial link to the common people. The chiefs represented the integral link between them and their people who continued to view them as wise and guided by spiritual forces. In the 1950s the Action Group, led by Awolọwọ, conducted a “bloodless revolution,” placing the colonial native authority that was in the hands of traditional rulers under the control of a local government comprised of educated elites.<sup>68</sup> In line with the modernist view, Awolọwọ viewed traditional rulers as “antithetical” to democracy and progress.<sup>69</sup> Despite his opinion, however, he worked pragmatically and pushed the pan-Yorùbá avenue to bolster support for the Action Group as the party for the Yorùbá. Awolọwọ, indeed, did not utilize this plan alone; at the same time, the other regional powers in Nigeria were forming ethnic-based political parties. In his essay, Olufemi Vaughan reviews the state of the chieftaincy structures during the period of decolonization.

At this critical moment in Nigeria’s history, regionalism became the most utilized political tool, which today remains one of Nigeria’s most damaging problems. Vaughan writes in his essay that the ethnic-based elites used regionalism to consolidate their political power. What is important to note is that the theory of regionalism came from Chief Bode Thomas of Ọyọ who spoke forcefully about the benefits of forming political parties based on Nigeria’s three regions. His colleague Awolọwọ, however, is better known for his contribution to the idea of regionalism. Although Awolọwọ was not an ardent regionalist, he wrote and spoke extensively on the subject. In reality the majority groups such as the Yorùbá in Western Nigeria dominated the region just as the Igbo did in the east and the Hausa in the north.<sup>70</sup> This regional division set the stage for the ethnopolitical dilemmas of the modern Nigerian state.

The traditional chieftaincy structure, for lack of a better temporal term, dramatically changed during colonial rule and, more importantly, during the forging

of the newly independent Nigeria. The future role of chiefs figured prominently in discussions over the fate of Nigerian politics. A consensus was far from reached as people clung to ideologies and visions of the future. Conclusions on the role of chiefs came from a mixture of Western and Nigerian theories on development and notions of political “progress,” splitting scholars into several camps.

During the 1980s, many scholars began to conclude that the role of the *ọba* could no longer be categorized as only symbolic. A body of literature discussing this issue emerged, primarily in the 1980s. Recognizing this contemporary problem, Bolanle Awe, then the director of the Institute of African Studies at the University of *Ìbàdàn*, convened a conference on the subject in 1984. At the Conference on the Role of Traditional Rulers, various scholars presented their ideas on the role of the traditional ruler in modern Nigeria.<sup>71</sup> Participants found themselves divided into camps, each emphasizing their position on the subject. One scholar described the two major views as the *abolitionist school* and the *retentionist school*. The former stated that the institution no longer served a useful purpose and would disappear with time, whereas the latter argued that chiefs served a ceremonial and cultural purpose. Voices of the retentionist school also argued that if chiefs maintained a political role, it should be restricted to the local level. Jean-Luc Martineau writes that in modern Yorùbá politics, the *ọbas* “constitute an indispensable intermediate body.” Falola writes in his essay “Power, Status and Influence” that whatever the final decision may be, that for now, the chiefs need to maintain a visible position in the local government in participatory functions such as literacy programs and attracting investments. In short, they represent an integral part of Yorùbá participation in Nigeria’s modern politics.

## Modern Politics

The Yorùbá contributed to the development of national politics in Nigeria, most notably as the voice of a new African intelligentsia. Philip Zachernuk, a scholar of Yorùbá intellectual history, writes that their elite status teetered between being African and embracing European education and identity.<sup>72</sup> This elite started as a “small group of merchants and servants of the church” and expanded in the late colonial era to a large group of diverse Nigerians.<sup>73</sup> During colonialism, they spearheaded the anticolonial movement, and during decolonization, they played a major role in creating a focus for independent Nigeria. Although the pan-Yorùbá idea has gained prominence, no monofocal vision has emerged on key issues such as the role of chieftaincies, the preservation of culture, and the level of Yorùbá influence in national politics. Through regionalism, the Yorùbá vision is not only based on the future of their ethnic group, but also as a political party beginning with the Action Group. The essay by Julius O. Adekunle looks at the intra-ethnic issues that developed during decolonization into the intra-party problems of today. While covering the same period as Adekunle, Funṣo Afọlayan traces the loss of Yorùbá power in Nigerian politics up to the present day. Works such as

Afọlayan's and Adekunle's serve as a reminder of the political complexity that stems from a mire of ethnic tension that clouds our understanding of Nigerian people. Works such as these remind us of the prominent role of the Yorùbá in national politics, particularly during the early years of the newly independent Nigeria.

Adding to the complexity, Ann Genova takes the history of Nigerian politics and plugs this into the possibility of bitumen production in Yorùbáland. Placing bitumen exploration within the context of national politics, she concludes that the wavering interest in the project by the national government largely stems from ethnic-based politics that hinder the country's ability to stabilize itself politically and grow economically. Like Adekunle and Afọlayan, Genova's work focuses on the early 1990s as a dramatic moment for the Yorùbá in Nigeria's political history.

Much of our analysis of the Yorùbá is connected to the annulled election of June 12, 1993. This election scandal spun the country into years of chaos and dramatically affected the hopes of Nigeria's future, the effectiveness of Nigeria's political system, and the volatile tailspin of Nigeria's economy. Within the literature on Yorùbá history and politics, a series of changes took place as well. Scholars began to talk seriously about the feasibility of Nigeria remaining a nation and the possibility of the Yorùbá ever gaining political influence on the national level. Numerous works have analyzed the election results and the destructive steps taken by General Ibrahim Babangida. The essay by Ọlayiwọla Abegunrin does exactly this, by reexamining the election results state by state and suggesting the influential role of the so-called *Kaduna Mafia*, a powerful group of northern politicians. The years of political and economic turmoil also prompted the migration of many Nigerians to Europe and North America. The essay by Charles Temitope Adeyanju in this volume, for example, discusses the influx of Nigerians into Toronto. As will be addressed later, scholars also began to write about the "national question." They asked whether Nigeria's ethnopolitical divide would end in the near future. The impact of the 1993 election had a profound impact not only on the life of Nigerians, but also on the Yorùbá discourse taking place in the literature. For this reason, we feel it imperative to briefly discuss this catastrophic event in Nigeria's history.

Nigeria's political history reached a new low in 1993 when a failed attempt at launching a Third Republic took place. General Babangida had been in power through a military coup since 1985 and promised the country that he would assist in the holding of democratic elections and the transition to civilian rule. He set the election date for June 1990, but changed it to 1992 and delayed it again until 1993. In the meantime, thirteen political parties formed in anticipation of the election. Of particular importance for the Yorùbá was the presidential candidate, Chief Moshood K. O. Abiọla, a Yorùbá Muslim. Amidst the banning and legalizing by Babangida of political parties that threatened his power, Abiọla remained a strong candidate, running against a Muslim candidate from the north. Five days before the election, Babangida's campaign focused on keeping him in power and pressed for an injunction to stop the election from taking place. The Lagos High

Court dismissed the request and the election took place. The results showed a 58 percent win for Abiọla during what has been often described as the most peaceful and democratic election in Nigeria's history. Abiọla gained votes from non-Yorùbá areas such as the north. On June 23, however, Babangida annulled the election results. Public reaction to the decision erupted into spontaneous protests and riots, particularly in the southwest. People feared a civil war. The elections only illuminated for the Yorùbá the lengths the northern politicians would go to maintain their power.<sup>74</sup>

The significance of the June 1993 election was that if it had not been annulled it would have represented the first time a democratically elected southerner rose to national power. This would have meant a major power shift away from the north. Afọlayan writes in his chapter that the annulment placed the Yorùbá in a crisis of alienation. In response to the election results, Yorùbá leaders considered secession through the formation of the Oodua People's Congress.<sup>75</sup> This idea never fully materialized and, in fact, the Yorùbá led the creation of the Sovereign National Conference to oversee unity in the country.

Political incidents such as the June 12 election have prompted many Yorùbá to leave the country in search of a safer and more stable life. No longer willing to face the complicated, and seemingly endless, problem of ethnic turmoil, some are seeking any means possible to pursue a new life outside of Nigeria. A great deal of work has been done on the Yorùbá diaspora in regard to the transatlantic slave trade and the resilience of Yorùbá culture, language, and religion, but less on the voluntary migration since the mid-twentieth century, where economic factors and the search for civil liberties encouraged migration to developed countries such as those in Europe and North America.<sup>76</sup> By including two essays on migration, we hope to bring the Yorùbá living outside of their homeland into a more central discussion on the Yorùbá in general. Migration brings into question whether people are forced by the political and economic situation to leave their original homeland.

The topic of the diaspora also brings into discussion the notion of citizenship. In the case of Nigeria, it has been a sticky issue made so by successive constitutions since independence. Olaniyi writes that the more recent constitutions (1979 and 1999) do not reinforce the idea that national citizenship takes precedence over regional citizenship. Furthermore, migrations within Nigeria flame ethnic conflicts between the predominantly Muslim north and Christian south.

Much of discussion on the diaspora is also wrapped into the larger issues of globalization, because migration represents just one aspect in the wide range of ideas and things that move across oceans, borders, and societies. Also, migration brings into question the benefits of this era of globalization where more and more people from less developed countries are migrating to more developed countries such as the United States. Is the increase in migration an indicator that the economic liberalism associated with globalization is harming less developed countries? In the developed countries, immigrants opt for lower paying jobs in an effort to compete with indigenous workers. The result is that the labor market splits into two. Developing countries, on the other hand, suffer the problem of

losing many of their young, motivated, and intelligent members to the West in search of higher education or to launch their careers. This phenomenon, referred to as *Nigeria's brain drain*, has meant that Nigeria's members trained in teaching, computers, technology, and medicine are applying their skills outside of a country that sorely needs them. For this reason, migration based on economic and political factors has become a major topic of research.

We have added an important contribution on the Yorùbá to the literature on contemporary migration from Nigeria. Adeyanju's work examines *transmigrants*, those immigrants who build a social life based on their country of origin within their country or new region of settlement. These people often find themselves connected to multiple social networks simultaneously. Adeyanju examines the migration and emergence of the Yorùbá community in Toronto, Canada. Adeyanju tells us that in Canada Nigerians represent the fourth largest population of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa after Somalians, South Africans, and Kenyans. Adeyanju looks at reasons other than economic that encourage migration to Toronto, including political oppression during the military regimes of General Babangida and General Sanni Abacha. He urges scholars to look at migration through the perspective of *transnationalism*, which views immigration as a process, because their reasons for migrating "conflate over time and space." His work is based on fieldwork conducted in 1999, when he interviewed fifty Yorùbá living in Toronto. He concludes that Yorùbá migration resulted from a combination of "unfavorable social, economic, and political situations stemming from the Nigerian nation-state in the mid-1980s."<sup>77</sup> No previous work on the Yorùbá presence and influence in Canada had been written, making Adeyanju's work seminal on contemporary Yorùbá migration. Adeyanju's essay, through his research on the Yorùbá diaspora, reminds us that geographical distance from southwestern Nigeria should not limit our study of the Yorùbá. The crisis of June 1993, aside from causing political havoc prompting Yorùbá to migrate, brought people from all walks of life to discuss the future of Nigeria.

Facing the brink of a possible civil war, nationalists and those who genuinely believed in Nigeria as a peaceful, unified state began to ask serious questions about the feasibility of Nigeria functioning as such. Conscious of the theoretical debate or not, people all over the world looked at Nigeria and tried to identify for themselves the solution to Nigeria's "national question."

## National Question

At the forefront of modern political discourse is the topic of Nigeria's "national question" or the future of Nigeria as a state. The national question represents the most perplexing problem for Nigerians, one that no one has sufficiently answered. The question takes into account Nigeria's political instability and asks the simple, but challenging, question of "how do we solve this problem and create a unified nation?" As popular a topic as it is, the definition of the national



question varies. To Abubakar Momoh, it is the “realization of human essence” and the fundamental question of human rights within a nation, whereas to Georges Nzongtola-Ntalaja it represents the intersection of nation building and state building.<sup>78</sup> In relation to the essays in this volume, the national question takes on a more political than philosophical meaning. The national question addresses how to manage ethnic differences within a federal state. For us, the national question contains a strong human component by dealing with how equality/inequality and freedom/oppression among ethnic groups affects Nigeria’s politics.

The historiography on the national question of Nigeria has emerged only within the past twenty years or less. The annulment of the June 1993 presidential elections really appears to be when scholars addressed ethnicity as a major catalyst of Nigeria’s problems. The roots of the national question as a theoretical discussion, however, reach back to Marxism.<sup>79</sup> To many scholars, the issue with Nigeria includes class, but is really best captured through an ethnicity-focused analysis. In Nigerian politics, power includes class, but is supported by ethnic tension. Thus, those in power, many would argue, are kept in place through their ethnic ties. Thus, a Marxian analysis would fail to fully explain Nigeria’s situation.

Scholars of Nigerian history and politics discuss the historical roots of the national questions in ways that emphasize the complexity of the issue. First, they highlight that Nigeria is a heterogeneous population, but that during precolonial times they shared many common practices. During this period, as Olusanya indicates, Nigerians interacted with one another peacefully through intermarriage, a shared origin myth, and the spreading of culture through social and economic contact.<sup>80</sup> Second, he states that Nigeria was a forced creation by its colonial rulers. This forging of a “nation” unified ethnic groups through common exploitation, racial discrimination, and subjugation.<sup>81</sup>

A consensus on solving the national question in Nigeria has yet to be reached, but several different views on the problem have emerged. The milder ideas include the restructuring of the federation and the rezoning of political offices to allow for more equitable participation. The more radical ones include self-determinism, as mentioned, involving ethnic-based autonomy within a federation. The main appeal to this plan includes the freedom regions to control their resources.<sup>82</sup>

All the works in this volume touch on the national question in one way or another. They view the national question as one of building Nigeria into a solid, unified nation. More specifically, the national question addresses the problems arising from the relationship between ethnic groups within Nigeria. The essays by Adekunle, Afọlayan, and Genova look at the national question by examining what the current Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ administration is doing to incur positive changes in Nigeria. All the three essays summarize and evaluate Ọbasanjọ’s activities toward reducing the political inequalities based on ethnicity in the country.

Afọlayan, in his essay, writes that the installment of Ọbasanjọ occurred through a political compromise in an effort to remove a military leader from power. He emphasizes that Ọbasanjọ represents the only Nigerian military ruler not only to have organized a transition from military to civilian, but also to have voluntarily

yielded power to an elected president. Furthermore, he is one of the few politicians from the southwest who is accepted by the northern ruling class. In short, his administration represents a positive move toward Yorùbá representation and national unity. Adekunle adds to Afọlayan's comments on Ọbasanjo by writing that many Yorùbá view him with skepticism based on his administrative style, which has been criticized as leaning toward the demands of the north. But, as Adekunle points out, Nigeria is not an easy country to govern. Turning this politically and economically torn country around will take time. Even if no conclusions can be made yet about his administration, it is safe to say that since 1999 the Yorùbá have become more unified than in previous years.

Ọbasanjo has certainly attracted the scrutiny, but more importantly, the hope and fear of his people and the international community through his attempts to address the issues of the national question. In light of this new, democratically elected civilian government and the arrival of the twenty-first century, it appears we are witnessing a new era of history for Nigeria. The essays in the volume reflect this sense of expectation, not only for the future of Nigeria, but also for the future of scholarly research on Yorùbá participation in it. By highlighting the Yorùbá past and present, we hope to illuminate the future course of the Yorùbá within Nigeria. To borrow a Yorùbá saying from a contributor to this volume that best describes the Yorùbá view on the national question: *igì kan kì i da'gbó ẹ*, meaning "one tree does not make a forest."<sup>83</sup>

## Notes

1. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 6th ed. (Lagos: CSS Limited, 2001), viii.
2. P. C. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government among the Yoruba," *Africa* 30, no. 3 (July 1960): 223. Arguments made by scholars such as Robin Law state that aside from the origin myth that all Yorùbá came from Odùduwà, a collective Yorùbá identity did not develop until the nineteenth century. Scholars such as I. A. Akinjogbin, however, argue that pan-Yorùbá consciousness existed in the pre-colonial era. See Ade Obayemi, "History, Culture, Yoruba and Northern Factors," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, ed. G. O. Olusanya (Ìbàdàn: University Press Limited, 1983), 73–74.
3. Saburi Oladeni Biobaku, ed., *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 1.
4. A. I. Asiwaju, "Dynamics of Yoruba Studies," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, 26.
5. *Ibid.*, 26.
6. *Ibid.*, 28.
7. *Ibid.*, 35.
8. Robin Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 74.
9. Biobaku, ed., *Sources of Yoruba History*.
10. Aderibigbe, "Biobaku the Scholar and His Works," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, 4, 9.
11. *Ibid.*, 10.

12. Olusanya, ed., *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*.
13. Toyin Falola, ed., *Yoruba Historiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1991).
14. *Ibid.*, 1.
15. Elisée A. Soumonni, "Dahomean Yorubaland," in *Yoruba Historiography*, 65–74.
16. Biobaku, introduction to *Sources of Yoruba History*, 8.
17. Scholars such as Robin Law have established themselves as the experts on the historiography of the Yorùbá. See, for instance, Robin Law, "The Atlantic Slave Trade in Yoruba Historiography," in *Yoruba Historiography*, 123–34; R. C. C. Law, "Contemporary Written Sources," in *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 9–24; and Robin Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," *History in Africa* 3 (1976): 69–89.
18. Asiwaju, "Dynamics of Yoruba Studies," 30.
19. Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," 71.
20. *Ibid.*, 80.
21. Toyin Falola, *Nationalism and African Intellectuals* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001), 75. See Mojola Agbebi, "The West African Problem," in *Papers on Interracial Problems*, ed. G. Spiller (London: P. S. King, 1911), 341–48; and Mojola Agbebi, *The Christian Handbook* (Calabar: self-published, 1903).
22. See, for instance, J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yorùbá* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).
23. Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," 74–75.
24. Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000).
25. Toyin Falola, "A Research Agenda on the Yoruba in the Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 211–12.
26. See J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971); and Toyin Falola and G. O. Oguntomisin, *Yoruba Warlords of the Nineteenth Century* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001).
27. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, xxii.
28. Funṣo Afọlayan, "Towards a History of Eastern Yorubaland," in *Yoruba Historiography* (1991), 76–77.
29. Aderibigbe, "Biobaku the Scholar and His Works," 7–8.
30. Johnson, *The History of Yorubas*, 110–11.
31. See J. A. Ayorinde, "Oriki" in *Sources of Yoruba History*, 63–76; and Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki," *Africa* 44 (1974): 331–49.
32. Karin Barber, "Oriki and the Changing Perception of Greatness in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland," in *Yoruba Historiography*, 31.
33. D. O. Epega, *Iwe Itan Ijebu ati Awon Ilu Miran* [A History of Ijebu and Some Other Towns], 2nd ed. (Lagos: Ifé–Olú Printing Works, 1934); T. O. Ogunkoya, "The Early History of Ijebu," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1 no. 1 (December 1956): 48–53.
34. On the value of the this approach, see an old but still useful essay: "The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic Data in the Study of Idoma and Yoruba History," in *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, ed. Jan Vansina, R. Mauny, and L. V. Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1964).
35. E. A. Ayandele, "Ijebuland 1800–1891: Era of Splendid Isolation," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture* (1983), 88–90.

36. J. S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), ix.
37. A. E. Afigbo, "Fact and Myth in Nigerian Historiography," *Nigeria Magazine* FESTAC Edition 122–23 (1976): 81–98.
38. Eades, *The Yoruba Today*, 5–16.
39. A. I. Asiwaju, *West African Transformations: Comparative Impacts of French and British Colonialism* (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd., 2001); A. I. Asiwaju, ed., *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884–1984* (Lagos, University of Lagos Press, 1984); and A. I. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi, eds., *Borderlands in Africa* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1989).
40. In a previous essay, Ann O'Hear encouraged scholars of Yorùbá studies to examine letters written by David Carnegie, a Scottish colonial officer assigned to Northern Nigeria who spent a great deal of time in Ìlörin. See Ann O'Hear, "David Carnegie's Letters from Nigeria," in *Yoruba Historiography* (1991), 51–64.
41. Funṣo Afọlayan, "Towards a History of Eastern Yorubaland," 77.
42. B. Agbaje-Williams, "Archaeology and Yoruba Studies," in *Yoruba Historiography* (1991), 23.
43. Biobaku, introduction to *Sources of Yoruba History*, 7.
44. Although there are numerous examples of contemporary local histories, we would like to highlight one recent work by Lawal Babatunde Adams, *The History, People and Culture of Ita-Tinubu Community* (Lagos: Tinubu Foundation, 2002).
45. Michael Crowder and Obaro Ikime, eds., *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York: Africana Publishing, 1970), ix.
46. *Ibid.*
47. Ganiyu Bello, *Foremost Traditional Rulers in Nigeria*, vol. I (Lagos: Al-Amin Communication, 2002), 3.
48. Toyin Falọla, *The Power of African Cultures* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2003).
49. Bello, *Foremost Traditional Rulers*, 5.
50. *Ibid.*, 28.
51. Falọla, ed., *Yoruba Historiography*.
52. *Ibid.*
53. On Michael Foucault, see Colin Gordon Hassocks, ed., *Power-Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972–1977* (Brighton: Harvester, 1980); On James Harrington, see J. G. A. Pocock, ed., *Commonwealth of Oceana* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
54. Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s–1990s* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 3.
55. *Ibid.*, 13.
56. Crowder and Ikime, eds., *West African Chiefs*, ix.
57. See, for instance, John Pemberton III and Funṣo Afọlayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship: A Power Like That of the Gods* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1996).
58. *Ibid.*
59. Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 14.
60. *Ibid.*
61. Bello, *Foremost Traditional Rulers*, 2.
62. *Ibid.*, 5.
63. Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 15.

64. Mahood Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 39.

65. *Ibid.*, 22.

66. E. A. Ayandele, “Ijebuland 1800–1891: Era of Splendid Isolation,” in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, 105.

67. C. O. Ayodele, “Awolowo and the Development of Local Government,” in *Obafemi Awolowo: The End of an Era?*, ed. Olasope O. Oyelaran, and others. (Ilé-Ifé: Obafemi Awolowo University, 1988), 666.

68. *Ibid.*, 673.

69. *Ibid.*, 669.

70. Richard L. Sklar, “Contradictions in the Nigerian Political System,” in *African Politics in Postimperial Times: The Essays of Richard L. Sklar*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2002), 274–75.

71. Bello, *Foremost Traditional Rulers*, 12.

72. Philip Zachernuk, “The Lagos Intelligentsia and the Idea of Progress, ca. 1860–1960,” in *Yoruba Historiography* (1991), 147.

73. *Ibid.*, 147.

74. Toyin Falola, *History of Nigeria* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 188–92; Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (London: C. Hurst & Co., 1998), 251–66.

75. For more on the Oodua People’s Congress, see Funṣo Afọlayan’s chapter in this volume.

76. For more on Yorùbá diaspora and cultural retention within former slave colonies, see Toyin Falola and Ann Genova, eds., *Orisa: Yoruba Gods and Spiritual Identity in Africa and the Diaspora* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005).

77. See the chapter by Charles Temitope Adeyanju in this volume.

78. Abubakar Momoh, “The Philosophy and Theory of the National Question,” in *The National Question in Nigeria*, ed. Abubakar Momoh and Said Adejumo (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 2, 8.

79. See Walker Connor, *The National Question in Marxist-Leninist Theory and Strategy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984).

80. Momoh, “The Philosophy and Theory of the National Question,” 18.

81. *Ibid.*, 18.

82. *Ibid.*, 21.

83. See the chapter by Julius O. Adekunle in this volume.

# **PART I**

*Writing Yorùbá*

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# 1

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## THE YORÙBÁ NATION

Toyin Falola

### The “Nation” and Its People

The modern map consigns the Yorùbá to the southwestern part of Nigeria, a product of colonial creation reflecting the limitations of maps and the European origins of the modern nation state in Africa. This specific location does not capture the historical geography of the Yorùbá-speaking people, although it has had a substantial impact on how knowledge about them has been constituted. The map is true in the sense that the majority of the Yorùbá population now lives in southwestern Nigeria. It is incomplete because the colonial map does not include the entire “home” of the Yorùbá in West Africa and the African diaspora.<sup>1</sup>

As the Yorùbá entered the map of the first half of the twentieth century, they were mainly lumped in what was known for many years as “Western Nigeria.” The configuration of their identity also reflected this map, especially after the 1940s when political parties were formed. The Yorùbá regarded the Western Region as theirs, thus merging ethnic and regional identities as one. To the south of this map is a coast, followed by a dense equatorial forest that stretched west for about fifty miles, and also broadening eastward. And there is the savanna to the north. Using a linguistic definition, the Yorùbá are located within the long stretch of the river Niger in the east and the river Mono in the west, which is bigger than the representation in the modern map. This location has been specified to include many Yorùbá subgroups (e.g., Òyó, Ijẹṣa, Ekiti).<sup>2</sup> Although some of these groups speak some dialects that are mutually unintelligible, they have nevertheless been categorized into one “Yorùbá” linguistic family. It remains unclear what name they called themselves as a collective in the distant past, if indeed there was such a name. Such collective names as *Anago*, *Aku*, or *Lukumi* are probably not ancient enough. *Aku*, for instance, was originally a label for Yorùbá in



Sierra Leone. Since the nineteenth century, the term *Yorùbá* has become not only popular, but the only one to describe the people and the language in a collective sense. The language has become the basis to define and sustain the identity of the people.<sup>3</sup>

The Yorùbá identity, most strikingly at the town's level, must have existed for a long time. The intellectualization of the Yorùbá as a collective identity (that is, of one nation) dates back to the nineteenth century, thanks to the Christian missionaries and the pioneer Yorùbá elite. The Yorùbá discovered the missionaries and used the knowledge they provided to discover themselves. By the time Samuel Johnson completed his classic in the 1890s,<sup>4</sup> *Yorùbá* had become a widely used name among the pioneer Christian elite to define the people and their land, culture, and language.

Although naming is important, especially in the politics of the twentieth century, which consolidated ethnic identities in Nigeria, the definition of Yorùbá identity is linked to the historical connection to Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in two interrelated ways: first, as the city where the Yorùbá believe that they all originated; and second, as the city where their political dynasties emigrated from. The most common myth takes Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as the original home, where the first humans were created. It was from here that other Yorùbá groups and cities derived their own origins. A series of migration stories show how various groups, led by princes who created dynasties, left Ilé-Ifẹ̀. A common ancestral father, Odùduwà, provides the biological link: all Yorùbá claim him as their progenitor. A linguistic unity has also emerged in spite of the fact that the Yorùbá language has various dialects. Since the nineteenth century, the Ọ̀yọ́ dialect has become so successful that the majority of other Yorùbá groups uses and understands it, even if their own dialect is different.

The Yorùbá “nation” was not one geographical entity governed by one leader. The kings and chiefs were many, and each king exercised power in his own kingdom. Until the twentieth century, there was no assembly of kings, and each enjoyed his own autonomy. Various kingdoms emerged in a process of state formation, which actually involved wars among the Yorùbá themselves. The largest and most successful of the kingdoms was Ọ̀yọ́, with an *aláàfin* (king), whose power stretched over a large area covering most of the Yorùbá-speaking people and, at various periods, also the Nupe to the north, the Fon of Dahomey (and sometimes the Asante) to the west, and Benin and some other groups to the east. The ability to construct such a huge empire as Ọ̀yọ́ demonstrates, beyond all reasonable doubt, the political sophistication of the Yorùbá. For not only did the process of empire building require a successful military machine, there must be, in addition, a strong economic basis to sustain politics and a cultural ideology to sustain kingship. Ọ̀yọ́'s imperialism, dependent on cavalry, was based in the open savanna to the north. The name “Yorùbá” probably originally referred to the Ọ̀yọ́ people and their empire before the entire “nation” became labeled by it. There were other groups with their kingdoms as well, such as the Ìjẹ̀bù, Ondó, and Ijeṣa. Some kingdoms accepted Ọ̀yọ́'s dominance; a few remained independent. Each

had a prestigious origin story to tell. The expression of subnationalism could be intense, even today. For instance, the Ìjẹ̀bù had always maintained their independence, even of the Ọ̀yọ́. Looking to the coast, the Ìjẹ̀bù prided themselves for building a trade rather than a political empire. The Ondó looked toward Benin in the forest.

In studying the Yorùbá, one can approach it via the institutions of each kingdom and group. Certain peculiarities emerge in how they define kinship, organize their towns and settlement patterns, distribute power among chiefs, and structure their “classes.” With this approach, one can identify differences between the Ìjẹ̀bù and the Ijeṣa or between the Ekiti and the Ọ̀yọ́. There are many comprehensive studies that have pursued this line of investigation.<sup>5</sup> The Yorùbá themselves point to these differences when they compete for power or engage in fights over “cultural” differences or superiority. In this volume, the chapters on the Western Yorùbá, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ílá, and Okun-Yorùbá show the orientation toward focusing on the Yorùbá subgroups. Much of the writing on the Yorùbá was generated when the Yorùbá wars of the nineteenth century had ended. British rule after 1893 was, however, bringing its own “wars.” In dividing the Yorùbá into provinces and districts, the boundaries followed the cultural units of old. Thus, as some spoke of the Yorùbá as one “nation,” there were those who sought to defend the new administrative and cultural boundaries. Some attention was paid to differences in cultural and social organizations, as in how N. A. Fadipe characterized the Egbá, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ọ̀yọ́, Ijeṣa, and Ekiti, in some ways following Johnson’s characterization.<sup>6</sup> Such differences were complicated by the wars of the nineteenth century.

Samuel Johnson intended something else with his book: In spite of the peculiarities and differences of a people, the construction of a “nation” was not only viable, but also should be the chief pursuit of the elite. In his preface, Johnson made it clear that he wanted to recover history but not at the expense of the “nation”:

In the perusal of this feeble attempt, the author craves the forbearance of his readers; he deprecates the spirit of tribal feelings and petty jealousies now rife among us. In recording events of what transpired, good or bad, failures or successes, among the various tribes, he has endeavoured to avoid whatever would cause needless offence to anyone, or irritate the feelings of those especially interested in the narratives, provided only that the cause of truth, and of public benefit be faithfully served.<sup>7</sup>

To be sure, his book was not a “feeble attempt,” but a rather massive enterprise. In the quest to create a nation, he put the Ọ̀yọ́ empire at the center of his narrative—his ancestors were from the Ọ̀yọ́ metropolis itself. The centrality of Ọ̀yọ́ provoked other histories among other groups,<sup>8</sup> which later brought back the “tribal feelings” that Johnson did not want. As his account became the basis for some official colonial policies, other groups with claims to make needed to present their own histories. Johnson was long dead before these other histories appeared, but he wrote as if he anticipated them. He witnessed the early years of

British rule in the 1890s, a series of events that he was able to connect to his own missionary work. He saw “progress” in the years ahead, a “distinct gain” that would benefit all. The gain, he hoped, would stabilize politics, and create not divisions but a nation under one political umbrella. He closed his accounts of the nineteenth century wars—the best that we have—with a “Christian” prayer:

But that peace should reign universally, with prosperity and advancement, and that the disjointed units should all be once more welded into one under one head from the Niger to the coast as in the happy days of ABIODUN, so dear to our fathers, that clannish spirit disappear, and above all, that Christianity should be the principal religion in the land—paganism and Mohammedanism having had their full trial—should be the wish and prayer of every true son of Yoruba.<sup>9</sup>

Johnson had provided one strong method to attain this: the use of knowledge to construct the project of the nation. Johnson carefully managed a large body of data, covering a long period of time, under one umbrella: a large Yorùbá nation governed by one powerful emperor, the *aláàfin*. The Abiodun mentioned was one such leader. In an “imperial theory,” the emperor united everyone. The wars of the nineteenth century disrupted the order, and Johnson called for the restoration of a nation under one powerful ruler. To Johnson, the wars created “confusion,” and what he wanted was not just an “order,” but also a unity. A confused Yorùbá “nation” was not just “disorderly” but also disaggregated and disunited. Power exercised by a structured government should bring about a new unity, and unity in turn would bring about peace and prosperity. The colonial government originally accepted Johnson’s imperial model, but began to modify it when it was realized that many chiefs and kings refused to accept the authority of the *aláàfin*. As the name of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and its king (the *ọ̀ọ̀ni*) circulated, a new model emerged: that of one nation with two lords; the “spiritual” king symbolized by the *ọ̀ọ̀ni* of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and the “political” king symbolized by the *aláàfin*. The two-emperors’ thesis, sometimes equated with the pope and emperor in the Roman Empire, was still an attempt to construct a united and peaceful “nation.” The problem, in reality, was that neither the *ọ̀ọ̀ni* nor the *aláàfin* and their subjects separated spiritual from political power.

Johnson’s successors, notably academic scholars, did not give up the challenge of providing detailed histories of “precolonial” Yorùbá people. Such a history is possible, and it has been done in ways that Johnson would very much endorse. A “neat” structure has emerged: there was a cluster of ancient settlements in a pre-Odùduwà phase; then came Odùduwà who introduced a dynasty and strong monarchy at Ilé-Ifẹ̀; from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ princes were born who later went to different areas to establish various kingdoms. As princes, they maintained their family bonds.

I. A. Akinjogbin, a scholar based at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ for the greater part of his academic career, has contributed to fashioning the unity of this precolonial history. He formulated what one may call a “unity theory,” turning the creation myth and kinship networks into a political and cultural ideology. As he claims, all Yorùbá belonged to one “ebi system,” a sort of commonwealth where all families were

interlocked.<sup>10</sup> What cemented political relationships, Akinjogbin notes, was not military or economic, but blood relations. In Akinjogbin's analysis, society acquired not just a structure but also a character, which, he implies, conferred legitimacy to its sociopolitical organization. If many take the Odùduwà story as a myth, Akinjogbin regards it as verifiable history, and his thesis covers the time when Odùduwà governed as a king to the nineteenth century, a period of more than one thousand years. If some scholars see the Yorùbá as an invention of the nineteenth century, Akinjogbin disagrees as well. A consciousness of a nation had emerged for centuries, according to his thesis. To Akinjogbin, Odùduwà laid the foundation of this *ebi* with his sons (the princes) who established other kingdoms. As each prince conquered an area, he was doing so as an addition to the Odùduwà territory, thereby creating a commonwealth. New areas were part of the acquisition by the "grand father." As the Yorùbá "nation" emerged, so too was an "ebi" framework with some peculiar characteristics that Akinjogbin also identified. First, they all accepted a common source of origin—called *orirun*—located at Ilé-Ifè. Second, they had a "feeling of belonging together,"<sup>11</sup> not derived from any use of force, "but by a common acceptance of having been related by blood."<sup>12</sup> No member could opt out of the union, even if there were serious disagreements or political conflicts. Neither could those not related by blood be admitted. Third, a "filial" duty obligated the princes to protect Odùduwà and his territory. As Akinjogbin closes his ideas, one sees that taking the nineteenth century as the turning period during which the Yorùbá defined their identity cannot fit into his concept.

The idea is not to look for a perfect fit, nor is this a case of finding evidence to contradict Akinjogbin's thesis. The issue is to underscore the intellectual agenda already prefaced by Johnson: The Yorùbá must seek the means to unite themselves by creating an identity to define the "nation." The scholarly project is not to endlessly search for variety in politics and cultures, as foreign scholars have been accused of doing, but to either provide a set of generalizations applicable to most Yorùbá groups or to look for common denominators in traditions and politics. Samuel Johnson offered many topics to pursue, an impressive list that includes economic, cultural, and political institutions. N. A. Fadipe, the first trained Yorùbá sociologist, took the topics and ran with them, supplying more evidence of commonality.<sup>13</sup> Akinjogbin kept extending his "ebi concept" to explain interlocking relationships at the community level. G. J. A. Ojo created a cultural geography around the nation.<sup>14</sup> The voice of the scholars has become the voice of the nation.

## The Nation and Its History

This essay indicates the nature and complexity of studying the Yorùbá. In addition, this essay also reveals aspects of early history. Read in combination with the extant literature, the picture that emerges is how certain areas were settled and peopled, and how some monarchies emerged and functioned. There are two

tendencies—the homogenizing tendency to write a unified history of the Yorùbá “nation” connected with Odùduwà as mentioned and the “separate histories” of the towns and subgroups presented in this volume.

Both historical orientations actually rely on similar sources.<sup>15</sup> There are oral traditions, and the data on Yorùbá data have been extensive. Many essays using oral traditions using oral traditions show the strength and limitations of oral sources. Although the interpretations appear bold, the conclusions remain conjectural. What the traditions are trying to say is not always difficult to understand. Whether we accept the evidence and the conclusions is a different matter. As to what the traditions want to say, they seek to explain how places were peopled, settlements created, and dynasties established. Samuel Johnson’s traditions locate the origins of the Yorùbá outside of their present homeland, a view endorsed by some academic scholars such as S. O. Biobaku, who concludes that the Yorùbá came to their present home in various waves from North Africa, having passed through the influences of Egyptians, Jews, and the Etruscans.<sup>16</sup> The external migration stories, originally associated with the Òyó, might have derived from contacts with Islam and Òyó’s northern neighbors with similar origin stories. The most common origin stories locate the beginnings of the Yorùbá in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ or some other parts of the Yorùbá homeland. Such origin stories had existed for so long, with some documented during the nineteenth century, that they are essentially creation myths with various versions attributing the origin of the Yorùbá (and sometimes the rest of the world) to *Olódùmarè* (a supreme being). They are mainly myths and are hard to verify by any historical sources.

There are more myths on the creation of dynasties and the “secularization” of power among the Yorùbá than those on their origins. Sometimes presented as the beginning of the world itself, and sometimes as the starting point of the institution of kingship, the myths begin at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and with Odùduwà. The story of the king (father) and of his sons (the princes) that features Odùduwà as the first king whose princes became the kings of other groups and kingdoms is now firmly established. Yorùbá academic historians have accepted the story as well, treating Odùduwà as a real human being instead of probably an idea. The Odùduwà myth, unlike the creation myth, is not seen as a way to explain a prehistory but the very beginning of an organized Yorùbá political system. As the myth becomes interpreted as history, Ilé-Ifẹ̀ becomes the birthplace of a sacred kingship.<sup>17</sup> As various myths explain, the process of establishing this sacred kingship was “bloody,” with episodes of battles and conflicts between the Odùduwà group and previous migrants.<sup>18</sup> The long and probably complicated process of the emergence of a kingship with enormous power may be hard to capture in one or two myths. A short myth may have compressed events that lasted over a century. Or the myth could even be dealing with a process that no one fully understands.

A number of issues are clear from a combination of evidence. The institution of kingship went along with the control of land. As the monarchy developed, it also meant a process of social stratification. To be sure, a dynasty implied the creation of “royal families,” giving political entitlements to a small number of

lineages. The palace became a public symbol of power, where the king resided, and from where law and order emanated. A crown with beaded fringes was yet another powerful symbol, the king being the only person in the town entitled to wear one. A cult was created to give kingship its ritual powers. In the early years of the monarchy at Ilé-Ifẹ̀, the Imole secret cult was tied to kingship and land, a concentration of power in a few hands. The palace, the crown, and a cult were all too powerful political instruments of control, allowing the king to dominate the public. Various myths, too numerous to count, arose to explain why a ruling house emerged in various places, why women and certain segments of the population were excluded from power, and why rituals and some gods acquired influence in certain locales. Irrespective of how the stories are packaged, they say a number of interrelated things: a group of migrants survived the ordeals of a difficult journey from a source (e.g., Ilé-Ifẹ̀), traveling through various places to reach their present destination; they had to encounter serious challenges which they overcame, after which they established their power and gods; and as they settled, they also expanded to create an autonomous kingdom.

There is evidence from archaeology, with Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́ dominating most of the research. Archaeological evidence has told us of the antiquity of people living in the Yorùbá region, but we do not know whether such people were “Yorùbá.”<sup>19</sup> The sources have been unable to determine when the Yorùbá evolved a separate identity from their neighbors. The narratives that the sources have yielded in various works describe the creation of states and the origins of dynasties. The result was a political system based on centralization: the kings exercised power, aided by chiefs and palace officials. The practice of agriculture was successful, providing adequate surplus to sustain the population and members of the political class. There was a diversity of economic specialization as well, with resources drawn locally, and the products distributed in local and regional markets.

The emphasis in this volume is on politics: the evolution of states, the uses of power, and the search for power. As to the evolution of states, the Yorùbá have to accept the historical reality that they were once divided into kingdoms. Given the relationship between state formation and military resources, the kingdoms could neither be of the same size nor enjoy the same stature. They did not develop at the same time, and their resources were never equal. At one extreme was Ọ̀yọ́ in the enormity of its scale and size; at the other extreme were the Akoko kingdoms that were rather small and not always able to protect themselves when attacked by their more powerful neighbors.

The historical narratives on each kingdom give considerable prestige to its leaders, kings, and war generals. The stories are accounts on the formation of states, rise of leadership, and interstate relations. The idea of “one nation” is easily forgotten in such narratives, as each kingdom regards itself as the center of a Yorùbá “universe.” Owu’s tradition claims the status of being the first kingdom, founded by the eldest prince and first son of Odùduwà. Located in the northern grassland, it probably developed into a powerful kingdom based on cavalry. As more powerful neighbors emerged, notably Borgu and Ọ̀yọ́, Owu lost its prestige and was

finally destroyed early in the nineteenth century. Then followed Ọ̀yọ́, founded by a more aggressive prince, Oranmiyan. A succession of able and ruthless kings, such as Ẓàngó, (later deified as the god of thunder), established the foundation of a huge and prosperous empire that lasted until the 1830s. Ajibogun (or Ajaka), another prince, moved east of Ifẹ̀ to lay the foundation of the Ijesa kingdom. The Ekiti developed about twenty kingdoms, with sixteen of them headed by crowned kings. Close to the Ekiti was also the kingdom of Akure. To the northeast was a cluster of smaller and weaker states founded by the Ibolu, Okun-Yorùbá, and Ìgbómìnà. The most northeasterly state was Owo, whose contacts with Benin were much stronger mainly because of its location. Ondó, a state to the east, also established greater contacts with Benin than with Ọ̀yọ́ or Ilé-Ifẹ̀. To the south of Ifẹ̀ were the kingdoms of Ìjẹ̀bú, Egbá, Egbado, and Awori, who took advantage of their proximity to the sea to develop trade.

In spite of the multiplicity and complexity of these various kingdoms, an “intellectual map” of the nation has emerged, and we can now talk about Yorùbá kinship, religion, politics, economy, and other aspects, either as generalized phenomenon or even as a sketch.<sup>20</sup> As the use of a standard Yorùbá language became widespread, it provided an opportunity to talk about “Yorùbá culture,” homogenizing many aspects of it. We see some of such elements in this book (as in the chapters on chiefs and dress). The economy revolved around agriculture; trade (local and regional) was well developed. Inferior technology did not retard the growth of culture, which was highly urbanized and sophisticated. Even a dependence on farming did not slow down the urbanization process. In politics, the king was at the apex of power. His position was hereditary, his personhood and office were sacred, and his words were law. Each town gave a title to its ọ̀ba (e.g., the alááfin of Ọ̀yọ́ or ọ̀wa of Iléṣà), with an explanation that linked the man to the gods, making him their companions. Checks and balances ensured that the political theory was not one of absolutism. There was a host of chiefs; in some towns, these chiefs represented powerful lineages or interest groups. The king had to work with his council of chiefs, thereby generating consensus behind several decisions. Some responsibilities were shared by others (chiefs, priests, elders, and women) to manage lineages, wards, towns, villages, and kingdoms.

## The Nation and Its Politics

Johnson and his successor scholars created the “nation” in the image of an elite. They did not have to invent any data to create the “nation.” The traditions and “past” were there for them to formulate their theories: imperial, ebi, or ancestral. Some ideas, like those of the monarchy and dispersal of princes, were rather compelling not to “use.” Not only did these ideas create a united race, they supplied legitimacy to power. The myth surrounding Odùduwà was powerful enough to argue that the Yorùbá developed a consciousness of the “nation” long before the wars of the nineteenth century divided them. Ilé-Ifẹ̀, as the “cradle of humanity,”

provides a center for the politics of the “nation.” That the Yorùbá lived in different kingdoms should not disrupt the unity created by a nation. The stories of dispersal from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ by the princes who established the kingdoms have settled the problems: the princes were all sons of the same father who were not competing but expanding the frontiers of a joint territory. Each became a “manager” of his own domain.

In the 1940s, the politicians and nationalists had “converted” the idea of the nation into a political project. By this time, British rule had firmly consolidated ethnicities, and British Nigeria was fragmented into regions brought together by some kind of federal-oriented policies. The Yorùbá subgroups might have been competing, as in the case of the Ìbàdàn and Ìjẹ̀bù, but their politicians looking for power in Nigeria had to struggle to unite them if they wanted to compete with their Igbo and Yorùbá rivals. The benefits derivable from ethnicity contributed to the creation of the Yorùbá “nation.”

The central figure in the translation of Yorùbá history to Yorùbá politics is Chief Ọ̀bafẹ̀mi Awolọ̀wọ. No modern Yorùbá has come near the stature of Awolọ̀wọ, who is now often described in some kind of mythological way. One scholar describes him as “the first truly heroic, visionary leader of the Yorùbá since Odùduwà.”<sup>21</sup> The connection between two heroes—Odùduwà and Awolọ̀wọ—reveals two things: the “creation” of history by Odùduwà and the “use” of history by Awolọ̀wọ. But the “creation” and “use” of history are connected in the emergence of the idea of the Yorùbá nation. Awolọ̀wọ’s political career reflects the careful manipulation of Yorùbá history and traditions infused with the ideas of modernization.

Awolọ̀wọ had, by the 1940s, regarded himself as a politician with a future. The manifestation of Awolọ̀wọ’s concrete ideas began in 1945 when, as a student in London,<sup>22</sup> he established a cultural association known as the *Egbẹ̀ Ọmọ Odùduwà* (the society of the descendants of Odùduwà), later to metamorphose into a political party, the Action Group (AG), in 1951. If his peers in London had established associations for reasons of social interactions in a foreign land, Awolọ̀wọ had Nigeria in mind. On his return, he reestablished the *Egbẹ̀* in Lagos in 1947, reinventing it from an association of migrant students in London to that of a Yorùbá elite in Nigeria. As an organization in Lagos, it was born against the background of an intense Yorùbá–Igbo rivalry for the control of Lagos politics. To Awolọ̀wọ, Nnamdi Azikiwe and his political party, the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), were threatening the leadership of the Yorùbá in Lagos and national politics. The *Egbẹ̀* was one way to mobilize established and aspiring Yorùbá politicians to deal with the challenge. The *Egbẹ̀*’s orientation was a big change in politics. Up until 1941, when the Nigerian Youth Movement collapsed, the politicians had been trying to create a consciousness of Nigeria. With the *Egbẹ̀*, it was a consciousness of being Yorùbá.

In June 1948, Awolọ̀wọ inaugurated the *Egbẹ̀* at Ilé-Ifẹ̀, the city of creation, a move designed to tap into the core of Yorùbá identity. He was able to mobilize a group of Yorùbá educated elite to support the ideas behind the creation of the *Egbẹ̀ Ọmọ Odùduwà*, and to get himself appointed as its general secretary, the most powerful position in the organization. They chose Ilé-Ifẹ̀ for its powerful



symbolism as the origin of all of them. The name of the organization reflected the acceptance of Odùduwà as their common ancestor. The members originally set out to avoid politics and concentrate on cultural issues that would unite the nation. The Ègbé was a merger of the members of the modern and traditional elite. Notable kings, chiefs, and prominent Western-educated people identified themselves with the Ègbé. The Ègbé sought to develop ideas about one Yorùbá, a consciousness based on shared history and culture. The Ègbé turned itself into a platform to speak on behalf of the Yorùbá people. Although there had been associations by a group of people, the Ègbé was the first to clearly elaborate the agenda of cultural nationalism: It would seek the means to protect and promote Yorùbá culture and traditional institutions, it would create a unity among the Yorùbá, and it would modernize the Yorùbá people and protect their interests in Nigeria. Without a doubt, the Ègbé stimulated a spirit of Yorùbá “national” consciousness by the creation of an elite network, the demand to redraw the boundaries of western Nigeria to include the Yorùbá of Ìlọ̀rín and Kabba, and the publication of Yorùbá literature. The members were expected to contribute resources—financial and intellectual—to the project of Yorùbá cultural nationalism. On being accepted as a member, the ceremony was sealed with an oath:

Evil shall haunt the evil doer  
 Disloyal persons shall be destroyed by the mother earth  
 So help me, Oh God, in this my oath,  
 And in my obligation to the Ègbé Ọ̀mọ̀ Odùduwà.<sup>23</sup>

To betray the cause of Yorùbá unity and identity became a powerful curse.

Again in London, while developing his political vision, Awolọ̀wọ̀ began to consider ideas on how best Nigeria could be governed after the British had left. His answers reflected the aspirations that led to the establishment of the Ègbé and how the interests of his people would be protected. In his major book published in 1947, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*,<sup>24</sup> federalism was put forward as the best solution to run the country. There was nothing new in the theory of federalism, but Awolọ̀wọ̀ connected it with ethnicity. His premise was that the country was heterogeneous and that the political parties to represent them must be organized along cultural and regional lines. The representatives of the parties could come together at the center to discuss common affairs. To him, each ethnic group should be allowed to develop in its own line, moving at a pace suitable to its needs and traditions.<sup>25</sup> “The constitution of each national group,” Awolọ̀wọ̀ concluded with a view that was endorsed by a number of other Yorùbá politicians at the time, “is the sole concern of members of that group.”<sup>26</sup> Awolọ̀wọ̀ believed that the Yorùbá were at the forefront of modernization and far ahead, in education and skills, compared to the majority of other Nigerian groups. To him, they should use their advantage to develop themselves and provide the leadership to develop Nigeria.

The Macpherson Constitution of 1950 called for elections into the House of Representatives and the Regional House, the first time that the entire country

would be involved in a democratic process. Political-oriented associations had to formally become political parties before they could contest elections.<sup>27</sup> Awolowo carefully converted a cultural group into a political party. His accounts of why he opted for this approach was that there was no “national” or “regional” party that he could identify with. He knew little about northern Nigeria where the elite from the south was resented; he was eager for a leadership position, which could not be readily available if he joined the existing parties in Lagos, and he was uncomfortable working with Azikiwe’s party (the NCNC). He had been a member of the Nigerian Youth Movement, which collapsed in 1941, after a bitter contest for the control of the party between the Igbo and Yorùbá factions. In an astute political move, he turned to the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, which had already established some branches in different towns. He received the support of the Ègbé’s leadership to establish a political party, although the Ègbé decided that as an organization it would not affiliate itself with any party. As his plans unfolded in many political meetings held in secret, Awolowo was able to align his interests with those of the Ègbé. The general secretary of the Ègbé was now the founder and president of the AG.

The formation of the AG was announced on March 2, 1951. From then until his death in May 1987, Awolowo struggled unsuccessfully to become the country’s head of state. He was jailed by his political enemies in 1962 and released by the military in 1967, after which he became a hero and the most towering Yorùbá political figure. If the Yorùbá regard him as their hero, the other rival groups regard him as a “tribalist.” To Azikiwe, his archrival for the entire duration of Awolowo’s career, Awolowo introduced “extreme regionalism” into Nigeria.<sup>28</sup> Critics like Azikiwe focused on the link that Awolowo created between political party and ethnicity, rather than between ethnicity and federalism. They focused on the power that Awolowo wanted to give the Yorùbá, rather than the general concept of power devolution that would give each group a considerable amount of power.

However, the “game” that Azikiwe and Awolowo were playing was very much alike. Even the critics of Awolowo began to behave like him: Azikiwe turned the NCNC into an Igbo-dominated party that controlled the Eastern Region, and the politicians in the north went as far as creating a party, the Northern People’s Congress (NPC), with a membership largely restricted to its region. The context was the transfer of power from the 1940s onward. The nationalists and politicians eager for power began to work toward attaining their goals. For the rest of the century, the AG, in various forms and guises, dominated Yorùbá politics. Awolowo assumed the leadership of the party, a position that he occupied for his entire life, although military regimes usually proscribed political parties and drove them underground. Awolowo and his party began to defend the pursuit of a federal system of government that would give each region and its group semi-autonomy. He did not see anything wrong with the AG representing the interests of the Yorùbá. Without leaving the Ègbé, Awolowo exploited its established organizational network to the advantage of his new party. If some ordinary members of the Ègbé did not see the connections between it and the new AG, Awolowo made it apparent enough. The AG adopted some of the ideas of the Ègbé. Five of the powerful members of the Central

Executive Committee of the AG were also members of the Ègbé. Four of the early meetings of the AG were held at the Ègbé's office at Ìbàdàn.<sup>29</sup> The AG openly declared that it would maintain strong associations with the Ègbé and other cultural unions that were working for the interest of the Western Region in a way that both the political party and a cultural union would become bigger and more relevant. The Ègbé, too, began to work actively to disseminate the ideas of the AG.

A political triangulation was born: the AG was a political party to fight for the Yorùbá; the Ègbé, a cultural organization, would do its "cultural" work of selling the party's ideas and ideals packaged in the "language" of the Yorùbá nation; the people, the beneficiaries of progress, would follow as electors expected to vote as a single bloc. The party and the Ègbé would work as a team to defend the Yorùbá nation. The kings and chiefs, as members of the Ègbé, were to enhance the interests of the AG. Here was the merger of the traditional and modern elite to accomplish the same goal. The academic scholars were to join, not as dissenting voices, but as articulators of the Yorùbá nation. The thread between Samuel Johnson of the nineteenth century and Samuel Akintoye<sup>30</sup> of the twentieth century was becoming visible. As to the electorate, the cultural agenda of the Ègbé and the political agenda of the AG were one and the same. The AG adopted a Yorùbá name, *Ègbé Afenifere* (the party that loves progress) that, to many electors, was close in meaning to the aspirations embodied in the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà. Odùduwà "created" them; Afenifere wanted to supply the breast milk. Although the structures and membership of both the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà and the Ègbé Afenifere were different and the media portrayed one as cultural and the other as political, the two identities merged into one bigger project: the articulation of "Yorùbáness."

With the Ègbé and AG behind him, Awolọwọ now had to unite the Yorùbá into one political party. This was a difficult task, but he succeeded in making the AG the most acceptable to the majority of the Yorùbá. As he sold the AG to the Yorùbá, he had to operate within the framework of ethnic politics and prevent parties controlled by the non-Yorùbá from gaining any significant foothold in his area. On the one hand, Awolọwọ and the AG promised to create a nationwide political party and work with others; on the other hand, they sought to do this by building a formidable Yorùbá party. The AG never became a truly national party; this was almost impossible if other ethnicities were establishing their own political parties. As soon as it was established, the AG set about to capture power in the Western Region, a process that involved overcoming the competition from the Lagos-based political parties and the NCNC, which had gained a foothold in many places.

It was much easier for the AG to attack the Yorùbá with whom it was in competition: they were accused of not being Yorùbá enough. Since the 1950s, the fight over who is Yorùbá or not has been bitter and endless. In its most bitter expression, to identify with the Hausa-Fulani in the north and the Igbo in the east was to be described as being "non-Yorùbá." Consequently, those who joined the non-Yorùbá parties, irrespective of their ideology and level of commitment, were castigated as enemies of their people. In cases of violence that followed elections,

many people have had their houses and cars destroyed. To build an ethnic party, the “fifth columnists” had to be eliminated.

The struggle among the Yorùbá also took the form of an interelite power rivalry. Awolòwọ had to find a way of marginalizing those before him, most especially those identified with the Herbert Macaulay–led Nigeria National Democratic Party. In this battle, ideology took over from ethnicity. Awolòwọ positioned himself as a reformer, and he worked out, in some kind of elaborate manner, the strategies to modernize the Yorùbá through the massive expansion of the school system and the creation of modern industries. Such opportunity, however, was only possible during the period of diarchy that began in 1951 with the introduction of the Macpherson Constitution. The constitution provided for more accommodation and partnership; it replaced mere representation with “responsible” government. The British encouraged Nigerian participation in the political decision-making process by liberalizing the franchise. Lagos and Calabar also ceased to be the only municipal areas where the elective principle was allowed. Awolòwọ believed that by turning the west into the most modernized part of Nigeria, others elsewhere would see a model and come to recognize the merits of making the AG a national party. The Yorùbá elite was split: those for Awolòwọ and the AG described themselves as reformers, radicals, and progressives; those against them became “traditionalists” and “conservatives.” If the wars of the nineteenth century were fought along subethnic lines, those of the twentieth century were being defined along the Yorùbá and the other ethnicities, the reformers against nonreformers (ideology). The so-called nonreformers turned to history to fight back. In Ilésà, Ìbàdàn, and Ọyọ, initial centers of the anti-AG movement, the opposition forces that identified with the NCNC were warning the others of the attempts by one Yorùbá subgroup (Awolòwọ’s Ìjẹ̀bù people) to dominate the others.<sup>31</sup> Rivalries between the Ifẹ and Ijẹ̀sa or Ìbàdàn and Ìjẹ̀bù were expressed as support for, or opposition to, the AG. The AG, in responding to the political circumstances created by the colonial governments, sought to move forward by manipulating ethnicity and the idea of the Yorùbá nation. The AG succeeded in controlling the Western Region, but it never did succeed in controlling the federal government. Awolòwọ tried three times to become the country’s president: thrice he failed, but the political process involved with his failure contributed to the civil war and long periods of military regimes in the country.<sup>32</sup>

Awolòwọ represents the face of the modern elite seeking power. Part of his success was the domination of the other face, the one represented by the chiefs and kings. In the next two sections, I shed additional light on these two faces of “tradition” and “modernity” and their phases.

## Chiefs and Traditional Power

When we leave the long precolonial period behind us—elucidated through the windows of “sources”—the rest of this essay deals with the *modern period*, defined as an era since the mid-nineteenth century. A preface to this era was the Yorùbá

internal war, covering a large part of the nineteenth century with major consequences for peoples and states. The once flourishing empire of Òyó collapsed, new cities such as Abeòkuta and Ìbàdàn were created, and population moved from war-ravaged areas to relatively peaceful places.

The nineteenth century witnessed the strengthening of Euro–Yorùbá relations. The slave trade ended, and the Yorùbá were spared some of the tragedies of being massively recruited as slave. Among the liberated slaves were many Yorùbá, with a number of them returning back home and others staying in the Americas and the “land of freedom” in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Then came Christianity, the instigator of cultural and social change among the Yorùbá (and other African groups for that matter).<sup>33</sup> A Yorùbá elite began to emerge in the nineteenth century, later to acquire prominence. In its very first generation, this elite was assertive. Many of the missionaries who came among them were shocked when some Yorùbá used Christianity to formulate ideas of independency. In the 1880s, they began to create their own churches, some later becoming known as the *Aladura*,<sup>34</sup> partly to protest against foreign-led, European-controlled churches, and partly to translate the foreign religion into a local milieu. In demanding power from the colonial government after 1945, the early creation of this elite, with its prestige and talent, became one justification. The Yorùbá elite claimed that they knew the British and colonial governments the longest and that they had been attracted to modernity more than their Hausa and Igbo rivals.

The post-1893 kings and chiefs had to operate within a different milieu and in a new political era. They were not removed as kings or chiefs, and their land was not moveable. The colonial order redefined the meaning of sovereignty and created a bigger state called *Nigeria*. There was no king of Nigeria, but a governor general accountable to a bigger power in London, yet in control of Nigeria. The kings and chiefs came under the authority of the governor general. The relationship was redefined over time, but by 1960 the kings and chiefs had lost most of their traditional power. After 1960, as some essays in this volume show, they struggled in vain to regain some of the lost power.

It was not that the chiefs voluntarily surrendered their sovereignty. The British takeover of Nigeria was an act of violence. Many of the chiefs engaged in wars and diplomacy of resistance. They lost. Those threatened by the power of the Gatling and Maxim guns surrendered. And there were those who actually calculated that a new political atmosphere could advance their interests. Between 1891 and 1897, the pioneer British officers engaged in the final act of conquest, although it was presented as the restoration of peace to the troubled Yorùbá people who were now about to leave their wars behind them. The early officers, known as the *traveling commissioners*, allowed the chiefs to exercise their power as before while laying some new guidelines. Where anticolonial resistance continued, the traveling commissioners called on the Lagos constabulary to deal with the protests. In 1897, a Council of Chiefs was established in various places, headed by the traveling commissioners (called the *presidents*). The officer replaced a king as the head of the council, and some chiefs, members of the former king-in-council, were dropped. The council

system was modified after 1901 by creating many more to serve various towns, making the kings the presidents. A number of kings (those of Òyó, Ondó, Ìjẹ́bú Ode, and Abeokuta) were given more power over judicial and executive matters.

The most far-reaching change was the introduction of a system of indirect rule in 1914. A number of kings had their power enhanced far more than what previous traditions had required. The kings exercised wide-ranging powers and became part of the tax collection bureaucracy. Some paramount chiefs emerged with wider power over subordinate chiefs. The aláàfin acquired tremendous power in the 1920s, so much so that a “new Òyó empire” was created.<sup>35</sup> The *awujale* of Ìjẹ́bú Ode, the *osemawe* of Ondo, and the *alake* of Abeokuta all had their powers enhanced between 1914 and 1931.

Protests over indirect rule and pressure from a new group of Western-educated elite created the case for the administrative reorganization between 1930 and 1950, changes that set the stage for the decline in the power of kings and chiefs. The towns whose own kings had been placed under some “paramount kings” protested indirect rule, as in the case of Ìbàdàn under the aláàfin. There were also those who accused the paramount chiefs of abusing their power in matters relating to land, administration of justice, and the appointment of junior chiefs. To the Western-educated elite, the chiefs and kings did not have the formal education necessary to bring progress to the society. The reorganization of the 1930s and 1940s ended the indirect rule system and the prestige of many kings. Provinces were split into smaller, independent native authorities; power was taken away from the kings to serve as sole native authorities, and replaced by a system of advisory councils made up of many chiefs. In 1952, the Western Government Law of that year democratized the system by transferring power from kings and chiefs to elected councilors. The AG had also ensured that the kings and chiefs could not be politically neutral: whoever wanted to retain influence among them must either be a member of the AG or work to promote the interest of the party. Awolowo had used the Ègbẹ́ and the AG to dominate the traditional elite—through the Ègbẹ́ they were drawn into a cultural network to pursue the agenda of the elite; and through the AG they were expected to mobilize their people to vote for the politicians. As compensation, the government paid their salaries and treated them with respect.

The constitution to manage Nigeria favors the Western-educated elite. When the constitutions are followed, power is obtained through the ballot box. When the military is in power, violence is the main source of attaining and retaining power. The kings and chiefs enjoy the power granted to them by either the military or the members of the political class. The elite that emerged has been bureaucratic, acquiring wealth, authority, and power through its connections to state power.

## The Nation and Its Modern Politics

As the kings and chiefs began to lose their power, the Western-educated Yorùbá elite began to gain theirs. As “civilians,” they exercised power in the 1950s, and

during the First Republic (1960–65). The military came to power, from 1966 to 1979, and involved a number of prominent civilians, creating a merger between generals and politicians.<sup>36</sup> Then came the Second Republic from 1979 to 1983 with a “civilian rule,” and another long period of military rule that ended in 1999. Between the 1950s and 1999, the Yorùbá struggled to dominate national politics and produce a president. Awolòwọ failed in his number one ambition of leading the country. Then came Chief M. K. O. Abiọla in the 1990s, not hitherto connected with the politics of the AG (which reappeared as the United Party of Nigeria in the Second Republic, and other new labels in the 1980s and 1990s), but with the hurriedly formed Social Democratic Party. Fed up with a long period of military rule and the deception of its leading officers to hand over power to civilians,<sup>37</sup> the Yorùbá united behind Abiọla who, as chapter seventeen points out, also received support in other parts of the country. The electoral commission was stopped by the military administration of General Babangida from declaring Abiọla as the winner of the 1993 presidential elections, whose results were thereafter annulled. Protracted struggles and protests followed, Abiọla died in detention, and the military eventually relinquished power. The country was almost thrown into a second civil war during the 1990s. Members of the Yorùbá political class successfully sold the idea to the majority of the Yorùbá people that they had become “colonized” by the northerners. Yorùbá consciousness around the idea of one “nation” was heightened as never before. In addition, ethnic militias—notably the Oodua People’s Congress—emerged to advocate autonomy or even a secession to create a new country, Odùduwà.

The aforementioned summary hides the history of a troubled nation, a series of crises, riots, civil war, disorder, and political corruption. The critical insertion of Yorùbá ethnicity into Nigerian politics began in the 1950s, in the last decade of the decolonization years. The Yorùbá had always been active in politics, and they pioneered in Lagos the formation of modern political parties and associations.<sup>38</sup> Up until the eve of World War II, mild-mannered men seeking reforms organized the parties. After the war, the country entered a radical phase, with the parties now mobilized to see the end of European rule. As the end became possible, the politicians began to organize parties along ethnic lines. The fault lines of regionalism—north, east, and west—produced the regional parties. The AG, created to mobilize the Yorùbá, had to compete with two other major regional parties, the NCNC in the east and the NPC in the north. The rivalry was intense, and it ultimately led to the fall of the First Republic and civil war, all within the first decade of independence in the 1960s.

Space does not permit full elaboration of the incorporation of the Yorùbá into national politics and the various crises it provoked. Scholars reflect the mood of the Yorùbá nationalists; the frustration that their struggles since the 1950s—after they had created a “nation”—has yet to produce what they want: the acquisition of power and the attainment of modernization. Their failure, sometimes presented as a collective tragedy, is blamed not on themselves but on others. In the closing years of the nineteenth century, the Yorùbá blamed themselves for creating

the wars that slowed down their progress. A hundred years later, they had the same feeling: their progress had been curtailed by “wars” with others, but they did not regard themselves as the instigators of any “war.”

Scholars may be talking in depressing terms, as “nationalists” often do. In reality, the Yorùbá have also been accused by other groups of creating problems for them. To the Igbo political class who seceded in the 1960s, their failure was often attributed to the role of Awolòwọ as the “prime minister” of Nigeria during the war and as the finance minister who ruined the nascent Biafran economy. To the northern political class, the Yorùbá have made it difficult for them to have a permanent grip on federal power. In view of the interethnic rivalries and finger pointing, the politics of the Yorùbá “nation” have to be located in the larger context of Nigeria itself. Awolòwọ based his formation of the AG on the assumption, clearly stated in *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, that Nigeria could not be described as a nation but “a mere geographical expression.”<sup>39</sup> His counterparts agreed—Tafawa Balewa, the country’s first prime minister, was always eager to say that Nigerians were different in their religions, customs, and beliefs, and that the creation of a united country was a wish.

To be sure, the differences in religions and customs were clear.<sup>40</sup> However, Awolòwọ and his peers became primordial and instrumentalists in turning these differences into political advantage. The British governed in a way that each region was almost autonomous while actually encouraging cultural and religious differences, resulting in a feeling that national unity or identity would be hard to create. Nigeria was created by the imperative of imperialism. To manage a conquered area of that magnitude, colonial administrative policies encouraged political autonomy in various parts. By the 1940s, regionalism had become powerful, the north–south divide was sharpened, and ethnic nationalism, which gave birth to modern political parties, was encouraged to flourish. The Yorùbá were part of a huge Nigerian conglomerate that was divided by religions, cultures, languages, and ethnicity.

The nationalism of Nigeria was not necessarily aligned with the nationalism of the Yorùbá nation. The AG and the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà wanted to develop their own people. There is not much to argue about in saying that political and cultural associations should develop their people. The problem, one that is yet to be solved, has been that the development of one’s people can mean (or has been interpreted to mean) the underdevelopment of others. As perceived by other groups in the country, Yorùbá ethnic nationalism is dangerous. A clash of various ethnic nationalisms has been a source of conflict, expressed in prejudices, excessive commitment to one’s group at the expense of others, and inability to share power and resources. As ethnic nationalism becomes an ingrained aspect of modern politics, the denial of Abiọla’s presidency made the Yorùbá angry, but not necessarily all Nigerians. When one group attains power, the expectation is that it should engage in political corruption to favor its own people. To mobilize the Yorùbá to think as one and vote for one party must carry some rewards, which may influence the Nigerian nation to work with the ethics of nepotism.



The politics of the Yorùbá “nation” will remain for the foreseeable future. Now divided into many small states in the country, the Yorùbá will continue to compete among one another for power. However, the incorporation of the Yorùbá into Nigeria means that the bigger political umbrella of Nigeria will continue to create relevance for ethnicity. Members of the Yorùbá political class, like their counterparts in other regions, will continue to find useful the manipulation of Yorùbá identity. To gain federal power and lucrative business contacts, the political class will continue to talk of the Yorùbá nation, even when it means the manipulation of ethnic consciousness for individual self-interest.

However, because the consciousness has already taken deep root, its survival is far more than the instrumentalist need of the political class. The demand that states and ethnic groups should have the power and autonomy to control their own affairs continues to grow, in part because many now regard the overcentralized federal government as a failure. The Yorùbá have been at the forefront of the demand for a national conference where the representatives of all groups would meet to renegotiate the basis of their existence and agree on how to share power and resources. Moreover, the notion of citizenship has been constructed around the idea of the Yorùbá nation itself—one is first a Yorùbá, and second a Nigerian. Until the order of citizenship is rearranged—Nigerian first, Yorùbá second—it is harder to diminish the sense of consciousness that is already invested in the creation and maintenance of the ideology of the Yorùbá nation.

## Notes

1. Some recent works are bringing the various locations together to discuss some specific themes. See Toyin Falola and Matt Childs, eds., *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

2. I. A. Akinjogbin, “Towards a Historical Geography of Yorubaland,” in *Yoruba Civilisation*, vol. 1, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin and G. O. Ekemode (Ilé-Ifè, Nigeria: Mimeographed Conference Proceedings, Department of History, University of Ifè, 1976), 19–33.

3. On the link between language and ethnicity, see for instance, Keith Allan, “Nation, Tribalism and National Language,” *Cahiers d’Etudes Africaines* 18, 3 (1978), 397–415.

4. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.M.S. 1921).

5. Among others, see P. C. Lloyd, *Yoruba Land Law* (London, 1962); and S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours, 1842–1872* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1957).

6. N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ìbàdàn, Nigeria: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1970), 98.

7. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, viii.

8. See, for instance, J. D. E. Abiola, J. A. Babafemi, and S. O. S. Ataiyero, *Itan Ilesa* [History of Ilésà] (Ilésà, Nigeria: self-printed, 1932).

9. Johnson, *History of the Yorubas*, 642.

10. I. A. Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A Key to Understanding Yoruba History* (Ìbàdàn: Olù-Akin Publishers, 2002), 104–18.
11. *Ibid.*, 113.
12. *Ibid.*
13. Fadipe, *The Sociology*.
14. G. J. Afolabi Ojo, *Yoruba Culture: A Geographical Analysis* (Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and London: University of Ifẹ̀ and University of London Press, 1966).
15. S. O. Biobaku, ed., *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
16. S. O. Biobaku, *The Origins of the Yorubas* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1955). The view is also repeated in Akinjogbin and Ekemode, eds., *Yoruba Civilization*, 1, 8–9.
17. ‘Biodun Adediran, “The Early Beginnings of the Ife State,” in *The Cradle of a Race: Ile-Ife from the Beginnings to 1980*, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin (Port Harcourt: Sunray, 1992), 77–95.
18. See, for instance, J. A. Ademakinwa, *Ife: Cradle of the Yoruba*, 2 parts (Lagos: self-published, 1958).
19. Among others, see Thurstan Shaw, “The Prehistory of West Africa,” in *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1985), 67–73.
20. See, for instance, William Bascom, *The Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria* (New York: Holt, Reinhart, and Winston, 1969).
21. S. O. Arifalo, *The Egbe Omo Oduduwa: A Study in Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism, 1945–1965* (Akure, Nigeria: Stebak Books and Publishers, 2001), dedication page.
22. Ọbafẹ̀mi Awolowo, *Awo: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 168.
23. Quoted in S. O. Arifalo, *The Egbe*, 145. The author has improved upon the English translation of the oath recited in Yorùbà.
24. Ọbafẹ̀mi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947).
25. *Ibid.*
26. *Ibid.*, 53.
27. J. S. Coleman, “The Emergence of African Political Parties,” in *Africa Today*, ed. Grove Haines (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1955), 234.
28. Nnamdi Azikiwe, *Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1961): 324.
29. Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1963), 105.
30. Samuel Akintoye was a prominent member of the AG, author of *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840–1893* (London: Longman, 1971).
31. On the nature of sub-Yorùbá politics and nationalism, see for instance, J. D. Y. Peel, *Ijeshas and Nigerians: The Incorporation of a Yoruba Kingdom, 1890s–1970s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).
32. See, for instance, B. J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1973); Larry Diamond, *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria: The Failure of the First Republic* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1988); William D. Graf, *The Nigerian State: Political Economy State Class and Political System in the Post-Colonial Era* (London: James Currey, 1988); and K. W. J. Post and M. Vickers, *Structure and Politics in Nigeria* (London: Heinemann, 1973).
33. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000).

34. J. D. Y. Peel, *Aladura: A Religious Movement Among the Yoruba* (London: International African Institute and Oxford University Press, 1968).

35. J. A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934* (London: Longman, 1973).

36. Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere, *The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic 1979–1984* (London: Zed, 1985); Richard A. Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

37. On the nature of the highly deceptive transition process, see Paul A. Beckett and Crawford Young, eds., *Dilemmas of Democracy in Nigeria* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997).

38. See, for instance, Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties; James S. Coleman, Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958).

39. Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, preface.

40. See, for instance, John Paden, *Religion and Political Culture in Kano* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973); and C. S. Whitaker, Jr., *The Politics of Tradition: Continuity and Change in Northern Nigeria, 1946–66* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).

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## ORAL TRADITION AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF YORÙBÁ DRESS

Tunde M. Akinwumi

Dress as a human body covering is significant in the daily life of man worldwide. The study of dress generally has received attention from archaeologists, anthropologists, art historians, economic historians, home economists, and physical and chemical scientists, among others. Despite the favorable response to its study, not much is known about the pre-twentieth century period of its form, use, and production in many African communities.<sup>1</sup> For example, little is known about the pre-twentieth century Yorùbá dress traditions beyond glimpses from travelogues. This has created a lacuna in the study of Yorùbá history and culture. Filling this gap has involved, for example, the use of varying approaches such as the perspective of studying the dress modes of succeeding generations of families from their photograph albums.<sup>2</sup> The other way was the exploration of eyewitness accounts.<sup>3</sup> The short time span covered by these approaches poses some limitations, which are rectified by the use of oral tradition.

Oral history, otherwise known as *ìtàn* in Yorùbá (collective name for myths, legends, and traditional history), makes copious references to events that occurred many centuries ago without providing any reference to absolute dates. Another positive side is that many *ìtàn* provide stories of origins on varying subjects. Those on dress history reflect clothing traditions, beliefs, habits, laws, and values, as well as providing hindsight as to how some contemporary dress modes emanated from the distant past. These etiological stories assist in knowing whether the dress being investigated is still static in form and functions over time or not. This new insight on the subject matter is therefore worth exploring.

*Dress*, as defined in this chapter, refers to all the items that cover or are attached to and held by the natural body, modifying it through various manipulations. Such body modifications involve manipulation of the skin through painting and decorative scarification, hair manipulations, coverings with fabrics, apparel, jewelry,

shoes, and various accessories.<sup>4</sup> In a chapter of this nature, it is impossible to analyze all the *itàn* and *oriki* (praise poems) reflecting dress. Consequently, this chapter focuses on some etiological stories and praise poems relating to the evolution of women's bosom coverings, the introduction of certain Arab-styled men's robes and trousers, and the development of characteristic dress items associated with certain political and religious leaders such as Ọ̀bàtálá and Oṣun. The investigation contextualizes the dress items historically, suggesting possible dating, their persistence or shift from the original model in terms of form and function, and accounts for any cultural impact of these dress items. The study is offered as an illustration of what the dress historian of nonliterate peoples can expect to gain from an analysis of folk stories. This proposed vista should boost the study of Yorùbá dress, in particular, because it is a relatively unexplored subject in Yorùbá studies.

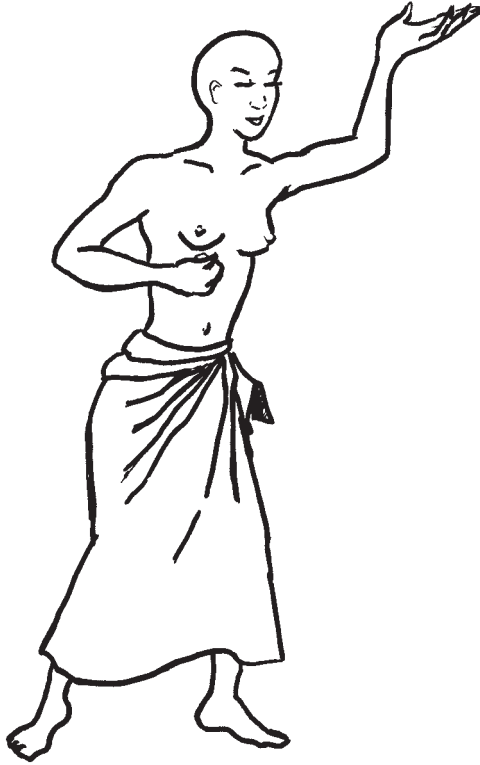
### **Ifá Literary Corpus and the Evolution of Women's Bosom Covering**

Ifá, otherwise known as *Ọ̀rúnmilà*, operated all over Yorùbáland at the inception of Ilé-Ifẹ̀. His various activities and events, including those of his cult, form a type of oral memoir known as the Ifá literary and divination corpus. It expresses ancient Yorùbá practices and confirms knowledge and wisdom of the past on various subjects. It is therefore a source of historical evidence of various subjects.<sup>5</sup> The Ifá story on the evolution of women's bosom covering goes thus:

Ṣonṣó orí ọ̀mú obìnrin,  
Ó ngún ni lojú  
A dífá fún Elédùmarè  
A ran awọ̀n obìnrin  
Ti ìkòlẹ̀ òrun bọ̀ wá kòlẹ̀ ayé.  
Wọ̀n sị ri ẹ̀ṣù si wọ̀n láyà.  
Ọ̀kúnrin tí nlo ní ọ̀kánkán ibẹ̀ ni yio maa wo.<sup>6</sup>

The ripples of womens' pointed breasts,  
Pinch our (men's) eyes  
Ifá divination was performed for Elédùmarè  
Who was about sending women  
From heaven on to the earth.  
And the devil (i.e., the tempting breast) was planted on their chests.  
Any man who sees them far off, usually fixes his gaze on the spots.

This narrative is presented in *Odù Ifá Obara Meji* and *Okanran Meji*.<sup>7</sup> It is set from a cosmological perspective. It reveals that on their earthbound journey, women offered wrapped *ẹ̀kọ* (solid corn pap) as sacrifices. The *ẹ̀kọ* grew into very attractive breasts as soon as they arrived on earth. The exposed breasts' fea-



**Figure 2.1.** Yorùbá women’s dress before the twelfth century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

tures caused much public havoc, and the women decided to cover their breasts with cloths. In essence, the myth suggests that there was a period in time when women generally tied a cloth wrapper around the waist, leaving the torso, including their bosoms, exposed and solutions had to be found to this apparent problem in various communities (Figure 2.1). The solution advanced was that women should shift their wrapper cloth to a point above the breast line. That was it; the public nuisance stopped (Figure 2.2). This social action appears to be the first attempt at providing a covering for the Yorùbá women’s bosoms.

When did this first take place (that is, when did the wrapper cloth shift upward to cover the bosoms) and for how long was the practice sustained? It is possible to glean answers from the scanty archaeological data available on ancient Ifẹ̀. The dress mode found on the bronze figures of an Ifẹ̀ royal couple can be studied.<sup>8</sup> The royal female figure wraps her fabric above her bosoms, and this is securely held under her armpits. As these figures have been dated between ca. twelfth century A.D. and ca. fifteenth century A.D. It seems reasonable, therefore, to suggest that the dress shift reform occurred much before then (before ca. 1100–1400



**Figure 2.2.** Yorùbá women's dress after the twelfth century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

A.D.). The dress reform was, however, short lived. Evidence abounds; even in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Abeokuta and Lagos missionary reports and in independent newspapers reveal noncompliance with this prohibition.<sup>9</sup> Many women went around half naked in private and public life.<sup>10</sup>

After this historic dress reform of the twelfth century, many dress items for the torso were developed, one after another. We examine these developments from other sources. It seems the wives of the traditional elite, namely the *oba* (chief/monarch) and chiefs' wives, were in the vanguard in the development of subsequent dress forms. First, they imbibed and propagated the custom of covering their bosoms, as evidenced from the bronze figures mentioned. They may have invented an *òjá*, a knotted kerchief in the form of a belt for holding in place the wrapper below the bust.<sup>11</sup> Subsequently, some royal women wore a separate piece of large fabric for the bosom known as *igba-omun*, a type of improvised brassiere. The fabric was wrapped around the breasts with its ends tied at the back of its wearer (Figure 2.3). This was the second stage of bosom-covering custom. R. F. Burton and W. H. Clarke separately provided evidence of this practice among some wives of Yorùbá monarchs in the mid-nineteenth century from the illustrations in their publications.<sup>12</sup> This means that this fashion trend perhaps started long before the nineteenth century. At an unknown time, an attempt was made to



**Figure 2.3.** Yorùbá women’s dress I. The dress incorporates an indigenous brassiere used before the 19th century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

cover the whole torso, particularly against the effects of cold in the night and during the wet season. *Ìborùn*, a shawl, was created for this purpose (Figure 2.4). The last stage had to do with the development of a *bùbá* blouse for covering the whole torso and arms. It was affected through a dress reform by the combined efforts of a group of Western-educated Yorùbá elite and the British colonial administration from the late 1880s (Figure 2.5). They felt at the time that the coverings evolved so far by the women were not “civilized” enough for the Christian and Western model of modesty. The reform was accepted by many Yorùbá monarchs and women, but not without initial resistance.<sup>13</sup> On the whole, the use of the *bùbá* blouse finally provided a complete answer to the age-long problem of covering the women’s torso.

Using scarves for covering the head was not a known feature among Yorùbá women for many centuries. The age-long practice was for women to plait their hair and display the styles for private and public admiration. Only certain notable men and women, such as *Ọ̀bàtálá* and *Ọ̀ṣun*, who are discussed below, used headkerchiefs in private and public life. However, Osifekunde observed the use of





**Figure 2.4.** Yorùbá women's dress II. Dress includes a shawl, which covers the entire torso and is useful during the wet season. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

head-kerchiefs among the Ìjẹ̀bú-Yorùbá soldiers between the late eighteenth century and the first decade of the nineteenth century.<sup>14</sup> The women's use of headscarves may have been copied from male votaries of Ọ̀bàtálá and soldiers long before the advent of Islam and Christianity, which required head covering with scarves as a convention.

### **Oríkì as a Source of Historical Data from the Eighteenth Century**

An *Oríkì ọ̀rìlẹ̀* is a lineage praise poem that incorporates a body of materials from the distant past, highlighting origin stories of the group including its members' occupations, rituals, taboos, descent or genealogy, exploits of great men in the lineage, and all other peculiar characteristic features. There is hardly any aspect of Yorùbá life that is not adequately found in *Oríkì ọ̀rìlẹ̀*.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2.5.** Select styles from the twentieth century. Many of these styles for women include the *bùbá*, ca. nineteenth century, and an elaborate head-dress, ca. ninth century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

Besides *oríkì bọ̀yòkìnní*, *oríkì anije* is a praise poem of a prominent individual, which gradually develops from the day of birth, even through old age. In essence, it very often describes the spectacular in the life of the individual referred to in the poem. The following elite praise poem documents the war dress of an unspecified Ọ̀yọ́ monarch (*aláàfin*) and the impact of culture contact on Yorùbá dress in the pre-twentieth century:

O wọ *kembeku* lọ ibi ìjà  
 Ìjà o pọ tan kii wọ efun  
*Abẹ̀nugbàngbà* [wide breeches] ni ifi da wọn l’ogun.<sup>16</sup>

He wore *kembeku* to war  
 Unless a battle was critical, he would not wear a tight-fitting trouser  
 With *abẹ̀nugbàngbà*, he struck them at war.

Another version:

Ìjà o pọ tan kii b’eha  
 O bọ kanki ja ọmọlọmọ l’ogun.  
 O bọ *kembeku* re ibi ìjà.<sup>17</sup>



**Figure 2.6.** Select Arab-style trousers. Trousers worn by Yorùbá men from the eighteenth century include (counter clockwise from top left): *atu*; *kanki* (*efun*, *kafo*); *kembeku*; *salubàki*. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

When a battle was fierce, he wore *eha*.  
 He wore *kanki* to fight somebody else's children at war.  
 He wore *kembeku* to war.

Some Arab-inspired dress items were introduced to Yorùbáland. The poems mention *kembeku*, *kanki*, *efun*, and *eha*, local names for some Arab-styled trousers. What was the nature of the trousers? Who is the Ọ̀yọ́ monarch referred to in the poem and at what period in time were these dress items first introduced in Ọ̀yọ́ either as part of Yorùbá war dress or as for other social use or for both? *Kembeku* are horse-riding knee breeches; *kanki*, *efun*, *kafo*, and *eha* are tight-fitting long trousers (Figure 2.6). Although not mentioned, the baggy types of trousers worn during the period were *salubàki* and *atu*, otherwise known as *efa*. The poem tells how the aláàfin went to war in this attire at certain, unspecified periods during the Ọ̀yọ́ imperial expansion. The time of the composition of this praise poem could be

associated with the campaign of Aláàfin Ajiboyede in the sixteenth century, Aláàfin Oluodo in the seventeenth century, Aláàfin Maku ca. 1798, or Aláàfin Oluewu, the last aláàfin of Òyó-Ilé in ca. 1834 to 1836. These were the four aláàfin ever known to have participated in battles before the fall of the Òyó Empire.<sup>18</sup> After Aláàfin Oluewu died in battle, no aláàfin was permitted to participate physically in war again. Since then, the praise poem has been used to praise all subsequent aláàfins for the valor and war exploits of their warrior-predecessors. These warrior-aláàfin added color to war dress in Yorùbáland<sup>19</sup> by adapting these foreign styles of dress.

The early aláàfin's use of these Arab-inspired robes and breeches coincided with their introduction in West Africa, namely, in the area of modern Liberia by the mid-seventeenth century, in the area of modern northern Ghana by 1817,<sup>20</sup> in the Gambia river area by 1738,<sup>21</sup> and in Nigeria's Hausaland in the early nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Muslim clerics and Arab traders were agents of the diffusion of these dress items. They were in the employ of the aláàfin as early as ca. 1787.<sup>23</sup> It is most likely that they introduced such dress items by then. It is reasonable to suggest that Aláàfin Maku, whose reign fell into this period, was the first to acquire these foreign items (kembeku, kanki, eha, efun) and adapting their use at the war front ca. 1797 and that he is the aláàfin referred to in the poem. It could, therefore, not have been Aláàfin Ajiboyede whose reign was during the sixteenth century, Oluodo in the seventeenth century, or Oluewu who died in battle in ca. 1834 to 1836. The probable use of the dress at war in 1797 is close to the beginning of the nineteenth century, the time earlier cited for the introduction of similar dress items in Hausaland, Yorùbá's neighbor to the north. This also means that the foreign dress must have been used before then. Therefore, one can safely declare that the use of Arab-inspired breeches and robes diffused to Yorùbáland around the mid-eighteenth century. It was after this period that many people started using the items at Òyó. H. Clapperton observed the use of this dress items at Òyó in the 1820s.<sup>24</sup>

The earliest users were chiefs. A number of praise poems document the enthusiasm with which many nineteenth century Yorùbá monarchs and chiefs adopted the new dress forms. Part of the praise poem of Ọba Okoro Aiyelagbe of Ipetumodu runs thus:

Baba Akinşola  
 O rowo isu ra'yi sembe-sembe.  
 Ọkọ Moyọọọla a maamu waákà olóyin.  
 Ọkọ mi da'sọ da bombata.  
 Ọkọ mi da'sọ t'ọlẹ ọlẹ gbe.  
 Ọkọ mi da'so t'oga nse l'ọdun.  
 Baba Akinşola a ba'so-iy'aşo-lenu.<sup>25</sup>

Akinşola's father

He has got the funds for buying an orange velvet.  
 My husband, the wearer of hand-woven fabrics with  
 nuances of blue stripes and other colors.  
 My husband commissioned a bombata dress

My husband commissioned this bombata dress  
 which a lazy man cannot lift.  
 My husband made dress with components of  
 changing shimmering colors.  
 Akinṣola's father, the owner of varying wonderful fabrics.

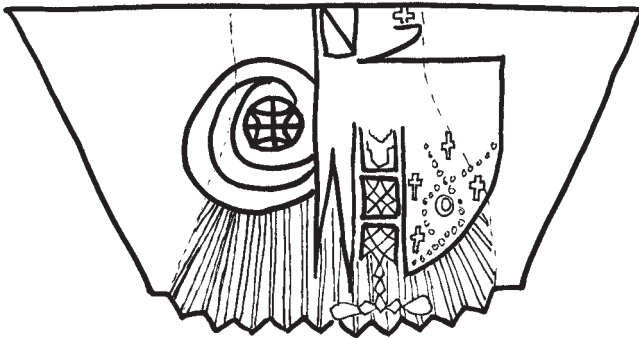
The poem suggests how the traditional elite of the nineteenth century used their wealth in the acquisition of fabrics as a mark of prestige. The materials included *waákà olóyìn*, an indigenously woven cloth with shades and tints of indigo in addition to red, yellow, and green, and *sembe-sembe*, an imported velvet. The fabrics were used for making the *bombata* robe, a large Arab-inspired gown having an all-over decorative corded and tuck surface. Another name for bombata is *giriike alagbari-eja* (Figure 2.7). It was the most expensive robe of the repertoire of Arab-styled dresses any Yorùbá monarch could choose in the nineteenth century, as well as the heaviest of the range of robes. No wonder the poet declares that it was too heavy for a lazy man to lift! The robe was usually worn for only a few hours because its weight could not be borne by many people for long.

A similar robe was acquired by Ọba Abimbola Sanni of Iwo (ca. 1830 to 1909). Its use is remarked upon in the following verses of his praise poem:

Oniṣokoto ododo.  
 Faran-da-agantan, Latubosun Alabi.  
 Faran-da-agantan, ọkọ ayaba, alewi-leṣe.  
 Faran-da-agantan.<sup>26</sup>  
 The one who wears a trousers of *alaari* (a red silk material).  
 He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan, Latubosun Alabi.  
 He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan, the husband of  
 the monarch's wife, able to do all things.  
 He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan.

The use of imported velvet aran re-echoes here. It was used for making agantan, another name for a *giriike*, a robe with the corded and tucked surface design mentioned. Still more local names were given to these robes and other prestige dress items as can be discovered in the praise poem celebrating Akintokun Akintola, the *balógun* (general) of Ìbàdàn, 1897 to 1899. The poem reads as follows:

Akintola! Iwo ni baba gbogbo won.  
 O-bo-pako-gun-gi.  
 O-bo-guru-gun-agbon.  
 O-bo-kembe-re-ibi-ija.<sup>27</sup>  
 Akintola, you are their lord.  
 You-who-climb-a-tree-with-a-clog-on.  
 You-who-wear-a-trailing-cloak-climbing-a-coconut-tree.  
 You-who-wear-a-horse-riding-knee-breeches-to-war.



**Figure 2.7.** Select Arab-style robes. Robes worn by Yorùbá men from the eighteenth century include: (top) agbaba (bottom) girike-alagbiri eja also known as agantan and bombata. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

In this poem, Akintòla was a warlord who dressed in *guru*, a trailing cloak (toga) made of a large prestigious fabric and draped over an undertunic or robe. The draping was done thus: an end of the fabric was laid against the chest, then carried over the left shoulder and around the back and brought under the right arm to the front. Next it was draped over the left shoulder, and finally tied in the back. This arrangement was made in such a way as to leave the right arm free. The draped toga further enhanced the stature of the wearer of *girike*, *gbariye*, *dàndógó*, or *orag-bádá* robe (Figure 2.7). The toga can be classified into two types. When the toga left a trail of about 3 meters on the floor, it was known as *guru* (Figure 2.8). If an elegant one almost touched the ground, it was known as *gogowu* (Figure 2.9). The



**Figure 2.8.** Arab-Yorùbá dress I. The combination of Arab and Yorùbá-inspired items include the girike, salubàki, guru, and gobi cap from the nineteenth century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

horse-riding knee breeches, *kembe*, were usually a part of their dress ensemble, as demonstrated in this poem. Other prestige items from the poem were clogs (*pako bibo*). Produced locally, *clog* appears to have been used exclusively by some lords before the nineteenth century (Figure 2.10). This was the case among some Ìjẹ̀bù-Yorùbá monarchs, as observed by Osifekinde.<sup>28</sup> The clogs were known as *saka* in the Ìjẹ̀bù area. Beside going in clogs and wearing gogowu or guru over the Arab-styled robes, some monarchs appeared in other dress combinations. They wore over any Arab-styled robe a waistband made of sizeable number of strung beads to show more affluence (Figure 2.10). Evidence of this fashion trend is reflected in a verse of the praise poem of the Apetumodu monarch, Ọ̀ba Fọ̀lășade Ajiga:

Fọ̀lășade o!  
 Ọ̀ba-abaja-wojo-wuileke.<sup>29</sup>  
 Hail Fọ̀lășade!  
 The-king-who-clads-in-beads-including-those-on-the-waist.



**Figure 2.9.** Arab-Yorùbá dress II. The combination of Arab and Yorùbá-inspired items include the dândógó, etu, gogowu, and abeti-aja cap. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

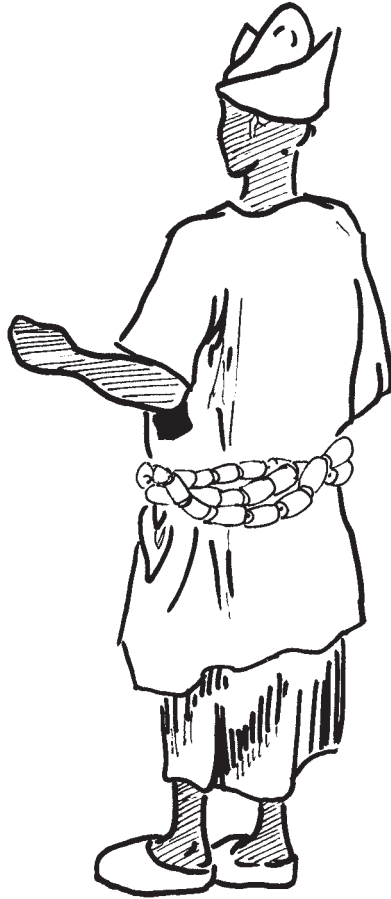
The praise poem celebrating Ọba Mohammed Lamuye Oluwo of Iwo (1805 to 1906) reveals other Arab-styled dress items which were introduced to the elite of the time. The poem runs thus:

Ọba ba l'ẹ̀şin  
Alukinba oun oşo.  
Aran ki l'eyi, baba Iwodotun?  
Aran ki l'eyi, baba Ikufo?<sup>30</sup>

The monarch perched on the horse  
Alukinba is for his personal adornment.  
Which velvet is this, the father of Iwodotun?  
Which velvet is this, the father of Ikufo?

It seems from this poem that the elite chose from a wide range of imported velvet materials available then. In the poem, Lamuye's subjects publicly appreciated the varying velvet dress he put on for different occasions. Aside from that, Lamuye





**Figure 2.10.** Arab-Yorùbá dress III. The combination of Arab and Yorùbá-inspired items include the eski, atu trousers, abeti-aja cap, and ileke-idi from the nineteenth century. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

wore *alukimba* (*alkayabba*) each time he rode on horseback. *Alkayabba*, an expensive Arab cloak worn over robes, was usually associated with Moslem chiefs of northern Nigeria. Made of either imported silk or velvet, it was, and still is, usually lavishly embroidered with arabesque patterns.

The five poems suggest the use of Arab-styled dress from the eighteenth century. In a nutshell, we propose the following people's response to the use of these dress items since then: That hitherto the indigenous dress ensemble for Yorùbá men was composed of a wrapper fabric fixed on the waist over shorts. In addition, the *gogowu* was draped over the whole body. The Yorùbá retained the use of *gogowu* as they adopted the Arab-style robes. The former was draped over the latter. This means that they regarded this foreign dress as additional rather than substitutive.



**Figure 2.11.** Sapara. This elegant form of the agbádá was created and popularized by a Yorùbá medical officer, Dr. Oguntola Sapara, in the 1920s. Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

The chiefs were the earliest users of these Arab dress items. They used the items to boost their ego and to enhance their dignified posture, while at the same time applying sumptuary laws to prevent the people in the lower rung of socio-economic ladder from using the items. Other sources confirm that the sumptuary laws were separately enforced, for example, at Òyó<sup>31</sup> and in Ìbàdàn by Oluyole.<sup>32</sup> The laws waned eventually during the second half of the nineteenth century with the fast spread of Islam, which specified converts to use the Arab-style dress items as symbols of identification with Islam. This move led to the widespread production and use of cheap robes to satisfy the purse of the less affluent converts.<sup>33</sup> As for most of the chiefs, their favorable disposition to the use of the Arab-style dress until the late nineteenth century had no relationship with the spread of Islam. This was because they embraced the indigenous faith.<sup>34</sup>

What happened in the last seven decades or so was the continuing use of some Arab robes and other forms and the cultural authentication of them for modern Yorùbá use. These included the creation of an elegant model of agbádá known as *sapara* (Figure 2.11). There has been very low patronage of dandogo, gbàriye, girike, kembe, bombata, guru, gogowu, and other prestige dress associated with the eighteenth and nineteenth century traditional elite fashion because of their

astronomical cost and, most importantly, their anachronism today. The preference is for the light and smart models of the Arab type of clothing as well as the choice of some Western-styled dress and indigenous forms.

## **Ifá Literary Corpus and the Origins of O.bàtálá White Dress**

According to one mythology, Ọbàtálá was a one-time ruler of Ilé-Ifẹ who after his dethronement became a religious leader. He was consulted thereafter by barren women desiring the fruit of the womb. We have here four narratives that shed light on the origins of Ọbàtálá's dress, and his dress production and selection when he was alive. There are several myths on Ọbàtálá. We only consider here those relating to his dress modes.

The first story, *Odù Orangun-Meji* from the Ifá literary corpus, goes like this: There were 401 great men and women who inhabited the ancient city of Ilé-Ifẹ. They came in waves of migration. The first wave of migrants included Ọbàtálá. The second wave included Ologbojo, Sanponna, Osanyin, Ògún, Sàngó, Èṣù, Òriṣà Oko, and Ọṣun. The third had among others Odu, Oya, Yemoja, Yemoo, Oro, and Yewa. There were thirteen migration bands in all. They were known as *òrìṣà* (i.e., special heads, special brains selected from heaven for Ilé-Ifẹ occupation; more commonly referred to as gods). Each of the 401 individuals had his or her own assignment apportioned by God.<sup>35</sup> These elite used to have public meetings which brought all of them together. Constant open rivalry among them resulted later in their relocation to various parts of Yorùbáland. Consequently, Ọbàtálá relocated to Ode Iranje, Ògún to Ode-Ire, Antete to Ode-Ikoyi and so forth.

Ọrúnmilá was one of these notable men. He personified divination. When he consulted the Ifá oracle, he was told to with him to his new location (i.e., Ode Iranje) certain materials which included clothing. They were a white wrapper fabric that he had to tie around his waist and white headgear (*gèlè*) on which was attached an *iko-ode* (red parrot feather). In addition, he had to walk with a giant walking stick known as *opá osooro*. Ọbàtálá complied and this was how he established his characteristic mode of dressing (Figure 2.12). Appearing this way was also a precondition for being empowered as a diviner who would cure women's barrenness.

In the second tale, Ọbàtálá was the head of the 401 notable men and women earlier mentioned as *òrìṣà*; hence, he was known as *Òriṣànlá* (head of all the *òrìṣà*). As a monarch, he was expected to take up a leadership role, live a transparent, pure life, and show good example to others. As purity of life was associated with immaculate whiteness, Òriṣànlá always had to be clad in white attire. This informs why thereafter Ọbàtálá was given another name, Ọbàtálá (*Ọba-ti-ala*) meaning "monarch-in-white-clothing." Consequently, his name changed to Ọbàtálá from his original name, Òriṣànlá. The third dress story in an *oríkì* illustrates Ọbàtálá's source of fabric:



**Figure 2.12.** Ọ̀bàtálá's dress. Ọ̀bàtálá's characteristic mode of dress in the ninth century, which includes the gogowu, cloth, gélé headgear with iko-ode (parrot feathers), and an opá iranje (large working stick). Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

Ọ̀bàtálá ni aṣo nile  
 Olú-Ifẹ̀ ni ile Ọ̀ṣinlẹ̀  
 Ni ile Sooko  
 Ni ibi ti a gbe nhun aṣo funfun balau  
 Fun Ọ̀ba bo ara.<sup>36</sup>

Ọ̀bàtálá has a collection of fabrics at home.  
 The monarch of Ifẹ̀ where the Ọ̀ṣinlẹ̀ lives  
 In Sooko's homestead  
 Where fine white fabrics were woven  
 For the monarch's use as body-draping cloths (Figure 2.12).

The fourth narrative in *Odù Ogbe-se Ifá* corpus demonstrates how Ọ̀bàtálá produced and used *aare*, a unique crown made of cowry shells.<sup>37</sup> In brief, the story goes thus: Ọ̀bàtálá needed slaves to take care of his domestic cores. He bought a

slave in the market not realizing that he was lame. Later Ọ̀bàtálá discovered that the lame slave was a virtuoso in beadwork. The slave promised to make a fine beaded crown for his master if he supplied two pieces of fabrics, two hands of thread, two needles, and a cylindrical container. These were provided and before long, the lame slave expelled a large number of tiny white beads. He used these beads for producing an unprecedented, immaculate white (aare). This crown made Ọ̀bàtálá more popular at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ because it was the greatest crown ever produced at the time. Ọ̀bàtálá got orders from the elite to produce varying types of crowns and hats and this made him very wealthy. Ọ̀bàtálá also produced a version of his own crown for Odùduwà.

We are able to deduce from the four narratives much history on Ọ̀bàtálá and his characteristic dress. We therefore propose the following: That his original name was Òrìṣànlá. He ruled in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ sometime in the ninth century A.D.<sup>38</sup> It is most likely he lived during the same period as the notable men and women mentioned above, especially those in the first and second batch of migration to Ilé-Ifẹ̀, namely Ọ̀rúnmilá, Ọ̀gún, Ṣàngó, Èṣù, Osanyin, Sanponna, Olòrìṣà Oko, Ologbojo, and Ọ̀ṣun. This is because evidence from the above Ifá corpus shows their participation in public meetings with Ọ̀bàtálá at various times before their separate relocations from Ilé-Ifẹ̀.<sup>39</sup>

We believe that Òrìṣànlá's rule over his subjects demanded a high level of purity of life at the time. We have internal and external purity of life. He demonstrated his external purity to others by wearing a white dress ensemble. This characteristic dressing style earned him the change of name from Òrìṣànlá to a more popular name, Ọ̀bàtálá, the monarch-in-white-clothing. He maintained this dressing style even after Odùduwà had displaced him from the throne and coveted his white crown and he had to relocate to Ode Iranje. Ọ̀rúnmilá emerged at this point perhaps as one of the measures to resettle Ọ̀bàtálá at Ode Iranje, giving him hope that all was not lost, encouraging him to sustain his dress style, and assuring him that compliance will empower him to cure women's suffering from barrenness. Although not depicted in color, the memorial sculpture of Ọ̀bàtálá standing in front of his Ideta shrine at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ still features his aare crown, royal long neck beads, steel wrist bangles, anklets, and waist wrapper dress.<sup>40</sup>

After Ọ̀bàtálá's death, he became a cult-hero-turned-divinity and one whom barren women still sought for the fruit of the womb. In remembrance of Ọ̀bàtálá, his votaries started imitating their master's dress mode with some slight modifications. The male votaries wore the following: white tunic garment, white trousers, white head-tie, gèlè, and white steel bangles, *oje*, on the left and right wrists. The choice of tunic and trousers were added by copying Arab-styled garments. The female votaries, on the other hand, wore the following: white wrapper cloth (*irobinrin*), white shawl (*iborun*), white sash (*oja*), white cap (*filà*), white steel bangles (*oje*) on the left and right wrists, and plenty of strings of white beaded necklaces, anklets, and wristlets (Figure 2.13). Women votaries chose to wear caps in order to distinguish themselves from their male counterpart. The relevance of *oje* is established in a proverb. It runs thus:



**Figure 2.13.** Dress of Ọ̀bàtálá's votaries. (top left) Female votary in búbá, irobinrin (white wrapper), iborùn (shawl), abeti-aja (men's cap), and oje (wrist bangles) (bottom right) male votary in esiki robe, atu trousers, gèlè (headgear), and oje (wrist bangles). Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

A fi oje ọ̀ olóríṣà lówó  
O ku ẹnì tí yọ̀ọ̀ bo o.<sup>41</sup>

We fix white steel bangle on the wrist of Ọ̀bàtálá votaries  
Who dares removes it from there.

The saying is significant. It establishes that from the day the bangle was fixed on the votary's wrist, it must never be removed. It is a symbol of permanent faithfulness, the total surrender of the votary to Ọ̀bàtálá. This partly account for the sustenance of Ọ̀bàtálá's dress code among his few faithful who are found all over Yorùbá towns and rural areas.<sup>42</sup>

## The Evolution of Ọ̀ṣun Dress in Ifá Literary Corpus

As indicated, Ọ̀ṣun was likely to have lived during the same period with Ọ̀bàtálá, Odùduwà, and other notable men and women, in the ninth century A.D. at Ilé-Ifẹ̀. Ọ̀ṣun was always resplendently dressed, appearing from her youthful days in an overwhelming number of brass (*idẹ*) bangles on her right and left hands and in a white wrapper dress. Therefore, she must have come from a wealthy family.<sup>43</sup>

Among the various stories on Ọ̀ṣun, *Odù Ifá Ogundasee*<sup>44</sup> is the most relevant myth on her dress evolution. Recaptured in brief, it runs thus: Ọ̀ṣun was barren. She approached Ọ̀rúnmilà for assistance to cure her barrenness. Then Ọ̀rúnmilà consulted the Ifá oracle. The oracle demanded certain sacrificial items, which included items of high fashion. The sacrificial dress items symbolized a medium for enticing children from "heaven" to Ọ̀ṣun as a barren woman. Ọ̀ṣun provided all the required sacrificial items such as mashed boiled beans (*tunpulu*), a pot (*kòtò*), two hens, plenty of brass bangles, a red wrapper dress, and a red headscarf (*gèlè*).

During another divination session, Ọ̀ṣun was instructed to dress up in the items earlier mentioned and carry a pot of mashed boiled beans on her head. After complying, Ọ̀ṣun found herself in a trance, standing before Olódùmarè and being besieged by numerous infants. While in the trance, she gave the children small rations of tunpulu and behold, they were ready to follow her back to the world. They followed Ọ̀ṣun up to the space separating the heavens from the earth. After coming round, Ọ̀ṣun discovered that the children were nowhere to be found. She was dejected. Then Ọ̀rúnmilà consoled her, assuring that she was already pregnant and that she should rejoice.

The time she gave birth to a baby coincided with the birth of thousands of new babies recorded all over Yorùbáland. Parents of the newly delivered babies were asked by Ọ̀rúnmilà to give thanks to God and Ọ̀ṣun because God used the latter in bringing the harvest of these new babies. Ọ̀ṣun became deified from this period on and was associated with all barren women and women with new babies.

After Ọ̀ṣun's death, the votaries continued worshipping her with full dedication following her precepts.<sup>45</sup> They started appearing in her characteristic mode of dressing, in the manner she appeared during her historic trance. The ensemble included tying a wrapper cloth reaching above the bosom area, wearing brass bangles, and *gèlè* (Figure 2.14). The votaries wear this ensemble as a memorial in honor of Ọ̀ṣun, particularly during the Ọ̀ṣun festivals and other ritual performances. At the



**Figure 2.14.** Oṣun’s dress. Items worn by Oṣun in the ninth century include red wrapper cloth, gélé (red scarf on head), and several idẹ (brass bangles). Credit: Jennifer G. Vaughn, 2006.

conclusion of Oṣun festivals, the supreme priestess (*Iya Oṣun*) wears everything mentioned, as well as Oṣun’s magical tuft (*osu Oṣun*).

In light of the above, the cultural import of the myth becomes apparent. It reveals the first use of Oṣun dress in the astral world as a medium for attracting unborn children. By extension, her votaries maintained the use of this dress as one of the means for communicating with God so that the barren could have children. The dress also signified that the person was Oṣun’s priestess. The existing priestesses took the worship of their matriarch with dedication in the face of the destructive impact of Islam and Christianity in Yorùbáland. The objects of worship, including Oṣun dress forms, have been sustained. Therefore, there has been no change made to Oṣun worship in terms of the dress worn by votaries at festivals and on other occasions.



## Summary and Conclusion

This chapter has examined the importance of the content of oral history, especially the etiological stories and praise poems, and argued that they are valid and valuable sources of historical evidence capturing events relating to the development of Yorùbá dress many centuries ago. Consequently, these sources are a worthwhile field for researchers in the disciplines of visual art and dress history in terms of the reconstruction of the past. They form an indispensable repository, providing relevant information particularly on the clothing values, habits, preferences, forms, and styles of certain notable individuals, religious, political groups, and of the society in general. They make a receptacle from which the society's response to introduced indigenous and foreign dress forms can be perceived and appreciated.

The examples analyzed demonstrate the response of various groups and individuals to the development of certain Yorùbá and Arab-style dress forms over time. Early attempts to change the dress came from some Yorùbá educated elite in conjunction with the British colonial administration in the late nineteenth century. The women's response to the earliest attempt at covering their bosoms occurred before the eleventh century A.D. The earliest reforms, as well as the subsequent ones, were rejected by many women. This was true, to some extent, of the evolution of *bùbá* blouse. On the whole, Yorùbá women are well clad, although a good number in rural communities still expose their bosoms while working during the day at home and on the farm. The excuse given was that they could not bear the heat of the day.

There were many Arab-inspired dress items introduced in Yorùbáland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The creation of, and the preference for, certain fashionable, elegant models of Arab dress in the twentieth century definitely is associated with the need to look elegant in the fast life characteristic of the present age. The *sapara-agbádá* robe and the tunic types in particular are favorites.

The unique dress ensembles of *Ọ̀bàtálá* and *Ọ̀ṣun* were informed and evolved by divining specification in the ninth century A.D. Their continuity have some relationship with the influence of uncontaminated practices that still prevailed in the worship of *Ọ̀bàtálá* and *Ọ̀ṣun* by their relatively few votaries in Yorùbáland.

In selecting this source, the historian must know that the relevant information is in bits and pieces, and attempts must be made to have a large collection of these etiological stories and praise poems before embarking on the reconstruction of the past. Besides, the etiological stories have certain problems. For example, it is difficult to separate myths from actual facts, especially from *Ifá* corpus. *Myth* is what one wants to believe about the past and is based on belief and emotion. The task is to demystify them. Similarly, praise poems contain many allusions, images, and touches of humor that are meaningless to many non-Yorùbá speakers; a deep knowledge of the language and dialect is very important for the proper understanding of the content of the narratives. One other great limitation of these sources is that they usually lack absolute dates for the events referred to in the narratives. This, of course, does not mean that the events never happened.

In spite of these and other difficulties, the consolation is that we have other relevant sources such as the written, archaeological, verbal art, and linguistic forms with which to augment, crosscheck, clarify, and criticize these narratives.

## Notes

1. We have very few detailed dress studies on precolonial Africa as compared to the large body of works on colonial and postcolonial African dress trends. This observation is from a careful study of the following two volumes: J. B. Eicher, *African Dress: A Select and Annotated Bibliography of Subsaharan Countries* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1970) and I. M. Pokornowski and others, *African Dress II: A Select and Annotated Bibliography* (East Lansing: African Study Centre, Michigan State University, 1985).

2. For example, see B. M. Wass, "Yoruba Dress: A Systematic Case Study of Five Generations of a Lagos Family" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1975).

3. For example, see T. M. Akinwumi, "Persistence and Change in Yoruba Costume: A Case Study of Oyo, ca. 1850–1981" (MA thesis, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Nigeria, 1981).

4. I. M. Pokornowski and others, *African Dress II*, 3.

5. Wande Abimbola, "Ifa Divination Poems as Sources of Historical Evidence," *Lagos Notes and Records* 1, no. 1 (1975): 17–26; Wande Abimbola, "The Literature of the Ifa Cult" in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S. O. Biobaku (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 41–62.

6. F. Agboola, "Ojulowo Eeki Ifa, Apa Kinni" (mimeograph, University of Lagos, Department of African Languages and Literatures, n.d.), 112–14.

7. *Ibid.*

8. Refer to F. Willett, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), 38, 41, plate III.

9. For reported scenes of women who habitually exposed their bosoms in public places not caring about the nuisance they created, see, for example, *Ìwé Iròyìn* (18 July 1864) and the editorial in the weekly *Lagos Times* (9 May 1891).

10. E. de Negri, "Yoruba Women's Costume," *Nigeria Magazine* 72 (1962): 7.

11. This was a common feature of the Ìjẹ̀bù-Yorùbá in the 1810s. See P. C. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu" in *Africa Remembered*, ed. P. H. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 264.

12. See evidence from R. F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountain*, vol. 1 (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863), frontispiece illustration; W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854–1858* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1972), plate III.

13. T. M. Akinwumi, "The Lagos Colonial Elite and their Buba Blouse Prescription for Yoruba Women's Improper Dressing, ca. 1880–1920" (paper presented at the Tenth Triennial Symposium on African Art, New York University, April 19–23, 1995).

14. See P. C. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 265.

15. See J. A. Ayorinde, "Oriki" in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S. O. Biobaku (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 63–76; Bolanle Awe, "Notes on Oriki and Warfare in Yorubaland" in *Yoruba Oral Tradition*, ed. Wande Abimbola (Ilé-Ife: University of Ifè, Department of African Languages and Literatures, 1975), 267–92; Bolanle Awe, "Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of the Yoruba Oriki," *Africa* 44, no. 4

(1974): 331–49; S. O. Babayemi, *Content Analysis of Oriki Orile* (Ìbàdàn: Institute of African Studies, University of Ìbàdàn, 1989).

16. This poem was collected from Alagba Lawani Ayankoso, the head chief *baale* of Òyó drummers, aged about 100, of Ilé Kowa, Oke Afin, Òyó (February 4, 1981).

17. Recorded from Mapanpa Oke, the head of Aláàfin's hunters (*Olú-Ode Aláàfin*), aged ca. 90, of Oke Afin, Òyó.

18. See Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CMS, 1921), 76, 196, 230, 282.

19. For more on war uniforms developed among various Yorùbá troops, see J. F. Ade Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1971), 134; R. F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountain*, 292; K. Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, part II, rev. ed. (Ìbàdàn: Caxton Press, n.d), 105; O. Olutoye and J. A. Olapade, "Implements and Tactics of War among the Yoruba" in *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1783–1893*, ed. I. A. Akinjogbin (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1998), 210.

20. T. E. Bowditch, *Mission from Cape Coast Castle to Ashante*, 3rd ed. (New York: n.p., 1966), 37.

21. R. Sieber, *African Textiles and Decorative Arts* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1972), 165.

22. D. Heathcote, "Insight into a Creative Process: A Rare Collection of Embroidery Designs from Kano," *Savannah* 1, no. 2 (1972): 165; J. Perani, "Nupe Costume Crafts," *African Arts* 12, no. 3 (1979): 54; C. Kriger, "Robes of the Sokoto Caliphate," *African Arts* 11, no. 3 (1988): 53.

23. R. Law, "The Oyo Empire: The History of a Yoruba State, ca. 1600–ca. 1838" (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 1971), 78.

24. H. Clapperton, *Journal of Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1966), 120.

25. A. Babalola, *Awon Oriki Borokinni* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), 39.

26. *Ibid.*, 58–59.

27. I. B. Akinyele, *Ìwé Itàn Ìbàdàn* (n.p.: 1911), 140.

28. P. C. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 264, 278.

29. Babalola, *Awon Oriki Borokinni*, 43, 14n.

30. *Ibid.*, 64.

31. See R. and J. Lander, *Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger* (London: John Murray, 1832), 122.

32. K. Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, 83–85.

33. See R. Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey Among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa in 1859–60* (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1861), 106; W. H. Clarke, *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, 100, 113–14, 151, 243; D. J. May, "Journey in the Yoruba and Nupe Countries in 1858," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 30 (1860), 213, 222, 229; E. de Veer and A. O'Hear, "Gerhard Rohlfs in Yorùlánd," *History in Africa* 21 (1994): 258.

34. J. Perani and N. H. Wolff, *Cloth, Dress and Art Patronage in Africa* (Oxford: Berg, 1999), 108.

35. The 401 òrìṣà have been separately interpreted by some scholars as highly notable men in Ilé-Ifẹ̀. A. Obayemi argues that they were probably notable men of certain professional occupations who came to Ilé-Ifẹ̀ before or during Odùduwà's invasion of the place, thus providing a vital industrialization, commercial, and intellectual development for the city of Ilé-Ifẹ̀. Consequently, those on the list included Òrúnmilà, who personifies divination; Ògún, metallurgy and Aje, commerce (or wealth). Elesije is described as

the physician (i.e., Awo Oodua, the Odùduwà's physician). See A. Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours before 1600" in *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1971), 213–14. Another specialist is P. Adewale Adeleke, "Oriki Alaro," HND Long Essay (Department of Industrial Design, Yaba College of Technology, Lagos, 1997). See also I. A. Akinjogbin, "Yorubaland Before Oduduwa," *Ife Journal of History* 1, no. 1 (1993), 1–12.

36. E. B. Idowu, *Olodumare, God in Yoruba Belief* (London: Longman, 1962), 71–74.

37. *Ibid.*, 113–16; I. Eleburuibon, *The Adventures of Obatala* (San Francisco: The North Scale Institute, 1990), 41–43.

38. See I. A. Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture* (Ìbàdàn: Olú-Akin Publishers, 2002), 9; I. A. Akinjogbin, "Yorubaland before Oduduwa," 4, 9.

39. C. Adeoye, *Igbagbo ati Esin Yorùbá* (Ìbàdàn: Odù Printing, 1985), 44–48.

40. Idowu, *Olodumare*, plate 6.

41. Adeoye, *Igbagbo*, 103.

42. Particularly for Ìbàdàn area, see G. E. Simpson, *Yoruba Religion and Medicine in Ibadan* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1980).

43. Adeoye, *Igbagbo*, 206.

44. *Ibid.*, 206–8.

45. *Ibid.*, 209–14.

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## DIARIES AS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORIES

Olufunke A. Adeboye

### Introduction

A *diary* is a personal document that presents events from an individual's perspective. It is rich in detail, particularly details of everyday life that are useful, among other things, for the writing of social history and biographies. The numerous historical volumes produced from the diaries of George Washington, for instance, testify to the usefulness of the diary as a historical source.<sup>1</sup> Although the diary and other autobiographical writings are to be found in most literate societies of the world, the diary-keeping culture is not a recent development. In Europe, diaries from the fifteenth century have survived until the present, and their numbers have increased over the years.<sup>2</sup>

In Yorùbáland, southwestern Nigeria, the diary-keeping culture developed in the late nineteenth century.<sup>3</sup> This was made possible by the introduction of Western education, which produced an educated elite, and, indirectly by the influence of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) agents in Yorùbáland who kept quarterly and biannual personal journals that were sent to their missionary headquarters periodically. The educated elite adopted this diary-keeping culture and faithfully recorded their appointments, summaries of daily activities, opinions on crucial issues, and future plans. These diaries contain information, not only on the personal lines of their authors, but also on the societies in which they lived.

This chapter regards these diaries as representing intellectual and cultural histories of the milieu in which they were written. It analyzes the extent to which the diaries were able to capture prevailing conditions, as well as their limitations from historiographical and literary perspectives. The conclusion is that despite these limitations, historians, and indeed other scholars, will find the diaries invaluable, especially for their rich display of the intellectual and cultural nuances of their times.

This chapter is divided into five sections. The first examines the spread of Western education and the rise of an educated elite in Yorùbáland. The second section introduces us to the authors of the diaries. The third and fourth sections highlight the cultural and intellectual contents of the diaries respectively, and the last section is a stylistic analysis of the diaries. The conclusion emphasizes the value of the diaries as historical documents.

## **Western Education and the Rise of an Educated Elite**

The first generation of educated Africans in Yorùbáland were liberated slaves from Sierra Leone, Cuba, and Brazil who settled in the urban centers of nineteenth-century Nigeria, namely Lagos, Abeòkuta, and Calabar.<sup>4</sup> Some of them gradually found their way into the interior to seek out their homelands and reunite with their relatives. These individuals had been educated outside Nigeria, and they enthusiastically patronized missionary education for their wards. Not all of them were highly educated in the sense of possessing postsecondary education. A lot of them, especially those from Brazil and Cuba, had been trained as masons, builders, and specialists in other crafts. Together with their descendants, the group remained a vital segment of the colonial intelligentsia and was active in the sociopolitical and economic life of Nigeria until the 1930s, when they were sidelined politically by a younger group of native-born politicians.<sup>5</sup>

The advent of missionaries in the 1840s also brought Western education. The main missionary groups were the CMS, the Wesleyans (Methodists), the Roman Catholic Mission, the American Baptists, and the Presbyterian Mission.<sup>6</sup> Each of these groups provided Western education in one way or the other for their converts. Their initial areas of influence were Badagri, Lagos, Abeòkuta, and Calabar, and they gradually moved into the interior.<sup>7</sup>

These Christian missions provided different categories of education for their converts. The most basic was elementary education, which was a tool for evangelization by the mission. Secondary education invariably produced clerks for the colonial service and the mercantile firms. Very few graduates of the grammar schools opted for mission employment, partly because of poor remuneration, as new opportunities were opening up in the colonial establishment. The earliest secondary institutions were the CMS Grammar School (1859), the Methodist Boys High School (1879), the Catholic St. Gregory's College (1881), and the Baptist Academy (1886), all in Lagos.<sup>8</sup> Some missions also provided vocational and industrial training for their converts. Such training deemphasized the literary aspect and made masons, carpenters, builders, and other professionals out of their pupils.<sup>9</sup>

In terms of higher education, only the CMS provided postsecondary training for its native agents by sponsoring them to Islington in England and Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone. Founded in 1827, Fourah Bay was affiliated with the

University of Durham in 1876 and became a degree-awarding institution.<sup>10</sup> From 1876 to 1948 (when the University College, Ìbàdàn was established), Fourah Bay played a significant role in the reproduction of the Nigerian educated elite. Apart from individuals sponsored by the CMS, wealthy Yorùbá families also sent their children to Fourah Bay, after which they came to work in Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ìbàdàn or in other emerging urban centers. A few, however, went straight to Britain or America after their secondary education in pursuit of higher education, sponsored by their families, communities, or even through government scholarships. All came back after qualifying in their respective professions to join the Western-educated community in Yorùbáland.

It is clear that the British government contributed minimally to the creation of the educated elite in Yorùbáland. The credit for this, especially in the first half of colonial rule, belongs to the Christian missions. However, it is pertinent to point out that the educated elite were not a homogenous group. It was a heterogeneous blend comprising the highly educated “returnees” (the Saro and other liberated slaves) among whom were to be found the earliest lawyers, doctors, surveyors, and public servants in Nigeria. There were also the highly skilled, literate craftsmen, masons, and builders from Brazil and Cuba. In addition to these were the alumni of Fourah Bay College and graduates of other British and American universities. Last, there were the clerks, products of the missionary grammar schools and training institutions. And, as noted, the highly educated “returnees” were the most visible of this lot before the 1930s. The acquisition of Western education and the culture of literacy were common features shared by this intelligentsia. There was also the fact that they were mostly Christians.

This educated elite embraced several aspects of Western culture. Phillip Zachernuk has described their “frock coats and elaborate dressing,” as well as other aspects of their lifestyle (e.g., recreation activities, and important functions such as weddings, balls, and jubilees), and their associations, such as the Masonic lodges.<sup>11</sup> However, this adoption of Western culture was checked from the 1880s until the early years of the twentieth century by a wave of cultural nationalism. This cultural nationalism was triggered by the discriminatory practices of the Europeans (both in the church and in government) against Africans. The cultural “renaissance” found expression in the founding of African churches, use of African names and dress, the writing of ethnic histories, and in other activities designed to promote the African cultural heritage.<sup>12</sup> By the 1920s this cultural nationalism had died down, but it was reawakened in the late 1940s by the Zikist Movement as part of their revolutionary ideology of liberation and “Positive Action” against the colonial establishment.<sup>13</sup>

It was the educated elite described who embraced the diary-keeping culture in Yorùbáland, and it appears the idea was more popular among those that had been close to missionary agents who had to keep quarterly or biannual journals through which they reported their activities to their home authorities. J. D. Y. Peel has pointed out some of the differences between the missionary journal and the personal diary.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the journal was written for an audience that lacked local

knowledge, the diary remained a personal document, “a mnemonic aid to the continuous narrative self-monitoring that effective human lives require.”<sup>15</sup> Again, the journal was concerned with the public life of the author, whereas the diary dealt with the private life and thoughts of the author. Moreover, the stories in the journals were “finished” and retrospectively recorded; the daily entry format of a diary disallowed this type of retrospection. Events were recorded in the diary, in installments, as they occurred.<sup>16</sup>

Perhaps we should ask at this juncture what the diary meant to the elite. Abner Cohen, in *The Politics of Elite Culture*, describes the manner in which an elite builds itself up and maintains its exclusiveness within wider society. This is expressed in the elite ideology, which, according to Cohen, is “objectified, developed and maintained by an elaborate body of symbols and dramatic performances: manners, etiquette, style of dress, accent, patterns or recreational authority, marriage rules, and a host of other traits that make up the group’s lifestyle.”<sup>17</sup> Although these dramatic performances and symbols described by Cohen are meant for an audience (the non-elite), the diary as a self-reflection is for personal consumption. Its aim is to provide an avenue for personal emotional release and afford the diarist an opportunity to be himself without the benefit of an audience. He is thus able to express his innermost thoughts without shame or fear of reprisal.<sup>18</sup> Seen in this light, the diary thus presents a paradox. On one hand, the ritual of daily entries composed in the English language belong to the symbols and dramaturgy of elite mystique; on the other hand, the very private nature of the contents make it a performance meant strictly for personal consumption.

## The Diarists

The individuals whose diaries are being considered here are Ladipo Şolanke, Rev. (later Bishop) A. B. Akinyele, and Chief Akinpeḷu Obişesan. They were contemporaries, having all been born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. They were also products of the CMS mission. Şolanke, and Akinyele were alumni of Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, where they obtained the Durham degree.<sup>19</sup> Obişesan, for his part, attended the CMS Training Institution at Öyó.<sup>20</sup> They were also members of the *Ègbé Àgbà-O-Tan* (Elders-Still-Exist Society), a pan-Yorùbá cultural organization established in 1914 in Ìbàdàn.<sup>21</sup> Akinyele and Obişesan were among the founding members of the Ègbé whereas Şolanke, joined during his 1929 to 1932 visit to West Africa from the U.K. where he had been residing since 1922.<sup>22</sup> As an association of Yorùbá intelligentsia, the Ègbé held tremendous appeal for Şolanke, who identified with them and introduced to them the Appeal Fund for the West African Students Union (WASU) of the United Kingdom of which he was secretary-general.<sup>23</sup> The lives of these three men also coincided with the colonial period in Nigerian history; therefore, much of their activities and thoughts reflected the major sociopolitical and economic currents of the colonial milieu. This is shown in their biographies, sketched out below.



## Ladipò Şolanke

Born in 1880 at Abeokuta of native Ègbà parents, Ladipò Şolanke, attended St. Peter's Primary School Ake, before he went to Fourah Bay College in Sierra Leone.<sup>24</sup> From his diary entries, it appears he first trained as a teacher at Fourah Bay before proceeding to study for a B.A. at the same institution. It was this teacher's training that equipped him to work in several educational institutions in Freetown such as Leopold Educational Institution (1917), U.M. Collegiate School (1918 to 1920), Government Education Department (1920), and finally at the Government Model School in Freetown (1921).<sup>25</sup> His B.A. degree was awarded in March 1921, and the following year he went to the U.K. to study law.<sup>26</sup>

Together with a few Nigerian students in London, he founded the Nigeria Progress Union in 1924 to represent the interests of Nigerians in the U.K. This group was soon eclipsed in 1925 by the WASU, which was formed in 1925 with the instrumentality of Şolanke, and one Dr. Bankole Bright, a doctor and pan-Africanist from Sierra Leone who visited London in the same year.<sup>27</sup> The immediate objective of WASU was to provide a hostel for West African students in London to ease their accommodation problems. Its general aims were to promote the spirit of self-help, unity, and cooperation as well as foster national consciousness and racial pride among its members. It was also committed to generating genuine information on African history and culture to the British public.<sup>28</sup> It published a monthly organ called *WASU*, which was circulated for about twenty years.

Şolanke, was the secretary-general of WASU, a post he held for life. For a period of thirty-three years (1925 to 1958), he directed the activities of the union. Through his instrumentality, the vision of establishing a hostel was realized, such that WASU eventually had with three hostels located in different parts of London.<sup>29</sup> As warden of the WASU hostels, Şolanke, acted as a father figure to many of the West African students, guiding them through their careers in London.

However, the most important impact of WASU and of Şolanke on the lives of the West African students was their politicization. WASU provided a political apprenticeship for many of these students who later returned to their respective countries, namely, Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and the Gambia to occupy leadership positions. Moreover, WASU branches were established in several urban centers in West Africa during the Şolanke's fundraising tours.<sup>30</sup>

Şolanke was a political activist to the core and at different times expressed pan-African and national views. In addition, he exposed the union, not only to labor politicians in the U.K. and to pan-Africans such as Marcus Garvey and his Universal Negro Improvement Association, but also to communists, much to the chagrin of the British government. Şolanke mastered the use of the petition as a tool of protest and many of his petitions were addressed to the British government, both in London and in Nigeria. He also proposed several political strategies to Nigerian nationalists during the decolonization period. His desire to see Africa free of colonial rule was gradually fulfilled as the Gold Coast (Ghana) was granted independence in 1957. Other African countries followed suit, but Şolanke did not live to witness their independence. He died in 1958.

## A. B. Akinyele

Alexander Babatunde Akinyele was born in 1876 to Josiah and Abigail Akinyele, who were among the first set of converts made by Rev. David Hinderer of the CMS in the 1850s when he came to evangelize Ìbàdàn.<sup>31</sup> Alexander attended mission schools for his elementary education and was sponsored by the CMS to Fourah Bay College. He obtained his B.A. in 1906, becoming the first university graduate in Ìbàdàn. He was ordained a priest in the Anglican Church in 1910. In 1913, when the CMS decided to establish a secondary school in Ìbàdàn, Rev. A. B. Akinyele was made the pioneer principal.<sup>32</sup> Ìbàdàn Grammar School was the first post-primary institution in Ìbàdàn, and Akinyele headed it for twenty years. It was during this time that he also earned a master's degree from Durham through Fourah Bay.<sup>33</sup> Akinyele laid a solid foundation for the grammar school such that throughout the colonial period (and even beyond) the school gradually became identified, though not exclusively, with elite children. It could thus be said that the Ìbàdàn Grammar School played a crucial role in the reproduction of the local educated elite.

In 1933, Alexander Akinyele was consecrated as the assistant bishop of the Lagos Diocese of the Anglican Church, and in 1952 he became the bishop of the Ìbàdàn Diocese, a post he held until his retirement in 1956.<sup>34</sup> Apart from his church and teaching activities, Akinyele was also involved in several cultural activities. We have already noted that he was a founding member of the *Ègbé Àgbà-O-Tan*, a society concerned with the preservation of Yorùbá culture, among other things. The Ègbé's membership included individuals such as Dr. Obadiah Johnson, Prince Adesoji Aderemi (he later became the *Ọ̀oni* of Ifẹ̀), Rev. M. C. Adeyemi, Salami Agbaje, J. A. Okuseinde, and E. H. Oke. The Ègbé had a publication committee headed by I. B. Akinyele (junior brother to A. B. Akinyele). Its publications included I. B. Akinyele's *Ìwé Ìtán Ìbàdàn* (1916) M. C. Adeyemi's *Ìwé Ìtán Ọ̀yọ̀ Ilé ati Ọ̀yọ̀ Isisiyìn abi Ago-D'Ọ̀yọ̀* (The History of Old Ọ̀yọ̀ and the Present Ọ̀yọ̀ Formerly Called Ago), and D. A. Obasa's *Ìwé Tì Awon Akewi* (Vol. 1 and 2). In fact, the efforts of Obadiah Johnson in publishing Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* could be said to have been inspired by the intellectual activities of the Ègbé.<sup>35</sup>

A. B. Akinyele was also involved in freemasonry. He was a member and later rose to be master in Lodge St. David No. 1356 SC of Oke Ado, Ìbàdàn, in the 1940s. He was also associated with Lodge Ọ̀banta No. 1487 SC of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode in the mid-1950s, with Lodge Faith No. 1271 SC of Lagos in 1954, and Eureka Lodge No. 6222 EC of Ìbàdàn in the late 1940s.<sup>36</sup> His lasting impact, however, was in the educational sphere of Ìbàdàn life. A. B. Akinyele was widely traveled, and during his numerous visits to London for CMS conferences, he always contacted Ladipo Ọ̀lanke, who sometimes lodged him in the WASU hostel.<sup>37</sup>

## Akinpeḷu Obiṣeṣan

Born in 1887 in Ìbàdàn, he attended a mission elementary school before proceeding to the Ọ̀yọ̀ Training Institution of the CMS.<sup>38</sup> However, he did not follow

this up with a career in the church either as a teacher or priest. Instead, he went into the produce-buying business between 1914 and 1923. From 1920 to 1930, when his commercial fortunes were at a low ebb, he served variously as a shopkeeper for Messrs Miller Brothers, one of the European trading firms with branches in Ìbàdàn; was an agent for the United African Company (UAC) and an agent to Chief Adebisi Giwa, a local merchant. In 1930, he went into full-time cocoa farming. His experiences as a cocoa farmer made him organize the cocoa cooperative movement in Ìbàdàn in the 1930s. As an educated man, he easily became the president of the movement, representing its interests before the foreign trading firms and the colonial authorities. Obiṣeṣan remained active in the cooperative movement until his death in 1963.

Meanwhile, he was also active in local and national politics. He was a councilor in the Ìbàdàn Native Authority from 1939 to 1942, and again from 1949 to 1951. He was appointed to the Western Nigeria House of Assembly in 1946, representing agriculture and cooperative societies, and from 1943 to 1951 he was a member of the Nigerian Legislative Council.<sup>39</sup> He was also the first president of the Cooperative Bank of Western Nigerian. By 1963, he was president of the Nigerian Cooperative Federation, president of the Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria, and of the Association of Nigerian Cooperative Exporters.<sup>40</sup>

In addition to all these, Obiṣeṣan was a member of the traditional elite in Ìbàdàn. He was a traditional chief and customary court judge. His most enduring impact on Nigerian life, however, was in mobilizing farmers to form cooperatives, which eventually became very successful. Today, the skyscraper called “Cocoa House” in Ìbàdàn is a monument to the cooperative activities of farmers in the western region of Nigeria and a testimony to the prosperity of the cocoa trade during the colonial period. The 1,000-seat Obiṣeṣan Hall located in the central business district of Ìbàdàn and constructed by the cooperative movement is in turn a memorial to Akinṣeṣan Obiṣeṣan, who labored so hard for the movement.

## The Cultural Contents of the Diaries

The diaries present an array of information on the interplay of different religious and cultural systems, and demonstrate how the educated elite in colonial Yorùbáland manipulated these systems. The diaries amply illustrate the interaction among elements of traditional African religion, Christianity, and Freemasonry. Akinṣeṣan Obiṣeṣan, for instance, was a Christian and an active member of the St. Peter’s Anglican Church, Aremo, Ìbàdàn.<sup>41</sup> However, his diaries are replete with references to rituals and sacrifices, which he carried out from time to time on behalf of himself and members of his large household. These evidently “unchristian” practices were expected to solve his numerous problems, chief among which was his financial insolvency in the 1920s and early 1930s.<sup>42</sup> The problems of *àbikú*,<sup>43</sup> infertility of two of his wives,<sup>44</sup> and children’s illnesses made him regularly consult

traditional healers and *babaláwo*.<sup>45</sup> Sometimes he “did *aaḵo*” (consultations with local herbalists and the performance of prescribed rituals) to fortify himself and enhance the success of his political aspirations in Ìbàdàn.<sup>46</sup> He subscribed to the general Yorùbá belief that malevolent forces needed to be warded off by a counterspiritual or supernatural attack. Thus, when Adeduntan, his 4-year-old daughter, died in 1932, he described the way he buried her as follows:

I attached with string to her right hand one knife with *iko-ode*<sup>47</sup> in order that her spirit might avenge the witches who killed her. I also buried her with 1½ yards of white brocade in addition to the cloth supplied by Atunwa (one of his wives).<sup>48</sup>

It is interesting to note that Obiṣeṣan did not consider these practices a violation of his Christian beliefs, which tend to suggest that such “syncretism” might have been common in his days. On February 13, 1927, he recorded in his diary that he killed a goat for *Sara*<sup>49</sup> on his return from a church service.<sup>50</sup>

A. B. Akinyele’s diaries do not contain records of “traditional ritual” practices, but they do contain information on his activities as a Freemason. Such activities included attending or officiating at thanksgiving services of the lodges held in different Anglican churches, attending functions involving other masons (e.g., burials and investiture of a few of them as “Masters” in the organization).<sup>51</sup> Yorùbá Freemasonry in the colonial period carried a “Christian” outlook because many of its symbols and registers were borrowed from Christianity, and most of its leading members were respected clergymen. The *Eḡbẹ̀ Àgbà-O-Tan* was also structured like a Masonic lodge, and its rituals shared Christian and traditional religious elements.<sup>52</sup>

The diaries also contain valuable information on the lifestyle and consumption patterns of the Yorùbá educated elite in the colonial period. Particularly relevant here are the diaries of Akinpeḷu Obiṣeṣan. In them, we see his numerous struggles, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, to maintain a lifestyle that resonated with his social class despite his financial incapability. While his other acquaintances (wealthy Muslims and educated Christians) seemed to cope relatively well with the demands of their social status, Obiṣeṣan was always indebted in his attempt to keep up with them.<sup>53</sup> The situation was so bad that he sometimes had to borrow again to pay an overdue loan. He had a large household with several wives, children, and other dependents. Apart from social obligations to family members and in-laws he also tried to live up to societal expectations of him as a “big man” by lavishly entertaining his guests according to the prevailing standard in his time. “Important” guests were entertained or presented with livestock (fowls, goats, turkeys), “bush” meat, kola nuts, imported biscuits, and, of course, with imported spirits (Gordon’s gin, schnapps, beer, etc.).<sup>54</sup> All these, he could hardly afford and his diaries in the 1920s are punctuated with outbursts of complaints and regrets about his financial status:

I engaged thoughtful thinking (sic) over my past, present and future life . . . (and) ask myself whether I am a nonentity in things monetary or not . . . Nobody in this town will

revere anyone of no means, he would be counted as a no-man . . . after all, what is our intelligence, our school going and reading of books without getting money to back this (sic) three things . . .<sup>55</sup>

Even when he was treated with special respect on numerous occasions, he still observed that without money to service his public image, such respect would not last:

It cannot be denied that am being regarded like (sic) a prominent chief. All this is good but I want plenty money: money will build me up.<sup>56</sup>

Furthermore, the diaries of Obiṣeṣan and Ladipo Ṣolanke contain interesting information about the credit system, not only in Yorùbáland, but also in Freetown and England. Obiṣeṣan usually borrowed money from Folarin Solaja, a professional moneylender in Ìbàdàn at a 60 percent interest rate.<sup>57</sup> This made a loan of £100 taken for a period of 6 months attract £30 in interest. A promissory note (which Obiṣeṣan calls a “receipt”), sealed with postal stamps, was given by the borrower to the moneylender as a security that the money would be repaid. It also appears that value of the stamps used for the “receipt” varied according to the volume of money involved in the transaction. For instance, a £150 loan taken in 1928 for a period of 6 months was sealed with 7 shillings worth of stamps.<sup>58</sup> Despite the fact that Obiṣeṣan complained bitterly about the high interest rate, he did not avoid it and he regularly borrowed from Solaja.

In a general study of money matters among the Yorùbá, Falola and Adebayo have indicated that the minimum interest rate charged by professional moneylenders in Yorùbáland from the nineteenth to the twentieth century was 100 percent.<sup>59</sup> This would make the Ìbàdàn rate appear considerable and humane. However, this was not the case. Debtors considered the interest rate as exploitative, particularly if they were unable to repay the loan at the agreed time. The only way out for somebody like Obiṣeṣan who took loans, not to finance any business transaction, but to maintain a lifestyle that was clearly beyond his means, was to take a fresh loan from another creditor to pay off the overdue one. Although this might appear financially unwise and unnecessary, it is an indication of the desire for social acceptance on the part of the educated elite even when it was clear they could barely afford to meet such obligations.

The effect of this lifestyle on Obiṣeṣan was ruinous. He incurred a monthly deficit of almost £300 at the shop he kept for the Miller Brothers.<sup>60</sup> He had to borrow money again at months’ ends to balance his accounts before the firm’s bookkeeper came to check his records. This development eventually cost him the whole shop.

By September 4, 1930, a total deficit of £680 was discovered in his business account, and his shop was subsequently closed down.<sup>61</sup> His experience with the UAC, with which he transacted business again as a middleman retailer, was not different. On January 10, 1933, he was taken to court by the UAC for the deficits he accumulated again.<sup>62</sup> Although Obiṣeṣan blamed his commercial woes on customers who bought goods on credit and defaulted in payment, his own conspicuous consumption and flamboyant lifestyle did not help matters. How does one

justify his purchase of a new Chevrolet in April 14, 1927, for instance, when all he earned as a storekeeper for Miller Brothers throughout that year was £60?<sup>63</sup> His diary record of using £100, which he claimed were *esusu* funds, to balance the payment, notwithstanding the source of the initial £70 deposit, which still needs to be clarified.<sup>64</sup> If he had borrowed it, as was his usual practice, an additional burden in the form of loan interests would have been added to his already comatose personal economy. It should be noted, however, that the 1920s generally was a decade of severe economic depression, which left the commercial careers of many in ruins.

It was this financial embarrassment that drove him to the farm where he started life afresh as a cash-crop farmer, planting cocoa, kola nuts, and coffee. However, as Obişesan's financial situation gradually improved, he too began to grant credit facilities to others. Although he did not charge a monetary interest like the professional moneylender, he gave out loans as a means of recruiting labor for his large farms.<sup>65</sup> This was the *iwòfà* system (pawning) through which interest on a loan was received in kind. The pawned individual, whether an adult or a child, worked for the creditor until the loan was fully repaid.<sup>66</sup>

Ladipo Şolanke's diaries also contain references to loans and debts. While in Freetown, Sierra Leone, in 1922, he recorded that he gave up a gold ring as collateral for a loan.<sup>67</sup> Again, while in London, he recorded another instance when he gave his "trinkets" to his landlady as security for a loan taken from her.<sup>68</sup> These two instances prove that jewelry was acceptable as security probably for small loans.

In addition, the diaries of Akinpeḷu Obişesan present information on certain aspects of the Yorùbá marriage institution. First, there was the issue of chastity before marriage on the part of the prospective bride, and how this was handled. In January 1939, Jadesola, one of Obişesan's daughters, got married and on the following day Ladapo, the groom:

joyfully sent the news of the virtuousness of his wife with the usual virginity cloth and money and all at home burst into joy and me (sic) in particular.<sup>69</sup>

This confirms the claims of N. A. Fadipe on the importance attached to virginity in traditional Yorùbáland. According to him, if a bride was found chaste on her wedding night, the news was relayed to her parents the next morning. "The white sheet smeared with blood was sent in a covered calabash bowl . . . [with] a sum of money and a hen for sacrifice to the 'head of the bride.'"<sup>70</sup> Second, there was also the levirate custom through which a man could inherit the wife/wives of his late sibling or kinsman. Akinpeḷu Obişesan inherited two of his late brother's wives when the latter's property was being shared in 1927.<sup>71</sup> These women further enlarged his household, compounding his financial problems in the late 1920s.

Finally, the diaries of Ladipo Şolanke indicate the hardships faced by Nigerian students studying in the U.K. in the colonial period. These ranged from domestic hazards such as gas accidents to racial discrimination and financial problems; Şolanke

gave private lessons in Yorùbá, Hausa, and Latin to interested individuals to make ends meet. Sometimes, the situation got so bad that he could afford to eat.<sup>72</sup>

Closely related to these were the problems faced by Ladipò Şolanke in running the WASU hostels in London. These included the high turnover of domestic staff, most of whom were British; difficulty in enforcing hostel rules, especially the one that forbade WASU members from bringing in white ladies; and the problem of dealing with stubborn and recalcitrant lodgers.<sup>73</sup> Apart from these general problems, Şolanke also had to battle with irregular remuneration for himself and frequent accusations of mismanagement of funds by other WASU members.<sup>74</sup>

### **The Intellectual Content of the Diaries**

Despite the fact that the educated elites whose diaries are being considered in this chapter belonged to the same generation, each had different ideas on British rule, European technology, African independence, and a few other crucial issues. Of particular significance in this respect are the diaries of Akinpeḷu Obiṣeṣan and Ladipò Şolanke. These two clearly articulated their ideas and reflections more than A. B. Akinyele, whose diary entries were very crisp and largely devoid of debates and intense personal reflections.

The attitude of Obiṣeṣan to British rule was largely accommodating. He rarely condemned the British throughout his diaries. Although he once wrote of “European bondage,”<sup>75</sup> he generally acknowledged the British as a “real civilizing agency . . . who rescued us from our woes.”<sup>76</sup> This uncritical attitude toward the colonial establishment sets Obiṣeṣan apart from other Nigerian intelligentsia who operated at the national and pan-African levels in the twentieth century. A case in point is Herbert Macaulay, the nationalist, who constantly poured vituperations on the British colonial authorities. Incidentally, Obiṣeṣan read some of Macaulay’s writings, but adopted none of his critical disposition to the British.<sup>77</sup>

It is therefore not surprising that Obiṣeṣan did not agitate for the attainment of independence for Nigeria. According to him, “a great number of Africans of intelligence believed that Europeans are demi-gods or gods-incarnate and whom no one on earth can oppose.”<sup>78</sup> And so, if Africa would be free, “it will be the work of providence”<sup>79</sup> By attributing the freedom of Africa to divine agency, Obiṣeṣan thus excused himself and other local intelligentsia who saw Europeans as “demi-gods” from the task of campaigning for independence. And it is interesting to note that by 1953, when nationalist agitations had reached a feverish pace with people like Anthony Enahoro demanding for self-rule for Nigeria, Obiṣeṣan was still unable to anticipate the idea of an independent nation with joy and excitement. Recounting an encounter he had with a British official earlier in the day, Obiṣeṣan recorded the following view in his diary on November 26, 1953: “In a nutshell, I gathered that the regime I grew up to know is gone and I became embarrassed on being unequivocally told what the implication of self-rule is.”<sup>80</sup> It is thus clear from

this that Obiṣeṣan was so pro-British that he found it “embarrassing” to contemplate what the country would be like without them.

Earlier in 1922, it appears a branch of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (founded by Marcus Garvey) had been formed in Ìbàdàn by Obiṣeṣan and a few other local intelligentsia who subsequently called themselves *Garveyites*.<sup>81</sup> They met regularly to discuss the ideas of Marcus Garvey as contained in the *Negro World*, which they all read. However, as much as they admired Garvey, they were quite skeptical about the practicality of his ideas because, in the words of Obiṣeṣan, “. . . Garvey, though a great champion of his race cause does not know the aims and aspirations of Africans, politically, commercially, socially and otherwise.”<sup>82</sup> It thus appears that Garveyism appealed only to the intellect of the Ìbàdàn intelligentsia; it did not solve or offer any practical solution to their problems, chief among which were their economic struggles, partly caused by the depression of the 1920s.<sup>83</sup>

Obiṣeṣan’s admiration for European technology is also evident in his writings. On his first visit to the Aerodrome at Ikeja, Lagos, in 1943 he wrote: “My observation is that for long the African will play the part of a spectator in life.”<sup>84</sup> This was because he probably could not imagine how long it would take Africans to produce such technology on their own. Again he expressed a similar view in 1952 when he visited the Leverhulme Museum while in London for a meeting on cooperative affairs:

Surely, this world belongs to the whites! It would be a wrong or hopeless idea to say that we are 1000 years behind them. It would not paint the picture too badly to say that we were not made to be like them, and if I am wrong let the future tell.<sup>85</sup>

The manner in which Obiṣeṣan combines his rapturous admiration for European achievement with a seeming disdain for African efforts shows not only his ignorance of African achievement in the past, but also his lack of exposure to mainstream nationalist and patriotic movements in Nigeria. Cultural nationalists in Nigeria had been emphasizing the African heritage right from the closing decades of the nineteenth century, while militant youth movements such as the Zikists reinforced this in their boycott of European products in the late 1940s. It seems Obiṣeṣan’s commitment to the British cause was too strong for him to subscribe to these other ideas.

However, it appears the only area where Obiṣeṣan believed in the capabilities of the African was the cooperative movement, with which he was deeply involved at Ìbàdàn. Despite the failure of the Ìbàdàn Planters’ Association (which was the first attempt at a cooperative enterprise in Ìbàdàn) in 1930, he still went ahead to mobilize local cocoa farmers to form the Ìbàdàn Cooperative Cocoa Marketing Union in 1934.<sup>86</sup> And as head of the union, and later of the Nigerian Cooperative Movement, he expressed strong views on the “good” of the movement.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, Obiṣeṣan was greatly committed to enhancing his personal intellectual development. Although he did not have the benefit of a university education like



A. B. Akinyele and Ladipo Şolanke, he made friends with other members of the local intelligentsia who could stimulate him intellectually. His relationship with schoolteacher J. L. Ogunsola was particularly fascinating. Ogunsola edited drafts of his speeches, letters, and newspaper contributions.<sup>88</sup> He explained to him the intricacies of the English Language. Messrs. Ibaru, whom Obişesan described as “a thinker of the 20th century,” Babarinsa, and I. B. Akinyele (all Garveyites) also stimulated Obişesan’s intellectual growth through their frequent debates with him and discussions on Lagos politics, Garveyism, and world politics.<sup>89</sup> Obişesan also consumed considerable literature, among which were *Macaulay’s Miscellaneous Writings and Speeches*, the *Negro World*, and the *World Review*.<sup>90</sup>

The views of Ladipo Şolanke, on the other hand, were radically different from those of Obişesan. Şolanke had no sympathy for the British colonial authorities; neither did he consider them to be on a civilizing mission. As a matter of fact, he was not impressed by Western civilization. After visiting the British Museum in 1924 and seeing several artworks from Nigeria, among other things, Şolanke wrote:

My conclusion is there is no new thing done yet by the said and much talked of (sic) Western Civilization . . . . The Negroes of West Africa need to set out their institutions and arise to preserve them. Their institutions are as good as others mostly oriental hence they must cast their lot on the oriental side.<sup>91</sup>

Şolanke’s point here is that even if African art and institutions were not on the same level with those of the Western world, they certainly could compare favorably with those of the oriental world. And if the people of the Orient were jealously preserving their institutions, then West Africans too should preserve theirs, and not allow them to be eroded and disparaged by the colonial establishment.

As a matter of fact, Şolanke took exception to derogatory representations of Africans in the British Empire. In a diary entry captioned “Position of Africans in the British Empire,” Şolanke listed several uncomplimentary references made to Africans in the British press and wished that they could be stopped.<sup>92</sup> It appears Şolanke actually did more than make wishes. He published rejoinders, one of which appeared in *West Africa* and was captioned “An Outrage.” This particular article so much impressed Amy Ashwood (wife of Marcus Garvey) that she wrote Şolanke to “compliment” him on it and this seemed to have marked the beginning of a relationship between Şolanke and the Garveys.<sup>93</sup>

To ensure that Europeans would no longer look down on Africans, Şolanke proposed that the latter should believe in self-help and not become a “race of beggars.”<sup>94</sup> This would also enhance their rating by other nations of the world. However, Şolanke was not oblivious to the problems of the African continent, chief among which was the dearth of capable leaders. Using Nigeria as a case study, he diagnosed the problems of West Africa as ranging from lack of continuity in sociopolitical activism to “bad” press coverage. Borrowing from Casely Hayford’s ideas, Şolanke then listed the essential qualities required in a “negro

politician” as “nobility of character,” “excellence of the work of his hand,” and “product of his brain.”<sup>95</sup>

It is interesting to note that not only did Şolanke promote pan-Africanism and nationalism, he also advocated ethnic nationalism, to a limited extent. His native town, Abeokuta, was so dear to him that he took time to review its state of affairs in 1923. He compared Abeokuta with other Yorùbá cities and concluded that it was lagging behind. The nationalist fervor in Lagos did not extend to Abeokuta despite the fact that the latter had a sizeable population of educated elite. In fact Şolanke considered the position of the traditional authorities in Abeokuta to be too pro-British. Moreover, the type of literary development that existed in Ìbàdàn, which was demonstrated through the publication of the *Yorùbá News* by its educated elite, was not replicated in Abeokuta. Şolanke then concluded his review of Abeokuta’s apathy by composing his “elegy” for her:

Awake, Awake, Abeokuta  
 Awake, Awake, from city of Lisabi  
 Arise, Alake and Council  
 To re-assert her “Primus Inter Pares”  
 Ere she becomes a centenarian.<sup>96</sup>

Ladipo Şolanke, like Otto Von Bismarck, the nineteenth-century German chancellor, nurtured ideas of micro- and macronationalism without being contradictory. Bismarck was first and foremost a Prussian statesman who cherished a united Germany in which Prussia would play a vital role. Similarly, Ladipo Şolanke was first and foremost an Ègbáman (from Abeokuta), although he was also a nationalist and pan-Africanist. The independent Nigeria he envisaged was one in which Abeokuta was expected to play a prominent role. This explains his disappointment at the level of apathy that he observed in the town in the 1920s. However, this should not be interpreted to mean that Şolanke was an “ethnic jingoist.” His other works (e.g., publications in *WASU* magazine) suggest that he had a lot of respect for other Yorùbá rulers and actually expected them to constitute a positive agency for change in the colonial period and beyond.

How then do we account for the sharp differences in the views of Obişesan and those of Şolanke? Şolanke appeared to be more exposed than Obişesan. This exposure made him promote national and pan-African ideas as well as sentiments on local awakening without necessarily being a “local champion.” Obişesan, on the other hand, was mainly a local figure. His brief appearance at the Western Region House of Assembly and the national Legislative Council could not turn him into a nationalist because he still felt obligated to a British regime that had brought “civilization” to his people. His vision was so conditioned by this that he saw nothing seriously wrong with colonial rule. Even when he had occasion to visit Europe, he was instantly overwhelmed by the grandeur of European technology. Şolanke and Obişesan were both products of a missionary education, but their subsequent exposure in life largely determined their individual perspectives on various issues.

## A Stylistic Analysis

It is important to note here that the authors of the diaries analyzed in this chapter were not literary giants. They were educated men who wrote, not for public consumption, but for personal use. In fact, Obiṣeṣan, throughout his life, was painfully aware of his own shortcomings in the use of the English language. Therefore, the stylistic analysis attempted here is not a specialized linguistic assessment of syntactic and semantic regularities or irregularities, but an examination of mood, motive, design, and pattern on the part of the diarists, in a very general sense. The approach here is to first discuss the general features of the three diaries before looking at the individual peculiarities of each diary. And while examining peculiar features, we shall move from the simple to the complex, that is, from the sparse, inhibited records of Akinyele to the detailed accounts of Obiṣeṣan, and then to the pedantic debates generated by Ladipo Ṣolanke.

On a general note, the diaries are laid out in the format of daily entries. And except when out of town or indisposed, the diarists tried to be faithful in making daily records. Ṣolanke was, of course, an exception. He omitted several days and made entries only when he had something “important” to record. Because of this daily entry format, the diaries contain incomplete stories and fragments of information. Sometimes the diarist gives an update of an event previously recorded, and in some cases the connections are not very smooth. The reader is thus left to put the bits and pieces together. This lack of connectivity is understandable because, apart from the fact that the diary is self-addressed, it is also a spontaneous production, which captures the moment. It also lacks a retrospective dimension, which we usually find in other historical records, such as the memoir, and missionary journal. In short, the diary records life as it is lived on a daily basis.

Furthermore, the diary contains details of private life. It contains information that is very personal to the author. Even when general events are recorded, they are given a personal slant, that is, set down from the personal prism of the diarist. The diaries, therefore, contain the thoughts and opinions of the authors on several issues. The fact that the diary is self-addressed is also reflected in the manner in which statements are constructed. The statements are brief, crisp, and terse. Sometimes personal pronouns indicating the subject in the sentences are altogether omitted, showing that the author need not introduce himself. A lot of statements thus are incomplete from the grammatical point of view, as the following examples from Akinyele’s diary show:

- 7/1/26—Went with the children in Agbaje’s car to Aremo and Elekuro to say thank you, we pass to Agbaje.
- 11/2/26—Posted letter to Anthony Agbaje.
- 13/2/26—Passed to Ayeye, missed Agbaje.<sup>97</sup>

This type of veiled references make the diary something of a “mnemonic aid,” which only the author can completely decipher.<sup>98</sup> Sometimes, the desire to encode information was so great (probably when there was the possibility of others having access to the information in the diaries) that the diarist resorted to using another language to record information he considered very secret to himself.

Apart from these general features, each diary has its own peculiarities, especially in the manner information is set down, in the type of information that is provided and excluded, and in the attachment of the diarist to the diary. At the heart of all these is the issue of what the diary meant to each of the three men studied in this chapter. Individual perception of the function of the diary significantly affected the nature and tone of the information recorded therein.

I. B. Akinyele’s diaries cover the period from 1904 to 1955. It appears that Akinyele saw the diary as an “official” record of his private activities. Akinyele wrote as if there were somebody standing over his shoulders reading his compositions. Or, it might be that he had the premonition that his diaries might be made public one day. Therefore, he was very careful about his disclosures. He avoided personal comments and opinions on other people’s characters and performances. He simply recorded activities. He also did not express his thoughts about himself and his family. Again, as a churchman, one would have expected him to also record his religious pursuits and spiritual aspirations. None of these is to be found in his diaries. That is why it is so difficult to assess his intellectual development and extract his personal ideas and ideologies from a reading of his diaries. Akinyele was so inhibited that even when he was consecrated bishop—and one expected that at least, there would be some sort of emotional outburst in his diary entries for that period, which might give us a glimpse of his mind—he still was very “official” in his records. He never really released himself in his diaries. He was always self-conscious and restrained.

Akinḡelu Obiḡeḡan, on the other hand, was more expressive. In all his diaries, which cover 1920 to 1962, we find a detailed record, not only of what he observed externally, but also of his internal turmoil and struggles. To Obiḡeḡan, the diary was a soul mate, a secret friend to whom he could come at the end of the day to pour out his heart. It appears there was an emotional attachment for Obiḡeḡan to his diary. The diary, of course, met his expectations by silently absorbing all his outbursts and emotions, unlike a human friend. Obiḡeḡan was uninhibited as far as his diary was concerned, and even when it crossed his mind that someone might possibly read what he wrote, he still said his mind.

Where I am I cannot say. My oft-repeated expressions of fear and misfortune at the end of month like this I am sure would make the reader of this my daily notes in future to pass slighting remarks—but I would ask how would he or she know of the time in which he or she never lived?<sup>99</sup>

Obiḡeḡan’s diary is a barometer of his emotions and feelings. He did not just record daily activities, he also set out his plans, general observations on society and man, and reflections on not just his own life, but on life generally. In his diary

we encounter his beliefs, fears, and apprehensions. His changing mood can easily be gauged from the pages of his diaries. Finally, because Obiṣeṣan was so expressive, his diaries, of the three analyzed here, present the most information from both the cultural and intellectual perspectives.

Ladipo Ṣolanke's diaries are the most complex in terms of style. Only five volumes of his diaries are available. This might be due to the fact that other volumes did not survive or that those five were all he wrote. The last possibility appears more likely to have been the case because even for the surviving volumes, Ṣolanke's entries are sporadic, showing that he was not a committed diarist. The first volume, which dated 1918 to 1920, covers his life in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The second volume, though dated 1920, was actually used until 1926. It contains information on his last two years in Freetown and his settling years in London. The third and fourth volumes, dated 1933 and 1934, respectively, were written when he was warden of the WASU hostel in London, and both contain information on the details of the daily administration of the hostel and other activities of WASU. The last volume, dated 1947, is purely an official diary of Ṣolanke's activities as warden. It contains records of his appointments, public functions, addresses, accounts, and reminder notes.

Ṣolanke saw a diary as a record of important events. Therefore, it was only when he had something "important" to record that he made entries. He often skipped several days and even whole months if nothing worthy of record occurred. This implies that he was particularly selective in terms of what he allowed in his diary. In terms of contents, only the diaries for 1918 to 1920 and 1920(to 1926) contain personal information about Ṣolanke. The other diaries for 1933, 1934, and 1947 are more impersonal.

Two distinct styles of entries are noted in Ṣolanke's diaries. One is the daily entry format in which the information provided pertain to events of a single day. But as noted, Ṣolanke did not ritually observe this practice everyday. For instance, his 1933 diary started with an entry on January 10, followed by January 17, 26, February 7, 8, 11, 13, etc. The second style is the memo format where each entry carries a caption (title) and is usually undated except for dates of newspaper articles and passing references to particular dated episodes. A typical memo entry is as follows:

Miss Amy Ashwood alias Mrs. Garvey

1. Unknown—yet wrote a letter 25/3/24 to me to compliment me for the article in the "West Africa"—"An Outrage"
2. Several letters passed between each other subsequently until
3. 2nd April 1924, she invited me and we had the first interview.<sup>100</sup>

This memo format also has two characteristics. The information it contains is broken into small bits and numbered serially. Second, the information contained is often a complete story from a sequence of events, which are then narrated in retrospect. This feature is quite uncommon in diaries, but is to be found in missionary journals discussed. The only difference between the two is that whereas Ṣolanke wrote for himself, the missionary agents wrote for a foreign audience and therefore

needed to make further clarifications and provide other general background information for the story to be intelligible to their readers. Sometimes these memos are presented as arguments logically presented with relevant points serialized as if in preparation for a legal debate.

Another peculiar feature of Şolanke's diaries is his use of the Yorùbá language to record very "personal" information. This type of information ranges from records of his personal hurts and disappointments, dreams and aspirations, to hints of his sexual intimacies. The Yorùbá language was thus used as a code to protect this "classified" information. Şolanke consciously created a boundary between what he considered "very personal" and exclusive to him and other general information. This reveals that despite the private nature of the diaries, the author still had the premonition that some other persons might likely have access to them whether during or after his lifetime. A similar consideration probably made Akinyele simply restrain himself from volunteering information he would not want others to have whereas Obişesan tried to justify actions that might attract the raised eyebrow and pleaded for understanding from "the future reader" of his "daily notes."

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing analysis, we can see the richness of the private diary especially from the historiographical point of view. However, this is not to present the diary as a perfect source. It possesses several limitations. First, the diarists selected the information they recorded. This means that we do not have a total picture or panoramic presentation of the events of their times. Several other events were considered unimportant and irrelevant, and therefore overlooked. Second, the diary records contain the biases and prejudices of their authors. The diary is, to a large extent, a subjective record and the information presented needs to be cross-checked. Third, the diaries are uncritical of the authors' activities. Şolanke's financial problems with other WASU executives and Obişesan's lack of financial prudence are presented, not as personal shortcomings, but as circumstances beyond the authors' control.

To overcome some of these problems, other sources have to be used to corroborate or cross-check the information presented in the diaries. Newspapers, for instance, though fraught with their own shortcomings, also contain contemporary information. Diaries of other contemporaries could also be used to cross-check information presented in these diaries.

However, the diary remains the most valid source of biographical information on the authors. We can even read between the lines to draw out information about the personal traits of the individual diarists. Thus, Akinyele could here be described as a cautious, restrained introvert while Obişesan was an ebullient, uninhibited, sanguine personality. Şolanke appears a resilient, persevering, and very committed individual.

But most important, the diaries generate ample information on the cultural and intellectual trends in colonial Western Nigeria, revealing vital inflections and slants that are often absent in other sources. The diary therefore remains a useful source for historical reconstruction and its usefulness is further enhanced when it is used together with other sources of history. Although not many of such diaries have survived, it is even doubtful whether the diary-keeping culture survived the colonial period. But the few diaries that presently exist should be adequately utilized, as they constitute a veritable mine of historical information. Moreover, the types of personal details they provide are unavailable elsewhere and are good for the writing of social history, intellectual history, and biographies, among other things.

## Notes

1. These include J. Sparks, ed., *The Writings of George Washington*, 12 vols. (Boston: American Stationer's Company, 1833–37); W. Irving, *Life of George Washington*, 5 vols. (New York: G.P. Putnam, 1857–59); J. C. Fitzpatrick, ed., *The Diaries of George Washington, 1748–1799*, 4 vols. (Boston and New York, 1925), and D. Jackson and D. Twohig, eds., *The Diaries of George Washington*, 6 vols. (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1976–79).

2. E. Mckay, "The Diary Network in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England," *Eras Journal* (November 2001): 2, [http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition\\_2/mckay.htm](http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/eras/edition_2/mckay.htm)

3. Elsewhere in the Nigerian coastal region, among the Efiks, the diary or personal journal featured earlier. There is Antera Duke's diary from 1767 in Old Calabar, which was taken to Scotland and portions of it published in Daryl Forde, ed., *Traders of Old Calabar* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956). There were also the personal journals of King Eyamba V of Duke Town, in which he recorded "events of the state in good English." E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842–1914* (London: Longman, 1966), 3.

4. J. F. Ade. Ajayi, "Nineteenth Century Origins of Nigerian Nationalism" in *Tradition And Change in Africa: The Essays of J. F. Ade-Ajayi*, ed. Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2000), 72–73.

5. P. S. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 86–87.

6. A. B. Fafunwa, *History of Education in Nigeria* (Ìbàdàn: NPS Educational Publishers Ltd., 1991), 76.

7. J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841–1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longman, 1965), 31–50.

8. *Ibid.*, 152–55.

9. Fafunwa, *History of Education*, 92.

10. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, 287.

11. Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects*, 30.

12. A. Olukoju, "The Dynamics of Cultural Nationalism in Colonial Nigeria" in *Nigerian Peoples and Cultures*, ed. A. O. Osuntokun and A. Olukoju (Ìbàdàn: Davidson Press, 1997), 296–307.

13. E. E. G. Iweriebor, *Radical Politics in Nigeria 1445–1950: The Significance of the Zikist Movement* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1996), 92, 95–96, 100.
14. J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2000), 9–16.
15. *Ibid.*, 16.
16. *Ibid.*, 14–16.
17. Abner, Cohen, *The Politics of Elite Culture: Explorations in the Drumaturgy of Power in a Modern African Society* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 2–3.
18. See O. A. Adeboye, “Elite Lifestyle and Consumption in Colonial Ibadan” in *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, ed. A. Oyebade (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 281–304.
19. O. A. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite, 1893–1966” (Ph.D. diss., University of Ìbàdàn, 1996), 152–53; University of Lagos Library (hereafter called U.L.L.), Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entry for March 8, 1921.
20. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite,” 75.
21. For a detailed study of the Egbé Àgbà-O-Tan, see O. A. Adeboye, “‘Elders-Still-Exist’: Socio-Cultural Groups and Political Participation in Colonial Ibadan” in *Indigenous Political Structures and Governance in Nigeria*, ed. O. Vaughan (Ìbàdàn: Bookcraft Press, 2004), 195–230.
22. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite,” 174.
23. G. O. Olusanya, *The West African Students’ Union and the Politics of Decolonisation, 1925–1958* (Ìbàdàn: Daystar Press, 1982), 23–24.
24. R. Uwechue, ed., *Makers of Modern Africa, Profiles in History* (London: Africa Books Ltd, 1991), 716–18.
25. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entries for October 2, 1919, October 1, 1920, and August 8, 1921.
26. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entry for March 30, 1921.
27. Olusanya, *West Africa Students’ Union*, 4–9.
28. *Ibid.*, 9–10.
29. *Ibid.*, 23, 74–75.
30. *Ibid.*, 41–45.
31. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite,” 152.
32. *Ibid.*, 213.
33. *Ibid.*, 153.
34. *Ibid.*, 72.
35. Adeboye, “Elders-Still-Exist,” 211.
36. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite,” 151.
37. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection: Box 35. Diary entry for July 31, 1933.
38. Adeboye, “The Ibadan Elite,” 75.
39. *Ibid.*
40. *Ibid.*, 324.
41. Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ìbàdàn (hereafter called K.D.L.) Obişesan Papers, Box 49. Diary entry for August 29, 1943.
42. K.D.L., Obişesan Papers, Box 47. Diary entries for February 13, 1927, January 1, 1932, and August 26, 1932. Box 49, entries for February 19, 1939, April 6, 1939, and June 7, 1939.
43. *Abikú* were children who died at infancy. Some of them were believed to be capable of reincarnating repeatedly, torturing their parents unless some supernatural intervention was initiated (though sacrifices and rituals) to arrest them.



44. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers Box 47. Diary entries for September 12 and November 4, 1929.

45. *Babaláwo* were traditional diviners and spiritual consultants.

46. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47, Diary entry for March 16, 1932.

47. *Iko-ode* is the feather of a parrot.

48. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Diary entry for January 9, 1932.

49. *Sara*, in this context, was the distribution of raw meat from a freshly slaughtered animal to neighbors and friends. The motive for this, however, was not just charity but for ritual absolution and benefaction.

50. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Diary entry for February 13, 1927.

51. K.D.L., Akinyele Papers, Box 3. Diary entries for April 10, 1932, January 18, 1934, and March 20, 1955.

52. Adeboye, "Elders-Still-Exist," 9–11.

53. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Diary entries for January 10, 1933.

54. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entries for January 6, 9, 1928; July 9, 1928; August 3, 1928; September 1, 1928; January 7, 1930. Box 50, Entry for March 29, 1948.

55. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Entry for February 3, 1922.

56. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Entry for March 14, 1922.

57. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for December 16, 1927.

58. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for August 30, 1928.

59. Toyin Falola and Akanmu Adebayo, *Culture, Politics and Money among the Yoruba* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000), 159–60, 173–76.

60. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for July 7, 1927.

61. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entries for September 4 and October 15, 1930.

62. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for January 10, 1933.

63. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for April 14, 1926.

64. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for January 26, 1928.

65. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for February 20, 1930.

66. For more details on the *iwòfà* system, see Toyin Falola, "Slavery and Pawnship in the Yoruba Economy of the Nineteenth Century" in *Pawnship, Slavery and Colonialism in Africa*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy and Toyin Falola (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003), 121.

67. U.L.L., Şolanke Papers, Box 35. Diary entry for May 31, 1922.

68. U.L.L., Şolanke Papers, Box 35. Information recorded under the heading "My Hardships in London" in the diary of 1918–20. This was a usual diary entry, and it appears the record was made in 1924, given the dates of the other events recorded around it.

69. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 49. Entry for January 27, 1939.

70. N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1970), 84–85.

71. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Entry for April 12, 1927.

72. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entries for January 14–16, February 6, and December 23, 1925.

73. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entries for March 21 to June 20, 1933; July 15 to August 16, 1933.

74. U.L.L., Şolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entries for May 26, 1933 and June 1–6, 1933.

75. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for March 3, 1922.

76. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for April 14, 1922.
77. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for April 8, 1922.
78. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for February 3, 1922.
79. Ibid.
80. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for November 26, 1956.
81. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for April 12, 1922.
82. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entry for March 3, 1922.
83. See also Gavin Williams, "Garveyism, Akinpelu Obiṣeṣan and his Contemporaries: Ibadan 1920–22" in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth-century Africa*, ed. T. Ranger and O. Vaughan (London: Macmillan, 1993), 112–25.
84. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 49. Diary entry for August 5, 1943.
85. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 51. Diary entry for September 24, 1952.
86. For more on this, see Adeboye, "The Ibadan Elite," 316–25.
87. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 49. Diary entry for May 30, 1939.
88. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Diary entry for August 10, 1927; Box 49, Diary entry for September 5, 1939.
89. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entries for January 13 and April 4, 1922.
90. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 55. Diary entries for January 1, March 2, and April 8, 1922; and April 17, 1949.
91. U.L.L., Ṣolanke Collection, Box 35. Diary entry for April 26, 1924.
92. U.L.L., Ṣolanke Collection, Box 35. An undated entry in the diary volume for 1920(–26). But it appears the entry was made in 1924.
93. U.L.L., Ṣolanke collection, Box 35. Another undated entry captioned "Miss Amy Ashwood alias Mrs Garvey" in the diary volume for 1920(–26). This also appears to have written in 1924.
94. U.L.L., Ṣolanke Collection, Box 35. An undated entry captioned "Advice to Africans to Give Up Race for Beggars . . ." in the diary volume for 1920(–26). This appears to have been written in 1924.
95. U.L.L., Ṣolanke Collection, Box 35. An undated entry titled "Negro Weak Points" in the diary volume for 1920(–26). This appears to have been written in 1924.
96. U.L.L., Ṣolanke collection, Box 35. An undated entry titled "Is Abeokuta Dying or Sleeping or Cruising? Wait and See" in the diary volume for 1920(–26). This appears to have been written between 1923 and 1924.
97. K.D.L., Akinyele Papers, Box 3. Diary entries for January 1, February 11 and 13, 1926.
98. See also Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 16.
99. K.D.L., Obiṣeṣan Papers, Box 47. Diary entry for February 6, 1927.
100. U.L.L., Ṣolanke Collection, Box 35. An undated entry title "Miss Amy Ashwood, alias Mrs. Garvey" in the diary volume for 1920–26. This appears to have been written in 1924.

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## HISTORIOGRAPHY OF WESTERN YORÙBÁ BORDERLANDS

R. T. Akinyele

### Introduction

The Yorùbá culture area is very large, and it traverses several political units. Within this area, one can identify layers of identities such as the reference to a Yorùbá nation, a Yorùbá race, and the Yorùbá diaspora. A. I. Asiwaju illustrates this point by using three concentric rings to describe the Yorùbá culture area. The innermost ring depicts the core area, beginning from southwestern Nigeria stretching through the southern and central parts of the Republic of Benin and terminating at the Ufe and Atakpame areas of central Togo. The middle ring embraces groups that are related to the Yorùbá by language, culture, and traditions of origin such as the Edo, Itsekiri, Borgu, Igala, and the Aja.<sup>1</sup> I. A. Akinjogbin has widened this middle ring to include the Nupe, the Fon of the Republic of Benin, and the Gaa, Krobo, and Adangbe of modern Ghana.<sup>2</sup> The outer ring, as identified by Asiwaju, is formed by the Yorùbá diaspora communities in Sierra Leone, Cuba, Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, and other places.

Geographically speaking, Yorùbáland lies between parallels 5.86° and 9.22° north and between 2.65° and 5.72° east. The territory is bounded in the south by the Bight of Benin and shares a boundary with Borgu in the north. In width, Yorùbáland starts from the border of Benin, on the east, and stops at the bank of the River Mono in central Togo.<sup>3</sup> The Yorùbá are made up of subgroups such as the Ifẹ̀, Ijeṣa, Ekiti, Ọ̀yọ́, Sabe, Ketu, Idaisa, Ilaje, and Ondó. These subgroups can also be classified according to their geographical locations: For instance, Ade Obayemi and Ayo Olukoju classify the Ikare, Akoko, and Okun subgroups as belonging to northeastern Yorùbáland.<sup>4</sup> R. S. Smith applies a geopolitical yardstick to divide Yorùbá land into eastern, western, and southern kingdoms. According to him, the Ekiti, Ijeṣa, Ìgbómìnà, Owo, and Ondó groups belong to

the eastern kingdoms, and the Ketu, Sabẹ, and Idaisa form the western kingdoms. The Egbá, Ìjẹbú, Lagos, and Egbado belong to the southern kingdoms.<sup>5</sup> The focus of this chapter is, however, on western Yorùbáland, particularly the subgroups bisected by the Nigeria–Benin international boundary.

Western Yorùbáland lies between latitudes 6 and 9 degrees north. It begins at the bank of the River Ògún and terminates at the bank of the River Mono. The borderlands can be identified as “those zones lying on both sides of a given binational boundary which enjoy functional interaction with one another as well as with each of the sovereign states or nations in contact,” and where “the culture, politics and economic arrangements of the inter-related states inter-penetrate and mingle.”<sup>6</sup> In essence, this description of the western borderlands embraces almost the whole of western Yorùbáland minus the parts in Togo. Today, there are six Yorùbá subgroups on both sides of the Nigerian–Benin border:

1. The Sabẹ in Iwajowa and Imeko/Afon Local Government Areas of Òyó and Ògún States of Nigeria and the adjacent Sous-Préfecture de Savé in the Republic of Benin.
2. The Ketu in the Imeko/Afon and the Yewa North Local Government Areas of Ògún State and the Sous-Préfecture de Kétou in the Plateau Province of Republic of Benin.
3. The Ije (also called *Ohori*) in the Yewa North Local Government Area of Ògún State and the adjacent Sous-Préfecture de Pobe (the French equivalent of Yorùbá Ipobe) in the Republic of Benin.
4. The Ifonyin in the Ipokia Local Government Area of Ògún State and the Sous-Préfecture of Ifonyin (*Ifangni* in French records) in the southern part of the Plateau Province of the Republic of Benin.
5. The Awori in the Ado Odo Local Government Area of Nigeria and Sous-Préfecture de Itakete in Benin.
6. The Anago in the Ipokia Local Government Area of Nigeria and the Sous-Préfecture de Itakete in the Republic of Benin.<sup>7</sup>

The partitioning of the Yorùbá into Nigeria and the Republic of Benin resulted from the Anglo/French Agreement of 1889, the details of which need not be told here. It is, however, important to stress that before the western kingdoms were broken into British and French dependencies, the Yorùbá subgroups occupied a geographically contiguous territory, spoke dialects of the same language, and developed similar sociopolitical institutions. The crucial question then is, what attention have the western borderlands attracted in the context of Yorùbá studies?

From 1921 when Samuel Johnson published *The History of the Yorubas*,<sup>8</sup> research on the Yorùbá has been continuous. Most of the works, however, focus on the Egbá-Òyó-Ìbádàn axis for reasons that are not difficult to explain. Òyó was the most prominent of the Yorùbá kingdoms. Its activities and the consequences of its fall had repercussions far and wide; hence, the high degree of patronage from researchers. On the other hand, the Egbá were ahead of the other Yorùbá groups

in terms of access to Western education. This is consequently reflected in the documentation of their history and the role they have played in the administration of Nigeria. Ìbàdàn distinguished itself as a successor state to the Òyó Empire, particularly at a period during which the Europeans were anxious to move into the interior of Yorùbáland. The prominent role of Ìbàdàn in the Yorùbá civil wars of the nineteenth century has aroused research interest on the origin of the settlement, the pattern of government, and the political economy of the Ìbàdàn empire.<sup>9</sup>

In contrast, not much has been written on the western Yorùbá groups, even though Johnson mentions Ketu, Sabe, and Popo as three of the seven Yorùbá kingdoms founded by direct descendants of Odùduwà, the progenitor of the Yorùbá race. While commenting on the position of the three kingdoms, he writes:

On the death of the king (i.e. Oduduwa), their grandfather, his property, was unequally divided among his children as follows: The king of Benin inherited his money (consisting of cowry shells), the Orangun of Ila his wives, the king of Sabe his cattle, the Olupopo the beads, the Olowu the garments, and the Alaketu the crowns, and nothing was left for Oranyan but the land.<sup>10</sup>

Fabunmi similarly identifies the Alaketu and the Olupopo as the fourth and eighth rulers to wear the crown after Odùduwà.<sup>11</sup> The dearth of literature on the western Yorùbá groups have been noted by virtually every researcher that has worked on the area. For instance, E. G. Parrinder, in his comments on Ketu, writes:

The history of Ketu is of considerable importance for those interested in the development of Yoruba peoples. But this history has been little known. Other Yoruba towns have found their historians; Oyo, Abeokuta and Ibadan have chroniclers; but Ketu has been neglected by Yoruba writers. This is partly due to its present isolation, and partly due to the fact that most of what has been written about it in this century has been in French.<sup>12</sup>

The research difficulties created by the location of the western Yorùbá groups is amplified by R. S. Smith:

Apart from that of Ketu, the histories of all these Yoruba are exceptionally complex and confused. Their kingdoms and chieftaincies, situated precariously among other peoples and separated from each other by alien territories, were neither sufficiently large nor well organised to contain the external dangers which beset them in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the south, the Egun and the Fon attacked, infiltrated, and overran their homelands; farther inland, their enemies included the Fon again, the Borgu, then the Fulani of Ilorin, and even their kinsmen from Oyo and Egba . . . The impression which emerges is that these were the advance guard of a migration which finally petered out, leaving them in an exposed position far from the centres of Yoruba life and sources of strength.<sup>13</sup>

Asiwaju notes that only a few publications exist on the Oho and that they are either “of little relevance or completely erroneous.” He attributes this to the

location of the group and the “characteristic withdrawal of the people,” which he said has “put them out of the reach of many interested researches.”<sup>14</sup> John Ogunsola Igué identifies yet another factor that appear to have contributed to the lack of research interest on the Yorùbá of the Republic of Benin. According to him, the destruction of the major Yorùbá cities in the Republic of Benin and the dislocation caused by the French administrative policy eliminated the urban dynamics that had sustained Yorùbá civilization and intellectualism on the Nigerian side.<sup>15</sup>

Last, there is the reluctance of Yorùbá historians in Nigeria to venture beyond the international boundary. I. A. Akinjogbin recently disclosed that some prominent Yorùbá objected to the idea of inviting some dignitaries from Ketu, Sabę, and Idaisa to participate in a pan-Yorùbá cultural festival in Nigeria on the grounds that they were foreigners.<sup>16</sup> The fear of ethnic domination, which has, in the recent past, encouraged prominent leaders of the Yorùbá in Benin and Nigeria to interact across the boundary may well be the beginning of the integration of the western Yorùbá groups into the main stream of Yorùbá studies. The Yorùbá of Benin constitute about one-third of the total population and this has brought with it some negative repercussions. On the other hand, the aggressive pursuit of the principle of ethnic self-determination in Nigeria has left the Yorùbá no choice than to fraternize with the Yorùbá communities outside the country.<sup>17</sup> The end of the isolation will stimulate research interest on the western Yorùbá. The task now is to review what has been written and identify the gaps that should be filled.

## Existing Studies

Several works have commented on the early history of the western Yorùbá group as a whole. Samuel Johnson, for instance, traces the origins of the Ketu, Sabę, and the other groups to Ilé-Ifẹ̀. In the course of narrating the civil wars of the nineteenth century, he highlights the events leading to the fall of Ilaro and Ijana as owing to the pressure exerted on the Egbado areas by the Egbá and the Dahomians. He also highlights the importance of Ketu to the search of the Ẹ̀jẹ̀bù for an alternative route to Porto-Novo after the British blockade of the Egbá route.<sup>18</sup>

Another work that touches on the origins of the western Yorùbá group is by P. Mercier titled *L'ancienne royauté de Savé et son évolution*. The author discusses the origins of the Yorùbá of the Republic of Benin and Togo as Clapperton and the Landers who passed through Ketu and Sabę in the 1820s had narrated it, namely, that the Yorùbá originated from the Middle East, possibly Arabia.<sup>19</sup> This work was completed in 1933.

Another European, J. Bertho, published an article in 1949 titled “La parenté des Yoruba aux peuplades de Dahomey et de Togo,” in which he concluded that the Aja and the Ewe of Dahomey and Togo with the Yorùbá of the French colonies all originated from Ifẹ̀. He also stated that they traveled together and that the former had a stopover at Ketu before dispersing to their present location.<sup>20</sup>

As is often the case, the most important source of the early history of the western Yorùbá group, particularly those of present day Republic of Benin, is that of a local historian, Father Thomas Moulero, a Yorùbá of Ketu origin. As early as 1926, he had completed his outline of Ketu history, which was based on the traditional version of the history given to him by the elders of the town. His *Histoire de Kétou* was followed by another work on Sabẹ in 1946. It was appropriately titled *Histoire et légende de Chabe*.<sup>21</sup> Father Moulero was a pioneer African missionary of the Catholic Church. Indeed, he was the first West African to be trained by the Lyon-based Society of African Missions in the famous seminary in Whydah. He was ordained on August 15, 1928, and died on August 3, 1975. Moulero spent most of his career years in the Yorùbá section of Dahomey, particularly Ketu, Idaisa, and Sabẹ. One is also reliably informed that he was in Sabẹ from 1933 to 1958. Father Moulero was a special guest at the Conference on Yorùbá Oral Tradition held at Ilé-Ifẹ from January 12 to 18, 1974. The style of Father Moulero was evidently not different from that of Samuel Johnson in the *History of the Yorubas* or Father Oguntuyi's *History of Ekiti*.<sup>22</sup> If anything, the proceedings of the conference reported that:

Father Moulero was happy to have visited Ifẹ about which he said he had learnt so much in folktales and legends as a child that he almost believed that the ancient city was on another planet.<sup>23</sup>

Nevertheless, the works of this great historian have continued to exert a beneficial influence on succeeding generations of scholars. For instance, Asiwaju pays glowing tribute to Moulero while admitting that his works were helpful in the writing of his *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*.<sup>24</sup> Parrinder's *The Story of Ketu*, published in 1956, is very popular. The author discusses the origins and migration of the people from Ilé-Ifẹ, the early kings, the civil strife, the siege and destruction of Ketu, and the revival of Ketu in 1893. The author benefited from the manuscript of Dungan, who merely improved on Moulero's *Histoire de Kétou* by adding other stories he had collected.<sup>25</sup>

A journal article written by Kola Folayan in 1967 throws a revealing light on the origins of the Yorùbá and Aja groups occupying the southwestern corner of Yorùbáland, east of the Nigerian–Benin boundary. Titled “Egbado to 1832: The Birth of a Dilemma,”<sup>26</sup> Folayan discusses the origins of the six groups and the cultural homogeneity that existed in the study area before the period of the partition. For instance, the author shows that the founders of Ilobi, Iboro, and Ibara, as well as those of the Awori settlements of Ota and Ilogun, migrated from Ifẹ. On the other hand, one is also told that the founders of Ilaro and the Aibo groups came from Ọyọ. Interestingly, too, while the founder of the Anango Kingdom of Ifonyin traced his roots to Ifẹ, that of Ihumbo came from Ọyọ. The article highlights the factors that accounted for Ọyọ supremacy in Egbado area, namely, the preponderance of the Ọyọ immigrants in the area and Ọyọ's imperial policy of consolidating its hold on the trade with Badagry and Porto-Novo. This last factor apparently explained the privileged position of the Olú of Ilaro as the accredited representative

of the *Aláàfin* (monarch) of Òyó. The author explains the relative peace that Egbado enjoyed before the collapse of Òyó in the context of the fear the powerful neighbors—Benin, Dahomey, and Ègbá—had of Òyó. He also highlighted the experience of the Egbado in the Aja-Yorùbá power politics occasioned by the collapse of the Òyó Empire, a theme that is fully discussed in his master's thesis.<sup>27</sup>

Perhaps the most comprehensive account of the early history of western Yorùbáland, published in 1994, is the book by Biodun Adediran, titled *The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland*.<sup>28</sup> It was conceived as a prelude to Asiwaju's *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*. The author was inspired by the bold effort of Asiwaju to attempt a reconstruction of the internal histories of the kingdoms from the period they were founded until they were brought under European rule. Accordingly, the author discusses the land and people, the dynastic origins of the kingdoms, and the process of political centralization and consolidation. In all of these, the structure of the administration in Ketu, Sabę, and Idaisa was clearly set out, including the constitutional adaptations. The analysis also showed that the kingdoms were linked together by the feeling of "brotherhood within the Odùduwà family," economic interdependence, and a common experience with the Òyó and Dahomey. The author skillfully narrates how the collapse of Òyó encouraged the incursion of the central Yorùbá groups of Ijaiye, Ègbá, and Ìbàdàn into the territory, especially from the 1840s. The combination of these attacks and the Dahomey raids had reduced the kingdoms into city-states comprising the metropolis and a few outlying settlements by 1870. Idaisa fell to Dahomey in 1881, Sabę in 1885, and Ketu a year later. Dahomey itself fell to the French in 1892, thereby bringing the greater part of the western Yorùbá kingdoms within the French orbit.

*The Frontier States* is unique on account of the extensive fieldwork done by the author, who should also be commended for his eye for details. The language is simple, and the use of suitable headings makes the book easy to understand. As could be expected, a book of this nature that attempts to dig deep into the distant past cannot rely primarily on oral traditions and the author makes some deductions that appear very speculative or conjectural. Although Adediran himself acknowledges his own limitations in the preface, it is obvious that he is swayed too far by his own imagination. For instance, whereas Folayan and Asiwaju write that the founders of Ketu migrated from Òyó, Adediran concludes that Òyó, Sabę, and Ifẹ were founded in the same way at about the same time. His analysis of the Yorùbá cosmology led him to conclude that Soipasan, the founder of Ketu, was the same person as Èṣù, a wicked ruler who reigned in Ifẹ before the era of Odùduwà.<sup>29</sup>

Such conclusions baffle Benedict Ibitokun, who argues that the western Yorùbá can only claim to be a part of the Odùduwà family through their association with Òyó. He therefore castigates Adediran for his adventurism. Ibitokun writes:

Coming back to the frontier states, we can therefore see that in the hands of the historian-researcher, the allegedly scientific platonic history is metamorphosed into an imaginative Homeric literature, fact into fiction, which is hurriedly let out in a wave of post-modernist adventurism.<sup>30</sup>



His assessment is that “*The Frontier States* suffers a three-fold tragedy: incurable miasma of the synecdoctic word, bad faith and whimsicality of the symbol-using/misusing animal.”<sup>31</sup> Such controversy suggests that further research is needed to lay the issue to rest.

The next phase of the history of the western Yorùbá, and within which the concept of borderland is meaningful, is the partition stage. There are many works on this theme. The earliest ones were written by historians and political geographers working in the context of indirect rule studies. The emphasis is usually on how the boundary came to be where it is. Often highlighted is the interaction of European diplomacy with local situations. Notable among them are the works of Joseph C. Anene, in which he tries to show that the European powers took ethnic and cultural ties of the people into consideration before delimiting the boundaries.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand, J. R. V. Prescott observes that the Nigeria–Benin border was quite arbitrary. He traces this to the use of geometric lines in the delimitation of the boundary owing to the scramble that preceded the partition.<sup>33</sup> Whereas L. R. Mills writes generally on the development of a frontier zone and border landscape along the Dahomey–Nigeria boundary,<sup>34</sup> Elysée A. Soumoni focuses mainly on the struggle between the French and the British for the control of Porto-Novo between 1861 and 1884. He narrates how the British occupation of Lagos compelled the ruler of Porto-Novo to gravitate toward the French. He also highlights the nature of the struggle between Glover and Diderot that resulted in the Convention of 1863, which can be described as the first international boundary agreement between the British and the French in western Yorùbáland. At the convention, France persuaded Britain to suspend its claim over Ipokia and pledged to allow the ruler of that kingdom to return from Porto-Novo into which his kingdom had been merged. The Convention of 1863 was taken into consideration in the Anglo-French Agreement of 1889, which drove a vertical line through the western kingdoms.<sup>35</sup> Subsequent development along the boundary, including the minor diplomatic adjustments leading to the delineation of 1895/1896 and the agreements of 1898 and 1906, as well as the attempts to erect boundary markers, have been discussed by A. C. McEwen.<sup>36</sup>

Research on the impact of the border on the life of the Yorùbá communities located along the Nigeria–Benin border is becoming very popular. Asiwaju blazes the trail in his *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*. The opening chapters of the book examine the pre-partition conditions with a particular emphasis on the traditions of origin and the economy, and the process of the establishment of colonial rule in the study area. Other chapters focused on the localized effect of the border on the chieftaincy institutions, reactions to taxation, conscription and forced labor, and the economic changes that took place on both sides of the border after the First World War. Last, the author examines the British and French systems of education and the implication of the dual heritage for Yorùbá unity.

Since then, Asiwaju has continued to spearhead research projects on African boundary problems.<sup>37</sup> His numerous articles on western Yorùbáland were recently published in book form.<sup>38</sup> This book of fifteen chapters complements *Western Yorubaland under European Rule*. Basically, the same themes are treated or explored in

the two books. The comparison of both shows that some of the issues or episodes mentioned in the first book were later developed into journal articles and chapters in books.

Other scholars such as E. D. Babatunde and Soumoni have written on the impact of the border on the cultural history of the Yorùbá and their chieftaincy institutions. Babatunde, a sociologist, wrote on “Marginality’s Perception of the Self: A Case of the Ketu Yoruba on the Nigeria–Bénin Border.”<sup>39</sup> On the theoretical plane, the author examines why the bulk of scholarship on the border has preferred the dominance/muted theoretical approach to border study and how the border locations achieve the verbalization of their unique views. In practical terms, however, his intention is to show that border communities are not passive recipients of policy formulation from the center. To prove this point, Babatunde shows how the perception of the French model of education, which engages the pupils for the better part of the day, made many parents from Ketu send their children to schools on the British side of the border. Similarly, the perception of the people in Imeko and the environment that the health facilities on the French side were superior encouraged them to refer serious cases to the dispensary at Dirin in the Benin Republic rather than the general hospitals at Ilaro and Abeokuta. The author also commented on the changing status of the Alaketu and Onimeko under colonial rule and the nature of the relationship that has continued to exist between them. Whereas indirect rule enhanced the status of the Onimeko, the powers of the Alaketu were drastically reduced by the French. Yet, the participation of the Alaketu in the installation of the Onimeko shows the supremacy of the Alaketu as it also demonstrates the superiority of kinship affinity over the force of nationalism among the Yorùbá along the border. The author then called for the promotion of such cross-border relationship to improve the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.<sup>40</sup>

Soumoni, in a chapter of a book, focuses on how traditional rulers on both sides of the boundary have tried to maintain and consolidate the unity and traditional links broken by the European intrusion. This extract illustrates the trend:

In 1982, the Onisabe and the Alaketu were invited by the Ooni of Ife in his capacity as chairman of the Oyo State Council of Obas. The two Beninois traditional rulers were thus given the opportunity to take part in the council’s deliberations. In January 1983, the Ooni paid a royal visit to Alaketu assisted by the Onisabe. The welcome given by the people of Ketu was particularly rousing. On that occasion, eighty-two eminent sons of Ketu drawn from the two sides of the border were honored with chieftaincy titles. In December 1987, the Alaketu went on official visit to Ife. He took the opportunity to pay courtesy calls on those rulers who had accompanied the Ooni to Ketu in 1983, in particular the Orangun of Ila, the Elejigbo of Ejigbo, the Timi of Ede, and the Eleruwa of Eruwa.<sup>41</sup>

Soumoni’s message in the chapter supports the view of Asiwaju on trans-border cooperation. He writes:

For the border zones, understanding and cooperation among traditional authorities within the framework of local governments may constitute, perhaps more than the action

of security agencies, an important factor of pacific co-existence and harmony in the sub-region.<sup>42</sup>

One can add that a number of Yorùbá traditional rulers from the Republic of Benin attended the World Yorùbá Congress held in Ìbàdàn from November 19 to 21, 2002. At this stage, what is required is an in-depth study of the political relationship between the Yorùbá of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. How does the interaction across the boundary affect the politics in both republics? For example, one is reliably informed that Sourou Migan Appity, whose mother is Yorùbá, founded his party, Parti République du Dahomey, after the Action Group (AG) that was in power in the western region. He adopted the symbol of the AG, the palm tree, as his party symbol and attended political meetings at Ìbàdàn. He actually wanted the unification of his party with the AG, but the intention was frustrated by the vagaries of ethnic politics in Nigeria. At least, the biography of this pan-Yorùbá politician is now long overdue.<sup>43</sup>

Additionally, the current leader of the National Assembly in the Republic of Benin, Hon. Babatunde Idji, recently told his audience at a book launch in Lagos how he once led a boundary delegation to Nigeria. Coincidentally his cousin, Asiwaju, was also at the head of the Nigerian team. As to be expected, the Nigerian side spoke English and the delegation from Benin spoke French. He then stressed how the presence of the two cousins at the head of their countries' delegations demonstrates the artificiality of the border. He confessed that because both of them saw things in the same way, they began to feel that the boundary commission was not making sufficient progress.

Aspects of the economic history of the western Yorùbá borderlands have received considerable attention from scholars, especially the subjects of cross-border trade and smuggling. The problem of smuggling can be traced directly to the British attempt to monopolize the trade in the hinterland after blockading the Ègbá in 1863. The first patrol to check smuggling was stationed on the Yewa River in 1865. During the colonial period, guns, gunpowder, and bicycles were smuggled from Nigeria into Dahomey and alcohol, tobacco, and textiles found their way illegally into Nigeria. Over the years, the number of items involved has increased to include petroleum products, cars, and agricultural produce. One of the official entry points—the Owode-Idi Iroko route—passed through our study area. Most of the illegal entry points are also found in the same areas, a situation that has placed the settlements at the mercy of the law enforcement agents. The Beninois scholar, John Ogunsola Igué, in an article entitled “L’officier, le parallèle et le clandestin,” discusses the freedom of movement that enabled the Hausa, Yorùbá, and Mande traders to traverse the length and breadth of West Africa in the precolonial period. He argues that the partition of Africa into colonies introduced trade barriers and restrictions that are inimical to the process of regional integration. Although noting that the encouragement of the cultivation of cash crops resulted in the physical transformation of the colonies, he observes that the development also paved the way for the evolution of the parallel market. His

analysis also shows that the clandestine trade in cocoa, groundnuts, cigarettes, and alcohol can be studied in detail by focusing on the areas of evacuation, means of transportation, and the category of middlemen involved as well as the distribution network. Although blaming the neglect of the borderland on smuggling, he identifies the major obstacles to regional integration in West Africa as political instability and the existence of different currency zones.<sup>44</sup>

C. A. Omeben focuses attention on cross-border crimes, particularly the smuggling of cars across the Nigeria–Benin border. He identified other serious cross-border crimes as drug and arms trafficking. He discusses the problem of policing the border in the context of the cultural affinity of the people on both sides of the border, the pattern of settlement, the extensive nature of the border, the multiplicity of routes, and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) protocol on free movement. He observes that more than a thousand vehicles believed to have been stolen in Nigeria are found in Cotonou and other cities in the neighboring countries, with law enforcement agencies pretending not to notice it. Omeben's recommendations on how to arrest the trend include the proper demarcation of the border, the establishment of joint patrols by the law enforcement agencies of both countries, and the implementation of the quadripartite agreement between Nigeria, Benin, Togo, and Ghana on the extradition of fugitives and the return of stolen property to the country of origin.<sup>45</sup>

Those who are interested in the cat and mouse game between the smugglers and the law enforcement agents will find Wale Okediran's *The Border Boys* a delightful read.<sup>46</sup> A few studies also exist on the industrialization and the economic development of the western Yorùbá borderlands. For instance, W. O. Adeyemi has written on the sugar company at Savé, incorporated in 1975, and the Onigbolo cement industry established jointly in 1979 by Nigeria and the Republic of Benin. The sugar complex occupies 6,000 acres and is accessible to the people from Kajola and Ifedapo Local Government Areas of Òyó State as well as the indigenes of Yewa North of Ògún State. Beninois from the rural districts of Quesse, Glazouer, and Dazza Zoume also have equal access to the company. The Onigbolo Cement Industry is located near Sabè on the road that connects Ilaro with Porto-Novo and Pobe. The Yorùbá and Ohori on both sides of the boundary can easily find employment in the industry. Adeyemi examines the potential of the two companies for employment for the border communities, the linkages for the industrial development of the western borderlands, and the strengthening of the bilateral relationship between Nigeria and the Republic of Benin.<sup>47</sup>

Bolarin Abioro similarly traces the history of the Hotel Frontier in Idiroko in the context of the official neglect of the border, the intermittent closure of the border since 1974, and the need to promote cordial relationship among the border communities.<sup>48</sup> On the whole, the literature on smuggling appears to dominate the studies on the economic history of the western Yorùbá borderlands. The research agenda should now focus on an integrative study that will embrace the study of trade, agriculture, industrialization, and transportation in the study area over an appreciable length of time.

Last, many of the works on the history of Western education in the study area have merely made a passing reference to the subject. The common approach has been to contrast the British and French educational policies to explain the establishment of more schools on the Nigerian side. This approach is reflected in the writings of Asiwaju and E. D. Babatunde.<sup>49</sup>

A particularly significant work is the study of P. O. Asiwaju on the Gaskiya College founded in Porto-Novo by a Nigerian educationist, Olatunde Lawrence, in 1972. The school started with eighty-three students transferred from the parent institution, Gaskiya College, Lagos. Students who performed brilliantly in French in the Lagos school were taken to Porto-Novo to continue their studies so as to expose them to the French cultural environment and students of Beninois origin who performed very well in the English language were similarly transferred to Lagos. The author traces how the government takeover of schools in Lagos State and the alteration of the school calendar have affected the fortunes of the college since 1976. He also analyzed how the frequent closure of the border affected the recruitment policy as well as the funding of the college. The author calls for direct government intervention to sustain the noble experiment in the spirit of ECOWAS.<sup>50</sup>

## Conclusion

The borderlands of western Yorùbáland are neglected not only in terms of physical development, but also in historical scholarship. The dearth of literature can be traced partly to the challenge posed by the physical environment and the limitation imposed by the French tight control over Western education. Unfortunately, the barrier effect of the Nigeria–Benin border has narrowed the research interest of many Yorùbá scholars in Nigeria to the core area. One way to address the imbalance is to deliberately steer graduate students and researchers on Yorùbá history and culture into western Yorùbáland. For instance, the controversy over the origins of the Yorùbá subgroups is yet to be settled as the challenge of Ibitokun has shown. There is also a lot that can still be written on the process of state formation. Urban history is becoming very popular in Nigeria. Although it may be true that the French deliberately destroyed the Yorùbá cities in Dahomey, there is no excuse why towns like Ketu and Sabę should not be included in a book on Yorùbá towns and cities such as the one recently edited by Dare Oguntomisin.<sup>51</sup> Besides, little has been written on the contemporary history of the western Yorùbá groups in general. Asiwaju has, however, demonstrated the value of *efe*, the gelede music, in the reconstruction of such recent history.<sup>52</sup> The challenge now is to take over from there. The researcher in intergroup relations will find the western borderlands particularly interesting. He not only will be in a position to study the pattern of interaction between the Yorùbá groups across the border, but also the relationship between them and their kinsmen. The frontier study will also help us to assess the influence of the Yorùbá on other groups in that transition zone and vice

versa, particularly in the area of language and culture. The researcher could even compare the experience of the Yorùbá communities on the western borderlands with those of the eastern marshes close to Benin. However, it is desirable that the historian from Nigeria who is ready to work on the western borderlands should have a working knowledge of French to be able to use the archives in Porto-Novo and, and while the Beninois counterpart should be competent in the English language to profit from sources in English.

## Notes

1. A. I. Asiwaju, "Yoruba in Nigeria and the Diaspora: One People, One Destiny" (paper, World Congress of the Yoruba Ibadan, 20–21 November 2002), 4–5.
2. I. A. Akinjogbin, *Milestone and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture* (unpublished manuscript), 16.
3. See N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1991), 21; and Biodun Adediran, *The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland, 1600–1889* (Ìbàdàn: Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique [IFRA], 1994), 2–3.
4. See Ayodeji Olukoju, Z. O. Apata, and Olayemi Akinwumi, *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of a Frontier Zone* (Ìbàdàn: Rex Charles, 2003).
5. R. S. Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1976), 57–109.
6. See M. A. Ajomo, "Legal Perspectives on Border Issues," in *Borderlands in Africa*, ed. Asiwaju and P. O. Adeniyi (Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 1989), 38; see also O. Adejuyigbe "Identification and Characteristics of Borderlands in Africa" in *Borderlands in Africa*, ed. Asiwaju and Adeniyi, 27–36.
7. See A. I. Asiwaju "Yoruba in Nigeria and the Diaspora," 4–5.
8. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 6th ed. (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 2001).
9. Bolanle Awe and Toyin Falola have written extensively on Ìbàdàn. See for instance, Bolanle Awe, "The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power in the Nineteenth Century" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1964); Bolanle Awe, "The Ajele System: A Study of Ibadan Imperialism in the Nineteenth Century" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) 3 (1964): 47–71; Bolanle Awe, "Militarism and Economic Development in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Country: The Ibadan Example," *Journal of African History* 14 (1973): 65–77; Bolanle Awe, "Ibadan, Its Early Beginnings," in *The City of Ibadan*, ed. P. C. Lloyd, A. L. Mabogunje and Bolanle Awe (London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 11–25; Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy of a Pre-colonial State: Ibadan, 1830–1900* (Ilé-Ife: University of Ife Press, 1984); Toyin Falola, "The Political System of Ibadan in the 19th Century" in *Evolution of Political Culture in Nigeria*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Bashir Ikara (Ìbàdàn: University Press, 1985), 104–16; Toyin Falola, *Politics and Economy in Ibadan, 1893–1945* (Lagos: Modolor, 1989); Toyin Falola, "Ibadan Power Elite and Search for Political Order, 1893–1939," *Africa: Rivista Trimestrale di studi e documentazione dell' Istituto Italo-Africano* 68 (1992): 336–54; Toyin Falola, "From Hospitality to Hostility: Ìbàdàn and Strangers, 1830–1904," *Journal of African History* 26 (1985): 51–68; Toyin Falola, "Kemi Morgan and the Second Reconstruction of Ibadan History," *History in Africa* 18 (1991): 93–112.
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## THE HISTORY OF THE OKUN YORÙBÁ: RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Ann O’Hear

This chapter concentrates largely on the Owe, Oworo, and Bunu (including Ikiri), the Yorùbá speakers closest to the Niger–Benue confluence. In examining the evidence available to me on these groups, I became aware of a number of themes and questions, which I present here with the intention of stimulating discussion on the directions in which the study of these Yorùbá speakers, and of the north-east (or *Okun*) Yorùbá in general, could profitably proceed.<sup>1</sup>

The first point that needs to be made is that the history of the Okun groups (Owe, Oworo, Bunu, Ijumu, and Yagba) has been sadly neglected.<sup>2</sup> The second is that, given the themes and questions discussed herein, it is clear that the history of the Okun Yorùbá is of considerable importance, not just to local history, but to the study of history on a broader scale.

One theme that arises from a study of available works on the Okun concerns Yorùbá origins. It seems likely, for example, that the Owe, Oworo, and Bunu have inhabited the area near the confluence for a considerable length of time.<sup>3</sup> Are the Okun Yorùbá, indeed, to be regarded as the “proto-Yorùbá,” indigenous people still adhering to the type of political organization that originally characterized the whole Yorùbá language group, as Robert Smith suggests?<sup>4</sup> Are “the ultimate origins of the Yorùbá-speaking peoples . . . located not very far from the Niger–Benue confluence area,” as Ade Obayemi suggested?<sup>5</sup> How convincing is this hypothesis and what further research needs to be carried out?<sup>6</sup> And what can all this contribute to the broader history of the growth and spread of what we now call Yorùbá culture?

The Okun Yorùbá reveal a great deal of linguistic and cultural similarity among them (along with some variation). According to Eva Krapf-Askari, writing

in the early 1960s:

A number of cultural traits are more or less common to all the Okun tribes, though differently patterned in each. Thus, in the field of traditional religious belief and practice, there is the public worship of a category of spirits known as *Èbọra*, who are thought of as inhabiting lonely and inaccessible places, especially the tops of the low but steep inselbergs in which the region abounds, and to function as protectors of social groups of varying span; the subsidiary cult of *Egùngùn*; the existence of respected and feared women's possession cults . . . ; the almost complete absence of the traditional Yoruba *orisa*. (*Ògun* is honoured by hunters and blacksmiths; *Ifá* diviners are freely consulted, but seem to be regarded more in the light of skilled fortune-tellers than exponents of esoteric knowledge.) Aside from *Èbọra* and *Egungun* rites, the most important public ritual is that associated with funerals . . . . As regards political organization, the most noticeable characteristic is a system of promotional title-taking based on wealth, very different from the lineage-hereditary titles and dynastic sacred kingship of the Western Region Yoruba. These title systems, as well as certain other structural features, show a curiously consistent tendency to be arranged in sets of three.<sup>7</sup>

The Okun Yorùbá were also noted for the use of red cloth for funerals, manufactured in *Bunu* and traded to the *Owe*, *Oworo*, and *Ijumu* (as well as to the *Ebira*).<sup>8</sup>

The Okun display some similarities to the wider Yorùbá world, but also differ from it in political and religious organization. In contrast with most other Yorùbá, they lack what has been called “[t]he institution of sacred kingship.”<sup>9</sup> They are organized into “mini-states” much smaller than the large-scale kingdoms in other parts of Yorùbáland, although not very different in size from the *Ekiti* polities and the old *Ègbá* kingdoms. They are said to lack much of the overall Yorùbá pantheon, but to recognize *Ifá*, *Egùngùn*, and *Ògún*. They share some traits with southeastern Yorùbáland.<sup>10</sup> Again, what do all these similarities and differences (if, indeed, the generalizations are correct) tell us of the development and spread of Yorùbá culture as a whole?

Whatever their role in the origins of the people we now call Yorùbá, the Yorùbá speakers around the confluence do not seem until recently to have been identified or to have identified themselves as Yorùbá. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the word *Yorùbá* seems to have been used to describe the more central Yorùbá peoples, a distinction made both by Western-educated Nigerians and by colonial officers between central Yorùbá and the peripheral northeastern groups who spoke dialects of the Yorùbá language. In 1918, for example, colonial officer C. K. Meek differentiated between the *Oworo* of the confluence area and the people he called the “pure Yorubas”: “The worship of *Shongo* is supposed to belong properly to the pure Yorùbá s and if an *Aworo* [*Oworo*] were killed by lightning the tribe would summon Yorubas from *Lokoja* [that is, residing in *Lokoja*] to come to *Agbaja* and perform the rites necessary to appease the angry Spirit.”<sup>11</sup> Even a *Bunu* ex-slave, who returned to the confluence as a missionary in the mid-nineteenth century, differentiated between his own people and the “Yoruba,” although he admitted that their languages were “almost alike.”<sup>12</sup> In the

course of the twentieth century, however, the Okun Yorùbá came to claim a connection with the wider Yorùbá world, probably with the intention of counterbalancing their precarious and isolated position as Yorùbá speakers and largely non-Muslims in what was, until 1967, the Northern Region of Nigeria.<sup>13</sup> (Although curiously, in the 1950s, the Yagba were said “now” to “deny that they are Yoruba.”<sup>14</sup>) What does all this imply for the study of the formation and growth of the modern Yorùbá identity overall?

The confluence area, including its Okun Yorùbá population, is also important to the study of the concept of “cultural circulation,” that is, of economic and cultural contact and sharing over the centuries. Various groups in the area have long been known for brass-working, suggesting an ancient tradition of circulation of ideas and materials.<sup>15</sup> Other cultural circulation centers around the use of red cloth, as Obayemi reported:

[t]he red cloth used for burials and for the regalia of the masquerades by the north-east Yorùbá is called *ukpo*—the Edo and Igala word for cloth—and Ikiri traditions claim that these were introduced from Idah and later on traded to the Igbirra. The fabrics used in its weaving were scarlet, probably imported by the Europeans to Benin but obtained via Idah.<sup>16</sup>

The more widespread movement of textile ideas around the confluence area (very broadly defined) in the nineteenth century may well also derive from a preexisting pattern of cultural circulation.<sup>17</sup> Even enslavement could lead to cultural circulation: It seems likely that numbers of Bunu women weavers were taken as slaves to Nupe, where they taught Nupe women their skills.<sup>18</sup>

Obayemi also notes political and religious connections among the Yorùbá and other groups around the confluence that point to extensive cultural circulation:

The dynasties of the Igbirra kingdoms of Panda and Igu, the rulers of the Alago kingdom of Doma, Attama and Eze of the Nsukka area in north-west Igboland on the border of the Igala, as well as the Oku of Ikiri in north-east Yorùbáland claim either that their founding ancestors came from Idah or derive the legitimacy of their offices from the Atta of Igala. Dynasties apart, the clans of the Igbirra [Ebira] Tao (Okene area), the Osomari Igbo south of Onitsha, some clans of the Idoma and Agatu claim migrations from Igala territory.<sup>19</sup>

The personnel behind the Egu-afia of the Igala, the Eku-ọba of the Igbirra, [the] Alekwu of the Idoma and the Egun of the . . . Abinu [Bunu] and Oworo share many things. The Igbirra *ovopa*, the Abinu *obakpa*, appear to be cognate with the Jukun *Abakwa*. . . . The Ekwe masquerade, sometimes described as the principal Igala masquerade, is traditionally said to have belonged to the Jukun. The long masquerade, the *okula*, *ouna*, *iro* and *okponobi* of the Abinu, Oworo, Owe and of some Ijumu towns or the *Ewuna* of the Bassa Nge all derive from a common tradition.

In the area of ancestor personification, the Igbirra . . . have a certain pre-eminence as founders of a cycle of these masquerades. The Igbirra . . . are mentioned as having

introduced some of the masquerades to the Abinu and Oworo, while the priests to some of these masquerades orders have the clan name *Adoga*, a name found among Idoma speaking peoples. The powerful women's cult *Ofosi* or *Ohosi* of the Abinu, Ikiri, Oworo, Owe, and some Ijumu towns are all said to derive from Olle in Bunu, the founder being a man who [came] from the Igala-Idoma side of the Niger some centuries ago. The language of this cult is not locally intelligible. The importance of the intermediary position of the Igbirra groups is further marked in the case of the Igala by the fact that the clans performing the *ilo* (*iro* among the north-east Yorùbá) in the Atta's burials are . . . clans . . . ultimately of Igbirra origin.<sup>20</sup>

In these cases, the directions of the cultural influences are suggested. In many cases, however, the direction and nature of influences have yet to be investigated.<sup>21</sup> The further study of the confluence area, which is one of extensive contact and cross-fertilization, and the investigation of the direction and nature of contact are important for the formation of hypotheses on the nature of "cultural circulation" in general.

In the nineteenth century, the most visible (and decidedly brutal) forms of contact between the Okun Yorùbá and other peoples were the raids carried out and the overlordship established by the Nupe-Fulani emirate of Bida, in a period during which many people were carried away as slaves (not only by Nupe, but also by Ìbàdàn and other raiders).<sup>22</sup> Although we must acknowledge the incalculable cost of these depredations in terms of individual human lives and liberty, we should also study the events of this period to increase our understanding of the concepts of resistance and accommodation to enslavers and enslavement<sup>23</sup> and to document the resilience of the human spirit as revealed by the continuance of normal life even in the direst of circumstances.

There was both resistance and accommodation to the Nupe-Fulani. Resistance was strong in the early period of Fulani raids, but also occurred later. Many fortifications, including those of the Owe settlements and in Bunu, date to this period.<sup>24</sup> The Oworo under Okpoto united against Mamudu's raiding in the early 1840s. The Owe (except for Kabba) resisted or revolted at some point under a certain "Ògún Gberi."<sup>25</sup> And the Ijumu, Akoko, and Yagba allied in resistance in the 1890s.<sup>26</sup>

For many people, withdrawal was the only available form of resistance to raids. Various settlements moved to the tops of steep hills, refusing to come down until well into the twentieth century. Some people withdrew to other "inaccessible places," "caves and rock-shelters as well as . . . the patches of rain and gallery forest where visibility was limited and cavalry movements difficult."<sup>27</sup> Others fled to the east bank of the Niger. For example, the 1841 Niger Expedition learned of a recent military campaign, a war "with the Bunu, a people between Kakanda and Nufi: some were taken captive, and others driven into the bush or to the opposite side of the river."<sup>28</sup> In the late 1850s, many Bunu were living at Gbebe, having left their homes to avoid the Fulani raids and to engage in trade.<sup>29</sup> When Gbebe was destroyed in a civil war, many fled again, especially to Lokoja.<sup>30</sup>

Another form of resistance was shown by those who fled from slavery north of the Niger after the British attack on Nupe,<sup>31</sup> and very probably earlier.

Accommodation was another response displayed by various chiefs and leaders. In Bunu, “upstart” chiefs became coordinators and assistant coordinators of tribute collection.<sup>32</sup> No doubt some of these were among the Bunu chiefs who converted to Islam, presumably in part at least as a gesture of accommodation to their Fulani masters.<sup>33</sup> Their accommodation was rewarded. A Bunu informant explains that the Nupe-Fulani “devised a method of paying our chiefs every month on the basis of their success in persuading villagers to contribute people. It was not easy to stop because by stopping this practice, the chiefs would not have their monthly salary. If that happened, where would they get money to eat?”<sup>34</sup>

The Owe settlement of Kabba and especially its chief (the Obaro) also cooperated with the Nupe-Fulani, who used Kabba as the headquarters for their forces.<sup>35</sup> In 1897, when George Goldie and his Royal Niger Company forces entered Kabba, the Obaro did a swift about-turn, transferring his accommodation immediately to the British. As Goldie and his force came through the town:

the chief and leading people threw themselves on their knees before him, and thanked him for having rid them of their oppressors. . . . this demonstration must be taken for what it is worth, as far as concerns the old chief, who would have welcomed either side impartially. He is known to have received a subsidy for collecting so many slaves and tribute from his own people.<sup>36</sup>

Others’ accommodation might also be of a similarly “active” nature. For example, the Oworo chief Agboshi, hearing of Masaba’s reverses in the civil war in Bida Emirate, switched his allegiance to Umoru Maiyaki.<sup>37</sup>

Various individuals and groups pursued various responses to depredations and enslavement. Often, to protect themselves and their dependents, they must have had little choice but to withdraw or to accept some form of accommodation with the invaders. Ultimately, it is necessary to accept all the choices made by people as given historical facts rather than as moral issues, and to detail as many examples of responses as we can, using assessment reports and other colonial records, missionary records (as Femi Kolapo has done), and oral and archaeological evidence to see how far we can advance our knowledge of the concepts (and complexity) of resistance and accommodation.

The exact effects of the nineteenth-century depredations in terms of population are difficult to assess, although further research may provide us with a better basis on which to judge.

Some towns and villages were deserted, their inhabitants having fled or been taken as slaves. When the missionary Obadiah Thomas journeyed to Bunu in the 1870s, he found the “remains of ruinous villages” and noted that his party traveled past Budan (or Budon, a Kakanda town on the Niger) almost all day before coming across a single small farm village.<sup>38</sup>

Some towns, however, increased in size. Lokoja was founded and became a center of population at the confluence, attracting refugees from its hinterland.<sup>39</sup> Kabba, Michael Mason suggests, also grew “as an administrative centre . . . it

attracted traders as well as soldiers and other clients connected with Nupe overrule.”<sup>40</sup> Seymour Vandeleur, however, observing Kabba town in 1897, reported that it was:

evidently a shadow of what it has been once upon a time. The mud wall plainly shows the former extent of the town, over a mile from side to the other, but it has been so reduced by raids and slavery for the past century, that now there cannot be more than 5000 inhabitants. It had been a sore tax on the inhabitants, having this war camp of the Fulahs at their very doors.<sup>41</sup>

Although this account may reflect the intensification of tribute collection in the late years of the nineteenth century, it is impossible to judge the previous population of Kabba town without earlier reports to consult. And the large space inside the walls may simply reflect the common practice of including farm and pasture land within them.

It is also difficult to assess the overall effect of the Nupe-Fulani raids and collection of tribute in slaves on the population of the area. A clergyman traveling with Bishop Tugwell and Phillips in 1894 reported that:

At Ayeri, a town close to Kabba, the king came to call on us . . . and told us the English king was the ruler of the world, and he besought us white men to come and help him. He said that four years ago, on his coming to the throne, the Nupes came and took away 300 of his people. He told us that oppression has been the rule here for forty years; that at first the Nupes only demanded couriers [carriers? cowries?], then farm produce, and that now they will have slaves as well. As all their own slaves are gone as tribute, they have to give their own children, and many, after giving their wives and children for tribute, have left the town and not come back—among others his own brother and cousin; that there are hardly any young people in the country, and that their nation is becoming extinct.<sup>42</sup>

This suggests a large-scale population loss. So does Ade Obayemi, using a number of arguments. First, in common with the chief of Ayeri, Obayemi points out that “tribute in human beings paid to Bida could not be met by the number of slaves locally owned nor by natural increase.” Second, he argues, population distribution today is uneven, and he suggests that the larger centers, collaborator settlements that were spared the worst ravages suffered by their neighbors, reflect what would have been the normal pre-nineteenth-century demographic pattern. Third, many lineages and sublineages are remembered but extinct, some of these being “‘towns’ in some senses of the word.”<sup>43</sup> These arguments are strong, especially the first and the third, but there are also problems. It is impossible to discount Michael Mason’s point that we do not know “either the absolute population or the population growth rate . . . before the twentieth century,” and that we do not know, “even approximately, how many slaves left the area and never returned,” so we cannot come to any conclusion on the seriousness of the long-term effects. There are “[e]ven lower population densities,” Mason goes on to point out, in

other areas (he mentions Borgu) “where the factor of invading armies may be assumed to be negligible.”<sup>44</sup> Early British administrators believed that slave raiding had serious effects on population, and the intensification of slave taking in the last years before the defeat of Nupe by the British may be argued to be confirmation of their beliefs. As C. K. Meek reported:

Towards the end of Maliki’s and the beginning of Abubakr’s reign the Bida Filanis, fully appreciating the Niger Company’s preparations for war, made a final raid on Aworo and it is safe to say that in the Aworo district today there isn’t a single male or female over the age of 30 who has not been a slave at Bida.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, Meek’s account also makes it clear that many of the slaves (especially, it is likely, the newly enslaved) did return to their homes. Other reports of the return of slaves from Nupe to their homes south of the Niger owing to British attacks on Nupe from 1897 onward support this conclusion. Reports of the large scale of Bunu cloth production in the early twentieth century suggest that many of the returnees were weavers. Ade Obayemi accepts that escape from north of the Niger might not have been too difficult for the slaves,<sup>46</sup> even before the British attacks on Nupe. However, we are still left without real statistical information from which to draw any adequate numerical conclusions.

We can, however, make tentative suggestions as to the economic effects of raids, tribute collection, and enslavement, and further research may well provide us with a fuller picture. Femi Kolapo, for example, makes the important point that, despite all the depredations, normal economic activity continued.<sup>47</sup> Agricultural production continued. In 1858, Emir Masaba even told his Bunu soldiers (no doubt conscripts) “that those persons who wanted to trade must go and trade, who wanted to work farm must do it, and leave war.”<sup>48</sup> Even if the largest part of the produce and products of their work found its way into the Nupe-Fulani coffers, this action of Masaba’s argues for the encouragement of at least some semblance of normal production routines. In any case, warfare was a seasonal affair.

Trade did not cease. Bunu and other traders who moved to Gbebe continued their trading activities, and some of them engaged in the downriver slave trade, in which compatriots of theirs were counted among the merchandise;<sup>49</sup> these traders profited from raids and kidnappings, not unlike the accommodationist chiefs. Even industrial innovation continued. In 1854, at Gbebe, William Balfour Baikie reported from Gbebe that “in one weaving establishment we found that some of our Turkey reds [blankets] had been taken to pieces and the threads, neatly knotted, were now being interwoven with some of their own white and blue.”<sup>50</sup> These weavers could well have been Bunu men or women; many Bunu women were observed by Bunu returnee missionary James Thomas in 1859 in the same town, “making country cloth.”<sup>51</sup> A new source of thread for the famed red cloths had been found.<sup>52</sup> Normal economic life and even innovation, it is demonstrated, continue under even the most unpropitious circumstances.



The cultural and political effects of Nupe imperialism and the intermingling of peoples in the nineteenth century are also topics needing more thorough investigation, again, not only to expand our knowledge of the Okun Yorùbá themselves, but also to add to our general understanding of cultural circulation and the relations between colonizer and colonized.

From the evidence of which I am at present aware, the cultural effects of the nineteenth-century events appear to have been generally limited and superficial. There appears to be relatively little evidence of cultural borrowing or absorption, although some Bunu are said to have been absorbed by the Bassa-Nge on the east bank and some Yorùbá speakers are said to have been “Igbirralized.”<sup>53</sup> Some limited intermarriage is reported between language groups,<sup>54</sup> but in general the ethnicities, even when scattered among one another, remained separate. According to C. K. Meek, in 1918:

Tribally the [Aworo] district is divisible into two halves inhabited by the Aworos and Bassanges respectively—the former occupying the country to the north, the Bassanges that to the south of Lokoja. In addition there are scattered settlements of Hausas, Igbirras, and Nupes, and there is a Bassa Komo village near IKEYA.<sup>55</sup>

[T]he tribes of the Kabba Division can roughly be divided into 2 classes, the “Nupe” tribes and the “Yorùbá” tribes, these terms being used generically, not to indicate a common origin so much as a common civilization and a common language group—the former living in round houses, observing the same institutions as the Nupes and speaking Nupe or a language affiliated to Nupe, the latter living in oblong houses, observing the cruder Southern customs of peoples forced to live in the hills or thick bush, and speaking languages which, when not actually dialects of Yoruba, are at least closely allied to Yoruba. The Aworo are one of the Yoruba, the Bassanges one of the Nupe group.<sup>56</sup>

Obayemi believes that where, as in Oworo, there is evidence of the adoption of Nupe traits, this is “the result of direct copying (as of titles and personal names) during the twentieth century.”<sup>57</sup> In this, however, he may not be entirely correct. According to C. K. Meek again, on the “Aworo District”:

When I paid my first visit to Agbaja I found that there was no one holding the position of second headman. The Olu was asked if he would prefer to have the old Aworo title of Lessaw restored or whether he would rather retain the Nupe titles of Yerima, Kpotun etc. The Olu preferred the 2nd alternative and . . . he was backed by all the principal men of the town.<sup>58</sup>

It seems to me that this account likely reflects the adoption of Nupe titles during the period of Nupe-Fulani overlordship as a further gesture of accommodation by the “principal men” and as a means to disguise any lack of local legitimacy as titleholders among them.<sup>59</sup> The titles seem to have become entrenched by 1918, and it is difficult to suggest a reason why they might have been adopted after the end of Nupe-Fulani rule.

There are differing opinions as to the extent to which Islam spread from the Nupe-Fulani into the Yorùbá-speaking areas near the confluence in the nineteenth

century, but it seems probable that its influence did not extend very far. Although Mason believes that “the impact of the nineteenth century jihad . . . caused . . . numbers [of Muslims] to swell to important proportions,”<sup>60</sup> Obayemi argues that the “entry of Islam into the O-kun districts date[s] effectively from the first and second decades of the twentieth century.”<sup>61</sup> Others tend to agree that conversion to Islam was not widespread in the nineteenth century. According to Renne, “During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when Nupe hegemony prevailed, some Bunu chiefs became Muslims although the majority of the people retained traditional beliefs. Although Muslim worship is not common in Bunu today, some people, particularly in Northern Bunu (Kiri) are practicing Muslims.”<sup>62</sup> Temple and Temple reported in the second decade of the twentieth century that the Bunu were “a pagan people, amongst whom Muhammadanism is penetrating.”<sup>63</sup> Niven, in 1926, asserted, of Kabba Province as a whole, that “[m]ost of the natives are animists.”<sup>64</sup> Mason records that returned slaves had become Muslims (“In nearly every village which [he] visited in Kabba Division, [he] was informed that ex-slaves, returned from the north, had become Muslims”),<sup>65</sup> but it is likely that many of these people did not return until 1897 or later.

Likewise, the impact of Christianity, the other religion entering the area, was not great in the nineteenth century. Christianity was preached by Church Missionary Society agents at Gbebe and Lokoja; most of them were Sierra Leone “recaptives” or their sons, and two of them were of Bunu origin.<sup>66</sup> Although they made some progress among the refugee populations in Gbebe and Lokoja, including Bunu and Oworo, they had little impact inland, although they made preaching tours there. It was the next generation of evangelists, early in the twentieth century, who began to have more success in the Bunu area.<sup>67</sup>

Politically, the Nupe imperialists had a more immediate impact on the confluence Yorùbá groups. A colonial officer even alleged that the area that became Kabba Division was “so devastated and so disintegrated that not only tribal organisation but even village organisation had been well nigh obliterated [*sic*].”<sup>68</sup> However, as Obayemi has pointed out, the lineage remained “the basic landowning and land-disposing unit,” giving the individual “his social identity and determining his political standing, his religious expression and economic opportunity.” Returned slaves were reabsorbed into their lineages, and where lineages had died out, “known descendants (even on the female line) were persuaded to return and resettle.” All of the “basic institutions of the ancient polities” were retained.<sup>69</sup> And among the Owe, Oworo, and Bunu, group identity was broadened. The introduction, by the Nupe-Fulani for their “administrative convenience,” of overall tribute coordinators or “heads” of the Bunu, Oworo, and Owe peoples was an innovation,<sup>70</sup> albeit one that led to considerable problems. In Oworo, for example, conflicts occurred after the death of Okpoto, who had been recognized by Bida as the Olú of all the Oworo.<sup>71</sup> Controversy over the title has continued in the twentieth century.<sup>72</sup>

The next imperialists faced by the Okun Yorùbá were the British, and the impact of British intervention and rule also needs further investigation. Early contacts were cordial, with some Okun groups asking the British to come and defend them

from the Nupe-Fulani.<sup>73</sup> The early results of British intervention against Nupe, first by the Royal Niger Company under Goldie, then by the authorities of the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria (declared in Lokoja in 1900),<sup>74</sup> were positive. Nupe raids and tribute collection ceased. Large numbers of slaves left their masters in Nupe north of the Niger and returned to their homes south of the river.<sup>75</sup> Safety returned to the area, and internal trade increased:

After the fall of Bida[,] Eggan [a Niger port] became a town of very considerable importance. Traders could safely bring in their products not only from the Nupe districts but from Bunu, Kabba, Yagba and Akoko country.<sup>76</sup>

Trade in local cloth flourished. Leo Frobenius, who visited Bida, the Nupe capital, in 1911 described its market, where

dealers with great bales of home-spuns come daily in from the Bunu district in the South, an outlying province of the Yoruban territory. The larger portion of the beautiful stuffs used by the Nupé ladies comes from there, and although they themselves can manage the handloom, their own producing power is a mere fleabite to the enormous output of Kabba and Bunu.<sup>77</sup>

Despite Frobenius's reference to "beautiful stuffs," on the evidence of the textiles brought back to Europe by Frobenius, as Colleen Kriger points out, much of the Bunu cloth sold in Bida is likely to have been of an inexpensive type, indicating the Bunu women weavers' strategy of developing (or redeveloping?) a large-scale industry in low-cost products, which continued until the 1960s (despite some competition from the Ebirá) and profited from the *pax Britannica*, which ensured the safety of long-distance trade.<sup>78</sup>

Overall, however, the long-term impact of British rule was less positive for the confluence area, and future research on the area should shed light on the concept of peripheralization under colonial rule. With the development of the railway system, the River Niger lost its importance as a trade conduit; in addition, no major export crop was found. The Yorùbá speakers of the confluence and their neighbors, therefore, found themselves in an economic backwater. By 1926, for example, "the Eggan area [was] now but the shadow of its former self. . . . Now there is very little save the town itself, a multitude of native huts on a crumbling sandbank, for most of the trade has gone across the river to Katcha, a market on the Baro-Minna Railway."<sup>79</sup>

Although the British caused the end of Nupe-Fulani domination over the confluence, nevertheless in many ways they allowed the effects of Nupe-Fulani domination to continue. In their boundary making, the British included the confluence peoples and many of the Okun Yorùbá within the Northern Region, to which the Nupe north of the Niger also belonged. Thus, the confluence peoples were further pushed to the periphery, both economically and politically.<sup>80</sup>

Within the area, the British retained much of the political system introduced by the Nupe. Basing their decision on what they considered "the preponderant role

of Kabba” during the Nupe period, the British chose Kabba as the capital, and the Obaro as the “Paramount Head,” of Kabba Division.<sup>81</sup> The *Oro of Aworro* (Olú of Oworo) also remained important, and in 1918 this chief was given supervisory authority over the Kakanda, Kupa, and Egga(n) Districts, while the “Baro of Kabba” was to oversee other groups.<sup>82</sup> The Owe and the Obaro of Kabba are said to have been “despised by the other tribes in the Division for their tame submission to the Fulani,”<sup>83</sup> an accusation no doubt fueled by resentment of Kabba’s dominant position in the area during the colonial period. In 1918, the Eбира were said to be “prolific” and “spreading over the surrounding districts in search of good farm land, or trading,” while the Owe were said to be decreasing in numbers.<sup>84</sup> What were the results of this *mélange* of population change, entrenchment of authority, and economic neglect on the relations between the Okun Yorùbá and their neighbors around the confluence in the twentieth century?<sup>85</sup>

Much of the story of the Okun Yorùbá still waits to be researched. Much of our present knowledge, together with promising lines of investigation, we owe to Ade Obayemi. We urgently need to follow up his work. Archaeological and linguistic studies need to be expanded. Oral testimony needs to be collected before yet another generation dies out. The publication of local histories needs to be encouraged.<sup>86</sup> Much of the area inhabited by the Okun Yorùbá may have been peripheralized in the last hundred years, but only in current economic terms; over the long term it has been an important area of cultural and economic contact and circulation.

This chapter has sought to demonstrate that the history of the Okun Yorùbá is not only of local importance (although this is of value in itself), but is also significant in the furtherance of historical knowledge and interpretation generally; the chapter also aims to stimulate discussion, not only of the themes discussed, but also of the other ways, no doubt numerous, in which the study of the Okun Yorùbá can contribute to our understanding of the wider world.

## Acknowledgment

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## Notes

1. Eva Krapf-Askari characterized the northeast Yorùbá as the “Okun” people, and in this she is followed by Ade Obayemi. Eva Krapf-Askari, “The Social Organization of the Owe,” *African Notes* 2, no. 3 (1964–65): 9; Ade Obayemi, “The Sokoto Jihad and the ‘O-kun’ Yorùbá: A Review,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 9 (1978): 61.

2. Toyin Falola, "A Research Agenda on the Yorùbá in the Nineteenth Century," *History in Africa* 15 (1988): 216–17; Funso Afolayan, "Towards a History of Eastern Yorùbáland," in *Yorùbá Historiography*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison African Studies Program, 1991), 75–77. Much of the published work on the Okun Yorùbá is by the late Professor Ade Obayemi, to whose memory I dedicate this chapter. A new work on the Okun is *Northeast Yorubaland: Studies in the History and Culture of a Frontier Zone*, ed. Ayodeji Olukoju, Z. O. Apata, and Olayemi Akinwumi (Ìbàdàn, Nigeria: Rex Charles Publication/Connel Publications, 2003). Unfortunately, I was unable to obtain a copy of this work in time to incorporate material from it into the present chapter.

3. For Oworo claims to indigenous status, see Daryll Forde, *The Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, Western Africa, Part IV) (London: International African Institute, 1951; reprinted with supplementary bibliography, 1969), 74; also Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna (NNAK) SNP 10 393p/1918, An Assessment Report on the Aworo (Oworraw) District of the Kabba Division, by Mr. C. K. Meek, assistant district officer, paras. 23, 39. However, Forde also cites the opinion of D. F. H. McBride that the Oworo were "the earliest known inhabitants of Koton-Karifi Division," on the east bank of the Niger, and "were driven across the Niger in the eighteenth century." D. F. H. McBride (or MacBride) was presumably a colonial officer. Forde is citing an unpublished manuscript by this author, "The Chieftdom of Koton Karifi, Koton Karifi Division, Kabba Province, 1935." C. R. Niven reports that "as far as one can see the probability is that once all the Kabba Province was occupied by Aworos, though whether they were or were not the indigenous inhabitants is impossible to say." See Niven, "The Kabba Province of the Northern Provinces, Nigeria," *Geographical Journal* 68, no. 4 (October 1926): 296. Niven adds that "[o]n the Kabba side the probability is that the Bunus were the first invaders from the south-west, and that they drove back the Aworos towards the River Niger." For other stories of origin of the Bunu and of the Owe, see Forde, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 74; O. Temple, comp., C. L. Temple, ed., *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, 2nd ed., new impression (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1967), 71, 306; K. V. Elphinstone, *Gazetteer of Ilorin Province* (London: Waterlow and Sons Limited, 1921), 48; Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann Educational Books [Nig.] Ltd., 1980), 149; P. C. Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S. O. Biobaku (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 209.

4. Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 50.

5. Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 148.

6. For the hypothesis and also criticisms or warnings in its regard, see Smith, *Kingdoms*, 50, 156; Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 148, 153; Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours before 1600 A.D.," in *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, 3rd ed., J. F. A. Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds. (Harlow, England: Longman, 1985), 261–63; Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," 208–9, 219–20; Afolayan, "Towards a History," 77.

7. Askari, "Social Organization of the Owe," 9–10, and see other references, 10. For similarities and differences among the Okun Yoruba groups, see also, for example, NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, Assistant District Officer, paras. 39, 52; Forde, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 74, 75, 79–80; Smith, *Kingdoms*, 50.

8. Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 164, 104n. See also references to red cloth herein.
9. Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," 208; and Smith, *Kingdoms*, 50; also Askari, quoted above.
10. See NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 45; Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," 206, 208–11, 217; Obayemi, "Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples," 280; Afolayan, *Towards a History*, 77. For "mini-states," see Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 62–63.
11. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 45.
12. See Femi J. Kolapo, "The 1858–59 Gbebe CMS Journal of Missionary James Thomas," *History in Africa* 27 (2000): 34n.
13. Askari, "Social Organization," 9; Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," 209. In 1967, the old regional structure was abolished and the northeast Yorùbá were included in Kwara State.
14. Forde, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 74.
15. Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 163. See also Obayemi, "Yorùbá and Edo-Speaking Peoples," 271.
16. Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 164.
17. See Ann O'Hear, "The Introduction of Weft Float Motifs to Strip Weaving in Ilorin" in *West African Economic and Social History: Studies in Memory of Marion Johnson*, ed. T. C. McCaskie and David Henige (Madison: University of Wisconsin African Studies Program, 1990).
18. Forde, *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples*, 77; S. F. Nadel, *A Black Byzantium* (London: Oxford University Press for International African Institute, 1942), 297.
19. Obayemi, "States and Peoples," 149.
20. *Ibid.*, 162–63.
21. Lloyd, "Political and Social Structure," 205–6.
22. Although it was mostly the Nupe-Fulani who controlled the northeast (Okun) Yorùbá and the Ìbàdàn and other Yorùbá who operated in Akoko and elsewhere, this was not a cut and dried arrangement. Nupe influence increased in Akoko, Ìgbómìnà raided the Oworo, and the names of Ìbàdàn generals are recorded in the traditions of the Okun Yorùbá. See J. F. Ade Ajayi and S. A. Akintoye, "Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century," in *Groundwork*, 290, 292; E. G. M. Dupigny, *Gazetteer of Nupe Province* (London: Waterlow and Sons, 1920), 15–17. On Akoko and the "Agge War," see Michael Mason, "The Jihad in the South: An Outline of the Nineteenth Century Nupe Hegemony in North-Eastern Yorùbáland and Afenmai," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 5, no. 2 (1970): 197–98; Femi James Kolapo, "Military Turbulence, Population Displacement and Commerce on a Slaving Frontier of the Sokoto Caliphate: Nupe c. 1830–1857" (Ph.D. diss., York University, Toronto, 1999), appendix 2, 289, 53n. Even Ìlọ̀rín raiders might venture far to the east. See Ann O'Hear, *Power Relations in Nigeria: Ilorin Slaves and Their Successors* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 1997), 23–24.
23. For the concepts of resistance and accommodation, see, for example, Ann O'Hear, "The Historiography of Resistance and Accommodation," in *Power Relations in Nigeria*, 4–20.
24. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 69.
25. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, paras. 27–28; Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 75 and 44n. Obayemi indicates that both oral and archival information is available on Ògún Gberi.

26. See, for example, J. F. Ade Ajayi and S. A. Akintoye, "Yorubaland," 292–93.

27. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 69, also 81 and 68n; Elisha Renne, *Cloth that Does not Die* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1995), 16. For similar occurrences in Akoko, see NNAK SNP 10 458p/1917, Ìlọ̀rín Province Report June 1917, by K. V. Elphinstone, para. 17.

28. Journal of J. F. Schon (*Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schon and Mr. Samuel Crowther*), quoted in Kolapo, "Military Turbulence," appendix 2, 280. See below for Bunu crossing the river and becoming absorbed in the Bassa-Nge.

29. Kolapo, "Military Turbulence," appendix 2, 282.

30. Femi J. Kolapo, "CMS Missionaries of African Origin and Extra-Religious Encounters at the Niger-Benue Confluence, 1858–1880," *African Studies Review* 43, no. 2 (2000): 109.

31. See Michael Mason, *Foundations of the Bida Kingdom* (Zaria: Ahmadu Bello University Press, 1981), 150; Paul E. Lovejoy and Jan S. Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery: The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chap. 2.

32. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 73.

33. See below.

34. Renne, *Cloth*, 159, quoting T. Moses.

35. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 75; Askari, "Social Organization," 9; Ajayi and Akintoye, "Yorubaland," 293.

36. Seymour Vandeleur, *Campaigning on the Upper Nile and Niger* (London: Methuen and Co., 1898), 189.

37. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 29.

38. Femi J. Kolapo, *The Grassroots: Town-Life during the Early 19th Century Nupe Wars* (unpublished manuscript). On desertion of settlements, see also Ade Obayemi, "An Archaeological Mission to Akpaa," *Confluence (An Academic Journal of the Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture)* 1, no. 1 (June 1978): 60, 61.

39. Mason, "Jihad in the South," 208.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Vandeleur, *Campaigning*, 189.

42. *Ibid.*, 189–90, quoting Rev. C. E. Wating.

43. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 82–84.

44. Mason, "Jihad in the South," 208.

45. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 35. For early British administrators' assumptions, see Mason, "Jihad in the South," 208; also Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 84, quoting Lugard.

46. Obayemi, "Sokoto Jihad," 82.

47. Kolapo, "Grassroots," unpublished ms.

48. Kolapo, "CMS Journal," October 15.

49. Kolapo, "Grassroots"; Kolapo, "CMS Journal," December 4. For Bunu people among the slaves traded down the Niger, see Kolapo, "Military Turbulence," 135–36; and "CMS Journal," July 10, 16, and 26.

50. William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue in 1854* (London: Frank Cass and Co., Ltd., 1966), 268.

51. Kolapo, "CMS Journal." July 13 is the date given by missionary James Thomas in his journal: this is incorrect, and Femi Kolapo suggests February 13 as the correct date. Personal communication.

52. See other references in this chapter to Bunu red cloths. Also Renne, *Cloth*, 104–6, 124–26, and 145–46, on men and women weaving these cloths.
53. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 83, and 74n; Obayemi, “States and Peoples,” 152, citing Y. A. Ibrahim.
54. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 39.
55. *Ibid.*, para. 8.
56. *Ibid.*, para. 22.
57. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 86.
58. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, para. 74.
59. For lack of legitimacy among Oworo chiefs, see NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, paras. 38, 57; also see previous discussion of “upstart” chiefs in Bunu.
60. Obayemi, “Jihad in the South,” 206–7.
61. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 76, 48n.
62. Renne, *Cloth*, 210, 24n.
63. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes*, 72.
64. Niven, “Kabba Province,” 298.
65. Mason, “Jihad in the South,” 207 and 4n.
66. Kolapo, “CMS Journal,” “Missionaries,” 96–99 and 7n, and “Military Turbulence,” 135–36.
67. Renne, *Cloth*, 159–60, 165–66, 225, 8n and 9n. The major period of conversion to Christianity among the Bunus came in the early 1930s, “in the wake of the Omi Mimo revival movement” and encouraged by CMS agents. Renne, *Cloth*, 164–66.
68. NNAK SNP 10 490p/1918, Ilorin Report no. 86, for Half Year 1918, by Resident K. V. Elphinstone, para. 9.
69. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 85–86.
70. *Ibid.*, 72–73, 76. More thoroughgoing political changes were introduced by the Nupe-Fulani in the Afenmai area, further south. Mason, “Jihad in the South,” 207, quoting a British colonial administrator.
71. NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, paras. 28 ff; Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 72.
72. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 72 and 32n; NNAK SNP 10 393p/1918, Assessment Report Aworo District, Meek, paras. 37, 38, 57.
73. Obayemi, “Sokoto Jihad,” 84 and n. 78; for the appeal made by the ruler of “Ayeri,” see above.
74. For British campaigns against the Nupe-Fulani Emirate, see Mason, *Foundations*, chapter 7.
75. *Ibid.*, 150; Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death*, chapter 2.
76. NNAK SNP 10 266p/1918: An Assessment Report on Kakanda, Kupa, and Eggan Districts of the Kabba Division by Mr. C. K. Meek, assistant district officer, para. 28. Eggan had been a trading center of great importance in the nineteenth century, at least up to 1890, when Mockler-Ferryman visited it (cited in Marion Johnson, “Cloth on the Banks of the Niger,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 4 [June 1973]: 363, 364). In 1897, however, “[t]he attitude of Eggan . . . towards the Royal Niger Company was not considered quite satisfactory. Bida spies and ajelai were apparently being harboured in the town. The town was accordingly burnt down and the Rogan Moman Lafiya deposed.” Assessment Report on Kakanda, Kupa and Eggan, para. 27.



77. Leo Frobenius, *The Voice of Africa*, trans. Rudolf Blind, vol. 2 (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1913), 415.

78. Colleen Kriger, "Textile Production and Gender in the Sokoto Caliphate," *Journal of African History* 34 (1993): 396. For Bunu textile production in the twentieth century, see Renne, *Cloth*.

79. Niven, "Kabba Province," 292.

80. Mason, "Jihad in the South," 208.

81. C. O. Akomolafe, "The District Head System in Akoko, 1914–1935," *Odu* [new series] 18 (July 1978): 32–33.

82. NNAK SNP 10 133p/1919, Ìlọ̀rìn Province Report Annual 1918, by K. V. Elphinstone, resident, para. 25.

83. NNAK SNP 10 490p/1918, Ìlọ̀rìn Report no. 86, for Half Year 1918, Elphinstone, para. 13 (report from Sydney Smith). When Michael Mason was conducting research, he was told that the Owes were "still regarded as collaborationists for serving the Nupes." "Jihad in the South," 204, 7n.

84. NNAK SNP 10 490p/1918, Ìlọ̀rìn Report no. 86, for Half Year 1918, Elphinstone, para. 13 (report from Sydney Smith).

85. One example of conflict between groups is to be seen in the competition between the Ebira and the Bunu women weavers. Both Bunu and Ebira informants told Elisha Renne that Atta Ibrahim "forbade" the Ebira to buy *aşo ipò* cloth (used for burials), "on the grounds that the Bunu people and their cloths were causing undue death among the Ebira." The Bunu "had a particular economic monopoly which Atta Ibrahim effectively broke by insisting that henceforth the Ebira people use an Ebira-woven white cloth (*itaogede*) for burials." Renne, *Cloth*, 146.

86. A good example is the recently published *History of the Yagba People*, by Ezekiel Bolaji Iyekolo (Lagos: Nelson Publishers Limited, 2000). This deals, for example, with Nupe and Yorùbá raids, notable warriors, war strategies, population movements, the fate of specific towns, and attitudes to Nupe dress and Islam.

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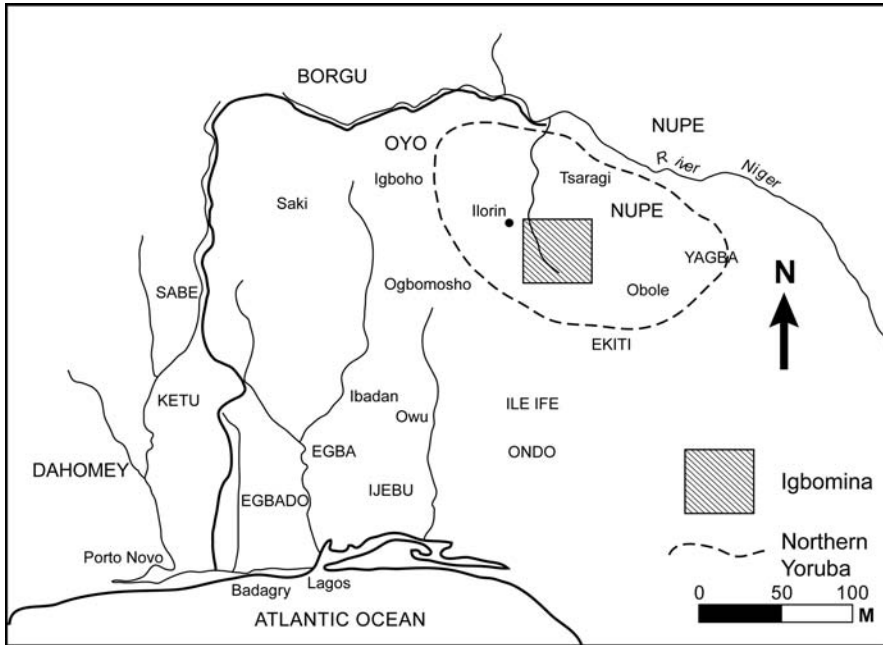
## ÌLÁ KINGDOM REVISITED: RECENT ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH AT ÌLÁ-YÀRÀ

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### Introduction

Most of the archaeological research in Yorùbáland has concentrated on the last thousand years, a period of the development of distinctive features of Yorùbá social complexity and cultures. This early research centered on large states and their capital cities. The urge to conduct archaeological excavation at such centers was often a result of their presumed historical importance as indicated by the oral traditions, the reports of early European visitors, or the presence of artworks or monumental structures such as enclosure walls. In southwestern Nigeria, the interest in documenting prehistoric societies has engendered focus on the large polities of Old Òyó, Ilé-Ifè, Benin, Owo, and Iléšà, among others. However, the archaeological contribution to understanding the processes of social formation and the dynamics of change in Yorùbáland has been very minimal. The outlying areas of Yorùbáland have not been investigated as much as central Yorùbá.

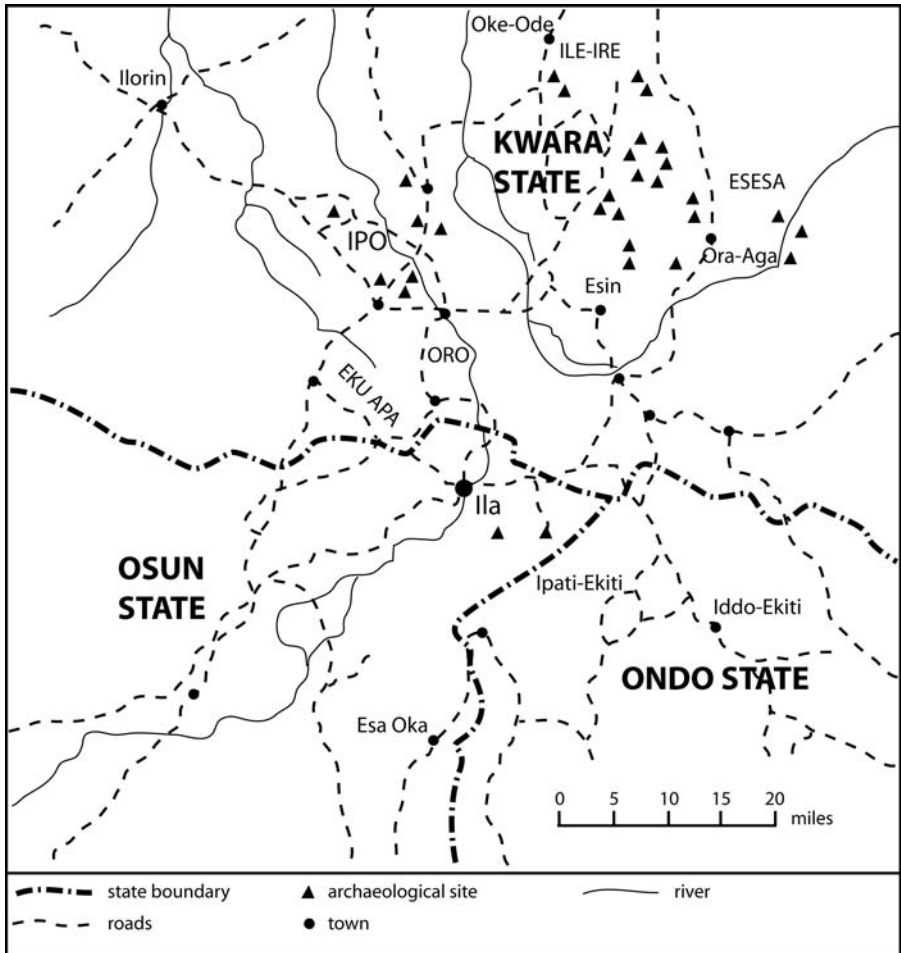
Northern Yorùbáland, particularly Ìgbómìnà, is relatively less known (Map 6.1). The region has always been seen as geographically too remote composed of mainly small-scale sociopolitical institutions not worthy of serious studies.<sup>1</sup> There is also a misconception that societies far removed from the center were unaffected both culturally and politically by the regional development that saw the rise of states. The dearth of information on the early history of the Ìgbómìnà groups has exacerbated doubt over their cultural identity. However, the study of the Ìgbómìnà would provide an understanding of the nature of the Yorùbá frontier polities in the north. By virtue of its location on the border, with the Nupe to the



**Map 6.1.** Yorùbá sub-groups map. Credit: Aribidesi Usman, 2006.

north, Ìgbómìnà became a competing zone between rival core polities, the Old Òyó and the Nupe, and later, Fulani and Ìbàdàn states. This chapter is a report of the recent archaeological work at Ìlǎ-Orangun in the Ìgbómìnà area of Oṣun State. The investigation, which is in its infancy, is an attempt to understand the cultural and historical trajectories and processes of sociopolitical formation and interactions in northern Yorùbá before the nineteenth century. For the early history of Ìlǎ, this study relies on nonwritten sources, of which oral tradition is the most important. This is supplemented with the findings of archaeological research.

Ìlǎ-Orangun lies about 65 km northeast of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and 90 km southeast of Ìlòrín on the southern edge of the savanna. It is part of a distinct dialectical Yorùbá sub-group known as Ìgbómìnà, much of which is presently located in Kwara State; Ìlǎ and Ora towns are in Oṣun State (Map 6.2). It can also be said that in the pre-colonial period Ìlǎ-Orangun was situated at the edge of the forest and the other Ìgbómìnà groups (e.g., Share, Ipo, Oke-Ode, Ilere, Esisa, Irese, Iyagba, Oro, and Isin) occupied the savanna stretch below the bend of the River Niger from latitude 4 and 8 degrees east and longitude 8 and 9 degrees north.<sup>2</sup> More than 80 percent of Ìlǎ people are farmers who plant a wide range of crops, including yams,



**Map 6.2.** Ìgbómìnà groups and archaeological site map. Credit: Aribidesi Usman, 2006.

cassava, pepper, maize, and plantains as well as cash crops such as cocoa, kola nut, pineapples, avocado pears, orange, and guava. In addition, the people are also skillful palm-wine tappers, a profession for which they are known nationwide; hence the Yorùbá saying *emu lògùn Ìlá* (palm-wine is the medicine of Ìlá, i.e., palm-wine is the cure for illness at Ìlá). While the men tap palm-wine, the women sell it in bars located in towns. Also, the Ìlá people engage in local arts and crafts industries such as basketry, pottery, soap making, and sculpture. Their fame in woodcarving is world acclaimed in the work of Fakeye, who hails from Ìlá-Ọrangun.

## Early History

The clearest insight into the process of sociopolitical formation of Ìlá is afforded by the history of its foundation. Various Yorùbá traditions identify Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as the place of creation, and legends associated the ancient city with Odùduwà, the first Ọba and founder of the Yorùbá people. It is believed that princes who were children of Odùduwà of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ founded some large political centers, one of which was Ìlá.<sup>3</sup> As Ade Obayemi put it, this “has inspired the descriptions of the Yorùbá as the *Ọmọ Oodua* (offspring, or those under the umbrella, of Odùduwà).”<sup>4</sup> Scholars who relied on oral and written tradition of Ifẹ̀ origin and dynastic theory have equated such “superior” dynastic link or so-called “crowned town” with political centralization. Ìlá has since been referred to as a kingdom and its ruler, the Ọrangun, as the leader of the Ìgbómìnà.<sup>5</sup> However, traditions in other Ìgbómìnà towns—such as Oba, Ajase, Isanlu-Isin, Oro, Ọwa, Ikosin, and Igbaja—indicate the existence of large communities in Ìgbómìnà before the emergence of Ìlá, and that Ìlá was not always the most powerful or its authority recognized by all Ìgbómìnà communities.<sup>6</sup>

The oral tradition of the royal houses in Ìlá dates the origins of the town to the thirteenth century and claims a link with Odùduwà and Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as the source of its authority as a crowned town. Some accounts refer to Ifagbamila (Ajagunla) as the son of Odùduwà who left Ilé-Ifẹ̀ with his mother, Queen Adetinrin, in about the twelfth century.<sup>7</sup> Other accounts suggest that Ajagunla was the son of Princess Adetinrin, the only daughter of Odùduwà, who came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ in the twelfth century. Princess Adetinrin was sent away from the palace because of an unwanted pregnancy.<sup>8</sup> Whatever the case, Adetinrin was at the head of a migrant group that settled at Ìlá-Kodomu (also referred to as Igbó-Ajagunla) in Ìlá history. She was said to have left Ilé-Ifẹ̀ with “slaves” and the paraphernalia of office namely the “Ogbo,” “Osere,” and a crown.

The Ìlá historical tradition further states that the people of Ìlá lived at various locations before they finally settled at their present site, Ìlá-Ọrangun, where Ọrangun Igbonnibi first reigned. These sites include Ajo, Ìlá-Yàrà, Ìlá Magbon (later known as Ìlá-Ọrangun), Oke Molododo, Ilase, Ilawo, and Ìlá-Okiri (Oke-Ìlá). The Ìlá people did not originally establish most of these settlements. The settlements were already in the area at the time Ìlá-Yàrà was occupied by migrants from Igbó Ajagunla. According to tradition, the royal succession controversy that marked Ogboye’s reign (Amota’s successor) at Ìlá-Yàrà continued under Oboyun, and the situation became so bad that those who had failed to gain the throne fled with their followers to the neighboring towns and villages of Ilase, Ìlá Magbon, Ilawo, and Ìlá Okiri.<sup>9</sup> It appears that the migration and the eventual occupation of these settlements by Ìlá refugees occurred in the course of several years and from the same center, Ìlá-Yàrà. These settlements existed side by side and from time to time played host to different groups of Ìlá people, including members of the Ọrangun families and their supporters whenever trouble broke out at Ìlá-Yàrà.

One source said Ìlá-Yàrà was abandoned because of a royal dispute; another source traced the cause of abandonment to an outbreak of earthworms that made the place uninhabitable.<sup>10</sup> Whatever the case, the two factors appear to be related. It is clear from the tradition that Oboyun's death was accompanied by a fierce and prolonged succession dispute with the emergence of two factions: Apakimo and his brother, Arutu. The Ifa divination and popular consensus picked Arutu as the Ọrangun, and the defeated faction, Apakimo, left Ìlá-Yàrà with his followers to settle at Ìlá Okiri where he was enthroned as Ọrangun. But the Apakimo faction at Ìlá Okiri was not pacified as they continued to carry out predatory incursions into Ìlá-Yàrà. They were so successful in creating internal dissension and a climate of insecurity in the town that it became impossible for Arutu to hold the people together. The harassment has been described metaphorically in local tradition as a "serious and fatal attack of earthworms."<sup>11</sup> Arutu and his younger brother, Igbonnibi, left Ìlá-Yàrà and migrated with many of his subjects to Ìlá Magbon.

It should be noted that no European observer in the precolonial period ever grasped the nature of the settlement at its inception. European travelers arrived too late in Ìgbómìnà and their reports only captured the horrific devastations of wars on Ìlá that began following the fall of Old Ọyọ. For example, William H. Clarke, a missionary of the Southern Baptist Convention and the first European to reach Ìlá-Ọrangun in 1858, described what he saw:

If there is a being that deserves our pity and sympathy it is the unfortunate one whom the ravages of time have reduced from opulence and power to a state of poverty and penury. Such seemed to be the condition of the monarch of Igbomina. Whatever the country and capital may have been in its palmy days, there are marks sufficiently evident to prove that those days are no more that the power of royalty is lost and the kingdom exists only in name.<sup>12</sup>

## Ìlá-Yàrà

Orally sourced information placed Ìlá-Yàrà within the migrational framework of Ìlá from Ilé-Ifẹ and to other parts of Yorùbáland. Ìlá-Yàrà is indicated in Ìlá history as among the settlements occupied before the present town of Ìlá-Ọrangun. Therefore, Ìlá-Yàrà is better considered in the mainstream of the origin of Ìlá-Ọrangun. Apart from being the main center of migration of Ìlá people in Ìgbómìnà, the location of Ìlá-Yàrà in relation to Ìlá-Ọrangun has provided a direct continuity between the Ìlá people and the abandoned settlement. So at least compared to other centers in Ìgbómìnà where the Ìlá people have lived, ethnographic evidence is readily available and parallels can be drawn from both settlements.

Ìlá-Yàrà is located at approximately 7°56' north and 4°57' east in the northeastern part of Ọsun State. It is approximately 7.5 km southeast of Ìlá-Ọrangun and 4 km west of Oke-Ìlá. Nearby settlements include Obasinkin, Aiyegunle, Ajebandele, Kajola, Edemosi, and Ajaba. A farm settlement known locally as Oko-Ejemu is located at the eastern part of Ìlá-Yàrà. The soil is generally moist and

deep in some areas where it has not been exposed. In areas where the vegetation had been disrupted, there is laterite and some ironstone concretions at the foot slopes that may have been utilized in iron working. A network of rivers and streams generally crisscrosses the area. Among these are the Isa, Oyi, and Alanwo. Isolated plains are concentrated in the southeastern part of Ìlá-Yàrà and they stretch northeastward. This was halted by the sudden rise or escarpment, which characterized the headwater of the Alanwo River. At the peak of the dry season the river ceases flowing, with water only in some isolated pools along its bed. With time most of these pools dried up except Ibu-Ògún at the base of Alanwo fall.

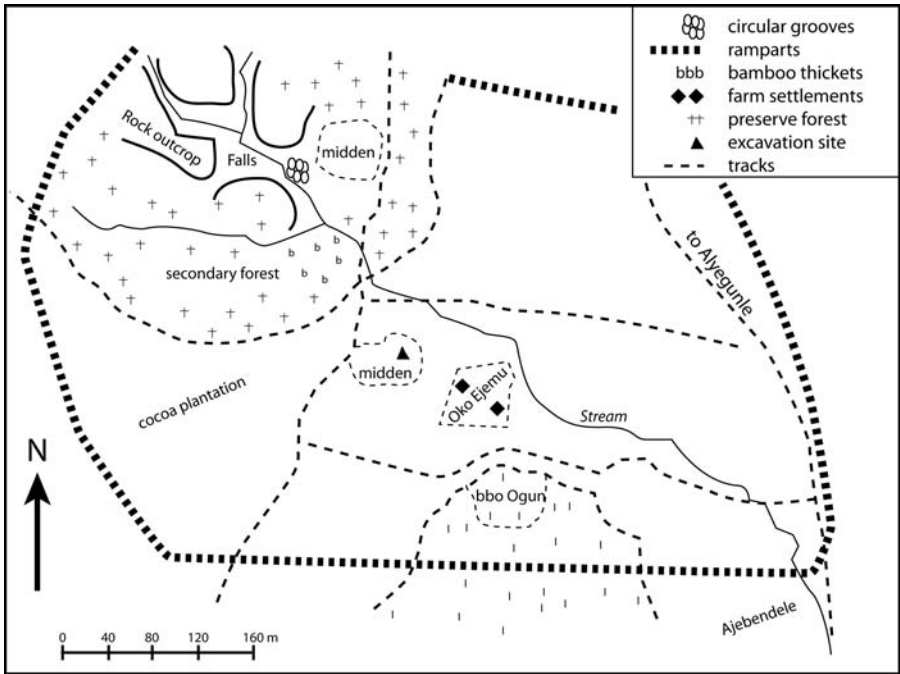
## Archaeological Work

The 2003 research at Ìlá-Yàrà was not the first archaeological work in the ancient town. In 1994, Joel Akpobasa conducted an intuitive exploratory survey of the site and produced a preliminary report of its cultural and natural features.<sup>13</sup> These findings are complemented by our recent work and provided an opportunity for further assessment of the physical and cultural features of the site to guide systematic surveys and excavations. Oral tradition and local guides assisted in the identification and interpretation of natural and cultural features. A detailed assessment of some areas of the site was impossible because of dense vegetation. This section of the chapter describes some of the surface features of Ìlá-Yàrà, the excavated materials, and their relevance to the precolonial history of Ìlá.

### Fortification

The most conspicuous features at Ìlá-Yàrà are trenches and ramparts, constructed by the former occupants of the site. Ramparts and trenches are artificial fortifications built most probably to ward off external aggressions or as a territorial and/or political demarcation. The cross-section of the trench and rampart along Ìlá-Aiyegunle Road gives the rampart to be 10.7m and the width of the trench 5.3m; the depth of the trench is 2.5m below surface level.<sup>14</sup> These dimensions appear uniform for all parts of the fortification (Map 6.3). No complete information is available presently on the entire walls and ditches at Ìlá-Yàrà and their characteristics (e.g., height, length or circumference, gates, etc). The name *Iyàrà* is synonymous with the conspicuous walling system of the site. *Iyàrà* or *Yàrà* in Yorùbá means trench, or “ditch behind the walls of a town.” A site in Ipo area of Ìgbómìnà with similar fortification is also known as *Iyàrà*. The term *Iyàrà* may have been added much later to the actual name of the site to distinguish it from other sites of the same social group with no fortification. The practice of building fortifications seems to have continued into the eighteenth century at Ìlá-Orangun and other extant settlements in Ìgbómìnà, such as Ajasepo.

In Ìlá's tradition, Amota is credited to have led his followers to Ìlá-Yàrà from Ajagunla. He established a military system based on cavalry and constructed



**Map 6.3.** Ìlá-Yàrà site map. Map shows site after Joel Akpobasa explored the region in 1994. Credit: Aribidesi Usman, 2006.

rampart walls and ditches.<sup>15</sup> This was a turbulent time in the history of towns and kingdoms in Yorùbáland. The increasing use of horses in warfare in the West African savanna from the thirteenth or fourteenth century onward also forced many towns and cities to protect themselves.<sup>16</sup> According to Ìlá’s tradition, Amota defended the town against the attacks of the Olowu of Owu, a once powerful Yorùbá kingdom to whom Òyó paid tribute in its early history.<sup>17</sup> Amota requested that his people supply him with a large quantity of “beans” with which to construct an *eredo*, a massive dirt wall fronted by a deep pit, around Ìlá.<sup>18</sup> “Beans” as described here may have been tributes or levies in the form of food on the citizens for the labor employed in the construction, a very good example of the power of royalty.

### Crushing Hollows

Crushing or grinding hollows were found in the bedrock of the Alanwo River. Each of the circular hollows has an average diameter of 8cm and depth range from 5 to 7cm. A Yorùbá recreation, the *ayò* game, has been suggested as the likely function of the artificially created hollows. That these hollows were probably adopted for recreational purpose cannot be ruled out. However, bedrock hollows may have been used for multiple purposes. As Clapperton observed



on his visit to northern Yorùbáland, “the top of the hill was covered with women grinding corn. They make round holes in the face of the rock in which they crush the grain.”<sup>19</sup> Additionally, jewelry is made using the holes in these rock formations. Shells of the kernel of the oil palm, after being rounded and smoothed, are bored and made into beads.<sup>20</sup>

A recent ethno-archaeological study in the northern part of Nigeria has described some bedrock hollows as “fining complexes” connected with iron working, especially processing of blooms.<sup>21</sup> The hollows may have been formed as the interior surfaces were roughened by the repeated impact of stone hammers transmitted through irregular fragments of bloomery iron (Figure 6.4). In Ìgbómìnà, generally, bedrock hollows are common. For example, at Obaloyan village in the Ipo area, a bedrock hollows located about 2 km southwest of the village is described in local tradition as Ògún Olowu’s horse’s footprints. Ògún Olowu, a warrior and iron smelter, is a deified figure at Obaloyan. The smelting furnace used in the past by Ògún Olowu is now a major village shrine dedicated to Ògún, god of iron and war in the Yorùbá pantheon. According to the tradition, Ògún Olowu left Obaloyan one day on his horse after a quarrel with the people. He was said to have passed through an outcrop where his horse left footprints on the rock surface.<sup>22</sup> The only probable explanation one can make out of this is that blooms may have been brought to this location from Ògún Olowu’s furnace, either by Ògún Olowu or other ironworkers, where they were crushed into small pieces. The location of the grinding hollows away from the edges of large supports indicate that these were utilized while in a kneeling or sitting position, just as today people either kneel before a grinding stone-mortar or sit with their legs stretched out alongside while pounding and grinding.

*Ibu Ògún* (Ògún pool), located at the base of Alanwo River at Ìlǎ-Yàrà and Igbo-Ògún (sacred forest of Ògún) in the southeastern part of the site, provided indirect evidence of ancient iron working and the importance of Ògún cult among the Ìlǎ people. Iron working at Ìlǎ-Yàrà may also be connected with the smelting furnace at Aiyegunle, a nearby settlement.<sup>23</sup> With the knowledge and use of iron, it was much easier for the inhabitants to produce their tools and weapons of war and materials to build a large rampart and trench around the settlement.

### **Habitation Remains**

No standing houses were found at Ìlǎ-Yàrà. The common habitation remains at the site are mounds (remains of collapsed structures) and middens (accumulation of trash). The distribution of midden mounds indicates different points of human occupation within the fortified area. Also, habitation appears concentrated in specific spots and other areas used as resource range or territorial range, that is, catchments areas for the occupational sites. The proximity of the occupational mounds to the Alanwo River explains its significance as the major source of water for the inhabitants at any point in time.

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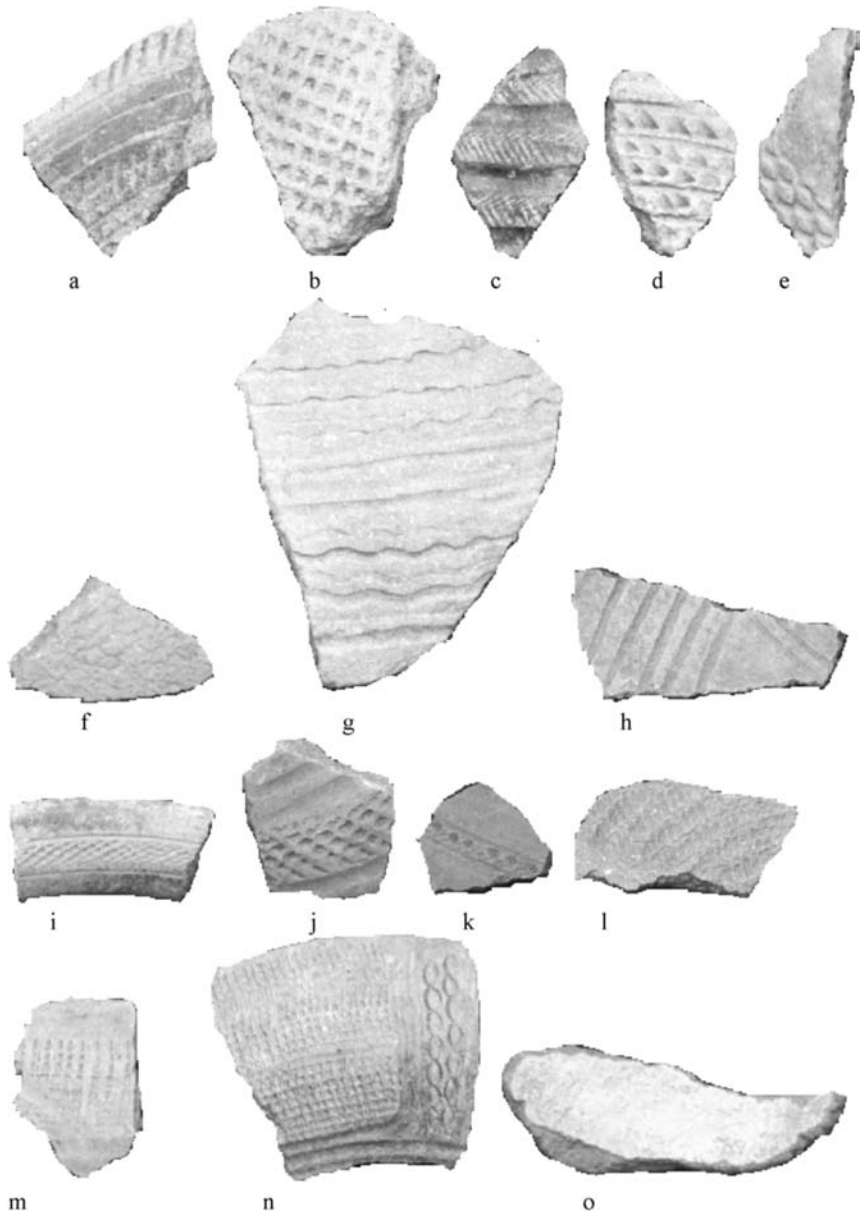
**Figure 6.4.** Bedrock hollows (crushing/grinding). Credit: Aribidesi Usman.

## Excavation and Materials

A small test unit of  $2 \times 1$  m within the midden mound located northeast of Igbo-Ògún was excavated to a depth of about 1.6 m sterile level. Because of a lack of any noticeable stratigraphic variation in the deposits, and for the purpose of establishing some form of chronology, an arbitrary excavation of soil in layers of 10 cm was employed. This unit-level method also served as a means of control for the removal of artifacts, their analysis, and subsequent interpretation. The excavation provided some of the cultural remains at the site and materials for radiocarbon dating. The majority of the artifacts are pottery, which is typical of African Iron Age sites. At Ìlálá-Yàrà, 6,891 potsherds were recovered, and 4,254 of these are decorated. Twisted string roulette constitutes about 73.6 percent of the decorated pottery, and groove, incisions, carved roulette, painted pottery, punctated, scallops, and composite (multiple decoration) types are present along with some black-burnished pottery (Figure 6.5).

The use of ceramic is of great interest to archaeologists concerned with the nature of interaction between different cultural groups, including the study of diffusion and exchange systems.<sup>24</sup> The stylistic attributes of ceramics, defined here as vessel and decoration motifs, are products of social cognition, historical relationships, and culture-specific ceramic functions. The main assumption underlying ceramic studies is that design distribution patterns directly reflect the nature and intensity of social interaction. From the excavated ceramic data, the Ìlálá-Yàrà pottery showed similar decorative attributes to Ifẹ̀ and Old Òyó pottery types, such as painted pottery, circle stylus, scallops, carved roulette, and punctation.<sup>25</sup> Akpobasa has included in his surface collection at Ìlálá-Yàrà some ceramics with snail shell (or fingernail) decorations typical of Old Òyó pottery.<sup>26</sup> So far our excavation at Ìlálá-Yàrà has not revealed this important ceramic type.<sup>27</sup> However, all the decorative attributes recognized at Ìlálá-Yàrà, including the snail shell decoration, have been found at Ipo sites (e.g., Apateki, Gbagede, Okegi, Obaloyan, and Olupefon) in western Ìgbómìnà.<sup>28</sup>

Non-pottery finds from the excavation include animal bones, shell, quartz beads, iron slag, iron pieces (e.g., spoon, needle, knife), *tuyere* (clay pipe), quartz bangle, cowries, fishing weight, metal points (arrow heads), and unutilized lithic debris. The presence of slag and *tuyere* in the excavation further suggests the engagement of the inhabitants of Ìlálá-Yàrà in iron working (smelting and smithing). A charcoal sample obtained from the lower level of the excavation (140 to 150 cm) at Ìlálá-Yàrà has been dated to a radiocarbon age of  $375 \pm 40$  B.P., calibrated from A.D. 1442 to 1531 and 1545 to 1635 (A13054). This represents a single date from only one charcoal sample. We need more datable materials from the site to make a definite conclusion on the chronology of Ìlálá-Yàrà. However, the significance of this single date lies in the fact that it corroborates the oral tradition on the foundation of Ìlálá-Yàrà. The traditions of Ìlálá agree that Ajagunla was born in a place other than Ilé-Ifẹ̀, and the original migration of the Ìlálá group from this area has been dated to the twelfth or thirteenth century.



**Figure 6.5.** Select decorated pottery pieces from Ìlá-Yàrà. a: mini-cordon; b: carved roulette-square grid pattern; c: carved roulette-diagonal chevron; d: impression-triangle punctate; e: nodular roulette; f: net impression; g: dragging-curvilinear; h: grooving; i: fine string roulette/incision; j: plaited cord roulette/groove; k: comb-stamping; l: twisted string roulette; m: comb-stamping-zigzag; n: carved roulette; and o: painting. Credit: Aribidesi Usman.

Because the group may have settled at other settlements before arriving at Ìlá-Yàrà, the occupation of Ìlá-Yàrà by the Ìlá group cannot be earlier than the thirteenth century, and possibly much later.

## Discussion

Some Ìgbómìnà traditions have postulated an ancient history for the region. For instance, a tradition described an ancient Oba “state” that was broken up by immigrants who later established large polities in the Ìgbómìnà area. It is claimed that the generic *oríkì* (cognomen) of the Oba people as *ọmọ ere*, meaning, “off-spring of the mud,” gives a picture of the possibility of the autochthonous origin.<sup>29</sup> Similar traditions are prevalent in other areas such as Isin, Esie, and Ajase, which point to the early habitation of Ìgbómìnà before the arrival of immigrants from Ifẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́. From the available archaeological data, establishment of settlements in Ìgbómìnà by the Yorùbá may have begun, at least, by the thirteenth century,<sup>30</sup> although a thermoluminescence date of 1100 A.D. obtained from Esie figures<sup>31</sup> may push the occupation to at least a century earlier.

The fifteenth century was a period of sociopolitical changes throughout Yorùbáland. Economic and political pressures forced people to migrate from central Yorùbá toward northern and eastern Yorùbá, establishing new settlements, overrunning older communities, and warring with others in their need and desire for economic stability, political power, and territory.<sup>32</sup> The establishment of Ìlá-Yàrà, a consequence of this migration process, corresponds to the Intermediate Period of Ifẹ̀ (ca. 1400 to 1600 A.D.). This is defined as the period of regional sociopolitical development in Yorùbá in terms of settlement aggregation, political centralization, the emergence of hegemonic ambitions, diffuse regional interaction networks, and ideological innovations.<sup>33</sup> The arrival of Ajagunla group at Ìlá-Yàrà in Ìgbómìnà resulted in a considerable political transformation, as territorial interests now came to the fore, and the organization of “centralize” polities with outlying villages and towns paying tribute began to take shape.<sup>34</sup>

Construction of walls and ditches appears to have followed the large-scale immigration into Igbominaland. Ramparts and trenches are important features in large states of Benin, Ọ̀yọ́-Ilẹ̀, Ifẹ̀, Koso, and Owu, and have been studied extensively.<sup>35</sup> Many of the Ìgbómìnà traditions suggest that amalgamation occurred under the pressure of external aggression. Thus, it appears that large polities of Ìgbómìnà, such as Ìlá-Yàrà, may have been the result of small communities combining for the purpose of defense. The Ìlá-Yàrà constructed enclosed walls and evolved toward more unified control to counter aggressions and protect local communities. It appears that Ìlá-Yàrà was associated with a turbulent period in the history of Yorùbá when warrior leaders were transforming settlements originally

organized in terms of a cluster of lineages headed by a council of elders.<sup>36</sup> The wall, therefore, also served as a symbol of the social and political group and to reinforce its identity. The fact that residential groups chose to demarcate their settlements with walls implies that the space and its contents were highly valued.<sup>37</sup>

The complex demographic, sociopolitical, and economic changes of the fifteenth century in Yorùbá land were not limited to Ìlá, but felt in other parts of Ìgbómìnà as well. In the Ipo area beginning about 1600, there was a trend toward settlement aggregation and the emergence of large centers of unprecedented size that probably dominated satellite communities.<sup>38</sup> Gbagede, established in the fourteenth century and the center of these changes, is contemporaneous with Ìlá-Yàrà. Like Ìlá-Yàrà, Gbagede was located in an area of high population density and may have been a head town where the chiefly elite (Olupo) resided. Also, ramparts and ditches with a circumference of about 3.4 km were built around Gbagede.<sup>39</sup> For some time, both Gbagede and Ìlá-Yàrà may have maintained close interactions, while serving as “overlords” of their respective zones in Ìgbómìnà. The Ọ̀yọ́ and Ifẹ̀ migrants in Ìlá and Ipo produced similar ceramic types by replicating design styles common at Ifẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́. Alternatively, the ceramic types may have been procured through exchange between the groups, or it could mean Ìlá and Ipo were dealing with the same exchange partner or center such as Ọ̀yọ́, Ifẹ̀, or other Nigerian groups. Generally, the Ìlá-Ipo-Erese-Oro-Esie areas of Ìgbómìnà may represent a culture area sharing the same cultural attributes, which include the widespread potsherd pavements and pottery types, among others. The presence of Ọ̀yọ́ and Ifẹ̀ pottery traits in Ìgbómìnà, at least from the thirteenth century, suggests that the large-scale Yorùbá immigration northward in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was preceded by smaller scale immigration or, at least, ceramic emulation.<sup>40</sup>

The process of Ìlá sociopolitical formation and complexity began at Ìlá-Yàrà. The site flourished as the center of Ọ̀rangun polity with a large population concentration where farming, crafts, and trade with neighboring communities developed. The existence of Ìlá-Yàrà was short lived, however, as a result of an internal factor. By the seventeenth century, the population had moved to Ìlá Magbon (later known as Ìlá-Ọ̀rangun), where the process of sociopolitical consolidation continued. Ìlá-Ọ̀rangun attracted a large population because it was better suited for farming and trading.<sup>41</sup> In addition, population may have been attracted to the town because of the increasing power and popularity of Ọ̀rangun, the increasing tension in the area, and the need for security. Ìlá-Ọ̀rangun exhibits defensive features similar to Ìlá-Yàrà, particularly ramparts and trenches. The influx of immigrants to Ìgbómìnà generally during this period was probably on the rise. These immigrants may have been people from small settlements or unassimilated groups who felt that living in large political centers offered a more alluring prospect. The population increase may have facilitated the prestige and prerogatives of royal elites. The growth of regional centers can encourage local population concentrations, whereas political elites may coerce people to live nearby, where they can be watched more easily and be better controlled.<sup>42</sup>

The sociopolitical efflorescent at Ìlǎ-Ọrangun may have been disrupted by the imperial ambition of Old Ọyọ and its increasing influence in Ìgbómìnà.<sup>43</sup> Such influence appears to have been much stronger in Ipo area of Ìgbómìnà where local tradition maintained that the Olupo kingship institution descended from Old Ọyọ royalty through the female line.<sup>44</sup> By the seventeenth century, the Ọyọ authority in the area had boosted the prestige of Olupo by using him as the local superintendent of Ọyọ interests in northern Ìgbómìnà.<sup>45</sup> It has been claimed that the success of Ọyọ in this area was based for most part on the subjugation of all these kingdoms to her sway, but the “provincial” chiefs continued to retain a good measure of their autonomy.<sup>46</sup> Also, the presence of warlike groups like the Tapa (Nupe) and Ibariba to the north might have played an indirect part in the unification of the region under Ọyọ.

Like other Ìgbómìnà groups, Ìlǎ suffered social, political, and economic devastation of various types. As early as the seventeenth century, the Ijesa peoples to the south and Benin warriors to the southeast had conducted raids on a number of Ìgbómìnà communities. According to local tradition, the Ipo area was often referred to as *ibi ti ijesa npo ni si* (where the Ijesa slaughtered people), a consequence of Ijesa onslaught, and where “Ipo” or “Po,” according to some traditions, was derived.<sup>47</sup> There was also repeated invasion by the Nupe cavalry from the northwest under the leadership of Etsu Jibrilu (1744 to 1759), Majiya II (1769 to 1777), and Mu’azu (1759 to 1769, 1787 to 1795). Several Ìgbómìnà settlements were destroyed, including those of the Olupo and the Ọrangun; inhabitants were taken into slavery, and people migrated to other towns or attempted to reestablish themselves at new sites.<sup>48</sup>

The nineteenth century Fulani insurgency, with their Nupe allies under Nupe ruler Majiya II, affected the Ìgbómìnà.<sup>49</sup> With political authority firmly established at Ìlọrin after 1830, the Fulani forces systematically conquered Ìgbómìnà settlements. Ìlǎ-Ọrangun was burned to the ground and the ruler (*Ọrangun*) was taken captive to Ìlọrin.<sup>50</sup> In the late 1840s, the armies of the Ìbàdàn warrior chiefs moved northeast through the Ekiti area and conquered most of the Ìgbómìnà towns north, south, and west, and stationed their *Ajéḗlẹ* (local warlord and tax collector).<sup>51</sup>

Throughout the 1850s and 1860s, Ìgbómìnà towns were laid waste by one army or another. People migrated, seeking refuge in towns not yet under siege, or sought to establish new settlements in unoccupied areas. Ọrangun Ariyowonye fled to Omu-Aran in 1867 to take refuge, while some of his subjects fled to different parts of Igbominaland.<sup>52</sup> The Kiriji war started in 1878 and the Ìgbómìnà-Ekitiparapo could not stop the Ìbàdàn forces, even with Ìlọrin support. The Ìgbómìnà and its allies were crushed and Ìbàdàn forces marched through the towns of Ìgbómìnà, destroying villages and towns on their path, including Ìlǎ, Ora, Ilofa, and Omu-Aran.<sup>53</sup> The Ọrangun fled with his followers from Omu-Aran and took refuge in the Ìgbómìnà village of Omupo where he remained until the signing of the 1886 peace treaty. Finally, Ọrangun Amesomoye and many of the Ìlǎ refugees scattered in different parts of Ìgbómìnà returned home to Ìlǎ-Ọrangun.<sup>54</sup>

## Conclusion

The precolonial history of Ìlá, just like any other Yorùbá group, is no doubt a complex one. Both archaeological and oral evidence suggests that there were established settlements in Ìgbómìnà prior to the large-scale immigration of Yorùbá from the south that began in the fifteenth century. A closer look at the traditions of some Ìgbómìnà groups would indicate that those who came to impose their authority on the original inhabitants of the area probably made those traditions. These migrant groups needed a kind of legitimacy to sustain them in power. The important ideological implication is that, for local rulers, in particular, there were obvious advantages to claiming a spurious royal ancestry. And because the leading states in Yorùbáland during the period were Ifẹ̀ and Old Ọ̀yọ́, it is likely that the migrants, in collaboration with Ifẹ̀ or Ọ̀yọ́, impressed on the earlier inhabitants of the Ìgbómìnà the need to have a political and social structure of the Ifẹ̀ or Ọ̀yọ́ type in the area. As Obayemi remarks, “one of the results of centuries of life as component units of such a monolithic kingdom is a feeling . . . that they were produced by the system.”<sup>55</sup> With the expansion of a migrant population over the original inhabitants, they began to impose on the people fairly complex Ifẹ̀ and Ọ̀yọ́ cultural features. As a result of Ìlá’s location, it is possible that the Ìlá, more than other Ìgbómìnà groups, maintained frequent interaction with people from Ifẹ̀, Benin, and others in the vicinity.

Our archaeological work in Ìlá is very limited and the research is still ongoing. However, we are beginning to get a picture of an emerging complex society on the northern frontier of Yorùbá, embroiled in what may be termed “political turmoil” right from its foundation, typical of most West African states’ development. It appears Amota’s attempt to establish a long-lasting kingdom seemed to have failed. Internecine warfare and royal dispute factionalized the populace and resulted in mass migration. How much influence Ìlá-Yàrà exerted in Ìgbómìnà before the seventeenth century is not clear. This will await further research in the area. One obvious area of further investigation is archaeological research, specifically with historical themes in mind, to identify other related precolonial settlements, structures, and artifacts that will reveal a great deal, not only about the processes of sociopolitical formation, but also precolonial interactions between Ìlá group and other Ìgbómìnà neighbors, as well as relations with Ifẹ̀, Benin, Old Ọ̀yọ́, and Nupe groups to the north.

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## EARLY ÌJÈBÚ HISTORY: AN ANALYSIS ON DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION AND STATE FORMATION

Tunde Oduwoji

In precolonial times, the Ìjẹ̀bú territory constituted a single kingdom under the *Awujale*, who was also the titular ruler of Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode, the capital of the kingdom. With a land area of approximately 8,130 km<sup>2</sup> (or 3,139 square miles), the Ìjẹ̀bú territory covers the eastern sections of Ògún and Lagos States of modern Nigeria. The Ògún State section is the larger of the two and is made up of about 6,360 km<sup>2</sup> (2,456 square miles). In terms of present-day local government arrangements, the Ìjẹ̀bú section of Ògún State comprises nine local government areas. These are, with their headquarters in parentheses: Ìjẹ̀bú East (Ogbere), Ìjẹ̀bú North (Ìjẹ̀bú-gbo), Ìjẹ̀bú Northeast (Atan), Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode (Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode), Ikenne (Ikenne), Odogbolu (Odogbolu), Ògún Waterside (Abigi), Remo North (Isara), and Sagamu (Sagamu). There are three Ìjẹ̀bú-speaking local government areas in Lagos State: Epe (Epe), Ibeju-Lekki (Akodo), and Ikorodu (Ikorodu).

The western portion of Ìjẹ̀bú, locally referred to as *Remo*, forms a sublinguistic unit with the speech of the area being phonologically characterized by the velar fricative, /gh/. For example *owó*, which means money, is pronounced *ogho*; *orowo*, and “head” is rendered *orugho*.<sup>1</sup> The local government areas of Ikenne, Remo North, and Sagamu in Ògún State, and Ikorodu in Lagos State are the Remo parts of Ìjẹ̀bú.

### Demographic Evolution

The Ìjẹ̀bú are a subgroup of the Yorùbá. As is now known, the application of the term *Yorùbá*, in its general form, dates from the nineteenth century, the people

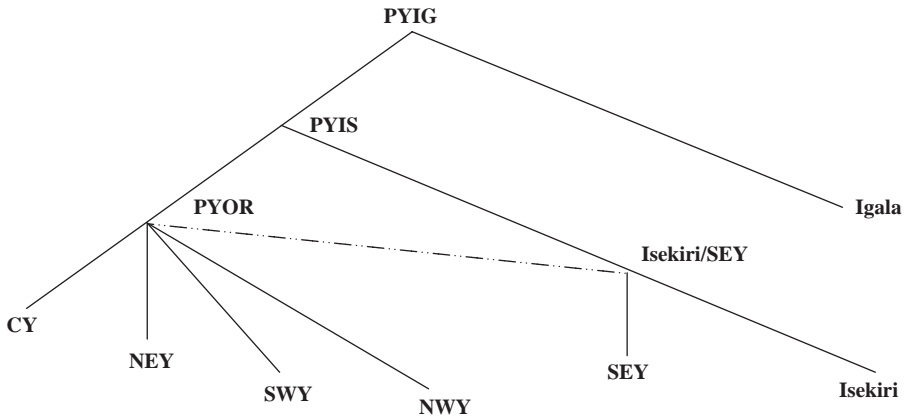
previously having no consciousness of themselves as a single ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> However, they had a common traditional belief of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as the cradle of mankind.<sup>3</sup> For example, an Ìjẹ̀bù war chief asserted in 1886 that it was from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ that the first Ìjẹ̀bù king “went to settle in the Ìjẹ̀bù country . . . Even the English King can be shown the spot at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ from whence his ancestors went out.”<sup>4</sup> But even this contention illustrates another characteristic of Yorùbá origin traditions: namely, that the phenomena of demographic evolution (population development) and state formation (political centralization) are usually conceived as one. Commenting on the development of Yorùbá kingdoms, Samuel Johnson noted that “in ancient patriarchal times the king of a country was regarded as the father or progenitor of his people.”<sup>5</sup> From the foregoing, it may be surmised that the Yorùbá traditional belief that the world was created at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ reflects no more than that Ifẹ̀ emerged as the first kingdom in the Yorùbá area.<sup>6</sup>

Linguistic studies have provided fresh insights on the issue of the demographic evolution of the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá language has been categorized among a number of genetically related languages, which cluster in the Niger–Benue confluence region.<sup>7</sup> This linguistic configuration has led to a suggestion of the Niger–Benue confluence region as the location of a parent language from which differentiation occurred as a result of successive population dispersion.<sup>8</sup> O. O. Akinkugbe has, in her study, attempted to shed light on major phases of the dispersion with regard to the Yorùbá. The first phase was the growth of a Proto-Yorùbá/Igala-speaking group in the Niger–Benue confluence region. Then there occurred a two-way split of the group, with one section moving westward and the other eastward. The westerly group developed as Proto-Yorùbá/Itsekiri. Subsequent southward movement of this group brought about the formation of two groups, namely, Proto-Yorùbá and Southeastern Yorùbá/Itsekiri. Over time, Proto-Yorùbá differentiated into four dialect groups, and Southeastern Yorùbá/Itsekiri separated into Southeastern Yorùbá and Itsekiri, with the former subsequently developing some contact with the rest of the Yorùbá groups (Figure 7.1).

For our purposes, the inference derivable from the foregoing is that the ancestors of the Ìjẹ̀bù, like those of other Yorùbá subgroups, originated from the Niger–Benue confluence region. R. G. Armstrong’s glottochronological computations of the development of the Yorùbá and other related languages suggest that the earliest Ìjẹ̀bù speakers had already settled in Ìjẹ̀bù by the beginning of the first millennium A.D.<sup>9</sup>

## The Traditions Reviewed

The earliest documented tradition concerning the early history of the Ìjẹ̀bù, as far as the present writer can ascertain, is recorded in Samuel Johnson’s *The History of the Yorùbás* written in 1897 and published in 1921. Johnson records two traditions on



- PYIG – Proto-Yorùbá/Igala  
 PYIS – Proto-Yorùbá/Isekiri  
 PYOR – Proto-Yorùbá  
 SEY – South-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Ondó, Owo, *Ìjẹ̀bù*, Ikale, Ilaje dialects)  
 CY – Central Yorùbá (comprising Ifẹ̀, Ijeṣa and Ekiti dialects)  
 NEY – North-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Yagba, Gbede, Ijumu and Ikiri dialects)  
 SWY – North-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Tsabe, Ifẹ̀ (Togo) dialects)  
 NWY – North-Western Yorùbá (comprising *Ọ̀yọ́*, *Èbaá* and Egbado dialects).  
 The broken line represents subsequent contacts between SEY and the other Yorùbá groups.

Source. Based on O. O. Akinkugbe, “A Comparative Phonology of Yoruba Dialects, Isekiri and Igala” (Ph.D. diss., University of *Ìbàdàn*, 1978), 54.

**Figure 7.1.** Yorùbá dialect-groups.

the *Ìjẹ̀bù*, both of which attribute servile origins to them. In the first, the ancestors of the *Ìjẹ̀bù* are said to have been “victims offered in sacrifice by the King of Benin to the god of the ocean, hence the term *Ìjẹ̀bù* from *Ije-ibu*, i.e., the food of the deep.”<sup>10</sup> In the second tradition, Johnson states that *Ọ̀banta*, who the *Ìjẹ̀bù* regarded as their progenitor, was a victim of sacrifice performed by the *Olowu* of Owu. *Ọ̀banta* was left for dead after the sacrifice, but he survived, and thereafter went on to found the *Ìjẹ̀bù* nation.<sup>11</sup>

Extant *Ìjẹ̀bù* traditions are, however, at variance with the versions offered by Johnson. In 1906, a British officer at *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* citing “Native tradition” reported: “The town of *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* is said to have been founded by 3 brothers who came from *Ilé-Ifẹ̀* and from two of them the town takes its name, *Ajebu* and *Olode*.”<sup>12</sup>

It is further stated that the name of the third founder was Osi. He was, it is claimed, “the first King of Ìjẹ̀bù but was forced to abdicate in favour of Ọ̀banta [who] came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and was said to be the eldest son of the Ọ̀oni (king) of Ifẹ̀.”<sup>13</sup>

The local historian, D. O. Epega, writing in 1919, also reports the above tradition, but adds that the displaced Osi (rendered in the alternative form, Osin) sought to immortalize his name by uttering an imprecation to the effect that peace would elude the reign of any future successor to the throne who failed to assume the authority of office in his (Osi’s) name. It thus became the practice to salute a newly elected Awujalẹ̀ with chants of “*owa Osi*” (Osi’s authority) at coronation.<sup>14</sup>

Another story of the tradition is reported in a document, which community leaders in Imusin submitted to local British officials in 1933.<sup>15</sup> The document, titled “History of Oloko, the King of Imusin,” relates that Imusin was the first area to be settled in Ìjẹ̀bù. The migrants came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ under the leadership of one Osifaderin, titled as the *Oloko*, who is said to be the eldest son of Oduduwa. Other notable personalities among the migrants were a hunter called Ajebu and two of Osifaderin’s sons known as Osinumesi and Olode. These three persons subsequently left Imusin to found Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. The name Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode was derived from Ajebu and Olode; Osinumesi was appointed as the ruler of the newly established settlement.

Osifaderin was later succeeded in Imusin by another son, Odute, during whose reign Ọ̀banta arrived in Ìjẹ̀bù. Odute advised Ọ̀banta to proceed to Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode where he would be made the new ruler, but that in taking power he should pay homage to Osifaderin’s primacy. Accordingly, Ọ̀banta, on receiving the mantle of authority at Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, instituted the “*owa Osi*” salutation, the name Osi being supposed to be an abridged form for Osifaderin.

A further account of the details of the early period of Ìjẹ̀bù history is provided in two other sources. The first is a document submitted by Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode community leaders to the local British officials in 1937 (hereinafter referred to as the 1937 document).<sup>16</sup> The other is a published account written by T. O. Ogunkoya in 1956.<sup>17</sup> The first migration into Ìjẹ̀bù is said to have been led by one Olú-Iwa whose chief companions were Ajebu and Olode. These Ìjẹ̀bù ancestors originated from a place called Wadai, which, according to the 1937 document, is located “in the far [i.e., distant] East, that is, near Egypt.”<sup>18</sup> The migrants had a stopover at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ before reaching Ìjẹ̀bù. The 1937 document states that Odùduwà, the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ king, gave his daughter, Gborowo, as wife to Olú-Iwa. But Ogunkoya records that it was the other way around, that Gborowo was Olú-Iwa’s daughter, and Olú-Iwa gave her in marriage to Oduduwa. Nevertheless, both sources agree that Gborowo’s marriage (i.e., either to Olú-Iwa or Odùduwà) resulted in the birth of Ogborogan, who subsequently became popularly known by the nickname Ọ̀banta.

Ogunkoya further reports that on the arrival of the migrants in Ìjẹ̀bù, Olú-Iwa directed Ajebu to mark out the boundary of Ìjẹ̀bù territory while he charged Olode with matters concerning the development of the premier settlement. And

“so well did Ajebu and Olode do their work,” Ogunkoya writes, “that the new town was named after them Ajebu and Olode, now corrupted and called *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode*.”<sup>19</sup> There is no mention in the 1937 document of the tasks Olú-Iwa assigned to Ajebu and Olode, but it is stated:

Ajebu and Olode had the honour of having the country and its capital called after their respective names; thus the whole nation is called “*Ìjẹ̀bù*” after Ajebu and the capital city which was formerly called “*ILE-ODE*” i.e., “the home of Olode” was called after Olode.<sup>20</sup>

The Olú-Iwa-led migration is reported in the two sources to have been subsequently followed by another under the leadership of one Arisu, also from Wadai. At Arisu’s death, he was succeeded by one Osinmore, abbreviated as Osin in Ogunkoya’s story. *Ọ̀banta* arrived in *Ìjẹ̀bù* during Osinmore’s reign, and after a while the latter decided to yield authority to the newcomer. The 1937 document adds that it was agreed that Osinmore’s name should be immortalized, hence the chants of “*owa Osi*” (or “*owa Osin*”) that accompany the coronation process of a newly elected *Awujalẹ̀*. Ogunkoya, however, is silent on this issue.

In the foregoing, an attempt has been made to relate some of the better known versions of the traditions concerning the early period of *Ìjẹ̀bù* history. Doubtless, the traditions present a confusing picture. The discordant strands may be highlighted to ease examination and comprehension. The first is constituted by Ajebu and Olode, both of whom appear together in the accounts. In the tradition reported in 1906 and by Epega, Ajebu and Olode are associated with *Osi*. In the *Imusin* document, they are listed with *Osifaderin* and *Osinumesi*; and in the 1937 document and Ogunkoya’s account they appear with *Olú-Iwa*. However, to place Ajebu and Olode in their proper historical perspectives, we should begin by noting that the word *ode* as it appears in *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* was a dialectal term for capital.<sup>21</sup> It was in this sense, for example, that the towns of *Ode-Ondó* (capital of the *Ondó* Kingdom) and *Ode-Itsekiri* (capital of the *Itsekiri* Kingdom) were originally referred.<sup>22</sup> In modern *Yorùbá*, *ode* translates as *olú ilú*, the premier or capital town.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the proper meaning of *ode* is only intelligible when used in the form “*Ode-Ìjẹ̀bù*,” which, as one piece of contemporary evidence indicates, was applied in the early nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Also, if the word *ode* means capital, its epithetical form *olode*, translates as “the head of the capital town.” Given this assumption, the claim reported by Ogunkoya, that the historical personage called *Olode* was asked to perform his assignment within the *Ìjẹ̀bù* premier settlement, seems likely to be an allegorical allusion to the *Awujalẹ̀* in his capacity as the ruler of the capital town of the *Ìjẹ̀bù*.

The same line of argument is applicable to *Ajebu*, which, as a term, might translate as “the head of *Ìjẹ̀bù*.” Hence, the claim that one Ajebu was asked to mark out the *Ìjẹ̀bù* boundary—that is, charged with duties outside the premier settlement—might well be taken as an allegorical allusion to the *Awujalẹ̀* in his capacity as the *Ìjẹ̀bù* paramount ruler.



Thus, rather than associate Olode and Ajebu with the nomenclatural derivation of Ode and Ìjẹ̀bù as the traditions would have it, they more probably represent disused forms or titles by which the Awujalẹ̀ was addressed in his dual status as the ruler of the capital town as well as the Ìjẹ̀bù paramount head. This suggestion, that Olode and Ajebu, as they appear in the traditions, are personified titles might be strengthened by an examination of the traditional claim that Ogborogan, which is commonly regarded as an abridged form for Ogborogannida,<sup>25</sup> was Ọ̀banta's original name. Reporting the recollections of an Ìjẹ̀bù who was enslaved in ca. 1820, M. d'Avezac-Macaya, a French ethnographer, recorded that the king of Ìjẹ̀bù was usually addressed by the title of "Obrogolouda."<sup>26</sup> d'Avezac-Macaya's rendition of the title apparently represents his difficulty in reproducing "Ogboroganluda" (or Ogborogannida). Thus, rather than being the original name of Ọ̀banta, *Ogborogan*, like Ajebu and Olode conceivably represents a disused form of addressing an Awujalẹ̀.

The second discordant strand of the received traditions relates to the institution of the "owa Osi" salutation. Again, we may note the differences. The Imusin version (1933) describes it as a posthumous honor for Osifaderin, whose son, Osinumesi, is said to be the first ruler in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, whereas in the Olú-Iwa-led migration story of the 1937 document, Osinmore is given as the name of the character who transferred power to Ọ̀banta. Despite these contradictions, it is possible to discern a unity consistent with the tradition of Osi's abdication as reported in 1906 and by Epega. Hence, the characters represented as Osifaderin and Osinumesi in the Imusin version are conceivably ingenious duplications of "Osi" intended to accord one way or the other with the tradition of Osi's abdication. Both names (Osifaderin and Osinumesi) might be used as abridged forms for Osi. The Osinmore of the 1937 document, identified as Osin by Ogunkoya, signifies (like Osifaderin and Osinumesi) another variation for Osi.

Although the central theme concerning Osi is that of displacement of authority, the historicity of the character need not be taken for granted. In Ìjẹ̀bù lexicon, the term *osi*, like *olú*, represents a synonym for *oba* or implies royalty. Given this fact, and that the word *owa* connotes (state) authority, the refrain of "*owa osi*" (literally, "royal authority") that accompanies the coronation of a newly elected Awujalẹ̀ signifies the conferment of state power (*owa*) on the new king (*osi*).<sup>27</sup> Cast in the role of transferring power to Ọ̀banta, therefore, "Osi," rather than being a historical figure, more probably represents an abstraction of political headship in pre-kingdom times.

The third discordant strand of the traditions relates to the character of Olú-Iwa, who appears in the 1937 account and Ogunkoya's as the head of the Ìjẹ̀bù primary migration from Wadai. In view of this acclaimed primary role, it is indeed puzzling that Olú-Iwa's name is not mentioned in earlier recorded accounts. To shed light on this issue, a few comments are necessary about Rev. Samuel Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*. As mentioned, this work was completed in 1897, but the manuscript, which was published in 1921, was prepared by the reverend's brother, Dr. Obadiah Johnson.<sup>28</sup> At a time when there was as yet little documented history

on precolonial Yorùbá society, Rev. Johnson's voluminous publication became the standard reference for early Yorùbá history.<sup>29</sup> The interest generated by the work may perhaps be illustrated by the evidence from an informant, active in local Ìjẹ̀bú politics during the colonial period, who told the present writer that he read *The History of the Yorubas* three times over.<sup>30</sup>

Johnson's claims, as discussed, that the ancestors of the Ìjẹ̀bú were of servile origin obviously provoked some disapproval in Ìjẹ̀bú. These claims were, for example, denounced by Epega in the preface to the second edition of his work published in 1934.<sup>31</sup> In response then, the traditional authorities might well have been inclined to provide a suitable tradition designed to undermine the publicized versions offered by Johnson. Thus, to counter the notion of servile origins, a rebuttal seemed to have been contrived that conceived the Ìjẹ̀bú as *omólúwàbí*, the traditional Yorùbá term for the freeborn, as distinct from *eru*, the slave.<sup>32</sup> For a morphological breakdown of the term, *omólúwàbí* (*omọ-olú-iwa-bí*) could literally be translated as "the child/children born of Olú-Iwa."<sup>33</sup> The name Olú-Iwa would therefore appear to have been adopted from *omólúwàbí* to discount any suggestion of the Ìjẹ̀bú as an inferior Yorùbá subgroup. It is within this context that claims of a consanguineous relationship between Olú-Iwa and Ọbanta (described by Johnson as the Ìjẹ̀bú progenitor who survived immolation) are also presumably to be understood. Equally worthy of mention is the claim in the 1937 document that Oduduwa prognosticated that Ọbanta's "kingdom shall . . . become great, and neither he nor his people shall be slaves to any man."<sup>34</sup> This was fulfilled, it is further stated, for "the Ìjẹ̀bús were never made slaves. . . ."<sup>35</sup> It may therefore be suggested that "Olú-Iwa" is a fictitious character invented as a response to Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*; and hence the absence of the name in local historical traditions as first reported in 1906.

Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas* also seems to have inspired the conception of Wadai as the original home of the Ìjẹ̀bú in two ways. First, the claim of a different location for Ìjẹ̀bú origins as distinct from the tradition that the Yorùbá race originated from Mecca reported by Johnson<sup>36</sup> seems to represent an attempt to deny the authority of Johnson's *The History of the Yorubás* as a source of early Ìjẹ̀bú history. Second, the claim of an original homeland, which, like Mecca, is situated distantly to the east (of Ìjẹ̀bú), may well represent an attempt to associate the Ìjẹ̀bú with the Middle East—the cradle of ancient and renowned civilizations—suggesting thereby an illustrious ancestry.

It must be noted that the one point on which the Ìjẹ̀bú traditions are in agreement is the advent of a historical figure called Ọbanta. This concurrence, in view of the doubt already raised on the historicity of all other principal characters mentioned in the traditions, underlines the tradition reported by Johnson that Ọbanta was considered by the Ìjẹ̀bú as their progenitor. As already suggested, the role of progenitor implies kingdom founder.

More will be said presently on the state formation process initiated by Ọbanta, but we may quickly note earlier interpretations of the early period of Ìjẹ̀bú history by some scholars. P. C. Lloyd, working on the basis of the Osifaderin version (the

Imusin document), postulated the existence of a pre-Ọbanta kingdom called Idoko, the name from which its titular head, the *Oloko*, was derived. d’Avezac-Macaya, the French ethnographer mentioned earlier, records, on the basis of evidence from his Ịjẹ̀bù informant, the existence of an “Idoko nation” located in the southeastern section of Ịjẹ̀bù. He mentioned Abigi and Makun—both of which form part of the present-day Ọ̀gún—Waterside Local Government Area—as some of the Idoko towns.<sup>37</sup> Lloyd concludes that d’Avezac-Macaya’s allusion to an “Idoko nation” “infers an important and distinct group of people,”<sup>38</sup> and that this group probably represented the relic of a pre-Ọbanta kingdom that had its capital in the Idoko area of Imusin that today comprises the three neighboring communities of Idoko Ajase, Idoko Olowa, and Idoko Aledo.<sup>39</sup>

But, although *nation* may suggest “a distinct group of people,” d’Avezac-Macaya’s reference may actually be an allusion to the fact that the Idoko area to the southeast, as evidence will be adduced to show presently, lay outside the parts constituting the nucleus of the Ịjẹ̀bù Kingdom. The link between the Idoko area of Imusin and the other one further east mentioned by d’Avezac-Macaya is thus probably more nomenclatural than historical.<sup>40</sup> The historical importance of the Oloko probably lies in the fact that it represented the title for the head of an erstwhile Idoko community in Imusin, and that some inauspicious circumstances led to the tripartite fragmentation of this community and a consequent lapse of the title.<sup>41</sup>

Relying on Lloyd, O. O. Ayantuga refers vaguely to a first wave of migration into Ịjẹ̀bù leading to the foundation of the Idoko community in Imusin. Then, using Ogunkoya’s account, he attributes the Olú-Iwa-led migration to be the second in Ịjẹ̀bù.<sup>42</sup>

E. A. Ayandele adopts a position similar to Ayantuga’s. He submits that the Idoko were the autochthonous dwellers of Ịjẹ̀bù and that they were wiped out by the Ịjẹ̀bù immigrants led by Olú-Iwa. Ayandele, however, confuses Olú-Iwa with Ọbanta as one and the same person.<sup>43</sup>

O. Ogunba, on the other hand, inverts the order of migration proposed by Ayantuga by postulating that the first settlers in Ịjẹ̀bù were led in by Olú-Iwa, and that they were followed by another set, the Idoko group—presumably under Osifaderin. According to him, the Idoko established political sway over many settlements in Ịjẹ̀bù, including Ịjẹ̀bù-Ode where they placed a viceroy—that is, in the person of Osinumesi. The power of the Idoko was subsequently terminated by the establishment of the Awujalẹ̀ dynasty. Ogunba concludes that political and cultural marginalization of the Idoko by the new dynasty in the succeeding centuries caused many to flee their original homes in the Imusin area during “the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,”<sup>44</sup> apparently to become the “Idoko nation” of d’Avezac-Macaya’s reference.

It will be observed that the various interpretations proposed have essentially been based on the Osifaderin and Olú-Iwa versions of the traditions. It has been necessary to examine them to underline the fact that the traditions deserve a more critical consideration. The analysis presented indicates that the extant

traditions concerning the early period of *Ìjẹ̀bú* history cannot be taken at their face value as providing the authentic details of events.

## Foundation and Development of the *Ìjẹ̀bú* Kingdom

The earliest contemporary reference to the *Ìjẹ̀bú* Kingdom appears in Duarte Pacheco Pereira's *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, written in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The reference is contained in the following passage describing the Lagos Lagoon (mistaken for a river) and the nature of commerce in its environs:

Once inside the mouth [of the lagoon], it forms a great lake, which is more than two leagues wide and as many long,<sup>46</sup> and twelve or thirteen leagues above by this river is a great city called Geebu, surrounded by a ditch; and the river of this land in our days is called Agusale; and the trade which can be done here is in slaves, who are sold for brass bracelets [manillas] at 12 or 13 each, and some elephants' teeth.<sup>47</sup>

The "Geebu" of the passage represents *Ìjẹ̀bú* and the "Agusale" is presumably Awujalẹ. The Bini rendition of Awujalẹ is *Aghuzale*,<sup>48</sup> the form that Pereira has apparently written as "Agusale." Further, as F. D. Fage and Robin Law have observed, the association of "Agusale" with a river in the text is evidently to be attributed to the miscopying of the Portuguese word *rio* (river) for *rey* (king).<sup>49</sup> More importantly, however, Pereira's use of "Agusale," the Bini form, may well reflect the Bini origins of the founder of the *Ìjẹ̀bú* Kingdom (i.e., *Ọbanta*) as claimed by Bini traditions. The *Ìjẹ̀bú* Kingdom is said to have been established during the reign of Ozolua (c. 1481 to c. 1517), thus suggesting a date (in view of Pereira's early sixteenth-century evidence) late in the fifteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

The "great ditch" mentioned by Pereira is presumably an allusion to the huge earth ramparts currently known as *eredo* Sungbo (lit., Sungbo's *eredo*).<sup>51</sup> The *eredo* seem to have marked the original boundaries of the kingdom, for they encircle a substantial portion of what may be described as the kingdom's nucleus.<sup>52</sup> An examination of certain features within this core area indicate the character of the state formation process leading to the establishment of the *Ìjẹ̀bú* Kingdom. Basically, this area is distinguished by a religious centralization in which the Awujalẹ is the pivot. The organization of the Agemo cult, the Awujalẹ's tutelary deity, typifies the phenomenon. As Oyin Ogunba's study on the cult indicates, the area is characterized by Agemo districts, each of which is headed by a chief priest called *alagemo*.<sup>53</sup> All the *alagemo* assemble at *Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode* for the annual Agemo festival (usually during July) at which propitiatory rites and sacrifices are made to the deity to shower blessings on the Awujalẹ. On the return of the *alagemo* to their respective districts, they organize a mini-Agemo festival called *Ifobu*, which is attended by minor Agemo priests, styled *alase*, under their district headship.<sup>54</sup>

This religious centralization was signified by the designation of *Oloja*. Thus, an *alagemo* was also usually referred to as *Oloja*, or, as P. C. Lloyd has observed: "Where

the village head has important ritual duties, notably at the installation or burial of the Awujalẹ, he bears the title *oloja*.<sup>55</sup> In other words, the significance of the title was conceived primarily in religious terms. However, outside the territorial zone signified by this religious centralization, *oloja* was strictly a political title.

In an attempt to shed light on the meaning of the title and its applicability in southeastern Yorùbáland, a British colonial officer once remarked:

The meaning . . . is apparently “The owner of the town” and not, as it would seem, “The owner of the market.” The [Yorùbá] word “*oja*” is possibly a derivative of the Jekiri [Itsekiri] word “*Aja*” meaning a collection of houses or a village.<sup>56</sup>

Akinkugbe’s study on the evolution of the Yorùbá and other related languages suggests that the Yorùbá *oja* and the Itsekiri *aja* are cognates for a settlement. And it is also instructive to note that among the Ìjẹ̀bù and some other southeastern Yorùbá groups (categorized as SEY in Figure 7.1), the indigenous term for market is *obu* and not *oja* as among the Yorùbá groups to the west.<sup>57</sup> Thus, *oloja*, which is an abridged form for *olú aja* or *olú oja*, means “town head,” and seems to have been the designation for community heads in pre-kingdom Ìjẹ̀bù.<sup>58</sup> Its conception in religious terms may therefore be explained as a feature of the institutional changes that marked the establishment of the kingdom. An alternative political term, *olóri ilú* (lit., town head), seemed to have been coined as a neologism for *oloja*.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, part of the institutional features marking the nucleus area included the fact that the political designation of *Otonba* (lit., an *ọ̀ba*’s descendant) was applied to scions of the Awujalẹ dynasty who founded and headed settlements. Such settlements bore the names of their founders, with the term *Odo* (settlement) attached as a prefix.<sup>60</sup>

Little evidence exists to enable an interpretation of the pattern of growth of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom. It may, however, be noted that the tenth Awujalẹ, Obaruwa, is traditionally remembered as a warrior king who established the ruling dynasties of Ode and Makun in Remo.<sup>61</sup> Also noteworthy is a Portuguese reference to the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom in 1620 as “small but very warlike.”<sup>62</sup> Considering the fact that the kingdom was probably just a little over a hundred years old in the early seventeenth century, the balance of evidence would suggest that the early rulers of the kingdom were warrior kings who extended the political boundaries of the kingdom beyond its nucleus area. The epithet *Ajogun* (warrior) by which the Awujalẹ is usually addressed is suggestive of this process. Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom, as described by d’Avezac-Macaya, constituted a “territorial core bearing the name Ìjẹ̀bù” with Remo (in the west) and Idoko (to the southeast) as its “dependencies.”<sup>63</sup>

It should be clear from the foregoing that as far as the origins of the Ìjẹ̀bù are concerned, the oral historical traditions do not take us beyond Ọ̀banta, that is, from the foundation of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom. On the other hand, linguistic evidence seems to indicate that the origins of the Ìjẹ̀bù, like other Yorùbá subgroups, lie toward the Niger–Benue confluence area; and more specifically, that the Ìjẹ̀bù had,

by the beginning of the first millennium A.D., settled in their present homelands signified by their speech. However, by the fifteenth century they seemed to have evolved into three territorial groups, namely, a western section (Remo), a central section (Ìjẹ̀bù), and a southeastern section (Idoko). The central or Ìjẹ̀bù area was consolidated into a state at the end of the fifteenth century, and the resultant Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom expanded to cover the other two sections in succeeding centuries.

## Notes

1. See A. Adetugbo, "The Yorurba Language in Yorùbá History," in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S. O. Biobaku (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 189; and F. Akere, "A Socio-linguistic Study of a Yoruba Speech Community in Nigeria: Variation and Change in the Ijebu Dialect Speech of Ikorodu" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1977), 337–38.

2. See Robin Law, "The Northern Factor in Yoruba History," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Yoruba Civilization*, ed. I. Akinjogbin and G. Ekemode (Ilé-Ifẹ̀: University of Ifẹ̀ Press, 1976), 106–9; and Robin Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: 'Lucumi' and 'Nago' as Ethnonyms in West Africa," *History in Africa* (HA) 24 (1997): 205–6, 215.

3. An alternative view identifies the Ifẹ̀ genesis strictly with the Yorùbá. But, as Robin Law has pointed out, this "separation of the origins of mankind in general from the origins of the Yorùbá, represents a rationalization of the general tradition of the creation of mankind at Ifẹ̀," resulting from a recognition of "the existence of other civilizations which could not plausibly be regarded as offshoots of the Yoruba." Robin Law, "How Truly Traditional is our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition," *HA* 11 (1984): 200n, *passim*.

4. British Parliamentary Papers (BPP) (ca. 5144), Ogunsigun to Moloney, April 26, 1886, enclosure in Moloney to Granville, June 23, 1886.

5. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.S.S. Bookshops, 1921), 15.

6. Archaeological evidence suggests that the institution of kingship in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ dates as far back as the eleventh century A.D. This is still the earliest known date for Yorùbá kingship. D. Calvocoressi and Nicholas David, "A New Survey of Radio-Carbon, and Thermoluminescence Dates for West Africa," *Journal of African History* (JAH) 20, no. 1 (1979): 18–19; cf. Frank Willet, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), *passim*.

7. See J. H. Greenberg, *Languages of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1966), 8; P. R. Bennett and J. P. Sterk, "South Central Niger-Congo: A Reclassification," *Studies in African Linguistics* 8, no. 3 (December 1977): 272–73, *passim*.

8. B. E. B. Fagg, "The Nok Culture in Pre-History," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) 1, no. 4 (December 1959): 289; Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours before 1600," in *History of West Africa*, 2nd ed, 2 vols., ed. J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1976) 1: 200–201; Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1980), 147–48; and Ade Obayemi, "The Peopling of Nigeria" (paper presented at the Workshop on the Teaching of Nigerian History from a National Perspective, Lagos, 2–8 February 1986), 14–16.

9. R. G. Armstrong, "The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic Data in the Study of Idoma and Yorùbá History," in *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, ed. Jan Vansina, R. Mauny, and L. V. Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 132.

10. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 18.

11. *Ibid.*, 19.

12. National Archives, Ìbàdàn (NAI), IjeProf.9/2, Letter Book, 1904–1908, W. Stanley Hern, "A Report on the District of Ijebu-Ode for the New Civil Service List," 1 October 1906.

13. *Ibid.*

14. D. O. Epega, *Ìwé Ìtán Ìjẹ̀bú ati Awon Ìlú Miran* [A History of Ìjẹ̀bú and Some Other Towns], 2nd ed. (Lagos: Ifẹ̀-Olú Printing Works, 1934), 11. I was unable to lay hands on the 1919 edition.

15. See H. M. Martindale, "Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Political and Administrative Relations between the Awujalẹ̀ of Ijebu-Ode and the Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo," December 1937, Exhibit G. 73. Imusin is a conglomeration of about fifty very small settlements.

16. It is titled "A Brief History of Ijebuland with Special Reference to the Origin of the Akarigbo Chieftaincy." (From the private papers of late Chief T. A. Fowokan, the Olisha of Ijebu-Ode.)

17. T. O. Ogunkoya, "The Early History of Ijebu," *JHSN* 1, no. 1 (December 1956): 48–53.

18. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 1.

19. Ogunkoya, "Early History of Ijebu," 49.

20. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 1.

21. M. A. P. d'Avezac-Macaya, *Notice sur le Pays et le Peuple des Yebous en Afrique* (Paris, 1845), 57.

22. The Ondó capital is now simply referred to as Ondó, and the Itsekiri now have their capital in Warri. It is instructive to note in this connection that Akinkugbe's study shows that the Itsekiri language and the Yorùbá dialects of Ìjẹ̀bú and Ondo are genetically close (cf. Figure 7.1).

23. Another dialectal variant of *ode* is possibly *ilé*, which appears in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ilẹ̀sà, the capitals of the Ifẹ̀ and Ijẹ̀sa kingdoms. Again, it is instructive that the Ifẹ̀ and Ijẹ̀sa dialects are classified as sub-branches of a dialectal bloc (cf. Figure 7.1).

24. d'Avezac-Macaya, *Notice sur le Pays*, 36, *passim*; P. C. Lloyd "Osifekunde of Ijebu," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. P. D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 247. For the coining of the term "Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode," see O. T. Oduwojì, "A Historical Study of Administrative and Political Developments in Ijebu, 1892–1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Lagos, 1995), 40–41.

25. B. O. Adebajo, *Ìtán Ido Ìjẹ̀bú* [A History of Ìjẹ̀bú] (Lagos: John West Publications Limited, 1990), 6.

26. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 281.

27. The descriptive clause used for the coronation ceremony is *imunigbu'wa osi*, literally "the act of making a person take on royal authority." See NAI, IjeProf. 2, File No. C. 17/4, Resident to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 19 May, 1933.

28. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, ix–x.

29. On this point, see B. A. Agiri, "Early Oyo History Reconsidered," *HA* 2 (1975), 1–2; and R. Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," *HA* 3 (1976): 75–76.

30. Personal communication with Chief J. A. Jaiyeola, Lagos, 27 March 1988.

31. Epega, *Ìwé Ìtán Ìjẹ̀bùu*, 4.

32. See, *A Dictionary of the Yorùbá Language*, 4th ed. (Ìbàdàn: University Press Limited, 1970); cf. A. K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, 3rd ed. (Lagos: Kash and Klare Bookshop, 1948), 26: "The Yorùbá maxim is *A ki ifi omólùwàbí je onìbodè*, meaning, 'No free born man [but a slave] is made to collect tolls.'" However, another use of *omólùwàbí* refers to a well-behaved person.

33. The 1937 document reports that Olú-Iwa was, during his reign, popular for his humaneness and fairness, thus: "any Ìjẹ̀bù of good character is described since then as *omò-olú-iwa-bí* meaning, 'the child begotten of Oluiwa,' constructed now to 'Òmólùwàbí,'" (Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 3).

34. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 5.

35. *Ibid.*, 15.

36. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 3.

37. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 243.

38. P.C. Lloyd, "Sungbo's Eredo," *Odù* 7 (March 1959): 20.

39. *Ibid.*, 22; Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 243, 59n.

40. There are, for example, no historical links between the towns of Ode and Makun in Remo and those of the same names in the Waterside area except that of appellation.

41. This perhaps may be inferred from the claim in the Imusin document that the title fell into abeyance as a result of a civil disturbance that occurred at the death of one Oloko Adewunmi.

42. O. O. Ayantuga, "Ijebu and Its Neighbours, 1851–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1965), 14.

43. E. A. Ayandele, "Ijebuland, 1800–1891: Era of Splendid Isolation," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, ed. G. O. Olusanya (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1983), 89–90; E. A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850–1950: Politics, Economy and Society* (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1992), 1, 30, 4n.

44. O. Ogunba, "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Study of Indigenous Festivals" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ìbàdàn, 1967), 13–19. Ogunba does not state the evidence for his claim of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Ogunba, "Ritual Drama," 19).

45. Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, trans. and ed., George H. T. Kimble (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937).

46. This wide expanse on the Lagos Lagoon is locally referred to as *Lamghasa*. Its counterpart is *Agan*, which is the large mass on the Lekki Lagoon. Bini traditions as recorded in J. U. Egharevba [*A Short History of Benin*, 3rd ed. (Ìbàdàn: University Press, 1960), 34] have it that Ọba Ehengbuda of Benin met his death on the *Agan* sometime during the first decade of the seventeenth century. Egharevba, however, erroneously referred to the *Agan* as a river. Hence the conclusion in R. S. Smith [*Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (London: James Currey Limited, 1988), 77, 41n] that, "The river Aghan [*sic*] where the Oba met his death does not seem to appear on any map."

47. As cited in Robin Law, "Early European Sources Relating to the Kingdom of Ijebu (1500–1700): A Critical Survey," *HA* 13 (1986): 246.

48. See J. U. Egharevba, *Some Tribal Gods of Southern Nigeria* (Benin: self-published, 1951), 2.

49. J. D. Fage, "A Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira's Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* and some other Early Accounts," *HA* 7 (1980): 65; Law, "Early European Sources," 246.



50. Egharevba, *Some Tribal Gods*, 12; cf. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London: Frank Cass, 1969) 1: 218. For the date of Ozolua's reign, see R. E. Bradbury, "Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History," *JHSN* 1, no. 4 (1959): 277–81; A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans* (London: Longman, 1969), 46–51.

51. For a description of the ramparts, see Lloyd, "Sungbo's Eredo," 5–22.

52. This covers the following local government areas: Ìjẹ̀bù East, Ìjẹ̀bù North, Ìjẹ̀bù Northeast, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, Odogbolu, and Epe.

53. Oyin Ogunba, "The Agemo Cult in Ijebuland," *Nigeria Magazine* 86 (1965): 176–86; Ogunba, "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People . . .," *passim*.

54. The sixteen alagemo at the beginning of the colonial period were (their respective towns in parentheses): *Tami* (Odogbolu); *Magodo* (Aiyeye); *Moko* (Okun Owa); *Lasawu* (Imoro); *Serefusi* (Igbile); *Ogegbo* (Ibowon); *Petu* (Isiwo); *Nopa* (Imusin); *Bajelu* (Imuku); *Lasen* (Oru); *Idebi* and *Lubamisan* (Ago-Iwoye); *Onugbo* (Okenugbo); *Posa*, *Ija* and *Ewujagbori* (Imosan). See M. B. Okubote, *Ìwé Ikekuru ti Itán Ìjẹ̀bù* [A Short History of Ìjẹ̀bù] (Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode: self-published, 1937), 63–64.

55. P. C. Lloyd, *Yoruba Land Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 149.

56. NAI, CSO. 26/3, File No. 29956, J. H. Beeley, "Intelligence Report on the Owo and Ifon Districts . . . Ondo Province," 1934, 8, as cited in Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples . . .," 220.

57. Akinkugbe, "A Comparative Phonology," 34–37, 46–52.

58. Thus, for example, Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode is associated with the title of *Ògbéni Oja* (community leader?) whose holder acts for the Awujale during interregna. See Oduwoḡi, "A Historical Study," 36–37. *Ògbéni* means leader or head.

59. For *olóri ilú* and the precolonial political institutions of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom, see Oduwoḡi, "A Historical Study," 29–40.

60. Examples are Odoregbe (Regbe's settlement), Odosentalu (Sentalu's settlement) Odoyanta (Ayanta's settlement), etc. It is to be observed, however, that the title of *Òtunba* is now corruptly rendered as *Ọtunba*, and that the latter form does not mean, "the right hand man of the ọba" (i.e., the ọba's principal counselor) as a literal translation might suggest. Cf. Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 296: "Otonba is a contraction of *otun oba*, meaning the senior assistant and adviser of the Oba."

61. Epega, *Iwe Itan*, 20–21; H. J. Ellis and James Johnson, *Two Missionary Visits to Ijebu Country 1892* (Ìbàdàn: Daystar Press, 1974), 8, 34. As mentioned (40n), two towns in the Waterside area also bear the names Ode and Makun. The distinction is usually denoted with the suffixes of *Remo* and *Omi* (water) to indicate the respective geographic locations of the towns.

62. "Relacao de Garcia Mendes Castello Branco," Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria*, 6: 471, quoted in Robin Law, "Early European Sources . . .," 248.

63. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 249–56.

# **PART II**

*Chiefs and Tradition*

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# 8

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## **POWER, STATUS, AND INFLUENCE OF YORÙBÁ CHIEFS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Toyin Falola

Power, status, and influence are dynamic aspects of elite politics in all societies. Because the three are related to a society's political philosophy and economy, they inevitably undergo modifications as the other aspects of society also change. For instance, the power of a ruler may be affected by economic misfortunes, political changes such as the imposition of a new dynasty, the incorporation of one polity by another, and the redefinition of the concept of power. The forms are as varied as the factors of change. It can be revolutionary, that is, when a totally new structure, with attendant consequences on power and social relations within a polity, replaces another one. It may be no more than a modification to an existing structure. Change may even involve only the leadership elite and not the structure of politics itself. Change can also be tied to the evolution of a political system, such that each phase possesses its own distinctive character. A well-established system can also decay. These changes affect the leadership elite who can gain or lose power, influence, and status and who can also be replaced by a new set of leaders or even a new dynasty.

All these observations are applicable to the Yorùbá of southwestern Nigeria. The position of their chiefs was never static, as this chapter points out. Our examination of the role of Yorùbá chiefs that follows is set in the context of the changing political system.<sup>1</sup>

### **The Predynastic Era**

Although the Yorùbá had lived in cities and had established kingdoms and states for so long, it is still possible to recognize a predynastic, pre-Odùduwà era<sup>2</sup> when

the rulers not only controlled small areas but had limited power, judged by the number of people under their control and the military force at their disposal.

The literature on this era is still very thin, but accounts in some oral traditions and local chronicles do provide a few pieces of information that can be used to reconstruct the structure and relations of power. It is important to recognize that these predynastic groups (or what Ade Obayemi calls *mini-states*<sup>3</sup>) dotted most parts of the Yorùbá country. For instance, Ilé-Ifẹ traditions talk of a pre-Odùduwà period, represented in part by the Ọbàtálá traditions and the thirteen semi-autonomous “villages” ruled by thirteen different heads before the emergence of the institution of the Ọ̀nìshíp. In Iléṣà, there was the Ọbala era, which preceded that of the dynastic Ọwa Obokun group. In Ìjẹ̀bù, traditions also mention the Olú-Iwa period, which preceded that of the Ọbanta associated with the Odùduwà era. There is also the reference to several Idoko communities from Ondo in the east to the Ìjẹ̀bù in the west.<sup>4</sup>

These predynastic communities had rulers, essentially lineage heads who exercised power over small hamlets inhabited by people related to one another by blood. Some communities had leaders who were able to govern a collective of two or more lineages. In Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, for instance, there were “several kingdoms, each having its own rulers.”<sup>5</sup> Ilé-Ifẹ traditions mention the king of Igbo, a rival monarch; Ọbàtálá is also said to possess a crown, known as the *Arẹ*. In the Iléṣà region, traditions mention a host of rulers in charge of different settlements: Okesa headed by the Ọbanlá, Ibosinrin by the *Labosinrin*, Ikogun by the *Akogun*, and Itaji by the *Onitaji*.<sup>6</sup> In Akure, the four or more communities here had different rulers.<sup>7</sup> In Ado, the *Elesun* ruled over the different Ilesun communities of Ulesun, Ulero, Isina, Ilamoji, Aso, Asa, Ukere, and Agbaun. All these tend to suggest a monarchical system. The structure of this monarchy is unclear, but the less-known *Ikedu*, a pro-Ifẹ genre of oral traditions collected by one historian, I. A. Akinjogbin, provides some tentative clues, at least for the Ilé-Ifẹ region. The *Ikedu* makes references to a village headman, the *Uhedo*, his policemen, the *Uko*, and age grade organizations, the *Egbengben*. Many villages were grouped together in a province controlled by an *Otu*, with a council, the *Petele*. There was an overall head, the *Oghene*, with his seat at Ifẹ.<sup>8</sup>

The small size of the communities is one indication that the rulers exercised power over a limited area. However, in the case of Ilé-Ifẹ, the traditions speak of an Oghene as the overall head of all the communities. We do not, however, know the extent of his power over his colleagues and the ordinary citizens. But whether as lineage heads or as chiefs, these predynastic rulers exercised limited power over the citizens under them. From the patchy evidence on the mode of production, they probably presided over the allocation of factors of production, especially land, and perhaps over the distribution of harvests. Some of these leaders were also priests, an indication that religion was used as a basis of power. The rulers possessed some power of coercion as well; there is evidence that they used force and persuasion to mobilize their people for war. Leadership could have conferred the advantage of appropriating part of the surplus produced by others. If accumulation was possible, these early leaders would have more wealth than most others in the society.

## Leadership in the City-States

The structure of the government became more complex as the Yorùbá established dynasties and centralized city-states.<sup>9</sup> Most of what we know of the Yorùbá chiefs derives from this era. At least, there were two forms of power structure: the town government and the central administration. These two forms enabled the chiefs to exercise power and enjoy great influence and status.

The town government had several common features. The overall head was the *oba alade* (a crowned king) or an uncrowned ruler, the *baale*, who presided over subordinate villages. Every *oba* or *baale* had a council of chiefs, chosen from the dynastic lineages that constituted the core of the town or village. The representatives of other groups in the community (e.g., women, trade guilds) were co-opted to the council whenever there was a need to do so. The town was divided into different quarters, each with a recognized chief (the *Ijoye adugbo* or *Olóri itùn*). A quarter or ward comprised many compounds, each with a recognized head, the *baale* or *Olóri ilé*. The quarter and compound heads were in charge of local administration, and they were also responsible for mobilizing the masses for public work.

The central administration, the second form of government, operated in the kingdoms, notably in Ilé-Ife, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ijẹ̀ṣa, Ondó, and Ọ̀yọ́. A kingdom consisted of a capital or the metropolis and several subordinate towns and villages. There were, however, some Yorùbá towns without large central political organizations, like the Ekiti, Ondó, Owo, and Awori. For instance, among the Ekiti, there were no fewer than sixteen kingdoms, each asserting its autonomy. The same was true of the Ondó where three towns—Ondó, Ilé-Oluji, and Idanre—also enjoyed an autonomy. The Awori were not centralized, their villages representing a high level of political organization, exceeded only by Lagos, which had a strong monarch because of its contacts with Benin and the participation in the slave trade from the eighteenth century that brought substantial wealth to its elite.

Irrespective of the differences in the constitution of the central administration, the *oba*, *bale*, *baale*, and other functionaries wielded power and enjoyed a number of privileges. The *oba* and chiefs lived in the metropolis where they made and executed laws for the kingdom. The *oba* and the council constituted the highest court in the land. In other words, these rulers were responsible for executive, legislative, and judicial functions.

The *oba* was sacred and, in theory, exercised absolute power. To his people, the *oba* was both an earthly king and a companion of the gods. Indeed, some were deified after their death and worshipped as gods, as in the case of Owanise of Iléṣà or Sàngó of Ọ̀yọ́. The *obas* were often versed in charms or, at least, they exercised influence on those who had. They were in charge of rituals, either as supervisors or patrons. These rituals were important because they were associated with the peace, tranquility, and prosperity of the community.

In theory, the *oba* had the power of life and death over his people, but in practice he was more of a constitutional monarch because he could not dispense with his council of chiefs and the representatives of the key lineages. An *oba* who

attempted to be tyrannical would face a number of sanctions, and this varied from one society to another. In Ìjẹ̀bù and Ègbàland, the *Osugbo* or *Ogboni* cult could depose an offending ọ̀ba.<sup>10</sup> In Ọ̀yó, the *Oyomesi* could bring pressure on an *Aláàfín* either to change or commit suicide. Among the Ondó, Akoko, and Ijeṣa where cults were not politically strong and where the chiefs could not reject the ọ̀ba, there could be a general insurrection by the public. The chiefs might also boycott the palace and thus bring the business of government to a halt.

As pointed out, the ọ̀ba was not alone in the business of government. The subordinate towns and seats of local provincial governments were headed by the baalẹ̀ or oloja. They were autonomous to the extent that they had no power over external relations and only as long as they paid their tributes to the metropolises. They also administered their areas together with their councils.

Both the ward and compound chiefs enjoyed a degree of power as well. They were responsible for the administration of their areas. The compound head watched over the welfare of the members of the compound. He was responsible for supervising his people while they engaged in collective work and to assist ward chiefs in sending people for community work. The compound and ward chiefs also engaged in the administration of justice. Whereas the ọ̀ba or baalẹ̀ and the council made laws, they—in association with the ward and compound chiefs—implemented them. There were different courts: the court of the compound head, that of the ward chief, and that of the ọ̀ba or baalẹ̀. The compound head settled disputes between the members of his compounds. Appeal could be made to the court of the ward chief where intercompound disputes were settled. The ọ̀ba's court was the final court of appeal, but the *Osugbo* and *Ogboni* societies played similar leading roles between the Ègbá and Ìjẹ̀bù.

The power of chiefs extended to economic activities; they made laws on prices of goods, saw to the maintenance of trade routes, constitution of markets, and so on. For them to be able to monitor market activities effectively, most markets were located close to the residences of the chiefs. For their immense power, the rulers enjoyed tremendous influence and were the leading influence in the society. Other citizens, irrespective of their wealth or occupation, were rated below them.

To reinforce political and spiritual powers, the chiefs controlled economic resources. They derived wealth from the proceeds of their farms and because of the chiefs' access to a large pool of labor, their farms were usually the biggest in the community. Other sources of revenue available to them included gifts, fines, tributes, tolls, and profits from trade. Although all the chiefs had identical sources of revenue, the ọ̀ba was the richest person. The ọ̀ba received a higher percentage of the fines, tributes, and tolls than the other chiefs. In addition, he received death duties from the family of deceased chiefs and other prominent citizens. An ọ̀ba also had the privilege of inheriting the property, wives, and slaves of his predecessors, thus allowing him to build on the wealth of others. A part of this wealth was spent on the community. The chiefs performed rituals to the gods for the welfare of their people and also feasted their subjects occasionally.

## Modifications in the Nineteenth Century: The Hegemony of the Military

Three major factors brought about significant changes to the chieftaincy institution during the nineteenth century: the fall of the Old Òyó empire; the wars that accompanied this fall; and the emergence of a host of refugee towns.<sup>11</sup> Six new forms of political organization emerged, all with varying consequences for chiefs: a composite administrative structure; a “palatinate” system in New Òyó; political federalism in Abeokuta and Oke Odan; a military aristocracy in Ìbàdàn; a military dictatorship in Ijaye; and the integration of the military into politics in many other places.<sup>12</sup>

A composite administrative structure emerged in a few towns that received a substantial number of refugees who fled from the Old Òyó empire in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A large number of these refugees migrated not as individuals but as corporate groups with corporate identities. The host towns where they settled (e.g., Ogbomoṣo, Oke-Iho, Saki, Oṣogbo, and Ikirun) were quickly transformed from unitary towns to large conglomerates, with different quarters representing some cohesive groups with their rulers, gods, lineages, and so on.<sup>13</sup> The administration in the host towns had to be modified to incorporate the leaders of the new group and also to integrate the entire group into the community. A composite political structure had to be fashioned and this involved the modification of the previous structure. There emerged a more powerful council with the *oba* and *baale* of the refugee groups and a few other senior chiefs. The *baale* or *oba* of the host town acted as the chairman. Three types of crises were created. The first was that some quarter or ward chiefs had their powers relegated in the council. Second, the power that the *oba* or *baale* had on some quarters had to diminish because the people gave more recognition to their own rulers with whom they had migrated rather than to the ruler of their host town. Third, there was struggle for dominance between some *baale* and *oba*. Where a *baale* took refuge in a town with an *oba*, there was no problem because the former was traditionally lower in rank to the latter. But where an *oba* was a refugee in a place ruled by a *baale*, there was political tension because the *oba*'s power would be relegated to that of a ward head. Ogbomoṣo witnessed this type of crisis when the *Soun*, a *baale*, had to play host to three *obas* and former provincial leaders: the *Onikoyi* of Ikoyi, the *Aresa* of Iresa, and the *Onpetu* of Ido. These three *obas* received recognition from the people and also refused to cooperate with the *Soun* who had to make use of the *Ogboni* cult to strengthen his position.<sup>14</sup>

In Òyó, a “palatinate” system was established; this diminished the power of some members of the *Oyomesi* while Aláàfin Atiba, the architect of the new arrangements, gained in power.<sup>15</sup> The task of reorganizing the rump of the Òyó empire fell on Atiba. At Òyó Oja (later renamed Òyó), Atiba not only appointed several key people to fill the vacant posts but also created a number of new offices.<sup>16</sup> Because of defense and security considerations, Atiba entered into a pact with Kurunmi of Ijaye whom he made the *Are Ona Kakanfo* and Oluyole of Ìbàdàn whom he appointed as



the *Basorun*. The remaining Ọyọ empire was divided into two parts: Kurunmi was to protect the west and northwest from the incursion of Dahomey and Oluyole was to defend the east and northeast from the menace of the Fulani. Ancient towns such as Saki, Igboho, and Iluku were to be protected by Atiba. He was not, however, to take the field in any war but to concern himself with domestic matters and rituals. Consequently, the alááfin was militarily weak and his area of authority small.

In the case of Kurunmi of Ijaye, his own power was so strong that a dictatorship was established.<sup>17</sup> Ijaye was originally an Ẹgbá Gbagura town until ca. 1831 when it was occupied by Ọyọ refugee soldiers, mainly from the towns of Akese and Ikoyi. But Kurunmi, the leader of the Ikoyi faction, seized Ijaye and drove away the Akese group, thus creating a settlement that was more homogeneous than most refugee settlements. Kurunmi was also able to combine political and military authority, without checks and balances, to regulate how he exercised power. There were no strong civil or military chiefs, and Kurunmi was able to eliminate those who attempted to challenge him. He appointed his chiefs and this allowed him to pick either weak men or his favorites. His chiefs were not, however, advisers, and Kurunmi hardly consulted them. Instead, they received orders that they had to carry out if they wished to remain in power.

Villages and towns subordinate to Ijaye were also all under Kurunmi because they had neither patrons nor political residents. The rulers of these subordinate settlements received direct orders from Kurunmi. Because of his wide powers, Kurunmi was able to accumulate substantial wealth by appropriating most of the tributes, taxes, customs dues, gifts, and levies. This wealth enabled him to build a big compound, a large arsenal, several followers, and a big harem.

In the contemporary town of Ìbàdàn, an aristocratic class of military chiefs emerged because no one was as strong as Kurunmi in creating a dictatorship.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, there were several competing warriors who made it very difficult for any one of them to wield so much power to the detriment of his colleagues. Unlike Ijaye, which was destroyed in 1862, Ìbàdàn lasted forever, making it possible for a more stable structure of government to emerge. Ìbàdàn jettisoned the older system of hereditary office holders for a leadership based on individual achievement in wars. Promotion within the system was also attained by displaying valor.

From ca. 1830 to ca. 1850, the city-state was organized as a purely military state, with most of the chiefs as warriors. For the remaining part of the century a sort of military republic with two chieftaincy lines, civil and military, emerged. Both lines were open to men of talent, and mobility was from the lowest to the highest ranks. The military chiefs were the most important, acquiring more power and influence than the civil chiefs. They dominated the government, and political decisions had to be suspended whenever they were at war. The military chiefs could influence key decisions even when they were far away in war camps.

The rulers in Abeokuta and Oke-Odan exercised their own power within a federal system. As in the other places, the form of political organization was determined by the refugees. In the case of Abeokuta and Oke-Odan, the refugees were social or biological groups from different towns and villages who congregated in

one new settlement mainly for security reasons. Abeokuta was made up of displaced Ègbá townships, each settling separately as different quarters with their own independent identities. Each quarter had a quasi-autonomous government, comprising its òba, chiefs, and members of the *Ogboni*. The *Olorogun*, the society of warriors, however, cut across the townships. There was a central Olorogun under Sodeke. This society was extremely powerful, exercising control over wars and foreign policy. Thus, it is possible to talk of a loosely organized federation under a centralized military hierarchy. The military chiefs could not, however, be despotic because there were still sectional chiefs and members of the *Ogboni*. This system remained until 1854 when Okukenu, the *Sagbua*, became the *Alake*, the òba of Ake, the most senior of the Ègbá rulers. It was Okukenu who began civil rule in Abeokuta.

Oke-Odan was made up of refugees from Ilaro, Erinja, Ilobi, and Eyo. The refugees from each of these towns established different wards. The administration that evolved was designed to provide security against the Ègbá, Dahomey, and Igbeji. There was a central military council governing the town. Each of the wards provided four chiefs to the council: the *Balogun*, *Otun Balogun*, *Osi Balogun*, and the *Apena*. This central council was in charge of security, war, and external relations. Unlike the system at Abeokuta, it had no head; each *Balogun* regarded the other as an equal, and the presidency had to be rotated. At the level of the ward, there was a council comprising mainly military chiefs and leaders. The ward council administered the area occupied by its people. This federal system lasted until 1850 when the first *Elerinja* of Erinja was installed and was able to transform himself into the overall head.

In many other Yorùbá communities, the system had to be modified to accommodate successful warriors without hereditary rights to offices.<sup>19</sup> Such men included Olugbosin, Ajana, and Olotugbangba of Oye; Faboro of Ido; Esubiyi of Aiyede; Kuku and Onafowokan of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode; Obe, Arimoro, Fabunmi, Omole, Odo, Edidi, Fayise, Ayibiowu, and Ogedengbe of Ilésà; Bakare of Afa-Akoko; Fabunmi of Okemesi; and Akogun, Ogunmonakan, and Aduloju of Ado. All these men tried to gain power and influence in several ways. There were those like *Balogun* Ali of Iwo and Esubiyi of Aiyede who tried to reduce traditional rulers to figureheads. There were those who wanted to share power with the traditional rulers and usurped the powers of the former, hereditary military titleholders. The military could not be challenged; might was right. Several additional titles were created to reward them. Titles such as the *Balogun*, *Seriki*, and *Sarumi* were adopted in many places to reward successful war heroes.

There were warriors who chose to carve autonomous areas of influence for themselves so that they could operate with absolute power and with little or no regard for the òba of the area. Eastern Yorùbáland was the home for some of these ambitious soldiers such as Ogedengbe, Aduloju, and some of Ìbàdàn warriors.

The new forms of political organization described above affected the “traditional” chieftaincy system. The major change was the preeminence of warriors in the government, mainly at the expense of civil office holders. In Ijaye, there was

no room for civil office holders to exercise power. In Ìbàdàn, the military wielded more power than civilians. In Abeokuta and Oke-Odan, there was a return to civilian administration only in the second half of the nineteenth century. Several ọbas had their power curtailed by the warriors who became key defenders of their polities in an insecure age. The military chiefs enjoyed many of the attributes associated with the senior civil chiefs. Their exploits in war gave them the resources to build large houses and acquire harems, slaves, and retainers. Courage and access to guns added to their power and prestige.<sup>20</sup>

## **The Impact of British Rule, 1900 to 1960**

Although the changes in the nineteenth century were motivated by factors internal to the Yorùbá, those in the first half of the twentieth century were brought about by British colonial rule. Changes in administration, economy, and society affected the chiefs in negative and positive ways.

Before 1914, the major event was the conquest of the area and the consolidation of foreign rule. These involved a loss of sovereignty to all the communities and the subordination of their chiefs to alien rule.<sup>21</sup> The years from 1914 to 1933 were the golden age of indirect rule. As described by Lord Lugard, its principal spokesman, indirect rule was through the chiefs as part of the machinery of government. The method was to involve the indigenous rulers in the government to solve the problems of the scarcity of British officials, reduce administration costs, and make use of Africans in governing themselves to minimize tension. In this arrangement, the chiefs shot into the limelight, becoming some of the key officials in Native Administration. For instance, in the Native Courts where their power was most visible, the courts of the paramount ọbas were of both first instance and appeal, except in more serious cases, which had to be referred to the resident. They were also involved in tax collection, a duty that they did well because their salaries were related to tax volume. As a chief struggled to collect more taxes, so did he incur the anger of his own people.

In many ways, the autonomy of the chiefs was encroached upon. The chiefs were under a colonial officer, the resident or the district officer. Those chiefs who failed to understand the loss of power were humiliated. Take, for instance, the case of the Aláàfin, who in 1895 was wounded and forced to run to the British when his town was bombarded, or the two rulers of Ìbàdàn who were deposed early in the century. The British interfered in the appointment process, as they sought chiefs who would be loyal to the new administration. The governor had to justify this in 1933 when Daniel Adesanya was appointed the *Awujalẹ* of Ìjẹbú Ode by saying that: "native law and custom cannot be regarded as immutable but as subject to modification, if necessary, to meet the circumstances of a more advanced and enlightened age."<sup>22</sup> Third, colonial administrators raised the status of some ọbas above what they had before. For instance, the power of the Aláàfin

increased from 1906 to 1931, as he controlled more territory, became autocratic, and deposed some of his own subordinates.<sup>23</sup> A number of Ekiti ọbas and the Awujalẹ of Ìjẹbù Ode enjoyed similar privileges. Fourthly, those chiefs who had formed a partnership with the ọba in the precolonial framework were to suffer a reduction in their power and influence. Where the status of the ọba became enhanced, such chiefs became subordinates and had to curry the ọba's favor. In areas whose chiefs suffered great decline, they had to turn to historical reconstruction to make their case. History and legends of their previous status were advertised to gain influence in contemporary society.

The ọbas, too, could not perform all their previous functions. In almost all cases, they lost their power over life and death to a new set of judicial officers with the knowledge to interpret English laws. Although they retained some executive power, this was as defined by the colonial state. The base of their revenue narrowed from a limitless number of sources (war booty, tolls, tributes, etc.) to salaries from the government. A reliance on salary was one reason for doing their best not to offend the government.

Additional changes, more adverse than before, followed after 1933. Between 1933 and 1945, the sole Native Authority was reorganized, with four ọbas, graded as first-class chiefs, enjoying the status of sole native authorities. These were the Ọṣni of Ifẹ, the Aláàfin of Ọyó, the Awujalẹ of Ìjẹbù-Ode, and the Ọwa of Ilẹ̀sà. The other ọbas lost power. The Native Authority Council also became important, and some educated men were chosen to participate in local government.

From 1945 onward, more councils were created, with elected men in the administration. The ọbas had their power curtailed, and the number of chiefs in the councils was reduced in preference for elected members. Men of wealth (derived mainly from cocoa) and educated people took an interest in local government.<sup>24</sup> Most of these "new men" had little respect for traditional rulers and contributed to the humiliation of the chiefs by calling for their exclusion from the government. The "new men" understood the colonial power structure and they knew that the chiefs occupied a secondary role to the British officials. More important, some of them were well paid in their jobs whereas others had viable businesses. Thus, they were wealthier than the traditional chiefs, and this further served to upset the balance between the educated elite and the chiefs.

In 1951, the parliamentary system of government was introduced to the western region. Part of the system was a House of Chiefs, comprising the ọbas and chiefs. However, the real power was exercised by the House of Assembly, made up of elected representatives. Except for those able to benefit from political patronage (notably the Ọṣni Adesoji Aderemi and S. Akinsaya, the Ọdẹmọ of Isara), the chiefs wielded little power.<sup>25</sup>

Their power was almost totally broken at the local level with the Western Nigerian Local Government Law of 1952, which made the ọba a ceremonial president of the local council; the prominent chiefs were not to constitute more than a third of its membership.<sup>26</sup> The law also made it possible for the regional

government to recognize any chief of its choice in the council. The participation of chiefs also depended on whether the elected members invited them or not. In a 1959 amendment (Legal Notice 40 of 1959), the traditional ruler could not become the chairman of the council, whereas any other member of the council had the privilege of assuming that significant position. The other minor role of the chiefs was in the appointment of persons to recognized chieftaincy.

Apart from this law, political parties had become important in the country, and politicians were less tolerant of the chiefs who did not belong to their party. For instance, there was a crisis from 1952 to 1954 between the Action Group (AG), the party in control of the western region, and the Aláâfin. Aláâfin Adeniran Adeyemi II, coming to the throne after the powerful Ladigbolu, wanted to exercise as much power as his predecessor. His failure to understand the changes of his time misled him to think that it was only the AG that was behind the usurpation of his power. He allied with the less-popular National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons and became caught in a bitter interparty rivalry that led to a riot and his deposition. His successor, Ladigbolu II (1956 to 1968), was wise enough to satisfy the politicians. The chiefs knew that they had only one alternative: to identify with the AG. By 1958, only one of the fifty-four members of the House of Chiefs was not a sympathizer to this party.<sup>27</sup>

Judicial powers were taken away from the chiefs. Customary courts of appeal and Grades A and B courts were now to be presided over by literate men. Acts of Parliament on taxation, boundary disputes, and adjudication also curtailed the influence of the chiefs. Other measures were pursued, based on the assumption that a democratic form of government was incompatible with the hereditary, traditional, and ascriptive role of traditional chiefs.

## Post-Independence Development

Independence brought a bitter experience for the chiefs. Whereas the British took power from them, they handed it over to a Western-educated elite. Whatever status the chiefs had since 1960 has owed not to the country's constitution but rather to political patronage, business connections, the ability to align their interests with those of the leading members of their towns, and their skills in manipulating competing political groups in their domains.

From 1960 to 1966, that is, during the First Republic, the *obas* were still ceremonial presidents of local government councils. At the regional level, the House of Chiefs enjoyed some legislative power with the House of Assembly, although the Republican Constitution of 1963 indicated its preference for the latter. The constitution did not, however, define who a chief was; those men with honorary chieftaincy titles were allowed as members. The *oba* of Benin once wrote of "a ridiculous case where a chief was gazetted as a 'recognized chief' while his traditional ruler who conferred his chieftaincy title on him was classified as a 'minor chief' by those in power."<sup>28</sup>

The military in power from 1966 to 1979 regarded traditional rulers as part of the Nigerian culture, which should be preserved. They, however, took two major steps that further threatened and defined the power of the chiefs. The first was the Land Use Decree of April 1, 1978, which made land a public property and vested its control in the hands of the state and federal governments. This denied the *oba* and chiefs the power to sell or give away the land in their domain. The second was the 1976 local government reform, which spelled out a nonexecutive function for them. Provisions were made for the establishment of a traditional council in each local government area. This council comprised:

- a. The principal chief as president thereof and in appropriate cases two or more such persons shall hold office as president either in succession or alternatively;
- b. Other traditional titleholders.

The council's functions were:

- a. to formulate general proposals as advice to the local government or to all local governments in its area;
- b. where appropriate, to harmonize the activities of such local governments through discussion of problems affecting them generally and by giving advice and guidance thereon to such local government;
- c. to determine religious matters where appropriate;
- d. to give support for arts and culture;
- e. to assist in the maintenance of law and order;
- f. to advise on any matter referred to it by the state or federal government;
- g. to make representation or express opinions to the state government or any other organization on behalf of the local government, or, as the case may require, the collective behalf of all such local governments on any matter of concern to the areas as a whole whether or not such a matter is within the legislative competence of any such local government;
- h. to determine questions relating to chieftaincy matters and control of traditional titles, and, where such matters are within the exclusive prerogative of the principal chief, to give advice thereon where so requested; and
- i. notwithstanding any other provision of the edict, to determine customary law and practice on all matters governed by customary law including land tenure under customary law.

In addition, there was a police committee that comprised at least one traditional ruler, "to hold regular meetings to consider and make recommendations on all matters concerning the police and preservation of peace in the area and will, in particular, maintain a review of enforcement of legislation made by the Local Government." At the state level, there was a Council of Chiefs that was to meet occasionally to make suggestions to the governor and also to advise on matters

referred to it. But, as Oba Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale of Ijẹ̀bú-Ode, believed, this council was not effective:

... my experience of the membership of the council was that of political organ to rubber stamp government's plan to depose any Oba or chief. Of course any advice from us which did not agree with the wishes of the government of the day was ignored.<sup>29</sup>

As a ceremonial head of a local government or a council member, the traditional ruler was not of much political significance. The people themselves knew this and took problems either to the councilors or other functionaries of the state government.

The traditional rulers had no coercive power, no control over money, lacked status within the structure of government, and exercised little influence over policy makers. In addition, most of the traditional chiefs had also lost the aura of sacrosanctity surrounding their office. In the precolonial era, religion was used to reinforce power, but Christianity and to some extent Islam eroded this—the priests and imams, and not the chiefs, now wield more religious influence over the people. The influence of the arrogant, proud, and contemptuous educated elite continues to remain a major threat.

The 1979 presidential constitution under which the defunct Second Republic operated did not improve on the previous arrangement. Section 3 of Part II of the Third Schedule provided for a State Council of Chiefs that would advise the governor on “customary law or cultural affairs, inter-communal relations and chieftaincy matters.” Section of Part I of the Third Schedule also allowed a member of the State Council of Chiefs to be part of the Council of State. The traditional rulers had constraints, as one of them explained:

the traditional ruler is ineffective for he is inhibited by the presence of his Governor in two respects: he may express opinion at variance with that of his Governor and the Executive is not likely to take kindly to that, or against his better judgement, he would try to be in line with his Governor in which case the traditional ruler cannot be expressing his honest opinion. So, to me, including the traditional rulers in the National Council of State is really not giving them any worthwhile role commensurate with their status.<sup>30</sup>

It should be added that it was not mandatory for the governor or president to seek the advice of traditional rulers or take to it when offered.

The oba and chiefs were not satisfied with the 1979 constitution, and they seized several opportunities to air their views on this. In 1982, a group of traditional rulers in Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, and Ondo States held a conference and prepared a memorandum to the president.<sup>31</sup> The chief commented on their lack of representation in both the council of chiefs and the council of state and called for a new body, which would enable them “to give their opinion to the Legislative and the Executive.” They also added that the power the constitution gave them was not only useless but also enabled politicians to play “politics with the revered office of a traditional or paramount rulers.” They called for an urgent review “so that

traditional or paramount rulers . . . will be given positive recognition and effective powers, duties and responsibilities in the running of our various governments.”<sup>32</sup>

Earlier in 1980, the renowned Ọba Adeyinka Oyekan of Lagos threatened that the ọbas would pursue a radical line of action:

the traditional rulers might soon form a trade union if the present withdrawal of some of their traditional duties as contained in the constitution was not rescinded . . . The formulation of the union is necessary because traditional rulers are no more rulers but “traditional keepers of our custom.”<sup>33</sup>

The constitutional limitation did not, however, prevent the politicians from making false promises. For instance, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the president during the Second Republic, declared in his 1979 campaign that,

the position of all traditional rulers in the country would be adequately promoted in order to enhance their dignity and control over their subjects. . . . To do this, the Government of the National Party of Nigeria to be formed in October this year would commit all traditional rulers to the activities of various Governments within their domain.<sup>34</sup>

None of the political parties ever committed the traditional rulers to the activities of their respective governments. Rather, they were manipulated, abused, deposed, reduced, or raised in status, all for political ends. One commitment, however, remained: most politicians received chieftaincy titles, if only to be called *Chief*, more dignifying than a simple *Mister*.

## Conclusion

This chapter is a broad overview of the Yorùbá chieftaincy system over a long period of time. As indicated, most of the chiefs no longer play any significant political role. Their traditional legitimacy is being questioned in modern Nigeria. They have limited power to reward others; many do not even possess any land to give away as before. They lack coercive power; a person could sue a chief and show him no courtesy. Those among them who continue to wield influence do so on account of their wealth, connections, and charisma.

What, then, is the future of chieftaincy? There are, at least, three answers: some suggest a total abolition;<sup>35</sup> some prefer their retention as cultural objects of the past, the living museums; and there are those who want them to be included in the country’s government, even if only for non-executive functions.<sup>36</sup> There is no indication at the moment that the institution will be abolished. The various communities are responding to new challenges by emphasizing wealth, education, and the network of the qualified candidates before they are appointed. Although this has its own problems, the idea behind it is to have men who will rely less on their subjects to maintain their office and more on people who can wield some influence in attracting government projects.



To survive in the long run, the future of chiefs depends on the political system and economic ideology of Nigeria. For the meantime, for the sake of visibility, the chiefs should be involved in the running of customary courts, public complaints commission, adult literacy programs, maintenance of communal cohesion, the preservation of culture, and as administrative links between the people in the grassroots and the government. The chiefs should be involved in the running of local governments in non-executive but participatory functions. In spite of efforts to reform the local government there is as yet no alternative leadership structure at the local level. Most people in the rural areas still look to some of the chiefs for leadership. They are still called upon to solve problems in the community such as attracting investments, road construction, and so on.

Whatever happens, the golden age of the chieftaincy institution is gone forever. Now, there are too many groups competing for power, each challenging the other: Western-educated elite, generals, former military Generals, rich contractors, and others. Today, the real enemy of the chiefs is not the changes of the past that I have narrated here, but their aggressive competitors for power in the unstable Nigerian political system.

## Notes

1. For a general history of the Yorùbá, see Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.M.S., 1921); J. S. Eades, *The Yoruba Today* (Cambridge University Press, 1980); W. R. Bascom, *The Yoruba of South Western Nigeria* (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1969); and G. O. Olusanya, ed., *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture* (Ìbàdàn: University Press, 1983).

2. Among others, see H. U. Beier, "Before Oduduwa," *Odù* 3 (1956): 25–32; Isola Olomola, "Eastern Yorubaland before Oduduwa," *The Proceedings of the Conference in Yoruba Civilization*, vol. 1. (Ilé-Ifè: Dept. of History, 1976), 34–76; and I. A. Akinjogbin, "Yorubaland before Oduduwa" (unpublished seminar paper, University of Ilé, 1980/81).

3. Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and their Neighbours before 1600" in *History of West Africa*, 3rd ed., vol. 1, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1985), 255–323.

4. For similar stories, see J. O. Ojo, *History and Traditions of Ondo*, n.d.; and J. A. Olusola, *Ancient Ijebu Ode* (self-published, 1968), 9–29.

5. P. C. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu" in *Africa Remembered*, ed. P. D. Curtin (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1967), 218.

6. J. O. E. Abiola, J. A. Babafemi, and S. O. S. Ataiyero, *Ìwé Ìtán Obokun, Ilé Owuro* (Iléšà: self-published, 1932), 21–27; and J. O. Oni, *A History of Ijeshaland* (Ilé-Ifè: self-published, 1972), 29.

7. These were Ọba, Igan, Idopetu, Ileru, and Ipalefa. See S. O. Arifalo, "An Analysis and Comparison of the Legends of Origin of Akure" (B.A. History, Original Essay, University of Ifè, 1965), 26–29.

8. Akinjogbin, "Yorubaland before Oduduwa," 3–4.

9. On the forms of this government, see Toyin Falola and G.O. Oguntomisin, *The Military in 19th Century Yoruba Politics* (Ilé-Ifè: University of Ifè Press, 1985).

10. See A. Pallinda-Law, "Government in Abeokuta 1830–1914 with Special Reference to the Egba Government, 1898–1914" (Ph.D. diss., Goteberg University, 1973), 9; S. O. Biobaku, "An Historical Sketch of Egba Traditional Authorities," *Africa* 24 (1952): 38; and N. A. Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, ed. F. O. and O. O. Okediji (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1970), 243–48.

11. For details of these, see J. F. Ade Ajayi and R. Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: University Press, 1964); S. A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland 1840–1893* (London: Longman, 1973); and P. C. Lloyd, *The Political Development of Yoruba Kingdoms in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (London: Royal Anthropological Institute, 1971).

12. For details of these forms, see Toyin Falola and G. O. Oguntomisin, "New Forms of Indigenous Political Organisation in 19th century Yorubaland" (unpublished seminar paper, 1986).

13. Oral interviews.

14. B. A. Agiri, "The Development of Local Government in Ogbomoso" (M.A. thesis, University of Ìbàdàn, 1966), 43–47.

15. For the political system before the disturbances see K. Balogun, *Government in Old Oyo Empire* (Lagos: Africanus, 1985); and Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–1836* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

16. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 275–76.

17. See Falola and Oguntomisin, *The Military*.

18. For details, see Toyin Falola, "The Political System of Ibadan in the 19th Century," in *The Evolution of Nigerian Political Systems*, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and B. Ikara (Ìbàdàn: University Press Ltd, 1985), 104–17.

19. See, for instance, Toyin Falola, "Power-Drift in the Political System of Yorubaland in the 19th Century," *Odù* 22 (Jan./July, 1982): 109–27.

20. The theme of wealth has been pursued in Toyin Falola, *The Political Economy Of A Pre-colonial African State: Ibadan, 1830–1890* (Ilé-Ifè: University of Ifè Press, 1984).

21. Toyin Falola, "Post-war Political changes in Ibadan, 1893–1913," *Odù* 24 (July 1983): 61–77.

22. National Archives, Ìbàdàn, Ije Prof. 2/C.17/4, Ag. Chief Secretary Southern Provinces to Resident, 15/8/1933 and Òyó Prof. 6/9/C./1925.

23. J. A. Atanda, "The Changing Status of the Alaafin of Oyo under Colonial Rule and Independence" in *West African Chiefs: Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule And Independence*, ed. M. Crowder and O. Ikime (Ilé-Ifè: University of Ifè Press, 1970), 212–30. Also Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934* (London: Longman, 1973).

24. See, for instance, P. Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites in the Politics of Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); and P. C. Lloyd, ed., *The New Elites of Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).

25. For details, see P. C. Lloyd, "Local Government in Yoruba Towns: An Analysis of the roles of the Obas, Chiefs and the Elected Councillors" (Ph.D. diss., Oxford University, 1958).

26. For details on changes in local government since the 1950s, see A. Gboyega, *Political Values and Local Government in Nigeria* (Lagos: Malthouse, 1987).

27. O. Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1978), 280.

28. Omo N'oba N'edo, Uku Akpolokpolo, Erediaua, CFR, Oba of Benin, "The Roles of Traditional Rulers In Government," Conference Paper, University of Ifè, April 25, 1983, 18.

29. *Sunday Times* (16 December 1979), 17.

30. Oba of Benin, "The Roles," 17.

31. For the full text, see *Nigerian Herald* (25 September 1982), 6.

32. *Ibid.*

33. *Daily Sketch* (17 March 1980), 17.

34. *New Nigerian* (2 April 1979), 3.

35. See, for instance, "Building the Foundations of a New Social Order," The First Progress Report of the Government of Kano State, 1 October 1979–1 October 1980, 7. For other comments on abolition, see *Nigerian Herald* (1 July 1978): 3 and (21 April 1981): 8; *New Nigerian* (18 June 1981): 1, (17 July 1981): 16, and (22 August 1981): 1; and *Daily Times* (24 Jan 1983), 7.

36. See Toyin Falola, "Chiefs and the Nigerian Polity," mimeo.

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## CHIEFTAINCY STRUCTURES, COMMUNAL IDENTITY, AND DECOLONIZATION IN YORÙBÁLAND

Olufemi Vaughan

Historians of Africa generally agree that indigenous political structures (chieftaincy institutions) were central to the strategies of governance in colonial Yorùbáland. Although British colonial rule distorted chieftaincy structures, powerful *obas* (monarchs), *baales* (head chiefs), and Western-educated elites still managed to effectively deploy local political forces to advance their political status in a rapidly shifting colonial context. This dynamic political relationship among *obas*, chiefs, British administrators, and an emergent indigenous Western-educated elite was complicated by the new emphasis on development, democracy, and modern governance that nationalist elites insisted on during the late colonial period. Analyzed in the context of the political configurations that emerged under the indirect rule system and the unfolding drama of an emergent post-colonial Nigerian state, I seek to critically discuss the following major themes in Yorùbá politics during the decolonization process: traditional political authorities and the imperative of institutional transformation; chieftaincy politics and communal identity; and chieftaincy structures, state formation, and the construction of a Yorùbá ethnic identity. Thus, this chapter contends that interpretations of traditional political authorities, along with the underlying neo-traditional character of local communities, the pressing demands of a Yorùbá nationalist elite for development and modern governance, and the structural imbalance that emerged in the terminal years of colonial rule, transformed Yorùbá collective political action during the decolonization process.

Overall, this chapter seeks to analyze the critical intersection between the shifting interpretations of traditional political authorities and the construction of communal identity in Yorùbá politics during the important historical moment of decolonization.

I contend that the complex meaning of tradition, power, and community complicated the pressing demands of the Yorùbá nationalist elites for development, civic values, and modern governance during the decolonization process.

### **Theoretical Perspectives: Tradition, Modernity, and Decolonization**

Starting with the indirect rule system, which drew heavily from conflicting interpretations of precolonial Yorùbá political relations, British administrators, *ọbas*, *baalès*, chiefs, and educated elites deployed traditional accounts through which local communities contested power during colonial rule. The most enduring legacy of these colonial practices was apparent in contentious notions of chieftaincy rules and customary law.<sup>1</sup> Sociologist J. D. Y. Peel shows how the implementation of colonial policies and the processes of Nigerian state formation transformed collective political consciousness and action among a major Yorùbá subgroup, the *Iješa*, in the course of the twentieth century.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, political scientist David Laitin's imaginative application of Gramsci's theory of hegemony to colonial and postcolonial Yorùbá politics suggests that the major feature of Yorùbá collective political action involves a consistent exploitation of Yorùbá ancestral city state fissures. Despite the more recent influence of Christianity and Islam on Yorùbá social relations, collective political action in the region is still dominated by the prevailing grassroots structures of "hometown ideologies." Co-opted by British administrators, this adherence to Yorùbá ancestral hometown ideologies provided the framework on which the colonial system of indirect rule was subsequently institutionalized. Because hometown consciousness is a platform for the construction of contending hegemonic ideologies, the new men of power skillfully utilized this medium as a critical political resource, mobilizing political following along communal lines during the decolonization process.<sup>3</sup> Whereas ancestral hometown fissures remain vital in modern Yorùbá politics, local elites and the constituencies they claim to represent have nevertheless demonstrated considerable flexibility since the imposition of colonial rule in the late nineteenth century. It follows that, to define new strategies of collective political action—whether drawn from hometown loyalties or other social boundaries—myths, traditions, rituals, and social memory assume considerable significance in the modern construction of communal identities, especially during the volatile period of decolonization. Thus, drawing on these two important theoretical perspectives, the specific Yorùbá case study analyzed in this chapter reveals considerable dynamism and flexibility. The articulation and mobilization of collective political action took on multiple dimensions, especially during the transitional period of decolonization.

The driving engine of this complex process was the modernizing elites, especially politicians and state functionaries, who utilized communal structures and

ideologies as mediums for political mobilization during the decolonization process.<sup>4</sup> The paradox of the Yorùbá nationalists thus lies in their embrace of communal and traditional doctrines that extol the corporate character of local groups, while simultaneously insisting that modern development and governance require the expertise of the intelligentsia. Thus, the ideologies that sustained elite power were inextricably linked to the ideology of imperial legitimization itself. Indeed, twentieth-century concepts of development and enlightenment among the Yorùbá, as elsewhere in West Africa, were derived from the imbrication of external and internal sources; the formal are associated with the advent of world religions, Western education, imperialism, long-distance trade, and travel. Although integral to the colonial enterprise, these developments were products of great political transitions in which competing elites had much to gain from the reorganization of societies in which the uncertainties of rapid social mobilization induced local people to reaffirm their commitment to communal ideologies. This critical historical moment in colonial Nigeria is the period of decolonization.<sup>5</sup> As the major transitional phase in twentieth-century Africa, the politics of decolonization unleashed competing communal doctrines that were grafted on substantive, but contentious, notions of traditional political authority. Thus, confronted with the imperative of mobilizing a large following, Yorùbá nationalist elites formed new political institutions that sought to utilize the dominant communal doctrines, symbols, and mythologies, while emphasizing the pressing demands for modern governance and development.

### **Ethno-regionalism and Chieftaincy Politics: Yorùbáland and Nigeria**

This section analyzes the complex interaction among traditional rulers, nationalist elites, and communal identity within the context of decolonization. While drawing on the prevailing conditions of indigenous political structures that had been transformed by the indirect rule system, I contend that it was the specific conditions of decolonization, especially the desire of an emergent nationalist elite to mobilize local communities in an evolving ethno-regional context, that transformed communal identity and chieftaincy structures in Yorùbá towns.

As political developments unfolded in the immediate postwar years, and with the very future of Nigeria increasingly at stake, the British colonial government, under pressure from Nigerian nationalists, began the gradual process of the transfer of power at the regional and national levels of government. The centerpiece of this process was the Nigerian Constitution of 1951 (the Macpherson Constitution). In provinces where the structures of the indirect rule system were entrenched, traditional rulers and nationalist elites provided the fulcrum for the erection of a new ethno-regional political class.<sup>6</sup> This set the stage for the interplay between ethno-regional and class interests in the postcolonial period.

Despite the markedly varied character of local communities in the Nigerian region, the Nigerian Constitution of 1951 established a tripod federal political structure that opened the door to the ascendancy of the northern provinces in the emerging federation. A relatively weak unicameral federal legislature, the House of Representatives, drawn from the three regional houses of assemblies, constituted the national government. More important, the promulgation of the Macpherson Constitution led to the establishment of strong ties between grassroots sociopolitical organizations and the new nationalist political parties that struggled to integrate ethno-regional and town-based identities, as well as emerging class interests. For example, the most powerful party in the Northern Region, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), emerged in 1951 as a political offshoot of the *Jam'yyar Mutanen Arewa*, a predominantly Hausa-Fulani elite organization rooted in emirate ideology and interest. The NPC, led by the Sardauna of Sokoto, Mallam Ahmadu Bello, was subsequently dominated by an alliance between the *Masu Sarauta*, the Hausa-Fulani emirate structure, and a small group of relatively young senior civil servants and businessmen from the northern provinces. In the Eastern Region where the colonial warrant chiefs system had profoundly distorted indigenous political institutions,<sup>7</sup> the dominant regional political party, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC; later the National Council of Nigerian Citizens) emerged mainly with the assistance of ethnic unions, especially the predominant Igbo State Union. The prominent role of the Igbo State Union and other Igbo communal groups undermined the nationalist reputation of the NCNC as a nationalist party with crosscutting unifying alliances among southern Nigeria's major ethnic groups. The NCNC was soon projected by Yorùbá nationalist elites as an instrument of Igbo sectional and elite interests, thus gradually eroding its popularity in Yorùbá towns. This in part explains the Yorùbá nationalist elites' rationalization for the formation of a Yorùbá political party, the Action Group (AG) in 1951 as it emerged from the popular ethnic solidarity sociocultural group, the *Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* (society of the children of Odùduwà, the legendary progenitor of the Yorùbá people), which was initially formed by a group of Yorùbá university students in London in 1945 and formally launched in Ilé-Ife, the legendary origin of the Yorùbá people in 1948.

As in other regions, political mobilization in the western provinces thus operated through a pan-ethnic alliance dominated by regional politicians, *ọbas*, *baales*, and other community leaders in Yorùbá hometowns. Thus, as was the case for the NPC in the northern provinces and the NCNC in the eastern provinces, it was a pan-ethnic discourse deployed in a competitive context of the new federation and the regions that was critical for political success. As interests crystallized along ethno-regional lines, the *Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* allowed for an effective political collaboration between pioneering politicians, *ọbas*, and grassroots leaders, in turn laying the foundation for a regional party.<sup>8</sup> In reaction to political developments in Nigeria as a whole, and to the need of Yorùbá nationalist elites to mobilize protection and support, the AG, led by Ọbafeṣi Awolọwọ, was able to take power in the western provinces. A strong pan-Yorùbá identity was key to mass mobilization and support.

Two converging trends of political mobilization and conflict emerged following the emergence of the nationalist Yorùbá party, the AG, as the party in control of the regional government during the years of decolonization, from 1951 to 1959. First, the schism along ethno-regional lines of collective political action not only continued but also intensified in the 1950s. Second, the decolonization process also deepened the political consciousness, loyalty, and conflict along the prevailing traditional fault lines of ancestral hometown loyalty that had been established during the turbulent decades of the nineteenth century<sup>9</sup> and had been exploited by the indirect rule system during the preceding colonial years. Thus, drawing on prevailing lines of communal loyalties under the indirect rule system, nationalist elites, *ōbas*, and chiefs of Yorùbá hometowns collaborated to reconstruct contending versions of traditional authorities to reinforce and expand their power. With a strong emphasis on modern governance and development, this evolving trend further distorted the prevailing political arrangements in the colonial era and failed to achieve the hierarchical traditional order that the new nationalist elites worked hard to establish. Within the context of local government and native court reforms, *ōbas*, chiefs, and educated elites appropriated communal doctrines and conflicting interpretations of the meaning of traditional political authority, as well as discourse of modern development, to justify and give voice to an array of competing political claims.

Although it would be wrong to suggest that the political struggle over the far reaching reforms of the decolonization process was simply an irreconcilable confrontation between a reactionary traditional aristocracy and a progressive modernizing elite,<sup>10</sup> decolonization also intensified the struggle of local elites and their constituencies over the distributive resources of the local colonial state. Traditional and modern political leaders deployed strong communal ideologies and neo-traditional themes that rigidly defined competing Yorùbá communities as natives and outsiders. The politics of decolonization in Òyó Province, Yorùbáland's most dominant region, further illustrates how the conflicting interpretations of traditional authorities, the historical significance of communal identities, and the political configurations that were transformed by the indirect rule system shaped modernizing reforms of the Yorùbá nationalist elites during decolonization. These developments were profoundly expressed in the AG regional government's historic local government and native court reforms.

### **Òyó Province: Ìbàdàn and Òyó Divisions**

The following narratives and analyses reveal the implications and consequences of landmark AG local government and native court reform policies in two key divisions in Òyó Province, Ìbàdàn and Òyó, in the 1950s. The implementation of these policies precipitated political alliances and conflicts that took on the prevailing and evolving ethno-regional and ancestral hometown consciousness. These contending lines of communal identity and collective political action were reinforced and shaped by the politics of regionalism that



emerged as the centerpiece of the decolonization process in Nigeria. Within Ìbàdàn and Òyó Divisions, the historic local government and native court reforms that accompanied decolonization not only entailed the propagation of traditional political authorities, myths, and conflicting interpretation of the meaning of custom and tradition, but also led to the emergence of strong populist and nativist doctrines.

Fashioned after the English Local Government Act of 1933, Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, the Ìjẹbú-Yorùbá leader of the AG and leader of government business, introduced the 1952 Western Region local government policy that established a three-tiered system of divisional, district, and local councils. Each council was autonomous with its own corporate identity, the ability to assess taxes and rates, award contracts for public works, and employ its own staff, including local authority police. The councils' jurisdictions were also clearly defined. The divisional council, the largest of the three exercised authority over an area coterminous with an existing administrative division; the district could exercise authority over a substantial group of towns and villages where economic, social, and historical factors had developed common bonds; and the local council, where appropriate, exercised jurisdiction over remote communities.

The 1952 Local Government Law also counterbalanced the power of traditional leaders with that of elected local councilors. Unlike previous native authority ordinances where ọbas and chiefs dominated local government affairs, this policy insisted that three quarters of council members must be elected. Finally, the policy provided regional authorities with considerable regulatory powers over local government in the following specific ways. First, the regional government was empowered to appoint inspectors who would evaluate the performance of the local councils, have access to all council meetings and records, and provide advice on local matters. Second, the regional authority could amend the instrument establishing local councils, redefine their areas of jurisdiction, and alter their status, functions, and membership. Finally, the regional government could dissolve local councils should they contravene important provisions of the Local Government Law. By utilizing this law to advance its modernist program, the AG Western Regional government had to confront several political and economic interests in various sections of the region, notably the protracted struggle over local government reform in Ìbàdàn division and the celebrated *Aláàfìn* (monarch) of Òyó Affair in the 1950s.

Although an exhaustive account of these case studies is not the objective here, I briefly summarize the impact of the central themes of local government and native court reform policies on power relations in Ìbàdàn and Òyó Divisions in the 1950s. Specifically, I underscore the implications of the following important points for Yorùbá politics during this critical period. First, the process of political institutionalization that resulted as a consequence of the 1952 Local Government Law involved a strategy of mobilization that attempted to reconcile antecedent structures with the pressing demands of the modern state project. In Ìbàdàn and Òyó Divisions, conflicting local interests were reconfigured in response to the

reform policies of the AG Western Region government. In the struggle that ensued, the AG's reform policies were challenged by opposition politicians, *o*bas, chiefs, and elders, who sought refuge behind the formidable regional opposition party, the NCNC. Second, the two dominant regional political parties provided the organizational nexus around which elite alliances and competition were organized. Whereas the AG provided the institutional medium through which the Yorùbá nationalist elite mobilized support, the NCNC, exploiting the historical ancestral hometown fault lines, emerged as the party of disaffected politicians, *o*bas, chiefs, and community leaders. In short, traditional and modern political elites mobilized political support and forged alliances along the prevailing ancestral hometown consciousness and the evolving ethno-regional boundary.

The processes of political alliances and schism in Ìbàdàn and Òyó Divisions also had serious implications for state policy during this critical transitional phase, especially the contentious issues of "indigenous" law. In August 1950, at a time when regional and local parties were in their infancy, the governor of the western provinces established a commission of inquiry to investigate the provincial native courts.<sup>11</sup> This did not come as a surprise given the fact that the native courts were generally considered inefficient and corrupt. Under the chairmanship of Justice N. J. Brooke, and made up of senior colonial administrators and two distinguished educated Yorùbás—A. Soetan, a prominent barrister, and Chief J. R. Turton, Risawe of Ilẹ̀ṣà—the commission was authorized to examine all aspects of the native court system in the region, especially their practices and procedures, and even to repeal or amend the Native Court Ordinance. After a year of deliberation that included visits to *o*bas, native court judges, and community leaders in Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá towns, the Brooke Commission presented its report to the governor in 1951. Despite the recognition that native courts were critical in the maintenance of law and order in local communities, the commission confirmed the general feeling of British administrators and Yorùbá educated elites, namely, that the courts were grossly inefficient and corrupt. Thus, the commission called for the repeal of the 1948 Native Court Ordinance and the introduction of a modern native court policy. The native court law that subsequently emerged out of the Brooke Commission's recommendations insisted on more modern local court that adapted "customary" practice to changing social conditions; regional government oversight; inclusion of some educated persons in court deliberations; the removal of the courts from the control of traditional political authorities; the subordination of the native courts to the English-derived magistrate courts; and the customary courts' accountability to local communities. Although the preceding system was an integral product of British colonial policy, *o*bas and chiefs, as custodians of this reconstructed notion of Yorùbá "indigenous" law, forcefully opposed what they considered an unwarranted intrusion into their traditional prerogatives.

It was in the context of these local government and native court reforms that collective political action, along with attendant alliances, tensions, and conflicts, emerged in Ìbàdàn during the decolonization process. This was profoundly

expressed in the celebrated conflict between the AG regional government and the *Mabọlajẹ*-NCNC grand alliance (*Mabọlajẹ* means “do not spoil the honor of the chiefs”) that gained control over the newly established Ìbàdàn District Council in April 1954.<sup>12</sup> Under the leadership of Ìbàdàn’s legendary political boss in the 1950s, Adegoke Adelabu, the *Mabọlajẹ*-NCNC-dominated Ìbàdàn District Council had ninety-three members, twenty of whom were chiefs, including the Olubadan, and seventy-three councilors (overwhelming *Mabọlajẹ* members) elected from forty-three city and thirty district wards.

As the AG Western Region government sought to implement its native court reform, Adelabu, as leader of the *Mabọlajẹ*-NCNC-controlled Ìbàdàn District Council, mobilized conservative chiefs and mogajis (heads of powerful lineages), as well as various populist and nativist groups with strong hometown loyalties, notably the Ẹgbé Ọmọ Ìbílẹ̀, Mayiegun League, and the Ìbàdàn Welfare Band against the AG’s new local government and native court policies.<sup>13</sup> Although the groups represented distinct interests that ultimately splintered into competing factions, their campaign at least initially resulted in an alliance of neo-traditionalists within Ìbàdàn city. They organized around what the leaders of the groups regarded as “the evil intentions of the Ìjẹ̀bù-dominated AG government” (Awolowo, the AG leader was Ìjẹ̀bù-Yorùbá from the Ìjẹ̀bù Remo town of Ikenne). Under Adelabu’s charismatic leadership, the Ìbàdàn Tax Payers Association (ITPA) provided the essential organizational umbrella through which these voices of discontent were expressed. The ITPA emphasized its commitment to the “special position of chiefs” in local administration. With the support of the regional opposition party, the NCNC, the movement embraced a variety of highly sensitive issues: native court and local government reforms, the erosion of chiefly power, and the impending separation of subordinate communities from the control of Ìbàdàn chiefs. Significantly, although the evolving regional structure of the Nigerian federation had prompted the Yorùbá political class to construct a relatively cohesive pan-ethnic ideology, bringing together historically diverse subgroups (in the Ìbàdàn context, chiefs and community leaders) under Adelabu’s leadership, in fact saw the policies as an attack on the collective interests of native Ìbàdàns. Thus, they revived a town-based doctrine to undermine the pan-ethnic ideology that the new regional political elite was working so feverishly to cement.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the stipulations of the 1952 Local Government Law, the council used this new-found political platform to further weaken the little power the AG had in Ìbàdàn politics. More important, Adelabu—as leader of the *Mabọlajẹ*-NCNC-controlled Ìbàdàn District Council—used the council to undermine chiefs considered sympathetic to the AG, and simultaneously brought the institution of chieftaincy under his control. Having had himself elected chairman of all the standing committees, including chieftaincy, Adelabu dominated every aspect of local government council affairs. Prominent Ìbàdàn senior chiefs, notably Chief I. B. Akinyele, Balogun of Ìbàdàn (later Olubadan of Ìbàdàn) and Chief Salawu Aminu, Otun-Balogun of Ìbàdàn, in turn, opposed what they considered Chairman Adelabu’s excessive powers. Complaints from these chiefs and Ìbàdàn

AG politicians led the Western Region minister for local government and justice F. A. Rotimi Williams to formally warn the Mabolaje-NCNC-controlled Ìbàdàn District Council for contravening the 1952 Western Region Local Government Law in late 1954.<sup>15</sup> In addition, prominent Ìbàdàn AG politicians levied serious allegations of corruption against the Mabolaje-NCNC-controlled Ìbàdàn District Council. Adelabu's most controversial attempt to dominate chieftaincy institution was, however, when he unsuccessfully attempted to impose an ally, Chief Akinyo, as Olubadan, instead of the rightful successor to the title, Chief Akinyele, following the death of his one-time ally, Ọba Igbintade in February 1955.<sup>16</sup>

As the division between the council and senior chiefs widened, the minister for local government appointed F. W. J. Nicholson, town clerk of Abingdon Council in England, who was on a lecture tour in Nigeria, as commissioner to investigate the Ìbàdàn District Council.<sup>17</sup> After twenty-seven sessions—including sixty-five petitions of evidence and exhibits given by chiefs and councilors, administrative officers, leaders of local organizations and contractors—Commissioner Nicholson identified eleven substantial failures of the District Council. Of these, the following, he noted, were beyond redress: the assessment and collection of taxes; unbridled patronage involving council members, their supporters, and business associates; and the administration of Ìbàdàn's central bus terminal at Ogunpa.<sup>18</sup> Armed with the recommendations of Commissioner Nicholson and still confronted with intense political wrangling, the AG Western Region government dissolved the Ìbàdàn District Council on March 4, 1956. Four days later, the regional government appointed a provisional council, which elected Ọba Akinyele as its president and chairman. In short, the Mabolaje-NCNC-controlled Ìbàdàn District Council was essentially "a populist aggregation of residential, occupational, and protest organizations,"<sup>19</sup> incapable of formulating and implementing effective policies as far as local governance and development were concerned.

A second example of conflict was the celebrated dispute between the Aláàfin of Ọyọ, Ọba Adeniran Adeyemi II, and the AG Ọyọ Divisional Council. Although also the direct product of the 1952 Local Government Law, this conflict differed from the Ìbàdàn case in several ways. Most striking was the pattern of political alliances: In Ọyọ, the AG-controlled divisional council had the cooperation of the regional government, whereas Ọba Adeyemi formed an alliance with the local NCNC. What the two cases have in common grew out of the competition for patronage dispensed by those in control of the local authority. As elsewhere, community development was based on a complex political process dominated by the interests of powerful groups and individuals, and in which reconstructed local traditions, histories, and communal identities were once again deployed. As in Ìbàdàn, the Aláàfin's neo-traditional populism proved to be a formidable force against the political authority of both regional and local AG politicians.

The conflict that ultimately resulted in the deposition of Aláàfin Adeyemi also reveals the tortuous strategies of the new political class in deploying both modern skills and traditional symbols, as in the formation of the Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, to reinforce their status, while undermining the old guard, the ọbas and chiefs. The

appropriation of traditional themes was matched by the politicization of local organizations; the elaboration of pan-ethnic ideology by the intensification of communal divisions at the local level; and the processes of decolonization by the struggle to incorporate indigenous structures.

The Aláàfin of Òyó, Ọba Adeniran Adeyemi II, typified the old-style conservative Yorùbá ọba during the late colonial period. As successor to the legendary Aláàfin Ladigbolu, who reigned during the controversial tenure of Resident William A. Ross,<sup>20</sup> he had assumed control of local politics in Òyó Division in 1945. The early years of Aláàfin Adeyemi's reign thus coincided with the ferment of the decolonization process and the critical turning point of the unfolding Nigerian political development. With the rapid modernization of local government administration and the introduction of parliamentary democracy in the 1940s and 1950s, the Aláàfin, like other major Yorùbá traditional rulers, who had retained considerable political power under the Lugardian system of indirect rule, was forced to yield a significant part of his authority to elected councilors. Appointed as a sole native authority (the ultimate local government authority in Òyó Division) in 1945, by the early 1950s Ọba Adeyemi was required to share power with nominated native authority members, and lost even more authority when the Òyó Divisional and District Councils came under the control of elected councilors in the early 1950s.<sup>21</sup>

Although Ọba Adeyemi II lacked a Western education, he nevertheless attempted to collaborate with the new Yorùbá nationalist elites to accommodate reform. In 1948, for example, he became the patron of the Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà. In 1950, he gave Sir Kofo Abayomi, the prominent Yorùbá nationalist elite leader of the Ẹgbé, the important chieftaincy title of Ona-Isokun of Òyó. Ọba Adeyemi hosted the Ẹgbé's second annual general assembly and donated £150 to its endowment fund. His relationship with leaders of the AG was equally cordial, notably with Bode Thomas and Abiodun Akerele, two prominent Òyó natives in the leadership of the regional nationalist party. In 1950, he honored the charismatic Bode Thomas with the important chieftaincy title of Balogun of Òyó, and in the 1951 regional elections he actively supported Thomas and Akerele in their successful bid for the house of assembly. Following the elections in 1952, Thomas was elected chairman of the Òyó Divisional NA, which had jurisdiction over Òyó town and its hinterland; Akerele became the chairman of the Òyó Southern District NA. Both councils had been under the jurisdiction of Ọba Adeyemi when he was appointed Aláàfin in 1945.

Unfortunately, the Aláàfin's cordial relations with Thomas and Akerele rapidly deteriorated. Through their power in the new council, AG councilors had steadily introduced reforms undermining the Aláàfin's power. For example, the Òyó Divisional NA's native court reforms of 1952 withdrew one of the Aláàfin's main sources of economic and political power by replacing the *iwefa* traditional chiefs with appointees of the new local authorities. Moreover, the partisanship that accompanied the elections of 1950 and 1951 and the new wave of reforms implemented by the regional government encouraged senior chiefs, baales (head

chiefs) of district towns, and leaders of civic groups such as the Ọ̀yọ́ Progressive Union—an influential town-based organization dominated by educated elites—to assert their claims within the new political dispensation.<sup>22</sup> The Aláàfin was no longer legally recognized as paramount. Finally, the AG government's tax program, which introduced the 10-shilling capitation tax and the 4-shilling education rate, together with a new system of collection brought an end to the Aláàfin's 7-year control of tax assessment and collection.<sup>23</sup> The Aláàfin's initial reaction was to withdraw his support from the AG and from affiliated organizations such as the *Egbé Ọ̀mọ Odùduwà*.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, Ọ̀ba Adeyemi openly flouted government policies, encouraging opposition to both regional and local authorities. In early 1953, for instance, along with his son, the Aremo, the "Crown Prince" of Ọ̀yọ́, he actively opposed the new tax policies, encouraging local people not to cooperate with the new local authorities. It was alleged that at a meeting in the *Ààfin* (the palace), the Aláàfin passed a resolution opposing the government's native court reforms by establishing his own private courts in the *Ààfin* and the residences of trusted chiefs. The Aláàfin's courts soon rendered the new state courts impotent, as litigants (especially those involved in matrimonial cases) preferred the prompt decisions of the Aláàfin and his chiefs. The Aláàfin's opponent in the AG-controlled councils further charged that Ọ̀ba Adeyemi's supporters intimidated all those that opposed them. For example, in a widely reported incident, Bode Thomas, the chairman of the divisional council, charged the Aremo with aggravated assault.<sup>25</sup>

AG councilors soon reacted against what they considered a pattern of abuse of power by the Aláàfin. An anti-Aláàfin group, consisting of AG politicians and some senior Oyomesi chiefs, mounted a campaign accusing Aláàfin Adeyemi and the Aremo of autocracy and sabotaging the AG regional government's tax, local government, and native court laws. Following various punitive measures by the regional and local governments—including a significant reduction in the Aláàfin's annual salary, the cancellation of the Aremo's salary, a council resolution rejecting Ọ̀ba Adeyemi II as Aláàfin, and the banishment of the Aremo from Ọ̀yọ́ town—Aláàfin Adeyemi publicly endorsed the opposition party, the NCNC, and the *Egbé Ọ̀mọ Ọ̀yọ́ Parapò* (organization for the unity of Ọ̀yọ́ natives), a populist town-based party that had formed an alliance with the regional opposition party to defend the Aláàfin against AG regional government and Ọ̀yọ́ local government assault. With renewed support from influential native sons of Ọ̀yọ́, the Aláàfin gained fresh confidence, campaigning against the AG in the 1954 local government elections. The AG-controlled council acted swiftly, this time insisting that the AG regional government depose ọ̀ba Adeyemi as Aláàfin.

Aláàfin Adeyemi's endorsement of the NCNC-*Egbé Ọ̀mọ Ọ̀yọ́ Parapò* alliance dampened any lingering spirit of reconciliation. Even the intervention of Yorùbá leaders of thought in the dominant pan-ethnic sociocultural organization, *Egbé Ọ̀mọ Odùduwà*, could not bring respite to this crisis at this stage. The sudden death of Bode Thomas at only 34 further aggravated an already charged political atmosphere.<sup>26</sup> Outbreaks of violence between the AG and Ọ̀yọ́ *Parapò*-NCNC persisted throughout the spring of 1954. The wave of violence reached a peak in

the riots of September 5 in Òyó and several district towns, resulting in the deaths of six people believed to be AG supporters. Many more were seriously injured, and property worth thousands of pounds was destroyed.

In Ìbàdàn, the regional capital, Awolowo and his cabinet saw this incident as an assault on the AG regional government's authority. Given the AG's vulnerability in Ìbàdàn and Iléṣà Divisions (two NCNC strongholds), the party could hardly afford similar challenges in another important Yorùbá division. A delegation of senior ọbas and elders, however, intervened, calling on the premier and the minister of local government to allow them as "Fathers of the Yorùbá People" to find a solution to what was now an open confrontation between the government and one of Yorùbáland's preeminent ọbas. A conflict of this magnitude, they feared, could undermine the AG's authority in Òyó Division and bring the institution of ọbaship into disrepute. The emergency meeting on September 6, 1954, which included leading AG politicians, ọbas, and leaders of the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, denounced the Aláàfin. And at the insistence of AG politicians, ọbas, led by the Ọṣni of Ifẹ and the Alake of Abeokuta, accepted the government's suspension of Ọba Adeyemi as Aláàfin and his temporary exile from Òyó.

Although the immediate crisis subsided, the regional authorities' punitive measures only widened the gulf between the feuding factions in Òyó and its hinterland. Many Òyó senior chiefs and prominent Òyó natives, both at home and abroad, saw the government's stern measures as an affront to the revered institution of the Aláàfin and an insult to their ancestral hometown. This response also reflected a growing rivalry between Òyó and Ifẹ crowns. Influential Òyó sons had long believed that the AG authorities favored the Ọṣni of Ifẹ, Sir Adesoji Aderemi, over the Aláàfin. This was only heightened by the Ọṣni's role in the disciplinary action against the Aláàfin. Their concern was not unfounded. By portraying the Aláàfin as a self-serving monarch, averse to progressive change, AG authorities in contrast embraced the educated Ọṣni Aderemi as a model ọba who was committed to the government's critical reforms. As a confirmation of Ọṣni Aderemi's "spiritual leadership" of Yorùbá ọbas and his strong alliance with AG stalwarts, the Ọṣni, who had participated in several constitutional conferences, was subsequently appointed to the largely ceremonial, but highly influential, position of regional governor in 1959. Prominent Òyó notables, chiefs, and leaders of local organizations also passed resolutions condemning the government's harsh position and, in some cases, volunteered to accompany the Aláàfin en masse into exile. Some prominent Òyó AG supporters switched their loyalty to the NCNC.<sup>27</sup>

The colonial governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, accepted the recommendation of the Western Region government to appoint a commissioner to investigate the conflict in Òyó and its district communities. He appointed Richard D. Lloyd, a senior crown counsel, as sole commissioner to investigate the causes of the conflict and to make recommendations to the government. In an inquiry that took center stage in regional politics, AG councilors in Òyó's local authorities, with the support of the regional government, alleged that in 1952 and 1953

Aláàfin Adeyemi had consistently broken state law by rejecting the regional government's native court and tax policies, holding illegal courts, interfering with courts, and encouraging nonpayment of taxes. They further accused the Aláàfin of involving himself in partisan politics by establishing the Egbẹ̀ Ọmọ Ọyọ̀ Parapọ̀ and organizing an alliance with the NCNC. Ọba Adeyemi's transgressions, the AG-dominated local government council insisted, also included "autocracy" and the creation of illegal chieftaincy titles.<sup>28</sup>

With the exception of the charges concerning illegal courts, all allegations against Ọba Adeyemi were dismissed. Commissioner Lloyd, moreover, argued that the new men of power who dominated the councils should have shown more tolerance. Like most colonial administrators, Lloyd pronounced the conflict as a straightforward confrontation between a modernizing elite, committed to the progressive transformation of local communities, and a reactionary traditional aristocracy, uncompromisingly opposed to change.<sup>29</sup> Whereas Lloyd exonerated the Aláàfin and recommended his return from exile, the AG minister of local government officially deposed Ọba Adeyemi as Aláàfin by executive order in 1956. Despite Lloyd's observation, a careful reading of the commissioner's report, including evidence and petition from witnesses, suggest that the conflict was less cultural or generational than political, involving opposing fractions and interest groups.<sup>30</sup> As in Ìbàdàn, this was a struggle over power and distributive resources of the state and over the sources and symbols of legitimacy. The Aláàfin grievances, therefore, became a platform for all those who felt marginalized by the new political dispensation.

## Conclusion

During the decolonization process, the Yorùbá nationalist elites, like their counterparts in other parts of Africa, insisted that they had the legitimate right to political authority because of their education and their commitment to modernizing development. Conversely, their claim to political authority was also based on their appeal to the symbol and myth of "traditional" Yorùbá culture that had been the preserve of ọbas and chiefs throughout the colonial period. While forging alliances and movements of local and regional power and patronage, Yorùbá nationalist elites, as modernizers of their communities, clashed with traditional rulers in the evolving political arrangement of the immediate post-World War II period.

Complicated by the important historical moment of decolonization—especially the competition of nationalist elites for power, status, and privilege, and the evolving political arrangement of competitive party politics, ethno-regionalism, and communalism—this critical period of transition was naturally more ambiguous than the preceding era of the indirect rule system. In Ìbàdàn and Ọyọ̀ Divisions, like most Yorùbá communities, the colonial state shifted from the "legitimizing" system of indirect rule to a new "legitimizing" system of modern governance, development,



and democratic reform under the leadership of an emergent Yorùbá nationalist elite. Responding to these shifts, which centered on the dialectical tensions of tradition and modernity, and the struggle for the distributive resources of the emergent postcolonial state, Yorùbá nationalist elites and ọbas of diverse sociopolitical affiliations embraced multiple political strategies, especially along communal lines. These volatile political developments reflected new political alliances and conflicts.

## Notes

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3. David D. Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change Among the Yoruba* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986).

4. For a detailed analysis, see Thomas Hodgkin, *African Political Party* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961); Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963).

5. For a detailed comparative analysis of the construction of ethnicity during the decolonization process, see A. D. Smith, "The Nation Invented, Imagined, Reconstructed," *Millennium* 26 (1991).

6. See James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (University of California Press, 1963).

7. A. G. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, 1891–1929* (London: Longman, 1971).

8. For detailed discussion of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, see Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947).

9. For a detailed analysis, see Toyin Falola and Dare Oguntomisin, *The Military in Nineteenth Century Yoruba Politics* (Ilé-Ifẹ: University of Ifẹ Press, 1982).

10. Arthur Lewis, *Politics in West Africa* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965).

11. *Government Proposal for the Reform of the Native Court Law in the Western Region* (Ìbàdàn: Government Printer, 1951).

12. Following Ìbàdàn ancestral hometown ideological lines, the party dominated local government elections in 1954.

13. Kenneth Post and George Jenkins, *The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973).

14. See Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture*.

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16. *Ibid.*

17. *Ibid.*

18. F. W. J., *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Ibadan District Council* (Ìbàdàn: Government Printer, 1956).

19. Richard Joseph, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 115.

20. J. A. Atanda, *The New Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Southeastern Western Nigeria, 1850–1950* (London: Longman, 1973).
21. *Western Nigeria Ministry of Local Government*, File 109, Vols. I, II, III.
22. *Daily Times*, 11 March 1954.
23. *Daily Sketch*, 11 September 1954.
24. *Oyo Provisional Papers*, 1/1, 55.
25. *Daily Service*, 11 March 1953.
26. *Daily Service*, 7 November 1953; *Daily Times*, 24 November 1953.
27. *Daily Times*, 11 October 1954.
28. *Daily Times*, 11 September 1954.
29. *Daily Times*, 15 November 1954.
30. For a detailed account of the report, see *ibid.*

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## **ODOGBOLU CHIEFTAINCY DISPUTE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE**

Abolade Adeniji

### **Introduction**

Of all the known existing kingdoms in Yorùbáland in precolonial times, only the Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom managed to escape from the worst vicissitude of the hundred-year Yorùbá civil wars. In spite of the “splendid isolation”<sup>1</sup> maintained by the Ìjẹ̀bú, however, it was only a matter of time before the prevailing exigencies compelled them to respond to the dynamics of instability and disorder prevalent in Yorùbáland at the time.

As one newspaper remarked in the late nineteenth century, “[T]he Ijebu have preferred to live in small towns always, but for greater security . . . they are manifesting a disposition to bring their small towns together and include them within the walls.”<sup>2</sup> The tendency toward federation, however, antedated the late nineteenth century. For Odogbolu, the idea of constituting a federating unit had intensified at the peak of the instability in the Yorùbá country by the middle of the nineteenth century. The instability in Yorùbáland during the period was at once social, political, and economic in nature and could be traced to the decline and eventual collapse of the old Òyó Empire.

While it existed, the Òyó Empire acted as a kind of bulwark against political instability in Yorùbá. Vassal states had been content to pay traditional yearly tributes and neighboring states were compelled to hold their peace. Such was the peace thus engendered that, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century when the Òyó Empire held sway, most parts of Yorùbáland maintained a peaceful coexistence.

By the opening years of the nineteenth century, however, it was clear that the peace that had reigned for so long was becoming tenuous and would soon give way to chaos. In the first place, the economic prosperity and military capability of

the Ọ̀yọ́ Empire had become suspect. The slave trade, which had been the lifeblood of the empire's economy, had become largely unprofitable. The British had stepped up the tempo of abolitionist activities and Ọ̀yọ́ was finding it difficult to export her surplus of human cargo. At the same time, Ọ̀yọ́ could no longer receive the supply of horses from the north because of the problem she had with the Fulani jihadists who had recently taken over power in Sokoto.<sup>3</sup> The inability to procure horses rendered her military might vulnerable.

The effect of all this was that by 1837, the capital city of the once illustrious Ọ̀yọ́ Empire had been laid to waste. Consequently, new states emerged and warred among themselves to fill the vacuum created by Ọ̀yọ́'s collapse. It should be noted that in the 20 turbulent years before the destruction of the capital city of Ọ̀yọ́, almost every major town of the empire had been sacked. Famine and disease swept the land; armies pillaged everything of value and carried away hundreds into slavery. Each new defeat or destruction of a town in the north sent waves of refugees pouring south into Ogbomoṣo, Oṣogbo, Ifẹ, Owu, and Ẹgbáland. As a result, some of the southern kingdoms began to look at refugees as potential slaves for farm work or sale at the coast. Prior to this, the Yorùbá had not been in the habit of selling their brethren to the Atlantic slave traders.<sup>4</sup>

Because Ìjẹ̀bùland was part and parcel of the Yorùbá country, it is reasonable to assume that it shared, albeit less acutely, the sufferings and the dislocation occasioned by this wave of insecurity. The origin of the decision of the eight *orílès* (homesteads) that were later to make up Odogbolu town to come together can be located against the background of this scenario.

In general, two federating patterns are discernible. The first involved the movement of smaller and weaker communities to form adjoining sections of their relatively larger and more powerful neighbors. In this way, the town of Iperu played host to the communities of Idarika and Idena; Ode-Remo received the Iraye community; and Ikenne played host to Idotun. The other federating pattern is characterized by communities who left their respective settlements to jointly establish a new composite town. Well-known formations of this category include Sagamu (twelve towns), Aiyepe (six towns), and Odogbolu (eight towns).<sup>5</sup>

## **Origin of a Cacophony**

The history of migration and settlement in Odogbolu could be said to inhere in the history of the three major chieftaincy families in the town. This can be traced to the fact that since, there exists a tussle for the headship of the town. The various contenders for leadership became so versed in the knowledge of the town's political history (as perceived by each claimant) that an examination of the claims of each group reveals a comprehensive, albeit sectional, political history of the town. But Odogbolu is by no means made up of three homesteads. It comprises eight homesteads each of which migrated from an original settlement (Table 10.1).

**Table 10.1.** Odogbolu homesteads.

Homesteads	Quarters Inhabited	Head
Orule Efiyan	Efiyan	Elesi
Orule Idena	Idena	Aganmoyan
Orule Odoyangan	Odoyangan	Yangan
Orule Odogbon	Odogbon	Olugbon
Orule Odolayanra	Odolayanra (Odo)	Oremadegun
Orule Odo Aloro	Odo Aloro	Aloro
Orule Iloda	Iloda	Moloda
Orule Ikosa	Ikosa	Tami

Source: G. O. Ogunremi and A. Adeniji. *The History of Odogbolu since the Earliest Times* (Benin City: Ilupeju Press, 1989), 10.

Although it is easy to deduce that these various homesteads did come together around 1850 for their collective benefit, it is nonetheless a difficult task to trace how each of them got to its original settlement. One source, however, has suggested that many of the people migrated from Ilé-Ifẹ̀. In other words, some of them came with Ọbanta and others came after him. The legend of Ọbanta relates that he was the son of Odùduwà—the progenitor of the Yorùbá race—by a daughter of Olú Iwa. After the dispersal of princes from Ilé-Ifẹ̀, he traveled first east to Imesi and then south through Ondó before turning towards Ìjẹ̀bù. During this journey, he was involved in many adventures and gained numerous adherents to his party. On entering Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, Ogboran, as he was then called, was at once acclaimed by the inhabitants who called out “Ọba wa nita,” meaning, “the king is outside.” Hence, the name Ọbanta by which this founding hero is widely known.<sup>6</sup> After this, there ensued a dispersal of princes with Ọbanta sending his followers to rule over different parts of the land. Thus, it is possible that among those who established the various homesteads that made up Odogbolu were members of the original retinue of Ọbanta. Indeed the first *Moloda* of Iloda homestead claims to have migrated from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ together with the Ọbanta in the sixteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

The difficulty involved in determining the origin of the various homesteads becomes comparatively easier when placed against the controversy determining the original founder and the head of all Odogbolu chiefs. Over the years, three contenders to the headship of the town have emerged. At various times, the *Elesi*, the *Oremadegun*, and the *Moloda* have all made claims suggesting that the headship of the town belongs to them. It is perhaps worthwhile to pause here to provide an account of these claims and subsequently subject them to historical analysis.

### The Elesi

The Elesi’s claim to the headship of Odogbolu rests heavily on the belief that he was the original landlord of the town. According to him, following the instability

that plagued Odogbolu during the slave raids by the Ẹgbá and Ìbàdàn, coupled with the fear of wild animals that often attacked them at random, the Elesi had sent out his chief priest (*Abọrẹ*) Ogbolu to go and find a suitable and fertile place where all the homesteads could settle down and live together. The claim went further that when Ọbanta came from Wadai, he passed through Ifẹ where he met Odùduwà. At Ifẹ, he gave his junior sister, Ajibade, to Odùduwà in marriage. The product of the marriage was a son named Ogunlana Adepameru. Following the death of Odùduwà, Ogunlana Adepameru and his mother, Ajibade, decided to go in search of their brother and uncle (Ọbanta).

When Adepameru left Ifẹ, probably recognizing the nature of the difficulty he was likely to encounter, he took with him Ogbolu (a great medicine man with the ability to ward off evil spirits, who later became the *Abọrẹ* earlier referred to). On their way, Ajibade, the mother, died at the Ọṣun River near Oṣogbo. Adepameru buried his mother there and with Ogbolu continued his journey to Ìjẹbù-Ode. It should be noted that when Adepameru left Ifẹ, he took with him a beaded crown and other royal emblems, including properties given to him out of his father's estate.<sup>8</sup>

At Ìjẹbù-Ode, the claim continues, Ọbanta, now the *Awujalẹ*, welcomed Adepameru and he was settled at Agunsebi. Adepameru got married and had three sons: Ọgún, a blacksmith who settled at Atiba near Osa; Opa, who settled at a place known as Oke-Opi; and Alere, who opted to stay with his father at Ososa. When Adepameru became very advanced in age, Alere, brought him to Ìjẹbù-Ode where he died and was buried because a royal person was never buried in a farm (Ososa was then regarded as a farm).

The *Awujalẹ* then told Alere to move behind the river Ome to establish his own kingdom with the agreement that any offender who escaped to his domain would be pardoned. All the land behind the Ome River was known as Alekun. Alere became the *Ololu* Alekun and upon his death his son, Ajaro, succeeded him.

Ajaro was later to earn a title for himself when, in a rare show of bravery, he presented to the *Awujalẹ* a live boar (*esi*) during the annual *Erena* festival. The significance of the present lay in the fact that it was used as part of a ritual to enable a childless and beloved *olori* (queen) to have a baby. Thus, Ajaro became the Elesi of Alekun. When he died, he was succeeded by his son, Asalu, who—with his permission—moved further and settled at *Orile Efiyan*. He was conferred with all the authority of his title and he ruled as the Elesi of Alekun. He ruled over Alekun, which included the present day Odogbolu, Okun-Ọwa, Aiyepe, and Eyinwa. Asalu died at Orile Efiyan and was succeeded by his son, Sendugba. It was during the reign of Sendugba that the movement to the present site known as Odogbolu took place. When Ogbolu was sent to look for a place where all the villages could settle together, he came back to report that he had found a suitable place, which belonged to one Nomuye. This was around 1860. The Elesi subsequently entered into negotiation with Nomuye, who finally agreed to give his farm to all the homesteads for settlement. It was after this that Elesi Sendugba sent emissaries to the other seven heads reporting that he had found a suitable place where they could

all settle together and collectively ward off external aggression. Ogbolu was compensated for his hard work and loyalty, and the town was named after him. The Elesi and Ogbolu came first to the town (hence, their location in the center) and thereafter, the other seven villages joined them.

Although this account may be castigated on the grounds that it is full of discrepancies and baseless claims, the fact remains that it has helped in no small measure to throw light on some obscure issues. First, the account confirms the general belief that Odogbolu was founded around 1860. Also, it agrees with the general notion that a considerable portion of the land belonged to Nomuye. Additionally, it lends credence to the fact that the eight homesteads decided to come together for security purposes. However, before examining some of the curious claims, perhaps we should pause here to state the claims of the other chiefs.

### **The Oremadegun**

The *Oremadegun* based his claim to headship on the fact that he was the son of an Awujalẹ of Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode. When he was young, he liked his father's crowns and always played with them. When he grew older, he stole one of the crowns and together with his supporters fled to a place known as Imodi, which was about 3 miles away from Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode. At Imodi, Oremadegun engaged unceasingly in the act of beating his *gbẹ̀du* drum during ceremonies.

The Awujalẹ found this very irritating and ordered that Oremadegun should move away from that vicinity. From then onward, the Oremadegun got his name, a contraction of the statement *ore mu adé gun*, which, translated literally, means "are made away with the crown for good."<sup>9</sup> Oremadegun thus left Imodi and settled at Okun-Ọwa. But because of constant epidemics that plagued him and his supporters there, he soon proceeded to settle at a place known as Odo (Layanra), which is a part of the present-day Odogbolu town. It should be added that at various times, the Oremadegun also claimed to have been the original landlord of the town. The significance of this claim is that it has helped to establish that the ancestry of the Oremadegun can be traced to Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode. Besides, it appears to lend credence to the notion that the Oremadegun was, at one time, an *Ọtunba* in Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode.

### **The Moloda**

As for the Moloda, his claim to being the head chief of Odogbolu was never based on being the founder of the town. Such a claim would have been spurious, for, of the three ọbas, he was the last to arrive at Odogbolu. However, his claim rests solidly on the fact that of the three, he possessed the oldest crown; indeed the other two, according to him, were more or less "capped chiefs" (chiefs of lesser ranks). The first Moloda had migrated with Ọbanta from Ilẹ̀-Ifẹ̀ in the sixteenth century. He was the first crowned head in the Ìjẹ̀bú providence to have had an *Olisa*. Ọbanta and Moloda met Chief Olode and Chief Osi at Ijasi in Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode "when only seven roofs were all that could be said to make Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode town."<sup>10</sup>

Moloda settled at Odepo in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. For the period in which Ọbanta and Moloda stayed together at Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, Ọbanta accorded every respect to the section of the town within the jurisdiction of the Moloda and regarded that part of the town as a sanctuary. Anxious to extend his authority further, however, Ọbanta reasoned with, and finally prevailed upon, the Moloda to move to the other side of the bank of the river Ome. From then onward, the Moloda got the appellation *Ọba dúdú èhin ome*, meaning, “the black king behind the Ome river.”<sup>11</sup> It was nevertheless agreed that wherever the Moloda settled would still be regarded as a sanctuary. Additionally, to compensate the Moloda for the loss of his right over Idepo, Ọbanta assured the Moloda on oath that at his demise, a crown, a beaded pair of shoes, one beaded garment, an *aguren* (Awujalẹ’s messenger), and an *olori* would fall to him as a legacy bequeathed by the Ọbanta. As a result of this covenant, the Moloda was the first to enter the Ọbanta’s palace before his demise was officially declared. The covenant of the Ọbanta is also binding on his successors. The *Moloda*, to date, remains a beneficiary of any deceased Awujalẹ. The Moloda moved into Odogbolu and, being a crowned head from Ilé-Ifẹ, was acknowledged as the overlord of all the local chiefs he met in the town.<sup>12</sup>

### **Untangling the Truth**

A critical appraisal of all the claims so far made reveals that although some of the claims are quite true and reasonable, some are not only untrue, but also ridiculous. The claim of the Elesi, for instance, that Ajibade was the wife of Odùduwà who had a son called Ogunlana Adepameru is supported by either the oral or written information available to historians of Yorùbáland. Also, opponents of the Elesi have argued—with a degree of justification—that Ogbolu was not and has never been a prime minister of the Elesi. Rather, they contend, Ogbolu himself was the founder of Odogbolu. The merit of this criticism hinges on the fact that Odogbolu town derives its name from the contraction of the words *odo Ogbolu*, meaning, “Ogbolu’s quarter.” The puzzle therefore is this: If Ogbolu was given the honor of having the town named after him, what about Nomuye who owned the land? Also, the claim of the Elesi to the effect that he was the one who sent for the other groups to move into Odogbolu town after successfully negotiating with Nomuye has been challenged at various times by the Oremadegun. The Oremadegun claims that most of the land in Odogbolu belongs to him. It was he who gave the others land to settle on and whereas the others were recognized as quarter heads, he was the paramount ruler of the whole town as well as the recognized landlord.<sup>13</sup>

That the Oremadegun was from the royal lineage of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode appears to be quite true. What is doubtful, however, is the claim that he was the offspring of Awujalẹ Ekewa Olú (Obanuwa); the Awujalẹ Obanuwa is listed as the tenth Awujalẹ of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. Thus, if the claim is true, then logic dictates that the Oremadegun founded Odogbolu hundreds of years ago. But we do know that Odogbolu is by no means an ancient town. It was the creation of the slave wars and raids carried out



by Ẹgbá and Ìbàdàn raiders during the middle of the nineteenth century. Thus, if it is true that the Oremadegun did establish a settlement, it must have been none other than Odo Layanra, situated at its *orílè*. Perhaps because of the fact that he was a prince living in the settlement for quite some time, the Oremadegun felt reasonably justified to make the claim that the other chiefs met him there.

The claim of the Moloda that he was a crowned head who migrated from Ilé-Ifè together with Ọbanta is largely true. At various times, the claim has been supported by the Awujalẹ.<sup>14</sup> But opponents of the Moloda have taken pains to point out that the Moloda did not leave Ìjẹbú-Ode on account of the Awujalẹ's wish to extend his territory. Rather, they contend, he was forced to flee after having refused to respect the authority of the Awujalẹ to whom he was a very junior half-brother. A much more serious allegation, however, has it that he was sent out of Ìjẹbú-Ode after having tried to cohabit with one of the Awujalẹ's *oloris*.

From this mass of contradictory and sometimes confusing information, one could in the main glean the following facts. By around 1850, eight homesteads left their original settlements and headed for the present Odogbolu town. Apparently, most did not stay too far away from the site. The land on which they settled belonged to one Nomuye; hence, it was known as *Irapa Nomuye* (Nomuye's farmland). Their coming together was largely informed by the need for collective security. Of note, however, is the fact that when they came together, the issue of who would be the overall head was not of primary importance.<sup>15</sup> Rather, the need for collective security was placed over and above all other considerations. They lived in peace and shared many things in common. They intermarried and shared market places together. Colonial rule appeared to have shattered this unity.

## Colonial Rule and the Intensification of Disunity

The defeat of the Ìjẹbú army by a British-led expeditionary force at Magbon in May 1892 marked the last days of the Ìjẹbú Kingdom and the dawn of a new era for the Ìjẹbú people. In the succeeding years, the Ìjẹbú lost their political independence and ultimately became a part of the geopolitical entity that evolved as Nigeria in 1914. With the advent of colonialism came the introduction of the Lugardian system. The attempt at indirect rule brought about the Native Administration system under which indigenous rulers were to continue to rule, but under the supervision of British colonial officers.

It appears that before the introduction of the Native Administration system, there existed a league of rulers in the Ìjẹbú Province (excluding Ìjẹbú Remo). This league included the Awujalẹ of Ìjẹbú-Ode, the *Ajalorun* of Ìjẹbú Ifẹ, the *Olowu* of Owu Ikija, the *Dagburewe* of Idowa, and the Moloda of Odogbolu. Indeed, each of the members of the league except the *Dagburewe* received a beaded staff as mark of government recognition.<sup>16</sup> Upon the introduction of the Native Administration system, however, a provision was made for all the other ọbas, including the *Akarigbo* of Ìjẹbú Remo, in the Native Administration budget for the

**Table 10.2.** Salaries of the Native Administration.

Title of Ruler	Salary per Annum Before Depression (£)	Salary per Annum After Depression (£)
The Awujale*	1,600	1,350
The Akarigbo	700	600
The Ajalorun*	400	325
The Olowu*	350	300
The Dagburewe*	350	300
The Olisa of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode†	450	350
The Orimolusi of Ìjẹ̀bù Igbo†	250	225

Source. NAI File No. 1993 Ije Prof. 1.

\*Members of the old league of five rulers.

†Not rulers, but local chiefs lower in rank than a district head.

payment of salaries and allowances. Curiously, the Moloda was left out of this arrangement, ostensibly because of the alleged support he gave to Prince Adekoya in Ademola–Adekoya imbroglio of 1916 (Table 10.2).<sup>17</sup>

Thus, whereas four of the five rulers who were members of the old league were given reasonable consideration in the distribution of the revenue accruing to the Native Treasury, the Moloda, although a member of the old league, was relegated to the rank of a “quarter” chief and was made to share equally with the Oremadegun and Elesi (who were in 1917 made joint presidents of the Native Court) the paltry sum of £48 per annum, representing an average sum of £16 per annum to each of the chiefs. In the meantime, even the *Olisa* of Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode and the *Orimolusi* of Ìjẹ̀bù Igbo, who were neither district heads nor subheads, received £450 and £250, respectively.

But the worst was yet to come. In 1927, the Oremadegun in a dramatic move was made the overall head of the whole town. The Moloda, this time with the support of the Elesi, vigorously protested this move and the whole town became divided against itself. Such was the degree of tension raised that mutual suspicion reached its peak as citizens of rival quarters refused to have anything to do with each other. But what informed this sudden elevation of the Oremadegun?

The only plausible answer appears to be that the episode was part of the decadence that characterized the reign of Awujale Adenuga in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode at the time. The Awujale’s court in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode had become notorious for all kinds of malpractice, especially those that had to do with the recommendation of rival candidates to position of authority. Among other allegations, he was found guilty of recommending an unqualified candidate as the *Onipe* of Ibu after collecting a substantial sum of money as bribe.<sup>18</sup> Indeed the Moloda, in a petition written in 1936 had cause to refer to this unfortunate era when according to him:

Chieftaincy dispute was . . . the sure source of steady income . . . and the chiefest (sic) item of bribery and corruption or in plain language a windfall to the Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode aristocrats.<sup>19</sup>

Such was the notoriety of the Awujalẹ that on February 4, 1929, he was deposed and exiled to Ìlọrin. Various punishments were also imposed on his close associates. It should be added that the sudden appointment of the Oremadegun as the head chief of Odogbolu should be seen as characteristic of the incumbent Awujalẹ's reign.

That the Oremadegun had an uneasy time in trying to foist his authority on the town is borne out by his constant request for support and reassurance from the Awujalẹ. In September 1924, for example, the Awujalẹ, in a private letter to the Oremadegun, assured him "not to worry" because "you are the chief of Odogbolu."<sup>20</sup> Referring to the protest letter earlier sent by the Moloda to Lagos, he remarked: "those who went to Lagos to lavish their money should return failingly [*sic*] in my present [*sic*] through God's help."<sup>21</sup> Again in 1926, the Awujalẹ persuaded the acting district officer, Mr. S. Cook, to reassure the Oremadegun that "You are the chief and only President in Odogbolu."<sup>22</sup> The letter further stressed that "the Moloda is to obey your lawful orders in connection with your office."<sup>23</sup>

The official recognition secured by the Oremadegun, far from legitimizing his authority, appears to have undermined his acceptability, for it had the untended effect of uniting the Elesi and the Moloda together in opposing his pretensions. In July 1935, Moloda James Idowu forwarded to the lieutenant governor of the Southern Province of Nigeria a detailed and emotional petition in which he complained about the unfair treatment meted to him over the years.<sup>24</sup> The significance of this petition is that, in September, it was followed by another one in which notable chiefs of the town, led by the Elesi, Chief Onagoruwa, and seven others, supported the Moloda's claim and pledged their loyalty to him.<sup>25</sup> Because the Awujalẹ was the consenting authority for chieftaincy classification in Ìjẹbùland, the matter was referred to him.

In response, the Awujalẹ, Adesanya Gbelegbuwa II, submitted that because the Elesi was prepared to surrender his claim to headship in favor of the Moloda and because the Moloda's aspirations were duly supported by other important chiefs at Odogbolu and the Odogbolu Advisory Committee, the seniority of the Moloda should be recognized and he should be paid £30 per annum, while the Oremadegun and the Elesi should be paid £24 per annum each from court sitting fines.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately for Odogbolu, this suggestion, laudable as it appears, did not put an end to the headship crisis, for the Oremadegun remained obstinate and uncompromising.

In 1944, the headship struggle in Odogbolu entered a new phase with the demise of Moloda James Idowu and the appointment of Josiah Maboroku Sheyin as the new Moloda. Josiah Sheyin was a fairly well educated man by contemporary standards. Following the completion of his early education, he had taken up appointment as a clerk with the Post and Telegraph Service of His Majesty's government from where he rose to the post of second class postal clerk and telegraphist. He was a reasonably enlightened and exposed man, especially because his job had taken him to such far places as Lagos, Minna, Lokoja, Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Potiskum, Offa, and Ibàdàn, among others. Determined to push his

claim to headship of Odogbolu to its logical end, the new Moloda embarked on an elaborate “coronation”<sup>27</sup> ceremony, which itself elicited complaint from the Oremadegun who protested that the ceremony was being planned in a provocative manner.<sup>28</sup>

The unending wrangling continued unabated. Barely 3 months after his enthronement, the new Moloda was engaged in a dispute with the Oremadegun regarding who should provide the ram for the Muslim community on the occasion of the feast of Id-el-Kabir of that year.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, the matter was settled only when the Awujalẹ took it upon himself to present the ram directly to the community. Of course this attempt by both parties is significant; whoever provided the ram was regarded as the spiritual head of the town, especially by the Muslim community. Two months after this, another dispute arose over the ownership of a typewriter. The Oremadegun accused the Moloda of “cunningly” borrowing a typewriter and refusing to return it to him. In his reply to the allegation, the Moloda argued that the typewriter in question was a present to him from the townspeople. The Oremadegun, he argued, could not claim ownership of the typewriter because, in his words, “he [the Oremadegun] was a non-party to the transaction.”<sup>30</sup>

In 1947, the resident of the Ìjẹbú Province made two decisions, which did not go down well with the Oremadegun. First, the Oremadegun was relieved of his appointment as the representative of Odogbolu town in the Ìjẹbú-Ode Judicial Council. The Moloda was put in his place. Second, the Moloda’s stipend was raised above that of the Oremadegun.<sup>31</sup> This move merely worsened the state of animosity between the two ọbas. The settlement of the Odogbolu headship crisis continued to defy any viable solution, and successive governments—first of the western region, later the Western State, and still later that of Ògún State—watched helplessly as the constant strife took its toll on the town’s development potentials.

## Harmony Restored

Following the coup d’état that ensured the overthrow of the Shehu Shagari regime in December 1983, Colonel (later General) Oladipo Diya became the military governor of Ògún State. Being a son of Odogbolu from the Odo quarters, Colonel Diya recognized the need to settle the Odogbolu headship crisis once and for all. On January 29, 1984, therefore, a three-man commission was set up to work out the implementation details of an earlier agreement whereby the three traditional titles should be merged into one, to be known as the *Alaye* of Odogbolu.<sup>32</sup> It was further agreed that after the demise of the present incumbent of each of the three titles—Moloda, Oremadegun and Elesi—there would be no successor. In other words, their successors would no longer claim rulership over the whole town. Instead, they would be referred to as *Olóri Ìlú*, shortened to *Ololu of Iloda*, *Ololu of Odo*, and *Ololu of Efiyan*, respectively. The Moloda was installed the first *Alaye* of Odogbolu. It was also agreed that upon the demise of Moloda, the

Oremadegun should be the next Alaye, followed by the Elesi whose vacant stool had only recently been filled. The Alaye was to serve as a member of the state Council of Chiefs, representing the whole of Odogbolu community. He was also to be a member of the Ìjẹ̀bù Traditional Council. In addition, he was to serve as the consenting authority to the appointment of the quarter chiefs in Odogbolu. He was also to ensure that all traditional rites are performed as and when necessary and generally see to the welfare of the town and its people.<sup>33</sup>

With the Moloda metamorphosed into the Alaye, immediate steps were taken to have an Ololu installed for the Iloda quarters. It was also agreed that the Ololus, following the demise of the present ọbas, should not wear crowns, as they would be regarded as high quarter chiefs. Just as the Alaye was to be the consenting authority for the appointment of chiefs in Odogbolu, the Awujalẹ was also to remain the consenting authority for the appointment of the Alaye. Also, in the appointment of the Alaye, it was decided that there would be nine kingmakers, three each from a ruling house.<sup>34</sup>

It was also agreed that all the quarter chiefs appointed by any of the three ọbas should be considered validly appointed and continue to exist as such, although the Alaye was granted the privilege of appointing a township equivalent of a quarter chief. In other words, there could be the *Balogun* of Odo side by side with the *Balogun* of Odogbolu.

On Saturday May 4, 1985, Brigadier Oladipo Diya presented to the new *Alaye*, Ọba Ismael Idowu Owoaje, the instrument of office. On the occasion, the governor thanked all the chiefs for their understanding and magnanimity. He requested religious leaders to give recognition only to the Alaye either in mosques or churches. Only one seat could be occupied by the Alaye at all times; a separate row of seats could be provided for all the other quarter chiefs including the Ololus.<sup>35</sup>

It should not be imagined that this arrangement was satisfactory to all sides. Very shortly after his installation, the Alaye passed away and rancor once more took center stage. It is worthy of note, however, that in spite of this, the arrangement appears to have lasted and Odogbolu has witnessed relative peace since 1985.

## Summary and Conclusion

What have we learned thus far? We have learned that the creation of Odogbolu was informed by the desire for collective security among the various orúlẹ that came together. We have shown that at the initial stages, the issue of who would be the overall head chief was not regarded as being of paramount importance. It has been revealed that the introduction of colonial rule and its consequent destabilizing effect led to the intense rivalry among the three quarter heads in the town. It has also been shown that at various times, the fortunes of the three ọbas fluctuated in line with the whims of the incumbent colonial officers and the Awujalẹ so much so that by the time of independence, matters had become so murky that not even post-independence government could find a solution to the crisis. The

resolution of the crisis had to await the arrival of the son of the soil who employed a combination of persuasion and subtle coercion to compel some sort of mutual accommodation.

On the whole, there is no doubt that the political strife that engulfed the town for so long contributed in no small measure to shackling its developmental potential. Perhaps the newfound harmony may yet reverse the trend for the better.

## Notes

1. E. A. Ayandele has referred to the years 1800 to 1891 as those of splendid isolation of Ìjẹ̀bùland. See E. A. Ayandele, "Ìjẹ̀buland 1800–1891: Era of Splendid Isolation" in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, ed. G. O. Olusanya (Ìbàdàn: University of Ìbàdàn Press, 1983).

2. *Lagos Times*, May 9, 1891.

3. See J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, eds., *History of West Africa*, vol. 1 (London: Longman, 1974).

4. J. B. Webster and A. A. Boahen with H. O. Idowu, *Revolutionary Years, West Africa since 1800* (London: Longman, 1971), 92.

5. Olutunde Oduwoḽi, "A Historical Study of Administrative and Political Development in Ijebu, 1892–1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Lagos, 1996).

6. This particular version of the origin of Ìjẹ̀bù history can be taken to represent the Odogbolu variant. Other versions can be found, for example, in Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás* (Lagos: CSS Bookshop, 1921); D. O. Epega, *Iwe Itan Ijebu at Ilu Miran* [A History of Ìjẹ̀bù and Some other Towns], 2nd ed. (Lagos: Ifẹ̀-Olú Printing Works, 1934); and E. A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland 1850–1950: Politics, Economy and Society* (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1992).

7. G. Ogunremi and A. Adeniji, *The History of Odogbolu since the Earliest Times to 1984* (Benin City: Ilupeju Press), 11.

8. Oral interview conducted by Miss M. O. Oludemi with Ambassador M. Oye Adefope, Ọ̀tunba Gbadero of Ìjẹ̀bùland, at his residence in Lagos, October 16, 1986.

9. Oral Interview conducted by Miss M. O. Oludemi with His Highness, the Oremadegun of Odo, on September 30, 1986.

10. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof 1.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid.

13. "Petition from the Oremadegun Olukoya to The Resident, Ijebu Province," dated August 4, 1937, in NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

14. Letter from His Highness Ọ̀ba Sikiru Adetona to Mr. J. M. Beckley, permanent secretary, ministry of local government and chieftaincy affairs, May 16, 1966. The Awujalẹ̀ supported in unequivocal terms the supremacy of the Moloda over the two other ọ̀bas in Odogbolu.

15. An interview personally conducted with Mr. Yemi Oyeneye, April 26, 1986, at his residence in Odogbolu.

16. The Moloda claimed that this staff was taken away by the district officer, Mr. H. de la Mothe, ostensibly for verification in 1924, but was never returned. NAI File No. 1193 Ìjẹ̀bù Prof. 1.

17. The Ademola–Adekoya crisis has been extensively covered by Olutunde Oduwoḃi, “A Historical Study,” 80–92.

18. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

19. Petition from the Moloda James Idowu to the Chief Commissioner, Southern Province of Nigeria, 26 June 1936. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

20. Letter from the Ag. District Officer S. Cook Through the Awujalẹ Adenuga to the Oremadegun of Odogbolu, April 13, 1926. File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

21. Letter from the Awujalẹ Adenuga to the Oremadegun of Odogbolu, September 6, 1924. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

22. Letter from the Ag. District Officer Mr. S. Cook through the Awujalẹ Adenuga to the Oremadegun of Odogbolu, April 13, 1926. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

23. Ibid.

24. Petition from the Moloda James Idowu to the Lieutenant Governor Southern Provinces, July 9, 1935. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

25. Petition from the Elesi Onagorua of Efiyan to the Awujalẹ and to the Resident, Ìjẹ̀bù Province, September 3, 1936. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

26. Letter from the Awujalẹ to the Resident, Ìjẹ̀bù Province, 19 September 1936. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

27. The Moloda had earlier been rebuked for referring to his installation ceremony as coronation and for inviting the resident to the occasion. See the letter from the Ag. Residence to the Awujalẹ, September 13, 1944 on the matter. NAI File No. 1193, Ije Prof. 1.

28. “Provocation as a Cause of Strive.” Petition from the *Oremadegun* Olukoya to the Resident Ìjẹ̀bù Province dated September 8, 1944.

29. Letter from the Ag. Resident, Ìjẹ̀bù Province through the Awujalẹ to the *Moloda* of Odogbolu, November 2, 1944. NAI File No. 1113, Ije Prof. 1.

30. Letter from the Moloda to the Awujalẹ, March 14, 1945. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

31. Reaction to this step is well captured in a petition by the Odogbolu Welfare Association (no doubt a sectional association) to this new decision. See Petition from Odogbolu Welfare Association to the Resident, Ìjẹ̀bù Province, March 17, 1948. NAI File No. 1193 Ije Prof. 1.

32. J. A. Oyesanya, *Government Views and Decisions on the Report of the Commission on Odogbolu Chieftaincy Dispute* (Lagos: Lasunkanmi Production Enterprises, n.d.), 5.

33. Ibid., 7.

34. Ibid., 8.

35. An address delivered by the military governor of Ògún State, Brigadier Oladipo Diya at the formal installation and presentation of the instrument of office to the Alaye of Odogbolu, Ọ̀ba Ismail Idowu Owoaje on Saturday, May 4, 1985.

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## YORÙBÁ NATIONALISM AND THE RESHAPING OF ỌBASHIP<sup>1</sup>

Jean-Luc Martineau

In 2003, Claude-Helene Perrot and F-X. Faubelle-Aymar published *Le retour des rois*, subtitled *Les autorités traditionnelles et l'État en Afrique contemporaine*,<sup>2</sup> taken from a conference held in Paris in 1999. According to this volume, it is necessary to reconsider the role of kings and chiefs in contemporary African societies 40 years after independence. Since the 1980s, there has been a reexamination of the previously accepted model, which postulates a dichotomy between, on the one hand, modernity, represented by the various elites who took over the control of the modern states, and on the other hand, “tradition,” symbolized by the historical chiefs. These analyses have been challenged by new ones underlining “a reciprocal mode of incorporation” or of “a reciprocal process of assimilation” by these two groups.<sup>3</sup>

Whereas the new African elites have seen ọbas and chiefs merely as the relics of a past to be fought or forgotten, and social science researchers themselves have described a dissolution of the monarchical institutions and a marginalization of historical elites, today contemporary synergies and new interrelations between these two groups have to be studied. The latest manifestation is the emergence of the “syncretic leader,”<sup>4</sup> who embodies formerly antagonistic legitimacies of power. More specifically, a syncretic leader emerges when an academic, a high civil servant, a diplomat, or a businessman is elected ọba by his community’s kingmakers.

However, the conferment of ọbanship on a man whose profile embodies both modernity and the membership of a royal family is not new in itself in Yorùbá-speaking areas. British institutional reforms and Yorùbá nationalism ensured the permanence of ọbanship long before the 1990s. This raises two series of observations about Yorùbá-speaking areas: First, given the diversification of the recruitment of ọbas and the improvement in their personal capacities, is it permissible to patronize these men and their titles out of our own desire to see democratic improvements in Yorùbá states? Have not, in fact, forms of self-sufficiency and



proofs of autonomy been perceivable among the *ọba* throughout the whole of the twentieth century? Second, it seems obvious that the *ọbas*' contemporary position in the Yorùbá society owes a lot to the specific process of Yorùbá identity building which took place with Chief *Ọbafemi Awolọwọ*, the *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* (society of the children of Odùduwà), and the Action Group (AG).

This leads me to three points. Are *ọbas* with higher education really just puppets? Did these indispensable *ọbas* extract benefits from both the colonial administration and AG in exchange for their support? Between 1966 and the 1990s, did the *ọbas* manage to benefit from their role as ethnic leaders to become self-sufficient actors of their own destinies?

### **Are Ọbas With Higher Education Acting as Puppets?**

Throughout the twentieth century, the educational attainment of *ọbas* has reached such a level that it is difficult to compare them with illiterate *ọbas* elected during the first half of the century. Two elections of *ọbas* in the twentieth century, one in 1930 and the other in 1980, illustrate this phenomenon, which were exceptional at the time but have simply become systematic since the end of the 1970s. I examine each in turn.

#### **The Invention of the Prototype of the Modern Ọba in Ilé-Ifẹ**

In 1930, the resident Ward-Price used his influence to favor the election of Adesoji Tadeniawo Aderemi (1888 to 1980) as the *Ọṣin* of Ifẹ. Adesoji Aderemi<sup>5</sup> was 42 years old and a former executive for several European trading companies in Nigeria. He embodied the ideal *ọba* according to the British at that time. According to the resident Ward-Price, who had met all the candidates, there were five suitable candidates. Each could have been elected for various reasons, but none of the four rivals of Aderemi was as good as him. To Ward-Price, Aderemi was young “and in good health, he writes and speaks English very well; he is intelligent and of good nature but modest, well-educated and of good reputation.”<sup>6</sup> Most important was his education: “He is a very different man from his predecessor. If Ifẹ remains ruled at such a high level, Ifẹ has a great chance of progressing.”<sup>7</sup> The trading companies that had employed him also granted their support to him.<sup>8</sup> However, the process of election of Aderemi did not go completely smoothly. Aderemi received, immediately after the death of his predecessor on June 24, 1930, strong support<sup>9</sup> among chiefs of Ifẹ and the public. The king-makers met in the town hall of Ifẹ on June 28 and 29, 1930. They belonged to two groups: ten chiefs of the city<sup>10</sup> and seven chiefs of the palace;<sup>11</sup> four were missing. During this first meeting, the rule of succession was established. The oracle chose Aderemi from the Irewo district and the chiefs, whom Ward-Price consulted, seemed to agree with this choice. Despite the approval of the election by the governor under the Ordinance No. 14 of 1930,<sup>12</sup> the protests of the unsuccessful

candidates forced the district officer and the resident Ward-Price himself to intervene to confirm the validity of both the candidacy and the election.

The thirteen members of the Kumbusu-Ologbenla house of the concession of Agbedegbede claimed the throne for their family in the name of their ancestor Derin Ologbenla, “captain general” and warchief in 1860, who had been elected *Ọ̀ni* in 1882. They had clearly understood what the colonizer expected from an *ọ̀ba*. Ojo Adedire Ologbenla, their candidate, “is ready to obey faithfully your orders and will have a progressive administration according to the criteria of modern civilization.”<sup>13</sup> The profile of Aderemi prompted criticism from one of his rivals, Prince David Augustus Adeboboye Tokumboh Ologbenla, who alluded to acts of corruption. Prince David Ologbenla said that he did not have enough money to bribe the oracle. A supporter of Adefarakan, S. F. Fajenhola,<sup>14</sup> criticized the promises Aderemi had made to certain chiefs: a car, a job with a salary in his company and £500 for the *olowa*, the *Lowa* of Ifẹ̀, together with a job for his son, a house for the *oronte*, and a house and £500 for other chiefs. These charges were also made by James Adefarakan himself: “He uses his wealth to get what he wants, with the complicity of Olowa.”<sup>15</sup>

In spite of this opposition, Aderemi received the official support of the king-makers who said, despite appearances to the contrary, that he was unanimously appreciated by the defeated families. Nevertheless, they were also eager to legitimize their choice according to modern conceptions, and this led them to add:

He is a litterate man and will help the city to escape from chaos (. . .) we are sure that he will restore our indigenous laws and customs without partiality, and since he was chosen in conformity with the usual rules and ceremony, we ask you to support him.<sup>16</sup>

The protests were relatively few but they forced Ward-Price to open an investigation,<sup>17</sup> which was originally expected to last 2 months. He completed it on the 6th of August. This investigation had the advantage of showing the British determination to neutralize the opponents, and Ward-Price completed his report with an unambiguous recommendation: “I recommend that the choice of Aderemi be approved as quickly as possible to allow the chiefs to return to their public or private activities.”<sup>18</sup> Following this advice, on the 23rd of August the governor agreed<sup>19</sup> to the crowning of Aderemi. First, the purely traditional Yorùbá<sup>20</sup> ceremonies took place. On the 24th of August, Aderemi was informed of his duties. The ceremony of *Soko* (ceremony of the prince) took place on the 25th of August, the ceremony of the *Waoro* (ceremony of propitiation), during which Aderemi asked for the gods’ forgiveness, took place on the 26th of August. On the 27th, he purchased the offerings for the gods and received the chiefs. The priests followed on the 28th. On the 29th, it was his turn to visit the priests of Odio (the first mythical ooni) who told him the sacrifices he would have to make during several ritual nights beginning September 1, 1930.<sup>21</sup> The official participation of the British in the ceremonies took place on the 23rd of September, rather than the 7th of October as the chiefs had wished, and then again at the end of October.

Ward-Price had accorded £100 to Aderemi to fund the first expenses of the coronation.<sup>22</sup> The ceremonies went off very well, according to the district officer:

Aderemi entered the palace where he was crowned. Then at the end of October, he received the staff-of-office from Captain Buchanan-Smith, acting lieutenant-governor<sup>23</sup> of the Southern Provinces. In November, the Ooni swore allegiance to Oranmiyan and seems to have managed very quickly to earn everybody's trust, by making official visits to the different parts of the town. Once in office, he showed real interest in local government and addressed the question of tax revenue, which was coming in very slowly despite the improvement in the conditions of their collection.<sup>24</sup>

The support he had given to the election of Aderemi as ooni did not prevent senior resident Ward-Price from trying to cut his protégé's salary. He must have considered that the *Ooni's* personal fortune was big enough to withstand these cuts. He intended to offer him £1,000 per year plus £40 for the upkeep of his car, that is, less than that of his predecessor Ademiluyi (£1,400). Aderemi pointed out that the expenses of the office remained the same:<sup>25</sup> feed the chiefs daily, pay for the voyages and the ceremonies, and pay the personnel. He won the argument. However, he had less success in 1932 when he asked the district officer, Mackenzie, to fund the improvements in his palace, which "is less comfortable than the house I had before 1930."<sup>26</sup> Likewise, in 1937, when he asked<sup>27</sup> for an increase in salary (without giving a figure) in accord with his position as "first rank oba of Yorubaland,"<sup>28</sup> he had to be reminded of several old rules of good public housekeeping. This salary demand indicates clearly that he understood the role the British wished him to play, that of a federative symbol for the whole of Yorùbáland. He clearly understood the distinction the British were now making between a form of inherited power, tied to an effectively governed territory, and an innovative, symbolic role extending far beyond this territory. From this point forward, it would be necessary to ensure the *Ọ̀ni's* prestige in a regional framework whose contours were yet to be determined.<sup>29</sup>

With Aderemi, the kingmakers of Ifẹ inaugurated a practice that was renewed in November 1980 with the election of the current ooni, Sijuwade Olubuse II. Membership in the business community had become the essential condition for being elected, because it guaranteed the modernity of the profile of the candidate to the throne. Okunade Adele Sijuwade was not a mere former executive in colonial commercial companies. He was a genuine businessman and as such his profile guaranteed his openness to the world and modernity. As a former managing director of several European and African companies, he had represented successively the interests of Leventis, National Motors (Nigeria) Ltd, and Agip,<sup>30</sup> and had already built up an immense personal fortune.

### **Rapid Diversification of *Ọ̀ba* Recruitment Since 1970**

As Cl.-H. Perrot points out in her book, the recruitment of *ọ̀bas* from circles considered far from the local monarchies has recently become more prevalent. For

example, the businessman Jimoh Oyewumi Ajagungba III, *Soun* of Ogbomoṣo<sup>31</sup> was crowned in 1973. On July 27, 1976, Ọ̀ba Iyiola Oyewale Matanmi III, a former chartered accountant<sup>32</sup> and graduate of the University of Lagos, was elected the *Ataọja* of Oṣogbo.<sup>33</sup> He was chosen by the kingmakers for the professional experience he had acquired in Nigeria and the United States. In the same year, the kingmakers of Ede chose another form of modernity in the person of a Yorùbá expatriate living in the United Kingdom for 13 years where he had become rich through trade. In the eyes of his family, who chose him unanimously, he represented individual success. In the eyes of the kingmakers, he embodied the desire for a more complete integration of ọ̀bashi in the modern world.<sup>34</sup>

The election of politicians with administrative careers was illustrated in Iwo where the *oluwo*, Ọ̀ba Asiru Olatunbosun Tadese Ariwajoye, a former UPN member of the local government, was appointed on August 29, 1992. His personal income came from his cocoa and palm tree plantations.<sup>35</sup> In April 1992, a jurist and Cambridge and Harvard Law School graduate, Prince Michael Adeniyi Sonarinwo was elected as the *Akarigbo* of Ijẹ̀bú-Remo. University historian Dr. Solomon Oyewole Babayemi became the *Olufi* Akinrinola I in 1989 at the age of 60. This researcher at the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ìbàdàn was hailed by the press<sup>36</sup> in terms close to those that had greeted the election of Aderemi in 1930. The university career, between the years 1967, at Ifẹ̀, and 1980, at Birmingham where he completed his thesis, was the subject of much discussion at the time. The “first literate” *olufi* had been chosen by the Akinrinola family as its candidate in September 1988. The choice was validated by the military administrator on March 24, 1989, and his coronation on the 22nd of July was considered as the “turning point in the history of Gbongan.” The wisdom coming from his training as a historian was praised as what enabled him to settle an internecine conflict that had divided the town. He asserted:

that the inhabitants of the town who have lived there a reasonable time may no longer be considered as foreigners in spite of their proximity with the Ọ̀yọ̀ of Modakeke. The speed with which he mobilises the administration, the banks and the councils in order to boost agricultural development is equally well received. His efficacy is credited to a mixture of Western education and traditional beliefs and practices.<sup>37</sup>

Over the last 20 years, the quality of the education of ọ̀bas has undoubtedly increased. The kingmakers have demonstrated an increasing determination to place the sovereigns in a position of force, intellectually and financially, *vis-à-vis* the other organs of power. Furthermore, the strategy of incorporating an ọ̀ba into a modernization project is not new. From this it follows that the Yorùbá-speaking area is not simply one example of a larger process happening everywhere else in sub-Saharan Africa. The current implantation of ọ̀bas in Yorùbá political society is not simply the result of the return of the kings and chiefs as a result of the African democratization process in the 1990s as in the case of Uganda and the Republic of Benin. National and regional specificities are important even as part of a more

general trend. The Yorùbá specificity is rooted in the political and administrative reforms of British Nigeria in the early twentieth century.

## **Ọbas and Modernization**

If we take into account the fact that, first, the ọbas in the early twentieth century were able to use new personal qualities against military and civilian hegemonic powers through their intellectual and, in certain cases, increasingly financial autonomy and, second, the successive civilian and military regimes needed the support of ọbas—as is illustrated by various meetings, relationships, negotiations, and even conflicts—may we not argue that it was increasingly difficult for the holders of state power to manipulate the chiefs, contrary to what received opinion would have us believe? The fact that these two groups of people share the same educational background and social codes weakens the effects of a supposed manipulation of the chiefs by the so-called “educated.” It seems more appropriate to speak of a permanent negotiation between the partners.

The 1930s, when the visibility of Yorùbá ọbas strongly increased, were a key moment in the setting up of this partnership for the joint management of Yorùbáland. Before this time, they could not make public appearances or leave their domain, that is, their home towns. The monarchical tradition forbade an ọba to meet other ọbas. Modernization and colonial rule began to change traditions.

### **Colonization and the Ọbas’ Relation to Public Space**

Colonization modified slowly but sensibly the ọbas’ relation to public space and their symbolic role as heads of urban communities. The British forced them to participate in a certain number of imported ceremonies dedicated to metropolitan events such as birthdays of sovereigns, coronations, and the armistice of 1918. Some ọbas also had to attend celebrations organized by governors or residents in the different Yorùbá provinces. As a result of colonization, the need arose to welcome foreign visitors such as the missionaries and European travelers who arrived in Ọyọ from the middle of the nineteenth century. This gave the ọbas new opportunities to appear in public, but this was always in their own towns and never outside the walls of their palace, the *ààfìn*.

From the beginning of the 1930s, the chief commissioner for southern provinces asked the ọba to accompany him in his tour of his area. This was the case of W. E. Hunt, who crossed the province of Ọyọ with the ọba in 1936. The episode was greeted by the colonial administration as an important concession to modernity and the chief commissioner<sup>38</sup> noted that the *Aláàfìn*, who had long been criticized for being authoritarian, had apparently changed his behavior. He proved to be “more progressive” and was starting to respect the new practices. This was especially

praiseworthy given that this tour of his province was a “new and risky exercise” for him.

The colonizers had already modified the organization of Yorùbá festivals and ceremonies (coronation, burials, and religious festivals) as the British authorities had had to fit into the different types of ceremonial. Henceforth, during the coronation, the staff-of-office was handed to the new ọba by the governor or his provincial representative according to his rank. Furthermore, during 25 years of service in the Province of Ọyọ, Resident Ross<sup>39</sup> never failed to be with the ọba during the Bere festival, going even so far as to demand that the Yorùbá lie down before him as before their king, according to tradition.

### **Public Appearances of Ọbas in the 1930s and 1940s**

In 1937, the first real rupture took place with the first conference of Yorùbá chiefs. It was a new, purely Yorùbá festive ceremony as well as a semipolitical meeting. The ọbas were gathered by the British colonizers in Ọyọ. This conference marked a turning point in the evolution of the public status of the ọba and was a key moment in the building of a self-conscious Yorùbá community. The principle of a common conference was conceived by the British as a strike against the independence of the former Yorùbá kingdoms because the public appearance and cooperation of all the ọbas, and the festive context, would be interpreted as the sign of the loss of independence of each city.<sup>40</sup> The outdoor festivals, which accompanied the public appearances of an outside of his palace, were a relatively recent development and would only take place in the inner town and be dedicated to the ọba’s people. Usually during these festivals the ọba had to perform various religious duties between different altars in the different districts of his town. The population would accompany him to the gates of certain temples where he would have to accomplish his religious duties.

Public appearance of the ọbas in the 1930s and 1940s had important consequences; that these conferences were official ceremonies as well as working meetings and festivals. However, the initial, essentially festive character of the first conference on March 31, 1937, was replaced by a didactic and deliberative function. In the beginning, it was a social event and a popular festival in the town in which the conference took place. In 1937, district officer J. I. Outram was very quickly overwhelmed by the cars on Palace Road between the palace of the aláàfin and the Town Hall where the meeting was to be held and by the crowd of musicians. Each ọba had come with trucks full of supporters because it was necessary for him to show his capacity of mobilizing his people and many Ọyọ people were in the streets. The festival in Ọyọ was all the more brilliant for the fact of being new and short (2 days) and because of the aláàfin’s desire to show off after 6 years of decline.

Contrary to the intentions of the British, the festive character of the meetings and the fact that the conferences were an opportunity for sovereigns to show their mobilizing capacity and prestige were orchestrated by the ọbas themselves. In

1940, the costs and ostentation of the conferences became a topic of debate between the *ọbas* and the British. The conferences took place between March and June every year,<sup>41</sup> even during the war. Over time, the British decided to change the function of the conferences and consequently brought together a growing number of participants.

### **Conferences and the Reshaping of *Ọbanship***

The role of the conferences was very important in the reshaping of the *ọbanship* and in its rooting in Yorùbá society with consequences that can still be seen today. Some of the contemporary conflicts between *ọbas* were even partly generated or revealed by the conferences. Between 1937 and 1939, for instance, conferences were purely Yorùbá and were the occasion for the first confrontation via newspapers between the *ọbas* and their communities. In 1937, eight *ọbas* inaugurated the cycle of the conferences: the *Ọ̀oni* of Ifẹ̀, the Aláàfin of *Ọ̀yó*, the Awujalẹ̀ of *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode*, the *Ọrangun* of *Ìlá*, the *Ọwa* of *Ilẹ̀sà*, the Olubadan of *Ìbàdàn*, the Alake of *Abeokuta*, and the *Oṣemowe* of *Ondó*. In 1939, seventeen *ọbas* were invited, all Yorùbá, eleven important chiefs and six minor chiefs. In 1940, several non-Yorùbá chiefs were invited because of an attempt by the colonial government to mobilize Nigerians in support of World War II. Membership remained almost the same: six major chiefs identified as such with their own privileges, all Yorùbá, and fifteen “ordinary” chiefs among whom some were new, for a total of twenty-one participants. The conference that year was different from the previous ones because of the first participation of non-Yorùbá chiefs and on April 19, 1940, the British renamed it “Conference of the Chiefs of the Western Province of Nigeria.” They wished to turn it into a forum to promote administrative and social reforms all over the provinces and not only in the inner central Yorùbáland, even though the most important *ọbas* were still there.

A major change in the way of organizing the conferences took place in 1942: twenty-seven chiefs, more than before, were invited, nine of whom were non-Yorùbá chiefs. These nine were also invited among the twenty-eight participants<sup>42</sup> in 1943 and 1944. Nevertheless, the conference remained essentially a Yorùbá event. The importance given to the ooni of the alake by the British, the preference given by the newspapers to the Yorùbá participants, the protocol, the meeting places of the conferences—everything was done to conserve the essentially Yorùbá character of the festivals. A visible division of the western provinces into several units with an *ọba* at the head of each was thereby created by the colonial administration.

The meetings constituted a break with the Yorùbá way of conceiving local interrelations, and the British were quite aware of the consequences. For the British this change accompanied other reforms. Their aims were multiple. Initially, the colonizers expected to use the popularity of the *ọbas* among their people to bring the Yorùbá to accept these reforms. The topics of discussion were of little importance; the main point was the presence of the *ọbas* in one place from where

they could give a message about the necessity of modernization to their people. Their presence in Òyó and then Ifẹ or Abeokuta guaranteed an audience for this message. And the crowds that heard it constantly grew from one year to the next. There was a joyful atmosphere in the city at the time of each conference: the movements of the ọba in the city, the religious ceremonies in honor of Yorùbá divinities, the Christian masses, and the Muslim Great Prayer at the mosque allowed musicians and dancers to occupy public space as is shown by the reports of district officers, journalists, and pictures in newspapers. But the initial purpose of the conferences, beyond their festive character, was to force ọbas to meet. It was essentially a way to bring ọbas to socialize and exchange their views and respective experiences of government. Thus, the conferences served an administrative purpose summarized by B. Bourdillon,<sup>43</sup> the governor who, despite knowing the independence of southern native administrations, wished to see the ọbas to consider themselves as part of a whole with common problems they needed to address and also able to benefit from the experiences of their neighbors.

However, the fact that made these conferences a major event in Yorùbá history is that they also took on a political dimension, which the colonizer undoubtedly did not see at the time. B. Bourdillon's program was very innovative, but he did not understand its political implications. The importance of the rituals that surrounded the participation of the ọbas in the conferences renewed the "archaisms" criticized by Bourdillon and at the same time gave the conferences their Yorùbá character. First, the festive character of the conferences played a decisive role. The organization of the conferences threw into relief the representative function of the individual within the framework of the community of the ọbas: the ọbas were not consulted as individuals by the colonizers but as a group. The governor's speech was addressed to the group; the response was made in the name of the group of ọbas. Thus, the ọba became part of the group, and this contributed to weakening his personal standing. Second, by placing ever more clearly the Ooni of Ifẹ at the heart of the symbolic and festive aspects of the conferences, the colonizers prepared the way for the ethnicization of politics and the building of identity along regional ethnic lines. At the same time, gradually but systematically, the British introduced a hierarchy among the chiefs, with the first-class, second-class, and third-class chiefs. This was not in contradiction with what has been described. It was necessary to weaken the local ancient "archaisms" before introducing new rules in conformity with the administrative rationalization the British wanted to introduce. Third, among the Yorùbá, if an ọba paid a visit to another ọba it was considered an act of homage or allegiance to him. In fact, when an ọba wished to pay homage or allegiance, traditionally he would send a delegation to represent him. Personal trips never happened. Given this, the case of the *Olubadan* of Ìbàdàn who had been recently promoted posed a problem. He was invited to a festival where his rank, considered as inferior to the rank of the ọba according to Òyó, did not authorize him to sit on the same footing as the aláàfin. The pro-Òyó press criticized the crime of *lèse-majesté* perpetrated against the aláàfin.



The end of secrecy and reclusion seemed to announce a new era. In 1936, *The Lagos Daily News* still described the Bere Festival in Ọ̀yọ̀ as:

one of the rare occasions where the Aláâfin has appeared in public in person under the central porch of the palace . . . a porch which is never used except at the time of these festivities when the Ọ̀ba must appear in official dress.<sup>44</sup>

Bourdillon had a lot of trouble getting rid of the tradition,<sup>45</sup> according to which the ọ̀ba was a sacred and inaccessible figure. In his 1937 opening speech, he hailed the end of the taboo that forbade the meeting of ọ̀bas and encouraged them to mix with their people and be more accessible to them to keep their trust. The end of reclusion had a dual objective. The presence at the conference constituted the first step, and the pursuit of direct exchanges outside of the newly established institutional framework was strongly encouraged. This was further proof that the conference was not an end in itself. The ọ̀bas' work was to continue beyond the simple and brief exchanges of opinions.

To sum up, the ọ̀bas had to accept to abandon their traditional role but at the same time the colonizers created the possibility for the ọ̀bas to reappropriate these meetings. Thus, the British needed the ọ̀bas and certain of them—such as the ooni and the aláâfin—were very aware of this. Their participation at the conferences, which were very popular among the people,<sup>46</sup> reinforced the collective prestige of the traditional chiefs at a time when the growing role of the economic bourgeoisie of planters and traders, as well as that of intellectuals and civil servants, was starting to challenge their authority, and indirectly that of the colonizers.

The pride most of the ọ̀bas felt from their participation in the conferences and from their new role contributed as planned to hide the limits set on their power at the local level, but the main ọ̀bas were able to exploit these changes to initiate a durable moral leadership at the regional level. Although the colonial administration thought that it controlled the situation, the break with the past was obvious in spite of all the efforts made to hide it through speeches about the permanence of traditions. The chieftaincy accepted this situation because they believed it would help in their struggle to survive in a “world in movement.” At the same time that the conferences were becoming regular, the objectives of the British were changing and the conferences became educational events both for the ọ̀bas and the chiefs. Out of several themes, the democratization of the institutions and the integration of the educated elites into local governing circles were the principal concerns of the colonizers. Governor Bourdillon warned the ọ̀bas that to survive in a modern world and keep their position in the local government system, they would have to cooperate with the young and more educated generation:

In these democratic times, no hereditary leader can survive unless he places the general interest of his people before his own interests and his personal pride. I have much sympathy to your desire to preserve your old habits but the world moves very quickly unless

you do move with, you will not be able to continue to occupy the important place that you currently occupy in the governmental apparatus (. . .) over all you must do all that you can to obtain the co-operation of the youngest generations and more educated people.<sup>47</sup>

The warning was perfectly understood by people like Aderemi from Ifẹ̀, who adhered unreservedly to the British project of tailoring the goals of the conferences to the needs of the moment (i.e., raising taxes during the war) and making them events for the promotion of the economic, social, educational, and medical modernization of the provinces.

The ọbas resisted the financial restriction that the British demanded and this resistance is further illustration of the increasing appropriation of the conferences both by the group (which asserted itself collectively against the British) and by individual ọbas (who wished to display their personal prestige). These annual meetings had become a key moment of the Yorùbá political year.

Between 1937 and 1945, the British brought about an internal modification in the Yorùbá political system. There was a weakening of the influence of the ọba and of Ọyọ́ as the center of the Yorùbá-speaking area. The problem of seniority was violently posed by two actions of the aláàfin. In 1940, to ensure the presence of the ọba at the conference in Abeokuta, the aláàfin, who the ọba considered his inferior, agreed not to read the reply to the governor, which was finally read by an interpreter and not by the aláàfin. In 1943, at the conference in Ìbàdàn, the Ọba demanded to deliver the address to the governor as he considered Ìbàdàn as part of his domain, which it had not been since 1934. In the end it was the Ooni who gave himself away in 1938 in Ifẹ̀, his home town.

As part of these developments, the ooni and the aláàfin saw their prestige go up among the people of their respective provinces. However, it is the victory of the ooni over the ọba that constituted the major change resulting from the setting up of the conferences. The festival, having become a workshop, enabled the personality of the Ooni Aderemi, who invested himself strongly in the preparation of the debates and the propaganda in favor of progress, to become dominant. On these occasions the ooni showed his progressive credentials in three specific ways: accepting the change in attitudes, no longer envisioning a return to the former political order, and exhibiting a sensitivity, rare among his peers, to questions of government and administrative modernization. The conferences favored his rise as the indispensable interlocutor of the colonial government because he had emerged as the pivot between the ọbas or chiefs and the British.

After an initial period, there followed a second illustrating great change. The initial change took place between 1937 and 1940 and represented an era of strengthening or the weakening of the influence of individual ọbas resulted in the leveling out of their respective positions. The second change took place between 1941 and 1945 and included the unification and preparation of festivals. Most important, the second period led to the emergence of the Ọṣoni of Ifẹ̀ as a figure who brought together and represented the different ọbas and thereby the Yorùbá

people. From 1945, political developments would follow the ethnic and regional route involuntarily opened by the British.

### **Ọbaship and Yorùbá Nationalism under Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, 1945 to 1966**

The role played by ọbas nowadays in Yorùbá society is the outcome of several parallel processes that were part of the nation-building process after World War II. Accordingly, the ọbas' survival strategies are part of the nationalist process the ooni and the alááfin were wise enough to be part of by agreeing to become national/ethnic symbols of the Awolowo project instead of remaining semi-puppets in colonial hands. This process was rooted in the previous reshaping of ọbaship. The ọba and, more particularly, the image in his community had an important role in the building of the modern Yorùbá national identity. If we follow the different steps in the process of changing ọbaship, we see how the ọbas have adapted themselves to political changes. They have always been aware of their role in the building of modern Yorùbá identity and have been able, to some extent, to protect themselves against the marginalization envisioned by the educated elite.

To understand how the ọbas have succeeded in adapting to political changes, it is useful to follow the different stages of the process. From 1945, when constitutional questions were placed on the agenda of the conferences, the ooni confirmed the pioneering role he had played since 1937. This enabled him to accompany Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ in the defense of the Yorùbá identity and the role of the ọbas in modern institutions. The future independence movement leader named his Yorùbá cultural association the Ẹgbẹ Ọmọ Odùduwà partly for this reason. The attitude of the ooni during the conferences had made him the interface between the world of tradition and that of the educated. For their part, the nationalists and Awolowo believed that they could easily manipulate the ọbas and chiefs who had been apparently discredited by their collaboration with the colonial power. From kings, they had become chiefs under the colonial regime. There were two reasons for this semantic change: to deprive them of the possibility of comparing their situation to that of the British sovereign, but most important to undermine their prestige by reducing their role to that of the colonizer's administrative officers.<sup>48</sup> This strategy failed to take into account the ọbas' capacity to be the masters of their own destiny.

The role played by the ọbas of Ifẹ, Abeokuta, or Ìbàdàn in the organization of the AG (even more so that of the ọba of Ọyọ in his oppositional role from the middle of the 1950s) contributed to their inclusion in the Yorùbá political landscape much more strongly than had been hoped for by the new Westernized elite. The place of the Yorùbá monarchies in the political landscape was strengthened by each peoples' need to see its ọba defend it within the context of the divided Western Region and the pluri-ethnic federal state. Each ọba contributed both to the reinforcement of the sentiment of self-identification of the people to

“ancestral cities”<sup>49</sup> and the perpetuation of his role of mediator in the confrontation between the people and the new Westernized Yorùbá rulers.

The deposition of the aláàfin of Ọyọ in 1956 illustrates the strength of his link with one’s people which an ọba can use. Certainly, in this episode, the ọba was not able to stay in power but the determination of the government of Awolowo to get rid of him indicates his very real disruptive power. For several days after his deposition, the Ọyọ people ignored his successor, Gbadamosi, an AG man, but in the following weeks, in conformity with an age-old practice, they hurried to the ààfin to pay homage to the new aláàfin.<sup>50</sup> It is true that the powers of the ọbas were persistently limited by the legislation adopted by the nationalists of the AG who came to power on February 6, 1952.<sup>51</sup> However, the debate that persisted throughout this period on the necessity of creating an official position for the ọbas within the framework of an assembly of chiefs reveals their essential role in the society. The creation in 1954 of the Western House of Chiefs<sup>52</sup> was as much a victory for the ọbas as for the Yorùbá politicians in mobilizing all the means of assertion of the Yorùbá identity.<sup>53</sup> It is true that Awolowo planned to use the Yorùbá House of Chiefs to advance the interests of the Western Region and considered it as a unifying symbol of the Yorùbá-speaking area, but it was also a framework for personal advancement for each of its members. The process of ọba advancement resulting from the establishment of the conferences in 1937 continued within this new framework, which gave a unique collective tribute for the promotion of regionalism. Like the British before them, the Awoist reinforced the Yorùbá ethnic consciousness by strengthening the symbolic relation between an ọba and the people of his ancestral city.

Of course the AG needed the help of some of the ọba, but some did more than simply support Awolowo’s projects: They survived as a social group with all financial and material interests related to their prescribed symbolic role. The ọba became the central point of each community through colonial administrative officers’ or Yorùbá politicians’ attempts to “use” them. It reinforced the ọba at a time when they were thought to be disappearing with modernization and democratization. Their participation in the establishment of the AG allowed them to survive as a social group and to carry out lobbying with all of the advantages that went with this. After the nineteenth century, during which the relations between the ọbas and their people had been confused, the ọbas now had managed to establish themselves as the central points of reference for each community far beyond what had been imagined by the colonial administrators and the nationalist politicians who had tried to manipulate them. It is true that they were obliged to adapt to the new circumstances, but the missions they were assigned enabled them to reinforce their position in the Yorùbá ancestral cities at the very moment when the rapid disappearance they feared was being predicted. The division of the political process in Africa along ethnic lines is neither the entire responsibility of the former colonial masters nor the sole initiative of nationalists. The political choices of the latter were often the product of administrative and political decisions of the former.

In the Yorùbá part of British Nigeria, the British policy toward the ọbas between 1930 and 1945 to 1947 had two consequences. First, it established an ethnic basis for local politics, which was to be of benefit to postwar nationalists, because Yorùbá crowds were devoted to their ọba and ready to follow him on local and national issues. Second, it also created conditions for the ọbas regularly to renew the forms of their “utility” on the sociopolitical stage in the Yorùbá cities.

### **Military Ọbanship: Honeymoon or Negotiation of Mutual Advantages?**

The coup of 1966 set the stage for a new interaction between the ọbas and a new set of political actors, the military. The initial political choices of particular individuals do not suffice to explain the weight of the ọbas today, and must be supplemented by subsequent considerations. The ọbas’ strategies for survival in politically troubled times strengthened their role as mediators between the communities and the military administrators. This obliges us to nuance the picture of a Manichaean confrontation between, on the one hand, the representatives of the new classes (teachers, civil servants, professionals), seen as the embodiment of republican and progressive values, and on the other, the inheritors of the monarchic tradition, considered as the instruments of militarism and archaism.

Those communities confronted by the necessity of electing a new ọba radically modified the sociological profile of the new representatives. Although they were not able to look outside the traditional breeding grounds of their ọbas, they made strategic choices designed to serve the group interest in the search for state or federal subsidies, as well as to reinforce the position of the ọbas in the cities and in the wider state. Academic research gives strong credence to the thesis of a “honeymoon” as an unequal partnership between the traditional sovereigns and the military, but the strong position of ọbas in the Yorùbá society today mainly results from the effects of individual trajectories and collective initiatives as we have seen.

After the establishment of the first military regime in 1966, a new process reinforced the existence of the ọbas in Yorùbá political society. Since 1945, via the AG, they had become the unifying symbols of the different populations of a Yorùbá national area. After the removal of the political class, they became interlocutors ready to sell their support to the military, which lacked other alternatives due to discrediting of Westernized elites, with the exception of those academics and civil servants who had not yet undertaken political activities and who constituted another possible recourse for the military. The forms of intervention in the public sphere undertaken by the ọbas reinforced the authority of the military for which they constituted a guarantee of respectability and seriousness. This engagement thus legitimized a mode of government with no democratic basis. Although the ọbas were not involved in the decision-making process, they were solicited for the application of the decrees and for propaganda purposes. When a

new ọba was nominated, the administrators or military governors acceded to the idea of the ọba's palace as an obligatory port of call where they would go to consult the ọbas and the main aristocrats of the town who had been convoked during public ceremonies constituting a form of mutual recognition.

The presence of the military administrator at the inaugural sessions of the meetings of the ọbas was obligatory as an absence would not have been understood. But their speeches provided them, above all, with the opportunity to fix the limit of the role of the ọbas. This was particularly the case at the meeting on January 3, 1990, when Col. S. A. Oresanya recalled the first session of the Ọyọ State Traditional Council which had just been reestablished as an official institution by the Military Executive Council on December 7, 1989:

Government believes that with the representativeness indicated by the spread of membership of the state traditional council, grass roots administration will be meaningful and purposeful, since members will be able to transmit government thinking and programmes to their people and feed the government with the reaction of their people to such programmes.<sup>54</sup>

The reestablishment of a consultative council and the institutional recognition of the ọbas within the structure of the modern state was part of the logic of *rap-prochement* between the military and the ọbas, even though the power of political initiative of this council was very clearly limited. However, the prospect of a return to civilian rule threatened the ọbas with a further loss of influence, and they had therefore earned more than a seat in the new assembly, the promise of a salary and an official car. By institutionalizing their participation, the military had made a step backward more difficult. As the military administrator said:

It is not a new thing for a governor (either Military or Civilian) to formalise, in the manner that is being done here this morning the co-operation between the Executive and the traditional Rulers.<sup>55</sup>

The appearances of the military generals next to the ọbas constituted an important moment in the mobilization of the Yorùbá sovereigns but one with an advantage for both sides. Even more than the visit itself, the publicity in the press, on television, and in propaganda leaflets had an important effect on public opinion. The ọbas were involved in the military parades, and the reception of international guests and ambassadors in the Yorùbá cities, and such occasions provided the opportunity of photographing the military officer with his entourage of civilian collaborators and sovereign chiefs.

The small publications provoked by an outgoing military administrator or the chief of the federal state are themselves very revealing about the military's desire to be invested with the support of the ọbas and various sovereign chiefs. In a leaflet of August 1993, a flatterer of the General Ibrahim Babangida underlines the point that President Babangida could have done nothing without the support,

firstly, of his wife, and secondly of the “traditional chiefs” who had rewarded him for his services:

*It was in appreciation of the good services rendered so far to the people of this country that made Traditional Rulers in the country to give IBB several chieftaincy titles. (. . .) In Oyo State during a visit before the creation of Osun State he was conferred with the title of Jagunmolu by all the obas of the state.<sup>56</sup>*

In 1989, the governor of the state of Òyó (July 1988 to August 1990), Colonel S. A. Oresanya ordered the publication of an official leaflet to celebrate the first anniversary of his appointment. The second photograph shows him on his visit to the Olubadan of Ìbàdàn, Yesufu Oloyede Asanike I: the oba was seated on his throne flanked by two soldiers, one of whom was Oresanya. Two other pictures<sup>57</sup> show Oresanya at inauguration ceremonies next to the obas of Ede and Ifedapo. A final photograph shows a visit of the *Seriki Sabo* of Ìbàdàn, Alhaji Shuaib Dikko, chief of the Hausa community of Ìbàdàn. However, in 17 pages of text, not a single line is devoted to these chiefs. The images alone are sufficient to legitimize the results of the modernizing action that the text describes. Colonel A. K. Adisa, governor of Òyó State (1990 to 1991), constitutes an exception to this rule whereby the obas promote the action of military administrators. In a brief leaflet, a compilation of quotations (1991), which closes his period as head of Òyó State, none of his declaration to the various obas is printed. Furthermore, the leaflet published by his cabinet in July 1991 as a record of the work undertaken by the military authorities since 1984, *Military Administration in Oyo State 1984 to Date*, makes no mention of the obas. On the other hand, in *Administration in Pictures, Oyo State*, published in the same year, several photos show certain governors with the obas, but only one of these shows Adisa in the presence of a group of sovereigns, at the launch of the census campaign of 1991. By contrast, there are numerous snapshots of his predecessors side by side with an oba. Colonel Olurin appears in the company of the Ataoja, Oba Iyiola Matanmi III at the festival of Oṣun at Oṣogbo and also at the opening of rural well scheme with the *Olokuku* of Okuku. Lieutenant-Colonel O. Popoola (1984 to 1986) is shown at the center of the *Council of Obas and Chiefs' of Oyo State*. Similar pictures appeared also in the Ìbàdàn press, which was subject to strict censorship.

### **The Oba's Survival Strategy**

The obas have thus renewed the sources of their legitimacy since the 1930s. Under the military regimes, they were the major civilian partners of the military administrators. During these years marked by a succession of economic and political crises, and by large-scale internal or cross-border migrations, they managed to reinforce their links with the expatriate communities and established themselves as strong symbols of Yorùbá identity. This means that they were able to renew the forms of their “utility” in the society. At a time of new types of behavior and new

difficulties, there arose correspondingly new needs to which the ọbas were able to respond. The election of former academics or top civil servants was similarly a response to the new needs of the communities.

The ọbas in the 1980s and 1990s took initiatives that show their willingness to test their ability to maneuver in relation to the power in place. Spectacular events such as the visit of the Ọṣoni of Ifẹ to Israel<sup>58</sup> in 1984 were rare but indicative of their individual strategies for acquiring greater autonomy for the first time since the military coup of 1966. This power of influence compensated for the erosion of their institutional and territorial power. Although the escape was punished by the ooni's house arrest for 6 months, it was nevertheless the expression of a divergence. Furthermore, the end of the house arrest was the occasion for vast campaign of self-promotion by the ooni, which was strongly echoed by the press. Since then, he has confirmed his international status by regular voyages that are less controversial but widely promoted by the press. In July 1988 he visited Trinidad and Tobago for the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the "emancipation." In September of the same year, four newspapers, including the *Sunday Tribune*,<sup>59</sup> covered his visit to the state of Ohio. The voyages of the ọbas within Nigeria also received widespread coverage, as, although only the ooni traveled a lot abroad, all of the ọbas traveled within the country, and these movements testify to their prestige in the eyes of their compatriots.

Moreover, the numerous trials brought by various ọbas against the military administrators constituted clear messages aimed at both public opinion and the military concerning their intention to play a role in public affairs. In many cases, these trials were linked to the organization of chieftaincy. For example, the long-running debate concerning the supremacy of Ifẹ or Ọyọ before the creation of Ọṣun State on August 27, 1991, generated a large number of cases on the part of the aláàfin, which were signs of his own weakness as well as of the strength of his rival. The recourse to the courts was, in this case as in others (succession controversies, land use conflicts, etc.), the means for the ọbas to mark out their domain of action.

The ooni who has no need of public subsidies to live comfortably, has maintained the modernizing policy of his predecessor by supporting the social programs of federal or local governments. He was quoted daily during the 1980s and 1990s and benefited from the clear support of journalists. In 1988, he backed population policy and supported the federal government's policy of limiting the number of children to four. He frequently gathered together "his brother ọbas" to help the poor. He also gave his opinion on political issues, often although not always connected with ọbashi. Traveling through his state in March 1984, he listened to the complaints<sup>60</sup> of local traditional rulers concerning the "deplorable conditions of roads," "poor hospitals," and ruined markets, and he was clearly described by newspapers as the champion of their cause. He called on the Yorùbá to display "unity in diversity" and in 1988 he criticized former civilian governments for their inability to "erect an enduring governmental superstructure which [would] integrate traditional and modern rule to form a unique African amalgam."<sup>61</sup> He also



advised the federal government not to favor any one of the country's religions and to invest more in universities instead of relying on foreign hospitals to train Nigerian doctors, while calling on Yorùbá state governments to provide decent salaries for all ọbas. On income issues, Aderemi was strongly challenged by other ọbas, among them Ọba Lamidi Adeyemi. With local newspapers, and especially *The Nigerian Tribune*, never missing the chance to promote their speeches, trips, or meetings, the ọbas came across as something more than mere puppets. All these interventions contributed to ensuring for the ọbas—and in particular for the main ones—a form of notoriety that enabled them to further their claims during the period leading up to changes in the regime.

### **Protests and Compromises of the Political Elite**

The strong, continued visibility of the ọbas today is explained by the persistence of the mechanisms we have examined. These mechanisms are still operational: the ọbas' ever-higher qualification, their financial independence, and the existence of a nationalist Yorùbá party in the southwest whose candidates are seeking to revive the historical partnership of the AG with the ọbas. However, the periods of civilian rule are not the most favorable for the ọbas. Opportunities for influencing civic life are fewer at such times as, unlike military administrators, civilian governors' benefit from the legitimacy bestowed by universal suffrage and free elections. However, the confrontations they have had with the new civilian rulers may be seen as a sign of the capacity of certain ọbas to advance their own individual interests. Despite the threats of Awolowo, the angry outbursts of Bola Ige against the chiefs and their speeches on the primacy of democracy and universal suffrage over other forms of legitimacy, those two nationalist leaders were constrained throughout their political careers from regularly reaffirming the importance of ọbanship in Yorùbá society so as not to alienate their electors. As all other Yorùbá politicians, they regularly consulted the ọbas and took care to make it known. This did not prevent them from passing laws to reduce the power of the ọbas, whose moral prestige remained nonetheless intact.

Another factor since the 1930s that has contributed to the local entrenchment of the ọbas is that the area over which they reign has gotten smaller and smaller. The multiplication of native authorities, initially autonomous, later independent, the promotion of the baalẹ to the title of ọba, the creations of new states, and the administrative boundary changes creating more clearly defined administrative constituencies for each ọba have all reinforced the ethnicization of communal politics right up to the local governments of today, which always have at their head at the very least a baalẹ or even an ọba. At the same time, the progressive unions of the 1930s, which were created by members of the local educated elite who had migrated to the big cities of Lagos or Ìbàdàn, have been replaced by associations of "sons of the town" (*Egbé Ọmọ . . .*). Like the old progressive union leaders, the current expatriate community leaders maintain strong links with the historic authorities of the cities of ancestors. Both types of structure placed under the

patronage of an *q̄ba* or eminent chief have a correspondent who acts as an intermediary between the expatriate groups and the *q̄bas* whose influence and prestige are thereby reinforced.

The increase in the number of public appearances from the 1930s onward carries with it the risk of stripping these interventions of much of their aura. This pitfall has, however, been avoided as may be seen from the fact that the participation of an *q̄ba* in a public ceremony in one of the Yorùbá towns remains to this day an important event for the majority of the inhabitants. The presence of the *q̄ba* attracts all of the sons of the city to the home town, with politicians and soldiers being among the most eager participants in the festivities. This central role of the *q̄bas* as champions of the identity of their community has undergone several changes of form since the 1990s. Local alliances organized around the *q̄bas* to pressure the federal government into the creation of new states corresponding to the subethnic Yorùbá divisions. Far from being simple figureheads in the race to create new federal states, they have become key figures on account of their particular individual backgrounds in the administration or university sector. The *Soun* of Ogbomoṣo, a former chartered accountant, is not the least important of these campaigners, according to Professor Alex Gboyega, himself the leader of the fruitless campaign of 1996 to create an Ogbomoṣo State.<sup>62</sup>

The political behavior of candidates in recent election campaigns and, significantly, the media coverage show how important the candidates still consider it to be to visit the *ààfin* of the *q̄ba* during these campaigns. This reinforces the conviction of the *q̄bas* that they constitute an indispensable intermediate body in the functioning of the Yorùbá federal states, whether under military or civilian rule. This dimension has recently attracted the interest of social scientists and new lines of research have been opened up by academics devoted to the study of *q̄bashi*p as a political and social reality, and no longer simply a symbolic one as was previously believed. A first attempt was made to synthesize this research in the volume edited by G. O. Olusango,<sup>63</sup> which reevaluates *q̄bashi*p in Yorùbá society since 1966. This volume emphasizes the decisive role of the periods of military rule as well as the deep-rootedness of the historical institution of *q̄bashi*p, and its durability, despite the policies of institutional modernization, in the shaping of this contemporary intermediate body. These analyses, conducted from the point of view of political science, cautiously initiated the replacement of the traditional historiographical figure of the *q̄ba* as marionette by that of *q̄ba* as actor. The periods of “honeymoon” with the military can no longer give rise to a unidirectional reading which reduced the *q̄bas* to the role of agents of the new order and ethical guarantor of the military. Each approach made by the military administrators gave the *q̄bas* the opportunity to advance their grievances, profit from the support they provided, or simply make their voices heard. Furthermore, the agreement of the *q̄bas* to appear side by side with officers brought about such an undeniable politicization of the dignity of the *q̄ba* that we may wonder about the extent to which the *q̄ba* has remained “father of all the Yorùbás.” A certain number of elected politicians do not hesitate to ask this question to justify their necessary marginalization with the return of civilian rule.

## Conclusion

Finally, one must speak of the reshaping of *obaship* that since the 1930s has reinforced the pyramid structure of the chieftaincy. The time when the councils of the chiefs had an influence among the entourage of the *obas* is a distant memory. The emergence of *obas* as “sole native authority” in the Yorùbá-speaking areas is the result of colonization. But far from having neutralized them by surrounding them with the advisory councils in the 1930s and 1940s, followed by the fully executive councils in the 1950s, the British in fact made them symbolic representatives of Yorùbá identity for peoples confronted by ever more rapid social, political, and economic change. The nationalists of the AG took advantage of this institutional construction to form an ethnicist discourse within which the *obas* became the essential unifying symbols.

The question of the place of the kings in institutional systems has been a subject of wider and more sustained research in relation to Yorùbá-speaking areas than for other areas in Africa. Many conferences bringing together *obas*, academics, and politicians are proof of intense intellectual activity around this subject: Local Government Reform in Nigeria Conference (1979), National Conference on the Roles of Traditional Rulers in Local Government (1983), and finally The Conference on the Role of Traditional Rulers in the Governance of Nigeria (1984). But even more remarkable is the fact that all have been organized in a specific political context in which the *obas* have had to negotiate a new role in the changing society: in 1979, on the eve of the return to civilian rule; in 1983, at the end of the Second Republic; and in 1984, after the military coup. Half a century after the creation of the *Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà*, the Yorùbá traditional rulers continue to occupy a central but unofficial place in the Yorùbá social and political system, as is attested by social science research.

## Notes

1. An *oba* is a sovereign whose authority addresses to territorial unit of various size, mostly towns with a rural environment or domain. Each city gives a specific name to its *oba*: *Ọ̀ni* in Ifẹ̀, *Alààfin* in Ọ̀yó, *Alààfin* in Abeokuta, *Soun* of Ogbomoṣo, *Ataoja* of Oṣogbo, *Akarigbo* of Ijẹ̀bú-Remo, *Alake* of Abeokuta, *Awujale* of Ijẹ̀bú-Ode, *Orangun* of Ilá, *Osemowe* of Ondó, and so on.

2. Claude-Hélène Perrot and François-Xavier Fauvelle-Aymar, *Le retour des rois, Les autorités traditionnelles et l'État en Afrique contemporaine* (Paris: Karthala, 2003).

3. R. Banegas, *La démocratie 'à pas de caméléon': Transition et consolidation démocratique au Bénin* (Paris, IEP-Karthala, 1998); J.-François Bayard, “Les sociétés africaines face au pouvoir,” *Pouvoirs* 25 (1983): 23–39.

4. Emile Adriaan van Rouveroy van Nieuwaal, *Sovereignty, Legitimacy and Power in West African Societies: Perspectives from Legal Anthropology* (Hamburg: Lit Verlag, 1998).

5. Rhodes House, Oxford (hereafter R.H.), C 94. R 00798, Dele Awoyinka, *Ooni of Ife Yoruba History* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria, 1992). His complete name is Adesoji

Tadeniawo Aderemi, born November 15, 1889, in the Akui compound, Irewo quarter in Ilé-Ifẹ̀.

6. National Archives of Ìbàdàn (hereafter N.A.I.), Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Ward-Price's report to Southern Provinces Chief-Secretary in Enugu, August 6, 1930.

7. N.A.I., Ifẹ̀ Div 1/1, no. 9, Quarterly Intelligence Report, September 3, 1930.

8. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letters to Ward-Price from *G.B. Ollivant and Co Ltd*, July 30, 1930, from *John Holt Company Liverpool Ltd*, July 30, 1930 and from *United African Company Ltd*, July 31, 1930.

9. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Ward-Price's report to Southern Provinces Chief-Secretary in Enugu, August 6, 1930.

10. The twelve town chiefs are (1) the *Orunto* or *Obalufe*, second to the *Ọ̀oni*, chief of the Irewo quarter but with an authority above the whole Ifẹ̀ population; (2) the *Obajio*, chief of the More and Ilare quarters; (3) the *Obalorun*, Ilode quarter; (4) the *Akogun*, Okewere quarter; (5) the *Jagunwosin*, second to the *Obalorun* for Ilode quarter; (6) the *Obalaye*, second to the *Akogun*; (7) the *Wasin*, who represents Ilare and second to the *Obajio*; (8) the *Ejesin*, second to the *Akogun*; (9) the *Segbunisin*, the *Lukosi*, and the *Apena* second, third, and fourth, respectively, to the *Obalorun*; (10) and a member of the *Ogboni Society*. The *Wasin* and *Akogunwere* were ill and did not attend.

11. The chiefs of the palace, close advisers of the *Ọ̀oni*, were only called for important affairs. They were nine: (1) the *Lowa Jarua*; (2) the *Jaran*; (3) the *Aguro*; (4) the *Osaniye*; (5) the *Arode*; (6) the *Ladin*; (7) the *Lowate*; (8) the *Erebese*; and (9) the *Yegbata*, Emeses' chief. The *Ladin* and the *Arode*, old and in poor health, did not attend.

12. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I: "Upon the death, resignation or deposition of any chief in the Colony or of any head chief in the protectorate, the governor may approve as the successor of such chief or head chief, as the case may be, any person appointed in that behalf by those entitled by native law and custom; and if no appointment is made before the expiration of such interval as is usual under native law and custom, the governor may himself appoint such person as he may deem fit and proper to carry out such duties incidental to the chieftaincy as it may be necessary to perform. The Governor shall be the sole judge as to whether any appointment of a chief or head chief as the case may be, had been made in accordance with native law and custom."

13. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter to Ward-Price, July 7, 1930 and signed by "Adepegba, Adetara, Farotade, Baderinka, Adejenlo, Ojo Adedire, Awawu Odetola, Adegebe, Aderere, Aderibigbe Raji, Adesesan, Adewoyin, Morera Ologbenla and all their sons."

14. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter to Ward-Price, July 22, 1930. It was followed by a praise of Adefarakan, founder of the African Church and man of faith. The same day an anonymous letter of almost the same writing reached Ward-Price. It reminded him Aderemi had been condemned in the past by W. A. Ross (6 months of prison or a fine of £25). It added that the *Olowa* was misgoverning the town and had already been suspended 3 months in the past. He announced crisis and riots in town in case Aderemi would be confirmed. After having written the name of his candidate "Adefarakan," he crossed it out carefully.

15. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Ward-Price's Report to the Southern Provinces Chief-Secretary in Enugu, August 6, 1930.

16. N.A.I., Òyó Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter from the *Lowa* to Ward-Price, July 7, 1930. Fourteen chiefs signed it with a cross. They were town chiefs with the

*Obalufe* (or *Orunto*), the *Obajio*, the *Obalorun*, the *Jagunoshin* (*Jagunwosin*), the *Lukosi*, the *Obalaye* or palace chiefs with the *Lowa*, the *Jaran*, the *Aguro*, the *Erebese*, the *Yegbata*, the *Ladin*, the *Lowate*, and the *Orude* (*Arode*). Seventeen kingmakers attended the meeting on June 28, 1930.

17. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter of Ward-Price to the *Lowa*, July 9, 1930.

18. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Ward-Price's report to Southern Provinces Chief-Secretary in Enugu, August 6, 1930.

19. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I.

20. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, District Officer's letter to Ward-Price, August 27, 1930.

21. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 1/2 File no. 472, Vol. I, The ceremony took place on September 23, 1930.

22. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter of Ward-Price to Aderemi, August 30, 1930.

23. He was the "Officer Administering the Government."

24. N.A.I., Ifẹ Div 1/1 File no. 9, Quarterly Intelligence Report, December 5, 1930. According to the District Officer, the program had been different, but he was not there personally at the beginning of the ceremonies. His report mentioned ceremonies between September 2 and September 28, 1930.

25. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Letter of the Ọṣoni, October 2, 1930. Ward-Price agreed on November 7, 1930.

26. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472, Vol. I, Ọṣoni Aderemi to the District Officer, January 8, 1932.

27. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. Ọyọ 472 Vol. I, Ọṣoni Aderemi to the District Officer, August 17, 1937. Ifẹ-Ilẹ̀sà District Officer Report, August 19, 1937 and response of the Southern Provinces Chief-Secretary in Enugu, October 16, 1937.

28. N.A.I., Ọyọ Prof. 2/1, File no. 472 Vol. I, Ifẹ-Ilẹ̀sà District Officer Report, August 19, 1937.

29. He asked for a compensation to the reduction of his territory during the nineteenth century and therefore of his tax revenues in the twentieth century. His £1,440 salary represented 16.7 percent of the Ifẹ Native Authority revenues in 1938 and 1939, and according to forecasts, this rate was to increase to 19.8 percent in 1939 to 1940. His situation was already that of a privileged ọba because, according to Lord Lugard's *Political Memorandum* (52n, 324), the salary of a sovereign should not exceed 12 to 14 percent of the revenues of his district. In 1938 to 1939, the Alááfin's incomes represented 6.9 percent of the indirect taxes and 5 percent of the District Native Authority Revenue; in addition 14.4 and 10.4 percent of these revenues were allowed to the Alááfin for extra expenses.

30. Nyaknno Osso, *Who's Who in Nigeria* (Lagos: Newswatch, 1990).

31. Interview with Oyewunmi Ajagunbade III, *Soun* of Ogbomoṣo, July 1995, Ogbomoṣo. Before becoming ọba, he was selling imported goods (initially mainly beer from Germany and Holland). He said he has five hotels in Oṣogbo, Jos (Plateau State), and in Ọṣun State as well as other private buildings in other towns and shares in several Nigerian or foreign companies.

32. Emmanuel Ogunde and Co., Chief's Accountant, Lagos.

33. Interview with the Ataoja of Oṣogbo, July 1995, Oṣogbo.

34. Interview with the Timi of Ede, July 1995, Ede.

35. Interview with the Oluwo of Iwo, July 1995, Iwo.
36. "Staff of Office for Olufi Today," *The Daily Sketch* [Nigeria] (July 22, 1989).
37. Ibid.
38. CO 583/214/30 018, P.R.O., Report on Ọyọ Province (1936).
39. William Alston Ross was posted to the Yorùbá-speaking areas from 1903 to September 1931.
40. The deliberate public and festive character, but also a bitterly negotiated protocol, made the relations between individuals clear and contributed to fixing a mental image of the balance of power, in particular by means of press or official photographs.
41. Except in 1943, when the conference took place from August 25 to 31 in Ìbàdàn.
42. Five "first class ọbas," four "second class ọbas," and nineteen "other ọbas" or non-Yorùbá chiefs.
43. Opening speech of B. Bourdillon, 1937 Ọyọ Conference, *The Nigerian Daily Telegraph* (6 April, 1937).
44. *The Lagos Daily News* (December 2, 1936).
45. See above.
46. In Ọyọ, in July 1996, some people among the oldest ones still remembered crowds and ostentation of the 1937 conference of ọbas and chiefs in Ọyọ.
47. Opening speech of B. Bourdillon.
48. M. Crowder and O. Ikime, eds., *West African Chiefs, Their Changing Status under Colonial Rule and Independence* (New York/Ìlẹ̀-Ìfẹ̀: Africana Publishing Corporation & University Press Ifẹ̀), 1970, ix.
49. David Laitin, *Hegemony and Culture: Politics and Religious Change among the Yorùbá* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 16.
50. Interview of M. Ingledow, Acting District Officer in Ọyọ in 1956, Oxford (R.-U.), August 1995.
51. It is not my subject here. According to Ọbafẹmi Awolowo, to break with the past, "we have established democratic local government councils: the Ọbas and Chiefs take their places side by side with elected Councilors in the statutory ratio of at least 3 elected Councilors to not more than one Ọba or Chief. And the administrative officers are confined to their proper role of advisers and inspectors. We passed the epochmaking Local Government Law in 1952." Ọbafẹmi Awolowo, *Awo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960), 278.
52. "The Nigerian (Constitution) Order in Council, 1954, no. 1146, section 24." Supplement to the *Nigerian Gazette Extraordinary* part B, 41, no. 43 (September 3, 1954).
53. O. Awolowo: "We have ensured the participation of our Chiefs in the work of the Regional Legislature by establishing a House of Chiefs." Awolowo, *Awo*, 277.
54. S. A. Oresanya, *My Task, Governor Oresanya's Memorable Speeches* vol. 2 (Ìbàdàn: Sketch Press, n.d.), 235–37.
55. Ibid.
56. A. G. A. Ladigbolu, *The Achievements of Babangida Administration on Creation of States and Local Governments in Nigeria* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1993), 10–11.
57. There are 14 in the brochure.
58. O. M. Laleye and V. Ayeni, "On the Politics of Traditional Rulership," *International Journal of Politics* 6, no. 4 (1993).
59. *The Sunday Tribune* (September 4, 1988).
60. *The Nigerian Tribune* (March 7, 1984).

61. *The Punch* (May 11, 1988) or *The Daily Sketch* (May 11, 1988).

62. Creation of Ekiti State instead of Ogbomoṣo State.

63. Peter P. Ekeh, Patrick Dele Cole, and Gabriel O. Olusanya, eds. *Nigeria since Independence: Politics and Institutions*, vol. 5 (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann Education Books, 1989). See Billy Bitiyong's chapter "The Chiefs," Najeem Ade Lawal's chapter "The Position of the Chiefs," and Kyari Tijani's chapter "The Ruling Elite."

# **PART III**

*Identity and Modern Politics*

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# 12

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## **APPROACHING THE STUDY OF THE YORÙBÁ DIASPORA IN NORTHERN NIGERIA**

Rasheed Olaniyi

In 1956, the defunct Western Region government launched the Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme. The main aim was to produce an authentic and coherent history of the Yorùbá, covering all aspects of the people from the earliest times to the present.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that a tremendous achievement has been recorded in this enterprise, an enormous lacuna still exists in the study of the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria. Although accounts of the Hausa impact on Yorùbá history, particularly for the precolonial and colonial periods, have been offered, only passing references have been made to acknowledge the Yorùbá factor in the history of the Hausa society during the same period.<sup>2</sup> Within this context, this chapter examines the chronology of Yorùbá migration and formation of diaspora communities in northern Nigeria during the twentieth century. It raises the following questions: What were the migration patterns? What forms of identities did the diaspora communities produce? What were their linkages with the Yorùbá homeland? What were their contributions toward the development of towns in Yorùbáland? Of what implication was the Yorùbá diaspora to the socioeconomic development of northern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole? The chapter focuses on the interplay of cultural, political, and economic forces in the formation of Yorùbá diaspora communities in northern Nigeria.

### **Conceptualizing the Yorùbá Diaspora**

#### **Àjò kò da bii ilé (Diaspora Is Not Like Home)**

The Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria is better understood within the historical context of the respective host communities and, indeed, the entire history of

northern Nigeria as a whole. It is equally important to examine the interaction of resources and opportunities to understand the dynamics of Yorùbá commerce in northern Nigeria. For the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, the economic opportunities, business environment, and nature of reception was crucial to their entrepreneurship within the host community. Professor Isa Hashim has offered three explanations why the Yorùbá were accepted in the north.<sup>3</sup> First, according to Islamic tradition, the Yorùbá were regarded as brothers and sisters of the Hausa people because the majority of Yorùbá were Muslims. This suggests why some Yorùbá have been assimilated into Hausa culture or enjoy the policy of accommodation. Second, economically, they were hard working in terms of productivity and quality of work delivery. Third, the Yorùbá shared a myth of origin with the Kanuri. Oral tradition in Borno has it that the Yorùbá and Kanuri were cousins. According to one mythology, the Yorùbá were said to be outspoken and the Kanuri were quiet people who detested discussing their private affairs in public, particularly those issues concerning their sexuality. The Kanuri thus referred to the Yorùbá as *Khairuba*, meaning that “there is no *alheri* in your habit” (that is, you do not keep secret, go away). As the myth goes, it was from *Khairuba* that Yorùbá was derived. There are those who say that the similarity in Yorùbá and Kanuri culture could be seen in their sweet voices and love for singing, particularly among their women.

Very often, diaspora communities construct identities that distinguish them from the host community. The identity can be expressed in terms of settlement patterns and social, religious, political, and economic institutions. *Diaspora* is Greek, and means “scattering.” According to Robin Cohen, *diaspora*, as first used in the Greek classical world (800 to 600 B.C.) implies “to sow widely, to expand.”<sup>4</sup> The concept of diaspora is used to describe a community that has a history of migration, possesses distinctive cultural practices that distinguished it from the host community, and maintains cultural ties with the homeland. Some diaspora members engage only in activities that involve their ethnic group (e.g., herbalists), whereas entrepreneurs and traders may specialize in economic interests involving their homeland (e.g., Yorùbá women *alajàpá*—itinerant foodstuffs traders; Figure 12.1).

*Yorùbá diaspora* is used herein to refer to all those of Yorùbá descent who settle outside the shores of the Yorùbá homeland but maintain sociocultural linkages with the homeland or who continue to maintain Yorùbá identity. Conceptualizing the Yorùbá diaspora could be situated in Robin Cohen’s framework for classifying diaspora, which involves migration from a homeland in search of work and pursuit of profitable commerce, and an ethnic consciousness preserved over a long time and based on a series of cultural distinctiveness.<sup>5</sup> Eades articulates four main types of migration among the Yorùbá that influence the formation of diaspora communities.<sup>6</sup> These were analyzed according to occupational categories. First, there were the unskilled labor migrants of the colonial period, looking for work on the cocoa farms or in larger towns. Second, there were migrant farmers looking for suitable land, especially for planting cocoa. Third, there were the long distance migrants, many of them traders. Trading was a particularly common commercial orientation in the savanna towns of Yorùbáland. Fourth, there was the

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**Figure 12.1.** Women herbalists at Yankura market, Kano. Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi.

migration of the younger educated people to the urban centers, especially since the rapid expansion of education in the 1950s. According to J. S. Eades, kinship plays an important part in channeling migration, as people move to join their relatives in other towns to find jobs. He argues that a steady flow of goods and information exists between home and diaspora. The Yorùbá diaspora includes people who have experienced migration and others who were born and brought up in a new community of settlement. In this way, the Yorùbá diaspora implies that their culture survived, transformed, and remained relevant even when members of the diaspora have not lived in the original homeland. The Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria developed its own political organization influenced by historical specificity and social forces operating in the host communities.

The analysis of diasporic connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. For example, in 1967, the expulsion of the Yorùbá from Ghana led to their migration to the northern Nigeria towns of Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Zaria, and Minna. There were many Yorùbá families in northern Nigeria who experienced cyclical migration and lived in many communities of the region. This greatly convoluted the spatiality of diasporas and produced a geography of diaspora, which was built on multiple localities.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of diaspora becomes imperative in the analysis of the legal status of Nigerians living in communities other than their own when considering the national question on citizenship in the post-independent period. The identity

crisis of citizenship and indigeneity rights within Nigeria calls for a review and redefinition of the term diaspora. According to E. Ifidon, “the level at which citizenship is truly realized is not the mega-state, but the home state or primary group level, where the Nigerian is a subject. Beyond this, a Nigerian is an alien in another state.”<sup>8</sup> The perception of a Nigerian citizen is compounded by the retrogressive provision of the 1999 constitution, which places an emphasis on places of origin and indigeneity rather than residency. In certain situations, it was easier for a person to be accepted as an abstract Nigerian citizen than to be recognized as belonging to the area of residency no matter how the person, group, or family had settled in the area.<sup>9</sup> A problematic factor for ethnic relations in Nigeria is the manner in which indigeneity has been entrenched in the constitution. Both the 1960 independence and the 1963 republican constitutions were progressive on the question of citizenship rights, but the 1979 constitution, on which the 1999 constitution was based, was retrogressive on citizenship. Whereas the former constitution granted citizenship rights to Nigerians in any part of the country, subject to a residency requirement of 3 years in the defunct northern region, the 1999 constitution is completely silent on the issue. The aftermath of this has led to the rise in ethnic conflicts between indigenes and settlers across the country. In several cases, the friction between “us” and “them” has been expressed violently and in terms of molestations.

This study expands our knowledge of Yorùbá migration in the north. Most of the Yorùbá diaspora studies have been carried out through ethnographical and anthropological research covering areas outside of the Nigerian region. An early account of Yorùbá society and the Yorùbá language appeared in French in 1845, notably the ethnographical study of Osifekunde, an Ìjẹ̀bú Yorùbá liberated slave in France. The life story of Osifekunde, studied by M. A. P. d’Avezac-Macaya of the Ethnological Society, Paris, in 1939, constitutes a pioneer scholarly work on the Yorùbá diaspora.<sup>10</sup>

## Colonial Antecedents

The historical relationship between the peoples of northern Nigeria and the Yorùbá runs deep. For more than 500 years before the British rule, Yorùbá merchants traversed communities in northern Nigeria and established their abodes. For example, Yorùbá traders established Unguwar Ayagi and Lalemi quarters in Kano and Bida, respectively.<sup>11</sup> They were assimilated and their descendants today form the core of people in the region. Nigeria is full of examples of individuals and groups who formed settled communities of occupational specialists in societies other than their own. Traditionally, the exchange of immigrants among communities has been part of the Nigerian historical heritage. Societies with centralized political structures accommodated culturally diverse groups with different modes of livelihood within a single political system. Immigrants provided complementary services alien to the host community, which often added value to the economy.

In the twentieth century, the formation of the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria had a linkage with the British conquest and colonial rule. Migration was largely driven by colonial labor policies, commercial opportunities available for Africans, and deprivations during economic crises. For example, D. R. Aronson observes that it was the wage labor of the colonial economy, together with the indigenous institutions of Yorùbá society, that provided the framework for individual migration.<sup>12</sup> Thus, economic pursuits produced a set of Yorùbá craftsmen, laborers, and traders in cities.

Indeed, the British utilized the services of the Yorùbá in the conquest of northern Nigeria. Some Yorùbá served as spies, commercial agents, and members of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF). In 1900, when Lord Lugard took over the colonial administration from the Royal Niger Company, its constabulary was absorbed into the WAFF, which was formed in 1898. For a long period, the force remained largely dominated by the Hausa and Yorùbá.<sup>13</sup> The civil government police force raised for the north included the Yorùbá in its service. In 1908, the force was made up of 240 Hausa, 216 Yorùbá, 102 Beriberi, 53 Fulani, 25 Nupe, and 54 others.<sup>14</sup> In Kano, by 1914, the government police were composed entirely of the Yorùbá ethnic group.<sup>15</sup> Some of the Yorùbá who served gallantly in the British army were rewarded with administrative positions in northern Nigeria. In the non-Muslim areas of northern Nigeria, the British imposed non-indigenous chiefs on the people for the purposes of suppressing rebellion and collection of taxes. For example, in the Abinsi Division of Tivland, Audu Dan Afonja, a Yorùbá Muslim from Ìlọ́rín, was imposed as the chief of Makurdi between 1914 and 1947. He had formerly served as a British agent and spy in the area. In Dekina, Ahmadu, a Yorùbá was imposed as the onu of Dekina between 1914 and 1918 as a result of his role as a member of WAFF in the conquest of Igalaland. His rule was tyrannical and full of extortion. In 1916, he arbitrarily raised taxes from 1 to 10 shillings per adult male.<sup>16</sup> His rule ended in turmoil and he was eventually sentenced to 4 years imprisonment.

The railway construction led to the employment of the Yorùbá in several projects and to their migration and settlement pattern across communities, both rural and urban, in northern Nigeria. In 1912, the completion of the Baro–Kano railway marked a turning point in Yorùbá migration to northern Nigeria. From the northern Yorùbá towns, there were migrations from Kabba, Ijumu, Isanlu, Offa, and Ìlọ́rín to Kaduna between 1916 and 1917.<sup>17</sup> After World War I, more Yorùbá, especially from Ogbomoṣo, Ìlọ́rín, and Kabba, migrated to Kaduna in an attempt to participate in the booming commerce about which they had received information from their family and social networks.<sup>18</sup> From Funtua, Nguru, Makurdi, and Malamadori to Jos, Yorùbá diaspora communities were established along the rail lines, taking advantage of modern communication for foodstuffs, livestock, groundnut, and kola nut trades. By the 1920s, the scarcity of Hausa clerical staff made the British employ southerners in the administration of northern Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the colonial institutions, for most Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, migration occurred within the kinship and social networks. The Yorùbá developed

diaspora communities through migration of kinship linkages from the same town and family compounds.<sup>20</sup> Successful “pioneer” migrants encouraged others to follow, and supportive social mechanisms emerged to connect places of origin and diaspora.

Indeed, throughout the colonial era, migration was a crucial identity among the Yorùbá. Yorùbá migrants in cities were better viewed than their folks who stayed at home. Commercial opportunities in the colonial era influenced the migration of Yorùbá to northern Nigeria. For example, the Jos township market created the pull and Ogbomoṣo people flocked in. Those who had already settled in places such as Minna and Bida could not resist the prospects of making money in the tin mining city. By the end of 1930s, the Jos market was dominated by Ogbomoṣo merchant families such as the Aladire, Aiyetoro, Odefara, Mafoni, Banki, Onilu, Araromi, Magajiya, Tapa, Idowu-Oke, Idowu-Isale, and Sabo, which developed to reflect the identity of the new traders and their cultural background.<sup>21</sup>

Nevertheless, colonial rule created distortions in ethnic relations whose consequences still exist. During the colonial era, the tasks facing the Yorùbá in diaspora changed dramatically from those that faced their predecessors in the precolonial era. In the precolonial era, migration often led to integration with the host community whereas in the colonial period, migration was overwhelmingly marked by segregation.

The establishment of Sabon-Gari between 1911 and 1913 was a central thrust of the British divide and rule system constructed to make colonial rule flourish on ethnic division and the enforcement of segregation. In the colonial era, Yorùbá immigrants in northern Nigeria were British “protected persons” and the hosts were subjects. In the post-independence period, the citizenship status was reversed in favor of the host communities who were regarded as indigenes and migrants as non-indigenes or settlers. The attempt by the British to segregate the Yorùbá from the indigenes failed in Kano and Zaria because of the historical relationships that had existed between them before the British conquest. In Kano, despite restrictions, the Yorùbá Muslims continued to live within the Native Reservation Area (Kano old city) and some Hausa lived in Sabon-Gari.

For the Yorùbá and Hausa, the colonial segregation was ineffective because of historical relations that had existed between the two groups for no less than 500 years before British rule. The idea of segregation was in some ways resisted by the two ethnic groups. For example, the establishments of the townships of Sabon-Gari created some problems for the British in Zaria. As early as 1915, the British found it difficult to keep out “emirate natives” who were neither employees of the government nor of European trading firms in the township area of Sabon-Gari. Hence the British resorted to the system of issuing “permits” to all residents of Sabon-Gari. It issued 1,355 permits: 885 to “nongovernment” and 470 to “government” residents.<sup>22</sup> In Kano, despite the British insistence, Yorùbá Muslims were allowed by the emir to either live in the native area or in Sabon-Gari. By 1937, the population statistics of Kano Township showed that there were 1,903 Hausa residents in Sabon-Gari and 1,547 Yorùbá residents.<sup>23</sup> By 1938, there were 2,040

Hausa (26 percent) of the population in Sabon-Gari, Kano.<sup>24</sup> In 1939, the population of the Hausa in Sabon-Gari Kaduna was 1,568 and the Yorùbá population was 1,093.<sup>25</sup>

The status of Yorùbá clerks, introduced and protected by the British in northern Nigeria, depended on the perpetuation of colonial rule. The host communities felt politically and economically threatened in the public sector where most of the Yorùbá were now employed on a contract basis. Under British rule, inter-communal relations in northern Nigeria as elsewhere in the country were enforced within the political and economic framework of colonialism. The British policy of exclusion created a dichotomy between the migrants who were British protected persons (custodians of Western values) and the indigenous host community who were British subjects (bearers of traditional culture).<sup>26</sup>

## Identity in the Diaspora

### **Odò kii gbàgbé orísun (A River Never Loses Sight of Its Source)**

Identity-based institutions articulated the Yorùbá diaspora and home ties. During the depression of the 1930s, the Yorùbá in the north organized themselves to combat the exploitation of British rule, and as a form of cultural nationalism. The Yorùbá in northern Nigeria articulated their communal goals through different levels of associational civil life of an ethnic, religious, township, and occupational nature.<sup>27</sup> L. Trager argues that the hometown associations served as a source of social and cultural identity among the Yorùbá in diaspora.<sup>28</sup> She demonstrates the propensity of Yorùbá groups to migrate and settle in other communities while maintaining ties with their homeland. Evidence from her study of the Ijeṣa-Yorùbá shows that at the individual level, migration was combined with the maintenance of ties to family, kin networks, and community in terms of remittances, ceremonies, and visits.

These networks served as mechanisms for managing threats of insecurity. Members drew on emotional resources, including friendship and family visits, to strengthen ethnic bonds. For example, in 1942, the Yorùbá Central Welfare Association in Kano formed a local branch of the *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* (society of the children of Odùduwà). It was the creative ingenuity of diaspora members to establish communal and ethnic associations rooted in their own culture. Chief D. O. Sanyaolu offered the association a plot of land where Oduduwa Hall in Kano was built, but after his death in 1960 the ownership of the land and the building was disputed between his family and the Yorùbá community. The formation of ethnic and communal associations constituted a crucial part of fraternal loyalty/allegiance to the Yorùbá homeland. The Yorùbá community was the representative assembly of the Yorùbá associations. It was organized within the framework of Yorùbá traditional political framework, having the *oba* (chief/king), *baṣorun* (prime minister), *iyá egbé* (matron), *òtún* (adviser to the king), *balogun* (chief of



security), and *baales* (district heads). In 2001, the Yorùbá Welfare Association in Naibawa, Kano, donated a new throne to the Yorùbá ọba in Kano State, Ọba Abdullahi Salihu Olowo, in an attempt to rehabilitate the palace and enhance the status of the ọba. This in essence was to give political meaning to their ethnic identity. Among the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria, the institution of ọba symbolized authority, solidarity, loyalty, and the final arbiter in disputes. The administrative setup of the organization has the ọba as the head and an executive council that serves as a customary court. Yorùbá community served as the centralized pseudopolitical institutions that regulate internal social order, communication, and diplomatic affairs both within the community, the homeland, and the host community.

Despite the fact that the Yorùbá have the highest number of legal practitioners in Nigeria, its tradition gives a high preference to settling cases out of modern secular courts. Hence, the Yorùbá community organized an autonomous judicial institution for settling disputes internally. The internal judicial arrangement ensured the social cohesion, exclusiveness, and integrity of the community. Thus, the judicial council adjudicated disputes over financial matters, business transactions, and social issues involving domestic disputes and breach of marital contracts. Of all the Yorùbá associations in Kano, only the Lisabi Club of the Ẹgbá Yorùbá had a “Town Hall” built in 1947 under the leadership of Chief D. O. Sanyaolu. Other associations operated in temporary meeting halls in the houses of influential leaders. Members were often a small fraction of the total number of the Yorùbá residents and, indeed, representative of the entire community.

Ethnic associations generated and disseminated information central to the identity of the community. To a greater degree, the elements of mutual solidarity provided informal mechanisms of social safety nets and security in times of adversity. For example, many of the ethnic associations provided assistance to deceased members by burying them in their hometowns and granted educational support to their children. This communal identity enhanced hometown ties and ensured resistance to cultural assimilation into the host community. Most of the associations were formed as a branch of larger unions with headquarters in the hometown (e.g., the Ogbomoṣo Parapo and Okin Club of Nigeria). Branches sent subscriptions and representatives to annual and quarterly meetings. The Yorùbá in northern Nigeria continued to maintain a close affinity with their homeland over several generations (Figure 12.2). Yorùbá social networks involved maintaining, reinforcing, and extending relationships with the homeland. At both the individual and group levels, these activities included sending remittances, marriage, sponsoring of festivals and events, and child fostering.

Social capital, grounded on ethnic networks, provided a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation in the diaspora. It increased economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, giving them better prospects for employing whatever skills they brought from their homeland. Yorùbá used the tradition of *esusu* and *ajo* (rotating credit associations) brought from their region of origin as

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**Figure 12.2.** Akoko Descendants Union (Kano, June 1973). Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 1973.

a means of acquiring or boosting business capital. Yorùbá women predominantly practiced *esusu* and *ajọ*. In Zuru town, some Yorùbá women entrepreneurs emerged richer than their husbands who brought them to the town.<sup>29</sup> The system of cooperatives and hire purchase schemes enabled Yorùbá men to dominate taxi transport across northern Nigerian cities.

Yorùbá immigrant groups had an additional advantage over the host communities in establishing small-scale businesses by virtue of their tradition of extended kinship and apprenticeship schemes. They facilitated the establishment, operation, and expansion of businesses. Some of the migrants who worked for co-ethnic businesses emerged as entrepreneurs through hard work and savings. Access to the cheap labor of apprentices and journeymen, rather than a large amount of capital, was essential to the operation of artisanship workshops such as auto mechanics, auto rewires, lathe work artisans, and battery chargers. These comparative advantages made it easy for Yorùbá artisans to start workshops with relatively simple technologies and small capital. Production technology was organized around the social relationship of kinship, friendship, and ethnicity.

However, the intermediate economic roles (concentration in credit schemes and money lending) subjected Yorùbá migrants to host hostility and commercial mistrust; however, this further enhanced their ethnic solidarity. This was particularly significant in the case of *Osomaalo* of Ijeṣa-Yorùbá textile traders until the 1970s when they diverted to corn mill and spare parts businesses.

In most of the northern communities where the *kulle* (seclusion of women) system was practiced, Yorùbá women played an intermediary role between the hosts and the immigrants. Yorùbá women were equally active players in commercial

networks and activities that linked regional, urban, and rural economies. This accounted for their retailing trade in household utensils, jewelry, textiles, and agricultural products and setting up of food canteens that employed Hausa men. In most communities of northern Nigeria, the Yorùbá became a powerful economic force, particularly in urban technical services, photography, printing, and auto repairs.<sup>30</sup>

Another factor that reinforced identity was the cultural flow of organized music and theater. Many Yorùbá musicians playing *fùjì*, *jùjú*, and *apala* genres and theater practitioners were invited to stage their plays either commercially or in annual, township, club, and ethnic celebrations. Equally, the evenings on which popular Yorùbá musicians and entertainers such as Hubert Ogunde, Dauda Epo Akara, Ayinla Omowura, Haruna Ishola, Sikiru Ayinde, and King Sunny Ade were invited to play in northern Nigeria illustrates cultural continuity and linkages between home and diaspora. In 1946, Hubert Ogunde took his play *Human Parasite* to the northern provinces—Jos, Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, and Minna—where he acquired many patrons. However, the display of his work *Strike and Hunger* was opposed by the British administrators in northern Nigeria who saw it as southern Nigeria's attempt to incite northerners against the British. In Jos, Ogunde was arrested and fined. The Yorùbá community in Jos supported Ogunde's fight against the British by contributing £100 to fight the case as a national one.<sup>31</sup> In May 1951, he was charged with sedition and banned from staging his play *Bread and Butter* in the Colonial Hotel, Sabon-Gari Kano. He was fined £6 for posting posters without permission.<sup>32</sup> His play was further banned in Kaduna and Makurdi. *Bread and Butter* was apparently produced in solidarity with the Enugu colliery strike of 1949. Such plays that were not provocative, such as *Mr. Devil's Money* and *Highway Eagle*, were staged in Zaria, Minna, Gusau, Bukuru, Kaduna, Jos, Oturkpo, Bida, and Jebba in 1955.<sup>33</sup>

Some Yorùbá in northern Nigeria lived in very poor conditions to accumulate capital. To them, the city was a farm. They lived together and sometimes squatted until they were able to marry and live independent of the person under whose influence they migrated. The interplay between the spheres of the workplace and the neighborhood was crucial to the social organization of the Yorùbá. As the Yorùbá were concentrated into larger communities, their interests became more harmonized and social consciousness was unified. Thus, urban neighborhoods were metaphors for urban villages with the primordial identity of kinship, religion, language, culture, and costume. Yorùbá culture expressed the philosophy of a "back to the land" vision in which traditional attire played a dramatic role. Since 1995, Yorùbá Cultural Day celebrations have been organized as a strategy for the unity, cultural renaissance, and ethnic identity in the north. Many Yorùbá cultural activities are displayed including dancing, a beauty competition, Ayo games, and Yorùbá traditional medicine trade fair. For the second Yorùbá Day Celebration in November 1997, individuals, Yorùbá ethnic associations, religious institutions, and corporate organizations in Kano donated more than 400,000 naira worth of food and drink.

## Religion in the Context of the Yorùbá Diaspora

The commercial and religious interactions between Yorùbáland and Kanem Borno led to the settling down of the two ethnic groups in each other's communities. The Yorùbá in Borno were products of two religious waves: First, Borno scholars who settled in Yorùbáland influenced the migration of Yorùbá students to Borno for Islamic education. Second, Yorùbá pilgrims to Mecca often passed through Borno. Some of these pilgrims identified business opportunities, which led them to settle in Borno.<sup>34</sup> In northern Nigeria, Islamic brotherhood constituted a fundamental relationship between the Yorùbá and their host communities. Thus, although Islam inspired the migration of Yorùbá Muslims, the drive for evangelism motivated most Yorùbá Christians to migrate to northern Nigeria.

The Yorùbá increasingly turned toward the homeland in search of spiritual stimulation. The practice of traditional religions was widespread among the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria. There were branches of the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity and the presence of *babaláwos* (*òrìṣà* priests), Yorùbá herbalists in northern Nigeria. Herbal medicine traders, both itinerant and those in diaspora, often sold their products in major markets.

It is equally noteworthy to understand the dynamics that gave rise to the formation of Yorùbá religious institutions within an ethnic framework. Some of these religious centers maintained linkages with the headquarters based in the Yorùbá homeland. For example, the establishment of Yorùbá mosques such as Ansar-al-deen, Samori-a-deen, Nawairudeen, and Nurudeen, and Yorùbá churches such as Baptist, Cherubim and Seraphim, and Aladura. In Maiduguri, the first mosque with a modern infrastructure was built by Yorùbá Muslims; the first church, the Holy Trinity, was built by some Yorùbá along with some Ghanaians and Sierra Leonians. In 1939, seven Yorùbá colonial workers from Lagos founded the Ansar-al-deen Society of Nigeria, Maiduguri Branch. It was officially launched in 1942, and they completed their mosque in 1948, a modern infrastructure popularly called "Madina Mosque."<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted how Yorùbá religious centers invested in human development through education in the host communities. Some Yorùbá mosques in the north operated their own nursery, primary, and secondary schools. The evangelical work of the Baptist mission in northern Nigeria spread from Plateau, Borno Provinces in the northeast, Zaria Province in the northwest to Benue Province in the south. Ogbomoṣo merchants opened the areas to evangelism. From 1855, Ogbomoṣo had been exposed to the work of the Baptist mission and this continued until the early twentieth century when traders from the town migrated. In 1915, Ogbomoṣo traders established the Baptist Church in Jos; Zungeru and Kaduna in 1916; Dorowa Babuje in 1926; Minna and Keffi in 1924; Kafanchan, Zaria, Kano, and Gindi Awati in 1926; Gana Ropp in 1927; Bida in 1929; Funtua in 1930; Katcha in 1931; and Bukuru in 1932.<sup>36</sup> Evangelism was carried out among the indigenous peoples of central and northern Nigeria, thereby solidifying the early work of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Indeed, Yorùbá had more religious

contacts with the indigenous northerners than most southern Nigerian groups.<sup>37</sup> The first indigenous Baptists were converted as a result of their efforts. For example, apart from visiting Yorùbá traders and civil servants in Kaduna, the Reverend I. A. Adejumbi started working among those Tiv whom the government brought to settle near Unguwan Rimi in 1937.<sup>38</sup> In Kano region, between 1975 and 1994, preaching stations were established at Munture/Bauna. Like the Christian missionaries, Ogbomoṣo Baptist adherents established schools partially to enhance their work and to train their own children and those of the converts who were excluded from the government-controlled schools. Reverend T. A. Taiwo opened the first Baptist Day School in Jos in 1926. In Kaduna, a Baptist school was established in 1926; in Minna and Zungeru, 1927; in Kano, 1929; and in Keffi, 1941. In the 1940s, schools were also established in Jos, Rahama, Bukuru, Mongu, Dorowa, and Gindi Akwati through the efforts of Rev. E. O. Agboola. Some of the schools were placed on the list of government-assisted schools in 1946 or received grants-in-aid from the government. By the 1980s, most of the mission schools had been taken over by governments.

A sizeable number of Yorùbá Muslim migrants established their settlements within the neighborhood of the host communities. Some Muslim members of the two ethnic groups are also adherents of Sufi Islamic brotherhoods, particularly Tijaniyat and Quadiritat. Yorùbá Muslims in northern Nigeria developed an extensive social network with the Hausa host community through intermarriages.<sup>39</sup>

## Postcolonial Experience

Yorùbá diaspora in postcolonial northern Nigeria was composed of the early migrants, their descendants, and the new migrants. Hence, the Yorùbá in the post-independence era can be understood in terms of an historical continuity of the dichotomy between the immigrants and the hosts. In terms of access to resources and opportunities, the distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes was decisive. Although the post-independence era brought about the dismantling of ethnic and residential segregation imposed by the British, migrant communities were confronted with the issue of citizenship in places where they had settled for several years. The residential segregation between immigrants and hosts decreased, as many among them enjoyed better income and education. Across northern Nigeria, Sabon-Gari was transformed from migrant enclaves to merchant cities. Culturally, the significance of Sabon-Gari became even more profound because of the unrestricted nature of interethnic social integration.

In recent decades, religious and ethnic affiliations became major criteria for appointment to political offices, employment in the civil service, and enrollment in schools. There was disparity in terms of school fees paid by indigenes and immigrants. This has led to unequal access to power and resources and to violent contestations and conflicts.

The Yorùbá were among the earliest settlers in Funtua, and they certainly played significant roles in the development of the town. A 1918 report of the cotton market at Funtua clearly indicated that out of the ten buying agents at the cotton market, three were Yorùbá; another three were of West African origin. Alhaji Sule Mohammed, the *Sarkin Yorùbáwa Funtua* (the leader of the Yorùbá in Funtua), observed that:

We want to be recognized as Katsina State indigenes. If we return to Ogbomoso, we would be ignored. Some of us don't even know our towns, but we do know that we have Yoruba roots. We wish that the Katsina State government would accept us fully.<sup>40</sup>

He acknowledged the fact that some Yorùbá who identified themselves with the host communities often benefited from scholarships and employment opportunities from the state government. A high rate of mutual coexistence was displayed in August 1999 to prevent a reprisal attack of the Hausa–Yorùbá conflict in Sagamu. The district head of Funtua, Alhaji Mainasara Idris, turned back Hausa refugees from Sagamu but also appealed for calm among the Yorùbá settlers.<sup>41</sup> Alhaji Mainasara observed that the Yorùbá in Funtua had become integrated with the indigenous community and that it was absurd for Hausa to rupture their time-honored relationship with the Yorùbá because of a distant ethnic strife between the Hausa and Yorùbá in Sagamu and Lagos:

Considering how united we have become with the Yorubas in Funtua, it will be completely irrational that we should want to isolate and kill them. This is the work of rouges, not ethnicity.<sup>42</sup>

According to the *Sarkin Yorùbáwa Funtua*, neither he nor his subjects in Funtua contemplated relocating to their homeland in Yorùbáland:

That will be useless. I have children here who are married to Hausa people of Katsina. I have no intention of going anywhere, and I believe it is the same with may of our people [Yorùbá] here.<sup>43</sup>

Although ethnic conflicts against the Yorùbá were prevented in a rural setting like Funtua, such an effort proved abortive in metropolitan Kano and Kaduna. Indeed, from the middle of the 1980s, the incessant ethno-religious conflicts in northern Nigeria towns has led to the unprecedented relocation of Yorùbá families from the conflict zones to their hometowns or other northern cities. Many Yorùbá have relocated to Abuja, the new federal capital territory, where Yorùbá men are dominant in taxi and construction trades.

After three or four generations in Kaduna, Kano, or Jos, a family might be seen as indigenes, but practical situations sometimes indicated that even after undergoing cultural, religious, and other dimensions of assimilation, such persons could still be regarded as non-indigenes.<sup>44</sup> In October 2000, much fear was aroused among the Yorùbá in Kaduna and other northern cities after the Oodua People's Congress (OPC)/Hausa violent conflicts in Ajegunle, Apapa, and other

parts of Lagos. The Yorùbá community leader in Kaduna, Alhaji Oguntoyinbo, who was conscious of possible reprisal attacks, repeatedly disassociated the approximately 4 million Yorùbá people in the northern states from OPC's activities while the Yorùbá Welfare Forum, led by Alhaji Rafiu Salawu, did the same while appealing for reason to be allowed to prevail. Justifying the fears of the Yorùbá ethnic group about the possibilities of retaliatory attacks, a coalition of thirteen northern youth under the aegis of G-13 disseminated statements that emphasized that all Yorùbá immigrants must leave Kaduna within 24 hours or risk their lives. In a statement entitled: "Who is Afraid," the coalition stated that:

Following the recent organized killing of Fulani cattle-herdsmen in Lagos and the subsequent events in Kwara State, we hereby give all Yorùbás resident in Kaduna, twenty-four hours to either pack out or pay for it. We have followed, with keen interest, the calculated plan to destroy our people with the support of powerful people in the society who have been aiding the OPC members with weapons of mass destruction. We call on President [Olusegun] Obasanjo and the Inspector General of Police to resign . . . .<sup>45</sup>

To some extent, the preponderance of the Islamic faith among the Yorùbá in Kaduna has provided some good measure of reassurance and sense of brotherhood among their Muslim hosts. For example, the quick intervention of the council of Ulama and several leading Muslim clerics, including Sheikh Yusuf Sambo Rigachikun of Sultan Bello Mosque, actually helped substantially toward putting the G-13 threat to rest. Since the resurgence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos in 2002, Yorùbá immigrants have been living in fear of attacks on their lives and properties. Many were displaced and forced to relocate to their hometowns.<sup>46</sup>

Since the resurgence of ethnic conflicts in 1999, largely masterminded by the OPC against the Hausa immigrants in Yorùbáland, the relations between the Hausa and Yorùbá has been transformed from hospitality to mutual suspicion and hostility. The uncertainty and state of insecurity has led to the formation of pan-Yorùbá and multi-ethnic organizations involving Yorùbá in northern Nigeria around the issues of security and peaceful coexistence. In 1995, the Yorùbá Community Northern States Council was formed. Alhaji A. G. Oguntoyinbo and Alhaji Y. A. Makanjuola, who became president general and secretary, respectively, coordinated the establishment of the association. The association further encouraged the formation of pan-Yorùbá groups in the northern states. The Kaduna State Chapter established the Northern States Council, similarly known as Northern Forum. In the executive council were Dr. J. P. Aiyelangbe, Kano (vice president); Alhaji Y. T. Dada of Bauchi; and Chief S. A. Adesina of Zamfara State (Figure 12.3). Others are Chief Akin Fatoyinbo (Gombe), Oba Solomon Olugbodi of Plateau, and others. The council, which is composed of the eighteen northern states excluding Kwara, began its maiden quarterly meeting in October 1996 in Kano. This was followed by meetings in Jos-Plateau, Bauchi, Adamawa, Sokoto, Nasarawa, and Zamfara.<sup>47</sup>

The formation of the Yorùbá Community Northern States was influenced by the sociopolitical crisis that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential

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**Figure 12.3.** Yorùbá community, Kano (1999). Alhaji Adbullah Salihu Olowo (right) Ọba Yorùbá, Kano State ad Dr. Jimpat Aiyelandgbe, President of Yorùbá Community (left). Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 1999.

elections. Indeed, the state of insecurity and tension and ethnic conflicts made the Yorùbá leaders in diaspora formed a pan-Yorùbá association for the protection of Yorùbá migrants through allegiance with host communities and the security agencies. The central agenda of the association is to foster unity and stability, and strengthen the cordial relationship among the Yorùbá on one hand and between Yorùbá and other Nigerians on the other hand. The association has the following objectives:

- a. to foster unity among Yorùbá;
- b. to be our brothers' keeper;
- c. to cooperate and assist ourselves in all fields;
- d. to identify ourselves where and whenever the need arises; and
- e. to seek continuous cordial relationship between our people, the indigenes, the government and other citizens in Northern Nigeria.

For mobilization of membership and solidarity, the association dedicated the month of November for the celebration of Yorùbá Day (Figure 12.4).

In the aftermath of the Kano anti-Yorùbá ethnic violence of July 1999, the National Integration Forum for Peace (NIFOR) was launched on August 23, 1999. The core targets of NIFOR were those Nigerians living outside of their states.



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**Figure 12.4.** Turban ceremony, Kano (5 December 2003). Alhaji Ibrahim Adedimeji Lawal (on the horse) during his turbaning ceremony as *Ọba Yorùbá* of Kaduna. Wearing the red turbans are the officials of the Emir of Zazzau. Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 2003.

NIFOR is an association of Nigerians who are thriving and happy to be living among ethnic groups other than their own. NIFOR was formed as a consequence of the ethnic riots that took place in Shagamu and Kano in July 1999. Dr. J. P. Aiyelangbe, a medical doctor who has lived in Kano for 24 years, the basorun of Yorùbá in Kano, and deputy president general of Yorùbá Community Council Northern States was appointed as the *pro tempore* chairperson; Alhaji Ahmed Zungeru, the Sarkin Hausa in Ìbàdànland, who was born at Ìbàdàn and holds the title of Asiwaju Adeen of Ìbàdànland, served as a co-chairperson. In a passionate letter to Alhaji Chief Bala Abdulsalami the Sarkin Hausawa of Oşogboland, dated November 4, 1999, Aiyelangbe passionately expressed that:

You will . . . remember that members of (NIFOR) like you have a very high stake in the unity of Nigeria, simply because we have intermarried, in fact every fourth marriage in Shagamu is mixed. Intermarriage is routine in Shagamu. People don't even notice it. We have houses and fixed assets that cannot be transferred. We have the clout we have in the place we live, so that if you Sarki[n] go back to Kano, you are an ordinary man, no more Sarki[n]. If I go back to Ondo State, I am no more accepted doctor, no more the Bashorun as this recognition is in Kano-by-Kano people. We need Nigeria. We can do something to keep Nigeria.<sup>48</sup>

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**Figure 12.5.** Yorùbá community, Gumel (27 July 1997). From Left: a) His Royal Highness, Emir of Gumel, Alhaji Ahmed Muhamad Sanni II; b) His Highness, Oba Adebayo Jegede, Oba Yorùbá of Gumel; c) His Royal Highness, Emir of Ringim, Alhaji Sayadi Abubakar; d) Chief Dele Bolarin, Akogun of Yorùbá, Gumel. Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 1997.

At its inception, NIFOR's membership was drawn from the Hausa–Fulani communities in the southwest and the Yorùbá community in the seventeen northern states, but membership has been increased to incorporate all Nigerians living in states other than their own (Figure 12.5).

## **Conclusion**

The existence of the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria has implications for national development. The Yorùbá have lived with other ethnic groups and exhibited the capacity for ethnic tolerance and religious pluralism in northern Nigeria. The migrants pursued and secured economic livelihoods that contributed to the development of the host and home communities. The entrepreneurial drives of the Yorùbá merchants enabled them to recruit labor from their kinship network for the expansion of their commercial base but such a strategy often prevented capital accumulation on a large scale. Kinship networks of extended family were a major strategy in the provision of employment, training, and capital that ensured the preponderance of

Yorùbá commerce in northern Nigeria. Some integrated with the host communities. Integration involved both the Yorùbá immigrants and the host communities achieving a degree of convergence. The integration of second-generation Yorùbá migrants was largely conditioned on how their parents were received in the host community. To a greater extent, the second generation confronted a pluralistic identity of Hausa and Yorùbá. Among the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, there emerged Hausa-Yorùbá, Nupe-Yorùbá, and Kanuri-Yorùbá identities. These are exhibited in attire and the spoken patterns of the Yorùbá in diaspora who felt at ease communicating in Hausa, Nupe, and Kanuri or who mixed the languages together with Yorùbá. The central question is not whether the second generation assimilated into Hausa society, but into what segment of that society it assimilated. Many of the descendants of early migrants have integrated into the Hausa society and became members of the political, intellectual, military, and commercial elites. Others used their integration into Hausa to benefit from scholarships, employment, and promotion opportunities but despised their Yorùbá ancestry. Those who maintained their Yorùbá identity in diaspora often ended up as “marginal citizens” without the right to lay claim to the community where they were born and grew up, or to their home origin where they were less known. Among the last group, however, were those who contested elections and won the right to represent the communities where they lived, particularly at the local government levels.

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# 13

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## **YORÙBÁ-NIGERIANS IN TORONTO: TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES AND EXPERIENCES**

Charles Temitope Adeyanju

At any rate it is clearly understood that the been-to has chosen, been awarded, a kind of death. A beneficial death, since cargo follows his return. Not just cargo but also importance, power, radiating influence capable of touching ergo elevating all those who in the first instance have suffered the special bereavement caused by the been-to's<sup>1</sup> going away... So how close are we to Melanesian islands? How close is everybody...<sup>2</sup>

Until the late 1980s, scholars had conceived of international immigration as simply job enrichment for the economically advanced countries of the world. The social phenomenon of migration/immigration was inexhaustibly explored within the framework of a push-pull couplet. In their scholarly works on transnationalism, Glick Schiller, Basch, and Szanton Blanc<sup>3</sup> emphasize how international migration is not simply about reproduction of unequal social relations; rather immigrants are social agents who are actively resisting their exploitation by maintaining social ties across geographic boundaries. To this end, they define *transnationalism* and *transmigrants*:

as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social fields are designated "transmigrants." Transmigrants develop and maintain multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political that span borders. Transmigrants take actions, make decisions, and feel concerns, and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously.<sup>4</sup>

The conception of transnationalism as a new phenomenon is contentious. S. Mintz, using historical and anthropological evidence, has argued that immigrants and migrants have always maintained social ties with their homelands.<sup>5</sup>

However, global capitalism has transformed the global social space by compressing time and space in an unprecedented way. Therefore, Glick Schiller and colleagues' significant contribution to the study of international migration is their conceptualization of transmigrants as social agents who are challenging capitalist hegemony. In other words, transnational migration serves as one measure employed by ordinary immigrants to resist the domineering power of globalization. This explains the reason why Michael Smith and Luis E. Guarnizo characterize the phenomenon as transnationalism from above and transnationalism from below.<sup>6</sup>

Using a local Nigerian–Yorùbá transnational community in Toronto as a case study, this chapter first reexamines the political economy explanation for migration and argues that there are salient extra-economic factors that are not taken into consideration in its analysis of international migration. Although the data collected for this study show that the embracing of a neoliberal Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) by the Nigerian government in the mid-1980s accentuated Nigerian–Yorùbá migration to North America, other noneconomic factors, including the historically engrained ideology of migration, and psychosexual competition, are equally important. The migration phenomenon, from the perspective of this local Nigerian–Yorùbá community, should be seen as a process in which the agency of immigrants' action and the structures that channel their decisions to migrate conflate over time and space. On the basis of these two points—extra-economic considerations and agency of immigrants—the chapter suggests transnationalism as a conceptual framework for understanding international migration in a fast-changing world for two reasons. First, transnationalism elaborates on factors motivating migration, especially the complex articulation of diverse motives, which render the classic push–pull model as oversocializing and inadequate in understanding the human condition. Second, transnationalism broadens our knowledge of migration by addressing the agentic role of immigrants, in the form of resistance and challenge to class and racial inequalities prevalent under the regime of “post-modern capitalism.”<sup>7</sup> It is also posited that although transnational migration provides avenues for immigrants to contest hegemonic powers in host and home countries through the politics of re-ethnicization, it may be disempowering when critically examined within the discursive construction of nation by the immigrants' power elites.

The analysis of the substantive part of the study is largely based on participants' interpretation of their intersubjective life-world.

## **Methodological and Theoretical Considerations**

### **Data and Methods**

The current study is based on data collected from an 8-month ethnographic fieldwork project, from May 1999 to December 1999 among the Yorùbá in Toronto, Ontario.<sup>8</sup> Using qualitative research methods, including participant observation and unstructured and semistructured interviews, fifty members of the community

were interviewed for this study. The study adopts an ethnographic approach purposely for understanding how the Yorùbá interpret their social milieus in relation to broader social, historical, political, and economic issues. The central epistemological assumption guiding the interpretive/interactionist tradition in sociology is that the human condition is understood and known from subjects' (multi)-perspectives of the social world.<sup>9</sup>

Participants in the study were between the ages of 18 and 60 years, with the exception of a 78-year-old man; totaling thirty-three men and seventeen women. Seven of the participants (five men and two women) were selected for in-depth unstructured interviews, lasting from 1 to 3½ hours. Six community association leaders participated in semistructured interviews for 1½ to 2 hours each. Participants were found through snowball sampling, with initial contacts made through a friend in the community. As a participant-observer, I attended the Yorùbá indigenized Christian churches in Toronto, summer picnics, association meetings, musical concert, traditional dances, and a chieftaincy ceremony. My role as a participant-observer was to observe, participate, and interact with subjects to understand how they make sense of their social world, based on their lived experience. The sample reflects, to some extent, the diversity within the community. It includes, but is not limited to, small business owners, the working class, white collar, and professionals (doctors, management consultant, musician, insurance broker, lawyer, etc.). Other members of the community encountered at various participant observation sessions include students, priests, refugee claimants, permanent residents, Canadian citizens, people in the trades, and unemployed people. There are also those who occupy what Olin Erik Wright calls *contradictory locations*.<sup>10</sup> For example, I encountered a small business owner who also worked in a factory to generate surplus income to meet family expenses in the "home country."

### **Migration, Transnationalism, and Racial Categorization**

Political economy conceives of international migration as a fortuitous phenomenon meant to benefit capitalist industrial economies at the expense of the pre-capitalist nonindustrial economies of the world. According to Michael Burawoy, for the functioning of capitalism migrant labor is preferable to immigrant or domestic labor because the former functions to externalize the costs of renewal of labor to an alternate economy. This stratagem, for Burawoy, benefits the state, the labor market, and the industrial organization, at the expense of foreign migrant workers. Using black migrants in South Africa and Mexican migrant farm workers in California as a case study of systems of migrant labor, Burawoy claims that raciocultural attributes of blacks in South Africa and Mexican migrants in the United States are used to rationalize their exploitation in the labor market and exclusion from mainstream society.<sup>11</sup>

Vic Satzewich, writing from a political economy school of thought, illustrates how postwar Canadian labor needs were met by the incorporation of immigrants



into Canada based on their somatic features, or “race.”<sup>12</sup> In Satzewich’s study, most immigrants of European descent were admitted into Canada as “free immigrants,” or “unfree immigrants,” whereas those of non-European descent were allowed into Canada as “unfree migrants.” Largely represented by Caribbean black men and women, “unfree migrants” were not only barred from circulating freely in the Canadian labor market, but were also precluded from being part of the Canadian “imagined community.”<sup>13</sup>

In their desperate bid to compete with indigenous workers, migrants in the industrially developed parts of the world opt for lower wages and invariably split the labor market.<sup>14</sup> Early works on international migration attribute the underlying cause of the split labor market to uneven development of the world caused by the rise of Western capitalism circa the fifteenth century.<sup>15</sup> Thus, most countries in ex-colonies of Africa, Asia, and Latin America have continuously sent their citizens overseas for job opportunities and better living conditions. In other words, the economic needs in the poor countries of the world have been the push factor responsible for migration, and the pull factor relates to the attraction of the rich countries that draws the migration. Under serious scrutiny, the push–pull approach has been considered simplistic in its explanation of international migration. The major shortcoming of this model is its overemphasis of economic decisions as responsible for labor migration. As Alejandro Portes and Jozsef Borocz point out, the motivation for international migration is not simply economic; international migration is social in nature. They argue:

Networks constructed by the movement and contact of people across space are at the core of the microstructures which sustain migration over time. More than individualistic calculations of gain, it is the insertion of people into such networks which helps explain differential proclivities to move and the enduring character of migrant flows.<sup>16</sup>

Under critical examination, the major shortcomings of the strict political economy explanation of international migration become obvious. First, the political economy perspective, as discussed, fails to recognize and identify the social agency and subjectivities of immigrants and racialized minorities. Second, the strict political economy approach to explaining international migration, apropos Satzewich and Burawoy, omits how immigrants are not passive to forms of oppression, such as racial oppression, but react to them. For example, it has been empirically shown that racialized immigrants/migrants often perceive racism as a rejection and struggle against it by creating their own parallel institutions.<sup>17</sup> Third, international migration and the motives of individuals and state actors involved cannot be reduced to economics and a capital–labor dialectic. Therefore, conditions motivating international migration can be disaggregated from a totality of three levels of approach: societal, organizational, and situational/individual.<sup>18</sup> Overemphasis on economics does not address the process of integration and multifactorial challenges faced by immigrants in their efforts to settle. The post-structuralist framework, in its explanation of the social, recognizes an intricate

conjunction of diverse and indeterminate forces as responsible for human action. In the works of Pierre Bourdieu, for example, individuals and groups can tap into three types of capital—economic, social, and cultural—for the purpose of building networks to improve their life chances.<sup>19</sup> Other capitals—political, moral, and so on—can be utilized by immigrants to build networks across time and space for both the present and future generations of migrants, their survival, and settlement in host society.

The study of transnationalism has improved the academic knowledge of international migration; it now provides key insights into understanding the causes and processes of contemporary migration, including settlement and networks issues, from the standpoint of transmigrants' social agency and social action. Drawing on a case study of Mexican immigrants in the United States, Luin Goldring affirms that Mexican migrants, as individuals, and as members of families and communities, construct and maintain "transnational social fields" as a means of claiming and valorizing status in their U.S. and Mexican localities.<sup>20</sup>

Goldring argues that claiming and valorizing social status and prestige is a major motivation for Mexican transnational migration.<sup>21</sup> Although Goldring does not attribute the Mexicans' quest for social validation to their alienation in mainstream American society, other studies have stated that immigrants attach importance to their local home community as a form of material and psychological resistance. Although Linda Basch and co-workers recognize the prevalence of, and necessity for, "extra-territorial activities of migrant populations," they argue that the hegemonic construction of the nation-state (the U.S. in this case) by the white dominant group curtails the social mobility of racialized immigrants, compared to white immigrants and the indigenous white population. Drawing on case studies of immigrants from St. Vincent, Grenada, and Haiti, on one hand, and immigrants from the Philippines on the other, Basch and her colleagues argue that racial orderings in the United States contribute to transnational identity formations of immigrants in the United States. In their observation, through racial structuring blacks are incorporated into the United States to occupy the bottom stratum of the racialized hierarchy: the Filipinos are below Americans of European descent in terms of acceptance and social mobility, but above black immigrants and black natives. One of the outcomes, as Basch and co-workers argue, is the assertion of ethnic identities that divide immigrants' loyalties between their home and host societies.<sup>22</sup>

For Basch and others<sup>23</sup> and for Goldring,<sup>24</sup> by being able to traverse more than one nation-state through transnational activities, transnational migration is a form of empowerment for the immigrants involved. However, where Basch and co-workers' analysis differs from that of Goldring's is at the point of providing explanations for transnational practices. Basch and her colleagues are more pessimistic in their assessment of motives behind transnationalism than Goldring. Although they emphasize the hegemonic construction of the United States as a white country, or racialization as critical to a construction of transnational identities, Goldring conceives migrants' activities, in the form of transnational migration, as

motivated by their quest for reorienting the regimes of stratification in Mexico. One significant contribution of Basch and colleagues to the study of transnational migration is their modification of Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and its application to how the dominant classes in the immigrants' home societies and in the United States are able to conceal prevalent class contradictions in the United States and globally through the discourse of race. In a particular example, Basch and co-workers illustrate how Jean-Bertrand Aristide articulates a discourse around patriotism and nationalism by appealing to Haitian nationals in the United States to view themselves as Haiti's "Tenth Department" to attract their financial support.<sup>25</sup> Other studies of subdominant immigrants cueing to the hegemonic influence of the dominant group have been documented. For example, Mahler, using Salvadoran refugees as an example, claims that the state of El Salvador uses its state apparatus—the consulate in the United States—to assist Salvadorans in the United States in gaining temporary legal status.<sup>26</sup>

Basch and her colleagues conceive ideological hegemony as trickling from top to bottom, rather than seeing it as a way in which people make sense of their social world.<sup>27</sup> In other words, hegemonic discourses around "race" have effects when they resonate with the individual and collective experiences of members of society. What this purports is that ordinary people, in this case migrants/immigrants, are not passive recipients of ideological content; as Hay argues, they are active agents in the process of conforming to the so-called dominant ideology.<sup>28</sup> Basch and associates completely omit the intermeshing and resonance of the dominant ideology and the everyday experience of immigrants and prospective migrants.

Hall indicates that the globalizing process of late modernity has redefined national cultures, making it possible for other cultures to coexist with the dominant one.<sup>29</sup> Multiplex identities that characterize the condition of late modernity imply that social identities are in constant flux and are challenging the engrained notion of fixed and stable cultural identity and nationality. It can be stated that Zygmunt Bauman's "strangers" are a metaphor for transnationals: Transnationals' positions in states and nation-states are indeterminate; they are "true hybrids, the monsters: not just unclassified, but unclassifiable."<sup>30</sup> Because they defy the common sense notion of definability of citizenship, and nationality, transnationals may be a source of anxiety for natives of late modern society. Regarding a search for a sense of certainty in an uncertain world of late modernity, expurgation of the other serves as a quest for certitude in a secure community—the "we" versus "them" feelings often played out in the quotidian front.

Sean Hier poignantly theorizes that insecurities stemming from heightened anxieties around risk and danger lead to "enemy stereotypes." Insecurities "originate with, or emerge from, everyday cultural stereotypes of the stranger."<sup>31</sup> A concrete example of how insecurity is dealt with, through the collective mobilization against what is perceived to be an etiology of societal problems, is drawn from an incident involving a Congolese traveler in Hamilton, Ontario, in the winter of 2001. The Congolese woman was suffering from complications from malaria and was misdiagnosed as having the deadly Ebola virus by the doctor because she

was African. The media uncritically represented the story and framed it within the discourse of immigration, claiming that non-European immigrants brought deadly diseases to Canada. The Canadian public, already perplexed by the challenge of global change, seized on the news to discriminate against black residents in the public space: every black became a cultural stereotype of contagion. The following are some of the news headlines and excerpts:

Mystery Virus Fells Woman  
Ebola not Ruled Out  
Woman Arrived From the Congo<sup>32</sup>

- a. "Apparently in that part of the world (Africa), it's not unusual for people to be entirely healthy walking around like you or I with that degree of a parasite load."<sup>33</sup>
- b. "It was a turn-around for a department that kept quiet when a man from the Dominican Republic with multi-drug-resistant tuberculosis exposed more than 1,200 people in Hamilton to the deadly disease."<sup>34</sup>
- c. "A staff member at Ecole Notre Dame, a French elementary school, said they have two students who recently arrived from Congo—but neither had been contacted by public health officials."<sup>35</sup>

Given the looming prevailing anxieties in late modernity, or what Anthony Giddens calls "ontological insecurity,"<sup>36</sup> racialized minorities—refugees, immigrants of color, and so on, by virtue of their discernible somatic features and cultures—easily become targets of the dominant population that is reinventing a "community." Rather than seeing material changes in their localities in relation to global dynamics, they inveigh against the cultural/racialized other and blame them for societal ills. What the dominant class does is articulate discourses relating to "race" to fuse ordinary individuals' social and material social positions with their experiential consciousness through what Gramsci calls "feeling passion."<sup>37</sup> In their reaction, immigrants employ transnationalism as a form of resistance. They are not merely passively consuming the hegemonic messages of the dominant groups or living in false consciousness by identifying with a "race."<sup>38</sup> Rather, in both their home and host societies, immigrants are active agents of their actions.

The sense of insecurity and risk articulated by Ulrich Beck<sup>39</sup> and Giddens<sup>40</sup> is not only pertaining to a "reflexive modern" society (late modern society). Anthony Richmond makes a distinction between "primary and secondary ontological insecurities." The former is derived from a "collapse of the normal routines of daily life."<sup>41</sup> Whereas security is contingent on "the predictability and reliability of key political, economic, and social institutions,"<sup>42</sup> secondary ontological insecurity is experienced "when particular spheres of social life are threatened. When political systems degenerate into anarchy and civil war, or revolutions overthrow established forms of government, security is threatened."<sup>43</sup> Richmond's insight into social anxiety suggests universality of insecurity in the face of social change, which implies that non-Western societies are confronted by their own state of insecurity and anxieties as well, which Giddens attributes to the "phenomenological worlds of globalization."<sup>44</sup> From a mediated experience, the place has become stripped of its local mooring through a sequestration of time and space. While people live their

local lives, their experiences are mediated by information, ideas, life style, and events in other places. In a sense, there is simultaneous intersection of presence and absence. Globalization has an all-pervading consequence on human societies across the world:

Globalization means that, in respect of the consequences of at least some disembedding mechanisms, no one can “opt out” of the transformations brought about by modernity: this is so, for example, in respect of the global risks of nuclear war or of ecological catastrophe. Many other aspects of modern institutions, including those operating on the small scale, affect people *living in more traditional settings*, outside the most strongly “developed” portions of the world. In those developed sectors, however, the connecting of the local and global has been tied to a profound set of transmutations in the nature of day-to-day life.<sup>45</sup>

However, local practices, such as history, ideology, tradition, mores, and cultural complexes, are still very important to people’s everyday practice.<sup>46</sup>

As members of nonindustrial modern societies are experiencing a situation similar to what Gramsci expresses as “the old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum there arises a great diversity of morbid symptoms,”<sup>47</sup> they are at the same time looking for “ontological security” when they are confronted by fear and anxiety of change in the global space. This situation makes a poly-causal explanation of migration more compelling, in that it is not the poorest of the poor of the capital-dependent countries that migrate, but a variety of people constituting a phenomenon that Arjun Appadurai jargonistically calls *global ethnoscapas*:

the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree.<sup>48</sup>

Apparently, in a time of fast-paced social change of an unprecedented degree of political and economic analysis is inadequate for explaining migration; instead, a combination of economic, social, political, and ideological factors, and so on, are sufficient.

## Background to Migration

### Nigeria’s Sociopolitical and Economic Conditions

Yorùbá is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. Nigeria was a British colony until 1960 when it gained independence from Britain. For a period of about 20 years after independence (1960 to 1980), the Nigerian economy experienced a boom based on primary resources, especially oil. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, Nigeria was a subregional economic power—a semi-periphery.<sup>49</sup> But

like other ex-colonies, its major economic sectors since independence have been controlled by multinational corporations. Terisa Turner and Pade Badru point out that Nigerian elites, like those in other developing countries, not only operate comprador/commercial capitalism, but also control the state. This form of political economy, Turner and Badru argue, is not only at the expense of the industrialization of Nigeria, but also serves as an impediment to the material and human development of Nigeria and its people.<sup>50</sup> As left nationalist political economists aver, economic independence and political autonomy lie not in investment in commodity–staple circulation, such as raw materials, wages, and commodities, but in fixed capital, such as the plant, equipment, and tools. Most colonized nations of the world fall into the first type, and most colonial countries belong to the second group.<sup>51</sup> This explains why, since independence, major sectors of the Nigerian economy, such as petroleum, manufacturing, distribution and construction, and others, have been dominated by European and American multinationals.<sup>52</sup>

Explanations have been given for the depreciating socioeconomic condition of Nigeria in recent years. There is a perspective linking it to colonialism/neocolonialism. For example, the Nigerian economy reacted to the fall in revenue from oil, which went from \$25 billion in 1980 to about \$6 billion in 1984.<sup>53</sup> Factors endogenous to the structure of the Nigerian nation-state have also been proffered. Some have argued that the succession of incompetent and corrupt military and civilian governments who siphoned off the public's funds to foreign-owned accounts is largely to be blamed for the poor state of the Nigerian economy.<sup>54</sup> Chinua Achebe argues that the problem with Nigeria does not lie with the ordinary people, the land, or the climate, but is socially perpetrated by its leaders who have failed "to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership."<sup>55</sup>

In the mid-1980s, after the adoption by the Nigerian government of the neoliberal SAP, the socioeconomic situation of Nigeria began to deteriorate and many Nigerians, mostly of the middle class and working class, started to migrate to industrialized capitalist countries. Ibrahim Jumare, in his article on the migration of the Nigerian intelligentsia, states that the implementation of the SAP in Nigeria in the mid-1980s affected core subsystems of Nigerian society, including the education system, and drove many university teachers overseas.<sup>56</sup> Rachel R. Reynolds, while claiming that economic factors such as a lack of economic opportunities in Nigeria cannot be attenuated as responsible for the Igbo people's decisions to migrate, the need for educational opportunities and a culture of emigration are other important reasons for their emigration.<sup>57</sup> B. Odunsin's study of Nigerian professionals in the United States seems to have summarized major motivating factors for Nigerian emigration. Odunsin indicates that most Nigerians working in the United States attribute their decision to migrate to a number of factors, including better educational opportunities, opportunities to fulfill occupational and professional aspirations, unavailability of employment opportunities in Nigeria, political and economic instability in Nigeria, and lack of information about employment opportunities in Nigeria.<sup>58</sup>

The economic problem in Nigeria in recent years has generated some internal crises in the form of ethnic and sectarian violence, insecurity of persons and properties, and so on. However, the Nigerian power elites have been able to manage some of these crises by concealing class contradictions and appealing to ethnic sentiments to fragment oppositional forces. Claude Ake affirms that ethnic nationalism, with its roots in the colonial policy of *divide et impera*, is articulated by postcolonial Nigerian military-civilian leaders who are continuously using ethnicity as an avenue to control the state regulated economy.<sup>59</sup> Akin A. Akiyoye also notes that Nigerian ruling elites, like most African leaders, conceal their corrupt practices and wastage by discursively externalizing the cause of postcolonial ills to “foreign adversaries.”<sup>60</sup> Ipso facto, ethnoreligious conflicts that have surged in different parts of Nigeria, in recent years, are not unrelated to widening social/class inequalities, which are being expressed in sectarian and ethnic violent ways.<sup>61</sup> In light of the political economy of ethnicity in Nigeria, the Yorùbá, like other Nigerian ethnic groups, have their own readings of ethnicity/“race” prior to their migration.

From all indications, Yorùbá migration to North America and to other parts of the world is largely connected to the depreciated socioeconomic conditions in Nigeria in the mid-1980s, coupled with the political repression of successive military governments headed by Generals Muhammed Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon (1983 to 1985), General Ibrahim Babangida (1985 to 1992), and General Sanni Abacha (1992 to 1998). These chains of military governments operated hard predatorial regimes, using the state as an avenue for amassing wealth—akin to Gerhard Lenski’s proprietary theory of state<sup>62</sup>—and sent a number of Nigerians into exile. Apparently incentives for migration are largely found in a multiple combination of unfavorable social, economic, and political situations stemming from the Nigerian nation-state in the mid-1980s.

## **Yorùbá Transnational Practices**

### **Factors Inducing Transnationalism<sup>63</sup>**

Four major factors are identified in this study as responsible for Nigerian–Yorùbá transnational practices. They are postcolonial economic insecurity, racism in Toronto, the value attached to the Yorùbá kinship system, and psychosocial factors.

### **Postcolonial Economic Situation**

The poor socioeconomic condition of Nigeria from the 1980s motivated, not only the migration of Nigerian–Yorùbás to Canada and other economically advanced countries of the West, but also led to perennial contact of immigrants with their family members. By the mid-1980s, when the Nigerian currency (naira) had devalued, those immigrants who hardly went home began to visit Nigeria because of the purchasing power of the Canadian dollar. One participant, Ola, who immigrated

to Toronto about 7 years ago, revealed that in the late 1970s, when he finished high school, he decided to study economics in Nigeria. He says:

Who wanted to travel overseas and stayed there then? There were so many opportunities in Nigeria for those with good education, those of my friends who did not do well in their high school exams left for overseas and did not come back until the late 1980s.

In the late 1980s, the Nigerian currency suffered devaluation due largely to the macroeconomic approach being adopted by the government. Since then, immigrants have been able to spend more while visiting Nigeria and also to send money to their family members in the form of remittances. Chief Thompson said that when he visited Nigeria in 1978, his old high school mates working in the expanding Nigerian civil service were doing better than he economically, but on another visit in 1990 there was a reversal of conditions as the standard of living had deteriorated:

In 1990 when I was visiting home, the country had changed a lot. The value of naira had fallen, unemployment was high and basic needs were not within the reach of those who were doing well during my last visit. Family members and some old friends, who would never have asked me for financial help did so.

Nearly all of those interviewed for the study, and those I encountered in the field, indicated that they support their family members in the form of remittances and goods, such as clothing and shoes. Remittances from immigrants are used for education and improvement of the social welfare of women, children, and the aged, and to help with the cost of traditional festivals.

### **Racialization**

Robert Miles argues that while the concept of “race” has no scientific validity, people with perceived visible physical characteristics are racialized. According to him, *racialization* occurs where “social relations between people have been structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities.”<sup>64</sup> By way of extension, racialization can also occur when cultural practices are signified for the purpose of exclusion; Martin Barker refers to this as a *new racism*. In new racism, “a theory about race can be concealed inside apparently innocent language.”<sup>65</sup>

Most of the Yorùbá immigrants interviewed for the study respond that they have suffered from different forms of racism. In the area of employment, the community experienced high levels of underemployment. Some of them also claim that they are confronted by “everyday racism,”<sup>66</sup> “systemic racism” and “subliminal” forms of racism.<sup>67</sup> The following are a recount of their experiences:

When asked: “In what ways do you experience racism?”

Mrs. Babatola responds: In many ways. I was an accountant in Nigeria for many years. I came to Canada to better myself, but could not find a decent job. They are always



asking for Canadian experience. Right now I work in the factory. In the factory the supervisors discriminated against black people. White workers receive easier tasks than us. People have no respect for women in the factory. Every time, fellow male workers use sexist words.

There is apparent underemployment among members of the community, which some members of the community interpret to be caused by racism. One factory worker, Samuel, says:

I studied both in Nigeria and overseas, and I hold a master's degree. I work in the factory making minimum wage. You see, those white folks in the factory have no education, but when they see you, they think you are a fool, regardless of your education.

Because racism often attenuates the self and the other, the perception and experience of racism by members of the Nigerian–Yorùbá community affected their level of interaction with the white population. In one instance, I probed a respondent:

Question: Why don't you have "white Canadians" as bosom friends?

Chief Sasere: How can you be friends with them? I am a cab driver, when I pick them up in cabs at night, that is the only time I interact with them. For those working in the factory, they do not see many of them there.

Racism is perceived by most members of the Nigerian–Yorùbá community as a sign of rejection. Perceptions of racial discrimination by members of a group make them withdraw to their ethnic enclaves to avoid competition and hostility from the racially dominant group.<sup>68</sup> As Miles claims, racialization is not necessarily disadvantageous to a group; members of a categorized group can turn their condition into empowerment.<sup>69</sup> A good example is the "Black is beautiful!" aphorism of the 1960s Négritude. The Yorùbá perception of their social location in Toronto makes them self-identify as black, and also makes them psychologically perceive Canada as a place not worthy of their full loyalty.

### **The Value of Kinship**

Transmigrants make family decisions across national borders. Family connections sustain transnational practices. Some of those who take part in the study have children, spouses, or parents in Nigeria who still rely on them for material support. Being a traditionally kin-ordered society, Nigerian–Yorùbá transnationals still maintain contacts with their extended family members. Most participants claim that they are asked by their relatives in Nigeria for financial support. More often than not, the immigrants support their family members. The relationship between the migrants and their family members in Nigeria is reciprocal. Kin members of immigrants assist them in their day-to-day activities when they are home visiting. They reinforce the existing taboos, provide reminders of local festivals, and even help to find them partners. The belief in endogamy is still very strong among the members of the community. Marrying outsiders is still strongly opposed by some members of the community.

### Psychosocial Explanation

Traveling overseas has traditionally been attractive to the Yorùbá. As has been argued, international migration is not necessarily induced by economic deprivation. In referring to the mimetic practice of black individuality, Fanon indicates that colonialism conditions the black person to love the “white civilization”: “the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man’s attitude...invests the hero, who is white...”<sup>70</sup> Through the colonial “ideological state apparatus,”<sup>71</sup> Western world-views were represented as superior to those of the colonized.<sup>72</sup> For example, the institution of education was meant to inculcate the values of the colonial society and to train individuals to think and behave Western. Chief Sasere, who grew up in 1950s Nigeria during colonialism, recounts one of the popular school songs of the time:

*Oun męta lo mú ki ilé-ìwé wù mi:  
ìgbà n bádúró bì alákhòwé,  
ìgbà n ba wọ bàtà tó ba mi lẹsẹ mu,  
ma de ‘lu òy ìnbó ka we o.*

Three things make me love the Western form of education:  
one, the way the ‘white man’ dresses;  
two, the kind of shoes he wears; and three,  
in the future I will go to the ‘white man’s’ land to study.

Another participant sings another song thus:

*ìlú òy ìnbó wu mi lọpọlọpọ,  
mo sì ma de bẹ o.*

I love the ‘white man’s’ land with passion,  
I hope to be there some day.

The Yorùbá also attribute prestige and honor to the West. Elder Adeogun, a 60-year-old man, left Nigeria for Toronto in 1970. According to his life story, he reveals that he had known that he would travel overseas as early as age 6. He says:

In those days, unlike now, people would predict the future through the *ifá*<sup>73</sup> divination. Whenever a child is born, the oracle would be contacted to know his/her destiny in life; my parents did the same thing for me and other children in the family. Ifá predicted that I would be great, because I would not practice the profession of my ancestors, which was farming... because I would go to the land of the white people...

The prestige associated with traveling to the West since colonial times motivates Nigerian–Yorùbá transnationals to sustain contacts with members of their community who never travel. At times of visitation, they command respect and recognition from members of the community who still believe that traveling and living overseas is prestigious.

Other psychosocial interpretations of the Nigerian–Yorùbá transnational experience relate to sexual competition. In consort with Stember, sexual competition among groups is connected with power struggle.<sup>74</sup> Sex is not simply biological, but also psychosocial. Individuals, both male and female, vie for prestige, recognition, and influence through sexual relationships and encounters with the sexual other. In the field, I heard stories from both Nigerian–Yorùbá men and women concerning multiple sexual partners. There were claims made by women of their husbands having more than one sexual partner, across borders; men, including young ones, boasted of their sexual prowess and opportunities they encountered when visiting Nigeria; on some occasions men recounted women’s infidelities when their men were away in Nigeria visiting or when they were working shift. Obviously, polygyny was one of the major sources of conflict in the community.

During the summer, I attended a musical concert by a Yorùbá band, popularly known as Obesere by Yorùbá in Nigeria and in the diaspora. Before the concert, in my usual ethnographic stance, I spent time outside the hall with a group of Yorùbá men in their thirties. They discussed different topics, most of which pertained to their lived experience in Canada and Nigeria. They also discussed their encounters with the sexual other and their competition on visits to Nigeria. I documented sexual relationships that these men claimed that they had while in Nigeria, and the advantages that visiting Nigeria from Canada could offer men in the unpredictable socioeconomic world of Nigeria. The most loquacious among them stated, *inter alia*:

...I really had a good time. I will always go to Nigeria. When I was home last time, guess how many women I had. *Bi mēsan ni mo mu bale!* (on different occasions, I had sex with close to nine women!).

This revelation was met with cheers, and others took turns sharing their experience. Interpretively, men from abroad are more attractive to young and older women in Nigeria based on their real and perceived socioeconomic improvement over their locally based male counterparts.

## **Resistance, Hegemony, and Transnational Migration**

In the Gramscian conception of ideology, through linguistic practice and communicative sign systems (or discourse), the social and political values of a hegemonic class become acceptable as universal, and the social becomes naturalized. Social inequalities within the two local Nigerian–Yorùbá transnational communities are seemingly normalized consensually. Contra Gramsci, ideological hegemony does not exclusively dwell within the confines of the civil society, but is also present (as insidious as it may be!) in the corridor of the state, as the Nigerian–Yorùbá situation shows. In the context of Nigerian–Yorùbá transnationalism, I experienced in the field, on the one hand, existing social inequalities (based on gender and class) in

Nigeria being transferred to their local Toronto community; and on the other hand a reaffirmation of sociological racial categories<sup>75</sup> through the politics of re-ethnicization in Toronto as transmigrants are perceiving Canada as a host society. In both cases, both ordinary Nigerian–Yorùbá transnationals and agents of the state take part in this process. For the purposes of illustration, I draw on a case study.

### **Case Study**

An old man clad in a white robe from the waist down, is led inside the hall by another man. The old man is asked to kneel down while a group of men and a woman perform the necessary traditional spiritual ritual. It is an emotional occasion for the old man, whose eyes are dripping with tears. The master of ceremonies pronounces more than two times, *ilé labọ̀ simi oko!*, a powerful Yorùbá platitude meaning there is no place like home!

I was present at a social function in the community, where an old member of the Yorùbá transnational immigrant community was conferred with a chieftaincy title by the monarch of his hometown in Nigeria. The old man had been in Canada for almost five decades. The chief objective for honoring him with a chieftaincy title was to encourage him to return home. *Ilé labọ̀ simi oko!* (there is no place like home!), as was chanted, is a powerful Yorùbá expression. A prominent and wealthy Yorùbá chief, with a base in Toronto, addressed the social gathering. He was a famous public administrator under a military junta before turning politician and had received more than ten chieftaincy titles in different Yorùbá towns. His introduction to the audience by two masters of ceremonies was long, and the chief was received with a loud ovation. In his presentation, he addressed the audience by stressing Yorùbá civilization, thus:

... unlike Europe and several regions of Africa with peerages, lordships and other titles, where people could buy peerages, lordships and other titles, the honor was given to him purely on merit, and merit alone nothing to do with the size of his purse ... Ilosho, which is about three hundred years old is having the first Ajagun ... , by the way, Ilosho is older than Canada ... Ilosho is about 300, 400 years old. The Yorùbá of Nigeria, to our guest here, the Yorùbá of Nigeria are a very enlightened race, as a matter of fact, history and writers attest to the fact that they are the most urbane of all the people in Africa, and their organization dating back to pre-colonial times and in several books written, which you might check in the library ... the urbanization index is higher than of France, it's higher than that of Poland, it's higher than that of Germany. They've always lived in cities while they go to farm and work, and so on. The Yorùbá are about 31 million people within Nigeria ... and worldwide we are talking about some 48 million of them. So when you talk about a Yorùbá person speaking a Yorùbá language, it is not a dialect, it is not vernacular, it is a language spoken by some 40 million people ... according to World Bank sources it's the 28th largest collection of people in the world ...<sup>76</sup>

The underlying significance of an event like this is that members of an ethnic community distinguish themselves from the dominant population by asserting their “difference.” The chief’s emphasis on “homeland,” “kinship,” “the Yorùbá race,” Yorùbá fecundity, referring to the palmy days of precolonial Yorùbá

civilization, has some resonance with the immigrant population's intersubjective understanding of their place in Canada as not fully belonging. Ipso facto, ethnicity becomes a naturalized common sense for members of this community. Moreover, although the discourse of *ilé labọ símì oko* is in a sense a form of solidarity and veneration of the Yorùbá ancestral land, it symbolically purports their self-alienation from the mainstream Canadian society that they equally belong, from the perspective of sociological social constructionism of "race."<sup>77</sup>

On another occasion, I was a participant-observer at a meeting involving some members of a Nigerian–Yorùbá voluntary ethnocultural group preparing to host their state governor, visiting from Nigeria, in the summer of 1999. Those who were to host the governor were "ordinary Nigerian–Yorùbá individuals" who would never have had an opportunity to get close to public figures, like the governor, by virtue of their pre-migration status. A key public figure like the governor would not interact with ordinary Nigerians, but in Toronto they would meet and discuss issues relating to home country development projects; for these association members, hosting their governor is an act of honor for them.

As Goldring indicates, membership in a voluntary association is connected to power and status in the local community.<sup>78</sup> Most projects embarked on by Yorùbá community voluntary associations are not done incognito. For example, I witnessed the deliberation of members of the Yorùbá Community Association, who wanted to buy a room in a sickle cell center in Nigeria, which they would name the "Toronto Room." In one instance, a community leader, in encouraging members of the association to donate, alluded to how both the young and old in their local community celebrated the migrants during a ceremony and prayed to God thus: *ki ori je ki ọmọ mi lọ Canada* (May God let my child travel to Canada). "Altruistic projects" embarked on by migrants create opportunities for them to bargain for social and political power in their local community of origin.<sup>79</sup> Not only does it afford them some social recognition among members of their immediate communities, but it also grants them avenues to meet key important figures, which they would never have met had they not traveled, engaged in, and maintained contact with their home country.

In my role as a participant-observer at the community's events, I found issues related to class and gender as contributing to the curtailment of Nigerian–Yorùbás' life-chances in Toronto, not being addressed. In a similar vein, class and gender inequalities in Nigeria are being reaffirmed and reconfigured. In their quests for prestige, status, and recognition in their different local communities in Yorùbáland, members of the transnational community relegate some of the global and national issues that are responsible for the migration. When political leaders from various communities in Nigeria come to visit to garner financial support for local community development in Nigeria, issues around the iniquitous political economy of Nigeria and its impact on the ordinary people do not arise in conversations. I observed on many occasions in the field ordinary members of the community deferring to some notable individuals from Nigeria who had participated in disreputable government activity in Nigeria.

Members of the community send photos (as individuals and a collective), calendars, videos, and audiotapes of celebrated events to their kith and kin in Nigeria to illustrate and make them appreciate their new social standings. Material goods sent to Nigeria are a system of representations of a better social condition elsewhere. However, material things are not mere things in and of themselves; they are embedded in social relations. As Glick Schiller and associates point out, material goods sent by migrants to their kin members do not merely stand as items of material culture that will change the material culture of the home society; rather, they stand as a statement about achievements overseas and as self-promotion of social standing in the local community.<sup>80</sup> In this case, a celebratory culture of migration only maintains the status quo.

As studies have shown, minority women suffer from triple oppressions of gender, “race,” and class.<sup>81</sup> Ethnicity can be an additional burden for women if an ethnic group possesses cultural values that devalue femininity.<sup>82</sup> Most Yorùbá men who took part in the study have some level of tolerance for women’s subordination. One male association leader comments:

it is going to take time for our men to admit there can be equality between men and women. At meetings, men do not take it lightly when their points are faulted by women.

A leader of an association (which contributes money on rotational basis, *esusu*, and which restricts membership to men but makes their wives prepare food for their meetings) says as follows: “We cannot allow women to be part of this association. As you know, women cannot be taken seriously. They gossip a lot and cannot focus on serious matters.”

In Canada, Nigerian–Yorùbá transmigrants associate, to some degree, with members of the black community, based on perceived physical similarities. Whereas Peter Li empirically demonstrates that there is correspondence between “race” and class inequality in Canada, Li argues that the “social value” attached to “race” is associated with the “market value” or worth of immigrants in the labor market, in terms of the kinds of job they do, regardless of their skills and academic qualifications.<sup>83</sup> Nigerian–Yorùbá transmigrants in Toronto can actually move beyond ethnic particularism by allying with other racialized groups in similar precarious class situation.

## Conclusion

Although the classic push–pull model privileges economics as the driving motor of international migration, transnationalism as a conceptual framework has advanced our knowledge of the phenomenon of international migration in two major ways. First, the political economic analysis of the human condition is too simplistic. In the alternative, human migration is social and is motivated by diverse factors. Second, immigrants are conscious social actors; they consciously react and

resist both real and perceived oppression in their host society. In corroborating Goldring,<sup>84</sup> the Nigerian–Yorùbá version of transnationalism is a resource for their transnational local communities: Toronto and their various communities in Yorùbáland. However, in quest for empowerment, the emergent politics of re-ethnicization has some implications in that: first, it revalidates the hegemonic construction of citizenship in a state as natural;<sup>85</sup> and second, re-ethnicization emphasizes what Joseph Manyoni refers to as *skinship*<sup>86</sup>—emphasis on perceived cultural and physical similarities at the expense of social differences of class and gender asymmetry—and reinforces preexisting social inequalities, namely, class, gender, and racial.

It is argued that Nigerian–Yorùbá transnationals' assertion of their ethnic particularisms cannot be interpreted as a false consciousness<sup>87</sup> or “interpellation.”<sup>88</sup> Their conception of ethnicity is a conscious action, greatly influenced by their postcolonial Nigerian experience where groups struggled for scarce resources and by their encounters with racism in Canada. Therefore, ethnicity is not a mere construction from the top down;<sup>89</sup> rather, ethnicity has some resonance with the lived experiential consciousness of members of the community. One major weakness of Nigerian–Yorùbá transmigrants' conception of biological ethnicity is the adumbration of key bases of inequality: class and gender.

## Notes

1. The term *been-to* is West African slang in English for those “who have *been to* overseas.”

2. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Fragments* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1969), 223–29.

3. Nina Glick Schiller, Linda Basch, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration: Race, Class, Ethnicity, and Nationalism Reconsidered* (New York: New York Academy of Sciences, 1992).

4. *Ibid.*, 1–2.

5. S. Mintz, “The Localization of Anthropological Practice, from area studies to transnationalism,” *Critique of Anthropology* 18, no. 2 (1998): 117–33.

6. Michael P. Smith and Luis E. Guarnizo, eds., *Transnationalism from Below* (London: Transaction Publishers, 1998).

7. Robert Miles and Victor Satzewich, “Migration, Racism and ‘Postmodern’ Capitalism,” *Economy and Society* 18, no. 3 (1990): 334–58.

8. Existing data on the population of Nigeria, and of the Yorùbá, residing in Canada and elsewhere is unknown because many migrants/immigrants avoid official registration. Citizenship and Immigration Canada (2003) put the Nigerian population in Canada for the period of January 1990 to December 2002 at 8,980. Nigeria has the fourth largest population of immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa in Canada, after Somalia, South Africa, and Kenya. The population of Nigerians in Ontario is 6,293; the proportion of the population in Toronto is not known. Citizenship and Immigration Canada does not stratify Nigerians into their ethnic groups. Yorùbá association leaders do not know the exact population of the Yorùbá in Toronto because it seems a large

number of them do not partake in association activities. Nevertheless, the population of the Yorùbá in Toronto is significant considering that they have evolved parallel social institutions and agencies such as the church, improvement associations, Yorùbá language school, legal clinic, and so on.

9. Mary L. Dietz, Robert Prus, and William Shaffir, eds., *Doing Everyday Life: Ethnographic as Human Lived Experience* (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994).

10. Olin Erik Wright, "Marxism after Communism," in *Social Theory and Sociology: The Classics Beyond*, ed. Stephen J. Turner (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1989).

11. Michael Burawoy, "Migrant Labour in South Africa and United States," in *Capital and Labour*, ed. Theo Nichols (Glasgow: Fontana, 1980), 138–73.

12. The concept of "race" is put in quotation marks throughout this paper to indicate that it is a social construction and a problematic concept. It is obviously a controversial concept. Because "race" is an empty biological construct, some social scientists have argued that its usage should be halted by academics. See Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1999) and Vic Satzewich, "The Political Economy of Race and Ethnicity," in *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*, Peter Li, ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989). Others have insisted that the concept must be retained, because it has been one major fundamental principle of social organization and identity formation in modern societies. See Joseph Mensah, *Black Canadians: History, Experiences, Social Condition* (Halifax: Fernwood Publishing, 2002) and Michael Omi and Howard Winant, "On the Theoretical Concept of Race," in *Race, Identity and Representation in Education*, ed. Cameron McCarthy and Warren Crichlow (New York: Routledge, 1993).

13. Edna Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 37 (1972): 547–59.

14. Ibid.

15. See Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People without History* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1982); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (Washington, Howard University Press, 1981).

16. Alejandro Portes and Jozsef Borocz, "Contemporary Immigration: Theoretical Perspectives on Its Determinants and Modes of Incorporation," *International Migration Review* 23 (Fall 1989): 612.

17. Charles Tilly, *Durable Inequality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Raymond Breton, "Institutional Completeness of Ethnic Communities and the Personal Relations of Immigrants," *American Journal of Sociology* 70 (1964): 103–205.

18. Societal theory explains the direct and indirect effect of uneven development of the world caused by global capitalism. Scarce material resources influence individuals' decisions to migrate. Organizational perspective addresses noneconomic factors, such as members of a group/organization being excluded from the social universe because of their ideas, associations, knowledge, and credential accumulation. Situational factors include personal characteristics such as age, gender, and psychology; Franz Fanon's insights into the psyche of the colonized blacks is an example of a situational condition. See, Franz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask* (New York: Grove Press, 1967). See also Robert Alford and Roger Friedland, *The Powers of Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985); Neil MacLaughlin, "Optimal Marginality: Innovation and Orthodoxy in Fromm's Revision of Psychoanalysis," *The Sociological Quarterly* (2001): 271–88.



19. Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays toward a Reflexive Sociology* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990).

20. Luin Goldring, "The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields," in *Transnationalism from Below*, 165–95.

21. *Ibid.*

22. Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments, and Deterritorialized Nation-States* (Langhorne, PA: Gordon and Breach Publishers, 1994).

23. *Ibid.*

24. Goldring, "The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields."

25. *Ibid.*, 267.

26. Sarah Mahler, "Theoretical and Empirical Contributions Toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism," in *Transnationalism from Below*, 64–100.

27. Basch and others, *Nations Unbound*.

28. Colin Hay, "Narrating Crisis: The Discursive Construction of the 'Winter of Discontent'," *Sociology* 30, no. 2 (1996): 253–77.

29. Stuart Hall, "The Question of Cultural Identity," in *Modernity and Its Futures*, ed. Stuart Hall, David Held, and Tony McGrew (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992), 273–325.

30. Zygmunt Bauman, "Modernity and Ambivalence," in *Global Culture: Nationalism, Globalization and Modernity*, ed. Mike Featherstone (London: Sage, 1990), 148.

31. Sean Hier, "Risk and Panic in Late Modernity: Implications of the Converging Sites of Social Anxiety," *The British Journal of Sociology* 54, no. 1 (2003): 17.

32. *Hamilton Spectator* (February 6, 2001).

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. *Globe and Mail* (February 8, 2001).

36. Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991).

37. See Graham Knight, "Hegemony, the Media and New Right Politics: Ontario in the Late 1990s," *Critical Sociology* 24, nos. 1/2 (1998): 105–29.

38. Oliver Cox, *Caste, Class and Race* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1948).

39. Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (New York: Sage, 1992).

40. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

41. Anthony Richmond, *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1991), 19.

42. *Ibid.*

43. *Ibid.*

44. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*.

45. *Ibid.*, 22. Emphasis added.

46. John Tomlinson, "A Phenomenology of Globalization? Giddens on Global Modernity," *European Journal of Communication* 9 (1994): 149–72.

47. Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971).

48. Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in *Recapturing Anthropology*, ed. Richard Fox (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 1991), 192.

49. Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Capitalist World-Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 100.

50. Terisa Turner and Pade Badru, "Oil and Instability: Class Contradictions and the 1983 Coup in Nigeria," *Journal of African Marxists* 7 (1984): 4–21.
51. See Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; Andre G. Frank, *Dependent Accumulation and Underdevelopment* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979); Wallace Clement, *Continental Corporate Power, Economic Elite Linkages between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Tom Naylor, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence," in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, ed. Gary Teeple (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 1–41.
52. See Pade Badru, *Imperialism and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998); Segun O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria: Historical Perspectives," *Review of African Political Economy* no. 69 (1996); B. Onimode, *Imperialism and Underdevelopment in Nigeria: the Dialectics of Mass Poverty* (London: Zed Press, 1982).
53. Badru, *Imperialism and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, 92.
54. See Peter Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation," 79–103; O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria"; Turner and Badru, "Oil and Instability."
55. See Lewis, "From Prebendalism to Predation: The Political Economy of Decline in Nigeria," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 34, no. 1 (1996): 79–103; O. Osoba, "Corruption in Nigeria"; Turner & Badru, "Oil and Instability."
56. Ibrahim Jumare, "The Displacement of the Nigerian Academic Community," *Journal of African and Asian Studies* 32, nos. 1/2 (1997).
57. Rachel R. Reynolds, "An African Brain Drain: Igbo Decisions to Immigrate to the US," *Review of African Political Economy* 92 (2002): 273–84.
58. B. Odunsin, "An Analysis of Brain-Drain and its Impact on Manpower Development in Nigeria," *Journal of Third World Studies* (1996): 131–214.
59. Claude Ake, "Political Ethnicity and State-Building in Nigeria," in *Global Convulsions*, ed. Winston A. Van Horne (Albany: State University of New York, 1997), 299–314.
60. Akin A. Akiyoye, "The Rhetorical Construction of Radical Africanism at the United Nations: Metaphoric Cluster as Strategy," *Discourse & Society* 5, no. 1 (1994): 7–31.
61. See Bala Usman, "History and Challenges to the Politics of Africa in the 21st Century" (lecture, University of Abuja, Abuja, November 22, 1999).
62. Gerhard Lenski, Patrick Nolan and Jean Lenski, *Human Societies: An Introduction to Macrosociology*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1995), 208.
63. Names used for the participants are pseudonyms. Titles such as Mrs., Leader, and Chief were used to address the participants in the actual study as they would in a nonresearch setting. In most cases, I used titles to address those who were older than me in age. This is congruent with the Yorùbá rule of seniority.
64. Robert Miles, *Racism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 75.
65. Martin Barker, *The New Racism, Conservatives and the Ideology of the Tribe* (London: Junction Books, 1981), 3.
66. Philomena Essed, *Understanding Everyday Racism: An Interdisciplinary Study* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991).
67. Augie Fleras and J. Kuntz, *Media and Minorities* (Toronto: Thompson Education Pub., 2001), 37.
68. Peter Li, *The Chinese in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1988), 2.
69. Miles, *Racism*.

70. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Mask*, 146.

71. Louis Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (London: New Left Books, 1971).

72. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972).

73. *Ifá* is a Yorùbá god of wisdom, and the oracle consulted for explaining and predicting the future.

74. Charles Herbert Stember, *Sexual Racism: The Emotional Barrier to an Integrated Society* (New York: Elsevier, 1976).

75. See P. Van Den Berghe, "Ethnicity and Sociobiology," in *Theories of Race and Ethnic Relations*, ed. John Rex and David Mason (Cambridge: University Press, 1986): 246–63.

76. Here, as usual, I have changed names of individuals mentioned by the speaker; and also names of key Yorùbá towns to conceal the identity of the speaker, who is actually a well-known figure among the Yorùbá in Nigeria and the diaspora. Of course, the text of the speech is original.

77. See Rhoda Howard-Hassmann, "'Canadian' as an Ethnic Category: Implications for Multiculturalism and National Unity," *Canadian Public Policy* 25, no. 4 (2001): 423–537.

78. Goldring, "The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields."

79. Mahler, "Theoretical and Empirical Contributions toward a Research Agenda for Transnationalism," 88.

80. Glick Schiller and others, *Towards a Transnational Perspective on Migration*, 10–11.

81. See Patricia Daenzer, "Challenging Diversity: Black Women and Social Welfare," in *Women and the Canadian Welfare State, Challenges and Change*, ed. Patricia Evans and Gerda R. Wekerle (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 269–90; Daiva Stasiulis, "Theorizing Connections: Gender, Race, Ethnicity and Class," in *Race and Ethnic Relations in Canada*, ed. Peter Li (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1990).

82. Augie Fleras and Jean L. Eliot, *Unequal Relations*, 3rd ed. (Scarborough: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 1999), 147–48.

83. Peter Li, "The Market Value and Social Value of Race," in *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada*, ed. Vic. Satzewich (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1999), 115–30.

84. Goldring, "The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields."

85. Basch and others, *Unbound Nations*.

86. Joseph Manyoni, "Ethnics and Non-Ethnics: Facts and Fads in the Study of Intergroup Relations," in *Ethnic Canadians: Culture and Education*, ed. M. L. Kovacs (Regina: Canadian Plains Studies, 1978), 38.

87. Cox, *Caste Class and Race*.

88. Althusser, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses."

89. Basch and others, *Unbound Nations*.

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## **YORÙBÁ FACTOR IN NIGERIAN POLITICS**

Julius O. Adekunle

### **Introduction**

As one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yorùbá have played prominent roles in the politics of the country since the colonial period. They came into the frontline of Nigerian politics with their previous experience of sophisticated centralized governments, their closeness to, and participation in, colonial administration, and their access to Western education. Their early interaction with the Europeans, especially the missionaries and colonial officials, helped them to adjust to a Western-styled political system.

This chapter concentrates on the contributions of the Yorùbá people to the growth of Nigerian politics from the colonial period to the present. It highlights some nationalist leaders who struggled for the decolonization and independence of Nigeria. They include Herbert Macaulay, Ladipo Solanke, and Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ. In 1923, Herbert Macaulay formed the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP). In 1951 the *Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* (society of the children of Odùduwà), a Yorùbá cultural group, led by Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, was transformed into a political party called the Action Group (AG). The Yorùbá suffered from the political instability that resulted from a series of military coups. The events that occurred in the Western Region in 1965 became the beginning of the political turning point for Nigeria. Leaders such as Samuel Akintola were assassinated. In the 1980s and 1990s, a turbulent period for Nigeria, Yorùbá politicians, and leaders strongly stood for the principles inherent in a democracy. This was especially the case regarding the June 12, 1993, election episode. Today, the Yorùbá remain in the vanguard of Nigerian politics.

## The Yorùbá Concept of Politics

The Yorùbá concept of politics began with the family unit, where each family member carried out specific functions, with the man as husband, father, and administrator. Division of labor was evident in the political, economic, and social organization of the family. From the family structure emerged the *ilú* (town) politics. The town, according to J. A. Atanda, constituted the basic political unit on which the larger, centralized governments were based.<sup>1</sup> The town was composed of lineages made up of several families, thus emphasizing close kinships, which remain an important aspect of the Yorùbá culture. In many cases, the head of the founding lineage assumed political leadership and performed a role similar to that of a king. In some cases, a powerful imperialistic immigrant group could impose its political hegemony over the indigenous ancestral lines. Yorùbá historians believe that there was a pre-Odùduwà political structure with a monarchical form of government. The Odùduwà group, however, conquered the indigenous people and imposed its own political organization and institutions. Unlike the former system, the Odùduwà structure was based on an *ẹbí* (kinship) arrangement, which became very elaborate and widely adopted in Yorùbáland.<sup>2</sup> The head of the lineage surrounded himself with an advisory council, composed of representatives from all the lineages in the town. As the town expanded and increased in population, the administration also became more complex. Thus, the institution of kingship emerged. The king, as the head of the town's government, was expected to provide protection for his people, working in conjunction with a council and the military.

According to popular legends, the Yorùbá centralized political system began when the sons of Odùduwà, the eponymous ancestor of the Yorùbá people, dispersed from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ to carve out kingdoms for themselves. The kingdoms that evolved included Owu, Ọ̀yọ́, Ìjẹ̀bù, Ijẹ̀ṣa, Ketu, Popo, Ẹ̀gbá, Sabe, Dassa, Egbado, Igbomina, and the sixteen Ekiti principalities whose rulers directly or indirectly traced their origin and source of authority to Odùduwà.<sup>3</sup> This ẹbí relationship made the Yorùbá homogenous, not only in language and culture, but also in political administration.

Analyzing the political systems of the Yorùbá and Edo people, Ade Obayemi distinguishes between mini-states and mega-states. He argues that the mini-states provided the political framework for the mega-state structure.<sup>4</sup> The mini-states, referring to a segmented lineage system, provided the foundation upon which the dynastic founders established larger and more centralized structures and institutions. Whether mini-state or mega-state, the pertinent point is that the Yorùbá evolved a sociopolitical system that not only suited them but also became very sophisticated.<sup>5</sup> The *Aláàfin* (monarch) of Ọ̀yọ́, *Ọ̀ba* (chief/king) Adeyemi, pointed out that the Yorùbá developed an unwritten but strong constitution and created a very practical method of administration by adopting the cabinet system of governance. He asserted that the Old Ọ̀yọ́ Empire had developed a cabinet system of government as far back as the sixteenth century. From the *aláàfin* to the prime

minister, and “the various divisional heads, all tiers have their specific roles and responsibilities, clearly spelt out and adhered to with separation of powers, and inputs for checks and balances.”<sup>6</sup> This indicates that the political philosophy of the Yorùbá, their political institutions, and strong organization were indigenous to them.

The complex monarchical system was in place until the end of the nineteenth century when a civil war engulfed the whole of Yorùbáland. This episode coincided with the European penetration into Africa during the era of the new imperialism. However, the eventual weakening and fall of the kingdoms into the hands of the Europeans did not immediately erase the complex political arrangements, institutions, and experiences of the Yorùbá people.

### **Ethnic Politics in the Colonial Period**

Yorùbá politics and society changed in the nineteenth century partly as a result of the civil war that ravaged the whole of Yorùbá land and also because of the coming of the Europeans with their imperialist ambitions. The majority of the Yorùbá-speaking people located in southwest Nigeria fell under British control; the French controlled those in Western Yorùbáland, such as Dassa and Sabè. When the British took control of Yorùbáland in 1900, they were compelled to allow traditional rulers, and later the educated elite, to participate in the colonial administration because of a shortage of personnel and lack of funds. In the indirect rule system, British officials supervised and guided traditional rulers in the performance of their local government functions, which included collection of taxes, maintenance of law and order, and judging minor cases. Although Yorùbá traditional rulers lost their former political power and economic status, the Yorùbá people nevertheless played, “leading roles [in political, economic, and social issues] until the attainment of independence in 1960 at which time the era of British hegemony over Yorubaland ended.”<sup>7</sup>

Early access to Western education through Christian missionaries made the Yorùbá the most educated group of people in Nigeria and led them to produce a core of educated elite who constituted the vanguard of Nigerian nationalism. Samuel Ajayi Crowther, the first African bishop, was a Yorùbá man. He was the first to receive a higher education at Fourah Bay College, established in 1827 in Sierra Leone. According to I. A. Akinjogbin, the Yorùbá had begun to build

European-type schools since about 1840. By the 1880s, many of them had attended universities in Europe and graduated in various disciplines studying with Europeans. . . . People of Yoruba descent who had become highly educated in Freetown came back to Lagos [a Yorùbá city].<sup>8</sup>

Western education expanded in Yorùbáland as a result of the increasing number of Christian missions and missionaries who built schools. This made it possible for

the number of educated people to increase in and outside Lagos. Akinjogbin also mentions that because the Yorùbá understood the advantages derived from formal education, they themselves financed the extension of education in Yorùbáland. This view underscores why the Yorùbá factor remains important in the political history of Nigeria. Chief Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, in his *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, stated that the Yorùbá, by embracing Western culture, took the lead, and benefited immensely.<sup>9</sup> The Western culture referred to includes Western education, which made the Yorùbá the pacesetters of Nigerian politics.

Among early beneficiaries of Western education in Yorùbáland was Herbert Macaulay (1864 to 1946), a “man of many parts: a civil engineer and surveyor by training, a civil servant, a politician, an editor and journalist, an accomplished violinist, an historian, and an ex-convict.”<sup>10</sup> Macaulay’s immeasurable contributions to Nigerian politics in the colonial period earned him the pseudonym the “Father of Nigerian Nationalism.” Unable to contest elective positions because of his two convictions, Macaulay demonstrated that he was indeed a Nigerian nationalist by working tirelessly behind the scenes as an advocate of the people.<sup>11</sup> He even led the NNDP, which won the three seats in the Legislative Council in 1923.

Along with twenty other law students, Ladipọ Ọlanke founded the West African Student’s Union (WASU) in Britain in 1925. WASU’s activities included regular meetings and consultation with British political officials, and the publication of a magazine.<sup>12</sup> Mojola Agbebi did not take active part in politics, but he was an educated cultural nationalist and an anticolonialist. E. A. Ayandele described Agbebi as “the only educated African who approximated to practical cultural nationalism.”<sup>13</sup> In 1934, the Lagos Youth Movement was inaugurated, but changed its name to the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1936. Although largely dominated by the Yorùbá, the NYM was conceived as a non-ethnic nationalist political organization. Some Yorùbá members of the movement included Dr. Kofo Abayomi, H. O. Davies, A. S. Akinsanya, Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ, Samuel Akintola, and Bode Thomas. The Ìbàdàn branch of the NYM had Sir Adeyemo Alakija and Awolọwọ as the elected president and secretary, respectively.

While studying in London, Awolọwọ and some Yorùbá students founded the Ẹgbẹ Ọmọ Odùduwà in 1945 as a Yorùbá cultural organization with the objectives of promoting the social welfare of the Yorùbá and of forging ethnic unity.<sup>14</sup> Describing Nigeria as a mere geographical expression, Awolọwọ believed that the Ẹgbẹ Ọmọ Odùduwà would serve the purpose of presenting, preserving, and promoting Yorùbá identity and nationalism in a multi-ethnic society. It would also promote education and protect traditional chiefs.<sup>15</sup> The official launching of the organization took place in Ilé-Ìfẹ in June 1948. The formation of the Ẹgbẹ Ọmọ Odùduwà, as S. O. Arifalo stated, marked “the first positive and most forceful expression of Yoruba nationalism as distinct from Nigerian nationalism hitherto advocated by Yoruba politicians in Lagos.”<sup>16</sup>

The Egbe became popular in Lagos where many Yorùbá intelligentsia resided. As the process of decolonization gathered momentum at the end of World War II, it became very important for the Yorùbá to be attached to a group for solidarity.

The increasing cultural and political awareness among the youth prompted them to join the Egbe, but leading Yorùbá politicians in Lagos, including Chief Bode Thomas, deplored this development because the youth could become radical and cause disturbances. On March 21, 1951, the Ẹgbẹ̀ Ọmọ Odùduwà transformed into a political party, the AG. On the one hand, some traditional rulers identified with the AG because it grew out of the Ẹgbẹ̀ Ọmọ Odùduwà, with an emphasis on cultural unity.<sup>17</sup> On the other hand, many Yorùbá youth supported the AG not for cultural reasons but for political participation.

The sophisticated sociopolitical organization, the exposure to Western education, and the participation in colonial administration provided considerable reinforcement for the Yorùbá political experience in the postcolonial period. Although the Yorùbá operated in the context of a larger political terrain, there were apparent indications of ethnic nationalism. Ethnicity has featured prominently in the political history of Nigeria since colonial times. Ethnicity has often been used as a source of political empowerment or for the enhancement of political position. The formation of political parties during the colonial period demonstrated that Nigerian nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ọbafẹmi Awolọwọ used ethnicity as one of their sources of political empowerment. Their parties, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the AG, were formed on the basis of ethnic affiliation. Under the strong influence of Awolọwọ, the AG stimulated political awareness of the Yorùbá. At independence in 1960, when no party successfully gained an overall majority, Sir Ahmadu Bello's Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the NCNC formed a coalition government, leaving the AG as the opposition party. Independence and even a contemporary democratic system have not obliterated the ethnic-based political system.

## Ìbàdàn: A Political Power House

Ìbàdàn has been one of the strongholds of Yorùbá politics. Along with Lagos, Ìbàdàn with its large and complex population played a prominent political role during the colonial period. As the capital of the Western Region, Ìbàdàn became a political powerhouse that produced politicians who have made impressive contributions to the growth of politics in Nigeria. Although Chief Awolọwọ, the first premier of the Western Region, was from Ìjẹbùland, he made Ìbàdàn his home. Some Ìbàdàn indigenes were leading members of the Ẹgbẹ̀ Ọmọ Odùduwà and the AG.<sup>18</sup> In 1951, some Ìbàdàn political elite who opposed Awolọwọ's ideologies and Ìjẹbù identity, and who felt that the AG did not represent the Yorùbá people, formed the Ìbàdàn Peoples Party (IPP). Chief A. M. A. Akinloye was its chairman. The AG unsuccessfully tried to win over some leaders of the IPP. A notable Ìbàdàn politician who did not belong to the AG was Adegoke Adelabu (a.k.a. *penkelemesi*, meaning "peculiar mess"). Adelabu, one of the best politicians of his time, was an



eloquent speaker, a man of the people, and a strong member of the NCNC, led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. Adelabu became the first leader of the opposition in the Western Region between 1956 and 1958. His membership and strong following made the NCNC a more national party than the AG.

Ìbàdàn has also been the center of political crisis, both intra- and interparty. The rivalry between the AG and NCNC tend to portray an intra-ethnic schism, but it also revealed the political maturity of the Yorùbá. Their sense of democracy and freedom of association was reflected in their embracement of parties that served their interests. Ìbàdàn remained a powerful factor during the Second Republic (1979 to 1983) when the rivalry and conflicts between the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and National Party of Nigeria (NPN) were reminiscent of those of the AG and NCNC. Well represented by top Ìbàdàn politicians, both parties struggled to control power at the state level. Top NPN members included Chief A. M. A. Akinloye, Chief Richard Akinjide, Dr. Omololu Olunloyo, and Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu. In support of the UPN were Alhaji Busari Adelokun and the Venerable Emmanuel Alayande. Like Adelabu in the 1950s, Adelokun dominated Ìbàdàn politics in the Second Republic. The intraparty problem of the UPN, especially between Chief Bola Ige, the governor, and Chief Adelokun, systematically strengthened the NPN. In the 1983 elections, the NPN came up with the slogan of “son of the soil,” implying that an Ìbàdàn indigene should become the governor. Today, there is evidence of a power struggle between Lamidi Adelabu and Senator Oladoja as to who is the governor of Òyó State.

Although intra-ethnic division has been a characteristic of the Yorùbá, it does not necessarily denote political weakness. For example, the NCNC received substantial support in the Western Region, which was the stronghold of the AG, largely due to the Adegoke Adelabu factor.

## **Crisis in the Western Region**

During and after the colonial period, the Western Region was the center of Nigerian politics. As Wòle Şoyinka put it, the west has always been “where the action was.”<sup>19</sup> The rivalry between the NCNC and AG, which involved Nnamdi Azikiwe, Awolòwò, and Adelabu Adegoke, made the west a vibrant and interesting political arena. In spite of the political maneuvers of the AG to control and consolidate in the west, the NCNC continued to win the sympathy of some Yorùbá, especially Ìbàdàn indigenes who were opposed to Awolòwò. In the Northern Region, the NPC and its splinter group, the Northern Elements Progressive Union, were diametrically opposed to the political ideologies of Awolòwò and the AG. The coalition of the NPC and NCNC in the 1959 elections was organized to undermine the AG and to reduce the growing influence of Awolòwò. Thus, at independence, Awolòwò became the leader of the opposition at the federal level and Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola served as the premier of the Western Region.

At this stage, every Nigerian politician looked to the Western Region, patiently awaiting the next political drama.

The chaos in the Western Region revealed the division within the Yorùbá society, undermined the administration of the AG, and marked the beginning of very serious political problems for Nigeria. With deep roots in ideological differences, conflicts of interest, and the power struggle between Awolòwọ and Akintola (the two leading members of the AG), the unresolved crisis dragged on into 1965. For the AG to maintain its firm grip on the Western Region and promote national support for the party, Awolòwọ proposed a democratic socialist ideology. But, considering democratic socialism a leftist and rabid concept appealing only to the educated elite, wage earners, and radical political elements of the region, Akintola opposed it. And Akintola's idea of restricting the operations of the AG to the Western Region and working with the NPC and NCNC coalition government was not favorably received by Awolòwọ. It became clear that the discord had reached a serious stage when the Akintola faction left the party's convention held in Jos in February 1962. Subsequent events such as the removal of Akintola and his replacement by D. S. Adegbenro as the premier of the Western Region, led to violence in the Western House of Assembly. The crisis in the Western Region exposed the disunity among the Yorùbá and destroyed the political maturity that was believed to have existed among them. At the intervention of the federal government, a state of emergency was declared and Akintola was reinstated. The reinstatement confirmed the allegation that Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the prime minister, supported Chief Akintola. After further investigation of the crisis, Awolòwọ and some AG leaders were accused of treason and were sent to jail. A substantial portion of the Yorùbá population regarded Akintola as a traitor. Partly responsible for the first military coup in January 1966, in which Chief S. L. Akintola, the premier of the Western Region, was assassinated along with other top Nigerian politicians, the episode ushered in a long period of political instability and the suspension of democratic rule in Nigeria.

### **Chief Awolòwọ and Awoists**

Since his participation in the decolonization of Nigeria, especially in his position as the first premier of the Western Region, Chief Ọbafẹmi Awolòwọ had been considered the leader of the Yorùbá. The formation of the Ẹgbé Ọmọ Odùduwà and the AG were proof of his ability to lead. Winning the 1951 regional elections, Awolòwọ was appointed the leader of government business and in 1954, he became the premier of the Western Region. Awolòwọ's administration is remembered for promoting the welfare of the people through free medical services and free primary education. The followers and beneficiaries of Awolòwọ's social and political programs accepted him as the leader of the Yorùbá. This position became officially recognized at a meeting held in Ìbàdàn in August 1966,

when General Yakubu Gowon, the head of state, released Awolowo from prison and the Yorùbá gathered in preparation for a national conference. Until his death, Chief Awolowo was a determining force behind Yorùbá political philosophy and strategies. P. C. Lloyd described Awolowo as “Western Nigeria’s foremost and certainly its best known ideologist.”<sup>20</sup> The politicians who followed him were committed to continuing and promoting those philosophical ideas and strategies. These politicians are called *Awoists* and their political philosophy is *Awoism*. Ebenezer Babatope, the former director of organization for the UPN; Chief Bola Ige, and Alhaji Lateef Jakande, former governors of the Òyó and Lagos states respectively, were diehard Awoists.

One of the greatest legacies of Awolowo, while serving as the premier of the Western Region, was the introduction of universal and free education in 1952. Chief S. O. Awokoya, the then Minister of Education, declared in July 1952 that, “educational development is imperative and urgent. It must be treated as a national emergency, second only to war. It must move with the momentum of a revolution.”<sup>21</sup> This remarkable educational program produced Yorùbá citizens who have become leaders in various fields of life, including politics. Other regions thought that free education was an ambitious and impracticable policy, but it has produced immeasurable results. The Yorùbá now play a leading role in the political and economic life of Nigeria. Awolowo’s government also provided free health care and good roads. Through education, health care, and roads, Awolowo’s government made life easier and better for the ordinary Yorùbá people. This is one of the reasons why the Yorùbá have been regarded as pacesetters in Nigeria.

It is, however, evident that Awolowo did not succeed in uniting the Yorùbá. Even while in power as the premier of the Western Region and the leader of the AG, Azikiwe’s NCNC won strong support in Ìbàdàn and the whole of the Western Region. This was due largely to the activities of Adegoke Adelabu. The AG would have won but according to a Yorùbá saying, *kòkòrò to n je èfò, ara èfò lo wa* (the bug that destroys the vegetable is within the vegetable). This means that the schisms among the Yorùbá prevented progress and fighting with a united front. There is no doubt that the death of Awolowo in 1987 created a major vacuum in the political leadership of the Yorùbá. To assume the mantle were Michael Ajasin of Ondó State, Bola Ige of Òyó State, Olabisi Onabanjo of Ògún State, and Lateef Jakande of Lagos State who were the flag bearers of the UPN, which Awolowo led.

Today, Awoists, leading the Afenifere and the Alliance for Democracy (AD) party, still keep the political philosophy of Awolowo alive. According to Governor Ladoja of Òyó State, “those of us that benefited from the good works of our leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, will continue to provide services to our people, and ensure that we advance the cause of justice, fairness and equity in all we do so that the legacies left behind by Chief Awolowo will continue for many decades to come.”<sup>22</sup> For many Yorùbá, Awolowo remains a legendary political figure who has left tremendous legacies that are almost impossible to destroy in Yorùbáland. Irrespective of what he achieved or what he did not accomplish, to many Yorùbá

people, Awolowo's name ranks among the top political leaders who have bequeathed democratic ideals on Nigeria. Lateef Jakande, an astute and knowledgeable politician, was looked upon as a credible successor to Awolowo as the leader of the Yorùbá. Jakande's success as the governor of Lagos proved his leadership ability and political astuteness. He was often referred to as *baba kékeré* (the small father). Jakande and Ebenezer Babatope fell out of favor with the Afenifere because they served in the Abacha regime that prevented the actualization of the June 12 election mandate in 1993.

Awoists are being criticized for not possessing the political stature, the integrative force, and the leading acumen of their mentor, Awolowo. Before Awolowo's death, Chief Michael Ajasin, a member of the Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà, the founder of the AG in Owo, and a leading member of the Afenifere, tried to step into Awolowo's shoes. Now, Senator Adesanya, in his position as the leader of the Afenifere, performs the role. But none has successfully won the popular support and recognition of the Yorùbá as Awolowo did. In a recent ceremony marking the ninety-fifth birthday and the seventeenth anniversary of Awolowo's death, Chief Adebayo Adefarati, former governor of Ondó State, defended the Awoists by arguing that they did their best to preserve the political philosophy and practice of their mentor. According to him, "we worked with what Awolowo stood for. When we are being criticized, people should know that we never had the type of Awolowo as chairman, and even Pa Adesanya was chairman of Afenifere and not the party. So, people should understand the circumstances in which we operated." Professor Adebayo Williams, of the University of the Incarnate Word, Texas, who delivered the keynote lecture, stated that, "the most profound legacy of Awolowo is the courage to face political odds and the character to confront political and social justice." And, in his own contribution, Rear Admiral Ndubuisi Kanu (rtd.) declared that "the Yoruba must remain proud of Awolowo. For all of us to build a country of different people, where we will have the good spirit of coming together, we must not lose sight of what we learnt or what we shared."<sup>23</sup> This shows, to a large extent, that Awolowo is still alive among Yorùbá politicians. Chief (Mrs.) Awolowo continues to provide leadership for the Awoists. She serves as the grand patroness of the Yorùbá Council of Elders (YCE, the *Igbimo Agba Yorùbá*). She is also the chairman of the oldest private surviving newspaper, the African Newspapers of Nigeria, publishers of the *Tribune* (Nigerian, Saturday, and Sunday *Tribune*).

The AG, basically operating on Awolowo's political ideologies, programs, and strategies, overwhelmingly won all the gubernatorial seats in Yorùbá land in the 1999 elections. And, Ọbasanjọ, although a Yorùbá but affiliated with the People's Democratic Party (PDP), did not win in the Yorùbá states. Surprisingly, the Yorùbá did not allow the concept of "son of the soil" to reflect in the 1999 presidential elections. Was this action based on the fact that the Yorùbá realized that the ideals and practices of democratic principles transcend ethnic affiliation? As it turned out, the Yorùbá played politics with ethnic loyalty. It should be emphasized that national unity is reinforced and the nation is transformed when the obstacles of

ethnic loyalty and mistrust are overcome. Unfortunately, the lack of a generally acceptable leader, intraparty, and intra-ethnic divisions, as manifested in the formation of competing organizations such as Afenifere, the YCE, and the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), tend to weaken Yorùbá cohesiveness and solidarity. There has been a significant shift of loyalty from the AD to the PDP as the elections of 2003 reveal. For example, out of frustration with the Afenifere, Babatope has become a national leader of the PDP caucus in Oṣun State and Jakande supports the All Nigerian People Party. Some other Yorùbá politicians have also joined the PDP. This new position reflects that whether in or out of the political party strongly associated with their ethnic group, the Yorùbá remain a factor to reckon with in the political schemes of Nigeria.

### **Traditional Rulers and Politics**

Yorùbá traditional rulers were always at the center stage of politics. They built a web of power and influence around themselves before the British imposed their colonial rule, and the change in their political fortune during the colonial era did not totally eliminate their participation in politics. For example, the British used them in their indirect rule system as part of the native authority. During the decolonization period, traditional rulers supported the educated nationalists in the struggle for independence. The Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà also served as a unifying force between traditional rulers and Yorùbá nationalists. As Remi Anifowose indicated:

Throughout Yorubaland, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa became a rallying focus of unity. The Egbe was solidly supported by leading Obas and Chiefs both in the Western Region and Lagos. It quickly evolved into an effective medium of co-operation between the new elite of the Western Region and the Yoruba Chiefs who retained considerable popularity in the rural areas.<sup>24</sup>

Ọba Adesoji Aderemi (Nov. 15, 1889 to July 7, 1980), the *Ọ̀oni* (chief/king) of Ifẹ between 1930 and 1980, participated in the colonial and postcolonial politics of Nigeria more than any Yorùbá traditional ruler. He was a statesman, patriot, educator, modernizer, and a legendary ruler.<sup>25</sup> He served as the president of the Western House of Chiefs (1954 to 1960), minister without portfolio (1951 to 1955), member of the Legislative Council, member of the Western Region House of Assembly, governor of the Western Region between 1960 and 1962, and was an active member of the Ègbé Ọmọ Odùduwà and the AG. About Ọba Aderemi, Chief Bola Ige said: "Ever since his ascension to this important chieftaincy he has displayed a sound common sense and statesmanlike ability which have made him not only a good administrator but a very valuable adviser as the chief Commissioner in Yorùbá matters." He added that Ọba Aderemi "perfectly blended tradition with modernity and his death marked the end of the past and

present.”<sup>26</sup> General Jemibewon recently launched his book entitled *Nigeria in Transition: A Biography of the Late Ooni of Ife, Oba Adesoji Tadeniawo Aderemi*. Commenting on the book, Iyabo Sotunde mentioned that at the creation of states in 1976, General Jemibewon revealed that Ọba Aderemi prevailed over General Ọbasanjo, the then head of state, to retain Ilé-Ifẹ and Ilẹ̀sà in Ọyó State rather than in the newly created Ondo State.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, no other traditional ruler has held public office as Ọba Aderemi did.

Ọba Aderemi’s participation in politics was not unique because the gradual and systematic involvement of traditional rulers in partisan politics began during the First Republic when many rulers asserted their loyalty to the Awolowo-led AG to retain their power, position, and patronage. In 1962, upon the outbreak of the political crisis in the Western Region, Dr. Moses Majekodunmi, the sole administrator, appointed rulers such as Ọba Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale of Ịjẹ̀bùland; Ọba Akinyele, the Olubadan of Ịbàdàn; and Ọba S. O. Abimbola, the Olú of Iwo as commissioners.

As discussed, the chaos in the Western Region brought about a significant turning point in the political history of Nigeria. The Western Region (now Yorùbá states or southwest Nigeria) was often referred to as the “Wild West,” because of its political vibrancy and also the problems that began there in 1962 and dragged on until 1965. The UPN and NPN rivalry in 1983, in which Omololu Olunloyo outmaneuvered Bola Ige in the “son of the soil” concept, was more or less a recreation of the Akintola–Adegbenro controversy. Mention can also be made of the ọ̀oni–alááfin rivalry for supremacy. The disturbances, which claimed many lives in the process of actualizing June 12 is also a reminder of the “Wild West.” Commenting on the most recent political situation in Yorùbáland, Reuben Abati, in his article entitled “Back to the Wild, Wild West,” stated that:

Western Nigeria has always been a source of problem to Nigerian politics, the scene of the most instructive dramas, with far-reaching implications for the larger Nigerian polity. . . . Politics in the West has always been dominated by a strain between isolationism and liberalism, with forces on both sides seeking such supremacy in elections which invariably ends in violence, or such prolonged animosity that ends up as a national dilemma with tragic consequences.<sup>28</sup>

The problems in the Western Region tend to demonstrate a high level of political consciousness within the population and not necessarily a desire to destabilize the nation. In all the controversies, the traditional rulers have played significant roles in mediating or pacifying their people.

Traditional rulers have been criticized for their participation in partisan politics, that doing so renders them ineffective in performing their primary functions as custodians of culture and tradition.<sup>29</sup> For example, in an article entitled, “Ọbas Eating the Forbidden Fruit?” Oluwole Odetola was of the opinion that:

Obas are natural rulers whose high pedestal should not be polluted by partisan politics. If they are to enjoy the loyalty and love of all their subjects, they must remain steadfastly as

true fathers of all. Like Plato they must show no love or hatred to any group . . . (so) Oba Adetona, neck-deep in partisan politics has an uphill task to convince his people that he is still their traditional ruler. He must choose between politics and the throne.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, Oma Djebah, Louis Achi, and Utibe Uko in their article, “Political Royal Fathers,” opposed the traditional rulers’ participation in active politics. Citing examples from different parts of Nigeria, they mentioned Oba Okunade Sijuade, the Ooni of Ife, “who fell short of rallying support for PDP from the podium . . . [and who] enthusiastically predicted total victory for President Oluṣegun Obasanjo.” They also stated that:

Shorn of constitutional roles in the republican environment of a presidential democracy, many traditional rulers, perhaps, as a form of adaptive survivalist response, have increasingly been edging into partisan political fray. By threading a path at odds with their roles as the guides and guardians of culture and tradition, they court an incipient backlash, more so against the background of perceived disappointing roles they have played in recent years, to the chagrin of their subjects. Often blamed equally alongside the military for the moral, political and socio-economic distortions that bedevil Nigeria today, they are simultaneously recognized as important in the nation’s quest for political stability.<sup>31</sup>

In a developing democratic society such as Nigeria, the contributions of everyone to nation building are important. Thus, traditional rulers in Yorùbáland want to be recognized not only as custodians of culture and traditions or as symbols of unity and cohesion but also as major actors and contributors in the process of nation development. Admittedly, as fathers of all, traditional rulers should be excluded from partisan politics but their roles should be clearly defined in the larger democratic political structure. Although traditional position may limit, it may not totally inhibit political participation. The traditional rulers still wield considerable influence on their people. They want their political contributions to extend beyond the local to the state and national level. That is why the Aláàfin of Òyó, Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, suggested that to improve the welfare of the people, traditional rulers should be assigned specific and major roles in the local government system.<sup>32</sup> On the national scene, Oba Adeyemi led a group of rulers to Vice President Atiku and stated that they could assist the federal government in its crusade against the vandalizing of oil pipelines.<sup>33</sup>

### **Militant Political Mechanism**

In the First Republic, Nigerian politicians employed the services of thugs, often the youth and the future leaders of the country, primarily to harass political opponents, and in some cases, to rig elections. Since then thuggery and violence have become synonymous with politics. Poverty and unemployment have also driven some people into hoodlumism. Abba Gana Shettima was of the opinion that “the

recruitment and use of the youth as political thugs across the country directly undermines the contribution of this vital group to the cause of democracy and good governance.”<sup>34</sup>

In more recent times, political militancy has become well pronounced in Nigeria. Ethnic militant associations have demonstrated their opposition to certain government policies that do not favor their ethnic groups. The rise of ethnic militias since the inauguration of the Fourth Republic in May 1999 has brought fear, intimidation, and insecurity to the people of Nigeria. Ethnic militias have emerged partly due to the long years of military rule during which time Nigerians experienced political, economic, and social hardships.<sup>35</sup> With the return to democracy, ethnic nationalism and chauvinism have replaced national interest. As Said Adejumobi rightly pointed out, “ethnic militias are essentially youth based groups formed with the purpose of promoting and protecting the parochial interests of their ethnic groups, and whose activities sometimes involve the use of violence.”<sup>36</sup>

The ethnic militias in Nigeria include the OPC in the southwest, the Arewa People’s Congress in the north; the Bakassi Boys of Africa and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra in the southeast; the Middle Belt Forum in the middle belt; and the Ijaw Youth Council and Egbesu Boys in the Niger Delta. The OPC, a pan-Yorùbá organization, was formed in 1994 to liberate the from the shackles of repression, to promote the interest of the Yorùbá people, and to demand a Yorùbá separate and distinct nation.<sup>37</sup> Whereas Tunde Babawale contends that “the OPC began as a militant resistant movement to the marginalization of the Yorùbá in the Nigerian power structure by the Hausa-Fulani faction of the Nigerian governing elite,”<sup>38</sup> Dr. Frederick Fasehun, the founding president of OPC, claims that the organization was meant to “defend the rights of every Yorùbá person on earth.”<sup>39</sup> The underlying reason for forming the OPC, according to Dr. Fasehun, was because the Yorùbá have been badly marginalized since independence; they “have not been allowed to come near the apex of power.” Giving the examples of Herbert Macaulay, who fought for the independence of Nigeria, and Awolowo (whom General Gowon released from prison to rescue Nigeria from economic problems during the Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970), Fasehun asserts that the country has always looked to the Yorùbá for leadership and initiatives.<sup>40</sup>

The formation of the OPC was therefore directly connected to the annulment of the 1993 presidential election results, which has been interpreted as part of a deliberate and systematic marginalization of the Yorùbá. The OPC intended to defend the rights of the Yorùbá to lead the nation by showing support for Chief M. K. O. Abiola, who was widely believed to have won the presidential election of June 12, 1993. A germane question to be answered is: Who gave the OPC the mandate to defend the Yorùbá? Its membership does not reflect that leading Yorùbá politicians support the group. If they had supported it, the leadership, programs, and activities would have been different. OPC would have been associated with politics, rather than with violence. If the OPC is not representative and is not



largely supported, how effectively could it defend the rights and nationality of the Yorùbá? It would appear that because of Babangida's action, a vacuum was created, and that provided a framework for this type of ethnic militia.

The cancellation of election results prolonged the political instability of Nigeria and significantly threatened the unity of the country. Generals Babangida and Abacha attempted to create the impression that the Yorùbá were in control by stage-managing the relinquishing of their power to an interim government led by a Yorùbá man. It also provided an opportunity for Abacha to carry out his ambition of becoming the head of state. Knowing that the Yorùbá could not be bought or silenced, Abacha began a process of eliminating notable Yorùbá people. That led to the imprisonment of Abiọla, who proclaimed himself president of Nigeria based on the mandate of the June 12 election. In 1995, Abacha alleged that a coup was planned to oust his government and General Oluşegun Ọbasanjo (rtd.) was involved. Ọbasanjo was arrested and imprisoned. General Diya Oladipo, the second in rank to Abacha, was also imprisoned. In 1998, the European Union (EU), expressed concern over Abacha's violations of human rights, arbitrary arrests, and harassment of pro-democracy activists, and his foot-dragging over plans to restore democratic rule. The EU demanded the release of political prisoners, especially Abiọla and Ọbasanjo. But Abacha did not yield to the EU request. For being an outspoken pro-democracy activist, Wọle Şoyinka's international passport was seized. Soyinka became an exile in America.

The ethnic clashes between the Yorùbá and Hausa/Fulani communities in Lagos in October 2000, which left approximately 100 people dead, were blamed on the OPC. Incidences of violence, considered inimical to the peace and unity of the country, have been identified with the OPC and because of that, the federal government decided to proscribe it. And, in swift reaction, Dr. Beko Ransome-Kuti, director of the Center for Constitutional Governance and a human rights activist, described the ban as contradictory to democratic principles. According to Beko, the OPC represents a sociocultural organization that defends the interest of the Yorùbá people and therefore should not be hounded by the federal government. The federal government described the OPC as an illegal organization while Beko described its ban as arbitrary.<sup>41</sup> In compliance with the federal government's directives, the police arrested Dr. Fasehun, Kayode Ogundamisi, the secretary-general, and other OPC officials.<sup>42</sup> Governor Bola Tinubu appointed a seven-member inquiry panel to investigate the "gruesome and senseless killings of citizens under the guise of ethnicity."<sup>43</sup> The Criminal Intelligence Bureau of the police had investigated and compiled a comprehensive report on the activities of the OPC. The report stated that "the leaders of the group had planned to use [the ethnic clash] as a breakaway assault machinery."<sup>44</sup> There are individuals who did not join but supported the separatist ideas of the OPC. For example, 'Niyi Ogunfolaju declared that:

The most civilized thing for the Yorubas to do right now is, to count their loss from . . . corporate Nigeria, pursue their self-determination, destiny, future and dreams under the

banner and new flag of “Oduduwa Nation,” while the most uncivilized and unrealistic thing to do is, to continue to believe that, God/Allah/Jesus/ or Mohammed will help us stop the Nigeria “Runaway Train.” The former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia did it, what’s wrong with Yorubas going their separate way in corporate Nigeria, after all a Yorùbá adage says, “E jawo ninu owo ti ko pe.” In other words, why continue to invest in unprofitable business?<sup>45</sup>

Given the geopolitical arrangements in Nigeria, the sophistication of the politics, and the bloody consequences of separation, pursuing an “Odùduwà Nation” may not be a realistic approach. During the Biafran War, a popular slogan was “To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done.” Awolòwọ has been heavily criticized for his isolationism by forming ethnic political parties. Therefore advocating separatism may not be the lasting solution to Nigeria’s ethnopolitical problems.

Nonmilitant, but well-organized political groups, such as the Egbe Afenifere (led by Senator Abraham Adesanya) and the YCE (led by Pa Emmanuel Alayande), also exist. Egbe Afenifere claims to be following in the footsteps of the late sage, Chief Ọbafẹmi Awolòwọ. This indicates that the AD is an offshoot of Afenifere. Members of the Afenifere such as Chief Bola Ige, Chief Olaniwun Ajayi, Chief Ayo Adebajo, Chief Adefarati, Oluşegun Osoba, and Lam Adesina follow Awolòwọ’s political ideologies. Because Afenifere purports to protect and promote the interests of the Yorùbá people, many Yorùbá elites did not hesitate to join it. Afenifere has been facing many internal problems, and the assassination of Chief Bola Ige dealt a devastating blow to the organization. Because of internal squabbles, Afenifere lost its influence on the AD. The AD, which won all the gubernatorial seats in Yorùbáland in the 1999 elections, performed woefully in the 2003 elections, even in Yorùbá states.

At the first meeting of the YCE on October 20, 2000, Emmanuel Alayande was elected as its leader and Justice Adewale Thompson was chosen as secretary. The YCE emerged as a different organization from the Afenifere.<sup>46</sup> Pa Alayande indicated that the purpose of the YCE was neither to antagonize any government authorities or other ethnic groups nor to divide the Yorùbá. Rather, it was to seek peace, cooperation, love, and mutual respect for all ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria. According to him, the council “will function as Afenifowo, Afenifalaafia, Afenifere, Afenifola and so on.”<sup>47</sup> He further stated that the realization “of a better future for the Yorùbá could only be a reality through a united front and healthy atmosphere of mutual friendship.”<sup>48</sup> The Yorùbá would resist being cheated, relegated, or marginalized by any government or ethnic group.

## **The Politics of June 12, 1993**

The Moshood Abiọla saga presents an important part of Yorùbá politics and introduces a new dimension to the political discourse in Nigeria. It is believed in many circles that the presidential election of 1993 was the fairest, most peaceful,

and most successful election Nigeria has ever conducted. It was apparent that the previous voting pattern on ethnic and regional divide changed in the June 12, 1993, election. Ethnic differences, in addition to the north and south dichotomy, prevented Chief Awolowo from becoming the prime minister in 1960 and stopped him from becoming president in 1979. The presidential election of 1993 was radically different. There is little evidence that ethnic affiliation played a major role in the election.

Chief Moshood Abiola, the central figure of June 12, was a strong member of the NPN. In 1983, he founded the *Concord* newspapers to promote his ambition of becoming the president. He, however, withdrew from active politics because of ideological differences and conflicts of interest with the northern oligarchy. The Babangida regime temporarily silenced his ambition, but with the lifting of the ban on political parties in 1993, Abiola resumed active political participation. Leading the Social Democratic Party, Abiola, a Yoruba and a Muslim, defeated Alhaji Bashir Tofa, a Hausa and a Muslim representing the National Republican Convention. In spite of this huge success, highly praised by international observers, General Babangida annulled the election results under the pretext of accusations of corruption. It was, however, commonly believed that General Abacha's ambition to become the head of state, along with ethnic politics, underscored Babangida's action.

The annulment of the election results not only was surprising but also absurd because it put Nigerian unity at stake. Ethnic tensions rose, but there were no immediate acts of violence. The Yoruba felt exploited and marginalized. In his biography entitled *Shehu Musa Yar' Adua: A Life of Service*, Yar' Adua stated that Nigerians wanted the military out of power Babangida but did not want to leave office and Abiola was the only one who could be used against him to bring democracy into practice. Abiola was used as a strong candidate from the southwest to generate momentum for the removal of the military. Frustrated voices called for "the balkanization of the country," claiming that it was time to correct Lugard's mistake of amalgamating Nigeria in 1914. Many people believed that the solution would be found in the creation of a separate Yoruba nation.<sup>49</sup> Babangida must have realized the consequences of his action. To mollify the Yoruba, he chose Chief Ernest Shonekan as the chairman of the interim national government. The absurdity of the annulment became apparent after 3 months, when General Sani Abacha overthrew Shonekan's transition regime.

Abacha's action did not sit well with the Yoruba who had the great expectation of Abiola becoming the first Yoruba civilian president. In spite of surrounding himself with some influential Yoruba leaders and politicians, Abacha was not very successful in dividing the Yoruba. The more the Yoruba called for democracy the more Abacha marginalized them. To uphold the mandate of the people, Abiola proclaimed himself the elected president of Nigeria on June 11, 1994, and Abacha arrested and imprisoned him on June 23, charging him with sedition. Realizing the burning anger in the Yoruba, Abacha offered an unconditional release to Abiola if he renounced his claim to the presidency. Abiola did not

acquiesce, believing that trading his claim to the presidency for freedom would have betrayed his conscience, would have let down the Yorùbá people, and would have disappointed the advocates for democracy.<sup>50</sup> The popular opinion on June 12 is that the Hausa did not want to relinquish political power to the Yorùbá. To many, June 12 remains an enigma for Nigeria and a huge loss for the Yorùbá people.

Amid other violations of human rights, including the hanging of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists for protesting against the Shell Oil Company for destroying their land, Abacha claimed that a coup had been planned to oust him. Many Yorùbá people, including Generals Ọbasanjọ and Oladipo Diya, were arrested and imprisoned. Because they did not enjoy how the military regimes treated them, the Yorùbá not surprisingly provided the stiffest opposition to Abacha's infamous regime. The sudden death of Abacha on June 8, 1998, signaled good fortune for political prisoners. Succeeding Abacha, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, a moderate military politician, released some political prisoners, including Ọbasanjọ, Bola Ige, and Olú Falae. Barely a month after Abacha's death, and on the eve of his release, Abiọla suddenly died in prison. The Yorùbá were again enraged because Abiọla, a symbol of reform and democracy, and an acceptable leader of the Yorùbá, had been eliminated. The reaction of the Yorùbá found expression in political and ethnic riots. Undoubtedly, Abiọla's death threatened the fragile foundation of Nigeria as a nation. Without wasting time, the call for a Yorùbá nation was revived. For example, the Odùduwà Movement (based in Britain) and Egbe Ọmọ Yorùbá (based in the United States) described Abiọla's death as the handiwork of the northern-dominated military regime to prevent the Yorùbá from leading the country. According to the Odùduwà Movement, "the mysterious death of Abiọla is a tragedy which the Yorùbá s will not take lightly." And, the Egbe Ọmọ Yorùbá stated that it was time "for Yoruba people world-wide to make the unity, empowerment, and autonomy of the Yorùbá nation a task that must be done within the context of a true federal union."<sup>51</sup> The two groups believed that the Yorùbá had been provoked, victimized, and humiliated. Responding to Abiọla's death from Canada, Olufẹmi Sanni wrote:

There is nothing called Nigeria, why do we keep fooling ourselves? It's time we all go our different ways. There was never any trust and there can never be any after this. The so-called northerners are just holding everybody back. Our ways of life are different; we all have different goal as human beings. Enough is enough. If this separation is not achieved peacefully it will be achieved forcefully.<sup>52</sup>

Ore Falomo, Abiọla's personal physician, also declared that "rather than fight a civil war [over Abiọla's death], we should all go our separate ways. You should not force people to stay together."<sup>53</sup> Dividing Nigeria into two countries—the north to form a Muslim state and the south to constitute a Christian state—may create another set of political and religious problems. In the same way, restructuring Nigeria into three regions is a revisit of regionalization that was heavily criticized

in the Richard's Constitution of 1946. Going in separate ways is not as easy as said or thought. As ethnic rivalry, unfriendly relations, and political tensions continue to show frightening pointers to balkanization, perhaps political education, tolerance, and understanding each other will help to bring about unity and peace, which would facilitate a democratic system. In 1998, Nelson Mandela said, "the reason why the world has opened its arms to South Africans is because we're able to sit down with our enemies and to say let us stop slaughtering one another. Let's talk peace."<sup>54</sup> Nigerians must do the same thing.

June 12, 1993, was a national problem. As Funṣo Afọlayan put it, June 12 was not about Abiṣṣa but about "the struggle for justice, equality, democracy and accountability."<sup>55</sup> The actualization of June 12 was not for the Yorùbá, but for Nigeria. Rather than going in separate ways, Nigerians should see June 12 as a national betrayal that calls for a common struggle for unity, peace, and stability. After a long and unsavory period of military rule, Nigeria requires a stable democratic system and good governance.

### **Yorùbá Political Roles Since 1999**

By virtue of the events that surrounded the June 12, 1993, election and the sudden death of Abiṣṣa, the Yorùbá had the opportunity to present the only two candidates in the 1999 presidential elections. Although Chief Olú Falae of the AD received tremendous support and votes from the Yorùbá, Ọbasanjọ failed to win in the southwest, even losing the election in Abeṣkuta. The Yorùbá, perhaps, did not forgive Ọbasanjọ for handing over the government to Shehu Shagari in 1979, after Awolọwọ strongly contested the election results. The respect the Yorùbá accorded Awolọwọ was reflected in 1999 because it was believed that Falae would have promoted some of Awolọwọ's ideals of government. Another offense Ọbasanjọ committed was his stand on June 12 when he claimed that Abiṣṣa was not the messiah Nigeria was waiting for. To the pro-democracy group, this was a disappointing pronouncement. Because the PDP failed to make inroads in the southwest, it is possible to argue that the Yorùbá were parochial and played ethnic politics. Furthermore, unlike the All People's Party that won nine governorship seats in three zones of the north, the AD was the only party that did not win gubernatorial elections outside its six states. This has led to criticism that Yorùbá politics has not transcended ethnic identity or its geopolitical enclave. Ọbasanjọ, however, won with overwhelming support from the northern states.

Even with Ọbasanjọ at the helm of power, the Yorùbá are not fully satisfied with their position in government. Like other Nigerians, some Yorùbá question Ọbasanjọ's political skill and criticize his administrative style. For example, Wọle Ṣoyinka accused Ọbasanjọ's regime of endangering the country's democracy by running a Mafia-like administration.<sup>56</sup> In spite of the criticism of Ọbasanjọ, it is obvious that Nigeria is a difficult country to govern, given the level of political

education, ethnic diversity, and long period of military rule. Godson Offoaro was of the opinion that

Obasanjo truly is a Nigerian nationalist doing everything to ensure that Nigeria which he will bequeath after 2007 will be a better one [politically], than he met it. And to reconstruct such a decadent society, you have to thoroughly rearrange its competing aggregating variables. The variables here being the multi-ethnic conglomerate, called Nigeria.<sup>57</sup>

Obasanjo's mission is to gradually develop Nigeria into a strong and united nation where ethnic politics cease to predominate. The lessons of history indicate that democracy does not thrive in an environment where ethnicity dominates, and that way of life has to be destroyed. Although agreeing that the Yorùbá have made meaningful contributions to Nigerian development by producing the first doctor, the first engineer, and the first lawyer, Obasanjo believes that these are achievements of the glorious past and the Yorùbá should be pursuing the national interest.<sup>58</sup>

In the framework of modern politics in Nigeria, the Yorùbá have to become more unified, not for the purpose of isolating themselves from other ethnic groups, but to prevent marginalization. Chief Hubert Ogunde illustrated this lack of unity, intra-ethnic conflict of interest, and rivalry among the Yorùbá in his record entitled "Yoruba Ronu." He asserted that because the Yorùbá had been trying to woo other ethnic groups, they became a pawn in Nigeria's political chess. Rather than being leaders, they have been used as ladders for other ethnic groups to rise to the top of Nigerian politics. Waxed in 1979 as part of his support for Chief Obafemi Awolowo's bid for the presidency, the record strongly called on the Yorùbá to rethink their roles as enviable leaders in Nigerian politics. There is strength in unity. Even while belonging to different political parties, the Yorùbá can still play politics maturity and without bitterness.

## Conclusion

The leading role of the Yorùbá in Nigerian politics cannot be easily dismissed. Since precolonial times, when they evolved sophisticated and well-administered political structures, the Yorùbá have demonstrated their political skillfulness. Continuing into the colonial period, they emerged at the forefront of Nigerian politics with many Western-educated nationalists providing inspiration, leadership, and strategies. After independence, the Yorùbá did not compromise their political prowess but continued to serve in different top political and administrative positions.<sup>59</sup>

As the Yorùbá themselves say, *igi kan ki i da'gbó sẹ* (one tree does not make a forest), they realize the necessity for peaceful coexistence, support, and cooperation among all ethnic groups to build a unified and strong nation. Recognizing the essence of unity and the political potential of other ethnicities, Yorùbá

elders, at a meeting in 1995, declared, “we Yoruba people believed in the unity of Nigeria and peaceful co-existence with all constituent nationalities but such co-existence must be based on the principles of equality, equity and justice.”<sup>60</sup> The preponderant self-interest of ethnic groups and separatist advocates diminish the power of democracy to forge a strong national integration. Some minority groups have accused the Yorùbá of oppressing them. For example, Major General David Ejor (rtd.) alleged that the Yorùbá have historically oppressed the Urhobo. General Ejor indicated that when Chief Awolowo was the premier of the Western Region, he oppressed the Urhobo in favor of the Yorùbá and Itsekiri. He also claimed that when General Obasanjo became the head of state in 1976, he “oppressed the [Urhobo] by denying them of their land and natural resources.” For General Ejor, the Urhobo continue to be in search of freedom from the Yorùbá because Obasanjo remains an “oppressor” of the Urhobo people.<sup>61</sup>

Recently, President Olusegun Obasanjo described the leadership role of the Yorùbá, especially Ògún State indigenes, in Nigerian politics as accidental but with a purpose. Giving examples of people such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief M. K. O. Abiola, Professor Eytayo Lambo, and Professor Wole Soyinka, Obasanjo believed that the purpose of Yorùbá leadership is for effective nation building. Nigerian politics is not which ethnic group would rule best, but how well the country is administered by competent and visionary leaders. No ethnic group should be marginalized, no ethnic group should arrogate power to itself, but all ethnic groups should contribute to the political and economic growth of the country.

One of the Yorùbá elites who has always criticized the government, past and present, is Wole Soyinka. An advocate of good governance and democracy, Soyinka condemned politicians for their ineffectiveness and repressive acts during the Shehu Shagari-led Second Republic, when looting, embezzlement, and corruption plunged the country into a serious political and economic disaster. In a satirical song, Soyinka demonstrated his love and patriotism to Nigeria by declaring, “I love my country, I no go lie, na inside am I go live and die.” Given the political and economic climate and ethnic relations of the time, not many people showed a similar patriotic spirit. In opposition to General Abacha’s cruel dictatorial regime, Chief Michael Ajasin, Senator Adesanya, and Chief Bola Ige led the National Democratic Coalition while Soyinka formed the National Liberation Council of Nigeria in the process of restoring democracy. Abacha’s regime opened old wounds and widened the gap in ethnic relations<sup>62</sup> because the Yorùbá felt insulted and marginalized when Abacha coerced Chief Ernest Shonekan into resigning as the head of the interim government. Based on the political education and activeness of Nigerians, especially the pro-democracy groups in the southwest, Soyinka predicted in 1994 that Abacha would be the last despot in Nigeria. The return to democracy in 1999 has proved him right.<sup>63</sup> In spite of a Yorùbá leading the present administration, Soyinka has not stopped criticizing it, which shows that his “love” for Nigeria transcends ethnic and cultural affiliation.

In the current political dispensation, the influence of the Yorùbá remains strong. There were great and perhaps unrealistic expectations when Ọbasanjọ assumed the presidency of Nigeria in May 1999. Ọbasanjọ's regime has been discredited for many reasons including corruption and nepotism, as well as ethnic and religious conflicts that have claimed approximately 10,000 lives. These national problems have led many people to conclude that Nigeria has not begun to enjoy the dividends of democracy, and the country is more ethnically divided and economically dejected than it formerly was. To worsen the situation, a culture of violence has emerged in which top politicians are assassinated or ambushed in every part of the country. These occurrences greatly impede progress. Could it be impatience on the part of the people, incompetence on the part of the government, or both? Nigeria is a complex country to administer and the enormity of damage wrought on it by the series of military regimes cannot be undone overnight.

Wale Adebaniwí believes that "Ọbasanjọ has blown up the myth of Yorùbá administrative competence."<sup>64</sup> Ọbasanjọ's performance should not be a yardstick to measure or judge the political skillfulness of all the Yorùbá people and his performance does not belittle the political contributions of the Yorùbá to national growth and development. It is inappropriate to blame national problems and political mistakes of the country on only one person or on an ethnic group. The Yorùbá did not single-handedly create the problems of Nigeria. For Nigeria to enjoy positive political and economic changes, leadership is important, but it is also a collective responsibility. In *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe contended that Nigeria's main problem "is simply and squarely a failure of leadership."<sup>65</sup> This shows that leaders before Ọbasanjọ have failed Nigeria and the country continues to search for a charismatic and nationally acceptable leader. However, as the leader of the country, Ọbasanjọ carries the burden of blame in the same way his advisers and officers do. Every Nigerian, not an individual and not a single ethnic group, has to contribute to the growth of the nation. The Yorùbá, along with other ethnic groups, must work together in finding lasting solutions. Good governance and sustainable political development of Nigeria is a collective responsibility.

## Notes

1. J. A. Atanda, "Government of Yorubaland in the Pre-colonial Period," *Tarihi* 4, no. 2 (1973): 1–12.
2. Akinjogbin articulated the ẹbí concept in I. A. Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture* (Ìbàdàn: Olú-Akin Publishers, 2002), 104–19.
3. J. A. Atanda, *An Introduction to Yoruba History* (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1980), 9.
4. Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours before 1600," in *History of West Africa*, vol. 1, ed. J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (London: Longman, 1976), 201–9.



5. For a more detail discussion on the transition from segmentary to centralized political system in Yorùbàland, see Biodun Adediran, *The Frontier States of Western Yorubaland, 1600–1889*. (Ìbàdàn: IFRA, 1994).

6. Aláàfin of Òyó, “Civilisation Started from Yoruba Kingdom,” *Focus Magazine* (22 August 2003), [www.nigeriaworld.com/feature/partners/focus/082203-alaafin.html](http://www.nigeriaworld.com/feature/partners/focus/082203-alaafin.html).

7. Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 83–84.

8. *Ibid.*, 85.

9. ObaḞemi Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), 49.

10. LaRay Denzer, “Herbert Samuel Heelas Macaulay,” <http://diaspora.northwestern.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/DiasporaX.woa/wa/displayArticle?atomid=902>.

11. S. O. Arifalo, *The Egbe Omo Oduduwa: A Study in Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism* (Akure, Nigeria: Stebak Books and Publishers, 2001), 23.

12. Becky Givan, “West African Student’s Union (WASU),” <http://diaspora.northwestern.edu/cgi-bin/WebObjects/DiasporaX.woa/wa/displayArticle?atomid=902>.

13. E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842–1914: A Political and Social Analysis* (London: Longman, 1966), 254–55.

14. Awolowo, *Path to Nigerian Freedom*.

15. For more information, see James S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Benin City, Nigeria: Broburg & Wistom, 1958), 343–52.

16. In its inaugural meeting in Nigeria in 1948, Sir Adeyemo Alakija, a member of the Legislative Council, became the first president of the Ègbé Omọ Odùduwà. Other officers included Yekini Ojikutu, S. A. Akinfenwa, I. O. Ransome-Kuti, Alhaji Soye, Prince Duro Adefarahan, Chief Otún Akinyede, S. O. Gbadamosi, and Dr. Akinola Maja as vice presidents, Dr. K. A. Abayomi as treasurer, and ObaḞemi Awolowo as general secretary. Arifalo, *The Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, 1, 104.

17. At the inauguration meeting of the AG, traditional rulers in attendance included the OḞni of Ifè, Sir Adesoji Aderemi; the Aláàfin of Òyó, Sir Adeniran Adeyemi; the alake of Abeokuta, Sir Ladapo Ademola; the Ewi of Ado Ekiti, Oba Aladesanmi II, and the Awujale of Ìjèbùland, Oba Gbelegbuwa II.

18. Leading politicians from Ìbàdàn include Chief Moyo Aboderin, Chief Mojeed Agbaje, Chief Kola Balogun, Chief A. M. A. Akinloye, Alhaji Busari Obisesan, D. T. Akinbiyi, Akinniyi Olunloyo, Chief Richard Akinjide, Chief Busari Adelakun (a.k.a. *Eruobodo*), Dr. Omololu Olunloyo, Alhaji Lamidi Adedibu, and Ven. Emmanuel Alayande, to mention a few.

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25. Governor Bola Ige, “Oba Adesoji Aderemi,” *Daily Sketch* (July 8, 1980).

26. *Ibid.*

27. Iyabo Sotunde, "How Late Oṣoni Foiled Ifè, Ijesha's Inclusion in Ondo, by Jemibewon," *Odili.net* (November 22, 2003), <http://odili.net/news/source/2003/nov/22/7.html>
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30. Oluwole Odetola, "Obas Eating the Forbidden Fruit?" *Daily Sketch* (August 6, 1980), 6.
31. Oma Djebah and others, "Political Royal Fathers."
32. "Oba Lamidi Wants Role for Traditional Rulers," *Daily Trust* (March 28, 2003), <http://news.biafranigeriaworld.com/archive/2003/mar/29/0145.html>
33. Hussaini Tukur, "Royal Fathers Vow to Stop Bunkering," *New Nigerian* (August 1, 2003), <http://www.gamji.com/nnn-080103-1.htm>
34. Abba Gana Shettima, "Politics as Motor Park Thuggery" (November 17, 2002) <http://www.kanoonline.com/cgi-bin/articles/template.php/ags010.txt>
35. Sulaiman A. Sulaiman, "2003 elections: Ethnic militia, a challenge to the Nigeria Police," *DailyTrust* (March 28, 2003), <http://news.biafranigeriaworld.com/archive/2003/mar/29/0166.html>
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47. "Yoruba Council of Elders," *Sunday Punch* (October 22, 2000), 1–3.
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Nations, and Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the secretary-general of the commonwealth, asking him to sign a statement that he would no longer declare himself president for the federal government to give him an unconditional release. *The Punch* (July 10, 1998), 11.

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57. Godson Offoaro, "Yoruba Nationalism: Mortally Wounded (Part I)," *Nigeriaworld* (April 28, 2003), <http://nigeriaworld.com/columnist/offoaro/042803.html>

58. Rasak Yusuf and Ademola Adeyemo in Ìbàdàn and Chuks Okocha in Abuja, "Obasanjo's Campaign Director Fired over Fraud," *This Day* (December 10, 2002), <http://odili.net/news/source/2002/dec/10/52.html> (accessed 2 March 2004).

59. Chief Simeon Adebó is one of the best civil servants Nigeria has ever produced. He began his career during the colonial period in 1933 at the Accounts Department of the Nigerian Railway, working with Bode Thomas (who became the first Nigerian federal minister) and S. L. Akintola (who became the premier of Western Region). Adebó served as assistant financial secretary in the colonial office, permanent secretary for the Western Region, and after his retirement in 1962, he served as ambassador and permanent representative at the United Nations (1962 to 1967). He was the executive director of the United Nations Institute for Training and Research (1968 to 1972). He was the chairman of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies. For more information, see Simeon O. Adebó, *Our Unforgettable Years* (Ìbàdàn: Macmillan Nigeria Publishers, 1983).

60. "The People of Yoruba Nation," *Odua Weekly News* (February 8, 1995), 8.

61. *Weekend Vanguard* (January 26, 2002).

62. In the wake of a riot that erupted during the celebration of May Day 1998 in which pro-democracy groups protested against Abacha's ambition of installing himself as a civilian president, some Yorùbá advocates of democracy were arrested. They included Chief Abiọla, General Ọbasanjó, Ọtunba Durojaiye, Chief Olú Falae, Prof. Osuntokun, Chief Bola Ige, Alhaji Lam Adesina, Chief Niyi Owolabi, Ola Oni, Ayo Opadokun, and Olusegun Maiyegun.

63. Raphael Chijoke Njoku, "The Last Despot," *Economist* 354, no. 8153 (January 15, 2000), 4.

64. Wale Adebánwí, "Obasanjo, Yoruba and the Future of Nigeria," *Nigeriaworld* (February 16, 2003), <http://odili.net/news/source/2003/feb/16/220.html>

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## **POLITICS, ETHNICITY, AND THE STRUGGLE FOR AUTONOMY AND DEMOCRACY**

Funṣo Afọlayan

This chapter focuses on the place of the Yorùbá in the perennial struggle for democratization and national integration in Nigeria. The Yorùbá occupy a strategic position in the scheme of things in Nigeria today. Since 1993, following the cancellation of the result of the presidential elections that were held that year and won by a Yorùbá man, the Yorùbá have been at the center of the sociopolitical crisis that has dominated Nigerian affairs and poisoned inter-group relations in the country. Between 1993 and 1998, more than at any other time since the Biafran Civil War (1967 to 1970), the fate of Nigeria, the validity of its continuing existence as a corporate entity, was severely threatened. Like the Igbo before them, the Yorùbá, feeling entirely alienated and chafing under the mindless terror of General Sanni Abacha's regime, became the champions of the struggle for a return to true federalism or the dissolution of Nigeria into its many component parts. The choice or even "imposition" in 1999 of only Yorùbá presidential candidates by all the political parties in the country was a compromise to forestall and stem the relentless slide into disintegration. Using an array of sources, primary and secondary, this paper carries out a historical exploration of the origins, the nature, and the dynamics of the Yorùbá interactions with the Nigerian polity. The paper argues that the fate of the Yorùbá, like those of other minority or marginalized groups, and the nature of their participation as equal and contented members of the Nigerian nation, will be at the center of Nigerian politics for years to come. Using the Yorùbá as a case study, the paper examines the conditions under which Nigeria, like other postcolonial African states, can successfully confront and solve its challenges of ethnicity, pluralism, and power sharing while remaining and surviving as a united, prosperous, and democratic state.

Who are the Yorùbá? How did they end up in the nation created by the British colonial rulers at the end of the nineteenth century and called *Nigeria*? What

are they doing there? What have been the consequences of their association with and inclusion in the Nigerian polity? Has that association proved to be a blessing or a curse? How have they negotiated their relationship with Nigeria over the years? Why has that relationship become especially strained after June 1993? How do we explain the profound sense of alienation and disillusionment that between 1993 and 1998 characterized Yorùbá perception of their membership in the political entity called *Nigeria*? Why did the call for secession and, failing that, a sovereign national conference, become very strident during those years? What can the Yorùbá experience tell us about the nature, the problems, challenges, and prospect of nation building in Nigeria? What light can this study of the Yorùbá throw on the problems and the dynamics of ethnicity, self-determination, and democracy in modern Nigeria?

The Yorùbá belong to the Kwa, Niger–Benue, and Kongo–Kordofanian linguistic groups. They number about 25 million people. This figure increases if the Yorùbá in Benin, Togo, and the Atlantic diaspora are included. They are noted for their urban lifestyle, rich artistic culture, and sacred kingship. They occupy a geographically contiguous area in southwestern Nigeria and are divided into a number of fairly definable dialectal units. Notable among these are the Ọ̀yọ́, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ẹ̀gbá, Egbado, Awori, Ekiti, Ìgbómìnà, Ibolo, and Okun-Yorùbá, to name the most populous ones. There is a general acknowledgment of the historical primacy of Ifẹ̀, as the cradle, or *orirun*, of the race, the origin or source of sacred kingship. Ifẹ̀ did not appear to have exercised political authority over the other Yorùbá groups. And in any case, whatever political primacy it had, appeared to have been overshadowed by the rising power of Ọ̀yọ́ kingdom, which from the sixteenth century onward became the most powerful of the Yorùbá states.

Ọ̀yọ́'s domination of much of Yorùbáland was regularly contested and challenged by other imperial powers with strategic interests in the region. From the mid-eighteenth century, a resurgent Nupe kingdom began to carry out successful predatory raids into northeastern Yorùbá country. To the west the highly homogeneous kingdom of Dahomey never gave up its desire to impose its power over parts of western Yorùbáland. In the southeast, the coastal kingdom of Benin extended its imperial tentacles to incorporate the Ilaje, Ondó, Owo, and the Awori of Lagos into its rising empire. The outbreak of the Fulani jihad in the Hausa country eventually posed the most potent threat to Ọ̀yọ́'s control and survival. By the early decades of the nineteenth century, the northern Ọ̀yọ́ frontier state of Ìlọ̀rín had fallen to Fulani jihadist conquest. The subsequent collapse of Ọ̀yọ́ set in motion a series of events that would eventually engulf the entire Yorùbá country in a series of century-long fratricidal civil wars and set the stage for French and the British conquests during the last decades of the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup>

## **The Yorùbá in Colonial Nigerian Politics**

Boundary arrangement and settlements between the British and the French truncated the Yorùbá country. Whereas the bulk of Yorùbáland came under the

British, the French had possession of the western Yorùbá groups of Ketu, Sabę, Idaisa, and related groups. Within British Nigeria, most Yorùbá found themselves in the southern provinces. A few, however, were not so lucky. Notable among these were the Ibolo, the Okun-Yorùbá, much of the Ìgbómìnà, and parts of the Ekiti, who as a result of previous Fulani conquests found themselves within the northern provinces. The desire of these Yorùbá subgroups to join their kith and kin in the south generated much controversy and agitation during the late colonial period. It became one of the thorny issues that proved very problematic during the era of decolonization. The Yorùbá in the south insisted that these groups should be separated from the north and reunited with the other Yorùbá groups in the south. On their part, the northern ruling elite made their agreement to remain part of an independent Nigeria conditional on their retention of every inch of land and every group that the British had made part of the colonial northern provinces, much of which they claimed to have conquered during the Islamic jihadist wars, irrespective of whatever language or culture these groups belonged to.<sup>2</sup>

In response to these conflicting demands, the British colonial masters set up the Willink Commission in 1958 to look into the fears of the minorities and recommend means for alleviating them. The commission could not persuade the northern ruling elite to give up their claim to the control of the northern Yorùbá minority groups. Consequently, to not jeopardize the progress toward independence, the commission recommended that there should be no change made to the status quo; the Yorùbá minorities in the north would remain part of the Northern Region. During the Nigerian First Republic, these Yorùbá minority groups would remain a thorn in the flesh of the northern ruling elite. They formed the *Ìlọrin Talaka Parapo* (the poor of Ìlọrin unite) a political association that would for a while rock the boat of state in the Ìlọrin province of the Northern Region.<sup>3</sup>

To counter the growing influence of the educated Igbo elite, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, and to protect and give expression to Yorùbá interests in Nigeria, Ọbafemi Awolọwọ founded the *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* (society of the children of Odùduwà) in London in 1944. This was a pan-Yorùbá cultural organization that would become a rallying point for the articulation and defense of Yorùbá interests vis-à-vis those of other ethnic groups in the country. Ethnic nationalism had become a major factor in Nigerian politics. In 1951, the Egbé gave birth to the Action Group (AG), the political party that would dominate Yorùbá politics for much of the 1950s and the early 1960s.<sup>4</sup>

## **The Yorùbá and the First Republic, 1960 to 1966**

At independence in 1960, the AG was in control of the west. Awolọwọ, the leader of the party, resigned as regional premier to contest the national elections. He lost and became the leader of the opposition in a government and legislature heavily dominated by the Northern People's Congress–National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NPC–NCNC) alliance. The AG, however, was not united in their

opposition to the federal government. A faction led by Ladoke Akintola, deputy AG leader and western regional premier, did not see the wisdom of the Yorùbá remaining in opposition against the rest of the country. According to this faction, this would be self-destructive, because it would deprive the Yorùbá of their share of the federal largess. They also saw no reason in the futile and wasteful effort of spending money to win elections in areas beyond the west, a key objective of Awolowo, who was bent on becoming the nation's leader. At the AG party conference in Jos in 1962, the disagreement erupted into a crisis. Awolowo's supporters voted to remove Akintola as deputy party leader. They also persuaded the Oṣoni of Ifẹ, who was then the governor of the west, to sack Akintola as premier, which he did on May 27. The attempt of Alhaji Adegbenro to form a new government provoked a violent reaction from Chief Akintola's supporters. Hell was let loose as the violence and bloodshed spread throughout the Western Region. This gave the federal government the opportunity to declare a state of emergency in the region. Akintola formed a new party and with the support of the NCNC parliamentarians he soon formed a new government.

In the meantime, Awolowo and many of his key supporters were arrested by the Federal Government and charged with treason. After a protracted trial, they were sentenced to prison. This, however, did not end the trouble in the West. The political violence reached its climax during the 1965 election. Known as "Operation Wetie," from the way in which the houses and properties of opponents were routinely doused with gasoline and set on fire, it was characterized by looting, burning, night attacks, mutilation, killing, and vandalizing. Pitched battles were fought between rival parties and with the police. Law and order had broken down, but the federal government refused to declare a state of emergency, even though it was unable to restore order in the region. Declaring a state of emergency would have required the Federal Government to suspend the premiership of Chief Ladoke Akintola, a key federal government ally in the region. On January 13, 1966, Akintola met with NPC and army leaders to find a way out of the crisis. Nothing positive seems to have come out of the meeting. Two days later, the army struck. Ladoke Akintola, the Western Region Premier; Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister; Ahmadu Bello, the Northern Premier; Festus Okotie-Eboh, the flashy federal Finance Minister; and a number of senior army officers were killed.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Yorùbá and the Military**

For the Yorùbá, the coup was a welcome relief from the chaos and the insecurity that had become their daily fear and preoccupation since independence. Military politics combined with ethnic nationalism and regional competition to set the nation on the precipitous path to civil war. At first, the Yorùbá—still recovering from the anarchy of civil rule that was their lot during the First Republic—were not sure which direction to go and what their fate or future should be in the Nigerian union. There were three views. Some wanted an independent and

self-governing Yorùbá state, which would include the Yorùbá minorities in the north as well as incorporate Lagos, the then-federal capital. Others wanted a loose federation, in which the Yorùbá would be semi-autonomous, run their affairs with little or no interference from the federal government, and have very little to do with the other groups. They noted that their association with these other non-Yorùbá groups had brought them nothing but trouble. A third group argued for a strong federation, which would lead to the breakup of the west as well as the other regions into smaller units for greater local autonomy.

Thus, as the nation moved toward the Biafran War, no one was sure where the Yorùbá would cast their vote. A number of factors, however, combined to bring them to the federal side in the conflict. First, after the ravages of the political violence that was most pronounced in the Western Region, the west was not enthusiastic about leading a revolution that would further prolong their sufferings, with nothing to show for it at the end. Second, the Yorùbá were not, militarily speaking, prepared for war. Unlike the Igbo and other northern ethnic groups, the Yorùbá were poorly represented in the rank and file of the army. Besides, as in the colonial period, northern troops remained firmly stationed in Lagos, Ìbàdàn, and Ìlòrín, making Yorùbáland particularly vulnerable to attack and police action in case its inhabitants showed any sign of disloyalty to the federal cause.

Third, to assuage the feelings of the Yorùbá, the government of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon released Chief Awolòwọ from prison and succeeded in making him accept an appointment in the federal executive council as finance minister and deputy chairman, a position akin to that of a prime minister. Because the army officers were new to politics and entirely inexperienced, much responsibility devolved to their civilian underlings. The net effect was to make the most popular Yorùbá leader the most powerful civilian personality in the government. Awolòwọ had gained through the military something close to what he had fruitlessly sought through the ballot box. After his experience in prison, in which no one seemed to have cared for his fate, Awolòwọ had little incentive to sacrifice his new position for a war no one was certain could be won. Furthermore, when the country was broken into twelve states in 1967, the West was left intact, apart from the federal capital territory, which became the nucleus of the new Lagos State. In addition, the seat of the federal government was in Lagos, the second largest Yorùbá city (after Ìbàdàn), and the home of most of the country's industries. Now that the most celebrated Yorùbá leader is ensconced as the most powerful civilian cabinet minister in the Federal Military Government, the time was not right for secession. To some people, for the Yorùbá to declare war against Nigeria would be like declaring war against themselves.

Finally, by the time of the outbreak of the civil war, the conflict had become a conflict largely between the northern ruling elite and the Igbo in the east. These two groups, from the perspective of most Yorùbá, had consistently allied to isolate and punish the Yorùbá. It was their coalition that had ensured northern hegemony and denied their most venerated leader, Awolòwọ, the opportunity to become president of Nigeria. It was this conspiracy that eventually sent Awolòwọ and his



supporters, mainly Yorùbá, to prison. If the two allies in the coalition against the Yorùbá were now tearing at each other's throats, why should the Yorùbá be expected to come and side with the Igbo who, in pursuit of material gains, had repeatedly betrayed the south to keep the north in power? Available evidence, of course, showed that most Yorùbá were sympathetic to the Igbo cause, having lately experienced what it meant to be an isolated and persecuted opposition. There were Yorùbá, most especially the intellectuals, who remained opposed to the war on moral and political grounds. Wọ́le Şoyinka—university teacher, controversial playwright, and Nobel laureate—remained opposed to both the secessionist strategies as well as to the military solution adopted by the government in its dealing with the problem. As far as he was concerned, this was a case of two brothers quarreling. The Igbos had genuine grievances against the treatment they had received in their membership of the Nigerian union and, as such, had every right to seek redress. Dialogue and mediation, Soyinka argued, rather than military coercion should be used to end the crisis. These views, publicly stated and widely canvassed and worked for, made Şoyinka an irritant to the Federal Military Government. Needless to say, he spent many of the war years in prison. The civil war and the oil boom that followed it considerably weakened the Igbo's influence and strengthened Yorùbá's position in the Nigerian polity.<sup>6</sup>

### **The Yorùbá and the Second Republic**

The Second Republic was almost a repeat of the first. The major political parties drew much of their support from their traditional ethnic bases. The Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Awolọwọ swept the presidential election in all the Yorùbá states, but performed too poorly in other parts of the country to muster enough votes to capture the presidency. For the second time, the attempt of a Yorùbá man to attain to the highest office was once again defeated. The UPN became the party of the opposition in the National Assembly. The victorious northern-dominated National Party of Nigeria (NPN), unable to win a decisive majority, fell back on its traditional Igbo allies, now in the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), to form another coalition government. This "north-east" alliance once again neutralized any effect the opposition of the Yorùbá-dominated UPN could have on the government. The old Yorùbá nightmare had returned. Now feeling permanently in the opposition, the Yorùbá felt alienated, isolated, and deprived in their association with the Nigerian polity. Awolọwọ played the role of leader of the opposition, vigorously and diligently. However, with the north-east coalition commanding a comfortable two-thirds majority in the legislature, Awolọwọ's tirades and reasoned criticism of government policies, poor performance, and rabid corruption achieved little besides deepening the marginalization of the Yorùbá from the helms of national affairs. Governors of the UPN-ruled states, led by Professor Ambrose Ali of Bendel State, had to repeatedly drag the federal government to court to secure a fair allocation of federal revenue for their states.

The second presidential elections, held in 1983, turned out to be even more disastrous than the first. Awolowo was once again defeated. For the third time, the attempt of a Yorùbá man to become president was frustrated. But even more effectual, the northern-dominated NPN, like its NPC predecessors in the First Republic, used its control of the key instruments of coercion to manipulate the electoral process to ensure a sweeping victory for itself. It gained power, not only in the north, but also in the west and part of the east. Of the nineteen Nigerian states, the Federal Electoral Commission (FEDECO) announced that the ruling NPN had won thirteen states, seizing Bendel, Ondó, and Òyó from the UPN; Borno and Gongola from the Great Nigeria People's Party; Anambra from the NPP; and Kaduna from the People's Redemption Party (PRP). Of the seven states it previously controlled, the NPN lost only one, Kwara, to the UPN. This was because the strongman of Kwara politics, Senator Olusola Saraki, had advised his NPN followers to vote against his disloyal protégé, Governor Adamu Atta, and in support of the UPN gubernatorial candidate, Cornelius Adebayo, a Yorùbá. Plateau State in the north remained in the hands of the NPP. It escaped the electoral clutch of the NPN only through the decisive intervention of Justice Ovie-Whiskey, the FEDECO chairman, who, smelling a rat in the unexplained delay of the release of the election results, ordered the immediate release of the results to ensure it would not be manipulated to favor the ruling party.

The "defeated" governors of Òyó, Ondó, and Anambra refused to accept defeat and declared themselves officially elected. In the north, life appeared to have continued as usual, besides sharp condemnations from the PRP and other critics of the government. In the east, the defeated governor of Anambra State, Jim Nwobodo, threatened fire and brimstone, but the east remained generally quiescent. In the west, it was a different story. Once again, the battlefield over the fate of democracy and the survival of Nigeria as a political entity shifted to the land of the Yorùbá. In Òyó and Ondó States, as the results of the elections were being announced, an orgy of bloody violence engulfed much of the region in protest against what they believed was a blatant and shameless election robbery. Law and order broke down as the furious mobs took the law into their hands, seeking out leading Yorùbá NPN leaders, dragging them from their homes to the street, flushing many from their hideouts, dousing those unlucky enough to be apprehended with gasoline, and making public bonfires of them and their properties in scenes reminiscent of the "Operation Wetie" for which the Yorùbá had become proverbially notorious in modern Nigerian politics. Obaḡemi Awolowo dismissed the constitutional possibility of going to court to challenge the results of the elections as "a waste of time," because the court was already politically compromised and entirely under the firm control of the NPN-controlled federal government. Describing the NPN's so-called victory as a Pyrrhic one, Awolowo warned the nation, about the dire consequences of allowing the results of the botched elections to stand: "I hope the NPN does not get away with it, for if they do, we should all forget about democracy in this country."<sup>7</sup>

The NPN nearly got away with the fraudulent victory. The second term of the Nigerian Second Republic lasted for 3 months. The corruption and the chaos that

followed in the wake of the mangled and farcical election brought in the military, led by General Muhammad Buhari, to power on the New Year's Eve of 1983. Ten years would elapse before the Yorùbá would once again become the center of the crisis of the nation-state in Nigeria.

The new regime of General Buhari and his no-nonsense deputy, General Tunde Idiagbon, attempted to restore sanity to the Nigerian polity by ridding it of the blatant corruption and gross indiscipline that had become the normal lifestyle of the civilian ruling elite between 1979 and 1993. Although Buhari was officially the head of the new military government, the star actor of the new dispensation was his deputy, Tunde Idiagbon, a Yorùbá from Ìlṣorin, Kwara State. His permanently stern and no-smiling demeanor lent an aura of seriousness to the new regime. To cure the polity of its pathological decadence, the government proceeded to summarily remove from office, arrest, detain, and try all the elected executives of the failed civilian regime. Many of these were sentenced to several years' imprisonment, ranging from 10 to more than 300 years. These long terms were designed to hammer in the message that corruption and misgovernment would no longer be tolerated, and that there would be no sanctuary or protection for sacred cows within the system. Initially these measures were welcomed by a Nigerian populace who had become fed up and disgusted with the recklessness and unbridled corruption of the politicians of the Second Republic.

However, the authoritarian style of the new military regime and its clampdown on civil society, labor unions, and repression of press freedom began to heat up the polity, creating disenchantment among the citizens. Many of those who had welcomed the corrective military regime now began to campaign against it. Taking advantage of the new disillusionment and responding to some internal power struggle within the top military brass, General Ibrahim Babangida, army chief of staff, seized the occasion of General Idiagbon's absence from Nigeria on a pilgrimage to Mecca to seize power on July 29, 1985.<sup>8</sup>

### **The Yorùbá, Babangida, and the Transition Without End**

To gain popular support, Babangida began to pursue a series of populist policies: releasing jailed journalists and politicians from prison and abrogating some of the authoritarian decrees promulgated by his predecessor. More important, he promised to draft a new constitution and hand over power to a democratically elected government within a reasonably short time. For the Yorùbá, this was a welcome development, an opportunity for them to once again take a shot at the nation's highest office, an office that had eluded them (apart from Ọ́basanjò's accidental military succession) since the nation attained its independence. After many postponements and procrastinations, on June 12, 1993, Nigerians went to the polls to elect a new president. When it became clear that Moshood K. O. Abiọ́la, the multimillionaire Yorùbá Muslim businessman, was about to win the election in a landslide, Babangida stepped in to stop the announcement of the results of the

election. A few days later, he cancelled the results and abrogated the entire transition program. For the Nigerian people, who had waited for so long after years of military rule to experience democratic governance, the cancellation was a major disappointment. For southerners, who saw the result of the election as a clear vindication of justice and equality and its acceptance a boost for national unity, the cancellation was a major setback. For the Yorùbá, who for the first time in the nation's history, were about to see a southerner, and in this case one of their own, ascend through democratic means to the highest office in the land, this was one cancellation too many. For the forces of civil society, who had labored assiduously for years to enthrone democratic peace and an accountable government, this cancellation was a disaster. The combination of all these factors and interests and aspirations explains the almost united uproar and resistance that met Babangida's cancellations and his attempt to prolong military rule. Unable to break the opposition, or enlist the full support of the army to perpetuate himself in office, Babangida stepped down as president in virtual disgrace on August 27, 1993.

To pacify the Yorùbá, who felt justly robbed of their chance to produce the president, an interim national government headed by Earnest Shonekan, a highly respected Yorùbá businessman from Abeokuta, the same town as Abiọla, was established. Lacking any form of legitimacy, the interim government could not rule; its staunchest opposition came from the Yorùbá, who regarded Shonekan's acceptance as a sellout and a betrayal of the Yorùbá cause. As the situation degenerated, a court in Lagos declared the interim government illegal. A few days later, on November 17, 1993, General Sanni Abacha, Babangida's deputy and minister of defense in the interim government, took over power. To assuage the Yorùbá, prominent Yorùbá leaders like Lateef Jakande (former populist governor of Lagos State), Ebenezer Babatope (popular journalist), and Olú Onagoruwa (leading human rights and constitutional lawyer) were brought into the government. General Oladipo Diya, also from Ògún State, the state of Abiọla, became the next in command to Abacha. These high-profile representations of the Yorùbá in the new military government did little to assuage Yorùbá feelings and hostility to the new regime as opposition continued.

### **Abacha and the Yorùbá: A Nation at War**

On June 4, 1996, armed gunmen suspected to be state security agents gunned down Kudirat, the outspoken wife of the winner of the 1993 Nigerian presidential election, in a hail of bullets in broad daylight. No one was apprehended or charged with the crime. On November 10, 1995, the Nigerian government executed the writer and environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogonis. The United States, Britain, and Nelson Mandela of South Africa described it as a "judicial murder."<sup>9</sup> In February 1998, armed men, believed to be state security agents, broke into the home of Tunde Oladepo, the senior editor of the independent *Guardian* newspaper. After shooting him, they forced his wife and children, at gunpoint, to watch

him slowly bleed to death, before leaving the house. On May 8, 1998, Biodun Ogunleye, a photojournalist for independent *Vanguard* newspaper, while on an assignment in Lagos, was brutalized by state security officers. They damaged his camera, beat him severely, and left him unconscious in a pool of blood. In April 1998, Dr. Gbolagade Agboluaje, a Nigerian political scientist teaching in the United States, was in Nigeria to visit his family. On arrival in Lagos, he was arrested by armed men, who whisked him to an unknown destination. The government repeatedly denied knowing anything about his abduction. Six weeks later, news reports emanating from the military establishment admitted that he had died after several days of torture and had been secretly buried in an unmarked grave. His crime: expression of views hostile to the military rulers. Welcome to Abacha's Nigeria, 1993 to 1998.

These few examples were the types of stories and news reports that characterized the iron-fist rule of General Sanni Abacha, the late dictator of Nigeria, and his transition program between 1993 and 1998. Abacha seized power in November 1993, in the midst of the crisis unleashed by the annulment of the results of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, adjudged by local and international observers to be the best and the most free and fair in the country's history. Thereafter, he worked assiduously and ruthlessly to entrench himself in power. He did this through a reign of terror and an adroitly crafted and regimented program of transition meant to frustrate any possibility of a genuine democratic transition, while preserving the oligarchic and hegemonic dominance of the small cabals of military and civilian leaders, who between them had dominated Nigerian politics since independence. Bespectacled in dark glasses, taciturn, inscrutable, and unforgiving, Abacha had the distinction of being the most brutal military tyrant in Nigerian history. Obsessed with security, a recluse rarely seen except by his coterie of hangers-on, and cocooned away in his highly garrisoned and inaccessible Aso Rock fortress, Abacha will probably continue to be remembered as the most inscrutable and enigmatic ruler in the country's history.

## **Drums of War and Echoes of Secession**

More than any other group, the Yorùbá became the main target of Abacha's repression. Their refusal to give up on Abiọla and his claim, or rather his Yorùbá people's claim, to the presidency made them the main object of Abacha's terror. In 1994, on the anniversary of his June 12 election, Abiọla declared himself the rightfully elected and constitutional president of Nigeria. The reaction of the Abacha government was swift and predictable. Abiọla was hunted down by state security agents, arrested, and thrown into jail. He was soon charged with treason. The tense political situation in the country ensured that his trial would drag on inconclusively for 3 years. The Yorùbá threatened to break away from Nigeria, should Abiọla die in jail. On its part, the government preferred to keep Abiọla in jail to handicap him from mobilizing to realize his June 12 mandate, while stealthily using its most

famous prisoner as a bargaining chip to woo over the Yorùbá. The efforts failed miserably. Every attempt to infiltrate the Yorùbá and break their united opposition to Abacha and continuing support for Abiọla's presidential mandate failed. Even the appointment of high-profile and "respectable" Yorùbá leaders, such as Lateef Jakande, Ebnezer Babatope, Olú Onagoruwa, Oladipo Diya, and others, into key positions in the Abacha administration only intensified the Yorùbá's opposition and alienation.

The failure of cooptation caused the government to intensify its repressive measures against leading Yorùbá elite, many of whom were routinely harassed, arrested, and tossed into jail. Prominent Yorùbá leaders such General Alani Akinrinade and Professor Bolaji Akinyemi (former Foreign Minister) fled into exile. Wọle Şoyinka was arrested and placed under house arrest. He managed to escape. Disguised as a woman he rode a motorcycle incognito across the border into Benin Republic. From thence, he flew to France to begin a period of exile that would make him the most prominent and outspoken opponent of the military junta in exile. With a rich bounty on his head, "dead or alive" (as one Nigerian news magazine, screamed), Soyinka became the unofficial but effective leader of the opposition to Abacha.<sup>10</sup> In December 1998, security agents attempted to blow up a plane carrying Oladipo Diya, Abacha's deputy and the most senior Yorùbá officer in the army. The attempt failed. Soon, however, Diya and other top military generals of Yorùbá origin, including retired General Oluşegun Ọbasanjọ, the only Yorùbá to have become head of state in Nigeria (1976 to 1979), were implicated in what eventually turned out to be a phantom coup and sentenced to death or varying terms (including life) of imprisonment. The Yorùbá believed that Nigeria was in a peculiar war, in which the military regime sought to eliminate any group obstructing its agenda.

Within Nigeria, Yorùbá elders and leaders had organized the Ẹgbẹ Afenifere, a pan-Yorùbá organization, meant to articulate Yorùbá feelings and demands and defend Yorùbá interests. It was initially led by the octogenarian, Adekunle Ajasin, former governor of Ondó State. At his death, the leadership passed to Abraham Adesanya, former senator during the Second Republic. The Afenifere adopted dialogue as their strategy of operation and eschewed violence, but remained uncompromising in their opposition to the Abacha regime and its demand for the actualization of the June 12 mandate given to Abiọla by the majority of the Nigerian electorate. Other groups soon began to emerge, groups who were less patient and committed to achieving their goals through whatever means necessary, including civil disobedience and violence. The most notable of these was the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), founded in 1995 by Dr. Fredrick Fasehun, a medical practitioner. For his efforts, Fasehun spent 19 months in prison under the Abacha regime. The OPC's message of ethnic pride and vigilantism against crime and its demand for Yorùbá autonomy within a confederal Nigeria resonated favorably among the younger generation. The Yorùbá, the OPC campaigned, must be prepared to fight and, if necessary, go to war to achieve their objectives and secure their interests within or without the Nigerian polity.<sup>11</sup>

The government soon became alarmed as discussion increased among the Yorùbá over the possibility or even necessity of seceding from the Nigerian union. This agitation for secession came from the Yorùbá's profound sense of alienation from the nation; the siege mentality, helplessness, and hopelessness created by the unabated repression specifically directed against the group by the Abacha regime. Tired of it all, the Yorùbá wanted a way out, including, if necessary, by secession. To achieve their objectives, they became the most vociferous in calling for the convening of a sovereign national conference where all the different stakeholders in the Nigerian union would be able to come together to discuss their grievances and renegotiate the terms of the union or agree to go their different ways. This house, they argued, was falling. The structure the British had delicately put together in 1914 was unraveling. Steps, they argued, must be taken to either rebuild the structure or dismantle it peacefully before the whole edifice collapse in a war of self-annihilation, as happened in Rwanda.<sup>12</sup>

### **1998: Hope on the Horizon**

The year began with General Sanni Abacha still firmly in control, while strategizing to transform himself into a military president in spite of mounting opposition at home and abroad. The world held its breath as the worst in political and humanitarian disasters were being predicted everywhere, should the world's tenth most populous and one of its most troubled nations implode. Abacha's sudden death in June 1998 was a welcome relief. It rescued Nigeria from a certain descent into the abyss. Abacha's army chief of staff, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who succeeded him, knew that he had only one mandate from the Nigerian people and the international community. This was to quickly disengage the army from politics and government and propose and carry through a transparent transition to democratic rule. For 30 of the 39 years since Nigeria gained independence, the military held political sway over the nation's affairs. Military rule had done very little to change the perspective of the Nigerian people that such non-democratic governance was an aberration, a necessary expedient to be tolerated only in dire circumstances. True progress, many continued to believe, could only come through democracy. It was this unusual commitment to democracy or representative government in a highly militarized and brutalized nation that explains why the cancellation of the results of the June 12, 1993, presidential elections was widely resented and remained an Achilles' heel for the Nigerian military rulers, until their formal disengagement from politics in 1999.

The significance of the June 12 election was that this was the first time a southerner would be elected to the highest office in the land. The acceptance of the result would have meant, for the first time in the nation's history, a shift of power, or of the presidency, from the Hausa-Fulani dominated north to the south. The cancellation resulted in a profound national crisis of alienation, especially in the southwest, among the 30 million or so Yorùbá who threatened secession and continued

resistance until their right to aspire to and attain the highest office in the land was guaranteed. The ruthless repression of the Abacha years failed to either change this attitude or bring stability. It was clear to everyone that until the June 12 issue was fully addressed and resolved, and the Yorùbá pacified, Nigeria would continue to totter on the brink of disaster. This was what happened from 1993 to 1998. It is, thus, not surprising that all the three registered political parties chose their final presidential candidates from Yorùbáland. On May 29, 1999, General Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ—former head of state, internationally respected statesman and a Yorùbá, and recently released from the prison dungeon where Abacha had dumped him—was sworn in as the democratically elected executive president of Africa’s most populous nation.

For Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ, it has been a long and checkered journey. To understand his sudden selection and election to the leadership of Africa’s most populous nation, a cursory review of his many interventions in Nigerian politics is in order. The story began in 1966. Following the January 15 coup led by Major Chukwemeka Nzeogwu, Ọbasanjọ, then a major in the army, played a pivotal role in suppressing the coup, by using his personal friendship with Nzeogwu to persuade the later to surrender peacefully, without risking further bloodshed and to safeguard the unity of the nation. The success of this effort allowed the success of the counter-coup that brought General Aguiyi Ironsi to power in January 1966. Eighteen months later, in August 1967, as the commander of the military garrison in Ìbàdàn, Ọbasanjọ used the forces at his disposal to frustrate the daring attempt of a detachment of the Biafran army to link up with supposed sympathizers in Lagos and the West and carry out a plan to overthrow both Ojukwu and Gowon simultaneously as a way to end the crisis in the country. Twenty months later, in January 1970, in his capacity as the Commander of the Third Marine Commando of the Nigerian Armed Forces, Ọbasanjọ, now a colonel, received the unconditional surrender of the Biafran army, thus ensuring the termination of hostility and the reunification of Nigeria as an indissoluble entity. In July 1975, following the overthrow of the Gowon military administration, Ọbasanjọ became the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters. The untimely assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in February 1976, brought Ọbasanjọ to the helm of affairs as Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. In October 1979, he voluntarily handed over power to a democratically elected government and retired from the army. Thereafter, he became a prominent advocate for democracy and was quite outspoken in his opposition to the attempts made by Babangida and later by Abacha to perpetuate themselves in office and continue military rule. However, Ọbasanjọ’s ambivalent attitude to the June 12, 1993 election palaver and his statement that the winner, Moshood Abiọla, was not the “messiah” Nigeria was waiting far alienated many of his Yorùbá kinsmen as well as many pro-democracy activists in the country. Nevertheless, his insistence on coming back from the safety of Europe to Nigeria, to personally face charges of treason and the possibility of death demonstrated and confirmed his undoubted courage and commitment to the nation, thus endearing him to many. Calmly and stoically,



he accepted the life prison sentence imposed on him by the Abacha regime. But this would not be the end of the story. The sudden death of Abacha led to Ḑbasanjo's release from prison. With the suspicious death of Abiḓla in prison a month later, the northern ruling elite scrambled around for a political figure from the Southwest with the respectability and credential to unite the nation and safeguard northern interests. The choice was clear: Oluṣegun Ḑbasanjo.<sup>13</sup>

Thus, Ḑbasanjo's candidacy was a compromise. As a former military head of state, his ascension was acceptable to the military that was being forced against its will by popular pressure to relinquish power. As a Yorùbá man, his candidacy was expected to pacify the Yorùbá, who had felt rightly cheated and deprived with the cancellation of the June 12 presidential election results won by Abiḓla. Abiḓla had died mysteriously in prison the day before his scheduled release and possibly his swearing-in as leader of an interim government. His supporters had no doubt he had been poisoned by agents of the Abubakar regime. As the only Nigerian military ruler, out of about a dozen or so, to have successfully organized a democratic transition and voluntarily surrendered power to an elected president, Ḑbasanjo's democratic credentials appeared unassailable. He was also acceptable to the northern ruling class because although he was the military head of states, the North fared favorably under him; he showed no inclination to favor his own ethnic groups or the south, thus confirming his much-debated claim to being a detribalized Nigerian. Besides, at the end of his tenure, in October 1979, Ḑbasanjo did not hesitate to hand over power to a northerner, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, even when the validity of the election results was being challenged in the south. In addition, he had remained closely associated and in friendly terms with the northern military and political elite, many of who now became the most prominent backer of his candidacy. His international respectability and connections were also seen as useful in helping Nigeria restore its battered image after years of ostracism and sanctions. All these made Ḑbasanjo the best possible compromise to move Nigeria forward. But no one should be under the illusion that Nigeria has reached the promised land. Ḑbasanjo's regime should be seen as yet another transition on the tortuous road to genuine democracy.

The imperfect nature of the transition that brought or recycled General Ḑbasanjo back to power must be noted. It was a hurried transition, pushed through by a harried and browbeating military desperate to salvage whatever respect was left for the military by exiting gracefully and swiftly from office. In its haste to leave, the transition regime left many issues unresolved. Building and consolidating democracy in Nigeria for the long haul requires that these issues be addressed and resolved. The first challenge is to clearly define and devise the most appropriate political structure for the country. To guarantee national unity while respecting group differences in this heterogeneous nation of more than 300 ethnolinguistic groups, Nigeria must return to true federalism. The current policy of rigid unitarism and repression that has failed woefully to bring peace or stability to the restive and aggrieved nationalities on the oil-producing delta region and other places must be discarded. Many have called for a sovereign conference of

nationalities to deal with this thorny issue and devise a new and acceptable political framework for the country.

The current constitution was drafted during the Abacha years to impose him as president. Adopted for the new order by Abubakar, it is considered illegitimate by most Nigerians. A new one may have to be drafted, either by the current National Assembly or through a sovereign national conference. President Ōbasanjo's efforts to work with the National Assembly and representatives of the leading political parties to amend the constitution remain controversial. Ōbasanjo's attempt at the beginning of 2005 to organize a National Political Reform Conference as an alternative to the convening of a Sovereign National Conference foundered on many points. First, the fact that virtually all the delegates would be appointed by the President and the governors of the thirty-six states made the project suspect. Ensuring independence of thoughts and action on the part of the delegate would be a Herculean task. The effort came under attack from many quarters. For the opposition, this was Ōbasanjo and the People's Democratic Party (PDP) show. Others were unhappy about the deliberate ignoring of ethnicity in a nation burdened by ethnic problems and civil strife. Other criticisms include the conference's exclusionary nature, most especially its underrepresentation of women, civil society, young people, and other pressure groups. Its domination by old politicians, the same group principally responsible for much of the nation's political malaise, was seen as indicative of the government's reluctance to support any new direction or chart a radical road map for the nation's future. With the members of the National Assembly insisting that they would not surrender sovereignty to the delegates of the Political Reform Conference, who as non-elected government nominees lacked legitimacy, and with many calling for the boycott of the conference, the project appeared crippled, if not doomed, before its inception. We may have to await the result of the conference, the unaltered ratification of its report by the National Assembly and the implementation of its recommendations by the government to know whether this is a genuine attempt to move the nation forward or another exercise in the politics of deceit and hidden agenda, that is the old game of keeping the people talking and busy, giving the impression something is being done, while everything really remains the same.

A progressive devolution of power from the center to the units must also be worked out. The current situation in which the center controls virtually everything from elementary schools to universities, from telephone services to television, from the water supply to electricity, and from agricultural marketing to mineral exploitation has bred nothing but inefficiency, corruption, and oppression. Because the center is the major source of power and wealth, gaining control of the center has become a fight to the death among the scrambling political elite. The opening up of the field to independent entrepreneurs in the areas of television, telecommunication and wireless services, private schools, and universities is a most welcome development.

Concurrent with the spirit of federalism, a new revenue allocation formula in which derivation will take precedence over or at least be more appropriately

balanced with population and equity will need to be devised and adopted if the ever-festering crisis in the oil-producing region is to be ended. The major problem with this is that the bulk of the nation's wealth in the form of oil is located in the minority region of the south and well beyond the north where political power has resided since independence. The current situation—in which the majority groups' elite control the oil wealth while the Ogoni and other minorities, who "own" the land, continue to die daily from ecological devastation, disease, and military repression to keep the oil flowing—is untenable. A safety valve or national tax might be included in the revenue formula to ensure a reasonable credit flow to the north to allay the northern fear of fiscal strangulation.

The Nigerian military must also be depoliticized, reeducated, professionalized, and made entirely and effectively responsible and subordinate to civil authorities. The undertrained, underpaid, and demoralized police force, which constantly preys on the citizens it was set up to protect, must be reformed, retrained, and revitalized to take over some of the civil and policing functions presently performed by the military. The government must also confront headlong the problem of corruption. This will involve a major shift in thinking and in attitude among the people as well as among public officials. But the government must go beyond rhetoric to demonstrate its deep abhorrence of corruption by examples. Anti-corruption institutional structures like the Code of Conduct Bureau, the Public Complaints Commission, and the Anti-Corruption Tribunal must be given enough power and teeth to probe and compel officials found guilty of corruption to face the music. The report of Justice Oputa's Human Rights Violation Commission should also be released and published, and its recommendations acted on.

Bankrolled into power by rich and powerful chieftains or, as Nigerians call them, moneybags with questionable or even negative democratic credentials, many did not give Obasanjo much chance in being able to deal with the enormous problems confronting Nigeria at his second coming. However, he appeared to have succeeded in pulling some surprises, proving his critics wrong while disappointing some of his ardent supporters. He brought the opposition into his government by appointing a few of them to key positions. Within a month of his coming into office, he turned on his most difficult constituency: the military. He ordered the immediate retirement of more than one hundred senior army officers, all of who had involved themselves in politics in the preceding fifteen years. That the majority of the affected officers were northerners is not a mark of an anti-northern agenda, but an indication of the north on Nigeria's political and military affairs since independence. Individuals including army officers and a son of Abacha who were implicated in corruption and political assassinations during the Abacha years were put on trial in the public courts. Obasanjo also begun to tackle the problems of the minorities in the oil-producing region through direct consultations with the people concerned. In addition, he also confronted the worst of all the scandals: perennial gas shortage. He did this first by breaking the cartel of middlemen behind the shortage, and second, by some drastic and contentious

price deregulation. With the field now opened up to competition, the Nigerian telephone services appear to be improving. Many problems, of course, remain: restiveness in the Niger delta; the introduction and implementation of the Sharia legal system in several of Nigeria's northern states; continuous and violent ethno-sectarian clashes, like the one that resulted in the imposition of emergency rule in Plateau State in April 2004; rabid and diabolical contest for power resulting in rampart political assassinations, such as that of the prominent Yorùbá politician and Ọbasanjo's Attorney-General, Bola Ige; continuing prebendalist tendencies as seen in the Anambra Ngige-Uba saga; and the macabre and lackluster performance of the National Assembly.

### **Ọbasanjo, the Yorùbá, and Beyond**

Ọbasanjo's resounding, albeit contentious, reelection victory as well as the crushing defeat of the Alliance for Democracy in all the Yorùbá-dominated states (except Lagos) and its continuing disintegration (in the face of nearly total Yorùbá indifference) showed how much has changed in Yorùbá and Nigerian politics since 1998. In 1998, still smarting from the "Great Robbery" of 1993 and the unexpected and suspicious death of Abiọla in prison, the Yorùbá voted overwhelmingly against the northern-dominated PDP. Ọbasanjo received the fewest votes from his own kin group. For the Yorùbá, the 1998 vote was a protest vote against the northern ruling oligarchy and their adopted son, Ọbasanjo. It was also a vote of affirmation in support of June 1993 and all that it came to stand for. Between 1998 and 2003, Ọbasanjo appeared to have warmed himself back to the hearts of his people. A vote for his party (the PDP), the ruling party, was also a vote for the continuation of a Yorùbá political presidency in the country, at least for another 4 years. How well Ọbasanjo's presidency will succeed in changing the structure and nature of Nigerian politics and of Yorùbá participation in that politics remains to be seen. We may have to wait until the election of 2007 to see whether this general-turned-farmer-turned-politician's era will be epochal or just another interlude in the now familiar history of north-south dichotomy politics of Nigeria. Whether this "interregnum" will succeed in bringing and keeping the Yorùbá within the mainstream of Nigerian politics and affairs or cause them to revert to their traditional position of opposition remains to be seen.

### **Notes**

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7. Quoted in *Daily Sketch* [Ìbàdàn] (August 18, 1983).

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10. “WANTED, DEAD, OR ALIVE: The Junta Guns for Soyinka,” *TELL* [Lagos] (March 25, 1996). See also, “Exclusive Interview: ‘Get Out Now!’ Soyinka Tells Abacha,” *TELL* [Lagos] no. 23 (June 3, 1996), 10–17.

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## **PETROLEUM AND ETHNO-POLITICS**

Ann Genova

### **Introduction**

The average person knows two things about Nigeria: that it is a country rife with political instability stemming from ethnic tension and that embedded within it is one of the world's most valuable oil reserves. What is not widely known is how these two intersect, particularly outside of the Niger delta. In this essay, I introduce the topic of bitumen exploration within Ondó State and insert it into the important discussion of Nigeria's ethnic and political tension. What needs to be emphasized here is the level to which ethnicity and politics played a role in simply the exploration of bitumen (i.e., the idea or possibility of there being bitumen production within the region). Even today exploration remains in the planning stages. Using primarily sources from Nigeria, I look at bitumen prospecting in Ondó State between 1960 and 2003 in southwestern Nigeria—more commonly referred to as *Yorùbáland*—and the impact it has had on the Yorùbá's relationship with the central government. This essay serves as a point of departure in the arena of connecting petroleum and politics in Nigeria because it introduces the bitumen and the Yorùbá into the discussion of petroleum in Nigeria, which has previously centered only on crude oil production and minority groups in the eastern region. I conclude that bitumen production in Ondó State has been the victim of ethno-political tension within Nigeria.

### **The Context: Ethno-Politics**

Nigeria has a long history of political upheaval mixed with momentary glimpses of peace, progress, and stability. Between 1960 and 2003, Nigeria experienced seven military coup d'états often accompanied by brutal military regimes, a civil war that lasted 3 years, and ongoing flare-ups of religious and ethnic violence

setting the north and south against each other. Nigeria has experienced roughly 29 years of military rule and only 14 years of democratic rule. It was during the latter periods when Nigeria supposedly experienced its moments of peace and prosperity. During those short periods of democratic rule, however, accusations of fraud have been widespread.<sup>1</sup> The key to understanding Nigeria's political situation lies in understanding the pivotal position of the ethnic. Violent clashes, acts of corruption, and military takeovers are examples of ethnic tension at work. Unfortunately, these events have fueled, and continue to fuel, ceaseless political corruption and economic instability.

Ethnic-based politics represents the single most difficult issue to settle in Nigeria. Political figures in Nigeria since independence have repeatedly used ethnicity, and their ethnic alliances, to muster political support and steer their political decisions once in power. Throughout this chapter I refer to this phenomenon as *ethno-politics*, meaning political decisions driven by ethnic interests. Ethno-politics essentially began with decolonization and the transfer of power through the formation of political parties in the late 1950s and elections in 1959, which determined the party that would rule the newly independent Nigeria. Using the best resources available at the time, Nigerians formed political parties along major ethnic lines. The British colonial administration used favoritism with ethnic groups and played them against one another for the specific purpose of expanding and enforcing its rule within Nigeria. They granted regions varying degrees of autonomy creating a severe sense of inequality within the fragile colony. Independence and, thus, the formation of ethnic-based political parties created an opportunity to remedy this imbalance. The drive for winning the 1959 election and seats within the federation was fierce.

The outcome of this election set Nigeria into ethno-political crisis from which it never recovered. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) became the dominant political party representing the interests of the Muslim Hausa in the north. The Yorùbá dominant Action Group (AG) of the western region and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons of the Igbo dominant eastern region disputed the results, clamoring for more seats and a new formula for revenue allocation. From this election to the present, dramatic power shifts have taken place resulting in a high turnover of governments, violence, and frequent policy changes.<sup>2</sup>

The problem of ethno-politics has left Nigerian politicians and scholars scratching their heads in search of a viable solution. From a variety of disciplines, scholars have attempted to address Nigeria's history and tease out the cause and effects of ethno-politics. In support of the latter, this chapter addresses ethno-politics from two new research perspectives: The first being the long-neglected topic of bitumen and the second being the insufficiently researched area of Ondó within Yorùbáland. Both topics represent a previously ignored arena in which ethno-politics has a negative effect.

To best get a handle on the relationship between ethno-politics and bitumen production, I approach the topic in three stages. Because both topics need a



proper introduction, the essay begins with an overview of the discovery, uses, and value of bitumen and moves into an introduction of Ondo State giving its history, location, and significance. Having laid out the foundation for analysis, the remainder of the essay connects bitumen exploration and ethno-politics, concluding with where bitumen exploration presently stands.

## **Bitumen Production and Ondó State**

*Bitumen* is the grouping of solid and semi-solid hydrocarbons that can be refined into commercial products such as asphalt and fuel oils.<sup>3</sup> Commonly referred to as *tar sand*,<sup>4</sup> bitumen is used as a general term for heavy crude oil. Bitumen exists in two ways: as a waste product when pumping crude oil out of the ground or as a thick substance naturally found in the ground. Bitumen is primarily used for the production of asphalt,<sup>5</sup> lubricating oils for engines, and for constructing buildings (i.e., caulking compounds and putty). It is regarded as a relatively inexpensive cement and waterproofing agent.

The presence of bitumen deposits in Nigeria has been known since precolonial times. In fact, early attempts to find flowing crude oil in the early twentieth century resulted in the discovery of bitumen. After this initial discovery, however, neither the Nigerian government nor the foreign oil companies expressed an interest in producing bitumen. Works written on oil production in Nigeria reflect this disinterest by only briefly mentioning the possibility of bitumen production.

Bitumen production in Ondó State has received little attention in the literature on Nigeria's oil industry. As the fifth largest producer of crude oil in the world, Nigeria has received a lot of scholarly attention for its handling of its crude oil revenue and its relationship with the major oil firms operating in the country.<sup>6</sup> Nigeria's industry generates a great deal of money and, if managed well, has the potential of turning Nigeria into a wealthy country. Thus far, however, this hope has not materialized, and Nigeria continues to bank on the production of existing fields and the discovery of new ones. Although Nigeria has long known about its bitumen, it has yet to make it into a lucrative industry as with crude oil. Until this addition, scholars will continue to focus on Nigeria's crude oil industry. For now, bitumen remains a major topic primarily for the Nigerian media.

Nigerian newspaper columns and editorials have begun to discuss the idea of bitumen production recently because of a newfound interest expressed by the current federal government, which will be discussed in detail. What is of concern here is that the interest in bitumen production has brought the possible economic contributions of Yorùbáland to the nation into focus. Thus, a surge of literature on Ondó State has emerged within the past few years.

Ondó State is named for the people considered within the Yorùbá ethno-linguistic group who live in the region.<sup>7</sup> The Ondó people live in the Yorùbá dominant southwestern Nigeria, commonly referred to as *Yorùbáland*. As a part of the Yorùbá, the Ondó believe in the Yorùbá creation myth stating that they

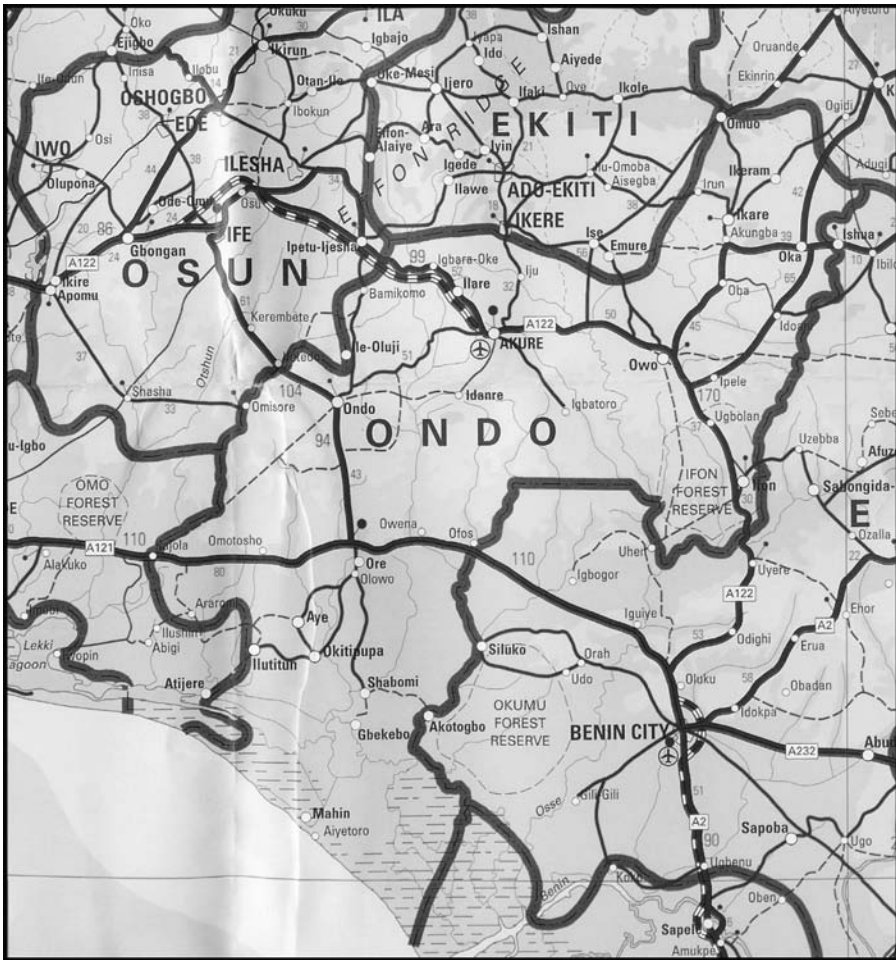
descended from Odùduwà.<sup>8</sup> The Ondó settled the town of Ode-Ondó, and expanded into a kingdom covering about 2,400 square miles.<sup>9</sup> Despite being ravaged by a civil war that damaged more than 100 towns and villages in the nineteenth century, the kingdom maintained its position as a major regional trade center.<sup>10</sup>

During the early years of British colonial rule, Ondó city represented a major trade center and stopping point for British administrators and missionaries. Until the late nineteenth century, Ondó served as a trading post from Ìbàdàn to Ọ̀yọ́. Sara S. Berry writes that in the 1860s, Ondó became a stopping point along a road from Lagos to Ilẹ̀ṣà referred to as *Ondo Road*.<sup>11</sup> This route established direct contact with traders in Lagos for the export of palm oil and the import of items such as textiles. Missionaries used it as well.<sup>12</sup> The Ondó viewed the British as a minor irritation in comparison to what they gained from them.<sup>13</sup> During the Yorùbá wars, Ondó Road became an important route used to bypass the Ìjẹ̀bù who waged war with Ìbàdàn in the 1870s. After the amalgamation of northern and southern Nigeria in 1914, Ondó was placed in the Ìjẹ̀bù Province. Pressure by Ondó chiefs on the colonial administration brought about the creation of the separate Ondó Division in 1924. Until 1951, Ondó was under indirect rule.<sup>14</sup> Under formal British colonialism, Ondó shifted from functioning as a trade depot into a major cocoa producer.

Beginning in the early twentieth century, Ondó became the heart of Nigeria's cocoa cultivation.<sup>15</sup> Much of the region's success came from its expanse of uncultivated forest. By the 1960s, Ondó was Nigeria's leading cocoa regions through its young and high-yielding trees. Also, their trees did not suffer from disease as did those in other cocoa regions in Nigeria at this time.<sup>16</sup> Today, the largest portion of the cocoa belt in southwestern Nigeria is located in modern Ondó State.<sup>17</sup>

In 1954, the federal system of government was introduced creating three regions: West, North, and East. Ondó was included in the Western Region as a province until the decision to create a fourth region, the Mid-West, was made in 1957. An historian on Yorùbá politics writes that the creation of the Mid-West Region in 1963 "raised the minority group politics beyond the level of rhetoric and parliamentary debates."<sup>18</sup> By 1965, political issues were not solved and people called for the reorganizing the federation. An argument circulated at the time that the ethnic groups were too many to work in the existing political system. To abate ethnic tension, the four regions were divided into twelve in 1967, forming Ondó State. In 1996, Ondó State was divided to form Ekiti State (Map 16.1).

Today, Ondó State is comprised of fourteen local government areas (LGAs), with four subordinate area authorities, which have recognized autonomy within their LGAs. Its population is primarily Yorùbá with the exception of the Ijaw and Ijo settlements. Its mark of distinction is its location as the easternmost state of Yorùbáland. Ondó State, with its capital in Akure, is approximately 9,300 square miles and shares its border with Edo and Delta States on the east, and Ọ̀gún and Ọ̀ṣun on the west, and Ekiti and Kogi States to the north. To the south is the Bight of Benin and the Atlantic Ocean. Ondó has the longest coastline in Nigeria and



**Map 16.1.** Map of Ondó state. Credit: Toyin Falola.

lies within Nigeria’s tropical rainforest region. With Ondó State’s unique history, it is surprising that little research has been done on the region.

Within the body of literature on the Yorùbá, the rich history and contribution of the people and contemporary State of Ondó was largely neglected. Ondó, a Yorùbá frontier state, has become a new area of research in the past few years. The state represents the borderland between the Yorùbá and Edo people. This southeastern region of Yorùbáland receives little scholarly attention until recently because typically research focused on the major towns of trade and commerce along the coast. States such as Ondó and Ekiti receive little attention, but are significant to the Yorùbá because they are positioned as ethnic frontier states and

make significant contributions to the Nigerian economy. As an ethnic frontier zone, it represents the meeting point of “sociopolitical relations.”<sup>19</sup> The region borders territory occupied by the Edo. It has, however, retained its Yorùbá cultural roots and economic activities.

Like its neighboring Yorùbá states along the tropical coastline, the economy of Ondó State continues to depend on its agricultural production. As a major agricultural producer, Ondó State “harbors” migrant farmers, referred to as *agatu*, from other states as far away as Benue to cultivate cocoa. Despite its agricultural endowments, however, Ondó State suffers from a lack of social infrastructure. For example, the town of Idanre has no regular supply of water.<sup>20</sup> In an effort to improve its economy, Ondó State has pushed for the development of a bitumen industry.

Nigeria bitumen reserves are located in Edo, Lagos, Ògún, and Ondó States. The reservoir expands about 72 miles across the four states passing through close to 100 communities.<sup>21</sup> Ondó, however, holds the majority. Collectively, the four states are believed to hold roughly 315 billion barrels of bitumen, making it one of the largest in the world after Canada and Venezuela. An expert on Nigeria’s oil industry, Julius Ihonvbere is quoted by the Consulate of Nigeria stating that Nigeria’s bitumen would be particularly attractive on the world market because it has a low level of impurities and sulfur content (between 0.9 and 1.2 percent).<sup>22</sup> Thus, Nigeria’s bitumen could have the same high demand as its crude oil on the world market.

The existence of bitumen in Nigeria has been known for centuries because it seeps to the surface. Locals used it to waterproof fishing boats and house wares.<sup>23</sup> In the local government of Ode-Irele in Ondó State, the presence of bitumen within their community has been known for a long time by its inhabitants. In fact, one of the villages within the region is named *Gbeleju Loda*, meaning “the town of tar.”<sup>24</sup> Oba Lebi, the Olofun of Loola village, commented to the *Guardian* on the existence of bitumen:

[F]rom time immemorial, we noticed certain black substance coming out of the ground. When we were young, we used to pact our calabash and pots with the substance.<sup>25</sup>

In Ondo State, the bitumen is located between Benin City to the east, Siluko to the north, and Mahin to the southwest, and northwest of the Lekki Lagoon. Bitumen is primarily located in the provinces of Okitipupa and Irele. In Ondó State, a bitumen belt of about 1.5 to 3 miles runs across Ondó State and into Ògún and Edo. As with contemporary crude oil production, Ondó State’s bitumen fields are designated by blocks along the coast totaling sixteen.<sup>26</sup> The largest bitumen deposit within the bitumen belt is Agbabu in Ondó State. The bitumen in Agbabu is relatively light, whereas in other parts of the region it is solid.<sup>27</sup> Until bitumen production becomes a reality, however, Nigeria will continue to import it.

Within the past few decades, there has been concern over why Nigeria imports bitumen when it holds such enormous reserves. Nigeria imported bitumen from

Venezuela and Saudi Arabia among others for processing at the Kaduna refinery in Kaduna State. In the 1980s, it was estimated that Nigeria's demand for lubricants was more than 25 million gallons per year totaling ₦45 million in import costs.<sup>28</sup> Looking back to the 1980s 20 years later, the Bitumen Implementation Project declared that the federal government spent over ₦400 million annually for the importation of bitumen from Venezuela.<sup>29</sup> Although the Nigerian government considered this a colossal waste of foreign exchange, J. K. Onoh writes that demand for bitumen during the 1980s was relatively low.<sup>30</sup> Twenty years later, however, official reports cited 1 million barrels of bitumen were consumed annually, costing the country roughly ₦133 billion per year in importing costs.<sup>31</sup> It is believed that millions of naira could be saved in import costs if Nigeria would produce and refine its own heavy crude oil. Essential items such as asphalt and lubricating oils were (and still are today) imported into the country, despite the known existence of local bitumen.

The first discovery of bitumen by major oil firms took place in the early twentieth century during an exploratory mission for crude oil. In 1908 a British company, the Nigerian Bitumen Company, began to explore Nigeria's coast in search of bitumen. They drilled about fifteen wells in the bitumen belt, which included Agbabu.<sup>32</sup> Because Nigeria was a British colony, any oil production was based on Britain's interest and conducted by British firms. At the time, Britain showed no interest in bitumen production. After Nigeria gained its independence, it invited new oil companies to explore the country for any form of petroleum. Between 1963 and 1966, the Tennessee Nigeria Inc. drilled holes and found bitumen around Lekki Lagoon.<sup>33</sup> Studies conducted by students in 1976 by the University of Ife confirmed the presence of "economically exploitable bitumen deposit."<sup>34</sup> One student cited the presence of more than 227 billion barrels of recoverable bitumen.<sup>35</sup> In the 1970s, it was believed that Nigeria's bitumen and heavy crude oil was enough to supply Nigeria and a portion of the international market. Ideas such as this triggered a major drive by the Ondó State government to make bitumen production a reality.

Ondó State saw bitumen production as a tremendous opportunity for its people and did all it could within the legal framework of the federation to make exploration for commercial quantities possible. After the students of the University of Ife released their results to the public, Ondó State made bitumen a high financial priority. In the 1980s and 1990s, the state spent millions of naira on assisting the bitumen exploration project.<sup>36</sup> According to the *Sunday Sketch* Ondó State reportedly spent more than ₦2 million in the 1990s.<sup>37</sup> The state governors committed such a sizable amount of the state's budget to the project because they believed that bitumen production would bring new employment opportunities, better infrastructure, and development projects. In 1986, the state governor at the time, Mike Akihigbe, stated that Ondó could use bitumen revenue to pay better wages and implement long overdue improvement projects.<sup>38</sup> More important, however, a bitumen industry in Ondó would increase revenue going to the coffers of the nation and state. A bitumen researcher from the University of Ife in 2000 confirmed what the people of Ondó State had been saying for decades. He projected that the industry would create 20,000 skilled jobs and more than 100,000

unskilled jobs.<sup>39</sup> Ondó State saw bitumen production as a potential avenue to receiving beneficial treatment by the federal government because of the state's importance to the nation.<sup>40</sup>

In the mid-1990s, questions over its quantity and global market value occupied Ondó State.<sup>41</sup> In 1992, Ondó State even raised funds and sent three of its own men to visit Venezuela to tour the Venezuelan-owned Caracas Bitumen Company, which boasted modern bitumen-processing technology. Influenced by Venezuela, Ondó State wanted to set up its own bitumen industry, but found Nigeria's federal structure limiting.<sup>42</sup> As the people of Ondó State saw it, bitumen production offered a variety of benefits and should become the nation's top priority for economic development.

Over the years, Ondó State has become frustrated with the federal government for its wavering interest in the state's natural resource potential. The Nigerian government shifted bitumen exploration in Ondó from a high priority to virtually unimportant. The long-lasting trend of fluctuating interest by the federal government left many to conclude that bitumen exploration in Ondó State had been a victim of ethno-politics.

## **Bitumen and Ethno-Politics**

Regardless of the mutual interest in the development of a bitumen industry in Ondó State, plans toward the project by the federal government only crept forward during the 1970s and 1980s, but have taken dramatic leaps within the past few years. Indications of formal exploration efforts from the Q̄basanjō administration have emerged. The recent upswing has raised questions as to whether ethno-politics favoring development is at work. The federal government shifted from officially declaring bitumen exploration a low priority since its discovery to a high priority since the election of Oluṣẹgun Q̄basanjō in 1999. This kind of dramatic transition lends itself to the idea that the rise and fall of interest in the bitumen project is because of the ethno-politics that created an unstable environment for the development of a new industry, whether directly or indirectly.

The idea that Nigeria's ethno-politics directly impacted the possibility of bitumen production comes from a variety of indicators. First and foremost, Nigeria has a long history of obvious power plays using ethnicity that range from the deliberate formation of political parties along ethnic lines to channeling funding more to one particular region (ethnic group) than another. Since Nigeria's independence, an endless number of examples illustrate this point. Instead of recounting them, I want to restrict my focus to how this history impacts bitumen production. The people from Ondó State viewed the delay as being wrapped up in the ethno-political tension taking place on a national level. One reporter wrote that the federal government has delayed the bitumen project, not only because of the cost, but also because investment in the southwestern states of the country is a low priority no matter the project. A reporter for *TELL* magazine wrote:

Prominent Ondo State citizens have alleged that the subject has wallowed in neglect because it is located in the south west of the country and since most of those who have steered the ship of the nation are from the North.<sup>43</sup>

The people of Ondó pointed to regime changes and biased committees appointed to the project over the years as the main indicators that ethno-politics were at work.

As mentioned, Nigeria experienced several military coup d'états and dramatic regime changes making any future plans for investing the nation's money into development-related projects virtually impossible. For example, the government under General Ibrahim Babangida in the early 1990s moved bitumen production forward, but by the time the oil firms compiled their results and asked for a production license in the mid-1990s, the government underwent a dramatic transformation and General Sanni Abacha seized power. In 1994, Jerez Energy from Canada with its Nigerian partners Rofem Industries explored for bitumen. By 1996, Jerez Energy had spent more than \$1.5 million (about ₦120 million) on the project and found roughly 770 million barrels of recoverable reserves. The company found their interests slowed by the fact that after 3 years of exploration the federal government still had not issued the company a mining license to produce the bitumen. Locals living in the bitumen-rich area speculated that political bureaucracy and financial constraints prevented the federal government from granting the license and allowing the project to progress.<sup>44</sup> In fact, the reign of Abacha represented the height of the country's political turmoil and oppression. Occupied with maintaining power in brutal ways, economic development and long-term financial investment for the good of the nation did not come under consideration. Although ethno-politics is not overtly present in relation to bitumen in this scenario, political turmoil based on ethnicity in general made maintaining a policy of bitumen exploration impossible. Regime changes, however, did take on a direct relationship to bitumen exploration.

In line with these regime changes, interest in bitumen production moved in and out of the national government's focus. Overall, the interest of bitumen production by the national government peaked briefly in the late 1980s with the formation of the Committee on the Implementation of the Bitumen Project (CIBP) and then not again until the late 1990s during the current Third Republic under President Oluṣegun Ṣobasanjo. Both of these periods are discussed again. The lowest points of interest for bitumen production in the region took place in the 1960s during the First Republic (1960 to 1966) and during the Second Republic (1979 to 1983). These low points coincide with the height of northern control of Nigeria's politics. A leading historian on Nigeria writes that "a northern-dominated triangle of ethno-political block prevailed from 1960 to 1966," and then regained power in 1979 through democratic elections of the Second Republic.<sup>45</sup> It is this latter period that represents a prime example of where ethno-politics prevented progress in bitumen exploration within Ondó State.

The Second Republic represents a key era in Nigeria's economic and political history. During this period, Nigeria saw the consolidation of northern dominance in national politics coupled with a severe economic downturn caused by the oil

shocks. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which formed out of the old NPC, became the dominant party represented in the National Assembly. Toyin Falola and Julius Ihonvbere characterized the party as focused on “making wealth not from productive activities but from politics,” which resulted in a major economic and political backslide toward high debt, political corruption, and rising unemployment.<sup>46</sup> Simultaneously, Nigeria faced the impending doom of the international oil bust. The mid-1970s marked the turning point where the price of Nigeria’s crude oil per barrel dropped dramatically. Nigeria’s oil export earnings went from \$22.4 billion in 1980 to \$9.6 billion in 1983.<sup>47</sup> In an effort to ease the impact, Nigeria, like other oil-producing countries, looked to diversify its economy and reduce its reliance on crude oil sales. The idea of bitumen production, again, emerged in newspapers as a viable solution, but the government did not follow the recommendation. Instead, the government focused on expanding its crude oil production with an emphasis on the north.

Based on the belief that Ondó State harbored commercial quantities of crude oil during the mid-1980s, the federal government briefly became interested in the state. Ondó officially joined crude oil-producing states such as Bendel, Rivers, Cross River, and Imo. Being declared an oil-rich state in the mid-1980s was major news for Ondó State because it indicated official recognition by the federal government.<sup>48</sup> By the end of the 1980s, however, placing Ondó in the esteemed position of an oil producer was premature and the federal government moved its focus to the north. The managing director of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation—Nigeria’s national oil company—Festus Marinho, stated that they only found bitumen mixed with small amounts of lighter crude oil, when they had hoped to find new deposits of commercial quantities of flowing crude oil.<sup>49</sup> By the late 1980s, formal announcements were made declaring any oil development in Ondó State as a low priority for the federal government. Based on exploration that did not look promising, the federal government focused on crude oil prospects in the north. For the Second Republic, bitumen production in Ondó ranked significantly lower than regions that offered little indication of crude oil potential. This decision coincided with the report about the potential for bitumen exploitation drafted by the University of Ifé. By the end of the 1980s investing in an industry in the southwest was of little concern to the federal government.

During the Second Republic, the idea of crude oil exploration in Borno State became a priority for the national government. The *Daily Sketch* phrased the government’s decision to drill in the Chad Basin in a way that greatly emphasized the ethno-politics being played in favor of the north:

Last Tuesday, the House of Representatives passed a motion urging the President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari to *ensure* that the drilling operations began immediately in the Nigerian portion of the Chad Basin area.<sup>50</sup>

Within a few years, oil exploration activities in the Chad Basin were underway, but proved unsuccessful in holding commercial quantities of crude oil. For the



Second Republic, however, production in the north would have made little difference with the military coup that took place in 1983.

Not all regime changes, however, stalled the possibility of bitumen exploration. In fact during the aborted transition from military rule under General Babangida to the failed democratic election in 1993, bitumen exploration in Ondó State took a step forward. One year prior, the former governor of Ondó State acquired the Agbabu bitumen field and let it sit. Chief Ernest Shonekan, head of the interim national government for Nigeria, visited Ondó State in 1994 and promised to invest ₦2 billion into bitumen exploration. After Shonekan's dismissal, the minister of industries, Major-General Olú Bajowa, a native of the region, demanded that the money be released as part of the investment strategy of the new head of state, General Sanni Abacha.<sup>51</sup> In this instance, ethno-politics pushed bitumen exploration forward. It seemed, however, for Ondó State that any step forward was complemented with a long period of inactivity. Even when the national government took the initiative, there was no guarantee that members of governmental bodies saw it as their duty to move the head of state's agenda.

Nigeria has experienced a great deal of turnover for the head of state position since independence. Likewise, the advisors, ministers, and various committee members also changed. With one swift regime change, committee members previously established collapse. A politicized state such as Nigeria may find that committees represent the patronage system in action. The result is the stalling of projects or refocusing the group's original decision to better suit the intents of the committee members. Also, many projects are simply not carried out. Feasibility reports and on-site research often do not take place and the administration, preoccupied with maintaining power, fails to monitor the progress. The activities of the CIBP provide us with an example of the former. In 1989, the CIBP formed under the direction of General Babangida to review the possibility of serious bitumen exploration and exploitation in Ondó State. After several years of little activity, the *Guardian* reported that bitumen production had become tangled in the web of politics within the committee.<sup>52</sup> Ondó State found this blatant disregard for its commercial interests frustrating because the sporadic exploration activities gave the state a small taste of what bitumen production could bring.

In the mid-1990s, foreign firms went into Ondó State to explore bitumen production. Their arrival stimulated the local economy and raised hopes of being a petroleum producer. Renting rooms and houses for the Canadian firm Jerez Energy staff became a new form of business.<sup>53</sup> Also, the company compensated farmers on whose land some exploration activity took place. The company reported that they paid roughly ₦20 million (about £154,000) for crops that they destroyed.<sup>54</sup> Even during the exploration, Jerez Energy brought the people living in bituminous regions of Ondó State potable water in tanker trucks because of the risk of contaminating their streams through drilling test wells.<sup>55</sup> Based on journalistic reports, the people of Ondó welcomed the changes and investment strategies of the companies and hoped that the exploration venture would turn into a production contract.

Politicians within Ondó State have also used bitumen production as a selling point for their careers. In the 1990s, Governor Adebayo Adefarati has made development his main priority for his state. Following in the steps of the former governor, Adekunle Ajasin, Adefarati focused on diversifying Ondó's industries in the twenty-first century. Adefarati looked to industries such as glass manufacturing and oil palm processing as the solution. More important, Adefarati expressed a commitment to bitumen production. Although subsoil production belongs to the federal government, Ondó State applied for bitumen sites in Agbabu. The state also called for the building of a seaport and railway line, which would help the transfer of bitumen.<sup>56</sup> Despite these steps forward, Ondó State has expressed frustration over their inability to move forward independent of the national government.

Although Nigeria has faced severe political turmoil since independence, it has still maintained the structure of a federation. For Ondó State, this loose sense of unity has posed a significant barrier to their interests. Although the state could claim legal ownership of the land in the bitumen belt, it did not have any legal right to the bitumen under it because the federal government held exclusive rights to any subsoil resource. As long as this law remained in place, Ondó State would not be allowed to produce and profit off bitumen production. The federation acted as the political glue keeping the states from becoming autonomous. As a result, states within the federation found themselves trapped into the parastatal embroiled in ethno-politics. Even when direct involvement did not take place, as was often the case, ethno-politics prevented the development of a bitumen industry in Ondó State.

Thus far, only the direct indicators of ethno-politics preventing bitumen exploration have been explored. A host of indirect indicators, which include the residual complications that resulted from ethno-political decisions, also exist. The most prominent examples of them include political run-off where struggles within the realm of national politics are reflected at the state level, and political upheaval where any sort of solid national development plan is not able to materialize owing to rapid regime changes. Both involve the transfer of ethno-politics from the national level to the state level and result in a severe reduction in economic development, foreign investment in new industries, and an overall neglect of basic social needs. Of concern here is that the impact of political run-off and upheaval indirectly hinder and distract from the development of bitumen exploration.

For Ondó State, there is one major political event that best reveals the political run-off of national politics. In August of 1983, Ondó State erupted into a popular protest against the outcome of gubernatorial elections that took place. The result of the elections indicated a win for Ajasin of the NPN within a state known as a Unity Party of Nigeria supporter. A leading historian on the protest writes that Ajasin had been an active member of the AG, the Yorùbá dominated political party of the former Western Region, but switched to the NPN in an effort to align himself with those controlling the national government and, thus, take part in the machine of corruption.<sup>57</sup> In the town of Ekiti, people burned property belonging

to members of the NPN and demanded the reversal of the fraudulent results.<sup>58</sup> The election riot of 1983 made Ondó State appear to be an unstable location, undesirable to foreign investors, or, more specifically, major petroleum companies interested in producing bitumen. Even if the protest had not occurred within its borders, Ondó State suffered the same fate as the rest of Nigeria in that any political upheaval anywhere in Nigeria impacted the people and reputation of Ondó.

Rapid regime changes as a result of political upheaval in Nigeria have resulted in the demise of plans for the country's economic and political growth. Having obtained power through a democratic process or military coup, the head of state often had a monofocal view of maintaining power. As a way of ensuring that they did not lose their position, Nigeria's leaders often used the effective method of playing ethno-politics. They often used development projects within a specific ethnic region to maintain loyalty or expand their support base. Some measures to remain in power, however, included brutality and oppression of those who opposed them and building support through cronyism. Within the political upheaval that characterized Nigeria, quick results became essential to maintaining power. As a result, Nigeria's leaders became known for focusing on short-term projects such as building roads, constructing new buildings, and investing in similar short-term projects. This is largely because the infrastructure and duration of the head of state's term was never fully secure. A rapid change in government meant that economic plans were drafted as quickly as they were set aside, leaving Nigeria at an economic standstill. Thus, development plans fell victim to Nigeria's political upheaval.

One of the most notable places in which political upheaval has created problems for Nigeria is in its refining industry. An inability to properly invest and maintain the industry caused it to collapse. Nigeria has four refineries (two in Port Harcourt, one in Warri, and one in Kaduna), but only one was specifically designed to handle heavy crude oil (bitumen) processing to make asphalt and lubricating oils for domestic use. The NNPC constructed the Kaduna refinery in the far northern state of Kaduna in 1980 to meet Nigeria's local demands, particularly in the north, by refining imported heavy crude oil with a high sulfur content to make petroleum derivatives such as asphalt, gasoline, and kerosene. Skeptics of the national government suspected that those who ran the Kaduna refinery in the north and made money off importing bitumen did not want local production of bitumen in the south to begin and, furthermore, discouraged the national government from investing in the project.<sup>59</sup> This argument, however, lost validity when it virtually shut down, making the business dramatically less profitable.

Suffering from neglect during the political upheaval of the 1980s and 1990s, the Kaduna refinery went from a success story to a failure. When constructed, the Kaduna refinery had a capacity of more than 100,000 barrels per day of petroleum and a little more than 1.8 million barrels of lubricating oil. Most important, it produced asphalt.<sup>60</sup> During its years of peak performance, bitumen processing, according to the *Daily Times*, made up 50 percent of the refinery's output capacity.<sup>61</sup>

By the early 1990s, however, the refinery began its decline, operating at less than half capacity by 1993.<sup>62</sup> Without routine maintenance and upkeep, the refinery closed almost completely in 1999.<sup>63</sup> In 2000, only the fuel section worked, barely.<sup>64</sup> Realizing the inability of Nigeria to resuscitate its refineries with any kind of speed, President Ōbasanjō has begun pushing for privatization of the four refineries. This way private investors can modernize and maintain the refineries without burdening the nation's stretched finances. More important, Ōbasanjō saw that political upheaval in the country drove the refining industry into a liability that would take years and trillions of naira to fix.

The state of the Kaduna refinery by the mid-1980s became a major disincentive for the national government to invest further in the production and processing of bitumen. It is probable that policy makers reasoned that if the Kaduna refinery, at less than full capacity, was unable to meet domestic demand processing imported bitumen, then what sense did it make to expand the amount of bitumen scheduled to move through the refinery? Accepting this line of thinking brings into focus the idea that ethno-politics on a national level took a serious toll on the Kaduna refinery. And, thus, it indirectly deterred the national government from investing in bitumen production. Under President Ōbasanjō, however, some change has begun for not only the refinery, but also the bitumen project. It appears that Nigeria's contemporary government is favorable for bitumen exploration.

## **Current State of Bitumen Exploration**

Since the arrival of Oluşegun Ōbasanjō to the presidency in 1999, bitumen has become a high priority. Ōbasanjō appears to understand the importance of stability because he witnessed the worst of Nigeria with a committed and critical eye. During his presidency thus far, Ōbasanjō has raised Nigeria to a level of political peace not seen for years and has taken Nigeria in a new economic direction. Among other development projects, Ōbasanjō set up the Bitumen Project Implementation Committee (BPIC) headed by Julius Ihonvbere in 2000. The committee was formed to oversee the exploration and exploitation of bitumen. Already this committee has distinguished itself from previous committees in that it has contributed to the clearing of land and paving of roads to reduce operating costs for investors.<sup>65</sup> The committee received \$5 million to conduct seismic surveys.<sup>66</sup> At the same time, the federal government took preliminary steps toward solidifying production contracts. It received twenty-two bids from oil firms to produce bitumen. In September 2002, Nigerian granted exploration licenses to two companies—Bitumen Exploration and Exploitation Company (Nigeria) Limited (BEECON) and NISSANDS (Nigeria) Limited from Canada. These companies had until 2004 to explore blocks 307B and 307C along the coast.<sup>67</sup> On March 17, 2003, President Ōbasanjō traveled to Ode-Irele in Ondó State for a bitumen groundbreaking ceremony, which marked the official beginning of exploration for commercial quantities of bitumen.

Ọbasanjo's dedication to bitumen exploration in Ondó State furthers the notion that ethno-politics continues to operate. It can be argued that as a democratically elected Yorùbá leader from the town of Abeokuta, Ọbasanjo represents a turnover in national politics favoring the Yorùbá. Although many Yorùbá argue that his loyalty lies more with the north than the south, the connection between his leadership and bitumen progress suggests that a link exists. For the first time, the Ondó State government and the federal government appear to be working together on the project. In 2000, the Ondó government donated two buildings to the BPIC.<sup>68</sup> Even while bitumen exploration is still in the beginning phases, the national government is already discussing the establishment of an overseeing body to implement tax holidays and deferred royalty payments. Also, the national government established a system ensuring the possibility of full ownership of the industry if desired at a later point. The steps taken so far indicate not only a long-term economic plan for Nigeria, but also a positive step toward Yorùbá representation in the national government.

President Ọbasanjo and his administration view bitumen exploration as an avenue to develop a new aspect to its booming petroleum industry and rekindle regional cooperation. Ọbasanjo hopes to maintain the international reputation as a major crude oil producer, while diversifying its petroleum industry in anticipation of the future. A recent global concern over a shortage of crude oil has made the idea of processing bitumen into a fuel oil a reality for petroleum-rich countries. The idea is that crude oil reservoirs supplying the world today may age and collapse, making bitumen production more economically feasible. Thus, Nigeria can only benefit from establishing a bitumen industry whether global crude oil reservoirs actually drop or not. For its West African neighbors ravaged by war, Nigeria intends to offer its bitumen to rebuild their roads. West African countries, Nigeria included, are heavy importers of asphalt. Ọbasanjo hopes to push his idea of regional cooperation by making Nigeria the supplier of asphalt to its neighbors, reinforcing a sense of economic solidarity and autonomy among African countries. Does this mean that Nigeria is on the road to economic growth without the dragging effect of ethno-politics? Early indications say not.

Ethnic turmoil linked to the crude oil fields of the Niger delta has delayed the two exploration companies. The Nigerian government gave the companies a 6-month ultimatum, under which they were required to begin exploration activity, but they failed to secure international technical companies.<sup>69</sup> Speculation has been widespread that political instability within Warri made investors uneasy. To reassure the companies, the state deputy governor, Otunba Omolade Oluwateru, confirmed that the communities in Ondó State would not disturb the production process.<sup>70</sup> This situation confirms that political upheaval in the country repels investors even when the ethnic-based tension does not involve the Yorùbá living in Ondó State.

Since the first notion of bitumen exploration in Ondó State, onlookers have expressed optimism that exploration and production would be divorced from politics and seen as a truly national project.<sup>71</sup> In this essay, however, I have shown that

bitumen production in Ondó State has been the victim of ethno-political tension within Nigeria since independence. To demonstrate this, I introduced the topic of bitumen exploration within Ondó State and linked it to Nigeria's political history.

One scholar described the breakdowns in Nigeria's political system as rooted in ethnic controversy.<sup>72</sup> As suggested in this essay, the issue of bitumen exploration in Ondó State exemplifies this problem. The production of this potentially lucrative resource would only add to Nigeria's already booming petroleum industry. To this day, however, exploration is in the early planning stages, although the Nigerian government has been aware of its existence since the formal confirmation of it by a German oil company in the early twentieth century. This is not to say that interest in bitumen production by the national government has never existed, but that fluctuating levels of interest have prevented the idea of exploration to fully materialize. Nigeria has a long history of ethno-political tension, which has directly and indirectly impacted bitumen exploration in Ondó State. But, perhaps, with the current administration, the future of bitumen exploration and production may become a reality.

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# 17

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## **CHIEF M. K. O. ABIOLA'S PRESIDENTIAL AMBITIONS AND YORUBÁ DEMOCRATIC RIGHTS**

Ọlayiwọla Abegunrin

Those who profess to favor freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who want crops without plowing the ground. They want rain without thunder and lightning. They want the Ocean without the awful roar of its waters. Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did, and never will.

Frederick Douglass<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

In the history of the Nigerian politics, the Northern political leaders have seen the Yorùbá people as their political rivals and an obstacle to their political ambition to continue the domination of Nigeria. The aim of this study is to examine the power struggle between the Yorùbá people and the other ethnic groups, especially the northerners in the Nigerian political equation, and offer a critical evaluation and analysis of the emergence of geo-ethno-military clique,<sup>2</sup> and their northern political class, better known as the Kaduna Mafia and the denial of Chief M. K. O. Abiọla's presidency of 1993. Abiọla was the winner of June 12, 1993, Presidential election in Nigeria. The conduct and manner of collation of results of this election still remain superior to the presidential elections of 1979, 1983, 1999, and 2003; hence June 12, 1993, is dubbed by most analysts as the only free, fair, and credible presidential election in the nation's history. One of the reasons why Chief Abiọla was denied this election was because he was from Yorùbá ethnic group, which the northern leaders have seen as their major political rival in Nigeria. The study also examines the annulment of this election as a betrayal of the democratic rights of the Yorùbá people, and the present and future relationship of the

Yorùbá people, and the northern leaders, the unity and the future of democracy in Nigeria.

The Kaduna Mafia has constituted one formidable clique committed to an undisputed, permanent northern rulership of Nigeria, with the exception of the Nigerian general elections of 1999 and 2003, which brought Oluṣẹgun Ọbasanjọ to power. The northerners' plan is that if the civilian component of this clique cannot win or satisfy with an election result, their military component should come to the aid of the north, and end political power through a military coup d'état.<sup>3</sup>

The transition to democracy was the major project to which General Ibrahim Babangida's regime committed itself in 1986, a year after he took over in a military coup of August 1985. He set up a Political Bureau to consult with Nigerian people and make recommendations on the country's political future and a Constitutional Review Committee on the 1979 suspended Constitution, which guided the defunct Second Republic. The government also set up the Directorate for Food, Roads, and Rural Infrastructure, the Directorate for Mass Mobilization, Social Justice and Economic Recovery, and the Center for Democratic Studies (CDS) to work toward promoting rural development and the mobilization and education of Nigerians for democracy. A population census was carried out in 1992, a National Orientation Movement<sup>4</sup> was initiated, and other structures aimed at ensuring a lasting democracy were established. In addition, the regime scuttled independent efforts at party formation following the lifting of the ban on politics. It banned a category of politicians from politics and constantly blamed the rich for the country's political crisis. In place of independent efforts at party formation, the Babangida military administration created its own two political parties—the National Republican Convention, described as a little to the right, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP), which was a little to the left.<sup>5</sup> The government then proceeded to build party offices at the Federal Capital, State and local governments across the country, and to fund all their activities, including deciding and imposing ideological platforms. General Babangida, the self-appointed military president intimidated the Nigerian political class, tinkered with the transition program, banned and unbanned political actors at will, postponed the election and handover date to civilian three different times. He threatened social and human rights activists, branded pro-democracy leaders as extremists, and poured billions of naira in promoting the emergence of the so-called new breed political elite that would lead the transition to a Third Republic for the country.<sup>6</sup>

## **Transition Without End**

Under normal conditions, some or most of these programs should contribute to the process of genuine political liberalization with possibilities for democratization through the empowerment of the people and their communities. Apparently, all

these were mere shadow chasing by General Babangida and his military clique. All along, General Babangida, the “self-confessed evil genius” had no intension of quitting the political scene. While blaming the politicians and the so-called “moneybags” for the country’s political problems, General Babangida poured more money into the hands of the political class. This increased the political stakes, promised each candidate something (mostly monetary rewards) to strengthen their resolve to capture political power by hook or crook, and continued to make the transition program as uncertain as possible by introducing new rules, reinterpreting existing legislation, and manipulating the set up transition institution.<sup>7</sup> With all these tricks and manipulations, General Babangida was very confident that no matter how much and how frequently he intervened in the transition program, and no matter how often he toyed around with the politicians and the electoral rules, the situation would not degenerate to a level where his personal control of the political system would be effectively challenged by the Nigerian political class. A reporter from the *Guardian* described Babangida’s actions:

His tight control of the elections, death threats against dissidents, and press closures . . . reinforced the transition to elected civilian rule, ignoring public opposition of the flawed electoral system, the institutions of government and the federal structure of Nigeria.<sup>8</sup>

Babangida’s transition program “negated any attempt at national consensus or popular involvement in the evolution of government and society in Nigeria.”<sup>9</sup>

The successful conduct of elections to gubernatorial offices, states houses of assembly, local government councils, the federal senate, and the House of Representatives gave many Nigerians and international observers the impression that a transition was indeed taking place and a Third Republic was forthcoming. Unfortunately, such optimistic evaluation of the Nigerian political reality was misplaced. The focus on superficial dimensions of liberalization overshadowed a more sinister program for dismantling institutions of civil society, entrenching military rule, and totally militarizing the country’s political landscape. Babangida’s major strategy for achieving this was the exhaustion of the political class; discrediting it through complex divide-and-rule tactics and by exploiting its irresponsibility, division, and greed; and by co-opting those individuals and organizations that were vulnerable enough for his northern sponsored geo-ethno-military clique project.

The Nigerian political class in general, and Yorùbá politicians in particular, were completely unprepared for the kinds of brutal manipulations and unending transitions to democracy that General Babangida was pursuing. Because his programs for the Third Republic did not provide much needed services for the Yorùbá people, their public education, health, and economic development suffered. Furthermore, Babangida failed to promoted democracy and true fiscal federalism by restructuring the nation’s political system as the Yorùbá demanded. As a result, Nigeria’s political classes became antagonistic to each other, opportunistic,

irresponsible, and totally unable to map out an agenda to see the military out of power.<sup>10</sup>

In fact, when General Babangida cancelled the results of the party primaries of September 1992 and banned many politicians, Yorùbá political elite accepted his actions and tried to meet his new demands and regulations. Fẹmi Falana, from *TELL* magazine, exclaimed:

the Campaign for Democracy (CD) an umbrella organizations of about thirty-five Human Rights Organizations was actually prepared to chase out Babangida on January 2, 1993, but our dilemma was that politicians that were disqualified were not prepared to champion any cause.<sup>11</sup>

With the conduct of the presidential election on June 12, 1993, it was generally expected that given the subservient attitude of the Nigerian politicians who obeyed all rules imposed on them, avoided critical and thorny political issues, and promised not to probe the Babangida regime on any issue, a transition to democracy would take place as planned. These promises and expectations had not counted on the hidden agenda of General Babangida and his geo-ethno-military clique, and the weaknesses and corruption of the Nigerian political class. Not only had the Yorùbá political leaders shown itself to be detached from the Yorùbá masses, but also it has succumbed to every move General Babangida has made against it. General Babangida was the nemesis of the country's political class, indeed of its elite. In the 8 years of his rule, he wound them around his little finger, exploited their greed, and showed them to be one thing: lacking in principle or in commitment to higher ideals.<sup>12</sup>

After all his tricks and maneuvers, the June 12, 1993, presidential election finally took place as scheduled. The election was adjudged to be the most free, fair, and credible in the history of Nigeria. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) declared it the very best election it had conducted thus far in the country. The Presidential Election Monitoring Group, which had been set up by the government to oversee the elections also declared:

... that it was administered with meticulous precision. It commended the National Electoral Commission for its diligent, dutiful, and in the main patriotic handling of the exercise. To the Presidential Election Monitoring Group, the June 12, election was devoid of the failings of previous exercises and this was a positive sign for the future of elections in Nigeria.<sup>13</sup>

The International Observer Team praised the NEC, the two political parties, candidates, Nigerian Security Forces, and noted in particular the maturity and decency of the campaigns, and declared that the election was free and fair.<sup>14</sup> The Director General of the government supported CDS, Omo Omoruyi, who also was a very close political adviser of General Babangida and a member of his kitchen cabinet, declared on June 16, 1993 that "the election was the best the nation ever had and should be accepted."<sup>15</sup> Omoruyi stated categorically that the June 12,

**Table 17.1.** Results of the June 12, 1993, presidential election.

State	NRC	SDP
Abia	59.0	41.0
Imo	55.1	44.9
Adamawa	54.3	45.71
Tabara	38.6	61.42
Akwa Ibom	43.7	56.3
Cross River	44.8	55.2
Anambra	42.9	57.1
Enugu	59.1	48.1
Bauchi	60.7	39.3
Benue	43.1	56.9
Kogi	54.4	45.6
Kwara	22.8	77.2
Edo	33.5	66.5
Delta	30.7	69.3
Kano	47.7	52.3
Jigawa	39.3	60.7
Katsina	61.3	38.7
Kaduna	47.8	52.2
Sokoto	79.2	20.8
Kebbi	67.3	32.7
Borno	45.6	54.4
Yobe	36.4	63.6
Lagos	14.5	85.5
Niger	61.9	38.1
Oyo	16.5	83.5
Osun	16.5	83.5
Ogun	12.2	87.8
Ondo	15.6	84.4
Plateau	38.3	61.7
Rivers	53.4	36.6
Abuja	NA	NA

Sources: *Daily Times* [Lagos], June 16, 1993; *National Concord* [Ikeja], June 16, 1993; and *Daily Sketch* [Ìbàdàn], June 15, 1993.

NA = figures not available.

1993, presidential election was free, fair, credible, and the best in the nation's history. According to all the available figures of the election results, it was clearly shown and known throughout Nigeria and outside the country that Chief Abiọla had won the presidential election without any question, and he had an overwhelming mandate from the Nigerian people. For details of the election results as reported by many Nigerian news organizations (Table 17.1).

## **The Annulment of June 12, 1993, Presidential Election**

The order to stop the authenticated results of the election by the officials of the NEC came from Babangida administration. General Babangida refused to announce the result or the winner of the presidential election, because Chief Abiola, the winner, was not acceptable candidate to the geo-ethno-military clique and their civilian northern political class the so-called Kaduna Mafia.<sup>16</sup> The refusal of General Babangida to announce the result of this election created a stalemate in the country and tension in Yorùbáland. As a result on June 18, 1993, General Babangida and his National Defense and Security Council (NDSC) moved to his personal home in Minna, Niger State, to decide on what to do about the result of election.

From June 18 to 21, 1993, General Babangida and his NDSC deliberated in his home in Minna and returned to Abuja on June 21. On June 23, 1993, the Press Secretary to the Vice President, Nduka Irabor released an unsigned statement from the State House to the press that the June 12, 1993, presidential election was annulled (cancelled), and stated that:

1. All court proceedings pending or to be instituted and appeals thereon in respect of any matter touching, relating or concerning the presidential election of June 12, 1993.
2. The appeal of the Transition to Civil Rule Political Program Amendment No. 3 Decree No. 52 of 1992, and the Presidential Election Basic Constitutional and Transitional Provisional Decree No. 13 of 1993, thus invalidating all acts or omissions done under these decrees.
3. The suspension of the National Electoral Commission as well as the nullification of all acts and commission, or omissions of its agents and officers under the repealed Decree No. 13 of 1993.<sup>17</sup>

Finally, on June 26, General Babangida, the “Prince of Niger, and self-confessed evil genius,” addressed the nation on national television and gave additional reasons for the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential election as following:

1. That there was tremendous negative use of money during the party primaries and presidential election and moral issues.
2. That there were documented and confirmed conflict of interest between the government and both presidential aspirants which would compromise their positions and responsibilities were they to become president.
3. That to continue action on the basis of the June 12, 1993 election, and to proclaim and swear in a president who encouraged a campaign of divide and rule amongst our various ethnic groups would have detrimental to the survival of the Third Republic.<sup>18</sup>

General Babangida went further, pointing out that he had proof of the electoral manipulations “through offer and acceptance of money and other forms of

inducement against officials of the NEC and members of the electorate and as well as evidence of conflict in the process of authentication and clearance of credentials of the presidential candidates.”<sup>19</sup> He promised that new elections would take place at the end of July, and his administration will usher in a democratic government by August 27, 1993.

Chief Abiḳḳa, the winner of the June 12, 1993, presidential election, in his reaction to the military government’s announcement of annulment of the election said:

The results were ready and I won. Yet, the Federal Military Government on the premise that the Judiciary caught itself in a web of ludicrous contradictions, has decided to cancel the election and its result. I say categorically that this decision is unfair, unjust and consequently unacceptable. I am a custodian of a sacred mandate, freely given, which I cannot surrender unless the people so demand, and it is virtue of this mandate that I say that the decision of the Federal Military Government to cancel the results is un-patriotic and capable of causing undue and unnecessary confusion in the country.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Background of the Emergence of Northern Political Domination in Nigeria**

First, why did General Babangida annul the June 12, 1993, presidential election, which was clearly won by Chief Abiḳḳa? General Babangida, even though it was obvious that there was a winner, eventually annulled this election because Chief Abiḳḳa, a Yorùbá man, was not acceptable to the northern leaders and their geo-ethno-military clique. Babangida’s action for nullifying this election has remote historical and immediate causes, and I deal with those remote background reasons first.

The Niger Territories, which correspond to present-day northern Nigeria, was under the Royal Niger Company between 1886 and 1899, and Lord Frederick Lugard as a Captain in the British Army worked for this company in negotiating a series of false treaties with traditional rulers in the Niger areas. However, the design to amalgamate the present territories known as Nigeria was conceived by Frederick Lugard on his appointment as the British High Commissioner of the Niger Territories in 1900. Lord Lugard brought the various parts of the Northern Emirates together under one administration called Niger Territories, later renamed Northern Protectorate of Nigeria. Nevertheless, the two governments in the south, the Southern Provinces and the Colony of Lagos, were merged in 1906 to form the Southern Protectorate (Southern Nigeria). Although Lord Lugard was appointed the British High Commissioner of the Niger Territories (Northern and Southern Protectorates) in 1900, technically between 1900 and 1912, the two territories were autonomous entities responsible separately to the Colonial Office in London. Therefore, the Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were ruled separately until the amalgamation on January 1, 1914. According to Michael

Crowder, this action came as the fulfillment of a suggestion made 16 years earlier, specifically in 1898 by Flora Shaw—Lady Lugard—in an article in *The Times* of London. At that time she proposed that the several British protectorates on the Niger River be known collectively as Nigeria.<sup>21</sup>

## The Economic Motive for the Amalgamation

It should be pointed out that between 1898 and 1912, Lord Lugard unified the Northern Territories under one administration, unlike the Southern Territories, which were under different administrative units by the time of amalgamation in 1914. The Southern Leaders, including the Yorùbá with their Legislative Council, were not consulted about their incorporation with the North. On January 1, 1914, Lord Lugard with the order of the colonial secretary, Lord Lewis Harcourt, officially decreed the amalgamation of these two separate and distinct protectorates. However, we can conclude that this amalgamation was a forced marriage of two different peoples, with different cultures, traditions, and history. Omoruyi writes:

the first time Yoruba knew of what was to befall them was after the British Colonial Secretary, Lord Harcourt's announcement in London before the House of Commons on June 27, 1913 which followed by the statement of the relationship between the North and the South Protectorates.<sup>22</sup>

This decision he called the “new British Government policy of two Nigeria.” Lord Harcourt spelled out the relationship between the North and the South thus:

We have released Northern Nigeria from the leading strings of the Treasury. The promising and well-conducted youth is now on an allowance on his own and is about to effect an alliance with a Southern lady of means. I have issued the special license and Lord Frederick Lugard will perform the ceremony. May the union be fruitful and couple be constant.<sup>23</sup>

Therefore, this relationship between the north and the south was meant as a marriage, with the North as the husband and the South as the wife. The alliance with a “Southern lady of means,” as conceived by Lord Harcourt in the incorporation of Southern Territories into the unified Northern Territories by the British, was done to garner the economic wealth of the South to offset the money spent by the British to pacify the less endowed Northern Territories. The well-being of the Yorùbá people was not the key consideration of the British Government to amalgamate the South with the North. The use of tax revenue (import and export dues) from the South for the funding of the administration of the Northern Territories that constituted a drain on the financial resources of the British colonial authority in London was the major motive. Therefore, the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria was done purposely for British economic interest,



and not for the purposes of nation building. I. F. Nicolson, one of the British colonial administrators in Nigeria, stated:

The immediate reason for the decision to amalgamate the two protectorates was economic expediency. The Northern Protectorate was running at a severe deficit, which was being met by subsidy from the Southern Protectorate, and an Imperial Grant-in-Aid from Britain of about \$900,000 a year. This conflicted with the colonial policy that each territory should be self-subsisting.<sup>24</sup>

Lord Lugard, as the agent of the British colonial authority in Nigeria, saw that it was uneconomical to administer northern parts as an autonomous colonial territory; hence the need to embark on the amalgamation plan with the southern parts. Nicholson succinctly described Lord Lugard's plan thus:

Instead of administering things and developing services, Lugard had been preoccupied with the widespread extension of rule over People, an undertaking so unprofitable that it made amalgamation of the viable South and the bankrupt North both far more urgent, from the point of view of the home (British) Government, and far more difficult, than the joining of two viable administrations would have been.<sup>25</sup>

On the occasion of the declaration of the constitution of the Colony and Protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria on January 1, 1914, Lord Lugard, the Governor-General declared:

The Colony of Lagos and Protectorate of Nigeria will be placed under the control of a single officer upon whom His Majesty has been pleased to confer the title of Governor-General, thus indicating the importance of this country among the Crown Colonies and Protectorates of the Empire. That portion which has hitherto been Northern Nigeria will be known in future as the Northern Provinces, while the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria will be known as the Southern Provinces of Nigeria; each will be under the immediate control of a Lieutenant-Governor responsible to the Governor-General. The Colony in view of its separate status and traditions will preserve a "separate identity," under an Administrator of its own dealing directly with the Governor-General. For the present, the Central Headquarters will remain at Lagos, and the Governor-General will divide his time between the Headquarter stations of the Northern and Southern Provinces.<sup>26</sup>

From these statements it appears the British designed the unification of the two protectorates to form Nigeria in 1914 in favor of the North. This newly created country contained multiplicity of peoples with 450 ethnic nationalities and a number of great kingdoms that had evolved complex systems of government independent of contact with Europe, autonomous and very rich in human and natural resources.<sup>27</sup>

In a sense, any country can be called an artificial creation. In the case of Nigeria, the union was sudden and it covered such widely differing groups of peoples that not only the British who created it, but also the inhabitants themselves have often doubted whether it could survive as a political entity. Right from its

creation in 1914, the Yorùbá opinion, especially in Lagos, was very critical of the British plan of amalgamation of Lagos Colony and Southern Provinces with the Northern Provinces. By the time of amalgamation in 1914, the Yorùbá people had been well exposed to the Western education. By tradition, the Colony of Lagos and all the Yorùbá areas, including the Benin people, were well developed and very progressive, whereas the northerners, the British so-called promising youth, were still living in the feudalistic age. Consequently, the northern leaders were amenable to colonial manipulations and easily became British stooges. The Yorùbá rejected "Governor Lugard's abandoning of Lagos and the transfer of the capital of the Southern Protectorate of Nigeria 500 miles upcountry to Kaduna."<sup>28</sup> Therefore, to understand the reason and the root cause of the northern domination, there is a need to understand the ethnic configuration of Nigeria in the geographical terms of the north-south dichotomy. In addition, the British design for Nigeria has been to the advantage of the North and the disadvantage of the Yorùbá since the amalgamation of 1914.

### **The Immediate Causes of the June 12, 1993, Annulment**

The forced marriage between the Northern and the Southern Protectorates of Nigeria in 1914 led to the succession claims during the period of decolonization of Nigeria from 1955 to 1960. Nigeria's federalism, however, takes its origin from the will of a colonizing power expressed through the amalgamation decree of January 1, 1914. All along, the British colonial overlords were more concerned for the northerners than for the Yorùbá people. These are some of the reasons that led Chief Q̄bafẹ̀mi Awolọ̀wọ̀ to identify Lord Lugard as the "founding father" of Nigeria, pointing out that "to him, (Lugard) more than anyone else, belongs the credit or discredit for setting Nigeria on a course which Nigerian Nationalists and Patriots feel obliged to pursue albeit with mixed feeling till the present day."<sup>29</sup> To confirm Chief Awolọ̀wọ̀' s statement that the generation of the Nigerian nationalists that obtained independence for Nigeria in 1960 were not the founding fathers, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa affirmed that in 1948 by stating:

Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religion beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite . . . Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.<sup>30</sup>

At the January 1950, Ìbàdàn General Conference on Review of the Nigerian Constitution, the Northerner leaders, led by Alhaji Balewa, demanded 50 percent representation in the Federal House of Representatives, and got it, with the British backing their obnoxious maneuvering behind the scenes.<sup>31</sup> The London Constitution Conference of May 1957 on Nigeria established the formation of a

National Unity Government of the three political parties: the Northern People's Congress (NPC) from the North, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) from the east, and Action Group (AG) from the west. In 1955, Governor James Robertson named Alhaji Balewa to take over charge of defense and police affairs, and after the national unity government was formed in 1957, he appointed Balewa the Prime Minister of the Federation of Nigeria over the political leaders in the NCNC from the east and in the AG from the west. To show the British favoritism of the northern over southern leaders, he, in addition to the position as the federal prime minister, named Alhaji Balewa as the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Therefore, the key ministerial positions were given to the NPC northern-led political party in the unity government of 1957 that led to the country's independence in 1960. As far as Governor Robertson was concerned, the northern leaders were men of the highest integrity, gentle, and most sincere, whereas the Yorùbá leaders were argumentative, ambitious, and trouble makers.

In furtherance of the British colonial policy of northern control of Nigeria, Governor James Robertson did not even wait to hear the complete results of the federal elections of 1959, before inviting Alhaji Balewa to form a government. In his own statement he said:

Before all the counting had finished, rumors began to circulate that the NCNC and the Action group were getting together, and might form a coalition; there was no doubt that Dr. Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo were in close touch through various go betweens. It seems clear that although there were a number of seats still to be declared, the state of the parties would finally be approximately NPC 140, NCNC 90, and AG 75, and if the AG and NCNC formed a coalition they would have majority in the House of Representatives. I believed that this could be very dangerous for Nigeria's future as, from all I had learned of the Sardauna, and the Northerners, they might well decide to leave the Federation for they would not readily accept a national government of the Southern Parties. Even if this did not happen, there was bound to be a serious political situation.<sup>32</sup>

Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and the leader of the NPC, supported Robertson's position, saying, "A sudden grouping of the Eastern and Western parties might take power and so endanger the north. This would of course be utterly disastrous. It might set back our programme of development seriously; it would therefore force us to take measures to avert the need."<sup>33</sup> The need that Alhaji Bello was referring to here was the Northern threats to secede from Nigeria unless the self-government motion by Chief Anthony Enahoro in March 1953 was killed by the British Government.<sup>34</sup> The NPC–NCNC coalition government from the 1959 election was a Northern strategy of divide and rule. It was a plan to entrench the Northern control of Nigeria and sabotage the efforts to form a coalition government of the Igbo-led NCNC and the Yorùbá-led AG political parties. Unfortunately, led by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the NCNC joined the coalition government with the northern-led NPC as senior partners by accepting a rubber stamp position of Governor-General from 1960 to 1963 and figurehead

President between 1963 and 1966. He later regretted his action in 1978, when he said, "I never ruled this country for one day."<sup>35</sup> From the time of amalgamation in 1914, the British as the creator of Nigeria had designed the political control of the country in favor of the northerners as long as the country exists as one political entity. Consequently, after the independence in 1960, Britain handed over the political power of the country to Northern leaders, the so-called promising youth.

The last colonial governor general, Sir James Robertson, unconstitutionally handpicked Alhaji Balewa in 1955 to head the Ministry of Defense and the Department of Police Affairs. The Ministry of Defense is in the hands of the Northern leaders even today. Consequently, the transformation of the military from a national institution to a northernized army in terms of leadership and later in orientation was a deliberate colonial design. This policy of divide and rule in Nigeria was initiated by Lord Lugard and perfected by Sir James Robertson before the Nigerian independence in 1960. The British made sure that the Chief Awolowo-led political party, the AG, a Yorùbá party, was excluded from the independent government in 1959, and only made up of the northern-led NPC and the Igbo-led NCNC coalition government. According to Sir James Robertson in his memoir, "It was this faculty resolution of the succession crisis that set in the train of events leading to the fatal developments of January 1966."<sup>36</sup>

The British design for Nigeria in 1914, was reenacted in the July 1966 counter-coup, which led to the appointment of Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon as head of state over Yorùbá senior officers and other southern military officers. For example, Brigadier Babafemi Ogundipe, Colonel Adeyinka Adebayo, Lieutenant Colonels George Kurubo, Philip Effiong, Hilary Njoku, and Chukwuemeka Ojukwu were all senior officers to Yakubu Gowon.<sup>37</sup> The northern military officers rejected Brigadier Ogundipe as Head of State, although he was the Chief of Staff, Supreme Headquarters, and the next highest military officer after General Aguiyi Ironsi, who was overthrown in the counter-coup. The northern military officers, all junior rank, confronted Brigadier Ogundipe, and demanded from him a choice between retirement or flight to avoid death.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, Brigadier Ogundipe fled the country into retirement in London. It should be noted that after the counter-coup of July 1966, the northern military officers were in disarray, and wanted to secede from Nigeria, because it appeared impossible for the permanent rule by Northerners to be accepted by the Yorùbá and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The British persuaded them to change their mind. Confirming the involvement of Britain and the United States in continued Northern domination of Nigeria, John Stremlau said, "The Ambassadors of the United States and Britain, Elbert Matthews, and Sir Francis Cumming-Bruce told Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon that not another dime in foreign assistance would come if Nigeria was allowed to dissolve."<sup>39</sup> According to Major-General James Oluleye, after General Ironsi was removed from power:

The immediate problem facing the Northern military officers was one of the rightful successor, the hero of the coup or the senior officer from the North whose role was one of

passivity in the struggle. Somehow the matter was resolved by the Northern Civil Servants in Lagos with the *British intervention who also emboldened them that the numerical strength of Northern troops in the Army could sustain a Northern-led government.*<sup>40</sup>

The obstacle in the form of the most senior officer, a Yorùbá in the Nigerian Army had been removed through the fright and flight of Brigadier Ogundipe. According to Major-General Oluleye, “with the caucus of the Northern officers, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon was the most senior, and he was made the Head of State, although he did not participate in the counter-coup.”<sup>41</sup> However, with this intervention, the British achieved their 1914 and 1959 plans of maintaining northerners as their successors in Nigeria over the Yorùbá and the other ethnic groups.

### **The Civil War and the Oil Factor**

The Nigerian Civil War of 1967 to 1970 emboldened and consolidated northern control of the military on the country and over the Yorùbá people, and gave the northern geo-ethno-military clique and their civilian political class unlimited access to new found source of wealth—oil money. The 39 years of Northern rule of Nigeria (1960 to 1999) nurtured the seed of discord between the Yorùbá and other southern ethnic groups, and their political leaders. The Northern domination of Nigeria since independence has produced three antagonistic groups in the South: the Yorùbá in the southwest, the Igbo in the southeast, and the minority groups in the delta. The northern leaders have perfected through corruption and greed the divide and rule tactics inherited from their British colonial masters, and “created the minority states at the price of abandoning the majority groups in the South, while the Northern rulers labored hard to keep the minority states in the North as part of one North one people.”<sup>42</sup>

Oil is one of the immediate factors of political conflicts in Nigeria and a crucial cause of the denial of Abiọla’s presidency. Oil did not feature as important commodity until the Civil War started in 1967, although “oil concessions covering the whole of Nigeria was given to Shell-British Petroleum in 1937 by the British Government.”<sup>43</sup> It was speculated by some authorities that if oil had been discovered in large commercial quantities before independence, the history of Nigeria would have been different, and its independence would not have occurred at the time it was achieved. Oil has become a major and very important factor in the Nigerian political equation since the civil war. Oil is located in an area that is politically and militarily important, but very sensitive and lately very explosive. It is located in the minority area of the Niger delta, and was recently found in two of the Yorùbá states of Lagos and Ondó, all in the south, the area called the “lady of means” by Lord Harcourt.<sup>44</sup> But the political and military power is under the control of the North, the British so-called “promising youth.”

## **What Chief Abiola's Victory Meant for the Northerners**

Since the first election of 1959, the northern political leaders have worked together to make sure that the political leaders from the Yorùbá, the Igbo, and the minority groups from the south were divided at all costs. The divide and rule tactics of northern leaders, a scheme the northern political leaders inherited from British colonial rule, frustrated all efforts of the Yorùbá leaders to bridge the gap between them and other ethnic groups and to unite. This policy was perfected by the geo-ethno-military clique and their civilian political class to deny Chief Abiola's presidential victory and denied the democratic rights of the Yorùbá people.<sup>45</sup>

Chief Abiola's election victory was the first time that a presidential candidate from any ethnic group would win a nationwide election that cut across ethnic, religious, and regional divides. Chief Abiola won the June 12, 1993, presidential election with a landslide national mandate, which posed a serious threat and challenge to the geo-ethno-military clique, and their civilian political class. The Kaduna Mafia knew that his political support cut across the entire country and that this could challenge their political domination. Chief Abiola was a man of independent mind, a democrat, and a man of independent wealth, an affluent not dependent on the northern leaders and not created for him by the grace of northern leaders. Therefore, he did not need a godfather from the North to survive politically and financially in Nigeria. Besides, as Omoruyi suggests, "the northern leaders knew that Chief Abiola had enormous international connections able to make him call their bluff and get away with it."<sup>46</sup> Chief Abiola was the kind of Yorùbá leader the northern leaders could not tolerate, because of his independence. The geo-ethno-military clique and their civilian political class knew that Chief Abiola's election victory meant their political doom in Nigeria. Consequently, they were ready to fight at all costs to prevent him from claiming his democratic rights and becoming the president.

## **The Geo-Ethno-Military Clique and Their Southern Collaborators**

The issue of corruption and graft is the most unfortunate problem for the Nigerian political leaders, be it from the North or the South, and our politicians are very corrupt. This is one of the major ailments ruining the country and cause of the conflicts of democracy in Nigeria. The key political leaders, including the chairman of Chief Abiola's own political party, the SDP, collaborated with the geo-ethno-military clique and their northern political class and annulled the June 12, 1993, election. These people colluded with the geo-ethno-military clique and sold out the mandate given to Chief Abiola by Nigerians. These corrupt party officials

were shortsighted and unpatriotic Nigerians who were prepared to sell even their own souls to the Kaduna Mafia for a price.

These people served as legal and public relations advisers for General Babangida during the June 1993 election crisis. These civilian officials constituted themselves as “the annullists.” Members of this group were the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Clement Akpmgbo; the Minister of Education, Professor Ben Nwabueze; the Minister of Information, Uche Chukwumerije; and Walter Ofonagoro. These people were solidly behind the geo-ethno-military clique and Babangida. They were the brains behind legal basis for the annulment of June 12, 1993, presidential election. These people were anti-Abiọla because he was a Yorùbá, and they had an axe to grind with the Yorùbá people in general. According to Professor Omo Omoruyi, “Clement Akpmgbo and Ben Nwabueze were private legal advisers to Babangida. They assured him that they would provide the legal basis for the annulment if the President [Babangida] would be courageous enough to do it.”<sup>47</sup> This group was out to avenge the Yorùbá for not supporting them during the Nigerian–Biafran war (1967 to 1970).

Arthur Nzeribe, as a member of the group, founded the Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) purposely to promote General Babangida’s extended stay in office. With his ABN, an unregistered organization, Nzeribe went to court to stop the NEC from holding the election on June 12 and to extend the tenure of the Nigerian military rule.<sup>48</sup> His argument was that Nigerian politicians were rogues and would not be able to hold the country together if the military handed over power to them.

### **The Northerners, the Yorùbá and, the Future of Democracy**

As it is now, the future of democracy in Nigeria is very gloomy as long as the present political institutions of the country are not restructured. The northern leaders do not believe in democratic governance or institutions. They are groups of autocratic leaders who still believe in the feudalistic system of rule. For instance, in 1982, when Chief Abiọla wanted to seek the presidential nomination of his party, the former National Party of Nigeria, in accordance with the original understanding within the leadership of the party that the presidential position should rotate to the three zones of the country—north, southwest, and southeast—for a term of 4 years, he was unsuccessful. Alhaji Shehu Shagari, a Northerner served 4 years as the president (1979 to 1983). According to Wọle Soyinka, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, said “‘the northern leaders’ interpretation was that zoning did not imply rotation.” Thus, President Shagari told Chief Abiọla, “Well Chief, you know, it is all in the natural order of things. A country is just like a farm where everyone has his functions. Allah has willed it that someone must hold the cow by the horns while another does the milking.”<sup>49</sup> He then asked Chief Abiọla what compensation

he would accept from him as President. "Oil lifting? How many barrels a day would satisfy him?"<sup>50</sup> For the Northern leaders, therefore, this meant that the Yorùbá people were destined by Allah to hold the cow by the horns, and the Northerners were destined by Allah to do the milking and sharing of the cow.

In military schools, the new recruits from the North are indoctrinated and made to believe that the mission of Northerners in the military must be to ensure that political leadership, military or civilian, will reside in the North. This practice of indoctrination was initiated during the time of Alhaji Bello, in the 1960s, and continues today. Ovedje Ogboru, who financed the April 1990 coup attempt against General Babangida, opined that, "It was popular (in Nigeria) for Yoruba to be assigned the position of bureaucrats, the Igbo that of traders, and the Hausas (Northerners) the sole leaders of our country."<sup>51</sup> One of The northern leaders in the First Republic, Alhaji Maitama Sule, has gone on record as saying that, "his fellow Nigerians should allow the will of Allah to stand, for after all, if Allah wanted all Nigerians to be the same stock, language and talent, Allah would have done it. Election cannot change Allah's plan for the people of Nigeria."<sup>52</sup> In the same vein, after the 1959 general elections, Sir Robertson, the last British governor general in Nigeria before independence said that "The Northerners would not readily accept a national government of the Southern parties (Igbo-Yorùbá parties) NCNC-AG."<sup>53</sup> Consequently, he facilitated the NPC-NCNC coalition to form a national government and left out the AG, a Yorùbá-led political party.

Another proof of the betrayal of the democratic rights of the Yorùbá people by the Northern leaders was pointed out by Omoruyi, that the former Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki warned General Babangida, "not to undo the many years of Sardauna's achievements for the north. The Sultan told him (Babangida) that the election of Chief M. K. O. Abiola, whom he liked as a person and as a fellow Muslim, would enable the Yorùbá to reverse the gains which the north had recorded since 1960."<sup>54</sup> In the words of Professor Omo Omoruyi, one of Babangida's closest confidant, Brigadier David Mark, even boasted that "I will kill him before he is sworn in," because he perceived Chief Abiola would kill him off economically."<sup>55</sup> The Political Bureau put together by the Babangida regime in January 1986, and headed by Samuel Cookey, submitted its recommendations in March 1987. One of its recommendations to General Babangida was that a nationwide referendum should be held to ascertain how Nigerians wanted the federation to be and how they would love to be governed in the Third Republic. Another innovation and radical recommendation put forward by the Constitutional Drafting Committee set in 1988 was that a clause should be inserted in the draft constitution implying that all those who have played various roles in toppling previous governments be brought back and tried. All these recommendations were jettisoned with a statement from General Babangida saying that, "I will not allow that to happen."<sup>56</sup> Babangida's plan as the leader of the geo-ethno-military clique and his Northern civilian leaders was to continue the Hausa-Fulani hegemony because of the oil wealth. What glues Nigeria together today is nothing but oil money.



To unite the country, move forward, and avoid a repeat of the election crisis of June 12, 1993, I suggest the following. It should be noted that until such festering issues are resolved on the basis of national consensus—the violence in the Niger delta, sectional domination, the ethnic clashes in Yorùbáland and in the North, the unresolved debate over Sharia question, the call for resource control by the Southern States, and the restructuring of Nigeria along true fiscal federalism are resolved—there can be no peace and political stability in the country. To prevent Northern or sectional hegemony, and political conflicts, democratic institutions must be established. Political domination, economic centralization, and ethnicity and ethnic conflicts that are responsible for the problems of instability must be discouraged. This can only be done through National Conference of all Nigerian Nationalities, including civil organizations, women’s and students’ organizations, and human rights groups. There is a need to restructure the country and give the autonomy to the states or geopolitical zones to have control over their own resources, and establish true and fiscal federalism. The support of Yorùbá is very crucial for the unity and future of democratic survival of Nigeria.

## Notes

1. Frederick Douglass, “West India Emancipation,” Speech Delivered at Canandaigua, New York (August 4, 1857).

2. *Geo-ethno-military clique* refers to the military leaders of northern origin, and their civilian political class/leaders from the north are known as the *Kaduna Mafia*, because the city of Kaduna (formerly the regional capital of the north) is the center of political power for the north. The Kaduna Mafia has been seen as the moving force for all core-north-dominant military and civilian regimes. The objective of the Kaduna Mafia is believed to be the defense and advocacy of northern interests, the most important of which is to sustain northern political domination of the federation of Nigeria. See Bala Takaya and Sonne Gwanle Tyoden, *The Kaduna Mafia: A Study of the Rise, Development and Consolidation of a Nigerian Power Elite* (Jos: University of Jos Press, 1987).

3. There have been six successful military coups in Nigeria between 1966 and 1993, and all were led and carried out by northern military leaders. For details see James J. Oluleye, *Military Leadership in Nigeria, 1966–1979* (Ibàdàn: Ibàdàn University Press, 1985); Oyeleye Oyediran, ed., *Nigerian Government and Politics under Military Rule, 1966–1979* (Ibàdàn: Macmillan Press, 1981); Omo Omoruyi, *The Tale of June 12: The Betrayal of the Democratic Rights of Nigerian (1993)* (London: Press Alliance Network, 1999); and Olayiwola Abegunrin, *Nigerian Foreign Policy under Military Rule, 1966–1999* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing Group, 2003).

4. Julius O. Ihonvbere and Timothy Shaw, *Illusions of Power: Nigeria in Transition* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), 193.

5. Babafemi A. Badejo, “Part Formation and Party Competition,” in *Transition Without End: Nigerian Politics and Civil Society under Babangida*, ed. Larry Diamond, Anthony Kirk-Greene, and Oyeleye Oyediran (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1997), 179–83.

6. Pita Agbese, "State, Media and the Imperatives of Repression: An Analysis of the Ban on Newswatch," *International Third World Studies Journal and Review* 1, no. 2 (1989): 234–335.
7. Tayo Awotusin, "Emergence of New Breed Politicians," *The Guardian* [Lagos] (June 20, 1993).
8. Paul Adams, "The Press under Seige," *The Guardian* [Lagos] (July 26, 1993).
9. Ibid.
10. Godwin Omyeacholem, "The Dilemma of Military Rule," *TELL* [Ikeja] (September 13, 1993).
11. Ibid.
12. Ima Niboro, "The Unseen Hands," *The African Guardian* [Lagos] (August 9, 1993).
13. Demola Akinlabi, "The Presidential Election Monitoring Group Report," *The African Guardian* [Lagos] (August 9, 1993).
14. Demola Akinlabi, "Special Report: June 12 Presidential Election," *TELL* [Ikeja] (June 12, 1993).
15. Omoruyi, *The Tale of June 12*, 26; see also, Omo Omoruyi, *The Trial of Chief M. K. O. Abiola and the Criminalization of Democracy in Nigeria* (Somerville, MA: Advancing Democracy in Africa, 1994), 1.
16. To see the reactions and believe of the northern leaders that it is their birth right to continue the political power in Nigeria, the northern leaders led by Sultan of Sokoto sent a message to General Babangida to postponing the election indefinitely if he could not cancel it altogether. Omoruyi, *The Tale of June 12*, 126–27.
17. Nduka Irabor, "Annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential Election," *National Concord* [Ikeja] (June 24, 1993), 2.
18. Kaye Whiteman, "Nigeria's Transition Blues: President Babangida's Address to Nigerians," *West Africa* [London] (July 5–11, 1993), 1137–38.
19. Chris Anyanwu, "Nigeria's Transition Crisis," *Sunday Magazine TSM* [Lagos] (July 4, 1993), 25–26.
20. Chuks Iloegbunam, "The Abiola Factor," *West Africa* [London] (June 28, 1993), 1078–79.
21. See Michael Crowder, *A Short History of Nigeria* (Washington, D.C.: Praeger, 1966), 21.
22. Omoruyi, *The Tale of June 12*, 299.
23. Ibid., 300.
24. Crowder, *A Short History*, 213.
25. I. F. Nicolson, *The Administration of Nigeria 1900–1960: Men, Methods, and Myths* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 181.
26. "A Speech by Governor, Sir F. Lugard, on the Occasion of the Declaration of the Constitution of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria, January 1, 1914," in *Lugard and The Amalgamation of Nigeria: A Documentary Record*, ed. Anthony H. M. Kirk-Greene (London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1968), 265–66.
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# INDEX

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Page numbers in italics refer to figures and maps.

- aare*. See crown
- Abacha, General Sanni, 21, 260, 286,  
288–90, 292, 305–6, 308–9, 324,  
326
- Abayomi, Sir Kofo, 186
- Abegunrin, Olayiwola, 19, 334–50
- Abeokuta, 42, 75, 76, 87, 166–67, 168
- Abiola, Chief Moshood K. O., 19, 44,  
285–86, 287–90, 292, 304–5, 306, 309,  
334, 335, 339–40, 347–49
- Abioro, Bolarin, 105
- Abubakar, General Abdulsalami, 308
- Abuja, 243
- Achebbe, Chinua, 293
- Action Group (AG), 17, 18, 37–41,  
44–45, 104, 170, 180–81, 182–89, 206,  
216–17, 218, 222, 224, 273, 277, 278,  
279–81, 283, 299–300, 317, 327, 344
- Adangbe, 96
- Adebanwi, Wale, 293
- Adeboye, Olufunke A., 10–11
- Adediran, Biodun, 101, 102
- Adefarati, Governor Adebayo, 327
- Adegbenro, Alhaji, 300
- Adegbenro, D. S., 279
- Adejumobi, Rev. I. A., 242
- Adekunle, Julius O., 18–19, 22, 23
- Adelabu, Adegoke, 184–85, 277–78
- Adelabu, Lamidi, 278
- Adelakun, Chief, 278
- Adeniji, Abolade, 192–203
- Adenuga, Awujale, 199–201
- Adeogun, Elder, 263
- Adepameru, Ogunlana, 195
- Aderemi, Oṣoni Adesoji, 169, 188, 206–8,  
221–22, 282–83
- Adesanya, Daniel, 168–69
- Adesanya, Pa, 281
- Adesanya, Senator Abraham, 169, 188,  
281, 282–83, 287, 292, 307
- Adetona, Oba Sikiru, 172, 283
- Adeyanju, Charles Temitope, 20
- Adeyemi, Alááfin/Oba Adeniran, 170,  
185, 187–89
- Adeyemi, Oba Lamidi, 284
- Adeyemi, W. O., 105
- Adisa, Colonel A. K., 220
- Administration in Pictures, Oyo State*, 220
- Adua, Yar', 288
- Afenifere, 281, 282, 307
- Afigbo, Adiele E., 9–10
- Afọlayan, Funso, 7, 11, 18–19, 20, 22–23,  
290, 297–313
- Afonja, Audu Dan, 235
- Agbabu bitumen field, 325
- Agbaje-Williams, B., 11–12
- Agbebi, Mojola, 6
- Agboluaje, Dr. Gbolagade, 306
- Agboola, Rev. E. O., 242
- Agboshi, Chief, 115
- agriculture, 36, 83, 85, 128–29, 321
- Agunsebi, 195
- Aiyelagbe, Oba Okoro, 57–58
- Aiyelandgbe, Dr. Jimpat, 245, 246
- Aiyepe, 195
- Aja, 96, 99, 100
- Ajagungba III, Jimoh Oyewumi, 209
- Ajaka. See Ajibogun



- Ajaro, 195  
 Ajasin, Adekunle, 307, 327  
 Ajasin, Chief Michael, 280, 281, 292  
 Ajebu, 148, 149, 150  
 Ajibade, 195, 197  
 Ajibogun, 36  
 Ajiga, Oba Folasade, 60–61  
*ajo* association, 238–39  
 Ake, Claude, 260  
 Akekunle, Julius O., 273–93  
 Akihigbe, Mike, 322  
 Akinjogbin, I. A., 32–33, 96, 162, 275–76  
 Akinkugbe, O. O., 146, 154  
 Akinloye, A. M. A., 277, 278  
 Akinrinade, General Alani, 307  
 Akinsaya, S., 169  
 Akintola-Adegbenro controversy, 283  
 Akintola, Akinsokun, 58  
 Akintola, Chief Samuel Ladoke, 273, 278–79, 300  
 Akintoye, Samuel, 40  
 Akinwumi, Tunde M., 7, 8, 49–71  
 Akinyele, Bishop Alexander Babatuunde, 10, 77, 79, 80–81, 84, 89  
 Akinyele, Oba, 185  
 Akinyele, R. T., 10, 11, 96–107  
 Akinyemi, Professor Bolaji, 307  
 Akiyoye, Akin A., 260  
 Akoko, 114, 164  
 Akoko Descendants Union, 239  
 Akpobasa, Joel, 132, 133  
 Akure, 36, 319  
*alááfin*. See king  
 Alááfin Ajiboyede, 57  
 Alááfin Maku, 57  
 Alááfin Oluewu, 57  
 Alááfin Oluodo, 57  
 Alago, 113–14  
 Alaketu, 98, 103  
 Alanwo River, 133, 134  
 Alayande, Emmanuel, 287  
 Alaye, 202  
 Alere, 195  
 All Nigerian People's Party, 289, 290  
 Alliance for Democracy (AD), 280, 287, 290, 313  
*Alukimba* (*alkayabba*), 62  
 Amota, 132–33  
 Anago, 97  
 Anambra, 303  
 Anglo/French Agreement of 1889, 97, 102  
 Anifowose, Remi, 282  
 Appadurai, Arjun, 258  
 Appeal Fund for the West African Students Union (WASU), 77  
 Appitty, Sourou Migan, 104  
 Archaeology, 35, 121, 127–28, 132–35; excavations and, 136–38, 141. *See also* artifacts  
 Arewa People's Congress, 285  
 Arifalo, S. O., 276  
 Aristide, Jean-Bertrand, 256  
 Ariwajoye, Oba Asiru Olatunbosun, 209  
 Armstrong, R. G., 146  
 Aronson, D. R., 235  
 artifacts, 51–52, 136–38. *See also* ceramics; jewelry  
 Arutu, 131  
 Asanike, Yesufu Oloyede, 220  
 Ashwood, Amy, 86  
 Asiwaju, A. I., 2, 96, 98–99, 102–3, 106  
 Association for Better Nigeria (ABN), 348  
 Association of Nigerian Cooperative Exports, 80  
 Atanda, J. A., 274  
 Atiba, 165–66  
 Awe, Bolanle, 18  
 Awoists, 280–82  
 Awolowo, Chief Obafemi, 17, 37–41, 45, 180, 182, 206, 216–17, 222, 273, 276, 277, 279–82, 285, 290, 291–92, 299, 300, 301–3, 343  
 Awori, 36, 97, 100, 163  
 Awujale, 148, 149, 150, 153, 154, 202  
 Ayandele, E. A., 16, 152  
 Ayagi, Unguwar, 234  
 Ayantuga, O. O., 152  
*ayò* game, 133  
 Ayodele, C. O., 17  
 Azikiwe, Nnamdi, 37, 39, 277, 278, 299, 344  
  
*baale*, 14–15, 163, 164, 165, 178, 180, 186–87. *See also* *oloja*

- babaláwos*, 241
- Babangida, General Ibrahim, 21, 44, 219–20, 260, 286, 288, 324, 326, 335–37, 339–40, 349
- Babatola, Mrs., 261–62
- Babatope, Ebenezer, 281, 305, 307
- Babatunde, E. D., 103, 106
- Babayemi, Solomon Oyewole, 209
- Badagri, 75
- Badru, Pade, 259
- Bajowa, Major-General Olú, 326
- Bakassi Boys of Africa, 285
- Balewa, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa, 45, 279, 300, 343–44
- Balogun*, 167
- Baptists, American, 75
- bangles, steel, 66–68
- Barber, Karin, 8
- Barker, Martin, 261
- Basch, Linda, 251, 255–56, 267
- beads, 66
- beans (*tunpulu*), 68
- Beck, Ulrich, 257
- bedrock hollows, 135
- Bello, Ahmadu, 277, 300, 344
- Bello, Ganiyu, 15
- Bende, 325
- Benin, Republic of, 1, 4, 30, 31, 96, 97, 99, 101, 103–4, 105, 127, 163, 170, 298, 307
- Benue, 241
- Berry, Sara S., 319
- Bertho, J., 99
- Biafran War, 287, 297, 300, 348
- Bida, 114, 120, 234
- Biobaku, Saburi Oladeni, 1, 3–4, 5, 7, 12, 34
- bitumen, 318, 323–29. *See also* bitumen exploration
- bitumen exploration, 316, 318–23, 326–27, 329–33. *See also* Agbabu bitumen field; Caracas Bitumen Company; Jerez Energy; Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation
- Bitumen Exploration and Exploitation Company (Nigeria) Limited (BEECON), 329
- Bitumen Implementation Project, 322
- Bitumen Project Implementation Committee (BPIC), 329
- blouse (*bubá*), 53, 70
- Border Bays, The* (W. Okediran), 105
- borderlands, 102–7
- Borgu, 35–36, 96
- Borno, 232, 241
- Borocz, Jozsef, 254
- bosom covering, 50–54. *See also* blouse; brassiere; scarf; shawl
- Bourdieu, Pierre, 255
- Bourdillon, B., 213–15
- “brain drain,” 20–21, 259
- brassiere (*igba-omun*), 52
- Brazil, 75, 76, 96
- Bright, Dr. Bankole, 78
- Britain, 76, 78, 345. *See also* United Kingdom
- British rule, 42–43, 102, 106, 119–21, 168–70, 177, 179, 182–83, 185–89, 198–201, 206–8, 210–18, 235–37, 275, 340–43, 346, 347. *See also* colonialism; indirect rule
- Brooke Commission, 183
- Brooke, Justice N. J., 183
- Buhari, General Muhammed, 260
- Bunu, 111, 112, 113, 114–15, 117, 119
- Buraway, Michael, 253
- bureaucracy, 43
- Burton, R. F., 52
- Calabar, 41, 75
- Canada, 21, 260–61, 324, 329; economy of, 253–54. *See also* Ontario; Toronto
- capitalism, 253–54
- Caracas Bitumen Company, 323
- centralization, 35
- ceramics, 136, 137, 139
- Chad Basin, 325–26
- chief, 13–18, 30, 36, 42–43, 162, 163–64, 169, 177, 178, 181, 182, 183, 185–87, 205, 235. *See also* chieftaincy; Council of Chiefs; king; military chiefs; *oba*; ward chief; warrant chief
- chieftaincy, 13–18, 149–50, 161–74, 177, 179–81, 195–97, 198–99. *See also* kingship

- Christian Missionary Society (CMS), 6, 74, 75–76, 79, 119
- Christianity, 42, 78–79, 81, 119, 241–42, 275–76
- citizenship, 20, 233–34, 242, 268
- city states, leadership in, 163–64
- civil society, 304, 305
- civil war, 10, 98, 192–93, 275, 298, 301, 319, 346. *See also* Biafran War
- Clapperton, H., 133–34
- Clarke, William H., 52, 131
- clogs, 60
- cocoa, 319. *See also* “Cocoa House”
- “Cocoa House,” 80
- Cohen, Abner, 77
- Cohen, Robin, 232
- collective identity, 29–31, 44, 178–79, 216, 217, 232, 237–40, 243, 248, 265–66, 268. *See also* nationalism; Yorùbá “nation”
- colonialism, 2, 14, 42–43, 120–21, 178, 187–89, 198–201, 206–8, 210–18, 236–37, 275, 298–99, 319, 340–43; chiefs and, 16–17. *See also* British rule; indirect rule
- Committee on the Implementation of the Bitumen Project (CIBP), 324, 326
- Concord*, 288
- “Conference of the Chiefs of the Western Province of Nigeria,” 212
- conferences, 212–16, 224
- Congolese, 256–57
- Constitutional Review Commission, 335
- constitutions, 38, 170, 172, 179–80, 234, 289–90, 311, 335, 343–44. *See also* Constitutional Review Commission; Macpherson Constitution
- Cook, S., 200
- Cooperative Bank of Western Nigeria, 80
- Cooperative Union of Western Nigeria, 80
- corruption, 259, 312, 346, 347–48
- Council of Chiefs, 36, 42–43, 163, 171, 172, 202. *See also* House of Chiefs
- coup, 201, 218, 224, 288, 300, 309, 345–46, 349
- cowry shells, 65
- credit associations, 238–39
- credit system, 82
- Cross River, 325
- Crowder, Michael, 13, 340–41
- crown, 65
- Crowther, Rev. Samuel Ajayi, 6, 241, 275
- crude oil, 318, 325–26, 328, 330, 346
- crushing hollows, 133–34
- Cuba, 75, 76, 96
- cults, 153, 164. *See also* Ogboni societies; Osugbo societies
- cultural “renaissance,” 76
- currency, 261
- Dahomey, 2, 4, 30, 99, 101, 166, 167
- Daily Sketch*, 325
- Daily Times*, 328
- Dasuki, Alhaji Ibrahim, 349
- d’Avezac-Macaya, M. A. P., 152, 234
- decolonization, 170–72, 177–81, 181–84, 189–90, 276–77
- Douglass, Frederick, 334
- diaries, 76–80, 88–92; analysis of, 88–91; cultural content and, 80–84; intellectual content and, 84–87
- diarists, 77–80
- Diaspora, *See* Yorùbá diaspora
- dictatorship, military, 165, 166. *See also* military regimes
- Dikko, Alhaji Shuaib, 220
- divide and rule, 347. *See also* indirect rule
- Diya, Brigadier Oladipo, 201, 202, 289, 305, 307
- dress. *See* Yorùbá dress
- Eades, J. S., 10, 233
- “ebi system,” 32–33
- Èbọṛà, 112
- Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), 105, 106
- economy, 232–33, 234–36, 238–40, 247–48, 253–54, 258–61, 319–20, 321, 341–42. *See also* bitumen; bitumen production; employment; oil wealth
- Edo, 96, 320, 321
- education, Western, 3, 75–77, 98, 103, 106, 206–9, 215. *See also* elite, educated; school, post-secondary; school, secondary

- Egbá, 2, 36, 97–98, 99, 101, 112, 167, 195.  
*See also* Egbáland
- Egbá townships, 166–67. *See also*  
 Egbáland
- Egbado, 36, 97, 100–101
- “Egbado to 1832: The Birth of a  
 Dilemma” (K. Folayan), 100
- Egbáland, 193
- Egbé, 37, 38–40, 45
- Egbé Afenifere, 307
- Egbé Àgbà-O-Tan* (Elders-Still-Exist  
 Society), 77, 79, 81
- Egbé Ọmọ Odiuduwà*, 180, 187–88, 237,  
 273, 276–77, 281, 282, 299
- Egbé Ọmọ Ọyó Parafò*, 187, 188–89
- Egbé Ọmọ Yorùbá, 289
- Egbesu Boys, 285
- Egùngùn, 112
- Ejor, Major General David, 292
- Ekiti, 1, 36, 112, 163, 169, 274, 299
- èko, 50
- elections, 19–20, 186, 206–7, 244–45,  
 281–82, 285, 286, 288, 297, 303–4,  
 308, 327–28, 337–38. *See also*  
 elections, presidential
- elections, presidential, 338, 339–40. *See*  
*also* elections
- electoral fraud, 308–9, 337, 339–40,  
 343–46
- Elesi, 194–96, 197, 199, 200, 201–2
- elite, Christian, 30
- elite, educated, 2, 16–17, 18, 43–44, 74,  
 75–77, 78–80, 84, 170, 177, 178, 179,  
 181, 183, 216, 275–77. *See also* elite,  
 Yorùbá
- elite, ruling, 260. *See also* elite, educated;  
 elite, Yorùbá
- elite, Yorùbá, 30, 37, 41, 53, 55–56,  
 63–64, 183, 184–89, 208–18, 222–23,  
 292. *See also* baalé; chief; council of  
 chiefs; elite, educated; king; oba;  
 Yorùbá politics.
- employment, 235–36, 238–40. *See also*  
 migrant labor
- Enahoro, Anthony, 84
- endogamy, 262
- Englisch Local Government Act of 1933,  
 182
- entrepreneurs, 239. *See also* economy
- Epega, D. O., 148, 151
- Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (D. Pereira), 153
- ethnic militias, 285
- ethnicity, politics and, 22. *See also*  
 collective identity; ethno-regionalism  
 ethno-politics. *See* politics, ethnicity and  
 ethno-regionalism, 180–81. *See also*  
 ethnicity, politics and; regionalism
- Europe, 19, 20
- Ewe, 99
- Eyinwa, 195
- Fabunmi, 98
- Fadipe, N. A., 31, 33, 83
- Fajenhola, S. F., 207
- Falae, Chief Olú, 290
- Falana, Femi, 337
- Falola, Toyin, 3–4, 13, 15, 17, 18, 29–46,  
 161–74, 325
- Falomo, Ore, 289
- Fasehun, Dr. Fredrick, 285
- Faubell-Aymar, E. X., 205
- federalism, 22, 39, 165, 166–67, 192, 193,  
 216–17, 297, 311–12, 319, 327,  
 336–37, 350. *See also* regionalism
- festivals, 99, 153, 211, 213, 240, 246.  
*See also* masquerades; Ọsun festival
- First Republic, 44, 170–72, 284–85, 298,  
 299–302, 324
- Folayan, Kola, 100
- Fon, 96
- fortifications, 132–33. *See also* Iyàrà
- Foucault, Michael, 14
- Fourah Bay College, 75–76, 78, 79, 275
- Fourth Republic, 285
- Fowokan, T. A., 149
- freemasonry, 79
- Freetown, 78, 82, 90
- French, 98, 99, 102, 106
- Frobenius, Leo, 120
- Frontier States of Western Yorubaland*,  
*The* (B. Adediran), 101, 102
- Fulani, 114–15, 120–21, 128, 140–41,  
 166, 285, 286, 298. *See also* Nupe-  
 Fulani
- funerals, 112
- Funtuwa, 235, 243

- Gaa, 96  
 Garvey, Marcus, 78, 85  
 Garveyism, 83, 86  
 gas shortage, 312–13  
 Gbadamosi, 217  
 Gbagede, 139  
 Gbebe, 117, 119  
*gbedu* drum, 196  
 Gbelegbuwa II, Adesanya, 200  
 Gboyega, Professor Alex, 223  
 gelede music (*efe*), 106  
 Genova, Ann, 10, 19, 22, 316–31  
 Ghana, 57, 96, 105, 233  
 Giddens, Anthony, 257–58  
*giriike*, 58  
 Giwa, Chief Adebisi, 80  
*Glebeju Loda*, 321  
 Glick Schiller, Nina, 251, 252, 255, 267  
 globalization, 20, 258. *See also* migration  
 Goldie, George, 115  
 Goldring, Luin, 255–56, 266, 268  
 gogowu, 62–63  
 Government Model School, 78  
 Gowon, General Yakubu, 279–80, 301, 309  
 Gramsci, Antonio, 256, 258. *See also*  
   Gramsci's theory  
 Gramsci's theory, 178  
*Guardian*, 305–6, 321, 336  
 Guarinzo, Luis E., 252  
*guru*, 59
- habitation remains, 134–35  
 Haiti, 96, 255, 256  
 Hall, Stuart, 256  
 Harcourt, Lord Lewis, 341, 346  
 Harrington, James, 14  
 Hashim, Professor Isa, 232  
 Hausa, 220, 231–32, 235, 236–37,  
   243–44, 245, 248, 285, 286, 289, 317.  
   *See also* Hausaland  
 Hausaland, 2, 9, 57. *See also* Hausa  
 Hay, Colin, 256  
 herbalists, 233, 241  
 Hier, Sean, 256  
 Hinderer, Rev. David, 79  
*Histoire de Kétou* (T. Moulero), 100  
*Histoire et légende de Chabe* (T. Moulero),  
   100
- historians, armature, 5–6  
 histories, local, 6, 148. *See also* oral  
   histories; oral tradition  
 historiography, 3–5, 99–106  
*History of Ekiti* (Father Oguntuyi),  
   100  
*History of the Yoruba, The* (S. Johnson), 1,  
   7, 32, 97, 98, 100, 146–48, 150–51  
 homesteads, 193–94, 195  
 hostel, WASU, 78, 79, 84  
 House of Assembly, 169, 170  
 House of Chiefs, 169, 170  
*Human Parasite* (H. Ogunde), 240  
 Hunt, W. E., 210
- Ìbàdàn, 2, 7, 41, 42, 76, 79, 85, 98, 101,  
   127, 166, 168, 181, 183–85, 188, 189,  
   195, 220, 272–78, 301  
 Ìbàdàn Cooperative Cocoa Marketing  
   Union, 85  
 Ìbàdàn District Council, 184, 185  
 Ìbàdàn General Conference on Review  
   of the Nigerian Constitution, 343  
 Ìbàdàn Grammar School, 79  
 Ìbàdàn Native Authority, 80  
 Ìbàdàn Peoples Party (IPP), 277  
 Ìbàdàn Planters' Association, 85  
 Ìbàdàn Tax Payers Association (ITPA),  
   184  
 Ibara, 100  
 Ibaru, Messrs, 86  
 Ibitokun, Benedict, 101–2, 106  
 Ibo. *See* Igbo  
 Ibolo, 36, 299  
 Iboro, 100  
*Ibu Ògún* (Ògún pool), 134  
 Idaisa, 97, 100, 101, 299  
 Idanre, 163  
 Idarika, 193  
 Idena, 193  
 Idiagbon, General Tunde, 260  
 Idji, Babatunde, 104  
 Idoko, 152, 154, 155, 162  
 Idowu, Moloda James, 200–201  
 Idris, Alhaji Mainasara, 243  
 Ifá (or *Orúnmìlà*), 50  
 Ifá corpus, 8  
 Ifá divination, 112, 131

- Ifá oracle, 68  
 Ifagbamila (Ajagunla), 130  
 Ifé, 169, 193  
 Ifidon, E., 234  
 Ifonyin, 97  
 Igbeji, 167  
 Igbirra, 113–14  
 Igbo, 45, 180, 301, 302, 349  
 Igbo State Union, 180  
 Ìgbómáná, 11, 36, 127–28, 129, 132–33, 134, 138–40, 299  
 Igbonnibi, Orangun, 130  
 Ige, Chief Bola, 222, 280, 283, 287, 292, 313  
 Igué, John Ogunsola, 99, 104  
 Ihonybere, Julios, 321, 325, 329  
 Ijana, 99  
 Ijaw, 319  
 Ijaw Youth Council, 285  
 Ìjaye, 101, 166, 167–68  
 Ìjèbù, 2, 8–9, 30, 31, 36, 97, 99, 145–55, 162, 163, 192–93, 277, 319  
 Ìjèbùland, 277. *See also* Ìjèbù-Ode  
 Ìjèbù Ife, 198  
 Ìjèbù Igbo, 199  
 Ìjèbù-Ode, 145, 147, 162, 168–69, 172, 184, 194–96, 198, 199, 200  
 Ìjèbù Remo, 198, 209. *See also* Remo  
 Ijesa, 30, 140, 163, 164, 178  
 Ijo, 319  
 Ijumu, 112, 114  
 Ìlá, 128–41  
 Ìlá Okiri, 130, 131  
 Ìlá-Orangun, 128–41  
 Ìlá-Yàrá, 130, 131–32, 133, 134–41  
 Ilaro, 99  
 Ilé-Ifè, 30, 32, 34, 35, 36–38, 64, 66, 68, 99, 127, 130, 141, 146, 148, 162, 163, 194, 196, 206–8, 276  
 Ilé-Oluji, 163  
 Ilèsà, 41, 169  
 Ilobi, 100  
 Ilogun, 100  
 Ìlorin, 235, 301  
 Ìlorin Talaka Parapo, 299  
 Imeko, 103  
 Imodi, 196  
 Imole secret cult, 35  
 imperialism, 114–21, 139–41. *See also* colonialism  
 Imusin, 152  
 independence, 16, 19, 84–85, 170–74, 208–10, 242–47, 299. *See also* decolonization  
 indirect rule, 16, 43, 168, 177, 178–79, 181, 186, 198–201, 236. *See also* British; colonialism  
 infertility (*àbikú*), 80–81  
 intelligentsia. *See* elite, Yoruba; elite, educated  
 International Observer Team, 337  
 iron, 134, 136  
 Ironsi, General Aguiyi, 309  
 Islam, 118–19. *See also* Muslims  
 Islamic education, 241  
 Itsekir, 292  
*iwòfà* system (pawning), 83  
*Iyàrà*, 132  
 Jakande, Alhaji Lateef, 280, 281, 282, 305, 307  
 Jamaica, 96  
 Jemibewon, General, 283  
 Jerez Energy, 324, 326  
 jewelry, 8, 134  
*jihad*, 2, 119  
 Johnson, Samuel, 1, 6, 7, 31–32, 33, 34, 40, 97, 98, 99, 100, 146–48, 150–51  
 Jos, 236, 240, 243, 279  
 judiciary, 170, 238  
 Jumare, Ibrahim, 259  
 Kabba, 115–16, 121, 235  
 Kaduna, 235, 242, 243, 244, 322. *See also* Kaduna refinery  
*Kaduna Mafia*, 19, 334, 335, 347–48  
 Kaduna refinery, 322, 328–29  
 Kano, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 242, 243, 244, 246  
 Kanuri, 232  
*Kembeku*, 56  
 Ketu, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 299  
 king, 14–15, 30, 32, 36, 42–43, 56–57, 168–69, 182, 210–11. *See also* chiefs; *oba*  
 kingdoms, 96–98

- kingship (*ebi*), 34–36, 233, 237, 239, 247–48, 262, 267, 274. *See also* chieftaincy
- Kolapo, Femi, 117
- Krapf-Askari, Eva, 111–12
- Kruger, Colleen, 120
- Krobo, 96
- kulle* (seclusion of women), 239–40
- Kurunmi, 166
- Kwara, 1
- Ladigbolu II, 170, 186
- Lagos, 1, 2, 37, 41, 75, 76, 87, 97, 163, 172, 173, 243–44, 277, 280, 301, 321  
*Lagos Daily, The*, 214
- Lagos Lagoon, 153
- Lagos Youth Movement. *See* Nigerian Youth Movement
- Laitin, David, 178
- Lalemi, 234
- Lambo Professor Eyitayo, 292  
*L'ancienne royauté de Savé et son évolution* (P Mercier), 99
- Land Use Decree (1978), 171
- Law, Robin, 3, 6
- Legal Notice, 40, 170
- Legislative Council, 282
- Lagoon, Lekki, 322
- Leopold Educational Institute, 78
- Li, Peter, 267
- Liberia, 42, 57
- Linguistics, 8, 29–30, 91, 121, 146, 147, 149, 150, 151, 154–55, 232
- Lisabi Club, 238
- Lloyd, P. C., 151–52, 153–54, 280
- Lloyd, Richard D., 188
- loans, 82–83
- local council, 169–70
- local government areas (LGAs), 319–20
- Local Government Law (1952), 182, 184
- Lodoja, Governor, 280
- Lokoja, 114, 115, 119
- London, 37, 78
- London Constitution Conference, 343
- Lugard, Lord Fredrick, 168, 235, 340, 341, 342, 343, 345
- Mabọ̀lajẹ-NCNC, 185. *See also* National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons
- Macaulay, Herbert, 41, 273, 276, 285
- Mackenzie, D. O., 208
- Macpherson Constitution (1950/1), 38–39, 41, 179–80
- Macpherson, Sir John, 188
- “Madina Mosque,” 241
- Magbon, 198
- Mahler, Sarah, 256
- Mainasara, Alhaji, 243
- Majekodunmi, Dr. Moses, 283
- Makanjuola, Alhaji Y. A., 244
- Makurdi, 235
- Malamadori, 235
- Mamdani, Mahmood, 16
- Mandela, Nelson, 290
- Manson, Michael, 115, 116–17
- Manyoni, Joseph, 268
- “Marginality’s Perception on the Self: A Case of the Ketu Yoruba on the Nigeria-Bénin Border” (E. Babatunde), 103
- marriage, 83
- Martineau, Jean-Luc, 18, 205–24
- Masaba, Emir, 114, 115, 117
- Masquerades, 113–14
- Mecca, 151
- Meek, C. K., 112, 117, 118, 120
- Mercier, P, 99
- Methodist Missionary Society, 6
- Mexicans, 255
- Mexico, 256
- Middle Belt Forum, 285
- migrant labor, 253–54
- migration, 2, 6, 19, 20, 34, 65, 66, 101, 130–31, 136, 138, 139, 140, 148–49, 152, 165, 193, 194, 195–97, 233, 235–37, 259; international, 251–52, 254, 260–64, 267–68. *See also* globalization; nationalism; origin stories; transmigration
- Miles, Robert, 261
- military, 132–33, 300–302, 312, 347–48. *See also* military regimes
- military aristocracy, 165, 166
- military chiefs, 166, 167

- military regimes, 19–20, 21, 44, 165, 171, 201, 218–20, 260, 284–87, 301–2, 305–6, 308–9, 335, 336–38, 340  
 military schools, 349  
 Mintz, S., 251  
 missionaries, 30, 42, 74, 75–77, 275–76.  
     *See also* Christianity  
 modernity, 205  
 modernization, 178–79, 181, 210–18, 221  
 Mohammed, Alhaji Sule, 243  
 Moloda, 194, 196–97, 198, 199–200, 201–2  
 Momoh, Abubakar, 22  
 monarchical system, 274–75  
 mosques, 241  
 Moulero, Father Thomas, 100  
 Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, 285  
 multinational corporations, 259  
 music, 240, 264. *See also* *gbèdu* drum; *gelede* music  
 Muslims, 232, 236, 242, 244. *See also* Islam  
 myth, 1–2, 30, 34–35, 36–37, 50–51, 64, 68, 70, 232, 274. *See also* origin stories  
  
 National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), 37, 39, 40, 41, 44, 180, 183, 184–85, 187–89, 277, 278–79, 280, 299, 300, 317, 328, 344–45. *See also* Mabolaje-NCNC  
 National Defense and Security Council (NDSC), 339  
 National Democratic Coalition, 292  
 National Electoral Commission (NEC), 337, 339–40  
 National Integration Forum for Peace (NIFOR), 244–47  
 National Liberation Council of Nigeria, 292  
 National Party of Nigeria (NPN), 173, 277, 283, 302, 325, 327  
 National Political Reform Conference, 311  
 National Republican Convention, 288, 335  
 nationalism, 3, 6, 13–14, 45, 177–78, 179, 180–81, 189–90, 205, 216–18, 224, 260, 276, 277, 299, 300. *See also* transnationalism  
  
 Native Administration, 199  
 Native Authority, 168, 169  
 Native Authority Council, 169  
 Native Court Ordinance, 183  
 Native Courts, 168, 183  
 NCNC-Egbé Ọmọ Ọyó Parapò alliance, 187  
 Ngige-Uba, Anambra, 313  
 Nguru, 235  
 Nicholson, F. W. J., 185, 342  
 Niger, 114  
 Niger Company, 117  
 Niger Delta, 313, 346, 350  
 Niger Expedition, 114  
 Nigeria, economy of, 258–61; “national question” and, 21–23; Northern, 231–48; states of, 10; Western, 96–110, 111–26, 300, 301. *See also* First Republic; Fourth Republic; Second Republic; Third Republic  
*Nigeria in Transtion* (General Jemibewon), 283  
 Nigeria Progress Union, 78  
 Nigerian Cooperative Movement, 85  
*Nigerian Chiefs* (O. Vaughan), 14  
 Nigerian Legislative Council, 80  
 Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), 273, 276  
 Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation, 325  
 Nigerian People’s Party (NPP), 302  
 Nigerian Youth Movement, 37, 39, 276  
 NISSANDS (Nigeria) Limited, 329  
 Nomuye, 195, 197  
 North America, 19, 20. *See also* Canada; United States  
 Northern People’s Congress (NPC), 39, 44, 180, 277, 278–79, 300, 317, 344–45  
 Northern People’s Congress-National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NPC-NCNC) Alliance, 299, 344–45, 349  
 Northern Protectorate of Nigeria, 340–43  
 Nupe, 30, 96, 113, 118, 119–21, 127–28, 140. *See also* Nupe-Fulani  
 Nupe-Fulani, 114–15, 116, 117, 118, 120–21



- Nzeogwu, Major Chukwemeka, 309  
 Nzeribe, Arthur, 348  
 Nzongtola-Ntalaja, Georges, 22
- oba*, 14, 18, 36, 150, 165, 168, 170–72, 177, 178, 181, 182, 183, 198–99, 205, 237–38; conferences and, 212–16; public space and, 210–12; survival and, 220–23; travel and, 221. *See also* chief; king
- Obanta (Ogborogan), 147, 148, 150, 151, 152, 194, 196–97
- Obaro Ikime, 13
- Obarua, 154
- Obasanjo, General/President Olusegun, 22–23, 281, 283, 286, 289, 290–91, 292–93, 307, 309, 310–13, 323, 324, 329–30, 335
- obaship, 205–24; military and, 218–20
- Obàtálá, 2, 50, 53, 64, 70; dress of, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68
- Obayemi, Ade, 111, 113–14, 116, 118, 119, 121, 130, 274
- Obesere, 264
- Obisesan, Chief Akinpelu, 10, 77, 79–80, 81–83, 84–86, 88, 89–90
- Ode Iranje, 66
- Ode-Ondó, 319
- Odepo, 197
- Odetola, Oluwole, 283–84
- Odo Layanra, 198
- Odogbolu, 192–93, 194–203
- Odù Ifá Obara Meji*, 50
- Odù Ifá Ogundasee*, 68
- Odù: Journal of Yoruba and Related Studies*, 9
- Odùduwà, 30, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36–37, 38, 66, 68, 98, 130, 197, 274. *See also* pre-Odùduwà era
- Odùduwà Movement, 289
- Odunsin, B., 259
- Odute, 148
- Oduwobi, Tunde, 7, 8–9, 145–55
- Offoaro, Godson, 291
- Ogbolu, 195–96, 197
- Ogbomoso, 165, 193, 235, 236, 241
- Ogboni* societies, 164, 165, 167
- Ogborogan (Ogborogannida), 150
- Ogboru, Ovedje, 349
- Ogoni, 289, 305, 312
- Ògún, 1, 145, 172, 195, 321
- Ogunba, Oyin, 152, 153
- Ogundamisi, Kayode, 286
- Ogunde, Chief Hubert, 240, 291
- Ogunfolaju, NIyi, 286–87
- Ogunkoya, T. O., 149
- Ogunsola, J. L., 86
- Oguntoyinbo, Alhaji, 244
- Oguntuyi, Father, 100
- O’Hear, Ann, 10, 11, 111–21
- oil. *See* crude oil; oil wealth
- oil wealth, 312, 346
- Òjá*, 52
- Ojo, G. J. A., 33
- Okanran Meji*, 50
- Okediran, Wale, 105
- Oke-Odan, 166–67, 168
- Okoti-Eboh, Festus, 300
- Okpoto, 114
- Oku, 113–14
- Okun-Owa, 195
- Okun-Yorùbá, 299
- Ola, 260–61
- Oladepo, Tunde, 305
- Oladoja, Senator, 278
- Olaniyi, Rasheed, 9, 20, 231–48
- Olode, 148, 149, 150
- Olódùmar (God), 2, 34
- Ologbenla, Prince David, 207
- oloja*, 153–54, 164. *See also* *baale*
- Olorogun*, 167
- Olowo, Alhaji Adbullah Salihu, 245
- Olubuse II, Sijuwade, 208
- Olú-Iwa, 149, 151
- Oluleye, Major-General James, 345–46
- Olunloyo, Omololu, 283
- Olupopo, 98
- Olusango, G. O., 3–4, 22, 223
- Oluwateru, Otunba Omolade, 330
- Oluwo, Oba Mohammed Lamuye, 61–62
- Oluyole, 166
- Omeben, C. A., 105
- Omoruvi, Omo, 337–38, 341, 347, 348, 349
- Omu-Aran, 140
- Onabanjo, Olabisi, 280
- Onagloruwa, Olú, 305, 307

- Onah, J. K., 322
- Ondó, 1, 10, 30, 31, 36, 163, 172, 346
- Ondo Road*, 319
- Ondó State, 316–31, 320, 321
- Onimeko, 103
- Ontario, 256
- Oodua People's Congress (OPC), 20, 44, 282, 285, 307
- Oṣoni, 32, 148, 169. *See also* king
- Oṣoniship*, 162
- Opa, 195
- oral histories (*itàn*), 6, 8, 49–50, 70, 138, 154, 195–97. *See also* histories, local; oral traditions; praise poems
- oral traditions, 7, 34–36, 121, 130–31, 132, 147–48, 149–51, 162, 232. *See also* histories, local; oral histories; praise poems
- Orangun, 131
- Oranmiyan, Prince, 36
- Oremadegun, 194, 196, 197–98, 199–202
- Oresanya, Col. S. A., 219–20
- origin stories, 33, 34, 54, 130–31, 146, 147–50, 232, 274. *See also* myth
- orikì*. *See* praise poems
- orikì anije*, 55
- orikì orilè*, 54. *See also* origin stories
- orirun*, 33. *See also* origin stories
- orìsà* (gods), 1–2, 64
- Òrìsànlá*. *See* Obàtálá
- Òrùnmìlá, 66, 68
- Osi (Osin), 148, 149, 150
- Osifaderin, 148, 150, 152
- Osifekunde, 53–54, 234
- Osinumesi, 148, 150, 152
- Osogbo, 193
- Osugbo* societies, 164
- Osun, 1, 50, 53, 68, 70; dress of, 68–68, 69
- Osun festival, 68–69
- Osun State, 11
- Ota, 100
- Outram, J. I., 211
- Owe, 111, 112, 114, 115
- Owo, 36, 127, 163
- Oworo, 111, 112, 114, 118, 118
- Owu, 35–36, 193
- Owu Ikija, 198
- Oyekan, Oba Adeyinka, 173
- Òyó, 1, 2, 7, 8, 9, 15–17, 30, 34, 35–36, 41, 42, 101, 127, 163, 169, 172, 181, 280. *See also* Òyó Empire; Òyó Province
- Òyó Divisional Council, 185–86, 189–90
- Òyó Empire, 13–14, 31, 98, 128, 131, 136, 140–41, 165, 192–93, 274–75, 297. *See also* Òyó
- Òyó Progressive Union, 187
- Òyó Province, 181–89
- Òyó Training Institution (of the CMS), 79
- Ozolua, 153
- “palatinate” system, 165–66
- palm-wine, 129
- pan-Africanism, 78, 83, 86–87
- parliamentary system, 169
- Parrinder, E. G., 98
- Parti République du Dahomey, 104
- Path to Nigerian Freedom* (O. Awolowo), 45, 276
- pawning. *See* *iwòfà* system
- Peel, J. D. Y., 76, 178
- People's Democratic Party (PDP), 281–82, 290, 313
- Pereira, Duarte Pacheco, 153
- Perrot, Claude-Helene, 205, 208
- Plateau State, 313
- plays, 240. *See also* *Human Parasite; Strike and Hunger*
- political parties, 37–41, 44, 170, 173, 180–81, 182–89, 216–18, 276–84, 288–91, 299–300, 302–3, 317, 327, 344–45; ethnicity and, 276–78, 280–82, 302–3; geography of, 180. *See also* Action Group; All Nigerian People's Party; Alliance for Democracy; Egbé; *Egbé Omọ Odùduwà*; Ìbàdàn Peoples Party; Igbo State Union; National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons; Nigerian National Democratic Party; National Party of Nigeria; Northern People's Congress; Nigerian People's Party; Oodua People's Congress; People's Democratic Party; United Party of Nigeria; Yorùbá Council of Elders

- political prisoners, 289, 305–7  
 “Political Royal Fathers” (Djebah et al.), 284  
 politics, 17–18, 78, 273–93, 311–13, 350;  
 colonialism and, 298–99; ethnicity and, 275–77, 316, 317–18, 323–29;  
 instability and, 316–18, 327–29;  
 marginalization and, 297, 334–35;  
 northern domination and, 334–35, 340–43, 344–46, 347, 349–50;  
 traditional rulers and, 282–84; Yorùbá concept of, 274–75. *See also* First Republic; military regimes; political parties, Second Republic  
 politics, modern, 18–21. *See also* politics  
*Politics of Elite Culture, The* (A. Cohen), 77  
 Popo, 98  
 Portez, Alejandro, 254  
 Porto-Novo, 102, 106, 107  
 pottery. *See* ceramics  
 praise poems (*oriki*), 8, 50, 54–64, 70  
 pre-Odùduwà era, 161–62  
 Presbyterian Mission, 75  
 Prescott, J. R. V., 102  
 Presidential Election Monitoring Group, 337  
 press, 213–14, 221, 257, 281, 305–6  
 primary sources, 6, 91–92. *See also*  
 diaries; oral histories; praise poems; travelogues  
 propaganda, 218–19, 220  
 proverbs, 67–68  
 race, 253–55, 256. *See also* racialization  
 racialization, 261–62 *See also* race  
 Ransome-Kuti, Dr. Beko, 286  
 refineries, 328, 329. *See* Kaduna refinery  
 Reformed Ogboni Fraternity, 241  
 regionalism, 17, 45, 181–82, 186–87. *See also* ethno-regionalism; federalism  
 Remo, 154, 155  
 Renne, Elisha, 119  
 research, field, 252–53  
*retour des rois, le* (Perrot & Faubelle-Aynar), 205  
 Reynolds, Rachel R., 259  
 Richard’s Constitution of 1946, 289–90  
 Richmond, Anthony, 257  
 riots, 187–88. *See also* violence  
 rituals, 163, 164  
 Rivers, 325  
 Robertson, Sir, 349  
 robes, 57–64, 70. *See also* *alukimba*; *girike*; *gogowu*; *toga*  
 Roman Catholic Mission, 75  
 Ross, Resident, 211  
 Royal Niger Company, 115, 120, 235, 340  
 Sabe, 97, 98, 100, 101, 299  
 Sabon-Gari, 236–37, 242  
 sacrifices, 50, 147  
 Sagamu, 243  
 Salawu, Alhaji Rafiu, 244  
 Salvadorans, 256  
 Sambo, Sheikh Yusuf, 244  
 Samuel, 262  
 Sàngó, 36  
 Sanni, Oba Abimbola, 58  
 Sanni, Olufemi, 289  
 Sanyaolu, Chief D. O., 237  
 Sapara, Dr. Oguntola, 63  
 Saro-Wiwa, Ken, 305  
 Sasere, Chief, 263  
 Satzewich, Vic, 254  
 Saudi Arabia, 322  
 scarf, 53–54  
 school, post-secondary, 75–76  
 school, secondary, 75. *See also* education; elite, educated  
 secessionism, 301, 302, 307–9  
 Second Republic, 44, 172–73, 292, 302–304, 324–26  
 sexual competition, 264  
 Shagamu, 246  
 Shagari, Alhaji Shehu, 173, 201, 290, 310, 348–49  
 Sharia, 350  
 shawl (*Ìborùn*), 53  
*Shehu Musa Yar’ Adua: A Life of Service* (Y. Adua), 288  
 Shettima, Abba Gana, 284–85  
 Sheyin Josiah Maboroku, 200  
 Shonekan, Chief Ernest, 288, 305, 326  
 Sierra Leone, 6, 42, 75–76, 78, 90, 96, 119, 275  
 Sijuwade, Oba Okunade Adele, 208, 284

- slave raids, 114–17, 140, 195; resistance to, 114–15, 119–20, 165–66. *See also* war
- slave trade, 116–17, 193. *See also* slave raids
- slave trade, transatlantic, 3, 20
- slaves, 3, 42, 66, 75. *See also* slave raids; slave trade; slave trade, international
- Smith, Robert S., 98, 111
- smuggling, 104–105
- Social Democratic Party (SDP), 335
- social transformation, 138–39. *See also* Yorùbá diaspora
- Society of African Missions, 100
- Soetan, A., 183
- Sokoto, 193
- Solaja, Folarin, 82
- Solanke, Ladipo, 10, 77, 78, 82, 83–84, 86–87, 88, 90–91
- soldiers. *See* warriors
- Sonarinwo, Prince Michael Adeniyi, 209
- Sotunde, Iyabo, 283
- Sounoni, Elysée, 103–4
- Sources of Yoruba History* (S. O. Biobaku), 3
- sources, primary, 6, 91–92. *See also* diaries; oral histories; praise poems; travelogues
- Southern Protectorate of Nigeria, 340
- Sovereign National Conference, 20
- Soyinka, Wòle, 278, 292, 302, 307, 348–49
- Stember, Charles Herbert, 264
- Story of Ketu, The* (E. Parrinder), 100
- Strike and Hunger* (H. Ogunde), 240
- Structural Adjustment Program (SAP), 252, 259
- Studies in Yoruba History and Culture* (G. O. Olusanya), 3
- Sunday Sketch*, 322
- Sunday Tribune*, 221
- Szanton Blanc, Cristina, 251, 256, 267
- tax, 168, 187. *See also* tribute
- TELL* magazine, 323–24
- Tennessee Nigeria Inc., 322
- Third Republic, 324, 336
- Thomas, Chief Bode, 17, 277
- Thomas, James, 117
- Thomas, Obadiah, 115
- Thompson, Chief, 261
- Thompson, Justice Adewale, 287
- Tinubu, Governor Bola, 286
- toga, 59–60
- Togo, Republic of, 1, 96, 97, 99, 105
- Toronto, 20, 21, 252–53, 260–68
- town construction, 138–39
- trade, 8, 9, 36, 57–58, 112, 117, 120, 232–33, 234–35, 319. *See also* slave trade; trade routes
- trade routes, 2
- tradition, 205, 214
- Trager, L., 237, 239–40, 241
- Transmigrants. *See* transmigration
- transmigration, 21, 251–52; psychology of, 263–64. *See also* migration
- transnationalism, 255–56, 260–64, 265–68
- travelogues, 49
- Tribune*, 281
- tribute, 116, 164, 192
- Trouble with Nigeria, The* (C. Achebe), 293
- trousers, 56–57. *See also* *Kembeku*
- Turban ceremony, 246
- Turner, Terisa, 259
- Turton, Chief J. R., 183
- U. M. Collegiate School, 78
- United African Company (UAC), 80, 82
- United Kingdom, 78, 82. *See also* Britain
- United Party of Nigeria (UPN), 287, 280, 283, 302. *See also* Action Group
- United States, 12, 20, 76, 255, 256, 345
- “unity theory,” 32–33
- Universal Negro Improvement Association, 78, 85
- universities, 6. *See also* education, western; school, post-secondary
- University of Durham, 76, 79
- University of Ìbàdàn, 18
- University of Ifè, 322, 325
- Urhobo, 292
- Usman, Aribidesi, 11, 127–41
- Vandeleur, Seymour, 116
- Vanguard*, 306
- Vaughan, Olufemi, 14–15, 17, 177–90

- Venezuela, 322, 323  
 Vincent, David Brown. *See* Mojola Agbebi  
 violence, 243–45, 286–87, 300, 350.  
*See also* riots
- Wadai, 148  
 Wallerstein, Immanuel, 257–58  
 war, 2, 31, 41–42, 44–45, 140–41, 192–93.  
*See also* civil war; jihad; slave raids;  
 violence  
 ward, 163, 167  
 ward chief, 165. *See also* *baale*; *oloja*  
 Ward-Price, Resident, 206–8  
 warrant chief, 180  
 Warri, 328, 330  
 warriors, 166, 167  
 WASU, 78, 84, 90  
 Weber, Max, 14  
 Wesleyans (Methodists), 75  
*West Africa*, 86  
 West African Frontier Force (WAFF), 235  
 West African Students Union (WASU),  
 276  
 Western House of Assembly, 279, 282  
 Western House of Chiefs, 217  
 Western Nigerian Local Government  
 Law of 1952, 169–70, 185  
*Western Yorubaland under European Rule*  
 (A. Asiwaju), 100, 101, 102–3  
 Williams, Professor Adebayo, 281  
 Willink Commission, 299  
 women, 239–40, 267  
 World Yorùbá Conference, 104  
 Wright, Olin Erik, 253
- Yagba, 114  
*Yàrà*. *See* *Iyàrà*
- Yorùbá associations, 237–38, 240,  
 245–46, 266  
 Yorùbá Central Welfare Association, 237  
 Yorùbá Community Association, 266  
 Yorùbá Community Council Northern  
 States, 244–45, 246  
 Yorùbá Council of Elders (YCE), 281,  
 282, 287  
 Yorùbá Cultural Day, 240  
 Yorùbá diaspora, 20–21, 96, 231–48,  
 251–68; community of, 247;  
 postcolonial experience and, 242–47;  
 religion and, 241–42. *See also* Nigeria,  
 Northern; Toronto  
 Yorùbá dress, 8, 49–50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55,  
 55–56, 112; Arab-influence and, 56,  
 57, 58, 59, 60, 60, 61, 62, 63–64, 70.  
*See also* bosom covering; clogs; robes;  
 trousers  
 Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme, 3,  
 231  
*Yoruba Historiography* (T. Falola), 4  
 Yorùbá language, 91  
 Yorùbá “nation,” 29–30, 33–34, 36–37,  
 40, 45–46, 96, 245, 247. *See also*  
 collective identity; nationalism  
*Yorùbá News*, 87  
 Yorùbá politics, 37–46, 78. *See also* elite,  
 Yorùbá; politics  
 “Yoruba Ronu” (H Ogunde), 291  
 Yorùbá subgroups, 96–97, 128  
 Yorùbá Welfare Association, 238  
 Yorùbá Welfare Forum, 244  
 Yorùbáland, 1, 9, 10, 11, 15, 19;  
 demography of, 145–46; geography  
 of, 29, 96–97, 127, 131–32, 145, 298;  
 northern, 127–44; southern, 145–55;  
 western, 96–110, 111–26. *See also*  
 Nigeria, southwest; Ondo State; Oyo;  
 Oyo Empire
- Zachernuk, Philip, 18, 76  
 Zaria, 236, 241  
 Zikists, 85  
 Zuru town, 239

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