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DRESS AND IDENTITY IN YORUBALAND, 1880-1980

Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniya

**Dress and Identity**  
IN YORUBALAND,  
1880 - 1980

**Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniya**

**Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980**

**Proefschrift**

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**Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980**

**Bukola A. Oyeniya**

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## CONTENTS

|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>  | <b>iv</b>  |
| <b>PREFACE</b>   | <b>ix</b>  |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>CHAPTER ONE: CONCEPTUALIZING DRESS AND<br/>IDENTITY IN YORUBALAND</b> | <b>1</b>   |
| Background to the Study  | 1          |
| Literature Review  | 6          |
| Research Methodology   | 20         |
| Theories of Identity and Dress   | 28         |
| Setting and Structure of the Study                                       | 38         |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>CHAPTER TWO: YORÙBÁNESS AND DRESS</b>                                 | <b>40</b>  |
| Introduction   | 40         |
| Constructiveness and Innateness of Ethnicity in Nigeria                  | 41         |
| Ethnicity: A Brief Exposition  | 41         |
| Yorùbá Ethno-Genesis   | 46         |
| Construction and Innateness of Ethnicity in Nigeria                      | 59         |
| Personal and Group Identity in Yorubaland                                | 62         |
| Origin and Conception of Dress among the Yorùbá                          | 66         |
| Purposes and Types of Dress in Yorubaland                                | 83         |
| Yorùbá Worldview on the role of Dress in the                             |            |
| Construction of Yorùbá Identity  | 89         |
| Conclusion   | 102        |
| <br>   |            |
| <b>CHAPTER THREE: YORÙBÁ DRESS IN PRE-COLONIAL<br/>PERIOD</b>            | <b>105</b> |
| Introduction   | 105        |

|   |            |
|---|------------|
| Dress-use in Pre-1800 Yorubaland  | 105        |
| Omoluabi in Yorùbá Pre-colonial Dress Culture   | 174        |
| Conclusion  | 175        |
| <b>CHAPTER FOUR: ISLAM, CHRISTIANITY, COLONIAL<br/>RULE AND YORÙBÁ DRESS</b>                        | <b>177</b> |
| Introduction  | 177        |
| The Nineteenth Century Yorùbá Civil War and the Coming of<br>Islam and Christianity into Yorubaland | 177        |
| The Influence of Islam on Yorùbá Dress  | 180        |
| Dressing the Converts: The Influence of Christianity on Yorùbá<br>Dress                             | 193        |
| Dressing the Natives: Colonial Influences on Yorùbá Dress   | 205        |
| Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Dress, 1800-1880  | 228        |
| Change and Conflicts in Yorùbá Dress Culture  | 235        |
| Omoluabi in Yorùbá colonial Dress Culture   | 253        |
| Conclusion  | 255        |
| <b>CHAPTER FIVE: CONTEMPORARY YORÙBÁ DRESS</b>  | <b>259</b> |
| Introduction  | 259        |
| Contemporary Yorùbá Dress, 1960-2000  | 259        |
| Continuities in Contemporary Yorùbá Dress   | 277        |
| Political Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland  | 277        |
| Social Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland   | 284        |
| Religious Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland  | 304        |
| Conclusion: Omoluabi in Yorùbá Contemporary Dress Culture   | 327        |



|  |            |
|--|------------|
| <b>CHAPTER SIX: THE POLITICS OF POWER AND RESISTANCE IN YORÙBÁ DRESS</b> | <b>329</b> |
| Introduction   | 329        |
| Dress as Locus of Power  | 330        |
| Nudity as Dress in Yorubaland  | 342        |
| Dress in Nigeria's Nationalist Discourse                                 | 353        |
| Traditional Dress versus European Dress:                                 |            |
| The Good versus the Bad  | 360        |
| Men versus Women: Resistance versus Adaptation                           | 370        |
| Omoluabi, Politics, Power, Resistance and Yorùbá Dress                   | 372        |
| Conclusion   | 372        |
| <b>CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION</b>   | <b>376</b> |
| Introduction   | 376        |
| Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980                              | 376        |
| Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Sartorial Tradition                      | 381        |
| Yorùbá Dress and Globalization   | 382        |
| Conclusion   | 385        |
| <b>SOURCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>  | <b>389</b> |

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OBA

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## PREFACE

Combining extant literature with archival and archaeological evidence, photo albums and oral interviews, eponymous names and witty sayings, folksongs and participant observation; this study, covering from 1880 to 1980, wrote a history of Yorubaland as seen through dress. Also subsumed in this study was a history of Yorùbá dress, especially its place in the construction of Yorùbá ethno-national identity. Dress, among the Yorùbá, was conceived as an assemblage of modifications and/or supplements to the human body, which included coiffed hair, coloured skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other items added to the body as supplements. Also included in this conceptualization were tattoo and facial marks, body painting and decorations, shoes and umbrellas, purses and bags, etc.

Underlying Yorùbá conceptualization of dress was the requirement of being an *Omoluabi*, an ethical category defined as a conglomeration of moral principles such as being lofty in spoken words and respectful, having good mind towards others and being truthful, possessing lofty character and being brave, hardworking and being intelligent, including having a good dress sense. All these formed Yorùbá individual and group identity (Yorùbáness) as well as what Yorùbá dress was all about. To be a Yorùbá man or woman was therefore to dress well and to dress well was to be a Yorùbá man or woman. Understood in this way, Yorùbáness therefore was impossible without Yorùbá dress and Yorùbá dress was impossible without Yorùbáness. From this conceptualization, the function of Yorùbá dress therefore transcended the biological functions of protecting the human body (from the elements) and covering the human body from unsolicited and unwanted visual intrusion to include expressing the existential value of being an *Omoluabi*.

As the study showed, the history of Yorùbá dress is a history of change and continuity. Yorùbá indigenous sartorial culture arose, on the one hand, as a response to the environment in Yorubaland. During this period, bark-clothes developed into thick



cotton-cloth, *Kijipa*. Other sartorial traditions such as ornamental beads and jewelry, facial marks and body arts, etc. played fundamental roles in determining and identifying different categories of Yorùbá men and women, their estates in life, religious and occupational affiliations, as well as social standing. On the other hand, the changes were orchestrated by external influences, in particular, contacts with Islamic/Arabic sartorial culture and later with Christian and European sartorial tradition.

Where comfortable accommodation cannot be ensured, force was deployed. Originally through trade relations and without necessarily seeking to supplant Yorùbá indigenous sartorial tradition, Islam later forced itself – religion and sartorial tradition – on Yorùbá people. The alternative to this was death. Christianity, which started peacefully in Yorubaland in the 1840s, soon began to assert itself; forcing its sartorial tradition on converts. The alternative to this was denial of two important Christian rituals, Baptism and Holy Communion.

Colonialism is something of a paradox. On the one hand, it brought out the differences in the different colonized peoples and, on the other hand, created new layers of differences among them. From 1919, colonial rule in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria introduced colonial uniforms, thick uniforms originally made for British troops during the First World War. Despite its incommodious nature, especially for wear in the tropics; colonial administration imposed these as official uniforms and dress on different categories of staff in the colonial and native administration. Signs and symbols, colours and epaulets, etc. indicated ranks.

No small reactions followed these developments. To the effect that Euro-Christian sartorial tradition aimed at supplanting Yorùbá sartorial tradition, educated Yorùbá elite rejected it. Islamic sartorial tradition became the sole beneficiary of this fight, as its dress-materials, unlike those of the Euro-Christian sartorial traditions, could also be used to evince the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition – being an *Omoluabi*. What is today regarded as Yorùbá dress is therefore an amalgam that derived from a pristine Yorùbá indigenous dress, upon which Islamic/Arabic and Euro-Christian sartorial traditions constructed their respective dress culture over the years.

As this study showed, although there has been a flowering of studies on Yorùbá people and Yorubaland, little or nothing has been written on Yorùbá dress. Despite its importance in identifying Yorùbá people, previous studies on Yorùbá people and Yorubaland have focused on politics and economy, warfare and diplomacy, gender and culture, among other themes. This study therefore is a pioneering study not just on Yorùbá history using dress as a tool of analysis, but also on Yorùbá dress history.

## Chapter One

### Conceptualizing Dress and Identity in Yorubaland

#### 1.1 Background to the Study

This study writes a history of Yorùbá dress, especially its place in the construction of Yorùbá ethno-national identity. Previous studies on Yorùbá people and Yorubaland have focused on politics and economy, warfare and diplomacy, gender and culture, among other themes<sup>1</sup>; but little or nothing has been written on dress. Also subsumed in this study is a history of Yorubaland as seen through dress. Dress, as the study showed, is an important component of Yorùbá identity; therefore a neglect of it in our understanding of Yorubaland is unacceptable. Writing Yorùbá history through dress is important because Yorùbá dress is central to Yorùbá culture and Yorùbá identity. Identity and the dressed body, among Yorùbá people of South West Nigeria, play fundamental roles in the creation of a person or a group's ideal personality. Historicizing how the body is adorned and what this means in the creation of a person's ideal personality is fundamentally about two phenomena

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<sup>1</sup> A brief look at the different themes explored by historians on Yorubaland testifies to the fact that little or nothing exists on Yorùbá dress and that a history of Yorubaland as seen through dress has not enjoyed any favourable attention among scholars. Beginning with Samuel Johnson, who documented ethno-histories of the different Yorùbá sub-groups, the Yorùbá wars and efforts made by the missionaries and colonial administration to end these internecine wars; to N.A. Fadipe who focused essentially on social life of the Yorùbá, while Bolanle Awe examined Ibadan-Ijaye (1860 to 1862) and Ibadan and Kiriji (1877 to 1893) wars. Smith and Ade-Ajayi also examined the Ijaye war while S.A. Akintoye extensively deliberated on the Kiriji war. On their parts, the duo of Falola and Smith focused on diplomacy and Smith, individually, pursued further studies on different ramifications of the Yorùbá civil war. Oguntomisin and Falola together examined warfare, displacement, and refugee crisis; while Akinjogbin examined the wars and their consequences. Others include Biobaku, who pioneered a study on Egbaland; Pallinder-Law, who extended the frontier of knowledge on Abeokuta by examining the role of the educated elite in the administration of the town; Babayemi who wrote extensively on the New Oyo founded by Atiba; Oguntomisin, individually, studied Ijaye while Awe and Falola studied Ibadan. Notwithstanding this flowering of academic and non-academic studies of Yorùbá and Yorubaland; few works have come to light on Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

that are deep in the history of Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria: continuity and change. For Yorùbá people, the adorned body is inexorably tied to what Yorùbáness is about and to write Yorùbá history through dress is to write about personhood and the ideal personality. This study therefore is about the provenance of dress and the enormous continuity that Yorùbá dress has witnessed over the years.

Dress, broadly conceived, is an assemblage of modifications and/or supplements to the human body.<sup>2</sup> Conceived in this way, dress includes, but not limited to coiffed hair, coloured skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other items added to the body as supplements.<sup>3</sup> Among the Yorùbá, dress is conceived as including cloth and clothing traditions, tattooing, facial marking, jewelry, hair-dressing, including barbing.<sup>4</sup> As this Yorùbá folksong, among many others, shows, the Yorùbá regard dress as a *sine qua non* to living itself:

*'Adaba ti ko l'apa; kini yo fi fo?  
Olomoge ti ko l'aso;  
Kini yo fi lo'gba?'*<sup>5</sup>

(A wingless dove; with what will it fly?  
A lady without dress;  
How will she survive the season?)

In addition to folksongs and everyday sayings, Yorùbá cultural practices such as eponymous names (*Oriki*), chants, and other customs demonstrate the importance of dress in the construction and establishment of individual and group identity among Yorùbá people. For instance, integral to *Opomulero* family's eponymous names are these lines:

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<sup>2</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins and Joanne B. Eicher, 'Dress and Identity' in Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson (eds.), *Dress and Identity*, (New York, 1995), 7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Adeoye C.L., *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, (Ibadan, 2005), 179-218.

<sup>5</sup> Just as a wingless dove cannot fly, so a young lady without dress cannot survive a season.

*Keke ta didun; Aso l'edidi eniyan,  
Bi ko si Aso, bi kosi egbigba Ileke;  
Oniruru Idi la ba ri.*<sup>6</sup>

(The spindle spurns beauty; cloth beautifies the human body, if not for cloths, If not for the big beads; we would have seen varying sizes of Buttocks.)

Other Yorùbá cultural practices underscoring the place of dress in Yorùbá worldview abound. Dress, to the Yorùbá, comprises of not just clothes but all bodily adornments. Any Yorùbá person, young and old, male and female, who lacks dress, or dresses improperly is regarded as being 'naked' and incapable of surviving a season. A careful reading of the first sayings above shows that to the Yorùbá, dress must also conform to fashion and seasonal changes. Season, as used here, means change in fashion and has nothing to do with planting seasons or the seasonal changes. In other words, a Yorùbá person, as part of his identity as an individual and as a member of a group, is expected to possess a wardrobe of fashionable cloths and other items of dress. A young lady must not only wear whatever cloth is in vogue, but must also wear hairdo that agrees with current fashion. A young man's dress sense is regarded as faulty and unacceptable if he lacks whatever dress items or fashion items his contemporaries are using.

Almost as a paradox, Yorùbá people also say; '*Aso Nla, ko ni Eniyan Nla*' i.e. a well-dressed person is not necessarily a well-placed or highly remarkable person. Without prejudice to the earlier position emphasizing the place of dress in establishing and constructing individual identity, this second position serves as a caveat that the reality dress espouses may differ markedly from an objective reality of the individual and, as such, individuals should separate a person's paraphernalia from his or her objective identity.

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<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that every Yorùbá person has *Oriki*. The one used above belongs to the Opomulero family, which could be found in different parts of Yorubaland, most notably amongst the Oyo, Ilorin, Oke-Ogun, Ijesha, etc. in Western Nigeria.

Compared to the earlier position, the second subsumes a paradox, if not a contradiction. This paradox or contradiction is made more pronounced in contemporary Yorùbá society, where clerics of religious organizations loudly admonish their followers to ‘dress the way you want to be addressed’.

Unarguably, the Yorùbá society makes distinctions between identity and dress. In the praise-names of Obas, the political heads of Yorùbá kingdoms and states, the Yorùbá people revered the Oba’s dress in the following words: *Kabiyesi, Alase Ekeji Orisa, Ki Ade pe l’Ori, ki Bata pe l’Ese*<sup>7</sup>. In this particular instance, the Oba’s personality is fused with his dress, as an Oba’s crown and shoe are symbols of authority and units of identity. The mere presence of the Oba’s staff (or any of his instruments of office) in any occasion signifies not only the Oba’s approval of such occasion, but also his presence. In addition, Obas are regarded as the reflection of their kingdoms’ wealth. Hence, the dress, behaviour, and carriage of an Oba must reflect the richness or riches of his kingdom. Invariably, Obas, chiefs and notable individuals in Yorubaland are usually clad in dresses that reflect their positions, statuses, and wealth. The commoners, in the same vein, also dress to reflect their stations in life, as can be seen in the following witty sayings; ‘*Ibere Osi, bi Oloro lori; ti nwo Aso Ile r’Oko*’ (The commencement of poverty is usually like wealth, which compels a poor man to wear his best cloth (dress) to the farm) and also ‘*Aifi Eni p’Eni, ai f’Eniyan p’ Eniyan, lo mu Ara Oko san Bante wo’lu*’ (It is sheer incontinence that makes a peasant to dress poorly into the town). In these two sayings, the Yorùbá’s conceptualization of dress and dressing is such that dress must not only suit the occasion and fashion of the time but also be commensurate with one’s estate in life.

In addition to the above, specific dress pattern, mode, and style gives some Yorùbá communities their identities. For instance, in pre-colonial Yorubaland, Abeokuta and Oshogbo were notable for *Adire* (tie and dye) making; Oyo, Oke-Ogun, and Ilesha were

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<sup>7</sup> Kabiyesi, the Commander and the Vice-Regent of the gods; May the crown and the royal shoes stay long on the king’s head and legs. This is generally a prayer for longevity for the king and his kingdom.

notable for the production of Ofi<sup>8</sup> etc. In the same manner, groups, within societies, have their dress patterns: Ogun (god of Iron) worshippers, for instance, are famous for wearing *Gberi* – a traditional shirt. In state, religious, and secular matters; different dress and dressing are used among the Yorùbá. As another Yorùbá saying puts it; '*Ohun to ndun ni, nipo l'oro eni, Ologun Eru ku, Aso re ko pe meta*' i.e. one is usually preoccupied with one's care; a great slave dealer died and left less than three pieces of cloths. Here, wealth is not expressed as possession of material things like cloths, rather as the slave dealers' care - the holding of slaves.

A number of developments have occurred in Yorubaland that impacted on dress. For instance, the coming and spread of Islam and Christianity, colonization and western education, independence and military rule, etc. have all played fundamental roles in dress culture in Yorubaland. Prior to 1880, to consider briefly one interesting example, nationalism in Nigeria took another turn, as dress suddenly became a kind of 'canvas' upon which nationalist discourses were 'written' or espoused. Nationalists of all hues and colours were advocating for a cultural renaissance; demanding for a return to Yorùbá culture, especially in language and dress. Among other things, they argued that Western dress was unsuitable, unhealthy, and incommodious to the tropical climate of Yorubaland. In addition, they used all kinds of Yorùbá dress to vocalize their nationalist agitations; and Yorùbá dress assumed a different role in the nationalist discourse. How have these developments played together to create, establish, reinforce, or alter individual and group identities of Yorùbá people? From slave trade to colonization, Christianity to western education, independence to military rule; how do these developments affect dress, views to dress, and personal/individual and group identity construction in Yorubaland?

As the study shows, issues such as family life, position in the society, occupation, religious belief, etc. also influence or affect dress and decisions about dress in Yorubaland. In the light of this, how is dress used in establishing, announcing or concealing individual and group identities? Since it is part of Yorùbá culture to demonstrate age, sex, religion, power, status, wealth, etc.

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<sup>8</sup> Ofi is a kind of traditional hand-woven thick cloth.

through sartorial tradition, given, especially the non-permanent nature of dress; how have the various changes affected dress and identity?

Yorùbá sartorial tradition is not static, as this study shows. The dynamic nature of Yorùbá sartorial tradition, the socio-cultural, economic and political links between sartorial tradition and identity construction in Yorubaland, and how Yorùbá sartorial tradition constitutes a vital part of Yorùbá people's 'Yorùbáness' are also examined and analyzed in this study.

As the study shows, before European contacts, whether through trade, religion, or colonialism; the people later named Yorùbá shared many things in common, including sartorial tradition, these differ from town to town, but nevertheless it unites the different peoples. This sartorial tradition has witnessed changes of different kinds over the years. The changes have stimulated further changes in the trajectory of Yorùbá sartorial tradition, and also in the various ways that this tradition is expressed and understood.

Far and above all other things, as this study shows with respect to Yorubaland, dress creates, denotes, and reinforces identity. From the foregoing, it can be affirmed that dress, among Yorùbá people, plays more roles than to merely cover or adorn the human body.

## **1.2 Literature Review**

In most literature, dress was hardly defined. For the most part, authors assumed that readers know what dress is. Common also in the literature is the general tendency to conceptualize dress only as cloth and clothing tradition. These two gaps can be understood, as the initial efforts at dress studies flowered among artists, art historians, fashion enthusiasts, and anthropologists whose main concerns include treating dress as costumes with specific emphasis on cloth and clothing tradition, religious, and curatorial values, as well as colour and production style. However, in the last few years, others such as archaeologists, psychologists, historians, philosophers, and, even, economists have taken interests in dress studies. Like the artists, these new entrants into dress studies have either continued in the tradition of the artists or detoured to impose their disciplinary ethos on dress study.



While economists have been concerned with production processes, entrepreneurization, and commoditization of dress; historians' main concerns include issues of provenance, utilization, change and continuity; while psychologists, among other things, have concentrated on the role of dress in attitudinal change, personality development, and societal change in general. Although these developments in dress studies have helped in extending the frontiers of knowledge on dress, they however present considerable challenges for readers, researchers and students, as the various disciplines, on the one hand, have presented one-sided, discipline-bound single stories, which, sometimes, mislead rather than elucidate on the phenomenon; and, on the other hand, readers, researchers and students, based on this one-sided, single stories, are forced to consume area-specific or subject-specific literature and to generalize on the phenomenon of dress in its entirety.

Notwithstanding the above criticisms, this flowering of interests in dress studies has helped to extend our understanding of various issues relating to dress as well as the range of key sources available to students of dress studies beyond insights from works of artists, art historians, fashion enthusiasts, and anthropologists to include insights from economics, history, psychology, and a host of other disciplines. However, it must be conceded that the development has nevertheless weaved a maze around the subject so much so that readers, researchers and students of dress studies now have to transcend their narrow disciplinary boundaries and peculiar disciplinary ethos to adopting multi-disciplinary approach if they must make meanings out of the tangled web that have been weaved or created around the subject by the various disciplines.

What then is dress? In most of the literature, dress is considered as cloth and clothing traditions. Only a few, a minute few, have gone beyond this narrow perspective to define dress as '*an assemblage of modifications of the body and/or supplements to the body*'.<sup>9</sup> This conceptualization includes things like '*coiffed hair, colored skin, pierced ears, and scented breath, as well as an equally long list of garments, jewelry, accessories, and other categories of items added to the body as supplements*'.<sup>10</sup> Similar to

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<sup>9</sup> Roach-Higgins and Eicher, 'Dress and Identity', 7.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 7.

the above definition by Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson, is the conceptualization offered by C.L. Adeoye, which conceptualizes dress as a process of beautification as well as everything involved in this process, which includes cloth, tattooing, facial marking, jewelry, hair-dressing, including barbing.<sup>11</sup> While lack of definition is not a draw-down on any literature on the subject, I reason that some of the gaps in existing literature would have been bridged if there has been an extensive consideration of what and how dress should be understood. As far as this study is concerned, the two definitions above formed the bedrock of the foregoing analysis.

Of invaluable importance to any study on dress in general are the following works: Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History*, which explores the relationship between Western dress and imperialism from a global angle.<sup>12</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson's edited work, *Dress and Identity*, which gathers insights from more than thirty contributors to explore the interrelationship between dress as a critical human behaviour and as a factor in the construction of human identity.<sup>13</sup> Ross, on his part, recounts how socio-cultural, economic, and political powers of Europe, initially through colonization, and later North America, through globalization of trade and culture, forced the adoption of 'standard' Western dress on the world; and how global responses, measured as either adoption or rejection, have followed the need, if not a desire, especially for males, to claim equality with colonial Europe while using the female bodies to reject and claim distinction from Western standard dress. In Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson's edited work, the various contributors weave a single narrative that dress, whether conceptualized narrowly or broadly, either establishes or supports personal identity. To situate this argument, the 62-chapter-long readings move from concepts, importance, and utilities of dress to relationship between dress and human body; to competition for prominence between human body and human dress

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<sup>11</sup> Adeoye, *Asa*, 179-218.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History*, (Cambridge, 2008).

<sup>13</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson (eds.), *Dress and Identity*, (New York, 1995).

as well as to existential values in both the stated and inferential objectives of dress use. Other issues explored are: what aspects of identity are tied to dress and are therefore communicated through dress; are there private identities that are not shared or shared with a limited few, etc. While these two works consider representative examples across the world, neither Ross nor Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson talked about provenance of dress, either narrowly or broadly.

Other key sources in dress studies include Barnes, R. and Eicher B. Joanne, *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning*, which focuses primarily on the relationship between Western dress and gender and covers a great variety of ethnographic areas reaching from Asia, Europe, and Africa, to North and South America.<sup>14</sup> In *Haircuts: Fifty Years of Styles and Cuts*, D. Jones<sup>15</sup> takes our conceptualization of dress away from cloth and clothing tradition to haircuts. He documents a period when haircut and hair-style became accessories to the human body but with an iconic status. His work offers a history of haircut and its related cults. S.B. Kaiser, in *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*, espouses the corpus of (social) meanings associated with human appearance and how this is established, conceived, and interpreted. Kaiser notes the importance of clothing and other accessories to this symbolic meaning-making venture, especially how humans have come to see themselves and how this perception contributes to the making of the human society.<sup>16</sup>

While enormous literature abound on dress in form of books, articles in journals, and newspaper write-ups, it must be noted that invaluable works have been done on dress and its related issues in the specialized journal, *Clothing and Textile Research Journal*, among others. As a specialized journal dedicated to research on clothing and textile, no less important subject of dress and its contributions to identity formation have featured in the different editions of the journal. The journal therefore constitutes

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<sup>14</sup> Barnes, R. and Eicher B. Joanne (eds.), *Dress and Gender: Making and Meaning*, (Oxford, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Jones D., *Haircuts: Fifty Years of Styles and Cuts*, (London, 1990).

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser S. B., *The Social Psychology of Clothing: Symbolic Appearances in Context*, (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition, New York), 1990.

one of the key sources for this study in general. Other journals that served in mining resources for this study include *The Art Bulletin*, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, *African Arts*, *Fashion Theory*, *Journal of Social History*, and *Journal of Material Culture* among many others.

Candidly, there is no way to write any sartorial history of Yorubaland without references to the works of Samuel Johnson's *The History of the Yorùbás*, N.A. Fadipe's *The Sociology of the Yorùbá* and C.L. Adeoye's *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*. These three books are invaluable reference materials upon which insights into Yorùbá worldview about dress could be garnered. Johnson, like Fadipe, adopted a narrow perspective to dress, conceptualizing dress to mean cloths. Although with its own inherent flaws, Adeoye adopted a broader perspective. More than others, Adeoye, as earlier noted, ambitiously defined dress as a process of beautifying the human body. Like others too, he nevertheless failed to trace the provenance of this process, but went ahead to discuss various modes of dress, highlighting peculiarities common to different cities and towns in Yorubaland.

While these three literature could be regarded as baseline literature on dress in Yorubaland, Elisha P. Renne<sup>17</sup>, Norman Wolf<sup>18</sup>, Judith Byfield<sup>19</sup> and many others, have also written on different issues relating to dress either in the narrower sense of cloth and clothing tradition or in the broader sense of other modifications and attachments to the human body. In conjunction with Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, Elisha P. Renne edited a work on Yorùbá religious textiles<sup>20</sup>, which captures the significance of cloth in religious worship among the Yorùbá. Renne, individually,

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<sup>17</sup> Elisha P. Renne, 'Aso ipo, red cloth from Bunu', *African Arts*, 25:3 (1992), 64-102; Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Norman Wolf, 'Cloth, dress, and art patronage in Africa', *American Anthropologist*, 103:2 (2001), 583-584.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*, (Cape Town, 2002); Judith Byfield, 'Innovation and conflict: cloth dyers and the interwar depression in Abeokuta, Nigeria', *The Journal of African History*, 38:1 (1997), 77-99.

<sup>20</sup> Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.) *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005).

also worked on funerary dress among the Bunu, a diasporic Yorùbá community in Northern Nigeria. Robin Poynor wrote extensively on dress use (religious and political) in Owo, an eastern Yorùbá town<sup>21</sup>; while Byfield worked on Abeokuta dyers. Betty M. Wass, using photo-albums, focused mainly on the use of dress in colonial Lagos.<sup>22</sup> Titilola Ebuja examines dress as a marker of status in colonial Lagos.<sup>23</sup> Perhaps Judith Byfield's major contribution to the study of dress in Yorubaland is not just *The Bluest Hands*, but also her essay on the use of dress and gender in Nigeria's nationalist discourse. She, in this essay, offers a nuanced insight into how early Yorùbá nationalists deployed dress as a metaphor for rejecting colonial rule.<sup>24</sup>

It must be noted that despite the different subjects pursued by these authors, none except Tunde M. Akinwumi attempted to trace origin of the aspect of dress that is the focus of their works. In addition, except for a few, these and many others adopted the narrow perspective. Except Titilola Ebuja and, to some extent Renne and Agbaje-Williams, not a single work exists in the literature on the place of dress in Yorùbá identity construction despite that oral tradition, folklores, witty sayings, etc. point to these connections. Notwithstanding these gaps in the literature, these bodies of literature serve as the bedrock or key sources for this study.

Generally, whether in Yorubaland or elsewhere, the common trend is to see dress as cloth and clothing tradition. For instance, Judith Byfield, after acknowledging that Barnes and Eicher interpreted dress as a comprehensive term for direct body

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<sup>21</sup> Robin Poynor, 'Egungun of Owo', *African Arts*, 11:3 (1978), 65-100; Robin Poynor, 'If the Chiefs are like This, What Must the King Be Like?: Chieftaincy Garb as Indicative of Position in the Owo Court', in Bate, *Ethnological Seminar*, (n.a. 1989).

<sup>22</sup> Betty M. Wass, 'Yorùbá Dress in Five Generations of a Lagos Family', in Cordwell, Justine M. and Schwarz, Ronald A. (eds.), *The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, (The Hague, (1979), 331.

<sup>23</sup> Titilola Ebuja, 'Dress and Status in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lagos' in Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri, and Jide Osuntokun (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos*, (Lagos, 1987), 142-162.

<sup>24</sup> Judith Byfield, "Unwrapping" *Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos*, (Discussion Papers 30, *African Humanities*, Boston: African Studies Center, 2000).

change, which includes from tattooing to plastic surgery, went further to interpret dress as cloth.<sup>25</sup> Similar views pervaded the 259 page edited volume by Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams, which collated views from ten contributors on Yorùbá religious textiles.<sup>26</sup> Although Tunde M. Akinwumi, earlier mentioned, set out his argument by claiming that dress refers to all items that cover or are attached to and held by the human body, he nevertheless detoured from this line of argument and narrowed his conceptualization to cloths and clothing tradition.<sup>27</sup> In other parts of the world, dress is also narrowly defined. Marybeth C. Stalp, Rachel Williams, Annette Lynch and M. Elise Radina writing about the Red Hat Society in America, conceptualized dress as essentially related to costume culture of (purple) cloths and (red) hats.<sup>28</sup> Although Barbara Voss admitted that dress is ‘*an individualistic medium for personal expression and social mobility*’, she however narrowed her discussion of dress as cloths.<sup>29</sup> Mitchell Strauss<sup>30</sup>, Johnson, Schofield and Yurchisin<sup>31</sup> as well as Nancy Nelson<sup>32</sup> also admitted that cloth is ‘*one aspect of*

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<sup>25</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, 2.

<sup>26</sup> Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles*, 2005.

<sup>27</sup> Tunde M. Akinwumi, “Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress”, in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.), *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (Rochester, 2006), 49.

<sup>28</sup> Marybeth C. Stalp, Rachel Williams, Annette Lynch, and M. Elise Radina, ‘Conspicuously consuming: the Red Hat Society and midlife women’s identity’, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 38:2 (2009).

<sup>29</sup> Barbara L. Voss, ‘Poor people in silk shirts: dress and ethnogenesis in Spanish-colonial San Francisco’, *Journal of Social Archaeology*, 8:3 (2008).

<sup>30</sup> Mitchell D. Strauss, ‘Identity construction among Confederate civil war reenactors: a study of dress, stage props, and discourse’, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 21:4 (2003).

<sup>31</sup> Kim K.P. Johnson, Nancy A. Schofield, and Jennifer Yurchisin, ‘Appearance and dress as a source of information: a qualitative approach to data collection’, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 15:3 (2002).

<sup>32</sup> Nancy J. Nelson, ‘Listening to Jane Cunningham Croly’s “Talks with Women”’: issues of gender, dress, and reform in Demorest’s Monthly Magazine’, *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*, 18:3 (2008).

*dress*', their arguments were never pursued beyond a tacit admission of a wider perspective to dress.<sup>33</sup>

Two distinct arguments can be offered for this narrow conceptualization of dress in the literature. On the one hand is the nature of the subjects pursued by these writers. For instance, the subject of Elisha Renne and Agbaje-Williams' edited work is religious textile. The ten contributors to the volume therefore limit their conceptualization to cloth and clothing tradition. Judith Byfield, who wrote about the *Adire* (tie-and dye) makers of Abeokuta, was also compelled by the subject-specific nature of her subject to narrow her conceptualization of dress to cloth and clothing tradition. Marybeth C. Stalp, Rachel Williams, Annette Lynch and M. Elise Radina focused primarily on the Red Hat Society in America, a subject that compelled them to narrow their discussions to purple cloths and red hats.

The other contention warranting this narrow conceptualization of dress deals with the common practice of interchanging dress with words such as appearance, cloth, clothing, ornament, adornment, and cosmetics.<sup>34</sup>

Notwithstanding the subject-specific nature of most literature and the common practice of substituting dress for cloths or any other categories, there is no gainsaying the fact that a broader conceptualization, outlook, and analysis of dress that recognizes the multi-dimensional nature of dress would have enhanced the various subjects pursued in the literature.

From extant literature, it can be argued that two different conceptualizations of dress have emerged: the narrower perspective, which sees dress as cloth and clothing tradition, and a broader perspective, which sees dress as all forms of modifications and supplements to the human body. Both conceptualizations are however used in this study.

Conceptually, identity, as a sociological and psychological concept, describes a process by which an individual or a group develops distinct personality or characteristics through which such

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<sup>33</sup> Kim K.P. Johnson, Nancy A. Schofield and Jennifer Yurchisin, 'Appearance' 125.

<sup>34</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson (eds.) *Dress and Identity*, 7.

individual or group is known and/or recognized. It could also be defined as the means through which social subjects construct relationships of taxonomic sameness and difference. Understood in this way, identities then become multi-scalar and are constantly undergoing negotiations with tension between similarity and alterity.<sup>35</sup> Individual or group identity includes a sense of continuity, a sense of uniqueness or difference from others, and a sense of affiliation. Individual or group identity therefore defines an individual or a group as well as differentiates an individual or group from other individuals and groups. Whether at the personal or group level, identity manifests in variety of forms. Examples include cultural, religious, national, professional, etc. identity. Cultural identity, as Coleman noted, is the feeling of identity of a group or culture, or of an individual as far as the individual is influenced by being a member of a group or culture. Cultural identity, more often than not, is synonymous with ethnic identity, which describes identification with a certain ethnicity, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry. Ethnic groups are also often united by common cultural, behavioral, linguistic, ritualistic, or religious traits. At a higher level, members of a particular nation espouse national identity, an identity that describes the process whereby all humans are divided into groups called nations. Members of a 'nation', called citizens, share a common identity, and usually a common origin, in the sense of ancestry, parentage or descent.

Another expression of identity is religion. A religious identity involves adherence to codified beliefs, practices, and rituals and study of ancestral or cultural traditions, writings, history, and mythology, as well as faith and mystical experiences that are generally held by an individual or a group. Whether cultural, ethnic, or religious; claimants to identity depend on recognition by other individuals and/or groups for such identity to be a distinct cultural, ethnic, or religious identity. Such recognition of a unique identity is called ethnogenesis.

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<sup>35</sup> Meskell L., 'The intersections of identity and politics in archaeology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 31:2 (2000), 279-301; see also Young R. J. C., *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, (New York, 1995).



Identity, whether of an individual or a group, is inexorably tied to self-concept or self-identity. Self-concept, which is the sum total of an individual's (or a group's) knowledge and understanding of his or her self, comprises of physical, psychological, and social attributes. These attributes can be influenced, on the one hand, by the individual's or group's attitudes, habits, beliefs, and ideas; and, on the other hand, by individual's or group's bio-social environment. It can be argued that dress interfaces with identity at the level of self-concept. Dress, as Roach-Higgins and others argued, rather than cloth and clothing tradition, comprises of physical, psychological, and social attributes that could be influenced, on the one hand, by the individual's or group's attitudes, habits, beliefs, and ideas; and, on the other hand, individual's or group's bio-social environment.

In some of the few literature on dress in Yorubaland, the arguments have focused on the enduring appeal and transformation of cloth/clothing; the effects of colonization, Islam, Christianity and Western education, modernity, and globalization on dress and identity. As many of these authors, especially Judith Byfield, Ruth Nielsen, Elisha P. Renne, Tunde M. Akinwumi, etc. claimed, owing to interaction with Islam and Christianity, many local dress practices changed in complex ways and Yorubaland today presents two broad dress cultures based on (i) the draping of cloth; and (ii) tailored Western-styled attires. Examples in these regard include the *boubou* (loose gown worn by women and men); cloth wrapper and head tie; and Western-styled dress such as trousers, shirt, suits, etc. In response to local, regional, and external influences, the boundaries of these dress cultures are still shifting.

Renne's ethnography of *Bunu* cloth in Nigeria examined culture and history of a specific part of Yorubaland, where distinct categories of women and men wear differently coloured and patterned cloths. Young women, Renne noted, wear black cloth at marriage, while hunters wear black-and-white-striped shirts, and chiefs wore 'red masquerade cloth with magnificent patterns'. White is the color of spiritual relations. Nielsen insisted that the associative power of these dress practices, endures as part of everyday life side-by-side with factory-produced imported cloth and tailored clothing. Renne, like Nielsen, informed us that most *Bunu* clothes, in much of Yorubaland as in the rest of West Africa,

outlive their owners and are, usually, passed-down from one generation to another.

For Perani and Wolff's, Hausa, Nupe, and Yorùbá clothing traditions are commodities with social lives.<sup>36</sup> Technologies of cloth production and artistic works converge in their study of several types of cloth, the effects of conversion to Islam on the clothing trade, the impact of British colonialism, and the coming of factory-produced yarn. They also discussed the fashionable Yorùbá dress-world, where *lurex* yarns entered strip-cloth weaving to produce the popular *shain-shain* styles of the 1990s. The cloth dynamic in Nigeria continues to shift and most recently, in response to structural adjustment programmes that reduced Nigerians overall purchasing power. LaRay Denzer examined how the reforms affected demand for custom-made clothing.<sup>37</sup> Tailors continued to produce traditional garments for ceremonial occasions but had fewer requests for Western fashions, Byfield noted concerning Yorubaland. Comaroff and Comaroff posit similar argument on the centrality of clothing to missionary conversion in Bechuanaland, a frontier region between colonial Botswana and South Africa, during the nineteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The struggle for souls entailed dressing African bodies in European cloths, it appears. Prior to this time, colonial administration had introduced uniform made of *Khaki*, which, as Renne noted, were originally imported from India, and forced on Africans. Initially, Africans accepted the development with great enthusiasm and European cloths became a popular prestige good even before the arrival of missionaries. With Christianity insisting that unless draped in European dress and able to drink tea, African converts could not be true converts, conflict soon arose and Yorùbá Christians began to reject European dress and a cultural renaissance in Yorùbá dress was born.

In other parts of Africa, Martin discussed urban vistas of vibrant and rapidly changing styles that the culturally diverse

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<sup>36</sup>Judith Perani and Norma H. Wolff, *Cloth, Dress and Art Patronage in Africa*, (Oxford, 1999).

<sup>37</sup> LaRay Denzer, "Yoruba Women: A Historiographical Study", *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1994, 1-39.

<sup>38</sup>Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff (1997), *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a south African Frontier*, (Chicago, 1997).

African townspeople integrated into their dress in Brazzaville during the French colonial period.<sup>39</sup> This colonial cosmopolis was a historical crossroad of trade and exchange where ostentatious body display accentuated long-held cultural ideas that connected dress and social status. Because of the contingent meanings of the dressed body, clothing readily becomes a contested issue.<sup>40</sup>

Recent works by Byfield,<sup>41</sup> Fair,<sup>42</sup> Allman,<sup>43</sup> De Jorio,<sup>44</sup> and Moorman,<sup>45</sup> examined struggles over class, gender, and generation as well as attempts to create “national dress” before and after independence in Africa. Tensions over “proper dress” arising from the popularity of miniskirts over long skirts continue after independence, revolving around issues of national culture,<sup>46</sup> revolution,<sup>47</sup> and gender and sexual dynamics.<sup>48</sup> Several works examine the incorporation of European styles and fabrics into the local dress universe, such as the combination of Yorùbá *Adire* and

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<sup>39</sup>Martin, Ann Smart. “Makers, Buyers, and Users: Consumerism as a Material Culture Framework”, *Winterthur Portfolio*, Vol.28, Nos. 2/4, (Summer/Autumn 1993), 141–157.

<sup>40</sup>Jean Marie Allman, *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, (Indiana, 2004).

<sup>41</sup>Judith Byfield, “Dress and Politics in Post-World War II Abeokuta (Western Nigeria)” in Jean Allman, (ed.), *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, (Indiana, 2004), 31-49.

<sup>42</sup>Cited in Rosabelle Boswell, “Say What You Like: Dress, Identity, and Heritage in Zanzibar, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 5, 2006,440-457.

<sup>43</sup>Jean Allman, (ed.), *Fashioning Africa*, *ibid*, 5-7.

<sup>44</sup>Andrea De Jorio, The Mime of the Ancients Investigated Through Neapolitan Gesture, cited by Joan Acocella, “The Neapolitan Finger”, in *The New York Review of Books*, (New York, 2002).

<sup>45</sup>Marissa Moorman, “Putting on a Pano and Dancing Like Our Grandparents: Dress and Nation in Late Colonial Luanda”, in Jean Allman, (ed.), *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, (Indiana, 2004), 84-103.

<sup>46</sup>Andrew Ivaska, “Consuming ‘Soul’ in 1960s Tanzania”, in Jean Allman, (ed.), *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, (Indiana, 2004), 104-21.

<sup>47</sup>Cited in Rosabelle Boswell, “Say What You Like: Dress, Identity, and Heritage in Zanzibar, *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, Vol. 12, No. 5, 2006,440-457.

<sup>48</sup>Karen Tranberg Hansen, “The World in Dress: Anthropological Perspectives on Clothing, Fashion, and Culture”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33, 369-392; see also Karen Tranberg Hansen, “Fashioning: Zambian Moments”, *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2004, 302-309.

European cloth,<sup>49</sup> the smocked Sotho dress<sup>50</sup> and the Herero long dress,<sup>51</sup> that serve as visible markers for “traditional” dress in West and Southern Africa. While dressing “our way” is part of the embodied experience of indigenous dress, the shared sensibility of wearing them is also means of establishing ethno-national identities.<sup>52</sup>

However, Ruth Nielsen, referring specifically to the use of elaborate clothing such as wrapper and over-blouse (*iro ati buba*) worn by Yorùbá women, claimed that elaborate cloth wearing was a nineteenth century phenomenon in Yorubaland. T. M. Akinwumi, although with a different time frame, also affirmed that the art of covering the totality of human body, most especially by women, is a recent development in Yorubaland. While Nielsen anchored her arguments on the nineteenth century developments in designing, printing and importation of Manchester and Dutch wax-prints into West Africa and Zaire; Akinwumi depended on *Ifa* corpus. However, Elisha P. Renne, Judith Byfield, and many others, negated Nielsen and Akinwumi by maintaining that the use of elaborate cloths including wrapper and over-blouse, *Agbada* and *Babanriga* were of longer antiquity in Yorubaland. Their sources include travelogues, reports and diaries of earliest explorers and merchants who visited Yorubaland before the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries and who reported the elaborate dress culture they witnessed.

As seen in the above, little or nothing exists, whether written by academic historians or non-academic lay-persons, on the nexus between dress and identity in Yorubaland. Although responding to a view that given the avalanche of works already done on Yorùbá history, there were no more “broad areas of virgin field” in Yorùbá history and therefore little or nothing remains to

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<sup>49</sup>Judith Byfield, “Taxation, Women, and the Colonial State: Egba Women’s Protest in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1918-1948”, *Meridians: A Journal on Feminism, Race, and Transnationalism*, (Vol. 3, No. 1, 2003), 250-277.

<sup>50</sup>Cited in Karen Tranberg Hansen, “Fashioning: Zambian Moments”, *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2004, 302-309.

<sup>51</sup>Hildi Hendrickson, *Clothing and Difference: Embodied Identities in Colonial and Post-Colonial Africa*, (Durham, 1996), 19-33.

<sup>52</sup>Cited in Karen Tranberg Hansen, “Fashioning: Zambian Moments”, *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2004, 302-309.

be written on Yorùbá and Nigeria again, Ade-Ajayi noted that efforts so far made by authors and scholars amounted only to “*scratching the matter on the surface*”, and that “*the rich ores are no longer at the surface level.*”<sup>53</sup> Writing in the same spirit, most especially about most historians’ preferences for events and happenings where written records could be found, Toyin Falola decried little or no historical reconstructions on issues and phenomena before the eighteenth century. He voiced dissatisfaction on how African historians, overtly or covertly, are obstinately fascinated with periods (and events) about which written records could be found while leaving aside those periods on which no written evidence exists.<sup>54</sup> Both Ade-Ajayi and Falola’s comments served as possible explanations to why there has been little or no reconstruction on Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

Another possible reason may be that when dress is narrowly conceived as cloth and clothing tradition, it is easy to fall into the error of seeing dress as impermanent, perishable and therefore something that can disappear almost with no trace. By digging deeper and going beyond the surface for the rich ores in Yorùbá (sartorial) tradition, this study goes back into the pre-eighteenth century period, using varieties of source materials, to reconstruct, in a broader sense, the nexus between Yorùbá dress and Yorùbá ethno-national identity.

As many historians have argued, historical events and personalities can best be understood within the especial contexts that produced them. In relation to dress and identity in Yorubaland, it can be argued that the especial circumstances of world religions, most especially Islam and Christianity; and global trade, which were the harbingers of colonialism, and, subsequently, Western education must have, either singly or collectively, played important roles in the metamorphosis of Yorùbá sartorial tradition. What were these changes and how were they fostered? What obtained before these changes occurred and how much of what existed today could be adduced to an indigenous period of Yorùbá history

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<sup>53</sup> Ade-Ajayi J.F., “A critique of themes preferred by Nigerian historians”, *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 10:3 (1980), 38.

<sup>54</sup> Toyin Falola, “A research agenda on the Yorùbá in the nineteenth century”, *History in Africa*, 15:1 (1988), 212.

or to a later period? Answers to these questions and many more are either lacking in extant literature or are glibly treated.

From these representative examples from the literature, there is no gainsaying the fact that dress history and its various contributions to Yorùbá ethnogenesis, are still at its infancy. Not many things are known yet. In fact, a lot is still shrouded in controversy, as scholars are yet to arrive at a common point on, for instance, dress provenance, forms, patterns, and progress of dress through time. These and many other issues are examined and, to a larger extent, resolved in this study.

### **1.3. Research Methodology**

It must be asserted that from Samuel Johnson to majority of academic and lay historians that followed Johnson, the use of traditional historical methodologies remained the vogue. This is in spite of Ade-Ajayi's 1980 challenge that to yield-up the rich ore, historians would need new tools, techniques and approaches, which will take them below the surface; and Falola's 1988 call for new tools and insights. Except for Betty M. Wass, whose work was anchored on the use of photo-albums, most works of history that have come to light on Yorubaland since the 1890s still deployed the traditional methodologies characterized by an examination or presentation of written, mostly archival, documents and oral accounts. For instance, in a ten-chapter collection edited by Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams on Yorùbá religious cloth, contributors limit their methodologies to written records and oral accounts. Not even the various insignias of the religious votaries and their artistic hairstyles featured in the 259-page book. Ironically, most of the contributors canvassed for a multidisciplinary approach, which they themselves hardly applied.

The validity of the use of a multidisciplinary approach in the study of dress stems in part from the fact that, whether conceived broadly or narrowly, dress study has drawn interests from variety of disciplines. All these disciplines have, no doubt, imposed their respective tools of data collection and analysis on it, therefore creating a skein, which can only be properly understood through a multidisciplinary approach. On the other hand, when dress is defined narrowly, it becomes perishable and impermanent; hence, except a study on dress depends on reflections from other

rather permanent sources, reconstruction becomes extremely difficult. However, when broadly conceived, the study, as it is done here, therefore benefits immensely from other disciplines.

This study differs in many respects from others before it. Besides an extensive conceptualization of dress, the various landmark events in Yorùbá vis-à-vis Nigerian history and how these have touched on Yorùbá sartorial tradition are highlighted, analyzed, and discussed. In addition to these, the study analyzed sartorial tradition as one of the key developments that have united Yorùbá people over the years.

Before colonialism, Yorùbá people shared many things, including sartorial tradition, which differs from town to town. More salient to the study is the discussion of dress as a form of language and how different Yorùbá groups have used dress, as a language, over the years and how the various epochal events in Yorùbá (and Nigerian) history have enriched the vocabularies of this language as well as changed its course over time. Furthermore, dress, as a language, is also discussed along gender lines. As already noted, it is part of Yorùbá culture to demonstrate age, sex, religion, power, status, wealth, etc. through dress. However, dress is not static but equally competitive in a competitive place like Nigeria.

Therefore, for data collection, this study used primary and secondary sources. Significant primary sources used in the study include archaeological excavations and art works, travelers and missionary records, traders and colonial reports, death and local government records, palace records and newspaper reports, oral interviews and memoirs, diaries and photographs. Other primary sources used, which proved very invaluable, but rarely used in previous studies, include witty sayings and anecdotes, proverbs and ethnographic data.

For the most parts, these primary sources were found in public and private archives and depositories in Yorubaland, especially in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta and Benin-City. In addition to these locations, which were essentially in Southwestern Nigeria, invaluable records were also obtained from the British Museum, where records on pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria, Yorùbá ancient arts, Nigerian leaders, and important national events through which insight about dress and its relation to Yorùbá ethno-

national identity were obtained. Newspaper reports, most especially early newspapers like the *Nigerian Herald*, *West African Pilot*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Iwe Iroyin Yorùbá*, etc. served as invaluable treasure trove for the study. These newspapers cover from as early as 1800s up to the closing days of the 1960s. Contemporary ones like the *Nigerian Tribune*, *The Nation*, *Vanguard*, *Guardian*, *The Punch*, etc. served critical roles in understanding current trends and perspectives about dress as it relates to the construction of Yorùbá identity. In addition to the above, photo-albums, both in the ministries of Information in all the eight states in Southwestern Nigeria and in private collections by different families, most especially Obas, chiefs, and notable politicians, were equally used as sources for data collection. In addition to private and government collections, photos were also obtained and examined both in the British Museum and CMS archive at Birmingham.

With regards to oral interviews, it is important to note that although death has decimated the number of direct witnesses to the phenomenon under study, especially during the pre-colonial and colonial periods; respondents, mainly people from ages 60 and above, were however purposively selected from Yorùbá communities like Ibadan, Abeokuta, Oyo, Lagos, Sagamu, Oshogbo, Ogbomosho, Ile-Ife, Ilesha, Ondo, Akure, Saki, and Kisi. Responses were analyzed both for content and for context. In order to shift truth from embellishment, exaggeration, and biases that are the inherent weaknesses of oral accounts, especially on events and traditions that spanned a very long time; corroborative evidence was sought from archeological excavations and descriptions, secondary literature, most especially those that were recorded by early merchants, explorers, travelers, and missionaries who came to Yorubaland when some of the dress were still in vogue.

The use of photograph for historical reconstruction is no doubt a challenging task. In a research study such as this, photographs are of primary importance, because they offer vivid illustration of the various issues and also serve as cold, mute and (sometimes) unintended witnesses to events and changes. Photographs used in this study were obtained from my private photo collections as well as those of other people. Some were



obtained from books, encyclopedias, government repositories, archives and private collections.

Notwithstanding their importance, details such as when the photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, oftentimes, lacking. This can be explained as stemming from the fact that when photographs were taken, they were taken for different purposes and not for any future historical reconstructions; hence, some of these details, as important as they are, were not put into considerations. In addition to this, most of these photographs were taken at random; therefore sequence of photographs that could help researchers to piece information together may be lacking or inadequate.

In the different chapters, a large proportion of photographs used were from my personal collections. In Yorubaland, collection of photographs is not just considered as an integral part of life, but also serves as a way of preserving memories of important events in life. Some of the photographs used here were taken some twenty or more years ago. In some of the photographs, I can recall vividly the events, names of celebrants, family members and key individuals. In others, I cannot adequately remember most of the people and the precise dates of the events when the photographs were taken. Similar problems also apply to photos that were sourced at the University of Ibadan, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), Lagos and different other institutional sources across Nigeria. These problems also apply to photographs obtained from even professional photographers, most especially Onile-Ayo Photo, Mokola, Ibadan; Sammy Photos, RCCG Camp, Getty Images, Pechu Family Album and others. In most cases, while efforts were made to preserve some details about the people photographed and life-events that were celebrated in these photos, especially those source from the universities in Ibadan and Ile-Ife; little is however known about who took them, when (date, location, and time) and (in some cases) why? At the individual level, I can confess that I have never taken any of these questions seriously (when taking my photographs) and could therefore relate with others (individuals and institutions) for not taken any of these important factors into consideration, as neither they nor me knew that the photographs

would serve any other purposes than to preserve for future references the particular events and peoples in our lives. This may not be a good excuse, but it is the truth.

Another source of photographs was the Facebook page of the group, The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960-1980 Project. The group was put together by one Mr. Uchenna, a lawyer at Afriwest Partners, Wesley House, Marina, Lagos. The group focuses primarily on exchanging photographs of life-events in Nigeria from 1900 to 1980. As a ground rule, members must state the provenance of their submissions; write a brief biodata of their submission as well as how the photographs connect to the task of nation building in Nigeria. The group proved to be a treasure-trove of colonial and family photographs. I must state that notwithstanding being a member, I sought express permission of the various individuals and the group before using any of the photographs from the group. I placed a general notice of intent to use the photographs on the general page as well as wrote personally to individuals whose submissions I found important to my work. I got not just the group permission to use the photos, but also individuals' permission.

Although members assiduously tried to provide detailed background about who took these photographs, when (date, location, and time) and (in some cases) why; for some of the photographs, the details were not just available. However, these inadequacies should not in any way deter anyone from using these photographs for historical reconstructions, especially as it is a common knowledge in the discipline of history that no source of history is infallible. It is precisely for these kinds of problems that historians are advised to subject their sources to internal and external checks and to reconcile them with insights from other sources and disciplines. The inadequacies inherent in these photographs were adequately redressed by other sources and disciplines, also almost all the circumstances and events been illustrated by the photographs are still on-going among Yorùbá people. These make these inadequacies easily redressed. Where the circumstances and events were out of use, for instance, the use of facial marks, I assembled a number of artistic illustrations, most especially those done by C.L. Adeoye who wrote a little earlier. It is important to state that although Adeoye did not also tell us the

sources of his illustration other than to say how different facial marks and caps look like, I also grew up in Oyo Town in the 1970s, where facial marks and wearing of caps were common practices. In addition to this is the fact that during my elementary school days, I and others like me that were not given facial marks were at the receiving ends of taunts and jokes for being plain faced amidst a colony of students with facial marks. In addition, my parents also have facial marks. In addition to artistic illustration, I combined insights from travellers and missionary reports with these photos to show what had existed and what changes there were as well as that I did not invent them.

A few of the photographs, most especially one in Chapter Three, which depicted indigenous Yorùbá female dress, was derived from an online postcard. The postcard is available at [www.delcampe.net](http://www.delcampe.net). Details of where, who took these photographs, when (date, location, and time) and (in some cases) why were not available. However, the fact that they illustrate a particular Yorùbá dress that can be dated to a particular period in Yorùbá history is not contestable, especially in view of insights from other sources.

Of immense importance to this study are my lived experiences. As a Yorùbá, I grew up knowing, both by training and by experience, a number of things that relate to dress and identity among Yorùbá people. To illustrate with just an example, the concept of *Omoluabi* discussed in Chapter Two, and which formed the core of Yorùbá identity, remains an integral part of my upbringing from childhood. It remains a guiding light on my path into adulthood. On many occasions, my parents would admonish me on what is the proper way to behave, the proper way to dress, to talk, to walk, to sit, etc. Any infraction, depending on gravity, was either punished with the cane or a simple statement: “*Se eyi to se yi si ye o?* (Does that fit you?) Or *Omoluabi kan ki hu iwa be yen!* (No responsible Yorùbá man would behave that way!). This process of bringing up a child is common to all Yorùbá man and woman. The only difference relates solely to how much force parents apply to ensure that children abide by the training. I have either been taught or I have experienced a number of issues in this study that deal with how a Yorùbá man or woman ought to behave or conduct him or herself both in private and public. In this study, I do not just put these issues down based on my training and

experiences, but check their correspondence with what others experienced or were trained to know and appreciate. These were further compared to written and other sources (e.g. interviews) to ascertain their veracity. The use of this method therefore allows me to view the different issues discussed as both an insider and outsider.

Given the eclectic nature of the study, a number of qualifications need to be made on how these different primary sources were used in the study. Writing on the *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus, Wande Abimbola remarked that “*the subject-matter of ese Ifa is the whole range of Yorùbá thought and belief. There is no subject that cannot feature in ese Ifa*”.<sup>55</sup> He outlined some of the issues found in the corpus to include myths, histories of origins, medicine, magic, observations about nature as well as abstract and speculative philosophical issues. As a source for historical reconstruction, Abimbola, like Jan Vansina, warned that enormous problems exist in using *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus for historical reconstruction, as its psychological function and its aesthetic qualities distort the facts described. In addition, the kind of historical information transmitted by poetry is usually of a rather vague, generalized nature, and is often impossible to attribute to any definite period in the past. However, he went further to state that *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus can be used in historical writing because it gives indications of the psychological attitude adopted by certain people towards certain historical events. Notwithstanding the inherent problems noted by Abimbola, I found the problem of dating *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus very daunting, especially where such dating is essential to the analysis. Despite this and many other inherent problems, I found that *Ifa* divination poems offer historians invaluable insights into events, issues, etc. where written and, to some degree, oral evidence are lacking. Given its intangible nature, dress, especially where it is narrowly conceptualized, is perishable and therefore could not keep for so long. *Ifa* literary poems, in this particular example, serve as hints, hints that one finds invaluable, especially when corroborated by other sources like archival, archaeological and

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<sup>55</sup>Wande Abimbola, “The Literature of the Ifa Cult”, in Saburi O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, (Oxford, 1973), 45.

even written sources. The sheer fact that *Ifa* corpus were handed down from one generation to the other makes it indispensable to a study of this nature, especially since most people who could testify to dress and its usages over the long run are dead, sometimes without written records. *Ifa* corpus, thus, serves as indirect witnesses to the events they hinted about.

In this study, the provenance of dress, usages of dress, and the entire arguments on religious or esoteric use of dress among the different Yorùbá groups derived from such hints as could be garnered from the *Ifa* literary and divinatory poems. It must be emphasized that the conclusions were not an uncritical acceptance of the corpus, but a critical balancing of the hints with insights provided from other sources, such as from archaeology.

As it is done with *Ifa* corpus, so it is done with witty sayings, proverbs, anecdotes, folksongs, etc., all of which are used in this study. As I.O. Delano argued, Yorùbá proverbs are self-evident truths, which give the full gist of what one intended to say in an unmistakable and concise form and which drive home the point or circumstances being described in a short, but succinct form. A Yorùbá proverb illustrates the importance of proverbs and witty-sayings to historical reconstruction: *Owe l' Esin Oro, Oro l' Esin Owe; B'Oro ba sonu, Owe la fin wa* – A proverb is like a horse, which can carry one swiftly to the idea sought.<sup>56</sup> Eponymous names, *Oriki*, also proved to be invaluable material for this study. This is considered as very important, as throughout Yorubaland, no child is given a name without also being given an *Oriki*. This describes the child's character, or the especial circumstances of birth, or what is hoped for concerning the future of such child. *Oriki* are of three kinds: *Oriki Orile* (town's), *Oriki Idile* (family's) and individual's *Oriki* (individual's). *Oriki*, among the Yorùbá, are sung or performed as Ijala-Ode, the style of the hunter's guild; *ewi*, a peculiar style of the Egbado Yorùbá, the style of the Egungun of the *labala* group; *ege*, a style originally peculiar to Owu people, and *rara*; a style peculiar to Ibadan and Oyo, sung by men and women during festivals and celebrations and may be accompanied by drums, which can themselves be used

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<sup>56</sup> Delano I.O., "Proverb, Songs, and Poems", in Saburi O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, (Oxford, 1973), 77.

to perform Oriki.<sup>57</sup> Oriki records a man, or a town or a family's life and, like *Ifa* literary and divinatory corpus, they are passed down from generation to generation. They are therefore exposed to the same historiographical problems already discussed above. They nevertheless hold invaluable resources to historians and are therefore treated cautiously here and the various hints given were balanced with other insights from other sources.

Generally, secondary sources like journal articles, chapters in edited volumes, and encyclopedic entries were used in obtaining critical insights into what had been done in the literature, and to substantiate contentious issues, even in oral interviews and archival data. Given these wide ranging sources of data, to weave a readily understandable narrative, the analysis in this study focused primarily on content and context.

Combining these and many other sources like written, archival, and archaeological records together; this study is able to probe deeper than the surface, and into the crust of past events to yield-up the invaluable ore in Yorùbá sartorial history and unearth and salvage Yorùbá sartorial tradition beyond a mere consideration of a few items of dress, or a particular purpose of dress, as replete in extant literature, and to ascertain the main purpose of Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

#### **1.4. Theories of Identity and Dress**

Identity is a derivative from the Latin nouns *identitas*, which, in itself, derives from the Latin adjective, *idem* – meaning ‘the same’. Even in its Latin sense, identity is used in the comparative sense to emphasize the sharing, within a given social space, of a level of sameness or oneness with others. Used in this way, identity is both relative and contextual.

Identity, as an area of study, is a subject of interest to a number of other disciplines. In both Psychology and Sociology, identity is understood strictly in term of a person's conception and expression of individuality and group affiliations. In Philosophy, it is understood in term of the self. These and other disciplines have not only imposed their respective ethos and analytical imperatives

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<sup>57</sup> Ayorinde J.A., “Oriki”, in Saburi O. Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, (Oxford, 1973), 63.

on its study, they have also yielded up many and different theories. Among these many theories, this study shall limit itself to Individualistic or Personal Identity theory, Reductionist or Bundle theory, Social Identity theory, Self-Categorization theory and Elimination or No-self theory. Of these few, only one will be used as basis for analysis in this study so as to conserve space and weed-out avoidable digressions.

Personal or individualistic identity theory deals with the necessary and sufficient conditions under which an individual at one time and at another time can be said to be the same person. Among so many others, Eric Olson<sup>58</sup> and Derek Parfit<sup>59</sup> are two proponents of this theory. In the main, Olson argued that identity through time depends on human's continuous bodily existence. In other words, we exist because we are alive and in the same body, irrespective of time and space. Using thought experiment, Parfit however argued that possession of identical physical body at different time and space is not enough to justify identity; rather identity depends on the mind. In the same etiological reasoning, John Locke considered personal identity to be a subset of continuity of consciousness and not of material substance. According to Locke, we are the same person to the extent that we are conscious of our past and future thoughts and actions in the same way as we are conscious of our present thoughts and actions. In this way, personal identity becomes a subset of repeated act of consciousness.<sup>60</sup> As individual and as a group, identity is formed by our ability to call up our past and future thoughts and actions in relation to our present. A number of criticisms have followed this theory.

Although proponents of reductionism or bundle theory are many, David Hume pioneered the study by looking at the mind-body problem. As Hume argued, as humans, we think that we are the same persons that we were five years ago, although we have changed in many respects. Hume located human identity in his or her capacity to perceive and that, as humans, we are a bundle or

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<sup>58</sup> Eric Todd Olson, *The Human Animal: Personal Identity Without Psychology*, (UK, 1997).

<sup>59</sup> Derek Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, (UK, 1984).

<sup>60</sup> John Locke, *Of Ideas of Identity and Diversity*, (UK, 1964).

collection of different perceptions, which follow one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a state of perpetual flux and movement. So, in constant revolution of our ideas, our imagination moves from one idea to another, which resembles the previous idea to establish, what Hume called, bond and association. In bonding and associating, personal and group identity is born.

This view to identity tallies with those of Buddha, who conceives of the soul as a commonwealth that retains its identity by being composed of many different, related, and yet constantly changing elements. Identity, in this wise, is weaned through cohesion of our personal experiences, which depend on relation of causation, contiguity and resemblances.<sup>61</sup> From the above, individual and group identity derives from humans' collective past.

Social Identity theory and its further development, the Self-Categorization theory can be traced to Henri Tajfel and John Turner<sup>62</sup> who located personal and group identity as a subset of social relation within social spaces. According to the duo, social identity is that portion of an individual's self-concept that derived from being a member of a relevant social group. By introducing social identity, the duo carefully explains inter-group behaviour on the basis of perceived status, legitimacy and permeability of the inter-group environment.

As noted, social identity theory posits that human social behaviour will vary along a continuum between inter-personal and inter-group behaviour, where inter-personal behaviour is the total individual characteristic and relationships within a group. Inter-group behaviour, in the same vein, would comprise of all behavioural characteristics determined solely by the group. Other components of these theories are positive distinctiveness, which describes a situation whereby individual seeks to be distinct and

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<sup>61</sup> A.E. Piston, *Hume's Philosophy of the Self*, (USA, 1998).

<sup>62</sup> Turner John and Oakes Penny, "The Significance of the Social Identity Concept for Social Psychology with Reference to Individualism, Interactionism and Social Influence", *British Journal of Social Psychology*, vol. 25, No. 3, 1986, 237-252; Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C., "An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict", in W.G. Austin and S. Worchel (eds), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, (Monterey, 1979); Tajfel, H. and Turner, J.C., "The Social Identity Theory of Intergroup Behaviour", in S. Worchel and W.G. Austin (eds); *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, (Chicago, 1986).



seeks cohabitation with similar individuals; individual mobility, which describes a situation whereby individuals move within a society depending on the degree of openness or closeness of this society; social creativity and social competition, which also depend on how open or close a society is.

From these theories, we understand that identity, whether at the personal or group level, is predicated on relation of taxonomic sameness and difference within a social space. Identity is therefore relative and space-bound.

Elimination or No-self theory posits that the self cannot be reduced to a bundle because the concept of a self is incompatible with the idea of a bundle, which implies a notion of bodily or psychological relations that do not exist. James Giles, one of its major proponents, argued that there is no substantial self and all that we have is an evolutionary artifact.<sup>63</sup>

In sum, all these models describe human behaviour both as individuals and as members in a group. Although all these and other models offer invaluable insights into dress and identity in Yorubaland, only the social identity theory would be applied in this study. This is, as already noted, mainly to conserve space and to ensure limited digression from the main course of the study. This subsection will now turn to dress theories.

Owing to the multi-disciplinary nature of dress studies; different theories, concepts, and ideas have also been developed. Two key theories and concepts around which most of the arguments on dress and identity have been built are the biological and symbolic interaction theories. Essentially, these theories are based on the use of dress in human society.

The biological theory conceptualizes the use of dress as owing essentially to the need to provide for the human body. This need includes protection of the body from vagaries of nature, unauthorized (visual) intrusion and censorship, and the need to sustain efficient and effective functionality of body processes. The biological function could be negative or positive in their effects on the body. For instance, while the removal of a bad tooth may help reduce pain and odour, the same could disfigure human face and

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<sup>63</sup> James Gilles, *No Self to be Found: The Search for Personal Identity*, (USA, 1997).

lead to embarrassment. In addition, plastic surgery may help in fixing ailing or defective body parts while, at the same time, it could lead to death, as the example of Mrs. Stella Obasanjo, the late wife of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, a former Nigerian president, suggests or gradual or intense erosion of the body, as could be seen in Michael Jackson's nose-jobs. In other words, the biological function could negatively or positively affect the body.

In addition to the above, the biological theory conceptualizes dress as an interface between the micro-physical environment and the macro-physical environment. At the micro-physical level, dress interacts directly with the body. For instance, a woolen socks alters body temperature and provides heat in a way that helps body processes. In the same way, hand-gloves and eye-glasses, as mechanisms, increase the body's capabilities to perform tasks. Similarly, cloth interfaces between the human body and wind, sunlight, external visual intrusion etc. Proponents of this theory therefore argue that dress performs two functions: alterant of body processes as well as an interface between the body and its physical environment. As alterant of body processes, dress becomes a micro-physical environment and as an interface between the body and the macro-physical environment. It must be emphasized that some dress performs dual functions – serving as alterant and also as interface.

The symbolic interaction theory, which was propounded by George Herbert Mead, is a major sociological perspective that places emphasis on micro-scale social interaction, which is particularly important in subfields such as urban sociology and social psychology. Symbolic interactionism holds that people act toward things based on the meaning those things have for them; and that these meanings are derived from social interaction and modified through interpretations. As Mead argued, there are four main tenets of pragmatism. The first is that true reality does not exist "out there" in the real world; it "is actively created as we act in and toward the world. Secondly, people remember and base their knowledge of the world on what has been useful to them and are likely to alter what no longer "works." Thirdly, people define the social and physical "objects" they encounter in the world according to their use for them. Lastly, if we want to understand actors, we must base our understanding on what people actually

do. Three of these ideas are critical to symbolic interactionism, i.e. the focus on the interaction between the actor and the world; a view of both the actor and the world as dynamic processes and not static structures and the actor's ability to interpret the social world. Thus, to Mead and other symbolic interactionists, consciousness is not separated from action and interaction, but is an integral part of both.

Gregory P. Stone, applying the basic insight of Mead's symbolic interaction theory to dress and identity construction, noted that identity is established, maintained, and altered through communication. Dress, he noted, as a form of non-verbal communication, is a communicator of identity and values. He therefore argued that every social interaction must be broken down into two analytic components, appearance and discourse. Appearance, as Stone argued, is as just important for the establishment and maintenance of the self as is discourse. Therefore, the study of appearance provides a powerful lever for the formulation of a conception of the self. Appearance, as Stone noted, is communicated through non-verbal symbols or codes such as gestures, grooming, clothing, and location; while discourse is mainly verbal symbol. Non-verbal and verbal symbols, according to symbolic interaction theory, are both important to identity formation and establishment.

Stone, among others, argued that in communication encounters, dress and appearance are encountered by the audience before conversation of any kind can be initiated. Appearance, therefore, has a certain priority over discourse in establishing identity either of an individual or a group. From this theory, it can be argued that individuals and groups acquired identities through social interaction in various social, physical, and biological settings. Dress therefore announces social positions such as age, sex, religion, political affiliation, school, etc. of both the wearers and observers within specific interaction setting. Just as dress announces identity, identity can, in turn, announce dress. Although some identities are assigned at birth, some are socially acquired. Irrespective of when or how identity is acquired, it must be emphasized that body variations and modifications can establish, sustain, announce, and reinforce identities.

These two theories are important for understanding dress and identity in Yorubaland. Dress, among the Yorùbá, is a *sine qua non* to life. It is comparable to a bird trying to fly without wings. Yorùbá people believe that dress is a critical part of life and they go to a greater extent to dress appropriately and fashionably. As a social phenomenon, Yorùbá dress communicates age, sex, gender, social class, school affiliations, and religion. The meanings associated with dress depend on individual's subjective interpretations of dress. In addition, the meanings an individual attributes to various outward characteristic of dress are, in most cases, based on the individual's socialization within a particular socio-cultural environment. For instance, to most non-Moslems, the wearing of *hijab* by Moslems is an infringement on female's fundamental rights, whereas to Moslems groomed in the socio-cultural milieu that regarded such practice as a religious obligation, it was not.

Goffman, and Weigert, Teitge and Teitge argue that dress' overt function is to communicate identity and values through appearance and symbols.<sup>64</sup> As noted above, because dress is seen even before verbal communication takes place in social encounters, (dress) discourse has a certain priority over discourse in establishing identity. To this end, the Yorùbá adage says: *Bi a se rin ni a ko ni* (dress the way you want to be addressed). As noted in symbolic interaction theory, individuals acquire identity through social interaction; hence, individual Yorùbá people must dress in the way that conforms to the various social, physical, and biological settings or environment that they found themselves.

As the history of Yorùbá sartorial tradition chronicled in this study shows, the symbolic interplay of bodies and changing social experiences devolves on dress in different ways. Just as Masquelier offered vivid insight into the power of clothing to define identity in Muslim Mawri communities in Southern Niger, where spirits of the *bori* cult choose their hosts and mediums,

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<sup>64</sup> Stone G. P., 'Appearance and the Self' in Rose A. M. (ed.), *Human Behavior and the Social Process: An Integrationist Approach*, (New York, 1962), 86-118; Weigert A. J., Teitge J. S., and Teitge D. W. (eds.), *Society and Identity: Towards a Sociological Psychology*, (Cambridge, 1986); Goffman E., *Behavior in Public*, New York, 1971).

Renne's research on style interaction in Yorùbá ecclesiastical dress demonstrates how hand-woven textiles connected cloth and body, asserting an African identity that is also Roman Catholic. In Cherubim and Seraphim churches (African Independent Churches), church leaders' visions and dreams inspire creativity in clothing designs, tailored by church members to reflect aesthetic aspects of belief and practice. Wearing visionary garments, almost as a souvenir from another world, church leaders emphasize their otherworldly connections and supernatural abilities in material terms.

Among the Yorùbá, communal or uniform dress, popularly called *Aso-Egbe-Jo-Da* or *Aso Ebi*, are worn at occasions mostly by groups and family members. More often than not, this communal dress not only signifies the importance of the celebration or occasion necessitating their use, but also communicates the identities of the wearers. Just as a policeman needs not carry guns, tear-gas, and baton to announce his presence, his uniform and the various epaulets attached to the uniform communicates not only his identity as an officer of the law but also his status in the police force. The same goes for soldiers and any other private or public office-holder using official uniform. As noted with the example of a police officer, uniforms communicate not only identity and status but also power and authority. For instance, the mere presence of a policeman at the scene of a crime not only signifies state-presence but also state-power to exert compliance. The policeman needs not use guns, tear-gas, and baton to exert compliance, as the various stakeholders in the social interaction space mutually understand and recognize not the personality of the police officer but his/her uniform as a representative of state power and authority. Notwithstanding this, dress is linked to individual and/or group identities. In fact, identities are believed to be communicated by dress, as well as by the material and social objects (other people) that contribute meaning to the social spaces of interaction.

The above examples, among many, illustrate that dress functions both in protecting the body as well as in communicating socially defined values. In both cases, it must be noted that dressing differently than cultural norms prescribe may provoke politically charged reactions, as Bastian (1996) described for

southeastern Nigerian women's adoption of the Hausa-style tunic on top of wrappers or trousers. The same issue was pursued further by Nielsen (1979) in her work on Nigerian female 'Alhajis' and entrepreneurship. Experimenting with elite dress from the Muslim northern Nigeria that politicians and businessmen took up in the wake of the 1970s oil boom, women created their own dress practice, as young male tailors used colours, fabrics, and accessories to subvert the dress aesthetic associated with chiefly rank in their hierarchically, male-dominated society. This example, among other things, illustrates that other than protecting and communicating values, dress also has power, which when deployed can be as potent as existential power and authority.

An individual can occupy a number of social positions and thus exudes a number of identities all of which contribute to his/her total self-configuration. As Stone affirmed, individuals acquire identities when they are '*cast in the shape of a social object by the acknowledgement of his (sic) participation or membership in social relations*'.<sup>65</sup> It can be argued, therefore, that individuals communicate identities as individuals and as members of social relations. As individuals or as members of social relations; individuals could determine, modify, or alter their identities within specific social contexts. These negotiations of identities derive from the deliberate communication of individual's self-identity through dress, described as 'program' by Stone, and other people's appraisal of the individual's program, otherwise known as 'review'.<sup>66</sup> On the basis of their experience through time and with other people; individuals develop, in advance of social interaction, notions of how other people are likely to react to their dress (review). Where such notion corresponds with others' reactions; the projected identities (program) are validated, which ultimately leads to satisfactory social interaction. Where the notion differs from other's reactions; negative reviews follow.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Stone G. P., 'Appearance and the Self' in Rose A. M. (ed.), *Human Behavior and the Social Processes: An Interactionist Approach*. (New York, 1962), 93.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 94.

<sup>67</sup> Mary Ellen Roach-Higgins, Joanne B. Eicher and Kim K. P. Johnson (eds.), *Dress and Identity*, 13.

Although the biological function of dress is equally important, the social function of dress, i.e. dress as communicator of values, remains the overarching theoretical imperative driving this study. The biological function of dress is commonplace in all human community and, essentially, cannot explain the varieties of dress, let alone their uses and changes that they have witnessed over time, especially in Yorubaland. It is on account of the above that this study limits itself to the social function of dress in Yorubaland. Essentially, the arguments in the study are weaved around these five basic questions:

- (i) What values do the Yorùbá people project when they dress?
- (ii) Why do the Yorùbá people dress the way they dress?
- (iii) When do the Yorùbá people dress the way they dress?
- (iv) What predictive value(s) are inherent in the way the Yorùbá people dress?
- (v) How do the Yorùbá people project these values through their dress?

At the heart of these questions is the need to know the value(s) Yorùbá dress projects and the conscious or unconscious efforts made by these people to modify, alter, and enhance these values. In relation to other people; the study seeks to know the uniqueness of Yorùbá dress that marks both the dress and the Yorùbá people out from others. History, as it is generally known, is about change and continuity. Generally, dress scholarship has focused on changes in clothing practices through complex socioeconomic and political transformations set into motion by shifting local and Western economic and military dominance and, more recently, by processes of globalization. Hence, by examining issues such as (i) the origin of dress and dress culture in Yorubaland; (ii) the developments in dress culture in Yorubaland; (iii) the political economy of dress in Yorubaland; (iv) colonial rule, Christianity, Western education and dress in Yorubaland; and (v) naturalistic self-image: European versus Nigerian concept, etc., the study shall show, in sharp relief, what changed and what endured.

### **1.5. Setting and Structure of the Study**

This study is set in Yorubaland, Southwest Nigeria. In pre-colonial Nigeria, the area was a home to a number of people who, although sharing a common ancestry from Ile-Ife and a common eponymous father - Oduduwa, had different political authorities and went by different names. The area constituted Western Region during the colonial period. However, in post-independence period, most especially during the military autocracy that abolished regions and established states all over Nigeria, the area has been divided into eight states: Ekiti, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Kwara, Kogi, and Lagos states.

While Yorùbá people abound in other parts of Africa, notably in Benin Republic, Brazil, Cuba, etc., this study however focuses primarily on the Yorùbá people of Nigeria. Although dress has a longer antiquity in Yorubaland, this study takes 1880 as a take-off time for the examination of the phenomenon of dress in the construction of Yorùbá ethno-national identity. Notwithstanding the date, the study however adopts a long term historical perspective to weave a narrative that, on the one hand, situates dress as a peculiar human behaviour, which could not be denied, and, on the other hand, examines the role of dress in the construction of Yorùbá ethnic identity, especially in the face of different developments such as Islam, Christianity, colonialism, and Western education.

1880 is a convenient starting point for this study, as it marks the coalescing of the debates on dress and culture in Nigeria vis-à-vis Africa, the official celebration of the emancipation of slaves in Brazil, separation of Lagos from the Gold Coast, the silver wedding anniversary of Queen Victoria, the Queen of England in whose name Britain held Empires across Africa; and burial of King Dosumu of Lagos. All these events mark 1880 as a year of great events that involved all manners of dress – indigenous, traditional, and Western. 1980, which is the terminal period preferred for the study, marks the hundred years of the various events already mentioned above and therefore offers a *longe duree* perspective on the place of dress in the construction of personal/individual and group identities of Yorùbá people.



Besides this introductory chapter, which sets out the basic objectives of the research and other essential components, the study has six other chapters. Chapter Two examines Yorùbáness and the role of dress in Yorùbá essence and innateness. In Chapter Three, Four, and Five, the study examines Yorùbá dress from the pre-colonial, through colonial to contemporary period. The focus of these three chapters is change and continuity in Yorùbá dress and how these changes impact on Yorùbá identity as a group and in its relationship with other groups in Nigeria. Chapter Six examines the use of dress in expressing power and hegemony and how these have played out and what sort of responses have followed. The chapter illustrates the social content of dress, as expression of individual and group identity. Chapter Seven concludes the study by teasing together the various findings from the analysis in the different chapters.

## Chapter Two

### Yorùbáness and Dress

#### 2.0. Introduction

Although the term “Yorùbá” is of recent origin, being a colonial and missionary creation; the sense of kinship, group solidarity, language, and common culture to which the term refers is a very old one. Yorùbá, a generic word, with variety of meanings, has been used to describe a people, the Yorùbá people; their land, the Yorubaland; their culture, the Yorùbá culture; and their language, the Yorùbá language. As a people, Yorùbá refers to the people living in South-western Nigeria, a people of different pre-colonial nation-states or political groupings but with common language, customs, traditions, etc. that are mutually comprehensible in spite of differences in dialects and other socio-cultural characteristics. These people, the land they occupy, their culture and innateness are all described by, at the least, the nineteenth century, as Yorùbá.

At yet another level, the people often describe their behaviours and idiosyncrasies as being characteristically Yorùbá. When, in a gathering, a person makes a brilliant speech or conducts him or herself in ways that are lofty and commendable; others are quick to commend: *O k' are omo Yorùbá atata* (Good conduct, true-born Yorùbá). Similarly, when anyone behaves in the most unbecoming manner, Yorùbá are also quick to say: *o 'fi Yorùbá han* (He or she has demonstrated that he is Yorùbá). It is this eclectic use of the term that makes it difficult to conceptualize even by the Yorùbá people themselves.

Notwithstanding the eclectic nature of the term, this study conceptualizes Yorùbá in the sense of a people, a language, a culture, and a land. The whole enterprise in this chapter aims at how these four items - a people, a language, a culture, and a land - have helped individuals and groups in Yorubaland to build their self-perceptions, both as individuals and as members of a group, and how this self-perception is expressed, especially through dress.

## **2.1. Constructiveness and Innateness of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

This section examines the construction and innateness of Yorùbá ethnic identity in Nigeria. In order to do this, the section is divided into three subsections. The first briefly conceptualizes ethnicity. Given the saliency of ethnicity to the discussion in this chapter, a brief exposition of what constitutes ethnicity is deemed necessary. The second subsection looks at Yorùbá ethno-genesis while the third subsection attempts to locate Yorùbá ethnicity within the larger construct of ethnicity in Nigeria. Common to the discussions in the various subsections is how materials, such as dress, distinguish one ethnic group from others in Nigeria.

### **2.1.1. Ethnicity: A Brief Exposition**

The term ethnicity, derived from the Greek word, *ethnos*, a synonym for gentiles, refers to non-Christian and non-Jewish pagan or barbarians. Homer used it to describe a band of friend, *ethnos hetairon*, *ethnos Luikon*, a tribe of Lycians, and *ethnos melisson* or *ornithon*, a swarm of bees or birds. Aeschylus called the Persians *an ethnos*, Pindar spoke of the *ethnos aneron* or *gunaikon*; a race of men or women, Herodotus spoke of the *Medikon ethnos*; the Median people and Plato of *ethnos kerukikon*; a caste of heralds. Common to these usages is the idea of a number of people, animals, or things who share some cultural or biological characteristics and who live and act in concert. In its most modern usage, the term connotes “otherness”, that is the tendencies to characterize and differentiate other people as different from one’s group, as seen in non-Greeks versus Greeks, understood broadly as people at the peripheral of Greece – foreign barbarians -, as *ethnea* while the Greeks referred to themselves as *genos Hellenon* or the Latin’s description of others as *natio* and themselves as *populous*. It is in the same way as the British and Americans describe their different societies as *nations* and others, especially of immigrant population, as *ethnic* societies or communities. The sense of non-ethnic ‘us’ versus ethnic ‘others’ is subsumed in the term, ethnicity.

Ethnic identity refers to an individual’s identification with a culturally defined collectivity, a sense on the part of an individual that she or he belongs to a particular cultural community that shares some cultural, biological and social characteristics, which

differentiate 'them' from 'others'. The biological aspect of the shared characteristics gives ethnic origin a sense of ancestry and nativity.

Conceptually, ethnic community or group has four levels of incorporation: (i) ethnic category, which could be real or perceived, or a cultural difference between a named group and outsiders, and a sense of boundary between them; (ii) ethnic network, which describes regular interaction between ethnic members such that the network can distribute resources among its members; (iii) ethnic association, whereby members develop common interests and political organizations to express these common interests at a collective or corporate level; and (iv) ethnic community, which possesses a permanent, physically bounded territory, over and above its political organizations.

From the above, ethnic community is a community where members interact regularly and have common interests and organization at a collective level. In other words, ethnic community is a collectivity within a larger society having real or putative common ancestry, memories of a shared historical past, and a cultural focus on one or more symbolic elements defined as epitome of their peoplehood. Examples of such symbolic elements could include kinship patterns, physical contiguity, religious affiliation, language or dialect forms, tribal affiliation, nationality, phenotypical features, dress, etc. or any combination of these.

Essentially, the following features are exhibited by ethnic groups: (i) a common proper name, to identify and express the 'essence' of the community; (ii) myths of common ancestry, a myth (rather than a fact) that includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and that gives an ethnic group a sense of fictive kinship; (iii) shared historical memories, including heroes, events, and their commemorations; (iv) one or more elements of common culture, which need not be specified but normally include religion, customs, or language; (v) link with a homeland, not necessarily its physical occupation by the ethnic group, but a symbolic attachment to the ancestral land, as with diaspora peoples; and (vi) a sense of solidarity on the part of the population.

The features above bring out the importance of shared myths and memories in the definition of ethnic group and the subjective identification of individuals with the community.

Without the shared myths and memories, including myths of origin and election, and the sense of solidarity they engender, we would be speaking of an ethnic category rather than a community. The second key element is the orientation of the past: to the origins and ancestors of the community and to its historical formation, including its 'golden ages', the periods of its political, artistic, or spiritual greatness. The destiny of an ethnic community is bound up with its ethno-history, with its own understanding of a unique, shared past.

Evidence of ethnicity had existed in the Middle East from the Third Millennium BC, especially with the advent of ancient Egyptians, Sumerians, and Elamites. Ethnic migrations, invasions, and conflicts that characterized the Middle East resulted from contacts with European ethnic groups who attempted to dominate other *ethnies*. These include the Greeks, Jews, Babylonians, Assyrians and Persians. Under the Hellenistic Roman empires, ethnic elites were encouraged to adopt Greek and Roman mores and to participate in its social and political institutions, although ethnic prejudice remained widespread.<sup>68</sup>

In the Far East, outlines of ethnicity could be discerned in China, Japan and Korea. Although the ethnic compositions of social life and political orders in South and South-East Asia were not clear enough, it must be noted that in Java, modern day Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, and Vietnam; a sense of common ethnicity based on Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam existed from the medieval period. With renewed migrations of Indo-European peoples into Europe under the late Roman Empire, ethnically based kingdoms emerged in what is now France (Franks), Spain (Visigoths), Italy (Lombards), Germany (Saxons), and England (Anglo-Saxons, and later Scandinavia (Viking kingdoms) and Hungary (Magyars). These ethnic groups formed prototypes for medieval kingdoms of France, Spain, England, Denmark, Sweden, and Hungary, which formed cultural basis of subsequent contemporary nations. In Eastern Europe, Slavic-speaking peoples

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<sup>68</sup> Sherwin-White, *Racial Prejudice in Imperial Rome*, (London, 1967); Balsdon J. P. V. D., *Romans and Aliens*, (Chapel Hill, 1979); Finley M.I., *Ancient History: Evidence and Models*, (USA, 1986); Mendels Doron, *The Rise and Fall of Jewish Nationalism*, (USA, 1992).

settled and became differentiated in the early medieval period into familiar ethnic communities and states of today – Croatia, Poland, Serbia, Bulgaria, Kiev, Muscovy – that are the basis for contemporary nation-states.<sup>69</sup>

However, in medieval Africa and Latin America, the fluidity and fragility of empires ostensibly prevented the emergence of ethnically based polities, and made the impact of ethnicity on socio-political life difficult to understand.<sup>70</sup> In contemporary world, especially with the appearance of modern bureaucratic state and capitalism, ethnic communities take on a new socio-political importance, while in older empires, ethnic identity played passive roles. In contemporary world, there is no room for ethnic autonomy that conflicted with the requirements for all citizens to integrate into the new nation-states. Political ideology of contemporary world is that all members of the nation-state must be united and homogenous; a requirement that is generating conflicts in states that are composed of many ethnic communities.<sup>71</sup> Owing to current ideology about ethnicity, many regard ethnic identity as a mere symbol, whereas others regard it, especially given ethnic identity revivals in the West and former Soviet Union, as demonstrating economic and political potentials of ethnic loyalties. Diaspora communities, especially those that engage in overseas vicarious nationalism, are also seen in this light.

In post-colonial non-western societies, ethnicity played important roles in state formations and distribution of resources in states. In Africa, for instance, the colonialists drew the national boundaries of various African states without any consideration for

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<sup>69</sup> Seton-Watson Hugh, *Nations and States: An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism*, (London, 1977); Spoonley P., “The Political Economy of Labour Migration: An Alternative to the Sociology of ‘Race’ and ‘Ethnic Relations’ in New Zealand”, *Journal of Sociology*, 21:1 (1985) 3-26; Reynolds Farley, “Two steps forward and two back? Recent changes in the social and economic status of blacks” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 8:1 (1985), 4-28; Llobera Josep R., *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe*, (USA, 1994).

<sup>70</sup> Roland Oliver and Anthony Atmore, *Africa Since 1800*, (Cambridge, 1981); Lapidus Ira M., *A History of Islamic Societies*, (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>71</sup> McNeill, William H., *Poly-ethnicity and National Unity in World History*, (Toronto, 1985).

pre-colonial ethnic cleavages. It then prosecuted ethnic classification, which required some ethnic communities to play special roles in the new colonial polities orchestrated by colonialism. While the Tutsis were given more latitudes in socio-economic and political engineering of the Rwandan state; in Nigeria, it was the Hausa-Fulani that were regarded as leader-ethnic group.

This development, immediately after independence, began to breed competition, especially for power, between the various ethnic groups using ethnic constituencies and symbols as their foundations for mass support. In Africa, Asia as well as in parts of Europe, ethnicity continues to divide nation-states, most notably, along religious and linguistic lines. As Martin N. Marger, citing Furnivall and Smith, had argued, ethnicity has also become allied to issues of 'race', especially in the so-called 'plural societies'.<sup>72</sup>

The prospect for ethnicity in the third millennium appears uncertain. On the one hand, homogenizing tendencies of advanced and industrialized nation-states leave little space for 'sub-national' ethnic identities.<sup>73</sup> On the other hand, ethnicity has become a residual category for people to fall back on when other projects and loyalties are found wanting; thereby withdrawing ethnicity from the folkloristic societal margins that globalization, industrialization and contemporary economic trends had pushed it to. Melucci argued that while globalization and industrialization may appear to be pushing ethnic identity to the background, in reality, recent advances in global trade, electronic communications and information technology are actually evolving 'sub-national' groups with dense cultural networks in 'post-industrial' societies. These revitalized ethnic ties are helping to sustain interaction networks in the face of the depersonalizing, bureaucratic structures of late modernity, and the need for distinctive cultural and psychological ethno-national conceptions by socio-political and

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<sup>72</sup> Martin N. Marger, *Race and Ethnic Relations: American and Global Perspectives*, (USA, 2006).

<sup>73</sup> Gellner Ernest, *Nations and Nationalism (New Perspectives on the Past)*, (Cornell, 1983).

economic elite in advanced societies.<sup>74</sup> Invariably, ethnicity remains a critical part of contemporary nation-states.

### 2.1.2. Yorùbá Ethno-Genesis

In Nigeria, there are over 250 ethnic groups, each with its own *proper name*, which identifies and expresses the *essence* of the community. Yorùbá, Igbo, Hausa, Tiv, Fulani, Igala, Edo, Itsekiri, Urhobo, Epira, Anag, etc. are some notable examples. As far as the Yorùbá ethnic group is concerned, and like other ethnic groups, a myth rather than a fact of common ancestry, which includes the idea of a common origin in time and place and which gives Yorùbá people a sense of fictive kinship or a super-family, exists around Oduduwa and Ile-Ife.

There are two traditions on the origin of Yorùbá people. The first claimed that ancient Ile-Ife was founded by God, *Olodumare*, who sent a celestial band from the heavens to earth through the infernal chains. At the head of this band were Orunmila (a.k.a. Agbomiregun), Oduduwa, and a number of others. From the heavens, this band of people was given a cock and a sack of cloth containing sand, iron, and palm kernel. The group could however not land on earth, as it was filled with primordial waters. At the behest of Orunmila, they poured the content of the sack on the waters and the cock was let loose to scatter the sand on the face of the waters. The spot, Ile-Ife, was the first home of humans and it was from this spot that other humans migrated to other parts of the world. Oduduwa was the political and administrative head of this community of people while Orunmila, the founder of *Ifa*, was their spiritual leader. Stories such as the above are not peculiar to Yorubaland, as the Bayajidda myth with emphasis on Daura is the equivalent of Oduduwa and Ile-Ife myth among the Hausa-Fulani. Similar stories about mythical personages and locations also exist among other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

On the other hand was the tradition that the Yorùbá migrated to their present location from somewhere in Arabia. N.A.

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<sup>74</sup> Yoshino Kosaku, *Cultural Nationalism in Contemporary Japan*, (USA, 1992); Melucci, Alberto, *Nomads of the Present: Social Movements and Individual Needs in Contemporary Society*, (Philadelphia, 1989).



Fadipe, quoting Captain Clapperton, who adduced Sultan Belo of Sokoto as his source, noted that:

*...the inhabitants of this province (Yarba), it is supposed, originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the west of Africa, was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yarrooba, son of Kahtan, out of Arabia to the Western coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot they advanced into the interior of Africa till they reached Yarba, where they fixed their residence. On their way they left in every place they stopped a tribe of their own people. Thus, it is supposed that all the tribes of the Soudan who inhabit the mountains originated from them, as also are the inhabitants of Yaory. Upon the whole the people of Yarba are nearly of the same description as those of Noofee (Nupee).<sup>75</sup>*

A number of archaeological evidence from Ile-Ife testify to the long existence of the city; however little or nothing in the evidence corroborates any of these grand stories. Although a number of traditions and re-enactments exist in Ile-Ife today celebrating both accounts, nevertheless, besides oral tradition, no evidence supports the dropping of human beings from the sky and the story could as well be an attempt by the aboriginal Yorùbá to give their origin some mythical interpretation. The second account, which sounds possible, also lacks credibility, as no evidence exists anywhere in Arabia of such a migration or a people. This point is made stronger by the fact that writing developed in Arabia a long time ago and an event of such magnitude could not have escaped the attention of Arabian writers of the period. As far as this study is concerned, the two accounts are considered as metaphorical ways through which Yorùbá people explain important things, which may not necessarily be historical facts. Or, can we believe any of these accounts just as we know (and believe) that Nigeria became independent from British Imperialism in 1960?

Despite the above, it was from Ile-Ife that other Yorùbá groups and cities, led by different men (princes) who created

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<sup>75</sup> Fadipe N.A., *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*, (Nigeria, 1991), 31.

dynasties for themselves where they went, were believed to have dispersed. Falola, like so many others, noted that Yorùbá identity is inexorably linked to the historical connection of the different Yorùbá peoples and groups to Ile-Ife both as the city where the Yorùbá originated from and also as the city where their political dynasties obtained their rights to rule.<sup>76</sup> He went further to warn that although both historical and linguistic evidence on the Yorùbá offer very bold interpretations, their conclusions are nevertheless conjectural.<sup>77</sup> For instance, the above passage from Fadipe, which was also reported by Samuel Johnson,<sup>78</sup> not only summarizes the tradition that claimed that the Yorùbá were immigrants, who settled at Ile-Ife, but also chronicles the origin of Yorùbá people in other places other than Southwestern Nigeria and anywhere in Africa. Furthermore, the tradition briefly explains how places that are designated as Yorubaland today are populated, how settlements were created and dynasties established, and, if one may add, how Yorùbá identity was established.

It has been argued that Yorùbá people have not described themselves, their language, and their land as Yorùbá people, Yorubaland, or Yorùbá culture, but that the different groups that made-up contemporary Yorubaland were, until the closing quarters of the nineteenth century, independent of one another and, as such, went by their different names such as Oyo, Ijebu, Ife, Ondo, Sabe, etc. While this is incontestable, Akinjogbin however maintained that the different polities recognized each other as a commonwealth of related brothers/kingdoms.<sup>79</sup>

Although the two accounts above talked about a people known as Yorùbá people, the accounts were however silent on the provenance of the name, 'Yorùbá', itself. What name did the early or proto-Yorùbá people bear? In providing answers to this question, J.D.Y. Peel noted the colonial, Christian and transnational dimensions of the name, both as individual identity or group

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<sup>76</sup> Toyin Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.), *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (New York, 2006), 30.

<sup>77</sup> Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>78</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorates*, (Lagos, 1920), 3-12.

<sup>79</sup> Akinjogbin I.A., *Milestones and Concepts in Yorùbá History and Culture*, (Ibadan, 2002), 8.

identity. The fact is that, he noted, “...*the person who has the best claim to be considered the proto Yorùbá – in the sense of being the first Yorùbá effectively to so ascribe himself, namely Samuel Ajayi Crowther, was also the first Yorùbá Christian of any significance*”. Furthermore and most significantly, Peel pointed out the absence of:

*...evidence that the Yorùbá-speaking peoples, despite the affinities of their dialects, their shared customs, and their widespread traditions of origin from Ife, used an all-embracing name for themselves in their homeland, where the “others” were the speakers of other Yorùbá dialects, Egba to Ijebu, Ijesha to Oyo. But it is telling that a common name based on linguistic and cultural resemblances did emerge wherever the Yorùbá were in diaspora, and the others were Igbo, Kongo, or Mandinka. Lukumi in Cuba, Nago in Brazil ...and Aku in Sierra Leone ...<sup>80</sup> (Emphasis added).*

On the strength of Peel’s analysis, it can be argued that the designation of a collective name, Yorùbá, resulted from the slave trade, particularly in Sierra Leone. Here a linguistically defined category emerged to describe and embrace all the Yorùbá-speaking groups. This linguistically defined category was “Aku”, derived from the Yorùbá mode of greeting, *o* (or *e*) *ku*.<sup>81</sup> For instance, Benjamin Isaac Pratt’s memorial tablet in Sierra Leone reads: “*a native of the Ifeh section of the Aku tribe*”. It must be asserted that *Aku* referred not only to people from Ife division, but to the entire Yorùbá-speaking peoples. Writing specifically on this, S.W. Koelle recognized twelve different dialects, which were broadly classified and referred to as *Aku*. He however remarked further that:

*Aku was not the historical name by which these numerous tribes are united in one nation; but it is retained here because the historical name is not known at present... The*

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<sup>80</sup> Peel J. D. Y., *Religious Encounter and The Making of the Yorùbá*, (USA, 2006), 283-284.

<sup>81</sup> Peel J. D. Y., “The Cultural Work of Yorùbá Ethnogenesis”, in Tonkin E., McDonunbiu Chapman M. (eds.) *History and Ethnicity*, (USA, 1989), 198-215.

*missionaries of the country ought to search after the proper national name of the whole Aku country. For the last few years they have erroneously made use of the name 'Yorùbá' in reference to the whole nation...*<sup>82</sup>

The name, Yorùbá, which was later adopted by the missions to describe the people, land, culture, and language of the people, was, indeed, of Hausa origin. Why the mission adopted this Hausa name, as Peel reasoned, was because it was used by earliest missionaries and travellers, most notably Clapperton, the Landers, Bowdich, and Dupius, whose language of business with the people of the interior, both in Nigeria and Kumasi, between 1829 and 1832 was Hausa.<sup>83</sup> However, in a more concrete term, the name, Yorùbá, was first used to describe the Yorùbá people by Samuel Ajayi Crowther in 1844 when he opened the first Yorùbá service in Freetown.

Writing specifically about the land, Yorubaland, Toyin Falola noted that the '*modern map consigns the Yorùbá to the southwestern part of Nigeria*'.<sup>84</sup> Falola's conceptualization, it must be emphasized, applies only to Yorùbá people in Nigeria alone. As Falola himself had noted, there are other Yorùbá people in other places outside Nigeria, which this conceptualization did not take into consideration. I.A. Akinjogbin, also writing on Yorubaland, captured the problems of locating the Yorùbá within a particular geographical landscape in his narration of a personal experience thus:

*...recently, among a group of highly educated and intelligent people, we were talking about those to be invited to a Pan-Yorùbá cultural festival. Everybody quickly agreed that all the eight Yorùbá-speaking states in Nigeria should be included as a matter of routine. Then, some suggested, inviting people from Ketu, Sabe and Idaisa in the Republic of Benin and promptly came an opposing view*

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<sup>82</sup> Koelle S. W. (1854), *Polyglotta Africana*, (revised edition and introduction Hair P.E.H. and Dalby D.), (Graz, 1963), 5.

<sup>83</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 283.

<sup>84</sup> Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', 29.

*from among the audience that those are foreigners because they are in French-speaking countries.*<sup>85</sup>

Two important observations could be made from this narration. On the one hand, it shows how much colonial acculturation has alienated the different Yorùbá groups from one another.<sup>86</sup> On the other hand, it shows that, even in Yorubaland, understanding of the exact geographical location of Yorùbá people is fluid.

Falola noted further that ‘southwestern Nigeria’ (see map below) ‘*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*’.<sup>87</sup>

He argued that the map is true to the extent of describing where ‘*majority of the Yorùbá population now lives...*’<sup>88</sup> He went further to state that the colonial map failed to incorporate other Yorùbá people in other places in West Africa and the diaspora.<sup>89</sup> N.A. Fadipe claimed that Yorubaland ‘*... lies between the parallels 5.36<sup>0</sup> and 9.22<sup>0</sup> north, and between 2.65<sup>0</sup> and 5.72<sup>0</sup> east*’. The southern boundary of which is the Bight of Benin, and extends from the eastern limit of Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) on the west to the Western border of the Kingdom of Benin (in Nigeria) to the east. On its eastern end, Yorubaland is bounded by the territory of the same kingdom, and by the Niger River up to Etobe, at about 7.3<sup>0</sup>. From this point, the boundary is in a north-westerly direction, along a straight line drawn rather arbitrarily to meet 9<sup>0</sup> of latitude immediately due south of Jebba.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

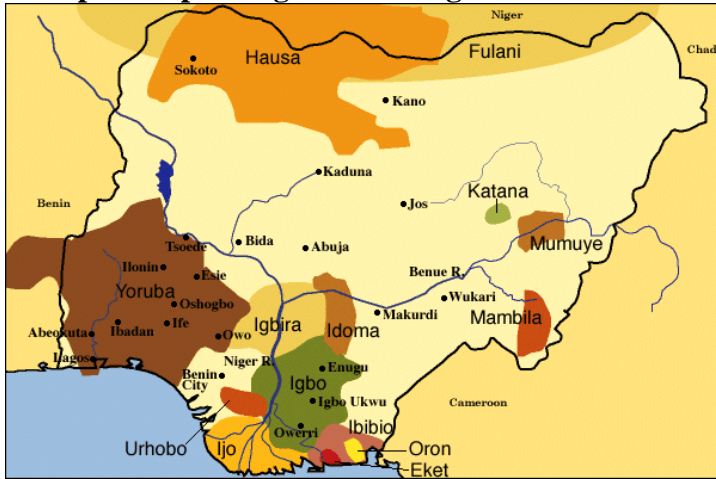
<sup>87</sup> Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, 29.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid*. p. 29.

<sup>89</sup> Toyin Falola and Matt Childs (eds.), *The Yorùbá Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, (Bloomington, 2005).

<sup>90</sup> Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*, 21.

**Map I: Map of Nigeria showing Yorubaland**



Source: <http://www.uiowa.edu/~africart/toc/countries/Nigeria.html>

Falola, using Nigeria's colonial inherited map as a reference, described the same areas thus: *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. He noted further that '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'*.<sup>91</sup>

Fadipe noted that this geographical boundary is not absolute, as there are many Yorùbá people whose villages and towns overlap into the territories bounding these geographical areas. Fadipe stated further that other villages and towns belonging to Yorùbá neighbours could also be found within the areas delineated as belonging to the Yorùbá.<sup>92</sup> It is therefore instructive to concede the point that the geographical location of Yorùbá people as depicted in modern maps, both colonial and post-colonial, takes into consideration the areas where Yorùbá people are the majority inhabitants.

The peoples who found themselves within the above geographical location include the Egbado, Awori, Ijebu, Ilaro,

<sup>91</sup> Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', 29.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 21.

Igbokoda, etc. of Abeokuta and Ijebu divisions; the Gbongan, Ife, Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, etc. of Oyo division; the Otun, Ado, Ikole, Efon, Ikale, Ondo, Idoko, Ilaje, etc. of Ondo division; the Yagba, Igbomina, Ilorin, etc. of Ilorin and Kabba divisions.<sup>93</sup>

An important qualification arising from this conceptualizing is that Yorùbá diasporas must therefore include those within Nigeria but outside southwestern Nigeria. This qualification derives justification from this passage from Fadipe:

*...for the last few years the name 'Yorùbá' has been very erroneously made use of in reference to the whole nation, supposing the Yorùbá is the most powerful Aku tribe. But this appellation is liable to far greater objection than that of 'Aku' and ought to be forthwith abandoned, for it is in the first place unhistorical, having never been used of the whole Aku nation by anybody except for the last few years conventionally by the Missionaries.*<sup>94</sup>

Besides attesting to the presence of other Yorùbá people(s) outside southwestern part of Nigeria, the above passage also confirms that the name 'Yorùbá' is of recent provenance, being a missionary creation during the colonial period; and that the entire Yorùbá people could have preferred to be called 'Aku' before the nineteenth century. Unarguably, while the entire Yorùbá nation, before the colonial intrusion, knew themselves as *Aku* and not Yorùbá; the various Yorùbá groups in southwestern part of Nigeria were, from the colonial intrusion, called Yorùbá.

Akinjogbin, earlier mentioned, differentiated between Yorùbá cultural areas and Yorùbá land areas. He noted; '*we will attempt to show the extent of the Yorùbá cultural area...inside Nigeria, the eight states of Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, Kwara and Kogi states present very little problems*' in being qualified as Yorùbá land areas while Yorùbá groups in '*the kingdom of Ketu, Sabe, Idaisa, ...in the Republic of Togo, the*

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<sup>93</sup> Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*, 29.

<sup>94</sup> *Church Missionary Intelligencer*, January 1856, cited in Fadipe N.A., *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*, 29.

*people of Atakpame, the Yanturuku and the Oku-oku are bona-fide Yorùbá speaking people occupying Yorùbá territories’.*<sup>95</sup>

Traditional accounts have mentioned the Edo people as also a stock of Yorùbá, especially Jacob Egharevba’s accounts.<sup>96</sup> However, recent oral accounts that are re-interpretations of the traditional accounts have controverted the claim.<sup>97</sup> Also included in the list of Yorùbá areas are the territories of the Kaba, Bunu, Owe, Igala, and Nupe peoples. In fact, Saburi Biobaku argued that it was from Nupe that the Yorùbá spread to the southwestern parts of Nigeria.<sup>98</sup> Other areas included are Ebira (Igbira), Egun, the Ewe, the Aja or the Arada (all in the Republic of Benin), the Gaa, the Krobo and the Adangbe (all in Ghana).<sup>99</sup>

Peel painted a clear picture of how previously fragmented nations transformed into one focal point of narrative and political force. Terence Ranger’s apt description of how colonial Africa continued the European tradition of inventing traditions that have flowered greatly in the 1870s Europe, in the 1880s and 1890s is an apt description for the creation of a Yorùbá identity out of numerous identities. Other studies have also pointed to the contribution of the Yorùbá Diaspora, Brazil in particular, in creating strong Yorùbá identity in Yorubaland. Luis Nicolau Pares, for example, pointed to the micro-politics of *Nago*, *Jeje* and *Angola* groups within Bahia in what he described as “The birth of the Yorùbá hegemony in post-abolition candomble”. Lorand Matory, on his own part, identified what he called the “Lagos Cultural Renaissance of the 1890s” as responsible for the strengthening of the identification of Yorùbá as an elitist cultural identity. Matory emphasized the significant contribution of *Saro* (Sierra Leone) and Afro-Latin returnees to their revered West African Coast (*a Costa*), which they have often pointed to as the source of their classic Black Brazilian culture, especially Lagos, which had turned prosperous during slave trade and under British colonization.

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<sup>95</sup> Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 9.

<sup>96</sup> Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan, 1960).

<sup>97</sup> Omo N’Oba Ereduawa I, *I Remain Sir, Your Obedient Servant*, (Ibadan, 2004).

<sup>98</sup> Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 10.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 10.



In spite of the above arguments about the transnational aspect of naming the Yorùbá, factor(s) that influenced the choice of Yorùbá and not Aku (as used in Sierra Leone), Nago (as used in Brazil) or Lucumi (as used in Cuba) with which the people are identified in the diaspora remain(s) hidden. While the meaning of Aku (*a ku*)<sup>100</sup> and Lucumi (*oluku mi* – my friend)<sup>101</sup> has been suggested within Yorùbá language; and the source of the word “Yorùbá” has been alluded to (Hausa and Arabs); Nago, both as a people and the meaning of the word in Yorùbá language remains problematic. Peter B. Clarke insisted Nago is the name the *Fon* people of Dahomey (now Republic of Benin) called the Yorùbá. Matory described them as “a small western [West Africa] group called the “Nago,” or “Anago,” which were especially vulnerable to Dahomean predations. We may never know which Yorùbá subgroup is referred to as Nago or Anago by the Fon. It is possible that the Fon could be referring to either Oyo or everyone whose language sounded alike. We may also never know how the word gains traction in Brazil.

However, Funso Aiyejina, drawing from his Akoko Edo background, used the word Anago in referring to mainstream Yorùbá.<sup>102</sup> In discussing the ethnic politics of Bahia, Joao Jose Reis cited the interrogation of those suspected of involvement in the uprising of the 1835, who identified themselves as “Nago-ba (Nago-Egba), Nago-ijebu, Nago-oyo, Nago-ijexa (Nago-Ijesha)” and one of them named Antonio, specifically said: “Even though

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100. It is not surprising that the Yorùbá common prefix (*a ku/e ku*) before most greetings such as: *a ku aaro* (good morning); *a ku ojo* (greeting used during rain); *a ku ogbele* (greeting during the dry season); *a ku ooru* (greeting during a hot weather) or even *a ku ewu omo* (to congratulate the birth of a new-born child) has been suggested as the etymology for the name of Yorùbá-speaking people of Sierra Leone, perhaps because of the unique and widespread use of both the word and the elaborate culture of greeting that pervades almost all occasions, conditions, situations and events.

101. Although the translation “my friend” for *oluku mi* is technically correct, it is worth pointing out that the word “*oluku*” – friend is only known to be used by the Ijebu and Yorùbá-speaking people of Ondo and not by other Yorùbá-speaking dialects who use the word *ore*. How the translation, and by extension, its use as the etymology for the word Lucumi has gone unchallenged in the literature, or at least pointed out, remains surprising.

102. Oral interview, Professor Funso Aiyejina, 67 years old, January 12, 2011.

[we] are all Nagos, each one has his own homeland.” This led Reis to conclude that: “...*Nago was fundamentally a construction of the African diaspora in Bahia, based, of course, on the re-creation and local adaptation of African cultural materials.*” Reis’s description catches one’s attention when placed side-by-side with Michele Reid’s similar explanation of how captive Yorùbá referred to themselves in Cuba: “*Lukumi-Ado, Lukumi-Oyo Lukumi-Egba, Lukumi-Yebu [Ijebu] and so on.*”

Although tons of questions remain unanswered, 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>103</sup>

As C.L. Adeoye noted, Yorùbá, as a language, is complex and multi-dimensional. It is not given to easy understanding, as most Yorùbá words have more than one meaning.<sup>104</sup> In addition to this, the language has more than hundred variants inter-communicable dialects.<sup>105</sup> Linguists have classed Yorùbá’s inter-communicable dialects as belonging to similar dialect areas.

According to Leonard Bloomfield, dialect areas describe a range of dialects spoken across some geographical areas that differ only slightly between neighbouring areas, but as one travels in any direction, the differences between dialects accumulate such that speakers from opposite ends of the continuum are no longer mutually intelligible.<sup>106</sup> Resulting from the above, linguists have classified the various Yorùbá dialects into three major dialect areas: the Northwest Yorùbá, which comprises of Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, Ogun and Lagos (Eko) areas; the Central Yorùbá, which comprises of Igbomina, Yagba, Ife, Ekiti, Iworoko Ekiti, Akure, Efon, and Ijebu areas; and Southeast Yorùbá, which includes Okitipupa, Ondo, Owo, Ikare, Sagamu, and parts of Ijebu areas.<sup>107</sup> Adetugbo

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<sup>103</sup> Keith Allan, “Nation, Tribalism and National Language,” *Cahiers d’ Etudes Africaines* 18:3 (1978), 19-33.

<sup>104</sup> Adeoye C.L., *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, (Ibadan, 2005), 2.

<sup>105</sup> Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, 29.

<sup>106</sup> Bloomfield Leonard, *Language*, (London, 1935), 51.

<sup>107</sup> Adetugbo Abiodun, “Towards a Yorùbá Dialectology”, in Afolayan, A., (ed.), *Yorùbá Language and Literature*, (Ibadan, 1982), 207–224; see also J.F. Ade-Ajayi, “How Yorùbá was reduced to writing”, in *Odu: A Journal of Yorùbá, Edo*

noted that the different dialects of the Yorùbá language coalesce into one language and that its orthography, a hybrid of Oyo and Ibadan dialects; its phonemes, markedly of Abeokuta; and its lexicon, essentially of Lagos and Yorùbá diaspora, took thirty years to emerge.<sup>108</sup>

Whether or not we accept the oral accounts, the linguistic evidence, and the various conclusions already drawn from them by Yorùbá academic and lay historians is a different matter; what is not contestable in the narratives so far is that the different Yorùbá peoples recognized their affinity and shared identity, but had no use for any specific, unifying name for themselves as a group until they came in contact with other groups, be it in the larger areas now known as Nigeria or in other parts of Africa, Europe, America and the New World.

While shared values, geographical contiguity, language and the ignoble experience of slavery provided the building blocks for Yorùbá identity; the concrete task of building the identity was done by Samuel Johnson, the Oyo-born Anglican Pastor and, to some extent, Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Johnson, consciously and patriotically, championed Mission's and colonial interventions in the century-long Yorùbá civil war. Ajayi Crowther's missionary activities in Yorubaland, most especially his translation of the Holy Bible into Yorùbá language, were commendable. The reduction of the Yorùbá language into writing; and the designation of the different peoples as the Yorùbá people were some of Johnson's notable achievements. Besides the above, Johnson also enjoined the various Yorùbá peoples to unite and cooperate around a common destiny characterized by Western education, Christianity, and European civilization.

While in Johnson, a pan-Yorùbá identity was both cultural and political; in his successors, most notably Chief Oyeniyi Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo; it was more of a political issue. This is in contrast to received knowledge about ethnicity, which

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*and Related Studies*, 8:1 (1960), 49–58; Adetugbo Abiodun , “The Yorùbá Language in Yorùbá History”, in S.O. Biobaku, (ed.), *Sources of Yorùbá History*, (Oxford, 1973), 176–204.

<sup>108</sup> Adetugbo A., *The Yorùbá Language in Western Nigeria: Its Major Dialect Areas*, unpublished Ph. D Dissertation, Columbia University, 1967; Ade-Ajayi J.F., “How Yorùbá was reduced to writing”, *Odu*, 8:1 (1960), 49-58.

maintains that ethnic identity is, first, political and, later, cultural; Yorùbá ethnicity was, as Peel noted, at first, a cultural project before becoming a political instrument. For instance, the various groups that made up contemporary Yorubaland had, prior to the 1900, recognized their wider affinity in one or two distinct, even if sometimes, overlapping ways. The most common being similar dialects and shared culture. Although these shared customs, for instance, included certain principles of political organization, a number of religious cults, and a tradition of dynamic descent from a shared center, Ile-Ife; the different sub-groups however had different political heads and no attempt was, at any time, made to unite them into a one-government political structure.

Except for the Ekitiparapo coalition by a number of groups during the nineteenth century wars, which aimed primarily at repelling Ibadan hegemony, no other instance of united front exist in Yorùbá history. Therefore, following the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire, Samuel Johnson and others ensured the intervention of the Protestant missions, the new cultural agency, in ensuring peace. Johnson, while denouncing the internecine nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, aggregated the view of a pan-Yorùbá identity for the different Yorùbá groups and peoples based on shared customs and values. He canvassed not just for a united and free Yorubaland, but also for a return to the period of Alaafin Abiodun, an Oyo king of old, when what is today regarded as the entire Yorubaland witnessed unprecedented socio-economic development even though the different Yorùbá groups had their respective political heads. Johnson's advocacy was not for the Yorùbá to return to a pristine past when they existed as splintered groups, but to come together as one nation, a proposition that he regarded as the ultimate goal of Oduduwa, the Alaafins, and ultimately all Yorùbá peoples.

From this time, the forging of a common identity thus became an ultimate goal that the Yorùbá pursued all through the colonial period. Combined with the missionary efforts to penetrate the Yorùbá hinterland, the colonial need to identify different Nigerian peoples for economic reasons, especially for taxation, helped the Yorùbá peoples in forging this pan-Yorùbá identity.

Two lines of successors followed Johnson: the political class ably represented by Chief Obafemi Awolowo and M.K.O.

Abiola, and the academic class, among who were I.A. Akinjogbin, J.F. Ade-Ajayi, G.J.A. Ojo, J.A. Atanda, S. Biobaku, to mention just a few.

Chief Obafemi Awolowo aggregated the cultural elements in Yorùbá ethno-national identity with his founding of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in London in 1945. As a socio-cultural group, the *Egbe*, which was launched with fanfare and pomp, had Ile-Ife as its headquarters and all Yorùbá people as members. Its founding ethos was to represent Yorùbá peoples and nation. However, the *Egbe* did not take any political form until 1951 when party politics, which brought Yorùbá people into further contacts with other ethnic groups in Nigeria, began. The *Egbe* then metamorphosed into a political party – the Action Group. In 1979, the political component of Yorùbá ethnic identity became fully matured. The fulcrum of this political agenda, the Action Group, was re-christened the Unity Party of Nigeria, and won more votes from Yorubaland than ever before. From then on, the party became synonymous with Yorubaland and the political component of Yorùbá identity became solidified.

The academic class, following precisely after Johnson, reconstructed the pre-colonial histories of almost all groups, minor and major, in Yorubaland. Their emphases were not different from those of Johnson: there were clusters of ancient settlements before Oduduwa; Oduduwa instituted the monarchy and his sons, the princes, were commissioned to establish other kingdoms in Yorubaland. As princes from Ile-Ife and stocks of Oduduwa, the princes maintained the family bonds. Akinjogbin's *Ebi* system was built around this unity theory. He literally turned the creation myths and kinship networks into a political and cultural ideology, the *Ebi* system.

### **2.1.3. Construction and Innateness of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

The literature on Nigerian history is replete with instances of ethnic negotiations of different kinds. As shown above, the advent of Christianity and colonialism brought the Yorùbá effectively into greater contact and interaction with other ethnic groups in Nigeria and it is in these contacts with non-Yorùbá ethnic groups that the ethnic identity of the Yorùbá became firmly entrenched. The process, by and large, is facilitated by Yorùbá's early exposure to

Western education and Christianity, followed by the translation of the Holy Bible into Yorùbá language and later, the posting of trained Yorùbá people, as teachers, preachers, nurses, etc. from Yorubaland into other parts of Nigeria coupled with trade and employment of many Yorùbá people in the colonial service. All these served to set Yorùbá people up in opposition to other ethnic groups, especially in their competition for greater latitude in the socio-economic and political administration of what later became known as Nigeria.

In this contestation, Yorùbá intelligentsia not only manipulated such symbols as dress and language to articulate their individual and group uniqueness but also deployed these symbols as border guards, which sets boundary between Yorùbá and other ethnic groups. The translation of the Bible into Yorùbá language, the setting up of (mission) schools, hospitals, railways, etc. in Yorubaland, soon spawned situations whereby Yorùbá people began to associate being civilized and modern with having all these border guards. Other ethnic groups soon began to agitate for these border guards as markers of civilization for their respective ethnic groups within the Nigerian space. In order to exhibit their uniqueness, not only were they asserting the use of their language, dress and other cultural items, they were also requesting the translation of the Bible into their own languages, the setting up of schools in their domains and a frenzied competition between the various ethnic groups soon ensued.

The establishment of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, which morphed into Action Group and later took over the political administration of Western Region led to greater frenzy among other ethnic groups, as different socio-cultural organizations changed from being socio-cultural organizations to political parties. For instance, the *Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa*, hitherto socio-cultural organization in Northern Nigeria, later changed to Northern Peoples' Congress<sup>109</sup>, a political

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<sup>109</sup> Mr. Otiye Igbuzor, *Nigeria's Experience in Managing the Challenges of Ethnic and Religious Diversity Through Constitutional Provisions*. Accessed 07/25/2011 and available at <http://www.enburma.net/index.php/feature/54-feature/166-nigerias-experience-in-managing-the-challenges-of-ethnic-a-religious-diversity-through-constitutional-provisions.html>.

party, which later controlled the Northern region. Only Benjamin Nnamdi Azikiwe did not evolve from any socio-cultural association, having co-founded the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) alongside Herbert Macaulay in 1944. However, following the developments in Western and Northern Nigeria, Azikiwe also, in 1952, moved to the Eastern Region where he turned NCNC into a regional party and was elected to the position of Chief Minister and in 1954 became Premier of Nigeria's Eastern Region.

However, the competition grew, as Western Region recorded more landmark and hitherto unprecedented achievements. For instance, Action Group introduced Free Education and Free Health, which, within a short while, revolutionized the region. Other landmark achievements of Western Region include the establishment of the first Television Service in Africa, a radio station, the Liberty Stadium, etc. all of which stimulated, in other regions, a quest to establish similar projects.

Through these and many other efforts, Yorùbá ethnic identity, as *primus inter pares*, was not only established, but also paraded before other ethnic groups in Nigeria and Yorubaland thus became not just a torch bearer, but a pacesetter for other ethnic groups in Nigeria. To consolidate this identity as trend-setter, the Yorùbá people and Yorùbá group, led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, not only raised the various symbols that embodied their identity as a people, but also presented them as moral exemplars for others. Thus, manipulative symbols and border guards such as dress and language became the hallmark of Yorùbá identity, which set them aside from other ethnic groups as well as defined them both as individuals and as a corporate group. These competitions and negotiations not only accelerated the process of incorporating these different ethnic groups into the vortex of colonialism, both also the eventual emergence of clearly defined ethnic cleavages in Nigeria.

The sum of the above is that Yorùbá ethnic identity as a cultural, economic and political unit, which began to be forged modestly in the 1920s has blossomed into a socio-cultural, economic and political entity today. Its evolution, originally a cultural project, derived impetus from colonially orchestrated labour migration, cash-crop production, Western education and

Christianity. As these developments marked Yorubaland as a center of commerce and prosperity between the 1930s and 1950s, and more and more people from what later became known as Nigeria came into Yorubaland and Yorùbá peoples became drawn into a Nigeria-wide socio-political sphere of relations. The more the 'new' Yorubaland came in contact with other ethnic groups from other parts of Nigeria, especially from the 1930s and 1950s when national politics assumed a competitive edge, the more solidified the socio-cultural and political components of Yorùbá identity, as an ethnic group in Nigeria, became.

## **2.2. Personal and Group Identity in Yorubaland.**

Identity, conceptualized as an individual or a group's sense of self-conception, expression, and affiliation, embodies not just a person's or a group's sense of uniqueness, but also those of continuity and affiliation. This section is organized in three parts: a discussion of how individual and group identity is formed in Yorubaland, followed by how Yorùbá people express their identity in myriad of ways, including in dress; and a concluding part which touches on the role of dress in the construction, development, and reinforcement of a distinct Yorùbá identity either as individuals or as a group.

The two overarching determinants of personal and group identity in pre-colonial and post-colonial Yorubaland are a commonwealth of blood-relation, otherwise called *Ebi*, and an individual's ability to trace his or her origin to Ile-Ife, the *Orirun* (source) of Yorùbá race. *Ebi*, according to Akinjogbin, was both a system of government and a unit of social organization. As Akinjogbin, its most vocal proponent, had noted, Oduduwa laid the foundation of *ebi* with his sons, the princes, who established other Yorùbá kingdoms. At the close of Oduduwa's days, he encouraged his sons to go out and establish new kingdoms and, as each prince conquered an area, he was doing so as an addition to Oduduwa's territory, thereby creating a commonwealth or an *ebi*. In this way, Yorùbá nation emerged as a network of blood-related (brothers) kingdoms. The *ebi* system worked on two principles: the acceptance of a common source, called *Orirun*, located at Ile-Ife; and the feeling of being bond or belonging together. In this system, relationship and obedience are not derived from any force of arms,



but “*by a common acceptance of having been related by blood*”.<sup>110</sup> In this system, no member could opt out and no outsider could be incorporated. It must however be stated that although *ebi* was a closed group, as members are agnatically related. Migrants could, over a long period, be incorporated into the compound and they could evolve their respective *ebi*; however, they cannot aspire to headship of the *Idile*. Only the autochthonous *ebi* members could. This applied to all parts of Yorubaland with the exception of Ibadan, especially resulting from the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars and conflicts.

With Ibadan as a war camp from where Yorùbá warriors repelled Fulani attacks, new governmental structure emerged that differed markedly from what obtained in other parts of Yorubaland. Attainment rather than circumstances of birth became criteria for office holding. In this way, strangers, common people and even slaves were able to take office by hard work and sheer enterprise. Notwithstanding Ibadan’s exceptional system, to keep the *Ebi* system working, filial relation and duty imposed on the younger ones the obligation to serve the older ones; just as Oduduwa’s sons served and protected him and his territory. It is perhaps this complex but dynamic system of government that led Lonsdale to conclude that “*the most distinctively African contribution to human history could be the civilized art of living fairly peaceably together not in states*”.<sup>111</sup>

At the personal level, an individual derived his identity by being a member of a family, the *Idile*. The *Idile* is a fusion of nucleated families, often residing in close or contiguous houses, and with very strong filial or kinship ties. The oldest male member of the *Idile* heads the *Idile*<sup>112</sup>. He needs not be the very oldest, but the oldest man that meets the minimum quality of having a sound mind in a sound body (*mens sana in corpore sano*). He is the *Baale* (family head). *Idile* is the basic socio-economic and political unit, which comprises of members who are able to trace their ancestry

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<sup>110</sup> Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 113.

<sup>111</sup> John Lonsdale, ‘States and Social Processes in Africa: A Historical Survey’, *African Studies Review*, vol. XXIV, nos. 2/3, June/September 1981.

<sup>112</sup> Oguntomisin G. O., *The Process of Peacekeeping and Peacemaking in Pre-Colonial Nigeria*, (Ibadan, 2004), 1.

to a common ancestor, possessing common deities, observing common taboos, farming on a common or contiguous land, answering to the same descriptive or eponymous name (*Oriki Idile*), and with members living in contiguous houses called *Agbo Ile*, the Compound.

It is important to state that although with a number of variations, both *ebi* and *Idile* survived even till date. Contemporary Yorùbá people still claim identity based on membership of the *ebi* and *Idile*.

Under this system, the basis of individual's claim to the community was acquired by the integration of the individual into a specific *Idile*. The articulation of individuals into Yorùbá society took place through the *Idile*. Since family headship was reserved for the oldest male member, every member of the *Idile* regards *Baale* as father of the *Agbo-Ile*. Both *Ebi* and *Idile* are patrilineal.

Munoz, quoting Fadipe, underscored the place of *Baale* in Yorùbá society. He noted that only through the family head could an individual express his loyalty to the central authority, as “*there was not much of an abstract loyalty to country. The individual stood behind the head of his extended family, however bad the cause he espoused, particularly if he was successful and prosperous*”.<sup>113</sup>

The *Baale* was responsible for the day-to-day socio-economic and political administration of *Agbo-Ile*, especially the maintenance of peace and strong kinship ties. He settles minor disputes through arbitration and mediation, performs religious duties as well as ensures that members of the *Agbo-Ile* observe whatever duties religion and good neighborliness impose on them<sup>114</sup>.

As the population of the *Idile* increases, the *Agbo-Ile* expands. There is no limit to the extent to which an *Idile* or *Agbo-Ile* can grow. Members of the *Idile* are called *Ebi* and are bound together as *Molebi*, a commonwealth of blood relations.

Group identity also derives from the *Idile*. The aggregate of all *Idile* in any Yorùbá town forms the town. The oldest male from the family of those who found the town is regarded as the head of

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<sup>113</sup> Munoz, *The Yorùbá Studies*, (Ibadan, 2005), 67.

<sup>114</sup> Oguntomisin, *The Process of Peacekeeping*, 1.

the town. To be recognized in any town as a true member of another town, individuals must belong to an *Idile*, and this *Idile* must be able to trace its lineage to Oduduwa and Ile-Ife.

The spirit and soul of Yorùbá town is, therefore, the *Ebi*. It is regarded as the most potent force binding together individuals and their communities in an agnatic relationship, which cannot be broken and to which no stranger, who is not a part of the *Molebi*, can aspire.

The importance of this group identity (*Ebi*) is such that individuals must comport themselves, both in public and private spaces, in ways and manners that do not taint the name of the *Ebi*, even on the pain of death. In the pre-colonial period, errant *Molebi* could be sold as slave or banished. Members of *Idile* were therefore regarded as ambassadors of their families, and errant members were regarded as bad ambassadors.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that Yorùbáness includes various institutional things and that the *Ebi* system fused together individual identity with group identity. Yorùbá marriage system illustrates this identity fusion adequately. Marriage among the Yorùbá is not regarded as an affair between couples but between two families and, at times, two communities. Therefore, couples cannot single-handedly dissolve marriages. While living together, couples represent their respective *Ebi* and, since no one wants to see the name of his or her *Ebi* dragged in the mud, the couple must live together in ways and manners that will project the kind of family each of them represents.

Another source of Yorùbá identity is the Yorùbá tradition of origin, which adduced the origin of Yorùbá people to Ile-Ife. Notwithstanding criticism about these traditions, the traditions gave Yorùbá people a sense of identity. Without doubt, the Yorùbá founded nation-states, built kingdoms, advanced militarily; but were they a cohesive group? At what point then did the Yorùbá, as a group, become aware of their identity? In other words, what is the individuation process of Yorùbá ethno-genesis? Within Yorubaland and in the family, a Yorùbá man or woman's identity differs markedly from when such individual is amidst non-Yorùbá. So, what is the process of differentiation between the Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá and how does a differentiated component become integrated into a stable whole? Whether at the individual level or at

group level; what is the role of dress in this process of individuation? What significant role(s) did dress play in the construction, development, and reinforcement of a distinct Yorùbá identity? Before attempting answers to these questions, the study shall first look at origins and conception of dress among Yorùbá people.

### **2.3. Origin and Conception of Dress among the Yorùbá**

Whether broadly or narrowly defined, it is difficult to trace the origin of dress among Yorùbá people. Samuel Johnson, in spite of the depth of his pioneering work on Yorubaland, said nothing about the origin of dress. N.A. Fadipe, who wrote on Yorùbá sociology, equally said nothing on the origin of dress. Contemporary writers have also taken the issue of provenance as largely unnecessary to the understanding of the study. Understandably, the difficulty associated with tracing the origin of dress in Yorubaland, stems, in part, from the fact that Yorùbá people, up till the close of the nineteenth century, were orally literate. The situation is made complex by early historians' failure to engage witnesses to periods before the advent of writing on the matter before they died. Reconstructing events and phenomena associated with those periods has since remained a great challenge to contemporary historians. Attesting the difficulty associated with historicizing dress in Yorubaland, T.M. Akinwumi noted that despite the favourable response to the study of dress among art historians, "*not much is known about the pre-twentieth century period on its form, use, and production in many African communities...beyond glimpses from travelogues.*"<sup>115</sup> Although Akinwumi suggested the use of photo albums of succeeding generations, eyewitness accounts (as found in diaries, memoirs, calendars, etc.), *Ifa* corpus and oral traditions as possible source materials to help gain insights into how dress-use began in Yorubaland, he however did not pursue it himself. As novel as his suggestion was, it beats my imagination how, for example, photo albums of previous generations could shed lights on dress-use in,

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<sup>115</sup> Tunde M. Akinwumi, 'Oral Tradition and the Construction of Yorùbá Dress', in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.), *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (New York, 2006), 49.

say 1400. Except for oral tradition, and to a greater extent, *Ifa* corpus; other sources suggested by Akinwumi are modern and therefore may not help so much in reconstructing origin of dress use in Yorubaland.

Notwithstanding the above, Akinwumi used a judicious blend of tradition, praise poems, *Ifa* corpus, and photo albums to trace the origin 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 Obatala and Osun*”.<sup>116</sup> Akinwumi’s use of the *Ifa* corpus, rather than helping to solve the problem of origin of dress, however, raises a fundamental historiographical question. For instance, he cited *Odu Ifa Obara Meji* and *Okanran Meji* as sources for his reconstruction. However, it must be noted that the same *Odu* also talked about Sango, one of the kings that ruled Old-Oyo many years after Orunmila, the famed composer of the *Ifa* corpus. How could Orunmila write about events many years after his death? Given this chronological defect, one cannot but doubt the appropriateness of *Ifa* corpus as a credible source for such historical reconstruction, especially as Orunmila died many years before Sango ruled Oyo and there was no other Sango in Yorùbá history. Despite this discrepancy, Akinwumi went ahead to reconstruct the provenance of bosom covering for women, which cannot substitute for the provenance of dress-use in general. Dress, especially as evidence preserved in pictures, paintings, carvings, sculptures and other art forms have shown; has a longer history in Yorubaland.

*Ifa*, without any doubt, is the cannon of Yorùbáness and, in hundreds of its corpus, *Ifa* talks about Yorùbá people using (wearing) dress. As noted in the different corpuses, dress, whether narrowly conceived as cloth and clothing tradition or broadly conceived to include other attachments and supplements to the human body, has been a part of Yorùbá culture since creation. Note that the celestial band who founded Ile-Ife was not only dressed (vide *Odu Ifa Obara Meji* and *Okanran Meji*), but also were given a sack of cloth containing sand, iron and palm kernel by *Olodumare*. Since Yorùbáness is about God – *Olodumare*,

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 50.

acceptance of *Ifa*, Oduduwa, Ile-Ife, Yorùbá dress, etc. Akinwumi can therefore not be faulted for suggesting the use of *Ifa* corpus in reconstructing Yorùbá dress history.

Besides Akinwumi, Colleen Kriger<sup>117</sup> also attempted a narrative on the history of cotton textile production in pre-colonial and colonial West Africa. Although Kriger focused on cotton textile, her work proved to be far more useful than Akinwumi in shedding light on the origin of cloth in Yorubaland. Using photo albums of succeeding generations, eyewitness accounts (as found in diaries, memoirs, calendars, etc.), *Ifa* corpus, oral traditions, archaeological sources and early Muslim and European trade accounts, I attempt, in the remaining part of this sub-section, a history of two aspects of dress - cloth and facial markings - in Yorubaland.

Perhaps, it was Leo Frobenus, the German archaeologist, who, in 1910, first discovered Ife ancient arts, a collection of stone images, terracotta heads, brass, and bronze life-size figures. Perturbed at their magnificence, he declared that they must have been some of the lost or stolen Greek arts or, at best, Ile-Ife could probably be the lost City of Atlantis. In 1938, seventeen more Ife ancient arts were discovered, this time, at the king's palace. Others have since been dug up not just at Ile-Ife, but also in different parts of Yorubaland, most especially at Esie, Owo, Iwo-Eleru, etc. Other archaeologists have since proved Frobenus wrong and that the art works were not just made-in-Ife, but also made by Ife artists. These arts, especially the stone figures and terracotta heads, were remarkable windows through which dress history in Yorubaland could be reconstructed. From Ile-Ife and Iwo-Eleru to Esie and Owo, these arts were believed to have been made for the ruling elite. In addition, they are remarkable for their idealized naturalism, full length and heavy beads. On the one hand, the stone figures have been dated to between 900 and 500 BC<sup>118</sup>, while, on the other

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<sup>117</sup> Colleen Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*, (Lanham, 2006).

<sup>118</sup> See among others: Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Vizuala a Artei: Arta Africana*, (Italy, 2010), 6. Dierk Lange, 'Origin of the Yorùbá and "The Lost Tribes of Israel"', *Anthropos*, 106, (2011), 579-595; Fage John Donnelly, *A History of Africa*, (London, 1976); Henige David, *Oral Historiography*, (London, 1982); Ellis Alfred Burton, *The Yorùbá-Speaking Peoples of the Slave*

hand, terracotta heads, bronze and brass sculptures were dated to between 1000 and 1500 A.D.<sup>119</sup>. Ile-Ife, where majority of the finds were discovered, has been dated to about 500 BC. At the very least, Ife stone figures and, perhaps, terracotta heads, bronze and brass sculptures may therefore have existed at Ile-Ife for very long. The stone figures, like the terracotta, brass and bronze arts have similar characteristics, despite the stretch of time separating their productions. These characteristics include facial marks, head gears, which, in most cases, include diadems, crowns, and coronets; beads, scarifications, cloths, lip-plugs, hairs that were done into different styles, and all sorts of beautification to the face and head. If Ife stone figures were dated to from 500 BC, and still had all these features; then it is certain that dress, whether narrowly or broadly conceptualized, had been in Yorubaland long before those arts were made. The same could be said for brass and bronze figures.

Although scarification, diadems, crowns, and facial marks found on these ancient arts may connote different things to generations that produced them, it has been suggested that they could/may be an indication/portrayal of the religious, socio-economic and political positions of the different people represented in the arts.

For instance, Figure 1 is *Idena*; the stone figure-gatekeeper not only had iron nails in its coiffure, but also an elaborately tied sash. Figure 2 is the terracotta head of a female, probably the image of a queen, also had an elaborately beaded headdress. Figure 3 is another female terracotta head, probably also a queen with facial striations and an elaborate head gear. Figure 4 has been described as Child of Obatala, the creation divinity, a sculpture that probably depicts a ritual specialist, as indicated by the bead on his

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*Coast of West Africa*, (London, 1894); Saburi O. Biobaku, *The Origin of the Yorùbá*, University of Lagos, Humanities Monograph Series, 1, (Lagos, 1955) Bascom William, *The Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria*, (New York, 1969); Agiri A. Babatunde, 'Early Oyo History Reconsidered', *History in Africa*, vol. 2, (1975), 1-16.

<sup>119</sup> Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Visual a Artei*, 7; Frobenius Leo, *The Voice of Africa*, (London, 1913); see also Willett Frank, *Ife in the History of West African Sculpture*, (London, 1967); Olupona K. Jacob, *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space and Imagination*, (Berkeley, 2011).

forehead and the skull pendant on his neck. Figure 5 is a bronze bust of one Ooni, the king of Ile-Ife. Figure 6 is a bronze head of another king.

It is clear from figures 1 and 5 as well as figures 10 and 12 that cloth-use had been in existence as at the time of producing these arts. Figures 5 to 9 and figure 11 show elaborate facial markings, which are still in existence at Ile-Ife today. Figures 5 to 8 show crowns and diadems of special magnificence; while figures 2 and 3 are remarkable for the beads that decorated them. Figures 12 and 15 had on their heads what looked like coronets or, at the very least, caps. Figure 10, a female figure that wore what looked like a pair of shorts.

Unarguably, these mute and unintended witnesses to events and circumstances that produced them show different forms of Yorùbá dress: cloths, caps, crowns, beads, arm-band, wrist-bands, facial marks, etc. Other archeological remains found in other parts of Yorubaland, most especially in Esie and Iwo-Eleru, were not in any way different from the above.

Even if these ancient arts could say nothing about the nature and component materials that went into making these earliest cloths, there is no doubt, whatsoever that the materials must have been obtained locally. The astonishing natural beauty of these ancient arts must have resulted from a magnificent craftsmanship that could only come from long training and meticulous observation. This points to the fact that dress-use and dress-making may have been in existence longer that these arts could possibly tell.

Early Muslim and European trade accounts showed that sub-Saharan Africa's earliest cloths were made from nonwoven bark-cloths. Other materials that have appeared in the literature include goats' wool, raffia, and cotton.<sup>120</sup> While we may not know at what time Africans began to use bark-cloths, earliest Arab Moslem traders and invaders in the 12th and 13th centuries, noted that while sub-Saharan rulers and some elite wore wool and cotton cloths, most people they saw wore either bark-cloths or animal

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<sup>120</sup> Renne E., *Cloth that does not die. The meaning of cloth in Benin Social life*, (Seattle, 1995), 102.



skins.<sup>121</sup> In addition, early accounts of slave raiding in Africa confirmed that throughout the forest regions and along West African coast, slaves obtained from Senegal to Angola, “wore either bark-cloth or a sarong-like body wrap of about 4x8 feet, worn at the waist or above the bust, which, in some regions, was called *kijipa*”.<sup>122</sup> Both, it was claimed, continued to be popular until around 1717 among the Ewe and till 1910 among the Kongo.<sup>123</sup>

### Ife Ancient Arts

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**



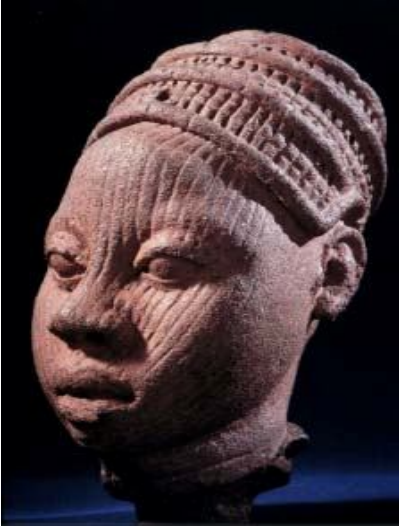
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<sup>121</sup> Peter Adler, *African Majesty: The Textile Art of the Ashanti and Ewe*, (New York, 1995); see also Alpern B. Stanley, ‘What Africans got for their slaves: a master list of European trade goods’, *History in Africa*, 22, (1995), 5-43.

<sup>122</sup> Stanley, ‘What Africans Got’, 5-43.

<sup>123</sup> Adler, *African Majesty*, 1995; see also Almada, Andre Alvares d’, *Brief Treatise on The Rivers of Guinea*, Part I (1594), (Liverpool, 1984).

**Figure 3**



**Figure 4**



**Figure 5**



**Figure 6**



**Figure 7**



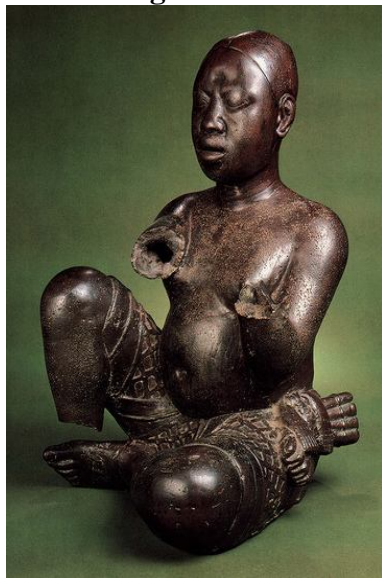
**Figure 8**



**Figure 9**



**Figure 10**



**Figure 11**



**Figure 12**



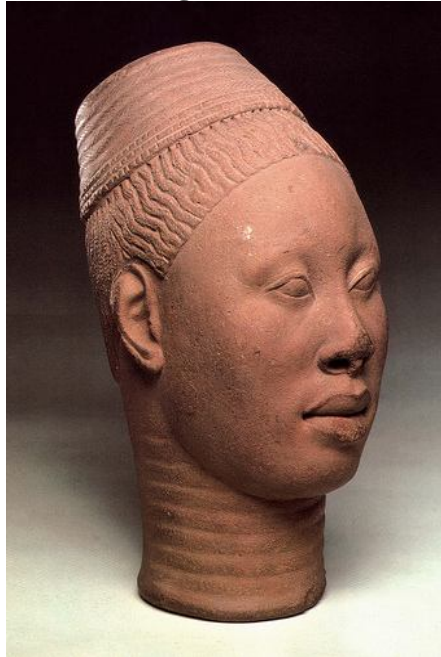
**Figure 13**



**Figure 14**



**Figure 15**



**Sources:** Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Vizuala a Artei: Arta Africana*, (Italy, 2010), 116-126; National Museum, Ile-Ife, Nigeria; National Museum, Esie, Esie, Nigeria; National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria.

Writing on the provenance of dress among the Yorùbá, T.M. Akinwumi, using *Ifa* corpus, noted that Yorùbá people had been using or wearing cloths since *Eledumare*, God, sent them from heaven to establish the world.<sup>124</sup> He noted, however, that during this period, men and women dressed lightly, with women using only a wrapper, which leaves their bosoms bare and men wearing *sokoto* and *buba*. In *Okanran Meji* and *Oyeku Meji* – the two *Ifa* corpus used - it is explained that an attempt to protect women's breasts from unwanted and unsolicited gaze, led to the introduction and adoption of bosom-covering cloths among the Yorùbá. Although Akinwumi did not date any of these two sources, however, it could be noted that in oral tradition, the *Ifa* corpus is

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<sup>124</sup> Akinwumi, 'Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress', 49-73.

believed to have been handed to Orunmila when, as part of the celestial band commissioned by God to establish and populate the world, departed from the heavens. *Ifa*, composed by Orunmila, has been described as a traditional Yorùbá science of divination, and it pre-dated either Islam or Christianity. In addition to the above, there is a dynamic element to *Ifa* corpus that can be noted in references to items or issues, which can be dated to more recent times. Variations in *Ifa* corpus in different Yorùbá societies also implies that specific reference materials might be more indicative of local occurrences than indicative of general applicability across Yorubaland. Therefore, it can be argued that these two *Ifa* verses attested to long antiquity of dress-use among certain group of Yorùbá or, possibly, all Yorùbá people.

Despite claims from *Ifa* corpus and oral traditions, oral interviews across Yorubaland on provenance of Yorùbá dress revealed that cloth production began among Ila-Orangun people, also known as Akoko, in the Igbomina province.<sup>125</sup> It was believed that cloths and the art of cloth-production were imported from this area into other parts of Yorubaland, both by inhabitants of the area and traders from other parts of Yorubaland, thousands of years ago. Among Oyo people, this earliest Yorùbá cloth, because they were made by Akoko women, was known as ‘Akoko cloth’.<sup>126</sup> Among the Egba and Ijebu, the cloth was known as *Egbedi Aso Ila*<sup>127</sup>, while among the Igbomina, from where the cloth emanated, it was called *Kijipa*.<sup>128</sup>

I found the above claim difficult to accept, especially as evidence also abound in different communities across Yorubaland that different households in different communities had their home-

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<sup>125</sup> More than fifty people were interviewed across Yorubaland on the provenance of cloth and the consensus was that *Kijipa* was the first Yorùbá cloth. However, there is a divergent view on where it emanated from. For eight people, it was an Ijesha cloth, while others maintained that it was from Ila-Orangun. It is important to note that Ila-Orangun, until after the settlement of the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, was an Ijesha enclave, which was ceded to the Ibadan warriors. Given the above, I reckoned that the divergence is unnecessary. The interviewees are listed in the Appendix.

<sup>126</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás*, 110.

<sup>127</sup> Interview with Baba Fatimoh, Sagamu, 12 June 2010.

<sup>128</sup> Interview with Oba Lamidi Adeyemi Olayiwola, Oyo, 12 April, 2010.

made cloth-making traditions that, no doubt, would have served them as admirably as those of the Akoko women in the Igbomina area. In other words, it can be argued that rather than introducing *Kijipa* into Yorubaland, what may have happened was that Akoko women were the first to probably standardize their home-made cloths, which were then imported into other Yorùbá communities.

In addition to *Kijipa*, there is also *Ofi*, *Sanyan*, *Etu*, *Alari* or *Petuje* which, as argued by Adeyinka Ajayi, originated from different parts of Yorubaland.<sup>129</sup> For instance, *Ofi*, known today as *Aso-Oke*, originated from Iseyin, Oyo-Ile, and Ilorin. *Alari*, as noted by Victor Osaro Edo, originated from Ondo.<sup>130</sup> It must be emphasized that *Sanyan*, *Etu*, *Alari* and *Petuje* are different kinds of *Ofi*. Although it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to date when *Kijipa*, *Ofi*, *Sanyan*, *Etu*, *Alari* or *Petuje* came into existence in Yorubaland, however, it is possible to date mass production of these cloths using excavated looms used in weaving among other ways.

As Adeyinka Ajayi noted, a view this study strongly supports, cloth-use and cloth production generally evolved in different parts of Yorubaland in response to environmental dictates. Other factors that could serve as explanation for diffusion of cloth across Yorubaland, which evaded Adeyinka Ajayi, include people's tastes, and market trend as a result of fashion and popular rituals. She however noted that specific cloths originated from particular areas due to availability of raw materials for their production in such areas. She argued that in the entire Yorubaland, easy access necessary for cloth production was never a problem, as farmers grew cotton and that indigenous cotton had been cultivated for many centuries and products from the local cloth industry had entered into the internal trade of Yorubaland before contacts with Islam, Christianity, and colonialism.

Arguing in the same vein as Adeyinka Ajayi, Olaoye also noted that cloth-use and production developed at different times in Yorubaland and that peoples from Ijebu, Owo, and Osogbo have distinguished themselves as good cloth weavers before the

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<sup>129</sup> Adeyinka Ajayi, *The Economics of Cloth Weaving in Eastern Yorubaland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005), 45.

<sup>130</sup> Interview with Osaro Victor Edo, Ibadan, 13 November, 2010.

European contacts. The Ijebu communities produced high quality and durable textile, which from the seventeenth century were being exported to Benin where they were bought by the Europeans. Hugh Clapperton recorded about Owo in the 1820s that '*we have observed several looms going here: in one house we saw eight or ten – in fact – a regular manufactory. Their cloth is good in texture and some very fine.*'<sup>131</sup> Osogbo dyers were particularly famous for their varied and intricate techniques; Iseyin had been known as an important center of men's weaving in Yorubaland. In Shaki, Kishi, Igbeti, and Igboho the art of cloth making was elaborately known long before colonialism. In Okene, Yagba, and Oyi, cloth weaving and therefore cloth-use, were in use as early as the 1500 AD.<sup>132</sup> Despite that various centers have emerged as cloth-weaving centers, some of which are notable for specific cloth-production, it must be stated that *Kijipa* is regarded generally as the first Yorùbá cloth.

At least, two stories are told of the origin of scarification in Yorubaland. The first was that Oduduwa was advised by *Ifa* to give all his children facial marks purely for identification purposes when Oduduwa and his band departed from the East. *Ifa* was reported to have warned that Oduduwa would face serious problems on his way, which would disperse many of his followers. So, by giving them facial marks, it would be easier for them to recognize one another. It was believed that peoples in Aswan (in Egypt), Northern Sudan, Ethiopia, Bornu Emirate and Daura area (both in Nigeria), especially those who also indulge in the practice of facial marking, were also descendants of Oduduwa who were left behind in these areas as Oduduwa and his bands migrated from the East to Yorubaland, where they finally settled.

It was further reported that when Oduduwa settled at Ile-Ife, he was afflicted with child mortality, which decimated his offspring to a paltry two, one of which died even while Oduduwa was alive. Owing to this development, Oduduwa was said to have consulted *Ifa* again, who ordered that he should stop the practice,

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<sup>131</sup> Ogunremi, *ibid*, 6.

<sup>132</sup> Olaoye R.A., 'The Traditional Cloth-Weaving Industry in Nigeria Before 1800', in Oguntomisin G.O. and Ademola Ajayi S. (eds.) *Readings in Nigerian History and Culture*, (Ibadan, 2002), 196-201.



as he had arrived at his final destination. Oduduwa stopped, but his chiefs and nobles persisted in the practice. It was believed that it was from this modest but eventful beginning that facial marking began among Yorùbá people.

In yet another story, it was reported that facial marking actually began with Sango, a former *Alaafin* in Old-Oyo, as mentioned earlier. Sango was reported to have consulted *Ifa*, who advised him to make sacrifices to his late mother, lest he be defeated in a planned campaign. Sango was said to have forgotten his mother's name, and therefore asked one *Ilari*, a palace officer, and a slave to go back to his Tapa people in Nupe to ask for his mother's name. The emissaries were well received and lavishly entertained at Nupe. The *Ilari* was so drunk that, on returning to Oyo-Ile, he had completely forgotten Sango's mother's name. However, the slave, who tasted nothing at Nupe, told Sango his mother's name and, in anger, Sango ordered that the *Ilari* should be tied to a stake and all manners of marks be made on his face. As the marks were made, the *Ilari* writhed in agony. Ostensibly shocked to see the *Ilari* in such a state, Sango asked that similar marks be made on his own shoulder and, after the third mark, he recoiled in great pains and asked them to stop. When the wound healed and Sango noticed how beautiful his shoulders had become, he ordered that all his children be given the three marks on their shoulders. This had assumed a tone of tradition and is practiced at the palace in Oyo till date.

The tradition that linked facial marking to Ile-Ife notwithstanding, most literature, as supported by folksongs and praise-songs from and about people of Ile-Ife, asserts that Ile-Ife people, unlike the other peoples in Yorubaland, hardly marked their faces. In the tradition on Oduduwa's experiences of child mortality, it is noted that the oracle asked Oduduwa to desist from marking the faces of his children, but similar edict was not issued to his chiefs and evidence abound to say that the practice continued among his chiefs and nobles.<sup>133</sup> In addition, it must be noted that excavations from Ile-Ife as can be seen in the figures above, reveal that facial marking had a longer antiquity in Ile-Ife than as suggested by folk-songs, tales, and oral traditions.

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<sup>133</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás*, 18; 107-09.

As can be seen from the Yorùbá ancient arts above, it is improbable for any of the traditions to explain the provenance of facial markings among Yorùbá and the arguments already made concerning cloth can also apply to facial marking and other forms of body scarification. In addition, art historians have identified three types of Ife arts on the basis of whether or not they have facial marks and scarification patterns or not. Cornelius Adepegba, for instance, noted that stylistic differences of Ife arts represented stages of Ife dynastic changes, with the oldest being plain faced, representing Obatala's dynasty; and later works being with long cicatrization for Oduduwa's dynasty.<sup>134</sup> Adepegba's argument is supported by Ife's oral traditions, as traditions noted that a band of foreigners led by Oduduwa overthrew the Obalufon/Obatala group. Another tradition also stated that Oranmiyan, the grandson of Oduduwa left Ile-Ife for Benin and later to Oyo-Ile. It could therefore be argued that Oranmiyan may have taken and introduced facial marking to Oyo-Ile, from where the practice diffused to other parts of Yorubaland.

Another important argument that must be made here is that Ile-Ife people had originally used facial marks until around the tenth century when it was discontinued during Oduduwa's reign and later re-introduced between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the Oyo-Ile immigrants. The adoption of Oyo-Ile's mark by the Ife deserves a special mention. It has been established in the literature that Oyo's socio-cultural and political dominance over other Yorùbá sub-ethnic groups was widespread and totally entrenched from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and that when the Atlantic Slave Trade was at its height, *Alabaja*, i.e. anyone with the *Abaja* marks were excluded from enslavement; hence, most communities under Oyo's influence, especially their kings and nobles adopted the *Abaja* marks but not the *Eyeo*, the mark on Sango's shoulder, for identification and possible escape from enslavement.<sup>135</sup> During the nineteenth century, it must be

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<sup>134</sup> Cornelius Adepegba, 'Yorùbá Art and Art History' in Deji Ogunremi and Biodun Adediran (eds.), *Culture and Society in Yorubaland*, (Ibadan, 1980), 121-143.

<sup>135</sup> Parliamentary Papers, Lagos, (PP) C4957, Moloney to Rowe, 12 May 1881, encl. in Rowe to Kimberley, 2 July 1881.

noted, anybody could be enslaved and evidence abound that many kings, especially from the Ijesha axis, were enslaved by the Ilorin, Ekiti, and Ibadan for extended periods. *Owa* of Ilesha, king Agunloye-Bi-Oyinbo, in fact, noted that he was enslaved three times by the Ekiti and Ibadan during the nineteenth century.

*I myself was taking (sic) captive...but managed to escape; there is scarcely any man or woman in all the one thousand four hundred and sixty towns and villages that I rule over that were not three or four times slaves to the Ibadans.*<sup>136</sup>

Whatever the origin of scarification and facial markings in Yorubaland, it must be emphasized that scarification and tattooing are some of the means ‘by which the different races in Africa are distinguished from each other much more easily than by any natural peculiarity in the colour of the skin, or their general appearance’.<sup>137</sup> In addition to identification, it was done also for beautification. Hence the popular saying: “*Bi a sa Keke, ti a wo Gombo; Aajo ewa naa ni*” (Whether we are marked with Keke or with Gombo; facial markings are for body adornment). Of the different groups in Yorubaland, facial marking is predominant among the Oyo, Egba, Ijebu, Owu, Ife, Ondo, Ijesha, Ila, Igbomina, and Yagba.<sup>138</sup>

Clapperton noted that tattooing and facial marking are not peculiar to the Yorùbá people alone, but a general practice from Badagry to Sokoto. He maintained further that facial markings were given to every Yorùbá child from age six or seven as a form of identification and membership of different Yorùbá communities.<sup>139</sup>

C.L. Adeoye noted that dress is an important part of Yorùbá people’s life and that the people would stop at nothing in

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<sup>136</sup> Public Records Office, London, (PRO) FOn147/48, statement made by His Majesty, *Owa* Agunloye-bi-Oyinbo, 12<sup>th</sup> January 1882, enclosure 10 in Rowe to Kimberly, 14 March 1882.

<sup>137</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition in Africa*, (vol. 2, London, 1830), 215.

<sup>138</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 179.

<sup>139</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s Last Expedition in Africa*, (vol. 1, London, 1830), 217.

order to dress well.<sup>140</sup> Dress and dressing well are regarded by Yorùbá people as a gift from God and that not all human beings are blessed with this special gift. However, those that are blessed and those that are not must endeavour to dress well, as appearing well determines public reception and acceptance.<sup>141</sup> To ensure positive public acceptance, respect, and reference, therefore, Judith Byfield noted, the “*Yorùbá men and women expended considerable time and resources on dress.*”<sup>142</sup> By implication, while a well-dressed person is respected and accepted, a filthy and improperly-dressed person risks being disrespected and rejected or, at best, tolerated. Just as the Yorùbá frowned at improper dressing, especially for females, so also they frowned at excessive or outrageous dressing, especially for men. The Yorùbá saying ‘*Faari aseju, oko olowo ni mu ni lo*’ (excessive or immoderate dress brings reproach), clearly illustrates that moderation is advocated, for both sexes in Yorubaland.

Early explorers (and later the missionaries and colonial administrators) attested to the rich dress culture of Yorùbá people. Sir Richard Burton, one of the earliest explorers, noted that the Yorùbá people “*are tolerably well clothed...men wore shogoto (Sokoto), or loose cotton drawers fastened above the hips...and extending to the knee. The body was covered with cloth gracefully thrown...over the body.*”<sup>143</sup> William Clarke observed that in Yorubaland, which he visited between 1854 and 1858, men and women took great care to dress and were very proud of their dress. He noted that among Yorùbá, dress is not just a collection of cloths and accessories but that men and women exercised great care in selection of styles and colours.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 162.

<sup>141</sup> A popular saying among the Yorùbá people is ‘*iri ni si ni isenilojo*’, which could be translated to mean, appearance determines the degree of public respect, acceptance and reference.

<sup>142</sup> Judith A. Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*, (United Kingdom, 2002), 2.

<sup>143</sup> Richard F. Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroons Mountain: An Exploration*, (vol. 1, London, 1863, 102.

<sup>144</sup> William H. Clarke, *Travel and Explorations in Yorubaland, 1854-1858*, edited by J.A. Atanda, (Ibadan, 1972), 243.

#### **2.4. Purposes and Types of Dress in Yorubaland.**

This section examines the purposes and types of dress in pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorubaland. However, before going into this examination, it is important to note that most of the practices examined here survived, although in different categories, till date. Notwithstanding this, the following discussion focuses primarily on pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorubaland.

Yorùbá dress, in pre-colonial, pre-Christian and pre-Islamic periods, served two important purposes: to protect the human body from vagaries of nature and to project individual and group identity. The first, which includes covering human nakedness from unwanted and unsolicited visual intrusion or gaze, is perhaps the most visible and could be termed the biological function of Yorùbá dress. The second, which deals with the existential values of identity formation and reinforcement, projects age, status, sex, occupational, socio-political and religious affiliations. This is the social function of dress.

The need to protect the human body, most especially from nature necessitated the use of different dresses for different weathers. During the dry season, Yorùbá people wore light cloths, which were often flung across the body. Essentially, these cloths were made of very light materials and were usually wrapped around the lower body, leaving the upper body bare in order to allow for air to go around the body. In the wet season, cloths were mostly thick, so as to generate warmth.

To protect the body and ensure its health, bathing daily and cleaning the teeth, eyes, and ears, as well as decorating the waist, wrists, ankles and neck, etc. were regarded as part of dressing, as this helped the body to fight germs and diseases. In addition, barbing and shaving of human head, especially of young boys, was commonplace. As far as barbing was concerned, it was believed that barbing was not only for aesthetic reasons, but also for health reasons. For the adults, barbing was compulsory, in addition, complete shaving of the head was done by some category of people, e.g. priests, priestesses, votaries, etc. of the different deities. This praise-name (*Oriki*) of the Ife people makes clear the general practice of head shaving in Yorubaland.

*Omo Olu Ife Ooni, Omo bante jogina,*

*L'omu Ife Ooni wumi, ori Ifa kodoro l'o mu ibe su mi!*<sup>145</sup>

(Worthy children of Ife Ooni, worthy Jogina Apron wearers,  
This endears Ife Ooni to me, head-shaving,  
However, that repels me.)

*Omo oju r'abe sa, Omo bante Jogina,  
L'o mu Ife wu mi, omo ori kodoro,  
L'o mu ibe su mi!*<sup>146</sup>

(Worthy children devoid of facial marks,  
Worthy Jogina Apron wearers,  
This endears me to Ife Ooni, worthy head-shaving children,  
however, that repels me!)

While head shaving was common with adult males, youths barbed their hairs into different styles. Notable examples were *Aaso*, *Afari Apakan*, *Osu Dida*, etc. for the males. The young females also shaved their heads. However, as they mature, especially from age 8, hairstyles such as *Kolese*, *Ipako Elede*, *Suku*, *Moremi*, *Ogun Pari*, *Layipo*, *Koju-S'oko*, *Kehin-S'oko*, *Onile Gogoro*, etc. became the norm.<sup>147</sup> Johnson, like Adeoye and Fadipe, confirmed that between age 8 and 15, females could afford to do just anything with their hairs. However, from age of marriage, females generally adopted other forms of aesthetic and ornamental hairstyles.<sup>148</sup>

Based on their functions, Yorùbá cloths could be broadly classified into four: work or professional cloth, casual cloth, ceremonial cloth, and fashion cloth. This classification is for analytical purposes and has nothing to do with style, mode, design, material, and seasons.

As farmers, hunters, traders, and craftsmen/women, Yorùbá people assigned cloths of different types to different professions or works. For farmers and hunters, *Gberi* and *Sokoto Digo* were the

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<sup>145</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 163.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 176.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid, 164-174.

<sup>148</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 101.

norm. The major differences between farmers and hunters' dress were that hunters' dress had pockets, especially in front, and a hunter's dress was deemed incomplete without a fly-whisk, an *Aparu*. Women and other professionals also had their respective dresses.

Casual cloth was an everyday wear, which, in most cases, was determined by individual's wealth. For some, it contained a handful of cloths, devoid of embroidery and, therefore, not chosen or worn for any aesthetic reason. For others, it contained many hand-woven cloths that were done to specifically reflect riches and stations of life of their owners. By implication, a person's casual cloth may be another's ceremonial cloth. Ceremonial cloths were cloths used for important events or ceremonies. These cloths, like casual cloth, were also determined by individual's wealth. Every Yorùbá man and woman was expected to have a few ceremonial cloths irrespective of their stations and statuses in the society. Fashion cloths performed similar functions as ceremonial cloths the only difference being that fashion cloths are made for a given period and possession of these cloths was predicated on individual's wealth. The following Yorùbá saying however attests to its importance in the people's ward robes: "*Aso igba la da fun igba*" (individuals should wear cloths that are commensurate to the time). However, fashion cloths were not compulsory, as this adage shows: "*Bi a ti mo la a se, enikan ki sin omo niyawo, ko fi omo sofa*" (each should live according to his or her means, as no one pawns a child to pay for another's marriage ceremony); "*Twon eku, ni iwon ite; eni ti ko to gelete, ko gbodo mi fin*" (the size of a rat is also the size of its bed) or (a lanky person cannot complain of overweight). The use of fashion cloths was nevertheless limited to kings, chiefs, and people of enormous means.<sup>149</sup>

The use of jewelry among the Yorùbá was both for aesthetic and religious purposes. Culturally, it was not part of Yorùbá culture to leave the necks, waists, and wrists bare. Beads and jewelry (from precious metals) of different colours, sizes, and worth were usually worn either as part of dress ensemble on important occasions or as part of everyday wear. In fact, only great

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<sup>149</sup> Interview with Oba Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi, Oyo, 15 July 2010.

calamity like death and mourning, would remove beads and other jewelry from the waists, necks, and wrists of the Yorùbá.

Beads were used to adorn the waists, necks, ankle, and wrists; while jewelries were reserved only for the necks and wrists. These entire dress ensembles were used according to sex, age, and status.

Beads were also part of dress ensemble of priests, priestesses, votaries and devotees of the different deities. The most notable of these religion-related beads was *Kele*, which were of two colours, white and red. *Kele* were smaller beads and worn mainly by *Sango* and *Ooba* worshippers. Besides *Kele*, there was also *Otutu-opon*, which came in black, red, or green, and was usually worn by diviners. *Oyinde* and *Ebolo* were two smaller beads usually worn on the necks by *Osun* votaries. *Sese-efun*, another white small bead, was used by votaries of *Ogiyan*, *Orisa-ala*, *Orisa Ijehun*, *Orisa Adaatan*, *Obalufon*, *Orisa Ife*, *Orisa Irowu*, and *Orisa Alaso-funfun*. *Itun*, *Ifa*, and *Abere* were also three important beads, which, unlike others, were not worn to adorn the waists, necks, or wrists, but used only for *Ifa* ritual purposes. *Jojo*, big and small, was used to adorn youngsters' waists, necks, and wrists. While the small *Jojo* were used to adorn children's necks and wrists, the big ones were used for the waists.

Wives, whether newly married or not, must adorn their waists, necks, and wrists with beads. The following Yorùbá adage makes clear Yorùbá worldview on this: "*Gbongan ko ju gbongan; iyawo ti ko so l'eke mo'di, yo so ikarawun*" (Jingling of beads or bangles are the same; a wife who wears no bead must wear snail-shells).

Although there were many kinds of bead, *Iyun* was the most notable. Others that must not be lacking in any woman's wardrobe included *segi*, *okun wewe*, *jojo wewe*, *lagidigba*, *enla*, and *ankara*. It must be noted that while others were used to adorn either the wrists or necks, some others such as *lagidigba*, *enla*, and *ankara* were mainly used to adorn the waists.

Aged women, chiefs, and kings also have age or status-specific beads. Aged women could wear any of the aforementioned beads; however the use of the following beads was peculiar to them: *opoto*, *oyadokun*, *kagi*, *dangbongbon*, *kokoro*, *kundi*, *koko-aro*, *lakuta*, *oju-aguntan*, *moni-moni*, *enu-eye*, *eegun-oyinbo*, and



*opa-aro*. As for kings and chiefs; the following beads are predominant: *segi*, *akun*, and *ankara*. As C.L. Adeoye noted, except for *segi*, others were used specifically by kings and chiefs as symbol of authority, especially in places like Ilesha, Akure, and Ondo.<sup>150</sup> Also, in other parts of Yorubaland, most notably Ife, Ekiti, Ila, Oyo, Tapa, Beriberi, Gogobiri and Igbomina, the use of status-specific beads were predominant. The following Yorùbá popular song attests to this:

*Oba o! Oba Alase Oba, Oba to de ade owo,*

(All Hail the King, the Supreme King!  
The king who wears a crown of cowries.)

*Oba to wo bata ileke, Oba to te opa ileke  
Oba o! Oba Alase, Oba.*

(The king who wears shoes of beads,  
The king who don a staff of beads,  
All Hail the King, the Supreme King!)

Yorùbá people also say: *Ade la fin mo Oba, Ileke ni t'awon Ijoye* (A king is known by his crown, as chiefs are known by their beads. From the above, it can be argued that beads were both for aesthetics, identity construction, and religious purposes.

Besides beads, jewelry was also used in Yorubaland. Like beads, they are for aesthetics, identity construction, and religious purposes. As the following Yorùbá popular song shows:

*Ide wewe ni t'Osun, Oje gbongbo ni t'oorisa  
Sekeseke ni t' Ogun, e ba mi sipe fun Baale  
Ko fun wa l' Ododo pa kaja,  
Gbogbo wa l' Ogun jo bi.  
Hepa! Eru wa le.*

(Small brass is for Osun worship,  
Huge bronze figures are for the deities,  
Chains are for Ogun,

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<sup>150</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 190.

Please, warn the head chief;  
To allow us our colourful dress.  
We are all worshipers of Ogun.  
Hepa! A slave has entered.)

From this folk song, it is incontrovertible that brass was part of religious dress of Osun worshipers as bronze were used by worshipers of deities such as *Obalufon*, *Ogiyan*, *Orisa-Popo*, *Orisa Ikire*, *Orisa Ife*, and *Orisa Adaatan*. However, cast chains were used for charms, which were used as leg and wrist chains for spirit-children, *Abiku*. Cast chains were also used as charms by warriors and elderly people.

Contacts with Muslims and, later, European traders introduced the use of gold and other precious stones into Yorubaland. The use of gold was not gender-specific and goldsmiths have cast gold into neck-chain, wrist-chain, rings, and bangles. More recently, Yorùbá people have begun to use gold to adorn their teeth, a practice that was closely associated with Islam.

Tattooing and use of henna were also part of Yorùbá dress. Female and male indulge in its use. However, Yorùbá believed that only a lazy and fashion-freak male would indulge in tattooing and using henna. Nevertheless, both were popular among Yorùbá people, especially in Ilorin, Ofa, Tapa, Oyo, and Ekiti.

Unlike cloth and jewelry, facial marking has nothing to do with status or wealth. As Samuel Johnson rightly argued, “*facial marks are for the purpose of distinguishing the various Yorùbá families.*”<sup>151</sup> Among the Oyo, marks such as *Abaja*, *Pele*, *Keke*, and *Gombo* were commonplace. This markedly differentiated Oyo people from either the Egba or the Igbomina people. Besides, the different cities and towns had their individual facial markings. Different compounds in Yorubaland also had their respective facial markings. Invariably, there can be as many as a hundred different facial markings in a Yorùbá town. It must be noted that in Yorubaland, facial marks of ordinary people differed markedly from those of royal families. For instance, *Abaja* was an exclusive preserve of the *Alaafin* and the royal family.<sup>152</sup> Although facial

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<sup>151</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 106.

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Oba Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi, Oyo, 15 July 2010.

mark also existed in Ile-Ife, it was however not as predominant as in other Yorùbá communities.

The different communities in Yorubaland were notable for production of different dress. For instance, Oshogbo, Oyo, Ondo, Ibadan, Abeokuta, and Iseyin, among many others, were reputable for the production of tie and dye, *Ofi*, *Sanyan* and *Alari*. Ile-Ife, Benin, Oyo, etc. were reputable for smiting (of bronze, brass, etc.). Although tradition credited dexterity in the production of different dresses by different communities to the different deities, gods, and goddesses, it must be emphasized that in all practical sense, such dexterity owed more to geographical factors than to any other thing. For instance, Oshogbo, Oyo, Abeokuta, etc. where tie and dye was predominant, lie in an open semi-savannah terrain, which was suitable for the growth of *Elu*, the main ingredient for making tie and dye. In the same way, Oshogbo and Abeokuta, also notable for pottery-making, sat on abundant clay deposit. As this is true of the aforementioned examples, so also it is for the different communities and cities across Yorubaland where the production of one dress or the other was commonplace.

## **2.5. Yorùbá Worldview on the Role of Dress in the Construction of Yorùbá Identity.**

Western education and the art of writing, which today are important requirements in determining a civilized society or people, were unknown to Yorùbá people until the closing period of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Yorùbá people had their criteria to differentiate between a civilized person and a country bumpkin. At that time, civilization was dependent on two basic criteria: social conducts of individuals, encapsulated as being an *Omoluabi*, and where an individual lives.

*Omoluabi* has been conceptualized in a variety of ways. Professor 'Wande Abimbola, former vice-chancellor of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria and a renown *Babalawo*, described *Omoluabi* as '*to exhibit and demonstrate the inherent virtue and value of iwapele*'<sup>153</sup>, where *iwapele*, a contraction of

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<sup>153</sup> 'Wande Abimbola, "*Iwapele: The Concept of Good Character in Ifa Literary Corpus*", in 'Wande Abimbola (ed.) *Yorùbá Oral Tradition: Poetry in Music, Dance, and Drama*, (Ibadan, 1975), 389.

two words – ‘*iwa*’, character or behaviour, and ‘*pele*’, gentleness – means a gentle person with lofty character. Sophie Oluwole, an emeritus Professor of Philosophy, conceptualized *Omoluabi* as “*a person that is given to deep knowledge, wisdom, and self-discipline*”<sup>154</sup>, a combination of which gave such individual a high sense of responsibility, which showed in his or her private and public actions and which earned the individual moral and social integrity and socio-political personality, in the society. Rowland O. Abiodun, the John C. Newton Professor of the History of Art and Black Studies and Chair of Black Studies at Amherst College, described “*an Omoluwabi as someone who has been well brought up or a person who is highly cultured*”.<sup>155</sup> As noted by these notable scholars of Yorùbá culture, a conglomeration of moral principles such as being lofty in *oro siso*, (spoken word), *iteriba* (respect), *inu rere* (having good mind to others), *otito* (truth), *iwa* (character), *akinkanju* (bravery), *ise* (hard work), *opolo pipe* (intelligence) and *iwo aso* (dress) were core defining attributes of *Omoluabi*. Although Yorùbá people also realized the higher demand of being an *Omoluabi*, they however regarded anyone who was not an *Omoluabi* as *Eniyan Buburu*, *Eni-Ibi*, *Onijamba*, *Omolasan*, etc. Although Yorubaland was fragmented into different groups, *Omoluabi* was, undoubtedly, an ultimate basis of social, cultural, religious, and political conducts of Yorùbá people.

Although *Omoluabi*, as a moral and ethical requirement, applies to both male and female, irrespective of age and status; it was however believed that any untoward behaviour or conduct has a feminine face. For instance, a badly behaved son or daughter was regarded as to have taken after his or her mother and it was common for such erring boy or girl to be derogatorily described thus: *o ja fun iya e je*’ or *’owu ti iya gbon, l’omo o ran*’ (a child that has eaten part of his/her mother’s intestine or it is the thread that a mother spins that his or her child will sew with.

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<sup>154</sup> Oluwole B. Sophie, “Who are (we) the Yorùbá?” A Key Note paper delivered at Pre-World Philosophy Day Conference, June 12, at the National Theatre, Lagos, 2007, 12-15.

<sup>155</sup> Abiodun Rowland, “Identity and the artistic process in the Yorùbá aesthetic concept of *Iwa*”, *Journal of Cultures and Ideas*, 1:1 (1983), 14.

In addition to being an *Omoluabi*, the second requirement of a civilized state in pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorubaland is whether an individual lives in the city or in the village. Although traditionally farmers, hunters and traders; Yorùbá people have three types of farms - *Okò Eti'le*, *Okò-Egan* and *Okò-Igbo*.<sup>156</sup> These three classifications deal with the distance of the various farms from their homes. While the first was usually located just at the outskirts of their village, *Okò-Egan* was far and usually in the open savannah. *Okò-Igbo*, as the name implies, lay deep in the forest. For the first two, Yorùbá people went to any of the first two daily and returned to their homes in the evening. For the last one, it might take a whole day of traveling to get to *Okò-Igbo*; hence, houses were normally built at *Okò-Igbo* where people live for as long as they have works to do there. While everyday crops were usually planted in the first two, cash crops were the primary products at *Okò-Igbo*. Yorùbá people believed that the longer one stayed at *Okò-Igbo*, the more bucolic and uncivilized one became; hence those who stayed longer periods, sometimes between six unbroken months and a year, were mostly regarded as *Ara-Okò*, country bumpkins.

Pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorùbá conceptualization of civilization, from the foregoing, differed markedly from contemporary conceptualization of civilization, which sees the phenomenon as a state of intellectual, cultural, and material development that is characterized by progress in the arts and sciences, as well as the extensive use of technology and writing. For the pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorùbá, civilization, which they called *Olaju*, was a moral, cultural, social, and intellectual refinement, which related essentially to an individual's possession of high sense of responsibility and social integrity, being lofty in speech and respectful to others, being good minded and truthful, having good taste in socio-political manners, speech, and dress, being brave and intelligent, etc. These qualities, which all Yorùbá people were expected to possess, and were therefore striving to achieve, were encapsulated in the phenomenon called *Omoluabi*.

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<sup>156</sup> Ajisafe Moore E.A., *The Laws and Customs of the Yorùbá People*, (Abeokuta, 1918, reprinted in 1924), 10-15.

The strict requirement of being an *Omoluabi* was premised on the fact that only such a person can function in any office without bias, let or hindrance. He or she was regarded as representing both his/her family and Yorubaland in general. *Omoluabi* was, thus, an internal standard of moral or civic virtue against which the Yorùbá measure personal esteem and individual's qualification for group control and identity. For the pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorùbá, *Omoluabi* was a common human instinct, which was created out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour. It was a system of moral meaning and ethical reputation within Yorubaland. Understood in this way, *Omoluabi*, therefore, played fundamental roles in pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorùbá social, moral and political thoughts. Only an *Omoluabi* can hold socio-political and religious office in Yorubaland.<sup>157</sup>

*Olaju*, the opposite of which is *Oju-Dudu*, was essentially related to whether one was an *Omoluabi* and lived in a town/city or a country bumpkin. A city dweller, above every other person, was expected to be civilized not just in manner of speech, but also in dress and gait. He was regarded as an *Olaju*, a civilized person, as against an *Ara-Okò* who was believed to be rustic in manner, uncouth in speech, and poorly dressed. An *Olaju* was everything other than an *Ara-Okò*. An *Ara-Okò*, owing to being the opposite of an *Olaju*, is described in simple terms as an *Ara-Okò* or more banally as “*eni ti oju e dudu*” (an uncivilized or uncultured fellow). Characteristically, an *Ara-Okò* manifested the following traits: usually from a rural farm village, spoke petulantly, behaved in ways that can generally be described as lacking in understanding of worldly affairs. Above all, an *Ara-Okò* was usually ignorant of his or her uncivilized state. It was far easier to know an *Ara-Okò* from an *Olaju* even when both were silent, as manners of dress easily passed one up as either an *Olaju* or an *Ara-Okò*.

An *Ara-Okò* was not just uncivilized, but also dirty and such a person was only good to serve the civilized ones. The following popular Yorùbá song illustrates this perception.

*Afinju w'oja, won a rin gbendeke;*

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, especially chapters 4 to 7 for details on pristine qualifications for socio-political and religious positions in Yorubaland.

*Obun wo'ja won a rin pa siosio.*  
*Obun siosio ni yo r'eru Afinju wo'le.*

(The civilized walks regally into the market square;  
While the filthy cuts an image of pity.  
The filthy shall carry the loads of the civilized.)

It was common in pre-colonial and pre-mission Oyo, Ondo, Ekiti and Ibadan to also refer to people without facial marks as *Ara-Oko*, just as people in contemporary Lagos and Abeokuta would regard those with facial marks or people from Oyo and its environs as *Ara-Oko*. In most cities, it was common to describe any unruly behaviour, whether in speech or in dressing, as essentially those of *Ara-Oko* even if such errant individual was a city-dweller.

It must be emphasized that Yorùbá people do not confuse being a village dweller with being devoid of the qualities of an *Omoluabi*. One can be a city dweller and still be *Omolasan*. In fact, in contemporary Yorubaland, city dwellers often are regarded as devoid of the essential characteristic of *Omoluabi*, being polluted by Western civilization which places emphasis on material things. Having made the above qualification, it is important to add that anybody who fails to conform to this Yorùbá's internal value was regarded as *Omolasan*. Invariably, an *Ara Oko* was not necessarily an *Omolasan* or *Eniyan buruku* simply because he was a village dweller while a city dweller was not necessarily an *Omoluabi* simply because he was a city dweller. For Yorùbá people, the combination of being an *Omoluabi* and a city dweller marked one out as a civilized person. The emphasis on being a city dweller, it must be emphasized, deals exclusively with knowing the acceptable manner of speech and walk, mode of dressing and general conduct associated with the high culture of the courts.

In relation to non-Yorùbá people, the Yorùbá recognized the fact that every community has its standard of behaviour; nevertheless, they evinced pride in their subsistence civilization epitomized by *Omoluabi* and disdained other ways through which other people may determine their religious and secular representation and control. Such other ways were regarded as those

of *Ara-Oko* or *awon t'Oju won dudu*, (the uncultured, uncivilized country bumpkins), the opposite of *Olaju*. Hence, only the Yorùbá who possess the internal quality of being an *Omoluabi* and lives in the city, were *Olaju*. Others, especially when such people live in faraway places and when their social customs and manners differed from those of Yorùbá people, were regarded as *Ara-Oko*. It was on the basis of this view of their own values that non-Yorùbá people, for instance, Hausa, Tiv, Igala or Igbo ethnic groups, were commonly regarded by the Yorùbá as *Ara-Oko*.

However, prudential values such as inter-group marriages, shared religions, long-distance trading, inter-ethnic migration, clientage, and folk-practices ensured that the Yorùbá people were not chauvinistic despite their obtuse fascination with their internal values inherent in *Omoluabi*. These prudential values ensured that spatial and ethnic frontiers between Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá remain porous, thereby facilitating cross-frontier cooperation. Yorùbá, in any cross-frontier cooperation, were quick to say concerning such cooperation that “*a fe la awon Ara-Oko l'Oju*” (we want to civilize these country bumpkins). In this way, Yorùbá people not only validate their ethical differences, but also assert their moral and ethical superiority to others. Such grandstanding inexorably sets out the differences between the Yorùbá and other people as well as sets out how Yorùbá people expect others to behave when they are in contacts with them.

In pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorubaland, the question of who held an office was not just premised on what family was customarily entitled to the office, but the question of which of the qualified members of such family possessed the internal value of being an *Omoluabi*. Only the candidate that possessed that internal value was vested with power. Cases abound in different Yorùbá communities where many *Omo-oye* (title-candidates) were rejected by the communities for moral deficiencies. At a broader level, the various contestations involving the different Yorùbá groups, for example the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars can best be described as attempts by the Yorùbá peoples to figure out whom, among the many contenders, best expressed Yorùbá's ethical internal values for governance.

The following popular sayings make clear the importance of being an *Omoluabi* in Yorùbá culture: “*iwa rere l'eso eniyan*”



(the pride of any human being is a lofty conduct) and also “*iwa l’ewa omo eniyan*” (the beauty of any human being is a lofty conduct). Among the Yorùbá, a rich and well-dressed person with questionable character is usually described as wearing “*aso ete*” (ridiculous dress) and “*aso abuku*” (contemptuous cloths) as against “*aso iyi*” (glorious cloths) and “*aso eye*” (cloths of honour) of a poor man with lofty character. In support of the above is also the saying that underscores the values of an *Omoluabi*, even in a state of penury: “*b’eniyan ja’le l’ekan, bo ba d’aran b’ori; aso ole lo da bo’ra*” (no matter how richly-dressed is a thief, he remains a thief). Others include: “*A-gbabo-o sokoto, bi ko funni lese a soni; remuremu ni ohun eni mbani mu*” (borrowed trousers: if they are not too tight around the legs, they will be too loose; one’s own things fit one exactly), which means that borrowed articles are never like one’s own. “*Agbalagba to wewu aseju, ete ni yo fi ri*” (an elder who wears the garment of immoderation will be disgraced) or immoderation brings disgrace. “*Ara oko ni oun gbo finrin finrin; ta lo so fun bi ko se ara ile?*” (The bush dweller says he heard a rumour; who told him, if it was not a town dweller?) Or that people should not presume to instruct those who know better than they; “*Aso a-fo-fun o je ka mo olowo*” (cloths washed clean make identifying the rich person impossible) or, more appropriately, that a poor person looks rich in his or her appearance. “*Aso to kuni ku ni nje gogowu*” (whatever clothing one is left with is one’s best”, meaning that one makes the most of what one has; “*A-te-e-ka ni iyi olola; salubata ni iyi oloto; ba a ba gbera lagbeeju oba ni won nfini ise*” (spreading-the-mat-without-rolling-it-back-up is the mark of the wealthy; sandals are the mark of the illustrious; if one sings one’s praise too loudly one is liable to be made a king) or that people take one as one presents oneself. “*A-win-na-wo o yeni; a-gba-bo-o sokoto o ye omo eeyan; bi ko funni lese a dorogi; ohun eni ni nyeni*” (borrowing-money-to-spend does not speak well of one; borrowed trousers do not become a person; if it is not tight around the legs it is difficult to remove; it is one’s thing that fits one), this teaches that one should not live beyond one’s means.

C.L. Adeoye, while discussing the art of beautifying oneself, noted that the Yorùbá consider dress and dressing as gifts from God and that anyone who is beautiful or who dresses well is

lucky, as he or she has received a gift from God. He also noted that it is part of Yorùbá custom to beautify their bodies.<sup>158</sup> More importantly, as Byfield also noted, dress makes “*enduring statements about one’s character and station in life.*”<sup>159</sup> Underlying this conception of dress among the Yorùbá is the need to appear pleasing and acceptable not only to (and by) oneself but also to (and by) the public. Hence, this Yorùbá popular adage is instructive: “*Obun sio sio, ni yo ru eru afinju wole*” (A dirty person would serve the beautiful).

N.A. Fadipe, underscoring the social contents of dress in Yorubaland, added that part of the qualities families look for while seeking wives (for their young boys) or husbands (for their young girls) was ability to dress well.<sup>160</sup> Families discreetly sought out to marry from families that have no record of sickness, insanity, indebtedness, and filthiness. These inquiries were considered necessary in order to “*ensure not only soundness of stock (and thus to eliminate as far as possible the risk of a union which would bring shame or unhappiness upon the family), but also to guarantee the peace of members of the family...*”<sup>161</sup>

On intersection between economy and social relations, the Yorùbá believe that “*Ki adara die, kato s’awure ni awure fi n je*”, (to appear presentable (or to dress properly) before using luck-inducing charm, aids the charm’s potency). In a 259-page edited volume, Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams assembled ten essays to assess the significance of cloth in religious worship among Yorùbá people of Nigeria.<sup>162</sup> Judith Byfield, writing on the philosophy of dress, noted that dress constitutes the most important form of aesthetic expression in Yorubaland. Beyond aesthetics, Byfield noted further that dress, “*did not merely cover the body, it indicated one’s gender, character, wealth, and status...*”<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 162

<sup>159</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, 3.

<sup>160</sup> Fadipe, *The Sociology*, 71.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, p. 71.

<sup>162</sup> Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje Williams, *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005).

<sup>163</sup> Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, 2.

Quoting Sir Richard Burton, Byfield noted that Yorùbá believe that dress reflects socio-economic distinctions between the rich and poor. Wealthy men, she noted, wore embroidery robe, a loose garment, worn over the shoulders, and falling below the knees; while poor men often dispensed with *Sokoto* and shoulder cloth retaining only *Diggo* or loin wrap.<sup>164</sup> In yet another sense, *Gberi* and *Digo* were common to hunters and farmers in Yorubaland before contact with Arabs, Europeans and Asians; however, they were designed differently that one can tell one from the other by merely looking at them. Female traders, unlike farmer's wives who wore *Buba* and *Ilabiru*, wore *Iro* and *Buba*. Just as professions had their respective dress; positions also had their corresponding dress. The Yorùbá adage, “*a ki fi ola ji'yo, sugbon a mo fi l'aso*” (salt consumption is not predicated on wealth, unlike dress), goes further to buttress this. The use of *Dandogo* among Yorùbá people presupposed that users must be wealthy, as Yorùbá maintain that: “*Dandogo ko ja a binu da*” (Dandogo is too costly to be sewn for fun). In other words, it is sewn only by the wealthy. The poor, as Johnson and Adeoye noted, wore *Buba* and *Sokoto Sooro*, or *Dansiki* and *Sokoto Sooro* or *Latan*, *Oyala* and *Sokoto Atu*, *Sapara* and *Sokoto Sooro*. In addition to *Dandogo*, the rich could wear *Gbariye*, and *Agbada*.<sup>165</sup> While these different clothes signify social and political status of individuals, they also mirror wealth. In line with the above, another example of dress as signifier of position and status is this popular Yorùbá assertion, “*Ade ori la n mo Oba, Irukere ni ta'won Ijoye*” (A king is known by his crown, fly-whisks are for Chiefs).

Although used within specific contexts, an exceptional quality of the above sayings is their allusions to dress, which makes clear the importance of dress to the Yorùbá people. From these and thousands of more examples, societal expectation from an *Omoluabi*, to be very modest, is a tough call. It must be noted that within the Yorùbá group, the question of who represents or who holds what office was settled by a number of criteria, chief among which was being an *Omoluabi*, the keystone of Yorùbá moral ethnicity. In contemporary Yorubaland, an *Omoluabi* must

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid, 3.

<sup>165</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 192-218; Johnson, *The History*, 110-113.

also be educated. Only an *Omoluabi* can hold office in pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorubaland, as only he or she can readily command people's obedience. To sustain his or her place, the office holder knows that being an *Omoluabi* was a quotidian requirement.

Whereas the Yorùbá people imposed this higher ethical value upon themselves; in the larger arena, involving different ethnic groups, no such criteria exist. Once the Yorùbá had thrown an *Omoluabi* into the ring, such individual and his or her claims to power in the larger arena, entails no accountability and responsibility to the larger group, but to the Yorùbá people. This is a big flaw, as it prevented the Yorùbá from exporting their high moral value and also ensured the corruption of their representatives. More often than not, the conducts of such representatives have been unprecedented and some of them have reaped limitless rewards, as was the case with Chiefs Obafemi Awolowo and Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Premier of Western Region and his Deputy. High politics, during this period, ensured that dissenting voices within Yorubaland to this lack of high ethical standard in the larger arena were suppressed. The high-point of which was the disagreement that ensued between Awolowo and Akintola and one which later consumed Yorubaland.

From the above, it can be argued that pre-colonial and pre-mission Yorùbá social and political thoughts revolved around being an *Omoluabi*, which combined strict moral qualities with being urbane. The combination of all these constituted what Yorùbá people considered as their very essence, the soul of their peoplehood. Therefore, to be a Yorùbá man or woman is to be well-behaved, to be well-behaved is, among other things, to be well-dressed. A poorly-dressed Yorùbá man or woman, not minding if he or she dwelt in the city or farm-village, was regarded as a second-rate citizen; hence, the saying: "*Aifini pe ni, aif'eniyan p'eniyan; lon mu Ara-Oko san Bante wo'lu*"<sup>166</sup>.

With respect to the above saying, it was not uncommon for parents to scold or ask a child rhetorically: *Bawo lo se mu'ra bi*

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<sup>166</sup> It is crass incivility that makes a country bumpkin enter the City in his *Bante*. *Bante* is a covering around the waist made from either cloth or leather.

*ara oko yi?* (Why are you dressed like a country bumpkin?) This can only happen when such a person dresses poorly. Immodest dress, most especially body-revealing or body-hugging cloths, was frowned at completely. In such instances, Yorùbá were wont to say: “*Omoluabi kan ki mura be yen*” or “*Omo Yorùbá kan ki mura be yen*” (no cultured Yorùbá man or woman would dress that way). So, by implication, one can reason that while dwelling in the city is believed to be associated with knowing and using new fashion trend, behaving in a cultured or civilized manner; a city dweller may lack these refined and much-sought characteristic and a village dweller may possess them. Where such was the case, the city dweller was roundly rebuffed and described as an *Ara-Oko* and the village dweller with lofty conducts was accepted and applauded as being an *Olaju*.



**Dandago is too costly to be sewn for fun**  
(Sources: Personal Collection)

Essentially, being well-behaved entails also being well-dressed, as material expression of being an *Omoluabi* is not limited

to manner of speech, lofty conduct, and a high sense of moral rectitude alone, but also to bodily expression such as gait and dress. The emphasis on bodily expression was premised on Yorùbá's belief that the outer person mirrored the inner one, as makes clear in these sayings: "*ara la mo, a o mo inu*" (the body is visible, not the mind) and also "*b'inu se ri, ni obi nyan*" (oracular divination usually tallies with one's inner man). On the face value, these Yorùbá sayings appear to run counter to the English aphorism that appearance is deceptive and misleading (same as 'not all that glitter are gold'), it must however be noted that the Yorùbá also say that "*Oju ba'ni re, ore o de'kun*", which is the same as the aforementioned English aphorism. The sense in the first set of Yorùbá sayings differs markedly from the second, which places emphasis on the misleading nature of appearance. In the first, the Yorùbá believe that humans are incapable of altering the reality in the inner recesses of their minds; hence, the emphasis is on the inner man, which is believed to be discernible by an insightful audience or a careful reviewer with "*aju inu*", inner eyes. Hence, the saying: "*Oju inu l'agbalagba nlo*" (elders deploy inner eyes or insight).

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that Yorùbáness is founded on a number of things, among which being well-dressed is perhaps one of the most essential. In other words, Yorùbá dress, among other things, creates Yorùbáness. Also essential to Yorùbá identity construction and essence is being urbane. Perhaps the oldest sources of this important quality of the Yorùbá people remains the *Ifa* corpus, which was first compiled and published in 1898 by Rev. E.M. Lijadu<sup>167</sup> and, in 1899, by Rev. James Johnson,<sup>168</sup> both of whom wrote many years before Rev. Samuel Johnson<sup>169</sup> (in 1920) and Dr. N.A. Fadipe<sup>170</sup> (in 1970). Eloquent testimonies of unrivalled ethical morality of the Yorùbá people also dotted mines and plantation records where slaves from Yorubaland were taken to. They were reputed to hold

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<sup>167</sup> Lijadu E.M, *Ifa – Imole Re ti i Se Ipile Isin ni Ile Yorùbá*, (Ado-Ekiti, 1898); see also: Lijadu E.M., *Orunmila Nipa*, (Ado-Ekiti, 1908).

<sup>168</sup> Johnson James, *Yorùbá Heathenism*, (Exter, 1899).

<sup>169</sup> Johnson, *The History*.

<sup>170</sup> Fadipe N.A., *The Sociology*.

seriously the ethical value of an *Omoluabi*, being “*remarkably shrewd, intelligent, very diplomatic, cautious almost to timidity, provokingly conservative, and withal very masterful*”, “*that those of them who had the misfortune of being carried away to foreign climes so displayed these characteristics there, and assumed such airs of superiority and leadership over the men of their race they met there, in such a matter of fact way that the attention of their masters was perforce drawn to this*” and therefore prefer and “*appoint many of them as overseers and supervisors*” over other slaves.<sup>171</sup> They were completely different from other ethnic groups, especially those from northern Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani, who were reputable for lying.<sup>172</sup> In another report, Captain Clapperton, passing through Yorubaland in 1825, was reported to have described the people’s honesty as no less remarkable, where stealing of any kind was a taboo and having travelled sixty miles in eight days, with a numerous and heavy baggage, and about ten different relays of carriers, without losing so much as the value of a shilling, in public or private; a circumstance evincing not only somewhat more than common honesty in the inhabitants, but a degree of subordination and regulation.<sup>173</sup> Clapperton, in the same text, wondered how such a “*sophisticated government could exist amongst a people hitherto considered barbarians.*”

From the foregoing, one can conclude safely that Yorùbá identity revolves around, not just been native of Yorubaland, but also the existential qualities of being an *Omoluabi* and being urbane, none of which is possible without dress and being well-dressed. Invariably, it can be argued that prior to the twentieth century, an era characterized by colonialism and Christian missionary activities, an *Ara-Okò* in Yorubaland is either a fellow Yorùbá whose conducts can be described as reflecting those of uncultured, manner-less and poorly-dressed individual or a non-Yorùbá, whose culture, most notably dress and any other social

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<sup>171</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 20.

<sup>172</sup> Temple C.L., *Native races and Their Rulers: Sketches and Studies of Official Life and Administrative Problems in Nigeria*, (Cape Town, 1918), 103-122.

<sup>173</sup> Anonymous, *The Destruction of Lagos*, (London, 1852), 9-10. (The author of this book is unknown; however, the book is one of the earliest records on slave trade and formed a part of William and Berta Bascom collections at The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, USA.

categories like speech and gait, is different from that of the Yorùbá people.

## **2.6. Conclusion**

From the foregoing, a number of arguments could be made on Yorùbáness and dress. In the first place, Yorùbáness develops a long time before colonial rule and missionary activities in Yorubaland. Hence, adducing any of the nineteenth century developments, most notably the naming of the Yorùbá ethnic groups by the ex-slaves, whether in the New World or in Sierra Leone and Liberia; as well as missionary activities in Nigeria and colonialism, both of which required a distinct identification of the various groups, as origin of Yorùbá identity, to be very modest, is limiting and self-serving. Such interpretations take no cognizance of shared histories and values that have united the different Yorùbá groups since the beginning of time.

Yorubaland, divided into splintered groups and never ruled as one group until the colonial period and, each with its socio-economic and political head, shared similar characteristics with the ancient Greek city-states, described as *'poleis'*. *'Polis'* (singular), a Greek word, originally meaning city, has, in modern historiography, come to connote not just city-states, but also citizenship and body of citizens. The Latin equivalent, *'civis'*, means 'citizen', from where the word *'civitas'*, which means 'citizen-hood', from where 'citizen' and 'citizenship' were derived, differs markedly from *'municipium'*, a non-sovereign local entity or a primordial ancient city states such as Tyre or Sidon. Yorùbá city-states were self-governed like, for instance, Sparta and Athens, and completely different from any known primordial ancient city-states, which were ruled by a king or a small oligarchy. Like the ancient Greeks, the different Yorùbá groups went by their different names – Oyo, Ife, Egba, Ijebu, etc. - just like the Athenians, Lacedaemonians, and Thebans. They never felt the need to bear a single, uniform name despite shared values, inter-communicable language, customs, traditions, culture, and identities. Until their contacts with other ethnic groups, whether for trade or war, the need to act as one was never felt. Like Athens, Sparta, Thebes and other poleis of the ancient Greece, they traded with one another and fought one another when the need arose. The term *'polis'* (so



also the Latin equivalent, '*civis*'), which in archaic Greece meant city, changed with the development of the governance center in the city to indicate state (which included its surrounding villages), and finally with the emergence of a citizenship notion between the different classes of people within the city-states, it came to describe the entire body of citizens.

Yorùbá city-states, as socio-economic and political entities that were ruled by the body of their citizens, shared all the essential characteristics that informed their fusion into one group during the colonial period. The building blocks of Yorùbáness, therefore, transcend the developments in the New World and other places associated with the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, colonial rule and missionary activities. In as much as a child has identity, unique in its own, before christening, then Yorùbá identity is as good as already made before the christening done by the ex-slaves, missionaries and colonial administrators in the late nineteenth century.

In other words, Yorùbáness, especially since the late nineteenth century, is an expression of what had already existed, a critical component of which is (Yorùbá) dress. As already shown, Yorùbáness is impossible without (Yorùbá) dress and the dressed body is a central component of Yorùbáness. It must be emphasized that the nexus between Yorùbáness and (Yorùbá) dress, not minding the variety of changes that Yorubaland had witnessed over the years, remains active and shall always be. It is impossible to remove (Yorùbá) dress from Yorùbáness, as Yorùbáness cannot be possible without (Yorùbá) dress. Yorùbáness and (Yorùbá) dress are comparable only to a bone and the marrow inside it. Yorùbáness embodies (Yorùbá) dress, just as the bone encased the marrow. And like the marrow, (Yorùbá) dress gives Yorùbáness life. The harmonious functioning of both the marrow and bone, gives the body its vitality, efficient functioning and life. Just as a dysfunctional marrow leads to complex polygenic traits such as neurogenic hypertension, aplastic anemia, etc; so also is any attempt to remove (Yorùbá) dress from the ethnic group's identity and essence.

As far back as we can tell Yorùbáness has been characterized by urbanity, urbaneness, being civilized and political. Although possessing its inherent flaws, the oldest evidence of these

characteristic of Yorùbáness remains the *Ifa* corpus. Its oldest descriptions, compiled by E.M. Lijadu, James Johnson, and Ajisafe Moore many years before the much-more celebrated Samuel Johnson, and corroborated by oral traditions and archeological discoveries, especially the ancient Yorùbá arts, some of which were dated to 500 B.C, attested to these characteristics. As shown above, Yorùbáness is more than being urbane; it also entails being guided by the internal, ethical value of *Omoluabi*, which qualifies individuals for socio-economic, political and religious office within Yorùbá ethnic group. Being an *Omoluabi*, as already demonstrated, is to be well-behaved, and to be well behaved is, among other things, to be well-dressed.

From Oduduwa to the Alaafins, Samuel Crowther to Samuel Johnson, Obafemi Awolowo to M.K.O. Abiola; the ideological construction of Yorùbáness is the distillation of communities who believed they belong together and Yorùbá ethnicity is expressed in different ways, one of which is dress. Yorùbáness therefore was and remains a civilization and political development. From ancient Ife arts to contemporary Yorubaland where Western education has become an important component of Yorùbáness, human bodies have always been decorated and Yorùbá identity is created using this dressed body. Yorùbá dress, therefore, still remains active and not passive, and Yorùbá people were regarded by other Nigerians as perhaps the most educated, most flamboyantly dressed, and the most civilized in contemporary Nigeria.

## Chapter Three

### Yorùbá Dress in Pre-Colonial Period

#### 3.0. Introduction

Having traced the provenance of dress among Yorùbá people in Chapter two, this chapter examines dress use in pre-1800 Yorubaland. By focusing on the pre-colonial period, the chapter specifically isolates Yorùbá indigenous dress culture before contacts either with Islam or Christianity. The succeeding chapters, most especially chapters four and five, examine how indigenous Yorùbá sartorial tradition identified in this chapter yielded place to sartorial hybridity, which is characterized by influences from Islam and Christianity or more precisely Arabs and European sartorial traditions. In these three chapters, emphasis is placed on the role of dress in the construction of individual and group identity of Yorùbá people.

#### 3.1. Dress-Use in Pre-1800 Yorubaland

Describing the dress worn by the former Nigerian president, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, at the 2003 G8 meeting of world leaders at Evian, France, Robert Ross noted that, like Prince Abdullah Ibn Abdul Aziz Al Saud who attended the same meeting dressed in (a) *'flowing Bedouin robes'*, Chief Obasanjo *'was in equally flowing Yorùbá costume'*. Ross then went further to wonder what a gathering of Obasanjo's predecessors, for instance the Alaafin of Oyo, would have worn four hundred years before Obasanjo at such a gathering.<sup>174</sup> Although the time of Captain Clapperton's journey through Yorubaland was not up to four hundred years, Clapperton's description of *Alaafin* Adolee (Awole)'s dress could, to a large extent, serve as a possible answer to Ross. Clapperton described *Alaafin* Awole's dress thus:

*He was gorgeously arrayed in a scarlet cloak, literally covered with gold lace, and white kerseymere trowsers (sic) similarly embroidered. His hat was turned up in front*

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<sup>174</sup> Robert Ross, *Clothing: A Global History*, (Cambridge, 2008), 2.

*with rich band of gold lace, and decorated with a splendid plume of white ostrich feathers, which, waving gracefully over his head, added not a little to the imposing dignity of his appearance!... ..an umbrella was unfurled and held over his head, whilst a dozen of his wives stood round their lord and master with diverse-coloured fans, whose wind did seem to glow the delicate cheeks which they did cool.*<sup>175</sup>

In addition to the king's dress, Clapperton's description of the king's representatives was also instructive:

*On his head he wore a cap and feathers, evidently of European manufacture, and he was clad in a scarlet jacket, fluttering in rags, with dirty yellow facings, and loose trousers of faded nankeen – a dress of which he was extravagantly vain.*<sup>176</sup>

Clapperton, also describing the King's slaves, noted that they '*wore plain scarlet coats, with white collars and large cocked hats, tastefully trimmed with gold lace, which costly material all cases excessively admire*'<sup>177</sup>. On the dress culture of the masses, Clapperton went further to state that they were '*neatly dressed in cap, shirt (tobe), and trousers, and very cleanly in their personal appearance*'.<sup>178</sup>

The descriptions above, among other things, show that dress, in its broadest sense, has a long antiquity in Yorubaland. Although Yorùbá dress, as seen in Clapperton's and Ross' descriptions, derived essentially from different dress cultures, evidence however abounds to ascertain that the Yorùbá had their indigenous dress culture.

Samuel Johnson, writing at the close of the nineteenth century, gave a terse description of the kinds of cloth that were in use during the period. He noted that Yorùbá people, prior to contacts with either the Arabs or Europeans, clothed themselves in

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<sup>175</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa*, (vol. 1, London, 1830), 46-47.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid*, 53.

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid*, 47.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid*, 78.

'a sheet of cloth three yards by two, which is thrown around the body for a covering and passing under the right arm-pit, and enveloping the left shoulder'.<sup>179</sup> R.A. Olaoye, on his part, noted that the description given by Johnson applies primarily to one of the ways through which Yorùbá people used *Kijipa*, which, as he claimed, was one of the products from women's broad looms.

While evidence abound all over Yorubaland attesting to the possibility that the first Yorùbá cotton cloth was *Kijipa*, it must be noted that in Yorubaland, the throwing of cloth around the body and or passing a strip of the same cloth under the arm-pit as described by Johnson, is called *Pipa Aso ni Kaja* (or simply as *Kaja*). *Kaja*, as Chief Onaolapo Shokenu noted, was one form of dress-use known to 'our great grand parents' before the coming of either Islam or Christianity.<sup>180</sup> Chief Elufidiya, speaking on *Kaja*, noted that its use was not gender sensitive, although more men than women used it. In addition, the use of *Kaja*, both by male and female, was not restricted to in-door, or private use, but also used out-door, or for public use. As shall be shown below, some professions (most notably, herbalists and seers), and socio-economic and political office-holders, use *Kaja*.

It must also be asserted that *Kaja*, both by male and female, was used either in private, as a wrapper or cover-cloth (*Aso Ibo'ra*) for warding off cold at night, or in public, as *Aso-Imur'ode*, cloths for important outings or occasions. However, except for herbalists and seers, *Kaja* usage in public arena by male and female usually signifies age and status.<sup>181</sup>

As Johnson also asserted, an alternative to *Kaja*, in ancient times, was for the male, especially married ones, to wear tailored gowns, vests (*Kukumo*), and a very free and ample kind of trousers called *Sokoto*, which were devoid of any embroidery and made from 'purely native manufacture'.<sup>182</sup> The unmarried male adults also wore tailored cloths.<sup>183</sup> In the main, male tailored-dress

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<sup>179</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas from the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorates*, (Lagos, 2001), 110.

<sup>180</sup> Interview with Chief Onaolapo Shokenu, Abeokuta, 23 June 2010

<sup>181</sup> Interview with Chief Elufidiya, Ile-Ife, 1 June, 2010

<sup>182</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorates*, (Lagos, 1920), 212.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, 122.

comprised of gowns, vests, and trousers, all of which could be made into different styles and forms. Beside *Kukumo*, earlier mentioned, other styles and forms include *Ewu*, *Gbariye*, *Sapara*, *Oyala*, *Dansiki*, *Buba*, *Suliya*, *Dandogo*, *Girike*, and *Agbada*, and so on.

As there are styles and forms of gowns, so also are there different styles and forms of trousers. Knickers (*Sokoto Penpe*), *Bante*, *Digo*, *Ladugbo*, *Aibopo*, *Alongo*, *Kafo*, *Efa*, *Abenugbagada*, *Wondo*, *Agadansi*, *Latan*, *Abidan*, *Sooro*, *Atu*, *Kenbe*, *Kamu*, *Agbantara*, and *Nangudu*. In traditional dress-sense, a man's dress was regarded as incomplete or outdated without a cap. There are different styles and forms of caps: *Adiro*, *Labankada*, *Ikori*, *Abeti-Aja*, and *Fila Onide* are remembered. Hats were also of use in pre-colonial Yorubaland.

Below are some artistic illustrations of pre-colonial Yorùbá caps. This is followed by contemporary expressions or what survived of these caps from the pre-colonial through the colonial and to the present.

#### **Artistic illustration of pre-colonial Yorùbá caps**

Abeti-Aja



Adiro-Agbe



Fila Onide



Fila Onide



Adiro-Ode



Ik' Ori



(Sources: C.L. Adeoye, *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, Plc, 2005, 180)

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, oftentimes, lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate contemporary Yorùbá caps.

### Contemporary Yorùbá caps



(I)



(II)



(III)



(IV)





(V)



(VI)

### A cross section of Yorùbá Caps

(Sources: Except for Photo (V), which was obtained from President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan's campaign programme, other photos are from my personal collections).

As far as evidence can show, females had fewer options in dress than males. Their dress comprised mainly of *Iro* (a wrap-around cloth), *Buba* (a blouse), *Gele* (head-tie/scarf), and *Yeri* (earings) or *Tobi* (skirt). In addition to the three mentioned above was *Iborun*, a shawl, which was either wrapped around the neck and shoulder or used to cover the head. It must be asserted that the unmarried female could use two *Iro*, a bigger and a smaller one. The bigger one was wrapped tightly around the waist, while the smaller one was wrapped tightly above the breasts.

Captain Clapperton, earlier mentioned, described *Alaafin* Awole thus:

*The monarch was richly dressed in a scarlet damask robe, ornamented with coral beads, and short trousers of the same colour with a light blue stripe, made of country cloth; with legs, as far as the knees, were stained red with hennah (sic), and on his feet he wore sandals of red leather. A cap of blue damask, thickly studded with handsome coral*

*beads, was on his head; and his neck, arms, and legs, were decorated with large silver rings.*<sup>184</sup>

Below are photos of different types of female head-gears (gele). As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, oftentimes, lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate contemporary Yorùbá Yorùbá female headgears.

It must be noted that artistic illustrations of pre-colonial head-gears cannot be obtained, hence below are contemporary expressions of Yorùbá female head-gears, which are believed to have survived from the pre-colonial and colonial periods.

### **Contemporary Yorùbá female head-gears (Gele)**



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<sup>184</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's*, 195.







**A cross-section of contemporary Yorùbá female head-gears**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

It was noted further that the king's wives spent considerable time in making themselves presentable to the king by employing:

*...their time in the adornment of their bodies, and beautifying their teeth and hair, in order to make themselves the more agreeable and fascinating to their imperious master – to whom they sing, in a kind of*

*recitative, several times in the day, and whom they fan to sleep at night.*<sup>185</sup>

Writing on Yorùbá dress, Clapperton limited his discussion only to cloths. He however noted that the Yorùbá male dress comprised primarily of ‘*full trouser*’, ‘*not lower than the knees*’; ‘*a short sleeve tobe with large holes for the arms and head*’. The above was completed with ‘*a fantastically made cloth cap, and leather boots*’. Besides noting that all of the above were made from ‘*country cloth dyed*’ into various colours, he also added that depending on wealth and status, Yorùbá people also made use of ‘*red, yellow, and purple silk velvet, which they obtained from Europeans on the coast*’. He went further to assert that in other parts of Nigeria that he visited, except in Yorubaland, only the rich and royal wore cloths; other, especially the ‘*very poor people and slaves use no other wearing apparel than the skins of goats, sheep, monkeys, and other animals*’.<sup>186</sup>

Describing Yorùbá dress culture when he visited Alaafin Mansolah, Clapperton noted that:

*A womanish fondness for dress and admiration, and a childish vanity in the most trivial as well as more important concerns, were strikingly visible in the character of every prince we met with in Africa; nor did the monarch of the Yariba (Yorùbá) think these frivolities beneath him, any more than his royal neighbours; but in his case, there was mixed up with this weakness, a certain consciousness of the absurdity of it; which I never observed in the character of any other African whatever. Mansolah only conformed to the whims and fancies of his people, he said, when he attired himself so fancifully; for that they prefer a ruler with a smart and gorgeous exterior, even if he happened to be the most odious tyrant on the face of the earth, to a prince meanly dressed, although he were endowed with every amiable quality.*<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 197.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid, 212-213.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 111-112.



**Indigenous Yorùbá Female Dress**  
(Source: [www.delcampe.net](http://www.delcampe.net))

Could the use of these items signal either the beginning or the peak of Yorùbá sartorial borrowing from European? This might be difficult to ascertain!

As far as evidence can show, just as the Yorùbá have greetings for all manners of circumstances, so also they have dresses for all manners of purposes, professions, times, and seasons. Although Samuel Johnson claimed that some of these styles and forms of dress were of Arabian origin, they however were in use all over Yorubaland before the coming of Islam. His explanation was that the Yorùbá actually migrated from somewhere in the East.<sup>188</sup> In all, male and female cloths were believed to have been made of *Kijipa*. All these styles and forms of gowns, blouses, trousers, wrappers, shawls, and caps were indigenous to the Yorùbá and, probably, were in use everywhere in Yorubaland before contacts with the Arabians, Christians and British Imperialists.

Although the above concerns dress culture generally, the wearing or using of cloth follows age and position. Johnson noted that in the pristine times, the Yorùbá dressed scantily, with boys and girls below age eight walking around “*in puris naturalibus*”.<sup>189</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 110.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.

From age eight to puberty; boys and girls used aprons to cover the lower parts of their body, while the girls leave their breasts bare. The male apron, as noted above, is called *Bante* while the female apron is called *Tobi*. In the *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition in Africa*, Richard Lander described the *Alaafin's* wives as 'half-dressed ladies', obviously and certainly not without covering their bosoms.<sup>190</sup> Not minding Johnson's sweeping generalization that boys and girls walked around naked, except for *Bante* and *Tobi* as their only items of cloth, *Bante* and *Tobi* are, in fact, work and play (casual) cloth. Other cloths used by females during this time include *Ilabiru* and *Yeri*, both were forms of skirts. There were two types of *Yeri*: the long and the short ones, with the long ones used as play cloth. The long one was customarily drawn-up high enough so as to cover the upper body. It however terminated a little above the breast. The short one was primarily worn under *Aso Imu r'Ode*.

For as long as we have information, from puberty to marriage, while the male may dress scantily, wearing, for the most part, their *Bante* and *Aso Ise*, except during a ceremony or an outing; the female used the long *Yeri*, which, depending on weather condition, may be drawn to cover, or not, the torso. This scanty dress culture, which Johnson inadvertently attributed to 'extreme poverty of the people in those early times,'<sup>191</sup> was more of an environmentally induced culture than extreme poverty, as the rich and the powerful in Yorubaland during this period also dressed in the same manner.<sup>192</sup> More over, it can be argued that the pervasive use of *Aso Ise*, *Aso Isere*, and *Aso Iwole* rather than *Aso Imurode* owes solely to the fact that Yorubaland, being an agrarian society, was not as clean as today's urban, office, and clean environment. The people worked and lived on the farm. The following Yorùbá adage negates the position that extreme poverty necessitated scanty dressing among the Yorùbá: "*Ibere osi, bi oloro ni ri; ti mu won wo Aso ile r'oko*" (Poverty compels a poor man to wear his best to the farm). When this is applied to pre-eighteenth century Yorubaland, it could be argued that the nature

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<sup>190</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's*, 191.

<sup>191</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 100.

<sup>192</sup> Interview with Baba Fatimoh, Sagamu, 12 June 2010.



of work or job at hand would necessarily determine what manner of cloth one wears. Every profession in Yorubaland has its own work-cloth; with farming being the predominant occupation, work mostly entailed going to the farm unlike work in the present day in an urban setting which involves going to an office. This requires clean formal clothes unlike work on the farm which required cloths that did not have to be the best. So, it could not have been poverty, as Johnson claimed.

It is important to state that evidence showed that all Yorùbá cloths were dyed in indigo. Styles and fashion were reflected in the depth and variance of the dye used.

Beside cloth and clothing tradition, other forms of dress in Yorubaland includes scarification, tattooing, and care of the head, which of course includes barbing; care of ear and eye-care; beautifying or ornamenting the neck, waists, and hands.

Evidence showed that there were, at least, five forms of body scarification and tattooing in Yorubaland before contacts with either the Arab/Muslims or the Europeans. These were facial marking (*Ila-Oju*), stomach or torso marking (*Ila-Inu*), incision (*Gbere*), tattooing (*Soju*), the use of antimony (*tiiro*), and the use of henna (*lile-laali*). In most literature, circumcision was mentioned as part of body scarification and tattooing. While this might be misleading, as circumcision has its ritual significance among Yorùbá people, which cannot be grouped together with body beautification. In fact, one could get his head broken for calling another boy an *alatoto* – an uncircumcised! Notwithstanding this, circumcision is left out in this discussion because it relates more to health and hygiene as well as being private to individuals and cannot be known simply by seeing or looking at an individual.

Torso scarification, although similar to tattoo has been described in some literature as a type of tattoo; however, torso scarification involved cutting or making an incision into the skin, which when it heals, leaves behind a permanent scar. Tattoo's impermanency, therefore, makes it different from torso marking. Importantly, it must be asserted that, of the five mentioned forms of body marking, facial marking and torso marking symbolize ethnic identity while incision, tattooing, and the use of henna are

matters of fashion and therefore could overlap in their various designs.

There are different types of facial marks: *Keke*, *Gombo*, *Pele*, *Abaja*, *Baramu*, *Ture*, *Mande*, *Jamgbadi*, and so on. This popular saying serves to illustrate the pervasiveness of facial marks among the Yorùbá: “*Pele oju kan l’ o ko; Abaja oju kan l’ o bu, E ko r’ aye oni Gombo!*” (He was marked Pele on one cheek and Abaja on the other; what a life for them that have Gombo!)

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photograph below was taken, where it was taken, who took it and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, the photo aptly illustrates contemporary Yorùbá facial marks.



**In this picture, the two women and the man in the front row have facial marks**

**(Sources: Personal collections)**

As evidence showed, there were two basic classifications of Yorùbá facial marks: *Abaja*, which predominated in Oyo and all other communities under Old-Oyo’s socio-cultural and political influences, and *Pele*, which originally began as a lone-some mark and predominated in eastern Yorubaland. *Pele*, as shall be shown in the next chapter, has undergone enormous changes with the

incoming and influence of Islam on Yorubaland. From the above, it could be argued that except for Ile-Ife where facial marking was discontinued between the tenth and eighteenth centuries, Yorubaland and Yorùbá people could be divided into either Abaja axis or Pele axis, with Abaja axis stretching from Old-Oyo towards the coast and Pele axis stretching from the eastern direction towards Benin Kingdom. Notwithstanding these two broad classifications, various types of facial marking existed in different parts of Yorubaland. A few of these are examined below.

*Abaja*, ostensibly the most important and famous facial marking among the Yorùbá, was exclusively reserved for the Oyo royal family and a few of the chiefs, especially the *Basorun*. *Abaja*, contrary to Johnson who maintained that *Abaja* consists of three or four parallel lines, describes between six and twelve geometrical lines placed either vertically or horizontally on the two cheeks. *Abaja* are of four kinds: *Abaja Omo Oba*, *Abaja Basorun*, *Abaja Olowu* and *Abaja Oro*. Of these four, *Abaja Omo Oba*, which contains six geometrical lines cut horizontally into the two cheeks, remains the most famous. Unlike *Abaja Omo Oba*, *Abaja Basorun* contains three horizontal lines on the right cheek and four vertical lines on the left cheek. *Abaja Olowu*, also known as *Abaja Mefa*, contains on each of the cheek, three geometrical lines placed horizontally on a set of three vertical geometrical lines.

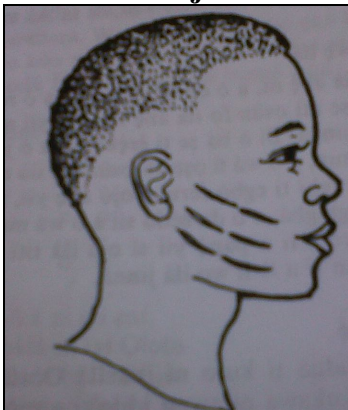
*Abaja Oro* (vertical *Abaja*), as the name implies, is a set of three perpendicular lines that is set in an upright position and cut into the two cheeks. This was common among the Egba people and differed from *Pele* only in length. While *Pele* is short, *Abaja Oro* is longer. While *Abaja Omo Oba* and *Abaja Basorun* were popular in Oyo, *Abaja Olowu* and *Abaja Oro* applied only to the Egba people of Abeokuta, Egbado, Owu and their environs. *Abaja Omo Oba* is also called *Mefa-Mefa* or *Mefa-Ibule*, which describes both the number (six) and the horizontal positioning of the six geometrical lines. In addition to these three types of *Abaja* are four others: *mejo-mejo*, *merin-merin*, *merin pelu Baramu*, *mokanla-mokanla* and *meje-meje*. These forms of *Abaja* were commonplace in eastern and western Yorubaland, especially in places like Ofa, Ilorin, Ajase-Ipo, and so on. Although all these forms of *Abaja* were used by many families in Yorubaland, *Abaja Omo Oba* was

the most respected because of its being Oyo royal family's facial marks.

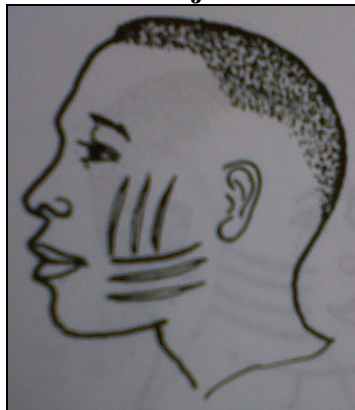
Although *Abaja Omo Oba* was also given to slaves born in the royal household, it must be however stated that three broad marks, called *Eyeo*, were cut, both on the arms and thighs, of the sons and daughters of the *Alaafin* in order to differentiate them from others in the royal family. Only those with *Abaja Omo Oba* and *Eyeo* could ascend the throne. It must be noted that all the *Alaafins* that have ruled Oyo have both the *Eyeo* and *Abaja* facial mark. The above totally differs from Olatunji Ojo's claim that even slaves born in the royal families also receive *Eyeo*.<sup>193</sup>

Below are artistic illustrations of pre-colonial Yorùbá facial marks. Although the use of facial marks has declined considerably in contemporary Yorubaland, it must be noted that in most rural areas, the practice is still in place. Therefore, following the artistic illustrations are contemporary expressions of facial marks.

**Abaja Omo Oba**



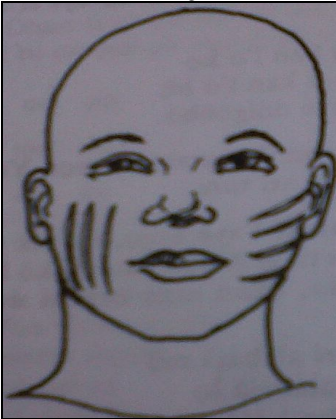
**Abaja Olowu**



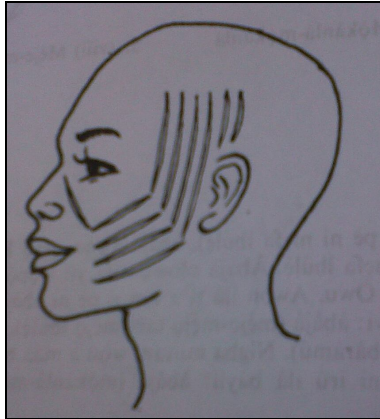
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<sup>193</sup> Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond diversity: women, scarification, and Yorùbá identity', *History in Africa*, 35:1 (2008), 369.

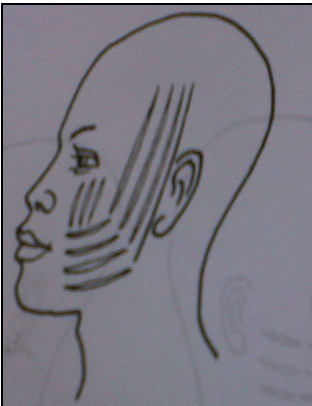
**Abaja Basorun**



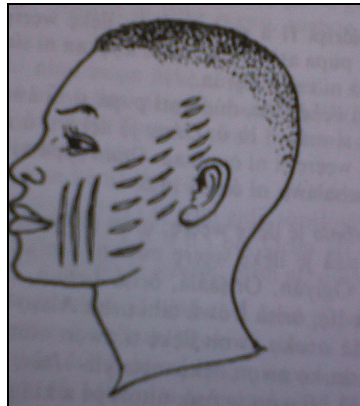
**Gombo Pelu Baramu**



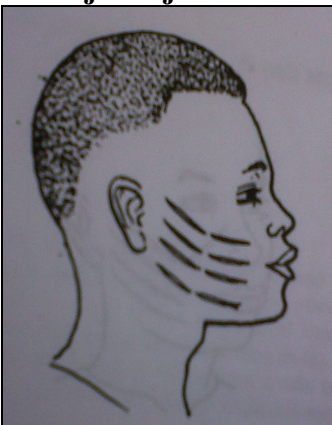
**Gombo**



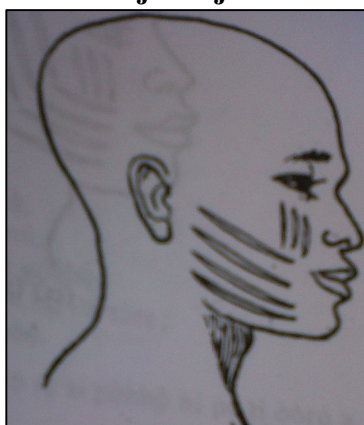
**Keke**



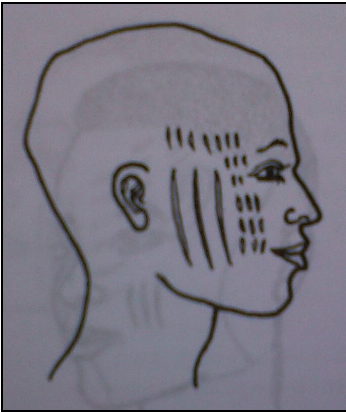
**Mejo Mejo**



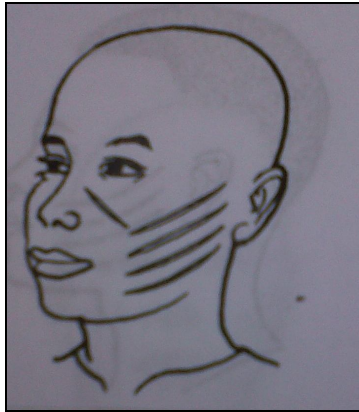
**Meje Meje**



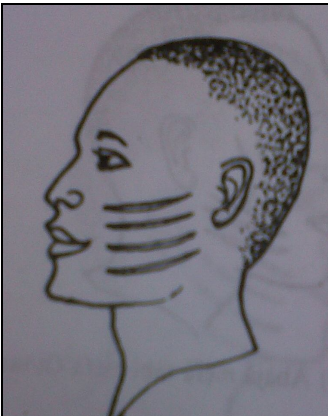
**Ture**



**Merin Pelu Baramu**



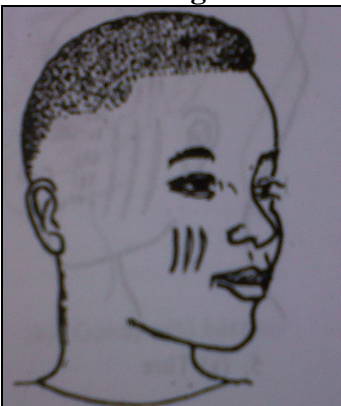
**Merin Merin**



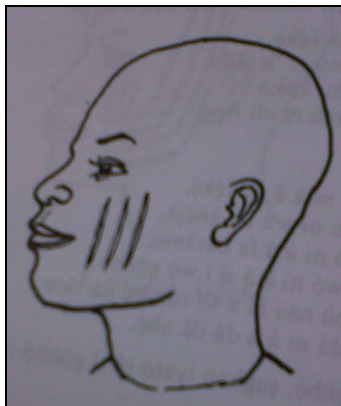
**Mokanla-Mokanla**



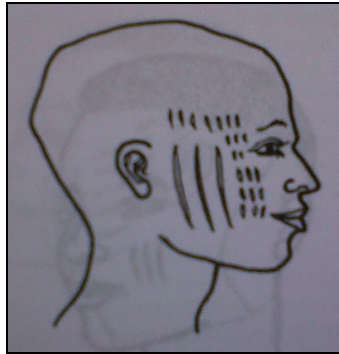
**Pele Egba**



**Pele**



### Ture



**Sources:** C.L. Adeoye, *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, Plc, 2005, 180.

The following are contemporary expressions of Yorùbá facial marks. As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, for the most part, lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate contemporary Yorùbá facial marks. In addition to the above, it must be noted that despite change, the shapes, sizes and patterns of facial marks remained the same over the years.

#### A cross section of Yorùbá facial marks



(I)



(II)



(III)

(Sources: Photo (I) Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, the Alaafin of Oyo and (II) Late Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola, Premier Western Region were obtained from an almanac from the Alaafin of Oyo's palace, while photo (III) Mr. Adediwura Kabiru, a friend, is from my personal collections).

Besides *Abaja*, there was also *Keke* and *Gombo*. These are four or five perpendicular and horizontal lines placed at an angle on both cheeks; the design of which fills the entire human cheeks. There were three types of *Gombo*: *Gombo*; *Gombo and Towoboju*; and *Gombo and Baramu*. The first comprises of four horizontal lines, serving as base, and four vertical lines that appear as continuation of the horizontal lines that break at a right angle, projecting vertically a little close to the ear-lobes. Three more vertical lines are cut into the bumps linking the nose with the eyes. The second differs only in the addition of two vertical, but smaller geometrical lines above the ear-lobes that are parallel to the original four lines. The third has, in addition to the second and in place of the three vertical lines on the bumps linking the nose with the eyes, as described in the first, a lonesome parallel projection that terminates on the ridge of the nose.

*Keke*, on the other hand, differs markedly from *Gombo*, as it comprised of three long vertical lines, placed beside fifteen horizontal lines. Altogether, eighteen lines were cut into each cheek. Given the nature of these facial marks, *Gombo* and *Keke*, many Yorùbá people were wont to taunt those who have them “*Mo sa Keke, mo mu re 'le Ado; Mo bu Abaja, mo mu re idi Ape*” (Keke



is synonymous with Ado people and Abaja, with Idi Ape people).<sup>194</sup>

In addition to the above, there was also *Mande* and *Jamgbadi*, both being exclusively used by non-Yorùbá who had naturalized among the Yorùbá. Two other facial marks of importance were *Pele* and *Ture*. Discussions about these two facial marks would be taken up in the next Chapter, as they are tied to Islamic influence on Yorùbá dress culture.

It must be noted that the above is not the totality of facial markings in Yorubaland, but the most important ones. In fact, variations of the above abound in different parts of Yorubaland. Although both males and females were given facial marks, facial mark is nevertheless patrilineal, as children were given facial marks that were peculiar to their fathers. By implication, married women are likely to have facial marks that are different from the rest of the family. However, where royal marriages are involved, two patterns of facial markings ultimately evolved. Where marriage involved a royal family and family of either a warrior or a powerful man, the facial marks of the royal family were cut into one cheek and that of the husband was cut into the other cheek of children from such marriages. Where royal marriage involves the commoners, it is the paternal facial mark that was given to the “fruits” of such marriages. When this example happens (i.e. where royal marriage involves the commoners), the Yorùbá are wont to say “*Jemureke! Olowo pade omo olola*” (Stop press! the powerful have collided with the royal).

For as long as we have information, facial marking among pre-eighteenth century Yorùbá people was comparable only to a national passport, a kind of insignia, a badge of identity, or a uniform for all individuals of the same group, village or lineage and therefore differed markedly from one community, group, and sub-ethnic group to another.<sup>195</sup> As citizenship badge, facial marking was given either between ages six and seven as a signifier of membership of a particular family, lineage and community or given to adult non-members of a particular family as a symbol or a mark of naturalization into a particular family, lineage, and town.

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<sup>194</sup> Idi Ape, is the part of Oyo where the Alaafins are buried.

<sup>195</sup> Olatunji Ojo, ‘Beyond diversity, 368.

Irrespective of what time it was given, uniqueness and differences were added to it through length, positioning, and numbers of strokes. Beauty was added to it by adding pigment to the scarification's opening to give it a shining black colour and, invariably, to translate a certain ethno-political object into a thing of fashion and beauty. As noted above, facial marks differed from community to community, group to group, and family to family. It must be added that beautification of markings through pigmentation also reflects wealth, beauty, and status, as the following Yorùbá folksong suggests: *Ko r'Owo ko 'la; O gbe bembe eke R'Oshogbo* (He cannot afford the cost of procuring marks, he therefore went plain-faced to Oshogbo).

In general terms, body markings (especially facial), were strong citizenship and identity markers. And, as already noted, when given to adults, especially plain-faced adults from another land, not Yorubaland, or those who missed out on the initial conferment of citizenship or slaves; it allowed for the incorporation of strangers or foreigners into a family, a lineage, and a community. The cases below help to illustrate the saliency of body marking, as it related to identity in pre-eighteenth century Yorubaland.

On 18<sup>th</sup> March 1898, one Okolu, an Ijesha man, accused Otunba of Italemo ward, in Ondo, of seizing and enslaving his sister, Osun, and his niece – mother and daughter. Osun and her daughter had been enslaved by the Ikale in 1894 and had, in 1895, escaped and fled from their master, but as they headed towards Ilesha Otunba seized them. As the mother claimed, Otunba forced her to become his wife, hoe a farm, and gave her daughter one deep, bold-line (Ondo facial markings) on each cheek. At the trial, Otunba and his witness, Itoyimaki, denied only the enslavement charge, but proudly asserted that he prevented Osun and her daughter from being taken away as slaves by Soba, another slave dealer, and also that he took Osun as his wife and the daughter was given the Ondo mark to bestow on her Ondo identity.<sup>196</sup> Obviously, Otunba was an Ondo man. While it must be admitted that the event took place in the nineteenth century, it however

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<sup>196</sup> Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Ondo Division 8/1, Albert Erhardt, *Journal*, 18 and 22 March 1898.

reflected the general trend of things, especially the place of marriages, identity, and aesthetics in ethnic configurations across pre-colonial Yorubaland.

Another example is the case of Osundina, a 1892 baptismal candidate in Ondo whose mother had been enslaved at Ile-Ife, where Osundina was born. Because he was born far away from Ondo, he was plain-faced as a result of his stay at Ile-Ife. With the end of the Yorùbá civil war and the eventual incorporation of Yorubaland into the vortex of colonialism in 1893, domestic or internal slavery was abolished and many who had been enslaved in different parts of Yorubaland and Nigeria became free, and many returned home, Osundina's mother returned to Ondo, but Osundina stayed behind at Ile-Ife.

When in 1894, Osundina rejoined her mother in Ondo; he was daily treated as a slave and not as an Ondo citizen for the simple fact that he had no facial mark. So, to "*remove the scandal that he is a slave*", Osundina was given the Ondo facial mark.<sup>197</sup> It must be asserted that Osundina's plain face symbolized his 'alien' origin and reduced him to the status of only a slave.

Owing to widespread displacement and dislocation of peoples as a result of the Yorùbá civil war, peoples – refugees, slaves, and defeated soldiers – converged on Ibadan, Ijaye, and Abeokuta to continue the war, especially to curb the menace of the Fulani Jihadists from Ilorin, at another theatre of war. This development brought about the mixing of peoples from different families, lineages, and communities into Ibadan. This medley or motley of peoples formed the nucleus of the Ibadan army. One of the implications of this was that facial markings would not serve to identify and differentiate the various individual soldiers. At the campaign of Osogbo where Ibadan recorded a resounding victory over the Jihadists in 1843 and later in 1878 at Ikirun where another Ibadan victory was also recorded, Ibadan had to invent a password or a code, which was known only to the soldiers involved in the civil war and not to any other person, even if they have the same

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<sup>197</sup> Nigerian National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Phillips 3/5, *Names of Baptismal Candidates, Ondo, 1892*. See also; Paul Lovejoy, "Scarification and the Loss of History in the African Diaspora," being text of a paper presented at York University, Toronto, (7 July, 2005), 14.

facial marks as the Ibadan warriors. When there is the need to differentiate between the real Ibadan soldier from a 'suspicious' character who might want to infiltrate the Ibadan camp for purposes of attacking or escaping with the Ibadan soldiers, the question asked was "*Elo ni owo Odo?*", which means 'How much is the fare to cross the river?'. The invention of this code was strictly tied to what the Ibadan warlords paid to ferrymen who brought Ibadan soldiers across the Osun River. It was therefore impossible for anybody not involved in the campaign to know that the Ibadan warlords paid two thousand cowries to the ferrymen.

The import of the above is that the mixing of people occasioned by the nineteenth century conflict-induced displacement rendered identity or citizenship based on facial marking difficult for the Ibadan and, one can guess, for most communities that received displaced Yorùbá peoples during the period. Therefore the Ibadan warlords had to issue a special password known only to the soldiers involved with specific campaign. It must also be noted that Ibadan, owing to its policy of assimilating and integrating slaves and foreigners into its city during this period, made it a kind of melting pot where facial marking, as a symbol of citizenship, was not recognized.

On the use of facial marking to confer citizenship by naturalization, the example of the Egba nobles is illuminating. Rev. James Johnson of the Christian Missionary Society recorded widespread practice of adoption and outright purchase (for the purpose of adoption) of thousands of child slaves by rich and childless Egba nobles and chiefs immediately peace was reinstalled in Yorubaland. A similar situation was reported of rich and childless Owo nobles and chiefs. In the case of the Egbas, it must be noted that the practice was for each rich and childless Egba noble and chief to give such an adopted child the facial mark of his or her family. In the case of Owo, David O. Asabia and J.O. Adegbesan argued that the prevalence of Ijesha facial marks in Owo towns was as a result of sexual liaisons between Ijesha soldiers and Owo women following a decade of Ijesha military campaigns in northeastern Yorubaland in the 1870s. Invariably, this evidence points to command sex or sex-for-safety problem, which is common, even, in modern wars and conflicts.

However, these adopted children, in as far as they bore the facial marks of their new families, lineages, and communities, were bestowed with the same status as given to home-born slaves. They also enjoyed fairly good treatment, as they could own properties in their own right; a leverage that non-home-born slaves did not enjoy.<sup>198</sup>

As a badge of citizenship, scarification imposed great liability on the various Yorùbá peoples during the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars. As noted by Rev Richard Henry Stone, the Baptist Pastor of Abeokuta between 1859 and 1861 who introduced and mandated that all Yorùbá converts must wear European dress, noted that facial marking, owing to its visibility and ease of identification of where the wearer was from, made it:

*...impossible for strangers to conceal their identity and slaves rarely escape to the interior. The fugitive is compelled to follow the roads leading through the towns and the gatekeepers recognize them by their face marks and their scanty outfit, and they are captured and returned to their masters...Gatekeepers are thoroughly posted in this kind of lore and they know the nationality of every one passing through their gates.*<sup>199</sup>

It must be noted that Rev. Stone, who served in Yorubaland during the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war era, compiled an eye-witness account of Yorùbá cultures and customs as well as what he witnessed in Yorubaland during the late 1850s and again during the first years of the American Civil War. He was an intelligent, self-reflective, and reliable observer, making his works important sources of information on Yorùbá society before the intervention of European colonialism. In *Africa's Forest and Jungle* is a rare account of West African culture, made all the more complete by the additional journal entries, letters, and photographs collected in this edition. In addition to this negative effect of facial marking noted by Stone, facial marking was also used as a form of

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<sup>198</sup> Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond diversity', 370.

<sup>199</sup> Richard Henry Stone and Betty Finklea Florey, *In Africa's Forest and Jungle: Six Years Among the Yorùbás*, USA: Religion and American Culture, 2009, 30-31.

punishment not only for erring slaves, as the case of *Alaafin Sango*, noted in Chapter Two, demonstrates, but also to punish warriors, as the example of Chief Ogedengbe, the famous Ijesha warrior, illustrates. Ogedengbe, who was captured by the Ibadan forces at about 1860, was accused of violating his oath not to attack Ibadan warriors after the truce of Iperu. When he was captured in 1860 by the Ibadan, Chief Ogunmola of Ibadan ordered that Ogedengbe be given rough facial marks, which formed a broad patch and gave him an appearance of a Bunu man, which many writers noted when they met him in the 1880s.<sup>200</sup> With this branding, which can never be erased, Ogedengbe quit being a native of Ijeshaland, and was looked upon as a ‘*mark of scorn*’. He was expected to die; unpitied and unknown in a foreign land.<sup>201</sup>

Invariably, scarification, especially when it was ‘meted’ out as a form of punishment, became some kind of a tracking device worn by all and through which, depending on who captured whom, friends were differentiated from foes. When this happened, Olatunji Ojo argued, the punishment amounted to disenfranchisement of the individuals concerned. In the case of Ogedengbe, it would therefore mean that Ogedengbe, although not an Ibadan man and could therefore not be disenfranchised by Ogunmola’s action, but had his “citizen’s passport” defaced or re-branded from being a Yorùbá man of Ijesha extraction to that of a Bunu man.

In addition to the above, Clapperton described that facial markings and tattooing were also used to punish criminals and offenders. When a Yorùbá person perpetrated a crime, the tattoo mark of his nation was so crossed by other incisions, inflicted upon him by the ministers of justice that it became utterly undistinguishable, and the impression of another people was substituted on the other side of the face in its stead. With this brand, which can never be erased, the offender was disenfranchised and must therefore quit his native country, as he was constantly looked upon even by a toddler as ‘*a mark of scorn*’.

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<sup>200</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 377. Among other writers who reported Ogedengbe’s rough patch and its contorted identity is Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s*, 217.

<sup>201</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s*, 217.

In most cases, offenders, thus treated, normally leave their communities, as their immediate family members usually reject them out of shame. They therefore wandered to another, but far communities where they could not be traced and lived quietly till they died; unpitied and unknown.<sup>202</sup>

As already noted, not all Yorùbá people had facial marks. The predominance of facial marking waned considerably during the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, as many suffered untold hardships during the wars. From the 1850s, the number of plain-faced Yorùbá people increased, as the end of the war made certain ethnic identity only fashionable. Social change occasioned by British Imperial rule in Yorubaland reduced the allure of facial marking, as being plain-faced became synonymous with modernity, civilization and Christianity; while to wear facial marks was regarded as being conservative, backward, and encrusted in the past.

As evidence showed, tattooing (*Ara-fifin*), among the Yorùbá, was for aesthetics and health reasons. Incisions of different kinds were common among the Yorùbá and health care involved not just the oral use of herbs of different kinds to cure diseases, but also the rubbing of concoctions of different kinds into incisions cut into the body with sharp objects. Incision use varied widely with class, age, gender, and fashion.

Customarily, as part of the initiation rites of kings and chiefs in Yorubaland, hundreds of incisions were cut into the head, arms, body, and so on of kings and chiefs and herbal concoctions were rubbed into the open wounds for the veins to drain and absorb the vital ingredients in the concoctions. During the installation of the *Are-Ona-Kakanfo*, the Field Marshal of the Oyo army, 201 incisions were said to have been cut into the head of the candidate and charms of different kinds were rubbed into the open wounds to make him fearless, courageous and impervious to iron weaponry and bullets.

Olatunji, earlier cited, described the scars of the wounds from these numerous incisions as '*living symbols*' and also noted that tattoos, citing Landers and Peter C Lloyd, that were strictly

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<sup>202</sup> Ibid, 217.

tied to fashion moved with time based on generational and fashion preferences.<sup>203</sup>

Cutting and plaiting of human hair, another items of dress in Yorubaland, are both for identity and aesthetics. In fact, both could be regarded as forms of care of the head. However, the focus here would be limited to identity and aesthetics. Johnson, among others, argued that the Yorùbá people always “*shaved or have a strip of hair running from the forehead to the occiput along the top of the head..., which is sometimes made into circular patches*”<sup>204</sup>. This description, it must be emphasized, is too simplistic and regionally specific to be applicable to the entire Yorùbá people about whom Johnson claimed to have written. For instance, many years before Samuel Johnson, Clapperton noted that among the Yorùbá, the king’s wives were distinguished by having their hair cut and shaved into a number of patches, like the ace of diamonds, but larger; and that of the wives of the humbler classes was cut entirely off, leaving the head as bald and bright as a barber’s basin.<sup>205</sup>

It was customary in Yorubaland to shave the heads of children clean, say from a day old to age 8. This was mainly for hygiene sake. Besides children, aged people also shave their heads clean. Logically, it could be reasoned that this deals with beauty, as, for the most part, their hairs are either grey or they are partly bald. Beside these classes of people, it was not customary, as Johnson had erroneously stated, for the Yorùbá to shave their hairs. However, it must be noted that of all groups in Yorubaland, the people of Ile-Ife were notable for shaving their heads. As the following praise-names (*Oriki*) of the Ife people clearly shows, if at all it was customary for any group in Yorubaland to shave their hair, it is most probable that the group was Ile-Ife:

*Omo Olu Ife Ooni,*  
*Omo bante Jogina,*  
*L’omu Ife Ooni wumi,*  
*Ori fifa kodoro l’ o mu ibe su mi!*<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Olatunji Ojo, ‘Beyond diversity’, 367.

<sup>204</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 101.

<sup>205</sup> Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton’s*, 219.

<sup>206</sup> Adeoye C.L., *Asa ati Ise Yoruba*, (Ibadan, 2005), 163.



(Worthy children of Ife Ooni,  
Worthy Jogina Apron wearers,  
This endears Ife Ooni to me,  
I am, however, repelled by their head-shaving.)

*Omo oju r'abe sa,  
Omo bante Jogina,  
L'o mu Ife wu mi  
Omo ori kodoro  
L'o mu be su mi!*<sup>207</sup>

(Worthy children devoid of facial marks,  
Worthy Jogina Apron wearers,  
This endears Ife Ooni to me,  
Worthy Head-shaving children,  
However, that repels me!)

The youths, for different reasons, barbered their hair into different hairstyles most notably *Aaso*, *Fi fa'ri Apakan*, *Osu Dida*, *Jongori*, and so on for the males. As shall be shown shortly, religions and professions also had their peculiar hairstyles.

From puberty, a growing male child could barb his hair into either *Jongori* or *Aaso*. *Jongori*, barbered even today, was mainly for children and young adults. To barb *Jongori*, the entire head, except for the middle region from the front to back, was shaved clean. The middle region was however kept short. This style, like others, was simply for aesthetics. *Aaso*, it must be noted, was of two types: *Aaso ewa* or Ordinary *Aaso* and *Aaso Oluode*. The ordinary *Aaso*, which differs markedly from that of the *Oluode*, was the style for boys from the age of puberty. All parts of the head were shaved clean, except for the crown of the head, where there are patches of hair – one to the front, another in the middle and the last towards the back; thereby making the head look like it was harbouring three moons on a clear sky.

*Aaso Oluode* differed markedly from the ordinary *Aaso* in terms of number and the location of the *Aaso*. Rather than three

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<sup>207</sup> Ibid, 176.

hair-patches, *Aaso Oluode* has just one mould and, rather at the crown of the head, it was situated a little to the side of the head and is usually left to grow longer, while efforts were made to keep other parts of the head bare. *Aaso Oluode* was an exclusive preserve of the head-hunter of a town or city. To be made an Oluode, such a hunter needed not be the oldest hunter in the group, but mainly the most powerful, the boldest and such a man with demonstrable quality of having the most potent charms. Such a man was not only saddled with the responsibility of ensuring internal peace, but also to lead others in battle, in case of external aggression.

A little different from *Aaso Oluode* were *Osu Dida* and *Ere*. *Osu Dida* was religious in character. The two deities (*Orisa*), Sango and Sanponna, insisted that their votaries and, in special instances, their worshipers should “*da Osu*” or barb their hairs in *Osu* style. Outside these two categories, it was customary for the Mogba family members to appoint an *Ad’Osu* (*Osu* appointee) who not only presided over religious worships, but also served as a chief representing the Mogba family in the local administration of the community.

Herbalists and diviners can also mandate individuals, especially when plagued by incessant infant mortality, who were not from Mogba family to sacrifice to Sango or to pledge their wards and children to Sango so as to prevent continual and untimely decimation of their children and wards. In such situations, the children’s hairs were cut into *Osu* (*won da Osu*). Also where thunderbolt struck or affected a household, the people must appoint a person who would *d’Osu* in order to appease Sango or Sanponna.

Another hair-style was *Fi fa’ri Apakan*. Of all hairstyles in Yorubaland, this was peculiar to two groups of people: the *Ilari* and *Aagberi* (or *Iragberi*) people. The *Ilaris* were the Oba’s representatives and by shaving one side of their head, they were easily recognizable, especially as they normally wear no cap. The *Ilaris* were accorded the same respect as the king because they represented the king. It must be noted that not all kings in Yorubaland had *Ilaris*, but the great ones like the *Alaafin* of Oyo. So, for the *Ilaris*, their peculiar hairstyle was a mark of identity and status not for aesthetics.

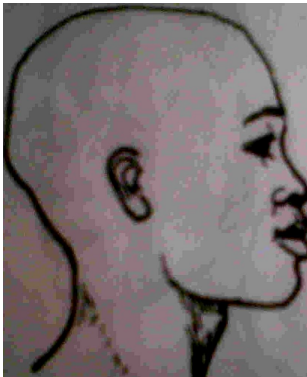
*Aagberi* people are a group in Yorubaland, who were said to be related to *Aresa*, one of the ancient kings of lore. Unlike the *Ilaris*, the representatives and slaves of the *Aagberi* people could cut their hairs in any form, but not *Fi fa'ri Apakan*, which was exclusive to the bonafide *Aagberi* people themselves. While for the *Aagberi*, a bit of ritual was involved to *fa'ri Apakan*, the case of the *Ilari* was completely secular.

Similar to *Aaso Oluode* was *Ere*. Like *Osu*, *Ere* also had religious connotations, as it was exclusive to *Esu*, the deity of opening and closing doors; intersections, etc., which symbolized human choice; votaries and worshipers. Unlike *Aaso* and *Osu*, *Ere* was usually at the back of the head. During the offering of sacrifices and other forms of *Esu* worship, it was the *Ad'Ere* i.e. those votaries and worshipers who barbered the *Ere* hairstyle, that led the procession.

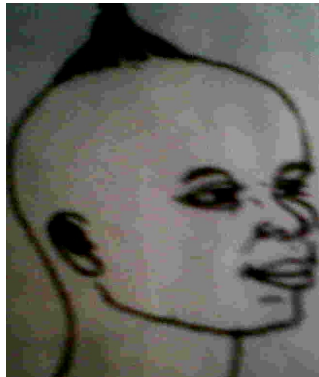
Just as clean-shaven head was common, so also was bushy hair. *Kannankanbu*, as this was known among the Yorùbá people, described the art of leaving the hair uncut and patterned a little stylishly along the sides to the ears. When *Kannankanbu* grows so long as to link up with the beard, it was considered as the height of filthiness.

Below are some artistic illustrations of the various barbering or hair styles in pre-eighteenth century Yorubaland.

**Afari Kodoro**



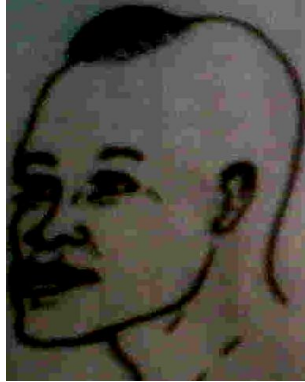
**Aso Oluode**



**Afari-Apa ‘Kan**



**Osu Dida**



### **Hair styles in pre-eighteenth century Yorubaland**

(Sources: C.L. Adeoye, *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, Plc, 2005, 180).

On the other hand, the females, from birth till about age eight, also kept clean-shaven heads. It must be noted that shaving and barbing of hairs were not common for females in Yorubaland. They were usually reserved for males. Rather than shaving and barbing, as the females grow and mature, say from age 8 and above, they either plaited or weaved their hairs into different forms or styles such as *Kolese*, *Ipako Elede*, *Suku*, *Moremi*, *Ogun Pari*, *Layipo*, *Koju-S’oko*, *Kehin-S’oko*, *Onile Gogoro*, and so on.<sup>208</sup> Johnson, like Adeoye and Fadipe, confirmed that between age 8 and 15, females could do just anything with their hairs. However, from the age of marriage, females adopted other forms of aesthetic and ornamental hairstyles.<sup>209</sup>

On barbing, facial markings, and other dress forms, Stone noted that:

*...woolly heads are never seen among the men, who shave not only the face, but also the head and even the eyebrows and nostrils. Some leave a strip of hair from the forehead over the head to the back of the neck. Others leave little patches as marks of devotion to some particular deity.*<sup>210</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid, 164-174.

<sup>209</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 101.

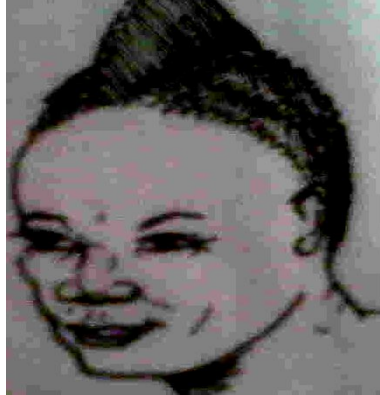
<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 30.

Below are artistic illustrations of pre-colonial Yorùbá female hair styles. Although modern hair styles have displaced this pre-colonial hair styles, the culture still remains, most especially in the rural areas. Following the artistic illustrations are contemporary expressions of Yorùbá female hair styles.

**Kolese**



**Osu Dida**



**Ipako Elede**



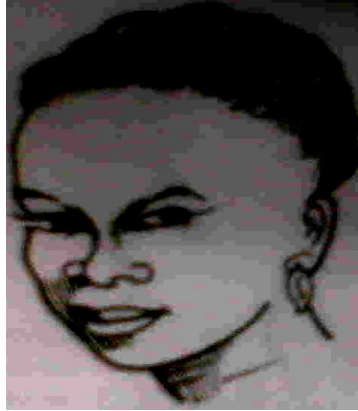
**Suku**



**Moremi Ajansoro**



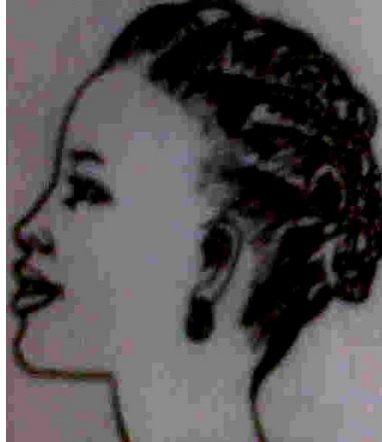
**Ogun Pari**



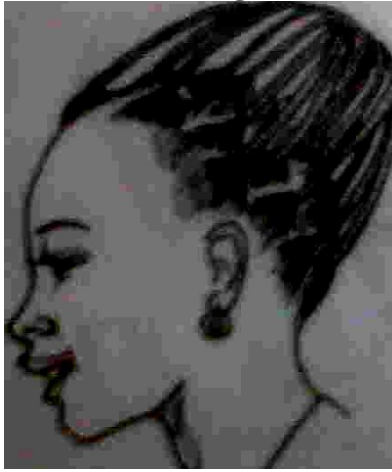
**Layipo**



**Kehin S'Oko**



### **Onile Gogoro**

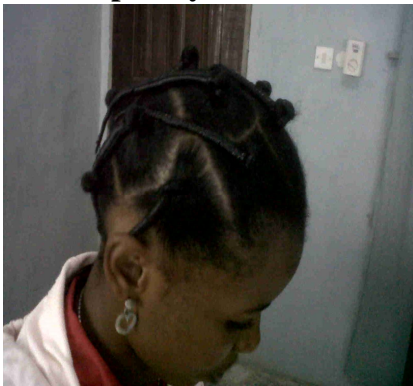


### **Pre-colonial Yorùbá female hair styles**

(Sources: Adeoye C.L., *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, Plc, 2005, 180).

Below are contemporary Yorùbá female hairstyles and as noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism cannot remove the fact that these photos aptly illustrate contemporary Yorùbá female hairstyles.

### **Contemporary Yorùbá female hair styles**



**Plaited Hair**



**Weaved Hair**



### **Weaved Hair**

(Sources: Persoanl collections)

Weaving (*irun didi*), unlike plaiting (*irun biba*), was the vintage way females, irrespective of age, status, and all over Yorubaland, adorned their hairs. Culturally, Yorùbá people consider any woman who barbered or shaved her hair as unfashionable (*alailafinju* or *obun sio-sio*). Therefore when a woman plaited her hair into between one and three, it could be as a result of inability to find time out of a busy schedule to weave the hairs, as weaving takes more time than plaiting. When women plaited their hairs, it was usually for a few days before the hair was weaved into any pattern of their choices.

Hair-weaving, as noted earlier, involved time and resources. Structurally, weaving takes different forms; however, the following were the most popular hair styles during the pre-eighteenth century period. *Kolese*, also called *Panumo*; *Ipako Elede* and *Suku* are the major ones. Others were mere variations of these three. *Kolese* is weaved backward, with the forehead serving as the starting point and the various ends of the weaved-hairs bounded into a knot at the base of the neck at the back. *Ipako Elede* is the inverted version of *Kolese* with the other difference being that instead of bounding the end into a knot, the inverted end is spread along the forehead with each group of strands having its respective knot.



*Suku* differs from the two in that the hairs are weaved from all sides of the hairline into a knot at the crown of the head. Except in the case of *Ipako Elede*, *Kolese* and *Suku* give the females a rather prominent and bold face, which, among other things, added to their beauty by emphasizing their faces and other beauty accessories added to enhance these faces.

Prior to contacts with either the Arab or European, the use of raffia (*iko*) to tie female hairs into standing stocks, which were fashioned into different styles was common, although this was later substituted with the use of long, thin strand of rubber and black thread. Prior to the use of rubber, the following styles were common: *Koju S'Oko*, *Kehin S'Oko*, *Onile Gogoro*, *Moremi*, *Ogun Pari*, *Layipo*, and so on. To achieve any of these styles, the hairs are gathered into heaps of few strands and finely treated raffia are weaved tightly and closely around the heap of hairs till the heaps are turned into a few standing stock of hairs. These stocks are then turned and twisted into different shapes to achieve any of the above-named styles. *Layipo*, for instance, is achieved by twisting and bending the stocks of hairs and directing the mass of hairs into a round heap at an angle towards the left ear. The right side of the head is done up in such a way that only the bent stocks, protruding to the crown of the head, are visible. *Layipo* therefore described the twisting of the stock of hairs from the right to the left side of the head. Like the other forms of female hair styles, thread weaving also added to females' beauty by emphasizing their faces and other accessories used to enhance their beauty.

In addition to hair, the Yorùbá also took special care of their ears and teeth. Shortly after birth, the Yorùbá people pierced their female children's ears for the purpose of beautification. When a female child's ears were pierced, a knotted thread was inserted to keep the holes after the wounds might have healed. Between the times the wound was healed and to about age one, a piece of bead, most especially white beads, *Sese Efun*, was tied to a thread and inserted into the hole as a form of earring. From age one to age eight; all manners of ornamental things were used as *Yeri Eti* or *Yeti* (something that fits or decorates the ears or earrings).

Adult females, from the age of puberty and above, could use all manners of *Yeti* ranging from beads to precious stones. *Yeti* was regarded among the Yorùbá as part of a female's dress and

enormous resources were spent in acquiring them. Characteristically, a woman must have two kinds of *Yeti*: *Yeti Awosere* or *Awoyile* and *Yeti Imurode*. *Yeti Awosere* was for everyday use while *Yeti Imurode* is mainly used for occasions. The best of *Yeti* are on display during occasions and, at that point, the preciousness of any *Yeti* distinguishes its wearer as a daughter or wife of a man of status, dignity, and wealth. Hence, *Yeti Imurode* also serves as a mark of identity.

For as long as we have information, it can be argued that it was neither a part of Yorùbá culture nor a part of Yorùbá tradition to leave the neck, waists, and hands, especially of females, bare. Although economic and socio-political considerations played fundamental roles in the above qualification, it was however considered a breach of Yorùbá dress ethics to leave the neck, waists, and wrists bare, especially when engaged in any social outing. Culturally, it was only during great calamity or periods of bereavement that the human neck, waist, and hands were not decorated and beautified with either precious beads or ornamental chains. There were different types of beads and necklaces made from precious metals; however, while beads were used to decorate and beautify the wrists, waists, and necks; ornamental necklaces were limited to wrists and necks. Although there were great varieties, it must be noted that they were determined by age. While some were for children, others were for adults. There was also the class distinction, which, for the most part, was premised on costs. The most precious of these ornamental beads and chains were used by the rich, powerful, and royal families. The cheapest were for the commoners and children. In fact, depending on the parents' wealth, children could also use precious and costly ornamental beads and chains.

Another important dimension to the above is that some of these ornamental beads and chains were used for religious purposes, so it was not unusual to see both costly or extremely cheap ornamental beads and chains on adults, especially votaries of deities.

Beginning with decorative beads for children, there are different kinds: *Jojo*, usually made of rubber; *Erogan*, *Ileke Okun*, *Sipef'ori*, *Gbinjinni*, *Eleeru*, and so on. For the most parts, these beads are of different colours, and could be either small or big. The

small ones are used to decorate and beautify the wrists and necks, while the big ones are used to decorate and beautify the waists. From the examples above, it must be noted that while *Gbinjinni* was exclusively used for the neck, *Eleeru* was exclusively used for the wrists and *Lagidigba* for the waists.

It must also be noted that powerful and wealthy individuals could give gold earrings and neck chains or costly ornamental beads to their wards and children. In this instance, family wealth determines what children wear or use. In a sense, merely seeing a Yorùbá child's dress, one can easily decipher what sort of home such a child comes from, as parents tend to use their children to express their own riches, influences, and power.

As a general practice, from the age of puberty, especially for a betrothed, the use of ornamental and decorative beads and chains were of utmost importance. In the folksong that compares any Yorùbá female that has no fashionable dress with a wingless dove, Yorùbá people use dress to describe a whole gamut of things, including ornamental and decorative beads and chains. It must also be noted that whether a woman is newly married or has been married for a many years, there is an unending competition among females in the use of ornamental and decorative beads and chains in Yorubaland. This unending competition is illustrated in yet another Yorùbá adage: "*Gbongan ko ju gbongan; iyawo ti ko so l'eke mo'di, yo so ikarawun*" (Jingling of beads or bangles are the same; a wife who could not afford to use beads, must use snailshells). On a wedding day, it is also customary, almost as a rule, for drummers to ask the wife, albeit with their talking drum: "*Se o wa n'be: Ileke Idi?*" (Are they there: Waist beads?).

Just as females used waist beads, so they also used wrists beads and chains. In fact, it was a critical part of the tradition of daughters of chiefs and kings to use (*lo Ileke*) or wear (*wo Ileke*) a large number of beads, especially on their wrists, at their weddings. It marked them out as daughters of the rich and powerful as well as showed their noble parentage. A few of the types of beads used by this category of females are: *Iyun*, *Segi*, *Lapade*, *Okun-Wewe*, *Lagidigba*, *Enla*, *Ankara*. Of these, *Iyun* is the most precious. The importance and high regard which the Yorùbá placed on this bead was demonstrated by liking it to

having a child: *Omo ni Iyun, Omo ni Ide* (A child is like Iyun and bronze).

*Iyun* was used as wrists and necks decorative ornament and has never been used on the waists. Next in rank to *Iyun* is *Segi*. The importance of *Segi* is aptly demonstrated in the Yorùbá prestigious name for wealthy and royal personages such as “Segilola”, a person who has so much of the *Segi* beads like money. Another dimension to the importance of these two beads lies in the fact that they remained the only beads that were sought after by the rich and royal. They were costly and taken as wealth itself, as only the wealthy can buy and use them.

Of the examples of beads mentioned above, it must be noted that *Lagidigba*, a thick and black bead, was worn only on the waists. When they were mass-used on a waist, they were collectively called *Bebe*.

Although, women of any age could use any of the aforementioned beads, it must be noted that aged women, used ornamental beads and decorative chains sparingly. The following beads were used by elderly women in Yorubaland *opoto, oyadokun, kagi, dangbongbon, kokoro, kundi, koko-aro, lakuta, oju-aguntan, moni-moni, enu-eye, opa-aro*, among many others.

The chiefs and kings in Yorubaland also used beads and their bead-use cannot be said to be solely ornamental and decorative, but also as symbol of office, as the following Yorùbá adage suggests: “*Ade Ori ni ti Oba; Ileke niti awon Ijoye*” (Kings are known by their crowns, and chiefs by their beads). For the chiefs, *Akun* was the main bead. In all parts of Yorubaland, only chiefs use *Akun* and for them, *Akun* was not for decorative and ornamental purposes, but more like a uniform and an insignia of office, as chiefs were removed from their offices when the king demanded for their *Akun*. Also, the procedures from installing new chiefs involved that the king must offered individual candidate *Akun*, without which such candidate was not considered as a validly made chief. While the use of *Akun* as symbol and insignial of office was common in Oyo, Ilesha, Ondo, Ekiti, and Akure; in other parts of Yorubaland, *Segi* played this role. The following folk-song is illustrative and instructive on the role of beads as a symbol of office in places like Ile-Ife, Ekiti, Ila, Oyo, Tapa,

Beriberi, Gogobiri and Igbomina. In addition, the insignias of office are underlined in the song:

*Oba o! Oba Alase Oba,  
Oba to de ade owo,  
Oba to wo bata ileke,  
Oba to te opa ileke  
Oba o! Oba Alase, Oba.*

(All Hail the King, the Supreme King!  
The king who wears a crown of cowries,  
The king who wears shoes of beads,  
The king who dons a staff of beads,  
All Hail the King, the Supreme King! )

In Owo, one of the ancient Yorùbá towns, the use of beads was somewhat different from its use in other parts of Yorubaland. While in other parts of Yorubaland, the commoners, chiefs and kings used or wore beads; in Owo, beads denoted and differentiated the different chiefs. As Robin Poynor noted, of the 850 chiefs whose power differed within a hierarchy called ‘*Edibo Olowo*’, the easiest and most distinguishing symbol was the ceremonial dress of the Owo chiefs.<sup>211</sup> The crust of this Owo traditional ceremonial dress was *Okun* beads. In fact, the more beads a chief used, the higher was his rank among fellow chiefs. Beside the *Olowo*, the king of Owo, the next in rank was the *Ojomo*, whose ceremonial dress comprises of *Agokun*, *Orufonran*, *Udaigha*, *Akonka*, *Patako*, and so on. Although all Owo chiefs wore coral anklets, but not all of them were granted the constituent elements of *Agokun*, which consisted primarily of accumulations of coral and jasper beads worn with a wrapper of white cloth, a band of beads around the neck – the *Akonka* -, a band of beads around the forehead, *Udaigha*; a band of beads worn diagonally across the chest, *Patako*; and anklets, *Akondo* or *Akonke*.

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<sup>211</sup> Poynor, Robin. “If the Chiefs Are Like This, What Must the King Be Like?: Chieftancy Garb as Indicators of Position in the Owo Court.” in *Man Does Not Go Naked*, Basel: Ethnologisches Seminar der Universität und Museum für Völkerkunde, in Kommission bei Wepf, 1989, 133-148.

*Orufonran*, unlike the *Agokun*, was worn by a smaller number of chiefs. The jacket-like dress was worn over a wrapper or embroidered trousers or both and was decorated with ivory and brass sculptural ornaments. Attached to this jacket were lots of ornamental objects that symbolize power and were made from precious articles. The jacket was finished with different types of coral beads. As the wearer walked or danced in procession, the beads and the various attachments to the jacket cannot but make eerie noise, which were considered as the hallmark of the foremost Owo chiefs. Of the numerous Owo chiefs, only the *Olowo* and the holder of the *Ojomo* title had the rights to wear both the most elaborate *Orufonran* and *Agokun*.<sup>212</sup>

Votaries and worshipers of deities (*orisha*) also used beads and chains. Like the chiefs and kings, their beads and chains were not for ornamental or decorative purposes, but symbols and insignia of their offices. Deities such as Osun, Ooba, Sango, Ogiyan, Orisaala, Orisa Ijehun, Orisa Adaatan, and Ifa used beads. The most notable of these kinds of beads was *Kele*, which came in two different forms: white and red. *Kele* are smaller beads and worn mainly by *Sango* worshipers.

During Sango worship, it was mandatory for devotees to use *Kele*. Failure to do so, it was believed, would incur the wrath of the deity. The following Sango worship song attests to this.

*Omo kekere, mo so Kele*  
*Agbalagba, mo so Kele;*  
*Sango, ma so mi l'okun l'ofun,*  
*Mo so Kele.*

(Children, I wear Kele,  
Elders, I wear Kele;  
Sango, don't strangulate me,  
I wear Kele.)

It must be noted that *Ooba*, also used smaller white or red beads. Besides *Kele*, there was also *Otutu-opon*, which came in black, red, or green, and was usually worn by diviners. *Oyinde* and *Ebolo* were two smaller beads usually worn on the necks by *Osun*

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 148.

votaries. *Sese-efun*, another white small bead, was used by votaries of *Ogiyan*, *Orisa-ala*, *Orisa Ijehun*, *Orisa Adaatan*, *Obalufon*, *Orisa Ife*, *Orisa Irowu*, and *Orisa Alaso-funfun*.

In addition to the above, *Itun*, *Ifa*, and *Abere* were also three important beads, although they were not worn to adorn the waists, necks, or wrists, but were used for Ifa ritual purposes only.

Beside beads, other types of jewelry were also used in Yorubaland, and like beads, they were both for aesthetics and religious purposes, as the following Yorùbá popular song shows:

*Ide wewe ni t'Osun*  
*Oje gbongbo ni t'oorisa*  
*Sekeseke ni t'Ogun*  
*E ba mi sipe fun Baale*  
*Ko fun wa l' Ododo pa kaja*  
*Gbogbo wa l' Ogun jo bi*  
*Hepa! Eru wa le.*

(Small brass is for Osun worship,  
Huge bronze figures are for the deities,  
Chains are for Ogun,  
Please, warn the head chief;  
To allow us our colourful dress.  
We are all worshipers of Ogun.  
Hepa! A slave has returned home.)

From this song, it is incontrovertible that brass was part of the religious dress of Osun worshipers as bronze were used by worshipers of deities such as *Obalufon*, *Ogiyan*, *Orisa-Popo*, *Orisa Ikire*, *Orisa Ife*, and *Orisa Adaatan*. However, cast chains were used for charms, which were used as leg and wrist chains for spirit-children, *Abiku*. The Yorùbá used brass, bronze, and copper to cast wrists, legs, and neck chains prior to contacts with the Arabs and Europeans. It must be noted also that cast chains were also worn by warriors, hunters, and elderly people.

Tattooing and the use of henna and antimony were also part of Yorùbá dress culture. While this was limited to females, it must be noted that males also indulged in tattooing and the use of henna and antimony. The Yorùbá believed that only lazy and fashion-freak males have the time and pleasure to indulge in tattooing and

using henna and antimony. However, both were popular among Yorùbá people, especially those from Ilorin, Ofa, Tapa, Oyo, and Ekiti.

R.H. Stone noted that the use of antimony, by which “*both sexes blacken the margin of the eyelids with pulverized sulphuret of antimony, and the women dye their finger nails, their feet and the palms of their hands with pulverized camwood*”<sup>213</sup> was commonplace in Yorubaland before colonial rule, a residue of which he met. Antimony, used in tandem with other items, as the following statement from Stone shows, was also used in religious rituals:

*...when about to take part in some sacrifice, they frequently give the entire person a pinkish tinge. Beads, nose-jewels, and bracelets of gold, silver, brass and carved ivory are the principal jewels of the women. The rings are often worn on the ankles as well as the arms. Men also wear necklaces of coral and bracelets of metal. Tattooing in blue is practiced to a limited extent and is so well done that it resembles a covering of figured cloth.*<sup>214</sup>

In addition to the above, indigenous Yorùbá people also use creams. These include shear-butter (*Oori*), palm-oil conduction (*Eebe*), roasted palm-kernel oil (*Adi-eyan* or *Yanko*) and cocoanut oil (*Adi-agbon*). These assortments of creams served both aesthetic and health functions. While *Adi-agbon* and *Oori* were used after bathing, *Eebe* and *Adi-eyan* are used in treatment of fever, skin-diseases, measles, ring-worm and enzema. For Yorùbá people, the use of *Adi-agbon* as a component of dress is mandatory. However, it must be asserted that the poor who cannot afford *Adi-agbon* uses palm oil as cream.

From the foregoing, it can be observed that dress in Yorubaland before contacts with either the Arabs or Europeans comprises of all of the above. It is therefore simplistic to argue that Yorùbá people dressed sparingly until their contacts with either the Arabs or the Europeans, as what forms dress among the Yorùbá is not only limited to cloths and clothing tradition but to a whole lot

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 31.



of things far removed from the simple conceptualization of dress as cloth and clothing tradition.

As far as evidence showed, the use of clothes, before these contacts, can therefore be divided into four categories: *Aso iyile*, (daily or casual wears) *Aso ise* (work clothes), *Aso imurode* (occasional or ceremonial wears), and *Aso asiko* (fashion clothes). In addition to these four categories, Yorùbá people had (and also wore) different clothes for different life cycle events: birth, puberty, marriage, procreation, eldership and death.

It must be asserted that the description of Yorùbá dress, given by Samuel Johnson, primarily describes Yorùbá casual clothes, which were worn in and around the house and, in the case of children, to run errands.

Work clothes, for the most part, were vocation-determined. For instance, hunters traditionally wore *Gberi Ode* and *Digo* trousers. These they wore both for hunting and during celebration of the annual Ogun festival. In addition to these two events, it must be noted that whenever any member of the hunting guild or hunting community died, it was customary for other members to set aside a special day when the hunting community would fete the departed colleague. On such a day, the hunters, irrespective of age and experience, would don their *Gberi Ode* and *Digo* trousers, armed with their guns, and proceeded to where the celebration and rite of passage (*Ipa Sisi* or *Isipa*) would be held.

The story is told of a certain great hunter, Erinmina, whose spirit was tormenting his children for not giving him a proper burial. After some months of visiting his house, Erinmina visited his closest friend and asked that all his work-clothes be taken out of the house and buried outside the village. He went further to state that:

*Oku onigbagbo ko sun 'le ahoro*  
*Oku Imale ko gbodo sun gbongan Orisa*  
*Orite nile Onigbagbo*  
*Oju gbangba la a sin 'Male*  
*Egun ko, epe ko,*  
*Bode ba ku ninu ile,*  
*Ti a ba sinku re, sinu ile tan*  
*Afi ka yara kaso kewuu re*  
*Ka ko o lo sehin odi ilu*

*Nitori pe ajeje ode ki i wonu igba,  
Apo Ode ki i denu agbon  
Atajeje, atapo ode  
Ojo to ba wonu agbon lo dipa ode.*<sup>215</sup>

(No Christian is buried in the hut  
No Muslim is buried at the shrine  
Christians are buried at cemetery  
Muslims are buried in open-spaces  
It is not a curse  
When a hunter dies at home,  
After burying him at home  
We must take all his dress  
Outside the town gates  
Because no hunter is buried in a calabash  
Hunter's bag is never put in a basket  
Both the hunter's essembles and bags  
It is forbidden for these to happen.)

Much as hunters would like to ascertain that feting dead colleagues was an ancient practice among the Yorùbá and would cite the practice to have started with the burial request of Erinmina, the above *Iremoje* (hunters' song) made it clear that the song was of recent provenance. For instance, both Islam and Christianity, which featured prominently in the song, must have been firmly entrenched in Yorubaland before the Erinmina saga occurred.

As another song, usually sung at the burial of hunters, would show, many things such as basket, bags, pots, hoes, cutlasses, swords, etc. were considered as part of a hunter's dress.

*Ewu ode re e o, motiele  
Sokoto ode re e o, motiele  
Agbon ode re e o, motiele  
Fila ode re e o, motiele  
Apo ode re e o, motiele  
Oru ode re e o, motiele  
Ada ode re e o, motiele*

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<sup>215</sup> Lawuyi Ogunniran, "Ìse ti Awon Yorùbá Nse" in Oludare Olajubu (ed.), *Iwe Asa Ibile Yorùbá*, (Ibadan, 1981), 135.

*Eruko ode re e o, motiele*  
*Ako ode re e o, motiele*  
*Odo ode re e o, motiele*  
*Ikoko ode re e o, motiele*  
*Ado ode re e o, motiele.*<sup>216</sup>

(This is the hunter's shirt, motiele.  
This is the hunter's trousers, motiele.  
This is the hunter's basket, motiele.  
This is the hunter's cap, motiele.  
This is the hunter's bag, motiele.  
This is the hunter's water-pot, motiele.  
This is the hunter's cutlass, motiele.  
This is the hunter's hoe, motiele.  
This is the hunter's sword-sheath, motiele.  
This is the hunter's mortal, motiele.  
This is the hunter's cooking-pot, motiele.  
This is the hunter's medicine-gourd, motiele.)

In the case of farmers, although *Gberi Agbe* and *Digo* trousers were also worn, there was however major differences in the ways the farmers' *Gberi* and *Digo* trousers were made. For the hunters, the *Gberi* and *Digo* trousers must have pockets in-front and at the back. Like hunters, farmers also have their own association or club, the *Egbe Alongo*.

However, whether for hunters or farmers; *Gberi Ode* or *Gberi Agbe* and *Digo* trousers were work clothes. As already noted, the pervasive use of *aso ise*, *aso Isere*, and *aso iwole* rather than *aso imurode* owes solely to the fact that Yorubaland, being an agrarian society, was not as clean as today's urban, office and clean environment. The people worked and lived on the farm. Both farmers and hunters have other clothes that can be worn for and on different occasions; however, where a member of either *Egbe Olode* or *Egbe Alongo* died, it was mandatory for members to wear their *Gberi* and *Digo* trousers. Another important component of farmers and hunters' work clothes was a cap and a fly-whisk (*Apa-Iru*) for hunters. One notable characteristic of *Gberi* and *Digo*

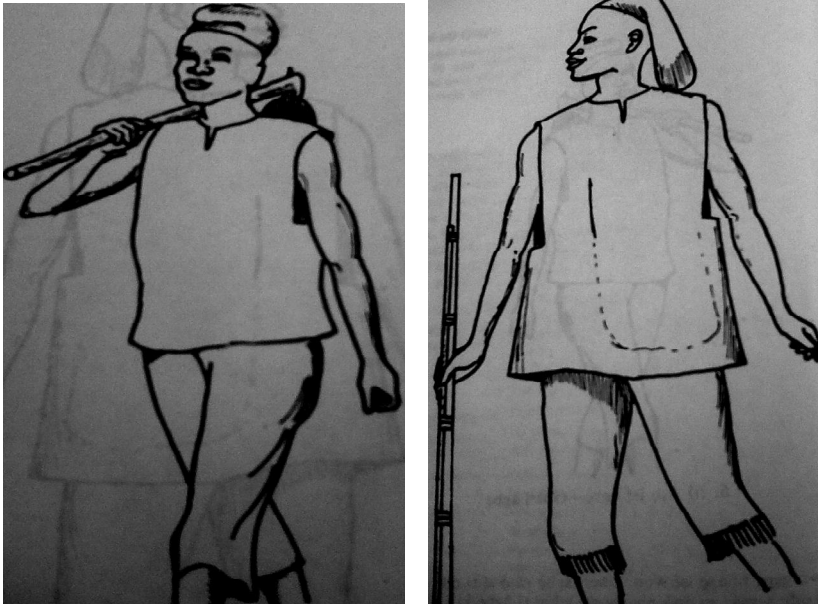
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<sup>216</sup> Ibid, 136.

trousers was smartness. Given the nature of hunting and farming; the work-clothes for both professions must be close-fitting and not loose. Blacksmiths, like farmers and hunters, also use close-fitting clothes.

Below are some artistic illustrations of hunters and farmers' dress used in pre-eighteenth century Yorubaland.

### Gberi-Agbe, Gberi-Ode, and Digo Trousers



(Sources: C.L. Adeoye, *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, Ibadan, Nigeria: University Press, Plc, 2005).

Occasional clothes or wears are used in the celebration of life cycle events such as birth, puberty, marriage, procreation, eldership and death. As 'Tunde M. Akinwumi noted, these events *'are accompanied by a variety of ritual celebrations in which participants dance, sing and perform...'*<sup>217</sup> Dress, owing to these qualifications, therefore played an important role in these events. Taking birth and death as representative examples, it must be asserted that these events involved people in the same house, compound and community as well as their relatives and kin who may be living in another segment of the community or in another community entirely. Since birth, at least for nine months, is known ahead, unlike death that could come suddenly; birth and naming ceremonies are, depending on individuals' economic circumstances, well planned in Yorubaland. Before delivery, the couples either sewed new clothes or used their old but very good clothes on the christening day. Usually, prior to the christening day, the decision on what cloths to wear by the mother of the new baby usually falls on the wife or her mother. Characteristically, the new mother typically wears the most elaborate dress not only to *'make the occasion exhilarating and memorable'*<sup>218</sup>, but also to show her family's wealth, status, and prestige on the day of the event. The husband, although equally well dressed, cannot in any way compare to his wife, as the Yorùbá consider excessive dressing on the part of males as idleness.<sup>219</sup>

Christening ceremony, depending on the wealth and status of the husband and/ or his extended family, can be an elaborate ceremony. Circumstances surrounding the birth of a child can also play significant roles in the nature of the ceremony involved on the christening day. Where the parents are rich, royal, or important in the community; christening or any ceremony for that matter is usually elaborately celebrated. In such cases, the parents of the couple, if they are alive and able, are in attendance with their

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<sup>217</sup> Tunde M. Akinwumi, 'Ero: A Celebration of Eldership in the Indigo Cloths of Owo', in Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles*, (Ibadan, 2005), 49.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 49.

<sup>219</sup> Interview with Mrs. Oluwafunmilade Hannah Akande, Iresi, Osun State, 13 November 2010.

friends and dependants. Friends of the couple are also present, as well as those of their older children.

During such occasions, depending on the status and wealth of the couple, two categories of clothes are involved: *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe J'oda*. These two categories of clothes differ markedly from what the couple would wear on the day of the ceremony. *Aso Ebi* is a cloth used exclusively by members of the immediate (extended and nuclear) family of the couple. *Aso Egbe J'oda*, which may be many and of different types, are worn by friends and club members, not just of the couple, but also of the parents. The wife, during the course of the ceremony, is expected to change her clothes, depending on the wealth and riches of the family, as many times as possible. While this is aimed at showing-off the family's riches, it is also aimed at showing her own (paternal) family that she is well taken care of and provided for by her husband.

The use of *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe J'oda* are, in many ways, tied to identity construction and reinforcement. While *Aso Ebi* clearly enables the concerned party to be clearly distinguished, *Aso Egbe J'oda* clearly and unmistakably shows their relatives and friends. The sheer fact that the couple is not bound to wear either of these makes it possible for families, friends, and well-wishers to distinguish them from other family members.

When the ceremony involves death and its associated passage-rites, the differences from christening or any other ceremony are expressed, not in the solemnity involved, but in the colour of cloth and elaborateness involved. In a burial, for instance, of aged parents, which the Yorùbá usually describes as *Oku Eko* (death involving the eating of pap), the difference from christening may never be seen by non-Yorùbá who may not pay closer attention to the various dresses put on by the various parties. Where the celebration involves a young man, the ceremony is usually not elaborate and the colour of clothes and other dress ensembles used is black. In Yorubaland, as in most indigenous African communities, a widow and, sometimes, other members of the family of the deceased, is expected to be clad in black. The metaphors and associated meanings of dress, as Aderonke

Adesanya argued, '*expressed in their forms and colours...are signifiers of moods and events*' among the Yorùbá.<sup>220</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate Yorùbá *Aso Ebi*.



**A couple in Aso Ebi**  
(Sources: Personal Collection).

Adesanya, citing personal communication with Ademola Dasylyva, noted that the garment and mien of traditional religious leaders during the burial ceremony of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1987 was not only spectacular, but also amusing and provocative, as they '*wore garments embellished with an assortment of charms, cowries and small gourds,*' substances of varying colours were also painted on their body and garments and '*some left mucus oozing out of their nostrils to the extent that the accoutrement and demeanour were laughable*'.<sup>221</sup> Yet the metaphor and associated meanings of their dress, provocative and fearful as they were, is so

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<sup>220</sup> Aderonke Adesola Adesanya, 'A Semiotics of Clothing Insignia of Indigenous Secret Societies among the Ijebu Yorùbá', in Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles*, (Ibadan, 2005), 27.

<sup>221</sup> Aderonke Adesola Adesanya, *ibid*, 27.



known to the people that no one dared to deride them. The metaphors and associated meanings of colours as signifiers of moods and events are carried further by Yorùbá people to times of war. In such occasion, red flags were hoisted in Yorùbá towns or in areas dedicated to such war, as Yorùbá people do not fight where people live or have their living but in bushes and dedicated areas so as to avoid death and injuries to non-combatants. In such areas, red and black flags were hoisted on poles and trees to signify the prevalent moods and events – death and war. At the termination of a war, white flags were not only hoisted in dedicated places, but also in the city centers and king's palace. The same is carried forward to the use of white dove as signifier of peace and owl as signifier of war and death.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photograph here was taken, where it was taken, who took it and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. Nevertheless, the photo aptly illustrate Yorùbá secret society garb.



**Chief Hubert Ogunde in a typical Awo (secret society) garbs**  
(Source: Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria).

*Aso asiko* (fashion clothes) are usually of bright colours, as they signify peace of mind, riches, and fashion. The Yorùbá believe that dressing to suit the prevailing fashion and societal dictates is good. Hence, both males and females are expected to dress fashionably, although they frown at excessive dressing, especially by men. T.M. Akinwumi described the following Yorùbá dress as prestige (fashion) clothes: *Dandogo, Gbarye, Girike, Kembe, Bombata, Guru, and Gogowu*.<sup>222</sup> He went further to argue that their decline, especially from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, owed, in part, to the ‘*astronomical cost and, most importantly, their anachronism...*’ As C.L. Adeoye argued, fashion was considered by the Yorùbá as women’s forte and any man, although there were many of them, who devote much attention to his personal appearance is regarded as a lazy man.<sup>223</sup> Paradoxically, a man that paid scanty attention to his personal appearance was regarded as a filthy man, an *Obun*, who will serve the chic (*Obun sio sio, ni yo ru eru Afinju wo’le*). For females, an excessively dressed woman was regarded as *Onifaari*, and the Yorùbá were wont to say: *Faari aseju, oko olowo lo ran won lo* (excessive dressing or fashion leads to bankruptcy and, invariably, pawnship). Consequently, it could be argued that for both sexes, the Yorùbá place emphasis on moderation in dressing and outward appearance.

The photo below shows a cross-section of Yorùbá women wearing indigenous Yorùbá *Aso Asiko* (occasional dress) of the pre-colonial period. The place and date when the photo was taken are unknown. Immediately after this picture are three other photos of contemporary expressions of Yorùbá occasional dress.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate Yorùbá pre-colonial *Aso Asiko*.

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<sup>222</sup> Akinwumi T. M., ‘Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress’, in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.) *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (Rochester, 2005), 63.

<sup>223</sup> Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise*, 56.





**A cross section of Yorùbá contemporay Aso Asiko**

(**Sources:** except for the first photograph, which was obtained from Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, others are from my personal collections).

In addition to the above, clothes were also used in religious worships. Aderonke Adesanya noted that clothes, following the dictates of the Ifa oracle, could be used to appease the gods. Cloths were, in such situations, sacrificed to the gods<sup>224</sup>; to placate witches, wizards, and deities<sup>225</sup>; and so on. While, in some cases, such sacrifices may be simply honorific, for the most part, the intention was to court the favour of the gods or other spiritual entities.<sup>226</sup>

In rites of passage such as death, clothes played an important role. Among the Yorùbá people of Nigeria, black cloths are worn. Among the Asanti of Ghana, red clothes are worn. Notwithstanding colour-differences in different parts of Africa, it must be emphasized that in religious observances relating to death and bereavement, widows and, sometimes, relatives, were clad in black dress. The red colour, to consider another instance, implied

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<sup>224</sup> Aderonke Adesanya, 'A Semiotic', 26.

<sup>225</sup> William Bascom, *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa*, (Bloomington, 1969), 23.

<sup>226</sup> Aderonke Adesanya, 'A Semiotic', 26.

certain spiritual state for *Sango* and *Ogun* worshipers. White, so also water, was important to *Osun* worshipers. The use of water is complemented with the use of white dress. Both relate to the virtue of colour and the spiritual quality of water. White cloth, *Aso ala*, was used in shrines and sanctuaries. In most shrines and sanctuaries, for instance *Imole* shrine, white cloths, white cowries, and other items formed the bases of shrines and sanctuaries. In most cases, a devotee or worshiper who was seeking the favour of the Orisha for anything usually brought sacrificial items, among which were white cloths, to the deities. At an *imole* shrine in Sagamu, Ogun State, a middle-aged woman brought a wrapper and hand-woven baby-tie, *Oja*, to the shrine. She claimed that she had asked the deity for a child and mainly brought the two items to the shrine for sanctification so that when she eventually had the child, the two items would be used in carrying the baby.<sup>227</sup>

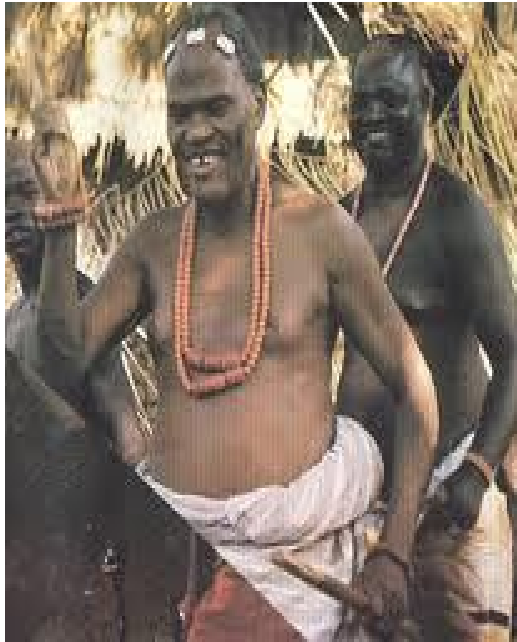
In addition to its use as sacred items in shrines and sanctuaries, white cloths were also worn by votaries and worshipers, especially when performing important rituals. White cloths were also used to mark the abode of particular spirits in natural sites such as trees, rivers, stones, and so on. Where this was the case, the cloth itself could be appeased. For instance at Ile-Ife, like in so many other places in Yorubaland, trees such as *Ose* and/or *Iroko* (baobab) trees were regularly wrapped in white cloths to signify and distinguish them as abodes of the spirits.

*Babalawo*, head priests, as well as masquerades also wore white cloths as insignia of their offices or professions. In Lagos, *Eyo*, the traditional masquerade of the Eko people, so also *Agemo*, wore white cloths. Other masquerades in Yorubaland, before wearing any other costume, wear an inner white cloth, called *Jepe*, which underscored the closeness of the white cloth with the secret knowledge of the masquerade.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are, oftentimes, lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate Yorùbá religious dress.

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<sup>227</sup> Interview with Mrs. Raliat Adeola, Sagamu, Ogun State, 10 October 2010.



**Atypical Yorùbá Aso Ala, with beads and cowries signifying a religious presence**

(Sources: National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria).



### **Eyo Festival in Lagos, 2011**

(Sources: National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria).

It must be asserted that all masquerades must wear *Jepe*. Writing on the importance of *Jepe* in masquerade's costumes, Robert Faris Thompson noted:

*Yorùbá sacred body-covering with netted viewing-shields are death-connected sacred objects. We pierce or lift up their lapped structures at our peril. The danger lies in the fact that, for the Yorùbá, such 'masking' philosophically keeps secret the distinction between the spiritual world and the world of the living. Therefore we are not talking about the mere wearing of cloths and lappets. We are talking about the ritual wearing of thresholds.*<sup>228</sup>

*Jepe*, without doubt, was therefore the very essence of the masquerade's costumes; hence, the outer, exposed cloths may be

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<sup>228</sup> Thompson, R.F., 'Recapturing Heaven's Glamour: Afro-Caribbean Festivalizing Arts', in J. Bettelheim (ed.), *Caribbean Festival Arts*, (Los Angeles, 1988), 17-37.

beautiful, but they were expendable. Elisha Renne and Agbaje-Williams, citing Lawal, associated this with ‘*inner goodness in constituting beauty*’.<sup>229</sup>

From the above, it is clear that Yorùbá religious expression manifests in their dress. This include variety of religious dresses, ranging from plain white cloths to embroidered, appliquéd, and beaded cloths, from ragged and faded cloths to brightly coloured, elaborately pieced cloth. These cloths featured in shrines, sanctuaries, and altars; they were used in sacrifices; in masquerade costumes; in traditionalist rituals; as a way of identifying disjuncture and continuities in the formal qualities, iconography, and meanings of Yorùbá dress tradition over many years. In religious uses, Yorùbá dress projected the sacred character of individuals wearing or using them, demarcated sacred places, marked a spiritual presence or space, represented the identities of special deities, and indicated particular forms of dedication to the deities and to God (*Eledumare*).

Cloths used in religious worship – as altar cloths, sacred objects, covering for sacred objects, and so on – demonstrate the expressive character of persons and objects associated with the deity. In the same vein, the Yorùbá’s used of cloths to drape dead bodies and to line coffins. These acts or practices anchored on the belief that dress, once it touched the body, became a second skin, which united the material and spiritual qualities of the wearers or users with those of the deities. Invariably, dress, when used for religious purposes; suggested a link between the world of the living with those of the dead or of the spirit.

Embedded in this kind of belief system is the notion of secrecy. For instance, most Yorùbá cloths are opaque in colour and may, symbolically suggest mystery. In relation to religion, Bolaji Idowu asserted that the idea of mystery was an important element of Yorùbá religious belief. This idea is expressed in terms of the secret (*awo*) – that which cannot be known, seen, or understood by the un-initiated. Hence, shrine objects (including cloths) were regarded as repositories of power, ‘*ase*’. This belief was carried further into ‘*eku egungun*’ (masquerade’s costume), which

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<sup>229</sup> Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles*, (Ibadan, 2005), 14.



concealed the identity of the person wearing the masquerade and projected the presence of the spirit being.

At yet another level, Yorùbá cloths, because they were made of *Kijipa* or *Ofi*, are thick and therefore a fit material for dyeing and printing of messages and icons, which, in its modern use, carry more spiritual messages and icons than ordinary cloths. In the pre-1800 periods, Yorùbá religious cloths were usually soaked in herbal and medicinal concoctions to strengthen and protect the wearer, who also contributed his or her sweat, and therefore reinforcing the connection between the wearer and the cloths.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. Notwithstanding this criticism, these photos aptly illustrate Yorùbá indigenous clothes.







**A cross section of Yorùbá indigenous cloths**  
(Source: National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria).

Socially, Yorùbá society can be calibrated either by wealth or by status. By wealth, Yorùbá community could be divided into four distinct classes: *Olola* (the royals and nobles, which includes the chiefs, kings and others from the royal family), *Olowo* (the rich, also called *Oloro*), *Talika* (the poor or a middle class person, in today's parlance), and *Akuse* (the dreg of the society). By status, three distinct classes can be recognized: Omo (free-born children), *Iwofa* (pawns), and *Eru* (slaves). For control and administration, the different individuals in these categories were, first and foremost, members of one family or the other. As members of families, they were under the tutelage of their different family heads. The family heads submitted themselves to the Compound Chief (*Ijoye Adugbo*), and together with the king, the Oba-in-council is formed. These different categories were therefore ruled by the *Oba*, whose seemingly boundless power, as the appellation - '*Alase, Ekeji Orisha*' - suggested, was, in turn, controlled and checked by an extra-judicial or extra-legal body, the *Ogboni*. This body was known in different Yorùbá communities by different names. For instance, among the Ijebu, it was called the *Osugbo*. No matter the nomenclature, this body comprised of men and

women of note and membership of the body is predicated on so many things, including riches and good behaviour. Because the body was saddled with the responsibilities of trying the king in any matter involving him and his chiefs, as well as in any matter involving life, membership in the *Ogboni* was usually kept secret.

Among the Ijebu, like in other Yorùbá communities, membership of the *Osugbo* may be secret but that was not to say that they, indeed, were unknown. Dress played an important role in the identity of the *Osugbo* members. While the *Osugbo* could be identified by their use of *Itagbe* shag cloth, a cloth that sets them apart from other *Ogboni* and other cults in Yorubaland. Cadre within the *Osugbo* was also reflected in the various insignia weaved into the *Itagbe* of members of this cult. The iconography on each member's *Itagbe* was not only a study in hidden knowledge but also the seven knots at the bottom of the *Itagbe* represented the king – the Awujale – and his six chiefs. The *Itagbe* and its iconography clearly distinguished members of the *Osugbo* from any other cults in Ijebu Ode as well as other cults, *Ogboni* inclusive, in Yorubaland.<sup>230</sup>

In Owo, as in Ikere-Ekiti, Iyere, Ipele, Emure, Isuada, Upenmen (also called as Epinmi), Idashe, Ute, and Okeluse *Ero* eldership festival clearly underscored the importance of dress in the establishment and maintenance of Yorùbá identity. Like in other Yorùbá communities, pre-colonial Owo society comprised of five age-grades: *Ugbama* (0-30), *Kaya* (30-40), *Eleteta* (40-50), *Elehe* (50-60) and *Ero* (60-65). While the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war and, later, colonialism rendered the use of age-grade in societal engineering obsolete, they however failed in consigning both *Eleteta* and *Ero* into the dustbin of history. Of the five age-grades, it must be emphasized, *Ero*, which marks transition from youthful age to adulthood, is the most celebrated in Owo.

One striking feature of the *Ero* celebration was the use of specially commissioned *Ero* cloths by its members. While, in some literature, the origin of the practice is attributed to Edo influence on Owo; it must however be noted that, as Talbot argued, while there were five age-grades in Owo, only four existed in Benin and

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<sup>230</sup> Aderonke Adesanya, 'A Semiotic', 23-48.

these four were more of caste systems and not age-grades. In addition, Chief J.B. Ashara noted that the age-grade system was brought from Ile-Ife by Ejugbelu, the first Olowo of Owo.<sup>231</sup> *Ero*, no matter its provenance, is a celebration of eldership, which marked a transition from youthful and active working life to that of retirement and it is marked by commissioning and the use of identical hand woven indigo blue *Girijo* and *Igbero* cloths during the celebration. Two other indigo blue cloths associated with *Ero* are the *Ashigbo* and *Ebolo* cloths. All these and many more were specially commissioned and used in the celebration of *Ero* festival.<sup>232</sup>

Common to *Ero* cloths is the beautiful combination of nuanced shades of white, gray, blue, and blue-black indigo stripes, which, together, distinguish *Ero* cloths from ordinary, everyday ceremonial cloths. *Girijo* cloths, unlike *Igbero*, were usually small and therefore used as waist-wrapper while the *Igbero* was quite large and was worn, draped over the body. Members of the five different quarters of Owo made their choices of *Girijo* and *Igbero* designs independently of one another. There were elaborate rituals associated with the making of the *Ero* cloths. They were commissioned and were made by women, especially the first daughter of the *Ero* candidate, who customarily commissioned the production of *Ero* cloths for her retiring father. In case the man had no daughter, other women could be made to perform the same task. The daughter must provide the ritual and symbolic materials and must ensure that the *Ero* cloth was completed within the stipulated seven days. The weaver, during the entire seven days of weaving the *Ero* cloths, must be in a state of purity; hence, must not be menstruating or engaged in any sexual and unclean activity. To ensure that these ritualistic requirements were met, *Ero* cloths were usually woven by older women who had passed their menopausal age.<sup>233</sup>

On the day of the celebration, *Ero* candidates were clad in their *Girijo* and *Igbero* cloths and danced, first from their homes to

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<sup>231</sup> Tunde M. Akinwumi, 'Ero: A Celebration', 50-51.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>233</sup> Ibid, 49-70.

the shrine, and later to the Olowo's palace. Usually, *Ero* festival is usually followed by the Igogo festival.<sup>234</sup>

Among the Bunu, west of the Niger River in present day Kogi State, Nigeria; *Aso Ipo*, a generic name given to five types of indigenous red-and-tan patterned cloths, were used by this and other Yorùbá peoples in funeral rituals. As Elisha P. Renne noted, *Aso Ipo* mirrored the Bunu political hierarchy, with the five cloths ranked according to size and use in funerals. The first, *Aponupoyin*, was displayed only for *Olu*, also known as *Obaro*, who are the highest ranking chiefs, comprising also of kings, who were holding three traditional titles. The second, *Abata*, was displayed at the funeral of chiefs with two titles, while *Ifale* cloths were used or displayed at the funeral of chiefs with one title. Although women and men of great riches and influences may also have *Ifale* cloths displayed for them, the last two – *Oja* and *Ebe* – were used at the commemorative funerals of all chiefs, irrespective of rank. Technically, these five cloths, among the Bunu, were used cumulatively, so that a lower ranking chief could have three cloths (*Ebe*, *Oja*, and *Ifale*) displayed at his funerals. High-ranking chiefs, including the kings, may have between four or five cloths displayed at their funerals.<sup>235</sup>

These cloths, except for *Aponupoyin*, are patterned on one side with red and tan geometric motifs, while on the other side, the cloths are plain white. In the case of *Aponupoyin*, both sides of the cloth are made red and tan; hence the name *Aponupoyin* - red on both sides. Characteristically, *Aso Ipo* was made from one or more cloth strips, so they are excessively thick. In making *Aso Ipo*, strips of cloths are hand-sewn together in cross-stitch variation. Geometric shapes are added by supplementary weft patterning anchored to the foundation cloth by regularly spaced warp threads. This is similar to how Akwete and Epira (in Central Nigeria) and Ijebu, another Yorùbá group in present day Ogun State, Nigeria, made their *Aso Olona*.

*Aso Ipo* was usually not worn. Its use was limited to burial and funerary purposes. *Aso Ipo* was used not only by the Bunu, but

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<sup>234</sup> 'The Igogo Festival', *Nigerian Magazine* 77, (Lagos, 1963), 91-104.

<sup>235</sup> Elisha P. Renne, 'Aso Ipo, Red Cloth from Bunu', *African Arts*, 25:3 (1992), 64-102.

also by the Ijumu, Owe, Ebira, Okun, Okpella, and Oworo peoples. Besides commemorative funerary use, it was used by masquerades in these areas, especially at the funeral of the king. It must be noted that *Aso Ipo*, besides being a funerary cloth, it was also fortified such that the cloth breathes, a phenomenon that made many, especially the Ijumu to call it *Aso Gbingbin* -the cloth that breathes.<sup>236</sup> Moreover, among all Yorùbá groups, the communities listed above remained the only ones who utilize red cloths for funeral purposes. Among other Yorùbá groups, white cloths were used in burying the dead while black was worn by the bereaved widows and family members.

Closely tied to cloth's use in religious milieu is the conception of religious or fortified cloths as measure of protection. For example, Daniel Okanlawon Afolabi, as corroborated by the Nigerian Police, Ajaawa Division, successfully warded-off bullets with his 'thick-cloth' when a niece ordered her thugs to shoot Mr. Afolabi during a land dispute. Mr. Afolabi, who claimed to be ignorant of the presence of intruders on his farm on 5 October 1993, was plucking oranges when he heard a gun shot and noticed that his 'thick-cloth' had saved him from death at such a close range as ten meters away from where he was standing.<sup>237</sup> Police records corroborated Mr. Afolabi's claim of being shot at and the Police were equally perturbed that the bullet had no effect on him.

From the above, dress, especially their flexibility, texture, myriads of colours, patterns, absorbency and weight, along with their association with the wearers' belief systems, combine to define not only the identity of the wearers, but also the socio-economic, religious, and political contexts and contents in which dress was used. At the macro-level, dress, more generally, dealt with the general purpose of covering the human nakedness from unwanted and unsolicited gaze as well as protecting the body from the elements. At the micro-level, dress was understood among the Yorùbá as dealing essentially with symbols, particular insignia, emblems, offices, meanings, and so on, which are mutually

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<sup>236</sup> Interview with Prof. Z.O. Apata, Ikeji-Arakeji, Osun State, 12 June 2011.

<sup>237</sup> Interview with Mr. Daniel Okanlawon Afolabi, Otamakun, Ogbomoso, 12 November 2010.

intelligible only between the wearer and the socio-cultural, religious and political space where such dress belonged.

### **3.2. Omoluabi in Yorùbá Pre-colonial Dress Culture**

From the above analysis of pre-colonial and pre-Christian Yorùbá sartorial tradition, it is clear that whether in secular or religious matter, Yorùbá people ensured, as much as they can, that the individual and group social requirement of being an *Omoluabi* reflected in their dress. From caps to head ties, facial marks to clothes, body arts to other additions and/or supplements to the human body; Yorùbá sartorial tradition went beyond the need to cover human nakedness to include the need to reflect the existential values of being urbane, gentle, wise, intelligent, and being well brought up as well as being highly cultured.

Whether a Yorùbá man or woman lived in the city or in the village, he or she is expected to demonstrate, in his or her dress, good breeding, as representative of his or her family, community, and race. He or she must possess items of dress that exhibited the inherent qualities of an *Omoluabi*, and also exhibited his or her intellectual refinement by ensuring that his or her dress conformed to this acceptable social standard. At home, using *Aso Isere*, or at work, using *Aso Ise*; every Yorùbá man and woman must exhibit not just her sex, age, and religious affiliation, but also family's social status. In social gathering, using *Aso Imurode*, which could be either *Aso Egbe'Joda* or *Aso Ebi*, he or she must adhere strictly to the expectation of Yorùbá people, which he or she was taught and brought up with.

Although item of dress such as facial marks and body arts were permanent, others such as hairstyles, beads, ornamental chains and rings, antimony, shoes, and bags were not. While those that were permanent were not subject to occasional change in fashion, others, irrespective of change in fashion, must conform to acceptable ethical and moral standard encapsulated in the concept of *Omoluabi*.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

Although the provenance of dress in Yorubaland may be difficult to ascertain, it is however not subject to any debate that dress, whether narrowly or broadly conceived, had a longer antiquity in



Yorubaland and the view, many and varied in popular literature, that Yorùbá people, prior to the European contacts, dressed semi-nude is but wrong. As this chapter has shown, dress of different forms existed in Yorubaland before Euro-Asian contacts. *Ifa* corpus as well as many of the earliest European explorers, traders, and missionaries copiously recorded the splendor of Yorùbá indigenous dress that they found when they first came to Yorubaland.

The different professions, socio-political offices, and religions among the Yorùbá had dress that were specifically tied to them. While some of these have changed in forms and shapes today due to contacts, first, with the Arabs, through Islam, and later with the West through slave trade, Christianity, Western education and colonialism; some have remained marginally unchanged as shall be shown in the next two chapters.

As the analyses have shown, before contacts either with Islam or Christianity, indigenous Yorùbá dress, for males, comprised essentially of an *Agbada*, *Buba*, *Fila*, and *Sokoto* or a short knickers and a wrapper tied across the shoulder as a *Kaja*. For the females, a simple wrapper, which may, depending on age and status, cover the breast or not. These could be complemented with neck and wrists beads; antimony, henna, haircuts (for males) or plaited/weaved hair (for females). On the head, a cap (for males) or a shawl (for females) completed what can be termed 'indigenous' Yorùbá dress.

In addition to the above, it can be argued that, in pre-colonial times, Yorùbá dress, whether conceptualized narrowly to mean cloths or broadly to include other attachments, modifications, and supplements to the human body; aimed at presenting the dressed body (to both the self and others) in ways that evince pride in being a Yorùbá man or woman; established and reinforced individual and corporate identity of the Yorùbá people; and, above all considerations, outwardly projected an inward state of being an *Omoluabi*, where *Omoluabi*, the soul of Yorùbá peoplehood noted in Chapter Two, was essentially being well-behaved, well-dressed, lofty in speech and conduct, fashionable, urbane, etc.



## Chapter Four

### Islam, Christianity, Colonial Rule and Yorùbá Dress

#### 4.0. Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of Islam and Christianity, colonial rule and Western education on Yorùbá dress. Islam, which came into Yorubaland through Northern Nigeria, got to Yorubaland before Christianity. Christianity, which began effectively in Yorubaland from 1830s, became widespread in Yorubaland as a result of the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, most notably the need to end the internecine civil war, which tore Yorubaland apart for nearly a century. Missionary and colonial intervention in the civil war not only ensured the termination of the war, but also the eventual incorporation of Yorubaland into the vortex of colonialism and global trade. Colonialism, as shown in the chapter, was daubed by colonial masters as civilization and a critical part of this colonial civilization included the wearing of European dress either as uniform in colonial service or in public life as part of conversion to Christianity. The chapter's overarching emphasis is the various changes indigenous Yorùbá dress culture witnessed consequent upon the coming of Islam, Christianity, Western education, and colonial rule.

#### 4.1. The Nineteenth Century Yorùbá Civil War and the Coming of Islam and Christianity into Yorubaland

During most of the eighteenth century, the Yorùbá, excluding the Ijebu, were united into one kingdom ruled from Old-Oyo<sup>238</sup>. But by 1780, Yorubaland was split into four states namely Oyo, Ketu, Egba and Ijebu. By 1850, as a result of the Fulani invasion, four new states emerged, namely Ibadan, Ilesha, Ife, and the Ekitiparapo.<sup>239</sup> From this period, what the Yorùbá had established

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<sup>238</sup> Oguntomisin G. O. and Toyin Falola, "Refugees in 19th Century Yorubaland", in Isaac AdeagboAkinjogbin (ed.), *Ife: The Cradle of a Race, from the Beginning to 1980*, (Port Harcourt, 1992), 381-384.

<sup>239</sup> Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, "Keynote Address", in Isaac AdeagboAkinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 1-6.

and maintained over the course of many years was threatened by a political crisis, which began at the heart of the Empire, Old-Oyo. One of its major causes was the inordinate ambition of functionaries of the central government, which led to a breakdown in constitutional mechanism of the Empire.<sup>240</sup>

This sign of decay began to manifest when Gaa became *Basorun* and head of Oyo-Mesi (the kingmakers in Oyo).<sup>241</sup> He subverted the constitution and from 1754 to 1774, he usurped the power of the *Alaafin* and ruled with unparalleled despotism and ruthlessness. Although Abiodun succeeded in ending Gaa's ignoble reign, and was installed as the *Alaafin*, he nevertheless could not reverse or avert the repercussion of Gaa's reign, especially in the provinces.<sup>242</sup>

The pace set by Gaa was later followed by Afonja, the *Are-Ona-Kakanfo* (the Field Marshall of Oyo Army and military governor at Ilorin). Afonja not only disobeyed *Alaafin* Awole who reigned after Abiodun, but also carved an Empire out of the Old-Oyo Empire for himself.<sup>243</sup> To achieve these, he allied with some important chiefs in Oyo, most especially *Basorun* Asamu, the head of the Oyo-Mesi, and Owota Lafianu, one of the Imperial guards, who were also desirous to exercise power beyond the constitutional provisions.<sup>244</sup> Acting in concert with these individuals, Afonja refused the order by the *Alaafin* to attack Iwere-Ile, a well-fortified city South West of Oyo-Ile, and turned his armies against Oyo-Ile instead.<sup>245</sup> In 1796, they besieged the capital and demanded the head of Awole. Disappointed at the turn of events, Awole committed suicide. Adebo, who reigned after

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<sup>240</sup>Ibid, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F., "19th Century Wars and Yorùbá Ethnicity" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 10.

<sup>242</sup> Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, "The Causes of the 19th Century Civil Wars" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 133.

<sup>243</sup>Ibid, 135.

<sup>244</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorates*, (Lagos, 1920), 165-168.

<sup>245</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F., "Fundamental Causes of the 19th Century Yorùbá Wars" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 146.

Awole, was not recognized by Afonja. Adebo died shortly after ascending the throne and Maku reigned in his stead.<sup>246</sup>

Maku was more war-like and Afonja sensed that confrontation with Maku was inevitable. To strengthen his hands against Maku, he allied with Sheikh al-Salih, also called Alimi, a Fulani Muslim cleric from Sokoto.<sup>247</sup> Although Alimi agreed, but unfortunately for Afonja, Alimi had other plans. Like other Muslims, Alimi shared in the reformist ideals of Uthman Dan Fodio and saw the political crisis at Oyo-Ile as an opportunity to realizing the ambition of taking Islam into Yorubaland.<sup>248</sup>

Within a short time, Alimi and his men murdered Afonja. They then established Ilorin as their base,<sup>249</sup> from where they began a systematic attack on Old-Oyo Empire, which could offer little or no resistance. At the Ogele War, as in Mugbamugba, Kanla and Eleduwe wars, Oyo not only lost in battle, but also its king, *Alaafin* Oluewu, and his Borgu ally, Eleduwe, were all killed in battle.<sup>250</sup> Resulting from this defeat and unprecedented development, Oyo-Ile, the capital of the Empire, was set on fire and its inhabitants fled in different directions.

With their successes in these wars, the Jihadists soon began moving into the heart of Yorubaland towards the coast. Many Yorùbá cities and towns were soon overrun. Resistance was crushed with utmost brutality. To escape brutality, towns and cities were asked to surrender and take to Islam. Many cities and towns, as far as Ijebu, few kilometers to Lagos, took to Islam even before the Fulani warriors approached it. Iwo led by its king, turned to Islam and all its people were dressed up in Arabian fashion before the Fulani showed up at its gates. The ultimate aim of the Fulani Jihadists was to convert the entire Yorubaland to Islam and bring it under Caliphate rule.

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<sup>246</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 165.

<sup>247</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F. and Akintoye S. A., "Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century", in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Nigeria, 1980), 285.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 286.

<sup>249</sup> Law R.C.C., *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (London, 1977), 89.

<sup>250</sup> Atanda J. A., 'The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire: A Reconsideration of its Causes', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5:4, (1971), 447-490.

The result of incessant struggles for power among the succeeding states of Oyo was series of wars that devastated Yorubaland throughout the nineteenth century. More than anything else, these wars led to dispersal of people and therefore skills in dress production as well as transfer of associated skills and dexterity from one part of Yorubaland, especially those involved in the wars, to others that were not affected by the wars. In this way, Oke-Ogun, Iseyin, and Oyo-Ile people took *Ofi* production to Ijeshaland. Ilorin received many people from Oyo-Ile who not only took the art and skills involved in making *Ofi*, but also tie-and-dye to Ilorin. Ilorin, like other Yorùbá communities that embraced Islam began to adopt the Islamic sartorial tradition with their short or small *Agbada* (or *dansiki*) and small skull caps (mostly red colour caps). To escape death and destruction, many non-Oyo people also adopted Oyo facial marks, most especially those of the royal family, *Abaja*. In Ilorin and other Moslem enclaves in Yorubaland, facial marks, most especially *Abaja* facial marks, were either modified to *Pele* or discarded altogether.

To impose order on the discussion on the developments that followed the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, the coming and spread of Islam and Christianity and how these influenced Yorùbá sartorial tradition, the next two sub-sections discuss Islam and Christianity's influences on Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

#### **4.2. The Influence of Islam on Yorùbá Dress**

Islam's influences on Yorùbá sartorial tradition can be understood as fall out of two important developments: the nineteenth century Yorùbá wars and the abolition of slave trade. As already noted, the spread of Islam in Yorubaland cannot be dissociated from the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars. Some of the factors already highlighted include dispersal of artisans and therefore, diffusion of skills and expertise in dress production from areas of initial existence to new areas where the refugees fled.

Before the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, a few individuals, most especially long-distance traders took to Islam. Hence, Yorùbá Muslims were scattered and had little or no socio-political status. The nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars however changed this position of weakness to one of advantage, as the few scattered Yorùbá Muslims began to raise their heads following the

elimination of Afonja, the gradual decimation of Yorubaland, and the establishment of Ilorin as Jihadists' base in Yorubaland.<sup>251</sup>

Islam, like Christianity, also benefited from British's ending of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. As efforts were intensified to curb slave trade from its source, freed slaves, a few of whom were Moslems before their enslavement, boarded commercial vessels from the Americas and Sierra Leone and settled in Badagry, Lagos, Abeokuta and other places in Yorubaland.<sup>252</sup> These men and women proved advantageous and significant to the development of Muslim communities in Lagos, Ijebu Ode, Ijebu Igbo, Iwo, Iseyin, Saki, Oke-Iho, and Ilorin as in other parts of Yorubaland. Like their Christian counterparts, these Muslims, although operating from the cities reconnected with their hometowns and helped their different communities to achieve developmental progress.<sup>253</sup> The attainment of this hitherto unseen developmental progress in education, Koranic education, building of mosques, and other community development projects, therefore contributed to why Islam was quickly revived in both urban and rural Yorubaland.

Unlike Christianity that focused on individuals, Islam aimed at converting whole families and communities. In addition, the multi-dimensional role of its mallams as men of God, preachers, teachers, scholars, traders, advisers, and medicine-men, as well as the fact that Islam allowed traditional rulers and chiefs to practice their customs and traditions combined to give Islam an edge over Christianity in term of acceptance in Yorubaland. And Yorùbá people began to wear the *turban*, which Islam permitted over Yorùbá indigenous dress. Hence, a Yorùbá man studied Arabic and employed it in his prayers, but certain aspects of his worship are conducted in his own language, which, in any case, still remained the language of communication at all meetings. The Muslim songs are invariably his own. He remained a full member of his extended family, with Islam confirming his obligations to

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<sup>251</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam Among the Yorùbá, 1841-1908*, (Ibadan, 1985), 23.

<sup>252</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade-Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity in Nigeria', in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, (Nigeria, 1980), 353.

<sup>253</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 53.

this extended family. As a *Mallam*, his roles as the diviner and medicine-man satisfied the spiritual and metaphysical needs of his society in ways similar to those of the traditional religion.<sup>254</sup>

As members of society, Yorùbá Muslims (in communities) are treated as equals, and there was no occasion for discrimination based on colour. Each Muslim community, although guided by the knowledge and experiences of orthodox Islamic practices, is independent and self-governing. The traditional titles and institutions such as *Igba Keji*, *Eketa*, *Ekerin*, and *Balogun*, which were traditional to Yorùbá communities, were adopted. Even when accustomed to foreign titles such as *Imam*, *Mallam*, and *Muezzin* were used; their functions and conditions of service were grounded in known and acceptable societal canon of the traditional Yorùbá society.<sup>255</sup> In summary, Islam was more society-friendly than Christianity and, as such, it enjoyed ready acceptance among the Yorùbá than Christianity.

It could be argued that Arab-styled dress began to appear in Yorubaland before the eighteenth century, however by the 1750, references to Islamic influence on Yorùbá dress began to appear in the praise-names of the *Alaafin* of Oyo. A few of the local names given this dress include: *kembeku*, *kanki*, *eha*, and *efun*. Others are *kafo*, *saluba*, and *atu*. Unlike *kanki*, *efun*, *kafo*, and *eha*, which are tight-fitting long trousers, *kembeku* are horse-riding knee breeches. *Saluba* and *atu*, also known as *efa*, are baggy-type trousers also worn during the middle of the eighteenth century.

A consideration of praise-names of Yorùbá kings and chiefs reveals the preponderance of Arab-style dress ensemble, which helps to show their enthusiasm and acceptance of the Islamic dress culture in Yorubaland. In the praise-names of the *Alaafin*, the king was described in the following words:

*O wokembeku lo ibiija*

*Ija o po tan kiiwoefun*

Abenugbangba ni ifi da won logun.<sup>256</sup>

(He wore a kembeku to war;

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<sup>254</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 359.

<sup>255</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 163.

<sup>256</sup> Adeoye C.L., *AsaatiIse Yoruba*, (Ibadan, 2005), 45.



Unless a battle is critical, he would not wear  
A tight-fitting trouser, with agenugbangba, he struck them  
at war).

In yet another version:

*Ijako'po tan, kiib'eha*  
*O bokankijaomolomol'ogun*  
*O bokembeku re ibiija.*<sup>257</sup>

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

In a similar way, *Oba OkoroAiyelagbe* of Ipetumodu's  
praise-names runs thus:

*Baba Akinsola,*  
*Orowoisura'yisembe-sembe.*  
*Oko Moyoola a maamu waaka oloyin.*  
*Oko mi da 'so da bombata*  
*Oko mi da 'so ti ole o le gbe*  
*Oko mi da 'so t' ogansel'odun*  
*Baba Akinsola a ba 'so-iyaso-lenu.*<sup>258</sup>

(Akinsola's father He has got the funds for buyingorang-  
colour velvet  
My husband, the wearer of hand-woven fabrics with  
nuances of blue stripes and other colour.  
My husband commissioned a bombata dress which a lazy  
man cannot lift.  
My husband made dress with components of changing  
shimmering colours.  
Akinsola's father, the owner of varying wonderful fabrics).

The following verse appears in the praise-names of the  
Oluwo of Iwo, *Oba Abimbola Sanni*:

*Oni sokoto ododo.*

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<sup>257</sup>Ibid, 49.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid, 59.

*Faran-da-agantan*<sup>259</sup>, *Latubosun Alabi*  
*Faran-da-agatan, oko ayaba, alewi-lese.*  
*Faran-da-agantan.*<sup>260</sup>

(The one who wear a trouser of Alaari (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.)

In the praise-names of the *Alaafin*, the king was reputed to have worn this dress to war at an unspecified period of Oyo's imperial expansion. According to Oyo history, only four kings led the Oyo armies in battle: Ajiboyede in the sixteenth century, Oluodo in the seventeenth century, Maku at about 1798, and Oluewu at between 1834 and 1836. Given the above, it could be argued that the use of Arab-style dress in Yorubaland might have occurred even before the spread of Islam into Yorubaland during the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, as Islam had spread into Yorubaland through trade before this time. However, the large-scale use of Arab-style dress in Yorubaland might have coincided with the introduction of Islam in West Africa: Liberia by the middle of the seventeenth century, Gambia in 1738, Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1817, and Nigeria in the early nineteenth century.<sup>261</sup>

Although the precise date that the use of Arab-style dress began in Yorubaland may not be known, it is however clear that the use of Arab-style dress by the political class in Yorubaland predated the nineteenth century. In fact, Muslim clerics and Arab traders, as agents of Islamic culture, had been part of Oyo royal court since 1787.<sup>262</sup> It is therefore reasonable to suggest that these agents of Islamic culture might have introduced Arab-style dress to

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<sup>259</sup> Agantan is another name given to Girike.

<sup>260</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 169.

<sup>261</sup> Heathcote D., 'Insight into a Creative Process: A Rare collection of Embroidery Design from Kano', *Savannah*, 1:2 (1972), 165; J. Perani, 'Nupe Costume Craft', *African Arts*, 12:3 (1979), 54; and C. Kriger, 'Robes of the Sokoto Caliphate', *African Arts*, 11:3 (1978), 53.

<sup>262</sup> Law R., *The Oyo Empire: The History of a Yorùbá State, ca.1600-ca.1838*, (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971), 78.

the court, first as gifts to the kings and chiefs, and, later, as medicine or fortified dress, which have featured in Yorùbá traditional use of cloths from time immemorial. Even if all these conclusions are mere assumptions, Captain Clapperton, passing through Yorubaland during his second journey in the 1820s, testified to the use of Arab-style dress in the area.<sup>263</sup>

In the praise-names of Akinkotun Akintola, the *Balogun* of Ibadan between 1897 and 1899, he was reputed as:

Akintola! Iwo ni baba gbogbo won,  
O-bo-pako-gun-gi.  
O-bo-guru-gun-agbon,  
O-bo-kembe-re-ibi-ija.<sup>264</sup>

(Akintola, you are their lord,  
He-who-climbs-a-tree-with-a-clog-on.  
He-who-wears-a-trailing-cloak-climbing-a-coconut-tree,  
He-who-wears-horse-riding-breeches-to-war.)

In this example, Akintola, a warlord, was being revered for his bravery and valour, which, in spite of the dire situations of warfare and coconut tree climbing, still went ahead to don a voluminous dress. *Guru*, it must be noted, is a trailing cloak or a toga made of a large prestigious fabric and draped over an under tunic or robe. Other Yorùbá dress with Arab or Muslim origin include the *Girike*, *Gbariye*, *Dandogo*, *Dansiki*, *Esiki*, *Guru*, *Abeti-Ajacap*, *Gogowu*, and the popular Yorùbá voluminous dress, the *Agbada*.<sup>265</sup>

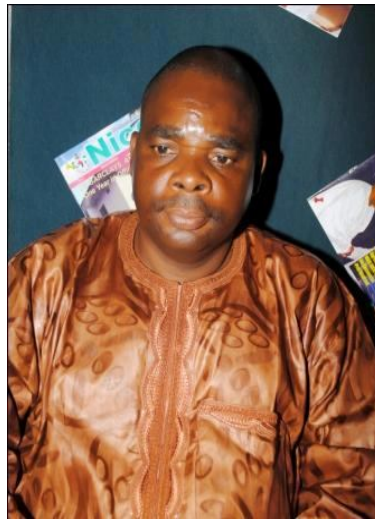
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate Islamic influences on contemporary Yorùbá dress.

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<sup>263</sup> Clapperton H., *Journal of Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, (London, 1966), 120.

<sup>264</sup> Akinyele I. B., *IweItan Ibadan*, (n.p. 1911), 140.

<sup>265</sup> Akinwumi T. M., 'Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress', in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.) *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (Rochester, 2005), 69.



**A cross section of Islamic/Hausa influences on Yorùbá dress**  
(Sources: Personal collections)



**Atypical Hausa-Fulani Abeti-Aja Cap**  
(Sources: Personal collections)



**Atypical Yorùbá modification of Abeti-Aja Cap**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

From these and many more examples, it could be asserted that Islam's society-friendly nature made absorbing its dress culture easier for the Yorùbá.

In general, Arab-style toga dress incorporated into Yorùbá dress culture is easily discernible. Unlike the traditional Yorùbá

toga dress, most Arab-style toga dress usually left a train of about 3 meters on the floor. This is called *Gogowu* among the Yorùbá. *Gobi*, *Salubaki*, *Guru*, and *Girike* are modifications of *Gogowu*. While all the above Arab-style dresses pertained only to the *Eewu*, cloths worn on top of a trouser; the Yorùbá traditional trouser, the *Kembe*, is usually worn with these Arab-style dresses.

It is important to state that the incorporation of Islamic dress culture into Yorùbá dress culture was at that time, among the Yorùbá, a mark of distinction. In the first place, the dress ensemble is quite enormous; hence, only the rich and the affluent can afford them. The implication of this on the generality of the people was that the majority might love and accept the dress culture, but not all could afford it. Invariably, Islamic dress culture assumed a tag of status symbol among the Yorùbá. Hence; the common statement: “*Dandogokoja a binu da*” (Dandogo is not sewn in haste or in protest or for the fun of it).

As status symbol, Arab-style dress was used mainly during important festivals and ceremonies. They were used by the kings and chiefs as well as the rich ones in the society. As the following praise-name of Oba Muhammed Lamuye, the Oluwo of Iwo (1850 to 1906) shows, Arab-style dresses were mainly for adornment, show-off, and used as status symbol.

*Oba ba l'esin*

*Alukinba oun oso.*

*Aran kil'eyi, baba Iwodotun?*

*Aran kil'eyi, baba Ikufo?*<sup>266</sup>

(The king 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?)

Apart from cloths, the above praise-poem reveals that royal personages, the rich, and the affluent had varieties of imported materials from which they could pick. In Akintola's praise-poem, clog was mentioned. In the Oluwo's praise poem, as in his predecessor, Sanni Abimbola, he was also credited with the use of

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<sup>266</sup> Babalola A., *Awon Oriki Borokini*, (London, 1975), 64.

velvet, which was not made anywhere in Yorubaland during the period. *Alukinba*, a corruption of *Alkayabba*, an expensive Arab cloak worn over robes, was usually worn when the king mounted his horse.

Islam's influence on Yorùbá dress culture was not limited to cloths and clothing tradition alone, it also featured in the areas of body scarification and tattooing. With facial mark serving as a passport denoting nationality, the need arose among the Yorùbá people, especially in Ilorin where those that were born during the *Jihadists'* take-over adopted a new form of facial marks that were completely different from those of other Yorùbá groups. *Pele*, earlier mentioned, was introduced and could, today, be found not only in Ilorin, but also in other parts of Yorubaland that were effectively controlled by the *Jihadists* during the nineteenth century. In addition to *Pele*, especially for those who had been given facial marks before Ilorin's take-over, *Keke* was adopted as an addition to whatever was earlier given to them. In this way, both *Oni Pele* and *Oni Keke* were able to escape death and destruction in the hands of the Ilorin *Jihadists* during the period. Today, these two facial marks could be found in Ilorin, Ekiti, and among the Ijesha.<sup>267</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when this photograph was taken, where it was taken, who took it and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that this photo illustrates Islam's influence on Yorùbá dress culture.

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<sup>267</sup>Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yorùbá Identity', *History in Africa*, 35:1 (2008), 369.



**Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro in his Islamic garb, 1962  
(Sources: Getty Images)**

By the middle of the nineteenth century when Islam had spread wider in Yorubaland, the glass ceilings on the use of Arab-style dress crashed, as Islamic culture, with its specific emphasis on converts' mandatory use of Arab-style dress for identification with Islam, became widespread. The development led to a widespread production and use of cheap robes to satisfy the economic needs of the less affluent Muslim convert.<sup>268</sup>

R.H. Stone described a typical Yorùbá dress during this period thus:

*...the main articles of dress worn by the males are a kind of loose trousers called shocoto, a cloth worn like a Highlander's plaid and a brimless cloth cap. ...When not engaged in manual labor, the men also wear a sleeveless*

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<sup>268</sup> Campbell R., *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey Among the Egbas and Yorùbás of Central Africa in 1859-60*, (New York, 1861), 106; Clarke W.H., *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, (Ibadan, 1972), 100-243; May D.J., 'Journey in the Yorùbá and Nupe Countries in 1858', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 30:1 (1860), 222, 229; E. de Veer and A. O'Hear, 'Gerhard Rohlfs in Yorubaland', *History in Africa*, 21:1 (1994), 258.



*vest under their shoulder cloth. The shocoto is girt about the waist and extends to the knees and sometimes to the ankles. In the place of this, young men sometimes wear a garment exactly like a Highlander's kilt.*<sup>269</sup>

Owing to the widespread use of Arab dress culture in Yorubaland during Stone's period in Abeokuta, he noted further that "*Mussulmans always wear a turban. Among the prosperous a tobe, a loose robe, generally of white material, takes the place of the shoulder cloth. This garment is gracefully worn and is often very beautifully embroidered.*"<sup>270</sup>

Writing on a typical female dress, Stone noted that the female dress focused exclusively on convenience and not aesthetics and:

*...consists of one or more cloths fastened around the waist, one thrown over the shoulders, and a turban, all of the same material, generally cotton cloth. Except in cold weather, the shoulder cloth is passed around the body just under the armpits and securely tucked on one side or the other. The cloths around the waist extend to the knee on one side and to the ankle on the other and are skillfully tucked over the hip. One of the cloths around the waist is used for the baby's hammock or basket, and here it laughs, coos and sleeps as happy as can be, suspended from its mother's back or riding on her hip with her loving arm for a support.*<sup>271</sup>

Although he was not attempting a provenance of Yorùbá dress, Stone however noted that: *cotton is the material out of which the clothing of the masses is made; but on state occasions, the rulers and rich men appear in garments of silk and silk-velvet. Through foreign merchants, these men obtain from Europe whatever they fancy, especially costly cloths and choice liquors.*<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Stone R. H., *In Afric's Forest and Jungle*, (New York, 1899), 29.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibdi*, 30.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidi*, 33.

Demonstrating the influence of Islam on Yorùbá dress, most especially haircuts and hairdos, Stone noted further that *Aaso* (patches), earlier mentioned, “...are concealed by the tight-fitting cloth cap or the turban”.<sup>273</sup> Highlighting the beauty of shaving the head, as practiced among the Yorùbá, Stone added that “after a man has made a visit to a barber shop, his head and his face shine alike and, if he should have on a spotless *tobe* and turban, he makes quite a presentable appearance.”<sup>274</sup>

The wider acceptance of Arab-style dress among the kings, chiefs, and the masses in Yorubaland must not be translated or equated with a wider acceptance of Islam as a religion, the kings, chiefs, and the masses accepted and incorporated Islamic dress culture but not the religion, as majority of them remained with their indigenous faith.<sup>275</sup>

Ojo, citing P.C. Lloyd and N.A. Fabunmi, noted that:

*In the course of the early nineteenth century Yorùbá wars, the Oyo were easily identified by their tattoos. This phase of the warfare had an Islamic bias, and perhaps for Islam's transnational appeal, it became fashionable for people to embrace tattoos that reflected this new ideology. At this time, Pele – three short vertical lines of about an inch long on each cheek, not distinctive of any group - became popular. Pioneers of this new mark included Yorùbá Muslims who opposed ethnic divisions, but loathed remaining plain-faced. Hence Pele replaced Jamgbadi or Mande and Ture distinctive of aliens naturalized amongst the Yorùbás.*<sup>276</sup>

From this, we can conclude that *Pele*, although originally Yorùbá facial marks, became prevalent and diffused across the entire Yorubaland as a result of Islamic influences on Yorùbá

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<sup>273</sup>Ibid, 34.

<sup>274</sup>Ibid, 32.

<sup>275</sup> Perani J. and Wolff N.H., *Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in Africa*, (Oxford, 1999), 108.

<sup>276</sup>OlatunjiOjo, ‘Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yorùbá Identity’, *History in Africa*, vol. 35 (2008), 372.

political and social systems orchestrated by the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars.

Although the use of creams of different kinds abound in Yorubaland before contacts with the Arabs/Islam; it must however be noted that the use of perfumes, incenses and deodorants were introduced into Yorùbá dress culture by the Arabs. Information on when this occurred is however scanty. Nevertheless, the use of perfumes, especially *Bint El Sudan* (popularly called Bintu among the Yorùbá)<sup>277</sup>, was synonymous with Islamic clerics and this was used not just for aesthetics but also for spiritual purposes. It must be noted that *Bint El Sudan* was introduced to the market in 1920, but the precise date of its entry into Nigeria remains unknown.<sup>278</sup> It was a common practice in Ilorin and other notable Islamic enclaves in Yorubaland to find perfumes, incenses (*Turari*) and charms (*Tira*) been sold publicly near central mosques and at Jumat services.

From the discussion above, the following points could be made about Islamic influences on Yorùbá dress culture: (i) that rather than supplanting the Yorùbá dress cultures, Islamic dress culture was grafted into the hitherto indigenous Yorùbá dress culture. For instance, the Yorùbá dress for men comprising originally of a wrapper fabric or a shirt – *Buba* - fixed on the waist over a short (*Sokoto Penpe*) or a trouser (*Sokoto Gigun*), was reformed to incorporate different Arab-styled dresses such as *Gogowu*, *Agbada*, *Sulia*, etc. It must be noted that some of these dress items had being in existence before the Islamic influences, for instance, the *Gogowu*, like *Agbada* and other Yorùbá flowing gowns, which was draped over the whole body, was reformed or adapted to fit and incorporate Islamic culture. Females, who originally plaited their hair and displayed it both privately and openly for admiration, took to the use of *Iborun* (shawl) to cover the heads, as Islam forbids the opening of the hair in religious worship, especially for females; (ii) the emerging dress culture

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<sup>277</sup> Oral interview with Pa. Taiwo Ajibade Oyeboode; aged 80, Ibadan, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012.

<sup>278</sup> *Bint El Sudan*, Arabic for Daughter of Sudan, was first made in Khartoum, Sudan in 1920 and was reputable for been the first non-alcoholic perfume ever made. It was for many years the world best-selling perfume.

following contacts with Islam however remained, for the most parts, Islamic in character, but Yorùbá in essence; (iii) the kings and chiefs, as earliest users of Arab-style dresses, used these Islamic-oriented dress to enhance and boost their ego and dignified posture, while at the same time applying sumptuary laws, especially in Oyo<sup>279</sup> and Ibadan<sup>280</sup>, to prevent low class people from acquiring such dress items; (iv) Arab-style dress, especially voluminous dress, became a symbol of wealth, status, political position, and influence; hence, other dress culture, especially when Christian's influence on Yorùbá dress culture was predominant, became symbol of poverty, lowliness, and inferiority.

### **4.3. Dressing the Converts: The Influence of Christianity on Yorùbá Dress**

The history of Christianity in Yorubaland, beginning in the 1830s, has often been told in connection with the various missions – the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian missions. The activities of these missions, by the 1840s when freed slaves of Yorùbá and neighbouring ethnic group origins were returning from Sierra Leone, Cuba and Brazil to their homelands, were however limited to the coast.<sup>281</sup> As Andrian Hastings had noted, missionary enterprises, especially those of the CMS, in Yorubaland, the Niger-Benue confluence, and in other parts of Nigeria derived from a larger plan to build a series of stations along the River Niger. This strategy was premised on a host of factors: the ease of access and communication that the Niger River afforded the missions in establishing Christian and European influence(s); the British efforts at stopping the slave trade, the introduction of profitable produce trade; Christianizing the people; and the need to curb Islam's advance in Yorùbá hinterland.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Lander R. and Lander J., *The Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger*, (London, 1832), 122.

<sup>280</sup>Kemi Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, (Ibadan, 1985), 83-85.

<sup>281</sup>Femi J. Kolapo, 'Christian Missions and Religious Encounters at the Niger-Benue Confluence', in Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, (Trenton, 2005), 509.

<sup>282</sup>Andrian Hasting, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, (Oxford, 1994), 344 - 45.

Primary to Christian mission's inability to access Yorùbá hinterland was the factor of the raging Yorùbá civil wars of the nineteenth century. The civil wars and the strategies deployed by the different Yorùbá communities, more than anything else ensured that movement of men and merchandise from one part of Yorubaland to another and from the coast into Yorùbá hinterland were severely checked by the civil war, which also affected missionary activities.

With the abolition of the slave trade and the consequent need to ensure that the freed slaves were engaged in some useful pursuits, their sponsors trained them in, among other things, farming, masonry, trading and missionary works. Despite their training, the majority were unsuccessful, as opportunities were limited. At the instance of Thomas Fowell Buxton, their sponsors were agitating for a return of the freed-slaves to Africa where they could use their skills and better not just their lots through their skills but also the lot of the continent, especially as such venture would take the light of Christianity to dispel the 'darkness' of paganism in Africa. The bible and the plough were therefore seen as the panacea to curbing the trade in slaves and also to ushering in light and civilization into the heart of the African continent.<sup>283</sup>

At the vanguard of actualizing this 'bible and plough' policy, were freed slaves - the *Saro* or Creoles and *Amaro* – who, as noted above, migrated to Nigeria in the beginning of the 1830s. The *Saro* and *Amaro* also settled in other West African countries such as the Gold Coast (Ghana). Many of the returnees, the greater majority of whom were originally descended from the Yorùbá people, chose to return to Nigeria for cultural, missionary, and economic reasons. These newly arrived immigrants resided in the Niger Delta, Lagos, and in some Eastern Nigerian cities such as Aba, Owerri, and Onitsha.<sup>284</sup>

While living in Sierra Leone, many *Saro* became exposed to the Christian faith as a result of the work of British missionaries who established some churches, a few grammar schools and a pioneer educational institution, the Fourah Bay College.

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<sup>283</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 349.

<sup>284</sup> Mac Dixon-Fyle, 'The Saro in the Political Life of Early Port Harcourt, 1913-49', *The Journal of African History*, 30:1 (1998), 126.

Relatively, the residents of Sierra Leone soon gained a fast start in Western education and were soon well trained and experienced in medicine, law, and the civil service. Many of them graduated from grammar schools and became administrative workers for the British imperial interest in the country. By the middle of the nineteenth century, some of the African literati in Sierra Leone began to migrate to Nigeria, especially the colony of Lagos, for economic reasons. Some were administrative personnel who were reassigned to Lagos. An expedition of the River Niger by Samuel Ajayi Crowther furthered the evangelical interest in Nigeria of many Sierra Leoneans, many of whom had grown to be accessories of the missionaries and their efforts.

Unlike the *Saro* who were principally from Sierra Leone, the *Amaro*, who were sometimes called *Nago* or *Anago*, were liberated slaves from Brazil and Cuba. These returnees from Brazil and Cuba were (and are) more commonly called “Aguda”. They went to the New World as slaves from different sub-ethnic and ethnic backgrounds but approached relationships among themselves as equals. They came back to Nigeria, principally to reconnect with their fatherland. Although they were not brought up in the Anglican faith like the Sierra Leoneans, they however chose Catholicism, the dominant religion in Brazil. It must be added that some of these Aguda were also Muslims.

These ex-slaves were technically skilled artisans and known for building distinctive Brazilian architecture in their settlements and later in the Lagos environs. During the time, modern European architecture was not only meant to be a nice abode but also a dominating advertisement to show Africans a different style and culture.<sup>285</sup> However, in due time, Brazilian style emerged as a modern, viable alternative and style used by African contractors working on public and (large) private jobs such as the Holy Cross Cathedral and the Mohammed Shitta-Bey Mosque, both in Lagos. These ex-slaves from Brazil introduced to Nigeria elaborate architectural designs, two story buildings and bungalows

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<sup>285</sup> John Michael Vlach, ‘The Brazilian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th-Century Vernacular House Type’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 97:383 (1984), 6.

with stucco facades. The Brazilian returnees also popularized the use of cassava as a food crop.<sup>286</sup>

The *Saro* and *Amaro*, equipped with different Western skills and technical knowledge, in addition to being Christians, arrived Yorubaland from the Americas and Sierra Leone. They arrived first in Badagry, which they tried to make their base. However, Badagry people were in no mood to receive missionaries. The missionaries therefore had to look further afield to Abeokuta, which by 1846, became their base.<sup>287</sup> Although embroiled in a prolonged civil war, the different Yorùbá communities utilized these individuals in re-engineering their societies. In addition, these Christianized freed-slaves were instrumental in prevailing over the colonial administration, which had earlier refused to intervene in the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, to mediate and ensure peace in Yorubaland. Through treaties and agreements; the warring factions in the Yorùbá civil wars were forced to sheath their swords. Roads were opened to men, merchandise, and ideas. Churches and educational institutions, manned by Europeans and African assistants, founded by the various missions sprouted in Badagry, Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ijaye, Oyo, and Ogbomoso.<sup>288</sup>

The missionary efforts of reverends Samuel Ajayi Crowther, James Johnson, Samuel Johnson, M. S. Cole, T.A.J. Ogunbiyi, Henry Townsend, M.T. Euler-Ajayi, and Gollmer resulted in the introduction of Christianity into various Yorùbá towns and villages. Townsend, Crowther and Gollmer built churches and schools in Abeokuta in 1845; Edward Bickerstand built a preaching station at Ogbe and was sole agent till 1859. On the whole, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and many other contributed immensely to the growth of Christianity and Western education in Yorubaland.<sup>289</sup>

In its efforts to curtail the growth and spread of Islam in Yorubaland, the missions, most especially the CMS, embarked on

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<sup>286</sup>Kehinde Faluyi, 'Migrants and the Economic Development of Lagos, From the Earliest of Times to 1880', *Lagos Historical Review*, vol.1 (2001), 1.

<sup>287</sup>Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 349.

<sup>288</sup>Ade Ajayi J. F., *Christian Mission in Nigeria, 1841-1891*, (London, 1965), 35.

<sup>289</sup>. Gbadamosi T.G.O and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 353.

a greater evangelization, using a trained clergy, and encouraging literacy in English and producing Christian literature. Of these, the use of education helped immensely in the spread of Christianity, as it placed the Christians in apposite position for colonial service.

All over Yorubaland, Christian mission schools, serving both as handmaid of Christian missions and providing corps of workforce for colonial administration, littered the landscape. The schools were relatively inexpensive and attracted interests of traders and rulers who sent their wards and children to acquire new tools for commercial transactions and, in this way, the parents themselves were drawn later towards Christianity.<sup>290</sup>

The pursuit of Western education as a way to win converts helped Christianity and colonial administration and endeared the former to the latter. In addition to providing workforce, the missionaries were needed by the European traders and the colonial government. As explorers, the missionaries had risked their lives by foraging into the hinterlands. They therefore served as veritable tools through which the European traders and colonial government knew Yorubaland. So, as explorers, the missionaries provided valuable information on trade routes, the attitude and habits of the different peoples, products of the various lands, and the latest development in the country.

In return, colonial government served as backers, sponsors, and protectors of the missions. The rapport between the colonial administration and the mission was aptly demonstrated by colonial acceptance to wade into the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars at the instance of the missionaries. Another example is their involvement in the political tussle between Kosoko and Akitoye at Eko (Lagos) in the 1890s. In this particular instance, the missionaries were openly urging the British Consul, Mr. Beecroft, to attack Lagos, which they described as a slave depot under the usurper, Kosoko. The Consul attacked Lagos and installed Akitoye, a step that gave colonial administration a foothold in Lagos. It must be added that similar developments, with the missionaries urging that Yorùbá communities be attacked for the benefits of European traders, missions, and colonial administration, were recorded in Ijebu, Oyo, Abeokuta, Calabar and elsewhere.

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<sup>290</sup> Ade Ajayi J.F., *Christian Mission*, 135.



To pay the mission for their efforts in turning Lagos into a British colony, Beecroft ensured the interests of the missions in Article 8 of the Treaty, which demanded that ‘...*complete protection...and encouragement*’, shall be given to the Christian missionaries and ministers. Following the treaty, thousands of Christian emigrants (freed slaves) from Sierra Leone were resettled at Olowogbowo while those from Brazil and Cuba were settled at Campos Square in Lagos.<sup>291</sup>

In its relationship with the people, Christianity constantly looked towards the colonial government, most especially its military arm, and this had significant effects on its acceptance and people’s perception about Christianity. Unlike Islam, Christianity encourages individualism and the converts found themselves more divorced from their society than their Muslim counterparts. A convert was encouraged to become individualized, stand apart from his extended family, recognizing only his wife and children. He came to look down on his society, its cultures, including language, and was made to strive after the acquisition of European civilization in order to be properly accepted as a Christian. Many, as noted below, believed that converts who did not drink tea, or wear European cloths could not be genuine Christians.

Amongst the Europeans, the African converts were considered as imitators and therefore unaccepted. In the society, they were rejected as impostors. A typical African Christian thus becomes a hybrid – with no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity. As Ayandele puts it, they ‘*were like pictures in phantasmagoria*’.<sup>292</sup>

For the most part, while Islam grafted itself to the society, Christianity stood aloof and distant from the society and the people it aimed to convert. In tandem with colonialism, Christianity undermined and supplanted traditional authorities. It was therefore unacceptable and hated by the rulers, chiefs, and the nobles. Christianity thus became the religion of the dregs of the Yorùbá society. The incorporation of the educated Christian into the vortex of colonialism raised the specter of Christianity far and above other religions and enhanced the social prestige and economic progress

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<sup>291</sup> Ayandele E.A., *Missionary Impact on Nigeria*, (UK, 1985), 124.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, 129.

of its converts. Notwithstanding this off-setting factor, Christianity, to a larger extent, appears in Nigeria to be the religion of the poor, the educated class and not that of the politically and economically vibrant Yorùbá even in twenty-first century Yorubaland.

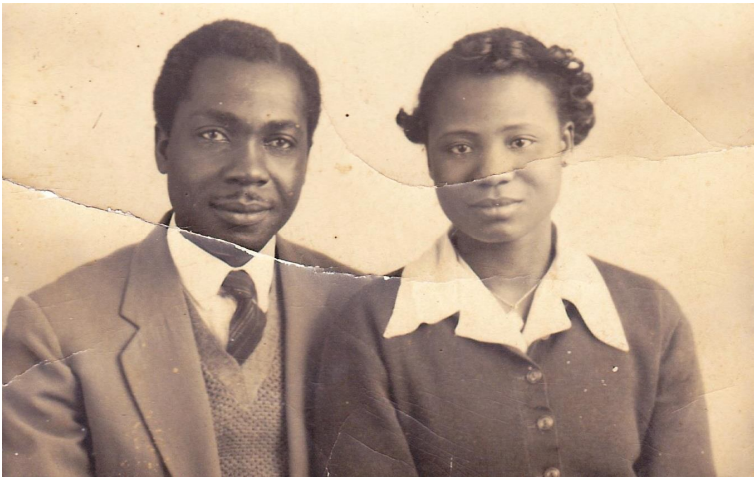
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help researchers in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate



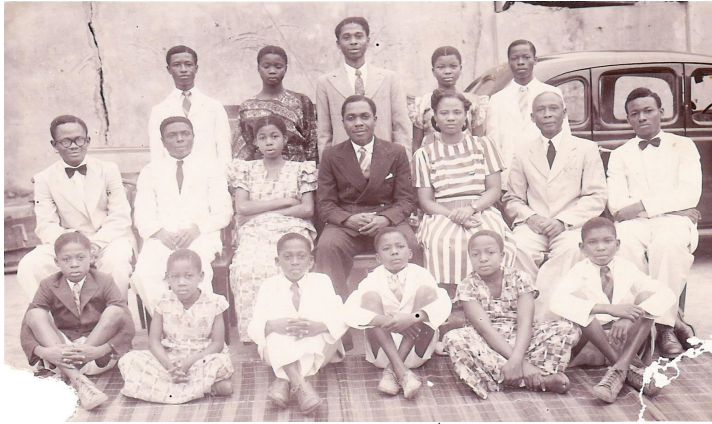
**A Yorùbá Christian Lady, 1950**  
(Sources: Onile-Ayo Photo, Mokola, Ibadan)



**Olugbenga Pechu Family, Lagos, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1930  
(Sources: Pechu Family Album).**



**Mr & Mrs Olugbenga Pechu, Lagos, 1 January 1930 (Sources:  
Pechu Family Album).**



**Olugbenga Pechu Family, Lagos, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1930 (Sources: Pechu Family Album).**

In the remaining part of this sub-section, attention shall be turned to the politics of wearing European dress by Yorùbá converts as evidence of conversion, as orchestrated by the missions in Yorubaland. Tracing the origin of this development, Judith Byfield claimed that the ‘*returnees from Sierra Leone and Brazil, and Christian missionaries*’<sup>293</sup> orchestrated the equalization of European dress with Christian faith in Yorubaland. The *Saro*, as she claimed, were not only educated, but also Christians who adopted the practice of wearing European clothes. The same applies to the *Amaro*, i.e. the Afro-Brazilian returnees. For these two groups, ‘*European dress came to indicate their religious affinity as well as wealth, achieved or anticipated social status, and modernity. In addition to wearing European dress, both groups wore an adaptation of Yorùbá dress in their homes, but European dress was preferred for public occasions.*’<sup>294</sup>

Titilola Euba, also noting the provenance of Western dress in Yorubaland, linked it to the incoming of the *Saro* and *Amaro*. She noted, among other things, that when the slaves were rescued by the British and landed in Sierra Leone, their indigenous dresses were taken away from them and cotton cloths were provided. But

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<sup>293</sup> Judith Byfield, “Unwrapping” *Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos*, Occasional Publication Number 30, *African Humanities* (Boston, 2000), 1.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

these freed slaves soon discarded these cotton cloths provided for them by their captors because they were restrictive and not as free as their indigenous cloths. With encouragement by their captors and later the government of Sierra Leone, they became reconciled to the Western dress. In the 1820s, Euba noted further that Governor MacCarthy, fired by his vision of making these men and women “*Christians, literate, and industrious*” ordered hats for the men, and “*bonnets for the women, shoes for all; gowns and petticoats, trousers and braces – buttons, too, with needles, thread and thimbles, soap and smoothing-irons, even clothes-brushes,...*”<sup>295</sup>

In many of the writings on the homecoming of the *Saro* and *Amaro*, joyful reception as well as awe was reported. The awe deals more with the appearance of these Africans wearing European dress than with the actual reunion and homecoming. The above is supported by the reception of Reverend Ladipo Lateju by his people of Abeokuta. In fact, the story of Rev. Ladipo Lateju’s arrival at Abeokuta is illustrative of the general nature of dress worn by the *Saro* and *Amaro* when they arrived in Yorubaland and how they were received by their people.

Lateju first learnt of his people of Abeokuta through traders and other missionaries and decided to find out for himself. He arrived at Abeokuta alongside other *Saro* in the noon and, being unfamiliar with the new community, he headed straight for the Alake’s palace. He was not only well received, but was also well assisted in locating his people.

Dressed in a three-piece suit with matching bowler hat and swagger stick, Lateju was conducted to his people and was happy for the glorious reunion. He assured his people that although he would be departing for Lagos late in the evening, he would relocate to Abeokuta as soon as it was practicable. However, he expressed his worry that his immediate younger sister, who had been withdrawing from him since he arrived, could still not come to terms with the fact that he was alive. The more he tried to draw her close; she made no pretense of not wanting to come in contact

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<sup>295</sup>Titlola Euba, ‘Dress and Status in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lagos’, in Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri and Jide Osuntokun (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, (Lagos, 1987), 147.

with him. At the height of the ensuing drama, the young lady ran away from him, saying that he looked like a ghost in his dress as she fled. Even the elders who were not overtly withdrawing from him were encouraging him to pull off the 'ghostly cloths' he was wearing, which "contorted his appearance like that of a sick man'. Much as he tried to educate them about Western dress, Lateju was shocked to see that the people remained unyielding in their abhorrence of his dress. Although happy to reunite with his people, he departed for Lagos a sad man.<sup>296</sup>

Besides the *Saro* and the *Amaro*, the European missionaries also encouraged European dress. For instance, the earlier mentioned American Baptist minister, Pastor R. H. Stone, who was then heading one of the mission stations in Abeokuta and Ijaye, regarded European dress as '*emblems of the new way of life*' of every convert and therefore compelled all boys in his mission station to wear a knee-length shirt.<sup>297</sup> In fact, the missionaries argued that any convert who failed to wear European dress or adopt the drinking of tea, etc. could not be a genuine Christian.

Ade-Ajayi, describing the convoluted state of things during this initial phase, noted that civilization meant to the Europeans, the *Saro* and *Amaro*, all they considered best in the European eyes. They expected the Yorùbá to conform to European social manners and customs. They "*insisted on even minor observances as necessary outward and visible signs of an inward 'civilized' state*".<sup>298</sup> Among these include the wearing of European dress, drinking of tea, and adopting European mannerisms. Reverend S. Annear also noted that at the first wedding ceremony held by the missionary at Badagry, the missionary gave a tea party, which was called '*a token of civilization*'. So, the convert, like the European pastor, must wear a clerical black cloak, sweating under the scorching sun, rather than to be seen '*in a state of semi-nudity, having only the waist cloth, being from the waist upwards and from the knee downward naked, and that too in the presence of ladies*.'<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup>Cited in *Anglo African Times*, 14 November, 1883.

<sup>297</sup> Stone R. H., *In Afric's Forest and Jungle*, (New York, 1899), 29.

<sup>298</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 14.

<sup>299</sup> S. Annear, *Journal of a Visit to the Encampment*, (n.a. 20<sup>th</sup> Oct., 1844).

As far as the missionaries were concerned, these customs and habits were not just as unimportant matters of social convenience, but each had a religious significance. So, a Yorùbá Christian convert was not regarded as a true Christian until he jettisoned the wearing of Yorùbá dress for European dress; so also a boy or girl should bow to his or her elders instead of prostrating or kneeling down, which were regarded as sinful elements of worshipping a human being.<sup>300</sup> Wearing Yorùbá dress was equated to remaining a pagan or, at the very best, being a Muslim. Using Yorùbá musical instruments in the church was considered sinful as the animals whose skins provided materials for the drums were sacrificed to idols, thereby; Yorùbá drums were regarded as sacrifices to idols.

Some Africans, indeed, applauded the adoption of European dress, while many opposed it. For instance while Ladipo Lateju adopted and applauded European dress, Mrs. Fry, the wife of a missionary who also lived in Abeokuta between 1899 and 1915, noted as follows about Yorùbá dress:

*...the dress of the women when not at work is neat and graceful; they usually wear three cloths – two for the lower part of the body, the under one generally of a blue cotton material or fancy pattern, the upper one of stamped velveteen or white native material...; the third cloth is gracefully draped from the shoulders and is a thinner material.*<sup>301</sup>

Mrs. Fry therefore argued that the adoption of European dress by Africans was deplorable owing to the fact that it was unsuitable for both Africa's climate and customs. Similarly, Lord Lugard also decried the practice. He argued that African wearing European dress transgressed the social, cultural, and racial divide, which, unfortunately, his government in Nigeria sought to maintain. He therefore condemned the missionaries and colonial officers who encouraged Africans to wear European dress or who

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<sup>300</sup> Ade-Ajayi J.F., *Christian Missions*, 14.

<sup>301</sup> Judith Byfield, "Unwrapping" *Nationalism*, 8.

perform menial jobs as destroying ‘*missionary influence for good and lessened the prestige of Europeans*’.<sup>302</sup>

In addition to the above, it must be noted Christianity also introduced a number of other things into Yorùbá dress culture. Some few examples include incenses, perfumes, face-powders, pomades and oils. Although a few of these, especially incenses and oils were tied to religious worship, others like face-powder, perfumes and pomades were not.

#### **4.4. Dressing the Natives: Colonial Influences on Yorùbá Dress**

War-wearied and desirous of peace, various interest groups, especially the Yorùbá members of the Christian Missionary Society in Lagos, solicited the intervention of the colonial administration in Lagos in ending the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war and destruction in the hinterland, which impeded trade and commerce, as well as the advance of Christianity. The resultant intervention paved the way for the incorporation of Yorubaland into the vortex of colonialism.

By accepting the European intervention in the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, the various Yorùbá communities, their leaders, and heirs agreed to ‘*become subjects of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, and so on. her heirs and successors*’; and, as stated in clause three, the control and administration of Yorubaland became vested in Her Majesty the Queen of Britain and her representative, who reserves the right to ensure ‘*...peace and friendship between the subjects and the Queen and her representatives;*’ and, in clause three, that ‘*should any difference or dispute accidentally arise between us and the said subjects of the Queen, it shall be referred to the Governor of Lagos for settlement as may be deemed expedient.*’<sup>303</sup>

Perhaps the most important consequence of the 1893 treaties was the introduction of colonial rule. Political power became resident in colonial administrative officials, as against the erstwhile Obas and Chiefs. The new political system, different and complex, had, at the top, the Governor, followed by the lieutenant

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<sup>302</sup>Ibid, 8.

<sup>303</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 651.



governors, the colonial bureaucracy, the field staff of residents and district officers, the army and police. This constituted the central authority. Beneath this central controlling authority, which made all decisions, were more than two hundred separate units of local government (native administration) of varying types and sizes. The native authorities, who received instructions from the central authority and implemented such instructions, were headed by the Obas and Chiefs. As a body corporate, the native authorities had delegated powers and were subject to the supervision of the central authority. The central authority was, in all cases, all British, while the native administrations were all Africans.<sup>304</sup>

Other important changes that followed colonialism include the opening of all roads within Yorubaland, which facilitated free and unhindered movement of men, merchandise and ideas; commercialization of agriculture, which orchestrated commercial production of cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber and corn; the introduction of Christianity and Western Education; new health system; abolition of domestic slavery, pawnship, and human sacrifices; uniform currency; construction of roads, railways and harbors.

The above developments impacted on dress and identity in two different ways: colonial service, which involved the use of uniforms, official, and office dress; and economic prosperity, which stimulated upward social mobility among many Yorùbá people, who thereby were able to afford all manners of dress hitherto unknown.

Beginning with colonialism, it must be noted that the use of uniform in colonial Yorubaland (and essentially in Nigeria) could be traced to the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF), a British-conscripted African force that aided Great Britain in its prosecution of the First World War. Although the uniforms donned by RWAFF were essentially determined by Great Britain, the end of the First World War however witnessed a conversion of the RWAFF into the Nigeria Regiment, later renamed (in 1956) as Nigerian Military Forces, and, at independence in 1960, was

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<sup>304</sup> Asiwaju I. O., 'Western Nigeria Under Colonial Rule', in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Ibadan, 1980), 430-431; see also, J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (Benin-City, 1986), 45.

renamed the Nigerian Armed Forces.<sup>305</sup> To clothe this force, Imperial Britain did not initially issue any uniform other than those used by the RWAFF men, but on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1919, G.H. Kingston, writing on behalf of the Controller of the Disposal Board of the Ministry of Munitions, asked that Khaki drill garments, knickers, blouses, kilt aprons, and so on that were surplus to British army requirements be shipped from Britain to the colonies in West, East, and Southern Africa.<sup>306</sup> In his response of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1919, G. Grindle of the Lagos Colony required that, after some modifications aimed at ensuring that the origin of the cloths were disguised, the uniforms be shipped to Nigeria for use in the colonial service, particularly by men of the King's African Rifles and RWAFF.<sup>307</sup>

On the general description of the uniforms, a correspondence from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Nigerian Regiment, noted that the uniforms issued to the force were *'most unsuitable for wear in the tropics, being too heavy.'* The correspondence made specific description of the uniforms as being *'made of khaki drill with a high collar similar to a British rank and file blouse, the trousers are (sic) also very thick serge, whilst the drawers and socks are excessively thick.'*<sup>308</sup>

Notwithstanding these inadequacies in the nature of the uniforms, especially their unsuitability for use in a tropical climate, the uniforms were not only issued to the Nigerian Regiment, but also extended to the colonial civil service. During this period, it must be emphasized that colonial service was divided into Native Authority (N.A.) and the colonial government civil service. Under the Indirect Rule system, the NA comprised primarily of Africans

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<sup>305</sup> Kayode J. Fayemi, 'Governing the Security Sector in a Democratizing Polity: Nigeria' in Garvin Cawthra and Robin Luckman (eds.), *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies*, (London, 2003), 57-77.

<sup>306</sup> National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Enclosure D.D.7/Clothing/1042 (B.B.3.B.24), Kingston to Controller, 24 November 1919.

<sup>307</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Enclosure 67178/1919, G. Grindle to Kingston, 29 November 1919.

<sup>308</sup> National Archive, Kaduna, (NAK), Correspondence from C.C. West, Lt-Colonel, Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment to the Headquarters, Nigerian Regiment, Kaduna, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919.

who were carrying out and executing policies and programmes of the mainly British colonial government for and on behalf of the Imperial Britain. These native agencies, headed by the traditional kings and chiefs, were effectively and directly controlled by colonial administrators ranging from the provincial to the districts British officers. The provincials, districts, and colonial headquarters constituted the colonial government service.

When the discarded, disused, and defaced British Army khaki drills arrived in 1919, the uniforms were not only issued to the rank and file of the Nigerian Regiment, but also to all African staff of the colonial establishments both at the level of the NA and at the level of colonial government service. While cadre and status, at the level of the NA, were determined by the kings and chiefs; clear-cut rules existed to determine cadre and status in the colonial government service. For the most part, Africans constituted the lower rung of the colonial government service, while the upper echelon was filled entirely with British officials. While all staff of the NA, excluding the kings and chiefs, were issued uniforms, only African officers whose positions were listed in Chapter Three of the Civil Service General Order were issued uniforms in the colonial government service.<sup>309</sup>

Although uniforms were not issued to junior administrative staff, unwritten regulations however existed to ensure that junior administrative staff also use some form of office dress. As noted in a correspondence between the Acting Secretary of the Western Provinces and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, which was copied to all the provinces in Yorubaland, P.V. Main noted, *inter alia*, that '*the unwritten rule for office wear of a tie in the morning and sports dress in the afternoon is sound and has worked satisfactorily*'<sup>310</sup> and therefore must be strictly adhered to.

In yet another circular, the colonial government reiterated that

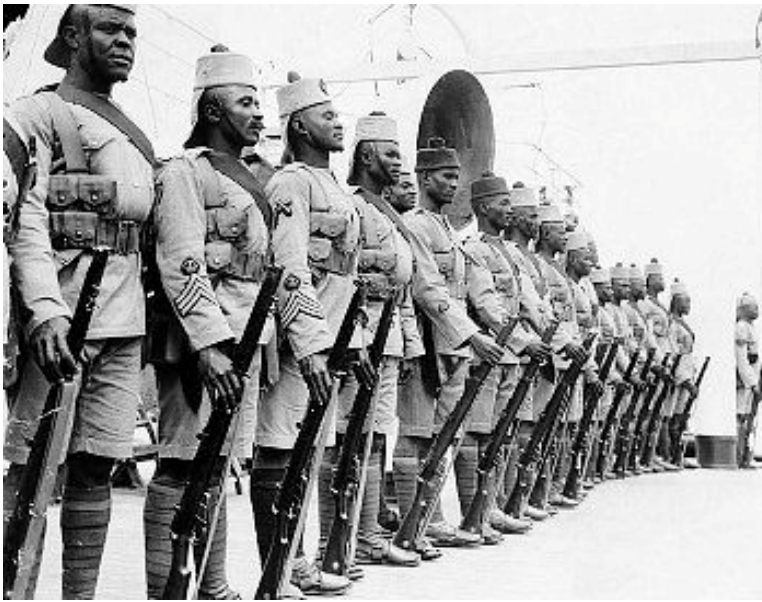
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<sup>309</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 8/1949, M.P.P. 5428, *Ceremonial Allowances*, Correspondence between T.V. Serivenor, Civil Service Commissioner, Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos and all Heads of Departments and Secretaries, 31 January 1949.

<sup>310</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19104/11, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between P.V. Main, Acting Secretary of the Western Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 15 June 1946.

*...black shoes should not be worn with white uniform. Either black boots (Wellingtons) may be worn, or white buckskin shoes lace up and without toe caps...His Excellency does wish to point out that white shoes and "slacks", properly ironed, look decidedly smarter than badly cut overalls and Wellingtons...*<sup>311</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they are different examples of uniforms worn by police and soldiers before the colonial and after take-over of administration in different parts of Nigeria.



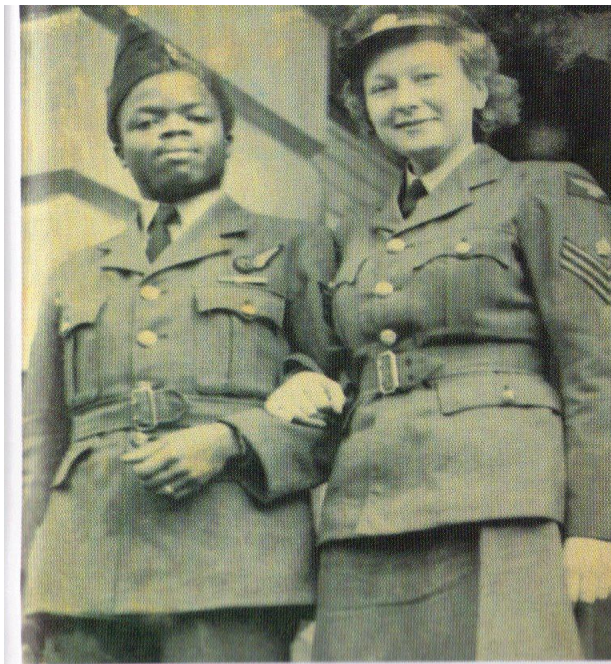
**The Nigerian Regiment, First World War, taken in 1917.**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).

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<sup>311</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI),Circular No. 49/1936), *Civil Service Uniform*, C.C. Whiteley, Ag Secretary to the Government to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, M.P. No. 31496, 26 September 1936,.



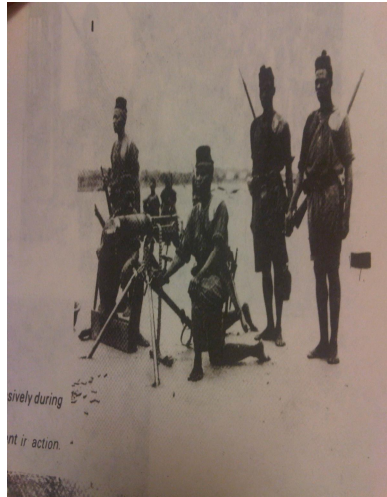
**The Nigerian Regiment, First World War, probably taken in 1917. (Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).**



**Mr. & Mrs. David Oguntoye, in Nigerian Regiment uniform, 15 January 1946. (Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).**



**1900 cap of a member of the Southern Nigerian Regiment.**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**A cross section of Nigerian soldiers in the RWAFF**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

On appointment, administrative staff, except those whose positions were listed in Chapter Three of the Civil Service General Order, were allowed to wear office dress for official and unofficial functions. However, upon confirmation of appointments, others whose positions were not listed in the General Order could be issued and must wear the civil service uniforms. In NA, where no categorization of any kind existed, staff, ranging from the *Akodas*

to tax-collectors, was issued with uniforms that were, in material and design, similar to that of the police.<sup>312</sup> In a correspondence between *Alaafin* Ladigbolu and the Resident, Oyo Province, the king requested that the Resident should assist him in getting

*...two sashes for Oloko head Akoda, one for daily use and one for occasional use...I prefer red one and I shall be grateful if the Resident will help me about it. I took notice when we got to Ibadan about sashes of all head Akodas in N.A. Departments...*<sup>313</sup>

Prior to 1931, not only were NA and junior administrative staff in the colonial civil service not issued uniforms, also no effort was made to differentiate or show ranks and statuses on the uniforms of other staff in the colonial government civil service. However, from 10<sup>th</sup> October 1931, NA staff and junior administrative officers, per memorandum number S.P. 6641/59 were, for the first time, issued uniforms. Between 1931 and 1936, uniforms used in the NA, which were irregular and lacking any distinguishing features or qualities, were modified. The need to differentiate ranks and cadres both in the NA and government civil service began in 1936 following *Alaafin* Ladigbolu's letter. This development, according to government Gazette Notice No. 582, necessitated a modification in the badges on the uniforms of staff on levels three and four. Initially, badges used by the two cadres had four leaves. With *Alaafin* Ladigbolu's letter, one of the four leaves on the badges of staff on cadre three was dropped.<sup>314</sup> From 1936 onward, staff, whether in the NA or in colonial government

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<sup>312</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No. S.P.6641/59, *Uniform for Junior Administrative Officers*, from Resident, Oyo Province to the Commissioner of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931.

<sup>313</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 175/3/29, Correspondence between Ladigbolu, the *Alaafin* of Oyo, and the Resident, Oyo Province, Oyo, 9 June 1939.

<sup>314</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 8/1949, M.P.P. 5428, *White Civil Uniform*, Circular M.P. No. 03401. P. Vol. IV, signed by C.C. Whitelley, the Acting Chief Secretary of the Government of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1936 ; see also National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), *Ceremonial Allowances*, Correspondence between T.V. Serivenor, Civil Service Commissioner, Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos and all Heads of Departments and Secretaries, 31 January 1949.

civil service, was expected to wear either uniforms or office dress to official, semi-official, and unofficial events.

For those issued with uniforms, these include two khaki drills – white and brown -, one rain coat, one suit, two shirts, a pair of trousers, a pair of knickers, one green tie, a pair of boots, a rain cap, a fez cap, a pocket book (for the police), and a hammer (for forest guards). The epaulets on the uniforms were to denote ranks and statuses in either the NA or colonial government civil service. Others who were not issued uniforms were expected to wear office dress, which comprised of open-necked suits, trousers, and boots during office hours and also to wear sport dress in the evening.<sup>315</sup> *‘The type of dress which His honour had in mind was one similar to the uniform worn by the Police Officers – a tunic of similar pattern, open at the neck, to be worn with shorts, stockings and shoes, the tunic and shorts to be made of white drill for wearing in offices and khaki for traveling and for ‘bush’ work’.*<sup>316</sup>

What reasons underlay and justifies this development and how was the development received by (i) Yorùbá people in colonial employ; (ii) the new class of Yorùbá elite comprising, as it was, the educated and Christian natives, non-literate Christian converts, native agency comprising of the Obas and chiefs; and (iii) the ordinary Yorùbá people who were not educated, not converted, and not in colonial employment? While the discussion that follows focuses on reasons for introducing uniforms, even in public service, the reactions of the different people were limited to those in colonial employ whether at the NA level or colonial government level. In other sections of the study, reactions of other divisions of Yorùbá society, most especially the Christians and non-Christians, shall be discussed.

As noted in different memoranda and circulars, colonial administration’s primary reasons for adopting uniforms and office dress include protection from the elements: *‘as it would appear to be reasonable to supply them with adequate protection from the*

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<sup>315</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19112/9, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between R.F.A. Grey, Acting Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 22 May 1946.

<sup>316</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19112/9, paragraph 3, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between R.F.A. Grey, Acting Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 22<sup>th</sup> May 1946.



rain'<sup>317</sup>; to 'smarten up their appearances considerably and the men would take more pride in themselves'<sup>318</sup>; there should be an easily discernible distinction' of the different officials<sup>319</sup>; '...for the purposes of distinction'<sup>320</sup>; and so on.

Invariably, it could be asserted that from the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Police, to native administration's 'Akodas', tax collectors and forest guards, political agents, and market inspectors; colonial administration obligated the use of uniforms and office dress of different materials, colours, designs, and decorations to, on the one hand, protect the people from nature – sun and rain; and, on the other hand, to establish: (a) difference between the various personnel – native administration staff from government staff; (b) difference between colonial staff and the local people; and to (c) establish and reinforce the power dynamics that colonialism and colonial officers, African and non-African, wield over the colonized people. The uniforms that were imported to Nigeria in 1919 were made for British soldiers who were engaged in fighting during the First World War in Europe, a temperate area, and not for tropical areas like East, West, and Southern Africa. So, the uniforms were, to say the least, inappropriate and, in itself, a health risk for Africans in the colonial service. As noted earlier, the initial reaction of staff in the colonial service was outright condemnation of the dress as being

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<sup>317</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No.E.120/8, *Uniform for Out-door Employees*, from District Officer, Epe to the commissioner of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

<sup>318</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No. P.18/11121, *Native Authority Police Kummerband*, Vivian P. Birch, the Assistant Superintendent of Nigerian Police and Officer-in-Charge N.A. Police, Oyo Province to Senior Resident, Oyo Province, Oyo, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1947.

<sup>319</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. W. 175/57, *N.A. Police Forces – Uniform of*, Correspondence between Assistant Commissioner, Western Area and the Commissioner of Police, Lagos, 21 June 1948.

<sup>320</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/Vol. 11/108, *N.A. Police Uniform*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police, Office i/c District Council Police, Ibadan Province and the District Officer, Oyo Division, Oyo; the District Officer, Ibadan Divisional Office, Ibadan; District Officer, Oshun Division, Osogbo, 13 May 1954.

'...*excessively thick.*'<sup>321</sup> Upon its issuance, opposition to the uniform's thickness began in December of 1919 when Acting Commandant of the Royal West African Frontier Force wrote to the Nigerian Regiment headquarters, Kaduna, to state that the uniforms were '*most unsuitable for wear in the tropics, being far too heavy.*'<sup>322</sup> In 1928, 1929, 1934, and 1936 complaints were lodged with the different colonial offices about the unsuitability of the uniforms in tropical climate: '*...I have to inform you that Tax Collectors in this district very rarely wear their uniforms*', the District Officer therefore suggested that '*for touring, khaki bush shirts and shorts would be more suitable*'.<sup>323</sup> As noble as the suggestion appears, the request was not granted. In 1950, the Assistant Superintendent of Police, in-charge of the NA Police, Oyo Province also reiterated the same issue as raised in 1936 by the District Officer, Epe Division, he however added that '*I am not in favour of any change in colour but I suggest that the thick material at present in use be altered to one of light serge*'.<sup>324</sup> In 1942, staff in the Commissioner of the Colony office wrote to protest the inappropriateness of their uniforms, noting, among other things that '*...our health and, incidentally, our efficiency are impaired as we often go about in the sun or under the rain without cover for our heads...*'<sup>325</sup> Also at a meeting in Atiba Hall, Oyo on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1950, a unanimous appeal by staff of Oyo Province was made to the Resident, Oyo Province on the need to

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<sup>321</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence from C.C. West, Lt-Colonel, Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment to the Headquarters, Nigerian Regiment, Kaduna, on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919.

<sup>322</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence between C.C. West, Lieutenant Colonel Commanding, 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919, National Archives, Ibadan.

<sup>323</sup> *Uniform for Out-door Officials*, Ref. No. E. 120/70, Correspondence between District Officer, Epe Divisional Office, Epe and the Commissioner of the Colony, 31 December 1936, National Archives, Ibadan.

<sup>324</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/1308, *Oyo Provincial Native Authorities' Representative Conference*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police in-charge of NA Police, Oyo Province, to the Resident, Oyo Province, 22 November 1950.

<sup>325</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence between 5 staff of Commissioner of the Colony's Office and the Commissioner of the Colony, Lagos, 21 August 1942.

change the thick uniforms to a lighter one. Of the three issues raised on uniform in 1954, the first was that *'the uniforms are far too thick, too hot, and too unhealthy to wear'*.<sup>326</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they showed colonial uniforms of the colonial period.



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<sup>326</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/Vol. 11/108, *N.A. Police Uniforms*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police in-charge of Ibadan Province, Ibadan, to the District Officer, Ibadan Province; District Officer, Oyo Division; and the District Officer, Oshun Division, Oshogbo, 13 May 1954.



**A cross section of Colonial Police**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**Oba of Lagos, Adeniji Adele, flanked by a Colonial Police (Akoda), 1956.**

(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**A cross section of Colonial Police**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

From northern Nigeria came the complaint that the ‘...types of *Field Service Dress at present allowed are unquestionably unsuitable for the purposes or occasions for which they are required*’; however, the administration considered the ‘*wearing of uniform on certain occasions as for instance in Court, at important meetings or on ceremonial occasions is a factor which is as essential in the eyes of the African in Nigeria as it is in the case of the populace in England*’.<sup>327</sup>

From the above, it can be ascertained that Africans, whether in the NA or in the colonial government service, protested and complained about the unsuitability of colonial uniforms and office dress in tropical climate. In addition, those British officials who work directly with the Africans also realized and complained about the unsuitability of the uniforms in tropical climate. The suggestion that Africans be allowed to use shorts, especially whenever staff had to be under the sun, went unheeded. As the above discussions have shown, it could be argued that colonial government’s preoccupation with uniforms and office dress was mainly to establish and show specific identity and not to protect the individual Yorùbá staff from the vagaries of nature.

In addition to sartorial tradition introduced directly into Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria by colonialism, socio-cultural, political, and economic growths that followed colonialism also impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition. New employment opportunities followed developments in transportation, agriculture, and colonial administration. Young men and women, most notably those recently freed from the shackles of slavery and pawnship, found themselves in a ‘new’ Yorubaland where the strength of their hands, rather than conditions of their births or unfortunate situations of being enslaved or pawned, determined how far they could go on the social ladder.

Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, a major transporter in Oyo town, argued that *the introduction of inter-territorial telegraphic and telephonic system was also of primary importance to the*

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<sup>327</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. S.P. 6641/Vol. II/20, *Uniform for Administrative Officers not entitled to Civil Uniform*, Correspondence between Secretary, Southern Provinces and Secretary, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, 27 December 1929.

*development during this period.*<sup>328</sup> Coleman also noted that by 1922, more than 40 per cent of the revenue of Western Region, where Yorubaland belonged, was devoted to the construction and maintenance of communication facilities. Besides easing communication problems for the colonial administration and the European merchants, this development also brought employment opportunities to many Yorùbá people as well as increasing the flow of communication among Yorùbá people and Nigerians as postage stamp, telephone and telegraph services replaced the indigenous message delivery through human medium.

Salary, which was first introduced in the army where about a thousand youths were recruited in 1896,<sup>329</sup> varied. Some were paid as high as 50 pounds annually, a sum Pa. Alaka considered as “*huge, mouth-watering and unprecedented*”,<sup>330</sup> while others, such as unskilled labourer in both government department and trading stores received as little as between 4d and 7d per day.<sup>331</sup>

Wage earning led to an unprecedented increase in money supplied in the society, thereby serving as another impetus for migration and upward social mobility. Wage earners lavished money on alcohol and women.<sup>332</sup> Although social vices such as stealing and excessive drinking had been in existence before this time, they, in tandem with divorce, however rampant and were therefore considered as social problems.<sup>333</sup> Thousands of youths dumped agriculture for wage labour and no sooner had this happened than famine occurred in Yorubaland, first, in 1905, then in 1906 and in 1911.<sup>334</sup>

Yorùbá people lampooned wage earners in songs and in jibes. Most notable among these songs are the following:

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<sup>328</sup>Federal Government of Nigeria, *Nigeria Handbook, 1926*, (Lagos, 1926), 161-170.

<sup>329</sup>Nzula A. T., (ed.) *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*, (London, 1979), 234.

<sup>330</sup>Interview with Pa. Alaka Adebisi Quadri, Poweline Street, Osogbo, Osun State, 14 March, 2008.

<sup>331</sup>National Archive, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.

<sup>332</sup>Nzula A. T., (ed.) *Forced Labour*, 202.

<sup>333</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.

<sup>334</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.



*Tete ji mi'*  
*Ani o tete ji mi;*  
*Eni gba ise oyinbo fi ra re so fa;*  
*Eni gba soja gba yonu.*

(Please wake me up early enough  
I said: please wake me up early in the morning;  
He who works for the whiteman  
Has pawned himself;  
He who enlists as a soldier has courted trouble.)

Sudden wealth of many, especially rubber, cotton, corn and cocoa retainers or middlemen, was lampooned thus:

*Pebi Agbado mewa so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge .*

(Ten Measures of corn have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

Alternatively, the song is modified thus:  
*Pebi Koko mewa so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge.*

(Ten Measures of cocoa have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

Or better still, and most common for wage earners:  
*Pelebe mewa so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge.*<sup>335</sup>

(Ten British coins have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

In addition to cotton, another colonial agricultural policy that impacted on cloth production is the introduction of silkworm –

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<sup>335</sup> Interview with Pa. Ajiboye, Obantoko, Abeokuta, 23 August 2008. The varieties of the song were given my Mama Adebisi Ijeru, Ijeru Compound, Ogbomoso, 2 August, 2008.

*anaphevenata* – also in the nineteenth century. From this, as noted by Judith Byfield citing M.O. Ashiru, silk cloths<sup>336</sup> and treadle loom<sup>337</sup> entered into Yorùbá dress production system. Similarly, local yarn gave way to imported rayon and cotton yarn, which were mixed with metallic synthetic thread, called *lurex*, used in the production of light-weight shinning cloths.<sup>338</sup>

The impact of these policies and programmes on Yorubaland were enormous. It ranged from social and economic to political developments. For instance, Chief ToriolaSokenu of Makun, Sagamu who joined the railways in 1937 and served both at Iddo and Osogbo offices had built a house in Makun, Sagamu by 1945. It was the first one storey building in the town. As the old man intoned:

*I was such a young man then that majority was fearful where I got the money with which I built the house. Everybody trooped to the house to, at least, confirm if it was true. When I went to Lagos to take up employment with the railways, I was considered too young to do the work. But, in a way, I coped. When I wanted to marry, no one would allow her daughter come close to me. I was called 'Onise Loko' (Locomotive Engine Workers). When in 1945, the house was built, it took everybody by surprise.*<sup>339</sup>

The general trend was for migrants both from and into Yorubaland to remit money from these places to their hometowns. With such monies, these people began to play hitherto unanticipated roles in their hometowns. Chief Michael Omilani, with other seven Ijebu migrants, founded the '*Ile Ni Abo Isinmi Oko*', a social club comprising of Egba and Ijebu migrants, in Ibadan by 1930. The club was instrumental to chain migration of Egba and Ijebu not only to Ibadan but also to Lagos, Ile-Ife,

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<sup>336</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1890-1940*, (Portsmouth, 2002), 8.

<sup>337</sup> Adeyinka Ajayi, *The Economics of Cloth Weaving in Eastern Yorubaland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005), 46.

<sup>338</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ondo Prof. 1/1/1846b, *Textile Centers, Ado-Ekiti, 1948*.

<sup>339</sup> Interview with Chief Toriola Ogunmakin, Sagamu, Ogun State, 2nd August 2010.

Osogbo, etc. Pa. Omilani wrote in the Club Minutes for 13 November 1933, that owing to the successes of members in their different 'enterprises, more young men and women have come by the way of the cities'.<sup>340</sup> One of the objectives of the Club was to render financial assistance to members in order to embark on capital projects in their hometowns as well as providing accommodation and assistance to new migrants.

In most Yorùbá towns and cities, it was not unusual to have houses built of concrete as against bricks and roofed with zinc as against thatch all over the place. As noted by the Department of Public Works, migrants, in most cases, indulged in the habit of remitting considerable resources to their hometowns, and as early as 1940, the *Baale* and Chiefs in most towns in Yorubaland lodged one complaint or the other with colonial administration about how the 'Ajoji' (the migrants) were milking away resources of the land to build their hometowns. Efforts were made to get Governor Eggerton to impose sanctions on migrants, most especially those working with government and other departments. To assuage the grievances of these chiefs and *Baale*, government proposed that taxes, as from 1940, would be shared between colonial government and the cities. Renewed attention was called for infrastructural development for most cities to cater for the increasing rate at which migrants, most notably youths, thronged the cities.

As Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, 98 years old, revealed in Oyo town:

*I followed my brothers to Lagos in 1935. It was as a trend then for young men and women to go to the city. Although Oyo was regarded as a city because it was the seat of a DO, but Ibadan and Lagos were the big cities. Those who went to these cities, returned as rich men and women. Many who, before this time, were regarded as commoners returned doing what real men were doing. They were building houses, marrying wives, and, above all, buying cars. There were little differences between the educated ones who work with the administration and those who work for others. They were all doing exploits. Most families developed the attitude of sending one or two of their sons to*

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<sup>340</sup> Interview with Pa Omilani, Osogbo, Osun State, 22 August 2010.

*Lagos, Ibadan, etc. to become men. I was educated, so it was not a surprise for my parents when I got a job in Lagos. I was there for fourteen years.*<sup>341</sup>

From the above representative examples, it could be seen that what constituted wealth, for the first time in Yorubaland, changed from good character, good bearing, and honesty to material acquisition, etc. Hence, many of the nouveau rich expressed their new found freedom in material acquisition, multiple marriages, alcoholism, and licentious living. Sarah Tucker noted that many of these new men and women soon adopted new airs:

*...independently of any religious motive, some of the gay young men affect the Mohamendan costume, and wear wide sack-like trousers, much embroidered, and confined close around the ankle, with loose upper garment, and turban...Some of them are beginning to adopt English dress.*<sup>342</sup>

Aberrant behaviours therefore predominated in Yorubaland. The Obas and chiefs could not do anything, as colonial economic enterprise required markets for most of the goods that attracted the youth. Dr. Agbebi, earlier mentioned, described the scenario as a state of transition:

*The phrase 'state of transition' usually applied to people who are supposed to be affected by passing social conditions, but who really are in the unfortunate dilemma of having their social order of life dislocated by the introduction of a foreign order really implies a state of transition from a regular order of life ingrained in a people and practiced by them to a social whirlpool of confusion and disorder where there is not sufficient material for or*

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<sup>341</sup> Interview with Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, Oyo, Oyo State, 23 August 2010.

<sup>342</sup> Sarah Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise within the Tropics: An Outline of the Origin and Progress of the Yorùbá Mission*, (London, 1853), 24-25.

*the materials which exist do not contribute to social reconstruction.*<sup>343</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they photos illustrate Yorùbá dress used during the colonial period by young men.



**A cross section of young Yorùbá men in colonial Lagos,  
22 March 1925**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

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<sup>343</sup>Rev. Mojola Agbebi, 'Inaugural Sermon', in Ayo J. Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970*, (London, 1979), 135.



**A cross section of young Yorùbá men in colonial Lagos,  
22 March 1956**

**(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)**

The transition from indigenous political economy to one epitomized by capitalism therefore ensured that it was this class of young men and women who related and cooperated with colonialism and were the eventual inheritors of Yorùbá vis-à-vis Nigeria's socio-economic and political leadership.

#### **4.5. Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Dress, 1800-1880**

As Betty Wass argued, dress, in any culture and as a means of communication, conveys messages when members of a society who share a given culture have learned to associate types of dress with given, customary usage.<sup>344</sup> Through this customary association, specific types of dress become symbols for either specific or class or social roles, with this symbolism changing over time and in different social, religious, political and cultural contexts. The impact of Islam, Christianity, Western education, and colonialism in Yorubaland on Yorùbá dress, as shown above brought about tremendous changes. The period, 1800 and 1880, is

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<sup>344</sup>Betty M. Wass, 'Yoruba Dress in Five Generations of a Lagos Family', in Justine M. Cordwell and Schwarz A. Ronald (eds.), *The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, (The Hague, 1979), 331. 331.

important to any discussion on these changes in dress and identity in Yorubaland, as the developments during this period helped in shaping and reinforcing Yorùbá dress and cultural identity. The period, characterized by the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, as well as the introduction and spread of Islam and Christianity, witnessed an unprecedented shift from indigenous Yorùbá dress to 'new' dress modes, which have since become 'traditional' to Yorùbá people.

Between 1800 and 1840, the on-going Yorùbá civil wars created so much dislocation in the various centers of cloth production. This development affected dress in two ways: it brought Islamic/Arabic dress culture into greater contact with the Yorùbá people; and diffused cloth production techniques, as refugees from the various beleaguered towns not only escaped with their lives and people, but also carried their skills in their head to their various places of refuge.

As Adeyinka Ajayi, Olaoba, and Akinyele<sup>345</sup> had noted, *Ofi*, *Adire*, and other cloth-making traditions moved from the northern end of Old Oyo – from places like Iseyin, Igboho, Shaki, Igboora – to Abeokuta, Ago-Oja (now Oyo), Osogbo, Iwo. The Jihadist dress culture, which had become firmly rooted at Ilorin, was spread to other parts of Yorubaland as the Jihadists conquered one Yorùbá community after the other. As already noted, Islamic/Arabic cloth was not only cheap, but also devoid of any trappings relating to status. As also noted earlier, facial marking, as a result of Islam/Arabic influences, became de-emphasized.

While the civil war raged, there was a low pan-Yorùbá ethnic consciousness, as individuals and communities were more interested in escaping death and destruction than to take interest in whatever anybody wore, except where such dress culture, as was the case with the Arabic/Islamic dress culture, would preserve their lives. Generally throughout this period, there was no pan-Yorùbá ethnic consciousness tied to dress, as Yorùbá people, whether in the urban or rural areas, took to the use of either the Islamic/Arabic dress, especially where the Jihadists had taken over, or their indigenous dress. In other words, since occupations were tied exclusively to religion and since Islamic education was not as

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<sup>345</sup>Kemi Morgan, *The History of Ibadan*, (Ibadan, 1990), 65.

prevalent; long distance trade and the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars served Islam in multi-dimensional ways. Islamic scholars became part of the courts, serving as, among other things, as advisers, *Imams*, medicine or charm-makers, and not so much as Islamic teachers. Islamic culture, not only in dress, but also in social and court systems gained the upper hand.

However, between 1840s when Christianity and Western education were introduced and 1900 when Nigeria became officially a part of the British Empire and Lagos emerged as its chief capital, enormous changes that altered socio-economic and political nature of Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria occurred. The era brought higher wages, more and better jobs, and a chance at a new kind of prosperity tied to working with the colonial government or in the Euro-Asian trading concerns that suddenly emerged, first in the urban areas, and later in their trading out-posts in the rural areas. Because the focus of the Yorùbá people, both in rural and urban areas, was on how to adjust to these new, unprecedented changes, there were no movements or efforts at advocating a pan-Yorùbá cultural nationalism in dress and language at the time.

Western education followed Christianity into Yorubaland, and since most schools were in the hands of Christian missions, anyone who would be educated would certainly be converted to Christianity. Although socio-economic and political power rested exclusively on colonial administrators, dwellers in urban Yorùbá communities like Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Osogbo, etc. soon realized the need to covet education as a catalyst for social mobility. With formal education, at least, a clerical or professional position was more or less guaranteed. From the 1840s therefore, educated Yorùbá elite began to emerge as a new status group distinct from the common people in both urban and rural areas. This educated, new class of Yorùbá leaders emulated the British in many ways; they however retained their Yorùbá values, which they, for the most part, used in their homes and rural areas.

In her study of five generations of a Lagos family, Betty M. Wass noted that individuals in the family, like most educated, new class of Yorùbá elite in Lagos and other urban centers, acquired appropriate skills for jobs in the new colonial administration and Euro-Asian trading concerns. Set apart from their fellow Yorùbá



by their conversion to Christianity and acquisition of Western education; this educated, new class of Yorùbá elite emulated not only the Christian missionaries, British administrators and merchants but also African repatriates from Sierra Leone and Liberia – the *Saro* and *Amaro* - in eating, speaking, and dressing habits. For the most part, this educated, new class of Yorùbá elite attached so much pride and care to the wearing Western dress, as it was considered a badge of education, Christianity, and therefore civilization. It must consequently be asserted that while the old, indigenous Yorùbá elite were the first to emulate the Islamic and Arabic dress culture, the repatriates from Sierra Leone and Liberia and later the educated, new class of Yorùbá elite also emulated Christian missionaries, whose dress was dictated for the most part by their religion – Christianity - and European businessmen, eager to sell imported goods at the coasts.

This shift in dress-use among the educated, new class of Yorùbá elite was not just as a result of the desire by Yorùbá elite to emulate the European missionaries, administrators, and traders. The shift began primarily from the introduction of uniforms and office dress in both the colonial and native administration. Western dress, Western eating habits, Western mannerism, etc. were considered the vintage culture, a badge of civilization and therefore, to wear non-European dress or to adopt non-European airs was regarded as being uncivilized, uneducated, encrusted in tradition and being rustic. Invigorating this belief was the sheer fact that the emerging socio-economic and political order in Yorubaland placed power, wealth and therefore upward social mobility in the hands of the few, educated ones. The emerging socio-economic and political developments in Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria therefore served to raise, reinforce, and reinvigorate the importance and status of Western (dress) culture over and above other dress cultures– Islamic and indigenous Yorùbá dress cultures.

From the 1800s to 1860s therefore, dress-use in urban Yorubaland shifted from the pre-1800 indigenous Yorùbá dress, to, minimally, Islamic/Arabic dress culture, and later, at a large scale (level), to purely Western dress, in both private and public life. As photograph collections at the archives and information offices at Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Abeokuta and Lagos showed, Yorùbá men and

women in Lagos, Ibadan, Oshogbo, Abeokuta, etc. and majority of the educated elite wore Western dress while those of rural dwellers wore purely indigenous Yorùbá dress, an indication that Western education as well as Christianity were limited to the urban areas at this initial stage in Yorubaland. Invariably it can be argued that dress-use in rural Yorubaland remained largely the Yorùbá indigenous dress culture, while in the urban areas, Western dress predominated.

Oba Akiolu, the Oba of Lagos, noted in an oral interview that in the early 1900s, the wearing of Western dress was commonplace and that more and more semi-literate and uneducated inhabitant of Lagos would rather wear Western dress than wear Yorùbá dress.<sup>346</sup> Speaking in the same tone, Isaac Delano noted that ‘the Bible and the tie’ appeared simultaneously in Yorubaland, and that to be a Christian and to be educated means to possess these two most vital qualifications for a better life.<sup>347</sup>

Betty Wass, earlier cited, noted that eighty nine percent educated (male) Yorùbá elite in Lagos between 1880 and the 1900s wore Western dress while only sixty percent of their female counterparts took to the wearing of Western dress. The collections of photograph at the Ministry of Information, Lagos State as well as at the Lagos City Hall confirmed that Yorùbá people with the highest educational attainment during this period wore more Western dress than the rest of the population whether in urban or rural areas.

Occupation and religion, as already noted, accounted for the use of Western dress, but explaining the disparity in the use of Western dress between males and females, Wass noted that the number of women in colonial service and European trading concerns were few, as majority of them remained confined to domestic works and therefore tied to the traditional spheres associated with trading, crafts, and child care. Modupeolu Fasheke however maintained that with the exception of teaching in the mission schools, not a single woman was employed in colonial

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<sup>346</sup>Interview with Oba Rilwan Akiolu, Lagos, 12 February 2011.

<sup>347</sup>Interview with Isaac Delano, Marina, Lagos, 12 February 2011.

service.<sup>348</sup> While the above may not necessarily explain why the females were unable to acquire and use Western dress, it however shows that colonialism offered women limited opportunity for advancement, as more men than women were educated and therefore employed. However, as educated Yorùbá men moved on to Western-type occupations, the more the chances that they, their children and their wives would wear Western-type dress.

As can be gleaned from photographs from Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun states' information ministries, urban Yorùbá female and male dresses comprised essentially of Western dress, with the typical female wearing a dress, shoes, bracelet, earrings, stockings, and neck chain. For a typical male, dress comprised only of a shirt, long trousers, jacket, shoes, and neckties. Although Western dress was the preferred dress, especially among the urban dwellers, a typical Yorùbá male dress worn, especially at home and for special occasions, during this period includes *Agbada*, *Fila*, *Sokoto* and *Bata* for males. For the females, the traditional dress includes *Iro*, *Buba*, *Iborun*, *Gele*, *Ipele*, *Bata*, and *Ileke*. From this, it can be argued that female dress changed from comprising a few things to include a whole range of hitherto unconsidered items. It is contestable that this change was driven by increase in wage-earning opportunities available to women, as the number of females employed into the colonial service and native administration was negligible and so could not be taken to account for the higher percentage of women wearing Western dress. Possible reasons for this jump in the number of women involved in the use of Western dress could be the importation of sewing machines, importation of cheap fabrics, and the sheer fact that the tailors were creative enough to emulate or copy European missionary dress styles, which were sewn for the few Yorùbá teachers, nurses, missionary's wives, etc.

It must be noted that tailors and seamstresses, most especially in Ibadan and Lagos, played important roles in the diffusion of European dress in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria. Ibadan and Lagos were the major training centers from where hundreds and possibly thousands of other peoples from other parts

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<sup>348</sup> Modupeolu Fasheke, *Women, Marriage, and Administration in Colonial Nigeria*, (London, n. a.), 1-8.

of Yorubaland were trained (via apprenticeship) in the sewing of European type dresses. On becoming free and returning back to their homes, these new master tailors continued to spread European-type style dresses throughout Yorubaland. At the Ibadan Archive, more than ten boxes exist on contracts and tenders made available to tailors in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta by colonial administration for the production of complete dresses, most especially uniforms and office dresses for native and colonial administration's use. Besides sewing for official customers like the Church and colonial administration; these tailors, owing to their dexterity in dress-making, made it possible for all and sundry to copy, satisfactorily, the various European styles and, indirectly helped in propagating European sartorial culture.

Haircuts, like cloth-use, also witnessed some tremendous changes, as the indigenous hairstyles such as shaving the head clean and other styles gave way to Western haircut styles such as *Boma* (Burma), *Kunba*, *Kosikoomu* (cockscorn), *Togo* (Togoland), *Onboodu* (On-Board), *Bituu* (Beetle), and *Sobiseka* (Chubby-checker).<sup>349</sup> For the females, the following hairstyles became commonplace and were the predominant fashionable hairstyles women of all status and callings used: *Ogun-Pari*, *Onilegogoro*, *Oolu-baaki* (All-Back), etc. These changes in male and female hair-styles followed the on-going socio-political changes, not just in Yorubaland and other parts of what later became Nigeria but globally. For instance, while the end of the First World War introduced hairstyles such as *Ogun-Pari* and *Boma* into the corps of female and male hairstyles, the coming of sailors introduced 'On-Board' to male's haircut styles. Contacts with other Africans, most especially Togolese, brought their unique haircut style into what Yorùbá men used.

It must be asserted that although texture of hair between Nigerians and Europeans are different, however these haircut styles, which were first seen on the Europeans, the foreigners and others, especially soldiers who fought on the side of Great Britain during the Second World War, gave educated Yorùbá elite new ideas for new haircut styles. They were then copied or adapted by the Yorùbá people.

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<sup>349</sup> Adeoye C.L., *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, (Ibadan, 2005), 169.

#### 4.6 Change and Conflicts in Yorùbá Dress Culture

At the vanguard of sartorial imposition in Yorubaland were, first, the Muslims, especially during the early days of the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars. They were followed by the Christian missionaries from the 1840s, and later the British administrators' from 1919. Responses, in different parts of Yorubaland, were essentially characterized by initial acceptance, which soon gave way, especially from the 1840s, to 'grumbling' and by the 1880s, grumbling had changed into open protests against what was regarded as cultural erosion in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria.

Leading the protests were the new class of educated Yorùbá elite who, by the 1880s, formed a movement not only in Yorubaland, but across Nigeria. Serving as impetus for the agitation were a host of other factors, most notably CMS's refusal to make Samuel Ajayi Crowther a bishop on racial ground and dismissal of Moses Ladejo Stone, who practically built Baptist mission in Nigeria following South American Mission's inability to post pastors to Nigeria because of the American Civil War. These were all motivation the educated Yorùbá elite in Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ibadan needed for the agitation, which coalesced into a cultural renaissance in language and dress, to burst into the open.

As a way of rejecting European cultural domination, educated Yorùbá converts began to dump their Christian names and were taken up their original, Yorùbá names. Dr. David Brown Vincent reverted to Mojola Agbebi. Christopher Alexander Williams, the first Nigerian lawyer, who had been an avid supporter of European rule and culture, reverted to Sapara Williams and sponsored an Egungun dance, a traditional ceremony, in October of 1896; stating that "*A lawyer lives for the direction of his people and the advancement of the cause of his country*".<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>Oladipo Jimilehin, 'The Legal Profession and Role of Lawyers in Nigerian Politics', *Nigerian Tribune*, (Ibadan, 27 April 2010), 23-25; see also, Holger G. Ehling, Claus-Peter Holste-von Mutius, *No Condition is Permanent: Nigerian Writing and the Struggle for Democracy*, (USA, 2001), 150.

Unlike Christopher Williams who mainly dropped two English names and simply went by Sapara Williams, his brother, Dr. Alexander Williams, changed completely to Dr. Oguntola Odunbaku Sapara. However, like Williams, Oguntola, although a medical doctor, joined the *Sanpono*<sup>351</sup> Cult at Epe in 1897.<sup>352</sup> On dress, both brothers were reputed for their cheeky style of *Danshiki*, a version of Yorùbá flowing gown, which today is called ‘*Sapara*’ in reference to their peculiar hybrid style of dress.<sup>353</sup>

At its zenith, the agitation led to the formation of African independent churches, including Native Baptist Church in Lagos and the Aladura churches, where emphasis was on worshipping God and not cultural hegemony. At the social level, renewed interest in Yorùbá dress led to dress hybridity, as many took to wearing an “*unusual combination of adire (tie and dye) wrapper and differently patterned European prints as buba-like overblouse, head-tie, and shawl...and combined hand-woven cloth, adire and European prints*”.<sup>354</sup> In addition to the above, the development also stimulated a vigorous linguistic and cultural campaign in late 1880s, spear-headed by Yorùbá people from Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, Oshogbo, and Ile-Ife<sup>355</sup>, which aimed at stimulating greater interest in indigenous culture, was thus instituted in Nigeria. Similar development occurred in other parts of West Africa, most especially Sierra Leone where the Creoles also launched a dress reform movement.

Besides condemning equalization of western dress with Christianity, the educated Yorùbá elite also argued that Western dress were unsuitable, unhygienic, and incommodious to the tropical climate of Yorubaland. Some other practices condemned include segregation, most notably on steamships, colonial

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<sup>351</sup> A guild of local and Western experts in the treatment of smallpox, which sprouted in Epe, Lagos in 1897.

<sup>352</sup> Adeloye Adelola, ‘Some Early Nigerian Doctors and Their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa’, *Medical History*, 18:1, (1974), 288-90.

<sup>353</sup> Easmon M. C. F., ‘Sierra Leone Doctors’, *Sierra Leone Studies: Journal of the Sierra Leone Society*, vol. 6, (1956), 81-96.

<sup>354</sup> Judith Byfield “‘Unwrapping’ Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos”, *African Humanities*, Occasional Publication No. 30, (Boston University, 2000), 17.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

hospitals, civil service and the Church. In colonial hospitals separate wards were built for European patients and nurses after 1896. Therefore, from Lagos to Abeokuta, Ibadan to Oyo, and Oshogbo to Ile-Ife; Lagos and Yorùbá nationalists thereby instituted a vigorous cultural consciousness campaign, which sought to stimulate a greater interest in the use and study of Yorùbá language in schools; the use of African dress for official and unofficial engagements; acceptance of polygamy as a marriage system suitable for African societies; the education of women, and toleration of Yorùbá secret societies.<sup>356</sup>

Unprecedented changes became noticeable both in Lagos and in major cities across Yorubaland and in the interior. The glamour and lure of European culture was demystified and, like those of the traditional institutions that European culture supplanted, also collapsed. Yorùbá Christians and educated elite both in the cities and in the rural areas turned to 'traditional' dress in their bid to reconnect Yorùbá culture. Women and girls began to experiment with the combination of 'traditional' dress and European dress; just as locally-woven cloth gradually became a prestige item.

Although importation of cloths and clothing materials from Europe and Asia into Yorubaland and other parts of what later become known as Nigeria must have begun before the nineteenth century, the agitation for cultural renaissance in dress and language coincided with the importation of imported cotton cloths variously called 'Specialty African Prints', 'Manchester cloth', 'African prints', 'Dutch prints', etc. from Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands into Yorubaland, other parts of West Africa, and Zaire. They were (and are still) called *Ankara* among Yorùbá people of Nigeria. These European-made cloths have become '*an important part of Yorùbá inherent culture*'.<sup>357</sup> Ruth Nielsen noted that although the designs of these cloths '*evolved primarily from the indigenous hand textile industry of West Africa, where the people had a highly developed sense of design, color, and quality*' ,

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<sup>356</sup>Ibid, 10.

<sup>357</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History', 467.

they were however used by Africans, most especially Yorùbá and never by Europeans<sup>358</sup>.

Perhaps the success of the campaign for a renewed interest in Yorùbá dress cannot be dissociated from yet another development: the design, production, importation and marketing of cheap, cotton European-manufactured, machine-made wax-printed clothes, which were brought to West Africa and Zaire (now Congo) during the period. Called by varieties of names, such as 'Specialty African prints', 'Manchester cloth', 'African prints', 'Dutch prints', etc. these machine-made cotton fabrics, bought and used by Africans as against hand-woven, indigenous African clothes, have become '*an important part of their inherent culture*'<sup>359</sup>. As Ruth Nielsen noted, although the designs of these clothes '*evolved primarily from the indigenous hand and textile industry of West Africa, where the people had a highly developed sense of design, color, and quality*'<sup>360</sup>, they were however manufactured in Europe and imported into West Africa and Zaire during the time the agitation for a renewed interest in Yorùbá/African dress and language was going on in Yorubaland, Sierra Leone, and other parts of West Africa.

As already established in chapter four, the use of imported textiles in West Africa dates back to early West African empires; hence as Yorùbá elite and nationalists were agitating for cultural renaissance in dress and language, these imported fabrics provided many Yorùbá people with extremely cheap and readily available alternative dress compared to Yorùbá indigenous dress, which required time and enormous resources to make.

At the initial stage, West Africans frowned at the quality, garish colours, and crude designs of these cloths. In their stead, they preferred the lighter, all-cotton Indian prints and their bright colours as against Manchester's coarse linen cloths and their dull colours. To stay in the trade and afloat, both the Manchester and

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 467.

<sup>359</sup> Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development of Wax-printed Textiles, Intended for West Africa and Zaire', in Cordwell J. M. and Schwarz R. A. (eds.), *The Fabric of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, (The Hague, 1979), 467.

<sup>360</sup> Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 467.



Dutch printers were compelled to modify their cloths to suit the taste and requirements of West Africans: varied cloths both in design and colour to reflect West African regional peculiarities, a development which ultimately resulted in a clear line of special West African market for Manchester and Dutch cotton cloths. In addition, the European cloth merchants sponsored craftsmen to visit the West Coast to learn the African indigenous cloth making and develop this in Europe in order to make West African specific-clothes. Consequently, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, European cloth merchants had captured, dominated, and replaced Indian cotton clothes on the West African regional market.<sup>361</sup>

At the vanguard of this trade in imported African cotton-cloths were Previnair, N.V. Haarlemsche Katoendrukkerij, Van Vlissingen (also known as Vlisco), Hatema, Newton Banks Works, English Calico Ltd, A. Brunnschweiler (UK) Ltd, Johan Streiff, Egidius Trumpi (of Glarius), Hohlenstein, etc. These and many other companies were based in Holland, Switzerland, and Great Britain, especially in Manchester. They pioneered the mass-production and importation of machine-made java batiks cotton-cloths into West Africa. Common to their cloths was the employment of varieties of designs, patterns, and colours to produce wax and fancy prints of different qualities. Success of a clothing-line was a factor of consumers' acceptance, which is measured as increase in sales of a particular design over production time.

Consumer's acceptance is premised on '*the totality of the African culture, language, geography and environmental conditions*',<sup>362</sup> being represented in a design project. To facilitate successful cloth-trading in West Africa therefore, these companies sponsored many designers to visit the West Coast of Africa in order to study and incorporate such motifs that truly represent West African people, language, culture and peculiarities and ensure that all these were incorporated into their various designs. Notable sources for the design of African wax-prints include (i) Indian cotton and its rich cultural designs codified into a book form by the East India Company in the eighteenth century; (ii) Javanese batiks,

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<sup>361</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 469.

<sup>362</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 482.

which derived its design originally from natural forms and was influenced in its later manifestations by myriad of cultures and religions, historical and mythological events in Asia; (iii) European prints designs; (iv) African indigenous cloth, which evolved from Africa's rich indigenous hand textile industry; (v) traditional African objects and symbols; (vi) contacts with consumers, traders and market women in Africa who, more often than not, expressed their preferences; (vii) historical events, current events, political figures and ideas; (viii) religion and mythology; (ix) natural forms; and (x) geometrical designs, especially since Islam forbade the making of the likeness of living objects.<sup>363</sup>

The desire to maximize profits by the European cloth merchants therefore served as a boost for the Yorùbá elite and nationalists cultural renaissance campaign, as the African prints were, unlike the indigenous Yorùbá cloths, colourful and cheap, although inferior to the indigenous Yorùbá cloths. The cheapness and inferior quality of these cloths are some of the reasons attending the acceptance of these clothes in West Africa and Zaire, as different cadre of the Yorùbá society could afford these cloths as against the indigenous cloths. To buy into the cultural agitation of the Yorùbá elite and nationalists, a poor civil servant who cannot afford either *Sanyan* or *Alaari*, may choose from a tie and dye made from cheap imported cotton or an imported African print, which the tailors soon mastered and made into all manner of styles.

Invariably, both the illiterate in the villages and the educated class in the city-centers were able to participate in the crusade. Judith Byfield made specific example of the daughters of Richard Blaize - Carrie Lumpkin and Charlottee Blaize – among many others who took to wearing an “*unusual combination of adire ‘tie dye’ wrapper and differently patterned European prints as buba-like overblouse, head-tie, and shawl...and combined hand-woven cloth, adire and European prints*”.<sup>364</sup>

This new alternative to indigenous Yorùbá cloth was not only regarded and treated as traditional Yorùbá cloths by the Yorùbá themselves, but also by the European manufacturers. As

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<sup>363</sup>Ruth Nielsen, ‘The History and Development’, 482.

<sup>364</sup>Judith Byfield, “‘Unwrapping’ Nationalism”, 17.

far as the manufacturers were concerned, any cloth-line that is sold regularly, received a name from its African consumers, and is kept and cherished by Africans is regarded as a classic or 'traditional' African cloth. As Ruth Nielsen have noted, *'the criteria for nontraditional design therefore would be: lack of a name bestowed by the consumer, lack of sufficient admiration to make the print worth 'treasuring', and lack of enough sales to keep the print on the market for several years'*.<sup>365</sup> So, for the Yorùbá elite and nationalists, these European-designed, machine-made imported cloths became Yorùbá traditional cloths, and these cloths offered them credible and affordable commodities or resources through which they expressed their personal and group conception, expression, and affiliation.

It must be emphasized that this cannot be a history of imported cloth to Yorubaland, as imported textiles have been in Yorubaland since the early West African empires, when imported fabrics were transported on the backs of donkeys and camels, on the heads of porters, and in the holds of river boats. As a principal trade item, cloth served as currency in the marketplace and was bartered for slaves; it was exchanged for oil, ivory, and gold. Cloth was carried along trade routes from the Mediterranean ports of Africa across the Sahara and through the rain forest to the West coast. English and Dutch companies of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries further promoted this trade, as Indian cotton were also imported to West Africa.<sup>366</sup>

During this period, imported textile, especially from Holland and Manchester, dominated textile trade and invariably introduced cheaper cloths into Yorubaland. To take a full advantage of the trade therefore, the Dutch and Manchester merchants modified their cloth to suit African taste, and from 1750 to 1900, their cloth could compare favourably well with Indian clothes.<sup>367</sup> In addition, Manchester printers began to vary their cloth, both in design and colour, to reflect West African regional peculiarities, a development which ultimately resulted in a clear line of special West African market for Manchester cotton cloths.

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<sup>365</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 483.

<sup>366</sup>Ibid, 468.

<sup>367</sup>Ibid, 469.

To boost trade, European cloth merchants sponsored craftsmen to visit the West African Coast to learn the African indigenous cloth making and develop this in Europe in order to make West African specific-cloths. Consequently, by the nineteenth century, Manchester merchants had captured, dominated, and replaced Indian cotton cloths on the West African regional market.<sup>368</sup>

*Ankara*, it must be noted, an extremely popular Indonesian luxury cloth called *Ankara Mohair*, which was very popular among Ottoman and Polish gentries in late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, entered into West Africa through Dutch merchants. By mid-seventeenth century, Ottoman conquests destroyed Indonesian trade in *Ankara* and the trade went into decline. However, the technology was picked up by Dutch merchants, who, before its decline, were marketing it and, later, were manufacturing it.<sup>369</sup> Common to the Dutch, British and other manufacturers' cloths were varieties of designs, patterns, and colours through which they produced fancy prints of different qualities.

Success, measured as increase in sales of a particular design over production time, was a factor of consumers' acceptance and consumers' acceptance was premised on '*the totality of the African culture, language, geography and environmental conditions*'<sup>370</sup> expressed in any cloth. To facilitate trade, these companies sponsored designers to West Africa in order to study and incorporate such motifs that truly represent West African peoples, languages, culture and peculiarities, which were later incorporated into cloth designs. Notable motifs included those obtained from (i) East India Company's design book written in the eighteenth century; (ii) Javanese batiks' natural forms, cultures, religions, historical and mythological events; (iii) European prints designs; (iv) African indigenous cloth, which evolved from Africa's indigenous textile industry; (v) traditional African objects

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<sup>368</sup>Ibid, 469.

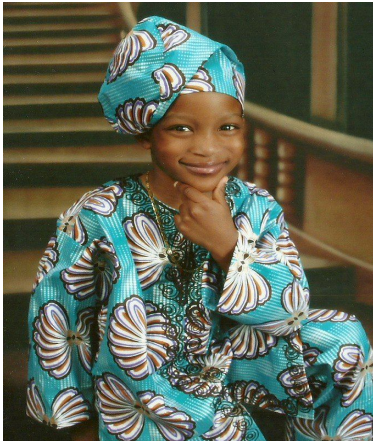
<sup>369</sup>Suraiya Faruqi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, (New York, 2004), 199-216; see also Suraiya Faruqi and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, (UK, 1997), 456-8; Ronald T. Marchese, *The Fabric of Life: Cultural Transformations in Turkish Society*, (USA, 2005), 214-216.

<sup>370</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History', 482.

and symbols; (vi) expressed preferences of Africans, especially consumers, traders and market women; (vii) historical and current events, political figures and ideas; (viii) religion and mythology; (ix) natural forms; and (x) geometrical designs, especially since Islam forbids making likenesses of living objects.<sup>371</sup>

European manufacturers regarded these cloths as alternatives to indigenous ones. For the manufacturers, any cloth that is sold regularly, received a name from its African consumers, and is kept and cherished by Africans is regarded as a classic or 'traditional' African cloth. As Ruth Nielsen noted, *'the criteria for non-traditional design therefore would be: lack of a name bestowed by the consumer, lack of sufficient admiration to make the print worth 'treasuring', and lack of enough sales to keep the print on the market for several years'*.<sup>372</sup>

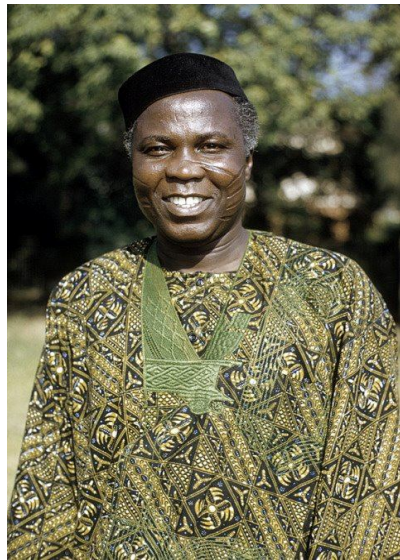
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate different types and forms of *Ankara* use in Yorubaland.

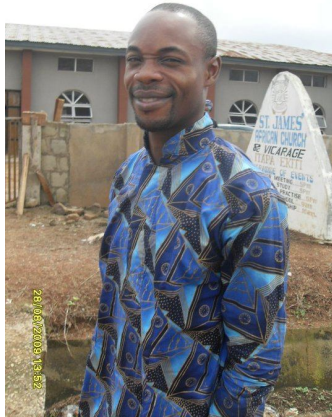


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<sup>371</sup>Ibid, 482.

<sup>372</sup>Ibid, 483.











**A cross section of Ankara wearers**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

The combination of importation of European-made cotton cloth into Yorubaland and the agitation for cultural renaissance in language and dress by the educated elite played decisive roles in

expanding the choices available to Yorùbá people on cloth-types, relaxing their attachments to heavy, time-consuming and costlier indigenous cloths, and stemmed the much-hyped cultural erosion orchestrated by European dress. Increasing wealth, resulting from new employment opportunities in the colonial administration, mission schools, and the Church, meant that Yorùbá people could use either indigenous Yorùbá cloths, which many regarded as old-fashioned, rustic, and uncivilized, or Europe-made African wax-print cloths.

The immediate advantage of this development was the dramatic increase in what constituted a woman's cloth. Describing a female's cloth during the period, Judith Byfield noted that

*in Yorubaland, what is now considered women's "traditional dress" consists of a wrapper or iro, a piece of cloth wrapped around the body covering the waist to the ankles; a buba, a blouse-like garment that was only adopted at the end of the nineteenth century; a head-dress or gele and often another cloth used as a shawl, the iborun.*<sup>373</sup>

As Yorùbá ethno-nationalism became firmly rooted, female's dress, especially the wrapper, became a symbol of the protest, and women's '*wrapper became one icon in this ideological rejection of colonialism*', as some women, most notably educated Christian women, made the wearing of wrapper a significant way of expressing support for '*the cultural movement and critique*'. As Byfield noted, wrappers therefore '*spoke of the 'traditional', the truly African, the uncontaminated by Western mores and materialism*'.<sup>374</sup>

Wrapper and any other forms of African dress not only allowed for a cultural rebirth and a renewed affinity to those who still lived by 'traditional' values and their culture, it also became a wearable text, described by Chatterjee as existing in '*adversarial relationship*' to discourse of colonialism. Through this, nationalists of different hues and colours questioned the veracity of the colonialist knowledge, disputed their arguments, pointed out the

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<sup>373</sup> Judith Byfield "'Unwrapping' Nationalism, 1.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.* 2.

contradictions in these arguments, and rejected the moral basis of them.<sup>375</sup>

As the foregoing has shown, this period was characterized by increasing nationalistic fervor not only in Yorubaland, but across what later became known as Nigeria. However, the impetus for the agitation was orchestrated by the new class of Yorùbá elite, majority of who were educated and had converted to Christianity. These men and women organized political parties to direct Nigerians passion for independence. Students returning from studies in Europe and the United States demanded for increasing space for Nigerians in the administration of the country. Nationalism, rather than ethnic-nationalism, became the lodestar of all the political parties during the period. The exploits of Nigerian soldiers who fought alongside white officers during the Second World War fueled self-confidence among generality of Nigerians, and this increased the momentum of nationalist agitations. Additionally, wartime requirements necessitated Nigerian administration to provide locally for all its needs, so Nigerians needed not to look up to Britain for its needs. When Britain attempted to control Nigeria's resources to meet its wartime requirements, Nigerians responded by boycotting imports. The rejection of imports soon evolved into cultural renaissance, as political activists enlisted the support of the masses to agitate for cultural renaissance and independence.

All over Yorubaland, Christianity and Western education had become sources of superior status from the 1930s. As such, majority craved both. While the rich and the affluent were able to send their wards and children for studies overseas, a number of higher institutions had begun to flourish in the country, offering equally superior training to other Nigerians who could not afford overseas education for their children and wards. Products from these institutions either joined the colonial service or went into private business. However, by the 1950s, education and Christianity as sources of prestige and higher status had become less assured.

Owing to increasing educational opportunity and development in the colonial administration, a number of women

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<sup>375</sup>Ibid. 2.

were absorbed into government services; thereby women's latitude in dress-use increased tremendously. It must also be asserted that during this period, the mixing of European and African prints had become pervasive. The agitation for cultural renaissance and the importation of cheap, African-focus wax prints into Yorubaland therefore changed the dress culture of the Yorùbá people. Individuals who had the maximum amount of education or had studied abroad and who had used less indigenous cloths before the first period began to use more and more indigenous cloths. Wass noted that about half the population of educated elite in Yorùbá cities had begun to wear Yorùbá dress, including African wax prints, again. This is in contrast to between fourteen and fifteen percent of the previous period.

Along with the trend to wear indigenous Yorùbá cloths, especially by women, was another trend: the mixing of Western dress styles with the indigenous ones. This hybridity was more predominant in females' dress than in males. Wass was of the opinion that more than eighty percent of women's dress ensemble comprised of this hybrid dress-items. This, in conjunction with increasing employment opportunities for women led to increasing number of dress for Yorùbá women. Articles like shawl, the second wrapper, and extra jewelry were added to Yorùbá women's dress. Although the materials, the technology and expertise used in the making of most of these dresses may not necessarily originate from Yorubaland, they were however regarded as symbols of Yorùbá culture.<sup>376</sup> This increasing use of indigenous Yorùbá dress by males and females urban and rural dwellers therefore was in consonance with the increasing nationalist awareness and self-concept developing between 1880 and 1959.

Relative to age and sex, more and more adult males wore more indigenous dress while children wore more Western dress than females. Wass noted that more people over the age of sixteen wore fifty percent indigenous dress, a tremendous increase from about thirty-three percent in the previous period. Children's dress, during the second period, became more Western, increasing from 80 to 92 percent. While this may signal parents' increasing belief in Western education as signifying development, it however

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<sup>376</sup>Betty M. Wass, 'Yoruba Dress', 1.

signals that children were unaffected by the nationalistic agitation, which was a major concern of the educated Yorùbá nationalists.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate hybridity in *Ankara* use in contemporary Yorubaland.





**A cross section of people wearing different expressions of hybrid dress**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

On special occasions, like weddings, funeral, christening, etc., both Western and indigenous dress were worn. Contrasted to the first period when Western dress was worn, during the second period, what type of dress to wear was predominantly determined by the type of occasion. However, indigenous dress-use also recorded a more than average score. From the 1940s onward, it must be asserted that indigenous dress took the center stage and the major wearers were males.

#### **4.7. Omoluabi in Yorùbá Colonial Dress Culture**

There is no gainsaying the fact that Islam, Christianity and colonial rule influenced Yorùbá sartorial tradition, however, the kernel of

Yorùbá dress, which is encapsulated in the concept of *Omoluabi*, as the analysis in this Chapter has shown, survived the trio of Islam, Christianity and colonialism. While Islam's main incursion into Yorubaland entailed force of arms, Christianity was through proselytism. Widespread acceptance of Islamic sartorial tradition by Yorùbá people can be excused as arising, on the one hand, from force and, on the other hand, from Islam's respect for the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition. To the extent that Islam allowed Yorùbá people to keep their culture and not at any time sought to replace it, Islamic sartorial culture became easily grafted into Yorùbá sartorial culture and, in this way, Yorùbá people made Islamic sartorial tradition to reflect the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition, being an *Omoluabi*.

The relative cheapness of some Islamic dress compared to even Yorùbá sartorial tradition gave young men and women different options in dress and therefore aided in the diffusion of Islamic dress. As far as the political class is concerned, the sheer volume of Islamic dress, especially clothes, has a certain nearness to what had already existed in Yorubaland before the advent of Islam. The flowing and trailing Islamic dress afforded the political class in Yorubaland the leeway to show power, prestige, and status in the same way as Yorùbá dress. Given this, Islamic sartorial tradition can be described, to the extent of its nearness to existing Yorùbá sartorial tradition, as a familiar tradition. It was therefore on account of its nearness to the existing Yorùbá sartorial tradition that it became widespread in Yorubaland and was easily grafted into Yorùbá sartorial culture.

Diametrically opposed to Islamic sartorial tradition was Christian and European sartorial tradition, which came gently and without force. It was readily accepted, especially among Yorùbá converts and the educated class. However, its pretensions to be superior to other sartorial traditions, most especially Islamic and Yorùbá indigenous sartorial cultures, and its overt desire to subvert and replace the ethos of Yorùbá sartorial culture inevitably led to a friction. This friction, on the one hand, imposed a negative image on Christian and European sartorial tradition, and on the other hand, stimulated renewed interest among Yorùbá converts in Yorùbá sartorial tradition. For the Yorùbá, to the extent that Christianity aimed at supplanting Yorùbá sartorial tradition and

imposed its own cannon, it can only live in Yorubaland by sufferance. Met with a stiff opposition and regarded by Yorùbá people as denigrating the kernel of their dress culture, Christian and European sartorial tradition came to represent force, imposition, corruption, lasciviousness, promiscuity, and everything other than the existential value of an *Omoluabi*.

Amidst these changes brought on Yorùbá sartorial tradition by Islam, Christianity and colonialism; Yorùbá people made efforts to preserve the kernel of their sartorial tradition. Colonial uniforms were recognized in the same way as their own *Aso Ise*, but were rejected for their incommensurable nature. To the extent that other European dresses were regarded as exhibiting alien values, they were rejected.

Although European dress was conceived in this way, Yorùbá young men and women, aided by European and missionary-trained tailors and others in colonial employments, however invented hybrid clothes through the admixture of Yorùbá and Christian/European sartorial traditions. In a sense, this hybrid clothes was one way through which Yorùbá people imported their *Omoluabi* concept into the public space where Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá people had to interact. Just as in politics, where the internal values which produced the core of Yorùbá intelligentsia were downplayed except to the extent that it determined which Yorùbá man or woman would represent the race in the larger arena, the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition was also downplayed in the wider and non-racial space created by hybrid dress. In yet another sense, this hybrid sartorial tradition also showed that there can be a comfortable and equal accommodation between European values and Yorùbá values if element of force and sartorial hegemony was removed.

To the extent that European dress was used predominantly in the urban areas, urban life was regarded as essentially devoid of the qualities of *Omoluabi* and wearing of Yorùbá indigenous dress in urban centers was regarded as being uncultured, unfashionable, and being encrusted in tradition. The use of hybrid dress was nevertheless regarded as emblematic of refinement associated with European civilization without necessarily adopting European values.



#### 4.8 Conclusion

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars were the harbingers of Islam, Christianity, colonialism and western education into Yorubaland. Chequered and laced with blood and destruction, Islam and Arabic sartorial tradition was grafted into the existing Yorùbá dress culture and, in so far as the new culture did not attempt to super-impose itself on Yorubaland, it was accepted, incorporated and adapted into the repertoires of dress tradition in Yorubaland. It soon became popular and widely accepted, even if its acceptance and wide-use cannot be dissociated from the need to escape enslavement and war.

Unlike Islam, Christianity asserted its hegemonic stance by requiring converts to wear European dress as a mark of genuine conversion. Its appeal, especially at the early stages, cannot be dissociated from the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars which served as the handmaiden of Christian faith in Yorubaland in the first place. The need for peace after almost a century of war compelled the Yorùbá people to imbibe, albeit uncritically, the Christian culture. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the uncritical acceptance later gave way to open revolts against a sartorial culture that was not only in dissonance with Yorùbá culture, but also not suited for a tropical environment. Perhaps nothing demonstrate the ambivalence of the early Christian missionaries like their obtuse insistence on converts donning European dress and adopting European airs as marks of true Christian conversion.

Thick, woolen colonial uniforms, office dress and other paraphernalia of colonial rule, which were forced on colonial and native administrative staffers, have demonstrated the power dynamics between the junior and senior staffers, but this would only have had the intended meanings with colonial and native administration staffers and certainly not in the eyes of the natives who had always had their own work-cloths and were in no way related to colonial employment. Colonial service dress, as the chapter showed, aimed primarily at reflecting European sartorial tradition “*in the eyes of Africans in Nigeria as it is in the case of the populace in England*”.

Contacts with Islam and Christianity, as the chapter showed, revolutionized different forms and styles of Yorùbá dress.

Facial marks, which originally served as national identity card or national passport, began to change with the advent of Islam and eventually faded out with the coming of Christianity. In most rural areas in Yorubaland, except for a handful of civil servants working in government departments or units located in these areas, Yorùbá people were predominantly farmers, traders, hunters, and herders tied to the soil.<sup>377</sup>

Contacts, first, with Islam and, later, with Christianity, brought about changes not just in what the people wear, but also in their conception of dress in general. For instance, hunters who converted to Islam may preserve the use of *Gberi-Ode* and *Digo*; the general practice was for them to wear whatever suits their fancies to the bush and farm. The first to disappear was the hunter's cap, which was replaced by a small, round cap used commonly by the Muslims. As Stone noted, many young men and women took to the Mohammedan dress not so much resultant of conversion to Islam as it is of fashion.

As Islamic influences became widespread, smart cloth, except for those used by farmers, hunters, and blacksmith, changed to loose-fitting cloth, as loose-fitting cloth became incorporated into Yorùbá clothing traditions. For instance, as an alternative to *Gberi-Ode*, *Alaborun* came into use. Unlike the former, which is a smart and body-hugging or close-fitting cloth, the latter is however a loose fitting cloth. Also, the use of charms and other associated materials traditionally regarded as *sine qua non* to hunting were discarded, as both religions regarded most of these materials as fetishes and sinful.<sup>378</sup> The use of loose-fitting cloths is today more pronounced among the semi-literates and illiterates in both the urban and rural areas in contemporary Yorubaland.

Following contacts with Islam and Christianity, contemporary 'traditional' Yorùbá dress for men comprises of an *Agbada* worn over a *Buba* and *Sokoto*, and or with a matching *Abeti-Aja* cap. Similarly, a supposedly traditional Yorùbá female dress would comprise of a *Buba* worn over an *Iro* and with a matching *Gele*. For both male and female, the above dresses are

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<sup>377</sup> Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, (Trenton, 2005), 120-121

<sup>378</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 123.

incomplete without a matching neck bead or chain and, especially for the female, a matching *Yeri-Eti* (earrings). In the urban areas; males are oftentimes tolerated when they wear *Buba* and *Sokoto* without either the *Agbada* or the cap. In the rural areas, it was considered height of incivility. For the females, the use of shawls (*Iborun*) is also relaxed, and males and females could dress for formal and informal occasions without them.

For the most part, the wearing of European dress is predominant in the urban areas than in the rural areas. This must not be interpreted as meaning that people in rural areas do not wear European dress; but to underscore the fact that while in the urban areas, the wearing of indigenous dress is regarded as being uncultured, unfashionable, and being encrusted in tradition; in the rural areas, wearing of European dress is regarded as being lost to tradition. Hence, rural dwellers, whether in formal or informal gathering, wear traditional dress.

While the above example may sign-post change and adaptations, the use of facial marks simply disappeared. In contemporary Yorubaland, the use of facial marks does not only denote being uncivilized, uncultured, and unfashionable, but also being an ugly foreigner.<sup>379</sup>

In describing the dress worn by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's former President, Robert Ross, although recognizing the dress as a '*flowing Yorùbá costume*', however likened it to a Bedouin robe. Given the impact of Islam, Christianity, and colonialism on Yorùbá dress culture, it can be safely argued that a typical Yorùbá man's *Agbada* may as well be a Bedouin - Arabic-speaking nomadic peoples of the Middle Eastern deserts, especially of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan - dress adopted and incorporated into Yorùbá dress culture over a long period. While this is not to say that the Yorùbá did not use the *Agbada* before contacts with Islam, but to underscore the fact that given the trajectory of Yorùbá dress discussed above, Yorùbá contemporary *Agbada* cannot be described as 'indigenous' Yorùbá *Agbada*. As styles change with fashion, so also what can be described as Yorùbá in contemporary Yorùbá dress may as well be, in the case of Chief Obasanjo's cloth described by Ross, the tie-and dye and

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<sup>379</sup>Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond Diversity', 349.

not the *Agbada* itself. For a typical, contemporary female dress, whether the cloth is sewn into *Buba* and *Iro*, or skirt and blouse; the Yorùbá elements in such female cloth may not exist beyond the invention or ingenuity of tailors.

As shown in this chapter, Islam, Christianity, colonialism, Western education and a host of associated developments impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition, Yorùbáness still remained an expression of what had already existed, a critical component of which is Yorùbá dress. It can also be seen from the analysis above that notwithstanding changes wrought on Yorùbá sartorial traditions by these developments, the links between Yorùbáness and Yorùbá dress still remains active and, as shown in subsequent chapters, these links will always remain active. As noted in Chapter Two, just as it is difficult to separate a bone from its marrows and still ensure the harmonious functioning of the body, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove Yorùbá dress from Yorùbáness. It can therefore be argued that, in the colonial period, the innateness and peoplehood of Yorùbá people centered on so many things, a critical part of which was Yorùbá dress and that Yorùbá dress cannot be removed from Yorùbá identity and essence.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Contemporary Yorùbá Dress**

#### **5.0. Introduction**

This chapter examines contemporary Yorùbá dress. The chapter argues that change occasioned by contacts with Islam/Arabs and Christianity/Europeans, on the one hand, necessitated culture conflicts and that Yorùbá contemporary dress evolved from the embers of these sartorial conflicts, on the other hand. Contemporary Yorùbá dress, as the chapter argues, is therefore a product of (i) change in indigenous Yorùbá sartorial tradition, (ii) conflicts with Islamic and Christian sartorial traditions, and (iii) continuities arising from the blending of indigenous Yorùbá sartorial tradition with foreign (Islamic/Arab and Christian/European)sartorial traditions. As chapters three and four have shown, indigenous Yorùbá sartorial traditions witnessed a number of changes owing to these identified multi-dimensional developments. There is no gainsaying the fact that these changes, although not necessarily all, have long lasting impact on what could be described as contemporary Yorùbá dress; however, what can be called contemporary Yorùbá dress is an amalgam of different sartorial culture, which built, over the years, on indigenous Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

#### **5.1. Contemporary Yorùbá Dress, 1960-2000**

The qualification, ‘contemporary’, as used here imposes a serious challenge and therefore deserves a brief mentioning before considering contemporary Yorùbá dress. In order to ensure a neat chronology on sartorial development in Yorubaland, the term contemporary will be understood as commencing from independence in 1960 when foreign rule, which had, over the years, served as impetus for Christianity and colonialism, ceased. From this time to the present, narrowly determined as year 2000, the socio-cultural fate of Yorubaland as well as other parts of Nigeria was in the hands of Yorùbá and Nigerian peoples. Hence, by contemporary Yorùbá dress, this section means dress culture

that emanated from post-colonial Yorubaland and weaned through many years of military autocracy interspersed by few years of civil rule. This is what is discussed in this section.

Following Nigeria's independence in 1960, Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan and other urban centers across Yorubaland, which had received a large number of labour migrants, became centers of attraction to many people within and outside Yorubaland. The interest in these urban centers, most especially Lagos, was the increasing wave of physical and infrastructural developments associated with the emergence of Lagos as the capital of the new nation. As more and more industries were set-up, needing more and more workers; rural-urban migrations followed. Although Lagos' rapid socio-economic and political developments were slowed down by the Nigerian Civil War, it could not truncate the spate of physical and infrastructural developments. Invariably, the cessation of the war brought more people from other parts of Nigeria to Lagos and to other major cities in Yorubaland that were untouched by the Civil War.

The resultant mixing of peoples that this development brought was unprecedented. The Igbos, Edos, Igalas, Tivs, Hausas, Fulanis, etc. migrated to Lagos to take part in the new economic opportunities. This mixing of peoples therefore meant mixing of different (dress) culture.

It must be added that from 1880 to 1959, the development of African church forced the various missions to jettison their obtuse fascination with sumptuary laws and imposition of Western sartorial culture on Yorùbá people and, invariably, the mixing of culture with religion. So, the post-independence period (1960 to date) witnessed increasing number of educated Yorùbá people taking interests in Yorùbá dress, as more and more people were educated. Wass, cited above, noted that family members in Lagos and in other cities and towns in Yorubaland maintained the patterns of education, occupation, and religion of the pre-independence period.

Much unlike the pre-colonial period, the use of indigenous dress, including African wax prints, was slightly greater than during the colonial period. Wass noted that in the colonial period, especially with the increasing agitation for cultural renaissance and independence, about a half of Yorùbá educated elite population

was using indigenous dress. The independence and post-independence periods however recorded marginal increases in the number of indigenous dress users, as more than half of Yorùbá population used Yorùbá indigenous dress. Although there was only marginal difference between users of Yorùbá indigenous dress from 1800 to 1880 and from 1880 to 1959; the number of users of hybrid dress, especially among youths, increased greatly.<sup>380</sup>

However, it must be asserted that the dramatic increase in male's indigenous dress use that was characteristic of the independence period was not maintained in post-independence period, as male indigenous dress-use dropped dramatically after independence. As Wass noted, this new development was as a result of the introduction of hybrid suit, the Conductor Suit, which became the most fashionable in post-independence period.<sup>381</sup> As Houlberg, cited by Wass, had noted, the post-independence period however witnessed a remarkable upsurge in the use of indigenous dress by the females. This can be as a result of an improved work condition for the females and as a result of women's increasing realization of their self-worth. While the use of indigenous hairstyles fell during the independence period, the post-independence period witnessed an increasing use of indigenous hairstyles, at least by the females.

Besides national pride, as argued by Wass, one important point to note in explaining this return to indigenous hairstyles by the females is changes in roles. From independence, Nigerian women became more financially independent, as more and more employment or wage-earning opportunities came their way. Those of them who were not in any employment could afford to trade or go into craft-making. Although not in any way a position of status, the inflow of cash rendered any status-related value untenable. As informants, photographs, and ethnographic data have shown, more women were combining traditional task of keeping homes with one gainful employment or the other. The import of this is that more women were becoming financially independent, which gave them chances to increase the sizes of their wardrobes. Invariably, women, from the independent period began to wear dress that was

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<sup>380</sup>Ibid, 343.

<sup>381</sup>Ibid, 345.

hitherto considered as children's dress as a means to enhance their self-worth and visibility. Increasingly, women adopted not just the use of trousers and suits like men, but also female *Agbada* became a part and parcel of most women's wardrobes.

The shock with which Yorùbá society received these and other developments during the period can be gleaned from the following lines from Alhaji Odolaye Aremu (of *Dadakuada* musical genre), one Yorùbá popular musicians:

*...Nigeria! E dakun o, mo be yin pupo  
Ewo'gba ta ti mba kinni yi bo wa  
Oba mewa, igba re mewa  
E bi mi, e ni kinni mori ti mo e wi be  
Baalu to de nko?  
O ba wa mbeni, a ba daadaa  
Ogun Ojuku to de nko?  
O ba wa mb'eni, a o ba daadaa  
Ogun ka ma a sun le, ogun abe 'le,  
Ka ma asun 'le, ka maa sun ra eni,  
O ba wa mbe ni, a o ba daadaa  
Ogun ki okunrin o fi ile le f'obirin  
O ba wa mbe ni, a o ba daadaa  
Sokoto JB, to dide yagbuayagbua, to so, to daa,  
Ti awon obinrin fi nwa oko ni Nigeria  
O ba wa mbe ni, a o ba daadaa  
Agbada ti o d'oke ti o de sale – oju yi la ju; be ni!  
Agbada ti o d'oke ti o de sale a!  
Ti awon obinrin nda nko, ti won nwo nko?  
O ba wa mbe ni, a o ba daadaa  
Ki obinrin o ko oko, ko tun d'ijo kefa  
Ko tun ko'gba wale  
O ba wa mbe ni, a o ba daadaa<sup>382</sup>.*

(Nigeria! Please I enjoin you  
Consider where we've been coming from

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382. Alhaji Odolaye Aremu (Baba ni Kwara) and his Dadakuada Group, *Nigeria in Evolution*, Olatubosun Records Company Limited Production (ORCLP), 031, 1979.



For ten kings, there are ten eras  
Ask me what I've seen that makes me speak  
How about the coming of aeroplanes?  
It met us here and we met it well<sup>383</sup>  
How about Ojukwu's war?  
It met us here, but we didn't meet it well  
And arson during the civil war, during which  
We set fire on properties and people?  
It met us here, but we didn't meet it well  
The issue of men leaving home for women?  
It met us here, but we didn't meet it well  
And the JB trouser, so straight and wide, also good;  
That women wear when they're driving in Nigeria?  
It met us here, but we didn't meet it well  
The short *agbada*- what an opening of the eyes, yes!  
That women are making and wearing?  
It met us here, but we didn't meet it well  
For a woman to divorce her husband and  
Return on the sixth day; for her to return home with her  
bric-a-brac?  
It met us here but we didn't meet it well.)

As far as the children were concerned, it must be noted that the fascination with Western dress, which prevailed during the colonial period, dropped tremendously. However, the wearing of Western dress for children remained and the use of indigenous dress, even in children, was confined to special occasions.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate contemporary male Yorùbá dress.

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<sup>383</sup> The refrain "it met us here and we met it well" is a direct translation of Ilorin dialect of Yoruba language, which takes pleasure in playing on the common greeting: "Se aba ile daadaa?" Here "aa ba daadaa" simply translates to mean "it met us here".

On the whole, it can be argued that Yorùbá people, from independence in 1960 to date, either wore Yorùbá dress, which could be indigenous or traditional – African wax print, for instance – or Western dress.



**A cross section of people in traditional/indigenous Yorùbá dress**

**(Sources: Personal collections)**

Historically, Nigeria had shown potentials for a great and prosperous economy with abundant natural resources begging to be

harnessed as early as 1960. However, military incursion into politics, the civil war and the first oil boom of the 1973/1974 combined to spell disaster for the new nation, as military rule and civil war combined to slow down the progress made immediately after independence and served as harbingers of ethnic suspicions and mutual distrust between the various ethnic groups. The 1973/74 oil boom soon led to reckless spending. For the collapse of oil prices and downward review of Nigeria's oil production quotas by the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC) in the 1980s also led to a sharp decline in Nigeria's petroleum output, a development that brought the precarious nature of the country's economic and financial positions to the fore. The results of all these include economic recession, as manifested by fiscal crisis, foreign exchange shortages, balance of payments and debt crises, high rate of unemployment, and negative economic growth, to mention a few.

The inability to revamp the economy through ad-hoc economic measures taken by government between 1978 and 1985, therefore led the country into accepting the International Monetary Fund's structural adjustment facility, which included conditionalities such as free market programmes and policies, which include internal changes (most especially privatization and deregulation) and external ones, (especially the reduction of trade barriers).<sup>384</sup> Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), as the policy is called, describes the policy changes implemented by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank in developing countries. These policy changes are conditions or pre-conditions for getting new loans or for obtaining lower interest rates on existing loans. Hence, SAP is created with the goal of reducing a country's borrowing and fiscal imbalances. In other words, the policies are designed to promote economic growth, generate income, and pay off accumulated debt. The policies are insured by a variety of loan distribution programmes, and progress is monitored by the lending institutions.

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<sup>384</sup> Jeffrey Herbst and Charles Soludo, 'Aid and Reform in Africa', accessed 23December 2011, available at <http://www.worldbank.org/research/aid/africa/draftsum.pdf>.

Other conditions for these loans include cutting down on social expenditures, focusing economic output on direct export and resource extraction, devaluation of currencies, trade liberalization, lifting import and export restrictions, increasing the stability of investment (by supplementing foreign direct investment with the opening of domestic stock markets), balancing budgets, removing price controls and state subsidies, privatization, enhancing the rights of foreign investors vis-à-vis national laws, improving governance and fighting corruption.

SAP played multi-dimensional roles in the history of Nigeria. On the one hand, the cutting down on government spending, currency devaluation, etc. led to increasing poverty, as both public and private establishment began to lay-off staff. On the other hand, government institutions, multinational corporations, and privately owned firms began to outsource labour that was hitherto permanent through a myriad of small-scale informal operators. Aside from rendering many people jobless and creating general insecurity in the nation; the trend also made some private individuals wield more, unregulated financial and political powers due to their links in government and multinational corporations via contracts, tenders and auctions.<sup>385</sup>

The inability of SAP to revamp the economy, its attendant job losses and deepening economic problems invariably led to two important developments on dress and dressing tradition, not only in Yorubaland but also across the country. On the one hand, it led to the importation of fairly-used or dis-used clothing, as merchants and politicians with clouts in government and financial power turned to importation of different items into the country. On the other hand, it stimulated the use of locally-made cloths, most especially tie-and-dye (*Adire*) cloths in Yorubaland.

Although SAP's emphasis was on currency devaluation, economic deregulation, liberalization, and privatization of public enterprises, all of which served as harbingers of declining regulated wage labour, unemployment, and growing number of job-cuts, the programmes however stimulated unprecedented socio-economic and political changes among which was

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<sup>385</sup> Oyejide T. A., Soyode A., and Kayode M. O., *Nigeria and the IMF*, (Ibadan, 1985), 24.

importation, especially of cheap, oftentimes, low quality goods from Europe and the United States of America into Nigeria.<sup>386</sup> Deepening impoverishment, especially of the middle and low classes, soon necessitated inability of these important segments of the nation to buy and use new items, including cloth. For this category of people, who of course were in the majority, the use of cheap, fairly-used imported cloth became prevalent.

Although many Yorùbá merchants and politicians participated in the importation business, however, foremost in the trade were the Chinese, Indians, as well as many other Nigerians. China Town, Katangua, Oshodi, and many other markets in Lagos, as well as in other urban centers in Yorubaland became major centers for selling and buying imported items. In these markets, both new and old clothes, among many other things, were on offer. Individuals, young and old, males and females, not only bought these cloths for use; many became middlemen retailing these items of clothing in different parts of Yorubaland and Nigeria as a whole. The relative cheapness, durability and availability of these clothes served as safety-nets for individuals and families who were unable to buy new clothes.

In China Town, originally located at Victoria Island, a high-brow location in Lagos, different items were on offer. Essentially, the new market was dominated by Chinese and other Asian traders, with Nigerians, mostly Igbos and Yorùbás, acting as middlemen. By serving as middlemen, the Igbo and Yorùbá traders soon moved into importation of cheap, dis-used and still serviceable clothing items, which were sold across the length and breadth of not just urban centers but rural areas in Nigeria. The development in China Town soon led to the establishment of another center, this time in Katangua, a local suburb near Agege. China Town was also later relocated to Ojota area.

The relocation of China Town from Victoria Island to Ojota was mainly as a result of the need for more space, as the trade in second-hand cloth became widely accepted within a short

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<sup>386</sup>Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniya, 'Road Transport Workers' Union: The Paradox of Negotiating Socio-Economic and Political Space in Nigeria in Nigeria', StreetNet International Documents, 2007; accessed on August 21, 2009, available at [www.streetnet.org.za/English/page10.htm](http://www.streetnet.org.za/English/page10.htm)

while. More importantly, other markets, most especially Alade, Tejuoso, Oke-Arin, Isolo, Yaba and other markets in Lagos depended on China Town for their supplies. The same is true of other marketing zones across Nigeria. The import of this is not just to underscore the importance of trade in second-hand cloth and the role China Town had come to play in the trade but also to show that the volume of traffic generated by the trade in and around Victoria Island soon became unbearable that government had to relocate the market to Ojota in order to reduce the traffic gridlock usually created by the need to bring large containers from the port at Apapa to China Town and the need for trucks and lorries to transport cloth from China Town to other parts of Lagos.

In addition to the relocation of China Town and establishment of Katangua and other markets, neighbouring nations like Togo and Benin Republic also served as important trade links to Nigeria's second-hand clothes trade. In Seme, Nigeria's border with Benin Republic, a booming irregular trade in assortment of goods, including second-hand clothes trade, became dominant from the 1990s to the present.

Initially, Yorùbá people denigrated second-hand clothes; describing them as *Aloku-Oyinbo*, *Tokunbo*, and the various markets where they were sold were derogatorily called as 'Bend-down Boutique', '*Bosi-Koro*'. The attitude was borne out of the general consideration that no one knows the original owners of such second-hand clothes, especially as the Yorùbá believe that there is spiritual attachment between clothes and their owners. Hence, since the spiritual state of the initial owners could not be ascertained, then the use of such clothes could bring calamity to its wearers. Despite this belief, imported clothes, which were originally sold in common markets, bus stops, and roadsides, soon found their ways into main markets and supermarkets, especially those clothes that were found to be of superior quality and/or possibly new cloths. The resultant acceptance that these cloths received in major city centers soon necessitated their being taken into the rural areas, as many Yorùbá people began to use them both for official and unofficial purposes. Major users in Yorubaland include teachers, both in the elementary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions; bank workers, unemployed school leavers, graduates, and others whose professions required the

wearing of some form of office dress or another. As their usage became widespread; shops, makeshift trading outlets in open markets and roadside developed in towns and cities as well as in rural Yorubaland.

It must however be added that the differences in the adoption of European dress between rural versus urban dwellers perhaps has much to do with class or economic prospects as it has to do with identification of the rural people with tradition. Children, in particular, tend nowadays to be clothed more in European dress styles, *Bosi-koro* or locally sewed. On the other hand, rural farmers who ordinarily would wear complete traditional Yorùbá dress during non-work situations, you will find wearing torn or worn-out *Bosi-koro* shirts and trousers to the farm.

Although there was a widespread use of second-hand clothes, locally-made cloths, most especially *Adire*, as well as imported *Ankara* are nevertheless used in private ceremonies including religious worships. The use of locally-made cloths was not limited to the rich and affluent, but also many who cannot afford new cloths and had taken to the use of second-hand clothes. As shall be shown in the sub-section on social dress in Yorubaland below, while second-hand clothes are used as office dress and during official ceremonies; locally-made cloths are used for both private and public ceremonies.

From the above, it can be argued that the failure of SAP served as impetus not only for the use of second-hand clothes in Yorubaland particularly Nigeria, but also for the revival and use of locally-made cloths. As the different governments attempted to stimulate self-reliance culture in Nigerians, provide employment and eradicate poverty, more and more people began to patronize indigenous cloth producers. For instance, the trade in tie and dye cloths, *Adire*, which had nose-dived since the colonial period, as Judith Byfield claimed, witnessed a turnaround as government began to deploy unemployed graduates to the various centers of productions for training sponsored by government through the different poverty alleviation programmes. Not only did this stimulate local production of *Adire* but also its use not just for occasions and festivities but also as office dress. The boom in local cloth production was so great that informal operators in the trade soon came together to form local and national unions, the Tie and

Dye Makers Association of Nigeria (TDMAN), which they used as platform for collective bargaining, especially in obtaining loans from banks through informal operators' cooperative societies. The cardinal objectives of TDMAN, the umbrella body of *Adire* manufacturers in Nigeria, include regulating and controlling entrance and exit into the cloth-making industry by ensuring that new entrants are trained and registered. The organization's mandates also include determining prices of *Adire*, so as to ensure uniformity and also to ensure that stakeholders in the industry are protected from negative effects of SAP.

Although unorganized at first, *Adire*-making, by the 1990s, had become so successful that markets of considerable sizes such as Itoku (in Abeokuta), Akerele (in Lagos), Gbagi and Oje (in Ibadan), Oja-Oba (in Ilorin), Powerline (in Osogbo), Erekesan (in Akure), etc. emerged all over Yorubaland. Today, TDMAN claimed to have not less than 34, 000 members across Nigeria.<sup>387</sup> Owing to the successes recorded by the industry in terms of acceptance, most Fine Arts departments in secondary schools, colleges of education, and polytechnics have incorporated *Adire*-making into their curriculums. Besides, government began to pay attention to the industry like never before. For instance, Ogun, Lagos, Oyo and Osun states contingents to major sporting and cultural events since the 1997 have adopted *Adire* as states uniforms.<sup>388</sup> In a recent trip to South Africa, the Minister of Culture and Tourism and his entourage adopted it as official uniform '*to showcase our rich cultural heritage*'.<sup>389</sup> Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the Nigeria's former president, unofficially adopted *Adire* as his 'official' dress on foreign trips throughout his 8 year rule (1999-2007) as civilian president. Between 1976 and 1979, when Chief Obasanjo was a military head of state, he had worn Khaki uniform as his official dress whether on foreign or local trips. Other notable Nigerians that have taken to *Adire* include Professor Wole Soyinka, Ambassador Olusola Adeniyi, Professor Ade-Ajayi, etc. *Adire* has also taken the center-stage

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<sup>387</sup> Interview with Mrs. Stephen-Imala, Surulere, Lagos, 5 August, 2009.

<sup>388</sup> Interview with Mrs. Stephen-Imala, Surulere, Lagos, 5 August, 2009.

<sup>389</sup> Evelyn Osagie and Josephine Ojehumen, 'Is Kampala Endangered?', *The Nation*, vol. 3, No. 1111, 5 August, 2009, A2.



among party enthusiasts, teachers and fashion-buffs for important (official and unofficial) occasions.

As an industry, *Adire* provides employment for different kinds of people. Unlike in the pre-colonial times when the indigenous people produced threads and cloths, *Adire* is made with industry-produced cloths, which may be imported or made locally in Nigeria. Today, besides the end users, there are four classes of people in the trade – producers, artists-in-residence, fashion designers, and retailers. The producers are merchants who have enough money to buy materials – cloths, caustic soda, synthetic dyes, etc. in bulk for retail trading. At Itoku, as well as at Akerele *Adire* Market, the producers also have artists-in-residence who specialize in making patterns on print, and fashion-designers who specialize in creating new fashion styles with the designed materials. There are also the retailers who sell either materials or finished *Adire*. There are also tailors and seamstresses or fashion-designers who ply their trades independent of any producer. Besides the aforementioned, there are dyers who either dye materials brought to them by producers or end-users. Interestingly, from Abeokuta to Osogbo and Ilorin to Lagos; there is no industrial estate or park for the *Adire*-makers. For the most part, business-owners use shops in front of their houses or open spaces and sidewalks to ply their trades. Some house-owners also run the trade by converting part of their houses to business points. In Abeokuta, where many people regarded as the home of *Adire* in Nigeria, Itoku market is a beehive of activities, posing serious environmental and health hazard (in environmental waste and overcrowding) to both the traders and their customers.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could have helped in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate the use of tie and dye in contemporary Yorubaland.



**Mr. Lateef Rasheed Olaitan in his Adire Agbada  
(Sources: Personal collections).**



**Miss. Adeola Oyeyode and Prof. Femi John Kolapo in Adire  
cloths  
(Sources: Personal collections)**

Notwithstanding its uncoordinated operation systems, stakeholders in the industry attest to its potentials. Mrs. Grace Stephen-Imala, the National President of Adire-makers in Nigeria, claimed that

*...the trade has brought me a lot of luck and fame. With it, I was able to send all my children to school. Through it, I have sat with the high and mighty in Nigeria and abroad. Apart from the fact that people come to me from all around the globe for the material, I have also met many good people.*<sup>390</sup>

Mrs. Stephen-Imala recounted that she was one of the government delegates to welcome former American President, Bill Clinton, when he visited Nigeria in 2000. She recounted with gusto:

*The experience I cannot forget is when I met the former American president Bill Clinton face-to-face in 2000. I was one of the delegates in Abuja when he visited Nigerian in 2000. I think it was in the month of August. I was also one of those invited to exhibit Adire by the former Vice-President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, and the same year Clinton came.*<sup>391</sup>

Mrs. Stephen-Imala however noted that the industry is currently suffering, as

*materials are now expensive. I used to buy a drum of Sulphate for 9,000 naira in 2008, in 2009, the same goes for 18,000 naira; in 2008, caustic soda was sold for 2,400 naira, in 2009, it is sold for 7,000 naira. It is the same with other materials that we use. Brocade, quality dye, etc. are now sold for twice the price. When we increase the price of Adire, customers just disappeared.*<sup>392</sup>

Mr. Tunji Adedayo, a specialist in designing *Adire* and director of Febat Enterprises, noted:

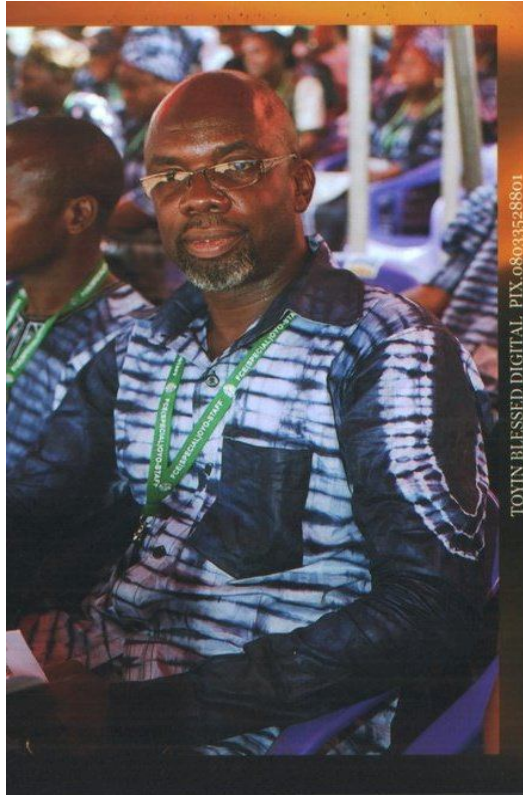
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<sup>390</sup>Interview with Mrs. Stephen-Imala, Surulere, Lagos, 5August, 2009.

<sup>391</sup>Ibid.

<sup>392</sup>Ibid.

*ten years ago, the Kampala (this is another name for Adire) business was booming. Then we had lots of designs and new innovations. The graph began to drop in 2003 and by last year, the situation became very worse (sic). People are now citing the financial meltdown as reason for the decline in patronage.*<sup>393</sup>



**An Adire Wearer**  
(Sources: Toyin Blessed Digital Photo, Ibadan)

Mrs. Dupe Adeyemi, a customer at Akerele market noted that *“the situation of things in the country is affecting everybody. I used to buy materials in bulk, but these days, I just come here to count very few (sic) because people are no longer buying as they used to.”*<sup>394</sup>

<sup>393</sup> Interview with Mr. Tunji Adedayo, Surulere, Lagos, 5 August, 2009.

<sup>394</sup> Evelyn Osagie and Josephine Ojehumen, ‘Is Kampala Endangered?’, *The Nation*, vol. 3, No. 1111, 5 August, 2009, A2.

Given its wider acceptance, long antiquity and its centrality to Yorùbá culture, one wonders why the new decline in the *Adire* industry. Miss Mariam Sosan, a 38 years old Itoku tailor, claimed that:

*the problems we are facing are many: no credit facilities, there is the competition with imported clothes from China, and high cost of importing raw materials. Within the industry itself, there are whole lots of problems. There is the need to improve on designs. We cannot be doing it in the same way our parents did it. Time has changed. We need to modernize. We need to change Adire from local industry to a modern one. Yes, there are improvements here and there. In Lagos, you don't see people bending over coal-pots or stove to boil and mix dyes. They are now using electricity. But what about mixing the dye and the actual dying? We are still doing it the same way. That explains why our hands are like leather. Some of what we need to change cannot be done without the government.*<sup>395</sup>

Miss Sosan, like many others both in Abeokuta and Ibadan, claimed to have been assisted by the government agency, the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), to learn the trade. She however decried a situation whereby such assistance was intermittent and limited to party faithful.

*I benefited from NDE and NAPEP. When I completed my teacher training at Osiele, I roamed the streets for three years seeking for non-existing jobs. In 2005, I obtained NDE and NAPEP form and listed that I have a Teacher's Certificate, but would like to learn a trade. I went round to see the politicians who facilitated the process and I was shortlisted. I had wanted to learn Computer, but I was shortlisted for Adire-making. I accepted it and was sent to Madam Badmus Shogbesan at Itoku. I was there for three months and was paid three thousand naira every month. When we completed the training, we were given certificates*

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<sup>395</sup> Interview with Mariam Sosan, Abeokuta, 15 August, 2009.

*and ten thousand naira each, as capital to start our trade.*<sup>396</sup>

Madam Badmus Shogbesan expressed worry about government's non-participation or non-involvement in the *Adire* industry. She decried a situation whereby governments talk about self-employment, self-reliance, but does not back it with commitment.

*When we started what became TDMAN today, we thought of using the organization to help seek the face of government so as to help us, especially with loans. We were told to partner with government's programme on employment and poverty alleviation. NDE was the first to approach us; later NAPEP and SMEDAN approached us. We were to provide training for youths and government promised to pay us 30, 000 naira per trainee. People were sent to us for three month training and everything went smoothly until it was time for paying us. We went to the offices of NDE and NAPEP on many occasions. Only those with connections with the politicians get paid. Others were not.*<sup>397</sup>

Mr. Tunji Adedayo, also a beneficiary of the government initiative, said:

*the trouble with Nigerian policy makers is that they see everything as politics and politics as everything. As a card-carrying member of the ruling PDP, I can tell you that none of those laudable objectives of NAPEP, SMEDAN, NDE etc. could be realized. They are politicized almost immediately they are formulated. Politicians use them to pay-back their cronies. I was trained in this trade during the NDE days. To get into the NDE, or NAPEP, you either pledged the three month allowances to the politicians or your name would not appear on the list.*<sup>398</sup>

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<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Interview with Badmus Shogbesan, Abeokuta, 15 August, 2009.

<sup>398</sup> Interview with Tunji Adedayo, Surulere, Lagos, 5 August, 2009.

Unarguably, the implementation of SAP in 1986 played multi-dimensional roles in dress-use in Yorubaland. It not only stimulated increasing use of second-hand clothes, but also the use of *Ankara* and locally-made cloths, especially *Adire*. From 1999 when Nigeria returned to civil rule to the present time, changes of all kinds have occurred, which served to shape people's lives in an unprecedented manner, not only in Yorubaland but across Nigeria. Deepening poverty and declining wage labour stimulated the use of imported, second-hand items, including cloths, as well as the use of locally-made cloths. While Yorùbá people are gradually dumping second-hand clothes for new ones, owing to the positive impact of liberalization and privatization policies of government between 1999 and 2007, the use of locally-made cloths still remains high.

### **5.3. Continuities in Contemporary Yorùbá Dress**

From the above, it is incontrovertible that dress in contemporary Yorubaland has been characterized by change, conflicts, and continuities. As already shown, contemporary Yorùbá sartorial tradition received influences from different and sometimes overlapping sartorial cultures, first from Islam/Arabs, and later from Christianity/Europeans. Change, conflicts, and continuities therefore best explain contemporary Yorùbá dress and while change and conflicts have been discussed in the previous section, continuities, which underpins contemporary Yorùbá dress, is discussed in this section. In other to impose order on the discussion, the ensuing discourse is divided into three broad headings: political, social, and religious uses of dress. My contention, in this section, is that these three broad ways form the key ways through which dress is used in contemporary Yorubaland.

#### **5.3.1. Political Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland**

Perhaps, one of the best ways that the Yorùbá vis-à-vis other Nigerians has used cloths and dress from independence till the contemporary period is in relation to power and its associated metaphor. For instance, the Yorùbá, like others peoples in Nigeria, used clothes as metaphor of political power. Writing about this, Elisha P. Renne noted that the shift from colonial to independent

rule, as also demonstrated by the transition from military autocracy to civil rule in Nigeria, has been expressed in terms of transition from *Khaki* to *Agbada*. More aptly, the metaphor of dress is conceived as a change from colonial administrative uniform or in the case of military rule, the change from military uniform, simply referred to as *Khaki*, to civilian dress, often referred to among the Yorùbá as *Agbada*.<sup>399</sup>

*Agbada*, as noted earlier, is the large gown made of locally hand-woven cloth and worn by traditional Yorùbá Obas, chiefs, noblemen. The equivalent among the Hausa-Fulani is the *Babban Riga*. *Khaki*, Urdu (India) word for 'dusty', on the other hand, is the brownish uniform material used as uniforms by native and colonial administrative staff, the police and armed forces during colonial rule. The historical association of *Khaki* with colonial and later Nigerian military rule signifies that the transition from colonial and military rule exemplified by *Khaki* to civilian administration, exemplified by *Agbada*, does not only represent a different form of political organization but also the historical events associated with colonialism, military rule, and post-independence civilian rule.

Among the Yorùbá people, the symbolical or metaphorical expressions of both a particular form of political order and of social distinctions are all subsumed in the expression 'from *Khaki* to *Agbada*'. Political order, as used above, could be a colonial rule, military rule, traditional rule, and democratic rule; while a social distinction could include distinctions between royalty and commoners, military and civilians, an educated elite and non-literates, etc. In general, the expression focused primarily on the shifts in colonial, military, and civilian leadership and on the attendant changing fashions in political dress.

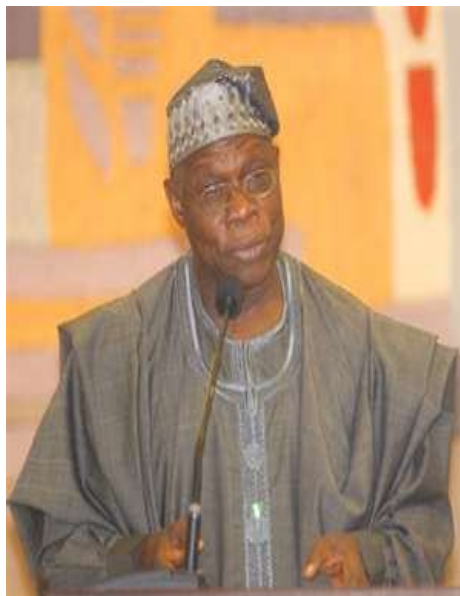
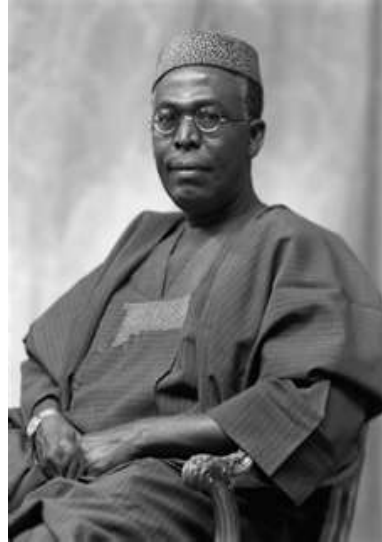
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not

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<sup>399</sup>Elisha P. Renne, 'From Khaki to Agbada: Dress and Political Transition in Nigeria', in Allman J. (ed.), *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*, (Indianapolis, 2004), 125.



remove the fact that these photos illustrate *Agbada* use in Nigerian politics.



**Oba Lamidi Adeyemi, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Chief Olusegun Obasanjo wearing Agbada**  
(Sources: Oyo State Ministry of Information, Ibadan, Nigeria)

Underlying the expression is the desire to differentiate everyday dress from occasional dress as well as differentiating dress of the political class from those of the ordinary people. As Elisha P. Renne argued in respect of the Attah of Igala and *serikin-turawa*, these political leaders were described as ‘*arrayed in an ample tobe, fantastically brocaded with gold, beneath which was another of red velvet; and judging from his size, many other of various hues might have been his under-garments*’. And the principal courtiers in Attah’s palace were, for the most part, ‘*neatly dressed in white tobés and small caps, though some had them blue or checked, with a sort of embroidery round the opening for the neck*’. In addition, the *seriki* was described as ‘*showily and picturesquely dressed*’ being dressed “*in a green and white striped tobe, wider trowsers of speckled pattern color, like the plumage of the Guinea-fowl, with an embroidery of green silk in front of the legs. Over this, he wore a gaudy red bernus, while round his red cap a white turban was wound crosswise in a very neat and careful manner.*”<sup>400</sup>

When the above is contrasted with the native/colonial administrative officer’s uniform or the military uniform of the post-independence period, the picture the Yorùbá are presenting regarding the symbolism of dress and political power became clearer. Captain J.D. Falconer of the British colonial force, comparing the indigenous political class’ dress and power with those of the colonial and military class of the colonialists (a description that also applies to the military class of the post-colonial period), noted that the pre-colonial rulers’ “‘*medieval romance*’ and ‘*barbaric splendour*’ differs markedly from ‘*the incongruous khaki-clad Briton*’ who was, as noted, ‘*neither “the old or new regime” (i.e., neither traditional nor modern)*’.”<sup>401</sup>

Among the Yorùbá, joining the army was perceived as worse than being a city dweller who has lost touch with Yorùbá culture, especially who has become Westernized or wrongly-civilized (*oju ala ju*), as against country bumpkins. Yorùbá people believed and were wont to say that “*omo buruku la ran lo s’ogun*”

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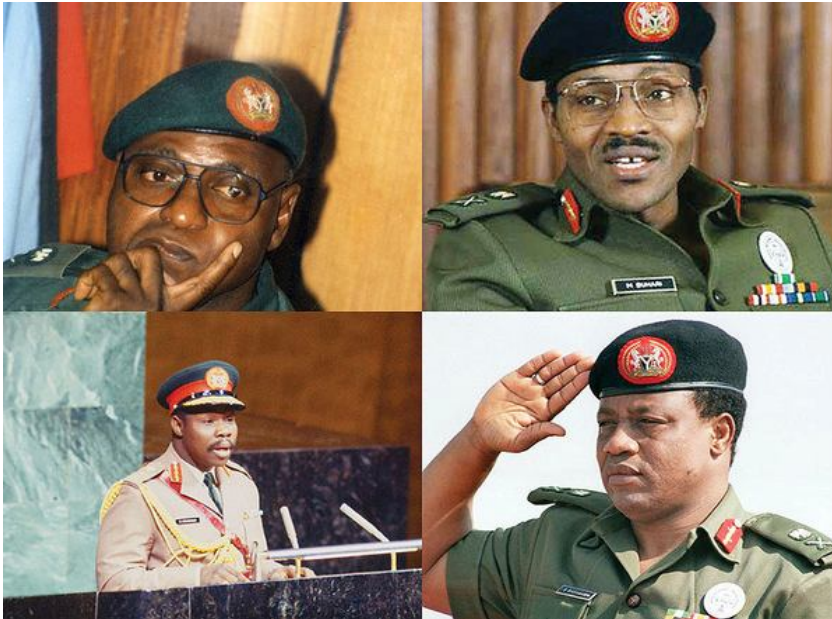
<sup>400</sup>Elisha P. Renne, ‘From Khaki to Agbada’, *ibid*, 126.

<sup>401</sup>*Ibid*, 129.

or “*bi omo ba le laleju, e ran lo s’ogun*” – the most wayward child are usually sent to the army.

It must be emphasized that the dress of the political rulers in pre-colonial Nigeria were, as can be inferred from the previous analysis, either imported or locally-woven. Not only were the dress expensive and elaborately embroidered, they were also made from materials which distinguished them from the commoners’ dress.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate the use of *Khaki* uniform in Nigerian politics.



**A cross-section of Nigeria Military Leaders in their Khaki Uniforms**

(Sources: <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/Leaders.asp>).

Apart from the above, the practice of giving out gifts such as items of dress by the rulers to their subjects at occasions was commonplace. It was one way of ensuring and sustaining solidarity, patronage, and rewards. The type and quality of gifts in

this regard relates primarily to the socio-economic and political importance of both the givers and the receivers.

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With the advent of colonialism, a situation that can be effectively described as the first transition from *Agbada* to *Khaki*; British Imperialism, using small locally-recruited military units, such as the Royal Niger Company Constabulary, along with the British and West Indian troops, clad in their "*Zouave jacket over a shirt and trousers (or shorts) and a red fez cap with a blue silk tassel*",<sup>402</sup>, subdued the different ethnic nationalities in what is known as Nigeria.

As noted earlier, the full dress and working uniforms of the West African Frontier Force, which, as described above by Renne, during the course of colonial rule, changed to British military *Khaki*, which were used during the Second World War, during the course of colonial rule. From *Zouave*, to a smaller uniform in 1914; the uniform was further changed to include '*puttees*' but not shoes in 1933; sandals were introduced in 1937 and the men were not issued shoes until the World War II. Evidence from different parts of Nigerian showed that the uniform had tremendous impact on Nigerians. Colonial administration realized this impact and took advantage of it by ensuring that not only soldiers (African and British) wore uniforms but also civil servants. British officers were, by their uniforms, distinct from the Nigerian Regiment. Ranks were also distinguished by types and placements of badges on the different uniforms. All these, as explained in the previous chapters, conveyed the different ranks.

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<sup>402</sup>Ibid, 130.

With independence in 1960, the Royal Nigeria Military Forces changed its name to Royal Nigerian Army and later, in 1963, to Nigerian Army. With the change to Nigerian Army, the old brown *Khaki* uniform also gave way to a green '*khaki uniforms, consisting of long-sleeved shirts, trousers, boots, a peaked cap, and a new emblem*'. The old uniform was regarded as associated with '*the colonial army of occupation*' with its '*political license and lawlessness*'.<sup>403</sup>

The new, civilian leadership therefore adopted the civilian dress often the voluminous white *Agbada*. The alternation of *Khaki* and *Agbada*, following incessant military take-overs since independence in 1960, orchestrated the symbolism and the different variants of this symbolism over the years. For instance, '*a shirt, machine-embroidered in green, worn with a white robe and a tall embroidered cap*' came to be known as 'Shagari-style', which not only conformed with Alhaji Shehu Shagari's style of dressing while in office but also the corruption and fraud that characterized his less than five years civil rule. In the same vein, the wearing of dark goggles, over a tailored kaftan made of guinea brocade, with modest machine-made embroidery, a style of dress that was associated with General Sanni Abacha's attempt to perpetuate himself in office, is daubed as *tazarce*, which, in Hausa, literally means 'continue' or 'carry-on'.<sup>404</sup>

From the above, dress not only differentiates the ruled from the rulers, just as *Khaki* and other military insignia and epaulets denoting ranks and status, but also differentiate one officer from the other. In the same vein, *Khaki* also denotes government by compulsion, fiat, and decrees, while *Agbada* denotes government by popular consent, dialogue, and deliberation. Just as *Khaki* denotes ranks and status, especially in the uniformed services, *Agbada* on the other hands communicates political authority and government. Invariably, power and government is sustained in Yorùbá worldviews, first among British and Nigerian personnel, and later between the military and civilians by a hierarchy of uniforms. The above points underscore the importance of political dress, *Khaki* and *Agbada*, in constituting and maintaining political

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<sup>403</sup>Ibid, 136.

<sup>404</sup>Ibid, 136.

regimes and as symbol of popular skepticism on the claims of national political leaders in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria.

### **5.3. 2. Social Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland**

Social life in Yorubaland can be divided broadly into two: life transitions and religious ceremonies. Life transition describes socio-cultural changes such as birth and naming ceremonies, birthday celebrations, wedding ceremonies, death and rite of passage ceremonies. Common to all these is change from one state to another. Religious ceremonies, as used here, include all celebrations that are directly or indirectly tied to the worship of a particular deity. For the Yorùbá, as noted earlier, religion is bound-up with all aspects of life, so therefore, secular events usually have their religious dimensions.

In this sub-section, attention will be paid only to the use of dress for social – life transitions – purposes while discussions on religious-related dress-uses are taken up in the next sub-section on religious dress-use in Yorubaland. This sub-section depends on interviews, personal and participant observations as well as ethnographic data.

Depending on factors such as the social status, economic power, cultural relevance, and societal dictates; life transitions are occasions for one form of ceremony or another among the Yorùbá. Therefore, all occasions afford the Yorùbá opportunities to don one dress or the other. For analytical purposes, ceremonies can be classified based on whether they are driven by joy or sadness, although the Yorùbá classified some ceremonies as straddling between sadness and joy. Marriage, christening, birthday, house-warming, among many others are essentially driven by joy; hence, dress-use for such occasions must not only reflect the underlying joy in terms of volume but also colours. Phenomena such as burial, wake-keeping, inheritance-sharing, warfare, etc. are, undoubtedly, driven by sadness and losses; they therefore must be reflected in the dress of the concerned parties.

Although the volume of cloths used are, for the most part, tied to status; it also has a bearing on the circumstances of whether the ceremony is driven by sadness or joy. Depending on age and status, adult males and females must wear the full complement of dress for any occasion whether driven by joy or sadness. While the

kings and chiefs could afford to wear whatever they like in private and outside the public glare; they must not only wear full complement of Yorùbá dress in their public engagements but also wear such dresses with matching accoutrements and insignia of their respective offices.

A full complement of dress for adult males, nobles, chiefs and kings include *Agbada*, *Buba*, *Sokoto*, *Ileke*, *Bata*, *Fila*, and *Opa* (walking stick). Priests, priestesses, chiefs and kings have different insignia of office, which must be worn to complement the above dress. For adult females, married women, priestesses and newly married young women, a full complement of Yorùbá contemporary dress include *Iro*, *Buba*, *Gele*, *Ipele*, *Iborun*, *Buba*, *Apamo'wo*, *Ileke*, *Egba-Owo*, *Egba-Ese*, *Egba-Orun*, and *Yeri-Eti*.

Although there are no hard and fast rules guiding colour selections, bright colours, for the most part, are used in joy-driven occasions while dull colours are used for sadness-driven occasions. It must however be noted that for reason of economy, dress used for a particular occasion could be used for another one. The use of dull-colours is often limited to the most affected people in any sadness-driven occasion.

Depending on status and wealth, most occasions in Yorubaland involve the use of between one or three or more cloths. Using a traditional Yorùbá marriage ceremony as an example, couples are expected to have as many as three different cloths for the wedding ceremony. The first being exclusive to the couples, and the second, called *Aso Ebi*, is limited to the immediate family members of the couples; and the third, *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, is used by the generality of well-wishers: friends, co-workers, religious groups, etc. The couples' wealth and social status would play fundamental roles in the choice of the first type of cloth.<sup>405</sup> For the most part, in any ceremony, this is the most costly cloth and aims primarily to showcase the couples' status, (real, aspired, or imagined) wealth, and family connections.

For most people, cloths like guinea brocade, lace, locally woven *Aso-Oke* (*Ofi*, *Sanyan*, *Alari*, *Etu*, etc.) are used. Emphasis is usually placed on quality, and as such its use in a marriage ceremony is limited to the couples alone. In some cases, children

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<sup>405</sup>Interview with Raof Olutokun Adebayo, Oyo, Nigeria, 13 January 2011.

of the affluent, royals and politicians could also use these high quality cloths alongside their parents.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. This criticism however does not remove the fact that they illustrate contemporary Yorùbá social dress.









**A cross section of social dress in contemporary Yorubaland**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

The second type, depending on family wealth and status, could be as costly as the first, but consideration is usually given to the less privileged members of the family before making the choice of what *Aso Ebi* to choose for any occasion. While it is not

compulsory for all members of the family to buy and use this cloth, it is regarded as lack of unity in a family when all members of the family do not wear the selected *Aso Ebi*. As earlier noted, family wealth and status play important roles in deciding what choice of cloth to use, so guinea brocade, lace, or *Ankara* could be used.

The choice of *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, like the previous two, is also predicated upon status and wealth. The wealthy and noble may choose as many type and quality of cloth as they like as *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* for a single ceremony. In most cases, different social clubs, societies, religious organizations, etc. that the couples belong may decide to choose different cloths as against a general *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. An alternative to the above is for the couple to choose a general *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, which friends and other well-wishers would wear at the ceremony.

The use of *Aso Egbe Jo 'Da* is not limited to family-related ceremonies, as schools, religious institutions as well as political parties also use it. For example, *West African Pilot*, one of Nigeria's foremost newspapers of the colonial period, noted a particular use of *Aso Egbe Jo 'Da* during the 1952 elections in colonial Nigeria where:

*Market women supporters of the Action Group were furious on Thursday night, and several of them yesterday refused to cook for their Action Group husbands.*

*Why?*

*As one put (sic) it to a representative of the West African Pilot yesterday, the women had been erroneously led to believe that the Action Group would win and had donned...their best attire to dance to the tunes of Sakara, Sekere, and Aro and Gbedu music only to be disappointed in the end.<sup>406</sup>*

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. This criticism however does not remove the fact that they illustrate *Aso Ebi* in contemporary Yorubaland.

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<sup>406</sup> 'Action Group Hired Drummers & Women Returned Dismayed – Election Result Shatters Plans', *West African Pilot*, (Lagos, November 28, 1952), 1.







**A cross section of couples wearing Aso Ebi**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

The above analysis is not limited to marriage ceremony or any other joy-driven ceremony alone, in any sadness-driven ceremony; the same conditions apply, except where the departed is a young man or woman. Where the departed is a young person, no elaborate ceremony is involved after the interment. But where the departed is aged and is regarded as a person of great accomplishments, the family usually considered such burial ceremony as *Oku-Eko*, a grief driven but intermingling of sadness and joy: sadness in the death of a loved one, and joy in the glorious exit or a celebration of life of a person of means and great accomplishment.<sup>407</sup>

Whether driven by sadness, joy or the intermingling of sadness and joy; any occasion that warranted a ceremony of whatever sort is usually fete with elaborate dressing not so much to demonstrate sadness or joy, but to establish or reinforce a particular identity. Identity in this context could be understood in both its mundane meaning and its specialized meaning. While the first cloth demonstrates the riches and status of the celebrants, it

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<sup>407</sup> Interview with AmosunOgunnaike, Oyo State, Nigeria, 13 January 2011.

also needs no telling who the celebrants in any Yorùbá ceremony are, as they are usually distinguished by the richness and uniqueness of their dress. *Aso Ebi*, the second dress, aims to identify the family (ies) of the celebrant(s) and also to show other values such as the extent of unity and cohesion in the family as well as family wealth. The third dress, *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, unlike the second dress, aims mainly to identify the friends and well-wishers of the celebrant(s). It has little or nothing to do with their respective individual's wealth or status.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. This criticism however does not remove the fact that they illustrate *Aso Egbe 'Joda* in contemporary Yorubaland.





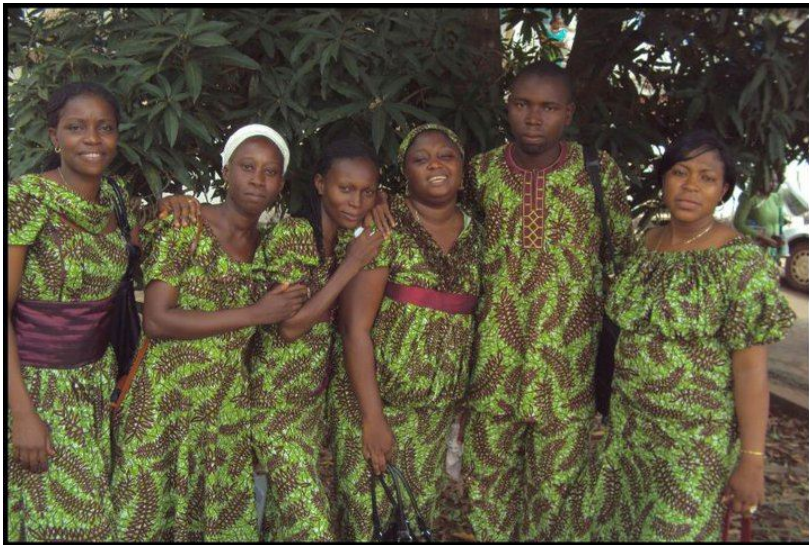
















**A cross section of people in Aso Egbe 'Joda**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

In addition to reinforcing the identity of well-wishers, *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*, in contemporary Yorubaland, has assumed another importance, as celebrants used such cloths to raise funds for their ceremonies. The general practice all over Yorubaland is for the celebrants to select a number of cloths as *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* and since he or she is to supply his friends and well-wishers with these cloths, the practice is to add extra costs to advantage the celebrant. In some communities in Yorubaland, most especially among the Ijebus, Egbas, and Ibadans; it is commonplace to deny friends and well-wishers any form of entertainment at ceremonies because of their failure to buy and wear the *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*. In these areas of Yorubaland, '*Kora Ankara, ko je Semo*' (any well-wisher or friend who failed to buy the celebrant's *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* (*Ankara*) would not be entertained with Semolina/Semovita), is a common saying.<sup>408</sup>

The saying above not only underscores the economic components of *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* phenomena among the Yorùbá, but also shows the transformation that the practice has witnessed

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<sup>408</sup> Interview with Oluwakemi Onisile, Ibadan, Nigeria, 23 January 2011.

due to economic recession of the 1980s and how the practice has been turned around to serve as a veritable means of getting friends and well-wishers to contribute their quotas, if not towards the celebration, but to their own entertainments. It must be noted, however, that many friends and well-wishers decried the practice, claiming, among other things, that most celebrants, especially females, placed so much emphasis and importance on the gains accruable to them through the use of *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* that the quality of most cloths are not commensurate with the amount paid. For some cross-section of friends and well-wishers, they consider it incumbent on them not only to attend the celebration, but also to ensure that they treated themselves to the best of entertainment the celebrants could offer. In this way, it is believed, they would have covered the cost of the *Aso Egbe Jo'Da*.

Mrs. Oluwakemi Onisile, an elementary school teacher at Eleyele, Ibadan, however noted that the *Aso Egbe Jo'Da* practice helps celebrants to defray costs of entertainment and sundry expenses and that the essence is not to ensure that friends and well-wishers added another quality dress to their wardrobes or treated to any lavish entertainment, but to serve as an avenue for friends and well-wishers to demonstrate their love and friendship with the celebrants. While some out rightly condemn the practice, many regarded it as part and parcel of what gives ceremonies colour and respect in Yorubaland.<sup>409</sup>

In most ceremonies, except for the celebrant(s) who is expected to don a full complement of Yorùbá dress, others could as well dress partially. Partial dress, for the males, may mean the wearing of *Buba* and *Sokoto*; while for the females, it could mean the wearing of *Iro* and *Buba*. For the most part, the practice of wearing partial Yorùbá dress by both male and female followed economic recession, discussed above, and change in fashion. For instance, many young males and females have imbibed the culture of using indigenous Yorùbá cloths to sew English shirts, trousers, and even suits. It would amount to being uncultured to combine this hybrid dress with either a *Fila* (for the males) and *Gele* or *Iborun* (for the females).

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<sup>409</sup>Interview with Oluwakemi Onisile, Ibadan, Nigeria, 23 January 2011.



From the 1980s, there has been prevalence of cross-sex dressing in Yorubaland. Cross-sex dressing describes the adoption of dress culture culturally believed to be for a particular sex by the opposite sex. In the case of cross-sex dressing in Yorubaland, most, if not all, male dress is today being worn by females. The practice, which was initially an offshoot of Islamic influence on Hausa dress, has become widespread in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria so much so that variants of different male Yorùbá dress can now be found in the wardrobe of most females in Yorubaland. Just as males have *Agbada*, *Buba*, *Sokoto* and *Fila*; so also contemporary Yorùbá females.

A common trend in most parts of Yorubaland is the general tendency for most people to wear Western dress between Mondays and Thursdays while wearing Yorùbá indigenous dress on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. In order to ascertain the prevalence of this trend in different parts of Yorubaland, state secretariats of Osun, Oyo, Lagos, Ondo, and Kwara states were visited. In addition, local government secretariats of four local councils in Lagos, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Akure, Ilorin, Oyo and Oshogbo were also visited. In these states, various banks and schools were also visited. The primary purpose for these visits was to observe the dress mode of staff in these institutions. It must be emphasized that the findings from these visits are limited exclusively to Yorùbá people in the formal sector and not necessarily reflective of the general practice among the populace.

It was observed that more than two-third of workers in these various but different institutions wear Western dress, popularly called 'formal dress' or 'office dress' between Monday and Wednesdays. The wearing of Yorùbá indigenous dress actually began from Thursdays and peaked on Fridays, with more than two third of workers wearing Yorùbá indigenous dress or what majority called 'native dress'. Although the data for this analysis relates mainly to the formal sector staff in Yorubaland, it must be noted that the practice is nonetheless popular among informal sector operators.

Despite the widespread nature of the practice, there is however an exemption: politicians in the state and local government secretariats, more often than not, wear Yorùbá indigenous dress more for the fact that the nations is under a

civilian governance; hence, the symbolism of using native dress to represent civil rule and Western dress for military rule remains commonplace.

The wearing of Yorùbá indigenous dress on Fridays and Sundays, days set aside for religious worships by both the Muslims and Christians, can be said to have emanated from the nationalists' agitations for cultural renaissance in dress and language that characterized the second period considered above. Except for marriage ceremonies conducted at the local government registry on Thursdays, marriage and other ceremonies are slated for Saturdays all over Nigeria. Invariably, it is common these days to see a rise in the number of Yorùbá people wearing indigenous dress on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays.

### **5.2.3. Religious Dress in Contemporary Yorubaland**

Religious dress in contemporary Yorubaland has been driven by two overarching principles. On the one hand is the general perception that religion is a limited set of personal beliefs about God and worship, which can be isolated from a person's general culture and can be changed without necessarily upsetting the person's culture or worldview. On the other hand is the other belief that religion is an affair of a community that is so intimately bound up with the community's way of life that a change in religion inexorably leads to a change of culture and the development of new identity, conscience, etc. Christianity in Yorubaland is underlined by the former, while Yorùbá traditional religion and Islam are underlined by the latter. These two views played significant roles in Yorùbá dress culture in general. This subsection focuses primarily on religious dress and dress-use for religious ceremonies. While religious dress relates to dress as a part of the ethos of a particular religion, dress-use for religious ceremonies, on the other hand, relates to the use of dress by religious adherents in religious celebrations. While the first is inexorably tied or related to the worship of a particular God or deity, the second straddles both religious and secular use of dress.

For analytical reasons, the discussion shall focus on indigenous Yorùbá religion, Islam and Christianity. Given the large number of deities, goddesses, and gods being worshipped in Yorubaland, the discussion on Yorùbá religion shall focus on dress

generally used in the worship of deities, goddesses, and gods in general rather than treating the individual deities, goddesses, and gods, in specifics. It must be emphasized that sects of different kinds abound in both Islam and Christianity, however, for space and coherence reasons, the discussions on the two religions shall be streamlined to cater for dress-use in both religions in general as against how the different sects have used dress for religious purposes. Notwithstanding the above, specific examples shall be treated where such need arises.

Specifically, dress, whether defined broadly to include variety of things or narrowly as cloths, are used in a range of spiritual settings in Yorùbá Traditional Religions (YTR). As Elisha Renne had noted, cloths, among the YTR worshippers have been used in '*demarcating sacred space, in marking a spiritual presence, in representing specific religious identities, and indicating particular forms of dedication to God or other deities*'.<sup>410</sup> This, as other studies have shown, could include dress use as insignia by indigenous secret cults, as a critical part of masquerade's costumes, ensigns on trees, shrines, etc. to show what deity a particular tree or shrine is dedicated to.<sup>411</sup> Whatever the circumstances of its use, dress formed a critical part of religious experience of the Yorùbá people.

Different deities have different dress associated with them. While the use of white cloth is common to almost all deities in Yorubaland, each of the deities also has specific dress that is regarded as sacred to them. Red cloth or any red item is associated with *Sango*, for instance. The use of white cloth, including water, is synonymous with *Ifa*, *Obatala*, *Orisa* and *Imole* religious worships.

Besides associating different cloths and colours of cloths with particular deities; in most part of Yorubaland, the use of white, red, and black cloths to demarcate shrines, spiritual centers,

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<sup>410</sup>Elisha P. Renne, "“Let your garments always be white...”Expression of Past and Present in Yorùbá Religious Textiles', in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honour of J.D.Y. Peel*, (Durham, 2005), 140.

<sup>411</sup>Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005). See in particular chapters 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

and personages is prevalent. In Osogbo, Ondo, Ikole-Ekiti, Ile-Ife, among many other places across Yorubaland, it is commonplace to find trees, shrines, and other totems of different deities clothed with white or red cloths or camwood. Renne and Adepegba noted the ritual wrapping of white cloths ‘around a large trio of *Ose trees next to Elekole’s palace*’ at Ikole-Ekiti. Emmanuel Olakunle Filani and Babasehinde Ademuleya noted the religious and royal use of white cloths in shrines and palaces in Lagos, a practice that many identified so much with the Awori, Ilaje, and Ijebu in Ikorodu. Babatunde-Agabje Williams also noted the ritual clothing of trees, as a precursor to Yorùbá religious thoughts.<sup>412</sup> All these illustrate the use of cloths in religious worship.

Apart from the use of cloths, irrespective of colour, mentioned above, cloths are of especial significance in rituals and other forms of worships in YTR. Votaries, priests and priestesses of deities, as part of their symbols of office, have particular dress, which speak of their position, status, and devotion to these deities. Another dimension recognized by Aderonke Adesanya is the use of cloth as insignia of office, especially among indigenous secret societies.<sup>413</sup> In this particular instance, dress does not only communicate membership of a particular society, but also ranks within the society. The *Osugbo’s Itagbe* not only marks members of this cult from other cults, for instance the *Ogboni*, in Yorubaland, but insignias or motifs inscribed on the various *Itagbe* such as crocodile, lizard, toad, wall gecko, chameleon, crab and fish marked the various members’ ranks and importance as members of the *Osugbo* cult.<sup>414</sup>

Although the two photographs below were taken at different locations and for different purposes, it must however be noted that details such as when they were taken, where they were

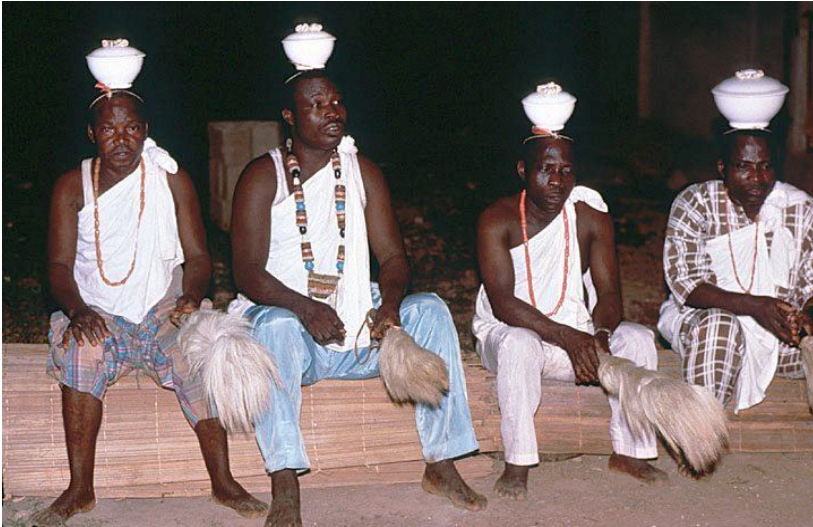
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<sup>412</sup>Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005). See in particular chapters 7, and 8. See also, Elisha P. Renne, “‘Let your garments’, 143.

<sup>413</sup>Aderonke Adesola Adesanya, ‘A Semiotic of Clothing Insignia of Indigenous Secret Societies among the Ijebu Yorùbá’, in Elisha P. Renne and Babatunde Agbaje-Williams (eds.), *Yorùbá Religious Textiles: Essays in Honour of Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba*, (Ibadan, 2005), 23-48.

<sup>414</sup>Ibid, 36.

taken, who took them and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. This criticism however does not remove the fact that they illustrate religious use of dress in contemporary Yorubaland.



**Itefa Ceremony, Ile-Ife, 1975**

(Sources: Hezekiah Akinsanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife)

In spite of its modern and urban nature, Lagos is replete with different deities, to whom annual worship, even if for their touristic values, is being held. Notable among these deities are *Adamuorisa (Eyo)*, *Egungun*, *Igunnuko*, *Olokun*, *OsiGelede*, and *Osun Iya-Alaro*. Annual worship and celebration, actively supported by the government, is held annually for *Adamuorisa (Eyo)*, like the *Osun Osogbo*. It is not only commonplace to find people, not only the devotees and worshippers, to wear white dress of varying designs, but also common people and invited dignitaries to wear white dress in honour of the annual worship and its attendant festivals, which last for one week. It must be noted that the king and chiefs of Lagos derived their indigenous official dress and insignia of office from this deity; hence, the high chiefs are called the White Cap Chiefs.<sup>415</sup>

<sup>415</sup>Interview with Lasisi Apalara, Lagos, 30 January 2011.



**Eyo Festival, 1970**

(Sources: Lagos State Ministry of Information)

From Samuel Johnson, we gathered that *Olodumare*, *Orisha Nla*, and *Ifa* are also clad in white cloths in the celestial plain. In the earthly plain, it must be emphasized that votaries of these two deities not only mark their various religious items in white but also wear white cloths. *Olodumare* is synonymous with whiteness and is often represented with white cloth, water, or anything that is white in colour.<sup>416</sup>

*Ogun*, the Yorùbá god of iron, is symbolized by red cloth almost in the same way as *Sango*, the god of thunder. Black colour and iron are also used to represent or mark the spiritual essence and presence of *Ogun*. Hence, a cursory visit to Ondo, Igboho, and Oyo during the annual *Ogun* worship would not only show the use of these two cloths and colour, but would also demonstrate how widespread the practice of using symbols, in addition to cloths, to mark spiritual essence and presence of the deities.

Mention must be made of *Orisagamu Ewa*, the national god of Sagamu, one of the Ijebu towns, where hundreds of hand-woven baby tie (*Oja*) of different colours could be found in the shrine.

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<sup>416</sup>Elisha P. Renne, “‘Let your garments’, 146.

These baby ties are placed at the shrine by women seeking to cure barrenness and hoping that should the deity answer their prayers, the resultant babies would be carried with the consecrated and fortified baby ties.<sup>417</sup>

While the various dress used in the services of particular deities, gods, and goddesses are purpose-built, dress that are used in, for example, annual and periodic worships could also be used for secular things. It is a common practice for worshippers of different deities, gods, and goddesses to wear uniform-dress during annual celebrations. Such uniform-dress may have been sewn for commemorating a particular religious worship; they could however be used for other social engagements.<sup>418</sup>

From the foregoing, it can be argued that dress, in indigenous Yorùbá religion, is used for protection, as medicine, and as a representation of spiritual connections. Instances abound among the Yorùbá where devotees and worshippers of the various deities, gods, and goddesses were asked to wear certain cloths or use certain religious items or icons for healing purposes. Spirit children, *Abiku*, were often given charmed iron bangles, which they either wore on the legs or wrists. As already noted, charmed iron bangles are used by the *Osun*, *Orisa Nla*, etc. The use of charmed iron bangles is for protection against evil spirits. More often than not, diviners have asked many barren women to offer white cloths or cloths of whatever colour to *Osun*, *Yemoja*, or any other gods, goddesses and deities to cure barrenness. Annually during the *Osun Osogbo* festival in Osun State, thousands of women are led to the *Osun* groove by the *Arugba* where supplications of all kinds are made to obtain *Osun's* favour.

Religion, as Arinze had noted, manifests in cults and worship.<sup>419</sup> The fascination with *Egungun* clearly illustrates the prevalence of religious cults in Yorubaland. Yorùbá traditional religion recognizes the power of the departed ancestors and these ancestors are worshipped as *Egungun*. As already noted, besides the various costumes, the inner cloth or underwear – *Jepe* - is synonymous with secrecy, occultist knowledge and the sacred. The

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<sup>417</sup>Interview with Awodiya Olatubosun, Sagamu, 12 January 2011.

<sup>418</sup>Interview with Awodiya Olatubosun, Sagamu, 12 January 2011.

<sup>419</sup>F.A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, (Ibadan, 1970), 63.

*Egungun* costume consists of varied colours and types of cloths. These cloths and other attachments are regarded as embodiments of the gods.

During annual celebrations, some *Egungun* may come out in new costume, while others may come in their old, dreadful costumes. Whether new or old costume is used or not depends essentially on result of rituals determine whether the *Egungun* would require a new or old costume. Perhaps the *Egungun* remain the most decorated deities in Yorùbá cosmogony.

Although traditional worship is fast shrinking in Yorubaland, the use of cloths and beliefs in dress' spiritual association with the deities, gods and goddesses are nevertheless widespread and on-going. Cloths are use in shrines and on thrones to mark spiritual presence of the deities, gods, and goddesses. Votaries and worshippers also have official dress, which sometimes served for identification, but oftentimes as medicine, as protection against evil forces, and to signify purity of character as seen in the practice of differentiating evil from good as separating black from white. Dress forms a critical mass in Yorùbá traditional religion.



**Raffia-costumed Egungun in Yorubaland, 1985**  
(Sources: Personal collections)





**Damask-costumed Egungun in Yorubaland, 1985**  
(Sources: Personal collections)



**Ankara-costumed Egungun in Yorubaland, 1985**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

As noted in the section on Islamic influence on Yorùbá dress, most loose Yorùbá dress of today derived from Islamic impact on Yorùbá dress culture. Perhaps one of the most enduring the impact of Islam on contemporary Yorùbá dress is the use of

caps, *Fila*. While *Abeti-Aja*, one of the most popular Yorùbá cap, was of Hausa-Fulani origin, other caps have featured in Yorùbá dress culture that also derived their provenance from outside Yorubaland. Today, a typical Yorùbá Muslim would not wear traditional Yorùbá dress without a cap. Some of the devoted Yorùbá Muslims would rather wear Western dress, even a suit, with a matching Arab-styled skull cap, than wear anything that would reveal any part of their body. For the male, especially those that have performed the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, as demanded of Muslims by the Koran; the wearing of long robe of white and black colour with fringes of gold is commonplace. Such Yorùbá Muslim is not deemed to have completely dressed unless with a matching “*Makawiya*” (Mecca-wear) on his head.<sup>420</sup> As the name itself suggests, *Makawiya*, a four-sided gated cap, must have been imported into Yorubaland by Yorùbá Muslims who must have visited Mecca, the Holy land. Generally, the dress ensemble includes a long, flowing white gown, underneath which men also wear a long trouser or a three-quarter, an embroidered black tunic, loosely worn over the flowing white gown, a turban, or a *Makawiya* or a skull cap.

Islam frowns at the wearing of body-revealing cloths and jewelry, especially for the females, irrespective of age and status. The use of ankle-long trousers is regarded as the height of filthiness; as such trousers stand as capable of transmitting disease from the ground to the body. Body-revealing dress is regarded as unholy; as body-revealing cloths could lead others to sinning. Hence, it is customary for Yorùbá Muslims in, for instance, Ilorin, Iwo, Ijebu-Ode, Ibadan, Oyo and other places to wear trousers that do not go beyond the ankle and to wear leggings, stockings, or socks in addition to a goatee as part of males’ atypical dress. For the females, the use of ankle-long flowing gowns, usually black gowns, are commonplace. When there is a need to wear Yorùbá dress, a Yorùbá Muslim, most especially married female, is usually seen in her *Iro* and *Buba*, with a matching head-tie, a shawl and, if a devoted or what is popularly called a ‘practicing’ Muslim, a *hijab*.<sup>421</sup>

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<sup>420</sup>Interview with Raof Olutokun Adebayo, Oyo, Nigeria, 13 January 2011.

<sup>421</sup>Interview with Raof Olutokun Adebayo, Oyo, Nigeria, 13 January 2011.

Consequently, atypical Yorùbá Muslim's Yorùbá dress is not only voluminous such that the entire human body is covered, but also devoid of jewelry of all kinds, unlike the secular or Christian woman who can afford the use of *Egba-Owo*, *Egba-Orun* or *Egba-Ese*. It must be asserted that the volume of atypical Muslim Yorùbá dress, as described above, made it difficult to see if the wearer uses jewelry or not. A young Muslim girl, at the threshold of marriage, must not only dress to reflect the traditions and piety of Islam, but also individual's family dignity, which is considered as integral to individual and corporate ethnic identity.



**A young Muslim Girl**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

Other than for devoted Muslims, the influence of Islam on contemporary Yorùbá dress is not different from what had already been stated in the previous sub-sections. It must however be stated that Yorùbá Muslims, unless because of office requirements, are wont to wear indigenous dress than Western dress in both the private and public spheres.

The influence of Christianity on Yorùbá dress is by far the most profound. In the preceding periods, civilization was regarded as being a Christian and the wearing of Western dress. Notwithstanding the post-1880 agitation mounted by the various political and nationalistic groups cross Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria, the use of Western dress or the combination of Western and Yorùbá indigenous dress is common

to Yorùbá Christians of today. Although beggars and alms-seekers are more likely to address anybody in Western dress as a Christian, Yorùbá indigenous dress continues to be used by Christians as much as it is used by Muslims.

Notwithstanding denominational differences; the clergymen, nuns, monks, and laities of the different churches in Yorubaland and what later became known as Nigeria have their respective (official and non-official) uniforms, which are differentiated by different insignias, epaulets and signs. Besides serving as identity tags differentiating between the different officials and churches or denomination, these uniforms are not only regarded as critical to worshipping and serving God, but also as forms or levels of identities.

For instance, among the Yorùbá Christian churches, white materials, which could range from water to cloth, are used in a number of spiritual settings: as uniforms worn by both the clergy, the laity and congregation – vide Celestial Church of Christ, Cherubim and Seraphim Church, Church of the Lord, Aladura, etc.; as marker of sacred spaces – altars, church drapes, sacred spaces, etc.; as representation of spiritual or religious identities; and as ‘sacrifices’ to God. These various uses derive from two sources: on the one hand is the religious injunction in Ecclesiastes 9 verse 8, which admonishes Christians to always let their garments be white, and on the other hand are claims of spiritual revelations through dreams and visions by the different church leaders.<sup>422</sup>

For the most parts, these garments and cloths, whether tailored or untailored, convey messages that relate qualities and colour of the textiles to specific moral states. Virtues such as purity, goodness, light as against darkness, etc. are all implied or subsumed in the use of white garments by churches. It must be noted that, even in churches that use white garments, white is not the only colour in use. Other colours are purple, blue, black, red,

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<sup>422</sup>See for instance W.F. Sosan, one of the founders of the Cherubim and Seraphim Church, claimed to have received visions on the use of white garment in the Church. Her special collection is available at the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Similar claims were made by founders of Celestial Church of Christ, Church of the Lord, Aladura, etc.

etc. Purple, for instance, is used by the Bishop in the Anglican Church, black by others in the laity; while white or blue garments (cassocks) are used by many of the churches as uniforms for their priests, monks, nuns, priests, fathers, sisters, etc.

Moses Orimolade, after a week-long fasting and praying session, claimed to have received directives from God through a vision to sew and wear white garments in much the same way as the attire worn by angels described as being “in a white robe and feather”.<sup>423</sup> Unlike traditional religious worshippers who used untailored and stitch-less wrappers, the Christians use tailored garments and Western dress.

The use of white garments among Christians was orchestrated in Yorubaland by the Cherubim and Seraphim Church in Lagos in 1926. Major A.B. Lawrence was accredited with this development. He was noted to have received a vision from God where “*the pattern of the dress was revealed to him*”. As Omoyajowo had noted, these were cassocks with different but specially designed adornments to signify ranks and statuses within the congregation. While it was claimed that the white garment was revealed through vision, nothing is known about the provenance of the different but specially designed adornments signifying statuses and ranks.

In the book of Revelation 7:9, 13-14, it was written:

*After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on the earth or sea or against any tree... After this I looked and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands. Then one of the elders addressed me, saying, “Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?” “I said to him, “Sir, you know. “And he said to me, “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.*

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<sup>423</sup> Omoyajowo J.A., *Cherubim and Seraphim: The History of an African Independent Church*, (New York, 1982), 45.

Cherubim and Seraphim and many other white garment churches in Yorubaland have claimed that the use of white garments relates to those standing before Jesus Christ in the biblical passage above, whom Jesus had “*washed their robes and made them white*”. The specific description of the angels manning the ‘four corners of the earth’ as being four also relates to the four-sided caps of the prophets of white garment churches across Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria. The un-seamed sleeves, usually draping down over the hands of these prophets relates to the wings of the Cherubs. The beauty of the Cherubs is also replicated in the prophets’ garments by adding shinning materials or covered with sequins.

To show statuses, cadre, and hierarchy; different materials, including sashes, colour, and insignias, are added to these garments. In some churches, prayer-warrior group has specially designed oftentimes red sashes. More often than not, flaming swords, like that of Angel Michael, are woven into the sashes. In some cases, biblical passages are woven into either the caps or sashes. All these attachments made possible the identification of different church members by their groups, cadres, and statuses.

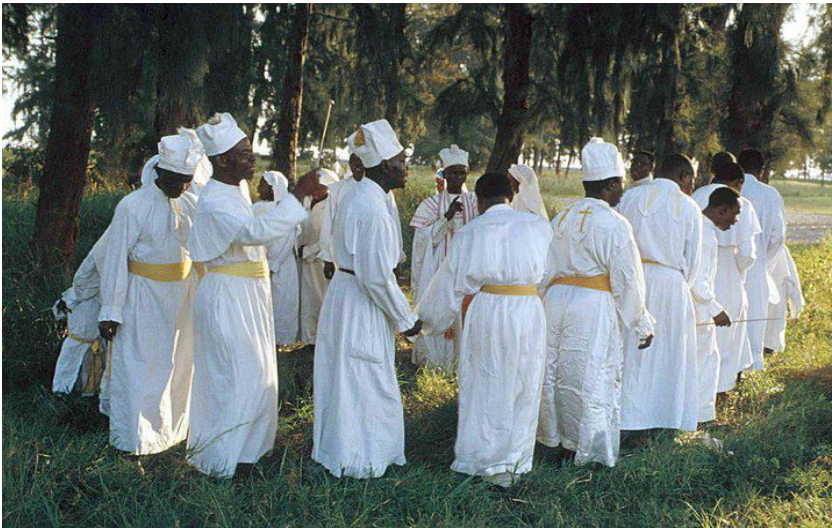
As distinct from other white garment churches in Yorubaland, the Celestial Church of Christ is a sect that is very finicky about its choice of colours. The colour white to them is of supreme importance, as it symbolizes the purity of God to which they jointly aspire. Although other shades of colours are used in worship by this sect, as markers of holy spaces and as insignia that differentiate one sub-group from others within the larger community of worshippers, the colours black and red are decidedly rejected and rebuffed. The colour blue is also important in the church as it marks out the prophets and prophetesses, and the colour is exclusively used by them. Their loin girdle is entirely of blue colour. No other sub-group is allowed to use it.<sup>424</sup>

Material distinctions also exist in some churches where white garments are not used, especially in Pentecostal churches. In most of these churches, the clergy and, for the most part, the

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<sup>424</sup> Interview with Mr. Adegoke Oluwasegun Sameul, Ibadan, Oyo State, 29 December 2011.

congregation make use of what Schneider described as “dress for success” business suits. While this may convey a different message when compared with the white garments of say the Cherubim and Seraphim churches, it must be noted that the use of dress to signify holiness and other existential values is also common with Pentecostal churches despite the pretension that these churches are different from the white garment churches. For instance, while the white garment churches communicate the church’s concern with spiritual and secular holiness in their dress, Pentecostal churches with their business suits and holy handkerchiefs, which are most times ‘anointed’, ‘blessed’, or infused with ‘holy oil’, are also concerned with prosperity and modern global connections.<sup>425</sup>



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<sup>425</sup>Elisha P. Renne, “Let Your Garment’, 141.









**A cross section of Cherubim & Seraphim worshippers.  
(Sources: Personal collections)**

**(The caps and sashes denote ranks and statuses in the church)**



**Miss Seyi Adegoke, a Celestial Church of Christ worshipper in  
her white garment (Sources: Personal collections)**



**A Cherubim & Seraphim worshiper with glittering objects fixed to her dress**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

In both the orthodox (Catholics, Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, etc.), Pentecostal and white garment churches; choristers have distinct robes, which differs markedly from other cloths used by the congregation. While in orthodox churches, the use of long, flowing robe is commonplace; in Pentecostal churches, the use of business suits, shirt and trousers, skirt and blouse as well as vests are commonplace. Whether in orthodox, white garment or Pentecostal churches; the primary aim of using specific uniform is to differentiate the choir from other functionaries of the church. As a religious dress, choristers' robes are mainly for worship and differ markedly from individual's dress.

In contemporary Yorubaland, it is common to see groups and societies within churches using specially selected dress for important church occasions. For instance, the youth group may decide to use a vest with the crest of the association to celebrate

Easter or Harvest or a Youth Week. Similarly, choirs in most Pentecostal churches today are de-emphasizing the use of robes for either Western or hybrid dress. As Marshal and Fratani had argued, the predilection of one group or the other within a church to dress either in Western mode or Yorùbá indigenous dress mode depends on the individual church founders. Owing to the fact that most, if not all, Pentecostal churches in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria are founded and administered by individuals, it is more likely that the dress sense of such individuals would direct what forms of dress would be considered as appropriate in such churches. For example, Pastor Chris Oyakhilome, the founder of Christ Embassy Church and Believers' Love World Ministry, usually dress in Western dress, comprising almost entirely of a three-piece business suit. His pastors and congregations have not only turned the use of Western dress to a kind of a culture in the church but also the wearing of jerry-curly, even by males just like Pastor Chris. Similarly, the conservative nature of Christ Apostolic Church founder, Apostle Joseph Ayo Babalola, can be seen in the mode of dress of pastors and members of the church worldwide today. They take pride in dressing simply, without jewelry, braiding of hairs by the females, etc.

It must be noted that while conservatively dressed churches are daily losing the youths to Pentecostal and business suit-pastored churches; more and more older people, driven by one problem or the other, are flocking daily to white garment churches, even if they also feature in Pentecostal churches periodic programmes.



**Pastor E. A. Adeboye, (General Overseer, Redeemed Church)**



**Pastor Chris Okotie, (General Overseer, House of God Church)**



**Pastor W.F. Kumuyi**  
(General Overseer, Deeper Life Bible Church)



**Bishop David Oyedepo** (General Overseer, Winner's Chapel)



**Pastor Chris Oyakhilome,**  
(General Overseer, Christ Embassy Church)



**Pastor Tunde Bakare,** (General Overseer, Latter Rain Assembly)

**Sources:** <http://www.latterrainassembly.org/> ;  
<http://www.christembassy.org/site/home>;  
<http://www.davidoyedepoministries.org/#>; <http://www.dclm.org/>;  
<http://www.householdofgodchurch.com/rev.html>; <http://rccg.org/>

It must be emphasized that Pentecostal church leaders and pastors' obtuse fascination with European dress completely negates the contentions of their forebears who, as demonstrated in Chapter Six, fought with the earliest missionaries who tried to impose European dress on them. As the above photographs showed, most Pentecostal church leaders and pastors regaled in European dress and so also their congregations. In addition to this is the tendency by these church leaders and pastors to project Yorùbá dress in bad light, giving it negative connotations, which, with their use of European dress, serves to push Yorùbá dress to the background.

From the foregoing, it can be argued that although Christianity witnessed a robust display of nationalism during the second period, this nationalistic fervor could not however displace the use of Western dress, especially among the Yorùbá Christians in Nigeria. While the youths have found a judicious use of Western and hybrid dress modes in the Christian faith, the adults still regard and therefore use Yorùbá indigenous dress not just at important church programmes but also on daily basis for Sundays and mid-week church programmes. This accommodation between Western, hybrid, and Yorùbá dress constitute a layer of identity for the Yorùbá people, which is not replicated in Northern Nigeria where Islam is the predominant religion or in Eastern Nigeria, where Christianity is the predominant religion.

### **5.3. Conclusion: Omoluabi in Yorùbá Contemporary Dress Culture**

From facial marks to clothes, body arts to other additions and/or supplements to the human body; every item of contemporary Yorùbá dress evinces the individual and group social requirement of being an *Omoluabi*. Despite social, political, and economic changes, which were first occasioned by Islam, and later by the



duo of Christianity and colonialism; contemporary Yorùbá sartorial tradition still reflects the existential values of being urbane, gentle, wise, intelligent, and being well brought up as well as being highly cultured. As far as Yorùbá people are concerned, indigenous and traditional Yorùbá dress speaks about being good, being morally upright and being affirmative of Yorùbá culture.

Diametrically opposed to the above view to Yorùbá sartorial tradition is also the view that converts should dress the way they want to be addressed. This view, made popular by contemporary suit-wearing, Pentecostal Christians, made all other sartorial traditions also capable of reflecting the value of being an *Omoluabi*. As a result, contemporary Christians, especially the youths, have come to regard Islamic and European sartorial traditions as also capable of evincing the internal value of being an *Omoluabi* in the same manner as Yorùbá sartorial tradition does.

As a result of this, contemporary Yorùbá sartorial tradition has become not just a blend of indigenous Yorùbá culture and an agglomeration of Islamic/Arabic, Asian and European cultures, but also a blend of Yorùbá, Islamic, and European values.

As seen in this and the previous chapters; most of what today could be described as indigenous Yorùbá dress has given way to different dress cultures, all of which have become traditional to Yorubaland. Whether for religious or secular use, Yorùbá dress not only covers human nakedness, but also plays existential roles in connoting, establishing and reinforcing individual and group multi-layered identities.

The various changes orchestrated by contacts with outsiders not only produced changes in fashion and materials used in dress tradition, but also allowed individuals and groups in Yorubaland to use dress to search for new meanings and languages through which they repudiate preceding generations while distinguishing theirs.<sup>426</sup> The adaptation and incorporation of Arab and European dress cultures into the fabric of Yorùbá dress culture and the long usage of this multi-layered dress cultures by the Yorùbá not only allowed for intergenerational dialogue, but also

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<sup>426</sup>Fernand Braudel, *Capitalism and Material Life, 1400-1800*, (trans. Miriam Kochan; New York, 1967), 236.

assured a revolution that changes indigenous dress to traditional dress in Yorubaland.

As the analysis in this chapter has shown, contacts with other peoples, the imposition and or adoption of their sartorial traditions, and globalization of labour, culture, etc. have altered Yorùbá sartorial culture tremendously. However, change from Yorùbá 'indigenous' dress and the evolution of 'traditional' Yorùbá dress can be described as attempts by indigenous Yorùbá sartorial culture to re-assert its cherished and underlying values in the face of a hegemonic culture, whose impact Yorùbá culture finds very strong. By blending its esteemed values, most especially those related to possessing a moral, cultural, social, and intellectual refinement, high sense of responsibility, social integrity, being lofty in speech and respectful to others, being good minded and truthful, having good taste in socio-political manners, speech, and dress, being brave and intelligent, etc. with what is considered valuable from other sartorial traditions; Yorùbá sartorial culture seeks to assert that dress, far from its biological uses, makes enduring statements about character, social, religious, and political identity either of individuals or groups.

## Chapter Six

### The Politics of Power and Resistance in Yorùbá Dress

#### 6.0. Introduction

From the introduction, adoption, and diffusion of Islamic/Arabs' dress culture to the use of Christian/European dress, originally introduced to Yorubaland by returned ex-slaves and, later, as uniforms in the colonial native administration service and also in the church, emphasis is placed on the different dress cultures, which these different but mutually reinforcing socio-economic, political and cultural changes introduced into Yorubaland. The chapter examines how the Yorùbá people reacted to these 'new' dress cultures. For instance, while Oba Kosoko, among many others, was noted for wearing 'formal' European suit to high class Portuguese dinner in mid-19th century; Dr. Mojola Agbebi and Sapara Williams were icons in the agitation for Yorùbá dress and language during the same period.

As Chapter Four has shown, varieties of reasons drive dress-use. Generally speaking, dress-use could be for religious or secular reasons or the admixture of both. Whether for religious or secular use; Yorùbá dress possesses the innate quality of establishing, expressing, and reinforcing power both at the individual and group levels. Power, as this chapter will show, has been expressed in multiplicity of forms: power inherent in a particular dress, socio-economic and political power of dress-users, power associated with the especial circumstances necessitating the use of dress, etc. As far as the Yorùbá people are concerned, the totality of the above plays important roles in their personal conception and expression as individuals, and their collective expression and affiliation as a group. In this chapter, the study examines how Yorùbá people use dress to encapsulate and express power. The chapter looks at, among other things, how dress has become a locus of power through which individual and collective identities are expressed. It also examines how nudity, understood simply as state of 'not wearing cloth' has been used as a form of

protest 'dress', especially in politics and governance in Yorubaland.

Given the multi-layered changes orchestrated by Islam, Christianity and colonialism examined in the last chapter, this chapter looks the various ways Yorùbá people responded, especially as the responses contributed to how a people make meanings, develop consumption pattern, and make use of commodities as resources in the meaning making process. Two layers of responses were considered: political response, which was entirely dominated by the males, and the social, which was essentially dominated by the females. In all, the chapter not only show these various expressions of power symbolized by dress, but also the various ways the Yorùbá, as individual and as a people, have reacted to these varying expressions of power through dress.

### **6.1. Dress as Locus of Power**

For the Yorùbá, the spiritual and physical are intertwined. Events, phenomena, and everyday life are believed to possess both physical and spiritual components. Success or positive result in any of these is believed to have occurred either by luck or by the dominance of positive spiritual forces over the physical. Disease of any kind is believed to have both a physical and a spiritual component. While drugs and other physical care may result in a cure, it is believed that such cure only applies to the physical component of such ailment; only a spiritual solution can achieve a total cure and it is therefore prescribed and sought. More than anything else, spiritual cure is believed to be more efficacious than physical cure. For any physical cure to achieve a lasting result, it must be guided by the spiritual. It is believed that the spiritual controls the physical and, as such, getting a spiritual control of anything is a one-stop activity to attain success. Physical actions, for the most part, are regarded as mere palliative and not total actions that are capable of yielding tangible results.

Power, understood broadly as a person or a group's ability to carry out an action or a person or a group's ability to control other people or group and their activities, is both secular and spiritual in Yorùbá worldview. For the Yorùbá people, the greatest power is the spiritual power. Secular power, like those wield by political office-holders, is regarded as containing both a secular

component and a spiritual component. While the secular component is bestowed by communities; the deities, gods, and goddesses bestow spiritual power. Obas, chiefs, especially high chiefs, priests and priestesses, are believed to possess spiritual powers which are bestowed on them by the deities, gods, and goddesses. Others, who may have been appointed into office by the community, are believed to possess secular powers. More often than not, those that are regarded as holding spiritual powers often have hereditary offices, as the spiritual power associated with their offices are regarded as transferrable from father or mother to sons or daughters.

Some offices, such as those of kings, are believed to be both spiritual and secular. Kings, for instance, are members of all cults and esoteric bodies, whether open or secret. They are also patrons to all associations, clubs and guilds. Hence, the appellation, *Oba, oko ilu* - the king, the husband or father of the entire town – is a critical part of the kings' cognomen all over Yorubaland. Consequently, Yorùbá kings are, officially, members of all religions in Yorubaland even though they may have their personal religions.

In addition to the above, it must be emphasized that elaborate traditions and institutions exist everywhere in Yorubaland establishing and reinforcing this belief and ensuring its continuance. For instance, before a king is installed in Oyo, as in other Yorùbá communities, consultation and approval of the *Ifa* oracle must be sought and obtained. In addition, state gods, priests, and priestesses abound in all Yorùbá communities, and with the priests and priestess serving as media; the Obas and chiefs must consult these gods and goddesses on all important state affairs. In Ile-Ife, it is believed that deity-worship of different kind involving the *Ooni* takes place each day except for one day in a year. In addition to the above, the different deities, gods, and goddesses also inform the Obas and chiefs of any important oracular messages that may result occasionally or as the deities, gods, and goddesses may command. Hence, it could be said that there is a strong link between the secular and the religious in Yorubaland. This spiritual asset therefore affords and assures the Obas, chiefs, priests and priestesses' ready obedience of their subjects and devotees in all matters – religious and secular - as directives and

orders are taken as proceeding from the deities, gods, and goddesses.

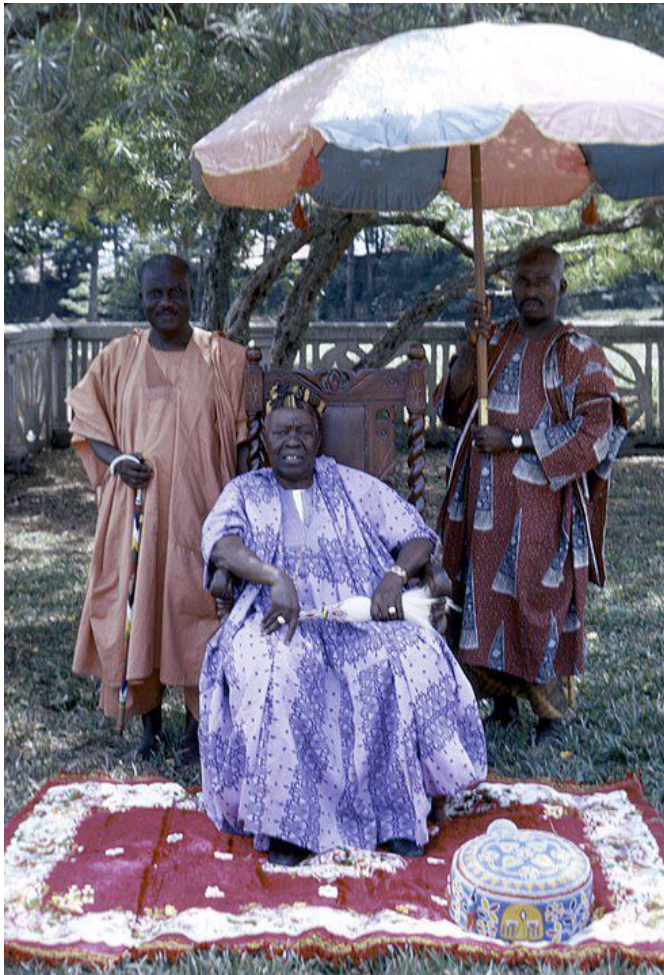
Intricately tied to the power of the Obas, chiefs, priests, and priestesses in Yorubaland is also their respective dress, as some of these items are regarded not just as dress items associated with their offices but also symbols of their authority, which aid their effective and efficient functioning as state officials. For the Obas, the crown is not just a head-dress with which a king is distinguished from other state officials, but also an instrument of office. The *Akun* beads decorate and beautify the chiefs just like the crown, but also serve the chiefs as an instrument of office without which a chief is not more than a mere commoner. As noted in chapter four, the role of an *Ad'osu Sango* is not solely to inter-mediate between worshippers and the deity, but also only an *Ad'osu* can stand before *Sango*. It must be re-emphasized that both farmers and hunters barb *Osu* hair style; hence, the strict adherence to *Osu* by *Sango* worshippers not only reinforces the belief in the deity, but also the primary importance *Sango* worshippers placed on the nexus between the deity, its worships, and its votaries.

This duality – spiritual and physical – manifests even in immaterial things. A hunter whose gun malfunctioned in the forest is expected to consult the oracle and to sacrifice to *Ogun*, the god of iron. When an apprentice driver is certified by his master to have mastered the skill well enough to be independent, such candidate is expected to sacrifice to *Ogun*. In contemporary Yorubaland, it is common to refer to dogs as *eran Ogun*, *Ogun's* meat, and also to sacrifice dogs to anything made of iron. The practice is premised on the belief that by giving *Ogun* his favorite meat, dog; good fortune is assured.

Similar belief is shared among the Yorùbá about dress. For the most part, the conceptualization of things, events and material things like dress not only recognizes this duality, but also respects it. In the specific case of dress, it must be asserted that while specific dress may be exclusively tied to the worship of specific gods, goddesses, and deities; others may be used simply in commemorating specific religious events. In most instances, dresses that are regarded as integral to religious worship are kept aside for just the religious worship. Whereas if a dress is just used

in religious ceremony, the same dress may also serve the individual or group as everyday dress.

Below is the photograph of a late King of Ile-Ife. As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photograph below was taken, where it was taken, who took it and why, which could help in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that the photo illustrates different uses of Yorùbá dress.



**Ooni Adesoji Aderemi, 1971**

(Sources: Palace Album, Enuwa, Ile-Ife)

In addition to the above, it must be noted that from cloth production to cloth usage; there are elaborate spiritual and secular ceremonies associated with the different stages or processes of dress-use. To illustrate this, the example of *ashigbo*, one of the five clothes use for funerary purposes in *Owo*, is considered below.

Although *ashigbo*, a cloth of black and white warp stripes of varying widths, is regarded as the most important funerary cloth in *Owo*, generally, the production of all the funerary cloths in *Owo* involves elaborate rituals, with specific demands and prescriptions placed on the cloth-weaver, his or her people, and the wearer. Soon after the death of the *Olowo* or any of the other important chiefs, funerary cloths must be commissioned. As part of the production processes; parts of the loom are carried shoulder-high by the women as (funeral) ceremonial accessories. In particular, the women carry the *apasaa*, beaters or swords, as they sing, dance, and parade around the city. Also as part of the production processes, the women's clothes are folded and, as they go along the street, the clothes are pounded rhythmically to serve as accompaniment for women's singing groups.

Historically, *Ashigbo* was brought to *Owo* by a slave woman captured by the *Ugwaba*, who was a sub-chief of *Sashere*, the war chief of *Owo*.<sup>427</sup> Today, both families - the families of the *Ugwaba* and *Sashere* - share ownership rights to *ashigbo*. Although other people in *Owo* may weave and use *ashigbo*, permission must be sought and obtained from the *Ugwaba* and *Sashere* families and the proper fees and rituals are performed.

To ask for the permission, the cloth-weavers must bring their beaters or swords with elaborate dancing to the *Sashere* family. All those who will participate in the weaving must accompany the head of the household to the *Sashere* house, dancing and singing. In addition to these, the family of the deceased must present the *Sashere* family with 200 each of the following items: plantains, bean cakes, sticks of sugar cane, eggs, kola-nuts, and numerous other things.<sup>428</sup>

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<sup>427</sup> Historically, Chief *Sashere* was one of the greatest war chiefs in ancient *Owo*.

<sup>428</sup> Frank Willett, 'On the funeral Effigies of *Owo* and *Benin* and the Interpretation of the Life-size Bronze Heads from *Ife*, *Nigeria*', *Man*, 1:1, (1966), 34-35.



At the Sashere house, the deceased family would inform the *Sashere* family that: “*In seventeen days’ time I shall be using ashigbo.*” This would be repeated three times and positive answers must be received three times before permission is believed to have been granted. If the response to the request was positive three times, then, the family head of the deceased’s household presses his palms against the wall of the Sashere house saying: “*As the wall stands, so must I stand with Sashere and Ugwaba.*” By so doing, the family has pledged their loyalty and (political) support for these two chiefs.

After obtaining the consent of the Sashere family head or chief, the thread to be used in making the cloth is divided among the several generations of weavers in the family. It is after this is done that the actual weaving of the cloth can begin. In total, the work must be done over a nine-day period. During these nine days, the weavers must be clean, spiritually and physically. To be clean spiritually and physically, they must avoid sexual intercourse with their husbands; must not menstruate, must always bathe before touching the cloth, must ensure that the courtyard where the weaving takes place is scrubbed daily, etc.

All through the nine days, the deceased family must ensure regular supply of food to the weavers. Foods regarded as *sine-qua-non* to *ashigbo* production include yams, plantains, corn, sugar cane, antelope meat, bean cakes, etc. All food must be freshly prepared and foods that were prepared the previous day must not be eaten by the weavers. In addition to these requirements, the weavers must stage daily processions around the town, singing and dancing.

To ensure conformity to standard, the females of the house of Sashere must visit the house of the deceased and the weavers on the seventh day. If the weaving does not meet the required standard or if any of the ritual prohibitions have been violated, the Sashere women may slash the fabric from the looms. If it meets their approval, they return to the Sashere, who gives the final approval for the use of the *ashigbo*. Once the final approval to use the cloth has been given by the Sashere, the women, once again, take to the streets rejoicing, dancing, and singing.

Where permission is not given for the cloth production (or where the weaving fails to pass the test of standardization), and the

deceased family decided to proceed with the cloth production or where no attempt was made to seek and obtain the permission of these two families before the cloth was made, the family of *Sashere* reserves the rights to deal with the culprits as they see fit and the cloth may be confiscated. Given the above production procedure and rituals, wearers of *ashigbo* are treated with veneration, and no *ashigbo* wearer may prostrate before another person, not even before the *Olowo*.<sup>429</sup>

Another dimension of power of dress deals with belief that major centers of dress production are imbued with spiritual essence and that the very act of dress making is controlled by the deities, gods, and goddesses. As such dress is considered to have shared in the spiritual powers and qualities of the various deities, gods, and goddesses associated with these centers. For instance, tie-and-dye, which is the major craft in Abeokuta and Oshogbo, and through which most of Yorùbá dress is made, is believed to be controlled by *Orisa Osun*, *Iya Mopo*, and *Obalufo*. These two goddess and deity are believed to be behind the dexterity in crafts and dress-making by men and women all over Yorubaland.

Oshogbo's eponymous name, *Oshogbo ilu aro, oroki asala*<sup>430</sup>, reveals two important things about Oshogbo. One, it is believed to be the birthplace of tie and dye and it could be argued that the production of tie and dye spread from Oshogbo to other Yorùbá towns and cities, especially as no other Yorùbá towns and cities is given similar appellation. The second thing in the eponymous name is Oshogbo's place as a city of refuge, especially for displaced people, fugitive and criminals.

The story of the founding of Oshogbo is also illustrative of the role of Oshogbo in dress-making in general. The story was told that a certain Laro, accompanied by the hunter, Timenyin, set out from Ile-Ife to find water for their people at a time of great drought and they came to a lush river surrounded by much vegetation and many trees. Laro and Timenyin considered the place an ideal location to settle their people and began clearing the bush and cutting down the trees. One of the trees fell across the river and, as

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<sup>429</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>430</sup> Joni L. Jones, 'Performing Osun without Bodies: Documenting the Osun Festival in Print', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, vol. 17 (1997), 73.

it fell, a voice rose from the river, the voice of Osun, saying, among other things, “*You bad people! You have broken all my pots of dye! You have spilled them all!*”<sup>431</sup> Osun therefore warned them to move away from her territory to a not too distant place near the river. She promised to reward them with abundance and protection should they do this. She argued that they would be disturbing her solitude should they stay at the river bank. She ordered that, in turn for protection and abundance, they have to worship her yearly at the river bank. Laro and Timeyen agreed and Oshogbo was born.<sup>432</sup>

It was believed that tie and dye was first introduced to the Oshogbo women by Osun after their settlement, and that the spread of the craft was as a result of trade relations, labour migration (in and out of Oshogbo), and craft training.<sup>433</sup>

In yet another account, *Iya Moopo*, the ancient supreme trinity of the female, which bore the totemic features of *Iyamowo*, *Iyalode*, and Nana Ibukun, was believed to be the patron goddess of all female’s crafts and trades. Represented by the *Edon*, the sacred bronze casting, *Iya Moopo*, holds one child close to her breast while tying the other one on her back with a sash and with the child’s head downward and the feet pointing upward. *Iya Moopo* is a potter woman, reputable for moulding forms around pre-existing holes or spaces. The story is told about Orisa Ajagemo, whose core ritual takes place in Ede. Ajagemo was said to have seen a potter woman at work and painfully asked: “*Which is older, the pot or the hole inside it?*” The simple answer given by the potter woman was: “*Don’t ask what you know: it is the hole.*”<sup>434</sup>

To *Iya Moopo*, all bodies are pots and form is a latter addition. In Yorùbá cosmogony, the potter-wheel, which is represented by the navel, stands still while the potter woman circles round it with all her body in controlled relaxation preserving the idea of form. *Iya Moopo* is also in-charge of all women’s trades, childbearing and birth. She is consequently a sister to another deity, *Iyemowo* and close to *Odu* with thought and

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<sup>431</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>434</sup> Ibid, 75.

word formation. She is a cotton spinner and weaver (cloth and hair) as she also cooks (black) soap and palm-oil. In addition and more absurd, she is also the patron goddess of robbers and thieves as she is the owner of the indigo dye, which is black and obscure in darkness.<sup>435</sup>

Far and above *Osun* and *Iya Moopo* is *Obalufon*, the legendary early ruler of Ile-Ife who is credited with the invention of brass-casting. *Obalufon*, in consonance with the *Ogboni*, are the principal patrons of the arts in Yorubaland, especially brass-casting, bead-works and cloth-weaving. *Obalufon*, who ruled Ile-Ife briefly before he was deposed, resumed his rule after intense battle with Oranmiyan. The peace that characterised his second tenure and his death was so eventful that it not only gave the inhabitants the enabling environment to practice their crafts, but also enabled the *Ogboni*, which was believed to have been founded under *Obalufon*, to flourish and gain legitimacy and considerable power at the palace. Their arts – bronze-casting, weaving (hair and cloths) and bead-works – flourished during this period that there is no mentioning of any of these without any reference to *Obalufon* and the *Ogboni* in Yorùbá history.

*Obalufon*, like other kings in Yorubaland, was deified at his death. Idowu noted that *Obalufon* is one of the divinities worshipped at Ile-Ife and all over Yorubaland, but that rather than being a god, *Obalufon* began as an ancestor.<sup>436</sup> Although Ile-Ife remains the most important center for the worship of *Obalufon*, however the dispersal of *Obalufon* worship, unlike *Osun* and *Iya Moopo* which followed trade, was as a result of dispersal from Ile-Ife. In the first place, when *Obalufon* was dethroned during his first reign in Ile-Ife, he fled to the Ekiti areas where he is referred to and worshipped variously as *Obalifon*, *Abalufon*, *Abalifon*, etc. After his death, his descendants were believed to have migrated from Ile-Ife to many other places, where they set-up shrines for the worship of their father. Among many other places, places where they settled and where *Obalufon* is worshipped today include Ido-Osun, near Oshogbo; Isesa, Igbokiti, Igbo Oyao, Ido Osun, Ijebu, Sagamu, etc.

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<sup>435</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>436</sup> Ibid, 75.

Although *Obalufon* is known majorly as the divinity in-charge of war and peace; he is however the patron gods of bronze-casters, bead-makers, and weavers (cloth and hair) all over Yorubaland.

From the above, it can be argued that from Oshogbo to Ekiti, Ondo to Ilorin, *Osun*, *Iya Mopo*, and *Obalufon* are believed to be the goddesses and deity in-charge of tie and dye, bronze-casting, bead-works, weaving, pottery making, etc. Invariably, the worship of these goddesses and deity is common in the major center for the production of *Adire*, *Ofi*, *Alari*, *Ide*, etc.

It must be added that the worship of gods, goddesses and deities associated with dress-production is not limited to these three; elaborate worship is offered to *Olokun*, *Sango*, *Ogun*, *Oya*, among many others. Robert Farris Thompson, writing about the relationship between *Obalufon* and bead-making, noted that like other men desirous of being noticed, *Obalufon* invented the beads and strung them in different colours on bracelets and necklaces so that gods, and men who follow them, might stand in proud distinction in a crowd. Although *Obalufon* is credited with bead-making, it must be however noted that beadwork is often associated with *Olokun*.<sup>437</sup>

One of the factors determining which of the gods, goddesses, and deities is deserving of worship in relation to any dress is the relationship between these god, goddesses, and deities and the implements or tools used in the production of such dress. For instance, *Ogun*, earlier mentioned, is important not only to hunters and blacksmiths, but also farmers, weavers, and bronze-casters. This is so because all the implements or tools used by these professions depend on iron tools. As such, each centers of dress production have gods, goddesses and deities associated with their crafts and these divinities enjoyed daily and periodic worship in return for success and dexterity in the production of the different crafts.

The Yorùbá people also believe that there is a tenuous link between individuals' spirituality and his or her physical materials. Oba Oyewale Matanmi III described it in these words:

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<sup>437</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, *Black Gods and Kings: Yoruba Art at UCLA*, (Los Angeles, 1976), 1-8.

*I found it difficult to separate the two. The physical materials enhanced the spiritual and the spiritual is deepened by the physical materials. Traditional religion is also your culture. It is a synthesis of culture and religion. The physical is one continuous though physical materials melds culture and religion or the physical materials and spiritual ones together; thereby making physical materials and spiritual ones inseparable.*<sup>438</sup>

Owing to the above, it is believed that individuals' dresses are imbued with their spiritual essences and, as such, the Yorùbá would rather burn an old cloth than give such cloth out to other people, especially when these are not members of the same immediate family. Religious votaries, herbalists, seers, and diviners believe in the potency of their dresses so much so that the presence of the dresses is believed to confer potency on any action being undertaken and also confirm the presence of specific deities, gods, and goddesses in any event. In most cases, kings and chiefs are believed to be physically present not because they may have one or two person representing them at a ceremony, but when one of their instruments of office, such as the staff, the crown, or the king's wife, is in attendance.

Another dimension to this is that the different deities, gods, and goddesses have specific colour and other dress items that are culturally assigned to them. While red colour is regarded as Ogun's colour, black is considered as Sango's colour. White belongs to *Osun*, *Olokun*, *Obatala*, etc. While devotees of any of the deities, gods, and goddesses may use any colour for their secular enterprises, they are duty-bound to use the colour of dress that is associated with their specific deities, gods, and goddesses for religious ceremonies. However, in secular existence, black is synonymous with death, sadness, and sorrow. Red is synonymous with life and vitality while other bright colours are also imbued with different other meanings. Notwithstanding this, black and red are regarded as also symbol of age. So, it is common to find in some Yorùbá communities red and black dress been venerated.

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<sup>438</sup> Joni L. Jones, "'Performing Osun without bodies', 83-84.

In some cases, diviners, seers, and herbalists often prescribed the use of certain dress by worshippers to propitiate the gods and goddesses. Black dress is used mainly for funeral, although cults and secret societies also use black dress. Funerary rites, especially of members of secret societies and cults, involve the wearing and displaying of dresses of different colour, with black as the predominant colour. In this way, the Yorùbá differentiates between religious dress and secular dress. Religious dress is believed to have imbibed the spiritual power of the deities, gods, and goddesses and is, as such, treated with reverence.

Among the *Ogboni*, *Oososi*, and other secret societies and cults in Yorubaland, specific dress is regarded as exclusive to the societies and cults. For instance, no other person can use the *Itagbe*, no matter how highly placed or wealthy. In addition to the above, it must be noted also that some dress are forbidden to people on account of religion. For instance, beads, such as *kele*, *sese-efun*, and many others are exclusively used by Sango and Osun worshippers. While these may not have been codified, they were mutually intelligible cultural norms among the Yorùbá.

From the above, power is located in dress in two distinct ways: power inherent in a particular dress due to its close association with a particular deity, gods, and goddesses; or power associated with exclusive utilization of certain dress. While priests and priestesses of deities, gods, and goddesses may use dress that are exclusive to their deities, gods, and goddesses and therefore are separated from other worshippers and believers; both the votaries and the worshippers may use dress that are considered as laden with spiritual powers.

Although no written sumptuary laws existed anywhere in pre-19<sup>th</sup> century Yorubaland, however, there existed culturally imposed sumptuary laws, which aimed at controlling excessive dressing. Adages such as '*Ibere osi, bi oloro ni ri; ti wo aso ile r'oko*' (It is poverty that forces a poor man to wear his best cloths to the farm); '*Eni ti ko se bi alaarú l'Oyingbo, ko le se bi Adegboro l'Oja Oba*' (He that would not labour at Oyingbo market, would not purchase anything at King's Market); '*O wu imado ko se bi elede, iwo ori re ni koje*', '*Dandogo ko ja abi nu da*', etc. are pointers to the need to dress according to one's station in life and according to societal bounds of decorum. However, it

must be noted that in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Ibadan, *Are Latosisa*, (also spelt as *Latosia*) the ruler of Ibadan of the period, attempted to introduce sumptuary laws by forbidding every other person except himself from using velvet and some other costly items of clothing. The story is told of a certain aberrant Ife soldier, also at Ibadan, who defied *Latosisa* and was, consequently, banished. It must be pointed out that this lone example can be arrogated to the confused state of things necessitated by the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yorùbá civil wars and the military nature of Ibadan itself.

Custom forbids irresponsible dressing in Yorubaland, as the above adages have shown. As noted in the previous chapter, the use of dress during ceremonies also reflects the power dynamics associated with dress. For instance, the use of *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe 'Joda* may serve the purpose of differentiating the celebrants, his or her immediate nuclear and extended families, as well as his or her circle of friends; it also shows what power individuals wield as members of groups.

## **6.2. Nudity as Dress in Yorubaland**

Common to almost all groups and peoples in Africa is the fact that nudity is also regarded as dress and it is employed, most especially by the females, as a counter-check to male's socio-political dominance. Nudity, understood simply as the condition of being nude or being semi-nude, is used sometimes as a form of protest dress deployed as a tool of last resort in engaging with political power dominated by the male-folks.

Nudity as dress takes two forms: (i) as a political tool, usually wielded by the females, to ensure that the political class accede to a particular request, not necessarily requests made by the female folks, but those made by the generality of the society, especially when there is a stalemate between popular demands and political class' preferences; (ii) as a sign of sacredness of the human body. Here oath-taking and other (sacred or) religious activities, which placed unflinching importance on honesty, chastity, truthfulness, and absolute loyalty on the females are involved. For the most part, in establishing cases of adultery, a woman may be compelled to dance naked before a shrine. This often occurs when material evidence points to the woman as being guilty. So, in order to establish her innocence, such a woman may



be asked to dance naked before the shrine. In some instances, women have, uncompelled, strip naked before the deity, gods, or goddesses as a way of establishing their innocence. At yet another level, parents often threaten to or actually strip before their children, most especially when such children are incorrigible and behave, almost inconsolably, errantly. This is regarded as a curse in Yorubaland. The essence of such a practice is to force the erring children to adjust.

Historically, Yorùbá women have traditionally used access to and denial of their bodies as a form of protest for generations. In some cases, many used the threat or actual act of nakedness/undress or denial of sexual/conjugal relation as a form of tool for effective political engagement with the male.

In traditional Yorùbá society, it is a vote of no confidence passed by the female folks on the male folks and not just the wielders of power in the society; hence, the wielders of power are expected to vacate the throne. Other males in the society must ensure that this is done within seven days of the nude protests.

In pre-colonial Oyo Empire and prior to Bashorun Gaa's death, women of Oyo-Ile protested naked to show their rejection of Gaa's bestial rule. Bashorun Gaa, it must be noted, was not the Alaafin; he was the Head of the Oyo-Mesi, the seven most powerful chiefs who were responsible for installing and removing the Alaafin. Gaa's emergence as the head of the state was associated with his power and political influence. He manipulated his ways such that no Alaafin was installed and he acted as the Alaafin until his death. Gaa was a veritable terror, as such even after the nude protest by Oyo women; no one could face him to ask him to abdicate the throne. It took the young Alaafin-designate, Prince Abiodun and outside helps to rid the state of Gaa and ensure his coronation, as the people will.

In order words, nude protest was one of the extreme checks and balances put in place by the indigenous people to check arbitrary rule by the king in Old-Oyo. It must be noted that it is not in all cases where nude protests were carried out that the king must abdicate the throne. In most cases, the women themselves expressed the focus of their protests and agitation. The king is expected to ensure fulfillment of these desires, if not, he is expected to abdicate the throne, as the mothers of the state have, by

their action, pronounced the king as enemy of the state. So, it would be foolhardiness to allow any issue to degenerate into a situation whereby nude protests had to be staged before any Yorùbá king would know the general will. The state intelligence mechanism must be alert to state affairs and how the people are responding to them. Hence, the saying: '*Eti Oba, ni Ile, Eti Oba l' Oko; Eniyan lo nje be*' or '*Oba, abi eti lu kara bi ajere*' (state intelligence is insidious).

Nude protest as a measure to de-legitimize state power is not common in African history. In fact, no state could bear it, as it was considered a thing of shame and a taboo. As gathered in Ekiti, nude protest derived from a cultural milieu which regarded woman's nakedness as a virtue not only of the woman or her husband but also of her community. Hence, virginity is celebrated to the highest degree not only by brides on their wedding nights but also by the bride's immediate relations – parents, brothers, sisters, and community. Consequently, nude protest is treated as rape and sexual violence, an insult or assault not only on the woman but also on the community where she came from.

To illustrate with another example, in Apomu, a market town bordering Ile-Ife, a disagreement over the price of alligator pepper between one Owu man, Akogun, and an Ijebu female trader degenerated into an open fight. In the process, the trader's clothes loosened and she was stalk naked in the market. Other Ijebu persons in the market rose up to defend the naked Ijebu woman, as the act was translated as an insult not only on the woman but also on the Ijebu State. The fight was fierce and long. The Ijebu woman, who was pregnant, sustained mortal injury and died. On realizing that the woman was dead, other Ijebu people in the market abandoned their wares and fled to Ijebu Ode to report that the Owu were killing Ijebu people in Apomu. A war was raised not only by the Ijebu but by the entire Yorubaland against Owu. Owu was consequently sacked and an interdict was placed on it never to be inhabited again. While it could be argued that other issues added-up to the cause of the war against the Owu, it must be noted that Owu would have escaped punishment for its earliest actions if not for the case of the woman. Hence, the unwrapping of female body under abnormal circumstances deviates from the established

norm that such action is regarded as an aberration, which, if it involves another group, wars are usually declared.

In the 1930s, members and supporters of the Abeokuta Women's Union in Yorubaland walked naked in protest of the Alake of Abeokuta's political actions. Consequent upon this action, the *Oba* was forced to abdicate the throne and went on exile.

Between 1920 and 1936, Abeokuta, like other Yorùbá towns and cities, was integrated into the international economy both as an exporter of cash crops and an importer of manufactured products. It became one of the primary producing areas of cocoa and kola nuts in western Nigeria.<sup>439</sup> Abeokuta's integration into the international economy had a profound effect on its local textile industry. As weavers gained access to European threads and dyers gained access to European cloth, relations of production were transformed. Both sets of producers became dependent on European trading firms for their raw materials and were thus brought squarely into the nexus of international trade. Dyeing, which was predominantly a women's industry, benefited substantially from this economic relationship. Dyers' access to cloth as well as credit from the European firms allowed them to become autonomous producers of tie-dyed cloth, *adire*, which was in great demand across Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Senegal and the Belgian Congo.

From the mid-1920s onward, the *adire* industry experienced a dramatic decline which was largely shaped by falling commodity prices and the cycles of recession and depression that characterized the years between the First and Second World Wars. The prolonged economic crisis redefined the social and economic world of dyers and dyeing. Competing social groups, such as European traders and Egba men, used privileges based on class and gender to enhance or protect their economic position. As a result, dyers were left vulnerable and the gains they

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<sup>439</sup> B. A. Agiri, "Kola in western Nigeria, 1850-1950: A History Of the Cultivation of Cola Nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Ota Areas" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1972), and Sara Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* (Oxford, 1975).

had made as producers and women since the end of the nineteenth century became increasingly threatened. Conflicts also surfaced among dyers as those who shared the privilege of age and wealth tried to assert their control over the industry.

The most far-reaching initiative was the incorporation of new technologies, caustic soda and synthetic dyes, which had a dramatic impact on the dyeing industry. It exacerbated old tensions and created new ones while allowing dyers to increase production and cut costs. As the crisis deepened, many realized that these efforts did not improve their economic situation and called on the local government to intervene. Even without the dyers' encouragement, the Alake, the head of the local government, was motivated to take action because of consumer complaints about the quality of Abeokuta's *adire*.<sup>440</sup>

As the crisis deepened and the industry floundered, it became clear that individual approaches were hurting more than they were helping. As early as 1925, some dyers turned to the Alake, requesting help to regulate the industry.<sup>441</sup> The European firms also approached the Alake at the same time to encourage him to intervene in the industry. In the matter, the king was helpless, as he had to do the biddings of not just the European traders but also those of the colonial government, both of which ran counter to the wishes of the Abeokuta women. The Alake could not take action against the trading firms, but he could take action against the dyers. He, at the urging of the Resident, banned the use of caustic

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<sup>440</sup> In 1898, the Lagos governor helped restructure the Egba political system and centralized power in the Alake, one of the town's four senior kings. The Alake in theory ruled in consultation with a Council comprised of the other senior kings, military and non-military titled men. This structure was largely retained when Abeokuta lost its independence in 1914. See Agneta Pallinder-Law, 'Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914: with special reference to the Egba United Government, 1898-1914', (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Goteborg University, 1973). For more on the pre-colonial Egba political structure see Saburi Biobaku, 'An Historical Sketch of Egba Traditional Authorities', *Africa*, vol. XXII (1952), 35-49, and Saburi Biobaku, *The Egba and Their Neighbours, 1842-1872* (Oxford, 1957).

<sup>441</sup> No copy of the minutes of this meeting exist anymore, however, mention was made of it in the public meeting with the Adire dyers on 29 July 1927. Report of the Public Meeting of the Adire Women, 29 July 1927, Egba Administration Bulletin, 31 August 1927, 106.

soda in an attempt to regulate the trade. The ban, rather than alleviating the pains of the traders, exacerbated it and the women refused to obey the ban. Desirous of enforcing his rule; the Alake summoned a meeting with the women, with the Resident in attendance. The Alake not only insulted and cajoled the women to obey the ban, but also went as far as calling the women stubborn and lazy, 'unlike our industrious mothers of old'.<sup>442</sup> He likened them to a son who refused to heed his father's direction and was therefore on the road to ruin. The Resident, who was also present, compared the adire industry to the goose that laid the golden egg, and suggested that dyers were like the town's people in the fable who, overcome by their greed and selfish interest, killed the goose.<sup>443</sup>

Despite all the intimidation and cajoling, the women refused to obey the Alake. In reaction, on 12 February 1936, police began to arrest the dyers in large numbers and confiscated their cloths. On the following day, 1,500 dyers marched to the palace. During their confrontation, the Alake ordered the women to comply with the law and stop holding meetings about the issues. Yet, once again they ignored his orders. They continued to meet, and to do so without the senior chiefs from their quarters. Instead, they hired several male letter-writers and lawyers to represent them.<sup>444</sup> As these men began the process of publicizing the dyer's grievances, the Chief Secretary of the Government tried to downplay the dispute, but his efforts were hampered by the numerous letters and petitions the dyers' lawyers sent to each branch of government and the press.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>442</sup> National Archive Ibadan, (NAI), ECR 1/1/42, vol. II, Extract from Egba Native Authority's Minutes of Council Meeting, 8 Aug. 1935, 1.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>444</sup> Their representatives are Oladipo Somoye, a former clerk for UAC; M. A. Egberongbe, a former clerk for one of the Native Courts and John Holt and Co.; J. K. Doherty, a disbarred lawyer from Abeokuta; and William Geary, an English lawyer practicing in Lagos. See National Archive Ibadan, (NAI), ECR I/1/46, Letter from Resident to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 24th Apr. 1936.

<sup>445</sup> National Archive Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 28400, vol. 1, Letter from Somoye to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 6 Mar. 1936; see also National Archive Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 28400, vol. 1, Letter from Geary to the Chief Secretary to the Government, 20 Apr. 1936.

By April, it was quite clear that the dyers were not going to abide by Alake's ruling. In order to resolve the conflict, one side had to shift ground for the other. Either the Alake had to accept the women's claims that the new technologies were not the problem and lift the ban, or the women had to accept the Alake's rights to act unilaterally. Once it was obvious that the Alake was not ready to yield, the women took to the street naked; demanding that the Alake should abdicated the throne, as he had become not just ineffectual, but a stooge of a foreign power, which made him to rule against the wishes of his people. Although protected by the colonial government, the Alake however understood that his reign had ended, as the women had deployed the sacred, traditional tool against him.

The most recent women's involvement in political protest and struggle in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Nigeria is the Ekiti Women for Peace nude protest of 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009. Following the nullification of the electoral victory of Mr. Segun Oni of the ruling Peoples' Democratic Party at the Electoral Petition Tribunal, the Ekiti people were set for a re-run election in ten wards. Few weeks to the election, politicians from different parts of Nigeria converged on Ekiti to ensure adequate preparation for the re-run election. As the day of the re-run drew closer, the atmosphere became tense, as the ruling party and its main contender, the Action Congress Party, jostled for support. Midway into the election, the Resident Electoral Officer, Mrs. Aduke Adebayo, disappeared and the process was halted. Government initially reported that she took ill. Later, she sent in a resignation letter purporting that she was not ill but that she went underground as she was being forced to declare an unpopular candidate, which was against the wishes of Ekiti people, as expressed in the voting, and her conscience, as a Christian. For resigning and going underground; the police declared her wanted.

On the 29<sup>th</sup> April, 2009, half-naked Ekiti women marched on the streets of Ado-Ekiti and other parts of the state to protest an alleged attempt to subvert the electoral will of the people. They deplored the delay in announcing the winner of the April 25 governorship election rerun. They invoked the spirits of their ancestors against those "*who planned to announce the loser of the*

*election as the winner.*”<sup>446</sup> The peaceful protest by the placard-carrying women, under the aegis of Ekiti Women for Peace, paralyzed traffic on the major streets of Ado-Ekiti. Some of their placards read: “INEC, Announce Election Result Now”, “Prof Iwu, Be Warned”, “We Salute Mrs. Ayoka Adebayo’s Courage”, “Dr. Fayemi Won, No Magomago”, “Iwu, Stop Your Antics”, “VP Jonathan, Stop Your Imposition”, “Ayoka Adebayo, Heroine of Democracy” and “Prof Iwu, Fear God”<sup>447</sup>, among others.

The women, numbering about 300, and comprising of young mothers, school girls and aged women, also sang:



### **Nude Protest in Ekiti**

(Sources, *The Nation Newspaper*, 30 April, 2009)

*“Magbe, magbe o,  
Ibo Fayemi ko see gbe,  
Magbe, magbe”*

(Don’t steal it, don’t steal it,

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<sup>446</sup> ‘Women Protest’, *Nation Newspaper*, 30 April, 2009, 1, 2.

<sup>447</sup> *Ibid*, 1.

Fayemi's votes cannot be stolen,  
Don't steal it, don't steal it.)

*"Mayi, mayi o,  
Ibo Fayemi ko see yi,  
Mayi, mayi"*

(Don't manipulate it, don't manipulate it,  
Fayemi's votes cannot be manipulated,  
Don't manipulate it, don't manipulate it.)

Majority of the protesters wore white apparel and held white handkerchiefs, and their hair was uncovered. They said the Action Congress (AC) candidate, Dr. Kayode Fayemi, won the election and demanded that the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) should declare him as the winner.

The nude protest was organized by a group comprising of women from all the 16 local government areas in Ekiti State. They were led by the President of Ekiti Women for Peace, Mrs. Ronke Okusanya, herself. Also in the group was the wife of the AC candidate, Mrs. Olabisi Fayemi and the Governorship candidate's running mate, Mrs. Funmilayo Olayinka. According to Mrs. Okusanya, the women decided to go half-naked to press home the demand for the sanctity of their votes.<sup>448</sup> She added that the protest was a warning to election riggers and manipulators of the electoral will of the people that they could no longer get away with fraud.

While the outcome of the election is of secondary concern to this paper, it must be noted that Mrs. Aduke Adebayo later resurfaced, recanted her earlier position and declared the PDP candidate as the winner of the election. Notwithstanding this development, the Ekiti women's nude-protest re-enacted an age-old practice of unwrapping as a form of (en) gendering civil protest in Nigeria. While many people have berated these women as over-sentimentalizing the issue, others have argued that such action portends great danger for Nigeria and democratic growth in the nation.

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<sup>448</sup> Interview with Mrs. Okusanya, Ado-Ekiti, 30 April, 2009.



In June 2002, hundreds of women, whose ages ranged between 20 and 90, overran oil producing facilities in Nigeria's Niger-Delta to demand for safer environment and development in the region. Similarly, in 2006, female South African prisoners staged a naked protest to prevent prison authorities from relocating them to another prison facility. On May 7, 2009, female pensioners in Oyo State, Nigeria also planned a naked protest against the Oyo State government's continual refusal to pay pensions and gratuities.

As these representative examples have shown, Yorùbá women have traditionally used their bodies as a tool deployed in protest for generations. Wrapping and unwrapping of human bodies has been used as unconventional tools in the expression of dissents among Nigerians, especially women.

Among the Yorùbá, nude protest is also regarded as a form of sexual violence. The perpetrators are both the people whose actions or inactions might have caused the women to embark on such decision and the onlookers. Traditionally, the onlookers are also guilty by association. Customarily, they were expected to also go naked in solidarity with the women's course. Hence, the streets and markets in Ado-Ekiti were quickly deserted, as no one wants to be considered as a perpetrator of such heinous crime against, most of all, aged mothers. In the same way as the prison facility in South Africa and laboratory in Kenya were abandoned. For the women, therefore, nude protest is an asymmetric strategy aimed at forcing the target of the action to accede to their wills as well as forcing onlookers to compel the powerful to accede to the wills of the powerless. Nude protest happens only in a mutually intelligible cultural milieu that values women sexuality as a property, which must be cherished and upheld. Failure to accede to the demands of the nude protesters is regarded as rape and sexual assault whose imports are not limited to the actual victims, the women, but also the entire communities whose values are brought into disrepute.

Naked protest derived from the general belief that women's bodies, most notably those of aged-women, young and old mother, are to be revered. As such, it is a taboo for a woman, and particularly a married or older woman, to choose to disrobe in public in reaction to a social/political situation. As already shown, Aba Women protested naked in 1929, so also members and

supporters of the Abeokuta Women's Union, who walked naked on the streets of Abeokuta in protest of the Alake's political actions and forced him into exile in 1949. Essentially, the practice is not peculiar to Nigeria alone, as in 2001, a team of scientists abandoned their research after naked Kenyan women descended on their facility. In another development, female politicians called on Kenyan women, most especially wives to deny their husband access to their bodies until certain political actions were taken. This "sex ban" also extended to commercial sex-workers, as the wife of Kenya's Prime Minister also consented to the ban and women's groups paid prostitutes to turn down clients. Similarly, in 2006, female South African prisoners staged a *setshwetla* - naked protest - to prevent their relocation to another prison facility. It goes without saying that bodies, whether wrapped or unwrapped, hold particular meanings to Africans. What does nude-protest and breast-barring mean to Nigerians and under what context must it be understood? Under what circumstances did women, prior to the Ekiti case, use nudity to express political preferences and why? In this section, the study shall attempt to answer all these and other questions as well as put together African's belief about naked protest.

Nude protest, whether in Ekiti or Nairobi, signifies women's voice, especially in the face growing denial in the political process. Hence, it could be described as the weapon of the weak in the face of continued injustice by/of the powerful. Women, as it is generally believed, can unwrap either when bathing or in the inner recesses of their homes with their husbands, as part of their conjugal duties to their husbands. Hence, only insanity and conquest associated with war would warrant a sane woman to unwrap in the public. Under any other circumstances, unwrapping by women in full public glare could therefore be an indirect protest against an imposed situation. Among the Yorùbá, it is the worst form of protest, as it signifies that the state is perpetrating a war against its own people and the people, by protesting nude, they are declaring themselves as being captured as in a situation of war and molested in the full glare of the public by making public what should remain in the private domain. It signifies absolute lack of confidence in the state and whoever holds power in the state is expected to abdicate the throne. As noted by

Mrs. Fayemi, the recent nude protest in Ekiti State derived from the need to let the women's voices be heard, it is premised on people's belief that it is a "*taboo to see the naked body of an old woman in the public. These women are protesting against the injustice in the land and they are insisting that their votes must count*".<sup>449</sup>

Nude protest, without doubt, is an ancient culture that is not restricted to Yorubaland or Nigeria alone. However, its re-enactments, whether in Nigeria, Kenya or elsewhere, in contemporary Africa is premised on the fact that political accountability is lacking in most countries in Africa. In pre-colonial Africa, kings derived their powers from the consent of their people. Hence, nude protest was one of the ways through which a pre-colonial polity could be delegitimized. Other measures abound, but nude protest was considered shameful and a taboo. Its power lies on what could be termed its 'shame-value'. It was considered a thing of shame and moral irresponsibility to be deposed. As such, no king could endure, let alone, survive nude protest. Hence, kings, more often than not, ensured that any decision that could elicit such response are withdrawn or reversed with immediate effect.

As the Yorùbá puts it:

*Oba to je, ti Ilu tu;*

*Oba to je, ti Ilu toro;*

*Oruko won ko ni parun.*

(The King, in whose reign the city is in disorder;  
The King, in whose reign the city is peaceful;  
His name shall never be forgotten.)

The import of the above is that any king in whose time disorder reigns would not only be deposed, but his generations would also be prevented from ruling again. As a people, the indigenous Yorùbá people were conscious of their place in history and, as such, placed so much value on how history would remember them.

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<sup>449</sup> 'Women Protest', *Nation Newspaper*, 30 April, 2009, 1, 2.

### 6.3. Dress in Nigeria's Nationalist Discourse

As noted in Chapter Five, the Christian mission imposed European culture, most especially in dress and language, on the Yorùbá vis-à-vis other Nigerian peoples. In Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ibadan, missionaries imposed European dress on the converts, arguing that any convert who still wore his or her native dress, is not a genuine Christian. So, the likes of Pastor R. H. Stone mandated converts in his church to wear shirt and trousers as marks of Christianity and civilization. Almost as this was happening, the colonial administrators also introduced the use of uniforms for both government and native administration staff.

Therefore, in their agitations for independence, Yorùbá elite, especially those in Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ibadan, began to agitate for a cultural renaissance both in language and in dress. As noted earlier, many of them who were given Christian names at conversion reverted to their old, Yorùbá names. They also began to wear Yorùbá dress in public and private ceremonies. In addition, they agitated for the teaching of Yorùbá language and culture in schools as well as the use of Yorùbá dress in public and private functions. Notable individuals championing this cause include Mojola Agbebi and Sapara Williams who both reverted from their Christian names to their old, Yorùbá names.

Although the converts were not denied membership in their various churches, they were however regarded as 'counterfeit' Christians for not wearing European dress; they were however denied Baptism and the Holy Communion.<sup>450</sup> Dr. Mojola Agbebi, who, upon converting to Christianity, was re-christened David Vincent Brown, decried the imposition of European dress and European culture on Africans. "*The introduction of the usages and institutions of European life into the African social system,*" Agbebi contended, "*has resulted in a disordering and dislocation of the latter which threaten to overthrow the system altogether and produce a state of social anarchy.*" Some of the major ill effects of such an introduction of European usages and institutions included the "*total breakdown of parental control*" and the "*advent of a life of wild license mistakenly taken to mean the rightful exercise of the*

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<sup>450</sup> Gbadamosi T.G.O. and Ade Ajayi J. F., 'Islam and Christianity in Nigeria', in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Ibadan, 1980), 358.

*rights and prerogatives of individual liberty, as defined and permitted under the customs and usages of European life.*"<sup>451</sup> In short, Agbebi argued that contact with European culture resulted in the abnegation of African social laws by Europeanized Africans and a transfer of the contempt of African customs from the Europeans to the Europeanized Africans.

These Yorùbá ethno-nationalist Christian converts therefore posited that *'every African bearing a foreign name is like a ship sailing under false colours, and every African wearing a foreign dress in his country is like the jackdaw in peacock's feathers'*.<sup>452</sup> In reaction, Dr. Agbebi, for instance, denounced his Christian names – David Vincent Brown – and reverted to his original Yorùbá names – Mojola Agbebi. Besides Dr. Agbebi, others like Sapara-Williams, E. M. Lijadu, Theophilus A. J. Ogunbiyi, J. T. Leigh, A. J. Sapara-Williams, Thomas Ige George, Nyamgbi Tete Alamayong, Prince of Little Popo and Kwara, Charles W. George, M. Euler-Ajayi, A. N. Cole, S. Saguwa Davies, S. P. Johnson, L. Walton-Lumpkin, A. D. William Shitta, D. Macaulay, E. A. Caulcrick, Jacob Bajulaye, S. Peters, O. T. Somefun, T. Lloyd Harrison, Joseph D. E. Z. Macauley, Ayodeji Oyejola, E. Bamisele Agbebi, G. O. Kufeji, H. O. Otolorin Williams, G. Adebayo Agbebi<sup>453</sup>, and the daughters of Richard Blaize, Carrie Lumpkin, and Charlottee Blaize, to mention a few, took to wearing a combination of *adire* (tie and dye) and European prints.

Agbebi challenged the missions' rights to name particular tune, language, drums, dress, and songs which would be conducive to worship in another culture.

*... The joys are one, Redemption is one, Christ is one, God is one, but our tongues are various and our styles innumerable. Hymn-books, therefore, are one of the non-essentials of worship. Prayer-books and hymn-books, harmonium-dedications, pew constructions, surpliced*

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<sup>451</sup> Akinsola Akiwowo, 'The Place of Mojola Agbebi in the African Nationalist Movements: 1890-1917', *Phylon*, 26:2 (1965), 122-139.

<sup>452</sup> Judith Byfield "'Unwrapping' Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos', *African Humanities*, Occasional Publication No. 30, (Boston University, 2000), 11.

<sup>453</sup> Akinsola Akiwowo, 'The Place of Mojola Agbebi', 137.

choir, the white man's style, the white man's name, the white man's dress, are so many non-essentials, so many props and crutches affecting the religious manhood of the Christian African.<sup>454</sup> (Emphasis added)

He argued that dress, tunes, and songs depended on “*the frame of mind, breadth of soul, experiences of life, attitude of faith, and latitude of love of individuals...*” and therefore Yorùbá culture should be permitted to dictate dress, songs, language, etc. of Yorùbá Christian experience. He averred that English/European harmonium, organ, and piano musical instruments were unknown to the Israelites of old who used their own native musical instruments in their religious worships. Therefore Yorùbá converts should be allowed to use “*our Dundun and Batakoto, our Gese and Kerikeri, our Fajakis and Sambas*” which “*would serve admirable purposes of joy and praise if properly directed and wisely brought into play.*”<sup>455</sup> He went further to advocate that “*in carrying out the function of singing therefore, let us always remember that we are Africans, and that we ought to sing African songs, and that in African style and fashion.*”<sup>456</sup> By African style and fashion, Mojola Agbebi excluded the use of “*surplices, European dress, and structures for sitting during religious worship*”, which he described as non-essentials of religion.

Comparing Christianity to Islam, Agbebi noted that while Islam accepted African culture, Christianity sought to denationalize and degrade it:

*The African Moslem, our co-religionist, though he reads the Koran in Arabic and counts his beads as our Christian brother the Roman Catholic does, and though he repeats the same formula of prayer in an unknown tongue from mosques and minarets five times a day throughout Africa, yet he spreads no common prayer before him in his devotions and carries no hymn-book in his worship of the Almighty. His dress is after the manner of the Apostles and*

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<sup>454</sup> Rev. Mojola Agbebi, ‘Inaugural Sermon’, in Ayo J. Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970*, (London, 1979).

<sup>455</sup> Ibid.

<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

*Prophets, and his name, though indicating his faith, was never put on in a way to denationalize or degrade him.*<sup>457</sup>

(Emphasis added)

Agbebi therefore declared that “*European Christianity is a dangerous thing*”; that “*Islam is the religion of Africa*” and finally that “*Christianity lives here by sufferance*”. He then asked:

*What do you think of a religion which holds a bottle of gin in one hand and a Common Prayer in another? Which carries a glass of rum as a vade-mecum to a ‘Holy’ book? A religion which points with one hand to the skies, bidding you ‘lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven,’ and while you are looking up grasps all your worldly goods with the other hand, seizes your ancestral lands, labels your forests, and places your patrimony under inexplicable legislations?*<sup>458</sup>

Dr. Agbebi noted further that the effects of intercultural contacts upon the African, “*whose mode of life is entirely dissimilar to that of the European, if not actually opposed to it*” must be evaluated. Agbebi saw the collision of European and African cultures as bound to have far-reaching and disturbing effects of great dimension upon the moral and social arrangement of the Africans, especially upon “*the foundation and vital parts of African life.*”<sup>459</sup>

The ordinary Yorùbá converts also found the dress policy abnormal and lampooned the missionaries in no small measure. T.A. Ladele picked on this development in his book, *Esin Igbagbo wo Ilu Owo*, and noted that a Yorùbá convert, John, while taking his leave of the church, wrote to intimate the Pastor that he was no longer interested in Christianity, as he was compelled to pay for almost every considerable thing under the sky – *owo ore, owo idamewa, owo oju iwe, owo opin ose*, etc. - and that above all, he was not allowed to bear his own name, but ‘*Joonu san pan na*’

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<sup>457</sup> Rev. Mojola Agbebi, ‘Inaugural Sermon’.

<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Akinsola Akiwowo, ‘The Place of Mojola Agbebi’, 135.

(just ordinary and meaningless John).<sup>460</sup> Through John's characterization, Ladele also lamented the dress policy.

Perhaps nothing reflected the general mood of the people towards the imposition of European dress on Yorùbá converts like the words of its most vocal critics, Dr. Agbebi who, himself was a Baptist pastor like R.H. Stone. Dr. Agbebi challenged the missionaries' right to name the particular tune, language, drums, dress, and songs which would be conducive to worship in another culture. He argued that dress, tunes, and songs depend on the frame of mind, the breadth of soul, the experiences of life, the attitude of faith, and the latitude of love of the individual within a socio-cultural space. After recognizing the secular and profane origin of many "sacred" hymns in the famous collections of hymns by Ira D. Sankey, which were used in many West African Protestant churches, Dr. Agbebi quoted Biblical verses in support of his suggestion that individual culture should be permitted to dictate the dress, songs, language, etc. of Yorùbá Christian experience.

Like others, he went further to advocate that "*in carrying out the function of singing therefore, let us always remember that we are Africans, and that we ought to sing African songs, and that in African style and fashion.*"<sup>461</sup> By African style and fashion, Mojola Agbebi excluded the use of "*surplices, European dress, and structures for sitting during religious worship*", which he described as non-essentials of religion:

*...Prayer-books and hymnbooks, harmonium, dedications, pew constructions, surpliced choir, the white man's style and white man's names, the white man's dress, are so many non-essentials, so many props and crutches affecting the religious manhood of the Christian African.*<sup>462</sup>

The initial acceptance of European culture, values, and religion soon gave way to socio-political protests of different kinds. The resultant re-evaluation of European values was not peculiar to Yorùbá people alone, as it covered the entire West

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<sup>460</sup> Ladele T.A., *Esin Igbagbo Wo Ilu Owo*, Nigeria: Longman, 1975, 56.

<sup>461</sup> Lloyd Gwam, 'Pioneers of Modern Professions: No. 3-Letters: Mojola Agbebi"', *Sunday Times*, (Lagos, November, 1964), 8-9.

<sup>462</sup> *Ibid*, 9.



African sub-region, most especially Sierra Leone where the Creoles had also launched a dress reform movement in the late 1880s. Therefore, from Lagos to Abeokuta, Ibadan to Oyo, and Oshogbo to Ile-Ife; Yorùbá elite and nationalists, most of whom were based in Lagos, instituted a vigorous linguistic and cultural campaign, which aimed at stimulating greater interest in Yorùbá culture in dress and language as well as in ‘...*African dress, polygamy, the education of women, and Yorùbá secret societies*’.<sup>463</sup>

So, as forms of protest, the wearing of native dress and the speaking of Yorùbá language became icons “*in this ideological rejection of colonialism*”. Many educated Christians made the wearing of native dress and the speaking of Yorùbá language significant ways of expressing support ‘*of the cultural movement and critique*’ of the time. As they argued, native language and dress ‘*spoke of the ‘traditional’, the truly African, uncontaminated by Western mores and materialism*’.<sup>464</sup> The agitators argued that Yorùbá dress not only allowed for a cultural rebirth and a renewed affinity to those who still lived by ‘traditional’ values, but also became a wearable text, described by Chatterjee as existing in ‘adversarial relationship’ to the discourse of colonialism.

As noted in Chapter Five, the campaign led to a number of developments: the development therefore contributed to the formation of African independent churches, including Native Baptist Church in Lagos and the Aladura churches, where emphasis was on worshipping God and not cultural hegemony; the establishment of the Lagos Native Research Society in 1903; Yorùbá men and women began dropping their European names and adopting Yorùbá names; some also dropped European dress and began wearing “native” dress; the development of a more critical Lagos newspaper editorials most of which characterized European dress as unsuitable for African climate, a symbol of mental bondage, and a concrete reminder of European ambivalent cultural and social position, etc. Through this, nationalists of different hues and colours questioned the veracity of the colonialist knowledge, disputed their arguments, pointed out the

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<sup>463</sup> Judith Byfield, “Unwrapping” Nationalism’, 10.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid, 2.

contradictions in their arguments, and rejected the moral basis of them.<sup>465</sup>

#### **6.4. Traditional Dress versus European dress: The Good versus the Bad**

There has been an increasing fascination with traditional and indigenous dress in contemporary Yorubaland in recent times. This development cannot be dissociated from the general tendency among the Yorùbá, most especially in the rural areas, to regard indigenous and traditional dress as the 'good' dress, which is befitting and honourable, while European dress, for the most part, is regarded as bad, unbecoming, and dishonourable. Historically, the development emanated from the colonial era when the Yorùbá elite and nationalists were agitating for cultural renaissance in dress and language. As noted earlier, the agitation was not limited to dress and language alone, but also incorporated a spirited defense of polygamy and Yorùbá secret societies, as well as the education of women and girls.

The education of women and girls in Yorubaland was not without its socio-economic consequences. In the first place, many women became educated and many began to work outside the home; a development which invariably necessitated their wearing of dress originally regarded as male dress. In addition, more exposure to economic benefits of colonialism led to a change in social status as more women began to play active roles in both colonial and church matters. This increasing latitude led to accumulation of wealth, which, for the Yorùbá women, manifested in many ways including dress.

Serving as impetus for the development was also the fact that most missionaries' wives were unemployed except in helping their husbands and maintaining the mission house. Some of these women took to sewing, which they taught many Yorùbá women converts. Hannah Hinderer was reputed for her tailoring and teaching skills in Ibadan and so also many other missionaries' wives across Yorubaland during this period. With advancement in education and a little training in sewing and stitching, women and children who had little choice of what to wear during the pre-1800

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid, 2.

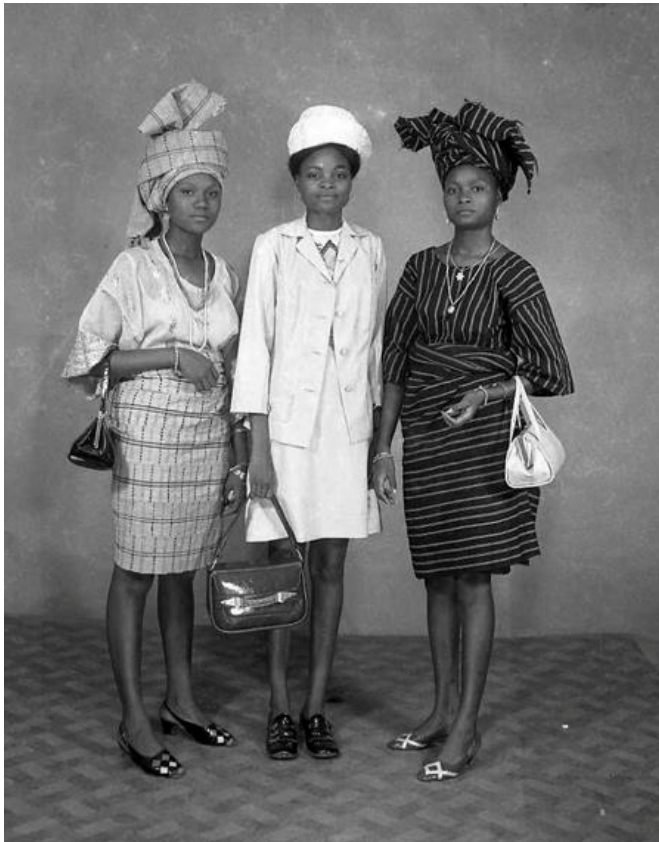
period suddenly have more than enough styles and designs depending on the dexterity and imagination of the seamstress and tailors. Education and tailoring thereby provided not just employment to women but also gave them ample choice on what to wear.

Despite spirited defense mounted in support of polygamy, it must be stated that Christianity and colonialism eschewed polygamy, and therefore would not bulge. Although resounding successes were recorded by the nationalists in the areas of education and women empowerment through tailoring; the social fabric of the society is being torn away in other areas. Education and Christianity eroded the traditional political authority both in the urban and rural areas. Change in social status of hitherto lowly-born and therefore poor people changed with increasing employment opportunity in the colonial enterprise and also in the unfolding political economy and its emphasis on material acquisition. Consequently, two developments followed: on the one hand, the power of the elders collapsed while, on the other hand, the glamour and lure of European culture was demystified and also collapsed, as Yorùbá elite and nationalists were able to show the cultural ambiguity of the Europeans. Christians and educated elite turned to 'traditional' dress and reconnected to Yorùbá culture. Women and girls began to experiment with the combination of indigenous and European dress; just as locally-woven cloth gradually became a prestige item. The resultant dress culture, owing to its hybrid nature, has since become traditional.

While the Yorùbá elite and nationalists savored their victories in the areas of language and dress; they however decried the fact that most of the female dress that emerged from the hybridization of indigenous and European dresses heavily accentuated women's features, most especially their curves, with much nakedness around their waists and shoulders. This was completely unlike the indigenous dress, which places emphasis on age, status, and occupation. The period, for the women, was characterized by increasing latitude in dress, as different styles of dress were introduced. As Mrs. Fry, earlier mentioned, noted, the period also witnessed increasing creativity in women's dress, as tailors and seamstresses began to combine indigenous, traditional Yorùbá dresses with European dress to create and make different

designs and styles of dress. Teaching and nursing, the two most common opportunities for women during the period, were almost always, synonymous with the wearing of *Kaaba* (a long flowing gown) and *Bonfo* (a short, above-the-knee gown), two of the most popular styles of the period.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate the different dress used during the period under discussion.



**A cross section of female popular dress mode of the colonial period**

**(Sources: Onile-Ayo Photo, Mokola, Ibadan)**

The argument was captured succinctly in two of John Akintola Ademuwagun (who went by the stage name Roy Chicago)'s songs *Onile Gogoro* and *Obinrin Nbe L'Eko*. In the first, he lampooned women's dress, which he represented with their head tall gear, of the period as deceptive: when a young one dresses, she is alluring; and when an old woman dresses, she becomes younger and alluring. He cautioned concerning the new dress culture noting that irrespective of the age and status, the dress made the female-folks younger, finer, and more alluring. In the second, he criticized the various dresses as so revealing that one makes no effort to know the various sizes and shapes of their breasts and backsides.

The criticism is better appreciated when taken alongside the general consideration of the role of women in Yorùbá society in general. Women are not just mothers and daughters, but the upholders of customs, culture, and traditions of the society. The change in dress culture, which for the most part, accentuated the female sexual features, therefore exhibits a general erosion of Yorùbá customs, culture, and traditions. The argument is made stronger by the fact that while the males were agitating for cultural renaissance in dress and language, among other things, the very people who were expected to protect, uphold, and transmit Yorùbá indigenous culture and traditions have capitulated under the influences of European culture.

While the argument was not so much against women emancipation, but against the erosion of Yorùbá traditions and culture, the development arising from the introduction of the Colonial or Native Court system cannot be dissociated from protesting women's financial emancipation as such. Although colonial rule was introduced to Yorubaland since the 1890s, it was not until the 1914 that the pre-colonial justice administration system was substituted for the Colonial or Native Court system. Before 1914 there were three grades of courts in Yorubaland: the *Ile-Ejo Baale* (Baale's Court), *Ile-Ejo Ijoye Adugbo* (Compound Chief's Court) and *Ile-Ejo Oba* (King's Court). In a village where the Bale ruled, the last court was the *Ile-Ejo Bale* (Bale's Court). Greater flexibilities existed in these courts that were alien to the Native Court system.

The Native Court system collided in almost all areas of life with the indigenous societal values and, in all cases, the natives had no alternative than to acquiesce in the matter. Divorce, for instance, remains one key issue that fractured the society most during the period. As must be noted, sense of nationhood or statehood in traditional African society was fostered on kinship. Hence, the family was regarded as sacred and anything that was capable of breaking the union of the kin or family ties was treated with utmost caution. Under the new court system, as soon as a woman indicated her desire to break the union between her and the husband, the Native Court system allowed such women, having paid the necessary summon fees, the right to single-handedly dissolve the union. In fact, under the Native Court system, the head chief of the community must reserve a room for such women to forestall any family intervention. This was known as the *dipomu* (holding-the-post) system. Under this kind of arrangement, the court was concerned not with the societal harmony but with generating revenue through fees and fines from such cases. Consequently, divorce cases became rampant and this upset the societal scale that men became apprehensive that they might return home after a laborious day at the farm and discovered that their wives had gone 'to hold the post'. If and when such happened, the society could achieve nothing, especially as the associated fees and fines required of the complainant were paid.

So while spirited efforts were being made to get the church and colonial administration to see the socio-cultural and economic benefits of polygamy; the Native Court system ensured that as many women who wanted a break from such unions, had their freedom once the associated fees are paid.

The current interest in Yorùbá dress, although different in motivation from the colonial period, also shares many things in common with that of the colonial period. Economic and social problems associated with political instability since independence and, most especially, the economic downturn and change in fortune orchestrated by the structural adjustment years led many people to seek spiritual solutions to almost all things. Beginning therefore from the later 1980s, radical and fundamental religious groups sprang-up almost everywhere in Nigeria adducing the nation's woes to sins and ungodliness, especially since the nation

held the Festival of Arts and Culture in 1977. Many televangelists since the 1980s have described the pan-African conference as fetish and a celebration of idolatry. They therefore claimed that the prostrate state of the country was retribution from God for the nation's apostasy. In most tertiary institutions in Nigeria today, it is common to find billboards conspicuously located within different parts of the institutions admonishing students, most especially female students, about indecent dressing. Joseph Ayo Babalola University, like other privately-owned universities in Nigeria, instituted a dress-code for the students. In the introductory section of the dress-code, it was argued that:

*As Christians, whatever we do must be to the glory of God our creator. This is more particularly so in the way we dress. In many decided rape cases, judges have ruled that, the victims were accomplices, having induced (sic) their assailants by their mode of dressing and general appearances. The Yorùbás also agree that the way one dresses generally, reflects on the way others perceive one – either with respect or disdain. A person who dresses like a hooligan is seen and treated as such; while a lady who dresses like a prostitute is seen and treated as such. When a woman dresses with half the breast bare and uncovered; when the stomach down to the abdomen is uncovered or when a skirt is so short that it leaves little or nothing to the imagination; or when sitted (sic), exposes her underwear; all these amount to invitation to the opposite counterpart to buy sex for money or other favours such as marks.<sup>466</sup>*

From the above, indecent dressing simply refers to any cloth that is body-revealing either in part, to include issues like short or mini-skirts, shoulder-revealing blouses, and jumpers or as a whole, to include any seductive or provocative dress entirely. While there are dress-codes in public institutions, there were no strict attempts at enforcing the laws. In private institutions, lecturers and hall officials “*are empowered to prevent students*

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<sup>466</sup> Joseph Ayo Babalola University, *Dress Code*, available at <http://jabu.edu.ng/index.php/student/dress-code> 2011/04/22; accessed on 23/04/2011.

*who fail to meet the... dress code from attending lectures or participating in other activities”<sup>467</sup>.*

It can be argued that imposition of dress codes, especially for females as the above quotation from Joseph Ayo Babalola University Dress Code shows, are ways through which males generally attempt to put females in check and also to deny female sexuality, etc. This becomes important as dress code was enforced in the case of females while males were only prohibited from wearing fez caps. It is ironic that there has not been any protest from the females against this gender-biased dress code.

The pastor and founder of the Benson Idahosa Outreach, Archbishop Benson Idahosa, was famous for the statement: “*dress the way you want to be addressed*”. Underlining this statement is not simply the need for members to communicate their status in the appearances, but also to demonstrate their moral and spiritual values in their dressing. Recently in Den Haag, the Netherlands, I was invited to a religious gathering, *Eurocon*, a biennial programme of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Mainland Europe, by Mr. and Mrs. Odiase. As we approached the venue of the programme, an argument ensued between the husband and wife over the latter’s trouser, which the husband considered as too tight and therefore revealing the wife’s ‘*sexual appeal*’ for public consumption. Although the wife insisted that the trouser was not as tight and body-hugging as the husband presented it, the husband maintained that “*dress such as this, easily leads other people into sinning, as they will most likely want to see what your shape looks like without cloth of any kind. It is just not okay and I don’t like it at all*”. When I probed the husband closely on why he had to prescribe what sort of cloth his wife should wear, he was point blank:

*Look here; don’t think I don’t know what I am saying. All these Europeans you see around walking about almost nude do not have any culture. See, how bad their family system has become! Is this the kind of thing my wife will*

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<sup>467</sup> Ibid.



*teach my children? No, I won't take that. It is a sin not just before man, but also before God*<sup>468</sup>.

A similar position is held by the authorities of Joseph Ayo Babalola University, as seen from the introduction to the university's dress code, already quoted above.

For the most part, European dress, except formal dress, is regarded as bad by many in Yorubaland. On the one hand, many still regard European dress as emblematic of European culture and values. So, their rejection of European dress was not only out of moral consideration but also of nationalistic sentiment. On the other hand, we have those who decried European dress on moral and religious principles. This class of people argued that European dress emphasizes female's sexuality not only in design, but also in style and materials of make. For both groups, European dress is regarded as 'bad' dress and these are the prime agitators for the use of (Yorùbá) 'traditional' dress in both private and public spaces.

For the most part, these agitators desired "*decency in dressing and appearance*", as this "presents the image of a cultured, educated person". They argued further that moderation in dressing is a sign of good religious and cultural upbringing, while extravagance in dressing is outward evidence of vanity. "It is capable of leading youth astray especially when parents are unable to afford them. The insatiable love of extravagant and flamboyant attire, which cannot be supported, would lead male students to stealing and gangsterism, while female students are lured into prostitution and even stealing!

As far as the mission-owned universities are concerned, the Bible enjoins Christians to avoid ostentatious and extravagant dressing. So students, whether they are Christians or not, must focus on internal and external adornment of purity and love, which takes dressing and other body adornment beyond outward extravagant adornment. Therefore, dressing in the mission-owned universities is the same as dressing to the place of worship; hence, for both male and female students, formal dress, whether native or European, is recommended. Ajayi Crowther University succinctly

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<sup>468</sup> Interview with Mr and Mrs Harrison Obayuwana Odiase, 40 Zuiggerstraat, 2561KL, 'S-Gravenhage, the Netherlands, 22 April 2011.

puts it thus: “...*the University attaches great importance to Modest and Good Dressing. Your dressing adds values to your personality, self-confidence and self-worth. Hence, Dress the way you would like to be addressed*”.<sup>469</sup>

The crust of anti-European dress argument is that it symbolizes colonialism as well as promotes indecency and adultery; especially the transparent, body hugging, and body shape revealing ones. It must be conceded that society reserves the rights to determine what it considers right and wrong at any given time, it must be noted however that such rights must not interfere with personal and group rights of others. Hence, while tenuous link may exist between indecent or immodest dressing and seduction; there is no justifiable reason to support the argument that indecent dressing and promiscuity are linked. Hence, the moral and religious bent of the argument, is, to say the least, preposterous and self-serving.

Notwithstanding this, it must be noted that in most part of Nigeria today, the wearing of European dress is synonymous with the possession of three things: Western education, being from Southern part of Nigeria, and being a Christian. While this is not to say that the use of European dress is peculiar only to the south, but to underscore that the generality of southern Nigeria wear European dress while traditional dress is most popular in the North and Central Nigeria. This could be linked to colonialism and the concentration of Christianity and Western education in the south during the colonial period.

In Southern part of Nigeria, however, the use of European dress, even for formal uses, is, almost as a rule, limited to four days (Mondays to Thursdays) in a week. Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are set aside for the wearing of traditional dress not only in Yorubaland but also across the Southern Nigeria and the Federal Capital, Abuja. In government establishments, as in banks, insurance companies, oil and gas facilities, etc., Friday is recognized and regarded as a day of worship for the Muslims; hence, the wearing of traditional dress is popular on Fridays, especially in Southern part of Nigeria. Owing to the economic

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<sup>469</sup> Ajayi Crowther University, *Students Life*, available at <http://www.acu.edu.ng/studentlife.asp>; accessed on 24<sup>th</sup> April 2011.

system handed down to independent Nigeria by Imperial Britain, Mondays through Fridays are set aside for work of different kinds, while Saturdays and Sundays are set aside for rest and religious worship, especially Sundays for the Christians. So, like Fridays, Sundays are used for worship while Saturdays are set aside for important ceremonies like wedding, funeral, house-warming, etc. ceremonies. Ceremonies such as the aforementioned, for Christians and Muslims, are important occasions where all manners of indigenous and traditional dresses are on display. Even in churches, where fascination with European dress still endures, all ceremonies attract the use of traditional Yorùbá dress, except marriage. Even during wedding ceremonies, once the couples are out of the church, they, almost as a rule, return home to change into traditional Yorùbá dress. In general, Fridays through Sundays are days of the week when it is permissible and common for people - male and female, old and young - to turn out in their indigenous and traditional Yorùbá dress.

Given the fact that Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays are usually crowded with all manners of ceremonies in most towns and cities; Thursdays are being gradually incorporated into what can be called ceremony days in Yorubaland. Interviews conducted at the registries of the various local government council in Lagos, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Kwara states reveal that a sizeable number of people prefer to marry on Thursdays than on Saturdays, as was previously the norm. This recent development can be adduced to the crowded nature of streets and event centers on most Saturdays and Sundays. Hence, to ensure free passage on the roads and to avoid the competition for space and its attendant high costs, many have begun to consider Thursdays as also a ceremony day. In other words, weddings are held in registries on Thursdays and church weddings are done on Saturdays.

Taken together, the above developments are important to our understanding of the dynamic ways in which dress have interfaced with (i) power; (ii) individual; and (iii) group identity among the Yorùbá. On the one hand, contemporary interest in Yorùbá dress is premised almost entirely on the same premise as the earliest Yorùbá nationalists, who agitated for cultural renaissance in language and dress during the colonial period. While the earliest Yorùbá elite and nationalists quickly reverted to

European dress almost immediately after independence, contemporary Yorùbá people are increasingly reverting back to traditional dress. On the other hand, contemporary metaphor of arrogating power to dress signifies the growing importance and conceptualization of traditional dress as good, unsoiled, and virgin; while at the same time conceptualizing European dress as bad, soiled and dishonourable. The most eloquent expression of this development is the metaphor of 'Agbada' (traditional Yorùbá flowing gown) and 'khaki' to signify civilian rule and military rule in Nigerian political parlance. Agbada is regarded as traditional, indigenous, and therefore good and unsoiled; while Khaki is regarded as foreign and soiled.

#### **6.5. Men versus Women: Resistance versus Adaptation**

Customs, traditions, and culture are, for the most part, created by men. Women, irrespective of age and time, are simply regarded as the carriers and transmitters of these customs, traditions, and culture. As far as the history of dress in Yorubaland is concerned, both men and women have played significant roles in its growth and development. During the colonial period, and even before this time, men were dictating the direction of what should constitute a 'good' dress. The agitation for cultural renaissance in language and dress witnessed men actively engaging imposition of European culture on the Yorùbá vis-à-vis other Nigerians. Women, and invariably their children, were like mannequins, on whose shoulders the agitation is to be displayed, tested and inspected. They, women, were not only expected to wear traditional dresses, as a measure of the tradition and culture they are carrying and transmitting, but also to ensure that their children reflect these customs, traditions, and culture wherever they went.

In a sense, the British imposition of European culture on the Yorùbá and the consequent resistance benefited Yorùbá women in a number of ways. In the first place, it ensured their freedom from practices such as forced marriages and polygamy. On the other hand, it gave them more options on what they could wear. As noted in the previous chapter, British colonial administration not only opened Yorubaland and Nigeria to the global economy but also ensured a justice administration that frowned at practices such as enslavement, scarification, pawnship, and forced marriage. On

its part, the church was vehemently opposed to polygamy and idolatry. Successes recorded on all fronts, except on polygamy and idolatry, were such that women became freer and better engaged than in the pre-1800 periods. Although polygamy and idolatry continued in the hinterland, it was hoped that increasing education and the reach of evangelism would snuff out these practices with time. In general, these cultural practices were regarded as not just only against God, but also anti-civilization and backward. Hence, at the initial stages of both Christianity and colonization, every Yorùbá man and woman was doing everything to rid their community of the practices. Genuine attempts were made at imposing European civilization on Yorubaland not only by the Europeans but also by the Yorùbá elite themselves.

Notwithstanding the revolution that the resistance of the later period symbolized, women's dresses increased tremendously from what it used to be during the pre-1800 period when it was comprised mainly of *Ilabiru*, *Tobi*, *Iro*, *Buba*, *Osun*, *Laali*, *Ileke* (worn on the legs, wrists, neck and waist), *Egba* (worn on the wrists and neck), *Irun sise l'oge*, etc. By the time the agitation for cultural renaissance in dress and language was afoot, women's dress witnessed a dramatic turn around, especially with the development in the importation of European-manufactured African prints. In a way, the resistance and the development in tailoring, which was initially limited to the missionaries' wives at the mission house, made it possible for women not only to break the shackles of customs and culture that had kept them at the lower end of the economy, but also enabled them, for the very first time, to express their new found freedom, especially in their individual expression of self and in their expression of belonging as a member of a group.

Women began to experiment with different styles of dress, and were sooner combining indigenous Yorùbá dress with European dress and also to sew indigenous Yorùbá fabric in European styles and vice-versa. While all these were going on, male dress was slowing down and, with time, became fixated in the ideological debate over the supremacy of Yorùbá culture over European culture. Men's dress, depending on age, status, and position, has since remained simple. Today, female dress, while retaining some of the indigenous styles, can be said to be

‘modern’, and traditional while male dress have remained, except from change in material, indigenous, fixated, and encrusted in the past.

### **6.6. Omoluabi, Politics, Power, Resistance and Yorùbá Dress**

From the analysis in this chapter, it can be argued that the underlying principle behind politics and power in Yorubaland still remains the value of being an *Omoluabi*. By using the metaphor of dress, whether its actual usage or its lack of it; Yorùbá people emphasize that being an *Omoluabi* is a *sine qua non* to being a Yorùbá man or woman and that Yorùbá people are expected to abide by this moral and ethical requirement not just in politics, but also in religion and other aspects of their social lives.

For contemporary Yorùbá people, Yorùbá sartorial tradition bespeaks of good governance, uncorrupted and undefiled personality while other sartorial traditions bespeak of a lack of the internal value of being an *Omoluabi*. As current expressions of Yorùbá sartorial tradition reflects, it can also be argued that this view to Yorùbá sartorial tradition masquerade Yorùbá’s expectation about what they have always considered as the ideal - the value of being an *Omoluabi* – and not an actuality.

In addition to the above, it can also be argued that using dress, contemporary Yorùbá people, unlike their counterparts in the colonial period, succeeded in exporting their internal value of being an *Omoluabi* into the larger arena. However, this importation was limited only to how political power is used.

### **6.7. Conclusion**

Dress, in Yorùbá belief system, has power. It takes on power either from the processes of production or it is imbued with power when it is worn. The major centers of dress production were also believed to have special favour of certain deities, gods, and goddesses and that these supernatural beings infused dress with their special powers. Dexterity in dress production, it is believed, is one manifestation of these powers. The king’s staff of office or his crown is conceptualized as embodying the power and essence of the king himself in much the same way as the maze, say of a National Assembly, embodies the power of the nation’s National

Assembly and the constitution embodying the power of a state. Dress, conceptualized in this way, could therefore express individual's power, e.g. that of a king; or that of a group, e.g. a chorister's robe.

With colonialism and the introduction of European dress came another layer of dress and power. Offices and positions had their respective dresses with various insignia of office and power. Although the imposition of European dress by both the church and the colonial administrators on Yorùbá people vis-à-vis other Nigerians, as a measure of modernizing Yorubaland and Nigeria, was initially received by the Yorùbá and other Nigerian peoples, however, when European cultural superiority and hegemony began to take the center stage in dress, religion, and government administration; European sartorial culture was met with stiff opposition and open resistance. The crux of the resistance was that European dress has nothing to do with European religion and government and that one can be a Christian or work in colonial establishment, wearing Yorùbá or any dress as well. This position, in so far as Yorùbá believed that dress expresses power, turned logic on its head. The Yorùbá elite and nationalists were denying to Christianity what they allowed their indigenous religion and socio-political articulation. It is to this level that the agitation was nationalistic and it was as a result of this lack of depth that led to a resurgence of European dress in Yorubaland immediately after independence.

European dress, as far as the Yorùbá are concerned, is seen as emphasizing sensuality and sexuality. Yorùbá culture would rather restrict these features, especially in females, to the private space or private domain. Hence, with increasing number of women wearing European dress, European sartorial tradition was therefore regarded as indulging in over-emphasizing female sensuality and sexuality and therefore daubed as immoral and the wearers are considered as morally bankrupt and religious apostates.

As the Yorùbá elite and nationalists were protesting cultural abnegation being foisted on them by the colonial government and the European missionaries, the Yorùbá women were, in turn, protesting the invisibility foisted upon them by Yorùbá culture, customs, and traditions. These resistances paved the way for sundry developments in Yorubaland: on the one hand,

it ended years of females' socio-economic and political suppression, as females now had more options on what to wear; and the increasing number of women in gainful employments, whether in the colonial administration or in the European trading concerns, ensured that women gained more visibility and independence, especially in their purchasing power. Eradication of polygamy and other practices also played fundamental role in the above. On the other hand, the developments in tailoring, importation and sales, in Africa, of African prints, as well as the adaptation of African prints into different styles and designs by the females, captured the power dynamics that dress has come to encapsulate over the years.

During the colonial period, especially while the nationalist agitation for cultural renaissance was on course, men were resisting change in their dress ensemble while women were adapting, modifying, and integrating indigenous and European dress, a development that led to the emergence of sartorial hybridity, which is today regarded as traditional Yorùbá dress. This negotiation of power, especially over dress, as encapsulated by dress, has, on the one hand, gave women ample choices over what to wear, and, on the other hand, placed women at the lowest rung of the ladder in the areas of carrying and transmitting Yorùbá culture and traditions, as females dress are today more modern than their male counterparts. Women's increasing choices on what to wear made them more dominant and ubiquitous on matters of fashion; and men's decreasing choices on style and design other than *Agbada*, *Buba*, and *Sokoto*, made them less dominant and fashionable than women. Consequently, it can be argued that contrary to the general assumption that Yorùbá women are the bastions of Yorùbá cultural expressions, the reality is that men express more of an encrusted Yorùbá sartorial cultural tradition, understood (even) pejoratively as stale, unchanging, and encrusted in the past, than the females.

There is no doubting the fact that Yorùbá sartorial tradition has changed, as the above analysis showed. Resistance mounted against change could only metamorphose into yet another development, which led to sartorial hybridity. The essence of Yorùbáness was however changed from being an *Omoluabi* to emphasis on material wealth. This development not only shifted



the balance in the resistance, discussed in this chapter, in favour of Islamic and Western sartorial traditions, but also endangered Yorùbá internal standard of moral or civic virtue against which the Yorùbá had measured personal esteem and individual's qualification. For contemporary Yorùbá, *Omoluabi* may remain a common human instinct, which is created out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour; wealth rather than being an *Omoluabi* has become fundamental to religious, economic, cultural and political lives.

## Chapter Seven

### Conclusion

#### 7.0. Introduction

From the previous chapters, it is clear that claims such as the one made by Samuel Johnson that prior to Euro-Arab contacts with Yorubaland, Yorùbá people walked about scantily dressed and that their young ones walked about semi-nude until they attained the marriageable age, is not only untrue, but self-serving. This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the major findings in the previous chapters.

#### 7.1. Dress and Identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980

Although Yorùbá, as a collective name for a people, a land, a language, and a culture may be a colonial and missionary creation, the sense of kinship, group solidarity, language, and common culture to which the term refers is a very old one. Rather than this collective name, it is this set of shared values that gave the various peoples now known as the Yorùbá people their identities as individuals and as a group. Yorùbá history, especially from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century, is no doubt a richly documented history. During these long periods, academic and lay-historians, writing in English, Yorùbá and Arabic, rendered themselves as worthy chroniclers of events. Samuel Johnson, John Olawunmi George, E.M. Lijadu, Otunba Payne, and Mojola Agbebi left behind works of no mean quality upon which different reconstructions have been made. All these have contributed immensely to a Yorùbá historiography; a historiography that remained unparalleled in Nigerian history.

Notwithstanding their contributions to Yorùbá historiography, their works on Yorùbá sartorial tradition is, to say the least, rudimentary. While some basic knowledge about Yorùbá dress are lost forever, certain historical periods and geographical places, events and developments, local cultures and preferences, etc. have helped to shape, determine, define, and modify Yorùbá identity construction, maintenance, and establishment through

dress. As this study showed, Yorùbá people, individuals and group, assigned some central and basic significance to dress, especially in the construction of their individual and group identities.

Besides narrow conceptualization, enormous gaps abound in extant literature, especially in relation to provenance of dress in Yorubaland and how the various changes have helped to shape, determine, define, and modify Yorùbá identity as well as affected Yorùbá sartorial tradition. Other than examining, albeit contextually, specific aspects of dress, no work exists that discussed the evolution and growth of Yorùbá sartorial tradition in holistic term. The need to explore these and many other issues, especially how these different issues tied to Yorùbá identity, gave birth to this study.

Given the transient nature of dress, most notably clothes and fashion trends, and the sheer fact that direct witnesses to the infancy periods of Yorùbá sartorial developments are all dead constituted a draw-down to this study, as a paucity of written documents as well as oral interviews are lacking or grossly inadequate where they exist. However, the use of primary and secondary sources, most especially the use of proverbs, witty sayings, photo-albums, etc. served to ameliorate inadequacies posed by lack of or inadequate written records and oral data. Colonial and missionary records were synthesized with travelers' reports as well as a selected number of oral interviews and insights from such indirect witnesses such as memoirs, photo albums, etc. All these were used to weave a narrative on the evolution of dress and its place in constructing and sustaining individual and group identity of the Yorùbá people.

As seen in the different chapters, colonial and missionary reports as well as other sources yielded up essential information on the issues of dress and identity in Yorubaland, especially in relation to Christianity, colonial rule and colonial administration of Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria.

As this study finds, as an ontological phenomenon, Yorùbá dress performs more than to cover human nakedness and protect the body from unsolicited gaze and the vagaries of nature, but encompasses all direct body changes ranging from facial marks to tattooing; and all additions to human body, from clothes to jewelry. Yorùbá dress establishes and maintains Yorùbá identity and, as a

symbolic interactive tool, it also alters Yorùbá identity. Therefore, Yorùbá dress, as a form of non-verbal communication, is a communicator of Yorùbá identity and values. In a sense, Yorùbá dress functions both in protecting the body as well as in communicating socially defined values. In both cases, the study asserted that dressing differently than what Yorùbá cultural norms prescribed would provoke politically charged reactions, as the example of southeastern Nigerian women's adoption of the Hausa-style tunic on top of wrappers or trousers and many other examples in the study illustrated. As Chapter Four showed, Yorùbá dress constitutes one of the many ways through which Yorùbá people establishes, sustains, and reinforces their identities as individuals and as a group. Hence, dress does not only cover the body, but also reveals it. It indicates gender, character, occupation, wealth, religion, positions, power and status as well as reinforces it. It, in addition, determines and negotiates social relationship. These conceptualizations are encapsulated in the Yorùbá aphorism, *Iri ni si ni isonilojo* (one's appearance determines the degree of respect one gets from others).

Although the study recognized the biological function of Yorùbá dress, emphasis was however placed on the social function of dress, i.e. dress as communicator of values. The study argued that individuals occupy a number of social positions and thus exuded a number of identities all of which contribute to individual and groups' total self-configuration. By focusing on the social function of dress, the study was able to ascertain the values that Yorùbá people project when they dress; why they dress the way they do, etc.

Colonial rule is something of a paradox: on the one hand, it brought different Nigerian peoples in different conditions under one roof. On the other hand, it introduced new differences without as much as removing the old ones. The advent of colonialism brought important changes to Yorubaland: the termination of the 19th Century Yorùbá War; the opening of all roads within Yorubaland, which were closed consequent upon the war; free movement of men, merchandise and ideas; commercialization of agriculture, which was orchestrated with the introduction of cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber and corn; introduction of a new political system – indirect rule -; introduction of Christianity and Western

Education; introduction of a new health system; abolition of domestic slavery, pawnship, and human sacrifices; uniform currency; construction of roads, railways and harbor, which fostered trade growth and ensured unprecedented socio-economic and political changes in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria, etc. All these developments have important effects on social life in Yorùbá societies. The study identified the various changes occasioned by Islam, Christianity, and colonialism. The study asserted that Islam, Christianity and colonialism played fundamental roles in Yorùbá identity construction, especially the development of a new class of educated Yorùbá people.

On the one hand, the early missionaries considered no Yorùbá converts as truly converted until they donned the European dress. On the other hand, early educated Nigerians regarded European dress as status symbol and they wore them not only to reveal/display their new identity but also to ape the missionaries and the colonial masters. The colonial and post-colonial periods also witnessed increasing production and importation of European textile, which, unlike the indigenous Yorùbá cloths, were lighter, brighter, and cheaper, into Yorubaland vis-à-vis Africa. However, from the 1860, nationalist discourse shifted from agitating for increasing the numbers of Nigerians in colonial government and administration to agitation for cultural renewal and independence. Important to this discourse were (Yorùbá) language and dress. Increasing number of Nigerian nationalists dumped their European dress for indigenous African dress. Many went further to dump their European names for traditional African names. In Yorubaland, the use of Yorùbá dress rose significantly, as the educated or literate Yorùbá men and women who had earlier took to European dress, dumped European dress and took to its use. Also, Yorùbá women, especially the literate ones, combined European dress with the indigenous ones and creating new fashion trends, which stimulated new sales of both the European and indigenous Yorùbá dress across Yorubaland. European dress, from the 1860s, began to reflect the dominant political currents in Nigeria, as cloth-designers began to incorporate pictures, proverbs, etc. which bothered on socio-economic and political developments of the period into their designs. The overarching issues of this

period were the politics of dress and how this underpinned Yorùbá ethno-national identity over the long run.

Tribal marks, loose-fitting cloths, caps, office and formal dress, etc. were either introduced or the existing ones were modified to accommodate Islam, Christianity and colonialism. As the study argued, rather than supplanting Yorùbá sartorial tradition, these multi-layered developments led to sartorial hybridity, which manifested in different forms in contemporary Yorubaland.

There is no gainsaying the fact that contacts with the Arabic/Muslims and Europeans/Christians through religions (Islam and Christianity) and colonialism have left indelible imprints on Yorùbá sartorial tradition. However, they are, as this study has shown, no more than two evanescent ‘episodes’, although with devastating impact, in Yorùbá history. It must be noted, on the one hand, that none of the two episodes was a direct successor to the one before it. Just as Arabic/Muslims sartorial tradition was alien to Yorùbá sartorial tradition, so also was Europeans/Christians sartorial tradition. On the other hand, neither the Arabic/Muslims nor the Europeans/Christians sartorial traditions were able to supplant or displace the erstwhile Yorùbá sartorial tradition. Nevertheless, both aspired to supplant Yorùbá sartorial tradition: for instance, Islam, Christianity and colonial adventurers made concerted efforts at different times to superimpose Arabic and European sartorial traditions on Yorùbá people. These efforts, however, recorded limited successes. Not only did the Ibadan warriors rebuffed the Jihadists who had overran Ilorin and were, from this new capital, introducing Arabic/Islamic culture into Yorubaland, but also stuck to their traditional facial markings, clothing styles, etc.; leaving Ilorin and other conquered Yorùbá territories to adopt *Pele* and loose-fitting clothes common to Arabic/Muslims. The offspring of the Yorùbá who rebuffed the Jihadists later successfully rebuffed the church’s attempt to impose European/Christian dress, which was equated with being genuinely Christians.

On the one hand, Mojola Agbebi and many others took the church headlong on the sanctity of indigenous dress over European dress. On the other hand, others in colonial employment openly condemned the use of European dress (daubed ‘office dress’ or ‘uniform’) that were essentially made for temperate regions in

Nigeria's tropical climate, as both unhealthy and ambivalent of the so-called civilization the European missions and colonial administrators claimed they were spreading.

The high point of these contestations was that the wearing of traditional dress, as against Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dress became a nationalistic issue. To use Yorùbá dress was (and still is) to be Yorùbá and good, unsoiled and honest; while to use Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dresses was (and still is) to be unpatriotic and bad; corrupt and dishonest. In addition, indigenous Yorùbá dress embodied power, both spiritual and secular. Owing to the powers in them, whether real or putative, Yorùbá dress is regarded as sacred, as it shares the status, power, and identity of its wearers. Hence, a king needs not attend a function physically; so far one of his symbols of office is present at such occasion. In similar fashion as Christianity, the dress ensembles of deity priests and priestesses were regarded as potent as the powers reposed in these priests, and just as the biblical woman with issues of blood touched the hem of Jesus' cloak and was healed, dress ensembles of priests and priestesses are believed to be equally potent. Dress' overt function therefore goes beyond the existential value of covering human nakedness and preventing same from unsolicited and unwanted gaze to include complex phenomenon such as power, age, sex, status, office, etc. In fact, for the Yorùbá, the dress not only makes the monk, but also establishes, reinforces, and sustains the monk.

At yet another level, nudity and unwrapping of the human body is also a form of dress. This broad conceptualization of dress in Yorubaland showed the sacredness of human body and the power inherent in unwrapped or naked body. Women, from time immemorial, have used this medium to check governmental excesses and to rein-in erring leaders. Alake Adedamola, during the colonial period, was removed from office when Egba women staged a naked protest against him. Ekiti women staged a naked protest to demonstrate their abhorrence to the electoral malfeasances that characterized April 2003 Governorship elections! Cases of naked protests and unwrapping of the human body as political tools abound in Yorùbá history. The study argued that whether or not the human body is dressed; Yorùbá dress also constitutes a political tool that is capable of having physical and

spiritual impact. Therefore the generality of Yorùbá believed that dress is essential to life.

Ignorant of these values inherent in Yorùbá dress, missionaries and colonial administrators attempted to impose European sartorial tradition on Yorùbá people, a step that was met with stiff opposition. The initial acceptance of European dress, the study argued, soon gave way to open rejection, if not rebellion. Even now, contemporary Yorùbá people view European sartorial tradition as essentially corrupt, immodest and unhealthy.

Notwithstanding the protests mounted by Yorùbá nationalists against imposition of European sartorial tradition, women's dress witnessed a dramatic change and it can be safely argued that while men were busy fighting against cultural colonization in dress and language, their wives, daughters and sisters were busy experimenting with European dress and adapting them to suit their new-found sartorial freedom. So, contrary to generally held assumption that women were carriers of culture, the study argued that men, rather than women, are the carriers of Yorùbá sartorial culture.

In spite of the above, the admixture of health and moral reasons as underlying factors behind the protests against imposition of Arabic/Muslim and European/Christian dress over and above indigenous Yorùbá dress may be, in the case of health, reasonable and therefore right and justifiable. The moral aspect of the argument, the study argued, lacks any empirical evidence.

## **7.2. Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Sartorial Tradition**

As the study showed, Yorùbá sartorial tradition is about two things: change and continuity. Influences from Islam, Christianity and colonialism interfaced with indigenous dress system to produce the contemporary Yorùbá sartorial tradition. In contemporary Nigeria, Yorùbá people are not only famous for their traditional dress, but also European dress. It must be asserted that although Yorùbá people protested the imposition of European dress by the Church and colonial administrators during the colonial period, but no sooner had independence replaced colonialism than the Yorùbá people went back to European dress. As the study argued, the reasons for this turnaround deals with the political economic system handed over to Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria at



independence. In so far as independence did not lead to returning the various groups that formed contemporary Nigeria to their pre-colonial stages, but continued from where the colonial masters stopped and heading forward; the need for employment and capitalist enterprise that followed colonialism made it mandatory for contemporary Yorùbá people to continue in the colonial bureaucratic tradition. Invariably, European dress persists in contemporary Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria because it serves as a marker of political transition between city-states to nation-state; between traditional, indigenous authority to contemporary political class created by colonialism; between honesty of purpose and corruption; between khaki and *Agbada*, denoting military rule versus civilian rule; force versus deliberation; war versus peace; corruption versus prudence; etc. These dichotomies and their multi-layered meanings are parts of the meaning making processes that Yorùbá people encapsulate in their dress.

Essentially, the use of indigenous dress is equated with applauding traditional values and leadership while holding political values and leadership instituted by colonialism in abeyance. Invariably, the mixing of indigenous and western dress symbolizes incorporation of indigenous with contemporary leadership structure. Conceived in this way, this study steered the arguments on dress and the construction of Yorùbá ethno-national identity away from clothing consumption to the materiality of cloth as a strategic resource for the unmaking and remaking of persons and identities.

### **7.3. Yorùbá Dress and Globalization**

Globalization, in relation to Yorùbá dress, has manifested in two broad ways. On the one hand is the influence and incorporation of foreign or other sartorial traditions into Yorùbá dress culture, while on the other hand, is the imbibing and wearing of foreign dress culture by Yorùbá people. Attention has been given to the first, while a whole book can be written on the second. What shall be done on the second issue on globalization and Yorùbá dress here is to briefly outline the implications of these on the kernel of Yorùbá dress.

Like in other parts of the world, a feature of this second form of globalization in Yorùbá dress deals with Yorùbá people

imbibing in the jeans culture. The jeans culture is used here to describe the wearing of American-type jeans, business suits, tee-shirts, fez-caps, assortments of perfumes, etc. While it may be extremely difficult to date this development, it can however be said that its widespread usage cannot be dissociated from the era of the structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s. Whichever way it started, the fact remains that a drastic and sudden cut in government spending and drastic measures on the economy ensured that young men and women in Yorubaland, most of who had become jobless, soon find the wearing of jeans, tee-shirts, etc. as a way of coping with the austerity measure and this, today, has assumed a mark of not just sophistication but also of civilization. Hence, jeans culture is no longer limited to private use or associated with poverty, but now considered as standard dress. The enduring appeal of this type of dress does not lay on popularity and being foreign, but also on been trendy.

For many in Yorubaland, jeans and other clothes in this category not only speak of being young, but also of being ready to get into the trenches and get dirty. So, they are regarded as both work clothes, office clothes and fancy clothes. Institutions such as banks, insurance and telecommunication companies, etc. now encourage, if not mandate, their staff to use this type of dress, most especially on Thursdays and Fridays. Hence, it is commonplace in contemporary Yorubaland to see a Chief Executive Officer of a blue-chip company who, in the course of the week, had dressed in American business suit to turn up at the office on Friday in a pair of jeans and a branded tee-shirt with a fez cap.

While no evidence exists to support the fact that Yorùbá people used perfumes any time in their history before contacts with Islam, the introduction of the two world religions also brought about the use of assortments of perfumes, incenses, creams and deodorants in Yorùbá dress-world. Based on available information, the oldest perfume in Yorubaland is *Bint El Sudan*. It was believed to have been introduced to Yorubaland by either Muslim cleric from Northern Nigeria in early 1920s or through trade with the Sudanese around this period. In contemporary Yorubaland, assortment of perfumes and creams such as Coca, My-Only-Man, Channel 5, Joy, Nevea, Hugo Boss, Lacoste, Axe, Cocoa-butter,

Nku Cream, Pearls, etc. have replaced shear-butter, palm-kernel and cocoanut oils.

As already noted, in Nigeria today, a Yorùbá man is easily distinguished from, for instance a Hausa man not only on account of language, but most certainly on account of dress. For an average Yorùbá man or a person from Southern Nigeria, the jeans and Lacoste culture marks sophistication, western education and, in most cases, Christianity.

From previous chapters, we can unmistakably argue that Yorùbá sartorial tradition has always responded to stimuli from within and without its environment. Contemporary Yorubaland is dominated by a jeans and Lacoste generation of young boys and girls, who not only revel in wearing hybrid dress, comprising of Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá dress; but also cross-dress. It is now common for girls to wear shaved-hairs, jeans trousers, shirts and fez-caps just like their male counterparts while the boys also wear earrings, plait or weave or braid their hairs. In addition to all these, girls and boys are now wearing their trousers and skirts in such a way that a sizeable part of their buttocks are in full public glare. This is called 'sagging'. In addition to these, it is also commonplace to see young males use earrings, necklace, leg chains, etc.

From time immemorial, Yorùbá dress aims at presenting the dressed body (to both the self and others) in ways that evince pride and the value of being an *Omoluabi*, the soul of Yorùbá peoplehood noted in Chapter Two. This essentially entails being well-behaved, well-dressed, lofty in speech and conduct, fashionable, urbane, etc. Given the above, one can ask what value this new dress culture evinces. Can we arrogate this to globalization (of culture) or a collapse of Yorùbá sartorial values? In addition, given that Yorùbá sartorial tradition also established and reinforced individual and corporate identity of the Yorùbá people; whose identity - individual and corporate - is this globalized dress culture accentuating?

Using the social identity theory discussed in chapter one as a guide, answers to the above question and such other ones that one may raise in relation to sagging and associated dress ethos, could be found in the Eric Erikson's analysis of social identity opinion of Weinrich, who posits that how one construes oneself as

aspires to be in the future will differ considerably according to one's age and accumulated experiences. Weinrich's Identity Structural Analysis, a structural representation of individual's existential experience through which the relationship between individual and social space are organized, offers more insights into the new dress culture. As Weinrich noted, the process of forming a viable sense of identity in any social space starts from adolescent, where young members of the group learn group cultural traits through exploration and commitments. Four notable developments from this stage are identity diffusion, identity foreclosure, identity moratorium, and identity achievement. Identity diffusion is when a person lacks exploration and commitment to those group cultural traits that makes the group distinct from other groups. Identity foreclosure describes a situation whereby an individual failed to imbibe a group trait in the past, but now wish to commit to some group values or goals. Identity moratorium describes inability to commit oneself to a choice made. In such cases, the person displays a kind of flightiness. Lastly, identity achievement is when a person makes a choice of group trait and commits to it.

From the above, it can be argued that the new and globalized dress culture signposts identity crises associated with adolescents, especially at the start of a new thing. Unless this identity crisis is resolved at some point in life, this may be carried through an entire life.

#### **7.4. Conclusion**

From the study so far, we can conclude that although the biological functions of covering human nakedness and shielding it from unsolicited and unwanted visual intrusion remains cardinal to why people, not Yorùbá people alone, dress; the social functions of dress, that is dress as communicator of values, remains the most important part of Yorùbá sartorial tradition. The primary concern in social theory of dress, upon which the analysis in this study rests, is that dress, as a communicator of values, plays fundamental roles in how self and group identity is established, maintained, and altered. As the analyses in this study have shown, Yorùbá dress is a form of non-verbal communication, a language whose vocabularies, lexis, structure, etc. is mutually intelligible and understood by the Yorùbá people. In addition, as a non-verbal

linguistic code, it exerts a great influence on structure and process of Yorùbá's sense of self both at the individual level and at corporate level.

As a form of non-verbal communication, Yorùbá dress entails two distinct things: appearance and discourse. While appearance describes the outward expression of Yorùbá's identity through material things, dress as an example; discourse describes the inherent meanings associated with such material expressions. Although dress, as a language, is used in communication encounter among Yorùbá people, dress is however seen, processed and interpreted before verbal communication. Dress, therefore, takes pre-eminence over verbal communication in establishing and reinforcing identity - individual or group.

As is the case with all communication encounters, messages are coded using language, which could be verbal or non-verbal, by a source who encodes the message, (as we have seen in the case of dress, colour, style, semiotic of meanings, attachments, etc.) and transmits this through appropriate media to a receiver who decodes the message. This process, dubbed a review in this study, plays important role in identity construction. For instance, when a review (by the receiver) tallies with the intended message from the source; a successful communication is said to have been established. Where the reverse is the case, the source's message is challenged. Whether a communication is going to be established or challenged depends on whether or not both the source and receiver exists in a community of taxonomic sameness. Where they mutually understand the semiotic of meanings inherent in dress, a community is built. In this way, the language became inexorably tied to the community and vice versa.

It must however be noted that situations may arise whereby a source may code a language wrongly or a receiver may decode a language wrongly. This may occur deliberately as a form of protest (Ekiti Women's naked protest is a good example) or accidentally due to poor knowledge of the language (the discussions on *Ara-Oko* is an apt illustration of this). Situations such as these do nothing to invalidate the acceptance of the language within the group. Viewed in this way, Yorùbá dress became more meaningful when considered within the context of Yorubaland's socio-economic, political history and material culture.

It is in context of the foregoing that the varieties of dress, uses, and changes that Yorùbá dress has witnessed became meaningful in the general consideration of how Yorùbá dress built into Yorùbá identity. As the study has shown, Yorùbá people project the value of being an *Omoluabi*, a generic term for everything good, lofty and of good report.

Yorùbá people dress to appear acceptable both to themselves and to others. Appearance, here, deals essentially with both the self and others (the public). The first deals with how an individual view him or herself as an individual, while the other deals with how others see the individual. An individual's self-identity is validated when there is agreement in his or her own opinion of him or herself and those of others about him or her. Where opinions coincide, the individual's self-identity is validated, but where the reverse is the case, the individual's self-identity is challenged. To ensure correspondence between an individual's self-identity and those held by others about him or her, humans seek, using different means and methods, to influence not just their own perception of themselves, but also how others perceive them. Dress, one of the ingenious means through which humans seek to influence perception, therefore plays fundamental roles in establishing, altering, projecting self-identity not only of oneself to oneself, but also of oneself to others as well as of others to oneself.

As already shown, *Aso Ebi* and *Aso Egbe'Jo Da* may give different views or identities about a couple, they also mirror family cohesion and togetherness. Facial marks, caps, beads, and religious dress may reflect origin, ranks and other cherished categories; they may also show power and devotion at the same time. Not minding type, colour or circumstance of usage, it is this capacity of Yorùbá dress to communicate values, the most fundamental being the virtue of being an *Omoluabi*, which compels Yorùbá people to take the greatest care in presenting themselves to both 'the self' and to public.

Although Islam, Christianity, colonialism, Western education and a host of associated developments have impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition, Yorùbáness still remained an expression of what had already existed, a critical component of which is Yorùbá dress. Notwithstanding these changes, the links between Yorùbáness and Yorùbá dress still remains active and, as already

shown, these links will always remain active. As noted in the study, just as it is difficult to separate a bone from its marrows and still ensure the harmonious functioning of the body, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove Yorùbá dress from Yorùbá identity.

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### **6.1. Museums**

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National Museum, Esie, Esie, Nigeria

National Museum, Lagos, Nigeria

### **6.2 Libraries and Depositories**

Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Hezekiah Akinsanmi Library, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria

### **6.3 Encyclopedias and Books**

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### **6.4 Government Ministries and Departments**

Oyo State Ministry of Information, Ibadan, Nigeria

Lagos State Ministry of Information, Alausa, Lagos, Nigeria

National Institute for Cultural Orientation, Iganmu, Lagos, Nigeria

### **6.5 Palaces**

Alaafin of Oyo's Palace Album, Aafin, Oyo  
Ooni of Ife's Palace Album, Enuwa, Ile-Ife

### **6.6 Private Collections**

Getty Images  
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Sammy Photos, RCCG Camp, Mowe  
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### **6.7 Professional Photographers**

Pa. Olugbenga Pechu (family album), Lagos.  
Mr. and Mrs. Tunde Oyebode Family Album  
Mr. and Mrs. B.A. Oyeniya Family Album

### **6.8 Internet Sources**

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## Samenvatting

Dit is een studie van Yorubaland, in de periode tussen 1880 en 1980, die de geschiedenis beschouwt door te kijken naar kleding. De studie combineert bestaande literatuur met archiefbronnen en archeologisch bewijs, fotoalbums en mondelinge interviews, de analyse van namen en gezegden, folkloristische liederen en participerende observaties. Er wordt in het bijzonder gekeken naar de rol die kleding speelt in de constructie van Yoruba ethno-nationale identiteit. Bij de Yoruba werd kleding gezien als een samenstelling van wijzigingen en/of toevoegingen tot het menselijke lichaam. Deze konden gemodelleerd haar, een gekleurde huid, gepiercte oren en een geurige adem omvatten, alsmede een lange lijst van kleding, sieraden, accessoires en andere voorwerpen die toegevoegd werden aan het lichaam. Deze conceptualisatie omvatte ook tatoeages en het merken van het gezicht, het beschilderen en decoreren van het lichaam, schoenen en paraplu's, portemonnees en tassen, etc.

Aan de Yoruba conceptualisatie van kleding lag het idee van *Omoluabi* ten grondslag, een ethische categorie die gedefinieerd kan worden als een samenstelling van morele principes, zoals welbespraakt en respectvol zijn, eerlijk zijn en anderen in acht nemen, een goed karakter bezitten en moedig zijn, hardwerkend en intelligent zijn en een goed gevoel voor kleding hebben. Al deze eigenschappen vormden Yoruba individuele en groepsidentiteit (Yorubaheid) en definieerden waar kleding om hoorde te draaien. Goed gekleed zijn en een Yoruba man of vrouw zijn waren daarom onlosmakelijk met elkaar verbonden. Yorubaheid en Yoruba kleding gingen noodzakelijkerwijs samen. De functie van Yoruba kleding was daardoor meer dan alleen de biologische functie, het beschermen van het menselijke lichaam tegen het klimaat, of het bedekken van het lichaam tegen ongewenste en ongevraagde blikken. Belangrijker nog, kleding omvatte ook de belichaming van de existentiële waarde van een *Omoluabi* zijn.

Zoals deze studie heeft aangetoond, is de geschiedenis van Yoruba kleding een geschiedenis van verandering en continuïteit. Yoruba inheemse klederdracht ontstond, enerzijds, als een reactie op het leefmilieu in Yorubaland. Tijdens deze periode werd

kleding gemaakt van boomschors vervangen door dikke katoenstof, *Kijipa*. Andere tradities van klederdracht zoals kralen en sieraden, merken van het gezicht en lichaamsversieringen, etc. speelden een fundamentele rol in de definitie, identificatie en het onderscheid van verschillende categorieën van Yoruba mannen en vrouwen, hun levensfasen, religieuze en beroepsaffiliaties, alsmede sociale stand. Anderzijds werden de veranderingen beïnvloed door externe factoren, in het bijzonder door contacten met de Islamitisch/Arabische kledingcultuur en later door Christelijke en Europese kledingtradities.

Waar de verschillende invloeden niet goed samen konden gaan werd druk uitgeoefend. Dit gebeurde in eerste instantie door handelscontacten, die niet zozeer tot doel hadden om de inheemse Yoruba klederdracht te vervangen. Islam dwong zich later op aan de Yoruba bevolking, zowel de religie als de kledingstijl. Voor diegenen die niet conformeerden was het alternatief de dood. Christendom, welke geleidelijk en vreedzaam aanstalten maakte in Yorubaland sinds de jaren 1840, werd in toenemende mate assertief. Het Christendom dwong zijn kledingtraditie op aan gelovigen. Diegenen die zich hiertegen verzetten werden uitgesloten van twee belangrijke Christelijke rituelen, de doop en de heilige communie.

Kolonialisme had een paradoxale invloed. Aan de ene kant bracht het de verschillen tussen de gekoloniseerde groepen naar voren en aan de andere kant creëerde het nieuwe vormen van verschil. Vanaf 1919 introduceerde het koloniale bestuur in Yorubaland uniforms, dikke uniforms die oorspronkelijk waren gemaakt voor Britse troepen tijdens de Eerste Wereldoorlog. Deze uniforms hadden een ongemakkelijke pasvorm en waren slecht geschikt voor het tropische klimaat. Desalniettemin stelde het koloniale bestuur deze uniforms in als officiële klederdracht voor verschillende rangen van hun staf en inheemse administratie. Tekens en symbolen, kleuren en epauletten, etc. gaven rank weer.

Deze ontwikkelingen hadden vergaande gevolgen. De geschoolde Yoruba elite wees de Europese en Christelijke kledingtradities af, omdat deze probeerden de Yoruba kledingtraditie te vervangen. Islamitische klederdracht had als enige profijt van deze strijd, aangezien Islamitische kledingmaterialen, in tegenstelling tot de Europese en Christelijke

stijlen, gebruikt konden worden om de kern van Yoruba klederdrachttraditie (een *Omoluabi* zijn) weer te geven. Wat vandaag wordt gezien als Yoruba kleding is daarom een mengeling van een inheemse Yoruba kledingtraditie, met Islamitisch/Arabische, Europese en Christelijke invloeden. Dit is de basis waarmee Yoruba hun kledingcultuur door de jaren heen hebben vormgegeven.

Ook al zijn er veel studies gedaan naar Yorubaland en Yoruba mensen, er is tot nu toe weinig geschreven over Yoruba kleding. Voorgaande studies hebben zich gericht op de politiek en de economie, oorlogsvoering en diplomatie, gender en cultuur, ondanks het belang van kleding voor het identificeren van de Yoruba bevolking. Deze studie is daarom baanbrekend. Het is niet alleen een studie van Yoruba geschiedenis die kleding gebruikt als een hulpmiddel voor de analyse, maar het spitst zich ook nadrukkelijk toe op Yoruba kledinggeschiedenis.

## **CURRICULUM VITAE**

Bukola Adeyemi Oyeniya was born in Ogbomoso, Nigeria, on 13th November 1968. Between 1974 and 1980, he attended St Luke's Primary School, Idode, Oyo, where, between 1981 and 1985 he completed his secondary school education at Durbar Grammar School, Oyo, Oyo State, Nigeria. Between 1986 and 1990, he trained as a Pastor at Gospel Baptist Theological Seminary, Awe, Oyo State and proceeded to the University of Ibadan, Ibadan in 1994 for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Classical Studies. On completing Bachelor's degree, he enrolled, between 2000 and 2003, for a Master's degree in History, also at the University of Ibadan, Ibadan. He was thereafter employed as a Research Assistant by the Emeritus Professor of History, J.F. Ade-Ajayi. Between 2005 and 2009, he joined the Redeemer's University, Nigeria, as Lecturer Grade Two and was the pioneer Acting Head, History and International Relations Department. As of February 2010, he is employed at the Joseph Ayo Babalola University, Nigeria, where besides starting as pioneer Acting Head of Department, he also teaches Social History and Historiography.