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Dress and identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980

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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.⁶⁸

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

⁶⁸ 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.⁶⁹

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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ 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

⁶⁹ 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).

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

⁷¹ 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'.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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

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

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

economic elite in advanced societies.⁷⁴ 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, Ebira, 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.

⁷⁴ 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 (Nupe).⁷⁵

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

⁷⁵ 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.⁷⁶ He went further to warn that although both historical and linguistic evidence on the Yorùbá offer very bold interpretations, their conclusions are nevertheless conjectural.⁷⁷ For instance, the above passage from Fadipe, which was also reported by Samuel Johnson,⁷⁸ 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.⁷⁹

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

⁷⁶ Toyin Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.), *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (New York, 2006), 30.

⁷⁷ Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, *Ibid*, 34.

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

⁷⁹ 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 ...*⁸⁰ (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*.⁸¹ 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

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

⁸¹ 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...*⁸²

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.⁸³ 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*'.⁸⁴ 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

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

⁸³ Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 283.

⁸⁴ Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', 29.

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

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.⁸⁶ 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*’.⁸⁷

He argued that the map is true to the extent of describing where ‘*majority of the Yorùbá population now lives....*’⁸⁸ He went further to state that the colonial map failed to incorporate other Yorùbá people in other places in West Africa and the diaspora.⁸⁹ N.A. Fadipe claimed that Yorubaland ‘*... lies between the parallels 5.36⁰ and 9.22⁰ north, and between 2.65⁰ and 5.72⁰ 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 7.3⁰. From this point, the boundary is in a north-westerly direction, along a straight line drawn rather arbitrarily to meet 9⁰ of latitude immediately due south of Jebba.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 8.

⁸⁶ Ibid, 8.

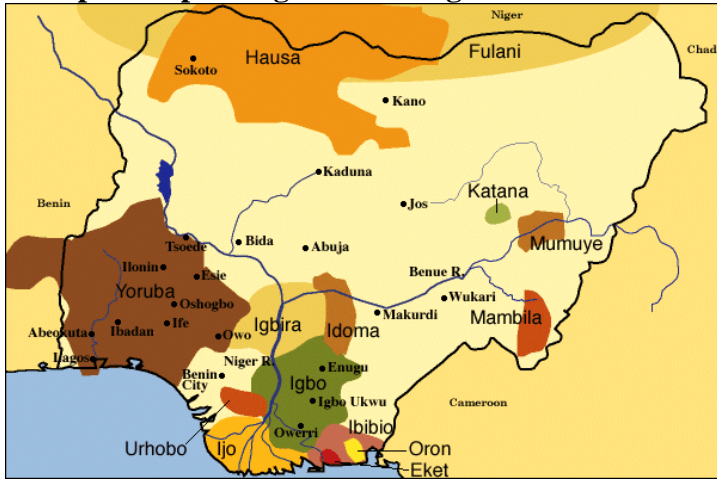
⁸⁷ Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, 29.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 29.

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

⁹⁰ 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*'.⁹¹

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.⁹² 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,

⁹¹ Falola, 'The Yorùbá Nation', 29.

⁹² 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.⁹³

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.*⁹⁴

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*

⁹³ Fadipe, *The Sociology of the Yorùbá*, 29.

⁹⁴ *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’.*⁹⁵

Traditional accounts have mentioned the Edo people as also a stock of Yorùbá, especially Jacob Egharevba’s accounts.⁹⁶ However, recent oral accounts that are re-interpretations of the traditional accounts have controverted the claim.⁹⁷ 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.⁹⁸ 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).⁹⁹

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.

⁹⁵ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 9.

⁹⁶ Jacob Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin*, (Ibadan, 1960).

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

⁹⁸ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 10.

⁹⁹ 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*)¹⁰⁰ and Lucumi (*oluku mi* – my friend)¹⁰¹ 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.¹⁰² 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

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.’¹⁰³

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.¹⁰⁴ In addition to this, the language has more than hundred variants inter-communicable dialects.¹⁰⁵ 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.¹⁰⁶ 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.¹⁰⁷ Adetugbo

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

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

¹⁰⁵ Falola, ‘The Yorùbá Nation’, 29.

¹⁰⁶ Bloomfield Leonard, *Language*, (London, 1935), 51.

¹⁰⁷ 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.¹⁰⁸

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

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.

¹⁰⁸ 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' Congress¹⁰⁹, a political

¹⁰⁹ 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*”.¹¹⁰ 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*”.¹¹¹

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*.¹¹² 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

¹¹⁰ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts*, 113.

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

¹¹² 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*".¹¹³

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 them¹¹⁴.

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

¹¹³ Munoz, *The Yorùbá Studies*, (Ibadan, 2005), 67.

¹¹⁴ 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."*¹¹⁵ 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,

¹¹⁵ 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*”.¹¹⁶ 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*,

¹¹⁶ 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 Kriger¹¹⁷ 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 Frobenius, 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 Frobenius 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 BC¹¹⁸, while, on the other

¹¹⁷ Colleen Kriger, *Cloth in West African History*, (Lanham, 2006).

¹¹⁸ See among others: Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Vizuala a Artei: Artă 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.¹¹⁹. 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

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.

¹¹⁹ Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Vizuala 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.¹²⁰ 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

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

skins.¹²¹ 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*”.¹²² Both, it was claimed, continued to be popular until around 1717 among the Ewe and till 1910 among the Kongo.¹²³

Ife Ancient Arts

Figure 1



Figure 2



¹²¹ 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.

¹²² Stanley, ‘What Africans Got’, 5-43.

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

Figure 3

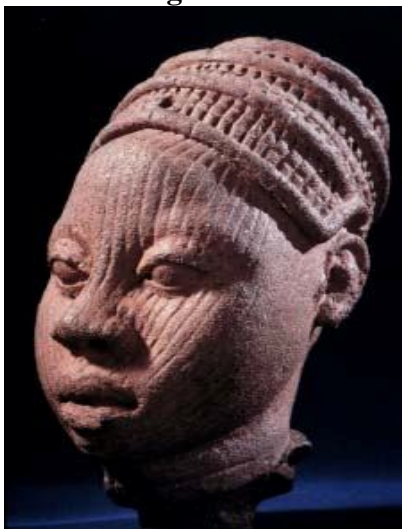


Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

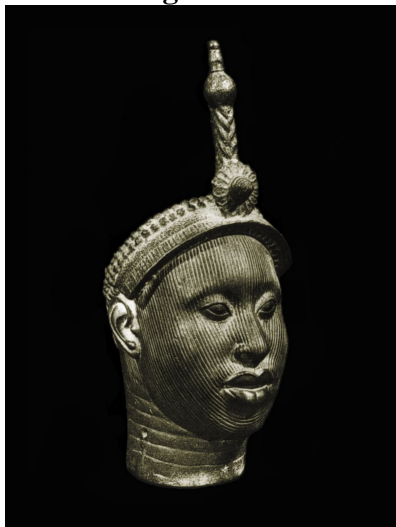


Figure 9



Figure 10

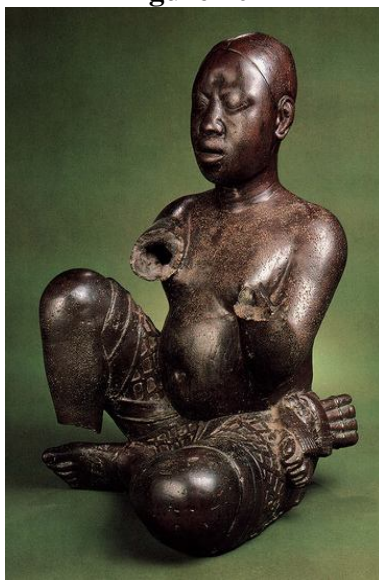


Figure 11



Figure 12



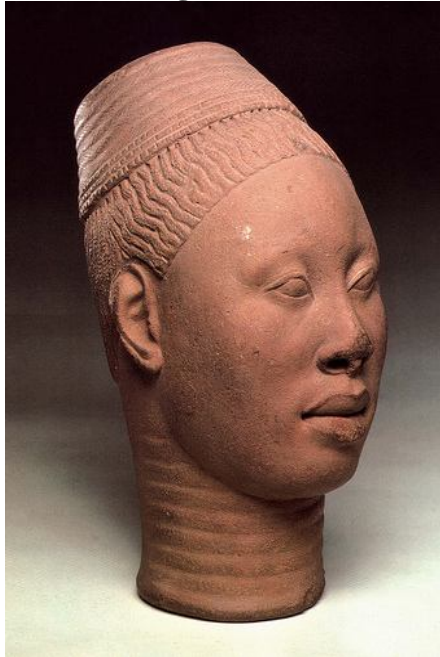
Figure 13



Figure 14



Figure 15



Sources: Moise I. Luciana, *Enciclopedia Vizuala a Artei: Artă 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.¹²⁴ 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* corpuses 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

¹²⁴ 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.¹²⁵ 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’.¹²⁶ Among the Egba and Ijebu, the cloth was known as *Egbedi Aso Ila*¹²⁷, while among the Igbomina, from where the cloth emanated, it was called *Kijipa*.¹²⁸

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-

¹²⁵ 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.

¹²⁶ Johnson, *The History of the Yorùbás*, 110.

¹²⁷ Interview with Baba Fatimoh, Sagamu, 12 June 2010.

¹²⁸ 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.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰ 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

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

¹³⁰ 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.*'¹³¹ 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.¹³² 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,

¹³¹ Ogunremi, *ibid*, 6.

¹³² 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.¹³³ 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.

¹³³ 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.¹³⁴ 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.¹³⁵ During the nineteenth century, it must be

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

¹³⁵ 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.*¹³⁶

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’.¹³⁷ 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.¹³⁸

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.¹³⁹

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

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

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

¹³⁸ Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 179.

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

order to dress well.¹⁴⁰ 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.¹⁴¹ To ensure positive public acceptance, respect, and reference, therefore, Judith Byfield noted, the “*Yorùbá men and women expended considerable time and resources on dress.*”¹⁴² 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.*”¹⁴³ 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.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 162.

¹⁴¹ 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.

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

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

¹⁴⁴ 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 flfa kodoro l'o mu ibe su mi!*¹⁴⁵

(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!*¹⁴⁶

(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.¹⁴⁷ 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.¹⁴⁸

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

¹⁴⁵ Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 163.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 176.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid, 164-174.

¹⁴⁸ 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.¹⁴⁹

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

¹⁴⁹ 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.¹⁵⁰ 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,

¹⁵⁰ 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.*”¹⁵¹ 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.¹⁵² Although facial

¹⁵¹ Johnson, *The History*, 106.

¹⁵² 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*'¹⁵³, where *iwapele*, a contraption of

¹⁵³ '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”¹⁵⁴, 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 *Omoluabi* as someone who has been well brought up or a person who is highly cultured”.¹⁵⁵ 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).

¹⁵⁴ 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.

¹⁵⁵ 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 - *Oko Eti'le*, *Oko-Egan* and *Oko-Igbo*.¹⁵⁶ These three classifications deal with the distance of the various farms from their homes. While the first was usually located just at the outskirt of their village, *Oko-Egan* was far and usually in the open savannah. *Oko-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 *Oko-Igbo*; hence, houses were normally built at *Oko-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 *Oko-Igbo*. Yorùbá people believed that the longer one stayed at *Oko-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-Oko*, 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*.

¹⁵⁶ 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.¹⁵⁷

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;

¹⁵⁷ 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.¹⁵⁸ More importantly, as Byfield also noted, dress makes “*enduring statements about one’s character and station in life.*”¹⁵⁹ 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.¹⁶⁰ 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...*”¹⁶¹

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 access the significance of cloth in religious worship among Yorùbá people of Nigeria.¹⁶² 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...*”¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Adeoye, *Asa ati Ise Yorùbá*, 162

¹⁵⁹ Byfield, *The Bluest Hands*, 3.

¹⁶⁰ Fadipe, *The Sociology*, 71.

¹⁶¹ Ibid, p. 71.

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

¹⁶³ 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.¹⁶⁴ 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*.¹⁶⁵ 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

¹⁶⁴ Ibid, 3.

¹⁶⁵ 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*"¹⁶⁶.

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*

¹⁶⁶ 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*.



Dandogo 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 "*oju 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. Lijadu¹⁶⁷ and, in 1899, by Rev. James Johnson,¹⁶⁸ both of whom wrote many years before Rev. Samuel Johnson¹⁶⁹ (in 1920) and Dr. N.A. Fadipe¹⁷⁰ (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

¹⁶⁷ 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).

¹⁶⁸ Johnson James, *Yorùbá Heathenism*, (Exter, 1899).

¹⁶⁹ Johnson, *The History*.

¹⁷⁰ 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.¹⁷¹ They were completely different from other ethnic groups, especially those from northern Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani, who were reputable for lying.¹⁷² 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.¹⁷³ 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

¹⁷¹ Johnson, *The History*, 20.

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

¹⁷³ 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.