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## **Dress and identity in Yorubaland, 1880-1980**

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## Chapter Four

### Islam, Christianity, Colonial Rule and Yorùbá Dress

#### 4.0. Introduction

This chapter examines the impact of Islam and Christianity, colonial rule and Western education on Yorùbá dress. Islam, which came into Yorubaland through Northern Nigeria, got to Yorubaland before Christianity. Christianity, which began effectively in Yorubaland from 1830s, became widespread in Yorubaland as a result of the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, most notably the need to end the internecine civil war, which tore Yorubaland apart for nearly a century. Missionary and colonial intervention in the civil war not only ensured the termination of the war, but also the eventual incorporation of Yorubaland into the vortex of colonialism and global trade. Colonialism, as shown in the chapter, was daubed by colonial masters as civilization and a critical part of this colonial civilization included the wearing of European dress either as uniform in colonial service or in public life as part of conversion to Christianity. The chapter's overarching emphasis is the various changes indigenous Yorùbá dress culture witnessed consequent upon the coming of Islam, Christianity, Western education, and colonial rule.

#### 4.1. The Nineteenth Century Yorùbá Civil War and the Coming of Islam and Christianity into Yorubaland

During most of the eighteenth century, the Yorùbá, excluding the Ijebu, were united into one kingdom ruled from Old-Oyo<sup>238</sup>. But by 1780, Yorubaland was split into four states namely Oyo, Ketu, Egba and Ijebu. By 1850, as a result of the Fulani invasion, four new states emerged, namely Ibadan, Ilesha, Ife, and the Ekitiparapo.<sup>239</sup> From this period, what the Yorùbá had established

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<sup>238</sup> Oguntomisin G. O. and Toyin Falola, "Refugees in 19th Century Yorubaland", in Isaac AdeagboAkinjogbin (ed.), *Ife: The Cradle of a Race, from the Beginning to 1980*, (Port Harcourt, 1992), 381-384.

<sup>239</sup> Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, "Keynote Address", in Isaac AdeagboAkinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 1-6.

and maintained over the course of many years was threatened by a political crisis, which began at the heart of the Empire, Old-Oyo. One of its major causes was the inordinate ambition of functionaries of the central government, which led to a breakdown in constitutional mechanism of the Empire.<sup>240</sup>

This sign of decay began to manifest when Gaa became *Basorun* and head of Oyo-Mesi (the kingmakers in Oyo).<sup>241</sup> He subverted the constitution and from 1754 to 1774, he usurped the power of the *Alaafin* and ruled with unparalleled despotism and ruthlessness. Although Abiodun succeeded in ending Gaa's ignoble reign, and was installed as the *Alaafin*, he nevertheless could not reverse or avert the repercussion of Gaa's reign, especially in the provinces.<sup>242</sup>

The pace set by Gaa was later followed by Afonja, the *Are-Ona-Kakanfo* (the Field Marshall of Oyo Army and military governor at Ilorin). Afonja not only disobeyed *Alaafin* Awole who reigned after Abiodun, but also carved an Empire out of the Old-Oyo Empire for himself.<sup>243</sup> To achieve these, he allied with some important chiefs in Oyo, most especially *Basorun* Asamu, the head of the Oyo-Mesi, and Owota Lafianu, one of the Imperial guards, who were also desirous to exercise power beyond the constitutional provisions.<sup>244</sup> Acting in concert with these individuals, Afonja refused the order by the *Alaafin* to attack Iwere-Ile, a well-fortified city South West of Oyo-Ile, and turned his armies against Oyo-Ile instead.<sup>245</sup> In 1796, they besieged the capital and demanded the head of Awole. Disappointed at the turn of events, Awole committed suicide. Adebo, who reigned after

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<sup>240</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>241</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F., "19th Century Wars and Yorùbá Ethnicity" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 10.

<sup>242</sup> Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, "The Causes of the 19th Century Civil Wars" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 133.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 135.

<sup>244</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas From the Earliest Times to the Beginning of the British Protectorates*, (Lagos, 1920), 165-168.

<sup>245</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F., "Fundamental Causes of the 19th Century Yorùbá Wars" in Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland, 1793-1893*, (Nigeria, 1998), 146.

Awole, was not recognized by Afonja. Adebo died shortly after ascending the throne and Maku reigned in his stead.<sup>246</sup>

Maku was more war-like and Afonja sensed that confrontation with Maku was inevitable. To strengthen his hands against Maku, he allied with Sheikh al-Salih, also called Alimi, a Fulani Muslim cleric from Sokoto.<sup>247</sup> Although Alimi agreed, but unfortunately for Afonja, Alimi had other plans. Like other Muslims, Alimi shared in the reformist ideals of Uthman Dan Fodio and saw the political crisis at Oyo-Ile as an opportunity to realizing the ambition of taking Islam into Yorubaland.<sup>248</sup>

Within a short time, Alimi and his men murdered Afonja. They then established Ilorin as their base,<sup>249</sup> from where they began a systematic attack on Old-Oyo Empire, which could offer little or no resistance. At the Ogele War, as in Mugbamugba, Kanla and Eleduwe wars, Oyo not only lost in battle, but also its king, *Alaafin* Oluewu, and his Borgu ally, Eleduwe, were all killed in battle.<sup>250</sup> Resulting from this defeat and unprecedented development, Oyo-Ile, the capital of the Empire, was set on fire and its inhabitants fled in different directions.

With their successes in these wars, the Jihadists soon began moving into the heart of Yorubaland towards the coast. Many Yorùbá cities and towns were soon overrun. Resistance was crushed with utmost brutality. To escape brutality, towns and cities were asked to surrender and take to Islam. Many cities and towns, as far as Ijebu, few kilometers to Lagos, took to Islam even before the Fulani warriors approached it. Iwo led by its king, turned to Islam and all its people were dressed up in Arabian fashion before the Fulani showed up at its gates. The ultimate aim of the Fulani Jihadists was to convert the entire Yorubaland to Islam and bring it under Caliphate rule.

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<sup>246</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 165.

<sup>247</sup> Ade-Ajayi J. F. and Akintoye S. A., "Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century", in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Nigeria, 1980), 285.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid, 286.

<sup>249</sup> Law R.C.C., *The Oyo Empire c. 1600-1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade*, (London, 1977), 89.

<sup>250</sup> Atanda J. A., 'The Fall of the Old Oyo Empire: A Reconsideration of its Causes', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 5:4, (1971), 447-490.

The result of incessant struggles for power among the succeeding states of Oyo was series of wars that devastated Yorubaland throughout the nineteenth century. More than anything else, these wars led to dispersal of people and therefore skills in dress production as well as transfer of associated skills and dexterity from one part of Yorubaland, especially those involved in the wars, to others that were not affected by the wars. In this way, Oke-Ogun, Iseyin, and Oyo-Ile people took *Ofi* production to Ijeshaland. Ilorin received many people from Oyo-Ile who not only took the art and skills involved in making *Ofi*, but also tie-and-dye to Ilorin. Ilorin, like other Yorùbá communities that embraced Islam began to adopt the Islamic sartorial tradition with their short or small *Agbada* (or *dansiki*) and small skull caps (mostly red colour caps). To escape death and destruction, many non-Oyo people also adopted Oyo facial marks, most especially those of the royal family, *Abaja*. In Ilorin and other Moslem enclaves in Yorubaland, facial marks, most especially *Abaja* facial marks, were either modified to *Pele* or discarded altogether.

To impose order on the discussion on the developments that followed the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, the coming and spread of Islam and Christianity and how these influenced Yorùbá sartorial tradition, the next two sub-sections discuss Islam and Christianity's influences on Yorùbá sartorial tradition.

#### **4.2. The Influence of Islam on Yorùbá Dress**

Islam's influences on Yorùbá sartorial tradition can be understood as fall out of two important developments: the nineteenth century Yorùbá wars and the abolition of slave trade. As already noted, the spread of Islam in Yorubaland cannot be dissociated from the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars. Some of the factors already highlighted include dispersal of artisans and therefore, diffusion of skills and expertise in dress production from areas of initial existence to new areas where the refugees fled.

Before the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, a few individuals, most especially long-distance traders took to Islam. Hence, Yorùbá Muslims were scattered and had little or no socio-political status. The nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars however changed this position of weakness to one of advantage, as the few scattered Yorùbá Muslims began to raise their heads following the

elimination of Afonja, the gradual decimation of Yorubaland, and the establishment of Ilorin as Jihadists' base in Yorubaland.<sup>251</sup>

Islam, like Christianity, also benefited from British's ending of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. As efforts were intensified to curb slave trade from its source, freed slaves, a few of whom were Moslems before their enslavement, boarded commercial vessels from the Americas and Sierra Leone and settled in Badagry, Lagos, Abeokuta and other places in Yorubaland.<sup>252</sup> These men and women proved advantageous and significant to the development of Muslim communities in Lagos, Ijebu Ode, Ijebu Igbo, Iwo, Iseyin, Saki, Oke-Iho, and Ilorin as in other parts of Yorubaland. Like their Christian counterparts, these Muslims, although operating from the cities reconnected with their hometowns and helped their different communities to achieve developmental progress.<sup>253</sup> The attainment of this hitherto unseen developmental progress in education, Koranic education, building of mosques, and other community development projects, therefore contributed to why Islam was quickly revived in both urban and rural Yorubaland.

Unlike Christianity that focused on individuals, Islam aimed at converting whole families and communities. In addition, the multi-dimensional role of its mallams as men of God, preachers, teachers, scholars, traders, advisers, and medicine-men, as well as the fact that Islam allowed traditional rulers and chiefs to practice their customs and traditions combined to give Islam an edge over Christianity in term of acceptance in Yorubaland. And Yorùbá people began to wear the *turban*, which Islam permitted over Yorùbá indigenous dress. Hence, a Yorùbá man studied Arabic and employed it in his prayers, but certain aspects of his worship are conducted in his own language, which, in any case, still remained the language of communication at all meetings. The Muslim songs are invariably his own. He remained a full member of his extended family, with Islam confirming his obligations to

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<sup>251</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam Among the Yorùbá, 1841-1908*, (Ibadan, 1985), 23.

<sup>252</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade-Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity in Nigeria', in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan, (Nigeria, 1980), 353.

<sup>253</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 53.

this extended family. As a *Mallam*, his roles as the diviner and medicine-man satisfied the spiritual and metaphysical needs of his society in ways similar to those of the traditional religion.<sup>254</sup>

As members of society, Yorùbá Muslims (in communities) are treated as equals, and there was no occasion for discrimination based on colour. Each Muslim community, although guided by the knowledge and experiences of orthodox Islamic practices, is independent and self-governing. The traditional titles and institutions such as *Igba Keji*, *Eketa*, *Ekerin*, and *Balogun*, which were traditional to Yorùbá communities, were adopted. Even when accustomed to foreign titles such as *Imam*, *Mallam*, and *Muezzin* were used; their functions and conditions of service were grounded in known and acceptable societal canon of the traditional Yorùbá society.<sup>255</sup> In summary, Islam was more society-friendly than Christianity and, as such, it enjoyed ready acceptance among the Yorùbá than Christianity.

It could be argued that Arab-styled dress began to appear in Yorubaland before the eighteenth century, however by the 1750, references to Islamic influence on Yorùbá dress began to appear in the praise-names of the *Alaafin* of Oyo. A few of the local names given this dress include: *kembeku*, *kanki*, *eha*, and *efun*. Others are *kafo*, *saluba*, and *atu*. Unlike *kanki*, *efun*, *kafo*, and *eha*, which are tight-fitting long trousers, *kembeku* are horse-riding knee breeches. *Saluba* and *atu*, also known as *efa*, are baggy-type trousers also worn during the middle of the eighteenth century.

A consideration of praise-names of Yorùbá kings and chiefs reveals the preponderance of Arab-style dress ensemble, which helps to show their enthusiasm and acceptance of the Islamic dress culture in Yorubaland. In the praise-names of the *Alaafin*, the king was described in the following words:

*O wokembeku lo ibiija*

*Ija o po tan kiiwoefun*

Abenugbangba ni ifi da won logun.<sup>256</sup>

(He wore a kembeku to war;

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<sup>254</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 359.

<sup>255</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 163.

<sup>256</sup> Adeoye C.L., *AsaatiIse Yoruba*, (Ibadan, 2005), 45.

Unless a battle is critical, he would not wear  
A tight-fitting trouser, with agenugbangba, he struck them  
at war).

In yet another version:

*Ijako'po tan, kiib'eha*  
*O bokankijaomolomol'ogun*  
*O bokembeku re ibiija.*<sup>257</sup>

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

In a similar way, *Oba OkoroAiyelagbe* of *Ipetumodu's*  
praise-names runs thus:

*Baba Akinsola,*  
*Orowoisura'yisembe-sembe.*  
*Oko Moyoola a maamu waaka oloyin.*  
*Oko mi da 'so da bombata*  
*Oko mi da 'so ti ole o le gbe*  
*Oko mi da 'so t' ogansel'odun*  
*Baba Akinsola a ba 'so-iyaso-lenu.*<sup>258</sup>

(Akinsola's father He has got the funds for buyingorang-  
colour velvet

My husband, the wearer of hand-woven fabrics with  
nuances of blue stripes and other colour.

My husband commissioned a bombata dress which a lazy  
man cannot lift.

My husband made dress with components of changing  
shimmering colours.

Akinsola's father, the owner of varying wonderful fabrics).

The following verse appears in the praise-names of the  
*Oluwo* of *Iwo*, *Oba Abimbola Sanni*:

*Oni sokoto ododo.*

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<sup>257</sup>Ibid, 49.

<sup>258</sup>Ibid, 59.

*Faran-da-agantan*<sup>259</sup>, *Latubosun Alabi*  
*Faran-da-agatan, oko ayaba, alewi-lese.*  
*Faran-da-agantan.*<sup>260</sup>

(The one who wear a trouser of Alaari (red-silk material).  
He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan, Latubosun Alabi.  
He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan, the husband of the  
monarch's wife, able to do all things.  
He-that-uses-velvet-to-make-agantan.)

In the praise-names of the *Alaafin*, the king was reputed to have worn this dress to war at an unspecified period of Oyo's imperial expansion. According to Oyo history, only four kings led the Oyo armies in battle: Ajiboyede in the sixteenth century, Oluodo in the seventeenth century, Maku at about 1798, and Oluewu at between 1834 and 1836. Given the above, it could be argued that the use of Arab-style dress in Yorubaland might have occurred even before the spread of Islam into Yorubaland during the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, as Islam had spread into Yorubaland through trade before this time. However, the large-scale use of Arab-style dress in Yorubaland might have coincided with the introduction of Islam in West Africa: Liberia by the middle of the seventeenth century, Gambia in 1738, Gold Coast (Ghana) in 1817, and Nigeria in the early nineteenth century.<sup>261</sup>

Although the precise date that the use of Arab-style dress began in Yorubaland may not be known, it is however clear that the use of Arab-style dress by the political class in Yorubaland predated the nineteenth century. In fact, Muslim clerics and Arab traders, as agents of Islamic culture, had been part of Oyo royal court since 1787.<sup>262</sup> It is therefore reasonable to suggest that these agents of Islamic culture might have introduced Arab-style dress to

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<sup>259</sup> Agantan is another name given to Girike.

<sup>260</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O., *The Growth of Islam*, 169.

<sup>261</sup> Heathcote D., 'Insight into a Creative Process: A Rare collection of Embroidery Design from Kano', *Savannah*, 1:2 (1972), 165; J. Perani, 'Nupe Costume Craft', *African Arts*, 12:3 (1979), 54; and C. Kriger, 'Robes of the Sokoto Caliphate', *African Arts*, 11:3 (1978), 53.

<sup>262</sup> Law R., *The Oyo Empire: The History of a Yorùbá State, ca.1600-ca.1838*, (unpublished Ph. D. thesis, University of Birmingham, 1971), 78.

the court, first as gifts to the kings and chiefs, and, later, as medicine or fortified dress, which have featured in Yorùbá traditional use of cloths from time immemorial. Even if all these conclusions are mere assumptions, Captain Clapperton, passing through Yorubaland during his second journey in the 1820s, testified to the use of Arab-style dress in the area.<sup>263</sup>

In the praise-names of Akinkotun Akintola, the *Balogun* of Ibadan between 1897 and 1899, he was reputed as:

Akintola! Iwo ni baba gbogbo won,  
O-bo-pako-gun-gi.  
O-bo-guru-gun-agbon,  
O-bo-kembe-re-ibi-ija.<sup>264</sup>

(Akintola, you are their lord,  
He-who-climbs-a-tree-with-a-clog-on.  
He-who-wears-a-trailing-cloak-climbing-a-coconut-tree,  
He-who-wears-horse-riding-breeches-to-war.)

In this example, Akintola, a warlord, was being revered for his bravery and valour, which, in spite of the dire situations of warfare and coconut tree climbing, still went ahead to don a voluminous dress. *Guru*, it must be noted, is a trailing cloak or a toga made of a large prestigious fabric and draped over an under tunic or robe. Other Yorùbá dress with Arab or Muslim origin include the *Girike*, *Gbariye*, *Dandogo*, *Dansiki*, *Esiki*, *Guru*, *Abeti-Ajacap*, *Gogowu*, and the popular Yorùbá voluminous dress, the *Agbada*.<sup>265</sup>

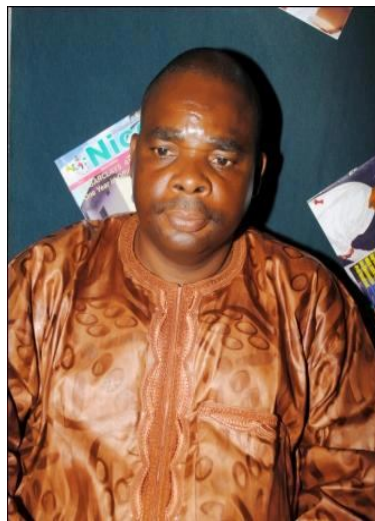
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate Islamic influences on contemporary Yorùbá dress.

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<sup>263</sup> Clapperton H., *Journal of Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa*, (London, 1966), 120.

<sup>264</sup> Akinyele I. B., *IweItan Ibadan*, (n.p. 1911), 140.

<sup>265</sup> Akinwumi T. M., 'Oral Tradition and the Reconstruction of Yorùbá Dress', in Toyin Falola and Ann Genova (eds.) *Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics*, (Rochester, 2005), 69.



**A cross section of Islamic/Hausa influences on Yorùbá dress**  
(Sources: Personal collections)



**Atypical Hausa-Fulani Abeti-Aja Cap**  
(Sources: Personal collections)



**Atypical Yorùbá modification of Abeti-Aja Cap**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

From these and many more examples, it could be asserted that Islam's society-friendly nature made absorbing its dress culture easier for the Yorùbá.

In general, Arab-style toga dress incorporated into Yorùbá dress culture is easily discernible. Unlike the traditional Yorùbá

toga dress, most Arab-style toga dress usually left a train of about 3 meters on the floor. This is called *Gogowu* among the Yorùbá. *Gobi*, *Salubaki*, *Guru*, and *Girike* are modifications of *Gogowu*. While all the above Arab-style dresses pertained only to the *Eewu*, cloths worn on top of a trouser; the Yorùbá traditional trouser, the *Kembe*, is usually worn with these Arab-style dresses.

It is important to state that the incorporation of Islamic dress culture into Yorùbá dress culture was at that time, among the Yorùbá, a mark of distinction. In the first place, the dress ensemble is quite enormous; hence, only the rich and the affluent can afford them. The implication of this on the generality of the people was that the majority might love and accept the dress culture, but not all could afford it. Invariably, Islamic dress culture assumed a tag of status symbol among the Yorùbá. Hence; the common statement: “*Dandogokoja a binu da*” (Dandogo is not sewn in haste or in protest or for the fun of it).

As status symbol, Arab-style dress was used mainly during important festivals and ceremonies. They were used by the kings and chiefs as well as the rich ones in the society. As the following praise-name of Oba Muhammed Lamuye, the Oluwo of Iwo (1850 to 1906) shows, Arab-style dresses were mainly for adornment, show-off, and used as status symbol.

*Oba ba l'esin*

*Alukinba oun oso.*

*Aran kil'eyi, baba Iwodotun?*

*Aran kil'eyi, baba Ikufo?*<sup>266</sup>

(The king perched on the horse

*Alukinba* is for his personal adornment.

Which velvet is this, the father of Iwodotun?

Which velvet is this, the father of Ikufo?)

Apart from cloths, the above praise-poem reveals that royal personages, the rich, and the affluent had varieties of imported materials from which they could pick. In Akintola's praise-poem, clog was mentioned. In the Oluwo's praise poem, as in his predecessor, Sanni Abimbola, he was also credited with the use of

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<sup>266</sup> Babalola A., *Awon Oriki Borokini*, (London, 1975), 64.

velvet, which was not made anywhere in Yorubaland during the period. *Alukinba*, a corruption of *Alkayabba*, an expensive Arab cloak worn over robes, was usually worn when the king mounted his horse.

Islam's influence on Yorùbá dress culture was not limited to cloths and clothing tradition alone, it also featured in the areas of body scarification and tattooing. With facial mark serving as a passport denoting nationality, the need arose among the Yorùbá people, especially in Ilorin where those that were born during the *Jihadists'* take-over adopted a new form of facial marks that were completely different from those of other Yorùbá groups. *Pele*, earlier mentioned, was introduced and could, today, be found not only in Ilorin, but also in other parts of Yorubaland that were effectively controlled by the *Jihadists* during the nineteenth century. In addition to *Pele*, especially for those who had been given facial marks before Ilorin's take-over, *Keke* was adopted as an addition to whatever was earlier given to them. In this way, both *Oni Pele* and *Oni Keke* were able to escape death and destruction in the hands of the Ilorin *Jihadists* during the period. Today, these two facial marks could be found in Ilorin, Ekiti, and among the Ijesha.<sup>267</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when this photograph was taken, where it was taken, who took it and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that this photo illustrates Islam's influence on Yorùbá dress culture.

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<sup>267</sup>Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yorùbá Identity', *History in Africa*, 35:1 (2008), 369.



**Alhaji Dauda Adegbenro in his Islamic garb, 1962  
(Sources: Getty Images)**

By the middle of the nineteenth century when Islam had spread wider in Yorubaland, the glass ceilings on the use of Arab-style dress crashed, as Islamic culture, with its specific emphasis on converts' mandatory use of Arab-style dress for identification with Islam, became widespread. The development led to a widespread production and use of cheap robes to satisfy the economic needs of the less affluent Muslim convert.<sup>268</sup>

R.H. Stone described a typical Yorùbá dress during this period thus:

*...the main articles of dress worn by the males are a kind of loose trousers called shocoto, a cloth worn like a Highlander's plaid and a brimless cloth cap. ...When not engaged in manual labor, the men also wear a sleeveless*

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<sup>268</sup> Campbell R., *A Pilgrimage to My Motherland: An Account of a Journey Among the Egbas and Yorùbás of Central Africa in 1859-60*, (New York, 1861), 106; Clarke W.H., *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland*, (Ibadan, 1972), 100-243; May D.J., 'Journey in the Yorùbá and Nupe Countries in 1858', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society*, 30:1 (1860), 222, 229; E. de Veer and A. O'Hear, 'Gerhard Rohlfs in Yorubaland', *History in Africa*, 21:1 (1994), 258.

*vest under their shoulder cloth. The shocoto is girt about the waist and extends to the knees and sometimes to the ankles. In the place of this, young men sometimes wear a garment exactly like a Highlander's kilt.*<sup>269</sup>

Owing to the widespread use of Arab dress culture in Yorubaland during Stone's period in Abeokuta, he noted further that "*Mussulmans always wear a turban. Among the prosperous a tobe, a loose robe, generally of white material, takes the place of the shoulder cloth. This garment is gracefully worn and is often very beautifully embroidered.*"<sup>270</sup>

Writing on a typical female dress, Stone noted that the female dress focused exclusively on convenience and not aesthetics and:

*...consists of one or more cloths fastened around the waist, one thrown over the shoulders, and a turban, all of the same material, generally cotton cloth. Except in cold weather, the shoulder cloth is passed around the body just under the armpits and securely tucked on one side or the other. The cloths around the waist extend to the knee on one side and to the ankle on the other and are skillfully tucked over the hip. One of the cloths around the waist is used for the baby's hammock or basket, and here it laughs, coos and sleeps as happy as can be, suspended from its mother's back or riding on her hip with her loving arm for a support.*<sup>271</sup>

Although he was not attempting a provenance of Yorùbá dress, Stone however noted that: *cotton is the material out of which the clothing of the masses is made; but on state occasions, the rulers and rich men appear in garments of silk and silk-velvet. Through foreign merchants, these men obtain from Europe whatever they fancy, especially costly cloths and choice liquors.*<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Stone R. H., *In Afric's Forest and Jungle*, (New York, 1899), 29.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibdi*, 30.

<sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, 31.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibidi*, 33.

Demonstrating the influence of Islam on Yorùbá dress, most especially haircuts and hairdos, Stone noted further that Aaso (patches), earlier mentioned, “...are concealed by the tight-fitting cloth cap or the turban”.<sup>273</sup> Highlighting the beauty of shaving the head, as practiced among the Yorùbá, Stone added that “after a man has made a visit to a barber shop, his head and his face shine alike and, if he should have on a spotless tobe and turban, he makes quite a presentable appearance.”<sup>274</sup>

The wider acceptance of Arab-style dress among the kings, chiefs, and the masses in Yorubaland must not be translated or equated with a wider acceptance of Islam as a religion, the kings, chiefs, and the masses accepted and incorporated Islamic dress culture but not the religion, as majority of them remained with their indigenous faith.<sup>275</sup>

Ojo, citing P.C. Lloyd and N.A. Fabunmi, noted that:

*In the course of the early nineteenth century Yorùbá wars, the Oyo were easily identified by their tattoos. This phase of the warfare had an Islamic bias, and perhaps for Islam's transnational appeal, it became fashionable for people to embrace tattoos that reflected this new ideology. At this time, Pele – three short vertical lines of about an inch long on each cheek, not distinctive of any group - became popular. Pioneers of this new mark included Yorùbá Muslims who opposed ethnic divisions, but loathed remaining plain-faced. Hence Pele replaced Jamgbadi or Mande and Ture distinctive of aliens naturalized amongst the Yorùbás.*<sup>276</sup>

From this, we can conclude that *Pele*, although originally Yorùbá facial marks, became prevalent and diffused across the entire Yorubaland as a result of Islamic influences on Yorùbá

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<sup>273</sup>Ibid, 34.

<sup>274</sup>Ibid, 32.

<sup>275</sup> Perani J. and Wolff N.H., *Cloth, Dress, and Art Patronage in Africa*, (Oxford, 1999), 108.

<sup>276</sup> OlatunjiOjo, ‘Beyond Diversity: Women, Scarification, and Yorùbá Identity’, *History in Africa*, vol. 35 (2008), 372.

political and social systems orchestrated by the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars.

Although the use of creams of different kinds abound in Yorubaland before contacts with the Arabs/Islam; it must however be noted that the use of perfumes, incenses and deodorants were introduced into Yorùbá dress culture by the Arabs. Information on when this occurred is however scanty. Nevertheless, the use of perfumes, especially *Bint El Sudan* (popularly called Bintu among the Yorùbá)<sup>277</sup>, was synonymous with Islamic clerics and this was used not just for aesthetics but also for spiritual purposes. It must be noted that *Bint El Sudan* was introduced to the market in 1920, but the precise date of its entry into Nigeria remains unknown.<sup>278</sup> It was a common practice in Ilorin and other notable Islamic enclaves in Yorubaland to find perfumes, incenses (*Turari*) and charms (*Tira*) been sold publicly near central mosques and at Jumat services.

From the discussion above, the following points could be made about Islamic influences on Yorùbá dress culture: (i) that rather than supplanting the Yorùbá dress cultures, Islamic dress culture was grafted into the hitherto indigenous Yorùbá dress culture. For instance, the Yorùbá dress for men comprising originally of a wrapper fabric or a shirt – *Buba* - fixed on the waist over a short (*Sokoto Penpe*) or a trouser (*Sokoto Gigun*), was reformed to incorporate different Arab-styled dresses such as *Gogowu*, *Agbada*, *Sulia*, etc. It must be noted that some of these dress items had being in existence before the Islamic influences, for instance, the *Gogowu*, like *Agbada* and other Yorùbá flowing gowns, which was draped over the whole body, was reformed or adapted to fit and incorporate Islamic culture. Females, who originally plaited their hair and displayed it both privately and openly for admiration, took to the use of *Iborun* (shawl) to cover the heads, as Islam forbids the opening of the hair in religious worship, especially for females; (ii) the emerging dress culture

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<sup>277</sup> Oral interview with Pa. Taiwo Ajibade Oyeboode; aged 80, Ibadan, 21<sup>st</sup> August, 2012.

<sup>278</sup> *Bint El Sudan*, Arabic for Daughter of Sudan, was first made in Khartoum, Sudan in 1920 and was reputable for been the first non-alcoholic perfume ever made. It was for many years the world best-selling perfume.

following contacts with Islam however remained, for the most parts, Islamic in character, but Yorùbá in essence; (iii) the kings and chiefs, as earliest users of Arab-style dresses, used these Islamic-oriented dress to enhance and boost their ego and dignified posture, while at the same time applying sumptuary laws, especially in Oyo<sup>279</sup> and Ibadan<sup>280</sup>, to prevent low class people from acquiring such dress items; (iv) Arab-style dress, especially voluminous dress, became a symbol of wealth, status, political position, and influence; hence, other dress culture, especially when Christian's influence on Yorùbá dress culture was predominant, became symbol of poverty, lowliness, and inferiority.

#### **4.3. Dressing the Converts: The Influence of Christianity on Yorùbá Dress**

The history of Christianity in Yorubaland, beginning in the 1830s, has often been told in connection with the various missions – the Christian Missionary Society (CMS), Methodist, Baptist, Presbyterian missions. The activities of these missions, by the 1840s when freed slaves of Yorùbá and neighbouring ethnic group origins were returning from Sierra Leone, Cuba and Brazil to their homelands, were however limited to the coast.<sup>281</sup> As Andrian Hastings had noted, missionary enterprises, especially those of the CMS, in Yorubaland, the Niger-Benue confluence, and in other parts of Nigeria derived from a larger plan to build a series of stations along the River Niger. This strategy was premised on a host of factors: the ease of access and communication that the Niger River afforded the missions in establishing Christian and European influence(s); the British efforts at stopping the slave trade, the introduction of profitable produce trade; Christianizing the people; and the need to curb Islam's advance in Yorùbá hinterland.<sup>282</sup>

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<sup>279</sup>Lander R. and Lander J., *The Journal of an Expedition to Explore the Course and Termination of the Niger*, (London, 1832), 122.

<sup>280</sup>Kemi Morgan, *Akinyele's Outline History of Ibadan*, (Ibadan, 1985), 83-85.

<sup>281</sup>Femi J. Kolapo, 'Christian Missions and Religious Encounters at the Niger-Benue Confluence', in Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, (Trenton, 2005), 509.

<sup>282</sup>Andrian Hasting, *The Church in Africa, 1450-1950*, (Oxford, 1994), 344 - 45.

Primary to Christian mission's inability to access Yorùbá hinterland was the factor of the raging Yorùbá civil wars of the nineteenth century. The civil wars and the strategies deployed by the different Yorùbá communities, more than anything else ensured that movement of men and merchandise from one part of Yorubaland to another and from the coast into Yorùbá hinterland were severely checked by the civil war, which also affected missionary activities.

With the abolition of the slave trade and the consequent need to ensure that the freed slaves were engaged in some useful pursuits, their sponsors trained them in, among other things, farming, masonry, trading and missionary works. Despite their training, the majority were unsuccessful, as opportunities were limited. At the instance of Thomas Fowell Buxton, their sponsors were agitating for a return of the freed-slaves to Africa where they could use their skills and better not just their lots through their skills but also the lot of the continent, especially as such venture would take the light of Christianity to dispel the 'darkness' of paganism in Africa. The bible and the plough were therefore seen as the panacea to curbing the trade in slaves and also to ushering in light and civilization into the heart of the African continent.<sup>283</sup>

At the vanguard of actualizing this 'bible and plough' policy, were freed slaves - the *Saro* or Creoles and *Amaro* – who, as noted above, migrated to Nigeria in the beginning of the 1830s. The *Saro* and *Amaro* also settled in other West African countries such as the Gold Coast (Ghana). Many of the returnees, the greater majority of whom were originally descended from the Yorùbá people, chose to return to Nigeria for cultural, missionary, and economic reasons. These newly arrived immigrants resided in the Niger Delta, Lagos, and in some Eastern Nigerian cities such as Aba, Owerri, and Onitsha.<sup>284</sup>

While living in Sierra Leone, many *Saro* became exposed to the Christian faith as a result of the work of British missionaries who established some churches, a few grammar schools and a pioneer educational institution, the Fourah Bay College.

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<sup>283</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 349.

<sup>284</sup> Mac Dixon-Fyle, 'The Saro in the Political Life of Early Port Harcourt, 1913-49', *The Journal of African History*, 30:1 (1998), 126.

Relatively, the residents of Sierra Leone soon gained a fast start in Western education and were soon well trained and experienced in medicine, law, and the civil service. Many of them graduated from grammar schools and became administrative workers for the British imperial interest in the country. By the middle of the nineteenth century, some of the African literati in Sierra Leone began to migrate to Nigeria, especially the colony of Lagos, for economic reasons. Some were administrative personnel who were reassigned to Lagos. An expedition of the River Niger by Samuel Ajayi Crowther furthered the evangelical interest in Nigeria of many Sierra Leoneans, many of whom had grown to be accessories of the missionaries and their efforts.

Unlike the *Saro* who were principally from Sierra Leone, the *Amaro*, who were sometimes called *Nago* or *Anago*, were liberated slaves from Brazil and Cuba. These returnees from Brazil and Cuba were (and are) more commonly called “Aguda”. They went to the New World as slaves from different sub-ethnic and ethnic backgrounds but approached relationships among themselves as equals. They came back to Nigeria, principally to reconnect with their fatherland. Although they were not brought up in the Anglican faith like the Sierra Leoneans, they however chose Catholicism, the dominant religion in Brazil. It must be added that some of these Aguda were also Muslims.

These ex-slaves were technically skilled artisans and known for building distinctive Brazilian architecture in their settlements and later in the Lagos environs. During the time, modern European architecture was not only meant to be a nice abode but also a dominating advertisement to show Africans a different style and culture.<sup>285</sup> However, in due time, Brazilian style emerged as a modern, viable alternative and style used by African contractors working on public and (large) private jobs such as the Holy Cross Cathedral and the Mohammed Shitta-Bey Mosque, both in Lagos. These ex-slaves from Brazil introduced to Nigeria elaborate architectural designs, two story buildings and bungalows

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<sup>285</sup> John Michael Vlach, ‘The Brazilian House in Nigeria: The Emergence of a 20th-Century Vernacular House Type’, *The Journal of American Folklore*, 97:383 (1984), 6.

with stucco facades. The Brazilian returnees also popularized the use of cassava as a food crop.<sup>286</sup>

The *Saro* and *Amaro*, equipped with different Western skills and technical knowledge, in addition to being Christians, arrived Yorubaland from the Americas and Sierra Leone. They arrived first in Badagry, which they tried to make their base. However, Badagry people were in no mood to receive missionaries. The missionaries therefore had to look further afield to Abeokuta, which by 1846, became their base.<sup>287</sup> Although embroiled in a prolonged civil war, the different Yorùbá communities utilized these individuals in re-engineering their societies. In addition, these Christianized freed-slaves were instrumental in prevailing over the colonial administration, which had earlier refused to intervene in the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, to mediate and ensure peace in Yorubaland. Through treaties and agreements; the warring factions in the Yorùbá civil wars were forced to sheath their swords. Roads were opened to men, merchandise, and ideas. Churches and educational institutions, manned by Europeans and African assistants, founded by the various missions sprouted in Badagry, Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Ijaye, Oyo, and Ogbomoso.<sup>288</sup>

The missionary efforts of reverends Samuel Ajayi Crowther, James Johnson, Samuel Johnson, M. S. Cole, T.A.J. Ogunbiyi, Henry Townsend, M.T. Euler-Ajayi, and Gollmer resulted in the introduction of Christianity into various Yorùbá towns and villages. Townsend, Crowther and Gollmer built churches and schools in Abeokuta in 1845; Edward Bickerstand built a preaching station at Ogbe and was sole agent till 1859. On the whole, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and many other contributed immensely to the growth of Christianity and Western education in Yorubaland.<sup>289</sup>

In its efforts to curtail the growth and spread of Islam in Yorubaland, the missions, most especially the CMS, embarked on

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<sup>286</sup> Kehinde Faluyi, 'Migrants and the Economic Development of Lagos, From the Earliest of Times to 1880', *Lagos Historical Review*, vol.1 ( 2001), 1.

<sup>287</sup> Gbadamosi T. G. O. and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 349.

<sup>288</sup> Ade Ajayi J. F., *Christian Mission in Nigeria, 1841-1891*, (London, 1965), 35.

<sup>289</sup> . Gbadamosi T.G.O and Ade Ajayi J.F., 'Islam and Christianity', 353.

a greater evangelization, using a trained clergy, and encouraging literacy in English and producing Christian literature. Of these, the use of education helped immensely in the spread of Christianity, as it placed the Christians in apposite position for colonial service.

All over Yorubaland, Christian mission schools, serving both as handmaid of Christian missions and providing corps of workforce for colonial administration, littered the landscape. The schools were relatively inexpensive and attracted interests of traders and rulers who sent their wards and children to acquire new tools for commercial transactions and, in this way, the parents themselves were drawn later towards Christianity.<sup>290</sup>

The pursuit of Western education as a way to win converts helped Christianity and colonial administration and endeared the former to the latter. In addition to providing workforce, the missionaries were needed by the European traders and the colonial government. As explorers, the missionaries had risked their lives by foraging into the hinterlands. They therefore served as veritable tools through which the European traders and colonial government knew Yorubaland. So, as explorers, the missionaries provided valuable information on trade routes, the attitude and habits of the different peoples, products of the various lands, and the latest development in the country.

In return, colonial government served as backers, sponsors, and protectors of the missions. The rapport between the colonial administration and the mission was aptly demonstrated by colonial acceptance to wade into the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars at the instance of the missionaries. Another example is their involvement in the political tussle between Kosoko and Akitoye at Eko (Lagos) in the 1890s. In this particular instance, the missionaries were openly urging the British Consul, Mr. Beecroft, to attack Lagos, which they described as a slave depot under the usurper, Kosoko. The Consul attacked Lagos and installed Akitoye, a step that gave colonial administration a foothold in Lagos. It must be added that similar developments, with the missionaries urging that Yorùbá communities be attacked for the benefits of European traders, missions, and colonial administration, were recorded in Ijebu, Oyo, Abeokuta, Calabar and elsewhere.

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<sup>290</sup> Ade Ajayi J.F., *Christian Mission*, 135.

To pay the mission for their efforts in turning Lagos into a British colony, Beecroft ensured the interests of the missions in Article 8 of the Treaty, which demanded that ‘...*complete protection...and encouragement*’, shall be given to the Christian missionaries and ministers. Following the treaty, thousands of Christian emigrants (freed slaves) from Sierra Leone were resettled at Olowogbowo while those from Brazil and Cuba were settled at Campos Square in Lagos.<sup>291</sup>

In its relationship with the people, Christianity constantly looked towards the colonial government, most especially its military arm, and this had significant effects on its acceptance and people’s perception about Christianity. Unlike Islam, Christianity encourages individualism and the converts found themselves more divorced from their society than their Muslim counterparts. A convert was encouraged to become individualized, stand apart from his extended family, recognizing only his wife and children. He came to look down on his society, its cultures, including language, and was made to strive after the acquisition of European civilization in order to be properly accepted as a Christian. Many, as noted below, believed that converts who did not drink tea, or wear European cloths could not be genuine Christians.

Amongst the Europeans, the African converts were considered as imitators and therefore unaccepted. In the society, they were rejected as impostors. A typical African Christian thus becomes a hybrid – with no pride of ancestry and no hope of posterity. As Ayandele puts it, they ‘*were like pictures in phantasmagoria*’.<sup>292</sup>

For the most part, while Islam grafted itself to the society, Christianity stood aloof and distant from the society and the people it aimed to convert. In tandem with colonialism, Christianity undermined and supplanted traditional authorities. It was therefore unacceptable and hated by the rulers, chiefs, and the nobles. Christianity thus became the religion of the dregs of the Yorùbá society. The incorporation of the educated Christian into the vortex of colonialism raised the specter of Christianity far and above other religions and enhanced the social prestige and economic progress

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<sup>291</sup> Ayandele E.A., *Missionary Impact on Nigeria*, (UK, 1985), 124.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid, 129.

of its converts. Notwithstanding this off-setting factor, Christianity, to a larger extent, appears in Nigeria to be the religion of the poor, the educated class and not that of the politically and economically vibrant Yorùbá even in twenty-first century Yorubaland.

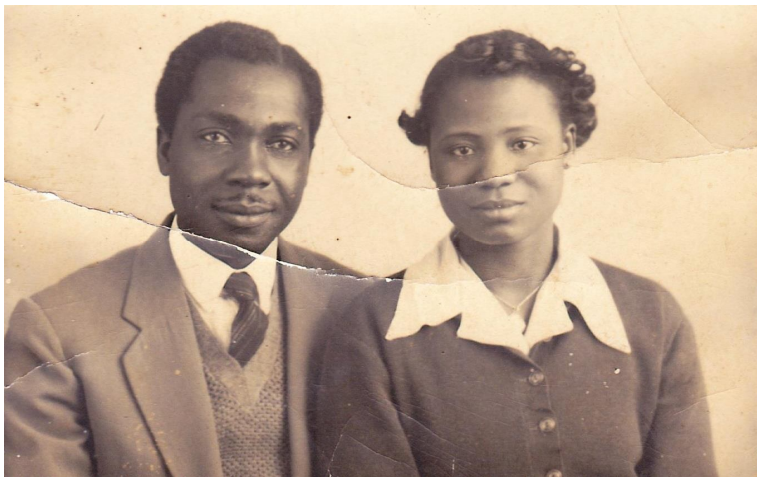
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help researchers in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate



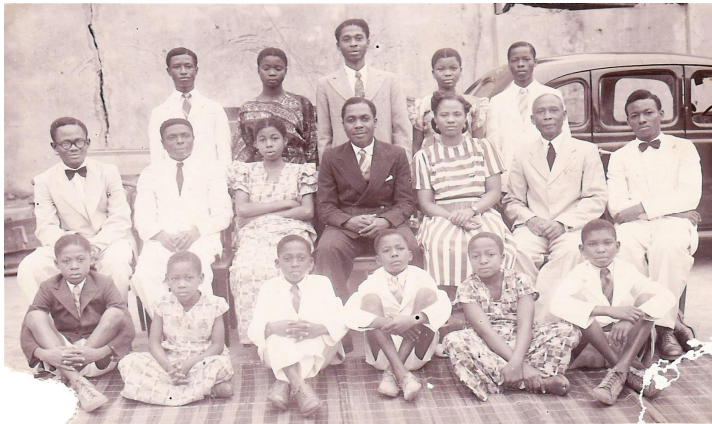
**A Yorùbá Christian Lady, 1950**  
(Sources: Onile-Ayo Photo, Mokola, Ibadan)



**Olugbenga Pechu Family, Lagos, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1930  
(Sources: Pechu Family Album).**



**Mr & Mrs Olugbenga Pechu, Lagos, 1 January 1930 (Sources:  
Pechu Family Album).**



**Olugbenga Pechu Family, Lagos, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1930 (Sources: Pechu Family Album).**

In the remaining part of this sub-section, attention shall be turned to the politics of wearing European dress by Yorùbá converts as evidence of conversion, as orchestrated by the missions in Yorubaland. Tracing the origin of this development, Judith Byfield claimed that the ‘*returnees from Sierra Leone and Brazil, and Christian missionaries*’<sup>293</sup> orchestrated the equalization of European dress with Christian faith in Yorubaland. The *Saro*, as she claimed, were not only educated, but also Christians who adopted the practice of wearing European clothes. The same applies to the *Amaro*, i.e. the Afro-Brazilian returnees. For these two groups, ‘*European dress came to indicate their religious affinity as well as wealth, achieved or anticipated social status, and modernity. In addition to wearing European dress, both groups wore an adaptation of Yorùbá dress in their homes, but European dress was preferred for public occasions.*’<sup>294</sup>

Titilola Euba, also noting the provenance of Western dress in Yorubaland, linked it to the incoming of the *Saro* and *Amaro*. She noted, among other things, that when the slaves were rescued by the British and landed in Sierra Leone, their indigenous dresses were taken away from them and cotton cloths were provided. But

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<sup>293</sup> Judith Byfield, “Unwrapping” *Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos*, Occasional Publication Number 30, *African Humanities* (Boston, 2000), 1.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

these freed slaves soon discarded these cotton cloths provided for them by their captors because they were restrictive and not as free as their indigenous cloths. With encouragement by their captors and later the government of Sierra Leone, they became reconciled to the Western dress. In the 1820s, Euba noted further that Governor MacCarthy, fired by his vision of making these men and women “*Christians, literate, and industrious*” ordered hats for the men, and “*bonnets for the women, shoes for all; gowns and petticoats, trousers and braces – buttons, too, with needles, thread and thimbles, soap and smoothing-irons, even clothes-brushes...*”<sup>295</sup>

In many of the writings on the homecoming of the *Saro* and *Amaro*, joyful reception as well as awe was reported. The awe deals more with the appearance of these Africans wearing European dress than with the actual reunion and homecoming. The above is supported by the reception of Reverend Ladipo Lateju by his people of Abeokuta. In fact, the story of Rev. Ladipo Lateju’s arrival at Abeokuta is illustrative of the general nature of dress worn by the *Saro* and *Amaro* when they arrived in Yorubaland and how they were received by their people.

Lateju first learnt of his people of Abeokuta through traders and other missionaries and decided to find out for himself. He arrived at Abeokuta alongside other *Saro* in the noon and, being unfamiliar with the new community, he headed straight for the Alake’s palace. He was not only well received, but was also well assisted in locating his people.

Dressed in a three-piece suit with matching bowler hat and swagger stick, Lateju was conducted to his people and was happy for the glorious reunion. He assured his people that although he would be departing for Lagos late in the evening, he would relocate to Abeokuta as soon as it was practicable. However, he expressed his worry that his immediate younger sister, who had been withdrawing from him since he arrived, could still not come to terms with the fact that he was alive. The more he tried to draw her close; she made no pretense of not wanting to come in contact

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<sup>295</sup>Titlola Euba, ‘Dress and Status in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Lagos’, in Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri and Jide Osuntokun (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos State*, (Lagos, 1987), 147.

with him. At the height of the ensuing drama, the young lady ran away from him, saying that he looked like a ghost in his dress as she fled. Even the elders who were not overtly withdrawing from him were encouraging him to pull off the 'ghostly cloths' he was wearing, which "contorted his appearance like that of a sick man". Much as he tried to educate them about Western dress, Lateju was shocked to see that the people remained unyielding in their abhorrence of his dress. Although happy to reunite with his people, he departed for Lagos a sad man.<sup>296</sup>

Besides the *Saro* and the *Amaro*, the European missionaries also encouraged European dress. For instance, the earlier mentioned American Baptist minister, Pastor R. H. Stone, who was then heading one of the mission stations in Abeokuta and Ijaye, regarded European dress as '*emblems of the new way of life*' of every convert and therefore compelled all boys in his mission station to wear a knee-length shirt.<sup>297</sup> In fact, the missionaries argued that any convert who failed to wear European dress or adopt the drinking of tea, etc. could not be a genuine Christian.

Ade-Ajayi, describing the convoluted state of things during this initial phase, noted that civilization meant to the Europeans, the *Saro* and *Amaro*, all they considered best in the European eyes. They expected the Yorùbá to conform to European social manners and customs. They "*insisted on even minor observances as necessary outward and visible signs of an inward 'civilized' state*".<sup>298</sup> Among these include the wearing of European dress, drinking of tea, and adopting European mannerisms. Reverend S. Annear also noted that at the first wedding ceremony held by the missionary at Badagry, the missionary gave a tea party, which was called '*a token of civilization*'. So, the convert, like the European pastor, must wear a clerical black cloak, sweating under the scorching sun, rather than to be seen '*in a state of semi-nudity, having only the waist cloth, being from the waist upwards and from the knee downward naked, and that too in the presence of ladies*.'<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Cited in *Anglo African Times*, 14 November, 1883.

<sup>297</sup> Stone R. H., *In Afric's Forest and Jungle*, (New York, 1899), 29.

<sup>298</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 14.

<sup>299</sup> S. Annear, *Journal of a Visit to the Encampment*, (n.a. 20<sup>th</sup> Oct., 1844).

As far as the missionaries were concerned, these customs and habits were not just as unimportant matters of social convenience, but each had a religious significance. So, a Yorùbá Christian convert was not regarded as a true Christian until he jettisoned the wearing of Yorùbá dress for European dress; so also a boy or girl should bow to his or her elders instead of prostrating or kneeling down, which were regarded as sinful elements of worshipping a human being.<sup>300</sup> Wearing Yorùbá dress was equated to remaining a pagan or, at the very best, being a Muslim. Using Yorùbá musical instruments in the church was considered sinful as the animals whose skins provided materials for the drums were sacrificed to idols, thereby; Yorùbá drums were regarded as sacrifices to idols.

Some Africans, indeed, applauded the adoption of European dress, while many opposed it. For instance while Ladipo Lateju adopted and applauded European dress, Mrs. Fry, the wife of a missionary who also lived in Abeokuta between 1899 and 1915, noted as follows about Yorùbá dress:

*...the dress of the women when not at work is neat and graceful; they usually wear three cloths – two for the lower part of the body, the under one generally of a blue cotton material or fancy pattern, the upper one of stamped velveteen or white native material...; the third cloth is gracefully draped from the shoulders and is a thinner material.*<sup>301</sup>

Mrs. Fry therefore argued that the adoption of European dress by Africans was deplorable owing to the fact that it was unsuitable for both Africa's climate and customs. Similarly, Lord Lugard also decried the practice. He argued that African wearing European dress transgressed the social, cultural, and racial divide, which, unfortunately, his government in Nigeria sought to maintain. He therefore condemned the missionaries and colonial officers who encouraged Africans to wear European dress or who

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<sup>300</sup> Ade-Ajayi J.F., *Christian Missions*, 14.

<sup>301</sup> Judith Byfield, *"Unwrapping" Nationalism*, 8.

perform menial jobs as destroying ‘missionary influence for good and lessened the prestige of Europeans’.<sup>302</sup>

In addition to the above, it must be noted Christianity also introduced a number of other things into Yorùbá dress culture. Some few examples include incenses, perfumes, face-powders, pomades and oils. Although a few of these, especially incenses and oils were tied to religious worship, others like face-powder, perfumes and pomades were not.

#### **4.4. Dressing the Natives: Colonial Influences on Yorùbá Dress**

War-wearied and desirous of peace, various interest groups, especially the Yorùbá members of the Christian Missionary Society in Lagos, solicited the intervention of the colonial administration in Lagos in ending the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war and destruction in the hinterland, which impeded trade and commerce, as well as the advance of Christianity. The resultant intervention paved the way for the incorporation of Yorubaland into the vortex of colonialism.

By accepting the European intervention in the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil war, the various Yorùbá communities, their leaders, and heirs agreed to ‘*become subjects of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain and Ireland, Empress of India, and so on. her heirs and successors*’; and, as stated in clause three, the control and administration of Yorubaland became vested in Her Majesty the Queen of Britain and her representative, who reserves the right to ensure ‘*...peace and friendship between the subjects and the Queen and her representatives*’; and, in clause three, that ‘*should any difference or dispute accidentally arise between us and the said subjects of the Queen, it shall be referred to the Governor of Lagos for settlement as may be deemed expedient*’.<sup>303</sup>

Perhaps the most important consequence of the 1893 treaties was the introduction of colonial rule. Political power became resident in colonial administrative officials, as against the erstwhile Obas and Chiefs. The new political system, different and complex, had, at the top, the Governor, followed by the lieutenant

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<sup>302</sup>Ibid, 8.

<sup>303</sup> Samuel Johnson, *The History*, 651.

governors, the colonial bureaucracy, the field staff of residents and district officers, the army and police. This constituted the central authority. Beneath this central controlling authority, which made all decisions, were more than two hundred separate units of local government (native administration) of varying types and sizes. The native authorities, who received instructions from the central authority and implemented such instructions, were headed by the Obas and Chiefs. As a body corporate, the native authorities had delegated powers and were subject to the supervision of the central authority. The central authority was, in all cases, all British, while the native administrations were all Africans.<sup>304</sup>

Other important changes that followed colonialism include the opening of all roads within Yorubaland, which facilitated free and unhindered movement of men, merchandise and ideas; commercialization of agriculture, which orchestrated commercial production of cocoa, coffee, cotton, rubber and corn; the introduction of Christianity and Western Education; new health system; abolition of domestic slavery, pawnship, and human sacrifices; uniform currency; construction of roads, railways and harbors.

The above developments impacted on dress and identity in two different ways: colonial service, which involved the use of uniforms, official, and office dress; and economic prosperity, which stimulated upward social mobility among many Yorùbá people, who thereby were able to afford all manners of dress hitherto unknown.

Beginning with colonialism, it must be noted that the use of uniform in colonial Yorubaland (and essentially in Nigeria) could be traced to the Royal West African Frontier Force (RWAFF), a British-conscripted African force that aided Great Britain in its prosecution of the First World War. Although the uniforms donned by RWAFF were essentially determined by Great Britain, the end of the First World War however witnessed a conversion of the RWAFF into the Nigeria Regiment, later renamed (in 1956) as Nigerian Military Forces, and, at independence in 1960, was

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<sup>304</sup> Asiawaju I. O., 'Western Nigeria Under Colonial Rule', in Obaro Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Ibadan, 1980), 430-431; see also, J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, (Benin-City, 1986), 45.

renamed the Nigerian Armed Forces.<sup>305</sup> To clothe this force, Imperial Britain did not initially issue any uniform other than those used by the RWAFF men, but on 24<sup>th</sup> November 1919, G.H. Kingston, writing on behalf of the Controller of the Disposal Board of the Ministry of Munitions, asked that Khaki drill garments, knickers, blouses, kilt aprons, and so on that were surplus to British army requirements be shipped from Britain to the colonies in West, East, and Southern Africa.<sup>306</sup> In his response of 29<sup>th</sup> November 1919, G. Grindle of the Lagos Colony required that, after some modifications aimed at ensuring that the origin of the cloths were disguised, the uniforms be shipped to Nigeria for use in the colonial service, particularly by men of the King's African Rifles and RWAFF.<sup>307</sup>

On the general description of the uniforms, a correspondence from the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Nigerian Regiment, noted that the uniforms issued to the force were '*most unsuitable for wear in the tropics, being too heavy.*' The correspondence made specific description of the uniforms as being '*made of khaki drill with a high collar similar to a British rank and file blouse, the trousers are (sic) also very thick serge, whilst the drawers and socks are excessively thick.*'<sup>308</sup>

Notwithstanding these inadequacies in the nature of the uniforms, especially their unsuitability for use in a tropical climate, the uniforms were not only issued to the Nigerian Regiment, but also extended to the colonial civil service. During this period, it must be emphasized that colonial service was divided into Native Authority (N.A.) and the colonial government civil service. Under the Indirect Rule system, the NA comprised primarily of Africans

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<sup>305</sup> Kayode J. Fayemi, 'Governing the Security Sector in a Democratizing Polity: Nigeria' in Garvin Cawthra and Robin Luckman (eds.), *Governing Insecurity: Democratic Control of Military and Security Establishments in Transitional Democracies*, (London, 2003), 57-77.

<sup>306</sup> National Archives, Ibadan (NAI), Enclosure D.D.7/Clothing/1042 (B.B.3.B.24), Kingston to Controller, 24 November 1919.

<sup>307</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Enclosure 67178/1919, G. Grindle to Kingston, 29 November 1919.

<sup>308</sup> National Archive, Kaduna, (NAK), Correspondence from C.C. West, Lt-Colonel, Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment to the Headquarters, Nigerian Regiment, Kaduna, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919.

who were carrying out and executing policies and programmes of the mainly British colonial government for and on behalf of the Imperial Britain. These native agencies, headed by the traditional kings and chiefs, were effectively and directly controlled by colonial administrators ranging from the provincial to the districts British officers. The provincials, districts, and colonial headquarters constituted the colonial government service.

When the discarded, disused, and defaced British Army khaki drills arrived in 1919, the uniforms were not only issued to the rank and file of the Nigerian Regiment, but also to all African staff of the colonial establishments both at the level of the NA and at the level of colonial government service. While cadre and status, at the level of the NA, were determined by the kings and chiefs; clear-cut rules existed to determine cadre and status in the colonial government service. For the most part, Africans constituted the lower rung of the colonial government service, while the upper echelon was filled entirely with British officials. While all staff of the NA, excluding the kings and chiefs, were issued uniforms, only African officers whose positions were listed in Chapter Three of the Civil Service General Order were issued uniforms in the colonial government service.<sup>309</sup>

Although uniforms were not issued to junior administrative staff, unwritten regulations however existed to ensure that junior administrative staff also use some form of office dress. As noted in a correspondence between the Acting Secretary of the Western Provinces and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, which was copied to all the provinces in Yorubaland, P.V. Main noted, *inter alia*, that '*the unwritten rule for office wear of a tie in the morning and sports dress in the afternoon is sound and has worked satisfactorily*'<sup>310</sup> and therefore must be strictly adhered to.

In yet another circular, the colonial government reiterated that

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<sup>309</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 8/1949, M.P.P. 5428, *Ceremonial Allowances*, Correspondence between T.V. Serivenor, Civil Service Commissioner, Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos and all Heads of Departments and Secretaries, 31 January 1949.

<sup>310</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19104/11, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between P.V. Main, Acting Secretary of the Western Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 15 June 1946.

*...black shoes should not be worn with white uniform. Either black boots (Wellingtons) may be worn, or white buckskin shoes lace up and without toe caps...His Excellency does wish to point out that white shoes and "slacks", properly ironed, look decidedly smarter than badly cut overalls and Wellingtons...*<sup>311</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they are different examples of uniforms worn by police and soldiers before the colonial and after take-over of administration in different parts of Nigeria.



**The Nigerian Regiment, First World War, taken in 1917.**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).

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<sup>311</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Circular No. 49/1936), *Civil Service Uniform*, C.C. Whiteley, Ag Secretary to the Government to the Honourable Secretary, Southern Provinces, M.P. No. 31496, 26 September 1936,.



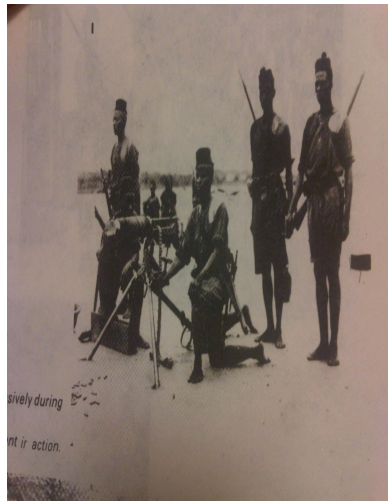
**The Nigerian Regiment, First World War, probably taken in 1917. (Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).**



**Mr. & Mrs. David Oguntoye, in Nigerian Regiment uniform, 15 January 1946. (Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project).**



**1900 cap of a member of the Southern Nigerian Regiment.**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**A cross section of Nigerian soldiers in the RWAFF**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

On appointment, administrative staff, except those whose positions were listed in Chapter Three of the Civil Service General Order, were allowed to wear office dress for official and unofficial functions. However, upon confirmation of appointments, others whose positions were not listed in the General Order could be issued and must wear the civil service uniforms. In NA, where no categorization of any kind existed, staff, ranging from the *Akodas*

to tax-collectors, was issued with uniforms that were, in material and design, similar to that of the police.<sup>312</sup> In a correspondence between *Alaafin* Ladigbolu and the Resident, Oyo Province, the king requested that the Resident should assist him in getting

*...two sashes for Oloko head Akoda, one for daily use and one for occasional use...I prefer red one and I shall be grateful if the Resident will help me about it. I took notice when we got to Ibadan about sashes of all head Akodas in N.A. Departments...*<sup>313</sup>

Prior to 1931, not only were NA and junior administrative staff in the colonial civil service not issued uniforms, also no effort was made to differentiate or show ranks and statuses on the uniforms of other staff in the colonial government civil service. However, from 10<sup>th</sup> October 1931, NA staff and junior administrative officers, per memorandum number S.P. 6641/59 were, for the first time, issued uniforms. Between 1931 and 1936, uniforms used in the NA, which were irregular and lacking any distinguishing features or qualities, were modified. The need to differentiate ranks and cadres both in the NA and government civil service began in 1936 following *Alaafin* Ladigbolu's letter. This development, according to government Gazette Notice No. 582, necessitated a modification in the badges on the uniforms of staff on levels three and four. Initially, badges used by the two cadres had four leaves. With *Alaafin* Ladigbolu's letter, one of the four leaves on the badges of staff on cadre three was dropped.<sup>314</sup> From 1936 onward, staff, whether in the NA or in colonial government

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<sup>312</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No. S.P.6641/59, *Uniform for Junior Administrative Officers*, from Resident, Oyo Province to the Commissioner of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> October 1931.

<sup>313</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 175/3/29, Correspondence between Ladigbolu, the *Alaafin* of Oyo, and the Resident, Oyo Province, Oyo, 9 June 1939.

<sup>314</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 8/1949, M.P.P. 5428, *White Civil Uniform*, Circular M.P. No. 03401. P. Vol. IV, signed by C.C. Whitelley, the Acting Chief Secretary of the Government of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> September 1936 ; see also National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), *Ceremonial Allowances*, Correspondence between T.V. Serivenor, Civil Service Commissioner, Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos and all Heads of Departments and Secretaries, 31 January 1949.

civil service, was expected to wear either uniforms or office dress to official, semi-official, and unofficial events.

For those issued with uniforms, these include two khaki drills – white and brown –, one rain coat, one suit, two shirts, a pair of trousers, a pair of knickers, one green tie, a pair of boots, a rain cap, a fez cap, a pocket book (for the police), and a hammer (for forest guards). The epaulets on the uniforms were to denote ranks and statuses in either the NA or colonial government civil service. Others who were not issued uniforms were expected to wear office dress, which comprised of open-necked suits, trousers, and boots during office hours and also to wear sport dress in the evening.<sup>315</sup> *‘The type of dress which His honour had in mind was one similar to the uniform worn by the Police Officers – a tunic of similar pattern, open at the neck, to be worn with shorts, stockings and shoes, the tunic and shorts to be made of white drill for wearing in offices and khaki for traveling and for ‘bush’ work’.*<sup>316</sup>

What reasons underlay and justifies this development and how was the development received by (i) Yorùbá people in colonial employ; (ii) the new class of Yorùbá elite comprising, as it was, the educated and Christian natives, non-literate Christian converts, native agency comprising of the Obas and chiefs; and (iii) the ordinary Yorùbá people who were not educated, not converted, and not in colonial employment? While the discussion that follows focuses on reasons for introducing uniforms, even in public service, the reactions of the different people were limited to those in colonial employ whether at the NA level or colonial government level. In other sections of the study, reactions of other divisions of Yorùbá society, most especially the Christians and non-Christians, shall be discussed.

As noted in different memoranda and circulars, colonial administration’s primary reasons for adopting uniforms and office dress include protection from the elements: *‘as it would appear to be reasonable to supply them with adequate protection from the*

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<sup>315</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19112/9, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between R.F.A. Grey, Acting Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 22 May 1946.

<sup>316</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), No. 19112/9, paragraph 3, *Office Dress*, Correspondence between R.F.A. Grey, Acting Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, and the Secretary to the Government of the Colony, 22<sup>th</sup> May 1946.

rain'<sup>317</sup>; to 'smarten up their appearances considerably and the men would take more pride in themselves'<sup>318</sup>; there should be an easily discernible distinction' of the different officials<sup>319</sup>; '...for the purposes of distinction'<sup>320</sup>; and so on.

Invariably, it could be asserted that from the Nigerian Armed Forces and the Police, to native administration's 'Akodas', tax collectors and forest guards, political agents, and market inspectors; colonial administration obligated the use of uniforms and office dress of different materials, colours, designs, and decorations to, on the one hand, protect the people from nature – sun and rain; and, on the other hand, to establish: (a) difference between the various personnel – native administration staff from government staff; (b) difference between colonial staff and the local people; and to (c) establish and reinforce the power dynamics that colonialism and colonial officers, African and non-African, wield over the colonized people. The uniforms that were imported to Nigeria in 1919 were made for British soldiers who were engaged in fighting during the First World War in Europe, a temperate area, and not for tropical areas like East, West, and Southern Africa. So, the uniforms were, to say the least, inappropriate and, in itself, a health risk for Africans in the colonial service. As noted earlier, the initial reaction of staff in the colonial service was outright condemnation of the dress as being

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<sup>317</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No.E.120/8, *Uniform for Out-door Employees*, from District Officer, Epe to the commissioner of the Colony, 26<sup>th</sup> July 1936.

<sup>318</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Memorandum No. P.18/11121, *Native Authority Police Kummerband*, Vivian P. Birch, the Assistant Superintendent of Nigerian Police and Officer-in-Charge N.A. Police, Oyo Province to Senior Resident, Oyo Province, Oyo, 4<sup>th</sup> February 1947.

<sup>319</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. W. 175/57, *N.A. Police Forces – Uniform of*, Correspondence between Assistant Commissioner, Western Area and the Commissioner of Police, Lagos, 21 June 1948.

<sup>320</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/Vol. 11/108, *N.A. Police Uniform*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police, Office i/c District Council Police, Ibadan Province and the District Officer, Oyo Division, Oyo; the District Officer, Ibadan Divisional Office, Ibadan; District Officer, Oshun Division, Osogbo, 13 May 1954.

'...*excessively thick*.'<sup>321</sup> Upon its issuance, opposition to the uniform's thickness began in December of 1919 when Acting Commandant of the Royal West African Frontier Force wrote to the Nigerian Regiment headquarters, Kaduna, to state that the uniforms were '*most unsuitable for wear in the tropics, being far too heavy*'.<sup>322</sup> In 1928, 1929, 1934, and 1936 complaints were lodged with the different colonial offices about the unsuitability of the uniforms in tropical climate: '*...I have to inform you that Tax Collectors in this district very rarely wear their uniforms*', the District Officer therefore suggested that '*for touring, khaki bush shirts and shorts would be more suitable*'.<sup>323</sup> As noble as the suggestion appears, the request was not granted. In 1950, the Assistant Superintendent of Police, in-charge of the NA Police, Oyo Province also reiterated the same issue as raised in 1936 by the District Officer, Epe Division, he however added that '*I am not in favour of any change in colour but I suggest that the thick material at present in use be altered to one of light serge*'.<sup>324</sup> In 1942, staff in the Commissioner of the Colony office wrote to protest the inappropriateness of their uniforms, noting, among other things that '*...our health and, incidentally, our efficiency are impaired as we often go about in the sun or under the rain without cover for our heads...*'.<sup>325</sup> Also at a meeting in Atiba Hall, Oyo on the 21<sup>st</sup> December 1950, a unanimous appeal by staff of Oyo Province was made to the Resident, Oyo Province on the need to

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<sup>321</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence from C.C. West, Lt-Colonel, Commanding 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment to the Headquarters, Nigerian Regiment, Kaduna, on 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919.

<sup>322</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence between C.C. West, Lieutenant Colonel Commanding, 4<sup>th</sup> Bn. Nigerian Regiment, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1919, National Archives, Ibadan.

<sup>323</sup> *Uniform for Out-door Officials*, Ref. No. E. 120/70, Correspondence between District Officer, Epe Divisional Office, Epe and the Commissioner of the Colony, 31 December 1936, National Archives, Ibadan.

<sup>324</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/1308, *Oyo Provincial Native Authorities' Representative Conference*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police in-charge of NA Police, Oyo Province, to the Resident, Oyo Province, 22 November 1950.

<sup>325</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Correspondence between 5 staff of Commissioner of the Colony's Office and the Commissioner of the Colony, Lagos, 21 August 1942.

change the thick uniforms to a lighter one. Of the three issues raised on uniform in 1954, the first was that *'the uniforms are far too thick, too hot, and too unhealthy to wear'*.<sup>326</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they showed colonial uniforms of the colonial period.



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<sup>326</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. 13/Vol. 11/108, N.A. *Police Uniforms*, Correspondence between Assistant Superintendent of Police in-charge of Ibadan Province, Ibadan, to the District Officer, Ibadan Province; District Officer, Oyo Division; and the District Officer, Oshun Division, Oshogbo, 13 May 1954.



**A cross section of Colonial Police**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**Oba of Lagos, Adeniji Adele, flanked by a Colonial Police (Akoda), 1956.**

(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)



**A cross section of Colonial Police**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

From northern Nigeria came the complaint that the ‘...types of Field Service Dress at present allowed are unquestionably unsuitable for the purposes or occasions for which they are required’; however, the administration considered the ‘wearing of uniform on certain occasions as for instance in Court, at important meetings or on ceremonial occasions is a factor which is as essential in the eyes of the African in Nigeria as it is in the case of the populace in England’.<sup>327</sup>

From the above, it can be ascertained that Africans, whether in the NA or in the colonial government service, protested and complained about the unsuitability of colonial uniforms and office dress in tropical climate. In addition, those British officials who work directly with the Africans also realized and complained about the unsuitability of the uniforms in tropical climate. The suggestion that Africans be allowed to use shorts, especially whenever staff had to be under the sun, went unheeded. As the above discussions have shown, it could be argued that colonial government’s preoccupation with uniforms and office dress was mainly to establish and show specific identity and not to protect the individual Yorùbá staff from the vagaries of nature.

In addition to sartorial tradition introduced directly into Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria by colonialism, socio-cultural, political, and economic growths that followed colonialism also impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition. New employment opportunities followed developments in transportation, agriculture, and colonial administration. Young men and women, most notably those recently freed from the shackles of slavery and pawnship, found themselves in a ‘new’ Yorubaland where the strength of their hands, rather than conditions of their births or unfortunate situations of being enslaved or pawned, determined how far they could go on the social ladder.

Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, a major transporter in Oyo town, argued that *the introduction of inter-territorial telegraphic and telephonic system was also of primary importance to the*

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<sup>327</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ref. No. S.P. 6641/Vol. II/20, *Uniform for Administrative Officers not entitled to Civil Uniform*, Correspondence between Secretary, Southern Provinces and Secretary, Northern Provinces, Kaduna, 27 December 1929.

*development during this period.*<sup>328</sup> Coleman also noted that by 1922, more than 40 per cent of the revenue of Western Region, where Yorubaland belonged, was devoted to the construction and maintenance of communication facilities. Besides easing communication problems for the colonial administration and the European merchants, this development also brought employment opportunities to many Yorùbá people as well as increasing the flow of communication among Yorùbá people and Nigerians as postage stamp, telephone and telegraph services replaced the indigenous message delivery through human medium.

Salary, which was first introduced in the army where about a thousand youths were recruited in 1896,<sup>329</sup> varied. Some were paid as high as 50 pounds annually, a sum Pa. Alaka considered as “*huge, mouth-watering and unprecedented*”,<sup>330</sup> while others, such as unskilled labourer in both government department and trading stores received as little as between 4d and 7d per day.<sup>331</sup>

Wage earning led to an unprecedented increase in money supplied in the society, thereby serving as another impetus for migration and upward social mobility. Wage earners lavished money on alcohol and women.<sup>332</sup> Although social vices such as stealing and excessive drinking had been in existence before this time, they, in tandem with divorce, however rampant and were therefore considered as social problems.<sup>333</sup> Thousands of youths dumped agriculture for wage labour and no sooner had this happened than famine occurred in Yorubaland, first, in 1905, then in 1906 and in 1911.<sup>334</sup>

Yorùbá people lampooned wage earners in songs and in jibes. Most notable among these songs are the following:

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<sup>328</sup>Federal Government of Nigeria, *Nigeria Handbook*, 1926, (Lagos, 1926), 161-170.

<sup>329</sup>Nzula A. T., (ed.) *Forced Labour in Colonial Africa*, (London, 1979), 234.

<sup>330</sup>Interview with Pa. Alaka Adebisi Quadri, Poweline Street, Osogbo, Osun State, 14 March, 2008.

<sup>331</sup>National Archive, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.

<sup>332</sup>Nzula A. T., (ed.) *Forced Labour*, 202.

<sup>333</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.

<sup>334</sup>National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), CSO 16/3/27 Confidential Report, 61/1901.

*Tete ji mi'*  
*Ani o tete ji mi;*  
*Eni gba ise oyinbo fi ra re so fa;*  
*Eni gba soja gba yonu.*

(Please wake me up early enough  
I said: please wake me up early in the morning;  
He who works for the whiteman  
Has pawned himself;  
He who enlists as a soldier has courted trouble.)

Sudden wealth of many, especially rubber, cotton, corn and cocoa retainers or middlemen, was lampooned thus:

*Pebi Agbado mewā so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge .*

(Ten Measures of corn have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

Alternatively, the song is modified thus:  
*Pebi Koko mewā so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge.*

(Ten Measures of cocoa have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

Or better still, and most common for wage earners:  
*Pelebe mewā so won d'oga;*  
*Olosi ana ns'oge.*<sup>335</sup>

(Ten British coins have turned them into masters;  
Poor men of yesterday are now prancing.)

In addition to cotton, another colonial agricultural policy that impacted on cloth production is the introduction of silkworm –

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<sup>335</sup> Interview with Pa. Ajiboye, Obantoko, Abeokuta, 23 August 2008. The varieties of the song were given my Mama Adebisi Ijeru, Ijeru Compound, Ogbomoso, 2 August, 2008.

*anaphevenata* – also in the nineteenth century. From this, as noted by Judith Byfield citing M.O. Ashiru, silk cloths<sup>336</sup> and treadle loom<sup>337</sup> entered into Yorùbá dress production system. Similarly, local yarn gave way to imported rayon and cotton yarn, which were mixed with metallic synthetic thread, called *lurex*, used in the production of light-weight shinning cloths.<sup>338</sup>

The impact of these policies and programmes on Yorubaland were enormous. It ranged from social and economic to political developments. For instance, Chief ToriolaSokenu of Makun, Sagamu who joined the railways in 1937 and served both at Iddo and Osogbo offices had built a house in Makun, Sagamu by 1945. It was the first one storey building in the town. As the old man intoned:

*I was such a young man then that majority was fearful where I got the money with which I built the house. Everybody trooped to the house to, at least, confirm if it was true. When I went to Lagos to take up employment with the railways, I was considered too young to do the work. But, in a way, I coped. When I wanted to marry, no one would allow her daughter come close to me. I was called 'Onise Loko' (Locomotive Engine Workers). When in 1945, the house was built, it took everybody by surprise.*<sup>339</sup>

The general trend was for migrants both from and into Yorubaland to remit money from these places to their hometowns. With such monies, these people began to play hitherto unanticipated roles in their hometowns. Chief Michael Omilani, with other seven Ijebu migrants, founded the '*Ile Ni Abo Isinmi Oko*', a social club comprising of Egba and Ijebu migrants, in Ibadan by 1930. The club was instrumental to chain migration of Egba and Ijebu not only to Ibadan but also to Lagos, Ile-Ife,

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<sup>336</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1890-1940*, (Portsmouth, 2002), 8.

<sup>337</sup> Adeyinka Ajayi, *The Economics of Cloth Weaving in Eastern Yorubaland in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, (unpublished Ph. D thesis, University of Ibadan, 2005), 46.

<sup>338</sup> National Archives, Ibadan, (NAI), Ondo Prof. 1/1/1846b, *Textile Centers, Ado-Ekiti, 1948*.

<sup>339</sup> Interview with Chief Toriola Ogunmakin, Sagamu, Ogun State, 2nd August 2010.

Osogbo, etc. Pa. Omilani wrote in the Club Minutes for 13 November 1933, that owing to the successes of members in their different 'enterprises, more young men and women have come by the way of the cities'.<sup>340</sup> One of the objectives of the Club was to render financial assistance to members in order to embark on capital projects in their hometowns as well as providing accommodation and assistance to new migrants.

In most Yorùbá towns and cities, it was not unusual to have houses built of concrete as against bricks and roofed with zinc as against thatch all over the place. As noted by the Department of Public Works, migrants, in most cases, indulged in the habit of remitting considerable resources to their hometowns, and as early as 1940, the *Baale* and Chiefs in most towns in Yorubaland lodged one complaint or the other with colonial administration about how the 'Ajoji' (the migrants) were milking away resources of the land to build their hometowns. Efforts were made to get Governor Eggerton to impose sanctions on migrants, most especially those working with government and other departments. To assuage the grievances of these chiefs and *Baale*, government proposed that taxes, as from 1940, would be shared between colonial government and the cities. Renewed attention was called for infrastructural development for most cities to cater for the increasing rate at which migrants, most notably youths, thronged the cities.

As Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, 98 years old, revealed in Oyo town:

*I followed my brothers to Lagos in 1935. It was as a trend then for young men and women to go to the city. Although Oyo was regarded as a city because it was the seat of a DO, but Ibadan and Lagos were the big cities. Those who went to these cities, returned as rich men and women. Many who, before this time, were regarded as commoners returned doing what real men were doing. They were building houses, marrying wives, and, above all, buying cars. There were little differences between the educated ones who work with the administration and those who work for others. They were all doing exploits. Most families developed the attitude of sending one or two of their sons to*

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<sup>340</sup> Interview with Pa Omilani, Osogbo, Osun State, 22 August 2010.

*Lagos, Ibadan, etc. to become men. I was educated, so it was not a surprise for my parents when I got a job in Lagos. I was there for fourteen years.*<sup>341</sup>

From the above representative examples, it could be seen that what constituted wealth, for the first time in Yorubaland, changed from good character, good bearing, and honesty to material acquisition, etc. Hence, many of the nouveau rich expressed their new found freedom in material acquisition, multiple marriages, alcoholism, and licentious living. Sarah Tucker noted that many of these new men and women soon adopted new airs:

*...independently of any religious motive, some of the gay young men affect the Mohamendan costume, and wear wide sack-like trousers, much embroidered, and confined close around the ankle, with loose upper garment, and turban...Some of them are beginning to adopt English dress.*<sup>342</sup>

Aberrant behaviours therefore predominated in Yorubaland. The Obas and chiefs could not do anything, as colonial economic enterprise required markets for most of the goods that attracted the youth. Dr. Agbebi, earlier mentioned, described the scenario as a state of transition:

*The phrase 'state of transition' usually applied to people who are supposed to be affected by passing social conditions, but who really are in the unfortunate dilemma of having their social order of life dislocated by the introduction of a foreign order really implies a state of transition from a regular order of life ingrained in a people and practiced by them to a social whirlpool of confusion and disorder where there is not sufficient material for or*

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<sup>341</sup> Interview with Alhaji Amuda Olorun-Adaba, Oyo, Oyo State, 23 August 2010.

<sup>342</sup> Sarah Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise within the Tropics: An Outline of the Origin and Progress of the Yorùbá Mission*, (London, 1853), 24-25.

*the materials which exist do not contribute to social reconstruction.*<sup>343</sup>

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when these photographs were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, they photos illustrate Yorùbá dress used during the colonial period by young men.



**A cross section of young Yorùbá men in colonial Lagos,  
22 March 1925**  
(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)

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<sup>343</sup>Rev. Mojola Agbebi, 'Inaugural Sermon', in Ayo J. Langley, *Ideologies of Liberation in Black Africa, 1856-1970*, (London, 1979), 135.



**A cross section of young Yorùbá men in colonial Lagos,  
22 March 1956**

**(Sources: The Nigerian Nostalgia 1960 -1980 Project)**

The transition from indigenous political economy to one epitomized by capitalism therefore ensured that it was this class of young men and women who related and cooperated with colonialism and were the eventual inheritors of Yorùbá vis-à-vis Nigeria's socio-economic and political leadership.

#### **4.5. Change and Continuity in Yorùbá Dress, 1800-1880**

As Betty Wass argued, dress, in any culture and as a means of communication, conveys messages when members of a society who share a given culture have learned to associate types of dress with given, customary usage.<sup>344</sup> Through this customary association, specific types of dress become symbols for either specific or class or social roles, with this symbolism changing over time and in different social, religious, political and cultural contexts. The impact of Islam, Christianity, Western education, and colonialism in Yorubaland on Yorùbá dress, as shown above brought about tremendous changes. The period, 1800 and 1880, is

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<sup>344</sup>Betty M. Wass, 'Yoruba Dress in Five Generations of a Lagos Family', in Justine M. Cordwell and Schwarz A. Ronald (eds.), *The Fabrics of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, (The Hague, 1979), 331. 331.

important to any discussion on these changes in dress and identity in Yorubaland, as the developments during this period helped in shaping and reinforcing Yorùbá dress and cultural identity. The period, characterized by the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars, as well as the introduction and spread of Islam and Christianity, witnessed an unprecedented shift from indigenous Yorùbá dress to 'new' dress modes, which have since become 'traditional' to Yorùbá people.

Between 1800 and 1840, the on-going Yorùbá civil wars created so much dislocation in the various centers of cloth production. This development affected dress in two ways: it brought Islamic/Arabic dress culture into greater contact with the Yorùbá people; and diffused cloth production techniques, as refugees from the various beleaguered towns not only escaped with their lives and people, but also carried their skills in their head to their various places of refuge.

As Adeyinka Ajayi, Olaoba, and Akinyele<sup>345</sup> had noted, *Ofi*, *Adire*, and other cloth-making traditions moved from the northern end of Old Oyo – from places like Iseyin, Igboho, Shaki, Igboora – to Abeokuta, Ago-Oja (now Oyo), Osogbo, Iwo. The Jihadist dress culture, which had become firmly rooted at Ilorin, was spread to other parts of Yorubaland as the Jihadists conquered one Yorùbá community after the other. As already noted, Islamic/Arabic cloth was not only cheap, but also devoid of any trappings relating to status. As also noted earlier, facial marking, as a result of Islam/Arabic influences, became de-emphasized.

While the civil war raged, there was a low pan-Yorùbá ethnic consciousness, as individuals and communities were more interested in escaping death and destruction than to take interest in whatever anybody wore, except where such dress culture, as was the case with the Arabic/Islamic dress culture, would preserve their lives. Generally throughout this period, there was no pan-Yorùbá ethnic consciousness tied to dress, as Yorùbá people, whether in the urban or rural areas, took to the use of either the Islamic/Arabic dress, especially where the Jihadists had taken over, or their indigenous dress. In other words, since occupations were tied exclusively to religion and since Islamic education was not as

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<sup>345</sup>Kemi Morgan, *The History of Ibadan*, (Ibadan, 1990), 65.

prevalent; long distance trade and the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars served Islam in multi-dimensional ways. Islamic scholars became part of the courts, serving as, among other things, as advisers, *Imams*, medicine or charm-makers, and not so much as Islamic teachers. Islamic culture, not only in dress, but also in social and court systems gained the upper hand.

However, between 1840s when Christianity and Western education were introduced and 1900 when Nigeria became officially a part of the British Empire and Lagos emerged as its chief capital, enormous changes that altered socio-economic and political nature of Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria occurred. The era brought higher wages, more and better jobs, and a chance at a new kind of prosperity tied to working with the colonial government or in the Euro-Asian trading concerns that suddenly emerged, first in the urban areas, and later in their trading out-posts in the rural areas. Because the focus of the Yorùbá people, both in rural and urban areas, was on how to adjust to these new, unprecedented changes, there were no movements or efforts at advocating a pan-Yorùbá cultural nationalism in dress and language at the time.

Western education followed Christianity into Yorubaland, and since most schools were in the hands of Christian missions, anyone who would be educated would certainly be converted to Christianity. Although socio-economic and political power rested exclusively on colonial administrators, dwellers in urban Yorùbá communities like Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Osogbo, etc. soon realized the need to covet education as a catalyst for social mobility. With formal education, at least, a clerical or professional position was more or less guaranteed. From the 1840s therefore, educated Yorùbá elite began to emerge as a new status group distinct from the common people in both urban and rural areas. This educated, new class of Yorùbá leaders emulated the British in many ways; they however retained their Yorùbá values, which they, for the most part, used in their homes and rural areas.

In her study of five generations of a Lagos family, Betty M. Wass noted that individuals in the family, like most educated, new class of Yorùbá elite in Lagos and other urban centers, acquired appropriate skills for jobs in the new colonial administration and Euro-Asian trading concerns. Set apart from their fellow Yorùbá

by their conversion to Christianity and acquisition of Western education; this educated, new class of Yorùbá elite emulated not only the Christian missionaries, British administrators and merchants but also African repatriates from Sierra Leone and Liberia – the *Saro* and *Amaro* - in eating, speaking, and dressing habits. For the most part, this educated, new class of Yorùbá elite attached so much pride and care to the wearing Western dress, as it was considered a badge of education, Christianity, and therefore civilization. It must consequently be asserted that while the old, indigenous Yorùbá elite were the first to emulate the Islamic and Arabic dress culture, the repatriates from Sierra Leone and Liberia and later the educated, new class of Yorùbá elite also emulated Christian missionaries, whose dress was dictated for the most part by their religion – Christianity - and European businessmen, eager to sell imported goods at the coasts.

This shift in dress-use among the educated, new class of Yorùbá elite was not just as a result of the desire by Yorùbá elite to emulate the European missionaries, administrators, and traders. The shift began primarily from the introduction of uniforms and office dress in both the colonial and native administration. Western dress, Western eating habits, Western mannerism, etc. were considered the vintage culture, a badge of civilization and therefore, to wear non-European dress or to adopt non-European airs was regarded as being uncivilized, uneducated, encrusted in tradition and being rustic. Invigorating this belief was the sheer fact that the emerging socio-economic and political order in Yorubaland placed power, wealth and therefore upward social mobility in the hands of the few, educated ones. The emerging socio-economic and political developments in Yorubaland vis-à-vis what later became known as Nigeria therefore served to raise, reinforce, and reinvigorate the importance and status of Western (dress) culture over and above other dress cultures– Islamic and indigenous Yorùbá dress cultures.

From the 1800s to 1860s therefore, dress-use in urban Yorubaland shifted from the pre-1800 indigenous Yorùbá dress, to, minimally, Islamic/Arabic dress culture, and later, at a large scale (level), to purely Western dress, in both private and public life. As photograph collections at the archives and information offices at Ibadan, Ile-Ife, Abeokuta and Lagos showed, Yorùbá men and

women in Lagos, Ibadan, Oshogbo, Abeokuta, etc. and majority of the educated elite wore Western dress while those of rural dwellers wore purely indigenous Yorùbá dress, an indication that Western education as well as Christianity were limited to the urban areas at this initial stage in Yorubaland. Invariably it can be argued that dress-use in rural Yorubaland remained largely the Yorùbá indigenous dress culture, while in the urban areas, Western dress predominated.

Oba Akiolu, the Oba of Lagos, noted in an oral interview that in the early 1900s, the wearing of Western dress was commonplace and that more and more semi-literate and uneducated inhabitant of Lagos would rather wear Western dress than wear Yorùbá dress.<sup>346</sup> Speaking in the same tone, Isaac Delano noted that ‘the Bible and the tie’ appeared simultaneously in Yorubaland, and that to be a Christian and to be educated means to possess these two most vital qualifications for a better life.<sup>347</sup>

Betty Wass, earlier cited, noted that eighty nine percent educated (male) Yorùbá elite in Lagos between 1880 and the 1900s wore Western dress while only sixty percent of their female counterparts took to the wearing of Western dress. The collections of photograph at the Ministry of Information, Lagos State as well as at the Lagos City Hall confirmed that Yorùbá people with the highest educational attainment during this period wore more Western dress than the rest of the population whether in urban or rural areas.

Occupation and religion, as already noted, accounted for the use of Western dress, but explaining the disparity in the use of Western dress between males and females, Wass noted that the number of women in colonial service and European trading concerns were few, as majority of them remained confined to domestic works and therefore tied to the traditional spheres associated with trading, crafts, and child care. Modupeolu Fasheke however maintained that with the exception of teaching in the mission schools, not a single woman was employed in colonial

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<sup>346</sup>Interview with Oba Rilwan Akiolu, Lagos, 12 February 2011.

<sup>347</sup>Interview with Isaac Delano, Marina, Lagos, 12 February 2011.

service.<sup>348</sup> While the above may not necessarily explain why the females were unable to acquire and use Western dress, it however shows that colonialism offered women limited opportunity for advancement, as more men than women were educated and therefore employed. However, as educated Yorùbá men moved on to Western-type occupations, the more the chances that they, their children and their wives would wear Western-type dress.

As can be gleaned from photographs from Lagos, Oyo, and Ogun states' information ministries, urban Yorùbá female and male dresses comprised essentially of Western dress, with the typical female wearing a dress, shoes, bracelet, earrings, stockings, and neck chain. For a typical male, dress comprised only of a shirt, long trousers, jacket, shoes, and neckties. Although Western dress was the preferred dress, especially among the urban dwellers, a typical Yorùbá male dress worn, especially at home and for special occasions, during this period includes *Agbada*, *Fila*, *Sokoto* and *Bata* for males. For the females, the traditional dress includes *Iro*, *Buba*, *Iborun*, *Gele*, *Ipele*, *Bata*, and *Ileke*. From this, it can be argued that female dress changed from comprising a few things to include a whole range of hitherto unconsidered items. It is contestable that this change was driven by increase in wage-earning opportunities available to women, as the number of females employed into the colonial service and native administration was negligible and so could not be taken to account for the higher percentage of women wearing Western dress. Possible reasons for this jump in the number of women involved in the use of Western dress could be the importation of sewing machines, importation of cheap fabrics, and the sheer fact that the tailors were creative enough to emulate or copy European missionary dress styles, which were sewn for the few Yorùbá teachers, nurses, missionary's wives, etc.

It must be noted that tailors and seamstresses, most especially in Ibadan and Lagos, played important roles in the diffusion of European dress in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria. Ibadan and Lagos were the major training centers from where hundreds and possibly thousands of other peoples from other parts

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<sup>348</sup> Modupeolu Fasheke, *Women, Marriage, and Administration in Colonial Nigeria*, (London, n. a.), 1-8.

of Yorubaland were trained (via apprenticeship) in the sewing of European type dresses. On becoming free and returning back to their homes, these new master tailors continued to spread European-type style dresses throughout Yorubaland. At the Ibadan Archive, more than ten boxes exist on contracts and tenders made available to tailors in Lagos, Ibadan and Abeokuta by colonial administration for the production of complete dresses, most especially uniforms and office dresses for native and colonial administration's use. Besides sewing for official customers like the Church and colonial administration; these tailors, owing to their dexterity in dress-making, made it possible for all and sundry to copy, satisfactorily, the various European styles and, indirectly helped in propagating European sartorial culture.

Haircuts, like cloth-use, also witnessed some tremendous changes, as the indigenous hairstyles such as shaving the head clean and other styles gave way to Western haircut styles such as *Boma* (Burma), *Kunba*, *Kosikoomu* (cockscorn), *Togo* (Togoland), *Onboodu* (On-Board), *Bituu* (Beetle), and *Sobiseka* (Chubby-checker).<sup>349</sup> For the females, the following hairstyles became commonplace and were the predominant fashionable hairstyles women of all status and callings used: *Ogun-Pari*, *Onilegogoro*, *Oolu-baaki* (All-Back), etc. These changes in male and female hair-styles followed the on-going socio-political changes, not just in Yorubaland and other parts of what later became Nigeria but globally. For instance, while the end of the First World War introduced hairstyles such as *Ogun-Pari* and *Boma* into the corps of female and male hairstyles, the coming of sailors introduced 'On-Board' to male's haircut styles. Contacts with other Africans, most especially Togolese, brought their unique haircut style into what Yorùbá men used.

It must be asserted that although texture of hair between Nigerians and Europeans are different, however these haircut styles, which were first seen on the Europeans, the foreigners and others, especially soldiers who fought on the side of Great Britain during the Second World War, gave educated Yorùbá elite new ideas for new haircut styles. They were then copied or adapted by the Yorùbá people.

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<sup>349</sup> Adeoye C.L., *Asa Ati Ise Yorùbá*, (Ibadan, 2005), 169.

#### 4.6 Change and Conflicts in Yorùbá Dress Culture

At the vanguard of sartorial imposition in Yorubaland were, first, the Muslims, especially during the early days of the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars. They were followed by the Christian missionaries from the 1840s, and later the British administrators' from 1919. Responses, in different parts of Yorubaland, were essentially characterized by initial acceptance, which soon gave way, especially from the 1840s, to 'grumbling' and by the 1880s, grumbling had changed into open protests against what was regarded as cultural erosion in Yorubaland vis-à-vis Nigeria.

Leading the protests were the new class of educated Yorùbá elite who, by the 1880s, formed a movement not only in Yorubaland, but across Nigeria. Serving as impetus for the agitation were a host of other factors, most notably CMS's refusal to make Samuel Ajayi Crowther a bishop on racial ground and dismissal of Moses Ladejo Stone, who practically built Baptist mission in Nigeria following South American Mission's inability to post pastors to Nigeria because of the American Civil War. These were all motivation the educated Yorùbá elite in Lagos, Abeokuta, and Ibadan needed for the agitation, which coalesced into a cultural renaissance in language and dress, to burst into the open.

As a way of rejecting European cultural domination, educated Yorùbá converts began to dump their Christian names and were taken up their original, Yorùbá names. Dr. David Brown Vincent reverted to Mojola Agbebi. Christopher Alexander Williams, the first Nigerian lawyer, who had been an avid supporter of European rule and culture, reverted to Sapara Williams and sponsored an Egungun dance, a traditional ceremony, in October of 1896; stating that "*A lawyer lives for the direction of his people and the advancement of the cause of his country*".<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>350</sup>Oladipo Jimilehin, 'The Legal Profession and Role of Lawyers in Nigerian Politics', *Nigerian Tribune*, (Ibadan, 27 April 2010), 23-25; see also, Holger G. Ehling, Claus-Peter Holste-von Mutius, *No Condition is Permanent: Nigerian Writing and the Struggle for Democracy*, (USA, 2001), 150.

Unlike Christopher Williams who mainly dropped two English names and simply went by Sapara Williams, his brother, Dr. Alexander Williams, changed completely to Dr. Oguntola Odunbaku Sapara. However, like Williams, Oguntola, although a medical doctor, joined the *Sanpono*<sup>351</sup> Cult at Epe in 1897.<sup>352</sup> On dress, both brothers were reputed for their cheeky style of *Danshiki*, a version of Yorùbá flowing gown, which today is called ‘*Sapara*’ in reference to their peculiar hybrid style of dress.<sup>353</sup>

At its zenith, the agitation led to the formation of African independent churches, including Native Baptist Church in Lagos and the Aladura churches, where emphasis was on worshipping God and not cultural hegemony. At the social level, renewed interest in Yorùbá dress led to dress hybridity, as many took to wearing an “*unusual combination of adire (tie and dye) wrapper and differently patterned European prints as buba-like overblouse, head-tie, and shawl...and combined hand-woven cloth, adire and European prints*”.<sup>354</sup> In addition to the above, the development also stimulated a vigorous linguistic and cultural campaign in late 1880s, spear-headed by Yorùbá people from Lagos, Abeokuta, Ibadan, Oyo, Oshogbo, and Ile-Ife<sup>355</sup>, which aimed at stimulating greater interest in indigenous culture, was thus instituted in Nigeria. Similar development occurred in other parts of West Africa, most especially Sierra Leone where the Creoles also launched a dress reform movement.

Besides condemning equalization of western dress with Christianity, the educated Yorùbá elite also argued that Western dress were unsuitable, unhygienic, and incommodious to the tropical climate of Yorubaland. Some other practices condemned include segregation, most notably on steamships, colonial

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<sup>351</sup> A guild of local and Western experts in the treatment of smallpox, which sprouted in Epe, Lagos in 1897.

<sup>352</sup> Adeloye Adelola, ‘Some Early Nigerian Doctors and Their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa’, *Medical History*, 18:1, (1974), 288-90.

<sup>353</sup> Easmon M. C. F., ‘Sierra Leone Doctors’, *Sierra Leone Studies: Journal of the Sierra Leone Society*, vol. 6, (1956), 81-96.

<sup>354</sup> Judith Byfield “‘Unwrapping’ Nationalism: Dress, Gender, and Nationalist Discourse in Colonial Lagos”, *African Humanities*, Occasional Publication No. 30, (Boston University, 2000), 17.

<sup>355</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

hospitals, civil service and the Church. In colonial hospitals separate wards were built for European patients and nurses after 1896. Therefore, from Lagos to Abeokuta, Ibadan to Oyo, and Oshogbo to Ile-Ife; Lagos and Yorùbá nationalists thereby instituted a vigorous cultural consciousness campaign, which sought to stimulate a greater interest in the use and study of Yorùbá language in schools; the use of African dress for official and unofficial engagements; acceptance of polygamy as a marriage system suitable for African societies; the education of women, and toleration of Yorùbá secret societies.<sup>356</sup>

Unprecedented changes became noticeable both in Lagos and in major cities across Yorubaland and in the interior. The glamour and lure of European culture was demystified and, like those of the traditional institutions that European culture supplanted, also collapsed. Yorùbá Christians and educated elite both in the cities and in the rural areas turned to 'traditional' dress in their bid to reconnect Yorùbá culture. Women and girls began to experiment with the combination of 'traditional' dress and European dress; just as locally-woven cloth gradually became a prestige item.

Although importation of cloths and clothing materials from Europe and Asia into Yorubaland and other parts of what later become known as Nigeria must have begun before the nineteenth century, the agitation for cultural renaissance in dress and language coincided with the importation of imported cotton cloths variously called 'Specialty African Prints', 'Manchester cloth', 'African prints', 'Dutch prints', etc. from Britain, Switzerland and the Netherlands into Yorubaland, other parts of West Africa, and Zaire. They were (and are still) called *Ankara* among Yorùbá people of Nigeria. These European-made cloths have become '*an important part of Yorùbá inherent culture*'.<sup>357</sup> Ruth Nielsen noted that although the designs of these cloths '*evolved primarily from the indigenous hand textile industry of West Africa, where the people had a highly developed sense of design, color, and quality*',

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<sup>356</sup>Ibid, 10.

<sup>357</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History', 467.

they were however used by Africans, most especially Yorùbá and never by Europeans<sup>358</sup>.

Perhaps the success of the campaign for a renewed interest in Yorùbá dress cannot be dissociated from yet another development: the design, production, importation and marketing of cheap, cotton European-manufactured, machine-made wax-printed clothes, which were brought to West Africa and Zaire (now Congo) during the period. Called by varieties of names, such as 'Specialty African prints', 'Manchester cloth', 'African prints', 'Dutch prints', etc. these machine-made cotton fabrics, bought and used by Africans as against hand-woven, indigenous African clothes, have become '*an important part of their inherent culture*'<sup>359</sup>. As Ruth Nielsen noted, although the designs of these clothes '*evolved primarily from the indigenous hand and textile industry of West Africa, where the people had a highly developed sense of design, color, and quality*'<sup>360</sup>, they were however manufactured in Europe and imported into West Africa and Zaire during the time the agitation for a renewed interest in Yorùbá/African dress and language was going on in Yorubaland, Sierra Leone, and other parts of West Africa.

As already established in chapter four, the use of imported textiles in West Africa dates back to early West African empires; hence as Yorùbá elite and nationalists were agitating for cultural renaissance in dress and language, these imported fabrics provided many Yorùbá people with extremely cheap and readily available alternative dress compared to Yorùbá indigenous dress, which required time and enormous resources to make.

At the initial stage, West Africans frowned at the quality, garish colours, and crude designs of these cloths. In their stead, they preferred the lighter, all-cotton Indian prints and their bright colours as against Manchester's coarse linen cloths and their dull colours. To stay in the trade and afloat, both the Manchester and

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<sup>358</sup> Ibid, 467.

<sup>359</sup> Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development of Wax-printed Textiles, Intended for West Africa and Zaire', in Cordwell J. M. and Schwarz R. A. (eds.), *The Fabric of Culture: The Anthropology of Clothing and Adornment*, (The Hague, 1979), 467.

<sup>360</sup> Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 467.

Dutch printers were compelled to modify their cloths to suit the taste and requirements of West Africans: varied cloths both in design and colour to reflect West African regional peculiarities, a development which ultimately resulted in a clear line of special West African market for Manchester and Dutch cotton cloths. In addition, the European cloth merchants sponsored craftsmen to visit the West Coast to learn the African indigenous cloth making and develop this in Europe in order to make West African specific-clothes. Consequently, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, European cloth merchants had captured, dominated, and replaced Indian cotton clothes on the West African regional market.<sup>361</sup>

At the vanguard of this trade in imported African cotton-cloths were Previnaire, N.V. Haarlemsche Katoendrukkerij, Van Vlissingen (also known as Vlisco), Hatema, Newton Banks Works, English Calico Ltd, A. Brunnschweiler (UK) Ltd, Johan Streiff, Egidius Trumpi (of Glarius), Hohlenstein, etc. These and many other companies were based in Holland, Switzerland, and Great Britain, especially in Manchester. They pioneered the mass-production and importation of machine-made java batiks cotton-cloths into West Africa. Common to their cloths was the employment of varieties of designs, patterns, and colours to produce wax and fancy prints of different qualities. Success of a clothing-line was a factor of consumers' acceptance, which is measured as increase in sales of a particular design over production time.

Consumer's acceptance is premised on '*the totality of the African culture, language, geography and environmental conditions*'<sup>362</sup> being represented in a design project. To facilitate successful cloth-trading in West Africa therefore, these companies sponsored many designers to visit the West Coast of Africa in order to study and incorporate such motifs that truly represent West African people, language, culture and peculiarities and ensure that all these were incorporated into their various designs. Notable sources for the design of African wax-prints include (i) Indian cotton and its rich cultural designs codified into a book form by the East India Company in the eighteenth century; (ii) Javanese batiks,

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<sup>361</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 469.

<sup>362</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 482.

which derived its design originally from natural forms and was influenced in its later manifestations by myriad of cultures and religions, historical and mythological events in Asia; (iii) European prints designs; (iv) African indigenous cloth, which evolved from Africa's rich indigenous hand textile industry; (v) traditional African objects and symbols; (vi) contacts with consumers, traders and market women in Africa who, more often than not, expressed their preferences; (vii) historical events, current events, political figures and ideas; (viii) religion and mythology; (ix) natural forms; and (x) geometrical designs, especially since Islam forbade the making of the likeness of living objects.<sup>363</sup>

The desire to maximize profits by the European cloth merchants therefore served as a boost for the Yorùbá elite and nationalists cultural renaissance campaign, as the African prints were, unlike the indigenous Yorùbá cloths, colourful and cheap, although inferior to the indigenous Yorùbá cloths. The cheapness and inferior quality of these cloths are some of the reasons attending the acceptance of these clothes in West Africa and Zaire, as different cadre of the Yorùbá society could afford these cloths as against the indigenous cloths. To buy into the cultural agitation of the Yorùbá elite and nationalists, a poor civil servant who cannot afford either *Sanyan* or *Alaari*, may choose from a tie and dye made from cheap imported cotton or an imported African print, which the tailors soon mastered and made into all manner of styles.

Invariably, both the illiterate in the villages and the educated class in the city-centers were able to participate in the crusade. Judith Byfield made specific example of the daughters of Richard Blaize - Carrie Lumpkin and Charlottee Blaize – among many others who took to wearing an “*unusual combination of adire ‘tie dye’ wrapper and differently patterned European prints as buba-like overblouse, head-tie, and shawl...and combined hand-woven cloth, adire and European prints*”.<sup>364</sup>

This new alternative to indigenous Yorùbá cloth was not only regarded and treated as traditional Yorùbá cloths by the Yorùbá themselves, but also by the European manufacturers. As

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<sup>363</sup> Ruth Nielsen, ‘The History and Development’, 482.

<sup>364</sup> Judith Byfield, “‘Unwrapping’ Nationalism”, 17.

far as the manufacturers were concerned, any cloth-line that is sold regularly, received a name from its African consumers, and is kept and cherished by Africans is regarded as a classic or 'traditional' African cloth. As Ruth Nielsen have noted, *'the criteria for nontraditional design therefore would be: lack of a name bestowed by the consumer, lack of sufficient admiration to make the print worth 'treasuring', and lack of enough sales to keep the print on the market for several years'*.<sup>365</sup> So, for the Yorùbá elite and nationalists, these European-designed, machine-made imported cloths became Yorùbá traditional cloths, and these cloths offered them credible and affordable commodities or resources through which they expressed their personal and group conception, expression, and affiliation.

It must be emphasized that this cannot be a history of imported cloth to Yorubaland, as imported textiles have been in Yorubaland since the early West African empires, when imported fabrics were transported on the backs of donkeys and camels, on the heads of porters, and in the holds of river boats. As a principal trade item, cloth served as currency in the marketplace and was bartered for slaves; it was exchanged for oil, ivory, and gold. Cloth was carried along trade routes from the Mediterranean ports of Africa across the Sahara and through the rain forest to the West coast. English and Dutch companies of the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries further promoted this trade, as Indian cotton were also imported to West Africa.<sup>366</sup>

During this period, imported textile, especially from Holland and Manchester, dominated textile trade and invariably introduced cheaper cloths into Yorubaland. To take a full advantage of the trade therefore, the Dutch and Manchester merchants modified their cloth to suit African taste, and from 1750 to 1900, their cloth could compare favourably well with Indian clothes.<sup>367</sup> In addition, Manchester printers began to vary their cloth, both in design and colour, to reflect West African regional peculiarities, a development which ultimately resulted in a clear line of special West African market for Manchester cotton cloths.

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<sup>365</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History and Development', 483.

<sup>366</sup>Ibid, 468.

<sup>367</sup>Ibid, 469.

To boost trade, European cloth merchants sponsored craftsmen to visit the West African Coast to learn the African indigenous cloth making and develop this in Europe in order to make West African specific-cloths. Consequently, by the nineteenth century, Manchester merchants had captured, dominated, and replaced Indian cotton cloths on the West African regional market.<sup>368</sup>

*Ankara*, it must be noted, an extremely popular Indonesian luxury cloth called *Ankara Mohair*, which was very popular among Ottoman and Polish gentries in late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, entered into West Africa through Dutch merchants. By mid-seventeenth century, Ottoman conquests destroyed Indonesian trade in *Ankara* and the trade went into decline. However, the technology was picked up by Dutch merchants, who, before its decline, were marketing it and, later, were manufacturing it.<sup>369</sup> Common to the Dutch, British and other manufacturers' cloths were varieties of designs, patterns, and colours through which they produced fancy prints of different qualities.

Success, measured as increase in sales of a particular design over production time, was a factor of consumers' acceptance and consumers' acceptance was premised on '*the totality of the African culture, language, geography and environmental conditions*'<sup>370</sup> expressed in any cloth. To facilitate trade, these companies sponsored designers to West Africa in other to study and incorporate such motifs that truly represent West African peoples, languages, culture and peculiarities, which were later incorporated into cloth designs. Notable motifs included those obtained from (i) East India Company's design book written in the eighteenth century; (ii) Javanese batiks' natural forms, cultures, religions, historical and mythological events; (iii) European prints designs; (iv) African indigenous cloth, which evolved from Africa's indigenous textile industry; (v) traditional African objects

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<sup>368</sup>Ibid, 469.

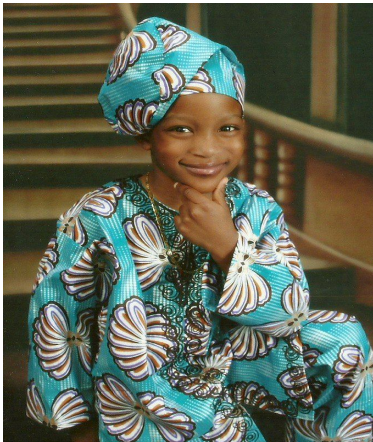
<sup>369</sup>Suraiya Faruqi, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It*, (New York, 2004), 199-216; see also Suraiya Faruqi and Donald Quataert, *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire*, (UK, 1997), 456-8; Ronald T. Marchese, *The Fabric of Life: Cultural Transformations in Turkish Society*, (USA, 2005), 214-216.

<sup>370</sup>Ruth Nielsen, 'The History', 482.

and symbols; (vi) expressed preferences of Africans, especially consumers, traders and market women; (vii) historical and current events, political figures and ideas; (viii) religion and mythology; (ix) natural forms; and (x) geometrical designs, especially since Islam forbids making likenesses of living objects.<sup>371</sup>

European manufacturers regarded these cloths as alternatives to indigenous ones. For the manufacturers, any cloth that is sold regularly, received a name from its African consumers, and is kept and cherished by Africans is regarded as a classic or 'traditional' African cloth. As Ruth Nielsen noted, *'the criteria for non-traditional design therefore would be: lack of a name bestowed by the consumer, lack of sufficient admiration to make the print worth 'treasuring', and lack of enough sales to keep the print on the market for several years'*.<sup>372</sup>

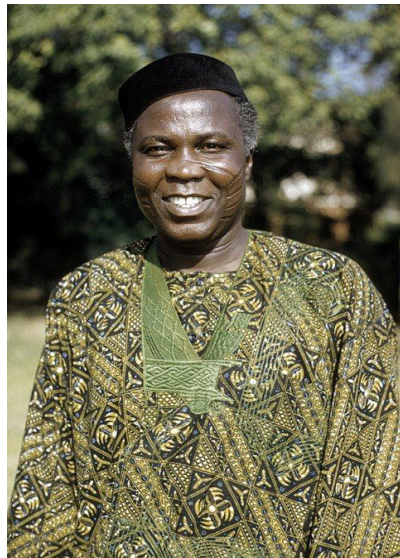
As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate different types and forms of *Ankara* use in Yorubaland.



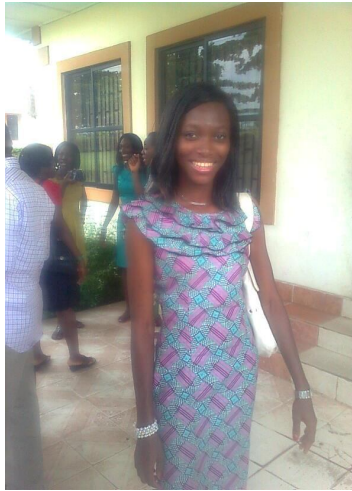
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<sup>371</sup>Ibid, 482.

<sup>372</sup>Ibid, 483.









**A cross section of Ankara wearers**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

The combination of importation of European-made cotton cloth into Yorubaland and the agitation for cultural renaissance in language and dress by the educated elite played decisive roles in

expanding the choices available to Yorùbá people on cloth-types, relaxing their attachments to heavy, time-consuming and costlier indigenous cloths, and stemmed the much-hyped cultural erosion orchestrated by European dress. Increasing wealth, resulting from new employment opportunities in the colonial administration, mission schools, and the Church, meant that Yorùbá people could use either indigenous Yorùbá cloths, which many regarded as old-fashioned, rustic, and uncivilized, or Europe-made African wax-print cloths.

The immediate advantage of this development was the dramatic increase in what constituted a woman's cloth. Describing a female's cloth during the period, Judith Byfield noted that

*in Yorubaland, what is now considered women's "traditional dress" consists of a wrapper or iro, a piece of cloth wrapped around the body covering the waist to the ankles; a buba, a blouse-like garment that was only adopted at the end of the nineteenth century; a head-dress or gele and often another cloth used as a shawl, the iborun.*<sup>373</sup>

As Yorùbá ethno-nationalism became firmly rooted, female's dress, especially the wrapper, became a symbol of the protest, and women's '*wrapper became one icon in this ideological rejection of colonialism*', as some women, most notably educated Christian women, made the wearing of wrapper a significant way of expressing support for '*the cultural movement and critique*'. As Byfield noted, wrappers therefore '*spoke of the 'traditional', the truly African, the uncontaminated by Western mores and materialism*'.<sup>374</sup>

Wrapper and any other forms of African dress not only allowed for a cultural rebirth and a renewed affinity to those who still lived by 'traditional' values and their culture, it also became a wearable text, described by Chatterjee as existing in '*adversarial relationship*' to discourse of colonialism. Through this, nationalists of different hues and colours questioned the veracity of the colonialist knowledge, disputed their arguments, pointed out the

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<sup>373</sup> Judith Byfield "'Unwrapping" Nationalism, 1.

<sup>374</sup> Ibid. 2.

contradictions in these arguments, and rejected the moral basis of them.<sup>375</sup>

As the foregoing has shown, this period was characterized by increasing nationalistic fervor not only in Yorubaland, but across what later became known as Nigeria. However, the impetus for the agitation was orchestrated by the new class of Yorùbá elite, majority of who were educated and had converted to Christianity. These men and women organized political parties to direct Nigerians passion for independence. Students returning from studies in Europe and the United States demanded for increasing space for Nigerians in the administration of the country. Nationalism, rather than ethnic-nationalism, became the lodestar of all the political parties during the period. The exploits of Nigerian soldiers who fought alongside white officers during the Second World War fueled self-confidence among generality of Nigerians, and this increased the momentum of nationalist agitations. Additionally, wartime requirements necessitated Nigerian administration to provide locally for all its needs, so Nigerians needed not to look up to Britain for its needs. When Britain attempted to control Nigeria's resources to meet its wartime requirements, Nigerians responded by boycotting imports. The rejection of imports soon evolved into cultural renaissance, as political activists enlisted the support of the masses to agitate for cultural renaissance and independence.

All over Yorubaland, Christianity and Western education had become sources of superior status from the 1930s. As such, majority craved both. While the rich and the affluent were able to send their wards and children for studies overseas, a number of higher institutions had begun to flourish in the country, offering equally superior training to other Nigerians who could not afford overseas education for their children and wards. Products from these institutions either joined the colonial service or went into private business. However, by the 1950s, education and Christianity as sources of prestige and higher status had become less assured.

Owing to increasing educational opportunity and development in the colonial administration, a number of women

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<sup>375</sup>Ibid. 2.

were absorbed into government services; thereby women's latitude in dress-use increased tremendously. It must also be asserted that during this period, the mixing of European and African prints had become pervasive. The agitation for cultural renaissance and the importation of cheap, African-focus wax prints into Yorubaland therefore changed the dress culture of the Yorùbá people. Individuals who had the maximum amount of education or had studied abroad and who had used less indigenous cloths before the first period began to use more and more indigenous cloths. Wass noted that about half the population of educated elite in Yorùbá cities had begun to wear Yorùbá dress, including African wax prints, again. This is in contrast to between fourteen and fifteen percent of the previous period.

Along with the trend to wear indigenous Yorùbá cloths, especially by women, was another trend: the mixing of Western dress styles with the indigenous ones. This hybridity was more predominant in females' dress than in males. Wass was of the opinion that more than eighty percent of women's dress ensemble comprised of this hybrid dress-items. This, in conjunction with increasing employment opportunities for women led to increasing number of dress for Yorùbá women. Articles like shawl, the second wrapper, and extra jewelry were added to Yorùbá women's dress. Although the materials, the technology and expertise used in the making of most of these dresses may not necessarily originate from Yorubaland, they were however regarded as symbols of Yorùbá culture.<sup>376</sup> This increasing use of indigenous Yorùbá dress by males and females urban and rural dwellers therefore was in consonance with the increasing nationalist awareness and self-concept developing between 1880 and 1959.

Relative to age and sex, more and more adult males wore more indigenous dress while children wore more Western dress than females. Wass noted that more people over the age of sixteen wore fifty percent indigenous dress, a tremendous increase from about thirty-three percent in the previous period. Children's dress, during the second period, became more Western, increasing from 80 to 92 percent. While this may signal parents' increasing belief in Western education as signifying development, it however

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<sup>376</sup>Betty M. Wass, 'Yoruba Dress', 1.

signals that children were unaffected by the nationalistic agitation, which was a major concern of the educated Yorùbá nationalists.

As noted in Chapter One, details such as when the photographs below were taken, where they were taken, who took them and why, which could help any researcher in the task of historical reconstruction are lacking. However, this criticism does not remove the fact that these photos illustrate hybridity in *Ankara* use in contemporary Yorubaland.





**A cross section of people wearing different expressions of hybrid dress**  
(Sources: Personal collections)

On special occasions, like weddings, funeral, christening, etc., both Western and indigenous dress were worn. Contrasted to the first period when Western dress was worn, during the second period, what type of dress to wear was predominantly determined by the type of occasion. However, indigenous dress-use also recorded a more than average score. From the 1940s onward, it must be asserted that indigenous dress took the center stage and the major wearers were males.

#### **4.7. Omoluabi in Yorùbá Colonial Dress Culture**

There is no gainsaying the fact that Islam, Christianity and colonial rule influenced Yorùbá sartorial tradition, however, the kernel of

Yorùbá dress, which is encapsulated in the concept of *Omoluabi*, as the analysis in this Chapter has shown, survived the trio of Islam, Christianity and colonialism. While Islam's main incursion into Yorubaland entailed force of arms, Christianity was through proselytism. Widespread acceptance of Islamic sartorial tradition by Yorùbá people can be excused as arising, on the one hand, from force and, on the other hand, from Islam's respect for the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition. To the extent that Islam allowed Yorùbá people to keep their culture and not at any time sought to replace it, Islamic sartorial culture became easily grafted into Yorùbá sartorial culture and, in this way, Yorùbá people made Islamic sartorial tradition to reflect the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition, being an *Omoluabi*.

The relative cheapness of some Islamic dress compared to even Yorùbá sartorial tradition gave young men and women different options in dress and therefore aided in the diffusion of Islamic dress. As far as the political class is concerned, the sheer volume of Islamic dress, especially clothes, has a certain nearness to what had already existed in Yorubaland before the advent of Islam. The flowing and trailing Islamic dress afforded the political class in Yorubaland the leeway to show power, prestige, and status in the same way as Yorùbá dress. Given this, Islamic sartorial tradition can be described, to the extent of its nearness to existing Yorùbá sartorial tradition, as a familiar tradition. It was therefore on account of its nearness to the existing Yorùbá sartorial tradition that it became widespread in Yorubaland and was easily grafted into Yorùbá sartorial culture.

Diametrically opposed to Islamic sartorial tradition was Christian and European sartorial tradition, which came gently and without force. It was readily accepted, especially among Yorùbá converts and the educated class. However, its pretensions to be superior to other sartorial traditions, most especially Islamic and Yorùbá indigenous sartorial cultures, and its overt desire to subvert and replace the ethos of Yorùbá sartorial culture inevitably led to a friction. This friction, on the one hand, imposed a negative image on Christian and European sartorial tradition, and on the other hand, stimulated renewed interest among Yorùbá converts in Yorùbá sartorial tradition. For the Yorùbá, to the extent that Christianity aimed at supplanting Yorùbá sartorial tradition and

imposed its own cannon, it can only live in Yorubaland by sufferance. Met with a stiff opposition and regarded by Yorùbá people as denigrating the kernel of their dress culture, Christian and European sartorial tradition came to represent force, imposition, corruption, lasciviousness, promiscuity, and everything other than the existential value of an *Omoluabi*.

Amidst these changes brought on Yorùbá sartorial tradition by Islam, Christianity and colonialism; Yorùbá people made efforts to preserve the kernel of their sartorial tradition. Colonial uniforms were recognized in the same way as their own *Aso Ise*, but were rejected for their incommodious nature. To the extent that other European dresses were regarded as exhibiting alien values, they were rejected.

Although European dress was conceived in this way, Yorùbá young men and women, aided by European and missionary-trained tailors and others in colonial employments, however invented hybrid clothes through the admixture of Yorùbá and Christian/European sartorial traditions. In a sense, this hybrid clothes was one way through which Yorùbá people imported their *Omoluabi* concept into the public space where Yorùbá and non-Yorùbá people had to interact. Just as in politics, where the internal values which produced the core of Yorùbá intelligentsia were downplayed except to the extent that it determined which Yorùbá man or woman would represent the race in the larger arena, the kernel of Yorùbá sartorial tradition was also downplayed in the wider and non-racial space created by hybrid dress. In yet another sense, this hybrid sartorial tradition also showed that there can be a comfortable and equal accommodation between European values and Yorùbá values if element of force and sartorial hegemony was removed.

To the extent that European dress was used predominantly in the urban areas, urban life was regarded as essentially devoid of the qualities of *Omoluabi* and wearing of Yorùbá indigenous dress in urban centers was regarded as being uncultured, unfashionable, and being encrusted in tradition. The use of hybrid dress was nevertheless regarded as emblematic of refinement associated with European civilization without necessarily adopting European values.

#### 4.8 Conclusion

From the foregoing, there is no gainsaying the fact that the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars were the harbingers of Islam, Christianity, colonialism and western education into Yorubaland. Chequered and laced with blood and destruction, Islam and Arabic sartorial tradition was grafted into the existing Yorùbá dress culture and, in so far as the new culture did not attempt to super-impose itself on Yorubaland, it was accepted, incorporated and adapted into the repertoires of dress tradition in Yorubaland. It soon became popular and widely accepted, even if its acceptance and wide-use cannot be dissociated from the need to escape enslavement and war.

Unlike Islam, Christianity asserted its hegemonic stance by requiring converts to wear European dress as a mark of genuine conversion. Its appeal, especially at the early stages, cannot be dissociated from the nineteenth century Yorùbá civil wars which served as the handmaiden of Christian faith in Yorubaland in the first place. The need for peace after almost a century of war compelled the Yorùbá people to imbibe, albeit uncritically, the Christian culture. As demonstrated in Chapter Six, the uncritical acceptance later gave way to open revolts against a sartorial culture that was not only in dissonance with Yorùbá culture, but also not suited for a tropical environment. Perhaps nothing demonstrate the ambivalence of the early Christian missionaries like their obtuse insistence on converts donning European dress and adopting European airs as marks of true Christian conversion.

Thick, woolen colonial uniforms, office dress and other paraphernalia of colonial rule, which were forced on colonial and native administrative staffers, have demonstrated the power dynamics between the junior and senior staffers, but this would only have had the intended meanings with colonial and native administration staffers and certainly not in the eyes of the natives who had always had their own work-cloths and were in no way related to colonial employment. Colonial service dress, as the chapter showed, aimed primarily at reflecting European sartorial tradition *“in the eyes of Africans in Nigeria as it is in the case of the populace in England”*.

Contacts with Islam and Christianity, as the chapter showed, revolutionized different forms and styles of Yorùbá dress.

Facial marks, which originally served as national identity card or national passport, began to change with the advent of Islam and eventually faded out with the coming of Christianity. In most rural areas in Yorubaland, except for a handful of civil servants working in government departments or units located in these areas, Yorùbá people were predominantly farmers, traders, hunters, and herders tied to the soil.<sup>377</sup>

Contacts, first, with Islam and, later, with Christianity, brought about changes not just in what the people wear, but also in their conception of dress in general. For instance, hunters who converted to Islam may preserve the use of *Gberi-Ode* and *Digo*; the general practice was for them to wear whatever suits their fancies to the bush and farm. The first to disappear was the hunter's cap, which was replaced by a small, round cap used commonly by the Muslims. As Stone noted, many young men and women took to the Mohammedan dress not so much resultant of conversion to Islam as it is of fashion.

As Islamic influences became widespread, smart cloth, except for those used by farmers, hunters, and blacksmith, changed to loose-fitting cloth, as loose-fitting cloth became incorporated into Yorùbá clothing traditions. For instance, as an alternative to *Gberi-Ode*, *Alaborun* came into use. Unlike the former, which is a smart and body-hugging or close-fitting cloth, the latter is however a loose fitting cloth. Also, the use of charms and other associated materials traditionally regarded as *sine qua non* to hunting were discarded, as both religions regarded most of these materials as fetishes and sinful.<sup>378</sup> The use of loose-fitting cloths is today more pronounced among the semi-literates and illiterates in both the urban and rural areas in contemporary Yorubaland.

Following contacts with Islam and Christianity, contemporary 'traditional' Yorùbá dress for men comprises of an *Agbada* worn over a *Buba* and *Sokoto*, and or with a matching *Abeti-Aja* cap. Similarly, a supposedly traditional Yorùbá female dress would comprise of a *Buba* worn over an *Iro* and with a matching *Gele*. For both male and female, the above dresses are

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<sup>377</sup> Akinwumi Ogundiran (ed.), *Precolonial Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, (Trenton, 2005), 120-121

<sup>378</sup> Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 123.

incomplete without a matching neck bead or chain and, especially for the female, a matching *Yeri-Eti* (earrings). In the urban areas; males are oftentimes tolerated when they wear *Buba* and *Sokoto* without either the *Agbada* or the cap. In the rural areas, it was considered height of incivility. For the females, the use of shawls (*Iborun*) is also relaxed, and males and females could dress for formal and informal occasions without them.

For the most part, the wearing of European dress is predominant in the urban areas than in the rural areas. This must not be interpreted as meaning that people in rural areas do not wear European dress; but to underscore the fact that while in the urban areas, the wearing of indigenous dress is regarded as being uncultured, unfashionable, and being encrusted in tradition; in the rural areas, wearing of European dress is regarded as being lost to tradition. Hence, rural dwellers, whether in formal or informal gathering, wear traditional dress.

While the above example may sign-post change and adaptations, the use of facial marks simply disappeared. In contemporary Yorubaland, the use of facial marks does not only denote being uncivilized, uncultured, and unfashionable, but also being an ugly foreigner.<sup>379</sup>

In describing the dress worn by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, Nigeria's former President, Robert Ross, although recognizing the dress as a '*flowing Yorùbá costume*', however likened it to a Bedouin robe. Given the impact of Islam, Christianity, and colonialism on Yorùbá dress culture, it can be safely argued that a typical Yorùbá man's *Agbada* may as well be a Bedouin - Arabic-speaking nomadic peoples of the Middle Eastern deserts, especially of Arabia, Iraq, Syria, and Jordan - dress adopted and incorporated into Yorùbá dress culture over a long period. While this is not to say that the Yorùbá did not use the *Agbada* before contacts with Islam, but to underscore the fact that given the trajectory of Yorùbá dress discussed above, Yorùbá contemporary *Agbada* cannot be described as 'indigenous' Yorùbá *Agbada*. As styles change with fashion, so also what can be described as Yorùbá in contemporary Yorùbá dress may as well be, in the case of Chief Obasanjo's cloth described by Ross, the tie-and dye and

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<sup>379</sup>Olatunji Ojo, 'Beyond Diversity', 349.

not the *Agbada* itself. For a typical, contemporary female dress, whether the cloth is sewn into *Buba* and *Iro*, or skirt and blouse; the Yorùbá elements in such female cloth may not exist beyond the invention or ingenuity of tailors.

As shown in this chapter, Islam, Christianity, colonialism, Western education and a host of associated developments impacted on Yorùbá sartorial tradition, Yorùbáness still remained an expression of what had already existed, a critical component of which is Yorùbá dress. It can also be seen from the analysis above that notwithstanding changes wrought on Yorùbá sartorial traditions by these developments, the links between Yorùbáness and Yorùbá dress still remains active and, as shown in subsequent chapters, these links will always remain active. As noted in Chapter Two, just as it is difficult to separate a bone from its marrows and still ensure the harmonious functioning of the body, so it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove Yorùbá dress from Yorùbáness. It can therefore be argued that, in the colonial period, the innateness and peoplehood of Yorùbá people centered on so many things, a critical part of which was Yorùbá dress and that Yorùbá dress cannot be removed from Yorùbá identity and essence.