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*Yorùbá Identity and Power Politics* is a breath of fresh air and a critical watershed in the discourse of the ever-so-challenging and complicated web of the idea of Yorùbáness. This work is indeed an assemblage of serious intellectuals of Yorùbá history whose collective voice projects a cutting edge in the discourse of the socio-political dichotomy of identity and power. This is a must read for anyone who is either genuinely interested in the knowledge of the Yorùbá history or truly excited about a people whose culture, history, and identity remain most enduring and most visible in the vast world of the African diaspora."

—Michael O. Afoláyan, assistant professor, Southern Illinois  
University, Edwardsville

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Falola  
Genova

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IN MEMORIAM

# YORÙBÁ IDENTITY AND POWER POLITICS

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## IN MEMORIAM

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To Gbenga Adeboye (alias Funwontan),  
cultural creator



## APPROACHING THE STUDY OF THE YORÙBÁ DIASPORA IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

Rasheed Olaniyi

In 1956, the defunct Western Region government launched the Yorùbá Historical Research Scheme. The main aim was to produce an authentic and coherent history of the Yorùbá, covering all aspects of the people from the earliest times to the present.<sup>1</sup> Despite the fact that a tremendous achievement has been recorded in this enterprise, an enormous lacuna still exists in the study of the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria. Although accounts of the Hausa impact on Yorùbá history, particularly for the precolonial and colonial periods, have been offered, only passing references have been made to acknowledge the Yorùbá factor in the history of the Hausa society during the same period.<sup>2</sup> Within this context, this chapter examines the chronology of Yorùbá migration and formation of diaspora communities in northern Nigeria during the twentieth century. It raises the following questions: What were the migration patterns? What forms of identities did the diaspora communities produce? What were their linkages with the Yorùbá homeland? What were their contributions toward the development of towns in Yorùbáland? Of what implication was the Yorùbá diaspora to the socioeconomic development of northern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole? The chapter focuses on the interplay of cultural, political, and economic forces in the formation of Yorùbá diaspora communities in northern Nigeria.

### Conceptualizing the Yorùbá Diaspora

#### *Àjò kò da bíi ilé (Diaspora Is Not Like Home)*

The Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria is better understood within the historical context of the respective host communities and, indeed, the entire history of



northern Nigeria as a whole. It is equally important to examine the interaction of resources and opportunities to understand the dynamics of Yorùbá commerce in northern Nigeria. For the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, the economic opportunities, business environment, and nature of reception was crucial to their entrepreneurship within the host community. Professor Isa Hashim has offered three explanations why the Yorùbá were accepted in the north.<sup>3</sup> First, according to Islamic tradition, the Yorùbá were regarded as brothers and sisters of the Hausa people because the majority of Yorùbá were Muslims. This suggests why some Yorùbá have been assimilated into Hausa culture or enjoy the policy of accommodation. Second, economically, they were hard working in terms of productivity and quality of work delivery. Third, the Yorùbá shared a myth of origin with the Kanuri. Oral tradition in Borno has it that the Yorùbá and Kanuri were cousins. According to one mythology, the Yorùbá were said to be outspoken and the Kanuri were quiet people who detested discussing their private affairs in public, particularly those issues concerning their sexuality. The Kanuri thus referred to the Yorùbá as *Khairuba*, meaning that "there is no *alheri* in your habit" (that is, you do not keep secret, go away). As the myth goes, it was from *Khairuba* that Yorùbá was derived. There are those who say that the similarity in Yorùbá and Kanuri culture could be seen in their sweet voices and love for singing, particularly among their women.

Very often, diaspora communities construct identities that distinguish them from the host community. The identity can be expressed in terms of settlement patterns and social, religious, political, and economic institutions. *Diaspora* is Greek and means "scattering." According to Robin Cohen, *diaspora*, as first used in the Greek classical world (800 to 600 B.C.) implies "to sow widely, to expand."<sup>4</sup> The concept of diaspora is used to describe a community that has a history of migration, possesses distinctive cultural practices that distinguished it from the host community, and maintains cultural ties with the homeland. Some diaspora members engage only in activities that involve their ethnic group (e.g., herbalists), whereas entrepreneurs and traders may specialize in economic interests involving their homeland (e.g., Yorùbá women *alajàpá*—itinerant foodstuffs traders; Figure 12.1).

*Yorùbá diaspora* is used herein to refer to all those of Yorùbá descent who settle outside the shores of the Yorùbá homeland but maintain sociocultural linkages with the homeland or who continue to maintain Yorùbá identity. Conceptualizing the Yorùbá diaspora could be situated in Robin Cohen's framework for classifying diaspora, which involves migration from a homeland in search of work and pursuit of profitable commerce, and an ethnic consciousness preserved over a long time and based on a series of cultural distinctiveness.<sup>5</sup> Eades articulates four main types of migration among the Yorùbá that influence the formation of diaspora communities.<sup>6</sup> These were analyzed according to occupational categories. First, there were the unskilled labor migrants of the colonial period, looking for work on the cocoa farms or in larger towns. Second, there were migrant farmers looking for suitable land, especially for planting cocoa. Third, there were the long distance migrants, many of them traders. Trading was a particularly common commercial orientation in the savanna towns of Yorùbaland. Fourth, there was the



Figure 12.1. Women herbalists at Yankura market, Kano. Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi.

migration of the younger educated people to the urban centers, especially since the rapid expansion of education in the 1950s. According to J. S. Eades, kinship plays an important part in channeling migration, as people move to join their relatives in other towns to find jobs. He argues that a steady flow of goods and information exists between home and diaspora. The Yorùbá diaspora includes people who have experienced migration and others who were born and brought up in a new community of settlement. In this way, the Yorùbá diaspora implies that their culture survived, transformed, and remained relevant even when members of the diaspora have not lived in the original homeland. The Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria developed its own political organization influenced by historical specificity and social forces operating in the host communities.

The analysis of diasporic connections may be as important as those formed around a teleology of origin/return. For example, in 1967, the expulsion of the Yorùbá from Ghana led to their migration to the northern Nigeria towns of Kano, Kaduna, Jos, Zaria, and Minna. There were many Yorùbá families in northern Nigeria who experienced cyclical migration and lived in many communities of the region. This greatly convoluted the spatiality of diasporas and produced a geography of diaspora, which was built on multiple localities.<sup>7</sup>

The concept of diaspora becomes imperative in the analysis of the legal status of Nigerians living in communities other than their own when considering the national question on citizenship in the post-independent period. The identity



citizenship and indigeneity rights within Nigeria calls for a review and redefinition of the term diaspora. According to E. Ifidon, "the level at which citizenship is truly realized is not the mega-state, but the home state or primary group level, where the Nigerian is a subject. Beyond this, a Nigerian is an alien in another state."<sup>8</sup> The perception of a Nigerian citizen is compounded by the retrogressive provision of the 1999 constitution, which places an emphasis on places of origin and indigeneity rather than residency. In certain situations, it was easier for a person to be accepted as an abstract Nigerian citizen than to be recognized as belonging to the area of residency no matter how the person, group, or family had settled in the area.<sup>9</sup> A problematic factor for ethnic relations in Nigeria is the manner in which indigeneity has been entrenched in the constitution. Both the 1960 independence and the 1963 republican constitutions were progressive on the question of citizenship rights, but the 1979 constitution, on which the 1999 constitution was based, was retrogressive on citizenship. Whereas the former constitution granted citizenship rights to Nigerians in any part of the country, subject to a residency requirement of 3 years in the defunct northern region, the 1999 constitution is completely silent on the issue. The aftermath of this has led to the rise in ethnic conflicts between indigenes and settlers across the country. In several cases, the friction between "us" and "them" has been expressed violently and in terms of molestations.

This study expands our knowledge of Yorùbá migration in the north. Most of the Yorùbá diaspora studies have been carried out through ethnographical and anthropological research covering areas outside of the Nigerian region. An early account of Yorùbá society and the Yorùbá language appeared in French in 1845, notably the ethnographical study of Osifekunde, an Ijèbù Yorùbá liberated slave in France. The life story of Osifekunde, studied by M. A. P. d'Avezac-Macaya of the Ethnological Society, Paris, in 1939, constitutes a pioneer scholarly work on the Yorùbá diaspora.<sup>10</sup>

### Colonial Antecedents

The historical relationship between the peoples of northern Nigeria and the Yorùbá runs deep. For more than 500 years before the British rule, Yorùbá merchants traversed communities in northern Nigeria and established their abodes. For example, Yorùbá traders established Unguwar Ayagi and Lalemi quarters in Kano and Bida, respectively.<sup>11</sup> They were assimilated and their descendants today form the core of people in the region. Nigeria is full of examples of individuals and groups who formed settled communities of occupational specialists in societies other than their own. Traditionally, the exchange of immigrants among communities has been part of the Nigerian historical heritage. Societies with centralized political structures accommodated culturally diverse groups with different modes of livelihood within a single political system. Immigrants provided complementary services alien to the host community, which often added value to the economy.

In the twentieth century, the formation of the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria had a linkage with the British conquest and colonial rule. Migration was largely driven by colonial labor policies, commercial opportunities available for Africans, and deprivations during economic crises. For example, D. R. Aronson observes that it was the wage labor of the colonial economy, together with the indigenous institutions of Yorùbá society, that provided the framework for individual migration.<sup>12</sup> Thus, economic pursuits produced a set of Yorùbá craftsmen, laborers, and traders in cities.

Indeed, the British utilized the services of the Yorùbá in the conquest of northern Nigeria. Some Yorùbá served as spies, commercial agents, and members of the West African Frontier Force (WAFF). In 1900, when Lord Lugard took over the colonial administration from the Royal Niger Company, its constabulary was absorbed into the WAFF, which was formed in 1898. For a long period, the force remained largely dominated by the Hausa and Yorùbá.<sup>13</sup> The civil government police force raised for the north included the Yorùbá in its service. In 1908, the force was made up of 240 Hausa, 216 Yorùbá, 102 Beriberi, 53 Fulani, 25 Nupe, and 54 others.<sup>14</sup> In Kano, by 1914, the government police were composed entirely of the Yorùbá ethnic group.<sup>15</sup> Some of the Yorùbá who served gallantly in the British army were rewarded with administrative positions in northern Nigeria. In the non-Muslim areas of northern Nigeria, the British imposed non-indigenous chiefs on the people for the purposes of suppressing rebellion and collection of taxes. For example, in the Abinsi Division of Tivland, Audu Dan Afonja, a Yorùbá Muslim from Ilorin, was imposed as the chief of Makurdi between 1914 and 1947. He had formerly served as a British agent and spy in the area. In Dekina, Ahmadu, a Yorùbá was imposed as the onu of Dekina between 1914 and 1918 as a result of his role as a member of WAFF in the conquest of Igalaland. His rule was tyrannical and full of extortion. In 1916, he arbitrarily raised taxes from 1 to 10 shillings per adult male.<sup>16</sup> His rule ended in turmoil and he was eventually sentenced to 4 years imprisonment.

The railway construction led to the employment of the Yorùbá in several projects and to their migration and settlement pattern across communities, both rural and urban, in northern Nigeria. In 1912, the completion of the Baro-Kano railway marked a turning point in Yorùbá migration to northern Nigeria. From the northern Yorùbá towns, there were migrations from Kabba, Ijumu, Isanlu, Offa, and Ilorin to Kaduna between 1916 and 1917.<sup>17</sup> After World War I, more Yorùbá, especially from Ogbomoso, Ilorin, and Kabba, migrated to Kaduna in an attempt to participate in the booming commerce about which they had received information from their family and social networks.<sup>18</sup> From Funtua, Nguru, Makurdi, and Malamadori to Jos, Yorùbá diaspora communities were established along the rail lines, taking advantage of modern communication for foodstuffs, livestock, groundnut, and kola nut trades. By the 1920s, the scarcity of Hausa clerical staff made the British employ southerners in the administration of northern Nigeria.<sup>19</sup> Beyond the colonial institutions, for most Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, migration occurred within the kinship and social networks. The Yorùbá developed



communities through migration of kinship linkages from the same town compounds.<sup>20</sup> Successful "pioneer" migrants encouraged others to follow. Supportive social mechanisms emerged to connect places of origin and

throughout the colonial era, migration was a crucial identity among the Yoruba migrants in cities were better viewed than their folks who stayed at home. Commercial opportunities in the colonial era influenced the migration of Yoruba to northern Nigeria. For example, the Jos township market created the Oyo people flocked in. Those who had already settled in places like Bida could not resist the prospects of making money in the tin mines. By the end of 1930s, the Jos market was dominated by Ogbomoso people such as the Aladire, Aiyetoro, Odefara, Mafoni, Banki, Onilu, Oyo, Tapa, Idowu-Oke, Idowu-Isale, and Sabo, which developed to suit the identity of the new traders and their cultural background.<sup>21</sup>

Colonial rule created distortions in ethnic relations whose consequences were different. During the colonial era, the tasks facing the Yoruba in diaspora were different from those that faced their predecessors in the precolonial era. In the colonial era, migration often led to integration with the host community. In the colonial period, migration was overwhelmingly marked by

the case of Sabon-Gari between 1911 and 1913 was a central thrust of British colonial rule system constructed to make colonial rule flourish on the basis of the enforcement of segregation. In the colonial era, Yoruba in northern Nigeria were British "protected persons" and the hosts were British. In the post-independence period, the citizenship status was different. The host communities who were regarded as indigenes and the migrants as newcomers or settlers. The attempt by the British to segregate the Yoruba and the indigenes failed in Kano and Zaria because of the historical relationship between them before the British conquest. In Kano, the Yoruba Muslims continued to live within the Native Settlement (the old city) and some Hausa lived in Sabon-Gari.

In Zaria, Hausa, the colonial segregation was ineffective because of the fact that there had existed between the two groups for no less than 500 years. The idea of segregation was in some ways resisted by the Yoruba. For example, the establishments of the townships of Sabon-Gari and Sabon-Gari for the British in Zaria. As early as 1915, the British refused to allow "emirate natives" who were neither employees of the colonial government nor trading firms in the township area of Sabon-Gari. The British moved to the system of issuing "permits" to all residents of Sabon-Gari. The number of permits: 885 to "nongovernment" and 470 to "government." Despite the British insistence, Yoruba Muslims were allowed to live in the native area or in Sabon-Gari. By 1937, the Sabon-Gari Township showed that there were 1,903 Hausa residents and 1,547 Yoruba residents.<sup>22</sup> By 1938, there were 2,040

Hausa (26 percent) of the population in Sabon-Gari, Kano.<sup>24</sup> In 1939, the population of the Hausa in Sabon-Gari Kaduna was 1,568 and the Yoruba population was 1,093.<sup>25</sup>

The status of Yoruba clerks, introduced and protected by the British in northern Nigeria, depended on the perpetuation of colonial rule. The host communities felt politically and economically threatened in the public sector where most of the Yoruba were now employed on a contract basis. Under British rule, intercommunal relations in northern Nigeria as elsewhere in the country were enforced within the political and economic framework of colonialism. The British policy of exclusion created a dichotomy between the migrants who were British protected persons (custodians of Western values) and the indigenous host community who were British subjects (bearers of traditional culture).<sup>26</sup>

## Identity in the Diaspora

### Odò kii gbàgbé orisun (A River Never Loses Sight of Its Source)

Identity-based institutions articulated the Yoruba diaspora and home ties. During the depression of the 1930s, the Yoruba in the north organized themselves to combat the exploitation of British rule, and as a form of cultural nationalism. The Yoruba in northern Nigeria articulated their communal goals through different levels of associational civil life of an ethnic, religious, township, and occupational nature.<sup>27</sup> L. Trager argues that the hometown associations served as a source of social and cultural identity among the Yoruba in diaspora.<sup>28</sup> She demonstrates the propensity of Yoruba groups to migrate and settle in other communities while maintaining ties with their homeland. Evidence from her study of the Ijesa-Yoruba shows that at the individual level, migration was combined with the maintenance of ties to family, kin networks, and community in terms of remittances, ceremonies, and visits.

These networks served as mechanisms for managing threats of insecurity. Members drew on emotional resources, including friendship and family visits, to strengthen ethnic bonds. For example, in 1942, the Yoruba Central Welfare Association in Kano formed a local branch of the *Egbé Omo Oduduwa* (society of the children of Oduduwa). It was the creative ingenuity of diaspora members to establish communal and ethnic associations rooted in their own culture. Chief D. O. Sanyaolu offered the association a plot of land where Oduduwa Hall in Kano was built, but after his death in 1960 the ownership of the land and the building was disputed between his family and the Yoruba community. The formation of ethnic and communal associations constituted a crucial part of fraternal loyalty/allegiance to the Yoruba homeland. The Yoruba community was the representative assembly of the Yoruba associations. It was organized within the framework of Yoruba traditional political framework, having the *oba* (chief/king), *baṣorun* (prime minister), *iyá egbé* (matron), *òtùn* (adviser to the king), *balogun* (chief of





Figure 12.2. Akoko Descendants Union (Kano, June 1973). Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 1973.

urity), and *baales* (district heads). In 2001, the Yorùbá Welfare Association in ìbàwà, Kàno, donated a new throne to the Yorùbá òbas in Kano State, Òba òdùllàhì Salihu Olòwò, in an attempt to rehabilitate the palace and enhance the status of the òba. This in essence was to give political meaning to their ethnic identity. Among the Yorùbá diaspora in northern Nigeria, the institution of òba symbolized authority, solidarity, loyalty, and the final arbiter in disputes. The administrative setup of the organization has the òba as the head and an executive council that serves as a customary court. Yorùbá community served as the central pseudopolitical institutions that regulate internal social order, communication, and diplomatic affairs both within the community, the homeland, and the host community.

Despite the fact that the Yorùbá have the highest number of legal practitioners in Nigeria, its tradition gives a high preference to settling cases out of modern secular courts. Hence, the Yorùbá community organized an autonomous judicial institution for settling disputes internally. The internal judicial arrangement ensured the social cohesion, exclusiveness, and integrity of the community. Thus, the judicial council adjudicated disputes over financial matters, business transactions, and social issues involving domestic disputes and breach of ritual contracts. Of all the Yorùbá associations in Kano, only the Lisabi Club of Egbá Yorùbá had a "Town Hall" built in 1947 under the leadership of Chief O. Sanyaolu. Other associations operated in temporary meeting halls in the houses of influential leaders. Members were often a small fraction of the total number of the Yorùbá residents and, indeed, representative of the entire community.

Ethnic associations generated and disseminated information central to the identity of the community. To a greater degree, the elements of mutual solidarity provided informal mechanisms of social safety nets and security in times of adversity. For example, many of the ethnic associations provided assistance to deceased members by burying them in their hometowns and granted educational support for their children. This communal identity enhanced hometown ties and ensured resistance to cultural assimilation into the host community. Most of the associations were formed as a branch of larger unions with headquarters in the homeland (e.g., the Ogbomoṣo Parapo and Okin Club of Nigeria). Branches sent descriptions and representatives to annual and quarterly meetings. The Yorùbá in northern Nigeria continued to maintain a close affinity with their homeland for several generations (Figure 12.2). Yorùbá social networks involved maintaining, reinforcing, and extending relationships with the homeland. At both the individual and group levels, these activities included sending remittances, marriage, sponsoring of festivals and events, and child fostering.

Social capital, grounded on ethnic networks, provided a key resource in confronting obstacles to successful adaptation in the diaspora. It increased economic opportunities for entrepreneurs, giving them better prospects for employing their ever skills they brought from their homeland. Yorùbá used the tradition of *esus* and *ajo* (rotating credit associations) brought from their region of origin as

a means of acquiring or boosting business capital. Yorùbá women predominantly practiced *esus* and *ajo*. In Zuru town, some Yorùbá women entrepreneurs emerged richer than their husbands who brought them to the town.<sup>29</sup> The system of cooperatives and hire purchase schemes enabled Yorùbá men to dominate taxi transport across northern Nigerian cities.

Yorùbá immigrant groups had an additional advantage over the host communities in establishing small-scale businesses by virtue of their tradition of extended kinship and apprenticeship schemes. They facilitated the establishment, operation, and expansion of businesses. Some of the migrants who worked for co-ethnic businesses emerged as entrepreneurs through hard work and savings. Access to the cheap labor of apprentices and journeymen, rather than a large amount of capital, was essential to the operation of artisanship workshops such as auto mechanics, auto rewires, lathe work artisans, and battery chargers. These comparative advantages made it easy for Yorùbá artisans to start workshops with relatively simple technologies and small capital. Production technology was organized around the social relationship of kinship, friendship, and ethnicity.

However, the intermediate economic roles (concentration in credit schemes and money lending) subjected Yorùbá migrants to host hostility and commercial mistrust; however, this further enhanced their ethnic solidarity. This was particularly significant in the case of *Osomaalo* of Ijesa-Yorùbá textile traders until the 1970s when they diverted to corn mill and spare parts businesses.

In most of the northern communities where the *kulle* (seclusion of women) system was practiced, Yorùbá women played an intermediary role between the hosts and the immigrants. Yorùbá women were equally active players in commercial



networks and activities that linked regional, urban, and rural economies. This accounted for their retailing trade in household utensils, jewelry, textiles, and agricultural products and setting up of food canteens that employed Hausa men. In most communities of northern Nigeria, the Yorùbá became a powerful economic force, particularly in urban technical services, photography, printing, and auto repairs.<sup>30</sup>

Another factor that reinforced identity was the cultural flow of organized music and theater. Many Yorùbá musicians playing *fuji*, *juju*, and *apala* genres and theater practitioners were invited to stage their plays either commercially or in annual, township, club, and ethnic celebrations. Equally, the evenings on which popular Yorùbá musicians and entertainers such as Hubert Ogunde, Dauda Epo Akara, Ayinla Omowura, Haruna Ishola, Sikiru Ayinde, and King Sunny Ade were invited to play in northern Nigeria illustrates cultural continuity and linkages between home and diaspora. In 1946, Hubert Ogunde took his play *Human Parasite* to the northern provinces—Jos, Kano, Zaria, Kaduna, and Minna—where he acquired many patrons. However, the display of his work *Strike and Hunger* was opposed by the British administrators in northern Nigeria who saw it as southern Nigeria's attempt to incite northerners against the British. In Jos, Ogunde was arrested and fined. The Yorùbá community in Jos supported Ogunde's fight against the British by contributing £100 to fight the case as a national one.<sup>31</sup> In May 1951, he was charged with sedition and banned from staging his play *Bread and Butter* in the Colonial Hotel, Sabon-Gari Kano. He was fined £6 for posting posters without permission.<sup>32</sup> His play was further banned in Kaduna and Ibadan. *Bread and Butter* was apparently produced in solidarity with the Enugu colliery strike of 1949. Such plays that were not provocative, such as *Mr. Devil's Loney* and *Highway Eagle*, were staged in Zaria, Minna, Gusau, Bukuru, Kaduna, Jos, Otuorkpo, Bida, and Jebba in 1955.<sup>33</sup>

Some Yorùbá in northern Nigeria lived in very poor conditions to accumulate capital. To them, the city was a farm. They lived together and sometimes squatted until they were able to marry and live independent of the person under whose influence they migrated. The interplay between the spheres of the workplace and the neighborhood was crucial to the social organization of the Yorùbá. As the Yorùbá were concentrated into larger communities, their interests became more harmonized and social consciousness was unified. Thus, urban neighborhoods are metaphors for urban villages with the primordial identity of kinship, religion, language, culture, and costume. Yorùbá culture expressed the philosophy of "back to the land" vision in which traditional attire played a dramatic role. Since 1995, Yorùbá Cultural Day celebrations have been organized as a strategy for the city, cultural renaissance, and ethnic identity in the north. Many Yorùbá cultural activities are displayed including dancing, a beauty competition, Ayo games, and *rà'arà* traditional medicine trade fair. For the second Yorùbá Day Celebration in November 1997, individuals, Yorùbá ethnic associations, religious institutions, and corporate organizations in Kano donated more than 400,000 naira worth of food and drink.

## Religion in the Context of the Yorùbá Diaspora

The commercial and religious interactions between Yorùbáland and Kanem-Borno led to the settling down of the two ethnic groups in each other's communities. The Yorùbá in Borno were products of two religious waves: First, Borno scholars who settled in Yorùbáland influenced the migration of Yorùbá students to Borno for Islamic education. Second, Yorùbá pilgrims to Mecca often passed through Borno. Some of these pilgrims identified business opportunities, which led them to settle in Borno.<sup>34</sup> In northern Nigeria, Islamic brotherhood constituted a fundamental relationship between the Yorùbá and their host communities. Thus, although Islam inspired the migration of Yorùbá Muslims, the drive for evangelism motivated most Yorùbá Christians to migrate to northern Nigeria.

The Yorùbá increasingly turned toward the homeland in search of spiritual stimulation. The practice of traditional religions was widespread among the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria. There were branches of the Reformed Ogboni Fraternity and the presence of *babalawos* (*orisha* priests), Yorùbá herbalists in northern Nigeria. Herbal medicine traders, both itinerant and those in diaspora, often sold their products in major markets.

It is equally noteworthy to understand the dynamics that gave rise to the formation of Yorùbá religious institutions within an ethnic framework. Some of these religious centers maintained linkages with the headquarters based in the Yorùbá homeland. For example, the establishment of Yorùbá mosques such as Ansar-al-deen, Samori-a-deen, Nawairudeen, and Nurudeen, and Yorùbá churches such as Baptist, Cherubim and Seraphim, and Aladura. In Maiduguri, the first mosque with a modern infrastructure was built by Yorùbá Muslims; the first church, the Holy Trinity, was built by some Yorùbá along with some Ghanaians and Sierra Leonians. In 1939, seven Yorùbá colonial workers from Lagos founded the Ansar-al-deen Society of Nigeria, Maiduguri Branch. It was officially launched in 1942, and they completed their mosque in 1948, a modern infrastructure popularly called "Madina Mosque."<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted how Yorùbá religious centers invested in human development through education in the host communities. Some Yorùbá mosques in the north operated their own nursery, primary, and secondary schools. The evangelical work of the Baptist mission in northern Nigeria spread from Plateau, Borno Provinces in the northeast, Zaria Province in the northwest to Benue Province in the south. Ogbomoṣo merchants opened the areas to evangelism. From 1855, Ogbomoṣo had been exposed to the work of the Baptist mission and this continued until the early twentieth century when traders from the town migrated. In 1915, Ogbomoṣo traders established the Baptist Church in Jos; Zungeru and Kaduna in 1916; Dorowa Babuje in 1926; Minna and Keffi in 1924; Kafanchan, Zaria, Kano, and Gindi Awati in 1926; Gana Ropp in 1927; Bida in 1929; Funtua in 1930; Katcha in 1931; and Bukuru in 1932.<sup>36</sup> Evangelism was carried out among the indigenous peoples of central and northern Nigeria, thereby solidifying the early work of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther. Indeed, Yorùbá had more religious



contacts with the indigenous northerners than most southern Nigerian groups.<sup>37</sup> The first indigenous Baptists were converted as a result of their efforts. For example, apart from visiting Yorùbá traders and civil servants in Kaduna, the Reverend A. Adejumobi started working among those Tiv whom the government brought to settle near Unguwan Rimi in 1937.<sup>38</sup> In Kano region, between 1975 and 1994, teaching stations were established at Munture/Bauna. Like the Christian missionaries, Ogbomoşo Baptist adherents established schools partially to enhance their work and to train their own children and those of the converts who were excluded from the government-controlled schools. Reverend T. A. Taiwo opened the first Baptist Day School in Jos in 1926. In Kaduna, a Baptist school was established in 1926; in Minna and Zungeru, 1927; in Kano, 1929; and in Keffi, 1941. In the 1940s, schools were also established in Jos, Rahama, Bukuru, Mongu, Dorowa, and Gindí Akwati through the efforts of Rev. E. O. Agboola. Some of the schools were placed on the list of government-assisted schools in 1946 or received grants-in-aid from the government. By the 1980s, most of the mission schools had been taken over by governments.

A sizeable number of Yorùbá Muslim migrants established their settlements in the neighborhood of the host communities. Some Muslim members of the ethnic groups are also adherents of Sufi Islamic brotherhoods, particularly the *niyat* and *Quadiritat*. Yorùbá Muslims in northern Nigeria developed an extensive social network with the Hausa host community through intermarriages.<sup>39</sup>

### Postcolonial Experience

The Yorùbá diaspora in postcolonial northern Nigeria was composed of the early migrants, their descendants, and the new migrants. Hence, the Yorùbá in the post-independence era can be understood in terms of an historical continuity of the relationship between the immigrants and the hosts. In terms of access to resources and opportunities, the distinction between indigenes and non-indigenes was decisive. Although the post-independence era brought about the dismantling of ethnic and residential segregation imposed by the British, migrant communities were confronted with the issue of citizenship in places where they had settled for several years. The residential segregation between immigrants and hosts decreased, and many among them enjoyed better income and education. Across northern Nigeria, Sabon-Gari was transformed from migrant enclaves to merchant cities. Generally, the significance of Sabon-Gari became even more profound because of its unrestricted nature of interethnic social integration.

In recent decades, religious and ethnic affiliations became major criteria for appointment to political offices, employment in the civil service, and enrollment in schools. There was disparity in terms of school fees paid by indigenes and immigrants. This has led to unequal access to power and resources and to violent confrontations and conflicts.

The Yorùbá were among the earliest settlers in Funtua, and they certainly played significant roles in the development of the town. A 1918 report of the cotton market at Funtua clearly indicated that out of the ten buying agents at the cotton market, three were Yorùbá; another three were of West African origin. Alhaji Sule Mohammed, the *Sarkin Yorùbáwa Funtua* (the leader of the Yorùbá in Funtua), observed that:

We want to be recognized as Katsina State indigenes. If we return to Ogbomosho, we would be ignored. Some of us don't even know our towns, but we do know that we have Yoruba roots. We wish that the Katsina State government would accept us fully.<sup>40</sup>

He acknowledged the fact that some Yorùbá who identified themselves with the host communities often benefited from scholarships and employment opportunities from the state government. A high rate of mutual coexistence was displayed in August 1999 to prevent a reprisal attack of the Hausa–Yorùbá conflict in Sagamu. The district head of Funtua, Alhaji Mainasara Idris, turned back Hausa refugees from Sagamu but also appealed for calm among the Yorùbá settlers.<sup>41</sup> Alhaji Mainasara observed that the Yorùbá in Funtua had become integrated with the indigenous community and that it was absurd for Hausa to rupture their time-honored relationship with the Yorùbá because of a distant ethnic strife between the Hausa and Yorùbá in Sagamu and Lagos:

Considering how united we have become with the Yorubas in Funtua, it will be completely irrational that we should want to isolate and kill them. This is the work of rouges, not ethnicity.<sup>42</sup>

According to the *Sarkin Yorùbáwa Funtua*, neither he nor his subjects in Funtua contemplated relocating to their homeland in Yorùbáland:

That will be useless. I have children here who are married to Hausa people of Katsina. I have no intention of going anywhere, and I believe it is the same with many of our people [Yorùbá] here.<sup>43</sup>

Although ethnic conflicts against the Yorùbá were prevented in a rural setting like Funtua, such an effort proved abortive in metropolitan Kano and Kaduna. Indeed, from the middle of the 1980s, the incessant ethno-religious conflicts in northern Nigeria towns has led to the unprecedented relocation of Yorùbá families from the conflict zones to their hometowns or other northern cities. Many Yorùbá have relocated to Abuja, the new federal capital territory, where Yorùbá men are dominant in taxi and construction trades.

After three or four generations in Kaduna, Kano, or Jos, a family might be seen as indigenes, but practical situations sometimes indicated that even after undergoing cultural, religious, and other dimensions of assimilation, such persons could still be regarded as non-indigenes.<sup>44</sup> In October 2000, much fear was aroused among the Yorùbá in Kaduna and other northern cities after the Oodua People's Congress (OPC)/Hausa violent conflicts in Ajegunle, Apapa, and other



parts of Lagos. The Yorùbá community leader in Kaduna, Alhaji Oguntoyinbo, was conscious of possible reprisal attacks, repeatedly disassociated the approximately 4 million Yorùbá people in the northern states from OPC's activities while the Yorùbá Welfare Forum, led by Alhaji Rafiu Salawu, did the same while appealing for reason to be allowed to prevail. Justifying the fears of the Yorùbá ethnic group about the possibilities of retaliatory attacks, a coalition of thirteen northern youth under the aegis of G-13 disseminated statements that emphasized that all Yorùbá immigrants must leave Kaduna within 24 hours or risk their lives. In a statement entitled: "Who is Afraid," the coalition stated that:

Following the recent organized killing of Fulani cattle-herdsmen in Lagos and the subsequent events in Kwara State, we hereby give all Yorùbás resident in Kaduna, twenty-four hours to either pack out or pay for it. We have followed, with keen interest, the calculated plan to destroy our people with the support of powerful people in the society who have been aiding the OPC members with weapons of mass destruction. We call on President [Olusegun] Obasanjo and the Inspector General of Police to resign. . . .<sup>45</sup>

To some extent, the preponderance of the Islamic faith among the Yorùbá in Kaduna has provided some good measure of reassurance and sense of brotherhood among their Muslim hosts. For example, the quick intervention of the council of Ulama and several leading Muslim clerics, including Sheikh Yusuf Sambo, Imam of Sultan Bello Mosque, actually helped substantially toward putting the G-13 threat to rest. Since the resurgence of ethno-religious conflicts in Jos in 1992, Yorùbá immigrants have been living in fear of attacks on their lives and properties. Many were displaced and forced to relocate to their hometowns.<sup>46</sup>

Since the resurgence of ethnic conflicts in 1999, largely masterminded by the military against the Hausa immigrants in Yorùbáland, the relations between the Hausa and Yorùbá has been transformed from hospitality to mutual suspicion and hostility. The uncertainty and state of insecurity has led to the formation of pan-Yorùbá and multi-ethnic organizations involving Yorùbá in northern Nigeria and the issues of security and peaceful coexistence. In 1995, the Yorùbá Community Northern States Council was formed. Alhaji A. G. Oguntoyinbo and Alhaji Y. A. Makanjuola, who became president general and secretary, respectively, spearheaded the establishment of the association. The association further encouraged the formation of pan-Yorùbá groups in the northern states. The Kaduna Chapter established the Northern States Council, similarly known as the Northern Forum. In the executive council were Dr. J. P. Aiyelangbe, Kano (vice president); Alhaji Y. T. Dada of Bauchi; and Chief S. A. Adesina of Zamfara State (Figure 12.3). Others are Chief Akin Fatoyinbo (Gombe), Oba Solomon Odebiyi of Plateau, and others. The council, which is composed of the eighteen northern states excluding Kwara, began its maiden quarterly meeting in October 1999 in Kano. This was followed by meetings in Jos-Plateau, Bauchi, Adamawa, Sokoto, Nasarawa, and Zamfara.<sup>47</sup>

The formation of the Yorùbá Community Northern States was influenced by the political crisis that followed the annulment of the June 12, 1993, presidential

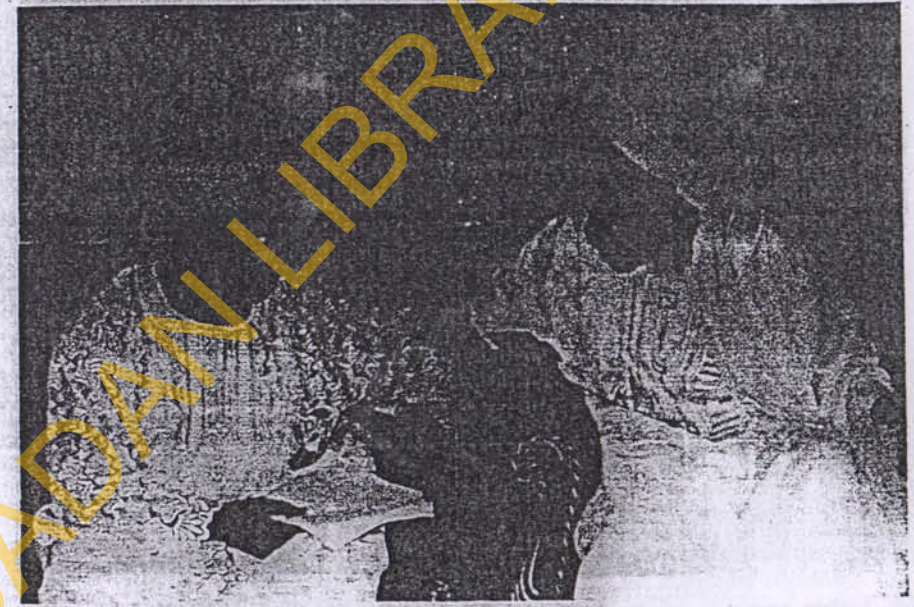


Figure 12.3. Yorùbá community, Kano (1999). Alhaji Adbullah Salihu Olowo (right) Oba Yorùbá, Kano State and Dr. Jumpat Aiyelangbe, President of Yorùbá Community (left). Credit: Rasheed Olaniyi, 1999.

elections. Indeed, the state of insecurity and tension and ethnic conflicts made the Yorùbá leaders in diaspora form a pan-Yorùbá association for the protection of Yorùbá migrants through allegiance with host communities and the security agencies. The central agenda of the association is to foster unity and stability, and strengthen the cordial relationship among the Yorùbá on one hand and between Yorùbá and other Nigerians on the other hand. The association has the following objectives:

- a. to foster unity among Yorùbá;
- b. to be our brothers' keeper;
- c. to cooperate and assist ourselves in all fields;
- d. to identify ourselves where and whenever the need arises; and
- e. to seek continuous cordial relationship between our people, the indigenes, the government and other citizens in Northern Nigeria.

For mobilization of membership and solidarity, the association dedicated the month of November for the celebration of Yorùbá Day (Figure 12.4):

In the aftermath of the Kano anti-Yorùbá ethnic violence of July 1999, the National Integration Forum for Peace (NIFOR) was launched on August 23, 1999. The core targets of NIFOR were those Nigerians living outside of their states.



Yorùbá commerce in northern Nigeria. Some integrated with the host communities. Integration involved both the Yorùbá immigrants and the host communities achieving a degree of convergence. The integration of second-generation Yorùbá immigrants was largely conditioned on how their parents were received in the host community. To a greater extent, the second generation confronted a pluralistic identity of Hausa and Yorùbá. Among the Yorùbá in northern Nigeria, there emerged Hausa-Yorùbá, Nupe-Yorùbá, and Kanuri-Yorùbá identities. These are exhibited in attire and the spoken patterns of the Yorùbá in diaspora who felt at ease communicating in Hausa, Nupe, and Kanuri or who mixed the languages together with Yorùbá. The central question is not whether the second generation assimilated into Hausa society, but into what segment of that society it assimilated. Many of the descendants of early migrants have integrated into the Hausa society and became members of the political, intellectual, military, and commercial elites. Others used their integration into Hausa to benefit from scholarships, employment, and promotion opportunities but despised their Yorùbá ancestry. Those who maintained their Yorùbá identity in diaspora often ended up as "marginal citizens" without the right to lay claim to the community where they were born and grew up, or to their home origin where they were less known. Among the last group, however, were those who contested elections and won the right to represent the communities where they lived, particularly at the local government levels.

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