

# THE CITY STATE OF IBADAN

Texts and Contexts



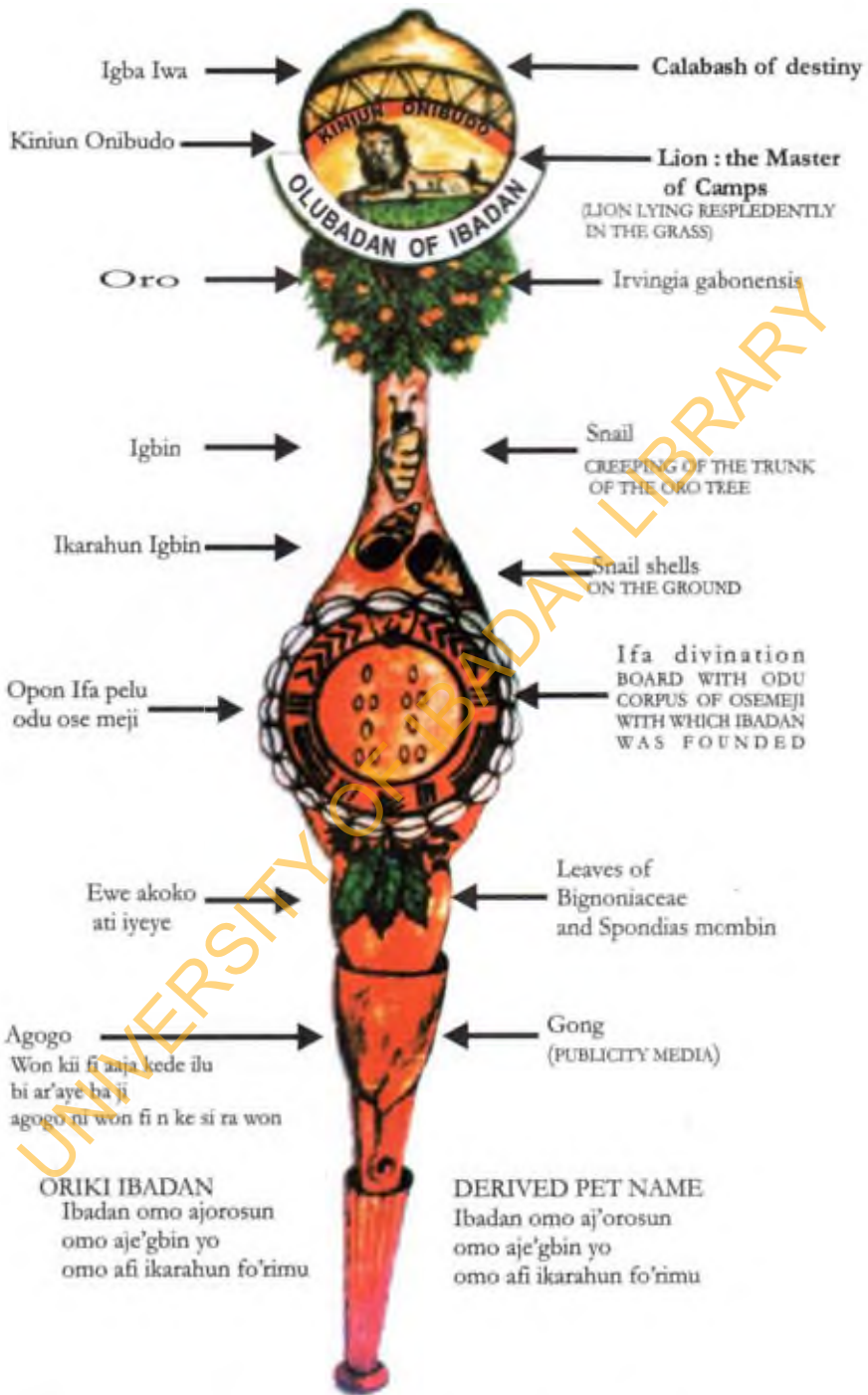
edited by  
DELE LAYIWOLA



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BY LATE CHIEF J.A. AYORINDE, D.LITT (HONS) IFE, MFR, MBE, JP

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*edited by*

**'Dele Layiwola**

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*In memory of those good souls who  
either directly or indirectly  
helped to shape this publication*

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## Ibadan 1960: Creativity and the Collective Impromptu

Dele Layiwola

### Introduction

It is true that Ibadan was founded in 1829. Over a century before it became the home of Nigeria's premier university and a conglomerate of publishing houses, the very roots of cultural nationalism and creative enterprise had always been evident. As a war camp, conquerors, wanderers, the weary and the mendicant found an accommodating home in Ibadan. Because of the planlessness and rowdiness of Ibadan, there had always been a strong sense of (in)security and heightened urban consciousness in the citizenry. In other words, the primary ingredient of drama – conflict – had always attended Ibadan. Her warriors became the strongest rallying point for the Yoruba nation just before the inception of colonial rule and the climax of Yoruba warfare. This paper to make the point that the hybridity and the complexity of Ibadan as an 'artificial' settlement played a crucial role in its being a centre of amazing creativity. Its fierce nationalism and violent municipal conflicts between 1830 and 1966 are signposts for cultural revival, identity re-formulation and re-invention.

As the Oyo Empire entered its steep decline at the beginning of the 19th century, the consequent vacuum and the basis of a new power bloc became imminent. The empire had been under pressure from the outside as well as from within. From the outside, the Fulani jihadists mounted an aggressive attack on the northern fringe of Yorubaland, while intrigues and betrayals of the ruling class precipitated internal revolts. Both internal and external pressures caused a massive southward advance from the seat of the empire situated on the northern fringe of Yorubaland. This dislocation, the demographic shift and the 'swarming' caused much unease on the southern fringe of the savannah and the northern fringe of the forest belt. The search for new homes and farmlands by the advancing population and the adventure prone chieftains and warlords "provoked a series of wars in the

central and southern areas of Yorubaland, with far-reaching consequences.<sup>1</sup>

Ife and Owu kingdoms were at loggerheads over the market town of Apomu.<sup>2</sup> The bone of contention would seem to be more economic than territorial. Ife, in alliance with Ijebu to the south, took advantage of the returning masses of Oyo army from the troubled capital in the north to prosecute the campaign. Owu was routed in the encounter. The allied army then turned on the neighbouring Egba settlements and began a systematic campaign. Ibadan happened to be one of these settlements.

Once the collapse of old Oyo was complete, a prince of Oyo by the name Atiba decided to re-settle the new capital of Oyo on the present site then named Ago. He gathered people from neighbouring settlements to populate the new capital. He was an astute leader, conscious of the traditions of his fathers. He built a palace based on the old models and kept the ceremonies of the king's court. He reached out to the new warlord of Ibadan called Oluyole and made him the *Basorun*. The charismatic leader of Ijaye, Kurumi, he made the generalissimo, the *Aare-ona-Kakanfo*. They had instructions to defend the territory of the dying kingdom. The chiefs were grateful for the honour and recognition, but they were quasi-independent because of their military capabilities. It was clear that in place of one monolithic and influential kingdom, there were several in its stead. Though Ijaye quickly emerged as a military power, Ibadan soon overtook her to become the most dominant of the three; Oyo became a cultural headquarters and a rallying point for all the fragmented bits of a once formidable empire.

### The emergence of Ibadan

Bolanle Awe had written on the rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba super power and empire.<sup>3</sup> At Ijaye, Kurumi subjugated the inhabitants of the town and brought the town under his firm control such that he dared anyone to dare him. In Ibadan, the situation was different. The city gradually got filled up. All those seeking refuge

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1 J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A. Akintoye, "Yorubaland in the Nineteenth Century" in Obaro Ikime, editor, *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980), p. 280 – 302.

2 A.L. Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History*. (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971).

3 B. Awe, "The Rise of Ibadan as A Yoruba Power, 1851 – 1893", Unpublished D.Phil Thesis, Oxford University, 1964.

from the turbulence of the 19th century steadily poured in from the four winds. Oluyole's ambition and ascendancy was terminated by his sudden and untimely death. His death left a gap for any talented or clever warlord from any background or location to aspire to leadership. Ibadan was an all comers' town, so there was room for aspirations irrespective of ethnic or ideological leanings. This made the town very popular to adventurers seeking a career in warfare and politics. This is the empirical explanation for its limitless expansion and drive for urbanization. As more able-bodied persons concentrated in Ibadan and were pretty idle, there re-emerged the tendency for military and political campaigns to the north and east of Yorubaland. This brought the Ibadan army into direct confrontation with Fulani jihadists who had annexed the fringes of the Yoruba country and had built their headquarters in Ilorin. Ibadan regained the control of Osun provinces and routed the Fulani army at Ikirun in 1840.

By 1854, Ibadan had annexed the Ife towns of Apomu, Ikire and Gbongan.<sup>4</sup> In fact, by 1893, when the British had succeeded in colonizing Nigeria, Ibadan warlords were still lamenting their uncompleted campaigns to fully regain Ilorin from the invading Fulani.<sup>5</sup> At the close of the 19th century, Ibadan had succeeded in replacing Oyo as the imperial power of the Yoruba country. The influence of Ibadan had been responsible for the continual migration and influx of peoples of diverse backgrounds into the metropolis in more recent times. There has been no other West African town that has expanded as unilaterally as Ibadan had done during the 20th century.

At this point, we need to look in greater detail at those other indices of identity formation that were responsible for the ascendancy of Ibadan as a unique settlement. Why, for instance did the Yoruba allied army not settle in Apomu, Gbongan or Ede? How did Ibadan become a popular choice?

I shall like to start with this *Oriki* or praise poem:

<i>Ibadan omo ajorosun</i>	Ibadan, descendant of
<i>Omo ajegbinyo</i>	African apple eaters.
<i>Omo ajegbin j'ekarahun</i>	Survivors on the flesh and shell of snails.

4 J.F.A. Ajayi and S.A. Akintoye, op. cit.

5 S. Johnson. *History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 1921).

There were waves of migrations and there might have been aborigines. The earliest settlement, however, was that by an Ife warrior named Lagelu from the Degelu family of Ife. Lagelu settled near an open grassland, hence the name *Eba Odan* (a place near the savannah).

When he arrived, he found others who had no established means of livelihood. They were mainly brigands and ruffians. That first settlement broke up when Lagelu's children showed disrespect to an *egungun*. Lagelu and his children regrouped and settled on a range of hills called Eleyele. It was here that they feasted on the abundance of snails and African apples. These earlier settlements would seem to predate the one recalled by Bolanle Awe. Awe's account indicates that Oyo leaders like Oluyole and Olupoyi as well as Labosinde from Ile-Ife settled with their men around Mapo and Oja'ba.<sup>6</sup>

The nagging question on why the war leaders settled in Ibadan rather than, for instance, the recently liberated Apomu or the sacked Owu would remain a source of robust speculation. The unarguable fact, however, is that Ibadan's geographical location played a huge part in the choice of Ibadan over Apomu and Owu. Ibadan is located between the ancient city of Ile-Ife, the spiritual headquarters of the Yoruba, and Oyo, the political and military headquarters. Symbolically, it shared the characteristics of both settlements. The Oyo subgroup finally submerged the rest of the Egba, Ijebu and Ife minorities. Today, that is still the pattern. The consequence of this is that there are bits of nomadic identities discernible in the character and flavour of the city of Ibadan as it stands today. Its sprawl, the combination of serenity and of perplexing conflict continue to challenge theories of citizenship and productive living. This is what, I believe, precipitated the ferment of the 1960s. As May Joseph<sup>7</sup> puts it:

Gradually, there unfolded a peculiar condition for which theories of citizenship do not adequately account: that of nomadic, conditional citizenship related to histories of migrancy and the tenuous status of immigrants.

I believe that the indeterminable choice for the actual citing of the city and the fact of its being an all comers' commune generated the serendipity and panoply that we

---

6 B. Awe, op. cit.

7 M. Joseph. *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship*. (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Pres, 1999).

witness in its cultural life. This is subtly highlighted in the city's anthem:

<i>Ibadan Ilu ori oke</i>	Ibadan of the hilly structure
<i>Ilu Ibukun Oluwa</i>	Blessed city
<i>K'Oluwa se oni'bukun</i>	May God make you a
<i>Fun onile at'alejo</i>	Blessing unto indigenes and settlers alike

The fact that Ibadan anticipates immigrants and welcomes them shows that she does not discriminate against settlers. This then gives room for relative anonymity, which is a sociological factor of genuine urban settlements. The hospitable nature of Ibadan also accounted for the establishment of certain key and vintage institutions situated in the land: the university, the publishing houses, as well as the Mbari Club.

## Ibadan's cultural institutions

### a. The University

From the latter half of the 19th century, there was an increasing need for higher institutions in Nigeria because the elite in Lagos had to send their children overseas for professional training. But the British government only seriously considered this need for the commonwealth, and particularly for West Africa, during the Second World War. The Asquith and Elliot Commissions were set up in 1943 to study the need and make a report to the colonial office. The commissions reported back in 1945. The reports of the Elliot Commission confirmed the need to establish a university college in Nigeria. The Asquith Commission concentrated on the principles, which were to guide the development of such institutions. It emphasized that the university to be founded should be a residential university affiliated with the London University. The commission also touched on matters relating to academic standards and university autonomy. Following all these, the University College Ibadan was founded in 1948 on an old site previously used by the 56th Military Hospital, about 6 or 7 kilometers from the present site. The new site covers 1,030 hectares of land leased by people and chiefs of Ibadan for 999 years. This was the site where Arthur Creech Jones, the then secretary of state for the colonies, and a reputable member of the Elliot Commission, turned the sod at the permanent site of the University College, Ibadan on 17 November 1948, which then became Foundation Day. A little over a century earlier, it was Lagelu, the Prince from Ile-Ife, who turned the first sod on Eleyele hill. History has it that the act repeated itself again.

Two very interesting factors are that the university, like its host city, was founded in phases at contiguous sites, except that it was a college of London University until 1962. The other factor is that it was founded near the site where Ibadan itself was founded, on Eleyele hill. This latter fact is symbolic and goes to the credit of the indigenes of the city, as we earlier affirmed, that they are hospitable. They willingly gave land to the university project without counting the cost, as they had the chance to do. It was clear from the very beginning that the fate of the university college was bound with the survival of not only its host city, but also that of Nigeria as a whole. In this regard, I shall like to quote excerpts from articles published in the premier journal of the university college known by the same name, *Ibadan*:

Clearly much of the stress of university expansion over the next eight crucial years must fall on Ibadan. It is suggested that the number of undergraduates in residence in this college ought to reach about 3,375 by 1968. This would be out of a total student population in Nigeria of 7,500 which, allowing for failures and courses longer than 3 years, should produce 2000 graduates annually. The other universities proposed at Nsukka, Zaria and Lagos would have a proportionately smaller contribution to make in this eight-year period.<sup>8</sup>

The other quotations are by Lalage Bown, who was writing on the principle of a liberal education and the indigenization of the curriculum on the African subsoil:

One of the attractive features of life at U.C.I. is the versatility of one's colleagues – a linguist turns out to be an opera singer and a biochemist anthologizes West African poetry. Presumably it is because we are working in the context of a vital and fast developing society that many of us are unafraid of traditional disciplinary boundaries and are conscious of a brave feeling that what touches any is the concern of all. One's first reaction, therefore to the idea of a classic and mathematician sitting down together to discuss the function of a university in a new nation is one of pleasure is yet another example of this community's intellectual liveliness<sup>9</sup>

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8 I. Espie, "Decades of Decision 1960 – 1970: Some Aspects of the Ashby Report" in *Ibadan* 1961; 11: 9-12.

9 L Bown, "Emergent University?" in *Ibadan* 1960; 11:17-19.

On the Nigerianization of the curriculum she observes, *inter alia*:

They do not mention the value of refresher courses for teachers at a time when school syllabuses still need to be more Nigerianized, nor the way education staff can help to provide worthy school textbooks. They also ignore the fact that one of the main activities of the U.C.I. extramural department is the organization of residential courses which enable people from all over Nigeria to come in contact with the college staff (so that it is untrue to say the internal staff can only influence people living in or near Ibadan).<sup>10</sup>

The vision of Ian Espie and Lalage Bown were borne out of the landmark contributions of the school of drama to the identity reformulation of a culture whose floodgates have just been burst open by the impetus of political independence and cultural revival. With corresponding grants from the Rockefeller and Ford Foundations, the school of drama at the University College Ibadan and its arts theatre became a monumental laboratory. Indigenous plays fused with European and American concepts created a ferment of cultural miscegenation and reformulation. Yoruba operas and court dramas were adapted for the proscenium arch and folk dances were choreographed. A most successful example of theatrical diffusion was that carried out by Dapo Adelugba in collaboration with the University College Ibadan Dramatic Society in 1960/61. It was an adaptation of *Les Foberies de Scapin* as *That Scoundrel Suberu*. The earthy sense of humour is universal, but the characterization has metamorphosed from the original French to Yoruba or Nigerian. This is justified thus in the prologue:

Our hero, Scapin, lived in Italy  
 He's now Suberu and he's played by me.  
 A clever rogue – young Wole's friend and tutor –  
 The scene, however's more like Abeokuta  
 Or some such place – it's really all the same –  
 Boys with their fathers play this little game  
 Whether it's Naples, Katsina or Calabar  
 [Substitute according to place of performance].  
 And daughters too, they sometimes go too far;  
 They give their hearts to those they love,  
 And never ask their parents to approve,

---

10 Ibid.

And when they are in a mess, they come to me...

The Arts Theatre at the University College, Ibadan, which performed stuff ranging from folk operas to Shakespeare and Ionesco, has been remarked by a host of commentators.<sup>11</sup>

### b. Publishing houses

The impression from 1960 onwards was that a pioneering cultural renaissance of national import had begun in Ibadan. This is indeed true because Ibadan is often referred to as Nigeria's cultural capital. Further, major publishing houses were set up near the old site of the university college at Eleyele and Jericho. Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Evans and Heinemann were among the first to set up publishing houses in Ibadan. At first, they were fully foreign-owned investments, but they have now become jointly Nigerian. At least two major newspapers also emerged in Ibadan: *The Daily Sketch* and *The Nigerian Tribune*. This is beside the fact that the first television station in Africa was established in Ibadan in 1959. A lot of printing presses quickly followed the establishment of the media houses. The printing houses were concentrated around Mokola and Oke Ado areas to cope with the elite trooping into Ibadan to make a living, to seek education and to seek adventure. In a secondary response to this fact, there was an upsurge of avenues for leisure, relaxation and creative expression. The Mbari club catered for this creative yearning by bringing folk sensibilities to cross-fertilize with the art of the intelligentsia. It also had a journal to document this cultural production as they emerged.

### c. The Mbari (Mbayo) Club

This club was established to further the interest of artists around Ibadan and Osogbo in the 1960s. It was a pan-cultural group that brought together all the artists, writers and poets under the patronage of Ulli Beier. Its publishing organ was the journal called *Black Orpheus*, in which writers like Christopher Okigbo, John

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11 U. Cockshott, "Dance of the Forests" in *Ibadan 1960*: 30-32; G. Axworthy, "Ibadan: Its Early Beginnings" in P.C. Lloyd, A.L. Mabogunje and Bolanle Awe, editors, *The City of Ibadan*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 11- 25; D. Adelugba, "Theatre Critique – *Faux Pas* – at Ibadan University Arts Theatre", *Ibadan* 1969; 26; D. Adelugba, "Professor Martin Banham: A Personal Tribute" in Dele Layiwola, editor, *African Theatre in Performance* (London: Harwood Academic Publishers, 2000), p. 1-4; A. Banjo, "The Lion and the Jewel at the Arts Theatre", *Ibadan* 1969; 26: 83-84.



Pepper Clark, Aig Higo, Duro Ladipo and Wale Ogunyemi first published their seminal works. Artists in other media like Demas Nwoko (a sculptor and builder), Tunji Oyelana (a singer/composer), and Segun Olusola, Femi Johnson and Dapo Adelugba, who were actors and impresarios along with Wole Soyinka, were all part of Mbari Club.

### **Conclusion**

Though Ibadan became the centre of 19th century Yoruba civilization after the collapse of the Oyo Empire, the cultural capital of Nigeria at political independence in 1960, the home of Nigeria's premier university and enlightenment, the epitome of civil service bureaucracy and one of the most hospitable cities anywhere, it had also been Nigeria's hottest political bed. It was the political troubles in Ibadan that led to the collapse of the First Republic. This high turnover may be indicative of high political consciousness, but it also depicts instability and flux. In spite of the façade of a dull civil service town, the ebb and tide are hyperactive, and the terrain is volatile.

It is clear that conflict is the soul of drama and the re-invention of a newfangled identity. We may therefore safely conclude that this supreme evidence of dazzling, unpredictable, and even cinematographic changes are responsible for the concentration of home videos, drama and performance groups in Ibadan. These are not only transformations of Ibadan's 19th century mendicant groups, they also represent her warriors earning a living on the flipside of a polity where war has become gravely unpopular.