

THE CITY STATE OF IBADAN

Texts and Contexts



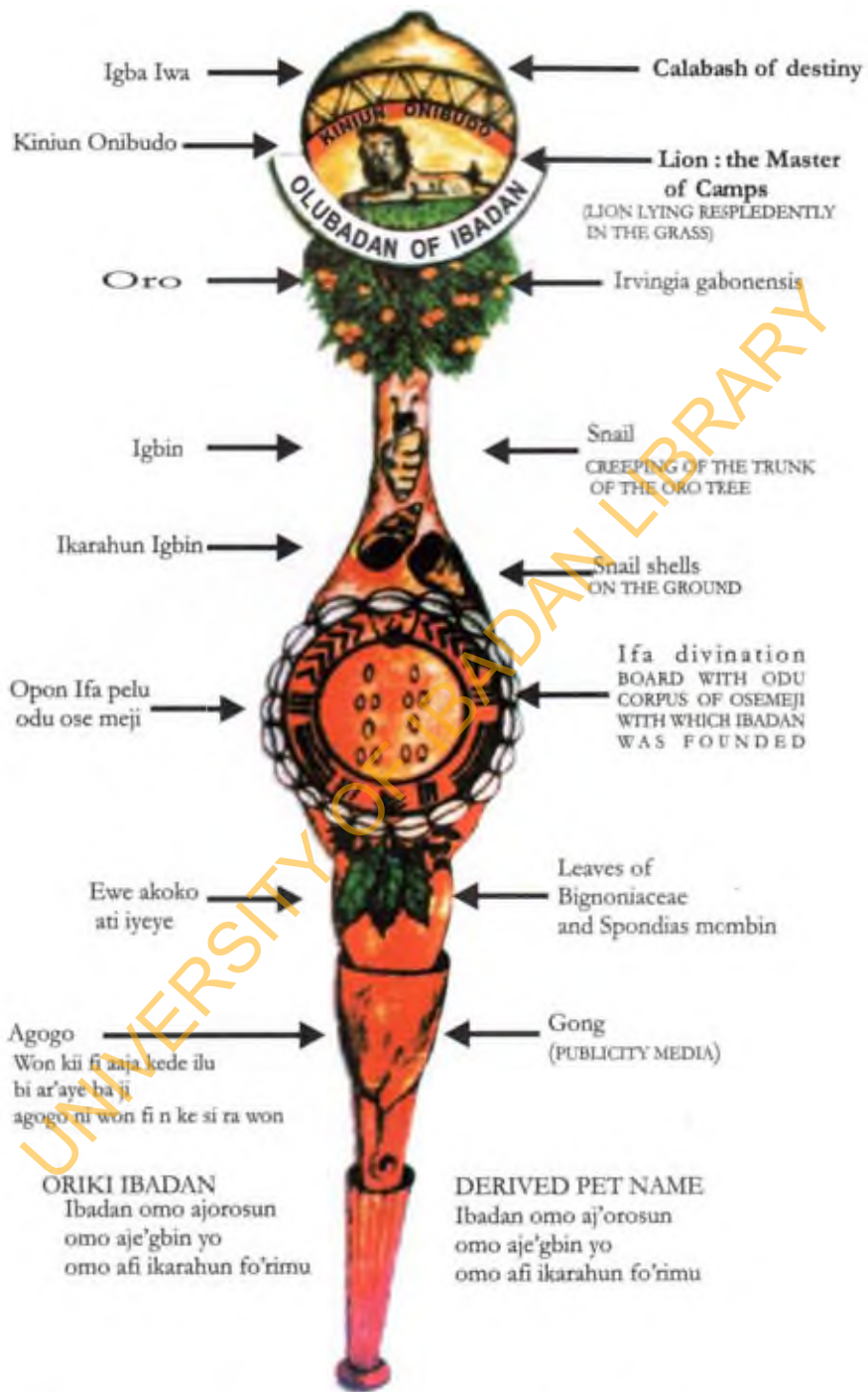
edited by
DELE LAYIWOLA



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

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'Dele Layiwola

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

Cornelius Oyeleke Adepegba, 1941–2002

Festus O Akintola, 1946–2013

John Adeyemi Abokede Ayorinde, 1907–1998

Barbara Best Barber, 1914–2012

Adeola Olapeju Kolawole, 1963–2002

Solomon Abidemi Layiwola, 1925–2004

Oyinade Ogunba, 1938–2008

Chief Moses Itanola Okunola, 1925–2012

Timipreye Brenda Zisinghan, 1963–2008

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Ibadan: Its Beginnings to the Close of the 20th Century

The Performing Arts and the Changing Identity of an African Subgroup

Dele Layiwola

Background

The etymology of the name of West Africa's largest city, Ibadan derives from the compound word *Eba-Odan*. This means 'savannah fringe'. Up until 1837, before the collapse of old Oyo,¹ an Egba village occupied the present site of Ibadan. From about the 1820s, however, when internal strife and external aggression laid siege on the integrity of the great Yoruba empire, migrants trickled into the fringes of the southern savannah zone.

Around this period, the Spanish and Portuguese colonies of South America had gained independence and there were demands for more slaves from the coast of West Africa to work on their plantations.² With the Fulani firmly entrenched in Ilorin, which had hitherto served as the gateway to the ready supply of slaves from the northern savannah zones, ready access was interrupted. The Yoruba people thereby turned on themselves to meet the

1 See Robert Smith, "The Alafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History", *Journal of African History*, 1965, 5 (1): 57.

2 Bolanle Awe, "Ibadan, Its Early Beginnings", in P.C. Lloyd, A.L. Mabogunje and Bolanle Awe, editors, *The City of Ibadan* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1967), p. 11 – 25.; also see Bolanle Awe, "The Rise of Ibadan as a Yoruba Power in the Nineteenth Century," Unpublished D.Phil thesis, Oxford University, 1963, p. 70.

demand for more slaves. The Yoruba sub-group exclusively near the coast were the Ijebu people, and they usually undertook the brokerage in the trans-Atlantic trade. This sub-group dropped the hint to their neighbours about the increase in the demand for slaves. Their hinterland neighbour, the Ife people, took the cue and allied themselves with the Ijebu to attack Owu. The Owu war was not as direct as it would ordinarily appear, but there were antecedents whereby the Owu seemed to have offended both the Ife and Ijebu on matters relating to the trading post at Apomu.³

It was not difficult for the Ife people to rally the Oyo migrants, who had fled the scourge of the Fulani from northern Yorubaland, and the Egba people as allies to do battle against the formidable Owu Kingdom. It took consistent efforts and considerable resources to bring Owu to its knees. Samuel Johnson affirmed that this became a decisive period in Yoruba history. A series of intra-ethnic feuds were to further destabilize southern Yorubaland. This led to the mushrooming of army camps of which Ibadan became a grand beneficiary. For the first time, gunpowder became an accessory for war and for slave raiding.⁴ The allied forces, either for reasons of centrality and accessibility, or for the strategic nature of the hills, chose Ibadan, an erstwhile Egba settlement as their camp. This happened between 1828 and 1829. Gradually, other soldiers from Ile-Ife, Ijebu and Oyo settled at Ibadan. Bolanle Awe established that Oyo leaders like *Oluwole* and *Olopoyi*, as well as *Labosinde* from Ile-Ife settled with their men around *Mapo* and *Oja'ba*, some Ijebu soldiers settled at Isale Ijebu and the Egba warriors at Iyecosu.⁵

The heterogeneity of the new town became both a source of remarkable strength as well as inherent weakness. Though an amalgam of subcultures were cohabiting and growing as a variegated *ethnos*, there was always a seminal struggle for supremacy. The belligerent nature of the settlers did not help matters. But it was sufficient that each group founded a settlement and home base by choice rather than by coercion. What finally put paid to this rivalry was

3 Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, (Lagos: CSS Bookshops, 1921, Reprinted 1937), p. 206 – 207.

4 *Ibid*, p.210.

5 Awe, 1967, p. 14.

the mass exodus of people from the northern fringes of the Oyo Empire. The emigrants found a home in Ibadan and gradually overwhelmed the population of the other sub-groups. It therefore meant that these Oyo groups, from a hitherto flourishing empire brought, wholesale, their culture and mores into their new environment.

A critical look into the early history of Oyo itself reveals that like most flourishing and established empires, there were set patterns to life and the grandeur of economic and military power gave rise to ceremonial and court traditions. It was from this and the ritualized aspects of culture that the vibrant development of theatrical instincts and gestural embellishments developed.

Cultural settlements and developments

It was reported that an *Ifa* divination was performed when some traditional religious leaders arrived to sanctify Ibadan with sacrifices on the Oluyole hills. The resulting *odu* was “*Ose Meji*”, This sign became the guardian *Odu* of the new city. The city patriarch, Lagelu, and six diviner-priests were present on that first occasion. The same *odu* sign then appeared again on three critical occasions in the life of the city. According to Bolaji Idowu,⁶ these were when:

- The populace sought divine blessings on the new settlement for prosperity. Then, the *Oke Ibadan* (or the spirit of Ibadan) was instituted as a totem of worship.
- The oracle was consulted on how to preserve the growing population and the emerging prosperity.
- A siege was laid on Ibadan and its expansion and security was threatened. *Ose Meji* (meaning double victory) appeared again to reassure the inhabitants of a slow but steady and persistent growth, as in the movement of snails.

It seems, this is why the snail or its shell became the mascot of the city's coat of arms. A close study of *Ose Meji* reveals that under the major thematic and metrical divisions, the sign is concerned with (a) survival (b) wealth (c) fertility

⁶ Bolaji Idowu, “Religion in Ibadan: Traditional Religion and Christianity” in Bolanle Awe, et al, p. 235 – 247.

and (d) victory.⁷ These are consistent with the preoccupations identified with the founders of the city in its early stages. The cultural importance of this point is that Ibadan, in spite of the pure serendipity connected with its location and founding, is still a traditional and spiritual home to its inhabitants. It shows that all care was taken as to its establishment and, contrary to the manner of settlement, nothing was given up to chance. Any Yoruba settlement, thus inaugurated by solid tradition, is often assured of its safety and stability. The city was soon to attract settlers from the four winds, expanding by leaps and bounds. The cultural idealism of the founding fathers was balanced by the empirical arrangement of its migrant settlers. A war camp back then, was convenient and central to the rest of the Yoruba people. Moreover, it proved to be a crucial location between the forest and savannah belts, a suitable mercantilist base and a centre for the exchange of cultural links.

The more contemporary areas of the city lie to the west and north of the range of hills first traversed by the founding fathers. Some of the hills are *Oke Sapati*, *Oke Oluokun*, *Oke Seni*, *Oke Are*, *Oke Foko*, *Oke Mapo*, *Oke Ado*, *Oke Bola*, etc. The settlement patterns are marked out by the variation in architectural patterns and, to some extent, the social and economic stratification within the sprawling city. Mabogunje noted that the earlier crop of immigrants into Ibadan from about 1900 were from neighbouring Yoruba communities – Ijebu, Egba and Ijesha.⁸ They were mostly traders who settled in parts of the western sector known as *Amunigun*, *Agbeni*, *Idikan*, *Oke-Padi* and *Oke Foko*. Though the housing units were built within compounds with central courtyards in the traditional fashion, these were modified into rectangular structures with isolated units subtending a courtyard. The new structures were inhabited by only the different immigrant families, who shared conveniences such as kitchens, bathrooms, toilets and wells. It also shows that the units were built for commercial purposes. Some of them were let to other immigrants arriving at different periods. Many of the immigrant quarters contrasted with the ‘native’ buildings, because they were of

7 Wande Abimbola, “Ose Meji” in *Ifa Divination Poetry*, (New York: Nok Publishers, 1977), p. 142 – 149.

8 A. L. Mabogunje, “The Morphology of Ibadan” in P.C. Lloyd, A.L. Mabogunje and Bolanle Awe, op.cit. p. 35 – 56.

higher standards, plastered with cement, and sometimes built with stones, even though the walls or mounds might have been built with clay.

An influx of settlers was noticeable with the arrival of the railway in 1901. A new suburb grew with the arrival of *Lagosians* and descendants of freed slaves who had settled in Lagos. This area, slightly north of the railway terminus, became known as *Ekotedo* or 'Lagos settlement'. The railway network also brought settlers who were originally from what later became known as the mid-west, southeastern and eastern Nigeria.

The Hausa from the North were granted a parcel of land which was christened *Sabo*, an abbreviation of *Sabon gari*. Sabo is often translated as new town or strangers' quarters. This is an indication that the area is a quarter for settlers, (more properly, strangers). Adjacent to this, the Nupe were settled in a portion of Mokola eponymously referred to as *Ago Tapa*, which translates as Nupe hamlets. Mabogunje rightly observed that the different appearances, as well as the architecture of the Hausa quarters were so impermanent as to suggest that they considered themselves sojourners rather than permanent settlers in the city. These settlements were about a mile and a half north of the railway terminus.

The foregoing description of Ibadan presents the picture of a city with an identity that is neither clear-cut nor easily negotiated. The original founders of Ibadan, early in the 18th century, were led by Lagelu, from the Degelu family of Ile-Ife. He and his group described those that they found on the site as brigands or ruffians.⁹ The sojourn at the first site was short-lived because Lagelu's children disrespected an ancestral masquerade, *egungun*. Lagelu and his followers then regrouped and settled at *Eleyele* hill.

In the 19th century, Ibadan became a war camp and its central position attracted settlers from all over Yorubaland. In the 20th century, it turned out that many more settlers came from all over Nigeria and pitched their tents at different locations around the original city. Now Ibadan has become so metropolitan that besides Lagos, Nigeria's former capital city, there is scarcely any other city in Nigeria with the same scope of a post-colonial aggregation of nomadic

9 Chief M. I. Okunola, "Ibadan and Some of Her Landmarks", Being an address given at the Nigerian Field Society, Ibadan Branch, on Tuesday, 4th March 1997.

identities.¹⁰ The implication of this is that Ibadan has always been a land of multifarious citizenships—Oyo, Egba, Ife, Ijebu, Ijesha, Ekiti, Hausa, Nupe, Igbo, Edo, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Efik, etc. As the cityscape changes, so its nationalities and identities grow with unsurpassable robustness. As with all post-colonial concepts of identity, every immigrant is an Ibadan man or woman. The (sub) ethnic difference disappears as soon as each individual or group has settled down. This probably contributed to the city's ability to attract to itself Nigeria's premier university, an array of publishing houses, Africa's first television station in 1959 and a host of other missionary inspired centres. This is why it was often referred to in the 1960s as Nigeria's cultural capital.

It is clear that Ibadan's cultural diversity is matched by a certain notion of performance: the 'performance of personhood', of 'citizenship' and of 'history'. The fact that a myriad of sub-groups first came together in response to the displacement of group boundaries, occasioned by war and migration, turned the beneficiary city into a cultural panoply. It became a political as well as a cultural laboratory for the 'performance of citizenship' through avocation and in theatrical performance. This warrants a more detailed investigation as a theory of cultural performance.

The performing arts in Ibadan

The Yoruba people, generally speaking, have always derived this aspect of culture from the trans-migrant concept that the living and the dead stand as a continuum, whereby a change in perceptual identity is likened to the change of physiological cloaks. Therefore, the human vessel is a disguise. This makes it possible for the dead, the ancestors or any beings from the netherworld to come to the world of the living, disguised. All they need do is to synchronize the moments of transition with those of the seasons so that mystically, they are part of the recurrence of greater world dramas. Most of these modes of entertainment or 'revelations' occur within the interface that is generally referred to as the season of harvest. It is, therefore, almost always analogous to renewal; there being an attendant afflatus. Ancestral incarnations do occur at other periods of

10 May Joseph, *Nomadic Identities: The Performance of Citizenship* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

exigency when stability or group identity is threatened. In his lecture on the landmarks of Ibadan, Chief M.I. Okunola indicated that the first settlement of Ibadan broke up as a sanction against Lagelu because of the disrespect his children showed towards *egungun*, an ancestral incarnation. Neighbouring rulers simply came together and sacked that settlement.

The indication in most Yoruba settlements is that the incarnation of an ancestral spirit is both a reality as well as a disguise. For the same reason, an *egungun* pronounces lofty, divine blessings and proffers mundane entertainment or revelry. This phenomenon is interesting in the adaptive mediation of contemporary dramatists of Yoruba extraction. In Wole Soyinka's *The Road*¹¹, the eccentric character called Professor met his doom because he desecrated an ancestral figure in public. The element of disguise, innocuous as it may seem, recurs in many institutionalized arts. There is an example in the Igboho period of Oyo history. Following Samuel Johnson, both Robert Smith¹² and Joel Adedeji¹³ remarked about the dramatic importance of the disguise figures that the councillors of Alaafin Abipa (c. 1590) used as phantoms to discourage the return from Igboho to Oyo Ile (Old Oyo). Six chiefs-in-council each presented physically-disabled persons with chalk and raffia costumes as spirits of the forests:

1. *Bashorun* presented a hunchback
2. *Alapinni* presented an albino
3. *Asipa* presented a leper
4. *Sanu* presented a prognathous (protruding jaw)
5. *Laguna* presented a dwarf

11 Wole Soyinka, *The Road* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 1973. See also Dele Layiwola, "Literature, Violence and the City: A Sociological Exploration of Wole Soyinka's *The Road*" in *Papers in Honour of Professor Dapo Adelugba at 60*, edited by Egbe Ife, (Ibadan: End-Time Publishing House, 2001), p. 200 – 208.

12 Robert Smith, op. cit.

13 J.A. Adedeji, "Alarinjo: The Traditional Yoruba Travelling Theatre" in Yemi Ogundibi, editor, *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Sourcebook* (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, 1981), p. 221 – 247.

6. *Akiniku* presented a cripple.

These 'counterfeit' spirits were revealed as a mere disguise, but a memorable historical drama resulted from it. As Smith noted, it became something of a state performance during three religious festivals in Old Oyo. The first was during the *Orisa Oke* or farm god festival. The second was at the *Orisa Mole* festival and the third was at the Oduduwa festival.¹⁴ Adedeji adds that it was also enacted at the installation of a new Alaafin, at a night reception in the *aganju* or palace foyer. The author reconfirmed Adedeji's claim in a private discussion with the late Oba (Dr) S.O. Babayemi (formerly of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, *Olufi* of *Gbongan*). Babayemi gave an eye witness account of one such enactment at the installation of Alaafin Olayiwola Adeyemi in 1971.

Though these enactments became customary about 1610, which was the year in which *Ogbolu* (same as *Abipa*) re-occupied Old Oyo, these dramatic enactments became a regular entertainment at the king's court in Oyo. It was not until some time later that the art became a widespread practice among the ordinary citizens of the kingdom. Adedeji has rightly identified this as the beginning of professionalism in traditional theatre in Yorubaland. Competition and the proliferation of groups further honed this craft. Beyond the entertainment value, they became status symbols for the royal courts and among the elite, men of influence and warlords. This was the situation when, in the 19th century, Ibadan gained military ascendancy and political independence from the stranglehold of the overbearing Oyo Empire. The Ibadan Empire, which became something of a surrogate to the erstwhile Oyo Empire, extended from southwestern Yorubaland to northeastern Yorubaland. Between 1830 and 1893, when Ibadan carved for itself an extensive and powerful empire, the new elite helped the theatre to flourish. Each *Ajele*, or resident overlord, had a standing troupe, which performed for his court and sometimes performed for the community. The rapport, which the court and the performer had, was exhibited in an unusual instance after the Kiriji war of 1877 - 1893.

Balogun Ajayi Osungbekun, the Ibadan war general resident in Ikirun, followed in the tradition of chieftains who enjoyed traditional theatrical performances. He invited the *Aiyelabola troupe* to perform at his behest. Olojede

14 Smith, p.70.

Aiyelabola, the son of the late founder and performer of the same name then managed the troupe. Another protégé of the late Aiyelabola, Tijuku Ajangila was then the leader of the *Agbegijo troupe*, which had emerged as a rival troupe to that of his late mentor. He lost out on the commission and wanted vengeance. The usual ploy of performance groups in rivalry was usually to invoke the rain to ruin a rival's show. If this fails, they resort to the use of other forms of black magic. Tijuku invoked the rain but this failed. Tijuku then resorted to the second ploy against Olojede. It was a taboo in the egungun society for an actor playing the costume episode or *apada* to expose any of his features. Under Tijuku's spell, Olojede overplayed himself by unwittingly exposing his body just as he deftly overturned his costume in the *apada* dance. Thus came the opportunity for Ajangila to excise his pound of flesh.

The officials of the egungun society, in compliance with the dictates of their guild, quickly dispersed the crowd and summoned Olojede for trial at the sacred grove. Tijuku did not fail to instigate the supreme penalty, that is, the death penalty on his arch-rival. Olojede's bravery and stoicism stunned his admirers when he accepted the verdict with a promise to go round the town on a farewell performance. By the time he arrived at the palace where the Balogun of Ibadan resided, all the warlords were waiting with laurels and prizes. Inspired by this heroic treatment, he chanted, in melodic verse, the heroic exploits and tragic end of his father as an extended analogy of his own travails and anticipated end. Balogun Osungbekun of Ibadan remembered the detail of Aiyelabola's heroic performances and contribution to the success of the last war. He then adopted him as the Olubadan's masque-dramaturge from that moment onwards. That was how Olojede escaped the death penalty passed on him at the grove in Ikirun.¹⁵

I have adopted the Aiyelabola story in relation to the story of Ibadan to illustrate the extent to which the performing arts have shaped the tastes of elites in history; and the extent to which those elites have, in turn, shaped its efflorescence. It is equally crucial to note that the cultivation of those arts aided professionalism and the shaping of identities. Performance and its devices thereby transcend borders, as actors and guilds go from one town to the other strengthening cultural ties and interpretations.

15 Adedeji, p. 232.

Ibadan and the forging of a post-colonial identity

The most distinct aspect of Ibadan history in the 19th century was her position as a central war camp in which war heroes, slave raiders and ex-slaves came to settle. The identity complex of the city, therefore, lies in its plurality. According to Chief M. I. Okunola, Ibadan was not only central to those from the forests and the savannah belts alone, the site was blessed with the abundance of *Ipara* trees. Now the root of this unique tree was invaluable to warriors because it contains a stimulant called *odi*, which was used for hardiness in warfare. It was therefore convenient for warriors, marauders and criminals to return periodically to Ibadan for the supply of *odi*.¹⁶ Since a settlement has emerged, however, leaders came together to establish the semblance of governance. According to Samuel Johnson,¹⁷ Oluyedun, the son of the late *Afonja* of Ilorin, became the first *Aare Ona Kakanfo* (war general) of Ibadan. He preferred this title to that of *Baale* (administrative chieftain), because the former was his father's title and preference.

Lakanle, a brave warrior, could not take his favoured title of Balogun because *Kakanfo*, already taken by Oluyedun, was a supreme military title, so he deferred to Oluyedun on grounds of age and nobility. He therefore took the title of *Otun Kakanfo*, whilst the great Oluyole became the *Osi Kakanfo*. Thus was established other titles such as *Ekerin* (the fourth in command), *Ekarun* (the fifth in line) and *Ekefa* (sixth in line). There were other military titles such as *Aare Abese* and *Sarumi* (cavalry chief). These titles were more or less patterned after those of the Oyo empire, from which most of these warriors came. But given the ad hoc nature of the new city, these titles were less established and in a desultory fashion. The only Ife chief who remained in Ibadan was the great Labosinde, who was not only revered for his age, but also on account of his acumen. He declined the mantle of political leadership but was honoured with the title of *Baba Isale* or chief counsellor.

The story of Ibadan from the foregoing agglomeration of cultural facts and patterns points to one fact. What we call post-colonial identities in persons or settlements, towns or cities is a fluid, diverse phenomenon in the way a

16 Okunola, p. 2.

17 Johnson, p.244.

community is welded together. In other words, our chosen or inherited identities partake of multitudes and are therefore nomadic or transnational in outlook.¹⁸ We have earlier inferred that due to the anonymity in the status of migrant citizenship across Yorubaland in the 19th century, Ibadan's status as a cosmopolis was volatile. There was much rivalry and clashes over the control of influence and territory. There was a perennial search for authenticity and the establishment of citizenship. This was inevitable because the occupation and settling of a virgin territory created a sense of what May Joseph described as "inauthentic citizenship posed by the large and dispersed communities..."¹⁹

There must, of necessity, evolve a state of flux whereby social events and historical accidents will weld the varied amalgam into a nation-state with a peculiar identity. The nature of the violence of historical circumstances is of distinct types. The fact that slave raiders and burglars stole into the city regularly is only one aspect of the pervasive violence that attends new communities of varied composition which, for lack of homogeneity, often lacks in centrifuge. That, essentially, is the basis of the sprawling planlessness that is seen in the structure of the older parts of the city. A poet described Ibadan in the following lines:

Ibadan,
Running splash of rust
And gold – flung and scattered
Among seven hills like broken
China in the sun.²⁰

Needless to say that the scattered nature of the irregular lines stand for the state of Ibadan in the poet's mind. A more regular, even sedentary kind of violence was that of domestic slave owners, as was typified by the dramatized episodes of Akinwumi Isola's *Efunsetan Aniwura*,²¹ where a single woman, slave owner,

18 Joseph, p.13 – 14.

19 *ibid.*, p. 2.

20 J.P. Clark, "Ibadan" in A.G. S. Momodu and Ulla Schild, editors, *Nigerian Writing* (Benin: Bendel Book Depot & Horst Erdmann Verlag, 1976), p.130.

21 Akinwumi Isola, *Efunsetan Aniwura: Iyalode Ibadan* (Ibadan: University Press, 1979).

initiated new, acquisitive values and held the whole of Ibadan to ransom. It took the intervention of the Baale, Aare Latoosa, and a detachment of soldiers to bring the situation under control.

The truth, in reality, was that the migrant population had become enamoured of the assertive values inherent in empire making and empire building. They therefore become unduly adventurous as they turn their acquired aggression inward against themselves. After all, soldiers were bred to go to war to subjugate territories and capture booty, not stay at home and idle away. Even at the time of Captain Bower, as late as 1893, when the British had subjugated the country, able-bodied men in Ibadan were still openly talking of re-opening the unfinished campaign against the intruding Fulanis who had retreated to Ilorin.²² This means that the notion of dispersed nations seeking permanent amalgamation in new cultural and legal ties²³ is always the context of post-colonial identities. Pre-colonial identities are recognizable as statutorily cephalous, organically knit communities where lineage ties are sacrosanct. On the other hand, a post-colonial identity is acquired through choice or forced migrancy and by psychological participation in a newfangled set of values. Transnationality is therefore a granted notion of post-colonial, even post-industrial identity.

Ibadan, as a cosmopolis, occupies a unique centre in the history and politics of Nigeria from the latter half of the 19th century, because it presented itself as the savannah haven unto which all strangers came. Even today, its sprawling nature not only makes it the largest city in central Africa; it has become the most populous city in Nigeria. The other cities in Nigeria that rival it are Lagos (itself a conglomeration of towns), Kano and Aba. Lagos is the most ethnically variegated of the three because it is a coastal port.

By 1850, and within the Yoruba country, Ibadan had become the enchanted, neutral space into which an amorphous, 'inauthentic' mass of people aspired for citizenship. The network of demography and commerce matured over a century such that by 1950, Nigeria's premier university as well as the major multinational, publishing houses, theatres, cinema halls and missionary schools found their home therein. Given the educational and cultural facilities, performance guilds,

22 Johnson, p. 643.

23 Joseph, p.14.

cultural troupes and entertainers moved into the rather desultory city made up of various sub-cultures. This multi-cultural trait helped creativity, improvisation and the spirit of discovery. The already established troupes of doyens such as Hubert Ogunde, Duro Ladipo and Kola Ogunmola had their bases in or near Ibadan. Ogunde, it must be said, preferred a more ubiquitous, touring approach, with his real base in Lagos rather than in Ibadan. Even though the Yoruba elite tended to live in cities, the concept of post-colonial urbanization and exploitative commerce, which set itself on the Nigerian soil about 1860, accelerated the pace of modern, proto-industrial development. This represented a new phase, which sometimes aids new unusual artistic development, but at other times subverts art forms and their archetypes. For instance, new modes of religious worship and the emergence of a new kind of civil service elite began to affect the production and discrimination of artistic and cultural performance. The erstwhile street and market place dances of the *egungun* had to be modified into new structures of theatrical sensibility and codes. New forms of pleasure were also being created as new forms of communication grew. The radio and the more recent development of television also re-structured and modified the production of traditional art and performance.

While popular forms of indigenous theatre flourished, the advent of a university in 1948, with a liberal arts curriculum brought a coterie of foreign as well as indigenous artists. The only major difference being that the artistic productions that emerged from the new citadels of British provenance were conceived and written in the English language. By the late 1950s, scores of young writers, artists and publishers who had rediscovered a new sense of nationalism had come together to found theatrical troupes which perfectly complement the tradition of the Yoruba doyens mentioned above. Wole Soyinka set up Orisun Theatre. Taiye Ayorinde set up what he called the Nigeria Theatre Group and Christopher Kolade set up The Players of the Dawn. Orisun was succeeded by the Unibadan Masques of 1960. A pan-cultural group that brought together all the artists, writers and poets emerged in 1960, under the patronage of Ulli Beier, called Mbari Club. Its publishing organ was the journal called *Black Orpheus*, in which writers like Christopher Okigbo, John Pepper Clark, Aig Higo and Wale Ogunyemi first published their seminal works. Artists in other media like Demas Nwoko, a sculptor and builder; Tunji Oyelana, a singer/composer; Segun Olusola, Femi Johnson, Dapo Adelugba, who were actors and impresarios along

with Wole Soyinka, were all part of the Mbari Club. Mbari, the club's name, is derived from the Igbo concept of artistic commune and creativity. The clubhouse, made up of a bar, a bandstand or dais, a small hall and dance floor was located first at Ogunpa Oyo when it started. The location was strategic. This is because the studio of the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation (WNBC) was located at Dugbe, a mere three minutes walk from the clubhouse. The British Council Library and its courtyard, which serves as the rehearsal arena for the amateur theatre groups was directly across the road from the WNBC and four minutes from the Mbari Club. The university campus (UG) and the newly-established Western Nigeria Television (WNTV) would be about 6 and 4 kilometres north and east respectively of the Ibadan city. The Mbari Club replicated itself in Osogbo as the Mbari Mbayo Club under the leadership of Ulli Beier and Susanne Wenger, with Duro Ladipo and some other fine and visual artists as the central figures. The two Mbari centres at Ibadan and Osogbo stoked each other as complements. But while the Ibadan workshop promoted the performing arts, the Osogbo workshop promoted visual, textile and plastic arts. With the benefit of hindsight, the period was a cultural renaissance for Nigeria.

Ibadan was particularly privileged with this all-comers revivalist projects which coincided with political and cultural independence after a century of colonial subjugation and governance. A new set of literary and dramatic styles emerged with the help of the university and its new talents. The new publishing houses were both British and Nigerian, on the southwestern corner of the city, around Onireke and Jericho. Understandably, their locations were situated just a stone's throw from the temporary campus of the university at Eleyele. The new television station, the first of its kind in Africa sat on the southeastern part of the city at Agodi, near the seat of the Western Regional Government.

By the time of political independence in 1960, the conglomerate of 'nomadic citizenscapes' of the previous century, which Ibadan gathered, had forged a peculiar identity. Ibadan became the centre of political and cultural performance. It was in Ibadan that we had the violent political movements of 1964 – 1966, which ushered the military into Nigerian politics. It was also in Ibadan that the performance of art and the notion of citizenship became most ebullient. The situation was similar to what May Joseph described thus:

While theorists of participatory democracy may quibble about the degree of participation available or its progressive possibilities, none

disagrees that the inherently performative nature of citizenship is simultaneously learned, cultivated and improvised as a total work of citizenship in formation. Performance emerges as an implied sphere rather than an actually located process. It is the self-conscious enactment of the legal, cultural, and social structuring logic in post industrial citizenry.²³

A new wave of nationalist consciousness brought forth a certain robust performance and affirmation of citizenship and of nationality. This stream of evolving consciousness was continuous, as it was segmental. Artistic communes would fragment and merge again as the Mbari Club of artists at Ibadan seemed to do. The camaraderie at Ogunpa broke up on account of the painful civil war of 1967 – 1970. Most of the artists were torn between the different sides of the war, and many talents and bonds were forcibly broken. Some remained in Ibadan but many went to Lagos, Nsukka, Jos, etc. The club itself relocated from Ogunpa to Adamasingba in 1969. This coincided with the rehearsal of Wole Soyinka's *Kongi's Harvest*. In fact, the play was premiered in the club at Adamasingba. By 1971, when the first film version of *Kongi's Harvest* by Calpenny Films began to make the rounds in Ibadan and its environs, the sheer success of the production caused the erstwhile Mbari Club to be re-named Kongi Club. The Nigerian civil war, which ended in 1970, had left a scar on the cultural and artistic landscape, and the artists who returned were full of wistful longing, but a little too much of anguish to allow for the re-remembering of Mbari or Kongi Clubs. The hollow shell of the cultural renaissance had taken on a new, self-consumptive materialism. That vacuum exists to this day.

The story of Ibadan's first set of migrants became the story of its variegated polity, as reflected in the various theatrical and performance troupes, numbering almost 200.²⁴ These troupes moved in and settled in the new cultural capital. They reflected a motley of sensibilities and attitudes like a mirror before an applique. Today, Ibadan remains a reflector of the diverse geographical space called the Nigerian state. Each ethnic group has at last permanently settled in its original quarters, with the Hausa group in Sabo and Sasa and the Ebara group largely at *Ago Tapa* and Mokola. The Igbo group is somewhat less isolated. They

24 Biodun Jeyifo, "The Yoruba Popular Travelling Theatre of Nigeria", *Nigeria Magazine*, 1984, p. 200 – 203.

have settled in indigenous quarters and have stalls side by side with traders in the different markets in the city. The other south-west, south-south and south-east groups have also integrated with the people in the city. In the densely-populated sections of Agbowo, Akobo, Odo-Ona, Oluyole and Felele-Challenge layouts, the majority Yoruba group is complemented with settlers from other parts of the country. The indigenous areas of the 1830s and 1840s like *Oje, Oja'ba Foko, Isale Ijebu, Inalende, Oranyan, Oniyarin, Gege, etc.* are, however, still largely inhabited by the early settlers and their descendants. The great difference is that the founding elite of the 19th century were warriors, while the elite from the second half of the 20th century were the intelligentsia.

The cosmopolitan outlook of Ibadan continues to derive its legitimacy from the fact that the Yoruba people have always lived in large groups and urban centres. The Yoruba people, therefore, have escaped the problem of inbreeding, which is the result of treating others as strangers or intruders. This has also helped their mutant outlook, which, like their theatrical performances, 'are quick to adapt and appropriate from the skills and the repertoires of others'. This pride of place as a cultural melting pot has a large proportion of the nation's intellectual capital within its gates as well. The once symbol of a liberal cultural movement—the Mbari Mbayo Club—has now moved, though as a fragment, into a modern, post-industrial glass house called *Segi Restaurant*. The imposing business complex housing *Segi* is called Broking House and was established by Femi Johnson (now of blessed memory), who was himself an artistic connoisseur and accomplished actor with the Mbari and Kongi Clubs as well as with *The Players of the Dawn*. The present location of Broking House is southwest of the original Mbari Club. The name Kongi stands for the anti-hero. In Soyinka's play, *Kongi's Harvest*, the character with the name Kongi is an over-bloated egoist whose alter-ego in the same play is the fiercely feminist, Segi. What could be responsible for this proto-feminist 'about turn'? Is it the sensibility of an elite with cultural detritus flung over their shoulder? Or is it a matter of trying the flip side of a perplexing historical phenomenon? This is better left as a rhetorical aside.

The transmutation of the chauvinistic male symbol of Kongi into the equally profound Segi, a quarter of a century later, is perhaps a subtle pointer to the cultural transmutation of Ibadan and the identities of its pluralist, variegated denizens in the impending millenium. It is a millenium so subtle, so feminist as

to be ruthless and utterly demanding. The new pressures are no longer those of wars and gangsterism, but those of uneasy globalization, overpopulation, high fibre, low textured performance of citizenship and, in all sincerity, those of dire profligacy. In all of these, Ibadan is only a port from which to draw the cursor to the rest of our developing cultural capitals in West Africa. It is clear that the days of intense cultural affirmation in art and theatre are gone. They have been subtly replaced by the production of tawdry video films and loud, lurid television adverts. These are no longer 'classics' as we used to know them, but a ragbag of ideas from cultures far afield as South America, India, Southeast Asia, the United States and Britain. What outlets these would lead to are difficult to pinpoint, but a new kind of industrialization is well underway.

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