

# **YORÙBÁ IDENTITY AND POWER POLITICS**

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Edited by

*Toyin Falola and Ann Genova*



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Toyin Falola, Senior Editor  
The Frances Higginbotham Nalle Centennial Professor in History  
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# 7

## EARLY ÌJÈBÚ HISTORY: AN ANALYSIS ON DEMOGRAPHIC EVOLUTION AND STATE FORMATION

Tunde Oduwobi

In precolonial times, the Ìjèbú territory constituted a single kingdom under the *Awujale*, who was also the titular ruler of Ìjèbú-Ode, the capital of the kingdom. With a land area of approximately 8,130 km<sup>2</sup> (or 3,139 square miles), the Ìjèbú territory covers the eastern sections of Ògún and Lagos States of modern Nigeria. The Ògún State section is the larger of the two and is made up of about 6,360 km<sup>2</sup> (2,456 square miles). In terms of present-day local government arrangements, the Ìjèbú section of Ògún State comprises nine local government areas. These are, with their headquarters in parentheses: Ìjèbú East (Ogbere), Ìjèbú North (Ìjèbú-gbo), Ìjèbú Northeast (Atan), Ìjèbú-Ode (Ìjèbú-Ode), Ikenne (Ikenne), Odogbolu (Odogbolu), Ògún Waterside (Abigi), Remo North (Isara), and Sagamu (Sagamu). There are three Ìjèbú-speaking local government areas in Lagos State: Epe (Epe), Ibeju-Lekki (Akodo), and Ikorodu (Ikorodu).

The western portion of Ìjèbú, locally referred to as *Remo*, forms a sublinguistic unit with the speech of the area being phonologically characterized by the velar fricative, /gh/. For example *owó*, which means money, is pronounced *ogho*; *oruwo*, and "head" is rendered *orugho*.<sup>1</sup> The local government areas of Ikenne, Remo North, and Sagamu in Ògún State, and Ikorodu in Lagos State are the Remo parts of Ìjèbú.

### Demographic Evolution

The Ìjèbú are a subgroup of the Yorùbá. As is now known, the application of the term *Yorùbá*, in its general form, dates from the nineteenth century, the people



previously having no consciousness of themselves as a single ethnic group.<sup>2</sup> However, they had a common traditional belief of Ilé-Ifẹ̀ as the cradle of mankind.<sup>3</sup> For example, an Ìjẹ̀bú war chief asserted in 1886 that it was from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ that the first Ìjẹ̀bú king “went to settle in the Ìjẹ̀bú country . . . Even the English King can be shown the spot at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ from whence his ancestors went out.”<sup>4</sup> But even this contention illustrates another characteristic of Yorùbá origin traditions: namely, that the phenomena of demographic evolution (population development) and state formation (political centralization) are usually conceived as one. Commenting on the development of Yorùbá kingdoms, Samuel Johnson noted that “in ancient patriarchal times the king of a country was regarded as the father or progenitor of his people.”<sup>5</sup> From the foregoing, it may be surmised that the Yorùbá traditional belief that the world was created at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ reflects no more than that Ifẹ̀ emerged as the first kingdom in the Yorùbá area.<sup>6</sup>

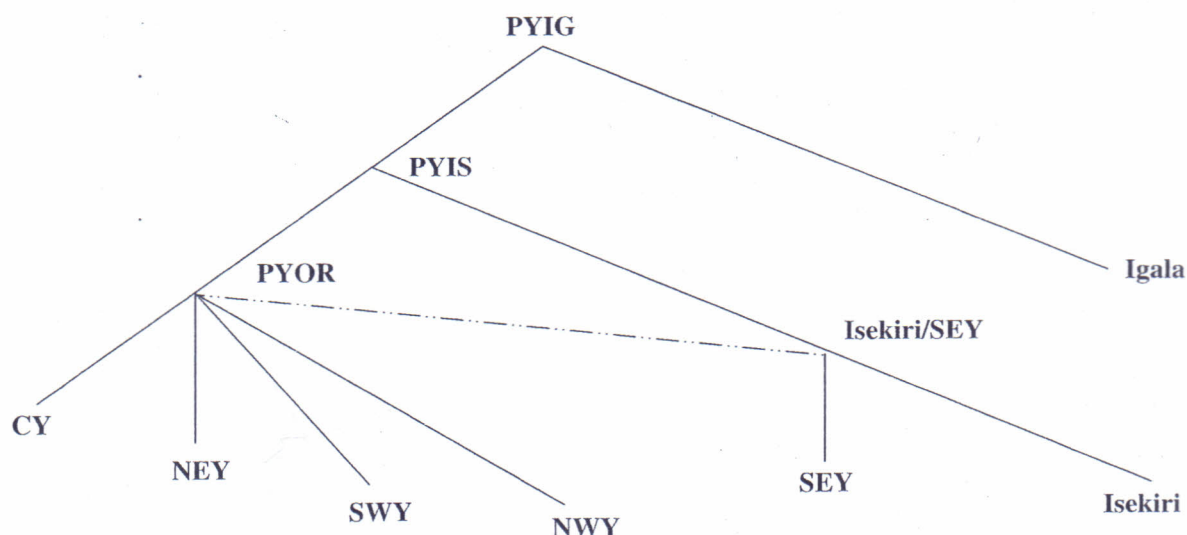
Linguistic studies have provided fresh insights on the issue of the demographic evolution of the Yorùbá. The Yorùbá language has been categorized among a number of genetically related languages, which cluster in the Niger–Benue confluence region.<sup>7</sup> This linguistic configuration has led to a suggestion of the Niger–Benue confluence region as the location of a parent language from which differentiation occurred as a result of successive population dispersion.<sup>8</sup> O. O. Akinkugbe has, in her study, attempted to shed light on major phases of the dispersion with regard to the Yorùbá. The first phase was the growth of a Proto-Yorùbá/Igala-speaking group in the Niger–Benue confluence region. Then there occurred a two-way split of the group, with one section moving westward and the other eastward. The westerly group developed as Proto-Yorùbá/Itsekiri. Subsequent southward movement of this group brought about the formation of two groups, namely, Proto-Yorùbá and Southeastern Yorùbá/Itsekiri. Over time, Proto-Yorùbá differentiated into four dialect groups, and Southeastern Yorùbá/Itsekiri separated into Southeastern Yorùbá and Itsekiri, with the former subsequently developing some contact with the rest of the Yorùbá groups (Figure 7.1).

For our purposes, the inference derivable from the foregoing is that the ancestors of the Ìjẹ̀bú, like those of other Yorùbá subgroups, originated from the Niger–Benue confluence region. R. G. Armstrong’s glottochronological computations of the development of the Yorùbá and other related languages suggest that the earliest Ìjẹ̀bú speakers had already settled in Ìjẹ̀bú by the beginning of the first millennium A.D.<sup>9</sup>

### The Traditions Reviewed

The earliest documented tradition concerning the early history of the Ìjẹ̀bú, as far as the present writer can ascertain, is recorded in Samuel Johnson’s *The History of the Yorùbás* written in 1897 and published in 1921. Johnson records two traditions on





- PYIG – Proto-Yorùbá/Igala  
 PYIS – Proto-Yorùbá/Isekiri  
 PYOR – Proto-Yorùbá  
 SEY – South-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Ondó, Owo, *Ìjẹ̀bù*, Ikale, Ilaje dialects)  
 CY – Central Yorùbá (comprising Ifẹ̀, Ijeṣa and Ekiti dialects)  
 NEY – North-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Yagba, Gbede, Ijumu and Ikiri dialects)  
 SWY – North-Eastern Yorùbá (comprising Tsabe, Ifẹ̀ (Togo) dialects)  
 NWY – North-Western Yorùbá (comprising Ọ̀yọ́, Ẹbaá and Egbado dialects).  
 The broken line represents subsequent contacts between SEY and the other Yorùbá groups.

*Source:* Based on O. O. Akinkugbe, "A Comparative Phonology of Yoruba Dialects, Isekiri and Igala" (Ph.D. diss., University of *Ìbàdàn*, 1978), 54.

**Figure 7.1.** Yorùbá dialect-groups.

the *Ìjẹ̀bù*, both of which attribute servile origins to them. In the first, the ancestors of the *Ìjẹ̀bù* are said to have been "victims offered in sacrifice by the King of Benin to the god of the ocean, hence the term *Ìjẹ̀bù* from *Ije-ibu*, i.e., the food of the deep."<sup>10</sup> In the second tradition, Johnson states that *Ọbanta*, who the *Ìjẹ̀bù* regarded as their progenitor, was a victim of sacrifice performed by the *Olowu* of Owu. *Ọbanta* was left for dead after the sacrifice, but he survived, and thereafter went on to found the *Ìjẹ̀bù* nation.<sup>11</sup>

Extant *Ìjẹ̀bù* traditions are, however, at variance with the versions offered by Johnson. In 1906, a British officer at *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* citing "Native tradition" reported: "The town of *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* is said to have been founded by 3 brothers who came from *Ilé-Ifẹ̀* and from two of them the town takes its name, *Ajebu* and *Olode*."<sup>12</sup>

It is further stated that the name of the third founder was Osi. He was, it is claimed, "the first King of Ìjẹ̀bù but was forced to abdicate in favour of Ọ̀banta [who] came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and was said to be the eldest son of the Ọ̀oni (king) of Ifẹ̀."<sup>13</sup>

The local historian, D. O. Epega, writing in 1919, also reports the above tradition, but adds that the displaced Osi (rendered in the alternative form, Osin) sought to immortalize his name by uttering an imprecation to the effect that peace would elude the reign of any future successor to the throne who failed to assume the authority of office in his (Osi's) name. It thus became the practice to salute a newly elected Awujalẹ̀ with chants of "owa Osi" (Osi's authority) at coronation.<sup>14</sup>

Another story of the tradition is reported in a document, which community leaders in Imusin submitted to local British officials in 1933.<sup>15</sup> The document, titled "History of Oloko, the King of Imusin," relates that Imusin was the first area to be settled in Ìjẹ̀bù. The migrants came from Ilé-Ifẹ̀ under the leadership of one Osifaderin, titled as the *Oloko*, who is said to be the eldest son of Oduduwa. Other notable personalities among the migrants were a hunter called Ajebu and two of Osifaderin's sons known as Osinumesi and Olode. These three persons subsequently left Imusin to found Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode. The name Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode was derived from Ajebu and Olode; Osinumesi was appointed as the ruler of the newly established settlement.

Osifaderin was later succeeded in Imusin by another son, Odute, during whose reign Ọ̀banta arrived in Ìjẹ̀bù. Odute advised Ọ̀banta to proceed to Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode where he would be made the new ruler, but that in taking power he should pay homage to Osifaderin's primacy. Accordingly, Ọ̀banta, on receiving the mantle of authority at Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, instituted the "owa Osi" salutation, the name Osi being supposed to be an abridged form for Osifaderin.

A further account of the details of the early period of Ìjẹ̀bù history is provided in two other sources. The first is a document submitted by Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode community leaders to the local British officials in 1937 (hereinafter referred to as the 1937 document).<sup>16</sup> The other is a published account written by T. O. Ogunkoya in 1956.<sup>17</sup> The first migration into Ìjẹ̀bù is said to have been led by one Olú-Iwa whose chief companions were Ajebu and Olode. These Ìjẹ̀bù ancestors originated from a place called Wadai, which, according to the 1937 document, is located "in the far [i.e., distant] East, that is, near Egypt."<sup>18</sup> The migrants had a stopover at Ilé-Ifẹ̀ before reaching Ìjẹ̀bù. The 1937 document states that Odùduwà, the Ilé-Ifẹ̀ king, gave his daughter, Gborowo, as wife to Olú-Iwa. But Ogunkoya records that it was the other way around, that Gborowo was Olú-Iwa's daughter, and Olú-Iwa gave her in marriage to Oduduwa. Nevertheless, both sources agree that Gborowo's marriage (i.e., either to Olú-Iwa or Odùduwà) resulted in the birth of Ogborogan, who subsequently became popularly known by the nickname Ọ̀banta.

Ogunkoya further reports that on the arrival of the migrants in Ìjẹ̀bù, Olú-Iwa directed Ajebu to mark out the boundary of Ìjẹ̀bù territory while he charged Olode with matters concerning the development of the premier settlement. And



"so well did Ajebu and Olode do their work," Ogunkoya writes, "that the new town was named after them Ajebu and Olode, now corrupted and called *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode*."<sup>19</sup> There is no mention in the 1937 document of the tasks *Olú-Iwa* assigned to Ajebu and Olode, but it is stated:

Ajebu and Olode had the honour of having the country and its capital called after their respective names; thus the whole nation is called "*Ìjẹ̀bù*" after Ajebu and the capital city which was formerly called "*ILE-ODE*" i.e., "the home of Olode" was called after Olode.<sup>20</sup>

The *Olú-Iwa*-led migration is reported in the two sources to have been subsequently followed by another under the leadership of one Arisu, also from Wadai. At Arisu's death, he was succeeded by one Osinmore, abbreviated as Osin in Ogunkoya's story. *Ọbanta* arrived in *Ìjẹ̀bù* during Osinmore's reign, and after a while the latter decided to yield authority to the newcomer. The 1937 document adds that it was agreed that Osinmore's name should be immortalized, hence the chants of "*owa Osi*" (or "*owa Osin*") that accompany the coronation process of a newly elected *Awujalẹ*. Ogunkoya, however, is silent on this issue.

In the foregoing, an attempt has been made to relate some of the better known versions of the traditions concerning the early period of *Ìjẹ̀bù* history. Doubtless, the traditions present a confusing picture. The discordant strands may be highlighted to ease examination and comprehension. The first is constituted by Ajebu and Olode, both of whom appear together in the accounts. In the tradition reported in 1906 and by Epega, Ajebu and Olode are associated with *Osi*. In the Imusin document, they are listed with *Osifaderin* and *Osinumesi*; and in the 1937 document and Ogunkoya's account they appear with *Olú-Iwa*. However, to place Ajebu and Olode in their proper historical perspectives, we should begin by noting that the word *ode* as it appears in *Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode* was a dialectal term for capital.<sup>21</sup> It was in this sense, for example, that the towns of *Ode-Ondó* (capital of the *Ondó* Kingdom) and *Ode-Itsekiri* (capital of the *Itsekiri* Kingdom) were originally referred.<sup>22</sup> In modern *Yorùbá*, *ode* translates as *olú ilú*, the premier or capital town.<sup>23</sup> Hence, the proper meaning of *ode* is only intelligible when used in the form "*Ode-Ìjẹ̀bù*," which, as one piece of contemporary evidence indicates, was applied in the early nineteenth century.<sup>24</sup> Also, if the word *ode* means capital, its epithetical form *olode*, translates as "the head of the capital town." Given this assumption, the claim reported by Ogunkoya, that the historical personage called Olode was asked to perform his assignment within the *Ìjẹ̀bù* premier settlement, seems likely to be an allegorical allusion to the *Awujalẹ* in his capacity as the ruler of the capital town of the *Ìjẹ̀bù*.

The same line of argument is applicable to *Ajebu*, which, as a term, might translate as "the head of *Ìjẹ̀bù*." Hence, the claim that one Ajebu was asked to mark out the *Ìjẹ̀bù* boundary—that is, charged with duties outside the premier settlement—might well be taken as an allegorical allusion to the *Awujalẹ* in his capacity as the *Ìjẹ̀bù* paramount ruler.



Thus, rather than associate Olode and Ajebu with the nomenclatural derivation of Ode and Ìjẹ̀bù as the traditions would have it, they more probably represent dis-used forms or titles by which the Awujalẹ was addressed in his dual status as the ruler of the capital town as well as the Ìjẹ̀bù paramount head. This suggestion, that Olode and Ajebu, as they appear in the traditions, are personified titles might be strengthened by an examination of the traditional claim that Ogborogan, which is commonly regarded as an abridged form for Ogborogannida,<sup>25</sup> was Ọbanta's original name. Reporting the recollections of an Ìjẹ̀bù who was enslaved in ca. 1820, M. d'Avezac-Macaya, a French ethnographer, recorded that the king of Ìjẹ̀bù was usually addressed by the title of "Obrogolouda."<sup>26</sup> d'Avezac-Macaya's rendition of the title apparently represents his difficulty in reproducing "Ogboroganluda" (or Ogborogannida). Thus, rather than being the original name of Ọbanta, *Ogborogan*, like Ajebu and Olode conceivably represents a dis-used form of addressing an Awujalẹ.

The second discordant strand of the received traditions relates to the institution of the "*owa Osi*" salutation. Again, we may note the differences. The Imusin version (1933) describes it as a posthumous honor for Osifaderin, whose son, Osinumesi, is said to be the first ruler in Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode, whereas in the Olú-Iwa-led migration story of the 1937 document, Osinmore is given as the name of the character who transferred power to Ọbanta. Despite these contradictions, it is possible to discern a unity consistent with the tradition of Osi's abdication as reported in 1906 and by Epega. Hence, the characters represented as Osifaderin and Osinumesi in the Imusin version are conceivably ingenious duplications of "Osi" intended to accord one way or the other with the tradition of Osi's abdication. Both names (Osifaderin and Osinumesi) might be used as abridged forms for Osi. The Osinmore of the 1937 document, identified as Osin by Ogunkoya, signifies (like Osifaderin and Osinumesi) another variation for Osi.

Although the central theme concerning Osi is that of displacement of authority, the historicity of the character need not be taken for granted. In Ìjẹ̀bù lexicon, the term *osi*, like *olú*, represents a synonym for *ọba* or implies royalty. Given this fact, and that the word *owa* connotes (state) authority, the refrain of "*owa osi*" (literally, "royal authority") that accompanies the coronation of a newly elected Awujalẹ signifies the conferment of state power (*owa*) on the new king (*osi*).<sup>27</sup> Cast in the role of transferring power to Ọbanta, therefore, "Osi," rather than being a historical figure, more probably represents an abstraction of political headship in pre-kingdom times.

The third discordant strand of the traditions relates to the character of Olú-Iwa, who appears in the 1937 account and Ogunkoya's as the head of the Ìjẹ̀bù primary migration from Wadai. In view of this acclaimed primary role, it is indeed puzzling that Olú-Iwa's name is not mentioned in earlier recorded accounts. To shed light on this issue, a few comments are necessary about Rev. Samuel Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*. As mentioned, this work was completed in 1897, but the manuscript, which was published in 1921, was prepared by the reverend's brother, Dr. Obadiah Johnson.<sup>28</sup> At a time when there was as yet little documented history



on precolonial Yorùbá society, Rev. Johnson's voluminous publication became the standard reference for early Yorùbá history.<sup>29</sup> The interest generated by the work may perhaps be illustrated by the evidence from an informant, active in local Ìjẹ̀bú politics during the colonial period, who told the present writer that he read *The History of the Yorubas* three times over.<sup>30</sup>

Johnson's claims, as discussed, that the ancestors of the Ìjẹ̀bú were of servile origin obviously provoked some disapproval in Ìjẹ̀bú. These claims were, for example, denounced by Epega in the preface to the second edition of his work published in 1934.<sup>31</sup> In response then, the traditional authorities might well have been inclined to provide a suitable tradition designed to undermine the publicized versions offered by Johnson. Thus, to counter the notion of servile origins, a rebuttal seemed to have been contrived that conceived the Ìjẹ̀bú as *omólùwàbí*, the traditional Yorùbá term for the freeborn, as distinct from *eru*, the slave.<sup>32</sup> For a morphological breakdown of the term, *omólùwàbí* (*omọ-olú-iwa-bí*) could literally be translated as "the child/children born of Olú-Iwa."<sup>33</sup> The name Olú-Iwa would therefore appear to have been adopted from *omólùwàbí* to discount any suggestion of the Ìjẹ̀bú as an inferior Yorùbá subgroup. It is within this context that claims of a consanguineous relationship between Olú-Iwa and Ọbanta (described by Johnson as the Ìjẹ̀bú progenitor who survived immolation) are also presumably to be understood. Equally worthy of mention is the claim in the 1937 document that Oduduwa prognosticated that Ọbanta's "kingdom shall . . . become great, and neither he nor his people shall be slaves to any man."<sup>34</sup> This was fulfilled, it is further stated, for "the Ìjẹ̀bús were never made slaves. . . ."<sup>35</sup> It may therefore be suggested that "Olú-Iwa" is a fictitious character invented as a response to Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas*; and hence the absence of the name in local historical traditions as first reported in 1906.

Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas* also seems to have inspired the conception of Wadai as the original home of the Ìjẹ̀bú in two ways. First, the claim of a different location for Ìjẹ̀bú origins as distinct from the tradition that the Yorùbá race originated from Mecca reported by Johnson<sup>36</sup> seems to represent an attempt to deny the authority of Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas* as a source of early Ìjẹ̀bú history. Second, the claim of an original homeland, which, like Mecca, is situated distantly to the east (of Ìjẹ̀bú), may well represent an attempt to associate the Ìjẹ̀bú with the Middle East—the cradle of ancient and renowned civilizations—suggesting thereby an illustrious ancestry.

It must be noted that the one point on which the Ìjẹ̀bú traditions are in agreement is the advent of a historical figure called Ọbanta. This concurrence, in view of the doubt already raised on the historicity of all other principal characters mentioned in the traditions, underlines the tradition reported by Johnson that Ọbanta was considered by the Ìjẹ̀bú as their progenitor. As already suggested, the role of progenitor implies kingdom founder.

More will be said presently on the state formation process initiated by Ọbanta, but we may quickly note earlier interpretations of the early period of Ìjẹ̀bú history by some scholars. P. C. Lloyd, working on the basis of the Osifaderin version (the



Imusin document), postulated the existence of a pre-Obanta kingdom called Idoko, the name from which its titular head, the *Oloko*, was derived. d'Avezac-Macaya, the French ethnographer mentioned earlier, records, on the basis of evidence from his Ìjẹ̀bù informant, the existence of an "Idoko nation" located in the southeastern section of Ìjẹ̀bù. He mentioned Abigì and Makun—both of which form part of the present-day Ògún—Waterside Local Government Area—as some of the Idoko towns.<sup>37</sup> Lloyd concludes that d'Avezac-Macaya's allusion to an "Idoko nation" "infers an important and distinct group of people,"<sup>38</sup> and that this group probably represented the relic of a pre-Obanta kingdom that had its capital in the Idoko area of Imusin that today comprises the three neighboring communities of Idoko Ajase, Idoko Olowa, and Idoko Aledo.<sup>39</sup>

But, although *nation* may suggest "a distinct group of people," d'Avezac-Macaya's reference may actually be an allusion to the fact that the Idoko area to the southeast, as evidence will be adduced to show presently, lay outside the parts constituting the nucleus of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom. The link between the Idoko area of Imusin and the other one further east mentioned by d'Avezac-Macaya is thus probably more nomenclatural than historical.<sup>40</sup> The historical importance of the *Oloko* probably lies in the fact that it represented the title for the head of an erstwhile Idoko community in Imusin, and that some inauspicious circumstances led to the tripartite fragmentation of this community and a consequent lapse of the title.<sup>41</sup>

Relying on Lloyd, O. O. Ayantuga refers vaguely to a first wave of migration into Ìjẹ̀bù leading to the foundation of the Idoko community in Imusin. Then, using Ogunkoya's account, he attributes the Olú-Iwa-led migration to be the second in Ìjẹ̀bù.<sup>42</sup>

E. A. Ayandele adopts a position similar to Ayantuga's. He submits that the Idoko were the autochthonous dwellers of Ìjẹ̀bù and that they were wiped out by the Ìjẹ̀bù immigrants led by Olú-Iwa. Ayandele, however, confuses Olú-Iwa with Obanta as one and the same person.<sup>43</sup>

O. Ogunba, on the other hand, inverses the order of migration proposed by Ayantuga by postulating that the first settlers in Ìjẹ̀bù were led in by Olú-Iwa, and that they were followed by another set, the Idoko group—presumably under Osifaderin. According to him, the Idoko established political sway over many settlements in Ìjẹ̀bù, including Ìjẹ̀bù-Ode where they placed a viceroy—that is, in the person of Osinumesi. The power of the Idoko was subsequently terminated by the establishment of the Awujalẹ dynasty. Ogunba concludes that political and cultural marginalization of the Idoko by the new dynasty in the succeeding centuries caused many to flee their original homes in the Imusin area during "the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries,"<sup>44</sup> apparently to become the "Idoko nation" of d'Avezac-Macaya's reference.

It will be observed that the various interpretations proposed have essentially been based on the Osifaderin and Olú-Iwa versions of the traditions. It has been necessary to examine them to underline the fact that the traditions deserve a more critical consideration. The analysis presented indicates that the extant



traditions concerning the early period of Ìjẹ̀bú history cannot be taken at their face value as providing the authentic details of events.

## Foundation and Development of the Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom

The earliest contemporary reference to the Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom appears in Duarte Pacheco Pereira's *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, written in the first decade of the sixteenth century.<sup>45</sup> The reference is contained in the following passage describing the Lagos Lagoon (mistaken for a river) and the nature of commerce in its environs:

Once inside the mouth [of the lagoon], it forms a great lake, which is more than two leagues wide and as many long,<sup>46</sup> and twelve or thirteen leagues above by this river is a great city called Geebu, surrounded by a ditch; and the river of this land in our days is called Agusale; and the trade which can be done here is in slaves, who are sold for brass bracelets [manillas] at 12 or 13 each, and some elephants' teeth.<sup>47</sup>

The "Geebu" of the passage represents Ìjẹ̀bú and the "Agusale" is presumably Awujalẹ. The Bini rendition of Awujalẹ is *Aghuzale*,<sup>48</sup> the form that Pereira has apparently written as "Agusale." Further, as F. D. Fage and Robin Law have observed, the association of "Agusale" with a river in the text is evidently to be attributed to the miscopying of the Portuguese word *rio* (river) for *rey* (king).<sup>49</sup> More importantly, however, Pereira's use of "Agusale," the Bini form, may well reflect the Bini origins of the founder of the Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom (i.e., Ọbanta) as claimed by Bini traditions. The Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom is said to have been established during the reign of Ozolua (c. 1481 to c. 1517), thus suggesting a date (in view of Pereira's early sixteenth-century evidence) late in the fifteenth century.<sup>50</sup>

The "great ditch" mentioned by Pereira is presumably an allusion to the huge earth ramparts currently known as *eredo* Sungbo (lit., Sungbo's *eredo*).<sup>51</sup> The *eredo* seem to have marked the original boundaries of the kingdom, for they encircle a substantial portion of what may be described as the kingdom's nucleus.<sup>52</sup> An examination of certain features within this core area indicate the character of the state formation process leading to the establishment of the Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom. Basically, this area is distinguished by a religious centralization in which the Awujalẹ is the pivot. The organization of the Agemo cult, the Awujalẹ's tutelary deity, typifies the phenomenon. As Oyin Ogunba's study on the cult indicates, the area is characterized by Agemo districts, each of which is headed by a chief priest called *alagemo*.<sup>53</sup> All the *alagemo* assemble at Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode for the annual Agemo festival (usually during July) at which propitiatory rites and sacrifices are made to the deity to shower blessings on the Awujalẹ. On the return of the *alagemo* to their respective districts, they organize a mini-Agemo festival called *Ifobu*, which is attended by minor Agemo priests, styled *alase*, under their district headship.<sup>54</sup>

This religious centralization was signified by the designation of *Oloja*. Thus, an *alagemo* was also usually referred to as *Oloja*, or, as P. C. Lloyd has observed: "Where



the village head has important ritual duties, notably at the installation or burial of the Awujale, he bears the title *oloja*.”<sup>55</sup> In other words, the significance of the title was conceived primarily in religious terms. However, outside the territorial zone signified by this religious centralization, *oloja* was strictly a political title.

In an attempt to shed light on the meaning of the title and its applicability in southeastern Yorùbáland, a British colonial officer once remarked:

The meaning . . . is apparently “The owner of the town” and not, as it would seem, “The owner of the market.” The [Yorùbá] word “*oja*” is possibly a derivative of the Jekiri [Itsekiri] word “*Aja*” meaning a collection of houses or a village.<sup>56</sup>

Akinkugbe’s study on the evolution of the Yorùbá and other related languages suggests that the Yorùbá *oja* and the Itsekiri *aja* are cognates for a settlement. And it is also instructive to note that among the Ìjẹ̀bù and some other southeastern Yorùbá groups (categorized as SEY in Figure 7.1), the indigenous term for market is *obu* and not *oja* as among the Yorùbá groups to the west.<sup>57</sup> Thus, *oloja*, which is an abridged form for *olú aja* or *olú oja*, means “town head,” and seems to have been the designation for community heads in pre-kingdom Ìjẹ̀bù.<sup>58</sup> Its conception in religious terms may therefore be explained as a feature of the institutional changes that marked the establishment of the kingdom. An alternative political term, *olóri ilú* (lit., town head), seemed to have been coined as a neologism for *oloja*.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, part of the institutional features marking the nucleus area included the fact that the political designation of *Otonba* (lit., an *oba*’s descendant) was applied to scions of the Awujale dynasty who founded and headed settlements. Such settlements bore the names of their founders, with the term *Odo* (settlement) attached as a prefix.<sup>60</sup>

Little evidence exists to enable an interpretation of the pattern of growth of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom. It may, however, be noted that the tenth Awujale, Obaruwa, is traditionally remembered as a warrior king who established the ruling dynasties of Ode and Makun in Remo.<sup>61</sup> Also noteworthy is a Portuguese reference to the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom in 1620 as “small but very warlike.”<sup>62</sup> Considering the fact that the kingdom was probably just a little over a hundred years old in the early seventeenth century, the balance of evidence would suggest that the early rulers of the kingdom were warrior kings who extended the political boundaries of the kingdom beyond its nucleus area. The epithet *Ajogun* (warrior) by which the Awujale is usually addressed is suggestive of this process. Thus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom, as described by d’Avezac-Macaya, constituted a “territorial core bearing the name Ìjẹ̀bù” with Remo (in the west) and Idokò (to the southeast) as its “dependencies.”<sup>63</sup>

It should be clear from the foregoing that as far as the origins of the Ìjẹ̀bù are concerned, the oral historical traditions do not take us beyond *Obanta*, that is, from the foundation of the Ìjẹ̀bù Kingdom. On the other hand, linguistic evidence seems to indicate that the origins of the Ìjẹ̀bù, like other Yorùbá subgroups, lie toward the Niger–Benue confluence area; and more specifically, that the Ìjẹ̀bù had,



by the beginning of the first millennium A.D., settled in their present homelands signified by their speech. However, by the fifteenth century they seemed to have evolved into three territorial groups, namely, a western section (Remo), a central section (Ìjẹ̀bú), and a southeastern section (Idoko). The central or Ìjẹ̀bú area was consolidated into a state at the end of the fifteenth century, and the resultant Ìjẹ̀bú Kingdom expanded to cover the other two sections in succeeding centuries.

## Notes

1. See A. Adetugbo, "The Yorurba Language in Yorùbá History," in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. S. O. Biobaku (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 189; and F. Akere, "A Socio-linguistic Study of a Yoruba Speech Community in Nigeria: Variation and Change in the Ijebu Dialect Speech of Ikorodu" (Ph.D. diss., University of Edinburgh, 1977), 337–38.

2. See Robin Law, "The Northern Factor in Yoruba History," in *Proceedings of the Conference on Yoruba Civilization*, ed. I. Akinjogbin and G. Ekemode (Ilé-Ifè: University of Ifè Press, 1976), 106–9; and Robin Law, "Ethnicity and the Slave Trade: 'Lucumi' and 'Nago' as Ethnonyms in West Africa," *History in Africa* (HA) 24 (1997): 205–6, 215.

3. An alternative view identifies the Ifè genesis strictly with the Yorùbá. But, as Robin Law has pointed out, this "separation of the origins of mankind in general from the origins of the Yorùbá, represents a rationalization of the general tradition of the creation of mankind at Ifè," resulting from a recognition of "the existence of other civilizations which could not plausibly be regarded as offshoots of the Yoruba." Robin Law, "How Truly Traditional is our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition," *HA* 11 (1984): 200n, *passim*.

4. British Parliamentary Papers (BPP) (ca. 5144), Ogunsigun to Moloney, April 26, 1886, enclosure in Moloney to Granville, June 23, 1886.

5. Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: C.S.S. Bookshops, 1921), 15.

6. Archaeological evidence suggests that the institution of kingship in Ilé-Ifè dates as far back as the eleventh century A.D. This is still the earliest known date for Yorùbá kingship. D. Calvocoressi and Nicholas David, "A New Survey of Radio-Carbon, and Thermoluminescence Dates for West Africa," *Journal of African History* (JAH) 20, no. 1 (1979): 18–19; cf. Frank Willet, *Ifè in the History of West African Sculpture* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1967), *passim*.

7. See J. H. Greenberg, *Languages of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1966), 8; P. R. Bennett and J. P. Sterk, "South Central Niger-Congo: A Reclassification," *Studies in African Linguistics* 8, no. 3 (December 1977): 272–73, *passim*.

8. B. E. B. Fagg, "The Nok Culture in Pre-History," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (JHSN) 1, no. 4 (December 1959): 289; Ade Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours before 1600," in *History of West Africa*, 2nd ed, 2 vols., ed. J. F. A. Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman, 1976) 1: 200–201; Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area," in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed. Obaro Ikime (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1980), 147–48; and Ade Obayemi, "The Peopling of Nigeria" (paper presented at the Workshop on the Teaching of Nigerian History from a National Perspective, Lagos, 2–8 February 1986), 14–16.



9. R. G. Armstrong, "The Use of Linguistic and Ethnographic Data in the Study of Idoma and Yorùbá History," in *The Historian in Tropical Africa*, ed. Jan Vansina, R. Mauny, and L. V. Thomas (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), 132.

10. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 18.

11. Ibid., 19.

12. National Archives, Ìbàdàn (NAI), IjeProf.9/2, Letter Book, 1904–1908, W. Stanley Hern, "A Report on the District of Ijebu-Ode for the New Civil Service List," 1 October 1906.

13. Ibid.

14. D. O. Epega, *Ìwé Ìtán Ìjẹ̀bú ati Awon Ìlú Miran* [A History of Ìjẹ̀bú and Some Other Towns], 2nd ed. (Lagos: Ifẹ̀-Olú Printing Works, 1934), 11. I was unable to lay hands on the 1919 edition.

15. See H. M. Martindale, "Commission of Inquiry Appointed to Inquire into the Political and Administrative Relations between the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode and the Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo," December 1937, Exhibit G. 73. Imusin is a conglomeration of about fifty very small settlements.

16. It is titled "A Brief History of Ijebuland with Special Reference to the Origin of the Akarigbo Chieftaincy." (From the private papers of late Chief T. A. Fowokan, the Olisa of Ijebu-Ode.)

17. T. O. Ogunkoya, "The Early History of Ijebu," *JHSN* 1, no. 1 (December 1956): 48–53.

18. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 1.

19. Ogunkoya, "Early History of Ijebu," 49.

20. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 1.

21. M. A. P. d'Avezac-Macaya, *Notice sur le Pays et le Peuple des Yebous en Afrique* (Paris, 1845), 57.

22. The Ondó capital is now simply referred to as Ondó, and the Itsekiri now have their capital in Warri. It is instructive to note in this connection that Akinkugbe's study shows that the Itsekiri language and the Yorùbá dialects of Ìjẹ̀bú and Ondo are genetically close (cf. Figure 7.1).

23. Another dialectal variant of *ode* is possibly *ilé*, which appears in Ilé-Ifẹ̀ and Ilẹ̀ṣà, the capitals of the Ifẹ̀ and Ijeṣa kingdoms. Again, it is instructive that the Ifẹ̀ and Ijeṣa dialects are classified as sub-branches of a dialectal bloc (cf. Figure 7.1).

24. d'Avezac-Macaya, *Notice sur le Pays*, 36, *passim*; P. C. Lloyd "Osifekunde of Ijebu," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. P. D. Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 247. For the coining of the term "Ìjẹ̀bú-Ode," see O. T. Oduwobi, "A Historical Study of Administrative and Political Developments in Ijebu, 1892–1960" (Ph.D. diss., University of Lagos, 1995), 40–41.

25. B. O. Adebajo, *Ìtán Ido Ìjẹ̀bú* [A History of Ìjẹ̀bú] (Lagos: John West Publications Limited, 1990), 6.

26. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 281.

27. The descriptive clause used for the coronation ceremony is *imunighu'wa osi*, literally "the act of making a person take on royal authority." See NAI, IjeProf. 2, File No. C. 17/4, Resident to Secretary, Southern Provinces, 19 May, 1933.

28. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, ix–x.

29. On this point, see B. A. Agiri, "Early Oyo History Reconsidered," *HA* 2 (1975), 1–2; and R. Law, "Early Yoruba Historiography," *HA* 3 (1976): 75–76.

30. Personal communication with Chief J. A. Jaiyeola, Lagos, 27 March 1988.



31. Epega, *Ìwé Ìtán Ìjẹ̀bú*, 4.

32. See, *A Dictionary of the Yorùbá Language*, 4th ed. (Ìbàdàn: University Press Limited, 1970); cf. A. K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, 3rd ed. (Lagos: Kash and Klare Bookshop, 1948), 26: "The Yorùbá maxim is *A ki ifi omólùwàbí je oníbodè*, meaning, 'No free born man [but a slave] is made to collect tolls.'" However, another use of *omólùwàbí* refers to a well-behaved person.

33. The 1937 document reports that Olú-Iwa was, during his reign, popular for his humaneness and fairness, thus: "any *Ìjẹ̀bú* of good character is described since then as *omo-olú-iwa-bí* meaning, 'the child begotten of Oluiwa,' constructed now to '*Omólùwàbí*,'" (Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 3).

34. "A Brief History of Ijebuland," 5.

35. *Ibid.*, 15.

36. Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas*, 3.

37. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 243.

38. P.C. Lloyd, "Sungbo's Eredo," *Odù* 7 (March 1959): 20.

39. *Ibid.*, 22; Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 243, 59n.

40. There are, for example, no historical links between the towns of Ode and Makun in Remo and those of the same names in the Waterside area except that of appellation.

41. This perhaps may be inferred from the claim in the Imusin document that the title fell into abeyance as a result of a civil disturbance that occurred at the death of one Oloko Adewunmi.

42. O. O. Ayantuga, "Ijebu and Its Neighbours, 1851–1914" (Ph.D. diss., University of London, 1965), 14.

43. E. A. Ayandele, "Ijebuland, 1800–1891: Era of Splendid Isolation," in *Studies in Yoruba History and Culture*, ed. G. O. Olusanya (Ìbàdàn: Ìbàdàn University Press, 1983), 89–90; E. A. Ayandele, *The Ijebu of Yorubaland, 1850–1950: Politics, Economy and Society* (Ìbàdàn: Heinemann, 1992), 1, 30, 4n.

44. O. Ogunba, "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People: A Study of Indigenous Festivals" (Ph.D. diss., University of Ìbàdàn, 1967), 13–19. Ogunba does not state the evidence for his claim of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. (Ogunba, "Ritual Drama," 19).

45. Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, trans. and ed., George H. T. Kimble (London: Printed for the Hakluyt Society, 1937).

46. This wide expanse on the Lagos Lagoon is locally referred to as *Lamgbasa*. Its counterpart is *Agan*, which is the large mass on the Lekki Lagoon. Bini traditions as recorded in J. U. Egharevba [*A Short History of Benin*, 3rd ed. (Ìbàdàn: University Press, 1960), 34] have it that Oba Ehengbuda of Benin met his death on the *Agan* sometime during the first decade of the seventeenth century. Egharevba, however, erroneously referred to the *Agan* as a river. Hence the conclusion in R. S. Smith [*Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, 3rd ed. (London: James Currey Limited, 1988), 77, 41n] that, "The river Aghan [*sic*] where the Oba met his death does not seem to appear on any map."

47. As cited in Robin Law, "Early European Sources Relating to the Kingdom of Ijebu (1500–1700): A Critical Survey," *HA* 13 (1986): 246.

48. See J. U. Egharevba, *Some Tribal Gods of Southern Nigeria* (Benin: self-published, 1951), 2.

49. J. D. Fage, "A Commentary on Duarte Pacheco Pereira's Account of the Lower Guinea Coastlands in His *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* and some other Early Accounts," *HA* 7 (1980): 65; Law, "Early European Sources," 246.



50. Egharevba, *Some Tribal Gods*, 12; cf. P. A. Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria*, 2nd ed., 4 vols. (London: Frank Cass, 1969) 1: 218. For the date of Ozolua's reign, see R. E. Bradbury, "Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History," *JHSN* 1, no. 4 (1959): 277-81; A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans* (London: Longman, 1969), 46-51.

51. For a description of the ramparts, see Lloyd, "Sungbo's Eredo," 5-22.

52. This covers the following local government areas: Ijèbú East, Ijèbú North, Ijèbú Northeast, Ijèbú-Ode, Odogbolu, and Epe.

53. Oyin Ogunba, "The Agemo Cult in Ijebuland," *Nigeria Magazine* 86 (1965): 176-86; Ogunba, "Ritual Drama of the Ijebu People . . .," *passim*.

54. The sixteen alagemo at the beginning of the colonial period were (their respective towns in parentheses): *Tami* (Odogbolu); *Magodo* (Aiyeye); *Moko* (Okun Owa); *Lasaowu* (Imoro); *Serefusi* (Igbile); *Ogegbo* (Ibowon); *Petu* (Isiwo); *Nopa* (Imusin); *Bajelu* (Imuku); *Lasen* (Oru); *Idebi* and *Lubamisan* (Ago-Iwoye); *Onugbo* (Okenugbo); *Posa*, *Ija* and *Ewujagbori* (Imosan). See M. B. Okubote, *Ìwé Ikekuru ti Ìtán Ìjèbú* [A Short History of Ijèbú] (Ijèbú-Ode: self-published, 1937), 63-64.

55. P. C. Lloyd, *Yoruba Land Law* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 149.

56. NAI, CSO. 26/3, File No. 29956, J. H. Beeley, "Intelligence Report on the Owo and Ifon Districts . . . Ondo Province," 1934, 8, as cited in Obayemi, "The Yoruba and Edo-Speaking Peoples . . .," 220.

57. Akinkugbe, "A Comparative Phonology," 34-37, 46-52.

58. Thus, for example, Ijèbú-Ode is associated with the title of *Ògbéni Oja* (community leader?) whose holder acts for the Awujale during interregna. See Oduwobi, "A Historical Study," 36-37. *Ògbéni* means leader or head.

59. For *olóri ilú* and the precolonial political institutions of the Ijèbú Kingdom, see Oduwobi, "A Historical Study," 29-40.

60. Examples are Odogbe (Regbe's settlement), Odosentalu (Sentalu's settlement) Odoyanta (Ayanta's settlement), etc. It is to be observed, however, that the title of *Otunba* is now corruptly rendered as *Otunba*, and that the latter form does not mean, "the right hand man of the oba" (i.e., the oba's principal counselor) as a literal translation might suggest. Cf. Jean Herskovits Kopytoff, *A Preface to Modern Nigeria* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), 296: "Otunba is a contraction of *otun oba*, meaning the senior assistant and adviser of the Oba."

61. Epega, *Iwe Itan*, 20-21; H. J. Ellis and James Johnson, *Two Missionary Visits to Ijebu Country 1892* (Ìbàdàn: Daystar Press, 1974), 8, 34. As mentioned (40n), two towns in the Waterside area also bear the names Ode and Makun. The distinction is usually denoted with the suffixes of *Remo* and *Omi* (water) to indicate the respective geographic locations of the towns.

62. "Relacao de Garcia Mendes Castello Branco," Brasio, *Monumenta Missionaria*, 6: 471, quoted in Robin Law, "Early European Sources . . .," 248.

63. Lloyd, "Osifekunde of Ijebu," 249-56.