

IDENTITY AND SOLIDARITY IN A YORUBA DIASPORA: THE *EGBE OMO ODUDUWA* IN NORTHERN NIGERIA, 1948-1966

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Introduction:

The Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria had profound inter-group relations with peoples of northern Nigeria well before the British colonial rule began in 1900. In different historical contexts, the shifting ethnic interaction was characterised by warfare, commerce, mobility and religions (especially around the old Oyo, Nupe, Borno, Borgu and Hausa city-states). The British colonial rule transformed the pattern of interactions. Between 1948 and 1966, the activities of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* constituted a turning point in the Hausa/Fulani -Yoruba relations. Among the Yoruba in northern Nigeria, as elsewhere, diaspora identity was expressed in terms of associational life, settlement patterns, social, religious, political and economic institutions. Yoruba diaspora in Northern Nigeria identifies with other diasporas globally; in terms of commitment to home, a collective memory and idealization of home, and an aspiration to return home.¹ Appadurai's study of "ethnoscapes" is buttressed by Trager's concept of "multilocality" among the Yoruba migrants, which implies, "the attachment to and participation in social and economic activities in a number of places."²

Existing studies of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* concentrate on the activities of the association in Yoruba land without paying attention to how Yorubas resident in other parts of Nigeria used the association to organize themselves. For instance, S. O. Arifalo's comprehensive

work on the history of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* does not provide details on its activities in northern Nigeria. The aim of this paper is to fill the lacuna that exists in the literature on the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. This provides a more nuanced understanding of the role of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in the Yoruba diaspora identity, inter-group relations and party politics. In this paper, the concept of diaspora is used to describe a community that has a history of migration, possesses distinctive cultural practices that distinguished it from the host community, and maintains cultural ties with the homeland.³ As an analytical category and social theory, the postmodern adoption of diaspora in the study of Yoruba in Northern Nigeria implies a community living ‘here’ and relating to a ‘there’. Diaspora refers to a community living outside of, and interacting with its homeland by maintaining economic, political and kinship ties.⁴ Yoruba diaspora in Northern Nigeria refers to the Yoruba migrants living outside Yorubaland but interacting with it. The use of Yoruba diaspora within the Nigerian context poses internal contradictions relating to the hierarchical nature of citizenship and ethnic stratification. Citizenship in Nigeria is characterised by a high degree of competition, ethnocentrism and differential power. While there are differential rights, power and social positions assigned to natives/indigenes/hosts and migrants/strangers, on the whole, there is inequality of power and opportunity among citizens. This dichotomy has over the years, set the stage for ethnic conflicts.

In Castells’ view, identity refers to people’s source of meaning and experience. Identity symbolizes the process of construction of meaning on the basis of culture and historical experiences. Identities are ever emergent and always in the making. Berger considers identity to be “socially bestowed, socially sustained and socially transformed.”⁵ Identity implies a person’s sense of belonging to a group which could be religious or ethnic. Ethnic identity goes beyond individuality and self-awareness, but identification with shared values and beliefs of a social

collectivity into which a person belongs. Ethnic identity is also defined in relation to an “other,” or “we” versus “them” syndrome. This could involve the feeling of superiority/inferiority, fear and lack of trust of others and lack of familiarity with the values and beliefs of others. Nagel (1994) and Waters (1990) cited by Sanders (2002: 328) suggests that “the ways in which insiders and outsiders go about characterizing a group, and thereby positioning it and its members in the larger society, are responsive to the social and historical context within which intergroup interactions take place.” Ethnic identities are fluid across time and social contexts.

Ethnic Nationalism Under Colonial Rule

Under colonial rule, ethnic nationalism as a categorical identity was invoked by power elite and other personalities in the political and social struggles. Ethnic nationalism and solidarity was a pre-eminent rhetoric in the emergent political communities and mobilisation. Agbese (2001: 125) demonstrates that colonial administrative exigencies warranted ‘the invention of tradition,’ and the flourishing of an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ syndrome: Muslim versus Christian; Northerner versus Southerner; Hausa/Fulani versus Yoruba; Yoruba versus Igbo. British colonial rule set the context of regional educational, economic and political imbalances that became potent in the mobilisation or manipulation of identity politics.⁶ The legacy of colonialism helped to shape the discordant nature of ethnic relations in postcolonial Nigeria. Cornell is of the view that “while circumstances construct identities, identities, via the actions they set in motion, are also capable of reconstructing circumstances.”⁷

In Nigeria, the colonial state in an attempt to solidify its authority co-opted ethnic organisations. According to Yinger in some developing states, ethnicity has been accepted as an organising principle, to some degree because no one ethnic group has had sufficient power to declare itself the core. The effloresce of ethnic associations stems from the paternalist form of

colonial state building. Colonial state steadfastly supported ethnic nationalism and traditional political authorities. Radical political groups that were trans-ethnic and national in outlook were prohibited. The colonial state had adopted a paternalistic policy in order to discourage the expression of public grievances, while promoting highly ethnicised, covert and fragmented nationalism. As opposed to radicalised associations, the British were favourably disposed to the emergence of ethnic associations. This is why Nigeria does not have citizens but indigenes of various communities. In October 1948, the Governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, intervened in the growing hostilities between Igbo and Yoruba elites. The Governor's support for the *Egbe* was indicated as follows:

As regards the Yorubas, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa was, I believe, formed to wake the Yorubas from their lethargy, to create an enlightened ethnic group which could play its part in the new constitution and resist being swamped by more vigorous Igbos.⁸

As Mamdani (2002) argues, rather than unite diverse ethnic groups in a common predicament, colonial domination was mediated through a variety of ethnically organised local powers. Ethnicity became another source of power. The subject population were incorporated and not excluded from the arena of colonial power. In northern Nigeria for example, indirect rule signified a rural tribal authority. Mamdani explains that political inequality went alongside civil inequality. The dichotomy between the natives and non-natives were salient features of colonialism, especially the one by the British.

In this scenario, it was ironical that the so called 'urbanised and detribalised African elite' spoke the language of culture and enforcement of customary powers as opposed to language of civil society and equal rights. Indirect rule reinforced ethnically bound institutions of control. The local apparatus of the colonial state was organized either on an ethnic or a religious basis.

Given that colonial rule produced a new ethnic map, there emerged bewildering variety of nationalisms. In 1938, the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in its charter canvassed for the unification of ethnic groups through a search for ideal and interests. However, the NYM was unable to escape from the consequences of the inexorable power of ethnic politics and rivalry. Following the Ikoli-Akinsanya conflict, NYM became the first political victim of ethnicity.

Nationalists reached out to the grassroots in their various localities not in national but ethnic form. Nnoli (1995: 66) suggests that in ethnically homogenous regions where the level of education was low, the nationalist leaders were compelled to speak in local languages and convince the people of the benefits to be derived from nationalism. Educated elite and nationalists used ethnic appeals emphasizing the tangible benefits to be derived in the post-colonial period. Most of the political parties founded in the 1950s were inspired by ethnicity.

The paper argues that Yoruba migrants in northern Nigeria were motivated by the forces of economics, politics and kinship in embracing *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. Under colonial rule, Yoruba migrants in northern Nigeria were regarded as aliens, subjected to physical segregation in Sabongari and economic discrimination as well as denial of political rights. Most migrants in Nigerian cities and rural areas cannot live or operate as citizens.

The Development of Ethnic Associations Among Yoruba Migrants in Northern Nigeria

From the early 1900s, Yoruba migration to northern Nigeria gathered momentum with the British colonial rule, the expansion of the colonial economy and development of railway lines. Many Yoruba migrated to northern Nigeria as colonial clerks, railway and European firm workers, missionaries in religious centres, independent traders and contractors as well as Licensed Produce Buying Agents. Late Chief Bola Ige recounted how his father, Solomon Ige worked as a signal man with the Nigerian Railway between 1916 and 1941 and served at most

important railway stations between Osogbo and Zaria.⁹ Many Yoruba made commercial fortunes along railway stations, urban and rural areas of northern Nigeria either as traders or artisans.

Long before the formation of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in 1948, Yoruba people in northern Nigeria had formed several organisations and unions to address their commercial, social and political challenges. The Sabongari system in northern Nigeria encouraged the formation of Yoruba ethnic organisations outside Yorubaland that performed mainly socio-economic roles and without political inclinations. Under colonial rule, migrants re-imagined their towns and villages through complex relations and linkages as well as ethnic unions.

Yoruba Kola nut traders in Jos, for example, opposed the excessive taxation imposed on them by the *Sarkin Kasuwar* Jos. In June 1926, the Yoruba traders presented their grievances to the colonial office against paying a *Rumfa* or Stall Tax of 3d per week for selling kola nuts and at the same time pay a tax of 1/-each bale brought into the market. The Yoruba traders opposed the double taxation due to the depressed state of Kola trade. They argued that the stall tax could be raised but imposing a tax on kola nuts in the market should be abolished. Prior to the imposition of tax, the *Sarkin Kasuwar* had been in the habit of taking 30 kola nuts from each bale, selling them, and crediting them to Market Dues Native Administration. His reason for altering the procedure to a flat-rate tax of 1/-on each bale was due to the complaints by Yoruba traders that he took the biggest kola nuts out of the basket. Comparatively at the period, the Stall or *Rumfa* tax was lower than in Kano, Zaria, Kaduna and Minna markets where kola sellers were made to pay from 1/6 to 2/6 per month.

Both the *Sarkin Kasuwar* and Yoruba traders agreed that: a) the tax on the bale of kola nuts, (1/-) be abolished and in its stead that b) the Stall Tax, payable not on the stall, but on each seller in the stall be raised from 1/-per month or 3d per week to 2/6 per month or 7½ per week.¹⁰

By October 1940, the Yoruba Community in Kaduna organised “The Yoruba Union.” It was requested that all communications on social or political matters concerning the Yoruba in general should be addressed to the Union for action, and that no notice should be taken of any other communications emanating from any section of the Yoruba, which had been embodied in the Union. This was to foster cooperation and better understanding between the colonial state, the Hausa host community and the Yoruba migrants.

In Kano, on August 18 1942, the Yoruba migrants notified the President of the Sabongari Mixed Court on the formation and inauguration of Yoruba Central Welfare Association (*Egbe Agbajo Ile Yoruba*). The Inaugural meeting of the association had 208 members. Working officers duly appointed at a mass meeting in the Colonial Hotel, Kano on 10 July, 1942 included: Mr. Kassim F. Hanid (President), Mr. D.A. Ogunbiyi (Vice President), Mr. M.T.E. Ajayi (General Secretary) and Mr. S.I. Adesokan (Assistant General Secretary). Mr. Sani Giwa Akiyode was appointed as the “*Olori*” (Chief) of the Yoruba in Kano. The Yoruba Central Welfare Association was established as a national concern to cater for the need and welfare of Yoruba migrants in Kano. Its objectives included: the promotion of unity and brotherhood among Yoruba generally regardless of clan and creed; the promotion of the welfare of Yoruba people in Kano particularly and in the Northern Region and to take keen and active interest on such matter or matters that will be an asset to the amelioration of Yoruba at home and abroad.

However, no official recognition was accorded the organisation by the President of the Sabongari Mixed Court. It was considered that the establishment of the Yoruba Central Welfare Association would create bad influence on the other ethnic unions to demand for similar recognition. Moreso, since the assessor of the Mixed Court was appointed as Chief of the Yoruba, it was considered that, it could lead to corruption and place Sabongari under two chiefs.

But the Yoruba migrants in Kano raised their objection to the opinion of the President of Sabongari Mixed Court. The Resolution passed at their general meeting held on 19 October, 1945 suggests that:

Be it resolved that the Yoruba Central Welfare Association, Kano viewed with great concern the present system of administering justice in the Mixed Court, Sabon-Gari, Kano, in all Civil Cases such as divorce, claim of properties by a deceased family, in the community, etc which have become unsatisfactory to all the Yoruba elements in Sabon-Gari, as case of such nature come directly under their Native Law and Custom.

The association appealed to the colonial authorities to advise the President of the Mixed Court to refer all such cases to Chief Sanni Giwa, the leader of the Yoruba in Kano.

Formation of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*

From the 1940s, ethnic solidarity became the new rhetoric of belonging. By forming *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, the Yoruba were grooming for political representation within the emerging Nigerian nation. At the onset of the Egbe, it was observed that, “*Egbe Omo Oduduwa* still prefers to be known as a Yoruba movement,...The issue of the Northern boundary of Yorubaland and not self-government, takes precedence in Egbe discussions”.¹¹ In 1957, Obafemi Awolowo noted that the underlining aim of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was to serve the Yoruba for the role played by Nnamdi Azikiwe in mobilising the Igbo since his return to Nigeria in 1931. This brings to mind the instrumentality theory popularised by Anthony Smith which posits that ethnic loyalty are the actions of community leaders who used cultural groups as sites and spaces of mass mobilisation and political strategy in the competition for power and resources.

Thus, the formation of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* had three-fold fundamental objectives: to foster unity among the Yoruba by promoting its cultural heritage and traditional leadership, to

rescue the Yoruba from the threat of other ethnic groups, especially the Igbo, and to empower the Yoruba youths educationally. An overriding objective was to protect the Yoruba from the “danger of Igbo domination.” *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was conceived by Yoruba intelligentsia studying in the United Kingdom who wanted to infuse “Yoruba nationalism” into the Yoruba speaking people. According to Ige, “Oduduwa was invoked and brought out from the shadows; his ‘children’ flocked to where he beckoned”.¹²

The collapse of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) signaled the rise of ethnicity and cultural organisations in Nigerian politics. In 1941, the Igbo members of the NYM led by Azikiwe pulled out of the organisation following the disputed election. The aftermath of the NYM crisis opened up ethnic consciousness and mobilisation that continue to characterise political space in Nigeria. According to Sofela, the NYM became virtually a Yoruba organisation and for the first time, an organisation that had had the fortune of operating as a national organisation dwarfed into a pseudo-ethnic organisation. By 1944, the Igbo State Union was formed under the leadership of Azikiwe. The formation of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* followed suit in 1948.

The *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* started in London as a student cultural organisation. It was not the first of its kind in Nigeria. It was preceded by the Igbo State Union, founded two years earlier. At the time *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was founded, Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC was the most influential politician in Nigeria. He was supported by many Yoruba who perceived the formation of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* as a set back on the vision and collective struggle against the British over lordship. The Yoruba of the NCNC political persuasion with the tacit support of Azikiwe founded a rival Yoruba organisation called the Federal Union. The construction of Yoruba identity under the aegis of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* produced new alignments and

revived old rivalries in the intra and intergroup relations of the Yoruba. *Egbe* was simultaneously a source of unity as well as a source of conflict and tension.

At the *Egbe*'s inaugural conference held at Ile-Ife in June 1948, Sir Adeyemo Alakija, the President remarked that: "This Big Tomorrow... (for the Yoruba) is the future of our children...How they will hold their own among other tribes of Nigeria...How the Yorubas will not be relegated to the background in the future".¹³ This declaration was corroborated by Mr. Isaac Delano, the Secretary of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* during the Egba Central Native Council Meeting held on June 29, 1950. Mr. Delano remarked that the *Egbe* stood for the advantage of the whole of Yorubaland and Yoruba people in general. The *Egbe* aimed at promoting all things pertaining to the progress of the Yoruba "race" and what was most important to the people of Yorubaland was the education of their children. It was noted that before the late 1940s, education was intensively encouraged by the Yoruba and they were acknowledged as leaders in the pursuit of education, but the trend got deteriorated. Of the 120 students at the University College, Ibadan, forty were Yoruba. Yoruba were few in the list of students winning scholarships for further studies. Education in Yorubaland got deteriorated and there was little progress under colonial rule. This spurred the *Egbe* to tour Yorubaland and motivate the people towards the education of their children. In order to train highly qualified teachers, the *Egbe* awarded seventeen scholarships to Yoruba students at the University College, Ibadan who were required to teach exclusively in Yorubaland after their qualifications. The cost of the scholarships per annum was estimated at £1,000. The *Egbe* also awarded scholarships to secondary school students.¹⁴

The formation of the *Egbe* intensified the Igbo-Yoruba tension and rivalry from 1948. A member of the *Egbe* declared that:

We were hunched together by the British who named us Nigeria. We never knew the Ibos, but since we came to know them we have tried to be friendly and neighbourly. Then came the Arch Devil to sow the seeds of distrust and hatred...We have tolerated enough from a class of Ibos and addle-brained Yorubas who have mortgaged their thinking caps to Azikiwe and his hirelings.¹⁵

As Iweriebor (1996: 134) explains, power struggles developed between the NCNC and Igbo intelligentsia in the Ibo State Union on the one hand, and the NYM and Yoruba intelligentsia in *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* on the other. The power struggles took place through the ‘vituperative press exchanges.’ Press war ensued between the two groups. *The West African Pilot* published by Azikiwe and the *Daily Service* published by the *Egbe* became major contestants. The “cold war” nearly snowballed into violence as Igbo and Yoruba nationalists bought up machetes in local markets between July and September, 1948. *The West African Pilot* declared that:

Henceforth, the cry must be one of battle against Egbe Omo Oduduwa, its leaders at home and abroad, uphill and down dale in the streets of Nigeria and in the residences of its advocates...It is the enemy of Nigeria; it must be crushed to the earth...There is no going back, until the Fascist Organisation of Sir Adeyemo has been dismembered.¹⁶

Between late 1947 and 1949, there was inter-communal “war of nerves” in Lagos. At a meeting of the Egbe’s Ile Ife branch in June 1948, Dr. A.F. Beyioku who conducted “a special invocatory service” described the *Ooni* of Ile-Ife as “lighting the lamp of liberty at the shrine of Oduduwa and handing it to Sir Adeyemo Alakija as the leader of the *Egbe*.”¹⁷ The historic Lamp of Liberty lighted at Ile-Ife conference of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* on June 5th 1948 was preserved in the Museum. An eye-witness account by T.O. Olujare, a member of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* who witnessed the event recounted that:

Collaboration with Egbe Omo Oduduwa were deeply debated among the Yoruba township or sub-ethnic groups. For example, the Lisabi Club sympathized with the *Egbe* and wondered why it faced adverse media propaganda. At the Lisabi meeting it was argued how some Yoruba formed a parallel organisation: Yoruba Peoples' Union or Yoruba League.

The *Egbe* eulogized Oduduwa as the hero, warrior, leader and father of the Yoruba people. He was also described as an offspring of spiritual parents who symbolized greatness. According to Arifalo, "In short, Oduduwa was surrounded with a quasi-religious symbolism as the founder of the Yoruba nation. The Oduduwa Almanac presented to the world for the first time, an inaugurative, impressive symbolic portrait of Oduduwa, the Yoruba 'patriarch.'"¹⁸ The *Egbe* adopted as its symbol and emblem, a lamp with five wickets, *Atupa Oloju Marun*. It was first announced that the five wickets represent the five leading *Oba* in Yorubaland: the *Ooni* of Ile-Ife, the *Alaafin* of Oyo, the *Alake* of Abeokuta, the *Awujale* of Ijebu-Ode and the *Oba* of Benin. Following protests by other Yoruba *Oba*, the *Egbe* claimed that the five wickets on the lamp symbolized the virtues and the ideals of the *Egbe*: love, charity, concord, friendship and prosperity.

Cultural construction was placed in the service of ethnic mobilisation. Nagel, 1994: 165 suggests that cultural renewal and transformation are important aspects of ethnic movements. Cultural claims, icons, and imagery are used by activists in the mobilisation process; cultural symbols and meanings produced as ethnic movements emerge and grow. According to Calhoun (1993: 211), ethnic solidarities and identities are claimed where groups do not seek "national" autonomy but rather recognition internal to or cross-cutting national or state boundaries. By forming *Egbe*, the Yoruba were grooming for political representation within the envisioned Nigerian nation. On 6 June, 1948 after a Sermon by Rev. J.S. Adejumo, the Endowment Fund of

£3000 was announced. It was decided to hold an Oduduwa Day as a public holiday every June. The programmes were attended by Yoruba traditional rulers and chiefs. Several Yoruba civil servants developed keen interest in the affairs/formation of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* that they requested the colonial administration to grant them leave in order to attend *Egbe*'s functions.

Expansion of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in Northern Nigeria

The formation of the *Egbe* created a forum for the discussions of issues affecting the Yoruba at home and the diaspora. For reasons of politics, personalities and history, not all the Yoruba supported the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* but within few months of its establishment, it spontaneously spread to several parts of Nigeria, as far as Sokoto. Three major factors could be adduced for the spread of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* among the Yoruba migrants in northern Nigeria. These include cultural nationalism; discontent against colonialism and re-homing processes. In January 1948, following the formation of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in Lagos, the Sokoto branch was established. Educated Yoruba migrants in Sokoto, who were principally in the colonial service and employees of European firms converged at the residence of Mr. R.O. Lagunju for the launching of the association. The main resolution was that the founding of the association was neither anti-Igbo nor any other ethnic group in Nigeria.¹⁹

On 7 February, 1948, the Ibadan branch of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was launched during the historic meeting at Oke-Ado in the residence of Barrister Obafemi Awolowo. "Lagos People" stormed Ibadan for the inauguration of the *Egbe*. According to Sir Adeyemo Alakija in his address to the dignitaries, the *Egbe* had formulated scholarship schemes not only for scholars of poor parents, but to give overseas industrial training to worthy sons of Yorubaland.²⁰ In February 1948, the Funtua branch of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was formed under the Chairmanship of Mr.

Salami Ajibade-the head of the Yoruba Community. The first outing of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Minna was marked in the form of a dance round Minna town. The dance commenced from the house of the Chairman, Mr. E.A. Oyeshola after a group photograph of all members and executives. The houses of all members were visited. The *Egbe* feasted at the houses of the Chairman and Mr. E.A. King, the *Sarkin Yorubawa*, Minna.

The branches of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in northern Nigeria were not only engaged in cultural nationalism and mobilization, but also social and intellectual events. Within a short period of its inauguration, the Zaria branch of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* justified its existence by multitudes of activities such as sporting events including Wrestling Contest which was held under the patronage of Mr. R.L.B. Maiden, Acting Resident, Zaria.²¹ The Zaria branch was formed on 17 December, 1947 and 100 members were sworn in. Meetings of the *Egbe* were held at the residence of *Sarkin Yorubawa*. It is equally noteworthy that in some other branches, the unity of all Nigerians irrespective of ethnic differences was stressed. For example, *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Funtua stressed the importance of Unity among all ethnic groups in Nigeria. On 9 April, 1949, the inaugural meeting of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Ilorin was held under the leadership of Mr. M.A. Adeyemi of the Agricultural Department. Equally, in 1949, the inaugural meeting of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* Makurdi took place at UNA Church, Wadata under the Chairmanship of Mr. Kadiri Kakafo, the *Oba Yoruba*.

Egbe's Tour and Ethnic Mobilisation in Northern Nigeria

Isaac O. Delano, a renowned author and cartoonist of Hosanna Lodge, Ibadan was appointed the Field Secretary of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* in July, 1948. From 5 to 28 May 1949, Mr. I.O. Delano carried out extensive tour of northern Nigeria on behalf of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. Mr. Delano's visit aided the flourishing of branches of the *Egbe* in northern Nigeria. At Ilorin, his

visit re-echoed the historic question of whether Ilorin would be part of the South or remain in the North in 1950. According to Delano, without Jebba Railway Station there is no Jebba town. Jebba, as a settlement and its residents were connected with the Railway. All *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* members at Jebba were connected with the Railway. As traders and fishermen, the success of their enterprises depended entirely on the Railway.²²

He visited Minna, Jebba, Zaria, Samaru, Kano, Jos, Bukuru, Kafanchan, Funtua and Kaduna. In all these places, Mr. Delano was given heroic reception commemorated by cultural dances and funfair. On 5 May, 1949, Mr. Delano arrived Minna through the Down Limited Train from Jebba. At the time of his arrival, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was already a strong force in Minna. He was received by over 1000 members of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* at the Railway Station. On arrival, he was accompanied by the executive and members of the *Egbe* with drummers of *Gangan*, *Aro*, *Shekere*, *Juju* and *Kakaki* in a long procession to the house of Rev. J.O. Ogunbanjo where he lodged. On the way, the song, “*Tani lawa o ni baba, kai a ni baba, Oduduwa baba wa, kai a ni baba, Alakija baba wa, kai a ni baba*” (Who says we don’t have father? Oduduwa our father, yes we have father, Alakija our father, yes we have father) was sung throughout. This was a demonstration of their loyalty to the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. Mr. Delano’s visit was a historic one in Minna. He held meetings with the members of the Minna branch of the *Egbe* in the Church Mission Society School room.

A general meeting with all Yoruba and non-Yoruba followed at the Railway African Club. About 3000 dignitaries attended the lecture titled, “Aims and Objectives of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*” delivered by Mr. Delano. Mr. F.A. Adeyinka gave the object of the meeting and introduced the Chairman, Mr. E.A. King, the *Sarkin Yorubawa*. After the opening speech of Mr. King, the Secretary, Mr. T.K. Kotun gave a brief account of what the *Egbe* stood for and then

introduced the lecturer to the audience. In his lecture, Mr. Delano discussed extensively the history of Yoruba and laid great emphasis on cooperation with other non-Yoruba. He informed the audience of the *Egbe*'s plan towards higher education, the upkeep of natural and cultural background, respect for *Oba* and unity. He advised members of the *Egbe* to donate to the endowment fund. The event was witnessed by several notable Igbo in Minna. One of them, Mr. O.A. Okochoro of the Loco Running Shed, Minna expressed his support for the formation of the *Egbe* since the Igbo also had their own ethnic association. He implored the *Egbe* to settle the dispute between Azikiwe and Yoruba leaders. Mr. Okochoro stressed that before the arrival of Azikiwe from the USA in 1937, there was no disunity between Yoruba and Igbo which was the main reason why many Igbo were not in support of Azikiwe's political method. At the gathering also, the head of the Zikist Movement in Minna supported the *Egbe*. Mr. Delano was received by many prominent Igbo in Minna.

An *Abalabi* dance was staged at the U.N.A ground in aid of the *Egbe* Endowment Fund. Mr. Abudu Ibiyeye who served as the Chairman contributed £150 towards the fund. Members and supporters of the *Egbe* contributed towards the fund generously. At the end of the event, over £400 was raised. On 10 May, 1949, Mr. I.O. Delano, the Administrative Secretary of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* arrived Zaria on tour of Northern Nigeria. He lodged with Mr. J. Ola Shodimu, the Hon. Secretary of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Zaria. Following his arrival, there was a Mass Meeting conveyed by the Zaria Branch of the *Egbe* under the Chairmanship of Mr. B.A. Kasumu-Sarikin Yorubawa and member of the Sabon-Gari Mixed Court at the Baptist Church playground. This was followed on May 14 by Variety Entertainment in the Baptist Church School Room under the Chairmanship of Mr. E. Sunday, a prominent trader in Sabon-Gari, Kaduna. On 15 May, members of the *Egbe* visited Samaru branch (12 miles distant to Zaria)

where the Administrative Secretary, Mr. Delano gave a lecture on the activities of the *Egbe*. Another lecture followed at Sabon-Gari, Zaria.²³

At Sabon-Gari, Zaria, the arrival of Mr. Delano was an epoch-making event. A squad of Motor Cyclists, headed by the Vice President of the local branch, Mr. Alabi McIver, displayed at the Kaduna-Zaria Road to welcome the guest. The Secretary was received with a roaring reception. Both Yoruba and non-Yoruba danced to the rhythmical beatings of *Sekere* and songs. *Abalabi* dance was staged in honour of the guest. On June 5 1949, Oduduwa Day was celebrated in Jebba with pump and pageantry. The event was organized to raise fund for the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* Endowment Fund. Fund raising drive was led by the Chairman of the *Egbe* Mr. A.O. Bilewu. In Jebba, the Igbo community was mobilized for the event. The houses of all officers of the *Egbe*, the *Oba* Yoruba Jebba, the elderly people, elites and members were visited.

The Women Branch of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* Kano celebrated the “*Oduduwa Day*” with variety of cultural events at the Colonial Hotel (now Paradise Hotel) in June 1949. The events were presided over by Mr. B.A. Kawosha, a prominent Kano-based contractor. Substantial amounts of money were collected for the *Egbe* during the occasion. One of the activities included the *Abalabi* Dance under the patronage of Mr. Abu Buari of the U.A.C. Motors. The event was attended by Yoruba dignitaries in Kano.²⁴ Mr. Delano was received in Kano by Chief Sanyaolu, Mr. Albert Bright, Mr. Fajemisin and other members of the Executive. Yoruba in Kano were enthusiastic on Mr. Delano’s mission. They donated £85. There was healthy rivalry between Kano and Zaria on their contributions to the development of the *Egbe*.

When Delano reached Ilorin on May 30, 1949, the most intriguing question he was confronted with was: “Will Ilorin come to the South or remain in the North in 1950?”²⁵ This

question was posed to him at a Mass meeting by an Ijebu man who had resided in Ilorin since the 1920s. Delano succeeded in inaugurating a flourishing branch of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* at Sabongari and concluded arrangements for Sir Adeyemo Alakija to lead a delegation to the *Emir* on the status of Ilorin and the Yoruba.

In Kaduna, a successful meeting of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was attended by over 200 Yoruba compatriots. Mr. Delano noted that many Yoruba in Kaduna had not grasped the ideals of the *Egbe*. Yoruba high ranking government officials were among them and they were apprehensive to identify themselves with the *Egbe* because of their official status. Kaduna at the time of Delano's visit was a major centre of Zikists in northern Nigeria. They held tenaciously to their ideals and political philosophy that were sharply opposed to those of the *Egbe*. The Kaduna mass meeting was attended by over one thousand people. After the executive committee meeting, the Kaduna branch unanimously passed a resolution that the *Egbe* should begin a research work into the history, culture, law and customs of the Yoruba. The resolution was passed through the General Secretary to the Central Executive Council. Another resolution was passed that a District Council should be formed for the progress of the *Egbe* in Northern Nigeria.²⁶ Among the Zikists who attended were those who raised questions against regionalization and advocated linguistic grouping as yardstick for political administration.

Mr. Delano was welcomed to Kaduna amidst funfair. He was honoured with the following song:

*Osu, osu ola le peregede
Oduduwa gbayi o gbeye
Osu, osu ola le peregede.
Osu, Osu ola le peregede
Delano gbayi o gbeye
Osu, osu ola le peregede.*

The Zaria branch remitted the sum of £120 to Lagos in respect of the Endowment Fund.

According to Delano, Zaria was evidently the leading branch in the North, not only in numerical strength but in efficient existence. It was considered next in rank to Lagos. Its members were regarded as salt in the Community. An additional £25 was handed over to Mr. Delano after his return from Gusau.

The *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was formed in Funtua on 31 July, 1948 under the Chairmanship of Mr. A.D. Akintunde with Mr. Yewale as Vice President and B.L. Fashola as Secretary. At Funtua, Mr. Delano was received with songs and drumming. The issue of the hesitation of Ogbomoso residents in Funtua regarding the *Egbe* was discussed. Corrupt practices involving two members who were purposely out to enrich themselves on the *Egbe* was discussed. One of them claimed that Sir Adeyemo Alakija had given him the mandate to launch branches of the *Egbe* all over Northern Nigeria. Mr. Delano's visit to Funtua was disrupted by the death of Mr. Kogbe, a staunch member of the *Egbe* who died of meningitis. The money collected for the endowment fund was over £17. At Bakori and Malum Fashi, the Chairman presented the sum of £40 to the Endowment Fund. At Bakori, he was introduced to the traditional authorities of the town. He addressed the *Iyan* of Bakori that,

I am glad to come to Bakori and see how your highness and your people are kind to the Yorubas living in Bakori. I am pleased to see that Yorubas and Hausas live happily together in the North. You and your people have contributed to this and it is a good sign for the future. I thank you for receiving me this morning and I shall report your kindness to me and Yorubas at Bakori to the Executive of the great *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*.²⁷

After his return to the house of the Chairman of the *Egbe*, he swore in 13 female members. During the mass meeting that followed, over £16 was contributed to the Endowment Fund. At Gusau, a concert was organized titled, "Oduduwa and his children." The Gusau O'dua

Youths elected officers of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* under the Chairmanship of Mr. Ladipo Ojo Bello in May 1949.

In Zaria, Mr. Delano received rumours of his impending arrest by the police over a case he had to give evidence. It was perceived that the rumour was peddled by the Zikists. The Administrative Secretary had prepared a sermon at Kaduna but when he reached Zaria, the arrangement was altered as the Muslim members objected and would not attend the sermon in a Church. In this way, the sermon was changed to a lecture on “Yoruba Kingdom Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow.” Money contributed after the lecture amounted to £35. In Kano, Delano declared that,

...nowhere in Nigeria does the past live before you as it does at Kano. Kano is a famous city and the great sights of Kano are to be remembered without much record. The wonderful inscriptions on the walls of houses all over the town are significant of a glory that had passed. The glory of Kano is the glory of the North.²⁸

Chief D.O. Sanyaolu and Mr. S.A. Fajemisin welcomed Mr. Delano to Kano. Members of the Yoruba Community Kano showed great interest in Mr. Delano’s mission. Money contributed to the Egbe’s Endowment Fund was over £85, which exceeded that of their rival branch, Zaria. Branches and members competed to contribute to the *Egbe*’s Fund. In Jos, Mr. Delano delivered four lectures at the end of which the sum of £28 was donated to the Endowment Fund. The Jos branch of the *Egbe* during the time of Mr. Delano’s visit was described as a strong baby still at its infancy. At Bukuru, Mr. Delano was given a rousing welcome. He delivered two lectures and watched a good concert. The Bukuru branch donated £32 to the Endowment Fund. At Kafanchan, he was given a royal reception. His arrival was described as a New Day for the Yoruba. Thousands of Yoruba in Kafanchan formed a procession, dancing and singing.

Surprisingly, the Yoruba party was stoned by the Igbo. According to Delano, everywhere you find strong antagonism by some Igbo against Yoruba. The most embarrassing moment was when the Chairman who was a devotee of Seraphim and Cherubim refused that the matter be reported to the Police. His belief was that God would judge throwers of the stones and that the victims should pray for them. The Yoruba youths, however, reported the case to the police. Otherwise, the incidence could have sparked off ethnic conflict between Yoruba and Igbo in northern Nigeria. This was unlike the situation in Jebba, the zone of Zikist Movement, where the Zikists listen to argument and voice of reason. Within one month of his visit, Mr. Delano collected the sum of £800 towards the *Egbe* Endowment Fund; received over £8,000 promises; and enrolled members at 2/-per head to the value of £30.

The *Egbe* showed a keen interest in the welfare of its members in Northern Nigeria through reporting on their activities in the media. For example, the *Daily Service* of May 1 1949 relayed the news of Mr. S.B. Ajayi, the Vice Chairman of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Minna and the Chief Clerk Railway, Minna who proceeded on leave and was expected to be posted to Enugu after the expiration of his leave. Mr. S.A. Ademuyiwa, of the Posts and Telegraphs Department, and a member of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Minna Branch was reported to have proceeded on leave and transferred to Lagos. Madam Moriamo Ibijoke Kotun, wife of Mr. T.K. Kotun of the Provincial Office and Hon. Secretary of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Minna was reported to have delivered a female child in Lagos.²⁹ Mr. B.L. Fashola, of the Gusau Branch attended the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* Easter School at Ibadan. The Gusau branch reported increase by three births to Messrs I.A. Onashile, Babatope and Ojo Farayola, the Vice Chairman, Secretary and member respectively. Mr. B.L. Fashola was elected as Social Secretary of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Gusau branch.

The visit of Mr. Delano reinforced a shared cultural value and experience, as well as dissemination of information. The cultural performances and meetings offered opportunities for Yoruba in the diaspora to relive their own culture, language, symbols and customs. The *Egbe* encouraged and fostered new ethnic consciousness and fora needed for consensus decision-making. Yoruba migrants felt affirmed to demand for change in a system where they had no stake. The characteristic feature of the *Egbe* was resource mobilization for the purpose of education and social empowerment. Delano's visit sowed the seed of identity and renewed unity among the Yoruba migrants in northern Nigeria.

The *Egbe* also used the media for publicity and propaganda throughout Nigeria and abroad. Newspapers such as the *Daily Service*, the *Nigerian Tribune* and a monthly bulletin, *The Star of Oduduwa* were published and circulated throughout northern Nigeria. As Arifalo (2001: 140) noted, the Kano branch of the *Egbe* was so impressed by the propaganda carried out by the *Daily Service* that it passed a resolution of gratitude to the newspaper for "the repeated elucidation" of the aims of the *Egbe*. In November 1948, Mr. M.O. Kuti, the President of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Kaduna Youths Section reported the activities of the *Egbe* and enthusiasms displayed by both the Hausa and Yoruba.³⁰ On the other hand, during the same period, Azikiwe's *West African Pilot* carried news of efforts of the Igbo in northern Nigeria to build "Igbo Union Schools" or raise funds to sponsor their sons on scholarships abroad. The media reports on the activities of the ethnic associations intensified ethnic rivalry in northern cities.

By 1949, the *Egbe* established 65 branches across Nigeria, which increased to 103 in 1951 with a total membership of 9, 810. By 1956, 134 registered branches had 13, 665 members and by 1958, branches soared to 160 nationwide. Even though the support for the *Egbe* in northern Nigeria was overwhelming, fewer people registered as members. The phenomenal

growth of the *Egbe* was illustrated by the fact that within the first five years of its existence, the *Egbe* became a social and political force nationwide. The General Secretary's Annual Report cited by Arifalo claimed that: "Some even regard the *Egbe* as the government whose authority must be obeyed before that of any other body."³¹ As noted earlier, during the one month tour of northern Nigeria in 1949, Mr. Delano collected £800 towards *Egbe*'s Educational Fund, while promises amounted to £8,000. In 1951, the *Egbe* spent £1,561, 17s.0d on University scholarships and £121.17s.0d on secondary school scholarship. The availability of support from *Egbe* either in terms of scholarship or logistics encouraged many Yoruba parents in northern Nigeria to send their wards to schools in southwestern Nigeria.

However, it should be noted that not all the Yoruba either at home or in diaspora supported the formation and activities of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. Indeed, Mr. S.A. Fajemisin, an Ijesa-Yoruba and Kano-based Licensed Auctioneer, criticised *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. According to him, not all the Yoruba people fall under the category of Oduduwa sons. Therefore, the name *Omo Oduduwa* was considered narrow.³² Oduduwa is particularly attached to Ile-Ife and that Ile-Ife has been using the name to arrogate to itself superiority over other Yoruba. Also, Mr. Bello Ijumu, a Yoruba migrant in Kano from Ijumu town (near Kabba present day Kogi state) was a founding member of the Northern Elements Progressives Union (NEPU) in 1950. In fact, pioneer meetings of NEPU were held in his house at Sabongari, Kano. There were many other Yoruba who were key members of the Zikist Movement and of course, National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Azikiwe. Many Yoruba families who were well integrated into the socio-cultural ethos of the Hausa host community were less concerned about the burgeoning Yoruba identity. There were also many onlookers dedicated primarily to their commercial activities and professional development. Above all, Olaniyi has noted that members

of Yoruba ethnic associations in northern Nigeria were merely a small fraction of the total number of the Yoruba residents.³³

Conclusion

The formation of the *Egbe* led to ethnic and political consciousness among the Yoruba. There was an awakening among the Yoruba educated and traditional power elite on the “danger of the Igbo domination.” This created social mistrusts between the two ethnic groups and intensified commercial rivalries in many cities where they co-existed. The activities of the Igbo State Union and the *Egbe* promoted political consciousness among other ethnic groups in Nigeria, which reshaped intergroup relations. In August, 1949, the Ibibio organised a conference with a plan to establish Iboku State. In the same vein, the Edo and the Itsekiri organised national unions and began to agitate for separate states. In December 1949, Northerners met in Kano and formed *Jamiyya Mutane Arewa* (Northern Peoples’ Congress) as a cultural organisation. It was meant to promote the power and authority of the *Emirs* in order to enlighten the masses. In 1951, the fear of Southern domination led to the transformation of the Congress into a political party with the slogan: “*One north, one people, irrespective of religion or rank or tribe.*” By the mid 1950s, the officials of the NPC government embarked on Native Authority Reforms that effectively checkmated employment opportunities, commercial dominance and acquisitive propensities of the southern “foreigners.”

The activities of the *Egbe* in northern Nigeria, especially the elaborate social functions, made the Yoruba more visible as organised groups. This created boundaries of identities and associations. For example, in June 1950, the second anniversary of the *Egbe* was celebrated in Zaria. A dance parade round the town was held by the women section of the *Egbe*. The greatness of Oduduwa was proclaimed and appeals were also made for unity in Yorubaland. Tributes were

paid to the founders of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. In a Hausa Muslim society where women were secluded, the dance parade would have created social friction.

It was assumed that the *Egbe* branches in northern Nigeria were outposts of Lagos in the north working against the interest of the region. It created political mistrust and animosity which survives till date. As Coleman (1958) and Nnoli (1995) noted, Northerners became preoccupied with the question of southern domination in the aftermath of independence. It was assumed that, southerners would take over power after the exit of the Europeans. There were concerns over southern Nigerians' domination of the civil service, especially railway stations, post offices, government hospitals and Public Work Departments in northern Nigeria. Subsequently, in 1954, the Northernisation policy ensured the gradual exclusion of southerners from government service in northern Nigeria. Many qualified southerners were appointed on contract. Southerners on contracts in northern Nigeria had limited labour rights and wage benefits. This was one of the factors that led to the fragmentation of the nationalist movement in Nigeria.

Between 1947 and 1950, ethnicity and regionalism became prevalent in Nigerian politics and intergroup relations. Indeed, the cultural organisations led to the comatose of the Nigerian mandate. As Arifalo concludes, "the parties which emerged were not based on social or economic ideologies, but on ethnic loyalties."³⁴ In the early 1950s, many Yoruba in northern Nigeria joined political parties in solidarity with their ancestral homeland. They raised funds for such political parties and organised rallies/meetings but were not interested in contesting elections. It was clear to them that they were strangers who would return to their ancestral homes. In May 1953, Chief S.L. Akintola was hosted by Chief Daniel Oguntolu Sanyaolu, the richest Yoruba and leader of Action Group in Kano. Chief Sanyaolu provided the necessary logistics that protected Chief Akintola from the violent protests that followed his campaign on

self-government tour to northern Nigeria in 1953. Nevertheless, there were some Yoruba members of the Action Group in northern Nigeria who wanted northerners to lead the party in the region. Ethnic politics also led to the problems of inter-ethnic competition and violence. Indeed, between 1946 and 1966, the pattern of inter-ethnic violence shifted from the Igbo and Hausa to the Igbo and Yoruba; and Yoruba and Hausa. At different scales, the ethnic animosities were waged in workplaces, markets, press and other public spaces. Indeed, the activities of the *Egbe* rekindled the rivalries between the Igbo and Yoruba. Ironically, it was the Igbo community that vehemently opposed the *Egbe* in some parts of northern Nigeria. This clearly debunked the myth of Southern Nigeria homogeneity or solidarity.

In conclusion, the activities of the *Egbe* in northern Nigeria promoted socio-economic development among the Yoruba through remittances and associational life. Yoruba migrants in northern Nigeria became associated with the social and political aspirations of the Yoruba. Information central to the identity of the community were disseminated. There was cultural flow of organised music concerts and theater, which reinforced identity consciousness among the Yoruba in northern Nigeria. Between 1946 and 1955, Hubert Ogunde's concert party staged plays in Jos, Zaria, Kano, Minna, Gusau, Bukuru, Kaduna, Oturkpo, Bida and Jebba.³⁵ From this scenario, retribalisation was taking place among the Yoruba migrants rather than de-tribalisation.

In all, it created boundaries of ethnic relations between the Yoruba and Hausa. By belonging to the *Egbe*, many Yoruba in northern Nigeria felt excluded from the others - Hausa, Igbo and so on. Their social allegiance created collective memory of Yoruba identity and history.

Endnotes

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¹⁶ Coleman, 348

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