

CHAPTER ONE

ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN THE MAKING OF MODERN NIGERIA

The critical foundation in the making of modern Nigeria was constructed on the convergence of two monumental world religious movements that transformed the Nigerian region, starting in the nineteenth century. These were the celebrated Islamic reformist movement that established the Sokoto Caliphate in the Hausa region of Northern Nigeria and a Christian evangelical missionary movement that gave impetus to the social transformation of coastal southwest Nigeria, beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century. Although shaped by regional and global forces, these religious movements had enduring consequences for the diverse peoples of the Nigerian region because they were also products of the internal dynamics among the local communities that would later constitute the modern Nigerian state and society. While these religious developments emerged from two distinct geocultural areas in the Nigerian region during the nineteenth century, I contend that the processes of their convergence after the imposition of British colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century was essential in the making of modern Nigeria. Starting with a comprehensive analysis of the ideologies and structures of the Sokoto Jihad, which transformed the Northern Nigerian region, and the Christian evangelical

movement, which precipitated the social transformation of Southern Nigeria, I argue that the scope and depth of these historic movements provided the social and political platform on which modern Nigeria was constructed after the imposition of colonial rule at the beginning of the twentieth century. In terms of chronology, this process began with the profound impact of the Muslim reformism of the Sokoto Jihad in the Hausa city-states of contemporary Northern Nigeria, culminating in the establishment of the historic Sokoto Caliphate at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

The Rise of the Sokoto Caliphate

Many of the major city centers in today's Hausa region of Northern Nigeria were derived from the traditional Hausa city-states that had evolved as political entities as early as 1000 AD: Kano, Katsina, Zaria, Gobir, Biram, Rano, and the principal city, Daura. These major Hausa city-states were linked to outlying towns of Zamfara, Kebbi, Yauri, Gwari, Nupe, Kororofa, and Yoruba through complex social, political, and economic networks.¹ Drawing on a common language and social interactions over the centuries, "the term 'Hausa,' 'Hausawa' and 'Kasar Hausa,' that defines contemporary Hausa ethno-religious consciousness in modern Nigerian society," Moses Ochonu notes, "is a concept that gained momentum with the monumental political and social transformations unleashed since the Sokoto Jihad" of the early nineteenth century. Ochonu further asserts that prior to the Sokoto Jihad "the peoples of the [Hausa] states, and ordinary Fulani migrants who lived among them, were likely to refer to the Hausa state citizens by their state of origin: 'Katsinawa' for those from Katsina, 'Kanawa' for those from Kano, 'Gobirawa' for those from Gobir and so on."² This strong identification with the city-state defines the essence of a formidable politico-social system in the Hausa region before the imposition of the Sokoto Jihad in the early nineteenth century.

At the apex of the political-social system in each Hausa city-state was the office of *sarki*, the sovereign authority on which the political, judicial, and military powers of the Hausa states were invested. The sarki was expected to be a shrewd ruler adept at manipulating the strings of politics to satisfy competing interest in upper Hausa society. Under the sovereign authority of the sarki was a class of aristocratic titleholders, known as the *sarauta*, who advised the sarki on a wide range of political and social matters. Relations of state and society were sustained largely through entrenched patron-client ties: consequently, in traditional Hausa society, the privileged class retained its legitimacy through patronage-clientage networks that were based on personal control of public

office and management of economic resources.³ Hausa society was thus rigidly divided between the aristocratic class, the *sarauta*, and the masses of commoners, known as the *talakawa*.

Starting in the fourteenth century, Islamic influence steadily encroached on Hausa city-states through complex networks of commercial and social interactions across the Sahel and the Maghreb. First came the Sudanese Muslim diasporas that migrated southwestward to the Hausa region; over time, the clerics of these Muslim populations converted local Hausa rulers to Islam through their teaching, preaching, and commercial activities.⁴ However, indigenous Hausa religious beliefs proved resilient to the transformative impact of Islam, especially among the *talakawa*. Nevertheless, Muslim administrative and judicial institutions steadily became prominent in many Hausa city-states. An important indicator of the prominence of Islam in Hausa society was the rise by the early eighteenth century of the *ulama* (predominantly Fulani Muslim clerics) in the courts of the Hausa sarki as advisers in local administration. As Islam gained greater prominence in Hausa society, *ulamas* became more influential in local communities; on the growing significance of *ulamas* in Hausa society, Mohammed Umar contends that these Muslim clerics generally exhibited two distinct qualities: *ulamas* who were active in state affairs served as judges, ministers, and scribes to Hausa rulers, reflecting the Maghilian tradition; conversely, many other *ulamas*, inspired by the Suwarian tradition, limited their activities to their clerical work and avoided direct involvement in state affairs.⁵ Significantly, the origins of the religious trends of the former, the Maghilian, was inspired by the singular contribution of the notable North African cleric Muhammad al-Maghili in the late fifteenth century.⁶

As the exponent of the famous Maghili School, Muhammad al-Maghili arrived in Kano, the Hausa region's most dominant city, in 1493 from the Kingdom of Tlemcen in modern-day Algeria, where he had fled the Reconquista. He preached against the syncretism that he found among Kano Muslims and campaigned for Islamic reform and the establishment of sharia. Through his works, al-Maghili established the Kano School, which dominates Islamic thought in Northern Nigeria even to this day.⁷ Al-Maghili is credited with writing the first Muslim constitution for Kano, which was officially received by Mohammed Rumfa, Kano's sarki (1463–1499), and thereafter consecrated as the famous manual on Islamic government in the Hausa region. In content and specification, al-Maghili's manual was precise in the definition of the role of Islam in local administration:⁸ in accordance with Islamic doctrine, he recommended a nine-member council of rulers; a treasury with professional accountants; a system of sharia courts run by a *qadi* and scribes; and provisions for public appeal

to the sarki's court.⁹ Consequently, through al-Maghili's influence, sharia was established as state law in Kano during the reign of Rumfa in the late fifteenth century.¹⁰

With the growing influence of ulamas in state affairs, the relationship between sarkis and ulamas deteriorated by the late eighteenth century as the influence of Islamic reformism grew in the Sahel and Maghreb regions. With this growing influence of Islam, ulamas increasingly based Islamic thought on the sovereignty of Allah, contending that Hausa sarkis can only exercise legitimate political authority when they comply with strict dictates of Islamic law. In this context, Umar argues, "Islam limits political power by requiring its exercise in accordance with sharia rule of law. This limit gives the ulama, as experts of sharia law, considerable political clout to challenge the authority of a ruler by arguing that he loses his legitimacy if he fails to uphold the law of God."¹¹ With their growing politico-religious influence, derived from scriptural texts and religious injunctions, ulamas asserted their authority in Hausa society during this moment of regional Islamic reformation. Significantly, the Islamic reformist teaching of Usman dan Fodio, which led to the historic Sokoto Jihad in the early nineteenth century, proved to be the most important manifestation of this growing trend by the late 1700s.¹² In addition to the critical theological role of the ulamas to the transformation of Hausa society, the huge success of the Sokoto Jihad can also be attributed to the rapidly shifting demographic conditions that were transforming the social and religious environment in the Sahel by the eighteenth century. Indeed, just as the Sokoto Jihad was inspired by earlier Fulani-led West African jihads—notably Futa Bundu, Futa Toro, and Futa Jallon—between 1650 and 1750, it, in turn, would inspire several jihads in this vast region, including Masina, Seku Ahmadu, and Tukulor later in the nineteenth century. As the most far-reaching example of Fulani-led Muslim reformist movements, the Sokoto Jihad reflected a global trend of Islamic reformism that was pervasive in the Muslim world in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.¹³

USMAN DAN FODIO AND THE SOKOTO JIHAD

Much has been written about the family lineage of Usman dan Fodio, the Fulani ulama who spearheaded the Sokoto Jihad in the Hausa region from 1804 to 1808. Fodio was born in Maratta in the Hausa city-state of Gobir in 1754, and like many from his Toronkawa Fulani clan,¹⁴ Fodio's forebears had migrated to Gobir from Futa Toro in modern-day Senegal. Young Fodio learned Islamic theology, philosophy, science, and Arabic, as well as the reformist doctrines that were widespread in the Muslim world of the time from renowned

North African cleric Sheikh Jibril Ibn Umar. By age twenty, he started preaching in Gobir and neighboring communities, drawing large crowds during his travels. During his teaching, Fodio challenged the religious syncretism that was widespread in Hausa society and denounced the abuse of power in the court of the sarki of Gobir, Yunfa Nafate. When tensions between Fodio and Yunfa reached their climax, Fodio and his followers retreated to Gudu, performing the *hijra*, the ritual flight that preceded the formal declaration of a jihad, on February 12, 1804. In Gudu, with the support of his able lieutenants, his brother Abdullahi and son Mohammed Bello, Usman dan Fodio launched a successful military assault against Yunfa's army at Tabkin Kwaith. This victory announced the Sokoto Jihad, which transformed what became Northern Nigeria in the nineteenth century.¹⁵ Michael Crowder notes that Fodio and his followers "justified their jihad against Yunfa and other Habe [Hausa] kings on the grounds that though they professed Islam, in mixing traditional practices with their observance of the true faith they were juridically pagans against whom it was legitimate to rebel."¹⁶ Beyond authorizing jihads against Hausa rulers—and eventually the Muslim rulers of Kanem-Bornu Empire to the northeast—Usman dan Fodio sanctioned military campaigns against the non-Muslim communities that were scattered throughout the region, especially contemporary Northern Nigeria's Middle Belt region. Thus Usman dan Fodio notes: "The waging of Holy war (al-jihad) is obligatory by assent . . . and to make war upon the heathen king who will not say 'There is no God but Allah' is obligatory by assent and to take the government from him is obligatory by assent."¹⁷ Consequently, in keeping with its injunction for Muslim piety,¹⁸ Usman dan Fodio established his Islamic reformist teaching as the foundation for the Sokoto Jihad in the early 1800s.

Usman dan Fodio was educated in the well-known Islamic system passed down to the Hausa region from Timbuktu. He wrote many books, mostly religious texts and poems, in Arabic, Hausa, and Ffulde. His extensive written works also covered themes as varied as Islamic law and statecraft. Fodio's impressive scholarly and religious works—along with those of his brother, Abdullahi, and son, Mohammed Bello—provide critical insight into the ideological and institutional framework for the Sokoto Jihad as it swept through the Hausa region in the early nineteenth century. In his *Kitab al-Farq*, written immediately after the declaration of the jihad in 1804, Fodio contrasts the conditions in the Hausa sarauta system to the righteous Muslim theocracy he envisioned. In his book *Tanbih al-ikhwan 'al ahwal al-Sudan* (*Concerning the Government of Our Country and the Neighboring Sudan*), Fodio observes: "The government of this country is the government of its king without question. If the king is a Muslim

his land is Muslim; if he is an unbeliever, his land is of an unbeliever. In this circumstance, it is obligatory for anyone to leave it for another country.” In his indictment of Hausa sarkis, Fodio underscores the scriptural injunctions that insist that legitimate Muslim rulers must submit to the dictates of Allah: “As for the sultans, they are undoubtedly unbelievers, even though they may profess Islam, because they practice polytheistic rituals and turn the people away from the path of God and raise the flag of world kingdom above the banner of Islam. All this is unbelief according to the consensus of opinion.”¹⁹

Usman dan Fodio thus insisted on the imposition of Muslim theocracies in the Hausa city-states to eradicate “un-Islamic” practices common in the courts of Hausa sarkis, notably, the lack of consultation with ulamas in state affairs, the prevalence of exploitative taxes, and oppressive laws on talakawa commoners by officials of Hausa sarkis.²⁰ Fodio identified five major foundations of his new Muslim polity: political authority shall be given only to those who are willing to govern according to Islamic law; political rulers must govern with the consent of local communities; rulers must abandon harsh punishments; justice in accordance with Islamic law is sacrosanct; and members of the ummah are called upon to do good deeds. On the structure of the Muslim state, Fodio identified specific functions for occupants of four principal offices in the ummah: the trustworthy vizier should be steadfast and compassionate toward the people; the judge must submit to Allah; the chief of police shall obtain justice for the weak; the tax collector shall discharge his duties in accordance to sharia. In the declaration of his jihad, Fodio, imploring Allah’s name, called on “every scholar and righteous man . . . in these countries to assist me in building up the characteristics of the Muslims in their governments.”²¹

During the formative years of the Sokoto Caliphate, the three men who established the foundation of the new theocratic confederacy were Usman dan Fodio; his brother, Abdullahi; and his son and successor as leader of the Muslim faithful, Mohammed Bello. They articulated the moral authority of their politico-religious project in accordance with a clearly defined vision of the ummah as espoused in the Qur’an and the hadith.²² According to Robert Hefner, in classical and modern times “movements of Islamic reform [such as the Sokoto Jihad] often involve the attempts of pious preachers to link their religious ambitions to some disadvantaged or aggrieved social class. Where such a linkage is created, movements of Islamic reform may extend their horizons beyond the aim of heightening piety toward the goal of social and political transformation.”²³ In this context, Fodio’s insistence on an ummah premised on justice for all resonated with Hausa talakawa commoners and disaffected

Fulani masses, who by the eighteenth century had become a major demographic group in the region.²⁴

The subject of Islamic law was central to the works of Usman dan Fodio and featured prominently in the discourse of the Sokoto Jihad (*Shifa' al-Ghalil fi ma ashkala min Kalam Shakh Shuykhina*). Consequently, Fodio drew enormous inspiration from texts of the *Bayan Wujub al-Hijra ala Ibad* to filter his prescriptions for the governance of the ummah. He insisted that the just Muslim ruler must be qualified to render independent judgments and execute his decisions; must provide guidance on all state affairs; and must draw a clear demarcation of authority among public officials, especially between the *waziri* (chief judge) and local judges. Rules regarding the handling of war booty, the use of lands acquired through conquest, and the levying of taxes also were stipulated in the works of Usman dan Fodio.²⁵

Abdullahi dan Fodio and Mohammed Bello also contributed immensely to the growth of Islamic thought, details of which are elaborated in the works of Islamic scholar Ibraheem Sulaiman.²⁶ In *Diya al-Imam*, Abdullahi stresses personal integrity and Islamic piety as pivotal qualities for political leadership: the imam (emir) must perform his functions as the ruler for the sake of Allah; treat the common people with compassion and leniency; and ensure that all state functions are clearly defined. Emphasis is placed on accountability; as such, all public officers must declare their assets, and if someone is found to have wealth above what he earns from his work, the ruler shall confiscate and restore it to the treasury.²⁷ Indeed, Islam not only provided a widely respected legal system, “it also provided a defense against encroachment by the Muslim Fulani. . . . Thus, public observance of the five daily prayers became common. Total abstinence from alcoholic beverages, especially from those associated with traditional religious practices were enforced. Prestige within the emirate was clearly and closely associated with Islam.”²⁸

The constitutional treatment of public office and division of powers received elaborate treatment in Abdullahi's *Diya al-Tawil*. There, as Sulaiman explains, the Shura was vested in three interrelated powers of the consultative assembly, the ulama, and the community. The consultative body was a formal constitutional group responsible for the efficient operation of the state. It comprised mujtahids, scholars, military generals, and community leaders.²⁹ Usman dan Fodio's pillar of state sovereignty was the *hisba*, the police system charged with the responsibility of “commanding the good and prohibiting the bad.” In Abdullahi's *Diya ahl al-Ihtisab* and *Diya al-Iman*, the institution of hisba, like the sharia from which it derives its authority, rests on the notion that local

people must be properly educated about their responsibilities in a just Muslim society. In short, the *hisba* deals with the regulation of the market, the promotion of justice, and the preservation of public morality.³⁰

In the *Usul al-Siyasa*, Mohammed Bello, the first caliph of Sokoto, focused on issues of integrity and modesty in leadership. Thus the first principle of government excludes anyone who covets a political position; indeed, the imam (emir) must strive to select men of conscience, piety, and probity as advisers. Given the emphasis on accountability, it is logical that Bello would condemn sycophancy among political leaders; he warned specifically against gains achieved through double-dealing and trickery. Basic premises of the rule of law are set forth in *al-Gayth al-Wabl*. The application of sharia rests on three interrelated principles: all people must be treated equally before the law; the law must follow its natural course without interference from the political elite; and the imam must not alter the law to suit narrow political interest.³¹ Significantly, Sulaiman's analysis of the works of the founders of the Sokoto Caliphate focuses exclusively on the pathways to good governance in a righteous Muslim state, suggesting a moral contrast between Usman dan Fodio's Sokoto Caliphate and the modern Nigerian state.

After only a few years of Fulani assault on the armies of Hausa rulers and non-Hausa communities in the region,³² Usman dan Fodio became the leader of the most populous geopolitical territory in nineteenth-century West Africa. He was succeeded on death (1817) by his son, Mohammed Bello, as the *amir al mu'minin* (commander of the Muslim faithful) and sultan (caliph) of the Sokoto Caliphate. The empire that succeeded the Sokoto Jihad was consolidated during Bello's reign from 1815 to 1837. Bello was charged with the control of the eastern emirates in the caliphate. His uncle Abdullahi, emir of Gwandu, took charge of the western emirates of Nupe and Ilorin. Sections of Bauchi and Adamawa also later came under the control of the Sokoto Caliphate while Sokoto Jihadists unsuccessfully attempted to incorporate the Muslim-ruled Kanem-Bornu Empire into the caliphate. Caliph Bello had to repel opposition from other potentates, including his brother Atiku, who later succeeded him as sultan, and rebellion from dissidents such as Dan Tunku of Kano, an old ally of his father. Thereafter, Bello emerged as a pragmatic empire builder. He consolidated the gains of the caliphate through a careful balance of religious doctrine and strategic political calculation, conceding authority to the emirs over the administration of their emirates and overlooking many precaliphate Hausa religious and social practices that his father had decried.

Mohammed Bello was an astute ruler who possessed a keen eye for statecraft: he presided over a theocratic confederacy that unified the previously autonomous

Hausa city-states under the politico-religious authority of the Sokoto Caliphate. This endeavor included integrating Islamic and sarauta institutions, incorporating Fulani pastoralists into agrarian life within Hausa communities, establishing mosques, and encouraging the education of talakawa commoners and women.³³ The intellectual perspectives of his leadership included original discourses (*Infakul Maisuri*) on the theological and political visions on which the caliphate was built, including detailed narratives about the history of the jihad. Ochonu tells us that Bello's *Infakul Maisuri* contains critical discussions on "epistolary efforts to place the Caliphate above Bornu in the hierarchy of Islamic piety."³⁴ The writing is the first treatise to articulate a Sokoto imperial hegemony over the non-Hausa Muslim areas of central and northeastern Nigeria (contemporary Nigeria's Middle Belt region). Indeed, the Sokoto Caliphate was not only defined as the custodian of Muslim values, but was delineated as the locus of regional power.³⁵

The early era of caliphate rule saw the establishment of Maliki law;³⁶ in addition, the new rulers monopolized judicial, religious, and political leadership.³⁷ Alkali courts, emirs' courts, and courts of appeals established during Usman dan Fodio's time were updated and incorporated.³⁸ The sheer volume of Sokoto leaders' writings on sharia indicates the prominence of Islamic law throughout the caliphate;³⁹ and Murray Last has pointed out that "any complainant could expect to see the Emir (or his local headman) personally any day after the dawn prayer; [and] people's complaints served to feed into governmental intelligence."⁴⁰

How effective was the new political and legal system in dispensing justice in the emirates that constituted the Sokoto Caliphate in its formative years? The dominant scholarship suggests that sharia was not firmly established in many of the communities that would constitute the Northern Nigerian Protectorate after the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate and Kanem Bornu Empire in the early twentieth century.⁴¹ Indeed, arbitrary rule did much more than erode the integrity of the political system; it also rendered the Sokoto Caliphate insecure.⁴² Similar to their Hausa predecessors, many of the Fulani Muslim rulers ignored Usman dan Fodio's injunctions against hereditary leadership and the discredited Hausa system of taxation.⁴³ Equally important, with the many wars of conquest from the jihad, slavery was pervasive in the new emirates.⁴⁴ Not surprisingly, Fulani misrule created pockets of local resistance, military brigandage, and Mahdist agitations.⁴⁵ But opposition among the disaffected sectors of Hausa society was weak,⁴⁶ and protests were easily contained and brutally suppressed. In effect, therefore, Fulani Muslim rulers under the new political and religious dispensation were largely despotic, failing to guarantee for

local communities the just ummah promised by Usman dan Fodio's jihad. In the military execution of the jihad, Crowder insists, "the ranks of his [Usman dan Fodio's] army were swollen by the faithful as well as the usual band of adventurers that followed any Soudanese army. This curious admixture of religious fanaticism and opportunism accounts for the charges of slaughter and plunder that accompanied most Fulani victories. The Shehu [Usman dan Fodio] was quick to condemn such actions on the part of his followers."⁴⁷

Additional features of local administration under the Sokoto Caliphate that indicated misrule were reflected in arbitrary taxation that Usman dan Fodio had denounced: for example, Fulani Muslim rulers reinstated the arbitrary *jangali* taxes that Hausa rulers had imposed on the nomadic Fulani during the preexisting political order. Among diverse communal groups, the word *jangali* inscribed the ethnic meaning of the tax, for the word is derived from the expressions *yan jangare* and *galla*, which imply the transient existence of Fulani nomads. Before the Sokoto Caliphate, the *jangali* tax affirmed the distinction between nomadic Fulani and non-nomadic Hausa groups. Under the Sokoto Caliphate, the *jangali* tax system was retained, but its utility was revised to reflect new interests and power dispositions. Instead of abolishing it, the new Fulani Muslim rulers reversed the concept of *jangali* to collect tax from non-Muslim (pagan) Fulani. Origins of the practice are associated with Emir Umoru Dellaji, the first Fulani emir of Katsina, who differentiated between Muslim Fulani and Fulani *rehazawa* or *kitiju* (pagans) by levying a tax called *zakka* (heretofore a Hausa tax) on Muslim Fulani. The *jangali* tax, then, took on the dual function of marking the religious and ethnic identity of non-Muslim Fulani outside the political echelon, while the *zakka* tax expanded its significance to include Islamic and ethnic connotations.⁴⁸ Sokoto Jihadists had charged that *jangali* was an arbitrary tax imposed on the Fulani under Hausa rulers. When Fulani Muslim rulers rose to power in the early nineteenth century, they continued the exercise of this arbitrary power by imposing the tax on "pagan" Fulani herders.⁴⁹ Thus, although the Sokoto Jihadists argued that the Hausa taxation system was oppressive toward the Fulani and they swore to ensure a thorough reform of all extractive policies to humanize society, in fact the new Fulani Muslim rulers ignored the rallying call for Islamic justice articulated in the Jihad of Usman dan Fodio. Needless to say, taxes, tributes, and other forms of extraction were symbols of official power and dictated the character of social relations.⁵⁰ Indeed, under the Sokoto Caliphate, the new Fulani Muslim rulers deployed preexisting modes of coercion to enforce new political and social relations: for example, Fulani Muslim rulers used the old Hausa *jakada* system (feudal army) to dominate tributary communities, especially outside the confines of the new

Hausa-Fulani emirates. Ochonou notes the ideological framework on which this vast and diverse territory was constructed:

The Fulani Islamic reform jihad of 1804–08 superimposed a central political and religious authority on the fragmented Hausa states of present-day Northwestern Nigeria and, through conquest and discourse, disciplined them into one politico-linguistic unit. More importantly, the jihad inscribed Islamic piety as one of the most important markers of Hausa identity. . . . [Thus] what the jihad did was to initiate the process of homogenization and the construction of a politically useful narrative of Hausa identity, a narrative which was underwritten by religious and cultural associations.⁵¹

Nigeria's first prime minister, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, wrote the novel *Shaihu Umar* (1966), in which the political and social effects of the Sokoto Caliphate system are creatively narrated. Specifically, it sought to reimagine a proper Muslim man, family, and society under Fulani Muslim rule. Set in late nineteenth-century emirate society, it portrays “the *fin de siècle*; the last days of a century of turbulence, bloodshed, and slavery,” amid caliphate breakdown.⁵² The plot revolves around three Hausa institutions: the Islamic court, slavery, and the tradition of itinerant Muslim preachers. Balewa portrays the court as corrupt and riddled with intrigue among Muslim clerics; societal ambivalence is revealed in how Muslim clerics condone slavery; although slavery is sometimes condemned as evil by puritanical Muslim clerics, powerful notables who actively engage in the practice are hardly denounced by ulamas; the system of itinerant preachers and Qur'anic education can embody Islamic piety. In short, Balewa's novel depicts an emirate society at the turn of the twentieth century that was far from the pious ummah Usman dan Fodio had envisioned in the early 1800s.

Whatever the deficiencies of the Sokoto Caliphate, Fulani Muslim rulers brought the Hausa city-states under their control, effectively asserting their dominance under the compromise of Fulani and Hausa Muslim rulers. Defined and inspired by Usman dan Fodio's Islamic reform, the Sokoto Jihad imposed a Muslim theocracy on the Hausa city-states. Fulani Muslim influence spread beyond the Hausa region, and as far away as Northern Yoruba communities.⁵³ By 1900, when the British declared their colonial control over the Sokoto Caliphate, the consequence of Usman dan Fodio's Jihad was glaring: Islamic rule was entrenched in northwestern Nigeria; many contemporary northeastern Nigerian communities were under Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers; Fulani Muslim rule had been projected into contemporary central Nigerian

communities; Muslim influence had grown significantly in the Yoruba hinterland of Oyo and Oshun, as well as among Southern Yoruba subgroups around the Atlantic coast, especially Ijebu, Egba, and Lagos.⁵⁴

The Yoruba Region: The Coming of Christianity

At the time when Hausa-Fulani Muslim rule was transforming the communities that soon would constitute Britain's Northern Nigerian Protectorate, mission Christianity began to make inroads into the diverse communities that would become colonial Southern Nigeria by the late nineteenth century.⁵⁵ This process had started in the early 1800s when several prominent western Christian evangelical societies began to explore opportunities for the establishment of missions in West Africa.⁵⁶ These missionary societies received an enormous morale boost from the convergence of favorable internal and external forces by the 1820s.⁵⁷ From the beginning, the remarkable work of the preeminent missionary society in West Africa, the Church Missionary Society (CMS), was sustained by notable Englishmen such as William Wilberforce, the celebrated abolitionist; Charles Grant of the East India Company; Thomas Clarkson and Zachary Macaulay of the Sierra Leone Company; and Lord Teignmouth, a former governor-general of India. These men had a mix of humanitarian and economic interests in Africa and India; they were strongly united by the antislavery campaign and mounted strong opposition against the human calamity. They found a common missionary platform in the establishment of the Society for Mission to Africa and the East, soon to be known as the Church Missionary Society.⁵⁸ More importantly, CMS missionary efforts in West Africa benefited significantly from the enthusiasm of Thomas Fowell Buxton, a British Parliamentarian who was also the vice president of the CMS. In his landmark book *The African Slave Trade and Its Remedy*, Buxton harbored boundless hope for the positive transformation of the African continent through the promotion of "legitimate" commerce and the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade. To achieve these important objectives, Buxton called on British authorities to encourage the exploration of the Niger River and establish treaties with West African rulers.⁵⁹

Much of the Christian missionary work that set the foundation of the transformation of the Nigerian region is thus inextricably linked to the history of the CMS mission in West Africa. Henry Venn, son of the Reverend John Venn, a founder of the CMS and its secretary-general from 1841 to 1872, contributed significantly to the policies that shaped the objectives of this great missionary society in the Nigerian region. Venn's long service as secretary-general encouraged local leadership of the new CMS mission stations in West Africa.⁶⁰ He

insisted on a mission that would be self-supporting and self-governing. Following Venn's vision, significant resources were invested in grooming Christian educated West Africans from British colonial Sierra Leone to lead local CMS missions in the Nigerian region, starting in the mid-nineteenth century.⁶¹ Consequently, the CMS began its missionary work in earnest in the West African Atlantic coast of the Nigerian region in 1841 under the leadership of a German missionary, the Reverend Jacob Friederich Schon, and the Reverend Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba repatriate from Freetown, Sierra Leone, who as a young boy had been liberated by British squadrons from a Portuguese slave ship off the coast of West Africa in 1821. From the onset, the mission forged a strong relationship with British colonial authorities in Lagos. This relationship was bolstered when the CMS arranged a meeting for Reverend Crowther with the prime minister, the colonial secretary, Queen Victoria, and Prince Albert in London in 1850.⁶² Crowther subsequently was consecrated Anglican Bishop of the Diocese of the Niger Territories in 1864. He would serve as bishop until 1890, when the territory and other CMS areas in the region were consolidated into the Diocese of Western Equatorial Africa.

Initially, CMS missionaries operating in the second half of the nineteenth century could not directly draw on British power to support their efforts in the Nigerian region.⁶³ Rather, these pioneering missionaries worked with European merchants to secure the support of local rulers to establish mission stations in Yoruba and other Nigerian communities.⁶⁴ As J. F. Ade Ajayi noted: "Traders and missionaries were interdependent. The Christian missions made a considerable impact on the trading situation. In turn, the expansion of European trade and political influence greatly facilitated the work of missionaries."⁶⁵ Thus CMS missionaries collaborated with European merchants to open up the Yoruba hinterland, the Niger-Benue confluence, and the Niger Delta region to Christian evangelism and European trade.⁶⁶ However, by the 1850s CMS missionaries established an effective partnership with colonial authorities stationed in Lagos. For example, the British government in Lagos supported three CMS Niger expeditions from the 1840s to the 1850s.⁶⁷ Indeed, with the support of Yoruba Sierra Leonean returnees, the CMS Niger Mission opened the area around the River Niger to trade, leading George Taubman Goldie, leader of the Royal Niger Company, to amalgamate British companies and seek a royal charter for monopoly in 1886.

The convergence of these regional and global developments in the second half of the nineteenth century,⁶⁸ shaped so profoundly by CMS missionary work and British imperial interests, were carried out against the backdrop of the intense military conflict among the rulers of Yoruba city-states for control

over resources and trade routes throughout much of the nineteenth century. Indeed, the consequences of this protracted conflict among Yoruba city-states would have far-reaching implications for CMS missionary work, ultimately shaping the direction and dimension of the social transformation of Yoruba communities since the turbulent nineteenth century. It is to this military conflict with such important implications for the work of the emergent Christian missions that we turn in the next session.

About the Yoruba Wars: A Detour

With the collapse of the dominant Yoruba city-state of Old Oyo in the early nineteenth century, regional wars disrupted political relations in the Yoruba region for much of the century.⁶⁹ The historical literature is clear that the collapse of the Old Oyo Kingdom, for several centuries the hegemon in the region, and the southern expansion of the Fulani Jihad into the Oyo-Yoruba city-state of Ilorin in the early nineteenth century unleashed protracted conflict among Yoruba city-states that was only brought to an end with the imposition of British rule in the last decade of the century. The human costs of the Yoruba wars are often measured in terms of the destruction of many Yoruba communities—indeed, Old Oyo Kingdom itself was destroyed and abandoned in the 1820s; large-scale human displacement led to the mass migration of many Oyo-Yoruba communities pushing southward; adding to the trauma was the inevitable competition for space among the mix of people pouring in waves southward, pushing other Yoruba subgroups, especially the Owu and Egba peoples, farther south at the expense of the Egba.⁷⁰

These major demographic shifts had several significant social and political consequences. First, there was the epochal shift in the hierarchy of power among Yoruba states: the age-old Yoruba monarchical principle continued to be observed in theory, but in practice it was the age of warrior entrepreneurs who mobilized hundreds of fighting men and utilized slave labor to produce palm oil for the European export trade in return for firearms. Second, instability became the order of the day: the new centers of power, now dominated by warriors, continually rained fear among populations by challenging existing monarchies for the exercise of power.⁷¹ Third, these disruptions produced new political experiments and alliances: for example, the displaced Egba and sections of the Owu regrouped in a new town, Abeokuta, about forty miles from the port city of Lagos. They welcomed missionaries hoping to use their influence with British colonial authorities and European merchants to build commercial and political power and outshine their closest rivals, the Ijebu; the

most successful of these political experiments were carried out by displaced Oyo warriors who established a new garrison town of Ibadan. They defeated the Ijaye, the only Oyo power to rival them, and built a novel chieftaincy system that consolidated the extensive power of Ibadan's new military rulers. Ibadan rulers emerged to control much of Southern Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, and Akoko, where they competed with regional powers—Benin, Nupe, and Ilorin—for hegemony.⁷² Eventually, responding to Ibadan's growing military threat, several Yoruba subgroups, the Ijesha, and Ekiti war chiefs formed a grand alliance (the Ekitiparapo) with the Ife, Ijebu, and Egba to control a route in Eastern Yorubaland to the coast in Lagos for the supply of breech-loading rifles.⁷³

Thus as military conflicts consumed many Yoruba communities, warlords displaced elders as leaders of local communities, and wealth derived from war booty gained importance, destabilizing traditional modes of social hierarchy. With warfare among Yoruba city-states intensifying over control of economic resources and trade routes, captives from armed conflicts, displaced refugee populations, domestic slaves, and other forms of unfree labor disrupted preexisting demographic arrangements in many Yoruba communities. These cataclysmic disruptions in one of West Africa's major geocultural regions fueled the Atlantic slave trade through the port cities of Lagos and Porto Novo, even as the slave trade declined in the Americas in the first half of the nineteenth century. Significantly, this coincided with the efforts of the British government, once the engine for the Atlantic slave trade in the previous century, to undermine the trade at this new West African source. A direct outcome of the Yoruba wars, Yoruba returnees who had been liberated by the British Royal Navy off the West African coast and settled in Freetown, Sierra Leone, emerged as the most ironic story in this tragic saga. Several decades after their departure from their homelands, these Yoruba returnees would play a critical role in the transformation of the Yoruba region from the mid-1800s to the early 1900s, when Britain consolidated its colonial control in the region.⁷⁴

REBIRTH AND EVANGELISM

As these Yoruba disruptions converged with global forces derived from British antislavery efforts against the slave trade, evangelizing efforts by the CMS, Wesleyan Methodists, and Baptists expanded in the coastal city of Lagos and in Abeokuta to its immediate north. New opportunities opened for Christian missions and European commercial interests in the Yoruba hinterland. In addition to their religious and moral claims, Christian missionaries also had explicitly secular ideas about the virtues of commerce, ideas of vocational training, and economic development, contending that “civilization” was contingent on the

formation of a Western-oriented Christian elite that would spearhead the progressive transformation of Yoruba society. Alongside the turbulence of the Yoruba wars, Yoruba returnees socialized in a pan-Yoruba consciousness in Sierra Leone emerged as agents of this modernization process in their homelands. As Christian missionary impact gained momentum by the late nineteenth century in many Yoruba communities, Yoruba religious practices revealed a mix of indigenous and global religions, consisting of Yoruba adherence to a supreme god; cults dedicated to *orisas* (lesser deities); Islam; and Christianity. However, Yoruba Sierra Leonean (Saro) Christian missionaries constructed the concept of a monotheistic Christian faith in contrast to the Muslim and “pagan” other, separating Christian religious practice from other aspects of life and positioning Christianity as the religion of peace. This message would resonate among war-weary Yoruba communities.⁷⁵

In the Yoruba region, the first major group of Christian missionaries charged with the responsibility of evangelizing the hinterland arrived through the auspices of the CMS in Badagry in 1842, preceded there by small groups of Yoruba returnees from Sierra Leone. Finding little success in this unwelcoming coastal town, they moved to the new and vibrant city of Abeokuta, where local chiefs led by Sodeke welcomed them, hoping they would serve as intermediaries on behalf of Abeokuta rulers with British authorities in Lagos to forestall the growing threat of the Dahomey Kingdom farther to the west. The success of these pioneering CMS missionaries—and successive missions, including the Wesleyan Methodist and the Baptist—led to the establishment of mission stations in Lagos, where Yoruba returnees from Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cuba were settling in large numbers by the 1850s.⁷⁶

From this vibrant beginning, Christian missions expanded rapidly throughout the Yoruba region. From bases in Abeokuta and Lagos, missionaries pushed inland, opening stations in major Yoruba towns such as Ibadan and Ijaye in 1853, and subsequently in Ikorodu, Sagamu, and Igbesa. By the late nineteenth century, missionaries, mostly Yoruba repatriates, became a regular feature in the Oyo-Yoruba towns of Oyo (New Oyo), Iseyin, Saki, Ogbomosho, and Awaye and in the western Yoruba towns of Ilaro, Ketu, Ibara, and Isaga. While political conditions limited their success in Ijebu-Ode, Ife, and Modakeke, a strong CMS mission was established in Ode-Ondo. This mission eventually served as the headquarters for CMS missionary work northward and eastward in Ife, Ijesha, and Ekiti, ultimately leading to the establishment of mission stations in Ife, Modakeke, Ado-Ekiti, Ijero, Aiyede, Akure, Ise, Owo, and Akoko, from the 1870s to the end of the century. In the eastern Yoruba hinterland of Ondo and

Ekiti, the arrival of Christian missionaries, most of them Yoruba Sierra Leonean (Saro) returnees, meant a reprieve from decades of Yoruba wars.⁷⁷ Lamin Sanneh notes the social and economic impact of Saro returnees in the transformation of Yoruba communities in the second half of the nineteenth century:

In the intervening years when government and mission were still wary of any reckless scheme of territorial overreach, the re-captives [Saro] bought ships and traveled up and down the coast, demonstrating that expansion beyond Sierra Leone was viable and logical development of the antislavery cause. . . . Such advances in the personal circumstances of the settlers and re-captives produced the educated and successful individuals who could plan and direct the antislavery outreach to Nigeria and elsewhere. Preachers, pastors, schoolteachers, traders, and clerical personnel composed the ranks of this buoyant cadre of modernizing agents, with their skills supporting their mobile lifestyle.⁷⁸

Saro returnees represented a significant component of the Yoruba cities of Lagos and Abeokuta in the second half of the nineteenth century. E. A. Ayandele estimates that in Lagos they numbered over five thousand, and about ten thousand in Abeokuta by the end of the century.⁷⁹ Indeed, Saro returnees had turned Abeokuta into a vibrant republic with modern administrative and infrastructural systems by the time the British consolidated their colonial rule in the early twentieth century.⁸⁰

MISSIONARY MOMENTUM: EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Concomitantly, CMS mission stations grew in strides in Yoruba communities, reflecting the significance of elementary, secondary, and vocational education as a critical expression of progressive social transformation. By 1846, four years after their arrival in Abeokuta, Reverends Crowther and Schon had founded a church and several schools. With the growing influence of the British authorities in Lagos, the work of missionaries intensified, leading to a significant increase in the number of schools in the city.⁸¹ As early as 1856, the CMS alone had 256 elementary-level pupils in Lagos and 549 students in nine schools throughout the Yoruba region. And with the opening of the CMS Grammar School in Lagos in 1859, the CMS began instruction at the secondary school level. A decade later, the mission opened a girls' secondary school, and in 1896, the CMS had opened a teacher-training college, St. Andrews College, in Oyo. By 1930, three decades after the imposition of British colonial rule in Nigeria

and only four decades after the devastating Yoruba wars, the CMS alone had a total of 567 elementary, secondary, and vocational schools with a total of 34,140 students in Southern Nigeria.⁸²

In Abeokuta, under the leadership of Yoruba Sierra Leonean returnees, the Egba United Kingdom collaborated with the local government to establish elementary and secondary schools in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These efforts resulted in the enrollment of about two thousand pupils in Egba schools by 1904, and the establishment of Nigeria's first community secondary school, the Abeokuta Grammar School, five years later. After the conquest of the Ijebu by the British in 1892, the CMS made quick inroads into the Ijebu region's primary city, Ijebu-Ode, leading to the establishment of a vibrant Anglican Church movement by the early twentieth century. This effort led to the establishment of a local secondary school, the Ijebu-Ode Grammar School, in 1913. Similarly, in Ibadan, following the establishment of a CMS mission by David Hinderer and Daniel Olubi in 1857, local Ibadan CMS leaders encouraged the mission to found a local community secondary school for boys, the Ibadan Grammar School, in 1913. After several years of hard work, the local Ondo CMS established a community secondary school, Ondo Boys High School, in 1919. A second secondary school in Ondo Province, Christ School, was created through the agitation of local CMS church leaders in Ado-Ekiti in 1933.⁸³ Moreover, in the eastern district of Lagos in the early years of colonial rule, Yoruba CMS missionary Thomas Ayegumbiyi describes the extent of local commitment to education:

Monday July 13 accompanied by Mr. Olubi, I attended a meeting of the parochial committee as a visitor. The chief topic for the discussion was the schoolmaster's salary; it seems the fund was exhausted and there was a difficulty to raise what was wanted even for the current quarter; the Bale [head chief] of the town, a Mohammedan was invited into the room to have a say in the discussion and out of the interest he has in the education of the young of the town, readily promised to do all he could to get his co-religionists to lend a helping hand. I understand that he has since got them to promise 6 pounds annually towards the fund.⁸⁴

Several other Christian missions, notably the Southern Baptist Convention (USA), Wesleyan Methodist, and Catholic Missions, followed the lead of the CMS, not only in the Yoruba region, but also in other Southern Nigerian regions, especially the Niger Delta and the southeast area of the Igbo people. Inspired by evangelical movements from Western Europe and missionary work in India, the American Baptist Convention began to send missionaries abroad in the early

nineteenth century. However, with growing divisions between contingents from Northern U.S. states, who opposed slavery, and their Southern counterparts, who condoned it, an intractable conflict led to the formation of the Southern (USA) Baptist Convention. This splinter group—the Southern Baptist Convention—ultimately emerged as pioneering white American Baptist missionaries to southwestern Nigeria, starting in the mid-nineteenth century. Thomas Jefferson Bowen pioneered the missionary efforts of the Southern Baptist Convention to the Yoruba region, initially settling in Ijaye in 1853 and ultimately encouraging the building of mission stations from Lagos on the coast through the Yoruba hinterland and on to the River Niger. His successors carried the work forward, establishing mission stations that eventually became prominent centers of Southern Baptist Convention missionary work among Oyo and Oshun Yoruba subgroups, establishing pioneering Christian missions in major towns at the turn of the twentieth century.⁸⁵ The triumph of the Baptist mission in the Yoruba region by the early twentieth century, despite the hard work of American missionaries, ultimately required the commitment of Yoruba pastors and church leaders. Through the work of Yoruba pastors such as Reverends Moses Ladejo Stone, Mojola Agbebi, and Lajide Tubi in the First Baptist Church of Lagos, Ebenezer Baptist Church, and Araromi Baptist Church in Lagos in the late nineteenth century, early Baptist missionary work led to the establishment of several schools in Lagos and Abeokuta.

Similarly, in many other Oyo and Oshun-Yoruba communities—and later in Ekiti towns—the Southern Baptist Convention was particularly successful because of strong collaboration between American missionaries and local Baptist leaders from the late nineteenth century to the end of colonial rule in the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁶ As challenging economic conditions forced new Oyo-Yoruba educated Baptists—especially Ogbomosho natives—to seek their fortune outside their hometown, they migrated not only to the major Yoruba cities of Lagos and Ibadan, but also settled far afield in Northern Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Dahomey, and Togoland. As they migrated to these alien regions, they established Yoruba diaspora churches wherever they went.⁸⁷ In Northern Nigerian cities such as Kaduna, Zaria, Kafanchan, Funtua, Minna, Bida, Katcha, and others, Ogbomosho Baptist immigrants, taking advantage of new economic opportunities in the early decades of colonial rule, became pastors, lay leaders, and active members of Baptist churches throughout the region. Indeed, Thomas Birch Freeman, a British-African Wesleyan missionary with experience among the Asante in the Gold Coast, accompanied by his wife and another West African missionary, William DeGraft, had added to this momentum of rapid social transformation of Yoruba communities by the early 1840s. Freeman and his

associates had established a mission in Badagry and Abeokuta in 1842. Their work led to the establishment of some of the first elementary and secondary schools in Nigeria, including Methodist Boys' High School, Lagos, founded in 1878, and a girls' secondary school, Methodist Girls' High School, Lagos, founded in 1879. These churches and schools would serve as pioneering institutions for vibrant Methodist religious and educational institutions not only in the Yoruba hinterland, but throughout Southern and central Nigeria by the mid-twentieth century.⁸⁸

Under the strong leadership of a French priest, Father Pierre Bouche, the Catholic Society of African Missions, following the lead of Protestant missions, established its educational work in Lagos, as well as the Igbo towns of Onitsha and Ibuzo, with secondary school instruction at St. Gregory College in Lagos, and Christ the King College in Onitsha, as well as teacher-training colleges in Onitsha and Ibuzo, by the turn of the twentieth century. In the specific case of Nigeria's southeastern region, Magnus Basse notes how the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Catholic mission challenged the educational work of CMS missionaries from the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century:

The period between 1885 and 1932 witnessed intense missionary rivalry in southern Nigeria, occasioned by the entry of the Holy Ghost Fathers of the Roman Catholic Mission into the missionary field in eastern Nigeria. In 1885 with the arrival of Father Lutz as the Catholic Superior of the mission, the Holy Ghost Fathers, who were put in charge of the Lower Niger, started work. That same year Father Lutz opened a mission at Onitsha on a piece of land donated by the Obi of Onitsha through the instrumentality of the Anglican Bishop Crowther. In 1900 Father Lejeune succeeded Father Lutz as the Catholic Superior. Lejeune was one of the greatest advocates of the policy of evangelization through the schools. . . . Lejeune further believed that good education would enable African students to earn a good living as well as exert their influence in society to the favor of the Roman Catholic Church. . . . When Father Shanahan took over from Father Lejeune he expressed a similar concern. Under Father (later Bishop) Shanahan, the RCM spread its variety of religion and education to most parts of the Igbo, Ibibio, and Ogoja provinces east of the Niger.⁸⁹

Starting with CMS missions as early as the 1840s, '50s, and '60s, Christian missionaries of all denominations embraced the idea that missionary work required some investment in basic medical services to address the needs of their mission stations and, whenever possible, to meet the basic health needs of the

local community. Following the works of Bishop Crowther and other pioneering missionaries, Christian missionaries provided vaccination against smallpox and established medical dispensaries from the 1840s. Indeed, the genealogy of the modern Nigerian medical profession can be traced to the training of a handful of gifted Saro CMS men who pioneered modern medicine in Nigeria.⁹⁰ Naturally, with the slow growth of the medical profession, CMS missions established health clinics to meet enormous health problems of local communities. Following the establishment of health clinics in the Yoruba hinterland, where Saro returnees had led mission stations by the late nineteenth century, the CMS expanded modest health care facilities to their new Southern and central Nigerian missions by the early twentieth century. For example, several decades after Saro returnees pioneered the CMS mission, Sybil K. Batley, a CMS missionary, notes the enormous need for modern health care in Iyi-Enu Medical Mission: “The maternity department has increased markedly. Growing numbers of women are attending for ante-natal advice, over 5,000 of these attendees having been made through the Government Department.”⁹¹ Nevertheless, the daunting challenges confronting the CMS missions’ health care initiatives—as well as other missionary health care programs—would persist late into the colonial period.

The most significant impact of Christian missionary work in Southern Nigeria, however, would lie in the cultural implications of Western literary traditions, vigorously pushed by Saro missionaries in Yoruba communities, beginning with the arrival of the CMS missions in the 1840s. Ajayi’s vivid analysis of the significance of the translation of the Bible to the Yoruba language by Crowther and his CMS associates underscores this important development not only in Yoruba society, but in various Southern and central Nigerian communities by the turn of the twentieth century. In this context, the translation of the Bible from English to Yoruba was not only essential to the propagation of Christianity; it was also critical for the flowering of a literary tradition in Yoruba communities. Noting the significance of Crowther’s critical role in the translation of the Bible to the Yoruba language, Ajayi observes:

He published a few extracts in 1848; the Epistle to the Romans in 1850; Luke, Acts, James, and I and II Peter in 1851; Genesis and Matthew in 1853; Exodus and the Psalms in 1854; Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in 1856 and revisions of earlier text. After 1857, he had to work with others. Thomas King had collaborated with him on Matthew in 1853. In 1857–62, they worked on the Epistles—Philippians, I and II Colossians, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, John,

Jude, Revelations, thus completing the New Testament in 1861. . . . When people remark casually on the literary quality of the Yoruba Bible and the foundation it has laid for developing the Yoruba language as a vehicle for education and communication, let us remember that it took hard work, scholarly study, and high literary skills. Wherever Crowther went, he collected vocabularies, probed histories, concepts and ideas.⁹²

The literary pursuits necessitated by the translation of the Bible and other Christian theological documents to Yoruba—along with the establishment of schools—soon opened the door to a vibrant Nigerian printing industry by the early twentieth century. Starting with the establishment of the headquarters of the CMS Press in Lagos in 1913, the CMS established bookshops in many Yoruba cities, notably Ibadan, Ijebu-Ode, Ile-Ife, Ilesha, Akure, Ondo, Owo, Ado-Ekiti, and Ikare. With Yoruba CMS laymen as managers, these bookstores encouraged the growth of literacy throughout Nigeria.⁹³ And with the growth of literacy in these Yoruba cities, print culture became a crucial medium of collective social action, shaping the meaning of identity in an increasingly diverse society. Adebajji Akintoye notes the implications of this print medium not just for literacy, but for the articulation of a Yoruba ethnonational identity:

The men of Yoruba origin employed in the Christian missions, and the growing number of literate people in various parts of the country were attracted to the fascinating traditions of the past preserved in every Yoruba community, and began to write about them, as well as about current happenings in Yorubaland. John Augustus Otunba Payne of Lagos became the leading person among the early writers, with his *Lagos and West African Almanac* published annually from 1874. . . . Writing on Yoruba history and institutions was to grow very richly during the last decade of the nineteenth century and to become even richer in the twentieth century. The reduction of the language into writing during the nineteenth century, and the emergence of a common Yoruba orthography, enabled some of the writers to produce their works in Yoruba language—and this was to become a very significant cultural development during the twentieth century.⁹⁴

Christian missionaries also facilitated the growth of modern apprenticeship in Nigeria. Yoruba returnee Christians from Sierra Leone, Brazil, and Cuba, with the support of missionary groups, brought to Nigeria their artisanal skills in bricklaying, masonry, carpentry, tailoring, watch repair, painting, and basic architecture.⁹⁵ Indeed, with the establishment of the Yoruba CMS mission in

the 1840s, CMS secretary-general Henry Venn, critical of the orientation of Saro elite toward literary education, stressed the importance of industrial training in the new mission: “In 1853, for example, he sent Mr. R. Paley, a young Cambridge graduate, to go and turn the Abeokuta Training Institution into a model self-supporting institution where learning will be combined with industrial labor in the manner of the Basle missionaries in the Gold Coast. . . . The institution organized a system of apprenticeship, and trained a few carpenters, tailors, printers, brick-makers, and masons.”⁹⁶ The growth of artisans enabled the further development of apprenticeships through missionary schools. Within a short period of time, the products of missionary apprenticeship became a small but influential middle class in Yoruba cities around the Atlantic coast, such as Lagos and Abeokuta. Many in this upwardly mobile class went into other businesses and had become successful by the time the Yoruba region came under British colonial rule at the end of the century.⁹⁷

By the early twentieth century, the strong partnership between Nigerian and European missionaries had shaped the rapid growth of the Niger Diocese of the CMS in southeastern Nigeria. In Nsukka, an important CMS stronghold in Igboland, for instance, there were about sixty established churches for local clergymen to manage. Clergymen and other church officials traveled great distance to consolidate the successes of the CMS mission stations in many Southern and central Nigerian communities.⁹⁸

In this overview, I have underscored how the activities of local missionaries—especially Yoruba CMS missionaries and Christian converts—gave impetus to the rapid process of social change: Christian missionaries consistently shaped social, political, and economic factors to create the peculiar environment on which emergent Southern Nigerian communities were built from the beginning of the twentieth century. British imperial interests also played critical roles in this transformative process, creating local administrative institutions that coordinated the social transformation of Southern Nigeria. These emerging Southern Nigerian communities were fundamentally different from patterns that were being consolidated in the Hausa-Fulani Muslim confederacy north of the River Niger,⁹⁹ analyzed above. The Nigerian colonial state—at least in Southern Nigeria, especially the Yoruba region—had started with the colonization of Lagos between 1851 and 1861 and the incorporation of Nigerian producers into global markets through the activities of the Royal Niger Company. But it was the ingenuity of Yoruba missionaries and new Christian converts that provided the essential social framework for the growth of these political and economic developments by the early decades of colonial rule.

CHRISTIAN, ETHNO-NATIONAL,
AND DIASPORAN IDENTITIES

It is essential to underscore the peculiarities of social change at this juncture and the characteristics of the purveyors of these complex processes of social transformation. In addition to the Saro returnees discussed above, the process of mission Christianity and migration was complicated by the arrival of another important returnee population, the Afro-Brazilians, during this era of Yoruba social transformation. Having been a casualty of the many disruptions among West African city-states, especially the Yoruba wars, Afro-Brazilian returnees began to arrive in Lagos in the second half of the nineteenth century. Popularly known as the *Aguda* because of their distinctive Catholic identity, Afro-Brazilians demonstrated strong connections to Luso-Brazilian culture and were connected to the religious universe of the Yoruba Diaspora that dominated the Bahian world they left behind in Brazil.¹⁰⁰ While elite Saros, through the educational institutions of the CMS, dominated the modern professions—especially clergy, education, medicine, law, and civil service—by the beginning of the twentieth century,¹⁰¹ Afro-Brazilians emerged as exceptional craftsmen and traders who took advantage of the dynamic conditions taking place in Lagos by the late 1800s.¹⁰² While some Afro-Brazilians became wealth merchants, engaging in trade between Lagos and the Lusophone world, many became successful as masons and carpenters.¹⁰³

I have already highlighted the consequences of the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire that heralded the seven-decade-long “age of confusion” during the Yoruba wars. Mission Christianity provided a new lens for looking at this turbulent Yoruba world. I have also discussed the emergence of new cultural identities: Saro missionaries combined evangelical Christianity with Yoruba ethnic identity, and the intersection of historical space-time and evangelism produced new interpretations of Christian theology. The Catholicism of Afro-Brazilians enriched the throbbing social and cultural space, especially in the rapidly growing cities of Lagos and Abeokuta. Christian notions of sin and salvation dominated debates among local clergies and their congregations. Debates on culture and religion reverberated throughout the Yoruba region’s emerging colonial society. The transformative impact of Christian missions in these Yoruba communities reflects David Chidester’s observation that “although Christian missionaries from Europe insisted that they were bringing light into a region of darkness, their gospel of sin and salvation was experienced by Africans as a local problem of translation. . . . African Christian communities engaged [the issues] in an ongoing process of intercultural translation, moving back and forth

between indigenous religious knowledge and the terms of Christian doctrine, practice, and authority.”¹⁰⁴

In many ways Christian missions adapted to local social and political conditions in southwestern Nigeria.¹⁰⁵ In most Yoruba communities early Christian converts were typically the poor, former slaves, or those cut off from mainstream local communities. The so-called age of confusion had produced these marginal groups in large numbers, seeking empowerment under the growing hegemony of British imperial power sustained by the new ideas of mission Christianity and British commercial interests. To win converts, missionaries abandoned preaching for dialogue, connected the realms of heaven and earth, and emphasized Christ’s sacrifice to link Christianity with indigenous cosmology. This contrasts with Muslim conversion efforts, which had been making inroads into the Yoruba region since the early nineteenth century.¹⁰⁶ Muslim preachers from the Sokoto Caliphate had refused to translate the Qur’an or abandon Arabic terms. While Islam in the Yoruba region focused on its foreign origins, mission Christianity was shaped by the ideas of Yoruba Christian missionaries. These missionaries articulated a Yoruba national consciousness,¹⁰⁷ propelled by modern science and rationality. While they professed Western ideas of civilization derived from the missions, Yoruba returnee missionaries found creative ways to reconcile their Christian beliefs with local Yoruba traditions. Thus, as Femi Kolapo reflects, the Yoruba experience reveals that returnee missionaries

were sojourning neighbors, fellow countrymen, traders in new imported manufactures, and friends to white men with powerful gunboats. In addition, they had plenty of money to spend in the local economy and could redeem or buy off obstreperous or aging slaves. They were equally involved in political situations that, willy-nilly, positioned them as friends or as foes in respect of other settler groups. They constituted an economic and political group with corresponding obligations to the communities in which they were established.¹⁰⁸

Consequently, conversion to Christianity gained momentum in Yoruba cities and towns by the late nineteenth century. The end of the Yoruba wars and the imposition of the colonial state led to waves of conversion to Christianity by the early twentieth century. A sizable Christian population emerged, taking on mainline Catholic and Protestant denominations: Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, and, later, African independent and Pentecostal churches, which emphasized the spiritual force of prayer, individual connection to Christ, and vocal expression of Christian piety.

Yoruba missionaries were engaged in the tasks of reimagining an ethno-national identity, and it is said that the turn to Christianity brought with it the birth of Yoruba nationalism starting in the early twentieth century.¹⁰⁹ Yoruba subgroups possess strong understanding of intersecting historical experiences as a people, articulated in the emergent modernist project of Yoruba mission Christianity. An ethno-national discourse of shared Yoruba culture predicated on the powerful myths of common origin were incubated during this transformative moment of Yoruba history: the influential traditions centered on Ile-Ife as the cradle of Yoruba civilization and Oduduwa as the progenitor of the Yoruba people; a common pantheon of Yoruba gods and spirits; interconnected political experiences; and universal belief in the common ancestry of Yoruba dynastic traditions. It is true that the Yorubas lived in their many city-states and villages as subethnic groups; notwithstanding, I concur with Akintoye that the enduring structures that sustained this modern ethno-national consciousness were not simply contingent on the social realities of the times but, significantly, drew from the Yoruba peoples' tradition, religion, and customary ways. Precisely for this reason, Akintoye concludes: "Common consciousness of the larger ethnic group ran through their lives, their politics, their rituals, and worship, their economic institutions and practices, and their total worldview."¹¹⁰ The Yoruba wars of the nineteenth century were traumatic, though the experience also expanded Yoruba ethno-national consciousness. And Christianity, the new religion that supplanted the "age of confusion," did not erode Yoruba consciousness; it simply built on it.

This Yoruba encounter with mission Christianity from the mid-nineteenth century to the advent of colonial rule at the turn of the twentieth century—along with other Southern Nigerian experiences—contrast sharply with the social and political consequences of the Muslim reformism of the Sokoto Jihad, imposed on the Hausa city-states and other groups in what soon became Britain's Northern Nigerian Protectorate. The political and social destiny of these vastly different regions, shaped so profoundly by the Muslim reformism of the Sokoto Jihad and the Christian evangelization of the second half of the nineteenth century, were ultimately enclosed in Britain's colonial territories of Northern and Southern Nigerian Protectorates in the first half of the twentieth century.