

Cyber History: Homespun Historians, Ethnonationalism, and Recasting Yorùbá Oral Traditions in the Age of Social Media

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Abstract: Like other oral sources of history, oral traditions constantly respond to political incentives. In the social media world, demographics relegated to the peripheries of modern state-making projects are using oral traditions as a genre of political activism to negotiate belonging. Following this trajectory, Yorùbá homespun historians on social media are refining Yorùbá oral traditions with ethnonationalism contaminants to galvanize netizens in opposition to the ethnicity's marginalization in Nigeria and to demand a sovereign Yorùbá nation. This article interrogates the methods and approaches that Yorùbá homespun historians employ in recasting oral traditions. Consequently, it considers potential ramifications on oral traditions as a tool for historical inquiry.

Résumé: Comme les autres sources orales de l'histoire, les traditions orales répondent constamment aux incitations politiques. Dans le monde des médias sociaux, certaines populations reléguées aux périphéries des projets de création d'État moderne utilisent les traditions orales comme un genre d'activisme politique pour négocier leur sentiment d'appartenance. En suivant cette trajectoire, des historiens yorùbá présents sur les réseaux sociaux ont affiné les traditions orales yorùbá en les contaminant avec des idées ethno-nationalistes pour galvaniser les internautes s'opposant à la marginalisation de cette communauté au Nigeria et pour exiger une nation yorùbá souveraine. Cet article interroge les méthodes et approches que les historiens yorùbá mobilisent pour refondre certaines traditions orales. En conséquence, il considère les conséquences potentielles de cette utilisation des réseaux sociaux sur les traditions orales en tant qu'outil d'enquête historique.

Keywords: homespun historians, epistemic power, ethnonationalism, oral tradition, Yorùbá, social media

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The king's bards of ancient times, the royal historians, are no more. The men who profess to know anything of our [Ìjẹ̀bù-Yorùbá] history are hampered by the political happenings of our day.¹

– T. O. Ogunkoya (1956)

This [online] broadcast is created to promote Yorùbá history and traditions... so that foreigners may not be the ones to write our history and that neither the Fulani nor the Ìgbò would take our land or erase our history.²

– Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀pítàn Ìbàdàn (Chief historian of Ìbàdàn), Laji Abbas (2022)

Introduction

In a Facebook video recorded on 27 July 2021, the Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò Yorùbá, Otunba Ganiyu Adams, addressed members of the Oodua People's Congress, a Yorùbá nationalist organization, on the steps that he had taken to facilitate the release of political activist, Sunday Adeyemo. The latter was detained in the Benin Republic on 19 July 2021 at the request of the Nigerian government for leading protests across southwest Nigeria demanding a sovereign Yorùbá nation and an end to Fulani aggression in Yorùbá territories. At a point in the address, Adams cited oral traditions about a few past Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò while fiercely condemning the Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀pítàn Ilẹ̀ Ìbàdàn (chief historian of Ìbàdàn) Laji Abbas over a claim that the latter made in a live-streamed Facebook video on 13 July 2021.³ In the 13 July video, Abbas explained how the title of “Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò” was, according to history, occupied by the “head of guards” of Alááfin Ọ̀yọ̀ (Ruler of Ọ̀yọ̀) and for that reason, no Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò in the post-independence period, including Adams, could be more relevant than

¹ This observation is from T. O. Ogunkoya's article in the inaugural issue of the *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, published in December 1956, one year after the society's founding at the University College Ibadan. Ogunkoya was the principal of Muslim College Ijebu Ode (now Ijebu Muslim College). His lamentation reflects the emergency with which late-colonial Yorùbá academics raced to commit their people's history into written form. It also shows how these academics have long recognized the role of politics in the Yorùbá public's engagement with oral traditions. See T. O. Ogunkoya, “The Early History of Ijebu,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1–1 (1956), 48.

² Laji Abbas, “Ilẹ̀ Yorùbá,” Ìtàn Yorùbá YouTube (29 September 2022), <https://youtu.be/a2IgoMfyiBg>, 04:40–05:00, (accessed 30 September 2022).

³ Laji Abbas was made the Ààrẹ̀ Ọ̀pítàn Ilẹ̀ Ìbàdàn by Olubàdàn (Ruler of Ìbàdàn) Saliu Adetunji (2016–2022) on 16 January 2021. Although the title is not among the traditionally hereditary chieftainships of Ìbàdàn, it is an honorary title that commands authority and identifies the carrier as properly belonging to the Ìbàdàn nobility.

any *oba* (a monarch; typically the ruler of a town) in Yorùbáland.⁴ Abbas had also grounded his arguments in the 13 July broadcast in the same oral traditions that Adams would use in the 27 July rebuttal, albeit rendered with different historical claims. In Adams's view, his title is equivalent to "commander at arms of all Yorùbá peoples" and not simply "head of guards" to Aláàfin Ọyọ.⁵ Almost immediately after Adam's 27 July response, Abbas live-streamed an equally fiery response on Facebook re-emphasizing his initial interpretations of the title, admonishing Adams and Yorùbá netizens not to confuse "traditions based on myth" with "genuine traditions" that are "verifiable with documentary evidence."⁶ By December 2022, videos of the three exchanges between Abbas and Adams had attracted hundreds of thousands

⁴ There is no universally accepted English translation of this title, albeit, if onomastically imagined, it has provenance in *oriki* (praise name or praise poetry). In correspondence with the author, historian of the Yorùbá, Toyin Falola observed that "sometimes we use 'generalissimo,' which is borrowed from the European label" to recognize the Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò as "the overall commander of the [Ọyọ-Yorùbá] army." In another correspondence, Abiodun Rowland explains that a lexical semantics interpretation of Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò renders as "a very distinguished person – one who is capable of performing immeasurable wonders at home and on the battlefield." In a conversation with the Yorùbá literature scholar, Bayo Omolola, he holds that a simple equivalent would be "generalissimo or field marshal," which agrees with Falola's observation. For more on Omolola's appraisal, see Bayo Omolola, "Culturally, Historically Communicating the Yorùbá's Traditional Concept of Military Heroism: Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò," *KOME* 1–2 (2013), 81–97. Also, Robin Law submitted in 1977 that during the Ọyọ imperial period, Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò was appointed by Aláàfin as one of the leaders of Ọyọ military, and it was customary that "the title was conferred upon a man who was already the ruler of a provincial town" within the Ọyọ territory: Robin Law, *The Oyo Empire c. 1600–c. 1836: A West African Imperialism in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 192–195. The title's territorial limitations, from "Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò Ọyọ" to "Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò of Yorubaland," according to a reviewer for this journal, "derives and dates from the troubled politics of the Western Region in the early 1960s [in wake of Nigeria's independence] leading to the conferment of the title on Samuel Akintola (the [Western Region] Premier) with such sweeping geographical coverage." Elsewhere, the historian and former Olúfí Gbòngán (Ruler of Gbòngán), Solomon Babayemi claims that from the installment of the first Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò in the second half of the seventeenth century, the holder was normally initiated as *ìlàrí* (part of Aláàfin's security detail) but always saddled with the responsibility to "head both the capital [Ọyọ city] and the provincial forces in battle" until the emergence of Akintola: see S. O. Babayemi, *Topics on Oyo History* (Lagos: Lichfield Nigeria Limited, 1991), 132.

⁵ It suffices to note that Abbas had also recognized the Baṣorun – second-in-command to Aláàfin Ọyọ, who is a kind of prime minister – as the real "commander at arms of all Yorùbá peoples worldwide" in the same 13 July broadcast.

⁶ For a snippet of the video in the Yorùbá language, see Laji Abbas, "Ẹ Gbọ Ohun Ti Ààrẹ Ọ̀nà Kakanfò Sọ Si Ààrẹ Ọ̀pítàn," Itàn Yorùbá Facebook, 27 July 2021, <https://>

of views and commentaries on social media platforms such as Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Clubhouse, and WhatsApp. Yorùbá netizens in Nigeria and abroad also responded to the exchanges with numerous videos.

This contestation over historical accuracies in Yorùbá oral traditions and the right to perform epistemic power, pitching a homespun historian (Abbas) against a major Yorùbá chieftain (Adams) on social media with Yorùbá netizens – elders, royal bards, monarchs, clerics, poets, high school students, college students, market women, and politicians – acting as consumers and interlocutors, represent a new frontier for history negotiation.⁷ Such conversations are transforming social media platforms into the new loci where the urge to perform cyber patriotism toward a national or ethnic cause compels netizens and cyber homespun historians (CHHs) – homespun historians who use social media as the primary channel for engaging in discussions on history – to infuse ethnonationalism sentiments into conversations about Yorùbá oral traditions.⁸ Almost in the same manner that European netizens are recently identified to be utilizing social media for memory activism through the “sharing and disseminating of alternative knowledge about a contested past,” netizens protesting Yorùbá marginalization and demanding an independent Yorùbá nation are also converging around Yorùbá CHHs for political activism.⁹

This article stems from a study of 42 social-media-focused Yorùbá CHHs, both professional and self-professed. The study was particularly interested in

www.facebook.com/watch/?ref=search&v=341009970998766&external_log_id=1ed06bd3-654f-4c84-94ce-d644bf269f39&q=E%20gbo%20ohun%20ti%20Aare%20Ona%20Kakanfo%20so%20si%20Aare%20Opitan,00:05-07:34 (accessed 9 August 2022).

⁷ I borrow the concept of epistemic power from Alfred Archer and others who posit “a person has epistemic power to the extent she is able to influence what people think, believe, and know, and to the extent, she is able to enable and disable others from exerting epistemic influence” – see Alfred Archer, Amanda Cawson, Benjamin Matheson, and Machteld Geuskens, “Celebrity, Democracy, and Epistemic Power,” *Perspectives on Politics* 18–1 (2019), 29. For a broader discussion of this concept across the social sciences and humanities, see Suzanne de Castell, “Epistemic Authority, Institutional Power, and Curricular Knowledge,” *The Journal of Educational Thought* 16–1 (1982), 23–28; Robert Audi, “Intellectual Virtue and Epistemic Power,” in Greco, John (ed.), *Ernest Sosa: And his Critics* (Malden: Wiley 2004), 3–16; Caroline Sy Hau, “Privileging roots and routes: Filipino Intellectuals and the Contest Over Epistemic Power and Authority,” *Philippine Studies* 62–1 (2014), 29–65; Anna Meiser, “Alternative Models of Knowledge as a Critique of Epistemic Power Structures – Introduction,” *Sociologus* 67–1 (2017), 1–21.

⁸ On “netizen action” and “responsible netizenry,” see Rebecca Mackinnon, “The Netizen,” *Development* 55–2 (2012), 201–204.

⁹ Orli Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict: Unwanted Memories* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2022), 131.

how they research and present oral traditions on social media. I examine their research and presentation approaches in context of the political priorities expressed by Yorùbá netizens on Yorùbá-focused social media discussion forums. I consequently weigh the possible continuities and discontinuities that these approaches (by CHHs) and political priorities (by netizens) could have on how Yorùbá oral traditions progresses in the age of Facebook and Clubhouse community formation. One of the central conclusions of this study is that while oral traditions are usually influenced by politics, which trigger changes in their rendition over time, two factors make this change different in the social media metaverse in contrast to the off-internet world. The first relates to an unprecedented level of speed with which a specific tradition gets modified over numerous times on social media as a result of the rapid and consistent influx of new contaminants. The speed at which these contaminants (ethnicist, religious, nationalists, etc.) move across social media and reaches an unprecedented number of people at the same time makes new information that could alter “facts” in an oral tradition available at a rate that human communications have never experienced. The second concerns the presence of cyber archival footprints produced by netizens and CHHs in the form of posts, comments, videos, and so on, which allows for greater efficiency in tracking the factors that shape an oral tradition over time. These two qualities influencing oral traditions on social media platforms are absent – in their current form – before the invention of the internet. The presence of such new factors, among several others discussed in this article, are reasons why mainstream academic historians – those employed in institutions of higher education – should consider showing greater interest in the role that social media is playing in how people perform, interpret, and develop oral traditions for political causes.

How oral traditions are discussed on the internet sharply contrasts with the obsolete assumption that “once oral traditions are recorded and published, all variant traditions are extinguished in favor of the published version.”¹⁰ Instead, the recasting of Yorùbá oral traditions across social media conforms with the currently dominant view in scholarship that suggests “old narratives” and “new contaminants” are constantly in conflict, causing a tradition to change through time and space. David Henige established this fact in 1982 when he concluded that oral data, in general, “continuously adopt and adapt whatever new, relevant and interesting materials come their way.”¹¹ This article argues that the resistance against Yorùbá marginalization in Nigeria and the push for a sovereign Yorùbá nation are the two most

¹⁰ Ebiegberi Alagoa, “Oral Tradition among the Ijo of the Niger Delta,” *The Journal of African History* 7–3 (1966), 405.

¹¹ David Henige, “Truths Yet Unborn? Oral Tradition as a Casualty of Culture Contact,” *The Journal of African History* 23–3 (1982), 412.

peculiar new materials/contaminants colliding with old narratives, which is engendering the production of new variants of specific traditions.

The nature of Yorùbá oral traditions recast on social media are so malleable that the typologies of oral traditions identified by Jan Vansina (formulae, poetry, lists, tales, commentaries), Philip Curtin (formal, informal, and personal recollections), and others after them are collapsed into two dominant archetypes.¹² The first are traditions rendered to propagate Yorùbá exceptionalism – the excellence of Yorùbá culture. The second are traditions that push for Yorùbá unity and sovereignty. During the course of listening to and participating in dozens of Clubhouse rooms, WhatsApp groups, Twitter spaces, Facebook groups, and YouTube livestreams between February 2021 and December 2022, I asked 37 netizens about their motivations for engaging in conversations on these platforms. Of this group, 17 mentioned how useful they find social media to be a safe space for properly understanding the Nigerian government's privileging of the Fulani over the Yorùbá; 13 consider their participation to be a way of rekindling cultural and ethnic pride as Yorùbá; 5 came into the forums seeking guidance in their journeys to spiritual renewal in the Yorùbá religion. The story of two female netizens, Bola Salis (alias Àwòkò) and Olayemi Adewunmi (alias Òwúrùbutu), reflects that of several other female netizens I interviewed. At the time of the interview, 40-year-old Àwòkò was co-administrator of the Àwùjò Ọmọ Yorùbá channel on Clubhouse and resided in London. She invites Yorùbá CHHs to the channel and occasionally leads conversations relating to Yorùbá nation agitation. 45-year-old Òwúrùbutu is a presenter with Sweet 107.1 FM Abeokuta and the Yorùbá Broadcasting Network, an online television station. Unlike Àwòkò, Òwúrùbutu lives in Lagos. The latter equally works with Yorùbá CHHs to teach oral traditions on her programs.¹³ Apart from their drive for an independent Yorùbá nation, Àwòkò desires a renewal of faith in the Yorùbá religion. For Òwúrùbutu, it is about promoting Yorùbá excellence to her listeners. Individuals like these two married women defy gender like these two married women defy gender and other sociocultural boundaries by risking their lives, leading pro-Yorùbá nation agitations on social media. Netizens like Àwòkò and Òwúrùbutu are synchronously coexisting with Yorùbá CHHs as interlocutors in ethnonationalism-influenced dialectics about Yorùbá oral traditions. In turn, the dialectics are creating syntheses in the nature of new historical interpretations of oral traditions and influencing how netizens imagine real-life political issues.

¹² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology* (London: Routledge, 1961), 143–164; Philip Curtin, “Field Techniques for Collecting and Processing Oral Data,” *The Journal of African History* 9–3 (1968), 371–385.

¹³ Interview with Bola Salis (first and last name changed), virtual, 1 May 2022; Interview with Olayemi Adewunmi, virtual, 22 February 2022.

While mainstream history scholarship continues to be largely inaccessible to a significant demographic of the Yorùbá public owing to the usage of esoteric academic language in history writing and the high prices of monographs and journal articles, Yorùbá CHHs are bringing history and oral traditions to the same public using the plainest vernaculars without price tags in the open world of social media. The Nigerian literary scholar Pius Adesanmi rightly predicts that in these “Twitter and Facebook years,” the ability of players such as Yorùbá CHHs to assert epistemic power on sources of knowledge such as oral traditions stand to put “the writer and the scholar... light-years behind the... street.”¹⁴ Presently, the imaginary street Adesanmi points to is in the form of Facebook groups, Twitter spaces, Clubhouse rooms, etc. Among the Yorùbá public, the history buildings in that imaginary street are controlled by epistemic power-wielding Yorùbá CHHs. To ignore the latter’s impact is to dismiss the knowledge shaping the street’s understanding of history, and, in effect, to lose track of how oral traditions are changing in the social media age. Not all Yorùbá CHHs should be considered as amateur historians who lack the sophistication to scientifically appreciate history. They should be seen as more than informants and considered as “fellow travelers” on the path to reconstructing Africa’s past. Studying CHHs can aid mainstream academic historians in understanding how the African public are engaging the past in the present.¹⁵ Thomas Spear recognized this potential in 1981 when he observed that if mainstream academic historians can treat oral traditions as history, then they could benefit from seeing traditional oral historians – including CHHs – as “colleagues in the practice of a common craft.”¹⁶

Politicized Traditions

To suggest that ethnonationalism contaminants are guiding conversations about Yorùbá oral traditions on social media should not be strange. The Asian American historian Mae Ngai recognizes in her appraisal of Benedict Anderson that “literature on nations and nationalism has shown us not only that nations are... historically produced ‘imagined communities’” but that there is a “powerful influence that nationalism has had on the writing [and speaking] of history.”¹⁷ This contemplation has bewildered historians of Africa as well. In 1953, historian John Fage and social anthropologist David

¹⁴ Pius Adesanmi, *Who Owns the Problem?: Africa and the Struggle for Agency* (Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2020), 134.

¹⁵ Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola, *Recasting the Past: History Writing and Political Work in Modern Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2009), 3.

¹⁶ Thomas Spear, “Oral Traditions: Whose History?” *History in Africa* 8 (1981), 168.

¹⁷ Mae Ngai, *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 9.

Tait, both of the newly established University College of the Gold Coast, set out to understand “the nature of the problems involved in the recording and interpretation of oral traditions” in the colony’s Northern Territories.¹⁸ In the process, they observed that the oral traditions given to them by members of the Mamprusi had elements that reinforced the idea that the Mamprusi were the ancestral parents of communities such as Dagomba and several smaller Mole-Dagbane communities. Such historical premonition of sovereign dominance by one community over others was a consequence of the politics of the time, considering this was the height of independence agitations in French Togo and British Gold Coast. Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, anthropologists and historians sensed a similar problem in African oral traditions. For example, in a 1973 study of how Fante oral traditions related to colonial rule, David Henige noted that the Fante’s desire for power led them to conjure traditions that had no basis in their history. The Fante, he observes, used European sources, many of which contained factual errors, to create “traditions to fit every contingency.”¹⁹ Also, while investigating the role of political propaganda in the production of oral traditions among the Yorùbá in 1973, Robin Law suggests, in similarity with Henige, that between the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, Yorùbá rulers and early homespun historians modified oral traditions “to serve changing political functions.”²⁰ Elsewhere in 1977, historian Magbaily Fyle noticed the same problem as Fage and Tait, Henige, and Law while collecting oral traditions among the Yalunka (Dialonké), Kuranko, Limba, and Temne communities of Sierra Leone.²¹ In 1985, anthropologists in South Africa set out to compile pre-colonial Swazi oral traditions collected by different state agencies between the 1960s and the early 1980s due to the rapid evaporation of Swazi elders. The anthropologists had hoped to launch a project that would preserve “pre-colonial” Swazi oral traditions by storing all the collected recordings at the Lobamba National Archives. They realized that the politically toned history programs broadcasted on radio stations across Swaziland in the years leading up to the 1980s must have strongly shaped “the historical

¹⁸ John Fage, “Some Notes on a Scheme for the Investigation of Oral Tradition in Northern Territories of the Gold Coast,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 1–1 (1956), 15.

¹⁹ David Henige, “The Problem of Feedback in Oral Tradition: Four Examples from the Fante Coastlands,” *Journal of African History* 14–2 (1973), 235. He later expands on his argument in David Henige, “Truths Yet Unborn?” See also Gwilliam Jones’s comments on the influence of anthropologists in the corruption of oral traditions in southeast Nigeria in Gwilliam Jones, “Social Anthropology in Nigeria During the Colonial Period,” *Africa* 44–3 (1974), 285–286.

²⁰ Robin Law, “The Heritage of Oduduwa: Traditional History and Political Propaganda among the Yoruba,” *The Journal of African History* 14–2 (1973), 220–222.

²¹ Magbaily Fyle, “Oral Tradition and Sierra Leone History,” *History in Africa* 12 (1985), 65–72.

conceptions of the Swazi people.”²² Similar observations continue to emerge from the 1980s onward.²³ Likewise, legal historians of colonial Africa have, to varying degrees, encountered the same politically motivated changes in oral traditions as a source for customs codification.²⁴ Karin Barber’s 1991 work on praise poetry noted similar influence of written sources on oral sources in her 1991 anthropological study of Òkukù town in southwest Nigeria.²⁵

²² Carolyn A. Hamilton, “The Swaziland Oral History Project,” *History in Africa* 14 (1987), 383–387.

²³ Spear, “Oral Traditions,” 165–181; Robin Law, “How Truly Traditional Is Our Traditional History? The Case of Samuel Johnson and the Recording of Yoruba Oral Tradition,” *History in Africa* 11 (1984), 195–221; Donald Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1995); Mohamed N’Daou, “Sangalan Oral Traditions as Philosophy and Ideologies,” *History in Africa* 26 (1999), 239–267; Sultan Somjee, “Oral Traditions and Material Culture: An East Africa Experience,” *Research in African Literatures*, 31–4 (2000), 97–103; Ako Okoro, “Reflections on the Oral Traditions of the Nterapo of the Salaga Area,” *History in Africa* 35 (2008), 375–400; Anne Reef, “African Words, Academic Choices: Re-Presenting Interviews and Oral Histories,” *History in Africa* 35 (2008), 419–438; Barry Morton, “Narrativity and Tswana Oral Tradition,” *Botswana Notes and Records* 43 (2011), 52–63; John Cinnamon, “Fieldwork, Orality, Text: Ethnographic and Historical Fields of Knowledge in Colonial and Postcolonial Gabon,” *History in Africa* 38 (2011), 47–77; Jeong Kyung Park, “‘Singwaya Was a Mere Small Station’: Islamization and Ethnic Primacy in Digo Oral Traditions of Origin and Migration,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 24–2 (2012), 157–170; Chikage Oba-Smidt, “Poetry and Oral Historiography: An Analysis of the Boorana Oral Chronicle in Southern Ethiopia,” in Meckelburg, Alexander, Dege-Müller, Sophia and Bustorf, Dirk (eds.), *Oral Traditions in Ethiopian Studies* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2018), 185–212; Yusuf Juwayeyi, *Archaeology and Oral Tradition in Malawi: Origins and Early History of the Chewa* (Cape Town: UCT Press, 2020); Carola Lentz and Isidore Lobnibe, *Imagining Futures: Memory and Belonging in an African Family*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022); and Ama Aduonum, *Walking with Asafo in Ghana: An Ethnographic Account of Kormantse Bentsir Warrior Music* (Rochester: University of Rochester, 2022).

²⁴ See, for instance, David Cohen and Atieno Odhiambo, *Burying SM: The Politics of Knowledge and the Sociology of Power in Africa* (Portsmouth: Heinemann 1992); Kristin Mann, “The Rise of Taiwo Olowo: Law, Accumulation and Mobility in Early Colonial Lagos,” in Mann, Kristin and Roberts, Richard (eds.), *Law in Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1991), 85–107; Richard Roberts, *Litigants and Households: African Disputes and Colonial Courts in the French Soudan, 1895–1912* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2005); Marcia Wright, *Strategies of Slaves & Women Life-Stories from East/Central Africa* (New York, Lilian Barber Press, 1993); Trevor Getz and Liz Clarke, *Abina and the Important Men: A Graphic History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

²⁵ Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 59, 311. For other works that emerged during the third half of the twentieth century that also looks at oral sources of Yorùbá history, see Saburi Biobaku (ed.), *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973); Bolanle Awe, “Praise Poems as Historical Data: The Example of

Meanwhile, the interest in looking at the internet's role in the evolution of oral traditions has yet to gain significant attention from historians. This deficiency leaves a major gap in how historians could potentially inspect the role of politics in the life of oral traditions. Donald Ritchie brought this fact to attention in the preface to the 2014 reprint of his seminal work, *Doing Oral History*, suggesting “the internet has left us no excuses of parochialism” and that oral history – and, by extension, oral tradition – could improve the already “greater voice” given “to those who had been marginalized in historical [and political] narratives.”²⁶ The utilization of social media by Yorùbá CHHs and netizens to reject the political marginalization of their ethnicity exemplifies Ritchie's point.

There is a growing number of scholars across the humanities and social sciences who are using newer techniques to extract oral sources in digital spaces.²⁷ Others have suggested how to archive such sources.²⁸ One of the most interesting conversations in this regard is happening in the digital humanities where scholars are looking at the intersection of oral sources, memory, and politics on social media. A worthy mention is James Yékú, whose

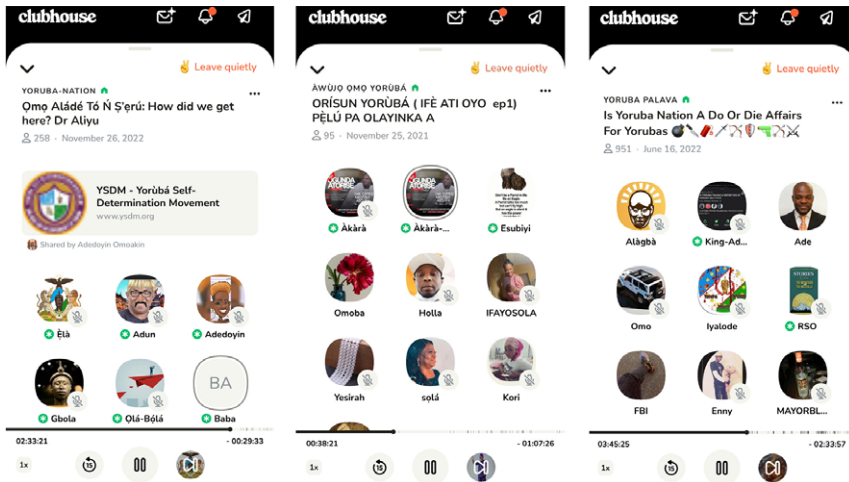
the Yoruba Oríkí,” *Africa* 44–4 (1974), 331–349; Karin Barber, “Yoruba “Oríkí” and Deconstructive Criticism,” *Research in African Literatures* 15–4 (1984), 497–518; and Karin Barber, “Quotation in the Constitution of Yorùbá Oral Texts,” *Research in African Literatures* 30–2 (1999), 17–41.

²⁶ Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, xii.

²⁷ John Foley, *Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2012); Jeffrey Shandler (ed.), *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); David Cline, *Twice Forgotten: African Americans and the Korean War, an Oral History* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021); Vicki Ruiz, “Situating Stories: The Surprising Consequences of Oral History,” in Chávez-García, Miroslava (ed.), *Latina Lives, Latina Narratives: Influential Essays by Vicki L. Ruiz* (New York: Routledge, 2021), 72–80; and Gabriel Tait and Rebecca Schriener, “My Story, My Voice: Student Podcasts Examining Oral Histories on Diversity in East Central Indiana,” in Mulvihill, Thalia and Swaminathan, Raji (eds.) *Oral History and Qualitative Methodologies: Educational Research for Social Justice* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022), 205–230.

²⁸ Wolfgang Ernst, *Digital Memory and the Archive* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Abigail De Kosnik, *Rogue Archives: Digital Cultural Memory and Media Fandom* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2016); Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017); Niels Brügger, *The Archived Web: Doing History in the Digital Age* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2018); Andrew Hoskins (ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Ashlyn Velte, “Ethical Challenges and Current Practices in Activist Social Media Archives,” *The American Archivist* 81–1 (2018), 112–134; Ally McCrow-Young, “Approaching Instagram Data: Reflections on Accessing, Archiving and Anonymising Visual Social Media,” *Communication Research and Practice* 7–1 (2020), 21–34; and James Yékú, *Cultural Netizenship: Social Media, Popular Culture, and Performance in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).

Figure 1. Screenshots of Clubhouse rooms of three Yorùbá-focused channels showing conversations on Yorùbá oral traditions and sovereignty. Photo credit: Author via Clubhouse.



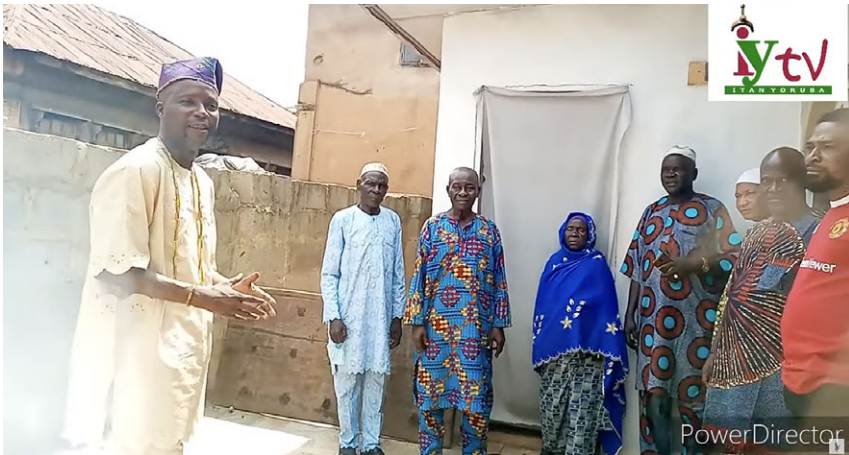
work suggests that Nigerian netizens – and by default, Yorùbá netizens – perform “subversive” and “anti-establishment” attitudes against the Nigerian state by using “trickstoid” characters extracted from oral and mythic traditions as cyber conduits.²⁹ Orli Fridman calls these performances “mnemonic tactic,” which also moderately correlates with Hongmei Li’s idea of “evil joking” among Chinese netizens who are resisting the Chinese Communist Party’s authoritarianism (Figure 1, 2).³⁰ For Yékú, social media, one of the modern “technologies of power,” is giving Nigerians the agency to self-represent by using satiric, comic, and direct speeches, whether written or contained in graphics, to convey anxieties and criticisms of the “corrupt and oppressive” state.³¹ Indeed, for Yorùbá CHHs and political activists elsewhere, social media is not only a space for mediating politically charged public discourses, but it is also a tool for influencing the public’s view of the past for the purpose of pushing a political agenda, oftentimes to the benefit of marginalized and minoritized communities.

²⁹ James Yékú, “Akpos Don Come Again: Nigerian Cyberpop Hero as Trickster,” *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 28–3 (2016), 245, 248, 251. Also see James Yékú, *Cultural Netizenship: Social Media, Popular Culture, and Performance in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2022).

³⁰ Fridman, *Memory Activism and Digital Practices after Conflict*, 131; Hongmei Li, “Parody and Resistance on the Chinese Internet,” in Herold, David and Marolt, Peter (eds.), *Online Society China: Creating, Celebrating, and Instrumentalising the Online Carnival* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 71–88.

³¹ Yékú, “Akpos Don Come Again,” 248.

Figure 2. Ààrẹ Laji Abbas (left) interviewing members of the Toki Onibudo royal family at the latter's ancestral house in Ìbàdàn in April 2022. Photo credit: Itàn Yorùbá via YouTube.



Making the Yorùbá Cyber Homespun Historian

In the 22 months spent observing conversations about oral traditions across 32 Yorùbá-history-focused social media forums, I noticed that several of the Clubhouse, Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, and YouTube forums are created and moderated by Yorùbá CHHs. This section of the article considers the sophistication of Yorùbá CHHs' process of historical inquiry and how it links with their ability to influence the recasting of oral traditions in these forums. The sophistication that I observed slightly departs from Derek Peterson and Giacomo Macola's 2009 observation that African homespun historians "did not work in universities, and they were not working to prefabricated academic patterns."³² These two features correctly describe some Yorùbá homespun historians of the pre-twenty-first-century, including Samuel Crowther, Moses Adeyemi, Olympus Moore, Isaac Akinyele, Moses Okubote, and Samuel Johnson, just as it correctly applies to their counterparts elsewhere in Africa such as Petros Lamula (Zulu), Vilho Kaulinge (Kwanyama), and Harry Nkumbula (Ila). Contemporary Yorùbá CHHs also do not work in universities; only 14 of the 42 consulted even have undergraduate degrees, with just one earning it in history. Meanwhile, some of the methodologies of historical inquiry or the so-called "prefabricated patterns" that might be considered exclusive to mainstream academic historians, are noticeable among Yorùbá CHHs as well. These patterns manifest in three phases.

³² Peterson and Macola, *Recasting the Past*, 15.

First, the average Yorùbá CHH demonstrates a strong understanding of primary sources' relevance to constructing and making claims about historical accuracy, particularly as it concerns oral traditions. They are familiar with visual, oral, and textual forms of evidence. About one-third of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs are deeply familiar with the existence of written documentary sources on the Yorùbá from pre-early-modern-era traveler accounts to post-fifteenth-century Arabic and Ajami manuscripts, and British colonial records. Open-access digitized archives, mainly in the form of government gazettes, missionary journals, explorer accounts, and newspapers, are popular among Yorùbá CHHs. They find such primary sources on Google Books, Internet Archive, Scribd, and other relatively open online repositories. Of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs, 32 confirm to have used at least one of these platforms more than ten times to find sources between February 2021 and August 2022; and 6 had, at some point, derived primary sources from subscription-based platforms such as Journal Storage, HathiTrust, and ProQuest, occasionally through associates affiliated with academic institutions. While all 42 Yorùbá CHHs mentioned that they visited such repositories in the past, only 6 had visited at least one brick-and-mortar archive – the Nigerian National Archives in Ibadan – to find primary sources within the same 18-month period. I asked all to list 10 secondary sources on the Yorùbá offhand without prompt. Of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs, 11 could mention between 8 and 10 secondary sources, while others were generally able to mention 2 or more. Although these distributions suggest that Yorùbá CHHs do not extensively engage physical archives and secondary sources, which starkly contrasts with mainstream academic historians, many among the Yorùbá CHHs are nonetheless astute in providing “presumed” justifications and evidence for the claims they make when narrating oral traditions. The “accuracy” of those claims is an entirely different debate.

Some differences in methodology separate Yorùbá CHHs from mainstream academic historians. When consulting written sources, most Yorùbá CHHs confirmed that they consider the publication year of such source as the most crucial determiner of its ability to convey “historical accuracy,” i.e., the older a book, the greater its dependability. Bukola Adeleke, a historian and a playwright based in Ibàdàn, who is also the founder of *Ìṣẹ̀dàlẹ̀ Media Concept* (*Origin Media Concept*, established in 2020), represents this sentiment while observing that “historians of the older days take time to do research compared to present-day historians, and for this reason, I consider older works over more recent works.”³³ Problematic as it may sound, this prioritization of publication year has canonized the works of Yorùbá homespun historians of the nineteenth to early twentieth century in the historical imaginations of Yorùbá CHHs. The canonization makes the work of Moore, Akinyele,

³³ Interview with Bukola Adeleke, virtual, 21 February 2022. Her location at the time of interview was Ibàdàn. Adeleke is in her late thirties and of Ibàdàn descent.

Johnson, and others effectively exist as a collective “article of faith” within which presumably “accurate” and “dependable” Yorùbá histories reside.³⁴

13 Yorùbá CHHs dismissed works from European and American historians in the belief that such works may not offer “proper” historical appreciation of the Yorùbá. When pestered further for clarity, they peg their disapproval on some supposed neocolonial and racist biases that inhibit the gaze of Western historians on Africa, with particular disapproval of the so-called “white” British academics. The latter category invigorates a special distaste among Yorùbá CHHs because of Britain’s forceful thrusting of the Yorùbá into the Nigerian colonial project. Only 6 Yorùbá CHHs mentioned anyone among the likes of Richard Dennet, Robert Smith, John Peel, and Karin Barber as dependable British scholars who specialize on the Yorùbá, primarily emphasizing their elongated residence and teaching commitments among the Yorùbá. Certainly, there is a legion of British scholars whose works are crucial in the field of Yorùbá studies and history, which renders the Yorùbá CHHs’ dismissal of, or lack of familiarity with, the former’s work a serious weakness. But considering the motivating factor for most Yorùbá CHHs is to galvanize netizens in antagonism to the Nigeria state’s marginalization, the rejection of British secondary sources has to be seen as more of a decolonial protest and less of an unforgivable weakness. Balogun Bokini, a media volunteer with the nationalist group Ìlànà Ọmọ Oòdua (Children of Oòdua’s Pathway), who occasionally leads history conversations on the group’s Clubhouse channel, justifies this protest by arguing that the anti-Yorùbá-nation critics – who make his group’s mission harder to accomplish – are misguided because those critics “read Yorùbá history publications produced by ‘white’ people and have refused to ground their thoughts in the oral traditions that we received from our forefathers and local historians.”³⁵

The second dominant pattern of historical inquiry I observed concerns fieldwork. Of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs, 34 declared preferences for researching the history of towns, villages, nobilities, and sites of historical significance. When at research locations, they collect data, including locally published pamphlets, record books, and diaries of religious and cultural groups, artworks, and family photographs. They also record audiovisual interviews. Many narrate the arduous task of traveling to research locations. It is usual for them to spend days, weeks, and sometimes months traveling to and staying at these locations collecting data. Such work comes at high personal costs as many often use personal savings to facilitate travel expenses. Several Yorùbá

³⁴ Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1999), 32. See Olympus Moore, *History of Abeokuta* (London: Richard Clay and Sons, 1916); Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yorubas* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1921); and Isaac Akinyele, *Iwe Itan Ibadan Ati Die Ninu Awon Ilu Agbegbe Re Bi Iwo, Oshogbo Ati Ikirun* (Exeter: J. Townsend, 1951).

³⁵ Interview with Balógun Olaseni Bokini, virtual, 1 April 2022. At the time of interview, he was located in Toronto, Canada. Bokini is of Lagos Island descent.

CHHs admit to receiving sponsorships from netizens who wish to have the former produce historical studies of the latter's hometown or lineage. Other Yorùbá CHHs occasionally get funding from monarchs, usually of lesser-known communities, for the same purpose. These public interventions in the production of local historical studies are, in purpose, similar to how mainstream academic historians get funded through foundations, private individuals, and state agencies.

More interestingly, several Yorùbá CHHs exhibit an understanding of what Vansina describes as the tendency of eyewitness accounts to be “conflated with rumors” or hearsay.³⁶ To avoid this hole, Yorùbá CHHs get data on one historical question from multiple informants. Olatunde Ogunniran, a historian and poet, holds that engaging more than one informant is necessary since “people add sentiments to what they say, and we do not accept what one informant says as the ultimate truth, but we compare various versions and settle for the middle which is most likely the accurate information.”³⁷ Of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs, 12 added that they usually consult monarchs, chiefs, heads of house, and – significantly – leading Ifá priests during fieldwork. Olayinka Adesina, historian and founder of Buk-Dam Fad Ventures and Records International, notes that he derives the outline of a community's history, more so if such community's existence predates the colonial era, from Ifá priests who evoke relevant Odù Ifá verses because “Ifá is the key to unlocking true Yorùbá histories, and it is where our history has from time remain chronicled.”³⁸ Of this same group, 18 consider oral sources the chief ingredient in their research. They recognize that myth and legend derived from the Odù Ifá, and other sources are useful historical evidence. Meanwhile, few like Laji Abbas – who, apart from being the chief historian of Ìbàdàn, is also the founder of the online media company named Ìtàn Yorùbá (Yorùbá History) – argue otherwise. They claim, as represented in Abbas's words, depending on myth and legend as representations of history may not “offer any help in advancing Yorùbá nationalism and history, but they will rather make outsiders not consider our past seriously.”³⁹ For most of those who are skeptical of myth and legend, they back their criticism with presumed

³⁶ Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition As History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 6, 54.

³⁷ Interview with Olatunde Ogunniran, virtual, 22 February 2022. His location at the time of the interview was Ìbàdàn.

³⁸ Interview with Olayinka Adesina, virtual, 27 March 2022. His location at the time of interview was Lagos. Adesina is of Ìgbómìnà descent, although he was born and raised in Òmùpo and Lagos State. He was part of the production team for Yorùbá history-related programs at Radio Lagos in the late 1990s. In the 2000s, he worked with notable performers of Yorùbá traditions and poetry including Idowu Adekoga Babaromi (deceased), Gbenga Adeboye (deceased), Sulaiman Ajobiwe, and Gbenga Adewusi, most of whom Adesina met at Radio Lagos.

³⁹ Interview with Ààrẹ Laji Abbas, virtual, 15 March 2022.

empirical evidence. For instance, one of the frequently debated traditions is the Yorùbá myth of origin that identifies Ilé-Ifè as the cradle of civilization, with the Yorùbá people as the earliest humans. When this tradition comes up in social media forums, Yorùbá CHHs often point to archaeological publications openly accessible online that put humans' origin in other parts of Africa. Such an action demonstrates the willingness among Yorùbá CHHs to adopt "scientific" evidence in the process of recasting oral traditions.

Many netizens and Yorùbá CHHs believe indigenous chiefs are not reliable sources of oral traditions. Bokini claims that "these are fine boy kings"⁴⁰ and "many Yorùbá chiefs and kings today bought their titles with money and not based on traditional qualifications, which prevents them from having deep knowledge of their people's history." For this, he notes further, "we [Yorùbá netizens] cannot depend on them for accurate oral traditions," hence the shift toward Yorùbá CHHs.⁴¹ Those in disagreement with this view – such as Olawale Bangbopa, a historian and manager of *Ìtàn Àti Ewì Àdídùn Lórìsirísi Lédè Yorùbá* (Exciting Histories and Poems in the Yorùbá Language) on Facebook – generally holds that monarchs are the strongest authority on Yorùbá oral traditions, especially given that mainstream academic historians "would not know a community's history more than the custodians of that community like chiefs and elders, and more so because these scholars sometime rely on monarchs and elders as informants during fieldwork."⁴²

The third pattern concerns how Yorùbá CHHs use the data gathered from secondary sources and fieldwork to produce new variation(s) of a particular tradition. Abbas captures this third stage observing that "it is like identifying and separating gold dust from bodies of earth collected from different places, with the collected gold dust, in the end, weighted for accuracy and tenacity to withstand criticism."⁴³ Throughout these three phases, particularly in the third, ethnonationalism contaminants get into oral tradition narratives. For example, if a given narrative is about a heroic figure, supposed "facts" about that figure's life are infused with anecdotes that reinforce Yorùbá exceptionalism. Such reconstruction often exaggerates the subjects' heroism. When the reconstruction concerns the history of a community, Yorùbá CHHs usually use their rendition to criticize the depletion of Yorùbá people into autonomous states under the Nigerian federal republic system, which has hitherto created a sense of political separation among the Yorùbá public. They equally lend dissatisfaction from the

⁴⁰ Interview with Balógun Bokini.

⁴¹ Interview with Ààrẹ Lajì Abbas.

⁴² Interview with Olawale Bangbopa, virtual, 20 February 2022. Olawale is the curator of *Ìtàn Àdídùn Lórìsirísi*, and he was located in Lagos at the time of interview. He is in his mid-twenties and of Yewa descent. Olayinka Adesina made a similar statement.

⁴³ Interview with Ààrẹ Lajì Abbas.

eighteenth-century Fulani jihadist invasions of northernmost Yorùbá territories such as Jẹ̀bà, Ìlòrín, Òffà, and Òṣogbo and the Fulani political hegemony over the Yorùbá in the twenty-first century. As Adesina laments when asked why they infuse such ethnonationalism sentiments, he complains:

Nigeria is founded on fraud, and it has caused the Yorùbá great trouble and misfortunes because they [the supposed Fulani-dominated government] do not want our language to be a source of pride... and they enslave us in this homeland and also try to regulate our thoughts. But we need sovereignty to organize things the way we want so that we can be the custodian of our present and future.⁴⁴

Possessing the ability to influence Yorùbá netizens' memorialization of the past through oral traditions and how the latter adopt such traditions to understand present political predicaments in Nigeria automatically produces significant epistemic power for Yorùbá CHHs.

Although Yorùbá CHHs are united in their desire to preserve oral traditions and galvanize toward a Yorùbá nation, I observe jealousies that lie deeply among their ranks. A few of them recount occasions when other Yorùbá CHHs discredited or verbally attacked a colleague's personality on social media for reasons relating to disagreement about historical accuracies. Commanding a larger pool of followership and receiving recognition from social clubs or political figures also strikes envy. Despite these unpalatable internal wranglings, it is crucial to reiterate that Yorùbá CHHs – as Peterson and Macola note about pre-twentieth-century African homespuns – vigorously “sought to draw their divided people together around” a common political agenda despite usually sharing conflicting “account of the past.”⁴⁵ More interestingly, though, certain Yorùbá CHHs do not stop at criticizing their colleagues but also go as far as questioning mainstream academic historians as proper authorities on Yorùbá traditions since, for example, and according to Ogunniran, “professorship is but a compilation of someone else's knowledge and thoughts.”⁴⁶ Again, while such assumptions are inaccurate, it is better to consider them as reactions to past approaches by Western scholars who refused to interpret African history using Africa sources, realities, and feelings.

Conversations about oral traditions in the Yorùbá history-focused forums could go smoothly or become outrightly abusive, or violent. In a Clubhouse conversation on the Think Yorùbá First channel on 23 July 2022 about whether Lagos is a Yorùbá territory, a debate on the “Yorùbáness” of the Benin people in present-day Nigeria turned the conversation chaotic. At the

⁴⁴ Interview with Adesina.

⁴⁵ Peterson and Macola, *Recasting the Past*, 17.

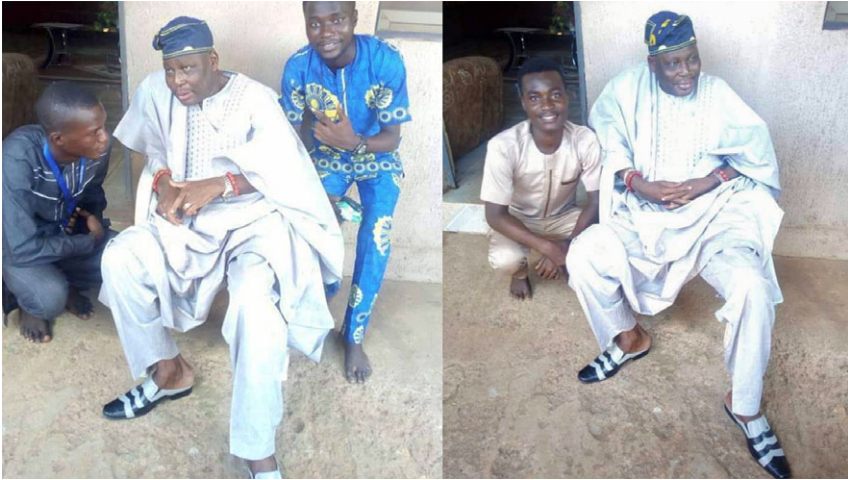
⁴⁶ Interview with Olatunde Ogunniran.

Figure 3. Bukola Adeleke (middle) interviewing the *Ọlọfin Àjáyè Ọrúgbò Idó* in Èpé, Lagos State, *Ọba Adewale Mushafau Abdul* at his residence in June 2021. Photo credit: Bukola Adeleke.



start of deliberation, Yorùbá CHHs and netizens were divided on the emergence of the Lagos-based politician, Bola Tinubu, as the Yorùbá's leading candidate in Nigeria's 2023 presidential elections. As deliberation progressed, Benin netizens in the room claimed that, historically, Lagos was founded by the Benin, which makes the *Eléṣókó* (Ruler of Lagos) a subject of the *Ọba Benin* (Ruler of Benin) (Figure 3, 4). Benin netizens cited several oral traditions to reinforce their claim. Yorùbá CHHs vigorously challenged this claim using some vicious words, which threw the room into full-blown verbal chaos. Unlike the Benin netizens, the Yorùbá CHHs were able to provide written sources for their counterclaims, earning them the approval of many netizens in the room. From this example, three archetypal problems associated with oral tradition conversations mediated by Yorùbá CHHs on social media emanates. First, the Yorùbá CHHs existed as the main performer of epistemic power by being a quasi-determiner of what rendition of an oral tradition is taken as valid or invalid. Second, historical accuracy in an oral tradition became the bone of contention even as the room was supposed to address another (political) topic. And third, a discussion about Yorùbá oral traditions in the context of Nigerian politics triggered ethnonationalism sentiments. Ibrahim Ariwoola, a curator with Afrika Uniqueness, validates the third problem – politicization of oral traditions – noting that “discussing

Figure 4. Ibrahim Ariwoola (left in the right frame) and the Afrika Uniqueness team during an interview with the Aséyìn Ìsèyìn in Ọyó State, Ọba Adekunle Salaudeen. Photo credit: Ibrahim Ariwoola



Yorùbá culture and oral traditions alone do not attract much interest, but infusing politics [like Yorùbá sovereignty agitations]” are what attracts Yorùbá netizens.⁴⁷

Of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs interviewed, 13 have prior training in media broadcasting and production. Several have experience working with either radio or television stations. For many of these Yorùbá CHHs, creating history-focused online channels to promote Yorùbá history and traditions is a greater career fulfillment than working at orthodox media companies. The professional trajectory of Abbas and Adesina reflects the experience of several Yorùbá CHHs.⁴⁸ Before establishing *Ìtàn Yorùbá* in 2010, Abbas presented Yorùbá history programs on Inspiration FM (*Ìbàdàn*), Sobi FM (*Ìlọrin*), and Agidigbo FM (*Ìbàdàn*). At the time of interviewing him in March 2022, he hosts similar programs on Noble FM, (*Ìbàdàn*). Adesina worked with Murhi International Television (MITV) in Lagos on the production team of several Yorùbá history and cultural programs before creating Buk-Dam Fad Ventures and Records International in 1997. Adesina and several other Yoruba several other Yorùbá CHHs, lamented the restrictions that guided the kind of history content they produced while working at these stations, especially those considered too “tribalist” or ethnonationalist. Programs along these lines

⁴⁷ Interview with Ibrahim Ariwoola, virtual, 20 February 2022. He is the curator of Afrika Uniqueness on Facebook; his location at the time of interview was Nassarawa. Ariwoola is in his 20s and of Igbó-Ọrà descent.

⁴⁸ Interview with Adesina.

have attracted more sanctions from the National Broadcasting Commission since 2015 when President Muhammadu Buhari assumed power. These sanctions targeted stations that supposedly show apologies toward secessionist movements such as the Yorùbá Nation and the Indigenous People of Biafra. Meanwhile, experiences garnered at the brick-and-mortar orthodox media houses are the building blocks for the transition into online media companies for many Yorùbá CHHs. In Adesina's case, before the abundant availability of the internet in the 2000s, Buk-Dam Fad produced dramatized presentations of oral traditions about Yorùbá monarchs on compact discs (CDs), which were distributed through local home video marketers across the Nigerian southwest. The CDs targeted the same demographics that watched the programs he helped produce for MITV. Famous among Buk-Dam Fad's CDs are *Òkèrẹ̀ Šaki* (Ruler of Saki, produced c. 2000), *Fabùnmi Òkèmẹ̀sí* (Fabùnmi of Òkèmẹ̀sí, c. 2000), a four-part series entitled *Orísun Yorùbá* (Origin of the Yorùbá, first episode produced in 2001), and another four-part series called *Ìlànà Yorùbá* (The Yorùbá Pathway, produced in 2001), all of which were major street hits in Lagos and Ìbàdàn. Leveraging on contacts made while at MITV, Adesina developed the scripts and appeared as the narrator in many of the CDs. He claims that students in tertiary institutions found the CDs useful, with several using them for undergraduate theses and doctoral dissertations. These CDs were among the first set of publications uploaded to Buk-Dam Fad's YouTube and Facebook channels, reaching even more consumers. Although these CDs, except for *Ìlànà Yorùbá*, are barely infused with secessionist and ethnonationalism sentiments, from 2015 onward, their equivalents published on Buk-Dam Fad's online channels carry heavy pro-Yorùbá nation and ethnonationalism messages in response to the increased violent incursions of Fulani herders into Yorùbá territories. Recent examples of such ethnonationalism-loaded productions by other Yorùbá CHHs include *Tani Fulani* (Who is Fulani?), released in 2021 by Alawiye Adebayo through Bàba Gbàgédé Ìmò TV (BGI TV), and *Yorùbá Ronú* (2022), an audio publication by Abbas under the auspices of Ìtàn Yorùbá. Adebayo's video presents Fulani history through the lens of the latter's jihadist and nomadic advancements into Yorùbá territories, while *Yorùbá Ronú* rallies the Yorùbá public to reject Fulani dominance in Nigeria by electing Bola Tinubu as the country's president in 2023.⁴⁹

For Yorùbá CHHs who had no prior experience in the traditional media, many among them spent several years teaching Yorùbá language classes in primary and secondary schools. 7 of the 42 Yorùbá CHHs had training in Yorùbá studies at undergraduate and graduate levels. Some among this

⁴⁹ BGI TV published the video on its YouTube page on 17 July 2021: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tfwyU2qR2A>, (accessed 24 August 2022). An audio version of *Yorùbá Ronú* was published on Audiomack on 5 January 2023: <https://audiomack.com/itanyoruba/song/yoruba-ronu>, (accessed 6 January 2023).

category were inspired and mentored by eminent Yorùbá literary icons, including Oladejo Okediji, Adebayo Faleti, Lawuyi Ogunniran, and Daniel Fagunwa. Bukola Adeleke's experience is relevant in this regard. Her first publication, entitled *Ìgbà Tìrẹ̀ Rẹ̀* (This Is Your Time), a fiction, which she created out of her undergraduate thesis – and eventually published in 2017 by Nelson Publishers, a Lagos-based company that worked with Fagunwa – brought her to Faleti's attention in 2012. Conversations with Faleti relating to the publication's promotion spurred Adeleke to focus on publishing books with historical significance.⁵⁰ She also had a similar encounter with Okediji in 2018 concerning another publication, *Aláàfín Àjàkà* (Àjàkà the Ruler).⁵¹ Like Adeleke, Olatunde Ogunnira recognized the robust guidance and influence he drew from his father, Lawuyi Ogunniran, on history writing before the latter died in 2020. But there are Yorùbá CHHs such as BGI TV's Adebayo who had no prior media experience or direct mentorship from eminent literary figures but only "heeded a divine call" to establish an internet-based broadcast company that focuses on promoting Yorùbá traditions and culture.⁵² For Yorùbá CHHs such as Adeleke and Ogunniran, whose original flair was in fiction writing, the consequence of their interaction with icons such as Faleti, Okediji, Lawuyi Ogunniran, etc. suggests that post-independence Yorùbá literary luminaries who wrote in the indigenous language were concerned with the preservation of Yorùbá oral traditions. It was out of this concern that they considered internet-age writers worthy vessels who could bring history to the Yorùbá public, even as the latter category do not have formal training as historians.

Conclusion

Pius Adesanmi closes his 2020 posthumous anthology on the struggle for agency in post-colonial Africa with an imperative question for scholars of African studies and history. He asks, "the dilemma we face with a generation in possession of multiple narratives of a single nation in the age of social media is this: will their stories become a thousand flowers armed with the inalienable right to bloom under the sun or will their stories be Babel?"⁵³ For Yorùbá CHHs helping the Yorùbá public understand the latter's place in

⁵⁰ Interview with Bukola Adeleke, virtual, 21 February 2022. Her location at the time of interview was Ìbàdàn. Adeleke is in her late thirties and of Ìbàdàn descent. Adeleke's transition is similar to the story of Abiodun Olawuyi; interview with Abiodun Olawuyi, virtual, 20 February 2022. His location at the time of interview was undisclosed. Olawuyi is of Ìsánlú descent.

⁵¹ Bukola Adeleke, *Ìgbà Tìrẹ̀ Rẹ̀* (Lagos: Nelson Publishers, 2012); Bukola Adeleke, *Aláàfín Àjàkà* (Abeokuta: Esnezer Heritage, 2018).

⁵² Interview with Alawiye Sabur Adebayo, virtual, 8 July 2022. He is from Onigbèdu area of Ewékorò in Abeokuta.

⁵³ Adesanmi, *Who Owns the Problem?*, 164.

Nigeria as a marginalized people, their narratives of a nation – Yorùbá exceptionalism and Yorùbá sovereignty – are already blooming. For this reason, it is critical for mainstream academic historians to diachronically interrogate the consequence such narratives are having on the integrity of oral tradition as a method of historical inquiry.

As this article demonstrates, nationalities and demographics relegated to the political peripheries of modern state-making projects, as is the case with the Yorùbá in Nigeria, are weaponizing oral traditions to negotiate belonging. In the internet age, those negotiations are happening in Facebook groups, Clubhouse rooms, Twitter spaces, and other forums within the social media loci. To Yorùbá netizens who are able to afford history monographs and journal articles authored by mainstream academic historians, it often appears as though the latter are more concerned with being diplomatic and value-free in their presentation of historical narratives. Meanwhile, the same Yorùbá netizens would often expect that such publications massage the reader's ethnonationalism biases, i.e., to demonstrate Yorùbá exceptionalism. This imagined lack of solidarity from mainstream academic historians pushes Yorùbá netizens toward Yorùbá CHHs. Such gravitation toward the latter is made easier because, in contrast to mainstream academic historians, most of whom write in English and primarily communicate through monographs and journal articles, Yorùbá CHHs are closer to netizens by virtue of using a shared indigenous language to communicate history while maintaining consistent engagement on social media. This proximity with netizens gives Yorùbá CHHs more epistemic power as propagators of Yorùbá oral traditions and, by extension, Yorùbá history, over mainstream academic historians in the social media metaverse.

Along a related line, though, there is no questioning the strength of scholarship about the role of politics in how people memorialize the past on social media and how this memorialization could be archived.⁵⁴ But if the

⁵⁴ Mike Frangos, "Transmedia Beckett: Come and Go and the Social Media Archive," *Adaptation* 6–2 (2012), 215–229; Janne Nielsen, *Using Web Archives in Research: An Introduction* (Aarhus: NetLab, 2016); Neils Brügger and Ralph Schroeder (eds.), *The Web as History: Using Web Archives to Understand the Past and the Present* (London: UCL Press, 2017); Pavlos Fafalios et al., "Multi-aspect Entity-Centric Analysis of Big Social Media Archives," in Kamps, Jaap et al. (eds.), *Research and Advanced Technology for Digital Libraries* (Cham: Springer, 2017), 261–273; Ashlyn Velte, "Ethical Challenges and Current Practices in Activist Social Media Archives," *The American Archivist* 81–1 (2018), 112–134; Carmen Lee and Dennis Chau, "Language as Pride, Love, and Hate: Archiving Emotions Through Multilingual Instagram Hashtags," *Discourse, Context, and Media* 22 (2018), 21–29. Pavlos Fafalios et al., "Tracking the History and Evolution of Entities: Entity-centric Temporal Analysis of Large Social Media Archives," *International Journal on Digital Libraries* 21 (2020), 5–17; Jessica Ogden, "'Everything on the internet can be saved': Archive Team, Tumblr and the Cultural Significance of Web Archiving," *Internet Histories* 6–1 (2022), 113–132; and

historian finds it useful to understand the evolution of a tradition and its effects on social relations over time before hoping to make a comprehensive sense of that tradition, it might be useful for the same historian to consider how contaminants permeating social media are altering continuities and discontinuities in that specific tradition. This openness is essential because the oral sources – traditions, life histories, etc. – that mainstream academic historians will seek during future fieldwork in Africa stands to echo the sentiments of CHHs.

The future of African writing and orally generated cultural texts is locked with the future of social media. Doing African history in the internet age without cognizance of social media's influence on oral sources leaves significant questions to be answered regarding the integrity of those sources. The fact that there are hardly any set guidelines for historians to use in studying oral sources on social media opens up an opportunity for suggestions in methodology-focused journals. Lastly, it is clear from the preceding that it would be wrong to suggest that orally generated cultural texts no longer serve as the primary driver of history conversations among Africans. Certainly, Africa is not in a post-oral age. As this article shows, the convergence of homespun historians and the non-academic public on social media platforms indicates a continued relevance of oral texts to history discourses in Africa. It also suggests that the unprecedented access to influencers and followers who share specific political biases on social media is respectively influencing African netizens and homespun historians to re-embrace their oral origin of history teaching.

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