15

Style, Race, and a Mosque of the "Òyìnbó Dúdú" (White-Black) in Lagos Colony, 1894

Adedoyin Teriba

In the darkness of early morning on June 6, 1894, a thirty-eight-year-old Englishman thought of the mission that lay before him as he waited in a Liverpool lodging house for the SS *Cabenda* to depart for the British protectorate of Lagos.[1] Less than two months prior, Abdul Hamid II, the sultan of the Ottoman Empire, had conveyed a letter through the Ottoman consul general of Liverpool asking the Briton go to Lagos, in what is now Nigeria, to do two things.[2] First, to bestow the Ottoman Third Class Order of the Medjidie medal on Mohammed Shitta, a Sierra Leonean Muslim immigrant, and second, to deliver a speech on the sultan's behalf at the opening of a mosque in Lagos that Mohammed Shitta had paid for.[3] (The medal was in a parcel from the Ottoman court). The Englishman's name was Abdullah Quilliam, and he was a Victorian Muslim.[4]

It was only natural that Sultan Abdul Hamid had picked Quilliam for these duties: he was the sheikh al-Islam to the sultan, the advisor of Islamic affairs in the British Isles. In 1887, seven years before the inauguration of the mosque in Lagos, to which this essay will soon turn, Quilliam had converted to Islam and founded the Liverpool Islamic Institute. Furthermore, he appointed the kola nut merchant Mohammed Shitta the vice president of the Liverpool organization four

Fig. 15.1 Mohammed Shitta-Bey in the 1890s, from Abdur Rahman I, *Islam in Nigeria* (Zaria, Nigeria: Gaskiya Corp., 1984).

months after the mosque in Lagos opened. After twenty days at sea, Quilliam finally disembarked on the shores of the city, a week before the opening ceremony of the mosque.

Many distinguished guests attended the officiation. King Oyekan I of Lagos was there, as well as Edward Wilmot Blyden, the Trinidadian pan-Africanist and naturalized citizen of Liberia. Sir Gilbert Carter, the British governor general of Lagos sat next to Quilliam during the ceremony. Quilliam delivered a speech on behalf of the sultan of Constantinople and gave Mohammed Shitta the noble Turkish title of "Bey," which was customary for recipients of the Third Class Order of the Medjidie. From that time until Shitta's death in 1895, the financier of the mosque affixed the Ottoman designation to his last name, calling himself Mohammed Shitta-Bey (figure 15.1).

The *Lagos Weekly Record* reported at the time that the mosque was the "finest specimen of ecclesiastical architecture in West Africa," and that the edifice should be embraced as an exemplar of what Lagosians could erect.[5] It is worth noting that, at this time, the *Weekly Record* was awash with letters from African immigrants who had debated whether local citizens should wear European-styled clothing and bear English names or cling on to local dress and names.[6] It seems that the *Record*'s coverage of the mosque continued an ongoing quest for a local modernity emerging in different aspects of the Lagosian society.[7] African immigrant readers of the Lagosian newspapers at the turn of the twentieth century had started to debate modernism and constituted a small part of the Lagos populace. The efforts of these settlers to cultivate a local Lagosian elite in print culture and in architecture may have given rise to the term òyìnbó *dúdú* used by locals to describe the immigrants.[8] Translated as "white-black" in English, the term may have been used by local Lagosians to differentiate themselves from the African immigrants who they thought acted and spoke like the British colonialists. Hence, they linked the immigrants' behavior, architecture, and taste in clothing with the European residents in the city: using a physiognomic description (white-black) as a metaphor for the immigrants' activities.

Colonial officials also praised the beauty of Shitta-Bey's mosque and the collaboration of individuals of different religions who executed the project.[9] For example, Sir Gilbert Carter, the British governor-general of Lagos Colony at the time, stated that for Lagos to continue to enjoy peace, the city's population had to emulate the migrant Muslims and Catholics' collaboration on the mosque's construction. This essay will examine how Shitta-Bey's mosque reveals the ways in which the collaborative building efforts of a group of settlers from Brazil and Sierra Leone, as well as Lagosian elites, embodied the enmeshing of architectural style and local notions of race in the colony at the turn of the twentieth century. Moreover, it will also explore how the mosque amplified certain Yorùbá-language concepts like òyìnbó dúdú, which reflected a local racial discourse that tried to decipher the place of African immigrants in the colony.

Before suggesting how Mohammed Shitta's mosque and other structures like it marked a shift in the relations between settlers and locals in Lagos, I will cover a short history of the city as well as a demographic analysis of the African immigrant population and how they related to the rest of Lagos's residents. The region that is now known as Lagos was first settled in the fifteenth century, by King Ògúnfúnminire, who established the fertile area as the kingdom of Èkó.[10] In 1852, Akítóyè, the *oba* (monarch) of Lagos gave the Olówógbówó borough to the Sàró (the Sierra Leonean immigrants).[11] Otherwise called "Sàró Town," it was located in the southwestern part of the city. Portuguese merchants who traded with Akítóyè's ancestors in the fifteenth century had initially named the entire city

"Lago de Curamo"—*lago* meaning lake in Portuguese—which the British later called "Lagos" when they annexed the territory in 1861.[12] Akítóyè had requested the British Crown's aid in order to reclaim his throne, which Kòsọ́kọ́, his cousin, had usurped in the 1850s. The British drove Kòsọ́kọ́ into exile in the kingdom of Ẹ̀pẹ́. His banishment also led to a ban on the city's slave trade, because he had exported slaves to Portugal and Brazil. Subsequently the British government in Lagos implemented a policy of "indirect rule," which kept Akítóyè in place as a titular sovereign.

The traditional urban planning of Èkó differed from the other older realms in what is now southwestern Nigeria. For example, in Ifẹ̀ the palace of the king of lay in the center of the ancient kingdom; chiefs lived in houses that surrounded the Ifẹ̀ monarch's residence, suggesting that royal power radiated from the center of kingdom outward. The absence of such spatial planning in Lagos alludes to the possibility that Ògúnfúnminire and his descendants ignored the precedent of older urban designs, preferring to conceive the urban landscape differently.[13] For example, the palace in Èkó was an architectural icon to be seen at different angles, and which was not shielded or protected by the houses of chiefs that surrounded it. The British colonialists did not interfere with the layout of the kingdom of Èkó and confined their urban planning to Marina, the seat of the colonial government in Lagos Colony. However, the colonial government also oversaw the allotment of parcels of land to African immigrants in other parts of the colony.[14] Moreover, the colonial government barred most Lagosians from owning property in Marina, only allowing wealthy locals like Chief Conrad Taiwo to purchase land in the vicinity.[15]

The absence of the visual spectacle of chiefs' houses around and concealing the king's palace and Britain's seizure of the Lagos colony in 1861 may have caused native Lagosians to question the power and endurance of the Lagosian monarchy.[16] The appeal to the British of the Sàró and to a lesser extent the Àgùdà (Afro-Brazilian immigrants) who settled in the colony between 1850 and 1900 to annex the kingdom in order to quell the slave trade was another significant event in the history of Lagos.[17] That episode may have worked in tandem with the Sàró and Àgùdà's choices of architectural design and construction to underscore how the British as well as the African immigrants eventually wrested control of the kingdom from the office of the *ọ̀ba* (king), known for its participation in the slave trade.[18]

The annexation of Lagos saw the emergence of four distinct urban zones at the turn of the twentieth century. The northeast part of the colony—Ìsàlẹ̀ Èkó—was where the ọba of Lagos resided. Consisting of the king's palace and the market, it was also called "Old Lagos."[19] To the north was Pópó Àgùdà, which the ọba gave to the Afro-Brazilians.[20] The British settled in and confined their interventions in

Marina, as mentioned earlier, which was east of Olówógbówó, another name for Sàró Town.[21]

Some of the Sàró and the Àgùdà spoke Ìjẹ̀bu, Ẹ̀gbá, and other dialects with common etymological roots, which Ajayi Crowther (1809–1891), a Sàró Protestant clergyman streamlined into a pan-Yorùbá language in the 1840s.[22] Other immigrants spoke the Igbo and Delta-Cross languages that originated in current-day southeastern Nigeria.[23] The Lagosians' connection to the area around the ọba's realm shaped their attitudes toward the Sàró and the Àgùdà, and vice versa. Ògúnfúnminire's descendants may have thought of themselves as *omọ ilé* (children of the earth) and viewed the new arrivals from Brazil and Sierra Leone as intruders. Consequentially, they would have chosen not to live outside Ìsàlẹ̀ Èkó. Some Àgùdà and Sàró's contempt for Ifá, the local religion, further soured their already tense relationships with the locals. There were other immigrants, however, who worshipped Yorùbá gods while remaining Muslims or Catholics. In fact, it was not uncommon for some to be devotees of three faiths (Islam, Catholicism, and Ifá) at the same time. Yet the Sàró and the Àgùdà saw this clash of faiths as a distinguishing divide from omọ ilé.[24] The Àgùdà also cooked Afro-Brazilian dishes and sang serenades in Portuguese, reminiscing about their past in Brazil.[25] Within this diverse, and often tense, ethnic mix the need to assert one's space in these boroughs became habitual.

The Marina area consisted of the residence of the governor-general, the colonial offices, as well as European and foreign African retail stores. Samuel Pearse's Elephant House of 1907 was an example of how a Sàró's residence conveyed, in the minds of locals, the blurred distinctions between the colonial buildings' facades and those owned by the descendants of Sierra Leonean immigrants. The residential, civic, and commercial buildings of the European residents and colonial officers of Lagos were mostly multistory prefabricated structures or were made out of stone and brick. The height of their architecture alone made a great contrast with the native Lagosians' single-story homes made out of adobe. The Sàró's residences, on the other hand, were as tall as the colonial architecture. Hence, Pearse's name, and two-story Elephant House, as well as his preference for bespoke tailored clothing may have reinforced in the minds of the native Lagosians the blurred distinctions between the Sàró and the European residents.

Born in Lagos in 1866, Pearse was educated in the city's Christian Missionary Society Grammar School. He was the cofounder of a shipping company known as Messrs. Pearse & Thompson, which had offices along the Marina district as well as in Leadenhall Street in London.[26] Additionally, Pearse produced a report on the state of rubber resources in Benin City for the colonial government in 1907. As the secretary of the Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Rights Protection Society, he led a delegation of Yorùbá chiefs to London to

contest the Foreshore decision of the Lagos Supreme Court of 1911, which had granted the British Crown ownership of all the land in Lagos Colony.[27] The Sàró use of ashlar masonry construction—which is specific to European design and construction—also reinforced their desire to be favorably compared with the colonialists. This aspiration to òyìnbó tastes among the Sàró contradicts Níyì Afọlábí's observation that ex-slaves in Brazil and West Africa created artifacts that were solely reconstructions of their "ancestral" pasts.[28] Moreover, the indigenes read the buildings of the Sàró and the Àgùdà as emblems of the visitors' cosmopolitan heritage, which the newcomers had the wherewithal to create. As will be shown, the Sàró and the Àgùdà urban interventions used baroque architectural forms and motifs to reimagine local customs to serve their aspirational goals as "black Europeans."

The Sàró and Àgùdà were part of a large contingent of black Europeans—black immigrants from either Europe or European colonies—who argued that Victorian ideals needed to be embraced to advance the black Lagosian society of the future.[29] The immigrants propagated their agenda through a slew of English-language newspapers they established in the 1880s, such as *Anglo-African* founded by West Indian Robert Campbell in Lagos in 1863.[30] These media outlets also served as platforms for debates over what aspects of Victorian culture and ancestral customs immigrants and natives should emulate or discard. In the case of the *Anglo-African*, about half its readership (roughly three thousand) were Sàró and West Indian, and the remainder were educated indigenes, which indicates the complex configuration of race and class identity in nineteenth-century Lagos. [31]

In literary and dramatic circles within the city, black Lagosian elite often worked with missionaries and European residents to produce concerts and plays and to open the first schools.[32] Within the black Victorian citizenry of Lagos, then, were individuals with varying degrees of influence and relations with their European counterparts and the "uneducated natives." While some immigrants saw themselves as middlemen between the Europeans and the natives in the region, there was a female Sàró whose status ranked even higher than that of the British governor-general of her time.[33] Sarah Forbes Bonetta, whose guardian was Queen Victoria, lived in Lagos from approximately 1863 to 1880 after her marriage to Sàró captain James Davies.[34] Forbes, then Sarah Davies, contributed to the emerging class of educated female natives in the region by teaching in the female institutions in Freetown and Lagos.

The black Victorian class in Lagos also included Muslims who were as committed as their Christian counterparts to "civilizing" the Lagosians—but in an Islamic way. Mohammed Shitta-Bey was one such Sàró Muslim, and his mosque was part of a civilizing project. His endeavor complemented the efforts of the Trinidadian educator Edward Blyden to nurture an Islamic Lagosian elite in the

1890s.[35] Mohammed Shitta-Bey's enchantment with the city, its diverse moods, and impressions presented an opportunity to create a lasting legacy for Sàró Muslim immigrants. And since his land was not within view of the ọba's realm, he could build a structure that did not fit into the neighborhood's existing urban fabric. What follows is an account of what prompted Shitta-Bey to build a mosque that changed Lagosians' conceptions of African Islam.

From 1820 to 1899, there was a migration of more than eight thousand ex-slaves of African descent who left northeastern Brazil and settled in Lagos. These migrants left Brazil for a variety of reasons. Salvador, Bahia, in Brazil witnessed nine antislavery uprisings in the nineteenth century.[36] The Malê, a group of Muslim slaves of African descent, were at the forefront of these revolts.[37] There were other Brazilian manumitted slaves who left Brazil because of the diminishing economic opportunities in the city centers—these were carpenters, goldsmiths, blacksmiths, masons, painters. In 1880 alone, Lagos had 3,221 Afro-Brazilians and Afro-Cubans as well as 111 Europeans out of a total population of 37,458 residents.[38]

The Sàró of Sierra Leone were primarily former slaves who had been brought to the colony after the abolition of the British slave trade. Church groups established schools, and even the University of Durham started the Fourah Bay College in Freetown, which taught freedmen. Hence, a number of African residents in Freetown could read and write English. Part of this literate class decided to relocate to southwestern Nigeria, including Mohammed Shitta-Bey. They tended to work as civil servants in the colonial government.

Encoded in the term òyìnbó dúdú, then, was the realization that these newcomers interacted with the British and other European settlers and with each other. Also implicit was the religious aspect of foreign difference, which can be seen in the construction team assembled for Shitta-Bey's mosque. Protestant Christians and Muslims built mosques and churches together in Sierra Leone, so it was no surprise that Mohammed Shitta-Bey hired two Afro-Brazilian Catholics to build his structure in Lagos.[39]

Shitta-Bey's mosque was placed in Sàró Town, in the Olówógbówó district. It was close to the British Government Reserved Area, and the similarity between the stone facing of the pilasters on its front facade and the post office building in Lagos suggests Shitta's taste for the colonial style of building. The symmetrical front facade of Shitta's mosque and the use of oculi echo classical architecture. The pinnacles that crowned the pilasters on both the face of the building and its rear deviate from the design strategies that the local inhabitants employed.

The facade is made out of brick and clad with ceramic tiles (figure 15.2). It is difficult to ascertain whether the building had a dome, as a newspaper article that covered its opening ceremony indicated.[40] Its rectangular square plan and barrel vault suggests that the journalist may have mistakenly called the vault a dome. In

Fig. 15.2 Mosque financed by Mohammed Shitta in colonial Lagos, 1894. Source: British Museum Photographic Archive.

any case, the vault is capped with a gable roof, which is now made of aluminum. Seven stone pilasters laid in ashlar masonry divide the mosque's facade.

A horizontal stone cornice separates the pediment proper from the arcade below, protruding beyond the surface of the pilasters. Intertwining red vine crockets capped with a star under a lunar crescent adorn the pediment's pilasters. The alignment of the pilasters creates a visual continuity despite the difference in surface, alluding to the baroque. The cornice consists of a fillet, cyma recta, cyma reversa, as well as a corona and is devoid of other features found in traditional cornices. Two oculi carved in stone lie side by side with the central pilaster, and a baroque twirl tops the cornice.

The arcade has wooden doors leading to the foyer. Male and female ablution rooms flank the north and south facades (see figures 15.3 and 15.4). Inside, the ceiling is lined with wood. The mihrab, the opening toward Mecca, is located at the center of the qibla wall. The curved staircase to the right of the mihrab serves as a minbar, from where the imam delivers his sermon. The conflation of the mihrab and minbar into a single space in this mosque is an unusual departure from the Islamic architectural canon.

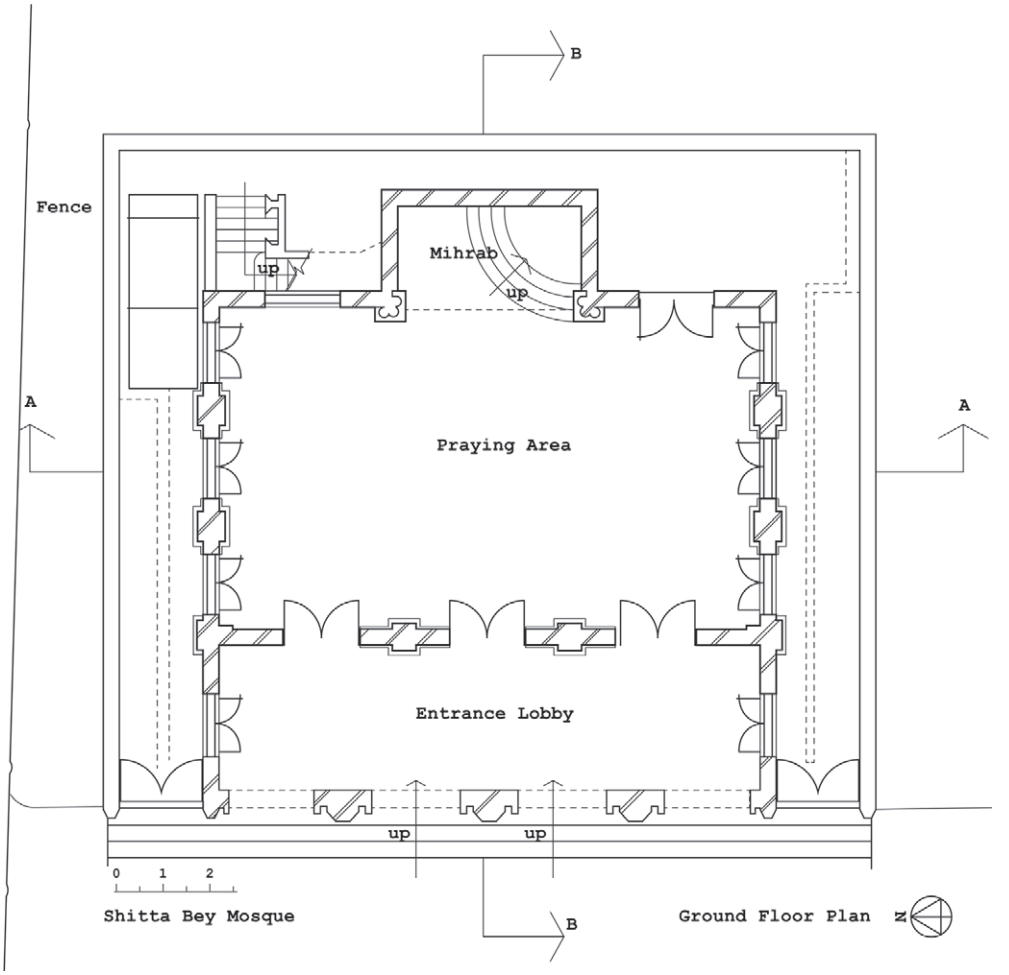

Fig. 15.3 Section of mosque. Drawing by Lina Kudinar after original from Marjorie Alonge, "Afro-Brazilian Architecture in Lagos State: A Case for Conservation," PhD diss. (University of Newcastle, 1994).

The symmetry of mosque's front facade was a typology that was common to the Victorian houses in England as well as the Jesuits' ecclesiastical architecture in northeastern Brazil. (The mosque's wooden gates in the arched bays were also a prevalent feature of many houses in northeastern Brazil.) The ashlar pilasters in the broken pediment of the building's facade on the other hand were a feature of Victorian architecture alone and highlight the subtle way that the two Afro-Brazilian master masons who worked on the building appropriated a feature of the colonial buildings in the city. The colorful ornamentation on the pinnacles of the broken pediment—which is dissimilar to the mostly monochromatic pinnacles on Gothic cathedrals—may reveal a continuation of the native Lagosians' propensity to paint icons of spirits on their religious buildings.

The mosque may have been Mohammed Shitta-Bey's most public gesture of elite cosmopolitan taste. Yet his family's Islamic educational causes suggest that

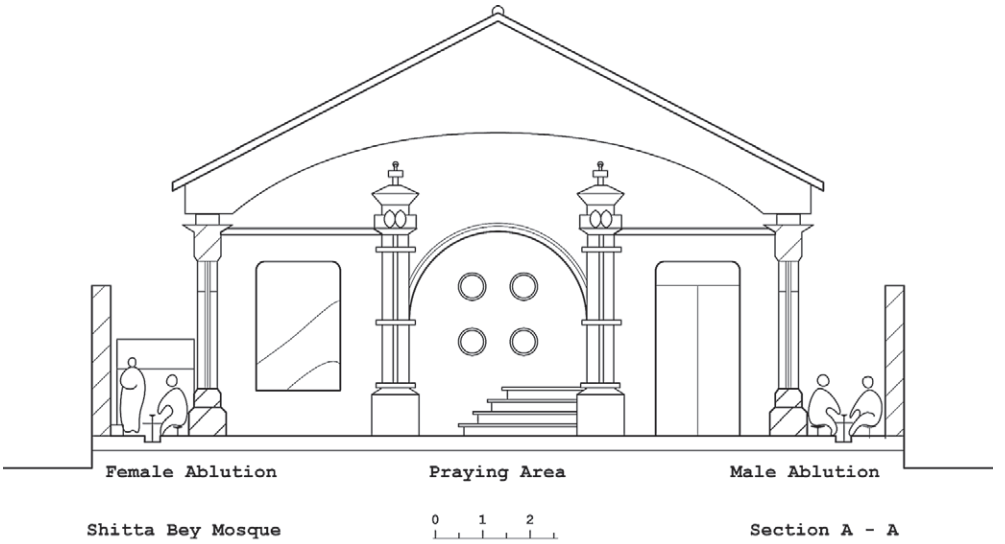

Fig. 15.4 Plan of mosque showing north and south ablution rooms. Drawing by Lina Kudinar after original from Marjorie Alonge, "Afro-Brazilian Architecture in Lagos State: A Case for Conservation," PhD diss. (University of Newcastle, 1994).

he may have empathized with local indigenes.[41] Local opinion of him was equally complex. Shitta-Bey was definitely an òyìnbó dúdú. Indigene Lagosians may have gotten this impression when, for example, he was one of the dignitaries who welcomed Princess Helen to Lagos in 1894. Standing side by side with Europeans, he displayed his kinship with the colonialists. His friends included most of the past British consuls of Lagos: John Beecroft, Benjamin Campbell, Henry Grant Foote, and Henry Stanhope Freeman. They affectionately called him William. The locals on their part called him Olówó Pupa, which means "the red man who has money." However, the name Olówó Pupa may have been another way of saying that Shitta-Bey was white, for Lagosians in this era also called Europeans *pupa* because of the pinkish color of their skin.

Additionally, Shitta's exposure to a Victorian worldview differed from the other Muslims in Lagos, further differentiating his aesthetic tastes and the ones of the omọ ilé who had become Muslims. Scant evidence exists about what mosques looked like before the Sàró and Àgùdà built their own. Adobe mosques in the British protectorate of Northern Nigeria could have been models Lagosian Muslims relied upon, especially since the emirates of Borno and Sokoto became the spiritual centers of Islam in the northern and southern protectorates of Nigeria.

In conclusion, Mohammed Shitta's mosque was a significant display of local discourses between citizens of various kingdoms in Lagos Colony about race, difference, and foreigners that relied upon a variety of visual markers including architectural styles. The mosque's size, its use of ornament, the status of the archi-

tects and patron who built it, as well as the architectural typologies that the mosque drew inspiration from underscore the omọ ilé's conception that such material objects, as well as the immigrants' physical features, were proof that the visitors came from a place across the seas. It also serves as evidence for the ways in which colonial power, class difference, and foreignness manifest in architecture aesthetically and materially, complicating an understanding of black and white in Lagos and producing a hierarchical and unstable racial logic.