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**Yoruba Nationalist Movements, Ethnic Politics and Violence:
A Creation from Historical Consciousness and Socio-political
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Abstract

Since 1900, the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria have put its ethnic history at work in the construction of its identity in Nigeria. The exercise resulted in the creation of ethno-nationalist movements and the practice of ethnic politics, often expressed through violent attacks on the Nigerian State¹ and some ethnic groups in Nigeria. Relying on mythological attachment to its traditions and subjective creation of cultural pride, the people created a sense of history that established a common interest among different Yoruba sub-groups in form of pan-Yoruba interest which forms the basis for the people's imagination of nation. Through this, historical consciousness and socio-political space in which Yoruba people are located acted as instrumental forces employed by Yoruba political elites, both at colonial and post-colonial periods to demand for increasing access to political and economic resources in Nigeria. In form of nationalism, nationalist movements and ethnic politics continued in South-western Nigeria since 1900, yet without resulting to actual creation of an independent Yoruba State up to 2009. Through ethnographic data, the part played by history, tradition and modernity is examined in this paper. While it is concluded that ethno-nationalist movement and ethnic politics in Yoruba society are constructive agenda dated back to pre-colonial period, it continues to transform both in structure and function. Thus, Yoruba ethno-nationalist movement and ethnic politics is ambiguous, dynamic and complex, to the extent that it remains a challenge to State actions in Nigeria.

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¹ State with upper case 'S' as used in this paper implies the politically sovereign group of people within a defined territory, while state with lower case 's' implies the federating units of a State as practiced in Nigeria.

Yoruba Nationalist Movements, Ethnic Politics and Violence: A Creation from Historical Consciousness and Socio-political Space in South-western Nigeria

Aderemi Suleiman Ajala¹

Introduction

In this paper, I deal with ethnic-based nationalism (subsequently refers to as Yoruba nationalist movements²), ethnic politics and violence in Yoruba land– an African society which is located in the tropical region of South-western Nigeria. As early as 1900s Yoruba people had started the creation of ethnic-based nationalist movements firstly as a cultural project and by the 1940s the Yoruba nationalist movements assumed a political dimension in form of civic nationalism; and between the 1960s to 2009, this involved the use of violence. The first intent of this paper is to discuss the development of Yoruba nationalist movements within the context of tradition, history and modernity. In the process, other themes such as the changing nature of Yoruba (ethnic) nationalist movement, the use of violence in ethno-nationalist movement and effects of Yoruba nationalist movement on the State actions in Nigeria are also detailed.

Many scholarly works are available on Yoruba identity and politics. Yet bearing in mind that group identity and socio-political formation that form the basis for nationalism and politics are complex and subject to change, more research is needed on Yoruba identity and politics especially on how ethnic-based nationalists shape Yoruba politics and how Yoruba nationalist movements have impacted on Nigerian State both at the colonial and post-colonial periods. It is particularly so in realization of the ambiguity and controversies characterizing Yoruba nationalist movements, and the changes which the movements experienced between the 1900s and 2009. Specifically, Yoruba nationalism and politics changed not only in terms of its structure but also in its functions. Resting on historical consciousness of the people and the socio-political space in which the Yoruba people live in Nigeria – a number of pre-colonial independent kingdoms (sub-ethnic groups) that was colonized and formed into a

¹ I would like to appreciate the valuable, strong, frank and polite comments by Prof. Carola Lentz on my research efforts; and that of Eva Spies for her critical comments on the second draft of this particular paper. I also thank Prof. Onookome Okome and Thomas Bierschenk for their useful suggestions at the Institutskolloquium where I presented the first draft of this paper. Jan Beek and Sarah Fichtner were also very helpful in many of our informal discussions on our individual research. As all the opinions raised in this paper are entirely mine, I am responsible for any shortcoming that might be noticed in the paper.

² I refer to Yoruba nationalism as nationalist movements because it is still in progress and it has not led to the creation of an independent Yoruba State.

British colonial territory with other ethnic groups around the River Niger area and since 1960 a member of about 270 ethnic groups forming a post-colonial State calls Nigeria – Yoruba nationalism is influenced by the changing nature of the Nigerian society as a whole.

Formation of group identity and socio-political movements among the Yoruba people in the colonial period was different both in form and functions compared with what it was at pre-colonial time. At the pre-colonial Yoruba society, the group consciousness was mainly created as historical link among the Yoruba people, mostly through the refugees and the Oyo migrants of the collapsed Old Oyo Kingdom, who invoked history to construct a political hegemony linking several Yoruba sub-groups (Dortmund, 1989; Falola and Genova, 2006), with either the political cradle (Oyo) and/or the spiritual cradle (Ile-Ife) of “the Yoruba people”³. Apart from Ife and Oyo, the Yoruba subgroups still consist about eighteen other subgroups in South-western Nigeria, with another two sub-groups in Republic of Benin and Togo. Different Yoruba sub-groups used their sense of common identity as a group to establish cultural influence and political power. Each of these different Yoruba sub-groups claimed its distinct sub-group identity at the pre-colonial period. During the colonial time, the early Yoruba elites mainly Christian clergies created the idea of cultural nationalism in form of pan-Yoruba identity initially constructed as a cultural work (Peel, 1989), which was later turned into a political project in the post-colonial era by Yoruba colonial political elites – a transition that began shortly before the end of British colonialism in Nigeria. It was the emphasis on its political imports that led Yoruba politicians to develop the idea of political nationalism from the earlier cultural nationalism, which in turn embraced the use of violence directed against Nigeria as a State and the Hausa/Fulani⁴ political group – another major ethnic group in Nigeria – whom the Yoruba politicians always perceived as causing socio-political marginalization against the Yoruba.

In this paper, following this introductory section, the rest of the paper is divided into three main parts. The first part contains both conceptual and the theoretical examinations of the terms- nationalism, ethnic politics and nationalist movements in Yoruba land. The anchoring concepts are contextualized and discussed theoretically relying on constructivists’ theoretical position. The second part discusses the research procedures and some findings that

³ Yoruba as a term is referring to the collection of people in South-western Nigeria is of recent invention dated to the early 19th century.

⁴ Hausa/Fulani ethnic group is one of the three most populated ethnic groups in Nigeria, located in Northern Nigeria. Other two ethnic groups are Yoruba in South-western Nigeria and Igbo in South-eastern Nigeria. Since Nigeria independence in 1960, these three ethnic groups have been involved in competition for Nigerian political power.

are relevant to the theme of this paper. This section apart from discussing the study motivation, the data collection and analysis procedures are detailed in such a way that brings out the comprehensiveness of the generated data. Also this part of the paper brings to bear the working of Yoruba history and traditions into nationalism and the part played by Yoruba political elites in the process. The last part of the paper discusses both the dynamics of Yoruba nationalist movements and brings out its implications on Nigeria as a State. On the whole the paper concludes that ethnic nationalism has spread to other ethnic groups in Nigeria, following the example of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria, and in effect ethnic nationalism continues to undermine the State process of fostering integration and political development in Nigeria.

I. Nationalism, ethnic politics and Yoruba nationalist movements

Conceptual Analysis: Nationalism and Ethnic Politics

The concept- nationalism emerged from nation and posited in various meanings by various scholars. Nation is an “imagined political community” (Anderson, 1983), “a daily plebiscite” (Renan, 1990), and “a contested community” (Yewah, 2001) that is sustained not by any actual judicial affiliation but by the imagination of its citizens (Young, 2004) who in the opinion of Brabazon (2005) must consent to their nationality. Whether a nation is imagined, constructed or invented, it is an imagination that is based on a some materiality real enough to bind a particular group of people together in an expression of certain commonly expressed cultural contents such as imagined space, spiritual link, history, ethnicity, ancestry, language, and political aspiration among others. All these homogenized cultural contents bind a group or sub-groups of people together to affirm nationhood.

Because nationalism is defined as loyalty and attachment to the nation (Virtanen, 2005), it is important that such loyalty and attachment must be expressed above and beyond individual differences. It must also be a projection of group identity aiming at declaring the group autonomy either in full or in part. Thus, nationalism is often expressed in the contexts of history of origin and political development, patri- or matrimonial descent, and cultural ethnocentrism commonly shared by a group of people seeing itself as different from others within which it jointly exists as a political State. This has being the experience among the Quebecois in Canada (Cormier, 2002), the Kurds in Iraq, Turkish and Iranian, Corsicans in Spain (Gurr, 2000); the Irish in United Kingdom (Hutchinson, 1987a) and the Eritrea in

Ethiopia who had been involved in ethno-nationalism. The above suggests that nationalism is the mobilization by a group of people who see themselves as sharing a common identity in terms of socio-cultural values such as language, history, tradition and political aspiration among others and use such in self-determination towards the creation of its own sovereign State. The utmost goal of nationalism therefore is a creation of an autonomous State by a group of people bounded together in a common identity.

While nationalism as a political project has changed the political landscapes of many States such as the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Ethiopia, where dissent ethno-nationalists have broken out to establish their own new Republics; in many other States like Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, aggrieved nationalist movements often threatened the collapse of the States through violent agitations. It therefore suggests that nationalism is a modern political identity engaged in competition for political sovereignty in many heterogeneous States. In the 21st century it is often expressed as resentment against perceived marginalization, over-centralization of State power, especially in the newly emerging democratic States of sub-Saharan Africa as democracy guarantees political freedom, which in many of the post-colonial African societies were initially denied by military governments that characterized many of these societies during the last decades of the 20th century. The expression of nationalism presents States in sub-Saharan Africa as a terminal community and acts as a form of ethnicity employed in creation of a distinct nation (Duruji, 2008: 89).

There are two distinctions of nationalism – cultural nationalism and civil nationalism. As observed by Hutchinson (1992) Hutchinson and Smith (1994) and Cormier (2000) civic nationalism develops claim to political autonomy expressed in form of sovereign State (Gellner, 1983; Cormier, 2002) based on common citizenship (Cormier, 2003: 531) created among politically homogenous but likely) culturally diverse groups that seek joint autonomy from oppressive regimes. Mostly, political actors and legislators often lead civic nationalist movements, engaging in political battles through constitutional reforms, political protests, formation of indigenous political party systems and political education and sensitizations that are institutionally channeled towards declaration of national sovereignty. In other words civic nationalism operates as a top-down system in which political leaders employ legal and political framework (Cormier, 2003) to mobilize different principal nationalities to claim independence from alien government, as was the case of many African post-colonial States that started to claim their independence from their former colonies in the late 1950s. Nigeria had its independence in 1960 following the use of civic nationalism against British

colonialism practiced in Nigeria between 1900 and 1960. Civic nationalism is therefore a political project of establishing indigenous statehood and politically sovereign State.

On the other hand, cultural nationalism rests on linguistic, educational (Hutchinson, 1987a Barber, 1989), artistic rejuvenation of a cultural community or nation (Hutchinson, 1992), expression of all forms of ideational and material cultures especially aesthetic values that are regarded as the cultural touchstones and prides of a particular cultural groups. As noted by Adebani (2005) the invention of such cultural pride, rest on the attachment of a common descent and aspirations of a set of people owing a strong cultural ties and an interest directed towards national sovereignty. This brand of nationalism appeals mostly to cultural intellectuals, educators, indigenous clergies, students, journalists and other professionals wanting to reassert their distinctive cultural pride against the perceived (already created or intended) cultural pride projected, using writing and media as their cultural values. In a way cultural nationalism connects together small-scale grassroots (Hutchinson, 1987b) socio-cultural organizations and associations who engage in struggle for the recognition of their cultural heritage and expression of such as preservable cultural pride (Cormier, 2003). As an expression of cultural pride, cultural nationalism is often a precursor to civic nationalism. However as the distinction between cultural nationalism and civic nationalism is often narrow, cultural nationalism can (as in most cases) develop to civic nationalism as often being the case in many States where cultural nationalism embraced political activity directed towards State autonomy. But in the case where cultural nationalism is not too political to have led a group to State autonomy, it is just ethnicity – a convergence between ethnicity which is to a large extent cultural and nationalism being political.

In the context of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria, the expression of nationalism as we shall see shortly in details is in three phases. The first was in form of cultural nationalism based on expression of Yoruba cultural pride and creation of a national unity among diverse Yoruba sub-groups that existed in distinct kingdoms or chiefdoms at their pre-colonial period. Started from 1880s, the new Yoruba colonial-made intelligentsia and clergies created cultural nationalism to establish a common myth of origin, language, ideologies, religions and beliefs, craft and popular cultures to establish a pan-Yoruba pride and cultural superiority in the colonial Nigeria. At that time till the 1940s, the early Yoruba intellectuals and clergies that were involved in cultural nationalism, were not interested in the creation of a politically autonomous Yoruba State, rather they were interested in the British colonial administrative recognition of their ideational culture mostly the Yoruba language and the unity of Yoruba people. The second was the translation of this cultural pride into a

political project by the Yoruba colonial politicians starting from the 1940s in colonial Nigeria. It involved an appropriation of the legacies of cultural nationalism to negotiate inclusion in colonial government and to gain political control of Nigeria in the subsequent post-colonial Nigeria that was emerging since the late 1940s. The Yoruba myth of origin was re-invented to bind all Yoruba groups together as a political constituency, with a feeling of collective consciousness of being Yoruba (as a pride group) through which a set of “perceived” qualities of being better than other ethnic groups in Nigeria was constructed. All of which were translated to political actions such as the formation of political parties and socio-cultural groups, used in accessing political power and negotiation for political domination in Nigeria. The second phase of Yoruba nationalism were series of political movements in form of civic nationalism initially rested on fraternal relationship with other ethnic groups that constituted colonial Nigeria between 1900 and 1960. Following the marginalization, which the Yoruba experienced under the British colonial government and subsequent political suppression, which the people perceived it faced in Nigerian post-colonial State, political violence characterized the Yoruba post-colonial nationalism. With strong attachment to its mythological and “actual”⁵ power and perceived enlightenment based on the people’s literacy capacity, the Yoruba re-created its nationalism with the use of violence since 1964 till 2009 as the third phase of its nationalism. However, since Yoruba nationalism has not led to the creation of a Yoruba autonomous State, it is referred to as nationalist movements. Nationalist movements therefore imply both cultural and political agencies and structures employed by Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria to negotiate the political control of its socio-political space in both colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. Among these agencies and structures, ethnic cultural pride, mythological power, ethnic politics, rhetoric of political marginalization and violence are dominant in Yoruba practice of ethno-nationalist movements.

Ethnic politics is political bargaining that does not transcend a particular ethnic boundary (Obi and Okwechime, 2004: 349). The hallmark of ethnic politics is the party system that is absolutely based on ethnic affiliation. If a political party is based on the rallying symbols, and ideology of a particular ethnic group in a multi ethnic society and the party fails to have a national outlook, such political party is based on ethnic politics. As mentioned by Babawale (2007: 33) ethnic politics was predominant in Nigeria between 1950s and 1966;

⁵ The use of actual power here refers to the Yoruba belief that it has more successes in introducing welfare programmes that are real aspects of human development in Nigeria. As part of its cultural pride, Yoruba often refer to introduction of free primary education, free health care system, establishment of first television station in Africa, the unprecedented urbanization and industrialisation in western Nigeria (between 1950s and 1970s), which spread to other parts of Nigeria as the Yoruba ingenuity in governance.

among the Yoruba between 1979 and 1983; and between 1999 and 2005. Between 1950s and 1966, the political parties in Nigeria were purely ethnic based as each of the three political parties then represented different ethnic interests of the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria. While Action Group (AG) represented the Yoruba interest in South-western Nigeria, the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) represented the Igbo interests in Eastern Nigeria and Northern People's Congress (NPC) represented the Hausa/Fulani interests in Northern Nigeria. Like other ethnic groups such as the Hausa/Fulani, the Igbo and Ijaw in Nigeria that involved in ethno-nationalist movements, the Yoruba post-colonial ethno-nationalist, ethnic politics and violence contributed in a large scale to the fragility of Nigeria as a modern State.

African Ethnicity, Colonialism and Yoruba Nationalist Movements: Theoretical Perspectives

In consideration of nationalism and ethnic politics as elements of ethnicity in Nigeria, it is necessary to historicize ethnicity and place Yoruba ethno-nationalist movements in both historical and broader perspectives. Through pre-colonial to post-colonial periods, Nigerian societies are characterized by three major features that tend to promote ethnicity. The first is the expression of cultural and ethnic-based political hegemony among different ethnic groups that constituted pre-colonial Nigeria. Before the British colonialism in Nigeria, many ethnic groups in Pre-colonial Nigeria existed in Kingdoms with different independent political systems appropriated with local political hegemonies. Among the major one are the Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria, the Igbo in Eastern Nigeria and the Yoruba (Oyo) in South-western Nigeria. As often being the case where different politically independent societies are contiguously located, usually expression of a superior feeling of a group claiming certain physical and cultural characteristics superior to other groups in the same political contiguous space is common (Laitin, 1986; Marizu, 1998; Nyuot Yoh, 2005). Such characteristics could be cultural pride, ecological features regarded as either economic or political resources; historical advantages that are often constructed into social capitals and political influence among many others. Often, in heterogeneous societies, where one or more of the differentiated groups express hegemony, other groups do not willingly accept such an expression, then resulting to ethnic tensions and conflicts (Marizu, 1998). This was the case among the three dominant ethnic groups in pre-colonial Nigeria that partly accounted for the spread of Fulani Jihad from northern to southern Nigeria, which engaged the Yoruba and

Fulani in war in the 1830s. Even at the colonial period the three ethnic groups still held on to their differently conceived political hegemony at the expense of Nigerian colonial State, albeit, the British colonialism being able to manage the ethnic tensions that were generated, yet the feeling of one group being superior to others characterized the colonial political relationship among many Nigerian ethnic groups.

The second feature is the socio-cultural differentiation based on diverse cultural identity, political history and contests for space-characteristics that started to manifest among different ethnic groups in Nigeria right from the pre-colonial period. According to Barth (1956) and Schwarz (1965) the separation of human groups into identifiable and discrete units remains complex. As the complexity combines with the dialectics of contests for space, it gives certain groups the chance to exert their control over others (Wimmer, 2002; Young, 2004; Patnaik, 2006). Thus, with the intention of one group wanting to control space, there are often tensions and conflicts engaged with others sharing the same space, which may end up inflaming group relationship especially in sharply ethnically-differentiated societies. As evident in Nigeria, starting from colonial period till the present post-colonial time, there exists a sharp socio-cultural differentiation among the ethnic groups that form the Nigerian State. Such differentiations are expressed in different cultural and political histories; different cultural ideologies and beliefs; as well as different values; aspirations and visions, which often develop into ethnic nationalism and ethnic politics.

The last feature is that ethnicity and nationalism combine as a changing force through which freedom and more political and economic resources can be appropriated. Like in many other societies where ethnicity has been scholarly examined, Nigerian ethnic groups are dynamic and constantly changing as an adaptive response to the changing material demands imposed by their changing space (Depress, 1975; Gellner, 1983; Ericksen, 1991; Leroy, 2003; Virtanen, 2005). In Nigerian in particular changes experienced by ethnic groups over several decades included the regimes of authoritarianism (both colonial and post-colonial forms); economic depression; loss of confidence on government and return to democracy. And so ethnic groups that perceived themselves as been more affected than others engage nationalism and ethnic politics to assert political freedom and negotiating more political and economic power.

From the recent Illife's discussions (1979) that saw ethnicity as a colonial creation in Africa to Nugent (2008) who put history back into the African ethnicity by mapping pre-colonial ethnicity history among the Madinka/Jola of Senegambia region, it is clear that there

are two levels of theoretical discussions on African ethnicity. The first is that African ethnicity is a colonial construction made possible by interplay of European interventions of colonial administrators, Christian missionaries, colonial employers and early ethnographers on one hand and on the other through the agency of local Christian converts, educated elites and urban migrants as shown among Tangayika (Illife, 1979); Southern Africa (Leroy, 1989); and in Gambia (Wright, 1999). Emphasizing the exclusive colonial invention of ethnicity in Africa, Wright (1999) specifically warned against the danger of reading ethnicity in pre-colonial African societies, drawing on his study of ethnicity in Gambia. The second school, having historicized African ethnicity fished out elements of ethnicity in pre-colonial African societies in Kenya (Berman and Lonsdale, 1992); Dagara in Northern Ghana (Lentz, 2006); Igbo in South-eastern Nigeria (Harneit-Sievers, 2006) and Madinka/Jola in Senegambia (Nugent, 2008). Strengthening the constructivists' idea, the epochal work of John Lonsdale (1992 and 1996) first made a distinction between moral ethnicity and political tribalism and Spear (2003) in his debate on ethnicity maintained that ethnic concepts (ethnic nationalism inclusive), processes and politics predated colonialism especially in African societies. This second school puts a deeper historical view on the processes of local construction of ethnicity and its elements as against the first school that sees the colonialists as the constructors of ethnicity in Africa. Relying on historical details of ethnicity in Africa (Lentz, 2006; Nugent, 2008) the second school further established that the colonial and post-colonial elements of African ethnicity were mere adaptation of the pre-colonial elements that were initially present and expressed in many African societies. For instance the creation of some (new) colonial elements of ethnicity such as nationalism and new form of patron-clientele politics were re-creations from African pre-colonial group loyalty and the political influence of many pre-colonial African kings and chiefs. These elements of ethnicity were used by colonial and pre-colonial political elites to access political and economic resources. While I developed interest in identity politics and nationalism in the midst of these debates and been mentored by a strong constructivist of the historical school, as I hold throughout this paper, my orientation inclines towards locating elements of ethnicity in pre-colonial Yoruba society, and how such elements were adapted and used as instrumental forces by Yoruba political elites as instruments of ethno-nationalist movement and politics in both colonial and post-colonial periods.

Ethnicity is essentially a cultural phenomenon, albeit subjective and dynamic against nationalism that is political and created, similarly fluid and complex; ethnic identities are particular features of a particular group of people created in context of different particular

situations. Hence, in Yoruba context, consciousness of sub-group identities, identity formation based on distinct language dialects, Yoruba pre-colonial inter-tribal wars for political supremacy among various pre-colonial kingdoms (Johnson, 1921; Atanda, 1997) and kingship institutions that featured patronage politics (Joseph, 1981) were elements of ethnicity in pre-colonial Yoruba society, of which many were adapted into Yoruba colonial and post-colonial politics. However Yoruba ethno-nationalist movement was created as an element of colonial ethnicity. Like in Yoruba society that had a pre-colonial state political system, this is particularly similar in the history of ethnicity among Igbo of South-eastern Nigeria (Harneit-Sievers, 2006) and the Dagara of Northern Ghana (Lentz, 2006) which were pre-colonial stateless societies.

Impliedly on Nigerian State, the foregoing suggests that British colonialism and the responses from the early Nigerian educated and political elites created a unique linkage between colonial and post-colonial forms of political authoritarianism, patronage and clientelism on one hand and on the other, an ethnic fragmentation and political competition that already characterized diverse cultural groups in the pre-colonial Nigeria. The continuity of these institutions in form of power relations and identities that run through colonial and post-colonial periods has shaped the particular character of the State-ethnic group relations and politics in Nigeria, which bred prebendal politics (Joseph, 1981) and the politics of the belly (Osaghae, 2004). These coalesce in ethno-nationalist movements that undermine the legitimacy of the State, inhibit the formation of broader trans-ethnic national identities and also challenge the current efforts at democratization.

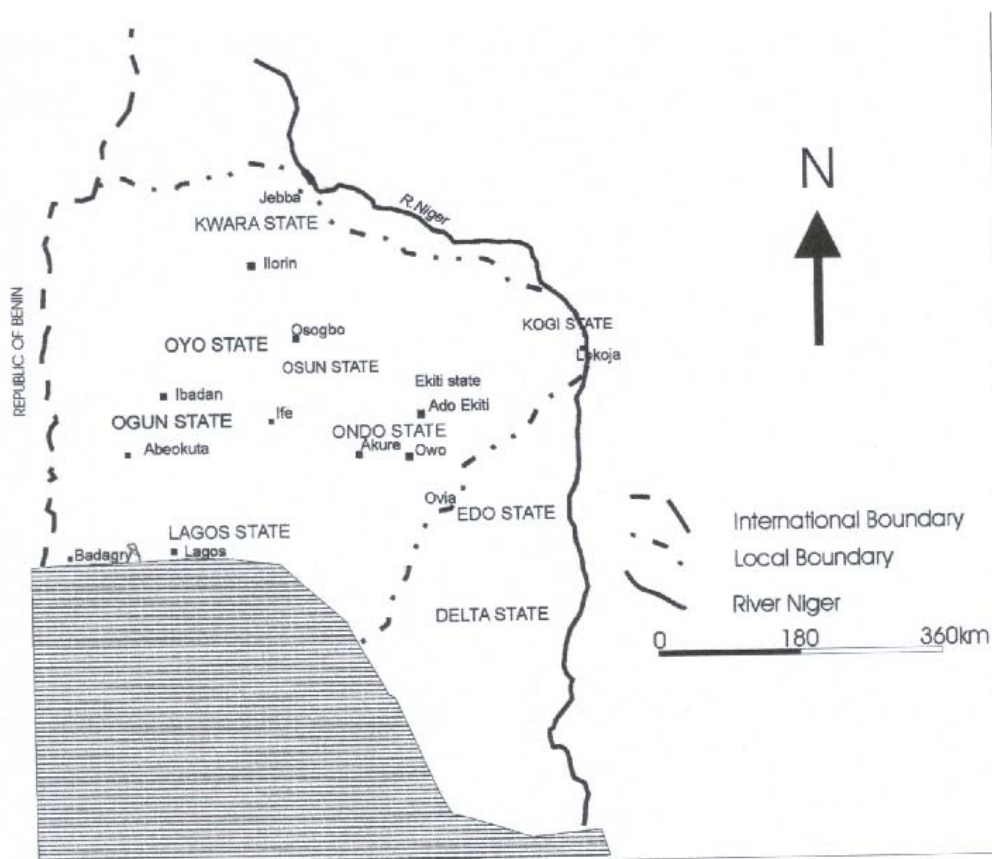
II. Research on Yoruba-nationalism

Research Methods

Predominantly, qualitative methods, through both primary and secondary sources, were used in the research. Primary data collection involved the use of observation, key informant interview and semi-structured interviews triangulated with survey study employing open-ended questions. The fieldwork was conducted in Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Kwara, Kogi and Ogun states. From each of the selected states, two Yoruba sub-ethnic groups were purposively selected. Survey interviews were conducted in Ekiti, Kogi and Oyo states, relying on random

sampling of 50% of sample frame of the entire study universe.⁶ In each of the randomly sampled states, two Local Government Areas (LGAs) were purposively selected as the study communities, based on the rural and urban divides in each state. Another round of random sampling was engaged in selecting the Enumeration Areas (EAs), the Households and the respondents for the interview.

The use of key informant interviews was restricted to Osun, Kwara and Ogun states. Some key informants were also located in Lagos state. The study covered all the Yoruba speaking states including Kwara and Kogi states, located in the lower Niger (Northern) belt of Nigeria and considered as part of Northern Nigeria since 1954. These two states have Yoruba people as the dominant population, with 62% and 48% Yorubas in Kwara and Kogi, respectively (National Population Commission, 2006). Their inclusion in the sample provides an opportunity to assess both the ecological and demographic trends of Yoruba nationalism and their political implications. Map 1 below shows the Yoruba territory where the fieldwork was conducted.



Map 1: The Yoruba territory in the 21st century with some of its major towns and cities
 Source: *Yoruba Nationalism and Ethnic Study, Ethnographic Study Map, 2007.*

⁶ The study universe is the Yoruba society of South-western Nigeria which has six geo-political states out of the 36 states forming the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The selection of Oyo (Ibadan and Oyo groups), Kwara (Ilorin and Offa groups) and Ondo (Ondo and Ilaje groups) states for survey study was motivated by a number of factors. Ibadan is regarded as the heartbeat of Yoruba politics since its foundation and following its appropriation of political superiority from the old Oyo Empire in the 1830s (Falola, 1984). During the colonial era, it became the administrative headquarters of the old Western Region. In addition, Ibadan is a creation of many Yoruba sub-ethnic groups such as Ijesa, Oyo, Ife, Egba, Owu, Ijebu, Igbomina and Ekiti, among others. Hence, a proper ethnographic study of Ibadan reflects a micro-study of the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria. Oyo group is regarded as the centre of colonial and post-colonial Yoruba nationalist movements because its cultural identity and ideologies had dominated Yoruba culture since the late 19th century. The focus on Oyo therefore provides both material and ideological evidence on the hegemonisation of Oyo culture in the entire Yoruba land as well as revealing the dynamics of its local identity in the 21st century. The selection of Ekiti for in-depth interview was also motivated by the fact that Ekiti state provides a case study of local nationalist movements rather than pan-Yoruba nationalist movements, as shown in the demand for an Ekiti state between 1983 and 1997. For an understanding of the link between local rivalries, Yoruba nationalist movements and political violence, Ekiti state provides rich and recent evidence, as the state experienced another spate of political violence linked with electoral fraud in 2009. Also in 1996 at a period when most members of the Yoruba political elites refused to be associated with the central government in Nigeria, Ekiti leaders successfully lobbied the Nigeria's ruling clique for the creation of an Ekiti state in 1997. Ilorin, being a Muslim-dominated community, provides comparative data with Offa, also a Muslim-dominated community in Kwara but with different views on Yoruba nationalist movement and politics. These communities are compared with Igbomina town of Igbaja in Northern Kwara which is predominantly Christian and has more educated people.

The study relied on observation and key informant interviews due to the need to concentrate on individual case studies, while in-depth interviews were designed to establish an overview of popular Yoruba perception of nationalism. These methods were complemented with the data sourced from archives and media documents. In total, close to seven hundred (700) respondents were interviewed throughout the fieldwork sessions that lasted between 2003 and 2009. These respondents exhibit characteristics that cut across the diverse socio-economic factors such as education, sex, religion, sub-ethnic groups, age, income and marital status.

Data collection started in 2003 with archival research and literature review, followed by key informant interview (KII) beginning from 2004. During the KII, observations of many political activities such as meetings and campaigns were conducted. Between 2005 and 2006, together with two research assistants, I engaged in survey study⁷, during which further observations were made. In 2006 more data were collected in Lokoja and Kaba in Kogi state. Subsequently, as more information trickled in on Yoruba nationalist movements and ethnic politics, more data were collected until the early part of 2009.⁸

The ethnographic analysis of the generated survey data was done through content and semi-quantitative methods. There were 591 survey data scripts from male and female respondents of different socio-economic status who gave a detailed account of their views on several cultural issues mostly related to politics in South-western Nigeria. As I deeply interacted with the respondents and studied the respondents mostly through immersion, cultural views, including shared and divisive cultural and political values, political principles and realities, religious intersections, ethno-national aspirations, violent ethno-nationalist movement and many other secondary views integrally linked with the Yoruba nationalist movement and ethnic politics began to emerge.

As the datasets include the Yoruba perception, attitudes and practices related to ethnic politics as an aspect of Yoruba nationalist movements, based on detailed and specific case studies of the entire Yoruba speaking people of South-western Nigeria, they present the opportunity for a comparative approach and a generalisation of findings. The above research design therefore gives insight into how local histories, socio-economic status, ideology religion and local rivalry influence the perception of Yoruba culture and politics, and within the context of cultural dynamics the understanding of Yoruba nationalist movement becomes generally explicit, as shall be shown in the rest of this work.

⁷ The Survey study involved the use of 600 questionnaire booklets containing open-ended questions distributed in Ibadan, Oyo, Ilorin, Offa, Ondo and Igbokoda (Ilaje) towns, with 100 questionnaires allocated for each of the selected towns. Out of these questionnaires only 591 were retrieved for analysis. Systematic sampling involved three stages of purposive and random samplings. States where surveys were conducted were purposively selected, while the local government areas serving as the research areas were randomly selected through lucky-dip selection among all the local government areas (LGAs) in each of the selected states. The enumeration areas were also randomly selected using the same selection procedures among the list of the Wards that are in each LGAs, while another round of systematic sampling involved the selection of households where the heads of each of the selected households were chosen for interviews.

⁸ Data collected in 2009 were mostly through the use of telephone conversations with some political actors in Nigeria, because I was in Germany between October 2008 and October 2009.

Some Results

A Brief Political History of Nigeria in Relation to Ethno-Nationalist Movement: 1900-2009

Nigeria has about 270 ethnic groups which were ‘wedded’ together to form a British colonial State in 1900 and an independent State in 1960. Each of these groups has distinct cultural and political identities, separate historical consciousness and different cultural awareness, besides several ideological differences. Also, in some areas, although certain groups are somehow interlocked with one another, each ethnic group is further demarcated by distinct ecological features, which make it possible for different traditional subsistence economies to exist. The ecological features range from swampy and coastal terrains to areas with enormous deposits of crude oil, which formed the bulk of Nigerian State revenue between early 1970s and 2009. This coastal region also engages in intensive aqua-economies such as fishing. Among the commonest groups engaged in this trade are the Efik, Ekoi, Ibibio, Oron, Yakuur, Andoni, Ogoni, Ijaw, Urhobo, Itsekiri and Ilaje who engage in intensive fishing and many other forms of aqua-trading. The southern hinterland located at the lower banks of rivers Niger and Benue which naturally divide the country into North and South is dominated by farming peoples such as the Igbo, Edo, Yoruba, Tivs, Jukun, Idoma and Igala. The Northern hinterland is dominated by the Gwari, Junkun, Hausa, Fulani, Zango, Kataf, Wukari, Takum and Kanuri, among others, who combine intensive farming with animal grazing. In terms of hegemonic political power, population and geographical spread, there are three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria, namely, the Yoruba, the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani, with political history claiming each of them as hegemonic power in their respective colonial and post-colonial territories.



Map 2: A map of Nigeria showing the locations of some of its ethnic groups. Source: Ethnic Map of Nigeria, <http://www.onlinenigeria.com/mapethnic.asp>

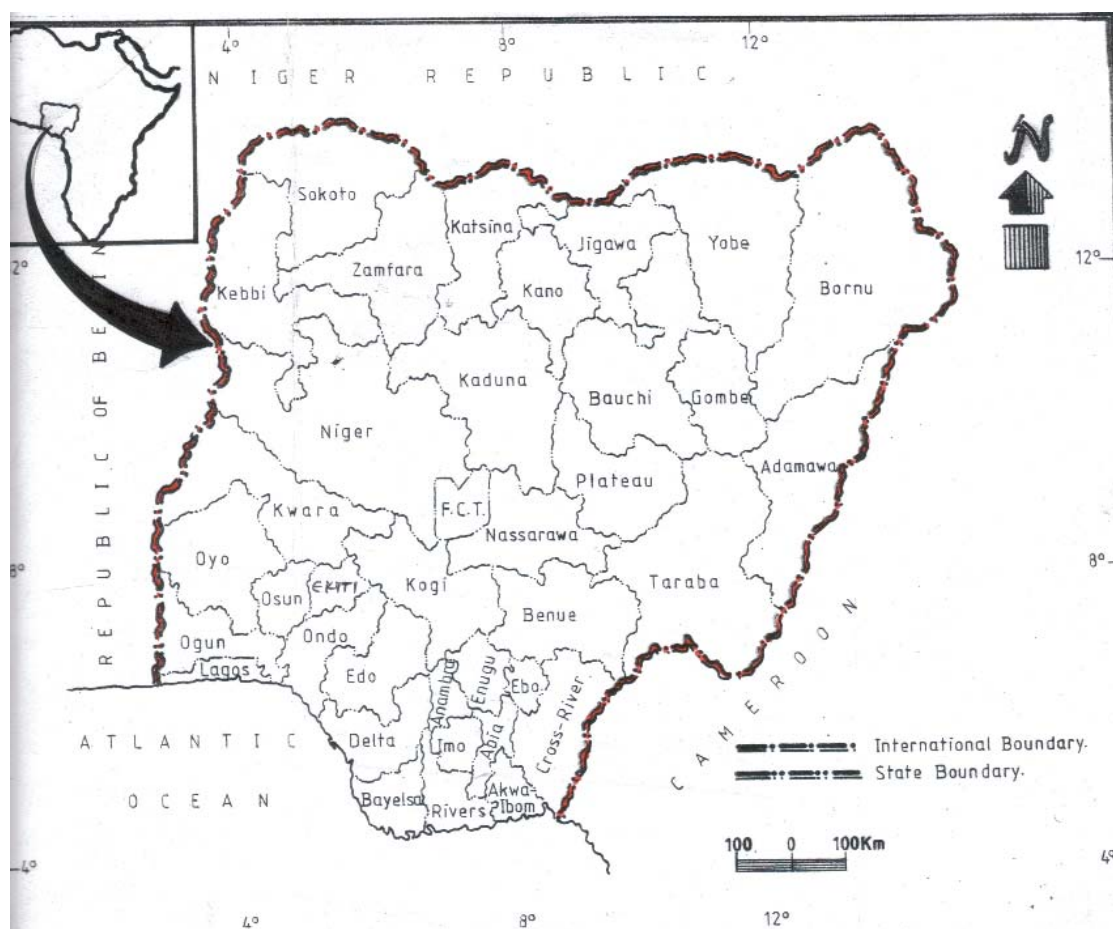
Through the Jihads, the Fulani had conquered almost all other ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria.⁹ Following the success of the 1804 Fulani Jihad, a fusion of Hausa/Fulani hegemony was established in Northern Nigeria. Also, in pre-colonial South-western Nigeria, the Yoruba, composed of different linguistic groups such as Oyo, Ife, Ijesa, Egba, and Awori, among others saw the Oyo group dominating the Yoruba pre-colonial political space between the 16th and early 19th centuries¹⁰ (Johnson, 1921; Falola and Genova, 2006). On the other hand, the Igbo was the dominant ethnic group among the ethnic groups occupying the pre-colonial South-eastern Nigeria. Each of these three groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) had established its hegemonic power long before colonialism; all of them thus refused to relinquish these powers for the interest of the colonial State of Nigeria. Even when the country got its independence in 1960, these groups still held on to their differently-conceived hegemonic powers, hence creating apprehensions of ethnic domination among themselves.

⁹ Except the Borno empire in North-eastern Nigeria which successfully repelled the Fulani warriors.

¹⁰ The Oyo Empire was however unable to dominate Ibadan state.

Religious differentiation in Nigeria also reflects three distinct religious systems: Islam (48%), Christianity (41%), indigenous religious beliefs (9%) and other religions (2%) (National Population Commission, 2006). Having secured Nigeria's independence, the differentiation among Nigerian ethnic groups became even more complex as competition for both political and economic resources intensified among the groups. Thus, ethno-nationalist movement and ethnic politics became instruments for accessing both political and economic resources in Nigeria. As the competition often manifested in diverse ways, it can be said that nationalism and ethnic politics were expressed in different dimensions, among which the political, mythological and violent expressions were dominant.

In 1960, the country was established as the Federal Republic of Nigeria until 1966 when it adopted a unitary government. But beside other reasons, the increasing rise of ethno-nationalist movements, made the country to change back to federalism in 1967 and has remained thus till the present, having 36 federating units called states as at August 2009, as shown in Map 3 below.



Map 3: Map of Nigeria showing the thirty six states making up the federal republic
Source: Yoruba Nationalism and Ethnic Study, Ethnographic Study Map, 2007.

The states are further divided into 774 local administrative units. Between 1966 and 1979 Nigeria was under military rule headed at different times by an Igbo man (1966), Hausa/Fulani (1966-1976) and a Yoruba man (1976-1979). Thereafter, between 1979 and 1983, there was a democratic government headed by a Hausa/Fulani. This was however toppled by another military government, headed by another Hausa/Fulani, which operated between 1983 and 1993. There was a planned return to civil rule in 1993, but this was aborted by electoral irregularities that led to the annulment of the 1993 federal elections. Between August and November 1993, an Interim National Government (ING) was put in place and headed by a Yoruba man. The country thereafter fell under another military regime that lasted between 1993 and 1999 and was headed by a Hausa/Fulani.

Since 1999 when the country returned to democratic government, the government has faced the daunting tasks of rebuilding a petroleum-based economic nation and institutionalizing stable democracy. In addition, between 1999 and 2007, the administration headed by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, who had between 1976 and 1979 headed the country as a military head of state, made efforts to defuse longstanding ethnic and religious tensions so as to build a sound foundation for economic growth and political stability. Yet, as it was the practice during the military regimes, between 1999 and 2008 Nigeria continued to experience political hostilities among its various ethnic groups. While the successive governments relied on ethnic attachment as an instrument to hang on to power and assert their legitimacy, Nigerians also engaged in the use of ethnicity and violence to effect changes in government (Maier, 2000).

The prevailing condition of maintaining a close attachment to ethnic identity therefore continues to undermine Nigerian political stability and development. Due to the prolonged military rule in Nigeria,¹¹ the country experienced international hostility that reduced its national economic growth. Such was the experience between 1993 and 1998 under the military headship of General Sanni Abacha. Various Nigerian military governments were accused of incapacitating the development of infrastructures (Osaghae, 2004:167). Public services such as energy supplies, roads, access to portable water, equitable health care services and quality education became inaccessible to many Nigerians, most especially between 1983 and 1999. Worsening the situation was the unending political transition which the country embarked on between 1987 and 1993.

¹¹ Nigeria witnessed 39 years of military rule within its 48 years of independence as at 2008. Military regimes ruled Nigeria between 1966 and 1979 and between 1983 and 1999.

The Yoruba of South-western Nigeria who had established a legacy of welfare governments during the periods 1950-1966 and 1979-1983 could not endure the socio-economic hardships that had pervaded the country. Among other means for redress, they re-emphasized cultural nationalism with which they had engaged the colonial government before the 1960s. Most especially, when a general election conducted in 1993¹² was annulled by the then military government, the ideological and cultural attachment they had towards their progenitor, Oduduwa, became the weapon with which they fought against their perceived political marginalization in Nigeria.

Yoruba in Nigeria: The Creation of an Imagined Community

Many arguments have been provided for the creation of the Yoruba as a nation, but it is still doubtful if the Yoruba community in South-western Nigeria can fit into the context of a nation yet. It could be said rather that the Yoruba people in Nigeria are a cultural group that has over the years, especially when the conceived and perceived sense of marginalization is high, imagined itself as a nation. Since the people are not entirely culturally homogenous, it is doubtful if certain elements of a nation exist among them. The Yoruba are made up about 20 sub-groups which use about eight distinct versions (dialects) of Yoruba languages that are not entirely mutually intelligible. While these dialects are often referred to as Yoruba dialects, some of them that are not mutually intelligible may be referred to as different languages. While it is agreed that all of them belong to the same language group – Kwa division of Niger-Kordofanian – some of them like Igbomina, Oyo, Egba, Ilorin, Ibolu, Ijebu and Remo among that have higher degree of mutual intelligibility may be regarded as dialects. But some others such as Ijesha, Owo, Ondo, Ilaje, Awori among others that are not mutually intelligible may not be regarded as dialects.¹³ The eight distinct languages used in Yoruba territory are:

1. Oyo with Igbomina, Egba, Ilorin, O’kun and Oke-ogun derivations, mostly used in the North, West and Central parts of the Yoruba land;
2. Ife spoken in the Central region;
3. Ijesa spoken in the Central-eastern region;
4. Ilaje with Ikale, mostly used in the South-eastern region;

¹² The election was generally believed to have been won by a Yoruba man, Chief MKO Abiola, but it was annulled for many reasons which were deemed illogical and unconvincing by Yoruba people.

¹³ This position is subject to further linguistic analysis.

5. Ondo with Akoko and Owo derivations spoken in the Eastern region;
6. Ekiti spoken in the East-western region;
7. Ijebu spoken in the South-eastern region;
8. Egun with Awori derivation spoken in the Southern region.

Each of these language groups remains largely incomprehensible to the other, suggesting the absence of mutual intelligibility.

On a similar note, it is improbable that the different ethnic sub-groups in Yoruba land share the same ancestry, although as the creation of a nation became necessary as a cultural and political project there was a creation of history linking all the Yoruba to a common ancestry. This historical creation was traced to a Yoruba traditional scriptural text, Ifa, which Peel (2008) recently traced to the advent of Islam in Yoruba land.¹⁴ In legitimizing this appropriated common ancestral history for the Yoruba, Johnson (1921) first made reference to the Yoruba people as a community sharing commonalities. While Johnson, as he noted in his conclusion, was bothered about ending inter-tribal wars that prevailed among the pre-colonial Yoruba, his logical solution to inter-tribal wars was to bind the various Yoruba 'tribes' into an imagined community. Johnson went further to expound on this:

But that hope should reign universally, with prosperity and advancement and that the disjointed units should all be once more welded into one head from the Niger to the coast as in the happy days of ABIODUN, so dear to our fathers, that clannish spirit disappear and above all that Christianity should be the principal religion ... should be the wish and prayer of every true son of Yoruba' (Johnson, 1921: 642).

Commonly evidential in Johnson's book and in books by many other Yoruba historians such as Law (1977), Atanda (1997) and Adediran (1998) is the reference to pre-colonial political competitions among the so-called Yoruba as 'inter-tribal wars'. If the Yoruba saw themselves as one nation, the idea of tribes would not have been in existence. Since tribe in the anthropological sense denotes a cultural group with a distinct cultural identity encompassing common language, beliefs, aspirations, collective history and ideology different from that of others, it is logical to submit that the pre-colonial 'Yoruba' was a federation of many tribal groups rather than a nation.

¹⁴ Peel (2008) recently claimed that Ifa was introduced to the Yoruba people by the early Muslim preachers who had contact with the Old Oyo Empire between the 12th and 13th centuries.

Similarly, the people did not share common political aspirations and it remains contestable even in the 21st century if there is any common political aspiration that is popular among the Yoruba. In pre-colonial times, there were numerous kingdoms with similar political systems but each one had its autonomy. Similarities in political systems can be explained in terms of ecological possibilism which made it possible for the people in those Yoruba region to be predominantly engaged in agricultural activities. And as such the people had a sedentary population, a state-like political system, a semi-formalized security and a political network like the kingship, are probable for political and social orderliness. Thus, the pre-colonial Yoruba society featured the Oyo, Ijesa, Ekiti, Egba and Ijaye kingdoms, among others. All these kingdoms had kingship institutions which were only necessary for defending the land and ensuring a strong political system that could curtail invasion from neighbouring tribes. Even at the 21st century, the political events that followed the imagined creation of Yoruba as a nation are still short of creating a common political aspiration for the Yoruba people as a whole.

Nonetheless, as ethno-nationalist movements became stronger, consciousness of ethnic commonality was established among the Yoruba. This cultural awareness has been traced to slavery, Christianity and colonial politics. According to Matory (2005), the Yoruba that were exported to Brazil, North America and the West Indies initially noticed among themselves that they came from the same port of embarkment and that they shared some degree of cultural similarity. Hence, they joined together to stage protests against the slave dealers. When slavery was aborted, all of them were returned to Sierra Leone where they formed a group known as the Creoles. Eventually, they were taken to Lagos in an attempt to re-settle them within their cultural origins. Among these new freed slaves were some lucky ones who had benefited from Portuguese gestures of Christianity and western education, factors that contributed to their becoming the elite of Lagos and Egba. It was these individuals who formed the first African clergy in Nigeria. Examples include Samuel Johnson, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Lipede who translated their sense of ethnic commonness into a cultural project.

This new clergy wanted to translate the English Bible into a local language in order to facilitate evangelization in South-western Nigeria. As they were constrained by orthography to use, they borrowed from German and Latin alphabets and sounds, with which they introduced the writing in Yoruba language with vocalization from the Oyo dialect. These early clergymen had their origins from the old Oyo kingdom, and so through them the Oyo socio-cultural pattern was made dominant as the expression of common Yoruba values

(Atanda, 1997). The establishment of western education which was initially tied to Christianity further boosted this agenda. In the schools, Oyo Yoruba was taught and it became the official language unifying all the pre-colonial Yoruba groups. Until now, amidst many local Yoruba dialects which individual Yoruba are accustomed to when in their local villages, Oyo dialect still exists.

It should be noted that even till the present, the term Yoruba does not exist in Yoruba dictionary. Of course, the term was traced to the Hausa word *Yar ba* (Awde, 1996). According to Awde (1996) in his Hausa dictionary, the term *Yar ba* was used for the Oyo people whom the Hausa had the earliest contact with in present-day South-western Nigeria. In Hausa, the term is used to refer to a group of people that are smart and clever. In pre-colonial times, however, the people now known as the Yoruba in South-western Nigeria were known by their distinct tribal names such as Oyo, Ijesa, Ife, Egba, Awori, Igbomina, Ekiti, Remo, Ijebu, Owo, Ondo, Ilaje, Egbado, Akoko, Ikale, O'kun, Egun, Yewah and Ilorin. The collective name, Yoruba, was never used in reference to these peoples.

In spite of the above contestations, the Yoruba political elites developed the sense of nationalist movements. Among the Yoruba, nationalism was more of a religio-cultural than a political project between 1900 and 1940, but from the 1940s it became a political project, employing ethnic politics through which the Yoruba people negotiate for more access to State resources. Contrary to the earlier spirit of nationalist movement that focused on re-branding the Yoruba ideational culture (language and philosophy) and aesthetic values, the later movement that was linked with Chief Obafemi Awolowo's political project assumed the Yoruba as a nation that should occupy a central position within the independent Nigerian political space, through the political ideology tied to Yoruba ethnicity. In the process of pursuing the latter idea of nationalism, the Yoruba re-created the spirit of oneness, which the people employed to construct their political essence in the emerging Nigerian post-colonial State. There were a multiplicity of factors that contributed to the re-invention and the success of ethnic politics that was in form of ethno-nationalist movements. Such factors included the role of western education and enlightenment, the nature of Nigerian colonial politics between 1914 and 1959, the Nigerian post-colonial military regimes and the emergence and increasing number of Yoruba political elites.

Having created the spirit of ethnic politics and ethno-nationalist movements, many cultural forces were put in place to create a sense of ethnic belonging among the Yoruba and

to influence the Yoruba's access to political control of the Nigerian federation. Such cultural forces include the following:

1. The creation of tribal socio-cultural associations linked with the Yoruba mythological ancestry. Examples are *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* founded in London in 1948 and launched in Nigeria in 1949, Afenifere in 1966 and O'odua Peoples' Congress in 1995. All these groups pursued a Yoruba social, cultural and political agenda.
2. The use of ethnic politics through ethnic-based political parties, for example, Action Group in 1951, Unity Party of Nigeria in 1978 and Alliance for Democracy in 1999.
3. The use of local genres mostly through media, musical and drama presentations in grassroots mobilization in support of ethno-nationalist movements. Examples of the music and drama genres included *Yoruba Ronu* (Yoruba must think) by Hubert Ogunde in 1957 and *Ka'sora* (We should be careful) by I.K Dairo in 1960. There were also many other Yoruba musicians who produced home videos and recorded songs between 1993 and 2003 expressing Yoruba concerns in Nigeria. Many other Yoruba based media outlets expressing Yoruba cause in Nigeria were founded especially following the annulment of the June 12th 1993 general elections in Nigeria. All these forms of local genres created a broader awareness of the Yoruba people in support of ethno-nationalist movements and ethnic politics mostly at the grassroots.
4. The involvement of Yoruba migrants both in Yoruba cities in Nigeria and abroad in support of Yoruba nationalist movements and ethnic politics. For example, following the 1993 election annulment Yoruba communities in Texas, London, Berlin and Ottawa supported the Yoruba agitations against the Nigerian State. The Yoruba community in Texas in particular founded a radio station known as Radio Kudirat through which a media war was staged against the military government in Nigeria between 1994 and 1997. In addition, in 1999 the Yoruba communities in London and Texas financially supported Yoruba ethnic based political parties.
5. Inclusion of other religions (Islam and traditional religions) and women in Yoruba nationalist movement and politics. Before 1993 Yoruba nationalist movements were both Christian (Peel, 1989) and male dominated (Nolte, 2008). Starting from the establishment of OPC – a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group that has strong grassroots supports – and following the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential election, both

Yoruba nationalist movement became more interested to many Yoruba irrespective of their religions and sexes.

6. The use of violence as a symbolic characteristic of Yoruba nationalist movement. Examples include *Operation Wet e* in Ibadan in 1964; the 1983 political violence in Owo, Akure, Ondo, Ekiti, Osogbo, Offa and Abeokuta; the 1993 political violence in protest against the annulment of June 12 elections in nearly all Yoruba towns and cities; the 1995-2002 violence by the OPC in Sagamu, Ilorin, Osogbo, Lagos and Ibadan; the 2003 violence in Osogbo, Akure and Ekiti; the 2007 violence in Osogbo, Ilesa, Ife, Ondo and Ekiti; the 2008 violence in Ondo and Ekiti and the May 2009 violence in Ekiti state.

7. Expression of Yoruba political and social marginalization in Nigeria.

Despite the fact that Awolowo's project of re-inventing the Yoruba as a nation seemed to be a success, it was more of a political project that is still in progress and mostly employed by the Yoruba political elite mostly in the progressive political camp to negotiate their inclusion in Nigerian political power structures. In support of the above claim is that following Awolowo's repeated failure to be the president of Nigeria, having contested three times (in 1959, 1979 and 1983) and his eventual death in 1987, the Yoruba nationalist movement based on ethnic politics started to decline until the 1992 when another Yoruba, M.K.O Abiola, contested and allegedly won the federal elections for presidency in 1993. The elections were however annulled, and it sparked off a re-emergence of an active Yoruba nationalist movement, this time dominated by Yoruba Muslims and many local tribal groups who saw themselves as agents of Yoruba nationalist movement and ethnic politics in Nigeria. Having lost the claim to the supposed Yoruba victory of Abiola, many Yoruba ethnic sub-groups have, since 1997, turned to provincialism rather than an all-embraced Yoruba national frontier of ethno-nationalist movement.

History, Tradition and Modernity in Yoruba Nationalist Movement and Ethnic Politics

Yoruba history presents a combination of traditions and modernity that worked together to account for the people's culture and civilization. Hence an understanding of the dynamics of Yoruba political identity in terms of the ethno-nationalist movement and politics requires some sense of longer-range processes, where the roots of many contemporary events of group

identity formation, creation of ethno-nationalist movement and the practice of ethnic politics can be traced back to some times in the past. As chronicled by scholars such as Shaw (1967), Bascom (1969), Shaw and Daniels (1984), Sowunmi (1987) and Atanda (1997), the culture and civilization, which the Yoruba people built over 11,000 years ago (Shaw 1967) – even in the face of colonial occupation, was their traditional heritage and legacy through which their perception of nationalist movement and civil politics was/is constructed. One of the legacies of the Yoruba people in the course of development is the people's pride in the villainy and prowess of their progenitor-Oduduwa. Oduduwa is believed to have rescued his people from wars and pestilences in the Yoruba pre-historic time. In addition, the people still believe in their ancestors, many of whom have been deified as gods and goddesses (Barber, 1981). The people also believe that their culture in terms of social, linguistic, political and religious systems is richer than that of many other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This perception creates in the Yoruba a sense of history arrogating the spirit of political assertiveness and superiority over other ethnic groups in the Federation of Nigeria, within which the Yoruba continue to influence Nigerian civil politics. The Yoruba belief is that civilization and modern development in Nigeria began with the Yoruba people and then spread to other parts. To demonstrate this Yoruba perception of patrimonial community, in the early days of Nigerian independence, when the country was practicing regional government, the Yoruba region scored the legacies of establishing the first television station in Nigeria¹⁵ and in Africa and one of the first best universities¹⁶ in Nigeria. These institutions have statues of Oduduwa's head as their symbols, indicating the Yoruba attachment to traditional belief in Nigeria. Apart from the University and the television station, the western regional government under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1954-1957), a foremost Yoruba politician, introduced more developmental drives that had not been witnessed in Nigeria as at that time. Such included the industrialization of the western region in Nigeria, which led to the rapid urbanization of the region. Universal free primary education was also introduced. Most of these new developments bore the symbols and imagination of Oduduwa personification¹⁷ in a way that a Yoruba mythological attachment to traditional cultural values is confirmed. Through this, the people created and sustained ethnic sentiments in the form of nationalism, which eventually led to the creation of ethnic politics in South-western Nigeria.

¹⁵ This television station is now called Nigerian Television Authority.

¹⁶ The university was formerly known as University of Ife, but since 1987, its name was changed to Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

¹⁷ Personal Interview with Chief Ademuyiwa, in Lagos on 27th May 2004. Chief Ademuyiwa is a Yoruba politician in Lagos.

As the concept of a Yoruba nation was created from the people's history and tradition, there was also a perceived feeling by the people that they shared commonalities in terms of social norms, political goals, cultural heritage and general aspirations. The Yoruba employed this feeling to construct a sense of political domination in Nigeria, and an urge to self-determination as soon as the political domination became unrealizable. Like in many other societies, nationalism was constructed around the development of emotional attachment to one's ethnic group (Nyuot yoh, 2005); Yoruba nationalist feeling has to do with the people's conviction of the answer to the question "what is our cultural heritage?" In this context, emotional affiliation to a particular "Yoruba nation" is not simply motivated by a concern for self-determination, but also by how the people feel about their traditions. In other words the Yoruba feelings concerning the people's cultural heritage and the perception of the Yoruba is that Yoruba is a group distinct from other groups in Nigeria, having been scientifically validated by archaeological data that the earliest human settlement in the Nigeria dated to 11,000 years ago was in Yoruba land -Iwo Eleru (Shaw, 1967). The emotional affiliation to that feeling, which involves promoting, defending and exerting superiority on other ethnic groups in Nigeria and directed towards the creation of an independent State constitutes the Yoruba nationalist movement.

Using ethnic sentiment that was built from history and tradition with new sense of what Nigeria ought to be, nationalist movement in Yoruba land expressed the Yoruba political aspiration and self-determination. To an average Yoruba person, as expressed by one of the respondents in key informant interviews, the Yoruba is "very proud of being a Yoruba, because Yoruba has a very rich culture and traditions, vast and richly endowed resources such as land for agriculture, ocean and sea. There is also a robust history of civilization that is more real than that of many other ethnic groups in Nigeria. All these indicate that the people have set the pace of development in Nigeria. Through this, Yoruba people constructed the perception that Nigeria needed to be defended by the Yoruba people; or rather Yoruba must have more participation in Nigerian government that would allow the Yoruba to change Nigerian for better. So many Yoruba people see nothing wrong in defending and translating these legacies to power over other people in Nigeria".¹⁸

Among the people, ethno-nationalism is a process of promoting aspects of their traditions and culture as superior, and, perhaps more importantly, promoting the shared

¹⁸ Personal interview with an anonymous key informant in Ibadan, June 2007. The key informant was a prominent Yoruba politician based in Ibadan.

feeling about these heritages. As this attitude is linked with Yoruba historical antecedents the people are fond of making reference to their past legacy and desired pride, to the extent of protecting such at all cost. As evident from the data generated in survey interview, 78.2% of the respondents believe that they would continue to protect the Yoruba past legacy and desired pride unflinchingly. This was further supported by 87.3% of the respondents affirming that even if it leads to the laying down of their lives they would continue to protect and defend Yoruba traditions and culture.

From their sense of cultural pride as noted above, the Yoruba constructed a distinct identity, and in conjunction with the process of group identity formation certain cultural pride is often expressed. Hence, ethnic identity among the Yoruba people is subjective to the extent that it denotes specific Yoruba historical, cultural and linguistic traits that distinguish the people from other ethnic groups. A popular belief among the Yoruba was endorsed by 15.5% of the respondents who asserted that Yoruba people are distinct from other ethnic groups in terms of their language. The belief is that the Yoruba language is still more original and richer in proverbs and idioms than other languages in Nigeria where such linguistic traits are absent – a claim that lacks empirical validation. The Yoruba language, according to a respondent, has so many dialects, some of which share mutual intelligibility in terms of meanings.¹⁹ Drawn from the people's assertion that Yoruba land is the cradle of civilization in Nigeria, statements such as "*Ibi Ojúmó ñ tí mó wá*" meaning the source of life are often expressed in relation to Yoruba. This view dominated the opinions of 50.7% of the key informants mostly from Oyo and Osogbo. The respondents from Ife and Osogbo also asserted that Ife, which is the ancestral home of the Yoruba, is the cradle of civilization. According to the Yoruba people, Ife has the earliest invention of textile, iron smelting and casting, carving, and a centralized political system. Osogbo, another historical town in Yoruba region, is referred to as the "Osun" meaning the city of living spring. Similarly, as reflected in the survey interview, 39.3% of the respondents believe that the Yoruba pride is also evident in Yoruba traditional political history, which is characterized by events leading to the formation of many traditional kingdoms aspiring to form a state society. Corroborating this notion of Yoruba pride is also the Yoruba political history that featured expansionist activities and resentment against unjust governments, even against the colonial government.²⁰ While many of these claims are supported by historical and archaeological evidence, the beliefs of people give subjective credence to identity formation, in the face of cultural relativity.

¹⁹ Personal interview with Pa Emmanuel Alayande in Ibadan on March 15, 2005.

²⁰ Personal interview with Lawuyi Tunde in his house in Osogbo on April 27, 2004.

All the above form the spectrum of ethno-nationalist movement among the Yoruba and prove that ethnic sensitivity and sentiments among the Yoruba are not recent developments. It was believed to have started a long time ago. A leader of the O'odua People's Congress made the following statement about ethno-nationalist movement in Yoruba land: "You can infer from the history of the Yoruba, which I just told you. You can see that the spirit of ethno-nationalist movement has always been the alter ego of the Yoruba people right from the origin of the people. At first it was "tribal" sensitivity as an internal affair, but later with the amalgamation of 1914, the struggle extended to cultural nationalism and beyond internal. Presently, I can say it is a national political force."²¹ Historically, Yoruba cultural consciousness can be phased into three main epochs. These are the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial/ transitional.

During the pre-colonial era, the course was tribal sensitivity, which was an internal process. It has to do with each of the Yoruba (tribes) kingdoms trying to exert influence over the other. The process involved internal warfare employed as a means of power negotiation and domination, even among the individuals in a particular kingdom. It was this process that marked the creation of Yoruba mythological hegemonic power associated with Oduduwa who negotiated for power and eventually emerged as a dominating political force. During the colonial era, Yoruba nationalist movement took a different dimension. Then, it was based on literary production featuring the attempt to (re) write the Yoruba literature in Yoruba (Oyo dialect) language, and pursuing Yoruba historical agenda (Barber, 1989). The Yoruba elite group seemed to have established an imagined Yoruba community called a nation. Nationalist movement at this time was aimed at making various Yoruba groups into recognizing the fact that they all belonged to an indivisible community. It was at this time that the myth of the origin and authority of the Yoruba became very dominant, especially the myth of Oduduwa as a unifying force among the Yoruba. Later, this 'passive' nationalist movement was translated into group action by the newly emerging Yoruba political elite class with people such as Herbert Macaulay and Obafemi Awolowo who spearheaded cultural movements and political parties that were Yoruba-based.²² These individuals aimed at fortifying various Yoruba interests into a common force targeted at re-claiming the Yoruba identity that had been lost to European missionary establishments and colonialism. Nationalist movement thus became a question of the revival and restoration of Yoruba tradition and a true Yoruba identity in terms

²¹ Personal interview with Chief Gani Adams in Lagos on 26th May 2004. Chief Gani Adams was the factional leader of O'odu Peoples' Congress (OPC) as at 2009. OPC is a Yoruba militant socio-cultural group founded in 1995.

²² Oyo prof. 23 file no c42, *Yoruba Politics in Lagos*. Ibadan, National Archives Ibadan, Vol. 42.

of language, customs, traditions and dressing. It was more about ethnic superiority, laying claim that the Yoruba people had a distinct culture, territory and system of production and that they had been conducting their affairs independently for a long time, even dealing diplomatically with neighbouring groups.

The exit of the colonial masters, beginning from the late 1950s, marked a change of order in Yoruba nationalist movement. Between that time and the early 1960s, the historical consciousness drawn from the Oduduwa legacy as a cultural object had started to fade at the insurgence of intense competition on Yoruba political space between the Yoruba and the Igbo. This notwithstanding, the emerging Yoruba nationalists capitalized on the same sentiment to establish agencies of nationalist movements such as the *Egbé Omo Oduduwa*, which was established in 1949 and later a political party (Action Group) in 1951.²³ Action Group later served as platforms for the ethnic politics that was dominant in Nigerian newly independent political system. As noted above Awolowo, a Yoruba nationalist, used the platforms to introduce a new phase of infrastructural development in the Yoruba region, and by extension in Nigerian politics. Such developments were translated to cultural pride, which made and still make the Yoruba people feel that they are superior to others. They also feel that if they are left alone to control their resources, they could manage the resources better. They feel that they are in a position to define their own mission and future and to show directions to other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Unlike in the other two periods, the use of violence and militarism for nationalist purposes was dominant during the post-colonial (transitional) period. Firstly, the political riot of 1964-65, tagged *Operation wet e* was a resistance against the imposition of the perceived Hausa/Fulani political agenda on the Yoruba people. Following this was the *Àgbékòyà* crisis of 1968 which was ignited by strong resentment against the slashing of cocoa prices by the Federal Government of Nigeria, which resentment was expressed through violent actions. Cocoa was regarded as the Yoruba chief economic resource, just as groundnuts and palm oil were to the Hausa/Fulani and Igbo in Northern and Eastern Nigeria, respectively. The resentment stemmed from the fact that the “Yoruba could not understand why the purchasing price of cocoa should be slashed and the same decree was not extended to groundnuts and palm oil’.”²⁴ The Yoruba explanation of the situation was that since the funding for developmental projects in the Yoruba region accrued from the proceeds on cocoa, the Federal

²³ *Tell Magazine*, April 30th, 2001.

²⁴ *Daily Times*, September 25th, 1972.

Government of Nigeria intended to cripple the development of the Yoruba “nation”. Thus, a violent resistance in the form of nationalist movement was triggered. The *Agbekoya* period marked the era of military governments in Nigeria whose various leaders were Hausa/Fulani extractions. Thus, the Yoruba people then always contrived socio-political marginalization, which they often blamed on the centralization of power characteristic of the military governments back then.²⁵

The postcolonial or transitional period represents the mainstream of Yoruba cultural consciousness, which is partly ideological. This time, the definition of nationalism is economic and political. It is not based on the notion of otherness but on access to the control of resources which the Yoruba people are supposedly entitled to, but denied by over-centralization of Nigerian political system that continue to justify inequitable access to Nigerian political power. Thus, as Yoruba feel more affected the historical consciousness about Oduduwa (the Yoruba progenitor) and other forms of cultural pride built into Yoruba identity are not only recreated but re-directed more strongly towards nationalist projects such as protecting Yoruba cultural resources, correcting injustice, fighting social alienation and combating political marginalization which the Yoruba experienced within the State of Nigeria.²⁶ From the desire to control what the Yoruba were supposedly entitled to, springs renewed ideas of ethno-nationalist movements that has shifted from the colonial perspective which defined nationalism purely in cultural terms to restructuring of the Nigerian political and economic system that will fit into the framework of an imagined Yoruba nation. The nationalists’ idea moved from an emphasis on literary production to self-determination and the actualization of Yoruba control of Nigeria. The concept of an imagined nation is construed in two senses: first, as the newly independent Nigeria, and secondly as the possible sovereign Yoruba nation – Odua Republic (a tentative name for an imagined nation) that will emerge should the independent Nigeria fail. Thus, the interest is vested on controlling huge resources and committing such to building the contemplated Yoruba nation, and competing with other ethnic groups in Nigeria for the control of national resources.

Since 1964 till 2009 Yoruba nationalist movements featured the use of violence. Up till 2009, the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria involved in a number of political violence, often linked to the ethnic-based political relationship among many ethnic groups that characterized Nigerian politics. The notable examples of such violence in Yoruba land

²⁵ *Tell Magazine*, November 15th, 2001.

²⁶ Personal interview with Lawuyi Tunde in Osogbo on September 13, 2005.

included *operation wet e* (1964-1966), *Àgbékòyà* crisis²⁷ (1968) in Ibadan, political violence caused by election rigging in the then Oyo and Ondo states in 1983 and the 1993 violence caused by the annulment of June 12, 1993 general elections. Many other crises in reactions to Yoruba perceived marginalization in Nigeria were instigated by O'odua People's Congress (OPC)²⁸ in Ibadan, Lagos, Sagamu, Osogbo and Ilorin among other Yoruba cities between 2002 and 2005. Other incidence of violence included election violence in Ekiti and Osun States following the 2007 general elections and the 2009 violent reactions in some towns and villages in Ekiti state due to the accusation of election frauds that characterized the re-run governorship election in the state. All the above cases of violence bore the expressions of certain Yoruba discontents against Nigerian political and economic structures. Occurrence of this violence during general elections in Nigeria suggests that a tight competition always exists in political power struggles among some ethnic groups that constitute the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Power struggle assumes different forms of conflicts, which democratic governance needs to manage through electoral principles and rule of law; rather, in Nigerian case since 1960, when the country got independence, many of its political elites have appropriated the gains of democracy to build ethnic-based political hegemony and caused violence whenever their political aspirations were frustrated. The Yoruba in particular often accused Hausa/Fulani political elites in Nigeria of dominating Nigerian federal political power for a long time through which the Hausa/Fulani have caused political marginalization of the Yoruba people. When their attempts to redress the situation through elective politics were frustrated by election riggings, Yoruba political elites engaged in violent political struggles usually instigated by Yoruba-based political parties and socio-cultural groups that constituted nationalist movements. As the political violence mostly occurred when Yoruba candidates were defeated in national presidential elections, it suggests that the Yoruba nationalists were agitating for more political power in Nigeria. Many of these crises have sent thousands of the people to their deaths and seriously reduced the tempo of development not only in Yoruba

²⁷ Although *Àgbékòyà* Crisis was more of peasant/state agitation, but the undertone and the state perception was that it was an expression of Yoruba nationalism against the State.

²⁸ O'odua People's Congress (OPC) is a militant pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organization founded in 1994 by Fredrick Fasheun, a medical doctor and former presidential aspirant on the platform of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) in Nigerian 1993 election. He joined with a group of Yoruba intellectuals including Beko Ransome-Kuti, another medical doctor and human rights activists who became the national treasurer, and Ganiyu Adams who was the head foot soldiers. According to an OPC leader in Osogbo, "initially the major source of its resistance was the annulment of June 12 presidential elections, and the need for Yoruba unity as a prelude to an "Oduduwa Republic. Between 1995 and 2008 OPC had instigated many violent crises in almost all the major Yoruba towns and cities where their objects of attack were Hausa/Fulani and institutions of Federal Government in Yoruba land.

communities but in entire Nigeria. Infrastructure such as houses, roads, offices and even hospitals are constantly under threat due to political violence.

From the above account, it can be deduced that the combination of tradition and modernity re-awakened Yoruba nationalist movement through the colonial to post-colonial period. On the part of tradition, the Yoruba continued their attachment to traditional values, and the legitimization of the people's self-constructed ethnic commonalities as group identity, which grew from being a cultural to a political project, and used as political instrument in negotiating for the political control of Nigeria. On the other hand, Yoruba access to western education and a colonial system of administration which however denied its educated elite's inclusion in the British colonial government, and more importantly the people's exposure to Christianity triggered a more intensified spirit of nationalist movement and the practice of ethnic politics. The consequence of all these multiple agencies of change was that the Yoruba became the catalyst influencing political change in Nigerian politics. Being exposed to all the above features that characterized both the colonial and post-colonial socio-political space in which Yoruba territory is situated, the Yoruba people continued to complain against both the colonial and military governments that subjected them to cultural devaluation, political repression, and economic deprivation in the Nigerian political community.²⁹ The people, especially the new Yoruba political elite, felt that they were not sufficiently included in government, and thus resorted to the use of Yoruba traditional values, cultural and political prides as instrumental forces to draw support from the grassroots people and to fight against the perceived marginalization of the Yoruba by the state.

III. The Dynamics of Yoruba Politics and Nationalist Movement: Implications for Nigerian Politics and the State

Yoruba nationalist movement engendered political changes within its space and such changes have implications for Nigerian national politics and the State as a whole. This suggests that change is a cultural action which is not devoid of consequences that may be either positive or negative. Such consequences may have the capacity of affecting a territorial space far beyond the space in which the change is initiated. In the context of Yoruba politics and nationalism, the initiated changes have far reaching implications on Nigerian national politics in such a

²⁹ Personal interview with Pa Emanuel Alayande in Ibadan, May 25th, 2005.

way that many of its resultant effects have become legacies which Nigerian polities have contended and still contend with for many years, as will be discussed below.

The political strength of Yoruba nationalist movement was the *Egbé Omo Odùduwà* founded in 1949 and transformed into a political party known as Action Group (AG) in 1951. The party dominated the politics of the western region between 1954 and 1957 after which it lost some of its seats in the Western Regional House of Assembly to the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), due to intra-party squabbles that undermined its strength. The crisis initially erupted in Ibadan which is regarded as the political power house of the western region (that is, the Yoruba political space). The Action Group reclaimed some of the political seats during the 1964 federal elections in post-colonial Nigeria and thereafter continued to maintain its political hegemony of the western region till the military incursion into Nigerian politics in 1966. In 1979, when the ban on political associations was lifted, it was the Yoruba led by Late Obafemi Awolowo who first announced the creation of a political party, Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), still formed on the basis of ethnic affiliation, as many of its principal functionaries were bulked up by mainly Yoruba politicians. The party, like the Action Group, did not win enough political seats outside the Yoruba political space. Following the Yoruba example, since the 1950s other major ethnic groups in Nigeria have established political parties to strengthen their ethno-nationalist movement. For instance, the Northern Elements People's Union (NEPU) represented the interests of the minority ethnic groups in Northern Nigeria, while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) catered for the interests of the core Northern ethnic groups (the Hausa/Fulani), with the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) becoming the political medium for Igbo nationalist movement between the 1950s and 1960s.

From the 1980s onwards, while other ethnic-based political associations such as the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian People's Party (NPP) in 1979, People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigerians People's Party (ANPP) in 1999 started to reflect national coverage and patronage, the Yoruba-based political associations like the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) between 1979 and 1983 and Alliance for Democracy (AD) between 1999 and 2008 failed to appeal to other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As in the 50s and 60s, the Yoruba conception of party formation, even in the 21st century, largely reflects socio-ethnic fragmentation. The Alliance for Democracy (AD), a Yoruba political party formed in 1998, featured ideologies similar to those of the AG and UPN which were initially founded by the

Yoruba politicians in the progressive political camp. Between 1998 and 2003, AD also acted as the Yoruba political force for ethno-nationalist movement in South-western Nigeria.

The formation of political parties along ethnic lines created real tensions among ethnic groups, which were often expressed independently of national political interests. The political elites across Nigeria created mutual distrust among the competing communities and harnessed political power via political violence based on ethnic subjectivity. The tensions were perpetuated even beyond the civil political space, as military governments in Nigeria have also featured spates of violence typical of ethnic tensions. As such incidences become more prominent in the Yoruba political space, instigated by Yoruba nationalist movement, the Yoruba infected the national politics with ethnic politics and violence. On many occasions, Yoruba violent nationalist movements have led to fundamental shifts in power in the Nigerian political landscape.

During the colonial and post-colonial eras, the changes introduced in Nigerian politics through Yoruba nationalist movement caused major constitutional shifts in Nigerian national politics. From 1920 to date, various constitutional and political developments have come about at the instances of Yoruba nationalist movement. The 1946 constitutional change was due to Yoruba political dissatisfactions against the 1922 Clifford Constitution which the then Yoruba elite criticized due to the poor representation of its members in the colonial government at the time. The 1922 Clifford Constitution was thus replaced with the 1946 Richard Constitution. This constitution however also crumbled as a result of quantified franchise granted by the constitution which disenfranchised many of the Yoruba political elite and thus limited their access to political power. It was this and many other flaws inherent in the Richard Constitution that led to its amendment and ultimate replacement with the 1951 McPherson Constitution. Still, the federalism which the 1951 Constitution granted Nigeria was not satisfactory to the Yoruba political elites as the newly colonial federated Nigeria was defined as a mere geographical expression (Awolowo, 1947). The Yoruba therefore put their machinery of nationalist movement into force, relying on the strong determination of several socio-cultural and political groups to change the constitution. This provoked a widespread agitation for self-government which was achieved for the Southern Protectorate in 1954 and for the Northern Protectorate in 1957. As from 1957, the political heat generated by the Yoruba made the colonial government uncomfortable and the British parliament had to grant Nigeria independence in 1959. Thus, Nigeria became fully independent in 1960.

The independent government was formed by a coalition that excluded the Yoruba politicians in the progressive camp from national politics, partly because of Yoruba ethnic politics and partly because of the unwillingness of the Yoruba political leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, to work with “less comparable political elites from Northern Nigeria” (Awolowo, 1970) who constituted the national government in 1960. The Yoruba posed stiff opposition against the national government, which put the first post-colonial civilian government on its toes to have performed fairly creditable between 1960 and 1966. However, as the government led by Northern Peoples’ Congress (NPC) political party engaged in electoral fraud in 1964 general elections in Nigeria, the Yoruba politicians in the progressive camps mostly in AG party instigated violent political crises that eventually resulted in the termination of the republic through a military coup on January 15th, 1966. The political crisis in western Nigeria tagged *operation wet e* (1964-1965) similarly marked the beginning of violent ethnic politics in Nigeria. This incidence of political violence has continued to mar Nigerian democratic development, as it re-occurred in 1983 and 1993 following the political swindling of the Yoruba politicians by the Hausa/Fulani political hegemony, leading to a military take-over. The consequences of such incidences include the loss of a sense of legitimacy on the part of the Nigerian ruling government, widespread political violence and abrupt changes in government such as those experienced by the Shagari government in 1983 and Shonekan’s Interim National Government (ING) in 1993.

An attempt to continue the legitimization of political hegemony in Nigeria by the Nigerian political oligarchy led to the annulment of a general election conducted on June 12th, 1993 in Nigeria. Despite the fact that the oligarchy defies ethnic and religious divides, many Yoruba saw the annulment as a political manipulation by the Hausa/Fulani to keep their hold on political hegemony in Nigeria. Since the election was believed to have won by a Yoruba man, its annulment was perceived by the Yoruba as a ‘rape’ of their political consciousness, and this created political misgivings which lasted between 1993 and 1998. During this period, the whole country experienced political crises that led to serious economic and political declines. The political landscape was characterized by assassinations, widespread political violence and ethnic confrontations. The Yoruba in their nationalistic consciousness formed many socio-cultural associations such as the O’odua Peoples’ Congress (OPC), Afenifere, Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) and Alajobi, all linked together by a common Yoruba identity and ancestry (Arifalo, 2001:213). All these groups perceived the political contrivance and affront as unbearable and thus re-created the Yoruba struggles against political marginalization. This new development in Yoruba politics diffused to other parts of Nigeria

as many militant socio-cultural groups representing varied interests emerged in different places. As at 2009, militant groups in Nigeria spread across Nigeria and remain countless, albeit the most popular include the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), Movement of the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and Chikoko Movement representing the Niger-Delta fighting against their ecological and economic deprivations; the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) represents the Igbo ethno-nationalist movements; and the Arewa Youths Consultative Forum (AYCF) representing the Hausa/Faulani nationalist interests. These groups are contesting not only for the political space in Nigeria and the gains of democracy denied them by military governments prior to civilian democracy but also for the social and economic spaces as part of the liberalization of the political movement (Ajala, 2008a). The Yoruba pressures on the government in protest against their political marginalization led to the transfer of power to civilian government by the military government in 1999 and subsequent call for a Sovereign National Conference – a call for the dialogue among all the ethnic groups in Nigeria to discuss the principles and practice of Nigerian federalism. The call was/is spearheaded by Yoruba political activists who are of progressive political ideology.³⁰

The spate of ethno-nationalist movement ironically appears to be what has unified Nigerians in political combat. Rather than lauding the efforts to get the State to function effectively after about thirty years of deleterious military rule, Nigerians generally have continued to express a lack of faith in the government and in the rule of law through ethnic militancy introduced into Nigerian politics by Yoruba nationalist movement. While all ethnic groups in Nigeria share a sense of oppression and denial of fair and equal access to both political and economic resources in the country, the Yoruba believe that should their politicians in the progressive political camp be conferred with federal power, such political misappropriations would seize. So, to many Yoruba, the only way out of the political quagmire is violent ethno-nationalist movement since the people's political wish could not be guaranteed in view of their progressive politicians often been denied more inclusion in Nigerian central government. This stands in opposition to the project of consolidating democracy which involves the internalization of rules governing the exercise of power, the ensuring of free and fair electoral contests, the equitable control of resources by all ethnic groups and the resolution of disputes through court system. Since the incidence of *operation wet e* of 1964 in western Nigeria, cases of extreme militancy in Nigerian politics have become

³⁰ As at July 2009, Nigerian government is yet to accede to this call, despite the fact that the groups calling for it is persistent in the call since 1995.

a national occurrence, causing the wanton destruction of lives and property characteristic of agitation against electoral frauds in Nigeria. Ethnic militancy has also led to the destruction of strategic infrastructure such as energy supply, oil and gas facilities across the country, to the extent that the national economic development is often put on hold.

The political ideology – Awoism – developed from the political ideas of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the foremost Yoruba politician (1907-1987), became the hallmark of performance in government not only in the western region but in the entire Nigeria. The ideology was enunciated in the western region in 1951 and practically demonstrated in the Action Group (AG) administration of the region between 1954 and 1964; and similarly adopted in the region between 1979 and 1983. With Awoism, emphasis was placed on discipline, good performance and strict compliance with the rules of the political game. In this concept, the above qualities were regarded as recipes for good government. The concept emphasized adherence to the principle of rules of law in constitutional democracy. That is, the government had to abide by the constitution, which Awolowo regarded as the will of the people. To him, running a government was a social contract, and at any time when the government no longer fulfilled its own parts of the deal, the people had recourse to terminate the contract (Awolowo, 1970).

This political ideology (Awoism) deconstructs social inequality on the basis of certain forms such as religion and economic background. In Awoism, appointment to political positions was not based on religious and cultural linings; rather it was based on who has outstanding credibility to perform in government, irrespective of religious and cultural positions. For instance, Obafemi Awolowo would not entrust anybody noted for extra-marital affairs with public political function that has to do with public resources management, because to Awolowo, such a person is indisciplined and capable of using public funds to manage his extra marital affairs (Awolowo, 1970). However, Awolowo recognized inequality based on age and intellectual capacity (Awolowo, 1960). Hence, to reduce the impact of this inequality on the Yoruba people and in Nigeria as a whole, Awoism, being one of the positive impacts of Yoruba nationalist movement considers access to western education as *primus inter pares* (Ajala, 2008b). One is therefore left with little doubt as to the reasons behind the vigour and zeal for free education, which was the cardinal political project of Awoist governments in Yoruba society. The project has since become the Yoruba political image in Nigeria, to the extent that any government wanting to control the masses must entrench free education in its political manifestoes. This further explains why in 1978, at the constitutional

drafting committee in Nigeria, Awolowo vigorously pushed arguments for the entrenchment of fundamental principles and objective policies of the government, which later became chapter 2 of the 1979 constitution, and since then it has continued to appear in subsequent Nigerian constitutions. Top most among the features of this constitutional provision was public access to basic education and health care. Although another clause of the constitution (section 6(6) c)³¹ makes it difficult for the provisions to be enforceable by the people, they have become constitutional drives towards the establishment of Nigeria as a welfare state, as embodied in Awoism – the cardinal principle of Yoruba nationalist movement.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that Yoruba nationalist movement and ethnic politics are complex and unique, as they act as forces of culture change in Nigerian politics, reflecting the multi-dimensional nature of traditional elements and modernity. Relying on their history that form the basis for traditional cultural values and prides, the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria construct a socio-cultural ego flexing ethno-nationalist movement of wanting to gain more control of both the political and economic resources in Nigeria. The historical consciousness of the Yoruba people, their perceived long years of being politically marginalized and the arbitrariness they associated with the control and distribution of national resources in Nigeria, were used by the Yoruba progressive political elite to incite Yoruba consciousness of self-determination in Nigeria. In addition, the exposure of the emergent political elite to western education, Christianity, colonialism, and military government in Nigeria gave the Yoruba elite the impetus to instigate the Yoruba masses against the State and other Nigerian ethnic groups, especially against the Hausa/Fulani people. Throughout the colonial and postcolonial periods, the Yoruba people have relied on their sense of nationalist movement to effect change not only within the Yoruba socio-political space, but also within the entire Nigerian political landscape.

Apart from effecting social change and impacting on the State action, Yoruba nationalist movement and ethnic politics seem to be the creation of the Yoruba political elite mostly in the progressive political camp. And as time changes and the competition for control of State resources in Nigeria becomes more intense, the use of nationalism and ethnic politics

³¹ Section 6 (6) (c) of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution makes the provisions of the Chapter 2 of the same constitution unenforceable, because this section of the section prohibits the public from challenging the failure of the government to implement the provisions of chapter 2 of the constitution. Yet these provisions (chapter 2 of Nigerian Constitution) have continued to appear in subsequent Nigerian constitutions since 1979 to date.

also assume different foci. Such foci from the 1900s to 2009 included the construction of ethnic commonality, colonial political instrument for more inclusion in British colonial government and independence from colonialism, equitable access to federal political power, restructuring of Nigerian lopsided federalism in such a way that more power is acceded to the federating units in Nigeria and among others democratically fair and free election. It therefore becomes improbable that the Yoruba people in Nigeria are interested in carving out their own independent State from the present Nigerian political map. Hence, Yoruba nationalist movement remains a construct of Yoruba traditional values driven by elements of modernization aimed at producing political change that can better place the Yoruba political elite within the mainstream of Nigerian political power. It is also a re-creation of political culture in the name of preserving the people's traditional identity, forging new identities and using those identities in power relations with other groups in Nigeria. Hence, traditions, history, and Yoruba socio-political space become cultural agencies that act as forces of political change in Nigeria.

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