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**Yoruba Nationalism: Culture, Politics and Violence
in South-western Nigeria (1900-2009)**

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Abstract

Since 1900, the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria have worked their local history into a nationalist project. Drawing on elements from local mythologies, traditions and cultural values, the Yoruba educated elite created a pan-Yoruba history that established a common interest among the different Yoruba sub-groups. This became the basis for the people's imagination of the nation. Transformed from pre-colonial group identity to cultural nationalism during colonial times, Yoruba nationalism turned political and became increasingly radical and violent during the post-colonial period. Post-colonial Yoruba nationalism is directed against the Nigerian nation-state and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This paper explores the role that history, tradition and modernity play in the workings of nationalism and local politics among the Yoruba, and it discusses the various phases in which Yoruba nationalism has developed. It argues that Yoruba nationalism builds on many elements that date back to the pre-colonial period, but continually changed both in structure and function. Yoruba nationalism and local politics are ambiguous, dynamic and complex, and they remain a challenge to state actions in Nigeria.

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Yoruba Nationalism: Culture, Politics and Violence in South-western Nigeria (1900-2009)

Aderemi Suleiman Ajala, PhD¹

Introduction

This paper is part of an ongoing book project that deals with the history of Yoruba nationalism, a locally-conceived nationalism that operates within a heterogeneous state and differs from a broader, more inclusive ‘Nigerian’ nationalism. Yoruba as a term refers to a collection of people in South-western Nigeria and is of recent invention, dating to the early nineteenth century. The group that today constitutes the ‘Yoruba’ was created out of a number of pre-colonial independent kingdoms that were amalgamated in 1914 into one British colonial territory, together with other ethnic groups around the River Niger area. Since independence, the Yoruba have been one of Nigeria’s three dominant ‘ethnic’ groups, or, as the Yoruba rather understand themselves, ‘nations’. As early as the turn of the twentieth century, the Yoruba people in South-western Nigeria had developed some kind of nationalism, firstly and predominantly as a cultural project. By the 1940s, Yoruba nationalism acquired a political dimension and was transformed into ‘civic’ nationalism. Since the 1960s, it has included the use of violence. The intention of this paper is to discuss this long-range development of Yoruba nationalism within the context of tradition, history and modernity and to explore its changing nature as well as its impact on the Nigerian state.

Group consciousness among the Yoruba was mainly created by invoking historical links. Different Yoruba sub-groups used their sense of a common historical identity to establish cultural influence and political power, and during the pre-colonial period, each sub-group claimed a distinct identity. Apart from Ife and Oyo, there were, and continue to be, eighteen such sub-groups in South-western Nigeria, and another two in the Republics of Benin and Togo. Already during the nineteenth century, however, refugees and migrants from the collapsed Old Oyo Kingdom attempted to appeal to a history of common ancestry that could link several of these sub-groups and establish a wider political influence, focussing on Oyo as the political cradle and/or Ile-Ife as the spiritual centre of ‘the Yoruba people’. During the colonial period, the early Yoruba educated elite, mainly Christian clergies, created an idea of a pan-Yoruba identity, based on assumptions of shared cultural values (Peel, 1989). Yoruba colonial political elites later politicised this cultural nationalism – a transformation that began shortly before the end of British colonialism. This new civic nationalism was eventually radicalised and embraced the use of violence against the Nigerian state and, especially, against the

¹ Between October 2008 and October 2009, I was a guest at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies, Johannes Gutenberg University, Mainz, under the sponsorship of a Georg Forster fellowship of the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation. I would like to thank Prof. Carola Lentz for her valuable contributions to my scholarship and her editing of the final draft of this paper. Eva Spies offered very helpful critical comments on an earlier draft. I also thank Prof. Onookome Okome and Prof. Thomas Bierschenk for their useful suggestions at the departmental seminar series where I presented the first draft. Christine Fricke, Jan Beek and Sarah Fichtner were also very helpful during many discussions on our individual research. As all the opinions raised in this paper are mine, I am responsible for any shortcomings.

Hausa/Fulani² political elite whom the Yoruba politicians and masses perceived as responsible for their own socio-political marginalisation.

Yoruba identity and politics have been discussed in a number of scholarly works (e.g. Doortmont, 1989; Falola and Genova, 2006; Duruji, 2008; Adebani, 2008), but Yoruba nationalism and its changes during the colonial and post-colonial periods up to the present day has received relatively little attention. Particularly the ambiguity and controversies surrounding Yoruba nationalism, and the changes which the nationalist movements experienced between the 1900s and 2009, need more research to which my book project contributes.

This paper is divided into four main parts. The first examines the key terms and theoretical approaches to nationalism, the second discusses the research design, data collection and analysis procedures. The third part focuses on the history of Yoruba nationalism and the part played by Yoruba political elites in the process. The last part, finally, discusses the dynamics of Yoruba nationalism and its implications for Nigeria as a state. The paper concludes that rather than building a type of nationalism that could strengthen Nigeria as a nation-state, the Yoruba locally-conceived nationalism undermines the state-led process of fostering integration and political development. Moreover, it set an example that many other ethnic groups in Nigeria have followed.

Conceptual discussion

Most of the existing literature on nationalism has defined the concept only loosely and created a variety of terms that are often used interchangeably with 'nationalism'. These terms include cultural nationalism (Doortmont, 1989), civic nationalism (Berman, 1990), political tribalism (Lonsdale, 1994), provincial nationalism (Kraxberger, 2005), and ethno-nationalism (Duruji, 2008), among others. 'Nationalism' is also often used in tandem with other terms such as ethnicity, but while the concepts of ethnicity and nationalism are related, they are nonetheless not the same. This fuzziness of concepts is not untypical for the social sciences. It creates the problem, however, of how to match conceptual discussions with empirical data. In this paper, nationalism refers to the imagination of a group of people who believe that they share certain characteristics that bind them together as a people, and who use such imagination to build an independent nation-state.

The concept of nationalism is closely related to that of the nation. A nation is an 'imagined political community' (Anderson, 1983), 'a daily plebiscite' (Renan, 1990), and 'a contested community' (Yawah, 2001) that is sustained not only by any actual judicial affiliation or constitutional patriotism, but by other imaginations (both cultural and civic) of its citizens (Young, 2004). Nation is therefore an expression of a common nationality. Whether a nation is imagined, constructed or invented, it is an imagination that is based on some materiality that is real enough to bind a particular group of people together in their common expression of certain cultural and civic contents. Such contents include, among others, an idea of a

² The Hausa/Fulani group is one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria, located in the North. The other two are the Yoruba in the South-west and the Igbo in the South-east. Since Nigerian independence in 1960, these three ethnic groups have been involved in competition for political power.

shared space, a spiritual link, a common history, ancestry, language, and political system and political aspirations. All these contents bind a group or sub-groups of people together to affirm nationhood.

Nationalism is defined as loyalty and attachment to a nation, above and beyond individual differences (Virtanen, 2005). It is a projection of group identity aiming at political autonomy, either in full or in part. Thus, nationalism is often expressed in the idiom of histories of origin and political development as well as cultural ethnocentrism, i.e. the people's ideology of seeing themselves as different from others. This can occur within an existing state, as, for instance, has been the case of the Quebecois in Canada (Cormier, 2002), the Kurds in Iraq, the Corsicans in Spain (Gurr, 2000), the Irish in the United Kingdom (Hutchinson, 1987) and the Eritreans in Ethiopia who have all been involved in some kind of nationalism. The utmost goal of nationalism, however, is usually the creation of an autonomous state.

Nationalism as a political project has changed the political landscape of many states such as the former Soviet Union, Yugoslavia and Ethiopia, where 'dissenting' nationalists have broken out to establish their own new republics. In other states like Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Nigeria, nationalist movements threatened the collapse of the states through violent agitation. This suggests that nationalism is a modern political identity movement engaged in competition for sovereignty or at least more political inclusion in heterogeneous states. In the twenty first century, nationalism is often expressed as resentment against perceived political marginalisation and over-centralisation of state power, especially in the newly emerging democratic states of sub-Saharan Africa that promise to guarantee more political freedom. While many post-colonial African societies were initially denied political freedom by military governments, the 'democratic' twenty first century has witnessed a resurgence of nationalism.

Some scholars have distinguished two different kinds of nationalism – cultural and civic. As observed by Hutchinson (1992), Hutchinson and Smith (1994) and Cormier (2002, 2003), civic nationalism develops claims to political autonomy expressed in the form of a sovereign state (Gellner, 1983). Often based on common citizenship, civic nationalism creates a sense of political homogeneity among culturally diverse groups who jointly seek political autonomy. This was the case in many 'multi-ethnic' sub-Saharan African post-colonial states that started to claim their independence from their former European colonial administrators in the late 1950s. Many of these states developed some form of civic nationalism in an attempt to create political homogeneity and foster citizenship among culturally diverse people. Nigeria, for example, became independent in 1960 following a period of civic nationalism against British colonialism. Civic nationalism, in any case, is usually a political project of establishing a politically sovereign state.

Cultural nationalism, on the other hand, rests on the linguistic, educational, or artistic rejuvenation of a cultural community or nation (Hutchinson, 1987, 1992; Barber, 1989). It also involves the expression of all forms of ideational and material culture and aesthetic values that are regarded as the touchstones and pride of a particular group. As noted by Adebanwi (2005), the creation of such cultural pride rests on the attachment to a common descent

and the aspirations of a set of people with strong cultural ties. As the distinction between cultural nationalism and civic nationalism is often narrow, cultural nationalism can (and in most cases indeed does) develop into civic nationalism and stimulate political activities that are directed towards state autonomy. But in cases where cultural nationalism is not political, it may be simply conceived of as ethnicity – a link between ethnicity and nationalism that can assume both cultural and political dimensions.

Among the Yoruba of South-western Nigeria, nationalism developed in three phases, as we shall see below in more detail. The first phase, before the colonial period, was marked by group consciousness based on the expression of Yoruba cultural pride and the creation of an ‘imagined’ unity among diverse Yoruba sub-groups that existed as distinct kingdoms or chiefdoms. Appearing in the 1880s, the new Yoruba colonial-made intelligentsia and clergy engaged in a project of cultural nationalism, creating a common myth of origin, language, ideologies, religions and beliefs, craft and popular cultures (Barber, 1989; Matory, 2005). Until the 1940s, during the second phase of Yoruba nationalism, the early Yoruba intellectuals and clergy were involved in cultural nationalism, but were not interested in the creation of a politically autonomous Yoruba state. Rather, they wanted European missionaries and the British colonial administration to recognise their ideational culture, mostly the Yoruba language and the unity as well as superiority of the Yoruba people in colonial Nigeria. During the third phase, starting in the 1940s, some members of the Yoruba colonial political elite translated this cultural pride into a political project. This involved the appropriation of the legacies of cultural nationalism in order to negotiate inclusion in the colonial government and to gain political superiority in colonial and post-colonial Nigeria. During this period, the Yoruba myth of origin was re-invented to bind all Yoruba groups together as a political constituency. The elites aimed at creating a collective consciousness that the Yoruba could be proud of being a group with qualities superior to those of other ethnic groups. All this was translated into political actions such as the formation of political parties and socio-cultural associations that could be useful for accessing political power and negotiating for political dominance in Nigeria. This phase was marked by civic nationalism that initially rested on a fraternal relationship with other ethnic groups. However, Yoruba nationalism from 1964 to the present was eventually marked by the adoption of political violence, in response to the marginalisation that the Yoruba claimed to have experienced under the British colonial government and subsequently the Nigerian post-colonial state. This recreation of Yoruba nationalism was supported by a strong attachment to mythological as well as ‘actual’ power³ and was based on the people’s well-developed literacy and their perception of being ‘enlightened’. All along, however, Yoruba nationalism has not led to the creation of an autonomous state. As of 2009, Yoruba nationalism is both cultural and civic. Nationalism is an ideology that some Yoruba elites in South-western Nigeria use to negotiate the preservation of Yoruba traditions and cultural values. At the same time, nationalism is mobilised for the political control of the Yoruba socio-political space and the struggle for the allocation of more political power.

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

Yoruba nationalism reflects the patterns and workings of ethnicity in Nigeria, and some of the scholarly work on ethnicity can be fruitfully brought to bear on the study of Yoruba nationalism. From Iliffe's (1979) assertion that ethnicity was a colonial creation in Africa, to Nugent (2008) who recently put history back into ethnicity by mapping the pre-colonial 'ethnic' history among the Mandinka and Jola of Senegambia, it is clear that there are two currents in theoretical discussions on African ethnicity and by extension nationalism. The first holds that ethnicity is a colonial construction created by the interplay of interventions of the colonial administrators, European Christian missionaries, colonial employers and early ethnographers, on the one hand, and the agency of local Christian converts, educated elites and urban migrants on the other.⁴ Emphasising the colonial invention of ethnicity in Africa, Wright (1999) specifically warned against the danger of reading ethnicity into pre-colonial African societies. The second school identified elements of ethnicity in pre-colonial African societies.⁵ The epochal work of Lonsdale (1994) and Berman and Lonsdale (1994) made a distinction between moral ethnicity and political tribalism while Spear (2003) maintained that ethnic concepts, processes and politics predated colonialism in many African societies. This second school takes a deeper historical view of the local construction of ethnicity while the first sees colonialism as the major constructor of ethnicity. Studying historical trajectories of ethnicity in Africa, we find that African ethnicity and nationalism can develop in both ways. For instance, among the Dagara of Northern Ghana, ethnicity did not play a major role in pre-colonial times (Lentz, 2006) while the Ashanti of Southern Ghana (McCaskie, 1983) and the Mandinka and Jola of Senegambia (Nugent, 2008) have stronger pre-colonial references to ethnicity. In African societies with pre-colonial traditions of ethnic identities, colonial and post-colonial ethnicities adapted pre-colonial elements and used them to access political and economic resources.

I developed interest in identity politics and nationalism in the midst of these debates and have been mentored by a strong constructivist of the first historical school. However, as I hold throughout this paper, my orientation inclines towards locating elements of ethnicity such as group consciousness in pre-colonial Yoruba society, and to exploring how such elements were adapted and used in the form of nationalism by different actors in the colonial and post-colonial periods. I also maintain that ethnicity is mostly a cultural phenomenon, subjective and dynamic to the extent that it can serve as a basis for nationalism both civic and cultural. In the pre-colonial Yoruba context, consciousness of sub-group identities, identity formation based on distinct dialects, wars for political supremacy among various kingdoms (Johnson, 1921; Atanda, 1997) and kingship institutions that featured patronage (Joseph, 1981) were elements of ethnicity, many of which were adapted into Yoruba colonial and post-colonial nationalism and politics. Hence, Yoruba nationalism in both its cultural and civic forms was the recreation of pre-colonial Yoruba consciousness of group identity made possible by colonial and post colonial culture and politics.

This 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

4 See, for instance, for Tanganyika Iliffe 1979, for Southern Africa Leroy 1989, and for Gambia Wright 1999.

5 See, for instance, Berman and Lonsdale 1992 on the Kikuyu in Kenya, Harneit-Sievers 2006 on the Igbo in Nigeria and Nugent 2008 for the Mandinka and Jola in Senegambia.

political authoritarianism, patronage and clientelism. At the same time, the ethnic fragmentation and political competition that characterised pre-colonial Nigeria continued to shape the particular character of the state-ethnic group relations and politics in Nigeria, breeding prebendal politics (Joseph, 1981) and ‘politics of the belly’ (Osaghae, 2004). They coalesce into a locally-conceived nationalism that undermines the legitimacy of the state, inhibits the formation of broader trans-ethnic national identities and also challenges the current efforts at democratisation.

Research design

The study reported in this paper is based on research in South-western Nigeria that is predominantly occupied by the Yoruba people. The Yoruba are predominantly located in the states⁶ of Ekiti, Kogi, Kwara, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo Osun and Oyo. While Kogi and Kwara states are in central Nigeria, the others are in South-western Nigeria, the Yoruba homeland that has no other indigenous ethnic group besides the Yoruba people. In South-western Nigeria, Yoruba make up about 93% of the inhabitants. In Kogi and Kwara, the Yoruba form about 34% of the population. As of 2006, of the 46 million people living in the South-west, 39.8 million were Yoruba (National Population Commission, 2006). By 2009, based on the average Nigerian annual population increase of about three per cent (Federal Office of Statistics, 2009), the Yoruba population must have risen to about 40.9 million.

For my study I relied on observation of events as well as key informant and semi-structured interviews that I triangulated with a survey-type study. Fieldwork was conducted in Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ogun, Ekiti, Kwara and Kogi states; the inclusion of the latter two was designed to control data gathered in the South-western states. Fieldwork consisted of various field visits between 2003 and 2008. I originally considered engaging in systematic sampling, but my actual field experience showed this to be unnecessary. The topic of my study is of such interest to the majority of the Yoruba that many people wanted to provide me with substantial information. Thus I could spontaneously recruit informants that represented a good cross-section of the Yoruba population with respect to gender, age, location and religion. Initially, I designed the fieldwork to represent the rural-urban divide, but in the field I soon discovered that this division did not influence Yoruba perceptions of nationalism and politics. In other words, the knowledge and interest of my Yoruba respondents were little informed by their location in an urban or rural context. Gender, too, did not have much of an influence, and men and women held similar views on nationalism and politics. Christian and Muslim perspectives on Yoruba nationalism, on the other hand, differed slightly.

Driven by the desire to gather comprehensive and broad-based information, I initially wanted to carry out research in all the states of South-western Nigeria, but soon realised that this was over-ambitious. Eventually, I decided to engage in random sampling of only two communities in each of the states. I listed the names of all the local government areas (LGAs) in each states on small pieces of paper, folded the papers and carried out a ‘lucky-dip’ raffle,

6 States in Nigeria are the federating units of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. As of 2009, Nigeria has 36 such states.

picking two LGAs from each state. The second step was to pick the communities to be researched. In South-western Nigeria, many LGAs contain both rural and urban communities. So I listed the rural and urban communities of each of my selected LGAs separately, and with the 'lucky-dip' raffle technique selected one rural and one urban community from each of the LGAs that had both rural and urban communities. The third process of random selection involved the selection of households for the survey interviews in the Ekiti, Kogi and Oyo states. I relied on the community maps of the Nigerian population commission that indicate the location and distribution of household units and ascribe numbers to all households. I picked every fifth household from these lists, and interviewed the heads of the households for my survey.

The above sampling system afforded the study the chance to achieve a broad-based and comprehensive coverage of many Yoruba sub-groups. In Oyo state I selected Ibadan and Oyo, in Kwara state Ilorin and the Igbomina sub-group from Igabja, and in Ondo state the Ondo and Ilaje sub-groups. While Ibadan is not a distinct Yoruba sub-group, its selection was very important for my study because it has been regarded as the heartbeat of Yoruba politics, particularly after it appropriated 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-groups such as Ijesa, Oyo, Ife, Egba, Ijebu, Igbomina and Ekiti. Hence, an ethnographic study of Ibadan is a micro-study of all Yoruba in South-western Nigeria. The Oyo group, on the other hand, is regarded as the centre of colonial and post-colonial Yoruba nationalism. Its cultural identity and ideologies dominated Yoruba culture since the late nineteenth century. The focus on Oyo therefore provides evidence on how the Oyo culture became hegemonic throughout the entire Yoruba land and allows us to study the dynamics of its local identity in the twenty first century. The selection of Ekiti for in-depth interviews was motivated by the fact that Ekiti state provides a case study of local nationalist movements rather than pan-Yoruba nationalism, as has become clear from the demand for an Ekiti state between 1983 and 1997. As the state experienced another spate of political violence linked with electoral fraud in 2009⁷, Ekiti provides rich evidence that allows us to explore the link between local rivalries, Yoruba nationalism and political violence. Ilorin, a Muslim-dominated community, offers comparative data with Offa⁸, another Muslim-dominated community in Kwara state but one with different views on Yoruba nationalism and politics. These two communities are compared with Igbomina town of Igabja in northern Kwara which is predominantly Christian and has more Western-educated people with opposing views about the influence of religion on Yoruba nationalism. In other states, I relied on key informant interviews of mostly Yoruba political elites and religious and community leaders. I was also able to observe numerous meetings of political parties and socio-cultural and religious organisations, and I attended many political parties' campaigns.

7 To capture these recent events while I was in Mainz, Germany, I contacted respondents in Ekiti state through telephone and e-mail conversations.

8 Offa was not initially in my random sample, but because other scholars have referred to its opposing views on Yoruba nationalism and politics (e.g. Peel, 1989), I decided to include it in my Kwara state sample.

As I interacted with a large number of respondents and observed the above-mentioned events, shared and divisive cultural and political values, principles and realities, religious intersections, aspirations for nationalism, views on violent nationalist movement and many other views integrally linked with the Yoruba nationalism and politics began to emerge. I was able to collect many data on Yoruba perceptions, attitudes and practices related to politics as an aspect of Yoruba nationalism. My detailed and specific case studies among the entire Yoruba-speaking people of South-western Nigeria, provide the opportunity for a comparative approach and a generalisation of findings. The research design allows insight into how local histories, socio-economic status, ideology, religion and rivalry influence the perception of Yoruba nationalism and politics.

The survey data were scrutinised with content analysis and semi-quantitative methods. I had 591 survey data scripts and close to a hundred interview transcripts from male and female respondents of different socio-economic statuses who gave detailed accounts of their views on issues related to nationalism and politics. The data were stored in questionnaire papers, transcribed oral interviews, telephone extracts, e-mail folders of interviews mostly through Yahoo chats, and video clips of some observed scenes. My one year research fellowship at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies at Mainz University (Germany) provided me with the opportunity to have deeper reflections on my data and, among others, write this paper that reports on my ongoing book project.

Yoruba nationalism from the pre-colonial to the post-colonial periods

Pre-colonial Yoruba identity and politics up to 1900

Up until the early nineteenth century, there was no collection of people referred to as the Yoruba. Rather, the present day Yoruba peoples were known by different ethnonyms. There were about twenty groups that Johnson (1921) and other European scholars of the early nineteenth century called 'tribes'. These groups were the Oyo (Ibarapa, Ibadan, Ilorin and Okeogun), Igbomina, Ife, Ijesa, Ibolu, Yagba, O'kun, Ekiti, Ondo, Owo, Akoko, Ilaje, Ikale, Ijebu, Remo, Egba, Yewa, Egun, Egbado and Awori. Up to the present day the people still retain these ethnonyms as their different local identities, despite the creation of a pan-ethnic Yoruba identity that seems to bind them together as a political unit. It should be noted that even today, the term Yoruba does not exist in the Yoruba dictionaries. The term can be traced to the Hausa word *Yar ba*. According to Awde (1996) in his Hausa dictionary, the term *Yar ba* was used by the Hausa for the Oyo people who were the first people with whom the Hausa had contact in present-day South-western Nigeria. In Hausa, the term is used to refer to a group of people that are smart and clever. The Yoruba indigenous scripts (Odu-Ifa) that comprise several thousand poetic verses and contain Yoruba cosmology, history of origin, ethno-science and other traditional forms of knowledge do not contain any reference to the 'Yoruba'. The Ifa verses refer to the people by their different ethnonyms or simply call them *Eniyan*, meaning the people.⁹

⁹ Interview with Babalawo Adigun, Osogbo, August 17, 2008. Adigun is a strong Ifa priest in Osogbo.

The creation of a pan-Yoruba identity in the early nineteenth century was later useful for a nationalist project. The roots of many contemporary elements of Yoruba identity, nationalism and local politics can be situated in the long-range history. As discussed by scholars like Shaw (1967), Bascom (1969), Shaw and Daniels (1984), Sowunmi (1987) and Atanda (1997), the culture and civilisation, which the diverse Yoruba sub-groups built over a long period of time and maintained in the face of colonial occupation, became their heritage and legacy through which they constructed nationalism and civil politics. One of these legacies is the people's pride in the villainy and prowess of their ancestors, many of whom have been deified as gods and goddesses (Barber, 1981). Yoruba is a hierarchical society with a centralised political system. The people are not only fond of an ancestral cult, but are also engaged in re-working local history to suit their political expediencies. Thus, the political power of the ancestors is often perceived to be reincarnated in living persons. As the people respect their ancestors, creating an idea of common ancestry binds the people together and political elites can use this for their nationalist projects. Among the Yoruba ancestors that are still imbued with divine political powers are Oduduwa and Oranmiyan (both pre-colonial) as well as, more recently, Awolowo (1909-1987) and Moshood Abiola (1937-1998). The belief in these ancestors cuts across all Yoruba sub-groups and diverse social and economic backgrounds.

Yoruba mythological history traces the people to one ancestor – Oduduwa¹⁰ whose origins are still the subject of historical speculation and diverse interpretations (Falola and Genova, 2006). Some believe that Oduduwa migrated from Mecca in Saudi Arabia down to Ile-Ife, the Yoruba Sanctuary, passing through the Hausa land in Northern Nigeria. Others think that Oduduwa descended directly from heaven to Ile-Ife which was initially inhabited by the sixteen Yoruba principal divinities and their worshippers¹¹. The first thesis was supported mostly by Yoruba Muslims who wanted to be actively involved in Yoruba cultural works and establish a cultural link with Northern Nigerian Muslims (Biobaku, 1991; Doortmont, 1989) that have dominated Nigerian politics since the 1960s. The second thesis tends to insist on the hegemony of Yoruba autochthonous traditions and civilisation, which Johnson (1921), among others, propagated. The contested origins of Oduduwa have both political and religious connotations and serve as the basis for diverse interests in nationalism and politics. Many of those believing in Oduduwa's Muslim link are Yoruba Muslims in support of the mostly Muslim Northern Nigerian political elites and conservative politicians. Yoruba Christians and traditional religious worshippers, on the other hand, mostly believe in the Yoruba autochthonous history and support a progressive political ideology. Nonetheless, as many Yoruba politicians are only 'structural' Christians or Muslims¹², the religious division in politics and nationalism is not too prominent.

Oranmiyan, the grandson of Oduduwa, extended the Yoruba frontiers to the Edo people in mid-western Nigeria and founded the Oyo Empire that became an imperial kingdom between the fourteenth and the seventeenth centuries (Atanda, 1997). It was through Oranmi-

10 Oduduwa is sometimes called O'odua as an abbreviation of Oduduwa.

11 Osa Eleye (An Ifa Verse that accounted for the origin of Oduduwa in Otu Ife).

12 According to Adebani (2008), 'structural' Muslims and Christians are nominal religious adherents. The structural Christians and Muslims engaged the use of their religious structures to achieve functions which are not religious. In Yoruba politics, many Yoruba political elites use religious structures to mobilise political support and to access political patronage.

yan's influence that many city-states so characteristic of Yoruba pre-colonial society were founded. The mythological history of origin helped to establish a pan-Yoruba identity starting from the 1900s. Johnson (1921), one of the chief architects of this history, noted that the main source of his history was the traditional kings' ballads of Oyo that transmitted the Yoruba history through oral traditions (Doortmont, 1989). Today, the belief in Oduduwa's and Oranmiyan's political heritage appeals to many Yoruba people. Both Obafemi Awolowo and Moshood Abiola drew on the Oduduwa and Oranmiyan legacies and on the cultural work towards a pan-Yoruba political identity that Johnson had started. Since the late nineteenth century, the initial cultural project was eventually transformed into a political project in the form of locally-conceived nationalism, amidst the contestations surrounding the imagination of Yoruba as a nation.

Yoruba nationalism and politics from ca. 1900 to the 1940s

As 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 who were exported to Brazil, North America and the West Indies became increasingly aware that they came from the same port of embarkment and were culturally similar. When slavery was abolished, many 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 areas of origin (Arifalo, 2001). Among these newly freed slaves were some lucky ones who had benefited from Portuguese gestures of Christianity and Western education – factors that now contributed to their becoming the elite of Lagos and Egba. It was these individuals who formed the first African clergies in Nigeria that pioneered early Yoruba nationalism as a cultural project beginning in 1896 (Barber, 1989). Examples include Samuel Johnson, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Lipede who translated their sense of ethnic commonness into a project of Yoruba cultural nationalism.

The new clergy wanted to translate the English Bible into a local language in order to facilitate evangelisation in south-western Nigeria. As they were constrained by the choice of orthography, they borrowed from the German and Latin alphabets and sounds, with which they introduced writing in the Yoruba language with vocalisation from the Oyo dialect. As most of these early clergymen had their origins in the old Oyo kingdom, their choice and use of the Oyo dialect came naturally to them. Through them the Oyo socio-cultural pattern became dominant as the expression of common Yoruba values (Atanda, 1997). The establishment of western education by European missionaries further boosted this agenda. In schools, Oyo Yoruba was taught and it became the official language unifying all the pre-colonial Yoruba sub-groups. Although vastly losing its strength over time, amidst local Yoruba dialects which individual Yoruba are accustomed to when in their villages, the Oyo dialect still exists as an official Yoruba language of education in South-western Nigeria.

Between 1896 and the 1920s, Yoruba nationalism was still more a religio-cultural project than a political one. Between the 1920s and the 1940s, Yoruba political leaders such as Herbert Macaulay, Ladipo Solanke, Mojola Agbebi, Dr. Kofu Abayomi, H.O. Davies, A.S. Akinsanya, Madam Pelewura and Mrs. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti (Awolowo, 1947; Nolte, 2008) joined their colleagues from other ethnic groups to engage in a nationalism that cut

across ethnic divides in colonial Nigeria. Nigerian nationalists such as Nnamdi Azikwe of Igbo extraction and his Yoruba colleagues became active in a fraternal nationalist movement against British colonialism. In the early 1940s, Nnamdi Azikwe used his astuteness as a Nigerian nationalist to wield political domination of Southern Nigeria, including some Yoruba communities in the South-west. However, his aspirations were soon challenged by the emerging Yoruba political elites who competed for political control over the Yoruba space. Notably Chief Obafemi Awolowo, a strong Yoruba politician, re-created a Yoruba sense of tradition, built around the mythological history of common ancestry, and thus attempted to re-make local Yoruba history into his political project (Nolte, 2009). Favoured by constitutional changes that the British colonial administration introduced in Nigeria during the 1940s, the Yoruba political elite started to construct nationalism as a locally-conceived political project, employing local politics through which the Yoruba people could negotiate for more access to political power in colonial Nigeria.

Post-colonial Yoruba nationalism and politics (1960-2009)

In spite of the above contestations surrounding both the Yoruba identity and the working of its nationalism, the Yoruba political elites developed the sense of nationalism from their pre-colonial assumption of group identity and cultural projects in the 1900s to a radicalised political project starting in the 1940s. The earlier spirit of nationalism focused on re-branding the Yoruba ideational culture (language and philosophy) and aesthetic values. In contrast the later nationalism, linked with Chief Obafemi Awolowo's political project, assumed that Yoruba as a nation should occupy a central position within the independent Nigerian political space. In the process of pursuing this latter idea of political nationalism, the Yoruba re-created the spirit of oneness. There were a multiplicity of factors that contributed to this re-creation and success of nationalist politics. They included the role of Western education, the nature of Nigerian colonial politics between 1914 and 1959, the structure of the Nigerian post-colonial military regimes and the emergence and increasing number of Yoruba political elites.

The elements that helped to create a sense of belonging among the Yoruba and influenced the Yoruba's project to gain political control in the Nigerian federation include the following:

1. The creation of socio-cultural associations linked with the Yoruba mythological ancestry. Examples are *Egbé Ọmọ Odùduwà* founded in London in 1947 and launched in Nigeria in 1949, *Afenifere* in 1966 and *O'odua Peoples' Congress* in 1995. All of these groups pursued a Yoruba social, cultural and political agenda.
2. The foundation of Yoruba dominated and controlled political parties, such as the *Action Group*, founded in 1951, the *Unity Party of Nigeria*, founded in 1978, and the *Alliance for Democracy*, created in 1999. All these political parties advanced the course of Yoruba locally-conceived nationalism and politics, and acted as organs of grassroots nationalist and political mobilisation.
3. The use of local genres of musical and drama presentations in grassroots mobilisation, through the media, in support of nationalism. Examples of the music and drama genres

included *Yoruba Ronu* (Yoruba must think), a genre of Yoruba cinema produced by Hubert Ogunde in 1957 and *Ka'sora* (We should be careful) – another Yoruba musical genre produced by I.K Dairo in 1960 (Nolte, 2009). There were also many other Yoruba artistes who produced home videos and recorded songs between 1993 and 2003 expressing Yoruba concerns in Nigeria. Many other Yoruba-based media outlets expressing Yoruba causes in Nigeria were founded especially following the annulment of the 12 June 1993 general elections in Nigeria. All these forms of local genres created a broader awareness of the Yoruba people in support of nationalism and local politics.

4. The involvement of Yoruba migrants both in Yoruba cities in Nigeria and abroad in support of Yoruba nationalism and local politics. For example, following the 1993 election annulment Yoruba communities in Texas, London, Berlin and Ottawa supported the Yoruba agitations against the Nigerian state. In both London and Texas there were a number of internet websites created for projecting information about nationalism and local politics. In particular, the Yoruba community in Texas 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 dominated and controlled political parties.
5. The inclusion of other religions (Islam and traditional religions) and women in Yoruba nationalism and politics. Before 1993 Yoruba nationalism was both Christian (Peel, 1989) and male dominated (Nolte, 2008). Starting from the establishment of OP, a pan-Yoruba socio-cultural group with strong grassroots support, and following the annulment of the 1993 presidential election, Yoruba nationalism became more interesting to many Yoruba irrespective of religion and gender.
6. The use of violence. Examples include *Operation Wetie* 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 the 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. Public expression of and complaints about Yoruba political and social marginalisation in Nigeria. The post-colonial nationalism in South-western Nigeria relied on the rhetoric of political and social marginalisation which drew support for the nationalist project among the grassroots. The Yoruba political elites, mostly in the progressive political camp, accused the Nigerian state of socially and politically marginalising the Yoruba people. Since the Northern Nigerian political elites have dominated Nigerian politics, Yoruba marginalisation is visited on the Hausa/Fulani who often became victims of both ethnic and political violence in the South-west.

Awolowo's project of re-inventing the Yoruba as a nation seemed to be a success. To negotiate Yoruba inclusion in Nigerian political power structures was a political project that is still in progress, supported by the Yoruba political elite, which is mostly in the progressive political camp. However, Awolowo's repeated failure to become the Nigerian president, having contested three times (1959, 1979 and 1983) and his eventual death in 1987, contributed to the decline of Yoruba nationalism – until 1993, when another Yoruba, Moshood Abiola, contested and allegedly won the federal elections for presidency. That the elections were annulled sparked off a re-emergence of active Yoruba nationalism, which became more inclusive. Nationalism now embraced both Yoruba Muslims and Christians and many local ethnic groups. But after losing the supposed Yoruba victory of Abiola, many Yoruba sub-groups have, since 1997, turned to provincialism rather than an all-embracing Yoruba nationalism. Between 2003 and 2007, when another Yoruba, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, finally became Nigerian president, the tempo of violent nationalism has been drastically reduced, albeit that political violence always accompanied the electoral process. Violence usually erupted over allegations that the conservative political parties, usually dominated by Northern Nigerian politicians, manipulated the elections to the detriment of the acclaimed Yoruba political parties in the progressive camp.

The dynamics of Yoruba nationalism and politics: implications for Nigeria as a nation-state

Yoruba nationalism caused changes which have some bearings on Nigeria as a nation-state. The first impact of Yoruba nationalism is that Nigerian political parties are closely associated with socio-cultural groups. The political strength of Yoruba nationalism relied on Yoruba socio-cultural groups such as the *Egbé Omo Odùduwà*, founded in 1947 and transformed into a political party known as the Action Group (AG) in 1951. This party dominated the politics of the South-western region between 1954 and 1957. Due to intra-party squabbles that undermined its strength it later lost some of its seats in the Western Regional House of Assembly to the National Congress of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The Action Group reclaimed some of these seats during the 1964 federal elections and thereafter continued to maintain its political hegemony of the Western Region until the military incursion into Nigerian politics in 1966. In 1978, when the ban on political associations was lifted, it was the Yoruba, led by the late Obafemi Awolowo who first announced the creation of a political party, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). The UPN was formed from another Yoruba socio-cultural group called *Afenifere*¹³ In 1998 another political party predominantly made up by the Yoruba political elite was again founded from *Afenifere*.¹⁴ These political parties did not win enough political seats outside the Yoruba political space which suggests that they mainly relied on local support. Following the Yoruba example, since the 1950s other major ethnic groups in Nigeria such as

13 Personal interview with Chief Lamidi Adedibu in Ibadan, 2007. Chief Adedibu was a strong Ibadan-based Yoruba politician. He further noted that *Afenifere* was then not as popular as *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* was in the 1950s.

14 By 1998 *Afenifere* had become very popular. The group was used mostly between 1994 and 1998 by many Yoruba political elites in the progressive camp to negotiate for the disannulment of the 12 June 1993 elections.

the Igbo and the Hausa-Fulani have also established political parties to strengthen their locally-conceived nationalism and politics. 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 the Igbo nationalist movement between the 1950s and 1960s (Harneit-Sievers, 2006).

From the 1980s onwards political associations founded by political elites from other parts of Nigeria, such as the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian People's Party (NPP) in 1979, People's Democratic Party (PDP) and All Nigerians Peoples Party (ANPP) in 1999 started to build up national coverage and patronage. The Yoruba-based political associations, however, such as the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) between 1979 and 1983 or the Alliance for Democracy (AD) between 1999 and 2008, failed to draw significant support from other ethnic groups in Nigeria. As in the 1950s and 1960s, the Yoruba conception of party formation, even in the twenty first century, still 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.

The formation of political parties along ethnic lines created real tensions among the ethnic groups. The political elites across Nigeria created mutual distrust among the competing communities. In their bids to use regional affiliation to access political power, conflicts of interest often escalated into political violence. The tensions were perpetuated even beyond the civil political space, as military governments in Nigeria have also featured spates of violence linked with ethnic tensions. As such incidences are more common in South-western Nigeria, it is likely that Yoruba nationalism 'infected' national politics with violence. On some occasions, such political violence led to fundamental shifts in the Nigerian political system and caused political instabilities.

During the colonial and post-colonial eras, the changes introduced in Nigerian politics at the instance of Yoruba nationalism included major constitutional shifts. For instance, the 1946 constitutional change was due to Yoruba political dissatisfaction with the 1922 Clifford Constitution which the then Yoruba elite criticised due to the poor representation of its members in the colonial government of the time (Arifalo, 2001). The Clifford Constitution was thus replaced, in 1946, by the Richard Constitution. This constitution, however, also crumbled because it disenfranchised many of the Yoruba politicians and limited their access to political power. Together with flaws inherent in the Richard Constitution, this led to its amendment and ultimate replacement with the 1951 McPherson Constitution. Still, the federalism which the 1951 Constitution granted was not satisfactory to the Yoruba political elite as in colonial Nigeria federalism was defined merely geographically (Awolowo, 1947) and did not provide enough regional autonomy for its federating units. The Yoruba political elite therefore put the machinery of nationalism into force, relying on the strong determination of its 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. From 1957, the political heat generated by the Yoruba nationalists made the colonial government uncomfortable, and the British had to grant Nigeria independence in 1960.

Nigeria's independent government was formed by a coalition that excluded the Yoruba politicians in the progressive camp from national politics, partly because of Yoruba local 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 mounted a stiff opposition and put this first post-colonial civilian government on its toes, forcing it to perform fairly creditably between 1960 and 1966. However, this government that was led by the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) engaged in electoral fraud in the 1964 general elections, the Yoruba politicians in the progressive camp instigated violent political crises that eventually resulted in the termination of the republic through a military coup in 1966. The political crisis in Western Nigeria, tagged *operation weti e* (1964-65), marked the beginning of large scale political violence in Nigeria. Such violence has continued to mar Nigerian democratic development, re-occurring in 1983 and 1993 following the political swindling of Yoruba politicians by the Hausa/Fulani political elite. Again, these two incidences of violence caused the civilian governments to be taken over by the military. The consequences of such incidences include the loss of legitimacy by the Nigerian 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 legitimisation of political hegemony in Nigeria by the Nigerian political oligarchy led to the annulment of the 1993 general election. Despite the fact that the oligarchy defies ethnic and religious divides, many Yoruba saw the annulment as a political manipulation by the Hausa/Fulani political elite maintain political control of Nigeria. Since the election was believed to have been won by a Yoruba man, its annulment was perceived by the Yoruba as a 'rape' of their election victory. This created political misgivings which lasted between 1993 and 1998. During this period, Nigeria experienced political crises that led to serious economic and political decline. The political landscape was characterised by assassinations, widespread violence and ethnic confrontations. The Yoruba elite in their nationalistic consciousness formed many socio-cultural associations such as the O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), O'odua Rock and Alajobi. These associations perceived the political contrivance and affront as unbearable and thus recreated the Yoruba struggles against political marginalisation. The recreation of Yoruba nationalism and local politics diffused to other parts of Nigeria as many militant socio-cultural groups representing varied interests emerged in different places in Nigeria. As of 2009, militant groups in Nigeria have spread across all Nigerian ethnic groups and remain countless. The most popular include the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Movement of the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and the Chikoko Movement representing the Niger-Delta fighting against their ecological and economic deprivations. The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) represents the Igbo nationalism, and the Arewa Youths Consultative Forum (AYCF) organising the Hausa/Fulani nationalist interests. These groups are contesting not only for control of political space in Nigeria; they also canvas for more de-

mocratic development that was denied by military governments prior to civilian democracy. They are also agitating for more inclusion in both social and economic space as part of the liberalisation project of the democratic governance (Ajala, 2008a). The Yoruba pressures on the government in protest against their political marginalisation led to the transfer of power to a civilian government in 1999 and the subsequent call for a sovereign National Conference – a call for dialogue among all ethnic groups in Nigeria to discuss the principles and practice of Nigerian federalism. The call was spearheaded by the Yoruba political elite and activists who are of progressive political ideology.¹⁵

The spate of locally-conceived nationalism ironically appears to be what has unified Nigerians in the spirit of political violence. 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. 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 political elites in the progressive camp believe that should they head Nigerian government, such political misappropriations would cease. So, to many of these Yoruba political elite, the only way out of the Nigerian political quagmire is radicalised nationalism, since the people's political wish could not be guaranteed in view of the government's continuous denial of more inclusion in Nigerian central government. This stands in opposition to the project of consolidating democracy which involves the internalisation of rules governing the exercise of power, ensuring free and fair electoral contests, the equitable control of resources by all ethnic groups and the resolution of disputes through the court system. Since the incidence of *operation weti e* of 1964 in Western Nigeria, cases of extreme political militancy have become a national occurrence, causing the wanton destruction of lives and property. These have characterised agitations against electoral frauds. Political and ethnic violence has also led to the destruction of strategic infrastructure such as energy supply, oil and gas facilities across the country, to the extent that national economic development is often put on hold.

There is, however, also a positive legacy of Yoruba nationalism, namely the ideology of 'Awoism', developed from the political ideas of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the foremost Yoruba politician (1907-1987). Awoism became the hallmark of 'good governance' not only in South-western Nigeria but in the entire country. The ideology was enunciated in the Western Region in 1951 and practised by the Action Group that administered the region between 1954 and 1964 as well as between 1979 and 1983. Awoism placed emphasis on discipline, good performance and strict compliance with the rules of the democratic governance, regarding these qualities as recipes for good government. The government was 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 fulfils its own parts of the deal, the people had recourse to terminate that contract (Awolowo, 1970). In Awoism, appointment to political positions was not based on religious and cultural leanings, but rather on who has outstanding credibility to perform in government (Nolte, 2009). For instance,

¹⁵ As of July 2009, the Nigerian government is yet to accede to this call, despite the fact that supporting groups have been persistently calling for it since 1995.

Obafemi Awolowo would not entrust anybody noted for extra-marital affairs with a public political function involving public resources management, because according to Awolowo, such a person was undisciplined and capable of using public funds to manage his extra marital affairs (Awolowo, 1970). However, Awolowo recognised inequality based on age and intellectual capacity (Awolowo, 1960). To reduce the impact of this type of inequality, Awoism considers access to western education essential (Ajala, 2008b), and free education became the cardinal political project of Awoist governments in Yoruba society. The project has since become part of the Yoruba's political image in Nigeria, to the extent that any government wanting to control the Yoruba masses must entrench free education in its political manifesto. In 1978, in the constitutional drafting committee, Awolowo vigorously pushed for the entrenchment of his fundamental principles of government which were eventually adopted in the 1979 and subsequent Nigerian constitutions. Topmost among these constitutional provisions was public access to basic education and health care. Although another clause of the constitution¹⁶ makes it difficult to enforce these provisions, they have become constitutional drives towards the establishment of Nigeria as a welfare state, as embodied in Awoism – the cardinal principle of Yoruba nationalism.

Conclusion: reflections on the future

Yoruba nationalism and politics are complex and unique and have acted as forces of change in Nigerian politics. Nationalism in South-western Nigeria is built on traditional as well as modern elements. Relying on traditional cultural values and pride, the Yoruba constructed a civic nationalism aimed at gaining more control of political and economic resources in Nigeria. The historical consciousness of the Yoruba people and their perception of long years of political marginalisation were used by the Yoruba progressive political elite to incite the masses into struggles for self-determination. In addition, the exposure to Western education, Christianity, colonialism, and military rule gave the Yoruba political elite the impetus to mobilise the Yoruba masses against the Nigerian nation-state and other Nigerian ethnic groups, especially the Hausa/Fulani and Northern Nigerian political interest. Throughout the colonial and post-colonial periods, the Yoruba people have relied on their sense of nationalism to effect changes not only within the Yoruba socio-political space, but also in the entire Nigerian political system.

Yoruba nationalism and politics seem to be the creation of the Yoruba political elite mostly in the progressive political camp. As time passes and the competition for the control of state resources in Nigeria becomes more intense, the use of nationalism and local politics also assume different foci. The Yoruba nationalist project began with the construction of ethnic commonality and political alliances for more inclusion in British colonial government and later for independence from colonialism. Later, it turned to calls for political and constitutional change in Nigeria, and eventually invoked political and ethnic violence. These devel-

16 Section 6 (6) (c) of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution makes the provisions of Chapter 2 of the same constitution unenforceable, because this part 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 from 1979 to date.

opments signal the need for restructuring Nigeria's lopsided federalism in such a way that more power is acceded to the federating units and fair and free democratic elections are ensured. It is improbable that the Yoruba are interested in carving out their own state, independent from the present Nigerian nation-state. Yoruba nationalism remains a construct of Yoruba traditional values driven by elements of modernisation 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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