

## **Cultural Nationalism, Democratization, and Conflict in Yoruba Perspectives: Focus on O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) in Nigerian Politics**

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**ABSTRACT** This paper is generated from hard data collected in Southwestern Nigeria, on cultural nationalism through violence in a democratic consolidating state of Nigeria. The heterogeneity of Nigeria operating under repressive conditions towards cultural aspirations and goals provoked violent cultural nationalism, as manifested in the operation of O'odua Peoples' Congress among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. The incidence is gruesome for the democratic consolidation in Nigeria, thus, the rationale for interrogating violent cultural nationalism as a social critique. The paper discusses how Yoruba historical consciousness works to aggravate social tension against the Nigeria as a State and argued that cultural nationalism is imperative in heterogeneous democratic consolidating states, because it gives strength to democratic development, but should be devoid of violence. Consequently, for cultural nationalism to promote sustainable democratic development there is a need for harmony, trust and confidence among the various ethnic groups constituting a heterogeneous state, while negotiating for power and seeking access to resource control.

### **STUDY BACKGROUND**

In the recent time, Nigeria's transition from the stage of electoral politics to the consolidation of democracy has reawakened the hitherto repressed or dormant political forces in Nigeria. The situation is characterized by the upsurge of ethnic militias, who seek to pursue their cultural nationalism. The experience seems to be typical of many other countries passing through a similar socio-political transition (Singer, 2000; Vickers, 2000). Mentions can be made of Cote D'Ivoire, Niger, Indonesia, Ghana, and Malaysia. This goes to suggest that democratic openings tend to aggravate ethnic nationalism, which sometimes provokes ethnic tensions and conflicts (Akwetey, 1996; Conteh-Morgan, 1997; Sandbrook, 2000). The situation is usually more pronounced in heterogeneous society of Nigeria.

Nigeria with its wealth, human resources, population and size could be considered a giant, relative to its neighbours. It is the sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world and got political independence from Britain on October 1, 1960. The name Nigeria was given to the country by a British journalist who later became the wife of the first Governor-General of the country - Sir Fredrick Lugard in 1898. The name was suggested for the collection of protectorates and colonies around River Niger. The suggestion was accepted and

since 1898 Nigeria came into being as a colonial State to Britain until 1960 when its independence was granted.

Since 1960, there had being more serious cases of ethnic nationalism in that country simply because each of over 250 ethnic groups wedded together in that country operates at an unequal level, and there are always the practice of injustices, marginalization and poor management of the country's resources (Best, et al, 1999). The most prominent among those groups involving in volatile ethnic-nationalism are the Yoruba people inhabiting the Southwestern part, the Hausa/Fulani occupying the Northern part of the country, and the Ibo who dominantly constitutes the Eastern section of the country.

No sooner than the country got Independence in 1960, that ethnic consciousness manifested itself through cultural nationalistic struggles in Nigeria. The first turbulent event was experienced in 1964, barely four years into newly won independence, and self government constructed on parliamentary democracy, when the Yoruba people felt disgruntled on electoral malpractices, which was believed to have been instigated by the Hausa/Fulani power bloc. The incidence led to the overthrow of the Yoruba political leadership of the Yoruba region headed by the Action Group - a political party belonging to the Yoruba. The election was declared in favour

of the ruling national party - Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) believed to be the Hausa/Fulani's political party. The incidence was greeted with tough crisis labeled "wild-wild west" or *Operation wet e*". The crisis was intervened in 1965 with the first military take-over, which the country witnessed. The Yoruba cultural nationalism did not rest, but later in 1966 saw a group of young serving soldiers mainly from the Yoruba background, but having few Ibos who shared the Yoruba feelings and visions for the young Nigeria, causing a socio-political revolution in the country. The revolution lasted until 1966, but a year later the Ibo people in their own cultural nationalistic perspective declared a civil war against the entire Nigeria in their bid to secede from Nigerian federalism. The war lasted until 1970s. Of course, the Ibo people lost, and since then the military governments were in place until 1979 when another civilian government was inaugurated, and collapsed in 1983 with four series of military governments that came between 1983 and 1999. There was a repression or dormancy of ethnic consciousness and cultural nationalism between 1983 and 1993. The annulment of June 12, 1993 federal election, which was believed to have won by a Yoruba man as the President of Nigeria, by the government, rippled Yoruba ethnic consciousness and nationalism. This led to three successive governments between 1993 and May 1999, when the present democratic government was inaugurated.

It is obvious from historical annals of Nigeria as a heterogeneous sovereign state characterized by ethnic primordialities where injustices, inequity, unfair distribution of national resources, political marginalization, poverty, squalor, and poor government pervaded, that drive towards national self-determination is more manifested in Nigeria. In addition, it portends a great challenge not only facing Nigeria, but also the entire international community.

Today, Nigeria lives in perpetual fears of militant ethnicity causing grave social, economic, political and human costs. This development in Nigeria taken on the guise of ethnic militia movements in form of cultural nationalism purportedly representing and seeking to protect their different ethnic interests in a country in which the state is largely perceived as non-chalant to the demands of the ethnic nationalities in the country (Agbu, 2004). In this situation, the

country has witnessed the birth of many cultural nationalist movements/groups, which include Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force and Chikoko Movement representing the Niger-Delta interests; O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Afenifere, Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE), among others representing the Yoruba interests, while the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Arewa Peoples' Congress (APC) representing the Ibo's and Hausa/Faulani interests respectively. These groups are contesting not only the political space and the gains of democracy as it was denied by military governments prior to civilian democracy but also the social and economic space as part of the liberalization of the political movement. The groups understood or rather misunderstood the democratic freedoms to mean unbridled freedom. In highly populated cities like Lagos, Aba, Onitsha, Sagamu, Ilorin, Kaduna, Kano, and Ibadan ethnic militia groups have sporadically unleashed extreme violence on civil population as well as on the institutions of governments. The charged rampaging youths brazenly overrun state security squads, killing and ransacking police officers and their stations, taking over the streets for days. The government's responses have been shooting-at-sight, arresting, and imposing curfews to quench the riots and restore order in volatile urban communities. However not all the cultural nationalist movements are violent. For instance, among the Yoruba group, only the O'odua Peoples' Congress believes in conflict, and operates through conflict.

The spate of cultural nationalism has ironically appeared to be what unified Nigeria - as against the excesses of the state after about thirty years of deleterious military rule. Nigerians are generally lacking faith in their government, and the rule of law. They share a sense of being oppressed and lack of fair and equitable access to both political and economic resources in Nigeria. So, to many Nigerians, the only way out of these extreme quagmires is the violent ethnic nationalism rather than consolidating democracy which involves the internalization of rules governing the exercise of power; determining free and fair electoral contests, resource control and dispute resolution.

Emerging from the above include: what is the background to cultural nationalism? What is the relevance of ethnic militia in cultural nationalism?

What is the place of cultural nationalism in the democratization process of a heterogeneous state? Should cultural nationalism involve in conflict as a way of solving democratic inequity and injustices? And of course, what are the challenges posed by cultural nationalism to a transitional and consolidating democratic state like Nigeria?

Attempts to answer the above questions provoked exploration of literature and collection of hard data on O'odua Peoples' Congress among the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria. African intellectuals and activists have interrogated cultural nationalism in Nigeria from different perspectives (Olukhosi and Laakso, 1996; Olukhosi and Liisa, 1996; Suberu, 1999; Agbu, 2004). They hold a common position that there are some common linkages between democratization, ethno-nationalism and violence in heterogeneous societies, which are undergoing political and economic transition. However, there is not yet an agreement whether the linkage is positive or negative in the context of national unity or democratic consolidation. Some are of the belief that incidence of low-intensity conflicts and social tensions in democratization are aggravated by ethnic nationalism (Olukoshi and Laakso, 1996; Akwetey, 1996; Olukhosi and Agbu, 1996; Osaghae, 1998 and Wippman, 1998), which acts to challenge the structure of authoritarianism. While in post-colonial African states, people face economic crisis, they increasingly had to fend for themselves by resulting to primordial sources of identification and assistance (Keefe, 1992; and Shedadi, 1993). Thus, seeking solace in new and resuscitated ethnic or religious associations according to Osaghae (1995). This situation manifests in Nigeria, and explains the resurgence of cultural nationalism. Hameso (1997) and Nzongola-Ntalaja (2001) see ethnic conflict as undesirable in democratic process. Ethnic conflict causes ethnic hatred, ethnic cleansing, wholesale massacres, and genocide, thus they are capable of derailing various democratization processes going on in Africa (Suberu, 1999; Agbu, 2004).

Following the above extreme disenchantment of the cultural nationalism and the understanding of cultural nationalism in transitional democratic heterogeneous society like Nigeria, a closer study of O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) is initiated. The purpose is to understand the nature of the growing challenge posed by OPC as a social critique in Nigeria. Explaining the emergence of

OPC in Nigeria's democratic transition period, and establishing how these challenges can be managed are also uppermost in this ethnographically generated discourse. The origin, objectives and the growth of OPC are explained with a view of identifying the causative factors in their violent approach, if any, and possible strategies for addressing the problem. The central focus of this paper is the process of power relation, resource distribution, and the failure of post-transitional politics to address the distortions in the polity as factors responsible for the emergence of cultural nationalism in Nigeria. The above study problems are constructed having noted an obvious gap in the existing literature, which have interrogated the question of democratization, ethnic nationalism and conflict in Nigeria. Evolving from the gaps are: why is OPC a political mobilization force among the Yoruba in Nigeria? To what extent has OPC agenda reflected the Yoruba feelings for Nigeria? In addition, can OPC approach transform the political inequity in Nigeria without derailing democracy and Nigerian unity?

Being an aspiring ethnographer, I was curious about relationship existing between the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Obviously, there are two principal reasons to this. One, since the Nigerian independence, the Yoruba people has always been complaining of political marginalization in Nigeria. One actually thought that it could be as a result of a Yoruba person having not been made as President of that country. However, between 1976 and 1979, August 27 and November 17<sup>th</sup> 1993, and 1999 till date, the Nigerian Presidents and Heads of State are Yoruba persons. Of course, the second reason evolved from the first. The Yoruba people continue to agitate against political marginalization in Nigeria, even having headed that country thrice within a period of 45 years of Nigeria's independence. Therefore raising critical questions of what else do the Yoruba people want in Nigeria? What do the Yoruba people mean by political marginalization? How has this being fought by the Yoruba people of Nigeria?

Attempt to answer these questions necessitated ethnographic study of Yoruba people in Nigeria, where a selection of four socio-political states were made out of seven dominantly and two scantily populated states by the Yoruba people. The four states selected for the study were Oyo, Osun, Ogun and Ekiti States.

The selection of the states as the study communities was by purposive sampling. This method was adopted simply because the study intends to interrogate general variables applicable to all the Yoruba people irrespective of sex, economic status and environmental location. The intention to have a larger coverage of sub-linguistic variations of the Yoruba people in the study similarly prompted the adoption of purposive sampling. Thus, the sampling produced Ekiti, Oyo, Igbomina, Ife/Ijesa and Egba sub-Yoruba linguistic groups. Since language is regarded as vehicle of communication of thoughts and symbol of identity and commonness, the distinction made, based on the sub-linguistic groups in this Yoruba study was of great asset to the study. In the first instance, the methodology provided the study with the opportunity of comparing what different Yoruba peoples refer to as democratization, violence and cultural nationalism.

Following the selection of the research sites, the study engaged in in-depth study relying on survey investigation in Oyo and Ekiti States. Ibadan and Ado-Ekiti being the capital cities of the two selected States were purposively chosen. These cities were chosen because they are urban communities, which feature migrants from many other Yoruba sub-ethnic and social groups found in those States. Some of the respondents interrogated were also from other Yoruba States whose sub-ethnic groups are not native of either Ekiti or Oyo States. The next stage of sampling was the Enumeration Areas (EAs). Three local governments were selected from Ibadan, while two local governments were also selected from Ado-Ekiti, thus making five local government areas selected as the Enumeration Areas (EAs). Each of the EAs has between ten and eleven political wards, from where three wards were selected, making fifteen wards. From the ward selection, a sample frame of 1/25<sup>th</sup> was designed to select households. This design produced 120 households from each of the wards for the study. From each of the households, a respondent was simple-randomly selected through an ascription of number to all persons available in every sampled household, where a particular number was objectively picked to avoid sampling error. Six hundred respondents evolved from the design. Questionnaires were administered on them. The questionnaire was a semi-structured type with about 72 sets of questions covering all the research variables. The need to allow for

qualitative expression of opinions motivated the choice of semi-structured questionnaire.

The second phase of data gathering involved the use of key informant interview, which was used in Ogun and Osun States. Three local government areas were similarly selected from each of the States using purposive sampling. In Osun State, local government councils in the rural areas were selected to establish a balanced coverage of rural and urban communities in Yoruba society; while only the urban local governments were selected in Ogun State. From all the six local government areas selected for Key Informant Interview (KII), 36 key informants were purposively selected.

To compliment the hard data generated from the ethnographic fieldwork, desktop research was involved. Through the desktop research, visits were made to three print media organizations in Lagos, Nigeria. These are Century Media Limited, the publisher of *New Age* (Daily publication), Independent Communications Network Limited, the publisher of *The News Magazine* (Weekly publication) and *Tell* magazine (Weekly publication). The study involved spending some time in their Library and Documentation Departments where extracts and paper cuttings related to the research focus were gathered.

#### **THE YORUBA PEOPLE AND CULTURAL NATIONALISM: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES**

The Yoruba people are presently dominating the southwestern part of modern Nigeria, where the bulk of the Yoruba people numbering about 46 million are concentrated (Ajala and Jegede, 2004). In Nigeria, the Yoruba people form one of the leading ethnic groups. Specifically, they densely occupy the whole of Oyo, Osun (their sanctuary), Ekiti, Ondo, Ogun, Lagos States, and Kwara and some parts of Edo and Kogi States in Nigeria. A substantial number of the Yoruba people also inhabit the southeastern part of Republic of Benin - Dahomey (as it was formerly called), a territory, which is contiguous with the area, which the Yoruba people occupy in Nigeria. Dahomey itself was part of the old Yoruba kingdom, with an undetached historical link with the Yoruba culture of Nigeria. The Yoruba people in Dahomey are locally called the *Eguns*. The Yoruba cultural history had it that Oniketu, one of the seven legitimate sons of Yoruba progenitor

(Okanbi) fled Ile-Ife to establish that territory, which later became famous during the glorious days of Old Oyo Kingdom in the 16<sup>th</sup> century as part of West-Eastern border of the kingdom then. It was the border post with the olden days Ashanti Empire in Ghana. All these areas enumerated in Nigeria and in Benin Republic formed what is known as the Yoruba nation before the European partition of Africa and the accompanied European rule (Ajayi, 1995).

The Yoruba nation roughly lies between latitude 6° and 9°N and longitude 2° 30' and 6° 30' east. Its area is about 181,300 square kilometers. Apart from this area, pockets of Yoruba population are found in other parts of Nigeria and some other parts of West African countries as migrants. Similarly, pockets of these people, largely offshoots from their West African base are also found across the Atlantic, as far as the Caribbean, and South America, especially in Cuba and Brazil as Diaspora Yoruba. However, the Yoruba nation defined above is regarded as the people's traditional homeland. The ecology of Yoruba homeland is very relevant to our discussion in this paper, because its topical issues are concerned with the historical consciousness and the question of identity in which geography plays a crucial factor. Based on the thesis of ecological determinism, ecology delineates the people into distinct culture, and subsequently determines people's specific identity, often times, human reactions to ecological possibilities establish distinctive traits in human culture, which human beings jealously seek to protect. These distinctive traits, which form the cultural heritage of the people, are capable of generating cultural history and consciousness.

Yoruba as a distinct language group must have evolved around the period C. 2000 B.C. - C. 1000 B.C. (Atanda, 1997). Their historical development as a people must have also begun within that period. However, the nature of the available evidence makes it impossible for the precise course of historical development of the Yoruba people from their emergence in the earliest period. Other source of evidence (Bascom, 1980) is as controversial as the mythological evidence due to their subjectivity and unscientific nature. Thus, they may not be solely relied upon. Hence, to reconstruct the historical development of the Yoruba people, reference is made to several archaeological investigations conducted in the areas like Iwo-Eleru, (Shaw and Daniels, 1984),

Badagry (Sowunmi, 1987) and oral historical accounts from Ifa corpus as circumstantial evidences which have provided a rational historical development of the Yoruba people in the southwestern Nigeria.

The period of the emergence of the Yoruba as a distinct people coincided with the Late Stone Age in West African history (Shaw, 1967). Characteristics of that period proved that the Yoruba must have begun their life as foragers in fruit gathering and game hunting, in an area where vegetation was forest and wooded grassland. The environment then provided rich varieties of wild edible fruits, which existed and still exist in abundance. Among the ones that can be found in the area until the present day are pawpaw (*Carica papaya*), locust beans from locust beans trees (*Parkia filicoidea*), palm fruits from palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*), shea butter fruits from shea butter tree (*Butyrospermum parkii*) etc. The people must have used microliths as hunting implements in this early period. As hunting activities became more intense, the production of microliths must have become a specialized and major industry among the people. Archaeologists have discovered evidence of microlithic industry at Iwo-Eleru near Akure (Shaw and Daniels, 1984) and cave sites at Old Oyo. There is also an indication that the earliest settlers in Ife must have practiced fruit gathering and hunting economy.

The process of transformation from simple tool using hunting and gathering to a more complex economic organization characterizing the Yoruba kingdoms in the 16<sup>th</sup> century must have spanned centuries of historical construction. Indeed, in the Yoruba kingdoms, their complex political institution that featured mass participatory governance (local democracy), formal economic system, complex sociation, and moral codes and ethics characterizing their indigenous socialization, all, which have survived to this day, were undoubtedly the climax of social and political formations, which have developed over time.

The nature of this paper does not accommodate the details of the development of various kingdoms and evolution of political institutions and government in Yorubaland in general. However, it suffices to say that evidence from "Osa meji" one of the Ifa verses accounts that the process first started in Ife area. There, a centralized state emerged some time in the first millennium B.C. when the later known Yoruba

sixteen principal divinities formed a theocracy. Each of these divinities was accorded specific administrative functions. Obatala was the head. During this theocratic regime, the state flourished and had significant achievement in political, economic and religious spheres. It was also gathered that the rudiments of the craft industries and the works of art for which Ife later acquired a worldwide fame began to develop during the period of theocracy, which lasted until 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D (Beier, 1957; Agbaje-Williams, 2005).

Obatala later grew to be weak and paved ways for plagues and epidemics, which took many lives. There was a yearning from the people for a change in government. It was at this time that Oduduwa who resided in Oramfe hill close to Ife-Oodaye intervened to dislodge Obatala and his theocratic government (Agbaje-Williams, 2005). On acquiring power, Oduduwa not only provided a dynamic leadership, he also revitalized all sectors of the state. He established a new dynasty, strengthened the monarchy and setting up a monarchical democracy, put life into the developments of the state in the economic and religious aspects and promoted craft and industries including metal art works. The foundation laid by Oduduwa enabled his successors to develop the kingdom of Ife to its peak, which lasted between 900-1650 A.D. This period was likened to the classical age of Greek and Roman Empire especially in art history. Oduduwa's career revolutionized the political developments in other parts of Yorubaland, the process, which was extended to village settlement level in many parts of Yorubaland during the time of Oduduwa. Many of these were noted to have claims to their oral traditions; customs and indigenous legal system with which they established semi-independent centralized political systems. They however still been influenced by the Ife dynasty. Prominent among these states were Owu Kingdom, Ketu Kingdom, Owo Kingdom, Ondo Kingdom, Oyo Empire and Igbomina Kingdom. Oyo Empire was the largest and the most militarily powerful in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Others were Egba, Egbado, Ijebu and Ibadan kingdoms.

The political crisis, which plagued the Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, culminated to the fall of the Old Oyo Empire and many of these kingdoms. This led to the redrawing of the political map of the Yoruba nation. However, as Yoruba people are proud of their heritage, new

states were similarly founded through merger and readjustment of the collapsed old states. Another turbulent event, which affected the Yorubaland, was the invasion of Ilorin - a Northern border of the Old Oyo Empire, by Fulani Jihad of 1804. The Jihad was spreading to the hinterland of the Old Oyo Empire before it was intercepted by the Yoruba combined forces of Ogunmola warriors from Ibadan, Ogedengbe warriors from Ijesa and Omolara warriors from Ilobu in 1826 at Otin in the present day Odo-Otin local government of Osun State (Ajala and Jegede, 2004).

Between 1826 and 1900, there was a gradual cession of Yorubaland to European occupation, which began in 1861 with the cession of Lagos and its eventual annexation as British Colony. British occupation of Yoruba land faced a lot of serious agitations from the Yoruba people. However, the people had to succumb to the superior British tactics in both weaponry and diplomacy.

The culture and civilization, which the Yoruba people built over several centuries even in the face of colonial occupation, was their heritage and legacy. One of the legacies of the Yoruba people in the course of their development is a social organization in which the lineage, "ebi" or "idile" is basic. The lineage is composed of a number of kindred nuclear families. It is an extended family comprising father, mother and children of the nuclear generation or first generation and their offsprings up to as many generations as possible until the blood or descent link becomes very thin, reaching the point of snapping and actually snapping off (Atanda, 1997).

The above socio-political chequered history arrogates to the Yoruba people in the present day Nigeria, the spirits of assertiveness, and superiority over other ethnic groups in the Federation of Nigeria. Yoruba believes, according to a key-informant that: "*Kaka ka dobale fun Gambari, ka kuku ku*", translated to mean, that: for Yoruba to humble any other ethnic group especially the Hausa, it is better for the Yoruba to die. The belief is that civilization and modern development in Nigeria begun from Yoruba people and spread to other parts. According to a key-informant, in the early days of Nigerian independence, when the country was practicing regional government, Yoruba region scored the legacies of establishing the first Television Station in Nigeria and in Africa, the first University in

Nigeria, and the first Industrial Estate in Nigeria. Today, the Yoruba nation has the largest number of urban communities and public schools. All these legacies form part of the construction of cultural nationalism among the Yoruba people in Nigeria.

Cultural nationalism is a universal norm. It is a feeling from a group of people identifies to sharing the same cultural forms in terms of social norms, political goals, cultural heritage and common aspirations (Keefe, 1992 and Nolte, 2004). This suggests that when a group of people shares common social and political goals, there tend to be a feeling of self-determination. It is apparent that cultural nationalism involves the development of emotional attachment. It has to do with individual's conviction on answering the question "what is my cultural heritage?" It therefore means that emotional affiliation to a particular cultural group is not simply a concern for self-determination, but rather it is the sum total of how individual feels about one's culture. For over several centuries, cultural nationalism has evolved among the Yoruba people of southwestern Nigeria, principally through their historical Particularism, which constructs historical consciousness and sense of commonness among the people. From these, in the opinion of a key-informant, "the Yoruba people have come to identify themselves as a distinct people possessing unique cultural traits, which they believed are not possessed by any other group of people within their immediate vicinity". Among the people, cultural nationalism is a process of adopting the Yoruba traditions and culture as superior, and, perhaps more importantly, the shared feeling among the people that their ethnic heritage is worthwhile. This attitude is linked with historical antecedents of the Yoruba people, which makes them to be fond of reference to their past legacies and desired prides, to the extent of protecting such at all cost.

Not coincidentally, it is in conjunction with the process of identity construction that a pride in cultural heritage is often expressed. Ethnic identity among the Yoruba people is objective to the extent that it denotes specific Yoruba historical, cultural and linguistic traits that distinguish the people from other ethnic groups. Cultural nationalism among the Yoruba is not a recent development. It started a long time ago. Historically, it can be phased into three main epochs. These are pre-colonial, colonial and

transitional. During the pre-colonial era, the course for cultural nationalism was an internal process. It has to do with Yoruba kingdoms trying to exert their influence on one another. The process involves internal warfares as a means of power negotiation and domination. Even among the individuals in a particular kingdom. Hence, the overthrowing of Obatala was motivated by the fact that he was no longer capable of defending and protecting the Yoruba heritage in the then pre-historic Ife State. That saw Oduduwa negotiating for power and eventually emerged as dominating, using the perspective of cultural nationalism. That he (Oduduwa) was capable of protecting and promoting Yoruba cultural prides than Obatala.

The evolution of states in Yorubaland saw intra-cultural struggles among the evolving states. Each state believed that the Yoruba cultural and traditional heritage needed be promoted and protected. Thus constructed cultural nationalism, which was used as a tool to negotiate for domination of the entire Yoruba nation. The most successful attempt in this drive was the Old Oyo Empire, which encapsulated all the Yoruba vassal states. This form of nationalism was premised on self-identity and protection of Yoruba power. This quest for the extension of the power was spread to Nupe land in Central Nigeria, and the Edo people in the Mid-western Nigeria. These two ethnic groups still presently share cultural affiliations with the Yoruba people. Nationalistic agenda then was for each sub-identity (vassal states) to become dominant. This was of course a proconsul to cultural nationalism at the colonial era. It was the dominant group, which the colonial power negotiated with, and thus becoming the major power to be recognized.

During the colonial era, Yoruba cultural nationalism took a different dimension. Then, it was based on literary production featuring the attempt to re-write the literature in Yoruba, pursuing Yoruba historical agenda. Nationalism, at this time was to galvanize the various Yoruba groups into recognizing the fact that they are indivisible lots. At this time the myth of origin and authority became very dominant in discussion especially the role played by Oduduwa. This was later translated to group action by the then newly emerging Yoruba elites like Herbert Macaulay and Obafemi Awolowo to create cultural movements, for example 'egbe omo Oduduwa' and Action Group- a political party in

the 1950s, which were Yoruba-based. They aimed at fortifying various Yoruba interests into a common force. It was targeted at re-claiming the Yoruba identity, which the European missionary and colonialism had changed. Nationalism thus, became the issue of cultural revival and restoration of the true Yoruba identity in terms of language, customs, traditions, and dressings. It was more of racial superiority claiming that the Yoruba people have their distinct culture, territory, a system of production and they have been conducting their affairs for a long time and particularly doing that diplomatically with their neighboring groups.

It should be noted that the perspective of cultural nationalism at pre-colonial and colonial era was based on defining a group against others in terms of power. To Yoruba people at pre-colonial the dominant state defined itself by exerting power on the less dominant States. At the colonial period, it was power definition against the outsiders who are the colonial master and other ethnic groups in Nigeria then, principally the Hausa/Fulani of Northern Nigeria and the Igbo of Southern Nigeria. The idea of cultural nationalism was still constructed on cultural pride using persuasive and less-violent means through education and politics. The trend continues into the transitional period, which evident the emergence of new groups.

The transitional period represents the mainstream of Yoruba consciousness, which is partly ideological. This time the definition of nationalism is economic and not political. It is not on the sense of otherness, but on resources, and access to have control of resources, which the Yoruba are supposedly entitled to. The historical consciousness about Oduduwa, and the historical Yoruba identity are redirected to the desire to protect the resources, correcting the sense of injustice, fighting the strict sense of social alienation and political marginalization within the statehood of Nigeria. From the desire to control what the Yoruba are supposedly entitled to, cultural nationalism changed from the previous colonial perspective defined in cultural terms to purely changing and restructuring the political and economic structure of an emerging nation. The idea of nationalism refocused from literary production to self-determination, and actualization of sense of control within Nigeria. The concept of emerging nation is construed in two senses according to the opinion of some of our key-

informants. To them these are: the newly independent Nigeria, and of course, the possibility of evolving a sovereign Yoruba nation should the newly independent Nigeria fails. The interest is vested on controlling huge resources and committing such to building the contemplated Yoruba nation, and competition with other ethnic groups in Nigeria, for the sharing and control of national resources in Nigeria.

The exit of the colonial masters beginning from the late 1950s marked a change of order in Yoruba cultural nationalism. Between that time and early 1960s the historical consciousness drawn from Oduduwa legacy had started fading, albeit the emerging Yoruba nationalists capitalized on this same sentiment to establish nationalist movement such as Egbe Omo Oduduwa which was later changed to a political party - Action Group in 1949. These later acted as platforms for the transitional cultural nationalism. The nationalists like Obafemi Awolowo, S.L Akintola and T.O.S Benson used the platforms to introduce new phase of development in the Yoruba region. Such developmental phases that was not witnessed in other ethnic regions in Nigeria. The introductions of free education in 1955, the first Television Station in Africa, the first University in Nigeria, were all executed in Yoruba region. These served as cultural prides, which made and still make the Yoruba people, as expressed by a respondent, to feel that the Yoruba people are superior to others, that they wanted to be left alone to control their resources, and that they could manage the resources better. They feel that they should be in the position to define their own mission and their own future. All these continue to precipitate cultural nationalism in the Yoruba people.

The use of conflicts and militarism was dominant in transitional cultural nationalism among the Yoruba. Firstly, it was the political riot of 1964-65 tagged *Wild Wild West*, where the imposition of Hausa/Fulani political agenda on the Yoruba people was opposed. Following this was the *Agbekoya* crisis of 1970s, where the slashing of cocoa price by the Federal Government of Nigeria was resented with violence. Cocoa was regarded as Yoruba resource as groundnut and palm oil were to the Hausa/Fulani and Igbo respectively. Yoruba could not understand why the purchasing price of cocoa should be slashed without being extended to groundnut and palm oil. The Yoruba explanation of the situation was that since the

funding of developmental projects in the Yoruba region accrued from the proceeds from cocoa, the Federal Government of Nigeria intended to cripple the development of Yoruba nation, thereby the Yoruba needed a militaristic cultural nationalism. The brutal and wicked manner with which the Yoruba nationalists were dealt with then changed the strategy to internal consolidation in the 1980s and 1990s.

The centralization project of the State-consolidation in Nigeria under the Military regimes in the 1980s and 1990s subjected the Yoruba people to cultural devaluation, political repression, and economic deprivation in Nigerian political community. Further, the Yoruba people believe that in a global moral and intellectual milieu, which has become very sensitive to abuse of group and individual rights and other excesses of centralized states, such dispositions need to provoke both domestic and national stricture. Principally in culturally fragmented community like Nigeria, group identity exerts a powerful and autonomous emotional, psychological, symbolic or consumatory actions. According to Suberu (1999), ethnic affiliations naturally tend to acquire greater salience and attraction since groups find it increasingly prudent to mobilize against historic and contemporary inequities and injustices in the socio-political processes of heterogeneous states. Cultural nationalism among the Yoruba in the 90s fulfills this thesis. This led to the escalation of ethnic and self-determination struggle in Nigeria, with the Yoruba being more vocal and vociferous. Ethnic nationalism thus becomes contagious. Among the Yoruba, several groups emerged especially following the annulment of a federal election conducted in June 12, 1993; the election, which was believed to have won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola - a Yoruba nationalist. The then military Head of State, whom the Yoruba believed was pursuing Hausa/Fulani political agenda against the Yoruba, annulled the election. The incidence was greeted with violence. Thus, causing several nationalist groups to emerge. Such include National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), O'odua Youth Movement (OYM), O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) founded - 1995, Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) founded in 2000, O'odua Liberation movement (OLM) founded in 1997, O'odua Republic Front (ORF) and Federation for Yoruba Culture and Consciousness (FYCC) formed in 2001. All the groups serve as vanguards for Yoruba cultural nationalism.

The transitional cultural nationalism is dissatisfied with the ways in which Nigeria as a state conducts its performance. According to a respondent, "the Yoruba want to faster the pace of development. They think the pace is slow and unfair, so they can push it forward, and accelerating the process of development. They want to act as motivator of positive change in Nigeria rather than exploiter". This is against the belief that the Yoruba want to do it alone, rather it is that the Yoruba have the superior means, might, intelligence, and resources to be able to do something better than what others in Nigeria are trying to do. The pertinent question emanating from this is do the Yoruba actually possess these attributes than other ethnic groups in Nigeria?

There are three explanations to the above question. These are mythical, comparative and new global order explanations. Mythical explanation reveals the Yoruba people have the historical antecedent of setting pace for development in Nigeria. Historically, the Yoruba believed that they have centralized political system, formal traditional administrative structure, regular army and more complex agrarian economy, unlike many other stateless groups in Nigeria. Similarly, the consciousness of being a well-structured group linked up with close social affinity constructed on kinship and lineage made the Yoruba to establish the impression that they have the might of doing things better.

The second explanation is the sense of comparative analysis in terms of the indices of development. The Yoruba believe that they are not the initiator of development project for only the Yoruba region, but also for the entire Nigeria. Yoruba initiated free primary education for the entire Nigeria, spearheaded struggle for Nigerian Independence, led the agitation for democracy and of recent in 2004 led the campaign for National political reforms.

The new global order explanation is predicated on the sense that Yoruba people are less conservative. They are liberal in terms of politics and economy. To them, these are suitable to new world order, which vulcanize freedom and equality. The Yoruba are the most educated in Nigeria; their territory is more developed with more sustainable infrastructural facilities compared to other ethnic regions in Nigeria. Underlying the above three explanations is the sense of superiority, and confidence that Yoruba have more vision for Nigeria, and exert ego and pride

on other ethnic groups in Nigeria. All these form the current frameworks for cultural nationalism in Yoruba society.

#### O'ODUA PEOPLES' CONGRESS (OPC)

O'odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) is a militant socio-cultural Yoruba organization founded in 1995 by Fredrick Fasheun, a medical doctor and former Presidential aspirant on the platform of the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP). 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. Initially the major source of its resistance was the annulment of June 12 presidential elections and the need for Yoruba unity, and the creation of an "Oduduwa Republic". Also contributing to the establishment of OPC according to a respondent was the visit of one Tony Ngrube to Fredrick Fasheun and Ganiyu Adams to initiate them into forming a violent Yoruba socio-cultural organization, which can curtail the excesses of Abacha's oppressive measures against the Yoruba (*Newswatch, January 31<sup>st</sup>, 2000*). OPC is a self-determination mouthpiece of the Yoruba people in the southwestern Nigeria, which has Elders' Council, National Executive Council and the foot soldiers "The Eshos" as its structure. The Elders' Council "Igbimo agba" is the consultative and spiritual body of the organization, while the National Executive Council is vested with the day-to-day administration of the organization. The "Esos" are the warriors. Igbimo Agba composes of the elderly members of the organization while the National Executive Council is made up of the elected officers of the organization. The Esos are largely unemployed and artisans usually semi-literate and miscreants (Adebamwi, 2005). They are usually recruited from the ward units of the organization. They undergo short training and many of them are traditional night guards in traditional Yoruba communities. They undertake oath taking and regularly fortified with local charms and ammunitions.

There are five levels of operation in OPC. The first one is the ward level. Each Local Government Area (LGA) is broken down into ward units ranging from five to ten, depending on the extent of interested people in that area. Next is the Local Government unit of the OPC, some Local

Government Areas are made up the Zonal unit of the organization. There is also the State level, and the last level is the National body. All the units operate through the three organizational structures discussed above.

Between 1995 and 1999, the organization had a pseudo-guerilla army, which was dismantled as a result of agreement in Nigeria for Yoruba presidency in 1999. This arrangement made it undesirable for the Yoruba people to secede from Nigerian federation any longer. The pseudo-guerilla army was made to actualize the breaking-away of the Yoruba from Nigeria between 1995 and 1999, which later became undesirable.

In 1999, there was a major crack in the organization, when a prominent member of the organization Mr. Ganiyu Adams, who happened to be one of the commanders of Esos felt disgruntled with the happenings in the organization, and decided to break away to establish his own faction of the organization. He declared that he had expelled Dr. Fredrick Fasheun from the organization. To him, he could not withstand the liberal and persuasive approaches, which Fasheun was employing. Gani Adams believes that there is need to be more radical and violent in the pursuit of OPC agenda. The two also had a misunderstanding as to either support Chief Olusegun Obasanjo as the presidential aspirant for 1999 Federal election in Nigeria or not. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was not the only Yoruba contesting in that election. While he contested under the Peoples Democratic Party, Chief Olu Falae, reliably learnt as having support for OPC was contesting under joint ticket of Alliance for Democracy and All Nigerian Peoples Party. Gani Adams was of the opinion that OPC should not be partisan and that if the organization supported any of the candidates, it would create division among the Yoruba, and the people would no longer believe in OPC (This Day, June 23rd, 2001). However, Fasheun being a politician himself, was a presidential aspirant under the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) in 1993 election, although he lost at the primary election, yet he was interested and active in partisan politics. He visited and showed concern for Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, having noted that Obasanjo was a most favoured candidate for the presidency then. This action culminated in Gani Adams pulling out. Another reason for Gani Adams' breaking out was that he believed he was unfairly treated because of his low level of education. According to a key informant very close

to Gani Adams, Faseun marginalized him because he was not lettered. However, since the pullout in 1999, the two groups continue to operate side-by-side but nurtured hatred and animosity against one another, which often lead to violent clashes. Between 2004 and February 2005, Chief Gbenga Daniel - the Ogun State Governor organized parleys to resolve the crisis between Gani Adams and Faseun. Several similar attempts were initially made by notable Yoruba elders such as Ooni of Ife to reconcile the two groups, but failed. The initiatives of Chief Gbenga Daniels have yielded positively since March 2005, when the two factions agreed to re-unite (Newswatch, February 23, 2005).

OPC is presently made up of intellectuals, unemployed youths, and many illiterate artisans who form the bulk of its members. Before March 2005, Ganiyu Adams's faction was more violent and contained more of the uneducated and unemployed individuals. The organization's main sources of funding are from taxes collected from its members, membership registration fees, and donations received from well-to-do individuals having affection for the organization.

The organization has a constitution containing its aims and objectives and other operational guides. Its stated objectives include:

- (i) Gather together all descendants of Oduduwa all over the earth, especially in Africa, the Caribbean, South America and North America for a profound, all embracing and unflinching unity.
- (ii) Identify with our historical and cultural origin with a view to reliving the glory of our past for the purpose of posterity.
- (iii) Educate and mobilize the descendants of Oduduwa for the purpose of the above.
- (iv) Integrate the aspirations and values of all the descendants of Oduduwa into a collective platform of the O'odua entity.
- (v) Monitor the various interests of the descendants of O'odua by whatever name, anywhere on the face of the earth and struggle for the protection of their interest.
- (vi) Ensure the maximum self-determination of the people of O'odua.
- (vii) Further the purpose of O'odua civilization by the protection and promoting of our values, norms, and the integrational transmission of same (O'odua People's Congress, 1996).

The above objectives present OPC to be a well-organized socio-political group invested with

Yoruba nationalism. The organization wants the Yoruba to be treated as equal, and equitable as other members of Nigerian federation. If impossible, they would opt out of Nigerian federalism to form an Oduduwa Republic. It appears that OPC is not just protesting but rebelling against the Nigerian State, which has been dominated by Hausa/Fulani political scheme (The News, May 26, 1997). According to Fredrick Faseun, in a personal interview, the OPC original objectives are for self-determination and social emancipation of the Yoruba people, restoration of regional autonomy, self-government and self-management, for economic reconstruction and control, and for a re-structured and a genuinely re-constituted federal union in Nigeria, which can be achieved through the convocation of Sovereign National Conference.

Since 1999, the OPC has become more violent in its approach to pursue Yoruba agenda. The focus completely changed from persuasive to conflicts, and using its activities to hold both the governments and the people in the southwest as hostages through their frequent clashes with other ethnic groups, their factional groups, and with law enforcement agencies especially in highly urbanized cities of Lagos, Ibadan and Ilorin. The organization has been accused of kidnapping and murder of a Senior Police Officer in Lagos, killed about 36 people suspected to be Hausa/Fulani extraction in Mile 2 area of Lagos in 2002, killing hundreds of people in its attempt to coronate a Yoruba Oba in Ilorin, maiming and killing many people and destroying huge property in Sagamu, in a fight to defend a Yoruba custom and religious practice from being desecrated by Hausa/Fulani in Sagamu, Ogun State in 2001 (*Tell Magazine, January 31, 2000; This Day, June 23, 2001*). In 2000, Nigeria Police claimed that the OPC was responsible for 60 per cent of 200 violent clashes recorded nationwide since 1999. All these activities were traced to Ganiyu Adams' faction of OPC. Indeed, since 1999 when Nigeria returned to civilian rule, the OPC as a Yoruba cultural nationalist movement has become more visible, more vocal, and more violent in the pursuit of its cultural nationalism.

#### **CULTURAL NATIONALISM, DEMOCRATIZATION AND CONFLICT - OPC PERSPECTIVES**

Reference to conflict in this discourse implies

variety of forces, militancy, coercions, destructions, and aggressions directed against persons, properties, and symbols of perceived sources of discontent. The list goes on to include riots, arson, guerilla warfare, civil wars, assassinations, rebellions, and insurrections. Mass violence and conflicts are common especially when a particular group of people is targeted as the symbol or agent of the political or civil discontents. There are four explanations to OPC violence in Nigeria democratic process. The first is the historical consciousness of the Yoruba, as the only ethnic group in Nigeria having superior historical legacy of initiating development in the country. This is constructed on the pre-colonial experience, the colonial and the post-independent history of the Yoruba people in Nigeria. At the pre-colonial era, the Yoruba people were the only ethnic group to establish formal centralized system of government, which lasted between 9<sup>th</sup> and late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Their various kingdoms were of repute in the pre-colonial African history, which initially made it difficult for the British occupation of the territory. It was when indirect rule, which brought the natives as part of the British colonial administration of the Yoruba region, introduced that the region became governable for the British colonial masters. Similarly, it was on record that it was the Yoruba people that spearheaded the agitation for Nigerian Independence between 1950s and 1960s.

While in 1970, the Yoruba people were actively involved in foiling the Biafran Civil War, which nearly broke the Nigerian Eastern Region - an oil-rich territory from the Nigerian federation. The late 1970s saw the Yoruba people using their literary intellect to attack military governments, which was in vogue in Nigeria then. Also, agitation against the annulment of June 12, 1993 general election by the then Military Head of State was led by the Yoruba people, not only because the election directly affected the Yoruba, but simply because the Yoruba people have established the historical consciousness of resenting injustices. The Yoruba people similarly caused the resignation of dictatorial governments of Ibrahim Babangida in 1993 and the oppressive regime of Sanni Abacha in 1998. They then called for National Sovereign Conference, which Obasanjo's government has acceded to in February 2005. As part of the Yoruba historical consciousness, between 1955 and 1964 when Nigeria operated regional system of government,

the western region, which is the sanctuary of the Yoruba people, set the pace for socio-economic development for the entire country. The region was the first to introduce free universal primary education in Nigeria, the first to establish television station in Africa, the first to establish sport stadium in Nigeria, the first to establish tertiary education in Nigeria and the first to establish modern industrial estates in Lagos, Ibadan, Akure and Abeokuta. All these led to speedy development of the region, which has attracted many other ethnic groups to migrate to Yoruba cities. All these legacies established in the Yoruba people, sense of historical pride, self-esteem, and superiority ahead of any other ethnic groups in Nigeria. The OPC translate these to weapons of power negotiation. When it becomes very difficult for the Yoruba people to use these to have access to power, they result to violence believing that they have the might to do so successfully.

The second explanation derives from psychological studies of conflict. It opines that relative deprivation, rising expectation, frustration, and failure of the state to address the people's needs often provoke social tensions. According to Anifowoshe (2000), the central thrust of this thesis is that aggression is always the result of frustration and anger, especially when there is a thwarted feeling of inability to get what one wants. In such a situation, the most satisfying inherent response is to strike out at the source of frustration. The origin of OPC and its violent approaches are linked to mass misgivings over the Yoruba perceived political marginalization, poverty and unemployment, collapse of social infrastructures, and state welfare programmes, as well as the perceived inefficient and corrupt state of government institutions. These rising frustrations and tendency towards aggression and violence heralded the present democratic dispensation. The Yoruba people using OPC feel that since democracy accommodates freedom, there is need for the expression of their cultural nationalistic feelings, with government reluctance led to democratic conflict. It is a democratic conflict because the Yoruba people using OPC are expressing their desires under democratic process. The third explanation is related to systemic model constructed by Nnoli (1995). This is constructed on the belief that there is a paradoxical relationship between modernization and political disorder. The new world order

speculates that excess freedom as entrenched in democracy is capable of resulting to political disorder. In like manner, in the federation of culture, specific cultural consciousness and identity seem to always ripple out, and usually result to conflagration. As most post-colonial African states including Nigeria are going through a period of political transition based on heterogeneous culture, in which there is tremendous stress and strain on the traditional, social, economic and political system, cultural nationalists employ the opportunity of the new world order legitimizing freedom, rights and liberal democracy to advance their ethnic agenda (Kurosaki, 2001). Thus, causing conflict of interests among various ethnic groups found in heterogeneous state. The result is usually conflict in democratization. Among the Yoruba people, OPC becomes a veritable organ within which the above thesis is operationalized in Nigeria. The fourth explanation is the group conflict model, which sees violence as a product of a struggle among various groups within the society. Since cultural nationalism is based on certain cleavages such as ethnic, regional, identity, political and religious cleavages, it is prone to cause serious conflict in multi-ethnic communities.

Obviously, the connection between democratization, cultural nationalism and conflict is perceived from negotiation for power and access to resource control in Nigeria. The OPC believe that the Yoruba people have invested much more to the building of Nigeria as a state, in terms of producing more educated elites, and having more human and material resources that could be used for national development in Nigeria. The people believed that they have produced more prominent lawyers, medical doctors, engineers, administrators, and teachers than any other ethnic groups in Nigeria. This ego continues to ripple Yoruba into ethnic nationalism, wanting to have equitable power sharing and resource control. Of course, the refusal to achieve this makes the agents of oppression as the victims of Yoruba attacks on the state and breeding ethno-political conflict.

Considering the OPC activities in Nigeria, violence and cultural nationalism in democratic process, negate the developmental function of democracy and may ultimately attack the root of democracy in Nigeria. However, there may not be cultural nationalism without iota of conflict, especially in heterogeneous society like Nigeria,

but it has to be on a very light and marginal scale. When conflict is minimal or dissociated, it becomes a dynamic force that helps to propel development in the society. In this perspective, OPC struggles could have being a principal variable in propelling developmental social change in Nigeria instead of its present violent perspective.

### CONCLUSION

The violent trend of cultural nationalism as being promoted by O'odua Peoples' Congress is a serious threat to democracy in Nigeria. The historical consciousness of the Yoruba people, their long years of being politically marginalized, and arbitrariness associated with control and distribution of national resources, provoked Yoruba consciousness of self-determination in Nigeria. The ruthless response from the state sparked violent reaction, and making Yoruba cultural nationalism within the OPC perspective to be violent. In consequent, it is argued that for Nigeria - a country with surplus human and material resources, the positive future and democratic consolidation would be assured if there were harmony, trust and confidence among various cultural nationalists existing in the country. The state also needs to address various ethnic agenda, which have clouded the state of trust, harmony and confidence among the 250 ethnic groups that make up the Nigerian state. With the kind of pressure evolving from the cultural nationalists such as the activities of OPC, the political elites and their representatives must either make this decision now, or others will make it on their behalf. Thus, there is a need for further studies on how and what to be done to fulfill this.

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