

## Full Length Research Paper

## Yoruba politics 1999-2003

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Accepted 12, March 2021

This paper examines the politics of ethnic mobilization. It uses as a case study, the political mobilization activities of one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba of the Southwest, to chart the sequence of relations between the ethnic group and the Nigerian State between 1999 - 2003. The paper argues that ethnic mobilization is not an anomic response to the disequilibria generated by modernization and definitely not an expression of deep-rooted animosities or difference but a quest for group security and development within a chaotic and often inegalitarian state structure. The weakness of civil society structures and absence of viable democratic structures for societal "voice" has encouraged the rise of ethnic politics, an amalgam of traditional and modernist principles, values and structures, as a means for articulating the demands of society and taking the lead in actualizing such in the face of an unresponsive state.

Key words: Ethnic, politics, Nigeria, identity, security, development, opposition.

## INTRODUCTION

In a well-functioning political system, periodic demands by groups for greater control of their own destinies, politically, socially and economically are expected and desired. It is more so under a neo-patrimonial regime of power, where in the absence of viable and democratic voice structures, periodic demands are made through ethnic and religious movements, which constitute for the disenfranchised groups and masses, the only means of accessing the public space and its resources.

This paper seeks to analyze the political mobilization activities of one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Yoruba of the Southwest, with the aim of charting the sequence of political relations between the ethnic group and the Nigerian State between 1999 - 2003.

The Yoruba of Nigeria occupy the southwestern region of the country and constitute about 21 - 25% of the total population. The Yoruba are the second largest ethnic group next to the Hausa/Fulani of the northern region (30%). Due to the vagaries of local and international politics, the Yoruba became embroiled in several destructive civil wars, which eventually led to the takeover of the coastal region where the Yoruba resided by the British. Thus, the Yoruba were autonomous until 1861, when they came under the control of the British.

The Yoruba have parlayed their acquisition of Western education, which they have successfully translated into

prominence in bureaucracy and academia. The Yoruba language group includes several ethnicities prominent among which are the Oyo, Ijebu, Ekiti. Yoruba-speakers are also found in neighboring Benin and Togo. The Yoruba are religiously plural in orientation with Christians, Muslims and people who worship in various indigenous religious traditions existing peacefully within the same community/family..

## Setting the context

## The nature of politics in Nigeria

To grasp adequately the dynamics of Yoruba politics, there is a need to understand the nature of politics in Nigeria. The major feature of politics in Nigeria is that it is identity-based, such that all "major political issues (issues considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state such as control of state power, resource allocation and citizenship) are contested along lines of the complex ethnic, religious, and regional divisions in the country (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

In pursuing identity-based politics, competing groups have tended to adopt exclusionary, winner-take-all strategies that have transformed Nigerian politics into one involving mutually antagonistic groups that are in perpetual

opposition to each other. In short, politics in Nigeria can be characterized as “antagonistic identity-based politics”. Such politics is seen to flow from diversity that characterizes Nigeria's social landscape which as a consequence makes it fragile and unstable because “almost by definition, there are fewer points of convergence and consensus among the constituent groups than are required to effectively mitigate or contain the centrifugal forces that tear the society apart”(Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

But contrary to what the “diversity as source of conflict/ antagonistic identity politics in Nigeria” thesis might suggest, “diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for conflict. In other words, the very fact that a country has different ethnic, communal, religious, and racial groups do not make division and conflicts inevitable”. Thus, “a greater degree of ethnic or religious diversity by itself” is not “a major and direct cause” of violent civil conflict or exclusionary, antagonistic identity politics. Rather, ethnic or religious diversity is associated with “conditions that favor insurgency,” including “poverty, which marks financially and bureaucratically weak states” (Fearon and Laitin, 2003). Other salient factors include the role of formal and informal institutions for conflict regulation, the different sizes of groups relative to the national arena, and the extent to which different identities (ethnic, regional, religious, class, etc) overlap with, or crosscut, each other (Fearon and Laitin, 1996; Horowitz, 1985; Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

In other words, there is a set of intervening variables that needs to be interrogated in order to unravel the nature of Nigerian politics, the most important of which, as emphasized by Nnoli (1978), Ukiwo (2005), Osaghae and Suberu (2005), Kalpagam, 2000; Watts, 2003 is colonialism. Colonialism, through a series of policies is the most important factor in the constitution of exclusionary and antagonistic nature of contemporary identity politics. Colonialists pursued divide and rule policies that enhanced segmentation and polarization in Nigeria. Specifically, as pointed out by Osaghae and Suberu (2005).

a). The British, by cobbling the different Nigerian groups into a culturally artificial political entity stimulated inter-group competition and mobilization for power and resources in the new state as a means to cushion the insecurity, instability, alienation and competitiveness of colonial urban life.

b). The British policy of ruling indirectly through indigenous political institutions or native authorities led to the reification of local tribal political institutions and loyalties.

c). British colonial policy fostered the uneven socio-economic and political development and mal-integration of the various Nigerian peoples. For example, the exclusion of Christian missionary activity and the highly prized mission-sponsored schools from the predominantly Muslim areas of the north, created a huge imbalance in westernization between north and south, which continues to

haunt the federation; the discouragement of any official political contact between north and south until 1947, the official promotion of segregated residential settlement patterns – the so-called “sabon gari” or strangers’ quarters and inflexible land tenure systems, both of which reinforced discrimination against migrant communities; and the lopsided recruitment of Nigerians into the army and police all fostered exclusion and antagonism between identity groups in Nigeria

The establishment in 1954 of a federal structure of three units, namely, the northern, western, and eastern regions that was inherently divisive, disintegrative and unstable because it promoted the invidious political hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani-dominated northern region, fostered ethnic majority chauvinism and secessionism by erecting the boundaries of the northern, western and eastern regions around the identities of the major ethnic formations of Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo, respectively; fuelled ethnic minority agitations because it denied the country’s non-Hausa-Fulani, non-Yoruba and non-Igbo groups the security of their own regions; and encouraged an enormous degree of ethno-regional polarization.

Resulting from colonial policies of divide and rule is the constitution of Identity groups into dominant and peripheral groups. Dominant identity groups have deployed mobilization strategies that further their objective of dominating the periphery, that is, one-party states and state centered economic development strategies, that concentrate power at the center while peripheral groups on their own part have favored mobilization strategies that further political and economic development of the periphery that is, revenue allocation policies that favor derivation and federalist political principles. These mobilization strategies have only succeeded in exacerbating the antagonistic nature of identity politics in Nigeria.

Colonial policies have bestowed a fatal legacy, a burdensome inheritance on post-independent Nigeria as groups have sought to cushion the insecurity, instability, alienation and competitiveness that characterize politicization of identity by adopting rigid, non-negotiable winner-takes-all stance to issues considered fundamental to the existence and legitimacy of the state such as control of state power, resource allocation and citizenship along with a willingness to deploy violence to support or change such a political posture. It is within the context of exclusionary and antagonistic, winner-takes all identity based political culture that the dynamics of Yoruba politics since independence in 1960 must be situated in order to be adequately grasped.

#### Features of Yoruba politics

Yoruba political mobilization displays two major characters; the first is its highly oppositional nature and the second, a high degree of institutionalization. The two features flow from the peripheral nature of Yoruba politics,

peripheral in relation to that of Hausa Fulani who constitute the dominant identity group in Nigerian politics.

Dominating Yoruba politics is the politics of opposition pursued by the Awoists, followers of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, 1<sup>st</sup> premier of the Western region and revered leader of the Yoruba, which advocate Yoruba independence outside national coalition of power dominated by Hausa Fulani and actively opposed by the anti-Awoists who argue for a "politics of collaboration premised on the view that Yoruba survival as a major power group in Nigeria is only possible within an Hausa Fulani dominated national power coalition (Olarinmoye, 2000).

The politics of opposition has been pursued through the mechanism of Yoruba political society, the fusion of mass political formations (Action Group and Alliance for Democracy, UPN), social movements, non-political formations (Egbe Omo Oduduwa, Egbe Afenifere) and tradition. Olarinmoye, 2006a:10. Yoruba political society, which emerged as counter-weight to European hegemony project in Africa as expressed in the form of the colonial state, has given to Yoruba elites the ability and flexibility required to undertake the series of maneuvers, resistances and appropriations necessary to avoid and negotiate the constraints of domination within the Nigerian state.

Within the post-colonial state, Yoruba politics has been structured around the creation, preservation and maintenance of an image of "technocratic efficiency" based on a functional bureaucracy and efficient public service delivery. Yoruba elites associated with Chief Obafemi Awolowo introduced a form of politics that was progressive (merit-based recruitment into public service, free-education, free health services, efficient marketing boards, road construction and scholarships) when compared with what was dominant within the Nigerian state (conservative and parochial). They were thus able to present themselves to the Nigerian public as a better alternative to the Nigerian state. Olarinmoye 2000b

The politics of opposition has been very successful as the Awoists have succeeded in translating it into the ideology of the Yoruba and used it to consolidate Yoruba political and identity unity under their control. A number of reasons can be given for such success; primary is the fact of the astute leadership of the Awoists as expressed in their consumption patterns and discipline. It ensured that the amount of resources they had at their disposal was used to satisfy a large part of the needs of the Yoruba (free education, free health, roads).

On the other hand, the Awoist movement has been characterized by intense factionalism and has had to confront a vigorous internal opposition supported by the government at the centre. The factionalism within the Awoists is due principally to the rigid nature of the pattern of recruitment, advancement and succession to leadership within the movement. The lack of intra and inter-generational transfer of power as seen in a "wait your turn orientation" to public life and appointments and in the pat-

ernalistic styles of Awoists leaders, created dissatisfaction within the movement.

The disgruntled constitute a pool of knowledgeable individuals that can be easily co-opted into the ranks of the anti-Awoist opposition in Yorubaland<sup>i</sup> with their activities proving to be the greatest problem confronting Yoruba politics of opposition. Thus at the heart of Yoruba politics are two contradictory characteristics that cancel themselves out leaving Yoruba politics of opposition greatly weakened (Olarinmoye, 2005).

#### Yoruba opposition politics 1999 - 2003

With the dominant trend in Yoruba politics, the politics of opposition been diluted in a great way by the effects of intense factionalism within the elite class, Yoruba opposition politics has been susceptible to manipulation by the Hausa Fulani dominated state, producing in 1993, the annulment of June 12 presidential elections won by a Yoruba politician M.K.O Abiola and serious repression by the Abacha regime between 1994 - 1998.

But the political society continued to provide Yoruba elites with ability and flexibility to undertake the series of maneuvers, resistances and appropriations required to avoid and negotiate the constraints of domination within the Nigerian state as expressed in the formation of the Oodua Peoples Congress, an ethnic militia, in response to the inadequacy of the non-violent strategies and mechanisms (negotiations, law courts, public denunciations) deployed by Yoruba elites to oppose the Abacha regime.

The formation of the Oodua Peoples Congress introduced for the first time, youths, drawn from the subaltern class within Yoruba society into the top ranks of Yoruba politics and ensured that Yoruba demands for "greater local equality in access to power and resources by federating units that enjoy substantive autonomy" or true federalism became entrenched as the centre-piece of civil society demands for democratic change.

Though Yoruba opposition experienced a very low period during the Abacha regime. Its main demand during the period for "true federalism" became the anthem of opposition forces nationwide immediately after the death of General Abacha in June 1998, thus pushing the Yoruba into the leadership of progressive opposition to the military regime of General Abdulsalam Abubakar.

The refusal of the Abubakar regime (1998 - 1999) to accede to the demands of opposition for cancellation of the Abacha instituted transition programme and installation of a Government of National Unity (GNU) and Sovereign National Government (SNC) to resolve the demands of true federalism<sup>ii</sup> pushed the opposition into a series of defensive maneuvers that resulted in the Yoruba producing the two presidential candidates at the elections and the prominent role Yoruba opposition were to play in the resulting fourth republic.

The fact that the Yoruba had to be compensated for

their loss of the presidency through the annulment of the results of the June 12 presidential elections by the Ibrahim Babangida military government in 1993 meant that any party which hoped to win elections in Yorubaland and beyond had to present a Yoruba presidential candidate. The centrality of the Yoruba to electoral success was further reinforced by Afenifere's (dominant Awoists) injunction to its members to join only those parties that espoused true federalism and the Sovereign National Conference<sup>iii</sup>.

The refusal of Afenifere to join parties that refused its claim had two major consequences for the politics of opposition during the Fourth Republic. First, it resulted in the formation of a basically regional party, the Alliance for Democracy, A.D. which regrouped the majority of the Awoists and progressives from other parts of the federation, and was to be recognized as the vanguard of opposition in the fourth republic.

Secondly, the demands of the Yoruba for true federalism<sup>iv</sup> and a Sovereign National Conference proved unacceptable to northern politicians, as it would have led to a complete restructuring of the extant power structure in the Nigerian federation, a power structure that worked in their interest.

But recognizing that to win they needed a Yoruba as their presidential candidate, the northern opponents of the Yoruba sought candidate from the Yoruba ethnic group that would agree to the maintenance of the power status quo in return for occupying the seat of the president in the fourth republic. Thus, two men from Yorubaland, Olu Falae for the AD/ANPP coalition and Olusegun Obasanjo for the Northern dominated PDP produced as presidential candidates of the two major electoral coalitions.

The vote of the Yoruba went to Olu Falae during the presidential elections as Olusegun Obasanjo was seen as candidate of the northern oppressors of the Yoruba while Olusegun Obasanjo won the elections due to the support he received from other parts of the country. Though their candidate lost, the statute of Yoruba opposition did not diminish as their party, the AD won all the states in Yorubaland and their allocation of seats at the national assembly.

Though the ANPP was the second largest party in the country it is seen as having no credibility due to dominance of by northerners within the party hierarchy. With the production of a Yoruba president, the *raison d'être* of Yoruba opposition should have been lost but this was not to be the case as the Yoruba president was from a party opposed to the agenda of the dominant political formation in Yorubaland, the Awoists.

Furthermore the internal dynamics of Yoruba politics was also to play a major positive role in the success of Yoruba opposition politics in the Fourth Republic. The acceptance by the Afenifere to adopt a position of engagement with the Abubakar regime through participation in

its transition programme had great ramifications within the leadership of the O.P.C. dominated by individuals drawn from subaltern class. It meant for the subaltern leadership, a return to the status-quo ante, in other words, a loss of power and control to elites who had fled into exile in the face of oppression by the Abacha regime. A reversion to the status quo ante would negate all the efforts they had put in to create a new legitimate OPC, based on active opposition to the Abacha regime, on the platform of vigilantism. It would threaten their new high status in a society that placed great emphasis on status based on education and wealth as the basis for leadership.

The refusal of the subaltern leadership of the OPC to accept the return of the elites led to the splitting of the OPC and a campaign by the subaltern-led OPC to replace the acknowledged elite leaders of Yoruba politics, the Awoists, as leaders of the Yoruba. To achieve their purpose they launched a campaign of violent militant action against whomever they saw as working against the interest of the Yoruba nation, and for them, the Hausa Fulani fit the bill.

The struggle within the OPC provided an interesting background to the activities of the Yoruba elites in Afenifere. The existence of the two factions did not in any way militate against their political calculations, rather it actually strengthened them as the existence of either a moderate or radical OPC sent a signal to Yoruba opponents and the Abubakar regime that the status quo must change and that the Yoruba had the capacity to effect it.<sup>v</sup> Rather than constitute a drawback to Yoruba politics, the fact that the subaltern revolt subscribed to the ideal of Yoruba unity made it easy for elites to incorporate their activities into the wider frame of Yoruba politics, reinforcing those of the Afenifere and Alliance for Democracy and their flexibility and maneuverability, in terms of response to changing political contexts, of Yoruba politics.

Obasanjo on his part had a serious problem. He was in power due to the grace of northern politicians, as his own people, the Yoruba, had rejected him. The dictates of power demanded that he developed an independent power base within the ruling party in order for him to have maneuvering space to carry out his policies and retain his seat. To reduce his dependence on northern politicians he had to cultivate support within his ethnic group, the Yoruba. To do so he had to ensure that he carried out at the national level, the agenda of Awoists i.e. SNC and true federalism/federal restructuring.

The meeting of minds between the OPC, Afenifere and Obasanjo on the issue of federal restructuring/true federalism and protection of Yoruba, though for different reasons, ensured that the weakness expected from the many divisions within the Yoruba was overcome. The OPC focused on confronting all opposition to the Yoruba agenda through the use of violence. It involved the targeting of members of ethnic groups seen as either directly

linked with the hated Hausa-Fulani oppressor state (Hausa Fulani residents in Yoruba land and Police) or as having benefited from Yoruba political marginalization (Ijaws and Hoodlums).

As it concerned the Hausa Fulani, The attacks of the OPC were directed at wresting control of major economic locations from Hausa-Fulani who were seen by the OPC as having converted their control of federal government into economic domination of Yorubaland in the form of the control of markets, lorry and bus terminus, fuel depots e.t.c. OPC attacks against the Hausa Fulani in Yorubaland concentrated on supporting, through use of violence, attempts by Yoruba traders, drivers, and stevedores to wrestle control of economic associations controlling markets, e.t.c. from the Hausa-Fulani. Adebani, 2000, Akin-yele, 2001, Nolte, 2004, Olarinmoye, 2006c There-fore, most OPC-Hausa clashes centered on markets and major trading points in Yorubaland (Sagamu, southern terminus for the kolanut trade<sup>vi</sup>) Ketu/Mile 12 (major food markets in Lagos state<sup>vii</sup>), Ajeromi-Ifeledun, Ojodu, Oko-Oba abattoir and Ajegunle<sup>viii</sup> (major food and meat markets in Lagos state), and Bodija market (major food market in Ibadan).

OPC actions against the Ijaw was directed at stopping the Ijaws from encroaching on the sources of major natural resources such as petroleum deposits (Ilaje in Ondo state) or eject them from any other economic sites that they controlled in Yorubaland before May 1999. This included the Apapa Ports in Lagos state<sup>ix</sup>. The OPC saw the Ijaws as economic opportunists who had exploited Yoruba hospitality and weakness due to state oppression between 1994 - 1998 to advance claims to resources in Yorubaland.

The OPC directed violence at the police because they saw them as oppressors and tools in the hands of the Hausa Fulani and hence legitimate targets to be contained in order to protect Yoruba interests. The OPC views of the police was born out of their displeasure about how the police was used by the Abacha regime between 1994-1998 to repress Yoruba agitations for the de-annulment of the June 12 presidential elections (Owan, 1998).

OPC action also focused on vigilante action against hoodlums on Yoruba territory who were seen as a threat to peace and prosperity of Yoruba land and whose unchecked actions could lead to encroachment of the federal government in the form of an imposition of a state of emergency and suspension of Awoist controlled state governments in Yorubaland<sup>x</sup>.

In sum, OPC violent actions involved the targeting of members of ethnic groups seen as either directly linked with what they constructed as the hated Hausa-Fulani oppressor state, and identified as the Hausa Fulani residents in Yorubaland and the Police: or those they saw as having benefited from Yoruba political marginalization. For the OPC, the Ijaws and hoodlums belonged in this

category. On the other hand, the Afenifere deployed constitutional methods channeled through the actions of the six governors of the Southwestern states and their elected members of the National Assembly. Afenifere activities during the period under review fell into three categories, the first focused on agitations for reforms in the federal structure of the state, the second on reforms in the Revenue Allocation Formula and the third on agitations for the abolition of the 2001 electoral bill.

The struggle for reform of federal structure was pursued through the medium of the Southern Governors Forum whose crucial meetings were hosted by governors of the Afenifere/Alliance for Democracy-controlled states during which the governors reached a consensus on the need for true federalism, and by implication, fiscal federalism, Balanced Revenue Allocation, National Security, the National I.D Card Project, reforms of the Sharia Legal System, Universal Basic Education, UBE, Local Government under the federal constitution and Joint Economic Ventures<sup>xi</sup>.

Afenifere/Alliance for Democracy-led demands for equitable distribution of revenue from the federation account pushed the federal government to institute a suit at the Supreme court where it sought to know: "who controls the resources accruing from the natural endowment at the nations offshore, FG or State government".

On April 5 2002, the Supreme Court ruled to give more money to the State government from the federal account not by altering the percentage distribution of revenue but by increasing allocation to States by ruling that the FG should "declare all revenue and share same with the other two tiers of government" and barring the FG from deducting seven and a half percent from the federal account for the funding of joint ventures and the special projects of the NNPC.

The Afenifere opposed sections of the electoral bill that sought to a) deny the eligibility of governors who had previously been elected to the same post under elections annulled by the military to seek re-election and b) Clause 80 (1) of the electoral law which mandated new parties to win 15% of the council and L.G chairmanship seats in at least 2/3 of the 36 states and Abuja before taking part in general elections.

Their opposition was predicated on two grounds, a) the clause dealing with local government meant that with the local government elections being scheduled to come last in the electoral bill, new parties could not contest until 2007 and b) the two clauses had been smuggled into the bill signed by President Obasanjo. In a case instituted by the Afenifere-led opposition against the Electoral Bill, the Supreme Court of Nigeria on March 28 2002 ruled that that the "legislators confused their limitations with the provisions of the constitution. Thus, as a result of this, the electoral act as a whole is a mix-up causing confusion because the National Assembly seems to have treated its legislative powers with respect to federal elections as if

they were co-extensive with the powers over local government elections”.

Concerning the eligibility of governors who had previously been elected to the same post under elections annulled by the military to seek re-election, the court ruled that the “National Assembly was incompetent to repeat in a law such things as “qualification” and “disqualification of candidates” for elections already provided in the constitution. Making provisions pertaining to L.G. elections are also not matters of procedure and so all the sections were judged incompetent and struck out”.

Obasanjo on his part used a mixture of force and constitutional maneuvering to achieve the Yoruba agenda at the national level. His campaign focused on federal restructuring, and on creating a Nigerian federation not characterized by the domination of any ethnic group. His task was most difficult as the means through which he sought to effect the desired changes in Nigerian federation, create a more equitable Nigerian federation, the military, judiciary, the executive, the legislature, the police, his political party, PDP e.t.c were all controlled by those who were the least disposed to allow such “politics” to emerge, the north.

The central plank Obasanjo’s new Nigeria was the “proper implementation of the federal character principle as he argued that “restructuring is a misnomer, that what was needed is a proper implementation of federal character principle”. His supporters claimed, “He was a systems man, who understood the system and could re-organize it” and so was the best person to create a new equitable federation favorable to the interest of the Yoruba.

Through a series of sweeping reforms, Obasanjo transformed the Police, the Bureaucracy, the Armed forces and the federal executive council into organizations that reflected the federal nature of Nigeria. He went on to attack the inequitable distribution of federal parastatals among the states of the federation and attendant corruption that had fuelled Hausa-Fulani domination of the federation.

The main opposition to Obasanjo’s campaign for federal restructuring came from the legislature and so he deployed a series of moves to neutralize northern opposition in the National Assembly. He ensured: a) That the leadership of the National Assembly was composed of loyalists. b) The impeachment of National Assembly leaders considered hostile to the administration and its policies like Senate President Chuba Okadigbo. c). Astute use of the mass media to publicize policies of the government to which the National assembly was perceived to be hostile to. Through such publicity, the executive was able to apply pressure on the National Assembly to pass such bills in other not to lose face with the public. For example, on the issues of the Niger-Delta Development Commission bill and the Anti-corruption bill on which the National Assembly proved hostile, the government took the matter to the court of public opinion through the mass media and

was able to generate a positive public support for the bills that forced the National Assembly to toe the government line.

The actions of the President transformed the Obasanjo executive into the main opposition movement to the PDP-dominated National Legislature, even though Chief Obasanjo had been elected president on the platform of the PDP. The opposition activities carried out by the three different Yoruba opposition groups were carried out simultaneously at different levels, with the OPC operating at local level, the Afenifere at the state and national assembly levels and the President at the national level. They were all united by a desire to end Yoruba marginalization vis-à-vis the north. Though the goals of the different Yoruba opposition groups within Yoruba society were antagonistic, there was active collaboration between them. Thus, the OPC received support from Afenifere and governors of southwestern Nigeria in its clashes with the police and federal government.

The Afenifere rejected the shoot-on-sight order to the police against the OPC claiming “the fact that the shoot at sight order was against one of the groups alleged to be involved in the fracas is prejudicial and weakens the moral authority of the state”. The Afenifere portrayed the order as “presidential lynching” as it portrays Nigeria as an uncivilized polity governed by men with a stone-age mentality<sup>xii</sup>.”.

The governors on their own part argued, “Some enemies of democracy must be funding some groups masquerading as OPC, creating problems that can be embarrassing to democratic development in the country. They gave as reasons for their conclusion the following points, “At what point were these so-called OPC members trained in what appears like guerilla warfare”, “Who is funding these hoodlums masquerading as OPC”, “Who is arming these groups with sophisticated weapons? On the other hand Afenifere and OPC gave support to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo in his struggle with Hausa Fulani legislators opposed to his federal restructuring campaign. For example, The Afenifere sent a congratulatory message to president Obasanjo immediately after his swearing in as President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria on May 29 1999. The message, signed by Mr. Ayo Opadokun, sec-retary of Afenifere, emphasized the willingness to cooperate with the administration of president Obasanjo in order to assist him in taking the urgent and critical steps towards national restructuring and rebirth<sup>xiii</sup>”.

The Faseun faction of the OPC in an article in the Guardian<sup>xiv</sup> described the impeachment moves of the national assembly “as a plot, as nothing other than political treachery comparing with the inglorious annulment of the June 12 1993 presidential polls results”. It warned:

“If they (National Assembly) continue with the impeachment process, we will regard it as an extension of June 12 and we will not condone it. We will move out of Nigeria. If they disturb the military as to make them take over

the governance of this country, Yoruba land will not be a part of military territory, we will opt out”.

From the above it is clear that the success of Yoruba political opposition was due to the intricacies of the dynamics of the internal politics of the Yoruba. The desire of the various groups dominant within Yoruba politics, the Afenifere, the OPC and the Obasanjo groups to control the Yoruba politics pushed all of them into pursuing the Yoruba agenda of ending the group's marginalization in Nigeria's politics and end Hausa/Fulani domination of the federation as only such a move could legitimize their claims to Yoruba leadership.

Trouble in the house of Oduduwa: decline of Yoruba politics 2000-2003

As pointed out earlier, Yoruba politics is characterized by intense factionalism. It is from the close interaction between the struggle for political leadership of Yoruba ethnic group and intense factionalisation of the dominant political grouping, the Awoists that the explanation for the decline of Yoruba opposition politics emerges. A renewed season of factionalisation within the Awoist core began early in 2000 over which group, Adesanya (leader of Afenifere) vs. Ige (deputy leader of Afenifere) would control the ethnic movement, Afenifere and the ethnic-based political party, the Alliance for Democracy. The opposition among the Awoists grouped around late Chief Bola Ige, the deputy leader of the Afenifere, demanded a separation of movement and party and the enlargement of the party's leadership to include other groups in the country. They argued that a strictly ethnic posture for the party as expressed in its close association of the AD with the Afenifere.

The split weakened the dominant elite political culture of discipline and self-less service in interest of the community and ensured its gradual replacement by a pragmatic orientation of self-aggrandizement and individualism as members of the faction supporting Chief Ige including Chief Ige agreed to work with President Obasanjo to effect the agenda of the Afenifere at the national level even though such would have led to loss of influence of the Afenifere within Yorubaland.

The thinking of the Ige group, supported by the Yoruba Council of Elders, an ethnic movement formed by estranged members of Afenifere, was that the success of the Yoruba agenda at the national level would provide them with the means to challenge the Adesanya group successfully for control of AD and Afenifere and use this as a platform for the successful prosecution of Chief Ige's presidential ambition. Their game plan was not to promote Chief Obasanjo's political project in Yorubaland but that of Chief Ige but Chief Obasanjo was to be the one to benefit from the plan of the Ige group as Chief Ige was assassinated by unknown persons in his home on 23<sup>rd</sup> of

December 2001. The disarray among the Awoists was aggravated by the reluctance of the state governors to take orders from the Adesanya group due to the perceived support the group was giving to persons suspected of harboring hostile intentions against the governors.

The governors on their own part had increasingly lost favor with their citizens due to their non-performance in office and their corrupt activities. The OPC saw its legitimacy reduce its efforts were undermined by the Yoruba romance with and appropriation of “Olaju” (enlightenment/sophistication/civilization/modernity), which is closely linked to “Iwe” (book, book learning) as preconditions for individual as well as communal advancement”.

It meant that while the majority of Yoruba agreed with their objective of revitalizing Yoruba identity, the manner in which they went about it (violence) soon became abhorrent and they quickly lost favor. Fearful of a possible loss in the 2003 elections due to a possible refusal of the Afenifere to support the OPC in light of public hostility and the successful implementation of the Yoruba agenda by the Obasanjo group at the federal level, the governors entered into a deal with Obasanjo which supposedly guaranteed their re-elections as governors (as the PDP would guarantee that it would not put forward candidates to challenge the governors) and gave the Yoruba vote for the presidency to Obasanjo.

The Obasanjo group reneged on the agreement using its newfound status as champion of Yoruba interest and federal control of armed forces, bureaucracy and police to wrestle, successfully control of western region from the Awoists. The difficulties of managing relations between different groups pursuing diametrically opposed objectives accounts in a large way for the decline of Yoruba opposition between 2002 - 2003.

## Conclusion

The following conclusions can be made about Yoruba politics and (broadly about ethnic politics) in Nigeria between 1999 - 2003:

- a). It establishes that to be successful in Nigerian politics a group needed to be multi-dimensional as it was, the multifaceted nature of Yoruba political mobilization, the close articulation of movement and political party and the ability of its leaders to legitimately and simultaneously espouse progressive and parochial objectives, and hence, to appeal meaningfully to a very wide audience in Nigeria that ensured the mastery of the process by Yoruba and prevented in a large way its subversion by state elites.
- b). It made clear the fact that democratic consolidation results not from a process of aggregation and institutionalization of the rules of the game forged during the upheaval of the transition stage but is a process that allows for a re-examination of the guiding principles of a system,

for a bargaining process between the groups that make up a state such that the rules that result can be institutionalized to create stability and development within a system for as long as possible. Yoruba politics during the period acted as a quality control mechanism, acting to emphasize the contested nature of the rules of the political game that arose from the transition process by showing the pitfalls that can result from unthoughtfully institutionalizing rules that emerge from transition process.

c). Highlights the fact that the progressive climate of Yoruba politics associated with the Awoists has percolated into the psyche of Nigerian political system, has become part and parcel of a national repertoire of collective action that must be subscribed to by any group or individual seeking to access political power any where in Nigeria. The success of the Awoists as expressed in the high status and visibility of the Yoruba in political, bureaucratic and business sectors of the Nigerian state has increased the expectations of people vis-à-vis their leaders and forced such leaders and the bureaucracies they control to become in one form or the other, more accountable to those they lead.

d). A study of Yoruba politics shows the problems associated with opposition politics in Africa even within the context of democratization and democracy. The weakness of civil society structures and hence the absence of viable democratic structures for societal "voice" needs has encouraged the rise of ethnic politics, an amalgam of traditional and modernist principles, values and structures, as a means for articulating the demands of society and taking the lead in actualizing the social agenda in the face of an unresponsive state.

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## Foot Notes

<sup>i</sup> Politics of Collaboration (anti-Awoists) which argued that Yoruba survival as a major power group in Nigeria is only possible within a Hausa Fulani dominated national power coalition.

<sup>ii</sup> Abubakar dismissed call for S.N.C thus; "some Nigerians yearn for an S.N.C in the belief that this is the only way to address the issue of governance of the country. Dissension and opposition are key elements of the democratic process. Those who have patriotic views should associate with others of like mind in the new political parties. Their parties will be registered to give voice to those views along guidelines of a truly independent electoral body". *TELL* August 3, 1998.

<sup>iii</sup> A Summit to sanction Yoruba participation in the Abubakar transition programme took place in middle of August, 1998, where Chief Adesanya gave Afenifere's reason for approving Yoruba participation in the programme: "if we stand aside, we will be in no position to influence the future course of events in Nigeria and this will be detrimental to our interest". *TELL* August 17, 1998.

<sup>iv</sup> Defined as true federalism, which would involve the comprehensive amendment or even abandonment of the present obvious unitary constitution, which masquerades as a federal one. More specifically it would involve the emplacement of a non-centralized scheme of fiscal federalism, the abolition of the current unitary police structure, recognition of state rights over the local government system and the dissolution of centralizing, military-created institutions like the National Judicial Council and the National Primary Education Commission.

<sup>v</sup> Afenifere believed that the OPC will help in instituting a "balance of terror" against the north that had monopolized terror for so long,

Adebanwi, "Carpenters Revolt," p. 315.

<sup>vi</sup> Mid-July 1999

<sup>vii</sup> November 25 & 26 1999

<sup>viii</sup> September-October 1999, October 2000

<sup>ix</sup> September 1999

<sup>1</sup> Akala, Lagos, vigilante operation December 1999, Ojo local government, Lagos, vigilante operation, October 2000.

<sup>xi</sup> Meeting held to counter that of northern governors, which had always made statements that portrayed a unified north in the face of a disunited South. *TELL* October 23 2000

<sup>xiv</sup> *The Guardian*, 8<sup>th</sup> September 2002.