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## Yoruba ethnic nationalism, power elite politics and the Nigerian state, 1948–2007

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### ABSTRACT

Known for its political sophistication, the Yoruba remain a force in Nigerian Politics. But its political peculiarities have remained more of an albatross driving a wedge within the group and limiting its political influence in a highly competitive ethno-regional and religious inclined Nigerian polity. These peculiarities have distinguished the Yoruba and its brand of nationalism. But they have also given a contradictory perception of its ideology and philosophy on one hand and its leadership on the other hand. Using its acclaimed but seriously constrained Yoruba homogeneity as a basis, this paper argues that the inability of the elite to distinguish their intent or person from the collective good of the group has proved disastrous. The paper concludes that Yoruba nationalism has suffered serious reversals since the attainment of political independence with the seemingly unending acrimonious struggle for power and its attendant benefits. The paper suggests a re-definition and a re-alignment of ideology, leadership and people's interest, without which the idea of Yoruba nationalism will be more of noise without substance and effect either within the group or in the larger Nigerian state.

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### Introduction

The Yoruba, like other ethnic groups in Nigeria, made significant contributions to the attainment of the country's political independence. Although the struggle for political independence cut across ethnic lines and was initially not ethnic-specific, the Yoruba with their early exposure to Western education coupled with the heritage of advanced civilization and socio-cultural developments had an edge over other groups. Beyond measuring the group's contributions against this background, it provides a basis for an understanding of the nature and dimension of Yoruba nationalism and the role played by its elite class both in its sustenance and hijack. More importantly, the sophistication of the group explains its political dynamism on one hand but accounts for its fragmentation, division and retrogression on the other hand.

Given the politicization of ethnic diversity of Nigeria which became increasingly problematic with the approach of political independence and thereafter, Yoruba nationalism assumed a more combative dimension particularly with the political elite struggle for power

among the major ethnic groups in the country. But the seeming united front presented by the dominant Yoruba elite could not be sustained despite the invocation of a broader ideological vehicle to rally a popular support. Obviously an indication of the underlying motive of the protagonists of ethnic nationalism, that is acquisition and exercise of political power and influence on one hand, and/or genuine disagreement borne out of differences in disposition, leadership style and ideological leaning on the other hand, the crack within the Yoruba nationalist front had grave implications both for the group and the Nigerian state. Beyond weakening Yoruba solidarity and limiting its effectiveness in the larger competitive Nigerian polity, even the political influence of the Yoruba elite was severely curtailed having been seriously challenged first at the home front.

Implicitly, the peculiarities of the Yoruba nation and the use to which they were put, dictated as it were by political exigencies, became more of a burden than an asset. The assumed homogeneity of the Yoruba group in addition to other peculiar features rather than serve to promote inclusion became alienating factors both within the group and outside it. Pertinent therefore is why the supposed source of strength became a haunt and why the desire to be and to become had not only reinforced the magnified differences, it had also become defining features. This paper probes into the basis, nature, pattern and dimension of Yoruba nationalism. It also probes into how its use to promote the political career of Yoruba elite has limited its effectiveness while further polarizing the group, in direct contrast to what it perhaps was meant or supposed to achieve *ab initio*.

## Understanding the Yoruba nation and nationalism

In exploring the nature of the problem of ethnicity and its involvement of the role of tradition in modern politics, Falola (2003, p. 128) stresses its involvement of a commitment to an established cultural group nation and identity that were constituted in the past and reinvented for modern purposes. He maintains that ethnicity is an agency of self-assertion as well as a means through which a group mobilizes ethnic nationalism to protect itself from other groups as it seeks equality and parity with other ethnic groups in access to modern education, contracts, jobs and other opportunities. He argues that the consciousness of being one combined with the belief of being united by history are used as tools to further unite the group and exclude outsiders from certain beliefs and rituals. He sees an ethnic group as an organized network united by certain factors, whose political identity makes leaders to seek changes to the collective group and rewards for individual members (Falola, 2003, p. 129). This seeming unity notwithstanding, Falola (2003, p. 130) argues that its politics and identity are usually not stable with conflict permeating component units and social classes within a group arising from and/or producing intra-elite and intra-ethnic tensions. He sees its politicization as usually being accomplished by a tiny number of individuals interested in power and wealth, who manipulate the group for their own agenda. Using the Yoruba as a core example, he raised the question often asked where politics is ethnicised as what can the country (Nigeria) do for the Yoruba? This he argued did not lead to the development of a commitment to a modern Nigeria as seen in the Kano riots of the 1950s, the civil war of 1967–1970 and the recurrent ethno-religious crises since the 1980 (2003, pp. 132, 133). He concludes that ethnicity has served African politics as a bargaining device available to members of different groups to negotiate and compromise (2003, p. 163).

According to Falola (2006, pp. 29–36), the Yoruba nation emerged on the basis of common myths of origin built around the personality of Oduduwa, and solidified in the context of the evolving ethnicity occasioned by the British rule. This necessitated the need for the different sub-groups to overlook their differences as sub-groups and focus on features peculiar to them like similar language, homogenous or homogenizing culture, kingship structure, as well as perception as members of the same Ebi group. Adekunle (2006, pp. 273, 275) in particular sees the exposure of Yoruba to western education and culture as a potent development that made them a factor in Nigerian politics. It was this access that produced notable Yoruba leader like Herbert Macaulay, Mojola Agbebi and the National Youth Movement members including Chief Obafemi Awolowo, who organized the Yoruba into a cultural group and later political party. Falola (2006, pp. 37, 38) sees the 1940s as an important era when the politicians and nationalists converted the idea of a nation into a political project following the increasing importance and use of ethnicity. Falola (2003, pp. 149–152) particularly notes that the myth of common origin as well as the promotion of Ethiopianism are strategies used by Yoruba intelligentsia to forge the idea of Yoruba consciousness.

Whereas, Adekunle (2006, p. 276) echoes the belief of Chief Awolowo that the Egbe Omo Oduduwa would serve the purpose of presenting, preserving and promoting Yoruba identity and nationalism in a multi-ethnic society, Falola and Genova (2006, pp. 39–41) stress that by promoting cultural nationalism and the consciousness of being a Yoruba through the agency of Egbe Omo Oduduwa and establishing the Action Group (AG) to foster politics, Chief Awolowo, the central figure in the translation of the Yoruba nation merged his strategies into one-bid project to promote a common identity, the Yoruba identity. Quoting Arifalo, Adekunle (2006, p. 276) therefore sees the formation of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, as ‘the first positive and most forceful expression of Yoruba nationalism as distinct from Nigerian nationalism hitherto advocated by Yoruba politicians in Lagos’. This becomes pertinent given that ethnicity has often been used as a source of political empowerment or for the enhancement of political position. This became glaring with the formation of political parties along ethnic lines by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Awolowo.

As far as Afolayan (2006, p. 299) is concerned, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa was formed to counter the growing influence of the Igbo and to protect and give expression to Yoruba interest in Nigeria. But the attempt to promote Yoruba unity notwithstanding, Adekunle (2006, pp. 277, 278) sees Ibadan as a stronghold of politics and crises with Ibadan elite belonging to different political camp and challenging Chief Awolowo’s dominance through Chief Adisa Akinloye’ Ibadan Peoples’ Party and Chief Adegoke Adelabu’s Mabolaje-NCNC. While noting that intra-ethnic division has been a characteristic of the Yoruba, he concludes that it does not necessarily denote political weakness. He argues that the NCNC for example, received substantial support in the Western Region, which was the stronghold of the AG, largely due to the Adegoke Adelabu factor.

Both Afolayan and Adekunle’s position corroborates the claim of Falola (2003, pp. 151–155) that ethnic consciousness gave way to ethnic rivalry in the twentieth century with the emergence of Egbe Omo Oduduwa and the design of various strategies to promote Yoruba unity resulting in the emergence of Igbo State Union and *Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa*. Much more, he sees the failure of Chief Awolowo to occupy a central office as a limit of ethnic politics particularly given the emergence of ethnic association in other regions and the emergence of resistant groups from within the region to Awolowo’s leadership. Adekunle (2006, pp. 278–282) established a link between the crisis in western region which he traced

to a combination of ideological differences, conflict of interest and power struggle, the emergence of Awoism and Awoists who had scattered and re-grouped in different cells as well as the recurrent political turmoil in the Western region. While stressing that the Yoruba remain a potent force irrespective of their political affiliation, he sees the political turmoil in the region as a strong evidence of the political consciousness of the Yoruba rather than propensity for violence. It was this same consciousness that led to the emergence of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) and the fierce struggle without firing a shot over the annulment of 12 June 1993 election involving Chief MKO Abiola, a Yoruba man. What perhaps is not seriously considered here is the propensity of these divisions to weaken Yoruba nationalism, destroy internal cohesion and portray the gladiators as people seeking to promote themselves which apparently the whole project of Yoruba nationalism eventually turned out to mean. But this worked against Yoruba internal cohesion and by extension her nationalism agenda, and made other ethnics to want to resist her.

Building on the foundation of an identity according to Falola (2006, p. 44) was the success of the Yoruba political class in selling the idea to the majority of the Yoruba people that they had become 'colonized' by the northerners which heightened Yoruba consciousness around the idea of one 'nation'. He singled out the annulment of 12 June 1993 election, widely acclaimed to be free and fair as the catalyst for the emergence of the OPC which advocated autonomy or even a secession to create Oduduwa Republic, a position that Afolayan (2006, pp. 306–308) corroborates and elaborated on as a major factor that made the Yoruba to become advocate of restructuring and the practice of true federalism in Nigeria. Ascribing the frustration of Yoruba to capture power at the centre to others, Falola (2006, p. 45) note that others also blamed Yoruba for their woes, the same way Yoruba also labelled themselves on the basis of their political affiliation. Specifically, by labelling themselves either as being cunning, power hungry, aggressive and untrustworthy, Falola (2003, pp. 132–138) describes the way different ethnic groups particularly the major ones perceive and stereotype themselves. Particularly worthy of note is Falola's submission that the emergence of the National Democratic Coalition, the formation of Egbe Omo Yoruba in Europe and America and the emergence of OPC are expression of the frustration of the Yoruba nation in the Nigerian state particularly following the failure of political alliance as pursued by Chief Abiola (Falola, 2003, pp. 155–163). While stressing that the consciousness and survival of Yoruba identity has gone beyond political leaders to the people particularly with the construction of citizenship around the Yoruba nation, Falola (2006, p. 46) posit that the Yoruba political class will continue to compete among one another for power and manipulate Yoruba identity and ethnic consciousness for individual self interest. What this paper seeks to address are those dynamics that accounted for the failure of the Yoruba nationalism and the blame game which Falola made tacit reference to. It also seeks to address in detail how the political class had competed for power and manipulated Yoruba identity for self interest.

Afolayan (2006, pp. 298–308) focuses on the place of the Yoruba in the perennial struggle for democratization and national integration in Nigeria. In tracing the history of the struggle from the First Republic when the Yoruba in the north struggled unsuccessfully to unite with their kiths and kins in the south, the gang-up against the Yoruba in the First Republic, the electoral fraud of 1983, the disappointment with the General Ibrahim Babangida's populist programmes and the battering of the Yoruba nation under General Sani Abacha, he notes that the failure of cooptation eventually gave way to repression. He observed however that the collaboration between the north and the Igbo against the Yoruba and their leaders which

continued in the Second Republic despite the scar of the civil war effectively sidelined Chief Awolowo who was forced into opposition. The development erased the Yoruba gains and its strengthened influence following the end of the civil war and the weakening of Igbo influence.

Afolayan (2006, p. 307) stressed the refusal of the Yoruba to be pacified by the appointment of Chief Ernest Shonekan, Alhaji Lateef Jakande, Chief Ebenezer Babatope, Olu Onagoruwa and General Oladipo Diya, by the duo of Generals Babangida and Abacha until they found accommodation under General Abdulsalami Abubakar transition programme. Afolayan's position largely corroborates Falola's analysis but Falola (2003, pp. 139–140) particularly notes that the Yoruba's initial coldness to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo's emergence as Nigeria's elected President later gave way to support for him because of their perception of anti-Obasanjo sentiments as anti-Yoruba sentiment. But in what appears as a misreading of south-west politics, Afolayan (2006, pp. 308–313) sees the Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP) winning streak in south-west in 2003 as an acceptance of Obasanjo's leadership and person by the Yoruba, which portends whether or not Yoruba have accepted their incorporation into mainstream position. While it is clear that Chief Obasanjo was a compromise candidate acceptable to both the north and the Military, it is also widely accepted that the elections until very recently were hardly credible. The gradual restoration of power to the isolationists until 2015 when the Yoruba collaboration with the north took them from opposition to the centre albeit in supportive capacity is a further proof.

Unlike Adekunle (2006, pp. 282–284) who sees the involvement of traditional rulers in the Action Group's government as something that drew strident criticism, Martineau (2006, pp. 206–215) maintains that the Obas' contemporary position in the Yoruba society owes a lot to the specific process of Yoruba identity building which took place with Chief Awolowo, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, and the AG. He argues that the Oba were not mere puppet but used their position to extract benefits from the colonial and postcolonial governments particularly as ethnic leaders and used this to attain self-sufficiency as well as actors of their destinies. While tracing the emergence of modern elite as Oba to the British political and administrative reforms of the early twentieth century, he argues that their status was a product of negotiation with the British colonialist as partners, a development that was originally meant to weaken them but ended up soaring their prestige and more importantly contributed to the emergence of self-conscious Yoruba community. Beyond surviving by being part of Chief Awolowo nationalist project, traditional rulers have also survived using different strategies such as serving as moderators, interlocutors and collaborators among others. He however observes that like the British before them, the Awoists reinforced the Yoruba ethnic consciousness by strengthening the symbolic relation between an Oba and the people of his ancestral city. They also took advantage of this institutional construction to form an ethnicist discourse within which the Obas became the essential unifying symbols. Although as contended by Martineau (2006, pp. 220–223), the Obas' higher qualification, their financial independence and the existence of a nationalist Yoruba party in the south-west whose candidates are seeking to revive the historical partnership of the AG with the Obas explains their visibility, what is incontrovertible or the reality is that they do not have constitutional roles again and mostly reigned and exercise influence at the pleasure of modern elite in government.

## The Oduduwa factor in Yoruba nationalism

The Oduduwa factor is phenomenal in the history of Yoruba nationalism. Its invention and re-invention as well as the recurrent reference to it attest to its potency (but also smacks of attempt to promote elitism beginning with the use of traditions). Oduduwa, the acclaimed progenitor of the Yoruba race, was credited with significant revolutionary developments such as the centralization of political authority and the adoption of a beaded crown as a symbol of royal authority (Adediran, 1998, pp. 1–11; Ibiloye, 2011, pp. 32–37). With its radical transformation of the Yoruba society, the Oduduwa phenomenon became the basis for legitimizing political authority or kingship in Yorubaland both in the past and in the present. But beyond it, it became a basis for political legitimacy in the immediate pre- and post-colonial Nigeria, and in contemporary period particularly following its exhumation and its use as a rallying point for Yoruba unity. It had as its objective:

... to accelerate the emergence of a virile modernized and efficient Yoruba state with its own individuality within the Federal State of Nigeria ... [and] to unite the various clans and tribes in Yorubaland and generally create and actively foster the idea of a single nationalism throughout Yorubaland. (Coleman, 1986, p. 344)

Whereas the Egbe Omo Oduduwa formed in London in 1945 and inaugurated in Ile-Ife on 5 June 1948 had mass appeal with its programme of promoting Yoruba history and culture, and facilitating cooperation between traditional rulers and the people, it nonetheless was a political platform for the actualization of the political desire of the Yoruba elite. Its links with the AG, a political party formed in 1951 and dominated by the cream of Yoruba elite is a concrete proof (Arifalo, 1981, pp. 73, 74, 1988, pp. 54, 82–93, Arifalo, 2001, pp. 82–86, 107, 230–235; Awolowo, 1960, p. 168; Richardson, 2003, pp. 109–110; Sklar, 1963, p. 68).

The wide gap in time notwithstanding, the emergence of the OPC in 1994 reinforced the Oduduwa factor in Yoruba nationalism. A major factor in the emergence of the OPC., seen as the armed wing of the Yoruba nationalist movement, was the annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election popularly acclaimed to have been won by Chief Abiola, a Yoruba of Egba extraction from Ogun State (Adebanwi, 2005, pp. 339–365; Akinyele, 2001, pp. 623–640; Attoh & Soyombo, 2011, pp. 40–44; Babawale, 2003, pp. 201–211; Nolte, 2007, pp. 217–235). The major objectives of the OPC include the agitation for the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference as a vehicle for the restructuring of Nigeria into a true federal state, achievement of regional autonomy and self-determination of all nationalities as well as the achievement of equal rights of all national leadership. Importantly, the group seeks to achieve, promote and protect the interest of Yoruba in diaspora (Ajala, 2009, pp. 1–45; Fasheun, 2003; Sesay, Ukeje, Aina, & Odebiyi, 2003). Obviously, the exclusion of the Yoruba from national politics and their persecution as seen in the annulment of 12 June presidential election played a major role in its emergence. But the peacetime witnessed the emergence of a pan-Yoruba group like the Oodua Development Council (ODC). Formed in 2000, it succeeded in attracting leading Yoruba elite including hitherto strange bedfellows and their followers who had been polarized into seemingly irreconcilable camps since the First Republic following the schism in *Afenifere* and the AG. The socio-economic growth and development of the Yoruba nation within Nigeria following the decay occasioned by long periods of military rule was a major consideration in its establishment (Olajide & Ajayi, 2000; Sanni, 2000). The ODC was specifically designed to chart the path of development and aggregate the expertise of Yoruba at home and in diaspora. Its establishment was a follow-up

to the resolution of the fourth pan-Yoruba Congress held in Ibadan in 1999 to establish institutions necessary for the all-round development of the Yoruba nation. Characteristic of other pan-Yoruba groups before it, committees were constituted in order to enhance the attainment of its objectives.

The establishment of other pan-Yoruba groups measures the seriousness of both the Yoruba elite and the masses to present a united front in their relationship with other groups and segment of the Nigerian society. But given their proliferation and overlapping nature in terms of philosophy and membership, the goal which they sought to achieve was hindered *ab initio*. Such groups included Yoruba Leaders' Forum, Pan-Yoruba Congress, Oduduwa Assembly, Yoruba Parapo and of late Afenifere Renewal Group (ARG). Thus, with the exhumation of the mythological or historical Oduduwa factor, the Oduduwa phenomenon became a defining factor of Yoruba nationalism. Situated in the broader context of Nigerian politics, the Oduduwa phenomenon meant dissatisfaction with and a rejection, either forceful or subtle, of what existed before it. In the case of the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, it was a reaction to foreign domination, first by the British and later the political hegemony of the Hausa-Fulani, and commercial competitiveness (and political assertiveness) of the Igbo (Babarinsa, 2003). In particular, the efforts at promoting Igbo nationalism under the leadership of Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe following the schism in the Nigerian Youth Movement catalyzed Yoruba nationalism (Akinyele, 2003, p. 24). Implicitly, it meant the politicization of ethnic differences and laid the basis for the combative nationalism of the 1990s and thereafter, in which the OPC perfectly fits in.

But the assumption underlying the promotion of ethnic nationalism whether by the Yoruba or the Igbo, that is, its use either by design or an afterthought to attain political power was to generate tremendous political liability which the Yoruba nation is yet to fully recover from.

### **Yoruba ethnic nationalism: beyond the profession**

Underlying Yoruba nationalism is the assumption of the homogeneity of the group. Although the relative homogeneity of the Yoruba nation is not in doubt given the similarity in culture and language, as well as the contiguous land area occupied by the group, it would appear that the factors that divide the group are more than those that unite it. Deep suspicion resulting in negative perception and antagonistic relationship among the different Yoruba sub-groups has ensured the fragmentation of the group as it were by struggle for political power. Accounting for this development could be the factor of their past relationships characterized by fratricidal wars, and struggle over land and chieftaincy, and with such impact as long-drawn court cases, heated debates in newspapers and magazines, and in some extreme cases open conflict characterized by violent destruction of lives and property (Adesoji, 2003, 2007, pp. 59–62). Pertinent also was the colonial and postcolonial governments' management of the issues and problems (Adesoji, 2005, pp. 1–19).

Significantly, the disdain with which the various Yoruba sub-groups treat one another and the derogatory terms with which they describe one another are clear manifestation of the mutual suspicion characterizing their relationship. Whereas the Egba would denigrate Ijebu, the Ife and Ijesa would cast aspersions on the Oyo. The Oyo believe that an Ijebu man is more dangerous than the most poisonous snake and as such should be killed first before the snake is killed. Similarly, the Ife and Ijesa strongly believe that when an Oyo man



prostrates himself on his belly, his real self actually squats. This portrays the Oyo as deceptive and slippery people. Also the Ondo and Ikale are fond of referring to other Yoruba sub-groups derogatorily as *Koololo*, which literally means people that do not speak well, but connotatively people that are ignorant. In addition, the Oyo in Modakeke see Ife indigenes as a bunch of lazy and never-do-well people who spend all their time drinking palm wine (Adesoji, 2007, pp. 59–62). Compounding the problem of mutual antagonism or perhaps explaining it is the antagonistic relationship between and among different Yoruba communities typified in the hostility between Ife and Oyo settlers in Modakeke, Ifon-Ilobu relations and Ogbomoso-Orile-Igbon relations among others (Adesoji, 2003; Akinjogbin, 1998, pp. 44–48; Olaniyan, 1992, pp. 266–282; Oyediran, 1974, pp. 63–78; The Punch, 2003). Thus, from within the Yoruba nation are challenges posed by its differentiation into regional sub-groups like the Oyo, Ijebu, Ife, Ekiti, Egba, Ijesa, Ondo, Ikale, Ilaje, Akoko and others with their known qualities but often magnified weaknesses. This is compounded by either deliberate meddling or chanced intervention in Yoruba politics by outside interests and forces within the Nigerian state. It is against this background that the challenges against Yoruba nationalism could be understood and properly contextualized.

Notwithstanding the impression of unity and solidarity given by the Egbe Omo Oduduwa or its protagonists, it did not embrace or incorporate all the leading Yoruba elite of the period. Whether these elite were deliberately cut off or chose not to belong is not the issue but the more important issue is that the idea of promoting Yoruba solidarity was defeated at its commencement. Not surprisingly, this fragmentation became more of a pattern having been aided by struggle over the exercise of political power and influence. The relationship between Egbe Omo Oduduwa and Egbe Omo Olofin, the revived Afenifere and the Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE) as well as the Fasheun and Adams-led factions of the OPC best explicate this position. The Egbe Omo Olofin, another Yoruba cultural association whose formation was championed by the likes of Sir Adetokunbo Ademola and Dr Adekoyejo Majekodunmi among others emerged in the 1960s following the split within the AG. A combination of personal, ideological and economic differences polarized the AG leadership and by extension the Yoruba nation which they purported to lead. This according to Abati (2003, p. 18) was the origin of the strain between isolationism and liberalism. Whereas isolationism advocated a preferment of a Yoruba-dominated strong region preserved politically for the Yoruba ideology and interest and which could serve as a launching pad for the Yoruba-dominated Nigerian state, liberalism advocated the participation of the Yoruba in mainstream politics irrespective of the fiddle played by them, in order to gain advantages for Yoruba people. This strain has always dominated politics in the south-west. Similarly, the emergence of the YCE in 2000, otherwise known as the Igbimo Agba Yoruba, observably created a silent but strong leadership tussle in Yorubaland with its contention with Afenifere for political space. Obviously a rival centre of power and influence, the origin of YCE dates back to 1995 when Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, its chief protagonist and his National Unity Organization of Nigeria, NUON formed it. Although NUON according to Chief Obasanjo was conceived to provide an all-embracing platform across regional and ethnic divides that would save Nigeria from imminent collapse given the misrule and unbridled desire by military actors to sustain themselves in power, the Yoruba elite in Afenifere did not see it that way. Rather they saw it as a platform specially raised by Chief Obasanjo to weaken the Afenifere and prepare the ground for his entry into politics by building bridges across regions and groups (Ijabiyi, 2009).

Afenifere, a synonym with the AG was a catchphrase specifically designed for the largely illiterate following the party in Yorubaland and eventually became the 'indigenous name' of the party and that of Awolowo's followers (Adebanwi, 2008, pp. 335–360; Falola, 2006, pp. 29–48). The annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election catalyzed the regrouping and reorganization of Afenifere. But its links with a political party, the Alliance for Democracy, (AD) like the Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the perceived intolerance of its leadership and the practice of exclusion known with its predecessor worked against it on one hand and contributed to the blossoming of the YCE on the other hand. In particular, the exclusion of the alleged traitors, specifically the politicians that served as ministers under General Sani Abacha and generally those who have been in opposition to Chief Awolowo since the First Republic, characteristically undermined the effort at promoting Yoruba nationalism, the same way the composition of YCE showed its fluid nature, made up as it were of both core loyalists and haters of Chief Awolowo. Political calculation rather than patriotism could have explained this better. In a similar vein, the factionalization of the OPC by a combination of personal and ideological reasons was a major challenge to Yoruba nationalism (Sesay et al., 2003).

The emergence of ARG was a continuation of the seemingly unending schism within the Yoruba nation particularly at the leadership level. One major reason given for its emergence was the inability of the elders and leaders of the Afenifere to reconcile their differences evident in the emergence of the Reuben Fasoranti and Ayo Fasanmi factions, and offer purposeful leadership for the Yoruba nation. Although the ARG is dominated by younger elements like Wale Oshun, Yinka Odumakin, Jimi Agbaje and Wale Adebanwi among others, it has the support of older elements like Chiefs Bisi Akande, Olusegun Osoba and Bola Tinubu. The catalyst for its emergence however was the attempt by a faction of Afenifere comprising Pa Ayo Adebanjo among others to install Chief Reuben Fasoranti as the successor to Chief Abraham Adesanya only six months after his death without first resolving the internal wranglings within the group which according to them Chief Adesanya battled unsuccessfully for five years before his death (Bamidele, 2009; Osokoya & Fabiyi, 2008). The seeming genuineness of this position notwithstanding, what is apparent is the persistence of the struggle for power and position within the group necessitating the emergence of the third and perhaps the most revolutionary faction. However, irreconcilable differences particularly the claim of the compromised independence of the group which was a major factor in its emergence *ab initio* among other factors led Yinka Odumakin to return to the fold of the main Afenifere group. Implicitly, the group became a victim of what it was trying to correct. Significantly also, the widely held allegation that the Fasoranti faction was being sponsored by Gbenga Daniel, former governor of Ogun State and much later, Olusegun Mimiko of Ondo state is reminiscent of Chief Obasanjo's support for YCE, and another instance of the conservatives' meddling in the affairs of the progressives, obviously with certain underlying motives known perhaps to the sponsors as well as those being sponsored (Bamidele, 2009). Thus, whether at the level of groups or ideology, Yoruba homogeneity has been questioned, a development that has militated against its effectiveness. But more importantly, the desire by Yoruba elite to advance their political career using the platform of Yoruba nationalism constituted the greatest challenge to its effectiveness.

### Yoruba nationalism, elite and party politics

The emergence of the AG in 1951 marked the close links of Yoruba nationalism with partisan politics. But the crisis within the party which reached its peak in 1962 exposed the political

underbelly of Yoruba nationalism. The AG crisis of 1962 has been traced to the failure of Chief Awolowo to become the Prime Minister (Mackintosh, 1963, pp. 126–155, 1966, p. 441). With the decision of Chief Awolowo to move from the Western region to the federal legislature, the issue of a successor-generated disagreement within the party. Chief S.L. Akintola, Awolowo's deputy, eventually became premier against Awolowo's wish and soon after began to control decision-making in the Western Regional government allegedly with the least possible consultation with Awolowo. Thus, within two years of Chief Akintola's takeover of the premiership, dissension within the AG became public knowledge particularly with the suspension of Chief Akintola and some others from the party at the convention held in Jos in 1962 (Mackintosh, 1966, pp. 444–446). Apart from other personal issues, the disagreement between Awolowo and Akintola centred primarily on the federal prime minister, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's idea of strengthening national unity through the formation of a coalition government by the three major political parties (AG, NCNC and Northern Peoples' Congress), a proposition which Akintola strongly supported but which Awolowo opposed. The outbreak of a riot at the Western House of Assembly on 25 May 1962 and the subsequent reconvened meeting led to the sealing off of the Assembly chamber and the declaration of a state of emergency. With the relieving of the political office holders of their post, Dr Majekodunmi, the personal physician to the Prime Minister, was appointed administrator with considerable powers (Oyediran, 1988, pp. 13, 14).

Following the declaration of state of emergency, other developments followed in quick succession. These included the setting up by the Federal Government of a commission of inquiry into the financial and investment policies of Western Regional government statutory corporations including their relations with political parties, and the treason trial. In particular, Chief Awolowo and some other leaders of the AG were accused of plotting to overthrow the Federal Government, found guilty and sentenced to varying prison terms while Chief Akintola was vindicated. Meanwhile, following their expulsion from the AG, Chief Akintola and Ayo Rosiji (General Secretary of the AG) together with their supporters formed a new political party, the United Peoples' Party which later merged with a wing of the NCNC in the West to form the Nigerian National Democratic Party. With the reconvening of the Western House of Assembly on 18 April 1963, Chief Akintola won a vote of confidence and resumed his leadership of the region till 15 January 1966 when the first military *coup d'état* swept him out of office alongside others. Significantly the split of the party into two irreconcilable and antagonistic groups as well as the exclusion of Chief Akintola set a recurring pattern whose polarizing effect was felt beyond the First Republic. Political regroupings of subsequent Republics were not markedly different. Thus, from the AG, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) formed in the Second Republic, to the AD and the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) of the Fourth Republic, the isolationists or the regionalists acclaimed as the progressives, retained their membership not only of their group but strove to retain their hold on power in south-western region dominated by the Yoruba. In a similar vein, the exclusion of the liberalists or the nationalists labelled as the conservatives, which started in the First Republic and perhaps much earlier with the formation of AG was sustained one way or the other either by the excluding or the excluded group. This explains why despite the conception and perception of the UPN and the AD as a Yoruba party, the liberalists were in opposition and actually worked against the isolationists. The outcome was the political crisis that rocked the south-western Nigeria in 1983 following the proven massive election rigging by the National Party

of Nigeria (NPN)-led Federal Government (Babarinsa, 2003, pp. 1–18, 259–261; Falola & Ihonvbere, 1985, pp. 216–221).

Although Chief Abiola, hitherto a political foe of Chief Awolowo got an overwhelming support from his kinsmen in his bid to rule Nigeria, it was after he had shown penitence, mended fences and re-integrated himself into the mainstream of Yoruba society. In a sense, Chief Abiola represented a bridge of a sort between the conservatives and the progressives within the Yoruba nation whose interest converged in the desire to ensure the emergence of a Yoruba man as a Nigerian leader. But in a broader context, his emergence represented a re-alignment of forces which cut across Yorubaland and extended to other parts of the country. Generally subsumed under the progressive label, the looseness of the re-aligned group eventually aided its quick collapse thus restricting the struggle for the validation of Chief Abiola's victory to Yorubaland. Hitherto, Chief Abiola while in NPN had used all weapons at his disposal particularly the instrumentality of the Concord Group of Newspapers to blackmail and harass Chief Awolowo and his lieutenants. The campaign mounted on Chief Awolowo over the Maroko land deal better illustrates this point. Chief Awolowo was alleged to have acquired 360 plots of land at Maroko. Beyond admitting the acquisition of only 103 plots, Chief Awolowo also acknowledged the transfer of conveyance to Dideolu Estates Limited (DEL). As far as the *Concord* (1980a) was concerned, Chief Awolowo opened himself to questions on the score of morality and probity. It queried whether the transfer of the land to a company owned by his wife, his children and himself, in any way deprived him of ownership of any portion of the land or whether it was morally justifiable that the Awolowo family should own 360 plots. Besides, the *Concord* stressed that Chief Awolowo did not pause to ask himself how the acquisition of the land would make for the early advent of socialism preached by him (1980b). Contending further that Awolowo was DEL and DEL was Awolowo, the *Concord* (1980c) maintained that by multiple acts which could hardly pass moral, legal or ethical tests, Chief Awolowo or DEL has held 360 plots of prime land which was rushed through legal processes on the same day the Land Use Decree came into effect. It therefore stressed that '... we do not think this is good enough for someone who claims to be the most qualified person to be the president of Nigeria'. The war continued until Chief Abiola's ambition to become Nigeria's president on the platform of NPN was rubbished following a gang-up against him (Ojiako 1983, pp. 36–41, Olayiwola, 1991, pp. 1–15).

The emergence of the YCE in 2000 was perhaps a direct response to or a major fall-out of the AD presidential primary election held at D'Rovans Hotel Ibadan in 1999. The inability to reach a consensus between Chiefs Bola Ige and Oluyemisi Falae informed the commitment of the choice to 'fourteen wise men', a 14-man committee to pick a suitable candidate for the AD on behalf of Afenifere. The choice of Olu Falae over the highly rated Bola Ige generated some disquiet which though did not affect the fortune of the party in the 1999 general elections had a long-term effect on the fortune or misfortune of the party in the south-west region. But more importantly, it could not be divorced from the romance of Chief Ige with the PDP government of Olusegun Obasanjo (Bamidele, 2009). Arguably, the use of consensus and its abuse remains an albatross of this group.

Unlike the landmark electoral victory recorded by the AD in 1999 following the return of democratic government, the experience in 2003 and 2007 was different with the displacement of the isolationists. Whereas the Yoruba masses identification with the political persecution of the group during the 5 years rule of General Abacha and which aided the registration of the AD in the first instance contributed to its electoral success in 1999, the situation was

different in 2003 and 2007 (Kew, 2004, pp. 139–174, Adejumobi 2007, Osinbajo, 2009). Beyond the alleged desperation of the liberalists represented in the PDP to take over the south-west and incorporate it into the much advocated mainstream politics, other factors could explain the displacement. This included the alleged non-performance of the AD-elected officers, absence of internal democracy leading to the imposition of candidates (made up mostly of children and/or relatives of, and even old but known faces in the progressive group), and the rigidity of office holders particularly in terms of programmes and policy implementation not minding their negative impacts on the governed.

Although these allegations are not peculiar to the AD, the issue of imposition of candidates in the AD was more of a continuation of the policy of allowing candidates to emerge on the basis of their seniority in the group and loyalty to the group leadership or much more undemocratic, the favouring of candidates because their parents or grandparents were members of the progressive groups in the past. Certain exceptions to this belief and practice as was the case between Pa Emmanuel Alayande and Chief Ige during the UPN primary election in 1978 was made possible by the political shrewdness of gladiators like Chief Ige who aligned with Alayande's kinsman, Chief Busari Adelakun and others like Chief Sunday Afolabi. The same problem accounted for the bitter contest between two serving governors, Chiefs Ige of the old Oyo State and Adekunle Ajasin of the old Ondo State, and their deputies, Chiefs Afolabi and Akin Omoboriowo, respectively, in 1983 leading to their defecting to the opposition NPN (Babarinsa, 2003, pp. 147–162). Pertinent also to the collapse of the progressive camp in southwestern Nigeria was perhaps the unprincipled support of the AD leadership in the region for the re-election of a 'son of the soil', Chief Obasanjo for the office of the head of the central government. This support unlike his overwhelming rejection in the region in 1999 coupled with the confusion it generated weakened the remaining hold of the AD on the region while ensuring the growth of the influence of advocate of mainstream politics. It was therefore easy for the conservatives to build on the in-road gained into the region in 2003 in the 2007 general elections with almost all the states in the region with the exception of Lagos being won by them. Although the allegation of massive rigging and other electoral manipulations was loud and widespread, the conservatives' hold was sustained until it was reversed through the legal process particularly in the three states of Ekiti, Ondo and Osun (Adisa, 2010; Ajani, 2010; Fasure, 2010; *The Nation* 15 October 2010; Olaleye, 2010; Omotola, 2010, pp. 63–72).

What perhaps was not realized or glossed over was that the Yoruba elite in the conservative camp who had felt overwhelmed by the stature of Chief Awolowo and his followers were also looking for opportunities to be recognized as leaders of the race, an opportunity that their growing influence in the region beginning from 2003 offered them on a platter of gold. The case of Chief Obasanjo is pertinent. He had intervened in the crisis between Chiefs Ige and Afolabi in 1982 over the UPN gubernatorial primary election in the old Oyo state. Even when Chief Awolowo frowned seriously at it and it almost caused Chiefs Ige and Afolabi's expulsion from the party, Chief Obasanjo's intervention had laid a foundation for future relationship with the duo (Babarinsa, 2003, pp. 112–114). Both eventually served as Ministers in Obasanjo-led federal government, one as a member of the opposition party and the other as a member of the conservative group, which he joined in 1983 after defecting from the UPN. What should be noted however is the longstanding relationship between the duo and Chief Obasanjo. Whereas Chief Afolabi was his mate at the Baptist Boys High School,

Abeokuta, Chief Ige was his personal friend (Babarinsa, 2003, pp. 113, 114), a clear indication of the convergence of elite interest irrespective of political leanings or differences in groups.

Like it was among the regionalists from the era of the AG, the imposition of candidates under the guise of consensus, the promotion of party interest or desire to present competent and strong candidates has not only remained the albatross of the acclaimed progressives, it has been taken to an unprecedented height in its fold. Thus unlike in the Awolowo era where primary elections were conducted though with some favoured or anointed candidates participating, the trend in recent times was the brazen imposition of candidates either without any primary election at all or in shoddily conducted primary elections. Oftentimes, such extraneous considerations as the disposition of the leaders to the candidacy of the aspirants and their evaluation of their chances and competence, and more importantly their links with the leaders and sponsors of the group play a major role in determining the aspirants presented for elections. Instances abound in the relatively recent past and particularly in the build-up to the 2011 elections of the sustenance of this age-long practice (Ajiboye, 2011; Akoni, 2011; Kanu, 2011; Oyekola, 2011). Beyond rubbishing the essence of internal democracy which should serve as a filter and also deepen democratic ethos and practices, this practice has shown clearly that the group has not learnt any lesson from its bitter past. More importantly, the spate of defections and the threat of it are pertinent. Worrisome therefore is the inadvertent promotion of exclusion and a further depletion of the group. More importantly is the negation of the ideals of Yoruba nationalism meant to foster unity through the provision of a common and popular platform for the Yoruba, the use of Chief Awolowo's name and legacy as bait notwithstanding.

One major implication of the spread of the conservative influence in the region was the attempt at blurring the dividing line between the two groups and their brand of politics particularly with their cultivation of healthy relationship with traditional institution (which the AG and its successor, UPN, were known for, particularly those who matter in their political calculation) and romance with known progressive families (like the Awolowos or local potentates in their respective localities), all in attempts at legitimization of their influence and power. Subsequent attempts at reconciling the elite in the two camps have not yielded any fruitful result given the bitterness that followed the attempts at displacement and even its sustenance. For instance, following the election manipulation of 2003 and 2007 which depleted the political fortunes of the AD in the south-west, the Yoruba elite who perceived themselves as the core Awoist or the real progressives have refused to gather or meet with PDP governors in south-west who they consider as fake Awoist or pretenders and impostors despite some attempts championed by the likes of Chief (Mrs) H.I.D. Awolowo, the matriarch of the Awolowo dynasty, Bishop Bolanle Gbonigi and others under the banner of the Yoruba Unity Forum (Egbe Isokan Yoruba) (formerly Yoruba Legacy Forum) to bring them together (Bamidele, 2010; Olukoya & Adekanmbi, 2010; Oriola, 2010).

The complaints also in the progressive circles was that the pace of development in the region had been affected given the poor commitment of the conservatives to the agenda of massive and an all-embracing development set by Chief Awolowo and sustained subsequently. What could also not be discountenanced was a wholesome attempt by the conservative government to pacify the dominant elite represented by the traditional elite and their cronies which bred massive corruption and affected the quality of democratic governance, the same accusation that led to the displacement of the progressive camp in 2003. Observably, serious acts of thuggery and violence akin to what was obtained in the First

Republic (though not on the same scale) following the open differences between the two camps and which characterized the struggle for entrenchment vs. displacement in the Second Republic played itself out again in the region with the revival of the struggle for the soul of the south-west.

Arguably, the division between the progressives and the conservatives could in the real sense be a matter of convenience in that in a way the political elite could actually be characterized as being the same given the convergence of their interest. As such the division is perhaps a matter of sustaining the status quo as a way of seeking relevance, protecting common interest and seeking to be better placed to command greater patronage. The attachment to and continuous use of the name and achievements of Chief Awolowo across the divide is pertinent (Adebanwi, 2008, pp. 335–360; Adekanmbi & Awolaja, 2011). More so, the division has become so fluid now that attempting a categorization amounts to an exercise in futility and a waste of time particularly with the constant cross-carpeting bereft of any sound ideological persuasion or conviction. Thus, the factionalism within the elite class notwithstanding, it is not uncommon for them to realign forces, shift allegiance and change camps as the case may be depending on the prevailing political situation. What could not be wished away however is that the legacy of good governance left by Chief Awolowo is being sustained not on the basis of division into camps but on the basis of what individual leaders have to offer, because of the innate leadership quality in them, in which case, the division or categorization or camps is just a matter of affiliation or perhaps desire for relevance in the quest for political offices.

But beyond the struggle between the conservatives and the progressives, the greatest challenge to Yoruba nationalism and solidarity came from within the progressive camp. Beyond the AG crisis in the First Republic and the crisis over who becomes what in the UPN in the Second Republic, the problem manifested fully in the Fourth Republic. The problem actually started in the prelude to the Fourth Republic during the regime of General Sani Abacha when some members of the progressive camp like Alhaji Lateef Jakande and Chief Ebenezer Babatope who were nominated to serve in the government refused to quit despite being asked to do so. Obviously, their inability to influence the Abacha government to hand over to Chief Abiola like other progressive elements in the government was their undoing. But the crisis over the choice of a presidential candidate for the AD drove a more powerful wedge within the camp resulting in the emergence of the YCE. Chief Ige who lost in the primaries held in January 1999 felt betrayed by his colleagues in the revived Afenifere who dumped him for Chief Olu Falae (Bamidele, 2010). Chief Ige's decision to accept a ministerial appointment under Chief Obasanjo in addition to inspiring the emergence of the YCE could be linked with this perceived betrayal. The dominance of Akure/Owo elements in the Afenifere leadership at the time represented by the likes of Chief Reuben Fasoranti could have aided the scheming against Chief Ige who unlike Chief Falae from Akure, was an Ijesa Yoruba. Hitherto, the dominant centre of Afenifere's influence had moved between Ikenne and Ibadan during the time of Chief Awolowo, Akure under the leadership of Chief Adekunle Ajasin and Ijebu Igbo under the leadership of Chief Adesanya. Indeed such extraneous consideration as the relationship of Mrs Falae (formerly Miss Rachael Olatunbosun Fasoranti) by blood to Chief Fasoranti though mundane is a potent political factor (Vanguard, 2011). This re-enacted (and was similar to) the hostility of some Ibadan elite who felt threatened by the dominance of Ijebu elements represented by Chief Awolowo in the First Republic (Sklar & Whitaker, 1964, pp. 597–654).

Whereas the murder of Chief Ige even as a sitting Minister of Justice and Attorney-General produced a temporary truce within the group, it nonetheless solidified the liberalists hold on the region particularly with the exit of a mobilizer, an organizer and a motivator like Chief Ige. Chief Ige was murdered in his Ibadan residence on 23 December 2001 while serving as the Federal Attorney-General and Minister of Justice. His assassination was preceded by the assault on him at the palace of the Ooni of Ife by irate youths allegedly linked with Chief Iyiola Omisore, former Deputy-Governor of Osun state on 15 December 2001. The assassination of Chief Ige was itself preceded by the murder of Honourable Odunayo Olagbaju, a member of the Osun state parliament and a close ally of Chief Omisore (Chimee, 2011, pp. 222, 223). Insinuations were made about the murder of Chief Ige. Some linked it with the protracted crisis in Osun state involving Chief Akande, the Osun state governor between 1999 and 2003, and Chief Omisore. Chief Ige was seen as a major *interest* in the crisis given his support for Chief Akande, a development that also explained the assault on him (Chief Ige) at the Ooni's palace. To some others, it was a continuation of the war between the liberalists and the isolationists, and the attempt to prevent Chief Ige from being entrenched in government dominated by the conservatives. In this sense, it was perceived as a continuation of the enmity between Chiefs Ige and Afolabi. These perspectives notwithstanding, the murder case, like many others was not resolved despite arrests, confessions and trial of some suspects. But the death of Chief Ige, like the contest between him and Chief Falae, further polarized the Yoruba nation as it widened the gulf between the contending groups and exposed the political underbelly of Yoruba nationalism. Ironically, while still claiming to remain within the progressive circle, Chief Falae, hob-nobbed with different political groups before finally pitching his tent with the Social Democratic Party which he co-founded (Adefaka, 2010; Vanguard, 2011). But this is not peculiar to Chief Falae as other members of the group now belong to other political parties although a major segment led by Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu formed the nucleus of the ACN.

### **Yoruba nationalism and power elite in the Nigerian state**

Contrary to the publicized philosophy behind Yoruba nationalism, the Yoruba nation has never been more divided given the effect of factionalization arising from the struggle to be and to become. Implicitly, the Yoruba nation has not been the model it was conceived or touted to be in the context of the Nigerian state. Neither has the elite been able to operate from a position of strength given that the home front from where the regionalists had intended to launch into the mainstream politics has remained weak. In a similar vein, the desire of the nationalists to bring the benefits of mainstream politics to bear on the region has remained an illusion. The inability to separate the platform for the promotion of ethnic nationalism from that of seeking power and influence could explain this. Like it was in 1964 and 1983 when the AG and UPN, respectively, under Chief Awolowo formed a political alliance with presumably similar ideologically inclined political parties, the era of alliance continued under the AD. Both the 1964 and 1983 alliances resulting in the emergence of the United Progressive Grand Alliance and Progressive Parties Alliance, respectively, and incorporating the progressive elements of the period had as its aim the desire to wrest power from the conservatives dominated by the Hausa-Fulani power bloc. Not only did both alliances fail, their tempo was not sustained and more importantly, the virus of disunity carried



over from the components parts weakened and eventually scattered them (Falola & Ihonvbere, 1985, pp. 66, 78; Oyediran, 1988, pp. 17, 18).

In a similar manner, the AD/All People's Party (APP) alliance hurriedly contrived to confront PDP in the 1999 presidential election went the way of its predecessors. The leadership of the APP which transformed into All Nigeria Peoples' Party sacrificed its presidential candidate, Dr Ogbonnaya Onu, to accommodate the AD. The same uncritical support for Chief Obasanjo in 2003 in the name of Yoruba solidarity was capitalized on by the PDP to wrest the south-west Nigeria. The wider implication of these alliances is that they were not beneficial both to the Yoruba nation and the elite. When they appeared beneficial, individual elite whose support base cut across ethnic divides were the beneficiaries and it was not due to the support of their ethnic base or because of their position as the champion of ethnic nationalism. For instance, despite the model of leadership he provided in southwestern Nigeria in the late 1950s and early 1960s, Chief Awolowo never had the opportunity to provide leadership at the national level beyond serving as opposition leader but Chief Obasanjo despite his rejection at home came into national reckoning. Chief Awolowo's emergence as a Federal Commissioner for Finance and the Vice-Chairman of the Federal Executive Council under General Yakubu Gowon between 1966 and 1974 was an appointment rather than through popular election. In a rather unprecedented and rare case, Chief Abiola, the acclaimed winner of 12 June 1993 presidential election came close to national leadership with the overwhelming support of his Yoruba ethnic base but even before he was stopped, it was glaring that the forces behind his victory transcended his ethnic base or any ethnic nationalism. Even then, the alliance with other regions could not guarantee Nigeria's presidency for him and indeed became ineffectual when it was most needed.

Placed on a wider political scale therefore, Yoruba nationalism lacks clear direction given the inability to separate the wider interest of the Yoruba nation from that of the elite who though championed ethnic nationalism were encumbered and limited by their personal desire to wield and exercise political influence. Even at that, Yoruba nationalist aspiration for relevance in national politics remains a mirage. Although Chief Obasanjo, a Yoruba man of Egba extraction was in the saddle of national leadership for eight years, he was not mostly seen as representing Yoruba interest by a dominant section of the Yoruba nation even though other Nigerian groups saw him as such. But despite his perception as anti-Afenifere from within the Yoruba nation, Chief Obasanjo was accused by forces outside the Yoruba nation of being a willing tool in the hands of Afenifere to protect and project Yoruba cause. His inability or perhaps reluctance to tame OPC in the south-west unlike the situation in Odi, Benue and other places where similar developments were brutally suppressed is given as a good reason (Adebanwi, 2004; Douglas, 2005; Sesay et al., 2003, pp. 27–39). On the other hand, Chief Obasanjo's refusal to publicly acknowledge Chief Awolowo as a recognized and an acclaimed Yoruba leader and even Chief Abiola as a hero of democracy whose struggle and persecution contributed to the emergence of a Yoruba person as an elected national leader since the attainment of political independence was seen as a slight on the Yoruba nation particularly by the supposed beneficiary (Chief Obasanjo) of the sacrifice of the duo. Thus, Yoruba nationalism suffered double tragedy: it was ineffectual and controversial at the home front but considered beneficial to the Yoruba albeit wrongly from outside the region. The intensification of other ethnic groups' nationalism manifesting in the emergence, reinvigoration or sustenance of other groups either to project and defend their ethnic interest

or to counter similar development which they considered a threat could not be divorced from the growth of Yoruba nationalism, the use to which it was put notwithstanding.

But despite being encumbered and limited in several ways, the promotion of Yoruba nationalism amounted to building an enclave within the Nigerian nation state more so that the negative use of ethnicity and religion remains a major hindrance to the process of nation building. Significantly also, the divided platform in Yorubaland infected other regions and groups as both the liberalists and the regionalists either looked for allies to support their cause or attracted attention to the Yoruba nation by the conflicting desire for entrenchment or displacement and the attendant resistance. The logical outcome of such conflicts was the emergence of a situation whereby when the Yoruba nation sneezed, the whole of Nigeria caught cold. This was the situation in the 1960s when the A.G. crisis in the south-west was a major factor in the military coup of 1966. In a similar manner, the electoral manipulations of 1983 and 1993 and the attendant resistance contributed to the change in government at both periods. These crises and other related developments have slowed down considerably the process of nation-building and in a few instances have actually reversed it.

## Conclusion

Given the stiff competition for power and privilege in Nigeria, the growth of Yoruba nationalism is understandable and could be situated in this context. But the way and manner the Yoruba elite went about it was problematic. As such, the effectiveness of Yoruba nationalism has been hindered right from its commencement. It has therefore been difficult to conceive in clear terms what Yoruba nationalism entails and what it has achieved. Even the elite that have used its platform to advance their political interest have found political accommodation particularly in the larger Nigerian state difficult. They have therefore become more of appendages rather than prominent actors that they should have been, given the background of their advanced civilization and exposure. The masses have suffered worst fate as they are pushed around within and labelled outside their region or ethnic base. Although, charisma plays a major role in the acceptance of leaders in Yorubaland as was the case with Chief Awolowo, it has not sustained Yoruba nationalism particularly with the grand deception and the mostly worn out clichés employed by leaders to attain political limelight.

The effectiveness of Yoruba nationalism particularly in terms of the benefits accruable to the Yoruba masses would be enhanced when it is genuinely conceived as a platform to negotiate a better deal for the Yoruba nation devoid of the common selfish desire that was hitherto the vogue. The starting point in achieving this is to ensure the incorporation of all Yoruba irrespective of sub-ethnic, political and ideological leanings. An all embracing overtly non-political platform will serve this purpose better. Overcoming the problem of exclusion and the subjugation of personal and ideological differences to the larger objective of promoting and advancing the broader Yoruba unity and solidarity are pertinent, the same way the elite should seek to bring the benefits of their political affiliations to bear on the development of the region without any labelling or imposition as was the case in the past and even presently. Equating Yoruba nationalism with party politics will not give any comprehensible meaning to it. Neither will it advance the cause of the Yoruba nation and its people.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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