

**AN AGENDA FOR THE YORUBA NATION IN THE FEDERAL  
REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA\***

**BY**

**PROFESSOR AYODEJI O. OLUKOJU**

**VICE-CHANCELLOR, CALEB UNIVERSITY, IMOTA**

**LAGOS STATE**

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**“Scratch some comrades and you would find a Russian chauvinist” – V.I. Lenin**

**“Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto you” – Kwame Nkrumah**

## **Preamble**

Your Excellencies, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.

I thank the organizers of this event for inviting me to share my thoughts on this topical issue. To be fair, I must confess my initial unease at the political incorrectness of having to approach a national problem from a regional, if not parochial, perspective but I reconsidered my position in view of certain realities. First, it is an incontrovertible fact that every Nigerian necessarily has some ethno-regional affiliation and sentiment as a form of political identification. Second, while the Yoruba have often been (unfairly) pilloried for their strident clamour for self-determination – a stance informed by their historical experiences – the truth is that their counterparts in other parts of the country have, even more than the Yoruba, used such platforms for self-assertion and aggrandisement politics, without attracting as much opprobrium or odium of ethno-regional particularism. Third, it is a democratic right of any people in a multi-ethnic federation to associate and discuss issues of common interest provided those do not threaten the corporate existence, peace and stability of the nation-state. I subscribe to the view that this gathering is in the mould of the rich intellectual and cultural feast that the Annual Ahiajoku Lectures and the annual gatherings of the Northern elite in honour of Sir Ahmadu Bello represent for the Igbo and the Hausa/Fulani, respectively. All fair-minded people should, therefore, welcome robust discourse, such as today’s exercise, on the state of the Nigerian nation and its constituent (sub)nationalities. In effect, our preoccupation with what my friends on the far left would dismiss as “false consciousness” is not an idle or atavistic pastime. My involvement, which is consistent with my centrist (left of centre) position, should be seen as a creative engagement with an enduring, if constantly mutating, reality of our times.

For the record, I speak in my personal capacity as a concerned and non-partisan socially engaged Nigerian citizen, and not in any official capacity. But I do have my political sympathies as I

could not be indifferent to the politics and politicking that shaped my life, having witnessed many political battles. My father, Hon. Israel Adeniyi Olukoju (who will be 86 next month) was a First Republic Member of Parliament in Ibadan (1960-65). He is a surviving witness and potential target of the violence on the floor of the Western House of Assembly in 1962, and one of the 27 diehards who refused to abandon the Action Group in spite of personal travails, including several assassination attempts. I also witnessed first-hand, the cowardly use of “federal might” in his inhuman and unnecessary incarceration along with some of his colleagues in August 1983 on the flimsy excuse that they were alleged to be hatching a plot to eliminate a political opponent, the Secretary to the Federal Electoral Commission in Ondo State! It turned out that it was a well-orchestrated plan to get them out of the way to rig Omoboriowo into power. I am, therefore, a son of a principled and uncompromising politician with my own well formed opinion and disposition.

My argument in this presentation is simple. We must engage in debates over the roles and accompanying rules of engagement of ethno-regional groupings and their sub-groupings in shaping the larger Nigerian nation-state. Furthermore, we must be grounded in historical dynamics and avoid metanarratives and overgeneralizations that gloss over significant but often overlooked or misunderstood events, milestones and turning points. Hence, in our discourse, we would highlight historical turning points, by employing the Awolowo developmental decade as a paradigm, flirting with counterfactuals, drawing some tentative conclusions from local and comparative perspectives, and then proffer some suggestions on the future of the Yoruba Nation in Nigeria.

### **The Problematique of Yoruba Nationality**

The notion of a Yoruba Nation is problematic for some reasons. The Nation, properly speaking, refers to a group of people, who are self-identified by a common language or cultural practices, shared history or residence within a geographical space. Of course, a nation does not have to be identified with a clearly defined territory, for it could merely be an idea waiting for actualization or even forged by a traumatic experience, or a real or perceived common adversity. Hence, there are many types of nations and nationalities – some coterminous with independent countries, others with occupation of a region within or across national boundaries or even dispersed

communities in the diaspora. Indeed, it is possible for a nation to exist in more than one sense, especially where a common nationality is separated by international or internal boundaries, and, at the same time, its elements are spread abroad in dispersed communities around the world.

My idea of a Yoruba Nation is of the most elastic type. In one sense, the Yoruba in Nigeria occupy a specific region (the Southwest). However, they are present in two regions of Nigeria (Kwara and Kogi States in North Central and some border villages in Edo State in the South-South). Across West Africa, there are indigenous Yoruba communities in the Republics of Benin and Togo, and further afield as settlers in Ghana, Cote d' Ivoire, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Across the Atlantic, the descendants and cultural survivals of the Yoruba are found in Brazil and the Caribbean. If the foregoing could be considered as "core" Yoruba, Yoruboid peoples (defined by language and other cultural traits) constitute a strong element of the Nation. A clear illustration of the nature of the ambiguity of the extent of the Yoruba nation and identity is the self-deprecating taunt common among the Itsekiri and the Ilaje. It literally translates as follows: "An Ilaje (person) is a half-baked Yoruba, while an Itsekiri is a half-baked Ilaje!" I should not complicate this discussion by dwelling on the controversial dynastic ties between the Bini and the Yoruba peoples.

What this means for our present exercise is that "Yoruba Nation" is, or should be deployed as, an increasingly inclusive term. Its usage is, therefore, contextual and subject to differing meanings. In strictly political terms, the elastic conception is to be preferred to a fundamentalist and exclusive definition based on residence or citizenship in Nigeria's Southwest and some parts of the North Central and South-South zones. In the course of this presentation, I shall employ the notion of a Yoruba Nation in the changing contexts of the Southwest, admittedly the bastion of the Yoruba Nation, at other times in the wider context of the Yoruba-speaking communities of the Southwest and North Central zones, and finally, in appropriate contexts, in terms of the Political West, which includes Edo and, to a lesser extent, Delta States.

### **The Yoruba and the Nigerian Nation-State**

Although the idea of Nigeria as a concrete entity certainly did not precede the nineteenth century, it has been argued by scholars, such as Professor G.O. Olusanya, that there were pre-colonial underpinnings of the Nigerian nation. Specifically, geographical factors, such as the river

systems and the complementarity of the agro-pastoral and vegetation systems, commercial, diplomatic, political and social intercourse among the peoples and states of pre-modern Nigeria had, in Adiele Afigbo's words established a precolonial commonwealth of Nigerian peoples. The point is that, long before the colonial enforcement of the *Pax Nigeriana*, peoples in the Nigerian region, especially the Yoruba, had engaged in intermarriage, oracular networking, inter-state labour migrations, political and military conflicts, exchange of medical and technical knowledge and dynastic and military alliances. In short, the Yoruba and other Nigerian peoples were no strangers to one another and it cannot be said that it was the British that literally introduced them to one another. In the particular case of the Yoruba, the famed but often controversial relations between the Ife and Benin dynasties, the presence of non-Yoruba (Hausa, Arabic etc) loan words in their language, the striking similarities among Yoruba, Itsekiri, Igala and Nupe expressions buttress the point that, despite the acrimony of pre-colonial warfare, more enduring and mutually beneficial vestiges of these relationships exist to this day. For good measure, the interlocking traditions of origins and migration stories of the Yoruba and their Nigerian neighbours underscore the antiquity of their relationships.

What the colonial intervention did was to reshape and encapsulate these relations in a formal and straitjacketed nation-state of differing "tribes and tongues," in the words of our old national anthem. To be sure, the colonial state had contradictory effects on the Yoruba and other nationalities – it stifled initiative and self-expression, but also created opportunities for new forms of self-expression and identity formation. To be fair, the combination of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Christian missionary enterprise and colonial rule opened new vistas for the efflorescence of Yoruba ingenuity – the development of the written language and literature of the Yoruba, the increasing harmonization, if not homogenization, of Yoruba language and culture, and the accelerated growth of a modern intelligentsia.

### **The Obafemi Awolowo Developmental Decade and the Yoruba Nation**

At the risk of reductionism, it can be asserted that the rise of the Yoruba Nation as we know it can be traced assuredly to the 1950s and attributed to the critical role and political genius of Obafemi Awolowo – and his able compatriots. It is fashionable, and justifiably so, to lionize or demonize Obafemi Awolowo as the real founder of the modern Yoruba nationality in the

Nigerian nation-state. Of all his path-breaking accomplishments, the democratization of education through the free primary education scheme must rank among the most enduring and epochal. The massification of primary education at state expense unleashed the creativity of the people and produced within a generation an enlightened citizenry that proved easier to mobilize, enlighten and lead, and increasingly difficult to hoodwink.

Next to this was Awolowo's uncanny ability to assemble the best and brightest of his generation, without feeling dwarfed by any one of them, and to develop a blueprint for the development of the region. It can be argued that Awolowo's Western Region government between 1952 and 1959 exemplified the capability of a developmental state at the sub-national level (where many would not expect such initiative and impact) and within the context of a fading colonial hegemony (which still remained stifling). Awolowo's local government reforms were also path-breaking for two reasons – grassroots democratization or entrenchment of elective representation in place of the colonial order nomination of chiefs and pro-establishment Nigerians; and the implicit principle that local governments must pay their own way – the principle of financial viability and autonomy, a local variant of modern fiscal federalism!

His agricultural reforms were also unique, if not ahead of their time. Awolowo's government took advantage of the Israeli experiences in farm settlement to replicate the experiment in Western Nigeria, the results of which time and obscurantist leadership have failed to completely obliterate. One might be guilty of over-romanticizing the Awolowo developmental decade in Western Nigeria but it is also fair to place it in context. A close friend, Professor Bolade Eyinla of the University of Ilorin, related how the late Professor J. Olubi Sodipo, once lamented in his presence the sorry state into which Western Nigeria had fallen. According to the story, when a contingent from Western Nigeria visited South Korea in 1957 to understudy the Chaebol for possible adoption and adaptation, its members (including Sodipo) were surprised that developmental strategies and trajectory projected for Western Nigeria were clearly ahead of South Korea's at the time and the trip appeared to have been a waste of time and resources. But I believe that it was not a futile exercise insofar as it drove home the advances that the region had recorded in less than a decade of self-government. But, as is well known, South Korea soon developed rapidly into a world economic powerhouse within another generation while the forces

of darkness conspired to push Western Nigeria steadily into regression, losing its way in the thicket of national anti-developmentalism. We should ask the inheritors of the Gbadamosi and Odutola industries and likes of Chief Chris Ogunbanjo to tell us their sad story. It is a story of “All things wise and wonderful, the Lord God created them all. All things well ordered on the developmental path, the reactionaries kill them all.” We should all begin to appreciate the import of Chief Hubert Ogunde’s timeless song, *Yoruba Ronu*.

What is often overlooked by analysts of the Awolowo phenomenon was his political tolerance of the opposition. Even in the 1950s, with all the giant strides of his government and party, his regional government was the only one that suffered political defeat in the elections into the Federal House of Representatives in 1954. The NCNC won 22 seats while AG won 19 seats. In Ibadan, the capital city of the Western Region, the ruling party, AG, secured just one out of the five federal seats in contention. With the benefit of hindsight, Awolowo’s strong belief in the concept of “loyal opposition” served to be his political undoing! We all know that since then, only the Awolowo kind of Yoruba leaders had suffered the opposition to win parliamentary and even gubernatorial elections, while they wielded the power of incumbency. Others in his position, especially those with federal backing, routinely declared themselves and their parties overwhelming winners even in states and constituencies where they were known to be overwhelmingly unpopular. In his time, votes counted and the electorate still existed to freely express its political preference unlike now when cast ballot papers outnumber registered voters!

Paradoxically, the fate of Western Nigeria was sealed by Awolowo himself. His strategic political miscalculation – the decision to abandon the Premiership of the region for the centre (where he ended up being Leader of the Opposition) in 1959 - spelt doom for his region and nationality, and ultimately ruined his otherwise well-laid plans. The region then became a playground for all kinds of charlatans and rouble-rousers. In the realm of counterfactuals, Nigerian history would most likely have taken a different turn if Awolowo had remained Premier of the Western Region for another decade. In that event, the Political West (Western Nigeria before 1963) would most likely have continued on its developmental trajectory like South Korea and Singapore, and endured like its Eastern and Northern counterparts (admittedly with the muffling of minority voices). As well, the travails of the 1960s – census controversies, the

Action Group crisis and the electoral malfeasance of 1964 and 1965 – might have been averted. More likely, the economic structures would have survived the fall in produce prices and economic crisis averted with Awolowo's famed economic expertise (attested by his management of Nigeria's Federal Government's prosecution of the civil war without incurring a national debt). There is the strong possibility that, given these scenarios, the civil war might have been averted. In that event, the Political West would probably have gone ahead to develop its human, natural and mineral resources to consolidate its leading position in the Nigerian nation. Whether the oil-rich Western Delta would have degenerated to the crisis of the 1990s till date is a moot point.

Back to the realm of reality, the foregoing scenario never materialised. Awolowo lost the 1959 General Elections and ended up being Leader of the Opposition in the Federal House of Representatives. The contrived crisis in the Action Group snowballed into a conflagration that consumed Awolowo's pre-1966 political career, the lives and careers of several of his leading adversaries, and, ultimately, Nigeria's First Republic. By a twist of fate, Awolowo did serve at the federal level, where he had always wanted to showcase his vaunted organizational and state-building acumen. But it was only in a subaltern position in a non-democratic setting. As is well known, his attempts in 1979 and 1983 to return to the federal level on his own terms in a democratic setting proved a mirage, no thanks to the enduring obstacles that he faced all his political life. His futile efforts were paralleled by the tragedy of Moshood Abiola's arrested victory in the June 12, 1993 presidential election. By that time, the political frustration of the Yoruba West had reached boiling point. This was not helped by the unfortunate framing of the struggle in parochial terms, the series of political betrayals and ideological sommersaults, and the savage military suppression of the Babangida-Abacha years. The Shonekan interregnum and the Obasanjo Presidency did nothing to assuage the deep hurt of the Yoruba nation, which still festers, but has found expression in the militancy of the Odua Peoples Congress and the guerilla journalism of the pro-people wing of the famed Lagos-Ibadan media.

At this juncture, it is apposite to analyze and comment on the Yoruba Agenda in the unfolding dispensation of the Fourth Republic and beyond. The discussion is based upon current realities and some audacious projections.

## **The Future of the Yoruba Nation in a Nigerian Nation-State: Setting the Agenda**

Although it is not explicitly stated, much of the travails of the Yoruba Nation since the late colonial period emanated not necessarily from its self-assertiveness (misread as cultural arrogance) but from its huge potential as an entity in itself. By virtue of its clearly defined boundaries, surfeit of human and material endowment and strategic location – abutting the coastline containing West Africa’s leading seaport and Nigeria’s Western border, the Yoruba Nation standing alone would easily rank as a leading African nation. Its rating would even go higher in the wider configuration of the Political West. For the avoidance of doubt, this is not a manifesto for secession – which was an attractive option during periods of extreme stress in earlier times - but a blueprint for regional self-development in the context of a competitive federal state. My proposals focus on internal reforms and external synergies.

First, there should be critical self-examination to identify our strengths and weaknesses. Second, there should be a comprehensive blueprint for regional development for greater interdependence in the Nigerian state. As for the intrinsic strength of the Yoruba, the wide and deep pool of knowledge in the indigenous and Western contexts, the array of highly qualified professionals in all spheres of life, the powerful media assets known derisively as the Lagos-Ibadan Axis, the accommodating spirit towards non-indigenes – as buttressed by the high percentage of very prosperous non-indigenes in the region, freely admitted but often abused by the beneficiaries; the essentially laissez faire attitude towards religious profession and practice, the homogenizing and refining impact of an ancient tradition of urbanization, the battered but enduring concept of *omoluwabi*, the high rate of political and social mobilization, the recurring resurgence of a dominant progressive political tradition committed to good governance driven by an aristocracy of talent, the existence of formal and informal channels of pressure group politics and conflict resolution, and enduring family ties that transcend religious and several other divisions prevalent in many other sub-nationalities..

Ranged against these positive attributes are the presumed and actual pitfalls in the Yoruba make-up – the rapid dissolution of political consensus in the face of a recurring countervailing reactionary tendency among a powerful minority that I shall allude to subsequently, the zero-sum approach to political contests, and the persistence of inter-generational vendetta (over political,

land and chieftaincy disputes). It appears to me that the greatest undoing of the Yoruba is the uncanny ability to always snatch defeat from the jaws of victory, the inability to manage success, the tendency to allow spite or personal slight to unravel otherwise formidable political alliances, the tendency to adopt hardline positions and so allow ordinarily manageable situations to snowball into uncontrollable crises, the tendency to tar and ostracise opponents (as *demo* or *olote*) without allowing for compromise or rehabilitation, and the speed with which we invite external forces to mediate or intervene in domestic disputes. From the days of Afonja till now, a recurring decimal in Yoruba political history has been the tendency to invite outsiders, who in the first instance do not wish the Yoruba nation well, to right perceived wrongs, or to help secure unmerited positions. Since the 1960s, a minority of Yoruba politicians, waving the flag of joining “mainstream politics,” but without commensurate grassroots support, have invited federal forces to declare false election results as in 1964, 1965, 1983, 2003 and 2007. In at least two instances, a state of emergency was declared when least deserved, while in glaring cases of total breakdown of law and order in certain states, no such order was given or, recently, when a State House of Assembly was shut down by executive fiat, the deserved clampdown was never effected.

If the Yoruba Nation could solve the fundamental political problem of taking bitterness – invariably leading to violence and the evil over-ambition of “do-or die” politics to win by hook or crook – out of politics, as it does in religious matters, much good would be done. This would entail consensus building around some key common values – the primacy of the common good, public office as public service, justice and equity, respect for women and minority rights, the quest for enduring legacies and a good name, rather than temporary political advantage and ill-gotten wealth, the censure of violators of valid political agreements/principles (such as non-involvement of external actors), and the neutrality of traditional institutions as arbiters (as our people say, “agba kii wa l’oja k’ori omo titun won”, literally, elders exist to maintain order or exercise a moderating influence). That said, there must be a consensus on how to engage with other stakeholders in the Nigeria Project. For instance, no group or political party where Yoruba wo/men have a say should compromise on the key issues of regional self-determination, respect for women and minority rights, the primacy of mass education and human capital development,

and competitive federalism as the irreducible minimum preconditions for co-existence in the Nigerian nation-state.

The central plank of the Yoruba Agenda is regional self-development – and this is justifiably so. This will focus on the internal resources of the constituent local governments and states. There should be an audit/mapping of available resources to see how they can be best deployed and harnessed. The comparative advantage of the localities should be exploited in a holistic framework. Osun State, for example, as a notable indigene noted recently, has two major endowments – culture and agriculture. The first is the bedrock of tourism while the other is the cornerstone of food security that can make the State a regional or national breadbasket. An integrated tourism calendar that coordinates the seasonal festivals across Yorubaland and adjoining regions in an annual cycle should be packaged for foreign visitors, as well as local art and culture enthusiasts. The agricultural economy can be revived in tandem with an updated version of Awolowo’s rural development vision and strategy around the concept of model communities with all modern amenities in the rural areas to reduce the pressure on the urban centres. In addition to engaging the younger generation in agriculture, such settlements will be skills acquisition centres where households can survive on composite livelihoods that keep them engaged all year round in accordance with changing weather and the different fruiting seasons of horticulture (fruits and vegetables) and cash crops. Above all, the semi- or full processing of farm produce should be one of the goals of the integrated agricultural development, with the processing and storage facilities deliberately sited in close proximity to the farming locations. Ironically, what Awolowo had advocated and practised as far back as the 1950s now forms the bedrock of the modern UNDP Millennium Development Village Concept.

Beyond that, I envisage a regional development plan that coordinates infrastructure development, agro-industrial development and job creation. A clear example is the collaboration between contiguous states to construct dams and bridges, especially for border communities. There should also be joint agencies to combat common problems in the areas of education, housing, agriculture, sanitation, environmental management etc, where pooled results and coordinated efforts will produce a synergy that will yield better and cost-effective results. As in the case of

the Olokola OK LNG and deep sea port project, strategic enterprises in the region may be jointly owned and managed with the Federal government.

On the related issues of social and cultural development, I suggest the adoption of a common school curriculum and exchange of teachers, especially in areas of lack, and the airing of common radio and television programmes especially those with educational focus, as well as the resuscitation of pan-Yoruba cultural activities to strengthen bonds. I dare to suggest that cultural revival be promoted right from the cradle through any of the following: a conscious promotion of the use of the Yoruba language in the home and in schools, the printing and circulation of educative comics, such as the *Aworerin* series, the popularization of the old classics, especially the Fagunwa, Odunjo and Adeoye texts of the 1960s and 1970s, regional sports competitions, and excursions by schools. Unfortunately, the home-made video industry has destroyed the tradition of the Yoruba travelling theatre, which was a key element of our cultural life in the 1960s and 1970s. But the themes of the home videos should shift to more edifying aspects of Yoruba national life though we cannot pretend that all of the episodes enacted are make-belief.

In general, Yoruba people must familiarize themselves with their own history and culture. They should read academic and popular texts on Yoruba history and culture, beginning with Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas*. Admittedly, so much has been written on the history and culture of the Yoruba that only the diligent can possibly cover most of the literature. An easy way to navigate through the corpus of rich material is to focus on edited collections of essays and general works or syntheses on a theme, region or period of Yoruba history. Pre-colonial history can be made building blocks, such as between ancestral communities and their diaspora, often located in different Yoruba states today. Their traditional rulers and peoples can re-enact their ancient links through exchange of visits, joint celebration of festivals and other matters of common interest. In addition, the concept of sister cities/communities can be promoted to foster unity among different Yoruba groups and communities.

Our traditional institutions and the people that run them should be enlisted in the task of the Yoruba National Rebirth. While one is too incompetent to counsel the repositories of ancient traditions and corpus of wisdom, I dare to suggest that our royal fathers and mothers should be circumspect in their involvement in political issues and more assertive in calling their errant

subjects to order. They should remember that, ordinarily, their thrones and tenure will outlast the limited term of temporary office holders. We should encourage them to protect and uphold the sanctity of their ancient stools, which should not be desecrated by transient occupants of political office. Our royal fathers and mothers should strive to be above the fray, play stabilizing roles in their domains, earn the affection and respect of their subjects and the wider Yoruba and Nigerian community, and represent the Yoruba National Interest at the national parleys of traditional rulers. They cannot afford to behave like some of our politicians who act as though they owe allegiance to nobody and cannot be held accountable by anybody.

After all said and done, we must recognize that the political question remains the fundamental question. The Yoruba Nation must get it right to fully come into its own. This calls for a sophisticated re-appraisal of the Yoruba Nation's strategy of political engagement with the wider concentric circles of its Nigerian neighbours. First, there should be an acknowledgement that we cannot go it alone in a lopsided Nigerian quasi(pseudo?) federation. Second, there must be a thorough articulation and promotion of common interests, possibly spelt out in a blueprint for all to see. This should be properly reinforced and oiled through group and personal contacts, and carefully thought-out and principled alliances. Third, there should be the identification and management of potential flashpoints, in relations with our Nigerian neighbours. For instance, the status of the the Yoruba of Kwara and Kogi States in relation to Arewa in a redefined Nigerian federation. Fourth, the Yoruba must know when it is strategically expedient to compromise on non-core issues or even make some sacrificial concessions in the short run in the long term interest of the Nation. The zero-sum, winner-takes-all approach must be jettisoned to achieve higher strategic goals.

Yet, core principles cannot be jettisoned on any grounds. First, a Yoruba Consensus on the imperative of regional self-determination – its meaning in practice - should be vigorously pursued within the Nigerian nation-state on the lines of the Lyttelton Constitution of 1954. Second, it is imperative to devise ways of excluding interlopers who have always exploited cracks within the family, helped no doubt by the myopic selfishness of a few quislings. Third, there is a serious need for the articulation of a regional economic development blueprint, and one

that equally acknowledges the local peculiarities in the constituent States and communities, is sensitive to local sensibilities but actually ignores the artificial barriers of political boundaries.

To be sure, there are legal obstacles to inter-state planning and project implementation, especially where financial outlays are required to prosecute joint projects. But these can be overcome through mutual commitment to agreed objectives. That this micro-integration is already in progress is indicated by some developments. First, the creation of a dedicated Ministry of Integration and Intergovernmental Affairs in some of the States of the Yoruba West. Second, the open declaration of the new Osun State government that it aimed to make the State the food basket for Lagos State. Third, the popular articulation of specific projects for inter-state cooperation. In a letter to the editor of *The Punch* newspaper of Wednesday, 16 March 2011, one Ade Ajayi made the following submission: “As a new governor with vision, Fayemi should join hands with the Osun State (governor), Mr. Rauf Aregbesola and link Ekiti State with a modern highway from Ilesha-Akure Expressway to Iloko-Ijesha and then to Esaoke junction.” The said commentator also made a suggestion of great strategic significance – he demanded that joint efforts should go into making the road network running through Iloko, Aramoko, Ijero, Ifaki, Omuo and Kabba to Lokoja motorable. This, he stressed, “is the shortest and most convenient route to the Federal Capital Territory.” This clearly underscores the compatibility of internal development and regional integration in Yorubaland with a positive articulation with the larger Nigerian entity symbolised by road access to Abuja, the seat of federal power.

The issue of integrated infrastructure development across Yorubaland goes beyond road links, as critical as these may be. What is required, as in Europe, is strategic rail links. I am aware of the abortive scheme of an Odua Group-led private consortium to build and operate a 25-minute rail link between Lagos and Ibadan. Yet, the Federal Government in its wisdom is funding the Abuja-Kaduna rail link, turning a blind eye to the more strategic and economically viable Lagos-Ibadan or Okene-Abuja rail link. This reminds one of the aborted Lagos Metroline scheme, which was conceived by the progressive Jakande administration in 1980. By the time the project was murdered by the Federal Government in 1985, a whopping sum of over \$100m had been expended without an inch of railway track. Worse, a colossal sum of money was paid as penalty for the breach of that contract. Evidently, the project of rail network development across

Yorubaland, like every other beneficial regional project, has been a victim of external intrigue and sabotage, with the connivance of some internal collaborators in a classical case of cutting the nose to spite the face. The way forward, as indicated below, is to have formidable representation at the national level, where in alliance with like minds, necessary legislative activism will effect the amendment of the colonial-era Railway Act of 1958 which gave monopoly to the Nigerian Railway Corporation. In this day and age of deregulation and liberalisation, the exercise must not be selective; the rail transport sector must be fully liberalised for the full potential of Nigeria to be developed. The success of liberalization in the telecommunications and aviation sectors – to the extent that consumers have a choice and inefficient monopoly is broken - indicates that the same can be replicated in the rail sector of our transport economy. All that is required is to enlighten the entrenched interests – the shadowy road lobby – how their interests will not be affected by the regional railway transport aspirations of the Yoruba Nation. In any case, it can also be argued that it is the brunt of road haulage that makes roads in this region crater-infested and accident-prone, killing our people, polluting our environment and inflicting material damage. To that extent, rail transport will take pressure off the roads, save more lives and reduce air pollution generated by fleets of diesel powered haulage trucks. In effect, what the region needs is a coordinated inter-modal transport system that links all parts together, especially the economic hubs – ports, industrial complexes, refineries, farm settlements etc.

An annual economic summit which rotates among the constituent states will provide a platform for articulating and harmonizing common economic aspirations across political party lines and other divides. The forum will also permit stocktaking as stakeholders can engage with political office holders and others in charge of economic policy formulation and implementation. New possibilities of cooperation beyond the governmental level can also be canvassed during such gatherings, which must not be turned into political or social jamborees. Either way, the economic summit will afford the showcasing of success stories so that good practices can be disseminated across and, even beyond, the region. Astute and accomplished professionals across all fields of human endeavour of Yoruba origin in Nigeria and the Diaspora should be involved in this summit.

The Yoruba should also reflect on the need to further develop the local entrepreneurial class. Nurture capitalism has worked elsewhere as engines of growth. The fact that it has been abused in the past should not foreclose future re-invention. The Odua Investment Conglomerate should be revived, lost assets retrieved and strategic expansion undertaken. Japan developed using its *zaibatsu*, as problematic as that was, while South Korea could not have achieved its current state of development without its *chaebols*. An economic blueprint that accommodates such family-based and state-run mega firms should be developed to take care of diverse economic interests in Yorubaland. It is relevant to note that the man that started the celebrated TATA Industry of India was a contemporary of the Odutola Brothers (Adeola and Jimoh), Gbadamosi and Ogunbanjo. We can all see where TATA is today – a Global Fortune 500 Company, capable of buying Rover of Britain - but where are the industries established by the Odutolas, Gbadamosis and Ogunbanjos? Ruined by government's stifling policy and inability to provide regular power supply and a conducive environment for enterprise.

A major plank of the economic blueprint must be job creation. Given the common traditional focus of all Yoruba-led governments since the 1950s on mass education, there must be a complementary programme that addresses youth unemployment. As the bureaucracy, private firms and other wage-labour employers cannot absorb all the products of various vocational, technical and literary schools, the emphasis should be on self-reliance hinged upon creating creators of jobs or skilled workers who can operate within the formal and informal sectors of the economy. The advantages of gainful employment in the agricultural, building and infrastructure development and manufacturing sectors of the economy are manifold – a multiplier economic effect and the reduction of crime and youth restiveness, as expressed in the militancy in the Niger Delta and violent involvements in communal and political party disputes, leading to loss of precious lives and destruction of property and livelihoods.

Yet, care must be taken to ensure a balanced development of the various areas of Yorubaland. Already, some parts are ahead of others – often significantly so, and there is the urgent need to bridge the gap between the relatively advantaged and the evidently disadvantaged communities. Glaring cases within particular states – such as Okeogun in Oyo State – should be redressed in terms of road transport infrastructure, health and educational facilities and labour intensive

industries. This will ensure that some sub-regions do not become labour recruitment areas or ghettos in the Yoruba Commonwealth.

In terms of relations with proximate neighbours and the Nigerian state, the Yoruba Nation must devise creative strategies of positive engagement. We must learn from our modern history to identify the hurdles to scale in getting to the promised land. A striking one is that the Yoruba are doughty fighters who usually stumble on the cusp of victory. This calls for ways to stay the course till the end. The other is the recurring tendency that it always takes a coalition of aggrieved Yoruba elements – usually a tactically crafty but strategically deficient minority, focused on short-term personal gains– and hostile forces operating from the centre to undo the peace and development of the region. This happened in the 1960s, 1982-83 and since the 1990s. Third, major political crises in the Yoruba Nation have always snowballed into national conflagrations. Fourth, such crises have followed a familiar pattern – a political rift among the Yoruba provided an opportunity for adventurers to massively declare election results completely at variance with local preferences and realities, thus provoking spontaneous violent protests from the aggrieved majority. The same external forces that provoked the outrage would now deploy overwhelming federal power to suppress the disenfranchised and impose an illegal regime and a reign of terror. We need to break this familiar cycle by working together to uphold the will of the people as expressed through the ballot box. Votes must be cast, counted, and genuine results announced. Anything else is an invitation to cause mayhem.

Our external relations within the Nigerian polity should, therefore focus on forestalling the usual reactionary alliances between a hostile federal power and local quislings. Building an internal consensus will always be a difficult task as every nation has its fair share of opportunists and fifth columnists who are always willing and ready to sell the family heirlooms for a mess of pottage. Enlightenment and mobilization of stakeholders – traditional rulers, politicians, the intelligentsia, women and youth - around core Yoruba national ideals – free and fair elections, peaceful resolution of political and other conflicts, regional self-determination and fiscal federalism, respect for the rights of minorities, women and the youth, and entrenchment of good governance (defined as articulating and delivering programmes and projects aimed at raising the living standards or enhancing the well-being of the vast majority of the populace). We must

identify and resuscitate ties with our ancient allies, such as those in the basins of the Cross River and Gongola, and seek new ones, even in unexpected places. We should engage them in alliances over common objectives that require federal legislation and stress the mutual benefits in such relationships. No group, not even the most conservative or reactionary, should be excluded in our charm offensive. In engaging with other Nigerian interest groups within and beyond formal settings such as political parties and legislative chambers, the Yoruba must always deploy their best – the proverbial first eleven. Specifically, Members of the National Assembly representing Yoruba communities anywhere in Nigeria must be well educated, politically astute, self-confident and dependable. So far as can be discerned, the Yoruba National Assembly Team, especially in the Senate, during the Second Republic, 1979-83 has yet to be rivalled much less surpassed. What with the likes of Senators J.A. Odebiyi, Abraham Adesanya, C.L. Adeoye, Banji Akintoye, David Oke, Ayo Fasanmi, Olorunnimbe Farukanmi and C. O. Ilori. These were highly accomplished men with a track record of intellectual sagacity, personal integrity and meritorious service. We cannot afford to drop below this benchmark, and must indeed demand not to fall below the benchmark, especially now that the talk of zoning the Presidency of the Senate to the Southwest is rife

The Yoruba should adopt a professional approach towards governance by setting up a Think Tank where ideas for the development and political engagement of the nation can be processed and disseminated. A Yoruba Political Institute with a light bureaucracy peopled by competent hands will be saddled with, among others, crisis prevention and management, and political education. Experts should design early warning signs parameters to be deployed to anticipate and forestall major crises, such as the negative use of thugs in electioneering campaigns, the tone of rhetoric and the danger inherent in the use of volatile language, possible precautionary measures on the eve of elections, the monitoring of polls, the management of pre- and post-election conflicts, and capacity building for every new set of Yoruba federal legislators. The Institute can also produce blueprints for specific joint projects or act as a clearing house for managing intergovernmental challenges. The Institute could also help in devising solutions to the recurring problem of political succession and the raising of future leaders. The issue of political succession has been a recurring Yoruba problem as epitomised by the Awolowo/Akintola, Ajasin/Omoboriowo and Ige/Afolabi cases in the First and Second Republics.

## **Lessons from the Spanish (Catalan) and Canadian Experiences**

Students of history are familiar with the processes leading to the evolution of the modern states of Europe. As an undergraduate, I was fascinated by Dr. Edmund Egbah's narration of the political and marital union of Ferdinand of Aragon and Isabella of Castile, which marked the turning point in the creation of modern Spain. But, as is well known, Spanish history, even up to present times, has been wracked by violent ethno-regional nationalism, the most striking being the Basque separatist movement which prosecuted its mission with a long campaign of bombings and assassinations until recent times. That the Basque resistance has opted for a non-violent campaign, that regional development has spurred national stability in Spain is a lesson for both the Yoruba and other Nigerian nationalities. What should interest us is not the Basque experience but that of Catalonia, which is more famous for its hugely successful football club, FC Barcelona and the port-city in which it is based.

As in other jurisdictions like Canada, states or provinces have the following under their control: property and civil rights; administration of justice; natural resources and the environment; education; health; and welfare. Provinces own natural resources, gain greatest benefits from royalties and employment among others (Banting & Simeon, 1983). That is why Alberta province enjoys rapid growth of revenues due to the concentration of gas and oil within its jurisdiction. Spain shared similar responsibilities at the state or provincial level of government: education at all levels; health; agriculture; industry; energy and mines; environment; tourism and domestic trade; social services; historical and artistic patrimonial protection and own region's language protection; housing and territorial arrangement; regional infrastructures; highways and railroads within the autonomous community; sport; port; and sport airports (Lopez-Labroda, Martinez-Vazquez, & Monasterio, 2006).

Based on the afore-mentioned, how can we use these examples to articulate a bigger role in these areas in the Yoruba nation? It is also pertinent to mention the third layer of government – municipal or local government level. In Canada, water; sewage; waste collection; public transit; land use planning; libraries; emergency services; animal control; and economic development all fall under municipal or local government oversight. In Spain, local governments/municipalities oversee water supply; sewerages system and garbage collection; public lighting system; social

protection; cemeteries; repair and maintenance of non-university school centers; parks and public gardens; and street paving. As well, municipalities with more than 50,000 inhabitants, also oversee urban transportation; and local environment protection. In charting a forward-looking Yoruba Nation agenda, there is a need to clearly delineate the roles and responsibilities of the third-tier of government, and with accompanying power and support ceded to them to take governance and development to the grassroots.

The Yoruba Nation's use of diplomacy must be sharpened, given the obvious reality that the federal government's release or withholding of grants could affect other areas, including areas outside its direct jurisdiction. A good example is the Canadian experience between 2003 and 2006. In that particular case, "the social policy portfolios most affected are not those in which the federal government intervened directly and that came under its own areas of jurisdiction (for instance, social policy concerning Aboriginal communities)". According to the report, the effect of federal government intervention was felt more in areas "it intervened indirectly through conditional grants to the provinces and territories and that belonged to areas outside its jurisdiction." (Vaillancourt & Thériault, 2008: 33)

## **Conclusion**

At the risk of reductionism, it can be summarised that political crises in Yorubaland since the 1960s can be located in a recurring conflict of aspirations and strategy by the political elite. Ironically, both camps accept the reality of engagement with the federal power. But they differ on the terms of the engagement.

On the one hand are apostles of what might be called pragmatism, who seem to argue that the Yoruba should acknowledge the reality of Nigerian politics – a lopsided federation in which we controlled a third, then a quarter and, now, a sixth of the geopolitical space, and one in which the federal cake is being shared without accountability, and venality continues with impunity – and make the best of the situation. This is rationalized on the grounds that no single individual or group acting alone can save Nigeria – if it is worth saving at all - and that we should join them

since we cannot beat them. This position appears reasonable in the circumstances but it is cynical and defeatist, and it is anything but progressive or development-oriented.

On the other hand, some hardliners insist on what might be regarded as an idealistic and principled engagement with the federal government on the basis of the equality of federating units and with an underlying assumption that the Nigerian federation can be made to work for the good of the majority and for the overall projection of Nigeria as it ought to be – the Giant of Africa. Unfortunately, this romantic position has been undermined by the aggressiveness of the opposition and the defection of its war-weary or faint-hearted members. Fortunately, this ideal has refused to die in the Yoruba Nation and has kept reinventing itself throughout the changing phases of Nigeria's post-independence existence.

The Yoruba Nation needs to think through this impasse. The idea of political mainstreaming in and of itself is not such a bad idea if the terms of engagement are equitable. My position is that short-term, personal gains of the first group will never trickle down, much less generate a developmental impact in the Yoruba Nation. The scandalous differences in the personal wealth, which is most often ill-gotten, of the political office holders, as well as the level of socio-economic development in the Southwest from 1960 to 1966, 1979 to 1983 and since 1999 prove this point beyond reasonable doubt. The idea of mainstreaming at all cost is not a sustainable position because it condemns the Yoruba to playing the second fiddle or worse, and accepting mere crumbs from the master's table. Any illusions about the dubious clamour for unprincipled conscription into mainstream politics have been shattered by the Yoruba experience in the Fourth Republic, when a son of the soil had control over the highest office in the land for all of eight years – with little or nothing to show for it.

Conversely, history is on the side of the idealists, for subaltern acquiescence to wrongheaded hegemony does not last for ever as the events in Egypt and Tunisia illustrate. What is required is creative building of alliances, focus on winning (with allies) a considerable number of gubernatorial positions and national assembly seats as a precondition for negotiation as equal partners. Fortunately for this optimistic scenario, the vaunted regional consensus in the traditional nemesis of the Old West – the Old North - is itself succumbing to fissiparous tendencies, as greater political enlightenment is generating unprecedented ferment there and

elsewhere. There are, therefore, tantalizing openings for positive collaboration within such interstices of political reconfiguration elsewhere in Nigeria. This will require the building of a common (progressive) platform with likeminded ethnic nationalities across the country whose focus must be on development of both human and natural resources for the good of all.

As already canvassed, leaders of the Yoruba Nation should strive to avert cracks that interlopers can exploit for their own good, but to the detriment of the Yoruba nation. Respected opinion (and religious) leaders and bipartisan platforms should act to preempt a relapse into the cycle of fratricidal political wars of attrition which have sapped the corporate strength of our people. Intra-party conflict and inter-state boundary or asset-sharing disputes must be better managed than in recent times. The acrimonious parting of ways at the Ondo State University at Ado-Ekiti, jointly owned by the sister states of Ekiti and Ondo, and the ongoing replay at LAUTECH, Ogbomosho belie the depth of crisis-management resources, including traditional diplomacy, for which the Yoruba are known.

The concept of *Omoluwabi* should be celebrated now, more than ever before. Hence, an annual awards ceremony should be instituted, and people of good character with living legacies honored. This is expected to challenge the “get-rich-quick by any means” syndrome and send a clear message to the younger generation that the Yoruba Nation has no respect for, and will not condone crooks and charlatans.

Your Excellencies, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, much has been said and a lot remains to be done. We are at a critical juncture in Yoruba history with the impending elections. There is no doubt that our future lies in in a truly *federal* and *republican* Nigeria. The manifest destiny of the Yoruba is to be one of the key players in transforming Nigeria into a continental power in the first instance. We must set our house in order, work with like minds to make Nigeria great. We cannot afford to betray our noble heritage or bequeath anything less to our children. I am confident that we will do it.

Thank you for listening. God bless you.

## Note

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## PROFESSOR AYODEJI O. OLUKOJU – BIODATA

- BA First Class Honours, University of Nigeria, Nsukka; MA, PhD (Ibadan)
- Career: Ogun State University, 1984-87; University of Lagos, 1987 till date
- Appointed Professor on October 1, 1998, Head, Department of History (2001-2004) and two-term elected Dean of Arts, (2005-2009), all at the University of Lagos.
- Holder of (1) Japan Foundation (2) British Academy (3) DAAD (Germany) (4) IDE (Japan) (5) Leventis (UK) and (6) Chapman (UK) post-doctoral research fellowships, and (7) the WARA Travel Grant/Residency (Emory University, USA), between 1993 & 2005.
- Author of 5 books, 3 monographs, 51 book chapters and 42 articles in 20 journals of maritime, economic, social, transport, imperial, global and African history (Authored books - *Maritime Trade, Port Development and Administration: The Japanese Experience and Lessons for Nigeria* (Tokyo, 1996), *Infrastructure Development and Urban Facilities in Lagos, 1861-2000* (Ibadan, 2003), *The Liverpool of West Africa: The Dynamics and Impact of Maritime Trade in Lagos, 1900-1950* (Trenton, US, 2004), *Culture and Customs of Liberia* (Westport, US/London, 2006), *The Fourteenth Commissar of Works: The Life and Labour of Rauf Aregbesola* (Lagos/Winnipeg, 2007).
- The University of Lagos Best Researcher in the Arts/Humanities for 2006 and 2009
- First-ever elected African member of the Executive Committee of the International Maritime Economic History Association (IMEHA), 2008-2012
- Member, editorial boards of *African Economic History* (Madison, USA), 1998-2002; *Afrika Zamani: Journal of the Association of African Historians* (Dakar, Senegal), 2001-2005; *History in Africa: A Journal of Method* (USA), 2010- and *Journal of African History* (Cambridge, UK), 2011-
- **Assistant Secretary, Nigerian Academy of Letters, 2010-**
- External Examiner and Professorial Assessor at several Nigerian and Ghanaian Universities, 2004; Convener, Network of Nigerian Historians, 2010-
- Member, Governing Council, Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), 2011
- Listed among Nigeria's 100 Foremost First Class Graduates
- **Vice-Chancellor, Caleb University, Imota, Lagos State**, from October 18, 2010 (on leave of absence from the University of Lagos)