

## HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY POLITICAL CULTURE AND SOCIALIZATION AMONG THE YORUBA OF SOUTH-WESTERN NIGERIA

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Yoruba of South-Western Nigeria emerged as a distinct language group around 2000 BC to 1000 BC. The Yoruba developed kingship political system around 1000 BC. This article elucidates the significant features of Yoruba traditional political culture and socialization, which depends enormously on political symbols and language for the legitimisation of political domination.*

*Moreover, the article presents the family, as the traditional basic unit of indigenous political administration, with chiefs representing the interest of respective families in central administration. This afforded the provision of checks and balances on the Oba (King), as he could not run contrary to the expectation of his subjects without grave consequences. Real political powers were thus reposed in the king's subjects, represented by their chiefs. Political authority was therefore vested in the 'social' rather than the 'individual'. Colonization brought about transformations in Yoruba political culture as people's power was taken, harnessed and reposed in the Oba who henceforth became answerable to colonial officials. The tide changed as South-Western Nigeria gained self-governance and the new indigenous elite rulers enacted laws, which transferred powers held by traditional rulers to themselves. Subsequently, new clientelistic structure evolved in Yorubaland wherein patrons and clients engage in exchange relations. This has been the situation ever since modern government was introduced and it has remained fundamental to stability in Yoruba political structure, its potential detrimental implications to development.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

One of the earliest achievements of man whether as roaming bands (hunting and gathering societies) or as individuals occupying a geographical area, is the ability to sustain life by living in groups. Even though this fact has either consciously or unconsciously gone as a taken-for-granted reality for many people, it remains one of the strategies man has devised for overcoming the impediments, man's immediate environment may pose to existence. For humans to exist within an environment, they have to create and re-create their personalities and social world through group interaction (Omobowale 2015, Derricourt 2011). It is through group interaction that human beings evolve the culture with which they overcome and exist within their environments (Omobowale 2006).

The first sets of human settlements emerged in Africa (and elsewhere), as human beings through interaction with the immediate social and physical environments discovered the art of domestication of plants and animals (Omobowale 2015, Derricourt 2011, David and Sterner 1999, Clark 1977). At this stage, agriculture accompanied sedentary life. However, agriculture could only be practised with land. Land, therefore, became fundamental as means of production. Furthermore, land, which was available abundantly, had to be cultivated for production. Meanwhile, individual labour could prove insufficient for the tilling of a large expanse of land provided for each individual. Human settlements, therefore, required the interacting social group that could work together to provide labour for production. Among the Yoruba, land served an early and primary production purpose. Hence, land was a denominator of group relations, political structure and economic life (Omobowale 2015, 2008a,b). Of course, land could not be appropriated by a single individual, land was kin-owned, it was the major factor of production and catalyst of urbanisation in pre-colonial Yorubaland (Vaughan 2003, Perham 1962, Bascom 1955).

In contemporary times, the Yoruba are predominantly located in Southwestern Nigeria, and Kwara and Kogi states in North-Central Nigeria. The Yoruba are not one monolithic group as there are distinct sub-ethnicities such as the Oyo, Ijesha, Ekiti, Igbomina and Okun among others. It is important to note that most, if not all Yoruba sub-ethnic groups trace their oral histories to Ife, and have accepted the Oyo Yoruba as the *lingua franca*. Pre-colonial Yoruba nation spread across to parts of the present-day Benin Republic and Togo and there remain significant Yoruba populations in these countries (Omobowale 2008a). Due to the transatlantic slave trade, aspects of Yoruba culture, language and religion were transported to the American continent, and these are practiced in places such as Brazil, Haiti and Cuba (Fandrich 2007, Gordon 1979). The Yoruba are highly urbanised and politically conscious. The initial struggles for Nigeria independence started around Southwestern Nigeria in the 1940s, led by Herbert Macaulay and a host of other nationalists (Bourne 2015, Adebaniwi 2004). Southwestern Nigeria (along with Southeastern Nigeria) opted for self-governance in 1957, as a gradual process for Nigeria's independence in 1960. The years 1960-1966 were critical years in political development in Southwestern Nigeria. The prominent political Yoruba leaders in Southwestern Nigeria were embroiled in political imbroglio, the conflicts resulted in accusation and counter-accusation of electoral malpractices, and consequent violence earned the Southwest the imprint of the 'Wild, Wild, West (Omobowale and Fayiga 2017, Obadare 1999). Irrespective of the various explanations that have been provided on political consciousness among the Yoruba, this paper opines that Yoruba political consciousness is traceable to its culture and political development over time. Hence, this paper historically reflects on Yoruba political culture and socialisation.

### **Political Symbols and Language in Yoruba Politics**

Pre-history human settlements in Yorubaland took a form similar to sedentary settlements and human structures in other parts of the world (Derricourt 2011, Atanda 1996, 1980) suggested sedentary life might have begun in some constituent and surrounding territories of Yorubaland around 3000 B.C. when the domestication of Yam, a major West African staple food, was made possible through constant interaction with the physical and social environment. Despite that Yoruba language was not reduced to writing until about the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Yoruba, had means of preserving its history. History preservation was generally done cognitively and orally while particular persons were specially trained for that purpose. One of the oral traditions about the origin of the Yoruba, which have survived through time, is *Ikedu* tradition at Ife. According to this tradition, Atanda stated, that, there were human settlements in Yorubaland before the advent of Oduduwa into political prominence. In all, *Ikedu* tradition stated that about 93 to 97 kings ruled in Ife before the emergence of Oduduwa. Depending largely on this tradition coupled with some archaeological findings, Atanda finally submitted that the Yoruba may have emerged as a unique linguistic group between 2000BC to about 1000BC (see also Blier 2012, Adepegba 1986).

For the earliest Yoruba groups, agriculture must have formed the basis of production and subsistence. And just like many other social groups, which emerged around this period, the family became the foundation on which the means of production was situated. For every individual, his family served as his social security. To survive, an individual had to exist within a family of birth, adoption or procreation, and thus, the interpretations of the social world and personality were dependent on the ensuing realities in the family and within the immediate exo-family environment. The primary means of production (particularly land and labour) was largely sourced from the family and among close kin. The family system allocated land according to need and labour was provided by the nuclear family and close kin (Clarke 2002, Fadipe 1970, Johnson 1921). Since primarily an individual's social well-being and subsistence rested within his/her family, individuals

were socialised to route their loyalty to the society through the same family (for emphasis see Alanamu 2016, Akintoye 1971, Fadipe 1970, Johnson 1921). Hence, the socialization (both political and otherwise) of the individual started from the home. Among the Yoruba, everyday construction and reconstruction of the social-being and interpretive understanding of the social structure come linguistically. They come in the form of proverbs, idioms, dirges, and poems among others (Omobowale 2014, 2008a, Olutayo 2004). These linguistic approaches are social symbols through which the social world is understood.

Yoruba political culture is highly dependent on age. From the family to the society at large, individuals are socialised to accord deference to elders (see Omobowale 2014, Fadipe 1970). This is because elders are considered as the epitome of experience, wisdom and knowledge. Hence the proverb:

- (1) Bi omode ba l'aso bi agba  
Ko le ni akisa bi agba

A youth's garments may be as many as those  
of an elder  
However, a youth's disused garments cannot  
be as many as those of an elder.

- (2) Agba o si n'ilu  
llu baje,  
Baale ile ku ile re d'ahoro

With the absence of elders  
The community turns sour  
The death of the family head  
Brings desolation to his home

The two proverbs highlighted above attest to the paramount positions elders occupy. They are accepted as natural leaders. Their leadership rests on their age, wisdom, knowledge and wealth of experience they have gained through interaction with physical and social environments. Hence, they are not disregarded, and are consulted by all and sundry, on matters related to the state and individual development (Akintoye 1971). The Yoruba believe that elders, through their experience and wisdom contribute immensely to stability in the social structure.

Despite the fact that Yoruba culture gives great credence to age, political organisation is harnessed through the family institution. Each family group is headed by a *baale* (i.e. family head). Ascension to this position is through age. The oldest male member of the family group assumes the position of the family head. The allegiance of members of his family to the state comes only through him. Moreover, they (that is, family members) identify with him on matters involving the society at large even when it runs contrary to the ideas of societal leaders (Akintoye 1971). The family group consists of both the nuclear and the extended family. This group is held together by the *alajobi* (kin bond) value (Omobowale and Akanle 2017, Atanda 1996). Within the *alajobi* value lies the normative cohesion of the family group. The family group is empowered to sanction or honour its members according to their conduct. Hence, while existing within his/her environment, an individual is mindful of the consequences of his/her conduct on himself and his/her family. It is instructive to note here that the strong influence of the family on its members may not be unconnected with the fact that each individual's subsistence was sought through the family

system, which had ultimate authority on land, necessary for production and subsistence. The construction of the primary importance of the family bond started from this premise, and modernity values have not entirely eroded it.

At the central level, the traditional political administration was centred on the king (*Oba*) and his Council of Chiefs (*Igbimo awon Ijoye*). The *Oba* ruled in conjunction with his chiefs. They were distinguished and set apart by the symbols, which were constructed around their positions, physically and through political sayings, some of which are mythical. Among others, the *Aafin* (Palace) stood as the principal symbol of authority and reign of a Yoruba *Oba*. The *Aafin* was (is) publicly owned and served as the official residence of the *Oba* throughout his reign, until death or deposition. Prior to the advent of the British colonialists, the *Oba* was supposedly treated with awe and dread. He was not supposed to be seen by ordinary men and so was traditionally obliged to stay indoors, except at particular days of the year to play important roles in festivals and sacrifices (Perham 1962). To further buttress the 'awesomeness' and 'dreadfulness' of the *Oba*, he was (is) addressed with appellations such as (especially the *Alaafin* of Oyo):

*Iku, Baba, Yeye*  
*Alase ekeji Orisa*

Death, Father, Mother  
Second in Command to god

The appellation above describes, succinctly the belief that the *Oba* had power over life and death. Furthermore, the importance of the leadership structure instituted first within the family unit is buttressed. And so the *Oba* is seen as the subjects' father and mother. Above all, he is seen as second only in command to the gods (that is, supernatural). By allotting the aura of supernaturalism to the *Oba*, there is a profound suggestion of the *Oba*'s affinity to the gods. Since the *Oba* hardly appeared in public; the larger populace was informed mainly and socialised about the supernatural nature of the *Oba*ship stool. By so doing, the political structure was largely preserved except in cases where the *Oba* was rejected by his chiefs and asked to commit suicide for crime against the state.

In addition, the traditional political ruling class was characterised by the use of beaded materials. Both, *Oba* and Chiefs use beaded materials as symbols of political authority, royalty and influence. Particularly, the *Oba* wears crowns made of beads, beaded sandals and hold staff (*Opa-ase*) and horse-tails (*Irukere*) decorated with beads. In order to serve as symbol of connection with kings who had reigned earlier, the crown of a reigning *Oba* is affixed with fragments of crowns worn by his predecessors. Likewise, chiefs too make use of beaded materials, but they are restricted to beaded necklaces (see Lange 1995). At this point, it is crucial to note that despite the fact that the Yoruba hardly beheld their *Oba* due to traditional customs, they were however socialized through proverbs, idioms and so on, to recognise those in political authority and the different classes to which they belong(ed) through the symbolic materials, which they wear. One of such political saying is:

*Ade la fi n m'oba*  
*Ileke la fi n mo'joye*

The king is recognised by his crown  
Chiefs are recognised by their beaded  
necklaces

The Oba goes by appellations such as *Kabiyesi* (that is, *ka bi o, ko si*, meaning; the one that cannot be questioned), *t'oba l'ase* (the king's word is final) and *Oba l'oni ile* (the king is the owner/lord of the land). These appellations are political sayings, which are transmitted from generation to generation in order to keep within the consciousness of Yoruba people, the fact that there is a personality at the helm of affairs who must be revered. The honour accorded traditional political authority was of primary importance to its survival; otherwise, the political institution may lose its relevance. Hence, individuals with leadership clout (whether ascriptive/achieved) are put in positions of authority. This is summarised by these proverbs:

- (i) *Akuku ljoye*  
*O san ju enu mi o ka lu*

It is better not to take up leadership position  
Than for ones words to be disregarded by subjects

- (ii) *Eni ta fi j'oye awodi*  
*Ti ko le gbadiye*

He who was made eagles' chief  
But who cannot carry a fowl.

From the two proverbs above, it could be deduced, that the Yoruba view leadership as such that must be reserved only for those who possess leadership charisma. It is the possession of the requisite leadership qualities, which qualifies a man for leadership position. Accordingly, in whichever profession or family a person belongs to, he is trained to defer to leaders and internalise qualities that may be required of him when he too takes up a leadership position (Fadipe 1970).

In terms of Yoruba social identity, it is pertinent to note that it is constructed around Oduduwa personality (see for example Adediran 1989). Even though empirical findings reveal that Oduduwa could not have being the biological progenitor of the Yoruba (this will be discussed latter), his achievements during his reign may have contributed to the adoption of his image as a symbol of Yoruba social identity. For this reason, Oduduwa is customarily referred to as the father of the Yorubas:

*Oduduwa atewonro*  
*Baba Yoruba*

Oduduwa, the one who glided down with a  
chain  
The father of Yoruba

It is not surprising therefore that Obafemi Awolowo's socio-political movement, *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* (Movement for the sons of Oduduwa) gained prominence by identifying with Oduduwa symbol, when it was established in 1948 (see Adi 2000, Ayoade 1985). In addition, the movement gained support through its close association with many Yoruba *Oba* who by then had become one of the lasting symbols of Yoruba culture and social identity. By the time political participation was introduced in the 1950s, the leaders of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* came up with Action Group (AG). The AG won most of the elective posts in predominantly Yoruba South Western Nigeria in consequent elections in the 1950s (Omobowale and Olutayo 2007, Ayoade 1985). By the virtue

of this development, it effectively swept off, at least for some time, the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC), which had hitherto held sway (Omobowale 2018a, Arifalo 1988, 1981). The position of this paper is that if the leaders of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* had not identified with Yoruba traditional symbols, their emergence into prominence in Yoruba/Nigeria political structure may not have been possible. The NCNC, which was dislodged from the West, had Yoruba political figures among its numbers (e.g. Herbert Macaulay and T.O.S. Benson). However its undoing may be borne out of its failure to identify and appeal to Yoruba traditional systems.

Since then and even till now, it seems to have come to the consciousness of politicians in Yorubaland that the road to political offices is identification with Yoruba symbols. It is not surprising therefore that rival factions in Yoruba politics now identify with the personality of 'Awolowo', a new political symbol to seek for relevance at electioneering periods. The saying '*gbogbo wa l'omo Awolowo*' (we are all children of Awolowo) has thus become a popular political language among groups, which members of the Awoist Movement rather consider as political rivals and awoism opportunists.

Finally, the call for Yoruba consciousness is usually centred on symbols, which are of great significance to Yoruba identity. Apart from the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* mentioned above, of note at this juncture as well is the Oduduwa Peoples Congress (OPC), which came into prominence in 1993 when the military government of General Ibrahim Babangida annulled the presidential election, a Yoruba man, Chief M.K.O Abiola was posed to win (Omobowale and Olutayo 2007, Ikelegbe 2001). The Congress (i.e. OPC) in its ingenuity adopted the icon of Oduduwa as its logo (symbol). Likewise, the OPC's slogan and anthem express Yoruba attachment to Oduduwa. Below are the slogan and the anthem adopted and chanted by members of Oduduwa People's Congress (OPC).

#### **Slogan**

*Oodua ni mi t'okan t'okan,  
Oodua ni mi t'okan tara*

I am a personification of Oduduwa  
body and soul

#### **Anthem**

*Ile ya, ile ya o, omo Oodua ile ya  
Ti a ko ba mo ibi a nre, nje ko ye ka pada sile  
E ja wo l'apon ti o yo, ka lo gbomi ila ka na  
Ile ya, ile ya o, omo Oodua ile ya*

Home beckons, children of Oduduwa  
Heed the call for a return  
If we do not know where we are going,  
Shouldn't we return home?  
Leave the apon soup that does not draw and go for okro  
Home beckons, children of Oduduwa, lets go home

(Akinyele, 2001: 626)

Within a short period of time, a great number of Yorubas, both young and old came to identify with the course of the OPC. The aim was achieved. Traditional sentiments bordering on the Oduduwa – Yoruba social identity had once again been called forth, successfully. Akinyele stated that up to about 2,786 branches, with about 3 million members had been opened by March 1993. Once again a socio-cultural group without political power was able to gain political relevance through the use of symbols of traditional significance (see also Nolte 2008, Pratten 2008). The discourse of the significance of symbols and political language in Yoruba political culture and socialization is of great import because of their far-reaching impact on Yoruba political structure and by extension social structure/order. The subsequent section discusses retrospectively Yoruba political structure and the transformations that have occurred through the influence of colonization.

### **A Retrospective Discourse of Yoruba Political Structure: Pre-Colonial to Post-Colonial**

As stated earlier, Yoruba people may have evolved as a distinct linguist group between 2000 BC to 1000BC. This phenomenon they could have achieved as they migrated from the Niger-Benue confluence and developed a distinguishable language from the kwa language group. Additionally, facts extracted from the *Ikedu* tradition attest to Yoruba kingship antiquity. It revealed that kingship actually predates Oduduwa generally regarded as the 'father' of the Yorubas and the first king to reign over a Yoruba town, Ile-Ife), from where other Yoruba kingdoms evolved (Atanda 1996). Thus, while Yoruba kingship probably dates to about 1000BC, Oduduwa's reign may not have commenced until about 700AD. Thus he could not have been the progenitor of the Yoruba race. Nevertheless, the unequalled prominence of Oduduwa in Yoruba history may not be unconnected with his exploits at taking over leadership from an incumbent weak king, Obatala (Lawuyi 1992). Under Oduduwa's leadership, Yoruba was transformed into a flourishing kingdom and external threats were effectively curtailed, even while spreading Yoruba (Ife) political influence to adjoining territories (Atanda 1996).

Traditional political authority is reposed in the hands of the king (Oba) and his chief (*Ijoye*). The Oba was generally regarded as the head and ruler of the group on which he reigns. He was thought to have power over life and death. And his claim to power is perceived as supernatural, divine and unquestionable. In real sense, the real power did not rest on the Oba. Rather the real power rested with his chiefs. The source of the power of chiefs was not located in the supernatural. It rested in the families they represented. Hence subjects routed their allegiance to the central authority through their respective families. This could be as a result of the fact that individual survival was through the family institution. It was the family, which provided land for production and the same family was responsible for the protection of individual rights. In short, an individual considered his/her family as the protector of his/her interests.

Thus, as individuals were socialized into their respective family cultures, they grew up to identify first with their families, then the society. The family, therefore, administered the collection of power deposited in individuals to ensure social order. Meaning therefore,, that the successful reign of a king was dependent on the willingness of families to submit their powers to him. Apart from the family institution, there were other societies, which contributed immensely to political administration through their representatives. These societies include, age-grades, guilds and so on (Adebayo 1994, Munoz 1981, Akintoye 1971).

Despite the aura of dread and awesomeness, which pervaded the king, the system did not allow autocracy. The king ruled in conjunction with his *Igbimo awon Oloye* (Council of Chiefs). He was not supposed to be tyrannical or conduct himself in such a way that would be counter-productive to the state. The chiefs who doubled as family/subjects representatives were there to

put a check on him. In order to forestall the emergence of an Oba whose reign may be inimical, part of the coronation rights included the socialization of Oba-elect on the rudiments of good governance. The Oba-elect, prior to the final rights that conferred power on him, was made to pay visits to chiefs and elders, who tutored him on how best to run his government. Perhaps, to serve as deterrence, the Oba-elect was made to view his coffin before he finally ascends the throne (Perham 1962). The council of chiefs was replicated with similar powers and functions in every Yoruba settlement with an Oba. These councils may vary in nomenclature as pointed out by Atanda (1980: 20) who stated: "...the Igbimo had specific names. They were called Oyo Mesi in Oyo, the Ilamuren in Ijebu Ode, the Ogboni in Egba towns, the Iwarefa in Ife, Ijesa, Ekiti and Ondo towns".

On any matter concerning the town, the Oba consulted the council of chiefs for deliberation and approval. He had no power to act dictatorially. The consequences of such actions may be grave. This was because, should he lose the support of his chiefs/subjects, it may signal the end of his reign through deposition and/or death. Of particular note here is the power exercised by the *Oyo Mesi*. The *Oyo Mesi* was empowered to ask a reigning Alaafin (King of Oyo) to commit suicide once he was no longer wanted. In such instances, the *Ogboni Cult*, which was supposed to protect the interest of the Alaafin, was rendered powerless (Vaughan 2003, Atanda 1980, Agiri 1975). This clearly shows the powers of the people represented in the *Oyo Mesi* rather than the *Ogboni*. While the *Oyo Mesi* represented the people, on the *Ogboni* cult was a society of selected members of the community. They did not represent the interest of the people; hence, the limitation to their powers (see Balogun 1985, Agiri 1975). Moreover, the king did not appoint his chiefs. He only approved the appointment of candidates selected by title holding families. The Oba had no power to appoint chiefs outside the traditional title holding families. However, he was allowed to appoint a number of lower chiefs out of his own discretion. Finally, the picture depicted above may present the Oba as a figurehead, at the mercy of his chiefs and their families. It is actually a testimony of the primacy of people's power in Yoruba traditional political structure.

Traditional Yoruba political structure endured until Yoruba territory came under British control in the latter years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ajayi and Akintoye 1980). The advent of the British colonialists brought about transformations in the political structure. The system of indirect rule was introduced through the enactment of Native Authority Ordinances of 1914, 1916 and 1933. These ordinances inadvertently removed political powers from the 'social' to the 'individual'. The Oba became the 'sole administrator' of his community. He became answerable only to colonial officials who ruled indirectly by giving instruction to him (i.e. the Oba). (Balogun 1985:92, see also Omobowale 2006). Furthermore, the family institution in which real political authority hitherto resided was broken down through a series of policies implemented by the colonial government. Some of the policies implemented included: the introduction of tax payable by every adult member of a household and forced labour. As individuals migrated out of, and far away from family members, working for European entrepreneurs, the strong kinship ties, which bound families together, started crumbling. Having superimposed colonial authority on traditional authority, the leadership (with real powers) that could be seen, ceased to be chiefs (family heads) as representative of the people, but colonial officials with power to impose or depose, imprison or set-free traditional leadership at will as the case was in many Yoruba towns including Ibadan, Oyo and Ilesha, just to mention a few (Falola 1981, Asiwaju 1980).

At this stage, what the colonial authority was able to achieve was the imposition of the European modern system of government. And according to Tocqueville (1986), what European modern system of government does is the usurpation of the power held by the traditional authority.



Traditional authority ensured a chain of command based on reciprocal expectations and duties between the dominated and the dominating ensuring checks and balances, thereby. The powers so usurped was eventually reposed in the Oba as the head of the native authority while leaving the locals as mere subjects with minimal powers. Hence, by the time a new set of educated elites took over political power from the colonialists they simply enacted laws, which transferred political authority to them from traditional rulers (Omobowale 2006, Gboyega 2003). Still, it was the European political system, which became greatly entrenched in the modern era. Meanwhile, traditional rulers have remained very relevant because they are closer to the people at the grassroots. The political arrangement now is such that modern political system is grafted on the traditional political system. While the traditional seek recognition from the modern, the modern depend on it for votes, maintenance of law and order; especially in rural areas and the sensitisation of the people on government policies and actions. From this interaction between the modern and the traditional, and the ruling and the ruled, there has emerged political clientelism. It remains a major factor in community development and political career. On account of this, the next section discusses the nexus between political clientelism and political career in Yorubaland.

### **Political Clientelism and Political Career in Yorubaland**

The prospect for self-governance in Nigeria by 1960 acted as a catalyst for increased political participation in Yoruba land. In the 1960s, a major feature of political development in Nigeria, in general, was the appeal to ethnic sentiments (Omobowale 2018a, Otite 2002, 1977). Just as the case was in other sections of Nigeria, the Action Group, an offshoot of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* emerged in 1950 and became the dominant political group. As for the Northern Regions and Eastern Regions, they were dominated by the Hausa/Fulani controlled Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Igbo controlled National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC). The Action Group (AG) was able to gain political control of Yorubaland not only by evoking ethnic/cultural sentiments but also by securing the support of traditional rulers, note that at his point, traditional rulers held enormous moral and political influence/power over their subjects. Apart from their highly revered primordial links to their subjects, the indirect system granted them considerable political power, which made them quite influential in their domains.

Prior to the introduction of party politics in 1950, the leaders of the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* were cognizant of the political worth of Yoruba kings and quickly co-opted them as patrons. It is not surprising then that the Action Group easily swept the South Western polls when elections were conducted in 1954 (Arifalo 1981). It could be inferred, therefore, that political clientelism actually increased in Yorubaland at a grander scale with the introduction of party politics in 1950. At this period, traditional rulers were the patrons the politicians depended on as clients. Both groups (that is, traditional rulers and politicians) had reciprocal responsibilities to themselves. Self-rule at the regional level and independence at the national level were fast approaching. Politicians needed to clinch political power while traditional rulers wanted their thrones protected. The traditional rulers had realised that if politicians unsympathetic to their course came to power, it could mean the total loss of their thrones by the use of force of state power. Hence, Yoruba kings without hesitation openly identified with the Action Group (AG). Interestingly, the clientelistic relationship scored a political victory for the Action Group. It emerged as dominant winner of elections in Yorubaland in 1954 while NCNC was largely swept off, except for a few places. From this period onward, political clientelism emerged as the mainstay of survival of political career in South-Western Nigeria. It is a statement of fact that the political influence of traditional rulers declined in South-Western Nigeria soon after the assumption of office of the new class of political elites. They were instrumental to the enactment of laws, which further curtailed the powers of

traditional rulers. Nonetheless, traditional rulers still play some political roles primarily in the rural areas.

As the new ruling class assumed offices, which conferred enormous powers on them, they too had clientelistic structures formed around them (Omobowale 2018b, Omobowale and Olutayo 2010). Their political careers are largely dependent on these structures. As patrons, they confer privileges, such as offices, material gratifications, contracts and developmental projects on individuals or/and communities loyal to them. The support and the loyalty of the clients are assured, for as long the inflow of these 'dividends' of political allegiance subsist. Otherwise, the clients withdraw their support and the political career comes to an end. The arrangement is such that it is the politicians and the parties that 'deliver the goods' that survive (Joseph 1991: 116). A vivid example was that of political developments in Iwo in 1976 Local Government elections. According to Olurode (1986), supposedly senior politician, a former commissioner in the Western Region, lost local government chairmanship elections to a politically unknown candidate because he did not facilitate government development projects at Iwo. Furthermore, Olurode noted that another wealthy politician who served in the Constituent Assembly in 1977 lost political relevance because he failed to initiate development projects of public interest in Iwo town.

For this reason, the article submits that Yoruba politics is highly clientelistic and prebendal. Both the electorate and politicians are consciously and unconsciously socialized into a political culture that plays politics on the basis of the obligations/assistance one party can render to the other. And of course, the resultant effect of this kind of relationship is the fact that it is the ruled (electorate) that gets exploited often times unknowingly. Since the patrons (the ruling class, which may include all individuals of political influence in the community) serve as 'gate-keepers', they may therefore determine a community's development. The exploitation may persist until the ruled realize their precarious state and break off from the clientelistic relationship.

## **CONCLUSION**

Yoruba political culture and socialisation date back to the gradual evolution of the Yoruba as a distinct linguistic group between 2000 BC and 1000 BC. The nature and structure of Yoruba political structure have experienced social change from a representative system through family structures with the Oba as the heads and chiefs as representatives of the people, to the modern system imposed through colonialism that situates powers in elected and appointed officials. Unfortunately, the present political culture super-imposes political elites and the people such that patronage (clientelism) stands out as a means of ensuring a trickle down of some benefits to the populace at the detriment of national development.

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