PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS AND THE SOCIO-POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF OODUA SEPARATIST MOVEMENT IN SOUTHWEST NIGERIA

ISAIAH BUKOLA OLATUNBOSUN
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
Federal University Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
+2348166084627
isaiaholatunbosun1@gmail.com

OLALEKAN AFEEZ AZEEZ
Department of Peace and Conflict Studies
Federal University Oye Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria
+2348161728516
azeezolalekanafeez@gmail.com

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Abstract

Background: *The proximity of regional settlement by members of each major tribe- Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo- is instrumental in formulating ethnic militia groups and garnering local support across the nation.*
Research Problem: *However, the period preceding the Nigerian 2023 elections was characterized by demonstrations and secessionist plots by the Yorubas over attacks across their region by Fulani herdsmen, while blaming the existence of these security threats on the impunity of the government. Despite the emergence of the Yoruba as the President, the activities of the Oodua separatist group for the Yoruba's emancipation continued to intensify. Therefore, this paper assesses the perceptions of the Yoruba citizens about the separatist movement and the socio-political implications in their region.*
Methods/Theoretical Framework*: Resting on the Frustration-Aggression theory, this paper adopted a qualitative methodology and gathered data from both primary and secondary sources through semi-structured interviews. The participants included members of the separatist group, the informal security network, and the Yoruba citizens residing in the region, who were selected through a purposive sampling technique.*
Results: *The study discovered that the reinvigoration of the Oodua group is a result of unmet expectations of the Yoruba citizens by the*

incumbent administration, which also leveraged their platform to win the 2023 elections.
Conclusion: *The study argued that the intensification of the activities of this group has weakened the security bond in the region, with the gradual incorporation of the members of the Oodua group into formal and informal security agencies.*
Key Contributions to Knowledge: *The paper contributed to knowledge by revealing theimpacts of OoduaRepublic agitations on thenational security and socio-political activities in the southwest region.*
Recommendations: *The study recommended that the government ensure a regular security orientation program for the security forces to prevent security sabotage by agitators who are secretly working against the interests of the government.*

Introduction

The struggle and strive for self-autonomy basically in the form of nationalist movements by the Nigerian ethnic groups dated back to the early days of colonialization by British officials. This epoch was characterized by the practice of ethnic politics, which resulted in a series of uprisings against the colonial government (Ajala, 2009). The event was made possible by the shared cultural consciousness and identity of the people and the proximity of settlement by each group. After gaining independence from the British in 1960, the country now had to contest with teeming ethnic tensions and assertion of superiority over each other as ostensibly engineered by the leaders of each ethnic nationality. Apart from the defective amalgamation of incongruent units in 1914, the crisis that followed was popularly regarded by scholars as the fruit of the colonial masters in politically and culturally favoring one group over others (Dibua, 2005; Lenshie& Johnson, 2012; Paul, Alih& Eri, 2014, Perpetuai et. al, 2021). Aminu (2022) noted that the period preceding the independence of Nigeria witnessed the British attempt to pit the Yoruba against the Hausa, who were seen as the British favorites; thus, the Hausa were majorly recruited in the military and were handed over the political authority.

The ethnically polarizing situation of the country has become intractable and entrenched in the polity, which culminated in botched attempts at integration and even development across all regions. The perpetuation and intensification of ethnic rivalry and the quest for separatism have been associated with several factors, which are not limited to fear of domination, favoritism, political segregation, and ethnic marginalization by the government of a particular group (Perpetuai et. al, 2021). In the post-independence geopolitical regionalization of Nigeria, for instance, the southeast has been the only region created with five states, while other regions have six states, except the Northwest, which has seven. However, the claim that the distribution of states was faulted over the size of the region has been met vigorously with several violent agitations by the Igbo secessionist movement dubbed Indigenous People of Biafra (Perpetuai et al, 2021). These agitations to press home the creation of an additional state in the region have been a part of why the dreadful group has turned into a serious threat to the government and other ethnic nationalities in the country.

Similarly, the agitation for self-determination by the Yorubas in the southwest region is not a nascent movement in the history of the Yoruba people. The movements of this kind can be drawn from the events of the 1950s when the Yoruba spearheaded the motion for self-government. Nonetheless, the pronouncement of Lagos as no man's land by the Eastern region's house representatives invoked a propensity for secession among the Yoruba at the 1953 conference, whereby the Yoruba contingents requested that Lagos be administered on the agreements as a Yoruba town (Adesanya, 2023a). The resumption of the Yoruba Action Group at the 1954 confab to propose enactment of policies for the incorporation of unilateral secession in the constitution was strongly countered by the Eastern group of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) headed by Nnamdi Azikiwe who understood the right to unilateral separation as illegitimate, suicidal and a call to disorderliness (Tamuno, 1970; Alumona et al., 2019; Adesanya, 2023a). The quest for the Yoruba nation resurged with a violent outbreak after 1960 accompanying the announcement of the state of emergency and the imposition of an illegal government in the region by the central authority during the western region election crisis in 1965. (Tamuno, 1970; Harnischfege, 2019). The events that followed the government annulment of the supposedly free and fair election won by a Yoruba business mogul-Chief MKO Abiola- on June 12, 1993, sparked further press for the breakaway of the Yoruba. The situation generated resentful feelings towards the military regime and threatened unity and peaceful co-existence in Nigeria (Duruji, 2012). The annulment however saw the creation of the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) by Dr Fredrick Fasheun who premised the objectives of the ethnic militias group on the agitation for the interests of the Yoruba citizens as well as ensuring justice. From time immemorial, the agitation by the Yorubas can be likened to a tool of political bargaining in the Nigeria federation to readjust the power and resource allocation disparity. To date, the clamor for self-autonomy by the Yorubas is invariably carried out irregularly, and there have not been overt agitations to that effect, rather than using peaceful conduct and other legal actions (Adesanya, 2023b).

However, the recent developments across the southwest states over the violent activities of the agitators of the Oodua separatist movement have raised a series of questions in the minds of concerned individuals and as well question the validation of the group among the Yoruba citizens. This is also evident from the public declaration of lack of support by the other Yoruba groups for the attempted efforts by the supposed agitators of the Oduduwa republic to invade the Oyo state secretariat in Ibadan capital city on the 13 of April, 2024. Prof. Banji Akintoye, the founder of one the Yoruba groups, (*Ilana Omo Oduduwa*) posited through his General Secretary on the said event:

These criminal elements are not known to us and, as such, are not part of any genuine agitating groups demanding freedom for the Yoruba people. We thank God that law enforcement agencies were able to handle them. I am speaking on behalf of the struggle for the Yoruba Nation. There is no need for us to go violent. We are not part of the violence that anyone is propagating (Premium Times, 2024)

Nonetheless, the period preceding the 2023 general elections witnessed several attacks on the livelihood of the Yoruba farmers and highway travelers in the southwest during the Hausa/Fulani government. As compounded by the inability of President Buhari to bring the criminals to book, which was faulted over his ethnic favoritism, this event gave a dignifying posture to the hues and cries of the Yoruba citizens to capture the presidential seat. It was during this period that one of the leaders,

Sunday Igboho, came out in the public space to advance the cause of the movement after his release from detention in the Benin Republic. However, the emergence of the Yoruba candidate- Bola Ahmed Tinubu- as the president in the elections has been a reflection by the Yorubas on the questions for the basis for the reinvigoration of the agitation by the Oduduwa republic agitators. In addition, there has also been the fair placement of Yoruba citizens across the segments of the country which will serve as an avenue to effect the desired change in the polity.

Although, there has been an avalanche of literature on the separatist movement in Nigeria, especially on the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (see Nwefuru, 2010;Alumona et al., 2019; Ndukwe et al., 2019; Abada, et al., 2020; Ogunobo, 2022; Adesanya, 2023; Saidu, 2023; Ojo, 2023; Celestine et al., 2023), little attention is paid specifically to Oodua secessionist movement in the southwest. This may be partly because of the more peaceful approach adopted by the Yoruba agitators compared to the IPOB. Consequent to the recent trends and patterns in their approach, some scholars have now cultivated an interest in the subject. For instance, Aminu (2022) investigated the ideological discourse analysis of Oduduwa secessionist online narratives, while Adesanya (2023) talked about the Yoruba nation and the clamor for restructuring relying on secondary data. In the meantime, Oluyemi (2022) also examined the consequences of the government militarization of the Yoruba separatist movement. His findings reveal a significant prospect of the government militarizing the movement with the outburst of mass violence as a potential outcome. Moreover, Akano (2024) conducted similar research in another discipline to assess the online discourse of the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement in Nigeria.

Despite these scholarly attempts, the Oduduwa nation secessionist movement still seems to be insufficiently explored and scantily researched, particularly in Peace and Conflict Studies. Unlike what previous studies did not comprehensively do, this study, therefore, brings to the fore the perceptions of the Oodua secessionist movement among the Yoruba citizens whose interests the group seeks to protect. It also investigates the impacts of Oodua republic agitations on the socio-political activities in the southwest region.

Conceptual Clarification

Oodua

The term "Oòdua" is a contraction of "Oduduwa" and both are used interchangeably. It first became evident as one of the divinities of the Yoruba theogony. The Yoruba historical account reveals that Oduduwa means "the essence of behavior" (Odu-ti-o-da-Iwa) or "the reservoir of culture or manners" (Odu-ti-o-du-iwa) (Adedoyin, 2013). However, Omotosho (2013) added to it by defining each morpheme and giving another interpretation to the overall meaning. According to him, "Odu"denotes strongly guarded secrecy in Yoruba, while "DA" literally implies to create and, lastly,"IWA" indicates existence. Thus, the overall meaning ofOduduwais the body of secrecy or power that creates existence (Omotosho, 2013).Similarly, Oduduwa was a great personality and the king who founded the city of Ile-Ife, which is the cradle of the Yoruba race. Oduduwa is the originator of Yoruba idealism and culture (Johnson, 1921). He sent his offspring on the ontological expeditions to establish other cities and towns while admonishing them to actualize the ability to think critically (Adedoyin, 2013). These cities are towns are what expanded and became the Yoruba southwest of Nigeria.

The Concept of Separatism

The term "separatism" is coined from the Latin word "separatus" which connotes "divided", "separated". Its first adoption was exclusively for the processes taking place in religious and social life (Mosora, 2022).Ojo (2022) described separatism as the desire to break away from the existing parent state to gain autonomy. It means a group of people laying claim on a particular geographical territory.In other words, separatism is commonly associated with a form of agitation by a distinctive political entity within a specific country for a decentralization of authority from the central government. It is carried out by a subnational unit in order to achieve a greater autonomy in certain activities (Chukwurah, 2022).Angya (2023) viewed separatist movement as an organized group of people who feel uncomfortable co-existing with the large association and experience more sense of belonging, liberty, and freedom when in a small group with very close identity.However,whether regarded as separatist or autonomist associations, the methods employed by these groups vary from amicable, non-violence approach to violent and armed struggle tactics (2017).When separatism involves countries, it is also perceived as secession. Itoccurs often, though not always, for reasons that are religious, ethnic, gender-based, or racial.Nevertheless, political and economic circumstances are the primarymotivating factor proliferating separatist movements (Matsumoto, 2019).Hence, separatism could be referred to as an organized movement by an undauntedgroup of people with similarideologywhose primary aim is to evictthe existing larger unit and have an absolute control over their apportioned territory using any achievable means.

The Concept of Public perception

Perception is a mental activity of identifying and interpreting perceptual information, facilitating our recognition of important objects and events (Hagedorn, Blanch& Harwood, 2011).Hoffman et al. (2015) opined that our perceptions of space-time and objects areaffected by natural preference to conceal the truth and influence adaptive behaviors. Perceptions encompasses our awareness (or unawareness) and discernment, and involves a component of freewill and action. That is to say, every individual chooses to "see" things in specific ways, and the socio-cultural determinants of those preferences vary with time and location(Dowler et al., 2006).Meanwhile, public perception is simply the form of insightelicited from a public opinion survey.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on the Frustration-Aggression theory.

The theory is propounded by Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939). It has been widely used and accepted in Social Sciences and other fields to explain human behaviors and the cause of violent events in the society. The theory was originally developed in the Psychology discipline and has been remolded over time by authors to suit appropriate human conditions. According to the proponents of Frustration-Aggression, the theory implies that frustration is the precursor to aggression, and contrariwise, aggression leads to frustration. In describing human (inter)actions, it presupposes that individuals' frustrated states are inclinations for their aggressive behaviors in society. The theory also dictates that frustration transcends a mere emotional experience but is "an interference with the occurrence of an instigated goal-response." (Dollard et al., 1939, p. 7).

The surge of separatist movements in Nigeria across regions aptly validates the assumption of the proponents of this theory. Precisely, the movement for the Oodua nation republic is believed to be a response of the frustrated Yoruba group, who presumably champions the cause of liberating their ethnic nationalities. The frustrating conditions depict the fragile peace and the prevalence of security threats across the states of the federation. The continued co-existence with the nation is perceived as a further frustration of the attainment of their goals and their rights to self-determination, which may invite further aggressive responses. Scholars of this school of thought have gone further to argue that the power relations between the aggressors and the target is a deterministic factor (Cohen,1955; Harris, 1974). They added that the available resources at the disposal of the individuals would determine the intensity of their aggressive tendencies to frustrating events. This proposition was justified by the level of material support gained by the Biafra separatist movement in 1967 and how the event metamorphosed into a civil war.

Nevertheless, scholars have faulted the theory over its lack of distinction in explaining how frustration precipitates aggression and vice versa (Grossarth-Maticek, Eysenck, & Vetter, 1989; Seligman, 1975; Morlan, 1949). Scholars who contend argue that aggression may not necessarily be a response to some frustrating occurrences. That is, individuals may ordinarily assume aggressive behaviors as a reaction to the perceived strictness of standardized norms. It is posited that individuals may be aggressive for mere catharsis, which may not be as a result of their frustrating experiences. The contenders of the theory further argued that there ought to be justifications for aggressive responses towards frustrated assumed events. This corroborates the question about the justifiability of the reinvigoration of the agitation for the Oodua separatist movement despite the emergence of the Yoruba as the president and their occupation of several political positions. This is not the case with IPOB separatist groups whose agitations are based on the political marginalization (Abada, 2020).

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative methodology and ethnographic design. This qualitative approach facilitates the detailed description of respondents' feelings, views, and experiences; and interprets the meanings of their actions (Denzin, 1989). Data were collected from mainly primary sources through semi-structured interviews of ten study participants. The participants were randomly and purposively selected from the study population. The population includes the Yoruba people who reside in Ibadan, Nigeria. The participants were chosen from Ibadan being the most populous and considered the heart of the Yoruba land. It also embodies the settlement of other ethnic groups in the region. Of the ten respondents, three members were Okada riders, one of whom was a Political Science graduate, and the remaining two of the three identified as ardent members of the movement for the Oodua nation republic. Three participants were members of the southwestern informal security outfit. One participant was a retired school principal and history teacher in a government school. He was chosen for his vast knowledge of the subject and his ability to synthesize the chronological events that characterized the operations of the Oodua nation agitation until the moment. This participant together with another respondent, who was a recent graduate, volunteered to grant online interviews by telephone conversation because of their physical unavailability. Of course, the researcher took cognizant of the challenges associated with online interviews, such as distraction and network failure. To also capture emotional reactions accompanying their views, the researcher video-called them

while on recording and also jotted some responses. The researcher allotted 25 minutes to each study participant. However, the remaining two respondents were traders from one of the major markets in Ibadan. One of these middle-aged traders identified as the wife of a retired journalist to affirm her currency about the subject matter. Before the interviews, the researcher educated the participants on the nature and the objectives of the study. For the integrity of the data sourced, the consent of the participants was sought. They were told of the strict protection of their anonymity and the confidentiality of the information given because of the sensitivity of the research. The process of data gathering was between April and May 2024. The information obtained in both Yoruba and English languages was audio-recorded and jotted down in the case of a technical failure. The researcher first translated the data obtained in the Yoruba language into English and, thereafter, transcribed, arranged, and coded the responses to meet the study objectives. The findings were analyzed thematically.

Results and Discussion

The section contains the thematic analysis and discussion of findings.

Insiders' Views of the Yoruba Nation Republic and the Emergence of Bola Ahmed Tinubu as Yoruba President

It is appalling that the ostentatious practices of bad governance by the Nigerian political leaders have made the hapless and helpless citizens undersell themselves and be used by state and non-state actors to perpetrate evils against the government and the communities. This provides for justifications for secessionist movements across the country. The citizens have perceived various government bodies as exploiters with little or no regard for their ethnic membership. With the incessant rise of these separatist movements and their active acceptance by the masses, it is apparent that the country may become fragmented and relapse into serious chaotic conditions. As evident from the study, while a very few study participants were against or were double-sided, the majority expressed their full support for the Yoruba nation republic. The participants argued that they would be hell-bent on making their demands known to the world with no retreat despite having a Yoruba person as the president. The people felt that the enactment and implementation of unfavorable policies by the incumbent administration and its incorporation of qualified but incompetent people in administrative capacities have worsened their conditions. However, it was reported that the agitations have gained momentum and new dimensions in recent times with the belief that the president, being a Yoruba, would succumb and grant the request for separation. This is confirmed by a study participant who kicked against the movement. According to her:

> The emergence of President Tinubu had a significant impact on the agitation for the Yoruba nation because the agitators felt that because they had Yoruba as the President, the Yoruba President may want to get influenced and succumb to pressure. Do you know that for the past so many years, the agitators have not been so intense like this? They feel perhaps Tinubu will consider them. Lo and behold! *Baba Ojuyobo*, I am not sure he is ready to allow them. I feel that they should not even agitate again since we have Yoruba as our President, but the agitators feel that President Tinubu as a Yoruba President will not be there forever. They know the division is forever. Being the President is just 4-8 years maximum!

The participant added that the movement is sponsored by some foreign bodies and saboteurs of government policies who were also spreading propaganda during Buhari's regime to discredit his administration. She

opined that the sponsors have been engaging in subversive events in a bid to make their names known even when they are fully aware that their goals are unattainable in the long run. It is believed that the agitators championing the cause have only been fighting for their selfish interests to capture and subjugate their people, which are not for the collective interests of the Yoruba descent. This is corroborated by a study participant who went on to tell the researcher that the assumption of the presidential position by the Yoruba has beckoned a sign of relief. From the inferences, it can be argued that Buhari's administration was bastardized by his primordial loyalty to his ethnic group as reflected in the discrepancies in his allocation of ministerial appointments and sheer disregard for federal character. Furthermore, the Yoruba group had accused his government of impunity by granting unnecessary amnesty to serial criminals as a result of their ethnic sameness. This was why a study participant vehemently asserted as follows:

For me, I do not think they have the right cause during this administration, but their agitation could be justified during the previous administration. Buhari appointed more ministers from the North and had very few Yorubas in his cabinet. There were incessant kidnappings and attacks during Buhari's administration because those perpetrators, who were Hausas/Fulanis, had the belief that when the case got to Abuja, they would be released by their Fulani brothers. Then, the Yorubas had tenable reasons to secede from the government... There was nothing like repentant kidnappers in Yorubas, but there was the policy of pardoning "repentant" Fulani criminals. Aside from that, tagging them as being repentant insurgents and terrorists, the government chose to send those criminals to school abroad, funded them, and all without minding the extent of damage invoked on the victims. We started hearing "repentant Boko Haram," "repentant bandits," etc.,and these people came back to society to kill again. Then, the AfenifereYorubas said, No! We can't continue like this.

In support of the foregoing revelation, the study conducted by Abada et al. (2020) and Perpetua et al. (2021) found that the imbalance in the allocation of government key political positions and resources has created a sharp divide among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The study also implies that there has been relative peace and a drastic reduction of the heinous practices by the Fulani herdsmen in southwest Nigeria with the emergence of President Tinubu. Sardonically, the study discovered that the allotments of political positions by the incumbent administration leaned towards the southern region. This poses a great threat to the principles of federalism in Nigeria while also being a replica of the previous government, which was faulted over acute tribalism. However, a non-adherent of the separatist movement played down the secession plots as the way forward to Nigerian problems by recounting the ordeal and uneasy peace that accompanied the breakaway of South Sudan in 2011. Although it is understood that the government will be much nearer to the people and be held more accountable, the breakaway of Yoruba from Nigeria may also witness severe internal uprisings of units over their dialectical dissimilarities. It is envisaged that the situation for the Yorubas post-separation could be a similar one with the current Yoruba political leaders reemerging as new leaders of the new nation, thus advancing their corrupt practices. However, it was asserted that the intensification of the secessionist movement in other parts of Nigeria has been a motivation for the Yorubas to advance their cause to break away from the country.

In addition, the over-centralization of power in the federal capital, which weakens the decision-making process at state levels has encouraged the rise of secessionist movement

in Yoruba land. It was argued that the humongous size of the country and its composition of over 250 ethnic groups has made the Yoruba nation agitators feel cheated and afraid of further exploitation while considering their capacities to develop as a sovereign country. The group also opined that, upon victory, they are confident of the impending material and human support to be received from the middle belt states in the region which will hence be incorporated into the new Yoruba republic. Citing numerous unique achievements before 1960, a study participant believed that it was the Nigerian independence constitution that crippled the progressive movements of the Yoruba leaders which exacerbated the irrecoverable damage incurred by the 1914 amalgamation. In tandem, Awofeso (2017) argued that historical grievances, a sense of marginalization, economic challenges, security concerns, and discontent with the present political system are the main drivers of the agitation for Biafra and Yoruba self-determination. In the words of a study participant:

We knew where we were before independence. Yoruba was leading in the whole of Africa as evident in our numerous achievements. We were the first. We were the only ones having free education in Africa. Then, the various achievements; the Liberty Stadium. Yoruba had the first television in the whole of Africa, even when France had no television. However, since independence, everything has become centralized we have not been achieving any progress since then. So, if we are on our own we will catch up with so-called developed countries. So, that is why our stay with Nigeria is not making any meaningful impact on the part of Yorubas. Our requests will be granted in the long run. We are not the first to request a separate nation.

This suggests that the ideology beneath governing a unit of people with a similar ancestral and historical background may not be the same as being led together in a country characterized by diverse tribes. It can also be deduced that the accomplishments of an ethnic group in a heterogenous country are dubbed as a collective undertaking of the whole nation and may not be used to motivate other ethnic nationalities. This discourages group members from showcasing their potential and exploring initiatives that could benefit the whole country. It is said that the creation of the Yoruba Republic would give proper recognition and leeway to citizens to develop a sense of belonging and ownership while reaching the optimum of their potential. This was the argument of the agitators who postulated that the new nation would be positioned to hold their leaders more accountable by shared cultural attributes and relatedness. However,the idea that the realization of Oodua nation would be beneficial was sharply contrasted by Nwakpa's (2022) argument that there had been internal struggles for dominance and controlamong the Yoruba people before amalgamation. As a result, the Oodua nation would probably pose more issues than the current federal structure (Nwakpa, 2022).

When asked about their movement in comparison to others, they argued that even if their operations had not been well-pronounced, there could never be a proscription of Yoruba nation agitation, which had been in existence before the Nigeria Fourth Republic. That is, the government can only silence them but can never eliminate them. The agitators have perceived themselves as freedom fighters for the Yoruba stock who had been under the improper hands of those who pursue their interests over the collective interests of their people. According to the study, the political objectives of any Yoruba president, who may be on the prowl for the country's overall resources and to balance support from every ethnic segment to stay long in power, compromise their loyalty to grant the agitators' request. The political aspirants have

also been accused of secretly riding on the platforms of ethnic agitations to win the interests of their ethnic groups, which also dated back to the 1959 general elections. This makes them reward loyal members of their secessionist movement after capturing political power with political appointments. This was also cited as one of the frustrating challenges that inhibited the realization of the Yoruba nation over time. To buttress this, a study participant captured, "*The reason Tinubu will not support the Yoruba agitators is because he is seeking political support from all the tribes and for his second tenure."* He continued, *"So, we believe Tinubu will not want to jeopardize the agreement he has with the North and others...*" Put differently, another participant succinctly stated as quoted below:

In fact, Yorubas massively influenced themselves to support their Yoruba candidate reminding themselves that the last time we had a Yoruba president was 1999 to 2007. There were chanting "*Yoruba ronu o*" Which means Yorubas must think. The emergence of Tinubu has reduced the clamor for separation until what happened recently in Ibadan to take over the state secretariat…

The foregoing stipulates that the weariness of the agitators of the Yoruba nation over the inaction of the president to rationalize their movement after being given mandates culminated in the hijacking of the Ibadan city secretariat. This is because Ibadan is considered the most populous, civilized Yoruba city and an ancient seat of influential power of Yoruba descent, even during colonization. This portends that when the agitators are successful in invading the city, they have captured the heart of the Yoruba settlements. The study participants, who expressed their regrets over lending their voices through voting for President Tinubu, opined that they had lost faith in one Nigeria since their son could rule the nation in such disbelief.

Modes of Membership Recruitment

The fact that the activities of the Yoruba nation agitators have been conducted in nonviolent ways has motivated a good number of citizens to join the movement. Nonetheless, the agitators have not been persistent in their demands. It was gathered that the agitators only come out when they feel affected or cheated as well as when government policies are not going in their favor. That could account for the reason their movement is not very evident for steep media attentions and scholarly debates. The current economic hardship and the public outcry to end bad governance have been explored by the supporters to persuade and convince their targets that the new nation will yield the desired results. It is also to note that the Yoruba republic is an ideological and tribalistic movement that can be easily propagated and subscribed to by the citizens weary of the Nigerian co-existence. However, as argued by the proponents of constructivism, the recruiters of the ethnic-based movement have gained followers through the use of financial resources and promises of key positions to ardent members in the future. The current wave of globalization and media influence has been perceived as a potent tool that has been copiously employed by the agitators to evangelize for the realization of the Yoruba nation. Through the participant observation, many posters of the separatist movement were pasted on the walls of some houses in some local villages and rural areas by the agitators to influence local people. Perusing the flyers, several promissory benefits were enlisted to shape the ideology at the grassroots towards believing the cause. In the words of a respondent:

Let us look at Facebook, Twitter now X, and so on, we have members across all these platforms. Social media is very easy to advocate for their cause. We get people from the diaspora and all who subscribe to our

ideology. We talk to people in a beer parlor, in their respective villages, at restaurants, and all. People talk about it openly. It is not hidden. Some people are members from afar.

Adopting both traditional and contemporary media outlets, it is estimated that when these kinds of news are propagated during a volatile government administration, the country could be on the verge of witnessing a subversive movement as evident in southeast Nigeria.

Socio-political Implications of the Oodua Secessionist Movement in Southwest Nigeria

Despite its low intensity in operation, the Oodua movement has brought some notable issues on the political, social, economic, and security aspects of people in the region and the country as a whole. Based on the findings, these are expounded below:

The Political Implication*:* The fear of the unknown about the separatist movement has reduced the active political participation of citizens at the grassroots. People are wary of exercising their civic duties and political rights. It was gathered that this happened during the local government election held on April 28 in Oyo state. The election officials in Ibadan recorded an unprecedented low turn-up of electorates which was associated with the paranoia of the citizens about a surprise attack by the agitators. In the words of a respondent, "*People were scared to come out. We have agitators everywhere. The government that cannot protect itself,"* he continued*, "is that the government that will protect the masses? Go out at your perils!"* However, this fact could be contested since several reasons characterize political apathy in the Nigerian local government elections. However, with the intensity of the activities of the separatist movement, it is projected that the emergence of another administration which may not be Yoruba would pit the new government against the Yorubas. Hence, the new government either Hausa or Igbo may look at the Yorubas with such indelible records of secessionist movement, even though unsuccessful, and may enact unfavorable policies towards the Yorubas. The persistent clamor for separation by the Yorubas could also result in the sidelining of Yoruba leaders from key political positions by the new government over the fear that the appointees may use political means to mobilize resources to advance their cause. This has exemplified the position of the Igbos in Nigerian central politics over their age-long bellicose move to secede from the nation ever since their failed attempt in 1967 and 1970.

***The Security Implication*:** There have been emerging security tensions arising from the propagation of the Oodua nation republic. The agitation has now started weakening the security system in the southwest because people in security agencies and the agitators share bonds. These agitators have members across both formal and informal security agencies. For instance, there are Amotekun (southwestern informal security network outfit) members who identified as agitators. There are Agbekoya and Vigilante members who also believe in the Yoruba Republic. As time goes on, these people may start influencing the rest of them who are Yorubas to the movement with persuasive words of concern. As a result, they may start losing trust in the government and join the movement. This will affect the zeal and passion for security in the land as cemented by the ostentatious display of corruption by Nigerian political leaders and the issue of bad governance. Likewise, Yussuf et. al. (2025) supported the study that secessionist movement has posed a great security risk to the entire nation with the militarized response by the government, whichfurther perpetuates cycle of unrest.A study participant argued:

Let us take Amotekun for instance, if they are appointing the new head of Amotekun

corps, who is a believer of the Yoruba republic, he may compromise and sell the state off for his cause. That is a big security risk. The government may think they are appointing a Yoruba man, but the government does not know he is against them. He will prioritize his movement over the country's.

This kind of weak security system was also the case in Niger Republic and Mali when the military supported the civilians in ousting their civilian government. A respondent who is a member of the Oodua Republic captured:

…if they do not address these things, we are just postponing the days of violence. It is imminent. There will be a spread of fear among the people of other tribes in our land. Take what happened in Delta as a case when the civilians started targeting the military personnel. They waylaid them. See that one. That was why they arrested their traditional rulers… The security forces will later have no option but to support the movement when they are tired.

In addition, the inferences revealed that there could be fragmentation of the movement for the Oodua Republic. This will subdue the core objectives of the group and lead to pejorative framing of the Yoruba agitation. It will also endanger the lives and properties of citizens in the region while creating an unsafe picture of the areas and scare away foreign investors. It was asserted that the southwest security situation may be the same as what is obtainable in the southeast which succeeded the apprehension of Nnamdi Kanu- the leader of the Igbo separatist group. Factions are springing out which have incurred serious troubles in the land with evidence from individuals at home and abroad declaring themselves as leaders of the movement. A good example is Simon Ekpa who has come out in public to pronounce himself as the prime minister of the self-acclaimed Republic of Biafra in the east.

***The Economic Implication*:** The findings depict that the Oodua movement has started straining the economic relation between the Yorubas who believe in the ideology and the other tribes in the southwest. This was said to be more prominent during the Buhari's administration which was plagued by recurring attacks against the Yoruba farmers and travelers. The movement intensified adversarial dealings and several threats of quit notices were issued to other tribes who are for business activities in Yorubaland. One of the instances was the issuance of open threats to Hausas by the Yoruba nation poster boy- Sunday Igboho- during the previous government. It was noted that the gradual acceptance of the movement among the Yoruba citizens has affected business patronage between the Yorubas and other tribes, especially those who trade perishable commodities. Engineered by the agitators, this lack of trust had also been influenced by the rumors spread among the Yorubas in some localities that there might be some poisonous contents in the goods imported from other regions. This will not only affect the economic growth and the food security in the southwest but across the country. In tandem, Uvere and Ovie(2025) addedthat,by causing restricted movement across borders and weakening efforts to create integrated regional market, separatist movement not only affects internal economic development but also frustratesthe Nigerian economic relation with other members of the Economic of the West African States (ECOWAS).Onwude (2025) and Adesanya (2023) also supportedthat separatist movements have undermined economic opportunities and led to a pervasive economic instability, which requires amassive intervention to facilitate the recovery and rebuilding process.

***The Policy Implication*:** The reports also revealed that the operation of the Oodua nation

may be used as a trade-off to bargain political power by the political leaders. This is consistent with the claim of the respondents that many of the key agitators of the Yoruba nation are in the political affairs of the state. It can be argued that these types of leaders can sabotage or influence government policies to reflect their surreptitious agendas. In the meantime, they use public funds and resources to sustain their tribalistic cause to the detriment of the state. In corroboration, a respondent puts it differently:

Just like how Muslim New Year was declared a public holiday in Oyo state but not in other states when SeyiMakinde was coming in as the Governor, it was one of the criteria the Muslim community gave him to get their support. They told him if he wanted their votes, he must declare all their festivals as holidays in Oyo state. By declaring those holidays, it will affect the economy of the land in some ways. People will not go to work on those days and it will cause a reduction in income generation. These decisions are selfish.

The Complexity of the Way Forward

There have been numerous suggestions on the steps to be followed by the agitators to accomplish their objectives of lawfully seceding from the nation which have been considered arduous and unrealistic. The use of violent means may bring about wanton violation of human rights on both sides and may not yield the desired results as in the case of the Nigeria civil war and other low-level internal uprisings that accompanied the event. It was implied that the leaders of the movements must be persistently writing to the international bodies with actionable evidence to register their displeasure about the nature of their leadership and the throes of co-existence in Nigeria. This can be exemplified by the several attempts by one of the Yoruba nation's key leaders- BabayoAfenifere- during the Buhari regime. He and the rest filed a case against the federal government to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) over the perceived culture of impunity and tribalistic leadership of President Buhari. Considering the degree of elitism and educational attainment of some members of the secessionist struggle, this is encouraged for them not to jeopardize the peace of the people they claim to protect and fight for. However, this legal means of pressing their demands have been met with the disillusionment of agitators. That is, it is believed those who they are reporting to were the ones who had bestowed the legacy of what has become of Nigeria today. It was argued that this may prevent the treatment of their complaints because of the ties between the Nigerian government and them. The intricacy has also been noted that the support of the international bodies to the Yoruba agitators may constitute a threat to the oil supplies and other economic transactions by the Nigerian government. Oluyemi (2022) corroborated that the wide-ranging implications of secession in regional and global environments could hamper the support of advanced states, and continental and international organizations to aid separatist movements in Nigeria and any other African states. Answering a similar question, a respondent shared:

Those white folks have a hand in what is going on in our country. They support our government. They may not want to process the complaints. If they do, it may affect their supply of natural resources from us. Our separation will not benefit those white people we are reporting to. They know if we separate, it will be difficult for them to exploit each region of their mineral resources individually. That is, they will not act on our proposals through legal means. America will tell you they do not have crude oil, but the crude oil they will use for the next 200 years is secured. How do they do that? Imagine! You should know they have taken a large quantity of our

oils from our leaders for reserve. How will they not support our leaders that way?

Another study participant buttressed the preceding:

If the Yoruba nation agitators go through this process of paperwork, that means they will be persistent with cogent reasons and evidence every time, which I know may not be treated in the long run. It is those who are inflicting pain on us that also can deliver us from this o. It may take long, like generations upon generations before those plans will materialize. But who can continue to wait for the future that is not promised or guaranteed?

It can be opined that the agitators had lost confidence in the legal procedure to call the attention of the international community to intervene in the issues of bad governance in Nigeria. These have been cited during a series of demonstrations against the federal government that have resulted in violation of citizens' human rights despite wide international media coverage. Learning from the historical antecedents of major countries of the world has given the agitators resolve and hope that their demands would be actualized in no distant time. With a well-founded assurance, a retired school principal who staunchly believed in the movement said:

Let me tell you many of these advanced countries were once under the same umbrella, but after some years of pressure, then, many of them were granted their independence. Look at the Republic of Ireland; it was under the Great Britain before. Now, it has become an entity on its own. Look at the former USSR, which split into many countries of today. Ours is not an exception. I believe we will be granted later with much pressure. There is a clause under the United Nations that countries speaking for their autonomy can be given and that is what Professor Adebanji Akintoye, a professor of history, is championing. He knows the nitty-gritty of how to grow about this process. I believe Yoruba would be granted their nation one day.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The study examined the perceptions of the Yoruba citizens of Nigeria about the agitation for the Yoruba nation republic and the socio-political and security implications of the movement. The Yorubas believed that the actualization of the movement would be for their betterment and claim their lost values in the international sphere and economic parlance. Despite the emergence of the Yoruba president, they have been vigorously and clandestinely working to part ways with the nation with the unabated practices in the Nigerian polity. Their lack of persistence in aggregating internal views and pressing for their demands have made them be perceived as docile and unserious. The perceived complexity of the non-violent process in hammering and hewing for secession in Nigeria has titillated the supporters of the movement to result in non-amicable ways and this can only result in more devasting events. Nonetheless, the activities of the Yoruba agitators have impaired the economic uprightness of the region and are engendering inter-tribal tensions in the region. Aside from that, there is a growing security concern that stems from the composition of the federally-owned security apparatus of the agitators which may use that avenue to unleash troubles in the meantime. The Yoruba agitators are very silent and logical in infiltrating core areas of Nigerian leadership and are as a result influencing the policies in their favor. This may facilitate their secessionist movement in the future with their wide assumption of key positions and understanding of all the areas of government in Nigeria even when things are not going in their way. To this end, every region is secretly building up in the case that a violent separatist agitation breaks out in the future which may result in a collapse of human

and material infrastructure that those regions intend to even inherit post-separation.

Based on these important revelations, the following recommendations are made for the Nigerian government, policymakers, and other interested stakeholders:

- It is recommended that the government provide for impactful structure to stimulate dialogue between the government and the Yoruba traditional institutions. This avenue will help them to discuss the issues of the separatist movement and how they can be addressed.
- The government must not underestimate the capacity and influence of Yoruba nation agitators simply because their operations are at a low level. Therefore, the government must ensure that there is a regular security orientation program for both the informal and formal security forces in the country. This is to prevent security sabotage at all levels by the agitators who are secretly working against the interest of the government.
- Considering the tensions across the nation, the government must curtail the formation of regional-based security forces across the country. This may serve as a build for civil war.
- The government must always ensure the due recognition of the unique attributes and achievements of each ethnic group to bolster their contribution to the country without the feeling of being cheated.
- The political leaders must desist from manipulating their ethnic structure to advocate their political cause. They must also refrain from making unrealistic promises to the people of their ethnic group just to win their support at the polls.

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Conflict of Interest

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