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## Yoruba Nationalist Groups and the Media: A Critical Discourse Analysis

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### **Abstract:**

*This study examines the struggle for better political deal for the Yoruba nation in the Nigerian commonwealth. It focuses on the use of the media by Yoruba nationalist groups. The objectives are to identify the Yoruba nationalist groups, their goals, leaders as well as their interaction with one another. Using the framework of the Agenda setting and Uses and Gratifications theory, the paper examines how the nationalist groups set the agenda for the media and how they use the media to achieve gratify their needs. The paper critically examines the creation and composition of the various Yoruba nationalist groups as well as their interactions with one another. Findings from the study show that the nationalist groups are disjointed in their pursuits. The study recommends greater consultation of the people and the incorporation of communication policy experts from the Yoruba nation for the development and implementation of a comprehensive communication policy for the Yoruba nation.*

**Keywords:** Nationalism, communication policy, development, uses and gratification

### **1. Introduction**

Power is a complex and polemic concept construct with the potential to divide and unite people in equal proportion. It possesses inherent opportunities and threats to the advancement of mankind. The direction of output depends on the person wielding the power. The recognition of the limitless opportunities and dangers inherent in power is arguably universal and this recognition gives birth to the man's desire to hold the levers of power either directly or indirectly through one of its own kind.

Man generally assumes that the custodian of power would naturally exercise it in favour of members of his/her social, cultural, religious, professional and ethnic group. This assumption is widespread in Nigeria, thus the credit for the achievements and the blame for the failures of the country are claimed and rejected across ethnic lines. The Yoruba nation revels in its legendary educational advancement but blames the Hausa/Fulani-dominated North for stunting the growth and development of the Yoruba nation through the control of federal power (by the Northern oligarchs). They feel it is an aberration for "semi-literate nomads" to lead a country that is blessed with a plethora of very educated, highly sophisticated and widely travelled individuals. Therefore, greater political power should be given to them.

The Hausa/Fulani nation on its own part takes pride in the efforts and accomplishments of their ancestors especially in the area of Islamic education. They however, blame the South generally for the moral decadence in the North in particular and the nation at large. For this reason, it is important to hold onto the levers of power by all means in order to protect the society from further decay.

The third principal ethnic block, the Igbo also take the pride in their entrepreneurial acumen and their dominance of the informal economy. They believe they could transform Nigeria from a Third World to a First World economy if they had the political power. They also blame the Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba nations for the systematic infrastructural underdevelopment of their region.

The leaders of the three major groups have taken to the media to demand better deals for their ethnic nations within the Nigerian commonwealth. In the same vein, leaders of minority groups within the regions are also clamouring for improved power relations within the region for their own groups. The narratives employed by the individual and institutional players in the power tussle could have negative implications for the country going forward.

The interest of this paper is the Yoruba nation. They are vociferous in the expression of their opinions, values and aspirations within the Nigerian commonwealth. Their visibility in the public sphere can be attributed to their early exposure to western education and journalism. It is important to note that most Nigerian national newspapers operate from the Yoruba region. It is however important to note that despite their loud voices in the media space, the Yoruba nation has rarely spoken with one voice as there are so many groups claiming to represent the interest of the nation. These groups range from the militant to the pacific. While some operate from Nigeria, others operate from the diaspora. Some of

these groups are Afenifere, Yoruba World Congress, Afenifere Renewal Group, Omoluabi United, Yoruba Youths Coalition and Young Yoruba for Freedom.

Although all these groups claim to represent and protect Yoruba interest within the Nigerian corporate existence, they are seemingly preoccupied with the protection and preservation of the individual and collective interests of the members of the groups. Each of them claims to be the authentic voice of the Yoruba race while disparaging the claims of other groups.

With the ethnic nature of Nigerian politics, the Yoruba nation could benefit from emulating their Hausa and Igbo counterparts who are represented by the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) and the OhanezeNdi'gbo respectively at the top echelon of ethnic political negotiations. Although there are many Hausa and Igbo pressure groups, they often defer to the authority of the Arewa Consultative Forum and the OhanezeNdi'gbo on matters collectively affecting all Hausas and Igbos.

## 2. Statement of Problem

The Yoruba nation is not united in its bid to get a better deal within the Nigerian federation. There are too many Yoruba groups with similar agitations. It must be said that the common Yoruba folks are not aware of all the Yoruba nationalist groups claiming to be fighting for their interests. Any developmental effort that is not owned by the people will not succeed, and their ownership of such efforts must be characterised by their involvement in the birth and/or development of such efforts. For them to be involved in it, they must be in possession of information about the ideals and goals of such efforts. Consequently, there is a gap to be filled by the communication experts in the research, development, harmonisation and dissemination.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

This paper is an effort directed at achieving the following objectives:

- Identify the leading Yoruba nationalist groups.
- Examine the objectives of the leading groups.
- Probe the inter-group relations among the various groups.
- Analyse the use of the media by the identified Yoruba nationalist groups.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

Theories help us develop better understanding of the world around us. This study is therefore sited on the provisions of the Agenda Setting and Uses and Gratification theories.

### 4.1. Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda-setting theory is based on the "idea that media don't tell people what to think, but what to think about" (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 293). This theory was developed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald L. Shaw in 1972/73 (Lane, 2001). It explains the powerful nature of the media as well as the resultant influence of the media over the users. The summation of the theory is that the media possesses "the ability to tell us what issues is important" (University of Twente, 2019). The media-defined "important issues" are then discussed by the media users until such a time when the media comes up with new agenda. The use of Agenda Setting as a theoretical foundation in political communication can be traced to the concerned of Walter Lippman. As early as 1922, Walter Lippman, a newspaper columnist thought deeply about the effects projected by the media on the minds of the public (University of Twente, 2019) while "as far back as 1922, the newspaper columnist Walter Lippman was concerned that the media had the power to present images to the public McCombs and Shaw investigated presidential campaigns in 1968, 1972 and 1976" (University of Twente, 2019).

This present effort hinges on these precedents by using the agenda setting theory as a theoretical base for the discourse of the effects of the newspaper columnists in Nigeria on the interaction among the different Nigerian ethnic and religious groups and its ultimate effect on the presidential elections scheduled for March 28, 2015.

The Agenda Setting theory takes into cognizance the power of individual differences unlike the Hypodermic Needle Theory which claims that people act as they are programmed to do by the media. The Agenda Setting Theory says that the media can give the public topics to think about, but it cannot tell the public what to think about the topics. However, I believe that the reaction of the public to the topic (agenda) given by the each medium would depend on the social experiences of the audience as well as the history and reputation of the media organization that is reporting the information (setting the agenda). Therefore, one would expect the various narratives and discourses by the columnists to generate further discourses among the readers in the process of impacting on the polity. The resulting impact would therefore be a product of the receptions, perceptions and discourses at different levels rather than a product of the desire and effort of any individual columnist or group of columnists.

Media owners and professional journalist are closer to the elite class which Eric Louw calls the insiders. This closeness gives them the professional freedom and license to determine the topics of public discourse as well as the narratives on them thus making them "symbolic elites" (Onifade, 2015, p. 21). This elite position provides them with the skills required for the manufacturing of "public knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, norms, values morals and ideologies" (Ademilokun & Taiwo, 2013, p. 442).

#### 4.2. *Uses and Gratifications Theory*

The uses-and gratifications theory is an "approach to media study focusing on the uses to which people put media and the gratifications they seek from those uses" (Baran & Davis, 2012, p. 245). This approach to media consumption was developed by Elihu Katz, Jay Blumler, and Michael Gurevitch. The central idea of the "uses-and-gratifications theory is that the uses that audiences make of the media and the gratifications produced by those uses can be traced back to a constellation of individual psychological and social needs" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009, p. 65).

While earlier studies of uses and gratifications have been done from the perspective of media consumers, this study employs it from the perspective of the media content provider. While the classical approach to uses and gratification focuses on the satisfactions which media audience derives from the use of specific media, this paper focuses on the fulfillments which the various Yoruba nationalist groups derive from the use of different media forms in their bids to achieve their objectives.

The uses and gratifications theory is based on the assumption that the media audience plays an active role in the mass communication process. The nationalist groups claiming representation of the Yoruba nation are active users of the media. Their active use of the media varies. While the likes of Afenifere, Yoruba World Congress and Afenifere Renewal group provide media content to traditional mass media through interviews and staged events, the likes of Young Yoruba for Freedom produce and disseminate media content to the public largely through the social media. Such messages are usually very controversial and largely uncensored thus forcing the traditional media to report them.

There are three objectives for the development of the uses and gratifications theory. The first objective is to explain how individuals use mass communication to gratify their needs. The second objective is to discover underlying motives for individuals' media use and the third objective is to identify the positive and the negative consequences of individual media use.

### 5. Yoruba Nationalist Groups

The foremost Yoruba nationalist groups operating from within and outside the country are outlined below.

#### 5.1. *Afenifere*

This literally translates as well wishers. The group is arguably the apex body socio-cultural and political Yoruba group. The group is made up of eminent Yoruba sons who are largely lieutenants of the late political sage, Obafemi Awolowo. The founding leader was the late Abraham Adesanya while late Bola Ige was its deputy leader. Other members are Chief Ayo Adebajo, Pa Reuben Fasoranti, Femi Okunroumu, GaniuDawodu, OlanihunAjayi, OluFalae and Adebayo Adefarati among others. Although Afenifere as presently constituted was birthed in 1998, it is arguable that it has been in existence since the days of "Egbe Omo Oduduwa" (Tytler, 2007).

Afenifere never has never hidden its political stance since inception and its agenda were well spelt out. The goals of Afenifere include the entrenchment of true federalism in Nigeria, the actualization of resource control as well as "the convocation of a sovereign national conference" (Tytler, 2007).

#### 5.2. *Yoruba Council of Elders (YCE)*

The Yoruba Council of Elders was formed as an alternative and counterweight to Afenifere. At its inception, it was headed by Pa Emmanuel Alayande and Justice Thomson Adewale who were lieutenants of the late sage, Obafemi Awolowo just like the Afenifere leaders. One of the ideas behind the formation of the Yoruba Council of Elders is to show to the world that Awoism- the political and economic thoughts of late Yoruba political sage, Obafemi Awolowo- transcends a political party or group of his disciples and encompasses all well-meaning Yorubas. The Yoruba Council of Elders and the Afenifere have been at loggerheads over the true leadership of the Yoruba nation.

#### 5.3. *Afenifere Renewal Group (ARG)*

This group was formed in 2008 and it held its first official meeting on January 9, 2009 (Jamiu, 2009). Although promoters of the group claim that it was established to restore the core values of the Yoruba nation through the promotion of the concept of "Omoluabi", the group was formed by dissidents in Afenifere who were displeased by the emergence of Reuben Fasoranti as the leader of Afenifere (Jamiu, 2009). The idea of an "Omoluabi" is characterised by hard work, respect for elders, and rule of law, sanctity of votes, good governance and egalitarianism among others. The leading lights of the Afenifere Renewal Group include OlabiyiDurojaiye, Chief BisiAkande, Wale Oshun and YinkaOdumakin. Yinka Odumakin has been the spokesperson for the group since inception.

There have been allegations that the Afenifere Renewal Group was sponsored by Bola Tinubu to whittle down the influence of the Afenifere in the politics of Yorubaland. At the return to democratic rule in 1998, Bola Tinubu was backed by the Afenifere to run on its political platform (Alliance for Democracy) for the governorship of Lagos State. The group also nominated his running mate, Senator Kofoworola Akerele-Bucknor (another strong personality). After winning the election and assuming office, the two politicians had a fall out and the Afenifere supported the Deputy Governor. Tinubu ensured the removal of his deputy thus further alienating himself from the Afenifere. It is important to note that the influence of Bola Tinubu in Nigerian politics has been on the ascendance while that of the Afenifere has been waning since the rift between them in 2003.

The Afenifere Renewal Group is very visible in Nigerian politics as it comments on major national issues with strong opinions on how to move the nation forwards. It also canvases for better deals for the Yoruba nation within the Nigerian political space.

#### 5.4. Young Yoruba for Freedom

This group is a conservative youth organization of the Yoruba nation. The group was founded in 2012. It is targeted at the young people under the age of 35 years. The mission of the group is to inspire and galvanize young Yoruba people to actualize the Oduduwa Republic characterised by liberty, individual freedom, free enterprise and self-preservation ([youngyorubaforfreedom.org](http://youngyorubaforfreedom.org), 2019). The group operates largely from the diaspora and it is headed by Adeyinka Shoyemi (a.k.a. Adeyinka Grandson). The Young Yoruba for Freedom aggressively campaigns on the social media using negative rhetoric against other tribes that make up the Nigerian federation.

#### 5.5. Yoruba World Congress

This group claims to be an umbrella body of "all Yoruba socio-cultural, self-determination and advocacy groups in Nigeria and Diaspora" (Kehinde, 2019). The body was founded on October 10, 2019 following a summit by 36 Yoruba groups and Professor Banji Akintoye, a professor of History was elected as the leader of the Congress (Adeniran, 2019). The group's aim is to harmonize all Yoruba interest groups and their thoughts and actions on how to defend and promote the interest of the Yoruba nation within the Nigerian context. The Yoruba World Congress has added its voice to national issues projecting and protecting the interest of the Yoruba nation. The group's media advocacy has been largely done through the traditional media.

The foremost Yoruba socio-cultural group Afenifere has rejected the election of Professor Akintoye as the leader of the Yoruba nation. ARG spokesman "YinkaOdumakin, described the gathering where Akintoye was picked as the Yoruba leader as comical" (Babalola, 2019).

### 6. Conclusion

There is a proliferation of Yoruba nationalist groups claiming representation of the ethnic group. They contribute to the setting of political agenda for Nigerian media and by extension the Nigerian public. They also use the media to gratify the needs of their groups. While the groups directed at young people have great social media presence, those comprising of older people are largely restricted to the traditional media and their forays into the social media are through the handles and web pages of the traditional media carrying stories about them.

Although the ultimate goals of the Yoruba nationalist groups align, they lack unity in their approaches and methods for the actualization of their goals. Also there seems to be clashes of ego and personality among the leading personalities fronting for the groups.

There is a need to truly harmonise the positions of all the nationalist groups and get the people involved in the propagation of the ideals of the Yoruba race as well as the activities of the groups. They also need to enlist the support and creative skills of development communication experts in their quest to achieve their goals. These experts would help in the development and implementation of comprehensive communication policy for the Yoruba nation and ultimately facilitate the development of the ethnic group within the Nigerian state.

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