

Principle of *Utis Possidetis* and challenges of sitting at the frontier in Africa: The Yoruba in the Old Ilorin province and the politics of identity and belonging in post-colonial Nigeria

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Abstract

For communities that sit at the fringe of ethnic, cultural and linguistic divide, the twin questions of identity and belonging often remain issues of concern. The remoteness of such communities from the mainstream of socio-cultural and political processes, the straddling of ethno-cultural boundaries and the dilution of cultural beliefs, values system, practices and language often reinforce the notion that they belong to the peripheries of the nationalities. This in turn can generate crises of marginalization of such communities as is the case of the Yoruba's of the old Ilorin Province. Through the circumstance of history and the geographical location of Ilorin at the fringe of the Yoruba nation, the people of the Old Ilorin Province have come to be seen as a community that is of less importance to the socio-cultural, political and economic development of the Yoruba nation at large. Thus, the issue of where to place Ilorin has remained an enigma for the people of the community and the Yoruba nation. This has generated a crisis of identity and belonging for the Yoruba of the old Ilorin Province. To this end, this study examined how frontier communities experience and navigate the complexity of identity politics and belonging using Ilorin as a point of reference. The study made use of archival, historical documents and other qualitative data to weave its narration of the crisis of identity and belonging facing the Yoruba of the old Ilorin Province as a common phenomenon in Africa because of colonial legacy.

Keywords: Politics; Identity; Ilorin; Yoruba; Nigeria; Geography.

Introduction

Discourse on ethnicity, ethnic identity, ethnic group's boundaries and the politics of belonging and exclusion is complex, intricate, and often evokes emotion. This is particularly the case given the cross-cutting issues that often revolve around the question of ethno-national identity, identity marker, history about the myth of origin and what constitutes who is an insider and outsider in the context of discussion of ethnic identity and belonging

in contemporary time. This is as a result of merging people of different languages, culture, orientation and background together, irrespective of the shortcomings entrenched in such arrangement. To make matters worse, the principle of *uti possidetis*¹ that was adopted hook, line and sinker by the defunct Organisation of African Unity (OAU), carried on by the African Union (AU) has further perpetuated this problem.² The complexity and the challenges are made more daunting particularly for communities that sit at the frontier of ethno-linguistic and cultural boundaries. For communities that sit at the cross-road of ethno-linguistic and cultural boundaries, the question of identity and belonging is not only complex and daunting but is also vexing.

This is largely because of two main factors. The first is the remoteness and detachment of such communities from the mainstream of identity construction and reconstruction within the main groups in which they claim affiliation. The second factor relates to the fact that their location at the frontier does expose them to cultural values, beliefs and practices from other ethno-linguistic and cultural groups. This often results in the dilution of cultural values and practices and thus makes such communities at the fringe to become a melting point of culture and practices. While the notion of being a melting point can be maximally employed for the development of such communities as it creates opportunities for such communities to tap from the multiple cultural values and practices, it can also create its own peculiar challenges. The most potent of such problems especially within the context of the contentious politics of identity, belonging and attendant resource allocation and/or distribution is the fact that it can generate a crisis of marginalization and exclusion.

The feeling of marginalization can manifest in many forms, the most significant being cultural and political. Cultural marginalization manifests itself through the relegation of frontier communities in the discourse on the construction and reconstruction of group identity, while political marginalization can manifest itself through the relegation of frontier communities in the discourse on distribution of resources inclusive of political power. These forms of marginalization often lead to a feeling of exclusion for members of communities at the frontier of ethnic boundaries. While the notion of

1 A principle that was developed in 1810 in the Spanish Latin American states where it was agreed that the inherited colonial boundary should be observed so as to avoid political instability and cultural irredentism that currently plague Africa. For more detail on this, see DM Ahmed, *Boundaries and secession in Africa and International Law: Challenging Uti Possidetis* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

2 L. Amusan, "Boundary demarcation and delimitation in Africa: Sources of economic underdevelopment, political instability and migration challenges", *Transylvanian Review*, XXVI(24), 2018, pp. 6519-6527.

social exclusion can be a subject of perception, it is also important to note that exclusion for communities at the frontier of ethnic boundaries can also be real. This becomes a particularly serious problem for communities at the frontier of group boundary because of the fact that ethnic boundary canalizes social life and entails a complex organization of behaviour and social relations.³ Thus, it is within the context of social relations (cultural reproduction and allocation of political resources) that the feeling of marginalization clearly manifests itself for frontier communities.

The scenario above epitomises the case of the Yoruba people in the old Ilorin Province, in the old Northern region of Nigeria. Through the circumstance of history and the geographical location of Ilorin at the fringe of the Yoruba nation, the people of the Old Ilorin Province have come to be seen as a community that is of less importance to the socio-cultural, political and economic development of the Yoruba nation at large.⁴ Though geographically placed in the old Northern region and continued to be regarded as part of Northern Nigeria, as a result of colonial authorities demarcation of internal political borders of modern Nigeria, however, the 'Northernness' of Ilorin within the context of Northern Nigeria political/power matrix can be said to be conditional and subject to the vagaries of political calculation of the power elite in Northern Nigeria. Thus, the issue of where to place Ilorin remains an enigma for the people of the community, the Yoruba nation and Northern Nigeria political establishment. This has generated a crisis of identity and belonging for the Yoruba of the old Ilorin Province. To this end, this study examined how frontier communities experience and navigate the complexity of identity politics and belonging using Ilorin as point of reference. The study made use of secondary documents (historical) and other qualitative data to weave its narration of the crisis of identity and belonging facing the Yoruba of the old Ilorin Province.

Frontier; frontier communities and the question of identity

A scholarly study of frontier and the process of development of frontier community as it relates to the evolution of culture, values and system of socio-political organization is growing. The approach to the examination of

3 M Lamont, V Molnar, "The study of boundaries in the social sciences", *Annual Review of Sociology*, 28, 2002, pp. 169; F Barth (ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries: The social organization of cultural differences* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1969), p. 15.

4 AA Usman, *The Yoruba frontier: A regional history of community formation, experience, and changes in West Africa* (Durham, NC, Carolina Academic Press, 2012), p. 19.

what constitutes frontier is changing and frontier phenomena are increasingly becoming studies from different periods, geographical regions, and disciplines. Arising therefrom, scholars in various disciplines have examined and are treating the concept of frontier and analysing issues and factors that combine to shape the evolution of frontier in geographical, cultural, socio-economics and political contexts.⁵

It is now being acknowledged that societies throughout the ages have been formed, shaped and transformed significantly in relation to their frontiers.⁶ In the study on the making of frontier communities and issues that have shaped them across time, particular attention has been given to the issues of diffusion and ethnicity. The issues of acculturation and cultural assimilation have also been given consideration given that group interaction at the frontiers of cultural societies entails exchange of ideas, adoption of values and mixing of practices. Within the context of studying frontiers, attention has also been paid to the nature of power relations that take place in the process of diffusion and how this impacted on the notion of ethnicity especially as it relates to the problems of belonging and exclusion.

Like most frontier communities, migration constitutes an important factor in the narration of the history of Northern Yoruba frontier. While migration is significant in the historical narration of the formation of frontier communities, however, Oyelaran and Shaw and Daniels,⁷ note that as it concern Okun and Igbomina, there might not have been strong archaeological evidence to support the position that earlier occupation of these two Yoruba Northern frontier communities was by people that can traced their descent to Ile Ife and Old Oyo Oyo. This then means that there is the likely possibility of some level of autochthonous population as early settlers in most of the communities that later became important settlements in the Northern

5 For details on what constitutes a frontier and the dimensions it entails please see; G Gavrilis, *The dynamics of interstate boundaries* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008); BJ Parker, "Toward an understanding of borderland processes", *American Antiquity* 71(1), 2006, pp. 77-100; RM Eaton, "Three overlapping frontiers in early Modern Bengal: Religious, agrarian, imperial", BJ Parker, L Rodseth (eds.), *Untaming the frontier in Anthropology, Archaeology, and History* (Tucson, University of Arizona Press, 2005), pp. 52-82; K Schubert, "Frontier languages, language boundaries", M Rösler & T Wendl (ed.), *Frontiers and borderlands: Anthropological perspectives* (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1999), pp. 201-209; DK Flynn, "'We are the border': Identity, exchange, and the state along the Benin-Nigeria border", *American Ethnologist*, 24(2), 1997, pp. 311-330; M Anderson, *Frontiers: Territory and state formation in the modern world* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1996); AI Asiwaju, "The concept of frontier in the setting of states in Pre-colonial Africa", *Presence Africaine* 127-128, 1983, pp. 43-49.

6 AA Usman, *The Yoruba frontier...*, p. 4.

7 P Oyelaran, "Early settlement and archaeological sequence of the Northeast Yorubaland", *African Archaeological Review*, 15(1), 1998, pp. 65-79; T Shaw & SGH Daniels, "Excavations at Iwo Eleru, Ondo State, Nigeria", *West African Journal of Archaeology*, 14, 1984, pp. 1-26.

frontier of the Yoruba nation. This particular position holds true for Ilorin, as an important frontier community in the northernmost fringe of Yorubaland. This position notwithstanding, it is still important to reiterate the fact that as frontier communities the injection of, interaction and relationship with external elements (peoples, ideas, values) remain very strong influence in the development of frontier communities, the shaping of their history and identity.⁸

In the examination of the process of the making of frontier communities and the interaction of peoples on such frontiers, Barth argued that such interaction at the frontier between different ethnic groups does not lead to the weakening or elimination of ethnic boundaries. As Barth opined that such interaction often strengthens ethnic differences as the individual population groups involved strive to maintain their identities within this context of cultural exchange and economic interdependence.⁹ However, Barth's approach has raised some issues. One of those important issues is that since the focus was on the boundaries between groups rather than the traits of various ethnic groups, his study leaves the question of how such boundaries are maintained despite the flow of cultural materials across them.¹⁰ Another important issue especially as it relates to the nature of frontier communities with reference to Ilorin on the northwest frontier of Yoruba land, has to do with the adoption of the Yoruba language, names and other cultural values by the Fulani that held and wielded political control in Ilorin as a result of the establishment of the Emirate system after the routing of Aare Afonja, while political allegiance is directed to the caliphate in Gwandu. Also of significance is how political control is maintained through the deft deployment of diplomacy, dispersal of power and authority through the institution of Balogun paying particular attention to inclusion of the important cultural groups in Ilorin (Yoruba, Fulani and Hausa).

The Yoruba nation and the making of Ilorin as a frontier community

Yoruba homeland with its centre of gravity in post-colonial South-western Nigeria, extends over a large expanse of landmass with diverse geographical features. From the coastal city of Lagos, through to Badagry and Epe and inward through to the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) to Edo in

8 AA Usman, *The Yoruba frontier...*, p. 73.

9 F Barth (ed.), *Ethnic groups and boundaries...*, pp. 15-16.

10 JW Cole, & ER Wolf, *The hidden frontier: Ecology and ethnicity in an Alpine Valley* (New York, Academic Press, 1974).

South-Central Nigeria and up to the Okun speaking Yoruba in the northeast and Igboho, Igbeti, Kisi and ultimately Ilorin in the northwest direction.

Image 1: The Kingdom of Old Oyo and Its Neighbours, ca. 1800



Source: P Morton-Williams, "The Yoruba Kingdom in Oyo", D Forde and P Kaberry eds., *West African kingdoms in the nineteenth century* (London, Oxford University Press for the International African Institute, 1967) pp. 38.

While diversity of ecological conditions informed the complexity that characterized political organisations among the Yoruba, however, by the 18th century, the Kingdom of Oyo had evolved a well-developed and highly

centralized political system towards the northern section of Yoruba land.¹¹ With a strong military force under the command of Aare Onakakanfo, an expansionist posture that was largely informed by commercial interest, the Old Oyo Kingdom managed to lord it over many of the other Yoruba peoples and territory in the 18th century.

However, as no empire reigns forever, the hegemony of Oyo began to decline by the early 19th century. Factors that propelled the political destabilization and the weakening of Oyo military domination over the areas it controlled can be found in the internal problems that had both political and economic dimensions. Of importance was the recklessness and insubordination of chiefs to the leadership of Ala'afin of which the Basorun Gaa episode was the most noted. There is also the increasing security concern arising from the military incursion of the Fulani Jihadist from the north of the empire and the attendant population dispersal from Oyo Ile. As the vestige of the political power, influence and military force of the Old Oyo Empire unravelled, Yoruba land was thrown into a state of political confusion. The population dispersal and mass migration that accompanied the fall of the Old Oyo Empire boost the prominence of new settlements of which Abeokuta, Ibadan and Ilorin were the most prominent.¹² The fall of the Old Oyo, the Islamization of the northern section of the empire, the rise of new city-states, growth of western educated Yoruba elite, the increasing influence of Christian missions and the imposition of colonial political authority largely aided the re-shaping of the Yoruba nation, its society and of course politics in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.¹³

Myth and reality: Migration and the making of Ilorin as a frontier community

As it relates to the establishment of Ilorin as a human settlement, Jimoh avers that the first settler in what became Ilorin was a Baruba hermit. It then meant that Ojo "Isekuse", the itinerant Yoruba hunter that accounts have it as the

11 MR Doortmont, "Recapturing the past: Samuel Johnson and the history of the Yoruba" (Ph.D, Erasmus University Rotterdam, 1994), p. 1.

12 IS Otukoko, "Migration, settlement pattern and transformation in Ilorin history", IS Otukoko (ed.), *Breakers of the Ilorin city wall: A socio-economic and political history of the Aliagans and their neighbours* (Ilorin: Fig & Olive Limited, 2016), pp. 1-26; AL Olumoh, *Managing ethno-political relations in Nigeria: The Ilorin example (1823-2003)* (Lagos: University of Lagos Press and Bookshop Limited, 2015); HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy in nineteenth century Ilorin: Some reflections", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies (CILS)* (Ilorin, University of Ilorin, 2012); LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*

13 MR Doortmont, "Recapturing the past...", p. 3.

first Yoruba of Oyo descent in the settlement, met the Baruba hermit in the location.¹⁴ An account on how the settlement derived its name has it that the name comes from the rock that Ojo used to sharpen his hunting instruments (Okuta Ilo Irin; Ilo Irin). Other accounts alluded to the abundance of iron and the flourishing of iron working (Ilu Irin) and abundance of games for hunting (Ilu Erin) in the surrounding areas that make up present day Ilorin communities.¹⁵ While history did not recount what later happened to the Baruba, it is of importance to note that the Baruba quarters adjacent to Idi-Ape, the homestead of the Afonja still exists till today in Ilorin. While those that lives currently in the area might not be able to trace their descent to Baruba ethno-linguistic group, the area serves the purpose of immortalizing the first Baruba homestead in Ilorin.¹⁶

In relation to population migration into Ilorin, Otukoko notes that the history can be divided into two broad phases, which he denotes as the Pre-Islamic and the Islamic periods. Otukoko further breaks these into five phases of migration wave into Ilorin.¹⁷ The first and second phases of people movement into the site of present day Ilorin is identifiable with the settlement of Ojo Isekuse, Ayinla, Asaju. The third phase relates to the arrival of Laderin and his group and his appointment as Ajele for the Alaafin in the settlement. The fourth phase of people migration is associated with the time of Aare Ona-Kakanfo Afonja and the transition of Ilorin from being a war camp to the establishment of more settlement clusters by groups other than the Yoruba. This period coincides with the era of social upheaval and political turbulence in the Old Oyo Empire. As people migrate in search of save heaven, Ilorin, like Ibadan and Abeokuta, was a natural choice for migrants. Thus, Muslims migrants from the Old Oyo settled at Oke-Suna area under the control of the Sholagberu. Later the Gaa Olufadi and the Gambari Quarters were settled by Fulani and Hausa.¹⁸

It is important to highlight the position held by Omoiya (2013:35-36) that the imperial authority and suzerainty of the Old Oyo empire over Ilorin

14 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 18.

15 IS Otukoko, "Migration, settlement pattern and transformation in Ilorin history", IS Otukoko (ed.), *Breakers of the Ilorin city wall...*, pp. 121-124; LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, pp. 18-26; S Jimba, *Iwe itan Ilorin* (Ilorin, Jimba Books Productions), p. 13; S Johnson, *The history of the Yorubas from the earliest times to the beginning of British protectorate* (Lagos, CMS Bookshop, 1921, Reprint, 1976), pp. 119-120.

16 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, pp. 18 & 26.

17 IS Otukoko, "Migration, settlement pattern and transformation in Ilorin history", IS Otukoko (ed.), *Breakers of the Ilorin city wall...*, p. 2.

18 IS Otukoko, IS Otukoko, "Migration, settlement pattern and transformation in Ilorin history", IS Otukoko (ed.), *Breakers of the Ilorin city wall...*, p. 11.

starting from the 17th century is never in doubt as this has been acknowledged by scholars and writers of Ilorin and Yoruba history.¹⁹ Indeed, this political control aided the growth of Ilorin as it facilitated the economic growth of the community even in the period before the establishment of the emirate political system. Prior to the appointment of Laderin, the progenitor of Aare Onakakanfo Afonja as Oyo empire 'Ajele' in Ilorin, the various groups (Ojo group, Asaju group, the Sholageru-Okesuna group and the Olufadi-Fulani group) that reside in the areas are said to exist independent of each other. The appointment brought the groups under a single authority that owes allegiance to the Oyo Empire.²⁰

One thing that is clear as it relates to the rendition of Ilorin history is that a wide variety of literature exists on the nature of the origin and subsequent development of Ilorin as a community before the establishment of the Emirate system towards the end of the 19th century.²¹ However, as Danmole notes, an assessment of most of these accounts as given in the literature shows that they were full of obscurities and differing in the positions they held.²² Notwithstanding, the controversies that shrouded the differing interpretation of Ilorin history, one common factor that runs through them all was that Ilorin was an important centre in Northern Yorubaland before 19th century. However, the community went through important transformation in relation to religion, politics and economy in the 19th century.²³

Aare Ona Kakanfo Afonja, Shehu Alimi, Solagberu and the making of Ilorin

According to Danmole, the transformation that Ilorin witnessed at the beginning of the 19th century revolved around the socio-political careers of three important personalities that shaped the course of the town's history. These personalities were Aare Ona Kakanfo Afonja; Al-Salih popularly referred to as Shehu Alimi and Solagberu. The interrelationship between the three

19 SY Omoiya, "The location of economic potentials of a frontier community in Nigeria: An exploit on Ilorin in the 20th century", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Invention*, 2(1), pp. 35-36.

20 SY Omoiya, "The location of economic potentials of a frontier community in Nigeria...", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Invention*, 2(1), p. 36

21 For details JA Burdon, *Northern Nigeria, historical notes on certain emirates and tribes* (London, Gregg International Publishers, 1907, Reprint in 1972); KV Elphinstone, *Gazetteer of Ilorin province* (London, Waterlow, 1921); HB Hermon-Hodge, *Gazetteer of Ilorin province* (London, Allen and Unwin, 1929); SJ Hogben & AHM Kirk-Greene, *Emirates of Northern Nigeria* (London, Oxford University Press, 1966); HO Danmole & T Falola, "The documentation of Ilorin by Samuel Ojo Bada", *History in Africa: A Journal of Method*, 20, 1993, pp. 1-13.

22 HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy...", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies*, 2012, p. 6.

23 HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy...", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies*, 2012, p. 7.

personalities (cooperation, discord and open confrontation) largely influenced the path of history of Ilorin especially as it relates to the establishment of and imposition of emirate system of political organization. Danmole, also notes that Ilorin became an important and widely known settlement as a result of Afonja's military prowess. This also corresponds closely with the influence of important military warriors and the growth of Ogbomoso, Ibadan and Abeokuta during this time of political upheaval in the Old Oyo Empire.²⁴

Also of high historical significance as it relates to the growth of Ilorin especially the influence of Islam as a unifying bond and the establishment of the emirate system, is the personality of Al-Salih (Shehu Alimi). Before settling down permanently in Ilorin, Shehu Alimi was recalled to have visited some Yoruba community, teaching and spreading the message of Islam. By settling down in Ilorin, Muslims fleeing from the crisis in the Old Oyo Empire flocked to Ilorin while Alimi friendship with Afonja also gave the Muslims within Afonja's fold both the spiritual and security succour they craved for. On his own part, Sholagberu who moved from Kuwo near present day Ilorin settled at Oke-Suna and helped to attract Muslims converts from the empire and adjacent villages to Ilorin. Aside attracting Muslim converts, Sholagberu's Oke Suna also serves as a fertile ground for Alimi to advance his Islamic propagation activities. Sholagberu support was also very instrumental to the emergence of Abdulsalam, the first son of Shehu Alimi as the first Emir of Ilorin after the political intrigues that revolved around the declaration of the Emirate had settled.²⁵

In the course of the development and growth of Ilorin as an important frontier community north of the Old Oyo Empire, the town took directive from and got legitimacy from two main centres of power; the Old Oyo Empire under the control of the Alaafin at the earliest stage and from the Sokoto Caliphate via the Emir of Gwandu at the latter stage of its development when the emirate system took hold. According to Danmole, between 1817 and 1823, Ilorin legitimacy emanated from the title of Aare Ona Kakanfo that Afonja got from the Alaafin of the Old Oyo Empire and Alimi spiritual authority. From 1823 onward, Ilorin legitimacy emanated from her status as the Emirate of the Yoruba and sanctioned from Gwandu in 1829 with the directive that the Emir should use his position to aid the propagation of Islam.²⁶

24 HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy...", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies*, 2012, pp. 6-7.

25 HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy...", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies*, 2012, pp. 8-9.

26 HO Danmole, "Religion, politics and the economy...", *1st Lecture Series of the Centre for Ilorin Studies*, 2012, pp. 10-11.

Frontier community as melting point of cultures and the challenges of identity and belonging: Insights from Ilorin

Who are the people of Ilorin? How can we categorize the people that inhabit the area that is today known as Ilorin? Are the people of Ilorin, Yoruba in ethno-cultural categorization or are they just speakers of the Yoruba language? What constitute the most important factor(s) for ascribing ethnic marker to a people or community? Will it be geographical location; sharing of cultural practices, values and beliefs; spoken language and/or linguistic consideration; or identity of political leaders? There is no doubt that attaching a definite social categorization to people that occupy the frontier of ethno-cultural and linguistic group is a vexing issue. And the problematique is majorly as a result of the cross-cutting nature of social interaction and intermingling of ideas, values and beliefs at the frontier. Without much doubt, the dynamism of socio-cultural exchange at the frontier does enrich in significant manner the social experiences of frontier communities. However, this dynamism at the same time creates the crisis of ascription of social categorization.

Within this context, people/community at the frontier of ethno-cultural group are often seen as too distant from the mainstream of the group that they claim affiliation to. Not only this, their belongingness to the group is, often times under scrutiny and under constant questioning. But more importantly is that such communities also face the dilemma of “self-ascription” in relation to how inhabitants of such community see themselves. To this end, the issue of identity ascription to the people of Ilorin by the Yoruba from the Southwest from which the community “Ilorin’ takes the language that predominates in the Ilorin emirate and to the Caliphate from where the emirate system takes its legitimacy, the Emir and Fulani heritage and the geo-political categorization of Ilorin as part of Northern Nigeria creates a complex identity crisis. The dynamism of social relations and the crisis of identity ascription as it relates to Ilorin, clearly manifest in the complexity that characterized the composition of populations of main quarters in Ilorin, especially in the context of ethnic affiliation of early fore-bearers of the areas as highlighted by Jimoh in his important work on the history of Ilorin.²⁷

As asserted by Omoiya the suzerainty of Oyo over Ilorin especially in the formative era of the community is never a subject of doubt.²⁸ This much is also

27 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 40.

28 SY Omoiya, “The location of economic potentials of a frontier community...”, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Invention*, 2(1), pp. 36-37.

alluded to by Olumoh and by Jimoh.²⁹ However, as highlighted earlier, the sons of Alimi, that implant the emirate system over Ilorin and whose lineage continues to occupy the position of Emir of Ilorin sought and got legitimacy from the Sokoto Caliphate through Gwandu. The letter (wothiqat) sent to Oba Abdulsalami, the first Emir of Ilorin was a testimony to this effect.³⁰ Thus, as it relates to politics, authority for the Emir flows from Sokoto, the administrative capital and seat of the Caliphate. While the establishment of a Fulani ruling dynasty over Ilorin which is originally under Oyo suzerainty might be seen as an aberration, Jimoh however, argues that this phenomenon relates perfectly with the establishment of Fulani hegemony in the other emirates in Hausa and Nupe areas of Northern Nigeria and tallies with the usurpation of Ibadan from the Egbas by Oyo fugitive and the seizure of Ago-Oja by Alaafin Atiba to establish a new capital for the crumbling Oyo empire after the sacking of Oyo Ile.³¹

Having said this, it is important to note that the change in the nature of political relationship in Ilorin after the establishment of the emirate political system did not detract from the importance and significance of the Yoruba influence over Ilorin especially in the cultural sphere with the Yoruba language being the most important marker of this seemingly but subtle Yoruba influence on Ilorin as a community and its people. Till date, Yoruba remains the lingua franca and most widely spoken language among the people of Ilorin. Another important area that highlights Oyo Yoruba's continued relevance in Ilorin relates to the enduring influence of Yoruba names given to people of Ilorin including those who are originally non-Yoruba through their progenitors. This also reflects in Yoruba names appearing in the names of Ilorin Fulani ruling elite and their offspring. The Ninth Emir of Ilorin, Zulukarinainin Gambari bears "Aiyelabowo" which is a Yoruba name. The Tenth Emir, Aliyu AbdulKadir bears "Baba Agba" while the Eleventh Emir, Ibrahim Zulu Gambari bears "Kolapo".

Another important marker of Oyo Yoruba influence on the evolution of Ilorin, especially in political term, is the introduction of the institution of Balogun (Warlord; War Chief and/or War Commander) for the three most important ethno-linguistic clusters that make up the Ilorin emirate. Although there are differing schools of thought as they relate to the emergence of the

29 AL Olumoh, *Managing ethno-political relations in Nigeria...*; LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 40.

30 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 44.

31 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 12.

Balogun as a powerful political institution in the administration of Ilorin emirate, Omoiya, notes that events in Ilorin emirate history are pointer to the fact that the emergence of the Balogun institution was a trend associated with the militarized phase and military adventure that was significant in Ilorin history.³² Aside, the adoption of the title for all population clusters (Yoruba and Non-Yoruba) points to the fact that the political transformation of Ilorin into an emirate system was from a Yoruba political system and underscores the enduring influence of Yoruba in Ilorin's social history and evolution of its political system.

Underscoring the significance of the Baloguns' as war commanders and administrative heads of their quarters, Omoiya notes that the traditional political structure in Ilorin emirate could simply be likened to a confederacy.³³ Adopting this administrative arrangement by the earliest Emir, notably Abdulsalami and Shitta was a deft political strategy to ensure survival by incorporating the different linguistic clusters in the political administration and governance of the emirate. This position was informed by the fact that each of the Balogun enjoys relative autonomy in the running of their respective administrative wards within the township and participates actively in arriving at decision jointly with the Emir as it relates to governance of Ilorin Emirate, the Emir's Council.³⁴ As in relates to the appointment of Balogun in Ilorin history, the first to be appointed as Balogun into the Emir's council were, Doshe as Balogun Gambari, the Olufadi as Balogun Fulani, Usman from the Yoruba, as Balogun Ajikobi. As a result of numerous wars waged to ward-off Oyo army attacks on Ilorin, a fourth Balogun was appointed among the Yoruba and thus Yusufu Bale was appointed Balogun Alanamu.³⁵ Also of importance is the need to note that while Aare Afonja was rooted at battle with Shehu Alimi's jamma, his offspring were rehabilitated and given the title of Magaji Aare and they still continue to hold the position.³⁶ The position of Baba Isale was also created for the offspring of the Afonja lineage.

32 SY Omoiya, "The Balogun institution as an ethnic representation in the traditional emirate system in Ilorin", *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 7(2), 2007, p. 50.

33 SY Omoiya, "The Balogun institution as an ethnic representation...", *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 7(2), 2007, p. 57.

34 SY Omoiya, "The Balogun institution as an ethnic representation...", *Benue Valley Journal of Humanities*, 7(2), 2007, pp. 50-51 & 57.

35 Jimoh, however notes that Se'eni was the first to commander troops from Alanamu quarter during the Nupe War and thus Se'eni is the first Balogun for the Alanamu quarter. On this see; LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 83.

36 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, pp. 34 & 58.

Another important area where the enduring influence of Yoruba manifests itself is in the naming of compounds within Ilorin inclusive of Balogun Gambari and Fulani wards, areas that would traditionally be interpreted as been non-Yoruba. Indeed, as Jimoh, notes, the composition and evolution of Ilorin as an ethno-cultural melting point is a serious candidate for study in social anthropology.³⁷ For instance, in Oke Imale areas, there are numerous families whose ancestry are of non-Yoruba. In Balogun Fulani ward, there are more families with Yoruba ancestry than are those with Fulani ancestry even though one will tend to expect that the Ward will be more populated by those that are of Fulani in ethno-linguistic term. In the Balogun Gambari ward, there are families that are of core Yoruba ancestry, inclusive of key chieftaincy families in the ward. This is not to deny the fact that the ward is cosmopolitan comprising Hausa, Kanuri, Nupe, Gwari, Baruba and Kemberi.³⁸ Thus, it is clear that Ilorin rather than being a homo-ethnic community was actually multi-ethnic in composition and thus a melting point of cultures. By this, the cultural heritage of Ilorin though benefitting immensely from the Yoruba to the south, but it also interacted with, borrowed from and infused other cultural practices, values and beliefs with the predominant Yoruba culture to create a distinct ethno-cultural mix that is peculiar to its history of socio-cultural and political evolution.

Herein lies the challenge of identity for Ilorin and its people. The catch is while the apparent Yorubanization of many social aspects of life and living of the people in Ilorin and the seemingly passive obliteration of other cultures from which Ilorin taps tend to stamp the Yoruba identity on the city and its people. However, it will be wrong to dismiss other cultures from which Ilorin takes sustenance as a cosmopolitan and ethnically mixed community. It is also important to note that notwithstanding the apparent Yorubanization of Ilorin and its people, the Yorubanness of Ilorin people inclusive of those that carry core Yoruba ancestry continue to be called to question by the mainstream Yoruba people in Southwestern Nigeria. As for Northern Nigeria ruling elite, Ilorin and its people are only categorized as Northern as political expediency dictates. While the influence of Islam as a single unifying factor among the disparate groups that make up Ilorin cannot be called to question, however, the sharing of same religion has not been a strong enough reason to wholly adopt Ilorin by the power elite in the North. Thus, whether in socio-cultural or political context, the fate of Ilorin and its people appear to be an undecided

37 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, p. 9.

38 LAK Jimoh, *Ilorin the journey so far...*, pp. 10-11.

issue which is subject to the vagaries of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction in the canvass of social, cultural and political engineering.³⁹

Conclusion

The northern frontier of Yoruba is geographically distinct from the rest of Yoruba land to the south and also culturally more diverse. Although the areas at the frontier of Yoruba in the north are populated by groups that speak the “Yoruba” language, however their Yoruba language differs from that of other Yoruba groups in terms of dialect, and among its own speakers in intonation and pronunciation of some words. Though with strong infusion of Yoruba values, ideas and principles, the people at the frontier of Yoruba also benefitted immensely from other cultures in the course of their historical evolution as the experience of the Okun Yoruba in present day Kogi state and the Igbomina and Ilorin in present Kwara state vividly demonstrates.⁴⁰ Thus, as their experience indicates, communities in the northern frontiers of Yoruba land to the east and west are but melting point of cultures and practices.

For Ilorin in particular, the community has largely been successful in wedging together the disparate cultures and values of the peoples that now called Ilorin their home. This successes, has greatly enriched the culture of the community and project it as a shining example of a peaceful multicultural community.

The multicultural character of communities in the northern frontier of Yoruba land, accounts for the uniqueness of the traditions of these communities and sets them apart from the rest of the Yoruba cultural groups. This has been demonstrated by this brief attempt at discussing the frontier character of Ilorin and its multi-cultural tradition. As Usman notes, the Yoruba speaking communities to the north of the frontier of Yoruba land have also been a foci of power politics and diplomacy.⁴¹ Historically, the frontier nature of the region has been a mixed blessing. It has served via commercial and sociocultural contacts and as an entrepôt of northern cultural traditions and trade to the rest of Yorubaland. On the other hand, the region was also plagued by and had to contend with threats of external invasion. To this end, it had to wage war of survival as the case of Ilorin had shown. While the multicultural character of communities at the frontier of Yoruba land to the

39 SA Aliyu, “The indices of ethnic identity in a multicultural society: an appraisal of Ilorin’s identity”, *The FAIS Journal of Humanities*, 4(2), 2010, pp. 1-29.

40 AA Usman, *The Yoruba frontier...*, p. 73.

41 AA Usman, *The Yoruba frontier...*, p. 88.

north has enriched the socio-cultural life of these communities, it has also created its own challenges. The most significant of these being the crisis of identity that arose from this particular multi-cultural nature as the example of Ilorin discussed, has been pointed out.