

Yorùbá Muslim Engagement with Contemporary Òòduà Nationalism in Nigeria

Tijani, Olawale Shehu, Ph.D¹ & Sanni, Mubarak Oluwadamilola, Ph.D²

Abstract

The resurgence of Yorùbá nationalism, particularly the Òòduà secessionist project, raises complex questions of identity, political authority, and religious pluralism in Nigeria. This study examines Yorùbá Muslim perceptions of the movement, showing how Islamic ethical principles, historical marginalisation, and engagement with Yorùbá cultural identity shape responses. Using qualitative semi-structured interviews with Yorùbá Muslim leaders and scholars in south-western Nigeria, data were analysed thematically within Social Identity Theory. Findings reveal that Yorùbá Muslims assess the agitation through unity (waḥdah), public welfare (al-maṣāliḥ al-mursalāh), obedience to legitimate authority (ṭā'at al-imām), and avoidance of disorder (fitnah), and the broader higher objectives of Islamic law (maqāṣid as-sharī'ah). While recognising political grievances, Muslims are sceptical toward secession due to religious exclusion, prioritisation of ethnicity over Islamic universalism, potential social destabilisation, and syncretic Yorùbá religious practices. The paper concludes that there is a need for inclusive reforms, respect for Muslim monotheistic practices, and non-violent advocacy by all Òòduà agitators.

Keywords: Yorùbá, Islam, Nationalism, Ethics, Secession

¹ Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo.
ORCID: 0009-0007-7122-5345

² Department of Religions and Peace Studies, Lagos State University, Ojo.
ORCID: 0009-0008-2170-0061

Introduction

The renewed agitation for Yorùbá nationalism in contemporary Nigeria has foregrounded complex questions of identity, political authority, and collective belonging within a plural and multi-religious society. While ethnic mobilisation has long featured in Yorùbá political expression, recent calls for an Òòduà or Yorùbá nation have increasingly assumed secessionist tones, accompanied by assertive cultural symbolism, confrontational rhetoric, and challenges to existing political structures. These developments have generated divergent responses within Yorùbá society, reflecting not only political calculations but also deeper moral and religious considerations. Among those most directly affected by this resurgence are Yorùbá Muslims, who constitute a significant proportion of the Yorùbá population and whose political reasoning is shaped by Islamic ethical and legal norms. Consequently, the rise of an explicitly ethno-nationalist project raises fundamental questions about moral legitimacy, religious compatibility, and communal coexistence from an Islamic standpoint.

The central issue of this study is the tension between Yorùbá ethno-nationalist mobilisation and Islamic political ethics as articulated by Yorùbá Muslims. It analyses Islamic and Yorùbá Muslim perceptions of Yorùbá nationalism, focusing on the Òòduà secessionist project. The study examines how Islamic ethical principles, unity (*waḥdah*), public interest (*al-maṣāliḥ al-mursalah*), obedience to constituted authority (*tā'at al-imām*), avoidance of disorder (*fitnah*), and the higher objectives of Islamic law (*maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*), shape Muslim evaluations of political agitation, protest, and secession. It also considers how concerns over religious symbolism, leadership exclusion, and anticipated socio-political consequences inform widespread Muslim scepticism toward the movement. Significantly, this analysis highlights Yorùbá Muslim political reasoning as morally grounded and coherent, demonstrating that resistance to Yorùbá nationalism reflects a principled preference for reform, justice, and peaceful coexistence over political fragmentation and ethno-religious exclusivism. This framing lays the foundation for examining the historical context, nationalist ideology, and Islamic jurisprudential evaluation of the Òòduà project.

Literature Review

Scholarly engagement with Muslim identity, political authority, and collective belonging emphasises the *Ummah* as a universal moral and socio-political community, with the Madīnah period following Prophet Muḥammad's migration in 622 CE as its formative moment. The Constitution of Medina is widely interpreted as an early model of plural governance grounded in justice, consultation (*shūrā*), and collective welfare. Arjomand (2009), Donner (2010), Kamali (2008), and Esposito and Voll (2008) show that early Islamic governance translated universalist ethical principles into institutional practice, with political authority morally constrained and socially accountable. Historical scholarship, however, highlights the fragility of this ideal. Succession disputes after the Prophet's death in 632 CE exposed tensions between normative principles and political realities, culminating, first, in the *Sunnī–Shī'a* divide (Rogerson, 2006). Madelung (1997) and Shoemaker (2011) demonstrate that kinship, tribal alliances, and strategic interests frequently influenced authority alongside ethical norms. These struggles illustrate the enduring challenge of reconciling moral universalism with the contingencies of power. Feldman (2008) shows that colonialism, secular nationalism, and imperial restructuring further fragmented Muslim political authority, forcing Islamic movements to navigate ethical commitments amid socio-political marginalisation (Tella et al., 2014).

Nigeria provides a particularly instructive context. Coleman (1958) argues that Nigerian nationalism arose primarily from colonial administrative amalgamation rather than organic unity, with ethnic identities often preceding national consciousness. Falola and Aderinto (2010) deepen this insight, showing how nationalist histories have been selectively constructed, privileging dominant ethnic narratives while marginalising religious and sub-ethnic perspectives. Nationalism thus functions not only as a political project but also as a historiographical process shaping inclusion and exclusion. Within Nigeria's contested national space, Yorùbá identity occupies a distinctive position. Falola and Genova (2006) show that Yorùbá identity is historically contingent and internally diverse, shaped by

negotiations over power, culture, religion, and modernity. While the volume highlights the political instrumentalisation of culture and ethnicity, religion, particularly Islam, often appears secondary rather than as an autonomous moral and political framework. Studies focusing on Yorùbá Muslims provide corrective insights. Opeloye (2011) and Quadri (2003) document how they navigate Islamic commitments alongside Yorùbá cultural practices, producing layered identities shaped by colonial and postcolonial transformations. Busari (2013) demonstrates how religious marginalisation, socio-economic inequality, and political exclusion generate intra-communal tensions, challenging assumptions of ethnic homogeneity. Yet these studies largely do not examine how Islamic universalism shapes Yorùbá Muslim responses to contemporary ethno-nationalist projects.

Moreover, recent scholarship on Yorùbá nationalism and secessionist agitation emphasises political grievances, insecurity, and mobilisation strategies. Osisanwo and Akano (2024) examine digital media's role in framing Yorùbá nationalism as resistance to political and economic marginalisation, while Babalola (2020) traces contemporary agitation to precolonial fragmentation and colonial disruption. Aniobi et al. (2021) link escalating insecurity in south-western Nigeria to renewed self-determination claims, and Ojo (2024) situates separatist demands within international human rights norms. From a legal-constitutional perspective, Ikubanni and Olujinmi (2024) argue that although the 1999 Constitution recognises collective rights and political participation, it provides no lawful basis for unilateral secession. They maintain that self-determination must occur via constitutional amendment, restructuring, or enhanced federalism. Nevertheless, persistent governance failures, marginalisation, and insecurity fuel moral and political grievances. This literature largely treats the Yorùbá as a unified political subject, giving limited attention to internal religious and ethical plurality, particularly how Yorùbá Muslim normative frameworks shape perceptions of nationalism, legality, and political obligation.

Overall, the literature demonstrates substantial engagement with Islamic universalism, historical contestations of Muslim political authority, Muslim identity formation under modernity, and Yorùbá nationalism. Yet a significant gap remains at the intersection of these fields. The relationship

between Yorùbá Muslim identity and Yorùbá secessionist agitation is insufficiently theorised. Existing studies rarely examine how Islamic universalist ethics shape Yorùbá Muslim political reasoning or how experiences of religious marginalisation inform Muslim scepticism toward ethno-nationalist projects. By situating Yorùbá Muslim engagements with Yorùbá nationalism within Islamic ethical and universalist frameworks, this study addresses this gap and contributes to broader debates on religion, nationalism, and political legitimacy in religiously plural societies.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a normative-ethical framework that integrates Islamic political ethics with Social Identity Theory. Islamic ethics, particularly the principles of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, emphasise justice, social welfare, unity, obedience to legitimate authority, and the prevention of disorder (Kamali, 2008; Esposito & Voll, 2008). These principles provide a moral lens through which Yorùbá Muslims evaluate political agitation, secessionist demands, and ethno-nationalist mobilisation. Complementing this, Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, shaping intergroup attitudes, political judgement, and responses to perceived exclusion. These frameworks allow the study to capture how Yorùbá Muslims navigate the intersection of religious obligations and ethnic identity in assessing the Òòduà secessionist project.

Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews with Yorùbá Muslim leaders, scholars, and community members across urban and semi-urban settings in south-western Nigeria. This approach facilitates in-depth exploration of participants' ethical reasoning, perceptions of political legitimacy, and interpretations of nationalist claims. Document analysis of speeches, writings, and media outputs from Òòduà movement actors, supplements interview data, providing contextual depth and triangulation. Data were thematically coded, emphasising recurring patterns

of moral evaluation, concerns about religious and political exclusion, and the reconciliation of Islamic principles with Yorùbá ethno-nationalist discourse.

Discussion and Findings

Historical Context: Islām within Yoruba Society

Yorùbá historical consciousness is commonly traced to traditions locating the people's origin in Odùduwà, with Ilé-Ifè regarded as the symbolic and spiritual cradle of Yorùbá civilisation. Between the eleventh and eighteenth centuries, several Yorùbá sub-polities, including Òyó, Kétu, Ìjèbú, Ègbá, Ìwó, Àkùré, and Benin, emerged, and often legitimising authority through claims of migration from Ilé-Ifè (Akinjogbin & Ayandele, 1980; Usman & Falola, 2019). Before the fifteenth century, “Yorùbá” primarily denoted a linguistic and cultural grouping in the interior of the Bight of Benin rather than a unified political identity. This understanding was later reinforced by colonial-era historiography, notably Johnson's *The History of the Yorubas* (1921), which influenced early Christian elites in defining Yorùbá land, language, and identity (Usman & Falola, 2019).

Islam represents one of the most significant external influences on Yorùbá society. Originating in seventh-century Arabia, it spread into West Africa via trans-Saharan trade and scholarly networks, reaching northern Nigeria by the eleventh century (Trimingham, 1962; Strides & Ifeka, 1971). Its penetration into Yorùbáland was gradual, occurring primarily through commerce, itinerant clerics, and Islamic education, becoming noticeable from the sixteenth century and well established in major towns by the nineteenth century (Balogun, 1980; Gbadamosi, 2018). Rather than displacing indigenous religions, Islam was incorporated into an already plural environment, producing patterns of accommodation and syncretism that reflected Yorùbá social pragmatism (Peel, 2003). By the mid-nineteenth century, Islam had gained substantial acceptance, particularly in urban centres, while continuing to negotiate its boundaries with traditional practices (Peel, 2003).

Subsequently, colonial intervention marked a decisive turning point in the religious configuration of Yorùbáland. The Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, the expansion of Christian missionary activity, and the subsequent amalgamation of Nigeria transformed Yorùbá society into a formally multi-religious and politically centralised colonial space. Christianity's close association with Western education and colonial administration altered pre-existing religious balances, intensifying competition among Muslims, Christians, and adherents of indigenous religions (Gbadamosi & Ade-Ajayi, 1980; Peel, 2003). These changes heightened debates over cultural authority, moral legitimacy, and public space, turning religious difference into a site of social and political contestation. Tensions between Islam and indigenous religious institutions existed both before and during the colonial period. A notable is Alfa Bisiriyu Apalara, a Muslim cleric in Lagos whose public denunciation of traditional cults provoked violent opposition and culminated in his murder in 1953 (Osifodunrin, 2012). Such episodes illustrate the historically fraught process through which Islam asserted moral authority in Yorùbá society, often encountering resistance from entrenched religious institutions and cultural custodians.

Politically, colonial structures disproportionately favoured Yorùbá Christians, whose early access to missionary education facilitated entry into colonial administration and postcolonial leadership. Yorùbá Muslims, by contrast, were comparatively marginalised, limiting their influence in formal politics and state institutions (Oluwatoki, 2018). This imbalance has had enduring effects, compelling Yorùbá Muslims to negotiate recognition, representation, and religious legitimacy within a broader Yorùbá identity often shaped by Christian-dominated elite narratives. Overall, the historical experience of Islam in Yorùbáland reflects a complex process of accommodation, contestation, and marginalisation. Islam became deeply embedded in Yorùbá society, yet its adherents have persistently navigated structural inequalities and cultural hierarchies shaped by colonial legacies and postcolonial power relations. This context is crucial for understanding contemporary Yorùbá Muslim perceptions of identity, belonging, and political mobilisation within an ethnically defined but religiously plural society.

Yoruba Nationalism: Origins and Contemporary Expressions

Yorùbá nationalism has evolved through distinct historical phases, shaped by precolonial political traditions, colonial disruptions, religious pluralism, and postcolonial state failure. From early cultural self-assertion to contemporary separatist agitation, it reflects shifting strategies through which identity, power, and belonging are negotiated within, and increasingly against, the Nigerian state. Its foundations lie in long-standing traditions of political organisation and cultural cohesion. Precolonial Yorùbá societies such as Òyó, Ìjẹ̀bú, Ègbá, and Ìfẹ̀ were politically autonomous yet culturally interconnected, bound by shared language, myths of origin traced to Odùduwà, and governance systems that balanced kingship with institutional checks (Usman & Falola, 2019). These traditions fostered a collective consciousness that became mobilisable under colonial rule.

Religion and culture were central to Yorùbá identity formation, shaping social organisation long before the emergence of modern nationalist politics. Indigenous religious systems anchored in Ifá divination and Òriṣà worship constituted the original spiritual framework, while Islam, spreading steadily from the sixteenth century and expanding significantly by the nineteenth, became deeply embedded through Arabic literacy, Islamic education, and moral discipline (Busari, 2025; Fafunwa, 2018; Trimmingham, 1962). Christianity arrived later but benefitted disproportionately from colonial patronage, with missionaries and early clergy playing a formative role in articulating cultural consciousness during the colonial era (Omotoye, 2015). This historical sequence is captured in the Yorùbá proverb: “*Aye l’ a bá Ifá, aye l’ a bá Mùsùlùmí; òsán gangan ni ìgbàgbó dé*”—we met Ifá and Islam in the world; Christianity arrived at midday. The resulting religious pluralism produced what has been described as a “triangular religious encounter,” marked by coexistence alongside persistent competition for moral authority, cultural legitimacy, and social influence (Peel, 2003).

Against this cultural and religious backdrop, the nineteenth-century Yorùbá wars and subsequent British conquest disrupted precolonial polities and created new incentives for collective reorganisation. By the early twentieth century, Yorùbá elites responded through cultural and hometown

associations aimed at preserving identity and advancing regional interests within the colonial order. Organisations such as the Egba Society prioritised education, welfare, and political representation, reflecting an early phase of cultural nationalism rather than separatism (Usman & Falola, 2019). As independence approached, ethnic consciousness became increasingly politicised, and nationalist mobilisation followed ethno-regional lines, culminating in the formation of regionally anchored political parties (Bourne, 2016; Coleman, 1958; Osaghe, 2018). In the Western Region, the Action Group (AG), founded in 1951 by Obafemi Awolowo, emerged from the cultural platform of *Egbe Omo Odùduwà*, which sought to unify the Yorùbá around shared ancestry and collective political interests (Awolowo, 1960; Falola, 2020; Ige, 1994). However, under colonial conditions shaped by Western education and administrative centralisation, political leadership became dominated by Western-educated Christian elites, generating early tensions and sustained scepticism among Yorùbá Muslims who perceived marginalisation within a movement framed as ethnically inclusive but religiously imbalanced (Oluwatoki, 2018).

Contemporary Yorùbá nationalism marks a decisive shift from reformist demands for federal restructuring toward explicit calls for secession and the creation of an independent Òòduà Republic. Earlier movements such as Afenifere and the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) framed Yorùbá grievances within a democratic reform agenda, prioritising inclusion and constitutional restructuring over separation (Bourne, 2016). After 2015, however, escalating insecurity, farmer–herder conflicts, economic precarity, and perceptions of selective state protection radicalised nationalist discourse, recasting political claims as existential struggles over survival, dignity, and collective security. This phase has been shaped by the convergence of elite ideological leadership and populist mobilisation. Organisational consolidation began with the establishment of the Yorùbá World Congress (YWC) in 2019 under Professor Banji Akintoye as an umbrella body for socio-cultural groups (Oluyemi, 2022). The YWC articulated grievances centred on marginalisation, land encroachment, and insecurity, and in 2020 was reconstituted as *Ilana Omo Odùduwà*, symbolically invoking the

nationalist legacy of Obafemi Awolowo while advancing an explicitly secessionist agenda.

Under Banji Akintoye's leadership, *Ilana Omo Odùduwà* articulated the intellectual and legal foundations of contemporary Yorùbá secessionism. Nigeria is framed as a coercive colonial construct that failed to evolve into a just political community, with the Yorùbá incorporated without consent and constitutional reforms perpetuating structural imbalance (Adesanya, 2023). Self-determination is thus presented not as rebellion but as a lawful and moral remedy grounded in international norms, with secession cast as the logical outcome of the exhaustion of restructuring as a viable political project. Akintoye's approach prioritised legal argumentation, elite advocacy, and international legitimacy. Alongside this elite constitutionalism, Yorùbá nationalism has been driven by populist, security-oriented mobilisation, most visibly associated with Sunday Adeyemo (Sunday Igboho). Emerging from earlier inter-communal conflicts, notably between Modákéké and Ilé-Ifè, Igboho reappeared as a self-styled defender of Yorùbá communities against perceived external threats, particularly farmer–herder violence. His January 2021 mobilisation in Igangan, Oyo State, following an ultimatum to Fulani herders amid allegations of killings and kidnappings (Sahara Reporters, 2021), ethnicised insecurity and popularised separatist sentiment. Perceived federal inaction under President Muhammadu Buhari (2015–2023) deepened feelings of exclusion, while the interaction between Akintoye's elite advocacy and Igboho's grassroots mobilisation hastened the shift from reformist demands to secessionist claims. This dual leadership broadened appeal but also exposed the movement to repression, culminating in allegations of violence and Igboho's flight from Nigeria in 2021 (BBC News, 2021).

At the grassroots, support for Òòduà nationalism is driven less by ideology than by lived experiences of insecurity, economic loss, and perceived state abandonment. During pro-Òòduà protests, demonstrators repeatedly expressed political dispossession. One protester in Lagos State stated, "We have no freedom at all; we do not control our own affairs. This entity called Nigeria no longer works for us" (FLIP TV, 2021). Another lamented the destruction of farms by cattle and the absence of government response (FLIP

TV, 2021). A female protester similarly remarked, “If Nigeria cannot protect us, we have the right to leave” (FLIP TV, 2021). Others articulated secession in moral and cultural terms, invoking Yorùbá ideals of dignity (*omolúàbí*) and collective self-rule: “We should not be begging for our rights... Òòduà is ours, and we want to govern ourselves” (FLIP TV, 2021). These testimonies reveal how everyday experiences of state failure are translated into ethical claims for autonomy, recasting secession not simply as a political demand but as a morally grounded response rooted in Yorùbá notions of dignity, justice, and collective self-worth.

However, radicalisation has also taken the form of illegal and confrontational actions that weaken the movement’s moral and legal claims. Incidents such as the invasion of the Oyo State Secretariat by Òòduà agitators and the unilateral declaration of Yorùbá secession by Modupe Onitiri Abiola (Omonua, 2024) bypassed constitutional processes and reinforced state portrayals of the movement as a security threat. These episodes reveal how populist urgency has, at times, undercut the legalist strategy promoted by *Ilana Omo Odùduwà*. The intensification of Òòduà nationalism has posed particular challenges for Yorùbá Muslims. Ethno-nationalist discourse increasingly elevates indigenous religion and cultural symbolism while casting “foreign” faiths, especially Islam, as peripheral or suspect. This exclusionary logic has translated into concrete tensions and violence. On 26 June 2021, Muslim worshippers were attacked during prayers at the Kamorudeen Central Mosque in Osogbo amid a masquerade procession, resulting in deaths and injuries (Obarayese, 2021). The incident starkly illustrates the precarious position of Yorùbá Muslims within a nationalist imagination that narrows belonging along religious lines.

The marginalisation of Yorùbá Muslims has also been reinforced through symbolic and discursive acts. In a widely circulated 2018 Facebook video, Abdur-Raheem Aduranigba, a self-proclaimed Imām of Yorùbáland, described Islamic names among Yorùbá Muslims as markers of “slavery” and second-class status (My Naija, n.y). Though unrepresentative of mainstream scholarship, this rhetoric underscores how religious identity has become a contested site within Yorùbá nationalism. Digital media and diaspora networks have amplified polarising narratives of “Islamisation” and

“Fulanisation,” obscuring internal Yorùbá diversity and deepening suspicion toward Muslims whose ethical and political commitments diverge from ethno-nationalist norms.

Indeed, Yorùbá nationalism remains internally divided. While *Ilana Omo Odùduwà* advocates secession, other elites, including the late Governor Rotimi Akeredolu (Dada, 2022), President Bola Ahmed Tinubu (The Guardian, 2024), and former President Olusegun Obasanjo (The Nation, 2021), support restructuring within Nigeria. The election of a Yorùbá president in 2023 further fragmented consensus, tempering separatist urgency for some while reinforcing scepticism among those who see elite inclusion as insufficient to address structural injustice. Contemporary Yorùbá nationalism thus reflects long-standing struggles over identity, belonging, and political legitimacy, but unresolved religious tensions, sub-ethnic divisions, and the involvement of violent actors raise critical questions about its inclusivity, moral legitimacy, and the viability of secession.



Figure 1. News captions of Òòduà secession declaration and armed invasion in Oyo State.



Figure 2. Some arrested Òòduà nation agitators and their weapons in Oyo State.



Figure 3. Some insignias of the Òòduà nation secessionist agitators.

Islam and Yorùbá Muslim Perceptions of the Òòduà Nation Project

From an Islamic perspective, the structural drivers of secessionist agitation, political exclusion, economic inequality, and social grievances, are addressed through foundational principles such as justice (Qur’ān 4:135) consultation (Qur’ān 3:159; Salisu, 2004), tolerance (Qur’ān 2:256), and the promotion of public welfare (Kamali, 2008). Indeed, Allah emphasises equitable governance and responsible leadership (Tijani, 2022), as illustrated in Qur’ān 38:26, where Prophet Dāūd is commanded to judge with truth and warned against self-interest that leads to social harm. Dialogue (*muḥāḍarāt*), reconciliation (*ṣulḥ*), and inclusive local participation are therefore essential mechanisms for resolving grievances and sustaining social cohesion (Mustapha et al., 2018, & Mustapha et al., 2020). For Yorùbá Muslims, these

ethical prescriptions are interpreted and applied through a distinctive religious–ethnic identity that mediates engagement with ethno-nationalist politics. The dual belonging to Islam and Yorùbá culture generates a negotiated balance in which cultural affiliation is affirmed, yet subordinated to Islamic moral commitments. As Falola (2020) observes, Yorùbá Muslims may prioritise solidarity with co-religionists across ethnic lines when ethnic loyalty conflicts with Islamic norms, reflecting a universalist orientation grounded in faith. This commitment extends beyond ritual devotion (*‘ibādah*) to social conduct (*mu‘āmalāt*), encompassing political, economic, and moral responsibilities regulated by the *Sharī‘ah*.

Within the framework of Islamic universalism, Yorùbá Muslims evaluate the Òòduà secessionist project. Grounded in the Madīnah polity, Islamic universalism prioritises inclusivity, justice, and political cooperation beyond ethnic boundaries. From this standpoint, Yorùbá Muslims engage the Òòduà agitation critically, assessing its claims against the dangers of ethnic exclusivism, religious marginalisation, and social fragmentation. Several points of tension consequently emerge. Identity conflicts arise as Yorùbá Muslims negotiate dual allegiances; ethno-nationalist symbols, particularly Odùduwà iconography, often clash with Islamic principles, especially where traditional religious practices are elevated. Socially, anti-Muslim biases surface through name distortions, media representations, and overt discrimination in employment, education, and public spaces (Akintola, 2018a). Politically, Yorùbá Muslims have experienced persistent marginalisation in appointments and decision-making forums, often shaped by the narrative of a uniformly “Christian South.” Indeed, emphasis on Islamic supremacy often leads to scepticism from Yorùbá nationalists, resulting in marginalisation and exclusion from nationalist discourse.

As noted by a prominent Yorùbá Muslim scholar and activist, Prof. Ishaq Akintola, adherence to Islamic norms supersedes ethnic nationalism, a stance that has, at times, resulted in the political exclusion of Yorùbá Muslims from nationalist movements and decision-making processes (I. Akintola, personal communication, October 12, 2023). This exclusion was evident at the 2014 Nigerian National Conference, where the Yorùbá delegation was composed entirely of Christians, including Sir Olaniwun Ajayi, Chief Olu Falae,

Governor Olusegun Rahman Mimiko, General Alani Akinrinade (rtd), Chief Reuben Fasoranti, Chief Ayo Adebajo, Dr. Tunji Braithwaite, Pastor Tunde Bakare, Bishop Bolanle Gbonigi, and Archbishop Ayo Ladigbolu (Akintola, 2018b). This was despite the presence of prominent Yorùbá Muslim political leaders at the time including Governors Rauf Aregbesola (Osun), Isiaka Ajimobi (Oyo), Ibikunle Amosun (Ogun), and Babatunde Raji Fashola (Lagos). Marginalisation was further reinforced symbolically when the sensitisation tour of the Conference Planning Committee was scheduled for a Friday during *Jumu'ah* prayer. This pattern illustrates the structural and symbolic exclusion of Yorùbá Muslims from key national political processes.

Nevertheless, Islamic ethical frameworks provide further grounds for critique of the Òòduà agitation. The *maqāṣid as-Sharī'ah* emphasise the preservation of religion, life, intellect, lineage, and property (Sanni, 2025), which serve as criteria to evaluate the permissibility of political action. From this perspective, any movement that risks widespread violence, economic disruption, or moral decay is impermissible, regardless of its claims to self-determination. Yorùbá Muslim scholars highlight that the Òòduà movement's confrontational tactics, exclusion of non-violent negotiation (*ṣulh*), and symbolic revival of traditional religious practices contradict these principles. The use of charms, amulets, and indigenous religious paraphernalia, often promoted publicly within the movement, is interpreted as *shirk* (idolatry), heightening fears of institutionalised religious marginalisation.

A wide range of scholars, clerics, and organisations articulate these concerns. They reject the Òòduà project, arguing it offers no moral, economic, or political advantage to Yorùbá Muslims and warning that secession often exacerbates instability, citing historical examples like South Sudan and the Bakassi Peninsula (Abdullateef, 2021). Sheikh Habībullah A. Al-Ilory situates contemporary agitation within historical patterns of elite manipulation and political crises, including the 1963 Western Region elections and the 1993 annulment, advocating for reform rooted in *ʿadl*, accountability, and equity (Al-Ilory, 2021). Institutional leaders such as Prof. N. Onibon (personal communication, February 19, 2025) and Prof. I. Akintola of the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) (personal communication, October 12, 2023) reinforce these concerns. They highlight the exclusion of

Yorùbá Muslims from leadership, the absence of guarantees for religious inclusivity, and the movement's disregard for Qur'ānic injunctions on unity.

At the organisational level, groups including the Muslim Ummah of South West Nigeria (MUSWEN) (M. Yahya, personal communication, March 15, 2025), the League of Imams and Alfas in Yorùbáland (A. Abdur-Razaq, personal communication, October 28, 2024), the Muslim Rights Concern (MURIC) (J. Busari, personal communication, October 14, 2023), MICA (A. Danmole, personal communication, October 16, 2024), the Ansarudeen Society (I. Ibrahim, personal communication, October 9, 2024), and the Nasrul-Lahi-il Fathi Society of Nigeria (NASFAT) (M. Abdullah, personal communication, July 13, 2025) question the agitation's legitimacy, representativeness, and ethical coherence. Other interviewees (K. Afolabi, B. Ayolo, K. Adekanbi & I. Lawal, personal communication, October 2024 - July 2025) further argue that the agitators' reliance on charms, occult symbolism, and political intimidation undermines both moral and religious legitimacy.

The above perspectives reveal consistent Yorùbá Muslim perceptions:

- a. The Òòduà nationalism is regarded as hostile to Islam and Yorùbá Muslims;
- b. The Òòduà nationalism ethno-nationalist orientation and use of traditional religious symbols are seen as threats to institutionalised religious freedom;
- c. The Òòduà nationalism violent and confrontational tactics violate Islamic ethical norms and constitutional legality; and
- d. The Òòduà nationalism lacks broad-based support or representativeness.

In response to these perceptions, the views of Yorùbá Muslims scholars and individuals reveals that Yorùbá Muslims favour lawful, non-violent reform through dialogue, constitutional processes, and political accountability. This stance draws on historical memory, Islamic jurisprudence, and pragmatic political analysis, reflecting neither anti-Yorùbá sentiment nor uncritical loyalty to the Nigerian state, but a multidimensional

strategy to preserve social cohesion, religious freedom, and political stability. Grounded in Islamic ethics and universalist principles, their critique prioritises justice, communal welfare, and adherence to religious and legal norms over ethnic nationalism.

Conclusion

This study has examined Yorùbá Muslim perceptions of the contemporary Òòduà secessionist project, revealing that responses are shaped by Islamic ethical principles, historical marginalisation, and engagement with Yorùbá cultural identity. Yorùbá Muslims evaluate the agitation through moral frameworks emphasising unity, public welfare, obedience to legitimate authority, and avoidance of disorder. While recognising grievances arising from political and socio-economic marginalisation, Muslims express scepticism toward secession due to concerns over religious exclusion, the prioritisation of ethnic identity over Islamic universalism, potential social destabilisation, and the incorporation of syncretic and traditional Yorùbá religious elements, which conflict with Islamic monotheism.

Based on these findings, the study makes several recommendations. First, efforts to address Yorùbá grievances should adopt inclusive political reforms that respect both ethnic and religious diversity, ensuring that Muslim concerns and Islamic ethical principles are integrated into policymaking. Second, nationalist movements should avoid cultural and symbolic practices that blend traditional Yorùbá religion with political mobilisation, recognising that such practices are incompatible with Islam; Yorùbá Muslims' monotheistic religious practices must be respected and not subjected to syncretic or traditional rituals. Third, Yorùbá Muslims should be actively engaged in dialogue around political reform and self-determination, while simultaneously encouraging all Òòduà agitators to adopt non-violent and peaceful methods of advocacy. Constructive engagement should prioritise ethical principles, public welfare, and religious inclusivity, ensuring that political mobilisation does not threaten social cohesion or the rights of religious minorities.

In conclusion, this study contributes to scholarship by highlighting how Islamic ethics and religious identity shape Yorùbá Muslim political reasoning, demonstrating that resistance to the Òòduà project is principled and morally grounded rather than merely reactive or secondary to ethnic politics. It underscores the importance of considering religious diversity within ethnic nationalist movements and provides a framework for understanding the interplay of faith, identity, and political engagement in plural societies.

References

- Abdullateef, A. (2021, May 20). *Yorùbá Nation agitation: The Islamic perspective* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/V/IXbcrr96Z+1/>
- Adesanya, P. A. (2023). Catalyst of division: Historical analysis of contemporary separatism in Nigeria. *Mazedan Journals*, 4(4), 28-35.
- Oluyemi, O.A. (2022). Suggestible consequences of militarizing self-determination movements in Nigeria: A case study of Yorùbá separatist movements. *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Studies*, 4(4), 249-262.
- Akinjogbin, I. A., & Ayandele, E. A. (1980). Yorubaland up to 1800. In O. Ikime (Ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (pp. 121–143). HEBN Publishers.
- Akintola, I.L. (2018a). Contemporary challenges facing Islam in Yorubaland. In M. O. Opeloye, M. A. Bidmos, A. Oladosu, & I. Musa (Eds.), *Islam in Yorubaland: History, education and culture* (pp. 311-332). University of Lagos Press.
- Akintola, I. L. (2018). Yoruba Committee on National Conference: A parochial agenda. In *Voice of MURIC* (Vol. 1). Azooahir Publishers.
- Al-Ilory, H. A. (2021, July 19). *Òrò nipa Yorùbá Nation* [Video]. ISPAK TV Yorùbá. YouTube. <https://youtube.be/qND5cJktgms>
- Aniobi, C. S., Ewuim, N. C., & Sumumma, Z. S. (2021). Effects of growing insecurity on agitation for self-determination in Southwest Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Social Development*, 10(1), 17–25.

- Arjomand, S. A. (2009). The Constitution of Medina: A sociolegal interpretation of Muhammad's acts of foundation of the umma. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 41(4), 555–575. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020743809990067>
- Awolowo, O. (1960). *Awo: The autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*. Cambridge University Press.
- Babalola, J. T. (2020). *The formation of the Yorùbá nation and the challenge of leadership since the pre-colonial era* [Conference paper]. Òòduà Progressive Union Annual General Meeting, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria.
- Balogun, S. A. (1980). History of Islam up to 1800. In O. Ikime (Ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (pp. 210–223). HEBN Publishers.
- BBC News. (2021, July 26). Sunday Igboho: The Nigerian separatist who wants a Yorùbá nation. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/africa>
- Bola Ige. (1994). *People, politics, and politicians of Nigeria, 1940–1979*. Heinemann Educational Books.
- Bourne, R. (2016). *Nigeria: A history of a turbulent century*. Bookcraft.
- Busari, J. M. (2024). Islam In Yorubaland, Southwest Nigeria: A Historical Review Of Its Advent And Impacts Till Present Time. *Al-Qanatir: International Journal of Islamic Studies*, 33(1), 44–66. Retrieved from <https://al-qanatir.com/aq/article/view/643>
- Donner, F. M. (2010). *Muhammad and the believers: At the origins of Islam*. Harvard University Press.
- Esposito, J. L., & Voll, J. O. (2008). *Islam and democracy*. Oxford University Press.
- Falola, T. (2020). *Understanding modern Nigeria: Ethnicity, democracy, and development*. Cambridge University Press.
- Falola, T., & Aderinto, S. (2010). *Nigeria, nationalism, and writing history*. University of Rochester Press.
- Falola, T., & Akinyemi, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Encyclopedia of the Yorùbá*. Indiana University Press.
- Falola, T., & Genova, A. (Eds.). (2006). *Yorùbá identity and power politics*. University of Rochester Press.
- Fafunwa, A. B. (2018). *History of education in Nigeria*. Routledge.

- Feldman, N. (2008). *The fall and rise of the Islamic state*. Princeton University Press.
- FLIP TV. (2021, July 3). *Against all odds: Yoruba Nation's agitators hold Lagos rally* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jjdZMQrGgIM&t=587s>
- Gbadamosi, T. G. O. (2018). Islam in Yorubaland. In M. O. Opeloye, M. A. Bidmos, A. Oladosu, & I. Musa (Eds.), *Islam in Yorubaland: History, education, and culture* (pp. 1–20). University of Lagos Press.
- Gbadamosi, T. G. O., & Ajayi, J. F. A. (1980). Islam and Christianity in Nigeria. In O. Ikime (Ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian history* (pp. 352–366). HEBN Publishers.
- Ikubanni, O. O., & Olujinmi, M. A. (2024). The Yorùbá people's quest for self-determination within the Nigerian constitution. *Fountain University Law Journal*, 1(1), 37–53.
- Kamali, M. H. (2008). *Shari'ah law: An introduction*. Oxford University Press.
- Madelung, W. (1997). *The succession to Muhammad: A study of the early caliphate*. Cambridge University Press.
- Mustapha, A. R., Higazi, A., Lar, J., & Chromy, K. (2018). Jos: Bottom-up & top-down approaches to peace building (Chapter 10). In A. R. Mustapha & D. Ehrhardt (Eds.), *Creed and grievance: Muslim-Christian relations & conflict resolution in northern Nigeria* (pp. 308–336). Premium Times Books.
- Mustapha, A. R., Meagher, K., Umar, M. S., Monguno, A. K., Umara, I., Idrissa, R., Sanda, J. G., Ehrhardt, D., & others. (2020). Conclusion: Toward a whole-of-society approach to counter-radicalization (Chapter 11). In A. R. Mustapha & K. Meagher (Eds.), *Overcoming Boko Haram: Faith, society & Islamic radicalization in Northern Nigeria* (pp. 304–324). Premium Times Books.
- My Naija Latest Islamic Lectures. (n.d.). *Chief Imam of Yorùbá land comment on Yorùbá Nation agitation* [Video]. Facebook. <https://www.facebook.com/share/vlg7NMZAX=Ub8>
- Obasanjo: Why I will never support Yorùbá Nation. (2021, December 17). *The Nation*. <https://thenationonlineng.net/>

- Ojo, J. S. (2024). Transforming pacifists into warmongers? Separatist movement, state repression, and the politics of framing terrorism in Nigeria: Evidence from IPOB and Yoruba nation's freedom frontiers. *Journal of Applied Security Research*, 19(3), 377–412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19361610.2023.2189867>
- Oluwatoki, J. A. (2018). Islam and politics in South-West Nigeria. In M. O. Opeloye, M. A. Bidmos, A. Oladosu, & I. Musa (Eds.), *Islam in Yorubaland: History, education and culture* (pp. 407–426). University of Lagos Press.
- Omonua, P. (2024, May 8). Modupe Onitiri's declaration: Ibadan invasion and hypocrisy of Yoruba Nation agitation. *The Guardian*. <https://guardian.ng/opinion/modupe-onitiris-declaration-ibadan-invasion-and-hypocrisy-of-yoruba-nation-agitation/>
- Omotoye, R.W. (2015). Christianity as a catalyst for socio-economic and political change in Yorubaland, Nigeria: An account of a church historian. *The one hundred and fifty-ninth (159th) inaugural lecture of the University of Ilorin*. The Library and Publications Committee University of Ilorin.
- Opeloye, M. O. (2011). The Yorùbá Muslims' cultural identity question. *Ilorin Journal of Religious Studies*, 1(2), 1–20.
- Osaghae, E. E. (2018). *Ethnicity, ethnic politics, and ethnic nationalism*. Bookcraft.
- Osisanwo, A., & Akano, R. (2024). A threat to national unity, an emancipator: The discourse construction of the Yorùbá nation secessionist agitation in selected Nigerian digital communities. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 21(6), 647–663.
- Osifodunrin, P. (2012). Crime, murder, and the religious body in late-colonial Lagos. In S. Aderinto & P. Osifodunrin (Eds.), *Third wave of historical scholarship on Nigeria* (pp. 306–333). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Peel, J. D. Y. (2003). *Religious encounter and the making of the Yorùbá*. Indiana University Press.

- Quadri, Y. A. (2003). The Yorùbá Muslims and the problem of cultural identity. In P. A. Dopamu (Ed.), *Religion, science and culture* (pp. 240–258). Nigeria Association for the Study of Religions.
- Rogerson, B. (2006). *The heirs of the Prophet Muhammad and the roots of the Sunni–Shia schism*. Abacus.
- Sahara Reporters. (2021, June 8). Sunday Igboho, army allegedly clash in Oyo community over killings by suspected herders. <https://saharareporters.com/>
- Salisu, T. M. (2004). Shura (mutual consultation): A provision par excellence in the medieval polity. *Anyigba Journal of Arabic and Islāmic Studies*, 32-56.
- Sanni, M. (2025). Analysing crime waves in contemporary Nigeria through the *maqāṣid al-sharī‘ah* framework. *Invest Journal of Sharia & Economic Law*, 5(2), 252–287. <https://doi.org/10.21154/invest.v5i2.10970>.
- Shoemaker, S. J. (2011). *The death of a prophet: The end of Muhammad’s life and the beginnings of Islam*. University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Stride, G. T., & Ifeka, C. (1971). *Peoples and empires of West Africa*. Thomas Nelson.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tella, M. T., Mamman, D., & Siben, E. (2014). Islamic movements, struggles for power and governance. *Global Journal of Political Science and Administration*, 2(1), 55–63.
- Tijani, S.O. (2022). Leadership-followers relationship in nation building: An analytical study of Qur’ān chapter 49: verses 1-8. *Journal of National Association for the Study of Religions and Education (NASRED)*, 21(2), 235-248.
- Trimingham, J. S. (1962). *A history of Islam in West Africa*. Oxford University Press.
- Usman, A., & Falola, T. (2019). *The Yorùbá from prehistory to the present*. Cambridge University Press.