

# EUROPEAN COLONIZATION AND EROSION OF AFRICA POLITICAL CULTURAL HERITAGE: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PRE-COLONIAL AND COLONIAL YORUBA POLITICAL ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEM

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The study examines the profound impact of European colonialism on the political and cultural heritage of the Yoruba people of West Africa. Before the colonization process, the Yoruba had developed an intricate political system that was decentralized as well as democratic and entailed the integration of cultural customs and practices. Through qualitative methods such as focus group discussions (FGDs) and documentary analysis, the research examines the pre-colonial Yoruba governance structure, the changes imposed under British colonial rule, and the extent to which indigenous institutions and customs were eroded. Research findings reveal that the pre-colonial Yoruba system was highly decentralized, involving councils serving as checks on traditional rulers within a dispersed federation of towns, reflecting democratic accountability. The advent of colonialism however led to a centralization of power, limited democratic practices like council oversight functions and suppressed customary laws and traditions. The imposition of English education system undermined the Yoruba language as an important tool and vehicle for cultural transmission. Although resilient in preserving its heritage, the effects of colonialism created challenges for the Yoruba in revitalizing its political autonomy and recouping disregarded customs. Through this study, the colonial impacts on African societies and the complicated nature of cultural persistence alongside pressures of subjugation are illuminated. By examining this case, the research serves to underscore the importance of promoting indigenous governance in Africa as well as cultural preservation.*

**Keywords:** *Adaptation, Colonialism, Cultural Heritage, Decentralized Government, European colonialism, Political Heritage, Traditional Democracy, Resilience and Yoruba.*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The enduring legacies of European colonization have left indelible marks on the political, social and cultural dimensions of African states. From the erosion of the indigenous governance systems to the suppression of the

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traditional practices, the effects of the colonialism still echoes through the lived experience of the African communities. Instantly, it becomes clear that the history of the peoples of West Africa, particularly the Yoruba, represents a case study on political and cultural transformation under the pressure of colonialism.

The Yoruba are an ethnic group native to southwest Nigeria, as well as the Republic of Benin and Togo, who have had an immensely rich and extraordinary life ever since the ancient age. Before the arrival of the Europeans into the Yorubas land, Yorubas had developed a complex and stratified political system in which communication among the people was actually the base of political power and the check on centralized authority (Ajayi & Smith, 1971). The constitutive element of the political power was the city-state, with the Oba, who exercised his authority with the balance established by various consultative and advisory councils. (Bascom, 1969). To throw more light on Yoruba pre-colonial and colonial Yoruba political administrative system, Oyo Empire will be discussed out of the two empires that ever existed in Yoruba nation ( Ife Empire being considered to be the first Yoruba Empire founded by Oduduwa, while the Oyo Empire was recognized to be the second Empire headed by Alaafin between the 17th and 18th centuries). The Oyo Empire itself reflected a well-established model of decentralized system of governance. The empire was ruled by the Alaafin, the head of the Oyo townships, but he shared power with the council of the senior chiefs who were called the Oyo Mesi (Oyeweso, 2021). With this system, it was impossible for the king to exercise absolute power, as the need for consultation was always a prerequisite to the meaningful decision-making which reflected the Yoruba culture characterised by consensus-building, democracy and collective participation (Ajayi et al, 1971). The political system of the pre-colonial Yoruba people also had component of the age-grade associations, professional guilds, and secret societies which served as social organisation and political participation (Bascom, 1969). These respective institutions created a sense of community and civic responsibility among the people and ensured the continued existence of the democratic and communal system (Ajayi, et al 1971).

The Yoruba had a rich cultural heritage which formed the cornerstones of their political affairs. This heritage included language, religion, arts, and social norms. The Yoruba tongue, and its wealthy oral traditions and complex linguistic structures, was the foundation of personal and community identity (Falola, et al 2006). The Yoruba religious activities, for instance, the worship of Orishas and the observance of the traditional festivals, were all closely intertwined with the social structure of the community (Pemberton, et al 1996). Meanwhile, the Yorubas enjoyed great feats in art and crafts, from the intricate

casting in bronze of Ife to the colorful textile weaving of Abeokuta (Drewal et al., 1989). However, these delicate balances of political, cultural, and social elements were inevitably distorted by the start of European colonizing of the 19th century. Colonization brought in alien administrative systems, legal setups, and educational paradigms which impacted negatively on the cherished traditional institutions and cultural lives of the Yoruba people. (Falola, 1999). The loss of Yoruba traditional democratic practices, the imposition of cultural of foreign culture and legal system denied the Yoruba their political and social evenness.

The transformation of the Yoruba political and administrative structures was a salient part of the colonisation process. The decentralized, democratic governance structure that had prevailed in the pre-colonial era was completely disrupted, as the colonial authority tried to assert their control over the region (Akintoye, 1971). The authority of the Oba increased, while the power of the council of chiefs' and the whole community's influence on the decision taking procedures were greatly reduced. Traditional law and customs were replaced with the colonizer's judicial functions and the introduction of a new administrative system (Akintoye, 1971). These led to a breakdown of the traditional elders' councils, age-grade groups and other institutions which had served as the avenue for citizen engagement and collective decision-making. This condition did not only ruined the democratic principles of Yoruba governance, but resulted to the disintegration of the people's cultural identity and sense of political autonomy.

The processes of political transformations also inevitably affected the Yoruba cultural heritage. The adoption of colonialists' language, English, as the language of instruction and official correspondence led to the underutilization of the Yoruba language (Awoniyi, 1975). The colonialist curriculum projected their traditional gods and worship system as abominable, hence, they should be discarded. Moreover, cultural institutions and traditional practices were considered primitive and barbaric. As generations of Yoruba people melted into the social-cultural mold formed by Europeans, the identity and culture of the natives were not strongly reckoned with by the native. This assault on the original political and cultural heritage by foreign administrative systems and their replacement represented a profound trauma which still echoes in the modern-day struggles for self-determination and cultural rejuvenation. Crucial indications of the long-term effects of colonial transformation are seen by the present-day challenges faced by the Yoruba community in redefining their political and cultural heritage. The Yoruba people face numerous challenges having evolved to the post-colonial systems which are characterized by the experienced colonial effects, as well as the attitudinal alteration among various

segments of the society. These colonial legacies have contributed immensely to the huge obstacles that the Yoruba people face in their struggle to recover and preserve their traditional practices (Akintoye, 1971).

### **1.1 Problem Statement**

The statement of the problem here is that the cultural landscape of the Yoruba people was greatly affected by the European colonization beyond the political sphere. The spread of Western education and Christianity, promoted by colonial authorities and missionaries brought to bear the marginalization of common religious practice and beliefs that were vital to the Yoruba way of life (Peel, 2000). Another reason for this is because the promotion of English as a language of formal education and administration has had a negative impact on the Yoruba language, a major store of traditional knowledge and culture. Bamgbose, among others, posits: "The introduction of English as the official language in education and administration initiated an unbalancing of the Yoruba language at the center of culture and performance". Western political, educational and religious system substituted previous generational transmission of the Yoruba culture and oral tradition which used to be gained through generations (Ajayi, et al 1965). The disruption here was profound in the sense that it broke the age-long cultural heritage connection of the Yoruba people by which they have always relied on for their identity, unity, and survival for so long.

Although European colonization was a huge threat to Yoruba culture, the Yoruba society showed a varying degree of cultural resilience and adaptation in preserving and maintaining their culture. Traditional practices and religion were often combined with elements of Western culture, the results of which were the birth of unique cultural expressions and cultural hybridity (Peel, 2000). Moreover, the Yoruba language remained a means of conveying cultural literary and musical heritage as well as the oral traditions (Bamgbose, 1976; Ozuchi et al., 2015). The remarkable endurance and flexibility of Yoruba cultural identity reflected in its resilience and continued traditional practices and beliefs stand as an evidence of the strength and sturdiness of the Yoruba people amid colonial rule.

### **1.2 Rationale of the Study**

The legacy of European colonization on Yoruba political and cultural heritage is an issue that keeps attracting attention as it makes it possible to understand better the diversity of the processes which were involved in cultural interaction, resistance, and adaptation that molded the present-day Yoruba society. It is necessary to comprehend and appreciate the historical processes

to be able to understand the wealth of diversity and depth of Yoruba culture, as well as the most recent endeavors to revive and revitalize the indigenous traditions and forms of governance. Also, the Yoruba experience is representative of the wider African experience in the colonial era, as it provides a lens for probing into similar challenges and coping techniques utilized by many African societies as they struggled to reclaim their sovereignty from European domination. Through considering the case of Yoruba, it will become more clear that the preservation and the promotion of the indigenous cultural heritage is important for keeping the identity, maintaining the unity and assuring the persistence of the ancient customs when the external pressures of the changes are taken into account.

In sum, the subject of the study on the influence of European colonization on Yoruba political and cultural heritage has been woven around the complex and worthy Yoruba history, their well-studied political system, and deep-seated cultural traditions. The disruption and transformation of the native structures and practices by European powers, mainly the British were mostly brought about through colonial rule which led to political, social and cultural upheavals among the colonized people. Nevertheless, the Yoruba people's capability to adjust and adapt assures the preservation of their cultural heritage as a whole though now modified and blended. It is more than just an account of the Yoruba experience; it also gives a glimpse into the various effects of colonialism and the present attempts to rediscover and reinvigorate African indigenous cultures and government systems after centuries of oppression.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

This study has an important significance in several aspects. First of all, it will contribute to the ongoing discourse and scholarly understanding of the impact of European colonization on African societies, particularly in the context of the Yoruba people. Through a comparative analysis of pre-colonial and colonial Yoruba political systems and evaluating the extent to which their cultural heritage was eroded or undermined, this study provides some insights into the complex and multifaceted effects of colonialism on African ethnic cultural identities and systems of governance. Secondly, the study will fill the gap and intend to correct an impression that colonial masters introduced democracy, federal and presidential system of government with their institution and structural organs to Yoruba nation. Further, this study has practical implications for contemporary efforts to revitalize or preserve the cultural heritage of the Yoruba people. By examining the resilience and continuity of certain cultural practices and traditions, as well as the strategies

that the Yoruba people have applied to preserve their customs, this study can provide valuable insights and lessons for ongoing and future initiatives in this area. Finally, this study will contribute to the broader discourse on the preservation and protection of indigenous cultures and knowledge systems in the face of globalization and cultural homogenization.

It needs to be acknowledged that in the last few decades, Yoruba intellectuals, cultural organizations, and community members have been working hard to restore and disseminate their cultural heritage. This has been achieved through various initiatives such as preserving and promoting the Yoruba language, arts and oral traditions as well as reviving and adapting traditional governance systems and practices to the current context (Abiodun, 2014). However, these attempts have also come up against many obstacles, for instance, globalization, urbanization, and Western cultural norms and governance systems still prevail. According to Adejumo (2023) there is the need for the Yoruba people to strike a balance between preserving their cultural heritage and adapting to the demands of modernity and globalization.

On the basis of the above, this paper will build on a thorough analysis of how European colonization affected the political and cultural heritage of Yoruba people, especially with the respect to contrast precolonial and colonial administrative system. The study analyses the transformations in history, and the long-term consequences. These are done to uncover the range of colonial impact which have affected the Yoruba's identity and culture. As a matter of fact, such an understanding is not optional, but it is a sure way to bring to light the persistent and toddling consequences of colonial rule as well as to ensure preservation and revitalization of the Yoruba culture. The investigation of the Yoruba case study is of special importance given the prominence of this community in West African history as well as their influence in the modern time in the region. Yoruba people are numerous and very cultured. Their experience with colonial rule and their later attempts to preserve their political and cultural identity can be enlightening to understanding the nuances of the colonial encounter in Africa.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

1. How did the Yoruba pre-colonial political system function and what were its key features and guiding principles?
2. What changes were introduced to the Yoruba political and administrative structures under British colonial rule?
3. To what extent did the imposition of European systems of governance disrupt or displace traditional Yoruba political institutions and cultural values?

## **1.5 Research Hypotheses**

1. Traditional stool in Yoruba nation was not democratic before the advent of liberal democracy.
2. Federal and Presidential like system of government has not being in existence in Yoruba nation before the advent of colonization.
3. Parliament and Judiciary were not part of administrative instrument in Yoruba nation traditional stool before the advent of colonization.
4. Imposition of colonial language as a means of formal education has not slow down the pace of development in Yoruba nation.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Pre-Colonial Yoruba Political System**

Many scholars have written in details about the complex and sophisticated political system that existed in the Yoruba land before Europeans colonized the country. As Ajayi and Smith (1964) have put it, "The Yoruba people had successfully established a well formed government system with a clear hierarchical structure and the system of checks and balances". The "Oyo Empire" was the name of their confederation, and it was organized as a federation of kingdoms and city-states, each governed by an Oba (traditional ruler) and an Oyomesi (a council of chiefs). As stated by Falola and Genova (2006), the Yorubas' political system was flexible and decentralized thus their citizens' participation in policymaking was allowed. It is indicated that the Yoruba leaders served as figurehead while the power rests with the council of chiefs and representatives from different communities being the real decision makers. Professor Akinleye's argument reveals the importance of the Ogboni society, known as The Council of the Supreme, which was the major power in check with the Oba and the council of the chiefs. The Ogboni society was the major custodian of the throne, being the one responsible for selecting and instigating new rulers, as well as advising on crucial state issues.

Many researchers believe that the rules of democracy form a part of the traditional Yoruba political system. Likewise, Fadipe (1970) tells us about the constitutionality of the Yoruba monarchy, this power of Oba was controlled by the legislative council of chiefs and the people's representatives (members). According to the Akinjogbin (1992), Yoruba system was "a kind of democracy which is not so different from the Western concept of democracy" In the preamble of the U.S. Constitution (1787), there are provisions like the division of powers, checks and balances and accountability mechanisms, among others as a characteristic of democracy. So also Yoruba kind of traditional democracy was patterned before colonization.

## **2.2 Impact of European Colonization**

The impact of the European colonial powers, in particular the British on traditional Yoruba political system was profound. As Ajayi and Smith (1964) point, "The imposition of British rule resulted in the interruption of the existing systems of power and the introduction of a new type of governing system that stemmed from European models." Many Falola and Genova (2006) state that the colonial administration not only eroded the traditional sources of power and authority in the Yoruba nation but it also led to a total collapse of their cultural heritage. In point they explained that the British used the indirect rule system, which did not remove the traditional rulers completely, but rather subjected them to British control, thus withdrawing the real authority from them and only left a figurehead. Akintoye (1971) also shows the harmful effects of colonization, as asserted that "the British colonial authorities marginalized powers and centralized authority in their administration thus undermining the decentralized nature of the politics system of the Yoruba" The second point is that the power of the kingdom was centralized. This is contrary to the balanced checks that used to be characteristic of how Yoruba people used to rule.

Many scholars investigated the consequences of the specific amendments that the British Colonial Administration undertook. In his work, Akintoye (2010) notes that under colonization, the rulers were replaced with British-appointed chiefs, power was centralized and indirect rule was introduced which did not favor the autonomy of the Yoruba city-states. As Etebom and Wijaya (2022) note, the British stopped the development of the parliamentary institutions and installed a system of indirect rule.

## **2.3 Erosion of Cultural Heritage**

Besides studying the decline of the political structures, historians have taken a keen interest on how colonialism brought about the elimination of the rich cultural traditions of the Yorubas. According to Ajayi and Smith, (1964) "one observes a progressive but gradual erosion of Yoruba heritage as or as a culture whenever Western education and the speaking of the English language is put into force". As observed by Falola and Genova (2006), Christianity and Western cultural influence were the major factors that were responsible for shaping the colonial experience with the Yoruba civilization. The two infer that "The arrival of Christianity and Western values indirectly contributed to shaking the Yoruba belief systems and ethical practices". Akintoye (1971) also points out that neither the colonial nor the post-independence period was characterized by cultural development and the almost total erosion of cultural heritage, the newly formed African states just 'blindly' wanting to follow the



Western civilization model as a way of thinking and behavior, thus neglecting their own cultural traditions.

The colonial regime undoubtedly reshaped the Yoruba political and cultural ancestry beyond any recognition, and they are other scholars with divergent views who assert that some practices and values continued or took different turns. Colonialism though had its advantages over Africa it did not wipe out cultural identities of the people but rather affected them. Adesina (2012) observes "despite the challenges posed by colonial rule, the Yoruba people maintained a strong connection to their cultural roots, with traditional beliefs and practices continuing to shape their identities and social structures" So, researchers are all in agreement in recognizing that the Yoruba people not only displayed considerable resistance but also showed acute adaptability in the face of colonization. As Guyer (1996) points out that Yorubas demonstrated great ability of selectively adopting some of the colonial elements and of adopting them, while saving their core cultural values and practices remain unchanged.

### **3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This paper employs a qualitative research design, using a combination of historical research technique, focus group discussions, and documentary analysis to collect and analyze data. The paper research questions and hypotheses earlier enumerated are the guide to the paper.

**Study Population:** The study population consists of 18 participants from the Yoruba community, including traditional leaders, elders, historians, and cultural experts from Oyo town, Oyo State.

**Sampling Method and Sample Size:** The sampling method used in this study is purposive sampling, which involves selecting participants based on their expertise and knowledge of the Yoruba political and cultural heritage from Oyo town, Oyo State. The sample size is 18 participants.

**Method of Data Collection:** The method of data collection used in this study is qualitative, involving focus group discussions and documentary analysis. Primary and secondary data were collected from various sources, including historical documents, oral traditions, and expert opinions.

**Method of Data Analysis:** The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involves identifying and coding themes and patterns in the data.

### **3.1 Theoretical Framework**

This study uses the cultural imperialism theory as the theoretical framework that offers a broad perspective for the processes through which the dominant cultures assert their power and replace the culture of the subjugated peoples (Tomlinson, 1991). The theory of cultural domination focuses on the power asymmetry, the imposition of foreign norms, and the systematic suppression of indigenous cultural traditions as the fundamental mechanisms of cultural domination (Schiller, 1976).

The framework of cultural imperialism in the context of the European colonisation of Africa demonstrates how the colonial authorities aimed at undermining and eventually replacing the political, social and cultural structures of indigenous communities such as the Yoruba culture, replacing them with their own institutions and value system (Wa Thiong'o, 1986). The process of cultural displacement brought about during the colonial rule was not just a product of the colonial domination but rather the strategic tactic that the colonizers employed to claim hegemony over the colonized territories (Fanon, 1961). The cultural imperialism theory captures the multi-layered process of it, including colonial language imposition, subjugation of indigenous state practices, marginalization of customary rules and beliefs, and disrupting of educational as well as religious systems (Storey, 2018).

The research can be mediated through this theoretical lens to explore the nuanced dimensions of colonial power structures, resistance, and the survival of indigenous cultural identity in the face of colonial oppression. Furthermore, the cultural imperialism framework establishes the basis of the political and cultural heritage in the Yoruba's history which was due to the influence of the colonialism. The consolidated work of this theory is on the slow erosion of traditional practices together with the gradual detachment of young generation from the cultural upholding. Such a process can have severe and long-lasting effects on the collective identity and self-determination of the Yoruba community. Basically, the cultural imperialism theory gives us a certain theoretical bases for the analysis of the historical experience of the Yoruba and the further creation of programs to preserve and restore their own unique political and cultural heritage.

**4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

**Research Question 1: How did the pre-colonial Yoruba political system function, and what were its key features and guiding principles?**

Research Questions	Theme	Evidence from Participants (P) Responses
<p>RQ1: How did the pre-colonial Yoruba political system function, and what were its key features and guiding principles?</p>	<p>Democratic Governance Structure</p>	<p>P1: "There was no absolute ruler (Alafin). The Alafin was elected by the council of chiefs (Oyomesi) and was answerable to the people. P6: "Power was shared between the chiefs and the opinion of the people was put in consideration in decision-making processes."</p>
	<p>Decentralized Administrative System</p>	<p>P3: "The Yoruba towns and communities had their own administrative structures headed by the Oba who was greatly assisted by different chiefs and councils." P15: "The Oba was the head of the state, and also the council of chiefs helped in the management of the community, while the balance of power and accountability guaranteed decentralized administrative system."</p>
	<p>Judicial and Legislative Functions</p>	<p>P5: "The Oba and the council of chiefs constitute the judiciary, they rule in accordance to the customary laws and resolve disputes within the community."</p>
	<p>Absence of Distinct Parliamentary and Judicial Institutions</p>	<p>R4: "Our traditional stool incorporated decision-making and conflict resolution within its structure. It wasn't divided into separate branches like the colonial system." R12: "the traditional stool system, the parliament and the judiciary included were not separated but formed a single governing body."</p>

Source: 2024 field work

All members of the focus group agreed that the conventional Yoruba political and administrative organization was democratic and relatively decentralized. Participant 1 said, "There was no absolute ruler Alafin. The Alafin

was elected by the council of chiefs (Oyomesi) and was answerable to the people. In his decisions, the council had to approve them." Participant 6 also confirmed that the political system of the Yorubas was not autocratic. While there was an Oba that exercised the highest authority in the community, he was not autocratic. Power was shared between the chiefs and the opinion of the people was put in consideration in decision-making processes." Participant 12 further emphasized the populist nature of the traditional stool, describing it as "a populist position with power, sustained by the agreement of the community and the king's authority and its governance."

The decentralized nature of the administrative system was highlighted by several participants. Participant 3 explained, "The Yoruba towns and communities had their own administrative structures headed by the Oba who was greatly assisted by different chiefs and councils." Participant 9 added that this system "included local autonomy and quick reaction to the needs of the citizens. It was not one-way top-down structure." Participant 15 summarized the balance of power, stating, "The Oba (Alafin) was the head of the state, and also the council of chiefs helped in the management of the community, while the balance of power and accountability guaranteed decentralized administrative system."

The pre-colonial Yoruba political system also incorporated judicial and legislative functions. Participant 7 described how "the Yoruba stool, the traditional seat of power, had both the judicial and legislative departments. King, together with the chiefs, performed the judicial function, adjudicating the disputes and enforcing customary rules." Participant 5 added that "The Oba and the council of chiefs constitute the judiciary, they rule in accordance to the customary laws and resolve disputes within the community." The legislative role was emphasized by Participant 11, who noted that the "Council of Chiefs in addition to performing a legislative function by enacting and proposing policies meant for the community." Participant 14 expanded on this, stating that "The council of chiefs carried out not only the legislative function, such as proposing and enacting laws for the community. A system of government, which involved not only the political area, but also the social one, was given by them." Participant 17 summarized this dual role, saying, "The stool of the traditional Yoruba epitomized a dualism of both law enforcement and decision-making authority that formed the basis of governance of the community."

According to the respondents similarly, the ancient Yoruba political system was a true federal system that had an integrated angle to its political structure before colonization. Under such a system, parliamentary and judicial systems were less defined and entities that served in these capacities also had

different responsibilities. This is evidenced by the responses of participants. Respondent 4, for instance stated that "Our traditional stool incorporated decision-making and conflict resolution within its structure. It wasn't divided into separate branches like the colonial system. " This integrated nature was further emphasized by Respondent 9, a traditional leader, who noted, "The idea of a parliament separate from the Oba's council is a colonial concept. Traditionally, decisions were made collectively by the Oba and his chiefs." The basis of judgment in this system was explained by Respondent 10, "Judgment in our traditional system depend on adage, Ijala and Itan- the written code of law was not formal. The Oba and elders were our judges." In the traditional stool system, the parliament and the judiciary included were not separated but formed a single governing body," said Respondent 12. Finally, Respondent 18, asserted that "Our traditional system had checks and balances, but not in the form of separate parliament and judiciary. It was all integrated under the Oba's leadership. "

### **Discussion of findings to Research Question 1: How did the pre-colonial Yoruba political system function, and what were its key features and guiding principles?**

Their political and administrative systems, deeply embedded in traditions and beliefs which had been in place before the colonial outbreak, were rather intricate and established. The Yoruba were made up of many city-states each one was led by a traditional ruler (Oba) and a council of elders (Igbimo). Akintoye (2010) says that this system was of the "type where each town is autonomous and independent, but they all acknowledge symbolically the overlordship of the Oba of the leading town". The decentralized system was based on democratic principles and a system of checks and balances, which was represented by the Ogboni society, a strong council of chiefs and elders, as a check on the authority of the Oba (Falola & Genova, 2006).

The Yoruba, political organization was so interlinked with their religious practices and beliefs. In addition, the Oba was not just the political but also the religious head of the community". This fusion of political and spiritual authority gave the entire Yoruba political system an infrastructural and ideological foundation, which proved very powerful and put the system in high regard among the Yorubas. Furthermore, Yorubas live in extended family units and lineages grouped together, with a council of elders from each lineage representing them. This makes sure that the Yoruba people democratic ethos was addressed using a participatory and inclusive decision-making process (Falola & Heaton, 2008).

**Research Question 2: What changes were introduced to the Yoruba political and administrative structures under British colonial rule?**

Research Questions	Theme	Evidence from Participants (P) Responses
<p>RQ2: What changes were introduced to the Yoruba political and administrative structures under British colonial rule?</p>	<p>Centralization of Power</p> <p>Erosion of Traditional Democratic Practices</p> <p>Suppression of Customary Laws and Practices</p> <p>Imposition of Colonial Language and Education</p>	<p>P2: "Colonial administration saw the emergence of a more centralized system of government, which was very different from the traditional local government that was mainly decentralized."</p> <p>P8: "The colonizer imposed own legal and administration structure, and in most case obliterated or subdued the customary laws and culture of the Yoruba people."</p> <p>P11: "The suppression of our native laws and the undermining of our legislative functions negatively affect the erosion of our unique cultural identity."</p> <p>P16: "The colonial educational system had the main goal of transmission of the culture and the language of the colonizer; indigenous education settings predominantly meant the imposition of colonist's worldview and the suppression of traditional Yoruba knowledge."</p>

Source: 2024 field work

Most of the participants in the focus group pointed to some changes and transformations in the Yoruba political and administrative structures during colonialism. One of the chief changes was a concentration of power. Participant 2 continued this line of thought by saying, "Colonial administration was characterized by an even more centralized system of government which was prominently different from the traditional local government which was a decentralized system of government, decision-making authority now solely belongs to the Oba while the council of chiefs simply have limited powers". Participant 9 had this to say, "The colonial master aimed at achieving a systematic rule hence, they minimized the power of the traditional authority".

Another noticeable shift was that democratic practices had gradually started eroding. Participant 4 stated, "Selection of a ruler became arbitrary from the imperial interest and the ruler selected without input of the community". Participant 10 noted that "The colonial rule thus reduced the democratic value in practice within the Yoruba indigenous system of leadership." Participant 16 described the end result system as "A very autocratic system of power emerged due to the colonialism."

Special emphasis was further made on the fact that customary laws and practices were suppressed. As participant 8 said, "The coloniser imposed own legal and administration structure, and in most case obliterated or subdued the customary laws and culture of the Yoruba people." Participant 14 went further to explain by stating that "The colonial authority relegated, detached, unfroze or endorsed the political and juridical powers of the Yoruba stools." Participant 18 viewed this as "The enforced suspension of our tradition, customs and culture was a systemic cunning scheme of bringing down the Yoruba's political and cultural nationalism."

The imposition of colonial language and education was another significant change. Participants 1 and 8 jointly noted, "The colonialists nationalized their own language (English), to be used as a medium of formal education and administration. This linguistic imposition diminished use and transmission of the Yoruba language and implied the erosion of cultural practices." Participant 16 added, "The colonial educational system had the main goal of transmission of the culture and the language of the colonizer; indigenous education settings predominantly meant the imposition of colonist's worldview and the suppression of traditional Yoruba knowledge." Participant 6 observed the long-term effects, stating, "The linguistic imposition which we experienced, led to the erosion of our cultural practices and produced a growing feeling of distance between the younger generation and their cultural traditions." Participant 12 concluded, "Assimilation of the colonial language and education system is indeed, a factor that hampers development in Yoruba nation, because it resulted in loss of local knowledge and its transmission to future generations."

### **Discussion of findings to Research Question 2: What changes were introduced to the Yoruba political and administrative structures under British colonial rule?**

Colonialism has a profound effect on the pre-colonial Yoruba political-administrative system which really changed the political identity of an egalitarian society which hitherto was in operation before European adventure in Africa. Apart from the fact colonialism stripped the pre-colonial Yoruba

traditional institution of its autonomy and sovereignty, its major effect could also be found in the selection process of and authority of a king (Oba). An erosion in the selection of traditional ruler (Oba) has been a major setback which the European incursion created in the Yoruba political landscape. For instance, Yoruba cosmology belief system emphasizes the sacredness and power of the traditional ruler. Hence, the intense ritual processes and activities which accompany the selection, initiation and coronation of Oba, attest to his divinity as *alasekejiorisa* meaning 'second in command to the *orisa* (deities) who possesses the like-authority in essence and functions. (Ogungbile, et al 2015). In view of this, Ifa oracle which is a special divinity among the Yoruba is consulted to choose the right prince among many princes in conjunction with kingmakers. The essence of this is that Yoruba political institutions is rooted in religion and culture of the communities. The monarch is held as sacred, and his sacredness is enshrined and reinforced through the process of ritual ordering in the selection, election and initiation (coronation and enthronement). In the pre-colonial era, when the selection of a king in any community was done in accordance with socio-religious ethos, princes that were not picked would have to accept their fate and believed that ancestors and deities had picked the right choice for the communities for peace to reign supreme in the land. However, colonial and contemporary influences of Western civilization/modernization had made mockery of this age-long processes of selection an Oba in Yoruba land, even though the selection processes of an Oba could have still be modified, and selections could be achieved (spiritually) through prayers, in accordance to Catholic traditions of selecting Pope in the Vatican City, but the colonial masters were more interested in the system of economic exploitation and alienation of African political culture to sweet their selfish interest. The resultant effect of this is that all these veneration and reverence have today died a natural death. In contemporary Yoruba communities the method of selection of an Oba always goes to the highest bidder among the princes. And this sometimes led to court cases which can drag on for many years. Sometimes, the throne can be left vacant for many years as a result of royal tussles within many ruling houses. Cases of post-selection of Oba are abounded in many Yoruba towns and communities today. Colonial rule and its brand Western-type of democracy inherited by African political class imposed on the continent a political system which is not congruent with African brand. In the Western types of democracy, State government has the final say in the selection of the king by given what is now described as 'staff of office' to the king before such a king can be recognized as *dejure* and *defacto* ruler of the land. The implication of this is that, for fees those who crown kings in contemporary Yoruba land bypass



sacred ritual necessary before the ascension of kings to the stool. Again, Christianity and Islam which are harbingers which prepared the ground for eventual colonization of Yorubaland, played important role in destroying this practice. (Adedayo, et al 2024). And when such an Oba who was not Ifa oracle choice ascended the throne knowing well that he did not pass through the proper traditional process before his ascension, he would peel off traditional institution its coats of pride, respect and myths. In addition to this, traditional appurtenances of the ancient monarchies would be thrown overboard. In fact, colonial rule induced the creation of alien Western-type of political environment in Yorubaland through modern day government which has the power to dethrone and enthrone an Oba in the region as well as in the country.

**Research Question 3: To what degree did the imposition of European systems of governance disrupt or displace traditional Yoruba political institutions and cultural values?**

Research Questions	Theme	Evidence from Participants (P) Responses
RQ3: To what degree did the imposition of European systems of governance disrupt or displace traditional Yoruba political institutions and cultural values?	Weakening of Traditional Governance Structures	P10: "Due to the centralization of power and erosion of the democratic practices in the context of the Yoruba political system, the traditional governance structures are weakening and the council of chiefs has lost its place while the Obas activities are being concentrated in his office and thus balance of power and accountability are being shifted from the traditional system."
	Erosion of Cultural Practices and Identity	P5: "The young people of contemporary Yoruba community are becoming increasingly detached from the heritage of their ancestors, due to the weakened impact of colonialism on our customs and traditions."
	Challenges in Revitalizing Traditional Practices	P9: "The lingering colonial legacy, in terms of governance organization and community perception, has demonstrate great obstacles to the Yoruba people in their wish to revitalize and preserve their traditional political and cultural practices."

Source: 2024 field work

The focus group discussions revealed the profound and lasting impact of colonial influence on the Yoruba's political and cultural heritage. Participants voiced their concerns over the weakening of traditional governance structures. Participant 10 observed, "Due to the centralization of power and erosion of the democratic practices in the context of the Yoruba political system, the traditional governance structures were weakened and the council of chiefs has lost its place while the Obas' activities are being concentrated in his office and thus balance of power and accountability are being shifted from the traditional system." Participant 3 added, "Along with the withering of our tribal governing systems, it has become difficult to keep community involvement and concern in the decision making processes." Participant 13 noted, "The vintage checks and balances within the Yoruba pre-colonial governance system have however been heavily undermined, thereby making it very difficult for the community to keep in check their leaders, participate in the decision making process and hold them accountable." Participant 9 summed up the impact, stating, "As a result, the traditional balance of power that existed when the Yoruba had political system was wiped out and the community's voice was lost." Participant 15 concluded, "Colonization is the source of a massive destabilisation of our political system, which makes it really difficult to maintain the democratic principles that used to be at the core of how our government is run."

The erosion of cultural practices and identity was another significant impact. Participant 17 observed, "The subjugation of indigenous laws and the superimposition of colonial language and education have led to the dissolution of Yoruba customary practices and the steady loss of cultural identity. The younger generation of Yoruba people is progressively detached from their traditional heritage which may eventually lead to extinction of their cultural heritage." Participant 5 added, "The young people of contemporary Yoruba community are becoming increasingly detached from the heritage of their ancestors, due to the weakened impact of colonialism on our customs and traditions." Participant 11 noted, "The suppression of our native laws and the undermining of our legislative functions negatively affect the erosion of our unique cultural identity." Participant 17 further emphasized, "The imposition of the colonizers' language and education bring about the gradual loss of our native language, traditions, and overall cultural heritage." Participant 18 concluded, "Interruption of the dissemination of Yoruba language, traditional knowledge and customs have had a deep impact on the community's identity and affiliation. The diminishing of these elements has made the preservation of the Yoruba' unique cultural heritage more complex."

The participants also highlighted the challenges in revitalizing traditional practices. Participant 2 observed, "The fact that colonial legacies have had long-lasting effects results in a difficult process of re-establishing and protecting the Yoruba political and cultural practices. Efforts to reclaim and preserve the traditional Yoruba heritage face barriers erected by institutions, society, law in colonial times." Participant 9 added, "The lingering colonial legacy, in terms of governance organization and community perception, has demonstrate great obstacles to the Yoruba people in their wish to revitalize and preserve their traditional political and cultural practices." Participant 7 noted, "The process of political and cultural regeneration of the Yoruba is stunted by problems ranging from institutional, social, and sometimes even legal." Participant 13 concluded, "Post-colonial systems and structures have been deeply enrooted and it needs a continued and sustained intervention to free our native practices from these impediments."

The group discussions overall, showed that colonialism really took its heaviest toll on the political and cultural aspects of the Yoruba. Governance systems in traditional areas were not strong. Cultural practices and identities were also at risk. In addition, the revitalization of traditional practices were pointed out by the participants as a recurring theme.

### **Discussion of findings to Research Question 3: To what degree did the imposition of European systems of governance disrupt or displace traditional Yoruba political institutions and cultural values?**

But, it is from the dawn of the colonial dominance of the British in the nineteenth century the Yoruba people and their political as well as cultural heritage experienced a dramatic shift. Using their imperial aim and the urge to consolidate control, the British initiated the policy of centralization and blocked the native decentralized governmental system. As Falola and Heaton (2008) argue, "The British's aim was to dismantle the ancient multi-level system of checks and balances, by putting all the authorities in the hands of only one Alafin of Oyo whilst neglecting the other Obas and their councils of chiefs." This greatly undermined the traditional system and brought about the loss of autonomy among the different". The destruction of tradition structures being the direct result of the indirect methods used by the colonial administration was the second factor that led to this erosion. For example, traditional rulers were corrupted, co-opted and manipulated to become agents of the colonial government (Ajayi & Espie, 1965).

#### **4.1 Analysis of Hypothesis**

##### **Null Hypothesis 1: Traditional stools in the Yoruba nation were not democratic before the advent of liberal democracy.**

The above null hypothesis was rejected as evidence indicates that the Yoruba had a participatory and inclusive governance system which was democratic in nature long before European colonization. As evidenced in the literature, the pre-colonial Yoruba political system included some democratic features and systems of power balance, albeit it was different from the classical Western liberal democracies. A decentralized state with autonomous city-states, a council of elders representing lineages as well as the Ogboni society as a check on Obas points to democratic traditions among the Yoruba since ancient times (Akintoye, 2010 and Falola & Genova, 2006).

##### **Null Hypothesis 2: A federal and presidential-like system of government did not exist in the Yoruba nation before the advent of colonization.**

The above null hypothesis was rejected. This is because the Yoruba had a form of federalism, though not identical to modern federal presidential systems. As evidenced in the literature, while the terminology may differ, historians describe the pre-colonial Yoruba as having a decentralized, quasi-federal system where each town was self-governing yet recognized a symbolic overlord (Akintoye, 2010; Falola & Heaton, 2008). This resembles a federal structure to a certain extent. This findings point to the pre-colonial Yoruba exhibiting democratic traditions, a degree of federalism, indigenous governance institutions, and a rich cultural heritage disrupted by European colonization and had other far reaching effects also.

##### **Null Hypothesis 3: Parliament and the judiciary were not part of the administrative instruments in the Yoruba nation's traditional stools before colonization.**

The above null hypothesis was rejected. This is because the Yoruba owned traditional positions which served parliamentary and judicial roles, albeit dissimilar to their western counterparts. As evidenced in the literature, while formal parliaments and court systems comparable to the present were possibly not known, it is indicated that councils of elders (Igbimo) and societies like Ogboni served legislative and judicial functions in resolving disputes and checking the ruler's powers (Fadipe, 1970; Falola & Genova, 2006).

**Null Hypothesis 4: The imposition of the colonial language as a means of formal education did not slow the pace of development in the Yoruba nation.**

The above null hypothesis was rejected. This is because scholarly evidence seems to show that the colonial language policy affected the development of the Yoruba intellectual and cultural potentials negatively. As evidenced in the literature, scholars suggest the propagation of English language consequently thwarted the growth of the Yoruba language and it was mainly in formal sectors like education and administration where English language became the major language of communication and transmission instead of the Yoruba language (Bamgbose, 1976; Peel, 2000). This undermined the transmission of indigenous knowledge and slow down or make the learning process very difficult.

**4.2 Discussion of Findings to the Hypothesis**

The findings of the group discussions and the analysis of the research hypotheses provide valuable proof and insights into Yoruba political structure, that democracy, democracy institutions and organ of government were existing before the arrival of European colonization and how the colonization had negatively impacted the political and cultural heritage of the Yoruba nation.

**Traditional stools in the Yoruba nation were democratic before the advent of liberal democracy**

The rejection of the first null hypothesis, which stated that traditional stools in the Yoruba nation were not democratic before the advent of liberal democracy, is a significant finding. The focus group discussions and the literature review strongly indicate that the pre-colonial Yoruba political system embodied democratic principles and practices. The existence of councils of elders, such as the Igbimo and Ogboni, served as checks on the authority of the traditional rulers (Obas), ensuring a balance of power and accountability (Fadipe, 1970; Falola & Genova, 2006). Additionally, the Yoruba political structure, which was divided into town or city-states that were autonomous but acknowledged a symbolic over lordship, parallels the core democratic principles of self-rule and decentralized decision-making (Akintoye, 2010; Falola & Heaton, 2008). This contradicts the idea that democracy was brought to Africa by European colonial powers alone, and instead shows that the Yoruba people had their own well-organized traditional democratic system.

### **A federal and presidential-like system of government exist in the Yoruba nation before the advent of colonization**

The rejection of the second null hypothesis, which claimed that a federal and presidential-like system of government did not exist in the Yoruba nation before colonization, further indicates the sophistication and complexity of the pre-colonial Yoruba political structure. The literature and focus groups show that the Yoruba polity emphasized the federalist structure, which was made up of autonomous city-states and a symbolic ruler (Akintoye, 2010; Falola & Heaton, 2008). It should also be pointed out that the Igbimo and Ogboni institutions, which performed parliamentary type functions, were instrumental in the development of structures that facilitated inclusive decision-making and checks on power (Akintoye, 2010 and Falola & Genova, 2006). Even though there was no direct equivalent to the British parliament or judiciary, these findings disprove the idea that pre-colonial African communities did not possess advanced political institutions or governance.

### **Parliament and the judiciary were part of the administrative instruments in the Yoruba nation's traditional stools before colonization**

This is because the Yoruba appeared to own traditional positions which served parliamentary and judicial roles, albeit dissimilar to their western counterparts. The Oba and his council engaged in legislative, executive, and judicial activities without the clear delineation of powers akin to a parliament or an independent judiciary system. This integrated system was based on Yoruba culture and practices, thus it worked properly until the colonialism when Western type of political system began to take roots. As evidenced in the literature, while formal parliaments and court systems comparable to the present were possibly not known, it is indicated that councils of elders (Igbimo) and societies like Ogboni served legislative and judicial functions in resolving disputes and checking the ruler's powers (Fadipe, 1970; Falola & Genova, 2006) Claimed that parliament and the judiciary were part of the administrative instruments in the Yoruba nation's traditional stools before colonization, highlights a need for further investigation and comprehensive understanding of the Yoruba political and administrative structures. While advisory councils performed parliamentary-like functions, the evidence regarding a separate judicial branch is less clear.

### **The imposition of the colonial language as a means of formal education slow the pace of development in the Yoruba nation**

However, the imposition of the colonial language as a means of formal education slow the pace of development in the Yoruba nation, is a significant finding. The focus group discussions and literature review (Bamgbose, 1976;

Peel, 2000), primarily consider that rendering English as the primary language in education and governance contributed to the deterioration of Yoruba which was a significant cultural knowledge repository and medium of expression, unlike Chinese that were colonized by the same British retained their language as a means of official communication and it has contributed to their country development tremendously. This erosion of the Yoruba language and the marginalization of traditional practices and beliefs due to the spread of Western education (Peel, 2000) represent a significant disruption of the Yoruba cultural heritage. The findings indicate the need to place the discourse about the impacts of colonial policies on indigenous cultural practices and to promote the revitalization and preservation of these vital aspects of Yoruba identity and heritage.

Additionally, it was established that despite the significant challenges posed by European colonization, the findings reflect the Yoruba people's resilience and their ability to employ appropriate strategies for the preservation of their cultural identity. Based on the focus group discussions and literature review (Peel, 2000; Bamgbose, 1976), it can be argued that traditional practices and beliefs were adapted to, and in some way mixed with elements of Western culture, leading to a unique cultural expression and hybrid identity. Yoruba language too continued to be used and honoured in various contexts; literature, musicals, oral traditions which played great part in the preservation and transmission of cultural knowledge (Bamgbose, 1976). The fact that the Yoruba people remained resilient and adaptable in the face of colonial subjugation indicates the abiding vitality of their cultural values and the enduring will to maintain their heritage through external forces of change.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study offers important lessons on how to preserve and promote indigenous heritage that are not only important to the Yoruba but to all other communities that have experienced the negative effects of colonization as well. The study starts by stressing that political organization, religious beliefs and cultural practices are not discrete areas of indigenous societies, but rather closely interact with each other. The weakening of the local governance systems that may occur within the cultural life of the community echoes through various aspects of the cultural life of the society, posing the danger of disrupting its operation. Firstly, this study sets forth the importance of working directly with traditional leaders, elders and cultural experts in order to truly connect with those experiences in detail and listen to firsthand perspectives of what these people have gone through. Their voices express vital ideas that, in their turn, can lead to corrective actions to maintain the indigenous heritage.

Also, resilience and adaptive behaviours of Yoruba people in preservation of their cultural heritage are the proofs and models that other groups can follow while overcoming such obstacles. The ways of syncretism, language preservation, and creative reinterpretations of traditions could generate a suitable vehicle not only for the identification of local cultures but also for the preservation of the old practices against any other external forces to change. Finally, the result has highlighted the need to recognize and address the on-going legacy of colonialism that still influence our societies and everyday attempts for reclaiming and celebrating our native cultures. Through acknowledging and creating opportunities for the mainstream discussion about the past experiences, societies will be able to open the lines of communication towards the national healing, restoration, and strengthening of their cultural traditions.

Overall, findings brings to light the devastating consequences of the European colonialism on the Yoruba political institutions and culture, on the other hand, it also shows the Yoruba people's power of survival and their ability to keep their traditions and culture alive. Data obtained from this study provide the important lessons for other communities which are caught in the web of the issues relating to the legacy of colonialism as well as in the process of the conservation of the indigenous culture in the dynamic world. The results of the study can be crucially applied in explaining the intricate nature of cultural interactions, resistance, and adoption in the making of today's Yoruba culture. In the same vein, they underscore the notion of acknowledging and honouring the incomparable sophistication and depth of African indigenous political and cultural traditions, plus their ongoing work of restoration and revival. Moreover, one can draw the conclusion that the Yoruba history is in fact the encapsulation of the overall African experience under European occupation as this gives an insight into the common obstacles and effective coping strategies adopted across the various African societies in the course of colonization. It is imperative to note that several African nations have at last gradually reverting to their ancient political cultures and are now acknowledging traditional democracy e .g (1). In the Kingdoms of Lesotho and Swaziland, the King Letsie III of Lesotho functions as President. (2) The National House of Chiefs was created under the 1992 Ghanaian constitution, which forbids the state from designating or rejecting the 30% of seats set aside for traditional leaders in the district assembly. (3) South African 1994 constitutions provided for constitutional monarchy in the Kwazulu Nata. Despite the fact that Nigeria traditional rulers are yet to be given constitutional role, the Yoruba culture represents a perfect example through which the significance of safeguarding of and advocating for indigenous cultural heritage as a means of reinforcing



identity, promoting unity, and preserving the integrity of the prevailing traditional beliefs in the face of forces of change can be demonstrated. If the following can be considered, it will better the future of Yoruba nation and Nigeria at large:

1. Federal government as a matter of urgency through ministry of Education should formulate a policy and direct that all the nations that make up Nigeria should start teaching in their various national vernaculars from primary to tertiary institution, this; will contribute to the rapid development and knowledge will be easily transferred for the betterment of the different nations. E.g countries like China, Japan, Italy and Germany are doing well because knowledge have always been easily transferred through indigenous languages to their citizens.
2. Confederalism system of government or regional self-style pattern of government should be established in Nigeria, whereby different nations that make up the present Nigeria can go back to their earlier pre-colonial political structures and values with little adjustment to meet up with today political contemporary needs. E.g Saudi Arabia has a King as a President and they are doing well with their own style of government.

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