

THE DYNAMICS OF HONOUR IN VIOLENCE AND CHIEFTAINCY POLITICS IN IBADAN HISTORY

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1.0 POWER AND HONOUR IN IBADAN SOCIETY

Honour is a composite concept that has to do with esteem, respectability, and reputation. The twin elements of self-regard and social esteem run through several definitions of honour. According to Julian Pitt-Rivers quoted by Olufunke Adebayo (2007):

“...Honour is the value of persons in his own eyes but also in the eyes of the society. it is his estimation of his own worth, his claim to pride, but it is also the acknowledgement of that claim his excellence recognized by society, his right to pride (1966,21).”

This means that a personal evaluation of oneself is not enough to confer honour, the society must “acknowledge that claim” which is usually manifested through a person’s reputation. The role of society as judge is thus very significant in the acquisition of honour by its members. Those two dimensions of honor, the personal and the social are as a result closely related.

The practice of politically motivated suicide was powered by a military machine laden with intrigues, machinations and intense competition for public office and social advancement. The ideals of honour which had its antecedents in the nineteenth century thus carried over into the twentieth century were so strong that Ibadan survived the first three decades of colonial rule despite the intrigue-laced nature of Ibadan chieftaincy politics and the official interference of the colonial authorities.

Throughout the nineteenth century, five principal chiefs committed suicide in Ibadan: Lakanle (1855), Balogun Ajobo (1870), Seriki Iyapo (1877), Chief Aiyejenku Foko (1877) and Balogun Ajayi Osungbekun (1893). In the colonial era were Baale Dada Opadare (1907). Baale Irefin (1914), and Balogun Ola (1917). They did this because they thought themselves to be on the brink of ignominy.

The desire to preserve personal and family honour in the face of impending ignominy was a major factor that moved public figures to commit suicide. Far from being “**victims**” they made the most of disadvantageous situation, turned them around and earned respect and esteem in death instead of the ridicule that would have been their lot. Suicide thus served an “**honourable**” purpose for them. The ideals of honour thus carried over into the 20th century were so strong that they survived the first three decades rule despite the intrigue-laced nature of Ibadan chieftaincy politics and the official interference of the colonial authorities.

This paper reveals that politically motivated suicide, though self destructive was usually mean to serve an honourable purpose such that those involved became heroes even in death.

2.0 WARRIOR CULTURE AND ELEPO’S TRAGEDY

Elepo and his brothers, Atipo and Epo-o-jorun-o-pa-igi came to Ibadan from Ilobu after the Gbanamu war when the Oyos took control of Ibadan. They arrived and settled at Adelakun compound. According to I.B. Akinyele, they came along with Bankole Alesinloye who came from Ofa whose one of his sons became the first Olubadan of Ibadan in 1963.

Chief Elepo, a brave warrior, became a close friend of Oluyole who was the Osi Are Ona-Kakanfo of Oluyedun. During the Ota war Oluyole was sent to head a team comprising Elepo, Inakoju the Seriki and Bankole Alesinloye. Oluyole made Ipara his headquarters.

According to Rev. Samuel Johnson, the contingent of Ibadan army under Chiefs Elepo and Inakoju met Oluyole at Ipara. Here, a plot was hatched by which Lakanle and Bankole his lieutenant should be wiped out, but the plot was discovered and it aroused great indignation at Ibadan. In the civil war that ensued, Lakanle, the otun Are Ona-Kakanfo committed suicide when Chief Aiyejenku his friend, was sent to him by Oluyole to leave the town after winning other Chiefs over. Thus, the first political suicide was committed in the nineteenth century in Ibadan.

When Oluyole was installed the Bale of Ibadan, he made Bankole Alesinloye the first Balogun of Ibadan as written by I.B. Akinyele in "Iwe Itan Ibadan at page 38" Oluyole sent Bankole Alesinloye his Balogun to Ijebu Remo but he refused to go. Bankole seized the opportunity to plot against Oluyole and prevented him from entering Ibadan from Ijebu Remo war. However, Oluyole and his war boys did not take the route guarded by Bankole, instead, they took Elekuro route. When Oluyole entered Ibadan, there was civil war and Temileke, one of Oluyole war boys, shot and killed Bankole as he was trying to enter Oluyole's residence to kill him.

Thereafter, Oluyole offered Elepo the post of Balogun which he rejected despite pressure from his brothers and eminent Ibadan war-chiefs saying his name was enough to win wars.

Bale Oluyole sent Elepo to Iberekodo to attack the town near Abeokuta. Unknown to Elepo, the Bale of Iberekodo had sent gifts to Oluyole while he was boasting that with or without the help of God, he would win the battle and capture Iberekodo. Oluyole subsequently withdrew Elepo from Iberekodo.

Thereafter, Elepo was asked by Basorun Oluyole, after Eleduwe war, to wage war against Ede and Ilobu under the command of Balogun Oderinlo who succeeded Balogun Alesinloye. However, Elepo vetoed the destruction of Ede and so Ibadan army marched on to Ilobu (Rev. Samuel Johnson, 1976 page 284). The people of Ilobu showed signs of

submission by giving Elepo presents and people from surrounding villages gave themselves up to Elepo instead of Balogun Oderinlo.

Rev. Samuel Johnson went further that Elepo ruled the army according to his will; and consequently the Balogun was indignant at this usurpation of his rights and the other chiefs sympathized with him. The restless warriors had nobody to fight and started to go home. According to Rev. Samuel Johnson, he described the scenario as “The AGBAMAJA War” i.e. fully armed but engaging in no fight. The war chiefs rejected Elepo despite his apologies when they got to Ibadan. To worsen the situation, Elepo refused arrogantly to prostrate to Balogun Oderinlo. Which means he did not accept his leadership but he respected only Basorun Oluyole.

Consequently, Elepo’s principal subordinate war-chiefs were withdrawn from him and conferred town chiefs on them while all matters of his quarters of the town were taken straight to the Balogun. Thus, Elepo saw himself isolated.

During the Fulani war of 1840 at Osogbo, Balogun Oderinlo marched out with the whole mighty army of Ibadan without Elepo and Basorun Oluyole, the former having been rejected by the war-chiefs for his actions at the last AGBAMAJS expedition. The Basorun approved of this resolve and therefore Elepo stayed at home. The victory at Osogbo was a most important one and forms a turning point in Yoruba history so concluded Rev. Samuel Johnson in the “The History of the Yorubas”

Elepo not being allowed to go to Osogbo war was sent to Otefan. On his return, Basorun Oluyole conveyed the message of the war-chiefs to leave the town after being victorious of Oshogbo. Basorun later gave him accommodation at his quarter of the town and allowed him to park his goods and belongings at another house (kara). Yet, the Chiefs insisted that he must leave the town. On his way to Ijebu Remo, he asked for his property to which Oluyole said that anything that entered Iba’s house cannot come out again. It was clear to him that his loyalty to Basorun Oluyole was in vein.

His brother, Atipo escaped to Ijaiye where he became famous having won for Kurunmi many wars like Ogodo, Otefon, and Gbogogbo. Elepo later left Remo and went to Ijaiye having heard of his brother's Progress and influence at Ijaiye. On getting there, it was said that Oluyole got wind of it and linked up with Kurunmi. Elepo was sent to attack Ile-Bioku from where he did not return. Kurunmi, the Are Ona Kakanfo entered Ogboni house (Cult House) and came out with Atipo's head (I.B. Akinyele, 190 pg.42)

The consequence was very disastrous for Elepo and his brothers as they ended their career in Ijaiye in disgrace. Elepo's attitude did not portray him as a visionary and amiable leader like many war leaders in Ibadan in the nineteenth century. The desire to preserve personal and family honour in the face of impending ignominy made Elepo a selfish leader who was not sensitive to the events happening around him. His inability to re-examine his loyalty and suspect Oluyole's move to eliminate him showed him as a weak person who had no direction and did not know what he wanted. His selfish ambition led him to join his brother, Atipo at Ijaiye to make name but his calculation was wrong. Kurunmi, as a dictator would not allow competition for power and control of Ijaiye.

Considering what he did to his Balogun Aasu who founded Fiditi and the conflicts for power between him and Oluyole that caused BATEDO war in 1844, he was a different man not to be trusted.

In conclusion, the fact that Elepo was deprived of all his principle subordinate war-chiefs by conferring town title on each of them, making them members of the town council with equal votes was enough to commit suicide if he had to preserve. He was even not allowed to follow Ibadan army to Osogbo war of 1840 was to tell him wars. Finally all matters in his quarter of the town were taken straight to the Balogun and Oba I.B. Akinyele did not include his compound in "Iwe Itan Ibadan" which he wrote in 1911.

(i) Baale Lakanle

The first of politically motivated suicide in Ibadan involved Chief Lakanle, the Otun Are-Ona-Kakanfo of Are Oluyedun (second-in-command to general commander) in the early 1830s. It was the death of Oluyedun that created a succession dispute between Lakanle and Oluyole his immediate subordinate. This degenerated into a civil conflict between the followers of the two chiefs. Oluyole's group gained the upper hand and he immediately demanded the death or exile of Lakanle. The later, in typical Eso fashion, choose death by ripping his bowels open with a jack knife. Upon Lakanle's death. Oluyole promptly became the head of Ibadan. (I.B. Akinyele, Kemi Morgan and Olufunke Adeboye 2007)

(ii) Chief Aiyejenku Foko

The second case of political suicide took place in 1877 and it involved Chief Aiyejenku, a war veteran who was most respected by the masses (Johnson 1966, 407-10, Akinyele 1981. 101-103). His offence was that he was bold and fearless, the only person who pointed out the excess of Are Latosa (1871-1885). He advised Are Latosa to stop war against Abeokuta (Akinyele 1981 pg. 101) and not interfere in Igbajo chieftaincy dispute which was under his control when Oba of the town was deposed (Kemi Morgan, pages 114-116 part III).

This, no doubt, earned him the hatred of Are Latosa who together with his supporters initiated a web of intrigue in which Chief Aiyejenku was caught. Eventually, he committed suicide by blowing his head with his own gun as Lakanle, his friend, did.

(iii) Seriki Iyapo

The third example was the case of Seriki Iyapo (the son of Balogun Ibikunle). Iyapo's possession of fame, military might, material resources and a heritage of "ile-ola" made him a potential threat to all the senior chiefs especially, the Are Latosa.

The Seriki subsequently became the target of an intrigue master-minded by his political enemies. He was stripped of his title and deprived of his fighting men. He was then asked by the Aare to die. He was not bothered by the Aare's threat but save his compound because he had made up his mind like a brave warrior. He promptly ordered his grave and coffin to be prepared, put his house in order, retired to his inner chamber and killed himself on 17 November, 1877 (Johnson 1966, 416).

According to Olufunke Adeboye (2007), that the military chiefs in these cases committed suicide rather than fleeing demonstrates their commitment to their own honour and to that of their family. Considerations of one's family honour were particularly instrumental in the choice to die as a martyr in order to preserve the family.

(iv) Balogun Ajobo

Balogun Ajobo was accused of not consulting the Baale-in-council on many issues including the installation of a new Owa of Ilesa and that he was instrumental to the death of Balogun Akre during the siege of Ilesa town. He was rejected by the chiefs during the reign of Baale Orowusi (1870-1871).

When he saw that he had been rejected by the council of Ibadan chiefs on 5 June, 1870, he returned the war staff in his custody to the Baale, ordered his coffin and grave to be prepared during the night, he left the town and took refuge among the Ijebu, one of the Ibadan enemies (Johnson 1966, 385). Ibadan chiefs reacted by driving his remaining family members out of the town and his compound was set ablaze.

Ajobo's choice, according to Olufunke Adeboye (2007), affected his property. Most of the slaves escaped and the freeborn soldiers under him sought out new patrons. Ajobo's compound thus became desolate (ahoro). Some of his descendants that later returned to Ibadan lived as nonentities. Even in the twentieth century, none of them could aspire in the most junior chieftaincy title. It was the fear of this type of negative reversal of fortunes that made other embattled chiefs choose suicide over exile (Akinyele 1981, 84).

(v) Balogun Ajayi Osungbekun

Balogun Ajayi Osungbekun was accused of failure to check the conflicts among the war chiefs on the hand, and competition for wealth and power between him and his colleagues on the other. He was also accused of becoming an auto-crat like the late Are Latosa. All political moves to placate his aggrieved lieutenants were futile as he was also accused of lack of control over his slaves' atrocities in the community. He was rejected by the chiefs and had to commit suicide otherwise his compound would be destroyed and several of his relations and children would be killed (Toyin Falola, 1989, 292).

3.0 TRADITIONAL GOVERNANCE OF IBADAN CITY

(a) Political System

The Structure of government reflected the dominance of the military from Maye Okunade era through Oluyedun and Otuyole. By 1851, three military and two civil lines had emerged. Of all these chieftaincy titles, the Balogun, Baale and Seriki were the most significant and these were not hereditary titles. The titles could be competed for by several men of Oyo Yoruba origin including the Yoruba sub-ethnic group from Osun Division.

In the exercise of power, the Baale was the chief executive. There were cases when the overall civil and military authorities were combined in one person (e.g. Oluyole, Ogunmola, Latosa) but when the power was separated between the Baale and the Balogun, the former was supposed to preside at meetings. However, when the military title holders were at war, all major decision had to be suspended or taken by them in the camp.

Promotion was an integral aspect of the system. This enabled title holders who were all keen on mobility to give their best in the service of the state. Criteria for promotion included military valour and vacancies. There were other criteria, notably the policy of the leading elite who preferred younger men, the ability of title-seekers to gain

the friendship and support of their superior colleagues, and the possession of wealth and large followership.

An integral aspect of the political system was the intense conflict for power. The leading elite were always engaged in power politics; and the balance shifted from one person to another on the basis of wealth, influence, and size of followers. All elite normally conspired to prevent the emergence of any one who would wield absolute power. Oluyole and Latosa who tried to create a dictatorship, akin to Kurunmi's model, did not succeed (Toyin Falola, 1989).

4.0 PROMOTION TO BAALE BEFORE 1946

In the nineteenth century, no Balogun was lucky to become Bale of Ibadan due to death. Opeagbe, the Osi Balogun became the Bale because the Otun Balogun Lajumoke had died after Oderinlo. Olugbode, the Abese Balogun succeeded Bale Opeagbe in 1851. Ogunmola, the Otun Balogun Ibikunle beamed the Bale in 1865. Orowusi, the Asipa Balogun became the Bale after Tubosun and Abayomi, the Otun Balogun and Osi Balogun respectively, had died Latosisa, the Otun Balogun became the Bale after orowusi because Balogun Ajobo had been expelled from Ibadan. Fijabi, the Abese Balogun succeeded Are Latosa because Balogun Ajayi Osungbekun was rejected by the Chiefs after Kiriji war and he had to commit suicide. Fijabi became Bale from Abese Balogun.

In the close of 19th century, Balogun Akintola refused to become Bale giving way to Otun Bale Osuntoki to become the first civil chief to become Bale of Ibadan and also Bale Fajimi who later became Basorun, the title he acquired from Alaafin Adeyemi I of Oyo kingdom Balogun Kongi was rejected by the Chiefs and so died in exile at Iwo. Balogun Apampa had to cross to the civil lie to become Bale of Ibadan and also became the fourth and last Baorun of Ibadan. Consequently, Balogun Akintayo became the first Bale of Ibadan from Balogun Line in Ibadan Chieftaincy history (1910-1912). He was succeeded by Irefin from civil inspite of protests from Balogun Cheifs because majority of the populace wanted him.

Situ rose from Balogun in 1914 to the rank of Baale but after his exile in 1925. Chief Lafa because of his Age was not allowed to become Bale from Otun Bale in 1912 and because people preferred Bale Akintayo Awanibaku Elempe while Bale Akinwale rose from Maye Bale to Osi Bale because chieftaincy promotion was not regulated and Bale had the power to promote any chief to any problem.

From the chieftaincy system of Ibadan being practiced since the nineteenth century and historical antecedents, no Seriki had ever become Bale of Ibadan, but were promoted to Balogun as follows:

- i. Ibikunle from Seriki to Balogun (1851);
- ii. Ajobo from Seriki to Balogun (1870);
- iii. Latosa from Otun Seriki to Balogun (1870);
- iv. Mosanya from Seriki to Asipa Balogun;
- v. Abibu Solalu from Areago Seriki to Maye Balogun
- vi. Ajai-Osungbekun from Seriki to Balogun;

When Balogun Akintola refused the title of Baale twice in 1893 and 1895, thinking he would still have the opportunity to carry his new title to war, the succession passed to chiefs in the Baale line (Falola 1989, 51). The chiefs in the Baale line interpreted this as a constitutional amendment which made them the only ones now eligible to succeed to the Baaleship.

The situation fuelled a lot of succession disputes in Ibadan. It was until 1946 that a formal constitutional amendment, which allowed the two lines to succeed in turn, was made. Unfortunately, Baale Dada Opadare fell a victim of the power rivalries among the chiefs. Baale Irefin and Baale Situ were victims of Captain Ross attempt to impose Alaasin of Oyo on Ibadan which they both stood against, Baale Irefin eventually committed suicide while Baale Situ died in exile in Oke-Ogun area. Balogun Ola was a victim of tax agitation and betrayer of Ibadan chiefs. This brave and heroic act earns his compound the name **Kobomoje**