

AN UPDATE ON THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE OYO STATE COUNCIL OF OBAS AND CHIEFS

If we take a quick look at the history of the world, we shall find that it is a record of a continual process of change. It is a record of the great Empires and civilizations which have lasted for a time and then passed away. Egypt, Greece and Rome are examples of these great civilizations that have passed away as a result of wars of conquest by stronger and sometimes less civilized tribes and nations.

Internal strife and self-defeating competition among the various Yoruba groups in the 19th century led to the easy subjugation of the country by a greater and stronger power and loss of Ilorin to the Fulanis, including Offa and some Igbomina towns.

Similarly, with the destruction of Ikoyi, Igbon, Iresa and others, the representatives heads of the family completely became subject to the ruler of the town of refuge, be the Bale or a king. Thus, ***“the Olugbon at Ogbomoso is subject to the Bale of Ogbomoso. The Aresa to the king of Emir of Ilorin and the Olowu at Abeokuta is nominally subject to the Alake of Ake, the primes of the Egba Chiefs (Rev. Samuel Johnson, 1921)”***

The civil wars in Yorubaland also forced relocation of many towns such as Ede, and Oyo while new ones were founded like Abeokuta many Obas too refuge in towns where they could be protected or join forces to strengthen their base. According to Professor I. A. Akinjogbin (2002), “for purpose of defence, the Egba discarded the old norm whereby two Obas could not reside in a single town. They accepted that each of the community making up their composite town could retain its own Oba. Thus you had in Abeokuta four or five Obas. A similar situation occurred in Ogbomoso when in addition to the Soun of Ogbomoso, you had the Olugbon, the Aresa and the Onpetu. Similarly Ilupeju in Ijebu Kingdom had about seven Obas.”

Thus, the civil wars of the 19th century had reduced to the barest minimum the powers, the positions and the influence of the Obas. Consequently, the military Chiefs who before the 19th century were not particularly given any prominence in the civil societies except in Oyo became the centre of power and wealth in Yorubaland in the 19th century.

Indeed, by the end of the 19th century the military were installing the Oba in various towns and controlling their activities. During period, no Oba within the sphere of influence of Ibadan could be installed without the express approval of Ibadan military leaders. Any one of them so installed was strictly controlled by the Ibadan Ajele, without whose consent, he could take any action in his area (I. A. Akinjogbin, 2002)

The dream of Alafin Ladigbolu I New Oyo Empire was shattered when the New Oyo Province created in 1914 was split into five Independent Native Authorities instead of a province where the Alafin was the most powerful paramount Chief in 1934. This was published in the Supplement to the Nigeria. Gazette Extra-ordinary, No. 17 of 3, April, 1934, pp.I and II. The Alafin was left with only Oyo Division (J. A. Atanda, 1973, 1979 p.268).\

The principle of Rotation was initiated by the Colonial Administration in 1930s to resolve seniority crisis among Yoruba Obas and Chiefs. The Alafin of Oyo, the Oni of Ife, Olubadan of

Ibadanland, the Alake of Abeokuta, the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode and Oba of Benin hested Obas meetings in respectively. (J. A. Atanda, Toyin Falola).

The Action Group Government gave a legal backing to the creation of Council of Obas and Chiefs in 1959 referred to as Law of Western Region. No. 38 of 1959. Since then, no permanent Chairman of the Council had been appointed.

Cap. 29 Laws of Oyo State which originated from Governor Jembewon's Amendment to the Council of Obas and Chiefs Edict No. 4 of 1977 amending the original Law W. R. No. 38 of 1959 provided that the **“Chairman of the Council and the deputy Chairman shall be appointed by the Executive Council from amongst the members, and the member of the Council shall hold the office for such period as may be determined by the Executive Council”**.

Colonel Rotimi, according to Governor Omololu Olunloyo's statewide Broadcast, refused to be dragged into making statutory legislation as to who, whether in person or ex-officio should be the Chairman. It clearly emerged that the appointment of Chairman of the Council was the prerogative of the government of the day.

Brigadier David Jembewon went a step further by arranging the names in alphabetical order to avoid any seniority protest which could elicit acrimony.

The Alafin of Oyo, Oba Adeyemi III, the Olubadan of Ibadanland and Soun of Ogbomoso resisted the attempt of Governor Bola Ige to make the Ooni of Ife, permanent Chairman of Council of Obas and Chiefs and they even went to court.

The Government of Dr. Omololu Olunloyo also returned to the original practice of two years tenure of office for the Chairman of the Council of Obas and Chiefs. He also decided that **“There shall not be a permanent automatic Chairman appointed ex-officio his title or in person”**.

When Governor Abdulkarim Adisa approved the rotational system for the present Oyo State via Amended Edict No. 6 of October 30, 1991 published in the Oyo State Extra-ordinary Gazette, No. 45, Vol. 16 Schedule II, the Alafin of Oyo, Oba Adeyemi III was the first beneficiary and was succeeded by Oba Emmanuel Adegboyega Adeyemo Operinde I, the Olubadan of Ibadanland between December 1994 and December, 1995.

The controversial change came with the Oyo State Gazette No. 27 Vol. 26 of July 16, 2001, which carried the views of the military government of colonel. Ike Nwosu on the 1995 White Paper on Chieftaincies and Prescribed Authorities.

The restoration of the Rotation of Chairmanship of the Council of Obas and Chiefs by Governor Adebayo Alao Akala is a welcome development.

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