MODERNIZING TRADITION: THE TRANSFORMATION OF PALACE ADMINISTRATION IN YORUBALAND

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Abstract

The Yoruba people are indeed a cultural people who, over time, are dynamic in their way of life and culture. While modernization has impacted a handful of their traditions, the Yoruba culture endures. The work examines the place of the Afin (palace), which traditionally houses the Oba (king) and his queens in Yourubaland and was the powerhouse for political administration and governance. This work further espouses the changing dynamic from pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial administrative dynamism that has enveloped palace administration vis-a-vis modernization. This paper posits that in the face of modernization and the erosion of pre-colonial administrative dexterity displayed by the Obas, the adaptability of the Yoruba culture to historical changes ensures its survival over time.

Keywords: Palace administration, Yorubaland, Modernisation and Tradition

Introduction

This chapter examines the dynamics of change in the palace administration of Yoruba towns and how modernity has affected it in contemporary times. Traditionally, all societies have unique ways of doing things anchored on culture and tradition. These traditions and cultures manifest in the system of administering society. In Nigeria, many tribal societies have a form of government that is used to order the affairs of its people.[1] Since the earliest times, the people of Yorubaland had an institutionalized framework and have been governed through the palace

administration. Decisions were made on issues affecting the people directly from the palace, a glamorous edifice of the king and queen(s). The king exercises authority at the palace through his lesser chiefs and the entire palace officers to make the town city or community better and secure. The palace has long been the center of authority, power, and attention in any community.[2]

The towns have administrative hierarchies, district organizations, chief advisers, and courts at different levels to ensure political supremacy. It is clear from the context that the features of the Yoruba kingdom's political administration are not limited to one man due to its large size, nor are they given to the states. However, changes motivated by colonialism, such as constitutional government, influenced the political structure of some Yoruba towns as the features of the traditional government and political institutions changed drastically. The structure of the palace form of the administrative system and the roles played by the conventional rulers have changed from what they used to be at immemorial in the contemporary period. Consequently, introducing British indirect rule, its imperialist and expansionist policy, and modernity led to some transformations in modern times.[3]

Unlike traditional Yoruba towns, the features and structure of conventional palace administration relatively took another dimension as item braces the structure of modern constitutional monarchy. Based on this preliminary background, the primary aim of this work is to examine the nexus between tradition and modernity in the palace administration of Yorubaland in contemporary times. To analyze the changing roles of palace administration in modern times, one needs to examine palace administration in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Yorubaland.

Palace Administration in the Pre-Colonial Period

Before the arrival of the British colonial government, the advent of colonialism and its imposition of the Weberian state, the Yoruba people of modern-day Nigeria have their traditional way of controlling and organizing themselves. The Yoruba people, who inhabit the southwestern part of present-day Nigeria and are divided into several tribes, which include the Oyo, Ijebu, Ekiti, Egba, Ijesha, Ondo, Akoko and Ife, have aged-long maintained an orderly and uniformed political system which was in the form of a palace administration. Generally, the people trace their origins to a common ancestor known as *Oduduwa*. The Yoruba myth had it that *Oduduwa* founded the famous city of Ile-Ife, popularly regarded as the cradle of Yoruba civilization or the historical source.[4] It is also referred to as the spiritual source. Oduduwa dispatched his sons to establish cities and kingdoms around Ile-Ife. As Oyeleye noted:

> By the end of the sixteenth century, the political organization of most Yoruba kingdoms was complete and broadly similar. Each kingdom consisted of a capital town, subordinate several cities, villages, markets, farmlands, and kingdoms whose rulers claimed descent from Oduduwa and ruled a clearly defined territory.[5]

However, with time, some of these cities became very large and surpassed Ile-Ife in power and prestige. At this point in history, Ile-Ife, like Rome of antiquity, became the spiritual rallying point for all Yorubas. Upon its establishment, a palace system was established to organize the people and manage its affairs. The palace administration system was decentralized, with the division of powers between the central level headed by the *Oba* (King) and subordinate units headed by provincial governors (*Baale* or *Obas*).[6] In every Yoruba community or town, there are lesser chiefs. Several chiefs and other title holders assisted the king in the day-to-day administration. Likewise, the provincial governors were also assisted by a handful of chiefs within their domain. Oba ruled the kingdom directly from the palace, while the provincial governors administered the administrative towns and villages under the king's jurisdiction. *Baale* sees the welfare of the dwellers in all areas of their lives.[7] For instance, in Ile-Ife, in the center of the city is the *Aafin* (palace) of the *Ooni,* the traditional head of the Ife kingdom and the political head of the palace administration. The *Ooni* is assisted by conventional chiefs who oversee the affairs of the surrounding city sections for a better and more effective administration. The *Ooni* carries out the administration through *Obalufe* (*Obunto)*, who is the second-in-command and next in rank to Ooni; the *Obalufe* controls *Iremo* while other provincial governors or kings such as *Obaloran* controls *Ilode*, *Obajio* controls *Moore*, *Obalaaye* controls *Iraye* (the original name for *Modakeke*) and *Wasin* controls *Ilare*.[8]

According to Bascom, before the Yoruba Civil Wars, the geographical size of Ife Kingdom was about seventy miles long and forty miles wide before the Yoruba Civil Wars of the nineteenth century.[9] One controversial issue in Ife's pre-colonial political system is the relative importance of these sets of chiefs. According to Bascom, Ooni ruled the kingdom through three chiefs: the *Ihare* chiefs (over the outlying towns of *Ihare*) and the *Modewa* and *Isoro* chiefs. Although Bascom noted that the *Isoro* chiefs were not fully involved in the kingdom's administration, they were strictly religious leaders who also served as priests.[10] On the other hand, Chief Fashogbon claims that only the *Ihare* and *Isoro* chiefs were deeply involved in the kingdom's administration. He argues that since *Modewa* chiefs were originally slaves of *Ooni,* they could not have been given such a high position in administrating a kingdom with well-defined and respected traditions.[11] Akinjogbin accepts Fashogbon's claim by naming *Ihare* and *Isoro* chiefs as the two who helped the *Oon*i in the pre-colonial palace administration of Ife.[12] Whatever the relative importance of these sets of chiefs, it is clear that the *Ooni* did not rule the Kingdom alone but with some chiefs. In addition, the king guards (*Eso*) are in charge of security arrangements.

There are absolute but constitutional checks and balances in the Yoruba palace administration.[13] The palace administration in Yorubaland had a decentralized structure, i.e., power was constitutionally shared among all political levels/sections of the kingdom, ranging from the highest to the lowest unit. In Ile-Ife, the *Ooni* was invested with absolute but rarely exercised powers. This was because of the effective or de facto limitations on these powers. In the pre-colonial days, three critical channels were open to senior chiefs within each administration to limit the powers of an Oba effectively. As members of the governing council, it was their duty to advise

the *Oba*. As Kingmakers, their influence was often exerted in the choice of an accommodating candidate. The third and most crucial effective limitation was the powers of chiefs to depose an Oba considered a despot.

In lle-Ife, the legislative and judicial functions of the kingdom were performed by the Geru court, an assembly of senior chiefs. *Lowa*, the most senior of the *Modewa* line of chiefs, communicated the body's decisions to him. He was also responsible for returning the *Ooni's* views to the chiefs. Decisions at these meetings were not final. They became final after ratification by the *Ooni*. The sixteen *Ifa* priests resolved disagreements between the chiefs and the *Ooni* after consultation with the *Ifa* oracle.

There was another critical body called *Mole*. It was a secret, powerful body. *Mole* in lle-Ife was not an executive council. It functioned essentially as a court for men of position in the city. The *Mole* court, which consisted of the *Ooni* and all the Ife chiefs, was believed to be an impartial body that paid no regard to status. The *Ooni* was an ordinary member, subject to the authority of whoever was in charge of directing the proceeding of the meeting from time to time. The court was often called "*Apata Odaju*," which means "a rock where there is no mercy".[14]

As in most Yoruba kingdoms, there was no rigidly fixed procedure for succession to the position of *Ooni*, as the rule of primogeniture was hardly ever practiced. At the death of a reigning *Oba*, no one was sure who the next would be. In Ife, the royal family was divided into many houses; some say four, and others say five. Since there was no fixed order of rotation and each house could and often presented more than one candidate to the kingmakers, it was only practical that the chiefs used the opportunity to choose a candidate congenial to their ideas and interests. It is claimed that apart from good character and selflessness, one of the most important qualities required of a candidate for the position of *Ooni* is a willingness to listen to advice.[15]

According to Lloyd, the deposition of a Yoruba *Oba* in pre-colonial days was a constitutional procedure affected by death.[16] When *Ooni's* rule became unpopular, people demonstrated outside the palace walls. The chiefs met at the palace gate and sent words to the king that he was no longer wanted and would henceforth refuse to answer his call. When this happened, "he opened a 'calabash of death' containing a powerful charm made of parrots' eggs which were kept for such an occasion, and the sight of it killed him".[17] The *Ooni* could, however, take refuge with *Araba*, the head of the diviners. When this happened, he was permitted to live in exile.[18]

All these limitations made it impossible for an *Ooni* to exercise extended powers that conflicted with the wishes of his council of chiefs. The degree to which these limitations were effectively applied varied from council to council and from one *Ooni* to the other. It is not unlikely that even before the era of colonial rule, particularly during the Yoruba Civil Wars, the position of the chief vis-à-vis that of the *Ooni* had weakened. For example, in 1877, the Ibadan imposed Ayikiti as *Ooni* of life against the wishes of Ife senior chiefs. This meant that the *Ooni* did not owe his

position to the chiefs and did not have to make their want since there was a greater force behind him as the Resident or Lieutenant Governor came to be in later years.[19]

Similarly, Oyo, one of the cities founded by the children of Oduduwa, became the most powerful and prominent.[20] Records had it that it existed in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries.[21] Its capital was old Oyo, which was located in the savannah area close to the River Niger. Interestingly, the Oyo Empire expanded in all directions through wars and conquests. By the sixteenth century, a unique political system had evolved under the rulership of *Alaafin*. Being the supreme head of the palace administration, the *Alaafin* possessed supreme judicial authority and controlled the succession of chief titles. The *Alaafin* ruled with the aid of a principal council of influential advisers called the *Oyomesi*, who were seven in number and assisted in the day-to-day administration. The chief among the *Oyomesi* is the *Basorun*, who carried out the duties of Chief Executive Officer of the state and principal adviser to the *Alaafin*. The Oyomesi constituted the electoral council and possessed the legislative powers to carry out their duty. The councilors include *Bashorun*, *Agbaakin*, *Samu*, *Alapinni*, *Laguna, Akiniku* and *Ashipa*. Those seven councilors represented the nation's voice and also had the chief responsibility of protecting the interests of the empire. The Alaafin also takes counsel from them whenever matters affecting the state occur.[22]

The *Alaafin*, while being the sole voice of the authority, was unable to exercise complete and unquestioned authority or power. His jurisdiction was curbed by the various political institutions of Oyo, particularly the *Oyomesi*.[23] The *Oyomesi* guided the king in many essential matters, including military actions and religious festivals. At the same time, the *Bashorun*, the leader of the *Oyomesi*, the next in rank to the *Alaafin*, exercised the highest authority and control, which in many ways rivaled the power of the *Alaafin* himself. For example, the *Bashorun* served as the army's commander-in-chief and equally orchestrated various religious festivals in Oyo. This position accorded him both militaristic and religious authority above the king. He wears a beaded coronet, while the *Alaafin* wears a beaded crown. He helped manage the all-important festival of *Orun*. This festival would figure prominently in the rise of the *Oyomesi* over the *Alaafin* because the *Alaafin* could not leave the palace due to ritual restrictions accompanying the position, which grossly curtailed his ability to implement and exercise his authority outside the palace walls.[24] Samuel Johnson further described the palace administration system of the Oyo Empire when he asserted that "the father (*Alaafin*) is the king of the palace and the son, the king for the general public." While the *Bashorun* has his small throne, and his wives are called *ayinba* (those who sing the praise of the Oba), the *Alaafin* possesses an enormous throne, and his wives are called guayaba (the king's wives). Finally, the Oyomesi had the power to depose the *Alaafin* by forcing him to commit suicide during the *Orun* festival.[25]

Apart from the institution of *Oyomesi*, other organs that assisted the paramount head, the *Alaafin*, in the daily administration of the empire were secret societies, age grades, war councils, etc. The *Ogboni* cult strengthened the intense

political force of the *Oyomesi*.[26] Within the city, the *Alaafin*-in-council was complemented in the discharge of its administrative duties by sectional/ward heads. These subordinate chiefs were in charge of the various peripheral provinces. It should, however, be noted that at these peripheries, the same form and substance of governance were replicated. Indeed, in each of the established kingdoms, the Oba, assisted by the council of chiefs and other agencies, administered each kingdom. However, the peripheral Oba had to pay homage to the Alaafin through tributes and taxes.[27] The *Are Ona Kakanfo* also assists the *Alaafin* in securing the Oyo Empire to protect the people from internal threats and external aggression. He was only allowed to go to war when the *Alaafin* declared it and was not to return when defeated but to commit suicide. Under the *Alaafin's* authority was an elaborate court organization that included palace enslaved people or Eunuchs, whose leaders were in charge of judicial, religious, and administrative matters; enslaved people who served as bodyguards, messengers, and collectors of taxes; and titled officers who fulfilled various administrative and ritual functions.[28] In some Yoruba towns, the high chief, popularly referred to as *Abobaku,* was present in the palace's administration. The *Abobaku* was one of the three eunuchs in Oyo who were made to live and rule like a king in the castle but were not allowed to wear a beaded crown. He participates actively in both traditional and ceremonious functions. It was a custom in the Yoruba palace administration that the *Abobaku* must be buried with him whenever the king dies.[29]

More so in Iwo, there was the use of hereditary town chiefs. However, a small number of the lineages in Iwo were able to have hereditary chieftaincy titles vested in them. In the remainder, the *bale* was the only official. The *baale* was usually responsible to the chief in charge of his quarter, that is, to the senior civil or war chief in *Gidigbo* or *Oke Adan*, to *Oloya* in *Molete*, and the *Oluwo* or the senior royal titleholder in *Isale Oba*. The remaining chiefs had no official territorial jurisdiction, though they may have considered themselves in charge of compounds. The government of Iwo rested with the town chiefs; they met daily on the outer verandah of the palace, carrying their decisions to the *Oluwo*. Inside the palace, the *Oluwo* sat surrounded by the royal chiefs of both groups, discussing the town affairs. These had no official place in the constitution. Still, because of the close relationship of some with the *Oluwo* and the large numbers of people represented by them all, their opinions carried much weight so that the *Oluwo* could often overrule his town chiefs.[30]

In Akure, *Deji* was in charge of the palace administration and was assisted by all the village heads under the political jurisdiction, who also carried him in administrating their different villages. In administering the people, the chiefs and village heads made laws not only to maintain order in their domains but also to regulate the economic activities of the villages. They deliberated on cases brought before them either from the towns or their quarters. Since the *Deji* and the *Iare* constituted the supreme court of the kingdom, major cases were dealt with centrally in the *Deji's* court. The head of the family reported instances of theft, adultery or rape to the head of the village. Rarely were matters reported directly to the head of the town without them going through the head of the family.[31]

Women also took an active part in the pre-colonial administration of the kingdom. Apart from *Olori* (Royal wives), three critical groups of women chiefs participated in the kingdom's administration. One of these groups was the *Apate*, headed by *Eyelobirin* (women leader). They were the only group of women granted the unique privilege to carry *a* (board or tray) upon which the flesh of wild animals was cut for sale at the marketplace. They were not butchers. Members of this group had to keep the king and the chief well-informed about the day-to-day happenings in the market. They had to enforce the closure of the marketplace as required by tradition from time to time. The second group of female chiefs was *Ukoju* (the meeting of eyes), which consisted of the daughters of Akure traditional chiefs. The third group of female chiefs was the *Esare* group (the selected). This group consisted of the past kings' daughters and their daughters.[32]

Also, for the security of lives and property, Akure had some groups of people who performed the role of security agents, and their primary duty was the apprehension of criminals. One of these groups was *Erinse*, headed by Chief *Ologbosere*. This group of people acted as policemen, soldiers and prison officers. The head of the police wing was Chief *Omoolaare*. If anybody erred in the village, his case must be reported to the *Deji*, who would order the *Erinse* to go and arrest the culprit. The *Erinse* only had to present the Deji's staff of office as the arrest warrant. On being detained, the offender would face a preliminary investigation by the *Ikomo*, who would treat the matter summarily or refer the decision to the village heads and *Iare*. The people also executed the judgment of the *Deji*. Akure also had an army responsible for maintaining and enforcing law and order. This group was fully engaged in the inter-state wars that ravaged Yorubaland in the 19th century. *Odoo* was the commander-in-chief of the Akure army before *Sao* supplanted him during the reign of *Deji* Gbogi (1648 and 1674). The hunters also acted as security agents, warding off dangerous animals and external aggressors. It was also their duty to arrest and prosecute lawbreakers at the quarter levels and hand them over to the quarter chiefs. The Age group, comprised of youths, also constituted themselves into formidable security units through which they maintained law and order.[33]

In pre-colonial Akure, there were prison yards called *Igbon* (the house of wisdom). There were three types: the first one, *Igbon* Akure, was under the supervision of Ologbosere; the second, also known as Igbon Akure, was under the supervision of Olusogan, while the third, Igbon Deji, was under the watch of Chief Saraku. Accused persons were to be remanded here until their cases were heard or decided upon.[34]

From the above, it can be said that the palace administration system in Yorubaland was pyramidal. In other words, the king of Yoruba town not only controlled the city center from the palace, but his authority was also obeyed by all the smaller villages and towns in the nooks and crannies of the empire.

Palace Administration in Colonial Yorubaland

With the consolidation of British colonial rule on January 1, 1900, the whole of Yorubaland and other areas witnessed another form of administration. This no doubt altered the socio-political lives of communities it had encountered.[35] Wherever it found a foothold, it brought exploitation.[36] Although the palace administration was still operated due to British adoption of indirect rule, which respected, maintained and continued with the existing culture of the native Yoruba people, some modifications were still made.[37] While indigenous armies disappeared, native treasuries appeared anew in many places. Indigenous cabinets and councils, courts and bureaucracies remained. In the case of the bureaucracies, they were a mixture of the indigenous and the imported. The colonial policy though ruled the people indirectly through their traditional rulers and traditional political institutions, but the palace system of administration took a new form. The latest development launched the Yoruba into a new form of political transformation. Lord Lugard's policy of indirect rule, though, might have used traditionalism as a symbol of order and as a strategy for power; it changed the places and fundamental roles of the traditional rulers in the oppressive establishment, using them nominally as robots and puppets even though they were given peanuts as salaries. The *Ooni* of Ife was one of such Oba who benefited from the various attempts of the British administrators to "revive" their lost position and territories from Modakeke.[38]

The policy frantically stated that no Yoruba *Oba* should have absolute authority in the mold of Louis XIV of eighteenth-century France. The colonial government saw that the Yoruba political structure, as explained earlier, was a delicate balance of power between the king and the chiefs, to the extent that a tyrannical king could be deposed by his chiefs. For instance, the case of the weak *Ooni* Oba Ademiluyi, whose reign witnessed great political turmoil consequent to the murder of the Balogun of Ife in 1914. The stationing of the District Commissioner to regenerate Ife when the Resident officer reported the *Ooni* to the Chief Commissioner gave the colonial government the impression that the ruling *Ooni* was not as strong as the previous ones were amidst their chiefs. Hence, stopping this unbearable action from disposing of the king with the public declaration to back up the *Ooni* no doubt shows that the *Ooni* enjoyed support from the colonial administration to remain as *Oba*.[39]

The imperialist government also noticed that its frameworks of regulation were not consistent with the Yoruba traditional system. By so doing, it strengthened the power of the kings and maintained the palace administration system.[40] The principle of checks and balances disappeared during the colonial rule in the palace administration system of the Yorubas. Aderemi Atanda confirmed that the British had created a new Oyo empire. He meant that the Alaafin under the British enjoyed too much and sometimes illegitimate power. The Alaafin's position was supreme in most of what later became the Yoruba part of western Nigeria under the British.

During the colonial era, the palace administrators performed modern and traditional functions at the local or communal levels. The conventional functions

included the settlement of customary conflicts in customary courts, the control of traditional land, the recruitment of chiefs, the recognition of elders and the management of the ritual welfare of the traditional mass. Included in the modern functions of the traditional political systems were communication links between the central rulers and the ruled, the collection of taxes, the making of bylaws and community development (with particular reference to health, roads and agriculture). The traditional political systems in the service of imperial authority performed other functions that do not fall easily into either category. They helped maintain social order and the judicial settlements of conflicts. The capacity of the palace structure was used to strengthen the survival of colonialism in Nigeria. They helped to surpass the imported system in these areas of public activity.[41] They helped collect levy of tolls from commodity traders of neighboring Yoruba towns and collected the poll tax, thus generating a good source of revenue for the colonial government.

At this junction, it must be stated that the tremendous support for Ademiluyi as the Sole Native Authority for Ife increased the power and motivated the existing palace administration of the Yoruba towns. It also ushered changes to the structure of the palace system and its modes of operations and or functions. For instance, the status of Sole Native Authority conferred on the *Ooni* in 1916 (and retained until 1949) completely changed the old relationship between the *Ooni* and his chiefs. The Geru court, which functioned as the traditional council of chiefs and a check on the excesses of the *Ooni*, ceased to exist, at least in law. It was reduced, at best, to an advisory role. The position of Mole Court was even worse. It was assigned no role in the colonial system but was allowed to die slowly. As a result, the role of chiefs in decision-making was greatly diminished.

Furthermore, the status conferred on the *Ooni* the powers to recommend the appointment, suspension and dismissal of chiefs and those who became members of the native courts. A good example of the *Ooni's* exercise of power was the suspension of Chief Omishore, the Lowa of Ile-Ife, who was accused of failure to attend the reconciliation meeting called at the palace after a quarrel between the sons of the two men, and the fact that he wore a unique gown "in the Ooni's presence to which the Ooni takes objection".[42] Despite Lowa's good work in the court, he was still suspended on the order of the Ooni. This meant that if a chief did not find favor with the Ooni, whatever his rank within the chieftaincy hierarchy, he may not be elected to sit on the native court. In the remunerative importance of a seat on the native court, unlike the earlier system under which the chiefs shared the court fees and fines with the Ooni, the new system made the chiefs subservient by directing all local government revenue to the native administration.

Before the independence era, in the first place, unlike the old council dominated by chiefs who owed their position to the Ooni, the new councils were dominated by elected representatives who owed their position to their electorates. Secondly, the only position the structure prescribed for the Ooni was president of the Divisional Council - a purely ceremonial position. The influential position of council chairman was filled annually by election among the total members. Thirdly, the

control of the purse and recruitment into the council bureaucracy was in the hands of the elected representatives led by Fani Kayode. In other words, the power to appoint, dismiss, and remunerate ceased to be that of the Ooni. Elected representatives, rather than the Ooni or his chiefs, became the group that could grant favors, render help when constituency members got in trouble, and create employment opportunities. This was the most crucial factor that affected the position of the Ooni as it had been in the colonial period.[43]

Under the Nigerian Council of Lord Lugard, the kings no longer had the power to make laws and neither did they have the power to harness decisions on their own. The British officials enforced decisions by creating the legislative council, which served as advisers and supervisors to the palace administrators. With the introduction of the Clifford constitution of 1922, the governor was empowered by the Secretary of state for colonies with the powers to administer the Southern Protectorate where the Yorubas presided, and the palace administration was made to operate under the governor's veto power and by the written constitution. Hence, the monarchs of Yorubaland were transformed into Western constitutional ones. The Richard constitution of 1946 further brought more changes, which affected the palace administrative system of the Yoruba people. The constitution introduced regionalism and, most importantly, created Regional Houses of Assembly/Chiefs where the native authorities (which included the chiefs) had to elect members of the central legislative council (who were also chiefs) through electoral colleges. Establishing a bi-cameral legislature also made all first-class chiefs automatic members of the Regional Houses of Chiefs.[44] It could be seen that the functions of the chiefs were no longer limited to the palace alone as they got involved in Western politics. One can posit that the palace administration in Yoruba became politicized.

The Richard constitution allowed for the formation of political parties, which were formed along ethnic lines and made them compete for powers. Although the traditional chiefs were among the unofficial majority members of the central legislative council, they were only allowed to witness how decisions were taken for their subjects. Therefore, the authority to decide for their people directly from the palace no longer featured in the administration of their lands. Similarly, matters became worse when the educated elites who were not among the ruling council of the palace formed a political party, namely the Action Group (AG), in 1951 that could, in a real sense, articulate and increase their demands and/or interests in colonial Nigeria.[45]

The Macpherson constitution of 1951 also influenced the palace administrative system of the Yoruba people. It empowered the regional legislature with the powers to make laws on some specific matters such as local matters, cooperative societies, social welfare, local government, native courts and health, which were functions that were mainly performed by the palace administrators in the Southern Protectorate where the Yorubas resided in.[46] The constitution allowed the educated elites to overpower the palace authority by creating the post of lieutenant governor. The Lieutenant governor became the sole authority over the kings, who

were the political heads of palace administration. The colonial authorities introduced electoralisation politics in the 1950s. The so-called political parties contested and won regional elections and formed regional government.[47] Obafemi Awolowo became the western region's premier, which the Yoruba people habituated.

The palace administration in Yorubaland finally became a mirage when the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 introduced the federal system of government where power is distributed between the Central Authority and the subordinate unit, the regional government. The constitution constituted the post of the premier as the government leader in the regions who ruled along with his appointed ministers. The king, who had long been controlling their societies directly from the palace, began to take authority from the premier and central authority, which became the sole authority.[48] This continued until October 1, 1960, when Nigeria entered the post-colonial era with a federal parliamentary constitution. Besides, the new order required that politics be played at both the horizontal and vertical levels and in the most civilized way.[49]

During military rule and civilian democracy, the palace administration also witnessed some changes. By the time the military took over power, the Native Authority Police and the courts and prisons, hitherto managed by traditional rulers, were taken over by the State governments. In addition, the subsequent constitutional reforms indicate that the traditional rulers are to be projected within the confines of palace administrators. The council's functions in the 1975 reforms include formulating general proposals as advice to local governments, determining religious matters, and determining customary law and practice on all issues, including land-related ones. In the 1976 reforms, the palace administrators were virtually excluded from the decision-making process of the duly established democratic local government council. They were made non–executive and non-participatory in their role.[50]

In addition, even the 1979 constitution did not prescribe any executive role or function to the traditional rulers. It only prescribed advisory roles on national population census and compilation, the prerogative of mercy and maintaining public order. The above function applies to all the other tiers of government. To facilitate the enforcement of law and order necessary for good and effective government, the government establishes a security committee in each local government area with the traditional rulers as members. The committee must hold regular meetings to consider and make recommendations on all matters concerning the security and preservation of peace in the area. It will, in particular, maintain a review of the enforcement of legislation made by the local government.

From 1979 till date, coupled with the military interregna, the traditional institution had only been reduced to a mere tool in the hands of politicians who have continued to reduce the political relevance of the royal fathers for their selfish advancement. The 1999 constitution was, nonetheless, a complete undermining of the palace administrators' constitutional recognition, including even the advisory role given to them by the 1979 constitution. Even though the traditional institution

remains the oldest surviving cultural-political institution, which has always been the pivot for social security, national cohesion and meaningful socio-cultural development, the operative constitution has failed to make any provisions for the institution's existence.[51]

Tradition and Modernity in Palace Administration of Contemporary Yoruba Towns

With the attainment of independence, Yoruba societies or communities replaced their traditional palace administration with a new form of government. They gradually became modernized societies. The concept of "modernism" is a persistent trend that sets apart contemporary and future civilizations of the indigenous blacks like the Yorubas from the ancient and the traditional. It often consists of a continuous process of change, which results in the development of a higher and more efficient civilization. With Nigeria gaining independence from the Europeans, Yorubas inherited the spell of modernity and thus continued with Euro-African imperialism. Due to the indigenization of all British enterprises, they later adopted the traditional modern governmentism, where a cordial relationship was made between the king (palace) and the local government in the smooth running of the towns and communities under its jurisdiction.

Introducing the party system into Nigerian politics has undoubtedly contributed to transforming the character of traditional society, including its system of administration and the palace administration. Hence, the enormous developments in Western education, the increase in educated elites, the emergence of mass political parties, and the rise in the number of politicians have combined to have overwhelming power over traditionalism. The political party candidate enjoys more power in government at the local council than the king at the palace. Given these rapid changes, the structure, functions, status and institutions of Yoruba palace administrative system undergo significant transformation.

On the other hand, few kings still enjoy the power to control their subjects, if not much like in the past. However, it must be noted that the power is mainly enjoyed during the election period as the political parties and their candidates visit the palace to receive the king's blessing and recognition and, most importantly, to end the king's declaration of support from the people who still pay obeisance to him. Examples are the *Ooni* of Ife and the *Alaafin* of Oyo, who enjoy enormous power because they are the most preeminent among the aristocratic kings. The commoners, the chiefs, the flag bearer, and other dignitaries of the political parties present for campaigns pay obeisance to the king of any town or community they rally to. During these times, the opinions and views of the 'king' in his palace carry weight in social and political circles. It is, however, not unchecked and unlimited power. The aristocracy of chiefs, coming from ancient and leading lineages and having an autonomous right to chieftaincy, follows the king closely in ranking prestige and power.

The traditional rulers could not operate effectively from the palace because they could not stand the tide of modernism. Under these circumstances, the conventional leaders tried to be lost by filling the widened gaps in their economic interests.[52] As a result of this increasing gap, the new generations of Yoruba kings have turned their eyes to the modern kingdom to fulfill their dreams. They have also lost their magical hold as a royal father in charge of palace administration on the masses.[53] To ensure its survival, the palace administration lost its features and functioning roles to the constitutional governor and his cabinets at the State level and to the Chairman and his Councilors at the Local Government unit as they tactically engaged in partisan politics by backing candidates they believe can support their cause.

In the past, the Yoruba tradition was to consult the oracle and make divinations through the priest of the land before selecting a new king after a demised one. Due to modernity, this practice has been swept under the carpet as kings in charge of palace administrations are now appointed and installed by the governor of their state. This explains why kings, like political appointees, have been removed from the throne. Besides, Western culture impeaches an elected political appointee and dismisses an appointed minister or commissioner whom the executive is appointing. As a result of the fact that the governor appointed the king, he can also be uninstalled from the throne when he fails to support the ruling government.[54] It is also worth noting that traditionally, the criteria for selecting traditional rulers were strictly based on the conventional procedure, whereby only members of the royal families had the right to be crowned.[55] However, in contemporary times, many of the current crops of traditional rulers' ancestry cannot be traced to any form of royalty. Instances about where history is invented to favor some candidates for royal tools over others.

Traditionally, the palace was responsible for collecting *Isakole* (taxes) in the past, but since contemporary times, the government now collects taxes.[56] In addition, the palace administration in Yorubaland has a hierarchical structure but has somehow been restructured and redesigned with different functions. Using the palace of the Alaafin of Oyo as an example, before the British's conquest of the territory now called Nigeria in 1895, the *ayaba* (the king's wives) was felt. They played the role of palace priestesses, as the heads of compounds in the women's section and as official mothers to all the Alaafin's functionaries. They were essentially to educate the princes and princesses in the palace. The senior wife usually takes instructions from the *Ayaba Agba* regarding palace traditions. As stated earlier, some provincial rulers also played an essential role in the palace administration of Oyo. The *Iwarefa* and the three eunuchs collectively handled the running of the palace, from religious matters to presiding over the palace court. The *Ilaris* also played vital roles in palace administration. The men and women formed the core of the Alaafin's domestic servants, messengers, laborers, and soldiers and prepared and executed rituals to reinforce the king's spiritual powers. The *Ilaris*, at the time of taking office, shave their heads completely, and 201 incisions are made on their occipital, with 201 different lancets and specially prepared ingredients from 201 vials rubbed into the

cuts, one for each. This is supposed to render him fearless. They are always shaved, but the hair on the inoculated part is allowed to grow long and, when plaited, forms a tuft or a sort of pigtail.[57] However, with modernity, the role expectations and actual functions of these various palace officials have changed with the changing political and economic scenes. This explains the recent scenario which took place during the inauguration of a 34.85 km Oyo-Iseyin Road and the completed Ladoke Akintola University of Technology in Iseyin Campus, Oyo, where the ex-President Chief Olusegun Obasanjo insulted the traditional rulers (precisely the kings) in Yorubaland ordering them to stand up. According to Punch newspaper and Channels Television, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, on a Friday, lectured some traditional rulers on the need to respect the culture and give honor to who is due when he opined as follows:

Eyin lobaloba, Ori ade, mo ki yin kujoko

Ese tie w n bi.

Sugbon eje ki n so nkankan

Ibi ti governor ba wa tabi ti president bawa

Kosi oba na o ni lati dide fun governor

Edide! Ejoko…[58]

This means:

I greet the kings and chiefs here, sitting

I am grateful that you are here

Let me say this:

Whenever the president or governor is present,

kings must stand up to honor him.

Stand up! Sit down!

From the foregoing, it can be gainsaid that palace administrative structure and roles have changed since the earliest time, and the structure of palace administration during the pre-colonial era has undergone some transformations in modern times due to contemporary developments.

Today, the ritual and religious powers of the *Alaafin's* wives are greatly diminished. The eunuchs are also no longer castrated, and the *Ilari* are no longer initiated into the services of the Alaafin as in the past.[59] Even criminal issues are no longer addressed by the palace administrators but by the government. This explains

why the native prison (*tubu*) is no longer used. The king and his chiefs have now referred matters concerning crimes to the modern government to investigate and settle. Only a few issues, which are not complicated, like cases between family compounds, are now addressed in the palace. The sacredness of the palace has been reduced to the minimum level.

Adaptability of Traditional Rulers in the Globalised Era

Historically, traditional rulers wielded significant power in the past, and their authority diminished due to the pressures of colonization. However, the traditional rulers in the globalized era have been able to adapt to these challenges. The first step the Yoruba group took to adapt to the effects of the constitutional and globalized era was to install educated people as kings. Undoubtedly, many traditional leaders possess education, enabling them to adapt contemporary ideas and ideologies. It is indisputable that most Yoruba traditional rulers exhibit adaptability, as records show that most are well-educated.[60] For instance the Oba of Lagos was a Police, the present Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Oyewusi (Ojaja II) served as a Chartered Accountant, the Akire of Ikire, Olatunde Falabi (Orisatola III) worked as a Pharmacist, the Timi of Ede, Oba Munirudeen Adesola Lawal was a lecturer at the Polytechnic of Iree, the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode, Oba Sikiru Olukayode Adetona also worked as an Account (in fact as an Auditor in the Audit Department of the Western Region in Ibadan between 1957 and 1958). Alake of Egba, Oba Adedotun Gbadebo served as a principal staff Officer before retiring as a Colonel in the Nigerian Army, amongst others, just as modern philosophies.

The adaptability of the Yoruba traditional rulers to modernity after independence can be traced to the period of the Second Republic when Alhaji Shehu Shagari, the civilian head of state of the Second Republic, acknowledged the role of traditional leaders in his government. During this period, he selected Chiefs to work and maintain their influence in national politics. Similarly, the Obasanjo civilian government appointed the traditional rulers into the university governing councils (1999–2007).[61] During the Yar A'dua administration (2007-2009), traditional rulers were appointed as chancellors and chairpersons of cultural universities and into other appointments as board members. For instance, the late Oba Okunade Sijuade Olubuse II, the Ooni of Ile-Ife, was appointed as the Chancellor of Osun State University. During the Buhari administration, about forty-two (42) traditional rulers were appointed as Chancellors of Universities. Twenty-seven (27) other individuals were pro-chancellors of some federal universities and inter-university centers. Among these are the following Yoruba traditional rulers: Oba Rufus Adeyemo Adejugbe Aladesanmi III, the Ewi of Ado-Ekiti (chancellor of Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi), HRM Oba Aremu Gbadebo, Alake of Egbaland (Chancellor of Alex Ekwueme University, Ndufu-Alike, Ebonyi State), HRH. Oba Babatunde Adewale Ajayi, Torungbuwa II, Akarigho of Remoland (Chancellor of Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun), HRM Aladetoyinbo Ogunlade Aladelusi, Deji of Akure (Chancellor of the Federal University of Technology, Minna), Alhaji Ibrahim Sulu Gambari, The Emir of Ilorin (Chancellor of the

University of Agriculture, Markurdi), hrm, Oba (Dr.) Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi III, Alafin of Oyo (Chancellor of the University of Maiduguri), HRM, Oba Adeyeye Enitan Babatunde Ogunwusi, Ojaja II, the Ooni of Ife (Chancellor of University of Nigeria, Nsukka), Alayeluwa Oba (Dr.) Riliwanu Babatunde Osuolale Aremu Akiolu I, Oba of Lagos (Chancellor of Usmanu Danfodiyo University.[62]

Recently, it has become apparent that traditional rulers have given full support and ensured the maintenance of law and order in the corporate existence of their locality. The traditional rulers actively promote national security in the Western region and Nigeria in general.[63] In the Ife and Modakeke crisis case, the Ooni of Ife led the Yoruba chiefs and traditional rules to intervene. Besides, because the traditional rulers traditionally head their ethnic group, clan or community, they hold the highest executive authority in such communities. They are appointed based on the people's culture, customs, and traditions. The government has now recognized Its office and power through the presentation of "staff of office", an instrument of power. The government has recognized the traditional rulers as the leaders of their people and has been playing a significant role in managing the people and their affairs. Therefore, their role in conflict management, resolution, and prevention cannot be over-emphasized, as they manage people in their domain and resolve societal conflicts to ensure peace and stability.

Again, the adaptability of the traditional rulers in the globalized age has thus made them serve as intermediaries between the government and their people to ensure that change occurs in an orderly and familiar way. In providing this, they display impressive flexibility, adapting to measures that will help meet the people's needs to ensure peace, stability, progress and development in their area or community. They lead their people to adapt by publicly accepting the change despite the consequences and challenges.[64] Although, unfortunately, the government has failed to recognize the significant roles of the traditional rulers in implementing their policies among the citizens, the latter did not react as been neglected in the political system even though they are aware that it is the responsibility of the elective government to maintain an effective leadership and good governance. In recent times, people and communities have risen against government policies. Still, traditional rulers see their duty as assisting the government in day-to-day administration, disseminating information on government policies, and explaining their purpose to the government.

The traditional ruler's adaptability is very obvious as they act as advisers to the government on security issues. As part of the state council of chiefs, they partner with government security agents to present first-hand information on security issues. They are closer to the people as they live among them. The traditional rulers, on their part, alert members of the security agencies in the state to act. Through this body, they make their contribution to security matters.[65] Such contributions have helped maintain public order and preserve peace through the representative of the Traditional Council of Chiefs to the government to act upon.

Furthermore, the Yoruba traditional rulers have so adapted that they are now represented in the police committee in the Local Government areas for the responsibility of maintaining security in the local government areas, as established by the Federal Government in its guidelines for local government reforms. The traditional rulers have helped prevent acts of lawlessness that could lead to breaches of peace and instability by providing information to complement the government's efforts toward achieving nation-building. They maintain security in their areas by setting up local vigilantes, which are funded by the community to ensure the maintenance of national security, prevent lawlessness, which could affect the stability and peace of the community, and observe criminality.[66] In some cases, these local vigilantes are voluntary security agencies made up of non-disabled men and local hunters in the area. They are encouraged and empowered to continue in this regard for sustainable security.

From the foregoing, one can equally posit that the future of the traditional rulers in Nigeria is inevitable, and this is because conventional rulers play a significant role in the promotion of peace and security in their domains; as Erezene observed, "no responsible country play with its security,"[67] and this is so because security is the essential factor in the existence and survival of the society and the nation. Therefore, the government cannot do with the traditional rulers because they remain a significant force of stability in moments of change. As Smith noted, "he who attempts to remove the stability which chieftaincy provides without first ensuring an even greater stability is courting disaster".[68] It should be noted that, just as the British could not do without the Chiefs and traditional rulers during the colonial period in implementing her policies, so do the government of Nigeria cannot do without them, as they are a major force against factors of social chaos, disintegration, and instability. Therefore, for any government to develop a policy, especially on sensitive national issues, without letting the traditional rulers play a role in either its dissemination or implementation is a great disaster for such a policy.

Nevertheless, due to the observation of Erezene that "traditional rulers are the traditional leaders of thought, custodians of wisdom, customs and traditions of the people,"[69] as well as the significant role they play in national security, there can be a collaboration between the government and the people to ensure absolute peace and unity, and there can also be the allocation of funds for security for the traditional institution which will enable the institution to mobilize the people for the maintenance of security. There can also be recognition and backing for the actions of the traditional rulers and institutions by the government. With these, the future of the traditional rulers can be sure.

Conclusion

This paper discussed the dynamics of change in palace administration and how modernity has affected it in contemporary times. It demonstrated that the king's power in palace administration was limited compared to the modern government's. It also showed that the traditional rulers were able to adapt to the challenges confronted by the contemporary government through their active roles in national security,

maintenance of peace and law, acting as advisers to the democratic government, assisting in the sensitization of her citizens at the community level on government policies and programs, and modernizing the traditional institutions through the selection of educated kings. Aside from this, the political system still finds them relevant in discharging certain administrative functions. The general belief is that traditional rulers are the custodians of culture and traditions. Despite this, the palace administration has been reformed in this modern era in many ways. This can be seen in the changing of its functions and limitation of its legislative, executive and judicial powers to an advisory role developmental role by complementing the efforts of government in revenue and sourcing for the resources from the wealthy men or philanthropists in their localities, sensitizing their subjects on government's programs such as voting during the election, participating in health care services (communicable and contagious diseases like HIV/AIDS, Covid, etc.) and conflict resolution role. The issuance of a certificate of installation as a king indicated modernization.

To this end, during the 30th-anniversary celebration of the late *Ooni* of Ile-Ife, Oba Okunade Sijuwade, on the throne, ex-president Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, in his speech, regretted that traditional institutions had not been given a meaningful role in shaping democratic governance in the country. He advocated that traditional rulers should be given well-spaced roles as fathers of all in the constitution.[70] However, the introduction of modern civilization by the colonialist government was a significant factor that influenced and led to the changes that dominated palace administration in Yorubaland. However, the ability of the traditional rulers to adapt in the face of modernization and to the erosion of pre-colonial administrative dexterity displayed by the Obas, as well as the adaptability of the Yoruba culture to historical changes, ensures its survival over time.

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