

The Nexus between Tradition and Modernity: A Case Study of Ooni Adesoji Aderemi's Legacy in Post-Colonial Politics of Nigeria



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ABSTRACT

Interrogating the Ooni Institution legacy in the post-colonial politics of Nigeria is conceptually problematic. This is because, in post-colonial Nigeria, the Ooni throne had been occupied at different times by three distinct personalities with different ideological, educational and socio-economic orientations. Incidentally, the three Ooni have assertive personalities that have impacted the Nigerian post-colonial political space. This study essentially focused on the evolutionary pattern of the Ooni Institution's engagements in the post-colonial politics of Nigeria. The study examined how the Ooni Institution was able to manage the changing roles and power of the Ooni occasioned by the exigencies of Europeanised political authority in post-colonial Nigeria. Particularly, efforts were made to explain strategies deployed by Ooni Adesoji Aderemi to manage the seemingly irreconcilable differences between monarchism and republicanism of constitutional democracy in post-colonial Nigeria. This study also identified specific instances in Nigerian post-colonial politics in which Ooni Adesoji Aderemi played a crucial role as a stabilising agency to maintain the corporate existence of Nigerian statehood. In this instance, Ooni Adesoji Aderemi's decisive interventions during the Nigerian civil war were examined. Of importance to this study is also the role of the Ooni as a legitimising authority for military regimes at epochal moments in the Nigerian checkered political history. This study has made a concerted effort to identify the role of Ooni in defining the Yoruba personality in Nigerian politics as a unifier and bridge builder for a sustainable and harmonious state.

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INTRODUCTION

The Ile-Ife story is central to Yoruba history. To begin with, the common Yoruba mythology on human creation posited that Ile Ife is the source of the Yoruba race and indeed the origin of the world. Consequently, every major town in Yorubaland has a story of origin rooted in Ile Ife's history. Every beaded crown in Yorubaland is legitimatised through affiliation with Ile Ife royalty. Therefore, whichever king that ruled in the context of Ile Ife history has a significant role and impact in bringing to light and defining what constitutes the culture, politics, economy and social life of the Yoruba race.¹ In other words, there is a need to understand that in a sense, the *Ooni* stool plays a pivotal role in determining the political orientation, the ideological coronation and the social orientation of the Yoruba

¹ Isaac Adeagbo Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A Key to Understanding Yoruba History* (Ibadan: Olu-Akin Publishers, 2002), 15-23.

race. This study attempts to explain how the *Ooni* Institution has been able to play a significant role in defining the common social and political identity of the Yoruba people. An effort will also be necessary to identify how the *Ooni* Institution provided the template or model for the kind of transition that happened from the traditional political system to the modern constitutional government that Nigeria presently runs.

THE OONI INSTITUTION: FROM TRADITIONAL ORDER TO EUROPEANISED CONSTITUTIONAL ORDER

The Yoruba had one of the most developed traditional political administrations long before any contact with any other group in the entire world. The Yoruba, as has been noted, is one of the most urbanised groups in Africa. Indeed, the Yoruba have been building towns with complex economic and political administrative systems long before contact with the Europeans.² From the available records, the first established contact between the Yoruba and the Europeans was in the 15th century when Portuguese explorers contacted the Benin kingdom.³ The Benin kingdom of history was established by people of the Yoruba race. It has its origin historically in Yoruba cultural life. At the point of contact with the Portuguese, it was very apparent that the Yoruba were on least at par with the Europeans (Portuguese), given the glowing historical account given by the Portuguese explorers on Yoruba political administration.

The important point is that there was a versatile political and administrative system of government long before the Yoruba met with the Europeans and this was epitomised in what is called the royal institution where there was an Oba who lay his claim to a divine authority consequent upon the Oba being a direct descendant of the acclaimed creator of the Yoruba kingdom- 'Oduduwa'.⁴ The person who in modern times represented the Oduduwa as it were, was and is still the *Ooni*. This is where the position of the *Ooni* became very significant as he epitomised the Yoruba traditional royalty. The political administrative nomenclature of Ile Ife is replicated in every Yoruba town. This particular administrative system was well established in almost all Yoruba towns, where there were kings that were modeled after the pattern of the one that was in Ile Ife. In other words, there is usually an Oba, a traditional council of chiefs, and chiefs who head different quarters of every town. The chiefs of these quarters had a way of reporting back to the traditional council and to *Ooni*-in-council. This was the kind of political administration that was in place before the advent of colonialism. To a very large extent, it served the Yoruba people and the race became one of the most expansive racial groups in Africa, having territories as far as Ghana.⁵

It is also very important to note that the Yoruba have accepted the *Ooni* Institution and Ile Ife as a model to be referenced and protected at all costs. This explains why the Yoruba had a traditional convention that stipulated that under no circumstance would any Yoruba town invade Ile Ife or conquer Ile Ife for whatever political reason.⁶ At some point, Yoruba had independent political authorities. The *Alafin*, *Awujale*, the *Owa*, etc., had different independent political authorities, but despite the independent powers of these authorities, including the Ibadan leadership in the late nineteenth century, it was an unwritten rule among the Yoruba that nobody must and should not tamper with Ile Ife, particularly the political institution within the context of Ile Ife. This was religiously adhered to until a town, Owu, attempted to conquer Ile Ife. The Yoruba rose as a group and through the Apomu War destroyed and scattered the Owu people.⁷ This historical development explains why we have the Owu all over Yorubaland today because of the resolution of the Yoruba race that Ile Ife is not to be conquered. This goes to show the importance of Ile Ife and indeed the *Ooni* Institution to the Yoruba race as a group.

It is important to know that even when the colonial administration came, the *Ooni* Institution was still able to maintain its relative position of authority within the British colonial administration. It should be noted that the colonisation of Yoruba territory began in 1861 with the proclamation of Lagos

² Joseph Adebawale Atanda, *The Collected Works of JA Atanda*, ed. Toyin Falola (Austin: Pan-African University Press, 2017), 89-95.

³ Fajana A. and Biggs B.J., *Nigeria in History* (Ikeja: Longman Nig. Ltd, 1964), 131-136.

⁴ Atanda, *The Collected Works of JA Atanda*, 84-95.

⁵ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A Key to Understanding Yoruba History*, 8-13.

⁶ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A Key to Understanding Yoruba History*, 21.

⁷ Akin Mabogunje and J. D. Omer-Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History* (Ibadan: University Press, 1971), 41-71.

Colony, and eventually by the late nineteenth century, most Yoruba states were colonised. Colonisation took place, particularly through the British purported attempt to pacify the warring sections of Yoruba states during the Kiriji War.⁸ Eventually, by the beginning of the twentieth century, almost all Yoruba towns had been colonised by the British through one treaty or the other.

At this juncture, the pertinent question is why the *Obaship* institution, as epitomised by the *Ooni* in Yorubaland, has been able to survive the colonial administration in Nigeria and remains relevant even under constitutional republican and military governments in the Nigerian political space. This shall be the next focus of this study. To begin with, it is important to note that at the time the Yoruba, were colonised, different forces influenced the nature of the colonial administration within the context of the Yoruba nation. The colonisers began from Lagos and when the Lagos Colony was established in 1861 we also saw the role British colonial power played in undermining the political authority of Dosunmu and Kosoko to stabilise colonial rule within the context of Lagos and how the traditional political authority in Lagos became subdued under the leadership of the colonial authority. First, Lagos was ruled by colonial officials resident in Sierra Leone and later from Ghana.⁹ The revocation of the royal charter granted to the Royal Niger Company to rule the Oil-Protectorate was terminated on December 31, 1899, and subsequently direct British rule of colonial rule began from the first of January 1900. By 1900, British colonial authority governed Lagos along most parts of Yorubaland that had been colonised and well consolidated under British colonial rule.

The important thing at this material time was that when the colonial government came, it came with an indirect rule system that was well established in the northern part of the country, with relative success in the southwestern part of the country. Why was it relatively successful? It was relatively successful to the extent that there were well-established political authorities with well-defined roles, and functions and effective communication systems within the communities, which was quite useful for the Europeans. Unfortunately, for the Europeans at this material time, there was already a quite appreciable number of Yoruba who had been able to acquire a Western education. The perception of the educated elite of the relevance of traditional institutions in colonial administration was jaundiced because the educated elite believed that they were better trained and educated to run the colonial government than the traditional rulers. The problem between the educated elite and traditional rulers was not very deep because the traditional rulers embraced Western education. This explains the relative success of the indirect rule system in Yorubaland.

It is important to note how the *Ooni* became very relevant in the context of Yoruba history during the colonial time. In the period when colonialism came to Yorubaland, different Yoruba states were consolidating their geographical territories. This manifested in intra-ethnic conflicts, migrations, settlements and the struggle for control of fertile agricultural lands. The Ife-Modakeke conflict first erupted during the reign of Oba Adekun Olubuse 1 (1894-1910), which led to the establishment of Ode-Omu in 1909. This became possible because of the intervention of the colonial government. Although the Ode-Omu relocation treaty was consummated and signed by Ibadan and Ile-Ife leaderships in 1886, it was the colonial government that facilitated the establishment of Ode-Omu as a way of facilitating peace between the Ife and Modakeke. This again shows the kind of influence that *Ooni* began to acquire under colonial rule. The colonial government could not eliminate the *Ooni* Institution. They were unable to do this because they knew the relevance that the *Ooni* Institution had even for the sustenance and maintenance of peace, that the administrative structure that was already in place in the traditional Ile Ife system and this served the purpose of colonial government. However, the *Ooni* lost his absolute political power over his subjects to colonial authority.¹⁰ The reality of the amazing power of the *Ooni* declining became very apparent. In other words, the *Ooni*, who was supposed to be a deity and a king that could not be questioned, began to be subdued under a colonial authority and the *Ooni* Institution was very pragmatic in its approach towards the colonial administration.

⁸ Akinjogbin, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture: A Key to Understanding Yoruba History*, 77-84.

⁹ Kamilu Sani Fage and David O. Alabi, *Nigerian Government and Politics* (Abuja: Basfaj Global Concept Ltd, 2017), 37-40.

¹⁰ Atanda, *The Collected Works of JA Atanda*, 125 - 131.

The kind of socio-economic institution that was in place during the colonial period played a very significant role in the transition of the *Ooni* Institution from a core traditional political system to a modernised traditional political system within the context of Ile Ife at this material time.

OONIS IN THE CONTEXT OF COLONIAL HISTORY OF NIGERIA

To be sure, there were five *Oonis* whose reign occurred during the period of British colonial rule of Nigeria extended to Ile-Ife. These were Ooni Derin Ologbenla (1880-1894); Ooni Adelekun Olubuse 1 (1894-1910); Ooni Adekola (1910); Ooni Ademiluyi Ajagun (1910-1930), and Ooni Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi (1930-1980).

One of the first major issues that elicited contact between the *Ooni* and colonial authority was when Ooni Adelekun Olubuse 1 (1894-1910) worked with the colonial government to establish Ode-Omu. However, the reign of Ooni Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi (1930-1980) was a turning point in the colonial history of Ile Ife. For this reason, it is very important to know when and how Oba Adesoji Aderemi was able to play a pivotal role in creating the pattern of transition from traditional to a modernised political authority of the *Ooni* Institution. It is symbolically important to note that Ooni Adesoji Aderemi was the first *Ooni* to bear Christianised and Europeanised names (Titus Martins).

Ooni Adesoji Aderemi was born on November 15, 1889 at a time the British had established a Lagos colony and they were making serious inroads into the hinterland of Yorubaland. It is also important to note that at this material time, various missionary groups had established schools as a way of establishing an elite class that would be well-groomed for European culture. One of the earliest beneficiaries of European education was Oba Adesoji Aderemi. Not only was he a beneficiary of Western education, but he was also converted to Christianity. Indeed, he became Europeanised in such a way that his baptismal name in the Christian religion was Titus and his European name was Martins. Hence, his name was Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi. He had the benefit of Western education. He started at St. Philip Primary School in 1901 in Ile Ife. Western education gave him insight into the operations of the Europeanised political system.

It is interesting to know the socio-economic condition that facilitated the emergence of Oba Martins Adesoji Aderemi. Europe underwent traumatic economic challenges immediately after the First World War. It was a period of tough economic recession for Europeans, particularly Britain. Britain fought a devastating world war between 1914 and 1918 and this war had a serious impact on the productive capacity of the country.¹¹ At this time, Britain had a very big empire; as a result, the resources of Britain became so thin that it had to rely on resources outside Britain. Britain began to look to Africa, particularly Nigeria, for resources for economic sustenance and development. This explains why the British colonial interests were concentrated initially along the oil rivers (Niger Delta), which were designated as the Oil River Protectorate.¹²

At this epoch, crude oil had not begun to play a major role in industrial activities in Europe. It was palm kernel that was used not only for the production of goods like consumable vegetable oil and soap, but also important for the lubrication of various industrial machines. That was why the struggle for the Niger Delta was very intense. Wars against indigenous entrepreneurs like Nana Olomu and Jaja of Opobo were fought by the British colonial army in order to gain absolute control of the then lucrative palm oil trade exclusively for British merchant companies.¹³ Other needs in the British economy were also sourced from Nigeria during this period. The British colonial government tacitly reoriented Nigerian farmers to cultivate food items that were in demand in Britain through a repressive tax regime payable in British pounds. The colonial government ensured that the British pounds could only be earned by farmers who produced for the British market. This was the beginning of cocoa plantations in colonial Nigeria. Eventually, at that time, Yorubaland became a major source of food for Britain.

¹¹ Andrew Gamble, *The Free Economy and the Strong State: The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Macmillian Education Ltd, 1994), 6-9.

¹² Adeniyi Justus Aboyeji, *From (Palm) Oil to (Crude) Oil: The Changing Phases of the Niger-Delta Oil Economy*, ed. C.C.C. Osakwe and L.E. Odeh (Kaduna: Nigerian Defence Academy Publishers, 2020), 25-42.

¹³ Olukoya Ogen, "Mega-Entrepreneurs: A Prosopographical Study Of Nigerian Entrepreneurship 1850-2000," in *Studies in Entrepreneurship in Nigeria. History Principles and Practice* (Oshogbo: College of Humanities and Culture, Osun State University, 2011), 26-36.

Nigerians who had the advantages of a formal Western education went into the business of 'buying agency' for British trading companies. This was because they had a relative advantage through contact with the Europeans. The educated elites became trading agents between the local farmers and major companies like the Royal Niger Company, Lever Brothers, etc., that were monopolising the import and export trade between colonial Nigeria and Britain.¹⁴

One of the major beneficiaries of the import and export trade between colonial Nigeria and Britain was Oba Adesoji Aderemi. He became a major agent of British companies, facilitating trade between the local farmers and British companies. It was this agency that laid the foundation of wealth. Oba Adesoji Aderemi became wealthy and influential in Ile Ife environs, where he operated his agency that specialised mainly in buying cocoa and reselling the commodity to British companies that were licensed by the colonial government to export the product.

When Ooni Ademiluyi Ajagun (1910-1930) died in 1930, Oba Adesoji Aderemi had acquired considerable wealth and influence to become a major contender for the *Ooni* throne, given his royal parental background. Eventually, he was enthroned as the *Ooni* of Ife in 1930. He reigned between 1930 and 1980, a period of 50 years. The period of 50 years of Oba Adesoji Aderemi's reign was the most impactful one in the colonial and post-colonial politics of Nigeria.¹⁵

To be sure, major parts of the geographical area now known as Nigeria were governed by a private company, the Royal Niger Company, under a charter granted by the British crown. On December 31, 1899, the British Crown revoked the charter and the British colonial government assumed full authority on January 1, 1900. Different parts of Nigeria were governed differently by the British colonial government. Eventually, the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated on January 1, 1914, to create a country called Nigeria. Thereafter, Order in Council was used to govern Nigeria by the British colonial government. Britain's engagement in the First World War did not allow Britain to pay much attention to Nigeria. After the war, Britain began to make administrative and constitutional changes, which culminated in the enactment of the 1922 Clifford Constitution in Nigeria. Despite the articulated reservations of Nigerians about the 1922 Clifford constitution, the post-First World War economic depression, particularly in Britain, did not allow Britain to proactively engage Nigeria in constitutional reforms until the Second World War engulfed the world.¹⁶

Britain had to mobilise both the human and natural resources of Nigeria and her allies to prosecute the Second World War.¹⁷ At this time, the reigning Oba in Ile Ife, the ancestral home of the Yoruba people, was Oba Adesoji Aderemi. Oba Adesoji Aderemi who had the benefit of Western education, economic transactions and a well-established relationship with the British was properly positioned to be able to play a pivotal role in understanding the dynamics of the political reality of accepting British colonial government authority and adapting the hitherto traditional political institution to meet exigencies of changing ethical values caused by declining authority of traditional political authority.

OBA ADESOJI ADEREMI AND POWER BALANCE BETWEEN THE COLONIAL AND TRADITIONAL AUTHORITIES

There were agitations by nationalist movements for independence from colonial rule in Africa. Several factors influenced nationalists' struggle for liberation from colonial rule. One of the factors was the ethnicisation of the nationalist's struggle for independence. In colonial Nigeria, political parties were formed along ethno-religious and regional interest lines. Politics became ethnicised. Different contending ethnic nationalities began to manifest themselves. Of course, the 'Divide and Rule' British colonial policies in Nigeria provided the platform for myopic ethno-religious and regional politics to thrive.

¹⁴ Ogen, "Mega-Entrepreneurs: A Prosopographical Study Of Nigerian Entrepreneurship 1850-2000," 39-45.

¹⁵ Karl Maier, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (London: Penguin Books, 2002), 9-15; Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (London: Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, 2006), 1-8.

¹⁶ Fage and Alabi, *Nigerian Government and Politics*, 37-51.

¹⁷ Daron Acemoglu and James A Robinson, *Why Nations Fail: The Origins of Power, Prosperity, and Poverty* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2013), 253 - 258.

The first major ethnic confrontation between major ethnic groups during the colonial period in Nigeria happened during the reign of Oba Adesoji Aderemi in Ile-Ife when the Hausa kolanut traders fought with Yoruba traders in Ile Ife in 1934.¹⁸ This event laid the foundation for ethnic consciousness in Nigerian politics and became more manifest in post-colonial politics. Indeed, ethnic consciousness inadvertently became institutionalised when the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was established by predominantly Yoruba people in Lagos led by Herbert Macaulay. NCNC eventually ended up as an Igbo-dominated political party that ruled the Eastern region. Without any pretence to any national base, the elite of Northern Nigeria, like Mallams Aminu Kano, Alliyu Abubakar, Abubakar Imam, and Dr. R.A.B. Dikko established the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The NPC became the dominant political party in the Northern Region. Expectedly, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Chief Michael Ajasin and others established an essentially Yoruba dominated Action Group (AG) that ruled in the Western Region.

In the northern part of Nigeria, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) was established to protect the perceived interests of the northern people. The Yoruba could not be different therefore; there was a consolidation of political interest which culminated in the formation of the Action Group in 1949 at Owo, in present-day Ondo State. In all these events, Oba Adesoji Aderemi served as an inspiration. Although Oba Adesoji Aderemi was never a card-carrying member of Action Group, it was very apparent that he had an amiable working relationship with the top echelon of Action Group leadership. Oba Adesoji Aderemi's position as the *Ooni*, a foremost traditional ruler of the Yoruba people, clearly necessitated his alliance with the dominant political group in Yorubaland, particularly when the Emirs in Northern Nigeria did not hide their preference for NPC.¹⁹

Oba Adesoji Aderemi was not very active in the formation of the Action Group, but he was one of the powers behind the scenes that facilitated the formation of the party. The divisive politics of the colonial period ensured that the major political parties could not agree on a date for the termination of colonial rule in Nigeria. Consequently, the British colonial government decided to placate the Action Group, which demanded immediate and unconditional independence for Nigeria by agreeing to grant internal self-government to any region that desired it. Internal self-government was granted to the Western Region in 1957.

The Action Group that was in power in the Western Region made efforts to ensure that a Yoruba person was appointed as the Western Regional Governor to represent a symbolic British crown colonial authority. The British Queen was represented as the governor of the Western Region through an African. Oba Adesoji Aderemi had the privilege of becoming the first Oba in the context of Africa to become the governor of a region. He was appointed the governor of the Western Region in 1960. Oba Adesoji Aderemi held this office until the western region's political crisis of 1962. The Western Region crisis became endemic and a state of emergency had to be declared within the context of the region. In all these political happenings, Oba Adesoji Aderemi understood the delicate balance between colonial and traditional authorities. He knew the limits of his power. He deferred to the superior authority of the new Nigerian state. This was practically demonstrated in his swiftness in vacating 'Government House' (the official residence of the Governor) within 24 hours on May 29, 1962, when the NPC-led Federal Government declared a state of emergency in the Western Region.²⁰

Oba Adesoji Aderemi was one of the key political actors whose political dexterity and maturity helped in consolidating "the authority of Ooni" as a modern political authority. The transition of *Ooni* from a traditional political system to a modernised political system within the context of colonial government was largely due to the character, integrity and intellectual capability of Oba Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi. Oba Adesoji Aderemi was a pioneer of a sort in resolving the assumed conflict between monarchism and republicanism. Oba Adesoji Aderemi was able to do this by understanding the limits of his power and accepting British colonial authority while still retaining the moral authority over his people and the traditional domain of the Yoruba township authority.

¹⁸ Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978).71-75.

¹⁹ Adewale Ademoyega, *Why We Struck: The Story of the First Nigerian Coup* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigerian Publisher, 1981), 1-22.

²⁰ Obafemi Awolowo, *The Travails of Democracy and the Rule of Law* (Ibadan: Evans Brothers Nigeria Publishers, Ltd, 1987).

Oba Adesoji Aderemi's perception of political power as an instrument of dexterous management of traditional culture and modernity created the necessary impetus that made the *Ooni* Institution not diminish in prestige and status in spite of legal and political limitations imposed on the *Ooni* Institution by colonialism and later by the republican constitutional political order. In other words, the *Ooni* Institution was one of the very first institutions that made it possible for the traditional institutions to remain relevant within the context of colonial government because of the ethics, morals, maturity and political tolerance displayed by Oba Adesoji Aderemi.

OBA ADESOJI ADEREMI AND POST-COLONIAL POLITICS OF NIGERIA

Oba Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi's reign epitomised the best model of a traditional ruler's involvement in politics. He was quite proactive in Nigerian politics. He was the first African to be appointed a Governor to represent the British Crown in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1960 when the country became independent. He was the Governor between 1960 and 1962. Incidentally, this was a momentous period in Nigerian history. The period represented the epitome of political crisis that culminated in the demise of the First Republic through the January 15, 1966, military coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu of the Nigerian Army.

At the time Oba Adesoji Aderemi was appointed Governor of the Western Region, Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola had taken over as the Premier of the region. This was a result of the decision of Chief Obafemi Awolowo to relinquish his seat at the Western Region House of Assembly to enable him to contest in the Federal election into the National Assembly in 1959 to become the Prime Minister of Nigeria. Later, Chief Obafemi Awolowo became the leader of the opposition in the National Assembly and the leader of the Action Group. Chief Samuel Ladoke Akintola was appointed the Premier of the Western Region because AG had the majority of members in the Parliament in the Western Region House of Assembly.

By 1962, there was a major crisis that redefined the context of politics within the Western Region and Nigeria. It all began when there was disharmony between the leader of AG, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and the Premier of Western Region, Chief SL Akintola. Chief SL Akintola was accused of being disloyal to the party. This was because during the 1962 national convention of Action Group held in Jos, Chief Akintola left the convention to receive Alhaji Ahamdu Bello, the Premier of the North, who was on a private visit to Ibadan to commission the Ahamdu Bello hall in the University of Ibadan, named after him. There had been a crisis of confidence between SL Akintola and Obafemi Awolowo. Chief SL Akintola's action at the AG convention was the breaking point in the relationship between the leaders. Eventually, the party resolved that they were going to remove Chief SL Akintola as the Premier of the Western Region and decided to elect Alhaji S. A. Adegbenro as the new premier.

It was a parliamentary system of government where the party had the right to choose who became its leader then. The Western Region Governor at this period was Oba Adesoji Aderemi. The AG leadership wrote to Oba Adesoji Aderemi to change the Premier of the Western Region by replacing Chief SL Akintola with Chief SA Adegbenro. However, Chief SL Akintola rejected the move to remove him and advised the Governor that the vote of confidence expressed through the letter to the Governor signed by members of the Western Region House of Assembly to remove him from office was inadequate. Chief SL Akintola insisted that the members had to sit in the Parliament and formally pass a vote of no confidence on him and that was the only condition that would make him accept the decision.

Oba Adesoji Aderemi, as Governor of Western Region, did not use his veto power. He advised the AG to urge members of the House of Assembly to meet in parliament and pass a vote of no confidence on Chief SL Akintola and subsequently elect a premier of their choice. At the parliamentary meeting where this was to be done, there was chaos. Members of Parliament loyal to Chief Akintola did not allow the house to sit and they deliberately took the mace and caused disorderliness within the House of Assembly. The police came in, applied tear gas and forced the members out of parliament, causing a crisis within the assembly. Shortly after this incident, the Federal Government perceived to be sympathetic to Chief SL Akintola's faction, decided to declare a state of emergency in the Western Region on May 29, 1962. What is interesting within this discourse is that then, Oba Adesoji Aderemi was at the centre of these political intrigues.

As Governor of the Western Region, Oba Adesoji Aderemi had the power to decide who became the premier on the advice of the political party that controlled a majority of members of parliament. Oba Adesoji Aderemi could have announced Chief S.A. Adegbenro as the new premier, but he decided to play political maturity by allowing members of parliament to sit to formally pass a vote of no confidence on Chief SL Akintola's premiership, as it turned out that was not to be.

At this crucial time, efforts were made by politicians to discredit the *Ooni* Institution and bastardise that institution to erode the respect that the Yoruba had for the *Ooni* Institution. The children of Yoruba were deeply concerned. One of the concerned members of the Yoruba race was the then Chief Justice of Nigeria, Sir Adetokunbo Ademola, who advised Oba Adesoji Aderemi to leave the government house and relocate back to Ile Ife to spare him from the humiliation the then ruling party, NPC, had planned for him. Oba Adesoji Aderemi could have rejected the advice, but he demonstrated political maturity by resigning to avoid the humiliation that may have followed. The Federal Government of Nigeria led by Prime Minister Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region and consequently appointed a sole administrator, Dr. M. A. Majekodumi, for the region for six months.

Consequently, after the expiration of the state of emergency in the Western Region, there was another election in which a new party, the Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP), formed by Chief SL Akintola, won the election. Chief SL Akintola was restored to power as Premier of the Western Region while Chief Fadahunsi was appointed as the Governor of the region. What is important for our discourse here is that at that material time in the Nigerian chequered history, Oba Adesoji Aderemi allowed maturity to prevail. He could have behaved in a manner that could have made the whole crisis more complex by refusing to leave office. If he had done that, he could have been humiliated or killed, which could have elicited the anger of the Yoruba people, who incidentally were the major supporters of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group. At this time, Oba Adesoji Aderemi was the kind of leader that God used to minimise what later became destructive political activities within the Western Region. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was later accused of a 'criminal offence of treasonable felony' for which he was sentenced to ten years' imprisonment. Perhaps if Oba Adesoji Aderemi had not wisely resigned as the Governor of Western Region, it is not impossible that he could have been accused along with Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Maybe Oba Adesoji Aderemi could have been sentenced to prison too, thereby bringing the *Ooni* stool to a historic disrepute.

The political maturity displayed by Oba Adesoji Aderemi during the 1962 crisis in the Western Region was one of the glaring examples of how a traditional ruler should manage himself within the reality of the republican constitutional system. Therefore, Oba Adesoji Aderemi had realised that he was no longer "Kabieosi" (a Supreme Ruler). He knew the limits of his power and, therefore, he exercised the power with absolute discretion in a manner that did not bring his name and the *Ooni* Institution into disrepute in Yorubaland.

The post-1962 Western Region crisis was particularly traumatic for the Yoruba. It was a difficult time for the Yoruba when people were killed wantonly; properties were lost to politically induced violence that happened within the region.²¹ In this entire crisis, there was never a time when Oba Adesoji Aderemi was accused of any involvement or facilitation of the crisis in the Western Region. In spite of the humiliation he had suffered from the NNDP political group that was loyal to Chief SL Akintola, Oba Adesoji Aderemi allowed his integrity as an impartial traditional ruler to remain intact by not allowing himself to be dragged into "dirty politics of the era". This was the situation until the military coup of 1966 when the five Majors led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu struck to determine the First Republic constitutional government of Nigeria and eventually lost political power to the then GOC of the Nigerian Army, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi who became the Head of State of Nigeria on January 15, 1966.²²

OBA ADESOJI ADEREMI AND MILITARY GOVERNMENTS IN NIGERIA

Oba Adesoji Aderemi played a crucial role as a stabilising factor during the momentous crisis that engulfed Nigeria shortly after the January 15, 1966, military putsch. The January 15, 1966, military

²¹ Alexander A Madiebo, *The Nigerian Revolution and the Biafran War*, (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 1-14.

²² M Chris Alli, "The Federal Republic of Nigerian Army: The Siege of a Nation," 2001.

coup d'état redefined the Nigerian political space. The brutal extermination of major political and military elites from western and northern regions by the January 15, 1966, military coup plotters, who were mainly of Igbo's extractions and the perceived Major General Aguiyi Ironsi's Igbo ethnic agenda orchestrated through Decree 6 of 1966, technically changed Nigeria's federal system to a unitary system. For the record, the Prime Minister of Nigeria, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Premier of Northern Region, Alhaji Ahamdu Bello, Brig.-Gen Z. Maimalari and Colonel Kur Muhammed (most senior political and military officers from Northern Nigeria) were assassinated brutally by Igbo military officers led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu on January 15, 1966. In the same way, the Premier of Western Region, Chief SL Akintola, along with two very senior Yoruba military officers (Brigadier General Samuel Ademulegun and Colonel Ralph Sodehinde), were murdered by the same Igbo officers.

Consequently, the Nigerian political space became intensely fractionalised along ethnic lines. In a bid to assuage the aggrieved political and ethnic interests, the then Head of State, Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, opted to tour different regions. Major General Aguiyi Ironsi was in Ibadan on July 28, 1966 to hold meetings with major stakeholders in the Western Region, which included Oba Adesoji Aderemi. In the early hours of July 29, 1966, military officers of the northern region extractions invaded the Government House in Ibadan. The coup plotters abducted Major General Aguiyi Ironsi and his host, the Military Governor of Western Region, Lt. Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi, to a location, Iyana Offa, outside Ibadan, where they were brutally murdered. Military officers of the Northern region thereafter took over the government and announced Lt. Colonel Jack Yakubu Gowon as Head of State of Nigeria.

The importance of these monumental occurrences to our present discourse is that Oba Adesoji Aderemi's leadership role during this period helped to mitigate plausible negative reactions from the Yoruba people. Let us explain. The military coup d'état of January 15, 1966 resulted in the death of high-profile political and military leaders in the northern and western (Yoruba) regions. The people of the northern region reacted on July 29, 1966 when Igbo officers and a notable Yoruba military officer were murdered. Thereafter, the infamous massive killings of Igbo in the northern region began setting the stage for a fratricidal 30-month civil war in Nigeria.²³ In other words, the Yoruba were victims of both the January 15, 1966 and July 29, 1966 coup d'états. Indeed, there were two more senior Yoruba military officers than Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon at the time he was appointed Head of State of Nigeria. These were Brigadier General Babafemi Ogundipe and Colonel Robert Adeyinka Adebayo. Thus, Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon's appointment negated the military hierarchical command order. The Yoruba leadership could have justifiably mobilised public opinion for revenge against other ethnic groups. One of the reasons why the Yoruba never sought revenge was the moderating influence of Oba Adesoji Aderemi on the Yoruba leadership.

All efforts were made at this time to consolidate the leadership of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Of significance was the unique role played by Oba Adesoji Aderemi to ensure that the entire Yoruba political, intellectual, business and traditional elite became united under one leadership. Oba Adesoji Aderemi played a pivotal role in the election of Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the Yoruba leader on August 12, 1966 in Ibadan.²⁴ It was the election of Chief Obafemi Awolowo Yoruba leader that gave him the decisive platform to mediate between leaders of Northern and Eastern regions in the pre-Nigeria civil war negotiations. Chief Obafemi Awolowo eventually served as the Minister of Finance and Vice Chairman of the Nigeria Executive Council throughout Nigeria's civil war.

Oba Adesoji Aderemi, a key traditional ruler in Nigeria's military regimes, sought his cooperation to legitimise their policy thrusts. The regimes of General Aguiyi Ironsi, General Yakubu Gowon, General Muritala Muhammed and General Olusegun Obasanjo (1966-1979) actively sought the opinions of Oba Adesoji Aderemi on policy matters. This became expedient for military regimes' legitimacy, as traditional rulers remained the only viable link to the people, since all elected representatives of the people had been removed from political offices.

²³ Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Penguin, 2012), 63-96.

²⁴ Adeyinka Adebayo, *West: Problems and Solutions* (Ibadan: Information Division, Western State Ministry of Home Affairs and Information, 1971), 13.

Discussion Summary

By his public conduct, Oba Adesoji Aderemi assisted in defining Yoruba personality identity as a politically tolerant, logically minded and decisive bridge builder. Oba Adesoji Aderemi's reign as the *Ooni* redefined the Institution of *Ooni*. Oba Adesoji Aderemi's long reign of 50 years (1930-1980), offered him an unequal opportunity to witness major transformations of Nigeria's political structure through three major colonial constitutional developments. These included the First Republic constitution, three military administrations, and the Second Republic constitution. Oba Adesoji Aderemi reigned through the usurpation of his traditional political power by British colonial authority. Incidentally, Oba Adesoji Aderemi was equally a beneficiary of colonial government unification of hitherto balkanised Yoruba towns into the Western Region, where he eventually became the first African to be appointed Governor of Western Region. He was able to exercise a decisive political authority and influence far beyond his traditional geographical territory of Ile-Ife. Oba Adesoji Aderemi's reign marked the beginning of the *Ooni* Institution exercising political influence in the national political space. For instance, the *Ooni* of Ile-Ife, along with the Sultan of Sokoto and the Obi of Onitsha, were permanent chairmen of the Nigeria Traditional Rulers' Council. Of a truth, Oba Adesoji Aderemi brought the *Ooni* Institution into national recognition through his dexterous and strategic political alliances, integrity and disciplined public life.

CONCLUSION

The monarch, Oba Titus Martins Adesoji Aderemi, who had acquired Western education, influence and considerable wealth became the *Ooni* of Ile-Ife in 1930. He was in power for 50 years. The period could be considered as the most impactful one in the colonial and post-colonial politics of Nigeria. Oba Adesoji Aderemi made the *Ooni* Institution one of the first institutions to make traditional institutions remain relevant within the perspective of the colonial government in Africa. He employed ethics, morality, maturity, and political tolerance to become the best model of the participation of a traditional ruler in politics.

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