

## **Ọmọ́lúwàbí and Ojude-Oba**

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The Ijẹbu people of Nigeria took on and domesticated the Durbar concept over a hundred years ago. The historical background to Ojude-Oba (Durbar among Ijẹbus) was well articulated in a Facebook posting by Engineer Kayode Sote last year. There is no doubt that the current paramount King of the Ijẹbus Oba Sikiru Adetona, the Awujale of Ijẹbuland went far in modernising Ojude-Oba and made it a major annual carnival that is now on the cultural tourism circuit of Nigeria.

It is even important that Ijẹbus in the diaspora are sharing this non-partisan non-religious one love carnival of culture and tradition in other lands. While at Houston in the last two weeks, I learnt, through advertisements, of the impending celebration of Ojude-Oba at Atlanta on September 8, 2018. I felt sad that I would have left Atlanta, my current stop before the event.

Indeed, the Ijẹbus, like other Yorubas in Nigeria, West Africa and the Americas readily espouse a number of persisting virtues. Some of these include political/religious tolerance/accommodation as well as the important concept of "Omoluabi" or written as "Ọmọ́lúwàbí" happens to be one of a number of Yoruba words not easy to translate into English. Omoluabi is the guiding virtue for living in society that envelopes many other virtues like: civility, tolerance, mutual respect, concern and support for the advancement of the well being of others in society, etc. It is the anti-thesis of the crass individualism and dog eat dog that allows people to take advantage of those who are comparatively weaker to themselves. In effect, a liar, selfish person, cheat, thief, robber, etc., can never be an Omoluabi. The opposite of an Ọmọ́lúwàbí is Ènìyàn Kénìyàn. An embodiment of everything that negates the positive virtues of an Ọmọ́lúwàbí

To be regarded as an Ọmọ́lúwàbí is a badge of honour among the Ijẹbus/Yorubas. Anyone described as an Omoluabi is a role model and mentor for younger generations. A selfless individual able to put the interest of society on the front burner and not a liar or robber etc.

The August 23, 2018, parade of Ijẹbu culture and tradition during Ojude-Oba, according to media reports, saw a reaction by a small group within the crowd against the Special Guest of Honour at the event, in the person of Senator Bukola Saraki accompanied by two others of his friends. This uncivil and anti-Ọmọ́lúwàbí behaviour rightly received the reproach of the Oba Sikiru Adetona. He stated: "...Ojude Oba is about culture and tradition. It is non-political. It has been like that since our forefathers started it. It is an abomination for anyone to drag politics into it". He went further to suggest that those who briefly interrupted the ceremony could not be Ijẹbus but a rented partisan crowd. In other words, he was asserting that those who shouted partisan insults at the Special Guest of Honour cannot be Omoluabi and hence not Ijẹbu.

I agree with our King that his choice of Special Guest of Honour should not be booed by his own people. However, this experience provides a great lesson that should take us back to the embrace of our great virtue of Ọmọ́lúwàbí. We have a great opportunity for Ojude-Oba to move a notch higher and ab initio screen for people who, when announced as Special Guests of Honour, will on all scores, be deemed honourable by most right thinking Ijẹbu people.

Ijẹbus are a hardworking and very moral people. We have no problems with people being rich but not as corrupt people who took from society with impunity whether in the public, private or social sectors, thereby making it impossible for all to have basic infrastructures for a good life in Ijẹbuland in particular and Nigeria in general. We may not be able to change the stealing spree over our land, but we can put forth highly moral individuals who are epitomes of Omoluabi. Even if someone has smart lawyers who get him out of harms

way, the fact that ones name surfaces on many sordid corruption lists should be a pointer for us to ask if a Special Guest of Honour is a moral role model for Ijẹbu youths who we want to be Omoluabis.

Politics is part of life. It is not possible to have an Ojude-Oba event that is devoid of politics. Perhaps the issue is avoidance of partisan politics. Oba Sikiru Adetona is right that partisan politics should not be allowed to divide us. Ijẹbus must continue to teach the world lessons on political and especially religious accommodation.

Ojude-Oba needs to now go beyond tradition, cultural fashion displays and occasional age-group building gateways as development. It could be used to propagate the realisation of Omoluabi in society. Like Nobel prize, the annual Ojude-Oba could be a ceremony at which one Omoluabi for the year is recognised and called upon to be a role model for our youths. With all humility, I would like to suggest that like-minded people should work together with the Ojude-Oba Organising Committee to start from today and decide to only honour epitomes of Omoluabi whether Nigerian or non-Nigerian.

The annual choice for the Special Guest of Honour should not be based on ownership of dubious riches or even political calculations on who can advance other goals like realising a state status for the Ijẹbus within a possible political restructuring of Nigeria being canvassed.

Our Special Guest of Honour should be an Omoluabi that no right thinking Ijẹbu person can contest as a good role model for Ijẹbu youths.