

## **The Chinese and Fulani Only Need Patience with Yoruba over Southwest Nigeria**

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On December 6, 2020, after some debate on whether I should rest or not, I summoned the courage and strength to proceed to the Sadique Baba Abubakar Golf Club (SBAGC). This Golf Club is at the Nigerian Airforce Base, at Shasha, a suburb of Lagos. Wondering about the name Sadique Baba Abubakar? It belongs to the Air Marshall who is the 20<sup>th</sup> Chief of the Air Staff Nigerian Airforce.

One of the many impacts of Covid-19 was the establishment of the SBAGC about April 2020 as the lockdown was biting hard and the Lagos State Government (LASG) had closed Ikeja Golf Club. With the Air Force premises being outside of the control of LASG, it was possible to follow a reasonable anti-Covid-19 protocol that was not a one-size fits all, of the LASG. I joined the SBAGC at the beginning of July 2020.

My golfing is not as great as it should be. I have not gone lower than the handicap 28 I acquired in Liberia when my friend Major-General Muhammad Tahir Rtd (Pakistan), then the Deputy Force Commander at the UN Mission in Liberia, finally got me to learn how to play. I am happy when I play, (what we call a one-ball), accompanied by Tunde my caddie. The experience of walking for over two hours plus chasing and hitting a small ball goes beyond exercise. It always offers me reflection time.

On December 6, 2020, Aderinwa was on my mind as I played. Aderinwa Badejo is the new addition to my family. He is my third grandchild. Since he was born outside Nigeria, he was given his name virtually on December 5, 2020. The Yoruba gave name to their children on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of birth. Prior to that day, the child is referred to with “it” as opposed to he or she. I have often wondered why this is the case. But I thought high child mortality within the first week of birth in the olden days might have made families wait for the 8<sup>th</sup> day before conferring a name. Yoruba people of whatever religion gave a child a name on the 8<sup>th</sup> day of birth. So, I thought it was a Yoruba cultural issue alone until my son read the passage that the Anglican Venerable had asked him to read.

Aderinwa’s father read the specified passage from Luke 1: 57-66. He was reading to us over Zoom as the Venerable Anglican Reverend managed the worldwide congregation using Zoom from his residence having been confined by the police instructions that we should stay off the roads of the specified Local Government Areas because of bye-elections in our Senatorial District. About 20 family and friends were in our Magodo, Lagos, living room joining my wife, our last daughter as we manipulated Zoom as host. I had upgraded my Zoom account on December 3<sup>rd</sup> to accommodate family and friends from many countries like Nigeria, Cote D’Ivoire, Canada, Kenya, Madagascar, United States. Many family members and our friends in the Lagos area, including Aderinwa’s maternal grandfather, faced the unfriendly police order that we later learnt was not even enforced. So, they could only watch the event and not partake of the post-naming merriments. The merriments had to be scaled down as we canceled, at the last minute, food orders and instead mobilized friends that could stay overnight to cook for a drastically reduced number. Why lockdown about a third of Lagos from 6 am to 6 pm, for an election in which there are 1,168,790 registered voters of which only about 104,405 voted? People were unnecessarily forced off their places of work. And for all that violation of the fundamental right of movement, only 11% of the electorate felt happy enough to participate in

the charade. Was this one of the “punishments of democracy” we are constantly subjected to instead of “dividends of democracy” that others around the world talk about? Or was this just inefficiency of the police to mount an operation of policing elections in only some sections of a state that is run on the basis of a one-party system that is full of pretenses to give impressions to the effect that people are really making choices?

In any case, Luke 1: 59 caught my attention as my son read it: “When the baby was eight days old, all the relatives and friends came for the circumcision ceremony. They all assumed the baby’s name would be Zacharias, after his father”. The import of this passage from the Bible was that the 8<sup>th</sup> day is not unique to Yoruba people. Did they borrow it from Christianity? Cannot be so. Islam came to Yorubaland centuries before the colonization agenda of the British was accompanied by ideological control by the Anglican Church that made the people continue to pray for a better life in the hereafter as the British sucked them dry under the claim of having a religious responsibility to civilize the “dark continent”. It is not that Islam was or is free of its own ideological control. Or how does one explain the Fulani control over the extraordinarily more populous Hausa people that continues to date, the condonement of the enslavement of Africans? These are interesting questions.

More important, however, is the fact that, the Yoruba people of my generation and those following are fast losing the essence of being Yoruba: that is, the culture. Professor Banji Akintoye has been constantly pointing out that, in the not too distant future, Yoruba language would become extinct if serious efforts are not undertaken to modernize the language and pass it on. He is canvassing for funds to have some academics at the spiritual base of the Yoruba (Ile-Ife) to reverse this developing trend. However, other realities are in contention on the continued presence of Yoruba people in the Southwest of Nigeria.

Aderinwa was born outside Nigeria. Interestingly, the medical doctor who delivered Aderinwa is a Yoruba lady assisted by two nurses from other nationalities from Southern Nigeria. These experts who were trained with public subsidies at different educational levels in Nigeria have professional fulfillment with up to date equipment to practice with outside the country. In Nigeria, obsolete equipment is available since resources for updating equipment are normally stolen as many acquiesce these days to lootocracy a.k.a looting of national patrimony.

These diaspora Yoruba/Nigerians are jolly well expressing their freedom of migration, freedom to explore anywhere in settling down where they are more comfortable with daily living realities and running away from the drudgery of living in Nigeria. I believe the Northwest, Northeast and some portions of Northcentral Nigeria are under-represented in this diaspora settlement arrangements. It is some of the children of elite Northerners who spend time outside to read. Quite a good number of these elitist kids when they choose Western education, benefit from the so-called federal character and enter the Universities in Nigeria with ease as merit is sacrificed. So, they have less push to join diaspora Nigerians. Unlike other ethnicities/races around the world, the Yoruba/Southern Nigerian diaspora are not coming back to Nigeria despite the nostalgia they continue to have for home. Many Yoruba compatriots, given the high value we attach to education, sacrificed all and sent children outside to read. They imbibed western culture in-toto and are more comfortable outside. Their children do not speak the language since it is not selling at the international level, despite some miniscule interests in few places like Brazil. At the death of parents, they are selling inherited real estate and not looking

back. Some are actually abandoning real estate for good and not looking back after burying their parents.

These Yoruba diaspora no longer feel anything with the culture of the Yoruba beyond food, fashion and some theatrical performances. In effect, the bond of culture is weakening as it is being attacked from many sources. When I try to protest against the crass Western individualism that I see in my family, my wife's pertinent question tended to be if I wanted my children to be thinking Yoruba, why did I send them to America to read?

The problem is more than this. Venerable Reverend spoke about the importance of the naming ceremony to the Yoruba people. But he could not and did not perform a Yoruba naming ceremony. He performed an Anglican ceremony – the Church of birth of my wife and I, after all we were born into colonial Nigeria. Another time, I could expand on how a good number of Nigerian Churches are business enterprises that, at the same time, continue to deliver us to the West via ideological suasion. In growing up, many a time, I witnessed the processes involved in naming a Yoruba child. It involved blessings to the new born that used specific food items: obi (cola nut), orogbo (bitter cola), oyin (honey), omi (water), epo (palm oil), iyo (salt) etc. to pray for the child as the child is made to minimally taste the items for the first time. The child's feet are made to touch the ground outside of the homestead hence the expression (ikomo jade) etc. We have lost all these to Christianity and Islam. The Christians say the "Blood of Jesus" has overridden all that the Yoruba used to pray and blessed a new child with. This development is recent as my son and his older sisters were welcomed with all Yoruba compliments. In a dialogue with a Chief Imam and a Muslim learned friend, I am told that earlier Muslim Imam's were tolerant and accepted the Yoruba cultural practices to encourage easy transition into greater acceptance of Islam. But these Yoruba practices are no longer done today. In fact, Islam is becoming more assertive and performs the naming ceremony on the 7<sup>th</sup> day even though it could also be done on the 8<sup>th</sup> day. Such tolerance on the part of Islam was also the approach of the Anglican Church that was initially more tolerant in comparison to the Catholic Church among the Yoruba. The Anglicans did not force Yoruba men to get rid of their many wives remaining with only one before they could be proper Catholics as Chinua Achebe informed us that they did with the Igbo people. Little wonder that Yoruba are more Anglican than Catholic. Not being satisfied, the irrepressible Yoruba confidence led them to decide that if the British Monarch can set up his own Church and end ideological control by the Pope, they can set up theirs also and do away with the Church of England. Today, so many Church movements for the collection of tithes at every corner. Factories that once produced goods have been bought by Churches as people lost employment but continued to pray for work. Of course, they must pay tithe even if it is stolen money or their last dime, it does not matter. They have been told they would not make heaven without paying tithes which goes towards life more abundantly more comfortable for Pastors here on earth.

If we are losing the essences of naming a child, how can we continue to claim that Yoruba names have meaning? In my graduate school days at UCLA, Dalili an African American wanted the oldest Yoruba man around to provide a name for her grandchild. Prof. Akiwowo would have none of that. How could one source a name for a child whose sex was unknown he wondered (this was before sex of a child could be known in the womb)? I tried to suggest he could give a female and a male name since a name must be given and recorded before leaving the hospital. Of course, Prof declined the honour. Dalili ended up naming the child after a perfume she liked!

Looks like I lost focus of my title? Not really. The Fulani came from Futa-Jallon area and in Nigeria used religion and supplanted the Hausa Kings of yore. And with indirect rule, the Fulani crowned one among themselves as Emirs and adopted Hausa as language of the Court. They kept Fulfude, their own language to themselves. They have remained in control of the many times more populous Hausa to date. They succeeded in Ilorin as the Yoruba authority system over the town was supplanted. In 1840 the Fulani got defeated by the Yoruba as they tried to move and occupy the rest of Yorubaland. The Yoruba are convinced that the 1840 plan of the Fulani Emirate system is still afoot even today.

Furthermore, in a 2019 study: “Ethnic Disparities in Fertility and its Determinants in Nigeria”, Ayo Stephen Adebawale pointed out differentials in the fertility rates of the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. “The total fertility rate was 8.02, 4.91 and 4.43 among women in Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba ethnic group respectively. The proportion of women with  $\geq 5$  children was highest among the Hausa/Fulani (40%), followed by Igbo (21.6%) and Yoruba (17.5%)”. What this means is that the Hausa/Fulani are replicating more than the Yoruba.

So, I am wondering if the Fulani can just be patient, seems to me that with time, once you continue to have the best Yoruba brains outside of Nigeria and the replication rate continues to comparatively dwindle, the Fulani elites would only have the Chinese to contend with over who owns what used to be Yorubaland. The Chinese imperative of needing more land to settle such a large population is driving them all over the world including buying up Yoruba farms and properties. After all, they have cash. The Fulani are also settling in forest areas in Yorubaland as they are also buying rural lands.

The fate of the Yoruba seems to be the fate of Southerners in general. The Southerners took towards the West and are getting more and more sucked into a different culture instead of building theirs to resist subjugation by any other race or ethnicity. But am I being emotional? Why should those who are happy with Western life and all it offers care about wanting to remain Yoruba? What is so special about being Yoruba?

The situation may not be as bleak as I am suggesting if appropriate answers can be provided. The Yoruba are a problem-solving people who use more of brain than brawn. Should they be swimming against the current? If they are happy that Wally Adeyemo was nominated as Deputy Treasury Secretary in the United States, should they be worried about a Fulani aiming to be Governor in Lagos state or an Igbo or Tiv having cabinet positions in any of the Yoruba states? Yorubaland is being developed from investments from other ethnicities. Should this be of concern? If it should be, how are they to handle the current willing buyer and willing seller arrangements? Do they set up funds that can consolidate properties in the hands of Yoruba people in the Southwest? Can such efforts boost youth employment in Yorubaland? Will focus on land lift Yoruba people out of poverty if they are remaining producers of raw products that will not go far in the artificial intelligence age? Can diaspora Yoruba help if they still have some affection of belonging to large families that make up communities and the Yoruba nation?

Seems clear that the leadership of the Yoruba people have an uphill task that is bigger than protecting the language. The ongoing generational exodus of Yoruba people to the diaspora and the resulting population share reduction in Nigeria from the exodus and birth rate as well as the steady erosion of the Yoruba culture are issues that need attention. Can the entirety of the Yoruba race be limited to Nigeria or other Yoruba dominated parts of the world, alone? Certainly Not. But some thinking is much needed on preservation and transmission of the

Yoruba culture beyond borders. Welcome to Aderinwa. May he join in finding answers to the Yoruba conundrum. Should he? Why should he be bothered about the emotional wish of a grandfather? If the language is going extinct at some point, and the general culture is facing onslaught from the West and the East as well as from Christianity and Islam, why should Aderinwa and his generation objectively care?