

New Olu of Odoşenlu Receives Staff of Office.

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As I was about to retire, my wife stressed the need to upgrade our country home at Odoşenlu, Ijebu-Ode. It was clear that I would not settle in Geneva, New York or Nairobi as a number of my UN retiring colleagues tend to do. These choices for many UN retirees are easily explainable. Returning to home countries after socializing with an international oriented cosmopolitan group for decades tends to be traumatic. As a result, UN retirees tend to die off on an average of five years after retirement. Of course, a few died a day after retirement as a result of accidents and some make it well beyond thirty years.

The protected life the UN offers, especially for nationals of countries like Nigeria is enormous. Retirement in UN headquarters cities given infrastructural developments and social living with people of like mind close by as co-retirees and/or those still in service is generally superior to trying to strive to be reabsorbed into a place with decadent infrastructure arising from obvious leadership deficit that fosters high rate of corruption, squalor, poverty and retarded development. Also, for many the inability to fit into that “corruption is normal environment” and unchecked impunity and lawlessness that hold firm grips back home, takes its own turn. Visas to travel become more difficult as the UN passport is returned after the last official travel home.

However, many of us return home and in my case, my wife had always held forth at home as I moved from one conflict spot to the other. Hence, my reintegration with support from two older friends was not very difficult. Odoşenlu, where my forefathers were born, was meant to be my family escape from the hustle and bustle of Lagos. As a kid, I used to accompany a cousin into the forest shared by my family and those of others at Tipolu to check my cousin’s traps for animals as protein for food.

Since January 2, 2020, we could not visit home away from home - where one of my brothers and his family make us feel royal, (which we really are), for almost eight months, because of Covid-19. The incidence of Covid-19 is much lower outside of Lagos. None has been reported at Odoşenlu, some one hour ten minutes from Lagos when traffic is sane. And traffic is never sane on the main arterial road linking Lagos with other parts of the country and especially northwards and eastwards. The 130 kilometres of an 8-lane road have been continually worked upon eternally. The upgrading that started under President Olusegun Obasanjo continues to date. Julius Berger a

German construction company that struck gold in Nigeria before becoming Nigerian continues off and on, on this small stretch of road that would normally be upgraded in a week or two in low corruption countries. There are probably 6 or 8 lanes (difficult to tell as they always close portions for upgrading) and as one portion is constructed, the other is used. When the first one is finished, the second one is already in poor shape, and the scam has continued, causing untold hardship to travelers. However, for much of the lockdown, policy saw a stoppage in inter-state travels. My children insisted that I keep in doors in Lagos being in the at-risk age.

It was a great relief when the Oba (King) elect of Odoşenlu, Oba Adedotun Oduneye Odusanya, informed me that he would receive his staff of office from the Governor of our state on August 27, 2020. This day marks the anniversary of the ignominious coup d'etat led by Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida which worsened integrity as a value in Nigeria. The looting of national patrimony got heightened as the distribution of oil blocs to friends, military colleagues, etc who, in conjunction with some bankers, lawyers and religious leaders are majorly the Nigerian billionaires of today. Acquisition of wealth without accountability viciously started. Of course, that process, picked up additional steam in the current concocted civilian rule that started in 1999 and despite the pretentious claims of President Buhari about fighting corruption, looting that is laundered in our face continues unabated. It is no longer stealing and hiding the proceeds for a while. Now, people steal and immediately flaunt the theft and demand respectability. Unfortunately, with the support of the media and helpless acquiescence from the majority like myself, they ride roughshod over us and even demand higher offices to steal more. Of course, they tend to achieve their goals of higher offices and indeed steal more undisturbed.

The information of the coronation and presentation of Staff Office from the Oba-elect became an irresistible allure to return to my home away from home accompanied by Abraham Ameh, my Special Assistant - my wife is stranded in the US – thanks to Covid-19. None of my children would follow me as one actually and rightly so chided me for traveling when Covid-19 is still very much attacking us. I found it difficult to stay away from my origin on this occasion and decided to take a foolish risk.

Many Yoruba towns have overtime acquired the right to wear beaded crowns beyond the original sixteen directly traceable to Oduduwa, the primogeniture of the Yoruba people. As I grew-up, the head of our village was a Baalę, a village head who wore no crown. In 1998, this status got upgraded to that of an Oba, thanks to the Awujale, the paramount King of the Ijebu - a major nationality within the Yoruba nation. Until the British used the maxim gun to subjugate the Ijebu

people at the Imagbon war of 1892, the Awujale was the supreme authority who ruled and reigned over his people. My father showed me the rod with iron casted on one end that his father took to Imagbon to waylay the British. This iron rod that got lost as we moved from one rented house to the other was not the only war plan. Super in the armory were expected spiritual powers from the various deities of the Ijebu and their sixteen Agemos representing different parts of Ijebuland. Some dane guns had been bought during trading with the British. The Ijebu had negotiated that they must be middle-men between the British and the hinterland of the Yoruba. They also demanded free access for church missionaries who were to preach of a better place to look forward to in paradise to help acquiescence to the British incursion to steal as much as they want. It was and is still known as ideological suasion as a means of control. To cut it short, the Ijebu were disappointed by all the incantations of their spiritual leaders, tested ability of their warriors and dane guns as well as iron ribbed wooden rods were no match for the maxim gun that the British had acquired about a decade earlier and practiced on the Ijebu. Kayode Sote, in his compendium on the Ijebu nation represents a resent rendition of this war that changed the history of Nigeria. Disappointed by their gods, the Ijebu who had earlier welcomed Islam which was still miniscule in the land started abandoning their gods. Given the love of the pomp and pageantry we are noted for, the Ijebu retained many of the festivals of yore to date in spite of the pressures towards a permanent rejection of our traditions in favour of practicing Islam and/or Christianity. The choice of religion at the individual and family level is a free one, as the Ijebu have always been very tolerant on religious practices. The bravery of my forefathers in facing the British marauders must be acknowledged. If the other Yoruba people had the foresight of resisting the people whose color was funny and treated them with disdain, the historical situation would have been different. The other Yoruba people left the Ijebu to their fate as they signed dubious pieces of papers dubbed protection treaties that served the economic interests of the British. The British needed time to subjugate the powerful Benin Kingdom which was achieved in 1897.

The British accommodated the traditional ruling authorities, in an arrangement known as indirect rule. They allowed the different potentates to appear to be the sovereign authorities over their respective peoples. But in actual fact, they had not only become stooges, but conspirators with the British design to steal our resources as they pretended to be on a civilization mission, like Lord Lugard declared in his Dual Mandate. Of course, they changed our path of growth and took away our self confidence. In playing the role of extortionist-in-chief for the British, the colonial overlords accepted the royalty arrangement of the people but reserved the ultimate right to grant authority and power to the potentate. The British gave to themselves the ceremonial right to present

the staff of authority the respective Kings used. This authority that was depicted as a high staff having a mini-crown on top started to be referred to as “Staff of Office”. The British as the rulers took over control and with mosquitoes not allowing them to settle in large numbers especially in the interiors, used the Staff of Office to maintain control over a swathe of people through the Kings.

At independence, the new African political leaders saw it as being in their interests to retain the Staff of Office concept. The politicians would not accept any competition and needed to make it clear to the Kings that they reign over their people at the behest of the respective Governors, who like the British, hire and fire. This is really useful. In the many remote communities, of Nigeria, the government, at all levels, remain irrelevant as people remain attached to their traditional rulers. Traditional rulers who are paid pittance as public servants become royal fathers serving as intermediaries between the governments and their people. However, the traditional rulers know that they must be of “good behavior” because he who gives the Staff of Office can withdraw it. This was a major problem under party political arrangements. A traditional leader that was attached to a party that loses in an election risked loss of his Staff of Office when ruling parties changed. As a response, the tendency became presenting traditional leaders as father of all of his people, irrespective of partisan alignments.

Ordinarily, I do not attend these ceremonies but chose to be part of the presentation of the Staff of Office to the Oba of my own neck of the wood. With the word coronation normally added to invitations for the ceremony, I had always thought that the Awujale places a crown on the head of the new king. But that was not the case. The Oba, having completed all traditional rights, including retreating into the forest for a range of 7 days to 3 months where he learns many things that I do not know as a novice in this area, already got the blessing of his people as their traditional leader – the symbol of the community. The Oba settles minor conflicts, especially civil problems. He equally canvasses for developmental support for his domain from friends and governments. For this many-sided roles, the Oba gets to wear the Yoruba beaded crown in many designs.

It was indeed a colorful ceremony, however, it was challenging to know who-is-who, as everyone had their face masks complimenting their dressing. The usual style of salutation was also affected, as many could only do the elbow jamming, all part of compliance with the Covid-19 safety protocols. The hall started with physical distancing of about two feet. But this reduced as invited guests added a few more seats in order to be part of the event.

The different brother (no sister for a long while) Obas in different regalia were in attendance. The reigning Paramount ruler has granted many new crowns. The clamour continues given Yoruba love of titles. It costs money to acquire the appurtenances of office for the different Obas. The brother Obas of the Olu of Odosenlu accompanied the newly recognized in dancing the Gbèdu drum in three successive back and forth. I love the ceremonial Gbèdu drums that are associated with Obas. The Gbedu is more to be listened to during ceremonies involving the King. This is unlike the Apepẹ ensemble that normally gets me enchanted.

The new Oba and I, by the Ijebu tradition belong to the same age-group called regberegbe. Everyone born within each three-year set are seen as an age group with a designated name given by the Awujale. Each age-group's name reflect important events within the period in Ijebuland. The Oba had formally joined and I have, so far, remained outside the fence. The age-group was adequately represented in chocolate brown Agbada (Boubou) and Fila (Cap) to match as a colorful addition to the ceremony. The different Otunbas and Chiefs in our domain decked their respective caps reflecting their titles. As is usual in Nigerian ceremonies, we had opening and closing prayers. The opening prayer was by the Bishop-Elect of the Anglican Church at Ijebu and the closing prayer by the Chief Imam of Odoşenlu.

There after, it was entertainment galore as the town, with just a week's notice, rose up to the occasion and planned a reasonably worthy ceremony. I had invited some of my friends from Ijebu-Ode (Odoşenlu is a mere 5 miles from Ijebu-Ode) and Lagos to join in the festivities. The Badejo-Dada family which I lead had decided to support the event as part of our duty to our domain. A good number of friends and relations honored our invitation and were entertained at our country home. Many from the town were also welcomed. Food and drinks of different types were in abundance. There was also qualitative dialogues among people who had not met for quite a long while. We tried to be Coronavirus protocols compliant. However, the masks disappeared as some danced to Apepẹ music and the physical distance became slightly reduced although washing of hands was present and well arranged.