

## CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE POST-COLONIAL CHIEFTAINCY INSTITUTION IN IBADAN, 1960-2020

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### **Abstract**

*Chieftaincy institution has a symbolic effect in underscoring the legitimacy of leadership and governance at the local and state levels and it is significant in defining territoriality, nationality, citizenship and the extent of inclusion and exclusion in Ibadan. This paper examines the continuity and change in the chieftaincy institution in Ibadan since 1960 to 2020 with a view to bringing out the uniqueness of the institution. The chieftaincy system of Ibadan from inception has been the ascendancy of governance which recognized the paramount chief as Baale, until it was amended in 1957 Chieftaincy Declaration Law which made the chief have the staff of office and become the beaded crown Oba since 1936. Chieftaincy institution in Ibadan is tied to seniority, governance, peace, and security; this has resulted in continuity, in governance and in the reforms that have taken place in the institution based on communal understanding of social peace, diplomacy, democratic justice, and equity among the ruling communities. The historical method was used to analyze the data which were derived through primary and secondary sources. Findings of the study show that the system has undergone significant democratic changes since 1960, in form of systematic and linear promotion from one step to the other as a social rule and respect for human rights. The paper concludes that the Ibadan Chieftaincy Institution faces a major significant challenge of installing very old people on the throne, but with adaptation, innovation and community engagement, the chieftaincy institution can continue to play vital roles in people's cultural and social life. Therefore, it is recommended that chieftaincy institution should continue and be more dynamic in view of modern day realities.*

**Keywords:** *Continuity, Chieftaincy Title, Chieftaincy Institution, Obaship, Legitimacy.*

### **Introduction**

The Chieftaincy Institution in Ibadan from 1960 to 2020 depicts Ibadan as a city in the South-Western Nigeria that has a rich cultural heritage and a long history of traditional leadership dating back to the late 19th century. The institution has evolved over time, with significant changes occurring during the colonial and post-colonial periods. The Chieftaincy institution is part of cultural assets and

peculiarities of Yoruba speaking people and it constitutes important aspects of relationship and co-existence among the Yorubas before, during and after the colonial period. Chieftaincy and leadership used to be synonymous before the advent of colonialism within the traditional Yoruba society. In the contemporary society there are different ways of putting up the Chieftaincy meaning. As postulated by Alo<sup>1</sup>, Chieftaincy is described as an institution for identifying and revering traditional rulers in a society. It is the indigenous way of governance which has the Executive, Judicial and Legislative powers. In the Yoruba society and particularly in Ibadan, Chieftaincy is associated with leadership. It encompasses a paramount ruler of a kingdom, (i.e. the *Oba* usually *Baale* in the pre-colonial Ibadan) along with his council of Chiefs (the *ijòyè*). The Chieftaincy system comprises four different ranks: (i) Royal Chiefs, (ii) Noble Chiefs, (iii) Common Chiefs and (iv) Honorary Chiefs. The royal chiefs are led by the Obas and they usually make up the council of chiefs or kingmakers. The other three ranks oversee the daily administration of their respective communities and constituents. The Honorary chiefs are not accountable to the people of the town but to the *Oba* and the Chief-in-Council (Paramount Chief). However, it is pertinent to point out here that such an individual to be given an honorary chieftaincy title must be approved and acceptable to the community before his appointment.

### **Brief History of Ibadanland**

Ibadan, a city in South-Western Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage and a long history of traditional leadership dating back to the 19th century. The chieftaincy institution in Ibadan has evolved over time, with significant changes occurring during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

According to Morgan<sup>2</sup>, the city of Ibadan was founded in the nineteenth century i.e, around 1829 while oral tradition explained that Ibadan experienced three waves of migrations. The first Ibadan was founded much earlier by an Ife prince called Lagelu about sixteenth century when Sango ruled the old Oyo kingdom. Lagelu gathered a band of men and women and other willing relatives and found a new settlement. It was recorded that he led his followers to the notorious forest of Ipara. The second band of settlers was led by Sooko and Abu a prince and a princess from Ile-Ife and by the beginning of the nineteenth century three sets of settlers had come to join the second Ibadan community and this had brought about its rapid change. One was led by a prince of a town called Isheri as recorded by Morgan<sup>3</sup>. The young prince made his way to Ibadan and asked for permission to settle on a parcel of land to build on. It was peopled by the Egba Gbagura and some migrants from other parts of Yorubaland like Isheri with different settlers at different time. The third category of settlers came from Owu, a very powerful ancient town in Yorubaland at the time; the coming of the Owus to settle in Ibadan had a great impact on Ibadan<sup>4</sup>. Akinyele further stated that the ancient town of

Owu was closed to Ile-Ife and was founded by a grandson of Oduduwa named Ajibosin whose mother was Okanbi's eldest daughter<sup>5</sup>.

### **Procedural of Chieftaincy Institution in Ibadan**

Ibadanland, as an ancient city and a historical settlement of warlords, was renowned for its unique system of selecting its traditional ruler, the Olubadan. Various historical accounts by authors such as Reverend Samuel Johnson and the late Olubadan, Oba Isaac Akinyele as quoted by Afolabi<sup>6</sup> highlighted the rich and uniqueness of the system. The first step to Obaship position started with the *Mogaji*, a family head. From there the *Mogaji* would be promoted to Jagun and then emerged Jagun will be on either line of Otun or Balogun<sup>7</sup>. For Balogun line the promotion is from Jagun Balogun until it eventually gets to Olubadan. Also the Otun line, the nomenclature was similar but shorter by one step. Starting from Jagun Olubadan until it lastly gets to Olubadan. The rudiment and statutory protocol was so long that the chiefs would have been old in age having spent years of climbing the ladder of succession<sup>8</sup>.

### **From Baale to Olubadan Title**

The traditional ruler of the city started the title 'Olubadan' in 1936 during the reign of Oba Okunola Abass Alesinloye. He reigned between 1930 and 1936 as *Baale* of Ibadan and then Olubadan from 1936 to 1946 after which he joined his ancestors. He remained the longest reigning monarch of Ibadanland, having ruled for sixteen years.

### **Olubadan as a Beaded Crown Oba**

The Olubadan began to wear beaded crown in 1976 when the then Military Governor, Col. David Jembewon (Rtd) approved the beaded crown Chieftaincy for Olubadan and the first Olubadan to adorn the crown was Oba Gbadamosi Adebimpe the 35<sup>th</sup> Olubadan. He ruled between February 28, 1976 and July 17, 1977. Falola<sup>9</sup> in his work asserted that, whoever emerges the Olubadan at a given time must have passed through a 22-rung or 23-rung ladder, depending on the line of ascendancy. Laolu and Adegbite<sup>10</sup> stated in their editorial writing that the popular Olubadan and the first to have ascended the throne and lived in a public palace at Oja'ba was Yesufu Oloyede Asanike. He ascended the throne on February 4, 1983 and died on December 24, 1993. Ibadan Chieftaincy institution since 1960 up to the present time is different from what obtains in other towns.

### **Conceptual Clarification: Continuity and Change in Chieftaincy Titles in Ibadan**

Continuity according to Henrick Petersen<sup>11</sup> is a classic dichotomy within the field of history and social science. It is used to discuss and evaluate the extent at which an event represents a decisive historical change or a situation remains largely unchanged - continuation. Continuity is the condition of locations or cultures of

places staying the same; they are relatively unchanged over time. Not all things change over time and if it changes of what impact? Some things remain the same across long period of time, sometimes lasting into the modern world<sup>12</sup>. Continuity includes long standing traditions, cultural values or political systems that endure despite the changes that may occur in other areas. It provides stability and a correction to the past, and shapes the development of societies and culture over time. Continuity in relation to the chieftaincy system in Ibadanland has a traditional authority. The Olubadan of Ibadan has maintained its significance, but its role and responsibilities have changed over time<sup>13</sup>. The system of chieftaincy titles and hierarchies has been retained. However, in terms of cultural significance, chieftaincy continues to play a vital role in Ibadan's cultural and social life. The Olubadan also remains a symbol of unity and cultural heritage<sup>14</sup>.

Change on the other hand refers to things that are obviously different from what occurred previously. It refers to the alterations or transformations that occur in the societies, culture, political systems or other aspects of the human experience from other political or traditional institutions from other cities, towns or tribes. Change can result from a variety of factors which included technological advancements, natural disasters, wars, social movements and economic developments. Change can be positive or negative. It can impact individuals and communities in diverse ways. For instance, what occur in the pre-colonial era cannot be the same as what will transpire in the twenty first century. As a result of sudden and clear change and at a single occurrence, when a new innovation takes place in chieftaincy institution, it is called the turning point<sup>15</sup>. The traditional institution in Ibadan faced challenges in adapting to modernity. The city's rapid urbanization and growth have put pressure on its traditional systems of governance hence the need for change<sup>16</sup>. Additionally the influence of colonialism and Western education has led to changes in the values and beliefs of the Ibadan people, which have impacted the traditional institution. Nevertheless, the traditional institution remains an important part of the city's identity and culture while efforts are being made to preserve and promote Ibadan cultural heritage, including its traditional music, dance and art<sup>17</sup>.

#### **Key Events that occurred between 1960 and 2020**

- 1960 – Nigeria's independence and constitutional recognition of Chieftaincy Institution;
- 1976 – Introduction of Chieftaincy Edict which reformed the selection process and roles of chiefs;
- 1999 – Returns to democratic rule and further reforms;
- 2017 – Controversy over the Olubadan Chieftaincy reforms;
- 2020 – Ongoing debates about the role of chiefs in contemporary Ibadan society<sup>18</sup>.

### **Change and Reforms in the Modern day Ibadan Chieftaincy Institution**

Modernity entails the use of very recent ideas, fashions or ways of thinking to approach an issue. It has both negative and positive effects on chieftaincy institution in Yoruba land. The negative impacts could be understood in the way the Europeans maltreated and rendered the institution redundant following the introduction of Western system of government. According to Oyeweso and Osin<sup>19</sup> this has made traditional system of government a subsidiary one. Today, the chiefs are not seriously recognized, owing to the emergence of the Councilors, Chairmen, Governors, Senators, and Members of House of Assembly and the President as the governing agents at the Ward, Local, State and Federal levels of Government. People in the society now show more allegiance to these personalities than to the *Obas*.

#### **Impact of the Change**

##### **Ascendancy and Free Power Struggle**

From inception, the system of chieftaincy institution was through ascendancy. The chieftaincy structure of Ibadanland mainly exercised ascendancy; the chieftaincy ladder starts from *Mogaji* and will continue to move up to the position of Olubadan. For instance, the current Olubadan designate, Oba Owolabi Olakulehin during his inspection of the newly renovated central Olubadan palace reiterated his chieftaincy journey as quoted by Laolu and Ademola<sup>20</sup>, “When we started the ladder Mogaji, I asked, do we get to the climax? And they said yes. So I knew that I would become Olubadan of Ibadanland. Now that we are there, we still need to pray to God because He has done good things for us in Ibadan. So we must continue to praise Him”.

##### **(ii) Social impact**

By implication, a chieftaincy title is a symbol of social status, which involves ideas about the political and legal rights of persons within socio-political community, as asserted by Turner<sup>21</sup>. With this, it is believed that chieftaincy is connected with social prestige, credit, distinction; eminence, fame, glory, honor, importance and influence as far as Yoruba people are concerned. It is no wonder why the status and symbolic nature of chieftaincy has been incorporated into the present religious circles. For example, both the contemporary Islamic and Christian social structure makes provision for conferment of chieftaincy honour to some members of the church or mosque. Today in religious circles, we have chieftaincy titles such as *Mayegun Ijo* (the one who ensures that peace reigns supreme in the religious circle). The same mentality has even been extended to the wider society. As a sign of honour and desire for social class, we have a type of social arrangement which makes it possible for non-indigenes in a particular town to become chiefs who govern indigenes residing in that particular town. For instance, we have *Eze Ndi Igbo* chief, who represents the interest of all Igbos in Ibadan, a Yoruba city. We have *Seriki Hausawa* who represents the interest of Hausa people in Ibadan. On this note, Lipset<sup>22</sup> defines status as the positive

estimation of honour, or prestige received by the individuals or position. Thus, chieftaincy titles involve the felt perception of people in the society.

### **(iii) Religious impact**

In all ramifications, traditional religion is the basis of chieftaincy institution in Ibadan. This is so because in Yorubaland, there is little or no distinction between religion and politics. Politics relates to chieftaincy-ship. For the Yoruba community, political laws are embedded in religious laws. This goes with the impression popularized by Idowu<sup>23</sup> about Yoruba people that in all things including their philosophy, politics, law and business, they are religious. In fact, Idowu proves that religion forms the foundation and the all-governing principles of life for them, and that it forms the themes of songs, makes topics for minstrelsy, finds vehicles in myths, folktales, proverbs and sayings, and is the basis of philosophy

### **Consequences of the Change in Ibadan**

On this account, it could be reasonably argued that the changes, which are occurring in the traditional societies, are affecting both the structure of chieftainship and the values attached to this sacred institution. Worse still, the government in power sometimes politicizes the chieftaincy institution. During the civilian government, we had instances in which the government is not favourably disposed to particular chiefs (on the ground that the chief belonged to a party different from the party in power). Government has punished, maltreated and banished certain chieftaincy title-holders. For example, an *Alaafin* of Oyo was deposed by the then Action Group Government in the late 50s in the then Western Region<sup>24</sup>. On that account, chieftaincy institution and its survival are subjected to the whim and caprices of the government in power. This is one of the negative developments of modern time. However, there still exist some positive aspects of the change which enhance the preservation of chieftaincy institution. For example, the present political arrangement necessitates the need for politicians to start their political enterprise from the grassroots level. Arising from this, they do solicit the support, approval, assistance, backing, cooperation, loyalty, patronage and succor of the kings whom they believe have control over their subjects. By so doing, chieftaincy institution becomes indispensable as a force to reckon with consciously or unconsciously in the political arrangement in the Nigerian nation. As a result, some chiefs are on the payroll of the government to various degrees. Besides, the chiefs are always revered by the government during critical times especially during impasse between certain individuals, ethnic groups and various arms or organs of government.

Chieftaincy is a legalized institution because some of the chieftaincy titles are gazetted. Evidence of these abounds in Nigeria National Archives. In fact, starting from colonial time to date, there have been government laws and edicts passed and enacted at different times concerning chieftaincy matters, on issues

related to enthronement, deposition and death of chiefs recorded<sup>25</sup>. This political apparatus establishes instruments of council of chiefs across the country. Based on this system, the government issues white papers on chieftaincy matters, which provides the reason why the government always presents the office staff to the chiefs – especially first class chiefs – as a way of legalizing, confirming and ratifying the entire enthronement procedures.

Furthermore, another area of change in the chieftaincy title was the visit of Olubadan-designate, Oba Owolabi Olakulehin who visited the Aliwo family compound of the late Olubadan of Ibadanland, Oba Lekan Balogun where he paid glowing tributes to the late monarch as recorded by Ademola Adegbite<sup>26</sup>. Oba Olakulehin lauded Oba Balogun for engendering unity and love among the members of the Olubadan Advisory Council. He further said it had not happened in the history of Ibadan that the Olubadan-designate will visit his predecessor.

As earlier remarked by Laolu and Ademola<sup>27</sup> that, during Asanike's reign he used the ancestral palace. Even though he was tagged an illiterate; he brought about the change contrary to what his successors used to practice. This necessitated the Chief makers to reach a compromise to complete the new central palace for the upcoming Olubadans to ensure continuity and uniformity of using the central palace wherever it is located. This is another landmark that the chieftaincy reforms of Ibadanland are dynamic and experiencing refurbishment as corroborated by Oyo Insight<sup>28</sup>.

Moreover, as asserted by Awe<sup>29</sup> Ibadan has been known for the rancor-free ascension to the throne of its ruler. This allows for quick nomination of successor as a result of the demise of any Olubadan. It was known that within twenty-one days of the demise of one Olubadan, another Oba must be enthroned as observed and recorded by Laolu Afolabi<sup>30</sup>.

## **Challenges and Prospects of Chieftainship Titles in Ibadan**

### **Challenges**

The status – symbolic nature of chieftaincy titles, which makes kingship attractive or appealing to all and sundry, goes with its attendant problems. Some of these are unhealthy rivalry between contestants for titles, especially major chieftaincy titles. This has resulted in numerous court cases. Example was the withdrawal of the court case by High Chief Rashidi Ladoja against the ten (10) other chiefs crowned beaded Obas as a result of Chieftaincy reforms of the chieftaincy institution in Ibadan in the recent times to allow the new Olubadan designate to do the coronation. Whenever the case is not well-resolved by the courts of law, the aggrieved party and his sympathizers resort to conflict, insult and argumentation, which often result in destruction of lives and property and finally lead to social unrest. The cases of unnecessary power tussle or struggling among

certain categories of chiefs over the question of superiority or issue on health ground was another challenge facing chieftaincy institution. In recent times in Ibadanland, the Otun Balogun, Oba Tajudeen Ajibola according to Ademola<sup>31</sup> has reportedly insisted that the Olubadan-designate cannot be enthroned on health ground.

### **Prospects**

All the above notwithstanding, the chieftaincy institution will have a better future in Ibadanland considering the caliber of people who have shown and are still showing interest in becoming chiefs. For example, in the early sixties, history recalled that educated elite became Olubadan in person of Oba Isaac Babalola Akinyele, the founder of Christ Apostolic Church. Ever since then numerous well educated elites Olubadans have come to the throne<sup>32</sup>. The same goes for many academics, business tycoons, industrialists and retired civil servants who show positive interest in being made chiefs. These new sets of people will try to refine the institution by demystifying and by removing all the archaic religious traditions associated with chieftaincy institutions in primitive times. At the same time, they will attempt to legitimize the institution by modernizing it for the global age. On the part of individual chiefs, the Chief-makers (Olubadan-In-Council) should advocate a return to tradition. The chiefs should start to think and act honorably as it was in the past. Suggestively, a chief should commit no action that has any element of opprobrium. Yielding to the recommendation of Ayisi, chiefs should not engage in adulterous practices or incestuous congresses, stealing, sorcery, or kindred actions Ayisi<sup>33</sup>.

### **Findings**

The chieftaincy institution in Ibadan has undergone significant changes since 1960, including modernization, urbanization, and democratization. Although, there are challenges facing the institution these include succession crises, financial dependence, cultural erosion, and political interference; but in spite of these challenges, the institution remains relevant in Ibadan's cultural and social life.

### **Conclusion**

Finally, this study on the continuity and change in the chieftaincy institution in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria (1960-2020) reveals that the institution has undergone significant transformations in response to modernization, urbanization, and democratization. Despite these changes, the chieftaincy institution remains a vital part of Ibadan's cultural and social fabric. However, the institution faces numerous challenges, including succession crises, financial dependence, cultural erosion, and political interference. To address these challenges, the institution must adapt, innovate, and engage with the community, youth, and government. The study's findings and recommendations provide a framework for

strengthening the chieftaincy institution and ensuring its continued relevance in modern society. The research contributes to our understanding of traditional leadership, cultural heritage, and community development in Africa. By embracing change and innovation while preserving traditional values, the chieftaincy institution in Ibadan can continue to play a vital role in promoting cultural heritage, social cohesion, and community development.

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