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978-0-521-08692-9 - The Price of Liberty: Personality and Politics in Colonial Nigeria

Kenneth W. J. Post and George D. Jenkins

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER 1

## SETTING FOR A CAREER

As a son of Ibadan I welcome you to the Yoruba Sparta, the Giant City set on the Hill. I hope the Spirit of the Founders...of all the valiant Generals and illustrious statesmen who founded this republic as a Bastion of Freedom against Fulani invasion and steered her through her stormy history will guide and counsel us in our deliberations so that the seeds sown here may blossom into...freedom and Nigerian independence.

Adelabu, *The Turning Point*, 1952

This is the biography of Adegoke Adelabu, whose political career spanned all levels of Nigerian politics during the crucial last years of colonial rule. Above all, Adelabu saw himself as a son of Ibadan. Our story begins in this city.

Ibadan is the capital of the Western State of Nigeria, known before June 1967 as Western Nigeria. Its 900,000 residents are packed into some 24,000 living units, whose houses are mostly one-story buildings constructed from the red clay soil of the hills over which the city spreads.\* Traditional thatched roofs have been replaced with corrugated iron, mottled by rust in the older, denser, central part of the city, still shiny and new in the more recently and sparsely developed outskirts. From the roof of the City Council's offices in Mapo Hall, a Parthenon-like structure on a hill in the center of the city, one sees the surrounding ring of modern hospitals, schools, universities, military establishments, industrial undertakings and residential areas, which have surrounded the old city in more recent times and virtually cut it off from the rain forest in which many of the city-dwellers have their farming plots. Mapo Hall is the focal point of Ibadan's political life and a good place from which to get a view of the city.<sup>1</sup>

From the front of the courtyard surrounding Mapo Hall one looks downhill along a divided roadway named King George V Avenue. It divides a number of important compounds before becoming Agbeni Street, which proceeds still further westward down the slope toward Ogunpa, a swampy

\* A population of 900,000 can be estimated from school enrollments and what is known of age pyramids more accurately than from the census of 1963 which gives a figure of 670,000.

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area. Leading westward from the Motor Park in the Ogunpa basin are Lebanon Street and New Court Road, the main thoroughfares of the major commercial area. The open-fronted and windowless buildings of West African trading company architecture are here interspersed with the house-over-shop structures of the Lebanese and Syrian merchants (who dominate the imported cloth market), transporters, grocers and a restaurant operator who form a relatively self-contained – and unpopular – community. At the top of these two thoroughfares, farthest away from Ogunpa Stream and its estuary, are the large, concrete and glass buildings of the European-owned enterprises, joined in recent years by the Obisesan Centre and Ibadan's only sky-scraper, headquarters of the State's Produce Marketing Board. This commercial area, offering a startling array of imported goods, is in fact an intrusion into the city of a segment of the encompassing ring of the modern portion of the city, a segment which includes the railway station and Dugbe Market, and beyond these a warehousing and processing district, a new residential suburb and the New Army Barracks.

One may also turn to the right on leaving Mapo Hall and proceed north on Ogunmola Road, named after a former head chief of the city. This double carriageway was built to link the Council offices to the headquarters of the Colonial District Officers at Agodi. Between the New Army Barracks and Agodi, proceeding clockwise around the ring, one finds Ekotedo, Sabon Gari and Mokola, the respective residential areas of Yoruba, Hausa and Nigerian immigrants generally, and the University Teaching Hospital operated by the Federal Government through the University of Ibadan, which lies farther to the north. Between these two educational establishments is the Secretariat of the Western State.

Still a third road circles around Mapo Hill and heads eastward through Oranyan, a low swampy area crossed by a stream, and on to the edge of the city where a number of schools are located. Between Agodi and this point are to be found cemeteries, a Roman Catholic hospital, the Adeoye Hospital and the Methodist Wesley College.

If one proceeds southward, to the left, from Mapo Hall, he passes through Oja'ba Market, where the installation of the head chief occurs, and behind which was the Central Mosque. Down the slope from Oja'ba is the less crowded and newer residential area known as Isale Ijebu, where many Ijebu Yoruba residents have built or rented houses and where most of the city's doctors, lawyers, surveyors and businessmen live. At the end of this road one again finds warehouses, the Ibadan Grammar School, the Sports Stadium, and another government housing reservation. Set some distance from the city are King's Barracks, Moor Plantation, which is operated by the Department of Agriculture, the Government College, and industrial developments. A

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commercial and residential area and rail yards lie between this and the railway station.

What holds the central city together is thus the barrier created by the encircling modern sector owned principally by the State and national governments and large institutions, a barrier which is less than two miles from Mapo Hall at most points. It effectively prevents the city from expanding, which means the center becomes even more congested as the population grows. Around Mapo Hall, the Central Mosque and the traditional market which adjoin the Mapo Hall grounds to the south, population densities of 250 per acre are common, although this figure may in fact double on weekends when the call to Friday prayers, Christian and Yoruba religious observances and holidays, and opportunities for leisure and amusement attract to the city those who spend the rest of the week in the rural areas. It is thus at the center of the city where most people live, work and know each other, where the noise from the radio-diffusion speakers is loudest, the small shops the most numerous, the scavenger animals the thickest and the traffic the most alarming and entertaining.

If this is where Ibadan is most exciting, it is also the place where its problems from a modern point of view are most pressing. The amenities of water, electric light and sewage are rare, and central Ibadan today is thus close to its nineteenth-century form. Much of this book deals with the continuity of nineteenth-century Ibadan into the twentieth century as it was surrounded by, but only partially integrated into, the wider activities of Nigerian national life.

Founded in 1829, Ibadan became one of a dozen or so city-states of the Yoruba people whose principal cities today have populations exceeding 50,000. Although Ibadan is one of the youngest of these city-states it quickly became the largest, its capital growing to a population of perhaps a quarter of a million during the first sixty years of its history prior to being incorporated into the British Empire in 1893.

Historically Ibadan is a relatively new city-state, but it is directly linked to traditions which centered on two more ancient states to the north – old Ife, founded sometime between A.D. 700 and A.D. 1000 and old Oyo, which with Ife exercised some central political and religious authority over other Yoruba polities.<sup>2</sup> To these traditions the northern Yoruba people in particular looked for their cultural identity, and it was in this area that Adegoke Adelabu hoped to re-create a Central Yoruba State in the 1950s. South of Ibadan, deeper into the rain forest, lay Abeokuta, also founded in the nineteenth century when the Egba branch of the Yoruba was pushed from its original place around Ibadan, which was one of its villages. At Abeokuta the Church Missionary Society of the Anglican Church opened a school which educated

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many of the African C.M.S. agents who later went to Ibadan. In the coastal lagoons was the town of Lagos, now the national capital of Nigeria and the headquarters of such foreign firms as the United Africa Company, for which Adelabu worked at various times. Strategically located between Ibadan and Lagos was Ijebu Ode, whose traders controlled the Ejinrin route along which slaves moved south to Lagos and the sea, and munitions north for the internal Yoruba wars. (Adelabu was later to claim that his father was 'one of the shrewdest pioneers' of this trade route.) Friction occasionally arose between Ibadan and Ijebu Ode, but this did not prevent Ijebus from living at peace in Ibadan.

In the late eighteenth century, protest grew among the subjects of the Alafin (or King) of Oyo against his waning and arbitrary exercise of power, and in the first decade of the nineteenth century Ilorin, one of his subordinate cities, revolted and allowed the northern Muslim Fulani people to move southward into Yorubaland, whereupon they took over Ilorin, engulfed Ife and Oyo (then situated to the north of their present locations) and destroyed whatever functional unity still existed among the Yoruba people.<sup>3</sup> The Fulanis, however, proved unable to press farther into Yoruba territory, in part because their horses could not survive in the tsetse fly-infested forest and in part because of resistance offered by the Ife and Oyo refugees and military bands who had made the secluded Egba village of Ibadan into a 'Bastion of Freedom against Fulani invasion'. Situated, as its name suggests, 'at the edge of the field' between open farm land and the dense forest, it occupied a particularly advantageous strategic position. Their cities set against each other, the Yoruba people spent the rest of the century in turmoil; one debilitating by-product of which was the growing use of slaves for labor and export for the overseas slave trade. Even today, the various branches of the Yoruba people, harboring their nineteenth-century histories of diplomatic, military and economic conflict, often command a political allegiance which challenges that paid to the Yoruba nation as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

Ibadan from its inception was thus at the very center of critical Yoruba problems, not the least of which was the problem of violence, which destroyed old cities, created new ones and altered the relations among the Yoruba city-states.<sup>5</sup>

The principal constituent element of Ibadan society was the extended family or kinship group called a patrilineage. The patrilineage included all the male descendants of a given male forbearer and their immediate families. This kinship group, in the usage of the anthropologist, was also patri-local, which means that the married sons continued to live in their father's compound. The founders of the Ibadan lineages were the first architects and town planners of the city. Their original walled-in settlement on Mapo Hill,

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where the City Council offices now stand, was filled with the lineage compounds, or great connected groups of apartments, verandahs, and courtyards of traditional Yoruba architecture. As Mapo Hill filled up, the original settlement spread across low-lying swamps and streams to new high ground. Public passageways and roads were simply the spaces remaining between one compound wall and the next, or wet areas unsuitable for building. Even today, most houses in Ibadan do not face on a public road.

About 1840, the quarter within whose traditional architecture and social patterns Adelabu lived and maintained his home throughout his lifetime was established by the Oluokun lineage. There is an account of the coming of the Oluokun lineage to Ibadan which is interesting because it also describes the relationship between the Oluokuns and the Adelabus.<sup>6</sup> According to this, the founder of the Oluokun lineage and Adegoke Adelabu's grandfather were cousins, sons of brothers from Oyo-Ekiti, who settled in old Oyo. When that city collapsed, the brothers fled to Igbetti where they learned the art of weaving, a speciality of that town, and where Adegoke's great-grandfather married a daughter of the Alafin of Oyo. A result of this union was grandfather Adelabu; his cousin, Oluokun, was also born at Igbetti. The cousins became weavers and migrated to Ibadan where they settled in an area containing the compounds of a number of earlier settlers. It was after the fortune and fame of Oluokun had waxed, and he had become the most influential of its residents and holder of a chiefly title, that the quarter was given his name. Although his cousin, Adelabu, continued to live in the same compound, his fortune did not prosper equally and no chiefly prerogatives were extended to his branch of the family.

From its earliest days, Ibadan's chiefs were drawn largely from the heads (known as mogajis) of its important lineages. Since the army consisted of the followers of the individual chiefs (known in this context as babaoguns or war leaders) rather than of conscripts or volunteers loyal to a central authority, the lineage was the basic military organizational unit. Slaves captured in war often became farm laborers or part of a chief's fighting contingent, thus adding to his power. A critical restraint on the arbitrary exercise of this power was the fact that freemen could pledge their loyalty to leaders of their own choosing. Considerable social, economic and military opportunity existed in this loose and flexible system, even for slaves. One source refers to 'the thousands of slaves brought in annually' to the city.<sup>7</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, however, they had become so important a part of the population and the military economy that their general condition was hardly a repressive one by existing standards, and they could look forward to improving their lot and indeed to freedom.

In addition to organizing urban spatial arrangements and military and social

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life, the lineage also controlled the agricultural hinterland. Agriculture was and remains Ibadan's main economic activity. Land was corporately held by and distributed through the city-based lineage, which meant that to have primary land holding rights one had to be a city-dweller. Thus there was no functional distinction between urban and rural in Ibadan agriculture. Virtually everyone was a part-time farmer, but since most crops of Yorubaland do not require intensive labor throughout the year, Ibadan farmers have much time for urban life. Typically those with lands close to the city walked daily to their farms; those whose land was farther away stayed there for longer periods during clearing, planting and harvesting time. Agricultural commuting was thus an aspect of urban life. Particularly at festival time or for the celebration of marriages, deaths and births the members of a lineage would be at their urban compound. Politically this meant that the organization of the rural hinterland proceeded through the major urban lineages, which as we shall see later was of some significance as modern institutions developed for organizing agricultural unions, winning the rural vote at election time, and in deciding whether Ibadan as a governmental unit should include the city with its rural areas or whether separate and specialized governmental agencies should be provided to meet urban and rural needs. Use of farm land, as opposed to its ownership, was open to followers and slaves of a lineage and their children after them for an annual payment of *ishakole*, a gift in kind, later in cash, which symbolically identified the owner and the user. The user was obligated to provide such services as helping clear lineage lands at planting time, harvesting, and contributing to extraordinary lineage expenses at the time of a chieftaincy promotion or a death. In return, however, he became a quasi-member of the lineage, entitled to physical protection, justice in the lineage court and a permanent place in the corporate life of the lineage. He was a significant link in the social network, which was based on urban residence, urban definition of rights and an agricultural economy.

Other organizational aspects of the economy included the craftsmen and retailers and the market places. Blacksmiths, cloth weavers, dyers, chicken sellers and yam flour manufacturers were all organized into guilds which regulated the quality and price of goods as well as the number of persons engaged in a particular economic activity. The heads of these guilds were recognized in their offices by the Bale (i.e. Baba Ile, or father of the town, head civil chief) as were the heads of the markets, which were usually controlled by the chief on whose property they were located. It was a pre-industrial economy, but nevertheless well organized, the various guild hierarchies not only providing order within the economy but also serving as structures through which communication with the political institutions and the masses could be achieved. However, there were virtually none of the

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public and indivisible goods such as roads, water wells, civic buildings and public places which were the common property of pre-industrial cities as viewed by Sjöberg.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, since control of the agricultural hinterland was divided among lineages, no single urban group could exploit the rural areas for the creation of urban monuments and amenities.

It was the major chieftaincy lineage, then, and the compound which it controlled, which was the most important structure in pre-British society. In fact, in each compound there lived a microcosm of the city's wealthy and its poor, its politically powerful and its slaves, so that the various types of persons and classes were scattered evenly across the cityscape. Kinship and allegiance united those of different economic, ethnic and political characteristics into subcommunities whose authority extended even to the rural areas; the differential use of space that characterizes the modern industrial city was not to be found in Ibadan. Unfortunately, not even the crudest estimate exists of the proportions of Ibadan's modern population which stem from slaves, freemen, chieftaincy lineages or from mixtures of these backgrounds. Such a determination might be useful in explaining the twentieth-century decline of chieftaincy and the rise of elected political leaders, particularly if one guesses that the chieftaincy lineage population of Ibadan was never more than twenty per cent is correct.

The lineage organized within the compound a large and diverse population subject to the disputes of a small town. The lineage council served as a court of first instance in the hierarchy of Ibadan courts, settling matters of limited geographical import and lesser political consequence. More serious cases could be initiated in or appealed to the courts of the senior chiefs or to the Ibadan Council sitting in its judicial capacity. Even in the late 1960s, with an elaborate system of local regional and national courts all prescribed by law, the lineage courts still met regularly, usually on Saturday mornings, to settle compound matters.

Thus, for the lineage member and to a considerable extent for all residents of the compound, the first identification was his lineage affiliation. Each lineage had its own facial scarifications by which its members could always be identified. To leave the compound to walk the streets was to represent the lineage, not to escape it. Yet the lineage could be authoritatively represented only by its head, its mogaji, and it was the mogajis who were citizens in the fullest sense of the word.

Sometimes strengthening, sometimes cutting across the lineage organization of society, was the principle of 'followership'. Insofar as they could, warriors, land-holding clients and freemen attempted to attach themselves to successful military leaders, to the rich and generous. Since this allegiance could be transferred at will, wealthy and ambitious leaders could thus bid for

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the allegiance of the followings of other lineage heads. The lineage, although it pervaded nearly every other relationship, was thus itself not impervious to the cleavages introduced by popular choice and patronage. This form of patronage is known today as the popularity of the 'big man'. In its rawest forms, it simply allows the indigent to live off the wealthy, who fear the danger of mass violence. In its more subtle use, through 'begging', a supplicant could place his political errors, his financial debts or his economic welfare at the feet of a public figure, who by 'forgiving' him assumed the prestige and the responsibility of a patron. Throughout Ibadan history, the practice has served to make the economy a distributive one and keep the well-to-do mindful of the problems and needs of the masses.

The lineages were also the recruiting ground for new chiefs. As older chiefs died and younger ones were promoted up the hierarchical ladder to fill their places, the mogajis, or heads of the important lineages, were appointed to the vacant positions. In this way, civic office rotated from person to person and thereby from lineage to lineage, and the lineages and their economic and military power were linked to a common central system. Thus, after the death of Oluokun his successor as head of the family was recognized by the Council as a mogaji, or person eligible to become a chief, which he and his successors indeed became. By 1893 there were about a hundred lineages whose heads were recognized as mogajis. Since mogajis tended to be senior men in their lineages, the deference paid to age in the kinship structure also accrued to the political system.

During the nineteenth century, there were five types of chiefs arranged in parallel hierarchies or 'lines'. The earliest line was that of the Balogun, or Warlord, and at its inception it provided both civic rule and military command. Later the line of Bale was established as the structure of civil authority, although it was in fact subject to the approval of the more influential chiefs of the Balogun's line. Parallel in organization but also formally subjected to the Balogun (War Chief) were the lines of the Seriki (Head of the Young Men) and the Sarumi (Head of the Cavalry). The fifth line was that of the Iyalode, or Mother of the Town, who had authority in women's affairs, the markets, trading guilds, and civil affairs generally.

The Council of Ibadan consisted, roughly, of the senior chiefs in each line, but there was no fixed rule concerning membership, nor traditionally was there any formal logic which determined where the line between senior and junior chiefs was drawn. Usually 'senior' meant the head of each line plus the next six chiefs of the lines of the Balogun and the Bale.\* Of course

\* The chieftaincy titles in the lines of the Olubadan and Balogun were eventually more or less standardized as follows (approximate translations are given): (1) Otun (right hand); (2) Osi (left hand); (3) Ashipa (leader of the vanguard); (4) Ekerin (fourth

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warfare and death brought constant rotation in office. Although the chiefs became more wealthy through the accumulation of the spoils of war, on their death their wealth was divided within their lineages and their successors as mogajis did not inherit their offices as chiefs. Thus political power, although constantly striven for, was constantly re-allocated.

The Ibadan Council could in theory deal with any question, although in practice it left minor problems to the lineage councils for which it served as an appellate body while it concentrated on broader military, diplomatic and economic matters. However, it was without tax powers, relying on the wealth of the chiefs to finance common ventures such as military expeditions. It provided no services and supervised no public works that required revenue. The army, as we have seen, was organized by the chiefs and the lineages, not by a bureaucracy. Nor did the Council have a police force at its disposal, relying on the lineages to surrender criminals voluntarily to its power, which was in fact that of its head, the Bale. In extreme cases, particularly those involving public outrage against murder, treason or carelessness with fire (a capital crime in a city of thatched roofs), when a lineage refused to surrender a miscreant his compound might be declared by the authorities to be an object of public wrath, whereupon its devastation would promptly follow. Property would be stolen or burned, animals slaughtered and the inhabitants sold into slavery. We shall consider in Chapter 15 of this book a suggestion that this practice was not entirely forgotten in later times.

In marked contrast to the divine kingships found in other Yoruba cities, Ibadan politics were highly secular. No Ibadan Bale would be permitted to claim descent from Oduduwa, the Yorubas' legendary ancestor, and establish a dynasty, thus blocking access to the benefits of office to other important lineages. Ibadan could choose the elements of Yoruba custom which it would observe, and divine rulers and inheritance of political office were clearly rejected. The installation of new chiefs was conducted by the Oluwo, the descendant of the chief who had first installed the other chiefs; the cult of the worshippers of thunder and lightning was important in war; and the advice of the diviners of the Ifa oracle was important in the selection of chiefs and of dates for significant undertakings. Yet none of these held any place in the Council.

chief); (5) Ekarun (fifth chief); (6) Abese (leader of the footmen); (7) Maye ('does not move an inch'); (8) Ekefa (sixth chief); (9) Agbakin (leader of the old men); (10) Arealasa (head shield bearer); (11) Ikolaba (wearer of the apron of Shango); (12) Asaju (shield bearer to the great chief); (13) Ayingun (warrior); (14) Areago (head of a family); (15) Lagunna (one who fights on the highway); (16) Ota (*not known*); (17) Aregbcomo (head of the youths); (18) Gbonka (keeper of the chamber); (19) Areonibon (head of the rifles); (20) Bada (head of the swordsmen); (21) Ajia (messenger); (22) Jagun (ordinary warrior).

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In sum, the emphasis placed on merit, secularism and kinship kept Ibadan politics pragmatic, flexible and close to the people.

Six decades of Ibadan history and intra-Yoruba warfare preceded British colonial rule in Ibadan. During this time, it came to differ from other Yoruba cities in that its population was drawn from all sub-groups of the Yoruba people – the Oyo, the Egba, the Ekiti, the Ijebu, the Ife and the Ijesha – rather than from a homogeneous area. These people and those of such discrepant ethnic origins as the European missionaries and Hausa northerners, were allocated land by the earlier settlers and ethnic variety, like wealth and social status, was scattered across the face of the city. During this same period, Ibadan accumulated an empire which extended beyond the Oshun River thirty miles away, consisting of some one hundred towns and villages taken in war or allied with it for purposes of defense against the Fulani. The city was thus always heterogeneous in its make up and imperial in its external ambitions and responsibilities.

Yorubaland during these sixty years was undergoing modifications of its religious institutions which were also to have long-lasting and deeply political consequences in Ibadan. Islam came to Ibadan in the 1830s and its agents quickly found an audience among the chiefs and the general population. In the twentieth century the major focal point for Ibadan Muslims has been the Central Mosque, with its Chief Imam, but allegiances to individual Alfas, or religious teachers, and to the numerous Muslim mutual-aid societies have sometimes counted for more than any sense of a community of believers. Christianity came to Ibadan with the Anglican Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.) in 1851. Land for a chapel and school in Kudeti quarter, on the outskirts of the city and a few hundred yards from the Oluokun compound, were provided by Chief Olunloyo, whose son became the first student in the mission and later an ordained priest. It is also worth noting, however, that Christian proselytization was more effective among slaves and members of the less important families than with the major chieftaincy houses. Nevertheless, because of their education, the English-speaking C.M.S. agents frequently advised the chiefs on diplomatic affairs involving the British Governor of Lagos, and enjoyed their support in educational, medical and religious activities.

In 1860, rapidly rising Ibadan clashed with the city-state of Ijaye for hegemony over what was still formally the domain of the Alafin of Oyo.<sup>9</sup> During the Ijaye war, in August 1861, the British annexed the city-state of Lagos on the coast less than a hundred miles from Ibadan. In alliance with Ibadan, the new Governor of Lagos helped defeat the Egba, who had allied themselves with Ijaye as that state collapsed, an intervention marking the shape of things to come. As the tiny British enclave became economically