

## **King and Counsellors: Pre-Colonial Indigenous Administrative Virtues in South-West Nigeria as Transformative Tool in Stemming Socio-Religious Tides in Africa**

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**Abstract:** One of the major challenges to transformation in Africa is insecurity due to socio-religious upheavals. The level of insecurity in some countries in Africa is so high that it poses great threat to transformative bids in various facets of governance. Constant security reports in the audio-visual and print media are largely on the negative to the point that one is forced to assume that the experience is now the order of the day. The perpetrators of the evil act seem to be taking advantage of concentration of security vigilance on city-centres rather than local settings where the recruitment and training of the hoodlums seem to be carried out more. This implies that there is the need for an administrative procedure that will easily detect and nip the socio-religious upheavals in the bud. This paper therefore, proposes the indigenous administrative procedure of king and his counsellors in South-west Nigeria to transform the African societies to a more peaceful atmosphere. This is because the indigenous administrative virtues being proposed accounted for the enduring peaceful scenarios in the traditional African societies.

**Keywords:** King, Counsellors, Indigenous, Administrative, Nigeria, Virtues, Religious, Tides, Africa

### **INTRODUCTION**

There are enough evidences in most of African countries at present that transformation is required in virtually all facets of life. Most importantly, there is great need for transformation in the area of security because of socio-religious upheavals that threaten life and property frequently in Africa. Even in Maslow's hierarchy of human deficiency needs, security is a serious one which must be met if life will have meaning. According to Huitt [1], the deficiency needs in hierarchy of human needs by Maslow include: physiological aspect which involves hunger, thirst, bodily comforts; safety/security, referring to being out of danger; belongingness and love which relates to affiliating with others and being accepted; and esteem that focuses on achieving in life, being competent, gaining approval and recognition of others. It is however, regrettable that none of these deficiency needs are satisfied at present, particularly in the African setting.

For instance, hunger is staring most of the Africans in the face due to the abject poverty condition. Most Africans no longer eat what they should but whatever they find. The issue of balanced diet has become history. Is there need to talk about potable water or consumption of anything liquid just to partially quench thirst? In the name of an attempt to boost

collective economy, many of the good rivers supplying towns and villages with drinkable water are now defiled and polluted with oil-spillage due to oil-dredging and gold mining (*galamsey*) in Nigeria and Ghana, as examples. The resultant effect is the fact that bodily comfort considered by Maslow as basic need is eluding most Africans.

The third level of the deficiency needs in Maslow's theory is belongingness and love. It is still appalling to note that this virtue has eluded the African society. Western civilization that should be a blessing to Africa has been imported without careful application in a way that it might affect African context positively. The experience has been attraction to urban areas where communal sense of living for which Africa was known could not be practiced conveniently [2]. The communal living was of many blessings as it afforded opportunity for love, sharing and security in Africa. Presently, isolated life style and lonely living characterize life in Africa. One is not unaware of some modern associations like religious and job-oriented fellowships. It is however, noted that these cannot function like the African community which were operative at the family and clan settings.

Esteem is another need postulated by Maslow which is in connection with desire to achieve in life, to

be competent, gain approval and recognition. In fairness, the current African situation apparently gives cognizance to all these. Unfortunately again, it is taken to the extreme in the sense that esteem is now sought by hook or crook. This is due to the fact that monetary reward is commonly attached to recognizable service or position which poses a serious threat to probity.

Safety/security came second in Maslow's list but it is discussed last here because it directly relates to the concern of this paper. Maslow opined that human beings will move toward self-actualization if they have sense of security and feel out of danger. The present situation in Africa is a contrast because security of life and property is threatened on daily basis. It is even more ironical when safety and security problem is associated with socio-religious activities which, ordinarily are expected to be sources of succour for people. While all these deficiency needs are important, this paper lays emphasis on security needs which requires transformation to a large extent in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. It is hereby deemed necessary to present a brief socio-religious situation in Nigeria with a brief allusion to the Ghanaian experience to exemplify the security situation in Africa.

A recent example of insecurity in West Africa in particular, is the case of abrupt termination of the life of Kofi Awoonor, a prominent Ghanaian Professor of worth who was murdered in Kenya. His sudden death was the handiwork of a fanatical religious group. As reported in *Daily Graphic*, Monday, September 23, 2013,

When Professor Kofi Nyidevu Awoonor received invitation to attend this year's Storymoja Hay Festival, a Kenyan literary festival, little did he know that a foot in the Eastern African country's capital would be his last stint with life... The 78 year old former chairman of the Council of State was among 69 people confirmed dead by the Kenyan government in the shooting at the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, for which the Somali Islamic extremist group, Al-Shabab, has claimed responsibility" ( p.3).

The report in *The Ghanaian Times*, Monday September 23, 2013 also corroborated the horrific nature of the attack on Awoonor and the need to combat the religion-associated menace of insecurity in Africa thus:

The death of this illustrious son should serve as a wake-up call that terrorism cannot be treated in isolation. Wherever it rears its ugly head, it is a potential threat to all nations and must be confronted head on. Africans must therefore, resolve to fight this menace together

until peace is restored on the continent. Terrorism is indeed a threat to peace, democracy and the well-being of mankind (p.4).

The call for a serious attention to address insecurity is clear here and should not be taken lightly. The particular state of security in Nigeria from where the pre-colonial indigenous administrative illustration is taken will be relevant here.

#### **CURRENT SOCIO-RELIGIOUS SECURITY RELATED SITUATION IN NIGERIA**

The issue of socio-religious imbroglio in Nigeria is no longer news. The problem is noted to be common between Christians and Muslims which usually resulted in threatening, maiming and killing of innocent citizens. Ayankeye [3] reported that some towns and cities were abandoned by many residents who escaped for safety, abandoning their immovable properties. The Boko-Haram saga in Borno State of Nigeria is a typical example of the devastating security threat (p.140). Key religious crises in Nigeria are summarized below.

According to Momodu and Edem [4], the Maitatsine uproar occurred in the Northern Nigeria between 1980 and 1984 (p.19). Another threat to interreligious harmony in Nigeria occurred in the year 2004 when Sharia Law was demanded by Muslims in some Northern States starting from Zamfara, to be entrenched in the legal system and recognized as parallel to the constitution of the nation. There was also the Kano riot of 1990, Tafawa Balewa crises of 1991, 1994, 1995 and 2001 and Shagamu imbroglio of 1999. One should not forget quickly the Kafanchan riots of 1987, Funtua religious upheaval in 1993 and Kaduna interreligious blood-shed and property destruction of 1999 [11].

Furthermore, records of sour relationship between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria are evidenced in Yelwa uproars of 2004 in Jos, Maiduguri crises of December 11, 1998 and 2006. In the year 2007, was also Gombe crises and Numan crises of May 2003/2004. Popular, devastating and currently repeated is the Boko Haram saga which occurred in Bauchi, Borno, Kano and Yobe States concurrently in July 2009 [11]. The same Boko Haram crisis continues to spread like wild fire at present to the point that Abuja, the seat of the Federal Government of Nigeria is not spared at the moment. In the words of Oladeji [5], "The frequent occurrence of religious riots in different parts of the North coupled with the usual recourse to burning of churches and killing and maiming of Christians has complicated the situation" (p.105). Indeed, both Christians and Muslims contribute to and share from the bitter pills of unrest resulting from religious crises.

Moreover, the above interreligious crises did not go without leaving their adverse effects on the social, economic, political and religious scene of the nation. For instance, Oladeji [5] reported that loss of lives due to clashes in 1999 were more than 1000. In the year 2000, more than 2,000 persons lost their dear lives in Sharia-related crises. Available records indicated that as of the year 2000, more than 5,000 persons have been killed due to religious crises. In addition to killings, people have been displaced severally due to Christian-Muslim clashes. About 72 villages have been burnt down in Plateau State alone between year 2002 and 2003. Again, nothing less than 57,000 people fled their homes following sectarian violence involving Christians and Muslims in Northern and Central Nigeria. More than 30,000 Christians have been displaced from their homes in Kano. A further 27,000 displaced people had sought refuge in Bauchi State in East Central Nigeria following the massacre of Muslims by Christian gangsters in the neighbouring Plateau State in May 2001 (19-20). It means that the record of loss of lives at present will be a heart-renting one. Regrettably, the planning of these security threatening activities are mostly done at hidden settings like villages and remote parts of township areas so that the perpetrators might not be noticed easily. It then means that it is imperative for the present day leadership in Africa to revisit and borrow a leaf from indigenous administrative procedure of the traditional African kingdoms exemplified by *Oyo-Alaafin* in the southwest Nigeria for enhancement of security strategies that can yield socio-religious transformation in their lands.

#### **ESSENTIATING THE RELEVANCE OF THE CASE STUDY WITH COMMON FACTORS IN AFRICA**

A proposal for application of pre-colonial indigenous administrative virtues in Nigeria for socio-religious transformation in Africa would not have been appropriate if Africans are not possessing some unifying features. The proposal is however, relevant because there are factors common to Africans which point to applicability of the administrative procedures recommended in this paper for transformation of socio-religious atmosphere.

According to O'Donovan [6], studies have revealed similarities among many traditional African groups. It is even so conspicuous that a sense of belonging to Africa is paramount in many of the groups than that of belonging to a country (p. 3). A few of such are summarized here.

#### **Communal Sense of Living:**

Africans are known traditionally for practicing life in community among extended family members within the clan. Identity and meaning in life were found by belonging to extended family, clan as well as tribal groupings. It was a pride to handle life

collectively, develop a united history and pursue a common goal [6]. Oyedele [2] shared similar view where he stated that "the Africans have strong sense of community belonging. This provides them with identity and feeling and security. As a result of the sense of community belonging, communal works are encouraged" (p. 68).

#### **Belief in the Spirit World and Relationship between the Living and the Dead**

A person does not belong to a community in the traditional African setting without having relationship with the living dead. It might not be at the same level but most of the traditional African people attach importance to relationship to the spirits of their ancestors. They also strongly held the view that there was the spirit world which was interconnected with the physical world. Whether or not it is pronounced, the reality of a God is common to Africans. They in addition, believe there is a world of spirits hovering around which must be reckoned with to make life run smoothly. These spirits are around to either help or harm – depending on one's relationship with them or how they are employed to act [6].

#### **High Value System**

Africans set priorities and pursue them particularly as human relationships were of higher value than material possession [6]. The Africans were known to rate integrity highly to the point that they gave regard to people of integrity and respected them, even if such people with integrity were poor [2]. This characteristic of Africans gave rise to some songs emphasizing integrity. One of a commonly sung among the Yoruba of the Southwest Nigeria is: *Eni ba jale leekan, b'oba d'aran bori; Aso ole l'o dabo'ra*, (meaning: Any person caught stealing once and appears in a costly dress later in life is considered to have also stolen the dress). It means that integrity was not taken with levity among the Yoruba in particular and Africans in general.

#### **Comprehensive View of Life**

Life, from the traditional African perspective was not departmentalized into unrelated parts. Rather, they saw life as a whole intertwined. "All the parts together form a beautiful picture called life" [6]. This is similar to Maslow's view of human needs which are collaborative in the proper development of life.

#### **Humanitarian Culture**

The Africans were known to be caring people who show concern to people greatly. They took notice of one another's needs and respond to them quickly. There was not the case of hoarding property when others were in need [2]. With these common factors among the traditional African people, the paper now narrows down on the administrative procedure in the southwestern part of Nigeria, among the Yoruba people in particular.

**History of Colonial Rule and Later Independence**

Most African countries had their taste of colonial rule which was a distasteful experience. It was the sour experience that motivated call for independence which was later gained by most [6]. So, most of the traditional Africans could tell the story of personal experience of the whip of colonial masters or the spill-over from a neighbouring country to the one not directly colonized.

**SOUTH-WEST NIGERIAN PRE-COLONIAL INDIGENOUS ADMINISTRATIVE VIRTUES**

Nigeria is a country with multi-ethnic groups who are distinguishable on the lines of language, customs and religious inclinations. The case study of the Yoruba indigenous administration is summarized here. Yoruba people are a key ethnic group with rich administrative traditions under the leadership of their kings. The southwestern Nigeria is the above of the Yoruba people where kingship is held in high esteem. Awoniyi [7] noted that

The Yoruba indigenous administrative system accounts for her advancement and survival.

A close study of the ancient Yoruba kingdoms of Ife, Oyo, Egba, Ijesha, Ijebu, Ekiti and Ondo in the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries is a testimony that, though the entire Yoruba race has never being organized into a one complete government in a modern state, nevertheless,

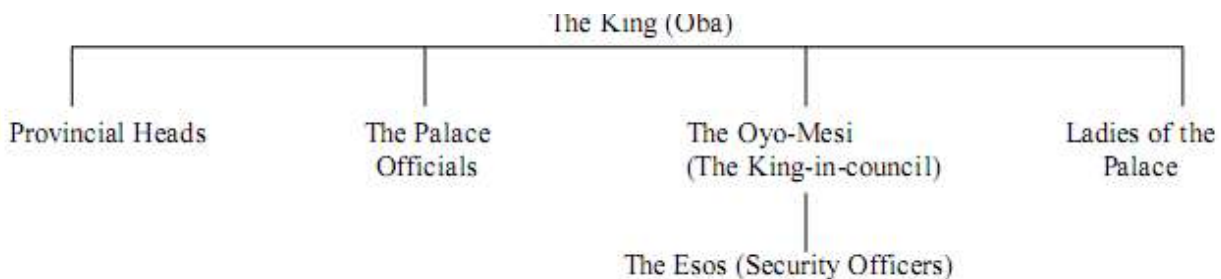
each of the feudal states mentioned was effectively administered... (p. 261).

In other words, there are common administrative features among the Yoruba kingdoms which served as cohesive elements.

According to Idowu [8] The Yoruba people are united by a common language (Ife Yoruba), traditions political administration and religious beliefs. This accounted for replication of practices from one clan to another (p. 5). It is worthy of note that the Yoruba indigenous administrative procedure have some features which could be viewed as similar to the present political system in African countries. For instance, the administrations are people oriented, religiously inclined at certain levels, structured leadership styles and categorical institutional objectives [7]. Among the Yoruba feudal states of Ife, Oyo, Egba, Ijesha, Ijebu, Ekiti, and Ondo, Oyo-Alaafin is used analogously in this paper because of the age long indigenous administrative system that can enhance information dissemination which aided cohesion and security.

**The Oyo-Alaafin Administrative procedure**

The administrative system of Oyo-Alaafin is diagrammatically represented below and the roles of the officials described.



**The King (Oba)**

The traditional title for a Yoruba King is Oba which is monarchical in nature with political and religious roles. These were roles taking care of the physical and spiritual aspects of the lives of the people under the care of the King. Traditionally, Yoruba kings were revered even than some gods because their intermediary role between their subjects and the living dead was essential for the community. This was a reason why the utterances of the king were authoritative. The office was hereditary but not necessarily automatically transferred from father to son. There was a set of men of nobility which oversaw the choice of a King [9].

As the representative of the gods and the living dead, he ensured the observances of religious festival as he also acted as the spokesman of his subject. The king

ruled from the top downward as he handled allocation of land within his territory. By this means the king controls the economy of his community because returns came to him from the occupants of the land. Part of his role was that the king presided over a traditional council. He also made regulations through the counsel of a constituted council called *Oyo-Mesi* and a crown prince called *Areemo* who was ever close by to assist his father [7]. The king was almost always available in the palace which resulted in the proverbial saying among the Yoruba. "*O nr' Oyo, o nkanju, Alaafin ko re'bi kan*" (meaning: you are going to Oyo and you are in a hurry when the king of Oyo is always in the palace).

**The Oyo-Mesi**

The *Oyo-Mesi* was king-in-council which was constituted by seven high chiefs headed by *Basorun* who normally deputized for the king in the latter's

absence. It is significant to note that the *Oyo-Mesi* used to meeting two times daily at the palace to ruminate on the affairs of the kingdom. The purpose of these meetings was to ensure no problem was allowed to prolong [10]. This set of chiefs constantly gave counsel to the king on vital issues regarding the kingdom. The *Oyo-Mesi* represented the voice of the subjects while meeting with the *Alaafin* (Owner of the palace which refers to the King of Oyo). The chiefs in this category played a significant role in the administrative process of *Oyo-Alaafin* which was not exactly the same way but similar in other kingdoms in Yoruba land [7].

#### **The Esos**

The *Esos* were the next in rank to the *Oyo-Mesi* and theirs was military title which was not hereditary. The *Esos* were headed by *Aare Ona Kakanfo* and were seventy in number. These were physically strong men who were capable of defending the kingdom against any intrusion. The *Aare Ona Kakanfo* had the role of checking the excesses of the administrative powers of the *Alaafin* (king) and the *Oyo-Mesi*. The *Esos* were the kingdom guards and advisers to the king on security matters on regular basis [7].

#### **The Provincial Heads**

Since many of the prominent Yoruba kings ruled over some other smaller towns and villages under them, there were also heads for those provinces. These heads were either kings at their own levels or *Baale* (Mayor). Their positions were hereditary because they were either founders of their towns, districts or province, or descendants of the founders. Their titles were taken from either the names of their territories or a particular historical issue connected to such a place or the founders. "Distinguished members of the royal family did not reside in the metropolis, unless they were holding responsible positions... they were regarded as the father of the king. They were to advise, admonish or instruct the King... in a situation when the king came to the throne at a very early age..." [7]

#### **The Palace Officials and the Ladies of the Palace**

There were other groups or individuals connected to the palace who played some key but silent administrative roles. There were the palace officials like the Eunuchs (*Iwefa*) and the *Ilaris*. These performed judicial, religious and executive functions. They also assisted the king in some ways and attend to petty issues brought to the palace when the king was not on seat [7]. There were also the ladies of the palace which were eight titled ladies, serving as priestesses. Others in this category were the *Ayabas* (Queens) and the *Ilaris* (female servants). The ladies of the palace were also the king's counsellors with particular reference to women affairs.

The structural arrangement of the administration of the indigenous Yoruba kingdom of the southwestern Nigeria, typified by the *Oyo-Alaafin* as described above, have some key virtues helpful for security purposes which are summarized here. One virtue is that kings and their counsellors were chosen because of heredity or what they could offer the kingdom. Another virtue is that the kings and counsellors were available to attend to the affairs of their kingdoms. Also, the kingdoms were secured by the kings and their chiefs to the point that they had confidence to keep their own family members within their domain. There was also regularity in the meetings of the king-in-council to receive feedback and treat kingdom affairs. Again, the *Esos* were equipped with gun, gunpowder and bullets, and charms to function well. It was on the bases of these administrative virtues that there was peace and security to a large extent within the domains of the traditional Yoruba kings.

#### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This paper has noted that there are socio-religious upheavals in Africa at a level that is capable of hindering transforming in all facets of life. It has also noted that the structural arrangement of the administration of African nations may need to borrow a leaf from the traditional African situation to stem the tide of insecurity staring many African countries on the face. The southwestern Nigeria has been noted to have some indigenous administrative procedures that helped in keeping the kingdoms secure to a large extent.

The virtues of the Yoruba kingdoms represented by *Oyo-Alaafin* has been x-rayed and found recommendable for improved administration that can yield transformative result in the African society. It is worthy of note that the administrative style recommended in this paper emphasized service to people with commitment. It is believed that wisdom can be derived from the indigenous administrative procedure of the Yoruba kingdom by the leaders of African nations to detect security threats faster and nip them in the bud. If African leaders at different levels of governance can make themselves more available in their territories, it is believed that socio-religious imbroglios shall reduce and peace will reign once again in African countries.

The foregoing description of the administrative procedure of the indigenous Yoruba kingdoms has some virtues that can help in governance to transform the socio-religious atmosphere in the present day Africa. This is believed to be capable of assisting in improving security of life and property and specific recommendations are presented to this effect.

1. One of the key virtues in the traditional African context was that kings and their counsellors were appointed on the basis of their knowledge of their land

and clans. Theirs was not importation of leaders who were not familiar with the culture and customs of the land. Government officials should be selected on the basis of their attachment to their local settings to allow room for commitment and seriousness in performing in office.

2. Kings were available to attend to the affairs of their kingdoms. This is in contrast to the present leadership situation in Africa where someone may be made a King or a chief without residing within the community where he/she is a leader for a considerable long period of time that can allow him/her to understand the community and their needs on regular basis. Official who will be busy with their businesses outside their constituencies should not be appointed, and if selected by mistake, should be relieved of public responsibilities in time.

3. Traditional African Kings secured their kingdoms in a way that they were largely confident to keep their own family members within their domains. The contemporary African leaders (political and the rest) should imbibe the idea of ensuring their territorial security to the point they will also be confident to allow their children to develop in the African context.

4. Regularity of *Oyo-Mesi* meetings (twice every day) should be emulated by the present day participants in governance in Africa. While it is acknowledged that regular security meetings may not be as frequent as the case of the pre-colonial *Oyo-Mesi*, yet room should be created for constant and consistent security feedback with effective follow-up process that can yield result in stemming the socio-religious tides bedeviling Africa.

5. Like the *Esos* played the roles of check and balances in the administration of Oyo kingdom, room needs to be given to security agents to perform when it comes to excesses in governance without fear or favour regarding the personalities involved. Confidentiality also needs to be improved in the aspect of people giving secret information about security risks in their environments. As Africans had common history of colonialism, dictatorial leadership without evidence of concern for their security will only refresh their minds of the people of the pains of colonialism and possible violent resistance.

6. Information technology is acknowledged to have contributed positively to fast dissemination of pieces of information. It should however, be acknowledged that the facility is not yet available in the remote areas which are also part of the nations. It means the indigenous system of information dissemination through kings' counsellors should not be jettisoned yet. These officials should be empowered with necessary equipping of personnel and other resources that can help make them functional.

7. The traditional Africans placed value on integrity and it helped in keeping the land safe, to a large extent. Present day African leaders need to take decisive steps towards a paradigm shift from non-enduring awards like beauty contests, lotteries and other quick wealth acquisition promotional programmes that may instil security-threat tendencies in young people who cannot make it through the afore-mentioned means.

8. Finally, the traditional Africans believe in the spirit world and relationship with the ancestors and it instills fear in them, resulting in probity in their transactions. The leaderships in African countries need to improve emphasis on fear of God and demonstrate it in all aspects of governance so that the citizenry may imbibe the idea of positive religious practices that can enhance security in Africa.

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