

**LET LAGOS STATE BE**  
**An address to Idunganran Club of Lagos**  
**on the occasion of its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary**  
**by**  
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GE DE GBE L'EKO WA.

Let us go back to Memory Lane.

**WHO ARE THE LAGOSIANS?**

The Aworis were the original settlers in Eko, called “Lagos” by Portuguese adventurers. The “Idejo” class of chiefs – Olumegbon, Oluwa, Oniru, Onisemo, Oloto, Aromire, Elegushi, Ojomu, Onikoyi, Onisiwo, Ojora, Onitolo, Onitana – were the landowning chiefs who along with their families and followers settled in different parts of Lagos and the environs in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were the original land owners of Lagos<sup>1</sup>.

Then came the Bini invasion. All the Obas of Lagos, starting from Oba Ado, were of Bini origin. So is Oba Alaiyeluwa Akiolu I, the present Oba of Lagos.  
Ki ade pe lori, Ki bata pe lese.

In

**Amodu Tijani**  
**v.**  
**Secretary, Southern Provinces**

where the question before the court was whether full compensation should be paid to the Appellant (as Chief Oluwa of Lagos) for compulsory acquisition of Apapa, the Privy Council (the highest court of jurisdiction for British Colonies) held:

“About the beginning of the eighteenth century the island of Lagos was held by a Chief called Olofin. He had parcelled out the island and part of the adjoining mainland among some sixteen subordinate Chiefs, called “Whitecap” in recognition of their dominion over the portions parcelled out of them. About 1790 Lagos was successfully invaded by the neighbouring Benins. They did not remain in occupation, but left a representative as ruler whose title was the “Eleko”. The successive Elekos in the end became the kings of Lagos, although for a long time they

1. See, pp. 1-22 of Political and Cultural Perspectives of Lagos by H.A.B. Fasinro.

acknowledged the sovereignty of the king of the Benins, and paid tribute to him. The Benins appear to have interfered but little with the customs and arrangements in the island.....”<sup>2</sup>

The Binis (Edos) who accompanied Ado to Lagos settled mostly in Isale Eko, in particular at Iduntafa, Idunmagbo, Idunshagbe, Idunmota, Idunmaigbo. The word “Idun” means “area”.

The Akarigbere class of chiefs (or civil chiefs) are also of Bini origin. They are: Eletu Odigbo, Eletu Iwashe, Eletu Ika, Ologun Agbeje, Ologun Adodo, Eletu Awo, Ologun Agan, Ologun Atebo, Ologun Igbesodi, Ologun Ide Okoro. So also are the Abagbon class of chiefs or war chiefs : Ashogbon, Bajulaiye, Saba, Bajulu and Bashua<sup>3</sup>. They and their families have Benin blood flowing in their veins and arteries.

Incidentally, the installation of an Oba of Lagos, as well as that of each white-capped Chief of Lagos, bears the hall mark of the installation of the Oba of Benin. The ceremony at Enuowa tells eloquently our Benin heritage. The installation of the Obi of Onitsha bears similar heritage.

Another set of original settlers in Lagos were the “Nupe” or “Tapa” from present day Niger State. They settled at Idunshagbe, Ita Agarawu, Oko Awo, and most especially at Ita Oshodi, popularly called Epetedo. The Oshodi Family are of Tapa origin. Successive Chief Imams of Lagos are Nupe; so also are many prominent families in Lagos.

And the Brazilian Quarters! The Pereira, Marinho, Da Silva, Sho Silva, Salvador, Ramos, Peregrino, Ferreira, Augusto, Pinheiro, Campos, Da Rhocha, Da Costa, Gonzalez, Martins, Vera Cruz and Pedro families – all returnees from Brazil in the early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries whose ancestors were taken into slavery mostly from Yoruba land and Dahomey (Benin Republic). They settled mostly at “Popo Aguda” or Brazilian Quarters in Lagos Island. The “Portoqui” or Aguda (as they are called) brought “Kareta” festival at Easter to Lagos as well as “Brazilian” architecture.

2. Judgment of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, delivered in the case of Amodu Tijani v. Secretary, Southern Provinces 19 on 11<sup>th</sup> July 1921 and reported in 3N.L.R (Privy Council) 24 at pp 60-61. See also Nigerian Land Law and Custom by Dr. T. Olawale Elias, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of p. 2

3. See, p. 31 (ibid)

There are the Saros especially from Free Town in Sierra Leon – Savage, Williams, Carew, Caulcrick and Cole families, *et al.* They settled at Olowogbowo area of Lagos. The Saros were immigrants from Sierra Leone either as descendants of slaves from Cuba or Brazil, or freed slaves who first settled at Free Town in Sierra Leone and then emigrated to Lagos.

There were waves of Yoruba settlers also as Ago “Ijaiye”, Ijesha Tedo, Agodo Egba, Agidingbi, Shomolu and such other areas of Lagos will testify.

And of course, the Ijebus in Epe and Ikorodu. And the “Eguns” in Badagry. All of them were original settlers of Lagos State.

All these people, and more, make up Lagos. They are the “Lagosians”.

It has often been said that Lagos is a Yoruba state because Yoruba is the common language among its people, notwithstanding the fact that there is a large percentage of its people whose ancestral languages were Bini or Tapa. The same argument can be said for millions of Fulanis in Sokoto State or Adamawa, Gongola, Kano or Katsina State who are no less Fulani in origin just because the common language of these Fulanis in those states is Hausa, and not Fulani. The Binis and the Tapa, the Potoki (Brazilians) and the Saros have adopted Yoruba as their common language in the same way as the Fulanis have adopted Hausa.

As we are all aware, Lagos State was the first British Colony established in 1861 in modern-day Nigeria, followed by the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria in 1900. Lagos Colony, including Ikeja, Epe and Badagry divisions remained under a separate administration from the two Protectorates or three Regions (1946 - 51) until 1951. The last British Commissioner for the Colony was Mr. E.A. Carr under the Richards Constitution (1946). And his deputy was Major J.C. Allen.

### **LAGOS SPOKE FOR NIGERIA**

Lagos was the centre of Nigerian politics from the proclamation of the protectorate in 1900 until 1950. Lagos was Nigeria! Herbert Macaulay (who founded the Democratic Party in 1922), Nnamdi Azikwe, Ibiyinka Olorunnimbe (all of Democratic Party / NCNC Alliance) and James Churchill Vanghan, Kofo Abayomi, Akinola Maja, H.O. Davies, Jubril Martins, Ernest Ikoli (Nigerian Youth Movement, founded in 1933), and before them people like Orisadipe Obasa, Kitoyi Ajasa, Haratio Jackson dominated the political scene in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Then Obafemi Awolowo entered the scene, on the demise of NYM and the formation of Action Group at Owo in 1951. Nnamdi Azikwe's NCNC/Democratic Party Alliance and Action Group dominated Lagos politics until the 1966 military coup d'état.

With India gaining her independence from Britain in 1947, agitation for self government for Nigeria, especially by the Lagos politicians, continued apace. The Richards' constitution (1946 – 51) did not go far enough.

The new Governor of Nigeria, Sir John MacPherson (1948 – 54) summoned the first assembly of representatives of the people of Nigeria at Ibadan in 1950 to discuss the political future of the country. This led to the MacPherson Constitution, 1951 – 1954.

### **TEMPORARY MERGER WITH THE WEST**

With regard to the future of Lagos Colony, the majority of the delegates at the Ibadan General Conference decided that Lagos Colony should not be merged with any Region; rather Lagos should remain as the capital of Nigeria.

Eleven delegates however, including Oba Adesoji Aderemi, the Oni of Ife, Bode Thomas, Akinpelu Obisesan, S.O. Awokoya, Adegunle Soetan, M.A. Ajasin, T.A. Bankole, Chief Ogunlana II, C.D. Akran and Arthur Priest submitted a minority report urging the British Government to merge Lagos Colony with the Western Region<sup>4</sup>. Except for Chief Ogunlana, the Obanikoro of Lagos, and the Oni of Ife, all of them were foundation members of the Action Group. The Colonial Secretary acceded to their request, and Lagos Colony was merged with the Western Region under the new constitution, the Nigeria (Constitution) Order-in-Council, 1951. Lagos however remained the capital of Nigeria.

But not for long. The merger with the Western Region did not last long !

### **LAGOS REGAINED HER INDEPENDENCE FROM THE WEST**

Lagosians fought back.

H.M. Alli-Balogun, Prince Delumo Ibikunle Akitoye (Black Prince) and son of Oba Akitoye II, Kasali Aremu Kotun (K.K), T.O.S. Benson, and others founded **Lagos State Movement**, with the slogan "***Ge de gbe ni Eko wa***" which was already popular with the majority of the people of Lagos.

4. See, The Development of Political Parties in Nigeria by Nnamdi Azikiwe (1957 at pages 17 – 18)

In 1954, under the Lyttleton Constitution, Lagos City regained its independence from the West and became the Federal Territory (and a constituent unit of the Federation) until the creation of Lagos State in May 1967 when the Colony province (Epe, Badagry and Ikeja) rejoined the city to constituent Lagos state in General Yakubu Gowon's Twelve State structure to replace the four regions under the 1963 constitution.

Let it be on record that Alaiyeluwa Oba Adeniji Adele II, the Oba of Lagos who provided a political platform for Action group in Lagos by creating Area Councils in various wards in the city, also joined the struggle for the independence of Lagos.

In a letter to Mr. Alan Lennox – Boyd, the British Colonial Secretary, dated 6<sup>th</sup> June 1956, Oba Adele pleaded for the creation of Lagos Region.

In his 11 – paged Memorandum to the Colonial Secretary, the Alaiyeluwa reminded him of the Treaty of Cession of Lagos in 1861 with Oba Dosunmu, and that inspite of the merger of the Colony with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in 1906 and the amalgamation of 1914, Lagos Colony remained “one administrative unit up to December 1951”

Oba Adeniji Adele proposed a Lagos Region with its own Governor, Deputy Governor, House of Chiefs, House of Assembly, a Premier and Ministers. There was already in existence a High Court for the Federal Territory of Lagos. The Oba's letter did not discuss the judiciary.

### **CIVIS BRITANNICUS SUM**

One other matter about the difference between Lagos Colony, now Lagos State, and the rest of Nigeria. After the Treaty of Lagos in 1861, all persons born in Lagos and until mid-night of 30<sup>th</sup> September 1960, were full – fledged British citizens, with all the rights enjoyed by Britons all over the world.

And all those born in the rest of Nigeria were British subjects, or *British protected persons*.

As British citizens, Lagosians held British passports.

All other Nigerians, born outside Lagos, carried “British subjects” or British Protected Person on their passports!

The British Colony of Lagos was the sole British “possession” from 1861 until 1900 when the Imperial power occupied the two protectorates and took over political and administrative power from the chartered companies.

In spite of the merger with the Southern Protectorate in 1906, Lagos Colony retained its status as an independent administrative unit free from the two protectorates (1914 – 46) or the three regions (1946 - ) comprising Nigeria until 1951 when it was politically and administratively merged with the Western Region.

As already discussed in this treatise, the Colonial Secretary accepted the minority report on the merger with the West submitted by those people who later became some of the foundation members of the Action Group.

Lagos City was however excised from the Western Region in 1954 to become the Federal Territory and one of the five federating units of the Federation.

### **CREATION OF LAGOS STATE**

In 1967, the old Lagos Colony became one of the twelve states created by the administration of Colonel Yakubu Gowon, still operating under the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1963.

Each of the twelve new states enjoyed all the powers and functions of the erstwhile regional governments under the 1960 and 1963 Constitutions.

There was however one concession made by the military authorities to obtain the co-operation of Chief Awolowo in the creation of Lagos State. Unlike the Interim Common Services Agency set up for the new states carved out of the old Northern Region to manage their joint assets and apportionment among the new states, Lagos State was excluded by a decree<sup>5</sup> from a share of the Oduduwa Group investments, even though many of those assets are still in Lagos State.

In so far as such assets relate to land however, title to such lands is now vested in the Governor of Lagos State in trust for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians by virtue of section 1 of the Land Use Act, 1978<sup>6</sup>. Companies belonging to Oduduwa Group holding such lands in Lagos State are *ipso facto* tenants of Lagos State Government.

That is not the end of the story.

5. State (Creation and Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) (No. 2) Decree 1967, otherwise known as Decree No. 25 of 1967.

6. Land Use Act or Decree No. 6 of 1978, Laws of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The struggle for the merger of Lagos with the Western Region or South West today did not die in 1954. It was very fierce in 1966 and 1967 before the creation of Lagos State. It surfaced again at the Political Reform Conference in 2005.

It has been intensified in recent years. It is still ranging more relentlessly today than ever before.

Let me here pay special tributes to Judge T.O. Elias and Chief Ishola Bajulaiye, the Eletu Odigbo of Lagos for our principled stand at the Ad Hoc Constitutional Conference in 1966 for our advocacy for Lagos State. I must also recognize the role of my other comrades-in-arms in 1966 – 67 : Sikiru Shitta-Bey, Prof. Ganiyu Jawando, Prof Tunde Williams, Bayo Braithwaite, Ade Thomas, Senu Oke, Biola Oshodi, Femi Ayantuga, Ishola Talabi, Miss Simi Johnson, Mugni Danmole and several others in the struggle for the creation of Lagos State who have all since answered the call of God. We represented all shades of political opinions in the old Lagos Colony, partisans politicians and non partisan free thinkers.

It is only proper to recognize also two other contemporaries of mine at King's College, Lagos who played a significant role in ensuring that Lagos State "shall be": Akene Allison Ayida and Philip Chiedu Asiodu.

The fact of history shows that though many Lagosians have Yoruba blood, we also have Bini (Edo) blood. We have Tapa (Niger State) blood. We have strands of blood from other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Even if the inhabitants of Lagos State were all Yorubas (which they are not), all Yorubas in Nigeria should not all be in one state. Yorubas are in the majority in Kwara State. They are in Kogi State. All the eggs must never be put in one basket. The Ibo-speaking Nigerians are not all in one state. They are in East Central State (now South East), some in Delta State and there are some in Rivers State.

The Fulani-speaking Nigerians are spread over several states, from Sokoto in the north-west to Adamawa on the Cameroon boarder. In the same way, the Hausa ethnic groups are in several states in north-west and north central parts of the country.

Lagos State, now 50 years old, has come to stay.

The Battle for the independence of Nigeria was fought on the streets of Lagos, by indigenes and non indigenes alike. It was fought at Glover Hall, at Oko Awo (Bombata) playing fields, at Isalegangan Square and Campos Square, and at Tom Jones Memorial Hall.

Let Lagos State be!

You Lagosians,

You are too passive.

Get out of your slumber.

Join the debate on “restructuring”.

Join the conversation.

Come out to defend the integrity of Lagos State as members of the Lagos State Movement – our uncles, fathers and grand fathers – did between 1950 and 1954, and as Oba Alaiyeluwa Adeniji Adele II did in 1956.

We were the voice of Lagos State in 1966 – 67, and also in 2005.

We remain the voice of Lagos till today.

Nigerians of Lagos State origin,

Fellow Lagosians, stop murmuring.

Get out of your groove.

Speak up and speak out for Lagos State.

There is no comfort zone.

LET LAGOS STATE BE.

LAGOS STATE IS NOT FOR MERGER.

GEDEGBE NI EKO WA.

**Femi Okunnu, SAN, CON.**

**1<sup>st</sup> November 2017**