

Yoruba Qbaship Institution and its New Religious Paradigms

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Abstract

The institution of Qbaship in Africa is not only sacred but also revered and exalted as a traditional institution because the Qba (king), who ascends the indigenous stool of Qbaship, is regarded not as an ordinary person but as a 'ritualised human being'. In Yorubaland, Qba is regarded as 'next to God Almighty'. He is worshipped and adored as one of the deities. He is an institution in his own right. Qbas are the custodians of the relics of history, culture and traditions. However, this paper examines Yoruba Qbaship institution and its new religious paradigms. Utilising descriptive and historical content analysis and participant observation of some traditional rulers' spiritual beliefs and practices. Findings reveal that foreign religions and their civilisations have affected the Yoruba Qbaship institution. The paper concludes that there is a significant departure from both the historical past and modern trends in the religious beliefs and practices of Yoruba traditional rulers.

Keywords: Qbaship, Indigenous, Religion, Paradigm and Yoruba

Introduction

African Indigenous religious traditions are a comprehensive part of the superstructure of the Indigenous organic pattern, which operates within the framework of traditional institutions. The Yoruba have numerous cultural phenomena that make them exceptionally interesting in terms of their worldviews on religion, culture, kinship, language, thought, and Qbaship institution (OLUPONA 1991; ABIMBOLA 1987). Generally, the Yoruba people believe in the supremacy and absolute authority of their traditional rulers, as well as the sacred nature of the Qba institution. Qbas are the custodians of their people's culture, philosophy, Indigenous festivals, traditions, and belief system. In Yoruba culture, Qbas are powerful determinants of cultural paradigms and social norms (OLOMU 2015). The position of Qba in Yoruba culture, spirituality, and cosmology is significant to the social construct of reality in the Yoruba people's understanding of the universe (ADEYEMI 1993).

Moreover, scholars like Kolawole Balogun (1985), Jacob Kehinde Olupona (1991), Adeyemi Adedayo Adebayo (2003), Adewale Josuah Adelakun (2011), Moses Ayoade Fasehun (2012), Olusegun Adebolu Oladosu (2014), David Olugbenga Ogungbile and Ropo Awoniyi (2015) have written extensively on the sacred kingship and the roles of traditional authorities in Yorubaland. The work of these scholars, among others, reviewed the kingship system in Yorubaland. The

word *Íjọba* in the Yoruba language denotes the king's authority, which is derived from the root word *Ọba* (meaning 'king') to mean *Àjọ àwọn Ọba*, or *Àwujọ àwọn Ọba*, meaning 'gathering of those who have and possess authority' (OSISANWO 2010).



Plate1: Yoruba Ọba receiving homage and greetings from his Chiefs
Source: Fieldwork, 2021

Abimbola Adesoji argues that Ọba in Yoruba kingdoms is the ritual head of his community, although not the Priests. He further states that the Ọba is expected to lead his people in the annual traditional festivals and ceremonies. During the annual traditional festival, Ọba would receive divine blessings from the royal ancestors and the hill spirits guarding the town, and convey these blessings to his chiefs and subjects (ADESOJI 2010). Also, Parrinder asserts that Ọba is not merely the head of the community in Yoruba communities; he is also the symbol of unity, dignity, and communal spiritual empowerment. The Yoruba people attached much importance to their Ọba and his traditional stool because he is their leader, Priest, lawgiver, a war leader, and simultaneously a source of wealth to their subjects (BASCOM 1969; PARRINDER 1975).

In order to establish the prominence of Ọba in Yoruba culture, Ayoade Fasehun (2012) advances that it is a traditional duty of the Ọba to provide ritual materials and spiritual elements for the sacrifice to the host of the deities and ensuring that the proper performance of such rituals is done to enable the kingdom to enjoy the rains of prosperity during his reign (FASEHUN 2012). Adelakun argues that though Ọba is a popular public figure in Yorubaland. Ọba often makes a few public appearances, and even during traditional festivals where he needs to perform traditional rites and pray for the town, his face is still hidden by an *Adé* (the crown) with its beaded fringe (ADELAKUN 2011). Culturally, Ọbas are used to wear veils. They take meals alone and their eating and sleeping may not be mentioned. More importantly, some parts of Ọba's body, like saliva, defecation, hair, and nails, are buried, lest those bodily items are seen by ordinary people or used maliciously against them (ABIMBOLA 1987). Buttressing this, Jacob Olupona (1991) stresses that the right to wear an *Adé* is still a jealously guarded

privilege in Yorubaland, especially among the Yoruba rulers. He adds that, in most Yoruba kingdoms, there is only one beaded crown for the Ọba, who is known as Ọba-aládé (OLUPONA 1991). Adebolu Oladosu succinctly gives an apt description of Yoruba Ọba, he writes:

The culture of the Yoruba serves as the fundamental foundation for their government. Their social structure identifies five distinct segments: Ọba (chief), Baálè (provincial leader), Baálé (one in charge of an extended family), and Olórí àdúgbò (one in charge of compounds). The Ọba must be chosen by the voice of the oracle, which must also agree with the kingmakers' majority decision. The office of Ọba among the Yoruba is hereditary and patrilineal. Ọba, as a ruler, takes control of the land; he speaks with àṣẹ, "authority," and becomes a member of all the cults, as he also directs all the elements of social organisation. (OLADOSU 2014, 56)

The view expressed in the above excerpt highlights the centrality of the Ọba's place in Yorubaland. Ọba, in this sense, refers to the overall head of the community, both physically and spiritually. (BASCUM 1969). This paper consists of five sections. The first part discusses Indigenous traditions and religious freedom among Ọbas. The second part addresses the Yoruba traditional ruler and the nature of their religious inclusivity. The third part explains the influence of Christian faith on the Yoruba Ọbaship institution. The fourth part discusses the religious undertaking of Christian Ọbas, while the last section summarises the paper and its conclusion.

Indigenous Traditions in Motion and the Concept of Religious Freedom among Ọbas

Indigenous systems, influences, and social mechanisms differ from one community to another, depending on the attitudes and level of receptivity of the traditional rulers to the foreign faith and its civilisation. Over the years, the wind of change and civilisation through the Christian faith has swept across Africa, leaving a remnant that could be described as traditional religious people. Mofolorunsho Ilesanmi (1996), identifies the forms and nature of religious freedom and religious inclusiveness among traditional rulers. He admits that religious exclusivity is one of the main reasons that traditional religion and value systems have diminished (ILESANMI 1996). Moreover, Adewale Ashiru (2012) advanced arguments on the social and cultural contexts of the Ọba's status in society. He claims that Ọbas are like other human beings, who have equal rights and privileges to express and enjoy fundamental rights and freedom of speech, association, and movement (ASHIRU 2012). Admittedly, if arguments for religious freedom is sustained, then, it follows that Ọbas are humans and citizens who have equal rights like any other person in the community.

However, another school of thought contends that Ọbas and traditional leaders are not mere men and ordinary citizens like other people but essentially 'Sacred' and 'ritualised beings due to the position they occupy in their culture and community (ABIMBOLA 1987, FALOLA 2004). The Ọba in pristine Yoruba society is guided by the customs, norms, conventions, culture, the guiding spirit of the ancestors and the people they represent on the throne. Conversely, due to the

influence of foreign religion, it is somehow difficult to draw a line between the traditional rulers and the culture they claim to represent (LATEJU & OLADOSU 2012).

Furthermore, in order to show the position of *Ọba* in Yoruba cultural milieu, David Ogungbile argues that *Ọbas* are like deities, such as *Ògun*, *Sàngó*, *Ọsun*, and *Ọbàtálá*, whose existence transcends the experiences of a mere human personality due to the myths of traditional stool they occupy and ritual significance attached to the throne they ascend (OLOMU 2023). In Yoruba culture, the position of *Ọba* is sacred to the cultural beliefs, social norms, and traditional institutions that represent the totality of the Yoruba traditional identity and artistic patrimony. The traditions of the Yoruba show that *Obas* are more than mere symbolic cultural figures (ABIMBOLA 1987). For instance, *Obas* are symbols of collective dignity and identity that transcend individual personality and religious affiliation (OGUNGBILE 1998). The roles of *Obas* are significant to the cultural and religious lives of the people, making *Ọba* the possessor of both human and spiritual authority (FALOLA 2004).

Rationally, the people whom the traditional ruler leads may consider it absurd that their political and spiritual head does not actively participate in and show interest in their religious beliefs and traditions. The fundamental question is, should a traditional ruler, with all the ritual elements and cultural paraphernalia of office, such as those of a god or deity, become a Pastor, Evangelist, Prophet, Alfa, or Imam? The answer largely depends on the individual's human rights, the community in which the ruler resides, and the circumstances surrounding their selection to the traditional stool of the *Ọba*. Even though, being a Pastor or an Imam may not constitute any known problem, provided the majority of *Ọba*'s subjects in the town are Muslims or Christians (ADETUNBI 2017). After all, we are aware of certain kingdoms in the world that adhere to an absolute religious tradition (e.g., Arab, Israel, and other notable Asian kingdoms).

The issue surrounding *Ọbaship* and chieftaincy in Yorubaland should reflect that of a pluralistic society, for which the Yoruba nation is noted. This explains why *Ọba*'s religious identity in Yoruba culture should or should not be considered neutral. As Robert Nozick famously asserts, "Individuals have rights and there are things no person or group may do to them without violating their rights" (NOZICK, 1974:97). This sustains the argument that leaders and public figures in society also have rights to their private lives is undeniable. Nonetheless, the fundamental question for the rational mind is: to what extent can private rights affect the public interest?

Furthermore, Sunday Awoniyi (1998) stresses that *Obas* are not often seen in public spaces in Yorubaland. *Obas* are believed to be the second to the gods (AWONIYI 1998). There are certain places in their community that *Obas* are not permitted to visit except when ritual sacrifices are performed. These places often include a house or compound where the placenta of the *Ọba* is buried, as well as grooves, and shrines where customary relics and Indigenous items related to previous *Obas* were kept (OGUNGBILE and AWONIYI 2015). Also, the *Ọba* must present himself for annual ritual prayers at designated locations within the town (ILESANMI 1996). Culturally, *Obas* are restricted due to the ritual performance, taboos and cultural peculiarities of the traditional office they occupy. Adelokun argues that people are unaware that a traditional ruler is an individual

representing their micro-community in the larger society and therefore has a right to protect the country's constitution of the country (ADELAKUN 2011). Thus, the crises that arise between adherents of the Indigenous religion and some traditional rulers may not really necessary because the latter have the freedom to exercise their fundamental human rights under the provisions of the constitution, just like any other law-abiding citizen of the country, including those related to association and religious affiliation (OJO 2002). This should not cause any problems. Adelakun further contends that the individual's right supersedes the group's interests (ADELAKUN 2011). Also, it is contended that a traditional ruler who is a Christian or Muslim by conviction may not be comfortable with going to the shrine or grove of traditional gods for ritual sacrifices because such practices seem to negate the teachings, doctrines, and practices of the Christian faith.

Yoruba Traditional Ruler and the Nature of their Religious Inclusivity

According to Mathews Ojo (2002), religious inclusivity is the belief that adherence to one or more religious beliefs is accurate and valid. This position is against the new age religious movement, which claims that the founder or leader's unique revelation is superior and final (Ojo 2002). Religious inclusivity emphasises the need for more than one valid perspective on religious truth. This implies that there is no monopoly on religious truth, but rather that all religious traditions possess their truthfulness as an independent, genuine belief (FALOLA 2004). However, some people erroneously misrepresent inclusivity to mean syncretism. Religious syncretism involves believing in and practicing more than one religious tradition while holding that such beliefs are true (OLUSEGUN 2004). Olaniyi examines syncretism as a convergent policy of cohesion among groups with mixed sacred origins, uniting them for religious, social, and political purposes (OLANIYI 2016). The notion that syncretism is a form of belief system whereby religious adherents accept the beliefs of other faiths as accurate and authentic could be understood as a pluralistic religious view, but not necessarily syncretic. Hence, religious syncretism is a form of reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of beliefs as a single entity (OJO 2002). This often occurs when foreign beliefs are introduced into an Indigenous system and their teachings are integrated. The new heterogeneous belief takes the shape of its own. Thus, both syncretism and inclusivity encourage an element of proselytization (BOER 2005). However, the conservative and orthodox perceive syncretism and inclusivity as confused beliefs that are neither here nor there, claiming that unstable beliefs are not beliefs (BALJON 1994). Instead, they advocate for distinct, exclusivist tendencies in religious belief. The supporting argument for religious inclusivity is the tendency to accommodate other truths in different religious traditions. Stressing this fact, religious inclusivity focuses on the degree of agreement on religious beliefs and practices and attempts to reduce the differences in religious beliefs.

Furthermore, Fredric Glover (2005), one of the foremost proponents of religious inclusivity, asserts that while one set of beliefs is proper, it is likely that the others are not (GLOVER 2005). Religious inclusivity encompasses diverse beliefs, recognizing that there are elements of truth in every belief system, at least in its forms and within the context of religious traditions. This implies that no religion is either true or false. According to Richard Ellwood (1993), two schools

of thought explain religious inclusivity. The first is traditional inclusivity. This thought posits that believers' views are true and that believers of other religions are correct if their beliefs are consistent with their faith claims. The second school of thought is relativistic inclusivity. This asserts that an unknown set of beliefs is equally valid (ELLWOOD 1993). This argument is intended to establish the view that no human being has yet attained the highest form of absolute truth and that all human beings can only claim a fragment of religious truth, but not absolute truth (OJO 2002). Hence, as we have religious inclusivity, we can also have cultural inclusivity. This is when there is a belief in more than a culture. All religions originate from a specific cultural context (ASHIRU 2012). Therefore, the term 'religious inclusivity' is an adopted concept that explains the changing role of the traditional Qbas in religious participation. The concept describes the Qbas and traditional rulers who practice and promote other religious traditions apart from the Indigenous religious tradition that brought them to power. The religious behaviour of some traditional rulers is perceived to be inclusive. Conventionally, in Yoruba culture, Qbas are assumed to be syncretic (AWONIYI 2015). The Syncretistic nature of the Qbas can be described as an attempt to blend diverse religious views to satisfy all adherents within their jurisdictions. In other words, syncretism involves a unique fusion of beliefs tailored to a particular experience and context (BERNARD 2015).

Influence of Christian Faith on Yoruba Obaship Institution

The epistemic question raised by the social anthropologist of religion is, how do we measure and quantify the effects of modern civilisation through the demise of religion as a belief system? This is undoubtedly one of the theses and antitheses of French sociologist and philosopher Auguste Comte, whose classifications of modernism, based on three stages of civilisation, served as a model that plotted development through the phases of civilisation from theological to philosophical and to the culmination of science and technology. This view does not conform to the socio-religious realities of Yorubaland because, instead of the demise of religion, it appears that religion remains the praxis by which social development and civilisation are being measured. Also, there is competition among the traditional religiosity, resurgence in Islam and intense Christian evangelisation. How do Indigenous religious traditions survive in the face of the competing and rapid evangelizing efforts of the fundamentalist and Pentecostal Christian missions?

Moreover, the dimension by which Christianity is making a new wave of intense evangelisation among the traditional rulers and Yoruba Oba is alarming. The Qbanship institution and the palace of each community in Yorubaland express the depth of diversity and unity within such a community. This is also reflected in the formation of communal identity, the people's culture, and the indigenes' socio-religious life (ADETUNBI 2017). The drastic conversion of some Yoruba traditional Obas to the Christian faith and how the Oba, 'Kabiyesi Aláse Èkéjì Òrìsà' meaning 'The absolute king, whose authority is next to the divinities', turned out to be a diligent and ardent born-again Christian, seems to alter the traditional landscape of Qbanship institution in Yorubaland (ILESANMI 1996). The climax of this socio-religious change is the formation of the Association of Born-Again Christian Oba (AOBACO). In some communities, a significant number of

Christian Oba professes Christian faith and practicing their new faith without hindrance. The Obas who embraced Christian faith are educated, well-travelled and elites who want to exercise their fundamental rights. Perhaps, the people of their town desire their traditional rulers because some of the traditional rulers are rich and wealthy before becoming Obas.



Plate 2: Members Association of Born-Again Christian Obas
Source: Fieldwork, August 2021

Religious Undertakings of Yoruba Christian Oba

Discussions on Yoruba societies are hardly complete without consideration of their religious aspects. This is because the Yoruba people are known to be spiritual and actively practicing the three dominant religions in Nigeria. The Yoruba primarily composed of different subethnic groups who speak various local dialects, including Oyo, Egba, Ilaje, Ikale, Ìjèshà, Ife, Ìgbómìnà, Èkìtì, and Ìjèbú in southwestern Nigeria (FALOLA, 2004; ILESANMI 1996). Although the Yoruba nation is considered a pluralistic society comprising various tribal and ethnic groups, the relative peace and freedom that dwellers and settlers extend to each other in Yorubaland set the pace for tranquility in that part of the country. The religious lives of Yoruba people was described, as Christopher Leonard puts it:

...are, in the strict and natural sense of the word, a firmly and deeply religious people of whom it can be said, as it has been told of the Hindus, they eat religiously, dress religiously and sin religiously. In a few words, the religion of these natives... is their existence, and their existence is religion. (LEONARD 1996, 34)

From the above excerpt, before the total exposure of the Yoruba nation to foreign influences and traditions occasioned through the slave trade, colonialism, foreign religions, modern science, technology, and eventual globalization, religion was the sole worldview within which every other thing and event was explained (FALOLA 2004). The code of conduct and social values, the core of behavioural patterns, were tailored to religious precepts. Religion permeates every facet of people's lives and is particularly significant in inculcating and promoting discipline. Hence, in Yorubaland, the spiritual landscape and space contestation

among religious groups seem competitive but devoid of violence (OLATAYO 2014).

The intervention of the British in the administration of Yoruba politics and the consequences of Uthman Danfodio's jihad of the century affected the religious practices of Yorubaland, making it easier for foreign religions to establish a presence in the region. Before the arrival of Christianity and Islam in Yorubaland, Indigenous religious traditions had no rivalry in the area. Despite the strong influence and propagation of both Christianity and Islam among the Yoruba people, the population of worshipers of African Traditional Religion remains significant in the religious distribution in Yorubaland (ADETUNBI 2017). The establishment of the Association of Born-Again Christian Obas (AOBACO) has its antecedents in the phenomenon of the born-again trend among the Evangelical Christian Renewal group, which began in the United States of America in the mid-1960s (ADEDEJI 2003). The trend later spread to other parts of the world, notably in Nigeria in the 1970s (OSUN 2000). This consequently led to another popular movement among the Christian groups known as Scripture Union (SU). This movement was engineered and gained popularity among Christian Youth Groups and high school and tertiary institution students. The born-again and the Scripture Union trends became fashionable among radical evangelical groups to the extent that the emphasis is mainly on holiness and a sanctimonious, pious lifestyle. The born-again is perceived as a unique religious fantasy resulting from a supernatural spiritual experience (OLUPONA 1991). Consequently, being born again in this context is synonymous with zeal, agility, and an overwhelming fervency for spiritual things (ADEBOYE 2007). Ogungbile and Awoniyi argue that the term 'born-again' is often associated with an inward conviction, conversion, new birth, new life, new creation, dying to sin, renewal, spiritual rebirth, regeneration, spiritual life transformation, and birth from above by God. They further claim that the term born-again is a fashionable household name adopted not only by the different Christian groups who had treated the born-again group with disdain but also by the Muslim faithful (OGUNGBILE and AWONIYI 2015).

The idea of forming a fellowship of Christian traditional rulers was first conceived in 1977 by the late Oba Mathew Oyeyode Oyekale, the traditional ruler of Masifa in Ejigbo Local Government, Osun State, Nigeria. Thereafter, the Association of Born-Again Christian Obas was formally inaugurated on May 27, 2000, in Osogbo, Osun State. The fellowship's growth was improved through the unrelenting efforts and activities of the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship (ADEDEJI 2003). This interdenominational Christian group organises its services through talks, social interactions, and Bible teachings interspersed with some prayer sessions. (OGUNGBILE & AWONIYI, 2015). According to Olufunke Adeboye (2007), the organization serves as an umbrella body under which the Christian Obas express their spirituality. The organization's formation provides ample opportunities for the Christian Obas to facilitate and practice their Christian faith (ADEBOYE 2007). The Association of the born-again Obas is a voluntary socio-religious organisation and is not registered under any law in Yorubaland or the country. The organization's primary purpose is to have a body of traditional rulers who share similar visions on faith conviction, thereby strengthening the spiritual needs and enhancing the religious growth of its members. Since 2001, AOBACO has become a strong religious association for interested Christian Obas

and traditional rulers who have keyed into the born-again trend. The group members have been performing consultative roles for one another, sharing ideas on the issues that border them. Oba also come together for fasting and prayers every month. After the prayer programme, they advise and encourage one another in the words of God and provide support for members facing challenges and difficulties in their lives (ADEBOYE 2007; ADEYEMI 2024).

According to Oba Dr. Adetoyese, Olúfi of Gbòngán, and Oba Jonathan Oyeleye, Olólà of Ola, in separate interviews, the two monarch claimed that the Association has a clear vision and mission to uplift the spiritual lives of its members and form a united body of Christian Obas. Adetoyese and Oyeleye are of the opinion that, this is achieved through their coming together for monthly prayers and fasting meetings, where Obas commit their families and thrones to God. The Obas claim that they are not ignorant of the devil's devices, as they rule in rugged terrains, of which spiritual warfare should not be underrated (ADETOYESE, 2017). Oba Jonathan Oyeleye, Olólà of Olà, notes that Christian Obas operate in a peculiar terrain, which is primarily traditional settings, and nearly everybody believes that Obas should be an Ifá priest, a Muslim Imam, and powerful occult members. But this could not be so with an Oba who has professed to be a faithful and born-again Christian. AOBACO members claim that they are instruments of change, redefining Indigenous traditions and evolving a new tradition in line with the faith professed, which would empower the Obas. According to Oba Oyeleye, this would enable them to recreate a new religious order, giving the Obas a new identity within the contemporary Qbanship system in Yorubaland (OYELEYE 2017). The pertinent issue that arises from the formation of AOBACO is that all the Obas that formed the membership of the organisation are graduates who are literate enough to assert their religious rights and freedom of Association. Besides, the born-again Obas are elites and socio-religious crusaders who are reconstructing cultural and traditional order in Yoruba societies. More importantly, Obas' ability to read and interpret the Bible for their spiritual needs allow them to exercise their newfound faith without hindrance.

According to Oba Gabriel Fashade Owá of Ìgbájo, the level of one's religious commitment before accepting the crown is related to one's spiritual disposition on the throne. He argues that accepting the crown and the throne may not necessarily remove one's religious conviction and faith claim because position, wealth, education and popularity are ephemeral things that one cannot enjoy forever. His religious convictions, service to humanity, and the concept of serving God are significant to him. Oba Fashade cited an instance where there is no hard and fast line demarcating religion from culture, and everything religion dictates is cultural; it may be a terrible thing to absorb hook, line, and sinker. Oba Fashade claims that whatever people perceive as cultural is what traditional religion demands, and any deviation usually attracts the wrath of the gods. The next thing is ritual prescriptions in the form of sacrifice on a cosmic level. There is nothing like grace in traditional practices; such orthodox and conventional beliefs must be changed. He claimed (FASHADE 2017). Thus, the better option is a faith that is not punitive but offers grace. He asserts that Christianity is a liberal religion that accommodates forgiveness and a simple lifestyle. Oba Fashade is a strong Baptist member and an officer of the Baptist Association in his domain. He claims to have been born again before becoming a traditional ruler (FASHADE 2017).

Accordingly, the Association of Christian-born-again Obas believes in the biblical teachings and the manifestation of the spiritual gift of the Holy Spirit. The emphasis is on three cardinal essential elements: Jesus' power is real, the beautiful work of redemption in Jesus, and direct access to God through Jesus as the way to eternal life after death (ADETUNBI 2017). They claim to believe that traditional religion could not offer these. It is one of the practices of the Association to organize and support open-air crusade revival in their domain. This is typically done with the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). During their meeting, the programme includes Bible exaltation, prayer sessions (for the members, their towns and thrones, and the state and country), counseling provision, and sharing experiences with members facing challenges and persecutions in their city. The group also has an evangelical outreach programme to the downtrodden in society, such as the less privileged, physically challenged, orphans, widows, motherless babies home, homeless people and prison correctional centres and hospitals. The group often provides care for the poor and vulnerable in society. The Association's meeting is usually rotated among the members at the organization's inception but later decentralised to various state zones.

The Association has three principal officers: a chairman, a secretary, and a treasurer. The Association is sustained financially through personal donations, as well as contributions and donations from affluent members of the society who share an interest in the Association's vision and mission, as well as the spiritual activities of the traditional ruler. One of the practices Christian Obas engage is public religious programmes and ministrations. It is interesting seeing Obas with the paraphernalia and instruments of the royal office, which include a crown, horsetail, special caps, royal beads, and traditional staff, displayed on a crusade advertising banner. Additionally, churches also entice traditional rulers, who are considered part of their denomination, to continue patronising their Church and religious group (OLANIPEKUN and OLATAYO 2024). This is achieved through various means, including public advertisements of the Oba to identify with the Church. Of course, it is not only a mere religious advertising banner to invite people to worship but also a kind of advertisement to sensitize the public about the religious behaviours of the traditional ruler, which this study coaches as religious inclusivity among the traditional rulers. Some Christian religious prayer rituals that the monarchs participated in included regular Church and special prayer services with the mantra of these titles. For example, 'Night of Mercy,' 'Night of God's Throne,' 'Early Morning with Christ,' 'My Case is Urgent,' 'What God can't do, doesn't exist,' and many other prayer-tagged church events. In support of this viewpoint, Ogungbile and Awoniyi provide a concise historical account of the religious practices of Oba Isaac Akinyele, the then Olubadan of Ibadan, who was a traditional ruler and ordained Priest in the Christ Apostolic Church (CAC) worldwide. In an attempt to explain the religious and royal life of Oba Akinyele, they write:

Perhaps the first noticeable appearance of the claim to be a born-again brand of Christianity by a traditional ruler was that of Oba Isaac Babalola Akinyele, the Olubadan of Ibadan. Of course, specific important facts are noteworthy about Oba I.B. Akinyele regarding faith experience and Indigenous tradition... Oba Akinyele was already an influential member of

the Ibadan elite and distinguished himself as an active Pentecostal member who openly professed his Christian faith. He was a practicing Christian and lived his faith among his people. He was a peripatetic preacher to many villages in Ibadan and its environs, where he preached the doctrines of holiness, prayer, faith healing, and freedom from demonic attacks. These doctrines were received from the Faith Tabernacle Group, which he also transferred to the Christ Apostolic Church when the movement began in the 1930s. It was also recorded that Qba I.B. Akinyele converted many of his Chiefs to Christianity. (OGUNGILE and AWONIYI 2015, 76)

The above excerpt provides a cursory overview of the religious beliefs and practices of Qba Isaac Akinyele, a renowned Christian Priest and traditional ruler in the ancient city of Ibadan. During Qba Akinyele's reign as Olubadan of Ibadan, traditional practices, ritual performances, and Indigenous palace traditions prevalent in the ancient city of Ibadan were discouraged, reordered, and even replaced with Christian worship (ALOKAN 2012; OLATAYO 2024). This is due to Qba Akinyele's continued practice of the Christian faith without repentance. He was one of the strong pillars of the then Faith Tabernacle prayer group. Faith Tabernacle was the name of the Aladura people, who came together for prayers in 1918. The group aimed to purify the Church's liturgical order by praying for the Holy Spirit's revival and spiritual rejuvenation of society through the power of prayer, living a life of holiness, and total dedication to God (ALOKAN 2012). The early pioneers of the group, which later turned into a movement, were J.B. Esinsinadé, D.O. Odúbàño, Sophia Odúnlámi, and Daniel Orekoya. These were Christian prayer warriors from the Saint Saviors Anglican Church Ìjèbú Ode, Nigeria. The prayer group was first known as Precious Stone and later became the Diamond Society of Nigeria. Later, through the efforts of Pastor Andrew Clark of the Faith Tabernacle in Philadelphia, United States of America, the name was changed to the Faith Tabernacle Nigeria (OSUN 1981, AYESBOYIN & ISHOLA 1999, FOLARIN 2017).

The Aladura prayer group later metamorphosed into Christ Apostolic Church Nigeria in the late 1920s (ALOKAN 2012). Qba Akinyele refused to deny his Christian religious beliefs due to his new position as traditional ruler, his fame and wealth (FOLARIN 2017). Evidently, Qba Akinyele did not succumb to the pressures of the traditional demands in the ritual performance before his ascension to the throne of Olubadan. The Olubadan is the royal stool and the traditional title of the Qba of Ibadan-land in southwestern Nigeria. The city was founded in the sixteenth century, but the present Yoruba people took control of the town in 1820 (OLATAYO 2014). Thus, in the 1850s, the Ibadan people established their unique succession principle, which differs significantly from other traditional Yoruba rulers, as it takes several years to groom an Olubadan for the stool through a multi-stage chieftaincy promotion process. He was probably the first educated Christian Qba to profess his religious convictions publicly and refuse to wear his traditional crown due to his religious beliefs. The available records show that Qba Akinyele was ordained on July 15, 1946, and later became the first President of the Christ Apostolic Church (ADEMAKINWA 1971).



Plate 3: Oba Isaac Babalola Akinyele as Pastor and Olubadan of Ibadan

Source: CAC Headquarters General Secretariat's Archive, 2021

Recently, one of the new developments that Christian Obas have incorporated into the traditional Obaship institution in Yorubaland is the public proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, as their religious faith doctrine demands. This is done by seeking new converts to their religious fold. Christian royal fathers are accustomed to relinquishing their traditional thrones in the palace, despite the sacredness attached to their position, to minister the gospel in public crusades and revival programs. Moreover, born-again Obas were observed of leaving the palace's comfort to evangelize around the town and sometimes outside the city. The emergence of revivalism as a religious movement among traditional rulers has introduced significant changes to the Obaship institution within the cultural milieu (ADEYEMI 2003). This, however, has led the Oba to hold dual identities as both Priest and monarch. The involvement of traditional rulers in practical street evangelism and religious activities has been seen as a veritable means of creating a sense of security and self-survival tactics through a series of ceaseless ritual

practices associated with the traditional throne they occupy. Admittedly, Qbas that flaunt their religious activities are perceived to be seeking divine security from the Judeo-Christian God, who is assured to be all-loving, caring, graceful, and merciful and has maximum power to protect in times of danger and calamity.



Plate 4: Yoruba Oba during the Crusade

Source: Fieldwork, October 2020

The born-again Qbas are religiously rigid in terms of their belief and convictions with the Pentecostal belief, which sees the relationship between their Christian beliefs and relationship with Indigenous traditions as syncretic and sinful (OGUNGBILE and AWONIYI 2015). The Qbas' Pentecostal belief is a form of faith that attaches divine importance to holiness as a means of righteous living and the regeneration of the soul from a sinful world, achieved through the experience of being born again (OLATAYO 2024). The emphasis on their preaching and other religious activities is majorly focused on fervent prayers, holy living, divine healing from sickness and infirmities, casting out of demonic spirits, manifestations of Holy Spirit power by speaking in tongues, conducting deliverance service and preaching of the words of God to the individuals and congregation (OLANIPEKUN&OLATAYO 2024). Of course, to other Christians, who shared similar religious practices of the born-again and Pentecostal experience of the Christian Qbas? The religious behaviour of the born-again monarchs is the right decision in the right direction. Any Qbas who stand for the Christian faith must not pollute themselves with idolatry. The emphasis in their preaching and other religious activities is primarily on fervent prayer, holy living, divine healing from sickness and infirmities, casting out demonic spirits, manifestations of the Holy Spirit's power through speaking in tongues, conducting deliverance services, and preaching the words of God to individuals and the congregation (ADEYEMI 2024). Of course, to other Christians who shared similar religious practices, such as the born-again and Pentecostal experiences of the Christian Qbas? The religious behaviour of the born-again monarchs is the right decision in the right direction. Any Oba who stands for the Christian faith must not pollute themselves with idolatry.



Plate 5: Yoruba Oba as the keyboardist in the Church
Source: Fieldwork, January 2020.

Oba Meshach Oyewole is a traditional ruler, keyboardist, singer, instrumentalist, and chorister. He claims that his best worship and service to God is by rendering solemn music to praise God, 'King of the kings'. According to Oba Oyewole, one of his favorite times is when he plays music to glorify God. He claims that God usually inspires him to compose the music in a dream, and he would write it down and later teach the choir the song. Furthermore, the religious activities of traditional rulers have significantly contributed to the peaceful atmosphere of their communities while also consolidating the steady growth and development of Christianity in Yorubaland. This, however, can be described as a way of coalescing the task of nation-building at grassroots communities, both on the symbolic level and in real-life situations. This is perceived as the depth of the Christian Obas' involvement in the religious activities as the traditional rulers in their localities. Oba Jonathan Oyeleye, Akinpelu, explained one of his ordeals with his decision to serve his God. He said he was accustomed to spearheading a yearly revival programme, which had hitherto evolved into a movement to revive the town's lost glory and deliver the city from the grip of the demons. The yearly revival programme is always tagged "Ola for Christ" (OYELEYE 2017). For the revival programme, an Evangelist is invited to preach and pray for the town and its people. Oba Oyeleye further noted that the revival usually started in the Church and ended in front of his palace. Moreover, some Yoruba palaces are recognised as sacred places with divine spaces where several deities and ancestral spirits are believed to reside. It is a place where vestiges of historical artefacts and Indigenous valuables are preserved as relics of history for the prosperity and benefit of future generations (BENARD 2015).

Apart from being the headquarters of traditional authority, in most cases, it is the final court of arbitration in conventional society, where justice and equity are dispensed. Yoruba palaces are more than mere symbolic residences of the

monarch; they are also places where natural things (both spiritual and physical artefacts) are conserved for historical purposes. Before the advent of Qba Meshach Oyewole is a singer, musical instrumentalist, and chorister who claims his best worship and service to God is by rendering solemn music to praise the 'King of the kings'. He claims that God usually inspires him to compose the music in a dream, and he would write it down and later teach the choir the song. Furthermore, the religious activities of traditional rulers have significantly contributed to the peaceful atmosphere of their communities while also consolidating the steady growth and development of Christianity in Yorubaland. This, however, can be described as a way of coalescing the task of nation-building at grassroots communities, both on the symbolic level and in real-life situations. This is perceived as the depth of the Christian Qbas' involvement in the religious activities as the traditional rulers in their localities. Qba Jonathan, Oyeleye explained one of his ordeals with his decision to serve his God. He said he was accustomed to spearheading a yearly revival programme, which had hitherto evolved into a movement to revive the town's lost glory and deliver the city from the grip of the demons. The yearly revival programme is always tagged "Qla for Christ" (OYELEYE 2017). For the revival programme, an Evangelist is invited to preach and pray for the town and its people. He noted that the revival usually started in the Church and ended in front of his palace.

Moreover, some Yoruba palaces are recognised as sacred places with divine spaces where several deities and ancestral spirits are believed to reside. It is a place where vestiges of historical artefacts and Indigenous valuables are preserved as relics of history for the prosperity and benefit of future generations. Apart from being the headquarters of traditional authority, in most cases, it is the final court of arbitration in conventional society, where justice and equity are dispensed. Yoruba palaces are more than mere symbolic residences of the monarch; they are also places where natural things (both spiritual and physical artefacts) are conserved for historical purposes. Before the advent of colonialism, Western education, and its attendant civilisations, the Yoruba palaces were regarded as a local museum where relics of historical artefacts were kept and a mausoleum where the remains of past monarchs in the community were interred (ADEDEJI 2003). This implies that the traditional ruler, whose remains were not buried in the palace, the lineage of such a conventional ruler might not continue as the heir to the throne of Qbaship in such a town or community. This is called 'Orírun' or 'Ojú-orí' in the Yoruba language meaning the source or cradle. Thus, owing to the growing influence of Christianity in Yoruba communities in modern times, palaces in Yorubaland are gradually losing their sacredness and becoming just like other places in the community. In some communities in Yorubaland, their traditional rulers avowed to be a born-again Christian, most of the sacred places in the palace have been destroyed and converted to the Church or Fellowship Centre (ADEDEJI 2003). As earlier said, some of the Christian Qbas are educated elites who perhaps are graduates and professionals in various careers. Providing qualitative and affordable education for their subjects remains one of their primary goals in their communities. It is, therefore, not strange to see some of the Yoruba Qbas who established private schools in their localities. This is because they wanted to assist the government in providing good education for their people. However, some of the born-again monarchs establish faith-based schools, with the

goal of training children in both academic skills and good moral values. However, the patronage is not restricted to any particular religious group. Still, it is relatively open to all prospective children in their locality who desire a better education beyond what a government

Public school can offer.

Conclusion

This paper has been interrogating the Yoruba Ọbashi institution and the religious paradigms of the born-again Ọbas in Yorubaland. The salient features of the Christian-born-again Ọbas, who tend to promote their new faith in their communities at the expense of the Indigenous norms and customs typically associated with the traditional values of the Ọbashi institution in Yorubaland, are extensively discussed. The observed traditional rulers are educated elites with economic power and material resources to take care of their people. In the true sense, the born-again phenomenon is a case of apparent 'culture clash'. The born-again experience of Ọba has a profound effect and implications for traditional institutions in many ways. As earlier mentioned, it is argued that the primordality of any traditional community is instrumental to its Indigenous structure and organisation. This is rehearsed in community rituals. This paper argues that Yoruba Ọbas came to the traditional throne of Ọbashi through the instrumentality of the Ifá oracle. Second, the Ọbashi institution is reinforced by the voices of the ancestors and divinities, which claim to have established the community. Thus, the Ọba is the representative of the collective identity of his people and community, as well as its primordial mythic narrative and ritual practices (BENARD 2015; OLOMU 2023). Therefore, claiming to be born-again under the auspices of the Christian faith is an aberration from the cultural traditions and community norms. Having sustained these arguments in the paper, it is concluded that there is a departure from the traditional ritual practices associated with the Yoruba Ọbashi institution to a new religious movement promoted by Christian-born-again Ọbas.

Declaration

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