

# THINKING ZONAL

## A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF YORUBALAND A PRESENTATION TO YORUBA LEADERS AND STAKEHOLDERS

By

EGBE OMO YORUBA NORTH AMERICA

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### Homage

Ajuba Olodumare, Ajuba Akoda, Ajuba Aseda, Ajuba Olojo oni. A ki awon Oba wa. A ki awon Gominaa wa. A si ki gbogbo awon agbagba ilee wa. Agba koni tan ni ile wa. Inu wa dun pupo pupo lati rin, irin ajo yi wa lati wa jiroro pelu eyin Baba, Iya ati eyin asiwaju ilee wa. Oluwa to fi yin si ipo ola, ipo agba naa, ko ni gba ogbon ati oye ti e fin se eto ilu naa lowo yin o. Ase.

### Preamble

Egbe Omo Yoruba North America is a non-partisan, non-sectarian association of Yoruba sons and daughters who are mindful of their position in history as ambassadors of Nigeria in general and Yorubaland in particular in North America. The events of June and July 1993 and 1994 were too painful for the patriotic sense of the founders of the association and this was what led to the coming together of the Yoruba in North America in 1995 to struggle against military dictatorship of the period. The association collaborated with other Nigerian organizations to form the World Congress of Free Nigerians which served as one of the umbrella agencies for the resistance to military rule.

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, Egbe Omo Yoruba has engaged Nigerian leaders in general and leaders of Yorubaland in particular in civil discussions concerning the requirements of democracy, human rights and economic development in order for our people who have suffered so much abuse and neglect during the various past political administrations, especially during the military rule, to reap for once, some of the proverbial dividends of democracy.

Without a doubt, we have very high expectation of our leaders to improve the socio-economic development of our people. We, as a people believe in excellence and expect our leader to guide us in that direction. We look at the example of some countries in Asia, with whom we started the journey of political independence in the late 50's and 60's, and we feel a sense of betrayal. These other nations have made great strides in socio-economic and political development that have catapulted them into the league of developed nations. We believe that we can do better with the resources that the Almighty has endowed us.

There is no doubt that leadership is a serious challenge, and we know that to whom much is given much is expected. We are not out to blame any of our leaders, because we believe that a genuine leader would desire to leave a trail of success behind. At the same time, we believe that we have a responsibility, bestowed on us by our special placement at this time by virtue of where we call our second homes, to put our well-thought ideas before our leaders with the conviction that we are all in pursuit of a common goal of uplifting our people and our land.

### Appreciating the task of governance

"Ibi akinkanju, laa ba omo Akin..." We would like to congratulate all our state governors, the legislatures, the judiciary, and the traditional rulers for their commitment to the development of our fatherland. We appreciate the enormity of the tasks of governing Yorubaland. Our people are naturally difficult to lead. This is not a new thing. We go back to our history and we see numerous instances of conflicts between the ruler and the ruled in several cases leading to the dethronement, and worse, demise of the ruler. This is not to be regretted. It is what makes us a unique people. Indeed our system of traditional politics has been suggested to be governed by

the principle of constitutional monarchy which is democratic in form and substance. Our ancestors devised a means of curtailing the power of the ruler so as to give the people enough room for freedom of thought and action. This is the tradition that we have carried on and any of our contemporary leaders must appreciate this element of our tradition. It is a carry-over from our past. But it provides our contemporary leaders with an opportunity. They must learn to carry the people with them in whatever they do. Our people do not like to be dictated to. That is why we are always the leaders in protesting against any form of dictatorship, whether internal or external.

### **The task of promoting people's welfare**

Once we all agree on the foregoing premise of governance to be in accordance with the tradition of freedom and rule of law that is entrenched in Yoruba heritage, the next question is how our leaders can win the hearts of our people through the enhancement of the peoples' welfare. We also owe this aspect of our expectation to tradition. The saying of our people that "*agba ti o lajeku ni o ru gba e doko*" (an elder who does not leave a remnant of food for the young will carry his own load to the farm), is extendable to the pact between the ruler and the ruled. If a ruler promotes the welfare of the people through projects that are beneficial to their lives and the lives of their children, such a ruler will write his or her name in the hearts and minds of the people. The people will love him or her and when our people fall in love with a leader, it is difficult to find fault easily with such a leader. We have seen it many times in our history. The Oyo Yoruba continue to sing the praise of Alafin Abiodun while they condemn the reign of Alafin Aole: *Layee Abiodun laa fi gba won wo; layee Aole laa daadi ka le.*

The question then is how can a government affect the welfare of Yoruba people effectively? We are aware of the many good things that the present governments of Yorubaland plan to do in their separate states. And we know that they are all geared toward the welfare of their various peoples. While we want to continue to encourage this and more, we want to suggest another approach which we think would make the collective efforts of the present governments more effective throughout the Yorubaland. It is not a coincidence that the whole of Yorubaland is politically categorized as the southwest zone. We do not mind this geographical nomenclature, though we would prefer our cultural nomenclature as Yoruba or Oduduwa region. But that is just a matter of preference. It is not a coincidence because we have a history of being one people, one culture, and one language by virtue of our common ancestry. As a result of this cultural identity, we also must have a unity of purpose, a common goal as to where we want to be as a people. This is a task that cannot be performed just by focusing attention on each state by each governor.

We do not want to be misunderstood. Every governor is expected to have a mandate from the people of his state, and therefore must promote the development and welfare of his state and his people. However the mark of leadership is the ability to transcend the limitations artificially imposed by political or constitutional expediency in a federal ethos to do the right thing provided it is not illegal. A common approach to the development of Yorubaland as an entity by the collective agreement of all the state governors and assemblies in Yorubaland is long overdue. It is a task that our current governments must undertake to leave their individual and collective footprints on the sand of time.

In view of the foregoing, Egbe Omo Yoruba calls on all state governors, state assemblies and traditional rulers in Yorubaland to come together as one people, the way the Hausa-Fulani of Nigeria do and develop ideas for a common approach to the development of Yorubaland in the areas of language and culture, economy, and security.

## **Language and culture**

It appears that one great asset that we have, that binds us together as a people, is our Yoruba language and culture. We cannot wish these away without losing our identity and sense of being. No cultural group anywhere in the world has made respectable progress by or after losing its identity. We are Nigerians by birth and citizenship, but Yoruba by culture and tradition. Notwithstanding, we do cherish our citizenship and are proud of it. Yet we do know or at least ought to know that our culture is inseparable from our being. We can be both Yoruba and Nigerian. We can be proud of our language and still remain loyal Nigerians. It is regrettable however that Yoruba language is currently dying slowly because of the attitude of our people, and in some cases, our governments.

It is common knowledge that today, many middle class families in Yorubaland do not encourage their children to speak Yoruba language in the home. This is under the illusion that they cannot be good in English if they speak Yoruba in the house. It is an absurd proposition without basis in theory or practice. Soyinka is Yoruba and Achebe is Igbo and both of them have accomplished in their writings much more than most native speakers of English. They both grew up speaking their mother tongue at home, in church, and among their peers. To aggravate the situation, the national policy on education recommends only the first three years of schooling in the mother tongue. If Yoruba language is going to survive, the effort must be at the level of the school system and this puts the responsibility at the doorstep of our state administrations which must cooperate with their zonal counterparts with a common resolve to be matched with adequate resources. We propose a Zonal Yoruba Language Commission to be inaugurated and funded by all the state governments in Yorubaland. We also recommend that Yoruba Language be adopted by all Legislative bodies in Yorubaland.

This commission should be tasked with the responsibility of promoting Yoruba language in all its aspects beginning at the primary school level and beyond, and including the training of Yoruba language teachers in tertiary institutions.

## **The Economy**

We appreciate the efforts of each state government in the development of their various states, including the generation of revenue internally. It is regrettable however that the efforts, genuine as they are, have not yielded the significant results that they deserve. We believe that this is due to the economic principle known as economy of scale. We recall that the success of the economy of Yorubaland in the fifties and sixties had to do with the land area that was Western region at that time. On the basis of its length and breadth, the government was able to plan and execute a massive economic development program, the result of which we still revere today.

This is why we believe that even while our present state structure is constitutionally mandated, it is still strategically important to think zonal for the purpose of our economic development. If the six states of the Yoruba zone develop a common proposal for a particular industrial project, it has the probability of receiving a nod from foreign investors much quicker than if it were just one state. The question of location should not be a problem. It has to be determined by economic and political considerations. And since we are not thinking of just one industry, each state would benefit from the location of at least one industry on the basis of such collaboration on the part of all the states of Yorubaland.

Consider the potential for developing agro-based industries in Yorubaland. Each state has a strategic advantage in certain areas: oil palm, cassava, cocoa, cattle, kolanut, etc. each of which can be the basis of an elaborate and successful industrial conglomerate and potential foreign exchange earners. If we think zonal, there is no limit to the economic and cultural advantages that Yorubaland is going to achieve. And of course, as in the past, Yoruba people are not going to forget the leaders that put them on the path of prosperity once again.

## **Road Reconstruction and Development**

What is true of the economy in general is true of the development of our roads in particular. Many of our inter-state highways are federal-controlled, and are supposed to be the responsibility of the federal government. But we know that they are too many for the federal government to bear. What could be a politically responsible move is to initiate a restructuring program that could be bought into by other states and zones. Such a project would require the federal government to cede responsibility for some major inter-state highways to the zones that those highways traverse. Thus for instance, the Lagos-Ibadan expressway would be ceded to the Southwest zone. However, there would also have to be the financial provision as a separate budget item for such projects from the federal government to the various zones.

We are aware that zones are not now recognized for budgetary allocation. However, there are precedents. There are zonal development commissions such as the Niger Delta Development Commission which has its own budgetary allocation. There could be a Highway Development Commission for each zone that is funded centrally. Our Yoruba zone must initiate this proposal because we have the most to gain from it. Our people are dying unnecessary deaths along the various corridors of death that we call highways. Similar efforts can be made in respect of water transportation. Tons of goods and millions of people in Ondo, Ogun, and Lagos states can be moved along the coast by water transportation systems. Again a leadership that rises up to the cries of the people and does what promotes their well-being will live in their hearts.

## **Security**

The final area of importance is security. This is especially important for our membership for obvious reasons. We listen to the clarion call of our leaders for those of us abroad to come back home, or to invest at home. We love our homeland. We miss our people. And we know that "*ile laboo isimi oko*". But you cannot blame us for being on the side of caution. We read our papers. We watch the NTA and AIT on a daily basis. And we read horrific stories of armed robbers on the loose, of police overpowered by bandits, or assassination gangs prowling the streets of our cities. None of us wants to be part of a terrible statistic. And if we are so fearful of the situation, you can imagine what might be going on in the minds of prospective foreign investors that we are trying to lure to our land. This is why for many of our people, security is a first condition of prosperity.

Even in this matter of security, we must think zonally. There are many reasons for this. If a state develops an effective security system that makes the state unattractive to criminals, they can easily move to an adjoining state. We know that this has happened in the past. Therefore a holistic approach that treats Yorubaland as a center of security system is warranted. Second, the resources that are needed for an effective security system must be harnessed centrally through an effective collaboration of all the states in the zone.

Therefore, we also see the need for a Zonal Security Commission for Yorubaland. This commission will have the mandate to develop a comprehensive security system, including highway patrol, neighborhood patrol, and residential security systems. The commission does not have to be the provider of security. But it has to develop a system that would be used by providers who could be private investors or a combination of public-private initiatives. We have made a proposal for the introduction of state and community police in the past. However, we are willing to have the Zonal Security Commission come up with a workable and effective security system for Yorubaland. What is crucial is that our land and our people need security and it would take a zonal approach to provide an adequate security for them.

## **Financing**

We have developed the foregoing proposals not unmindful of the need for resources. While a number of them would require a financial restructuring of the federal system, which would cede responsibility in some areas, e.g. highways, to the zone, there is need for thinking about where the funds for other items would come from. Like any good thing, we are aware of the need for sacrifice. These are proposals that would put Yorubaland back on the front seat of development and make it once again the pace setter for progress. It would require thoughtfulness and determination on the part of leaders. But we believe that whoever puts the welfare of the people above self interest and politics would have his or her name written in platinum for ever.

To solve the problem of resources needed for these proposals, Yoruba zone cannot depend wholly on the federal government, especially since there is no budgetary recognition of zones in the constitution.

## **Recommendation**

Therefore we make the following proposals:

- **Regional Lottery:** In the good old days of Western Region, Western Nigeria Lottery was developed to fund the development programs of the region, including education. In many industrial countries today, including the US, lotteries are established as funding sources for education and other welfare programs. But such lotteries are not limited to one state. That would not be economically efficient. They are usually multi-state programs and this is their attraction to many clients. The current jackpot for Powerball, a multi-state program is \$275 million. The various states are going to make a huge amount of money from this. Yorubaland should have a zonal lottery.
- **State subvention:** There should be an equal quarterly subvention from each state to the zonal pool for the implementation of specific programs
- **State mineral resources subvention:** 5% of revenue from mineral resources of each state should be allocated to the zonal pool for the implementation of specific projects.
- **State VAT subvention:** Since the consumption of goods and services by Yoruba people cuts across states, 5% of VAT and Sales Tax Revenue from each state should be allocated to the zonal pool on a quarterly basis for the implementation of specific projects.
- **Vehicle Registration Surcharge:** If a one hundred (N100) surcharge is added to the fees paid to register the over five (5) million vehicles in the Yoruba zone annually, N5 billion would be generated for the maintenance of major arterials all over the region. Imagine the benefits of having such a fund in addition to whatever is received from the federal for roadway improvement.
- We encourage our leaders to consider reviving Agricultural Cooperative as we had it with the Western Region

In presenting the forgoing, we remind all, that we have Yoruba sons and daughters all over North America and Europe who are leading such solutions and are ready to come back home and join in this endeavor. The Egbe Omo Yoruba, North America does not say we have all the answers, but we are putting this blueprint on the table as a beginning of the renewal of the progressive spirit in Yorubaland. We urge all leaders of our people not just our political leaders, to think holistically and zonal. It is a proven formula that worked for us before.

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National President