



Whose turn is it to produce THE OBONG OF CALABAR?

Position of
EFIK EBURUTU CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY
(EECA)

Whose turn is it to produce THE OBONG OF CALABAR?

PAPER OF THE EFIK EBURUTU CONSULTATIVE ASSEMBLY (EECA)

The selection and installation of the Obong of Calabar has almost always been highly contentious; and this is on account of the failure of the persons concerned, to work out and agree a long lasting scheme for that purpose.

After the initial unified kingship of the Efik at Creek Town, some five hundred years ago, new communities were created and each had its own kingship. Hope Waddel described the rulers here as Republican Kings. At Calabar however, the King of Duke Town often forced his reign on the other principalities of Henshaw Town, Cobham Town and Old Town.

This was made possible by their monopolisation of trade with European Supercargoes (which made them very rich) and also by the military support of British colonialists. The 1874-76 war between Duke Town and Henshaw Town resulted from a resolute attempt by the people of Henshaw Town to free themselves from the overreaching control of Duke Town kings, and to establish their own independent kingship.

Similar exertions by Obutong (Old Town) led to the bombardment of that principality twice by the British, involving heavy losses in human lives and property.

THE 1902 PROCLAMATION

The first effort at unifying the kingship was the gathering in Calabar, in

December 1902, of all Efik Royal Houses, led by the heads of their Principalities (whose Republican Kingship ended with the conference). For instance there were Kings James Egbo Bassey for Cobham Town (including James Town), Efiom Otu Ekong for Obutong and Eyo Etim Ntuk for Ikot Offiong.

The conference reduced the kingships to two (with the statutory backing of the Colonial Government in NCR No. 4 of 1902), one for Old Calabar and one for Creek Town. The composition of each kingship is stated thus in that law:

In this rule, Old Calabar means Duke Town, which includes Archibong Town, Cobham Town (which includes James Town), Henshaw Town, Eyamba Town, Old Town and their dependencies; and Creek Town means Creek Town, Ikoneto, Ibonda, Ikoroffiong, Mbiabo, Adiabo and their dependencies.

By setting out the principalities that had a right to occupy the Throne of the Efik, the 1902 proclamation implied a rotation. Even though (as we see in the Hart Commission of Enquiry into the Obongship of Calabar in 1964) each group used the Proclamation to affirm its bona fides, the principle of rotation was generally observed in the breach.

In Old Calabar the incumbent Obong in 1902 was Adam E. Adam of Duke Town. When he died in 1906, it was expected that the Throne would move to another Principality, but it didn't go. He was succeeded by Ekpo Eyo Asibong, also of Duke Town, who died after only two years and was succeeded by Edem Effefiong, again of Duke Town. Edem Effefiong assumed the Throne in 1908. He was dethroned by the British Colonial

administration in 1927, but consistent with our tradition, no other Obong was installed until he died.

Even though his demise took place in 1940, fierce and brutal internal wranglings prevented the Efik from enthroning a replacement till 1950. A lot of the struggle was about forcing Duke Town to let go, and **Esop Iboku**, established by the Efik Royal Houses in 1948 to regulate the kingship affirmed the right of other Principalities to take turns, but when the next Obong was installed in 1950, he was again from Duke Town! Ededem Archibong V was indeed the first Obong to reign over both Creek Town and Calabar (as agreed in the **Esop Iboku**), and he was from Duke Town.

Attempt to dethrone him led to his death in 1962 and the usual struggle ensued, this time, exceedingly ferocious and virulent; aimed mainly at forcing a rotation.

Government set up the Hart Commission in 1964 to help resolve matters, but there was such frustration with the Duke Town monopoly that the Atai group of the Efik went there to denounce the entire Effiom Ekpo stock, to which Duke Town belongs, as non-Efik. Hart reports in paragraph 381:

The people of Duke Town...were not original Iboku... because they descended from Ekpo Ibanga Nkanta who was an Ibibio man. Ekpo Ibanga Nkanta, according to his view, was so friendly with the Efiks that in the war that occurred between them and the people of Uruan, he fought on the side of the strangers and left with them to Ikpa Ene, when the Ibibios succeeded in repulsing them from Uruan

At the end of proceedings however, the commission recommended Edem E. E. Adam (Edem Ekpenyong Tete) for certification as Obong of

Calabar, and the Throne remained at Duke Town!

It did not leave Duke Town till 1970, three good years after the death of Edem Ekpenyong Tete, and this was in the circumstance of a bone-crushing crisis.

THE 1970 ACCORD

There has been too much talk of the 1970 Accord, agreed by 'mme' Etubom of 20 Efik Houses in an endeavour to regulate succession to the Throne. Some insist that an Obong can be selected only in accordance with its provisions. They present it as an article of faith and even threaten to break up the kingship if it is breached.

But, what really is this Accord? Its one important canon is the provision for the occupancy of the Throne to rotate equally between "Western Calabar" and "Calabar Urban".

The Accord helped to confirm the selection and crowning of Edidem David Henshaw (of Henshaw Town) as Obong of Calabar; and thereafter assisted the following into position, alternating between "Western" and "Urban" Calabar:

1. Essien Ekpe Oku (Western)
2. Eyo Ephraim Adam (Central)
3. Otu Ekpenyong Effa (Western)
4. Boco Ene Mkpang Cobham (Central)

Cobham died in 1999, after which the arrangement changed. Nta Elijah Henshaw (Effiom Ekpo) assumed the Throne, following a denunciation of the Accord by the Effiom Ekpo Group. Henshaw's ascension marked the end of the Accord, just as other succession schemes had ended.

Now, to the legal and pragmatic issues involved. First of all the 1970 Accord never enjoyed any legal backing.

The 1902 proclamation was itself a statute, cited as **Native Council Rules No. 4 of 1902**. It was an administrative act of the Native Council of Old Calabar, sometimes called the **High Court of the Native Council of Old Calabar**.

Similarly, the decision of **Esop Iboku** to merge the Thrones of Creek Town and Old Calabar into one **Obong of Calabar** was backed by Eastern Nigerian Legal Notice, No. 14 of 1959. The 1970 Accord had no such footing, and could not have had. Whereas the administrative units of **Western Calabar District** and **Calabar Urban District** were abolished in June 1970, the Accord, which was put together in December 1970 ignored the fact that those units of administration had ceased to exist. In that strictly legal sense, therefore, the Accord was stillborn.

From a pragmatic point of view, Western Calabar had become Odukpani Local Government Area, whereas the other side had divided into four. It is difficult to see why one Local Government Area (which, by the way, does not include the Efik clans of Eniong, Ito, Idere, Ukwu and Eki, in the same Odukpani Local Government Area) should continue taking equal turns with the stock of four (Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Akpabuyo and Bakassi).

Following the death of Cobham V, as has been stated, the Effiom Ekpo Group did controvert the Accord before Henshaw VI was selected and crowned.

In a memo dated 18th January, 1999 addressed to the Etubom Traditional Council and signed by Chief Aye E. Henshaw (Chairman) and Lious B. Ephraim (Secretary) Esop Ndito Effiom Ekpo wrote as follows (from paragraph 6):

The Effiom Ekpo Group has taken a decision that the Throne alternate between Effiom Ekpo Group and Atai. This decision was taken within the last two years and ratified by the caucus of the Effiom Ekpo Etuboms, under the Chairmanship of Etubom Adam Ephraim Adam at 93 Goldie Street. In taking this decision we recognised that Western Calabar is no longer in existence..... Creek Town and its environs are now part of Odukpani Local Government Area, and separate from Calabar.

On the 15th of February, 1999, the "caucus of the Effiom Ekpo Etuboms" to which the memo alludes, confirmed the position of the group in another letter to the Etubom Traditional Council. The letter signed by Etubom Okon Ekpenyong John Eyamba and Etubom, Prof. Nta Elijah Henshaw, states in paragraph 5:

The 1970 Accord was drawn up when there was one Calabar Division which included Western Calabar and Calabar Central. Now, Western Calabar has one Local Government Area of Odukpani, and Calabar Central has four Local Government Areas of Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Akpabuyo and Bakassi. Shouldn't we, even on this basis, review the Accord?

Our position is that the Accord has since abolished itself. As a legal document, it was a non-starter; and as a Gentleman's Agreement, was discharged by both the Effiom Ekpo challenge and the ascension of Henshaw VI to the Throne. There is therefore nothing to be gained from pleading that Accord, either to enhance any candidate's chances, or to exclude others from contest.

SO WHOSE TURN IS IT?

The way things are, the choice of a successor to Henshaw VI goes back to the Conclave of 'mme' Etubom, a **conclave of All Efik Royal Houses** whose duty it is to select from amongst them, the candidate most suited to lead the Efik people to meet the challenges of the moment; for instance against discriminating against themselves; for inclusion and against exclusion.

The challenge is to address the urgent matters that have waited for too long, for the attention of the Efik Throne. Expanding, rampaging poverty is making the youth of our community into street urchins and criminals. We want a Throne that will work with the government of Cross River State to execute social improvement schemes that will restore peace and prosperity to our neighbourhoods.

Our communities are at war against each other. For instance, in Odukpani Local Government Area alone, Ikoneto is at war with Okoyong, and Obomitiat is at daggers drawn with Eki; both to very devastating consequences. **The Efik Throne is the turn of the person that will lead peace efforts in these and other areas. In a profound and long-lasting sense.** We no longer have a Throne to waste.

This is not a time to pursue a division between Creek Town and Calabar for, as the Udoh Commission (1972) observed:

The Efiks of the Calabar River are a homogeneous ethnic group. There are no differences between Creek Town and the outlying settlements on the Cross River and Calabar River on the one

hand, and Duke Town, which is commonly called Calabar, on the other, whether culturally, ethnologically, or historically.

WHERE DOES GOVERNMENT COME IN?

In 1976, 1977 and 1978, the Cross River State Government had the chance to legislate on the selection and ascension to the Throne of the Obong of Calabar. On all three occasions, Government declined to legislate. Those processes are according to tradition; and as the Etubom's Council Resolution of April 1972 pointed out, Government only comes in when there is an application for recognition, which the Resolution called "a gesture of mutual cooperation and respect."

Government does not interfere or place its facilities at the disposal of any one group or person, to secure for them, an unfair advantage.

The faction of 'mme' Etubom sitting at the palace at the moment are merely those who supported Edidem Prof. Henshaw in the palace crisis of 2004. They constitute a minority of 'mme' Etubom of Efik Houses. To assist them to exclude the majority (by the use of government facilities of force) is to prolong the crisis. As the Udoh Commission observed:

A second implication of Articles 3 and 4 (of the Proclamation) is that the right to Obongship of every free Efik family was recognised and the Etuboms of these various units became eligible for appointment... I have shown in the study of Efik social and political systems how the right to kingship of the various towns or families is justified in tradition.

The agitation, which led to the enactment of these Rules in 1902, was the last successful blow dealt by other Efik Families on the enforced superiority of the Okoho and Eyo groups of families, a superiority which was largely engineered and supported by European traders."

The hard won right of all Efik Families to the Kingship must not be trifled with. No faction should be shielded to pursue exclusion. Governments are usually on the side of inclusion.

Ours must not be different.



Chief Emmanuel B. Etim
National Secretary
For and on behalf of
Efik Eburutu Consultative Assembly
(EECA)