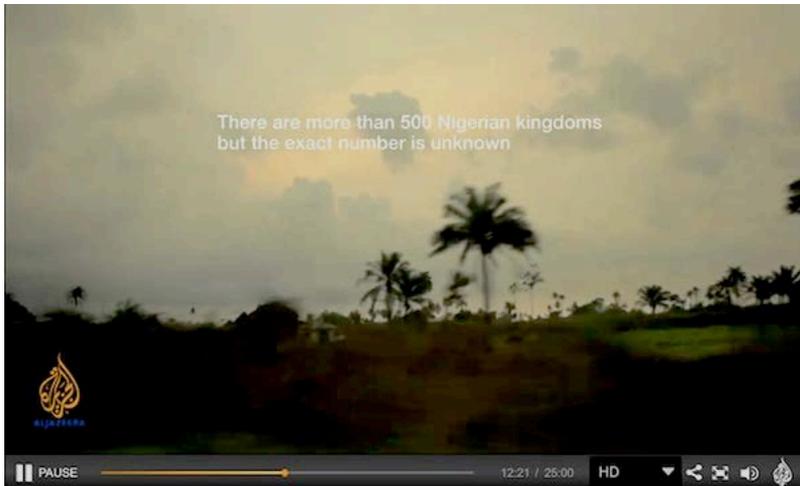


Update: Déin in Abachan drag?

Victor Manfredi, Boston University

The issues reviewed in [this paper](#)¹ receive a less political take in *George Osòdi: Kings of Nigeria*², a TV documentary by Katharina von Schroeder featuring two projects of an acclaimed Lagos photographer: one on [oil pollution in the Delta](#)³, the other on [Ija paramount chiefs](#)⁴. Here's the story angle: "Having captured the oil devastation, he photographs Nigeria's traditional monarchs to offer a positive way forward."² A sequence of overlays works hard to exculpate the chiefs:



(i) "There are more than 500 Nigerian kingdoms but the exact number is unknown" [12:21]



(ii) "The monarchs' authority comes from the loyalty of their people and has no constitutional basis" [12:26]



(iii) "They are funded through inherited property and contributions from the community" [12:30]

1. <http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/AAArevised.pdf>

2. <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/artscap/2013/04/2013421134016645276.html>

3. <http://georgeosodi.photoshelter.com/gallery/OIL-RICH-NIGER-DELTA-2003-2007/G0000ns8MS37FfZU/>

4. <http://georgeosodi.photoshelter.com/gallery/NIGERIAN-MONARCHS/G0000X9MCoZDi.bE/>

Slide (i) might be true depending on the definition of “king”, but slides (ii) and (iii) are false by common knowledge. While technical details have evolved over the past century, Nigerian “native authorities” have been wards of all colonial and successor regimes, by which their titles must be certified (cf. Coleman 1958; Crowder & Ikime 1970; Otite 1975; Vaughan 2000). Circumstantial evidence of this dependency flashes by in the documentary itself:



“Congratulations! Your Royal Majesty on the Grand Occasion of Your Coronation and Presentation of Staff of Office as the First *Ovie* of Umiaghwa-Abraka Kingdom by His Excellency Dr. Emmanuel Eweta Uduaghan, Executive Governor of Delta State on Saturday 7th April 2012. Orosu, Orosu, Orosu, Wo su to” [4:48]

That 9ja governments do indeed pay chiefly salaries and vet paramount titles is easily verified from public record, e.g.

<https://flashpointnews.wordpress.com/2012/05/25/olu-of-warri-is-new-chairman-delta-traditional-rulers-council/>
25 May 2012

[...] Governor Uduaghan advised traditional title holders, especially chiefs and President Generals of communities, not to undermine the powers of traditional rulers and should subject themselves to the authority of the royal fathers explaining that funds approved by government for traditional rulers were solely the right of traditional rulers to expend as they desired. “The President General is a subject of the traditional rulers, as such should not rub shoulders with traditional rulers. It is important to emphasise here that the funds made available to the traditional rulers is strictly for the traditional ruler and not for him to share with anyone else” he said.

<http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/index.php/news-news/2985-al-makura-upgrades-three-stools-to-first-class>
01 August 2012

Governor Umaru Tanko Al-Makura of Nasarawa State has upgraded three more traditional stools to first class status, increasing the number of paramount rulers in the state to 19. [...] NAG’s spokesperson, Jumai James Alheri, told *Daily Trust* yesterday that, “the governor’s action defeats his claims that the state has no resources. It contradicts his claims about the meagreness of our revenue, if he can get up and increase the wage bill by creating more first class stools.”

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/uduaghan-tells-police-to-arrest-fake-monarchs>
23 August 2013

Governor of Delta State, Dr. Emmanuel Uduaghan, Thursday, directed the police to apprehend individuals, who parade themselves as traditional rulers without government recognition. Uduaghan gave the order in Isiokolo, Ethiope East Local Government Area of the state during the presentation of Staff of Office to the Ovie of Agbon clan, HRM Ogurime-Rime, Ukori I. He frowned at situations where individuals ascribe kingship to themselves, especially in Otu-Jeremi and Oghara areas. He said: “Except you are recognised by the state government, you cannot be called a traditional ruler. If you are calling yourself a traditional ruler, you will be arrested and prosecuted.” [...]

An innocent viewer might never suspect that traditional politics have been “encapsulated” (in Professor Otite’s terminology) into the same state apparatus which lives parasitically on polluting Delta oil rents. Oşòdi may well be right to say that “the monarchy structure in the country [...] are closer to the people than the governors [are]”², but it would be more informative to compare that with the closeness of monarchs and governors *to each other*.

Oşòdi makes some poignant remarks about an archival photo of a Nigerdeltan potentate under British rule:

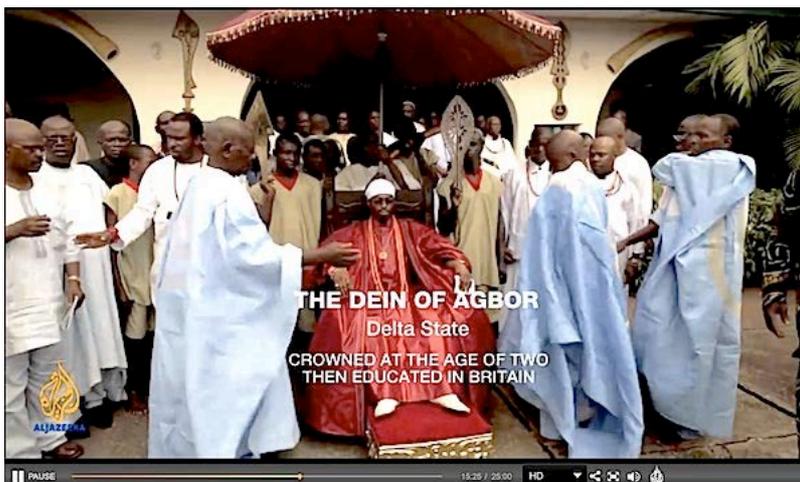


“Of course we were colonised by the British and there are some pictures that were shot by the colonial masters, especially when a kingdom was captured. You could see that the king is not happy. It’s sad because, yeah, it’s not him really wanting to take his own picture, it’s some master wanting to photograph him. It’s a new power that has come to loot and take over his kingdom. Imagine what it is to depose a king. Some kings were almost worshipped, you know, they were so powerful. They were like gods.” [audio starting at 13:46]

In fact (email of G. Oşòdì, 8 May 2013) the central figure is Déin Òbíkà, on or about 7 July 1935 the day of his installation—not his overthrow—by the British occupiers.⁵ Whether his face therefore displays pathos or gravitas, the royal faces are much happier in this [official portrait](#)⁶ of the Delta State Traditional Council flanking His Excellency Governor Dr. Uduaghan. Why are these beaded men smiling? Have their monthly stipends just been paid?⁷



The Al Jazeera special also confirms in passing that the current Òbí, HRH Déin Kí agbòekúzi—*n.b.* Òbíkà’s grandson—has adopted late General Sani Abacha’s permanent sunglasses as part of official Èzè Ágbò regalia:⁸



Glaring factual disconnect between 9ja’s petro-prebendalism (Joseph 1987) and film’s myth of royal autonomy makes the filmmaker’s description of her own fieldwork unintentionally exact:

“Visiting the Nigerian monarchs felt like moving through a fairy tale.”²

5. A. Ègwabò Ìdúùwè, *History of Greater Ágbò* <http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/Idunwe.History.pdf>, p. 35. Twenty-eight years on, Òbíkà’s facial expression was equally expressionless (Beier 1963 190f., reprinted in <http://people.bu.edu/manfredi/AAArevised.pdf>, p. 127).

6. http://www.governoruduaghan.org/news_fetcher.php?fid=785

7. See also the last line of the news report quoted in the Appendix below.

8. In 2017, designer shades arrived in Èdó regalia as well, extending perhaps the ritual veiling idiom of Oòduàn Yorùbá *ajé onilẹ̀ kẹ̀* (Bertho 1950, Aşiwájú 1976, Abíòdún 2014, 105f.). <http://guardian.ng/news/noa-preaches-peace-in-edo-lauds-benin-monarch-on-adr>



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Appendix: the difference between traditional rulers' smiles, and their frowns

<http://saharareporters.com/news-page/traditional-rulers-disrupt-delta-assembly-anniversary-walk-out-speaker-deputy-gov-others>

Traditional Rulers Disrupt Delta Assembly Anniversary, Walk Out On Speaker, Deputy Gov, Others
 Posted: Jun, 09 2014, 6:06AM
 By Saharareporters, New York

Mr. Peter Onwusanya, the speaker of the Delta State House of Assembly, got what he never bargained for as traditional rulers tongue lashed him for what they called, "Denigration of their titles." The mass walkout by the traditional leaders occurred during the public lecture of the Delta State House of Assembly to mark the 3rd Anniversary of the 5th Assembly in Asaba.

Trouble started shortly when the Speaker came on stage to deliver his speech and addressed the over 50 traditional rulers as "Our Fathers." This immediately provoked and angered the monarchs, there was some grumbling among them, even shouted words at Mr. Peter Onwusanya, and they staged a walk out on him. The state deputy governor, Prof. Amos Utuama, who represented Governor Emmanuel Uduaghan and other top state and federal government functionaries were stunned.

The monarchs' action, which had disrupted the lecture for several minutes, took the speaker by surprise and he appealed to the Deputy Governor to intervene.

The situation, however, took the deputy governor the better part of his energy, and time, to beg the angry traditional rulers who had protested the speaker's remarks to stop leaving through the exit door. They continued on anyway, thereby causing distractions to the affair and embarrassment to the already seated guests. It was an impressive list that included Prof. G. G. Darah, a Guest Speaker at the occasion, and delegates at the ongoing National Conference, as well as, Dr. Ferdinand Agu, the Senior Special Assistant to the President on Research and Documentation, who represented the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, and Senator Anyim Pius Anyim.

One of the traditional rulers, from the south-south zone of the state, spoke with newsmen afterwards, and described the speaker as someone who "lacks respect for constituted authority," adding that, "Though we don't blame him, after all, the position was given him on a platter of gold. But he should learn how to respect elders and accord them their due respect as custom demand."

Reacting to the action of the traditional rulers, an aide to the speaker who pleaded for his name not to be mentioned berated the monarchs adding that "What is wrong in calling them our father, are they not our fathers so what is the big deal there. Would they have embarked on a walk out or lashes at boss if it were to be the governor who addressed them as our father? The funniest thing is that severally I have witnessed the governor addressing them as our father and they dare not cough or is it because at the end the governor gives them envelop[e]s?"