

However, the British were in the process of reinstating the monarchy when the deposed *Oba* Ovonramwen died in exile on 13th January, 1914.<sup>14</sup> Given these developments and the popular demand for the restoration of the monarchy by the people, the British immediately restored the institution that year. In fact, popular opinion in Benin (with the exception of a few chiefs) clamoured for the *Oba's* son, Aiguobasinwin, to succeed his father. This was in accordance with the events of 1906 when Aiguobasinwin led other chiefs in a movement to remove Chief Agho Obaseki and restore *Oba* Ovonramwen.<sup>15</sup> Thus, with Ovonramwen's death, Aiguobasinwin was to Benin chiefs and people, the only logical and traditional successor to his father. Aiguobasinwin did not, however, find it easy to regain his father's throne. The British nearly succeeded in planting Chief Agho Obaseki as the *Oba*.

Before the installation of Prince Aiguobasinwin (the *Edaiken* of Uselu and heir apparent to the throne of Benin) as the *Oba* of Benin, the British administrator, Captain Moor, had to face the challenge of an *Uzama* chief, the *Ero* of Urubi. The British wanted to put into practice the system of 'Indirect Rule' as practised in the Northern part of Nigeria. The only trusted man who could do the administrative work for them was Chief Agho Obaseki. Encouraged by the British and compelled by his own ambition, the *Obaseki* made efforts to become the *Oba* of Benin. According to Pa Oghagbon Aiguedowan, Chief Obaseki carved his front door to look like that of the *Oba*.<sup>16</sup> All other *Uzama Nihiron* (kingmakers) except Chief Izedomwen, the *Ero* of Urubi, agreed to serve under Chief Agho Obaseki if made the *Oba* of Benin. The *Ezomo*, Chief Osarogiagbon, was a relation of Chief Agho Obaseki.<sup>17</sup> This relationship between Chief Agho and the *Ezomo* may have influenced the support the *Obaseki* had from other chiefs.

According to Pa Aiguedowan, the *Ezomo*, in giving support to the *Obaseki*, said he would serve under anybody as long as the British had sanctioned that person as *Oba*. Chief Izedomwen, the *Ero* of Urubi, was said to have vehemently opposed the *Ezomo* and others who supported Chief Agho, the *Obaseki*. Izedomwen told the British officer, Captain Moor, that in the tradition of Benin, it is the same rule that governs the succession to the office of every *Uzama* chief and the *Oba*. As the *Uzama* chieftaincy is hereditary, so also is the *Obaship* in Benin.<sup>17</sup> According to Bradbury, dynastic continuity was the first axiom of Edo political values, and there was almost universal agreement that Aiguobasinwin was the only acceptable candidate<sup>18</sup>. The views of Chief Izedomwen were taken by Captain Moor who instructed Prince Aiguobasinwin to perform all the traditional rites of his father and become the *Oba* of Benin.

It is worth noting that the issue involved in the succession of Prince Aiguobasinwin to the throne of his ancestors highlighted the extent to which the British had influenced the political structure of Benin during the years of interregnum. Traditionally, the *Edaiken* of Uselu succeeded to the throne at the death of an *Oba*. The *Edaiken* of Uselu was (and is still) the official title of the heir apparent to the Benin throne and was bestowed on an incumbent's first son. It was, therefore, surprising that Chief Agho, the *Obaseki* of Benin, who had become a very powerful and influential chief collaborated with the British to oppose the custom of the land. Besides, he was backed by some senior chiefs who, contrary to tradition, connived to get him installed as the *Oba* of Benin, but failed.<sup>19</sup> Those chiefs tried to convince the British officer that the *Obaseki* would be a good *Oba* of Benin, because he had been an integral part of the colonial government. The reason for the support of some of the senior chiefs might not be unconnected with the recognition the British had given to Chief Agho Obaseki for his role in the British conquest of Benin and his continued relevance in the British administration since 1897.

In fact, the *Obaseki* would not have turned down the opportunity of founding a new dynasty. Indeed, James Watt, then Resident of the Benin Area, would certainly have welcomed the accession of the government's most trusted agent had there been any chance of legitimising it. However, it was soon made clear to him that any move to install the *Obaseki* as *Oba* would be