

## Pax Britannica, Security and Akoko Resettlement, 1897–1960

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British-inspired peace (Pax-Britannica) after 1897 terminated the spectre of widespread warfare, brigandage, insecurity and instability that pervaded Yorubaland, southwest Nigeria throughout the nineteenth century. The Akoko of northeast Yorubaland, like other Yoruba sub-groups, experienced their fair share of the impact of British colonial rule that followed the restoration of peace to the Yoruba territory. This paper seeks to explore the transformatory impact of British rule upon Akoko society, with respect to settlement pattern. Using Ikare, Okeagbe, Erusu, Oka, Ipe and Ajowa communities as case studies, data analysis revealed that the era of British administration considerably changed *Akoko* settlement pattern in terms of relocation and resettlement of old communities from hilltops, caves and other hideouts to open places in plains and lowlands, spatial arrangement, type and material make-up of Akoko buildings. The study concludes that peace, security and stability facilitated by Britain, colonial policies and Christian missionary initiatives were the principal factors responsible for fundamental changes in Akoko homesteads, architecture and general social organization. The work adopts the historical, descriptive analytical method.

[British Rule; Peace; Security; Akoko Resettlement; Social Organization]

### Introduction

The disintegration of Old Oyo Empire mainly due to internal decay and pressures from Fulani Jihadists at Ilorin in early 19<sup>th</sup> century triggered protracted warfare among the Yoruba. The intra-Yoruba wars continued unabated until Britain intervened to make peace and impose herself as colonial ruler at the close of the century.<sup>1</sup> The British

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<sup>1</sup> J. ADE-AJAYI, 19<sup>th</sup> Century Wars and Yoruba Ethnicity, in: A. AKINJOGBIN (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793–1893*, Ibadan 1997, pp. 11–13; S. ARIFALO, The Educated Elite in Search for Peace, in: A. AKINJOGBIN (ed.), *War and Peace in Yorubaland 1793–1893*, Ibadan 1997, p. 43.

exploited the chaos in Yorubaland to intervene there under the pretext of establishing peace and order. In fact, Britain needed a favourable socio-political atmosphere to ensure the viability of the Crown Colony government established in Lagos earlier in 1861, and to promote her imports and exports trade, which was her principal motive for intervention. During the mediation process, the British hatched peace treaties with leaders of various Yoruba sub-groups between 1886 and 1893. Some of the clauses which the British tactfully put in the treaties undermined Yoruba sovereignty and gave Britain *de jure* authority over Yorubaland,<sup>2</sup> Akoko inclusive. Seemingly, the British had decided to impose colonial rule over the Akoko, like other Yoruba areas, even before 1900. Apart from the Royal Niger Company (RNC) headquarters already based in Lokoja, two out-stations were created at Ikaram-Akoko and Kabba in 1895 during the last days of Nupe imperialism in Akokoland. The 1884/1885 Berlin Conference proclamation that the RNC should claim on behalf of Britain the custodianship of free navigation of the Niger served as the international diplomatic and political basis upon which the RNC effected the conquest of Akokoland in 1897.<sup>3</sup> Although British penetration and eventual occupation of Akokoland was not totally smooth, the entire Akoko territory had fallen under British rule by 1906.<sup>4</sup> Against this background, this paper seeks to appraise the impact of British colonial administration on Akoko settlement pattern and social organization up to 1960. Based on field and documentary evidence, this study adopts six Akoko communities, namely, Ikare, Okeagbe, Erusu, Oka, Ipe and Ajowa, as case studies.

### **Pax Britannica and Akoko Resettlement**

Settlement pattern in Akokoland underwent considerable change(s) under British rule. Evidence points to a trend whereby Akoko towns and villages relocated from their original abodes (mainly hilltops) to

<sup>2</sup> S. OYEWESO – O. OSHIN, *British Administration and Conquest of Yorubaland*, in: D. OGUNREMI – B. ADEDIRAN (eds.), *Culture and Society in Yorubaland*, Ibadan 1998, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> L. LUGARD, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, London 1965, p. 19.

<sup>4</sup> A. AKINJOGBIN, *Milestones and Concepts in Yoruba History and Culture*, Ibadan 2002, p. 80; F. AMINU – W. KOLAWOLE, *Akokoland: History and Distinguished People*, Ibadan 1997, p. 26.

lowland areas to form new and permanent settlements, though under varying circumstances. To substantiate this claim, it would suffice to elucidate a few examples. Let us begin with Ikare.

### **Ikare**

Prior to 1900, Ikare consisted of fifteen Quarters situated atop mountains. These were Okele, Odo, Ese, Ilepa, Okoja, Odoruwa, Okeruwa, Ode Iyare, Oyinmo, Iku, Okorun, Okegbe, Ishakumi/Eho, Igbade, and Ekan. The adoption of this location and pattern of settlement by ‘early’ Ikare communities, like most other Akoko communities of the time, must have been dictated largely by the dire need and quest for security amidst the atmosphere of pervasive insecurity generated by virulent expansionist wars waged by non-European imperial powers (particularly the Nupe and Ibadan) during the nineteenth century. However, following the restoration of peace in Akokoland by British imperialist agents, and Christian missionaries at the close of the century, the Ikare people were persuaded to relocate from the hills to their present location. In this regard, the legendary Archdeacon Lennon was instrumental in the unification of the separate quarters of Ikare during the 1920s.<sup>5</sup>

### **Okeagbe**

Okeagbe’s case was similar to Ikare’s. Modern Okeagbe emerged between 1924 and 1927 following waves of immigration from the nearby mountain tops to its present location largely due to the efforts of Archdeacon Lennon. But unlike Ikare, Okeagbe emerged as an agglomeration of four distinct and independent villages, namely, Afa, Oge, Ido and Aje. Each of these had its own monarch (who was the Prescribed Authority for his village) and retained its own language and culture.<sup>6</sup> Although the idea of relocating to a central settlement downhill due

<sup>5</sup> M.O. OYEWOLE, *Significant Social Changes in Ikare since the Beginning of the Twentieth Century*, B.A. Long Essay, Ondo State University, Okitipupa 1986, p. 1; V. OKONEDO, *The History of Ikare up to 1990*, B.A. Long Essay, Lagos State University, Ojo 2003, pp. 11–13; J.L. AKEREDOLU, *Introduction of Christianity into Akoko*, Owo 1986, p. 36.

<sup>6</sup> O. FABOYEDE, *History of Okeagbe 1924–1999*, Lagos 2011; C. OHIRI-ANICHE, Language Diversification in the Akoko Area of Western Nigeria, in: R. BLENCH – M. SPRIGGS (eds.), *Archaeology and Language IV: Language, Change and Cultural Transformation*, New York 2013.

to security and economic exigencies predated British rule, it was the latter factor that hastened the development. The British-inspired peace across Akokoland in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century encouraged the people to accept Archdeacon Lennon's advocacy for unification downhill for rapid socio-economic development. However, some other factors influenced Okeagbe indigenes' decision to merge and relocate to their present settlement. For instance, the topography of the new settlement located on a fairly extensive plain and valley surrounded by craggy hills was very attractive. In addition, historical links among the villages and their people such as intermarriages and military alliances against Nupe and Ibadan imperial assaults, also favoured the idea of merger. Nevertheless, greater portions of the population were initially reluctant to vacate their old homesteads for the new settlement. It was the intervention of the colonial administration, which introduced the use of force that eventually compelled this category of people to move to the new site.<sup>7</sup>

#### Erusu

Erusu's case was like that of Okeagbe. Prior to the colonial era, the early settlers consisting of eight communities – Iga, Igbede, Usan, Onongu, Odo-owa, Oowa or Oyi, Amo and Ahan, lived on hilltops, foot of hills and in caves. Onongu was later wiped out due to the incidence of slave raiding that was widespread at the time. The relocation process to the new settlement, Erusu, began around 1917 with a consensual arrangement under which the remaining seven communities agreed to move and settle at *Titi* (Main Road). The road in question is the road from Owo through Oba, Ikare, Erusu, Ikaram, Ajowa, Kabba, finally terminating at Lokoja. The decision to settle along this road must have been motivated by the considerations of improved communication and commerce, which proximity to such a road would offer. To buttress this point, we may note that Erusu's central market came to be known as *Aaja Titi*, that is, Main Road Market. Although details of the circumstances leading to this transformation remain frosty, we do know that by 1923, at the new settlement, the seven communities coalesced into a single kingdom of four quarters under Oba

<sup>7</sup> J. OGUNDANA, Okeagbe, in: G. OGUNTOMISIN (ed.), *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, Ibadan 2003, pp. 68–69; P. OMOLOBA, *Origin and Development of Okeagbe*, B. A. Long Essay, Lagos State University, Ojo 2009, p. 1.

Amuna who took the title of *Osunla* of Erusu.<sup>8</sup> Like Okeagbe, the constituent units of modern Erusu, the Okega, Okesan, Amo, and Aga quarters each retained its peculiar cultural elements such as unique pottery design. While some specialised in *Agbagba* (bowl for frying cassava), others took specialty in *isaan obe* (a pot for soup-making), *Oru* (a pot for herbal preparation or placenta burial), or *agbaisu* (a pot for cooking yam). However, unlike Okeagbe, the constituent quarters of Erusu were neither autonomous nor had separate monarchs. In fact, the Quarter chiefs attended *Oba-in-* Council meetings in the *Osunla's* palace at Okega, headquarters of the new settlement.<sup>9</sup>

### Oka

Oka's permanent settlement(s) under colonial rule did not emerge at once – it spanned phases overtime. Although the Nupe imperialist forces were unable to subjugate Oka, the old Oka settlements were compelled by security and strategic considerations to retain their abodes in the hill sites as a way of forestalling future attacks. The establishment of peace, law and order following the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba civil wars created the incentive to settle in selected locations outside the initial wartime settlements. Additional contributory factors to the relocation downhill were the dearth of space and mud for building, as well as the increasing population.<sup>10</sup> Formation of a stable settlement on the high plains took shape under the reign of *Oba* Orimolade who ascended the throne in 1892. There is need to point out that the immigrations downhill were irregular. This was so mainly because people were inspired to move only after they had secured new space elsewhere, or when the farm soil in their existing settlements had been thoroughly depleted vis-vis the persistent rapid population growth. Moreover, because the effects of these conditions varied from place to place and occurred at different times, people in comparatively more fecund land areas stayed put, while others emigrated in search of greener pasture. To illustrate this point, whereas the inhabitants of Ikaram migrated to their present location in 1949, the Agba people did

<sup>8</sup> B. ADEWUNMI, *The Awayeterugbe of Erusu, 75 years, Ex-Teacher/Soldier/Politician* (Personal Communication), Okega Quarter, Erusu-Akoko [2012–05–14].

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>10</sup> R. UDOH, Transformation of Rural Settlement in British Tropical Africa, in: *Nigerian Geographical Journal*, 9, 1996.

not move until 1960. Aside the extreme attachment of the Agba people to tradition and kinship, the relatively long delay in their resettlement can be explained in terms of the relative fertility of their earliest settlement, its accessibility to the new settlements, a school and a church under a Resident Catechist.<sup>11</sup>

Emigrations from the high plains to the surrounding lowlands were equally irregular. This was so because, just like the earlier emigrations, these latter ones were inspired by diverse circumstances and thus did not take place simultaneously. The varied compelling factors included the advent of cash crop export-based economy, the rapidly increasing population (largely due to modern medical services), and the corresponding increase in the demand for land, both for agricultural and residential purposes. In addition, due to the constraints of road construction because of the rugged terrain, and the resultant poor communication, the less conservative inhabitants commenced migrations to the surrounding lowlands where land was cheap, water abundant and road construction relatively easier. The combination of the above conditions, and perhaps more, accounted for wholesale migrations downhill leading to the establishment of Iwaro in 1937, Aiyepe, 1952 and Oka Junction, 1959/1960.<sup>12</sup> This marked the foundation of protracted political cleavages within Oka kingdom between Oke-Oka (Upland) and Iwaro (Lowland).

### Ipe

Ipe people, like other Akoko people earlier discussed, used to live in caves, hilltops and jungles due to insecurity, prior to British rule. This sense of insecurity had to do largely with the fear of being taken into slavery, particularly by the Nupe and Ibadan forces during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>13</sup> According to evidence, the earliest Ipe community comprised of two groups, North and South, each consisting of several sub-quarters. The Northern group consisted of Uba, Ugbe, Ugbede, Itakpe and Ilegbe collectively known as Ogbabasa, while the south

<sup>11</sup> B. ADELADUN, *The Impact of Relief on Human Activities in Oka District of Western Nigeria*, B. A. Long Essay, University of Ibadan, Ibadan 1967, p. 41.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 43–44.

<sup>13</sup> I. AJIBOYE, 96 years, Farmer (Personal Communication), Ipe-Akoko [2013–04–15]; Oba F. APATA, the *Olupe* of Ipe (Personal Communication), Olupe's Palace, Ipe-Akoko [2013–04–15].

had Okuan, Isinodo, Itolo, Ipasso, and Uwi, jointly called Arewa. It was this initial structure or grouping that metamorphosed into Ipe-Oke (Upland) and Ipe-Odo (Lowland). Each of the sub-quarters under Ipe-Oke and Ipe-Odo had head-chiefs who performed the primary role of providing security of lives and property within their separate jurisdictions. However, the advent of British rule, together with the peace and order it enthroned in Akokoland, soon changed this pattern of settlement. In particular, the new atmosphere of security coupled with the construction of modern roads prompted the people to accept the colonial administration's request for their relocation downhill to the plains and open places to form a permanent settlement. Significantly, this relocation and resettlement exercise gave impetus to the need to create a central political entity out of the separate Ipe groups or sub-groups earlier mentioned. Thus, following the movement of Ipe people to their present site in 1930, Ipe-Oke and Ipe-Odo were fused into a single kingdom under Omoran, former Balogun of Ipe-Oke, with a British warrant to rule as *Oba* and central authority.<sup>14</sup> In their new site, Ipe's settlement and building pattern changed considerably. Unlike in the past, when the people built their huts far apart from one another in the hilltops and other hidden locations, at the new settlement they built their houses in the open, close to one another. In place of huts with thatched roofs, which were highly susceptible to fire outbreaks, the people started building more permanent structures roofed with corrugated iron sheets. Moreover, the modern roads that were constructed to link one Akoko town to the other helped to strengthen inter-community communication and relationship.<sup>15</sup>

### Ajowa

Ajowa's resettlement process under British rule was in tandem with that of Okeagbe. Like Okeagbe, Ajowa emerged as an agglomeration of autonomous villages as part of the post-19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba warfare reconstruction and resettlement of the Akoko area under colonial rule. In 1955, Hon. R. A. Olusa successfully brought together eight towns whose inhabitants used to live in various clusters in the hilltops to

<sup>14</sup> *Ondo State of Nigeria*, Report of the Ondo State Judicial Commission of Enquiry on Chieftaincy Matters Comprising Chieftaincy Declaration, Paramountcy, Prescribed and Consenting Authorities, Part Two, 1999, pp. 15–17; APATA.

<sup>15</sup> AJIBOYE; APATA.

form a single town, downhill called Ajowa.<sup>16</sup> Although sixteen towns initially signified interest in the resettlement amalgamation project, the new settlement eventually comprised Daja, Ojo, Efifa, Ora, Esuku, Oso, Iludotun and Uro. The major factor behind this amalgamation was the strong desire by the colonial administration for easy access to the nooks and crannies of the land since it was more convenient and cheaper to reach one large site than eight scattered communities. However, it needs to be stated that the unification of these communities only materialised after elaborate and extensive negotiations. As a product of these negotiations, all the eight communities unanimously agreed that each town would retain its autonomy and would not be subsumed by the whole or any part of the Ajowa 'federation'. Thus, each town retained its monarchy and cultural identity. From this point onwards, Ajowa was administered by the Ajowa Supreme Council of *Obas* (ASCO), which consists of all the eight kings each of whom serve as chairman on an annual rotational basis. It is to be noted that the foundation of Ajowa that was rooted in mutual consensus gave rise to a culture of cooperation and enthusiasm, especially in terms of joint developmental projects such as the town hall, maternity centre, health centre, central market, and community schools executed during the colonial era.<sup>17</sup> In all, the era of British rule considerably changed Akoko settlement pattern in terms of relocation and resettlement of old communities from hilltops, caves and other hideouts to open places in plains and lowlands, spatial arrangement, type and material make-up of Akoko buildings.

### Conclusion

This paper explored the transformatory impact of British rule upon Akoko society between 1897 and 1960 with particular respect to changes in the settlement pattern, architecture and social organisation of the people during that period. The discourse further under-

<sup>16</sup> Memorandum Submitted by H.R.H. *Oba* M.A. OLANIPEKUN III, the Zaki of Arigidi to Committee for the Review of Chieftaincy Matters bordering on Paramountcy and Consenting Authority, 2004, p. 16; Memorandum submitted by H. R. H. *Oba* T. A. AFIWASAIYE I, the *Olojo* of Ojo Ajowa, to the Deputy Governor of Ondo State on Up-grading of *Obas*.

<sup>17</sup> K. OLUSA, *Our History: The Ajowa Amalgam*, Washington 2007, p. 13; T. A. AGOYI, Language, Invasion and Insecurity: The History of Abesabesi, in: *American Journal of Social Issues*, 3, 2013, pp. 73–75.



scored the age-long nexus between peace, security and stability on the one hand, and societal organization and progress on the other. As the preceding analysis showed, Akoko settlement pattern changed considerably under British rule. Due to peace and order facilitated by the colonial authorities, coupled with other factors, Akoko towns and villages from the 1920s onwards relocated from their pre-colonial abodes, mainly hilltops, caves and other hidden locations, to lowland and open areas where they established new and permanent settlements. Some of the communities relocated downhill largely because of security, strategic and economic exigencies. Several communities moved due to considerations of improved communication, construction of modern roads and commerce. Some relocated because of the need for accessibility to new settlements and social infrastructure such as schools and churches, while some others were compelled to move by coercion from British colonial authorities. Other pull factors included the advent of cash crop export-based economy, rapidly increasing population (mainly because of modern medical services and facilities), and the concomitant surge in the demand for land, both for agricultural and residential purposes. In their new settlements, the spatial arrangement, type and material make-up of Akoko buildings took up a modern outlook. Finally, several towns owing to exigencies of the time, including the dire need for development, decided to amalgamate into a single political entity. Under some such new arrangements, the constituent quarters each retained its peculiar cultural elements, while the constituent units of other new settlements were autonomous under separate monarchs.