

Colonial administration of Ikorodu, 1894 - 1960: Impacts and changes on traditional institution and practices.

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Abstract

Extant literature on Yoruba historiography is replete with studies of colonial administration and its effects on major Yoruba towns and kingdoms such as Oyo, Ibadan, Ife, Ijebu, Ilesha and Lagos. Whereas, other Yoruba kingdoms and towns have not received adequate attention from scholars of history the way the aforementioned towns have. As a matter of fact, there have been a seemingly neglect on coastal Yoruba land in general and Ikorodu community in particular, which has created a vacuum in Yoruba historiography of the coast. This paper, intends to address this neglect by interrogating the changes on the traditional institution and practices of Ikorodu, necessitated first, by the annexation of Ikorodu by the colonial authorities in 1894 and second, by the subsequent introduction of colonial administration in the community up to 1960. The paper is divided into five parts. The first segment introduces the paper. The second part examines the tradition of origin and geography of Ikorodu, while the third section discusses the colonial annexation of the community. The fourth part interrogates the changes necessitated by colonial administrators while the last part concludes the study. The methodology of this research is descriptive and analytical. It relies essentially on colonial documents sourced from the national archive, in-depth interviews and secondary sources such as books and journals.

Keywords: Ikorodu, Colonial Rule, Change, Traditional Practice

Introduction

By about 1850 political and economic transformations had begun to alter the make-up of states and kingdoms in the Nigerian region, to a greater or lesser degree.¹ During this period, colonialism was gradually setting its foot into Nigeria and by the end of the century in 1899, colonialism had established a strong hold on Nigeria. The colonisation of Nigeria took over forty years to complete and was accomplished in a series of British maneuvers emanating from Lagos in the west, which became the base for all colonial operations in Yorubaland, and from the trading states of the Niger delta and Calabar in the east. From Lagos the British made their way inland, slowly bringing Yorubaland under British rule. The first major coup in the hinterland occurred in 1886, when the British intervened to end the arduous Ekitiparapo War between Ibadan and the alliance of Ekiti, Ijesa, Egba, Ijebu, and Ife forces.² Subsequently,

¹ Toyin Falola and Matthew M. Heaton *A History of Nigeria*. (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008) p. 86

² Ibid. p. 88



the British used this intervention and took control of Yoruba land through treaties with certain communities and bombardment of others. For example, the treaty ending the war declared that all signatory combatants would direct future disputes with each other to the British governor in Lagos for resolution. This invariably gave the British major control in the affairs of Yoruba towns. Towns that resisted such control like Ijebu and Oyo, were bombarded. While Ijebu was bombarded in 1892, Oyo was attacked in November 12, 1894, thereby giving the British full control of these kingdoms.

After the British government assumed control, full colonial administration started through indirect rule in Yorubaland and to prevent any united opposition to its authority, the British adopted a divide-and-rule policy, keeping Nigerian groups separate from one another as much as possible. Many changes accompanied British rule: Western education, the English language, and Christianity spread during the period; new forms of money, transportation, and communication were developed; and the Nigerian economy became based on the export of cash crops. As Olaniyan posits, change has always been a permanent feature of human society, and society is the main object of historical study, therefore, history is about change and change is the stuff of history.³ This presupposes the fact that nothing stays forever. Culture evolves, tradition changes and it is the duty of the historian to interrogate these changes in time perspective. This paper interrogates the changes that shaped the traditional landscape in Ikorodu as a result of the colonial annexation and administration of the community and how Ikorodu adapted, and continued these practices.

Traditions of Origin and Geography of Ikorodu

As it is with most Yoruba kingdoms, the origin of Ikorodu is shrouded in controversies as there are various versions on the origin and establishment of the kingdom. However, according to the body of oral tradition in the palace of the Ayangburen of Ikorodu, Ikorodu is said to have been founded by Olusoga, a warrior-hunter, and prominent trader with enormous wealth and followers. Olusoga, left Orile Offin, in Sagamu with his brothers Lasuwon and Sekumade who were also hunters and his followers. While Lasuwon and Sekumade joined the journey as escorts, Olusoga never planned to return. His motive was to go far away from home. This was why he left with his followers including diviners, healers and slaves. On getting to a particular land with Odu plants, Olusoga was said to have exclaimed "Okò Odu re" meaning this is a land of Odu plants. As a result, he ordered his followers to settle and this was how they came to establish their settlement in "Okò Odu" which was later corrupted to Ikorodu.

Ikorodu is a prominent town in Coastal Yorubaland. Coastal Yorubaland is a community of communities, with identifiable local peculiarities and sub – regions. Lying between Latitudes 6° and 6° 30'N and longitude 2° 3' and 6° E, it occupies the 800 – kilometer stretch from Badagry in the west to the eastern extremity of Ilajeland to the east.⁴ The Yoruba coast comprises the southern

³ Olaniyan R. A. *Nigerian Diplomacy: The Burden of History*, (Inaugural Lecture series 102 Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, 1990) P.3

⁴ R.O. Ajetunmobi, "Theories and Concepts in Migration and Settlement Studies: The Case of the Coastal Yoruba," *The Social Sciences*, (2012) pp 7-12

parts of modern Lagos, Ogun and Ondo States, and insofar as it includes non – Yoruba migrants, a large hinterland of speakers of Ijaw, Urhobo, Bini and other languages, and eventually Itsekiri territory in Delta State, it must actually be considered as multi- ethnic.⁵ As part of Coastal Yorubaland, Ikorodu community is situated at a distance of approximately 36km North of Lagos. It is bound on the South by the Lagoon (Ebute) where a light terminal port of Nigerian ports Authority is situated. The northern part of the town shares a common boundary with Ogun State, while the east part has common boundary with Agbowa-a town in Epe Division of Lagos State. Ikorodu is a gateway to the inter-land of Nigeria. It also serves as the western portion of the Ijebu country, a general area locally referred to as Remo. Ikorodu was the southern end of one of the two Ijebu routes that linked Lagos and the hinterland. Ikorodu Community is the main town of Ikorodu Local Government Area of Lagos State. The current Ikorodu Local Government is bounded in the east by Agbowa-Ikosi in Epe Local Government. In the west, it shares border with Kosofe Local Government at Odo-Ogun (Ogun River). To its north is Ogijo in the Shagamu Local Government of Ogun State, while its southern boundary is terminated by the Lagoon. Ikorodu is located at about 30 18' E longitude and 60 22' N latitude. It is situated within the equatorial rain forest belt.⁶

The Annexation and Colonisation of Ikorodu

One of the major events that engendered colonial administration over Yorubaland was European imperial expansion which got to its pinnacle in the nineteenth century. Coupled with the prevailing belligerence conditions in various parts of Yorubaland during the century, British rule penetrated the Yoruba country. The imposition started from Lagos in 1861 and had gradually transcended the entire Yoruba nation by the close of the century. This imperial rule was established in various communities either through treaty-making or military conquest and sometimes both. In the case of Ikorodu, the establishment of colonial rule was concluded through a Deed of Cession of August 4, 1894.⁷ The major reason which necessitated the official colonisation of Ikorodu was due to the strategic location of the town. G. T. Carter, who was appointed Governor and Commander in Chief of the Colony of Lagos on third of February 1891, was convinced about the annexation of Ikorodu but for this to be actualised, Ijebu needed to be conquered. As a result, he ordered an attack on Ijebu in 1892 and claimed it was in the interest of civilisation.⁸

As Boge posits, the official colonisation of what is now Ikorodu Local Government could be said to have taken place in two phases.⁹ One major reason

⁵ Olukoju, A. "Making Sense of the Yoruba Littoral", Texas, *Yoruba Studies Review* (2017) p. 45

⁶ Adegoke, O. S. "Strategic Planning for a Strategically Located Satellite Town: The Case Study of Ikorodu" *Ikorodu Division Resource Development Group* (IDRDG), Lecture Series no. 4,(2003). pp. 7-8.

⁷National Archive Ibadan, Ije Prof. 2 C32/1 p. 8.

⁸ Toyin Falola "The End of Slavery among Yoruba" in Miers, Suzanne; Klein, Martin A(eds). *Slavery and Colonial Rule in Africa*. Studies in slave and post slave societies and cultures. England: Routledge(1999)

⁹ Boge F. I. "An Administrative History of Ikorodu, 1894 – 1960" *African Journals Online* (Ajol) volume 14(2004)

Ikorodu was annexed and colonised was because the town had become a sort of regional place of commerce and a market place for Ijebu Ode, Sagamu, Epe and other places. During this period, Ikorodu served as a meeting point for traders and buyers from all part of Ijebu, Remo and Ibadan. And within a while, the market developed into a periodic market of five days.¹⁰ So, British interest in Ikorodu was clear. By annexing and controlling Ikorodu, Carter would have succeeded in capturing the commercial base of Ijebuland. As a matter of fact, the British wanted to maintain the use of Ikorodu route to get British commerce across to most areas of Ijebuland, Egbaland, Oyoland, and Ibadan districts. This initial effort was hindered by the confusion on who had hegemony over Ikorodu between the Akarigbo and Awujale coupled with the insistence of the Colonial Office in Britain that due consent of the paramount ruler must be secured before the annexation of an area. By and large, the first phase of colonisation was achieved in 1892 when the Akarigbo concurred that some communities around the Ikorodu Lagoon were not under his traditional jurisdiction.¹¹ These communities included Baiyeku, Ijede, Oreta, Ofin-Ile, Ibeshe, and Ebute-Iga which were said to have been peopled by migrants from Lagos in the course of the nineteenth century political instability arising from dynastic controversies in Lagos.¹² Thus, these suburbs had become part of the Lagos Colony in 1892. In June 1892, the *Oloja* of Ikorodu was said to have requested for political assistance from Governor Carter against the imperious posture of the head of Ikorodu army, Balogun Jaiyesimi. This request paved the way for the final stage of annexation. This was because Carter exploited the discord between the *Oloja* and his commander-in-chief to accomplish his ultimate goal.¹³

The second and final stage of annexation took place in 1894. The British-Ijebu war of 1892 cleared any doubt in the minds neighbouring towns about the might of the British constabulary. Influenced by the decisive outcome of the war and persuasions from some his urbanised subjects, the Akarigbo (Oba Oyebajo Torungbuwa) signed a Protectorate Treaty in August 4, 1894.¹⁴ As a result of this treaty, and having secured the consent of the *Oloja*, the Balogun and other Chiefs of Ikorodu, the Governor immediately concluded a Deed of Cession with the Akarigbo on the same date. By this Deed, Ikorodu and some adjoining communities came under British rule. Owing to this cession, Ikorodu henceforth became part of the Lagos Colony territories. These territories were administered in the tradition of a British Crown Colony. The Colony was administered as a separate territorial unit while the other acquired territories in the interior were administered as British protectorates.¹⁵ Thus, a new chapter was opened in the history of Ikorodu, a chapter of colonial administration that affected all spheres of the community including the

¹⁰ Interview with Dr. Suenu Adeyemi Adebawale, 51years, Academic, at his residence on 12/11/2021

¹¹ Babatunde A. Agiri, "Lagos-Ikorodu Relations, 1894-1950" in Ade Adefuye, Babatunde Agiri, and Jide Osuntokun, eds., *History of the People of Lagos State*, Lagos: Lantern Books, (1987) p. 200

¹² Robert S. Smith *The Lagos Consulate 1851-1861*, London: Macmillan, (1978) pp. 14-17.

¹³ Tunde Oduwobi *Ijebu under Colonial Rule, 1892-1960: An Administrative and Political Analysis*, Lagos: First Academic, (2004) pp. 14-16.

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 220-223

¹⁵ Asiwaju, A.I. "The Western Province under Colonial Rule" in Obaro Ikime, ed, *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan: Heinemann, (2006) p. 433

traditional landscape. It is important to state that by the virtue of the Cession Deed of August 4, 1894, all inhabitants of Ikorodu became British subjects. Invariably, this imperial rule was consolidated by the proclamation of November 9, 1894 where the kingdom of Ikorodu was duly integrated into the colony of Lagos. The boundary of the district was described by the Order-in-Council of December 7, 1894. It was re-defined by Order-in-Council of July 31, 1895 and again by Order-in-Council of April 1898. The District then included the portion lying between the meridian of Ojo and River Ibu which do not form part of the Lagos or Epe District. The shape of the District at this time was almost a triangle with its base on the Lagoon.¹⁶

Colonial Rule and Changes in Traditional Practices of Ikorodu

One fundamental change that characterized Ikorodu after the official colonialism was that the traditional political authorities such as the Oloja-in-Council, and the *Osugbo* Judicial Court seized to exercise formal powers. Thus, the Oloja and his chiefs became government agents who functioned strictly as stipendiary administrative officers with very little officially recognized initiatives of their own. During this period, the government functioned through a District Commissioner which was stationed at Sagamu (the headquarters of Remo Administration) and was assisted by a detachment of the colonial police force at Ikorodu. From 1898 however, the Remo Administration was included in Ikorodu District, though actual administration came from Colony of Lagos. In 1901, a Central Native Council was established for the Ikorodu District. The Council included the Balogun, the *Oloja*, and two other chiefs while a Resident Officer superintended over the affairs of the District.¹⁷ The Council functioned in advisory capacity and assisted the government to maintain law and order. This arrangement weakened the power of the *Osugbo*, the traditional governing council. Thus the era of the Ikorodu District Council, 1894 to 1913 was a challenging period for the traditional institutions which invariably affected traditional religious practices. The implication of this was that, traditional religious practices witnessed passive performances because of the new status of the gatekeepers of traditions in Ikorodu. Another change that shaped the traditional landscape was that, as part of the features of colonial rule, the appointments of the *Oloja* and other important chiefs were subjected to the final ratification of the government. This was reinforced through the Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance which was later amended in 1930.¹⁸ Owing to this Ordinance, the power of the *Osugbo* in the final selection of the ruler was whittled down. In January 1919, Akintelu was appointed as the new Balogun of Ikorodu on probation for one year. His work and conduct were satisfactory and he was confirmed in the appointment on January 28, 1920.¹⁹ Moreso, the performances and observation of traditional religious practices during this period were greatly hindered. For example, Akintelu the Balogun

¹⁶National Archive Ibadan, Ije Prof. 2 C32/1 pp. 15-16, Extract from Diary of the District Commissioner at Ikorodu for the Month of May 1898.

¹⁷Babatunde A. Agiri, "Lagos-Ikorodu Relations, 1894-1950" in Ade Adefuye et al, eds., *History of the People of Lagos State*, pp. 202-203.

¹⁸J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (California: University of California Press, 1958) pp. 280-284, www.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/..pdf

¹⁹Boge F. I. "An Administrative History of Ikorodu, 1894 – 1960" *African Journals Online* (Ajol) Volume 14(2004)

appointed by the colonial officials initially carried out his duties in line with the dictates of the colonial authority. This invariably affected the traditional space as religious practices were quietly observed and performed because he was on probation and wanted to please the government. However, after his confirmation in 1920, he observed and performed all necessary traditional religious practices expected of the Balogun. Moreso, it is important to note that until the 1950s Ikorodu was not an *Ilu Alade* (a town ruled by an Oba) but was ruled by an *Oloja* and Oloja Ajayi Ewujebe (1896-1928), was the one on throne when colonialism was perfected and as a result, his regime experienced a lot colonial interferences which affected the traditional institutions on the one hand and traditional practices on the other hand. Oloja Ewujebe was not respected by the colonial administration as he was not given the honour and respect the Oloja deserves. Rather, Balogun Jaiyesimi, the commander of Ikorodu army was rated above the Oloja. A number of reasons have been adduced for this. For example, Suenu states that it was because of Jaiyesimi's military leadership and intimidating figure which endeared him to Governor Carter.²⁰ As a result, in 1894, Balogun Jaiyesimi was appointed by the British as the first Chairman of Ikorodu Local Government with a monthly allowance of one hundred pounds – the same amount being paid to the Akarigbo Remo.²¹ Thus, the Oloja was not assertive and a number of traditional practices were suspended. For example, some traditional religious festivals were for years not celebrated until the era of Oloja Ajagbe.²²

Furthermore, the reign of Oloja Ewujebe was characterised by frictions and squabbles amongst members of the traditional institutions especially the Oshugbo and this invariably affected the observation and performances of traditional religious practices. For example, in 1927, the Oluwo, head of the Oshugbo died and the Oloja with most of the Oshugbos promoted one of them, Oshonoiki the Apena, to the vacant post, and another one, Oshoberu to the Apena.²³ This generated a lot of controversy because Oshonoiki refused to accept his promotion on the grounds that the "Apena alone has the right to appoint or (alternatively) the Oloja appoints but may only appoint Apena's nominee so that if they do not agree, no appointment can be made".²⁴ Also, he refused because he does not wish the new post in view of the expenses he incurred only four years ago on receipt of another title. This controversy characterized the whole of 1927 and affected the observation and performance of some traditional religious practice in the community. By 1928, the colonial administration got involved and in his memorandum to the administrator of the Colony, the District Officer states that:

Whether the Oloja is right or wrong, it will be very difficult for him to back out now, publicly "climb down" and cancel the appointments of Oshonoiki and Oshoberu; it would be looked on as a victory for Mabadeje Jaisimi and publicly

²⁰ Interview with Dr. Suenu Adeyemi Adebawale, 51years, Academic, 12/11/2021

²¹ Ikorodu Local Government Manual, Ikorodu, 2008. P-7.

²² Interview with Prof. Owodeinde Fatai Gbolahun, 71years Academic, 12/11/2021

²³ National Archive Ibadan, Dispute at Ikorodu, Memo of the District Officer to the Administrator of the Colony, Lagos.

²⁴ Ibid

celebrated as such by his followers unless the police intervenes.²⁵

The extract above, establishes the fact there was a power tussle between Mabadeje Jaisimi, the Balogun of Ikorodu, who is backing Oshonoiki and the Oloja. Thus, the disagreement over the appointment of Apena linger longer than necessary. The implication of this was that traditional religious practices which the Oshugbo should have coordinated and led were not done because of this crisis which continued till the death of Oloja Ewujebe in 1928. Thus, the period between 1927 and 1928, the tensions generated by this squabbles hindered the performances and observation of traditional religious practices.

After the demise of Oloja Ewujebe, who passed on in 1928, Oloja Adenaike Alagbe, 1929 -1951 was installed Oloja of Ikorodu on Monday June 3, 1929 at the age of 75 and was crowned on Monday April 10, 1950 as the first Oba with the title of Ayangbure of Ikorodu.²⁶ Alagbe was a core traditionalist, an Ifa priest and a bridge builder. Immediately after his installation as Oloja, Alagbe reconciled all parties and carried out all festivals and rituals to cleanse the community of evil.²⁷ The reign of Alagbe was one that is historically significant for a number of reasons. First, Alagbe is recognised in Ikorodu history as a transition-ruler. Not only for being the last Oloja and the first Oba to be crowned Ayangburen, he was also instrumental in the movement of the palace from Awofin in Ajina to Alyeluja when the community felt it was high time they built a befitting new palace for the traditional ruler of the town.²⁸ As a result, his reign can be said to be a new beginning for the community as they were a number of religious practices that were initiated during his reign. For example, the Awofin palace in Ajina became the sacred grove for all traditional activities. What this presupposes is that the new palace became the administrative headquarters and residence of the Ayangburen whereas the Amofin at Ajina became the spiritual conclave of the community where all traditional religious festivals in the community must visit. Another phase of the colonial era that shaped traditional practices in Ikorodu was the incorporation of Ikorodu into the Western Region. After World War II, nationalism in Nigeria generally and Lagos in particular became intensified. This partly due to the new wave of nationalism inspired by the Atlantic Charter which pave way for the consolidation of the demand for self-determination by colonised people. In order to placate the yearnings of the nationalists for active participations in the administrative and political affairs of the country, provincial, divisional, and regional conferences were held towards the end of the 1940s. One of the major outcomes of these conferences was the restructure of the administrative compositions of the country. This reorganisation was reinforced by the Local

²⁵ National Archive Ibadan, Dispute at Ikorodu, memo of the District Officer to the Administrator of the Colony, Lagos. See Appendix

²⁶ Ikorodu Local Government Ikorodu Local Government Manual, published by Ikorodu Local Government(2015)

²⁷ Interview with Odofin, High Chief Adewunmi Ogunsanya SAN 5/2/2020 and this was corroborated by Dr. Suenu Adeyemi Adebawale 12/11/2021

²⁸ Interview with High Chief Adewumi Ogunsanyan, the Odofin of Ikorodu, 5/2/2020

Government Ordinance of 1950 which was meant to reform the native authority system in Nigeria.²⁹

As a result of these constitutional reforms, Ikorodu was excised, for the first time in sixty years from the Colony of Lagos and was incorporated into the Western Region in 1954 as Ikorodu Division.³⁰ The Division consisted of Ikorodu Divisional Council, Igbogbo-Baiyeku District, Ijede District and Imota District. The Oloja of Ikorodu was recognised as the paramount chief and the President of the Ikorodu Divisional Council. The Council was composed of selected traditional chiefs and elected members who were indirectly elected into the Council from the District and Local Councils in the Division. The Council was empowered to make bye-laws which must not be inconsistent with the provisions of the 1952 Local Government Law.³¹

This new administrative reorganisation, places major towns in the present Ikorodu Local Government Area under the umbrella of the Ikorodu Divisional Council. A number of Ikorodu indigenes became active political gladiators in the political arena of the Western Region. For example, a prominent Ikorodu indigene, Alhaji S. O. Gbadamosi, was among the inaugural members of the Action Group (AG). This was a confrontation to the growing influence of the NCNC in the Division. As a result, Chief T. O. S. Benson lost his Ikorodu seat to Alhaji S. O. Gbadamosi in the regional election of 1956.³² As party politics became a necessary ingredient in the making of communities at local and regional levels, the people of the Division were partitioned along party politics of NCNC/AG. The implication of this on the traditional landscape was multi-dimensional and diverse. First was that, the major gladiators from the community involved in the regional politicking were traditional title holders who by tradition were bonded by the allegiance to Oga the progenitor of Ikorodu. However, as the politics of the Western Region became intense, the traditional landscape and institution in Ikorodu was through into disarray while notable chiefs were divided along party lines. Therefore, for the few years leading to the independence, politics overshadowed traditional practices.

Conclusion

The annexation of Ikorodu in 1894 and the subsequent introduction of colonialism into the community through its integration as part of the Colony of Lagos, had an extensive impact on the socio-political, economic and traditional systems of community. Though, Ikorodu had established diverse modes of traditional practices prior to colonial rule, colonialism introduced the European

²⁹National Archive Ibadan, CSO. 26/09512/vol xiii, Annual Report on the Colony for the Year 1949, p. 27.

³⁰National Archive Ibadan, CSO. 26/09512/S.1, Annual Report of the Colony for the Year 1954, pp. 7-8

³¹Boge F. I. "An Administrative History of Ikorodu, 1894 – 1960". *African Journals Online* (Ajol) Volume 14

³²Insa Nolte *Obafemi Awolowo and the Making of Remo: The Local Politics of a Nigerian Nationalists*. (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 2009) pp 164 -165.

model of public administration which modified the pre-colonial traditional practices of Ikorodu and brought fundamental changes into the community. These changes, as it affects traditional institution and practices is what this paper has interrogated and it can be said that, although colonial administration in Ikorodu, between 1894 – 1960, necessitated changes in the traditional space yet Ikorodu community adapted to these changes and continued some of these practices after the termination of colonial rule.

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