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**Akokoland before Colonial Rule: Earliest Times to 1900**

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**Abstract**

*The study examines the evolution and the growth of mini-states into towns and villages in Akokoland. During this period of emergence, these mini-states were very significant and were contributory factors to the urbanisation processes that took place in western and southeastern Yorubaland. In spite of their significant contributions to the growth of mega-states in western and southeastern parts of Yoruba land in the nineteenth century, much scholarly attention has not been given to the study of the mini-states. Thus, besides highlighting the value of the mini-states to historical reconstruction in Akokoland, the scope covers pre-interruption of the indigenous patterns of settlement in the Akoko region during the British administration. The level of neglect of the examination of mini-states in Yoruba historiography by early scholars is worrisome and thus informs the writing of this paper. However, the present study complements the paltry existing literatures, which are of course, considerable works on Yoruba history. The paper identifies the pre-historic histories that had existed before the colonial era. The paper concludes that local history is a valuable source of historical reconstruction.*

**Key words:** Akokoland, Colonial rule, Evolution, Mini-states, Urbanisation, Historical reconstruction

### Introduction

The study discusses the traditions of origin and migrations, patterns of settlement, culture and society and the economic activities of the people of Akoko from the earliest times to 1900. The study is important in that it attempts to bring scholarly attention on the significance of mini-states in Akokoland. A mini-state can be described as a kingdom. It is a small unit with identifiable features of a state, which belongs to a conglomeration of independent communities, for example, Ajowa is a cluster of eight communities and Okeagbe has a four multicultural community (Faboyede, 2011:15). In examining the relevance of mini-states in Yoruba historiography and in Akoko history in particular, it is germane to point out that this study is built upon the indispensable works of some scholars like Ade Obayemi (Obayemi, 1978), Michael Mason (Mason, 1970), S.A. Akintoye (Akintoye, 1969), C.O. Akomolafe (Akomolafe, 1976) and A. Olukoju (Olukoju, 2003) who have made significant contributions to the present study. However, these existing studies on the Akoko region have focused on the subject from a general point of view. The studies discussed themes like socio-political history of Oka people in Akokoland, Benin and Nupe factors in Akokoland. But there is yet to be any volume which deals with the local studies dealing with the impact of mini-states in Akokoland on Yoruba historiography.

Bearing in mind, the importance of mini-states and its historiographical neglect, it is against this backdrop that this study examines the overall impact of mini-states on the history of the people of Akokoland. This study is further justified given the fact that available works on Yoruba history in the nineteenth century only mention Akoko passively. Thus, considering the place of Akoko in northeastern Yoruba historiography, it becomes necessary to embark on this present study.

It is in this connection that the paper is divided into six parts. The first part introduces the chapter. The second part discusses the influence of physical features on the patterns of settlement in Akokoland and a historical survey of the traditions of origin and migrations of the people of Akokoland are highlighted. The third part examines the intra-community relations among Akoko communities in the pre-colonial time. The fourth part assesses the external influence of Nupe hegemony and contact with Ibadan warriors, traders and merchants. The fifth part makes a general review of the work.

### **Akokoland and its Environment**

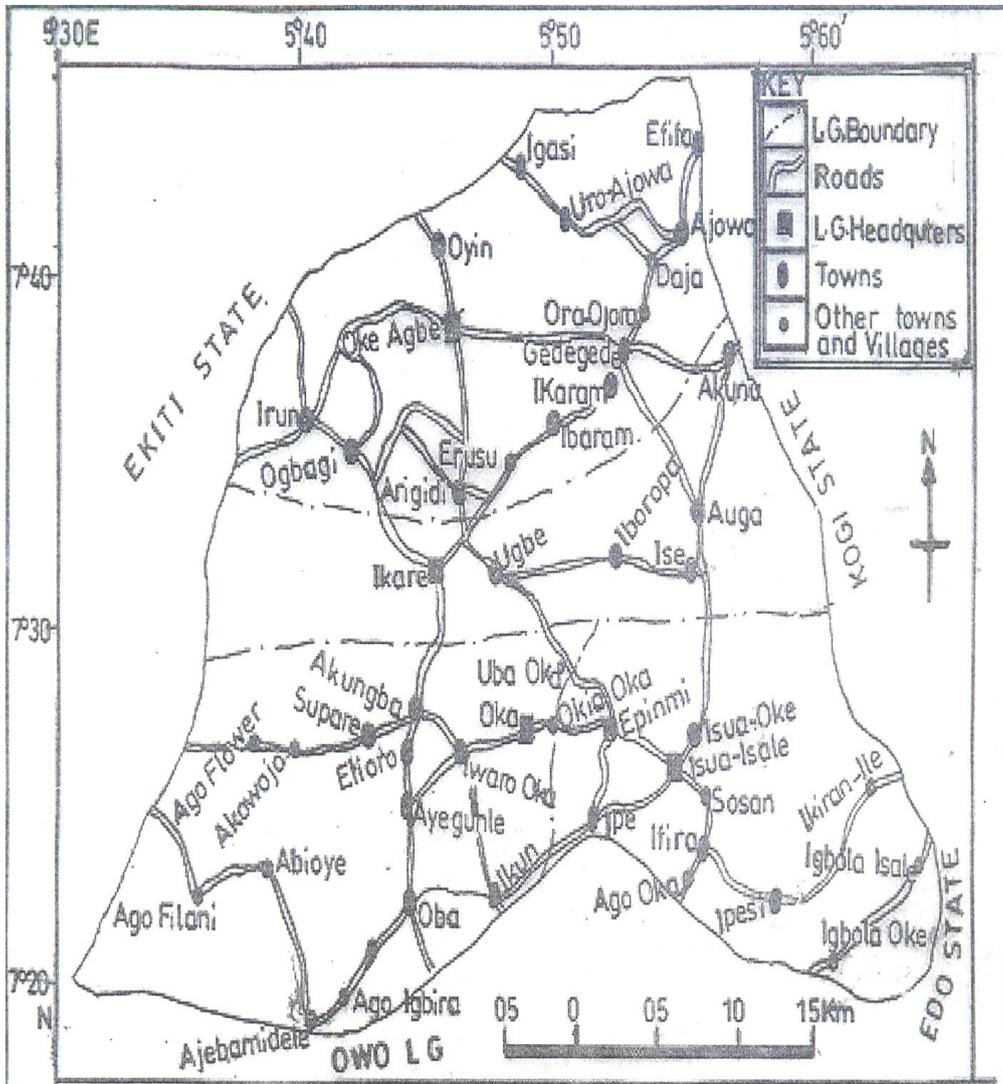
Akokoland is located in northeastern part of the frontier zone of Yorubaland (Olukoju, 2003:1). The exact date of the founding of Akoko mini-states was not known in history, but oral sources and traditions suggested that it had grown to a moderately large size with enormous strength from about 12<sup>th</sup> century when migration started at Ife in pre-colonial period (Oguntomisin, 2003:1). The *oba* had different sources of claims to the origin from Ife. Thus, Akoko is a geographical expression of people with diverse cultures and it is a description of conglomeration of peoples who live in the region that shared boundaries with Kabba and Yagba (now in the present Kogi State to the north and northeast). Despite differences in cultures, the people in Akokoland still retained Yoruba language as *lingua franca*. The Akoko region is made up of multiple independent mini-states (Akinjogbin, 1994: 1-8) that have no centralised system of government in place.

The Akoko region is sub-divided into five groups on the basis of dialectal spoken categories. The groups are classified below: The first group is the *Owo-Akokos*, which comprised Oka, Ikare, Akungba, Supare, Ifira, Ukpe (now Ipe) Ikpesi (now Ipesi), Oba, Afo, Ikun, Iboropa, Ugbe and Ora. These communities speak dialect of Yoruba phonology that is similar to that spoken in Owo and Ifon areas with negligible variations. It is important to point out that the dialect is generally mutually intelligible with the exception of Ipe. The second group is the *Ekiti-Akokos*, which comprised Omuo, Ogbagi, Irun and Ese. These communities speak the same Yoruba dialects as that spoken by the towns and villages of Ekiti. The third group is the *Benin-Akokos*. The communities are Arigidi, Erusu, Ojo, Oyin, Afin, Oge, Igasi, Aje, Uro and Oso. This group evidently has mixed origins of variations of Benin language. The fourth group is the *Akoko-Bangeri* or *Kukuruku Benin* is historically referred to a group that formed a clan comprising Kakumo-Ayanran, Aiyekoba group, Ise and Sosan, Isua, Epinmi, Auga, in addition to a number of satellite villages which all speak Benin dialects akin to those spoken in the Kukuruku/Afenmai area of Edo State. The fifth group is the *Kabba-Akoko* whose communities are Ikaram, Akunnu, Gedegede, Daja, Efifa and Eshuku (Beeley, 1934: 85-87, Adegbulu, 2004:186-187, Eweka, 1992: 183).

The strategic location and distribution of geographical features influenced human habitation and the practice of agriculture. All these towns and villages have distinct physical features. For instance, the plain and the forest part of northwest is forestry, while northeast is plain with open savannah and stud trees which are favourable to grazing. Again, the topography of southwest and southeast are thickly forested. The nature of land is undulating with numerous hills and mountains (Akomolafe, 1976: 2-3). Their earth crusts are always well-watered by constant rainfall between May and September of every year. Also, there are small rivers and

streams in Akokoland. The most important of these streams are: the Okota River, which flows from the hill outcrop on the Ogbagi to Arigidi road, the Otagala River that flows across Arigidi to Okeagbe road. Other significant rivers are Itapako in Isua, Owon and Ajan along Oba-Ikun road. These rivers usually get reduced in volume during the dry season and no upsurge during the raining season (Akomolafe, 1976:3-4).

There are hills and rugged topography in Akoko. Their features earned and still earn the whole Akoko the description of the hilliest and most rugged part of Yorubaland (Akomolafe, 1976: 3 & Programme, 2004: 13). Examples of such massive rocks are *Ale* hill at Ikare, Oka hill, Erurokun and Otakepe both at Ikun, and others in Isua and Ipe (Akintoye, 1971: 5). In Oka-Ikare area, the most notable relief characteristics are steep-sided, dome-shaped insulter's rising abruptly from the surrounding villages and displaying base rock faces. There are fertile plain land and lowland in places like Ikun, Oba, Ifira, Isua, Akungba and Supare. The fertile are used to practise agriculture for cultivation and production of food crops. The pieces of land contain economic value and medicinal plants of tropical varieties like species of mahogany, *iroko* trees, raffia palm, and oil palm. It is worthy of note that geography has contributed to the growth and advancement of mini-states in Akokoland. As a result, its frontier nature opened the Akoko region to external invasions from expansionist neighbours (Olukoju, 2003: vii). This facilitated the immigration of people into the area, which gave rise to early founding of the mini-states.



Map of Akoko Region of Ondo State

Source: Ondo State Ministry of Works, Survey Division

### Traditions of Origin and Migration of the People of Akokoland

The study of pre-colonial Akoko history in the context of its evolution and migrations lie within the context of diverse traditions of origin from Benin, Nupe and Kabba. The foundation of communities in Akokoland is interwoven in Ife myths of ‘creation’ and migration phenomenon. Historically, the writing of early history of

Akokoland was not without its flaws as oral traditions are susceptible to distortion. It is therefore, an urgent task for this study to cross-check the fact obtains from oral history with other sources especially archival and secondary sources to reconstruct the history of mini-states in Akokoland of northeastern Yorubaland. Suffice it to say that the origin of the indigenous people of Akokoland is contentious. Two contentious elements are identified on the traditional stories of migration of indigenous peoples in Akokoland. First, the origins are interwoven with myths. Second, their migrations are full of uncertainty and legendry (Olukoju, 2003: 13 & Beeley, 1934: 26).

On this backdrop, many families, especially the royal families still traced their direct descent heritage to Ife, in spite of acculturation that took place at Benin when some of the immigrant groups such as Arigidi, Isua among others, had a stop-over at Benin during the migration period (Egharevba, 1968: 76-79 & Akomolafe, 1976: 8). However, different reasons have been ascribed to the migrations of the immigrants from the acclaimed original home either directly from Ife or indirect contact with Benin people (Akinjogbin & Ayandele, 1980: 121-123). A case study of Ibaram and Iyani suggested that they both moved from Gedegede and later, dispersed due to disagreement with Gedegede people. However, chief Ajakaye differed in his opinion about such claim on migration of Ibaram from Gedegede. He asserted that the settlers in Ibaram migrated from Ife through Benin and Kabba areas (Ekunniyi, n.d: 8-22). Thus, diverse stories on origin reminded historians of disputed common roots, but pointed to the rich heritage on superiority among the monarchs.

The expedition for survival with its several manifestations made migration an undeniable phenomenon in pre-colonial Africa. Thus, the people of Akoko moved in from different directions as a result of reaction to succession disputes and dynastic struggles, population pressure, local strife, love of adventure, and ambition for political power and claim of sovereignty (Beeley, 1932: 33). Hence, the processes of settlement and integration followed the conquest of the autochthonous indigenes by the newcomers. Indeed, these changing of settlement pattern clustered with successive “waves” (Awe, 1964: 10 & 11) to meet the exigencies of that period. Notwithstanding different reasons for migration, the diverse groups still counted themselves as fellow products of historical circumstances, which came together by forces of human history and growth in a given geographical location.

From the foregoing, the sources of origin are identified and discussed. There are versions of claims attesting to the origin of towns and villages in Akokoland. According to Akomolafe, three sources of origin were famous on the early history of the people of Akokoland. The first account which is popular among the people stated that their founding fathers came directly from Ife around the twentieth century. It further states that the immigrants came with *Olowo Ojugbelu* (alias *Omoalaghaiye*, 1019A.D), the leader of the immigrants that later settled in Owo about the same time

(Ashara, 1951: 1-2 & Akomolafe, 1976: 5). The example of towns and villages within this category are Ikare, Oge, Ikun, Oka, Supare, Ipe, Oba, among others. Thus, Ife was and still regard as an ancient city where their creation and civilisation began in the earliest times (Ademankinwa, 1958: 32-38 & 45-46). The authenticity of this account is faulty, because of different dialects that are spoken by the people who claimed to have evolved from the same place. Nonetheless, Yoruba language is common to all of them.

The second version is of the splinter groups that left Ife with the *Elekole* group from Ife, but stayed in Ikole with *Ajana* group before they finally settled in the present domain (Babalola, 1984: 98-99). Some of the immigrants claimed direct and indirect migration from Ife. An outstanding example was the movement of Chief *Ajana* of Afa over a chieftaincy dispute (Akomolafe, 1976:6, Beeley, 1934:64 & Akintoye, 1971: 543). His inability to wrestle the crown as a ruler in Afa led to his migration to Owo, where he was made chief over the people of Isaipen in Owo. Following his assertion of power, his descendants are linked to and thus claimed Ife myth of origin about the same time with *Elekole* group about the twentieth century A.D (Akomolafe, 1976: 9 & Interview: Olowookere, 2013). On this background, semblance in political culture attested to sources of origin of the mini-states in Akokoland. Apart from similarities in dialects, chieftaincy titles and institutions are also replica of the same Benin people. The chieftaincy titles like *Ologbosere*, *Sasere*, *Edibo*, *Osunla* and *Ojomo* in Igasi and Arigidi are the same with that of Benin. The Villages in this category include Ayowe group in Afa, Erusu, Arigidi, Isua and Ipe (Akomolafe, 1976: 5-6).

The third version referred to the sub-ethnic groups which claimed northern origin. However, not much is known about these northern immigrants from Kabba and Yagba districts, which found settlements in Ikaram, Ibaramu, Gedegede, Daja, Ojo, Kakumo, Auga, Iyani and some parts of Arigidi (Eweka, 1992: 42, 46, 99, 213 & 104, Akomolafe, 1976: 6-7 & Egharevba, 1968: 7&8). Without mincing words, Akoko people are particularly dominated by political and social cultures of Ekiti people, Benin and Nupe people, apart from cultures that cut across all parts of Yorubaland. Indeed, the place of politics and languages are very significant in Akoko's history. The more we understand these cultural phenomena, the more they lead us into perceptive of their evolution elsewhere.

### **Pre-Colonial Political and Social Organisation**

The mini-states in Akokoland organised themselves in villages and towns and the *oba* was the highest in rank of power holder, whose title was largely hereditary. History recorded that the *oba* was sacred and publicly revered as the custodian of the norms and value of his society (Interview: Adesunloye, 2013). The political system was also strengthened by the age-grade, but every segment of the age owned

allegiance to the *oba*, whose life was guided by the whim of the priests (Arifalo & Okajare, 2005: 4 & 10). The monarchical system of government was the rein of power. Below the *oba* were chiefs (*ijoye*) who performed various constitutional, social and political functions at the civic sphere. They were given different titles in order to represent their households (Interview: Olowookere, 2013). In spite of the fact that the people of Akokoland had no written constitution to define and express their rules and regulations, were common practices embedded in the norms and taboo (*eewo*). Taboo was highly regarded in pre-colonial Akoko society as a means to honour the gods and control people's behavior, and that included the political elite (Okajare, 2011:3 & 4). As everybody in his kingdom observed *eewo*, so likewise the *oba* had his limitations in the kingdom. The essence of exercising *eewo* was to promote harmony and unity in the kingdom for checks and balances and thus, prevent violation of taboo that could bring calamity to the society (Akinjogbin & Ayandele, 1980: 131). More so, it was used as ethos for preserving moral uprightness. These were adapted as instruments of enforcing good governance.

Given the independent nature of Akoko community, such autonomy led to the emergence of single community without central authority, which was capable of exercising a wide political power or float social control over the wide place. Thus, Akoko was an amalgam of integrated political entity. As disjointed as the mini-states were, each still maintained its political autonomy strengthened by age grades. In that manner, Akoko cannot be referred to as an empire like that of Old Oyo kingdom (Adediran, 2000: 37).

The basic socio-political organisation was centered on the family. The extension of which was transformed into village administrative structure. However, the family relations constituted the smallest unit of administration and group of extended family. In that case, the control of every member of the family was under the auspices of *agba-ile* (the family head or senior member) usually male of the house. The family patriarch was the spiritual leader of the family who also had all members in prayers to the gods and ancestors. Ancestors were believed to be part of the living and guardian spirits for the living. Thus, they were revered and subsequently, the elders were to be careful with their conduct in the society, so as not to incur the wrath of the ancestors. Ancestors as deified ones were also propitiated by sharing food with them on the shrine; praise in local songs and dances, folktales and liturgies (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979: 25-6) for the well-being, blessings and prosperity of members of his household. There were different names, such as *Ogboni*, *Ighare* or *Ihare*, *Amurun* and *Opon* were given to the family head depending on the village line (Okajare, 2011: 2). In Oge for instance, *ude* is the general title for the highest age grade, *agba-oge* is the title for the oldest man, where at the family or quarters level. But *agba-oge* must have undergone the rite of passage to the highest

age grade. Again, the practice of sophisticated age grade initiation has always been a popular segment of the Akoko's culture (Interview: Adare, 2013).

The villages were sub-divided into *adugbo* (quarters). The political leader of each village was the *olori-adugbo* (quarter head) who had an advisory council composed of other titled men, gallant and enterprising leaders as well as influential elders in the quarter. These ones were subordinate to the *oba*. In large towns like Oka, Isua, Akungba, Oba, Irun, Ogbagi, Ajowa, Okeagbe and Ikare; quarters were further sub-divided into groups, with each group having a group head. These titled men were superior in ranks to the un-titled family heads that were required to rise through the ranks of age-grade to the highest level before they could rank with the (*agba-ilu*) elders (Ogundana, 2003: 20-21 & Saba, 2003:8& 9).

The division in the art of governance explained the administration of justice in Akokoland. The traditional title-holders performed social rites without any desecration. Any violation was death or serious penalty. Traditionally, the people in Akokoland were controlled under the patronage of a well structured political system of administration in different communities. Thus, the age grade system (*egbe*) was and still a common feature of the social organisation like in other parts of Yorubaland (Fajana, 1968:232-38). Thus, age grade served as the basis of the Akoko people's cultures (Akomolafe, 1976: 41&44). Be that as it may, maintenance of peace, law and order rested on traditional judicial administrations. Punishments were inflicted on offenders to serve as deterrence to others (Atanda, 1972:5-6). The royal court headed by the traditional ruler was the highest court of appeal. In most cases, litigants were required to swear to an oath before the hearing of their cases.

In civil cases, parties were required to deposit fees of cowries, the amount which varied from one place to another. Trial was also conducted by ordeal, whereby the defendant was made either to drink 'sasswood' concoction (*epo ebo*), or to swear to a deity. This ordeal was to make the defendant, if he was guilty, reveal his guilt or he could die after seven days (Interview: Olowookere, 2013). Another tradition claimed that in pre-colonial period, the people of Akokoland were peaceful in the disposition of their obligation in the society. Thus, in pre-colonial time, few crimes of a serious nature, cases of matrimony and debts were handled by the lower traditional courts, which rested its jurisprudence on the traditional system of administration as earlier pointed out. To enforce court verdicts, the town guild were appointed to see that court decision on any civil matters were executed. It could also be enforced by the successful litigant who was often empowered to seize live stocks of debtors or convicts. The debtors could redeem their live stocks by settling the debt within a specific period.

Socially, the Akoko society was set up along age-grade line. The more junior ones of the age groups performed all the communal physical works of the towns and

villages, while the senior ones did the supervision. The communal duties of the group were in duplicate; it used to perform communal works like clearing and construction of markets, guild functions, road constructions and re-thatching the roof of the village head house. Provision of security for the society may be added to the list of their duties. The inhabitants of Akokoland developed devices as obtained in securing and protecting themselves and their environment from both internal and external aggression. In order to protect themselves from external aggression, there were the community warriors (*ologun*) whose major duty was protection of the territorial integrity of the political domain (Interview: Olowookere: 2013). Awolowo claimed that the warriors were armed with incantation and spiritual bullet proofs like *agbeta* and *ayeta*, which embraced their gallant performance at the battlefield. And he posited thus:

the truth is that through some process of deterioration our immediate ancestors had lost the comprehension of the heritage handed down to the them by their more cultured, more humane fathers; and consequently what were meant originally to be used for beneficial purpose were afterwards employed to achieve devilish end (Awolowo, 1939: 30-31).

Sometimes brave hunters and medicine men were used as security agents.

T

he age grade system served as a connecting link between the village council and the people who made their wishes known to the council through their Heads. The village council, otherwise known as *apejo* or *ajo*, controlled village affairs, local laws and held regular meetings to discuss important matters (Saba, 2003: 9). Formulation of local policies and laws on prevention of theft and violence, maintenance of law and order especially on disputes were the major duties of the members of the village council. Also, the village councilors supervised the provision of ‘sassafras’ poison, *obo*, a traditional device to detect witchcraft in Akoko Communities. The council also performed judicial functions. The association comprised village head, the quarter heads, all titled family heads and the elders of the town. Town Criers or messengers were used to summon elaborate meeting of the village council (Interview: Adesunloye, 2013).

Also, there were common local laws on ownership of property. The family land tenure was obtained in Akokoland. The property comprised absolute ownership of land (cultivated and uncultivated) forests, orchards. On this note, the council village considered the king (*oba*) as a derivatively divine ruler, that is, one who ruled with divine scepter over the land.

### **Intra-Community Relations among Akoko Communities up to 1900**

There was evidence of cordial relationship among Akoko communities. The mutual relationship manifested in the areas of cultural, agricultural economic activities, intermarriages, community interactions and meetings during the celebration of traditional festivals. Like other Yoruba sub-groups, the inhabitants of Akokoland equally believed in the existence of God, *Olodumare* and other smaller gods like *Ogun*, the god of iron, *Ifa*, god of divination (Law, 1976: 69-89 & Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979: 74, 81, 91, 107& 143).

#### **Cultural Relationship**

Traditionally, the Akoko people believed in ancestral veneration as a means of religious expressions. They strongly believed that the ancestors had the power to punish and renew good conduct. It was the effect of such belief that influenced the practice of ancestral veneration, a means of invoking the ancestral spirit through device of *Ifa* potency. Virtually all indigenous people exercised belief system, norms and values on *egungun* (masquerade). To them, *egungun* is the spirit of living dead ancestor who descended from heaven and visited his relatives either for protection or to prosper them. A great numbers of the inhabitants of Akokoland were adherents of indigenous traditional religion (I.T.R.). Indigenous traditional religion is a concept that depicts traditional system of worshipping the gods and divinities in Akoko society and it was not idolatry in nature. Thus, the religion and the belief system of the pre-literate society believed in the existence and supremacy of the Supreme Being (Idowu, 29-32: 973). The people worshipped and revered the ancestors according to *Ifa*'s divination and direction, whenever any important ceremony was to be performed during the pre-colonial time (Saba, 2003:10 & Abimbola, 1976: 41-63). Consequently, indigenous traditional religion (I.T.R) in Akokoland served as a unified behavioural code of conducts. Fear and respect for the norms and values of the society prevented them from committing any heinous crime. It is a taboo to behave contrary to the tenets of the society.

Upon all, the people practised diffused monotheism. This was a religious philosophy in which the people worship God by placing Him at the apex of cosmogonic activities with lesser gods as intermediaries. Among the people, God is being referred to as *Olodumare* (owner of heaven). The Akoko people consciousness of God before the advent of the imported religion demonstrated in their names such as *Olorunfemi*, *Oluwadamilola*, *Oluwapamilerin*, *Olugbenga*, among others. The fact that most parts of Akoko society embraced Christianity during its introduction in the nineteenth century was relative ease, partly suggests their pre-knowledge of the Almighty God before that period.

In the same vein, traditional festivals, such as *ajagbo* in Ogbagi, *arigiya* in Iyometa community in Ikare, *ere* festival in Oge community, Okeagbe, *odun ijesu* (yam festival) were and still celebrated in these towns and villages. Through these festivals, unity and intra-community relations were developed among the people of Akokoland. Added to the above traditional ways of life, season of new planting again served as a forum for age groups between twenty and fifty years to come together and shared views on the problems encountered during the past harvest season. Indeed, agricultural practice, customs and observance relating to crops, as well as lore connecting to tree and plant, and teachings involving animals were usually discussed. Evidently, goodwill messages were expressed during the performance of *imana* and *itegbe* social festivals in Akunnu and in Isua (Interview: Adare: 2013). The celebration of *ajagbo* was common to towns and villages like Irun, Ogbagi, Afa in Okeagbe, Afin and Ese, while *ibegbe* or *egbegun* (age-grade celebration) and *imole* (veneration of rivers) were common to all the people in Akoko (Saba, 2003:10). The societal festival promoted social relations and integration of people in pre-colonial period

Apart from deliberation on poor harvest due to drought, there was usually exchange of ideas among the inhabitants of Akoko during marriage ceremonies. The cultural setting fostered inter-marriages, except in some cases where certain families or group of people were forbidden to marry themselves. An instance of that taboo had been traced to two families in Oge and Afa quarters in Okeagbe. It was a taboo for the sons and daughters of Ayagele family in Ogosi quarter of Afa quarter to marry from Oge community, Okeagbe (Interview: Aremo, 2006). The reason was due to betrayal suffered from an Oge man to Adebí, a renowned and deified female warrior in Afa in pre-colonial time. Be that as it may, there were dynastic marriages between *Akala* of Ikaram and *Oluwade* of Akunnu, *Onirun* of Irun and *Owa* of Ogbagi in the nineteenth century (Akomolafe, 1976: 21-22). Such dynastic unions were to prevent propagation or production of internal squabbles between the allies.

The burial ceremonies in Akokoland went beyond entertainment. The nature of burial to be given to the dead depended largely on the status, age, and the nature of death. When a title-holder died, a special coffin was used with some rites being performed, but when an evil doer died, he or she was thrown into the lonely forest with covering. On the death of the *Oba*, rites and ceremonies were performed between nine and fourteen days on his burial. Unfortunately, when a barren person died, he or she was cursed not to return to the family; by performing ritual on rejection on the corpse (Interview: Erebamí, 2013).

### **Akoko and Her Neighbours**

The study of inter-group relations has become an academic debate among scholars from diverse fields all over the world (Nwabueze, 2003:17-19). This part

discusses inter-group relations among Akoko communities and her neighbours from social, diplomatic and economic perspectives. In terms of political relations, there was inter-village warfare. Communal warfare was launched in Akokoland. For instance, chief Ayorinde of Ibadan, chief Ogedengbe of Ilesa and Imoru of Nupe attacks were devastated to lives and property in Akokoland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. At a time, Chief Ogedengbe rebelled against Ibadan domination of Akoko by 1860 (Akomolafe, 1976:31-32). These three identified personages were veteran warlords that executed several attacks on the people of Akoko mainly for territorial acquisition for economic reason.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Akoko fell into Nupe imperialism under the pretext of preventing them from the incessant attacks launched by Ibadan army led by their leaders, Aje and Ayorinde at different times in the 1840s. Thereafter, the Nupe established a system of administration that was known as hegemony. The excesses of Nupe imperialists were shown by stationing chief fief-holders (*ajeles*) at the strategic or turbulent places to control tax evasion. However, the *ajeles* were grudgingly accepted by the people of Akokoland, because payment of tax was not part of Akoko tradition, despite the oppressive rule of the *ajeles*. They forcefully introduced property tax and *jizya* tax (paid by non-Muslims) in Akoko (Beeley, 1934: 66 & Dupigny, 1920: 5). In the course of expansionist policy, Ayorinde conquered Irun in 1856. Aduloju raided Afa community in Okeagbe between 1880 and 1881. Also, the neighbouring communities of Afin, Igasi, Omuo and Ese were pillaged for showing support to Aduloju from Ado-Ekiti against the Nupe warriors (Akintoye, 1971:50). Still on the diplomatic relations, the incessant attacks and the oppression of Ibadan warlords in eastern and northeastern Yorubaland aided Fabunmi to raise war against Ibadan and her warlords in the nineteenth century (Falola & Oguntomisin, 2001: 74). The attack was checked and the power of the Nupe hegemony was broken through the effort of the Royal Niger Company (RNC) between 1888 and 189 at Ogidi battle field (Akomolafe, 1976: 27, 33, 31& 37).

The burden of the payment of tax, either in kind or in cash was very repressive during the reign of *Etsu* Maliki of Bida (Nadel, 1961: 115). At time, the Nupe armies looted the foodstuffs of the people of Akoko usually during the market days. Women were victims and mercilessly beaten. Their goods were seized to meet the annual assessment of taxes. The expropriation of taxation led people to evade tax and abandoned their settlement to a more remote area, despite the fact that the Nupe traders passed through Akoko routes to parts of Ekitiland and Afenmai to sell their wares – potash, copper, glass and shear butter which they exchanged for kola nuts, cam wood (*osun*) (Akomolafe, 1976: 33). The cam wood was a valued cosmetic wood. The aesthetic value of cam wood was useful in decoration of historical symbols at the shrines in Akokoland. As a result of growing economy, a village like Arigidi grew into an important commercial centre. At this juncture, we need to point

out that relationship between the Nupe and the people of Akoko in pre-colonial period was spelt out mainly on economic term. Apart from delirious economic effect, with the presence of great number of Fulani and Hausa Muslim missionaries, Islam became an indispensable feature in Akokoland and the spread of Islam began in 1860 through coercion.

Existing studies on Akokoland has shed more light on the spread and acceptance of Islam by the inhabitants of Akokoland. The relentless movement of Nupe and Ilorin Muslim traders influenced the infiltration of Islam into the Akoko region in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Starting from Ikare, a centrally positioned settlement encouraged trading activities. Traders and Islamic priests used Ikare township as the local base where Islam spread to Arigidi and to other towns and villages such as Oyin, Ogbagi, Okeagbe, Afin, Ese, Epinmi, Ikaram, Akunnu, Auga, Sosan, among others (Filani, n.p: 1975). Undoubtedly, the spread of Islam witnessed resistance. It was vehemently opposed by the indigenous traditional worshippers. The traditional worshippers attacked the Muslims for preaching new religion to their followers. With the attacks, the expansion of Islam was obstructed. Nonetheless, the defeat suffered by the Nupe in 1896 in Ogidi, saw an end to the Nupe hegemony in Akokoland. Consequently, the Akoko-Nupe relation was terminated by the intervention of the British who were seen by the people of Akoko as their “messiah” to liberate them from the autocratic rule of the *Etsu* of Bida under our period. However, the British conquest of Nupe on the part of Akoko people; it was a blessing in disguise.

### **Trade, Agriculture and Economic Activities**

Trade and agricultural economy depended on the growth of yam and guinea corn as the staple diet in pre-1900 (Saba, 2003:11). As earlier noted, the agricultural system was subsistence in nature (Hopkins, 1973:9) and it served as a major pivot to trade. There were historical trade routes which promoted trade and economic activities in pre-colonial period. The frontier nature of Akokoland provided opportunities for external contacts with Nupe and Benin traders and merchants. The Benin traders transacted in coral beads, glasses and farm implements with Ikare people at *osele* market. Traditional market was very important for socio-economic, cultural and relaxation reason in Akokoland. Coral beads, glasses and farm implements like hoes and cutlasses were exchanged with corns and millets, and locust beans from Arigidi (Saba, 2003; 11-12).

In the course of trading and collection of taxes on market commodities and toll fees, the *Osele* market became a place of call to traders due to active role of Benin and Nupe traders. The chief articles of trade were beads, Kolanut, locust beans, pots, farm implements (hoes, cutlasses). This continued to influence migration and settlement pattern in Akokoland, as Nupe merchants cherished articles of trade, such as oil palm, kolanut and others which were found in Akokoland. Local traders and

merchants carried goods along the aforementioned trade routes (Faboyede, 2010: 35-36) and paid for the purchased commodities in cowries. In ancient times, cowries were the most popular currency within Africa. Apart from being used as payment of fines, it was used for funeral rites, initiations into secret societies as well as divination, game and computation (Kayode-Wande, 2011:24), but towards the end of the nineteenth century, slaves became the currency for tax payments (Mason, 1969:554) and the *ajeles* recompensed the *Etsu* of Nupe, as his vassalage.

In order to cater for surplus agricultural produce at that place, the route was divided into two separate parts, as earlier indicated, while the second section was from Afenmai to Owo. Some routes were also passed through Ogbagi and Irun to southern Ekiti towns, such as Imesi-Ile, Ode, Ilumoba, and a host of others. The articles of trade transacted by traders along the route were pots from Arigidi, Kola nut and Palm wine dominated the economy of Irun and Ogbagi and locust beans produced in Arigidi were exchanged with commodities from Benin traders. Another route originated from Ikare which ran northwards to Okeagbe, Oyin, Omuo, and lastly to Kabba where caravan traders from the North (Nupe) took off Southwards. Commodities along the internal trade routes were pots, beads and cotton (Saba, 2003: 11-12).

In addition to trading activities, the exchanged of goods was carried out through the trade by barter system. Despite the shortcoming of trade by barter in terms of time negotiation and quality of goods exchanged, the economic transaction influenced intra-economic activities among Akoko communities. No doubt, the people of Akoko related through farming by cultivating the land through the formation of *aro* (a guild of farms) and work for each member on rotational basis (Daramola & Jeje, 2005:112-119 & Forde, 1951: 16). The socio-economic reason was to produce plenty of food and surplus cash crops with easy labour. Usually it was accompanied with pomp and fanfare by drinking palm wine, entertainment with pounded yam and assorted meats. At early stage, their agricultural pursuits were mainly rudimentary since the people engaged in subsistence farming with simple basic tools like locally made cutlasses and hoes.

### **Indigenous Technology and Manufacturing in Pre-colonial Akoko**

Craft and manufacture shaped a crucial economic foundation among the people of Akokoland during this period. According to oral traditions, the people developed indigenous industrial technology in the area of pottery, soap making; in addition to weaving production, which produced the major economic activities.

Weaving formed part of the structure of Akoko pre-colonial. The prominent example of such indigenous craft produced locally made cloth like *alagan* and were sold to traders from Kabba, Benin, Owo and Ilobu (Saba, 2003:11 & Faboyede, 2010:

36). Different types of clothes were fashioned and designed from cotton after degumming and spinning by women (Faboyede, 2013: 158). Other notable economic activities included pottery, clothe dying, iron work and carving. All these are subsidiary to farming for which the people were so efficient and popular. Thus, knowledge in art and craft method began with suitable modification of natural resources by gathering. Gathering, a scope of subsistence farming encouraged the promotion of agricultural activities, which empowered the population.

Economic activities were also spelt out or characterised by increased specialisation in weaving and cloth dying, pottery and basketry. In the area of specialisation, women were more reputed for craft in cloth weaving, spinning and dyeing, and croaking of cotton which were very important to the economy. Clothes like *aso ofi*, *sanyan*, *etu* and *alari* were designs of somber (*olowu dudu*). Yagba were locally produced and the Ekiti settlers in Akoko taught the indigenous people to make the local clothes (Faboyede, 2013: 158-160). Different local clothes were usually made for local consumption, social celebrations like marriages, naming of children, chieftaincy ceremonies and at solemn events like funeral of older people, while *saki* of different colours was used for carrying new baby. The traditional clothes were exchanged at *oja oba* market in Arigidi and also at *Esi Owa* market in Ikaram before the pairs of the locally made clothes were carried to Nupe in the northern part of the region.

The indigenous technology was subsidiary to farming with which the people were so prominent. Undoubtedly, trading, agriculture and other related economic activities performed vital roles in intra-group relations among Akoko communities prior to the penetration of the British into Akokoland.

In another manner, diplomatic and cultural relations were developed among the people of Akoko, the Nupe and Ibadan. The people were joined together in marriages and today, we have Nupe stocks who have settled in places like Arigidi, while those of Benin (Ado Benin) also have settled in Isua, Epinmi, and Oba in Akokoland (Saba, 2003: 13).

### Conclusion

The study has discussed variant stories which surrounded the traditions of origin and migrations of the people of Akokoland before 1900. The study reaffirmed that the stories of origin and migrations of the people of Akokoland were legends. The study also recognised the germane of intra- communal relations and inter-group relations as phenomena that demand serious attention to ponder on the irreconcilable genre that many towns and villages in southeastern and western parts of Yorubaland; particularly in the frontier zone of Yorubaland.

The progressive and dynamics of Akoko society was steadily enjoyed by te people until when it was disrupted by warriors from Nupe, Ibadan and Benin traders started to penetrated it by creating external influences both positively and negatively in name of conquest and expansionism . One of the major facts to be accepted was that the people had a progressive and enjoyed society of enviable quality capable of promoting urbanisation in the pre-colonial period. Regardless of the problems associated with the collection of materials and the writing of the pre-colonial history of Akoko people, this chapter has undoubtedly given a sense of identity and pride to the people under this study in the annal of Yoruba history.

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### **Oral data**

Interview held with Aremo, F. O. (chief), C. 94 years, rtd. teacher and a politician, B/46, Ikare Road, Ogosi, Afa Okeagbe, 20 – 06 – 2006. He is now late.

Interview held with Mr. Adare E.O., C. 67years, rtd. Civil servant, Osuma, Isua, 14 – 02 – 2013.

Interview held with Adesunloye Ajakaye, C. 88 years, farmer, Akungba, 20 – 03 – 2013

Interview held with Erebami (Chief Mrs.), C. 63 years, Petty traders, Ayeyemi Street, Oka, 12 – 03 – 2013.

Interview held with Idowu (Mrs.), C. 55years, petty trader and farmer, Iwaro-Oka, 12 – 03 – 2013.

Interview held with Pa Olowookere Philip, 87years, Aofin Oge, Okeagbe, 21-03-2013.