



## HISTORY



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### **Edo N'ekue Phenomenon: A Study in Pre-colonial Benin Imperialism and its Impact on Akure, Ikere and other Communities**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Most societies in pre-colonial times experienced one form of relationship or the other with their neighbours. More often than not, these relationships came in form of commercial, cultural and political relations. Characteristic of these relations were intermarriages, linguistic borrowings and other interactions dictated by the needs of the societies involved. In the case of pre-colonial Benin and some parts of Eastern Yoruba land, their relations always ran against the tide. But the issue for consideration here is not so much of the contradictory nature of these relations, but the preponderance of the Benin influence on virtually all aspects of the existence of the communities in focus. This study is necessitated by the need to straighten the record that the relations that once existed between the Benin and these Eastern Yoruba towns were purely commercial, and that the Benin elements in these communities are war captives. The paper interrogates the pervasiveness of the Benin socio-cultural and political influence particularly on Akure and Ikere. It seeks to investigate the circumstances for instance, where a Benin representative became a king and established a dynasty in Ikere where Benin elements had overwhelming influence and power under a recognized ruler not answerable to the Onikere of Ikere (King of Ikere); and in Akure where the Benin 'ambassador' acts like a potentate in Akure. The piece also seeks an explanation to the avalanche of titles of Benin origin found today in not only Akure, Owo and Ado but also in Ita-Ogbolu, Igbara-Oke, etc. The paper concludes, based on copious empirical evidence, that most communities and towns under review must have been for years, under the Benin suzerainty during which time, the Benin foisted its socio political influence on them, before the vast empire became too unwieldy to be administered by the central administration.

## INTRODUCTION

By 'Edo N'Ekue' we refer to Benin indigenes (remnants) in Akure (as they are called today). Before the advent of European imperialism cases of local imperialisms already abounds in Africa. Powerful kingdoms emerged, integrating the less powerful ones into their imperial complex and in certain situations such imperial holds endured while in some others, fortunes fluctuated. The case of Ibadan imperialism in pre-colonial Yoruba land is well known (B. Awe: 1964). Although some indigenes of Eastern Yoruba land have put up spirited arguments to explain away their subservient relations with the Benin, but some of the vestiges of servitude which portray their status vis-à-vis the Benin during this period, are just too glaring to ignore. Hence, the need to investigate the possibility of any tendentious advocacy on the part of the people concerned.

### **Akure and Its Geography**

Akure, the present day capital town of Ondo State, Nigeria is situated on 204 kilometers east of Ibadan in Oyo State, 168 kilometers north-east of Lagos. Akure is also the headquarters of Akure Local Government Area of Ondo State. The population of Akure presently is very difficult to ascertain. But based on the 1963 census figures, Akure is the sixth most populous town in Ondo State with a figure of 71,000 people. The figure must have since increased tremendously. Akure is in the humid tropical region of Nigeria lying on latitude  $7^{\circ} 15'$  north of the Equator and longitude  $5^{\circ} 15'$  east of the Greenwich Meridian. The town has a number of inselbergs and hills reaching up to 250 metres above the sea level. The average annual rainfall is about 1,500 millimeters. The area has two main seasons of the year, the dry season (October – March) and the rainy or wet season (March – October). The temperature averages about  $25^{\circ}$  centigrade.

### **Akure and the Benin Factor**

The origin of Akure, like most traditions of origin of African kingdoms revolves around the migration of one mythical figure or the other. Akure, being not an exception to this, shall not receive much attention in the present study as detailed history of its origin has been examined by different authors<sup>1</sup>. Rather, this paper focuses on the origin and nature of Benin-Akure relations during this period.

The reign of Oba Ewuare, (of Benin) (c.1440) is believed to have marked the beginning of an era in history. Ade Obayemi (1971) refers to the period as the "opening of a very vigorous period in Benin ...." Akintoye (1969) considers it to be "...the high tide of Benin expansionism...." Benin kingdom became consolidated internally and the frontiers of the empire expanded during the next four reigns<sup>2</sup>. The factors responsible for the expansion could be adduced to the advantages of a centralized political

### ***Femi Adegbulu***

structure under a monarch having the wherewithal of military and economic power to embark on territorial aggrandizement. This expansion must have antedated the use of guns, in that Egharevba points out that the use of guns probably started in Benin during the sixteenth century during the reign of Oba Esigie.

Benin expansionism, it must be noted, succeeded due to the disunited state of the societies with whom it dealt; more so, the weak level of resistance offered by the communities (Obayemi, 1971; Akintoye 1969). The whole of Ekiti, Kukuruku, Eka and Ibo on the western side of the Niger were all recorded by Egharevba to have fallen under the military weight of Benin. The Akure kingdom was not unaffected by this military subjugations. However, what cannot be said conclusively at this juncture, is whether these popularized large scale invasions of parts of eastern Yoruba communities, opened up for the first time the kingdom of Akure. Akure must have had contacts with Benin prior to the mid-fifteenth century Benin expansion into the areas of Akoko and Ekiti. Akintoye suggests that the earlier contacts must be explained in terms of the Akure tradition associating the Ajapada dynasty at its inauguration with the Benin kingdom. While the other communities in Akoko, Kukuruku (Nupe), Ibo (western side of the Niger) were invaded by Ewuare probably as new frontiers of his authority, Akure was also invaded probably for a different reason entirely. Oronmuza, the Onogie of Uselu, Egharevba says, was given the command "...of many troops to bring the rebellious people of Akure to their minds" (Egharevba, 1960). This statement, if it is anything to go by, aptly suggests that Akure had hitherto belonged to the mainstream of Benin imperial complex. The Akure people were now "rebellious" to their erstwhile conqueror. This move was just to remind the Akure people of their tribute obligations perhaps. Akure has also been reported to be the oldest entre pot of the trade between Ife and Benin (Akintoye).

However, other traditions which explain these relations exist. One of these links the Oba of Benin and Asodeboyede (ruler of Akure) as having left Ife at the same time, both going their separate ways to head different kingdoms. In a version presented by Omoregie (2006) 'the king of Benin and his nephew parted at Osu. (The nephew referred to Asodeboyede). After sometimes, this version claims, the Oba of Benin became worried about the welfare of his nephew and sent some group of servants in search of his nephew. The failure of this group to locate Asodeboyede necessitated the commissioning of emissaries led by Odiase, the son of Chief Inneh who was asked to locate Asodeboyede at all cost. This Uko (ambassador) went through Osu and came down to Akure where they met the Akure group already settled. Odiase was persuaded by Ajapanda to stay in Akure with his followers; but not until he got permission from the Oba of Benin, who, upon acceptance, added to Odiase's group more slaves and emissaries, which became perhaps, the first set of Benin immigrants to settle in Akure. Besides, this group might have been traders who later formed the nucleus of the ADO (Binis) community in Akure.

### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

In another account presented by A.A.U: African Studies Review Volume 4 and 5, an Oba of Benin named Ogiso and the Deji of Akure( Asodeboyede), left Ife at the same time and separated at Osu. After a long loss of contact, the Oba of Benin sent Odiase to search for his long loss brother. 'On getting to Akure, Odiase discovered that Osodeboyede had established a thriving settlement in Akure. Asodeboyede offered Odiase a piece of land on which to settle'. On the approval of Ogiso, Odiase was granted permission and given people to dwell with him in the new found kingdom of Akure. This account appears spurious in the sense that in the history of Benin, Ogiso is a title for an earlier dynasty, not a name of any individual. Therefore, the fact that it could not have been Ogiso that authorized Odiase to settle in Akure makes this account tendencious. However, the first Ogiso who became a ruler in Benin was Obagodo. Egharevba mentions this name when he says:

Ultimately Obagodo was made Ogiso or king Obagodo the first Ogiso wielded much influence and gained popularity as a good ruler. He died after a long reign and was succeeded by Ere his oldest son (1960)

Perhaps, Oba Erediauwa's is more explicit in this regard. According to him; The title (Ogiso) is said (by local tradition) to have derived from the description Ogie n Oriso meaning 'King in Heaven' and it originated from the wisdom in managing the affairs of the state especially settling disputes as demonstrated by the first and second earliest rulers known as 'Igodo' and 'Ere' (Erediauwa, 2004).

Although some have argued that irrespective of the name that is acceptable – Ogiso or Igodo – the irrefutable fact is that the two rulers could not have left Ife at the same time to found their kingdoms (Ogunbowale, 2009). Argument in favour of this view is premised on the record of Benin kingdom having been found around 900AD while that of Akure was founded in about 1150AD. This view seeks shelter in Akintoye's argument which insists:

That the Deji of Akure left Ife, the traditional head of the Yoruba in the company of their elder brother the Oba of Benin at Osu a village near Ilesa and after ruler of Benin wandering for years in the forest around Ara and Efon in Ekiti he finally settled at Akure

The Odiase episode discussed earlier looks more plausible as the security of the Benin kingdom is represented and at the same time, its prior existence, not taken for granted. It is not unlikely that their meeting at Ife was one of those periods when the Benin royalty came to Ife to pay homage or allegiance at Ife<sup>3</sup>. The dilemma created by this version is that it does not mention the period of Benin (Ogiso or Eweka) in which this occurred. The possible guess however is that prior to the Oranmiyan chapter in Benin in 1140 AD, there had been serious interaction between the Yoruba and Benin kingdoms.

However, all these arguments redound to one conclusion that contacts between Akure and Benin in economic, dynastic, cultural and perhaps military, started from the earliest times. The motives of war, trade and

### *Femi Adegbulu*

commerce seem like a recurring decimal in the origin of Benin – Akure relations. Oral interviews conducted in Akure, all claim that the Benin immigrants in Akure are captives of war, particularly the Benin – Akure war<sup>4</sup>. Meanwhile, while the rebuttal by the Odionwere of Akure (the leader of the Edo N'Ekue) High Chief Ajayi, who claims that the Benin immigrants were “more like permitted visitors who came in and out of Akure as they liked due to their blood ties with the Akure kingdom”<sup>5</sup>, is significant, the argument of Olu falae, a prominent indigene of Akure, that the Edo immigrants are “prisoners of war”<sup>6</sup>, requires further investigation to establish its authenticity. Traditions in Akure are somewhat bogus and biased in favour of Akure whose history has never been known to have recorded any account of war in which the Benin were conquered and her people taken captive.

Conversely, the exploits of Ewuare (the Great) is believed to have covered:

To the east (where) the western Igbo came under Benin rulership, to the north east, the empire expanded to include the Afenmai and other groups, to the north west, many towns and villages of Ekiti and Ikere and the important Yoruba kingdoms of Owo and Akure came to acknowledge Benin suzerainty (Egharevba, 1960).

It can be stated unequivocally therefore, that Ewuare's intervention in Akure triggered off the barrage of imperialistic incursions into Akure and its environs. Besides the version which focuses on expansionism, another version of the Ewuare's exploit sees dispersal as a major reason why a large number of Benin people took refuge outside of the vast empire. Omo N'Oba Erediauwa (2004) argues that:

...having lost his two sons, Ewuare ordered his people to mourn with him for three years during which nobody must have his bath or sexual interaction.... Many people outside the kingdom were asked to return to Benin but they bluntly refused. Some of such people could possibly have settled in Akure.

Logical as this argument seems, it is curious to note that two most authoritative texts on Benin history – Egharevba and Ryder – did not make any reference, however tangential, to this aspect of Ewuare's rule; thus making it difficult to accept the fact that a ruler like Ewuare who reveled in his policy of expansionism, would have kept a substantial number of Benin people out of his empire.

Trade probably constituted the first main thrust of Benin into the Akure. The high density of elephant distribution in the area is noteworthy. Trade in ivory was essential to the Benin people even before the fifteenth century. The elephant tusks carved by specialists in ivory carving met demands of political institutions, religious bodies and secret societies all which existed before the Benin imperialism. Akure was a major trading base for the Benin. Several trading routes around Akure helped foster Benin trade. Okeluse near Owo and Akure were commercial entre pots of this symbolic and profitable intercourse. The major articles of trade from the Benin area were salt, coral

### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

beads, brass utensils; while Akure exchanged these for clothes, leather goods, native pots, palm oil, kernels, Ilorin beans and locus beans gotten from North Ekiti and Igbomina. They also bought from Ekiti, Akoko and Owo, slaves which were displayed at Oliha market. But since the slave trade around here was less pronounced, the interest of the European traders was shifted to the Niger Delta area for more slaves in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Omoriegbe, 2006).

Moreover, because of the availability and the abundance of ivory in this region and noting the premium placed on ivory by the Benin authorities, hunters were dispatched to the various areas to hunt elephants. The tradition of Ipele near Owo, corroborates this. OLU-ERIN (Cord or Elephants) was said to have come in search of hunting ground for elephants when he established a settlement first at ULEJI (Ulejin), and later established Ipele community having his group of hunters as the nucleus of the new settlement. The hunter story recurs again in Ikere tradition (Ogoga) to which we shall turn later. He came to Ikere as a hunter but later settled for reasons of political opportunism. Thus, at the inception of Akure as a vassal community, Benin elements were already trading in the area.

Perhaps, it is pertinent at this juncture for one to conclude that the imperial tenure of Benin started with surreptitious commercial penetration rather than actual military and political domination (colonialism) as some traditions have claimed (Obayemi, 1971).

It is also plausible to say that since trade and commerce are always in the forefront of most imperial undertakings, an elaborate organization of Benin traders and subject peoples were made to facilitate them. Trade guilds sprang up at the capital and at the vassals. In the case of the centre (Benin), trade was a state monopoly especially in articles such as ivory and pepper. These and slaves which were the main merchandise traded in by the Benin traders, were available in Owo, Akure, Ekiti and the Akoko country of the eastern Yoruba. By the end of the sixteenth century, European (British and the Dutch), traded with Benin on the Benin river. Fierce competition for Benin articles of trade had a direct impact on the vassals and the long distance traders along the major trade routes passing through Akure.

The competition for Benin's goods enlarged trading opportunities and to meet the demands of a fast growing market, market associations were enlarged and trading areas correspondingly expanded. Akure became a major entre pot of Benin trade. The guild president responsible for one of the vital zonal associations, Ekhengo (forest traders), was the ODIONWERE<sup>7</sup>. He organized the trade in the interior for the Oba (of Benin) at Akure where the population of private traders now increased tremendously. Cloth, brass, utensils, iron implement coral (red) beads and smith workers were the dominant articles of Akure trade<sup>8</sup>. As noted earlier, Benin hunters were all over this region in search of elephants for ivory. The traditional control over the ivory trade was such that gave the Oba (of Benin) total monopoly over ivory. The hunter/trader naturally gave one tusk to the Oba as royal courtesy demanded, and sold the remaining one to the Oba who paid a price of his. It should be note that the first Ogoga (of Ikere) who is said to be a hunter/prince,

### ***Femi Adegbulu***

in compliance with the Benin tradition, had to send one of the tusks of the elephant he killed at Ikere to the Benin potentate.

The Benin settlers at Akure at this time were mainly traders, representatives of the Oba of Benin, and soldiers in the imperial army. They outnumbered all other settlers (non-Yoruba) in the town. According to N.A.C. Weir in his 1934 report on the Akure District, "It is estimated that their (stranger settlers) number in Akure town exceeds two thousand and that the Bini population exceeds half of that number"<sup>9</sup>. This group of settlers, though substantial in number were not domicile in a particular section of the town, (as there are separate areas for settlers at Ikere), they however, had a recognized leader called the OLOTU EKIRAN in Akure probably not answerable to the Oba of Akure. This could have been so because, the title (out of many others), was bestowed on the holder by the Oba of Benin. More so, he was the leader of a privileged (Akintoye, 1969) people resident in a vassal kingdom to Benin. He was probable at par with Odionwere also resident at Akure<sup>10</sup>.

Relations between Benin and Akure seem to have ebbed during the reign of Arakale (1769-1818) when a Benin ambassador called Osague was killed in Akure. This marked the beginning of seemingly interminable crises that came to an end during the reign of Osupa (1834-1846). Robert Smith records that prior to the war in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Benin had attacked Akure for being rebellious during the reign of Ehengbuda. The striking thing about this Benin-Akure war, is not the war itself but its political imprints on Akure; as the Osupa ruling line is said to be an offshoot of the war. As one account has it, the title 'Osupa to Edo wa,' meaning, moon has come back from Benin or someone who has brought fortunes from Edo. He was discovered to be an Akure prince that was captured in war. Realizing that he was of kingly origin, the Oba of Benin developed friendly relations with him until he was installed as the Deji when the throne in Akure was vacant.

According to Williams Aderounmu (2005),

It was during his reign that the Ado-Akures (Edo N'Ekue) settled in Akure. He was reported to have repaired and expanded the war-torn palace, he started the crusade of reconciliation, rehabilitation and resettlement of war victims. Igbehin and Eyinke quarters were established for the war returnees. Interestingly, Osupa ruling line is one of the ruling families in Akure which recently was revived by Adekunle Ajasin, a one-time Governor of old Ondo State. Perhaps the restoration was to deconstruct the notion in certain quarters, that, as a sign of repudiating the Benin hegemony, and its vestiges totally wiped out, the Osupa lineage was marginalized for a long time, owing to its link with Benin. Although it has been argued in certain quarters that the Benin oppression ended during the reign of Odundun (1882-1890) who stopped the payment of tribute to Benin through the instrumentality of the Aladoko masquerades. However, the established tradition does not support this view. Egharevba (1960) states:

At the close of this same year, Odundun, the Deji (Udezi) of Akure had made state swords for his own use without the sactions of the Oba. When



### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

Ovoranmwun heard of this early in 1889, he sent his Okpele to take the sword from the Deji. Okpele took with him several guns and kegs of powder and told the Deji that the Oba of Benin had sent him to fetch the swords and that if he refused to give them up he would be punished. The swords were surrendered to Okpele and brought to the Oba at Benin city. Odundun sent many presents to the Oba afterwards...

Obviously, the above account does not sound as if Akure was a free town, independent of Benin. The fact that Odundun still paid tribute to the Oba of Benin after the threat of the latter shows that Akure was still under the Benin subjugation. The Edo N'Ekue (Edo people in Akure) war returnees are today found in Eyinke, Igisin, Oke Arata, Oritagun, Oke Aro, Erun-Oba and Ereketi quarters of Akure (Ogunbowale, 2009). Interestingly, most of these names are Benin names, which makes it easily credible when Adebayo Afe says: 'The Ado-Akure were a law unto themselves. They constituted themselves into what may be described as a 'state within a state'<sup>11</sup>. However, this pattern can be said to be gradually fading out as the Edo N'Ekue are being one way or the other fused with the local population. Perhaps, the phrase, 'a state within a state' is germane when it is considered that the position of the Odionwere is like an ambassador of the Oba of Benin in charge of managing the Edo N'Ekue population in Akure. Besides superintending the political and administrative needs of his people, the Odionwere organizes the Benin festivals in Akure.

The people of Akure town used to receive chieftaincy titles from Benin. Most of these title holders were successful traders who could afford the relevant fees that came with the titles. Conferring titles on notables from Owo, Ipele, Akure, etc have been recorded as a source of revenue for the Benin Oba. However, most of these titles were never hereditary and this may explain why most are already extinct<sup>12</sup>. At the township level, certain titles still exist till date whose provenance are traceable to Benin. For example, the title such as LISA in Akure might be associated or linked with the Benin political influence on the leadership of Akure during the vassalage of the latter to the former. The Lisa in Akure is the second in command to the Deji in the traditional administration. The OJOMU title which probably translates to the EZOMO in Benin is an IARE chief of ORITAGUN quarters in Akure, where incidentally many of the Edo N'Ekue live<sup>13</sup>. The SASERE is another Akure title of possible Benin provenance. AJANA title, is also recorded as a Benin political legacy to Akure and other towns like owo and Idoani<sup>14</sup>. The most noticeable Benin court influence on Owo and its environs and on Akure in particular is perhaps, in the area of court regalia and royal paraphernalia. The leaf-shaped royal sword or state sword is a common feature in Akure court. It perhaps represented the staff of office given to the Deji by the Oba of Benin during the Akure vassalage. Egharevba's reference to Oba Odundun who made a state sword-replicating Benin's and the humiliating reprimand he suffered as a result of not securing the necessary clearance, attests to this. The coral (red beads), Obayemi (1971) asserts "are typical of Benin area and the Yoruba kingdoms within its orbits". The predominance

### *Femi Adegbulu*

of these bead type is evident in Akure's Oba's regalia. It is even more so in the case of Owo, a town which is noted for greater affinity with Benin. The ceremonial dress for the Oba and his chiefs and the adornments evince strong Benin connexion.

Besides, Egharevba records that when Eweka I, the erstwhile successor of Oranmiyan to the Benin throne was a young child probably a toddler, won a popular game referred to as AKUE; his father on hearing of this feat sent prizes to him. The moment he received this gifts he uttered his first statement, "OWOMIKA" (I have succeeded). This was corrupted or adulterated to EWEKA which became his title when he acceded to power. The signification of this story is that all succeeding Obas to the throne went to the same spot called USE before coronation to pronounce the title or agnomen by which they were to be called (Egharevba). In Akure too, at the accession of a Deji to the throne, there has since been the practice of choosing a title or agnomen on the spot referred to as OKITI OMOLORE (NOBLE HILL)<sup>15</sup>. From the above parallel, it seems that the Akure tradition on this aspect of coronation rites has a borrowing from Benin installation rites.

To all intents and purposes therefore, it seems, Akure had remained a vassal of Benin before the fifteenth century. Apart from being a tribute paying vassals, a trade centre port, Akure also served Benin, over the years, as a military outpost from where the garrison stationed there led out expeditions in the Ekiti country. This enhanced greater mobility of Benin forces and consequent firmer Benin control of the southern kingdoms of Akure, Ogotun, Ise, Emure, Ita-Ogbolu, Igbara-Oke and Ikere and beyond into the Ekiti interior. Perhaps, of utmost political and cultural importance has been the dynastic link between Benin and Akure. The Benin traditions maintain that the former title of the Obas in Akure changed at the instance of Benin influence.

The story is told of Atakumosa (the seventh Owa of Ilesa), who was banished from the throne by his people and had to seek political asylum in Benin during the reign of EHENGBUDA. Atakumosa did not leave Benin without raising a son through one of the palace maids. This son grew up to become a dexterous leopard hunter which gave him the name UDEZI (leopard killer). Udezi was later at Akure on route to Ilesa to meet his father when he started an affair with the daughter of the reigning AJAPADA. He was later to become the Oba because the Ajapada had no heir (Akintoye; Egharevba). When he became the Oba, he assumed the title IDEJI which his successors have since adopted<sup>16</sup>. The implication of this tradition is that it agrees with the Akure variant that the title of the Oba, Ajapada changed about this period all the same. However, the period when this episode occurred, the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century, gives the evidence of Akure being at the centre of Benin imperial hold. The former history, no doubt, must have been so told as is customary with many traditional nationalists, in order to explain away any alien influence, more so, an enduring influence at that.

## *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

It is important to note that Akure remained within Benin's imperial orbit until Benin itself fell prey to another imperialism by 1897. Benin had had to suppress acts of rebellion from her vassals-Owo, Akure, Ipele, Ise, etc, on grounds of tribute payment, which Benin reacted to militarily. This became a dominant theme during the dying days of Benin's imperial authority. Examples of such wars fought in order to reassert Benin's power and presence were: the Benin- Akure war of 1823; Benin-Ado, 1815; Owo-Benin war of early nineteenth century. It became too tasking for a declining power to hold down its tributaries effectively. However, the main socio-cultural thrusts made over the years, including the Edo N'Ekue, have remained relics of a past laden with Benin ties. This Benin factor which seems to be replicated almost in every community in Eastern Yorubaland, is conspicuous in Ikere, to which our attention is now turned.

### **IKERE**

#### **Geography**

Ikere-Ekiti<sup>17</sup> is presently the head-quarters of Ekiti South Local Government Area of Ekiti State. Ikere is about thirty six kilometers North of Akure, the capital of Ondo State. It is 330 kilometres North-East of Lagos. With over 107, 216 inhabitants, using the 1963 census figure, Ikere lies between latitudes 7° and 8° North of the Equator and Longitude 5° and 6° East of the Greenwich Meridian<sup>18</sup>. The town covers an area of about fifteen square kilometers. This area is entirely within the tropics. Like all Yoruba sub-groups, the Ikere people trace their origin to Ile-Ife, the cradle of Yoruba historical consciousness,<sup>19</sup> and Benin another cultural and political centre of antiquity. Other settlers also claim origin from Ado, Oyo, Iluombo, Agbado, Afao and Are. Details of these traditions of origin particularly its early connection with Benin, have been extensively documented by historians and will not engage our central focus here.<sup>20</sup>

#### **The Benin Factor**

It is interesting to note that Ikere has about four traditions of origin. But we shall discuss briefly, the one that connects it with Benin. However, it is imperative to point out from the outset that OLUKERE, (the king of Ikere ) who traced his origin from Ife, was once the ruler of Ikere, holding a temporal and political authority based on a spiritual sway he held over his people. He was "a Pope in the Vatican city",<sup>21</sup> i.e Olukere held both temporal or secular authority and ecclesiastical control over the people. This position of prominence seems to have vanished with the coming of the Benin elements. The Benin tradition is about an itinerant Benin prince, a skillful and adventurer named IGONIGA AGAMO. The story was told that it was when he was being questioned about his mission to Ikere that he answered thus: "Ekene -Goga san a ahin" (in Edo it means "this is how far I have

### *Femi Adegbulu*

endeavoured”).<sup>22</sup> It was later contracted to Igoga and later Ogoga which had since remained the title of his successors till date. According to the tradition, the prince left Benin as a result of a succession dispute. Ogoga, having lost out to a rival claimant to the stool of Benin, ran away from the city. This is because in those days it was risky and unsafe for a looser in such claims to remain in the city or seat of power. Before leaving Benin, he consulted the oracle and was told to propitiate certain gods and he refused to do so. He, however, proceeded on his journey first to a place called ISHARUN and later to AGAMO<sup>23</sup> where he paused the business he knew best – hunting.

One day as he was on a hunting expedition, he saw and shot at an elephant. The game did not die immediately but ran away all the same. Igoga pursued the elephant until he got to a point near Ikere where, the story maintains, the elephant turned into a rock. This rock was later called UTAMORAJERIN (a rock that resembles the elephant)<sup>24</sup>. This strange occurrence could only be attributed to the failure of Igoga to offer sacrifices in Benin as he was advised. This was catastrophic for a professional hunter; hence he went back to Benin in order to appease the gods as he was earlier counseled. As he was on another expedition sometime later, he shot at another elephant which later ran away toward the earlier course on which he lost the first elephant. Though he missed the prized game, he was not going to give up. In the course of continue search, he came to Ikere where, after a diligent investigation, he was directed to the palace of Olukere. The Olukere during this period was carrying out the traditional annual seclusion for a three-month duration<sup>25</sup>. Perhaps a more plausible explanation to the incessant disappearances to shot elephants is necessary to fully establish the authenticity of the story. Could it be that elephants were totems in Ikere, that made killing them a taboo? Better still, could it have been because the Olukere (king of Ikere) was performing his annual ritual, no elephant must be killed? For one would have expected that after Igoga had gone back to Benin to perform the rituals expected of him, his success as a hunter would be assured. Or, could elephant hunting be a surreptitious subterfuge used by Benin elements as cover for imperialism, as the establishment of Ipele (referred to earlier) by Benin group of hunters attests to? More investigation into this elephantine episode in Benin – Yoruba relations surely requires a further study.

However, Olukere was not supposed to be seen in the public, and was also not to be visited, more so by a stranger. Igoga, no doubt, must have been emboldened by his prowess as a hunter of repute and the fact that he was a medicine man of distinction. Besides, Igoga might have considered himself a prince, who could confer with a brother prince irrespective of any traditional sanction to the contrary. He strode into the Olukere’s compound, as he was being served palm wine by one of his palace officials, the ASA. As he entered, he was accosted thus: “O ri ere”, that is he has seen what he was not supposed to see. He was deemed to have committed an “eewo”, i.e. a taboo (Akinjogbin, Anyandele, 1980). Igoga thus quickly cleared himself narrating his experience of the lost elephant and that he meant well. He then

### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

offered an unsliced pod of kolanuts to the Olukere so as to propitiate the OLUSUNTA, the popular deity in Ikere on his behalf. This obligation was granted, later, he found the lost elephant. The spot where the elephant was found is known as UTAOGBOLUMODE<sup>26</sup>; here the head of the elephant was buried under the watchful eye of a Chief called ELEMOSO. This art of kola nut presentation has since remained a coronation imperative for every Ogoga on his accession to power.

As the Benin tradition required of him, he presented one of the elephant's tusks to the Oba of Benin and gave the remainder to the Olukere. The tusk was then installed in the palace of the Olukere until about 1975 A.D. when it was allegedly carted away by thieves<sup>27</sup>. The presentation of kola nuts by Igoga and the gifts of the elephant tusk to the Olukere are ascribable to an apparent acknowledgement of the superiority and the protection of the host monarch. The hunter prince was then lodged in the strangers' quarters called "EREPUPU" for the first seven years of his arrival. Also, his arrival coincided with the reign of the sixth Olukere called SISA. All the Ogogas that reigned have all had to be lodged in the same house under reference for at least seven days during their coronation ceremonies thus re-enacting the symbolic stranger status accorded the first Ogoga.

During a brief visit to Benin, this tradition has it that he (Igoga) was presented with a crown by the Oba of Benin for his bravery. This might be more than ordinary crown. It might have meant an encouragement by the Benin potentate given to Igoga to aggrandize power. The suspicion here however, is that the story of Ogoga as a recipient of crown is probably to give colour to the story; a colour of Benin imperialism. It will also suggest legitimacy since there is the tendency of rulers to trace their origins to cultural and political centre of antiquity such as Ife or Benin. The story maintains that it became the general wish of the entire people in the settlement that Igoga should continue to live among them because of his princely wisdom. He however, insisted on leaving since he was born a prince and according to Igoga, he was second to none. This clearly means that the hunter was not without political ambition. Ado sources try to explain the rise of Ogoga at the expense of the Olukere through his ability to aid the Ikere people in their wars against the Ado forces. This feat is reported to have been repeated on other occasions. According to Akintoye (1969):

"...the Ikere traditions concerning the origin of Ogoga are supported by Akure and Ado traditions; but the latter has the explanation that the rise of the Ogoga in Ikere was due to frequent Ado attacks on Ikere leading to the acceptance by the Ikere people of a wandering hunter prince as their leader in spite of the Olukere".

What all these suggest, it can be argued, may be found in Ogoga's career as a successful warrior and a saviour of the Ikere, which probably earned him a political office that over-shadowed the office of the Olukere. It also shows Ogoga perhaps leading a migrant group of highly organized hunters and adventurers, who probably due to exceptional military acumen, a more than average knowledge of state craft and social engineering, took over

authority, political and executive and only conceded royal authority confined to religious and spiritual levels. There exists today in rituals and festivals, the re-enactment of the process of power transfer. For example, during the OLUSUNTA festivals, the UDUGE, a New Yam celebration by the Ogoga marks the re-allegiance of the town's Chiefs to the Ogoga at his palace. Moreover, the annual traditional festival called UJERO, which afford the citizens of Ikere to meet in the Oba's palace to discuss the socio-economic and political development of the community, is the only occasion within the year when the Olukere meets the Ogoga. The Olukere alone wears a crown while the Ogoga ties a head band adorned with "IERE – OKIN" royal feathers. The two personages meet at the UWA UJERO (UJERO COURT) where the Ogoga presents the traditional unsliced pod of kola nut to the Olukere, in reminiscent of their very first meeting in Olukere's compound. The importance of this lies probably in considering the meeting a reminder of what could have been major "handing over" of power by the Olukere. Again, we can argue the psychological implication of this celebration. A ruler who had hitherto controlled the wherewithal of power and governance now feeling compelled to leave his palace in order to meet the Ogoga, the hunter prince in his own domain. This may be conceived as a victory over Olukere who would have normally received a 'visitor' in his own palace as tradition and royal courtesies demanded.

Perhaps the emphasis of Ikere tradition that the Olukere became old and ailing is relevant here. When he could no longer cope normally with power he had to relinquish to Ogoga, the more "Mundane" aspects of ruler ship and retained only the "higher duties" of religion and a position of ritual pre-eminence. This explanation is quite tendentious. The real power passed to the Ogoga through ability and possibly, sheer force. Hence Olukere went into political obscurity and now represents a ritual or symbolic figure. Hitherto the Olukere held temporal and spiritual powers over the people; having a kind of position akin to that of "Pope in the Vatican" retaining the spiritual function of interceding with ancestors of the people, and executive head of the people having the political authority deriving from their collective support. The prowess of the Ogoga most probably undermined the Olukere's position and power at its very base. Though at this crucial meeting the Ogoga does not put on a crown where as the Olukere does, however the IERE OKIN signifies political authority attributable to a Yoruba monarch. Moreover, the tradition maintains that when the prince went back to Benin to present the elephant tusk to the Benin potentate, it was during this period that he was given "six expert hunters who are now Ogoga's war Chiefs ..." This group of hunters probably formed the nucleus of his ELEGBE group of Chiefs. Besides, this act is characteristic of conquistadors who, having conquered a territory, post administrators there to represent their interests in such a territory. However, this could be conceived as an innovation made in the military organization of Ikere.

So far it has been shown that the origin and settlement in Ikere did not come in a single wave. The autochthons were earlier ruled by the Ife group

### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

but much later, the new migrants from Benin took over the mantle of leadership. Settlement in Ikere thus became a continuous process up to the nineteenth century especially in the Yorubaland when this period was of intense activity. At the zenith of its power, Benin, we have noted, expanded into the eastern Yoruba and north-eastern fringes of Yorubaland. Trade links were established; political and cultural influences of Benin became conspicuously noticeable. These phenomena also affected Ikere town as it fell on a main trade route between Benin and Oyo. It is also recorded that Ikere became a principal military out-post to Benin from its campaign into the southern kingdoms of Ekiti country. During this period, Ikere experienced a level of Edo immigrations. Their people came as soldiers, traders, adventurers, etc, to settle at Ikere especially in the Iro quarters of Ikere. An example of this is the SAO, the traditional Prime Minister to the Ogoga – whose family, traditions say migrated from Benin<sup>28</sup>. There exist today in Ikere other families who all claim Benin descent.

During the close of the eighteenth century, Benin expansion was far and wide but the irony was that the authorities in Benin court could no longer effectively control the whole expanse of the empire, which at its peak, exercised dominion over not only Akure, Ikere, Owo and Ipele, but also Igbara-Oke and Ita-Ogbolu, who all paid tribute to the Benin potentate<sup>29</sup>. But then, Benin's power began to dwindle, very fast. Attacks were made on vassal governments that defaulted in tolls and annual tributes to the Oba of Benin. Hence as a result of this re-awakening in the early nineteenth century, Benin's military presence was once again being felt albeit not much like before and Ikere began once more to serve in its traditional positions of a military outpost. The reason why this role stuck, it can be argued, could be found in the kinship that existed between Benin and Ogoga's Ikere – the two being natural allies.

At about 1815, a major event occurred, during one of the numerous Benin campaigns into Ekiti that really left an indelible Benin imprints on the region. Ado Ekiti, a town of about fifteen kilometers north of Ikere had for a long time been a cause of worry to the Ikeres. Many wars between the two kingdoms have been recorded. It is even believed that it was the ability of Ogoga to check Ado belligerency that earned him the leadership of Ikere. It is believed that during the reign of Ewi Aroloye, the Benin were on a military campaign to Otun, Ado (Adeyeri, 1983) one of the vassals to Benin that had probably repudiated her vassalage status during this period. The Binis advised the Ewi (Oba of Ado) to capitulate but he declined. He rather poised for a showdown with the Benin forces. The Ado people abandoned the town thus frustrating the Binis who were welcome by sheer emptiness. The Ado people had moved to another location called OKE-OKO near Ifaki. The Benin people thus reacted by evacuating adjoining Ado villages and dependencies to Ikere. The villages affected were Uyin (Iyin), Igede, Agbado, Iluomoba, Afao and Are. The evacuees were settled in Ikere at different locations bearing the names of their respective towns. It should be noted that some of these peoples returned home later in the course if time

### ***Femi Adegbulu***

while those who remained until now form the late settlers in Ikere. These include, Are, Afao, Iluomoba and Agbado- who all form four separate quarters out of the seven in Ikere.

The consequences of this had both military and political dimensions. This single move became a masterstroke that tilted the balance of power in favour of Ikere. Demographically, it increased the population of Ikere such that it provided labour for the production of food and the number of men that could be fielded during any campaign increased appreciably. Those days, it should be noted, warfare depended more on the number of men while other areas of logistics were ancillary. Also of note, is the settlement of Oyo elements amongst the people of Ikere. This group which included migrants from Osogbo, Oyo, Ibadan, Iwo etc, were (and still are) referred to as the Oyos generally. The political convulsions that followed the extinction of old Oyo forced many Oyo elements to migrate into the forest zones of Egbaland, Owu, Ijesa and Ekiti areas. If the long-distance-trade had hitherto been responsible for the presence of the Oyo amongst the Ekiti, the cataclysmic effects of the Ilorin pressure brought about a sort of forced migration among the Oyos of the capital. Hitherto they came into Ekiti in trickles, but due to the effects of the Kiriji or Ekiti-parapo confederation of the 1880s, they massed into our area of discourse immediately after the 1893 cessation of hostilities. The above aptly describes the position of Oyo settlers in Ikere up to the end of the nineteenth century.

Although the Oyo population in Ikere was relatively negligible but their impact was substantial enough on the people. Like in non parts of Yorubaland, due to this Oyo diaspora, cultural traits dominant among the Oyo sub-group became noticeable in Ikere. Among the Oyo in Ikere, the male operated looms were in use in the town. DUNDUN and BATA drums and the dance forms associated with the drums all became a part of Ikere culture. Food items were also introduced by the Oyos. Chief among these were OGI (pap) and ELUBO varieties (yam, cassava and plantain flour) etc. Politically, albeit this group was small numerically, it played major political roles in Ikere. According to Oguntuyi (1979) in his *Histry of Ado*, the Oyos, some of who were adventurers and foot loose soldiers concocted intricate stratagems for winning wars for Ikere at the expense of Ado between 1882 and 1896. It is worthy or note that while most towns and villages in Ekiti were joining the Ekiti parapo confederacy to challenge Ibadan imperialism, Ikere and Ado among others stood aside ostensibly fighting a war between themselves. It is believed that the Oyo elements in Ikere persuaded the reigning Ogoga to stay out of trouble by remaining friendly with Ibadan. Why this was so (if it was true) is not clear; especially against the backdrop of the fact that, taming Ibadan whose hegemonic and oppressive effect was widely felt in all of Yorubaland and Oyo in particular, should be of great advantage to Oyo. Nevertheless, the Oyo must have indeed been very influential among the Ikere authorities.

Waves of settlements have been recorded in Ikere and the important ones have been noted; however, it should be shown that other migrations not



### *A Study in Pre-Colonial Benin Imperialism and Impact on its Environs*

so significant as to have had profound socio-political implications might have been underplayed in the various traditions. But what is interesting is that Ikere as it was up to the nineteenth century, represented a mosaic of cultures. From this emerged a settlement predominantly Yoruba with a leadership having roots in Benin culture. This process has yielded a hybrid culture that is essentially Yoruba in language, Edo in political leadership with a citizenry from various parts of Yorubaland and probably beyond.

#### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the impact of Benin imperialism on a number of towns and communities in eastern Yorubaland during the pre-colonial period. The Benin influence in the heydays of her imperialism manifested in socio-cultural, economic and political dimensions. In the eighteenth century, the powers of Benin court could no-longer hold the precincts of the empire. Communities repudiated tribute obligations and severed the colonial domination of Benin. The imprints of Benin influence are still noticeable in some communities identified above. Of particular interest are the townships of Akure and ikere-Ekiti. Through trade and adventure, dynastic ties were established between Benin on the one hand and Ikere and Akure on the other. The dynasties in the two towns changed during the tenure of Benin imperialism and the modes of contact with the Akure and Ikere peoples suggest a Benin provenance of the new dynasties. Further research on this aspect is still expected to establish the genuineness or otherwise of these contacts. The socio-political formations in these two towns also changed in the course of this contact. Chieftaincy titles are also traceable to Benin. Settlers from the Edo-speaking areas came in fairly good numbers to make fortunes in these places as soldiers, smiths' workers, hunters, adventurers and stragglers etc. Edo settlements have been traced as the Edo N'Ekue elements in Akure, thereby justifying the title of this paper.

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***Femi Adegbulu***

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