

## IFE-Olukotun Community, North-Central Nigeria And Issues of Migration and Linkages with Other Yoruba Towns

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### Abstract:

Human beings world over tends to be perennially restive and Yoruba people seem to have had their own share of this human trait. People migrate for various reasons. Hence, it will certainly be a stretch of imagination to think that they have always occupied their present land. (Ogunba 1973:91) Though, a long period of effective occupation can make a community feel they are the original owner of a place. As such, to lay claim to a place as one's original home, the number of years one's fore fathers had settled there is imperative, likewise the language spoken whether original or borrowed and how homogenous or otherwise the culture is. It is in this wise that the heterogeneous nature and the recent awareness of certain Yoruba towns having the same cognomen and names with certain quarters in Ife-Olukotun engendered the desire to search for their link with such Yoruba towns to unearth the historical and socio-cultural accounts for insight for the present and future and preservation for posterity. More importantly, is the current wave of *Obaship* in the community with each of the quarters that made up Ife-Olukotun having their own Oba (king) as against the hitherto one *Oba (Olukotun of Ife)* for the entire community. Methodology adopted for the paper are Archival and Secondary sources.

**Keywords:** Ajalorun, IFE-Olukotun, Linkages, Migration, Yoruba Towns,

### Introduction

Ife-Olukotun, formerly called Ajalorun-Ife and Ife-Yagba is in Yagba East Local Government of Kogi State, Nigeria and the headquarters of South East Yagba district. The settlement pattern of the village is such that it is situated on a plain area surrounded by hills. The early settlers being predominantly farmers and hunters put many factors into consideration. First among such factors is the defensive function of the hills. This function was attested to in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when Nupes in their search for slaves attacked Yagba land. Another factor that influenced the settlement

pattern is the fertility of the land which made possible the practice of agriculture, though at the initial stage on subsistence level. With this, the people are able to produce food crops and cash crops. The importance of the available food crops allow the people not only to produce for her population but also sell the surplus thereby using the money generated from such sale to meet their financial obligations; which fits into Hopkins (1973:67) assertion that: it is now something of a common place to point out that the conventional 'subsistence economy' in which each household

produced its own requirements, had little application in pre-colonial West Africa.

More so, the disparity in the vegetation zone necessitated dependency of one zone on the other. That is why Ayittey (1991:319) contended that market was inevitable even if self-sufficiency was assumed to be strictly operative. 'That is, it was physically impossible for a homestead to produce all its needs on the farm. By necessity, a surplus over its needs was required to exchange for what it could not produce....' Hence, the appearance of marketable surpluses and the development of exchange led to trade relations among the indigenous Ife-Olukotun and neighbouring communities. Exchange of goods in a local scale and internal exchange between Ife-Olukotun and different parts of neighbouring communities became characteristic features of the economy. Thus, the imperativeness of local exchange became germane in the creation of local markets. Equally important is the four major roads linking the community with different regions of Kogi and Ekiti States thus enhancing its contact with other communities.

### **Brief Historical Account of Yagba Land as A Prelude to IFE-Olukotun Tradition of Origin**

The need to delve into the historical account of Yagba land is imperative, being germane to the tradition of origin of Ife-Olukotun. The word Yagba was coined from *Iya Agba*, meaning old woman. Yagba land has boundaries with the *Nupe* and *Igbomina* in the north, the *Yoruba* in the South and Southwest, the *Ijumu* and *Bunu* in the Southeast. Yagba tribe of the north eastern part of Yoruba land called Okun is divided into two parts and this accounts for the two versions or accounts of the Yagba people. One account claims that the Yagba people were descendants of a famous princess who in her later life was called Iya Agba. She was said to have led a group of immigrants from Old Oyo to settle at the present location of Yagba land.

In supporting this claim, Iyekolo (2000:4 ) while quoting Kenyo in his book, *The History of Yagba* people claims that the Alafin's seat of government

called Oyo-Ile fell victim of the Nupe warriors, forcing one of the *Ayabas* (queen) to migrate to this part of Yoruba world known as Iyagba named after the expression of *Ilu-Iya Agba* (meaning *Iya Agba's* community).

The other account or version of Yagba people claims that they migrated from *Ile-Ife* which is the generally dispersal source of all Yoruba people. The reason adduced for the exodus from the country of their birth was the overpopulation of the town Ife and the consequent lack of farming ground. At the time of their arrival, they were in three separate groups; those in the vicinity of *Ife-Olukotun* and *Ejuku*, those of Isanlu and those of Mopa. They had at no time a paramount ruler; but a council of elders who met on occasions to decide matters affecting the whole tribe. Their first settlement is alleged to have been a town called *Awoyo*, which was situated between Ife-Olukotun and Ejuku. Here, there were continuous quarrels over water, the supply being hopelessly inadequate during dry season; and consequently the inhabitants split up and the villages are presumably the offshoots. ( National Archives, Kaduna. NAK. File No. Acc.6.) On the surface, these accounts of origin seems contradictory, but they probably can be reconciled. Both have one salient point in common, that is, both agree on the fact that they are descendants of migrant founders. In short, Yagba groups represent a mixture of several migrants of diverse origins. (Aliu 2013:17-23)

### **IFE-Olukotun Tradition of Origin:**

Each community, family, clan and village however small or large had an established tradition concerning its origin. The community might split up, migrate and assimilate new elements or be conquered by others and be absorbed by new immigrants. Hence, the emergence of Ife-Olukotun as a village could not be unconnected with the split at Awoyo as asserted by archival account. Tradition of origin as a concept refers to the genesis or beginning of a society, people and community. The founding of a community is relatively by chance. People move from one place to the other to settle and this is referred to as migration and what

really determine the point of settlement is comfort. Hence, for a man to stay at a particular place there must be some variables that necessitate such decision. For instance, the nature of the people's belief system would make them stay where there are materials to experiment their religious belief. Besides, the dominance of the superior power over the inferior causes migration. Once the superior power moves in and dominates the inferior at the latter's aboriginal place of abode, the inferior with time would be forced to move. In fact, Isichie (1986) identifies war as part of the natural forces and proceeded to explain the Yoruba civil wars and its aftermath migration. However, whatever might have been the reason for a society, people and community to move from a place and settle in another place, the basic factor in such settlement is comfort and this was evident in the factors that influenced the settlement pattern of Ife-Olukotun community.

Historically, the origin of Ife-Olukotun like many other Yoruba town is traced to Ile-Ife. According to oral tradition, the community was said to have been founded by a man called Ajalorun who migrated from Ile-Ife as a result of chieftaincy feud between him and his brothers. He was said to have been instructed by Ifa oracle to move towards the northern part of Ile-Ife. As he journeyed through many villages, he consulted the oracle often to ascertain the direction to follow and if he had reached the final settlement. As instructed by the oracle, he and his followers settled among already settled immigrants at a place called Awoyo situated between the settlement and Ejuku. But how did Ajalorun and his entourage manage to have a hold on the already settled people they met? Probably, Ajalorun might have provided the type of leadership needed or a reflection of certain kind of leadership trait which appeared superior to the existing system. On the other hand, another answer that could be adduced is the Yoruba legend according to Ogunba (1973:95) which says that the sixteen sons of Oduduwa left Ile-Ife in the same day and spread over Yoruba land, their father giving each of them crown and some other precious material things which were recognised as

belonging to royalty wherever they went. Hence, the earlier settlers knew this and received them warmly. Meanwhile, oral information asserted that Ajalorun was a great and powerful hunter and this endeared him to people and he eventually became a rallying figure and a ruler. He was said to have reigned briefly before he joined his ancestors in a mysterious manner. The mystery surrounding the disappearance of all the rulers with the title Ajalorun necessitated the change in the title. Meanwhile, this mystery equally made the position of the ruler to be sacred and held in high esteem by the people. Consequently, the people readily gave their support and loyalty to subsequent successors. One salient or pertinent thing that comes to mind while taking into account Ife-Olukotun tradition of origin is the question of aboriginal inhabitants of the region. It should be borne in mind that the region was not altogether unpeopled, but from oral investigations, the aboriginal of the village is shrouded in obscurity. In confirming this obscurity, the archival account asserts that in common with all the tribes of Kabba Division, the Yagbas with Ife-Olukotun inclusive have little to tell of their origin or history in pre-colonial times.

The present Ife-Olukotun was initially known and called Ajalorun-Ife after the first settler, but later changed to Ife-Yagba and finally to Ife-Olukotun. The community is made up of Otun, Ohi and Ona clans. On the demise of the last Ajalorun, His Royal Highness Ajokole Woya Firifiri from Oke-Aga compound, it became the turn of Ogbo compound to produce the succeeding Ajalorun. Hence, when the holder of a war title known as Olukotun, Olukotun Aseja was called upon to fill the vacant position of Ajalorun, he sought the permission to retain his title and perform the function of an Oba instead of ascending the throne with the Ajalorun title. The reason was not unconnected with the fear of not living long as was the case with his predecessors with the Ajalorun title. Besides, the traditional requirements of Ajalorun title were enormous for him to meet, especially the requirement of human sacrifice. Coupled with this was a guardian cobra said to swallow the Ajalorun from toe to neck at night and vomit him before

daybreak. Each time this transpired, the Ajalorun would die shortly afterward. (Aliu: 2013:) Olukotun Aseja's request was granted and since then, the title Olukotun replaced the Ajalorun title and Olukotun Aseja became the first paramount ruler of Ife-Olukotun who adopted the title Olukotun.

### **Issues of Linkages with Other Yoruba Towns:**

Ife-Olukotun is made up of nine compounds: Oke-Aga, Ere, Ero, Okefe, Ogbo, Ona, Ohi, Ilero and Epo. Though in spite of cultural uniformity among the various clans, they are in fact heterogeneous especially when one considers each clans praise names. Take for instance Oke-Aga praise name; *omo alaka 'isi*, – meaning, one whose barn is filled and he refuses to open it. Also, *omo a lepo je eyin* – meaning, one that has palm oil, but prefers to eat palm kernel husk. This gives the impression that though the people from this clan are rich, yet they appear stingy. Perhaps this could be metaphorical taking cognizance of how prudent in spending and meticulous in the use of material things by the people.

On another note, take for instance Ogbo compound praise name; *omo onisu a do gogoro be* – meaning tubers of yam from their farms are so big and long that sitting down to peel would not be convenient except by standing. This shows that the people from this compound are good farmers.

Hence, there is no single uniform praise name applicable to the people of Ife-Olukotun and this is an indication that the people were at the initial stage diverse. These praise names however, have no appreciable lineage to other Yoruba towns. The reason often adduced for this is seen in the fact that Yagba people generally knew little about their origins. This they attributed to lack of knowledge due to the devastating raids of the Fulani-Nupe throughout some three generations prior to 1900 when most of their forebears, the custodian of their history were either killed or taken away as slaves to Bida. The old men died without passing on the knowledge they had, and succeeding generation grew without the chance to learn about their ancestors and this is supported by archival account.

Perhaps, those who had earlier established themselves in these Yagba settlements before the arrival of the famous hunter immigrants which were accorded founder status due to their military and magical prowess might have moved down from other Yoruba towns and villages. Although, linguistically, there seems to be a link with Ile-Ife. For instance, a greeting in Ife-Olukotun; *e mo okun, e mo rora* is similar to *e'urokun irora* in Ile-Ife. Another area where seems to be a linkage is in the words of Bridel, that from oral sources, Yagba of Ife-Olukotun and Ejuku, Isanlu and Mopa migrated at different times from Ile-Ife. He further stated that some families in Ile-Ife bear Yagba tribal marks and speak the dialect...concluded by confirming periodical visits of Yagba Ifa diety priests to Ile-Ife for consultation.

With respect to festivals, Egungun featured prominently and is said to have been brought from Ijan-Ekiti over hundred years ago. This further shows that the people of the community might at one time have affiliation with Ijan-Ekiti. Another festival celebrated annually in the community is Oluwa festival. During this festival, the priest dresses, plaits his hair like a woman and is called *yeye* - meaning grandmother.

The Egungun festival which was said to have been brought from Ijan-Ekiti reveals that there were immigrants from Ekiti in the community. Moreover, the celebration of Oluwa festival and the priest dressing and plaiting his hair like a woman and referred to as *yeye*, meaning grandmother has a striking relationship with the celebration of Orosen in Owo community of Ondo State, Nigeria. According to Ogunba, the Orosen episode was a case of jealousy among the Olowo's wives, with Orosen, an extremely talented woman and Olowo's (king) favourite as the centre and victim of jealous treatment. Oluwa, conspired with other wives to depose her taking advantage of Olowo's absence on an expedition drove out Orosen from the palace. This happening assumed awful magnitude as Orosen, perturbed and humiliated, refused to go back except certain conditions are met which included the execution of Oluwa, the senior wife. The condition was difficult to fulfil which made



Orosen disappear to an unknown. The enormity of the incident remained with the people and thus since then, the Owo community led by the Olowo himself who dresses up and plaits his hair like a woman celebrate Igogo festival to mark the event to appease Orosen's offended spirit.(Ogunba1973:101) Perhaps, those celebrating Oluwa festival in Ife-Olukotun per adventure might be the loyalist or supporters of Oluwa, who saw her as having done something extra ordinary which they all approved of by sending the favourite Olowo's wife, Orosen from the palace. Hence, they decided also to celebrate her every year for her feat or she might even be the ayaba (king's wife) referred to in the Oyo version of Yagba historical account. This is because one would not have expected her to still remain in the palace taking cognisance of the magnitude of her action which called for execution. With this, there is likelihood of some immigrants from Owo in Ife-Olukotun. In the recent past, the Sunday Concord Newspaper correlated the oral tradition that the ancestors of the people of Ife-Olukotun led by the first Ajalorun migrated from Ile-Ife with the caption; "Ile-Ife, Ijebu-Ife and Ife-Olukotun: A tale of three towns with one ancestor" which part of the story read; the story of Ife-Olukotun is the story of one man called Ajalorun, who like the founder of Ijebu-Ife, migrated to settle in Ife-Olukotun.... (Ipinyemi 2013:4). The current drives of search for linkages with other Yoruba towns becomes imperative taking cognisance of the fact that the demise of most old traditional historians could make the history of the community go into oblivion. The efforts to link with other Yoruba towns with similar historical and cultural accounts in the distant past could avail the community the opportunity to unearth lots of historical and socio-

cultural affiliation which could be of immense benefits to reconnect with hitherto forgotten past history, insight into the present and future for posterity. For in the words of Cicero; "To be ignorant of what occurred before you were born is to remain always a child. For what is the worth of human life, unless it is woven into the life of our ancestors by records of history?" (Cicero 106 B.C.-43 B.C.)

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