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Towards Deconstructing European Epistemic Domination of African Identity: Intergroup Relations as Agency of Cultural Hybridity among the Akoko-Yoruba

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Abstract
This article attempts at deconstructing the European epistemic domination of African identity by situating modern Akoko-Yoruba within the context of some external influences noticeable in the sub-division during its early (pre-colonial) years. Exploring the Akoko indigenous political, economic and social systems, the study argues that the sub-region's vibrant precolonial intergroup relations with close and distant neighbors shaped its contemporary culture of amazing plurality and diversity. While the study finds that the Akoko relationship with other indigenous influences in its geographical catchment area fundamentally impacted its extant society and culture, European domination merely came later as agent of hybridization. Offering a good platform for understanding the degrees of influence wielded by external influences in shaping contemporary Akoko society and culture, the study concludes that the Akoko culture is manifestly home-grown, original, multi-dimensional, and dynamic with strong layers of mix-grill of indigenous and external influences, thus making it a composite stock.

Key Words: Nigeria, Yoruba, External influences, impact, identity, culture, indigenous system

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Introduction

Against the backdrop of the nexus between the existential character of a people, race, or community and the extant body of knowledge produced and disseminated about them, African and Africanist scholars in their different but intersecting callings (historians, sociologists, anthropologists, political scientists and so on) have had to grapple with the problem of European domineering episteme in which Africa has been thoroughly misrepresented. An example of this epistemic dominance is the presentation of African cultural hybridity in the lens of European influence. As Ogot (2009:1) observes, "The process of narrating and interpreting the African past has long been an intellectual struggle against European assumptions and prejudices about the nature of time and history in Africa". He adds that,

> Little or no attention was paid to indigenous African views of the past or to the role Africans played in the shaping of global developments, processes, and structures. Explanations in this type of historiography – exogenous rather than endogenous – consisted of locating the external (rather than internal) causes of African events, and thus denied Africans their own historical agency. It is therefore imperative that those who teach and study Africa today learn to problematize the issue of representation in order to locate and unpack the economic, political, personal or other motivations that might underlie any particular image of Africa. In other words, how have African history and culture been represented in writing? And on what authority do authors represent a whole continent and its identities? (Ogot 2009:1).

Cohen (1985) argues along the same vein that, "The major issue in the reconstruction of the African past is the question of how far voices exterior to Africa shape the presentation of Africa's past and present". Cohen's position is anchored on his anxiety over the increasingly unquestioned preponderance of foreign intellectual views on the history and culture of the African continent which is too unilineal, thus compelling the need for diverse approaches as a means to have more balanced perspectives devoid of prejudice. This foreign epistemic domination is, according to Said (1994: xi), evident of a general pattern of world-wide agenda of imperial culture" and a "part of the general European efforts to rule distant lands and peoples". This is typified by the European conception of the "African …mind", which culminated in "the notions about bringing civilization to primitive or barbaric peoples, the disturbingly familiar view about flogging or death or extended punishment being required when they misbehaved or became rebellious, because they mainly understood force or violence best, "they" were not like "us" and for that reason deserved to be ruled. This is in concurrence with Ogot's observation that "Images of Africa have often been used by Western writers to establish "opposites" and "others" whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and reinterpretation of their differences from "us"(2009:2). However, it has been shown that this European perspective is symptomatic of racial

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prejudice, ethno-centric framework of inquiry and lopsided viewpoint. For example, Wolf (2010:2) poses an intellectual declaration that "the world of humankind constitutes a manifold, a totality of interconnected processes and inquiries that disassemble this totality into bits and then fails to reassemble it falsify reality".

The preponderant European view is that Africa is fitting only for socio-cultural and politico-economic exploitation, such that African identity as known today is possible only within the context of Europe's interactions with Africa, thus rendering intra-African cultural interactions and exchange unworthy of serious intellectual attention. Starting from the pedestal that any given culture is composite as it bears layers and substance of other cultures that grow among a people, or diffuse among peoples, this study explores the extant Akoko culture and society in Yorubaland, Southwestern Nigeria to be a composite stock since (and after) the kingdoms' process of migration, formation and settlement. The Akoko are a major sub-division in Northeastern Yorubaland. With a large nucleus of the parent Yoruba culture, Akoko culture has a strong overlay of many other foreign cultures with which the Akoko people had contact at various stages of their historical experience. The obvious cultural plurality and fluidity of Akoko in addition to their having different accounts of origin and cultural backgrounds, has been stimulated by the profound impact of the culture of their neighbours, and the imposition of colonial rule. While discussing these impacts, this study poses the main thesis that locates contemporary Akoko culture and society in a proper perspective that indigenous hybridisation was a feature of indigenous culture formation across pre-colonial Africa.

Background Note on the external relations of Akoko

Up to 1960, the history of Akoko sub-division of Yorubaland had profound evidence of interactions with some foreign (African and Western) influences in the course of its development. The former was a chequered history of interaction with some neighbouring or distant kingdoms, while the latter was mainly with Britain through colonial rule. Apart from relating with one another following the process of their state formation, Akoko communities related first with their Yoruba-speaking neighbours like Owo, Ekiti, and the Okun-un communities. It should be emphasized from the onset that geographical proximity more than any other factors made inter-group contact between Akoko and these fellow Yoruba-speaking sub-divisions inevitable, compelling and relatively easy. It is natural that while a group or an entity can choose its enemy or friend in any system, it cannot choose its neighbours most of the time. However, while there was no conventional diplomacy, as is known today, in their relationships involving of exchange of envoys, administration of embassies, and observance of diplomatic protocols and so on, the Akoko relationship with their neighbors came from their shared origins and other peculiarities. For instance, the popular Yoruba '*Ebi'* social concept (Akinjogbin 1979), traditional religion and beliefs as well as existence of trade routes were critical elements in such relationships.

The relationship between Akoko and their neighbouring Yoruba-speaking sub-groups followed the patterns of war and peace particularly at the early stage when survival was a priority among the sub-groups. Some Owo and Ekiti warlords severally menaced certain Akoko communities like Oba, Ikun, Afo, Supare, and Akungba for plundering and acquisition of slaves (Akintoye 1969:549; Akomolafe 1979:67). Of course, there is evidence to suggest that, "the Ekiti quite often used to carry wars of conquest and plunder into the Akoko (and Iyagba) countries. The geo-political balkanization of the Akoko was always a temptation to its neighbors. In particular, Ikole many times, invaded the Akoko and Iyagba

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countries and established its sway over a number of Akoko towns and villages. Ado too, seems to have made some conquests in Akoko" (Akintoye 1971:30-31). Not much is known about the pre-1800 patterns of military relationship between Ado Ekiti and Akoko. But, the nineteenth century was particularly marked by incessant invasions of many Akoko towns and villages by Aduloju – a famous Ado Ekiti war veteran. The main consequence of these adventures (sometimes imperialistic) was that the balance of power relations and previous mode of conducting wars among the Northeastern communities were greatly altered. This method of conducting war is succinctly captured in a tradition cited by Oso Davis. Hon. Secretary of the Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-slavery and Aborigines Protection Society as recorded by Olomola (1977:237; Akinrinade 2004: 119-141). It goes thus:

> Whenever war arose between them (Yoruba) and one conquered the other, the vanquished did not thereby forfeit or lose its independence. If at the worst, his (a) country be destroyed, the inhabitants taken in the war were usually sold into slavery, the rest dispersing into different countries until such time as they may be able to collect themselves together, which when done, they choose a king among the surviving princes, find a new home and commence anew, their national existence.

This was apt of Akoko's experience with their Yoruba neighbours like Ekiti. But things were different with imperialist states like Nupe and Ibadan (to a lesser degree) by whom plundering, exploitation and pillage of human and material resources became the order of the day. The imperialists were driven by the inordinate desire to secure "permanent allegiance by submission, tribute payment, and the acquisition of slaves for domestic use and for export" (Olomola 1977:238).

Trade, inter-marriage, attendance at cultural festivals and other peaceful means of inter-group relations were parts of the pre-colonial history of Akoko's external relations. Akoko communities had short-distance and long-distance trade interactions with their neighbours. They operated agrarian economies in the pre-colonial era, and given their geographical contiguity, their products were similar particularly crops like yam, cocoyam, maize, cotton and locust beans, among others. Some trade, however, developed among them as a matter of necessity. The operation of trade entailed the existence and maintenance of friendly relations at both personal and administrative levels. The Akoko communities and their neighbors appreciated the need for long distance trade, open economy and protection of traders and trade routes. In each community, according to an oral source, the authorities maintained and enhanced smooth trade relations with neighbours and protected traders (Oluwade 2007). Trade by barter appeared to have been the predominant system between them. The family engaged in production, at first, mainly for its immediate consumption, particularly at the very early stage. But it can be suggested that from 1850s, there began a steep population increase, which necessitated the need for more production and some degree of specialization.

Through all these activities, a solid foundation was laid for indigenous cultural hybridization between Akoko and their neighbours. While they shared some cultural affinities (Olomola 1979), individual uniqueness was also rife, which soon grew to hybridized culture. not necessarily a platform for separation. The core elements are further considered below as impact of Akoko relationship with their neighbors, which in turn, strengthened their cultural hybridity.

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Political Impact

Cultural hybridity through indigenous imperialism was rife in pre-colonial Akoko. Nupe in particular and Ibadan to a lesser degree had foisted some form of hegemony on Akoko in the 19th century. In both instances, the immediate impact was that local potentates lost their authority to the imperialists, and the communities became thoroughly weakened such that they had no strength to resist the introduction of colonial rule from 1897. Thus, Akoko has a chequered history of change and continuity of imperialism from 1840 under Nupe to 1900 under the British. The Nupe military adventure in Akoko has been extensively discussed elsewhere (Okajare 2015: 49-67) and bears no full repetition here. However, for the purpose of emphasis, it should be added that apart from the general raids on Akoko, some Nupe state officials also often raided Akoko with the approval of the *Etsu*. Particularly from 1882 when Maliki became the *Etsu*, he divided all the areas under Nupe hegemony, including Akoko, into fiefdoms, each under a chief. The immediate impact of this arrangement was that the chiefs became overzealous in their bid to outshine another (Aminu and Kolawole 1987:16). Also, it provoked resistance from Akoko as the people were not ready to cooperate with the fief-holders to the detriment of their pre-existing political system. For example, Oka successfully warded off Nupe's siege.

From all indication, fief-holders were responsible to the *Etsu* who was their appointing authority, and the system was meant really to promote Nupe's economic interests by forcible exaction of taxes and tributes. As Bida population increased in the latter decades of the 19th century, the need to produce more food to feed the growing population led to exchange of slaves for tribute payment. The *Etsu* at this time appointed titular chiefs (known as *Shaba* or *Dawodu*) (Aminu and Kolawole 1987:16) to assist the local potentates in administration. But given the source of their appointment, these titular chiefs soon became powerful than the local traditional rulers, and became law unto themselves. Their impact was so profound that even after Nupe invasion, and the era of British colonial rule up to the present, these two titles are prominent names in both the local dialects and indigenous administration of many Akoko communities. Apart from collecting slaves, the local agents also collected foodstuffs for onward transportation to Bida. It is clear from the above that the pressing need for economic survival was the major reason behind Nupe's onslaught and eventual imperial administration in Akoko. Usually, an *Etsu* dispatched his private army to strengthen the hands of the appointed chiefs to forcibly collect tax and tributes. Any rebellious community was summarily dealt with in a predictably most inhuman fashion. Arigidi, Ikaram and Ikare were 'collection centres' for Akoko taxes and tributes to be taken to Bida. Some credible oral sources (Momoh 2009; Komolafe 2010) affirmed that, in most cases, human potters from Akoko had to carry loads of cowry shells and foodstuffs to Bida. Slaves assumed that role when they became item of tribute.

As noted above, while Nupe was not successful in invading Oka (in the Southern part of Akoko), its attempt had some lasting impact on the kingdom's socio-political system. In the first instance, the pattern of settlement was affected. Majority of the old Oka settlements decided to remain on the top of the rugged plateau as a defensive mechanism against further onslaughts. This pattern of settlement continued in the colonial years until the 1930s when, according to Olukoju (1998:107), owing to personal ambition and political cleavages, chiefs and the people of Owalusin, Okado (Okaodo), Ebo and Owake chiefdoms started moving down into the plains where they established the now sizable community of Iwaro.[16] The immediate political impact of this development was that there emerged a new-found cleavage of upland (Oke-Oka) and lowland (Iwaro). Also, the consequent dispersal to Ayegunle

(formerly known as Oka Junction until 1975) (Kolawole 1998: 63, 98-99) in the West, and Uba, Simerin, and Okia in the East encouraged further fragmentation of Oka kingdom (Olukoju 1998:107).

The successful resistance of Oka against Nupe affected Akoko at large. As events unfolded later, Oka wore the toga of superiority and pride against other Akoko communities, which resented it. In turn, patterns of inter-communal relations between Oka and the others became strained, and their sense of unity and solidarity was severely affected. Instead, a seed of the political culture of struggle over space and resources had been planted among the Akoko communities. Colonial manipulations through paramountcy blossomed this seed and violated the Akoko tradition of mutual dependence and rejection of paramount rulers (Olukoju 1982: Chapters 3 and 4). Commenting on this, Olukoju (1998:108) states that, "it is significant … that an Oka chief styled himself "Uba Akoko", father of Akoko. Even as late as the 1950s the Oka community would present a candidate on a different political party platform to run against the consensus candidates of the other settlements". In short, Nupe invasion was a factor for the promotion of feeling of insularity in Oka people as against their Akoko compatriots.

Ibadan invasion was simultaneous with Nupe's in parts of Akoko. Ibadan, which had risen as a military power in the emergent paradigm shift in Yorubaland and propelled by economic consideration, established foothold on Akoko particularly in Irun and its nearby villages through freeborn soldiers and their supervising warlords. A freeborn soldier was expected to render some portions of his captives to his war chief both as an expression of loyalty, and for continuous protection. Thus, Akoko soon became a region of endless hunt for slaves, even in less provocative situations. As Akintoye hinted (1971:40);

> This system accounted at once for much of the strength and weakness of Ibadan. On the one hand, each campaign was characterised by a rivalry among the chiefs for distinction and achievements; each fighting man, too, was inspired by a strong personal loyalty to his chief in whose successes and glories he felt entitled to share and of whom he was intensely proud. On the other hand, the constant itch in every chief for chances to win honour and prove himself, the desire to increase his army through captures in the field, the necessity for, at the same time, acquiring other slaves for sale in order to be able to maintain his army and buy the guns and powder on which its greatness depended, the necessity to keep the army frequently busy and exercised – all these meant that Ibadan had to be continually fighting.

This informed why many Akoko communities were severely pillaged even after surrendering to Ibadan. And, the area for the most parts of the 1860s was constantly raided by the restless Ibadan war chiefs like Aje Ayorinde, and their military subordinates. This siege was on until 1866 when Ayorinde and his army of brigands were expelled by Aduloju of Ado-Ekiti and later through an alliance of Akoko with Ibadan, Ebira and Ilorin (Olukoju 1998: 104-105).

In addition to Nupe and Ibadan military attacks, evidences suggest that Benin and Ekiti had some binding political influence on Akoko. For instance, the *Ajana* title in Afa, Okeagbe has its origin in Ikole-Ekiti. The *Aofin* migrants among whom are the present-day Afa ruling house are said to have emigrated from Ikole-Ekiti. Their emigration was attributed to a dispute over the *Ajana* chieftaincy, which exists today in both Ikole and Afa. Having lost in the dispute, they moved to *Apole Afa* (old settlement of Afa) under the headship of their

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leader known as Agba, who had adopted the *Ajana* title. On arrival, he was made an honorary chief, with some measure of freedom to rule his own band of followers, by the Alafa (king of Afa). It was claimed further that after a while, the Alafa stool was vacant, and having found the honorary chief from Ikole effective, he was made the regent, and he continued to rule as there was no worthy successor from the Alafa ruling house (Olotu 1984:11; Abayomi 1989:18). Thus, the *Ajana* title has ever since been adopted as the traditional title of the Afa ruling house in Okeagbe.

Additionally, we note in this study that the process might not be as simplistic as outlined above. It is not impossible that sources in Okeagbe downplayed military defeats in their history. It can safely be suggested that the people of Afa could not have easily accepted the overlordship of Ajana, an emigrant, without a fight. In this vein, one may be mindful of accepting the Elekole's claim that Afa came under Ikole's tutelage in the nineteenth century (N.A.I. 1909: vol. 1). He might also have persuaded the Afa people to accept the *Aofin* band led by Ajana as their ruling house during the period of the tutelage (Adeleye 1989). A similar scenario is noted about Aje community in Okeagbe to where a band of emigrants were said to have come from Ado Ekiti under the leadership of Oloniyo. They joined the autochthones at *Apole* Aje (old settlement of Aje) when the latter were being led by *Are* Anaye. Oloniyo was said to have adopted the *Ewi* title probably because they came from Ado-Ekiti (Abayomi 1989: 42). But after sometime, the *Are* was relegated after a few skirmishes in which the guests roundly trounced the autochthones. Consequently, Oloniyo, the *Ewi* grew in power, popularity and influence among the people and became the king. Up till the present, the *Ewi* title remains the official title of the king of Aje.

An addendum to the above two instances is the prominence of some quarter chieftaincy titles in many Akoko communities, which were of non-Akoko origins. Titles like *Ologbosere, Olisa, Sasere*, and *Ojomo* among others were adopted in Akoko through their contact with Benin in the early period of state formation or indirectly through Owo, which for some time was more of an outlying district of old Benin Empire.

The above illustrations point to the fact that critical political dimensions of extant Akoko culture bear evident testimony of the hybridization of the originally evolved distinct political cultures, including titles and settlements and practices, of many Akoko kingdoms. It is known that, in the course of their state formation and settlement, the Akoko people evolved their own political culture and practices in concurrence with their domestic circumstances and prevailing realities, which colonial imposition uprooted and replaced with a Western model.

Social Impact

In addition to its political element, the Akoko interactions with their neighbours propelled some social impact characterised by prevalence of upheavals, unrest and demographic dislocation, which resulted from raiding and forced displacement of the people. Olomola (1977:304-305) succinctly captures it thus; "Thus, Eastern Yorubaland was full of desolate and depopulated towns and villages during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The inhabitants of such 'desolate' towns and villages often abandoned their homes and permanently or temporally settled elsewhere for defensive purposes…". Given the physical and political vulnerability of the area, there was no other part of Eastern Yorubaland where the above caption was more appropriate than Akoko, where the only option the people had was to escape from the onslaught of invaders or get caught and taken away into slavery. Ogundana (2003:6-76) argues that the four communities (Afa, Oge, Aje and Ido) that were later merged to become Okeagbe were severely affected by the Nupe invasion and its

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attendant consequence of population depletion. This was common in parts of Nigeria in the 19th century. While Mason (1986: 551-564) discusses this in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, Olukoju (1998:107) states that, unlike other Akoko communities, Oka did not suffer a decline in population as a result of warfare and slave raiding, but according to him;

> This contrasted with the fortunes of Epinmi and Afa, which lost a significant proportion of their population to the Nupe onslaught… communities such as Afa (which was reputed to have been the largest Akoko settlement in its heyday), Oyin, Eriti, Igasi, Efifa and Eshuku were reduced to insignificant villages and hamlets….

On the whole, Akoko suffered population depletion due mainly to the Nupe invasion and Ibadan harassments of the nineteenth century. Some oral sources (Oluwade 2007; Adebayo 2008; Anjorin 2009) attributed the sparse population of most Akoko communities to the grave impact of the Nupe invasion and Ayorinde's incessant attacks on Akoko before the white man came to the people's rescue.

A direct corollary of the invasions and, of course, other peaceful forms of interaction between Akoko communities and their neighbours was that there was infiltration of settlers into the ranks of dwellers in the area. A good number of communities that had been plundered wore a more composite outlook as settler elements came to stay permanently. Ikare, Arigidi and Epinmi are outstanding examples of Akoko communities with Nupe settlers. There is a location in Arigidi known as *Isale Tapa* (Nupe's settlement). Also, through trade (as will be seen below) and intermarriage, a sizeable number of non - Akoko elements have had to settle permanently and raise their families in Akoko.

The emergence of local warlords as products of circumstances across some Akoko communities where they wielded tremendous and pervasive influence was yet another social purveyor of hybridization in Akoko. In most cases, these war chiefs had either been rascals or brigands (referred to in the local parlance as *Ipata*), or had served actively in the Ayorinde-led Ibadan menacing army. Most of them were young men who "entered as captives or free adventurers into the service of the Ibadan chiefs and fought lustily for their chiefs against their own people" (C. 4957 1886; C.M.S., CA2/049 1861).

As Olukoju (1998:105) notes, they menaced the population and their guerrilla tactics suited them for war in a familiar terrain. It is claimed that these men also hired their services to warring communities. They were reputed to have been able to cross battle lines immune to bullets and other offensive weapons. One of them was known as Eleji, of the Iroho section of Okia chiefdom, Oka Akoko, who served in the Ayorinde Army with vast experience traversing Akoko and other parts of Yorubaland, until Ayorinde was sacked in 1866. Others were Balogun of Ikese and Dawodu of Iroho (Olukoju 1998:106-107) (both from Oka), Saba of Aje, Ojogbooru of Ido, Adetiba, Arasanyin, Olukoju, Adewanikin and Adanikin with Fagboungbe as their commander, all of Oge; Bakare, Adara, Agun, Uwan Aso, Magaji Osunla, Aturu, and Omole, all of Afa, and Odu of Ogbagi (Ogundana 2003:63-37).

Conversely, these men, at various times, participated in wars to liberate their communities from the yoke of external invasions. For example, Eleji, Balogun and Dawodu fought the Nupe invaders in the 1878 – 1884 siege of Oka. They were also involved in the liberation of Akoko particularly in the Ogidi War of 1895 – 1897 against Nupe. While they were influential in local administration such that the traditional chiefs lost control to them in the scheme of things and had to curry their favour to assure stability of the system, these

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warlords, in varying degrees, promoted cultural hybridity as they served as human agency for the proliferation of foreign cultures in their communities.

On the whole, the Akoko experience was akin to Ibadan's as Awe (1973:67) states that "military leadership based on achievement tended to take precedence over traditional leadership". Olomola (1977: 308-309) puts it more succinctly thus:

> In each of the Yoruba communities, military chiefs became members of a privileged class of wealthy and powerful men, who in terms of affluence and aristocratic style of living, compared with (where they did not in fact surpass) the traditional civil authorities. Many of the military chiefs built for themselves compounds, which were often larger than those of the civil chiefs. In terms of followership, they surpassed the civil chiefs, for in addition to possessing large families, these military chiefs possessed hundreds of slaves and clients whom they settled in their large farms.

He adds fittingly that;

> The rise of this new class of leaders to prominence in the states led to a new development in the traditional political organisation of each state. Before the nineteenth century upheavals, the kings and chiefs were *de jure* authorities of their respective kingdoms. In fact, there were no clear-cut military chiefs, and a few chiefs in each community were usually assigned military roles on an ad hoc basis in times of war. Both internal and external relations of the kingdoms were conducted by the kings and their chiefs. But during and after the upheavals of the mild-nineteenth century, the members of the new military aristocracy became very powerful and influential men in their respective communities. In many instances, they became a law unto themselves and even treated the civil authorities with scant respect. The military chiefs often superseded the civil chiefs, had influential voices in king making and, in many instances, were the *de facto* rulers of their communities.

In Oka for instance, a chief, basking in the euphoria of his military exploits, supplanted a paramount ruler as he had successfully carved a larger-than-life image for himself in the eyes of the people (Olukoju 1998:107). Indeed, warlords occupied a vantage position in the traditional administration of many Akoko communities right from the dying years of the nineteenth century through the colonial period. Arising directly from this was that they rendered the civil authorities vulnerable as the myth and reverence woven around the person and office of a traditional ruler became thoroughly shattered. As the military chiefs defied the authority of traditional institutions with impunity, recalcitrant subjects were thus encouraged to disobey the civil authorities and follow the warlords. And, in order to sustain their new-found fame, many of the warlords adopted foreign titles like *Shaba* and *Maiyaki* (Nadel 1942:89-99), which their families still bear up to the present without taking cognizance of the original meanings of these foreign words and titles. Both words actually mean 'Heir Presumptive' and General-in-Chief of the Army respectively. In fact, they were seen and recognised more as the true defenders of the society than the king and his civil chiefs. Thus, the pattern of ruler-subject relationship was altered and re-defined.

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Thus, it was easy for the colonizers to foist British imperialism on the area with little or no united front of resistance against them as would be shown shortly. As a matter of fact, the colonizers erroneously took the chaotic situation on ground as the established trend of things in Akoko as elsewhere in Northeastern Yorubaland.

Economic Impact

As already noted above, trade and other economic pursuits were central to the Akoko communities' process of state formation and their subsequent relationship with their neighbours. It bears no repeating here that Akoko has a history of trade with Benin, Owo, Nupe, Ekiti, and Kukuruku in the pre-colonial period. Along the invasions by Nupe and Ibadan was the continuity of slave trade in spite of the much-touted abolition. Following their knowledge of the huge gains accruable from slavery and slave trade, some of the chiefs and warlords were interested in the economic benefits of war. An example of this was the 1880 – 1881 Irun-Afa war, which resulted from a quarrel over six slaves between Bakare, the Ogbagi warlord and an Irun-Afa war chief who was the original owner of the slaves.

Bakare had seized the six slaves because of the accruable economic gains (Akintoye 1971:64; Ogundana 2003:63). Akinjogbin (1965:24) buttresses that slave hunting became a profitable venture among the Yoruba as from the third decade of the nineteenth century. In a similar vein, Olomola (1977: 305-306) avers that "slaves fetched their owners considerable income when sold and provided their owners with additional economic advantage providing labour and serving as porters of merchandise". The civil authorities in most Akoko communities soon accepted the situation and adjusted themselves to the reality on ground as they could not stem the tide of the military chiefs' excesses. This weakened the civil-military relations in Akoko on the eve of colonial rule. Beyond this and the profit-making prospect, the warlords spread proliferation of foreign ideas, practices and orientations across Akoko.

However, the pattern of economic life of Akoko communities began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century. This was not unconnected with their contact first with the missionaries and later colonial agents. Prior to this time, Akoko people's economic life had been mainly agrarian, rudimentary and rustic with subsistent living. But the 1880s, export-oriented and money-based economic culture had gradually begun among the people as elsewhere in Eastern Yorubaland. Through the efforts of the missionaries, foreign crops like cocoa, maize and kolanut (kola nitida, known as *gbanja* in the local parlance) had been well received and shortly after, well cultivated by the people. Returnee ex-slaves who facilitated the propagation of Christianity were the main agents for the spread of those crops among the local folks. The instant impact of this development was that "the cocoa industry was established; the palm oil and kernels trade was expanded and… men went off to bush in thousands to collect rubber" (Garvin and Oyemakinde 1980: 498-499). On their part, the colonizers hid under the pretext to put things in proper shape by harassing the military chiefs and disbanding their private armies in the main flash points of Yorubaland including Akoko, Ibadan, Abeokuta, Ijesa, Ife and Modakeke, Ekiti and Ilorin (Johnson 2001: 643-650), and foisted colonial rule on the people within a short while.

In their war-weary state, Akoko communities merely transited from one foreign subjugation to another between 1897 and 1900. After liberating the Akoko, Iyagba, Owe, Abunu and Oworo people and territories from the Nupe rule (Vandeleur 1898:197-216), the British soon established structures of government and authority, which placed Akoko within the jurisdiction of Kabba and the Obaro as paramount ruler, apparently in line with its experience under Nupe. Against extant historical antecedents, the Obaro was conferred with

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powers and authorities over subgroups within his jurisdiction including power of confirmation of the candidacy of a prince to be enthroned a king. For instance, in 1911, Akala of Ikaram was made to go to Kabba with his principal chiefs to obtain the confirmation of the Obaro to legitimize his enthronement (N.A.I., CSO, 16/29667, vol.1: 24). This was an erosion of the Yoruba identity of Akoko, and its age-long culture of uniqueness and community independence. Akoko remained a part of Northern Nigeria until January 1919 when it was amalgamated with Southern Nigeria. Even at that, Akoko was moved from the overlordship of Obaro of Kabba to the paramountcy of the Olowo of Owo from 1919 to 1934. In assessing the situation, Olomola (1977:324-325) states that:

> None of the indigenous rulers considered the possibility of losing their sovereignty to what they thought was a detached third party intervening in the multi-state conflict … the signing of treaties, a novel thing to the Yoruba, might have looked funny to the bewildered sovereigns … But in a situation of a show of force where the colonial treaty-signing agents surrounded themselves with Hausa soldiers and presented the indigenous rulers with treaty agreements with the terms (favourable to the alien government) spelt often vaguely, there was nothing else the frightened rulers could do but sign.

At any stage of this political transition, the group identity of Akoko was thoroughly hybridized. The rulers not only lost their authority and sovereignty to a combination of ignorance, deception and intimidation, every facet of British Administration evidently subverted the pre-existing culture of the Akoko communities. Generally, the colonial *modus operandi* provoked unmitigated crisis across Akoko. For example, the colonial divide and rule played out in Ikare between the Olukare Ajagunna and Momoh between 1917 and 1919 when voting system was introduced to the process of installing an Olukare, and Momoh was declared winner with overwhelming majority (N.A.I., Ondo Prof. 4/1: 2). On trumped up charges of maladministration, aiding and abetting three well known thieves to escape arrest, Ajagunna was deprived of his throne (N.A.I., Ondo Prof. 4/1: 6, para 49). In essence, the colonial agents tried to erode the fundamentals of the Akoko cultural value system and emplaced Western cultural orientations. Thus, there was a wide vacuum in the culture of the communities throughout the colonial years as age-long pristine ethos like sacred honour for the king, priests, chiefs and other legal officers of the old order, as well as constitutionalism of the monarchy were all thrown off.

To fully colonize Nigeria, the colonial authorities opened up the hinterland to the coast for easy transportation of goods. The Ondo Road, which was opened up in the dying years of the nineteenth century, facilitated import-export drive by linking Akoko through their Ekiti neighbours with the coast. As Olomola notes, "After the 1870s, the Ondo Road became an important artery of trade and communication of the eastern Yoruba people with the coastlands of Ijebu and Ilaje" (1977:339). Before then, trickles of European goods could only get to the hinterland of Eastern Yorubaland through Benin from the coast through both Egba and Ijebu that occupied a strategic position in the flow of trade. This provoked some fundamental changes of widespread social ramifications in the economic activities of the people. Local folks who had hitherto engaged in only subsistent farming then, now had a new orientation and outlook about economic life.

The pace of expansion in the transportation sub-sector continued as a means for the colonial authorities to assure steady exploitation of goods from the hinterland. To underscore

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the importance of roads to colonial commerce, the Travelling Commissioner in Eastern Yorubaland, Major Ewart, noted in 1896 that the mountainous roads in Ekiti, Owo and Akoko impeded the collection of the valuable produce of these places (Ewart 1896: 364-365). In 1902, the construction of a road linking Kabba with Akoko started (Beeley 1934: 8), while a network of 'motorised' roads linking Kabba with Isanlu in the North, Aiyede in the Southwest, and Ikaram and Ikare in the south was built ten years later (Davies 1960: 25). By mid-1920s, most of the major towns in Eastern Yorubaland including Akoko had been connected with 'motorable' roads. For example, the Owo-Ikare-Lokoja road was opened to traffic in 1927, and the Osogbo – Benin road linking Idoani and running through Isua to Ikaram where it joined the Owo-Ikare-Lokoja road had been constructed in1923 (Beeley 1934: 8).

The import of this multi-directional road network was that it encouraged a large number of people in various Akoko communities to embrace the new-found economic trend and social life. As a matter of fact, an oral source claimed that the road network provided unprecedented opportunity for young folks to travel outside their immediate environment for the first time. Similarly, the menial labour involved in the road construction offered many people employment opportunities, aside from farming, for the first time as they were recruited by the colonial authorities' Public Works Department (Komolafe 2010). The consequent mobility of labour within and outside Akoko provided wide corridors for cultural exchange as people travelled more frequently to Lokoja and Kabba for buying and selling. It was through this means that, items like bicycles, metal roofing sheets, nails, radiogram, sewing machines, wristwatch, and several others came to Akoko for the first time (Ikudaisi 2008; Anjorin 2009).

Also, the colonial lifestyle unfurled in Akoko, as elsewhere, had a negative impact on land management culture, which the people had evolved earlier. Whereas in the pre-colonial Akoko, land was held in trust by the traditional authorities with no known cases of dispute, it became an item of strategic value particularly under colonial economy. The sharp increase in trade volumes and the attendant desire for material wealth prompted people to lay claims to parcels of land, which hitherto were taken as community's property. Individuals and families became embroiled in disputes over land, which soon led to litigations and inter-community strife as witnessed in Supare in 1922 (N.A.I., Ondo Prof. 4/1 (9): para. 49).

Conclusion

This study has shown that foreign influences (from neighbors and colonial masters) had considerable impact on the hybridization of the Akoko contemporary culture and society. While this trend had been unfurling gradually in the pre-colonial period, the external dynamics of colonial rule prompted a new culture within which Akoko people soon began to conceive themselves as citizens under a modern government as against subjects of a supposedly sacred traditional chief. Indeed, colonial rule had revolutionary and profound impact on virtually all aspects of the indigenous society, emergent culture and history of the Akoko region of Northeastern Yorubaland through the colonial years up to the present times. It widened the scope and intensity of contact among Akoko communities as well as their relationship with near and distant neighbors, thus integrating foreign cultural traits into the original culture of Akoko communities. The study therefore underscores understanding the contemporary Akoko society and culture as heavily hybridized within the contexts of the remarkable dynamics and fundamental impact of the external influences with which the Akoko communities had contact in the course of their development. Also, the cultural fluidity

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visibly manifest in contemporary Akoko society is a by-product of the sub-division's historical movement and experience vividly expressed in its history of inter-group relations and contact with external factors. This typifies the nexus between external influences and original culture in contemporary Africa.

Knowledge of this cultural hybridity is necessary to accommodate, understand and prevent inter-group conflagrations from escalating to wars, and more so that feuding groups and sub-groups will not continue to tear themselves apart, appreciating that the prevalence of inter-group rivalries and conflicts is an inevitable and, indeed, integral feature of human societies. More importantly, it shows that attempts at pigeon-holing Africa within the narrow European dominant epistemic lens are not only unrepresentative of the African reality, they are baseless, ethnocentric, racist, unguided and sentimental utterances meant to unjustifiably assert European dominance of the global human society.

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