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# **British colonial policy, change and conflict in traditional political institutions and authorities of the Akoko of southwest nigeria, 1897-1960**

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## **I. Introduction**

The classical concept of authority has received much scholarly attention overtime. Nonetheless, it is apposite to undertake a brief clarification here. In a very simple sense, the term authority means “the right or power to direct and command others(Olawale, 5). As Neal puts it, “the right to use power is called authority(Neal, 335). That is, authority is an institution assigned to the enrichment and promotion of those over whom it is exercised. Thus, Peschke’s definition of authority as “the superiority of a person by which he is entitled to make demands on others for the sake of their individual good or that of society(Peschke, 227) is quite apt.

Traditional authority on its part can be defined as “a form of leadership in which authority (to rule) derives from tradition or custom”(Boundless Sociologyn,d) of the people. According to Weber, “traditional authority is legitimated by the sanctity of tradition. The ability and right to rule is passed down, often through heredity… the system of authority does not change(Weber, 1). In this regard,

Ritzer observed that “traditional authority is based on a claim by the leaders, and a belief on the part of the followers, that there is value in the sanctity of age-old rules and powers(Ritzer, 132). To elaborate, traditional authority is the type of authority whereby the traditional rights of a powerful and dominant individual or group are accepted, or at least unchallenged, by subordinate individuals. This category of authority may include religious, sacred or spiritual forms; well established and slowly changing culture; or tribal, family, or clan type structures. The dominant person could be a priest, clan leader, family head or their ilk. In other instances, dominant elite may govern. Under this kind of arrangement, traditional authority is usually buttressed by cultural elements like myths or connection to the sacred, symbols such as a cross or flag, and by structures and institutions which perpetuate this traditional authority(University of Regina, 3). It is important to note that traditional authority is found mostly in tribal communities, societies in which customs and traditions determine basic relationships, be it political, social or economic.

In Akokoland (as in other parts of Yorubaland), traditional authority was the cornerstone of socio-political administration, prior to the dawn of British imperialism. The power or right to govern in pre-colonial Akoko society was vested in the hands of chiefs (Obas) who ruled through other lesser chiefs and priests. Each Akoko mini-state operated a centralized monarchical system with which it maintained its political and territorial sovereignty, integrity and autonomy. These chiefs possessed both political and religious authorities. In fact, Akoko/Yoruba traditional rulers held and exercised legislative, executive and judicial powers (which were reinforced

by religious authority) over their territories and subjects(Ogunleye, 4; Osei Tutu, 3; Arifalo & Okajare, 8). That these traditional rulers derived their authority from the people's traditions made them to wield divine rights to govern their people. Their words were orders and their actions were divine and sacred. In this sense, the position of pre-colonial Akoko traditional rulers was not only divine, but was also based on virtual leadership, while political power was conceived as a sacred trust between the people and the ruler. The people were submissive to the authority of the rulers who had the responsibility to rule for the general good and wellbeing of the kingdom. Moreover, the rulers served as the symbols of the people's past, custodians of their cultural norms and societal values such as honesty, discipline, integrity, humility, responsibility, hard work and valour(Okereji; Oyeweso, 11;Loyd, 229). In a nutshell, the traditional ruler of a pre-colonial Akoko kingdom was in effect the ultimate mechanism of government.

The history of the Akoko of Southwest Nigeria has not received adequate scholarly attention (in both foreign/English and local/Nigerian literature). Therefore, this paper through the micro-history approach seeks to properly situate the role of British imperialism in the evolution of Akoko political system, particularly traditional authority and institution between 1897 and 1960, with a view to contributing to the gradually emerging body of literature on the past of Akoko societies. Thus, the subsequent discussion focuses on the transformatory impact of British colonial policy on traditional political authorities and institutions in Akokoland during the study period. It also examines how British policies created conflict within and between Akoko traditional political authorities and institutions in

the aforementioned period.

## **II. Impact of British Colonial Policy on Traditional Authority and Institution in Akokoland**

Right from the outset of British imperial incursion into Akoko territory, traditional authority in the area seemingly came under assault from the unwholesome influence of colonial policies and activities. Recall that during the course of Akoko resistance against British entry into their territory, the latter instituted drastic and punitive measures intended to subjugate the Akoko district by forcefully securing the submission of the chiefs and their people. A classic example was the British military onslaught of 1906 against Isua and the subsequent destruction of the kingdom, including the Olisua' spalace where the colonial forces looted the bulk of the ivory belonging to the monarch. In addition, Isua and other vanquished kingdoms like Ipe, Epinmi, Ipesi, Ifiraetc were compelled to pay a reparation of 100 British pounds(cf. N.A.K. 1906). The invasion, destruction and looting of the Olisua's palace, coupled with the imposition of fine on the vanquished Akoko kingdoms was a clear negation of traditional authority and sovereignty.

The indirect rule system that followed the conquest of Akoko land had far-reaching consequences on traditional authorities and institutions in the area. It has been argued that the creation of indirect rule was a reflection of the desire of the British not to destabilize the subsisting system of government, but to make it more humane and democratic(Abubakar, 450). However, it would appear that the

overriding consideration on the part of the British was that, due to the paucity of funds and personnel for their unwelcome rule it was auspicious to rule through the traditional rulers by exploiting their “unique position” to achieve British imperial political and economic objectives. The system operated in such a way that it thoroughly transformed the subsisting institutions of authority and power devolution. The power and authority of traditional rulers consistently dwindled as they became subordinates to the British colonial masters. Rather than issue orders (as they did in pre-colonial times), they now received orders from the colonial Resident and District Officers. The implication of this was that they became accountable to the British colonial officials who had forcefully appropriated their previous legislative, executive and judicial powers (Najeem, 72; cf. Olomola, 8). As Abubakar poignantly put it:

Thus, by the end of the British conquest, the institutions of (traditional authority) were weakened and discredited, and those appointed by the British ceased to be true rules of the people. The spell of their powers was broken and they had to depend on their new masters (Abubakar, 452).

Although indirect rule achieved the imperial goal for which it was established in Akokoland, it radically altered the balance of power in the traditional political system. Specifically, it disrupted traditional authority and chieftaincy institutions. It extraordinarily transformed the traditional arrangement of balance of powers and made the paramount rulers above board. As these rulers had become ready

tools and valuable agents for the implementation of the indirect rule policy and programmes, the colonial government offered them open support even at the expense of the demands and provisions of the people's laws and customs concerning autocratic tendencies and breach of coronation oaths(Olomola, 8). However, there is need to emphasize inspite of this British support traditional rulers merely danced to the tunes of the colonial officials. As an illustration, they collected taxes and remitted them to the District Officers for onward transmission to the Central Government. Thus, they were seen to be stooges of the colonial administration rather than being the custodians of the interests and well-being of the people, as they were prior to British rule(Oyeweso, 16).

The nature and operation of the mechanism of British imperial rule occasioned the steady destruction of the pre-existing autonomy and sovereignty of Akoko kingdoms. For instance, it was not uncommon for colonial political functionaries such as District or Traveling Commissioners to assemble the chiefs (Bales) of neighbouring communities in metropolitan towns and enforce their submissions to the paramount ruler(cf. Tucker). Chiefs of pre-colonial Akoko communities were independent sovereigns of their mini-states, therefore the enforced submission of such chiefs to an artificial and super-imposed paramount authority was an unfair policy. To elucidate, under the colonial state structure, the paramount ruler was assigned as the district head and therefore served as a crucial communication nexus between the British authorities and the district. In this wise, the entire Akoko territory was a sub-district of Kabba during the early phase of colonial rule. In effect, all the chiefs of the Akokovillages were cramped under the suzerainty of the *Obaro*

of Kabba(Davis, 8; N.A.K. 1922, 326).

It is significant to note that before the advent of British administration, the *Obaro* was only a high priest(cf. Divisional Office Record 1922). But contrary to established traditions and norms regarding traditional authority and chieftaincy among the Akoko, Lugard transformed the *Obaro* into a political chieftaincy and appointed him as the Paramount Chief and Native Authority (NA) of the entire Kabba Division, including Akokoland. As the Native Authority, he had powers to issue administrative proclamations to ensure law and order, fight crime, arrest and banish criminals. His administrative jurisdiction also included the power to initiate and carry out orders on public health and sanitary condition of his domain, as well as the recruitment of required personnel for the effective execution of his official duties(Okonjo, 44). Significantly, the *Obaro* was also empowered to grant confirmation of successions to the thrones of his subordinate communities. For instance, in 1911 the new *Akala* of Ikaram accompanied by his principal subjects traveled to Kabba, a distance of about forty kilometers, to get the *Obaro's* confirmation(Beeley 1934, C.S.O 25/3, 29667, Vol.1). The *Obaro's* confirmation of the *Akala's* succession was indeed a confirmation of the loss of sovereignty and authority by both the *Akala* institution and Ikaram kingdom.

Akoko traditional authorities were further undermined by the appointment and activities of political officers like the District and Traveling Commissioners and later in the 1910's, District Officers. These colonial officials took up the responsibility for ensuring law and order within their areas of jurisdiction, established boundaries with other colonial administrative units, inspected public works,

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intervened in inter-community conflicts and ensured that the people complied with treaty obligations. They administered justice, and became arbiters higher than the traditional authorities in terms of socio-political and economic affairs of the people. As a consequence, the previously independent traditional authorities lost their rights to the traditional avenues for enforcing their authority, the power to declare war and make peace, just as they completely stopped being the masters of their kingdoms destinies. Moreover, the traditional rulers became mere agents and appendages of the imperial administration who could be and were in fact summoned to the headquarters at will(Omorinbola, cf. Olomola, 334-335; Newbury, 84).

The colonial policy of boundary adjustment that accompanied indirect rule also subverted traditional authorities in Akokoland. The policy altered the balance of power in favour of the monarchs of the prominent states such that they became more powerful than ever in relation to other rulers within the area. As an illustration, the boundary adjustment of 1918 marked an unprecedented extension of the political authority of the *Olowo*(king) of Owo over and above Akoko kingdoms following his appointment as the sole Native Authority of the old Owo Division(Arifalo&Okajare, 14-15; Adesunloye-Otolola III, 2). It is noteworthy that it was the Akoko themselves who advocated for their transfer to the Southern Provinces largely due to the unpalatable subjugation under the *Obaro* of Kabba, however, the colonial policy decision to appoint the *Olowo* as Native Authority yielded a negative impact on Akoko traditional authorities. Following the approval of the Palmer-Hargreave Delimitation Commission is recommendation in 1917(Bewley; Adesunloye-Otolola, 3)



that the two districts of Afenmai and Akoko be merged with the Benin and Ondo Provinces respectively, the Owo Division consisting of Owo, Ifon and Akoko Districts became operational on 1 January, 1919. While Ifon retained the position of the seat of government (until 1925), the *Olowo* was made the Paramount Chief.

The subsequent establishment and operation of a Divisional Judicial Council composed of all the District Heads and having full jurisdiction to hear appeals from the Native Courts thoroughly undermined the authority and power of the Akoko rulers as the Olojawo became the *de facto* potentate even in matters of judicial administration. In addition, the lopsided representation in the council weakened the position of the Akoko kings. The council comprised of eight Ward Chiefs from Owo, five Akoko District Heads, the Oloja of Ifon, and the Olowo as president. Expectedly, the Akoko traditional rulers were irked by this British-inspired advantage of the Owo rulers over them more so as they could not see any basis for the membership of Ward Chiefs like the Ojomo, Ojumuand Osere in the council(cf. Avens Abu Sanni 2013). The situation was aggravated by the overbearing attitude of some of these chiefs who often interfered in the internal affairs of Akoko mini-states. As an example, in 1923, the Olowo deployed a delegation of Owo chiefs to supare -Akoko in an apparent attempt to interfere in a land crisis(Adewunmi 2013; cf. N.A.I.Ondo, 4/1,6). Rightly so, these and other hegemonic tendencies of the Olowo and his chiefs were decried by Akoko traditional rulers as an affront against their persons and thrones.

The decolonization era was equally fraught with challenges for Akoko traditional authorities. Akoko society inevitably received its share of the landmark impact of the 1939-1945 Second World War,

especially the attendant reawakening in the political consciousness of all Nigerians, regardless of their social status.<sup>1</sup> In the circumstance, traditional rulers were 'dragged' into party politics by politicians desperate to triumph during the years of transfer of power. In fact, the official launch of the Action Group (AG) at Owo in April 1951 was a landmark in the evolutionary history of the involvement of Yoruba traditional rulers in the mainstream of party politics. In the words of Awolowo:

(Chieftaincy has an) incalculable sentimental value for the masses in Western---Nigeria. This being so, it is *imperative*, as a matter of practical politics that we use the most efficient means ready to hand for organizing the masses for rapid political advancement(Awolowo, 66).

The constitutional developments of the post-war years extended party politics to the interior of Yorubaland, Akoko inclusive. Thus, the traditional rulers had to contend with a new political force, the emergent Nigerian political elite. Indeed, the authority of these monarchs received a huge knock following the election of councilors on party platforms into Native Authority and their active participation in local administration as from 1945. By April 1955, Action Group Party members were in control of the various local administrative councils across Akokoland(Ogunjemiwo; Olukoju 2003, 206-208).

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1. For details of the impact of World War II on political re-awakening and nationalist agitation in Nigeria, see J.S Coleman (1986).

Nigeria: Background to Nationalism, Benin; G.O. Olusanya The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria, 1939-1953, Ibadan: Evans Brothers Ltd.

In the face of the mounting threat and pressure from the politicians, traditional rulers began to pitch their tent with political groups. In a similar vein, while the creation of a House of Chiefs in the Western Region via the McPherson Constitution of 1951 reinforced the political influence of the traditional rulers, it heightened their partisanship because they began to give their support to the ruling parties, which determined the membership of the legislative house. By this, the traditional rulers had begun to breach customs and traditions, which required them to serve their subjects regardless of their political affiliations. More importantly, the involvement of traditional rulers in partisan politics created conditions that further eroded their integrity, power and authority(Oyeweso, 17; Arifalo & Okajare, 20). The above discussion represents a picture of the position or status of Akoko traditional authorities during the era of British imperialism.

### **III. British Colonial Policy and Conflict in Akoko Traditional Authority/Institution**

While certain British colonial policies subverted the power and authority of traditional rulers in Akokoland, some others created conflict within and amongst the traditional authorities and institutions of some Akoko kingdoms. Top among such policies was the District Head System and its appurtenances. The District Head System, introduced in Akokoland in 1912, was a core and common institution of colonial rule in Nigeria. A notable peculiarity in Akokoland, however, was that unlike in most parts of Nigeria, the colonial administration from about 1900 to 1919 merged Akokoland with the

Northern Group of Provinces instead of the Southern Provinces with which it was geographically contiguous. Chief among the chieftaincy conflicts in Akokoland under colonial rule were the crises in Ikare, Oka and Akungba.

### 1. Ikare—Akoko

The conflict in Ikare was of complex character. What may be regarded as the first type of chieftaincy crisis in Ikare during the period under consideration emerged in 1918 in the form of intra-*Owalukare* Ruling House conflict between the Ajagunna and Momoh branches. The root cause of this conflict was the introduction of the colonial policy of paramountcy, which pitched two half brothers, Ajagunna I, the *Olukare* and Momoh against each other. For reasons of administrative and political expediency, the colonial government had imposed Momoh as the Paramount Chief of Akokoland, an appointment that was deemed by many to be both anti-tradition and unhistorical. Expectedly, Ajagunna became very hostile to Momoh. In the web of intrigues that followed, both Momoh and Ajagunna were imprisoned by the British at various times allegedly on account of certain criminal acts (N.A.K. 1918a; Okereji; N.A.I. Ondo 1920-1921, 4/1,2). Citing the need to fill the vacuum created by the imprisonment of Ajagunna and Momoh, District Officer Monk suggested to the British Resident to cut-short Momoh's jail term with a view to making him the *Olukare* (cf. N.A.K 1917). Consequently, Momoh was released in September 1919, while Ajagunna was released in November same year following an *ad miserirordian* appeal (appeal to pity) (N.A.I. 1917, 25).

The return of Ajagunna and Momoh to Ikare exacerbated the prevalent confusion and fension in the kingdom. This was particularly so, given the dilemma faced by the British administration on how to 'fill' the *Olukare* throne. It should be noted that though Ajagunna had returned home from prison, sufficient damage had been done to his public image, acceptability and traditional authority.

As Ogunyemi described the situation:

---The damage had been done. Ikare people already had an ex-convict *Oba* and they relentlessly refused, except for the Ikeado Quarters of the town, to have him back as their king (Ogunyemi, 180).

For Momoh (who held no traditional title before), although the colonial authorities deemed him to be suitable and qualified for the throne by their own standard, they were unable to appoint him directly due to concerns about possible public discontent and backlash against such move. The option of election which the colonial administration eventually chose to resolve the logjam was both anti-Ikare tradition and ineffectual. Other than consult Ifa in line with Akoko customs and traditions, the colonial officials compelled the Ikare people to hold an election in 1920 to determine their preference between the embattled Ajagunna, and Momoh(N.A.I. Ondo Prof. 1920-1921, 4/1,2). Momoh reportedly recorded a landslide victory over Ajagunna. Ostensibly due to the stiff protest by Ajagunna and his supporters against this verdict, coupled with their petition to the Lieutenant-Governor, Mr. Moorhouse alleging irregularities in the election, the Resident ordered a re-election which Momoh

again won on 20 March, 1920 this time with a greater majority than the previous. Surprisingly, Moorhouse again set aside the election result and instead ordered the re-instatement of Ajagunna as Olukare. We may note that the British justification for this action was anchored upon the conviction that Ikare would not know peace so long as Ajagunna did not get back his throne(N.A.I. Ondo Prof. 1920-1921, 4/1,2). As Akomolafe argues:

The point should be made that although Momoh had the majority as the election results showed, the militant wing of the population was behind Ajagunna. It would appear Moorhouse realized this; hence he cleverly avoided taking a measure that could destroy the Native Administration, by setting aside the results of the election and declaring Ajagunna the Olukare of Ikare(Akomolafe, 94).

However, rather than Ajagunna's re-instatement yielding the proclaimed objective of peace, it gave rise to deep animosity against the colonial government, as well as violence in Ikare. In fact, on 10 June, 1920, thirteen out of the sixteen districts in the town reached an agreement not to support Ajagunna's rule(Ondo State of Nigeria 1977, 19).

Oba Ajagunna soon ran into troubled waters again. In 1922, another investigation initiated by Mr. Monk found the king culpable of maladministration, and aiding and abetting three notorious thieves to evade arrest(N.A.I. Ondo Prof. 1922, 4/1,6). Consequently, on 21 January 1923 he was deposed and exiled to Lagos, while Momoh was crowned Olukare. Due to the humiliating, and degrading

treatment the British subjected Ajagunna to, coupled with the concomitant damage to his monarchical authority, he poisoned himself to death at Ilesa on his return journey from exile after been granted amnesty (Akomolafe, 95).

A new facet of the intra Owalukare chieftaincy conflict opened in 1952 after a three-decade 'truce'. This emerged in the form of a bitter succession struggle between Amusa and Babatunde of the Momoh and Ajagunna ruling houses respectively in order to determine the successor to Oba AduMomoh II (1927-1952). Amidst the fierce contest between Amusa and Babatunde, an internal squabble broke out within the house of Momoh. In March 1952, the Ilori-led faction of the house petitioned the colonial administration in protest against an attempt by some elders to enthrone Amusa as the new king(Ondo State of Nigeria 1977, 23). In the meantime, the Ajagunna house continued its tenacious opposition to Amusa. The bitter rivalry that ensued the irreversible polarization of the kingdom into pro-Okela and anti-Okela forces.<sup>2</sup> The crisis reached its climax on 20 March, 1952 when the Ajagunna house unilaterally crowned Babatunde as the new Olukare with the title Ajagunna II, following British approval of his appointment(Ondo State of Nigeria 1977, 27). This brought to a close the intra-Owalukare chieftaincy crisis that found expression under British imperial rule.

A second type of chieftaincy crisis in Ikare, the Owa-Ale of Ikare vs Olukare conflict had emerged in 1946. This conflict that turned out to be intractable, began as a dispute over the issue of the

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2. In 1918, in the heat of the first intra-Owalukare crisis Momoh and his family had moved to Ilepa after leaving their home at Okela Quarter, Ikare, which used to be the town's royal district.

appropriateness or otherwise of the Olukare to wear a crown. According to sources, at the time Ikare and the entire Akokoland fell under Kabba province, the reigning Owa-Ale, Ajiboye usually sent Ajagunna to the District Officer in Kabba. Ajagunna misrepresented his master, Owa-Ale before the District Officer overtime which made the latter to subsequently acknowledge Ajagunna as the Olukare (the supreme ruler) of Ikare(Nigerian Tribune 2000; Ondo State of Nigeria 1999, 128-129). Tension began to mount between both sides in 1946 following the appearance of the Olukare, Jubril Momoh at an exhibition wearing a crown instead of a turban(Nigerian Tribune 2000). Consequently, in 1948, the Owa- Ale, Adegbite challenged the Olukare at the Supreme Court, Benin over the latter's right to wear a crown. In addition, Adegbite requested the court under Justice C.M.S. Pollard to issue a declaration that the title of Owa-Ale was superior to that of Olukare and that only the former had the right in Ikare to wear a crown.

After protracted litigations by both sides, the colonial judiciary did not declare any ruling on the claims by *Owa Ale* that he is the only person in Ikare entitled to wear a crown nor that the *Olukare* had no right to wear a crown, on the grounds of lack of jurisdiction citing section 2 sub-section 1 of the Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Ordinance of 1933(Nigerian Tribune; Ondo State of Nigeria 1979a, 135-138). On the whole, chieftaincy conflicts in Ikare under colonial rule bore serious consequences. While the intra-*Owalukare* disputes sowed the seeds of division in the *Owalukare* dynasty splitting it into two separate ruling houses (Ajagunna and Momoh) the *Owalukare* and *Owa-Ale* conflict effectively polarized Ikare-community up to 1960 and beyond.



## 2. Oka–Akoko

The Oka chieftaincy conflict between the Asin and Olubaka chieftaincies can be traced to the dawn of British colonial rule in Akokoland. From its outset in the 1900s up to 1960, the dispute centered, essentially around the issue of who was the real paramount traditional authority in Oka, between the Asin and Olubaka. As available evidence indicate, this conflict, like those in Ikare, were largely inspired by the introduction of the British policy of ‘paramourncy’ among Akoko traditional authorities during the early phase of colonial rule. According to a source, the Asin was the original settler and founder of Oka, Olubaka’s ancestors arrived in Oka and settled there alongside the Asin during the reign of Asin Olugbangada, the 9th in the genealogy of the Asin dynasty(Benin Court of Appeal Judgement, 18-19). During the period Oka was under the administration of the Northern Province, the supreme headship of the town was given to the reigning Olubaka by the District Officer Kabba, Major Larymore.

The beneficiary of this British scheme was Orimolade who displaced Asin Omorinbola II to become the last Olubaka of Ibaka and the first Olubaka of Oka. The presentation of the Staff of Office to Oba Orimolade as the first legally and officially recognized Olubaka of Okaland by the colonial administration in 1904 (Ondo State of Nigeria 1979b, 7) met with intense opposition from the Asin dynasty, sometimes degenerating into violence. The opposition persisted beyond the appointment and installation of Ilegbusi (who succeeded Odudu in 1918). The Asin and his Oka-Odo chiefdom backed by the Iwonrin, Owake and Ebo chiefdoms were said to have engaged

the Olowo and his chiefs in negotiations to the effect that Oka would acknowledge the suzerainty of Owo in return for the latter's support for Asin's claims. This scenario began prior to the death of Odudu in 1918 but reached a climax following the election of Elegbusi as the next Olubaka of Okaland by the other eleven chiefdoms and confirmation by the District Officer. At some point, the Asin, in desperation, dispatched messengers to salute the District Officer "in the name of Asin as Olu of Oka". Following the rebuff of Asin's gesture by the District Officer who chased away the former's messengers, the Asin group declined to obey any orders from Elegbusi and even refused to attend his installation. In December 1918, the group staged a riot during which they drove away the messengers and policemen sent by the Olubaka and the District Officer. As a consequence, there was increasing tension in the land, heightened by the beating of war drums in the disenchanting chiefdoms. Tempers only simmered after the District Officer issued an ultimatum against Asin and his leading followers who subsequently had to flee to Owo. The crisis was eventually doused by the colonial authorities through a combination of measures including arrests, deportations, imprisonments and outright enforcement of submission to Olubaka's authority(Olukoju 1993, 257-258;N.A.I. Ondo Prof. G.L.Monks).

By 1957, via colonial legislation the British government had completed the irreversible superimposition of the Olubaka chieftaincy over Asin chieftaincy. The law spelt out the three ruling houses (Okelosun, Odederu, and Odoagbo), the order of rotation in which the respective houses are to provide candidates to fill successive vacancies, and the criterion to determine qualified candidates that may be proposed by a ruling house. In addition, the law specified

the kingmakers as the Elebinrin, Oluwonrin, Aro, and Alasin, and also outlined the procedure for nomination by each ruling house. Significantly, the legislation stated that the consent of the Olubaka is required to an appointment made by the kingmakers(N.A.I. Ondo Prof. 1958). Although the declaration noted that the Olubaka's consent is only formal and may not be withheld, the whole essence of the law was an assault on the age-old independence and paramountcy of the Asin in Oka. In addition, the British-imposed paramountcy and suzerainty of the Olubaka over Okaland enthroned a culture of divisiveness and acrimony that has persisted till date.

### 3. Akungba - Akoko

The origin of the chieftaincy conflict in Akungba between the Alakungba and Alale chieftaincies dates back to the period between 1913 and 1918 during which the colonial government granted recognition to Village Heads in the Akoko Districts of Kabba Division. As in Ikare and Oka, this conflict emanated and subsisted primarily over the headship or paramount rulership of Akungba. Going by one account, Alale Omobokun usurped the position of the Alakungba dynasty as the paramount ruler of Akungba through the process of colonial recognition mentioned above. This power equation remained until the death of Alale Omobokun in 1918. The situation was sustained by the British authorities which handed over the Village Book (a symbol of paramountcy) and other paraphernalia of office to Alale Ajimo I who had earlier succeeded Omobokun(Supreme Court of Nigeria Judgement).

According to a second account, Alakungba, "historically," was the

founder and paramount head of Akungba, while the Alale, though a powerful chief and colonial tax collector, was a subordinate chief to the Alakungba. Alale Omobokun between 1913 and 1920 foisted himself upon the colonial authorities in Kabba and eventually usurped the position of the reigning Alakungba as he successfully took possession of the Village Book. At this juncture, it is opposite to shed light on the nature and significance of the so-called Village Book with respect to the Akungba chieftaincy conflict under consideration. In Akokoland during the era of British rule, Village Books were tax record-books comprising the names and addresses of tax payers within a particular territory. The British authorities especially the Native Authority Police, usually recorded the names of the tax-collectors themselves (who are normally the head chiefs) in the book. In the view of the British administration, the person who possessed the book was the head chief, and thus a conclusive evidence of his traditional authority over the persons (tax payers) whose names are contained in the book(Ogunyemi, 192-193). However, the Alale dynasty maintain a counter-claim that is in sharp contrast to that of the Alakungba. In this regard, the contention is that no Alakungba had ever ruled in Akungba as a monarch or paramount ruler, and therefore, the allegation that the Alale usurped the paramountcy of the Alakungba is irrelevant. In addition, the Alale, since the deep past had been the king of Akungba and that it was in recognition of this that the British authorities gave the Village Book to the incumbent Alale in 1913(Ondo State of Nigeria 1979b, 12). Regardless of the status of arguments of both sides, the clear point that needs to be stated here is that it was the colonial government's action of granting recognition and handing over the

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Village Book to the Alale that sparked conflict between the two chieftaincies and their followers.

The conflict gradually thickened in 1924 when Alale Ajimo declined to recognize Alakungba Esugbe who had earlier been crowned in 1923. In that year, the latter petitioned Mr. Knapp, the District Officer Owo Division (the division that inherited Akoko from Kabba Division) in protest against the former's refusal to release the Village Book to him as the town's head chief. Following his inquiry into the case, Mr. Knapp reached a conclusion in favour of the Alakungba's claim of paramountcy, noting that he might have been suppressed on account of his very young age (Ondo State of Nigeria 1987, 21). Nonetheless, Mr. Mackenzie, who succeeded Mr. Knapp, was not convinced. In his view (anchored upon the 'sacrosanct' nature of the Village Book earlier described, if Alakungba Esugbe's father was the head-chief of Akungba, his name would have been noted in the book instead of that of the late Alale. District officer Mackenzie therefore officially accorded the Alale the title of Paramount Ruler of Akungbaland over the Alakungba in 1924 (Ojomu, 5; Ondo State of Nigeria 1987, 22).

In his determination not to forfeit the family heritage, the new Alakungba on ascension of the throne in 1951 lodged numerous petitions with the colonial authorities for redress. As an illustration, in 1953 the Akoko Federal Native Authority instituted a commission to investigate the matter. The body's report declared in favour of the Alakungba's case and in fact recommended that his claim of being the traditional head of Akungba be upheld. Similarly, in 1955 when the matter came up again before the Ikamerin Local Council, the Alakungba was once more vindicated and recommended for

immediate recognition by government. Surprisingly, the government acted contrary to the above. In May 1956, the Ministry of Local Government of the Western Region (MLGWR) in an official statement acknowledged the ‘traditional validity’ of the Divisional Council and Local Council reports to the effect that the Alakungba was the rightful head-chief of Akungba. It however, declared that since the Alale had been recognized by government for about thirty years it was not keen on his sudden removal, advising that further action be suspended until there was a fair degree of consensus over the issue(Ondo State of Nigeria 1987, 24; cf. Legal Brief Africa). But the colonial administration did not display a similar sense of restraint earlier in 1924 when in utter disregard for the traditions and customs of the Akungba people it imposed the then Alale as Paramount Head over the town.

The chieftaincy conflicts in Ikare, Oka and Akungba detailed upon above were classic illustrations of the origin, nature and trajectory of chieftaincy crises in Akokoland under British colonial rule. However, a few cases, notably Erusu-Akoko, differed in some respects. In Erusu, as was the case in Ikare, Oka, Akungba and some other Akoko kingdoms, Afere, the self-styled *Alaga* of Erusu exploited the colonial policy-inspired contradictions and laxness in Akoko traditional institutions and authorities to usurp the position of *Oba* Amuna, the legitimate *Osunla*(King) of Erusu. But in contrast to the aforestated cases, the *Alaga* usurpation of the *Osunla* throne was shortlived. In addition, the conflict that ensued between both parties was short and not as bitter as the ones earlier discussed in this paper.

## IV. CONCLUSION

This foregoing study examined the impact of British imperialism on the political organization of Akokoland with particular respect to traditional authority and institution between 1897 and 1960. As the preceding discussion showed, the indirect rule system brought far-reaching consequences upon traditional authorities and institutions in the territory. Unlike in the pre-colonial era, Akoko traditional rulers became subservient and accountable to the British colonial officials in the exercise of political power and authority over their respective domains. By colonial fiat, the British administration disrupted, and in some cases permanently altered the traditional order of authority across Akokoland. In particular, the District Head System by which the colonial government granted recognition to certain village heads above others within various localities irrevocably tilted the balance of power in favour of some traditional rulers and their kingdoms to the detriment of others.

In consequence, this British policy engendered conflict, ill-feeling and divisiveness among some Akoko traditional rulers and communities. Using Ikare, Oka and Akungba as selected cases, this paper demonstrated the vagaries of British rule with respect to certain colonial policies that caused disaffection and chaos among some Akoko traditional authorities and communities, embers of which glimmered beyond the period covered by this study. In all, the study is a significant contribution to existing knowledge on Akoko history in terms of the comprehensive role of British imperialism in the process of change and evolution in Akoko political system. It is

also a useful platform for further/similar research on the political impact of some other colonial policies on colonized territories and peoples elsewhere.



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## **Abstract**

The Akoko are a sub-group of the Yoruba ethnic group in Southwest Nigeria. Despite sharp linguistic variations, the indigenous political system of Akoko towns is akin to the monarchical system in other Yoruba towns. However, between 1897 and 1960 Akokoland fell under British colonial rule, like many other Nigerian territories. The new political system brought far-reaching consequences upon the nature and operations of the pre-existing government and politics in Akoko territory. While certain British colonial policies subverted the power and authority of traditional rulers in Akokoland, some others created conflict within the traditional authorities and institutions of Akoko kingdoms. Therefore, using the chieftaincy crises in Ikare, Oka, and Akungba kingdoms as case studies, this paper shall evaluate the impact of British colonial policy on Akoko traditional political institutions and authorities, particularly with respect to change and conflict during the period 1897-1960. The Indirect rule system introduced by the British administration created far-reaching changes in Akoko traditional institutions, authorities, and society, especially as it substantially undermined the power and authority of Akoko traditional rulers, chiefs and other indigenous institutions in favour of the British colonial administrators and administration. In addition, British colonial policy created disaffection, tension and conflict within and between Akoko traditional institutions and authorities during the study period and left enduring legacies in some kingdoms. Data comprise both primary and secondary sources.

**Keywords:** British Colonial Policy, Change, Conflict, Traditional Authority, Traditional Institutions, Akokoland.

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국문 초록

## 영국 식민 정책과 나이지리아 남서부 Akoko 전통 정치기구 권력집단과의 충돌과 변화

아코코(Akoko)는 나이지리아 남서부에 있는 요루바(Yoruba) 민족 그룹의 하위 그룹이다. 급격한 언어 변이에도 불구하고 아코코 마을의 토착 정치 체제는 다른 요루바 도시의 군주제와 유사하다. 그러나 1897년에서 1960년 사이에 아코코 땅은 다른 많은 나이지리아 영토와 마찬가지로 영국 식민 통치하에 놓였다. 새로운 정치 체제는 아코코 영토에 존재하는 정부와 정치의 본질과 운영에 지대한 영향을 미치는 결과를 가져왔다. 특정 영국 식민지 정책이 아코코 땅의 전통적인 통치자의 권력과 권위를 침범하는 한편, 일부는 아코코 왕국의 전통적 권위와 제도 안에서 분쟁을 일으켰다. 따라서 이 연구는 Ikare, Oka 및 Akungba 왕국의 족장 권위의 위기를 사례 연구로 사용하여 아코코 전통 정치 기관 및 당국, 특히 1897-1960년의 변화와 갈등에 대한 영국 식민지 정책의 영향을 평가할 것이다. 영국 행정에 의해 도입된 간접적인 통치 제도는 아코코 전통 통치자, 족장 및 기타 원주민 기관의 권력과 권위를 영국 식민지 행정관들에게 유리하도록 실질적으로 약화 시켰기 때문에 아코코 전통 기관, 당국 및 사회에 광범위한 변화를 가져왔다. 또한 영국 식민지 정책은 연구 기간 동안 아코코 전통 기관과 당국 사이의 불만, 긴장과 갈등을 야기했으며 일부 왕국에서는 지속적인 유산을 남겼다. 데이터는 1차 자료와 2차 자료를 모두 포함하고 있다.

**키워드** : 영국 식민 정책, 변화, 충돌, 전통기관, 전통적 권위, Akokoland.

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