

British Colonial Administration and Inter-group Relations in Yorubaland: The Case of Remo Groups in Sagamu, Southwestern Nigeria

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The appearance of the Europeans on the West African coasts as well as the establishment of colonial rule is one of the defining moments in Nigerian history. This has brought about a profound impact on the socio-economic and political development of the people of Nigeria. Beyond this, the indirect rule policy, and its attendant elevation of some traditional chiefs, altered in a very fundamental way how many different groups in Nigeria had interacted with one another for centuries. The consequence of this was the incessant inter-group conflicts and confrontations during the colonial and post-colonial periods. This is particularly the case with the Remo groups in Sagamu, a town that owed its establishment to the nineteenth-century warfare that engulfed Yorubaland. The general insecurity of the period forced many Remo towns to come together for defence and survival between 1862 and 1872. Politically, each confederating town in Sagamu maintained its identity and independence. However, this arrangement was altered with the conferment of paramountcy on the *Akarigbo of Ofin* over other traditional rulers in the town by the British colonial government on August 4, 1894. This has often generated intra-group conflicts and crises which have been prevalent in the town since that time. It is against this background that this paper seeks to examine the impact of British policies and administration on the often-confrontational intra-group relations in Sagamu, particularly between the *Ofin* and *Makun* groups. This paper argues that British colonial policies did a lot to strain intra-group relations in Sagamu. The paper adopts historical research methods. Given this, both primary and secondary data constitute the main sources of information for the study.

[Colonial Administration; History; Intra-group Relations; Sagamu; Yorubaland]

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Introduction

The establishment of Sagamu in 1872 can be situated within the prevailing political and security situation in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century.¹ Without any doubt, the Yoruba internecine warfare of the period triggered by the decline of the Old Oyo had enormous political and socio-economic consequences on Remo townlets and villages. Most of these settlements were frequently subjected to devastating military raids, particularly from the Egba army. While some survived these incursions, many were destroyed and annihilated. Those that survived only did so by coming together to form stronger units of resistance and defence. Consequently, new settlements such as Ikenne and Sagamu emerged with new forms of social arrangements. In Sagamu, there emerged a confederal political arrangement among the thirteen hitherto independent Remo villages and townlets that came together to establish the town. The townlets are Ofin, Makun, Sonyindo, Epe, Ibido, Igbepa, Ado, Oko, Ipoji, Batoro, Ijoku, Latawa and Ijagba.² The two most prominent and largest of these Remo groups are Ofin and Makun groups.

The founding of Sagamu seemed to be based on some form of unwritten agreement among the federating Remo towns and villages. First, unlike similar formations in Yorubaland such as Abeokuta and Ogbomosho, there was no consensus on hierarchy among the traditional rulers of the independent townships that came together. Second, the federating townlets continue to exist as independent sovereign political entities within the newly found town. Each townlet had its markets, political system and knew its boundaries. Hence, a unitary political system was absent in Remoland. This situation however was meant to change with the imposition of colonial rule and its attendant indirect rule system in the area. By and large, British recognition of the paramountcy of the *Akarigbo* over Remoland came on the heels of an agreement signed with *Akarigbo* Oye-bajo establishing a British protectorate over Ijebu-Remo in August 1894.³

The promotion of the *Akarigbo* of Ofin as paramount ruler over other

1 A comprehensive account of the 19th Yoruba warfare can be found in J. F. A. AJAYI, *The Aftermath of the Fall of Oyo*, in: J. F. A. AJAYI – M. CROWDER (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Vol. II, London 1974, chapter 5; see also J. F. A. AJAYI – R. S. SMITH, *Yoruba Warfare in the 19th Century*, London 1964.

2 O. O. OLUBOMEHIN, Sagamu, in: G. O. OGUNTOMISIN (ed.), *Yoruba Towns and Cities*, Vol. I, Ibadan 2003, pp. 101–112.

3 O. AYODELE, *History of Remo Thirty-three Traditional Towns (Remo Metalelogbon), Migration to 2008*, Sagamu 2008, p. 295.

Remo groups strained the fraternal relationship that existed among them to the point of hostility till this present-day. A typical example was the crisis that ensued in Sagamu between Makun and Ofin as a fall-out of the performance of traditional burial rites for late Oba Moses Sowemimo Awolesi, the *Akarigbo* of Remo in 1988. Looking at the various accounts of the incidents as reported in the news media, one might be led to erroneously conclude that the confrontation was triggered by disagreement over the kind of traditional rites to perform and where to perform them. However, a proper understanding of the historical, as well as the socio-political dynamics within the town, is necessary to uncover what sparked off tension and unrest between the two Remo groups. The issues involved are steeped in the origin of the town as well as the type of socio-political relations that existed among the constituent groups, particularly the Makun and Ofin groups before the establishment of colonial rule in the area.

The main purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the impact of the British colonial policies and administration on the often-confrontational intra-group relations in Sagamu, particularly between the Ofin and Makun sub-groups of Remo. In achieving this objective, the study starts by discussing the traditions of origin of the Remo people in general, and Makun and Ofin sub-groups in particular. Thereafter, the traditional patterns of relationship between the two groups before integration in 1872 shall be examined. An attempt will also be made to x-ray the socio-political connections that have existed between the two groups in the aftermath of integration and the founding of Sagamu in 1872. The study presents a case for communal understanding and its implication for social and political stability by considering the communal rivalry and competition that have bedevilled the development of the town since its inception. It concludes by observing that despite the variations in their traditions of origin and distinctive social and political organisations, the Remo groups had a lot of things in common and had co-existed as brothers before the imposition of colonial rule in the area.

The Origin of the Remo Groups

The traditions of origin of the Remo people hold that there were thirty-three Remo towns that came under two major waves of migration. The first one was directly from Irewo Quarters in Ile-Ife about 1000 B.C. under the leadership of Eneyi Amunigbuwa.⁴ The second one came from

⁴ T. PEDRO, 87 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1986.

Ijebu-Ode, though they claimed to have earlier migrated from Ile-Ife.⁵ Today, however, “*the Remo area now consist of eleven principal village groups, of which the largest, Sagamu, consists of thirteen villages which combined for defence in 1872, the remainder of the original thirty-three villages having been destroyed in war*”.⁶ As a result of these migrations, there are various versions as regards the origin of Remo people. It is also important to state that there are various traditions one would find in various towns as being their story of origin. The complex nature of the traditions of origin of many Remo towns is further buttressed by the fact that even within the same town, groups or sections have different traditions of origin. In Ikenne, for instance, a prominent family, the Onafowokans, has their cognomen as “*omo a fidi pote mole*”. Afidipote is a ruling house in Ijebu Ode, so they probably have an affinity that dates back in history. However, within the same Ikenne town, a quarter claimed to recognise the authority of the Akarigbo of Ofin.

According to one tradition,⁷ which is popular in Ijebu-Ode, Olofin Ogbolu left Ile-Ife and became the first *Ajalorun* of Ijebu-Ife. He was also responsible for the establishment of Odogbolu, where the first Akarigbo was born by one of his wives. However, at an age not given, the Akarigbo offended his father and was banished to Remo, where he met the *Alara* and the *Elepe*. The other tradition, which is also popular in Ijebu-Ode, has Ijebu-Ode links.⁸ This tradition holds that Obanta, the first *Awujale*, while coming from Ile-Ife wrestled with the head of a village known as *Igbo*, who would not allow a passage through his village. In the wrestling match, Obanta defeated Olu-Igbo, after which he cut off his head. He later asked the wife of Olu-Igbo, Aka, to carry the head in a wooden tray and follow him on the onward journey to Ijebu-Ode. Aka, according to the tradition, was pregnant. Another account claims that Aka was sent away by Obanta with the head of Olu-Igbo, which she was carrying. Whatever is the true account, Aka gave birth to a boy who was later given the name, Akarigbo meaning ‘Aka carried Igbo’. The tradition goes further that

⁵ S. ADEGOKE, 76 years, Oral Interview, Ijebu-Ode, 1987.

⁶ M. H. Martindale *Inquiry Report, 1937, Summary and Conclusions*, Ibadan 2009, p. 1.

⁷ This tradition is recorded in A. F. ABELL, *Intelligence Report on Remo*, Ijebu-Remo District File No 1935, Agency Mark B1216, National Archives Ibadan, 1937.

⁸ S. ADEGOKE, 76 years, Oral Interview, Ijebu-Ode, 26 February 1987; see also T. O. OGUNKOYA, The Early History of Ijebu, in: *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 1, 1956, pp. 48–58; O. O. AYANTUGA, *Ijebu and Its Neighbours, 1851–1914*, Ph.D. Thesis, University of London, 1965.

when Akarigbo became of age, he was dispatched by *Awujale* to find a new land which turned out to be the present-day Remoland.

The third tradition⁹ is more popular and may be regarded as the official tradition in some Remo towns. It is official in the sense that it has been accorded acceptance, at least by some Remo towns as the correct version of their origin. This tradition maintains that Oba Iгимisoje, while other versions say it was Eneyi Amunigbuwa, led a migration from Ire모 Quarters in Ile-Ife at about 1,000 B.C. This group first settled at Okun-Owa, and later moved to Ofin Orile where they settled down. The groups that regard this tradition as sacrosanct include Ilisan, Ilara, Irolu, Akaka, some parts of Ikenne, majority of Ode-Remo people, and eleven of the Remo towns that formed Sagamu in 1872.¹⁰

Looking at all the traditions of origin, there are several questions to be asked. Do we regard the whole of Remo as having come from Ijebu-Ife? What explanation does one give for the group that claims direct descent from Ile-Ife? However, it must not be forgotten that the tradition that exists in Epe and Ilara asserts that they left Ile-Ife together with Ofin and other Remo groups.¹¹ Hence, if the earlier tradition which claims that *Akarigbo* of Ofin, for that was the initial title, met *Elepe* and *Alara* in Remo and the Epe and Ilara people claim that they left Ile-Ife together, then the validity of the earlier traditions stands to be doubted. Taking the second tradition about Aka, Obanta and Olu-Igbo, one might be tempted to disbelieve this tradition. How could it have been possible for Aka to have carried the husband's head for so long, one may ask? The derivation of the name, Akarigbo from *Aka ru ori Igbo*, maybe more mythical than real.

The question one may ask further is what could be said to be responsible for the contestation and crisis that attended the burial rites of the late *Akarigbo*, Oba Moses Sowemimo Awolesi in 1988? To find an answer to this, one may need to take a peep into the colonial history of Nigeria in general and that of the Ijebu and Remo in particular.

In May 1892, when the Ijebu expedition was embarked upon by the British, there was an existing treaty signed with the Ijebu in January 1892. Again, after the expedition, there was another separate treaty signed

⁹ A. ADEDOYIN, 73 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1987; A. SONEYE, 72 years, Oral Interview, Ikenne, 1980.

¹⁰ M. H. Martindale *Inquiry Report*, 1937, p. 2.

¹¹ L. MAKANJUOLA, 65 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1987; G. J. OLAWUNMI, *Elepe* of Epe, 75 years, Sagamu, 1987. See also M. H. Martindale *Commission of Inquiry Report* in possession of Sopolu Library, Ikenne, Ogun State, Nigeria.

with the *Akarigbo* of Remo on August 4, 1894, by the same British. It was with this treaty that Remo territory became part of the Colony of Lagos. Consequently, both the Ijebu and Remo were separated administratively as Remo was administered as part of the Lagos Colony.

By 1914 when the Nigerian state was born, there was the need for political reorganisation. Thus in 1917, the creation of provinces came up with the whole of Ijebu forming a province. The Ijebu province consisted of areas formerly under Remo and which up till this period were administered separately from the Ijebu area. However, the Remo group felt dissatisfied as a result of this administrative development. From that time until about 1937, there were several petitions written by the Remo group so that they might be separated from the Ijebu. Following four strong petitions written by the Remo on 7th June 1922, 9th June 1933, 26th June 1933, 16th January 1936, all addressed to the Colonial Governor calling for the autonomy of Remo, the Martindale Commission of Inquiry was set up by the Colonial Government on 18th August 1937. The Terms of Reference given to the Martindale Commission are very instructive, most especially the seventh one which says:

*“In view of the fact that the Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo migrated from Ile-Ife as a crowned Head, and that his descendants form the nucleus of the Remo District to this day, there is no historical sanction for the subordination of the Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo to the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode, which was affected on the formation of the Ijebu Native Administration by Gazette Notice No 104 of the 13th September, 1917.”*¹²

It would be seen from the foregoing that the two parties involved must have brought traditions to justify their positions. It must not be forgotten that *“the writing or the transmission of history whether we like it or not is in part a political system. Each generation reinterprets the myth of origin to fit the present reality”*.¹³ One may therefore contend that those traditions which originated from Ijebu Ode and are very popular there may be attempts to legitimise the claim of Ijebu-Ode suzerainty over Remo, most especially since they became popular from 1937 when Martindale Commission of Inquiry was set up.

As for the third tradition which claims direct descent from Iremo Quarters in Ile-Ife, many things point to the probable validity of the

¹² M. H. Martindale *Inquiry Report, 1937*, p. 6.

¹³ B. A. ODUNLAMI, *Socio-Political History of Ikenne from the Earliest Times to 1960*, B. A. Long Essay, Department of History, University of Jos, 1981, p. 122.

tradition. For instance, the Irewo Quarters still exists today in Ile-Ife and the people of that place still maintain socio-cultural links with those in Remo. Moreover, “*there is also the fact that the Ife traditional title of Yeye Oba of Ile-Ife has always been a preserve for the Remo people*”.¹⁴ Not only that, the Remo claim to Ile-Ife origin is in line with other traditions of other Yoruba groups. However, it must be pointed that it should not be taken for granted that all Yoruba groups migrate from Ile-Ife.¹⁵ What is certain is that taking into consideration all available facts, one may accept Remo’s claim to Ife origin. It should also be pointed out that this tradition does recognise the existence of a group that came into Remoland as a result of direct migration from Ijebu-Ode.¹⁶ What it has refused to accept is that the traditional head of all original Remo, Akarigbo, evolved from Ijebu-Ode.

The Traditions of Origin of Makun

In the popular Remo traditions of origin narrated above, there is one group that does not share in any of the versions – Makun. For them, there are two schools of thought about the traditional history of the town and a plethora of traditions of origin. The first of the two schools is that which traces the origin of Makun people to Ile-Ife. According to the story, Makun people were led out of Ile-Ife by two brothers, Arapetu and Liworu. They left Ile-Ife with various traditional paraphernalia, the most important of which was the beaded crown. These, the story indicates, were secured through the influence of their mother, Ewusi, said to be a princess of the Ife royal family. In their southward journey, the people did not have any permanent settlement until they got to Ijebu Ode, where they settled for many years.¹⁷ The second school is that which upholds that Makun people are an offshoot of Ijebu Ode. According to the tradition, Makun was the son of Obaruwa, the tenth *Awujale* of Ijebu Ode. Obaruwa reigned

¹⁴ O. O. OGUNBOMEHIN, *The Struggle for Political Autonomy: Ijebu-Ode-Ijebu-Remo Relations, 1892–1938*, B. A. Long Essay, Department of History, Ogun State University (now Olabisi Onabanjo University), Ago-Iwoye, 1986, p. 15.

¹⁵ For full details see R. HORTON, Ancient Ife: A Re-Assessment, in: *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, 9, 4, 1979, pp. 69–149; A. OBAYEMI, The Yoruba and Edo-speaking Peoples and Their Neighbours before 1600, in: J. F. ADE-AJAYI – M. CROWDER (eds.), *History of West Africa*, Vol 1, London 1976, pp. 196–263.

¹⁶ Some of these towns are Iperu, Makun, Epe, and some parts of Ikenne. It must also be pointed out that this conclusion has been arrived at on different occasions. See ABELL, p. 2; AYANTUGA, p. 23; H. M. Martindale *Commission of Inquiry Report*, p. 4.

¹⁷ AYODELE, p. 171.

after *Awujale* Ofinran and *Awujale* Obaganju was Obaruwa's successor.¹⁸

Apart from the Ile-Ife and Ijebu-Ode thoughts on the Makun origin, there are many different traditions of origin among the people with each either supporting the Ile-Ife or Ijebu-Ode school. Let us examine four prominent traditions. The first one talks of one Nonuwa and Osobiriya, both Princes of Ile-Ife, who migrated and settled at Ijebu Ode. While resident at Ijebu Ode, Nonuwa went out hunting and before he came back, Osobiriya, his brother, had died. The sad loss made Nonuwa to be disillusioned about the area and in protest moved to Agbele, where he was made king and ruled until he died in 1852. The second version still recognises Nonuwa as a Prince, but more specifically as the grandson of *Awujale* Obaruwa of Ijebu Ode. Because of an offence committed by him, he was banished from Ijebu Ode. He later settled at Agbele. The third version talks of a different migration from Ile-Ife. The party stopped at Ijebu Ode, where they helped the *Awujale* to defeat an Ondo army, which had constituted a challenge to him. The tradition indicates that the *Awujale* settled the party and sent them away for fear that they could take over his kingdom. They subsequently moved to Agbele, where they were accommodated by Igbepa and Ibido communities.¹⁹ The fourth tradition talks of Egba origin. Though the tradition talks of Makun Omi as a primary place of convergence, they were dispersed from this point because of a dispute with the Egba people. They then moved to Agbele.²⁰

There are a few observations to be made about these versions of Makun origin. The first observation is that the first three traditions establish direct link with Ijebu-Ode. There is also the agreement that they were settled at Agbele before moving to join other groups in Sagamu in 1872. The claim that Nonuwa died in 1852 makes his personality a recent one *vis-a-vis* the original migration of other Remo groups, which dates to 1000 B.C. Finally, the fourth tradition is too contradictory in geographical explanation. The mention of Egba in relation to Makun-Omi clearly makes this so. The location of Egba forest (the present Ibadan area) or in their present location is a far location from Makun-Omi, which is in the Ogun Waterside area. Moreover, the silence on Arapetu and Liworu in the Ijebu Ode versions of Makun origin calls for concern for a discerning

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 172.

¹⁹ A. OTUSANYA, *Onigbepa* of Igbepa, 60 years, Oral Interview, 1990 conducted by Kolade Oke-Owo.

²⁰ G. J. OLAWUNMI, *Elepe* of Epe, 75 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1989.

researcher. The two foremost quarters in Makun today are Ojutun and Agbowa, which are descendants of Arapetu and Liworu respectively.²¹ The question of what could be responsible for these versions of Makun origin shall be answered in our subsequent discussion of events that followed 1872.

Be that as it may, there are certain conclusions one may arrive at from the various accounts of the migration of the Remo people. These are that there were two groups of people that migrated into Remo at different times. The first group migrated directly from Ile-Ife while the other was the subsequent migration from Ijebu-Ode. Over time, the two groups have come to accept each other as one. As regards the date of these migrations, one may put it between 500 A.D. and 1,500 A.D. when the great dispersal from Ile-Ife probably took place.²² Looking at the traditions of origin above, one can see clearly that Sagamu cannot be regarded as a single town; but a conglomeration of towns. Again, not all the towns that came together to form the confederal arrangement claim common origin, most especially the Makun people. This particularly accounts for some of the bitter rivalry and conflicts that arose between Ofin and Makun within the town. Not only this, but events also leading to the formation of Sagamu in 1872 were to be responsible for the conflicts of the twentieth century.

Relationship between Makun and Ofin before 1872

Having got to Remo area, the people of Ofin settled at Okesensen near Majopa stream within the present-day Rubber Plantation, while Makun settled at Agbele on the way to Owode-Egba. At their various settlements, each had benefitted immensely from its geographical position. The arrival of Europeans and the beginning of European trade between the Coast of Lagos and the interior of Yorubaland made Ofin which was strategically located on the route to become very important and rich. It is on record that as early as 1852, the *Akarigbo* of Ofin was contacted for the signing of a treaty on 18th March. The treaty enjoined the *Akarigbo* “to ensure the suppression of the slave trade, abolition of human sacrifice, promotion of commerce and the protection of Christian missionaries”.²³

²¹ AYODELE, p. 172.

²² HORTON, p. 87.

²³ B. O. SOEWU, *A History of Sagamu, 1872–1938: A Study in Political Integration*, B. A. Long Essay, Department of History, Ogun State University (Now Olabisi Onabanjo University) Ago-Iwoye, 1987, p. 42.

Makun was also growing commercially and militarily. For instance, it is on record that she had clashes with Egba on several occasions.²⁴ The extent of her power and influence could be seen from the fact that when there was an agreement by all other Ijebu people to close their trade routes against Ibadan, Makun could afford to defy this order. One can therefore see economic rivalry existing between the Makun and Ofin groups. This rivalry was what probably degenerated to the 1862 Makun War in which the Ijebu-Ode, Egba, and some other Remo towns, except for Ode, Ipara and Epe, joined hands with Ofin to destroy Makun. Ibadan came to the assistance of Makun with a very small force, which was not enough to prevent its defeat.²⁵

The 1862 Makun War and the subsequent defeat of Makun brought to the fore certain dynamics in the relationship between the two groups. One is that none of them could win any war against each other without the support of other groups. Secondly, if the two of them should continue to fight one another, they both stood the risk of losing their privileged economic position to other powerful groups like Egba, Ijebu, and Ibadan. *“Thus, it may have been to bring the trade (and its incipient rivalry) under control that a political association or union was sought to regulate the trade”*²⁶ and also provide enough security for everybody. However, it may be necessary to point out that the *Ewusi* of Makun and his followers never gave the *Akarigbo* any serious recognition. One can therefore conclude that their coming together in 1872 to form Sagamu was the coming together of two major unfriendly foes and others who were seriously involved in the politics of the time. This was to have a serious effect on the relationship between Makun and Ofin to the present day.

Relations since Integration: 1872 up to the Present

The coming together of the thirteen townlets that formed Sagamu in 1872 was supposed to be greater in number. However, some villages like Ikenne, Ilisan, Iperu, Ogere, Ipara, and others backed out for several reasons. For

²⁴ A good example is the Makun-Egba/Dahomey War of 1851 in which the Egba/Dahomey warriors attacked Makun at Badoore and sacked the town and Makun people fled to Ikorodu. Under a new Balogun, Olumeru, Makun forces reorganised and marched from Ikorodu to Badoore, attacked the Egba who had taken occupation of the Makun settlement. The Egba suffered heavy defeat and driven out of Badoore. This was in 1852.

²⁵ AYODELE, p. 175.

²⁶ SOEWU, p. 34.

those of them that agreed to come together, there was a fundamental question that was not resolved, and this has to do with what should be the political status of the rulers of the communities coming together. It was a question of each community being allowed to operate independently. This was observed by Governor G. T. Carter when he visited Sagamu in February 1894. He said that Sagamu consisted of “*many kinglets and a weak Akarigbo*”.²⁷ This was because the kings of the various communities made efforts to jealously guard their supposed independence, the political arrangement notwithstanding.

However, the influence of the *Akarigbo* grew tremendously during this period due to a combination of factors. As earlier pointed out, as far as 1852 the *Akarigbo* had been approached by the British for the signing of a treaty. To add to this, the position of the *Akarigbo* as *primus inter pares* in Remo had been enhanced by the compromising stance of other Remo towns. This was demonstrated when most of them did not raise an eyebrow in the relationship between the *Akarigbo* and the British. On the other hand, it might be argued that the other Remo towns kept away from dealing with the British out of ignorance. Unable to appreciate the enormous benefits derivable from such a relationship, they decided to keep away. It may have also been due to the prevalent distrust and suspicion of the ‘white man’ whom some Ijebu towns and villages viewed as lepers because of their complexion.²⁸

Consequently, by the time of the August 4, 1894, Treaty with the *Akarigbo*, which was supposed to be a treaty with the Remo people, only *Akarigbo* and his chiefs were parties to the signing of the Agreement. This was to thereafter confer on the *Akarigbo* the title, *Akarigbo* of Ijebu-Remo. Despite this, it must be mentioned that in 1894 during the visit of Governor G. I. Carter to Remo, the *Akarigbo* admitted that he was never respected by other rulers and their subjects. Subsequent upon which the Governor promised to enhance his authority by stationing Hausa soldiers in the area as long as he could sign a treaty with British colonial authorities.²⁹

²⁷ B. A. AGIRI, Lagos-Ikorodu Relations, 1894–1950, in: A. ADEFUYE et al (eds.), *History of the Peoples of Lagos*, Ikeja 1987, p. 204.

²⁸ E. A. AYANDELE, External Relations with Europeans in the Nineteenth Century: Explorers, Missionaries and Traders, in O. IKIME (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan 1980, pp. 373–374.

²⁹ For more on this, see Document No. 39 African West No. 475 from G. T. Carter of Lagos to the *Marques of Ripen*, October 2nd, 1894, in possession of Chief Noah of Ikorodu.

The period following the signing of the Treaty of 1894 marked active rivalry, which although did not result to open hostility but permanently kept them apart. The Treaty gave the Ofin people an advantage of enjoying some privileges. When there was the need to site a health centre, a post office in the area, only the *Akarigbo* was consulted. The *Akarigbo* also received a stipend of one hundred pounds (£100) annually for signing the treaty which the other rulers did not receive. All these played a major role in heightening the rivalry among the Remo communities and most especially between Ofin, Makun, and Epe. The other two, Makun and Epe, therefore felt if they could get their rulers recognised by the Colonial Government, they would enjoy some of these privileges enjoyed by the *Akarigbo*. It was this that led to the Epe Crown Crisis of 1903 in which the *Ooni* of Ife was invited to Lagos by the Colonial government.³⁰ This resulted in the colonial authorities denying the *Elepe* the use of a beaded crown, with a fine of one hundred pounds (£100) on him, which was to be paid to the *Akarigbo*. Although this consolidated the position of *Akarigbo* as a paramount ruler in Remoland, it nonetheless further exacerbated the hostilities that had existed.

The creation of Provinces in 1917 and the lumping of Remo with Ijebu was to further worsen existing problems. Iperu, one of the towns in Remo, applied to the *Awujale* of Ijebu for a crown in 1925 and this was granted it. This made the *Ewusi* of Makun also apply for the same in 1927. This was quickly opposed by the *Akarigbo* further worsening the already precarious political situation in Sagamu. The then *Ewusi*, Sotinwa, was unsuccessful in his bid until he died in 1929. However, when the issue came up between 1929 and 1938 a new political development was already brewing in the area.

The *Akarigbo* of Remo in conjunction with some other Remo Kings petitioned the colonial authorities for the separation of Remo from Ijebu Province. While this struggle was on, Makun, Epe, Isara and Akaka opposed it. However, the *Elepe* withdrew from this opposition to join hands with the *Akarigbo*, thereby leaving Makun as the only opposing group to *Akarigbo* and his cause in Sagamu. By 1938, the *Akarigbo* and his supporters won the case and Remo was granted autonomy. It was after this that the new *Ewusi* Olukokun II reopened the issue of the crown. Though he knew the *Akarigbo* had been granted autonomy, he still applied

³⁰ G. J. OLAWUNMI, *Elepe* of Epe, 75 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1989; see also, *Sunday Tribune*, The Elepe Crisis of 1930, June 1987.

to the *Awujale* of Ijebu-Ode. This is a further indication that despite the reality of the period, the Makun people were still not prepared to recognise the authority of the *Akarigbo*. Though the *Akarigbo* protested this development, *Awujale* gave *Ewusi* a crown with the colonial authorities acquiescing. This was to be the last time any *Oba* in Remo was to get his crown from Ijebu-Ode.

Apart from all that has been mentioned above, there were other instances when Makun and Ofin had to clash. For instance, when in 1934 the *Ewusi* was appointed the President of the Sagamu Native Court to replace the non-performing President, who happened to be the *Olisa* of Ofin. Ofin protested this development and suggested that instead of having *Ewusi* as the President, another person, either the *Balogun* or *Oluwo* of Ofin could be chosen to replace the *Olisa*.³¹ Another area of dispute is the most important market in Sagamu. This market is located at the boundary between Ofin and Makun. While Makun people claim that they established the market in 1862 when they moved to Sagamu and therefore referred to it as *Obu Makun*,³² the Ofin group claim it is their own and to them, the market is known as *Falawo*. Most importantly, “the market was connected with Ofin deities which were worshipped regularly when funeral rites (called *Ifobu Oku*) of important persons are performed”.³³ The crisis over the ownership of the market had led to the establishment of Odemo Inquiry in 1958. This Inquiry ended their report by suggesting that Ofin should be the largest part of this market. The report says:

*“The basis of this decision was not on who actually founded the market, but the decision was based on the fact that given the situation of the market, (on the modern boundary between Makun and Ofin), Ofin should get the larger share because of certain landmarks in the market were nearest to Ofin.”*³⁴

Communal Rivalry and Implications for Socio-cultural Stability

Looking at the political history and inter-group relations among the Remo groups before the formation of the Sagamu confederacy in 1872 and ever since one would observe apparent socio-political tension within the town. The different communities that came together all have their different grievances, which was to affect their relationship. They all have

³¹ A. ADEDOYIN, 73 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1987.

³² *Obu* is the Remo/Ijebu word for ‘market’.

³³ SOEWU, p. 56.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

their different values and cultural peculiarities, which they all cherish and guard jealously. It is in the light of this that one can understand the crisis that followed the death of the *Akarigbo* in 1988 and the rites of passage that were to be performed.

One, it must be realised that though Sagamu may appear as a single, unified town, to the people of the town, they are different political entities. This is because each of them has its traditional ruler (*Oba*), *Iledi*, *Osugbo* – all that constitutes a complete traditional setup of a town. Two, when an *Oba* dies, the performance of burial rites is essential in all communities. Though those rites may not be made public for traditional reasons, those who perform them are very conversant with the processes. These rites are also believed to be essential if the towns are to be in peace. However, this is only relevant to the domain of the late *Oba*. Three, there have been great rivalries and hostilities between Ofin and Makun quarters/towns in Sagamu over the ages. These rivalries have spread to several facets of their social and political lives. The performance of burial rites, particularly for a late king, involves some essential areas of the town. This involves the closure of the main market in the town for three months and a ban on any social outing for the same number of months.³⁵

However, since there has been a dispute over the most important market in the town, there was bound to be a dispute over the performance of traditional rites. In the circumstances under discussion, the establishment of British rule did not have a direct consequence on the performance and observance of traditional rites. However, the political decision of the British in conferring superior authority to the stool of *Akarigbo* invariably heightened tension on rites associated with the institution. While one party (Ofin) saw their *Oba* as representing the whole town of Sagamu, because he had been so declared by the August 4, 1894, Treaty and as such, any rite connected to the institution should be seen as binding on all quarters and residents, the other party (Makun) did not regard the *Akarigbo* as representing beyond Ofin territory and were prepared at all times to challenge any violation of this.

These divergent positions had contributed immensely to creating social tension and conflicts since 1894. Also, since the various quarters regarded themselves as independent towns with separate traditional institutions such as *Oba*, they were bound to dispute the performance of burial rites for a dead *Oba* in a domain where the *Oba* is still alive. Above

³⁵ G. J. OLAWUNMI, *Elepe* of Epe, 75 years, Oral Interview, Sagamu, 1989.

all, if this could have been compromised, the age-long political rivalry between Ofin and Makun would have made this impossible.

The summaries that can be reached on the issue are:

1. It has led to the imposition of superior authority on an individual king in a supposed *primus inter pares* arrangement.
2. It has favoured unequally one party against another in government patronage.
3. Though rivalry had existed before the establishment of British colonial rule, it was done diplomatically to attract commercial patronage rather than a forceful expression of superiority and independence.
4. It has influenced the adoption of traditions of origin, which in all circumstances may not explain the actual origin, thus bringing historical distortion.

Concluding Remarks

The issues involved in the 1988 inter-communal crisis in Sagamu were more than the performance of burial rites for a passing monarch. The age-long political rivalry between two prominent quarters within a confederal town that is supposedly monolithic exacerbated the situation and heightened issues beyond the ordinary. Events that took place did not suggest that the people are ready to forget their differences and rivalry. Until, and unless, the major contending powers are properly schooled on the possible implication of the continued contention and competition for their corporate existence, they will continue to have frictions now and then.

There has been an increase in communal conflicts in Nigeria in the recent past. A number of these communal conflicts had been a consequence of government policies. For example, the Ijaw-Itsekiri conflict in the Niger Delta had been attributed to the creation of local governments and the issue of the location of administrative headquarters. In taking such decisions, however, those responsible for such acts have in most cases ignored the significance of historical facts about such communities. Attempts were not usually made to investigate the history of the communities involved and therefore be wisely guided. In most cases, political and influential figures have ensured that their communities get government patronage and support without any recourse or regard to historical antecedents. The consequence, most often than not, is the resurrection of old rivalries and tension. It is therefore important that in taking major

policy decisions that affect traditional institutions and communal politics in Nigeria, the services of the professional historian must be sought. When done, it can go a long way in avoiding unnecessary conflicts and ensuring stable polity for the country.