THE ROLE OF TRADITIONAL POLITICAL LEADERS IN THE URBAN DEVELOPMENT OF ISANLU KINGDOM UNDER OBA IBRAHIM AGBANA AGIE, 1935 - 1971

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Abstract

This study is an assessment of the contribution of Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie to urban development in Isanlu Kingdom between 1935 and 1971. The objectives of the study were to: The Traditional Leadership Institutions have remained an imperative heritage in Nigeria, the roles that Traditional leaders played in Urban development of the Country is tremendous. One of the traditional authorities that have not been given adequate documentation is the role played by Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie in bringing to place the present day Isanlu Kingdom in Yagba East L.G.A. of Kogi State.

1. *Discuss the emergence of Oba Ibrahim A. Agie in the political leadership of Isanlu*
2. *Analyse his roles in the village reorganisation of Isanlu Kingdom*
3. *Assess the relationship between the old villages and the new ones with the attendant problems*
4. *Interrogate the new layout villages of Isanlu kingdom and*
5. *Investigate the attendant problems associated with urban development in Isanlu kingdom*

The study adopted quantitative approach in analysing data gathered from Primary and Secondary sources of historical methods. Published works and other documents were consulted from Libraries. And data from Primary and Secondary sources were compared during analysis.

The findings of the study were that:

1. *Traditional Political Leaders Emergence played significant roles in the allocation of land.*
2. *The Emergence of Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie with the support of the Colonial Master influenced his acceptance of Colonial village reorganisation exercise in Isanlu kingdom.*
3. *The settlement pattern of Isanlu kingdom which was championed by Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie led to the emergence of the new Isanlu kingdom*
4. *The relationship between the old villages and the modern ones became cordial and brought development to Isanlu kingdom*
5. *The urge to move from the village to the place where social amenities were provided by government and the Community led to the desolation of some villages.*
6. *The practical implication was that migration of people to urban areas led to the extinction of some villages like Igbo odoko, Amuro, Okoloke etc*

The study therefore recommended that migration of people to urban centres must be adequately monitored and checked to around extin of towns and villages in Nigeria.

Introduction/Backround.

Isanlu is located at latitude 8^{o} 15 N and longitude 5^{o}45^{o}. Isanlu comprises of sixteen villages namely; Makutu, Mopo, Ijowa, Ofin, Odogbe, Idofin, Ilafin, Itedo Makutu, Irunda, Itedo Amuro Odo, Ilotin, Iye, Ido Ojesha, Bagido, Itedo Irunda, Itedo Ijowa. All the sixteen communities were under the administration of the 'Agbana' of Isanlu kingdom. Odogbe, Ilafin, Iye, Ilotin, Idofin, Ido Ojesha from Odo Osin were independent villages until 1912[1] . Itedo Makutu, Itedo Irudna, Itedo Amuro, Itedo Ijowa, Iddo Ojesha were the product of migration of 1950 – 1962 which Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie initiated.

Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie was born in 1885[2], to the family of Mr & Mrs Okunnisi Agie of Okegbo Makutu, Isanlu. Oba Ibrahim Agie Agbana travelled to Ilorin to learn the weaving of Aso oke and jakan[3]. He became a Muslim during his apprentice at Ilorin. He returned to Isanlu to practice his weaving and Jakan work. He became the king after the colonial masters made intensive investigations on the customs, laws and tradition of Isanlu[4]. According to Olorunmonu[5]there were other contestants for the prestigious position of Oba of Isanlu after the death of Oba Arungbemi in 1935. The then district officer Mr Bailey chose Ibrahim Agbana Agie who became the 5th Oba of Isanlu[6]. The list of the *Obas/Etsus* includes the following, Etsu Ipinlaye 1994 – 1987, Etsu Iyejirigi 1897 – 1900, Oba Arigbo 1900 – 1914, Oba Arungbemi 1915 – 1935 and the Oba under our consideration Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie 1935 – 1971.

1935 - 1960

Isanlu between 1935 and 1960 was under the colonial indirect rule. A chief or Oba is an individual selected in line with the custom and tradition of the people and recognized by the colonial government to possess authority and perform duties derived from tradition or assigned by the colonial government within a specified locality[7].The British wasnot willing to commit the needed resources to administer their colonies effectively which among other things made them to resort to an already policy of indirect rule. Seeing that the traditional ruler was the centre of economic resources, they decided that it would be inexpensive and a wise policy to rule the natives through their own leaders[8].It must be noted that the colonial domination of Isanlu started in 1897 when the entire Okunland was freed from Nupe hegemony at the Ogidi war[9].

Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie voluntarily released his place where he was doing his weaving for that purpose. It was suitable because it had large apartment where he used to do the weaving. That was the first (nucleus) of Yagba Native Administration building which is still majestically standing there at Makutu was begun that year 1935. Isanlu supplied labour and materials (stones) for the construction. It was completed in 1937 at a stupendous cost of £720 or ₦1440 (only)[10].

Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie became a member of Yagba Native Authority Council possibly because of his personal relationship with Mr Bailey, who had seen his leadership qualities during the period of the demarcation of the boundary between Ilorin and Kabba provinces and between Isanlu (Yagba) and Pategi in particular. Agbana volunteered and it is said that while others would work for one week and return home, Agbana was with Mr. Bailey throughout the exercise. It was then that Mr. Bailey saw the quality of the man in leadership and community services[11].Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie automatically became a member of Yagba N.A. Court, which has been removed from Mopa and reorganized to sit at Ijowa and Ejuku alternatively. Aloko was still a member of the court, and there were occasions when he gave very useful advice to the virtually new members of the court. Mopa people faithfully stood behind their demoted Oba and they earned a credit for that.The acid test for the young king was when a relative of his was taken to court and convicted.Members were hesitant to award the punishment, because of the man's relationship with Oba Agbana. But the Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agiecame out openly and stated that justice must be done and seen to be done irrespective of his blood relationship with the convict. The man was sentenced to six months imprisonment. Later the District Officer reviewed the case and freed the man saying that the evidence of an accomplice without corroboration was not sufficient for conviction. Oba Agbana had got a plus there[12].

Mr. L.M. Hamber, a British citizen was a miner. He started mining columbite and tantalite in West yagba. He married there a 'black' woman and had a daughter and a son from her. He was very popular there, because instead of looking down on Africans and discriminating against them like some white missionaries, he freely mixed with the people[13].This man came to Okolom to mine gold, and he had partners in Abadubadu who was partly deaf and a younger man who was called Aponri, because of his "red" hair with these two whitemen and many Hausa's and many semi-literate

yoruba's from the South West, Mr. Hamber turned Okolom camp into a sprawling city. By Mr. Bailey's demarcation of 1933[14]. Okolom belonged to Isanlu and by virtue of that Isanlu was affected positively and adversely by sudden growth of a new town in the kingdom. Positively, because the economy was by force enhanced. Labour (forced at first in aid of the Second World War) brought ready money into miners pocket. The mining was merely alluvial, even when some digging had to be done in some areas.

But, food became very scares as miners had to be fed while able-bodied men who would have been tilling the land went to Okolom to make money. Other towns in Yagba Helped to ameliorate the scarcity of food stuff. Yams and grains were in hot demand in those days. Young women and maidens were in the business of purchasing at home and selling at Okolom.

Apart from food scarcity, another effect of the growth of Okolom was the social disorder which followed. Young women and maidens who went to Okolom to sell what they had bought were captured and forced to become wives, their traditional marriage notwithstanding. For a virgin E8 would be paid either to the parents who might not accept the payment, and £5 for a married woman whose husband had to collect the money that he might not lose his wife and the large some of £5. Some parents were thoroughly traumatized but helpless[15].

Meanwhile, Okolom had developed into a sprawing modern city with electricity and pipe borne water for European quarters. Mr. L.M Hamber regularly brought his two children (Mary and John) on Mondays to Rev. D.O Thamer for their schooling at Makutu and returned to collect them on Fridays for the week-end at Okolom and West Yagba people sang:

Okolom d'Eeko ire
Okolom d'Eko ire
Alagba d'Agege e
Okolom d'Eko[16].

Meaning

Okolom has become Lagos,
Okolom has become Lagos,
Alagba has become Agege,
Okolom has become Lagos

Alagha was another mining site in Isanlu. The song was the traditional musicology of the Yagba people. There were four lines to a verse. The first and second lines were the same. The third line is

differently worded and tuned. The forth was a repetition of the first and second lines. A lot of drumming and dancing accompanied the song. Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie had to weather the storm created by Okolom and it was not an easy task. He must accommodate the strangers, and must at the same time protect the interest of the native who bore the brunt of the turmoil which Okolom had created.

Rev D.O. Thamer, a Canadian Missionary of the Sudan Interior Mission (S.I.M) came to Isanlu in 1933 to succeed Rev. Craig, the pioneer resident missionary in the Isanlu. Thamer was a very friendly person. He was the exact opposite of his predecessor in character, conduct and temperament. The people gave him a name by which he was known throughout his ten years tenure in Isanlu. The name was Kayode (the Person who brings joy to the people). They were comparing with Mr. Craig whom the people simply called Kurengi[17].Kayode was very keen in giving education to the young ones, he was not a snob or a racist and would mix with people freely. He started the school in his compound in 1937. Two of the first batches of pupils were: Chief Benjamin Ashe Ige of Odaro Makutu and Chief M.D.A. Olorunmonu. Four girls of those days were: Mrs. Mary Ade John, Mrs. Molly Onile, Mrs. Ife Olu Joel and Mrs. Marion Sanyanbola. The school was a two-classroom block and two of the three classes could be accommodated in one room. Evangelist Rowland Adegboye was the very able, but harsh teacher in the first three years of the existence of the school[18].

Rev D.O Thamer went to furlough in 1939 and returned in August 1940, refreshed and full of ideas for the development of Isanlu. He came in serious contact with the Agbana to move the school to Ofe. The two other churches in Makutu (The Apostolic and the Baptist), were convinced to participate in the work of the new school. S.I.M Mopo or what remained of it after the cleavage of 1930, participated in the work of the new school. He also encouraged Mopo people to build a new school which people of different faiths and demolitions built. That of Mopo was a smaller school. By the middle of 1941, the schools were opened but in December of that year the proprietorship of that of Mopo passed to the African Church which had the original permit to build the school[19].

In 1942, after a complaint to Rev D.O. Thamerby Oba IbrahimAgbana Agie, a post office which he operated from his residence. Soon the post office was moved to Agbana's house as he found it difficult to cope with the inconvenience of running the post office. People did not know that there was specific time when the

post office opened. They would go to him even when he was taking his siesta calling[20].

O, O! Kayode
Mo gha rag bin po we[21]
Meaning
Hail Kayode
I have come to buy
Something with which to
Post a letter

The 'P' in their words is pronounced as in English came from the word Post.

The first secondary school (St. Kizito's College Isanlu) was established in 1965[22]. Thanks to the Roman Catholic Missionary originating from Canada.

In 1946, Sir Arthur Richard (Governor of Nigeria) son of revived Lugards law (Appointment and Deposition of Chiefs Law). The law had been there since 1900 and operative in the northern Nigeria. It could have been used in 1935 to appoint the Agbana as the Chief of East Yagba without waiting for the review of the past twelve years. In 1946 Agbana became the chief East Yagba. Naturaly Aloko and Mopa people in general did not welcome that development and there one violent incident which went to court and earned the culprit a jail term. The D.O later revived the case and pushed the conviction on the ground that the young was a juvenile.

However, the amiable disposition of the Agbana sentenced the bitter animosity between Mopa and Isanlu in those days. For example, he gave his daughter Mary Agbana in marriage to the son of Chief Baba Egbe of Odole Mopa. That son was the late chief Stephen Ade John. The war of words continued until 1949 when a firm decision was taken to resettle Makutu in a new site.

The idea of moving to settle together was first mooted by Rev K.P Titus and Pastor David Adeniyi (Alaga) of Oga. it was a big idea. The whole of Yagba would move to build a large town around Oyi River as Abeokuta was a town of 2000 vilages called Egba (that meaning is not correct) it was merely used as a political stunt. But, there had been precedent of towns moving from their ancient abodes to new areas. Iloke Mopa, Ayeteju, Ijowa, Ayetoro, Igbaruku are a few examples. Agbana had no authority to move anybody from his place of abode. But, he had the constitutional power to close down a market and open a new one anywhere. Of course that power died with the eradication of Native Authorities.

1950/51 was Agbana's finest hour. The people built a palace for him, but he did not move into it. In 1951, the nucleus of the modern day Ajewo was formed, and towards the end of that year Olorunmonu became the secretary.

In 1954, the Native Authority in Council and Native Authority and Council System was introduced. The difference in theory was very important, but in practice no notice was taken either. Youths were elected into the councils. In many places nomination were just made, but in Isanlu it was a real head-count election. There were two serious contestants. Chief M.D.A. Olorunmonu won the election overwhelmingly. He was then 28years of age. Agbana and Olu Okeri were co-chairman of the Native Authority in Council, and this writer was elected the chairman of the new working committee by his fellow councilors. There were two meetings a month, and his pay as the chairman was £1 while other members earned 15shillings per month. And they worked to the best of their ability.Oba Agbana did not interfere in their work. He accommodated the new inevitable changes. The year before (1953), when Sarduana's Eight Point Programme[23] came to Lokoja and Government deliberately invited the youths to participate in the debate of accepting or rejecting it. Kabba Province was the only one that rejected it in the whole of Northern Nigeria. The begging and pleading of the resident in the meeting at Lokoja notwithstanding, we stood our ground and rejected the programme. After the meeting Oba Agbana called me and said,

"Moody, Oju m ki ibon tan
Oyibo ghanin ti tan lojum
Olorun seun![24]

Meaning:
Moody I knew the end of Nupe rule
And today I witness the end of the
Whiteman's rule
Praise God!

Isanlu was basking in the glory which Oba Agbana had given to it. Every town of importance in Yagba has a son or daughter who had a home in Isanlu. Annual Festivals like Agricultural Show were held in Isanlu. Two Government Rest Houses were built. The elite of the day at home and abroad were coming in to build their homes in Isanlu. Irunda partly moved twice to settle where they are now. Amuro moved en masse.

Later in 1957 supervisory councilors (two from West Yagba and two from East Yagba) took their offices on a permanent basis succeeding the former part-time Working Committee and Agbana calmly accepted the new policy. He even supported it, even though it was his powers that were eroded as he himself was well aware. He often said in the meetings of the council,

"O mo pe e nti ghi Oba
Oba a tan mi bon se tan
Ti Oyibo l ghanin ra tan"[25]

Meaning:
At long last there would be no Traditional rulership just as Nupe rule had ended and the rule of the whiteman will soon end"

One other significant achievement or contribution of Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie to the economic development of Isanlu kingdom was in the area of market. The market in Makutu was moved to the new site. Leslie Daniels[26] believe that the market became the driving force for the movement of Ilotin, Ilafin, Iye, Makutu, Irunda, Amuro and Ijowa. The market was cited at the centre of the land mass for the movement and the market stand in front of the palace at the Oba site. The market were patronized as far as Bida, Lokoja, Offa and Patigi. Kolanut, fish, cloths and food materials were sold in the market.

1960 - 1971

Then in 1960 the Penal Code was introduced into Northern Nigeria. It was considered at Government level necessary and just to have a uniform system of administrative justice throughout Northern Nigeria. After a lot of studies by legal experts and jurists in Islamic legal system, the Penal condo came into existence. Literate traditional rulers could not operate the code. Also it was against the principle of Separation of Powers. The Oba's were still members of the council and were therefore, Law-makers. Therefore, they were removed from the courts and literate officers and retired policeman became judges, as they were familiar with the penal Code in their training and service.That was another erosion of the power of Oba Agbana and other traditional rulers. But Agbana did not express any opinion against it, living up to his sobriquet.

Agbana gba naun naun

A te sibi aye te si[27].

Meaning:

He whose rule covers a large territory

But bends, as occasion demands

To where the winds blow

However, as if to soothe the nerves of Oba Agbana, he was graded a third class chief and he automatically became a member of the Northern House of Chiefs in his capacity as the Chief of East Yagba and not as the Agbana of Isanlu. Majority of people including highly educated people did not grasp the meaning of this statement.Agbana of Isanlu was not the one gazette as a Third-Class-Chief it was the Chief of East Yagba. The misunderstanding of this point created some confusion in 2001 and afterwards.One person could be the Agbana of Isanlu and at the same time be the Chief of East Yagba or as it is today Chairman, Yagba East Traditional Council. He had a very large American Limousine which was very difficult and expensive to maintain. It was given to him by the government of Northern Nigeria[28].

At this juncture we should have a cursory review of the gradual erosion of the power of traditional rulers.It began with Sir Donald Cameron, the governor of Nigeria when he was leaving Nigeria in 1953. He introduced nominated councils throughout the country. It was the end of the Sole Native Authority which Aloko of Mopa had practiced.

Then came the reforms of the Native Authorities in 1954 in Northern Nigeria which gave the councils and the Traditional Rulers equal powers in Local Administration. In some cases it was technically possible to pass a bye-law which could be against the wish of the traditional rulers.

Nigeria became a Republic in 1963 after we severed our judicial relationship with Britain. The army became Nigeria army. The Privy Council, our erstwhile Highest Court of Appeal in London was replaced in Nigeria with our own Supreme Court.And there were people who argued as the French Government had argued in their West African Territories, that traditional rule was incompatible with the tenets and practice of Republicanism[29].

However, it was then agreed that the traditional rulers should be allowed to retain their positions, but without any trace of political

powers. The 1979 constitution which was based on the US Presidential System of Administration did not mention traditional council at all. Those who did not understand the new political powerlessness of the Traditional Rulers fell under in other Places: Alake (1949), Attah (1951), Alaafin (1953) and more recently Sanusi (in kano), Dasuki (in Sokoto), Eje (in Ankpa) Kogi state.

In 1965, the first secondary school in Isanlu was established by the Roman Catholic Mission. It went by the name of St. Kizito's College. The first principal was Rev. Father Paul Emile Champagne. It was not without an opposition from another established church[30], but the late Agbana's diplomatic and amiable disposition settled that dispute.

Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie was a man of peace[31]. He could rarely be provoked into anger. Even when they railed abusive languages on him, he hardly showed his anger.And what did he expect from his people? Some rulers chose to be feared by their people. They seemed to enjoy such cringers do not have any real respect for the king. But Agbana was one of the only few leaders who knew the difference between being feared and being loved. Those who are feared are obeyed in their presence, but those who are loved are obeyed and respected even when they are not around[32]. The late Agbana was in the latter group.

He was very friendly with other traditional rulers in his area of authority. He even went out of his way to woo the Aloko of Mopa whom he had succeeded according to the belief of the day. He was very closely related to Baba Egbe of Odole Mopa. Olukotun of Ife was very close to Agbana. In the N.A council they were always on one side. He held the same attitude towards Olu of Oke-Eri, Chief of West Yagba[33].

Conclusion

The movement to settle Isanlu in a new site was the greatest achievement of the late Oba. We, therefore, decided to name the new site Itedo-Oba[34], and future Kings of Isanlu shall take the title of Agbana of Isanlu. He was graced a second class chief before he passed away late May 1971. The most important achievements of Oba Ibrahim Agbana Agie must be repeated for emphasis, a clearer understanding and a worthy example to be followed. That achievement was the unity of Isanlu as envisioned by him. He strongly believed the equality of the citizens irrespective of their places of abode or towns/village of origin. The foregoing is a food

for thought. Those who are at the forefront of the affairs of Isanlu today should make supreme efforts to emulate the late Agbana, Oba Ibrahim Agie, Chief of East Yagba. He was patriotic, committed and dedicated to the development of the Isanlu Kingdom[35]. He can be said to be the founder of modern Isanlu[36].

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