



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF HUMAN SOCIAL SCIENCE
ECONOMICS

Volume 13 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2013

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Social and Economic Development of Ibaland Up to 2000

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GJHSS-E Classification : FOR Code : 160505



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



Social and Economic Development of Ibaland Up to 2000

James Olusegun Adeyeri^α & Habeeb Abiodun Sanni^σ

Abstract - This paper examines the social and economic development of Ibaland up to 2000. The focus of this study is on the people of Ibaland, one of the multifarious Awori settlements on the southern part of Yoruba land, who had developed an elaborate system of socio-economic structures prior to the coming of the Europeans in the mid- 19th century. This became imperative in view of erroneous perceptions of some European writers that Africa had no history prior to their contact with African societies. The work also examines the development of one of the Awori settlements in the coastal region of Lagos, whose societies may not in any way be seen as one of the mega-states of pre-colonial Yoruba land, but as one of the mini-states that possesses some of the accoutrements of the mega states. The paper is structured into six parts namely, introduction, background/origin and geographical location of Ibaland, socio-religious activities, architecture, role of women, economy and conclusion.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Extant studies like (Losi, 1921), (Aderibigbe, 1975) and (Agiri and Barnes, 1987) on the history of coastal settlements in Lagos state seem to have focused mainly on the history of the kingdom of Lagos (Eko) where sedentary activities appeared to have predated many other mini-states that dot the landscape of modern Lagos state. Where efforts were geared towards these mini-states, they appeared to have paid desultory attention to the socio-economic development of individual states as these were "lumped together" with many others of such settlements. The impression being created by these writers such as Faluyi and Lawal (1987), Ajayi et al (1998) and Ajetunmobi, (2003) is that there is little or nothing to write about these various settlements. It is this lacuna that this paper intends to fill by examining the historical trajectory of socio-religious and economic development of Ibaland. It must be said however that the paper adopts the narrative historical methodology in the explanation of the various developments considered in this essay. It does not consider development from the classical theoretical or conceptual perspectives but from the simplistic angle of what J.D.Y Peel refers to as Olaju (Peel, 1978). Thus, the

core issues to be considered here include origin and geographical location of Ibaland, socio-religious activities, architecture, role of women, and economy. It is significant to point out that Ibaland had developed an intricate administrative arrangement based on the traditional monarchical system which ensured that the King, who appeared to be an absolute monarch in theory, was in practice guided by a number of traditions and taboos which ensured that he could not take a unilateral decision without recourse to the advice of what is today known as the King-In-Council. This is in line with many other traditional societies in Yoruba land, Hausa land and beyond the shores of modern Nigeria during the pre-colonial era.

II. BACKGROUND / ORIGIN AND GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION OF IBALAND

Iba is one of the numerous Awori settlements located within the coastal belt of Western Lagos state, Nigeria. It is considered as one of the Third-Tier Awori settlements which first began at Isheri-Olofin, about 12 miles north of Lagos Island. From here (Isheri), a series of Awori dispersals moved towards different parts of modern Lagos and Ogun states, with Otta, Ado-Odo and Igbesa, constituting the Second-tier of settlements. The founding of Iba could therefore be grouped with the third tier of settlements that led to the founding of such places as Ilogbo-Eremi, Otto, Obadore and Iba, among others.

The geographical location of Iba could be understood within the context of its surrounding communities. To the South of Iba is the kingdom of Ojo, a settlement located right on the fore shore of the Badagry Creek. To the West, is the town of Ishasi, a part of the Iba kingdom, where it shares boundary with Ketu and Ijanikin. To the north, is Obadore, a community considered to be more contemporaneous with Iba in terms of settlement, while Ijeododo and Ijegun constitute its eastern neighbors?

It is important to point out that the founding of the latter Awori settlements (Ibaland inclusive) in modern Lagos State took place much later than the first, which began at Isheri- Olofin. However, each of these settlements developed their own political system based mainly on the Yoruba basic social unit, the family (Ebi) through which subsequent traditional political leaderships emerged. Each of these settlements also

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developed socio-religious and economic activities that best suits their own societies at that time, with many of them replicating certain features that are generally found in many Yoruba communities of the pre-colonial period. An intellectual probe into these intricate activities in Ibaland therefore becomes imperative.

III. SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The Aworis like many other societies in Yoruba land are deeply involved in cultural and traditional beliefs and practices. Their socio-cultural lives revolve around a variety of festivals. These festivals are usually accompanied by elaborate rituals, sacrifices and appeasement. These elaborate rituals explain the people's strong belief in traditional deities and ancestral worship. Iba is not an exception. Apart from the Ifa Oracle brought from Ile-Ife, and in spite of the prevalence of Islam and Christianity in Iba, the people of the area worship and celebrate other gods and deities such as Ogun, Yewa, Egungun, Egba, Oro, Odua and Oba Oyonka.

One of the major festivals among the people of Iba is Egungun, often referred to as *Ara Orun* (visitor from heaven). Awori traditions link the origin of Egungun with Obatala and the diffusion of its cult from Ile-Ife to coastal Yoruba land. This aspect of Ibaland's social organization is akin to the setting in ancient Greece and Egypt where the people held very strong beliefs in the powers and functions of gods in the society. As an illustration, in Ancient Greece each of the twelve major gods (called Olympians) was seen by the people to be in charge of specific jurisdictions of societal life. In this wise, Zeus was the god of order and thunder, Hera the god of marriage, children and the home, Ares the god of war, Aphrodite the god of love and beauty, Apollo the god of the Sun, light and music, and Demeter the god of harvest, just to mention a few. (Ancient Greek Gods, mrddonn.org; Roman Council of 12 Gods – *Dei Consentes*, Greek Name: *Olympians*, mrddonn.org). Similarly, in Ancient Egypt Osiris served as the god of the dead and underworld, Ptah the god of craftsmen, Ra the god of the sun, Anubis the god of embalming and the dead, Geb the god of the earth and Bes the protector of pregnant women, newborn babies and the family e.t.c (Ancient Egyptian Gods, www.ancientegypt.co.uk/gods/explore/main.html). It is believed that departed people from this world are living elsewhere and are actively in touch with those left behind. Egungun festival in Iba and Aworiland as a whole is an age long practice which gained prominence in the 19th century. Egungun are often given family and group names apart from their theatrical nomenclatures. The festival is basically for men, but the women form the bulk of the singers and dancers in any outing. The women are also responsible for the preparation of *Akara* (bean - cake), and *Eko* (solidified pap), the major food during the

festival. Also, the *Iya Agan* who is traditionally the mother of Egungun, has important spiritual roles to play in the festival. Without Iya Agan's approval there cannot be an Egungun festival or outing. After obtaining the Oniba's consent the *Iya Agan* in conjunction with *Alaagba*, head of all Egungun worshippers, proceeds to make necessary arrangements for the conduct of a successful festival. The Festival is usually accompanied by series of musical performance and display of magical power called *Idan* during which Eggnog could change from human form to that of a wild animal or bird, such as lion, leopard, crocodile, snake, pigeon etc (Olatunji, 1998).

On the day of the festival people from different parts of Ibaland would have left home early enough to be opportune to witness every aspect of the festival in Iba town. This provides a platform for unity in the society, but which is yet to be fully explored by the people as an effective tool for social transformation of Ibaland in modern development efforts. At the commencement of the festival and throughout its duration, the *Gunging* dances to beatings of *Gbedu*, *Bata*, *Iyalu*, *Aporan*, *Akolu* and some other musical instruments to the admiration of the audience. At the *Oju-Egun*, (Egungun Shrine) the spirits of the ancestors is worshipped and appeased. The rituals are carried out in the innermost apartment of *Igbale Egun*. Apart from worshipping and appeasing the deity here, socio-economic and political issues in the town are also discussed. Some of the issues so discussed may form the fulcrum of future decision taken. This could be linked to the concept of village democracy which was practiced in some stateless societies such as Igboland, Ebiraland and some Hausa states during the pre-colonial era. Moreover, the *Egungun* festival is very important to the people of Iba because of their belief that the festival possessed potentials for curing ailments among the people of the community, bringing happiness, and staving off evil. The festival also has a number of economic significance. For example, the *Egungun* and its *Atokun* (pathfinder) make a lot of money during this period. The money derived by them comes largely from voluntary donations by the citizenry who believed that prayers offered by the Egungun serve as source of blessings in their future endeavors. The cane, beans and pap sellers enjoy a period of boom during the festival, while the *Egungun* dresses could be rented out to members of the cult. The commencement of the festival is often followed by lavish entertainment and heavy drinking of alcohol which increases the sales of liquor traders. Traders in herbs also benefit from the festivals as new charms and medicines call for the purchase of herbal materials. However, the local government seems to have failed in adequately tapping the economic benefits derivable from these socio-religious activities. Apart from being the consenting authority for the staging of the festival, the local government could use the occasion to build tourism and

its economic potentials by encouraging large numbers of citizens of Ibaland and adjoining communities to witness the Egungun festival. In addition, if traders of alcohol and herbal materials are accredited to display their wares after payment of some token, this could serve as source of revenue for the local government.

Another important festival in Iba is *Oro*. The cult is held in high esteem and regarded with great fear. It is believed to assist in staving off evil forces from the land. The *Oro* festival is peculiar to male members of the society. The festival is observed yearly, but it could be convened during any period of the year especially during socio-political crises, communal calamity, war and other forms of social disorder. *Oro* festival is usually observed in the night and death is a near certainty for any woman that sees *Oro* in the night, hence warnings are usually given for non-initiates and women particularly to remain indoors. The seclusion of women during *Oro* festival is hinged on a number of reasons. One of such is to maintain the secrecy of the *Oro* cult, which the women folks may not be able to protect. Furthermore, it is meant to protect the sacredness of the cult by ensuring that women going through the monthly menstrual circle had nothing to do with the *Oro* grove. Although, this age long practice appears to be contrary to the modern conceptions on gender issues which seem to belief that women, like their male counterparts are equal stakeholders in socio-religious and political affairs of human societies, African Traditional Culture, still share the opinion of restricting the women to their parents/husband's compound as much as possible during certain festivals.

The prosecution of *Oro* festival is a very expensive one for the Oba, due to the items (e.g pig and sheep) usually required for rituals to the appeasement of the gods. Before this ceremony, word is sent out by the Oniba through the town-crier to the effect that non-indigenes should remain indoors within a specified period of the night. The functions of the Town-Crier are similar to that of modern day Information Officers or Public Relations Officers whose roles have to do with the dissemination of information through the modern prints and broadcast media. While these new media of information dissemination may be more effective than that of town crier, the latter approach appears to be continuously relevant due to the nature of being an eye witness account of information dissemination. Thus, the Town Crier system which had been a pre-colonial approach to information dissemination remains relevant in spite of the challenges posed by modernization.

The significance of *Oro* festival to the people of Ibaland is multi-dimensional. For example, the *Oro* cult is an important aspect in the traditional administration of social justice and the enforcement of judgments in the society. It is also believed that *Oro* could make a barren woman to be fertile, and farmers, traders and artisans to be prosperous. The impact of this on current adminis-

trative practices is that oath taking which is a potent aspect of traditional justice system in the society, may be adopted in tackling the problems associated with red-tapism in modern-day dispensation of justice. Though, there is the challenge of how to ensure that punishment for crimes are in line with modern values, the above could go a long way in ameliorating socio-economic and political crimes in the society. Moreover, it is believed that both indigenes and non-indigenes enjoy the benefits of the festival which generally include peace, stability and progress in the land.

Egba is another important festival in Iba. The deity is venerated yearly by the community in order to avoid its wrath which sometimes results in the death of animals. During the ceremony, both men and women would climb palm trees in quest of oil all of which is used to prepare beans for the purpose of the festival which sometimes lasts up to two weeks. *Egba* festival is characterized by wining and dining daily, dancing and general merry-making. Among Iba people, the celebration of this divinity is believed to be capable of ushering in prosperity and peace in the land.

The Ogun festival is also important in Ibaland. Ogun is venerated yearly usually but, sometimes on monthly interval. This exercise is done to reduce the incidence of road accidents in the land. The Oniba buys a dog, invites his chiefs and together with the people, the *Abogun* (Head of Ogun Shrine) slaughters the animal to the appeasement of Ogun, the god of iron (Physical observation by the author, 1999). In Iba, on Idomila Street, there exists an *Ojubo-Ogun Oba* (Ogun Shrine of the Oba) which is an open shrine comprising of a small tree with palm fronds tied around it.

However, the celebration of Oba Oyonka is perhaps the most important traditional festival in Iba. Oba Oyonka, the first Oniba of Iba, was said to have disappeared into the ground at a particular spot on which a shrine has been erected. Oba Oyonka's legendary act became an event for yearly celebration among Iba people up till the present period. Annually, the people sacrifice a big black cow to the appeasement of Oba Oyonka who has become a deity. The Ceremony takes place at Oju Oyonka/Ayoka (Oyonka/Ayoka Shrine) located not too far from the incumbent Oniba's palace. The meat of the sacrificial cow must be entirely eaten up at the shrine as anyone is forbidden to take part of the meat home.

Tradition relating to the veneration of Oba Oyonka in Ibaland has been linked to a fallout of a serious conflict with his first wife (Olori) who allegedly made highly uncomplimentary remarks about the Oba's personality, insinuating that the latter was not worthy of the high esteem and respect accorded him by his subjects. At a public gathering where Oba Oyonka was to order the execution of the erring Olori's father, the Oniba became overwhelmed by the suffocating pleas for leniency from his subjects. Indeed it was in these dire

circumstances that Oniba Oyonka entered the ground, with part of his dog chain hanging out till this day.

Oba Oyonka's ceremony is indeed a very important one in the lives of Iba people. As an illustration, the Oniba and his family are usually at the forefront of this yearly anniversary (Physical Observation, 2000). Also, Iba people are of the firm belief that the veneration of the late king helps to ward off dangers such as external aggression and to enhance bountiful harvest. In the context of Iba tradition, by virtue of Oba Oyonka "divine protection" over his people, rain could suddenly emerge to dislodge harmful intruders and destroy their charms intended to cause danger in the community; whether they pass through Oyoka's Shrine or elsewhere, Oyonka would expose them (Oyewole, 1999). Moreover, Oyonka Shrine now serves as a tourism spot in Iba town in particular and Ibaland in general. From the foregoing analysis, it could be discerned that early people of Iba were staunch adherents of traditional religion, a continuous trend to the present, though with considerable reduction in its extent. However, this changed overtime particularly as a result of the penetration of Islam into coastal Yoruba land since 1816, and Christianity in subsequent years (Olatunji, 1998). Thus, since the advent of this modern era, the two foreign religions have taken over religious life in Iba and its sub-units. Christianity, in particular was brought into the town by Josiah Oye wole (Oyewole, 1999), father of Chief M.A Oyewole the present Otun Oba of Iba. The reigning monarch, Oba Goriola Oseni is a Muslim who has visited the Holy land, Mecca on pilgrimage just like many of his chiefs. This and other factors have boosted the rapid spread of Islam across Iba exemplified by numerous mosques and a large Muslim population in the area. Christianity has also had its fair share of converts in the land. In fact, there is already a very large number of churches in Iba and its environs, and new ones continue to spring up at very high rate. In all, the greatest portion of Iba population presently is either Muslims or Christians, with a negligible number still professing Traditional religion.

IV. ARCHITECTURE

At its dawn, Awori houses were simple in structure and design. The walls were generally made of mud; mud with bamboo stems or raffia palm fronds; or raffia palm fronds (*opa*) only, while the roofs were made of thatches (Olatunji, 1998). In Iba in particular, the buildings were mainly of three types: *Ile Opa*, *Ile Abara* and *Ile Gaga*. The walls of the first were made of raffia palm fronds while those of the second were of brown mud. As for the third type, the walls were built with black mud interspersed with bamboo stems or raffia palm fronds. In all three cases, the roofs were made of thatches. However, it must be noted that most of the buildings in Iba today are modern ones of varying

structures and designs. Hardly can one find old traditional buildings in the area any more. Most buildings are now of cement bricks and corrugated iron, or asbestos sheets for the walls and roofs respectively. In addition, most of these buildings are now beautifully painted in various colors (Physical Observation, 1999), thus showing the impact of modernization on Iba architecture. In fact, a number of modern housing schemes, both private and government sponsored had emerged. The Iba Housing Estate of Lateef Jakande's administration (1979-83) and the New Site where a number of beautiful houses with modern architectural designs dot the landscape could be seen as part of the town's urbanization process.

V. ROLE OF WOMEN

Available data reveals that pre-colonial Iba women like their counterparts in other Awori towns performed very important roles in socio-economic and political development. Contrary to the opinion that the average African woman was little more than a mere drawer of water, a fetcher of firewood, a domestic utensil, a baby machine and an object of man's sexual gratification, lacking in initiative and positive contribution to societal development and inextricably tied up amidst cultural restrictions and man's tyranny (Ajetunmobi, 1996), the truth, however, is that these women performed more important roles beyond their domestic requirements.

Traditionally, Iba and other Awori women performed such roles as cooking, washing, fetching of firewood, drawing water, nursing and cleaning of their surroundings. They cleaned the markets and swept the whole town, from its centre to Oba Oyonka's shrine and to the Oniba's palace (Balogun, 1999). Women also served as the earliest set of teachers for the child. They tutored them on pronunciation, greeting, dressing, toileting and bodily care. Furthermore, women helped their husbands in fishing and farming activities. They carried cassava, maize, banana, coconut, vegetables and sea foods to the market for sale. They also engaged in food processing and preservation, gathering and processing of local herbs for medical purpose. Indeed, women in Ibaland contributed greatly to the physical and mental well-being of their communities. Some of these women, variously called *Iya Alagbo* or *Elewe Omo*, were traditional physicians and chemists who saved many people from dying from curable diseases. The women were highly skilled in the preparation and utilization of traditional medicine. As early as the pre-1900 period, there were medicine for curing various diseases, keeping away evil forces and attracting prosperity (Ajetunmobi, 1996).

Women also contributed immensely to the socio-cultural festivals of the area. As an illustration, women featured in varying degrees in the festivals of

Gelede, Oro, Ogun and Egungun. In fact, the *Iya Agan* performed a central role during Egungun festival. After obtaining the Oniba's consent, the *Iya Agan* in conjunction with *Alaagba* (head of all Egungun worshippers), proceeds to make necessary arrangements for the conduct of a successful festival. She joined the *Alaagba* at the *Igbale* for necessary preliminary rituals. The *Iya Agan* also performed the responsibilities of informing her associates about arrangements, including the date and attire for the festival (Balogun, 1999).

According to tradition, the *Agan* who is the traditional spiritual leader of Egungun is like a son to *Iya Agan*. Significantly, without *Iya Agan* no *Agan* could come out and no Egungun festival could take place. *Iya Agan* is a post held by a woman who is next in rank to *Alaagba*. She is the head of the female wing of Egungun adherents. She is highly respected by the cult to the extent that she is allowed access to the *Igbale*, generally a no-go-area for women. Moreover, all masquerades and females pay homage to her during the festival. She performs spiritual functions of holding *Isan* (a special cane), giving the sword to special Egungun, handing over religious power to them and withdrawing it during the visitation to *Igbale* (Ajetunmobi, 1996).

The Oloris (kings wives) and *Iya Oba* (kings mother) also performed important roles in the traditional socio-political set-up of Iba. These women gave moral and psychological support to the Oniba. They were usually gaily dressed, and sat around him, particularly during ceremonies in the palace. It was unheard of for an Olori to abandon the side of the Oniba during such occasions. Sometimes the Oloris treated the Oba to dance steps. They also coordinated and oversaw feeding and other domestic requirements. In the contemporary period, women in Iba still perform much of the traditional roles, although to a lesser degree due to the effects of modernization. Many of them have joined their men folks in seeking white collar employment and this had led to the emergence of a woman chairman of the recently created Iba Local Council Development Area.

VI. ECONOMY

In the distant past, agriculture was the main economic activity of Ibaland. The original inhabitants of Ibaland practiced crop farming, poultry farming, and cattle/sheep rearing, fishing and hunting on a small scale. Of all these, the people concentrated more on crop farming and fishing.

Crop farming was of two geographical categories: compound farmland called *Oko-Etile* and distant farmland called *Oko Egan*. It is in *Oko Egan* that most of the permanent crops like cocoa, palm trees and crops of commercial value like maize cocoyams, cassava, guinea corn etc, were grown. The *Oko Etile* is

marked by cultivation of garden crops such as pepper, tomatoes and onions, Okro lemons, melon, vegetables, pumpkins, and soya beans, etc (Olaturunji, 1998). *Oko Etile* was visited at short intervals, particularly when there was the possibility of the farmer having an important visitor at home. On the other hand, *Oko Egan* was usually located at a far distance and the farmer usually spent a relatively longer period there compared to the *Oko Etile*.

Swamp farming was very common in Ibaland. On these swamp farms, vegetables, rice, maize and other consumables were cultivated. Though, the women did not feature prominently in farming but they had the responsibility of accompanying their husbands to the farm in order to assist them particularly during the harvesting of farm products, such as cassava. The women processed them into finished products such as gari, the staple food of all Aworis. The women harvested, peeled, washed and processed the cassava into either gari or fufu.

Inhabitants of Ibaland took some of their farm produce to Ojo market for sale. In some cases some of these products had to be returned home due to the general level of sales at the time which in itself was a result of two major factors: small population and the prevalence of farming, in many households. However, the income accruing from the marketing of these farm products ensured adequate feeding and general material survival for the farmer and his family. As there was general contentment among the people of that era, the incidence of stealing and armed robbery was very low, thus the people were almost completely free from the deep sense of insecurity and anxiety which now characterize modern day life (Balogun, 1999). Some inhabitants of Ibaland still engage in crop farming today, but the prevalent trend of 'unrestricted' sale of land by indigenes has greatly undermined the culture of farming among the people.

The peasant farmers also practiced some form of animal husbandry. They engaged themselves in keeping and rearing of such animals as goats, sheep, short-horned cattle, local pigs and domestic fowls in family compounds. These animals, with the exception of fowls are kept in special places (within the family compound) variously called *Ogbo Maalu*, *Ogbo Ewure*, *Ogbo Elede* etc. as the case may be. These animals were usually taken to the field by young children for pasture or they are fed with cassava or other edible leaves while other people kept their animals within the compound and fed them or practiced guarded pasturing in order to avoid conflicts with other farmers in case the animals destroy the crops.

Inhabitants of Ibaland also engaged in fishing. This is done either early in the morning, late in the evening or night depending on the fishing implement to be used and the weather condition. The people, particularly the women engaged in swamp fishing. They

usually had a field day during the dry season when the swamps were relatively dry, thereby allowing unhindered access to the fish. There was also fishing through the use of combination of hooks and nets. The hooks, armed with bait, such as earthworms, are set in the water with a float on the surface of the water. The float helps the fisherman in knowing whether a fish had been trapped or not (i.e the float sinks whenever fish is caught). The fisherman may go to river the following day to collect his catch, or wait around until a catch is made, depending on the period of the day. In addition, the people fished via the use of *Ogu*, a conical basket-like trap made from *Opa*, raffia palm fronds. This trap that permits only water to flow in between the woven pieces is tied to some reeds or a strong tree at the edge of the river. As the river flows, the fish which are unaware of the trap enter it and remain there until the fisherman comes for inspection. The economic value of this venture was that the fish were sometime sold fresh to standby customers or taken home to be preserved through smoking before selling at the neighborhood market usually at a higher value than the fresh type.

People of Ibaland are also noted as traders. They practiced trade by barter as was common in the ancient times. During this period, Ojo market was the only one in the area of the Central Awori Group (Oseni, 2000). The market which held every nine days was attended by traders from Lagos selling European manufactured articles, and purchasing local produce such as palm oil and kernels, firewood, charcoal, mats, pottery and others. Iba men and women took their wares, mainly farm produce, to the market for sale. The women in particular traded in sea produce like shrimps, crayfish, herbs and cowries. Some traders travelled as far as the Agege area to carry out their commercial transactions. A major obstacle to free trade in the past was bad (sandy, swampy or marshy) road network which made journeys from one place to another, very tedious and dangerous. However, with the advent of modernization, there are now various access roads linking Ibaland with various parts of the Lagos metropolis, even with the Republic of Benin. Not surprising therefore, inhabitants of Ibaland now go as far as the Mile 12 Market near Ikorodu, and also Cotonou in the Republic of Benin to purchase foodstuffs and European manufactured goods respectively for sale back home. But, lack of a standard market has continued to retard trade within Iba town.

Mat-weaving has also been an important economic activity of Ibaland since its dawn as a settlement. Though the enterprise is a peculiar occupation of Awori women, men also partook in it. Those engaged in the search for the raw materials for mat production earn their living by selling them to those who cannot engage in the search. Usually, searching for the raw materials is the job of the males because the *Ifin* (reeds) are found in water - logged areas, and palm

trees had to be climbed to get the *Iko* (fronds). Thus, there is division of labour in the mat production process. After the men must have fetched the raw materials, the women and children processed them for a few days before they are eventually utilized.

Mat - weaving is a hereditary profession handed down from generation to generation and it contributes to the upliftment of the local economy. Though, the art itself is very tedious as it requires sitting for long hours in a very special and strenuous position, the craft was lucrative in terms of monetary value. The finished products, died in various colours served as local consumption and also as export to other places.

Apart from the economic activities already highlighted, a crop of artisans began to emerge in Ibaland with the advent of western civilization. These included tailors/fashion designers, brick layers, and mechanics, and steel workers, radio technicians, in addition to a number of privately owned block industries and fish ponds.

Hostelling was also one of the earliest modern business ventures to emerge in Ibaland. Some major hotels presently operating there include the Royal Crown Hotel, De Vince Hotel, J-Joker Hotel and Adoff Hotel (Physical Observation, 1999). Aside from these hotels, a number of small-scale eateries are also in existence to serve the low income residents.

Another important commercial feature in Iba is the emergence of the Alaba International Market (at Sabo-Oniba) and the building of several shops which are rapidly being taken up by retail traders. Rows of such shops are noticeable at the junction of Isheri-LASU Road and the Iba Main Roads around Alaba International Market and around the junction of Lagos-Badagry Expressway and Isashi Main Road. Although a detailed study of Alaba International Market and its contribution to economic development has yet attracted the attention of Lagos scholars, it is important to point out that this market has over the years become the hub of ECOWAS traders who patronized it buying and selling all sort of items ranging from food-stuff, electronic and electrical materials, as well as livestock (Ram and Cow). In fact, the market has become an important centre of intergroup relations not only for the people of Yoruba land, but also for the Hausa and Igbo ethnic groups who dominate the sale of livestock, food items, and electronic/electrical materials respectively. It is also the first major terminus of the Beninese traders who use the market along the Badagry Expressway as a major stopping point of delivery of their wares ranging from rice, vegetable oil and other articles of trade.

VII. CONCLUSION

From the foregoing analysis, it could be seen that Ibaland, like many other pre-colonial Yoruba societies have developed their own socio-religious and

economic system which have over the years stood the test of time. From a society that emerged with traditional African religious beliefs and worship, the society gradually embraced foreign religious worship of Islam and Christianity which to a large extent became more appealing to the people, but could not obliterate the traditional socio-religious practice of their ancestors. They also developed an intricate system of economic activities which overtime moved from purely subsistent economic practices to the modern monetized economic system. This in turn affected their society such that it gradually emerged as one of the most important entrepôts of economic activities to the West of Lagos Island.

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