

## THE EVOLUTION OF AWORILAND IN THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DYNAMISM OF YORUBA RACE

By

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### ***Abstract***

*The Yoruba race has a rich heritage and history the Aworis, are a sub-sect of the larger 100 million Yoruba people cutting the South West of Nigeria, some part of Togo, Benin republic and Ghana and with a large Diaspora community in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, St. Lucia, Papua New Guinea, Jamaica, Granada, Trinidad and Tobago - all originating from Ile-Ife. We, the Aworis migrated to Isheri and most parts of Lagos and some parts of Ogun State in the late 14th century and established our kingdoms and chiefdoms there in the early 15th century. The Aworis are originally princes and princess of Ile Ife. They are children of Oduduwa. Last year, we did a homecoming event where leading Awori Obas, including myself, went to our ancestral home in Ile-Ife and were hosted by the Ooni Adimula, HRM Oba Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II at Ile Ife. The Awori are distinguished by four main characteristics: the language which is of Yoruba dialect, traditions of ancestral migration from Ile Ife, traditions of common descent from Oduduwa, the eponymous hero of Yoruba and traditions of consanguineous relationship resulting from the ancestry of ruling classes and cultural heritage as well as diffusion through migration and interaction. Awori Yoruba dialect remained a uniform force among the various groups; an Awori identifies himself with another Awori greeting term "Kitigbe o?" (How are you?" and the familiar response is "O gbee re" ("It is well").*

**Keywords:** Yoruba race, Aworiland, Oduduwa, Ile-Ife, Diaspora, Ogun State, Lagos State,

**Protocol**

Permit me to express my gratitude to the Chancellor, Vice Chancellor, Members of the University Senate and the entire student body of Crawford University for the honour done to me to address this august gathering as the first Royal father to be the Guest of the Crawford University Personality Platform.

The quest for greater you and by extension greater Nigeria has just begun, if you put all that you have learnt here into practice and make the desired change to start with you in your actions and reactions to what you will face in the larger society. Congratulations.

I have been asked to break the ice on today's lecture and to speak specifically on **The Evolution of Aworiland in Socioeconomic Dynamism and Prosperity of Yoruba race**. I will do that by providing personal and informed insights into these germane questions: Who are the Awori people? What is their status in the Yoruba cosmogony? Have they any stake in the prosperity of Yorubaland or the Nigerian Nation? How have they evolved and of what relevance is their story to the socio-economic evolution of Yorubaland and Nigeria?

**To the first question, Who Are the Awori People?**

I ask this question because not all of us here are familiar with who the Aworis are. And if you do not know the story of a people, it may be difficult to properly situate their nature, dispositions and indispositions and to discern or dissect their socio-demographic mannerisms. For the purpose of this discourse and as an academic and a traditional ruler, let me emphatically and authoritatively submit that we, the Aworis, are a sub-sect of the larger 100 million Yoruba people cutting the South West of Nigeria, some part of Togo, Benin republic and Ghana and with a large Diaspora community in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, Dominican Republic, Venezuela, St. Lucia, Papua New Guinea, Jamaica, Granada, Trinidad and Tobago - all originating from Ile-Ife. We, the Aworis migrated to Isheri and most parts of Lagos and some parts of Ogun State in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and established our kingdoms and chiefdoms there in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.

Our father, Olofin Ogunfunminire, who was a prince of Ife, indeed an acting Ooni of

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Ife, at a point, had to leave Ile Ife due to some palace intrigues. Through Ifa divination, he alongside some of his loyalists migrated southward along a river with a mud plate which he was instructed to place on the water and follow until it sank into the river. The plate journeyed downriver, stopping at several places including Oke Ata and Aro on the outskirts of today's Abeokuta and later Isheri, Iddo and finally Idumota in central Lagos, where it whirled around in the water and sank to the bottom. When Olofin returned to his group at Isheri, they are said to have asked him where the plate was. He answered "Awo Ti Ri" meaning "The plate has sunk". This is how the name Awori came into being.

Today, the Aworis have grown in leaps and bounds and are found in all the nooks and crannies of Lagos and Ogun towns like Isheri, Ota, Ado Odo in Ogun State and they are the original settlers of all the towns in the north, south east and west of Oto, Iddo, Ebutte Metta, Lagos Island, Isheri, Surulere, Somolu, Kosofe, Alimosho, Agege, Ikeja, Eti-Osa, Apapa, Idimu, Muslim, Oshodi, Isolo, Alagbado, Ogba, Ibejaland, and parts of Epe (with their progenitors being King Kosoko), Apa-Awori, Ale (Araromi), Ketu, Ilogbo-Eremi, Iworo, Iberekko, Magbon (in Badagry and environs) among so many others in Lagos state.

Next question is what is their status in Yoruba Cosmogony?

I have told you that they are originally princes and princess of Ile Ife. They are children of Oduduwa. Last year, we did a homecoming event where leading Awori Obas, including myself, went to our ancestral home in Ile-Ife and were hosted by the Ooni Adimula, HRM Oba Enitan Ogunwusi, Ojaja II at Ile Ife.

We are a very friendly, accommodating and peaceful people. It is clear that Awori people are a conglomeration of Yoruba migrants. Fabuyi (1987) and other anthropologists like Agiri and Barnes recognized that "There are strong indications that people now known as Awori represent a long and uneven movement of people from Ketu, Egbado, Oyo and no doubt, other regions who were forced by warfare and slave raids and this was occurring as early as 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century prior to and perhaps extending into the same period that saw Bini (Edo/Benin)" civilizations.

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The Awori are distinguished by four main characteristics: the language which is of Yoruba dialect, traditions of ancestral migration from Ile Ife, traditions of common descent from Oduduwa, the eponymous hero of Yoruba and traditions of consanguineous relationship resulting from the ancestry of ruling classes and cultural heritage as well as diffusion through migration and interaction. Awori Yoruba dialect remained a uniform force among the various groups; an Awori identifies himself with another Awori greeting term “Kitigbe o?” (How are you?” and the familiar response is “O gbee re” (“It is well”).

Linguistically, we speak a distinct North West dialect of Yoruboid languages that belongs to the larger Niger-Congo language group. We are a sub-group that possesses a distinguished speech pattern. An Anthropologists, W.G. Wormalin in his Intelligence Report gives a graphic description of the manner of our speech saying: “They speak low and slurred dialect of the Yoruba language”. But the slowness of the language rhythm has little to do with the vast contributions of our people to the socio-economic development of the Yoruba race

It must be noted that in Ogun state, the settlement of Awori people preceded the establishment of Abeokuta as an Egba kingdom in 1830. Otta, the foremost Awori town within the present Ogun state and which is the industrial nerve centre, for instance, has been existing since the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The first Olota, Oba Ikoriku Toribo was coronated in 1621, while the first Alake in Abeokuta, Sagbua Okukenu was crowned on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1854. It goes without saying that that putting an Olota under and Alake is both a traditional misnomer and historic fallacy. The Ife palace, where the crowns came from knows better and if current economic prognoses are anything to go by, it is a travesty of social justice.

What stakes have the Aworis in the Socio-economic evolution of Yorubaland?

It will be a great dis-service if I limit the contributions of Aworiland to Yorubaland. The contributions of our people during the inter-tribal war are legion, like in the legend of Iganmode Afeleja. The efforts at peacekeeping and ending slave trade are historic, just as the contributions to the country’s political development from hosting the seat of power till 1991 when it was moved to Abuja and what we still do as the Nation’s

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Economic capital. The Aworis have been in the forefront of socio-economic renaissance of the West Africa sub-regional integration.

For me, the big picture is Nigeria and perhaps Africa. As I speak today, the Awori speaking people in Nigeria covers only 0.4% of the total landmass of Nigeria but accounts for over 60% of the industrial and commercial activities in the country. Lagos GDP of US\$136 is the 5<sup>th</sup> largest in Africa and it still generates N34bn every month - higher in scope and diversity than Cote d'Ivoire and Kenya, two of Africa's most promising economies. If you add, Ogun's USD 10.470 GDP, it shows Aworiland where these states' humongous contributions comes from is second to none in the West Africa sub-region. What more, recent National Bureau of Statistics figures on IGR generated by states and federal capital territory (2018), shows that Ogun State came third among the best five performing states, behind Lagos and Rivers states. Ogun's IGR of N84.63bn is far ahead of those of FCT and Delta State. This year Ogun plans to generate N95bn – 80% of which, of course, will come from Aworiland!

Let's not forget that while the nation was bleeding from its feeding bottle federalism under the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2003- 2007 and the Tinubu administration was denied federal allocations to local governments for 4 years, Lagos posterity did not diminish – all thanks to Aworiland. It shows how far we have evolved from our pre-eminent occupations of fishing and farming to a modern industrial hub not only in Yorubaland but in Nigeria and Africa. Our people then took to agriculture and fisheries due to the nature of the geographical environment, fishing, rather than only farming which is traditionally the Yoruba major traditional preoccupation of the seaside. Awori are also great farmers and added a value chain where our farm produce like palm kernel gave us palm oil. We are also great craftsmen and women and produced our dane guns, weaved baskets and bedding in those early day. Of course, our apara delicacy are unique, just like ajogun, cocoyam, etc.

The climatic variation north of the coast offers an opportunity for the cultivation of a variety of crops. Cassava is probably the most widely cultivated as it could be planted and harvested throughout the year. In addition, it is a source of Garri, which now constitute a major staple food. Cassava is also processed for the production of starch and a locally produced starchy food known as Fufu and other confectionaries.

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Maize, Yams, Cocoyams and Oil Palm are also popular crops produced in the region. The food crops are supplemented by vegetables as well as animals such as goats, sheep and rabbits; birds like quail, cock, hen and goose, edible insects such as termites as well as alligators, which are prepared as a delicacy known as 'Ònì' among the Aworis of Lagos State.

However, with the industrial revolution pioneered by the Obafemi Awolowo government in the late 1950s and 1960s, the Awori-speaking areas like Ikeja and Isolo in Lagos, as well as Otta and Agbara began to see a concentration of industries, for which the indigenes surrendered their land for the economic transformation of their communities.

For instance, the Awori people were the earliest people to have contacts with the White missionaries and traders. It goes without saying that Aworiland was important gateway on Trans-Atlantic trade routes for legitimate and slave businesses. We had the First set of storey building and the 2<sup>nd</sup> of such is in my domain at Otta, where Bishop Ajayi Crowther translated some portion of English Bible to Yoruba. The first Methodists Church is at Baba Ode village, somewhere within Otta-Awori kingdom and where both religious and Western education mixed with trade and business socialization. I am not surprised that Aworiland today houses the largest concentration of universities in the country. The first tertiary institution, Yaba Technical College is in Aworiland. Today, UNILAG, LASU, Covenant, Crawford, Mountain Tops, Redeemers, Bells, Cetep City, Anchor among others are all on Awori soil.

Are you surprised that Aworiland is the capital of the rave-making Nollywood? Most films with local flavours are made here and almost all known names in the social spheres have a tinge of *Aworiness* in them - either living or having businesses in either Lekki or Festac Town and with their corporate sales headquarters at Idumota. This is because traditionally, we have dance drama pedigree. Egungun and Bata drums are our forte.

**Dialectics of Marginalization?**

Just as Walter Rodney's Seminal work, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972)

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takes the view that Africa was deliberately exploited and underdeveloped by European colonial regimes, my argument, is that Aworiland developed Ogun and Lagos State at the same rate successive Governments in these states, especially Ogun, underdeveloped Aworiland.

The yawning gaps between the other sections and Aworiland are there to see by the blind. While bridges, flyovers are all over the other sections, Iyana Ilogbo that links Abeokuta to Ota remains a dead trap and economic disincentive just as the road from Atan-Ota to Agbara that passes through your school here begs perpetually for repairs. The goose that lays the Golden eggs, Aworiland has no Government-owned tertiary institutions and insecurity reigns supreme here.

To address these gaps, I will draw inspiration from Prof Idris Ayinde's presentation when I launched the Foundation for Economic and Development Initiative - FECODEIN – at Ota as an empowerment and security agenda in Ota - the following questions must be provided honest answers to:

1. Is the concentration of companies here an asset or liability to Aworiland?
2. Do these industries translate to better livelihood and living conditions for the people?
3. Are they precursor of infrastructural development such as good road, potable supply of water to all, not a segment of the population?
4. Does this translate to adequate welfare and food security to the people?
5. Do they engage stakeholders in the land as to how best to design their corporate social responsibilities for maximum benefit to the people?
6. Does their presence foster employment opportunities for both the skilled and unskilled components of the communities?
7. According to Rowstow's postulate of the Endogenous Growth Model, do these

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industries lead

to new investment opportunities for the citizens in order to foster improved economic

development of the Aworis?

8. Does the State which benefit immensely through revenue generation from these manufacturers  
give back to the community in terms of social and physical infrastructure?
9. Are the leaders of thought in Aworiland sleeping and are they representing the  
common goal of  
the Aworis adequately?

### **Conclusions**

I call these food for thought. Today, Aworiland is now a business and manufacturing hub of Africa's largest economy, housing up to 229 economically viable industries, generating above 70% of the Ogun State's revenue. The Almighty God has blessed Aworiland but paradoxical we are like of a city lacking in the midst of many largesse. We have been abandoned. There is mass poverty, health centres are expensive and worse than consulting clinics with water or drugs. The social and physical infrastructure are sub-optimal to meet the need of the population; low level of western education is commonplace, most indigenes do not have tertiary education exposure, which limits potential opportunities that could come their way; roads are decrepit and insecurity of all types are here. A Namibian proverb says if the cobwebs unite, they can tie a lion. It is my hope and aspiration of every Awori that Aworiland must survive. We are in a world of survival of the fittest. Unity of vision, purpose, decision, action and efforts are central to the development of any people and that is the journey we are now undertaking for the greater interest of our people and in order for us to re-possess our primacy and preeminence in the socio-political and cultural transformation of Yorubaland and indeed, Nigeria and Africa.

Please journey with us. Thanks for your kind attention.