
Missionary Activities in Okunland: A History of Western Education, Social Change and Gender Relations up to 1960

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses how the activities of the Christian missionaries in Okunland led to the development of western education. It thus examines western education as a catalyst for social change. The new exposure to western education and civilization produced inevitable socio-economic changes. The impacts of these new events on gender relations are also investigated. The study posits that the activities of the Christian missionaries and the subsequent introduction of western education brought about alteration in the indigenous practices of the people. The study observed that though the indigenous crafts were abandoned as a result of the acquisition of western education. The introduction of western education notwithstanding led to the socio economic development of Okunland and prepared her for her future membership in the society and active participation in the development of Okunland. While the study utilizes both primary and secondary sources for the purpose of data collection, it utilizes the descriptive method for the purpose of data analysis.

KEYWORDS: *Western Education, Christian missionaries, Social change, Gender Relations, Okunland.*

INTRODUCTION

The Okun people are Yoruba by tribe, they currently occupy an area in Kogi state, Nigeria referred to as Kabba Division during the colonial periodⁱ. The word “Okun” was coined from the people’s mode of greetingⁱⁱ. One remarkable event during the colonial era was the development of western education. Western education led to series of changes in previous indigenous practices in Nigeria just like in other parts of Africa. The introduction of western education especially by the Christian missionaries affected virtually every aspect of societal life, namely, the social, spiritual and economic spheres. The impact of these changes on the people of Okunland can be analyzed positively and negatively. In essence, notable social changes brought about by colonial imperialism and western education produced both positive and negative impact which shall be analyzed here through the frame work of gender relations. As will be explained latter, although the people socially benefitted but the social role of the women folk was largely peripheral unlike their male counterparts who emerged as the greatest beneficiaries.

Christian Missionaries were believed to be agents of European imperialistsⁱⁱⁱ. They came to Africa primarily to spread Christianity which means the imposition of their culture on the people. Along the line, western education was introduced. This, however, resulted in socio-economic changes in various societies. In Okunland for instance, Christianity and western education had considerable impact on the socio-economic life of the people. Education was seen as both an end

in itself and a means to attaining other ends. Education has an obligation to transmit from one generation to the next the accumulated wisdom, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

Western education therefore prepared the people of Okunland for their future membership in the society and their active participation in the development of Okunland^{iv}. The activities of the missionaries at Christianizing the people of Okunland were therefore seen as an aspect of the object of development. The introduction of western education no doubt contributed immensely to the socio-political and economic development of Okunland. People were equipped for new roles associated with an expanding range of occupations. The introduction of western education and the attendant socio-economic changes re-defined the socio-economic status of the people (women inclusive) as expected. However, the impact on women was only marginal as men constituted the largest beneficiaries^v.

CHRISTIAN MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF WESTERN EDUCATION IN OKUNLAND

The emergence of western education during the period under study could be attributed to the activities of Christian missionaries^{vi}. However Christian missionary activities did not commence in Okunland until the beginning of the 18th Century. Okunland was brought under colonial rule in 1897^{vii}. But before that time, Bishop Ajayi Crowther, who was the first Nigerian Bishop, had already commence his missionary activities in Lokoja

The Niger Mission operated formal educational institutions and promoted adult education. The Niger Mission and Rev. J. L. Macintyre assisted few of the early converts by sending them for training to become future pastors at Lokoja. By 1941, a Bible College was established in Igbaja. Pa. Daniel Iluromi from Kabba, Pa. P.B. Owa from Odo-ere and Pa. Daniel Amokore from Mopa were some of the earliest products of the school^{viii}.

The people did not embrace the activities of the missionary on the soil of Okunland with open hands; there was serious opposition, as the people were discouraged from participating in all forms of indigenous rights as well as their traditional religion. Thus Sciortino the then District Officer of Kabba Division affirmed that: "In the Kabba division, Christianity is spreading so fast that it is beginning to come into conflict with fetishism. The older generation adheres to its old pagan beliefs while the younger is hot-foot after education and modernity"^{ix}.

One significant instrument used in spreading Christianity in this period was through organizing classes for teaching, reading and writing. It was designed to educate the people for them to be able to read the Bible and interpret it. Besides, they were trained in order for them to be able to participate in the day to day affairs of the Church^x. In the case of Okunland, the missionaries started by teaching them the Yoruba alphabets. Later, it became a matter of pride to be able to read and write and for this reason many attended the classes during which they were converted. This continued until other Christian denominations arrived Okunland. From the foregoing discussion, it appears that the Christian Missionary Society prepared a fertile ground for Christianity to grow in Okunland, because when other denominations began to arrive, there were less difficulties since a sizeable number of people had been converted. However, the Roman Catholic Mission, the Sudan Interior Mission and the Christian Missionary Society were concentrated in Kabba, Bunu, Ijumu and Oworo Districts, while the Sudan Interior Mission was

dominant in Yagba district. At independence, about 65 percent of the population had been converted and were attending seven or more denominational Churches^{xi}.

One of the laudable achievements of the early Christian missionaries could be seen in the unity and mutual cooperation that ensued among all the denominations. Christian activities were jointly organized to strengthen their faith. In most cases, prayers, rallies, crusades and Christian festivals were jointly organized^{xii}.

Christian missionaries have contributed immensely to the development of several societies in Africa, through the introduction of western education. Huillery^{xiii} observed that though western education was introduced with the sole aim of converting the people to their religion, but then most of the schools that were established are still in existence till date and are still servicing the people at providing the needed basic education. In the case of Okunland, Saint Mary, Saint John, and saint Augustine amongst others are still in existence servicing the entire populace of Okunland till date.

However, it should be noted clearly that the introduction of western education by the missionaries was not to educate the people of Okunland on the evil side of colonialism. In fact it was not in any way introduced to challenge colonial rule, but it was introduced with the sole motive of creating an incentive to the acceptance of Christianity. The missionaries felt it was the most appropriate way to lure the people to accept Christianity^{xiv}. In Okunland, effort was made at developing the reading skills of the people through Sunday school classes organized by the missionaries for early converts, which was a way of educating the new converts^{xv}. More so, the missionaries felt that one of the determining factors of success at Christianizing the people was to establish a favorable relationship with them^{xvi}. Hence, the school was seen as a forum where much of this awareness could be developed.

In 1910, the CMS made the first attempt at opening a vernacular school in Kabba and Ogidi but failed^{xvii}. In 1914, the CMS made the first attempt by opening a primary school in Kabba, Oshokoshoko and Odo Ape. However, the schools were closed down in the same year as a result of World War I. The schools were re-opened in 1925. At Kabba, by 1929, there were four classes and in 1930, enrolment stood at 50 boys and 20 girls^{xviii}. Another primary school was opened at Egbeda in 1929. In 1931, a Native Authority Elementary School was opened at Kabba but as a result of poor staffing the school was closed down in 1936. In 1932 the Sudan Interior Mission established central schools at Egbe, Isanlu and Mopa. In 1940, the Roman Catholic Mission established its own school in Okedayo. The Wesleyan Missionaries were not left out as they opened their own school at Kabba in 1952, a year later the Christian Missionary Society established its own school at Ohakiti, and in 1954 it established another primary school at Otu-Egunbe^{xix}.

Thus by the year 1960, the establishment of primary school in Okunland had increased tremendously but the post primary schools that was established was very few and was not established until around 1950s. In fact, the first post primary school in Okunland – Titcombe College – was established in 1951^{xx}

The non-availability of post-primary schools to match the substantial growth of primary education meant that, post-primary education could only be attained outside Okunland. Therefore, primary school leavers who wished to advance their education were left with the

option to attend post primary schools elsewhere. The nearest school to Okunland was the Okene Middle school (now Abdul Azeez Attah Memorial College)^{xxi}. Considerable number of people in Okunland attended this school.

As a result of the shortcomings mentioned above, secondary schools were established to meet the demand for post primary education. Thus, by 1958, two secondary schools in Okunland had already been founded by the Missionaries: these were Titcombe College, Egbe founded in 1951 by SIM and Saint Augustine's College founded in 1958 by RCM. The native administrations acknowledged that success can only be sustained by improving communications and by the spread of education. However the Northern Region government also established a women Teachers College in Kabba 1953. Pupils who gained admission to the colleges did so through competitive examinations and selective processes. Merit was the prerequisite for admission then^{xxii}

It must be noted here that, in the early days of learning, the module was mainly on religious instructions, passage readings from the Bible and singing Hymns. Education during the period under study was at no cost. It should be noted that despite this fact, most parents in Okunland vehemently refused to train girls initially, because they were considered as wasteful investments since they would eventually marry into another family^{xxiii}.

In addition to free education, no age limit was imposed on those who attended schools. Such policies helped undoubtedly in attracting pupils to school. The missionaries in several instances had to operate in the midst of stiff opposition from parents. Most parents detested the missionary Christian propaganda and hated the idea of giving out their children for schooling because this meant a loss of the much needed labor force in the farm. More so, the very few parents who released their child did it grudgingly, as only the males were released while the females were retained at home to perform domestic duties^{xxiv}.

Given the above historical analysis, the provision of education in the town was largely the handiwork of Christian missionaries. Christianity and provision of schools went side by side. Hence, The Missionaries' contribution towards the development and growth of western education in Okunland was the basis why larger percentage of the population became converted. People continued to give them the much needed support and cooperation for their growth and expansion. For instance, Land acquisition for missionary works was no problem, open air-preaching was allowed and inter-denominational bickering was discouraged^{xxv}.

Western Education and Social Change

Social change refers to a modification in the social order of a society^{xxvi} it could also mean the modification in social relations^{xxvii}. Social change is a constant occurrence in every society, thus social change is the alteration in approach and conduct that depicts a society^{xxviii}. The introduction of western education had a greater effect on a large section of the Okun community. However, towards the end of the third decade of the 18th century, people began to realize the importance of education when the products of early missionary schools were filling up posts in the Native Administration. It was a thing of joy and affluence to parents to see their children working in government services.

Besides, the few educated ones acquired new inclination and world views and developed new attitudes and behaviors. Thus western education has been observed as one of the influencing factors enhancing social change^{xxix}. These placed them in a world different from the tradition into which they were born. For example, many parents who had previously refused to send their children to school began to do so. Thus, as more and more went to school, they became converted. Therefore, the school became the most prolific place for converting people to Christianity^{xxx}.

An occurrence worth noting in this period was the cold attitude put in by the colonial government towards the development of western education. Despite the fact that the products of these schools were of much importance to them because they were useful in the Native Administration, the colonial Government's interest on education was highly discouraging. Instead, development of education and its sustenance rested on the shoulder of the missionaries in Okunland as well as in Nigeria. Nonetheless, by the early period of 1940s, the colonial Government took over the running of the schools^{xxxi}.

Hence, the acquisition of western education promoted social change because people were exposed to various academic training which resulted in their physical, spiritual, social and economic development. As a result of this exposure, an elite class of men and women was born. This set of new class was well cherished as they were engaged as teachers, interpreters, clerks and catechists. This also led to the introduction of wage economy and wage earners, and they saw themselves as greater than the non-wage earners. The establishment of Titcombe College Egbe in 1951, Women Teachers College Kabba in 1953 and Saint Augustine's College Kabba in 1958, led to the social development of Okunland. This development led to the influx of people into Okunland as there were no post secondary schools in neighboring regions. This brought people from far and near and thus led to the transformation of Okunland from a traditional setting into a semi urban society^{xxxii}.

Furthermore, western education has empowered both genders to rise above poverty and ignorance. It has enabled most especially the women to attain an enviable social and economic position in the society. More so, western education has led to women empowerment in Okunland because they had access to educational opportunities, facilities for skill acquisition and the expansion of positions of authority^{xxxiii}.

Similarly, western education opened new opportunities to women and thus helped to release them from certain customs which had previously prevented them from partaking in societal development. Some of the women after acquiring their primary school certificate were employed as housekeepers, the very few women who scaled through to Teachers College were employed as teachers in both mission schools and native authority schools, others who had grade II were further trained in the government hospital as attendants, while a handful of intelligent ones were further equipped to become middle III auxiliary nurses who were assigned to work in the rural areas of Okunland, and few females were also hired as office assistants.

The male gender had upper hand in the area of employment. There was disparity in education. The stiff opposition faced by most women in acquiring education made them late comers in the attainment of primary school education as well as post secondary education. Thus while most of the early educated men got employed as school teachers – the most prestigious and noble profession during the period under study, and a few of these men who were determined later

trained as pastors^{xxxiv}. Thus being educated became a prestigious feat. More so, apart from education being an agent of socialization, it also procured for the few educated ones enviable employment opportunities. As such, parents continued to make every effort to ensure that their children were not left out. They thus continued to ensure that their children have the best of education^{xxxv}.

Furthermore, by the year 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence, the Nigerian government had already realized the importance of education, coupled with the fact that she had to produce the required human resources needed to facilitate prompt economic development there was a vacuum that needed to be filled up, the administrative positions in government services for instance needed manpower. It was as a result of this pressing need that the government in the Northern part of Nigeria sought to expand facilities for secondary, higher and technical education. It was against this background that Christianity and Western education were the external stimuli that led to alterations in African indigenous social institutions^{xxxvi}.

IMPACT OF WESTERN EDUCATION AND SOCIAL CHANGE ON GENDER RELATIONS

One of the most obvious changes during the period under study was in the area of taste. There was drastic change in the taste of the people that acquired western education, besides the educated women participation in public activities. A lot of changes occurred in the role women played during the colonial era. Prior to the introduction of western education, women were relegated to the background due to the existence of patriarchy and the belief that women belonged to the kitchen and should not be seen participating actively and competing with the men folk particularly in public affairs. Prior to the colonial era, women participated actively in agriculture as well as trade and commerce. Even though they were active in these sectors, their agricultural roles were somewhat modified.

The few people who were educated gradually acquired a new but foreign culture which in turn modified the mode of life of the people and began to create a new social class “the educated”^{xxxvii}. In Okunland for instance, people abandoned their traditional names such as *Aina, Ifagbami, Ojo, Dada* and *Ige, molo, Ogunjobi* for the Christian ones like Mary, Moses, Joseph, Esther, Naomi, and Isaac^{xxxviii}.

Meanwhile, weaving was another industry that witnessed modifications after the introduction of western education as the few educated females who went back to cloth weaving did not depend on local cotton again but on industrially made one in a variety of available colours of thread for light-weight woven cloths. The introduction of coloured cotton rendered the tie and dye less significant because the educated weavers observed that the industrial yarns for weaving were more refined, lighter in weight and easy to weave, in short it made weaving more convenient. Besides, the preference of fairly used cloth brought from Europe known as *Aso Oyibo* by the educated group had negative impact on the indigenous textile productions and dress traditions^{xxxix}. Due to the change in the taste of cloth worn by the educated elite, the Okun people began to buy imported cloth generally known as *Aso Oyibo* which gradually replaced their own hand-woven cloth such as *Kijipa, Keke, asooke and Arikuku* which was previously worn as every day dress. With these cloths, they instituted new fashions including the wearing of wrappers “Iro” with separate blouse-like tops “Buba” for women and tailored shirts “Awu” and trousers

“Sokoto” for men. When asked the reason for the change of taste in the types of cloth worn, they replied by saying *aiyetid’ayieolaju* meaning we are now in a civilized world. Besides, most of those who were educated observed that factory printed cloth has wide variety of colours and comes in different attractive designs, they were lighter in weight more comfortable to sew, wear, and care for, for these obvious reasons imported damasks, velvets, satins and silk took over the market as prestigious garments while indigenous cloth was rejected leading to the decline of the cloth weaving industry. Hence the people of Okunland expressed their identification with a wider world and their approval of changes introduced by missionaries and colonial officers^{xi}.

Between 1945 and 1960, there was an increase in the numbers of young men and women who were being educated and were thus kept back for long periods in schools and colleges, and by the time they were through with their courses, the farms were no longer attractive to them, in fact most of them took up employment almost immediately and thus abandoned their farms^{xii}.

The education acquired by the women also enabled them to compete along side their male counterparts. Upon completion of their school certificate and having made the required minimum credits, very few of the girls proceeded to have their higher school certificate and then to the University. Most of the females after the completion of their education did not go back to the traditional labour^{xiii}. They were employed by the missionaries or the government. The few that went back to traditional labour modified the crude methods used. For instance, they made use of imported dyes for their weaving and factory-made threads were used instead of the locally made ones as could be seen in the weaving industry. Hence, the acquisition of western education has empowered women and has delivered them from the shackles of patriarchy.

Thus, by the year 1950, the ratio of girls to boys at the primary school level stood at 1 to 10 while at the post primary school level it stood at 1 to 25. But there was significant improvement by the year 1960 as it had reduced to about 1 to 5 at the primary school level and about 1 to 10 at the post primary school level^{xiii}.

Given the illustration above, it can be deduced that western education offered opportunities for both males and females but the opportunities for the female folks were very marginal. For example, the opportunities that accompanied western education appeared to be cockeyed in favour of the men folk while the women folk were left greatly disadvantaged. The argument is that western education and social change produced impacts on gender structure during the colonial era, as both sexes were offered opportunities to be socially empowered. The findings, however, revealed that the women failed to utilize these opportunities largely as a result of ignominious socio-cultural factors.

CONCLUSION

The coming of Christian missionaries to Okunland was received with mixed feelings as the younger generation saw their coming as an avenue for the enhancement of a better standard of living while the older generation saw the coming of the Christian missionaries as a means of distorting the already indigenous practice that was in place. Thus to be able to record the required successes, the missionaries tried everything within their capacity to establish a favourable relationship with the people. Hence schools and hospitals were built and the people were trained to read and write. The new exposure to western education and civilization produced

inevitable socio-economic changes. The impacts of these new events on gender relations were also investigated and it was observed that there was disparity in the acquisition of education by boys and girls, the boys had upper hand in the acquisition of western education while the girls were prevented from attending schools due to cultural practices.

Hence, a favourable environment should be made available for women so as to enable them to fulfill their economic potentials. The government must consciously realize the need to empower women economically. This can be achieved by promoting greater access to educational facilities that will consequently open up economic opportunities for them. Again, the factors that tend to pulverize the economic potentials of the women folk need to be addressed. These factors include certain cultural practices, infant and maternal mortality as well as the societal instituted discrimination against them.

ENDNOTES

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^v Oral interview M.B. Oniemola, January 2 2017, Kabba, Kogi State, Nigeria, age 67

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^{viii} E.B Iyekolo. *The Peoples of Okunland*. P. 155

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