



# Kpakpando Journal of History and International Studies

## Border Astride Nigeria-Benin: Effect on Ogun State Economy, 1976-2015

**Ezeifedi, Ugoeze Emmanuel**

Department of History and International Studies

Faculty of Humanities

Imo State University, Owerri, Nigeria

*Kpakpando Journal of History and International Studies: Vol. 1 no. 4 July, 2024. ISSN: 2437-1750*

### Abstract

It is a settled position both in scholarly literature and ordinary intelligent observation that geographic proximities can and does intensify international interaction. A nation state geographically contiguous to another nation-state or an ethnic group is either faced with potentially high risks of attack or provided with potential opportunities for cooperation. This was the case of Ogun borderlands people of Nigeria, whose affinity with the Peoples' Republic of Benin has impacted both positively and negatively on the economy of Ogun State. This paper discusses the various economic activities in Ogun State and to the extent that they have attracted other peoples of Africa through the expanse border astride Nigeria and Benin Republic between 1976 and 2015. Using the descriptive method, the paper reveals the degree of challenges and prospects this movement of persons and goods across these borderlands have brought on the land and people of Ogun, particularly, their economy. The paper concludes by offering useful recommendations that could transform the economy of the land and Nigeria by extension.

**Keywords:** Border, Borderland, Astride, Implication, Economy, Security.

## **Introduction**

Shared boundaries have been widely recognized as a major component of the geographic proximity scenario. Study after study based on the operationalisation of the border dynamics; have demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt that there is a co-variation between border and war at one level and, at the other, border and economic relations and integration. Particularly instructive in this regard are the incontrovertible data provided by the history of wars to the general conclusion that Island states have been relatively less prone to war than their continentally located counterparts, often close to a large number of other national states.

The modern history of Europe, the homeland of the nation-state and its border problematics, confronts the rest of the wider world of the border phenomenon with only one of two choices; the path of war and human tragedy, which constituted the emphasis in the era from the treaty of Westphalia in 1648 to the end of the second world war on the one hand and on the other, the option of peaceful cooperation characterized by the regional integration and trans-border cooperation endeavours of the period since, 1945. While in the period,

characterized by a heightened positive role for the factor of adjacency, the dedication has been for the simplification of the border and the creation of international good neighbourliness.

In the case of relations between the border people in Ogun State of Nigeria and Benin Republic, efforts de-emphasize the very factor of war and concentration centers on other cross-border interactions by economics. The extent to which these interactions have affected the economic activities of Ogun State is the centre-piece of this study. Therefore, attention will be given to such economic components as primary production, manufacturing occupation, construction sector, commercial activities, services as they affect Ogun State and people of the land.

## **Primary production**

Abeokuta South Local Government is blessed with gravel and other stone mineral resources such as granite which up to 2015 was yet to be fully tapped. The various mineral available in this local government include; Koalin, feldspar, mica, granite and decorative rocks.<sup>1</sup> The wide range of food crops produced in the local government include maize, yam, cocoyam, cassava and

fruits. Benin citizens constituted part of the labour in the farms and mining fields.<sup>2</sup>

Odeda local government is well endowed in terms of natural resources especially with regards to extensive fertile soil, which is suitable for agricultural activities. This may account for the dependent of the majority of the inhabitants of the area on agriculture. The local government is also endowed with exploitable mineral resources. These include Kaolin, Glass sand, Feldspar, Mica, Granite and Decorative Rock. By field observation, very few Benin citizens owned farms in this area and other inestimable few, work in the extractive sector of the economy.<sup>3</sup>

Ewekoro local government is greatly blessed in terms of natural resources as it is located on a sedimentary bedrock which serves as raw material for the production industry in the local government area. At the same time the availability of clay makes the presence of the state government to be really felt in the local government. This condition has resulted to the establishment of a clay block factory (Gateway Bricks) in the local government area.

Obafemi-Owode local government is blessed with clay and stone. The clay was used for pot making while the stone was quarried for

use in different parts of the country. It should be settled, with evidence from the observation carried out at ObafemiOwode that most of the people engaged in this extraction industries were indigenes of Ogun. Foreigners from Benin were not seen.<sup>4</sup>

Lumbering was part of the primary production. Ijebu-Ode showed evidence of agricultural production, though, dominated by the small scale farmers. There were, however, pockets of commercial farms which concentrates on both arable farming and livestock production the impacts of the agriculture department of the local government, and the extension services of the local government and affiliated agencies of Ogun State ministry of agriculture have enhanced agricultural production in the L.G.A. Of particular importance here are such food crops like cassava, yam, palm-oil, plantain and vegetable.<sup>5</sup> In the opinion of Olorire:

‘It is very difficult to say who is a Nigerian working in the farmlands of Ijebu-Ode. This is because Aja and other peoples of Benin and Togo Republics have so mixed with our indigenes to the extent that it takes a long history of the land to findout who is not an Ijebu man. It is more disappointing that some elders who can do this have died. Many of these foreigners speak our Ijebu dialect.’<sup>6</sup>

It is in terms of vegetal resources that Ijebu North Local Government was most prominent. It has a wide expanse of thick forest, containing a number of commercial trees such as *Iroko*, *Afara*, *Opepe*, *Oganwo* and many others; which may explain why the local government had a large number of Sawmills; and the consequent employment of a large proportion of its inhabitants in the lumbering business. Many, Yoruba-speaking employees in the lumbering mode of production are not Nigerians. On this note consider,

‘The easiest job we do in these villages is lumbering. It is not an easy job but wetinman go do. People who went to university still complain what of me way no go reach like that. So, we shall dwell everyday in the forest. Am not a Nigeria but I can speak Ijebu language. We are all Yoruba: whether in Benin or here we speak Yoruba. Wetin I know bi say I be Yoruba and I day work for Yoruba land.’<sup>7</sup>

The speaker was engaged in lumbering and spoke like an indigene of the land without intimidation. This resulted from the age-long affinity that existed between Dahomey and Oyo.

According to Bola Talabi, by the characteristics of the population, the people

of Yewa could be referred to as a people with double parentage. Hear him,

‘Trans-border cultural affinity with the unseen borders separating Nigeria and Benin, in Yewa as a whole has afforded the people of the area the opportunity to relate without barrier like those who possess double citizenship. Both in Yewa south and north Beninois participate in many aspects of the people’s affairs including extraction and manufacturing...’<sup>8</sup>

In fact, the existence of rich extensive fertile soil had culminated into specialization in different food and cash crops by various towns and villages in the area. Listed below are some Yoruba people of Ogun and the crops they cultivated.

Ayetoro	Cassava, maize, melon
Eggua	Fish, cassava, cocoa, maize
Ebute-Igbooro	Cocoa, rice, maize, fish
Ibese	Rice, cassava, maize
Ibooro	Maize
Igbogila	Cassava, melon, cocoa, Kolanut, citrus
IganAlade	Cassava, cocoa
Imasai	Cassava, Maize

Ijako-Orile Tomato, cassava, pepper, yam

Sikomi Rice

Sawonjo Melon, maize, yam, cassava

Owode-Ketu Cassava, Maize.<sup>9</sup>

The people who farmed here were both Yoruba of Nigeria and Yoruba-speaking population of Benin.

Imeko/Afon local government area share international boundary with the Republic of Benin to the west. The major raw materials were derived from agriculture. The land is blessed with fertile soil and large expanse of land mass. The main occupation of the inhabitants of the local government area was farming. Major cash crops grown include cocoa, citrus, cashew and wool. And the major food crops grown in the local government area were cassava, yam, plantain, maize, coco-yam and melon. The local government that had more mixed population with people from the Republic of Benin is Ipokia. Some of its communities where this abound were Tube Ijofin, Maun, Agosasas, Idiroko, Ilashe and Ifonyintedo.<sup>10</sup>

### Manufacturing Occupation Since 1976

Natural resources found in an area, often time, direct the pattern of industrial

development and secondary occupations in that area. In Abeokuta north, factory-Type manufacturing constituted another spatial scene of this local government. However, the available manufacturing plants in this local government were urban biased. It was from 1976 when the former western Yorubaland and a collection of other lands emerged as Ogun that many modern industries sprang up.

**Table I: Ogun State Agro-based and Mineral Resources, 2000**

	Local government area	Agro-Based	Mineral based
1	Abeokuta North	Maize, cassava, yam, cocoyam, fruits, decorative	Kaolin, felodspar, mica, granite sand
2	Abeokuta South	Maize, cassava, yam, coco-yam, fruits	Kaolin, feldspar, mica, Granite sand
3	Ado-Odo/Ota	Coconut, maize, cassava, yam, fruits, legumes	Kaolin, Glass sand, clay

4	Yewa North	Kolanut, Oil palm, forest products, maize cassava, rice, vegetable	Limestone, Kaolin, Glass sand, phosphate, feldspar
5	Yewa south	Oil palm, forest products, maize, cassava, yam, coco-yam, vegetables and legumes, fruits.	Limestone, Kaolin, Glass Sand, Gypsum
6	Ifo	Kolanut, oil palm, maize, cassava, rice, sugar cane, yam, vegetables and legumes, fruits	Kaolin, Glass sand, clay, phosphate, gypsum
7	Ijebu East	Cocoa, oil palm, forest products, maize, rice, yam, coco-yam,	Tar sand, glass sand, clay.

		fruits, vegetable	
8	Ijebu North	Cocoa, kolanut, oil palm, coconut, forest products, maize, cassava, yam, coco-yam, vegetable.	Kaolin, glass sand
9	Ijebu-Ode	Oil palm, maize, cassava, yam, coco-yam, vegetables	Tar sand, faolin, glass sand, feldspar.
10	Ikenne	Cocoa, kolanut, rubber, oil palm, coconut, maize, cassava, rice, yam, coco-yam, vegetables.	Kaolin, clay, phosphate.
11	Obafem-Owode	Cocoa, kolanut, rubber, oil palm, coconut, maize,	Kaolin, clay, phosphate.

		cassava, rice, yam, coco-yam.	
1 2	Odeda	Kolanut, oil palm, mazie, cassava, yam, coco-yam, sugarcane , fruits.	Kaolin, glass sand, feldspar, mica, Granite, and decorative rocks.
1 3	Odogbolu	Coca, rubber, oil palm, maize, cassava, yam, vegetable s.	Tar sand, kaolin, glass sand, mica feldspar.
1 4	Ogun Waterside	Rubber, oil palm, forest products, maize, fish, cassava, rice, yam, coco-yam, fruit.	Sand, clay, mica
1 5	Sagamu	Cocoa, kolanut, rubber, oil palm, coconut, maize, cassava,	Limeston e, kaolin, clay, phosphate .

		yam, coco-yam, fruits, vegetable.	
--	--	--	--

Source; Odugbemi, OO, *Ogun State in Nigeria: Giant in the Tropics*(ed), (Udo RK and Mamman,1995),354.

The over-riding influence of border security on productive activities in Ogun State could be approached under three perspectives. The first centers on the fact that the security of Ogun borderlands, particularly of Yewa South and Ipokia local government areas remained weak up to 2015. This went a long way to determine the movement of people and goods into Ogun State. The second perspective discusses the problematic and prospect of unrestricted movement of people with regard production activities and sources of labour: the marketing of products may be given less attention in this discourse. The third perspective focuses on the fate of infant or small-scale businesses in the face of increasing and open sales of contraband items smuggled through the borders. Considering the involvement of other West African countries in the manufacturing activities in Ogun State, the words of Ilo Moses becomes insightful:

‘Where two can relatively show the tribal distinctions between Yoruba within Nigeria and those coming from outside, is in Yewa communities. Though, the difference between the new-comers and those who have been here is very minute. Sincerely there is hardly any industry operating in Ogun State with upto twenty employees without the presence of other West African people. All the districts of Ogun: Ijebu-Ode, Sagamu, Abeokuta, Ifo are heavily filled with non-indigenes. This unrestricted immigration of people, partly resulted from ECOWAS treaty on free movement of people and to the larger problem of porosity of the borders.’<sup>11</sup>

An observation of the lands of Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode and Sagamu corroborated the opinion of Ilo. Indeed, there is no gainsaying the fact that many workers in different sectors of the state’s economy, particularly manufacturing activities were citizens of other West African countries

### **Border and construction works**

A survey of the lands of Ogun State revealed that many builders in the city of Abeokuta, Ijebu-Ode, Shagamu, Ilaro among others

were migrants from Benin and Togo Republics. Interview with builders in Ijebu-Ode and Shagamu: Abiye, Oye, Taj, Mofede, Kofola, Iglé and Bature indicated that before 1990, a good number of builders had resided in the land and had contributed significantly in the aspect of architectural development.<sup>12</sup>

The method of apprenticeship among this foreigners proved that crossing Nigeria-Benin borders was just like crossing Ondo and Ogun boundaries. On regular basis, the contractors among them travelled to their countries to get apprentices who would sign years of meticulous apprenticeship with their masters. In most cases, they picked children who were below ten years. Hence, this defined their life-style. This is why many people preferred to hire their services than Nigerians who would spend few years and began to seek contracts. Among these foreigners who imported their services across the land borders into Nigeria, there were great expertise and convincing mastery of the jobs.

The implication of this trans-border movement of professional builders was that a good number of Yoruba-speaking Nigerians lost their contracts right in their home-towns. In Ijebu-Ode, Oladimeji cried thus:

‘I used to collect contracts and build houses for our people here. But, these days you will see those who want build their houses, but when you go to them, they will tell you say another person has collected the contract. When my family was hungry, I decided to join it with Okada work...I believe this people from Benin use plenty charms to look for contract. Since five months I have not gotten any contract. But every time you see them working.’<sup>13</sup>

The Yoruba people of Ogun State are deviating to other sources of livelihood because of the unemployment created by the presence of foreign builders. Some of them believe that these foreigners use charms as demonstrated in the view of Oladimeji.

### **Commercial activities**

Most felt among the impact of the border astride Nigeria and Benin in Yewa upto 2015 was trade and commerce. The growth of illicit trade across the borderlands of Ogun rose to create a new aristocratic class in the land, who defined their livelihood in smuggling.

### **Smuggling**

One of the most serious consequences of the establishment of the international boundary

is smuggling. The boundary has led to distinct market conditions on both sides of the boundary.<sup>14</sup> Yewa has been classified as a smuggling zone. Price differentials along the Nigeria-Benin border dates back to the colonial period. In the French colonies, tariffs were reduced in an attempt to encourage foreign ships to call at their ports. In the 1860’s, duties in French territories were reduced to about 4%, while in Lagos they were about 10%.<sup>15</sup> The high prices of such goods in Lagos and Yewa compelled businessmen to seek the cheaper goods in Porto-Novo, avoid paying duties and widen their profit margins. Thus smuggling became inevitable.

The myriads of creeks, river inlets and lagoons linked Nigeria and Benin in Ogun borderlands provided ideal environment for smugglers. They could move at night without detection. There were many canoes rendering transport services in the region. With numerous fishermen, it became difficult to differentiate canoes carrying ordinary trade goods from those carrying contraband. This made it necessary to examine in more detail the nature of smuggling in the Porto-Novo region. The terrain makes canoe smuggling the most prevalent method of smuggling.

Four types of canoe smugglers have been identified in the region as follows-the canoe man who acted as a cyclist to an organized smuggling ring, the smuggling band that used the canoe directly, the fisherman-trader and smuggler and the canoe market women.

The canoe man who acted as a link to exporters of contraband and receivers took the cargo from the canoe at a fee. He was only a link in the chain of smuggling activity. Whenever he was caught the goods were seized but the source of supply remained secret. One such link caught in 1976 carried goods worth \$5,000 made up of raw tobacco, as sorted kinds of cigarettes, different brand of French wine and many other items.<sup>16</sup>

There was also a situation where the smugglers hired their own canoes and embarked on a direct purchase and transportation of the goods. Perhaps, they went in group of five or more, usually dangerously armed. It was such groups that engage customs patrol teams in gun battles. The case of the fisherman-trader and smuggler is an interesting one. He went for fishing and often carried his catch to Porto-Novo, sold it there and bought goods to be retailed in Yewa. He started off as an ordinary fisherman, latter became an

ordinary fish seller and finally turned up as a smuggler.

Perhaps, an important but often neglected group in the smuggling business were the canoe market women. As they moved from market to between Yewa and Badagry through Yewariver and through Yewa and Porto-Novo, they carried their wares in canoe as ordinary trade goods and often escaped the attention of customs personnel. These women were the most numerous and active agents of smuggling. Some of them on being questioned, did not consider their activities as smuggling, they merely bought and sold.<sup>17</sup> This again highlighted the futility of trying to keep apart coherent culture area. If the boundary line demarcated with boundary pillars on the ground can scarcely be recognized by experts, how much less the one on water by market women.

It should be noted also, that border communities often built houses on buffer zone in Yewa areas. This facilitated buying and storage of contraband goods. As they were living on the border line, they bought large quantity of goods and stored them up at night, in the day time, foreign goods had saturated border markets such as Owode market in Owode-Yewa, Araomi and Oja-Ale markets in Ajilete, Idogo market in

Idogo, Eredo market in Eredo and Olokuta market in Olokuta. It is from these markets that other Yoruba people bought goods and sent them in small quantities to markets in towns and cities of Ogun State.

The common items smuggled in through the borderlands include second hand shoes, cloths, rice of different brand, cars, vegetable oil, tyres among others.<sup>18</sup> A survey of the markets in Ogun State down the villages proved that there was no market which was free from smuggled items.

### Conclusion

The paper reveals the extent to which Ogun people of Nigeria have so much intermingled and have mixed with other peoples of Africa through the border which astride Nigeria and Benin Republic in Yewa area of Ogun State. The paper has identified above other factors, that the main problematic factors causing illegal movement of persons and contraband goods within the discourse time frame, resulted from the poor security situation around the borders demarcating these two nations, on one hand and the age long cultural affinity that integrated Oyo subjects, during the long reign of this Kingdom that extended to Dahomey, on the other hand. Among these factors, the former resulted

from unpatriotic security operatives: men deeply rooted in corruption of receiving inducement from smugglers and illegal migrants. The later resulted from cultural context of individuals from both sides of the border, whose cultural similarities had impaired the efforts of the few patriotic security personnel committed on the borderlands of Ogun.

Based on the above considerations, the paper has noted prevailed security 5indigenous industries that could not stand competition that resulted from the presence of highly demanded exotic foreign commodities. The paper therefore recommends that security electronic gadgets should be mounted both in Ogun State capital (i.e. Customs state office) and in Abuja for the surveillance of the border. In other words, this activity would help monitor the nature of relationship between security officers and illegal migrants or smugglers in these borderlands.

### References

1. Ogun State Government, *Ogun State Annual and investment Digest incorporating who's who* (Abeokuta: visionlink Nig. Ltd, 1999), 14.
2. Annual Investment Digest....13-14

3. S.O Onakomaiya et al (ed), *Ogun State in Maps* (Ibadan: Rex Charles, 1992), 27-28.
4. U.E Ezeifedi, An Observation carried out in the markets at Obafemi Owode on 18-19 November, 2016.
5. Wale Oloriri, Interview, c58, trader, at his residence in Ijebu-Ode, corroborated with a survey carried out by the researcher on some farmlands in Ijebu-Ode such as Igbeba and Ilese.
6. Wale Olorire, Interview...
7. Kuyeabiodun, Interview, c42, Lumbering worker, in house at Ijebu Mushin, 19 November, 2016.
8. Bola Talabi; Interview, c48, HOD History, Tai Solarin College of Education, Omu, at TASCE. 20-21 June 2017.
9. O.O Oyesiku, OO Odubemi, O.O Ademluyi et al, *Ogun State: local and regional perspectives* (Ijebu-Ode: AAMAB Enterprises, 2000), 429.
10. Wale Olorire, Interview, c58...validated by Bola Talabi, Interview...
11. Ilo, Moses, Interview, c51, At TASCE, 21-22 June, 2017.
12. Abiye Oronla: c28, WoyeTunde: 25, TajuGaniy: c35. A Mofede; c48, Anthony Igle, Group Interview, At building sites in Ijebu-Ode and Shagamu, 24-26 June, 2017.
13. Oldameji, Bature, Interview, c40, Builder, Okada Park at Lagos Garage, Ijebu-Ode, 24 June, 2017.
14. AI AkinjogbinDahomey and Its Neighbours, 1078-1888,...115.
15. AI AkinjogbinDahomey and Its Neighbours, 1078-1888,...117.
16. Igué and Adam“Porto-Novo and Cotonou Hinterland,...252.
17. Igué and Adam“Porto-Novo and Cotonou Hinterland,...252
18. U.E Ezeifedi, A survey conducted in some of the markets in Ogun State by the researcher. 20-24 November, 2016.