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Emancipating Africa through Morality and Good Work Ethics: A Study of the Holy Apostles of Ayétòrò Community, Ìlàjeland, Nigeria

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Article History:

Received: 30 October 2024; Accepted: 20 November 2024; Published: 25 November 2024

Abstract Ayétòrò, a Christian community in Ìlàjẹ area of Yorùbáland, Nigeria considers religion as a driving force in their daily living. Its inhabitants are as religious as most African nations. Unlike many African communities which are either insincere about true religion or hypocritical in their practice of it, Ayétòrò explored the benefits of religion and its virtues for their development. This research, a product of two ethnographic studies conducted fifty years apart, found that Ayétòrò's devotion to the tenets of their faith and their proper understanding of religion supported them to industrialise. The paper argues that religion unlike it has been wrongly applied in many African societies could be deployed as Ayétòrò did to propel, uplift and orchestrate Africa from underdevelopment to becoming a developed region. It concludes that Africa could deploy religious pragmatism to her advantage rather than (mis)using the peoples' inclination to faith to exploit and impoverish them.

Keywords religion, hard work, development, Africa, communalism

Volume 15, 2024

Publisher: The Brooklyn Research and Publishing Institute, 442 Lorimer St, Brooklyn, NY 11206, United States.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbss.v15p30>

Reviewers: Opted for Confidentiality

Citation: Adéfi, A. T., and Ọláwọyín, O. N. (2024). Emancipating Africa through Morality and Good Work Ethics: A Study of the Holy Apostles of Ayétòrò Community, Ìlàjeland, Nigeria. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 15, 317-327. <https://doi.org/10.30845/ijbss.v15p30>

1. Introduction

Despite the preponderance of vital economic resources (human, arable land, capital, mineral, intellectual among others), most African nations have defied all logic for attaining development (Kalu 2018). Rather, poor leadership, marked docility among significant populations of the citizens, corruption, treasury looting, nepotism, misplacement of priority, policy somersault to mention a few have remained crucial factors accounting for Africa's underdevelopment (Udoka 2006). Furthermore, Africa's underdevelopment has been linked to the impact of religion, (neo)colonialism, imperialism etc (PLO Lumumba, 2020 & 2023, Rodney, 1972). Some scholars have expounded that faulty theological positions of some Pentecostal clerics play crucial roles in the continent's development crisis (Zalanga 2010, Taden, 2022). Besides, religious leaders in some parts of the continent (especially Muslim and Christian clerics) have equally been accused of their exegetical ignorance and sometimes their deliberate misuse of scriptures to keep followers under religious and political slavery (Zalanga 2010). From the foregoing, there appears to be a double jeopardy where politicians and clerics actively or inadvertently contrive together to weaponize religion to deprive the people of qualitative living. This repressive connivance ensures citizens are captives of their greedy politicians and selfish or theologically ignorant religious leaders. This tragedy has lingered because Africans are by their very nature religious (Idowu, 1973). Idowu's observation is supported by Pew Forum (2023) which reveals that most Africans (about 93%) identify either as Christians or Muslims.

Africa's self-inflicted predicament has resulted in the continent's stunted growth. Consequently, her citizens have become lethargic, hopeless, perplexed, poor and hungry. Poor leadership has made several Africans slip into despondency thereby increasing the incidence of suicide on the continent (Mars, Burrows, Hjelmelands, & Gunnell; 2014; Babajani, Salari, Hosseinian-Far, Abdoli, Mosafer, Heidarian, & Mohammadi M; 2024). Some have lost the virtue of hard work and courage having been left disappointed by their governments as they have endured personal and collective losses due to all manner of abuse emanating from their leaders. Despite the reality of their situation, some of their religious leaders have also continued to assure them of hope in exchange for their piety and donations to religious activities (Enenche, 2024). Having underscored the importance of religion to them, the practice of true religion is a vital key to Africa's development. Africans need to acquaint themselves with the ideals of their various faiths especially those which relate to morality and good work ethics. When conscientiously embraced the combination of morality and good work ethics will be an antidote to underdevelopment. This will mean that from one of the tools deployed to keep the people from their aspiration for a better life would the solution to their artificially created problems arise. To demonstrate the potentials religion possesses in advancing development in Africa we beam the light on its social impact and transformative power among the Holy Apostles of Ayétòrò community. This case study unravels the dynamo effect created when religious ethos is correctly interpreted. It speaks to the implications of sound theological interpretations on the continent's economic, scientific and technological advancements. The establishment and administration of Ayétòrò, a community founded by members of an African Independent church movement in the Ìlàjẹ area of Yorùbáland in 1947 - which despite all odds attained economic and technological advancement - presents lessons on how religion can serve as a crucial factor for Africa's development. Founded upon the conviction of their faith, the community despite their obvious geographical challenges rose to attain rapid and massive development. To underscore Ayétòrò's path to development and draw vital lessons for Africa's emancipation, this work relies first on Stanley Barrett's study conducted on Ayétòrò community between 1969 and 1970 and goes further to draw from the authors' ethnographic study of the community between 2016 and 2019.

2. The Evolution of the Holy Apostles and the Growth of Ayétòrò Community

The origin of Ayétòrò Community can be traced to the disagreement between The Holy Apostles (a section of the membership of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society in Ìlàjẹland) with the local authority in their homeland. The conflict was over the traditional practice of twin-infanticide in Ìlàjẹ communities. The Holy Apostles' determination to end this tradition in 1942 set them on collision course with the traditional leaders (Barrett 1977). Before this intractable disagreement, they had been practicing their faith in a peaceful climate since they registered their presence in Ìlàjẹland in 1929 (Adefi, 2020). The call for the abolition of this traditional practice split the aládùrà¹ movement in Ilajeland.

¹ The word aládùrà means a praying people. It is the nomenclature adopted by a category of Christian denominations including the Cherubim and Seraphim Movement which originated in Yorùbáland, Nigeria in 1925. These groups combine some indigenous practices with their Christian faith. They believe in faith healing, the potency of fervent and rigorous prayers and the diverse expressions of the move of the Holy Spirit in their worship experience.

While those who challenged the practice broke ranks with the group, other members continued to show solidarity with the movement.

The puritans argued that the movement would lose its relevance in Ìlàjẹland except they rose to challenge the contentious tradition. They continued preaching vehemently against the practice to the displeasure of the local authority. Some of the prophets were fined and others imprisoned based on charges brought against them by the local authority, yet they stayed adamant on their convictions (Barrett 1977). When the disagreement became intractable, the District Officer of the Colonial Government in Òkitipupa intervened, but no lasting solution was proffered. The situation continued to deteriorate until the Holy Apostles decided to migrate to an independent settlement outside of the control of the local authorities where they could practice their faith without further persecution (Barrett 1977; Adefi, 2020)). Some prominent members of the group being notable princes of Ìlàjẹland identified uninhabited family lands and convinced the group to migrate there. This was possible because land ownership in Ìlàjẹland at the time was held by families (Adefi 2020). The first experiment of this kind of settlement in 1945 was not successful but those which followed from 1947 to 1951 became models for community formation in Ìlàjẹland². Prior to the establishment of the new settlements, the Holy Apostles had denounced their membership of the Cherubim and Seraphim Society.

Given the circumstances of its founding, there was deep disaffection between members of the newly founded Ayétòrò Community and dwellers of other Ìlàjẹ natal settlements. The rift was crystalised by the allegation that Ayétòrò members eloped with women who were recognised as being married in their natal communities under the customary laws (Barrett 1979a). As a result, sanctions were placed on Ayétòrò people such that it became extremely difficult for them to access the basic infrastructure available in their locality. Since movement in Ìlàjẹland was facilitated by canoes paddled on the canals and streams dug by communal efforts, Ayétòrò people were barred from using existing canals and other waterways. Furthermore, Ayétòrò residents were denied access to foods and other necessities from local markets. Some of their women were kidnapped when they attempted to travel out of their community without male escorts. Yet again, their children were denied access to education in the primary schools available in their locality (Barrett 1974). These occurrences forced the community to rethink their survival and take some drastic steps towards self-preservation. Although they had practiced a free economy where individuals and families engaged in economic activities of their choice upon their founding in 1947, one year after the founding of Ayétòrò, the *Oba* introduced communalism (McClelland 1966).

3. Turning Threats and Limitations to Opportunities: Complementing Faith with Hard Work and Team Spirit

Following the existential threat, they faced at the founding of the community, Ayétòrò residents were reputed to have inculcated good work ethics to surmount their challenges. They worked every day of the week and had little time to rest. When asked why they laboured so hard, their answer was that it was only God who had worked enough to deserve rest (Barrett, 1977). They were well motivated and derived a most compelling love for hard work from their faith. Ayétòrò residents had a clear belief in the inextricable link between faith and hard work. In as much as their faith remained intact, their irrevocable commitment to hard work which in turn ensured their attainment to development remained unshaken. For as long as this commitment was sustained, every member of the community went about performing communal tasks from the rising of the sun to its going down. Individuals and groups worked efficiently and effectively while carrying out their duties³. There was always some communal work in the fields, on the board walks or other places in and out of the community. For example, fishing was done by groups of men in boats or fishing trawlers built by the engineers in the community. Women dried fishes in modern ovens manufactured in the community while other tasks like road (board walk) construction, garment making, boat making etc went on efficiently.

² Four theocratic communities were established in Ìlàjẹland between 1947 and 1951. They are notable spiritual power-houses integral to the emergence of over forty of such religious communities which are identifiable today in Ìlàjẹland. These religious communities include the Holy Apostles Community, Ayétòrò (1947), the Cherubim and Seraphim Zion Community, Ugbó-nlá (1948), The Holy Apostles Community, Orí-Òkèl̀wà̀mímó formerly M̀à̀r̀à̀n Apostles (1950) and the Episcopal Cherubim and Seraphim Community, Zion Pẹ̀pẹ̀ (1951). These religious settlements which provide an alternative to the secular social structures generally found in Nigeria were studied in the PhD research conducted by one of the authors titled Religious Communities, Theocratic Settlements and Cultural Identities in the Ilaje Coastline of Southwest Nigeria from 1930. The thesis was examined in the Department of Religious Studies and Submitted to the College of Postgraduate Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria in December 2019.

³ Stanley Barrett discussed the Holy Apostles attitude to work in his book *The Rise and Fall of an African Utopia: A Wealthy Theocracy in Comparative Perspective*. However, this topic was explicitly presented and contextualised by the Council of Elders of Ayétòrò Community in an interview they collectively granted at the King's palace in the community during fieldwork. Some members of the council recall with nostalgia how members of the community undertook their duties when communalism was practiced in the settlement between 1948 and 1970.

To show their collective sense of responsibility even those of the *Oba*'s household including his wives took active part in communal work (Barrett, 1977).

The submission of their individual aspirations for communitarian practice was further demonstrated in some other ways. Using crude implements, they dug out a nine-mile-long canal from their community to connect to the mainland having been barred by the local authorities from using the existing canals and rivers (Barrett 1977). This would see them navigate through some very difficult swamps to avoid *ÒdeÙgbò* and *ÒdeMàhin* the traditional seats of the *Olúgbò* and *Amapétu*, the two paramount rulers and local authorities in *Ìlàjeland*. While the dredging was on course, *Ayétòrò* people were often seen in groups of men and women along the canal digging relentlessly (Adefi 2020). It took about two full years for the work to be completed.

Aside fishing, the second major economic activity *Ayétòrò* engaged in was the provision of the means of transportation along the waterways from Lagos in the west to as far as Cameroon in the east (Barrett 1974). This was a remarkably vast area considering the volume of movements of persons and goods that took place along that corridor. By the means of large boats powered by in-board engines built locally by *Ayétòrò* technicians the community was able to move humans, goods, articles of trade and merchandise among other items through the communities which fall within this space. They assigned capable men and women to run the boat transport services while they made remittances to the community purse regularly. As *Ayétòrò* sought all means for survival and self-preservation and achieved glowing results, they were energized to do more until their results became evident to all. By prudent management of the profit emanating from their fishing enterprise and fleet of boats - shunning corruption, treasury looting and other actions which have kept Africa from development - they ventured into other socio-economic activities to meet local needs. Two very vital instruments which accounted for *Ayétòrò*'s development were their faith (moral uprightness) and their understanding of how hard work complements their faith.

It is important to underscore the imperative of faith to *Ayétòrò* residents. The idea of morality was inseparable from their day-to-day activities and interactions. It was as though each of their actions was consistently being viewed by a set of invisible juries. They couldn't imagine the damage dishonesty, laziness, evil doing and a cover -up for the misdeeds of another which became known to them would do to their chances of immortality. To them, immortality was one of the ultimate rewards they stood to receive for their untainted uprightness as they traversed the earthly realm⁴. While they practiced communalism, there were isolated cases of dishonest acts by a few of the members (Barrett 1977). It was the responsibility of anyone (especially a family member) close enough to those suspected with dishonesty to report them to the authority for investigation which was also done fairly but rigorously. When such isolated cases were thoroughly investigated, social control mechanisms were deployed to punish or chastise culprits. As such, the community enjoyed a significant degree of compliance with the virtue of honesty. Materialism, favouritism and greed were therefore almost non-existent among them⁵. These in turn helped the community plough every bit of its resources into productive activities for its rapid development.

By 1953, the community had become economically stable having begun to enjoy the proceeds of their output in fishing. Having carefully considered the viability of their earnings, *Ayétòrò* leaders decided to install public electricity in the community (Barrett 1977). By this action, *Ayétòrò* became the first community in the entire Ondo region to enjoy public electricity. Not even Akure, the political capital of the region had access to electricity at the time. As it would turn out, the electrification of the community would have great implication for *Ayétòrò*'s subsequent industrialization. As the electricity generator installed in the community began to serve *Ayétòrò*, their fishermen began to launch farther and remained longer in the sea (Adefi 2020). Iced blocks produced from the public electricity supply helped keep the catch fresh and reassured the fishermen that remaining offshore much longer would do no harm to their continuous efforts. But this advancement came with a temporary problem which the community had to mitigate. Every time the generator developed a fault, engineers were brought in from the cosmopolitan city of Lagos. It took days for the engineers to arrive. Apart from their delayed arrival, additional days were required to allow them return to Lagos and to procure spare parts after their inspection of the machine. This made the *Oba* decide to send two men from the community to Lagos to acquire adequate skills needed to keep the generator in good running order and to fix it whenever it developed problems (Barrett 1974). This was another deliberate action contributing further to *Ayétòrò*'s economic advancement.

⁴ This position was enunciated by the members of the *Ayétòrò* Council of Elders in the interview they granted during fieldwork.

⁵ Interview with the Council of Elders, August 2019

This action of technology transfer was to open the door for Ayétòrò's industrialization. The newly trained technicians returned to the community to pioneer the innovations the community's technical department would later be known for. They began to train others and to diversify gradually into fabrication and carpentry⁶. They led the building of passenger boats which the community relied upon for transportation along the several scores of littoral settlements from Lagos to Cameroon. Only the first boat was built with minimal assistance from an expert from the mainland (Barrett 1977). After this initial assistance in taking off, they required no further assistance in building about twenty other boats which they deployed for commercial purposes. When they had achieved considerable expertise overtime, they began taking orders to manufacture large boats for interested persons and corporate bodies. To ensure they met their desire to deploy sophisticated trawlers for their fishing business in the Atlantic Ocean, the community built its first fishing trawler without external assistance. They relied on the experience gained in building large passenger boats while constructing their fishing trawlers (Barrett, 1977).

In advancing their fishing interests, Ayétòrò *Oba* reached out to some development partners to enlist their assistance in expanding the community's capacity to innovate. Barrett's disclosure that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) was contacted to aid the local capacity of the Ayétòrò technicians in building a more sophisticated fishing trawler than the ones the community had independently built was reinforced by Ayétòrò Council of Elders during fieldwork. A German corporation provided scholarship to a member of the community to study technology in Germany in 1959 while the USAID gave the community a grant of a mast for their fishing trawler built in 1970⁷. Although the community was on course for industrialization, these efforts boosted Ayétòrò's capacity and increased their turnover. With the little technical support they received, they went on to build some half dozen fishing trawlers which the community later owned. As a testament to the quality of their fishing launches, the Federal Government of Nigeria showed her readiness to contract the building of launches to the community (Barrett 1977).

Ayétòrò did not only develop her technical capacity. The community went a step further to engage in knowledge transfer. A technical school fully accredited by the Federal government of Nigeria was opened in the community. It had several departments which included carpentry, fabrication, plumbing, building and lots more. The school was reputed to have trained highly skilled technicians thereby bridging the technical competency gap in Nigeria⁸. Ayétòrò Council of Elders reiterated that marine experts trained in Ayétòrò were reputed to have significantly impacted the water transport and fishing industries in Nigeria. Next to the technical school were the kindergarten, primary and secondary schools established by the community. Since every adult member of the community was actively involved in at least one productive department in the village, it was necessary to ensure all children were adequately catered for while their parents were at work. The children were taught basic skills and fed collectively. All the children, including those of the *Oba* were treated equally. When the children attained the age of five or six, they would move from the kindergarten to begin their primary education. While at the primary school and as soon as the leadership of the community considered them old enough to begin apprenticeship, they were assigned to a factory or an activity group to begin to learn the rudiments of such vocation. From this exposure, they began to imbibe the community spirit of hard work and morality. The arrangement made for the school pupils was such that they went to school in the morning and resume at their assigned workshop, factory or other workplace in the evening for apprenticeship.

Aside the conscious efforts at educating their children, the community also gave attention to adult literacy. To bridge the obvious literacy gap of her adult population, arrangements were made for evening classes for men and women who wanted to become literate. Some teachers in the community school were assigned to undertake this task. Ayétòrò's educational policies were suited for their diverse population because they met the needs of the local population. It was designed to mitigate the knowledge deficiencies for each demography of their population while not suffering any decline in their productive hours. Within a brief time, children and adolescents across Ìlajeland began seeking admission to the schools established in the community. It is important to highlight the initial literacy gap in Ayétòrò as the community engaged the assistance of outsiders to read letters addressed to them in their early days (Barrett, 1977). To imagine a community which needed to enlist the services of outsiders to help read letters they received in the early days of its establishment to go ahead to bequeath to her inhabitant's robust education that outsiders now turned

⁶ During field work, Mr. Michael Bankole a member of the carpentry department who worked on the construction of the community's fishing trawlers and their boat ambulance gave his insight on the importance of the technical department to Ayétòrò's economic and technological advancement. Mr. Bankole shed light on the operations of the technical department in general and the carpentry unit in particular

⁷ Mr. Michael Bankole

⁸ During fieldwork, several products of Ayétòrò technical school were encountered in villages and communities in Ìlajeland. Besides, others who worked with personnel trained in the college spoke highly of them as competent engineers and technicians.

around to covet and seek points to the power of vision and determination of a purposeful administration. This transformation was made possible by the decision of the *Oba* to send four members of the community to the Teachers' Training College on the mainland to acquire formal training as teachers. The individuals, upon the completion of their training in the school became the foundational members of the community's educational system (Adefi, 2020).

Ayétòrò's reputation as pace setters in their region extends to their founding of the first secondary school in Ìlàjeland. Though the curriculum was quite rigorous and comprehensive, Ayétòrò residents generally had greater regard for and accorded the students at the technical college more prestige than their counterparts in the secondary school. This is because they valued the very tangible contributions of the technicians to the growth of their economy and the advancement of their society above the seeming theoretical and intangible knowledge - as it appeared to them - acquired at the secondary school at the time (Barrett 1974).

4. Measuring Development in Ayétòrò Community with Modern Indices

Aside the provision of universal basic education and literacy, there are other universally accepted parameters by which developed societies are characterised. These include access to adequate and comprehensive healthcare, good housing facilities, adequate employment opportunities, food security, stable governance and good justice system. The availability of basic infrastructure which include good road networks, electricity, potable water, modern postal/communication facilities among others also constitute distinguishing factors between developed and underdeveloped societies (Spacey, 2018).

On her part, Ayétòrò paid attention to each of these indices for development. Because communities in Ìlàjeland are waterlogged for a larger part of the year, the people are usually forced to build in swamps, creeks and by river and stream banks. Many communities, including Ayétòrò are also located on the bank of the Atlantic Ocean. This characterisation of their geography impacts on their mode of housing, intra and inter community road network and transport systems. For example, canoes are required to commute from house to house in many Ìlàjè communities (Ikuejube 2005 & 2017). The few footpaths available in some villages are waterlogged most of the year. In most cases poorly built board walks were constructed above the pools of water in many natal Ìlàjè communities. In the low-lying villages in Ìlàjeland, houses are built on stilts while roads were non-existent until about 2008 (Onipede 2017). However, in Ayétòrò as early as 1953, solid board walks were already in place. There was also a constant maintenance of the board walks in the community. They continued to improve on its quality until their network of board walks were able to support the first *Oba's* (Ethiopia Peter Ojágbohúnmi, *Ogelóyínbó I, 1947-1966*) car. The car was arguably the first in that perennially wet and waterlogged precinct of the Atlantic Ocean considered unsuitable for vehicular movement. With concerted efforts, Ayétòrò was able to solve the problem of movement within its borders. This in no small measure aided their economic activities. Their ease of doing business was better as less time was spent commuting between their homes and their workplaces. They saved manhour that would have been lost because of difficulties in reaching duty posts. They completely overcame terrains which in extreme cases would have been rendered impassable due to the impact of rains and flood. This in turn made their quality of life and standard of living better than those of their contemporaries in other Ìlàjè communities around them.

On the topic of healthcare, at the time Ayétòrò was founded the healthcare delivery system in Ìlàjeland was abysmally poor. In fact, Ayétòrò and other theocratic communities in the area became popular for their intervention during the several health crises which ravaged the region⁹. The natural decline in the health status of many residents of the area occasioned by accidents, bodily harm from wild animals, exposure to harmful bacteria, viruses and other dangerous pathogens/micro-organisms often met an ill-prepared healthcare system which witnessed no significant improvement decades after Ayétòrò was established. However, Ayétòrò took the health and physical wellbeing of her residents seriously albeit initially using a spiritual approach. Since, by some strange powers Ayétòrò residents survived these health challenges, they popularized the idea of their immortality. Immortality became attractive to Ayétòrò residents and their existence became defined by the belief that they would live forever (Barrett 1977). Though a few people died during the first few years of Ayétòrò, the cause of such deaths was not too difficult for them to explain. They held that those who died had committed sin and that their death was because of their sin (Barrett 1977). The common belief in the community was that any sick person among them was suffering the consequences of their sin and that they will die eventually if they refuse to confess such sin to their prophet. It therefore became a practice for people in the community

⁹ During fieldwork, several individuals encountered in Ayétòrò and other theocratic communities in the area gave vivid pictures of how their parents or themselves migrated to their religious communities in search of solutions to their health crisis. Many of them reported how they were healed miraculously after their encounter with the prophets.

to confess their sins to the prophets to escape death. Another remedy to the imminent death of any sick fellow in Ayétòrò was for the person to refuse to accept the idea that they were sick (Barrett 1974). Such fellow though physically ill would push themselves to laborious tasks by joining their colleagues in some community venture. This was how the community's connection of faith with good work ethics was expanded to accommodate a link between faith and physical health and wellness.

Ayétòrò was the first community in Ìlàjeland to have a dispensary which catered for the basic medical needs of her inhabitants. The opening of a dispensary in Ayétòrò was a parallel development to the community's belief in immortality (Adefi, 2017). Building upon the basic healthcare needs provided by the dispensary, the ambitious dream of the third *Oba* in the early 1970s (C. E. Akinlùwà, *Àbùsàwàrà*, 1966-1993) was to train young doctors from the crop of students educated at the community secondary school in the university and have them return to Ayétòrò to run a decent hospital which would be built and run by the community (Barret 1977). To demonstrate the value the community placed on access to health services, they built a boat ambulance to attend to emergency situations requiring swift evacuation of her members to health facilities on the mainland. This was an indication of the change in the community's perspective to health, healing and wellness. However, their initial position on immortality has, till date, affected their belief and treatment of the dead. The community neither celebrates the event of death nor have marked burial place within its territory (Adefi & Olawoyin, 2024). Burial takes place under the cover of the night and there is no information in the public sphere regarding their burial rites. No one except the few individuals who conduct the burial is permitted to attend the ceremony. (Barrett 1974)



Boat ambulance built by Ayetoro community (Photograph by author with permission)

Another area where Ayétòrò distinguished herself from other communities in Ìlàjeland was in the construction of her housing units and their community layout. Because the natural swampy Ìlàjè terrain made it difficult for houses to be built in strict compliance with physical urban planning principles, house owners were accustomed to adapting to the natural terrain as they built their property in a manner which the available lands permit. However, Ayétòrò made frantic efforts to partially fill the swamps in their community to the extent that it could support modern urban planning regulations. This activity was done without any assistance from outside. They then built shelters on stilts comparable to none in their immediate environment. They exploited forest resources within Ìlàjeland where they took timber and processed them for the building of their homes, board walks, boats and other furniture items.

Although Ayétòrò community was founded for religious freedom, like any society in serious pursuit of development, they were deliberate about actions which led to improvement in their standard of living. They had solid boardwalks which aided their movement within the community. This solved the challenge of poor road infrastructure associated with their natural environment. In addition, they built modern houses for themselves. The quality of building materials used in Ayétòrò differed from what was obtainable in other Ìlàjè villages. While houses in other villages were built using palm ribs for walls and covered with thatch roofs, Ayétòrò used more durable and weather-resistant materials. They had wooden walls finished with a touch of perfection while their windows were of glass. Their homes had well laid plank floors sitting on stable stilts. Their roofs were made of corrugated iron sheets which extended well beyond the walls. A veranda ran across the entire circumference of the building allowing access to the entire outer wall of each building. They built a magnificent palace for their *Oba* comparable to what was found in cities. The palace is a two-

storey architectural masterpiece. It was built in a way that provided access to its roof members. This offered a pleasant panoramic view of the whole community and a good part of the Atlantic Ocean which bordered the community¹⁰.

Findings during fieldwork revealed that Ayétòrò residents regarded investment in their factories and industries more important than building magnificent cathedrals. They prioritised economic and technological advancement above the hysteria of religious activities devoid of devoutness. They committed their energies to creating wealth over empty reliance on faith without equal efforts on transforming their environment. They were practical in solving any challenge which sprung up in the pursuit of their goals. Ayétòrò factories, workshops and other buildings of economic importance were purpose built and well-kept to guarantee their maximum contribution to the growth of their economy. Their carpentry workshop was crucial to any achievement they recorded. Materials used in building their board walks, homes, transport boats and fishing trawlers were all designed, built, and maintained by their team of highly talented carpenters and fabricators. Ayétòrò carpentry factory was by far the most expansive edifice in their community until the second palace was built in 1972. Its size is of little importance when considering the collection of tools, equipment and machines it holds. Despite the importance of the carpentry industry to their prosperity, the community did not restrict investment to this or other selected sectors.

Ayétòrò diversified to other economic activities including investment in local production to meet daily consumption of staple foods, foot wears and clothes. The community built a garment factory and installed ten automatic looms in it (Barrett 1974). They also leveraged on technology to provide clothing to meet local needs. Though they were criticised for concentrating on the production of a particular type of clothing (Khaki), it is important to note that their members were happy to be clad in the clothes. They blocked leakages in their earnings which would have gone towards the procurement of clothing for their members from outside had they decided not to produce their clothes locally. Barrett noted that by early 1969, the tailoring factory had also grown from operating with manual sewing machines. They had advanced and expanded to using twelve electric machines in a bid to scale up production and increase the prospect for export. This policy enabled the community to earn income from outside.

At inception, Ayétòrò shoe factory occupied a small house and operated with manual equipment. By 1961, a purpose-built factory was erected with imported machines. Ayétòrò's decision to open a shoe factory to serve her local population meant that they retained the resources used in procuring the commodity from outside. Although, the products were the simple flip-flop made from rubber, they served the community's economic interest by boosting local financial reserves. Before the advent of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, when the raw materials were readily available, the community sourced for market outside, and as a result, earned income from this economic enterprise (Barrett, 1977). It seems clear that Ayétòrò's economic team led by the first *Oba* Ethiopia PeterỌjágbohùnmi (*Ojelóyínbó 1*, 1947-1966) and other high-ranking men in the community understood the negative consequences of depleting the community's earnings on essential commodities which are needed for daily survival. Thus, by local production of essential commodities for her population, Ayétòrò retained a good portion of her earnings which were channelled into other investments.

Ayétòrò's import substitution policy resulted in the establishment of a bread-making factory in 1969. It was equipped with modern ovens and other baking tools. Manpower training was conducted and the workers were required to produce enough bread for the community. Once this target was met, they began to explore the ready market outside the community to earn some income into the vault. Ayétòrò is also reputed to have opened and ran the first Post Office in the Ọkitipupa region from the mid-1950s. In addition, the community also had an internal telephone system in place while they industrialised. They equally had a satisfactory food security system in place and their per capita income and standard of living was by far superior to any local community in the country during this period (Barrett 1974). Their deliberate attempts at diversification were geared towards self-reliance. Ayétòrò's creativity is epitomized in their theology of linking faith with hard work and sustaining the relationship between the two variables for more than twenty years.

While pursuing her technological advancement, no resident of Ayétòrò was unemployed. Although developed nations take single-digit unemployment rate as a great achievement, Ayétòrò outperformed them by recording a zero-percent unemployment rate as all her members were engaged in one productive activity or the other all year round. Every decision taken to expand productivity in Ayétòrò edged the community towards self-reliance. By seeking solutions to Ayétòrò's challenges, the community had bountiful harvests of results. The aggregation of these results had great

¹⁰ During fieldwork, access to Ayétòrò palace, especially its roof chambers was granted the authors. A beautiful scenery of the village and the Ocean can be captured from the palace rooftop.

implications on Ayétòrò's continuous drive towards prosperity. The commitment to constantly improve on their means of production served as the oil which continued to grease the wheels of development in Ayétòrò. Their faith combined with communalism enabled them to develop rapidly. However, this did not endure beyond a generation (Barrett 1979). Today, one is left to imagine how Ayétòrò would have navigated the process of further expanding the means and options of production beyond what is known about the community if they had persevered a little longer. After twenty years of its establishment, the younger generation in Ayétòrò began clamouring for financial independence. There was also a growing lethargy from charter members who had hitherto submitted to the community's socio-economic policy. The agitation led to distress among members. By 1970, the third *Oba*, C. E. Akinlùwà (*Àbùsàwàrà, Ogelóyínbó 1966-1993*) was left with no option than to open the economy for private ownership of property and a free economy (Barrett 1977).

To forestall the sudden redundancy of the industrial assets of the community, the *Oba* devised a means of motivating members to retain their positions in the factories, workshops and business sites by remunerating individuals who continued to keep them running. For example, as against the practice of yielding their catch to the women assigned to process the fishes in the community's modern ovens without a fee, the fishermen were paid for their catch as the women who processed the fishes and sold them got rewarded for their labour. In same vein, every individual who took part in one economic activity or the other in the interest of the community got a financial reward. As this new economic system swept through Ayétòrò, her inhabitants began concentrating more on what would accrue to them in exchange for their time and efforts in the line of duty. The spirit of ownership of the community assets ingrained in her charter members began to wane. Communalism sank while capitalism replaced the old order. The meticulous maintenance of these assets by members suffered serious setbacks while some members, especially those with proven technical competence preferred to take up higher paying jobs outside the community. It did not take long for the gradual decay of the assets to translate into significant dilapidation and finally a total collapse.

5. Conclusion

Ayétòrò was an example of a flourishing small town surrounded by numerous abysmally dysfunctional and underdeveloped communities. The community thrived on the ideology of faith, vision and hard work. Efforts were made by the leaders as well as the followers towards building it and bequeathing to themselves a viable economy. It is no surprise that its development was unprecedented. Communities which surrounded her were generally underdeveloped though situated amid favourable climate, arable land or aquatic resources and other latent resources. Like Ayétòrò's neighbours, most African nations continue to experience underdevelopment owing to several factors previously highlighted. Their self-inflicted poverty is driven by corruption, nepotism, lack of patriotism, dishonesty, treasury looting etc. Sadly, these realities are at variance with the tenets of the faiths most Africans subscribe to. They profess to be religious but their religiosity has not transformed the character of the larger fraction of Africans. Africa's notion of religiosity is one of its greatest obstacles to industrialisation. The contradiction lies in the fact that the faiths (African Traditional Religions, Islam and Christianity) pervasive among Africans are embedded with clear admonitions and instructions that if followed would ultimately lead African nations on the path of development and industrialization as seen in Ayétòrò. As such, Ayétòrò is not an exception. Rather, it is a clear example of how the adoption and the strict adherence to the tenets of the faith the community elected to follow combined with hard work, high moral values and tenacity of purpose assisted them in navigating their path from underdevelopment to industrialisation and prosperity. Religion is therefore not the bane of Africa's development. It is the misapplication of it and the disregard for what it truly prescribes while claiming to be under its grip that has consigned most African countries to underdevelopment.

Though the plight of Ayétòrò is no longer different from those of her neighbours and indeed most other African nations, it still has the relics of a once economically and technologically viable settlement. Like her neighbours, it has suffered immense decline physically as it is currently unable to boast of its once well-talked-about prosperity. About half of the community is currently under the Atlantic Ocean while the other half is constantly under the siege of the Ocean. Several times each year the Ocean submerges what remains of the village while the people remain helpless with government's neglect of their situation. The community still identifies as a theocratic settlement although it has undergone different stages in its years of existence. It has had a fair share of challenges that bedevil all societies including struggle for political control and power but has continued to forge ahead. African nations with claims of allegiance to religious tradition(s) of their choice have a lot of lessons to learn from Ayétòrò. They need to submit to the admonitions of their faith and follow the prescribed injunctions on issues of honesty, loyalty, contentment, dutifulness, love for humanity and become creative in their thoughts and actions. More than ever before, African nations need to demonstrate their

passion for development and prove their commitment to economic, scientific and technological advancement. Only then would the hope of Africa's emancipation from underdevelopment become realised. With their unrelenting resolve, the technological advancement and industrialization of the continent will be achieved while a new regime of prosperity and development would be ushered into the most underdeveloped continent of the world.

Conflict of Interest: None declared.

Ethical Approval: Not applicable.

Funding: None.

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