

Ile-Ife: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Throes of Transformation

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Abstract: Every city has its own history which expresses an identity, a symbol and an image. The ancient city of Ile-Ife, in south-western Nigeria, presents several paradoxes. Till date, its significance vis-à-vis the totality of the culture of the Yoruba race, continues to conflict with many of the requirements of a modernizing city. The traditional city centre is atypical in its development as, rather than epitomizing urban city-centre rejuvenation, it has steadily ceded commercializing activities to another part of the town. Also, the recent internecine war between Ifes and neighbouring Modakekes has created environmental scarification, schisms in physical alignments and influenced aberrations in both the process and actual fabric of the city's urbanization. Three main foci have been identified as virile urbanizing-activity zones: the city centre, the Sabo-Mayfair commercial spine and the Obafemi Awolowo University campus. These areas are critiqued in the light of their history, peculiarities and 're-sourcing' potentials.

Keywords: Ile-Ife city centre; traditional towns; city-centre rejuvenation; modernizing city; urbanization processes; urbanizing activity-zones; environmental scarification.

INTRODUCTION

Worldwide, various models have been identified to typify developmental patterns in history for the city. Among the Yoruba (according to an authority like Johnson (2001)), a typical traditional town developed along major circulation arteries, converging on (or radiating from) the *oba's* palace, which invariably had both the main market and community square contiguous to it. Cosmological considerations also demanded that the major routes had an orientation to the palace such that they coincided with the cardinal points, with the east-facing one associated with *Sango*, the west one, *Esu*, the one to the north, *Obatala*, and the southward one, *Ogun* (Obateru 2006:223) – all local deities. In many ways, the traditional Ile-Ife town was typical, as it supported this model and was poised to develop conventionally. However, several factors – historical and incidental – have inter-played to significantly condition the urbanizing-modernizing process; these have produced modifiers that have tended to uniquely affect the evolution of this regional secondary city.

The paper discusses the gradual transformation that is taking Ile-Ife from being a regional cultural centre, through a secondary-urban-centre status, to a city displaying the hallmarks of progressive urbanization and which, in recent times, has been rapidly modernizing. The peculiarities of the strong cultural pull the city is constantly subjected to, and the fact of the strategic positioning of the Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) being a guarantee of the needed resources for maintaining the modernizing momentum, produce an unusual synergy that the paper examines.

A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

The origins of the Ifes are lost in antiquity. According to Biobaku (1955:21), the town was probably founded between the 7th and 10th centuries AD; Jeffrey (1958:21-23) opines that it had become a flourishing civilization by the 11th Century. Carbon-dating appears to endorse these views, as it establishes that Ife "was a settlement of substantial size between the 9th and 12th centuries" (Willett 1971:367). Without prejudice to the issue of dating, controversy surrounds the actual founding of the town, as the two popular viewpoints are diametrically opposed: one school of thought recognizes the existence of settlements before the rise to prominence of Oduduwa, the legendary warrior and founding father of the Yoruba; the other, a creation myth, is anchored on viewing

Oduduwa as the progenitor of the whole human race (Johnson 2001:15; Obateru 2006:110), sent by his father *Olodumare* (the Creator God), to a hitherto formless earth. Ile-Ife was where he started carrying out the mandate to establish settlements.

The traditional Ife city, schematically, could be described as a wheel, with the *oba's* palace as the hub, from which roads radiated like spokes, and in relation to which the en-framing town wall represented the rim (Krapf-Askari 1969:3; Obateru 2006:164). Still in conformity with classical morphology, the Ife palace frontage also accommodated a community square. [One of the original concepts for this settlement formation, as explained by Johnson (2001:90-91), centres on incidental evolution based on a location servicing a popular demand for transit refreshment; in time, this could grow to become a major trading outpost, consequent upon which the leading citizen became the *baale* (or *oloja* – 'custodian of the market'), with a house built for him by communal effort, overlooking the market. As such, the classical Yoruba town was invariably characterized by the principal market being centrally-located, and in front of the paramount ruler's house – reminiscent of classical Hellenic planning (Wycherly 1967:7) and Middle-Eastern practices (Ismail 1972:109)].

As the traditional capital of Yoruba-land, during the Golden Age of its evolution (i.e. 1086-1793), Ile-Ife teemed with religious, civil and military leaders (the nobles) and "an assemblage of artisans and skilled craftsmen" (Obateru 2006:27). At the peak of this period, Obateru (2006:141) estimates that the city had a population of between 64,000 and 94,000. The relatively large population (a conventional index for urban ratings) was another characteristic of Yoruba settlements, as, throughout their history, they have tended to favour large social aggregations. (Obateru puts the figure for Old Oyo, during the same period, at between 200,000 and 826,000).

Histo-culturally, Ife's prominence hinges on two significant phenomena: the first, already mentioned, is that for the Yoruba (at home and in the diaspora) it symbolizes the genesis of the totality of their ethnicity. (The town is popularly referred to as *orisun* – the source of – Yoruba). As such – particularly in matters of traditional belief systems and mode of worship – the town is a reference-cum-rallying-point. Secondly, with art historians and archaeologists (like Frobenius and Willett) spotlighting the ancient city's exquisite artworks (in bronze and terracotta), the potential for authentic ethnological studies of Yoruba culture – and by extension, Negro culture – has heightened the town's socio-cultural value.

EARLY MODIFYING INFLUENCES

Colonial

As with the rest of the country, the singular incident that had the greatest long-term impact on transforming the ancient city was the advent of colonial administration. Prior to this – and as early as the 16th Century – Ife began to wane in political power (Willett 1971:34; Eades 1980:6); this decline was significantly exacerbated by the Yoruba wars (and in particular, Ife's own ravaging wars of the 19th Century). The town was rebuilt in the early 20th Century (Osasona & Hyland 2006:43). The physical presence of a colonial administrator (a District Officer, DO) became felt only in the 1940's; prior to this, the town had been administered indirectly, initially from Lagos, and later from Ibadan (Osasona 2001:78-79).

By 1930, the British colonial influence was well underway. In 1922, the construction of *Ile Nla* (a city hall) was completed. This facilitated the DO's interactions with representatives of the local populace; previous similar interactions had taken place either in the main courtyard within the palace complex, or in the Enuwa Square, in front of it (Osasona 2001:80). The political impact of the colonial presence consisted mainly in their helping the Ifes to rout their enemies. Economically, during the first thirty years of Aderemi's fifty-year reign (i.e. from 1930-'60), the town experienced noticeable transformation: it moved from being essentially a pre-industrial society, to one that contributed significantly to national trade to sustain industrialization in Britain. Cocoa became the main cash crop, but palm-oil and cotton were also produced in commercial quantities. European trading franchises (e.g. John Holt and United Africa Company) had local representation, trading their imported goods for the raw materials – and thus breaking the monopoly of the *parakoyi* and *ipariya* who had hitherto controlled the town's trade. To underpin these trading activities, motorable roads (from Lagos, through Ibadan) and warehouses, were constructed (Osasona *et al.* 2006:44-45). Missionaries were not left out in the colonial intervention, as through the agency of hospitals, schools and spiritual outreaches, Christianity was introduced to eventually rival the traditional religious practices. Obvious physical legacies of the colonial occupation were infrastructure and buildings (in the spirit of pluralism), servicing these administrative, commercial, religious and residential activities.

Post-Colonial policies and trends

Nigeria gained independence in 1960. On the eve of independence (and in keeping with the colonial policy of taking local education up to the tertiary level (Akinsemoyin & Vaughan-Richards 1977:56)), the first such institution (the University College, Ibadan) was established; the other post-secondary institutions came into existence under nationalist regimes, and reflected a regional political zoning. In 1962, four years after the one in Ibadan, the University of Ife (now Obafemi Awolowo University) was created. However, it was not until 1967 that the school moved to its present location (as it had originally been also located within Ibadan – then Africa's second-largest city). The founding fathers of the Ife university had great foresight as, apart from annexing a colossal expanse of land, they enlisted professionals in drawing up a master-plan for the institution which has been largely adhered to, till date.

Under colonial rule, the core of Ile-Ife continued to develop along classical lines: the palace, community square and major market, *oja oba* (the 'king's market') continued to be central to the lives of the people; the cultural axis starting at the palace and ending at the *Ogun* shrine, maintained its religio-social prominence, and the town continued to grow essentially along the sectors defined by the major radial roads; the inter-urban roads constructed by the colonialists (from Ibadan to Ife and from Ife to Ilesa, Ondo, Akure, etc.), initially did not attract development. Residential buildings in the core (the abode of the city's political and military classes, ranked outward from the palace to commoners on the periphery) benefited by the introduction of the new, imported, building materials (featuring metal roofing sheets and cement). Apart from the *Ile Nla* ('big house'), the major direct colonial construction in the city centre was the museum, built in 1954.

By 1992, obvious and important strides had been made towards the urbanization of Ile-Ife. The university was well-established, with its central core (comprising the academic, administrative and students' residential areas) virtually fully developed. Even back then, it had become obvious that the town was beginning to urbanize with significant development gravitating towards off-centre nodes. The city centre held tenaciously to its cultural relevance, with the *Olojo* (Ogun) Festival being the high-point of the Ifes' annual cycle of traditional religious rituals. For this festival in particular, the cultural axis taking its source from the palace was extra-significant, as the procession that culminated in the actual sacrificial rites at the Ogun Shrine, followed that path. (As recent as this year, the town still witnessed an influx of tourists to this festival from all over the globe – particularly diaspora Yoruba from as far as Cuba and Brazil). The Museum was well-entrenched, with a pottery annex at the Yemoo grove, less than two kilometres away from the palace. Apart from innovations within the palace complex, the museum and a few public buildings (namely the General Post Office, the Local Government Council office, two Magistrate Courts and the Telephone Exchange office), the city centre still displayed typical features of ageing traditional Yoruba settlements: the bulk of the dwellings were still in earth (though many had been plastered over with cement-render), with a sizeable number dilapidated and dilapidating; newer buildings (using the colonially-facilitated materials and stylistic expressions) became evidenced progressively farther away from the core; these were mostly the proud possessions of the town's *nouveau riche* – those who had become affluent as a result of the erstwhile booming cocoa trade and other commercial ventures, and who were out to make a social statement; the traditional nobility were also experimenting with the new architecture and moving out of the core, reserving their traditional houses for more symbolic extended-family concourses.

Characteristically, land in the inner core was scarce. However, rather than be minimally available at a premium (like is the case, worldwide), owing to the heavy, all-pervading old-world aura and strong cultural ethos, significant commercial or prestigious projects avoided the city core; as such, no demand appeared to be tasking its morphology. (From the viewpoint of the highly-urbanized West, this may be difficult to understand as, increasingly, the trend is to rejuvenate historical city centres by coaxing them to life with infusions of contemporary life. However, given the fact of the not-too-distant experience of colonization, where the traditional social order and lifestyle had been made to appear backward, the local populace was generally in favour of casting as much of their roots behind them, as they could do without; certainly, the built environment was an obvious stage on which to display new sensitivities and orientations). Rather, minimal space-use transformations were taking place: in consonance with the Yoruba living-and-trading lifestyle, home-based production/ retail enterprises resulted in extensions to and conversions of dwelling frontages. More serious commercial activities (i.e. those that could thrive only on greater and more regular turn-over) sought a less-crowded, more readily-accessible part of the town. Progressively, the inter-urban road running through the town and linking it from Ibadan to Ilesa (and on to Akure and beyond), became the favoured location for commercial activities. In particular, the section between Mayfair and Sabo (the Hausa migrant settlement), relating with an angular turn-off halfway down, has defined a wedge of intense commercial activities for the modernizing Ile-Ife.

The recent Ife-Modakeke wars

The history of the Yoruba is replete with internecine wars between various tribes, usually predicated upon appropriation of scarce resources (particularly land for settlement or expansion) or defaulting on tribute (by an already-subjugated people). The initial conflicts between the Ifes and Modakekes go back nearly two hundred years. Since a detailed account of the underlying issues is outside the scope of this work, suffice it to say that the Modakekes were refugees from the war-ravaged Old Oyo Empire, who sought political asylum in the ancient city of Ile-Ife and environs. The Ifes were very accommodating, giving the refugees farm land and employing many of them as labourers on Ife farms. Several of these historical conflicts between the two neighbours, actually saw the Ifes temporarily displaced from their ancestral lands; the Modakekes too, were routed and sent packing once – but conditionally allowed back in 1922 (Olaniyan 1992:268-270; Osasona *et al.* 2006:38, 44).

The most recent clash between the Modakekes and Ifes in contemporary times took place between 1999 and 2001. Though not a conventional modern war, it left the two settlements devastated – physically and psychologically. (In the ten years preceding, there had been at least two clashes between the two communities. These had been relatively minor skirmishes, taking place at the inter-face of the two settlements and affecting, essentially, indigenes from both sides located across the tribal borders, respectively). However, during the last confrontation, the Modakekes penetrated deep into Ife territory (and vice versa) and even non-indigenes were not spared. Properties were wantonly destroyed and many lives lost. The incursion into Ife over-ran conventional limits, and buildings (filling stations, schools, wholesale / retail outlets, etc) right on the inter-urban artery from Ibadan to Ilesa, were razed to the ground.

Apart from psychological wounds which are yet to heal, the upheaval has left noticeable visual blighting of the environment. Until last year, most of the damaged buildings dotting the prominent landscape of a major highway in the town, were left totally abandoned – a silent (but nonetheless, eloquent) reminder of the tragedy that recently befell the town.

URBANIZATION IN ILE-IFE CITY

Elements of urbanization

Based on various researches, universally accepted indices have been identified for rating a settlement 'urban', or for acknowledging that it is in the process of 'urbanizing'. The most basic (and probably most controversial, as acceptable actual figures differ) is the parameter of numbers. Sjoberg explains that (even) a pre-industrial city is "a community of substantial size and population density that shelters a variety of non-agricultural specialists, including a literate elite" (1965:55-56). Other definitions (e.g. that of Childe (1950:9-16)) add the dimension of monumental public buildings, social stratification and artistic expression. More contemporary definitions emphasize the issue of modern facilities and infrastructure, and a well-developed service-delivery system.

In its classical heyday, Ife was credited with a population size of well over 60,000; in 1963, the estimate was 130,050 (Encyclopedia Americana 1980); in 1991, it was 261,900 (New Encyclopaedia Britannica 1992); a 1995 estimate put the figure at 289,500 (Microsoft Encarta 2007), and the 2006 census figure was 644,373 (Encyclopaedia Britannica Online 2009) – clear evidence that the city is experiencing demographic growth. Traditionally, Ife had various guilds of skilled craftsmen (specializing in such crafts as bronze-casting, blacksmithing, pottery and weaving, among others) – so even in its classical stage, there was evidence of 'non-agricultural specialists'. Ife's naturalistic bronze heads surely rate among some of the world's finest 'artistic expressions'. Presently, even though most of these traditional crafts have waned (some have actually died out), other service-oriented specializations have replaced them. Social stratification among the Ifes was neither elaborate nor rigid (as with the caste system in Indian culture); nonetheless, hierarchy within the society was maintained (within the family, among the nobles, and between them and commoners), and slavery (i.e. the use of prisoners-of-war as menials), was common. As far as the issue of 'monumental public buildings' goes, when the German archaeologist Leo Frobenius visited the city in 1910, he described the palace complex as "an enchanted castle", and likened the totality of his experience to a visit to the "far-famed and mysterious Atlantis" (Olomola 1992:54). Obateru (2006:17-18) compares the studding and carvings on the Oranyan obelisk (a symbolic element in Ife iconography) with the ancient 'Maya glyph' from Childe's submissions; he concludes that given their similarity in expression and interpretation, ancient Ife had 'writing'. So, summing up the evidence on the various elements, even in antiquity, Ile-Ife already had an urban pre-disposition.

More contemporarily, the city has experienced the same social amenities and modern infrastructure to be found in other, clearly urbanized parts of the world. Undoubtedly, in addition to international trading opportunities,

colonization paved the way for other developments: inter-urban roads were constructed (the first, connecting Ife with Ibadan, was opened in 1919); on completion of the Mokuro Dam in 1935, pipe-borne water became available in the town – the same year electricity was locally commissioned; civic structures were erected (the first being *Ile Nla*, in 1922) and institutional buildings (featuring schools, churches and hospital) were facilitated.

‘Urbanizing nodes’

As previously-mentioned, there are three clearly-distinguishable locations where noticeable urbanizing development is taking place in Ile-Ife, each with its own unique characteristics: the first, the OAU campus; the second, the Mayfair-Sabo commercial spine; the third, the inner core. Though, in physical terms, each area is distinct, they are inter-dependent and spontaneously inter-relate, producing a synergy that is cumulatively transforming the physical, social and economic fabric of the whole town. The following is an analysis of these ‘nodes’.



FIGURE 1: Obafemi Awolowo University ‘motion ground’ – the piazza where professional photographers ply their trade. In the background is the university’s 9-storey secretariat building.

Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU)

The OAU campus epitomizes the best traditions in modern physical planning and architecture, in the West Africa region. With a master-plan and architectural designs produced by the bi-national consortium of Egbor-AMY and construction of the core area executed by Solel Boneh Ltd. (all leading lights in their respective fields at the time), the campus portrays good infrastructure and facilities planning and management, and general foresight. Architecturally, prototypes in the spirit of early modernism, tropicalized modernism, metaphor and other shades of post-modernism, abound. All roads (servicing the academic and administrative core area, students’ halls of residence and staff quarters) are tarred; the whole campus is linked to the electrical grid (in addition to having its own independent power-generating plant); the Opa Dam is a local expedient for generating potable water to all nooks and crannies of the campus.

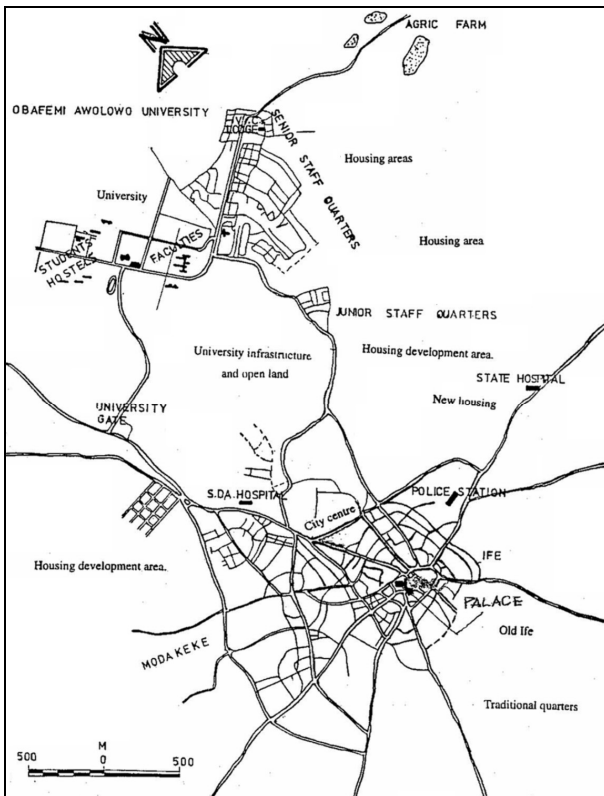


FIGURE 2: Part of Ile-Ife, showing the University campus and Modakeke area. Source: OAU Physical Planning & Development Unit (with authors’ modifications).

In its daily operations, the OAU campus is a microcosm of the typical lifestyle of any highly-urbanized place on the globe. The nearly 30,000-member community is linked by internet to the rest of the world. State-of-the-art techniques and facilities are employed in the training of the almost 25,000 students, 70% of whom are resident on campus. (Even though the university was planned to cater for a maximum of 15,000 students, the foresight of the founding fathers – and the professionalism of the consultants – has made it quite convenient for expansion to occur, to accommodate the present realities). Telephony (with the GSM available for about ten years now) and other sophisticated forms of communication are routinely engaged, and the university is reputed to be Nigeria’s leading ICT higher institution. One of the high points of OAU’s pride of place is the well thought-out (and maintained) landscaping, expressed in both hard and soft forms. The university community is highly sophisticated, and is the largest cosmopolitan aggregation (both in outlook and consumption tastes) in Ile-Ife. As such, there can be no doubt about the class of physical and social environments the Obafemi Awolowo community typifies (see Figures 1 and 2).

Commercial Activity / Social Amenity	1993 (Number available)	2009 (Number available)
Clothing / footwear retail	12	21
Household furnishing / furniture	16	23
Equipment / vehicle parts	17	21
Patent medicine	10	15
Crafts / blacksmithing	2 / 2	4 / -
Building materials	17	25
Provisions / foodstuffs	20	53
Bookshop / reprographic services	4 / 2	5 / 12
Pub / fast-foods	12	18/2
Cosmetics / jewellery	9	14
Textiles / sewing services	8	16
Banks	4	9
Hospital / clinic	2	1
Filling station	7	10
Church / mosque / shrine	4 / 1 / 1	7 / 1 / 1
Shopping mall / events centre	1 / -	2 / 1
Optometric services	4	2
Schools	6	5

TABLE 1: Major commercial activities and social amenities along the Mayfair-Sabo commercial spine of the town. Source: Ogunshakin's 1993 field survey and the authors' current (tentative) survey.

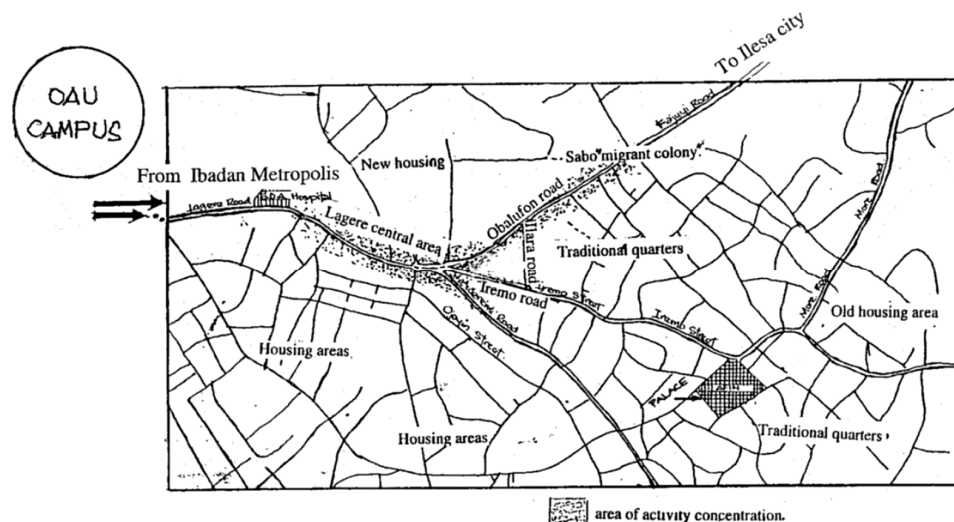


FIGURE 3: Mayfair-Sabo commercial spine. The drawing shows the Lagere-Obalufon section where there is the highest concentration of commercial activities



FIGURE 4: Lagere. Private property adjoining a filling station, razed during the local war. Recently acquired by a furniture company, the premises are gradually coming back to life.

Mayfair-Sabo commercial spine

This zone is a 3-kilometre stretch along the Ibadan-Ilesa inter-urban road that passes through the centre of the town. By 1993 it was already clear that Lagere (an area midway down this section) had taken on the distinct character of being the town's commercial nerve-centre; what businesses had fitfully been practised closer to the traditional core, had gradually migrated to this area for vibrancy.

Today, not only has this been further entrenched, but commercial activities have gradually spread, ribbon-like, along this axis: forward to Sabo (and beyond), towards the Ilesa end; backwards to Mayfair (towards the OAU campus), in the direction of Ibadan (see Figure 3). Apart from small-scale retailing, the area boasts big-time investments (like banking and petroleum franchises), and prestigious church buildings and schools. Table 1 sums up the situation in 1993 and presently. Sadly, it is this same prominent axis of development that has always been most vulnerable during the local internecine wars! (The diminishing figures of some amenities in 2009, is a testimony to some businesses or services re-locating from the line of fire). See Figure 4 for one of such properties destroyed at Lagere, during the 1999-2001 confrontation.

The Inner City core

This area is essentially the traditional heart of the city, comprising the *Ooni's* palace and other developments within roughly, a kilometre of it. In its admixture of strictly traditional (cob or adobe) and vernacular buildings, the area is typical of most modernizing Yoruba city centres. However, it is insightful to discover that, rather than increase the local content of 'urbanizing presence', many of the initial civic buildings, located there in the wake of colonization, have been re-located: by 2000, the law-courts and Local Government office had been moved to the outskirts, on the highway to Ibadan; the telephone exchange office moved to the Mayfair area, and the Electoral Commission office had been transferred to Osogbo, the State capital (Osasona *et al.* 2006:80-81). Only the palace grounds and the museum retain their pride of place; even *Ile Nla* lost its prominence to a City Hall completed in 1990. In this regard, Ife's traditional centre is *not* typical. Nevertheless, this is not to say the area is dead; on the contrary.

The area's vibrancy stems from the cardinal nature of its cultural position, as it is still the rallying point for all ethnically-symbolic ceremonies in the town – particularly those that have a strong tourist attraction. As such, a lot of revenue locally accrues annually from tourism. In the early 1990's, Enuwa Square was re-modelled; the triangular communal meeting area was transformed into a park, with the presence of a full-size statue of Oduduwa dominating the landscape. The unpretentious temporary mosque that used to be in the Square was demolished and replaced with an imposing edifice – the Central Mosque (Osasona 2001:82; Osasona *et al.* 2006:80-81, 104); even the *Ogun* Shrine that used to be just a symbolic tree (at the foot of which the rituals were performed), has been integrated in a refined way into the modern City Hall complex. The palace grounds and museum have not been left out: modifications and new construction (particularly of modernist structures) have taken place, and periodic face-lifts have taken place.

Socio-economic symbiosis

As with any other human aggregation, these various parts of the town are mutually dependent: the OAU campus constitutes a magnet for much of the town's labour force (for administrative, teaching, commercial and other services); the Mayfair-Sabo spine provides goods and services covering a wide enough spectrum to make the town virtually self-reliant, while the inner city ensures that the cultural relevance (and overall significance) of Ile-Ife is sustained.

RESOURCE/ (RE)SOURCING POTENTIALS

Despite the relatively slow pace of overall urbanization in Ile-Ife, the city has the needed wherewithal to continue to modernize until urbanism is uniformly manifest in its entire morphology. Several phenomena have tended to provide the enabling conditions to facilitate this, several of which are critiqued here.

Relative local peace and stability

Before the last outbreak of hostilities in 1999, Ife and its environs had experienced minor upheavals at roughly 4- to 5-year intervals; it has been more than 8 years since the last one died down – implying an increasing sense of peace and stability within the town and environs. Tensions are easing, and people are beginning to let down their hair, metaphorically-speaking. Apart from a much-needed psychological sense of well-being, this has translated in physical terms to rehabilitating many of the damaged properties, and new investments in urban-grade properties, as indigenes and non-indigenes alike increasingly view the terrain as socially and economically-viable and conducive.

Government banking consolidation

In 2006, the Federal government began to implement a new policy of consolidation in the banking sector. Prior to that, there had been over 150 banks in the country, the vast majority of them 'mushroom' banks (or family banks, as the government dubbed them). The initiative forced mergers, and resulted in the evolution of 24 highly viable mega-banks, some now with competitive presence in hitherto unexplored international banking arenas (e.g. Zenith Bank, Guaranty Trust Bank, Eco Bank and First Bank). The implication of the above on the life landscape – predicated on the relative political stability the town is enjoying – has been an apparent scramble by the new-look banks to register local presence, both within the commercial Lagere zone and on the OAU campus. This has generated a highly interesting competition in building in the most avant-garde expressions of the bank typology, as each organization has striven to outdo the others in making statements to impress, and to generally convince prospect customers.

OAU as 'Resource' and for 'Re-sourcing'

The university is Ile-Ife's greatest 're-sourcing' asset and resource. With its significant population size, the campus is the *raison d'être* for much of the urbanization the town has witnessed in the last 25 years. In physical terms, it is an oasis of highly-urbanized architectural expressions [including a nine-floor secretariat (Figure 1), a 4,000-capacity amphitheatre complex and modern lecture and sports facilities]; in social terms, it is a dense concentration of elite human capital.

Academic staff of OAU represents some of the country's finest brains in the various fields; in particular, the university has made landmark achievements in Medicine, Technology and the Arts. Apart from research that is generally moving the frontiers of knowledge forward, nationally, the 'town-and-gown' orientation of the university has produced several service-learning initiatives that have directly and positively impacted the local environment. For example, the first author has been involved in upgrading several of the town's heritage buildings, in conjunction with postgraduate students of the Department of Architecture; another initiative, spearheaded by faculty in the Social Sciences, has resulted in proposals for privy toilets and a clinic in the main market. The Obafemi Awolowo University Teaching Hospitals Complex (OAUTHC) is perhaps the interface between the university and the host community demonstrating the greatest contribution of academia in entrenching and generally facilitating the urbanization process of Ile-Ife. The hospital serves as the arena for practical demonstration of medical theories taught in the classroom, and has been a most effective tool in combating diseases associated with pre-industrial societies and more rural communities but which, unfortunately, still manifest. OAUTHC has several times caught the eye of the international press, for vital-organ transplants and the separation of conjoined twins, and has become a national referral medical centre for these sophisticated surgeries.

Administrative staff of the university in the upper echelon, compare favourably with the high-cadre civil servants of government public service, and CEO's of corporate concerns in regular primary regional urban centres. Some of these contribute to the life of the larger city, by serving on advisory boards of schools and neighbourhood associations. With the quality of their enlightened input to decision-making, the city has informal access to both intellectual and managerial competencies – which is aiding (slowly but surely) the modernizing process. The contributions of OAU students to the urbanization of Ile-Ife cannot be overlooked; in their overwhelming numbers, they are a force to be reckoned with. The OAU master-plan has had to be adjusted slightly, to cater for the explosion in student population. This has been such that the original integrity of the scheme was not compromised. It has necessitated the formulation of enabling policies [such as the PPP (Public- Private Partnership), which in turn spawned the BOT (Build, Operate and Transfer) schemes] that have made it possible for new housing – essentially still on university land – to be embarked upon. Even outside the intervention of the university authorities, students' housing has become a very viable economic venture for local private investors. Economically, OAU students wield the greatest purchasing power in town; as proof of this, whenever students are not around (either during routine vacations, or in the wake of strikes and emergency closures) the business life of the city is essentially comatose.

CONCLUSION

The paper has reviewed the historical significance of Ile-Ife. As such, it has shown its centrality to Yoruba ethnology, and has attempted to establish the fact that the city has been urbanizing – i.e. been consistently in the throes of modernizing transformations – since antiquity. Three main nodes were identified as being the centres facilitating the urbanization process (each contributing in its each unique way), with the Obafemi Awolowo University being the node that most encapsulates the essentials of both the process and the results. From all indications, a synergy has been established that appears sustainable enough to guarantee Ile-Ife's continued journey towards modernization – all things being equal; a major variable in the equation is the

relatively volatile political atmosphere. The OAU community – though not alone in this drive – has been playing the most significant role in maintaining the tempo of the town's urbanization. With the relatively long spell of political stability being enjoyed currently, increasingly, the academic community is engaging in individual property-development (for residence and commerce), which is further translating into obvious and qualitative physical upgrading of the whole town. Barring any further hostilities, the city appears poised to continue to evolve its own unique brand of a 21st century metropolis, where the core remains culturally symbolic and vibrant, supported by other parts that supply the globally accepted expression, logic and glitz of such developments.

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