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Ekiti Parapo War: A Historical Trajectory



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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to examine the historical factors that led to the war between the Ekiti and the Ibadan people who are all of Yoruba extraction in Southwestern Nigeria. The paper discusses the course and the process through which the war was fought; it also brought out the consequences of the war as it affects the Ekiti People and the entire people of southwestern Nigeria.

Methodology: Being a historical study, the research methodology adopted was that of historical enquiry into the past. Primary sources of data consulted included archival materials such as correspondences, minutes of meeting and annual report of colonial government. While secondary data were sourced from theses, journal articles, books and other publications from the internet.

Findings: The study revealed that it was the war that solidified the cultural unity and homogeneity of Ekiti people of Southwestern Nigeria. In fact, Olomola had described this period as “the most celebrated instance of the application of ‘ethnic’ solidarity among Ekiti communities.”¹

Unique Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice: Knowledge acquired from this study would be able to make readers gain specific knowledge on the factors that led to the war between the Ekiti and the Ibadan imperialists who are both of Yoruba extraction of Southwestern Nigeria in the 19th Century. One unique point included in this study was the resilience and doggedness with which the Ekiti and her allies fought and sustained the tempo of the liberation war for the long period it lasted before the British intervention finally brought the war to a conclusive end. Therefore, peace advocates, policy makers, governments both at the national and international levels should draw from the collective memories of the war to strengthen cultural identity and rekindle national consciousness in building a better and more formidable nation.

Keywords: *Ekiti-Parapo, Yoruba, Southwestern Nigeria, War, Historical Trajectory*

¹ Isola Olomola, *Ekiti Parapo Aspirations since Ekiti Parapo Aspiration since 1890*, Ile-Ife, Ankilad Ventures Nigeria Limited, 2005, 42.

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Before 1878, each kingdom and city state in Ekiti had maintained its own corporate existence, managed its own affairs in peace and in times of war, according to the discretion and abilities of its leaders without much interference from outside (Olomola, 2005). Prior to the Ekitiparapo war, there had been pockets of internecine wars between and among the Ekitis. This period however coincided with the period when the Ilorin army launched attacks on Oyo Empire. As the Ekitis attacked one another, they sought military assistance from Ilorin and the Ibadan (Fadipe, 2012). One party would appeal to Ilorin while the other would appeal to Ibadan. They eventually became tributary states to those who assisted them. In this way, it has been claimed that almost all the Ekiti became tributary to Ibadan (Johnson, 1969).

Consequent upon Ibadan Imperialism and the attendant highhandedness of its officials popularly called *Ajeles* which represented the Ibadan political authority in Ekiti towns, Ekiti people felt the need to come together to fight a common enemy- the Ibadan people. Hence, referred to as Ekiti – Parapo war meaning, Ekiti United War. This war was a very vital factor that underscored the unity and solidarity of Ekiti people.

The destruction of Oyo Ile in 1837 marked the end of the powerful opulent and well organized Old Oyo Empire (Johnson, 1969). The fall of Oyo Empire created a vacuum in Yorubaland which other surviving kingdoms vied to fill. In other words, the collapse of the empire led to power tussle and frequent wars between successor states in Yoruba land. Some of these states were Ibadan, *Egba*, *Ijebu*, *Ijaye*, and *Ogbomoso* (Aigbokai, 1971); out of all these states, Ibadan emerged as the strongest because of its military expertise. Consequent upon the emergence of Ibadan as the strongest power in Yoruba land, it quickly established her hegemony over other Yoruba states and kingdoms, wherein many of the subjugated areas were made to pay tributes to Ibadan. The states that were seriously affected include Ijesha, Ekiti, Akoko and Igbomina (Aigbokai, 1971).

The highhandedness of Ibadan Residents in the North-east Yoruba districts were so grave that the rulers of the various kingdoms regarded Ibadan as a menacing upstart that must be checked (Akintoye, 1971). The common feature of Ibadan imperialism was the setting up of a system of political control under the supervision of a chief called Babakekere. It was his duty to ensure that the tributary states under Ibadan remained loyal to the central authority. He was also to ensure that tributes were paid to the central government as and when due. Indeed, all assignments were carried out to the letter. In an attempt to ensure that all the subjects complied with the central authority, the chief appointed some officials called *Ajeles* whose duty was to see that tributes were collected and remitted on regular basis to Ibadan. He kept the chief well informed about the day to day activities in their various towns of jurisdiction, introduced foreign visitors to local authorities and arranged for the comfort of all Ibadan chiefs and messengers passing through his domain (Akintoye, 1971) Weekly taxes were levied on each household in every town and villages for running of administration and whenever there was the need, each town was commandeered to

emergency levies and supply of food stuffs whenever Ibadan was preparing to embark on military campaign (Akintoye, 1971).

The overbearing actions of the Ajeles in Ekiti and Ijesha was aptly captioned by Akintoye as “greedy and rapacious people given to licentiousness and debauchery, forcefully taking or stealing whatever caught their fancy, compelled wives in the presence of their husbands and daughters before their fathers to yield to their insatiable desires” (Akintoye, 1971) The Ajeles treat the chiefs and the natives with contempt, made outrageous demands on the markets, forcefully harvest agricultural crops from the farms and at times compelled women returning from the farms to carry their loads to Ajele’s compound (Omidiran, n.d) Some of the Ajeles served the interest of the vassal towns while some others seized the opportunity to enrich themselves. These are a few of the atrocities perpetrated by the Resident overlords from Ibadan. To worsen the situation, no regard was paid to the traditional political set up of the people. In view of the overbearing influence of the Ajeles, the people of Ekiti, Ijesha, Akoko and Igbomina decided to put aside their differences, came together under one political umbrella in the name of Ekitiparapo and sought to free themselves from the heavy yoke of the Ibadan imperialism. This war, which marked the beginning of the war between Ibadan and the other towns and kingdom of the eastern Yoruba land, lasted for sixteen years.

1.2 Methodology

The study used historical research design to collect, verify and synthesis evidences from the past. Informants were selected using purposive sampling method based on the criteria related to their knowledge on Ekiti parapo war. This enabled an in depth exploration of Ekiti parapo war and its historical trajectory. Primary data was collected from the national archives while secondary data were sourced from books, journal articles, monographs, thesis and other publications from the internet.

1.3 Causes of Ekitiparapo War

The people of Ekiti were aggrieved on account of the kind of administration that was put in place by its Ibadan overlord. The government in place was more interested in the collection of taxes than taking care of the welfare of the people. Ibadan’s prominence in the Kingdoms was based on military prowess in the battle field rather than the kinship relationship with Oduduwa.

Furthermore, the sixteen oba in Ekiti land were all crowned Oba during this period just like their kith and kin in Ijesha, Egba, and Ijebu while Ibadan was under the administrative leadership of uncrowned Baale. In view of this, the crowned Oba in Ekiti and other federating states considered it as demeaning to be under the political and administrative hegemony of Ibadan and their repressive agents (Ajeles) who were only equivalent to the status of sub-chiefs in their own domain.

The last straw that broke the camel’s back, which eventually resulted into military engagement was the moral decadence exhibited by the Ajeles in their respective domains in Ekiti and Ijesha

lands which was considered unacceptable and should be stopped forthwith. For instance, the *Ajele* resident in Imesi Igboodo (Okemesi) by name Aguntasolo was notorious for his acts of greed and wickedness. He was said to have indecently assaulted Fabunmi's wife on her way to *Odo Erinle* shrine where Fabunmi was on that day celebrating his annual *Erinle* Festival. When Fabunmi was informed about the news of the assault against his wife, he was determined to deal ruthlessly with the culprit. Fabunmi was said to have reacted to this affront by beheading the *Ajele* and some of his aides in tow (Olomola, 2005)

The execution of the *Ajele* and his entourage was a contravention of a powerful Yoruba convention which forbade physical assault on envoys, consuls and official messengers (Olomola, 2005). *IgboOdo* Authorities knew that the Imperial power at Ibadan would not take it lightly as they would be deeply affronted by the gruesome murder of the *Ajeles*. Hence, they thought it wise to seek assistance from their immediate neighbouring communities in any impending military engagement that might ensue (Olomola, 2005). The news of Fabunmi's action spread quickly across the length and breadth of Ekiti land even to Ijesha, Akoko and Igbomina. Fabunmi requested for military assistance, and this consequently ignited the fire that had long smoldered in the heart of the people.

Ibadan officials and all their accomplices were indiscriminately murdered throughout the length and breadth of the confederacy; others were either sold into slavery or sacrificed to the gods of the land. When the news reached Ibadan, Are Latosisa took it with levity because he considered it unthinkable that the Ekiti, Akoko, Ijesha and Igbomina could be brave enough as to take up arms to challenge the age old political hegemony of Ibadan. He made a mistake for underrating the military might and the courage of a determined people who were already tired of repression and suffering they had gone through under their Ibadan overlord. This incidence marked the commencement of the Ekitiparapo otherwise known as Kiriji war between the belligerent and the Ibadan which lasted for sixteen years. The title, Kiriji was derived from the resonating sound of the long flintlock cannons with huge muzzles guns used during the war. These guns, when fully loaded and fired emitted a report that resonated from one end to the other and sounded thus "ki-riji-i" (Awe, 1965; Oyeweso, 2012). The confederacy known as Ekitiparapo was formed in 1878 comprising Ekiti, Ijesha, Yagba, Efon, Igbomina and Akoko people. Their singular objective was to put a permanent end to the repressive hegemony of the Ibadan overlord.

1.4 The Course of the War

The call for a massive military show down with the Ibadan forces was initially received with mixed feelings among the people. While some received the call with enthusiasm in some quarters, others were lukewarm in their responses. These responses according to Olomola were however based on certain objective realities of the time. Although, almost all Ekiti communities were concerned and affected by the oppressive rule of Ibadan imperialists, consideration for and defense of local interest prevented some communities in the central and southern Ekiti from being actively involved in the rebellion (Olomola, 2005). For example, Ado and Ikere around this period were involved in

a form of mutual antagonism that neither of them was ready to be actively involved in the rebellion lest the absence of its armies exposed its communities to attack by its adversary.

However, a number of subordinate communities under Ado sent contingents to the Confederate army stationed at Imesi Ipole (Ekitiparapo military camp) (Olomola, 2005). Ise was yet to recover from the devastating effect of the military engagement with the combined armies of Ado and Akure that she could not send any official contingent to Kiriji. It should however be pointed out that a lot of individual volunteers from several communities across the length and breadth of Ekiti rose to the clarion call and joined the confederate army and fought at Kiriji (Olomola, 2005)

In September, 1878, the armies of the confederacy were assembled at Imesi Ipole. The armies made up of contingents of various communities were organized under their Balogun and lieutenants from each participating community. The intention of the Confederacy was to build up a large and formidable military force that would forestall any further aggression by Ibadan anywhere in Ekiti, Ijeshaland and Igbomina (Olomola, 2005) Thus, Imesi- Ile became a huge military camp as well as a commercial centre. The combined force of Ekiti confederacy was an exceedingly very large in comparison to the Ibadan military force stationed at Ikirun. The Ibadan army was intimidated by the military strength of Ekiti confederacy that they urgently requested for reinforcement.

In October, 1878, the war/fighting between Ibadan and the Ekiti confederacy began in earnest (Olomola, 2005). The Ekitiparapo army suffered a very debilitating defeat in the hand of the Ibadan army. This was due to the poor organization on the part of latter. After this initial onslaught, the Ekiti requested for military reinforcement in November, and thus brought in more men to strengthen their military personnel and to recoup themselves for the initial losses suffered in the hand of their adversary during their first encounter. However, the Ibadan also repeated the same feat in the second military encounter as the armies of the confederacy suffered great reverses. The defeat suffered in the first and the second encounter forced Ekitiparapo to look for military assistance from other quarters (Olomola, 2005). They sought for military assistance from Ogedengbe, (Johnson, 1969) a war lord who was then resident at Ido-Ani (Olomola, 2005). He was invited to come to their aid by providing leadership and direction to the confederate army. He was initially reluctant towards the offer but conceded after much persuasion and joined the confederate army in Imesi Ipole at the end of November, 1879. The arrival of Ogedengbe led to restructuring of the leadership position. Ogedengbe was given the new title of Seriki that was just created while Fabunmi retained the title of Balogun.

The Ekitiparapo warriors, in the course of fighting for their independence went on strengthening their forces by recruiting more soldiers/warriors from various places such as Ijesha, Ekiti, Efon, Yagba and Akoko right down to Egbe (Johnson, 1969). They further went into strengthening their military alliance with the Ilorin by an exchange of troops. One Ogunmodede with a strong force of Ijesha was sent to the Ilorin camp while the Ilorin sent one Lasebikan with his men to Ekiti camp (Johnson, 1969). Ilorin became a most willing ally as the war provided her with an

opportunity of vengeance on Ibadan. The battles raged and the war dragged on between the two combatants, the scope of hostilities widened in 1882 as a result of the entrance into the war by Ife and Ijebu on the side of Ekiti confederacy. This decision was driven by the fear of and hatred for Ibadan dominance over the entire Yoruba (Olomola, 2005). In view of the widened scope of the conflict, army units were deployed by the authority of the Confederacy to protect Ife, her military ally, against Ibadan and her allies. The Ibadan armies consisted of veterans drawn from Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Iwo and Ikirun, Odo Otin and Ibolu communities. The Ekitiparapo consisted of Ijesha, Igbomina, Ekiti and some Iyagba soldiers (Olomola, 2005).

The Ekitiparapo society in Lagos were also not left out as they provided logistic support for their people at the hinterland by procuring sophisticated weapons such as snider, martini, Henry Manser and other rifles and transported them through Ondo road to Imesi-Ipole. The Society also raised a rifle corps which played a prominent role at inflicting very heavy casualties on Ibadan military force in the mid-1880s Ilorin equally assisted to train a retinue of Calvary force. The term Ki-ri-jii which was a name later adopted for the war as pointed out earlier was derived from the un-usual sound made by the discharge of those guns. The debilitating effects of the military hard wares and the protracted nature of the war made individual personages and concerned groups to appeal for cease fire. Thus, the appeal was sent to the British administration in Lagos to intervene and put a stop to the wanton destruction of lives and properties occasioned by the war going on in Yoruba hinterland.

Following the intervention of the British colonial government in the protracted military engagement between the armies of Ibadan and Ekiti. This resulted into an agreement being signed by the two opposing camps which eventually put an end to the war that had lasted for almost sixteen years. This truce that was signed officially put a permanent end to the oppressive and domineering influence of the Ibadan over the Ekiti people.

The war led to the destruction of so many lives and properties. An untold number of lives were lost from both sides of the combatants until the intervention of the British colonial government. The war served as an opportunity to foster unity and oneness among Ekiti people who before the war had pursued a parochial and divisive interest among themselves. When the war broke out, they put their differences aside and rallied together to fight a common enemy.

The agreement that was signed also put an end to slave trade which had lasted for centuries in southwestern part of Nigeria. The British government used the opportunity to include this clause in the agreement to be signed between the two warring parties. Governor O.T Carter, in January 1893 made a public proclamation declaring the total emancipation of slaves. Consequently, those slaves wishing to return to their native homelands were granted the liberty to do so.

1.5 Economic Implications of the War

The Ekiti parapo war which was one of the longest wars fought in Yorubaland in the 19th century had tremendous impact on the economy of the people. This period coincided with the abolition of the European slave trade and the introduction of trade in articles like palm oil, otherwise referred to as the legitimate trade. The demand for palm oil by the European merchants during this period stimulated its production immensely in West Africa. (Ogunremi, 1986). With the huge demand for palm oil by the European merchants, a great number of labour force was required to meet up with the ever growing demands. Hence, in an attempt to solve this problem, the people resorted to the use of slave.

Ogunremi further noted that the 19th Century wars in Yorubaland contributed immensely to the acquisition of slaves in large number; though this should not be misinterpreted to suggest that the wars were basically fought primarily for the purpose of acquiring slaves as some foreign scholars would want to make us believe. Some of the those who acquired slaves for agricultural purposes in the 19th century were Bashorun Oluyole, (1830-1847), Balogun Ibikunle, 1851-1864, Momo Latosa, the Are Onakakanfo, the commander of Ibadan forces during the Kiriji war up to 1885. Women were also not left out in this agricultural enterprise just as Efunsetan Aniwura, a prominent woman chief in Ibadan engaged the use of slaves numbering up to two hundred to work on her farms in 1870 (Ajayi & Akintoye, 1999; Familugba, 2017).

Contrary to the view of some writers, Ogunremi, (1986) held the view that the Kiriji war did not have much negative impact on the economy of Yoruba land most importantly as it affects crop production. He adduced three major factors to support this assertion. Firstly, that there was no standing army. Meaning that wars were only fought whenever occasion for it arises. By implication, men do not devote the whole of their time to military engagement alone, they usually went back to their farms and any other economic engagements. Secondly, wars were not fought all the year round. He pointed out that “most campaigns came up towards the end of dry season when there was not much work on the farm” that even when wars were fought, this do not completely bring farming activities to a halt. After pitching their tent at the designated war camps, the soldiers made use of the available land around the vicinity of the camp for farming activities which was centred mostly on food crop production. Thirdly, farmers enjoyed adequate protection even during war times. This was aptly captioned by Samuel Johnson “Whilst the hunters were in the forest and on the lookout for kidnappers, the farmers could work in their farms with composure and confidence the men went to their farms well-armed and were ready for any emergency”.

While crop production was not seriously hampered by the Ekitiparapo war, it should, however, be pointed out that trading and other commercial activities suffered some set back. Two major factors accounted for this. The first was insecurity associated with walking the roads which made the traders susceptible to kidnapping and secondly the total blockade of roads.

The war was not without its negative effects on the economy of the colonial government. For example, between 1877 & 1878, the value of exports fell from 734,707 to 577,336; while import

fell from 614,359 to 483,623 and revenue fell from 59,389 to 50,389. In the year 1880, export fell to 576,510; imports to 407,369 and revenue to 47,987. After this, the economic depression continued until 1892, the worst years being 1881 and 1882. 1881 figures were 460,007 for exports, 333,659 for imports and 42,421 for revenue (Akintoye, 1986).

The colonial policy of non-intervention in the interior affairs did not help matters as to the restoration of peace, hence the policy came under a barrage of criticisms from the various stake holders such as the trade merchants, small trade holders and missionaries. (Akintoye, 1986). The negative effect of the war on the economy of the people was further emphasized by the news media with various captions such as ‘the badness of trade’ ‘Universal depression’ and ‘Unparalleled emergency’. (Lagos Times, 1881, Akintoye, 1986).

Trade merchants who deals in the sale of arms and ammunition had their economy boosted throughout the inter-war years. The craftsmen who were involved in large scale production and maintenance of war weapons such as swords, knives, daggers, slings, bracelets and iron clubs largely benefited from the wars (Ogunremi, 1986). Closely aligned with this were the charm makers who specializes in the production of protective charms and curative drugs for soldiers. It was unlikely that any soldier would go to war front without wearing one protective charm or the other. We can now visualize the enormity of the job before the craftsmen and the charm makers when we realize that hundreds of them went for military campaigns at any given time. (Ogunremi, 1986)

1.6 Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is instructive to adduce that the Ekitiparapo war did not put a permanent end to economic development among the people. We have seen that in spite of the minor disruptions occasioned by the war, none of the major sectors of the economy was out rightly neglected. However, when we consider the utilization of labour in the nineteenth century Yoruba economy, it would appear that much labour which would have largely contributed to general economic development was diverted to war efforts. It had been pointed out that not everyone was involved in the war operations whenever there were military campaigns, and even soldiers were not always on the field throughout the year round. Yet, the fact should not be forgotten that whenever there was a war, all productive tools would be down. These war interruptions certainly affected labour productivity.

1.7 Recommendation

This study recommends that the Ekiti people in particular and the entire Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria in general should draw from the collective memories of the war to strengthen cultural identity and rejig national consciousness in building a better and more formidable nation.

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