

Oye-Ekiti Community in Ibadan

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ABSTRACT This paper explains the inter-group relations between Oye-Ekiti and Ibadan in the 19th century. Essentially, the paper focused on the movement of Oye-Ekiti people to Ibadan in the 20th century, a period of change in the traditional pattern of migration in Nigeria. In the course of this study, oral interview and documentary method of information gathering were used. The study revealed that the process that spanned almost a century of regular inflow of migrants from Oye-Ekiti to Ibadan was peaceful. The work explained that Oye-Ekiti people were able to entrench themselves into the political terrain of south-western Nigeria, while socio-economically they were able to fit themselves better into a 'macro-economic' setting unlike the peasantry economy obtainable in Oye-Ekiti. Hence, Oye-Ekiti migrants were able to contribute to the development of Oye-Ekiti and Ibadan in particular and Nigeria in general.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Oye is one of the 16th kingdoms of Ekiti land. Oye-Ekiti people are a group of the south-western Yoruba, inhabiting the administrative headquarters of the present Oye Local Government area of Ekiti State. The Old Oye kingdom comprises of five villages namely Oye, Ire, Egosi, Eshetta, (Egosi and Eshetta have come together as Ilupeju) and Arigidi Ekiti (now Ayegbaju) and covers an area of about 64 square miles (National Archive, Ibadan). The population of Oye-Ekiti according to the 1952 national census was 13,696, (National Archive, Ibadan), 57,196 in 1963 and in 2006 the population was 168,251 (National Population Commission 2006).

Oye-Ekiti is located at a general altitude around 1500 feet with hills and granite outcrops rising to about 200 feet. It is covered by thick forest with very small patches of high forest and is surrounded by hills which provide her protection in times of war. In fact, the hills were a blessing to the people especially during the Benin invasion in the 19th century (Akintoye 1921).

The origin of Oye Ekiti which is also known as Obalatanland is associated with the founder of the town, Oloyemoyin who was born in Imore district of Ile Ife (Owoyomi 1995). Thus, the name Oye was coined from his name 'Oloyemoyin', a name supposedly put together because of the circumstances surrounding the birth of the founder of Oye who was said to have been born during a terrible and 'hostile' harmattan which normally blows from the Sahara desert

over and across north Africa countries and to all parts of Nigeria. And to preserve his life, he was kept in a dark room with female deity called 'Obalatan' for an unspecified period of time. Thus, he was observed as a wonderful prince whose birth had been accompanied by a horrible harmattan, while, traditional lamps were lit and arranged in the room both day and night to keep the room warm, coupled with the harmattan was the attendant dryness of his mother's breast so much that she could not breast feed him and rather he was fed with honey in place of breast milk. This is why he was named *Oloyemoyin*, meaning a harbinger of harmattan who fed on honey and this is express in the cognomen to the child and by extension all autochthons of Oye as; *Omo Oloye, Omo ora ufe ketana Osan gangan*, meaning that Oloye is an aboriginal son of Ile-Ife who always put on light during the day (Oye Progressive Union 1994).

According to available oral evidence, the prince left Ile-Ife in company of his brother *Ogunlire*, the acclaimed founder of *Ire-Ekiti*, with a remarkable entourage, equipped with large armies, crude weaponry, commanders, seers, oracles, priests and subtle counselors. The entourage on their way from Ile-Ife first settled at *Ule Oye Ora* (National Archive Ibadan). At *Oye Odo Ora*, the aborigines were not happy with such intrusion and as a result fought and scattered them. They, therefore, moved to a new settlement and called it *Oye Ekiti*, while *Ogunlire* migrated and settled in *Ire-Ekiti*. Some settled in *Egosi*, and others conquered *Eshetta* and *Arigidi* while, *Oye-Ekiti* became the head

of these towns and Oloye was recognized by them as their leader being the eldest son of their mother, *Yeye Aiye* (National Archive, District Officer Diary Ibadan)

OYE EKITI AND IBADAN RELATIONS BEFORE 1900

Trades serve as a great unifying factor for the Yoruba people. This explains the reason why many towns in Yorubaland before the 19th century had peaceful social and economic relationship with each town or community and had built trade routes for accessible and free trade relationship with their neighbours. The major routes before 1900 were the southern trade routes to the northern highway from *Akure* or *Ise-Ekiti* to Ado passing through *Are-Ekiti* to old *Oye-Ekiti* settlement, *Egosi*, (now *Ilupeju*) *Itaji*, *Obo* and *Otun* to the *Igbomina* towns, *Nupe* and the *Oyo* countries (Akintoye 1921).

There were, however, smaller routes from *Ikole* to *Oye* to *Ogotun*, *Ara* and *Efon Ekiti*. According to Felicia *Ogungbemi*, a regular trader to *Ibadan*, a trade route cut across *Oye* to *Igbaja* through to *Oyo*, *Moniya* and finally to *Oje* markets in *Ibadan*. The major articles of trade were kola nuts, calabash, spun cloth and came wood, beads with potash imported from the northern Nigeria through *Ekiti* towns from *Igbaja* and *Akoko* and exchanged for corals, European cloth, cowry shells and European iron implements and at a later time, particularly during the *Ekiti-Ibadan* wars with guns and gun powder (*Ogungbemi* 1995).

Trading activities with neighboring towns also flourished. Articles of trade include yam, cotton, kola nuts, palm oil, palm kernels, locally woven clothes, and pepper among others. All these articles were normally offered for sale on market days. *Oye* like other *Ekiti* towns was an agricultural town and as such attached much importance to farming due to the location of the town amidst dense evergreen forest. The men were predominantly farmers, while the women did a little cultivation and also helped their husbands during planting season and at harvesting.

It should be noted, that wealth at this period depended largely on one's agricultural output which also encouraged a large family. Other occupation in the town includes hunting, art and crafts, iron smiting or blacksmithing.

In *Oye-Ekiti*, hunting, arts, crafts and smiting were regarded as full time occupations but were done alongside farming, because the local blacksmith produced agricultural implements such as hoes, axes, knives and cutlasses on a subsistence level for the agricultural industry and this actually helped the people in the development of their agricultural industry. Nevertheless, growing two types of crop like yam, cocoyam, plantain, maize and vegetable was purely subsistence, while other crops like cocoa, kola nut, oil palm and coffee which are cash crop were grown as a result of their contact with the European towards the tail end of the 19th century (*Onipede* 1995).

And this actually explained the earliest major economic relationship between *Oye-Ekiti* and *Ibadan* in the 19th century, in the sense that within the Yoruba kingdom there were no physical barriers that could hinder rapprochement, which made contacts easy within towns and villages. Although, evidences have pointed to the facts that before 19th century, the eastern Yoruba kingdoms of *Ekiti* were drawn more towards the center of the Benin Kingdom in the south-east than westwards partly due to Benin wars of expansion (*Akintoye* 1995) and partly because of the lucrative routes, which cut across the *Ekiti* kingdoms, from Benin to the northern countries of the *Igbomina* and *Nupe*, which also provided an avenue for the *Ekiti* people to have access to European goods from Benin kingdom that had had earliest contacts and trading relationship with the Europeans prior to *Ibadan* (*Onipede* 1995)

Indeed, European cloths, iron tools, guns and powder were brought from Benin to *Ado Ekiti* to *Are-Ekiti* and to *Oye Ekiti* passing *Otun-Ekiti* through to the *Igbomina* towns, *Nupe* and to the *Oyo* countries of *Ijaye* and *Ibadan* (*Onipede* 1995). Oral evidence point to the fact that *Oye* was a meeting point, where traders within the districts assemble for take-off to places like *Igbaja* and *Nupe* where they in turn buy other articles to be resold in *Oyo* towns on their way coming and in *Oye-Ekiti* back home (*Ogungbemi* 1995) until the political upheavals of the late 19th century. However, it must be stated that, the *Ekiti* people did not feel the impact of the (Yoruba) *Oyo* kingdom and had not been part of the old *Oyo* Empire (*Awe* 1964) and as such had not been affected by the political troubles, which in the late 18th century and the early 19th

century led to the fall of old Oyo Empire (Awe 1964). But the attempt by the emerging powers like the Ibadan to extend their territory on the pretext of protecting other Yoruba towns led to the involvement of *Ekiti*, while the *Ekiti* people on the other hand saw the development as an infringement on their independence and political autonomy.

Although, owing to the collapse of *Oyo* Empire and the *Fulani* invasion of northern Yoruba countries from around 1820, many Oyo refugees came to settle in the *Igbomina* and *Ekiti* towns (Akintoye 1921). Nonetheless, the relationship was of mutual understanding rather than of political domination as was the case of Ibadan.

One important thing to note is that the collapse of the *Oyo* Empire made the defense of Yoruba kingdom against the *Fulani*'s fall on the shoulders of the new emerging states of Ibadan and Ijaye (Akintoye 1921). While the Ijaye bore the defense of the kingdom west of river Ogun, Ibadan faced the *Ilorin-Fulani* in the eastern *Ogun* district. Ibadan recorded their first major victory against the *Ilorin-Fulani* at *Osogbo* in 1840 and thus began a systematic rolling back of the *Ilorin-Fulani* hegemony over the Yoruba towns of *Igbomina* and the *Ekiti* and then established its political control over such towns by appointing *Ajele* to administer them (Ajayi 1970).

Of importance are the activities of these *Ajeles* (representatives) in the *Ekiti* kingdoms, which eventually led to a revolt of the *Ekiti* (Akintoye 1921) coupled with their moral decadence that later resulted into series of crisis. Indeed, it was the *Ajele* crisis of 1868-1769 between *Itaji* and *Egosi* (now *Ilupeju*), the latter an *Oye* town that finally brought *Oye* under the Ibadan hegemony.

Ibadan sometimes claimed that it was at the instance of the *Ekiti* that they intervene in the *Ekiti* crisis and wars, they also claimed that they had gone to the *Ekitiland* and *Ijesha* countries in order to free the people from the *Ilorin-Fulani* domination. It was also asserted that the Ibadan in invading *Ekiti* and *Ijesha* countries were inspired solely by philanthropic or brotherly feelings of serving the interest of these Yoruba towns (Awe 1964) but, one point that is clear is that the Ibadan invasions of *Ekiti* towns were primarily a means of extending her political influence over these Yoruba countries as was later

revealed in her appointment of *Ajele* to oversee *Ekiti*.

While the *Ekiti* towns accepted Ibadan over lordship in the hope of better treatment by their perceived kinsmen without resistance, the Ibadan soon neglected such aspirations and regarded them primarily as a means to wealth, of cheap slaves and cheap labour to work in their farms and man their armies, in general as a rich field for exploitation and the *Ekiti* people were not happy with the situation particularly when it got to the point that the *Ajeles* were taking undue advantage of their women. The consequence was that in August 1878, the *Ekiti* kingdoms allied with the *Ijesha* and revolted against Ibadan hegemony, marking the outbreak of the famous *Kiriji* war (Bamishie 1987). The war lasted for sixteen years from 1877 until 1893, when the Europeans had to intervene to bring the war to an end.

In all, *Oye* Ibadan relations could be seen from two perspectives before 1900. The first and early contact as primarily commercial, secondly, as political particularly, with the disintegration of the Yoruba kingdom, due to the defeat of *Ilorin-Fulani* allied forces by the Ibadan army in 1840 at *Osogbo* war which made Ibadan a sure power in Yoruba land and thus made her establish her political hegemony and influence over *Ekiti* kingdoms in general and *Oye* kingdom that had hitherto been under *Balogun Gambari* of *Ilorin* (Omole 1994).

The falls of *Ilorin* in the war meant liberation for *Oye* from *Ilorin* but an embrace of Ibadan hegemony, and not until 1877 at *Okemesi* when *Oye* joined the combined *Ekiti* and *Ijesha* forces (*Ekiti* and *Ijesha* army) at the famous *kiriji* war to fight Ibadan did *Oye* regain her independence (Onipede 1995).

THE ORIGIN AND GROWTH OF OYE COMMUNITY IN IBADAN

The coming of the Europeans in the late 19th century saw the gradual disappearance in warfare and slave trading and the emergence of new forces governing the movement of people. For instance, the Europeans greatly influence the cessation of hostility between the *Ekiti* and the Ibadan in 1877 at *Okemesi* (Awe 1964). Their involvement through treaties with different parties to the war later brought Yoruba kingdom under the sphere of their influence and by 1900

formal colonial administration was established in the modern day Nigeria.

The colonial system speedily saw to the development of administrative towns, and people had to move from the rural areas to these urban centers to enjoy certain benefits in politics, economy and social facilities which were not available prior to the European "invasion".

The position of Ibadan as an administrative town made it attractive to migrants from the rural Yoruba towns, the status which it had enjoyed after the collapse of Oyo Empire due to its central location at the edge of the rain forest and the savanna and probably as a major power in the region at the arrival of the Europeans (Adeleke 1979). Thus, it became a terminal for trade routes from the rural areas and a major center of commerce, industries and crafts. It is also the capital of western region of Nigeria as well as the center for both primary, post primary and higher education and in this struggle, Oye Ekiti people were not left out in the movement to Ibadan to share in the privileges of modern life.

The imposition of British rule over Yoruba land witnessed a series of change in the political, economic and social life of the people. In the hinterland, administrative towns were created, while new economic system and social values were introduced, particularly as there was the need for the Europeans to move into these areas in order to effectively tap the economic resources of the people, while those indigenous people engaging in civil service, commerce and industry had to move to the administrative centers from the rural areas in search of new life.

Thus, it was the colonial system of administration that influences the first set of migrants from Oye Ekiti to Ibadan (Austin 1982), while some left as colonial government worker, missionary's interpreter and assistants, others left as a result of the devastating effect of the Oye resettlement schemes of 1927 and 1947. The resettlement of 1927 was at the instance of Chief E O Babalola, the first graduate in Ekiti, who realized the need to bring together all the nine separate localities of Oye that he considered as being far removed from each other (Owoyomi 1994).

Also in 1947-1949, the Oye elite in their search for socio-economic development of the town presented the idea of shifting the major road leading to Lokoja from Ibadan to the new

Oye site through Oye communal labour, to the divisional officer in charge of Oye district, Mr. R B Brown, which was rejected. In fact, in the opinion of Mr. R.B.Brown "the government would neither divert nor close the major road because of Oye alone" (Bamishie 1987).

It was the divisional officer's assertion that forced the educated elites with other progressive elements in Oye to rally round Oba Adebayo Aribatishe II to shift the town from the 1927 location to the present site, in obedience to the saying that "if mountain does not come to Mohammed, Mohammed will go to the mountain:" while some could not afford the cost of building another house resulting from the second shift within twenty years had to leave for Ibadan in search of greener pasture and habitation (Owoyomi 1994).

However, the greater importance of individual migration can be understood from the fact that during the early years of colonial rule, a degree of compulsion was often used to secure adequate supply of labour and administrative conveniences, which greatly affected Oye people, particularly the introduction of tax in the second decade of the century and to evade this, people migrated elsewhere for conveniences.

The Adeoba episode in Oye was another catalyst to the movement (1932-1940). The installation of Adeoba as the Oloye was against the wish of the majority of Oye people (Omole 1994) and the vassal towns notably former Egosi and Eshetta, now Ilupeju, Ire and former Arigidi, now Ayegbaju-Ekiti. Though, few people supported the Oba elect against the majority but since the colonial government wanted him because of the level of his literacy many had to flee to Ibadan to avoid colonial persecution.

Indeed, this incidence degenerated into an open conflict between the people who wanted him removed and the supporters of the Oba, particularly the district officer who in a bid to protect the Oba drafted about one hundred and fifty policemen to the Oloye's palace from Ado-Ekiti to protect the Oba (Adeyemi 1994). He also gave directives that key actors should be arrested, while, some were arrested, others fled to places like Abeokuta and Ibadan where they finally settled (Owoyomi 1994).

On the significance of colonialism in migration in Africa, De Kiewet (1965) writes, "the development of Africa can be more understood, if it is seen as a result of two movements of mi-

gration. The first being the migrations of European traders, officials and settlers into Africa together with their skills, investments, equipments, and government organizations. The second is the migration of African man into the new world created by European enterprises" (Emielu 1987).

The colonial era witnessed the creation of a new world for Africans as stated by De Kiewet to the extent that developments in these centers of administrations became rapid, and industries were established, while new tastes were discovered. This attracted people from rural areas among which were the Oye people who moved in the search for employments, particularly the young school leavers. Also, some illiterates who had been 'married' to their farmlands divorced' farming and moved to Ibadan for all sorts of employment as unskilled labourers, night soil men, apprentice and drivers, cooks, house help among others.

The political status of Ibadan attracted school leavers, being the only center for trade and commerce in the region with much of government presence, which provided opportunity for white-collar jobs, unlike in the rural areas, while Ibadan was an ideal place that afforded and offered the pre-requisites for 'human existence', attracted some people's interest because the rising expectations and changing values of the people had created new demands for goods and services which to an increasing number could not be obtainable in Oye. They were, therefore, forced to migrate to areas where their expectations of job opportunity and the modern ways of life could be realized either in public service or in the private sector.

The introduction of Christianity in 1903 was another catalyst to the development of education in Oye (Bamishe 1987). It also increased the rate of emigration from the town, because it saw to the increase in the number of children enrollment into the primary schools that by 1920 Oye had produced four outstanding educated elite. A sound education at this period meant standard four to six graduate who could read and write and interpret for the missionaries and the colonial administrators. Mr. K. Atere passed standard six in 1919, and took up a railway appointment in Osogbo on a salary of 27 pound per annum. In 1920, Mr. Peter Falope and Mr. Thompson also completed their primary school. Chief E.O. Babalola became a school master in

Ibadan, he was the first graduate in Ekiti and one of the first nine in Ondo province. A minister in the western regional government of Chief Awolowo Obafemi (1951-1956) became a shelter for new comers from Oye (Owoyomi 1994).

Between 1940 and 1995, the waves of migration from Oye to Ibadan increased tremendously, as Oye people began to migrate in search of white collar jobs which were readily available in Lagos, Osogbo and Ibadan and due to proximity of these cities, Oye people saw Ibadan as a transit route where they could either get a job or linked up with either Lagos or Osogbo for employment. Ibadan thus became their second home. Those who could not get jobs in Lagos had to return to their friends who had settled in Ibadan. A new feeling of security which developed among the Oye people in Ibadan made them influence political, economic and socio-cultural life of the people in Ibadan and Oye on a greater magnitude than earlier periods.

Therefore, as more people moved from Oye to Ibadan from 1900, the need to identify with their new settlement and to adjust to new life obtainable in Ibadan began to manifest and hunt them, so also was the instinct to identify with their kith and kin from Oye. Hence, some of them who had been friends back home and had belong to the same age group/grade began to visit one another, the visitation became more intensified and later became a nucleus and avenue for the promotion of both personal and social interest and later transits into the Oye Progressive Union in 1936 (Adeyemi 1994).

OYE DEVELOPMENT UNION

Oye Development Union was founded in 1936 (Adeyemi 1994) by five members from *Oye*, *Egosi*, and *Eshetta*, villages that make the entire *Oye* Kingdom but with the exemption of *Arigidi-Ekiti* and have among its objectives the provision of financial assistance to members' (Oye Progressive Union 1990) particular the new migrants from *Oye*, in the areas of accommodation and payment of school fees for members and their wards who could not afford it.

In addition, was the formation of *Oye* Progressive Union in 1936 through the amalgamation of four social clubs namely the *Irare* Descendant Union, *Egbe* Unity Club, *Oye* Progressive Union and the *Oredegebe* Social Club, which had been existing since 1926 (Omole 1994). The

amalgamation was due to the appeal fund to be launched for *Ekiti* development by the *Ekiti Parapo* Progressive Union under its first President, Chief E.O. Babalola who was an Indigene of *Oye*, and to have a common front, all the four Unions had to come together to present a their donation jointly and in the process had their first meeting in Chief E.A Adeyemi house in 1936. Thus, Mr. Adeyemi was made the pioneer chairman and they all agreed to present their donation through a common purse with the name, *Oye* Progressive Union and this eventually marked the beginning of a unified *Oye* town union, (that is, the *Oye* Progressive Union) and a total departure from the earlier aims and objectives which were before limited to membership in the form of rendering financial assistance to only their members, but of projecting a better image of *Oye* to the outside world and also contributing positively towards social developments of *Oye* and Ibadan.

The Union became involved in the political activities in Ibadan because this was when independence struggle was gaining momentum in Nigeria, that it supported the formation of the then *Egbe Omo Oduduwa* with a launching in *Oye* in 1951 (Awolowo 1987). And because of this development, *Oye* Progressive Union was able to influence various developmental programs to *Oye* like the St. Augustine's Vocational School which was established 1962, the Teacher Training College in 1975 while the renovation of the Maternity Center in 1972 was wholly financed by the union (Adeyemi 1994).

In conclusion, the *Oye* progressive Union has served as a bridge between *Oye* community and Ibadan and had utilized the privileges provided by their contact arising from the various migration processes within the 20th century for the

socio-political and economic benefits of both communities which is a strong indication that inter-ethnic harmony, progress and holistic development is achievable in a multi-cultural environment.

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