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The 19th Century Anglo-Yoruba Relations

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Abstract

This paper examines the Anglo-Yoruba relations in the 19th century via the influence of the Ijebu people, a sub-group of the Yoruba; using oriki(Ijebu), a very important oral poetic genre among the Yoruba people of Southwestern Nigeria. 60 groups of oral art performers were sampled; data were drawn from 60 Ijebu towns and villages covering the nine local governments of the Ijebu in Ogun State and three local governments of the Ijebu in Lagos State. Interviews were conducted with 20 key informants selected on a stratified basis from the nine local governments of the Ijebu in Ogun State and one of the three local governments of the Ijebu in Lagos State. Library and archival

documentations were also collected. The *Ijebu* people are identified with four types of *oriki*: *Apeja* (*oriki soki* or name version), *Orufi* (*oriki*) *ulu* praises of towns, *Orufi gbajumo* (praises of distinguished personalities), *Orufi orisa* (praises of gods) and *Orufi Oba* (praises of obas). The *orufi* establishes that the *Ijebu* people are a veritable link in the relations of the Yoruba people and the West(ern world).

Introduction: The Yoruba People

The Yoruba people are in Nigerian states like Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Oyo, Osun, Ekiti, parts of Kwara, Edo and Kogi States. They are also in the diaspora in neighbouring countries like Benin Republic, Togo and some West African countries along the coast. Yoruba are in Brazil and elsewhere all over the world. Historically, Ile-Ife is the Yoruba centre of civilization and it is from there that the Yoruba got spread all over the world (Atanda 2007:1-14).

The *Ijebu* are related to the Yoruba people. Despite the fact that they do not speak the Oyo/Yoruba tongue (as mentioned elsewhere), which is nearest to the Standard Yoruba and the differences in the various dialects of the Yoruba people notwithstanding, the intra-relationship of *Ijebu* with other Yoruba people is affirmed (Abimbola 2011).

The *Ijebu* people are part of the Yoruba people living in the Southwestern part of Yorubaland to the coast. They occupy parts of Ogun and Lagos States of Nigeria. The *Ijebu*land is bounded on the North by Ibadanland, on the East by Ondoland, on the West by Egbaland and on the South by the lagoon. Oduw[bi (2004:1-3) says the *Ijebu* territory, in pre-colonial times, constituted a single kingdom under the Awujale, who was their ruler and the titular ruler of *Ijebu* -Ode, the capital of the kingdom with a land area of approximately 8,130 km (3139 square miles). The *Ijebu* territory covers the eastern section of both the Ogun and Lagos States of modern Nigeria. The Ogun State section is the larger of the two and is made up of about 6,360 Km² (2,456 square miles) (Oduw [bi 2004:1-2). In terms of present day local government arrangement, the *Ijebu* section of Ogun State comprises nine local government areas: *Ijebu* –East (Ogbere) *Ijebu* -North (*Ijebu* - Igbo), *Ijebu* North –East (Atan) *Ijebu* -Ode (*Ijebu* -Ode), Ikenne (Ikenne), Odogbolu (Odogbolu), Ogun Waterside (Abigi), Remo-North (Isara) and Sagamu (Sagamu). The *Ijebu* -speaking local government areas in Lagos State are Epe (Epe), Ibeju-Lekki (Akodo), and Ikorodu (Ikorodu). The Local Government areas of Ikenne, Remo-North and Sagamu in Ogun State and Ikorodu in Lagos State are the *Ijebu* -Remo (Remo) parts of *Ijebu*land.

The *Ijebu* land is in the rainforest belt. Therefore, the people are agrarian and predominantly farmers. They also engage in vocations like lumbering, weaving carving, printing, dyeing, fishing, schooling and other modern days educational services. According to common Yoruba sayings, no known profession could be mentioned without the presence of an *Ijebu* man, as an average *Ijebu* man engages in any trading activity just to make money. Being a people with early access to western education next to their Egba neighbour, (Ayandele 1982:1-25), the *Ijebu* people also do combine western education with commerce and trading which takes them to far distances. The geographical positioning of the *Ijebu* as a Yoruba people living very close to the coast put them at a vantage position of coming across the Europeans on the latter's arrival on the African soil in the early 19th century, thus establishing the relations between them.

Anglo- *Ijebu* / Yoruba Relations

More than the other Yoruba people, the *Ijebu* people have had a long time relation with the Europeans. This is because the *Ijebu* are the erstwhile coastal traders/ middle-men for the European goods, variously acknowledged by historians (Ajayi & Espie 1965), and as further proved by Biobaku (1972)

...Until the nineteenth century, European activities were restricted to the coast, and the only Yoruba states of which Europeans had any first-hand knowledge were *Ijebu* and, later, Lagos...

Initially, there was no cordial relation between the *Ijebu* and the other Yoruba states. This is because the road(s) to *Ijebuland* was blocked against all strangers and passersby, perhaps for selfish reasons (Ayandele 1966). Needless therefore to say that there was probably no relation between the *Ijebu* and the Europeans because the Europeans too could not access the land like they did to the other Yoruba states. But the *Ijebu* however continued to trade with the Europeans. But at a point in time, the relation between them got degenerated as a result of the Europeans' several attempts to enter the *Ijebu* territory which the *Ijebu* resisted until the invasion of, and eventual conquest of 1892 at the *Imagbon* war (Ayandele 1982: 1-32). The relations between the *Ijebu* and Europe are therefore exemplified as follows from the corpus of the various orufi of the *Ijebu* people as mentioned at the outset.

Anglo- *Ijebu* /Yoruba Trade Relations

From the following excerpts from orufi *Ijebu* -Ode:

Omo A-b'oyinbo jogu owo

One whose forebears traded with Europeans

The above line appears in most of the *oriki* collection in Ijebuland confirming the seeming good relation between the *Ijebu* and the Europeans at a time as the coastal traders and middlemen trading in various items like gun, bullet, ivory, cloth, tobacco, slaves and cash crops and sellers to other Yoruba states when the items were introduced to Africa.

Further, Master and Apprenticeship relationship between the Europeans and *Ijebu* also existed and this is exemplified in the following from the same orufi *Ijebu* -Ode:

Omo Oyinbo Iyonro
Ee mi gu'de ko mi gu'ba
Ko n gu naaaro
Ee gu n'ale
Offspring of the European at Iyonro
The brass and copper smith
If he did not smith in the morning
He would smith at night

Iyonro is a sub-quarter of Uwade in *Ijebu*-Ode. Odusino (2004: 10) says that Iyonro was the home of the first set of *Ijebu* people who learnt gold-smithing from Europeans. It was these *Ijebu* people who in turn taught the trade to others whence it got diffused to the other Yoruba people and other Nigerians. This is why, according to him, the first generation of licensed gold-smiths were *Ijebu* indigenes who travelled to other parts of West Africa spreading the trade. The *Ijebu* people, because of the said relation they had with the Europeans, got introduced to gold, brass and silver smithing, and even black smithing, hence the reference. And it is this dexterity in smithing that made the other Yoruba peoples derogatorily refer to the *Ijebu* people as maker of fake coins (owo *Ijebu*)

From orufi Odogbolu:

Omo A-jo k'Oyinbo raa jo
Omo A-jo k'Oyinbo raa wiron
Omo A-nerun -Oyinbo- nee
Oyinbo naa'Gemo
Oyinbo neEgu

Oyinbo n'eepe
Awa n'Agem [
A nepe, a tu n'Eeg5!
One whose forebears danced before-
The Europeans would dance
One whose forebears had what Europeans lack
European has no Eegu masquerade
European has no epe (potent curse power)
Whereas we have Agemo masquerade.
We have 4p4 as well as Eegu masquerade

The above is a demonstration of a relation becoming sour as a result of the Europeans co-habitation with the *Ijebu* people especially after the May 1892 *Ijebu* expedition. This is because the Europeans did not only settle among the *Ijebu* but wanted to have hegemony and control over their culture and worship, like they did elsewhere in Africa.

Also, part of the orufi Oke-Agbo *Ijebu* -Igbo says:

Oyinbo mi tepa ide
'Ye mi mi tepa ileke
The European uses brass staff
My mother uses a staff of beads

which is a confirmation of a relation going sour, from cordial to envy. These typify the various relations the colonial masters had with their many so-called protectorates/friends, before political independence in Africa.

Trade in Slavery

There is no over-emphasis that the *Ijebu* as a Yoruba people have capitalistic tendency. This probably pushed them into the trade in slaves. Apart from being traders in other merchandise, the *Ijebu* traded in slaves and brought the slaves from other part of Yorubaland to the coast, for onward shipment to Europe and America as depicted in orufi Atikori *Ijebu* -Igbo:

Omo O-ji-be'de-wo b'eleru n koja
O rowo reru jojo
O reru wewe o ko won r'ule
O reru lila o ko won r'ono oja
Owon yen ree la mi sise bo
Omo A-reru-boon7-roko

Offspring of a committed slave dealer
Offspring of the one rich in slave trade
He kept the average –size for domestic chores
The stout-size slaves he sent to the market
For toil and commercial purposes
Offspring of a great investor in slavery

The *Ijebu* people of old were committed slave dealers who did not only buy and sell slaves but the link between the interior people and the Europeans in the coast. The *Ijebu* also sold slaves for domestic services as hewers of stone, splitters of wood and drawers of water. A lot of money they reportedly made from this inhuman trade before the abolition, when the *Ijebu* still did not stop the trade (Stride & Ifeka 1971) until the eventual *Ijebu* Expedition of 1896.

Anglo- *Ijebu* /Yoruba and Cash Crops

Every human being requires a job as the source of likelihood. The *Ijebu* people, like most other African societies, were (and are still) essentially agrarian and they plant different types of food for utilitarian reasons before the advent of the Europeans in the land. The people, like the other Africans engaged in the planting of cash crops when they had encounter with the Europeans. Hence the orufi *Ijebu*:

Ara Oriwu

Native of Or7w6

which is almost common to all *Ijebu* settlements, is a piece of information on the peoples' agricultural potentiality. Or7w6 was coined from “ori” and “iwu”. Iwu is an *Ijebu* word meaning fertile or virgin land which is good for agricultural potentialities while “ori” means the head or home-stead of. Mostly the *Ijebu* people plant different agricultural commodities, especially cash crops notably cocoa and colanut sold to Europeans. Hence the *Ijebu* Isiwo people are known in their orufi as:

Omo Oloko lewo obi

Offspring of the great planter of kola

From the foregoing therefore, there is no over-emphasis describing the above various contributions and roles of the *Ijebu* /Yoruba people right from the colonial days as overwhelming, thus enabling us to see the *Ijebu* people as the link between the other Yoruba people and the Western world.

Conclusion

This paper examines orufi (oriki) among the *Ijebu* people of Southwestern Nigeria. It shows the relevance of orufi in the socio-political and economic life of the *Ijebu* people. This paper also highlights the place of oriki among the other literary genres among the *Ijebu* -Yoruba people. This enables us to *examine the Anglo-Yoruba relation in the 19th century via the influence of the Ijebu people*. The orufi *establishes* that the *Ijebu* people are a veritable link in the relations of the Yoruba people and the West(ern world).

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