

WAR AND PEACE IN EASTERN YORUBALAND: EFON ALAAYE AND HER NEIGHBOURS (1815-1893)

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ABSTRACT: *Warfare was the most dominant theme of nineteenth century Yoruba history. During the period, Yorubaland was engulfed by bloody conflicts ranging from small and short wars to complex and protracted civil wars. Eastern Yorubaland was one of the major theaters of this “season of Anomie”. Aside the large scale destruction of lives and property, which is common in such situations, the wars bore significant social, economic and political consequences for the land and people. The disaster only terminated towards the end of the century as a result of the intervention by British colonial officials via a combination of diplomacy and military force. This paper is a historical documentation of the background, trajectory and aftermath of warfare and diplomacy between Efon Alaaye and her neighbours during the 19th century. The study seeks to interrogate the significant factors of causation, course and consequences of conflict in the area during the period under consideration. Data for the work comprise of primary sources such as oral evidence, archival materials etc, and secondary sources like books, journal articles, and so on.*

KEYWORDS: *Efon Alaaye, War, Peace, Ibadan, Ijesa, Ekitiparapo, Eastern Yorubaland.*

INTRODUCTION

Eastern Yorubaland connotes, in the main, the homestead of the Yoruba-speaking peoples of present-day Osun, Ekiti, and Ondo States in Southwest Nigeria. During the 19th century, the period covered by this work, Efon Alaaye was one of the prominent political forces in the region, alongside Ife, Ondo, Owo, and some Ekiti and Akoko kingdoms. Efon Alaaye is located on Longitude 4.8 degrees East and Latitude 7.6 degrees north. The topography of Efon is mountainous. This hilly nature of the kingdom had produced the effect of making its people to be independent and warlike in nature. This peculiar hilly environment had made the Alaaye, the *Oba* to be reputedly known across Yorubaland for his eagerness to dare his neighbours for wars. However, the above does not suggest that the kingdom waged wars without cause. Using the Efon-Ibadan, Efon-Ijesa, and Ekitiparapo wars as selected cases, the prime focus of this paper is to investigate the causes, nature and consequences of conflict between Efon Alaaye and some of her neighbours during the period under study. The diplomatic initiatives that eventually resolved the wars are also considered in this work. Specifically, the period 1815 and 1886 can be aptly described as the era of instability in the chequered history of Efon Alaaye. The kingdom and district witnessed a great deal of socio-political turmoil and economic dislocation. Apart from its internal political wrangling, Efon alaaye was molested by many external invaders. For instance in 1815, Efon was attacked and subdued by the *Edo (Bini)*¹. Barely fifteen years later, the town

came under Ilorin's assault. The *Bini* in fact established a permanent residency at *Ugbonhan* area of Efon Alaaye where they engaged in fruitful commercial intercourse with the Efon until the second half of the 19th century. *Bini*'s influence can still be seen in the chieftaincy institution of Efon till today. The word *IHARE* (combination of *Iwarafa meta and Ikosa*) or *Agba ulu* in Efon parlance may have been a borrowed word from the *Bini* or *Edo* language. Details of the above wars need not detain us as they did not have any revolutionary impact on the socio-political and economic life of Efon. We shall thus concentrate our discussion on the invasions of Efon by the Ibadan and the Ijesas because they, more than any others, constituted great threat to the political sovereignty of the kingdom in the second half of the 19th century.

THE EFON-IBADAN WAR OF 1850s

When Oluyole the first Basorun of Ibadan and Aare Kurunmi of Ijaye were receiving their titles from Alaafin Atiba of Oyo, one of the oaths taken was "... to have a free hand over all Ijesa and Ekiti, to reduce them to subjection"². Fortunately for Ibadan, the towns of Aaye and Otun, in Ekiti sought external aids in a boundary dispute between their two communities. The Otun requested the assistance of Ilorin and the Aaye sought Ibadan's assistance. Ibadan sent an army under Balogun Oderinlo while the Ilorin deployed a force under a seasoned Fulani leader called Afuku. In the ensued encounter the Ilorin army was dislodged and disgraced out of Ekiti³. However,, the Ibadan did not move out of Ekitiland once their job had been completed. They pounced on Iloro-Ekiti, Aiyetoro, Usi and Isan and ravaged other Ekiti towns until they suffered reverses at Itaji. The Itaji expedition opened the way for the Ibadan's incessant raids into Ekitiland which continued every year until the whole region was brought under control. These unprovoked attacks are enough to debunk the much vaunted claim by Professor Bolanle Awe⁴ that the Ibadan, in invading the Ekiti-Ijesa countries were inspired by philanthropic or altruistic motives. The Ibadan no doubt had imperial ambition to fulfill as events in Efon-Alaaye later revealed. Any little pretext was sufficient for Ibadan to overrun Ekiti for further raids.

In 1848, some Ibadan, led by Balogun Ibikunle, and Ilorin force combined to raid the Efon district. Though they were successful, this attack did not lead to the formal establishment of political control over Efon. Failing to humble the Efon as they wished even though Ajayi Ogbori Efon⁵ had succeeded in murdering an unnamed Efon war General, the Ibadan dispatched another invading force to Efon in *circa* 1850⁶. The Ibadan did not initially find things easy due to the seemingly impregnable nature of Efon and the military ingenuity of its warlords. Seasoned warriors like ARELEYEKE, AMAYAURIN, AGADA and ELEJOFI GANGANBIRI proved their worth as experienced soldiers. Chief OLOGUNDE AJAGAJIGI of *Obalu* Quarters who was at the time one of the most redoubtable soldiers that ever lived in Efon, made things extremely difficult for the invaders. He and his warboys, the *ELEEGBE*, put up a strong wall of defense which Ibadan soldiers found impenetrable for a long time⁷. However, the Ibadan laid a long siege on Efon. As the town could no longer bear the strains of war alone, it sought the help of her neighbours. Most of these towns had suffered similar assaults from Ibadan and Ilorin forces and so were very weak to help. For instance, Ogotun had been routed by Ibadan who left only thirty two human beings and a dog in the town. Towns like Aramoko, Ijero and Imesi-Igbodo (now Okemesi) were already very weak. Only Ido-Irapa, Apa-Ipole (now Ipole-Iloro) and Uwaji (villages under Efon) were able to render military aid to Efon. But their combined efforts

could not withstand the Ibadan superior military force, as Efon was completely sacked and laid desolate. To save himself from being captured and humiliated the *Alaaye* took refuge in Ugbole Aaye⁸, his former habitat. To compound the situation, Efon experienced a serious famine as a result of the invasion⁹.

The Ibadan ate up every available foodstuff and green crops on Efon farms. Even the unripe yam seeds were uprooted and eaten up by the famished soldiers. The Ibadan were said to have tauntingly joked of this episode saying: “*Biko dun lenu Ekiti, o dun lenu awa*”¹⁰. This literally translated means if the ekiti (Efon) found them yet inedible, we (Ibadan) do not mind them at all”. Kemi Morgan, an Ibadan local historian, graphically captured the occasion when she wrote:

Ibikunle men made stew of their goats at Efon; they ate the stew with their pounded yams. They ate the Apepe yams ... the Alolo yams... And set fire to all their crops... Ibikunle took off his garments of war to rest...even then he looked like a dreaded apparition¹¹.

The war which lasted till about 1854 claimed many lives and broke the hearts of the brave and daring¹². As Efon were scathered in every direction whilst Ibadan carted away as many of them as they could into slavery¹³. Among the captured slaves were OGUNYOMI, a girl of about seven, and her mother FAGBEADE¹⁴. Ogunyomi was later bought and redeemed by the first Christian Missionary couple in Ibadan, David and Anna Hinderer. Due to a good act of providence, Fagbeade and her daughter, Ogunyomi, though bought by different masters later re-united and lived with the Hinderers at Saint David’s Church, Kudeti, Ibadan. It was here that Ogunyomi received her elementary primary school education before she got married to Francis Akinyele (later Revd. F.L. Akinyele)¹⁵, the first boy in Ibadan to go to school. Her mother, Fagbeade, later took an English name, Lucy, as her baptismal name at Saint David’s Anglican Church Kudeti, Ibadan¹⁶.

THE EFON IJESA WAR 1862-1865

This was another devastating war that almost put Efon-Alaaye and district out of shape shortly before the commencement of the sixteen- year Yoruba war. The Efons and the Ijesas had never been the best of friends¹⁷. Hitherto, the relationship between the two people had always been that of equals¹⁸. The Ijesa of Ilesa town had never liked the situation as it were but could not engage the Efon alone in a long drawn battle. Entrenched in their mountain fastness the Efons appeared safe from the Ijesas and other foes. The people of Ilesa therefore mustered the support of other Ijesa towns and villages before launching an attack on Efon.

The year 1862¹⁹, was an opportuned time for the Ijesa to carry out their grand designs against the Efon. Their grouse was that Efon allegedly gave military assistance to the Ibadan at the celebrated Ijebu-Ere war²⁰ between the Ijesa and Ibadan. The allegation made against Efon was unjustified because the Efon had not forgotten the devastation of their town by the Ibadan in the 1850s. Nonetheless, the Ijesa used the allegation as a pretext to attack Efon. The Ijesas were led by Ogedengbe Agbogunboro²¹, who, traditions in Efon and Ijesa claimed, had Efon blood flowing in his vein. What exactly his relationship was with Efon has not been proven beyond reasonable doubt. However, the warring parties first met at Ido-Gongo, a sub-town of Efon, some

eight kilometers South West of Efon. As the war continued the *Alaaye, Oba Ajogede*²², asked for military help from the neighbouring towns of Ogotun and Okemesi (Imesi-Igbodo)²³.

Meanwhile, the Ijesas had sent messengers round to the neighbours of Efon to procure their neutrality. At Ogotun and Okemesi, the authorities in both towns had it announced by their town criers that they had no interest in the war between Efon and Ijesa and would therefore remain neutral. At Okemesi, *Oba Aponlose* made it an offence for any Imesi man to go to the aid of Efon. But despite the professed neutrality by their *Obas*, the desire of the Imesi and Ogotun to aid their Efon neighbours overrode all fears. At Ogotun, a fearless warlord called Osunsanmi organized a volunteer force in support of Efon whilst Prince Adesoye, the brother of the reigning *Oba Aponlose* and father of Balogun Fabunmi (who later initiated the Ekitiparapo confederacy) openly defied his brother's warning. He, too, raised a formidable army in support of Efon²⁴. Combined forces of Efon, Uwaji, Apa-Ipole and Ido-Gongo (Efon satellite villages) pitched their camp against the Ijesa army. The people of Ido-Irapa (now Ido Ajinnare) and supposedly, Efon ally, secretly leaked Efon war plans to the Ijesas. Even at the battle-front they were firing *popondo* (beans) at the Ijesa instead of the fire-arms provided them by the Efon²⁵. Prominent among Efon war chieftains who took part in this battle were Balogun Ologunde Ajagajigi, Elemikan Jogunosimi (a.k.a. agbori olorisor), Ajagunna Iyaya, Osogun Sagasaga, Odele Ogun, Onibaba, Ogbirigilaya, Awolu sebi Aare, Odumirinkanle, Ogini Familusi and Okiribata²⁶.

The war was dogged, protracted and bloody. It lasted for over a year before the Efon and allies began to feel the strains and stresses of the war. They made a tactical retreat in a southerly direction to Ogotun²⁷. By now Efon had become very weak having formerly witnessed similar aggressions in the hands of the Edos, Ilorins and the Ibadans²⁸. The Efons lost the battle. They could not save their town from pillage and destruction. Once again the Efon deserted their town. Most of them fled to Ogotun in the company of Osunsanmi, the Ogotun war General.

The Ijesa army laid siege to Ogotun for giving military aid to Efon. Both Efon and Ogotun forces gallantly fought the Ijesas for about two years. When the Efons realized the futility of further resistance they decided to return home and the Ogotuns surrendered to the Ijesas but not before they had lost Osunsanmi in one of the battles. His lieutenant called Oliye fled to take refuge at Ikere. As a reprisal for coming to the assistance of Efon, the Ijesas also sacked Imesi Igbodo and carried away as much of their wealth as they could²⁹.

On their homeward journey from Ogotun the Efon passed through Erinmo in Ijesa territory where they rested for a while. The *Alaaye, Oba Ajogede* (plantain eater) was at this time murdered by unknown assassins amongst his aggrieved and famished subjects perhaps for his disgraceful outing. Reasons for this dastardly act are however not very clear. But according to source most of his soldiers felt betrayed, disgraced and humiliated with the cowardly behavior of the slain ruler who, it was alleged, unilaterally decided to go to the *Owa* of Ilesa to appease him. *Oba Asemojo*, successor to *Oba Ajogede*, finally led his people back home three years after Efon had been deserted. The new *Oba*, a very likeable man with imposing personality, enjoyed the confidence and support of his people. He was said to be wealthy and influential. He sent messages to the neighbouring towns and villages appealing to Efon in exile to come back home and re-settle. He also used his money and influence to redeem many who had voluntarily pawned themselves to their protectors. Hence, the popular saying in Efon till today: "*Oba Asemojo bi*

*Owo, Ogbaruku Efon soro*³⁰ which literally translated to mean the Oba who gathered children like money, he who gathered the sand of Efon to create wealth". During his time, peace and tranquility reigned supreme and Efon regained her lost glory until the outbreak of Ekitiparapo War in 1877. However, the war had taken its toll as many Efon and allied soldiers died in large numbers. Those who survived fell victims of famine and its attendant woes as the Efons were reduced to feeding on roots of trees, pounding hay for food and eating other loathsome objects³¹.

EFON ALAAYE IN THE EKITIPARAPO WAR 1877-1893

Shortly after the cessation of hostilities between Efon and Ijesa, the Ekitiparapo war popularly called KIRIJI war (1877-1893) broke out³². As expected Efon Alaaye joined the confederate army initiated by Balogun Fabunmi of Okemesi against the Ibadan – their common enemy. The war which took place between Imesi-Ile and Igbajo was protracted and sanguinary. The late Pa AMAYAUNRIN, AGADA, ELEJOFI GANGANBIRI, the father of the late Elejofi ASUKU OLAYINKA of Idagba area of Efon Alaaye, was among those soldiers who distinguished themselves in the war. Hostilities eventually ceased between 1886 and 1893 when the British colonial authority in Lagos intervened and diplomatically imposed their so-called *PAX BRITANNICA* (British peace) on the whole of Yorubaland.

IMPACT OF WARFARE ON EFON ALAAYE

The effects of the various wars on Efon Alaaye were far-reaching. A large number of people, soldiers, and civilians alike, fell to bullets, famine and its attendant woes. Many Efon people were sold into slavery, while many others were either displaced or became refugees. Enemy troops looted and destroyed food crops and animals extensively. The wars also brought about severe social dislocations and degradation of many families broke up, Efon kingdom was sacked and rendered desolate on at least two occasions, while many of its people reported to scavenging for survival.

It must however be pointed out that Efon Alaaye emerged from the aforementioned wars a battered but united town than hitherto. The effects of the wars it has been argued made the six hitherto autonomous quarters viz: *Aaye, Obalu, Ejingan, Emo, Usaja* and *Ukagbe*, to consider themselves as one against common invaders thus their eventual unification as a single, indivisible political entity called Efon-Alaaye. Hence, Efon today is an amalgam of different villages which settled at the present site at different periods for a common purpose³³. Thus the saying: *Efon Ilu alayejaye* (Efon a composite town). The effect of these wars on Efon can still be found in the number of old and abandoned sites of quarters which no longer exist. That Efon was at one time considerably larger than it is today is evident from the huge circumference of the old town moat, traces of which can still be seen at *Oke Iloya* and *Alanaka* areas of the town.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is evident that Efon Alaaye had an ample share of the vagaries of internecine wars that ravaged Yorubaland in the nineteenth century. Apart from ‘small wars’ fought against the Bini and the Ilorin, etc, Efon was pitched in fratricidal conflicts against the

Ijesa and Ibadan. Hostilities in the Ekitiparapo War (tagged the Mother of all Wars in Yorubaland), in which Efon was an active participant, was only terminated towards the close of the century by British intervention through a combination of diplomacy and military force. Expectedly, the various wars fought by Efon brought far-reaching consequences upon the socio-political and economic life of its people. There were great human casualties regarding soldiers and civilians alike whose deaths resulted from actual fighting as well as other factors like famine and its attendant woes. The wars had a negative demographic effect on Efon due to the high death rate, enslavement and displacement of people to distant places. The conflicts undermined the economy and means of livelihood of the people due to wanton looting and destruction of food crops and livestock. Social dislocations and degradation also occurred in terms of family break-ups, the sacking and desertion of Efon on at least two occasions, and the reduction of many people to the status of 'scavengers'. On the positive side, however, the Efon people emerged from the wars more united than before. The need for better defense and security compelled the hitherto autonomous communities to merge into a single political union and entity called Efon Alaaye. In all, this study is a significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge in the sense that it is a detailed historical reconstruction of war and peace with particular reference to Efon Alaaye during the precolonial era.

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- K. Morgan (n.d.), pp. 125-129
- K. Morgan (n.d.), p.128.
- K. Morgan (n.d.), p.128.

For instance, the Ijesa revealed their hatred for the Efon to Tabitha Jennie Clarke in 1854. When Clarke during her travels and explorations between 1854 and 1858 asked the Ijesa (in Ilesa) to show her the way to Efon about which she had heard so much, the reply she got was tinged with bitterness. The Ijesa said there was no town called by that name...” It is composed of those people who condemned for offences under the reign of a certain king, fled from justice or tyranny and located in this town”. See J.A. Atanda (ed.) (1972) *Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858* (By W.H.Clarke): Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, p.131.

See S. Johnson, (1976), p.321 where he refers to the Ekiti's, the Ijesa and the Efon. This shows that the Efon were originally neither Ekiti nor Ijesa. Efon traditions support this fact.

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