

A Historical Review of the Egun Tribe in Badagry: 1960 – 2015

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ABSTRACT: *There are untold accounts written by scholars on the history of Badagry town. Due to its historical importance to the subject of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in Nigeria and its rich tourism potential, Badagry town has aroused the interest of not only scholars but visitors everywhere who come for reasons such as leisure, learning or the unique purpose of self-identity (genealogy). Conversely, not much is known or has been written about the people who reside in Badagry town: The Egun ethnic group. The history of this tribe is wrapped up in obscurity that people assumed they do not exist. Therefore, this research work gives an explanatory note on the history of the Egun ethnic group in Badagry. It covers the post-colonial era period in Nigeria, from independence in 1960 to 2015. Data were obtained using a qualitative method(observations and interviews).*

KEYWORDS: colonialism; culture and tradition; ethnic segregation

INTRODUCTION

History plays an important role in community development. A community is a group of people who share similarities in race, culture, interest and/or nationality and reside within a geographical location [1]. Taking account of the keywords in this definition, it is quite difficult to identify the Egun ethnic group with a particular tribe in Nigeria. Over the years, its history has hardly been documented in Nigeria's history. The ethnic segregation of the Egun people by other ethnic groups in Nigeria has led to its unpopularity despite settling in one of the most historical towns in Nigeria. Through community resistance, the Egun ethnic group has weathered the storm and is slowly integrating into the larger community in Lagos State [2, 3].

There are different versions of the origin of Badagry, many of which vary in composition and similarity [4]. As it is common with most African societies that base their history on oral traditions, myths, legends, fables, and stories, it is difficult to ascertain the real history of such a society. Oral tradition accounts for a considerable part of Egun history. The irregularities ascribed to Egun's oral history may elucidate the superficial state of the past and present-day Egun ethnic group [5]. However, it remains a fact that oral tradition has been the elementary bedrock of history in African historical clime before the advent of written records by the Europeans.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Ogu (Erroneously called the Egun) are one of the major settlers in Lagos State [6]. Badagry is a town where the Egun is majorly found. This settlement is one of the major historical towns in Lagos State. It is noted historically as the door of civilization to Nigeria. Badagry also serves as the museum of relics and artefacts relating to the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in Nigeria. The town houses some historical landscapes like the first-story building and the Agia tree, where Christianity was first preached in Nigeria. Badagry also has several kilometres of aquatic richness, which spread out along the coast of the Atlantic Ocean in southwest Nigeria.

The Egun people are migrants from Dahomey, present-day Republic of Benin. Egun is a distinct ethnic group that occupies 15% of Lagos state population [7]. They are a sub-ethnic group of Egun-speaking people of the Republic of Benin. The homestead of the Egun in Nigeria: Badagry, shares a common boundary with the Republic of Benin. The Atlantic Ocean which straddles the coast of Badagry provides an avenue for fishing which is the major source of income generation for its people. The Egun women folk are highly skilled in the production of pottery, raffia mat and basket weaving. There is also, an abundance of coconut trees, which can be found all over the town and exported to other parts of Nigeria as cash crops [8]. The importance of the Egun people in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade and their acceptance as part of the Yoruba tribe has not received the attention it deserved by historians and the Nigerian populace.

METHODOLOGY

The research methodology used as the central focus for this study is the explanatory method due to limited information on the research topic. This method includes the use of primary and secondary sources. The main characteristic of these methods is that it uses historical objectivity and fact-finding enquiries. At the primary level, oral interviews were the major technique used to extract information. Interviews were conducted with different indigenes residing in and outside Badagry. Other sources such as archival materials were used for this research work. The National Archives in Ibadan contributed massively to this research work. At the secondary level, libraries of the University of Lagos and Lagos State University were also consulted. More so, the study considers, relevant information based on the works of other scholars. However, primary evidence forms the bulk of this research work, while written documents were used to corroborate the primary sources.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Egun in Post-Colonial Nigeria

The Egun general development as of independence in 1960 has not changed much since the abolition of the slave trade early in the mid-'90s [9]. Although Badagry served as the entry point at which the European accessed the rest of Nigeria, its historical importance has been greatly undermined. The creation of Lagos as a state triggered

astronomical growth in both the political relevance and economical importance of the state. Unfortunately, the only political significance Badagry had since the independence was the Monarchy of the town: Oba Akran [10].

The oil boom in the 1970s led to an increase in economic growth, improved quality of life of people, and changes in the lifestyle of many states in Nigeria. Lagos being the seat of power at that time developed rapidly, with roads, architecture and commercial activities springing up and dominating the city centre. These developments were only limited to some regions in the state. Regarding the abundant nature tourism resources in Badagry, its tourism potential remains underexploited by successive governments. Rather, relying on petroleum as the major source of revenue on the local and national levels. In the 1980s, there was no significant development of note to the people of Badagry. Its sons and daughters were not considered for political positions. Industrial parks and estates were being created in many regions across Lagos. Badagry had ample land for these projects, but it remains a mystery why it was overlooked. Besides its proximity to the Republic of Benin and the rest of West Africa, the Egun people had coastlines, lagoons and creeks that could serve as ports and wharves for goods coming into the country. It is safe to assume that the Egun people during the post-colonial era were not properly represented in the history of Nigeria.

Since the turn of the millennium and the full democratization of Nigeria, there have been considerable developments in the town; many of the Egun citizens are being represented in every facet of the state's development. Some commercial banks have branches in the town. However, economic activities remain sluggish leading to many businesses shutting down operations or offering limited services. Egunland still has a long way to go in actualizing its potential as a Historic town.

Migration and The Emergence of Ogu In Badagry.

The Egun migratory history is a chequered one since there is no collective agreement on their settlement in Badagry. The Egun are dispersed between the Republic of Benin, Ogun state and Lagos state in Nigeria. The Yoruba migration was allegedly led by an Ife Prince named Asheshe. He was said to be the son of an Ooni of Ife who is generally believed to have sent his sons to establish independent kingdoms. Thus, Asheshe established the kingdom of Apa (west of Badagry) and also found a line of Obas called 'Alapas'. Several villages from the Port-Novo district settled in different parts of the Badagry district. For instance, the Tori established Iragan village and were later joined by the Hueda. Today, Iragan has two quarters; The Toliko and Huedako quarters. The Ajara group settled in Ajara village near Badagry, while the Seho settled in Badagry. The Seho followed the Egun people of Port-Novo when they were displaced. The Adja communities in Port-Novo and Badagry formed a coherent cultural area which was closely interlocked and operated as a single socio-economic unit before the colonial era [11, 12].

Egun and Her Neighbours

To the Egun people, Badagry was established as a refuge and a defensive settlement against the marauding warriors from Dahomey. Since they migrated to Badagry town,

the Egun have built themselves a close-knitted community of people who live in harmony with one another. Although the Egun dominate Badagry, there were still other ethnic groups that live amongst them majorly the Awori and Egbado groups. It is also of note that the neighbouring Republic of Benin harbours the majority of the Egun tribes. Cities like Cotonou and Port – Novo are ancestral cousins to the Egun of Nigeria. Also, the Egun people have communities in Togo and Ghana [13]. There have been cultural, economic, and matrimonial exchanges between these peoples for several decades. These factors engendered a sort of togetherness amongst these people.

Egun Within the Yoruba Tribe

The Yoruba tribe is one of the three major tribes in Nigeria and the closest tribe to the Egun people. It has been difficult for The Yorubas to accept the Egun as part of the Original Yoruba group, unlike the Awori who speak their own distinct Yoruba dialect and are considered to be part of the Yoruba tribe. The Yorubas believe that all original indigenes of Yoruba descend from Oduduwa the progenitor of the Great Yoruba tribe. What fuelled these sentiments was the difference in traditional religion and linguistic and cultural similarities. Therefore, any group that does not have its roots in Ile-Ife does not belong to the Yoruba group. Today, these sentiments have changed, the Egun have now been considered a part of the Yoruba group and there has been a cordial relationship between the Egun and the Yorubas. The position of the Akran as one of the Obas in Yorubaland has been cemented by the frequent visit of the monarch to various monarchs in Yorubaland.

Trado - Cultural Aspect of Egun

Despite the influence of Western culture which has eroded the trado-cultural aspect of many African societies including Nigeria, Badagry still preserves its cultural identity. The difference in language and the remoteness of major towns in Yorubaland has been significant in upholding their beliefs and traditions. As with many ethnic groups in Nigeria, social events are the backbone of each community. The socio-religious organization of the Egun people will not be complete without the early history of Christianity in Nigeria. Despite the efforts made by the Christian missionaries to plant Christianity in Egunland, traditional religions continued to thrive. The Egun people have a strong belief in the supreme God whom they refer to as 'Jiwheyewhe' 'Mawu' or 'Ose'. Traditional Religion in Egunland has its distinct superstitious. For example, looking at the mirror while it is raining is forbidden as the Hevioso (god of thunder) would strike those who disobey. The worshippers believe that these taboos will discourage bad manners amongst them [14].

Culturally the Egun people possess a plethora of festivals to showcase many of their beliefs and tradition. The Oro, Egungun, Igunnuko, Zagbeto and Sato festivals are still noticeable in Badagry. Sato is the musical and dance of the people of Akarakumo who fled from what is known today as the Republic of Benin, during the Dahomean wars and settled on this idyllic lagoon front near Badagry town. It is a dance for kings, chiefs and Obas. The dance is performed annually on the twelfth of April. The oracle is consulted before the commemoration of the festival. If the oracle declares that the Sato dance should be performed that year; it is obeyed. For instance, the Oracle declared that

the Sato drums should not be brought out for celebration in 1987, it was obeyed and in such cases, nothing can be done to make the oracle change its mind [15]. The festival is believed to usher in peace and improvement in the economic life of the locals. Any male child born during this period is called "Satome" and a female "Satosi".

Socio-Economic activities of the Egun

Farming, sand mining, fishing, mat weaving and pottery making are dominant occupations among the Egun people of Badagry. Badagry has a large supply of fish all year round. Efforts made by the Lagos State Government to improve agriculture in the Badagry area were directed towards the growing of Coconuts [16]. To promote coconut production in Badagry, the government reserved a substantial amount of land in communities such as the Coconut village at Ikoga, Aradagun and neighbouring communities [17]. Mat-weaving is also a means of export for the people in Egunland. mats made in Badagry are exported as far as Ivory Coast. They are majorly sold at the main market in Badagry: Agbalata Market. Sand mining is also a laborious but financial rewarding job in Badagry. The locals dive deep into rivers to fetch sands which are loaded in locally made canoes and sold or used for other purposes.

Tourism in Badagry

Badagry has been a potential tourism haven due to its historical connection to the long abandoned slave trade. Badagry is also blessed with a long stretch of beautiful coastlines and lagoons that create an environment for relaxation for people. Unfortunately, these natural gifts are not utilized by the Egun people because of the neglect by the government [18]. In Badagry a few sites like Mobee Slave Chains and the First storey building are open to the public. There are very few hotels around Badagry that cater for tourism, Whispering Palms is a holiday resort in the lagoon area of Badagry that double as a hotel and tourist centre.

Implications to Research

The study will help to enrich the academic community and the public on the history and importance of the Egun ethnic group in Badagry, from post-colonial Nigeria. This study aims to unravel the emergence of the Egun in Nigeria, the perceived obscurity of the Egun people within the Yoruba tribe and the challenges faced by the Egun ethnic group since Nigeria's independence. In addition, this research work will serve as a scholarly basis for future studies on the history of the Egun people in Badagry; this is because the outcome will be useful for students and researchers who might want to conduct related studies in the future.

CONCLUSION

Compared to the post-colonial era discussed in this research, the 21st century has brought several positive developments to the Egunland. Infrastructural development of Badagry has been a top priority for the present Lagos state government and private investors are finding more reasons to invest in Badagry. The ongoing Badagry Port & Free Zone project will further promote the import and export activities in Lagos State,

hence leading to growth and the development of Egunland when these projects have been completed [19]. Furthermore, there have been promotional activities on tourism attractions in Badagry through social medial platforms and the media. The beautiful nature tourism resources such as beaches and festivals will offer huge tourist attractions, and also serve as an avenue for promoting the culture of Egunland. While the past seemed bleak, the future appears bright for the Egun tribe if there are continued efforts by the government and the general public to promote, develop and embrace the Egun community.

RECOMMENDATION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Nigeria is Africa's most populated nation with a rich tradition and over 250 ethnic groups. While the three major ethnic groups (Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa) continue to grow in popularity and dominance, equal attention should be paid to other minorities who form the bedrock of "One Nigeria". Moreover, a historical account of the colonial era and the significance of the Egun ethnic group should be properly documented in Nigeria's history books and taught in academic institutions. Further research should be conducted on Egunland to protect its history and values which are slowly weakening with time.

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