

DYNAMIC OF WARFARE IN PRE-COLONIAL OFFA LAND, 1878 - 1886

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ABSTRACT: *This paper interrogates the arts of Warfare in Pre-colonial Offa Land, 1878 – 1886. It examines dynamic nature of warfare under Balogun Agidiako the war commander of Offa land at Jalumi War and Ilorin War under the Leadership of Balogun Karara. This paper adopts historical narrative techniques on how warfare was executed in Offa land 1887 – 1888 differently, with things to remember: drawing on both primary and secondary sources this paper emphasized on system of control, the administration of forces, the strategies employed and the character of the forces involved towards a revolutionary changes and struggle for hegemony by Offa against Ilorin. This paper advances that Offa engaged in three different battles with distinct military prowess, warfare tactics and strategies. Though, this paper stands to contribute to academic discourse on Pre-colonial warfare in Sub-Saharan Africa.*

KEY WORDS: Warfare, Pre-colonial, Offa Land, Jalumi, Tactics and Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

War and societies in pre-colonial Africa have remain an emerging heated debate among scholars in African historiography with emphasis on political, economy and social issues as a causative factor among kingdoms and entities in pre-colonial times. Emphases have been on the rise and fall, political succession, economic relations and to some extent social integration and disparities. Most if not all of the existing literature are a reflection of the Eurocentric perspectives on Africa. Most often than not, explanations and writings on wars in African society's, perspectives usually tended to highlight the subordination of African societies and their life style to European perspectives and culture.

However, Africa has traditionally had a large number of traditional authorities and war veterans who have played an important role in community coherence and traditional defense systems, especially in the Southern, Northern and Middle Belt of the country. During the pre-colonial and -colonial era, the positions of

existing authorities were recognized, and new chiefs were created to harmonies the system. Although this system has persisted until the present day, the rise of alternative poles of power, in particular the local and state governments, has tended to undermine the powers of such individuals or councils.¹

Warfare within the context of Pre-colonial Offa Land was an act of prepared confrontations intended to compel openness or fulfill predetermine will of self independents out of external domination. It was a result of betrayal of what could be regarded as violation of common goodness of Offa Land by individuals Oligarchy of Ilorin, two or more hostile groups of Nupe incursion. War and Warfare played the most important factor in the history of Offa land, It carries with it fortunes and misfortunes, hopes and mishaps. It creates long lasting enmity and mutual suspicion between Offa and Ilorin till dates. Sometimes one could pause and ask what could have responsible for high level mistrust among two prominent cities of Kwara state. This paper argued that Pre-colonial Warfare between Offa Land and Ilorin, 1878 – 1886 is the father of diplomacy and dynamic resistance tactics and strategies to Ilorin incessant raids on Offa Land in pr-colonial times.

Against this background this paper present narratives analysis on warfare in Offa land where power, and in particular the power to make decisions about peace, war and about negotiation with other communities was concentrated in an oligarchy system, assisted by military commander, the war progenitors of Offa land and member of the community.

Geography and the People of Offa

Offa is an ancient town and Headquarters of Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria. It is the second largest town in the state, located in North central Nigeria with geographic coordinates of 8°9N 4°43E. Offa was founded by *Olalomi Olofa-gangan*; a crown prince from Oyo, and a direct descendant of king *Oranmiyan* in Ile-Ife, around 1395. He was a renowned hunter reputed for his dexterity as an archer. Offa is the traditional headquarters of *Ibolo* dialect of the Yoruba speaking people of Kwara and Osun States. Offa Local Government Area has five wards, namely; *Essa, Ojomu, Balogun, Shawo* and *Igbo-Idun*. Offa is the home of the legendary Moremi, who was believed to be responsible for the defeat of the frequent marauders who raided Ife, an ancient town and cradle of Yoruba race.²

Offa is centrally located in the midst and middle of many neighboring towns like Erin Ile in the south, Ijagbo in the north, Igosun and Ipee in the east and Ilemona, Irra, Ikotun and Ojoku in the west. Other towns surrounding Offa are Igosun and Igbo Idun. In addendum, Offa means "arrow" in the Yoruba

Language. Also Ilorin means "the sharpening of iron for military weapons", Offa and Ilorin being military towns of the Old Oyo Empire were military outposts of the Old Oyo Empire. Offa is a liner settlement which links other prominent cities like Ilorin to South west. This strategic importance Offa settlement could not afford Offa without allies. Thus, the relevance of Offa as strategic post for mobility and logistics supply during pre-colonial Yoruba wars.

The prominent knighted chiefs of Offa include Esa, Ojomu, Sawo and Balogun (the war lord). The praise name of Offa is "Ijakadi Loro Offa", a Yoruba phrase meaning "wrestling is our game". The city's mascot is the peacock bird which is one of the most prominent exotic avian species in the region. The strategic geographical relevance of Offa attracted influx of population settlement that contributed to her military strength and dynamic warfare culture of total wars. Thus, geographical relevance of Offa within the savannah promoted fighting on foot, her ecology necessarily shaped the way the Offa infantries fought in each of the battle notably within the forest zone, river and mutinous parts.

Pre-colonial Offa/Ilorin Military & Warfare: A Background

How were the wars organized, what was the economics of war mobilization like and how were the campaigns conducted? How did these wars impact on the socio-political structures of the Offa Land? Relaying of oral information on the strength of the defensive armies of the Offa Land in relation to Ilorin armies during the Pre-colonial era of confrontation and incessant raids by Ilorin, it was during the reign of Oba Okunoye that the war between Offa and Ilorin occurred; this commenced in 1878 and terminated 1886, a period of nine years.³ Understanding pre-colonial Offa Military display and Warfare, it is pertinent to emphasize Offa war against Ilorin was a resistant war at several battles in collaboration with several allies of Oyo, Ogbomoso, Osogbo and several Yoruba military organization of similar interest of resisting Ilorin armies and Islamic revolution.

Thus, the Ilorins, deriving vitality from the fraternity of a newly established state anchored in religion, the Muslim faith spread by Usman Danfodio Jihad, the first of its kind among Yoruba speaking people, faced several resistance from the waves of Yoruba armies sent against it and in the process, engaged on subjugation of Yoruba towns such as Ijagbo, Oyun, Offa with ultimate goal of reaching Osogbo and Oyo: though, checked by the armies of Offa vassal town in collaboration with combined armies of Ibadan. In the process, there emerged keeping of powerful warrior and armies who derived gains from the slave raids.⁴

It is succinct to state that geographical position of Offa cum extra territorial aggression of Ilorin in slave raids informed Offa/ Ilorin war. Be that as it may,

Ilorin found itself faced with the growing power of Ibadan trying to re-establish itself in the southeast and with the quest for territory of the Nupe emirates in the northeast.⁵ In both cases, cooperation proved to be profitable in terms of slave acquisition. Against the background of no permanent friend and no permanent enemy Samuel Johnson identified the Wokuti expedition of 1875-76⁶, in which Ilorin forces joined those of Ibadan, as an "expedition for slave-hunting" in Ekiti, Yagba, and Akoko land. The Ilorin forces, he reported, "did very well for themselves in the pursuit" of the people of the town of Ikole an enemy of Ibadan. Though, a unity of purpose that could not last turned Ibadan to the side of Offa after Ibadan ran in enmity with Ilorin; forming a lasting alliance with Offa to execute war against a common enemy "Ilorin". Offa in alliance with Ibadan stages a total war with Ilorin to resist slave raids and forays of kidnapping expeditions. At various times, Ilorin forces were reported to be "in the habit of kidnapping the caravans between Offa and Erin⁷ "dispat` `osho farms.⁸ War captives were also taken from among the population of

Offa itself. Nathaniel Popoola Olawoyin of Offa, for example, was captured and sold to a buyer in Abeokuta, and his mother and sister were taken to Ikirun. Other Offa people were "sold to wealthy people in Lagos by Ilorin.⁹ It has been established that the subject of warfare in precolonial Offa land centered on struggle for hegemony, though in social-political history of Offa the war is regarded as protective cum resistance warfare.

The Arts of Warfare: Offa Military

Pre-colonial army in Offa Land took many forms. In their human composition they range from citizen armies, to compact groups of professionals of machineries from Osogbo, Oyo and Ibadan on long term paid services. Armies were often reinforced by allies and by mercenaries, combination against a common foe, forged by diplomacy, were salient features of warfare in precolonial Offa land against the Muslim power of Ilorin¹¹

The principles of military leadership varied along balance of arms, in the sense specialization on the use of weapons and firepower. Within the spectrum of pre-colonial Offa land, war participation was not a function of class segregation as evidence abound that nearly every capable male and specially selected women capable of bearing arms were for military services in time of war.

Reaping the economic benefit of war, war captives played the role of spies in pre-colonial Offa warfare. Where advancement might be considered tedious and dangerous at first attack, war captives were deployed as spies to gathered preliminary information. Thus, war spies were utilized as doomed agent.¹² The mobilization strategies, the Olofa of Offa was the commander in chief of the

traditional army assisted by *Balogun* (the war commander) of Offa land who supervised the recruitment into the traditional army.

Oral accounts on pre-colonial warfare in Offa Land describe the all-infantry armies as being armed with double-edged swords, lances and bows, while protection was afforded by shields.¹⁰ However, other source indicate that the weapons in Pre-colonial Offa Warfare were at variance depending on the battle involved and preliminary information on the enemies strength and the objective condition of the war fields. In fact Pre-colonial Offa armies involved several specialized types of soldier differently equipped.¹³ Offa pre-colonial military armies under *Balogun Agidiako* the war commander of Offa land carried a sword, javelins which were often poisoned, a shield and likewise equipped with bows and arrows, and yet others carried only a sword. The term *Balogun* was derived from *Iba-ni-ogun*, meaning lord in war. During the war, the *Balogun* was supreme; he commanded the obedience from other warriors.¹⁴ It is remarkable to note the name Offa is coined from the dexterity of *Olalomi* the founder of Offa land a hunter reputed for his dexterity as an archer notable for his skills in the use of bows and arrows.

This weapon comprises three parts, the arrow (Ofa) which is the ammunition, an elastic bow string (orun) and the stave on which the bow is mounted. To ensure efficiency, the arrow is dipped into poison, so once it is directed to someone; it struck either to cause illness or death. Bows and arrows are infantry weapons that were used in Offa military wars.¹⁵

Pre-colonial infantry of Offa land were divided into unites of main force and reserved army with advanced training. Fighting was the responsibility of younger able bodies. The Offa armies along it allies of Ibadan was estimated as containing about sixty thousand souls numbering men and women.¹⁶ Reflecting on general characteristics of pre-colonial warfare in Offa land it could be argued that success in battles depends more on leadership and organization which rest on community resources. Nevertheless, the role of supernatural power of god of Iron was not taken for granted: *Ogun* (the god of iron) was consulted for favours and victory in the battle. A war confers honour and bestows respect at the end of the day it is believed that the neglect of *Ogun* might be disastrous. It guides the time to launch attack, the time to avoid direct confrontation among others. The warriors are expected to offer ritual sacrifices (*Ebo riru*).

Change in Military Structure, Strategies and Tactics

Pre-colonial Offa Warfare was characterized of notable changes in military structure and tactics aimed at quick victory against the enemies. The war was fought in battles both on the soil of Offa and outside post alongside the Ibadan allies against common enemy of Ilorin. Meanwhile, the change in tactics and

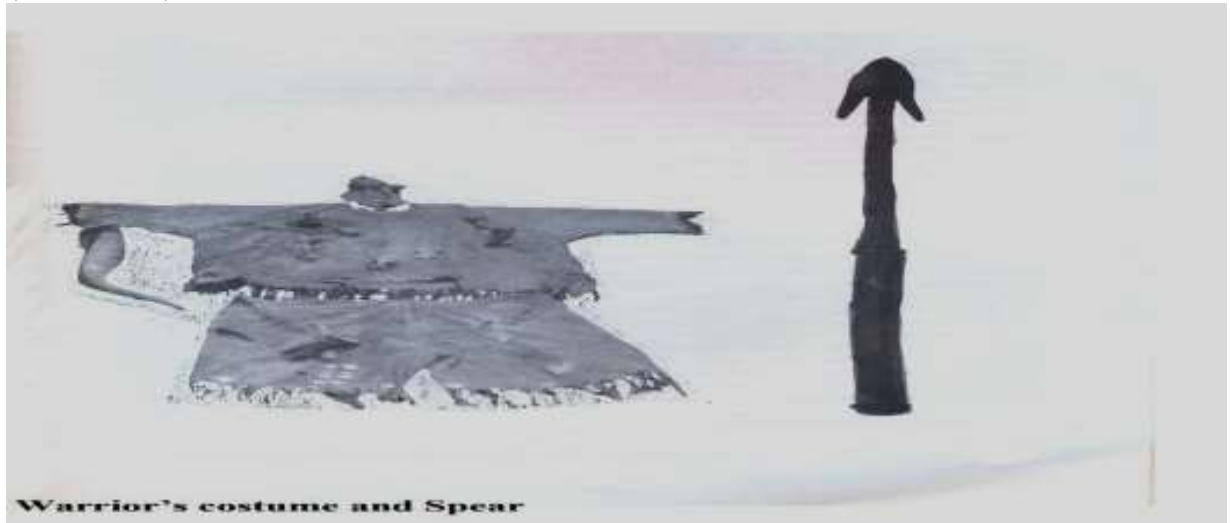
strategies of warfare by pre-colonial Offa was a calculated attempt on the context of the battles, instrument of war on the sides of the enemies. For instance, most of the Offa engagement with Ilorin at home front was physically fight at the early stage of the wars relying on the might of the war lords and their soldiers on foot. In 1882, Offa embraced vigorously the use of guns and lances to defeat the enemy along sides the combined solders of Oyo at *Kiriji* war. The term *Kiriji* war was derived from frightened noise of combined Offa, Osogbo and Ibadan guns which frightened the horses of Ilorin, the guns did not help the Ilorin to avert defeat.¹⁷ The guns used were locally made from woods which were hard pliant and piece of iron by local gold smiths usually from the military industrial quarters.



Picture of firearms Use in pre-colonial warfare of Offa Land at Kiriji war

A review of Offa community planning for war and overall strategy for victory indicate the use of communication lines such road access, Transportation Bridge to advantage to curtail advancement of the enemy. Thus, Offa engaged guerrilla tactics destroying major bridge on the way to Osogbo resulting in high causality of Ilorin armies and their houses flouting in water. Offa took advantage of war front physical environmental landscape at battle of Osogbo involving Offa and Ilorin which broadly took place in the savannah. The tropical rainforest of the River Osogbo sparsely inhabited, thus, from a strictly terrain point of view, involve the use of fine cavalry by Ilorin. But the use of horses does not favoure Ilorin as most of the horses were never able to survive the climate of the region pronouncing heavy causalities on the account of Ilorin.

Dynamic nature of warfare under *Balogun Agidiako* the war commander of Offa land 1878 – 1886 as part of strategies and tactics during the war, engaged successfully the service Offa women trained and fought like men, which manifested as very significant contributions in discharged of super natural power and hospitality services at war front. The point at which the women was most engaged in history of Offa became known as in history as “*Ojo ogun ojo*” (War of rain).¹⁸



Source: Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture

The Role of Supernatural power

Supernatural power play a significant role in pre-colonial Offa warfare, the practices of traditional beliefs find its way into the planning and execution battles, it is a common belief that the spirit of war determine success or failure of war, thus needs to be appease severally before and after the execution of warfare. Thus, both physical and supernatural forces were present in the administration of warfare in the pre-colonial society of Offa land.

The Esa (Offa tradition custodian) had the responsibility of providing items of sacrifice before and after the war.¹⁹ The war commander of Offa was usually with a staff as a symbol of war decorated with charms and amulets. It was also a symbol of strength ascribed with mysterious power. It was used as a material in appeasing the god of war before commencement of war.

Though it is not a weapon but it is a war standard that was relevant and important.

Amulets supernaturally, these are charms worn on various part of the body (waist, neck and arms). Examples of such are *Ifunpa* to protect against physical attack. It is used to disappear from the scene of war. *Okigbe* was another amulet

used against or to resist the effect of cuts. *Akiya* (motivator) was worn to remove fear and ensuring boldness.²⁰ *Apeta* - (invocation shooting) remain largely part of Offa pre-colonial warfare, a mud image of the person is designed. The name of the victim is called together incantations on the image. Then the image is shot with a gun or pierced with Knife and the person dies.

CONCLUSION

Conclusively, the nature of warfare in pre-colonial Offa land was a dynamic one with unique characteristics relevant to modern day war strategy and tactics of compliance with objective physical warring environment. Pre-colonial Offa Land, 1878 - 1886 engaged in three different battles successfully with distinct military prowess, warfare tactics and strategies, harnessed war comparative advantages of her linear settles cum subtle diplomacy of combine efforts of external allies. From the foregoing interrogation of Pre-colonial warfare of Offa land, it was discovered that military industrial prowess in the use of guns and lances defeated the enemy along sides the combined solders of Oyo at *Kiriji* war. The horrific sound of the guns used for the Oshogbo battle equally term *Kiriji* war was derived from frightened noise of combined Offa, Osogbo and Ibadan guns which frightened the horses of Ilorin, the guns did not help the Ilorin to avert defeat.

The guns used were locally made from woods which were hard pliant and piece of iron by local gold smiths usually from the military industrial quarters. As far as indigenous war technology play crucial role, so was the role of women and supernatural powers such as *Ifunpa* (waist, neck and arms lace) to protect against physical attack. Pre-colonial Offa combine other devastating war tactics such psychological tortured, guerrilla offensives. Warfare within the spectrum of precolonial Offa land, war participation was not a function of class segregation as evidence abound that nearly every capable male and specially selected women capable of bearing arms were for military services in time of war. Thus, a strategy for quick victory at war was considered a collective responsibility within reasonable time.

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