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Ife Origin Influence in the History of Ijebu People of South-Western Nigeria (Pp. 13-24)

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Abstract

This paper examined the Ife origin influence on the history of the Ijebu people. Though the Ijebu people are part of the Yoruba people living in the South-western part of Nigeria, who mostly traced their origin to Ife as the source of mankind, there are doubts in some quarters whether the people are Yoruba. The primary data for this paper were drawn from oral performance of oriki from selected Ijebu towns namely, Ijebu-Ode, Omu, Ikorodu, Aiyeye, Idowa, Imodi, Ijebu-Igbo; selected obas; some warlords and some notable personalities of Ijebuland. The secondary data were the gramophone records, waxed by Ijebu speakers and non-Ijebu speakers, written records, as well as library and archival documentations from the Universities in the South-western part of Nigeria. The study throws more light on the history and origin of the Ijebu people. It also proves that the Ijebu people are connected to the larger Yoruba race and that the Ijebu are still one despite their presence in more than one state and in many towns. The Ijebu people also have their own warlords like other Yoruba people. The study reveals that there is connection between the Ijebu people and the remaining Yoruba society from the Ijebu praise poetry studied. Through the oriki of Ijebu

people, we can locate their source, origin and points of migration to their present location. The study contributes to the development of Yoruba literature in that it has added to our corpus of oriki. This work would be of immense value to scholars of not only literary study but also other fields such as history, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, ethnography and cultural study

Introduction

The Ijebu people are part of the Yoruba people living in the South–Western part of Nigeria to the coast. They are prominently occupying parts of Ogun and Lagos states of Nigeria. The Ijebuland is bounded on the North by the Ibadan land, on the East by the Ondo land, on the West by the Egba land and in the South by the Lagos Lagoon.

Like every other pre-literate people, the history of the Ijebu people is both obscure and uncertain. It is obscure in that until barely two hundred years ago, there was no written history. Even now, people still have to rely on traditions handed down from one generation to another. This way of recording history, as we all realise, is not entirely reliable. Memory may fail, political exigencies may force on the historian the necessity for hiding the truth or remoulding the whole story. All these factors must be carefully weighted together when reading through the early history of our people. It is as well uncertain. As our history is largely unwritten, it is not possible to compare our records with those of other countries in this way. The king's bards of ancient times and the royal historians are no more. The men who profess to know everything of our history are hampered by the political happenings of our day. We shall however attempt the various origin history of the Ijebu people.

The Ijebu origin history

Ogunkoya (1956:48-53) says that the province now called Ijebu was at one time a desolate, uninhabited forest waste and that it was populated by waves of migration from the East. Some have claimed that the "East" referred to was a place called Wadai. Others would go as far as to maintain that it was Mecca. Some Ijebu people also claimed to have come to their present abode from Ife like other Yoruba in their oral tradition. For clarity reason, we shall therefore consider the following traditions in chronological order as our record of Ijebu origin history:

Extant Ijebu traditions claim that the town of Ijebu-Ode is said to have been

founded by 3 brothers: Olu iwa, Ajebu and Olode who came from Ile-Ife and from the two of them the town got its name. Ajebu and Olode

The local historian D.O. Epega (1919:11) also reports the above tradition. Same goes for the historical account of the origin of Ijebu-Igbo which was published in 1927.

Commenting on the pre-colonial ethnographic record of European travellers and curio-collectors like D' Avazac, Lloyd and Pereira on Ijebu origin, Oduwobi (2004:1-3) says:

Contemporary observers knew little of the political characters and institutions of the Ijebu kingdom during the nineteenth century .This was largely because until the eve of the colonial period the Ijebu, for commercial and political reason, kept out foreigners from their country, the British authorities in Lagos, for example, held a wrong impression of the political configuration of the Ijebu kingdom, believing that it was a federal of some sort.

Ogunkoya (1956:48-53) in his account says that Ijebuland was populated by three waves of migration and did not mention exactly where they came from. The first Ijebu migration he said was led by a man named Olu-iwa, accompanied by two warriors Ajebu and Olode.

Odukoya (1968:1-20) says although no living historian knows the meaning of *Ijebu*, being an ancient term, we all do know what it is not. Odukoya says this because Johnson (1921:79-90) in allusion to Ijebu history in his book *History of Yoruba* tried to define Ijebu as “*je” “Ibu” which he translated into food of the deep and associated the origin of the word with Olowu of Owu who came into existence only about 1,000 A.D.

Ayantuga (1965:1-3) refers vaguely to a first wave of migration into Ijebu leading to the foundation of the Idoko community in Imusin. Then, using Ogunkoya's account, he attributes the Olu-iwa led migration to be the second in Ijebu. Ayantuga, like Odukoya, did not mention where the Ijebu people came from.

Adesanya (1981:1-30) claims that the Ijebu originated from Wadai. According to him, the Ijebu originated directly from Noah of the Biblical and Koranic tradition. Adesanya claims that Noah, the only man saved from the

Biblical and Koranic flood had his name corrupted to Onuwa, later to Oluwa and later to Olu-iwa and therefore Oluwabi. Hence, Adesanya argues that the Ijebu should be referred to as ‘Omo Oluwabi “ and not “Omo Alare” or “Omo Obanta” since, (according to him) Obanta is not the sole “root’ of all the Ijebu but only a leader of an Ijebu migratory wave. Further in his thesis, Adesanya says there are eight Ifes namely: Ife Awaye, Ife Owoni, Ife Owolaa, Ife Ilere, Ife Owodaye, Ife Ojugborongu, Ife Oyelagboo and the present Ile-Ife. Further, Adesanya says the Ife Owodaye is the Wadai which he claims that the Ijebu came from. Adesanya interestingly (apart from his early denials of the Ife tradition like the Awujale) made an allusion to Ife by admitting the fact that a wave of the Ijebu migrants came from the known Ife and co-habited with the antedate people at Odoluwa (the original name for Ijebu -Ode).

Ayandele (1992) corroborates Ayantuga’s position. He submits that the Idoko were the autochthonous dwellers of Ijebu and that they were wiped out by the Ijebu immigrants led by Olu-iwa. Ayandele, However confuses Olu-iwa with Obanta as one and the same person.

Ogunba (1967:13-19) on the other hand, inverses the order of migration proposed by Ayantuga by postulating that the first settlers in Ijebu were led in by Olu-iwa and that they were followed by another set, the Idoko group presumably under Osifaderin. Ogunba too, did not mention the point of Ijebu origin before their migration to Ijebuland. According to him, the Idoko established political sway over many settlements in Ijebu including Ijebu-Ode where they placed a viceroy in the person of Osinumesi. The power of the Idoko was subsequently terminated by the establishment of the Awujale dynasty .Ogunba concludes that the political and cultural marginalization of the Idoko by the new dynasty in the succeeding centuries caused many of them to flee their original homes in the Imusin area during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Whereas Abimbola (2003:1-4) on the origin of the Ijebu people says:

.....it is very important to let researchers be aware that it was political exigencies, conspiracy, hatred, injustice, disrespect for others, fear of domination and other factors that had in the past contributed to not having a proper record on the Ijebu history...The Ijebu migration were in three or more waves and at

different times. The first was under the legendary Olu-iwa, the greatest forebear of the Ijebu people. Another leader, Arisu, also led his group of Ijebu migrants to Ijebu-Ode and settled down... the last group of Ijebu migrants was led by Obanta.

The origin of the Ijebu, according to the incumbent Awujale of Ijebuland, who is also the paramount traditional ruler in the land, Oba S. K. Adetona remains unchanged from his earlier position that the Ijebu people came from Wadai Sudan. Oba Adetona had said this several times and at various fora. To him and his ilk, the Ife tradition, to which several Yoruba states trace their origin, is nothing to write home about. The Awujale maintains this despite the claim of some traditions that he is a son of Oduduwa.

But unlike the Awujale's view, the position of a majority of the Ijebu obas in the course of this research work, notably the Liken of Iwopin, Ajalorun of Ijebu –Ife, Lenuwa of Ode-Omi, Osobiya of Makun omi, Orimolusi's Regent, Ayangbunren of Ikorodu, Akarigbo of Remo, to mention but a few is in support of the Ife tradition as the source of the origin of the Ijebu, like other Yoruba people.

An oral tradition on the history of Ijebu says the origin of the word "Ijebu" is derived from the action of someone who threw a boulder into a river and the resultant sound of the ripple: "jebu!" is the source of Ijebu as a name.

Another oral tradition on Ijebu history (also on the origin of Ijebu name) says that when the Ijebu settlement was founded long ago, a sentry was put at the settlement's entrance. The sentry had a powerful potion which would make the leg of an invader (robber or any undesirable element) on arrival at the settlement's entrance bleed. And this happened one day when an undesirable element came visiting the Ijebu settlement. It was from the resultant yell of "Ije bu"! that is "blood is gushing! ' from the sentry that the Ijebu settlement's name was formed.

Further on the origin of the Ijebu people and the source of the word "Ijebu", another oral tradition attributes the source of the name "Ijebu" to the two root word "je" (eat) and " bu" (what is mouldy). That is, ' "je + bu" = " Jebu .

Odusino (2004:1-29) in his account made attempt at treating the origin of the Ijebu people as well as the etymology of the word "Ijebu". Like he said,

Oni mi je nubu omo Oluweri

Omo Ajebugosa de Igbo-bini
O b'onibu rojo aijento
Bee, ii opa oun ko i kon'le
The Rovers of the deep, offspring of Oluweri
The rovers of deep waters as far as Igbobini
Who do not fear the depth of sea
Due to their dexterity on the sea

The whole Ijebuland , from the beginning, was water-logged and mostly riverine and the people could reach their neighbours (like the Igbobini people) only through the waterways. A time came when the service of a very powerful Babalawo (called Oniseemu Atikori) was sought. Oniseemu performed some wonder -rituals all over Ijebuland. he later sacrificed himself by sitting on a ritual mat which he spread on the lagoon at Ijebu-Ode and was swept away into the Atlantic ocean along with the lagoon thus draining the Ijebu-Ode area of water. The remaining part of Ijebuland, still with many water deposit is known as the Ijebu -waterside till today. Odusino described Obanta as a wayfarer who later became the oba in Ijebu-ode. According to him, the name “Obanta” means “Ebo-nita (but not in Johnson’s sense). He said Obanta was an intruder who usurped the kingship stool in Ijebu-Ode as “Ewinjaile” that is somebody who was used to swallow (settle) all the existing kingship tussle in Ijebu-Ode but erroneously pronounced “Awujale” today. Odusino said that the Awujale’s ascension to the throne in Ijebu-Ode is circumstantial in the sense that his arrival in Ijebu history was at the point of a political impasse/logjam caused by Osimade’s (the then Owa-Osi Ijasi) not having a heir, as a result of the curse placed on him by his elder brother Onayelu, (who later became the Orimolusi of Ijebu Igbo) whom Osimade cheated to become the oba in Ijebu-Ode thus making Onayelu to relocate to Ijebu-Igbo as the ruler. Odusino concluded that the use of the prefix “Ijebu” in Ijebu towns’ names (like Ijebu-Ode, Ijebu-Igbo and other towns) is a post-Ijebu Expedition event and it was also the British imperialists that made Ijebu-Ode the capital of the Ijebu people at the expense of Ijebu-Igbo; the supposed senior town to Ijebu-Ode

The Ife origin link

Having considered the diverse views of various scholars and authorities on the history of the origins of the Ijebu people, we can now attempt to draw our conclusion on the Ijebu origin:

- a. There is over-whelming historical evidence that the founder of

Ijebuland and Ijebu's first leader was the legendary Olu-iwa who probably came with Ajebu and Olode. We arrive at this position because at least ten out of our sixteen considered legends alluded to Olu-iwa's primogeneity in Ijebu history.

- b. The "Eastern location" where the Ijebu people were said to have migrated from is either Ife or Mecca/ Egypt.
- c. The meaning of the word "Ijebu" is *Ajebujosa: Oni mi je nubu* (rovers of the sea) as mentioned above.
- d. The origin of Ijebu-Ode could not be central to Ijebu origin because many other Ijebu towns took their sources from elsewhere like Ife. That Ijebu-Ode was said to be one of the first three towns to be founded and being the seat of the Awujale not withstanding. Even, the paramountcy of the Awujale is becoming disputable. His traditional senior siblings like the Liken of Iwopin, Lenuwa of Ode-omi, Orimolusi of Ijebu-Igbo and even the Akarigbo of Ijebu-Remo all contest his so-called supremacy. Also is the Oloko of Ijebu-Imusin who claims to be autochthonous in Ijebuland and hence superior to the Awujale.
- e. It is obvious that the Ife origin factor is not absent from the Ijebu origin history and cannot be ruled out. It could be established therefore that the Ijebu have a strong relation with the other Yoruba people. Perhaps, the Ijebu came from Ife, especially those led by Koyelu (Akarigbo) and the Emuren people as noted by Odukoya (above) while a few came from elsewhere.
- f. The Ijebu are a Yoruba people being a people with a close link and are allied in language, religious beliefs and traditional culture to the rest of the Yoruba race due probably to acculturation and geographical contiguity especially when considering some *oriki* Ijebu lines like:

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Omo Ilaje maro Ode | Offspring of Ilaje from Ode |
| A d'Ado maa k'Ewii | Offspring of the visitor at Ado - |
| O k'Ooni galegale | Who needs not pay homage to the Ewi |
| Ara Iwo r'aawa | One who greets the Ooni familiarly |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| A ii j'iwowo | Because we are related to Iwo |
| Ikole r'aawa | We as such abhor eating of porridge |
| A ii j'eron ako | Because we are of Ikole origin We herefore abhor eating of male cattle |
| Omo Olowu oduru | Offspring of Olowu-oduru who specializes in the making of potent curses |
| Omo Ajifepe sire | Offspring of Olobi wowotiwo |
| Omo Olobi wowotiwo | Offspring of Olobi wowotiwo |
| Omo A-duro gb'ofa nay | Offspring of the brave A-duro-gbofa-naya |
| E e gba t'ee neyin ojo ni | Whoever behaves otherwise is a coward |
| Omo Koyelu | Offspring of Koyelu |
| Omo Ireto Oodua | Offspring of Ireto Oodua |
| Omo Ogbolu Ife Owodaye | Offspring of Ogbolu from Ife Owodaye |
| Omo Ife Ooye | Offspring of Ife Ooye |

- g. The Osugbo cult, important as it is in Ijebu socio-political life, has a lot to reveal in the Ife origin link in Ijebu history. The Osugbo greet one another as follows:

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| Osugbo ree! | Oh! That is you Osugbo! |
| Agbalagba Ufe | The elderly one of Ufe |
| Ogbo Ato o ! | Long may you live! |

This is to be followed by their left hand shaking and kissing of the hand. The Ogoni/Osugbo we should note was formed in Ile-Ife before its spread to other Yoruba societies (Ayandele 1974).

- h. Yoruba culture attach much importance to pouring of libation at their spiritual gathering or any drinking spree. In Ijebuland, it is done with Ife link as follows: the server would serve, pour libation, drink first before serving others (especially elders) and say:

Obemu r'aagba nUfe o! The server is the senior in Ufe!

And others would chorus:

Waa mu un pe o! Long may you drink (live)

- i. The single word *owa* and its usage in Ijebu society should be noted. *owa* is a Yoruba word meaning a ruler. It is a truism that it is associated more with the Ijebu, another group of Yoruba people. But that is to the uninformed as it is as well much used in Ijebu. The central ruling council of the Awujale is known as Ajo *owa*. During some ceremonies, the Awujale is greeted ‘Owa Osi!’ Some traditional rulers in Ijebuland are known as Olowa: Olowa Igbo, Olowa Modisa, Olowa Iberu and so on. If the Ijebu society retains *owa* usage till now, it means that the Ijebu people must be seriously related to the Yoruba.
- j. Taking a cue from all the above conclusions, the Ijebu are a Yoruba people but not so recognised due to a missing link (perhaps) resultant from inavailability of proper record, political hampering, exigency, conspiracy (or all) as mentioned (above). This is because the Ijebu are closely allied in language, religious beliefs and traditional culture with other Yoruba groups, safe for their dialect. More importantly, about 95% incantations used in the psychotherapeutic healing system in Ijebuland is recited in either the standard Yorùbá language or (occasionally) in an admixture of the standard Yoruba and Ijebu dialect, directed to no other place as the source of the world than Ife (oro Ufe). Talking of their ancestral worship, safe the Agemo, Eluku and Obinren Ojowu (Eebi) cults that are not common to the other Yoruba people, there is invariably no difference in their traditional belief and worship. Even the Ijebu’s Osi (ancestors) are worshipped with Iyan (pounded yam) which is an irregular food of the Ijebu; needless to talk of their names (as earlier mentioned), except those having to do with their localized native tradition and sub-culture like Usen, Osi, Koya and Oso. They are as meaningful, as structured and allied to the Yoruba’s. Even musicians in Ijebuland do not (always) sing in Ijebu dialect. They either sing in the pure Yoruba language or in (occasional) admixture of Yoruba and Ijebu dialect. This according to them is the belief that the standard Yoruba is an integrated language belonging to all the “Kaaaro-oojiire” people; though some of them also agree that singing in the standard Yoruba is for

them to be heard and understood better beyond their immediate milieu. Speaking in the standard Yoruba, among the Ijebu people, seems to be a sort of “civilization” especially a hallmark of having gone to school. Hence, clerics take pride in speaking in standard Yoruba during their preaching or in an admixture of the standard Yoruba and Ijebu, rather than pure Ijebu dialect, be it in churches, mosques or any public arena, as a “civilized” person. People will therefore, say “Yoba ma ron mi so!” He is speaking Yoruba! It had been so for a long time since the Yoruba language had been reduced to writing.

In addition, folktale story telling in Ijebuland is rendered in Ijebu dialect but the usual closing coda is:

Iton mi gbo t’Alufe bo reyen o!

Ki m ba puro

Kaago erun mi maa dun

Ki m baa puro

Kaago erun mi dun gba meta po! po! po!

That is the story I collected from Ife (land)

If I had lied

The gong of my mouth should not sound

But if I had not told a lie

The gong of my mouth should sound po! po! po!

There definitely must be a link between Alufe (Ife) and Ijebu. Nothing to be written in the mother tongue in Ijebuland is written in 100% Ijebu dialect except things written in English, Arabic or Latin Languages. As earlier mentioned, they are either written in pure Yoruba language or an admixture of standard Yoruba and Ijebu dialect. Inscriptions on house frontages, vehicles, commercial centres, schools, graves/ tombs and Ijebu names are not written in 100% Ijebu dialect. For instance names like Opaneye, Adetona, Ogupolu, Ogunsiye, Sodemuren, Olountusen (among others) are spelled and written as Opaleye, Adetona, Ogunpolu, Ogunsiye, Sodemuren, Olountosin and so on. In the course of our research, it took a desperate efforts on our part

to get some part of the Oriki in this collection written in Ijebu dialect as many informants do not speak pure Ijebu dialect any more but Yoruba. The question then arises: if many things done are in standard Yoruba format, what further proof do we need to confirm that the Ijebu people are Yoruba? Although, authors of Ijebu extract like Dr. Odusino and Prince Adesanya and authority like the incumbent Awujale are of the opinion that Ijebu is a language and should be a language of its own and not a dialect of the Yoruba language as currently being experienced, some respected political authorities Like Sir Olaniwun Ajayi and his mentor late Chief Obafemi Awolowo who are also Ijebu indigenes have contrary opinion. The duo believe that the Ijebu are descendants of Oduduwa. It is interesting and rather paradoxical to note that despite the incumbent Awujale's stance that the Ijebu people are not Yoruba, his *oriki* written at the bottom of his portrait in the inner sanctuary of his palace is not written in 100% Ijebu dialect but in an admixture of the Yoruba language and Ijebu dialect. Even his own surname: Adetona and his ancestral lineage name: Anikilaya are not written in Ijebu. Paradoxically the Awujale makes it a habit not to speak Yoruba because of his claim that the Ijebu people are not Yoruba. The Awujale only speaks in Ijebu and English! It should be noted that the Awujale in the 1970s established a leather industry in Ijebu Ode named WADAI LEATHER INDUSTRY to back his claims that the Ijebu are not Yoruba but a people from a place called Wadai.

Again, considering all the above points one could establish the fact that the Ijebu people are Yoruba. After all, Olu-iwa, the Ijebu legendary leader was said to be Oduduwa's pal, contemporary and in-law. Every other reason apart, history proves that the Ijebu people too used to have three tribal marks 'pele' on each cheek like their Yoruba neighbours before putting a stop to the practice in about 1920. We conclude therefore that the Ijebu are a Yoruba people.

Conclusion

In this paper, we examine the Ife origin influence in the history of the Ijebu people. The study throws more light on the history of the origin of the Ijebu people, the people are a Yoruba people and that the Ijebu people are linked with Ife. It also proves that the Ijebu people are connected to the larger Yoruba race and that the Ijebu are still a people despite their presence in more than one state and towns. The study reveals that there is connection between the Ijebu people and the remaining Yoruba society from the Ijebu praise poetry studied. Through the *oriki* of Ijebu people, we can locate their

source, origin and points of migration to their present location.

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