**OBA ADEKUNLE AROMOLARAN’S CORONATION SEMINAR**

**ON**

**IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY**

**AND CULTURE**

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**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**AGÍRÍASASA**: **AN IJESA PHILOSOPHER**

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 Many names have become indelible in the history of Ijesaland because of the important contributions of the people bearing such names. Among such names are: Abíbógun, Ògèdèngbé, Fábùnmi, Arímorò etc. another important one is Agíríasasa.

 Ijesa community has always been referred to as open system. By open system, we mean many migrants from different parts of Yorubaland had settled in Ijesaland and they were accommodated because of the useful roles they played and their good contributions to the community at large. The contributions might have been in terms of military, economic, medicine and or philosophy.

 In terms of military prowess the following have been regarded as migrants: the Rísàwè from Òra in the Ìgbómìnà country, the Lórò from Ìjámò in Ondó, Sàlórò from Adó and Àrápaté from Arámoko both in Ekìtì. These chiefs were powerful people with considerable followers from their original home towns who were induced to settle permanently in Ilesa so as to enhance the power and greatness of Owa Obokun. This shows that traditional Ijesa government was open to new talents. In fact, the Ijesa traditional administration was founded on merit and personal achievement. The name Agíríasasa could therefore be associated with such talented migrants. He was recognized by his wisdom, power of reasoning and quick and accurate judgement. His potentiality had been used to aid Owa Obokun in his administration. His contribution had solved many problems that stared Ijesas in the face.

**Who was Agíríasasa?**

No one knows where Agíríasasa came from. Some people say he had a wife and children while others say he had only one servant and no wife and children. However, the fifth and sixth lines in his praise poem below indicate that he had no wife and that he was a bachelor for a while. His actual name was not known, the word Agíríasasa is just a nick-name. the name Agíríasasa which is an onomatopoeia shows the totality of the man. The name was given to him because of his wisdom and his ability to suggest good solutions to various problems. The word Agíríasasa is also a kind of metathesis in which juxtaposed sounds change places. Agíríasasa is a word whose pronunciation could be reserved by making the final syllables to form the initial syllables or vice-versa. This shows the philosophy of Agíríasasa and the kind of person he was. He did not believe that there is any permanence in nature. He believed that immediate problem should be solved with immediate solution.

 Lines two and three refer to his appearance. The statement:

‘Esisi abèdò kínní-kínní ‘

‘A fly with a very tiny liver’

shows that the man has a small stature. One feels that the man was not all that handsome by the name he was represented by fly and cockroach. But one could say that people loved him and his philosophy and hence they wanted him to be in their midst always. It is obvious that flies and cockroaches are present both in the house and outside.

 Lines 12, 13 and 14 in the praise poem below show that problems should not be left unsolved. Agíríasasa felt that the aftermath of such unsolved problems could be dangerous. Everyone knows how dangerous it is to blow fire against oneself or for someone to allow a snake to stay on one’s roof till day break or for someone to play with a cub. He believed that nobody would want to leave any problem unsolved. He did not take kindly to a person who has a type of problem two times without making use of the first experience to solve such problems. He felt that everyone should learn from experience. Hence the statement:

 ‘Òràn ònìyàn bá mò télè

 É gbodò se ni mó ‘.

 ‘A problem once known

 should not happen to the person again’

 Agíríasasa was regarded as a ‘Sage’ because his sayings and actions projected his wisdom at all times. He advised Owá Obòkun on difficult issues. he was therefore given the opportunity to move near Owá freely at all times in order that his talents might be made use of. Hence he was regarded as the (Onìtà Owá), which means, Owá’s adviser.

 Agíríasasa had new knowledge for Owá at anytime he went to the palace. His praise poem was chanted by both old and young. And the praise poem is an embodiment of his qualities. It runs thus:

 Agíríasasa, Agíríasasa,

 Òké – tekùnrin-èdò-mólè.

 ‘Esisi abèdò kínní-kínní.

Aìyán ulé aberun pétémuyéri.

Àpón é láya a bi gbogbo 5

Un-un sáún-sáún.

 Òjò perìnkin lonà, ó yà súlé àna

 Ewé ògèdè ran òjò lílá.

 È gbón abuké, àbúò aro,

 Abugògò leyin. 10

 Yè só lé funá sára fé?

 Yè só lé fi ejò sórí òrùlé sùn?

 Yè só lé gbó’mo ekùn ti ‘ra?

 Òràn ònìyàn bá mò télè

 É gbodò se ni mó. 15

 Agíríasasa, Agíríasasa

 The hill which tranples on a weak man

 The fly with a very tiny liver

 The cockroach with flat mouth

 A bachelor with meager property

 On his journey, he calls at his in-law’s

 House when there was rain,

 The senior brother has hunched back

 The junior brother is crippled.

 The one with hunched back.

 Who could blow fire against himself?

 Who could allow a snake to stay on his roof till day break?

 Who could play with a cub

 A problem once known should not happen to the

person again.

**His Proverbial Sayings**

Agíríasasa is noted for his proverbial sayings. Some of these sayings were termed ‘Àdìtú Òrò’. Most of these sayings were mainly didactic. Examples of such sayings are:

1. Yoyo lerun iráyé
2. Orí yéye ní Mògún, tàrìsè ló pòjù

Ùpín àrìsè, ùpín àrìrà….

1. Ubi kàn lé ba ugba ure jé.
2. Ijó an bá dá ‘jó olódì ni àn i dá tara oni.
3. Mo lè ran Owá lúsé
4. Esi olójú kàn

Interpretation

1. Hosanna today, crucify him tomorrow
2. Offenders heads which were cut are many at ‘Mògún’ but many of the heads are those of the innocents.
3. One vice can destroy two hundreds virtues.
4. It is the day one passes judgement on ones enemies that the judgement of oneself is determined.
5. I can ask Owá to work for me
6. A horse with one eye.

**Nature of his didactic Element**

The didactic element in Agíríasasa’s activities was concerned with three main topics:

1. Condemnation of Vices
2. Exaltation of virtues and
3. Social comment.

The vices he condemned ranged from pride, covetousness and envy. However, it might not be possible to expatiate on the three topics mentioned above. What is certain is that his teaching was marked by performance, audience and occasion. He would repeat certain sayings for his audience to think of. This would make the audience to be eager for an occasion when the meaning of the sayings would be brought to light and from which morals would be learnt.

The sayings mentioned earlier were topics for occasions and performance. And they were to teach the community certain lessons. E.g. (a) Yoyo lerun iráyé

This was put into action when he presented himself as an offender. He asked the people to tie him up with ropes; he was also beaten. He was taken round the town under such punishment. This was to find out what comments people would pass. It was discovered that Agíríasasa was condemned by almost everybody in Ilesa. That is, uncompromising comments were passed on him. But when the next day he was honoured by Owa with a horse to ride round the town with a good dress on him, the people started to pass good comments about him. The action was to explain the statement above.

(b) Orí yéye ní Mògún ti àìsè ló pò jù

This was illustrated by the punishment metted out to Agiriasasa’s servant when he was accused of killing Owá’s cock. It was later discovered that he was implicated. This is to prove that many people could be wrongly punished for the offence with which they are not in any way connected.

1. Ijó on bá dájó olódì ni òn i dájó ara oni

What this statement was trying to teach is that the law should not discriminated against anybody. That is, double standard should not be used when passing any judgement.

He illustrated this with someone’s cow which gave birth to two. This was regarded in Ijesaland as an abomination at the time. But Agiriasasa defended the man. He said it was a sign of prosperity for the town. Hence many presents were recommended for the owner of the cow. Some days later, Agiriasasa said his cow gave birth to two. He was also given many gifts instead of being punished.

1. Ubi kàn le ba ugba ure jé

This means one vice could destroy two hundred virtues. In order to prove this statement, Agiriasasa went to Owa to demand for two hundred and one kolanuts. He said Ifa Oracle instructed him to use the kolanuts for sacrifice in order that calamity might be averted in the town. He used each of the kolanuts but one to pray for Owa and his people at different cross-roads in the town. Many people witnessed his activities at each occasion.

However, he used the last kolanut which was the 201st one for quite a different thing. Instead of praying he used the last one for cursing the Owa and his people. The report got to Owa immediately. Owa was annoyed and Agiriasasa was ordered to be killed. But Agiriasasa later reminded Owa about his proverbial saying that one vice could destroy two hundred virtues. This made Owa to order his release immediately. The statement was to teach people that man should try to do good at all times.

1. Mo lè rán Owá lúsé

This is interpreted to mean ‘I can ask Owa to work for me’

In Ijesa tradition it is difficult to ask Owa to do any manual labour for anybody. Hence Ijesas were surprised to hear this type of statement from Agiriasasa. He however proved this statement when Owa asked Agiriasasa to repait part of the palace that was leaking. When the work was to start, Agiriasasa removed his dress and ask Owa to help him handle it. When he got to the top of roof, he ask Owa to pass some of the (gbòdògì) \* leaves to him. Since they were only two in the apartment, Owa had to render the help. Later, Agiriasasa told Owa that his saying had been proved. The saying was to prove that cooperation should exist in the society at all times.

* Sarcophrynium.
1. Esi Olójú kàn (A horse with one eye)

When Agiriasasa was entering a certain village, he told the people accompanying him that a horse with one eye was in the village. The people were surprised about the statement because they did not see any horse near-by. He later proved this by telling them that he observed that a horse had just eaten some grass and that the grass was eaten from one side of the road. The observation and statement were confirmed by the people when they say a horse with one eye in the village.

 It was to teach people that it is essential to be observant.

**Provision of Solution to difficult Tasks**

Apart from his teachings and his social comments, Agiriasasa was Owa Obokun’s good adviser whenever Ibadan warriors asked the Ijesas to perform certain tasks which the people regarded as impossibilities. It was usual of Ààre Látósà of Ibadan to make such difficult demands so as to find faults which might eventually lead to war. This paper would not be able to discuss the position of Ijesas to the Ààre Látósà at that point in time. However, the following are three of such tasks which the Oyos asked Ijesas to perform.

1. Removal of Ìmò Hill to Ibadan

 Ààre Látósà asked the Owá to tell his people to remove Ìmò Hill and take it to Ibadan. It was Agiriasasa who suggested a solution to the baffling task. A message was sent to Ibadan that the Ijesas were ready to carry the hill to Ibadan but that the people of Ibadan should come and help lift it up.

1. The Use of Yam-flour ropes

 Ààre Látósà asked Owá to send some ropes made of yam-flour to him, so that he (Ààre of Ibadan) could use the ropes to tie his horses. This task was side-tracked through the advice of Agiriasasa. He asked Ijesas to demand a sample of such ropes from Ààre Látósà.

1. Èfó tètè títù

Provision of fresh (Amaranthus Spinosus) vegetable.

This was one of the tasks to be performed by Ijesas. Ààre Látósà asked Owá to send fresh amaranthus spinosus to him. The Ijesas felt it was a difficult task because the vegetable would no more be fresh when it got to Ibadan. Ibadan being a far distance. It was Agiriasasa who suggested that the vegetable seeds should be planted in a big bowl which contained some humus soil. He also instructed the people to continue to water the vegetables till they got to Látósà. This is one of the reasons why people feel that supernatural power should not be applied to solve all problems. They feel simple common sense or simple scientific method could be applied.

**CONCLUSION**

 It is the philosophy of Agiriasasa that every problem has a solution. He believed that self-help is a means to self-development. He also advocated that justice should be maintained at all times.

 The implication of all these on Ijesas as a people is that it enables the people to know various methods of solving problems. Ijesa leaders are noted for the wisdom they exhibit when delivering judgement.

 They have been able to solve their domestic problems without any external aids. This is noticed in the way they go about their business. No one wants to be called a sycophant or a boot-licker. The system of solving such private problems in the community is seen in the way roads are constructed to link each street ever before the inception of town-planning authority, or before Reeve Tucker built the first European residence in the eastern part of Yorubaland on Òkè-Ìmò (Ìmo Hill) in Ilesa in the year 1898. (Ojo,1966:146). The name Agiriasasa will continue to be remembered in Ijesaland as Socrates is remembered in Greek history. His sayings have become clinches that are associated with Ijesa tradition. These are freely used as people of Ègbáland make use of Sóbò Aróbíodu’s sayings and wisdom.

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**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**ILESA:- HER RELIGIOUS LIFE YESTERDAY AND TODAY**

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Ilesa is the capital town of Ijesaland located some thirty five kilometers East of Ile-Ife the ancestral home of the Yorubas. The Ijesa people are direct descendants of Odudua, the Olofin-aye of Ile-Ife through Owa Obokun Ajibogun Orun Aja whose wisdom, bravery and filial love for his father made him succeed in getting the needed brine for the cure of his father’s bad eye sight. He succeeded where his brothers failed and received his father’s blessings. His father honoured him by giving him the SWORD OF VICTORY (Ida Ajasegun) which makes Owa Obokun of Ijesaland a distinct natural ruler in Yorubaland. The Victory Sword is the instrument of authority of every succeeding Owa of Ijesaland.

 This paper is basically on the religious life of the people of Ilesa since the birth of the town till today and this I shall address myself to. Religion is a vita social institution in the life of the people of Ilesa as it is in other group of people in Yorubaland and in the world over. The people of Ilesa are known as great religionists and this paper is going to deal extensively on the part religion plays in the life of the people.

 It will also interest my readers that Ilesa is referred to by some people as little Jerusalem, the town of the beloved, because of the numerous churches in the town today. Our people jokingly say, “Ilesa is the seat of God”.

 Ilesa like any other part of Yoruba land was a worshipper of so many gods before the advent of the religions that advocated for the worship of one God, that is, Christianity and Islam. This does not mean that the people had no idea of the living God but they felt that He is too superior to be approached by ordinary man. They therefore needed an intercessor between them and God like all those who worshipped Him in ignorance the world over. They called Him OLODUMARE which simply means the only wise.

 The people therefore used different gods at different festivals in the year to approach God for their needs. Most of the gods worshipped during this festivals were heroes who had done some great services for the people of Yorubaland in general and to the people of Ilesa in particular. Throughout the year, there is no cause for the people to be far away from God because their intercessors are approached every time. Some of the gods worshipped by the people of Ilesa are worshipped by the people of Yorubaland while some are peculiar to the Ijesas. Some of the gods worshipped by the people annually are:

1. Ogun Ijesa
2. Ifa
3. Osun
4. Obokun
5. Owaluse
6. Atakumosa
7. Sango
8. Owari
9. Aramofe
10. Oluodo

I shall examine about four of these in this paper; their origin and what part they played in the lives of the people.

**OGUN IJESA**

There are so many stories about Ogun. Ogun the God of Iron is worshipped all over Yorubaland. The very origin of all Oguns is Ogun Ijesa.

Ogun Ijesa was one of the sons of Odudua, the Olofin-aye of Ile-Ife. He was a senior brother to Owa Obokun Ajibogun, the first Owa of Ijesaland. When other brothers of Owa Ajibogun failed to get their father, brine to cure him of his bad eye sight, it was Ogun who reminded their father that he should not forget the predictions of Ifa oracle about Owa Ajibogun before his birth that he would succeed in all things he laid his hands on. He therefore advised their father to let Ajibogun try to get the sea water.

In actual fact it was an uphill task to be able to reach the sea in those days. When Ajibogun was told of this by his father he gladly accepted to run the errand for his father not minding the risk. After consulting the Ifa oracle, Ajibogun complied with all the instructions given by Ifa and sacrificed two hundred units of all the sacrificial materials. He succeeded in getting the sea water which made his father to receive back his sight. This praise worthy job done by Ajibogun made his father to bless him sincerely and to hand over to him the Victory Sword (Ida Ajasegun) very precious to Olofin himself.

The pity of it all was that his brother Ogun who paved his way to glory died before he returned. He therefore collected some of the war materials (especially those made of iron) used by Ogun in his life time and started to worship him as his benefactor. This was how Ogun the hunter and warrior started to be worshipped by every place visited in his life time including Ire where he did an unforgettable thing.

When Owa Ajibogun left for Igbadae near Ilesa to establish, he did not forget to carry along Ogun. Since he was the head of the town all his subjects worshipped Ogun with him annually. Owa Ajibogun had some grand children among them were Owari and Owaluse. Owaluse was the first Owa Obokun to establish at Ilesa. Since his father had got him ego involved in the worship of Ogun, he too continued with more zeal and made the deity the most respectable among other deities in the town. Ogun Ijesa is therefore the very first god of the Ijesas. All other gods take after Ogun.

Subsequent Owa Obokun of Ijesaland up to the late Oba Peter Agunlejika II led in the worship of Ogun. I am sure Owa Oba Adekunle Aromolaran II the present Owa Obokun of Ijesaland would take queue from his ancestors.

**HOW OGUN IS WORSHIPPED**

 Ogun is worshipped annually in the month of December. It attracts the sons and daughters of Ijesaland home no matter where they are. What would make one absent oneself from the festival would be grievous. It is the festival that precedes all other festivals in Ilesa.

 There is no doubt, the town is always in festive mood at this time of the year.

 Nine days to the festival, Owa Obokun would send words to the people through Chief Odole, one of his Chiefs, to inform them that the festival is fast approaching and that all people should get prepared for it. This is the message: -

Chief Odole: - Ye so pomo nigbe?

 Who kills other man’s child?

People’s answer: - E soni pomo nigbe

 Nobody kills other man’s child

Instruction: - Since nobody kills another man’s child, Owa

 greets you and sends to you that his father’s

 festival comes up nine days from now and that

 you should all join him to celebrate it.

The people receive the message with jubilation. The kola-nuts got ready for them by Owa Obokun would be given to them.

 Ogun is worshipped by everybody in Ijesaland. The materials to be used as sacrifice to Ogun, that is, dogs, snails, tortoise, hens, kegs of palm-wine, kola-nuts, yams etc are all bought by Owa Obokun on the throne at the time of worship.

 Four days are set aside for the festival. They are:

1. Ojo Ibegun: The day Ogun will be sacrificed to. Owa Obokun would sit majestically on his royal seat while the Ogun priests led by Chief Arapate perform the rites keenly watched by the congregation of people. The kola-nut is unique because it is from it the message from Ogun is delivered. It is Chief Arapate that interpretes what the message from the kola-nut to Owa Obokun and the generality of the people is. All other materials are then sacrificed to Ogun in his shrine. People return home to eat and merry.
2. Ojo Isagun: The day omode Owa and Elegbaaji (Owas attendants) dance round Ogun shrine singing jubilantly. The people are there to watch because it is entertaining.
3. (Iwa Ase) Ojo Ife aso han: This is the day the people, men and women, old and young, exhibit traditional dresses. This is performed in the evening at the palace. Everybody is gorgeously dressed this day and the whole town is full of life.
4. Ojo Iwude: This is the day the festival ends. At 10am all the chiefs in Ijesaland as well as the people gather at the palace. The hunters too are there with their guns well loaded. Shots are fired to the air to greet Owa and to let the people know that the festival is at its peak.

Owa Obokun with the chiefs and people would leave for chief Obanla’s house where food and drinks must have been ready for him his and everybody. He later leaves for Chief Lejoka’s house, where he eats and drinks. From there he leaves for (Orita Ogun) Ogun’s junction right at the centre of the town near the central mosque. There people gather to watch Owa and his chiefs dance to the Igede drum beaten by the Baseemi family only. For Owa Obokun, the drum is beaten slowly and softly. This song is rendered: -

“Odun ko,

Odun mo Jo o,

Iroko oko oko;

Odun oni mo ko o”

“Here comes the festival

The festival is here today

The Iroko tree

Today is the day of the festival”.

As the Owa Obokun dances dexterically to the drum’s melody, men prostrate and women kneel to pay homage and respect to him and to eulogize him.

 Then there is a change in the beating of the drum for the Owa Obokun’s queens to dance to. This is harder and quicker than the one Owa and his chiefs dance to.

 The third stage is the very hard and quick drumming of Igede which the generality of the people dance to. This is the climax of the festival every year. Owa Obokun and his chiefs leave for the palace where his chiefs depart to their different residents. The people disperse from the scene to end the year’s Ogun festival.

 There are other festivals that closely associated with Ogun. They are Orisa festival, Obalogun festival, Obokun festival, Owaluse festival etc. The one I would like to call your attention to is the Obokun festival.

**OBOKUN FESTIVAL**

 Obokun festival is closely associated with Owa Obokun Ajibogun for his contribution to Ijesa as a distinct group of people in Yorubaland. Historically, he had placed Ijesa on a conspicuous place in the history of Yoruba. This is why the people of Ijesaland deem it necessary to worship him every year. The Obokun festival comes up early in January. Obokun is worshipped also at Igbadae by the Chief priest who is the baale of Igbadae the representative of Chief Lemodu of Ijesaland who is the Chief priest of Obokun.

 The following are things sacrificed to Obokun: rams, cocks, kolanuts etc

Apart from worshipping Obokun at a particular time of the year, the chief priest and his household worship the deity every five years. He is dressed in immaculate white clothes and alabangada (abeti-aja) cap. He asks Obokun to provide his needs and the needs of his people. He believes absolutely that all his request would be granted.

People in Ijesaland and other parts of Yorubaland approach the chief priest to request for one thing or the other especially those who need children. There was a particular case of a couple who was directed to Ilesa from Ekiti to approach Obokun for a child. They made their request known to the present Lemodu who helped them speak to Obokun in his shrine. After a year the couple came back with a bouncing baby rejoicing and thanking the chief priests. They asked him what they would pay back in return. They were told to sacrifice a cock and some kola-nuts to Obokun.

Another interesting thing is that until a chief visits the Obokun shrine for the necessary rites performed, his chieftaincy celebration is not completed. This does not exclude an Owa Obokun elect. Chief Lemodu performs the rites for very important chiefs while his lieutenants perform the rites for lesser chiefs. It is Obokun who confirms any chief’s chieftaincy. The chiefs therefore buy the sacrificial materials.

During the worship, the chief priest or any of his lieutenants would continue to sing Obokun’s praises thus:

 “Ooka Okile.

 Owa sa gbalagigbalagi;

 Iji oko Olori.

 Owa sa korokoro ona.

 Adagbadimu obuko,

 Obuko sun,

 An in to lu”.

 “Ooka Okile,

 The palm frond of man that runs a run of malady.

 Embodiment of fear, the queen’s husband.

 The palm fond of a man that runs a straight run.

 The blocked nosed old he goal

 The he-goat that sleeps

 And people assume he is dead”.

During the yearly festival of Obokun, the chiefs in Ijesaland make sacrifices and worship the deity from whom they ask for prosperous year after thanking him for his grace received in the previous year.

The next festival we would examine is the Ifa worship.

**THE WORSHIP OF IFA**

Ifa is a god much respected in Yorubaland. After consultation with Ifa oracle, and Owa Obokun Ajibogun strictly adhering to Ifa’s instruction, he triumphed in getting the brine. It is no surprise afterwards that Owa Obokun Ajibogun should regard Ifa as his second benefactor and started to worship him. He left Ile-Ife with an Ifa priest that expresses what Ifa has to tell the Oba and his people; the sacrifices to make to ward off certain problems and to bring abundant joy in the year. There is no Owa Obokun who plays with Ifa oracle as he relies absolutely on the direction of Ifa.

Apart from the yearly popular Ifa worship which pulls a crowd of people to the palace, Ifa is worshipped by the Owa Obokun every five days led by an Ifa priest who is always at the service of the Owa. Chief Esegba is the head of Ifa priests at Owa’s service.

The Owa Obokun announces the arrival of the festival in the month of June by cutting fresh yams into pieces and getting ready fresh kola-nuts which he sends to his chiefs. Both the Ifa priests and the Osanyin priests get ready for the festival. It should be noted that Ifa and Osanyin are very close associates.

On the day of worship, hens and palm kernels are offered as sacrifices to Ifa. The hens are killed and the Opele is soaked in the blood. Ifa literally corpus are chanted to glorify Ifa by the Ifa priests.

Later the Ifa priests and the Osanyin priests stoop down in a circular form. Owa Obokun dances to Igede drum round them seven times. Songs are rendered among them are:

1. “Iku rorere

Oran buruku rorere la sele

Arun rorere

Oran buruku rorere la sele

Ofun rorere

Oran buruku rorere la sele . . .”

Death move far away

All bad things should happen afar off

Illness move far away

All bad things should happen afar off

Shortage move far away

All bad things should happen afar off . . .”

1. “Ifa wi ire

Opo foore

Asoni samodun

Araye soro”

“Ifa speaks favourably

Ope speaks well

As we do today, so shall we do next season

That we are again opportune for another festival”.

There is great merriment in the palace to end the Ifa worship for the year.

Let us see how another important deity is worshipped, that is, Osun festival.

**OSUN FESTIVAL**

The original home of Osun worship in Ijesaland is Iponda. It is from here the worshippers of Osun get to know about this important deity. She is referred to as goddess Osun. Osun worship is so vital to her worshippers because it is generally believed that she takes proper care of her own children; that is, children got through her.

Whenever a barren woman approaches Osun for the gift of a child, she makes some promises like sacrificing a black goat, a hen, beans, sugarcane and some other materials.

She is responsible for taking proper care of Osun shrine every five days sweeping and scrubbing the floor with animal dungs mixed with leaves. She also gets ready a special pot (Oru) with fern leaves (Omu) slightly tucked in. The Osun priest leads the barren woman to say the following which he daily repeats whenever he is at the Osun site to get water which she drinks to make her pregnant.

 “Ajape ewe

 Akaki agbo Olomitutu

 Aligimodana

 Alorumosegbo

 Iwo lorisa

 To romi tutu warun”.

 “An embodiment of medical leaves,

 Who cures with ordinary cold water

 She who does not make fire though she has firewood

 She has oru pot but does not cook herbs

 You are the deity

 That cures diseases with cold water only”.

Goddess Osun takes care of the pregnant woman who is warned not to use any medicine besides ordinary cold water. She should not use warm water either for bath or for drink. When the child is born, he/she is not taken care of by any medicine besides cold water and the name given to such a child is Olomitutu which has to do with cold water. Both sexes bear this name.

Osun is worshipped, by all who benefited from her and those who are anxiously expecting pregnancy, once a year during the festival, that is, the middle of the rainy season. The festival pulls a crowd of woman and it looks very much as if it is a festival of women only. This is not so because the chief priest is always a man.

The participants in the festival dance to Olukorigi and sekere drums. They render melodious songs among which we have the following:

 “Mo bomi rode

 Ileke Osun

 Yeye Aregunmeri

 Ileke Osun

 Oun lo mo loro

 Ileke Osun

 Oun lo bimo mefa

 Ileke Osun

 O fikan segbe Ajegbe

 Ileke Osun

 O fikan segbe Olori

 Ileke Osun

 O fikan segbe Amuru

 Ileke Osun

 O soro sise

 E soro sise mo mo

 Ileke Osun”.

 “I accompany cold water (Osun) away outside

 Osun’s beads

 The mother of Aregunmeri

Osun’s beads

The festival is hers

Osun’s beads

She bears six children

Osun’s beads

She puts one in Ajege’s group

Osun’s beads

She puts one in Olori’s group

Osun’s beads

She puts one in Olori’s group

Osun’s beads

She puts one in Amuru’s group

Osun’s beads

………………………………………

………………………………………

She is hard to worship

She is not hard to worship, I know

Osun’s beads”.

The women dance to the gung bell and they clap aloud to praise Osun.

Apart from this yearly worship of Osun, Osun is worshipped by individuals anytime of the year more so when one is in dare need of help from her.

I have dealt with only four of the several festivals observed in Ilesa and her environment because of time factor. But it is evident that the people had absolute reliance on these gods before the ‘imported religions’ were introduced to this part of Nigeria.

The consultation of Ifa oracle by our people can be compared to the Urim and Thumin practiced in the Jewish religion. Whatever it says they follow strictly. Nobody was left without worshipping one god at least. Members of the same religious group co-operated to see that their god was the greatest. They also worshipped with sincerity of heart believing that with him (their god) everything is possible.

This was the religious life of the people of Ijesaland before 1857 when Christianity was introduced to the people by the white missionaries. This I am going to deal with in the next chapter.

**THE IMPORTED RELIGIONS**

Some people call the religions alien to them ‘imported religion’ that is the religions that are brought to them from far away countries. The two outstanding religions alien to Nigerian where Ijesaland distinctly stands out as a people are Christianity and Islam. The two religions have their original homes in the Eastern world from where they spread to the West and other parts of the world including Ijesaland.

There are branches developing from the two stems of religions and these I shall deal with fully in this chapter. We shall also see the impact these religious have made on the people and what damage they have done to the traditional religion.

**A. CHRISTIANITY (I) C.M.S ANGLICAN MISSION**

The followers of Jesus Christ are known as Christians and the religion emanating from this is Christianity. This Jesus Christ was believed to have been wonderfully born by a virgin who received her conception through the Holy Ghost. He kept only thirty three years (33years) in the world and performed a lot of miracles, making the blind to see, the lame to walk, the deaf to hear, the dumb to speak and infant raising people from the dead. It is also believed that this same Jesus Christ who is God incarnate gave Himself up for death for the remission of our sins. He was nailed to the cross for man’s sins, dead, buried and rose the third day, He ascended into heaven where He is now pleading for us with God, our father. The Old and New Testaments speak extensively about Him. All surrounding Him is mystic, this makes people accept Him the world over and anxiously expecting His second coming as promised by Him.

This great and world acclaimed religion (Christianity) was brought to Ilesa by Reverend Hinderer in 1857. On his arrival, he visited Oba Ofokutu, the Owa Obokun of Ijesaland on the throne to intimate him of his mission. He also promised to send an evangelist who would expose to the people what Christianity is all about. Reverend Hinderer kept to his promise and sent evangelist G.V. Agbebi to Owa Obokun that same year. Evangelist Agbebi was given a place in the palace where he lodged. The chiefs and people of Ilesa thought him to be a spy for the white people, this made them fear and run away from him.

One of Owa’s attendants, late Pa Olulode was chosen to be taking care of the evangelist. Through this, Pa Olulode was able to learn Yoruba alphabets and was able to read the Bible. This surprised other Owa’s attendants and the chiefs. It was later realized that the evangelist was in Ilesa for a purpose quite different from being a spy. He was in town to teach them who Jesus Christ is. Evangelist Agbebi visited Ibadan in 1867 and did not return until 1868. On his return, he saw that some people had accepted Christ, he built a tent in the palace where he used to gather people every Sunday to expose the Bible to them through thorough teaching.

Something happened during Evangelist Agbebi’s stay in the palace. One of the Owa’s attendants impregnated Owa Ofokutu’s wife. For this insultive act, the chiefs decided that the attendant was to be killed. When the Evangelist heard about this, he spoke softly to His Highness, pleading for the life of the offender. Surprisingly, it was the Oba who pleaded with the chiefs for the offender’s life. A baby boy was born and the Owa named the child Adedeji who was kept in the palace and later became Risawe.

Oba Ofokutu himself became a Christian when he saw that the life lived by the Evangelist was pious. He was the first Owa Obokun of Ijesaland to become a Christian. This made many Ijesas to get converted to Christianity. All the converts became members of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) for which Reverend Hinderer and Evangelist Agbebi were working.

When many souls were falling for Christ, there was the need to build a church to accommodate them every Sunday. The first church was therefore built at Ifofin Street, Ilesa. Because of the population of the people who had accepted Jesus Christ, the people demanded for a Reverend Gentleman to head the church. Reverend M.J. Luke was sent to Ilesa by Bishop Philips. Reverend Luke’s presence won many more converts especially the chiefs. In 1895, Reverend R.S. Oyebode was sent to replace Reverend Luke. It was during Reverend Oyebode’s time that the church at Ifofin had to move to Iloro where there was more space. Because the population of the Christians was daily increasing, there was the need to build another church and this gave birth to Omo-Ofe Holy Trinity Church in about 1895.

The new Owa installed in 1897 was His Highness Jimoko I, the Owa Obokun of Ijesaland. On third of July, 1897, he was in the church at Iloro for thanksgiving service to mark his installation. His presence pulled up to five hundred and sixty six (566) people, the largest attendance since Christianity was embraced in Ilesa.

From Ilesa, C.M.S. (Anglican Mission) stretched her tentacles all over Ijesaland. Today there are many Anglican Churches in Ijesaland and there is Ilesa Diocese with the Cathedral at St. John’s Church Iloro, Ilesa. Ilesa is the seat of the Bishop for the Ilesa Anglican Diocese.

**(II) WESLEYAN METHODIST MISSION**

In 1897, Reverend H.A. Atundaolu, a native of Ilesa and who was a minister of Jesus Christ in the Wesleyan Methodist Church at Ogbomoso introduced the mission to the people of Ilesa with the kind permission of the General Superintendent of the Wesleyan Methodist Mission of Nigeria, the late Reverend Oliver J. Griffin.

The then reigning Owa Obokun of Ijesaland Oba Jimoko I, sponsored the mission with his good will and enthusiasm. There is no doubt that he was a member of this Mission in Lagos before he became the Owa Obokun. He welcomed Reverend Atundaolu and made the preliminary arrangements of his mission a grand success. A temporary chapel was built in the palace where people visited every Sunday to serve God. The Owa got his attendants interested in the mission as he himself showed keen interest. The Owa’s first daughter, Princess Adenibi, who was an active member of Olowogbowo Wesleyan Methodist Church, Lagos, contributed in no small measure to the foundation and working of the Methodist Church in Ilesa.

In about 1899, Owa Jimoko I secured the land where Otapete church is today. He contributed money and materials for the commencement and building of the church. Though the heathens did not like what the Owa Obokun did, especially the land given out which was for rituals, the Owa forged ahead inspite of the objection from the chiefs. He personally came to lay the foundation of the church.

One of the sons of Owa Jimoko I, Prince George Adetona Haastrup was the first teacher at Otapete Methodist School. The membership of the Methodist church was made up, at that time, of the Owa’s household, some of the children of the chiefs, Pa J.A. Laleye who crossed from Iloro Anglican Church, though a Methodist member at Abeokuta before he returned to Ilesa. Being a Christian he was attending the only Christian church at Ilesa then. Some other people joined Methodist Church because of Owa’s influence.

It is interesting that there is Ilesa circuit with six churches including Otapete Cathedral Church which is the mother church and the seat of the Bishop.

One thing is noteworthy. One would expect that there would be a clash of interest between the C.M.S (Anglican) Mission and the Wesleyan Methodist Mission. There was nothing of the sort. The mutual agreement was that the Anglican Mission should not evangelist in areas predominantly Methodist and the Methodist Mission should keep off where the Anglican Mission had a firm footing. That is why towns like Osu, Imesi-Ile, Otan-Ile and some others had Methodist Churches well established. Today, this agreement is being corroded because the two Missions are trying to establish their churches in every town and village in Ijesaland. There is the move now to build an Anglican church at Osu where there are two big Methodist churches existing.

Up till now, the two Missions are not antagonistic but they are working in harmony to bring Christ to every door. The most interesting thing is that their pastors are trained in the same college, Emmanuel College Ibadan. Their mode of worship is very identical.

**(III) CHERUBIM AND SERAPHIM MISSION**

The founder of Cherubim and Seraphim Mission of Nigeria was the late Apostle Orimalade. He was a lame man resident in Lagos when it was believed he heard the callings from God to win souls for Him. A woman, Captain Abiodun worked in Christ’s vineyard with Apostle Orimalade. It was this woman who brought the doctrine to Ilesa in about 1922.

Some people willingly accepted the doctrine and some of them were members of the C.M.S Church, Iloro. Prominent among them were Pa Samuel Omoniyi who was baptized at Iloro C.M.S. church, a layreader too; Pa Ilesanmi who was an elder at Iloro C.M.S. church and Pa. Adegbokun.

The present leader of the sect, The Most Senior Apostle S.A. Fajuuke, a native of Ilesa who baptized at the C.M.S. church Iloro in 1916 was away at Kano when the sec was brought to Ilesa. On his return from Kano, he was influenced by Pa Samuel Omoniyi to the sect as they were very close associates in the C.M.S. church before his departure for Kano. He quickly accepted the sect’s doctrine because his problem which had been the source of his sorrow at that time was solved through prayers and fasting which were slightly handled at the C.M.S. church. He became possessed of the Holy Spirit who started to guide and teach him everything. He found it easy to commune with God and to hear God instructing him to do certain things. He was able to perform some miracles which attracted some more people to the church.

Right now, there are many churches in Ilesa belonging to Cherubim and Seraphim sect. They founded a secondary school at Ilesa. Right now, the sect is gaining more converts all over Nigeria for the wonders performed by the Apostles of the church. They dress in special white robes and believe in the efficacy of candles in their prayers. They believe that the evil spirits run away whenever the candle burns and the prayers are on. The sect attracts more women than men as the women have one problem or the other which needs solution.

I have to limit myself meanwhile to these three Missions of the Christian church before 1930. There are other important Missions like the Roman Catholic introduced in 1913; African Mission in 1916; Baptist Mission in 1923; Salvation Army in 1923; Jehovah Witness; Celestial Church of Christ and many others some of which have their off-spring in Ilesa.

The Christians have some things in common that is, the Christians festivals like the Christmas, the New Year, Palm Sunday, Good Friday, Easter, etc, all celebrated at particular seasons of the year.

I shall next be examining the second ‘imported religion’ that is, Islamic Religion known as Mohammedanism.

**(B) THE ADVENT OF ISLAM IN IJESALAND**

The founder of this religion was Mohammed as Jesus Christ was the founder of Christianity. Some people call it Mohammedanism that is the followers of Prophet Mohammed. Islam spread from the East, that is Arabia, to other parts of the world, Ilesa inclusive.

During the inter-tribal wars in Yorubaland, some Ijesas were captured and enslaved. The British law which freed all slaves, set them free and they returned to Ilesa. During their stay in captivity, some had been indoctrinated into Islam. Those indoctrinate were mostly pagans.

The very man who first introduced Islam to Ilesa in 1860 was Pa Seedu Oogunkojengboran. He lived at Okesa Street Ilesa. He was later joined by people like Prince Abubakare Orimogunje from Jimoko ruling house; Pa Diisu Kannike who was very vast in the religion and led them at prayers; Pa Saibu, the Loja of Oke Eso; Alhaj Farise of Egbeidi; Alfa Kanmodi of Oke-Ola (Iwere) and many others.

The first mosque, known as quarter mosque, was built at Okesa in 1865. There they gathered every Friday to hold Jumat services. They evangelize people by organizing public lectures through which they had converts. Most of the converts if not all were pagans as the Christians did not believe in the doctrine of Islam.

When the members were becoming more in number through non natives who come to trade in the town, there was the need for a chief Imam, who is like the Bishop of their own central Mosque. The first Chief Imam was the son of the soil. Right now the fifth Imam reigns in the Mosque.

Now there are about sixty two (62) Mosques in Ilesa town where people offer prayers five times a day. They all congregate for the Jumat service on Friday at the central Mosque. The Jumat service is usually led by the Chief Imam. There are many sects emanating from Islam: - Ansar-Ud-deen, Nawar-Ud-deen, Ahmadiyya, Islamiyya etc.

It will interest my readers to learn that though the Christian and the Muslim doctrines are very antagonistic in some areas, yet there is no conflict between the two religions in Ilesa as such. The members of the two religions are working hard to get converts from each other. The Muslims arrange public lectures while the Christians busy themselves with revivals. The bone of contention between the two religions is the Lordship of Jesus Christ claimed by the Christians, the idea which the Muslims strongly disbelieve of.

Whatever the situation, the two religions and the remnant of the traditional religion co-exist in Ijesaland.

The next section will be dealing with the impact of 1930 revival at Oke-Oye, Ilesa on the religious life of the people of Ijesa.

**(I) 1930 – THE YEAR OF RELIGIOUS REVOLUTION IN IJESALAND**

1930 was a land mark in the religious life of Ijesaland. Before 1930, there was an important minister in the Iloro Anglican Church. He was the late Babatope who was a trained Catechist. The missionaries thought that the only way to compensate the hard working Catechists was to recommend them for training as clergy-men at Saint Andrew’s College, Oyo. Two Ijesa sons were allowed to attend the courses at Saint Andrew’s College. They were Reverend Yoloye and Oyeleye while Mr. Babatope who felt he had worked hard enough to be recommended and was not felt cheated and deserted the Anglican Church early in 1920s. What he did was to gather some people for prayers every Sunday. Oke Oye was the venue. He did not actually establish a church neither did he join any of the then existing mission in Ilesa.

When Joseph Babalola, a tractor driver, believed God has spoken to him to forsake the work of the flesh and to do the work of the spirit, he went to Iloro Anglican Church which was the biggest and most organized church in Ilesa at that time. He made his callings known to Reverend Oluyemi who least believed him. In short, he was rejected at Iloro Church.

 As soon as Pa Babatope got the wind of what was happening, he invited Joseph Babalola to join him for the gospel work. Joseph Babalola did not hesitate to team up with Babatope. The two of them worked hard to win converts. Majority of those who followed them were members of the Anglican Church.

Joseph Babalola who gave himself to prayers and fasting for many days became possessed of the Holy Spirit. This Holy Spirit was guiding him and performing a lot of miracles through him. 1930 was the climax of the whole thing when there was a big revival at Oke-Oye, Ilesa, where many diseases were cured; the barren was made pregnant, the pregnancy of many years were safely delivered, the lunatics were made normal and everybody was convinced that God was definitely working in him. He won many pagans, some of them brought their jujus and charms, their gods and goddesses which they were told to throw into the ditch. One of the outstanding things this revival did was that many Christians from other missions deserted their churches especially the Anglican Mission. This depopulation made other missions to report Joseph Babalola to the British Resident at Ilesa. When cross examined, he was not found guilty of causing trouble as alleged by his antagonists. He continued with his work of evangelism with no molestation from any quarter.

His spiritual power became known to many people far beyond Ijesaland and people were coming in their great numbers to Ilesa to either get healed or to share in the new doctrines. All he believed in was the power of prayers. He discouraged people from using medicine of any kind. He would only bless cold water with which people bathed and drank to receive healing. This compares favourably with what the Osun worshippers believed in but the difference is that Osun worshippers did not know who Christ is and Joseph Babalola used the name of Jesus Christ to cast out demons and put the witches and the familiar spirits under control.

He had it tough with the Muslims who felt he wanted to encroach on their religion. They could not do him anything.

Women, in particular, were deserting their former churches to join the Christ Apostolic Church, Joseph Babalola’s Church. The Cherubim and Seraphim church worked in harmony with Babalola because they had some things in common, that is, the gift of the Holy Spirit which they believed has been promised to every Christians. Oke-Oye became very popular all over Nigeria and some West African countries. Joseph Babalola was a prophet and a gospeller.

A herbalist wanted to try Joseph Babalola and get him impotent spiritually but unfortunately for him, Babalola’s performance beat the man’s imagination and was converted seeing God’s glory. Babalola’s name was in every mouth and people would pray and receive what they wanted by calling on the God of Joseph Babalola. This is a pointer to the fact that God was making use of him.

There are many Christ Apostolic Churches in Ijesaland and it is believed that it is a church of the spirit (Holy Spirit). The death of Joseph Babalola in 1959 did not reduce the membership of the mission as such as his followers are doing marvelous things to keep the name printed in the religious history of Ijesaland.

A secondary school for girls was founded in his remembrance at Ilesa and named after him, that is, Babalola Memorial Girls Grammar School, Ilesa, which was previously training the female sex of the mission but today opened to every female of the other mission because of the take over of schools by Oyo State Government.

**(II) 1977 PROPHET OLUWOLE OBADARE’S REVIVAL AT OKE-OYE, ILESA**

Prophet T.O. Obadare is a native of Ilesa born into the Christ Apostolic Church and a Christ Apostolic Church member from birth. He believed that his call to do God’s work and forsake the work of the flesh was God’s will.

He started his evangelical work in Kwara State and later moved to Akure where he established his ministry. Right now he has a secretariat there for the World Soul-Winning Evangelistic Ministry (WOSEM). He was working in the Holy Spirit and performing miracles like Joseph Babalola. Many people were moving to Akure as they moved to Ilesa at the time of Joseph Babalola but the number was much fewer.

It was believed that God instructed him to move to Ilesa, his home town where he was to look for the lost sheep of God. He reluctantly left for Ilesa in 1977 to start a revival service at Oke-Oye. This attracted many people as he performed exactly what Joseph Babalola performed years before. The lame was made to walk, the blind saw, the deaf heard, the lunatics became normal, those possessed of demons came to confess and to repent.

What he did was that he did not attach his ministry to a particular mission. He therefore called it interdenominational revival service. This made members of other churches apart from the Christ Apostolic Church to share with him his calling.

The greatest thing he did and he is doing is that he is uniting many churches by his preaching at revivals. At Ilesa, there is a fantastic non denominational Assembly Hall built at Oke-Oye where many Christians and even Muslims gather for prayers every time. Those with problems approach his evangelists for solution. Since he moves from one part of the country to the other for revival, he leaves behind in place he has evangelized some workers to continue to uphold those converted. His ministry is not even limited to Nigeria alone, it is being accepted in some overseas countries such as Republic of Benin, Ghana in West Africa and New York in America.

Ilesa being the home town of this world renowned prophet, it is of no doubt that Ilesa is becoming religiously known all over the world, as he does not hide his identity.

**COMMERCIALIZING RELIGION IN IJESALAND**

In Ilesa today, there are more than five hundred churches some with very few members. There are also as many as sixty mosques. Many of the churches break away from the mother churches especially the Cherubim and Seraphim Church whose members break to found their own churches. The reason for this is not far fetched. As one of the religious leaders who belong to this sect rightly told me, the Satan, he said, plays vital role in breaking up churches. He believes that everybody wants to be a master hence we have these churches being led by ambitious people who lead the breakage. What one sees in effect is that within a short time such a leader becomes wealthy more so if he could perform miracles through whichever means outside the Holy Spirit. Many of such churches are possessed with demonic power. Some of their leaders contact the herbalists and some men of the world who receive their powers from Satan to equip them with such powers so as to attract many members to their churches. Many of them today build four, five houses and ride in best of cars.

One of the trade in stock of the Ijesa people is religion. One then wonders if most of these people are not really misleading the people because what they do is worst than what the heathens do. The word of Jesus about the false prophets is coming to pass in Ilesa. Some of them hide under the name of Jesus Christ to do the will of their father Satan. They sell the name of Jesus Christ to amass wealth.

Those commercializing religion, the Christians and the Muslims, are doing greater damage than good as nominal Christians and Muslims whose standing in the faith are being scared away by these deceivers who use the satanic spirit to perform miracles rather than the power of the Holy Spirit. The counterfeit spiritualists are more in number in Ijesaland than those really being used by the Holy Ghost. These counterfeit spiritualists attract more people because under their tongues, there is deceit. People love darkness more than light because of their evil deeds.

Since religion, now as a trade, is more lucrative than some other trades in the town many are deserting their original trades to take up evangelism with the hope of amassing quick wealth within a short time. You only need to be sugar tongued and to be gifted with the power of prayer with exhortation, you will surely get on.

If care is not taken and necessary precautions not taken, with time, these hungry religionists would spoil the good the ‘imported religions’ intend to deliver in Ijesaland. The remnant of the pagans would have a means of pestering their heads and unfolding the ills in the ‘imported religions’ people may then prefer to revert to traditional religion.

**CONCLUSION**

I have just touched on the salient points in the religious life of the Ijesas. Time does not permit me to deal exhaustively on this important topic. This notwithstanding, my readers are able to see what impact religion has made on the life of the people.

Religion gave birth to education the very source of the social and economic development of any nation. Therefore, today in Oyo State, the Government believes that the greatest industry of the people of Ilesa in education the very child birth of religion. Important missions established primary and secondary institutions where their children are exposed to Western civilization.

One thing, I would like my readers to take proper note of is that inspite of the acceptance of Christianity and Islam by the people of Ijesaland, there are still some people who believe in traditional religion. There are some people who embrace either Christianity or Islam but still take active part in the traditional religion. That is why this song is at the lips of such people.

 “Awa o soro ile wa o

 Awa o soro ile wa o

 Igbagbo o ni kawa ma soro

 Awa o soro ile wa o”

 “We cannot but embrace our traditional religion

 We cannot but embrace our traditional religion

 Important religion (Christian/Islam) cannot obstruct

 us from observing our festivals.

 We shall embrace our traditional religion”.

Right now in Ijesaland there are many revival meetings organized by different groups to reveal to nominal Christians and non Christians who Christ is. The Bible is the instrument of their conquest. People are exposed to God’s words in the Bible. The most interesting thing is that the scriptures is being fulfilled that “It shall come to pass afterward that I will pour my spirit on all flesh, your sons and daughters shall prophecy and your young men shall see visions – Prophet Joel 2:28. The youths are being made use of in Ijesaland and they group themselves into Scripture Union (S.U.). They are really vast in the scriptures and winning souls for Christ.

To deliver the expected good by the true religionists, they have to come together to wage a religious war against those among them with sheep clothing but right deep in them, they are carnivorous animals (tiger and wolves). Prophet T.O. Obadare is taking the right step in the right direction by building an interdenominational hall for Christians in Ijesaland at Oke-Oye, Ilesa.

Ilesa, to really merit being the Jerusalem of Nigeria’s religiously the religionists have to work harder and rid the town of those who are anti-God in their words and deed. Happily enough, we have seen in this paper the contribution the different Owa Obokuns had made to advertising God by giving their time and materials to God’s service. Right from Owa Obokun Ofokutu, the first Christian Oba of Ijesaland, to Owa Obokun Peter Agunlejika, who recently joined his ancestral fathers; all the reigning Owas had contributed in no small measure to projecting who God is. The Owa Obokun is a man of all religions, as this paper has rightly enumerated his role in the traditional festivals as well as the Christian and the Muslim festivals. He plays a vital role in the Ijesa traditional festivals because it is there he pays homage to his ancestors. He also attends different Christian churches in the town as well as the central mosque for the worship of God. We should not forget that the Owa Obokun should subject himself to this type of thing because he is the traditional father of the people of Ijesaland and should try as much as possible to satisfy his children.

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8. Personal contact by me with Pa Arapate of Ijesa on Ogun Festival 21/3/82.
9. Personal contact by me with Chief Baseemi of Ilesa on Ogun Festival 22/3/82.
10. Personal contact by me with Chief Ajayi-Obe, the Lemodu of Ijesaland on Obokun festival 23/3/82.
11. Personal contact by me with Madam Alice on Osun festival 25/3/82.
12. Two pamphlets on Programme of Ilesa festivals for 1981 and 1982 collected from Chief Ajayi-Obe, the Lemodu of Ijesaland.

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

“The Ijesha in the History of the Yoruba”

By

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The task of unraveling the authentic past of the Yoruba until comparatively recent times a non-literate people is undoubtedly beset with great difficulties. In writing the history of non-literate societies the modern historian must work without his accustomed tools; in the absence of written sources he is essentially like a builder or mason who is required to make brick without straws. The historian normally fashions evidence from written records, both primary and secondary – the accounts of events by contemporary observers and the comments of knowledgeable persons upon those accounts based upon close study, analysis and synthesis – all of which are unavailable to the historian of non-literate societies. He must rely upon myths and legends, oral and remembered accounts both of which are usually tainted by the peculiar bias or prejudice of the informants. When, indeed, one is dealing with the history of a people or a nationality, one opens a dyke of group rivalry with stories of ancient glories pouring in on the one side of the flood gate and those of inglorious defeats in counter blast pouring in on the other side. The historian will do well to keep his head above the deluge otherwise his account will not only be patiently subjective but hopelessly ineffective in arriving at what actually happened, the real essence of all history.

One needs not be pessimistic for with all its shortcomings and pitfalls oral evidence has come to be accepted as an essential element in writing the history of non-literate societies. One cannot afford to ignore what the people themselves say of their history, however gilded; but one must apply to it the avid test of historical analysis. One must check one story from our source with another from a rival source; realizing that between both there might be the truth. The modern historian in practicing his craft (be it art, or science), must summon to his aid the insight of related disciplines of archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, religious studies, sociology and even chemical pathology, where the study of blood groups gives powerful clues to kindred human relations. The upshot of all this is that the modern study of the history of the Yoruba is still in its infancy; we have done enough, however, to realize that not only does much remain to be done but also we need a more systematic study. We need to wage an interdisciplinary intellectual war upon our past; go down beyond scratching the archaeological surface in a few chosen places towards a meaningful programme of continuous and sustained archaeological digging of sites sown broaden it throughout Yorubaland waiting for the scalpels of the experts. Our well-known art objects need to be closely studied, subjected to carbon dating processes where appropriate and compared with like-objects from other parts of Nigeria in order to fortify our knowledge of that artistic continuum of at least two thousand years which we believe is the proud heritage of all Nigerians.

We come now the Ijesas and their place in the history of the Yoruba. In this paper much will be taken for granted as to the origin of the Yoruba. The two schools of thought of migration from Mecca or Near East and of the Yoruba being autochthonous to the present Yorubaland are well-known and so need not claim much of our limited time. Indeed at Ile-Ife one can discern a “synthesis” of birth possibilities in that the popular view is of Ile-Ife as the centre of the creation myth, the place where all humanity was created, and the most esoteric view reserved only for the princes and cognoscenti that Oduduwa led a migration into Ife usually re-emphasized to a new Ooni at the point of entry by the Obajio during the periodic re-enactment ceremonies which from part of the indication rituals of a new ruler. The modern historian’s tentative but powerfully held view is often that migration into Ile-Ife must have taken place is two major ways both of which have been linked with the Kisra migration of about the 7th century aid so well known in the legends of the Borguwa and the Oduduwa Migration which took place probably in the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. and which almost certainly brought all the characteristics of Yoruba civilization in bolder relief to the present Yorubaland. It must be added, to counter the mischief of some western historian, that these migrations were not connected with the bogus diffusionist theories that said much migrations were primarily to infuse semetic elements into the negro blood. As far as we know, the migration that we talk about brought in waves of people of the same stock almost certainly from the Upper Egypt Region which was once subject to Meroitic influences.

Be that as it may, the Yoruba came into our parts of Africa and founded a sizeable kingdom at Ile-Ife from whence they dispersed to establish other kingdoms in what is today Yorubaland. We can only as yet go by the myths and legends as to how this local diaspora took place. There indeed, is the rub for our most comprehensive account as recorded in Johnson’s History of the Yoruba is contradicted by the mythical accounts of the several kingdoms and it dubbed subservient to Oyo imperialist pretensions. Naturally in this paper greater credence will be given to the Ijesa account in order to ignore what the people themselves say of their own history. Happily is essence, all the accounts agree that the Owa of Ilesha (now of Ijesaland) is a descendant of Oduduwa the mythical founder of the first Yoruba kingdom and to whom ultimately all Yoruba Oba (or crowned Heads) must trace their descent. These accounts are also predicated upon the fact that the story of the leader merely focuses attention upon the vicissitudes of a people; the leader is therefore, spoken of in his representative capacity and what applies to him must be regarded as applying not only to his immediate supporters in the leadership and his own family but also to the generality of the

1. The History of the Yorubas: the Rev. Samuel Johnson, C.S.S. Bookshop Reprint, Lagos, 1960.
2. “Itan Ilesha” nipa J.J.E. Abiola, B.A. Babafemi, Prince S.O.S. Ataiyeru, Ilesha 1932(?)

people whom he has the privilege to lead. It is certain here that for remembered history, the landmarks are easier for the memory to store and once the parameters are fixed so to speak, the details of the picture can easily be filled in.

The Ijesha version of the rise of the Owa can be briefly summarized thus. The first Owa was Ajibogun the son of Oduduwa, Olofin-Aye by the beautiful maid-servant of the Olofin’s favourite wife who unfortunately was herself barren. As old age approached the Olofin became blind and his healers after consulting the Ifa oracle, decided that a medical potion made from sea-water was the only means of curing the great ruler’s blindness. The question was who would fetch the sea-water from the coast, with all the hazards and uncertainties inherent upon such a journey? The older sons of the Olofin accepted the challenges in turns but came back one after the other empty-handed. Finally, the young Ajibogun undertook the task. First, he took the precaution of consulting the Ifa oracle himself and the Ifa priest forecast success provided he would make some sacrifices before starting off, which he duly did. During the journey itself, Ajibogun called upon the ruler of Ijebu-Ode on the way (the account named him as Awujale!) who deputed as Ijebu prince to accompany him. Needless to say the prince deserted him as the difficulties of the journey to the coast mounted; but Ajibogun persisted until he reached the ocean and secured the precious sea-water. He returned home first to the amazement of the Ijebu prince and secondly to the wonderment of the people of Ile-Ife. His brothers had by now left the city. The healers lost no time in making their sea-water concoction and the Olofin duly applied it to his blind eyes. The next morning, after untoward incidents which need not detain us, the Olofin regained his eye-sight and was able to see clearly to the joy of all. He asked his dutiful son to go into the palace and take whatever he liked of his belongings for a reward but Ajibogun found the palace empty, his brothers having looted it of its treasures, before they dispersed. The Olofin comforted him, asked him to go after his brothers, regain what he could of their possessions but not to kill them.

Ajibogun and the followers whom the Olofin had assigned to him found his brothers encamped not far away from Ile-Ife and after their pretence to welcome him they tried overnight to kill off his supporters; whereupon he fell upon them and decimated their followers whilst the princes themselves fled for dear life. Ajibogun took the possessions they left behind, and returned to Ile-Ife to be congratulated by the Olofin. Their father who then gave him the right to collect three-fifth of the tolls due to him at the Ilode custom post in perpetuity. Ajibogun who by now had added the title ‘Obokun’ (one who scoops the sea-water) to his name, went to Ilode to tell the customs people the wishes of the Olofin and promised to station his own collector amongst them to secure the three-fifth of their daily takings for him and then proceeded to Igbadaye where he camped with the followers.

It was from Igbadaye that Ajibogun took his forces to Ile-Ife thrice to fight and defeat the Ife people. First on hearing that the Ilode customs people had doubled his own collector he went to Ife to re-establish his position; he repeated this twice, succeeding on each occasion and taking many slaves and much booty. On the third occasion he became “trigger happy” and invaded the Olofin’s palace. On hearing of his approach the Olofin waited for him in front of the palace in full regalia including his fully bedecked crown. Ajibogun had cut off the fringes of the crown before he recognized his father and stopped his display of bravado. The old king admonished him and placed the crown without the frills upon Ajibogun’s head; hence till this day the Owa Obokun always wears his crowns without the fringes which usually covered the faces of other Obas when wearing their full regalia. Ajibogun Obokun then went away, back to Igbadaiye now with the full authority of a crowned Oba.

It was at Igbadaiye that the Owa received the news from the Iwarefa of Ile-Ife, that the Olofin had passed away. He went back for his father’s funeral expecting his brothers to do likewise but they failed to appear. Ajibogun and the Ife people performed the rites; he took what he wished of the Olofin’s remaining possessions and rather surprisingly he did not place himself on the throne of the Olofin but preferred to return to Igbadaiye and from there to the little settlement of Ibokun which was then subject to the periodic raid of the Alare and his forces whenever the Ibokun people celebrated their annual “Ita” festivals. In return for the warm hospitality the Owa Obokun received at Ibokun, he undertook to rid the people of the Alare menace of the Alare and his people and after a hard-fought battle which ended in a stale-mate Ajibogun used one of his daughters to play the Delilah stunt upon the Alare, obtained the sacred drum that enshrined the Alare’s invincibility for her father and the result of the next battle was predictable. Ibokun was rid of the Alare menace and in gratitude submitted to the overlordship of Owa Obokun. The conquering Ajibogun died at Ibokun and was succeeded by his son Oka-Kile who eventually moved on to Ilowa where he died. His brother and successor died at Oke-Osun. After moving to a few more places and a succession disputed involving two brothers the people eventually settled at Ilesha (a place specially selected) where Owaluse was the first Owa Obokun, to be succeeded later by his brother Atakunmosa, a famed warrior who was believed to advance even upon Benin City in his time.

Thus the Ijesha kingdom was firmly established at Ilesha under the Owa Obokun. Up to the reign of Owa Obokun Aromolaran 1, 45 Owa had held Office, four of whom were women and ten of whose names are nor recorded mainly because they died while at the house of the Ogboni Ilesha; that is before they were actually installed in the palace. There were some 134 dependent towns, villages and hamlets and at one time Ilesha itself had more than seventy wards. The thing to remember is that the Ijesha reproduced the normal Yoruba pattern of chiefships. A hierarchical people the Yoruba political system features various degradations of chieftains. In Ilesha, the Owa Obokun Adimula is supreme and his Iwarefa (the Yoruba cabinet of six) comprises the:

1. Obanla
2. Ogboni-Jebu-Jesha
3. Ogboni Ibokun
4. Ogboni Ipole
5. Ogboni Ilesha and
6. Oba-Odo

Another interesting feature is the establishment of his cadres of Inner and outer chiefs who are in charge of the security of the Owa Obokun: the Inner chiefs comprise the :

1. Odole
2. Risawe
3. Loro

and 4. Arapate.

and the outer, the:

1. Palero
2. Papaye
3. Lemodu
4. Segbua
5. Salotun
6. Batisin.

The war-chiefs are also graded and divided into two major cadres with the Lejoka at the head. There are also Emese as at Ile-Ife who were “servants” of the Owa with their own hierarchies.

The purpose of this short paper is not to attempt a history of Ilesha. Suffice it to say that in Ijesha were inevitably drawn into the internecine wars of the late 19th century which disturbed the peace and tranquility of Yorubaland. With the decay and inevitable collapse of the Oyo-Yoruba Empire and the Rise of Ibadan as the new Premier Military Power in Yorubaland the Ijesha played their part in stemming the tide of the advancing Fulani domination from Ilorin on the one hand and combing the excesses of the Ibadan warlords on the other. The hero of the times was Ogedengbe who led the Ijesha forces to many victories and was prominent in the Kiriji War when Ijesha and Ekiti seemed to be united in a desperate war of survival against Ibadan. In the process of establishing Pax Britannica in Yorubaland between 1886 and 1893 which involved the breaking up of the Kiriji War Camp Ogedengbe apparently could not accommodate himself to the new situation and he had to be exiled to Iwo in 1894 only to return to Ilesha in 1896 to be made the Obanla, the highest chieftaincy position open to an Ijesha of proven ability and worth. He died in 1910. Another noteworthy Ijesha war-lord was Obe.

The Ijesha have carved for themselves a notable place among the Yoruba. The doggedness with which Ajagunla, the first Owa Obokun pursued his mission to secure sea-water for making the medicine to restore normal sight to the blind Olofin Aiye of his father, when others had given up and returned to admit their failure, is characteristic of the well-known persistence and determination to succeed which the Yoruba have come to associate with the Ijesha. Although there are no occasions for the display of military prowess these days the Ijesha continue to excel in their display of their well- known business acumen and it is a matter for friendly barter to recall that with a little capital an Ijesha trader soon expands his business and acquire wealth,3 which is the envy of others. Indeed, they are famed to be the inventor of the hire-purchase sale technique in Nigeria as is illustrated by the following short story.

 “An Ijesha cloth peddler, once went into the outlying village, far from a well-known Yoruba town. On arrival, he displayed his wares, fraternized with everybody; inquired what the housewife lacked and cajoled her husband to buy a few yards of cloth to make a blouse for his wife. All what he required was a small deposit and he would come and collect the balance by installments on every market day. The luckless husband fell for the bait, paid the small deposit and the cloth was theirs.

3. The popular song: “Oso maa lo…”

The Ijesa peddler coming on foot and later by bicycle faithfully called on subsequent market days to collect the installments. Perhaps the husband defaulted on one market day; perhaps, the peddler was under financial pressure to meet his own financial commitments, he would suddenly demand full payment of the balance of the debt. All friendliness would vanish; he would refuse any offer of hospitality; not even a glass of water or a stool to sit upon. He would declare that he would only squat on his hindlegs and would not leave until he received his balance. In his picturesque Ijesha dialect he would reiterate

 “Oso maa lo . . .”

And he meant it – the hapless debtor had better find a money lender otherwise he would have an inexorable guest of a debt collector his hands.

Thus the Ijesha acquired the subsequent of “Oso maa lo”. The real lesson of this story is the invaluable role which the Ijesha played in the distributive trade in the early days of the establishment of the monetary economy amongst the Yoruba. Indeed they went far afield even beyond Yorubaland and enable trade to penetrate the interior far beyond, the large towns. If there is no more peddling small wares for sales these days they own rows of shops in large towns such as Ibadan, Abeokuta and Lagos and from the proceeds they have invested heavily in higher education and big business and today they are reaping rich dividends in the leadership they command in the professions, business and politics not only throughout Yorubaland but in Nigeria as a whole.

An honoured place is therefore assured for the Ijesha in Yoruba history. It is the challenge of modern historiography for us to add flesh to the bare bones of present historical knowledge and the opportunity of re-enactment of historical events which the installation of leading Yoruba Obas afford as should not be missed. We need to bring to our task all the modern tools of howing out the history of erstwhile non-literate societies. I am sure seminars such as this one will help us to highlight the problems and let us hope our Governments and people will provide us with the means to tackle the job – the job of writing our authentic history. Neither must we forget our good fortune that in Kabiyesi Alaiyeluwa Oba Aromolaran II the new Owa Obokun Adimula of Ijeshaland we have an historian who has promised us a history of Ilesha which cannot but he informed by his own wealth of knowledge and unique experience as a royal “insider”.

THANK YOU.

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE IJESALAND AND ITS PEOPLE: A SOCIO-GEOGRAPHICAL ANALYSIS**

**BY**

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 Ijesaland, found to the eastern part of Oyo State of Nigeria will be defined as the geographic unit situated between latitudes 7025’ and 7050’ north and longitudes 4043’ and 4057’ east. It is bounded to the north by Ifelodun Local Government Council and to the West by the Osogbo, Ede and Oranmiyan Local Government Councils. To the South is also the Oranmiyan Local Government Council while the area has boundary with Ondo State to the east and south-east (fig.1). The land area of Ijesaland covers about 1,700km2. Its 1963 population census figure is 481,720 meaning that the population density of Ijesaland is 283 persons per km2.

Ijesaland is made up of many settlements and from the available maps of the area there are no less than 350 settlements of various seizes. The biggest of them all is Ilesa, followed by Ijebu-Jesa, Osu, Ifewara, Esa-Oke, Iperindo, Esa-Odo, Ilare, Igangan, Ibokun, Iwara, Faforiji, Imesi-Ile, and Okebode. None of these settlements has less than 4,000 inhabitants living in it.

 The political structure of Ijesaland is a very dynamic one. Ijesaland used to be just one division but on March 23, 1967, it was divided into two division1.

 In 1976, there was a restructure of local governments at the national level. It was this time that the Ijesaland was carved into three Local Government Councils: Atakunmosa, Ilesa and Obokun with their respective headquarters at Osu, Ilesa and Ijebu-Jesa. But as from April 1981 Ijesaland has eight Local Government Councils. Ilesa Local Government is left intact while Atakunmosa has been divided into Atakunmosa West, Central and East Local government Councils with headquarters at Osu, Iwara and Iperindo respectively. Obokun has been broken into Obokun Central, North, North=West and South Local Government Councils with their respective headquarters at Ijebu-Jesa, Ilare, Ibokun and Ipetu-Jesa. Therefore, with the establishment of many councils, some hitherto unimportant settlements now perform more functions in terms of political, administrative, commercial and even industrial services.

 Culturally, there is a remarkable homogeneity in the ethnic characteristics of the dominant groups of the Yoruba inhabiting Ijesaland2. This has subsequently fostered the emergence of relatively compact and permanent settlers in the area. This is also observable in the control exercised by the Owa Obokun, the natural ruler of Ilesa, over the entire Ijesaland. Possibly with the exception of a few large settlements, the Owa appoints head chiefs (known as Loja) of the villages as his representatives. It is also important to note that whenever the Stool of Owa of Ijesaland is vacant, the next Owa need not come from Ilesa township; any of the Loja could be selected. The historical explanation that could be advanced for this trend is that a large number of the native people of Ijesaland originated from Ile-Ife tracing their ancestory to Ajibogun who was the first Owa of Ijesaland. He, together with his followers founded and resettled many settlements when he came to Ijesaland.

Geology and Relief

 As a result of the presence of gold deposits in parts of Ijesaland, the study of and the description of its geology has been carried out by de Swardt3; and Smyth and Montgomery4 also confirmed the former work in a study of the soils and land use of the area (table 1).

Table 1: A comparison of the Mapping Units Used by the Geological

 Survey and the Soil Survey in the Ilesa Area.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Geological Survey Mapping Units  Units |  Soil Survey Parent  Rock Groups |
| Muscovite Pegmatite Complex; Medium Grained Granite; Coarse Porphyritic Granite; Potash Granite Gneiss; Granite Gneiss. | Coarse Grained Granites and Gneisses. |
| Quartz Schist | Quartz Schist |
| Sericite and ChloriteSchist | Sericite Schist |
| Amphibolites Complex | Amphibolites |
| Gneiss and Biotite Schist | Fine-grained BiotiteSchist |

Source: Smyth and Montgomery (1962), p.232.

 Because the geological formation of Ijesaland is quite complex Smyth and Montgomery have tried to divide the area into three geographical distinctive districts viz western, central and eastern.

 The western district, which lies west of a line through Obalolu, Osu and Osin extends as far north as the Osun. In the main, this district overlies coarse granitic rocks. Notable topographic features in this district are the rather bare rocky hills formed by the potash granite gneiss and the medium-grained granite which lie respectively to the west and east of Alakowe.

 The central district lies immediately to the east and the western third and stretches as far as a line through Ifewara, Iloko, Ijebu-Jesa and Esa-Odo, Ilesa township lies within this district. Really, it is in this district that nearly all the gold which is won from the Ilesa gold field is mined. The two main rock types in the district are rocks rich in amphibole (the amphibolites complex) and gneiss and biotile schist. The former rocks are usually associated with a noticeably undulating topography. In this topographic setting it is not uncommon to find that the hills are capped by ironstone as depicted by the hills found around Itagunmodi village. The latter rocks appear to be very readily weathered and give rise to an undulating topography with very few rock outcrops.

 The eastern district lies to the east of the central district and has Erinoke, Iwaraja and Esa-Oke within its boundaries. The rocks of this district are quartz gneisses and schists consisting essentially of with small amounts of white micaceous minerals. In grain size and structure the rocks vary from fine quartz schists to coarse quartzites. These rocks have a distinct topography of steep-sided ridges frequently rising to over 650m above sea level and exhibit a remarkably persistent north-south trend. Furthermore, it is observed that the ridges reflect the highly resistant nature of some of the quartz rocks.

 The northern half of Ijesaland is drained by Osun drainage system. The two most important tributaries of Osun in this area are Oyile and Ora taking their sources from northern and southern part of Ijesaland respectively (fig. 2).

CLIMATE

 Ijesaland falls within the humid tropics as definite by Cernier5. It is characterized by the tropical wet and dry climate. In this climatic type there is a high but almost uniform temperature throughout the year. The mean annual temperature for the area ranges between 230c and 270c. The diurual range of temperature does not exceed 80c while that of the annual range is in the region of 40c. However, it should be noted that some areas are likely to be affected by the relief of such places like the Erin hills where there is waterfall and in the eastern district with marked high hills.

 The number of reliable weather station is very limited in Ijesaland6. However, the rainfall data from the Ministry of Works Meteorological

Table 2: 35-year Mean Monthly and Annual Rainfall for Ilesa

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Month | J | F | M | A | M | J | J | A | S | O | N | D | TOTAL |
| Rainfall (mm) | 8.5 | 23.1 | 89.3 | 120.3 | 159.9 | 170.2 | 161.0 | 98.6 | 203.8 | 210.7 | 55.9 | 110.8 | 1,312.1 |
| Rain days | 1 | 3 | 8 | 9 | 11 | 10 | 12 | 10 | 15 | 15 | 5 | 1 | 99 |

Source: Ministry of Works Meteorological Station, Ilesa.

Station, Ilesa could be used not only because of its relative reliability but also because of the centrality of Ilesa township in Ijesaland (see fig. 1). While the rainfall data from the Ministry of Works Meteorological Station could be taken as being representative of Ijesaland, it is pertinent to observe that tropical rainfall varies over land and space; and differences in rainfall amount and intensity have been observed over small areas 7, 8.

The data in Table 2 indicate that Ilesa experiences double maxima rainfall with first maximum in June and the second one in October. No month is totally dry although there are some years when the months of December, January and February are characteristically dry.

In general, the distribution pattern of rainfall over Ijesaland shows that the highest concentration is at Esa-Oke farm settlement whose mean annual rainfall approaches 1,500mm while that of Ilesa farm Institute is 1,490mm. West-wards of the Institute, there is a gradual decline with a mean value of 1,310mm. The decline of rainfall north-eastwards of Ijesaland is rather sharp; going to about 1,060mm towards Imesi-Ile9.

**VEGETATION**

In terms of its climatic region, Ijesaland has the tropical rainforest as its natural vegetation but except in few scattered places, this natural vegetation exists no more. It has been replaced by a varieties of vegetation types which do not exclude grasses.

Derived Savanna in this area results from biotic factor arising from the incessant cultivation of the land by man. This type of vegetation is common around the larger settlements which often reflect the influence of man’s activities10. Another reason that may be responsible for the establishment of this vegetation type is adaphic. Adejuwon has indicated that very sandy soils even along river courses may give rise to grasses11.

Secondary forests and regrowths are found all over the Ijesaland indicating areas of previous cultivation which have been left to fallow for convenient periods of times depending on the population pressure on land in an area. Closely related to secondary forests are the gallery forests that always line river courses. The trees in these secondary forests are generally not tall (between 5m and 15m), have thin, pale, smooth barks; and slender and unbranched trunks. However, commercial trees, especially Iroko and Mahogany, left on the land during initial clearing of the mature forest are found dotting the area. They may be as tall as 30m. In the case of secondary regrowths, Eupatorium Odoratum is observed to be an important fallow plant all over the area. Even, fallow plots of eight to ten years have this notorious weed. This contrasts sharply with Aweto’s finding in Sagamu area where fallow plots cease to have this weed after seven years12. This is surely indicative of the extent of field cropping practices taking place in Ijesaland.

As mentioned earlier, the true tropical rainforest types are found in patches all over the place but are found in relatively large extent in Ikeji/Ipetu Forest Reserve. They are also found in hilly areas that are very difficult to cultivate to crops especially on the quartz ridges of the eastern district13.

Another aspect of the vegetation of Ijesaland, like in most parts of the tropical rainforest of South-Western Nigeria, is at mosaic of anthropic tree-crop vegetation. This cultural vegetation is made up mainly of cacao (Theobroma Cacao) and Kolanut (with greater emphasis on Cola acuminate than C. nitida) with scattered oil palms (Elaeis guineensis). The tree-crops can be seen as true derivatives of the tropical rainforest since they are characteristically evergreen, but of smaller stature.

**SOILS**

The only well-known comprehensive work on soils classification of the Ijesaland is that carried out by Smyth and Montgomery in South-Western Nigeria14. These workers classify the soils into series and subsequently group these into associations. The classification and the grouping are based mainly on the physical characteristics of the soils. In Ijesaland the predominant soil type is the Egbeda series. The soil are very fine in texture, but a pronounced gravel layer including quartz gravel, stones and small spherical concretions is present between depths of 25cm and 120cm. The majority of profiles are very clayey sand to sandy clay in texture between 25cm and 50cm from the surface. The soil is of fairly high quality for agricultural practices.

Itagunmodi soils series occupy level to gently sloping sites at intermediate or fairly high levels in the topography. The soils are derived from a variety of basic rocks, which have in common a high content of ferro-magnesian minerals and a correspondingly lower proportion of free Silica. They are exceptionally clayey in texture, brownish red to red in colour and so friable in consistence that they often present a ‘dusty’ appearance. The soils of Itagunmodi series are extremely important on account of their high fertility in general and for their suitability for tree crops in particular. Much of the highest yielding cocoa in South-Western Nigeria is planted on these soils in Ijesaland.

Other soils types of importance in Ijesaland include Iregun, Olorunda, Apomu and Okemesi series. Iregun soil series shows a tendency to dry out severely in the dry season and is marginally suitable for cocoa. However, it is very suitable for citrus and will support kola and coffee satisfactorily. As a result of its derivation from fine colluvial material washed from higher sites that is stone and gravel-free to plough depth; and for the act that it usually occurs on moderate to gentle slopes at a low level in the topography, Smyth and Montgomery have suggested that Iregun soil series is well suited to mechanical cultivation and arable cropping.

Soils of the Olorunda series occupy gentle to moderate slopes at high or intermediate levels in the topography. They are clayey in texture and pale grayish brown, brown or pale orange brown in colour below a depth of 25cm from the surface. These soils, being fairly heavy in texture close to the surface and both porous and friable to considerable depth are suitable for cocoa, kola, coffee and citrus.

The Apomu soils series are derived from fairly fine colluvial material washed from higher sites and almost invariably occupy moderate to gentle slopes at a low level in the topography. They are closely associated with soils of the Iregun series but soils of Apomu series occupy the lower topographical site. On account of their sandy nature, soils of the Apomu series have poor properties of moisture and nutrient retention and are considered to be unsuitable for cocoa, coffee, kola and citrus. Like the Iregun, it could be suitable for mechanical cultivation and arable farming.

Soils of Okemesi series usually occupy steeply sloping sites on the sides of prominent ridges found to the eastern district of Ijesaland. They are sandy in texture, being not heavier than clayey sand in horizons above a depth of 45-50cm, and are usually rather shallow and very stony. Profile colour is typically greyish brown to brown. According to Smyth and Montgomery15, the shallow sandy soils of Okemesi series are almost useless for agriculture and the steep slopes which they normally occupy could only be cleared at the risk of disastrous erosion.

**OCCUPATION**

The major occupation of the Ijesa is farming and is closely followed by trading, an occupation that has made Ijesa people popular for a long time in Yorubaland.

In a recent survey of parts of Ijesaland16, it is apparent that probably before 1920 most farmers were cultivating food crops especially yam, and cassava that were, of course, mainly planted for subsistence. But after this period a drastic change in the cultivation pattern took place. This resulted from the introduction of cacao (Theobroma cacao) into the area. Cocoa has been known to have a west-est shift since the crop found its way to Nigeria late in 19th century. From the description of the geology, relief and soils of Ijesaland, it is obvious that the central district provides the best environment for cocoa production. However, this is not suggesting that cocoa is not produced in other parts but that the production is relatively lower especially in the eastern district. There is no doubt that cocoa has far reaching effects on the life pattern of the Ijesa farmers like other cocoa producers in Nigeria. A full account of the impact of cocoa on the farmers has been given by Galletti et al17. Other tree crops planted with cocoa or separately include kolanut, especially Cola acuminate, coffee and citrus.

A field crop that has grown by leaps and bounds in Ijesaland is rice. The variety of rice common in the area is the oryza sativa rather than O. glaberrima. The ‘ofada rice’, as the former variety is usually called, is believed to be first cultivated in 1942 at Erin-Oke by one of the itinerant traders who brought it from Abeokuta18. However, by 1960 the cultivation of rice has spread to all parts of Ijesaland. Rice cultivation is observably more successful in the northern division than in the Southern division. It is therefore necessary to note that before rice cultivation was introduced into Ijesaland, yam farming and cocoa cultivation, both of which require fairly large labour resource were the most important farming activities in the area. However, since yam is more sensitive to soil fertility than rice, the farmers shift to rice planting. Furthermore, in most parts of the Ijesa Northern division cocoa has been tried and it has failed to yield products commensurate with the inputs of capital and labour, hence, it is given only a passing attention19. It is for these reasons that rice has become prominent in the Northern part of Ijesaland. For example, in a study carried out by Aponbiede20, it is found that in Ijesa Northern division a farmer cultivates 2.0, 1.6 and 3.6 hectares of land for rice, other food crops and tree crops respectively. Whereas rice stands on its own on separate plots, other food crops include yam, maize, cassava and cocoyam while tree-crops include cocoa, kolanut and citrus.

Another feature of rice cultivation in Ijesaland is the location of rice farms on hillsides all over the Northern part. In the same study, Aponbiede21 finds that over 90 percent of the rice farms are located on the hill sides all over the Ijesa Northern division. This trend will not be unconnected with the greater need for more land to produce rice.

Apart from these crops the other important crops cultivated in Ijesaland in order of their importance are yams, cassava, maize and vegetables. It is pertinent to note that in most places where cocoa is planted, food-crop cultivation is limited to the close surroundings of the various settlements found within the area.

The Ijesa, popularly called ‘Osomaalo’, are great traders. They are reputed to have introduced the hire-purchase system into the Nigerian business several years ago22. In the past they were principally itinerant traders travelling from town to town and from village to village selling cloth and collecting money, forcibly atimes, over agreed periods of time. Today, the Ijesa have expanded their business tremendously and have settled in Ilesa and many other Nigerian cities as business-men and women.

Other occupational activities of Ijesa are cloth-weaving and mat-making mostly carried out by women; blacksmithing, wood-carving, carpentry, cloth-dyeing, photography, sewing and tailoring and welding to mention a few.

**ROADS**

According to Gould23, road density or accessibility is closely associated with population density but the location of an area and the intensity of its agricultural production also seem to be associated in some cases and may have a distorting effect. In Ijesaland, therefore, the factors of population and production have great influence on both long-distance and short-distance transports because they dictate the building and quality of roads. For example, the roads linking Ilesa with other major settlements in Ijesaland are tarred (fig. 3) whereas those roads from Ilesa to smaller settlements are not tarred (fig. 3). In actual fact, the main reason for constructing the latter road types to the various settlements is for the evacuation of agricultural products to Ilesa for local consumption and for transmission to other places in the case of food crops while tree-crop products, especially, cocoa, coffee and kolanuts, are sent out. One significant change about these roads which Atobatele24 referred to as seasonal roads is the usability of most of the roads throughout the year. This is so because the various communities have put efforts together to make their connecting routes usable. Of course, the efforts of the state government and local government councils in the construction and maintenance of roads in this area are also commendable.

The density of internal and road network in Ijesaland is quite high since most of the settlements are connected with one type of road or another. Apart from this, there is high density of road network in the larger settlements especially Ilesa, Ijebu-Jesa, Ipetu-Jesa, Osu, Ifewara, Esa-Oke and Iwara. The rate at which the townships roads are being constructed and reconstructed is high in Ilesa, and many roads connecting various parts of the city are now earmarked for surfacing.

**SERVICE**

There are many available social services in Ijesaland. In this paper, however, attention will be focused on public utilities like water, electricity, postal and telecommunications, health, banking, education and hotel facilities in the area.

By 1977, the output of the Ilesa waterworks, operated at Efon-Alaye, was more than 2.4 million litres per day25. It is however in plan to increase the water output of Ilesa water works to about 7 million litres per day since the present output is found to be grossly inadequate for both domestic and industrial requirements of the area. One aspect of water supply in Ijesaland is the high percentage of coverage of many settlements. Waterworks at Ikeji and Esa-Odo provide water for many settlements in Northern division of Ijesaland. Besides, the Erin Water Falls is tapped to provide water for Erin-Ijesa and Erin-Oke. In Ifewara a rural water scheme is in operation.

Electricity is another important public utility needed, not only for domestic use but also for industrial purposes. Many settlements have been provided with electricity in Ijesaland. Apart from the mother town of Ilesa more than twenty other settlements have electricity and it is envisaged that under the current rural electrification scheme of the Oyo State Government, over 50 percent of the relatively large settlement (of not less than 3,000 inhabitants) will benefit. Some of the other settlements with electricity are Ijebu-Jesa, Ipetu-Jesa, Osu, Ilare, Esa-Oke, Esa-Odo, Ibodi, Ibokun and Imesi-Ile.

There are two main hospitals in Ijesaland both of which are located in Ilesa. There are the Wesley Guild Hospital and the State Hospital both of which are now under the control of the University of Ife Teaching Hospitals Complex. The Wesley Guild Hospital is at Ijofi of Iwara road while the State Hospital is on the Muroko road. Apart from these two hospitals there are many dispensaries and maternity centres located in various settlements of Ijesaland. Furthermore, there are many private hospitals and clinics set up by qualified medical and para-medical personnel in the major towns of Ilesa, Ijebu-Jesa and Ipetu-Jesa while there are some set up in these towns and other settlements under the close supervision of qualified medical personnel. Supplementing the services of these various hospitals, clinics, dispensaries and maternity centres are large and small chemists and medicine stores. Not only do the large chemist shops sell many types of medicine and drugs they also medicate for their clients.

There is a general post-office at Ilesa and other six postal agencies in the town. Also there are full-fledged post offices in Ijebu-Jesa, Ipetu-Jesa, Sub-post-offices in Esa-Oke, Imesi-Ile, and Osu while postal agencies are located in many other settlements. The Ilesa main post-office has a telephone service with the headquarters in Osogbo.

The pattern of spread of commercial banks in Ijesaland is encouraging in comparison with other similar areas in Nigeria. It is contended that except in the very large cities of Nigeria there is hardly any other division with as many banks. In Ilesa township alone, there are five notable commercial banks while other six settlements have their own commercial banks.

**Table 3: Commercial Banks and Operation Centres in Ijesaland**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **COMMERCIAL BANKS** | **WHERE FOUND** |
| First Bank | Ilesa and Ijebu-Jesa |
| National Bank of Nigeria  | Ilesa, Ipetu-Jesa and Ibokun |
| United Bank for Africa | Osu and Imesi-Ile |
| International Bank for West Africa | Ilesa and Esa-Oke |
| Union Bank | Ilesa |
| African Continental Bank | Ilesa  |

One logical reason that could be advanced for this trend of high density of banking operations in Ijesaland is the business acumen possessed by the Ijesa people which invariably assures the various banking houses of profitable business.

Another financial enterprise that thrives well in Ijesaland is the insurance business. Most reputable insurance companies have their branch offices in Ilesa (11), Ijebu-Jesa (1), 26 Ipetu-Jesa, Ibokun and Imesi-Ile.

Possibly one of the greatest thriving servicing business in Ijesaland is education. In fact the area is part of the zone (Ife/Ijesa Zone) which was once declared the educational zone by the first military governor of Oyo State. At present, there are 263 primary schools located at various settlements in Ijesaland. Ilesa alone has over 42 primary schools. There are still four secondary modern schools in the area while the number of secondary grammar schools has risen phenomenally with the automatic admission of primary school graduates into secondary schools. In all, 83 secondary grammar schools serve the Ijesaland. In terms of higher institutions of learning, Ijesaland seems to have more than a fair share when compared with other areas of large or similar size in Oyo State. There are three Teachers’ Training Colleges (two at Ilesa and one at Ijebu-Jesa) a School of Health Technology, an Agricultural Institute; a College of Education offering N.C.E courses and which may soon become a degree awarding institution. All these are located in Ilesa. Lastly, there is a Polytechnic Satellite Campus at Esa-Oke.

It may be observed that the importance of educational services in Ijesaland is held in high esteem. This is denoted by the establishment of publishing houses and bookshops which cater for the production and sales of books in various disciplines for various institutions. Since publishing houses with their headquarters in Ilesa are Ilesanmi Press and Publishing Company and Fatiregun Press and Publishing Company. It may be worthy of note to mention that, at least, two very well-known and multi-million naira press and publishing houses in Ibadan are owned by sons of Ijesaland. One is owned by the new Owa of Ijesaland, His Highness Oba Adekunle Aromolaran II, known as Aromolaran Publishing Company while the other is Onibonoje Publishing Company owned by Mr. G.O. Onibonoje from Ijebu-Jesa.

There has been a substantial increase in the quantity and quality of hotel facilities in Ijesaland. In 1977, for example, Ilesa could boast of only three non-catering Government Rest Houses and three private hotels with full catering and accommodation facilities and one private hotel that is non-catering. At present, the number of private hotels of high standard that have both catering and accommodation facilities has reached ten in Ilesa alone. Ilo-Ijesa is about to have an inter-national hotel apart from those available in Ijebu-Jesa now. Hotels with catering and accommodation facilities have been established in such towns like Ipetu-Jesa, Imesi-Ile, Osu and Ibodi. It is needless to mention that hundred of beer parlours and “cooling” centres exist in Ijesaland.

**INDUSTRY**

 Although large industrial concerns are just coming up in Ijesaland, there is no doubt about the existence of hundreds of small-scale industries all over the area. Aluko et al 27 have defined a small-scale industry as one whose working capital is less than N25,000 and employing fewer than 50 full time workers, whether or not it uses motive power. In this connection, it is seen that such small-scale industries are located in various places of Ijesaland. For example, Awoyemi 28 has found that a total of 727 small-scale industries exist in Ilesa township alone. Table 4 shows the type and number of small scale industries establishments in Ilesa.

**Table 4: Small-Scale Industrial Establishments in Ilesa**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **TYPE OF INDUSTRY** | **NUMBER** |
| Furniture | 58 |
| Shoe-making | 58 |
| Knitting | 14 |
| Welding | 76 |
| Weaving | 59 |
| Blacksmithing | 30 |
| Goldsmithing | 25 |
| Printing | 34 |
| Bakery | 26 |
| Corn-milling | 34 |
| Paper milling | 265 |
| Block making | 38 |
| Saw-milling | 10 |
|  **Total** | **727** |

This trend could also be observed in all other bigger settlements in Ijesaland although it is certain that none of that none of these could match Ilesa. One major small-scale industry that requires special mention in one of these settlements is the distilling of gin popularly called “Baba Erin” in accordance with the name of the settlements in which it is distilled. This brand of gin is quite popular throughout Yorubaland and kiosks in which the gin is sold have sprung up along the new Ife/Akure road which bye-passes the towns of Erin-Jesa and Erin-Oke.

 Large-scale industries are now springing up in Ijesaland but it seems beer-brewing is the in-thing. Apart from the already established International Breweries Ltd., brewer of Trophy Larger Beer, two other big brewing industries are underway. They are the Presidential Breweries to be located at Esa-Odo and the Sanmi Breweries at Ilesa. Two large publishing companies are firmly established in Ilesa. These are the Ilesanmi and Fatiregun Press and Publishing Companies. These publishing houses and the International Breweries Ltd., employ substantial number of people.

 Ijeda is invariably assuming the status of an industrial sector in Ijesaland. Besides the operation of a nail industry in the town, a flour mill was officially commissioned just in March 1982.

**RELIGION**

The Ijesa people are, predominantly, Christians although some are Muslims and traditional religionists.

 In most settlements in Ijesaland, shrines of different gods and goddesses are observable. Most of these shrines may be closely linked with the founders of the various settlements, but Ogun (the god of Iron) seems to be common to all.

There are central mosques in large settlements where Muslims observe their Jumat services every Friday while numerous other mosques of lower order where daily prayers are held are found all over the area.

The impact of Christianity is immense in Ijesaland, for example, the Wesley Guild Hospital was the first hospital to be established in Ilesa as far back as 1931 by the Methodist Mission29. Two orthodox church organizations (the Methodist and the Anglican Missions) have their Diocesan headquarters in Ilesa while other numerous Christian organizations have churches in various parts of Ijesaland.

**TOURISM**

The Erin-Ijesa Water Falls is the most important tourist centre in Ijesaland. It is situated at Erin-Oke, the major fall is about 30m high. This tourist centre has attracted several tourists as well as holiday makers to Ijesaland in recent years. It is encouraging to observe that the surrounding of this tourist centre is being given a face-lift by the State Government so as to make it more attractive. For example, tourists used to trek about 2km before getting to the foot hill, but now a good road has been constructed to the place. Apart from serving as a tourist attraction the waters of this fall are treated for domestic uses for the people of Erin-Oke and Erin-Ijesa. It is contended that this tourist centre could yield revenue to the government if the place is improved.

Another natural tourist centre is the range of Imo Hills which offers great attraction to tourists, especially foreigners, because of its splendid scenery and geographical location. The Imo Hills are found to the North-East of Ilesa on Ilesa-Akure road.

In most Yoruba towns it is characteristics of the Oba’s palace to offer tourist attractions. This is quite true of the notable settlements in Ijesaland. The Adimula Palace is the official residence of the Owa of Ijesaland. Here, there is a very large collection of historical objects like the ancient crown of Olorin, the Ida Ajasegun (Victory Sword), shrines on ancient deities and works of ancient sculptors30 all preserved for posterity to see. In places like Ijebu-Jesa, Ipetu-Jesa and Ifewara, the palaces are endowed with works of ancient sculptors and artists. The structure of these palaces is even such that depicts the artistry and architectural capabilities of the Ijesa people.

**ILESA**

Ilesa town is the focal point of all Ijesa people and a short discussion on Ilesa at this juncture is considered necessary.

Ilesa township now covers almost 51km2 in areal extent. It is located at the intersection of latitude 7045’N and longitude 4045’E on the undulating plain 380m to 450m above sea level. However, to the North-Eastern end of the town stands prominently the Imo Hill which rises to a peak of over 500m above sea level. The undulating plain of Ilesa is underlain by rocks of the crystalline basement complex.

With a population of 165,832 (1963 Census) accounting for more than one-third of the total population of Ijesaland, Ilesa has a population density of about 3,250 persons per km2. Considering the rate of development of Ilesa and the influx of people it cannot be an overestimation to say that not less than 350,000 people live in the town at present. Not only is Ilesa the largest settlement in Ijesaland, it is also centrally located in the area (see fig. 1) that road radiate from the core of the town to other peripheral settlements and beyond. Infact Ogunkola31 has described Ilesa as a nodal point for some major and minor routes as well as a link between the cocoa producing Ife on the one hand and the cultural textile manufacturing city of Osogbo. Ilesa is also the gateway to the timber and cocoa growing areas of Ondo State.

Ilesa is one of the most densely populated towns in Yorubaland as well as one of the most prosperous agricultural areas of South-Western Nigeria. This is as a result of its situation in the humid belt of Southern Nigeria, coupled with its highly productive environment32. With the introduction of valuable cash crops into the agricultural economy, the town has attracted many modern facilities such as hospitals, institutions of learning and commercial banks and establishments and has thus attained great significance in the struggle for modernization in social and economic activities.

The most important market in Ilesa today is the Atakunmosa market, which was opened in 1967. It is adjacent to the Oba’s palace. Apart from daily attendance, the market has an important fortnightly periodic session (usually on Tuesdays) which attracts people from far and near33. Trade in manufactured products is concentrated along Ereguru, Adeti, Ereja, Otapete and Okesa Street. Ereja and Ereguru are some of the oldest shopping zones and here are located most of the retail goods and medicine stores. Otapete road and Odo Esinra area are more important for motor spare-parts and professional services. A number of photographic studios, record stores and bookshops are located along Okesa street. At the edges of the town, that is on Ife, Osogbo and Akure roads are to be found specialist services such as motor vehicle repairing, printing, petrol, stations, offices of different trade companies such as John Holt, G.B.O., C.F.A.O., and U.A.C. and some industrial concerns.

**CONCLUSION**

In this paper a cursory analysis of the physical and socio-economic activities of the Ijesaland and its people has been attempted. The relative differences in geology, topography and soils have brought about the cultivating of different crops in the region. In the central district where the rocks are easily weatherable, topography is flat and soils are fertile, tree crops, especially cocoa, predominate whereas to the North where these physical features slightly differ food crop farming especially rice and yam, are cultivated, with the former being cultivated even on hillsides. The impact of man on the natural vegetation in Ijesaland is substantial. Owing to agricultural practices in the main, much of the tropical rainforest vegetation has been destroyed giving way to bare surfaces, fallow re-growths and ‘evergreen’ tree-crop vegetation.

Despite the fact that Ijesaland is made up of complex geology and differing topographic features the homogeneity of its people is of great influence in the operation of its socio-economic activities. Hence a great majority of the Ijesa were erst-while itinerant traders but now they are mostly settled traders all over the country. Therefore, with the advancement of the Ijesa in all facets of human endeavour, these industrious people undoubtedly are playing, and still have a great part to play in the development of Oyo State in particular and Nigeria in general.

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OE/ade

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**THE EVOLUTION OF IJESA EMPIRE**

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**Ilesa.**

Historians of the Yoruba tend to regard Ijesaland as a single kingdom under the Owa Obokun1. Although the Owa Obokun, who was ordinarily resident in the capital city of Ilesa had by the 17th Century become the paramount ruler of Ijesaland2, he was not the only Oba in the area. Indeed, he was a Emperor par excellence, a king of kings, hence his title ‘Olori Alade’ 3, the leader of the crowned heads. For Ijesaland was (and is still) made up of several kingdoms, some of which like Ijebu-Jesa and Erin-Ijesa, claim strong dynastic links with the founders of the Obokun State4 while others like Ibokun (previously known as Ilemure), Ilare, Otan-Ile, Imesi-Ile, Esa-Oke, and Esa-Odo were Ife-derived kingdoms5 which subsequently came under the overlordship of the Owa Obokun.

In the heydays of the Ijesa empire in the 17th and 18th Centuries, several kingdoms in the Osun and Ekiti areas, which are now outside the political boundaries of Ijesaland were at one time or the other subject to the Owa Obokun. For example, the Osogbo kingdom which was an Ijesa outpost6 and a gate-way to the neighbouring Oyo empire remained under Ijesa control until 1845 when it fell to the Ibadan invaders? Likewise Igbajo which remained an important Ijesa kingdom until 18678; and other related kingdoms of Otan-Aiyegbaju, Iresi and Ada were technically Ijesa settlements until they were surrendered to Ibadan in 1886 as a result of British intervention in the Kiriji or Ekiti Parapo War9, which in its later years had showed signs of favouring the Ijesa and Ekiti freedom fighters.

In the Ekiti country, kingdoms like Ara, Imesi Igbado (now Imesi-Oke), Efon and Ogotun which belong to the Ijesa cultural zone10 remained part of the Ijesa empire until it fell upon evil days in the first quarter of the 19th century. Indeed, the Ara kingdom shared the same ruler with Ilesa in the 17th Century. This was the Owa Oge who according to tradition was forced to abdicate the Ilesa throne by Owa Obokun Atakunmosa on his return from Benin and who was subsequently accepted as Oba by the people Ara11. Before this time, the kingdom of Akure had come under a son of Atakunmosa, called Olufadeji12 – thus bringing this Ekiti Kingdom under the Ijesa empire until it became tributary to Benin. Although other Ekiti kingdoms like Ara, Efon and Imesi-Igbodo were also able to make good their independence of Ilesa control in the first half of the 19th Century, primarily because of their favourable geographical location in a naturally protected environment of hills and valleys, Ogotun which was not so well placed remained the ‘whipping boy’ of the Ijesa imperialists until the close of the 19th Century13.

The Ife kingdom, which some historian regard as the ‘untouchable’ kingdom because of its role as the cradle of Yoruba civilization and the ‘orirun’ of the Yoruba Obas14 remained a tributary state of the Ijesa empire until the first half of the 19th Century. According to an Ilesa tradition, the Owa Obokun exercised the right to collect three out of five cowries collected as tolls at the Ilode gate in Ife15 – a gate that controlled the traffic between the Ife kingdom on the one hand and the Ijesa, Ekiti and Benin kingdoms on the other. It is said that this right was renounced by Owa Obokun Ofokutu in honour of his mother who was an Ife woman16. But the true position is that Ilesa was by this time unable to enforce her supervisory jurisdiction over the Ife administration as a result of her involvement in wars with Ibadan17.

In fact, the first documentary evidence we have about the extent of the Ijesa empire belongs to this period when the signs of the decline of Ijesa imperial power were clearly visible. According to the Baptist Missionary, the Rev. W.H. Clarke, who visited Ilesa in 1857.

The boundaries of the Ijesa country as well

as could be ascertained are Ado (Benin) on the

South, Ijebu, South-west Akoko, South-East, Yagba,

Efon, Igbomina East-North-East and (Oyo) Yoruba,

North and West’18.

The significance of this vital evidence lies not only in its confirmation of Efon’s independence by 1857, but in its recognition of a common boundary between the Ijesa and Ado (Benin) empires. Indeed, it was the Ijesa empire that prevented not only the extension of the Oyo empire into Eastern Yorubaland but the expansion of the Benin empire beyond the Akure kingdom19. Throughout the 17th and the 18th centuries, the Ijesa empire was a veritable buffer state between the great Oyo and Benin empires, whose activities have continued to dominate the attention of modern historians20.

If Ijesaland was indeed an empire as we have tried to show, and not just as second class kingdom as she was downgraded by the British imperialists in the first quarter of this Century21, it will be useful to consider rather briefly how it has evolved over a period of time. The traditions of the Ijesas their neighbours attest to the fact that this empire started from small beginnings. The Obokun kingdom which developed into an enlarged Ijesa empire was originally a small but vigorous state which revolved around the first Owa Obokun Ajibogun and his immediate successors. Since these early rulers of the Obokun kingdom were warrior kings who looked desperately for settlements to conquer or to establish22, they constantly moved from place to place without having a permanent capital. Under Owa Obokun Ajibogun, Oseke Olotin (near Osu) and Igbadae served as royal capitals; and the preoccupation of the Obokun State was the administration of city of Ile-Ife.

Ijesa traditions about these early years emphasize the role of the Owa Obokun as the overseer of the Ife administration after the death of the great Oduduwa23. As the last Oduduwa prince to migrate from Ife24 and as the one whose kingdom was closest to Ife, Owa Obokun Ajibogun was said to have organized the burial of their great father and to have worked out a political settlement in Ife. The most important feature of this settlement was the Ooni-ship, which was conceived as a caretaker administration of an agent of the Owa Obokun, who according to tradition, had expected all his brothers to come to Ife to effect a permanent settlement25. How the Ooni-ship, which was intended to be a temporary political solution26 became a permanent settlement is not clear. In fact, Akinjogbin admits that:

 ‘The evolution after Oduduwa of the Ooni-ship

 as the core of government in Ile-Ife …………

 and the changes that occurred in its long

 history are yet to be studied27.

The circumstances which led to the removal of the Obokun capital from Igbadae after the death of the powerful Owa Ajibogun and the succession by a minor – Owa Obokun Owoka Okile28 – indicate that they were not unconnected with the political situation in Ife. Although Ijesa traditions are silent on this, it is probable that the Ifes had taken advantage of the succession to the Owaship by a minor to assist the incumbent Ooni to assert his independence and to force the evacuation of the young Owa.

The movement of the Obokun group into what is now the Ijesa heartland, which was then made up of several pre-dynastic communities29 as well as groups which claim close some affinity with Oduduwa30, progressed under Owa Obokun Owoka and Obarabaralokunesin. Owoka founded a new capital at Ilowa – the city of the Owa – and operated between there and the abandoned royal capital at Igbadae. But it was his son Obarabaralokunesin who resumed the career of conquest embarked upon by Owa Ajibogun, the first Owa Obokun. For Ijesa traditions current both at Ilesa and Ibokun, the city he dedicated to the memory of his illustrious grandfather, state clearly that he was a great conquering hero31. In fact, so great were his exploits that same Ijesa traditions even tend to confuse him with the first Owa Obokun who had died at Igbadae32. Ibokun traditions are emphatic that the warrior-king who helped Ilemure (later Ibokun) to defeat her greatest enemy the Ilare kingdom and was consequently ‘rewarded’ with the administration of the State was the first Owa Obokun33. The Ibokun traditionalists especially the Balaro who is the priest in charge of the Obokun shrine and the Orisa Onifon worship in Ibokun are even prepared to swear that the ruler whose shrine he keeps was Owa Obokun Ajibogun34.

However, the clue to the solution of this apparent conflict between Ibokun and Ilesa traditions over the personality of their Obokun ruler can be found in Ibokun traditions themselves. For example, Ibokun traditions claim that this ruler had a daughter called Okipo who was given in marriage to the Alare and who trayed her husband by giving away his war secrets to her father 35. After the conquest of Ilare, this woman was said to have married another famous warrior – one Obalogun, who was invited from Iloko to help dislodge the Owa Obokun from Ibokun by the displaced rulers of Ilemure but who turned round to join forces with the warrior king 36. Since Obalogun is known to have lived up to the time of Owa Obokun Owaluse 37, the founder of Ilesa as a royal capital and the fifth ruler of the Obokun State, one can safely conclude that the Owa Obokun with whom he had relations in Ibokun was not Ajibogun but Obarabaralokunesin. To suggest otherwise would be to accept that Obalogun had lived an active life of more than one and a half centuries – which is impossible.

In fact, to Obarabaralokunesin properly belongs the credit of founding what can be recorded as the nucleus of the Ijesa State after the conquest of Ilare and her dependencies. Ilesa traditions ascribe to this conquering Owa Obokun, who was nicknamed ‘Okunrin dudu ori esin’, ‘the dark-complexioned man on horseback’, the conquest of several settlements in the Ijesa heartland, including Oye, Ikoro, Iketewi, Iloja, Awo, Ilaha and Oke Igun38. His conquests in the Ibokun region had led to a series of migrations by pre-existing communities far into the Ijesa and Ekiti interior in order to escape from his mighty sword.

Ijesa traditions recall two of such migrations. One was by one of the principal groups that came to establish the town of Ijebu-Jesa in its present location and the other by the Agba-Ogo group which founded Imesi-Ile. While Ibokun traditions represent the Agba-Ogo group as part of the ancient Ilemure Community whose rulers claimed descent from the great Oduduwa of Ife 39, they portray the Ijebu-Jesa group as the inhabitants of an ancient settlement – the Alaku settlement – which used to exist in the region of present-day ogbon. Ijebu in Ibokun, where they worshipped an Iroko tree40. Since the Ijiku community under their ruler the Sajiku were the people who introduced Iroko worship into Ijebu-Jesa, Ibokun traditions were clearly pointing to this group, whose ruler is now one of the principal chiefs in Ijebu-Jesa and a member of the Iwarefa Council of kingmakers41. Within Ijebu-Jesa herself, there are two bodies of traditions regarding the origins of the city-state. One body, which one suspects is the authorized version stresses the links of the rulers of the city with the conquering Owa Obokun Ajibogun, who is described as the junior brother of Agigiri I, the founder of Ijebu-Jesa42. The other body, which is certainly more ancient and which seems to have belonged to the commoner still refers to their town as Ijebu Egboro and to themselves as ‘omo onijebu’ – Onijebu being the ancient title of their ruler43. Considering the insistence of Ilesa traditions that the Obokun dynasty was only closely connected with the rulers of Ijebu-Jesa in the reign of the fifty Owa Obokun Owanise44 one suspects that this first body of traditions was a mere backward projection of the relationship established during this period. In fact, traditions preserved in the Ifa corpus – Odu Ifa – indicate that Ijebu-Jesa was an ancient settlement and that ‘the Awujale of Ijebu-Ode was a younger prince of the house of the Awujale of Ijebu-Ere’45 (the name by which the town was known up to the early 20th Century).

Ilesa traditions, which are indeed the traditions of the Obokun group, agree that there was a definite connection between the founding fathers of Ijebu-Jesa and Ijebu-Ode but they insist that Agigiri I was either a ‘warboy of Obanita’ or the eldest son Obanita who was refused the throne after his father’s death and had to migrate to Ijesaland to seek a new home for himself in the territory of his father’s friend47. One suspects that these versions of Ilesa traditions which either refuse to accept the royal ancestry of the founder of Ijebu-Jesa or States that he belonged to the junior branch of the Obanta dynasty in Ijebu-Ode was intended to emphasize the fact of the kingdom’s subjection to the Owa Obokun. Indeed they belonged to the Colonial and early nationalist period and were intended to maintain the status quo in Ijesaland.

While Ibokun remained the royal capital under Owa Obokun Obarabaralokunesin some kind of working relationship – an accord – seemed to have been established between the ever expanding Obokun State and the Ijebu-Egboro kingdom. In fact, the two States seemed to have cooperated to subdue the pre-dynastic communities existing in the region between Ilare, Esa-Odo, and Ere on the one hand and Eesun, Ijaaregbe and Ijebu-Jesa on the other – a region said to have been inhabited by seven kingdoms (Elu meje) whose rulers were divested of their political power and reduced to the status of priests48. Power-sharing between the rulers of these cooperating states was expressed in a 30:20 formula, which Ijebu-Jesa traditions have preserved in the famous dictum: ‘Ijebu Ogun, Ijesa Ogbon; e ni pe k’ogun ra m’ogbon lara’ (Ijebu has twenty and Ijesa thirty: it is impossible for the latter to efface the former)49. The accord on which this power sharing was based was apparently sealed by two significant marriages: one of the eldest daughter of Obarabaralokunesin to the Osogun of Ijebu-Jesa50 and the other by one Yeyesaro, an Oyo princess, who was a sister of one of the wives of the Oba of Ijebu-Jesa to Owa Obokun Obarabaralokunesin51. While the first marriage produced the great warrior king, Owari who assumed the leadership of the Obokun group after the death of Obarabaralokunesin and who brought the Ijebu-Egboro kingdom into the political Orbit of the Ijesa Obokun State, the second produced his rival Owaluse who finally integrated the administration of the Ijebu kingdom into that of the larger Ijesa State.

Owari and Owaluse are two great names in Ijesa imperial history and they represent two traditions of empire building in Ijesaland. While the former looked to the East, in the direction of the Ekiti kingdoms and Benin, the latter looked towards North-Western Yorubaland, especially Oyo. Indeed, the contest between these two princes over the succession to the throne after the death of Obarabaralokunesin52 was a contest between Benin and Oyo for influence in Ijesaland. Although Ijesa traditions are not so clear on the Benin connections of Owari – and this is understandable because these traditions are hostile to him and would not want to dignify him with such an association – they are emphatic about Owaluse’s connections with Oyo where he had taken refuge after Owari’s ‘unconstitutional usurpation of power at Ilaye (later Ipole), the new Ijesa capital. Inspite of the silence of oral traditions on the relations of Owari with the Benin Empire, we have reason to believe that Benin warriors had fought on inside against Owaluse and his Oyo allies. This vital evidence comes from Erin-Ijesa, a kingdom whose founder Akinla was said to have been a senior sister of Owa Obokun Ajibogun, but which was involved in the triangular marriage of the two Oyo princesses Yeyesaro and Yeyedere to the rulers of Ibokun (the Owa Obokun Obarabaralokunesin) Ijebu-Jesa and Erin53. According to Erin traditions, the kingdom was sacked by Benin invaders in the reign of the half brother of Owaluse 54, who like the ruler of Ijebu-Jesa had resisted the usurpation of power by Owari. As a result of this invasion, the original site of the town had to be abandoned for about forty years 55. If, as the Benin historian Egharevba suggests Akure had become a Benin outpost in Eastern Yorubaland by the second half of the 15th Century, the Benin invaders of Erin must have operated from there.

This involvement of Benin agents in the politics of Ijesaland shows the country was already well known to the people of the Benin Empire by the 15th century. And there is every reason to believe that because of its position in eastern Yorubaland, Ijesaland was much better known in Benin that the more distant Oyo empire. Indeed, king ‘Licasaguou’ mentioned by the Portuguese writer 56. Duarte Pacheco in his description of the slave trade from the West Africa Coast in the early 15th century was most probably an Owa Obokun; for the description of his country as situated near the territory of the Hooguanee’ (Ooni) accords better with Ijesaland than with distant Oyo, whose interests at that time lay to the north 57. There is also reason to believe that slaves captured in the several wars fought by Owa Obokun Obarabaralokunesin and Owari, especially in the Ekiti country were sold to Benin agents who were active throughout eastern Yorubaland in the 15th and 16th centuries 58. The involvement of Owari in the slave trade had the effect of producing an administrative revolution in Ijesaland, leading to the creation of a militarized administration under a new class of warrior chiefs called the Elegbe (leader of warrior bands)59. These new chiefs, under the Lejoka, the Military Commander of the defeated Itaji commenting dislodged from their original settlement in the area of the present Government Teachers College, Ilesa 60, now took precedence over the established Palace Chiefs like the Odole, the Igbayewa and the Lemodu. This forced them to transfer their loyalty to Owari’s rival, Owaluse, who represented the principal of legitimacy.

Thanks to Owaluse’s Oyo connexions, the relations between the Ijesa and Oyo empire during this early period and better known. One significant event, the ‘Ijesa Arera’ war which occurred sometime in the 17th Century seemed to have advertised the power of the Ijesa state to the people of Oyo. This war which started as an Oyo military expedition aimed at the annexation of Ijesaland by the 14th Alaafin Obalokun ended as an Ijesa war of territorial expansion61. For not only were the Oyo invaders annihilated by the Ijesa warriors under the indomitable Owari of Ipole, but a sizeable part of the Oyo empire in the Ikirun area was annexed to the Ijesa empire. The people of Ikirun themselves are said to have been driven from their original site by Ijesa warriors. The disaster suffered by the Oyo army during this invasion was unprecedented. Johnson, the Oyo historian, records that almost every household in Oyo was affected by the tragedy62, which made the sharp-shooting and fleet-footed Ijesa warriors – the Arera-famous throughout the Oyo empire.

The assumption of power by Owaluse, and with it the rise of Oyo influence in the Ijesa country particularly in the new royal capital63, Ilesa was therefore not dictated by Oyo but by the political situation in Ijesaland. According to oral traditions, the Ijesa were simply tired of the tyranny and endless wars of their warrior king Owari and decided to put an end to his administration in order to ensure a return to legitimacy64. The strategy adopted by the leaders of the resistance to Owari was not to invite the Oyo army, but to encourage the migration of the people of Ipole (then called Ilaye) to a place called Igbo Obe which developed into present day Ilesa65. In fact, the war against Owari was won not because the Ijesa leaders of this period-notably the Lemodu and the Odole – could effectively counter the activities of the famous Owari commanders like Ajagbate, Joloki and Awamuforo, but because they were able to wage an effective psychological war against their opponent66. It was this that induced Owari and his supporters to loose confidence in their ability to fight, thus leading to their defeat and death. And it was only after the elimination of Owari and his commanders that Owaluse was invited from exile in Oyo.

The reign of Owaluse was essentially a period of constitutional development in Ijesaland. Indeed, to this hardworking ruler belongs the credit of giving a rational basis to Ijesa imperial administration, which had tended, in previous reigns, to operate on an ad-hoc basis67. The creation of an elaborate system of chieftaincies both in the royal capital and in the heartland of the empire was designed to make for effective mobilization in a new era of peace when it was no longer necessary to shift capitals as in medieval Ethiopia. In Ilesa for example, he created the Obanla chieftaincy as the second in command to the Owa Obokun in the metropolitan administration for the Baba Onila – the Okro farmer – who was the leader of the pre-dynastic esa people of the Okesha quarter in order to integrate this ancient community with the new settlers from Ilaje (Ipole). As a counterweight to the power of the Lejoka as military commander who was known to be loyal to the memory of his benefactor Owari69, Owaluse created the Loro title for a powerful Ondo migrant warrior with considerable followership70. In order to build up political support for the new monarchy he created, this wise ruler encouraged migrant groups from the Ekiti and Igbomina country to settle in Ilesa under their leaders. The most important of these were those led by the Arapate from Ara, the Saloro from Ado-Ekiti and the Risawe from Ora71. He even tried to bring powerful provincial warriors like the famous Obalogun of Iloko to the new capital in order to enhance the greatness of the Owa Obokun72.

In the Ijesa heartland – that is the core of Ijesaland like Ibokun, Ijebu-jesa and Ipole, where the Owa Obokun had come to exercise power through ‘agents’, Owaluse tried to streamline the administration by applying the title ‘Ogboni’ – Viceroy – which had early been adopted at Ibokun73 to those agents. This Ogboni title in Ibokun was certainly more ancient than that of Ilesa, which Owaluse created for an Ugbobini elderstateman who had come to settle in the new royal capital74. Considering the role which he played as the mediator between town and palace as Peel has rightly identified75, his title ‘Ogboni’ is indeed consistent with the traditional role of the Ibokun Ogboni as an agent, or mediator between the local community as their imperial overlord, the Owa Obokun. It will therefore be wrong as Peel has suggested that usually these villages, which erre agricultural centres were established by enterprising men and women81, whether connected with the Owa Obokun dynasty or not. For example Iwara and Imobi were founded during this period by famous warriors; the former by Abere-Ogun from Iwara quarters in Ife, who was related to Owanise82 and the latter by the great Obalogun from Iloko who was a client of Owaluse83. But as these villages developed, they were quickly taken over by the Owa Obokun, who then dispatched his sons to administer them on his behalf. According to oral traditions, the first Loja of Iwara was Asadan, a son of Owaluse84, who displaced Abereogun. For Owaluse saw the Lojaship as an excellent device for tension among idle royal princes at the capital.

However, useful as the Lojaship was in introducing royal princes to the management of local affairs in preparation for their future assignments as kings in the capital, it also tended to encourage centrifugal forces that could lead to the disintegration of the empire. For example, the first Awara, Asadan, was said to have worn beaded like the Owa Obokun himself this title represented ‘The survival of some earlier “federal” organization of the kingdom whose practical operation in its heyday is beyond recovery…….76. The Egba Ogboni model which influenced this suggestion77 is certainly not applicable to Ijesaland, which along with other parts of eastern Yorubaland, is noted for its almost total commitment to the worship of Ogun, the god of iron. In fact, Ogun is the national god of these peoples77. And according to tradition, a man fervently committed to Ogun – a superior, father god of Edan, the god of Ogboni, must not bend his knees to the lesser god78.

Another important administrative innovation introduced by Owaluse but which is popularly associated with his successor Atakunmosa79 was the Lojaship. This was the practice of making royal princes agents of local administration at the village level. As the era of peace and plenty which characterized Owaluse’s reign had led to a population explosion in Ilesa, especially with the influx of groups of immigrants from other parts of Yorubaland into the new royal capital80, a number of villages, grew in the adjoining countryside and to have refused, after their father’s death, to bow to his junior brother, Atakunmosa, who became the Owa until he was forced to do so and to surrender his crown85. But while Owaluse was firmly in control, the Lojaship was such a success that same long established settlements like Ijeda, which had problems of coping with the influx of immigrants into Ijesaland during this period asked for royal princes to administer them86.

Certainly the most ingenuous administrative instrument deviced by Owaluse was the Agbanla Council of Chiefs through which he administered the wider empire-especially the vassal states. This imperial Council, was originally made up of the three Ogboni (viceroys) of Ibokun, Ipole and Ijebu-Jesa, and the two leading high (town as opposed to palace) chiefs in the royal capital – the Obanla and the Ogboni87. It was a purely advisory body, whose members were not all expected to sit with the Owa at the same time except in grave emergencies88. In these early years, Owaluse seemed to have leaned heavily on the advice of the Ogboni of Ijebu-Jesa who was an elder relation, thus giving rise to the Ijesa dictum! Owa a dani pa k’Ijebu-Jesa ma mo89. The present practice, whereby the Obanla has become the leader of the Agbanla Council was product of the 19th century period of crisis, when the Owa lost effective control to the chiefs in the royal capital. In fact, it was usual for palace chiefs like the Odole, the Risawe, the Salaro and the Arapate who were even junior to the Obanla to exercise great influence because of their close personal relationships with the Owa Obokun. In the second half of the 19th century, the Odole Ariyasunle was so influential that he dictated Ijesa imperial policy in the era of weak kings, leading to the disastrous conflict with the vassal Ijesa kingdom of Igbajo in the 1860s90.

However, by the time Atakunmosa took over the runs of government from Owanise in the first half of the 17th century the foundation of Ijesa metropolitan, provincial and imperial administration had been firmly laid. In fact, apart from changing the frontage of the palace at the royal capital from the west to the east91 to signify the eastern orientation of his imperial administration, Atakunmosa hardly contributed anything significant to Ijesa constitutional development. As Loja of Iwoye, a village he founded92 near the important ‘provincial’ city of Ijebu-Jesa, Atakunmosa was himself a product of the administrative system created by his predecessor. His prolific marriages one of which gained the control of the important Akure kingdom for his son Olufadeji93 created problems of political instability in Ijesa administration before and after his death94; for it was difficult to find outlets for the energies for the energies of his several children, some of whom were said to have conspired with the townspeople to force their father to go on exile to Benin95.

Atakunmosa’s trip to Benin, though undertaken in adverse circumstances, helped to restore the links which the pro-Oyo Owaluse had certainly weakened96. In fact, Benin traditions recall the efforts made by the Benin king Ehengbuda to ‘persuade’ the Ijesa to have Atakunmosa back as their ruler97. While it is not clear whether this ‘persuasion’ was a mere euphemism for a military expedition, it is possible to hazard the guess that a large number of Benin armed attendants who followed Atakunmosa to Ilesa had been instrumental to his restoration; for the old king had to fight his way into the capital from the outlying village of Erinmo98. It is also likely, as Law has suggested, that Benin support for Atakunmosa had led to a conflict with Oyo over the control of eastern Yorubaland during this period. This conflict was finally resolved by a treaty which fixed the northern Ekiti town of Otun as the boundary between the two powers99.

Atakunmosa’s connexions with Benin and the settlement of Benin immigrants in Ilesa100 had the effect of opening Ijesaland to trade and new ideas from that region. In fact, Benin remained the source of Ijesa’s supply of European goods until the 19th century101. It was also as a result of this connexion that Benin artists came to influence Ijesa art forms even though Ilesa is lose to Ife, the centre of Yoruba art102. One particular product, which Ijesa oral traditions associate with Atakunmosa’s visit to Benin are the palmyra, which produce the oguro wine that is so popular in Ijesa and Ekiti areas103. In fact, the popularity of this wine over the local palm tree wine has made Atakunmosa who introduced the palmyra seeds a house-hold name in these parts from generation to generation.

The decades after the death of Atakunmosa in the 17th century were a period of political instability in Ijesaland as a result of the succession of weak rulers, some of whom were the daughters of Atakunmosa104. In fact, the only ruler which traditions still remember as maintaining the imperial stance of Atakunmosa was the Owa Obokun Bilaro. This ruler, who is also known as Oluodo, is said to have constructed a defensive ditch around Ilesa with the aid of several Ekiti and Igbomina rulers including the Ewi of Ado, the Alara of Ara, the Olujudo of Ido, the Ajero, the Oore of Otun and the Orangun of Ila105. Bilaro, who was a great warrior prince had provided leadership for these eastern Yoruba rulers at a time when Oyo tried to revive her imperialist ambitions in the area especially after the decline of Benin influence in the 17th and 18th centuries106.

Throughout the 18th century, the Ijesa Empire which rulers like Owari, Owaluse and Atakunmosa had fought to consolidate not only successfully repulsed attacks from Oyo but maintained her territorial integrity. In fact traditions recall that it was during this period that the Ijesa tradition constitution was expanded to accommodate the growth interests of the womenfolk. The Yeye Arise title was said to have been created by the Owa Obokun Oriabejoye, the last female Owa, for an enterprising woman who had assisted the Ijesa warriors to overcome the persistent invasions of the Tapa cavalry of the Alaafin of Oyo107. This chieftaincy, which confers on the incumbent the leadership of the womenfolk in Ilesa, and by implication through the Ijesa Empire, was a new administrative device which seemed to have been accepted by the constituent units of the empire.

Thus, by the first quarter of the 19th century when the Ijesa empire entered upon a period of troubles, the Owa Obokun was the greatest power in eastern Yorubaland and his empire the most extensive. This empire was, however, to fall under the hammer of the Ibadan invaders as from the 1840s, leading to the termination of Ijesa primacy in eastern-Yorubaland and the shrinking of Ijesaland to its present size.

**FOOTNOTES**

1. See I. A. Akinjogbin and E. A. Ayandele: Yorubaland Before 1800

in Obaro Ikime: Groundwork on Nigerian History, Heinema Ibadan, 1980, p. 134; Robin Law: The Oyo Empire c. 1600 – c. 1836, Oxford 1977, p. 176 and R.S. Smith: Kingdoms of the Yoruba, Methuen, London, p. 51.

2. Isola Olomola: Pre-Colonial Patterns of inter-state Relations in

Eastern Yorubaland, Ph.D. Thesis University of Ife, 1977, p. 227.

3. Information obtained from the Odole of Ilesa, Chief Babatope on

 12/4/82.

4. See J. O. Oni: A History of Ijesaland, p. 22 and E. O. Ogunlana:

 History of pre-colonial Erin-Ijesa.

5. The oral traditions of these small kingdoms claim that their

founders came from Ile-Ife before the arrival of the Owa Obokun In the Ijesa area.

6. See R. S. Smith, op. cit, p. 54 and Robin Law, op.cit, p. 126.

7. S. Johnson, The History of the Yoruba, Lagos, p.

8. Ibid.

9. For the loss of Igbajo, Iresi, Ada, and Otan-Aiyegbaju (formerly

Otankoto) to Ibadan see S, A. Akintoye: Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland, 1840-1893, 1971, p. 178.

10. These communities speak dialects of the Yoruba language that are

related to Ijesa. Infact, some of them like the Aaye group in Efon were previously settled in Iwori and Erinmo foothills before they formed the Obalu group on the Efon hills.

11. See S. A. Ataiyero: A short History of the Ijesas Part I. pp. 36-37.

12. Ibid. p. 35 and R. S. Smith, op. cit. p. 59.

13. On Ijesa wars with Ogotun in the late 19th Century, See S. A.

 Akintoye, op.cit., p.57.

14. See I. A. Akinjogbin: ‘The Ebi System Reconsidered’ in Department

 of History, Unife Seminar Series, 1978/79, p. 19.

15. See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 44

16. Ibid.

17. See S. A. Akintoye, op.cit., pp. 44-45 and pp 58-60.

18. W. H. Clarke: Travels and Explorations in Yorubaland 1854-1858

 edited by J. A. Atanda Ibadan, 1972, p. 132.

19. See J.D.E. Abiola, J. A. Babafemi and S.O.S. Ataiyero, Itan Ilesa

 (Ilesha 1932), p. 72.

20. Unlike these two empires, Ijesaland is poorly documented, hence it

did not attract attention of historians. See J.D.Y. Peel: Kings. Titles and Quarters: A conjectural History of Ilesha in HISTORY IN AFRICA 6 (1979), P. 109.

21. ILE DIV. 1/1 File No. 1569 (National Archives, Ibadan). Owa

Ajimoko II, Obanla, Ogboni, Oba Odo, Ogboni of Ijebu-Jesa, Ogboni Ibokun, Ogboni Ipole, Saba, Councillors Aderogba, Fadahunsi, Obe to Chief Commissioner, Western Provinces, Ibadan, 30th June, 1948.

22. For the stories of these warrior kings see J.D.E. Abiola et al,

op.cit., pp. 15-43; S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit., pp. 12-24; J. O. Oni, op.cit. pp. 57-58.

23. See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. P. 18.

24. See I. A. Akinjogbin and E. A. Ayandele, loc. cit p. 124.

25. S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit., pp. 20-21 and S. Johnson, op.cit. p. 24.

26. Oyo and Ijebu traditions support this Ijesa position. See Ron Law,

 op.cit, p. 122.

27. I. A. Akinjogbin and B. A. Ayandele, loc. cit, p. 125.

28. Ataiyero says the Ifes attempted to expel the Obokun group from

Igbadae even before Ajibogun’s death – See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 21.

29. These were groups like Akogun, Ibosinrin, Urere, Asoro and Esa of

pre-dynastic Ilesa. See S. A.Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 24 and J.D.Y Peel, loc. cit., p. 236.

30. These were settlements like Ilemure (later Ibokun and Ilare).

31. For a detailed account of Ibokun tradition see P. O. Fatoke: ‘The

Traditions of Origin of and Growth of Ibokun’. Original Essay for the B. A. Hons. History, University of Ife, June 1978, pp. 6-15.

32. See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 23.

33. See P. O. Fatoke, LOC. CIT.

34. Oyo Prof. 3/986-8/1027, Vol. 2. National Archives, Ibadan, D.S.O.

 Fadeyibi to D. O. Ife. 2/9/42.

35. S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 31 and P. O. Fatoke, loc.cit.

36. P. O. Fatoke, loc. cit.

37. This Obalogun was said to have found the Imobi Village in Iwara

 during this reign. See R. O. Akindele.

38. J. O. Oni, op.cit

39. P. O. Fatoke, loc. cit.

40. Ibid.

41. He is third in rank to the Ogboni

42. J. O. Oni, op.cit p. 22; M. Arojojoye, Isedale Ijebu, 1959.

43. This was revealed by the town’s popular oriki- for an account of

 this see Eshingbohungbe: Abridged History of Ijebu Jesa.

44. S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 113.

45. See N. A. Fadipe: The Sociology of the Yoruba edited by F. O. &

 O. O. Okediji: Ibadan University Press, 1970, p. 32.

46. S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit. p. 111.

47.

48. Some of these were Oke Ogun, Odo Eki, Agbegan and Omu, some

 of whose settlers have merged with Ijebu-Jesa.

49. J. O. Oni, op.cit.

50. S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit., p. 34.

51. Ibid. p. 113.

52. Ibid. p. 34

53. Ibid. p. 113

54. Information collected from Mr. E. O. Ogunlana, of Erin-Ijesa, April

 1982.

55. Ibid.

56 See R. S. Smith, op. cit 00. 20-21.

57. R. Law ‘The Northern Factory in Yoruba History’. Proceedings of

the Conference on Yoruba Civilization, Ife 1976, pp. 116-

120.

58. Robin Law, op. cit p. 126 and R. S. Smith op.cit p. 58.

59. This is the Agunrodo area.

60. See essay on Owari

61. For and Account of this war, see S. Johnson, op. cit. p. 169 and R.

 Law, op.cit p. 58.

62. S. Johnson op.cit p. 168.

63. For a detailed study of Ilesa as royal capital, see J.D.Y. Peel ‘Kings,

Titles and Quarters: A conjectural History of Ilesha, Part ii:

Institutional Growth in HISTORY IN AFRICA (7) 1980.

64. Owari’s regime was considered traditionally illegitimate. See S. A.

 Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 34.

65. Ibid. p. 33 and J.D.Y. Peel, ‘Kings, Titles, Quarters, Part II, pp. 236.

66. See Essay on Owari.

67. Before the fuel settlement in Ilesa, traditions talk largely of three

 major chieftaincies – the Odole, the Igbayewa and the

 Lemodu.

68. For Ilesa’s institutional growth – See J.D.Y. Peel, Kings, Titles and

 Quarters …… Part II.

69. A. Ataiyero, op. cit pp. 34-35 & J.E.D. Abiola, op. cit.

70. Ibid.

71. See J.D.Y. Peel: Kings, Titles and Quarters … Part II

72. See R. O. Latona: Obalogun: NCE History Project, Oyo State

 College of Education, Ilesa, June, 1980, p. 6.

73. See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit. p. 109.

74. J.O.Y Peel: Titles and Quarters …. Part II, p. 231.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid. p. 230

77. Ogun worship is popular Oluorogbo Eastern Yorubaland beginning

 from Ife, where it is done during the Olojo festival.

78. Information obtained from Pa. Ogunsanya, Oshogun Compound,

 Ijebu-Jesa, July 1979.

79. See S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit. pp. 35-36.

80. J.D.Y. Peel : Kings, Titles, Quarters Part II loc. cit.

81. For example, Odo was founded by a woman, one Yeyerise who

 hailed from Ilerin.

82. See R. O. Akindele. The Traditional History of Iwara, N.C.E.

History Project, Oyo State College of Education, Ilesa, June 1980, p. 3.

83. Ibid. p. 4.

84. ibid.

85. Ibid. p. 2.

86. See F. A, Ogunleye: Pre Colonial History of Ijeda, N.C.E. Long

 Essay, (in preparation) Oyo State College of Education, Ilesa.

87. For a detailed study of the ‘Agbanla’ chieftaincy, See J.D.Y. Peel:

 Kings, Titles, Quarters, Part II, pp. 228-230.

88. See O. A. Asomuyide: The Role of Owa and the District Chiefs in

the Traditional Government of Ijesaland, N.C.E. History Project, June 1980, p. 7.

89. See J. O. Oni, op.cit.

90. The Ijesa inversion of 1867 ended in a great strategy for Ijesa

 warriors.

91. See Toyin Falola: IlesanPalace.

92. See Essay on Iwoye.

93. See S. A. Ataiyero, op.cit p. 35.

94. Ibid. pp. 36 & 37

95. Ibid. p. 35 and R. S. Smith op. cit. p. 55.

96. For Oyo influence in Ilesa - See S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit. p. 34.

97. Robin Law. The Oyo Empire. P. 128.

98. S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit. p. 37. & J.D.Y Peel: Kings, Titles, Quarters

p. 239 Atakunmosa’s Benin attendants (Slaves) were settled at Idasa.

99. Robin Law, op. cit p. 133.

100. J.D.Y. Peel: loc. cit., p. 239.

101. Oral Interview.

102. This is evident from the settlement of Benin artists at Isona

 quarters Ilesa during this reign.

103. S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit p. 36.

104. Ibid. p. 37.

105. Ibid. p. 38

106. R. Law. The Oyo Empire. P. 133.

107. S. A. Ataiyero, op. cit. p. 41.

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESAMHISTORY AND CULTURE**

**IJESHA FOODS:**

**TRADITIONAL AND MODERN**

**BY**

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 **Ilesa.**

 This topic was chosen and introduced to me by the Dean of Arts of Oyo State College of education – Dr. G. O. Ekemode. He then told me I could present this paper within three weeks: Initially, I could review later, hence he become an enhancer, an impetus to a beginning of series of collecting of indigenous food preparation methods from Ijesa Community.

 The collection of recipes in this paper is a pointer to the fact that there had been food technology practiced on a small scale, by the house wives community in this area of Yoruba land. So far available information collected by two elderly women, namely Madam Mefolaku and Mrs. Sanni are also presented along with the authors view.

 My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Ekemode (OYCE) who had thus given me the lead into a field I had wished to start working ever a year ago.

**IJESHA FOODS**

**STARCHES:**

 The Primary starch sources in Ilesha area are Yams, Plantains, Maize, Rice and Fruits in season.

 Yam when pounded constitute a ready source of carbohydrate and energy. In fact pounded yam is food no 1 in Ijeshaland hence its oriki:

‘Iyan Iyan Iyan o

 Iyan to funfun lala.

 Okele funfun ona ofun

 Iyan to wewu egunsi

 Iyan to de fila okete, to wo bata isapa etc.

 All above indicate the priority given to Iyan. Variations of Iyan are Breadfruit pounded with or without boiled yam. Boiledyam. Boiled unripe plantains pounded with boiled yam. Eba or cassava foofoo can also be incorporated into pounded yam as fillers.

 Other starch sources are: indicated in the recipes that follow. Items No 8, 13, 15 – 21 and 27 – 41 are relevant.

1. Iyan the main food of Ijeshas is eaten in combination with the following stews/soup:
2. Isapa – hibiscus family
3. – Ila – Normal Okro
4. Ata source with meat added to either 2 or 3
5. Egunsi soup with or without vegetables
6. Efo woro i.e uncut stewed vegetable with delicaties e.g. sawa, kanni, or snails.
7. Abula ewedu i.e. ewedu with egunsi soup and meat.
8. Agidi which is next in rank is taken with any of stews above as well as with.
9. Akara (Koru)
10. Moinmoin – Olele
11. Ojojo
12. Ekuru

Akara, Moinmoin, or ojojo taken above constitute snack food.

1. Epa, is made from cooked yam slices which are no longer needed for pounding into yam or making into asaro. Hence they are dried hard and brittle. This is pounded before steaming in leaves as for olele (9).

Epa is normally eaten with pure ata sauce with any type of meat with (14) igba stew.

(15) Abari is eaten of all combinations of food, hence you find people eaten the one made with grated or pounded raw yam which is steamed in leaf wraps or

 (16) Abari ogede – plantain

 (17) Abari Onigba – from ewura

 (18) Abari Elede – with more condiment

 (19) Abari tepo tiyo (Cocoyam)

 (with added)

 (stew prior)

 (to steaming)

 (20.) Egbo also falls into this category. It is however made from

 dry corn washed and dehulled with wood ash

 (21.) Eba – is a more recent food from cassava sources

 (22) Rice – the round grain-ofada and the long grain – alabere are both boiled as snack food for children. Adult show their dislike of it by calling rice eyin tanpepe i.e. insect egg.

 Eye le je ‘resi – it is for the birds.

 (23) Boiled egg – is taken as snack and as drink accomplice e.g.

 (24) Pineapple drink ideally recipe

 (25) Pawpaw drink and are yet to be

 (26) Agadagidi drink collected.

 There are other foods equally important, these are

A - Roasted

(27) Plantain - Boil

(28) Corn – Guguru

(29) Groundnut - Epa

(30) Yam - Esunsu

(31) Crame - Eran sisun

(32) Corn in husk - Ketefe

(33) Fresh corn on coal fire – Agbado yiyan or sisun or tita or

 Penpeyemu Oloko o gbowo.

(34) Walnuts

B. Boiled

(35) Yam

(36) Plantain

(37) Maize – Osingin-Lomiro

(38) Cassava

 C. Fried

(39) Dodo

(40) Dundu

(41) Ipekere

(42) Coconut

(43) Esunsun – Insects for children

 D Eaten Raw

(44) Peeled mangoes (45) Peeled Pawpaw

(46) Peeled Pineapple (47) Sliced Coconut

(48) Peeled banana (49) Sliced ripe plantain

(50) Citrus and Guava and never shins (Whire fleshy)

(51) Kolanuts – Orogbo – Obi

(52) Bemes – Iyeye, Omu Aja, Obi edun.

 I once again show my appreciation for been called upon to start this work. More recipes would be added as they are discovered. The following recipes bear same numbers as indicated in earlier pages so our recipe 1 is Iyan the king of all foods.

**Appendix**

Foods dried smoked or salted

1. Dried Okro No II - muke
2. Dried ripe peppers

3a. Candied orange peel

4a. Dried plantain, cassava, yam meal

5. Salt fish

6a. Salt meat

7a. Smoke meat

 8. Smoke meat

 9. Boiled corn and Groundnuts

 10. Boiled Mushrooms

 11a. Muke

**IYAN**

**Recipe 1**

 Yam of desirable weight and texture water.

Method.

1. Peel Yam and cut into suitable sizes. Wash well

2. Put in boiling water and cook till tender.

3. Wash a mortar and pestle, and pound soft cooked yam pieces till

 Smooth.

4. Add water – preferably not until desirable texture is obtained.

5. Mould into balls and serve with desirable soup e.g. Egunsi

**ISAPA SOUP**

**Recipe 2**

The cotyledon of the fruit is eaten either green or dried.

 In order to tenderise the edible portion and to give it the distinctive brown colour, it is usually pre-boiled with fine wood ash before cooking in peeper stew. After the ash treatment the portion to be dried is drained washed and sun-dried until crisp.

**Method**

 To ata sauce with condiments, add pre-boiled and clean Isapa as desired. If edible mushroom is in season, this can also be added to the soup. See ata sauce and boiled Mushrooms.

**OBE ILA**

**Recipe 3.**

12 Okro finely chopped

4 garden eggs sliced or chopped

2 wraps locust beans

1 Onion

Crayfish

Cold water or meat stock

Salt to taste.

**Method**

 Boil water and add all other ingredients except okro and salt. Cook till done. Beat together okro and salt till ropy.

 Add the mixture to the boiling mixture, cover for 2 minutes. Open and mix and continue to cook and stir till done. Serve with ata sauce and starchy food of choice.

**ATA SAUCE**

**Recipe 4**

Ground pepper paste of Tomapep

2 Large onipns ground

Salt, Fresh ground tomatoes or paste, Ground Chrimps.

½ Kilo chopped meat.

2 dried fish skinned and boned

250 ml groundnut or palmoil.

**Method**

 Heat oil until a blue haze appears, fry the ground ingredients until cooked. Add meat shrimp etc after thoroughly washing them. Boil and stir till well done.

Add salt to taste.

Serve with their soups and starchy food.

**VEGETABLE STEW**

**Recipe 5 & 7**

500gm meat

500gm smoked fish

2 bundles vegetables in season

250ml palm oil-fresh

2 cups ground egusi

2 large Onions – ground

Salt and ground pepper to taste

2 pks local iru.

**Method**

1. Wash and cut meat, cook until tender, add ground pepper ½ of egunsi, ½ of onion.

 Pick leaves, and wash in several changes f water until clean. Add ½ portion onion to ½ portion melon with a little pepper and salt, mold into as many small balls as the melon combination would make.

 Add palmoil to cooking meat stew and stir. Continue boiling. Mix in the egunsi balls and cut vegetables to desired sizes. Stir the strew, let simmer for 30 minutes; and the vegetables and boil for 5 minutes with ewedu stir constantly to prevent loss remove from fire. Serve with any starchy food e.g. Pounded yam, eba, epa etc.

**SPINACH STEW – OR UNENT VEGETABLE**

**Recipe 6**

50 meat shredded

½ Bokoto

1 tin tomatoes or 1 cup ground fresh

2 bundles spinach leaves

1 large onion

250ml water

250ml palmoil

1 cup powdered egunsi

Salt and pepper to taste

Wash up bokoto and boil in water until tender. Wash leaves, plunge into saline water and bruise under water until firm to handle. Squeeze and cover.. grate onions, and add ground pepper. Heat both in palm oil till done. Add tomatoes water bokoto and meat (shredded) Boil till done. Add vegetables and salt to taste. Simmer gently for 15 – 20 minutes.

 Serve with amala, yam – asaro rice and other starch foods.

**EKO RIRO – AGIDI**

**Recipe 8**

 Make corn starch as for akamu. Use 8 cups of corns starch and1.500ml of boiling water.

**Method**

1.Mix starch to a thick pasted with clean cold water in a bowl.

2. Add the boiling water gradually with consistent stiring.

3. Return mixture to boiling water pot cook over gentle heat stirring with a long wooden until the mixture is cooked thoroughly. Add more water to suit personal taste.

4. Moulds of the paste eaten hot is called eko riro, while that wrapped and cooled in large leaves are called Agidi.

 The later can keep for several days.

 Both are taken with soups, Koru, Olele, or fried meat.

**KORU**

**Recipe 9**

This is made from bean paste base. The beans (of required quantity) are dehusked and ground finely, condiments may or may not be added. Salt is added to taste.

 The mixture is agitated and mixed to an even consistency prior to frying in first size balls.

**MOINMOIN - OLELE**

 It is prepared from beans as for Koru, but moinmoin is steamed with condiments.

 Original moinmoin contains less water and more oil than those in recent recipe book books. Today moinmoin like akara is softer and less chilly.

**MUKE – ADALU**

**Recipe 11A**

 6 Cups beans

3 cups dry corn

250ml palmoil

2 large onions ground

1 measure pepper ground

2 smoked fish

1 cup whate shrimps ground

1 measure large pepper

Salt to taste

**Method**

1. Wash and soak corn overnight
2. Wash again, put into a sauce-pan, add salt and cook covered.
3. Boil till almost soft
4. Wash beans and add to corn continue boiling until groundnuts and corn are soft.
5. Add palmoil and ingredients and cook till done.
6. Serve with eko or friend or cooked yam.

**NB:** Muke is always offered to young children especially those of school-age.

**OJOJO**

**Recipe 11**

Use soft yam or water yam. If hard yam is used water may be added. (it is eaten alone or with Agidi)

Chopped onions as desired. Chopped large peppers. Okro –grated for binding, also according salt to taste.

 Palm oil 500ml for frying.

**Method**

 Cut up the yam in good sizes peel and wash. Hold each piece against the yam grater and rub until slimy white at the other end. Continue until about 2/3 of all the yam had been grated then wash and grate the okro from the tip until all the okro had been grated. Then continue to grate the remaining yam 1/5 yam, this would clear all the okro from the grater. To this okro and yam mixture add the condiment and salt. Fry in desirable balls sizes in oil.

**GARDEN EGG STEW**

**Recipe 14**

150ml water, Salt and ground pepper to taste

2 cups chopped garden eggs

500gm smoked fish

2 large Onions – ground

1 cup ground tomatoes or 1 tin puree

200ml palm oil.

**Method**

It is important to wash thoroughly any ingredient for cutting, chopping or grinding. If need be plunge them in water to remove peel as for tomatoes and garden eggs, that of onions could be removed by hand or by knife.

 Heat palm oil in pot or sauce pan. Fry onion pepper and tomatoes. Stirring all the time. Add the chopped garden eggs, fish and liquid. Stir well. Simmer for 15-20 minutes and remove from fire.

 Serve with roasted yam or plantain boiled yam or plantain.

**ABARI ISU**

**Recipe 15**

Large Yam washed, peel and grated.

Onion to taste

Boiling water as required, salt to taste

Other ingredients are added according to type of Abari, these are Garden Eggs-chopped or diced. Palm oil, red large or small white crayfish. Smoked fish, fresh fish etc. in case one is more interested in plantain or corn, both can be used after being mulched or beaten to the right consistency.

**Method**

Cut banana or local Ewe eeran i.e the one used for Agidi wash and dry the leaves. Fold as for Olele leaves and add just enough of the mixture of yam, Onion, water and salt steam till done. Cooking done depends on quantity prepared. It might take from 1 hour for 6 servings for 12 wraps to 2 hours for larger quantity.

**EBA**

**Recipe 21**

4 Cups dry gari

1,200 ml boiling water

**Method**

1. Put the boiling water in a bowl and sprinkle the gari evenly on it. The gari will absorb the water.
2. Stop just before all the water is absorbed, you will notice some hard gari particles on the water; drain them off and cover the remaining mixture.
3. After 5 minutes, mix the mixture a smooth constituency with a wooden turner.
4. Serve with okro, Ewedu, and any meat stew.

**BOILED RICE**

**Recipe 22**

2 cup rice

1 onion

500ml water

**Method**

Bring water to boil, pick, wash and clean rice.

Cut onion in rings, add rice and onion to boiling water.

**BOILIED EGGS**

**Recipe 23**

To a bucket full of eggs, add ½ a bucket of water

**Method**

Clean and cook eggs in covered contain with water, until it boils. Remove cooking pot from fire and drain out all the water. Keep eggs in metal bucket until needed. Peel and serve with drinks. The eggs should all be consumed within 24 hour.

**N.B** Fresh eggs are always used. Such eggs are tested first by shaking in palm and also by holding against the sunlight. With the last method freshness is confirmed by the clear colour of the shell content.

**DODO**

**Recipe 39**

Use ripe plantains that are still firm

500ml oil for frying.

**Method**

Slice plantain across in circular oblong shapes, recently cutting up in cubes it done for quick frying. Heat oil and fry whatever shape is desired. Fry a little at a time.

 Drain and serve with ata sauce vegetable stew, cooked beans boiled rice or olele.

**DUNDU**

**Recipe 40**

 Use white yam for best results. 500ml palm oil for frying. Salt and water for rinsing.

**Method**

1. Peel yam and rinse properly

2. Immense in saline water until oil is hot.

3. Remove from saline water and fry.

4. If soft constituency is desired add same water to frying oil.

**IPEKERE**

**Recipe 41**

Mature but not bright yellow plantains are used. Colour range from green to cream. Salt to taste. 500ml oil for frying.

**Method**

 Peel and cut plantain into slices about ¼ thick length wise. Sprinkle with salt and fry in oil till done. Remove and drain.

 On draining the fried slices should become crisp.

**N.B.** Salt may be sprinkled before or after frying depending on the taste desired.

**FRIED COCONUT**

**Recipe 42**

Pieces of coconut, dipped in salt and sugar combinations are fried in ororo to make them crisp. They can be drained and eaten immediately or preserved in the frying oil for future use.

**FRIED ESUNSUN**

**Recipe 43**

Esunsun is the flying white ants; they are rampant in the raining season. They are gathered from source by children or by brooms by adults. The children keep them in saline solution until they came wingless. It is then time for frying with very light oil. Younger children however take pains to stake them like sore before roasting.

**PREPARATION OF ALL FRESH FRUITS EATEN RAW**

**Recipe No. 44, 51**

 Select firm disease free ripe fruit. The maturity colour should be bright.

**Method**

 Wash fruit, remove skin and/ or rino, cut up into neat desirable pieces. Place in a clean container for serving.

1. If pawpaw, serve slices immerse in water.
2. If coconut serve immersed in water to which some sugar was dissolved.
3. If orange peel decoratively and serve in seed free wedges, peeling may be avoided if the skin colour is to serve as decoration.
4. If pineapple serve in cubes or rings
5. If kolanuts wash, split and eat.

**DRIED OKRO 1A**

Wash okro and cut into small pieces; spread out on mat and dry in the sun for several days until they are crisp and brown. They should crumble easily at this stage.

 Pound in mortar and sieve, store in dry air tight clean containers.

**N.B:** Use same procedure for Onions Igba, Vegetables and even plantains but do not pound these. Store in air tight jars.

**2A DRIED RIPE PEPPERS**

Both chilli and sweet peppers are grown and preserved dry for future use. e.g. as plantain materials or for food, hence both are dried without cutting up as the skin preserves the planting seed materials. For food purposes they can be powdered or pureed with tomato paste.

**3A CARDIED ORANGE PEEL**

16 Oranges

4 tablespoons water

3 Cups water

**Method**

1. Remove peel from oranges and cut it into sections

2. Cover with water in a saucepan and boil until pitti.

 It is useful as flavouring and sweetener.

**4A DRIED PLAINTAIN OR CASSAVA OR YAM MEAL**

 Wash and peel the plantain or cassava. Cut into small cubes and spread out in the sun to dry. Remove every day with the dryer into the house in an airy place until quite dry.

 For amala riro or lafun pound in mortal until fine. Sieve and store for use.

 Any of both could be reconstituted without pounding to its original.

**5A SALT FISH - EJA ONIYO**

Scale fish, remove entrails and wash fish thoroughly. Make salt across the thick flesh and rub well with plenty of salt. Keep it covered for a day or two before using. If fish is to be kept for a long time, remove from the salt water, sprinkle some lime juice on the salted fish and dry in the sun. the lime juice helps to keep away flies.

**6A SALT MEAT - ERAN ONIYO**

 Wash and slice meat ½” thick and also rub well with salt. Keep covered in saline solution until ready for use. If preserved meat must be stared for a long time. Sun dry until very stiff and keep wrapped in clean container.

**SMOKED FISH OR MEAT**

Scale fish – wash

Wash meat – slice to desirable shape

Smoke over flame in a metal guard designed for the purpose until the meat or fish is completely dry – turning from side to side to ensure even drying and smoking.

**8A GAMES AND SMALLER MEATS AND OTHER INSECTS**

(for Okete, Okere, Ikun, Esunsun and some other meat sources) For bigger animals – remove internal organs carefully to prevent the spleen spilling bile juice into the carcass, wash thoroughly internal and external parts. Find a supporting metal or wood to pierce through heal and tail end. Make a bonfire and burn till done and all hairs removed. Scrape off burnt hair from carcass with back of knife of split bamboo. Insects are roasted on wood support top.

**9A BOILED CORN AND GROUNDNUTS**

4 Cups dry corn

4 Cups shelled groundnuts

Salt to taste

**Method**

1. Wash and soak corn overnight

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**OSOMAALO: A LEGACY OF INDIGENOUS ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

**BY**

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**Introduction**

 “The most powerful of this kingdoms in the Forest Region of Nigeria” observed Ajayi and Akintoye1, “is the Ijesa Kingdom which did not only successfully contained the aggression of the Savanah and desert kingdoms but also made aggressive expansion moves”.

this single observation, Mr. Chairman, show the type of people I am called upon to speak about to this August audience. And speaker after speaker, since this Seminar began, have confirmed the courage, the iron determination and the fearlessness of the Ijesas in facing the risks, not only of defensive and offensive military exploits, but, as I intend to show in this paper, also of economic and social challenges.

 At the time the intertribal wars were put to a forced and by the Europeans by the middle of the 18th century, the Ijesas, the “Arógun yọ’s” were still bubbling with energy and the thirst for more wara. This energy they ably diverted towards legitimate economic activities once peace was restored with the aggress equal to, if not greater than the energy needed to wage wars.

 As a result of their economic enterprises, they quickly became known to the European Administrators who emerged at the end of the wars. Ilesa, the headquarters of the Ijesas was quick to benefit from the first real development projects embarked upon by the British colonial Administration.

 “In the West”, reported Olugbekan2, “road were built out from the railway as it was extended North-wards from Lagos. Road Motor services were opened in 1906 from Ibadan, Oshogbo and Ede on the railway to Oyo, Ilesa and Iwo which lay off it”. Expatiating n this particular project, Nzegwu3 added that the Ibadan – Iwo railway was opened on the 23rd of October 1906 and the 51.5 kilometer Iwo-Osogbo Railway was opened on the 22nd of April 1907. From the evidences of these two scholars, it was clear that the Ibadan Oyo and the Ede – Iwo roads were opened after the railway they were to serve had been declared opened.

 In the case of Ilesa Oshogbo road however, it was not so conspicuous were the economic activities of the Ijesas off the rail line and so important were these economic services to the colonial interests that they could not wait until the 22nd of April 1907 when the railway and the railway station at Osogbo were actually opened. The Ilesa-Osogbo road which was designed to serve the station was opened one good year ahead.

 This inclusion, Mr. Chairman, was corroborated by Duncan4 when he observed that “There was railway motor transport services as early as 1907 linking Ibadan to Oyo, Iseyin to Ogbomoso and Ilesa to Oshogbo railway station’s …. These railway road services were progressively closed when indigenous operators were growing in number and were able to effectively compete with the railway by offering cheaper rates”. He should have mentioned the pioneering efforts of the Ijesas such as Ajanaku Bus transport service, Omole transport service, Kupoluyi Bus transport service, among others.

 Perhaps, the most important contribution of the Ijesas to the economic life of the Yorubas, Nigeria and indeed the whole world is in the area of commerce – the retail trade in textile materials which incorporates, perhaps for the first time in the Economic History of mankind, and the principles of hire purchase. This trade, otherwise known as “Òsóomàáló” is the subject of this paper.

 In section two, we consider the meaning of the word “Òsóomàáló”. The probable origin of the word is traced in section three. Section four discusses the Òsóomàáló unit as well as his mode of operation. In section five we examine the Economic significance of the Òsóomàáló trade on the local, national and international economy. Section six looks at the institution now and in the future. In section seven, we summarize and conclude.

**II. THE MEANING OF Òsóomàáló:-**

The word Òsóomàáló is an adaptation of an Ijesa clause: ‘Òsó ni màá ló’ which literarily means “I will not sit down.

 In the form of the word and as pronounced, “Òsómàáló”makes no complete sense. Even in the possible Ijesa formulation “Òsó ni màá ló”, it is at best a clause which does not convey a complete meaning until a subordinate adverbial clause of time is added;

“titi mo fi a gbowo mi lowo re” meaning “until I must have recovered the money which you own me from you”. However, the word Osomaalo, though rather ambiguous, conveys unambiguously to any Yoruba listener, the complete meaning of the complex sentence:

“I will be in a crouch position until I must have recovered the debt you own me from you” or ‘I will not sit down until I must have recovered the debt you own me from you’.

Today, the word ‘Osomaalo’ is used just like the word “Ijebu” to describe any person who is shrewd and clever in the art of trade or commerce generally. It must be noted however, that the two words are not synonymous. Those who use them interchangeably therefore do so in error or out of ignorance. For while the word ‘Osomaalo’ stands for shrewdness and cleverness in commerce, the word “Ijebu” conveys, in addition to these qualities, miserliness to others as well as to oneself in the desire to acquire wealth by all means.

**III. THE ORIGIN OF OSOMAALO:**

The word Osomaalo, as we have observed above is closely tied to the process of debt collection: “I will not sit down until I must have recovered the debt you owe me from you” A close examination of the word will reveal that Osomaalo is not an Ijesa word. It cannot be.

Firstly, the Ijesa’s are known for their brave and distinct pronunciation of words: “Akaa”, “obinrin” not “Obinin” and therefore, “Osonimaalo” not Osomaalo. Secondly the word Osomaalo is probably adapted to mock and to belittle the people so called. It is therefore logical to believe that a people cannot call itself a name which connotes mockery. Like non-followers of Christ (at Antioch) named the disciples “Christians” to mock them so also the other tribes, particularly among those the Ijesas carry out their trade, must have been responsible for calling the name based on the manner the Ijesa trader refuses to leave the premises of his debtor until he has been paid. It is the view of some of the elders interviewed that the word Osomaalo was an Oyo adaptation of the phrase “Oso ni maa lo” which the Ijesa trader says repeatedly while insisting that his money be paid to him before he leaves or sit down.

**IV. THE OSOMAALO BUSINESS:**

An Osomaalo unit consists of the master trader, his wife his children and his apprentices, all of who engage directly or indirectly in the trade. Generally, the man has the trade, provides the capital, usually as little as few naira, decides on where to settle and also maps out the day to day trading strategy for the unit.

The role of the woman is dual. She is a housewife – providing meals, keeping the house and caring for the children. On the other hand, she also takes active part in the real Osomaalo business. This is particularly so at the initial stage when the couple has no children or apprentices to assist. The woman carries the wares – some pieces of textile clothes – while the man leads the way from harmlet to harment and from village to village, along the routes which are often repeated to nonotony.

Once the woman begins to bear children she stops going with her husband to sell clothes. In order to make for the loss in resources, the master trader quickly diversifies his trade by providing miscellaneous commodities like matches, toys, toilet soap etc. which she displays for sale on a small table in front of their house. Or, if the woman has learned a trade such as sewing, she could then settle down under a shed to practice her trade and so augment the income of the family.

The child of an Osomaalo grows up into business. Except his father is prosperous enough to buy a bicycle for his trade, he could be requested to carry the wares behind his father on trade missions. He may also have to go out on such missions alone. Perhaps the most important part which children play in the Osomaalo business is in debt collection. Whenever a debt is due for collection, it is the children who are sent to remind the debtor of the need to pay up. If the debtor fails to honour his pledge, it is again the child of the Osomaalo who is given the stiff orders not to come back home until the outstanding debt is collected.

To accomplish this task, the child is left free to design his own strategies. These could include verbal rudeness to the debtors, acts of insubordination or even acts aimed at causing discomfort to the debtor, the members of his family and even neighbours. It is not uncommon for debt collectors, for example, to prevent their victims from eating or even from drinking water until his debt is paid.

A debt collector will not sit down until he has collected his money. He will not stop at that. He will torment the debtor to the very limit of his tolerance as well as those of his relatives and neighbours who can no longer remain indifferent at the punishments being metted to the debtor by small “ants”.

The Osomaalo’s child becomes relieved by the presence of an apprentice Osomaalo. An apprentice Osomaalo is rarely a close relation of the Osomaalo or his wife. To accept a close relation as an apprentice is to course trouble. The reason for this is not far fetched. The Osomaalo business is generally believed to be a hard job demanding the training required of perhaps a soldier. To gain mastery of the art and craft of it, one require the firmness of ones master and the treatments which bother on wickedness. It is therefore believed that a close relation may not be able to deliver the goods as a result of two much of kindness or favoritism. Or, in the alternative, if he is able to pass on the hard lessons the way they should, the relationship between the Osomaalo and his wife on the other hand, and the apprentice will almost be completely ruined for life.

An Osomaalo apprentice is a near slave – woods, fetching water, washing clothes, grinding pepper and corns and even preparing food for the family. On course, he has to carry the wares in front of his master on daily trade missions, and, as he gains experience (becoming well trained) undertake such missions alone.

It is the special duty of Osomaalo apprentice to collect debts. Some apprentice are known to have damaged the properties of their victims during the process of debt collection. Some have resorted to violence of all sorts including beating up wives of debtors, the debtors themselves, their children and even neighbours. Since they usually have the stiff orders of their master never to come back home except with the money, they adopt any means crude or decent to achieve their goals.

As much as possible, the master Osomaalo stays out of debt collection. This is for tactical reason. Firstly, as an elderly person often respected in the community, he may not be able to exert the necessary force required to make the debtor pay the debt by all means. Secondly, his market is limited, consisting of a few adjoining villages and harmlets. He cannot therefore, afford to earn the sustained hatred of the people of a village which automatically follows in the wake of debt collection by force. To make amends is therefore easier by playing the trick of Machiavellis’s Cesare Borgia on the suppressed people of Romagna by sacrificing his cruel but able Lieutenant Remirro de Oroo7.

Because the Master Osomaalo will not be there when debts are been violently collected, he could now turn round, on his next trade visit (during which he deliberately leaves behind the debt collector) to blame the unruly behaviour of his apprentice for behaving beyond his instructions and even threatening to send him back home. Thus, with tact, he is able to maintain his good will by creating the impression that if he had been there when the debt was being collected, he could not have condoned the rude and violent behaviours of his apprentice. In this way an Osomaalo is able to sell to a customer, collect his money by force, sell to him again and again collect his money by force and still sell to him the third time8.

**V. THE ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE TRADE**

The significance of Osomaalo are many. We can only mention a few important ones. Among the factors which Bauer and Yamch9 believed to be responsible for creating an atmosphere inimical to experiment and innovation as well as development and use of entrepreneurial qualities in “backward societies” are the force of custom, the rigidity of status, the distrust of new ideas and of the exercise of intellectual curiosity. All these an Osomaalo has overcome. He has successful liberate himself from the clutches of useless traditional believed. He has ceased to be rigid not only in ideas but also in his status. An Osomaalo can adapt to changing conditions whether pleasant or sower. He believes that “Eni ti ko ba se bi elede lona Ijebu ko le se bi Adegboro loja Oba” meaning “he who cannot do odd jobs at necessary places will not be able to display wealth in appropriate places.

An Osomaalo is receptive of new ideas and the exercise of intellectual curiosity. He is very resourceful and highly innovative. He is always thinking of new ideas to meet his changing economic and social circumstances. He is hard working, persevering and diligent. He is therefore respected by the people among whom he lives and trades. This respect for the person and view of an Ijesa man is one of the major contributions of Osomaalo to the glory of Ijesa people.

Also, where ever he goes and where ever he trade, the Osomaalo overwhelms those he comes across with the legendry fearlessness of the Ijesa tribe. By travelling far and wide in the course of his business, the Osomaalo impresses in the mind of other people that the Ijesas are above the petty. Traditional fears of the consequences of travelling far away from home and that the Ijesas have acquired the courage and the intelligence not only to live and survive even among hostile tribes but also to prosper among them.

In terms of entrepreneurial ability, every Ijesa, through the institution of Osomaalo, is regarded in the words of Sol Tax10, as “an entrepreneur, a business man, always looking for new ways of turning a penny”. He was never therefore, like the Bantu peasants of the early 1950s whom, Houghton and Walton found to have shown the greatest deficiency in entrepreneurial skills, economic enterprise and initiative.

It is interesting to note also that the Ijesa entrepreneurial skill, through the Osomaalo institution was developed independently of outside influence. Here a distinction exists between the successful Ijesa entrepreneurs and the few prosperous African shopkeepers of Nyasaland (Malawi) and Tanganyika (Tanzania) who, chalmers Wright12 observed, had passed through a period of apprenticeship under a non-African either as assistants or as shop-keepers.

At the home scene, the Osomaalo’s constitute the early elites who, being well travelled, come home on occasions with new fashions in dresses and in decoration. The Raleigh bicycle of an Osomaalo readily stands out among the others as a result of extra accessories – mirrors, special bells, red rubber pipes for bicycle spokes and decorated seat covers.

In terms of concrete development, the Osomaalo institution contributed greatly to the rapid physical development of Ilesa and some other Ijesa townships, by erecting residential buildings mostly two storey types. And at Christmas, New Year, Easter and other similar occasions when Osomaalo’s converge in major Ijesa towns, they raise the level of economic activities by considerably increasing the level of demand for goods and services and thus increase the local circulation of money.

At the National, and perhaps international level, the Osomaalo’s are perhaps the first people to introduce hire purchase. This they do by selling to customers textile clothes which they need now while they pay instalmentally over a specified period afterwards. Osomaalo charges a few coins extra.

VI. **OSOMAALO TODAY AND IN THE FUTURE**

 We have discussed the Osomaalo trade as an institution.

 At the individual Osomaalo level, success rates vary while mortality rate is very high. Osomaalo institution thrives on restricted supply sources. However, with improved means of transport, it becomes easy for everybody to travel from place to place and to pick and choose not only textile materials but other types of commodities as well.

 With Independence and free primary education in some parts of the country, the level of civilization is improving rapidly even in rural areas people are becoming more inquisitive and tend to probe into every transaction. The result is that the Osomaalo trade is becoming less and less rewarding. While the prosperous ones now settle at large Urban areas like Ibadan, Ogbomoso, Oshogbo, Ede etc. where they opened textile shops those are less fortunate are now turning to farming.

**CONCLUSION**

We have seen, Mr. Chairman, how Osomaalo trade developed from the inherent dynamic qualities of the Ijesas, their fearlessness, their willingness to take risks and their determination always to turn the kobo. We have also seen how, through the Osomaalo trade, the Ijesas have made themselves known, not only to the other Yoruba tribes but also among the Nupes, the Hausas and the Fulanis to the North, the Eguns and the Aworis of Benin Republic to the West, and the Edos, the Irhobos, the Itsokos and the Ibos to the East.

We have discussed as well, the impact of the Osomaalo trade not only on the Economy of Ijesaland but also of the other tribes in the country. Finally, we have examined the contribution of the Institution of Osomaalo to the development of indigenous entrepreneurship as well as to the economic history of mankind.

Although a more comprehensive study and detailed analysis of this popular trade is still desirable and is being undertaking, we have been able, in this short paper, to turn the Ijesa entrepreneur round and round and we have like Bauer, been proud to find in him, “exceptional efforts, foresight, resourcefulness, thrift and ability to perceive economic opportunity”.

As the institution of Osomaalo continues to bow to the rapidly changing socio-economic conditions of the country and as individual Osomaalo continues to adapt himself to these socio economic realities, how is the economy of the Ijesa towns, particularly the city of Ilesa been fairing?

Although developments in Ilesa in the last few years point in the direction of brighter tomorrow, the need for all Ijesas to be more involved in the economic development of the cities cannot be over emphasized. There is, for example, urgent need for the wealthy Ijesas to bring home some of their capital presently concentrated in Lagos, Ibadan and other major cities of Nigeria, for the establishment of new industries in Ijesaland. There is also the need for Ijesa politicians to employ the characteristics dynamisms of Ijesas to attract more socio-economic projects from both the state and the federal government.

While those individuals and group of individuals who have set up industries in Ijesaland have to be praised, deliberate efforts must be made to encourage others to join suit. And while the past and present state governments must be credited for their developments in Ijesaland, particularly in the field of education, particular mention has to be made of the Jemibewon Military Administration for its foresight in citing the Oyo State College of Education in Ilesa. It is, in my opinion, the duty of every patriotic Ijesaman to ensure that this College, like other educational and economic projects do not only grow rapidly to maturity, but also attains in the soonest possible time, the status of a degree awarding institution which it rightly deserves.

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**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**THE ‘LANGUAGE’ OF IJESA PEOPLE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

The paper is intended to examine in a very broad way some peculiarities of the Ijesa dialect vis-à-vis the other dialects of Yoruba language. The Koine or Standard Yoruba is however used as the model in this paper.

Given the paucity of raw linguistic materials at our disposal as well as the inadequate time factor, only a sketchy survey of the dialect could be done.

The present work, though sketchy because of the wide area covered, is intended to throw more light on most of the observations already made by earlier scholars of the dialect.

The Ijesa, geographically referred to as Central Yoruba (C.Y) according to Adetugbo (1973) and Oyelaran (1977) are linguistically grouped with her neighbours who shared linguistic traits with her. Such neighbours are the Ekitis and the Ifes.

Although linguistically grouped together, it is clear that the political, cultural and historical traditions of the Ijesa emphasize their separateness.

**The Etymology of the words Ijesa and Ilesa**

Many scholars have tried to explain the origin of the words Ijesa and Ilesa. Many have attempted a historical explanation while some have postulated theories that are neither historical nor linguistic.

Prince Atayero and some other historians of Ijesa origin attempted a historical explanation. They postulate that Ijesa means Ìjọ or Àjọ àwọn ẹni tí a sà (The group of specially selected people) while Ilesa means Ilé àwọn ẹni tí a sà (The home of the specially selected group). This claim was backed by a vivid historical account of Ọwá Obòkun’s escapades.

Although the picture painted is very beautiful and fascinating yet a lot of questions remain unanswered. One such question is the fact that almost every town and village in Ijesaland has her own distinct history. Infact, many of the towns and villages predates the advent of Ọwá Obòkun. There is no evidence historically to support the contention that it was the selected followers of Owa Obokun that founded most of the towns and villages of Ijesaland. There is even historical evidence to show that Ilesa predates the adventure of Owa Obokun. It is on record that Oba Onila had been reigning over the people of Okesa long before Ọwa and his people came. Ita was the king of Ilemure later known as Ibokun while Alàrè of Ìlàrè was reigning at Ìlàrè. The Ọwá Obòkun’s authority as the main rallying point, however, is in no doubt but the historical distinctness of the numerous Ijesa towns casts a doubt over what the historians thought was the origin of the words ‘Ìjèsà’ and ‘Ilésà’.

Rev. Johnson misfired when he literarily translated Ijesa to mean Ìjẹ àwọn Òrìsà (The food of the gods) and Ilésà – Ilé àwọn Òrìsà (The house of the gods). In the first instance, this assertion has not been supported by any known historical facts. The names of the gods are not known neither are the names of the priests nor the people who own the gods mentioned. It is equally not proved that the Ìjèsàs are in no way connected with Ifè the source of all the Yoruba.

Another apparent prove of inadequacy of the assertion is the apparent contradiction in the pronunciation of the word ‘Ìjèsà dialect. In standard Yoruba and in all the other dialects the word ‘jẹ’, means ‘to eat’ and Johnson asserts that Ìjèsà means ‘Ìjẹ Òrìsà’ One is at a loss why an Ìjèsà man pronounces the same word as Ìjèsà or Ìgèsà while a non-speaker pronounces the word Ìjèsà. Notice that where the native speaker pronounces /e/ sound the non-native pronounces /Ɛ/ sound where the native speaker pronounces /s/ the non-native pronounces /s/ and where /j/ or /g/ is used by a native speaker, only /j/ is used by a non-native and Johnson being a non-native could then be excused for interpreting the words according to his own pronunciation without taking into consideration what a native speaker actually pronounces. His own etymology has no historical or linguistic basis.

The possible source of the word would be traced to one of the major ancient occupations of the people that occupy the geographical entity now referred to as Ijesa Kingdom.

 Robert Smith 1969 have this to say –

 ‘………… Tradition relates that it was (Ilesa)

 already famous for the water pots made by

 its women, a circumstance from which its name

 may derive ‘Ile isa’ town of water pots ………’1

This observation of Smith is, to my mind more authentic and reasonable than the one posited by Johnson. Since the Ìjèsàs are noted for their industry and business acumen, it can safely be assumed that there was a time in history, even before the advent of Ọwá Ajaka, (notice that Okesa was in existence then) that the Ijesas traded majorly in pottery and since the present Ilésà is the most central, it automatically becomes the market for the pots made from the neighbouring towns. A place where pots are made and sold could then rightly be called Ilé Ìsà and a result of the contraction and assimilation we have Ilésà. In its full form when not contracted, the Ìjèsàs will call it Ulé Ùsà and when contracted you have ‘uléèsà’ which is now the present from that could be heard from a native speaker of the language.

As for the word ‘Ìjèsà’ this could mean a group of people who are skilled in the art of pot making i.e. àwọn tí ó ń gé ìsà – people who cut artistic patterns on pots as a result of some linguistic processes such as contraction and assimilation and rhotacization (which accounts for the change from /g/ to /j/ and the replacement of the derivative morpheme {a} with {i} we have ‘agésà’ (one who cuts pots) and later \*Ìgésà/ Ìjèsà2 which are now the two forms of the word.

**The ‘Language of the Ìjèsà**

Linguistically it will not be appropriate to refer to the variety of Yoruba language spoken by the Ìjèsà people as a language because to do so would mean total isolation of that variety from the group that make up what is called Yoruba language.

However, it is observed that every dialect is made up of a large number of idiolects and no dialect is completely homogenous. It is this heterogeneity of a dialect that makes its definition quite difficult. However, an adequate working definition of a dialect would be a sub-division of people who have some non-linguistic characteristics in common.

Viewed from this perspective, we can not say that the ‘language’ of the Ijesa is one of the various dialects that make up the variety that is known today as Standard Yoruba (S.Y.).

The Ìjèsà Kingdom has a fairly wide geographical spread spanning over a radius of about 65 kilometers. It shared boundaries with the Ifè on the West, Èkìtì on the East, the Ìgbóminàs on the North and the Ondos on the South.

Since no reliable Census figure is available right now in the country, except that of 1963 which puts it at 165,832, one could now hazard a guess of about a million people.

The geographical spread and the type of linguistic boundaries which the Ijesas have, greatly affected the language. Because no dialect is completely homogenous, we have a lot of sub-dialects within the dialect itself. For example, the following sentence has a lot of varieties in Ijesa dialect

S.Y. - Mo fé lọ sùn

Ìjèsà (Ilésà) Mọ mi la sùn

Ìjèsà (Èrìn) Mọ mi ya sun

Ìjèsà (Èsà-Òkè) Mè é rì a sùn

Ìjèsà (Ìbòkun) Màa yaa sùn

Ìjèsà (Ifèwàrà) Mọ pa mi la sàn

Ìjèsà (Ìpetu-Ìjèsà) Mẹẹ yaa sùn

Judging from the few samples above, it is obvious that the various differences noted is linguistic – boundary influenced.

If we take Ilesa as the centre, we see that Èsà-Òkè/Ìpetu zones are influenced by proximity to two different varieties of Ekiti dialects i.e. Èfòn/Arámọkọ and Ìgbàrà-Òkè/Ọgòtún respectively, Ìmèsí Ilé and Ìbòkun are variously influenced by Ìgbóminà and Òsun dialects respectively while Èrìn-Ìjèsà is a linguistic ‘buffer zone’ between Ìpetu and Ilésà brand of the dialect. Ifèwàrà is Ifè dialect with a sprinkling of Ìjèsà.

**Some Phonological Observations**

Ilesanmi (1974) observed that there are 17 consonant sounds in the dialect. He identified /b/, /d/, /g/, /gb/, /j/, /r/, /y/, /w/, /u/, /m/, /n/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /kp/, /s/ and /s/.

Ilesanmi noticed the total absence of /h/ sound. The /h/ sound is however replaced with /j/ in some few words.

S.Y. Ìjèsà

Ehín Eyín (Teeth)

Èhìn Èyìn (Back)

Even the occurrence of /h/ in the S.Y. form above is super-imposed on the language. It is the biblical form of the words as opposed to what the speakers of S.Y. or any other dialects actually say. In all dialects of Yoruba language nobody pronounces ‘Ehín’ or Èhìn: Eyín or Èyìn is the acceptable form. If that is the case it means that /h/ sound is completely absent from Ìjèsà dialect.

Here are some words indicating the absence of /h/ sound

S.Y. Ìjèsà

Mo fi ìkarahun họ ìdí ìkòkò Mo fo karaun ọ udi ùkòkò

 (I scrape the bottom of the

pot with an empty snail shell)

 he e

Mo ri owo he lona oko Mo roo e lona oko

 (I picked a lost coin on my

way to the farm)

 halè alè

Emi kó lo ń halè mó E e sèmi ọ mi alè é mó

 (It is not me that you are

threatening)

 hú

Mo ti hú isu mi tán Mo ti ú usu mi tán

 (I have uprooted all my yam

tubers).

A closer examination of the dialect further reveals that /s/ is rarely used. Although, in the language of the modern speakers /s/ sound is often heard but among the unadulterated native speakers /s/ is majorly absent. The introduction of /S/ is as a result of interaction with the other dialects of Yoruba language particularly the Osun type.

An example from the Eastern variety of the dialect (Esa-Odo/Esa-Oke) will explain what I mean.

S.Y. Ìjèsà(Èsà-Òkè/Èsà-Òdò)

Ta ló sè si erèé mi? È sé sè sérè o?

 (Who is it that has added to the

beans I was cooking)

Words like Isu are pronounced ‘usu’ ‘usa’ (big pot) ‘aùsá’ (walnut) (Eúsà (bush rat) aúsá (Hausa).

In most speaker’s dialect, ‘Ilésà’ is pronounced ‘Uléèsà’ with a total absence of /S/.

In other words, one could safely conclude that the dialect in its original form has only sixteen (16) consonant sounds.

**The vowel sounds**

If we disregard the tone marks, there are only seven (7) oral vowel sounds in the standard Yoruba. The vowel sounds are /i/, /e/, /Ɛ/, /a/, /Ɔ/, /o/ and /u/ and the nasal vowels are /a/Ɛ/i/u/Ɔ/.

But in Ijesa dialect an extra two vowel sounds have been identified (Oyelaran, 1977)

I i u U

 e o

Ɛ Ɔ

 a

It is noticed that the two extra vowels sounds /I/ and /U/ are produced close to the place of articulation of their counterparts /i/ and /u/.

A close examination of the use of the vowels identified indicates that perhaps, one could say that in terms of use, Ijesa dialect has eight (8) oral vowel sounds and not (9) as identified by Oyelaran. It is noticed in the dialect that /i/ is rarely used. Any word starting with /i/ is often replaced with /u/, /U/ or /I/ in Ijesa. If any words is found where /i/ sound is used at the initial position or as the first syllable, such words could be said to have been recently imported into the dialect.

The morphology of the dialect clearly shown that /i/ is not part of Ijesa dialect.

If the bound morpheme /i/ is added to any verb stem, the initial syllable of the derived word is often changed to /u/, /U/ or /I/.

Bound morpheme Free morpheme Derived work S.Y.

 {i} + {se} = Ùse Ìsẹ

 (The act of

working)

 {i} + {lo} = Ùlo Ìlọ

 (The act of

going)

 {i} + {je} = Ùje Ìjẹ

 (The act of

eating)

 {i} + {mu} = Ùmu Ìmu

 (The act of

drinking)

 {i} + {te} = Ìtẹ Ìtẹ

 (Nest)

 {i} + {lu} = Ùlù Ìlù

 (Drum)

Here are some words which starts with /i/ in S.Y. but changed in Ijesa.

 Ìjèsà S.Y.

 Ulé Ilé (House)

 Usu Isu (Yam)

 Ùlù Ìlú (town)

 Ùdó Ìdó (name of a town)

 Urin Irin (Iron)

 Imú Imú (nose)

 Ika Ìkà (wickedness)

 Use Isé (work)

**Vowel Co-occurrence and Restriction**

In Ijesa dialect, like in standard Yoruba there is a system of vowel co-occurrence and restrictions. For instance, if /o/ or /e/ is used at the initial vowel of a two syllable word, /a/ will not follow i.e. we do not have words like oga, eja.

Generally, it is observed that /i/ does not occur as the initial syllable of any Ijesa word.

Unlike the S.Y., /I/, /u/ or /U/ can occur at the initial position in a two syllable word.

/a/ can co-occur with any other vowel sound

/e/ and /Ɛ/ do not co-occur, so also is /o/ and /Ɔ/. /U/ can co-occur with /e/, /u/ and /o/ i.e. there are words like

Ulé

Ùlú

Ùjo

/Ɔ/ on the other hand can only co-occur with /E/, /a/ and /Ɔ/. If /i/ occurs at the initial position /a/, /E/, /Ɔ/ can follow.

**Syntax**

It is just not possible to deal exhaustively with the syntax of the dialect in a work of this nature but mention must be made of some noticeable aspect of the syntax of the dialect.

In terms of word arrangement there is no noticeable difference between S.Y. and Ijesa dialect but in terms of the words used and morphemic combinations we noticed a lot of differences.

S.Y. Ijesa

i. Mo ń lọ sí oko Mo mi lọ ó re oko

In the sentence above, the Ijesa personal pronoun is Mọ instead of Mo. Where S.Y. uses /O/, /Ɔ/ is used with /M/.

There is also a complete absence of the aspectual marker ‘n’ in Ijesa dialect. ‘MI’ is often used to replace it. The dual use of the word ‘re’ is also noticeable.

In some sentences ‘re’ can be used as a verb e.g.

S.Y.

 ii. Níbo lo ń lọ Where are you going

 Ijesa

 Ka rí bi o mí rè? “ “ “ “

 ‘rè’ in this sentence is used as a verb.

In (i) however, ‘rè’ is used as a directional preposition.

**Pronoun**

Jeje (1972) and Ilesanmi (1974) attempt a comparison of the Ijesa and S.Y. pronouns. They observe the following:

Person Ijesa S.Y.

 1st mi mi (me)

 2nd rẹ rẹ/ẹ (you)

 3rd rè rè/è

From the table above, one could see that except in the first person pronoun where the terminal vowel is /I/ and the elisory possibilities of /r/ in S.Y. and its obligatoriness in Ijesa, there is no other noticeable difference between S.Y. and Ijesa dialect.

The major difference is noticed in the possessive pronoun – nominal concatenation i.e. a combination of the possessive pronoun and the nominal.

 S.Y. Ijesa

 i. ti èyin (tiyin/tèyin) tin in

 ii. ti ìwo/ìre (tìwọ/tìrẹ) tùwọ/tìẹ

 iii. ti àwọn (tàwọn/tiwọn) ti an/ri an

 iv. ti àwa (tawa) tia/ria

Certain things are obvious from above in the Ìjèsà dialect.

1. The pattern of elision differs in the two varieties. It appears that in S.Y. any of the initial and terminal vowels could be retained in a pronoun concatenation of (i) pattern. Thus we can have ti+eyin = tiyin or teyin
2. In (ii) because the two vowels are identical just any one of the two can be elided.

In (iii)and (iv) it is the initial vowel of the nominal that is retained while the terminal vowel of the pronoun is elided. But in Ijesa dialect a lot of changes occur.

In (i) the terminal vowel of the pronoun becomes nasalized ti – tin while both the initial vowel and the following consonant are elided ti + eyin, tin in.

In (ii) where we have ti + iwo as usual with the dialect, vowel /i/ is rarely used and as such the /I/ vowel which is the terminal and initial vowel of the nominal and pronoun respectively changes to /u/ thus ti + ùwo = tùwo. The pattern of changes in tie is the same with (i) above.

In (iii) and (iv) above, another consonant is introduced to replace ti thus ti + awon becomes ri + awon and with the elision of the first vowel and the consonant of the nominal, we have ri + an = rian. It is also noted that the nasal vowel itself changes from /Ɔ/ (S.Y.) to /a/ in Ijesa dialect. It could even be said that /i/ is rarely used in Ìjèsà dialect.

In (iv), the process is the same except that it is the oral vowel /a/ that is left after the first vowel and consonant have been elided.

**The Socio-Cultural Effect of Ijesa dialect on the Ijesa people**

Language has often been said to be an index of personality. This dictum can never be more appropriate anywhere than with the Ìjèsà people. The Ìjèsà dialect in its original form is very ‘harsh’. There is a total absence of what many refer to as ‘honorific’ words. These are the specially chosen words used when a junior addresses an elder or when an elder addresses a gathering of juniors.

Such words are ‘Ẹyin’, ‘àwọn’ ‘tiyin’, ‘tiwon’ etc that are so noticeably present in some dialects of Yoruba especially the Oyo dialect. In Ìjèsà dialect, ‘Uwọ’ or ‘ọ’ is usually used. In Ibadan sub-dialect of Oyo dialect, a sentence like this could be heard.

Ibadan Ìjèsà S.Y.

Iya mii re n pe yin Yeye re mi pe o Iya yin n pe yin

To a non-speaker of the dialect this could be misinterpreted to mean that the Ìjèsà people are less humble or do not respect one another judging by the ‘harshness’ or bluntness of their language. Such a judgement would be false if one is aware of the fact that the Ìjèsàs are known to have absolute respect for elders and also for compeers.

Behind the ‘Uwọ’ used in addressing the elder, there is a complete humility and respect. It is absolutely forbidden for a junior to talk when an elder talks or to remain standing while delivering message from another elder.

Perhaps it is the bluntness of Ìjèsà dialect that has accounted for the various successors recorded in business by the people. The Ijesas prefer to call a spade a spade. They are less persuasive. Even the ancient Osomaalo is less persuasive when hawking his wares when compared with traders from other parts of Yoruba. He tells you to buy his goods without actually begging you. In some cases, the language carries some element of force. This is also noticed in their prayers or worship.

It is this trait that has led many to brand the Ijesas as being proud. The fact is that the Ijesas naturally detest begging. Research has shown that in Ilesa the number of Ijesas among the beggars is less than 2%.

It was also observed that even the languages of these few beggars are so harsh that they attract few sympathizers compared with beggars from other places. Among the lunatics the story is also the same. An Ijesa lunatic will hardly beg you for money. If you show some signs of reluctance, he just moves away.

The bluntness permeates every aspect of Ijesa culture. The music carries some element of force (Adamo music, Lukorigi, Iganga etc for example are not weaklings). The dance steps, rhythms, jokes and ceremonies are less soft.

**The ‘Negato-Positive’ use of the dialect**

The Ijesas are noted for their negative use of their dialects. In some cases positive actions are linguistically negatively rewarded. In appreciating a job well done, an Ijesa man may congratulate his friend by say Awe, ori rẹ máà búrú béè é o, o dè tún ti ra motò mínrìn. (Friend, you have a very bad luck, so you have got a new car) while praising a boy for passing an examination, a mother said:

“Ọmọ òún sun ùn,

E sọ ní yé gbuwájú rè

Li kíláàsi rè”

(The boy is not good,

nobody can beat him academically in

his class).

For any slight misdeed, an Ijesa would employ the use of the most offensive curse to register his protest. This has often created fear in the minds of non-speakers of the dialect. They very often regard the Ijesas as violent and curse loving. What baffles a lot of people is the non-efficacy of the curses. People have then concluded that curses are prayers for the Ijesa people. Few examples of curses peculiar to the Ijesas include:

‘Olóde lá gbé ọ lọ’ - You will be carried away by small pox

‘Sàngbàńgí lá bò ọ’ - Small pox shall cover you

‘Ó ra jèrè’ - You will not make profit

**Conclusion**

As earlier pointed out, this work scratches on the surface certain aspects of Ijesa dialect. From the foregoing, we can interfere that the most probable etymological explanation one can give to the two words ‘Ijesa’ and ‘Ilesa’ is linguistic and not historical.

Some phonological and syntactical comparison of Ijesa and S.Y. shows, to some extent, the basic differences and similarities in the two dialects.

The work further deals with the socio-cultural effect of the dialect on the people. Since language is said to be an index of personality, Ijesa dialect clearly showed, in all its ramification, the behavioural tendencies of Ijesa people.

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**FOOTNOTES**

1. R.S. Smith: Kingdoms of the Yoruba, P. 53
2. Igesa is the primitive form still used by the native speakers of the language. This was confirmed by Dada, Olubi and Sijuwola from Ere, Ipole and Igangan respectively.
3. Ojo, G.J.A.: Yoruba Culture, London, 1966, PP. 126 – 127.

**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**IJESHA RESISTANCE TO BRITISH RULE:**

**THE OKE – IMO EPISODE**

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In Nigeria and the world at large, many readers are familiar with episodes of military resistance against British imperialism in the Niger Delta city states notably Opobo, Brass Town and Brohimie and in the hinterland regions notably in Ijebu-Ode, Benin, Bida, Ilorin and Kontagora to name a few. The Ijesha resistance is one of many episodes so far untold, especially unattractive to historians because they involved no military confrontation. But resistance could and did take various forms, the form taken generally dictated by circumstances. In some of the episodes, British force was met with local force as in the case of Ijebu-Ode in May, 1882, Brohimie in July, 1894 and Benin in February, 1897 while in others, the British merely demonstrated naked force and its military superiority as in Oyo in November, 1895. In the case of Ijebu-Ode and Benin the large-scale sacrifices made to their gods on the eve of the British invasion could not avert the British conquest of the two kingdoms, in Benin for example, the armies were mauled, the city burnt and looted, six of the prominent chiefs hanged, the king tried and banished to Calabar where he eventually died in exile – all, ostensibly to avenge the murder in January, 1897 of the Vice-Consul Phillips and his men. In November, 1895, Oyo was bombarded, the Alafin Adeyemi I was hit in the knee and the people coerced into acquiescence to British rule.

Ijesha resistance to British rule took a different form and the result was different. In the first place British connections with Ijesha affairs began on a note of a seemingly detached third party intercessor on the part of the British. The Ijesha had constituted an integral part of Ekitiparapo multi-state alliance whose armies fought since 1879 to liberate Ekiti and Ijesha states from the burdensome imperial yoke of Ibadan. For about three decades previously Ijesaland and parts of Ekiti had endured the ravages of Ibadan armies, their incessant harassments, looting and extraction of tributes in foodstuffs, slaves and cowries currency.1 By 1886 however, both the Ekitiparapo and Ibadan protagonists were already war weary and near exhaustion having apparently overstretched their human and material resources. No appreciable end to the war was in sight and the belligerents had welcomed the British agents then shuttling back and forth between the camps to terminate the war.

The Ekitiparapo – Ibadan wars eventually came to an end in March, 1893 through the direct intervention of these British agents, who were actually pursuing their Christian and commercial interests, in the Yoruba hinterland. To the Ekitiparapo, the peace was welcome but the stake was great. But for the war weariness the British intervention and the guarantee of liberation (liberty) from Ibadan, the main object of the wars, it was tolerably certain that the war would have dragged on for much longer. The Ekitiparapo appeared in 1886 to have gained the upper hand while Ibadan, easily the greatest military power in Yorubaland in the nineteenth century was fastly becoming the under-dog. The cause of this was that the Ekitiparapo allies obtained snider riffles purchased for them by Ijeshamen such as Haastrup, Campbell, Thomas Ige, Harrison, Thompson Gureje etc. and Ekiti such as Olabinjo, Paine etc2, resident in Lagos. In desperation, Ibadan authorities as well as Alafin Adeyemi I had frantically implored the Lagos Government to intervene and stop the carnage at Kiriji. The Ekitiparapo allies were initially unwilling to allow intercession for, they rightly believed that they were winning the war on account of their newly acquired superior fire power.

Thus did British intervention in the war opened up a new chapter in the British relations with the Ijesa. In the first place, the British erroneously mistook as evidence of submission, the expression of courtesies: greetings and gifts sent and delivered to Governor Carter in March, 1893 by leaders of the belligerent states, for example Ogedengbe, the Seriki of Ekitiparapo confederate armies3. Unknown to the British the courtesies were attestations of relief and gratitude for what these leaders thought was a third party intercession on the part of the British peace-makers. In the second place, the Ekitiparapo confederates in general and the Ijesha in particular were dismayed to see that Igbajo, Ikirun, Iree and Iresi were awarded to Ibadan and were, for a long time, inconsolable for the loss of these towns most especially, Igbajo. Thirdly, the Ijesha were rather disturbed by the muscle-flexing posture of the British, its establishment of a garrison at Odo Otin and the hectoring and peremptory behavior of Captain R. L. Bower whom the British had appointed as Resident of Ibadan and Political Officer in Charge of the (Yoruba) Hinterland of Lagos. But the people took it cool, overawed by the knowledge of the purpose for which Bower had been appointed and the garrison established.

The second step towards the confrontation between the British agents and the Ijesha people was taken in June 1894. The event was the culmination of several months of Capt. Bower’s administration. The Resident, appointed to execute a policy of subjugation of the Yoruba hinterland, in short present-day Oyo State and Ekiti and Akure districts of Ondo State actually succeeded in imposing a somewhat autocratic and tyrannous administration in the region and the climax of his ‘highhandedness’ as far as the Ijesha were concerned was the arrest and imprisonment of Ogedengbe. This hero of Ekitiparapo had returned from Imesi Ipole in September, 1893 and set himself up in Ilesha as an independent chief, his army, the Ipaye, still attached to him as was customary among the professional war chiefs which arose among the Ekitiparapo during the second half of the nineteenth century. In a situation of unplanned demobilization of soldiers such as occurred after the 1893 peace settlement at Kiriji, soldiers could not immediately return to their homes and pre-war economic activities that most of them had abandoned for about fourteen years of fighting rather, they remained attached to their chiefs and for their maintenance committed outrages, wakowako, in the small towns and villages in their neighbourhoods. For instance, the Ipaye, perpetrated their wakowako in Ibokun, Ilare, Esa etc. and on 20 May, 1894 reportedly murdered the bale of Ijeda during one of their skirmishes. There were complaints against the Ipaye among residents of Ilesha, one of such complainants, Daddy Agbebi of the Iloro Church charged that they ate up all his fowls’, and these extortions reportedly caused many Ijesha people to flee their homes4.

Events reached a climax on 1 June, 1894, when the Resident arrived in Ilesa and held discussions with Owa Alowolodu and his chiefs. Chief Ogedengbe was summoned, reminded of the Residents’ several remonstrance’s and told of persistent protests about the atrocities of the Ipaye. The Resident thereupon arrested Ogedengbe and a few of Ipaye leaders5. There was a brief drama: Ogunleye, Ogedengbe’s son, struggled to prevent his father’s arrest but was badly beaten up by Bower’s soldiers; old and ailing Arimoro, hero of Ife – Modakeke wars, back in Ilesa only a few days thence, plodded to the scene and blocked Bower’s way charging; “eewo, asa I ‘ole ke gb’eiyele’ – God forbid that the hawk enters the house to snatch away the pigeon -, when the old man would not give way, Captain Bower reported dealt a sword blow on the old warrior’s head, but the officer’s sword broke up into bits6! Chief Ogedengbe was led away to Ibadan and imprisoned for twenty-one months in Iwo, the leaders of the Ipaye who were reputedly the perpetrators of the atrocities were imprisoned in Ibadan. However, Oba Haastrup, Ajimoko I and his chiefs pleaded on behalf of Ogedengbe and accepted to pay Bower’s fine of £200 sterling imposed on Ogedengbe and a guarantee of £500 sterling (Ijesha sources say £1000) for Ogedengbe’s future ‘good’ behaviour7. The British Government had succeeded in its campaign of intimidation against the military leader of Ijesha people, the local militia was discredited and destroyed: Ogedengbe, described in Lagos Government circles as ‘the one serious blot’ in the British policy in the region had been blackmailed, his arsenal of rifles, dane guns, kegs of gun powder, bullets and boxes of cartridges were impounded, some of his war boys were languishing in prison, the rest disbanded.

The civil leaders of the indigenous communities were the next target to be assaulted and the humiliation of the military leaders: Ogedengbe, Fabunmi and Aduloju was, according to Governor Carter (in his report cited above) to increase the prestige, that is, awful fear of the Lagos Government, that is, the British among those he chose to as the lawless native of the interior. By prestige the label Governor of Lagos meant extension of British political authority, annexation of land, and imposition of British informal and formal colonial rule. In anticipation and apparent preparation for achieving these enviable objectives, the British had entered between 1886 and 18948 into treaties with obas of principal Yoruba kingdoms, using these treaties as basis of transference of power and before the political leaders of Ijesaland realized the implications and binding powers of these treaties, the British political officers accompanied by soldiers of the Lagos constabulary began to stun them with proclamations of British peace, freedom of trade, prohibition of twin murder, trial by ordeal, use of violence and resort to weapons to vent grievances, slavery, attacks on traders and travelers. Soon, the Resident and his field officers were all over the place, incessantly harassing the obas and chiefs over some reported breaches of treaty obligations in their domains. The state of fright thus created in the communities by the British ‘knight errant’s can be assessed when in 1896, the baale and chiefs of Ekun (now Ile-Oluji) approached the Bishop C.S. Phillips of the CMS imploring him “to advise them how they should behave so that they may not incur the displeasure of the government”.9

These intimidatory episodes, otherwise called ‘pacification’ took a new turn towards the end of 1896 when the British declared a protectorate of Lagos and Yoruba Interior. The territory especially of the Yoruba Interior was too large and apparently irksome for a single Resident based in Ibadan. Thus, the vast area was to be divided for purposes of administrative convenience into smaller units to ensure that colonial administration was brought nearer to the people and for purposes of effective supervision, in other words, intimidation of the communities. Each administrative unit was to be placed under a commissioner who would constantly travel throughout his unit, and in doing so effectively ‘advise’ the obas, 10 chiefs and people, impose the British peace and stamp out all pretensions to organize resistance. This proposal was implemented in 1899 when the area under Bower and his successor Hawtayne was broken up into two: Western and North Eastern, the former consisting of present-day Oyo State less Ijesaland and Ekiti (with Akure as an integral part). The headquarters of the Northeastern District between 8 November, 1899 and March 1900 was temporarily located in Ilesa, and the Travelling Commissioner was guest of Owa Ajimoko I. Finally in April, 1900 the permanent headquarters was established on the crests of the twin Imo hills then about 2 or 3 kilometers on the Eastern outskirts of Ilesha 11 where it remained till the District administration was disbanded in December, 1912.

The establishment of the headquarters in Imo, a village just a few kilometers away from, and contiguous to Ilesha is suggestive of the same reason for the establishment in 1893 of Bower’s headquarters at Idi Ape on Iwo Road, so close to Ibadan. Ilesha was the largest ‘Ekitiparapo’ town and the colonial government supposed that the Owa of Ilesha was the civil head of the confederation. 12 This contention was strengthened by J.O. George in his book published in 1895 in which he opined that Owa of Ilesha was “the head of sixteen kings of Ekiti” 13. Moreover, since the period of negotiations towards ending the war at Kiriji the rank and file among the British officials appeared to believe that the Ijesha were difficult to govern. This contention was strengthened in the 1900 – 1901 Annual Report which described the Ijesha as “a stubborn race, difficult to manage 14 and in Johnson’s History of the Yorubas its manuscript completed early in the colonial episode describing them as “deficient in wit”.15 Thus, the colonial government established the headquarters close to Ilesha to keep the Ijesha under close surveillance and by December, 1900 the headquarters was replete with quarters for the civil and military officers, camp for the soldiers of the dreaded Lagos constabulary a guard room, a goal house, storerooms, a ‘palaver’ court and several servants’ quarters.

The Owa Ajimoko I, his chiefs and people probably welcomed the new arrangement perhaps as a status symbol comparable to the status of Ibadan while old arrangement persisted. Initially, the first Travelling Commissioner, Major, W. R. Reeve Tucker, lodging near present-day Methodist Mission was guest of the Owa and his chiefs and although his responsibilities – the power and authority were such that he became a super-officer over all Ijesha and Ekiti communities with the result that, in a fell swoop the traditional authorities lost their age-long powers and authority and were reduced in status to mere appendages and free hostages for their respective communities. It was apparent that the Owa enjoyed some added prestige in his relations with Reeve Tucker. The commissioner began to implement Governor Henry E. McCallum’s policy of governing the people through their leaders by inaugurating two councils, one for Ijesaland and one for Ekiti. As a background to this exercise, the Commissioner undertook a meet-the-rulers tour of the entire district between 15 November 1899 and February, 1900. During this tour, the commissioner visited most, if not all the major towns wherein he habitually assembled the baales in the courts of their principal rulers, enquired into the enforced old allegiances. In Ijesaland, for example, he enforced same old allegiances by effectively putting the Apetu of Ipetu, Owa Omiran of Esa and Owa Oye of Imesi-Ipole under the Owa of Ilesa against whom the apparently small but formerly independent towns were then openly up in arms. Although the Commissioner was resorting to this expediency to minimize the task of having to cope with innumerable petty chiefdoms, the Obas began to hope that the British would back them up against all pretensions of their ‘recalcitrant’ baales and treat their continuing agitations as non-cooperation with and rebellion against the colonial government.

As if confirming the optimism of these obas, the Owa Ajimoko I inclusive, the Commissioner inaugurated to two councils aforementioned on 21 January, 1900.16 In the case of Ijesaland, it consisted of Owa Ajimoko I and several of his principal Ilesa chiefs as well as some baales of the subordinate towns. The Commissioner was president. Although the actual purpose of these councils (similar ones were inaugurated in Ibadan and Oyo) was to impose definite and substantive obligations on the obas and chiefs such as enforcing corporate actions on their people through them, for instance obtaining conscript labour or levee for road construction, and using them as channels of information about all government edicts, yet, the obas saw the inauguration to the councils as a resuscitation of some old suzerainty and grandeur and a desire of the alien government to have them as partners in government.

But the Owa and his chiefs soon had cause to revise and then change their opinion concerning the Oke-Imo headquarters. The grievances seemed to have started to mount during the early months of Owa Ataiyero who had succeeded Owa Ajimoko (died, September, 1901) early in 1902. The grievances could be categorized into two: grievances against obnoxious aspects of the colonial administration and grievances against the atrocities being perpetrated in Ilesa and the rest of Ijesaland by the army of servicemen, most notoriously the colonial army and police personnel as well as carriers. Concerning the latter category the Commissioner administered his district through several subordinate officers. He thus had at the headquarters at Oke-Imo an army of servicemen consisting of soldiers of the Lagos constabulary, an instrument of coercion, messengers and carriers. The men of the Lagos Constabulary initially consisted mostly of non-Yoruba mostly from present Northern states as a result of which they were called ‘Hausa soldiers’ but in September, 1897 Governor Henry E. McCallum ordered recruitment of more Yoruba men into the force, thus increasing the numerical strength of the Yoruba, the recruits consisted mainly of Ibadan, Oyo, Modakeke, Ogbomoso and Iwo. But the officers were mostly ‘Hausa’. Up to 1895, the soldiers were armed with maxim and nordenfeldts but after 1898, there were armed mainly with snider riffles. Whatever their arms, they went through rigorous military training, represented an alien government, were under alien supervision and were therefore separated from the people. In traditional Yoruba societies, especially among the Ijesa, soldiers were citizen levies and until the rise of professional armies (warrior class) in the 1870’s, they did not generally live separately from the people.

In indigenous police among the Yoruba generally consisted mainly of members of some functional associations. Among the Ijesa, especially Ilesa people, the police consisted of the elegbe under the leadership of chief Lejoka; these people (indigenous police) combined police and prison duties with guarding the persons of the Owa, acting as hangmen detecting and arresting criminals and generally assisting the elders of Ilesa in the maintenance of law and order. Each town and village in Ijesaland had its own ‘police’ although there was inter-community cooperation. Members of the indigenous police were familiar people but the colonial policemen and soldiers, said Tamuno, consisted mainly of “fugitive slave and droppings of society”17.

Messengers were carefully poked men who wore uniforms, they conveyed messages from the Commissioner to the chiefs of the respective communities in the district.18 They also served policemen and might arrest offenders when necessary. Carriers included those recruited or employed on permanent basis, such permanent carriers included hammock carriers, stewards and carriers, of other items19. Carriers might be recruited on temporary basis when the need for more carriers arose. Whether permanent or temporary, carriers often cleared bush and erected temporary sheds or camps for touring officers and were often sent on special duties to the various towns and villages in the district.

The soldiers of the Lagos Constabulary, the colonial police known among the Ijesa as Imaro messengers as numbermen (oninomba) and carriers were notorious all over the district on account of their atrocities and rapaciosity. Following the proclamation in 1900 of the Supreme Court and Commissioners’ Ordinance which gave full original and appellate jurisdiction through the Travelling Commissioner to the Supreme Court, 20 the various districts became judicial units of the Lagos Protectorate. When the Ordinance came into force in 1901, Oke-Imo became the judicial headquarters of the North-Eastern District and the court there (the ‘palaver’ court) obtained yet another additional instrument of subjugation and intimidation of the communities. The colonial soldiers and policemen exploited the situation by behaving generally as members of an army of occupation, committing atrocities for sheer love and exercise of naked power on the local inhabitants, atrocities referred to by the Governor himself as “symbolical to them (the outraged communities) of the rougher side of British rule, of subjection and control”21. Although Governor McCallum was referring to reports reaching him in 1897 and confessed in the said report to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London that “the Hausa force and their wives have no doubt behaved very badly in the hinterland by looting, stealing and generally taking advantage of their position” yet, nothing was done the correct the situation and the largely Yoruba soldiers and police contingent posted to Oke-Imo behaved to type. The soldiers committed untold outrages in Ilesa and outstations whether or not they were on duty. For instance, messengers and carriers robbed, looted homes and extorted money and conscripted men in the streets to do petty jobs for them. And, expected to live in tents while on duty in the outstations the messengers and carriers usually lived on the local population who were generally forced to host and feed them in addition to gratifying their burdensome requests and mulcting the villagers in heavy contributions.

As pointed out earlier, the events that culminated in the Oke-Imo episode reached a climax during the reign of Owa Ataiyero, as he himself was a principal figure in the drama that eventually led to the break-up and abandonment of Oke-Imo headquarters in December, 1912. Oba Ataiyero himself, several of his chiefs and prominent citizens were victims of obnoxious orders and imaro brutality. In 1905 for example, Owa Ataiyero was accused of and charged with holding illegal court22. Perhaps the Oba and his subjects still regarded the palace as the final court and the Oba and his high chiefs as the final judges as in the period before the advent of British rule. The council of Oba and his principal chiefs created in 1900 had powers to legislate matrimonial offences ordinance and within its first year of operation had tried 42 cases exercises connected with this authorized court could not be termed illegal. After the establishment of the commissioner’s court at Oke-Imo in 1901 any aggrieved person: commoners, slaves, slave-owners, chiefs and obas could lodge complaints directly at the court, there, cases were tried and justice meted out; many of the convicts were sentenced to various terms of imprisonment with or without hard labour, many received strokes of the cane and some were executed. Thus after 1901, the Commissioner’s court became the solitary court and all unauthorized court proceedings were deemed illegal. Perhaps in spite of this, many of the Owa’s subjects who regarded him as father and his palace entre of political power still preferred to take their cases before the ‘Oba’s court’ as they customarily did before.

Perhaps a more serious conflict arose between the Owa and his chiefs on the one hand and the Commissioner on the other over the abolition in 1906 of tolls by the colonial authorities23. The colonial administration considered toll collection an impediment to free flow of trade an important object of the British in the Yoruba hinterland. The abolition might be well-meant but there should have been adequate consultation with the traditional rulers on whose orders and in whose names tolls were collected. The collection of tolls on articles entering or passing through towns constituted a principal source of revenue of indigenous state authorities in pre-colonial times. In those days each state or kingdom of the Yoruba constructed its own roads to the next state, had jurisdiction and exercised authority over its roads. As the important roads usually converged on the principal (oba’s) towns each metropolis had many gates. According to Meffre, Ilesa before colonial rule had seven gates: the Okesa gate which led to Ekiti, Owo and thence to Benin, the Ijeda gate which led to Ikirun and Oyo, Iwara and Ibodi gates which led to Ife, Ibokun and Osogbo gates which also led to Ikirun and Oyo and Unoda gate which led to Ondo24. The authorities posted custom-house officers or toll-collectors titled onibode at these gates, to identify traders, inspect luggage levy and collect duties on each marketable item and the customs-duties so collected constituted substantial proportions of revenue and economic mainstay of the state. Abolishing an age-old revenue-yielding practice without due consultation and compensation was bounds to lead to opposition and the Owa and his chiefs defied the order. Perhaps this was what Oke referred to his Itan Ile Ijesha when he described Owa Ataiyero as an oba who habitually did not comply with any unfavourable law emanating from Government (Oba ti ki gba ofinkofin ti awon ijoba ba mu wa nitori ilu re). 25

This non-compliance with ‘obnoxious’ orders appeared to have led to the second major cause of Ijesha ‘resistance’ against Oke-Imo headquarters, the symbol of British colonial administration in Ijesaland. Of course, the colonial administration was not likely to treat Ataiyero’s non-compliance to orders as a virtue, certainly not the then Commissioner, Captain H. H. Blair, notorious for his highhandedness (especially the nonchalance with which he left the Oloye of Oye Ekiti in custody in May 1910 while he went on leave in Britain). Early in 1907, Blair charged the Owa with disrespect to constituted authority and sent him into exile in Benin City26. Prominent Ijesa citizens such as Thomas Ige, Harrison and Sapara generally described by the colonial administration as ‘Lagos agitators’ protested against the banishment and humiliation of their Oba, the Oba was however on his way to Benin and was in Akure when the order of rescission of the banishment came. But Ataiyero reportedly insisted on going on to Benin City to repeat the adventures of his seventeenth century ancestor Atakunmosa who was similarly banished, but by his own subjects. It is possible the Owa Ataiyero actually reached Benin City and spent three months in exile before the protests of his people forced the colonial government to annul the banishment order for, he would have no need going on to Benin as if on his own volition when he was, in the first place, under official punishment.

The banishment of Owa Ataiyero appeared to most Ijesa people as yet another design of the colonial government to trounce and humiliate their leaders, first Ogedengbe, their war hero, now Ataiyero, their Oba. Relations between the Owa and the Oke-Imo administration became strained but in the following year, 1908, the Commissioner, Blair, probably out to improve relations between the Owa, his chiefs and people on the one hand and the Oke-Imo administration on the other, banished Apoti, the balogun of Ipetu to Oyo. Apoti was apparently a leader of the people in their struggle to throw off the suzerainty of the Owa.

While the memory of the banishment of Owa Ataiyero still rankled, news of police brutality against chiefs Loro and Oba Odo provoked spontaneous resentment and bitterness. Usually, whenever breaches were reported at the Commissioner’s headquarters, orders on police to investigate and arrest culprits were opportunities for the vastly illiterate soldiers and policemen to molest the local inhabitants, seize their livestock etc; in fact, such orders meant, in reality, letting the dreaded soldiers and ‘numbermen’ loose on the defenseless people, and the colonial servicemen respected no one. Chiefs Loro and Oba Odo were prominent chiefs in Ilesa, before 1920 were members of the inner (indigenous executive) council and two of the seven kingmakers. Oba Odo in particular was third in rank among the principal chiefs of Ilesa, following after the Obala and Ogboni, and therefore fourth in seniority rank below the Owa. Both chiefs were accused of taking a bribe of 10s and orders came from Oke-Imo headquarters for their arrest. Soldiers and policemen arrested the two chiefs but mercilessly beat them all along the road to the headquarters. Chief Odunro, the Oba Odo, apparently the older of the two chiefs fell under the blows and died at the headquarters. To complete the humiliation, the Oke-Imo authorities ordered that Oba Odo should be buried at the headquarters by prisoners, thus treating his corpse like that of a common criminal or pauper. Ilesa elders and the Oba Odo relatives protested and eventually retrieved the corpse for a proper and befitting burial.27

Ilesa people felt that they had had enough of the ‘rougher side of British rule’ that was no respecter of persons and offices. They decided not to wait till their Oba and chiefs went to prison as in the case of several chiefs and prominent men of the District who had languished at the Oke-Imo goal house. Members of the public at large began to show their resentment against the incessant harassments and molestations of the imaro forcing them to carry loads and causing such luckless victims to be absent from their homes for several days, the incessant assaults on their wives etc. For these and other atrocities, the Owa Ataiyero and his chiefs as well as prominent Ijesa citizens resident in Lagos had lodged complaints even before the Governor, apparently, so it appeared to them, to no avail.

Ijesa elders (leaders of thought) considered the options before them. Force was ruled out the local citizen soldiers would be no match for the colonial soldiers who were armed-to-the-teeth, the old redoubtable were dead, Arimoro in 1898, Ogedengbe lately in July, 1910. Even then any military action would be futile and would incur the wrath and greater punishment of the town, the cannon guns planted at the headquarters had their barrels trained on Ilesa and in any untoward and fool-hardy encounter, a great disaster might befall Ilesa and its people, the town might be utterly destroyed, several citizen might be killed and the survivors subjected to untold hardship.

A new and conciliatory Travelling Commissioner W. G. Beamish took over in August 1912 but the fat of Ijesa retaliation against about a decade of suffering, was already on fire. The leaders had decided on what to do. One day in October, 1912 they assembled at the court of Olumo (baale) of Imo, Arogunmatidi to solicit his help for their plan. Eventually, they prepared a charm, invoked the esu deity whose shrine stood (and still stands) in front of the Olumo’s courtyard. The priest of the god, accompanied by a few stalwarts stole to the headquarters in the dead of night and planted the charm behind one of the camps. After their return, the Olumo and the Ilesa elders planted another charm, apparently a protection against the former, outside Imo village.

It is said that about 9 days after this event, calamity, a small pox epidemic struck the Oke-Imo headquarters, first the horses died, then the epidemic spread among the servicemen. Within 2 weeks, the last week of November, and first week in December, thirty or more of the men had died and more than half of the rest were afflicted. 28 ‘No one’ knew the source and cause of the epidemic and why it was restricted to the headquarters only and soon, rumours went round that ‘ghosts’ had attacked or were attacking the headquarters.29

It is not known today whether or not the small pox epidemic was actually the main cause or a contributory cause for the break-up of the headquarters, the evacuation of its personnel and equipment and their transfer elsewhere. In the first place, there was a general reorganization then going on in the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria in anticipation of the adoption of Lugard’s indirect rule. Perhaps the dissolution of the North-Eastern District at the end of December, 1912 resulted from this reorganization and not as a result of the catastrophe induced by the Ijesa. But the North-Eastern District was only one of the ten districts into which the Lagos Protectorate, itself an integral part of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria was divided in 190630. Apparently none of the other nine districts was similarly affected at that time. For example the headquarters of the South-Eastern District remained in Ondo town where it had been located since 1899; Ijebu-Ode remained and Epe remained headquarters of the Eastern District. The dissolution of the headquarters of the North-Eastern District appeared to have been sped by some developments within the district and the connection of the epidemic with these developments cannot be ruled out. Indeed, what resulted from the dissolution seemed to confirm the association of the break-up of the district and transfer of its headquarters from Oke-Imo with Ijesa resistance. The Ijesa communities were separated from their Ekiti kiths and kins and merged with Ila and Ife to constitute a district with headquarters in Ile-Ife, while Ekiti, less Otun (moba communities) excised to become a part of Ilorin since 1901, became a district with its headquarters in Ado-Ekiti. It thus appears that unless there was need to abandon the Oke-Imo headquarters, the district could be dissolved while the headquarters was preserved to serve the new district to which Ijesaland belonged from January, 1913 for Ilesa, for administrative convenience, could have provided a more central zone and at no additional cost, than a new district headquarters in Ile-Ife. The break-up and evacuation of Oke-Imo headquarters can tolerably be connected with Ijesa resistance against the atrocities of the servicemen.

One might be tempted to say that there is little evidence of Ijesa ‘resistance’ and that there was no ‘resistance’ at all against the Oke-Imo administration. It all depends on what one can regard as the models of resistance movements, and the historian has to consider the numerous options before the Ijesa. For instance, many of those who endured the ravages of the servicemen and miscreants of the Oke-Imo administration had heard in their youth about the military power of the British. When this fact was not known to the Ijebu and they believed in the protecting powers of their deities and charms and went to war against the British in May, 1892, they lost the war and realized their mistake and inadequacy31. The Alafin Adeyemi I had a brush with the British in November, 1895 and got badly bruised for ‘his daring’, his palace was taken by storm and the town wheeled by only 60 soldiers of the Lagos constabulary32. More militarily powerful states such as Benin, Nupe and Ilorin fought and failed in their bid to resist British annexation and rule. In fact, very close to Ijesaland, at Odo Otin, an Ilorin army was routed by the little British garrison and towards the end of 1896 an overwhelming Ilorin army was repulsed with heavy losses at Erinmope (near Otun Ekiti) by only 42 men of the Lagos Constabulary led by Sergeant-Major Dangana, a veteran of Ijebu-Ode war.

These and other episodes were object lessons in futility and despair to the Ijesa. They were not resisting British penetration – that had taken place before they realized it and while they watched rather helplessly, all round them, the ubiquitous British, through the Lagos Government and its military and political agents using their superior military hardware, trounced the local military and civil chiefs, rode roughshod over their culture and destroyed their age-old sovereignty. To worsen their plight, the symbol and instrument of the alien government, the headquarters of the autocratic government lay within their reach, the instrument represented by an alien officer, titled Traveling Commissioner who exercised boundless power and authority over all and sundry! Really, the Ijesa were seeing evidences of the good things resulting from or encouraged by this alien government but they were suffering at the hands of a small group of daredevils and miscreants living at the nearby headquarters. All the Ijesa wanted was to force the ‘masters’ of these perpetrators of atrocities to break up the camps and evacuate the ‘army of occupation’ from their midst, not to terminate British rule which they had learnt to tolerate since there was nothing they could singularly do about it. In forcing the evacuation of the hateful and notorious gang, with whatever means at their disposal, the Ijesa had mounted a successful resistance and the isolated case of reorganization in the district, appeared to have been no more than a panic measure to remove the men from the jaws of death and the equipment, indeed the headquarters to a safer place.

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**CORONATION SEMINAR ON IJESA HISTORY AND CULTURE**

**EXTERNAL RELATIONS OF IJESA KINGDOM UP TO THE 19TH CENTURY**

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**HISTORICAL ORIGIN AND GROWTH**

One major kingdom apart from Ife that developed in Yorubaland up to 1800 was Ijesa with the capital at Ilesa. Ijesa Kingdom as it is today was situated on the Eastern side of Yorubaland. Ilesa, the capital, is about 125 kilometers away from Ibadan and 34 kilometers each from Ile-Ife and Osogbo. The area occupied by Ijesa continued to expand considerably in recent years.

Important towns comprising Ijesaland are Ijebu-Jesa, Ijeda, Ibodi, Ibokun, Ipetu-Jesa, Imesi-Ile, Esa-Oke, Esa-Odo, Oke-bode, Ifewara, Osu, Ilare, Erin-Jesa, Erinmo, Ikeji-Ile and some others. According to traditions, these Ijesa towns were formerly, autonomous until about the 16th century when there began occurrences of clashed and wars between neighbouring communities in Eastern Yorubaland1. Responding to the prevalence of the time, Ilesa waged wars against other weaker Ijesa communities and subjugate them. Eventually, Ilesa emerged as the dominant Ijesa Kingdom in about the 17th century. It is necessary to add that relations between Ilesa and its adjoining towns had always been cordial.

Ijesa had their first home in Ile-Ife, the cradle of all Yorubas before moving to the present location. Ijesa Kingship is held to derive from Ife. They maintained a separate political organization, cultural tradition history and dialect. Their ruler, the Owa Obokun wears a beaded crown. Like other Ife princes, the Owa moved out of Ile-Ife to found a kingdom. He traveled towards the East to settle at Igbadaye where he met his death. His successor continued the journey and settled first at Ilowa, then at Ilemure and Ilaye before the fifth Owa finally chose Ilesa as the permanent capital.

With Ilesa as capital, Ijesa rulers successfully resisted the invasion from old Oyo whose primary aim was to annex their kingdom. They also put up stiff resistance against pressures from Benin. Ijesa maintained their independence until the 19th century when the kingdom was overrun by Ibadan which rose to power after the fall of the old Oyo empire.

**CULTURAL AFFINITY BETWEEN IJESA AND OTHER KINGDOM**

Traditionally, there has been an enviable cultural connection between Ijesa and most of her neighbours, the Ifes, the Ekitis, Benin and even Oyo in the West. Apart from the claim to a common origin of the Yorubas, Ijesa traditions mention a particular period in their chequered history, probably from about 16th century when there was a flow of politically, motivated refugees into Ilesa from Iree, Ijamo, Itaji, Ifon, Ara. Leaders of these immigrant groups particularly from Ijamo, Itaji, Ifon, Ara and Ado-Ekiti failed to obtain chieftaincy title at home. It was as a result of the frustration emanating from their failures that finally brought them in close contact with the Owa-Obokun who later extended patronage to them in terms of the long awaited chieftaincy titles. According to Ijesa traditions, the leaders of those immigrants from Ijamo, Itaji, Ifon and Ara into Ilesa, were awarded chieftaincy tittles of Loro, Lejoka, Segbua and Arapate respectively2.

The result of this and other migrations that followed, was to make the population of Ijesaland heterogenous. The kingdom consisted of peoples from neighbouring and distant parts of the Yoruba country and from non-Yoruba speaking countries. This process was to be intensified by the 19th century wars, and had adverse effect on both the population and demography of Ijesa Kingdom.

**RELATIONS WITH ILE-IFE**

Among the Ijesas, Ile-Ife is held in high esteem since they derived their ruling family from the place. They believed that they belong to Ife ancestry and, this belief became an important factor in their relations with other kingdoms. They tended to judge the similarities of their culture with others in terms of their connection with Oduduwa dynasty at Ile-Ife.

Ijesa kingdom probably obtained her supplies of various bronze and other valuable objects and elaborate numerous instruments that symbolized wealth and political office in Ile-Ife. It is to be expected that Ijesa Kingdom maintained close artistic contact with the ancient town over the centuries.

**RELATIONS WITH AKURE**

Ijesa traditions believe in the existence of blood relationship between it and Akure. It was related that the first Deji of Akure was a son of Oba Atakunmosa of Ilesa3. This belief in blood relationship between Ijesa and Akure kingdoms constituted an important factor in their dealings with each other.

Ijesa traditions also claim the existence of blood relationships with Ikole, Omuo and Oye through an unnamed woman who eventually became the mother of the Owa Atakunmosa4.

Ijesa also shares a common type of political organization with Ekiti. For example, Johnson in his ‘History of the Yorubas’ said that, the term ‘Owa’ for king, was typical of Ekiti and Ijesa. It was ‘a generic term among them’.

Ijesa traditions also mention one man called Baba Arake, the founder of an Ijesa town called Igangan, who on his return from a journey to unnamed distant places, instituted Ejemu chieftaincy title in Igangan5.

**RELATIONS WITH OYO**

Ijesa Kingdom maintained marriage ties with Oyo Kingdom. Traditions claim that the mother of the Oba Owanise of Ijesa was the oldest daughter of the Alafin Aganyin of Oyo. This arrangement might obviously be the desire of the Alafin to preserve peace on the frontier between the Oyo and Ijesa Kingdoms and secondly, to establish a powerful Pro/Oyo party amenable to Oyo’s interests in the new town.

Traditions also spoke of a time when Igbajo people took tributes to the Owa of Ijesa. According to traditions, this was not as a result of conquest but because an Igbajo prince had once become the Owa of Ijesa, the royal families of Ilesa and Igbajo being in the earliest times of one and the same stock. Of the old Ijesa Kingdoms, only Igbajo which was situated far away on the more distant thickly forested hills of Northern Ijesa managed to retain its independence.

**RELATIONS WITH BENIN KINGDOM**

Ijesa Kingdom shares a common dynasty with Benin Kingdom. The two having descended from Oduduwa who was the father and progenitor of the Yorubas. Benin traditions spoke of one Prince Oranmiyan who was sent to Benin by his father. Instead of becoming king, he caused his son to be “Oba Ado” in his stead. Traditions mentioned Olofin-Aiye who was the father of all crown Kings, among whom were Owa of Ijesa and Oba of Benin.

Ijesa traditions mentioned a particular period when Owa Atakunmosa was dethroned and banished by his people because he was highhanded and oppressive. Owa Atakunmosa sought refuge with Oba Ehengbuda of Benin in about the late 16th century. Owa Atakunmosa was warmly received by his host. Oba of Benin had to intervene in the matter by sending for Ijesa elders at home. When they came, Oba of Benin was able to appease and persuade them to allow their Owa back.

When Owa was about to depart, he received a present from his host in form of neck beads, as worn by Benin Chiefs6. Owa was nicknamed ‘Orun Aja’ by his subjects as a result of the use, when he arrived back home. The use of neck beads was later to be adopted by all Ijesa chiefs and subsequent Owas.

**TRADE RELATIONS BETWEEN IJESA AND OTHER KINGDOMS**

Trade had developed from the dawn of Ijesa history to 19th century and after. This interstate trade, apart from its profit motive, developed in order to get rid of surplus products and obtain those that were needed but not produced in the kingdom. The result was the development of daily and periodic markets which had since then become an important feature of the economic organization of Ijesa.

Ijesa took part in exporting trade involving both agricultural and industrial product to neighbouring kingdom such as Nupe and Benin in exchange for some of their own goods as well as goods imported from distant places like North Africa and Europe. This trade began long before the advent of colonial rule. The operation involved the existence of friendly relations among those kingdoms involved in the trade. Besides, there should be adequate guarantee for the protection of traders along all the trade routes.

Process of exchange was very cumbersome. It was based on the barter system. It lacked any atom of sophistication in modern economic context. With the development of market oriented economy which involved greater number of people and exchange of greater number of food items, trade contacts became intensified. The result was the growth of more market centres which ushered in the era of the use of widely acceptable currency, measurement and pricing conventions7.

Ijesaland was well placed in the dyeing industry. Hence, it traded with Igbomina country which was noted for extensive cultivation of cotton and a large-scale cloth weaving. Ijesa traders would visit Ila markets to buy cotton, dyestuff and cloth8.

Ijesa was also noted to be visiting Egga a Nupe town which was reputed for being a cloth manufacturing centre. A large number of traders from Ijesa Kingdom visited this market regularly, and by the mid-19thC, they were found freely transacting business with their Hausa, Fulani and Igala counterparts. The importance of this trade, lies in the fact that, the route involved was one of the five major trade routes through hinterland regions. This was “a road from Atijere to Ilebu, Ondo, Ilesa, Ilorin and Kabba”9. Therefore, one can rightly say that Ijesaland was connected with the major centres of trade both in the North and South.

The geographical location of Ijesaland, being in the forest regions favoured the production of considerable amount of indigenous Kolanuts which was regarded to be of great economic and ceremonial value. As Clarke put it, Kolanuts are “necessary tokens of hospitality and kindness”. He added, “an important and profitable trade is carried on in the sale of Kola nuts”10. Ijesa traders would carry Kolanuts to Osogbo or Ila markets and bring back cloths from either place.

Camwood was a product of the forest land regions of which Ijesaland is one. The bulk of this trade was said to be under the control of Benin Kingdom since 16th century. This particular trade involved the Ijesa, Ekiti and Akoko traders and, went as far as to Oyo and back to Benin. Equally, Benin traders would bring corals, European cloths, cowries shells, European iron implement and at a later date, gun and gun-powder.

Ijesa took part in the salt trade which was another item of the long distance trade between the North and the South. Salt was manufactured from sea water by peoples from the lower Niger Delta, the Benin, Itsekiri, Ijaw and Ilajes. It was an old industry and from here, Yoruba countries obtained their salt supplies long before the introduction of European salt in the late 15th century11. Ibadan served as a large salt market and supplied many surrounding towns.

Ijesa traders also took part in the periodic markets. Here, neighbouring and far distant communities met. These markets were usually entrepots of local as well as long distance traders. Among such leading markets were Oke-Bode, Osogbo, Owo, Akure, Ikare, Ado, Otun, Egosi and Apomu. In 1857 when Clarke visited Oke-Bode, he noted “at this place every fifth day are collected together several thousand people from all the surrounding country with their various articles of exchange, and trading is carried on to such an extent in goods-manufactures and provisions that quite astonish one not acquainted with the commercial spirit of this interior country. Here may be seen the representatives of nearly all the Yoruba – Egba, Ilorin, Ijesa, Ogbomoso and Ife – all mingling together in harmony and peace with their various wares and merchandise……………. This is a continual recurrence every fifth day”.

Such a trade of inter-communication, must necessarily engage a considerable number of people and tend to favour friendly and peaceful relations.

In Ijesa Kingdom, there was in operation several little markets where traders from neighbouring states met to exchange their wares. In time of peace when traders were free, such traders were even allotted stalls and such stalls were named after the traders’ ethnic groups. In 1857, Clarke found one of such markets called ‘Oyo market’. As he put it, “a place where Yoruba traders exchange their goods and merchandise for those of Ijesa”12.

It is interesting to note that, inspite of constant hostilities, facility for trade was assured. Trade was buoyant despite the fact that civilized modes of transportation was absent and all traders had to carry their articles ‘upon their heads’ from one place to another.

External trade contributed immensely to the emergence and growth of urban centres. Many urban centres developed as offshoots of important ancient trade routes. “Igbara-Oke grew from or near the spot where Akure, Ijesa and Ogotun traders used to meet for trade”13.

As a result of the participation of Ijesa in the important local and long distance trade routes, the Kingdom became wealthy and powerful. Coupled with a buoyant agriculture, it provided a sound economy which survived the crisis of the 19th century.

**DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH OTHER KINGDOMS**

The nature of diplomatic system in Ijesa Kingdom was not different from what was operating in other parts of Yoruba Kingdoms. Like others, Ijesa Kingdom was an independent territorial entity. It exercised full right of sovereignty and recognized by other states. Yet, it cherished the idea of maintaining diplomatic relations with her neighbours by sending to them emissaries whenever the need arose.

State emissaries were drawn from among the royal servants called “Emese”. These states emissaries ‘Iko Owa’ shuttles here and there carrying out the ‘King’s mission’. These ‘Iko Owa’ carried beaded baton ‘Opa Ileke’ which was the symbol of authority from Owa.

Ijesa traditions mentioned the contributions made in terms of labour and materials by Ado, Ara, Ijero and Igbajo when the Owa Bilaro was building the fortification works around Ilesa about the 17th century sent for a loan of 200 cutlasses and 200 axes from Owa of Ijesa Kingdom and some others with a view to carrying out a defensive work around Akure.

There was also a period when the Owa of Ijesa was said to have sent conventional gifts and messages to the Alafin of Oyo on the occasion of Bere festivals celebration in Oyo town. These were common practices among the Yorubas generally. They involved exchange of greetings and courtesies and the sending of gifts, which were usually done on very important occasions14. Such practices tended to sustain the solidarity existing at various times between Ijesa and other Kingdoms.

**POLITICS AND MILITARISM**

Ijesas were brave and courageous. They had their most hated enemies in the people of Nupe and Ibadan. These were not their only powerful and ambitious neighbours. To the East lay the Kingdom of Benin.