



# Dutsinma Historical Review

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## CONSTITUTIONAL EXPERIMENTATIONS AND THE MILITARY FACTOR IN THE 19TH CENTURY YORUBA POWER POLITICS

*Aboyeji, Adeniyi Justus and Aboyeji, Oyeniyi Solomon*

### Abstract

This thrust of this paper bothers on the inherent constitutional experimentations and the military factor observable in the Yoruba power politics during the revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup> century. The paper adopts the historical research method, which employs the use of available primary and secondary sources of historical analysis. Findings in this study show that evidences abound on the emergence of new forms of political organisations throughout Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Ijaye under Kurunmi, Ibadan under Basorun Oluyole, Oyo under Alaafin Atiba, Ekiti (-parapo) under Prince Fabunmi and Ogedengbe, Egba, Abeokuta under Sodeke, Oke-Odan and Iwo under Balogun Ali, among others, provide us with clear examples of such experiments in political engineering. This was in the general spirit of the constitutional experimentations that pervaded the political space during that turbulent century. The paper concludes that although the 19th century was indeed an epoch of cataclysmic changes not only in the area around the Niger that came to be known as Nigeria but the West African sub-region in general, by and large, Yorubaland during the 19th century was particularly bedevilled by three distinct upheavals from three distinct quarters. The militarisation of politics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as against the politicisation of the military in the 20<sup>th</sup> century speaks of the political dynamism within the same political space.

**Keywords:** Yorubaland, Constitutional experimentation, Political organisation, Military Factor

**Aboyeji, Adeniyi Justus, PhD,** Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.

**Aboyeji, Oyeniyi Solomon, PhD,** Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Ilorin, Ilorin, Nigeria.



### Introduction

What later became known as Nigeria comprised of separate and independent entities that flourished in their different kingdoms and empires. These numerous states and nationalities which were categorised either as mega/centralised or 'mini'/non-centralised states were administered under different principalities. However, inter-group interactions with one another existed as a result of economic factors such as commercial (trade) contact, trade routes and traders, specialisation in craft; social factors such as inter-marriages, festivals, religious and cultural exchanges, migration, political factors such as wars and diplomacies, among several others.

It however needs be observed that the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a turning point, not only in Nigerian history, but also West African history at large. A few of such instances would suffice as we consider the cataclysmic changes this revolutionary century came along with.

One, generally speaking, the 19<sup>th</sup> century was a very important period because it was an age of radical change from the Middle Age of West African history (1000-1800 AD) to the modern. As this incorporates Nigeria, the changes marked the beginning of a new age quite different from that of the pre-1800. The period thus, saw great changes which had far-reaching effects on the religious, social, cultural, economic and political life of the peoples of the region.

Two, there was also religious renaissance, that is, revival of Islam in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century with the Uthman dan Fodio led jihad in Sokoto and the re-introduction of Christianity, especially in the forest lands as from the 1840s. Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Islamic religion had fallen into decline. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century however, Islam was re-established as a state religion through a series of revolutions in several states which began in Sokoto. European missionaries also successfully re-introduced Christianity which began in Yorubaland and consequently supplanted indigenous African religion.

Three, prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slave trade had dominated the coastal trade between the peoples of the region and Europe. Its adverse effects led to enormous demographic population loss, especially of young able-bodied men and women; retardation of progress caused by the wars fought as well as its widespread demoralisation. The 19<sup>th</sup> century however, witnessed the suppression and eventual abolition of slave trade and its replacement with 'legitimate' trade. Some European states notably Britain, took steps to bring about the suppression of the evil trade and traffic in human 'merchandise' and replace it with 'legitimate' trade in the agricultural and forest products

of Nigerian societies such as palm oil, gum, timber, cocoa, among others. The end of the slave trade meant an end to the wars and the miseries they brought as well as the end to other evil effects of the trade.

Four, there was also the Hinterland Movement (encroachment). Before the 1800s, European traders generally remained on the coast and did not venture to penetrate the hinterland to live or trade. Hence, no important changes were brought or caused by them in the social and cultural life of the people. However, the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the exploration of the interior of West Africa by the Europeans. European missionaries and traders who closely followed the explorers were swift and skilful to begin the spread of European religious, cultural and economic ideas among the peoples, which brought about a sharp revolutionary turn-around on the land and people(s).

Lastly, the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the beginning of European imperialism in Africa. They (European explorers, traders and missionaries) came to Nigeria and West Africa at large, not only to trade but to rule and so the entire West African states lost their independence as the continent was partitioned following the 1884/1885 Berlin West African Conference. This became possible through the use of 'protection' treaties and conquest.

These identified important developments and changes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century ultimately culminated in the partitioning of West Africa among the European powers and brought the disparate communities in the Nigerian region, in a marriage of split-identities, into a nation state.

### Yoruba's Clamour for Change in a Cataclysmic Century

The Yorùbás, who today, are undoubtedly the most populous cultural identity in the southern Nigeria, belong to the *Kwa* family within the Niger-Congo phylum of African languages.<sup>1</sup> They are mainly found in the Old Western Nigeria and modern Nigerian states acronymed as the LOOOOE states: Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ogun, Ondo and Ekiti according to Omofoyewa. This is beside some groups within Nigeria that are described as 'excised Yoruba sub-groups' such as parts of Kwara (Igbomina, Ibolo, Ekiti-Kwara, Ilorin-Yoruba, etc.) and some parts of Kogi and Edo states, (among the Ookun, Owe, Yagba and Oworo people). There are also excised Yoruba groups outside Nigeria, in the south-eastern part of the Republic of Benin (formerly Dahomey) and Togo. Yorùbá communities are also reportedly found in other West African countries like Sierra Leone and Ghana.<sup>2</sup>



Although legendarily believed to be descendants of Oduduwa, the different Yorùbá groups during the revolutionary 19<sup>th</sup> century seemed bored with the established order and apparently wanted a departure from the pre-existing tradition. Aboyeji<sup>3</sup> has traced the peregrination of the Yorùbá into civil dissection to the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the diverse Yorùbá groups such as the Ìyí, Egba, Ondo, Ij<sup>1</sup>bu, Igbomina, If<sup>1</sup>, Ij<sup>1</sup>sa and Ekiti, among others, apparently rebuffed the eponymous 'Yorùbá' appellation, to which they all answered. Instead, they began to see themselves as distinct tribes; as 'states' within a 'nation'. It was this that resulted into a series of Constitutional experimentations which brought some level of distinctiveness among the different Yorùbá groups.

Indeed, the history of Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century could perhaps, at best, be summarised as the history of the Oyo Empire and the aftermath its collapse left the entire Yorubaland to grapple with, all through the rest of the century. It could indeed be rightly argued that Oyo was the largest West African empire to ever exist in present day Yorubaland as well as the most important and authoritative of all the early Yoruba principalities. As Akintoye observed, from the very first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "...the traditional system of order in Yorubaland was disrupted by the collapse of the Oyo empire...."<sup>4</sup> The fall of Oyo left a power vacuum, the attempt to fill which made the Yoruba country the scene of a fratricidal war, which lasted over seventy years.<sup>5</sup> With the fall of the Oyo empire and monarchy, most Yoruba kingdoms became involved in active and sporadic constitutional reappraisals and a great deal of political upheaval which lasted the whole of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

#### Formation of New Settlements

One of such lasting effects of the collapse of the Oyo empire and monarchy was that on the demographic effect and statistical study of human population. Beside the mass loss of lives and properties, the inhabitants of the vast/fallen empire had to flee for their lives in search for safety and security. This greatly increased the populations of some of the existing Yoruba settlements like Ogbomoso, Owu, Osogbo and Ife. However, rather than settle in any of the already existing towns, some of the fleeing folks chose to gather under notable military leaders and founded new Yoruba towns and settlements. Thus, new edifices rose on the ancient ruins.<sup>7</sup> As has been rightly noted, by 1800, some of the most important Yoruba towns of today like Ibadan and Abeokuta did not exist. Osogbo was an Ijesa town; Ikire, Gbogan and others

were Ife; all these are now Oyo towns.<sup>8</sup> Atiba, son of Alaafin Abiodun founded the New Oyo in 1837 after the abandonment of the Old Oyo. Ijaye was founded by Kurunmi; Abeokuta by Sodeke in 1830, Ibadan by Basorun Oluyole in the 1820s. Others included Sagamu and Modakeke.

#### An Overview of the Military Factor in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba Power Politics

The military men (war chiefs) had established themselves as a significant, even controversial factor in political changes and development in Africa since they ventured into the politics of several contemporary African states. The process of their acquisition of political power, approach to government and the result of their interference in the political and economic processes of the various states are of great interest here. Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century escalation of military intervention in politics, writers have often overlooked the existence of and the part played by the military in some societies.<sup>9</sup>

The dramatic and revolutionary changes of the pre-colonial history of Africa that took place in the political system of the various states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been noted by several historians, yet there have been a general underestimation of the role of the war-chiefs in precipitating and actively participating in these changes. The few who do seem to be more preoccupied with the warfare and diplomacy conducted during the era than the political set up established and held unto by this new class of military-politicians.

As such, military rule was not the usual form that government took in Yorubaland before the 19<sup>th</sup> century. An attempt to categorise the various Yoruba states and kingdoms by their political system should therefore be made. Thus, in their typologies, Oyo was a fairly decentralised unitary state. It would be clearly dangerous to assume that the conditions of the colonial period or even of New Oyo in pre-colonial times can be safely extrapolated back into the 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, oral narratives explicitly or indirectly attest to some of the changes which have taken place.<sup>10</sup> Egba was a Confederacy; Ife a fully centralised state; Ekiti an agglomeration of separate independent kingdoms; and Awori a highly decentralised group, the highest level of political organisation among them being the village. It was further asserted that in all these states, civilians, and not the military, held the reins of power before the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>11</sup> What then brought the military into the administration of these states in the 19<sup>th</sup> century?



Unlike in the contemporary age when the military is heralded into power by a coup d'état, military intervention in the politics of the 19th century Yorubaland was a response to the disturbed political situation and was a natural outgrowth of the challenges of the various wars. The military governments were said to be contingency political arrangements designed to meet the demands of the precarious century.<sup>12</sup> That is to say that the military came in to fill the political power vacuum and disorder that followed the fall of the Oyo Empire.

Another facet of the readiness of the new political order was the widespread experimentation with new political constitutions. Just as Western Democracy is now the sanctified order of governance by our contemporary Capitalist-driven world, for practically all Yoruba by 1800, the monarchy was the sanctified order of the society, and even until the end of the 19th century, there were many Yoruba who still regarded as bastards, communities without crowned kings. During the century however, with old communities breaking up and new ones emerging to meet the challenges of new conditions, the Yorubas showed much political creativeness with the resulting constitutional experimentation<sup>13</sup> exemplified in their evolution of new forms of political organisations.

As at 1800, the Yoruba showed common cultural, religious and political institutions. The kingdom was the unit of political power. However, with the final collapse of the Old Oyo Empire, most Yoruba kingdoms became involved in rigorous constitutional re-appraisals. It is significant that Ibadan and Ijaye, the two towns whose new leaders and inhabitants were predominantly Oyo elements rejected the monarchical forms of government in all ramifications. The Ibadan particularly prided itself as a group that had nothing but contempt for crowns. The Egba decided on a federal type of constitution, in which kings were, though, recognised, but authority was decentralised. However, concurrently with these, the traditional systems were being tenaciously practiced, notably by Ife and Ijebu. One of the very many issues implicit in the Yoruba wars of the 19th century was, thus, the form of government that was suitable for holding the Yoruba together.<sup>14</sup>

### Ijaye

At Ijaye, a military autocracy was established around the person of Kurunmi. Ijaye has been acclaimed the first to emerge as a major military power. It was said that the flower of the Old Oyo army settled at Ijaye, and Kurunmi in a brutal rise to the top succeeded in imposing his personal rule and discipline as well as political whims and military

caprices over the whole town.<sup>15</sup> Kurunmi usurped all powers be they civil, military and religious. He was said to be a bloodthirsty tyrant who put to death all the chiefs rising into power and considered as potential threats to his inordinate political ambition and overbearing influence. Thus, all powers centred on him and resided in his family. In fact, he was considered to have been more dreaded at Ijaye than even the gods of the land.<sup>16</sup>

The way Kurunmi established his dictatorship over Ijaye reminds us of the methods employed by some autocratic military leaders in Africa. Ijaye, originally an Egba agricultural settlement, was peaceful before Dado and his warriors dispersed the settlement earlier in the 1830s. On Dado's invitation, Kurunmi settled in Ijaye and quickly set himself towards the task of displacing the former. He plotted the expulsion and later the assassination of Dado, and even annihilated or expelled other rival warriors in Ijaye. It was said that between 1831 and 1844, Kurunmi had consolidated himself in Ijaye. Consequently, the remaining chiefs were either his friends (those who had attached themselves to his fortune), his slaves (who had been raised to positions of prominence) or others too weak to resist his might, and had thus become subservient to his political whims and economic caprices. Hence, instead of being his political advisers, Kurunmi's chiefs were actually nothing but mere recipients to his orders.<sup>17</sup>

According to the conditional promise at the Eleduwe War by Prince Atiba, the Are-ona-kakanfo or Yoruba Field Marshall title was conferred upon Kurunmi of Ijaye. He was undoubtedly the greatest Yoruba General and tactician of the day throughout the Yoruba country. He was a great friend of the Alaafin (Atiba of New Oyo), who was said to have, during his term in office, shielded the sovereign against the encroachment on the prerogatives of his Ibadan nephew (Oluyole) who was by no means loyal to the king.<sup>18</sup> Thus, the system of government established at Ijaye has been variously described by scholars all, however, pointing to a single fact of a common political ideology: *militocracy*,<sup>19</sup> *military dictatorship*<sup>20</sup> and *military autocracy*.<sup>21</sup>

### Ibadan

In Ibadan, a military bureaucratic system of government emerged where access to office and promotion within the chieftaincy hierarchies was largely based on qualities of leadership shown especially in wars irrespective of ethnic status or background. Consequently, bands of warriors were attracted to Ibadan from all over Yorubaland thus, causing an influx of talented folks to Ibadan to learn the art of



professional warfare and seek a career in militarism. Ultimately, therefore, Ibadan's system proved superior to that of Ijaye. Ibadan, therefore grew rapidly as a major city, geared to war and further expansion. By 1854, Ife Kingdom as a whole was said to have become a vassal under Ibadan;<sup>22</sup> and by 1875, Ibadan was master of all the Ijesa, Ekiti, Akoko and most of Igbomina. It had also by then, elaborated the Ajele system of provincial administration.<sup>23</sup> Merit became emphasised and rewarded, and no hereditary titles were reserved or allowed.

Oluyole of Ibadan had received the conferment of the title of *Ibasorun* which was conditionally promised him at the Eleduwe war. His mother was Agborin, daughter of King Abiodun; his father Olokuoye and so, he was the Alaafin's (Atiba) nephew. He was the next man to the king and the chief of the seven principal councillors of state comprising the Oyo-mesi.<sup>24</sup> It thus came to pass that the two most distinguished titles in New Oyo, next to the sovereign, were held by the chiefs of the two largest towns in the South, viz that of *Basorun*, the head of all civil affairs, and that of *Kakanfo*, the head of the military department, both of them being relations of the Alaafin.

According to Falola and Oguntomisin, the military Republic in Ibadan was characterised by four salient factors: one, leadership was collective; two, appointment of chiefs was no longer hereditary; three, new titles were always created to reward bravery; and four, intense and dangerous rivalry for power, which resulted in the expulsion, destruction, elimination and assassination of great warriors by their over-ambitious or jealous rivals.<sup>25</sup>

### Oyo

Prince Atiba was the son of *Alaafin* Abiodun. He was said to have grown up as a reckless and wild lad, who rose to popularity by committing acts of violence and extortion with impunity. While at Ago-Oja, he plotted to bring about the downfall of the King by buying the support of the town's two most powerful war-chiefs left in the land; viz. Kurunmi and Oluyole,<sup>26</sup> by promising them compensations in form of title offices in his government.

Oyo was said to have run a predominantly political idea which was a kind of constitutional monarchy in which the king had wide powers of life and death, yet those powers were checked and balanced by the powers of the King-makers (i.e. Oyo-mesi) and the religious leaders.<sup>27</sup> The Oyo constitution made provision for an Oba (Alaafin) and a council of state of non-royal chiefs (Oyo-mesi) headed by the

*Ibasorun*, thus, the Alaafin's unquestionable power was balanceably checked by the states council. Although in theory, all decisions rested with the Alaafin but in practice, he was expected to take account of the views of the Oyo-mesi.<sup>28</sup>

### Ekiti (-parapo)

Although some have chosen to see the entire 19<sup>th</sup> century wars as one continuous episode, the wars may only, perhaps at best, be treated as a series of battles in a protracted war. For example, not less than eleven battles were fought between the 1826 and 1840. The first three were the *Ogele*, *Mugba-Mugba* and *Kanla* Battles; the *Pole* (7<sup>th</sup>) *Otefon*, *Eleduwe* and finally the *Osogbo* War in 1840.<sup>29</sup> Ibadan's oppressive and exploitative authority led to revolts against her by her subjects, aimed at overthrowing Ibadan's hegemony in their areas.

The Ekiti-Parapo/Kiriji War, otherwise known as the 16 Years War was a necessary phenomenon to both sides. Aboyeji maintained that for Ibadan, it could be said to be a *war of containment* – a war to preserve all the gains made since 1840 for Yorubaland; or for some, to preserve Ibadan's dominion. For the allies, it could be referred to as a *war of independence*, fought by all those towns either subject to Ibadan or jealous of its power or sceptically fearful of its domination, all in a bid to either *regain* or *retain* their independence–i.e. Ekiti, Ijesa, Akoko, Igbomina (later Egba, Ijebu, Ife, and Ilorin).<sup>30</sup> The Ijesa and Ekiti-parapo descended on Igbajo due to what they considered a treason by Igbajo, who, although a collection of Yoruba peoples, was on Ijesaland, and yet refused to join the Ekiti Confederacy but rather aligned with the Ibadan. Igbajo became the major war theatre. The Ibadan, therefore, went to the aid of Igbajo and the Ijesa army was routed. The confederates, also set out, in a rather retaliatory move, to destroy the Ibadan *Ajele* in their countries.<sup>31</sup>

The Ekitiparapo represented the institution of new loyalties transcending the confines of the old Kingdoms or sub-ethnic divisions. On their parts, the Ijesa and Ekiti, joined by the Igbomina and Akoko people who had also been conquered by Ibadan formed a grand alliance/confederacy called Ekiti-parapo Confederacy in 1878 under the leadership of one Prince Fabunmi (Imesi), Faboro (Ido), Olugbosu (Oye), Arimoro, Ogundele, Obe and Ogedengbe (Ilesa) and Prince Adeyale (Ila) with a view to putting an end to the uncontrolled Ibadan imperial activities, once and for all.<sup>32</sup> Ogedengbe was at a point the *primus inter pares* Generalissimo of the Ekiti-parapo war chiefs. The Confederacy was said to have invited Ogedengbe to come over to



lead them who turned it down for an earlier oath he had sworn with the Ekiti. Meanwhile, Fabunmi took the lead. The headquarters of the confederacy was initially the palace of the Oore at Otun-Ekiti but later shifted to Imesi-Igbodo.

The Ijesa, Ekiti, Efon, Akoko, Igbomina came together in 1878, under the leadership of Prince Fabunmi, a native of the Ekiti town of Imesi-Igbodo (Oke-Mesi) to form the grand alliance which they termed "Ekitiparapo" (i.e. Ekiti confederation). In 1882, Ife also revolted and thus joined the Confederacy. They raised a formidable army and were determined not only to liberate themselves of Ibadan's exploitation and suzerainty, but also to overrun the Oyo tribes right on the Ibadan farms at the River Oba.<sup>33</sup> The Igbomina and Ekiti joined with the aim of utilising the assistance of other members to rid themselves off Ilorin's hegemony and exploitation.

In the last years of its existence, the more radical and forward-looking of its men went so far as to suggest either the transformation of the Confederacy into a kingdom or the transplantation of all towns comprising it into a single vast metropolis under the military rulers of that epoch.<sup>34</sup> Those who championed such ideas were men who had attained to a state of mind that could gladly welcome the fusion of their kingdoms or subethnic groups to institute a new order of society.

#### **Egba, Abeokuta and Oke Odan**

Egba is unanimously viewed as a Republic. A constitution akin to that of Egba was adopted at Abeokuta, which was gradually evolving a new political system with three important claimants to power within the town. This constitutional development was experimented under Sodeke, the hero who led the Egba to Abeokuta. Although Sodeke tried to impose his personal rule on the town, the constitutional arrangement erupted after his death in 1845. The town eventually evolved a delicately balanced constitution in which the relative claim of all the competing groups were accommodated. In Abeokuta and Oke-Odan, "military federalism" was practiced which reflects the contemporary federal arrangements in Nigeria where the "Federal Character" is emphasised in appointments. Thus, Sodeke from Iporo township of Egba Ake assumed the title of Balogun and head of the central or all Egba. Olorogun Lumloye from Ilugun in Egba Oke Odan was appointed as the Otun Balogun while the Ogbo of Egba Gbagura was appointed the Osi Balogun.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Iwo and Others**

In other Yoruba states and kingdoms, the success of the war-chiefs depended on local factors. Generally, the coup d'état did not succeed. For instance, in Iwo, Balogun Ali's plot to oust Oluwo Lamuye was abortive and the consequences constituted a lesson for would-be plotters. Firstly, Ali was banished to Ibadan; secondly, Oluwo Lamuye became as autocratic as Kurunmi of Ijaye. Generally, therefore, the war-chiefs made significant impact in the evolution of new forms of administration in Yorubaland in this period.<sup>36</sup>

#### **Deviations**

It should be noted that none of these forms of government survived the century without modification.<sup>37</sup> In their view, the insecurity to life and property that prevailed in the 19th century was responsible for the emergence of military administration in some Yoruba city-states and the general dominant role war-chiefs played in Yorubaland. With peace at hand, these systems had to be modified, and civilian rulers were created to replace the war-chiefs in influence and precedence. Besides, certain attempts were made by some war-chiefs to deviate from the system being described.

This was so in the case of Ibadan. It was said that Basorun Oluyole and Aare Latosa both had autocratic tendencies. There was also the phenomenon of class formation and re-alignments in the new military societies. It was made obvious by Falola and Oguntomisin that powerful war-lords appropriated the wealth of the societies, and sometimes arrogated to themselves the religious, military, political and economic powers in their states.<sup>38</sup>

A significant effect of the Yoruba situation in the 19th century was the rise of new leaders, the warlords. Suffice it to say here that in the matter of their rise to leadership and in the pattern which they provided, these men, in their iconoclasm represented a departure from Yoruba tradition. Moreover, they constituted a very powerful challenge to the traditional elite. It was they rather than the civilians who provided the lead for the movement of change in Yorubaland during that cataclysmic century. However, every Yoruba land beside Ibadan, tried to ensure some legitimacy for kingship. They at least, maintained a cultural and political continuity with the past.

With the establishment of British rule over Yorubaland after 1893, the power of the new elite was destroyed while the power of the old was bolstered up, as one of the first actions of the British was to arrest some of the major war-chiefs and break up their followers. Also with



- <sup>21</sup> Falola and Oguntomisin, "The Military in 19th Century Yoruba Politics..."
- <sup>22</sup> Ajayi, J.F.A. and Akintoye, S. A. "Yorubaland in the 19th Century...", 287.
- <sup>23</sup> Awe, B. "The Ajele System: A Study of Ibadan Imperialism in the 19th Century" *JHSN*, Vol. III, No. 1, 1964.
- <sup>24</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba...*, pp. 274-278. However, others have argued against Johnson's book, one of which was that the Oyo Mesi were much more than he has given.
- <sup>25</sup> Falola and Oguntomisin, "The Military in 19th Century Yoruba Politics...", 161-164.
- <sup>26</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba...*
- <sup>27</sup> Aboyeji, A. J. "A Study of Igbomina Economy in the Colonial Era, C. 1897 to 1960" Master's Dissertation, Department of History, University of Ilorin, August 2004.
- <sup>28</sup> Law, R.C.C. "The Constitutional Troubles of Oyo in the 18th Century...", pp. 25-44.
- <sup>29</sup> Akinjogbin, I. A "The Causes of the 19<sup>th</sup> C Yoruba Century Wars..." 1998 pp. 140-141.
- <sup>30</sup> Aboyeji, A. J. "Foreign Influence on Igbomina, C. 1750-1900" Unpublished PhD Thesis, Department of History and International Studies, University of Ilorin, March, 2015, pp.128-129.
- <sup>31</sup> Aboyeji, A. J. "Foreign Influence on Igbomina, C. 1750-1900...", pp.128-129.
- <sup>32</sup> Gege, R.O. "The Impact of the 19<sup>th</sup> C Yoruba Wars on Isinland", Unpublished B.A. Dissertation, University of Ilorin, June, 1987, p. 66.
- <sup>33</sup> Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba...*, pp. 439-440.
- <sup>34</sup> Ajayi, J.F.A. and Akintoye, S. A. "Yorubaland in the 19th Century...", 300.
- <sup>35</sup> Falola and Oguntomisin, "The Military in 19th Century Yoruba Politics..."
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>37</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>39</sup> Ajayi, J.F.A. and Akintoye, S. A. "Yorubaland in the 19th Century...", 301-302.

## CORRUPTION AND STEEL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF THE AJAOKUTA STEEL PROJECT

Chukwuma Osakwe and Enesi Prince Habib

### Abstract

Corruption is an act which deviates from the established or formal rule of conduct governing actions of a person in a position of public or private authority which, most of the time, is of personal or selfish motives. Corruption is a pandemic and in Nigeria it has eaten into the fabric of society and, therefore, a bane to economic development. Arguably, the most glaring example of corruption in Nigeria since independence has been the Ajaokuta steel project. The project was established in 1979 by Decree 60 of the Federal Military Government which took over the responsibility of constructing, erecting and operating the Ajaokuta Steel Project from the Nigerian Steel Development Authority. Ever since, however, this project has not returned value to the government. At best, it has been a financial drain on the nation from its inception in 1979. This paper is an attempt to examine the various corrupt practices that account for the steel project being labeled a 'white elephant' project. It argues that corruption in addition to politics, mismanagement or international conspiracy account for the failure of the Steel Project and also led to financial loss to the nation. The paper adopts the thematic approach to historical reconstruction making use of primary and secondary sources.

### Introduction

The level of corruption in the country is said to have worsened political, social and macroeconomic indicators and, indeed, the poverty alleviation programme of the Nigerian government. Virtually all the sectors of the Nigerian economy; be political, economic, security, education and other social service sectors are badly affected with corruption on daily basis if not on hourly basis. Although, corruption

Chukwuma Osakwe, PhD, Department of History and War Studies, Nigerian Defence Academy, Kaduna.

Enesi Prince Habib, PhD, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Federal University of Kashere, Gombe State.