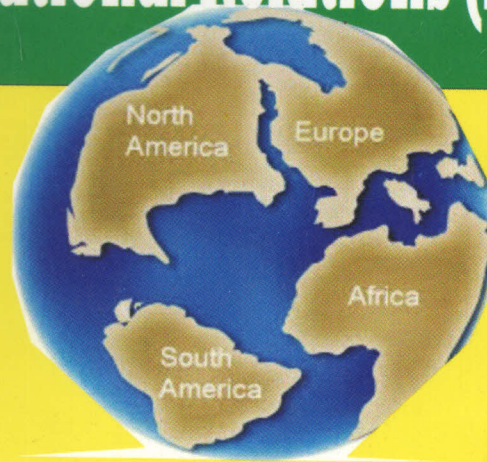




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GUILD SYSTEM IN THE ECONOMY OF ILORIN EMIRATE (NORTHERN NIGERIA): A CASE STUDY OF INDIGENOUS CRAFTS BEFORE 1960

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Abstract

The guilds system is an occupational based economic practice for the promotion of enterprise. It symbolized an empowerment or credit scheme for the members of the merchant class. For Ilorin Emirate, the guild system was a pre-colonial economic system that was sustained up to the colonial era and beyond. By using relevant source materials, the study focuses on indigenous crafts in colonial Ilorin Province. The trust of our exercise therefore is to critically analyze these traditional guild systems with a view to bringing it into limelight, since the modern industries had failed to provide employment for the hundreds of thousands of graduates coming out of our schools. In view of this, the study concludes that the various old guilds need to be encouraged and developed to perform the necessary role of jointly training and employing our young school leavers.

Keywords: Guild, Economy, Ilorin, Indigenous, Development

Introduction

The catastrophes of the 18th and 19th centuries that engulfed most of the West African Kingdoms turned the whole of Yoruba land into a theatre of war which led to the collapse of Oyo Alafinate and emergence of highly centralized and powerful states like Ibadan, Ijaiye and Ilorin among others in the early 19th Century (Law, 1977). These new states contributed to the socio-economic and political development of what later became western and northern regions of the area now known as Nigeria which gained independence in 1960. Among these developments was the emergence of merchant-class professional trades. These occupational groupings and trading association which were sometimes identified as the Guild System operated within and outside the context of these new powerful settlements.

The professional guilds in pre-colonial Ilorin varied and were organized according to occupation which included craft guilds like weaving, tinsmithing, blacksmithing, goldsmithing, spinning, photography, carpentry,

bricklaying and bakery among others. These guilds initially operated within the context of household. Some families or compound specialized in various aspects of production. The skills were later inherited by the descendants of work-men and women. In recent times however, this system has changed; the old guilds have been transformed into modern ones. Imported tools and machines now replaced the locally obtained materials. The consequence of this has been the neglect of the old guilds as backward crafts, an occupation reserved for the old and uneducated.

Origin of Ilorin Emirate

Ilorin came into lime light out of the activities of Afonja, the then Are Ona kakanfo of the old Oyo kingdom who decided to live in Ilorin. With Afonja in Ilorin, many people were attracted to settle there. Most of the people were skilled men and women from various occupational and religious background among whom included Malam al- Salih, an itinerant preacher who was invited by Afonja to come to his aid to fight his master, the Alafin. By the time of the death of Mallam al-Salih in 1823, the Muslims in Ilorin had fully integrated and consolidated their position (Gavin, 1977). This influx of divergent people of different linguistics and religious backgrounds contributed to the development of a high level of division of labour which made them to even group themselves into guilds.

Guild's System in Pre-Colonial Ilorin

The term 'Guild' refers to a society of persons with common interests and it is formed for the purpose of helping member of such group. It may be group of traders, artisans, social workers or even communal based. Africa, before the coming of the Europeans, could be regarded as a communalistic society, completely devoid of western interference. It was a society where people lived in brotherhood and where everyone was his brother's keeper. Africans at that time had a way of stage-managing their economic affairs and this was through the guild system. The guild system was in form of vocational education.

Ilorin economy by the mid-nineteenth century could be counted among the centralized economies in the area that later became Nigeria (Gavin and Oyemakinde, 1980). For instance, there was the development of a merchant class of professional traders involved in local and long distance trade networks or regional trade network. This contributed to the emergence

of professional guilds to which all practitioners of particular occupational mode were obliged to belong. The guilds determined standards, prices and other matters of general interest. There were guilds of porters, carpenters, bricklayers, blacksmiths and others (Lloyd, 1953).

In those days, raw materials were obtained locally. Blacksmiths made fires from palm kernel shells and wood. Their bellows were made from the skins of animal, and their furnaces were constructed of local clay. Builders of houses (bricklayers) used local mud with thatched leaves for roofing. Local Osara mud was used in cementing houses. The only cement available in pre-colonial, for instance, was Abraham cement and it could be got only at station at the local rate of onini (cent equivalent), of about two naira of today (Abdul-Ganiyu, 2017). The cement was used to top the mud to make it look beautiful. A small square-like box was constructed to serve as engine for making bricks. Mud was placed inside the square like stool and the mud was pressed until it was full in the square- box, then the box would be removed and what was produced was brick. Again, everything was done by the bricklayer (Alabi, 2017).

In pre-colonial and colonial Ilorin, photographers used local camera which contained only one film, and after a snap, another film was fixed. Porters found the best clay into the vicinity to make drinking vessels, plates, bowls, and cooking pots. Weavers used cotton grown in the area. Dyers used ash mixed the Elu plant to affect their indigo colouring. Mats and hats were woven from grass and plant fibers. Belts, Mats, Bags, and Drums were made from the leather of animal skin brought in by hunters (Ibrahim, 1992).

Most of these professional guilds operated in Ilorin on household basis, while a few had associations before the end of colonial rule. For those of household basis, members of specific families or compound specialized in various aspects of production. These skills were later inherited by the descendants of work-men and women (Ibrahim, 1992). On the other hand, these guilds also served as vocational education. These professional guilds had some apprentices who were close relatives of their masters. The duration of most apprenticeships was either three or five years. Fees vary considerably from one guild to the other, and when the apprenticeship extended for five years, there was usually little or no fees paid. In some cases, small payments were made by the masters to the apprentices and sometimes contributions in the form of food, clothing or shelter. Masters were often revered by their apprentices and in some cases, assisted in some domestic assignments like

washing the master's clothes, clearing of surrounding of houses and working on master's farms, among others (Oba, 2013). Apprentices accumulated tools during their apprenticeship, sometimes they were given tools as a gift from the master. The group members raised their capital themselves, sometimes saving through contribution (Esusu), while some were helped in various ways by their parents and relatives (Lloyd, 1953).

European's Incursion and the Guild System

The coming of the Europeans brought formal education and western ideologies to Ilorin. Those with the lowest formal education were guild members in weaving and blacksmithing industries. As a group, sixty –four per cent of the guilders in general had no formal schooling, fifteen per cent had less than full primary, sixteen per cent completed primary school, while five per cent went beyond secondary education (Oba, 2013).

Despite the influence of European or British colonialism, the nature of these guilds in Ilorin still was very primitive. For instance in photography, despite the introduction of some instruments that could accelerate their operations, most photographers could still not operate the instruments well because of their low level of literacy. The development in transportation was fashioned along the whims and caprices of the colonialists, vis-à-vis railway construction. With this, there was little or no development in road transportation as few motors were in existence (Garvin and Oyemakinde, 1980). This situation greatly hindered the proper operations of several professional guilds as most of their operations were still conducted in local ways. For instance, there was limit to the extent to which the bricklayer could use the local omolanke to carry sand or pebbles needed for his work, or the extent to which head-porterage could be used to carry sand, water and others (Porter, 2017). Up till 1958 the number of photographers in Ilorin stood at eight (Ola, 2010 and Easy, 2016), carpenters six (Kafinta, 2013), and bakers four (Iyanda, 2017). Some other guilders like porters, blacksmiths, leather-workers and many others that were larger in number operated within the context of house hold basis, still using local materials. The activities of these guilds were endangered with the various colonial economic policies, leaving the guilds in a highly deplorable state until after independence.

Impact of Colonial Economic Policies on the guilds system in Ilorin before independence

The method adopted by the British colonialists to conquer Ilorin may be classified into three dimensions. The first was the adoption of diplomacy, the second economic blockade and the third outright conquest. In an attempt to use the second method which is economic blockade, the British launched a series of attacks on the economic activities of the Emirate. In 1894 for instance, it was alleged that the stubbornness of Ilorin in not allowing Carter's messengers to pass from Ogbomoso to Ilorin to deliver Carter's letter to the Emir, made him lay blockade on Ilorin's trade route to Lagos. This blockade was effectively strengthened and by 1896, the Emir of Ilorin had to appeal for the removal of the blockade against his traders (Danmole, 1980). Equally, in the course of the conquest of Ilorin by 1897, Ilorin's major role as a middleman into the trade between the South and the North was destroyed. Ilorin itself was bombarded on 17th February 1897, when Ilorin's three month trading season was underway, and the business houses were then swelling with cloths and other combustibles which were all virtually destroyed (Gavin and Oyemakinde, 1980). This destruction affected the fortunes or power base of the Ilorin aristocracy who depended to a certain extent for its own sustenance on the control of these trade routes. This rapidly catalyzed the process that led to the fail of the Emirate. With the conquest, the British virtually destroyed and took over the control which the aristocracy, especially its Balogun (generals) wing had over the major means of sustenance. For instance, the various forms of taxes, tributes and tolls that the Balogun (generals) collected from the lands, farmers, artisans and at the markets were virtually taken over by the colonialists (NAK, Ilorprof, 1895).

Further, the British modified the control of the machinery of state power in their favours to consolidate their control over the Emirate. Haven noted that Ilorin Emirs had stopped going to war as far back as 1870s, leaving war campaigns to the dispatch of the Balogun, this greatly increased the power of the Baloguns who were no longer responsible to the Emir. War booties, tributes and tolls were no longer taken to the Emir, and the Baloguns defiantly arrogated conquered territories to themselves (O'Hear, 1983). Wars were prosecuted by the Baloguns without the consent of the Emir, purposely for their own benefits. Their power grew steadily during this period that the Emirs of Ilorin found it difficult to effectively turn down their request (Balogun, 1978). The attempt by Emir Aliyu (1869-1891) for example to stop

Balogun Gambari Karara from invading Offa, after Ilorin's defeat at Jalumi war in 1878 led to a serious misunderstanding between the Emir and his generals (NAK, Ilroprof, 1917). In the final analysis the Balogun had his way. The consequence was a protracted war with Offa which eventually resulted in a great destruction of Offa by the Ilorin forces. In the same vein, Emir Momo's unilateral decision to maintain good relations with the rest of Yoruba land and the Colonial administration in Lagos contributed largely to his suicide after a week's fight with his Baloguns led by Balogun Alanamu Inakoju (Danmole and Falola). Moreover, the unwillingness to come to terms with the colonial government in Lagos by Emir Sulaiman (1895-1915) who was given a solid support by his Baloguns escalated the tension between Ilorin and Lagos which contributed to the conquest of Ilorin in 1897 (Ikime,1977).

In the same manner, after the Erinmope battle which did not last more than forty-eight hours, and in which Ilorin lost about three hundred soldiers, the Emir and the Baloguns ran away. What the British then did was to call back the Emir and restored back his already lost power. This meant that he was no longer responsible to his Baloguns, but to the colonialists under the Native Authority. This was to facilitate the exploit of raw materials. With this development the Balogun felt humiliated and continued their resistance both against the Emir and the British. This affected the internal organization of the Emirate, especially with the loss of the control over the economy by the aristocracy and its gradual subordination to the control of the British colonialist. R.J. Garvin has aptly described the British Colonial conquest of Ilorin as:

The destruction of property may have been great, but the damage done to the business confidence, and political and economic structure was probably more enduring (Gavin, 1977).

Following this was the institutionalization of economic policies by the colonialists. The British went about organizing the production of raw materials needed in the metropolis. Through colonial agriculture, experimental farms were established for various types of cash crops (Ibrahim, 2013). The growth of cotton was firstly experimented and encouraged in Ilorin through the plantation system and by individual farmers. This was because the British cotton industry back at home needed cotton because at this time, cotton produce was British catalyst of growth. For the fact that Ilorin already had an indigenous weaving industry (Ibrahim, 2013),

the British felt optimistic that Ilorin would be a fertile area for cotton production. In pursuance of this, the indigenous rulers in the non-metropolitan districts were tasked to enforce its production. Unfortunately, the environmental and climatic condition in Ilorin did not suit the type of cotton introduced. Ilorin weather was too cold for cotton production as cotton produce was badly infected with “dieback” (Hermon, 1929). This situation greatly discouraged the activities of the British, and at the end of 1916, it was reported that condition for cotton was not suitable. Following this, the British moved into tobacco production. Four American varieties namely: “Tennessee Red”, “Boyd”, “Yellow Prayer”, and “Stirli” were grown experimentally with the objective of producing a bright tobacco of the Virginia type suitable for export. This was however, found impracticable to produce tobacco of suitable quality with the curing methods available to the native farmer, and the work was abandoned. The British also moved into groundnut production but this also later ran into problem. By 1920, the British concluded that Ilorin had failed economically (Olumoh, 2016).

Despite this, the British did not abandon Ilorin. It was believed that Ilorin must have a role to play in the development of the British economy. Therefore, the British switched into food-crop production like yam, guinea corn, cassava, etc. These food-crops were grown successfully and Ilorin was then discovered as a good food-producer. The British then decided to make Ilorin a food producing region. Ilorin thus became “market garden of the south” (A food producing area). From Ilorin, food stuffs were sent to other parts of Northern Nigeria like Jos and Kano, where the growth of cash crops were successful (Gavin and Oyemakinde, 1980). From this new role of Ilorin, a middle class then evolved between the cash-crop producing and food-stuff producing areas. In the Northern Nigeria, we had the Lebanese and the Dantata. In the case of Ilorin, the middle-class developed within food-crops producers that specialized in the collection and transportation of food-stuff across the country. We also had a class of retailers that specialized in the sale of European goods. Therefore, several petty-traders and wholesalers financed by big companies developed such as the Olumo, the Shagaya of Ilorin as far back as the 1940s (Olumoh, 2016).

Following this, the colonialists constructed railway that was used to aid the transportation of the produce in food-stuff from Ilorin in exchange with cotton and mine produce in Jos. The railway reached Ilorin in 1908 and by 1911 there was a through link to Kano in the North. With that, the old

head – leading and pack transport was doomed and along with it the preference for breaking bulk in Ilorin ([www.vanguard](http://www.vanguard.com.ng), 2017). The Emirs were used to mobilize feeder laborers. Labor was also recruited for the construction of telegraphic lines (Ikime, 1977), and for new road networks in a bid to facilitate the exploitation of the Emirate, as well as the institution of forced labours. There was no organized resistance as we had in other parts of Nigeria. People just migrated from Ilorin. In addition, after rail construction, especially by the 1920s and 1930s, the people found it difficult to go back to farm because they had been transferred from cash-crop production to wage earning. Part of them were absorbed, those not absorbed found their ways out of the city (Banwo, 1990).

In order to make sure that the people were forced to work, the colonialists insisted that taxes must be paid. Various taxes were introduced. By the 1920s, the need to pay taxes forced the people to migrate to south-west. Farmers also migrated to Ondo Province where they engaged in Cocoa-production. Some later came back, while some settled there permanently. Workers also became migrant laborers. Some even went northwest as far as Cotonou and Ghana to become road construction laborers. Many also became suppliers of labour for the colonial government. A number of middle-class also evolved, specializing in selling European goods at markets in Togo, Cote D’voire and other places (Abdulah, 1987).

Conclusion

The peopling of Ilorin especially during and after the formation of the Emirate encouraged the formation of Guilds by various crafts men and occupations. Some guilds were even peculiar to some families. However, the introduction of colonial economic policies to a very large extent had adverse effect on the Guild system in Ilorin. The imposition of foreign economic policies in the first place, disrupted the various professional guild system of the town, because the practitioners had to forcefully shift to the alien economic models. In addition, the construction of railway introduced to Ilorin, for which the people were recruited as laborers, turned the people away from their age-long professions and transformed them to wage earners. The result was that at the end of the railway construction, many of them were not absorbed; they therefore found it difficult to return to their various occupations. The alternative for them was to migrate out of the town. To compound this problem, the introduction of taxes which were to be paid by

the people also further escalated the rate of migration. As people migrated, the operations of various Guilds in Ilorin had drastically dwindled. This was the situation that persisted in Ilorin up to the end of colonial rule.

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