
Historical Deconstruction of the Peopling of Iyale, 1700-1900

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ABSTRACT: This study is a deconstruction of the History of Iyale from 1700 -1900. Geographically, Iyale which is a chiefdom under the Igala Kingdom is strategically located on the eastern flank of the Rivers Niger and Benue confluence. In temporal terms, the research starts from 1700 because it marked the establishment of Iyale and terminates in 1900 because it was the beginning of European incursion, subjugation, conquest and exploitation, which eventually metamorphosed into colonialism in Iyale area. The study adopts the political economy perspective. This research is built on the understanding that the development of any society, be it centralized or decentralized, represents a transformation or change in the social, political and economic system over time. This transformation is generally complex, involving both peaceful and non-peaceful means of integrating into society. Using primary sources, the study has shown that the 'almost' distorted tradition of origin of the people of Iyale was as a result of its historical experience and has established that the aboriginals of Iyale had existed in the Iyale area as early as the 15th century. We further discussed here the various versions of the tradition of origin of the people bearing in mind the contradictions in the interpretation of legends of origin; and the examination of the possible earliest centers associated with their development based on the materials available. This research has proved from available evidence that they were settlers already in Iyale before the establishment of the Attah dynasty at Idah and before the Igala-Jukun crises which other traditions have put forward as the exodus of the 'heroic four brothers' who left Idah to establish a new place of abode called Iyale.

INTRODUCTION

The history of most ancient settlements in Africa is shrouded in conflicting traditions, especially if one tries to trace the origin of the name and the evolution of the area. In Nigeria, however, when one comes to examine the record of the ways in which states were created in the past, one will find out that most books are concerned exclusively with the magical theory, neglecting the arduous, stumbling and protracted practice. Much prominence is given to the stories of the foreign hero who comes from afar and with his magical sword, or his mandate from the god of the sky, or his supernatural power otherwise derived, who imposes himself and his progeny on a previously unorganized people, creating new allegiances among them and mustering them into new communities in the form of states. This notion has been challenged by Smith (Smith, 1987) and other scholars of this school of thought, who using primary source materials, demonstrated that state formation was internally rather than externally motivated.

The study analysed the myth surrounding the history of the area under study and corrected certain misconceptions in the traditions of origin that has given the people a vague identity. The proposed theoretical framework adopted in this study is the Marxist Political Economy Theory. Marxist Political Economy is anchored principally on economic determinism theorized and popularized under these principles: Dialectical and Historical materialism. At the heart of this theory is the factor of the material condition (Oyedele, 2015). As a materialist conception of history, the theory gives primacy to material conditions, especially economic factors, for the explanation of socio-economic and political life of a society. Thus, the material factors: clothing, food, shelter, among others shape the human society, and the individual human being cannot accomplish all the things that are necessary for his livelihood unless he has cooperation from someone else. The economic factor is the most decisive, and largely determines the character of other structures, that is, the super-structure. The relationship between the economic base and the superstructure determines the general character, pattern and movement of historical developments in the society (Hamman, 2015).

The traditions of origin available for this study shows that the material needs of the progenitors of Iyale propelled their migration from Idah. The presence of *Aji-eko* (Leopard River) is clear evidence that the quest for water and fertile land for agricultural purpose encouraged their movement. This shows that the needs of people are primary to their existence and, thus, significant in understanding their history. There are several traditions of origin regarding the establishment of Iyale Chiefdom. Some of these traditions will be highlighted below:

THE AJIGIDO HISTORICAL CONNECTION

According to oral tradition, the first settlers were four brothers who left Idah with their families in search of greener pasture. The source (Wada, 2015) has it that their eldest brother was a hunter called Ajigodo who discovered the settlement while hunting in a

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thick forest. When he was done hunting, he sat down to rest and in the process of sitting down, he then looked up and saw a new moon setting in the sky. Ajigido went back home and invited his family and friends for the celebration of the *Ale* (sky) that he discovered. After the celebration, they decided to settle there and dedicated that place to their gods. Hence, the meaning of Iyale became known as “the place where he saw the sky (Atila, 2016). From the foregoing, the history of Iyale is not an exception from what Isichei called “Hunter-king Paradigm” which is associated with the arrival of heroic hunters, travellers, scholars and traders who established centralized State structures in distant places (Isichei, 1968). According to Boston, many communities in Igala land tell the story of their origin in form of either a clan or a lineage pedigree going back to a founder who is described as a hunter by profession. Typically, in these legends, the founder is said to have come to the locality from elsewhere and to have found it so good for hunting that he decided to remain and make a new home. His hunting camp becomes a permanent settlement in whose affairs the hunter's family play a leading role, and after his death his descendants form the dominant clan or lineage in that area. The theme of the actual arrival and settlement of the hunter is often woven into stories telling of his hunting exploits and describing the unusual success that he had in the hunting field. At first sight, these accounts of the founder's role and arrival appear to be statements which can be taken at their face value as a description of the way in which new communities were founded in unpopulated or only sparsely inhabited land (Boston, 1964)

THE IYALE-OBO/IDAH HISTORICAL CONNECTION

Another source (Odaudu, 2015) has it that Iyale which is the area of study had its progenitors migrate from a place called Iyale-Obo. The area is located very close to Idah, the ancestral home of the Igala. According to this tradition, because of land dispute with the settlers in Idah, the Iyale progenitors left Iyale-Obo in search of a new settlement where they and their descendants would live in peace (Odaudu, 2015). During migration, Iyale progenitors settled at Oko Ukwu-gbede but were not satisfied with their new abode because there was no water. In essence, the search for a permanent location for abode continued. Adagbobotika who was a hunter continued with the search for a better settlement in which he toured a long distance but could not find water. He further intensified his search and eventually came across a river where a leopard was drinking from; he took little from the river to show his brothers. The river became known as *Aji-eko* (Leopard River) and Adagbobotika was asked by his brothers to lead them hence forth. Whichever may have been the reason, it is generally conceded that the migration was attended by continuous friction with the ruling house at Idah. On the question of the hunter's origin as Boston has asserted concerning most Igala communities, this seems quite an acceptable explanation but has also raised many interesting issues, especially the first point that this type of legend usually makes it that he was a stranger who came to the locality in question from another area (Boston, 1964). In many cases, no information is given about the hunter's antecedents; this potential avenue of inquiry into the past is blocked by lack of information, and we cannot advance beyond the narrator's statement that 'our ancestor came here for hunting' or that he was not born here but came here for hunting. In many cases, the existence of any earlier population is denied, and the legends make a point of this fact by saying that the locality was covered by thick forest when the hunter came, or by maintaining that people had never lived there before. In those legends that mentioned a pre-existing population, the later fortunes of this group are completely merged with the hunters to the extent that little is known of their earlier condition or development. As valid as his assertions are, it does not deny the fact that human beings from inception have always sought means to survive and do away with unpleasant situations that are detrimental to their lives. This is not spectacular to Igala communities alone as people tend to migrate because of unpleasant situations such as war, drought, famine, quest for material resources and much more. But this research has helped us realised that Ada-gbobota did not just surface out of the blues; sources posit that he came from Idah but left before the Igala-Jukun war with his family. In contrast to Boston's claim, he did not impose himself on the people he met in Iyale. He invited Mohammed Ibrahim from Idah who helped chased the wild animals from the river and made the river accessible. This leadership traits in him made the then Attah of Igala (Ayegba) confer on him the leadership mantle (Abdullahi, 2016).

THE IYALE-OGO HISTORICAL CONNECTION

The people believed in a god called *Ogo* who is believed to have created a messenger called *Adagara* to supervise the activities of man on earth (Wada, 2015). Adagara wanted a form of security and tried to survive without such difficult phenomena associated with nature, such as drought, earthquakes and floods. It is these numerous problems facing man that pushed him to commune with the supernatural. The tradition of origin of *ogo* claims that the progenitors of Iyale were without any form of identification until their visit to Idah to grace the annual festival held by the Attah. After an excellent performance on that day at Idah with their masquerade called *ogede*; the Attah (Ayegba) pleaded and asked them to replace the *Ekwe* masquerade with his *ogede* masquerade because it performed better than his. While the people of Iyale were on their way back to their place of abode, those who were not at the scene of the event started asking questions on which group performed the best play; so, they were told that the best play already left. It is believed that the name Iyale was derived from the phrase “the best play has left” *Iya-le* (Wada, 2015). A possible conclusion from the discussion on Iyale and Idah connection represents evidence of the existence of *Ekwe* masquerade in the history of Iyale chieftdom.

THE IGALA-JUKUN HISTORICAL CONNECTION

This tradition has been accepted by the people of Iyale because it was associated with the major developments that occurred in the

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history of the area during the early period of its state formation (Atila, 2015). According to this tradition, the four heroic brothers arrived in Iyale in the 17th century when many people started migrating into other regions from Idah for fear of the Igala-Jukun crisis. The migration phenomenon started with the mallam's (medicine man) declaration of the doom awaiting Igala kingdom (Ukwedeh, 1976). As they migrated, they settled at Iyale, Ajobi, Ologba, Ojoku and other places. This resulted in the formation of mini-states like Ikpakpala, Ate-Oge, Ulaja, Oje and Atochi which were on transition from small chiefdoms to the creation of a large polity when the early progenitors of Iyale arrived at the area. Iyale came under Attah Ayegba Omi'Idoko because they were the custodians of royal *ebo* shrines transferred there from Idah on the advice of the royal diviner (Wada, 2015). The evidence also which points to their title and salutations they got from Idah, as most of the hunting titles carry the salutation of "Aidu and Doga".

THE PRE-ATTAH DYNASTIC HISTORY OF IYALE

Another version contends and suggests the existence of people in Iyale before the establishment of the Attah dynasty in Idah. Over the northern part of what is now known as the Igala division were scattered Opoto and Agatu settlements; whilst between this and the Niger were found numerous Igala outposts attracted by hunting and sylvan wealth in the hinterland, some must have penetrated the interior probably before the establishment of the Idah dynasty. They may be traced as far afield as Gwalahu **Iyale** oddu and Ogbobode (Clifford, 1936). Most of the human groups that came to form part of the Attah's domains outside the plains of Idah beginning from c.17th century had been settling in their respective areas for centuries before their incorporation (Ukwedeh, 1976).

Other evidence (Atila, 2015) that supports the above claim vehemently is the fact that when the four heroic brothers arrived at Iyale from Idah, they met people already settling there but the progenitors of Iyale could not access the river because of the presence of wild beast and animals. When Adagbogbotika arrived with his brothers, he went back to Idah after the Igala- Apa war to ask for help from the Attah (Ayegba Om'Idoko). The Attah obliged and allowed one of the Mallams' (Mohammed Ibrahim) who helped him gained victory in the Igala-Jukun war to accompany Adagbssogbotika to Iyale to solve their problem (Abdullahi, 2016). Contrary to the tradition that posits that the progenitors of Iyale left Idah because of land dispute between the four brothers and the Attah, it would have been easier for the Attah to recognise Adagbobotika when he came back to Idah to seek help. After corroborating other sources with oral source, it appears that the Attah did not recognise his rival (if at all he was) because he told his guards to bring in the man with veil round his neck who has been waiting outside for a while. And this was how Ajigodo got his nickname 'Gbogbotika' (veil around the neck or shoulder).

Despite the myth surrounding the traditions, the following could be of some assistance in explaining the emergence, evolution and development of Iyale.

- (i) The fact that Adagbogbotika is recognised in all the traditions as one of the first inhabitants of Iyale.
- (ii) The fact that Adagbogbotika was a hunter, attracted by the availability of elephants, buffalos, leopards, antelopes and a variety of birds, viz. *ugo* (eagle), *ulu* (wild ostrich) and *ulukoko-obo* (weaver bird), provides an explanation for the hunting tradition in Iyale. In other words, Iyale was at that point a communal, hunting and gathering settlement.
- (iii) The migration and settlement pattern were influenced by certain pull factors, such as the availability of water, animals, topography, edible fruits, roots, leaves and grains (Shaibu, 2010)
- (iv) It is also clear from some sources that there was a pre-existing population in the region before the establishment of the Attah dynasty at Idah and the subsequent Igala-Apa crises which other traditions have put forward as the migration of the "heroic" legend Ada-Gbogbotika (Shaibu, 2010).

CONCLUSION

One would conclude that it was the need to overcome some of such difficulties around Oko Ukwu-gbede settlement that the people moved out to a new area and not because of political threats from the Attah. The tradition of origin of Iyale shows that the evolution of Iyale area was a gradual process that started with the migration of different people from other plains of Igala land and across. There is also every indication of the existence of quite an extensive settlement at Agwudoko in the vicinity of Iyale long before the advent of the four 'Heroic Brothers'. The aboriginals of Iyale had existed in the area as early as the 15th century but its tradition of origin was almost distorted by its historical experience. These experiences included the tradition of origin which connected the Iyale people with Idah as their ancestral home and Ejule. When a group no longer remembers its place of origin, it is likely to choose one that was powerful enough to confer on it a kind of prestige or legitimacy while not posing any immediate threat to its political independence (Alagoa, 1970). This act over the years has been adopted by the people of Iyale, by associating their tradition of origin to the prestigious Idah as its ancestral home and place of origin. Evidence suggests that most of the Igala speaking groups (upland Igala) settled in their area beginning from the early 15th and late 16th centuries. If this is true, then Iyale's case should not be any different because the upland Igala people are known to be bearers of marks on both sides of their face (Egharevba, 1960). The earliest settlers of Iyale were also identified with these facial marks (Abdullahi, 2016).

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