

AN EXEMPLARY LEADERSHIP: THE IFON OROLU AND IFON OMIMA CONFLICT RESOLUTION PROCESS IN SOUTH-WEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Servant-hood is the splendor of leadership as clearly seen in the case of Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima both in Osun and Ondo states respectively, it is desirable to look at the examples given by their central authorities in peaceful resolution of conflicts that had lingered for thousands of years and had been settled for over a decade whereby the towns are thriving on politically, economically and socially. In view of this, this work will serve as an eye-opener to leaders that dialogue with peaceful resolution of differences is the best way adopted by the towns under consideration. All these will be thoroughly x-rayed on the exemplary conflict resolution process and the enviable results. The major sources of information were through few available books and oral interview from important personalities in the towns. It is apparent here that if peace education is well packaged for our learners there is tendency to have a society ridden of security threats and desirable development will thrive.

KEYWORDS: Conflicts, Resolution, Exemplary, Dialogue, Amicable.

1. Introduction

This research work focused on symbiotic relationship between Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima communities that are located in Osun and Ondo states respectively. Oral traditions revealed that their progenitors were siblings who separated because of succession disputes that they could not resolve amicably. However, in year 2002, the kings reconciled as brothers. Based on this historic development there is the need to look at their historical origin, the events that led to their separation, the process of reconciliation and the outcome of reconciliation. In addition, this work examines the administration of each town during separation and the similarities they share despite the separation. The major sources of information for this work are oral interviews and records in libraries, archives and palaces.

Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima were formerly together at a place known as 'Ifon-Ile' or 'Ifon Ilamopo' but separated due to succession disputes that emanated from deviation from the usual tradition of having the first son, 'aremo' in Yorubaland as the automatic successor of the deceased king. Hence, the younger brother that was chosen in place of the elderly one decided to migrate from 'Ifon-Ile' or 'Ifon-Ilamopo'. For many centuries, the two towns were separated until late twentieth century that the present king of Ifon Omima, Oba Israel Adegoke Adeusi and the former king of Ifon Orolu, Oba Ilufoye Olatoye II (deceased), took reconciliation steps. Ifon Omima is the headquarters and seat of government of Ose Local Government Area of Ondo State, Nigeria. It is a junction town with two axes to Edo State and one to the rest of Ondo State. It lies at about the mid-point on the Federal Highway that connects Akure and Benin City. It is located on an elevated terrain; a view from the center of the town confirms the beauty of the surrounding. Ifon Omima is an ancient town with European settlement as divisional or district headquarters as far back as 1903. The town is blessed with a large landmass and large-scale production of both cash and food crops, which encouraged traders and workers. Hence, this has led to an explosion in the population of the town. Ifon Orolu emerged at different times in the same region between the fourteenth and the sixteenth centuries. It is located north of Osun River, bounded by Ogbomoso to the north, Ikirun to the east, Ejigbo to the west, and Osogbo and Ede to the south. Ifon Orolu was located at different places though within the same region at different times. This led to the emergence of such settlements like Ifon Eega, Ifon Ere, Ifon Baale, and Ifon Osun at different times.

2. SEPARATION OF IFON OMIMA AND IFON OROLU

According to the interview held with Oba Israel Adegoke Adeusi (I) J.P., he emphasized vividly that succession dispute to the Olufon throne at Ifan'lamopo led to the separation. Here the usual tradition of having the eldest son as the heir apparent (*aremo*) to the throne was denied the opportunity of ascending the throne while the younger brother was installed in place of the elder brother that was contrary to Yoruba tradition. Consequently, there were factions and divisions between the chiefs and the people of Ifon. In essence, the younger brother proclaimed as the ruler was advised to leave the town and he left in annoyance since his elder brother insisted that he would not

allow justice to be perverted. Later on, the elder brother sent out an expedition led by the chief warrior to look for his younger brother who left in annoyance but all the efforts proved abortive for the warriors that had taken an oath of laying down their lives if the lost younger brother was not found. The chief warrior diverted and founded Ifon Sepeteri – the third Ifon town in present day's Oyo State instead of coming back to Ifan'lamopo and faced the consequences of the oath sworn before his departure. Since this period which data was not specifically given, Ifon people had been living apart. The elder brother left Ifan'lamopo (an inhabitable place now in Osun State) for various locations before the present day's Ifon Omima while the younger brother too who had first left settled in various places like Ifon Eega, Ifon Ere and so on before the present location at Ifon Orolu.

3. THE EUROPEAN INTERVENTION IN IFON OROLU AND IFON OMIMA

Various archival sources revealed the European intervention in the affairs of Ifon people. For instance, during the colonial period, government had taken keen interest in the problem of land acquisition in Orolu and made investigation to get details of the historical circumstances under which each community came to settle in the area. In 1918, the District Officer Ibadan, after enquiries and a thorough analysis of the submissions of both Ifon and Ilobu elders to the Resident of Oyo Province, that the boundary between Ifon and Ilobu should be the *Oponmolu* stream. He was annoyed at the Ilobu's persistence of claiming to have right over parcels of land that was not their own. The Senior Resident of Oyo Province in a strongly worded memorandum insisted that *'the boundary between them (i.e. Ifon and Ilobu) shall be the old wall and the Ilobu – Oba road to the Opomolu, and that Osolo's land belong to Ifon.'* The issue really had never been the traditional ownership of land but on the extent of the area allocated to Ilobu by the Olufon. In 1924, the colonial government fixed a boundary, which was done by the Senior Resident of Oyo Province, Captain William Ross who concluded intensive investigation, and he ascertained the boundary and gave the decision ruling that:

Osolo's farm belongs to the Olufon and it should be within his boundary. The boundary (between Ifon and Ilobu) is the old wall to the point where it cuts the Ilobu-Oba Roads and from there the Ilobu-Oba Road to the point where it intersects the river Opamolu, which river shall be the boundary to its confluence with the river Erinle...

This demarcation, which came to be recognized as "The Ross Boundary", was satisfactory to all parties and in 1941; the Olufon of Ifon engaged the services of one Mr. Gilbert, a Licensed Surveyor, clearly demarcate the boundary with pillars. For about thirty years there was no dispute over the boundary thus demarcated, indicating an acceptance by all parties concerned. However, in 1953, the Ilobu people instituted suit No.4/53 at the Ikirun Native Court. This court gave judgement based on a boundary that was significantly different from the Ross Boundary. The Olufon appealed against this judgement to the Osun Divisional Appeal Court in suit No. S.21/55. The appeal was allowed but a different boundary was established. The Olobu appealed to the District Officer's Suit in No. 9/1955, The Court dismissed the appeal of the Olobu and amended the judgement of the Osun Divisional Court of Appeal to read that the Boundary should be according to the Ross Boundary established in 1924. Again, the Olobu appealed to the Resident's Court of Appeal in Appeal No. 9/1959. This again dismissed the Olobu's appeal. The court found that the Olobu had accepted the Ross Boundary and held that the Ross Boundary having been accepted by both parties since 1924 was the only acceptable boundary between Ifon and Ilobu. The judgement of D.M.Elliot, Acting Resident, Ibadan Province on Monday 22nd August, 1955 reads in part:

The Ross Boundary has remained unchallenged for over thirty years and has been accepted by both sides until recently that changes occurred. The plaintiff i.e. (the Olobu) has brought a highly speculative action in the hope of obtaining additional land. He has little or no idea of any other boundary.

Inference could be made here that the European had successfully intervened and minimized struggle on land acquisition within Orolu community having considered Ifon Orolu and Ilobu communities. While considering various archival records on Owo and Ifon Districts, it could be seen also how the European intervened in settling farmland disputes, marital problems and crises between the king and the chiefs.

The Olufon Orolu has always been recognized everywhere as a principal potentate in this region, this informed the uneasy relationship between the Olufon on one hand, and the Olubadan on the other hand during the nineteenth century as well as during the colonial period. In the nineteenth century, Ibadan established its lordship over a large part of Yorubaland. In fact, an Ibadan *Ajele* (political agent) was stationed in Ifon and remained there until about 1894. Following the establishment of British rule, he was withdrawn. Nevertheless, during this period, the traditional system of administration of Ifon was not tampered with. In the same vein, the successive Alaafin insisted that the Olufon being a crowned ruler could not be subjected to a Baale as the Olubadan affairs was, and must be allowed to conduct the affairs of his kingdom in accordance with traditions. It is well known in historical literature that during the colonial period, the administrative machinery put in place by the British was not acceptable to the people of Ifon, Ilobu and Erin because it was found to be a deviation on traditional conventions. The creation of a District in which the Olufon would be subjected to Ataoja, who was then a Baale, was found disgusting, not only in Ifon but also all over Yorubaland. The attempt was strongly resisted and neighbouring people like the Ilobu and Erin while acknowledging the pre-eminence of the Olufon; rejected the idea of the "Ataoja and Council" even though the Olufon was always placed next to the Ataoja on the list of precedence. In fact, throughout the ancient and up till the colonial period, the Olufon was the only crowned ruler in the District. This was what led to the establishment of a

Native Court (Grade D) at Ilobu for the three settlements at Ilobu, Erin and Ifon. The Olufon was the president of the court until 1934 when separate courts (also 'Grade D') were established at Erin and Ifon. Then membership of the Ifon court was the Olufon, the *Eesa*, the *Aaje* the *Ooye* and the *Eleesi*. The colonial Intelligence Reports severally described the Olufon as of the same status as the Elejigbo (Ogiyan) of Ejigbo. Throughout the colonial period, therefore, Ifon ran its affairs without interference from Osogbo or Ibadan. The traditional council of chiefs under the Olufon continued to function and to administer the town, often reported directly to the Divisional Officer in Ibadan and thus bypassed the Osogbo District Council. For instance, the Ibadan court had appellate jurisdiction over cases decided by the Olufon, and serious cases were taken directly to Ibadan. The Osogbo Council in fact, accepted that it could not have a supervisory role over the Olufon and his council of chiefs and this corrected the anomaly in which the Olufon (a crowned ruler) was to be subordinate to the Ataoja.

The history during the period of British administration may generally be described as peaceful. Some exceptional events of importance which have occurred could be seen when the Owaof Owo was appointed in 1913 and the people under Owo Division were dissatisfied; this led to internal strife in Owo town itself and its repercussions were felt until 1928. The troubles resulted in the banishment of several title holders of Owo by the colonial rulers. Not until 1934 was the last banished chief allowed to return and a normal state of affairs were finally re-established.

In considering more cordial relationship between the British administrators and the Ifon people, the enthroned Olowo of Owo suggested the peaceful settlement of affairs in Owo District, he stressed that "*You should please understand that though many of these chiefs are illiterates, no Olowo can override them without unpleasant consequences...A wise man will learn from past history...I did not visit England to learn autocracy but more democracy*".

The peaceful coexistence between the British and the Ifon Omima people could be seen further in Mr. Michael Adekunle Ajasin's remark after a meeting held on Wednesday the 20th December, 1950 at the Owo No. 1 Court Hall at 12.30 p.m. on the proposed amalgamation of Ifon and Sobe Group Areas within Owo District. The meeting was between the Owo District Native Authority Council and the British Resident, Ondo Province, Akure. Mr. M. A. Ajasin who was unanimously appointed the Resident and the District Officer for all efforts made to make the re-organized Council a success. He further appreciated the British ways of government in that everybody was allowed freedom of speech especially in such Council he commented further that the Russian, German and other European Colonies did not enjoy such privilege.

On the other hand, some of the havocs done by the British in Owo Division could be seen in transfer of Jagba and Sobe Districts to Owo Division in Ondo Province and these people traced their origin to Benin with full allegiance to Oba of Benin. They had common heritage and culture with Benin People in terms of language, customs, traditions, and institutions. In essence, the Jagba and Sobe people had little or nothing in common with the Yoruba people. Barrister Omo Eboh further expressed in his letter that:

In 1927, the Ose River on Owo/Benin road was adopted as the boundary delimiting the spheres of influence of the residents of Ondo Province... for administrative convenience... Consequently, this had worked considerable hardship on the people of Benin stock who are on the Ifon side of Ose River and particularly on the inhabitants of both Sobe and Jagba... This act has divided the homogenous people into two separate groups with one group being placed with a people to who they are altogether foreign... and unfamiliar.

4. RECONCILIATION PROCESS

Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima reconciled based on the zeal that Oba Israel Adegoke Adeusi I had since his ascension to the throne on 7th November, 1997. He had the vision, thirst and desire that he should reconcile with his younger brother which he had not been in good terms with for over a century. At the peak of this conception, he shared the vision with his chiefs in a meeting; some embraced the idea while some kicked against it because it was forbidden for both kings to see each other not to talk of embracing each other or having discussion together. Hence, those that were indifferent to the vision were scared of negative or bad premonition that could befall their community. Being a man of positive mind, the king sent delegates on 12th June, 2002 with fear to Oroluland and alas! The penultimate king embraced the proposal to reconcile by allowing the Omima's delegates to sit down in his palace and a formal day of reconciliation was fixed whereby the elder brother would visit and reconcile with his younger brother just like the history of Esau and Jacob in the Bible. Fortunately, the date fixed was the period of annual Odun Ade's festival in Oroluland and many prominent kings from other Yoruba land could not wait to attend the prominent historical event on August 5th and 6th, 2002. Over five hundred people came from Ifon Omima, they were first received at Osogbo town and migrated to Ifon Orolu with music, songs and talking drums that encouraged them to move ahead and made the day a historic one indeed!. One of the songs rendered to encourage them was '*Wole, wole, ile baba omo, ki i ba omo leru, o ya wole wole.*'

Shortly after the official meeting at Orolu, the parting groove was visited with some traditional atonement at '*Ifon-Ibale*' or '*Ifan'lamopo*' which is inhabitable now. Here prayers, atonement and sacrifices were made to avert the evil curses pronounced on both towns peradventure they reconcile. Since then, tremendous progress witnessed by both towns has been testifying that the prayers offered were answered. After the reconciliation, Ifon Omima had

her annual festival, Obaloro festival and delegates from Oroluland attended the festival. For instance, the Ataoja of Osogbo, Olufon of Ifon Orolu, Oluwo of Iwo, Olokuku of Okuku among nine prominent rulers from Osun state and they stayed for two days to show that they were interested in the permanent reconciliation, since then, both communities had witnessed remarkable peace, unity of purpose, great development and achievement in all spheres of life.

5. THE BENEFITS OF RECONCILIATION

It is noteworthy that when there is peace among people definitely improvement, advancement and progress would follow. The case of Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima are not exceptional in the sense that the fear of unknown, threat of calamities that might befall the people were eradicated and the two communities were able to plan together and have unity of purpose concerning the development of their people and their communities. Above all, the two communities had some things in common like the 'Odun Ade' in Orolu land known as 'Obaloro' festival in Ifon Omima. Moreso, 'Ade Sese Efun' (White beaded crown) is unique and symbolic between the two towns because this crown was inherited directly from their common ancestor 'Obatala' and during festivals and ceremonies of these towns, the crown is usually worn and the kings usually dress in white apparel like 'Obatala' during the 'Odun Ade' and 'Obaloro' festivals. In essence, most traditional and cultural adornment of the kings is usually 'white' starting from the crowns to the shoes.

6. CHALLENGES DURING RECONCILIATION

In the process of reconciliation, there were diverse challenges especially on the part of Oba Israel Adegoke Adeusi (I). It took him many years after his enthronement before he could boldly divulge the vision to the chiefs which was accepted by few and majority kicked against the idea. Moreover, at the point of sending delegates to Ifon Orolu which some of the chiefs volunteered to do, the crew went with fear of unknown and on getting to the town, the king was not met even though the delegates were well received with their plans and proposals. All these steps were financially demanding, psychologically threatening, time consuming before the final trip was made to Ifon Orolu, and the reconciliation was concluded. Despite all the odds, the people were able to conquer due to determination and love for peace and unity.

7. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has vividly exposed a hidden aspect of human relationship which is having positive attitudes and response to inter-community clashes and disputes. The case of Ifon Omima and Ifon Orolu are not new and not exceptional in Yoruba nation but most leaders and followers lack vision, unity of purpose, determination to take risk regardless of ancestral curses and invocations, these people could not resolve issues amicably through dialogue except violent means. Succession disputes had been a serious venom plaguing our society since Yoruba nation had been created still the vice is still on increase starting from family position to societal political post, perversion of justice is still on the increase, however, an individual in the society could change the course of history if well determined despite all odds and oppositions.

The traditions of origin of the two towns are transferred in various versions but the most important issue is that the two towns were siblings who separated based on perverted judgement and succession dispute. Also, they both claimed Ile-Ife as their ancestral home with Obatala as their primogenitor; this is in relation with one of the oral tradition of Yoruba's origin. Consequently, some festivals and mode of dressing of their kings during the festive periods testifies that the peoples of Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima are true descendants of Obatala. In the course of separation, both communities had witnessed a tremendous growth and development. First, they have been able to imbibe some cultural activities of their neighbourhood. For example, Ifon Orolu people speak pure Yoruba related to the Osogbo people while Ifon Omima has synonymous dialect with Owo and Benin people because of their new geographical locations. More so the mode of dressing; types of food taken by these people had been influenced by their environment. Second, the communities had been able to acquire more lands in their newly settled area, for instance, Ifon Orolu settled at various places like Ifon Baale, Ifon Eega and so on before the people finally settled at their present location, same is applicable to Ifon Omima according to Oral tradition, interview and records of books. Third, there had been political development too, Ifon Orolu played a prominent role in Irepodun Local government of Osun State while Ifon Omima is headquarter of Ose Local Government in Ondo State. Economically, the communities had witnessed growth too for instance; most agricultural products of the towns are sold within and outside the towns in their rotational market centres and this had attracted traders in the neighbourhood and from other states like Oyo, Kwara, Edo and Ekiti States. Industrially, the communities are not left out; apart from local craft industries, some moribund companies had been in existence like Ifon Ceramic Industry at Ifon Omima.

On the other hand, despite the separation, yet the people had some things in common like individual and quarters' name since they had the same source at Ile-Ife. The nature of their new locations' soil are same too, hence, they have been able to produce some crops like cassava, yam, cocoyam among others. The qualities of 'Garri' cassava grain from these towns are noted to be first class among their neighbourhood. The political administrative structures are synonymous too except that the numbers of people in council in one town could be more than the other town. For example the role of 'Eesa' in Ifon Orolu is the same as the role of 'Ojomo' in Ifon Omima. The

annual 'Odun Ade' in Ifon Orolu is the same as 'Obaloro' festival in Ifon Omima whereby crowns were displayed most especially the ancient crowns. In terms of using beads, both towns are noted for using white beads and the two kings wear "Ade sese Efun" white beaded crown inherited from Obatala, their primogenitor. Both kings are well recognized in their communities because they are 'Crowned Kings'. Most of their traditional and cultural wears are whites too. Ifon Orolu and Ifon Omima are great towns that had made a remarkable landmark in Yoruba history, having separated for over a century yet their descendants still deemed it fit to reconcile, hence other towns could follow suit and learn from the epochal foundation laid by these communities

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