After the Fall of the Ọyọ Empire

Ọyọ Empire reached its climax in 18th century, unfortunately, it began declining towards the end of the century. Political struggle between Alaafin Abiodun and Ọyọ Mesi over the policy thrust of a peaceful diplomacy against military adventurism of Ọyọ Mesi for the Empire led to the gradual disintegration of the empire. Although, there were many open confrontations between some political leaders and Alaafin Abiọdun, even there was a revolt, in which Alaafin defeated his opponents. We should also remember that Alaafin Abiọdun had just ridden Ọyo of Baş|r|un Gaa’s intransigence and notoriety. Regardless of Alaafin’s military successes, no respite for the empire, rather an intractable constitutional crisis had been created, as years rolled by, crisis from it hastened the fall of Ọyọ Empire.

After the death of Alaafin Abiodun, the internal crisis in Oyo took a new dimension as the succession rate to the throne was so high, the situation created political instability that weakened the stool of Alaafin. Records show that some Alaafin stayed less than six months on the throne, even there was a period of political interregnum. More worrisome, was the conspiracy and distrust that engulfed the entire Oyo.

As Oyo was struggling with the domestic/internal problems, insurrections became the order of the day as people became resentful of Oyo’s hegemony. Yoruba-Egba revolted, declared independence under its leader, Lisabi Agbongbogbo Akala. In 1818, Abomey revolted and stopped paying tributes to Alaafin, other sub-groups within Oyo Empire joined in the race to become independent. This spirit of independence in the air showed that Oyo’s authority and influence, made posible by political and military power, would soon be gone.

The immediate cause of the fall of Oyo was the rivalry between Arẹ-Ọna-Kankan-Fo Afọnja and Alaafin Aọlẹ. Earlier, Aọlẹ had ordered Afọnja to attack Iwere-Ile (a Yoruba town and maternal home of Alaafin Ajagbomogun-Ileti Are-Elemele), the order was not only ignored by Afọnja, but created distrust between Aọlẹ and Afọnja. Within a short period of time the supremacy battle and suspicion (between the duo) resulted in attack on Ọyọ by Afọnja with the help of the Fulanis (under Alimi)-the new settlers in Ilorin. Ọyọ was destroyed and a new location was sought at Ago-Oja to form a new Oyo under Alaafin Atiba.

Shortly there after, Afọnja was killed in a political intrigue that followed in Ilorin. Yoruba lost Ilorin its northern gateway to the Fulani-led-Islamic-administration in Sokoto to Malam Alimi, Usman-Dan-Fodio’s representative.

The destruction of Ọyọ spelt a doom for entire Yorubaland as there was no more central or unified defense system, more important, there was a radical shift in power in Yorubaland. Four different power blocs emerged-(two military powers, one economic power, and a confederate/multi-kingdom power). Besides, several towns and communities were formed to care for hundreds of thousand Yoruba refugees; more pathetic was the social and political dislocations (intra-tribal wars) Yoruba witnessed.
between 1826/27 (when Ọyọ fell) and 1885, when the British-led armistice treaty was signed by various warring groups in Yoruba land.

The new political powers in Yoruba land were:

Ibadan— a military power which produced Baṣọrun such as: Oluyọle, Ọdẹrinde, Ojo, Ogunmọla, Latosisa etc.

Ijaye— a military power that revolved around a supreme commander and a dictator—Kurunmi.

Ẹgba, a confederate-political system, based not on military power alone, but on the moral force of Christianity, power of education, and industrialization. These factors made Ẹgba a different political power in Yoruba land.

Ijẹbu—an economic power because of its geographical location. A major trade route between Lagos and several Yoruba towns and villages.

Ibadan- A new Political Power in Yoruba Land.
Ibadan (Ẹba-Ọdan) meaning by the side of thick forest was initially established by Lagelu an Ile-Ife (commander-in-chief). For several years, Jagun Lagelu (oro, a pata maja) and his subjects were living together in peace in their first settlement at Awotan, in Apẹtẹ in the present Ido Local Government Area, until an incident happened. From history, we are told that certain individuals disrobed Egungun in Ẹba-Ọdan, the Egungun was brought to market where he suffered more humiliation before women and children. In Yoruba tradition, Egunguns are revered dead forefathers. when Ṣango, the Alaafin of Ọyọ heard of the incident, he ordered the destruction of Ẹba-Ọdan. Those who survived the attack ran to a near-by hill, lived on (Oro fruits), much later, when life returned to normal another settlement was formed. Ibadan, from records was attacked on three other times. However, the modern Ibadan was established in 1829, after the fall of Ọyọ.

Refugees from several Yoruba towns and villages came in droves and settled in Ibadan when Ọyọ was destroyed around 1826/1827, by 1850 the city population had grown to over 250,000 this made Ibadan to become a heterogeneous and the largest Yoruba town; more so, it became a safety net for the war displaced people. Because of its location, population, military exploits under various garrison commanders, Ibadan town became the most powerful, politically, and economically in Yorubaland. In no time, Ibadan filled the political vacuum created by the fall of Ọyọ.

Although, Ibadan is a Yoruba town, it operated a different political system ever known in Yorubaland. Ibadan had no Ọba, whose occupant is by inheritance, because of its formation; rather, it created four high offices: two military positions, one civil office, and one office for women leadership. The offices are:
“Iba” or “Baa’lẹ” civil, head of the town
“Balogun” later “Baṣọrun”; head of Ibadan military
“Seriki”; second-in-command, military office
“Iyalode”; head of all Ibadan women, a powerful office.

The system that produces Olubadan (formerly known as Iba) consists of two lines: the Otun and the Balogun. Each line has 23 steps on the rung for a would-be-Olubadan to climb before appointed. Vacancy is created when the occupant dies, becomes incapacitated or removed (which happens seldom) the next-in-rank moves a step up. The journey to Olubadan office is very long and enduring.

Otun line is for the civil office, while Balogun is for the military leadership. However, most senior title holder from either lines can become Olubadan, when the stool becomes vacant.

Iba or Baa’lẹ was the political head of Ibadan, the office was opened to the next-in-rank or second-in-command whenever the occupant died. The is practice is still same even (with Olubadan throne) to date. Balogun (later changed to Baṣọrun by Alaafin Atiba, but installed by Iba on the orders of Alaafin) and Seriki were the two prominent military leaders in the land (and to date) are opened, not by inheritance, but to the next-in-rank. Other high and middle level military titles were: Otun (General, right division); Osi (General, left division); Ekerin, Elarun, Ekefa (head of fourth, fifth, sixth divisions). Interestingly, these titles though, no longer in military format or structure still exist in Ibadan political system/arrangement; even, with several reforms, structural and administrative changes Ibadan had witnessed as a city over the years.

The fourth political office is that of Iyalode, the leader of Ibadan women. At inception, there was Traditional Council (Igbimọ Ilu) membership was drawn from both Otun line (civil) and Balogun line (military) to help Iba with day-to-day administration. Over the years, several administrative and political reforms had taken place in Ibadan, the most prominent were 1936 creation of Olubadan office, and 1976 when Olubadan became a permanent member of Western State Council Obas and Chiefs.

There are other several titles-by-household or compound, the most common is Mọgaji-the family head. The High Chiefs and Mọgajis carried out the civic duties- which enabled the indigenes accessed the land and to exercise their civil rights. Ibadan, under the leadership of Oluyole played a major role in Yoruba land. Oluyole was a grandson of Alaafin Abiọdun (through Agbọnyin, Abiọdun’s daughter). He fought several wars, which he won:

Ibadan versus Ijẹbu
Ibadan /Owu war
Ibadan/Ifẹ war
Ibadan /Ẹgba war
Ibadan/Ọgba war was a game changer in the post Ọyọ politics in Yoruba land, his defeat of the Ọgba at Ipara led to the take over of several Ọgba towns including Ibadan.

Consequently, Oluyọle became Areago of Ibadan, later he took the Osi-Ọna-Kankan-Fo title, second to Kurunmi- the Are-Ọna-Kankan-Fo (Generalissimo) of Yoruba land. The leadership of Ibadan over Ọyọ did not come by accident, rather, it came as Ibadan checkmated the rampaging Fulani warriors after the fall of Ọyọ. Yoruba had lost Igbonina; Ekiti and Akoko at this time were under threat. Ogbomọṣọ, Edẹ, Iwo, axis were under attack- even Oṣogbo had been defeated, occupied by Fulani. In fact, the entire Ọyọ land was under Ilorin-Fulani siege. Ibadan would not allow the onslaught to continue, by 1840, Ibadan soldiers defeated and pushed Fulani warriors back to Ilorin.

However, the only regret was Ibadan did not follow through to Ilorin. This military success stopped further Fulani attack on Yoruba land throughout 19th and early 20th centuries- the period that covered British annexation of Lagos from 1860 through the creation of Southern Protectorate- British’s political design meant to promote, protect, and to preserve the commercial interest of Royal Niger Company; the creation of Northern Protectorate and the amalgamation of January 1, 1914, leading to the formation-of Nigeria.

Ibadan was not done with wars yet, because it engaged in many more wars in Yorubaland in order to establish its supremacy. One of such war was Ibadan/Ijaye war of 1860-61. We should remember that Atiba, Oluyọle and Kurunmi were trio who fought the Eleduwẹ war during Alaafin Oluewu, to liberate Yoruba from the Fulani in Ilorin. At the war front- these three warriors became covenanted friends. At the end of the war- their friendship became even stronger- especially so, when Atiba succeeded Eluewu as the new Alaafin.

Unfortunately, their friendship later turned sour when Alaafin Atiba changed an age-long tradition in Ọyọ by abolishing the practice of Aremọ from dying with Alaafin. Kurunmi became enraged with the change in custom and tradition of Ọyọ, vowed not to recognize any Aremọ chosen as Alaafin in Ọyọ.

Alaafin Atiba died in 1859, his son Aremọ Adelu became the new Alaafin, Kurunmi refused to recognize Alaafin Adelu. Ibadan did not only recognize Adelu as Alaafin, but supported Ọyọ, this created enmity between Ibadan and Kurunmi of Ijaye. Earlier, Alaafin Atiba had made some far reaching administrative changes in Ọyọ, he divided Ọyọ into two sections, Kurunmi headed the (west) and Balogun Oluyọle in Ibadan led the (east). These changes, regardless, created more problems than it solved, because Kurunmi of Ijaye engaged in supremacy battle with Alaafin on who controlled upper Ogun towns and villages around Saki. Since the matter was not resolved before Alaafin Atiba’s death, Kurunmi saw his death as an opportunity to establish his control over Ọyọ West; without delay, he declared war on Ọyọ in 1860.
Ibadan war machine under Ogunmọla came in support of Òyọ, routed Kurunmi-Ijaye/Egba alliance (forces); more so, killed all his sons. When Kurunmi saw the direction of the war-that he was running against time, more important, there was no how he could have upper hand in the war; rather than being captured, Kurunmi committed suicide and Ijaye was destroyed by Ibadan army. Although, Oyo/Ibadan alliance paid off, yet, the war created more troubles and crises in Yorubaland—for two more decades—there was no peace in the land. Again, another Yoruba town with its power and influence went out of existence in Yorubaland.

The Ibadan/Ijaye war had just established Ibadan military superiority in Yorubaland, more important, the future role Ibadan would play in the politics of the region. Ibadan was not done with wars in Yoruba land, rather, it had just begun.

Prominent Ibadan leaders of 19th century were:

Baṣọrun Oluyọle
Baṣọrun Ibikunle
Baṣọrun Ogunmọla
Baṣọrun Latosisa
Iyalode Èfunṣetan Aniwura.

Between 1860 and 1885 Ibadan engaged in five different wars simultaneously. In 1877, Ibadan went to war against Ègba/Ijẹbu for attacking Ibadan traders, when coming from Port-Novó. The Ijẹṣa/Ekiti seized the moment, in 1878, attacked despotick Ibadan Ajèlès (viceroys) in their territories; Ibadan declared war on Ijẹṣa and Ekiti. The conflict between Ibadan/Ijẹṣa & Ekiti went on for sixteen years, the worst war in Yorubaland.

Ogedengbe-the Seriki of Ijẹṣa army, Fabunmi of Oke-Imesi, and Aduloju of Ado-Ekiti held Ibadan down as Ibadan engaged in other wars with the Ègba, Ijẹbu, Ilorin and the Ife. The Ibadan/Ijesa & Ekiti parapo war got to its peak at Kiriji, near Ikirun.

As these wars raged on in Yoruba land, no attempts were made to caution the warring groups, unfortunately, the leaders (Ọbas) in Yoruba land then were suspicious of themselves, enmeshed in bitter rivalry. The Church (CMS) and other religious organizations that should have played the role of peace-makers looked the other way. Sad to say, Lagos colonial administration stood aloof as entire Yorubaland was on fire. In 1884, events changed, partition of Africa was under way, British, which had more investments in the region than other rivals did not want the French or the Germans to have an upper hand. The realities on the ground made British stepped up, abandoned its lookwarm attitude, actively involved in resolving the internal strife in Yorubaland.

Through the Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Lagos colonial administration, reconciliation began among the warring Yoruba groups (Ibadan, Ijesa/Ekiti, Egba, and Ijebu). At a time, Lagos Governor Maloney went to Ikirun in 1885 during the Kiriji War between Ibadan and Ijesa/Ekiti alliance to find permanent solution to the crisis on hand. Finally, the combatants in the crises were tired of several decades of wars.
Through negotiations undertaken by the Church, which was spearheaded by Samuel Johnson, Charles Phillips, and Lagos Governor Maloney in 1886, peace gradually returned to Yorubaland as the warring groups sheathed their swords. At a time, Governor Carter had to use force on some Yoruba groups to open trade routes earlier closed. According to (Ayandele, 1967) the military onslaught on Ijẹbu in 1892 to open trade route and the attack on Ọyọ in 1895, the defeat of Ilorin by the Royal Niger Company in 1897 subdued entire Yorubaland. Thereafter, the history of Yorubaland changed by 1900 and even beyond. Ibadan maintained its influence and dominance on Yoruba, for years, it became the political and administrative headquarters of Yorubaland. Even, if today’s politics have changed the dynamics of Yoruba nation, Ibadan will always be remembered for its roles in shaping, and creating a new Yoruba nation in the 19th century.

Picture 55: Ibadan-Oluyole as at today. Single largest town in Nigeria
Source: www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-eQqdms-H_14/TD9Tbzl

Picture 56: Mapo Hall, Ibadan built in 1930; undergone several renovations- symbol of unity in Ibadan and center of political, cultural and economic activities in Yorubaland
Source: www.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-eQqdms-H_14/TD9Tbzl

Ẹgba-Abẹokuta From A Refuge Town to A Power Broker in Yoruba Land.
The Yoruba Ègbas lived in the southern part of old Ọyọ Empire, its current location has not changed significantly. Ègba’s journey to nationhood began in 1796 when Lisabi Agbongbogbo Akala revolted against Ọyọ under Alafin Aọlẹ. Ègba became a self-governing territory, however, the journey to freedom and self-determination within Yorubaland was very rough and tough.

For the next sixty-five years (1796-1860), it was marked by struggles for survival because of several military attacks from within Yoruba nation. In fact, the formation of Abẹokuta, the major Ègba town which means “under the rock” owed its existence to constant military attacks as the Ègbas needed a more secured location from fellow Yoruba and the rampaging Dahomey slave traders. Abẹokuta was founded in 1830, by Seriki Ṣodẹkẹ who led thousands of refugees from Ibadan-a major outcome from the fall of Ọyọ Empire.

Abẹokuta was built by refugees—majority came from Oyo and Ibadan, while several other groups with similar experience elsewhere joined. Between 1817 and 1824, Owu a prominent Ègba division, a traditional enemy of some Yoruba towns suffered a joint military attacks from Ijẹbu/Ife/Ọyọ alliance. From history, we are told about a minor issue on “alligator pepper” which happened between Owu man and Ijẹbu woman at Apomu market, a matter that would have been resolved amicably were there peace in Yorubaland. However, historians see the Ijẹbu/Ife/Ọyọ versus Owu war as a pay-back to Owu for its hostility and many won wars against some Yoruba towns. The coalition forces destroyed Owu town beyond repairs with several lives lost. In fact, this incident with the disaster that followed contributed in a large way to the founding of Abẹokuta much later.

Unfortunately, Owu was not the only victim, Ikija was attacked by the coalition army for supporting Owu. Besides, Ègbas in Ibadan were subjected to hostility, in the atmosphere of crisis and uncertainty, Ègba had no better choice than to leave Ibadan, but moved southward under Seriki Lamodi, who died on the way, as the exodus was completed under the leadership of Seriki Ṣodẹkẹ.

These migrants settled at Itoko, their host was Adagba, thereafter other Ègba groups started moving to Abẹokuta, in 1834, Owu joined.

Ègba had a large territory which extended to Ijaye up to Ogun River at Olokemeji. It also shared boundary with Ibadan, to the east is Remo division, on the west is the Ègbado (now Yewa) and to the south are the Aworis. Most of the prominent families came from Oyo, most Ègba chiefs were descendants of Esos especially the Sagbuuaa. Towns and communities were formed under individual leaders, the community operated a loose confederacy.
Other Egba Towns and Communities were:
Egba-Igbehin had Ake, Ijeun, Kenta, Iporo, Igbore- (this Egba group shares boundary with Remo) under Alake.

Egba-Oke-Ona is located close to Odo-Ona River and had the following towns: Ikerekun, Ikija, Idomapa, Odo, Podo under Osile.

Egba-Gbagura is situated near Oyo, this group is known as “Oyo-Egba” their towns include: Ilugun, Ibadan (before Egba/Ibadan war), Ifaye, Ika, Ojo, and Ilawo and several smaller communities. This group has Agura as its head

Some of the wars Êgba fought on their way to nationhood were:

- Êgba/Ijẹbu Rẹmọ war (Owiwi) of 1832
- Êgba/Ibadan war 1834
- Êgba/Ọta war to control the access road to Lagos, 1842
- Êgba/Ado war to punish the Ado for supporting Ọta in 1844
- Êgba/Ibarapa war 1849
- Êgba/Dahomey war under King Gezo 1851
- Êgba/Ijẹbu the Ere war of 1851
- Êgba/Ijaye war 1860-1862
- Êgba/Makun war 1862-1864

Êgba’s leadership role in Yoruba land was not measured by its military successes, though, Êgba won most of these wars and lost, but a few, rather, its contribution to a new Yoruba through western education, Christianity, introduction of constitutional monarchy, above all, the introduction and provision of infrastructure in a municipal run system- second of its type after Lagos, placed Êgba ahead of towns and villages and opened a new chapter in the history of Yoruba.

At inception, Êgba had more than 200 settlements grouped into five independent towns with individual kings. These towns are:

- Ake, the traditional head is Alake
- Owu, the Ọba is Olowu
- Gbagura, the head of the community is Agura
- Oke-Ọna, the king there is Ọṣhinlẹ
- Ibara, the Ọba is Olubara.

Each community ran an independent, but a centrally coordinated administration under the leadership of Alake of Êgbaland-a title created in-1854.
Apart from confederacy structure, Êgba had several councils of local chiefs running to over (4000 chiefs); these councils were:
Ogboni Society headed by Oluwo, the council had so much influence on the Oba (even to date). Other titles in Egba-Ogboni cults are: Aro, Apena, Ntowa, Bala, Basala Baki, Asipa, Asalu, Lalija, Apesi, Esinkin Ola, and Odofin. Military Council was headed by Balogun and Seriki, second to Ogboni society. Parakoyi (business/commercial council) headed by Babalaje of Ògbalánd.

Both the Christian and Muslim communities had representatives on these councils. In 1854, the office of Alake was created. Earlier, Šomoye, Ògba military commander established the Ògba United Board of Management (EUBM), but the body died with Šomoye in 1846.

Ògba took various steps to consolidate its power:

first, through British officials by treaties,
second, through the Church which had its headquarters in Òbòkúta.
Óbòkúta, after Lagos became another center of activities in Òyorubaland, because of the Church and the Saro Òyorubas.

The Saro Òyoruba changed the political/economic dynamics, even religion.
By 1893, the governor of Lagos, recognized Ògbaland as an independent territory within Òyorubaland,
five years later Ògba United Government (EUG) came into existence.

Althoug, Ògba became part of Òyorubaland within the southern protectorate that formed Nigeria in 1914.

Egba-Alake Rulers from 1829 to Date.
Names of Egba-Alake Rulers Status of Ruler ship Period
Seriki Shodẹkẹ War leader 1829 – 1845
Šomoye Regent 1845 – 1846
Sha gbua Okeku 1 nga Regent 1846 – 1854
Sha gbua Okeku (1st Alake of Œgba land) from Œyo-Œṣo Sha gbua stock First Alake of Egba land (office created in 1854) 8th August 1854 to 1862.
Šomoye Regent (2nd time) 1862- 1868
Ôba Ademọla Alake 2nd November, 1869-20th December, 1877.
Ôba Oluwajin Alake 9th Feb. 1885-27th Jan. 1889
Ôba Oṣọkalu Alake 18th Sept. 1891 – 11th June 1898.
Ôba Gbadebọ 1 Alake 8th August 1898 – 28th May 1920.
Ôba Adedọtun Arẹmu Gbadebọ 111 Alake 24th August 2005 to Date.
Ijebu-the 19th Century Power in Yorubaland.

Ijebu Yoruba live in the thick-forest/mangrove belt—south of Oyo Empire. A highly urbanized and entrepreneurial group- whose economic dexterity is a common knowledge.

There are several claims on the origin of Ijebu nation, but the most popular of these stories is the Obanta (the king outside)version, the Ife man, who was the first king in Ijebuland. Other historical versions are the “Biblical Jebusites” the Waddai story, and the Kingdom of Owodaiye of Ethiopia. Each version of these stories has been intellectually presented to the public- for instance, the oral historians believed that Ijebu
migrated to their present abode from Waddai, Sudan, several millennia ago, even before King Solomon of Israel and the “famous Makida” the Queen of Sheba. Protagonists of this version have cited cultural and historical similarities between the Ijebus, the Nubians and the Southern Sudan and Ethiopia- in names resemblance, such as (Saba/Shaba, Esiwu, Meleki/Menelik). They also cited tribal marks sameness, more so, household items with very strong socio-political significance.

Even though, the Obanta version as presented by Samuel Johnson in his book “History of the Yorubas” is different from the traditional and oral historians’ presentation. Regardless, from our studies, there were three fundamental and incontrovertible issues that have made Ijebu history very interesting:

One, Ijebu people have been part of Yoruba history for centuries,
Two, Ijebu people had undergone several transformational stages over the centuries, which would have affected their history.

No doubt, some individuals, even groups might have migrated from Sudan, or Near East centuries ago to the present Ijebuland, since migration is a common phenomenon among humans. On the other hand, one cannot ruled out the possibility of aborigines present in the land, at the time the migrants arrived. The natives must have accepted and welcomed the migrants, and their co-habitation produced an amalgam and blend of culture that has sustained Ijebu-Alare for centuries.

Three, Ijebu like other sub-groups within Yoruba nation- has contributed significantly to the greatness of Yoruba- through culture, education, Christianity, nationalism, above all, its unequal entrepreneur spirit.

There are several Ijebu towns, communities and villages today, Ijebu-Ode is the political/cultural headquarters of all Ijebu, the paramount ruler in Ijebuland is Awujale, also addressed as Akile-Ijebu. Awujale is produced by any of these four ruling houses: Tunwase, Fidipote, Ogbagba and Gbelegbuwa.

After the king there are three civil authorities in Ijebu, these are:
The Osugbo or Ogboni,
The Ipampa, and
the Lamurin.

These three bodies were so powerful, should they enact laws, no human (even the king) could repeal or annul them. By tradition, Oba should be a member of Osugbo. Ijebu land has a unique political system within Yoruba nation, there are over two hundred Ijebu towns, villages and communities (called “Egure”) with individual obas and baales, and their individual socio-cultural/political structures, still, these communities are part of a larger Ijebu kingdom under Awujale. Ijebu-Ode is the capital of Ijebuland, where Awujale lives. Olisa is the traditional head of Ijebu-Ode.
Agemọ is a major traditional festival, there are sixteen Agemọ in all Ijebuland, in every July, these Agemọ masquerades meet at Ijebu-Ode, before moving to Imodi-Mosan where the Agemọ festival holds.
Other Ijebu towns are Ijebu-Igbo, Ijebu-Ife, Agọ-Iwoye, Oọsọsa, Ikenne etc.
Ijebu played a major role in the history of Yoruba during the 19th century, because of its geographical location.

It became trade routes for Yoruba towns and villages to do business with Europeans who stayed and lived in Lagos. Unlike other Yoruba towns and kingdoms, Ijebu did not have strong military, rather it relied on “mercenaries”.