

# CHAPTER 3

## YORUBALAND IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

### Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- describe the political situations in Yorubaland at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century;
- examine the factors that led to the collapse of the old Oyo Empire;
- discuss the Owu war and its effects on the formation of New Yoruba Territories like Ibadan and Abeokuta;
- discuss the peace treaty of 1886 and its consequences.

### Introduction

The Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century witnessed several developmental changes that ranged from the political, social, economical and the cultural. It is composed of smaller ethnic groups like the Ekiti, Ondo, Akoko, Ijesa, Egbado, Owo and in particular, the old Oyo Empire which rose to prominence in the 19<sup>th</sup> century but however, it collapsed due to both external and internal factors which this work shall reveal.

### 3.1 The Political Situations In Yorubaland that Led to the Collapse of Oyo Empire

The weakness of the monarchical government of the Oyo Empire in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was indeed responsible for the eventual collapse of the empire. The empire is ruled by the Alaafin with the help of the most senior in the council called Oyomesi and the president called the Bashorun. The increasing power and influence of the Bashorun in the council started growing and this led to rivalry between the Bashorun and the Alaafin. The Alaafin could not contain or control the influence of Bashorun. Hence, the rise in tension. The Are-Ona-Okakanfo is also responsible for the expansion and defence of the empire and because of his position, he was not allowed to live within the capital. Sadly, the growing powers of the Bashorun and the Are-Ona-Okakanfo reduced and affected the political and military powers of the Alaafin. The rivalry and political tension between the leaders, led to the cracks, division and weakness of the empire which later created the opportunities of the vassal states to rebel against the empires as well as attack on the empire by external enemies.

With the political tension high, Afonja challenged Alaafin; he lost control of the context to the throne, with his private military aid and some Muslim allies, he declared the independence of Ilorin through the help of a Muslim cleric called Alimi by 1817. Afonja later had a problem with his Northern allies due to his refusal to convert to Islam. The misunderstanding with his allies, led to the revolt which later occupied Ilorin and eventually, led to his death and Ilorin came under the control of

the Fulanis. These were the political situations in Oyo Empire that prepared the ground for the civil war and fall of the Oyo Empire.

### 3.2 Factors that Led to the Collapse of the Old Oyo Empire

There are so many factors that caused the fall of the old Oyo Empire. These are both internal and external factors. They are as follows:

1. **The Collapse of the Central Government:** The cracks within the administration of the central government weakened. This led to the failure of the constitution. The Oyo Empire faced so many constitutional crisis which was as a result of the unresolved constitutional clashes that led to political instability. The power tussle between the Alaafin and the Bashorun led to the collapse of the constitution and also the neglect of the Yoruba tradition by the Alaafin. The continuous flouting and disregards to the Yoruba tradition by Alaafin weakened the government further. For instance, Oyo's invasion of Apomu an Ife town by Alaafin was seen as a sacrifice because it resulted in a breach of royal row called "eewo" whereby every Alaafin vowed not to use the "Ida Oranyan" against Ife. The breach of the vow by the Alaafin presented withdrawal of support by his subjects.
2. **Decline of the Military Strength:** The political instability in Oyo Empire weakened the military. This weakness was later exploited by its vassal states like Dahomy, Borgu and Nupe to gain independence which affected the armed forces because it barred the Oyo Empire from purchasing horses from its cavalry in the Northern markets. The Egba defeat and its inability to stop Afonja – Alimi military forces from taking Ilorin from Oyo exposed the porosity of the Oyo army.
3. **Economic Decline:** The economic position of the Oyo Empire was severely weakened by the decline in the slave trade due to its reliance on slave trade as a major source of its revenue as well as the independence of its vassal states which equally helped in reducing its revenue base – warranting Oyo kings to carry out slave raiding expedition in forbidden Yorubalands like Ile-Ife in particular, also the wealth accruing from slave trading made Oyo kings to be more tyrannical in nature. This further ensured slave raiding in Yorubaland. The constant raid in the 17<sup>th</sup> century led to incessant civil wars which destroyed the empire.
4. **The Size of the Empire:** The vast nature of the empire created administrative problems between the central government, the province and the vassal states. The gap in communication encouraged some provincial governors to revolt against the central government. The vastness of the empire resulted in poor and ineffective control over the vassal states making it easy for them to secure their independence.
5. **The Inter-Tribal Wars:** However, among the factors enumerated above, the factor which led to the final collapse of the Oyo Empire in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century has to do with the various internal and external civil wars fought by the old Oyo Empire, more especially, the invasion of

the Fulani Jihadists from the North. In the 1796, the Are-Ona-Okakanfo, the commander-in-chief of the Alaafin, Afonja, allied with local chiefs against Abiodun's successor, Awole. According to tradition, Awole was forced to commit suicide. The death of Awole led to the series of crises which confronted the empire as regards who succeeds him as the new Alaafin. In the state of this tensed political confusion, the Afonja declared him independent of Oyo Empire and then based in Ilorin in the North – east of Oyo where he held sway.

By 1817, Afonja formed an alliance with the Fulani Jihadists to the North, the force made up of Northern slaves, Fulani and Oyo Muslim came together and defeated and sacked old Oyo Empire, which signaled the final collapse of the Oyo Empire. However, with the loss of his economic base and his military commander, the Alaafin could no longer sustain the empire. Afonja later had a problem with his allied forces, they revolted against him, annexed Ilorin, Solagberu replaced him but also failed in his bid to control the empire. The Fulani took over Ilorin and Ilorin became an outpost of the Sokoto Caliphate, a base used to bringing other parts of Yorubaland under the caliphate. This was resisted, and Ilorin was then used as a centre to Islamise the Yorubaland. The final pressure on Oyo Empire by the Fulani Jihad led to the evacuation of people and thousands fled to the Southern part of Oyo-Soun, Egba, Ibarapa, Ekiti and Ijesa. The dislocation caused pressure which provoked series of wars with a reaching consequences.

### **3.2 The Owu War and its Effects on the Formation of New Yoruba Territories like Ibadan and Abeokuta**

**The Owu war:** The presence of the Fulani Jihadists in Oyo Empire created more hostilities in the old Oyo Empire, the capital was evacuated and the inhabitants fled from Oyo into the Southern part – the Osun and Ibarapa areas, the territories of Ijesa, Ekiti, Ife and the new independent Egba state. The subsequent migration of people provoked series of other wars in the Southern areas of Yorubaland such as the Owu war between the Ife and Owu kingdoms. The war was caused by the dispute over the ownership of the market at Apomu. However, the people of Ife, in trying to take the market, the people of Ife allied with Ijebu people and other groups of war – mongers from Oyo to fight against Owu. Owu was destroyed in the war and also, they fought against the Egba people for supporting Owu kingdom. The victories allies with their great booties and slaves encamped and settled in a village called Ibadan. The final consequence of the Owu war led to the development of Ibadan.

After the destruction of Egba by the allied forces, the remaining people left over after the war from the Egba and Owu kingdoms regrouped and settled at Abeokuta. However, other Oyo warriors settled at Ijaye, another Egba town.

### **3.3 The British Intervention**

#### **(a) The Peace Treaty of 1886 and Its Aftermath**

The 1886, treaty did not end the wars in Yorubaland, because the Egba people remained at war with and continued to restrict and block trade, with Ibadan. In 1883, the Ijebu withdrew from the war and

made peace with Ibadan, yet feared that Ibadan would not withdraw their force. This withdrawal led to a sharp division among Ijebu leadership and threatened a civil war which compelled the Awujale Fidipole, the advocate of all-out war to flee to exile. However, the 1886 treaty did not settle the lingering situation in Ife Kingdom as Modakeke force had sacked Ile-Ife. This made Ekitiparapo to send force to help Ife in destroying Modakeke. However, the term of the 1886 treaty provided that Modakeke should disband and move from Ife territory to Ibadan territory. Modakeke refused to jeopardize its freedom by moving to Ibadan, therefore, Ife equally refused to break up their forces and re-occupy their town. By 1886, the Ilorin – Ibadan conflict was not settled, Ibadan did not concede to the right of the Fulani over any Yoruba land and so refused to withdraw her forces to support Offa against Ilorin since the beginning of the war. Ibadan and Ilorin continued to fight for six years even after the fall of Offa. Despite, the withdrawal of Ibadan and Ekitiparapo force at Modakeke and Ife in 1887. Modakeke refused to move as stipulated by the 1886 treaty. Hence, the dreadlock in Ijebu country came to an end in 1892 by a British military expedition from which conquered Ijebu Kingdom forced its roads open, followed by Egba kingdom. The Ibadan – Ilorin war came to an end in 1893, establishing their boundary as a line between Offa and Ikirun.

Therefore, not satisfied with the 1893 settlement, Ilorin (continued to) sent some of its political offices to South of Offa, Igbomina and Northern Ekiti because Ilorin that her territory was checked by the British administration in Lagos to ensure compliance to the 1893 settlement treaty. However, in Ilorin various attempts to expel the British Garrison from around Ikirun failed. In 1897, Ilorin officials were killed or expected by the Northern Ekiti towns and collected a united army which met Ilorin army that was advancing into Ekiti. The five armies met at Erimope, but were stopped by British Garrison near Ikirun with heavy guns before they started fighting themselves. The British routed Ilorin there. However, not long, the British Royal Niger Company conquered Ilorin again.

## Summary

- The political situation in the Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century led to the weakening of the empire and subsequent collapse of the empire.
- Several factors such as the decline in the military strength, decline in economy, the large size and the constitutional crisis led to the fall of Oyo Empire.
- The Owu war with Ife over land disputation led to the formation of New Yoruba territories like Ibadan and Abeokuta.
- The British peace treaty of 1886 led to the achievement of peace and the final subjugation western region.

## Revision Questions

### Objectives

1. What is the major cause of the collapse of the Oyo Empire?

- A. Scarcity of food
  - B. The death of Bashorun
  - C. Civil war in Oyo
  - D. Settlement
2. The British peace treaty was in which year?
- A. 1801
  - B. 1870
  - C. 1808
  - D. 1886
3. What facts led to the weakening of the Old Oyo Empire?
- A. Military weakness
  - B. Lack of fund
  - C. Increase in food production
  - D. Chief Okuade
4. What is the cause of the Owu war?
- A. Ownership of farmland
  - B. Ownership of ownership
  - C. Construction of market
  - D. Renovation of market
5. Afonja formed an alliance with the Fulani in the year \_\_\_\_\_
- A. 1907
  - B. 2007
  - C. 1817
  - D. 1207
6. The death of Awole led to the \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Succession problem
  - B. Fulani invasion
  - C. British expedition
  - D. Jihad
7. The Are-Ona-Kakanfo is the \_\_\_\_\_
- A. Defence Minister
  - B. Alaafin
  - C. High priest
  - D. Ibadan
8. After the Fulani invasion, Ilorin became
- A. a centre of Islamization
  - B. a centre of crisis
  - C. a centre of Jiha

- D. Oyo
9. The Egba migration led to the formation of
- A. Abeokuta settlement
  - B. Ibadan settlement
  - C. Egba settlement
  - D. Igbonna settlement
10. The Yoruba is in \_\_\_\_\_ Nigeria.
- A. North East
  - B. North West
  - C. South East
  - D. South West

### **Essay Questions**

1. Explain certain factors that led to the settlement at Abeokuta.
2. Enumerate the factors that caused the weakness of Oyo Empire.
3. What are the consequences of Owu Civil War?
4. What are the importance of the 1886 peace treaty in Yorubaland?
5. Discuss the socio-political organization of the Oyo Empire.