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# **LASU Journal of Humanities (LASUJOH)**

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## **Conquest, Imperialism and Resistance in Fulani-Yoruba Relations in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: A Political Anthropological Discourse of Local Imperialism in Northeast Yoruba land**

*Tubi Paul-Kolade PhD, Oshewolo, Roseline PhD & Borok, Andrew Maren PhD*

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### **Abstract**

*The quest to bring freshness into academic discussion on conquest, imperialism and resistance to domination in pre-Colonial Africa can be enriched by political anthropological study. This study attempts to explore and extend the frontiers of political anthropological discussions on imperialistically imposed wars by the powerful nations on the weak in general and to provide refreshing data on the Fulani-Yoruba relations of 1840-1897 in particular. By using the Fulani-Yoruba relations as a case study, it examines the binaries of imperialism and resistance, domination and fight for freedom as constant variables of interethnic relations in pre-Colonial Africa. The period 1840-1897 was marked by intense conflicts imposed by the Fulani on northern Yoruba peoples. This paper assesses the factors that aided the Fulani conquests of the area and the various factors that culminated in their eventual defeat and expulsion from the area. Methodologically, the paper employs ethnographic paradigm based on fieldworks, interviews of key informants, and In-Depth discussions. It also uses archival materials and other documented sources. Data from the research indicated that the period was marked by series of wars and the Fulani subjected the populace to massive enslavement and excessive economic exploitation. The conquered territories eventually revolted and the paper discussed the reasons that led to the defeat of the Fulani. The research concludes that internal imperialism is as worse as external imperialism and that*

*struggle for freedom from domination was a dominant feature of African history. The paper makes significant contribution to the study of intergroup relations, aggression, conquest, resistance and freedom. The paper recommends the study of political anthropology as sine qua non for critical examination of historical events and intergroup study.*

Keywords: Ethnography, Fulani, interethnic relations, imperialism, political anthropology, Yoruba

## Introduction

**T**HE YEARS FROM 1840-1897 MARKED INTENSE PERIOD IN FULANI-YORUBA relations. This period has political anthropological importance, which can provide fresh insights into interethnic relations in pre-Colonial Africa. It is also capable of providing critical details about local imperialism in the continent. Political anthropology here refers to the organized study of impacts of human behaviour on political organization within a given polity. It further seeks to probe into the various factors that influence intermix of politics, culture and governance. Scholars like Gutorov, Koryushinkin and Zavershinsky (2019) have highlighted the relevance of political anthropology in the political culture of traditional societies, which are transiting to modernity. Lewellen (2013) and Vincent (1990, 2002) extends the frontiers of discipline by buttressing the usefulness of political anthropology in critiquing politics and offering new perspectives to politics mechanism in societies.

It is a fact of history that Fulani's imperialism and expansionist policy extended to the Yoruba people who live south of the Niger River. Their hegemony over northern Yoruba territory was achieved by 1840 (Apata, 2003, Aremu and Oniye 2018, Aremu and Afolabi 2018, Usman 2003, Mason 1973, Lewu 2015, Tubi 2020). However, the reasons for domination were sharply different for northeast and northwest Yoruba land. On one hand, the conquest of northwestern Yoruba was precipitated by a man called Afonja, the War Generalissimo of Yoruba land, who invited the Fulani militia as collaborators in his revolts against his master, the Alafin, the paramount ruler of the Yoruba living at Oyo. Having helped the people of Ilorin to defeat the Alafin and burnt Oyo, the capital, they turned against their Yoruba hosts, massacred Afonja the leader of Ilorin and usurped the throne. On the other hand, the conquest of northeastern Yoruba land was achieved by series of coordinated wars from their new base in Bida, they made incursions into northeastern Yoruba territory, the homeland of the Akoko and Okun speaking peoples and their neighbours.

Yoruba are group of indigenous peoples who inhabit parts of West Africa. They are composed of about 30 dialects; notable among these are Akoko, Ekiti, Igbonina, Ijebu, Ife, Oyo, and Okun amongst others. They are indigenous to Benin, Togo and Nigeria where majority of them are domiciled. Their orature/oral literature points to Ile Ife as their ancestral home and source. Oduduwa is their eponymous founder. The Fulani are a group of herders who came originally from Futa Toro, in northern modern Senegal known as ancient Tekrur by Arabic writers. They made series of peaceful incursions into indigenous Hausa territories of Nigeria. The militaristic incursions began as jihads (religious wars) in 1802 at Gobir, an ancient Hausa kingdom, and by 1808, most Hausa states were in their hands. The Fulani deposed the original Hausa rulers and imposed their maximum rule on the people, (Apata, 2003, Aremu and Oniye 2018, Aremu and Afolabi 2018 Mason 1973, Lewu 2015, Tubi 2020).

Methodologically, the paper adopts political anthropology because of its elasticity in addressing critical issues of politics and governance (Gladhill 2008, Lewellen 2003), and it is useful in the study of transitioning societies (Gutorov, Koryshkin, Zavershinsky 2019). Its application to the study of nationalism and freedom (Erikson, 2010) is very apt in this study. Rather than mere historical documentation and narration, the paper searches for the socio-political anthropological implications of the period. In this, it uses ethnography, which involved fieldworks among certain communities of northeastern Yoruba which played important roles in the Fulani-Yoruba relations. Key informants supplied data received from those who directly participated or witnessed the period of Fulani domination of the area. In addition, archival materials were consulted which furnish relevant information from Europeans who witnessed the period (Perham and Bull, 1967, Vandeleur, 1898), and Colonial officers. Archaeology data were retrieved from works of scholars that have examined the period (Obayemi 1978, 1980, Usman 2003 Tubi, 2020, 2021). Written sources by African scholars that provided scholarly documentation of the events were consulted extensively, (Apata 2003, Idrees 1989, Kolapo 2012, Obayemi 1978, Sidi 2012, Tubi 2020, 2021). The usefulness of this paper is that it retrieves and discusses political anthropological underpinnings of the period.

### **Political Anthropology in Theory**

Several studies have shown that political anthropology is a theoretical and methodological tool of analysis (Thomassen, 2012a; 2012b; Spencer, 2011;

Krohn-Hansen, 2015; Osterweil, 2013). As a theoretical and methodological instrument, it encourages the ethnographic and comparative study of politics and the associated subjects (Spencer, 2001). Political anthropology studies politics and the adjunct subjects taking into consideration the historical, social, and cultural contexts. In clear terms, it combines ethnographic or field-based research with history. The goal may be to dissect the historical context of a particular object of study - such as wars, rebellions and revolutions, political activism, public administration and others (Krohn-Hansen, 2015).

In the existing literatures, two distinct academic strands of political anthropology are identifiable. One academic strand focuses on important political institutions of the state and the major contestations over issues such as accountability, the distribution of authority, social movements, among others. The other academic strand focuses on 'politics in terms of power differentials within society'. This strand of political anthropology focuses on everyday politics along diverse lines such as gender, race, citizenship, etc. (Koster, 2021).

In more specific terms, political anthropology is an important framework for studying rebellions and revolutions, protests and resistance, social changes, political systems, and cultural values. It has become an instrument for explaining political transformations in societies. Political scientists, sociologists, and historians dominate researches of this nature (Thomassen, 2012a). As Osterweil (2013) would want us to believe, the framework of anthropology could be 'politically engaged'. Engagement in this context may imply direct political activism, including the dissection of dominant categories and practices. Political anthropology is becoming accustomed to the need to understand and apprehend important objects such as social movements and large scale inter-group conflicts (Osterweil, 2013; Thomassen, 2012b). Candea (2011:309) notes that the 'political' in political anthropology 'is left intentionally open-ended so as to enable critical engagement with an increasing range of topics'.

## **Reasons for Fulani invasion of Northeast Yoruba land**

Having successfully usurped the thrones of Nupe land from 1836-40, the Fulani leaders turned their attention southwards on the Yoruba across the Niger River. Scholars like Apata (2003), Obayemi (1978), and Lewu (2015) have discussed the reasons for Fulani invasion of northeast Yoruba land. Tubi (2020, 2021) summarises the reasons on six main points namely; demands for slaves used in payment to the Caliphate, pretext of religious conversion, forceful acquisition of

of local technological experts, plundering of human and material resources, use of slaves as cheap labours on client farms and sales of slaves to buy European firearms.

The expediency of supplying regular slaves to appease the Caliphate was perhaps the major reason why war was imposed on northern Yoruba peoples. The caliphate demanded regular tributes in form of human and material resources from the Fulani rulers in pledge of allegiance. The annual demand for slaves as booties became increasingly more difficult and it resorted into slave raids across the Niger. Another reason was the use of religion proselytization. The Fulani promised to extend the frontiers of Islam across the Niger and thus launched series of jihad (holy wars) into what was considered as pagan territories. The issue of waging Islamic religious war for the conversion of the peoples of northeast Yoruba land by Fulani "jihadists" has been called to question by scholars such as Obeyemi (1978), Lewu (2015) and Tubi (2020, 2021).

They contend that proselytization was the least concern of the Fulani and their collaborators. According to key informants, at the end, no conversion was attempted due to the fact that they value slave raids more than religious conversion, (Abiola, personal communication; Adewumi, personal communication; Fatimayin, personal communication). In fact, jihad was a mere pretext for war.

Plundering of human and economic resources of the conquered peoples was also a prime motive for invasion. The Fulani engaged in massive slave raids and sold the people into slavery to acquire more firm arms so as to prosecute more wars. In addition, they plunder economic resources, like Shea butter and palm oil/kernels, which were abundant in the area. They also took by force their foodstuffs, while forcing the people into excessive taxation. When Frederick Lugard, the British consul (who became the first Colonial Governor of Niger), William Balfour Bakie, British explorer and Samuel Ajayi Crowther, An African Missionary visited the area in 1854, they lamented that the Fulani forced the people to pay taxes with their children (Perham and Bull, 1976, Lewu, 2015, Tubi 2020, 2021). The Royal Niger Company, a British trading company under Tubman Goldie observed the rapacity of Fulani plundering and decided to confront them militarily, (Lewu 2015). Also, the Fulani invaded the northern Yoruba so as to forcefully take away their technological expertise. Obeyemi (1980) and Tubi (2020) highlights the expertise of the peoples of northeast Yoruba land, especially the Okun speaking people in iron technology and weaving. Weavers

and smithers were kidnapped (Johnson 1973) and enslaved and taken to Bida to work in foundries and weaving looms. They provide the needed professional labour in a bid to sustain the economy and maintain the exotic tastes of the elites. The Fulani needed slaves to work in client farms which were established in several parts of Nupe land to produce sufficient food to feed the populace and the militias, so as to maintain the war efforts. Finally, slave raids were conducted to capture slaves which were sold so as to buy European firearms which were used to prosecute more wars and capture more slaves in a vicious circle.

### **Factors that aided Fulani's conquest of the northeastern Yoruba land**

By 1884, the entire northeast Yoruba land and the lands of the Kukuruku and Esan laid in the hands of the Fulani rulers of Nupe land, with the exception of Ogidi, Oka and Okene. Fulani's conquest of the area has multifarious motivated factors; these are discussed below.

- i. **Lack of joint war effort by the conquered territories:** The most unfortunate tragedy that confronted the Okun people was their inability to put up a joint confrontation against Fulani invaders. Their failure to sense the impending doom, as too big to be confronted individually gave them away easily to invaders. They failed to know that they could not individually put up a viable challenge to the imperialists. Due to their inability to unite and confront a common enemy, the enemy was able to inflict total defeat on them and subjugated them (Apata, 2003; Tubi, 2021; Obahun, personal communication; Ajakaiye, personal communication).
- ii. **Deficiency of northeast Yoruba traditional polity:** Another problem that aided the conquest of northeast Yoruba land is the traditional political system of the people, which consists of mini-kingdoms. Mini-kingdoms are marked by their micro-demographic structure and absence of a standing army. The Akoko and Okun and their neighbours (the Ebira and Kukuruku peoples) never had large political central governments, (Tubi, 2021). The Fulani who invaded the land in bits and subjected them to easy conquests and domination exploited this deficiency.
- iii. **Enemy's superior military organization:** The Fulani has a standing army, well equipped and experienced generals, which were absent in northeast Yoruba land. Their military were tested soldiers who had been hardened by series of wars among the competing Fulani usurpers. Fulani forces had formidable numerous cavalries. The acquisition of European firearms by

Fulani was also an advantage to their cause. The Fulani utilized their trading contacts with the British and French merchants to acquire European weapons with which they inflicted maximum force on their enemies. Also, the Fulani had good warrior-leaders. All the Fulani rulers were tested military warriors. In addition, they had seasoned commanders such as Makun Muhammed in Okun land and Ndako Damisa in Akoko land. Others are NdaJiya, and Mayaki. Another military strategy employed by the invaders was psychological warfare, whereby they sent warmongers to targeted communities and instill fear and anxiety among them before the actual invasion. This created psychological defeat among the people before the war. Also, Nupe forces were forbidden from returning from a war front without winning the war (Aremu and Oniye, 2018; Sidi, 2012, Lewu, 2015), which greatly motivated their military exploits.

- iv. **European support to Fulani:** British interest laid in making economic gains and so the Royal Niger Company supported the Fulani in so far as trade routes were well managed and they had access to the hinterland. Thus, the Fulani were at liberty to access European economic activities from Lokoja principally due to the use of River Niger for trading and communication. Trading with the French and British merchants brought immense wealth to rulers. Included in the trade with Britain was the purchase of firearms. With immense wealth, the Fulani rulers were able to prosecute the wars of conquests and the wars brought more gains to them, (Tubi, 2021). Therefore, in a sequence of reciprocal cause and effect, they were involved in continuous circles of waging wars to gain wealth and use the gains to buy more weapons and equipment to prosecute more wars.
- v. Internal support for Fulani's imperialism: As found in all imperialistic domination, the role of internal collaborators was prominent in Fulani-yoruba relations of the period. Tacit support came from Egbe (Bridel, Loko/ Prof23/1926), Ejuku and Kabba (Krapf-Askari, 1966; Lewu, 2015; Obayemi, 1978). The Fulani established their imperialistic headquarters at Kabba "from which further raids were carried out" (Krapf-ASkari, 1966:10) and had bases at Egbe and Ejuku, where they planned military offensive against Okunland. Egbe had the opportunity to demobilise Masaba the Fulani tormentor in chief, but did not. When Masaba was exiled from Bida, he ran and found solace in Egbe. It was while in the community that he raised an army and retook his throne. He returned to be a tormentor and enslaver of

Okun people. In 1865-68, he made Egbe his war camp from where he invaded other surrounding territories. It was from Egbe that his army general Muhamud Yerima invaded other Yagba lands and subjugated them (Lewu, 2015). This strategic collaboration by Egbe cost both the indigenes in particular and Okun people in general immense loss of human and material resources.

Also, many kings and individuals became active collaborators of the imperialists while some Akoko, Okun, Agbede and Auchi indigenes were appointed as resident agents, called *ogba* among the Yoruba and called *azeni* among the Afenmai and Kukuruku peoples. Some local chiefs were appointed tribute coordinators and assistant coordinators as a result of their allegiance to the Fulani, in addition, they were even said to have converted to Islam in solidarity with the Fulani-Nupe who rewarded the chiefs handsomely for enforcing tribute payment (NAK, 1918). According to historical scholars, "Following the *ogun igberi*, *obaro* of Kabba worked together with the invaders and contributed so much to Fulani-Nupe colonial expansion in Ijumu and Akoko area. In recognition of his loyalty, the *obaro's* jurisdiction was extended over Ijumu and Akoko area" (Aremu and Oniye, 2018:4). Similar sentiments were expressed by Apata (2003:437) who submits that, "after the *ogun igberi*, the *Ohara* collaborated with Nupe and contributed immensely to the Nupe colonial expansion in Ijumu and Akoko area. In recognition of his unalloyed loyalty, the *obaro's* jurisdiction was extended over Ijumu and Akoko areas". As a result of the loyalty Kabba became an administrative centre of the Nupe forces. In like manner, Obayemi (1978:75) declares, "The Owe chief (*obaro*) seem to have been a faithful follower of the Nupe- a role they played until 1897 when resident Bida agents were forced to make their final withdrawal".

- vi. Upheavals in Yoruba land: After the fall of Oyo in 1826, the entire Yoruba land was engulfed in upheavals. Ibadan warriors began to subject other Yoruba groups to their control. This was rejected and it led to interneceine wars among the Yoruba. The invasion of northeast Yoruba land by Ibadan raiders, by a group of renegade Ibadan marauders *called gonigon*, completely weakened the Akoko and Okun peoples. Amidst this upheaval, the Fulani launched their attacks and found the northern Yoruba in a very weak state. The Akoko and Okun were confronted with war from two formidable adversaries, the *gonigon* (Ibadan raiders) and *tapa* (Fulani-Nupe enslavers).

According to colonial archives (NAK SNP 2749/1910), the Ibadan warrior, Ayorinde, who held the title of *Osi Balogun* of Ibadan, with Attah of Ayede invaded Yagba by sacking Ogbe, Ijagbe and Okoloke. Also, there was alliance between Ibadan and Fulani invaders, as it was reported that Yerima, Fulani ruler and Ayorinde, Ibadan warrior, made pact of area of influence so as to avoid confrontation with each other, but later quarreled due to suspicion among them (Apata, 2003).

## **Impacts of the Fulani hegemony on northeastern Yoruba and their neighbours**

This study agrees with local informants that the Nupe-Fulani hegemony was the most destructive event in the annals of the Akoko and Okun peoples, (Fatimayin, personal communication; Abiola, personal communication; Joledo, personal communication). The Fulani subjected the whole area to forceful enslavement, Baikie, British explorer who witnessed the period reports that about 300-400 slaves were sold daily, and that the figure rose to 800 on some days. Tubman Goldie of Royal Niger Company, (NAKSNP558P/1913, C.O 147/124) reports that numerous slaves dominate Fulani kingdom at Bida. Scholars have calculated 1,611 slave labour camps around Bida for captured people, (Lewu 2015, Tubi 2021).

One of the major fallouts of the series of raids in Okunland and the surrounding areas was economic despoliation of the people. The imperialists literally imposed economic slavery on northeast Yoruba people through the resident agent system called *ogba*. According to Colonial report by James (1914), the conquered peoples lived is total in serfdom, whereby all their produce and services were appropriated by the invaders. Depopulation of the entire landscape was another impact of Fulani imperialism. Oral sources (Ajakaiye, personal communication, Gbaluju, personal communication, Obahun, personal communication, Joledo, personal communication) and European accounts indicate that whole villages were captured and taken to Bida as slaves (Vandeleur, 1898). The situation was so bad that Colonial office (File 2339 A NAK) records that had the British not come by the time they did, all the communities would have disappeared. Be that as it may, oratures attest that many communities in these areas were completely obliterated from the map.

Incessant raids and enslavements destroyed the traditional technology of the people. Archaeological research by scholars like Obayemi, Oyelaran, Bakinde

and Tubi have revealed data of abundant ancient iron technology, pottery and weaving among the Okun. The Okun were adept in iron and brass casting. The Okun were also experts in cloth weaving and pottery technology. Ancient brass and iron working were at an advanced stage among the people. Expert blacksmiths were enslaved to Bida and they began to produce weapons of wars and farming equipment for their masters. According to oral sources, one of the consequences of that local imperialism was the forced transfer of the technology of cloth weaving and dyeing from Okunland to Nupeland. The enslaved Yoruba people known as *konu* have formed weavers guild who introduced new techniques in weaving and indigo dyeing in Nupe land (Lewu, 2015).

Under Fulani's imperialism, collaborators were installed as kings and their families were perpetuated on the throne, resulting in the novel idea of ruling families in few northern Yoruba communities, a concept that was forced on them. According to Colonial report on Kabba Division of 1932 (N.A.K. Loko. Prof. 354), the invaders deliberately imposed systematic starvation as war mechanism in a bid to force them into subjection. Under Fulani hegemony, linguistic infiltrations of Hausa and Nupe words entered northern Yoruba lexicon and personal names like Mayaki, Makun, Abu, Sumanu, Bello, Maliki Umoru etc., were enculturated and tribal marks of Nupe and traditional attires filtered into the area.

## **Summary and conclusion**

The conquered territories derived inspirations from the *Ekiti parapo* war which ended Ibadan's imperialism and formed a united war command to challenge Fulani's imperialism, as it became unbearable. The various efforts by individual communities did not achieve the desired effects, the formation of a formidable alliance among the Akoko, Ebira, Okun and their neighbours became imperative. Called Ogidi Grand Alliance, it was formed in 1865 at Ogidi Ela by the Ebira and Okun peoples. In 1894, the Akoko and Ekiti joined the alliance and camped at Ogidi Ela, while the Fulani and their collaborators camped at Kabba. The Fulani-Kabba-Hausa-Nupe forces had about 6,000 soldiers while the Ogidi Grand Alliance raised an army of close to 10,000 but rose to about 20-25,000 in the last year of the war.

As the war rages on, the Fulani forces deserted the war front on the night of January 13, 1897. The reasons could range from: (i) Fear of the decision of the British constabulary at Lokoja to intervene in the war. The Fulani forces dispersed at the approach of the constabulary towards Ogidi Ela. (ii) War weariness; they

were tired of incessant warfare complicated by absence of regular food supply and (iii) possession of superior European firearms supplied by Ekiti merchants to Ogidi Grand Alliance.

Fulani-Yoruba relations from 1840-1897 is significant for scholarly study of interethnic relations in pre-colonial Africa. It also makes a meaningful contribution to the study of imperialisticallyfueled wars and intergroup relations in the modern world by the powerful nations against the weak. The study espouses the evil and forceful nature of imperialism and colonialism on traditional communities. As soon as the war ended, it was supplanted by British imperialism, when supported by his forces, "Tubman Goldie presented the British flag to the *obaro* on January 17, 1897", (Vandeleur 2004:189). Thus, one imperialism replaces another and internal imperialism was replaced by external imperialism. In addition, the study of Fulani-Yoruba relations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century makes a significant contribution to intellectual work on pre-Colonial Africa as Lt. Seymour Vandeleur, Scottish soldier who was member of the Royal Niger Company and who participated in the war gave a report at the Royal Geographical Society, London on June 1, 1897.

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