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# **EJIGBO**

**Palace Organisation**

**A. M. ILUPEJU**

No. 14, November 2011

# **EJIGBO**

## **Palace Organisation**

**A. M. ILUPEJU**



**University of Lagos,  
Faculty of Arts**

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**ILUPEJU, AKANBI MUDASIRU**

## FOREWORD

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Ilupeju's work is on Ejigbo, one of the ancient and major Yoruba towns in Osun State of Nigeria. It is about 40 kilometres from Osogbo, the capital of Osun State. The work is an account of the existence, royal tradition and the culture of a people. According to oral history, Ejigbo is an ancient Yoruba settlement founded by Akinjole Ogiyan, a descendant of Oduduwa from the ruling family of Ile-Ife. 'Ejigbo Mekun', the name of a market in Ile-Ife, confirms Ejigbo's lineage with Ile-Ife.

This article traces the origin of "Ejigbo" which is linked to three major events and concludes that the name could be derived from the following three roots: "Ejiogbe", "Agbigbo" and "Eji-gba-j-o".

"Ejigbo Palace Organisation" is in essence the description of the political and traditional administration of a people from the beginning of settlement in their present abode till present day. The right to kingship and chieftaincy titles are traced from time immemorial and the genesis of ascendancy to the throne and chieftdom is documented.

The cultural life of the people is exemplified by the festival of Orisa Ogiyan, the most spectacular annual event in the town which is held at the beginning of the harvest of new yams, usually in the rainy season. The spectacular aspect of the festival is Ewo, the practice in which the people of the town divide themselves into two groups -- the Isale Osolo and the Oke Mapo. The tradition requires that there must be contests in every festival, otherwise, the town would not be at peace and the health of its people would be endangered. The festival has now become an annual carnival.

The uniqueness of Ejigbo as a Yoruba town is demonstrated in its linguistic peculiarity; an Anglophone town where French is the second language of communication after

Yoruba. This is due to the fact that the people of the town have had continuous migration to some neighbouring Francophone West African countries, notably: Republic of Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire, Republic of Niger, Togo, Republic of Mali, etc. Out of about a million Nigerians resident in Côte d'Ivoire since the 1930s, indigenes of Ejigbo Local Government area make up more than 50% of that population. The same thing could be said about those in Togo. It is astonishing to note that Ejigbo is more than 300 kilometres away from the closest Francophone border to Nigeria, yet, Francophone influence is observable in the people's daily life.

This work is useful to lovers of culture and indigenous history.

**Professor Duro Oni**  
Dean, Faculty of Arts  
University of Lagos.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ejigbo town is the headquarters of Ejigbo Local Government Area in Osun North-West Division of Osun State. Lying on Latitude  $7\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  to the North and Longitude  $4\frac{1}{2}^{\circ}$  to the East, Ejigbo is strategically placed in a middle position of 35 Kilometers to the North-East of Iwo, 30 Kilometers from Ogbomoso in the North and 24 Kilometers from Ede in the South East – (Map I). Towns and villages in Ejigbo Local Government Area include: Ayegbogbo, Ejigbo, Ika, Isundunrin, Iwata, Agurodo, Aaye, Isoko, Masifa, Oguro, Olla, Aato, Abogunde, Adegeedo, Adori-Oke, Afaake, Aponla, Ayegunle, Idiigba, Igbon, Ijimoba, Ika, Ilawo, Inisa I, Inisa II, Isundurin, Ologege, Olorin, Olosinmo, Osuntedo, Songbe, Ife-Odan, Olorin and Owu

The main annual rainfall is 52.35ins though there are great deviations from this mean value from year to year. Usually, the rainy season lasts from April to October. According to 2005 population estimates for cities in Nigeria, Ejigbo town has grown from 46,410, in 1963 to a population of 95,881 ([http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005\\_world\\_city\\_populations/Nigeria.html](http://www.mongabay.com/igapo/2005_world_city_populations/Nigeria.html)). The population of the town has been drastically affected by continuous migration of Ejigbo people to some neighboring West African countries, notably, Benin Republic, Burkina Faso, Côte-d'Ivoire, Ghana, Liberia, Niger Republic and Togo,. Out of about more than a million and two hundred thousand Nigerians residing in Ivory Coast since the 30s till present, indigenes of Ejigbo local Government area make up more than 50% of that population.

This migration has merits and demerits. The major demerits are drastic reduction in the revenue returns of the town and political disadvantages in creation of both state and National constituencies in the town. The attendant positive effects are epitomized largely in the rate of development in terms of

modern and beautiful buildings springing up at geometrical progression. The position of the houses are so well planned to the extent that they are reasonably distanced to the main roads and street despite the absence of government town planner before the 70s. This made a Ghanaian teacher in Baptist High School Ejigbo - Mr. Koffi Owiredu - in 1979 to observe that he was surprised to see that Ejigbo is the most well-planned town out of the Yoruba towns he had visited in Nigeria in spite of the absence of a government town planner. He gave Ogbomoso, Ede, and Iwo as examples.

Similarly, the presence of French-oriented Bakery, popularly referred to as "Oba Abidjan Bakery" meaning "the king of Abidjan (economic capital of Côte-d'Ivoire) Bakery" is a witness to the town's claim to Francophone influence. Above all, it has aided immensely the growth of civilization and contributed in no small measure to the social, educational and economic life of the town. Some of the foreign languages spoken today in Ejigbo include, French (second to Yoruba), Dioula (Mali) Eve (Togo) Asante (Ghana).

According to the Ogiyan of Ejigbo, His Royal Majesty Omowonuola Oyeyode Oyesosin II (in his farm house at Ejigbo in 2004), the people of Ejigbo are international people. The fact that in Ejigbo French is spoken in the street as if one is in a French town could be said to be accidental. It is just the result of a people getting the best out of nothing. For over a century, the people of Ejigbo have been going to francophone countries. As many as seven to eight generations have been there, not out of their own volition, but out of necessity. Originally, the people who migrated from Ejigbo did not go straight to Côte d'Ivoire. They first stayed in Dahomey (what is now known as Republic of Benin) from where they went to Ghana and from Ghana to Côte d'Ivoire. Côte d'Ivoire happened to be the place and it is still the place where they

find their means of livelihood. Basically, the people went out for greener pasture, at least to make two ends meet. When the first batch of the people got to the foreign land, they attracted their siblings to the place. Attraction came by way of affluence, good health and achievements to the extent that an average Ejigbo family will prefer their daughter to get married to someone from Côte d'Ivoire instead of someone living at home, because the difference was very clear. If one looks around the town, beautiful houses, the Brazilian types, are built by people from Côte d'Ivoire.

On getting to francophone countries, especially Côte d'Ivoire, the need to communicate with the local people necessitated the learning of one form of the French language or the other in order to transact their business. Ejigbo people in foreign land do not speak standard French, they speak the street French, at least to communicate. In Ejigbo today, along the street, hardly can you find people speaking English. They speak French instead, because they are part and parcel of the Francophone world. The are Ejigbo people are found in West Africa Francophone cities such as Cotonou, Port-Novo (also known as Ajase) in Republic of Benin, Lomé, Palimey, Lama-Kara and Atakpamé in Togo, Ouagadougou and Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina-Faso, Bamako in Mali, Dakar in Sénégal, Nouakchott I, Mauritania and even in Douala and Yaoundé in the Republic of Cameroon. In fact, they are everywhere French is spoken in Africa and in Europe. Hence, descendants of Ejigbo people have the opportunity of having dual-nationality in every Francophone country where they dwell. In Côte d'Ivoire, for example, they are found in local and national administration positions such as inspector of education, health administration and local government councils. The case of Togo is unique. Ejigbo descendants born in Togo before 1991 are fully integrated and have full citizenship. Among them one can mention the twin-brothers

Tidjani; while one was the Chief of Army Staff of late General Gnansingbe Eyadema (former Togolese President who ruled for up to 40 years), the second brother was the Rector of the only federal University. He is currently an economic adviser to the current government of Togo (the twin-brothers have Ejigbo royal family tribal marks). The parents of the Togolese international footballer, Adebayor and that of the Ivorian number one featherweight boxer as at 1986/87, Wahabi Spider, are from Ejigbo.

According to the Ogiyan of Ejigbo, around 1960, there was census in Côte d'Ivoire where the estimated population of all Nigerians living there was put at about 1.2 million. In that figure, Ejigbo people alone were said to have accounted for about 800,000 inhabitants. They are believed to be so established there to the extent that in each big city and town of Côte d'Ivoire, the Ejigbo people have a community leader they refer to as 'Oba' of that area, such as 'Oba Bouaké', 'Oba Abobo', 'Oba Dabou', 'Oba Grand Bassam', 'Oba Treichville' etc. while the 'Oba' who resides in Adjamé, suburb of Abidjan is called 'Oba Abidjan'. He is regarded as the paramount Ejigbo community leader of Côte d'Ivoire. All those designated Ejigbo community leaders are all recognized back home by His Royal Majesty, the Ogiyan of Ejigbo. A street is even named after 'Oba Abidjan' in Ejigbo. The recognition of Ejigbo people by the authority in Côte d'Ivoire is so well established to the extent that hardly could you see any Yoruba in that country who will tell you that he is from Ibadan or Ogbomosho etc. The majority claim to be Ejigbo indigenes, even when they are not. Côte d'Ivoire is more or less the second home of Ejigbo.

Oba Omowonuola Oyeyode Oyesosin II, observed that he was lucky to have titled his first degree dissertation in 1972. "The impact of Migration from Ejigbo to Ivory Coast on Ejigbo".

He remarked that one of the impacts of such migration was the building of most of the ultra modern churches and mosques in Ejigbo Local Government Area. He referred to Ejigbo in his project as a remittance economy, simply because, according to him, averagely Ejigbo people have no money to spend at home; everything comes from Côte d'Ivoire. All the churches and about 53 Ratibis-Mosques in Ejigbo Township are built by Ejigbo in Côte d'Ivoire. They have their branches in Côte d'Ivoire from where money and materials are ploughed back home for development. The Central Mosque, which cost a little above 1 billion Naira, was built mainly by the Ejigbo people in Côte d'Ivoire. Hardly could one mention any major project carried out in Ejigbo without the heavy financial backing from Ejigbo people in 'Diaspora'. There is a Terminal of buses going from Ejigbo to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, where it is easier and cheaper to board a vehicle to the West Coast than it would be in Lagos, for example.

In the colonial days, the town had little direct contact with European trading firms because of their concentration in bigger towns around Ejigbo, like Ogbomoso and Osogbo. This had closed the town to government attention and trade link to the outside world. But the desire for progress exists in the Ejigbo and this is shown by progressive Unions in the town doing self-helping projects.

Since the foundation of the town by Prince Akinjole at the same time Oranmiyan founded the Old Oyo Kingdom, industrial development in Ejigbo that started in the late 80s has come to a sudden halt by the beginning of the new millennium due to instability in electrical current supply. Prominent among the industries were Dalab Breweries (under construction), Oba Abidjan Bakery, and Obelawo Saw-mill. Poultry farms have, however, sprung up. Ejigbo,

has a potential for developing an agro-based industry. For entertainment, up to the early 90s there were many bars and beer parlours. Popular among them are Prestige; Kunbi Ogiyan; Angle "50", Happy Star; Amuludun; and African. Other big places of entertainment were, Ejigbo Central Hotel, Iluta Hotel, Sharp Corner Hotel and Ejigbo Recreation Club. Another popular area was the African Cinema, along Iwo Road. An ultra-modern Hotel is built along Igbon-Ara Road.

There was a Divisional Teachers' College along Ede road. It is today renamed Osun State Unity School. There are five Secondary Grammar Schools, among which are the Baptist High School and the Ansar-Ud-Deen High School, Ansar-Ud-Deen Grammar School, Local Authority and Ogiyan Community Grammar School. We can also count over fifteen primary schools in the town. Recently, the Osun State Government located one of the Osun State University Campuses in the town.

In terms of Health Centre, there are Maternity Centres and many private clinics. Ejigbo is known for the celebration of Ogiyan festival; Ogiyan being the title of the Oba of Ejigbo who is also the custodian of the gods of his ancestors known as Orisa-Ogiyan. This festival usually comes up during the month of September. One main feature of this traditional festival is the Ifa Oracle "Wake-keep" procession to worship at Ogiyan Shrine, and the traditional Warfare – "Ewo".

Finally, the early history of Ejigbo was less eventful than that of its most neighbouring settlements. Its people went out on raids and took part in small wars around them, but the town itself was never attacked nor conquered by outside raiders. When Ejigbo came under the way of Ibadan, at the time the Ibadan army moved to protect Osogbo from Ilorin in about 1835, a detachment from Ejigbo assisted the Ibadan army. In

the Ijaye, Jalumi and Kiriji wars, of 1860 and 1886, Ejigbo army participated. Ajayi Ogboriefon, Balogun and leader of Ibadan army in Jalumi war (1878) was a native of Ejigbo.

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