

ROLE OF COLLABORATORS AND MERCENARIES IN THE BIDA LED WARS IN AFEMAI LAND 1857-1897

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Abstract: -

In the second half of the 19th Century, the inhabitants of the three geographical regions of Afemai land experienced sporadic but coordinated military attacks organized by the Bida invaders whose primary objective was to exploit the human and economic resources of the Afemai. In spite of their resoluteness and gallantry in defending their sovereignty, the indigenes like most other communities in the Niger-Benue confluence area were forced to surrender to the highly mobile and tactical military of Bida. Factors responsible for the defeat suffered by the Afemai have become an issue of controversy within academic circles and among traditions who blame the intimidating military and superior weapons deployed by the invaders against the indigenous warriors as reason for the defeat. This paper aver that the successful invasion and subsequent conquest of Afemai by the enemy has more to do with the assistance received from collaborators who provided the enemy with all the information, logistics and other military supports required to achieve their annexation plot. In analyzing this aspect of the Bida wars in Afemai which has been relatively neglected, certain perceptible issues that enriched our knowledge on the general trend of events and missing in previous studies are brought to the fore.

Keywords: - *The 19th century, Bida wars, Afemai, collaborators, invasion, conquest, raids, exploitation, Resistance strategies and tactics.*

INTRODUCTION

The Bida wars popularly referred to as the '*Izannama* wars' in Afemai are recorded in the Afemai traditions as the most devastating and fiercely fought externally motivated conflict ever witnessed in Afemai land. The crisis started in 1860 and continued into the last decade of the 19th century and by 1897, nearly all the then Super Powers in the Afemai country including the Aviele-Agbede, South Ibie, Auchi, Uzairue, South-Uneme, Ekperi, Weppa-Wanno, and the highly rated North Ibie and Okpella clans in the south, central and eastern parts of Afemai had been brought to their knee.¹ In the northwestern part, all the militant communities of Northern Uneme, Igarra, Ososo, Somorika and Atte clans were also conquered in succession and forced to capitulate. With the defeat of these seemingly heavyweight, all the other smaller Afemai communities surrendered and accepted to pay the levy in human and agricultural resources imposed on them by the Bida authority.² Some of these communities were relatively poor in military experiences and equipage before the contact with Bida.

A number of battles were fought in several theaters between the Afemai defenders and their Bida predators during the over thirty years' period the war lasted. Though it is not our focus to provide detailed information on all the encounters that took place between the parties in a paper of this nature, it should however be noted that most of the battles occurred in the succeeding reigns of Etsu (Chief) Usman Zaki, Etsu Masaba, Etsu Umaru Majigi, Etsu Maliki, and Etsu Abubakar (1857-1897). These five Chiefs of Bida are recorded to have launched military campaigns on Afemai at one time or the other during the period under consideration.³ Though Mason credited Etsu Umaru Majigi with the ferocious in the extension of Bida domination to the southern part of Nigeria, available evidence reveal that the Bida attacks on Afemai were more fierce and drastic during the rule of Etsu Usman Zaki and Etsu Masaba 1857-1873. They both needed more human and material resources to rebuild their battered capital at Bida which was damaged in the 1833-1857 Bida conflicts that erupted between both of them.⁴

The claim of the two brothers to the throne vacated by their late father was what resulted in a protracted civil war that factionalized the Bida royal family into two opposing camps. The prolonged conflict fractured the economy of the kingdom forcing the various contenders to expand their revenue bases through military campaigns. Such campaigns were aimed at subjecting communities in the southern districts like Afemai into economic exploitation mainly through raids and levies. According to Kolapo, levies and tributes were required by the contending groups in Bida to send as presents to the Emir of Gwandu to gain his support or recognition to the Bida throne. It was in a bid to sustain the flow of such gratification to Gwandu that partly increased the rate of Bida attacks on communities in their southern frontiers.⁵ Afemai became a target at the point the wars were extended further south across the Niger-Benue confluence region especially during the period of Etsu Masaba 1857-1897. This period witnessed coordinated, intense and aggressive military attacks on the Afemai.⁶

However, it is difficult to establish the frequency of Bida military incursion into Afemai due to dearth of material. If information from Obayemi and Isichie are correct, Bida's military activities in Niger-Benue confluence area may have been extended to Afemai and beyond long before the 1804 Jihad of Usman Danfodio.⁷ This is not to say that the Jihad started earlier in the confluence area before Hausa land. It must be clarified that, early Bida activities in Afemai before 1857 were conducted by Bida non-state actors or aristocrats solely for plundering, looting and slave raids and not for political and economic domination. This contention was also highlighted by Kolapo who opined that the period before 1857 in the Bida military campaigns were periods in which various Bida warlords unleashed devastating and clearly non *Jizya* (Islamic tribute) and slave raids on their southern neighbors.⁸ Afemai traditions also noted that, during the early period, Bida attacks on Afemai manifested in the form of unpredictable skirmishes, plundering and slave raids which later transformed into frontal military combats between the two parties as from the middle 19th century.⁹

During the encounters, though as far as the time could permit, the Afemai had some sophisticated weapons like poisonous arrows and spears, such were not effectively utilized. Even in places where the weapons were efficaciously used, some traitors among the Afemai betrayed their people by rendering military assistance to enable the enemy infiltrate into their settlements to wreak havoc on the people.¹⁰ Additional evidence adduce to us shows that, Afemai forces also to a great extent relied on the use of supernatural powers as weapons for the wars. Unfortunately, in the course of the war, information about the weapons were also leaked to the invaders who promptly countered the efficacy of the Afemai charms and magical powers.¹¹

The wars in Afemai eventually came to an end in the later part of 1897 when the influence of Bida in Afemai land and the Niger-Benue confluence area was terminated by the British colonialist.¹² In a nutshell; the period 1857-1897 in Afemai was a period of struggle for survival which was dangerously threatened by the incursion of the Bida imperialist. Some of the weaker communities of Afemai were conquered after a short resistance. The inability of the invaders to suppress the resistance put up by the Afemai super powers at the early stage was a big challenge to them. This was linked with the unfriendly terrain in most part of Afemai. Consequently, Bida resolved to engage collaborators to assist them with the bidding.¹³ The activities of the collaborators dealt severe blow on the military operations of the Afemai people and hastened their eventual fall. Two category of collaborators were used by Bida namely; internal and external collaborators. The overall impact of this tactics on the scuffle between the parties is discussed below.

Role of Intelligence Gathering in the Bida Invasion of Afemai

It must be properly clarified that, the Bida armies were not unaware of the military capabilities of some of the Afemai communities before commencement of hostilities. The Bida, through intelligence gathering, had good knowledge of the military built up and weapons available to the Afemai people.¹⁴ Such information were supplied to them through Nupe-Hausa traders who were long involved in trading activities with Afemai earlier before the 1857.¹⁵ Some of the traders

were said to have earlier settled and intermingled freely among the Afemai people before the advent of the wars. It is interesting to note that by the mid-19th century, there were already thriving Nupe/Bida communities in places like Agenabode and North Ibie areas of Afemai. Waves of Yoruba and Nupe traders were also reported in Igara, Ososo, Auchu and Jattu in the Akoko-Edo and Etsako regions of Afemai in the early part of the 19th century.¹⁶

Scholars have highlighted the possibility of the Bida invaders using the opportunity created by their early business contacts with Afemai to infiltrate as spies with the intent of understudying the military strength, weaknesses and the various routes leading to the Afemai states ahead of the planned invasion.¹⁷ Afemai traditions alluded to the case of a particular famous Bida trader in the Agenebode town of Afemai known as Ndagi who by his long stay in Afemai was fluent in the Afemai language. He was later identified among the Bida invaders when the war eventually started in the area.¹⁸ The possibility of more of such Bida-Afemai citizens serving as spies for the Bida soldiers during the period was also highlighted.¹⁹ It was through similar intelligence gathering that Bida also got military information about the militant Afemai communities of Somorika, Igarra, the two Uneme (South and North Uneme), North Ibie, and Okpella who were reputed for the use of sophisticated weapons and application of the supernatural powers. The people considered supernatural powers very potent for the execution of warfare.²⁰

Information about Afemai military capability was also received by the invaders from the Epira-Tao (Epira-Okene) people and Yoruba slave raiders who preceded them in the area. The Epira were particularly said to have furnished Bida with vital information about the military strength of the two Afemai communities of Okpella and Okpekpe sharing common boundaries with them.²¹ Such information must have taught the Bida army that the only way they could defeat the Afemai was through the massive deployment of collaborators and traitors rather than physical combats which could have been more costly. The tactics later proved very effective as the wars progressed. The activities of the saboteurs like it happened in most pre-colonial African societies created serious setbacks and disunity among the Afemai people making it easy for the invaders to deflate their war machines.²² Generally speaking, the opinion of writers regarding the actual motives of indigenes who collaborated with external forces against their home country especially during the colonial period has been a matter of debate among scholars.

The first group is made up of writers who argue that such collaborators, by their actions facilitated the defeat and conquest of their polities and should be treated as saboteurs.²³ The other camp lead by the renown historian, Obaro Ikime, opine that those men and women accused of taking sides with foreign invaders against their home land merely reacted to the circumstances they found themselves at the time hence should not be classified as collaborators or unpatriotic elements.²⁴ The opinion of the second group of scholars is also applicable in the case of Afemai where the then Chiefs were believed to have been forced to render support to the enemy under military pressure. For instance after the Aviele-Agbede forces were defeated and their chief Emokpaire deposed for his uncooperative attitude, the community leaders were faced with the challenge of paying the heavy levy imposed on them by Bida authority. In an effort to get rid of the levy, the Aviele-Agbede elders were compelled to accept Bida peace proposal. Among other things, they accepted to render military assistance to Bida in the invasion of the neighboring Afemai communities of Warraki and Ibviaro yet to be conquered at the time.²⁵

The Chief Ikelebe of Auchu and Chief Omogbai of Uzairue, were in similar circumstances compelled to provide military assistance to the forces of Etsu Umaru Majigi of Bida emirate during his punitive wars against Afemai recalcitrant communities in the third quarter of the 19th century.²⁶ Bradbury narrated that after the defeat of the Uzairue clan, the invaders imposed an annual levy of twenty slaves on Chief Omogbai of Uzairue to pay. Chief Omogbai was therefore left with no option than to invade surrounding villages in his desperate search for slaves to offset the levy.²⁷ The actions of these two chiefs, though not intentional affected the defense strategies of the Afemai and made the war easy for the Bida forces to execute.

The Role of Indigenous Collaborators in the Conquest

According to Mason, the successful conquest of communities residing across the Niger-Benue confluence area by the Bida emirate was strengthened by the military aids and logistical supports provided by collaborators from one community against another.²⁸ In Afemai, Bida also benefited a lot from the services of their Afemai associates. Some of the collaborators volunteered to help the invaders through unfamiliar terrain while others participated actively on the side of enemy in battles against their fellow Afemai for economic and political gains. There were two main types of indigenous collaborators who assisted Bida to quell military challenges from Afemai fighters. The first group was made up of Afemai individuals who aided the invaders with information and logistical support for the invasion of their own people. This comprises of Afemai warriors who had previously surrendered or were captured by Bida from battlefields. Some of them were later recruited into the Bida armies as spies for intelligence gathering or served as combatants in the conquest of other Afemai communities.²⁹ This assertion was also shared by Sule Mohammed who noted that some of the Bida captives from previous battles were either conscripted into the Bida army for the prosecution of other battles or engaged in their plantations at home.³⁰ Sadly, in the case of the Afemai, some of these belligerent Afemai warriors turned Bida collaborators were those the people initially relied on to protect them against the Bida attackers.

Largely, indigenous collaborators played active role in the Bida conquest of the Weppa-wanno clan of Afemai land. Reportedly, after several military encounters between the two side and the Bida forces could not defeat the indigenes, the next tactics adopted by Bida was to ally themselves with sympathizers of Afemai origin who cooperated with them for stipends they received to destroy their own people.³¹ Notable Weppa-wanno saboteurs who participated in raiding their hometown in favour of the enemies were Obozuwa of the Iviukhua community, Etsukha of Iviogbepui community, Ogai of Iviobua community, and Asekhamhe of Imiava community all in the Weppa Wanno clan of Afemai.³² Also, in

Ekperi clan of Afemai, some of the warriors such as Ugbome of Iyatu-Ugbekpe community was rewarded with chieftaincy position by Bida for the assistance rendered them.³³

The second group of Bida-Afemai collaborators consisted of the Afemai chiefs and nobles who aligned themselves with the invaders for political reasons at the detriment of their subjects.³⁴ As noted earlier, the actions of the chiefs created great setbacks for the Afemai fighters.³⁵ For instance, Enagbuma and Odigie reported that, in spite of the show of force displayed by the Afemai forces against the invading Bida army, their effort was futile on account of the activities of collaborators who frustrated their efforts.³⁶ Okpekpe in the North Ibie clan of Afemai was example of one such communities that suffered greatly from the activities of saboteurs during the Bida war. In the heat of the Bida attacks, Okpekpe played host to refugees within and outside Afemai. For this reason, Bida mobilized a strong force for the invasion of the North Ibie stronghold of Okpekpe.³⁷ After several attempts to penetrate and conquer Okpekpe proved abortive, Bida sought for and received assistance from Chief Ugbomi of Epkeri and Chief Omogbai of Uzairue who quickly organized a powerful force and crush the Okpekpe stiff resistance.³⁸ When that failed and Bida realized that it was not possible to defeat the people through combat, they resorted to siege tactics. During the siege, Chief Omogbai of Uzairue was said to have dispatched a large contingent of troops, weapons and food to sustain Bida in their long period of siege against the Okpekpe.³⁹ This seriously affected the Okpekpe army who were later forced to surrender and accepted the peace proposal presented by Bida.⁴⁰ The proposal stipulated among other things that the Okpekpe would be protected by Bida from any future externally motivated attacks in return for payment of annual levy in food stuff and slaves. Payment was to be made through the Bida representative or agent known as *Azani* and in this case the Chief Omogbai of Uzairue clan.⁴¹ Apart from North Ibie, Bradbury noted that, Omogbai was also assigned the position or *Azani* in charge of the North-western Afemai villages of Atte and Ikpeshi in appreciation of his cordial relationship with Bida.⁴²

More painful is the fact that some of the Afemai communities were reported to have collaborated with Bida against each other to settle old scores and power rivalry. Some Afemai Chiefs also exploited the situation to enriched themselves through raids on communities within their area of jurisdiction on the pretense of acquiring tributes for Bida.⁴³ An example was the Bida conquests of the Aviele and Agbede clans which Stanfield explained was masterminded by the Chief Okhaimho Oshiafhi of South Ibie clan of Afemai⁴⁴ who was a traditional foe of the Aviele and Agbede people.⁴⁵ Consequently, after the defeat of Agbede by the combined forces of Bida and South Ibie, the Chief of Agbede shifted his allegiance to Bida. A mutual relationship was established between the two that enabled the Chief to engage in slave raids in neighboring Afemai communities.⁴⁶ Part of the slaves acquired were given as tributes to Bida. The remaining were either sold at slave markets along the river banks at Idah and Lokoja in the confluence area or conscripted into the Agbede army for further raids.⁴⁷ In similar instances, after several protracted battles with Bida, the two communities of Somorika and Okpe in the Akoko-Edo region of Afemai later compromised the security of the Akoko-Edo people by aligning themselves with the enemy for the conquest of other Akoko communities. In the same vain, Okpe and the Uneme people also in Akoko-Edo were also alleged to have team up and assisted the Bida army in the attack and defeat of the Igarra people⁴⁹ while Otuo community collaborated with the Bida to attack its traditional rival, the Okpe community.⁴⁸ In the end, most of the Akoko-Edo communities especially those lacking in military strength were compelled to submit and accepted to pay annual tax to the Bida authority.⁴⁹

In the Etsako region of Afemai, it has been noted earlier that, Chief Emopkarei of Agbede collaborated with Bida in the attacks on Warraki, Ivbiaro, and Ihebie clans of Owan in Afemai land.⁵⁰ Allegedly, Chief Ikelebe of Auchi clan was also reported to have actively participated in the Bida raids carried out against Sabongida-Ora clan and other villages in the Owan region of Afemai.⁵¹ Though based on very limited evidence, it is said that a reciprocal relationship between Ikelebe and Bida developed after Ikelebe's mother was incidentally killed by Bida army during one of their battles in the area.⁵² It was in the truce to appease Ikelebe of the wrong done to him that the invaders accepted and crowned Ikelebe as the new chief of Auchi. The invaders also encouraged and motivated chief Ikelebe with protective charms and assorted antidote known in Auchi as '*Inifidi*' to enable him engage in lucrative slave raid enterprise in the neighboring communities.⁵³ This positive support brought Ikelebe closer to the Bida and in appreciation, he was said to have sent enough foodstuff to the Bida army to sustain their military campaigns in other parts of Afemai.⁵⁴

The assistance rendered by the Chief in the conquest of Okpekpe community in North Ibie of Afemai has been highlighted previously.⁵⁵ A similar assistance by the Chief worth noting was the support he gave to Bida in their attacks on the Ikabigbo and Irekpa villages under his jurisdiction in the same Uzairue clan. Apparently, when the people of Irekpa revolted against the Bida arbitrary rule, Bida responded through Chief Omogbai. Accordingly, the Chief descended on the villages, smashed and quelled the reprisals with a battalion of soldiers.⁵⁶ At last, a mutual accommodation was reached signified by the exchange of gifts between Bida and Omogbai. The Chief was said to have received several bags of salt and potash as gift from Bida for assisting in the conquest of the recalcitrant Ikabigbo, Irekpa and Okpekpe communities. He was also rewarded for providing sufficient tribute in food stuff and slaves for Bida.⁵⁷ In Akoko-Edo, the Otua people fought on the side of the combined Yoruba and Bida forces against Okpe also a community within Akoko-Edo region of Afemai.⁵⁸ The disaffection created from this type of disunity among the Afemai also affected the outcome of the war in favour of Bida.

Unlike the Esan communities in the southern frontiers of Afemai that teamed up to ward off the Bida invaders when they attempted to foray into their territory, Afemai were greatly divided and their zeal to resist depleted in the course of the Bida wars. The Afemai probably out of the bitterness generated from the assistance some of their kin and rendered to the invaders, lacked the unity of purpose which was present in the case of the Esan people. The implication was that they did not considered an attack on one as attack on all hence they were captured piecemeal.⁵⁹ Ozimede laments the fact that, while the Weppa-wanno clan was being attacked, if the stronger Afemai communities of Okpekpe

and Okpella had intervened and combined their forces in support of Weppa-wanno, Bida would have probably been kept out of the region.⁶⁰ Instead there was no cohesion in the Afemai defense strategies which eventually lead to their overrun by the enemy. The same situation was recorded in the Etsako region of Afemai where the stronger Auchi, Aviele-Agbede and Uzairue felt unconcerned and refused to assist the people of Imeke and Iyuku communities while they were being invaded. The Uzairue and Auchi Chiefs rather provided Bida with military contingents against their fellow Afemai.⁶¹

Be that as it may, disunity was also witnessed even among Afemai villages in the same clan sharing a common ancestral origin. In Okpella clan for instance, the nine villages failed to agree on a common plan of action against the Bida intruders.⁶² Groom and Walker reported that when the Okpella heard of the impending attack on their clan, a council meeting was held among the nine villages to discuss the appropriate strategy to adopt but they failed to agree on a common course. The villages in the west favoured armed resistance against Bida but those in the east, out of fear of the intimidating Bida military wanted a peaceful negotiation.⁶³ Sadly, the combined army of the western villages were defeated after a stiff resistance. Retrospectively, if the two Okpella sub-groups had come together to engage the invaders, the war would have probably be prolonged till the coming of the British.⁶⁴

What made matters worse for the Afemai was the fact that majority of their communities were weak and lacked military experience. As such relied on their geographical features such as caves, rugged terrain and the thick tsetse fly infested forest present in their communities for cover. In the course of the war, the geographical terrain that would have played an instrumental role in their defense failed because of over reliance on them.⁶⁵ Some other Afemai communities at the outbreak of the war depended to a large extent on the stronger communities for their safety. The South and Northern Uneme blacksmiths were relied on for weapons and military protection against the invaders. Unfortunately, in the course of the war, the two communities were reportedly compromised and compelled to work with Bida.⁶⁶

In subsequent Bida attacks in other Afemai communities, the Uneme established a reciprocal relationship with the invaders by which they accepted to assist them with the repairs of their damaged weapons and also to supply them with new ones required to advance the conquest. Some of the acquired weapons assisted Bida in shaping their subsequent battles in Afemai.⁶⁷ This development also created strains in the cordial relationship that existed among the Afemai communities before the war. The new relationship between the two Uneme and Bida was interpreted by the other Afemai clan as sabotage.⁶⁸ Consequently, after the war, the embittered Uneme neighbors resolved never to have anything to do with Uneme who they blamed for their defeat.⁶⁹ Lamentably, with the acceptance of the Uneme to collaborate with the invaders, all the wicker Afemai communities that earlier depended on them for military protection and weapon had no option than to also surrender or negotiate their safety with the invaders.⁷⁰

Nevertheless, the Uneme were said to have benefited from their new found relationship with Bida. Like it happened in the

case of Chief Omogbai of Uzairue, the Uneme leaders were also rewarded immensely by Bida for the assistance they rendered. The Uneme chiefs were made the Bida agents in their areas of jurisdictions. They were also expected to keep part of the slaves acquired from tributes from the satellites communities before sending the balance to Bida.⁷¹ Hakeem Haruna noted that in appreciation of the role the Chief played in the conquest of the neighboring communities, a number of the Uneme elders were occasionally invited and warmly received by Bida diplomats at the outskirts of Uneme villages for exchange of gifts and pleasantries.⁷² This type of disunity also affected the outcome of the Bida wars and made it difficult for the Afemai to stand against the superior and highly organized Bida army. The situation was the same in all other parts of Afemai with one Afemai community after the other aligning with the enemy to attack another Afemai community for political and economic gains.⁷³ The point here is that, instead of the various Afemai communities to have united their forces in a common course against the enemy, they allowed themselves to be divided along the lines by issues that could have been resolved after the war. This created the opportunity for their easy defeat. The bitterness generated by some of these accusations contributed in no small measure in making subsequent Bida raids and attacks into other Afemai communities very easy to carry out as earlier demonstrated.

Role of External Collaborators

It is important to highlight the political situation in Nupe land as it affected the Bida wars in Afemai land. This will enrich our understanding on why Bida adopted the strategy of using external collaborators for their biddings in the Afemai country. Until the mid-19th century, the Nupe kingdom later Bida emirate was involved in series of political crises with the notable one being the struggle for power between Prince Usman Zaki and Prince Masaba 1833-1857. With the political crises over in 1857, Bida emerged the prominent emirate in the old Nupe kingdom and the new leadership became more determined and vigorously involved in a number of imperial wars. This was to enable them consolidate, exert their influences and tap the required human and material resources from the outlying communities in the Niger-Benue confluence area and Afemai land.⁷⁴ However, in Afemai, the invaders encountered several challenges, some of which have been discussed above. One of the constraints has to do with the rugged Afemai topography which the enemy found difficult to contend with.⁷⁵ The physical environment was unsuitable for the Bida cavalry warfare tactics which proved to be very effective on suitable plain terrain where the fast moving horsemen could operate easily.⁷⁶ The rocky and hilly nature of the Afemai environment coupled with thickly forested vegetation cover were particularly impregnable for the invaders to manipulate in the northeast and northwestern part of Afemai. Consequently, there were fewer Bida incursions in these areas⁷⁷ as the inhabitants easily sort for refuge in the inaccessible terrain whenever they receive information about a forthcoming Bida attack.⁷⁸

Ahmed Adam Okene expatiates that the invaders became concern about the Afemai environment because they did not want a repeat of what happened them in Eбира-Tao Land where they were defeated twice on the account of the Eбира

rugged terrain. The physical environment of the Ebira like that of Afemai was also characterized by hilly and rocky topographical which played a significant role in the early retreat of the Bida forces during the battles with the Ebira warriors.⁷⁹ The Ebira have a history of fervent resistance against the Bida invaders between the period 1860-1874. During the encounters, the Ebira were said to have contracted their civilians to their hilly heartland living combatants to engage the enemy. It is on record that when the Bida soldiers could not conquer the Ebira people through a military force, they decided to launch a siege on the people with the aim of starving them to surrender. However, due to several unbearable conditions such as shortage of food and water, the foreigners had no option than to retreat.⁸⁰ The Ebira therefore managed to avoid subjugation and retained their independence until the British invasion and conquest in 1897.⁸¹

In Afemai, some of the communities were also strategically located in similar inaccessible topography terrain like that of the Ebira. This was apparently why Bida army depended on the use of collaborators and mercenaries who had carved out spheres of influence in the area and were conversant with the various routes leading to Afemai land. Generally speaking, it was not only the Bida that conducted attacks on Afemai in the 19th century. The Yoruba of Akoko and Ekiti were reported to have preceded the Bida in the area.⁸² However, most of the previous works that discussed the Bida and Yoruba slaves raiding activities in Afemai tend to neglect the fact that, at a stage, both Bida and Yoruba raiders combined their forces and cooperated in their attacks on Afemai communities. Hence, the activities of the Bida invaders in Afemai are easily confused with those of the Yoruba slave raiders. Ozimede clarified that the activities of the Yoruba warlords in Afemai were characterized by banditry while that of Bida was more of attempted political and economic domination.⁸³ As Kolapo put it, the Bida military attacks were for the enforcement of the philosophy of the Sokoto Jihad, payment and collection of tributes from communities in the south.⁸⁴

By and large, the activities of the Yoruba slave raiders during the period under consideration were conducted by non-state actors on like the Bida military campaigns which were sponsored and carried out with the support of the state (Bida emirate) for revenue generation.⁸⁵ A number of Yoruba slave hunters and free boaters were also involved in plundering, pillaging and burning of Afemai villages for captives as slaves long before Bida appeared on the scene in Afemai.⁸⁶ Mason's account also support the assertion that the Bida invasion of Afemai had been preceded by incursions under a Yoruba warlord called Aje or Agge who is known to have raided Akoko from Ibadan in the early 1860.⁸⁷ Some of these raiders were later engaged by Bida as mercenaries for the invasion and conquest of places in Afemai. Though it is not very clear when the Yoruba started their raids in the area due to poor record keeping, available information shows that some of the raider might have entered the western part of Afemai as far back as the 18th century from the old Oyo kingdom. Some others penetrated through the Ibadan and Akoko regions⁸⁸ Oyo was traditionally the dominant military and political power in Yoruba land till the middle of the 18th century when the empire began to decline. Oyo controlled a large army, exercised influence over a large portion of the Yoruba territory and maintained a certain degree of unity till the 18th century.⁸⁹ The fall of Oyo empire had devastating socio-political and economic effects not just on the Yoruba kingdom but also on Afemai sharing boundaries with the Yoruba nations in the western. Okene noted that, with the fall of the old Oyo Empire, a lot of Yoruba warriors who used to champion warfare in the empire became redundant and constituted nuisance in the western region of the present day Nigeria and the outlying communities of Afemai.⁹⁰

The cumulative effect of the above was that it brought out a lot of bands of immigrants, particularly of the warrior class who began to roam the countryside restlessly, intervening in local disputes, acting as mercenaries and sometimes initiating quarrels between communities for their own gains.⁹¹ Bida made good use of these jobless warriors who were ready for mercenary work. They were engaged by Bida for the invasion and conquest of places in Bida's southern borders and of course Afemai land during the 19th century wars. Such mercenaries engaged by the Bida were either professional slave raiders or those who were familiar with the major routes leading to Afemai.⁹² Among them were Chief Ogedegbe of Ile-Ife, and Chief Ayorinde of Ibadan known in some literature as the Chief of Ogoniga. The activities of the Europeans merchants, particularly the introduction of guns facilitated the emergence of these groups of professional mercenary soldiers. They made maximum use of their military experiences and the weapons acquired through contact with Europeans during inter communal conflicts in the Akoko and surrounding Yoruba villages.

Ayorinde an Ibadan Chief for instance, stayed in Ekiti and later established himself at Irun in Akoko where he acquired enough military experience before moving to Afemai for slave raiding adventure.⁹³ He was said to have served as Masaba's agent in Ekiti and Akoko before conflict over tribute collection broke them apart.⁹⁴ If this assertion is correct, it means Ayorinde must have played a crucial role in the conquest of Afemai especially during the period of Etsu Masaba of Bida. However, some scholars have disputed the notion that Ayorinde had at one time served as a Bida mercenary soldier. Afolabi for instance is of the supposition that Ayorinde was already preposterous and enjoyed a flamboyant life style before the Bida military campaigns in the area started and as such could not have belittle himself to the extent of taking up mercenary job. However, several literatures as well as traditions obtained from Afemai attests to the fact that Ayorinde was engaged by the Bida for the conquest of a larger portion of Afemai territory.⁹⁵ Michael Mason in one of his works also attested to the allusion that Ayorinde served as a mercenary soldier of Etsu Masaba of Bida until they fell apart in 1863. Mason illustrated this by using one of the records contained in James Thomas 1863 journal diary:

....another war raised against some part of Yoruba. This people had their settlement by the name of Agoniga. The chief (called) Age (Ayorinde) before time....was King Dasaba's (Masaba) soldier some years back, Age refused to (go to) war or (to pay)tax to Dasaba. Age had taken those people (slaves paid as tributes) to him then Dasaba sent some persons (to tell Age) to left the place. Age refused to move.... Dasaba in rage raised war against Agoniga from Oct.1863 upwards to the month of July 1864. The war continues....⁹⁶

Mason further elaborated that the reference to Ayorinde to his having served as Masaba mercenary soldier suggest that in the 1860s, parts of Akoko and southern Ijumu may have been apportioned to him on the understanding that he will send an annual rent or tribute to the Bida. It was when he failed in his responsibility and then possibly, tried to extend his authority over contiguous lands, that Masaba declared his a traitor and attacked him.⁹⁷ Jimada was more specific when he noted that Ayorinde served as a war general under Etsu Masaba and assisted in executing Bida wars in Ekiti and Akoko before they separated due insubordination. He was accused of not remitting taxes collected from conquered states to Bida.⁹⁸ Sule Mohammed added that mercenaries used by Bida in their southward campaigns derived mainly from Hausa land, Borno Empire, and Yoruba kingdoms.⁹⁹ Faboyede agree that the combined forces of Chief Ogedengbe of Ilesa, Chief Ayorinde and Umaru of Nupe were devastating to lives and property in the region which include Afemai.¹⁰⁰ Bradbury also attest to the fact that the dual of Ogedegbe and Ayorinde were instrumental in the Bida conquest of several villages in Akoko-Edo and Owan regions of Afemai.¹⁰¹ This are facts to substantiate collaboration between the Bida and Yoruba warlords in their military campaigns to as far as Afemai land. It is also a clear evidence that establish the fact that, there was an initial understanding between Ayorinde and Bida which was violated and eventually resulted to conflict.¹⁰²

The Bida-Yoruba coalition concentrated their attacks on the Owan and Akoko-Edo communities of Afemai due to proximity. The Akoko people of Afemai share a common border with the Akoko of Yoruba land where Bida benefited immensely from the services of Yoruba mercenaries.¹⁰³ In summary, the Bida tactics of using mercenaries was so effective in Akoko-Edo to the extent that, by the turn of the 19th century, with the exception of the Ogugu and Akuku villages whose people took refuge in the inaccessible Somorika and Igara caves, all the other villages in the Akoko-Edo part of Afemai accepted Bida rule and they each agreed to pay taxes to Bida in food stuff and twelve slaves annually.¹⁰⁴ Some of the super powers like Somorika and Okpe entered into friendly relations with Bida and assisted them in invading other Afemai communities. With the acceptance of the superpowers to establish cordial relationship with the enemy, the fates of the smaller communities became increasingly compromised and were easily conquered. Bida influence in the area came to an end with the appearance of the British in the early 1890s.¹⁰⁵

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to discuss Bida strategies and tactics of using indigenous and external collaborators in the invasion and conquest of the Afemai between 1857 and 1897. The Bida invasion of Afemai land was partially an upshot of the Usman Danfodio Jihad which began in 1804 and led to the creation of Sokoto Caliphate. It was extended to Afemai through the confluence region of Nigeria specifically from Idah, Ebira-Tao and Akoko land. Before the commencement of the wars, Bida had to conduct exploratory campaign to ascertain the geographical characteristics as well as methods of war of the Afemai. This was particularly to avoid a repeat of the humiliation they suffered in the hands of the Ebira during their 1860 and 1873 military encounters. Haven realized that the Afemai could be difficult to conquered due to its environmental characteristics and military strength of some of the communities, Bida resolved to introduce new strategies and tactics that could produce the desired results. In the course of the battles, though the Afemai put up some stiff resistance, by the last quarter of the 19th century, except for some few resilient communities, every other bit and parcel of the Afemai territory was conquered piecemeal and brought under Bida rule. Several reasons have been noted by scholars as possible factors for the defeat with no serious attention given to Bida strategies and tactics of using collaborators to further their conquest. This work concludes that, notwithstanding the fact that the various Afemai communities lacked cohesion and did not see an attack on one of them as an attack on the whole; the wars would have been prolonged till the coming of the British if the people had not allowed themselves to be used as stooge in the conquest of their mother land.

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