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RECONSIDERING GRASSROOTS RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS AGAINST BRITISH COLONIAL POLICY IN NIGERIA: THE EXAMPLE OF THE ADUBI UPRISING OF 1918

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Abstract

Colonial policies of taxation and indirect rule were highly contested and resisted in Southern Nigeria. As a culmination of the piece-meal conquest of Nigeria, the British signed a treaty with the Egba nation in 1914, which de-facto annulled the earlier treaty of friendship and commerce of 1893, and withdrew the opportunity that had been extended to the Egba to practice self-government. The argument was that the Egba people were incapable of governing themselves. An attempt by the Egbas to re-assert their sovereignty had bitter consequences for them in the famous Ijemo massacre of 1914. For years, they bore bitter memories of the massacre, until they resisted their longsuffering in June 1918, by demonstrating their absolute dislike for the highhandedness of the colonial machinery in the 'Adubi' uprising. This paper attempts to appraise the 'Adubi' uprising, an episode in grassroots resistance movements against British colonial policy. Using the Egba example, it argues that unsolicited meddlesomeness in the socio-economic and political affairs of a people could generate tensions and violent resistance.

Introduction:

The British colonial government brought Yorubaland into the vortex of global capitalism, through the instrumentality of a coercive taxation regime. The Adubi uprising, otherwise called Egba uprising of 1918, was one of the several civil revolts by which grassroots or micro communities expressed disdain for distasteful British colonial policies, especially its burdensome taxation system. The Egba-Owu people displayed their disaffection over the taxation policy and the Lugardian Indirect Rule system, not only because taxation shattered their independence as a sovereign state within colonized Nigeria, but also because its implementation induced them to become cash-seeking laborers. The British

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colonial project in Nigeria was one of maximum economic exploitation based on internally-generated revenues. Towards this end, the post-1861 policy of the British was to pursue positive measures to encourage the flow of trade from the various Yoruba states to Lagos, a flow that was often disrupted by the Yoruba wars and the conflicting trade policies of Ibadan, Egba and Ijebu. They, at this point, were eager to abandon the friendship with the Egba in preference to Ibadan people, who were considered to be pro-commerce. The Colonial Office believed that the wars in Yorubaland should be blamed on the trade policy of the Egba and the Ijebu who, in their vigorous attempts to remain monopolists, closed their routes to other Yoruba states, who, in desperation, had to forcefully take their goods through the routes in order to sell.¹ This situation encouraged continuing rivalry and distrust among the Yoruba states.

Britain conquered Yorubaland through the use of superior weapons, religious penetration through missionaries, deceptions and treachery. Lagos and Ijebu were conquered in 1851 and 1892 respectively. Due to the long-drawn wars among the Yoruba, which characterized the period between 1877 and 1893,² the British colonizing forces had little difficulty in overrunning, wherever necessary, the Yoruba-speaking area militarily. This is because the people were already war-wearied and could only put up weakened resistance against the superior fire power of the imperialist army.

Precisely, the colonizing British authorities became involved directly in the Yoruba wars in Oyo, Ibadan, Ekiti and Ijesa homelands and concluded various "treaties" in which the British claimed, the indigenous rulers had ceded control of Yorubaland to British authorities. With the exception of Egband, the establishment of colonial authority over Yorubaland then followed gradually.³ Thus, through one form of negotiation or another, and in exchange for imperial protection, Governor Carter of Lagos signed this 'treaty of friendship and commerce' on the 7th January, 1893⁴, with Egband, while the remaining Yorubaland came under British control.

Background to the Adubi Riots: The Native Authority System and Taxation

As noted above, with the exception of Abeokuta, the homeland of the Egba people, which continued to enjoy the benefit of internal autonomy, the British concluded the subjugation of Yorubaland through diplomacy and coercion, and subtle force wherever it was deemed necessary. In other

words, the incursion of British conquerors into the hinterland was accomplished gradually through a combination of diplomacy and military campaigns. It could be said that the Egband was one of the few African states that survived the scramble, though for a short period, and for the first half of the 1860s,⁵ the Colonial Office remained unwilling to reverse the role it assigned to Abeokuta as the testing ground for Christianity and European civilization.

In 1893, Governor Gilbert Carter had, at Ogundeji's house, told the Egba chiefs that provided they agreed to certain stipulations, which included putting an end to inter-ethnic wars,⁶ they would be granted a free hand in the management of their affairs. As a result of the "treaty of friendship and commerce", which was concluded on 7th January, 1893 by Governor Carter of Lagos on behalf of the queen of England,⁷ Egband continued to maintain its status as an independent political unit within British Nigeria. However, the British government had a commissioner who represented British interests in the area, and whose responsibility was then largely the maintenance of law and order. It is significant to note that the power wielded by the commissioner undermined the autonomy of Egband. The Egba nation relied on the financial and administrative muscles of the British government in Lagos. They particularly needed the military strength of Lagos.

The 1893 treaty that was signed by Sir Gilbert Carter, which guaranteed the independence of Egband, was abrogated as a result of the Ijemo incident of 1914. The new treaty led to the loss of independence of the Egba people. Thus, the *Alake* and his successors, under the new treaty, became "the recognized head of the Egba people," and were also to "carry on the Native Administration of Egba land subject to the control of the Governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria".⁸ The *Alake* became very powerful with the inauguration of the Egba United Government (EUG) because he enjoyed the full backing of the Lagos government. He became the executive head of government, and this bred discontent between him and the sectional *Obas* (the *Agura* of Gbagura, *Osile* of Oke-Ona and *Olowu* of Owu) who were forcibly and legally brought under the authority of *Alake*.

Egba United Board (EUB) needed to source for revenue towards the modernization of the Egba nation. However, the Board was embroiled in cut-throat rivalry with another pan-Egba development group, the Egba United Government (EUG), which came into existence in 1898. One of the *raison detre* for the inauguration of the EUG was the restoration of the

Alake's paramountcy, which the EUB had usurped.⁹ Thus, the EUB soon lost its popularity as the business of running Abeokuta fell into the hands of EUG leaders.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the EUG enjoyed stronger push among the people than the Egba United Board (EUB), due partly to its attempt at salvaging the autonomy of the *Alake*, but more significantly, due to the great power and prestige its leadership commanded. However, as soon as the EUG assumed firm control over the intricate socio-economic and political squabbles in Egbaland, it ensured that all money and interests were expended on Abeokuta town, and the rest of the country, such as *Ijemo* and *Itori* were neglected and left to fend for themselves. Some of the threats to the viability of the Egba socio-political structure could be traced back in their history.¹¹

At this point, Egbaland was under the control of Egba United Government (EUG), which was headed by *Alake*, Egba paramount ruler, in alliance with three other chiefs, who held the reins of Abeokuta government. The three men were *Osundare*, the *Nlado*, *Ogundeji*, the *Mogaji* of *Iporo* and *Sorunke*, the *Jagunna* of *Igbehin* and *Balogun* of *Egba*.¹² For a while, it appeared that Egba's sovereignty was impregnable. However, the invincibility proved to be a stroke of luck. The *Alake* was found to be too weak to sustain authority over the land, a situation that paved the way for his chiefs, especially trio of the *Nlado*, the *Mogaji* and the *Jagunna*, who seemed to have forged a triumvirate over Egbaland. This is borne out of the fact that only the Egba military had a central and federal outlook. The political structure of the Egba was a loosely organized confederation with the *Alake* as a mere *primus inter pares*.¹³ Indeed, the *Alake's* influence was hardly felt in the outlying towns and localities, over which the chiefs held sway. Hence, the chiefs arrogated a lot of authority and became *de-facto* political rulers in the Egba kingdom.

The authority of the *Alake* was further eroded by the *Saros* or *Creoles*, freed slaves of Yoruba descent who began arriving in Lagos and *Badagry* in the 19th century, principally to reconnect with their fatherland. They began to arrive in Abeokuta from *Sierra-Leone* in 1838.¹⁴ Those among them who were of Egba extraction were about six thousand (6,000) in number and resident in Abeokuta.¹⁵ They were not only interested in Egba politics but refused to compromise with the conditions they found in Abeokuta, which they were determined to modernize. To this end, the Egba United Board (EUB) was formed in 1865.

It is significant to note that there was a connection between the '*Ijemo* incident' of 1914 and the *Adubi* uprising that followed four years later. The '*Ijemo* incident' was triggered by the face-off between one chief *Sobiye Pnlade* in *Fidiwo*, an Egba village, and some colonial sanitation officers. This 'incident', which led to the massacre of some Egba men, women and children, resulted in the death of *Pnlade*, abrogation of the treaty of 1893, and consequently, the deprivation of the Egba government of its autonomy and constitution as a state. The *Ijemo* people were enraged by the death of *Pnlade*, and they resorted to public demonstration with the purpose of forcing the *Alake* to dismiss his Secretary, Mr. *Edun*, but the *Alake* refused, trusting in military support from *Lagos* as he had always done in the past.

Lugard actually felt the need to rectify the anachronism of the existence of a "country within a country." In 1914, when the amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria was conducted, the British administrative system was not introduced to the nook and cranny of southern Nigeria, but to those parts of *Yorubaland* and *Benin* where the "conditions bore certain resemblance to those prevailing in the *Fulani States*"¹⁶ of Nigeria. The British colonial government was now ready to incorporate the EUG by ensuring the total application of the Indirect Rule System to the *Egba-Owu* people, thereby removing totally and finally the relic of an independent country within an administration and the government.

Troops were ordered into Abeokuta on 6th August, 1914 by the British Commissioner who had assumed control. In fact, Egbaland could no longer lay claim to sovereignty from the time the control of affairs passed into the hands of British Commissioner on 5th August.¹⁷ As a result of the '*Ijemo* incident', the British concluded the treaty of 1914, which *de-facto* rescinded the treaty of 1893, which meant the withdrawal of self-government. The opinion of *Lugard* was that since the Egba were incapable of governing themselves¹⁸ without *Lagos* assistance, Abeokuta's special status had no validity. Abeokuta was, consequently, brought under the protectorate.

Taxation in Colonial Western Nigerian: The British Decentralized Despotism

The British economic policy in South-western Nigeria was centrally targeted at deriving revenue for the mother country and making the Crown Colony of *Lagos* and the Western Protectorate as financially self-sustaining

as possible.¹⁹ The Colonial Office was not prepared to commit British resources to any policy of expansion which did not promise an immediate financial return.²⁰ The British governed the whole of Nigeria through what they themselves referred to as the Native Authority, which was adopted because the British did not have enough administrative personnel and knowledge of the Nigerians, as would be suitable for direct rule. More importantly, the colonial authority needed to avoid a situation where unnecessary financial burden would be heaped on the home government.

One of the three essential ingredients on which the colonial government rested its Indirect Rule system, was the Native Revenue.²¹ The British colonial government instituted the Native Administration to assist them in the day-to-day running of the government. The Native Authority was the decentralized arm of the colonial state, which comprised a hierarchy of chiefs, who symbolized the power of the British colonial government. The Native Administration was frequently faced with the task of finding money for several projects, and the tax department was one of its chief sources of revenue. The tax department was under the direction of an efficient British officer.²²

The institution of taxation was not a novelty introduced by the British to Nigeria. It was already in existence in Western Nigeria before the British contact with the indigenous people. However, the British did not dispense with the tax policy of the local people; rather, it was modified to suit colonial interests. The British recognized some elements worthy of preservation and perpetuation in the indigenous tax system. They appreciated the similarities between the indigenous system of taxation and theirs, hence, they opted for modification rather than abolition. Lugard himself puts the argument thus:

The assessment was based upon the sum of existing taxation ... modified by the Resident after careful personal inquiry and in accordance with the actual present wealth and ability of the village to pay. It was thus neither a mere consolidation of the existing taxes, nor was it an arbitrary assessment de-novo by the Resident.²³

It was better to regularize the series of "arbitrary, irregular and uncertain tributes" in order to achieve a "fair system of direct taxation"²⁴, than to introduce an alien taxation system. Essentially, therefore, the colonial

administrator changed the old indirect form of taxes to a direct one payable in cash. The colonial tax system, which was modeled after the old principle as laid down by Erl Gay in 1852, was that "the surest test for the soundness of measures for the improvement of an uncivilized people is that they should be self-supporting".²⁵ Lugard saw direct taxation, which the people were opposed to, as essential for indirect rule.²⁶

Generally speaking, during the early period of colonialism, the people in Yoruba land came to refer to capitation tax as "*Owo Orun*" (sleep money) because they could now go to bed at night without fear of surprise attack.²⁷ The period of restlessness and fear of massacre by hostile neighbours in the nights were over. Although resentment against taxation was widespread in Yoruba land during the early period of colonialism, it soon dawned on the people that direct taxation had come to stay as a permanent feature of the administration.²⁸

Direct taxation has been found to be a necessity in all civilized states across the globe. African communities that aspired to be regarded as civilized needed to share the common burden of civilization. Lugard held that the immediate object of direct taxation was to provide a revenue, which being collected through the medium of the native rulers and in accordance with native law and custom, could be shared with them, not as a dole from the government, which could destroy their self-respect, but as their deserved dues from their own people in return for their work as rulers or judges.²⁹ The process of effecting changes in socio-economic and political life of the people actually began in 1904 when Sir Walter Egerton became the Governor of what later came to be referred to as Southern Nigeria.³⁰ While the obligation of direct taxation was already firmly established in Northern Nigeria by 1914, it was not collected in the Western Provinces before 1918.³¹ This form of taxation was a necessary concomitant of the cessation of the spirit traffic from which two-thirds of the custom duties³² accrued before the outbreak of the war.

By 1915, however, there was general dissatisfaction at the provisions of the Native Court Ordinance, which forbade the acceptance of fees, presents, the private hearing of cases and the diversion of all court revenue from private pockets to the Native Administration coffers. At this time, regularized tribute, which was meant to provide salaries and take the place of former irregular perquisites, was momentarily delayed and there was apparently no recognized revenue for the chiefs in that year. As a result, there was general distrust of the new régime.³³

The British colonial administration was determined to wipe out the relics of the old practices that were not in conformity with the new procedures. Significantly, the chiefs were provided with legitimate incomes, and all other forms of exaction from the peasantry were declared illegal and suppressed. In Benin, Egbaland and in fact, Yorubaland generally, it was imperative to provide an adequate income for the chiefs and officers of the indigenous state, if it was going to be possible to put an end to force labour, heavy taxes on traders, arbitrary exactions of all kinds from the peasantry, and the perversion of justice by means of bribes or unjust fines.³⁴ To effect this objective, the Native Authority Ordinance was passed to support the authority of the chiefs, both in the collection of the authorized taxes and in the maintenance of order.³⁵ The colonial authority used land taxation and outright force to ensure the people's compliance³⁶ to the new system, thereby underestimating the power of the African, which meant setting the entire system on a keg of gun powder.

Yorubaland was part of the Western Protectorate in colonial Nigeria, and it was composed of four provinces, namely, Oyo Province, Abeokuta Province, Ijebu Province and Ondo Province, all in the Southern Province.³⁷ With the introduction of the Indirect Rule system, the positions of traditional rulers in Yorubaland were rendered less important. They were allowed to use the title of 'kings only in the African signification' and could only settle disputes between indigenes subject to British laws.³⁸ The coming of the British turned kings into complete puppets as the authority conferred by tradition and custom on them was taken over by the colonial government in exchange for annual pension from the Queen of Britain. Refusal to obey colonial directives always led to the stoppage of stipend.³⁹ The new situation in Yorubaland whereby the kings lost their traditional power was replicated in most parts of Southern Nigeria during the colonial period. This new situation brought in its wake contradistinction to the case in Yorubaland, where other traditional rulers were used as agents of British administration of the Indirect Rule system.⁴⁰ The situation was not different in Egbaland where the kings also became stooges of the British colonial administration, responding to directives as issued by the superior authority in return for stipends and protection from the colonial overlords.

Up till 1917, administrative officers were responsible for monitoring fiscal matters. However, the introduction of taxation had a major impact on the revenue base and the society in general. It was introduced as part of the changes that came with amalgamation in order to

generate revenue to pay salaries to chiefs in order to secure their co-operation as propagandists and supervisors in the collection of tax.⁴¹ The British colonial taxation translated into an additional burden on the poor who were the majority, and were expected to bend double backwards in order to meet colonial demands.

Although it has been suggested in certain quarters that policemen in the colony were used as tax collectors, this is not true. The collection of taxes was carried out by the Local or Native Authorities who, in nearly all cases, co-operated. However, in some cases, the tax collecting authorities were subjected to intimidation, and the courts were threatened with, or subjected to violence when hearing or about to hear cases against defaulters.⁴² The British actually fixed taxes depending on the nature of economic transactions and for anyone to be left unhindered in his normal business under the colonial rule, all he needed to do was to pay his or her capitation tax. In putting infrastructures in place and in order to cover other administrative expenses, the British colonial government ensured that her tax structure was mainly guided by capitalism as an economic system.

The *Adubi* Uprising of 1918: A Grassroots Resistance against British Colonial Policy in Egbaland

Significantly, the '*Ijemo* incident' of 1914 had no tax related background. Its origin could be traced to the sanitary situation in *Ijemo* and this ultimately led to the abrogation of 1893 treaty of friendship and commerce, which the British signed with the Egba United Government. This meant the loss of independence for Abeokuta and her dependencies. There is, however, a connection between the *Ijemo* incident and the *Adubi* uprising. The demand by the Egba people that Edun be removed from office in 1914 was to resurface in 1918.

The *Adubi* uprising otherwise called Egba riot of 1918 had its origin in a grievance that the Egba people had nursed against the Egba United Government (EUG) for many years. This grievance was always bubbling and simmering in their minds, but did not manifest until 1918 when it exploded into a full scale war. The uprising, which was actually precipitated by the introduction of direct taxation by the colonial government, was not just a manifestation of the Egba-Owu people's disaffection with the introduction of Indirect Rule System, but was also a mark of their absolute dislike for the colonial forced labour and the newly empowered Egba government, headed by Alake.

Lugard's Indirect Rule System accorded recognition to local institutions within the administration.⁴³ Therefore, the *Alake* and his successors remained in charge of Native Administration. Before 1918, the people of Imala in Egbaland paid tribute to the EUG. The total tax collected yearly in the district was divided between the Egba Native Authority and the British colonial administration. The British authority needed the fund to run its administration. 30% went to the government while the Egba Native Administration had 70%. But by 1918, when the EUG was no more, a poll tax of 5% per adult male and 2/6 per adult female was introduced. At this time, the tax that the women had to pay was not considered burdensome as it was 2/-6d,⁴⁴ which was just half what the men were required to pay.

The introduction of the colonial taxation policy into Southern Nigeria generally encountered opposition from the indigenous people. It was this vexed question of taxation and forced labour that eventually led to what is generally referred to as the *Adubi* uprising of June 1918. Beyond the issues of forced labour and taxation, the Native Court's system was also disliked as the presidents of the courts were, in almost all cases, untrained and incompetent men, who generally mismanaged the court systems⁴⁵ and its funds. It is significant to note that the question of taxation was first discussed at *Ake* palace on 12th June, 1914, when the focus of the colonial authority was directed at locating a means of increasing the revenue base which was then mainly derived from tolls.⁴⁶

Beyond that, the road construction work required free labour supply from the people in order to put in place some social infrastructure. But the demand for compulsory free labour supply by the colonial administration left the people very little time (if at all any) to attend to their personal farms. The introduction of tribute tax scheme also led to complaints.⁴⁷ However, it was not so much the demand for free compulsory labour that led to crises, it was the introduction of taxation that brought the soldiers into Egbaland again.

The free labour activities, which were formerly accompanied by feasting and merry making, soon began to attract fines, imprisonment and starvation. Formerly, it only took half a day and the uncompleted portion of the work was left for a distant date. But it soon began to take as much as three weeks of continuous labour. Farmers who left their farms for three weeks often returned to find their plants overgrown with weeds, and they could not cultivate and yield bountiful crops.⁴⁸ The resource poor peasant farmers were compelled to commit their time to the road construction work,

which was mandated by the colonial authority and thus, the personal activities of the farmers were being impeded. And if one counted the number of hours a resource poor peasant farmer household lost as a result of these compulsions, it was enough time to affect the output from his farm. We must also not lose sight of the political significance of this kind of compulsion; it translated into still another affirmation of the power relations on the ground. Apart from that, the general conduct of the sanitary authorities was offensive and intolerable; while rendering free services to their districts, the Egba police were busy arresting their wives for minor sanitary offenses.

It was consequently not surprising that *Adubi*, a 'no nonsense' head of *Abule-Owu*, one of the Owu villages in the Abeokuta province, was firm in his stand against the newly introduced Indirect Rule system, which was incompatible with the tradition and general ways of life of his people. Such issues that were related to the imposition of direct taxation, bias judicial system that imposed fine and forced labour in the name of community service, were what *Adubi* stood against. He was also opposed to the colonial forced labour and taxation policies, which did not exempt the women, who were required to pay half of what was required of the males. Consequently, he was resolute in his determination to frustrate the aims of the British colonial authority and the *Alake*, whom he considered a colonial stooge. He wasted no time in instructing his people never to submit to the authority of the Native Court again.⁴⁹

It is significant to note that the relationship between the EUG and the Owu people was never cordial. Part of the varied sources of grievances and protests of the Egba-Owu was their total dislike for Mr. Edun, the Secretary of the EUG, whom they believed, had a hand in the death of Sobiye Pnlade in 1914, when sanitary issues degenerated into riots. Some sections of Egbaland had not forgotten about the grievances they had with the Egba government and the role played by Edun during the '*Ijemo* incident'. The death of Pnlade left the Egba people emotionally devastated, and the bitter experience left a permanent scar on their minds. Consequently, they lost confidence in meeting with government authorities in times of crises. For instance, they refused to meet the Lieutenant Governor at *Papalanto* and even turned down an invitation by the Resident to come to Abeokuta.⁵⁰ Beyond that, they also held that Edun conspired with the Lagos Government and was therefore to be held accountable for all the difficulties they faced.

Repeated petitions of the Egba people were ignored by the British authorities. The farmers also complained bitterly about the inhuman treatment they suffered in the hands of the representatives of the native authorities. Prohibitive and unnecessary fines were collected from the farmers for trivial offences. During the Commission sitting, E. A. Vaughan noted in his response that the new taxation scheme represented a marked departure from the old system. The new taxation was considered too high as villages were assessed at 70, 80, and 100 pounds where the population ranged from three hundred to four hundred people.⁵¹

The role played by the Egba United Government (EUG) before the colonial onslaught did not help matter in Egbaland. They arbitrarily exercised authority, forcing citizens to abide by the newly imposed tax, and even threatening to kill whoever refused to abide or adhere to the law. These unfriendly attitudes triggered the anger of the citizens who had nursed a grudge against the EUG, most especially, the *Alake*, who was reputed to be a weak and incompetent ruler. The people believed that the *Alake* was being influenced and controlled by the EUG Secretary, Edun. It is significant to note that Edun and the British government in Lagos were alleged to be totally culpable in the assassination of Sobiye Poniade in 1914.

What actually triggered off the anger of the *Itori* or farm people was that the *Seriki* of the Egba Christians who was directed to collect tax threatened that the *Itori* farmers would be shot by the soldiers as the *Ijemo* were in 1914, if they failed to initiate the process of tax payment immediately. This statement not only infuriated them but also served as the needed prompting to instantly take up arms in self defense. And when the soldiers were sent to arrest the various village heads and chiefs of the districts, the situation snowballed into a full-scale war.

The first overt acts of rebellion took place in *Itori* district where the complaints were hottest. There, the railway and telegraph lines between *Kajola* and *Itori* were cut and a European agent, Ashworth of Holt, was captured and later killed. Under the leadership of *Adubi* who was the head of the farmers at *Elere* in *Itori*,⁵² the crisis spread rapidly. Oshile Karounwi was murdered at Oba, an adjacent town, and the Olowu escaped unhurt by taking refuge at a private hospital.⁵³ The British troops that had just returned from the East African campaign were brought in from Lagos and the uprising was promptly and decisively put down.⁵⁴

It was *Adubi* of *Elere* who provided the leadership role for the 1918 uprising in Egbaland. The British showed no mercy, and were brutal in their

war against what they saw as an *Adubi* rebellion, which they swiftly crushed. However, the *Adubi* uprising had some minor successes to its credit. It will be recalled that *Adubi* of *Elere* and *Sogade* of *Afowowa* had made overtures and even held several meetings with Owu chiefs in their bid to resolve the issues amicably, but these moves were rebuffed. It was only when their various complaints were not addressed that a resort to violence became an option. The armed dissidents were able to drive out the Resident and Clerk of the native court.⁵⁵ Some minor successes were also recorded by the 'rebels' and these took the form of destruction of railroads and stations.

However, the Egba and Owu began to suffer setback from 13th June, and by 23rd June, 1918, the British had taken full control of the railway lines and the adjacent villages. The Egba and Owu troops were shattered as insurgents were dealt devastating military blows from which they never recovered. *Adubi*, the arrow head of the crisis, was old and could not make a single push.⁵⁶ His charms did not work against the Maxim guns of the European. The humiliation was much when township chiefs surrendered in their number. By the middle of July, over 3000 guns were already seized⁵⁷ from the insurgents. Indeed, it was a sad experience for the Egba people.

The British prosecuted the war with seventy (70) European officers and two thousand, eight hundred (2,800) rank and file soldiers. The casualty on the part of the British was low. Lieutenant Feneran reported that eight (8) rank and file soldiers and two (2) civilian carriers were killed. Eighty-two (82) were wounded: four (5) Europeans and seventy-seven (77) Nigerian soldiers. On the part of the Egba and Owu, the British reported the death of five hundred and sixty four (564) soldiers.⁵⁸ *Adubi* finally succumbed to the power of Maxim gun, as the British army suppression of the riot marked the end to the hitherto semi-independent Egba state. He was arrested by the British soldiers and brought to Igbein where he was last seen by his people. His death consequently signaled an abrupt end of the riot. It is significant to note that the Egba-Owu resistance was stiff to the extent that Colonel Beatlie admitted early in 1919 that the "Abeokuta campaign was unusually large in scale for West Africa against a serious rising offering determined resistance."⁵⁹

The *Adubi* Rising was a classic demonstration of how the indigenous farmers of the colonial era rose and identified themselves with the politics of the time, and strongly protested against the native authority's oppressive regime and colonial impositions. For instance, the resource poor peasant farmers and the *Ogboni* felt cheated on the vexed issue of forced

labour and double exaction of taxation and sanitary fines. They also remembered very vividly the 'Ijemo incident' and the subsequent annexation of Egbaland by the British. They repeatedly tried to draw the attention of government to their plight. But it was only when persuasion and petition failed that the resort to violence became an option. The resultant revolts represented the reactions of the indigenous people to the predatory/parasitic colonial policies.

The *Adubi* uprising in Egbaland attracted some consequences. After the cessation of hostilities, the British colonial administration overhauled the system of tax collection with the withdrawal of district heads. This was because the farmer system destroyed the authority of the township chiefs in the villages. The colonial taxation system also led to further modifications in 1933. This time, of the fifteen districts that existed, only five had permanent district heads viz: *Ota* was under the *Olofa*, *Ifo*, *Sojuolu* and *Sureu* were under *Osile*, *Itori*, *Papalanto* and *Mosan* were under the *Ekerin* of Egba in place of the *Olowu* (office vacant). *Osiele* was under the *Agura* while *Imala* was under the *Amala*. Chiefs who represented the *Alake* visited other districts whenever it was time for tax collection.⁶⁰

The *Adubi* Rising had a significant impact on the British colonial government as it not only led to the retirement of Edun, but also resulted in the removal of the Resident, Mr. W. C. Syer by Lugard. The Right Reverend Bishop Tugwell also maintained that the 'Ijemo incident' of 1914 and the *Adubi* Rising of 1918 sadly disfigured Lugard's administration.⁶¹ Apparently, Lugard either had no adequate understanding of the state of affairs in Abeokuta, or simply failed to bring his experience to bear on the situation at hand. He held the unfounded belief that the unrest was due to the 'ill-doings of the late Egba Government', which "had been recognized by the people".⁶² The reality was that his 'men on the spot' did not demonstrate adequate knowledge of the people they ruled.

In the *Adubi* Rising, there was a clear conflict of interests between the British authority and the indigenous people's aspirations. The people could no longer continue to tolerate the authoritarianism of the 'men on the spot' like Mr. W. C. Syer. Unfortunately, the Colonial Office remained committed to the protection of its governors, at any cost, even when they were found to have erred in their management of riotous situations. When one considers the brutality with which the British crushed the *Adubi* Rising, then, one would be justified in condemning the government's combination of militarism and despotism as sources of 'wrong and robbery', which the

British authority in Egba districts represented. The 'arrogance and the intemperate use of power'⁶³ by the British authority in Southern Nigeria left much to be desired.

The substantial field experiences which had been gathered by the Colonial Office while administering its territories in the Far East, West Indies and some parts of Africa, failed them in crises situations most of the time in Southern Nigeria. The question may be asked, how much of such gathered information were relevant to the needs of the different localities? How relevant were their experiences to the crisis situations that were thrown up in South-Western Nigeria? It is necessary to make a distinction between the stored wisdom and its proper use. Lugard's access to such knowledge led him into applying such gathered experiences in other territories with different backgrounds.⁶⁴ For example, because of his experience in Northern Nigeria, he transplanted the Indirect Rule System into the Southern part of the country. Consequently, the 'Ijemo incident' of 1914, the *Iseyin-Okeiho* riots of 1916, the *Adubi* Rising of 1918, the *Ogbomoso* tax riots of 1924 and other unfortunate experiences occurred.

With the introduction of Indirect Rule System into Southern Nigeria, which almost always led to revolts, one cannot but criticize the British administration. Apparently, the accumulated knowledge with which Lyttleton credited the Colonial Office and the ability of the 'men on the spot' was put into question in all the uprisings in Southern Nigeria during the colonial period. The question is: how equipped were the 'men on the spot' to assume that role to the satisfaction of the people whose political destiny they controlled?

Apparently, the British colonial authority only considered the interests of their home government, and ignored the indigenous people under their charge who had no opportunity to express their views. How far were the effective channels opened to the people before the situations snowballed into riots in Yorubaland? Were the opinions/views of these people ever aggregated? One cannot but conclude that the colonial authorities did not have adequate understanding of the people they ruled. That was why Lugard, on learning that Margery Perham was going to be his biographer, commented that: "You will blame me about Abeokuta".⁶⁵ He realized that he had failed in Abeokuta, as he ultimately did in other places in Southern Nigeria.

Conclusions

The study demonstrates that the British Indirect Rule System was disruptive of the delicate balance between the rulers and the ruled. It generated mutual distrust, animosity, protests and riots within the Yoruba society. The people responded to the authoritarian nature of the rulers by violently resisting colonial impositions and high handedness. In fact, it was difficult for the people not to be rebellious when one puts into perspective the difficulties that came with the imposition of colonial rule. It was these socio-economic and political changes which came with British rule that ultimately culminated into a series of violent revolts in Western Nigeria.

Indeed, the *Adubi* war, like the *Ijemo* massacre, which the British colonial administration dubiously presented to the world as '*Ijemo* incident', epitomized another example of indigenous defiance of British colonial authority's hegemonic impositions and coercive manipulations. The British adopted the usual method of brutal suppression without much effort to underpin the reasons behind the people's grievances. Unfortunately, this trend of brutal suppression of moves perceived to be anti-establishment were repeated in other areas in Southern Nigeria during the colonial era.

The *Adubi* riots of 1918 represented the reactions of the indigenous people to the parasitic colonial tax policies. It showed clearly that the colonial administrators misaligned tax policies with implementation in an age of extreme economic hardship, occasioned by the First World War and the fall in the market price of cocoa. The policymakers during the period of study failed to put the issue of taxation in proper perspective and thus failed to resolve the traditional hostilities between the government and the governed. The study concludes that predatory leadership, heavy dependence on taxes from peasant farmers, and glaring insensitivity to peasant welfare seriously undermined the relative peace in the Egbaland during the early days of colonial rule in Nigeria.

Notes and References

- ¹ Toyin Falola, (1989). *Politics and Economy in Ibadan*, Modelor Design Aids Ltd., Lagos. P. 19.
- ² Toyin Falola, (1989). *Politics and Economy in Ibadan*. Modelor Design Aids Ltd., Lagos. P. 26.
- ³ UNESCO. *General History of Africa*, Vol. VII. Africa under Colonial Domination, 1800-1935, p.130.

- ⁴ Webster, Boahen and Idowu, (1972). *The Growth of African Civilization; The Revolutionary Years: West Africa Since 1800*, Longman, p. 105.
- ⁵ Canby, Courtlandt, (1984), *The Encyclopaedia of Historical Places*, New York, Fact of File publication, p. 2.
- ⁶ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 81.
- ⁷ NAI. C.92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re
- ⁸ J. J. Blair, (1938), Abeokuta Intelligence Report in NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta disturbances – Re. p. 268.
- ⁹ R. C.C. Law, *The Owu in Yoruba History*, Journal of African History, Vo. 7, No. 1.
- ¹⁰ In 1902, the position of the Secretary to the Egba United Government (EUG) fell into the hands of J. Henryson Samuel. This position carried great power and prestige for the officer who was in charge of the everyday business of the government. He was an Egba of outstanding administrative ability, and was well suited for the role. He was the initiator, as well as the executor of ideas which led to remarkable progress made by the Egba administration within the first two decades of the 20th century. He was originally a Methodist minister who abandoned his calling for politics in order to stamp his influence and authority on the politics of Egbaland. Abeokuta experienced tremendous development while he was the secretary.
- ¹¹ NAI.C.92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. See also Jide Osuntokun, (1979), *Nigeria in the First World War*, Longman Group Limited, p.100.
- ¹² NAI.C.92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re
- ¹³ G. O. Oguntomisin, (1981), *Political Change and Adaptation in Yorubaland in the 19th Century*, Canadian Journal of African Study, Vol. 15, No. 2, p. 230.
- ¹⁴ A. K. Ajisafe, (1948), *History of Abeokuta*, Lagos, Kash & Klare Bookshop, p. 79.

- ¹⁵ <http://www.polis.leeds.ac.uk/lucas/activities/leeds-african-studies-bulletin/book-reviews/book-review-afro-cuban-diasporas-in-the-atlantic-world.php>
- ¹⁶ O. Ikime, (1966), "Anti-tax Riots in Warri Province, 1927-1928", *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol. III, No. 3, p. 559.
- ¹⁷ Akinjide Osuntokun, (1979), *Nigeria in the First World War*, Longman Group Limited, (Ibadan History Series), p.106.
- ¹⁸ M. Crowder, & G. Abdullahi, (1979), *Nigeria an Introduction to its History*, London: Longman Group Limited, p. 159.
- ¹⁹ An in-depth analysis of the British Economic Policies in other Protectorates within Nigeria amply justifies the position maintained here.
- ²⁰ Toyin Falola, (1989), *Politics and Economy in Ibadan*, Modelor Design Aids Ltd., Lagos. P. 19.
- ²¹ The other two pillars of indirect rule were the Native Authority and Native Court. Direct and Indirect Rule actually evolved into complementary ways of native control. Direct Rule was the form of urban civil power. It was about the barring of natives from civil freedoms pledged to citizens in civil society. Indirect Rule, however, signified a rural tribal authority. It was about incorporating natives into a state-enforced customary order. Reformulated, Direct and Indirect Rule are better understood as variants of despotism. Lord Lugard had also argued that the creation of Native Treasury, from which the salaries of Native Administration personnel was to be paid, would put an end to the abuses of tax gatherers, which included former 'tribute,' irregular imposts and force labour. However, abuse of the chiefs or 'tax gatherer' continued and fuelled popular discontent among the indigenous people.
- ²² NAI. Oyo Prof. 1. File No. 1026, Vol. IX: (i) Assessment and Incidence of Taxation. (ii) General Report on Taxes. (iii) Tax Collection Authorities and Tax Collectors.
- ²³ K.A.H.M. Green, (ed.). *The Principle of Native Administration in Nigeria: 1947-1960*. London: O.U.P. p. 121.
- ²⁴ G.O. Orewa, (1962), *Taxation in Western Nigeria: The Problem of an Emergent State*. London, p. 2.
- ²⁵ M. Perham, (1948), *Mining, Commerce and Finance*. London: Frank Cass, p. 226. Apparently, the British colonial administration was much more focused on distancing itself from any financial commitment. Their

- so-called civilizing mission had to be at the expense of the indigenous Yoruba people.
- ²⁶ O. Ikime, (1968). "Reconsidering Indirect Rule: The Nigeria Example," in *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria (JHSN)*, Vol. IV, No. 3. It has been said that the Colonial State was in every instance a historical formation and the question has been asked; how can a tiny and foreign minority rule over an indigenous majority? There were two broad answers to this question: Direct and Indirect rule. Direct rule was Europe's initial response to the problem of administering colonies but soon, Indirect rule came to be the mode of domination over a 'free' peasantry. For the subject population of natives in Western Nigeria, Indirect Rule epitomized a mediated- decentralized despotism. For more on this subject that has been aptly titled 'The Bifurcated State,' see Mahmood Mamdani's *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, 2004, p. 17.
- ²⁷ A. I. Asiwaju, (1976). *Western Yorubaland under European Rule: 1889-1945. A Comparative Analysis of British and French Colonialism*. London: Longman Group Ltd. p. 121.
- ²⁸ Direct tax is one whose burden falls directly on person or thing taxed, and cannot be shifted to another person or thing. A poll tax is an example of direct tax. It is a tax of specific monetary amount imposed directly on an individual. It is also called lump-sum tax or head tax. In the United States, the term also refers to a tax (now prohibited) imposed on citizens as a requirement for voting. However, an indirect tax is one imposed on one person or thing but whose burden is borne indirectly. A sale tax though imposed on and collected by the seller, is an indirect tax on the buyer.
- ²⁹ Lord Lugard, 1970. *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1918*. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. P. 66.
- ³⁰ NAI. Oyo Prof. 1. File No. 06029, Annual Report 1921, Oyo Province, p. 7.
- ³¹ Tamuno. T. N. (1972), *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: the Southern Phase, 1898-1914*. P. 317.

- ³² Lord Lugard, 1970. *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1918*. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. P. 66.
- ³³ NAI. CSO 26/2, File No.12725, Vol. II. Oyo Province, Annual Report, 1924, p.170. Chiefs got their salaries from tributes and there were three distinct and recognized taxes in Yorubaland; *Ishakole*, which took the form of universal land rent, *Owo Ode*, tribute paid by men and women alike, partly in kind and partly in cash, varying from 5s to 20s per head, and *Owo Asingba*, consisted of personal services (such as building and repairing of town walls, work on the farms of chiefs, together with contributions of food. There were also the heaviest of all the taxes, which was the burden of fines, fees, bribes, presents in connection with court cases (*Obi*) together with tolls on trade, fees on appointment, and death duties. The abolition of these demands greatly impoverished the chiefs. However, abuse continued and fuelled popular discontent. In response, another so-called reform was implemented; in addition to being salaried, the position of the chief was made subject to appointment, transfer, and dismissal, thereby reducing his autonomy drastically vis-à-vis the colonial power. Even the British, the high priests of Indirect Rule through traditional authority, asserted that the agent of tradition would not be a hereditary but a colonial appointment. Once the colonial establishment stabilized, even the position of pre-colonial kings and native aristocracies were made subject to appointment and dismissal. See Mahmood Mamdani, (2004), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 52-61.
- ³⁴ Lord Lugard, (1970). *Political Memoranda: Revision of Instructions to Political Officers on Subjects Chiefly Political and Administrative, 1913-1918*. Frank Cass & Co. Ltd. P. 60.
- ³⁵ Tribute was only one of a very large number of exactions, which included special levies, fees, fines, bribes, presents and death duties, together with tolls on traders, taxes on cattle, ferries and fish, as well as forced labour.
- ³⁶ W. Rodney, (1972), *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, London: Bogle-Louvverture Publication, W-13, p. 180.
- ³⁷ NAI. Oyo Prof. 2/3, File No. C42, Ibadan-Oyo: Relationship Between. P.5.

- ³⁸ Olakunle A Lawal, Islam and Colonial Rule in Lagos, (Polarization of Lagos), V12NI Spring, 95 pdf-408_ V12NI, p. 68-72.
- ³⁹ NAI CSO 26/29709, 'Oba of the House of Docemo Subsidy'.
- ⁴⁰ A titanic study of British Indirect Rule system can be found in J A. Atanda, (1972), *The New Oyo Empire* (London: Longman).
- ⁴¹ Toyin Falola, (1989). *Politics and Economy in Ibadan*, Modelor Design Aids Ltd. Lagos, p. 129.
- ⁴² NAI. Oyo Prof. 1. File No. 1927 Vol. IV (i) Tax Collection, Oyo Province, (ii) Tax rates schedule (iii) Instructions – general. W.R. CMD. 1. Tax Collection in the Western Region. 1953-54 Nigeria: Government Printers. P. 2.
- ⁴³ M. Perham, (1960), *Lugard: The Years of Authority, 1889-1945*, London: Collins, pp. 12- 30.
- ⁴⁴ NAI. CSO 26/3, file no. 21790, Assessment Report, Imala District, Abeokuta Province. 4th of January 1928- 2nd of March, 1928.
- ⁴⁵ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 130.
- ⁴⁶ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 57.
- ⁴⁷ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 57.
- ⁴⁸ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 129.
- ⁴⁹ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 91.
- ⁵⁰ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 132.
- ⁵¹ NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the Abeokuta Disturbances – Re. p. 132.
- ⁵² In the Commission of Enquiry Report, he was referred to as *Adubi of Elere*.
- ⁵³ C. A. Dosumu, (1977), "The Owu and the *Adubi* Rising, 1914-20", unpublished B.A. thesis in the Department of History, University of Ibadan, p. 36.
- ⁵⁴ NAI.C.92/1918. J. Blair, Abeokuta Intelligence Report, February 1983, paragraph 63.

- 55 NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the
Abeokuta Disturbances – Re.
- 56 *Adubi* was not physically present at any of the fronts. He stayed at Elere
issuing directives. In an interview granted to the author by Baale
Olomooore in Abeokuta on the 12th of January, 2010, he revealed that
Adubi was ‘a cripple’ who could not move about. Little wonder then
why he could not be physically present on the battle field! .
- 57 NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the
Abeokuta Disturbances – Re.
- 58 The Egba and Owu were distinct Yoruba sub-group and were
neighbours in the Egba and Owu kingdom before the eventual relocation
of the Egba to Abeokuta in 1830. The Owu later settled in the new
Egba capital town in 1834. For more information, see Biobaku, S.O.
Egba and their neighbours, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press Ltd. 1991.
See also T.O. Erinoshio, “The Anglo-Egba Relations, 1842-1914: A
Diplomatic Interpretation” (M.A. Dissertation, Department of History,
University of Ibadan). The Egba-Owu people could not give an accurate
figure of the dead. The fact that their dead were immediately buried also
made accuracy in the number of deaths unattainable.
- 59 NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the
Abeokuta Disturbances – Re.
- 60 J.J. Blair, (1938), Abeokuta Intelligence Report. February, 1938. See
also Clement Adegoke Dosumu. “The Owu and the Adubi Rising, 1914-
20”, Unpublished B.A. thesis from the Department of History, 1977,
University of Ibadan, p. 43.
- 61 A .K. Ajisafe, (1948), *History of Abeokuta*,...p. 203.
- 62 NAI. C. 92/1918. Appointment of Commission of Enquiry into the
Abeokuta Disturbances-Re.
- 63 T. N. Tamuno, (1972), *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*:...p.98.
- 64 T. N. Tamuno, (1972), *The Evolution of the Nigerian State*:.....
p.106.
- 65 M. Perham, (1965), *Lugard: The Years of Authority*, p. 456.