CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

The 1968-1969 Peasant Farmers' Struggle for Social Equity in Southwestern Nigeria

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The Peasant Exploitation: The Colonial Antecedents

From 1899 to 1960, the Nigerian territory was under the administration of Britain. The administration of the Lagos protectorate was officially transferred from the foreign office to the colonial office on 1 April 1899, and Sir Ralph Moore was appointed the High Commissioner.[1] During the period of British rule, the 'cocoa economy' grew among the Yoruba. Cocoa, which was produced exclusively for the world market, accentuated and fostered latent class divisions. This cash crop, for decades, brought affluence and prosperity to some, but (as a monoculture) unfortunately turned out to be a fluctuating and unstable base for the economy of Yorubaland.

The British colonial government did little to facilitate the growth of cocoa production. However, it indirectly tinkered with the rural/domestic economy and ensured the extraction of small surplus through taxes/export duties for administrative finance. Thus, through its colonial taxation policy, peasant production was spurred, but the government attempt to impose heavy taxation in a period of falling producer prices had led to violent reaction in Yorubaland in 1918.[2] From then onward, British

1 W. Geary (1927). *Nigeria under British Rule.* London: Meathuen & Co. Ltd. p. 122.

2 J.A. Atanda, 1969. "Iseyin-Okeiho Rising of 1916: An Example of Socio-Political Conflict" in *Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria,* Vol. IV, No. 4, pp.120-138. See also *Nigeria Pioneer,* 26th July, 1918, where it was reported that before the revolt, para-military *Egbe-Agbe* had been formed throughout Egbaland primarily to fight the encroaching bureaucracy of the British. British troops were able to establish their supremacy ultimately, though not before over 200 'rebels' had been massacred.

colonial officials only cast a passing glance on and benevolently observed the cocoa trade, while indirectly taxing the producers in order to cover the cost of administration. The major beneficiaries of the cocoa trade were the colonial trading companies, who soon reconciled themselves to peasant production since it ultimately turned out to be cheaper and efficient than they had envisaged.

The Nigeria Cocoa Marketing Board was established in 1947 to 'assist in the development of the cocoa industry for the benefit and prosperity of the producers'.[3] The difference between world prices (less government export/produce duties, freight, etc.) and prices guaranteed by the Board constituted its 'surplus', which, according to the terms of its establishment, was to be kept in trust for the producers.[4] Although the peasant profited from the postwar prices of the colonial state through the Marketing Board, the latter was extracting a significant fraction of the actual world marketing prices, thereby shortchanging the local farmers perfectly. The degree of exploitation was intense and the Board had subtly assumed the role of a tax collector.[5] The income of the producer became massively destabilised and by 1956, private savings and investment by producers was almost impossible.[6] The Western Nigeria cocoa farmers began to live on the 'brink' from season to season, high or low prices translating to brief prosperity, and in some cases, foreclosure and ruin.

The Marketing Board engaged in quality control of cocoa products through an aggressive policy of produce inspection. Attempts were made to control the spread of cocoa diseases, particularly the swollen shoot diseases, but the Ibadan peasantry vigorously resisted the activities of the "cutting gangs". The details of the activities of the Ibadan Maiyegun Society have been well documented in another work.[7] The Maiyegun movement essentially epitomised protests by small peasant producers in the Ibadan area against government policies, (and her agents) which threatened to push them down from a precariously balanced precipice. Invariably, during the colonial period, the peasants became the butt in a

3 Galleli et al. 1965. *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers.* London: Oxford University Press, pp. x-xvi.

4 Galleli et al. 1965. *Nigeria . . .* p. 217.

5 Olatunbosun. 1975. *Nigeria's Neglected Rural Majority.* Ibadan: Oxford Press, pp. 53-75.

6 Baver. 1956. "Marketing Monopoly in British Africa." Kyklos: *International Review for Social Sciences.* Vol. 9, pp.164-180. The actual source of the marketing Board's 'surplus' arose from the systematic upholding of a large percentage of the fruits of the peasants labour.

7 C. Beer. 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria,* Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, pp. 54-57.

tripartite relationship between the British colonial government, the colonial trading companies and the indigenous planters.

The Western Region Marketing Board and Public Expenditure

The Action Group (AG) was elected into power in the Western Region in 1952 and one of its principal objectives was to use the huge "surpluses' of the Commodity Board locked up in London Banks to secure 'life more abundant' for the teaming population of Western Nigeria. During this period also, cocoa was the largest earner of foreign exchange for Nigeria and incidentally, Western Region had relative autonomy in the marketing of cocoa. Over the years, the region had built up a substantial financial reserve through the activities of Cocoa Marketing Board. The reserves became handy to the federal government of Nigeria during the civil war years as most of the instruments of war were imported and paid for in hard currency.[8]

The Colonial Cocoa Marketing Board, which was regionalised by Western Region Law No 10 of 1954, became the Western Region Marketing Board, but like its predecessor, it failed to promote the development of producing areas or even enhance the prosperity of the producers and the region as a whole. This is because the Board was soon drawn into the structure of the government through amendments made to the original law in order to boost the degree of political control over its activities. The region's ambitious First Development Plan was launched in 1955 and by 1959 had spent over £102m on education, economic development and social services.[9] A large amount was expended on providing social services like roads, healthcare, etc. However, it soon became apparent that it was the regions urban areas that really benefited from the 'life more abundant' drive of the Western Region's government socio-economic policies. The rural dwellers were left in the cold.

Between 1954 and 1961, the strategy of the region's development plan was precariously balanced on the heads of the rural producer. It is important to note that some of the weaknesses of the Action Group (AG) development strategy were really logical results of policies that were self-serving, which were deliberately geared towards satisfying the interests of the dominant classes in the society. It was, indeed, a policy which ensured

8 Oluranti Afowowe, 1998. *Onward Soldier Marches On*: A Biography of General Adeyinka Adebayo. Nigeria: Evans Brothers Nigeria Ltd, p. 83.

9 Ajayi, I and Ojeyide, T. 1974. The Role of Cocoa on Nigeria's economic development, *"Economics of Cocoa Production and Marketing"* ed. Koleyi Okali Rourte. University of Ghana, Legon.

that the highest possible financial benefits returned to its controllers, which included bureaucrats, politicians and commercial bourgeoisie. The class issue was succinctly noted by a news media when it asserted that there were two groups of people in the Western Region – "those who live at the public expenses and those who provide the money".[10]

After independence, the major source of revenue for the Western Region government continued to be taxes collected from the low income group who were in the majority both in the rural and urban centers. The conviction of the premier of Western Region, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, led to protests from Awo's supporters. Chaos and disorderliness had characterised the October, 1965 elections. The riggings and manipulations were to lead to violence and what came to be termed "operation wetie."[11] Indeed, it was the combination of the socio-economic and political events in the west that led to the military intervention of January 1966; for the rural areas, even the military intervention meant very little change, if at all any.

There was nothing necessarily evil or mean in the state government introduction of a new levy known as the State Development Levy as it was intended to cover up the shortfall in government revenue. But this levy sparked off discontent among the low-income groups who were mostly petty traders/market women as they were taxed on the same basis as their male counterpart. On the other hand, the affluent in the society deliberately avoided their fair share of taxes. Thus, 'farmers were being fleeced to pay for titled dignitaries and pen pushers.'[12] Unfortunately, the rate of infrastructural development was not commensurate with the enormous taxes, levies and rates that were demanded by the state. Even today, in Akufo and Akanran, two major centres of Agbekoya riots, basic amenities are still non-existent.[13]

10 *West Africa*, 6th June, 1959. From 1954 to 1961, the Western Region enjoyed a period of peasant-financed development. Her economy remained based on cocoa monoculture despite attempts at diversification. In fact, the attempt to base economic growth on cocoa 'surplus' experienced its first setback in the 1961/62 season. It marked the beginning of the end of the 'prosperity era' and gave the first jolt to the optimism and complacency of the ruling classes. It epitomised the birth of a slump in the rural areas which actually persisted until the late 1960s.

11 OSGF Bulletin. The In-House Publication of the office of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation,: Nigeria's 50th Independent Anniversary, Vol. 1, No. 16. P. 15. The 1965 election in Western Region produced violent protests. Members of the opposing party were literally set on fire after wetting them with petrol.

12 C. Beer. 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups* . . . p. 162.

13 Akanran today, (over 40 years after the 'war') remains under-developed. The electricity supply has been dysfunctional since 2005. The only visible tarred road was constructed in 1959. Industries are still non-existent and the first

The Western Region's financial reserve, which was generated from the sweat of the peasants, turned out to be what the federal government depended on to purchase most of the instruments of war like guns, ammunition, tanks, war-planes, etc. which were imported and paid for in hard currency during the Nigerian civil war. It was during this period that Governor Adebayo launched his new tax initiative that turned out to be politically volatile. Apart from increasing taxes and rates that were formerly payable within the region, compulsory Federal Savings Scheme and Regional Savings Schemes were also instituted.

The gossip and scandal that resulted from the government's involvement in the Marketing Board's affairs and the saving schemes were tremendous and through it all sympathy was generally with the low income earners. Was it, therefore, surprising that those socio-political observers who heard all the gossips about the economic policy of the military authorities should have thought wistfully that there was no serious philosophy behind the activities of the Western Region administration, except that of meeting the demands of the headquarters in Lagos. Money was required to prosecute the Nigerian civil war and the burden of providing the needed fund fell directly on the peasants. These excessive tax demands ultimately culminated in the Agbekoya riots of 1968/69.

The Origins of the Agbekoya Crisis

Indeed, the view that 'wars' are always fought for economic interests really found supports in the origin of the Agbekoya crisis. Personal ambition, fear, rivalry, etc. were not the motives which impelled the peasants to what proved a severe struggle. It had been said that the riot was not a considered protest movement, but a spontaneous response to distress. One cannot concentrate solely on their ostensible causes.

petrol station is just being put in place in the year 2008! The situation in Akufo is a metaphor for the dismal state of infrastructure in Nigeria. Basic infrastructural amenities are almost non-existent in Akufo today. However, I noticed that a broad road was being put in place to link Apete to Akufo in 2008. Alhaji Aransi Oladejo noted that electricity was provided for the first time in Ibadan in 1938, but 70 years down the line, this basic amenity remained dysfunctional in most of the areas that took part in the Agbekoya rising. In Akufo, the existing transformer has been there for 15 years, but yet no light! It would, consequently, be expecting too much to suppose that the illiterate peasant farmers of Western Nigeria would be anything but aggressive, having been marginalised and oppressed for so long. It is also important to note that irresponsible, unattractive and scatter-brained as the peasant's appeared, they enjoyed the benefit of attracting popular sympathy, which they utilised maximally during the riots.

'Whatever the apparent cause of any riot, the real one is always want of happiness.'[14] The causes of the peasant's unhappiness on the eve of the disturbances were multifarious. Therefore, generalisations regarding the causes of these riots would be misleading.

The Agbekoya rebellion was actually ignited by the very high rate of personal taxation (£3/5/0 plus water, local rates for those with an assessed income of under £50 per year) and the low cocoa price. Farmers knew that the Marketing Board was short-changing them by paying only a fraction of the world price. The uprising occurred only after peasants' efforts to use peaceful channels had proved abortive. It was a populist movement whose leaders and members were mainly illiterate, Muslim, small scale farmers and hunters who had not previously been noted for political activities.[15]

The introduction of the Marketing Board system a salient cause of the disturbance, and this meant that the government and the urban beneficiaries of its policies were exploiting the farmers much more effectively.[16] The point is that the Nigerian government's attempts to exploit the cocoa marketing surpluses for developmental purposes led to massive and disproportionate fiscal contribution by the farmers. As if this was not enough, the government sought additional revenue by increasing direct taxation and various levies, promising the farmers various social benefits like roads and electricity, which were never delivered.

Tax was central because its collection provided the farmers with the necessary issue and sanction with which to confront the authorities.[17] The

14 T. Paine. 1937. *Right of Man*. (ed) H.B., p. 137.

15 M. Peil. 1976. *The Nigerian Politics: The Peoples View*, London: Cassell and Company Ltd., p.171.

16 G. William. 1980. *State and Society in Nigeria*. Afrografika, Ondo, p.124. The cliché that says 'only the poor pay tax' became manifest in the attitude of the rich towards taxation, particularly during the 1960s in Western Nigeria. More often than not, the 'big men' avoided paying tax at all through clever accounting. These powerful people usually managed their tax and decided how much they wanted to pay the government. In fact, some of them negotiated their tax rate with the government while some of their registered companies paid no income tax at all. They were the real tax cons who cleverly avoided and evaded paying tax. They got all the beautiful things of life, while the poor paid for them. They set up companies in the names of their wives or relations resident in another state, thereby effectively avoiding their fair share of taxation. It was not a coincidence that we had a Western State that encouraged the rich to evade and avoid tax. The Agbekoya farmers were burdened with the urgent need to stop the rich, the most protected in the Yoruba society, from avoiding and evading their fair share of the taxes. They were the real criminals and that is why one could say tax avoidance at the top should be considered a crime. Indeed, it is fundamentally anti-social and anti-democratic not to pay tax.

17 G. William. 1980. *State and Society in Nigeria*. Afrografika, Ondo, p.125.

farmers saw themselves as exploited and oppressed by the military government that refused to accept fair prices for their cocoa, sent fraudulent officials to harass them and denied them of the amenities that they had been promised. They perceived themselves as victims of a government that kept demanding series of higher taxes at a time farmers did not earn enough to meet their existing obligations.[18] The atrocities committed by the tax collectors were many and the aggressive ways they went about their duties also left much to be desired.[19]

The peasants actually had deep-seated distaste for some new fiscal policies of the government, and these included the Federal Government's compulsory saving scheme, the water rate that was introduced on all taxpayers, the development rate and the newly introduced taxation of women earning above 100 pounds per annum.[20] What made the Agbekoya riots remarkable was that it cut across the West State. We shall now address the impact that the riots left in its wake.

The Impact of the Agbekoya Crisis on Yorubaland

In speaking of the Western State tax policy and the resultant state of anarchy that pervaded the Yorubaland as a result of farmers' displeasure, it had been necessary to discuss the fundamental issues that led to the

18 G. William. 1980. *State and Society in Nigeria.* Afrografika, Ondo, p.125. Pa Lasisi Obisesan noted that the demands made upon the income of the peasants by the government were unduly heavy and too burdensome for the peasants. Even those who had insufficient land and eked out their living by looking for additional source of income had to pay.

19 Alhaji Akadiri Olaniyi related how some tax collectors at Apete pursued a man who was trying to evade payment of tax until the latter met his untimely death in the process. He emphatically noted that there was no human face in the ways the tax collectors went about their business.

20 *Daily Times*, 22nd February 1969, p. 3. West riots blamed on four new taxes-Probe told. The taxation of women had too much unfortunate impact on the family system. Many family lives were really devastated because most women like Ma Adekambi Ajayi, wife of the Baale of Akufo in Ibadan, never envisaged that so early in their marriages, the riot was going to separate them from their husbands who were the major bread winners of the family. For so many low income women like her who had to eke out a living from small businesses, their husbands who was expected to give support had either been killed, maimed or incapacitated as a result of the war. It led to much disintegration among the family. Fathers were forced to run away from home and the burden of keeping the home together fell on wives. There was so much socio-economic upheaval as a result of the government tax policies. The poorer peasants and those whose agriculture was on the subsistence level or slightly above it resisted because the tax demands, rates and other dues pressed on their already low standard of living. The taxes were seen by the peasants as irritating burdens because the privileged classes had avoided their proper share of it.

revolts. We shall now attempt to examine the consequential impact on the polity. It is also necessary to put some of these disturbances into perspective in order to really appreciate the form, nature and extent of the crises, as these would enable us to address these issues distinctly and chronologically.

As early as 20 September 1968, disturbances broke out in Oyo. The goal of the demonstrators was to end the payment of Oranyan Grammar School's education rate, part of which had been misappropriated. The people also appealed to government about the increase in water rate arising from the establishment of Water Corporation when it became public knowledge that an increase had been effected.[21] It was these prevailing situations in Oyo that degenerated into riots.

The disturbances in Ibadan city and parts of Ibadan division sparked off on 21 October, 1968. Four men from Olode village pleaded in a petition to the governor of the Western Region, that since the year's harvest was bad, it would be practically impossible to pay the tax which had been raised from £3 to £6. They appealed to the governor to 'save them from the situation'.[22] This petition was never acknowledged. By 6 November, 1968, a 400 strong crowd staged a peaceful demonstration at the Olubadan palace and complained bitterly against the high level of the tax. The 400 demonstrators of 6 November had risen to 3,000 battle-ready men by 11 November, 1968. Consequently, a meeting called between the Olubadan and their ringleaders[23] ultimately snowballed into a full scale 'war'. The war that raged in Akufo was 'unprecedented'; an eye witness prayed that such never happen again in her life time.[24]

There were also civil disturbances in Egba Division between 13 and 30 December 1968. These riots were upshot of the refusal of market men and women in Egba-Owode to pay their taxes.[25] Also, at a meeting held at

21 *Ayoola Commission Report*. Op. cit, p. 15.

22 *Ayoola Commission Report*, p. 29.

23 *Ayoola Commission Report*, p. 21.

24 Ma Morianmo Adekanmbi Ajayi, wife of the then Baale of Akufo, affirmed that it was a real war that took place in Akufo. Houses were set ablaze; children were hidden inside baskets for safety and her husband, the Baale of Akufo then, Ajayi, survived by escaping to Ibadan where he stayed for seven months in exile. So many other fathers abandoned their social responsibilities as heads of the homes for their wives. Paradoxically, she believed that it was the state police that saved them from the situation of that time, which goes to show that the state, among many techniques, applied the 'divide and rule' system in her dealings with the peasant farmers.

25 *Ayoola Commission Report*. Op. cit, p. 25. It was later discovered that the Parakoyis, the traditional market supervisors, who looked after the markets and performed market rituals, engineered the agitation. Mr.Robert Olajide, the then divisional officer for Egba, submitted while giving evidence before the Ayoola

the Ake Town Hall on 16 December 1968 to discuss tax-related issues, there was a serious clash and exchange of words between His Royal Highness, the Alake of Abeokuta and Alhaji Adegbenro, the then Western State Commissioner of Finance.[26]

At Idi-Ayunre, the Commissioner and Mr. Borisade were met on the way by a crowd of 2000 people carrying charms and other dangerous weapons. However, the timely intervention of Colonel Olusegun Obasanjo of the Nigerian army prevented the situation from degenerating into a full-blown crisis. Eventually, the crowd was dispersed.[27] Also, policemen as well as soldiers were ambushed and killed by rioters at Akanran in early August, 1969. A leading hunter at Akanran led this agitation.[28] An eye witness account had it that some policemen stood rooted to the ground at the sight of the peasant farmers while other law enforcement agents who shot at them ended up catching the bullets. The police guns were practically rendered ineffective as a result of the potency of the Agbekoya charms. The wise ones among them simply abandoned the directives of the state and ran away from the rampaging peasant farmers.[29] The tense situation led to indefinite closure of council offices as officials were unwilling to report for duty without the provision of adequate police protection.[30]

On 16 September, 1969, the Akanran farmers reduced the Agodi prison to ruins. Prisoners were set free, but those whose term of sentences was about to be completed preferred not to take advantage of the situation to escape.[31] Gradually, what was initially regarded as a mere show of

probe panel that the Parakoyis, the traditional market supervisor, thought they had lost their ancient prestige to local councils. Consequently, they spared no effort in engineering the tax agitation. See *Daily Times,* 30th of January, 1969.

26 *Daily Times*, Friday July 4th 1969, p.1.

27 *Ayoola Commission Report*. p. 18.

28 *Ayoola Commission Report*, p. 22. Alfa Makanjuola who resides at Agbowo, near the University of Ibadan, revealed that of the eleven truck load of mobile policemen sent to Akufo, none returned.

29 Laiwola Jagun affirmed and was willing to sign a written statement to the effect that the saw policeman/law enforcement agents as they were being brought to Adeoyo hospital after an encounter with the Agbekoya farmers. Some of them were even taken out of the country for medical attention. He noted that some policemen had their uniform stuck to their bodies as a result of the encounter they had with the Agbekoya farmers. He also dropped his GSM number for anyone who doubted the authenticity of his assertions.

30 *Ayoola Commission Report*, op. cit, p. 23.

31 *Headlines*, 10th January, 1974, p. 8. The Agodi prison was reduced to ruins by the farmers from Akanran. The superintendent of police in charge of the prison, Mr. C. A. Agboyewa, was killed in the operation led by Tafa Adeoye. Eleven prisoners, including one Adeleke Ademiluyi who was serving a seven years sentence refused to leave their cells. See the front page of *Daily Times*, 17th of

magical prowess by a few disgruntled illiterate farmers had degenerated into a national issue.[32] Just when it was becoming apparent that the state government was incapable of a decisive blow against the rioters, about one thousand (1000) demonstrators attacked the policemen at Olode police post, released the three men that had been arrested earlier, and went on to damage the windows of the police post.[33] Anti-tax demonstrators also attacked the Shoun of Ogbomoso, Oba Olajide Olayode, with (*gaga-owo*) – (broomstick) machetes. His body was dismembered and carried round the streets.[34] A police report from Osogbo noted that a charged atmosphere over tax had erupted into riots when a group of collectors tried to raid defaulters.[35]

The tax disturbances in Western State had socio-economic and even political consequences; the most pronounced effect in areas otherwise calm was that of slowing down tax payment and collection. In fact, tax officials stopped making strong demands for payment. Resultantly, all revenue nose-dived from £5.17 million in (1967/68) to £3.04 million in (1968/69).[36] These figures were only a reflection of half the story, the

September, 1969. Also Mr. Olaoye Makanjuola, a.k.a Baba Igbajo, residence at N2/791, Ile Ali, Oju-Oopo, Oke Sapati, Ibadan, asserted that the battle between the rioters and the law enforcement agents was so fierce that it was being compared to the Ore encounter between the Federal and the Biafran troops. In his own words, "Oleku, Ija Akanran!" meaning that the clash between the peasants and the law enforcement agents at Akanran was a terrible one! Even before the invasion of Agodi, Akanran had become a high risk terrain for anti-riot policemen. According to Pa Lasisi, people like Sokoro, Raaji Kolobo and Supo, among others, ensured that this was so. Corpses of policemen were at various times deposited at the public mortuary of the state hospital, Adeoyo, Ibadan. See *Daily Times*, 2nd & 3rd of July, 1969.

32 *Headlines*, 10th January, 1974, p.8. This attempt was intended to mob and bully the state government.

33 *Ayoola Commission Report*, p. 29. The Agbekoya riots were really not limited to Ibadan area alone. The effects of the crises were felt within the length and breadth of Western State.

34 *Daily Times*, Friday 4th July, 1969, p.1. It has been said in some quarters that the Soun did not just go down without putting up some spirited efforts to save his life. He, indeed through the use of the traditional magical power, transformed himself into a number of animals like chicken, ('Adie') cat, ('*Olongbo*')and so on before he was cut to piece with a broom stick, ('*gaga owo*') which goes to show that the Agbekoya peasant war was not one fought with the orthodox weapons of war, but with the non-conventional types. Mr. Nojimu Akinde has also thrown a challenge to those that those who do not believe; that they should come to Ogbomoso and make clarifications about his assertion that Oba Olayode was cut to pieces with 'gaga Owo', a broom stick. Some chiefs also went down with the Soun.

35 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 7th May, 1969.

36 *Western State Statistical Abstract*, Vol. XII, No. 192, June/December 1971; Ministry of Economic Development, Statistics Division, Ibadan, p. 34.

drop being much sharper in areas where the riots had taken place. For instance, *Egba* Division showed a general revenue loss of more than £270,000, taxes and rates falling from £0.26 million to £0.06 million between 1967/68 and 1968/69 financial year. In Ibadan City, the 'little people' paid £261,000 less in taxes than they had in the previous financial year, while the Ibadan rural area paid £184,000 in 1967/68 and a mere £14,000 in the 1968/69 year![37]

In areas not affected by violence, 'civil disobedience' became the new order of the day; peasants showed their discontent by adamantly refusing to pay taxes.[38] The riots, however, did not degenerate into mere pilfering and hooliganism. By the start of 1969, the peasant groups had grown in membership, financing themselves through regular contributions and holding lively informal meetings to discuss local problems and relay news of fresh developments elsewhere in the state.[39] The disturbances led to the growth of new tax movements in areas otherwise calm, and these movements appeared under various names such as, *Talaka-parapo, Mekunnu-taku, Agbekoya* and *Aiyekoya,*[40] which

37 *Western Nigeria Digest Statistics,* Vol. IV. Ibadan Government Printers, 1969, p.6.

38 *Western Nigeria Digest Statistics,* Vol. IV. Ibadan Government Printers, 1969, p.6. The general belief then was that farmer's had been pushed against the wall and had no choice other than to fight back.

39 Market Women, petty traders, farmers and farm labourers attended meetings. Membership cards were issued and subscription fees paid. See Ayoola report. Op. Cit, p.80. These women too were not spared from the state's tax demands. Like the 1940 tax demands on the Lagos market women, the Agbekoya tax riots too was considered burdensome...unfair, vindictive and even unsociological because if any woman failed to pay income tax and was imprisoned, such family group in African society was simply dislocated. The ordinary market women and traders with little or no capital, who often found themselves thrown into the vortex of the fiercest battle of life to eke out a living, while struggling to maintain their children and educate them in good schools in town, under the pangs of great sacrifice were also subjected to taxation. Imposition of income tax on women never formed part of the traditional native law and custom, and according to the 1st Puisne judge of the Supreme court of Gold Coast, Sir James Marshal in 1876, "for any reform to be permanent and enduring, it must be based on and rooted in the principles of aboriginal institutions".

40 *Ayoola Commission Report.* Op.cit. P. 80. From the interview granted by the ex-Governor Adeyinka Adebayo on the 1st of September, 2008, it was apparent that he had no welfare policy for the peasant farmers when he took over power in 1966. He probably saw them as people who had to be milked for the benefit of the State. He had no respect for farmers and saw nothing wrong if they were shortchanged for the benefit of the State. As a result, the threat of violence and unlimited anarchy, which is symptomatic of lack of an effective state, became the order of the day. The State, obviously, had no respect for human rights and the contending issues of the period were closely associated with poverty and

variously interprets as 'the poor unites,' 'the poor adamantly refuses' and 'the 'world says no to suffering' or 'farmers reject suffering'.

The malaise which is the inevitable sequel to a relatively long period of disturbances found a political form. It was canalised into campaign of agitation and conspiracy against the existing *Obas* and *Baales* in Yorubaland, a campaign in which free use was made of the habits of violence learned in the years of war. The disturbances encouraged people in other areas to threaten and intimidate officials and sometimes, *Obas*. It was certainly a measure of the nature of changes taking place in peasants' consciousness, and the rulers totally failed to understand this development. Were not these the same Yoruba people who were sentimentally and fiercely devoted to their *Obas* during the pre-colonial period? But now, the peasants had correctly assessed that the *Obas* owed allegiance first to the state government that was responsible for their salaries, and only second to the people. *Obas* were then expected to use their sacred position to quell agitations, thereby demonstrating absolute loyalty to the Western State Government.[41] However, as early as the November/December 1968 disturbances, most rulers knew intuitively after that it was better to adopt the neutral position in order to escape the wrath of the rampaging peasants.

Yet, some *Oba, Baales* and chiefs as well as the council officials became victims of the farmers' hostility as the crisis developed. Caught in the classic predicament of the colonial African chiefs, they appealed for conciliation, but went further by urging the farmers to pay their taxes and eschew violence. The disharmony between the state officials and the Agbekoya movement provoked political hostility and convulsion, thereby dragging the entire polity into crisis. Consequently, the disruptions resulted in the butchering of the *Shoun* of Ogbomoso, Olajide Olayode, the razing down of the palace/clubbing to death of a traditional chief, Michael Bamidele Atoyebi, the *Elemono* of *Ila-Orogun,* and the

inequality. Thus, the Western State poor resource farmer's socio-economic development was sacrificed in the interest of the security of the entire nation. And while reflecting over the terror that was, in turn, unleashed on the State by the peasants, the statement of former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, comes to mind; and he said: 'humanity will not enjoy security without development, it will not enjoy development without security, and will not enjoy either without respect for human rights.' It is, therefore, not to be wondered at that peace and security became elusive in the Western State as a result of the unfriendly economic policy that was pursued by the government. See Duncan Green, 2008. From Poverty to Power: How Active Citizens and Effective States can Change the World. UK: Oxfam International, p. 273.

41 *Daily Sketch,* 15th of January, 1969.

properties of the then *Orimolusi of Ijebu-Igbo, Oba Adetayo Sami,* were reduced to rubbles.[42]

The farmers saw their 'fathers' as betraying the sons. How could one remain a faithful subject of the *Oba* whose conduct proved it to be ready ever and always to betray the interests of the peasant farmers? The peasant had come to feel in the very depth of his being that the historical mission of the Oba had to come to an end. Therefore they encouraged every movement that might lead towards the final disruption of that impossible state and its agents which had operated an unfriendly tax policy against her people. This 'Babylonian' state had to be confronted, and that meant the liberating of the people. Then, it would become possible for them to be reunited in the farmer's kingdom which they craved for.

In fact, several *Obas* and numerous *Baales* as Ajayi, the *Baale* of *Akufo*, fled for their lives while several chiefs were murdered. The links between the peasantry and their rulers, which Moore and Wolf regard as a crucial constraint on peasant rebellion had snapped, and like the industrial worker described by Adrian Peace, the farmers organised themselves under their own leadership to enforce their interests collectively.[43] They demonstrated that they had the consciousness and determination to resist oppressive and forcible exactions.

These were people who saw themselves as being outside the law, and as the expression went, who had no civil status. These were people who had everything to gain and nothing to lose from an upheaval and who inspired fear all around. It was, indeed, the government's failure to listen to the demands of a relatively well organised group that led to the rise of this populist movement, which applied non-constitutional method to secure redress, and in so doing, undermined the stability of the entire polity. They simply challenged the state government authorities in village

42 *Daily Times*, Friday 4th July, 1969, p.1. Chief Remi Akinajo, an eye witness from Akanran village, minced no words when he said there were more losses of lives among the civilians living in Akanran. The police came in with full force and it was really a war. It has also been said that it is impossible to have an accurate number of those who died as most people simply picked up their dead friends and relations for burial without reporting or registering them.

43 G. William, 1980. *State and Society in Nigeria.* Afrografika, Ondo, p.125. Pa Lasisi Obisesan also affirmed that the Olubadan of that period, Oba Aminu, suddenly became an object of ridicule and derision among farmers who publicly pulled him by his (agbada) gown in front of Mapo Hall. In July 1968, the officials and bourgeoisie life of elegant enjoyment was rudely interrupted as a result of the violent activities of the peasants. There was no longer a hiding place for the kings, chiefs, government officials and all those whose interests contrasted with those of the peasants. The peasants went about singing war songs and were determined to 'fill the very wide gully, which was adjacent to Oba Aminus residence, with the chopped heads of *Akoda,' the local policemen.*

affairs.[44] More importantly, they used "juju" and momentarily came top over the state's law enforcement agents. The military styles, which was applied by the peasants against the agents of the state government was simply unimaginable and confounding.[45]

It has been said in some quarters that the Yoruba of southwestern Nigeria preferred mob rule to constituted government. The fact is that the government of the time did not behave well. Nowhere in the western

44 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria*, pp. 381 and 394. It was a war where the peasants fought the state to a stand-still using every means within their disposal as objects of war. More importantly, they got the better of the state's law enforcement agents and this explains why the state government capitulated and gave concessions to the peasant farmers! It was a war where policemen had their uniform stuck to their bodies on contact with the peasant formers. It was also reported that because of what the police authorities described as 'subversive activities', twenty four policemen who allegedly 'retreated' during one of the operations in which some of their colleagues lost their lives, were slated for dismissal from the force. Some of these officers were known to have promptly packed their belongings in readiness to quit the barracks as they awaited the final order to leave. Apparently, these officers were terrified by what they saw happen to their colleagues. See *Daily Times*, 27 September, 1969.

45 Mrs. Mary Ogu, nee Akinde, related what her mother told her about the Agbekoya war; that it became impossible for policemen who encountered the Agbekoya warriors to have their uniforms removed from their bodies and attempts to take them off forcefully meant cutting off their skins. But Alhaji Aransi Oladoja later noted that it was only those warriors who protected themselves with the "original copy" of the local charms that were actually protected from injury or death from police bullets. According to him, antiriot police men died in their numbers while many peasant farmers also lost their lives. He noted that only those who had the 'original versions' of these local charms were shielded, and that there were times when these charms failed. Pa Lasisi Obisesan also noted that Tafa Adeoye and each of the six men who constituted the militant leadership of the peasants held 'Owo', a broom in a hand when they confronted the state law enforcement officers. They carried no gun or cutlass and according to Pa Obisesan, "the seventh person was a dog", whatever that meant. In his words, the 1st of July 1969 was a terrible day. It is important to note that it may not be easy to prove the existence of African science as demonstrated by Tafa and his cohort with physical evidence. The 'abracadabra' of seeing a broomstick that could severe the human flesh and bone with the precision of a razor sharp cutlass may be inexplicable in the eyes of the uninitiated in Africa. But we know that African science exists! However, When General Adebayo's view on the issue of the potency of the Agbekoya farmer's charms was sought, he simply asked; where is Tafa Adeoye today? It is important to note that Tafa Adeoye was taken into police custody on the 16th of September 1970, and despite efforts to secure his release by Bola Ige, he remained in detention in Jos, without trial or charges brought until March 1971. It is a measure of how much Tafa had lost the support of the farmers that his arrest, which was politically impossible a year previously, generated little disturbance among the farmers. See also *Ayoola Commission Report*, p. 29.

world would a government impose such increased taxes and rates without explaining and seeking co-operation. The problem is that the military nature of the government caused them not to realise the rights of the citizens. However, the attitude and utterances of the government of the 1960s gave the impression that the Yoruba of 1968/69 would have preferred not to be assessed by constituted authority.[46]

There is the cliché that says 'every state is founded on force'.[47] Although all political structures use force, they differ in the manner in which they use or threaten to use it against oppositions. The Western State government applied both force and diplomacy in the struggle against the Agbekoya peasant warriors. Among the diplomatic strategies adopted was the 'divide and rule' system, which was targeted at throwing the seed of disharmony among the leadership of the movement. A woman police officer was also engaged to seduce Tafa Adeoye in order to divert the attention of the peasant farmers from the riots.[48] Before the adoption of this modus operandi, it was virtually impossible to arrest Tafa.

The peasant farmers extensively made use of local 'juju' against all oppositions. However, a clergyman would not see the peasants' application of the indigenous seemingly fictitious power as an effective means of prosecuting the 'war'. He, indeed, admitted and expressed the belief that charms have always existed and still exists in parts of Africa. According to him, "to believe otherwise is to make a fool of one self."[49] Also, a scientist affirmed that the police could not immediately subjugate the peasant movements in spite of their superior fire power. The farmers

46 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 12th July 1969.

47 Gerth, H. M. & Mills, C.W. 1946. From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology, Oxford University Press, NY, p. 78.

48 Colonel Adeyemi of the Nigerian Army remembered very vividly that he was at the Benin front when the Agbekoya 'war' was raging alongside the civil war. He also affirmed that the state was only able to subdue the Agbekoya farmer's after its leadership had been compromised. He alluded to the state's use of a woman police officer to bring Tafa under control. Ultimately, on the 16th of September, 1970, Tafa Adeoye was arrested, and subsequently imprisoned in Jos in Northern Nigeria.

49 Dr. Pastor Olubamiwa Olaiwola said he has actually not experienced or witnessed people experimenting or demonstrating the effectiveness or otherwise of charms. He holds that people are, however, given to a lot of exaggerations. Even as a spiritual person, Pastor Olubamiwa believes that it could have happened. Another 'man of God' perceived the tax issue from another angle; the Anglican Bishop of Ibadan during the riots, the Right Rev. S. O. Odutola, attributed the sudden outburst of agitation to 'another unwelcome visitation of the devil'. He declared that the church body was not opposed to reform or redress but Christians must eschew the use of violence in seeking redress or reforms. *Daily Times*, Friday, February 14th. 1969. p. 3. 'Tax agitation is work of devil'.

made use of 'local traditional charms',[50] which appeared largely successful until their leadership was compromised by the state government.

In fact, the Agbekoya riots were not only devastating in terms of property destroyed, they were also horrendous because many innocent lives were lost. One cannot but agonise when the extent and consequences of the disturbances are considered. Perhaps, the same feeling was manifested when one newspaper described the "events" in the West as the 'war within a war'.[51] Over six thousand (6000) people died even at a conservative estimate in this uprising.[52] However, this unfortunate episode in the Western Region was eventually brought to an end through the intervention of some prominent people in the country. The initiatives of Chief Obafemi Awolowo spurred the governor and the Olubadan of Ibadan into lightning speed in order to get to the roots of the peasant grievances and steps were taken to redress them. Thus, Western State was saved from the destabilisation which, unquestionably, had menaced her. The factors that ultimately led to the demise of the Agbekoya movement will be discussed below.

The Government Concessions and the Collapse of the Agbekoya Movement

The Agbekoya Crisis, which started in Oyo on 7 October, 1968[53] and ultimately spread to other parts of Western Nigeria, abated towards the close of 1969, but not before the peasants had demonstrated their absolute disrespect for the military government of the day. They, in fact, dealt devastating psychological blows on the psyche of the law enforcement agents through the use of charms and other traditional instruments of war. Cutlasses, clubs and charms were mostly relied upon by the peasants to prosecute this 'war'. The state law enforcement agents were generally incapable of handling the Agbekoya menace. Police guns were mostly ineffective against the farmers because bullets shot at the farmers were

50 Dr. Adebayo Omoloye, a scientist from the Department of Crop Protection and Environmental Biology, University of Ibadan, said his father related to him that the peasant riot was, indeed, a political cum economic crisis, which was championed by Adegoke Adelabu. His father also told him how the farmers helped themselves with native charms like "Atidijo", which made it impossible for bullet shot from the police gun to come out from the barrel, but from the rear, thereby killing the person who pulled the trigger. The peasants also made use of "*Okigbe*", which made it impossible for cutlass to penetrate the body.

51 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 18th of September, 1969.

52 Total Number of deaths reported in newspapers was about three hundred and seventy five (375). Many deaths were unreported. Civilian figures were unreliable since the dead were often carried away.

53 *Ayoola Commission Report*, op. cit., p. 15.

falling off like powder on glass. Apparently, the entire state law enforcement structure had no answer, at least initially, to the magical powers of the peasant farmers.[54]

Governor Adebayo had stated that he knew of no 'modern government, which can function without funds'. He claimed that 'a few disgruntled elements were behind the agitation' and maintained that the riots were 'unprovoked.'[55] The governor was unrepentant in his determination to persevere in his tax drive. The press outside the Western Region had for long had reservations about Brigadier Adebayo's policies, and in the wake of the *Agodi* prison invasion of 16 September, 1969,[56] these doubts became stronger. His position seemed threatened by late September 1969, when the *New Nigeria* urged the Federal Military Government to declare a state of emergency in order to run the government of the West from Lagos.[57]

On October, 15, 1969, the government announced its plan to reduce the flat rate tax from £3:5 to £2. The suspension of the collection of Motor Park and market fees were effected while local district councils in Ibadan rural areas were abolished. The government promised to review

54 Pa Lasisi Obisesan also affirmed that holes were made on the clothes of Tafa during the shootings, but these bullets failed to penetrate his body and those of the peasant farmers that were behind him during the confrontation. He compared Tafa's brand of local charm to that used by Benjamin Adekunle of the Third Marine Commando during the Nigerian Civil War. See also *Daily Sketch*, 31st October, 1969.

55 *West Africa*, 12th July 1969; *Daily Sketch*, 7th of July, 1969. This is, unfortunately, the military mindset that has plagued Nigeria since independence. There is no place where a responsible government treats its citizens the way we are treated in Nigeria, as if the people have no right to complain. You cannot raise tax 50-100 percent at a time anywhere in the civilised world and expect things to remain the same. The question is: was it right to impose crushing taxes on the peasants to prosecute a war they were not interested in? This government was definitely not people-friendly. The civilian governments in Nigeria have not fared better. The way the pump prices of petroleum products were being indiscriminatingly raised, particularly during the civilian regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo left much to be desired. The situation even today leaves a bad taste in ones mouth. That explains why the Nigerian Labour Congress was always calling for and leading strikes; always at logger-head with the federal government in Nigeria. The authorities, whether military or civilian, are too insensitive to the welfare of the citizenry; their policies are harsh, and in most cases, not people-friendly.

56 *Daily Times*, 17th September, 1969, Rioters set 464 prisoners free at Ibadan. Front page.

57 *New Nigeria*, 24th of September, 1969. In his anniversary speech on the 1st of October, 1969, General Gowon urged the maintenance of 'law and order' in the West. His tone was firm, but it was apparent that he was unwilling to endorse Brigadier Adebayo's 'iron and blood' diplomacy.

cocoa prices 'soon', and it also reconstituted the Western State Farmer's Union (WSFU) with a view to making it an exclusively farmers' affair. All those arrested and convicted of crimes (murder exclusive) committed during the rising were promised freedom.[58] Two hundred Akodas were laid off in six district councils in October, 1969 while another seventy-six were also sacked over the months of November and December of the same year.[59] At the peak of the crisis, a council official even affirmed that he was laid off his job and taken to Agodi prison for no just reason.[60]

The peasantry knew that they had won a major victory. At Igbo-Ora, farmers mounted roadblocks, demanding money from policemen as "protection" taxes.[61] At this point, it was obvious that the state was incapable of containing the Agbekoya menace and this was what prompted an eye witness to declare that the state came very close relinquishing the running of the administration to the peasant farmers.[62] The intervention of Chief Awolowo was a strong stroke against the movement and the pendulum swung decisively in favour of the state government. Awo did a political summersault, and at the end of

58 *Sunday Times*, 28th of September, 1969. 'Awolowo speaks out on West riots and his Political future'.

59 *Daily Sketch*, 20th, 17th November, 1969.

60 Pa Lasisi said he wrote in his statement at Agodi Police Station that he was not an Agbekoya but a council worker. He then went on to ask rhetorically: how can you be a council worker and also be an Agbekoya?

61 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 27th November, 1969.

62 Alhaji Aransi Oladoja declared that "bi ara oko ba mowe ni, agbe i ba gbajoba", meaning, if the poor resource farmers were literate/educated, they would have taken over the government of Western Nigeria. He also related that he personally witnessed how a peasant farmer whose dane gun had earlier failed him, jumped amidst some policemen, drew his cutlass and started "slicing" the latter as knife goes through the Okro. According to him, local hunters who were forcibly recruited made use of local charms like 'afeeri', which rendered them invisible to the naked eye, 'Ayeta', which made the police bullets missed them, and 'Areta', which weakened the force of the bullet. He also confirmed to me that one of Tafa Adeoye prominent lieutenants, Sadiku Bogunbe, who was eventually arrested alongside Tafa, died in 2006 at Akufo. Abolade Kode was also arrested at the same time as Tafa Adeoye. He noted that it would have been impossible to arrest Tafa but for the intervention of the police woman who was used by the State to seduce him. It was even said that this woman who lived with Tafa as his wife sold him out to the State by discouraging him from carrying out his daily routine of 'soaking' himself in his traditional charms before embarking on his daily activities. Although Tafa was arrested and held in detention by the State, by the time he came back, his 'Delilah' had died mysteriously. When Tafa was asked about the cause of her death, he responded without any show of emotion that 'death just took her', which meant that he had no hand in her death. However, most people believed that Tafa must have been responsible for her death.

September 1969, published a lengthy article in the *Daily Times*, calling for the release of the arrested rioters, slashing of the water rate and abolition of the state development levy.[63] The Western State government might have been compelled to submit absolutely to the dictates of the peasants, but for the moderating counsels of 'Awo' and some other prominent leaders. The "untrammelled farmers' Kingdom," which Tafa Adeoye and the Agbekoya movement fought for, was almost achieved. Tafa made it very clear that they had never advocated for 'state creation', which he stated, was the idea of some greedy politicians. All they wanted was "farmers' control of farmer's life".[64]

Chief Awolowo's initiative soon became a subject of criticisms mostly from ex-political opponents. This issue cannot be fully discussed here,[65] but it is sufficient to note that even Governor Adebayo also resented the political gains, which Chief Awolowo made from the events. As it appeared, the elite all too readily accepted the victory of the peasants. Tafa Adeoye and his retinue of fierce-looking peasant farmers were received and entertained on the grounds of the governor's mansion.[66] The *Nigerian Tribune*, which in September, 1969 had called

63 *Sunday Times*, 28th of September, 1969. 'Awolowo speaks out on West riots and his political future'.

64 *The Nigerian Tribune*, October 16th 1969.

65 *West Africa*, No 18, 1969 and Sketch 21st and 22nd October, 1969. Adisa, Obisesan and Olunloyo, all NNDP members, attacked what they described as Chief Awolowo's belated negotiation and politics. Chief Awolowo was granted two months leave and he toured the state talking to large crowds in Osun, Egba, Ibadan and Ijebu. It was obvious that as an astute politician, Awolowo discerned the situation of the West and flew his kite accordingly, cashing in political gains.

66 *Daily Sketch*, 31st October, 1969. The question may even be asked: why would the state military governor be interested in lavishly entertaining some local peasant farmers if the former was not convinced that the farmers were VIPs? See *also Daily Times*, January 2, 1969. It is also important to note that General Adeyinka Adebayo saw the Agbekoya groups as 'foolish Ibadan farmers' who were simply intolerant of the tax demands made upon their income by the state government. He saw them as people who allowed themselves to be used by some elements within the state (whose names he would not mention) against one another, and not against the state as a lot of people believed. According to him, 'considering the enormous power that' he 'wielded, it was virtually impossible for these groups to confront' him. He noted the he could have ordered his soldiers to finish them off, but instead, he 'exposed' himself 'to some danger, traveled to Akanran to appeal to the leadership of the farmer groups to see reasons as to why they needed to pay the new taxes and rates. He also stated that, thereafter, he 'invited about fifty (50) of the leaders to the Government House' where they were treated to 'a lunch of pounded yam' and probably some kegs of palm wine, which usually complemented such a meals. According to him, the whole episode of the Agbekoya riots went into oblivion

for savage repression of the anti-tax movement, was by mid-November displaying in its front page pictures of Tafa with headlines such as 'Tafa Adeoye . . . a man worth knowing.'[67] The *New Nigerian* too congra-tulated the peasants on the successful expression and satisfaction of their grievances.

From October 15, 1969, the state government took the decision; stretched out a hand to the peasants, which the latter felt compelled to take. But the hand that the peasants took was an unholy one of deceit and treachery. What was really taking place behind the scene was a change in strategy by the state government. The new aim was not to resist the Agbekoya demands by force, but to compromise its leadership and neutralise the effectiveness of the movement. Apart from money, the state government used a woman police volunteer to compromise the Agbekoya movement.[68] Tafa Adeoye's prestige and fame sprung mainly from his successful military handling of the *Agodi* raid. The publicity, accolades and ardent support he enjoyed in November 1969 led him to embroil himself in political struggles between the various elite groups in the state. It appears that he alternately told Brigadier Adebayo and Chief Awolowo that each one had tried to use him against the other.[69]

The activities of the Ibadan south-east branch of the Agbekoya leadership soon resulted in conflict and within November 1969, the name, Agbekoya, was dropped and merger with other farmers' groups resulted in the formation of a unit, *Agbe-parapo*, which ultimately joined the

after the pounded yam romance of that day. Alas, how wrong he was! This is because the peasant's position was not materially improved by pounded yam and the seemingly benevolent utterances of the governor because the latter's concessions were not considered far reaching enough by the farmers. Also, the military government of Adeyinka Adebayo did not 'consult with the people' before taking vital decisions on tax related issues. See front page of Daily Times, 23rd of January, 1969.

67 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 31st October, 1969.

68 According to Mr. Adeniyi Folorunsho, this police woman who volunteered herself not only married Tafa Adeoye, she lived with him in the same house as his wife. She was, therefore, able to secure vital information about the Agbekoya movement from Tafa, which she relayed to the state. It was at one of such periods when Tafa was not in his "regalia of power" that Abidogun and a number of his 'friends' tricked and had him arrested at Iyaganku police station. Before the intervention of this police woman and other conspirators, it was virtually impossible to arrest him or penetrate the leadership of the Agbekoya movement. Tafa's decision to have her as a wife was seen by many peasants as a retrograde and thoughtless step. What the state decided to do at this point was simply to adopt a new 'modus operandi' in the war against the peasant farmers. It was this decision which saved the state from the Agbekoya disruptions which unquestionably had menaced her. At this stage too, unity in leadership and in organisation had been notably and fatally absent in the movement.

69 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p.200.

state's sponsored Western State Farmers Union (WSFU).[70] Significantly, 'Agbekoya' ceased to be applied strictly to the movement and thus, the beginning of the end of the Agbekoya movement had begun. As Christopher Beer puts it, 'Tafa Adeoye found himself in the unhappy position of riding several horses simultaneously' with most of them moving in different directions.[71] Since he had committed himself to a new government tax drive, though a peaceful one, the centre of the movement could no longer hold; the movement began to fall apart.

Any society is bound to be shaken by the experience of violence and sufferings involved in the period of war. The effect was doubly severe in Yorubaland as the war had led to defeat, sudden, unexpected defeat. By late December 1969, the gains of the peasant movement were gradually being lost. Brigadier Adebayo personally ordered a seizure of guns and charms from farmers at Gbongan, and soldiers burned these in his presence.[72] At Aiyedade, the governor warned farmers to desist from bragging about their control of government.[73] The implication was explicit and obvious; power remained where it had always been. The point being made here is that the peasant farmers could not sustain their earlier gains. Despite the initial capitulation[74] of the state, the concessions of the Western Region's executive 14th October, 1969 were already being reversed by late December 1969. However, the axiom that in the colonial country, only the peasants are revolutionary had once again been demonstrated.[75]

The movement, under Tafa's direction, had opened a temporary office in Ibadan for the collection of the new £2 flat rate on 24th November and he was the first to pay.[76] At a meeting, Governor Adebayo dispelled the rumour that Tafa Adeoye had received £5000 bribe from the government, but there was enough evidence to show that Adeoye had suddenly joined the ranks of the wealthy. In 1970, he acquired, at least 'one three story building in the city and bought a big American car, which

70 *Daily Sketch/ The Nigerian Tribune*, 29th November,1969.
71 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p. 206. After the initial victory of the farmers, the military authorities then decided to change their modus operandi; they abandoned the violent confrontational option and decided to compromise the leadership of the Agbekoya movement. It did not take them a long time before they entered into the soul of the leadership of the tax movement and began to tug it in different directions.
72 *The Nigeria Tribune*, 13th -15th November, 1969.
73 *The Nigerian Tribune*, 24th November, 1969. *Nigerian Tribune*, 2nd December, 1969. *Nigerian Tribune*, 14th November, 1969.
74 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p. 187.
75 F. Fanon, 1963. *Wretched of the Earth*, Great Britain Publication: Penguin books, P. 47.
76 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p. 200.

previously belonged to the *Alaafin* of Oyo'. Before the riots, he owned only a 'small windowless mud house in a small clearing in the village.'[77]

Apparently, the peasants had succeeded in 'creating a free village, untrammeled by tax collectors, labour recruiters, large land owners . . .' They replaced the state with their own 'home-made social order',[78] albeit, temporarily. The Agbekoya movement has shown that the political power of the 'scum' was not the less real for its lack of permanent institutional expression. In spite of that, the peasants of Western Nigeria played a major role in shaping socio-economic and political conditions of the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Whatever its gradations, the Western Nigeria peasantry considered the tax burdens as excessive and unjust. Those taxes, which were arbitrarily levied by the state, all too often deflected from its original purposes. Many of these government demands were seen as 'odious anachronisms', and so, these poor 'Sans-culottes'[79] of Western Nigeria did not just stop at raising petitions, they fought the Western Region government with everything they had, and the hands of the 'great folks' were forced by the revolting peasants! Unfortunately, co-ordinated action was not sustained after their initial success.

It is really unfortunate that the peasant's who constituted the majority of the population and were the producers of Nigeria's real wealth and foodstuffs had no voice. The elite class in Western Nigeria instituted a lot of tax policies and multitudes of administrative controls to ensure the economic exploitation of the peasant majority. How were these elite different from the colonialists who also exploited the peasants through exorbitant taxes and levies to provide money for development? How were they different when it is considered that the post-colonial *elite* developed only the urban areas for themselves, their 'heaven on wheels,' and their Swiss bank accounts continued to swell? The peasants had no such accounts. What the raiders and looters of the Nigerian treasury stashed abroad was even enough to pay off our entire foreign debt of 32 billion dollars.[80]

Yet, they were often the ones who berated colonial authority for their economic exploitation. They too have not fared better than the colonialist

77 C. Beer. 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p. 206.
78 C. Beer, 1976. *The Politics of Peasant Groups*, p. 187. See also E. R. Wolf, (1969), "On Peasants Rebellions" *International Social Science Journal* vol. XXI. 2, p. 292.
79 Alun Davies, Feb. 1964. The Origin of the French Revolution of 1789. *The Journal of Historical Association*, Vol. XLIX, No. 165. Edited by Alfred Cobban, London: Roughtledge and Kegan Paul, p. 34.
80 T. Moro, 1989. *An African Student in New Africa*, p. 38. See also G.B.N. Ayittey, (1991), *Indigenous African Institutions*, p. XXXIX.

since they assumed the position of leadership. Even today in Akufo, there is no electricity. Although there is an existing transformer that has been there for over ten years, it is yet to function. Generally speaking, the state of social infrastructure in most areas that took part in the Agbekoya riots still leaves much to desire, and yet, these poor farmers were required to pay for services, which were never delivered.[81]

No wonder then why the peasants applied violence to threaten the Governor Adebayo administration in order to make the latter change its taxation policy. They used the structures that were available to make their wants known, but when the government moved too far away from them, they resorted to force in order to make their point. They acted under local leaders with definite goals in mind. The violence that erupted from the peasants rising was based on rational calculation that was largely successful until the Agbekoya leadership was compromised.

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81 Alhaji Karimu Mobolaji Moboluwaduro asserted that the government of the day failed to provide most of the socio-economic amenities that were required by the peasant farmers. He also wondered why electricity and other essential amenities are still non-existent in Akufo, seventy years down the line, noting that it was in 1938 that electricity reached Ibadan. It is really amazing, still, why government demanded so much tax from the people and still failed to provide basic amenities for them. The leadership should be held accountable for the plights of the peasants after the departure of the British. Britain did the best it could under the prevailing circumstances at that time. Taxation was the weapon used by the leadership to further denigrate and dehumanise the peasants. If one took opinion polls in Nigeria in the 1980s, over 50% of the ordinary people will say that we were living better during the British rule and would not mind returning! This is a big shame, but the truth and facts are usually bitter! This is an unfortunate retrogression that Africa and the pride of the Blackman in Diaspora or even anywhere in the world can ill-afford in 21st century.