

The Rise and Fall of Egba Independence: An Review

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Introduction

Previous writers and scholars who have treated the Egba United Government (E.U.G.) have either focused on political development in Egbaland up to the period of the E.U.G or the fall of Egba independence, or both.¹ Studies on Egba, such as those of Saburi Biobaku, Kolawole Ajisafe, J. B. Losi and Ladipo Solanke, make passing references to the role that the E.U.G played in developing Egbaland and in which not much attention was given to the fall of the independence. The reason is that such works are not devoted to the rise and fall of Egba independence for their primary focus and analysis. Works of Isaac Delano, Adebessin Folarin and Sesan Soluade make specific reference to the fall of Egba independence without a corresponding and comprehensive focus on the rise of Egba independence. Pallinder-Law's PhD thesis focuses on the political development of Egba and the fall of Egba independence without an analysis of the rise of Egba independence.

Other scholars have placed undue emphasis on the influence of the Saro elements and the missionaries, in the development of Abeokuta.² Brunschwig seems to have identified development mainly in the field of military technology. Crowder while agreeing with this point of view also looks for the existence of an influential westernised minority, capable of cooperating with traditional elite in introducing western education and administrative structures. This view is supported by Pallinder-Law³. In the opinion of the present writer, development or modernisation is a continuous process which is not the exclusive preserve of any people or society. Historically, various peoples or societies have undergone this process at different levels and in different ways. The Egba in Abeokuta were doing their best to master their environment before the arrival of the Saro and missionaries on the sociopolitical scene of Abeokuta. A lot of nation-building activities⁴ had been undertaken by the Egba at both their *Orile* and in Abeokuta before the coming of the so-called agents of modernisation to Abeokuta.

While the present paper has profited from the various studies indicated above, it differs remarkably from them in the sense that its primary focus is on the situation in Abeokuta and indeed Egbaland and in neighbouring British Lagos, which had encouraged

both the rise and fall of Egba independence. Where these earlier studies privileged colonial and Creole influence and contributions, this paper renders an Egba-centric perspective of the Abeokuta's history. Consequently emphasis will be on the economic, geographical, political and socio-cultural factors that had accelerated the process of these two inter-related events of the Egba independence up till the era of the E.U.G.

The Making of Egba State

Any meaningful analysis of the rise of Egba independence must take cognizance of the situation in both the Egba forest before their immigration to Abeokuta and its environs from the inception of that town. The experience of the Egba under the yoke of Oyo⁵ made them determined as ever to retain their independence in Abeokuta. Lisabi having organised the Egba people under the guise of Aaro⁶ led the Egba in revolt against the authority of the Alafin and thus threw off the yoke of the Oyo *Ajele* (Residents) and their army of occupation. This started off the Egba's struggle to maintain their independence in Abeokuta. After protracted wars with various foes, they later enjoyed all the joy and liberty of independence and clamoured for its retention.

Moreover, the situation in Yorubaland immediately after the collapse of Old Oyo and Owu added fillip to the zeal of the Egba to remain independent. The aftermath of these wars saw a lot of disturbance in Yorubaland. Several areas and people were ravaged and dislodged from their original abode. There was a general situation of insecurity and many people were captured and re-conquered. The Oyo refugees, a motley assemblage of warriors, unleashed a lot of terrorism and havoc on diverse people including the Egba. The result was that these refugees settled on Egba soil and attempted to impose their rule on the Egba people. The Egba rejected such imposition. In fact, the need for security and the retention of their independence made the Egba to vacate Ibadan, where they first converged, and later, their Odo-Ona transit camp, for Abeokuta. Therefore, they became determined as ever to retain their independence in Abeokuta.

Shortly after they had founded Abeokuta, the Egba were fighting to defend it against attacks from other Yoruba sub-groups. The Egba beat the Ijebu at the battle of Owiwi in 1833, defeated the Iperu in 1836, and the Oyo in 1853 at Arakanga. They invaded Ota in 1842 and defeated it. They overran what is now part of the Lagos State Government and captured Ebute Meta and Iddo Island in 1842. At Ado, they defeated the Dahomeans and captured the state umbrella of Gezo, the King of Dahomey. Although the Dahomeans

continued their attempts to conquer Abeokuta several years later, the Egba defeated them each time. Thus, it was at last realised that the Egba would never allow their nascent town to be captured. The surviving Owu people reasoned that to be safe in the future from the attacks of their enemies they would have to go and live in Abeokuta. They therefore joined the Egba.

The strategic location of Abeokuta also encouraged Egba independence. Abeokuta was founded on the route to the coast where the Egba could, not only, secure access to European firearms needed for state building and suppression of their enemies at the time, but also, where they occupied the middle-man position between the interior and the coast. This location advantage enabled Abeokuta to control traffic on the Ogun River which was then a viable trade route to the coast.

Closely linked with the above is the economic factor which enabled the Egba people to be strong enough to sustain their independence in Abeokuta. The Egba were able to take advantage of the strategic location of Abeokuta to develop an agricultural economy which went beyond a subsistence one. The Egba traded with *Yewa* and via *Yewa* the Dahomean, the Ibadan, the Ijebu, the people from the north and Europeans at the coast. The period of transition from slave trade to legitimate trade saw the Egba combining cash crops with food crops. By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was reported that about 15,000 tons of oil were exported to Lagos from Abeokuta through the Ogun river⁷. In fact, for most of the nineteenth century, Abeokuta was the main hinterland of Lagos⁸. Articles such as palm produce, cotton, kolanut, slaves and European manufactures were traded in by the Egba in the nineteenth century.

The ecology of Abeokuta and its environs is another factor that encouraged the independence of Abeokuta. The ecology of this area ensured that agriculture was practiced on a large scale. A detailed study of the ecology of Abeokuta and its environs has been done by Mabogunje and Gleave⁹. Suffice it so say however, that the soil in Abeokuta encouraged farming on a large scale which in turn brought wealth to the Egba people. The uniqueness of this factor made Abeokuta not only the main hinterland of Lagos throughout the nineteenth century, but also ensured the Egba people were able to stand up to all their enemies especially Ibadan.

The role of the masses was also crucial to the independence of Abeokuta. It should be noted that at the time the Egba arrived in Abeokuta the food situation in the nascent town was critical. In fact, some Egba people had to pawn their children and wives to the people of Itoko

and Ijemo for food.¹⁰ The arrival of other groups like Owu and later Ijaiye, *Yewa* and Ibarapa resulted in population explosion and worsened this situation.¹¹ In an attempt to solve these problems of over-population and lack of food, the Egba of various sections of Egband decided to spread out primarily for farming and also to pacify adjoining territories. It was in the process of solving the above problems that the Egba conquered Ilaro and Ota and also bombarded Ado. By the 1850s, the boundary of Abeokuta with Lagos was at Ebute-Meta. The role of the masses in spreading out of Abeokuta to other areas ensured the independence of Abeokuta in the first half of the nineteenth century.

The adoption of a military form of political system, immediately after the Egba's arrival in Abeokuta, was also crucial to the maintenance of Egba independence. The need for security in their new abode made it necessary for them to unite under a central government in order to survive. This led to the emergence of a federal system of government under Sodeke. For some time after 1830, the war chiefs provided the leadership. But unlike at Ijaiye, it was impossible for these war chiefs to develop a military absolutism.¹² They had to reckon with the traditional rulers and the civil Ogboni chiefs in Abeokuta. For similar reasons it was impossible for either the Ogboni or the sectional Oba to emerge as supreme rulers. However, the leadership of Sodeke and his military assistants ensured peace not only in Abeokuta but also in the areas the Egba expanded to. It must be pointed out that the first common government of the heterogenous population of Abeokuta which composed of war leaders who held titles in this common hierarchy – the all-Egba Ologun – was a necessity in Abeokuta of the 1830s. The most senior of them being Sodeke of Iporo town, who held the title of Balogun of the Egba and under him were war chiefs of other towns. It should not however be surprising that leadership in early Abeokuta was in the hands of the war chiefs. The prime interest of the population of the city lay in its defence and in the expansion of the area under its control which soon came to include trade routes to the Coast, overland to Badagry, and by the Ogun River to the lagoon and Lagos. The contention of Pallinder-Law that the Egba did not evolve the kind of administrative structure they later adopted consequent upon the influence of the Saro and missionaries, immediately after 1830 is of no effect. Necessity is the mother of invention. The Egba from 1830 evolved a type of government that served their immediate needs.

The death of Sodeke in 1845 however saw the questioning of the leadership of the war chiefs. This was partly due to the fact that there was no obvious successor of sufficient standing and partly because military interests with the exception of the question of defence

against attacks from Dahomey were no longer quite so dominant. Therefore, an Ogboni chief, the Sagbua of Ake, emerged as the leading chief after Sodeke's death and eventually became the first Oba¹³ in Abeokuta. Thereafter, the Ogboni chiefs of all the townships of Abeokuta tried to organise themselves in an all-Egba hierarchy after the pattern of the war chiefs. However, this experiment did not survive the test of time. This was not because, as Pallinder-Law reasoned: "... the Ogboni chiefs saw their works... which was mainly judicial as their principal field of interest"¹⁴, but because as stated earlier, the Ogboni chiefs had to reckon with other power blocs in Abeokuta – the military and the traditional rulers. Any political dispensation that did not take into account the federal structure of Abeokuta was bound to collapse. This was the situation in Abeokuta until the need for a truly federal system was realised.

The setting up of an independent government in Abeokuta by the Egba and the concomitant pacification of adjoining areas drew the attention of the British and the missionaries to Abeokuta. The Saro had been returning to Abeokuta from the 1830s. The missionaries with the support of the British government in Lagos started coming into Abeokuta from the 1840s. The first missionaries to visit Abeokuta did so in 1842 and the first permanent missionary was established in 1846 by the Church Missionary Society C.M.S. The Methodist missionaries came a year later. Both the Saro and the missionaries were well received by the Egba leaders. The attraction of the peace in and around Abeokuta was a factor for the influx of both the European and the Egba returnees. The British in Lagos recognised the power and independence of Abeokuta as a nation and related with the powers that be in Abeokuta as such. For example, the British sought the assistance of Abeokuta against Kosoko of Lagos and promised Abeokuta the re-possession of Ebute Meta.

Relations with Lagos: Challenges of Sovereignty

A lot has been written on the early constitutional experiment in Abeokuta up to the establishment of the Egba United Board of Management (E.U.B.M.).¹⁵ Nonetheless, it can still be pointed out that the British in Lagos tried on so many occasions to abort the independence of Abeokuta. The British identified Abeokuta as a rival government with a potential to be a powerful nation.

Apart from this, the continued independence of Abeokuta in the vicinity of Lagos and in the era of slow but steady encroachment of the British on other areas was an affront to the British. The Egba relations with the British had deteriorated steadily after the British

annexation of Lagos in 1861. In 1862 the Lagos administration attempted to post a Vice-Consul to Abeokuta. This was rejected by the Egba and a diplomatic crisis followed as a result of which Henry Townsend, who had been the official letter writer for the Egba chiefs and an intermediary between European visitors and Egba rulers, became distrusted both by the Egba leaders and the British. He became distrusted by the British because he presented a memorandum, prepared by G. W. Johnson, which reviewed the relations of Lagos with Abeokuta since the time of Consul Foote and also enumerated old grievances. This breach with Lagos coupled with the incursion of European traders into Abeokuta made the Egba authorities to sideline him. The British therefore took various measures to intervene in the affairs of Abeokuta. Captain John H. Glover's betrayal¹⁶ of the Egba (1865) provided them with further proof of the aggressive designs of the Lagos government on Abeokuta since Captain Glover was the Governor of Lagos. Coupled with this was the closure of the outlet of the Ogun River by Captain Glover and his demand for compensation for robberies carried out on the Ogun River. The Egba however refused to pay compensation and the Acting Governor Glover imposed 2½% export duties on all goods going to Abeokuta as compensation for affected merchants. Soon afterwards, Glover decreed the prohibition of export of arms and ammunition to the interior. Although this measure could be said to affect both Abeokuta and Ibadan, it hurt Abeokuta more as the Egba were exposed to the attacks from the powerful Dahomey kingdom, to the West, in addition to threat of attack from its Yoruba neighbours.¹⁷

The Egba retaliated by closing the Ogun River for all export trade to Lagos. By March 1866, the new Governor-in-Chief, Major Blackhall, abolished the duty imposed on goods for Abeokuta and the E.U.B.M reciprocated by declaring the Ogun River free for trade between Abeokuta and Lagos. The Egba also imposed duties on all goods to be exported from Abeokuta which included palm oil, groundnut oil, cotton, ivory and shea butter. This situation was however unacceptable to the Lagos government and Glover who stationed Lagos Constables on the mainland of Lagos up to Isheri¹⁸ - areas which the Egba regarded as their possession. In order to force Glover to remove the Constables, the E.U.B.M ordered the closure of churches and chapels in Abeokuta. This measure sparked off unintended rioting against missions stations, churches, and converts' homes. This was the *Ifole* (house breaking) of October, 1867. The immediate result of the *Ifole* was the exodus of Christians from Abeokuta although many of the Saro and Egba converts returned within a year. The European traders and missionaries however, remained excluded from Abeokuta for over fifteen years. The British also shifted the blame of the outbreak on G. W. Johnson (a returnee from Sierra

Leone) and the E.U.B.M. which they refused to deal with and did their best to frustrate. For instance, letters written in the handwriting of Johnson on behalf of the E. U. B. M. were either not replied or unopen.¹⁹ The Lagos government even tried to impose their representative on the Egba authority at this point in time. The Lagos government decided to establish direct contact with Abeokuta by means of special embassies in the town. The first by the name of Thomas Tickel, a European trader who lived in Badagry, was forced to return to Lagos without even entering Abeokuta. The second by the name of A. L. Hethersett, a Yoruba clerk in the service of the Lagos government was received by the Alake (Oyekan 1879 – 81) and an assembly of chiefs but he was told to return to Lagos with the message that the Alake would choose his secretary for himself unless the Queen of England was prepared to let the Alake nominate her Secretary of State.²⁰

This diplomatic log-jam characterised the era of the E.U.B.M and was mainly responsible for the frequent departure from Abeokuta by Johnson. He however remained undaunted in the ability of E.U.B.M. to get new patrons who might put their weight behind a resuscitated E.U.B.M. Until his death in 1899, he reversed his decision to leave Abeokuta several times. He did in fact return to Abeokuta in 1880 when Oyekan was finally made the Alake; again in 1883, in 1885-86; and finally in 1895, when he was expelled through the influence of the Governor of Lagos.

The Lagos government's intervention in the affairs of Abeokuta could also be seen in the support given by the Lagos government to either a group or a chief, against the Egba authority. This was deliberately done to weaken the independence of Abeokuta. This policy of "divide and rule" had on many occasions discouraged the evolution of central administration in Abeokuta. The death of Bashorun Somoye in 1868 having created a power vacuum in Abeokuta saw some people contesting for the stool of the Alake. Oyekan was supported by a majority²¹ of people, including big time traders like Madam Tinubu. Instead of crowning him as the Alake, the Ogboni crowned Ademola I. Ademola I however, did not have the support enjoyed by Oyekan and so became known as Alake of Ake, while Oyekan became recognised as Alake of Abeokuta by the people.²² The British in line with their 'divide and rule' policy supported the minority camp of Ademola of Ake and gave him full recognition as King of Abeokuta although this did not change the political situation in Abeokuta. The British pursued this policy and by 1895, saw the expulsion of Johnson from Abeokuta. Johnson had remained a thorn in the flesh of the British administration in Lagos since the inception of the E.U.B.M until his expulsion. On each of the occasions he returned

to Abeokuta, he resumed toll collection both in Abeokuta (Aro and later Agbamaya) and Isheri in Lagos. This, the Lagos government did not like as he kept reminding them of the independence of Abeokuta.

Many authors²³ on Abeokuta refer to the 1893 Treaty of Friendship and commerce between Abeokuta and Lagos administration as the beginning of Egba independence. This view is not only erroneous but a misconception of the evolution of sociopolitical independence by the Egba. In the opinion of the present writer, the 1893 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce while acknowledging the independence of Abeokuta also impinged on it. A close study of the document shows that its terms were targeted at the core areas upon which Egba sovereignty resided. For instance, The first two wrote off Egba judicial independence by referring issues relating to ‘disputes and closure of roads’ which had been the responsibility of Egba authority to the Lagos government for arbitration.

That there shall be peace and friendship between the subjects of the Queen and Egba subjects and should any difference or dispute accidentally arise between us and the said subjects of the Queen, it shall be referred to the Governor of Lagos for settlement as may be deemed expedient.

That there shall be complete freedom of Trade between the Egba country and Lagos, and in view of the injury to commerce arising from the arbitrary closing of roads, we the said king and Authority; hereby declare that no roads shall in future be closed without the consent and approval of the Governor of Lagos.²⁴

Similarly, paragraphs five and six also called to question the issue of the independence of Abeokuta. Clauses in these paragraphs sought to guarantee the independence of Abeokuta for as long as the 1893 agreement was kept and no part of Egbaland was ceded to a foreign power. In other words, in 1893, the Lagos government already saw itself powerful enough to terminate the independence of Abeokuta.

Therefore, the 1893 Treaty was itself a threat, in principle, on the independence of Abeokuta. A major reason for the one sided Treaty which seemed to benefit the Lagos government more than Abeokuta should be sought in the year 1892. In that year, the British had ordered an expedition against the Ijebu to force them to open their door to trade. The success of the expedition no doubt had its multiplier effect on Abeokuta. It became apparent that the Egba could no longer hold on tenaciously to their independence. Might was now

becoming right. Since the Egba could not match the military might of the British, they had better had a re-think which they did by acquiescing to the 1893 Treaty. The discrepancy in the date "...11th and 18th January (1893)" is another food for thought. The inference one can draw from such different dates is that the agreement/treaty had been concluded by the real power holders in Abeokuta by the 11th of January before the Treaty was merely presented to Alake Osokalu on the 18th of January to append his signature for formality sake. The introduction to the Treaty was therefore written and added to it on the 18th of January, 1893, when Alake Osokalu had been "notified". Again it could be seen that only Egba Alake chiefs signed the 1895 Treaty. This did not escape the attention of G. W. Johnson who warned that in future, other sections may refuse to abide by it. This warning did not have any practical effect on the agreement probably in the belief that a divided Abeokuta would be easier to control than a united one.

The Egba United Government (E.U.G.) and the Loss of Egba Independence

The pacification of adjoining territories to Abeokuta by the British seemed to have aided the new political structure in Abeokuta. The establishment of the E.U.G was aided by the situation of 1898 – Lagos, Ilaro, Ijebu and Ibadan had been annexed by the British. Some studies²⁶ on Egba have described the establishment of the Egba United Government (E.U.G.) in 1898 as a novel one proposed by Governor McCallum. According to Pallinder-Law, although the constitution of the Egba Council of 1898 "shows much influence from ideas put forward and tried by G. W. Johnson and his associates, it included one completely novel feature".²⁷ It should however be noted that there was nothing new in that constitutional arrangement. Years before 1898, that is, as far back as 1871, Johnson (also known as Reversible Johnson) had proposed a reorganisation of Abeokuta government into a three-tier federal structure. The supreme ruler of the town was to bear the title of *Oba Onile*. Oyekan was to be first holder. Under *Oba Onile*²⁸, there were to be four *Oba Alade*²⁹ representing the four sections of Abeokuta. Below the *Oba Alade* were the *Oba Alakete*,³⁰ representing the township kings. Johnson himself was to be the first *Amono Oba* through whom the *Oba Onile* could be contacted and vice-versa³¹. This was the first federal structure taking into account the diverse political nature of Abeokuta. Also, it has been argued that the proposal put forward in 1898 by McCallum was a suggestion and advice given by Prince Ademola when the Governor sought his advice on the best way to solve the problem of political crisis in Abeokuta.³² Prince Ademola was of great help to the Governor in making the new type of government work. He had also been busy in other ways. He arranged the Egba Railway

Agreement with the British government in 1898 and three years later he became the Egba government agent in Lagos³³.

Therefore, with the help of Prince Ademola and W. A. Allen, the representative of the Lagos government in Abeokuta, Sir Henry McCallum proposed in February, 1898 a state council of eight ministers with the Alake as Chairman.³⁴ The *Osile* was to become Minister of Justice, the *Olowu*, Minister of Finance, the *Agura*, Minister of Roads and Works, the Oba Imale, Minister of Public Order, the *Balogun* of the Christians, Minister of Sanitation, the *Olori Parakoyi*, Minister of Trade and Agriculture, the *Seriki*, Assistant Minister of Justice, and the Apena of Iporo, Government Secretary.³⁵ It should be pointed out that the composition of the E.U.G continued to be extended as the need was felt for certain individuals or interests to be drawn into the central government. When Gbadebo became the Alake, his friend and Personal Secretary Mr. P. P. Martins became the Secretary to the E.U.G. Mr. C. B. Moore who had been unpaid treasurer for some time also became paid and full time member of the E.U.G. Reverend D. O. Williams was also made a member of the Council. As early as May, 1898, one representative each of Itoko and Ijemo townships had been added.

The argument by Pallinder-Law that these appointments were simply concessions to the “owners of the soil”³⁶ seems to have been buttressed by the fact that they did not attend any council meeting. The decision to invite the federal or all-Egba Ologun title-holders to the council was an important one. Being wealthy and influential, they might become dangerous leaders of dissenting groups if not incorporated. The *Seriki* had been a member since the beginning of the E.U.G. and by January, 1899, when the *Balogun* of Ilugun was appointed the *Balogun* of Abeokuta, following the deportation of Aboaba, he was included in the council. Later in 1899, the Otun *Balogun* and Osi *Balogun* became members. They were later joined by the Ekerin *Balogun*, an Owu Chief. Also, the Apena of Itoku and Apena of Ake who as leaders of the Ogboni Council of *Omo Iya* townships, joined the council in 1901. Two township Ologun, the Jaguna of Igbein and Jaguna of Ijeja (both Egba Alake) joined the council in 1901. In addition, provision was also made for chiefs who were not original members of the council to take part in Council meetings occasionally. By 1901, membership of the council had increased to about twenty-two including the Alake. These members received monthly stipend right from the Alake who received an initial amount of £8.6.8d down to the lowest paid who received £1.0.0d totaling £43.13.4d monthly and £524 yearly. Stipends were later increased and the number of councilors also increased such that by April

1899 the yearly cost of council stipends was £915 and by January 1900 £1059. The Alake was then receiving £15 per month while the lowest paid council member received £2.³⁷ The stipend was paid from the revenue yielded by the government's customs levy.

By 1902, J. H. Samuel who later became Adegboyega Edun replaced P. P. Martins as the Secretary while J. O. George succeeded C. B. Moore after his death in 1906. In order to fulfill the role of support-generating and generally mediating link between the townships and the central government, the council pursued a policy of enlarged council so as to include increasing number of chiefs with township titles. By the end of 1910, there were eighteen such chiefs on the council. During 1911, four more appointments were made but in August, the council was warned by the Financial Advisory Board (FAB) that no further 'unnecessary multiplication' of members of council would be authorised. This intervention by FAB prevented a further appointment which the council had already decided on in principle. Only two more township representatives were admitted in the last three years of the Egba United Government. However, as a result of loss through deaths and other causes, the number of townships chiefs on the council had fallen to nineteen by September, 1914. Moreover, the number of chiefs with all-Egba titles fell, as the incumbents died and new appointments were not made. By September, 1914, there were three such title-holders on the council compared to the nine they were in 1909. The total number of membership which had been thirty-two in December, 1910, had risen to a peak of thirty-five in December, 1912, and came down to thirty by December, 1914. Average attendance fell from 26 in May-June 1912 to 19 in December, 1913 – January 1914.³⁸

The membership of the council by township chiefs did not stop them from conducting their private courts – a practice which ran counter to EUG's policy of centralisation of judicial authority. Individual council members had been repeatedly found guilty of deviations from it. It was obvious that the practice of settling disputes in chiefs' private courts continued to be common. Therefore, the right of chiefs to settle uncomplicated cases concerning people from their own townships was admitted, in 1911, though the chiefs were not officially to receive hearing fees or presents, at least, not until after the amicable settlement of a case. Later in 1911, it was further conceded that township chiefs might settle cases that should properly be heard by the Egba court, provided regular court fees were collected and paid over to the Egba court³⁹. A further concession was made when an order-in-council of September, 1911, empowered township chiefs to investigate cases of burglary. This was in recognition of the traditional role of the Ogboni in suppression of crime.

It has been argued⁴⁰ that it is fair to say that the achievements of the E.U.G. did not go beyond those of the E.U.B.M., but the “modernizing” interests were far more solidly entrenched than they had been in the 1860s, and there was no risk of a set-back like that which the E.U.B.M had suffered. The development policy of the E.U.G. saw a strong push forward with the appointment of Adegboyega Edun. Development was concentrated in three areas vis: the political; the administrative; and the technological. It has been argued above that the E.U.G established a conscious policy of increasing the number of members of the council so as to make it more representative of the many divisions of Abeokuta society.

The administrative establishment of the E.U.G was rapidly expanded. In 1898 about twenty people were employed – clerks, messengers, post-master and a host of others. By 1908, the E.U.G. had employed about 350 people of whom eighty-five were in higher and lower clerical positions. The number of government departments also increased. In 1908, there was a secretariat, a treasury, audit office, customs department, judicial department, public works department, medical and sanitary department, police, prison, printing office, forest and agricultural office, post office and an education department. The annual expenditure which had been about £1,500 in 1898, was about £17,000 in 1908 and over £40,000 in 1911. Also, from 1904, yearly estimates of expenditure and revenue were printed by the E.U.G. printing office⁴¹.

In the technological field, the E.U.G. undertook a considerable programme of road building, although most of the roads were hammock roads rather than intended for wheeled transport. In Abeokuta town, motor transport was introduced by the E. U. G. in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴² The Roman Catholic Hospital was also financially assisted in addition to the employment of two Egba doctors and a number of smallpox vaccinators. A corn mill was installed for the use of the general public and a museum was founded to exhibit the economic products of the country. The E.U.G. also built water works which distributed piped water taken from the Ogun River to public fountains along the main roads of Abeokuta. The E.U.G also undertook a considerable programme of building of government offices and other public buildings in Abeokuta and in rural centres⁴³.

To a large extent, the E.U.G. was able to finance its undertakings from its revenue derived mainly from custom duties. Because the E.U.G. did not have full control over its main source of revenue – customs duties – since it had agreed to make changes in the tariffs only with the consent of the British, it could not derive the expected revenue to finance its

projects. Hence, it relied on the Lagos government for loan to execute its biggest project – water works.

Accounting for the Loss of Independence

Studies on Egba have given various reasons for the fall of Egba independence. While some have argued that the abrogation of the 1893 Treaty and the activities of the E.N.A. in enforcing direct taxation among others⁴⁴ were responsible for the fall, others argued that the financial crisis and the setting up of the F.A.B. among others were responsible. However, it is the opinion of the present writer that an event as important as the fall of Egba independence should be subjected to copious analysis in order to bring out all the factors responsible for its fall.

To start with, the role of the masses was crucial to the fall of Egba independence. The action of the masses vis-à-vis the activities of the E.U.G created rancour and bitterness within the rank and file of the Egba state such that it became difficult to provide a united front against the British. The people resented some of the policies of the E.U.G. There were many Egba who could see no good in either the Alake or the E.U.G. They believed that the interests of the Egba could only be looked after if a special new association was founded. Those who agreed with them came together and founded the Abeokuta Inhabitants Protection Association. These people antagonised the E.U.G. The E.U.G. was not liked by many people such that in 1901, the people of Itori decided to install their own *Oba* (Onitori) without reference to the Alake. When the Alake tried to show that he was still the master, the people seized the customs house and claimed they were independent of the Alake. This led to the intervention of the Lagos Government. Itori people were forced to give up their claim and a fine of £200 imposed on them. Again in 1903, the British troops were called to quell an uprising of the Kemta people. In 1908, an Ifa priest of Ikija was killed at a public meeting when police arrived on the scene to disperse the crowd⁴⁵. Disorder and riot ensued and to restore peace, the E.U.G. made a payment of £50 to the relatives of the priest.

The non-possession of armed forces by the E.U.G. was another factor for the fall of Egba independence. This made the E.U.G. reliant on the Lagos government as evident in 1898, 1901, 1903 and 1914. This also prevented the E.U.G. from dealing with the British as an autonomous entity. Also, the E.U.G. could not close its roads to defaulting traders, majority of whom were Europeans.

The centralisation of the court of law in Abeokuta also aided the fall of Egba independence. These courts, staffed by the E.U.G. aimed at taking over full responsibility for the exercise of jurisdiction from the Ogboni councils and other tribunals at township level or below. It thus threatened to deprive the chiefs of the income and prestige they had until then derived from their roles as judges and arbitrators. The chiefs resented this and continued with their township courts as before. But when they gave judgement the E.U.G. felt was too harsh, they were called to order as it happened in 1903 when an Ogboni chief of Kemta was arrested because of a judgement passed by him. This however resulted in the people rioting and the British troops invited at different times.

Over-expansion of the E.U.G. also aided the fall of Egba independence. The E.U.G. expanded its Council membership such that by 1911, annual expenditure was about £40,000. Of this a substantial amount went into payment of stipends to members. As a result, there was not enough left for developmental project. This resulted in financial woes for the E.U.G. as it resorted to borrowing money from the Lagos Administration for survival. The financial crisis led the E.U.G. to apply for a substantial amount of £30,000 from the Lagos government. The Lagos government on its part gave out the loan on the condition that P. V. Young, the British Commissioner in Abeokuta, was made to sit on the Estimates Committee in order to monitor the spending of the loan.

The appointment of P. V. Young to sit on the Estimates Committee led to the change of the Committee's name to Financial Advisory Board (F.A.B.). Young later became the President of the Board after the suspension of the Osile, the former President. With this change, the Board now met on a weekly basis as opposed to the once a year sitting of the former Estimates Committee. The Board now gradually took over the job of the E.U.G. and became the *de facto* government in Egbaland. Young the President of the Board also became the *de facto* ruler in Abeokuta. This was a steady encroachment on Egba independence.

The activities of the Egba in Lagos also aided the fall of Egba independence. Apart from the Lagos Weekly Record which generally supported the E.U.G., The Lagos Standard and the Nigerian Chronicle carried criticisms of the E.U.G. conducted by partly former employees of the E.U.G. and partly by the Egba in Lagos. These criticisms continued through 1912, 1913, and 1914.

Lugard's policy towards the E.U.G. was another factor. Lugard disliked Abeokuta's "independent" status during a period when other areas of the country were under his

administration. He therefore embarked on strategies (which included enlisting the assistance of Commissioner P.V. Young and the use of propaganda) to revoke Egba's independence.⁴⁶ Thus when the servicing of the loan and additional expenditure in connection with the water works, such as the building of residences for European engineers employed by the E.U.G., proved too heavy for the government, and the Egba proposed tax on palm produce, Lugard turned it down by referring to the 1893 free trade agreement. In the alternative, Lugard recommended direct taxation which the E.U.G. reluctantly decided to introduce in a modified version or as an alternative, the sale to the Lugard government, of Abeokuta land rented by the British.

The issue of direct taxation was also a factor in the fall of Egba independence. At meetings of a sub-committee of the F.A.B and at council meetings at the beginning of June, Alake and Edun put forward the case for direct taxation and proposed a scheme, which was felt might be acceptable to the chiefs and people. The proposed tax was introduced as a renewal of the ancient Egba custom of *Ose*, or the contribution of a fixed sum (traditionally five strings of cowries) from each citizen in times of public need such as warfare. Thereafter, Alake met with various groups⁴⁷ to explain the need for direct taxation. However, before any concrete decision could be taken towards collection, the E.U.G. members had the Ijemo crisis on their hands.

Various reasons have been adduced for the Ijemo rising. These reasons range from direct taxation to control of land and forced labour⁴⁸. As argued above, direct taxation had been agreed on as early as June 1914. That the people were aware of the plan for taxation by August, 1914 is not in doubt. The system of administration was such that the township chiefs who were members of the council relayed whatever had been decided at the council to the heads of each quarter who in turn relayed such decision to members of each compound, and down to the household. Through this system, the people were definitely aware of the plan to impose tax on them and were probably warming up for the day it would be introduced.

The E.U.G. also acquired land from the people anytime there was need for such land. It is not certain whether the E.U.G. demanded for Ijemo land about this time. It is however certain that the Ajura area was later acquired by the government for agricultural purpose.

In addition, the issue of forced labour had been adopted by the E.U.G for public works. Payment was allowed in lieu of forced labour. However, a local chief of Ajura village, Sobiya Ponlande who had never hidden his disrespect for the new form of government in

Abeokuta mobilised his men against forced labour. Other villages like Lemode, Ajura, Kobape and Kukoyi joined by withdrawing their men. F.A.B members in the person of Young and Edun accompanied by J. O. George (President of the Native Court) and some senior members of the E.U.G. toured the Ajura area in June, 1914, and arrested and sent to prison, a local chief (Ponlade) and his son for failure to take part in compulsory road work. The accounts of what happened vary greatly. However, H.A. Gailey has tried to reconstruct the incident by accepting the points of agreement of some of the witnesses who gave different accounts of the event. According to him, chief Ponlade “was roughly handled for a man of his years and position. He was brought before Edun and Young and was forced to lie prostrate in the sun for sometime while being questioned.”⁴⁹ It was alleged by Ducombe, the Acting Commissioner for Ijebu Province (who was an eye witness) that Ponlade “was beaten by Commissioner Young’s carrier boys and that he was tied up before being removed from his village.”⁵⁰ Governor Hugh Clifford reported many years later that “he had discovered that Ponlade hands had remained tied for twenty four hours.”⁵¹ Ponlade later died on July 1, 1914. This episode triggered off a chain of reactions mainly from Ijemo quarters. The E.U.G. requested and received reinforcement from Lagos who first arrived on July 13, and left for Lagos on July 27, without any incident. However, the request of an Ijemo deputation to the Commissioner for Edun’s dismissal stampeded the commissioner into recalling the Lagos troops. The following day, August 8, 1914, the troops arrived and were instructed to go and arrest some Ijemo chiefs. It is not clear why the troops should open fire on the assembly but suffice it to say that about 40 people were killed including the Oluwo of Ijemo.

This incident popularly known as the Ijemo massacre provided the needed excuse for Governor Fredrick John Dealtry Lugard to abrogate the 1893 Treaty of Friendship and commerce between the Lagos government and Egba authority. In the opinion of Lugard, Abeokuta could not be said to be independent if it relied on the Lagos government to enforce law and order. Consequently, another agreement was made by Lugard with Alake and the authority of the Egba kingdom under the government and Protectorate of Nigeria. The key features of the new treaty included the annulment of the 1893 one which had recognized Egba independence and the incorporation of the kingdom to the Protectorate of Nigeria.

Conclusion

The paper has argued for a better understanding of the rise and fall of Egba independence than the colonial account which has dominated the literature. It has argued that Egba political culture was well developed from Egba forest and in Abeokuta. Their organization enabled

them to overcome Oyo overlordship and the Owu wars. They also took advantage of the strategic location of Abeokuta, its economic viability and considerable productivity. The state adopted a system of government and organized itself militarily such that it was able to secure its independence during the turbulent 19th century. All these enabled the Egba not only to set up an independent government in Abeokuta, but also ensured the pacification of adjoining areas all of which drew the attention of the British and the missionaries to Abeokuta. On the other hand, the continued independence of Abeokuta; the diplomatic log-jam between Abeokuta and Lagos; the policy of divide and rule embarked upon by Lagos; the treaty of friendship and commerce; the over-expansion of the E.U.G.; the inability of the E.U.G. to finance its activities from revenue derived mainly from customs duties; the non-possession of armed forces by the E.U.G.; the centralisation of the court of law in Abeokuta; the appointment of P.V. Young to sit on the Estimates Committee; the feeling of rancour by some Egba towards the E.U.G.; the activities of the Egba abroad; Lugard's policy towards the E.U.G.; the issue of direct taxation; forced labour; and the Ijemo massacre among others brought about the collapse of Egba independence.

From all indications, there was no way Abeokuta could have remained independent in the face of the war of annexation waged by the British represented by Lugard in Lagos. Given the scenario painted above, it was just a question of time before the independence of Abeokuta collapsed like a pack of cards. But then, the mayhem that accompanied the collapse of the Egba independence was totally unnecessary. As Gailey rightly put it “without rancour and with full understanding of Lugard's contributons...”⁵³ he should be fully held responsible for the Ijemo massacre.

However, it did not appear as if the British learnt any lesson from their mistake of 1914. The Lugard administration continued to behave as if nothing serious had happened in Abeokuta. Even though a commission of enquiry was instituted, its findings were never made public. The British continued to act after 1914, with very little regard to Egba customs and tradition. The Egba were required for the first time to pay taxes while the former exactions of labour and high sanitary fines continued. Moreover, the Egba people detested the arbitrary appointment of district heads to collect the unpopular tax and the abuses in the mode of assessment. Apart from these grievances, was the general feeling of loss of an old way of life by the Egba people. Many Egba people also remembered with humiliation the Ijemo massacre and the subsequent annexation. Hugh Clifford who succeeded Lugard noted that both Residents Young and Syer “have comported themselves in a way little calculated to

inspire confidence in the good faith of the Government which they were appointed to represent.”⁵⁴ Therefore, the inability of the British to learn from their past mistake resulted in a bigger problem – the Adubi war of 1918.

Notes

1. S.O.Biobaku, *The egba and Their Neighbours 1842-1872*, Oxford, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1957; A.K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, Abeokuta, Ola Fola, 1924; L. Solanke, *Abeokuta Centenary Celebrations*, Abeokuta, 1931; I.O. Delano, *Oba Ademola II*, Ibadan, Oxford University Press (O.U.P.), 1969; S. Soluade, *History of Ijemo*, 1981; and A. Pallinder-Law, “Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914, with special reference to the period of the E.U.G.” PhD Goteborg, 1972, among others.
2. Both Brunschwig and Michael Crowder have canvassed this line of thought in their works.
3. A. Pallinder-Law, “Aborted Modernization in West Africa?. The case of Abeokuta”, *Journal of African History*(J.A.H.), XV, 1, 1974, p. 66.
4. The activities of both Lisabi and Sodeke united the Egba and were a step forward in advancing the course of modernisation.
5. See A. K. Ajisafe’s *History of Abeokuta*, Abeokuta, Ola Fola, 1924, on the treatment of the Egba by Oyo Ajele (residents). Also see Biobaku’s *The Egba and Their Neighbours 1842-1872*, Oxford, Oxford Clarendon Press, 1957, and Samuel Johnson’s *The History of the Yorubas*, Lagos, C.M.S., 1924.
6. Aaro was a system used by a group to work for each member in turn.
7. Akpofure and M. Crowder, *Nigeria*, (London, Faber and Faber, 1972), p. 132.
8. For more on the economic development of Abeokuta, see G. O. Davies, “Trade and Development in Abeokuta and its environs.”
9. Mabogunje and Gleave, “Changing Agricultural Landscape in Southern Nigeria – The example of Egba Division, 1850-1950”. *Nigeria Geographical Journal* (N.G.J.), (Vol. 7, No. 1, June, 1964), pp 1 – 15.
10. A. K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta....*
11. *Ibid.*
12. For more on military absolutism in Ijaiye, see Atanda J. A., ‘Government of Yorubaland in the Pre-Colonial Period’. *TARIKH*, Vol. 4, No. 2, 1977, pp 1 – 12.
13. The first Oba in Abeokuta was Alake Sagbua Okukenu (1854). Other sectional Oba were crowned after the had been crowned.
14. Pallinder-Law, ‘Aborted Modernization...’ p. 67.
15. A. Pallinder-Law, “Government in Abeokuta with particular reference to the period of the E.U.G”. Ph.D. Goteburg, 1973, pp. 34-62.
16. Glover had brought the Egba siege to an end by attacking and defeating the Egba siege army, whom he had earlier promised a free hand against Ikorodu.

17. Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta" p. 35.
18. *Ibid.* p. 39
19. Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta" p. 47
20. *Ibid.* p. 48
21. The Ologun, Madam Tinubu, Asalu of Kemta and other sections of Abeokuta supported Oyekan's candidature.
22. Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta" p. 14
23. Pallinder-Law's "Government in Abeokuta" among others is guilty of this error.
24. *N.A.I. C.S.O. S/1/18 1893*
25. *Ibid.*
26. See Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta...."
27. Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa?...." p.65
28. *Oba Onile* – The King who owns the land
29. *Oba Alade* – The King who wear headed crown
30. *Oba Alakete* – The Kings who wear hat
31. *Amono Oba* – Vizier/Prime Minister
32. C. M.S. CAZ/090 (Johnson to Glover)
33. Delano, I. O. *Oba Ademola II*, Ibadan, O.U.P.1969, pp. 8 – 9
34. *Ibid*, p. 9
35. The arrangement of entrusting each council member with responsibility for one department of government affairs was in line with Johnson's E.U.B.M.
36. This was perhaps done in line with the traditional function of the Apena as the spokesman of the Ogboni Council. It was W. A. Allen who doubled as Secretary to the E.U.G. in addition to his being the Representative of the Lagos government, or Superintendent of Native Affairs.
37. Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta...." p. 76
38. *Ibid*, p. 78
39. *Ibid*
40. Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa?", p. 75
41. Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa?", p. 76
42. *National Archives Abeokuta (N.A.A.)*, Egba Government Gazette.
43. Ajisafe, A. K., *History of Abeokuta....*
44. O. Soluade, *History of Ijemo*, 1981, pp. 10 – 21. This contention by Soluade is confusing as the annulment of 1893 Treaty signaled the end of Egba independence and not caused the Ijemo crisis. The .E.N.A. also came into existence after the fall of the E.U.G.
45. The Egba Police were used this time around. This event led to the E.U.G. abdicating seditious laws to the Lagos government.

46. H.A. Gailey, *Lugard and The Abeokuta Uprising*, London, Frank Cass, 1982, pp. 54-67.
47. The Alake met the Christians, Moslems, and other groups.
48. I.O. Delano, *Oba Ademola II*, Ibadan, O.U.P., 1969; Soluade, *History of Ijemo*, 1981; and Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta...." have given these reasons in their works.
49. Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising* pp.54-67. Also see Soluade, *History of Ijemo*, p. 14.
50. Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising*, pp. 54-67.
51. *Ibid.*
52. *N.A.I.* C.S.O. 5/2/25 1914
53. Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Rising*, pp. 105-118.
54. *Ibid.*