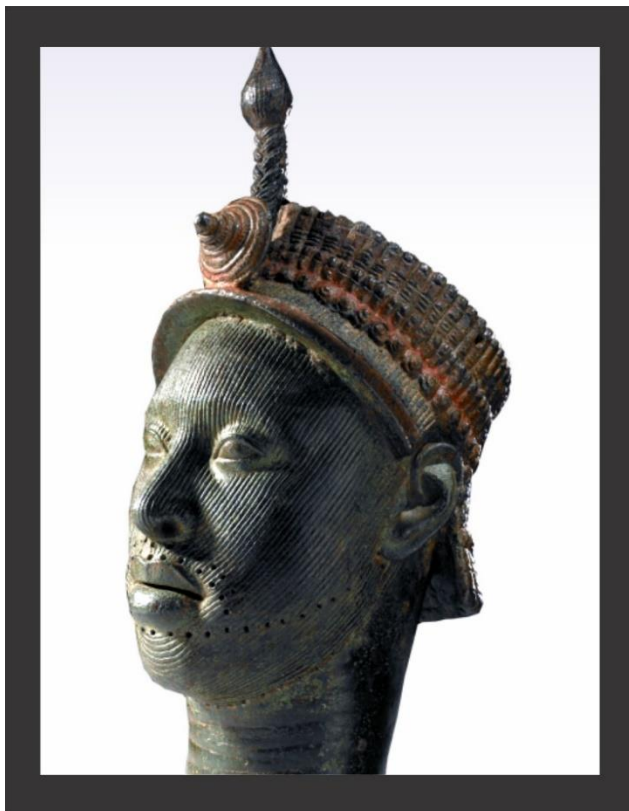


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World War II and Schooling in Western Nigeria, 1942–1948

Mutiati Titilope Oladejo

Abstract

World War II (WWII) was an important event in global history that particularly influenced the socio-political and economic milieus of British colonies in Africa. With specific reference to Western Nigeria, this paper examines the impact of WWII on the Nigerian school system. From the provision of educational resources to extra-curricular activities, schooling during the wartime was organised to conform to the needs of the wartime in the activities and methods of learning, as part of the philosophies of “win the war fund”. This paper explains how wartime activities shaped teaching and instilled British national interest in learning. This work uses the historical method with primary and secondary sources. Documents from the National Archives Ibadan (NAI) are deployed such as the papers of Ibadan Ministry of Education (IbMinED). Secondary sources such as books and journals are utilised. Ultimately, the school cultures that evolved in this era mattered in the post-World War II curriculum systems and educational planning in Western Nigeria that ushered in the period of internal self-rule from the late 1940s.

Keywords: World War II, schooling, Western Nigeria, colonialism, education, army

Introduction

On November 24, 1942, the manager of *Ijo Aladura* School in Ibadan wrote to the Senior Education Officer to request that war news magazines be sent out weekly to teachers in the colonial civil service.¹ This request signifies the kind of passion and loyalty teachers in the colony displayed towards the colonial cause and specifically, the support for Britain’s victory during WWII. Many studies on WWII are fixated on the roles of ex-servicemen in Nigeria post-1945.² In another vein, Chima Korieh analysed how WWII led to the re-organisation of production, distribution and consumption in Nigeria.³ Scholars have analysed various perspectives on WWII and the involvement of Africans,

but little attention is paid to the aspect of education and schooling. In the light of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, the dynamics of global relations changed drastically. An example of such change was schooling in the British colonies, using Nigeria as a case study. In the context of the "win the war fund" initiated in Nigeria, the colonies keyed into the process, schools were avenues of advocacy, fundraising, child labour and army recruitment.

After 1942, the allied powers, which comprised Britain, France, USA and the Soviet Union gained victories which became critical in world development. Britain's victory was evident in the Nigerian example between 1942 and 1945 when resources from the colonies enhanced wartime status. Nigeria's involvement in the victories of the Allied powers created new paradigms to imperial expansion.

Studies in education consider schooling in the forms of expansion, but this paper examines the social and economic activities embedded in schooling in Nigeria during WWII. Hence, it analyses the entanglement of colonial education policy and schooling before WWII; war literature, school administration and army recruitment 1942–1945; win the war fund and school resource management; empire day celebration and school sports; and post WWII plans for education in Western Nigeria at the inception of internal self-rule in the late 1940s.

This paper posits that the schools in Western Nigeria were spaces of exploitation to minimise cost of production especially to mainstream the colonies to provide personnel for cheap production of labour through school children. This paper argues that there was a deviation that the schools were subjected to in the form of skills acquisition during the War. But after, the idea of training for skills was jettisoned, which was a precursor to de-industrialisation. Few scholarly works exist on the African realities and responses to WWII, like Korieh's work on *Nigeria and World War II: Colonialism, Empire and Global Conflict*.⁴ The responses or involvement of Nigerians to the global event occurred in different ways. While some were reactionary, others were supportive. With the outbreak of the War in 1939, the attack against Germany was rendered as songs to construct the thinking of school children. According to Omolewa, school children in Western Nigeria were mentored to sing thus:

Hitler, a scatter brain who never had an issue and thus, does not appreciate the value of children. He has no compassion, no virtuous God, the Creator of the Universe, thoughts, please, strike Hitler dead, that he may stop his machination.⁵

This chant marked the beginning of influencing school children to support Britain in the War, and destabilising German culture in Nigeria. Similarly, in Eastern Nigeria, school children were mentored to chant songs directly tailored towards economic advantage thus:

Piam, piam, piam we crack the kernels so that we can get more to sell. We crack them all the time, we crack them till our bags are full just to help the Allied Nations win the War. Piam piam, piam.⁶

The setting of this song among school children in Southeastern Nigeria and the narratives surrounding the song explained how German aggression manifested in Onitsha, a major town in the Southeastern part of Nigeria. This example is a prelude to the way schools and school children were entangled in the War.

Education Policy and Schooling before WWII

The nature of schooling in the colonial era was an agglomeration of various factors from the mid-nineteenth century. Such were the issues in the legacies of the French revolution, industrial revolution, the movements for socio-economic reforms, the desire to train the colonial working class and the new requirements for technical education to boost the colonial economy.

Generally, from the outset, colonial education in British Africa was administered by the colonial office (CO). In Nigeria, for example, the idea of education in Lord Lugard's policy was adapted education.⁷ The idea of the adapted education was to support the policy of indirect rule. Hence, before WWII, several conferences and initiatives had existed to manage the dimensions of adapted education. Such were the move by the CO to establish the advisory committee on Native Education in Tropical Africa (ACNETA) in 1923 and Advisory Committee for Education in the Colonies (ACEC). At this stage, the British plans for education in the colonies was adopting the American idea of education that linked management, science, business and education.⁸

The idea of British adapted education in Nigeria was on this cause before WWII. With this, there were little interests in adopting the missionary education style, rather, a new approach was to harness the school potentials in line with the American approach. The WWII only fostered the purpose of the *adapted education*.

Education policy in the colonial era was critically relevant to understanding how global changes influenced schooling culture. While education was considered useful to the colonies, the policies were attuned to global capitalists' interest. The development indexed in education varied from the perspective of the metropolises. As part of the policy of indirect rule, the British government was concerned about cutting the cost of educational services.⁹ Through the missionaries, the schools were funded through grants-in-aid and they were referred to as assisted schools. However, during this period, only schools owned by the Church Missionary Society, Roman Catholic Mission and Wesley Methodist were assisted by the colonial government.¹⁰ The schooling system was decentralised and operated on a low cost. The *incur less cost* policy took different dimensions during the colonial era. The dimension that unfolded during WWII gives deeper insights into the way schools were mainstreamed into the relations of production. Schools' nationalists pressurised for policy changes due to the use of the schools as an extension of imperial capitalism.¹¹ Irrespective of the formats of educational policy, it was just a mere structure useful to the nationalists, but of less significance to imperial expansion.

Before WWII, colonial education was consolidated through series of imperial education conferences. The origin of such was rooted in the International Missionary Council Conference held at Edinburgh in 1910.¹² The conference was also intertwined with the interventions of the American philanthropic and missionary endeavours which formed plans for education policy in Africa. In the framework of *Education Policy in British Tropical Africa* (1925), the content of school curriculum was stated clearly and in the case of Nigeria, it was tagged "adapted education".¹³ This was in line with the indirect rule system of Lord Lugard. The colonial state plan for education was brewing up when WWII emerged in late 1930s. This work argues that in spite of the colonial education plans in British Africa, during the inter-war years, WWII disrupted the plans as the motives of schooling was tampered with for social and economic reasons.

Although schooling was initially under the control of the Christian missionaries and individual/communal proprietors, they were later complemented by the

colonial government through the provision of grants-in-aid to schools, enactment of Education Laws, establishment of government-owned schools in areas not reached by the missionaries and the establishment of the Department of Education.¹⁴ In the view of Adu Boahen, Europeans were rarely interested in educating Africans because of the perceived disruption it could mean in metropole-periphery relations.¹⁵ While the colonial government rarely established schools, the process that led to the establishment of the few were cumbersome. In the existing schools, Gabriel emphasised how the few schools in Nigeria were troubled by the WWII as there were relocations and disruptions.¹⁶ Despite the low availability of schools at the inception of WWII, the colonial state in Nigeria utilised the schools differently.

War Literature, School Administration and Army Recruitment, 1942–1945

Distribution of war texts to the colonies was a common phenomenon in the wartime period. Before then, teachers in the missionary schools already left their jobs without notice to join the Army in England.¹⁷ However, the terms of recruitment by which the teachers were wanted in the army was to preserve their duties under the Nigeria Defence Regulation of 1942.¹⁸ To an extent, the recruitment process was a mirage because teachers became inadequate to manage schools, as the School Manager of C.M.S. Schools complained that two-thirds of them left to join the Army.¹⁹ In spite of the shortage of teachers, the Chief Secretary T. Hoskyns-Abrahall affirmatively informed the Director of Education, Lagos that the military needed more recruits as tradesmen. Hence, the factual ramifications were stated that:

The military have recently represented that they are unable to obtain anything like sufficient recruits suitable for enlistment as Learner Tradesmen. They require 1,000 recruits a month, all of whom must be able to speak English and 20% of whom must have class II certificates. In December (1942), they obtained less than half this number.²⁰

As indicated, it was obvious that the colonial state was less concerned about genuine education of Africans, but rather, they wanted education to make Africans suitable for servicing colonial interests. Furthermore, Hoskyns Abrahall deferred the challenges of inadequate teaching personnel to the Principal Education Officers and initiated solutions to the shortage.

Under the Nigeria Defence Regulation of 1942, several categories of artisanal works were required for recruitment into the Army. By January 1943, the Education Officer in Ibadan was mandated to enlighten Nigerian pupils to join²¹ the Army. In the recruitment were incentives such as the allowances, the leave, clothes, hours of work and duties. In this regard, Colonel Hotman James was billed to visit Ibadan schools and enlighten teachers and education officers about the essence of joining the Army.²²

The Senior Education Officer at the Department of Education in Ibadan requested that the Information Officer in Lagos supply war literature to schools for teachers' use. For instance, teachers in St. Paul's C.M.S. School, Gbongan in the then Oyo Province requested for war literature in September 1942.²³ Bulk of educational planning in the then Western Region were based on statistical information from school census to determine the extent of demand and supply for war texts. African teachers were particularly interested in broadening their knowledge base in a newly found modernised society. Hence, the teachers used the texts to understand the essence of teaching in the schools and the values inculcated. The manager of Ijo Aladura School in Osun province wrote to the Senior Education Officer on November 24, 1942 to make a request thus:

I ask you humbly to please enlist my name with those school managers, who receive from you the War News, which is being sent out weekly. The War news entitled: Nigeria Review. I shall be very grateful to you for this forever.²⁴

Teachers were motivated to get wartime supply of books and it was an expression of patriotic interests to the British cause. In order to coordinate and maintain the power of managing schools, the Department of Education insisted on the supply of war texts to schools, and that it should solely be the responsibility of the Department of Education and not the public libraries as it was being obtained from Mapo Library, Ibadan. Subsequently, the schools in Western Region were to build their own libraries from the war texts sent to them. For schools in Oyo, Ijebu, Abeokuta and Ilesa areas of Western Nigeria, it was mandated that a "War Corner" be established to keep copies of texts and pictures of maps should be hanged as learning resources. Therefore, maps of Mediterranean and North Africa, Russian Front and Far East were given to the schools.²⁵

Actions to support Education Officers in the colonial service manifested in the role of Mr D.B.J. Amber who was transferred from Malayan Education Service to deliver lecture to teachers on "War in the Far East" in Ibadan. In addition, pupils and students were afforded the opportunity to learn war strategies by staging films to serve as propaganda. Precisely, the Cinema was shown at Rex Cinema on Wednesday, February 17, 1943.²⁶ All these were to impress it on teachers and pupils to have interest in joining the Army.

Standard VI pupils were considered qualified to enroll as Learner Clerk in the Army. Primary School learners were very well enlisted and as at August, 1943, 55 of such were given the privilege and even marriage allowance. Indirectly, the mission schools that had produced teachers but not in the teaching service realised that their graduates were less interested in teaching but to be enlisted in the Army as Learner Clerks which consequently affected the availability of teachers in Ijebu Wesleyan Schools.²⁷

Efficient functioning of African Schools was not really imperative, except for British victory in the War. Hence, enlistment in the Army was considered paramount. Indirectly, the education, military, business, politics and economy were interwoven to strictly favour capital exploits. The British Education Officers constantly engaged actions that entrenched British interests. In the period between 5th and 7th November, 1943, the Army Tradesmen were organised to visit Ibadan and display their works for the amusement of Ibadan public at Bower's Tower, Mapo Hall and Race Course.²⁸ The aim of the visit was geared towards recruitment into the Army. The recruitment occurred in two categories, namely those suitable for Learner Clerk and Tradesmen. The incentives and allowances attached to enlistment into the Army during this period decreased the zeal for further education. They saw enlistment in the Army as viable for the realities of survival in the colonial economy. Furthermore, the public was sensitised in Ibadan and other Yoruba towns to watch military display of Army Tradesmen targeted at gathering donations for ex-teachers and pupils to service their needs.²⁹

At the end of World War II, governing the schools in Western Nigeria to support the British was affirmed in the message of victory forwarded by Chief Secretary to the Government. For example, it was stated that:

To all of you, I send congratulations to on the occasion of victory and warmest thanks of His Majesty's Government and of the people of Great Britain for the loyal and generous part that all the varied communities of the British Colonial Empire have played in achieving it. Your contribution has been a noble and valuable one, and has shown itself in many and varied forms; in service in the Armed Forces and Merchant Navy and in Civil Defence; in helping to produce vital materials of war; in the maintenance of essential services in your own lands; in gifts of loan and money you have made for the furtherance of the War; and voluntary welfare work and hospitality for His Majesty's Forces.³⁰

The commemoration of the victory was initiated among the schools in Western Nigeria through the Victory Parade on June 8, 1946.

“Win the War Fund” and School Resource Management

The win the war fund was a campaign slogan during WWII to ensure loyalty and support from the colonies. The facts of the propaganda passed on to colonies in West Africa depict economic factors. Several reasons were adduced to motivate the colonies to support the British in the War against Germans. In a propaganda leaflet circulated in West Africa, the illustrations depict Germans as brutal and violent people who would rob West Africans of their produce. The leaflet titled *Victory is Vital* was aimed at sensitising Africans to engage in activities aimed towards Britain's victory.³¹ The produce economy was considered vital to the victory of the War. The illustrations of produce exchange were supported with quotes such as:

You are honestly paid in money for the produce you sell. If you like, you can save some of your money in the post office savings bank. The Post Office pays you to save, for your own future. With the money you receive, you can buy cloth for yourself and your children, kerosene to give you light at night, food, a bicycle or a sewing machine, or anything else you like from the store. When Britain has defeated Germany, more ships will be set free to carry your produce to many countries, and your trade will improve. In spite of the War, the British Government is paying you a fair price for your produce.³²

The words in the leaflet indicated economic benefit for the colonies. The idea was to ensure preparedness of the colonies to enhance produce trade necessary

for the War. In this case, the schools in Western Nigeria were spaces of annexation to facilitate the above narrative as stated in the leaflet.

Apart from the recruitment of teachers into the Army, school administration was tied to the forces of production and exchange in international trade. The Controller of Palm Kernels used child labour of pupils and students to facilitate primary processing for exports. Before the War, the education system that had trained Nigerians to be clerical officers was criticised even by the colonial state. The missionary schools had earlier introduced agricultural practices into the curriculum before the 1940s. The demand for agricultural processing from schools magnified the practice of mobilising students for post-harvest production. The mission schools were used as spaces for post-harvest production. This was enhanced by the rural training and farm demonstration centres. The farm-school network was a prominent education system implemented by mission schools in Yoruba-speaking areas around Ilorin. "The plan was with the desire of the Government Department of Education and we making planned agricultural activities part of the school curriculum where there is sufficient land available. Sixty-seven teachers had received special rural science training and 50 school farms were started."³³

By the mid-1943, managing resources in the school was initiated to engage students in the production of palm kernels for United African Company (UAC) as intermediary for export and also to make sales from which only five per cent was given to the school.³⁴ Therefore, under the school activity of practical work, the scheme of cracking palm nuts was set. Poorly maintained cracking machines were rotated around the schools to produce the nuts for exports. The five per cent that accrued to the school as a prize-giving strategy was tagged "School cracking the most kernels per scholar."³⁵ Also, it was a form of competition among schools that for the purpose of equity, sharing formula was devised to the extent that classes that produced the most were rewarded. This was equally used to motivate all the schools to be actively involved in the production of palm products for exports. Schools in Western Region were connected to the Deputy Controller of Palm Kernels in the Agriculture Department to coordinate primary processing in Western Nigeria. The implementation of the scheme tied up all schools to make practical activities work for the production and packaging for exports. The District Officers were involved in the coordination and the Nigerian Union of Teachers.³⁶

The schools had the opportunity of getting funds from the sales of palm kernels to UAC, which added value to the prestige of the schools and as well, enhanced competitiveness among students. The farm-school curriculum system enabled the coordination of the use of students as child labour for post-harvest production in the intense period of WWII. The education system introduced in WWII was more of emergency vocational education and practice to facilitate production and exchange of cash crops. The process was targeted at using child labour for production and it also inspired competitive learning among schools in Western Nigeria. Similar to the palm kernel scheme, a “salvage” programme was introduced to make paper wastes from schools in Western Region to be deposited at military salvage depots in Lagos. In a way of engaging the students to do social work to win war, the Boys Scout Club in schools were used to facilitate transportation from Osogbo and Abeokuta to Ibadan.³⁷

Empire Day Celebration and School Sports

Empire Day message to schools during World War II signified the essence of using the school as space to win the War.³⁸ The event was used to sensitise students and pupils to regard the war as a means of assisting Britain in winning the War. The students were sensitised to appreciate British interest against “enemy nations” and prepare for its efficiency through fitness. The campaign for fitness in the Empire Day Message indirectly motivated school boys’ and girls’ preparedness to join the Army. However, in the Empire Day Message of 1945, more emphasis was placed on character development. Emphasis on character development to “build up a future” deviated from the purpose for fitness emphasised in earlier WWII years.³⁹ School children were encouraged to keep up with the Nigerian future. Mostly, the idea of Nigerian unity was more emphasised in the Empire Day messages as the Nigerian unity was seen to be challenged by ethnic politics.

In Colonial Yorubaland, education systems as introduced by the British were largely accepted as a new form of civilisation. The value of education was taken to mean progress and accumulation of knowledge. Among the Yoruba, acceptance of western education was supported with green objects used in gaming activities. Examples of such were environmental objects such as lime, coconut, sand, wood, among others used in the management and planning of Empire Day Celebrations as it signified games and sporting activities.⁴⁰ The Empire Day celebrations were means of gathering pupils to display loyalty to

the British Empire through annual sporting activities. The event was a coordinated effort by the colonial state and the school owners to ensure that pupils and students are influenced to value British culture and support them in the wartime. To reduce the cost of hosting sport days in schools, the construction of sporting spaces and the materials in accomplishing a learning process was sought locally. Also, the planning and management of sporting activities manifest in the educational correspondences and teachers' networks among Yoruba towns.

Post World War II Education Plans

The commemoration of the victory after World War II manifested in schools across Western Nigeria. There were Victory parades on June 8, 1946. Subsequently, constitutional development and pressure from nationalist politicians devalued the functional education system that re-emerged during the War. More emphasis was placed on political structuring, while education was gradually less vocational. This was one of the factors that led to de-industrialisation in the education curricula, such that schooling for vocations were jettisoned for schooling for class mobility and prosperity. The structural changes that affected the perception of schooling post-WWII were influenced by the politics and economy structured by constitutional developments. Forrest's reflection on Nigeria's politics shows wide cultural and political differences across the geopolitical zones; thus, leading to the establishment of educational institutions.⁴¹ Therefore, structural existence of schools mattered more than its functionality for desired development.

The period of internal self-rule of the late 1940s after World War II created avenues for Africans to be part of education planning. Members that constituted Ibadan Township Education Committee on June 25, 1946 deliberated on the approval and location of schools. Education plans became complicated given the challenges of scarce resources of the colonial state. Scholarship schemes to train teachers were scrambled for among the provinces of Western Nigeria, while subject interests also differed, as there were more interests in getting teachers for science subjects.

The network of education for the colonies entailed funding by the missionaries to train teachers to study in London. In the scholarship scheme, several teachers were sent to London to enhance effective teaching in schools.

Prominent leaders in Western Nigeria who were teachers of the colonial era benefitted from this scheme. In a correspondence affirming the qualification of Mr Ajasin and Mr Alayande of Western Nigeria, H.E. Thomas of Fourah Bay College described them thus:

Mr Alayande's reference number is A5889. He took his Higher Elementary Teacher's Certificate in 1932, and his Senior Teacher's (Geography: Part I) in 1938. He taught last at Ondo Boys' High School, which he left in August, 1943.

Mr Ajasin's number is A7578. He was last teaching at the St. Luke's C.M.S. School at Sapele, Warri Province, but I understand that he is expecting to return to teach at the Imade College, Owo.⁴²

Mostly, the teachers sent to study under the scholarship schemes were entrusted to develop the Nigerian education system on return. The two examples cited above later became nationalist politicians and part of the movement towards the attainment of self-rule from the late 1940s. However, such expectations conflict with the interest of the missionaries that planned the scholarship. Thus, communities were also drawn into financing the scholarship schemes.

Most of the post WWII reforms were due to the fact that the educational policy was just a mere structure and rarely mattered in imperial capitalist growth except for school based labour, which made Britain agree to the holistic education ordinance of 1948 to entrench its colonial administrative powers. Also, the task of education in post WWII was situated within the frameworks of the plans of the United Nations Organisation (UNO) and the World Bank.

Conclusion

Schools were an extension of the win the war fund strategies in Western Nigeria. On the other hand, such strategies promoted the African vocational education system profound in the precolonial era. What happened in the schools was a redirection of productivity mechanisms to enhance profits by the school, community and colonial departments. Nigeria's involvement in the victories of the Allied powers created new paradigms to imperial expansion. From 1942 to 1945, the British ensured that schools in Nigeria fulfilled the cause of adapted education and were mainstreamed to adopt an economic culture of support within the local setting. Schooling was annexed to the WWII in a demand-supply driven manner, where labour and human capital utilisation

were of essence in post-World War II. Nigerian nationalists' agitation for favourable education plans was reinforced by the fact that the allied powers claimed in the Atlantic Charter of 1941 that they would "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they would live." The Colonial Development and Welfare Act (CDWA) of 1945 made provision for educational spending and ultimately, post-World War II educational adjustments were also included in the frameworks of global "development".

Endnotes

¹ NAI IbMinEd 1/9 Letter No.W. G. 387/369

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³ C. Korieh The reviews of the book as analysed by the author is available online at: <http://www.cambridge.org/2020/03/nigerias-role-in-world-war-ii-uneearthed>

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The Litmus Test: Police, Politics and Polls on the Eve of Nigeria's Independence in 1959

Saheed Amusa and Adewole Adeleke

Abstract

One of the major challenges facing the police force all over the world is political insulation and neutrality. The greatest criticism of the police worldwide has been its alleged use by ruling elites as instruments of intimidation of opposition parties. This paper examines the role of the Nigeria Police Force in the conduct of the first general elections in Nigeria in 1959. The paper relies on the critical analysis of both primary and secondary documents like minutes of meetings, constitution draft orders, memoranda, newspaper reports and journal articles to dissect the role of the Police in the period preceding the general elections of 1959 as well as the election periods and the immediate post-election periods. The paper shows that the 1959 general elections were the first litmus tests of the much-touted police political insulation recommended by the 1957 and 1958 London Constitutional Conferences. It also reveals that the police became subjects of severe criticisms by the politicians and political parties across the three regions of Nigeria during the period. The results of policing of the electoral process of 1959 showed that the Police was still susceptible to control and influence by the ruling political elites. In spite of the huge problems faced by the Police in policing the 1959 general elections, the colonial government did not alter the constitutional structure of the Nigeria Police Force till the attainment of independence in 1960.

Introduction

The year 1959 is as important as the year 1960 in the political history of Nigeria. However, while the importance of the year 1960 is widely acknowledged as the year of Nigeria's independence, the importance of the year 1959 is oblivious to many Nigerians. Indeed, the year 1959 was very eventful in the political history of Nigeria because the events which happened in that year put into test the agreements and decisions reached at the constitutional conferences of 1957

and 1958 on the subject of Nigeria's imminent attainment of sovereignty. The year was marked with intense political activities ranging from electioneering campaigns, political meetings, electorates' mobilisation and other political activities targeted at ensuring electoral successes for the respective political parties in the general elections that would usher in the first government of an independent Nigeria.¹

After the conclusion of the Constitutional Conferences of 1957 and 1958, some of the decisions and agreements reached were implemented by the Federal Government under the Governor-Generalship of Sir James Robertson, the last colonial Governor-General of Nigeria. Since it had been agreed by all delegates at the Conference that Nigeria should be granted independence on October 1, 1960, the year 1959 and the early months of 1960 witnessed several landmark political activities which ultimately led to the attainment of Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960.

It has been emphasised that effective policing of electoral processes is one of the greatest challenges for the Nigeria Police Force.² The first Nigerian general elections were finally held on December 12, 1959. As expected, the Police was again at the centre of all the electoral and political activities as the agency responsible for maintenance of law and order in the face of rising intra- and inter-party wrangling in the three regions and among the major ruling and opposition political parties, such as, the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), Action Group (AG), Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU), United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), and others.³ The period between October 27, 1958 when the constitutional conferences were concluded in London and December 12, 1959 when the First General Elections were held witnessed some prominent developments in police control and administration, particularly the question of the political control as well as the use of the Police by the political elite. The post-constitutional conferences' developments, as they concerned the practical use to which the Police were put by the political elite in the politicking and electioneering activities on the eve of national independence, were litmus tests for the practical applications of the decisions and compromises reached at the constitutional conferences.

Against this background, this paper examines the role of the Nigeria Police Force in policing the electoral process of 1959. The paper is divided into six major parts. The first part gives introductory background to the importance of

the year 1959 in Nigerian political history while the second part discusses the establishment and activities of the Police Council. The third part accounts for the nature of political situation and electioneering processes in Nigeria in 1959, while the fourth part assesses the level of preparedness of the Nigeria Police Force in the build-up to the 1959 General Elections. The fifth part examines the role of the Police in the conduct of the 1959 elections and the sixth part concludes the paper.

The Establishment of the Police Council and Its Activities

One of the first major activities carried out by the Federal Government of Nigeria after the conclusion of the 1957 and 1958 Conferences was the establishment of the Police Council. This was in line with the decisions of the Conferences and the provisions of The Nigeria (Constitution) (Amendment No. 2) Order in Council of 1959.⁴ The Police Council held its first meeting on Wednesday January 7, 1959 at the Council Chamber, Council of Ministers' Office, Lagos and it was chaired by Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General.⁵ Other members of the Council were Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (Prime Minister of the Federation), Dr M.I. Okpara (Minister of Production of Eastern Region), Chief Anthony Enahoro (Minister of Home and Mid-West Affairs of Western Region), Mr M.A. Buba (Minister of Social Services and Cooperatives of Northern Region) and G. Hawkesworth (Chairman of the Police Service Commission).⁶ Also in attendance at this inaugural meeting, as agreed at the Constitutional Conferences, were Mr C.S.K. Bovell (Inspector-General of Police), D.S. Fountain (Deputy Inspector-General of Police), J.E. Hodge (Commissioner of Police, Eastern Region), N.K. Millett (Commissioner of Police, Lagos Federal Territory), A.N.M. Davies (Acting Commissioner of Police, Northern Region), T.R. Pallet (Acting Commissioner of Police, Western Region) and M.J.H. Cartlidge (Assistant Commissioner of Police, Cameroons). J.A. Bey (Senior Assistant Secretary, Office of the Governor-General) and J. Lynn (Senior Superintendent of Police, Office of the Inspector-General of Police) served as Secretaries at this historic meeting.⁷

The inaugural meeting of the Police Council considered several important issues on the control and operational use of the Police ranging from procedure for Police Council Meeting, matters arising from minutes of meetings of Old Police Advisory Council, the Police Estimates in 1959/1960 and Immigration and Passport Control and Capital Works Programme.⁸ The Inspector-General

of Police also gave a comprehensive review of situations in the force in such areas as regional differentials in tax, Nigerianisation process, Specialist and Grade Pay, police extraneous duties, and the need to divorce the Police from the rest of the Public Service.⁹ These issues were considered through debates and lengthy discussions after which approvals were made appropriately with far-reaching consequences for the police establishments in Nigeria.

The Police Council held its meeting regularly in the year 1959 where important issues within its mandates were discussed by members drawn from government officials from the Federal and Regional Governments and significant resolutions were reached and implemented appropriately. However, the question of ensuring that the Police did not come under political parties' control which was the bone of contention at the constitutional conferences had become a major issue in the prelude to independence as allegations and counter-allegations of this ugly trend were made from different political quarters. This was in spite of the regular meeting of the Police Council, the constitution of its membership by Federal and Regional officials and even in spite of the presence of an all-inclusive Federal Council of Ministers constituted in 1957 by Prime Minister Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa.¹⁰ The invitation and subsequent membership of the Federal Council of Ministers by opposition parties' members were in fulfilment of the promise made by the Prime Minister in his inaugural speech on September 3, 1957:

This morning, I said in the House of Representatives that bitterness due to political differences would carry Nigeria nowhere, and I appealed to the political leaders throughout the country to control their party extremists. To you who are listening tonight I repeat that appeal—let us put away bitterness and go forward in friendship to independence. To further this overriding need for unity, my colleagues in the Council of Ministers and I have decided to give the country a lead by inviting the leaders of the Action Group to form with us a truly National Government composed of members of the main parties in the country, and here I must pay tribute to Dr Azikiwe, to Chief Awolowo, Dr Endeley and to the leader of my own party, the Sardauna of Sokoto, for supporting me in this decision. I and my colleagues of the NCNC and NPC hold out our hands in welcome to the Action Group members of the Council and I promise you that we shall do our utmost to ensure that the deliberations of the Council are held in an atmosphere devoid of strife and narrow party prejudice.¹¹

In spite of this seemingly positive beginning, the post-1957/1958 Constitutional Conferences' era was one of bitterness and rivalry among the politicians from the Southern and Northern divides of the country. This was not unconnected with the desire of each of the dominant political parties not only to retain the control of their strongholds but also to control the Federal Government at independence. The politics of bitterness, regional hostility, politicisation of ethnicity, sectional enmity, national disunity, mutual suspicions and other related factors prevented the attainment of Nigeria's independence on April 2, 1960 which had been tipped even before the 1958 Conference.¹² In fact, the April 2 date for independence was a special mandate embodied in a resolution of the Nigeria's Federal Parliament which stated as follows:

Pursuant to the All-Nigeria Party's statement made at the London Constitutional Conference of 1957 on the question of the independence of the Federation of Nigeria, this House mandates all Federal delegates to the resumed Conference to pursue the issue further and ensure that Nigeria attains her independence on April 2, 1960.¹³

This resolution was also popular among the majority of the party and regional delegates including Dr Azikiwe of the NCNC and Chief Awolowo of the Action Group. However, the political rivalries which characterised the event of the post-conferences era delayed the independence for another six months leading to Nigeria's independence in October 1, 1960. Of all these events, the electioneering activities across the length and breadth of the country showed the strengths and weaknesses of the resolutions reached at the conferences on the constitutional control and operational use of the Police.

The underlying factors of political turbulence in Nigeria on the eve of independence were the desires of political parties to retain their strongholds on one hand and to gain the control of the Federal Government on the other hand. This was because the party that had the highest numbers of seats at the Federal House of Representatives would not only present the Prime Minister but would also form and control the Federal Government. To achieve this, political parties and politicians had to engage in cross-regional political campaigns to canvass for votes and gain supporters and members from regions under them and those controlled by other political parties. These undoubtedly created problems because the existing political parties were regionally based and ethnically affiliated with the NPC which controlled the Northern Regional Government dominated by the Hausa/Fulani people, the AG was seen as a Yoruba party

dominant in the Western Region, while the NCNC which ran the affairs of the Eastern Region was dominantly controlled by the Igbo.¹⁴ The attempts by all these political parties and their leaders to extend their popularity and acceptance through quest for membership drive and support base to places where they were not so popular created new problems and challenges which threatened law, order and peace of the country in the prelude to the 1959 General Elections. The role of the Police in keeping the peace and at the same time, maintaining political neutrality was put to test during this period.¹⁵

The Nature of Political Situation and Electioneering Process in Nigeria in 1959

It is important to draw a picture of the political situation in Nigeria in the immediate period preceding the General Elections of 1959 *vis-a-vis* the electioneering campaigns and related activities across the three regions. In the first instance, in its bid to enlist supporters and gain grounds in the NPC-controlled Northern Region, the Action Group successfully used the age-long rivalries between the Hausa/Fulani and the Kanuri to secure the alliance of Ibrahim Imam and the Bornu Youth Movement (BYM) and, therefore, garnered a support base in the Borno Province of Northern Region.¹⁶ The response of the NPC government to this could be better imagined. Ibrahim Imam and the members of the BYM as well as sympathisers and supporters of the AG were arrested and jailed through the connivance of the Police and the *Alkali* (Shariah) courts.¹⁷ In the same vein, the AG used the same tactic to penetrate other parts of the Northern Region particularly the non-Muslim and non-Hausa/Fulani dominated areas of the Middle Belt. Its major ally in this region was J.S. Tarka of the Tiv Progressive Union (TPU) and the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC).¹⁸ The AG's use of helicopters for its campaigns across the country made it penetrate the nooks and crannies of the country but to the anger of other political parties, particularly the NPC.¹⁹

The success recorded by the AG-UMBC solidarity in Tivland in the 1959 General Elections was glaring as the AG won all the Federal seats defeating the candidates of the NPC.²⁰ This, however, created future problems for the Tiv people in its relations with the NPC-controlled Northern Regional Government which used all means at its disposals—the Police, the courts and the Native Authority Administration—to deal with them. This was the basis of the recurring Tiv crises since the era of decolonisation and independence politics.

In the long run, the AG and the UMBC successfully challenged, resisted and upturned the dominant status of the NPC in the Middle Belt of Nigeria in the 1959 General Elections and beyond, in spite of the alleged ignoble role of the Police.²¹ Even though it did not record significant progress in securing polling victories in the core of Hausa/Fulani city strongholds of the NPC, the AG extended its political awakening campaigns to the outskirts (*Sabon gari*) of Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Bauchi among other places which had several Southern residents.²²

Just as it did in the North, the AG also carried its drive for political presence to the Eastern Region, the domains of the NCNC. It employed the use of the minority groups in the Igbo-dominated Eastern Region such as Efik, Ibibio, Annang and the Ijaw to draw supporters by advocating the creation of Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) State from the Region.²³ It gained the supports of non-Igbo leaders like Okoi Arikpo of the United National Independence Party (UNIP) and Wenike Briggs of the Ijaw People Congress.²⁴ Even in the core Igbo areas, the AG, through the organisational ability of its Chief Organising Secretary, S.G. Ikoku, presented itself as a good alternative to the NCNC but with little electoral achievements due to successful NCNC counter-offensives which emphasised Igbo solidarity, personality of Azikiwe as a true statesman and pan-Nigerian nationalist, and the unprecedented achievements of the NCNC government in the Region in a few years compared to several years of colonial rule. In spite of these, the AG propaganda succeeded in eliciting impressive supports from the non-Igbo speaking areas of the Eastern Region.²⁵

Interestingly, the NCNC also attempted to sell itself beyond the Eastern Region where it dominated and Western Region where it had significant membership and support base to Northern Region where it was relatively unknown. It must be emphasised that the NCNC was very active in Western Region. It was quite prominent in Benin and Delta provinces and in core Yoruba-speaking towns like Ibadan, Oyo, Ilesa and Ile-Ife.²⁶ It was certainly a rival party to the Action Group's dominance in Western Region as it proved to exist with members in almost all parts of Yorubaland from Oyo to Ijesaland and from Ekiti to Akokoland.²⁷ It, most times, thrived on inter- and intra-community and inter-personal clashes between and among Yoruba cities and leaders of Action Group such as the crisis between Ife and Modakeke and personality and political clashes between Remi Fani-Kayode and Ooni Adesoji Aderemi.²⁸ The NCNC also strove to register its presence in the NPC-controlled Northern Region. Even though it did not do this vehemently like the Action Group, it entered into

an alliance with the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) led by Mallam Aminu Kano which was the only party that attempted to challenge NPC domination in core areas of Northern Nigeria.²⁹ The NEPU/NCNC alliance constituted threats to the NPC dominance in the core North and the AG/UMBC was a thorn in its flesh in the Middle Belt region during this period.

In contrast to the efforts of both the AG and the NCNC to broaden their national outlook in the preparation for the 1959 General Elections, the NPC did not make any serious efforts to make inroads to the Western or Eastern Regions.³⁰ But it must not be thought that it did not strategise at all, it was only that its strategies were unique. Since it was certain that if the NPC could hold on to its absolute control of the Northern Region, it would have majority seats at the Federal House of Representatives, then it concentrated all its efforts at achieving this. As a result, the strategies of the NPC were geared towards absolute control of the Northern Region, securing loyalty of all Northerners and dealing with political opponents particularly in Bornu and in the Middle Belt areas as well as Kano which was under the influence of Aminu Kano's NEPU.³¹ Bola Ige describes the NPC strategies in these words:

The NPC was quite strong, although it was not a mass party. Almost all influential people in Northern Nigeria belonged to it. All the Emirs supported it, and when the Emir of Kano, Sanusi proved difficult he was exiled to Azare.... The NPC did not believe in public campaigns and appealing to people in public. It was said that one of the things that irked Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna, was that Obafemi Awolowo and the Action Group forced him to go on a political campaign. Although the NPC had its headquarters in Kaduna manned by a Chief Organising Secretary, Muhammadu King, its organisation was tenuous. The big party leaders ran the party as situation demanded in their areas. The NPC thus had a tight hold on the Hausa-Fulani areas. In Bornu, the NPC detached many leading Kanuri from Ibrahim Imam and gave them important positions. Zanna Bukar Dipcharima who had been on the NCNC delegation to London became a Minister. A very handsome and likeable young man was Ibrahim Waziri. He was enticed from his UAC job, and although he held views which were almost too radical and heretical to the NPC he was accommodated and soon became a Federal Minister. Another young urbane and dashing man was Shettima Ali Monguno. The NPC found a place for him. But their best catch was Shettima Kashim.³²

The NPC also adopted divide-and-rule and divide-and-confuse tactics in the non-Hausa/Fulani areas. This was done through identification of brilliant and vibrant young men from these areas and giving them good jobs and positions in the Northern Civil Service. As a consequence, the NPC was able to get the support of majority of personnel of the Northern Civil Service.³³ The few privileged people from the minority groups in Northern Nigeria, therefore, became die-hard supporters of the NPC. The Northernisation policy of the NPC government was also used as by the Sardauna to draw support for the NPC. This policy was aimed at protecting, projecting and championing the cause and interest of all Northerners in national social, economic and political spheres.³⁴ The simple life of the Sardauna, Balewa and other leaders of the NPC also endeared the party to the ordinary Northerner who pledged absolute loyalty and affection for the two leaders and saw anything to dislodge the NPC as a danger to Northern Nigeria.³⁵

The Police Preparation for the 1959 General Elections

The above represents the political situation in Nigeria *vis-a-vis* inter-party and inter-regional relations in 1959, the year of the first General Election which would usher in the government at independence in 1960. Therefore, the stage was set for electoral processes ranging from political campaigns and tours, nomination of candidates, provision and supply of electoral materials, voting, counting, collation of results and declaration of winners, among other electoral issues. Expectedly, the Police was to provide a level playing field for all contestants and political parties in all these aspects of the electoral process across the country, particularly the transparency and credibility of the process. Relatively, the Police fared well in the discharge of its constitutional responsibilities during the conduct of the 1959 General Elections but this was not without some obvious limitations and shortcomings, particularly in areas where the NA/LG Police operated along with the Nigeria Police Force.

The Emirates of Northern Nigeria and Yoruba Kingdoms of Western Nigeria had Native Authority Police and Local Government Police which operated along with the Nigeria Police Force since the 1920s.³⁶ It was in these places that the use of the Police as political instruments by the ruling political parties was more pronounced and obvious with far-reaching consequences during the period. The political situation in Nigeria, as early as April 1959, had become so tense that politicians from all the political shades and regions in Nigeria had

begun to point accusing fingers at one another for a general election that was scheduled for December of that year. In a secret meeting held between the Governor-General, Sir James Robertson, and some NCNC and NEPU leaders, such as, Dr Azikiwe, Dr Okpara, Chief Okotie-Eboh and Mallam Aminu Kano on April 3 1959, Dr Azikiwe raised some issues about his dissatisfaction with what he encountered during his tours of Northern and Western Regions.³⁷ Dr Azikiwe raised several issues accusing the Governments of the Western and Northern Regions of acting contrary to what was agreed on at the 1957 and 1958 Constitutional Conferences. Among other allegations, Dr Azikiwe pointed out that it was agreed at both conferences that there should be freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, freedom of association and freedom of movement throughout the country. However, in the course of his tours, Dr Azikiwe said that he had discovered that these rights were being infringed upon in these places, that is, Northern and Western Regions. Specifically, on how the Police was affected in this regard, Dr Azikiwe was reported to have held that:

Customary Courts in both the North and West did not seem to abide by these universally accepted fundamental human rights, nor did the Native Administration Police in the West and North act in accordance with them. He thought that unless alterations were made in the general administration of these Regions, the elections might well turn out to be a farce in that political parties opposing the parties in power would not be given a hearing or be given a chance of putting their views across to the electorate.³⁸

Driving his point home in a more direct way, Dr Azikiwe revealed that political meetings were entirely banned in Bornu as he was not allowed to hold meetings in Maiduguri, Damaturu and Wamba in Plateau Province.³⁹ He also emphasised that in some parts of Northern Nigeria, such as, Kano and Maiduguri, political meetings were only allowed in some distance away from the main towns. More significantly, Dr Azikiwe frowned upon the practice in which the Native Authority Police were responsible for giving permit for political meetings in both Western and Northern Regions. He emphasised that in Northern Nigeria, political parties opposed to the NPC were denied such permits on several occasions while the situation in the Western Region were milder compared to situations in the Northern Region.⁴⁰

Interestingly, some of the stringent conditions attached to granting permits for political meetings in Northern Region, as revealed by Dr Azikiwe, include the submission of the names of speakers at such meetings beforehand; speakers'

signing of undertaking that they would not mention names of certain people, such as, the Sardauna, the Local Emir, the local *Alkali* Chief, members of the Emir's Council and members of the Regional Government. Furthermore, any political meeting must also not exceed the approved period of time and there were limits to topics or issues which could be discussed at political gatherings. It was in the enforcement of this condition that Dr Azikiwe was prevented by the police from addressing a political gathering in Northern Nigeria beyond one hour by the Native Authority Police because he was late to the meeting due to a breakdown of his vehicle and he had one hour left of the approved meeting hours.⁴¹ All these he considered serious limitations to fundamental human rights that were supposed to be enjoyed by all Nigerians in any part of the country.

As a consequence, Dr Azikiwe made two important suggestions as a way forward in this circumstance. First, he opined that the declaration of fundamental human rights which had been agreed upon at the Constitutional Conference should be written into the constitution as soon as possible to enable people whose rights had been infringed seek redress at the court of law. Second, he suggested that since the forthcoming elections for which these campaigns and political gatherings/meetings were meant were Federal elections, then all matters concerning the elections should be the responsibility of the Federal Police. He specifically argued that issuance of permits for political meetings and processions as well as protection and security during the elections should be given by the Federal Police and Federal Government in all parts of the country rather than by the Native Authority Police or the Regional Governments.⁴² The response of the Governor-General to the latter suggestion of Dr Azikiwe was that it would be difficult to take away the responsibility for law and order from the Native Authority Police because this was the provision of the Northern Regional Law. More importantly, the Governor-General reminded the people at the meeting that in many of the Northern Provinces, there were very few, if any, Nigeria Police, rather the Native Authority Police was entrusted with the task of law and order maintenance.⁴³

In his own contributions at this meeting, Mallam Aminu Kano, the leader of the Northern Elements' Progressive Union (NEPU) painted a more serious picture of the political situation in Northern Nigeria relating to NPC's intolerant dispositions to politicians of other parties' affiliations during the period under study. According to the report of the meeting with the Governor-General, Mallam Aminu Kano was quoted as follows:

He said that in Bornu Province no meetings of politicians were allowed, even in private houses. If his party wished to have a committee meeting in a private house in Bornu Province, even though the members attending were only quite few, they had to get a permit for it and in addition, the meeting would then be attended by a Native Authority Policeman and later on, the minutes would have to be submitted to the Native Authority Police. He said at Nguru, a committee meeting had been held and the secretary, a man named Aba Zakara, had been prosecuted and was now in goal (sic) on a four months' sentence. Surely, this was unfair? He went to say that in Katsina Province no branch of a political party was allowed to have more than 25 members. In a place, Malum Fashi, where his party had about 2,000 members, he, therefore, had to have 80 branches which seemed to be entirely ridiculous. He went on to mention a recent murder case in Kano where, after some trouble between the N.P.C. and the N.E.P.U, a tailor by name Tahalu, had been beaten-up by Native Authority Police so severely that he had died in hospital only few days ago.⁴⁴

The Governor-General responded to these allegations by the leadership of the NCNC and NEPU and promised that the points raised by them would be discussed between him and the Governor of Northern Region, Sir Gawain W. Bell and Governor of the Western Region, Sir John D. Rankine.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the Governor of the Northern Region responded to some of these allegations in a secret letter to the Governor-General copied to other Regional Governors.⁴⁶ In the said letter, Governor Bell maintained that political meetings had not been entirely banned in Bornu Province but only in Maiduguri since the riots of September 1958. He also revealed that Dr Azikiwe did not make any application to hold a meeting in Damaturu and that, at Wamba, Dr Azikiwe's party arrived on the day following that for which they had applied for, and had been granted a permit.⁴⁷ The Governor also defended some of the points raised by Azikiwe's team such as holding meetings outside the towns, police demand for list of speakers, specifying time limits for political meetings, non-referencing and mentioning of names of Northern notables and the need to seek police permit for political meetings in private residences. All these, according to Sir Bell, were done to prevent crises due to the traditional background and volatility of the Northern Region and particularly, these were only employed in places where violent clashes had recently occurred such as Maiduguri and Kano.⁴⁸

On Mallam Aminu Kano's allegation of murder of one of its members against the Kano Native Authority Police, the Governor of Northern Region provided

a detailed information about the background of the death of the said NEPU supporter and argued that he died as a result of the injuries sustained in a NEPU/NPC clash of March 9, 1959 rather than from attacks by the NA Police as alleged.⁴⁹ The NEPU, as the main opposition party in the Northern Region, had established itself as the most virulent critic of the Native Authority system and all its institutions, particularly the Native Authority Police. Therefore, serious efforts had been made by the NPC government in collaboration with the Nigeria Police Force and Native Authority Police to squash it right from its early years in 1951. By the mid-1950s, the activities of NEPU had become a serious security issue to the colonial government and the police in the Northern Region. Rotimi argues that the colonial government and the NPC used the Nigeria Police Force and Native Authority Police to deal ruthlessly with the NEPU and any other opposition party during this period.⁵⁰ The responses of the Governor of Western Region to NCNC and NEPU's allegations were contained in a short secret letter to the Governor-General dated April 13, 1959. The main content of it was that "in the Western Region, no permits for political meetings are required, whether issued by the Nigeria or the Local Government Police. But Section 6 of the Public Order Law, No. 24 of 1957, requires a twenty-four-hour notice of any political meeting to be given to the Police."⁵¹

It is important to add that Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the Premier of the Western Region, in a meeting he also held with the Governor-General on April 24, 1959, made similar observations about political situations in Northern Nigeria after his tour of the Region.⁵² Unlike Azikiwe's emphasis on NPC's clampdown on opposition, Awolowo's observations were more of general political atmosphere in the Region. He reported that his tours were generally peaceful and that his meetings had not been banned by Native Authority Police but not without pockets of troubles in few places like Bida and Abuja.⁵³ In spite of Chief Awolowo's appreciation of good job that had been done by the Governor of the Northern Region and the Governor-General in liberalising the political outlook of the North, he believed that much still needed to be done and he suggested three areas of reforms so that the elections would be a success.⁵⁴

First, Chief Awolowo implored the Governor-General to appeal to the Premier and Government of Northern Nigeria to allow legitimate criticisms, freedom of speech, campaigning at the time of elections and a cessation of the prosecution of political opponent through the Native Courts.⁵⁵ Second, he said that the electoral regulations must be greatly publicised in Northern Nigeria by the colonial government through broadcasting in local languages, press notices and

public speeches by the Governor of the Region and by the Governor-General himself. Lastly, Chief Awolowo suggested that the Northern Region's detachment of the Nigeria Police Force should be strengthened by reinforcements from the South during the elections because unlike the South, the Northerners were not accustomed to elections and that many of the ethnic groups were very primitive and could be easily incited to violence.⁵⁶ He even recommended that special constables could be enlisted and trained for this purpose in Northern Nigeria and promised to suggest this to the Inspector-General of Police, Mr. C.S.K. Bovell, who was billed to be in Ibadan later in the month.

The Governor-General appreciated Chief Awolowo for his observations and suggestions and promised to raise them up with the Governor of the Northern Region. In the immediate, the responses of the Governor-General emphasised the fact that it was expected that there would be some 20,000 polling stations across the country and there were only 11,000 officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force.⁵⁷ Therefore, what could be done was to have strong striking forces of police at suitable centres, ready to go to deal with troubles everywhere and this would have to be arranged between the Provincial Authorities, the Regional Government and the Inspector-General.⁵⁸ The Governor-General also asked for Chief Awolowo's position on Dr Azikiwe's suggestion that issuance of police permits and the general control of electoral affairs and questions of law and order relating to the Federal elections be removed from the Native Authority Police and put under the Nigeria Police Force. Chief Awolowo's response was that "he would not wish such an arrangement in the Western Region and did not expect that the Northern Government would agree to it."⁵⁹ The issue of voters' registration also came up in the meeting between Chief Awolowo and the Governor-General where he (Chief Awolowo) held that in spite of the reports of NPC's bias of the Chief Federal Electoral Officer in the North, the Chairman of the Electoral Commission of Nigeria, Mr R.E. Wraith, should be congratulated on the way he had organised the exercise and the clear instructions he had given to all his assistants leading to a hitch-free exercise in the country, including Northern Nigeria.⁶⁰

However, it must be added that in his response to a letter from the Governor-General on his meeting with Chief Awolowo, the Governor of Western Region, Sir J.D. Rankine, raised some issues about Chief Awolowo's suggestions and explicitly showed his dislikes for his political styles.⁶¹ First, he showed his support for a joint declaration by all the Premiers on the subjects of freedom of

speech, criticism and campaigning and the cessation of “political” prosecutions but believed that Awolowo was also guilty of some of these abuses and that the occasion can be used by other Premiers to point accusing fingers at him too.⁶² Second, he acquiesced to the publicising of electoral regulations and suggested that the three Premiers be made to agree in principles to which points they wanted to emphasise. More importantly, Sir Rankine intimated the Governor-General that Chief Awolowo refused to see the Inspector-General of Police when he came to Ibadan as envisaged on April 28. Rankine’s actual words on these and the question of voters’ registration and police permits for political meetings are reflective of his perceptions of Chief Awolowo’s personality and attitude:

Under the heading of Awolowo’s point (3), you record the hope expressed by him that he would be able to have discussions with Bovell when Bovell came to Ibadan on the 28th April. You may like to know that in the event, although Bovell waited on him, Awolowo was unable or unwilling to see him. This incident well illustrates the disparity between statesmanlike utterances and promise and poor performance which characterise so much of Awolowo’s behaviour. One should not be unkind but it is, perhaps, significant that in the West, he does not want permits for meetings, etc., taken away from the Local Authorities and given to the Police. It is interesting to learn that Awolowo thought well of the way in which registration had been conducted in the North, though it is not easy to see how the fact of the relatively high numbers registered there can be a real source of gratification to the Action Group. However, it is well to have this praise on record, for Awolowo is quite capable of coming out later with a tirade about “NPC-rigged registration”.⁶³

This excerpt from Sir Rankine is a pointer to the fact that the colonial government, at all levels in Nigeria during this period, disliked the pragmatic posture of people like Chief Awolowo and political groups like the Action Group but had a soft spot for the conservative Northern nationalists.⁶⁴

The question to be asked here is: Why was the political situation in the North critical in the build-up to the general elections of 1959? The answer is not far-fetched but it is linked with two major facts. First, the elections would bring the party that would lead Nigeria to independence in 1960.⁶⁵ Second, the party that had the majority seats in the House of Representatives would present the Prime Minister of the Federation and form the Central Government. But to the colonial government, the 1959 General Elections were important because its

conduct would show to the world whether or not Nigeria was ripe for self-government.⁶⁶ Therefore, the main reason that made the Northern Region a hot cake in the whole scenario was that it alone had 174 of the total seats in the 312-seat House of Representatives with the two other Regions and Lagos Federal Territory sharing the remaining 138.⁶⁷ As a consequence, all political parties desired to make electoral profits and gains by winning seats in the Northern Region. The NPC which controlled the Region desired to hold on to its stronghold and did not make any serious effort to win elections outside the Region knowing full well that it could retain power at the centre by merely holding sway in the North.

On the other hand, the Southern political parties, particularly the NCNC and the Action Group, were bent on making political incursions into the North and breaking the yoke of NPC political hegemony. To do this, they sought alliance with the minority parties in the North with NCNC teaming up with NEPU of Aminu Kano which was popular in Kano, Kaduna and other places and the AG entering into alliance with the UMBC of J.S. Tarka which was gaining huge supporters in the Middle Belt area.⁶⁸ There was bound to be a problem and indeed, there were problems.

As the elections drew nearer, necessary machineries were put in place to ensure a hitch-free exercise while the political parties were engaged in hot and fierce political campaigns. The electioneering campaigns preceding the December 1959 General Elections in Nigeria were characterised by press abuses through newspapers owned by the political parties, open clashes, clamping down on oppositions, infringements on fundamental human rights and other unfortunate things. All these happened in spite of joint statement made by the Premiers of the three Regions on August 20, 1959 calling on their supporters to refrain from violence and appealing to the press for moderation in their reportage of the electoral activities.⁶⁹ Sadly enough, Sir Ralph Grey, the Deputy Governor-General of Nigeria, regretted that the elections campaigns were turning to “the unhappy methods of bygone days.”⁷⁰ The violent nature of the electioneering campaigns was so serious that Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General of the Federation, upon his return to Nigeria from a leave trip to England, lamented in his nationwide broadcast of November 2, 1959 that:

It was a great disappointment to me during my recent leave in England to hear of increasing hooliganism. Such reports damage Nigeria's good name abroad. Now that I am back in Nigeria, I find that there is developing such lawlessness

and violence as may well prejudice the elections themselves. This is no way for any country to behave on the eve of independence. We talk of freedom of speech and of fundamental human rights. But there will be no freedom of any kind unless hooliganism is stopped at once. Lorry-loads of hired thugs, car-loads of machetes, bottles and stones can do no good to any political party. Nor does violent abuse in the press by one party of another (sic). These earn only the disgust of decent citizens and breed contempt for Nigeria in the outside world.⁷¹

It was clear from this moment that the elections promised to be violent and that it would be a great test for the Police because law, order and security of lives and property were at stake. The Governor-General also indicated in this speech that if the political parties did not call their supporters to order to halt degeneration to anarchy, he would “have no choice but to instruct the police to act more vigorously, and indeed severely.”⁷²

The build-up to the December 12, 1959 General Elections was very serious and crises were reported in different parts of the country. For instance, in spite of his National Broadcast of November 2, in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on November 7 1959, the Governor-General noted:

As the polling day approaches, feelings and tension mount, and hardly a day passes without my receiving telegraphic complaint from some quarter or other about incidents which have occurred. These complaints are usually very exaggerated and seem to come equally from all the Regions and all parties, though there are some especially troubled areas. A minor summit of intensity was reached just before the Lagos Town Council Elections on 29th October, when a good deal of hooliganism took place. Lorry loads of party hired “thugs” armed with machetes and bottles are reported and a certain amount of violence occurred between NCNC and Action Group supporters. In the Warri area of the Mid-West, there have been some unseemly sentences by Customary Courts which appear to be biased (sic), and although the Eastern Region generally seems to be quieter than others, there was a recent incident at Nsukka where a lorry load of NCNC hired hooligans arrived in the middle of an AG “helicopter” meeting and did £1,000 worth of damage to the machine. In Sokoto, in late August, NA Police stood by while gangs of youths beat up an Action Group Secretary, and the NA Council proved very uncooperative when the Administration and Nigeria Police Officers tried to restore order.⁷³

Assessing the Performance of the Police in the Conduct of the 1959 General Elections

Premised on these high-profile political and electoral disturbances across the Federation, the Federal Government took certain steps to reposition the police for the challenges ahead of the First General Elections in Nigeria. One of the first major steps taken, was the holding of series of meetings such as Police Council meeting, meeting of Regional Government leaders, meeting of the Governor-General and the Inspector-General of Police, Mr C.S.K. Bovell, meeting of Governor-General and the General Officer Commanding Nigerian Military Forces, Major-General N.L. Foster and a host of other stakeholders' meetings.⁷⁴ All these were to work out the modalities for adequate policing of the country before, during and after the elections and to ensure hitch-free electoral processes to usher Nigeria into independent nationhood. Consequent upon these meetings, several important decisions were made after long deliberations by attendees towards the assurance of adequate security and maintenance of law and order at the elections. At one of such meetings, the Inspector-General of Police, Sir C.S.K. Bovell, was documented to have outlined police arrangements for the elections thus:

He would have about 8,000 Nigeria Police for disposition. However, there would be about 25,000 pollingbooths, so it was obviously not possible for police to be on duty at every booth. The police would therefore be concentrated at strategic centres, so that they could be moved quickly to any area where trouble broke out. However, much would depend upon good transport and communications, and help on that would be given by the Nigerian Military Forces. It was not intended that the Nigeria Military Forces should give more general assistance. As even if the Nigeria Military Forces, Native Authority and Local Government Police, and the Nigeria Police were all mobilised on polling day, they would still be insufficient to allow staff to be posted to each booth. He relied on receiving assistance from Native Authority and Local Government Police and also from Special Constables. There were about 2,000 Special Constables at the present time, but that number could be doubled by polling day.⁷⁵

Quite expectedly, deliberations at the meeting where this submission was made and subsequent meetings on the conduct of the elections *vis-a-vis* the provision

of security on the polling day considered some of the points raised in the Inspector-General's speech. At the end, some consensus resolutions were made.

First, it was agreed upon by all stakeholders in the elections that the Governor-General should direct the Northern and Regional Governments to place the Native Authorities and Local Government Councils' police forces under the coordinating authority of Inspector-General for the 15 days prior to polling day on the understanding that they would be deployed and used in accordance with the advice given by the Inspector-General and officers of the Nigeria Police Force.⁷⁶ It was specifically stated that this did not entail the surrender of control of the police forces by the Native Authorities and the Local Government Councils to the Nigeria Police Force.⁷⁷ Second, it was also approved that the elections be held on a Saturday to enable some police personnel who worked as Courts and Judges' Orderlies and who served as Police Prosecutors to be available for electoral duties. In relation to this, it was agreed that Regional Governors should suggest to the Honourable Chief Justice of the High Court of their Region not to have any sitting of the High Court or of Magistrate's courts on the day before the polling day and on the polling day itself.⁷⁸ This was to solve the problem of providing adequate trained forces to ensure orderly conduct of the elections. It must be mentioned here that this was one of the reasons that the Federal Electoral Commission turned down the request of the Seventh Day Adventist Christians in Nigeria to shift the elections from a Saturday to a normal working day to enable them observe the Sabbath.⁷⁹

Furthermore, it was also approved that the military's assistance in the election should be limited to four major areas. First, the military was to help in the prevention of disturbances during the period before, at and immediately after the polling day, by their presence at strategically sited points throughout the country, with transport to enable them to move speedily to any place where their active intervention was required. It was also required to render assistance to the police with wireless communications. Third, they were expected to possibly help with static guards or with the escort of sealed boxes containing ballot-papers. Finally, the military was expected to carry out their normal functions as a reserve to be called on in aid of the civil power in unlikely event of serious disturbances.⁸⁰

On its own part, the Nigeria Police Force also took some major steps in preparation for effective policing of the elections. For instance, from the month of August 1959, it mandated its Special Branch to do a thorough pre-election

monitoring of the activities of all the political parties and do regular daily, weekly and monthly reports to guide the Force in proper ways to prepare itself for the electoral challenges.⁸¹ In the Monthly Intelligence Report of the Nigeria Police Force Special Branch for the month of August/September 1959, certain electoral moves and strategies of the political parties were reported. For instance, it reported that the Action Group had been alleged to have received foreign financial support for its electoral campaign principally from some Israeli companies of which it had formal business partnership in its Regional Development Corporation.⁸² There was also a report of the charter of four helicopters by the Action Group to tour all the constituencies in Nigeria, particularly Northern Nigeria where a very heavy provisional programme had been arranged to visit every town of importance. For the purpose of its Northern tours, the Action Group was reported to have got the service of Patrick DOLAN & Associates Ltd., an Anglo-American firm of publicity agents which was on contract with the Western Regional Government.⁸³ These Monthly Intelligence Reports aided, to a large extent, the preparation and actions of the Nigeria Police Force towards the policing of the general elections.

Based on its pre-election situation studies and reports, the Nigeria Police Force deployed its officers and men to the three Regions for policing of the elections accordingly. According to the Inspector-General of the Nigeria Police Force, Mr C.S.K. Bovell, the general policy of deployment was such that "each Regional Commissioner had the maximum number of Nigeria police on duty for the period immediately prior to the Election Day and on Election Day itself."⁸⁴ Provisions were also made for reinforcements to the Regions from Lagos. Local Government and Native Authority Police Forces were employed in their own provinces, districts and townships. Some special constables were also enlisted for the Federal Election duties while some were enlisted to relieve the Nigeria Police from certain routine duties. These special constables were, however, not to be formed into Riots Units.⁸⁵

In general terms, mobile police patrols were to visit all polling stations regularly on the day of the elections. Some polling stations in areas which were considered volatile based on Police Intelligence Reports were to have police officers permanently posted on election duties. Furthermore, reserves of Police Mobile Riot Units were strategically stationed and readily available to deal with emergencies while it was instructed that after polling had been completed, police concentration should be on Counting Stations where police would be permanently posted to maintain law and order. Quite significantly, it was

ensured that all Police Operations Rooms were manned and the Police teleprinter circuits, H.F. and V.H.F. wireless networks, and all mobile wireless stations were working on a 24-hour watch.⁸⁶ Police distributions to the regions for the general elections were done on the basis of regional needs, territorial extent and size, pre-election police situation reports and political background. For instance, while the Northern Region had a total of 9,858 Nigerian Police officers, NA Police and Special Constables, the Western Region had only 5,699 and Lagos had 2,690 police officers on duty for the elections.⁸⁷ In all, according to the Inspector-General of Police, 5,000 officers and men of the Nigeria Police Force, 1,200 Local Administration Police, 6,000 Native Authority Police and 6,000 Special Constables were deployed for the elections across the country along with the military officers.⁸⁸

The elections were held as scheduled on Saturday June 12, 1959 in all the 25,400 polling stations throughout the country without any major disturbances.⁸⁹ The Northern Region had 9,600 polling units, the Eastern Region had 8,000, the Western Region had 7500, while Lagos had 300 polling units.⁹⁰ Even though the electioneering campaigns had been so violent and crises-ridden, the conduct of the elections on the polling date did not record major disturbances. Trevor Clark, while describing the 1959 elections, writes that: "The army troops who had been conducting local training exercises from canvas camps around the country, and the Nigeria police reinforcement to NA and local government forces, went home without being called in to quell disorders."⁹¹

Also, the announcements of the results were not met with any major political conflagrations as the results reflected greatly the strength of the political parties in the pre-election periods. The results were satisfactory to all, albeit there were reservations from some quarters about irregularities in the elections, particularly in the Northern Region where Native Authorities' officers were used as electoral officials.⁹² The colonial government was most satisfied with the results which gave NPC a lean majority which would convince the Northerners not only to support attainment of independence in 1960 but also to be a major party in the government at independence.⁹³ The table below shows the results of the 1959 General Elections.

Regional Distributions of Seats won by Major Parties in the 1959 Elections

S/N	PARTY	NORTH	WEST	EAST	LAGOS	TOTAL
1.	NPC	134				134
2.	NCNC/NEPU	8	21	58	2	89
3.	AG	25	33	14	1	73
4.	OTHERS	7	8	1	0	16
5.	TOTAL	174	62	73	3	312

Source: C.M. Ngou, *"The 1959 Elections and Formation of the Independence Government"* in P.P. Ekeh, et al. (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence: The First 25 Years, Vol. V: Politics and Constitutions* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1989)

The results tabled above shows that the "AG's helicopter offensive" campaigns paid off in its securing of 25 seats in the Northern Region and NCNC's alliance with the NEPU also got for it 8 seats from the NPC strongholds. But the NPC still got the highest number of votes in the elections which tipped it as the likely party to form the Federal Government. However, the overall results show that no political party, not even the NPC, had the majority vote capable of making it form the Federal Government alone. Therefore, a coalition government had to be formed between two of the leading three political parties. There were reports of moves from all the three main political parties to outwit one another but personal and group interests often clashed.⁹⁴ In the end, after a careful consideration of all political interests among the three political parties, the NPC entered into an alliance with the NCNC and a coalition government was formed by the two parties.

Consequently, Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of the NPC became the Prime Minister and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC became the Governor-General. Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the AG was left to become the Leader of Opposition at the Federal House of Representatives.⁹⁵ The nation was granted political independence within the British Commonwealth on October 1, 1960 but the 1959 elections had left a legacy of bitterness among the major political parties which affected inter-party and intra-party relationship in the post-independence era.⁹⁶

In essence, it can be categorically stated that the Police was central to the political transition of Nigeria from a colonial state to an independent sovereign. The political terrain was so tough that there were accusations of intimidation, bribery and hypocrisy, among other things, and different party leaders made

official complaints to the Federal Government about their treatments in the regions controlled by their opponents.⁹⁷ It is important to stress that the Native Authority Police in the Northern Region was alleged to be most culpable in the incidents of being used by the NPC government to harass, intimidate and molest the opposition parties' leaders and supporters.⁹⁸ Also, in the Western Region, accusing fingers were pointed at the Local Government Police as being biased against opponent of the Action Group but not in the manners in which the NA Police of the Northern Region openly dealt with NPC's opponents.⁹⁹ This has been attributed to the fact that Local Government Police of the Western Region was under the supervision and command of Nigeria Police Force officers.¹⁰⁰

Importantly, the use to which the police was put in the run up to the General Elections shows the defects of the retention of the control of the NA and LG Police in the hands of the Regional Government as well as the problems of multiple policing systems. More importantly, the fact that the Nigeria Police Force, in some places, particularly in Northern Nigeria, also showed partisanship in their conducts during the period indicated that the Police could not be totally immune from political control at any level as was popularly preached and held by the Colonial Government at the pre-independence Conferences.¹⁰¹ This is why Chief Awolowo had expressed at the 1958 Resumed Conference that if it was not trusted that the Police would not be influenced by political parties at the regional level, then it should not also be trusted that it would not come under political parties' influence at the federal level.¹⁰² But beyond the ordinary, the colonial government, based on its understanding of the Nigerian situation, felt that it was best for the Police to remain a Federal subject in Nigeria at independence, even though it might not be totally free from political influences.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the role of the Nigeria Police Force in the conduct of the first general elections in Nigeria held in December 1959. It examined the efforts of the colonial government in ensuring the insulation of the Police from the political control of the politicians in the immediate period after the London Constitutional Conferences of 1957 and 1958. It has been shown that the 1959 general election was the first litmus test for the much-touted insulation of the Police from the control of the politicians in the build-up to Nigeria's

independence in 1960. From the pre-election period to the election period and the immediate period after the elections, the police was subject of severe criticisms from the politicians in the three regions. The existence of the Native Authority Police and the Local Government Police in the Northern and Western Regions respectively and their use by the ruling elites in the regions complicated the policing of the elections for the Nigeria Police Force. In spite of the seeming difficulty of retaining the control of the Nigeria Police Force in the hands of the Federal Government and the existence of Native Authority and Local Government Police Forces in the Northern and Western Regions of Nigeria, the colonial government retained this structure till the attainment of Nigerian independence in October 1960. In conclusion, the results of the policing of the 1959 general elections show that the Nigerian police failed the test of neutrality and insulation from political control and influence.

Endnotes

¹ For a detailed analysis of the 1959 General Elections in Nigeria, see K.J.W. Post, *The Nigerian Federal Election of 1959* (London: Oxford University Press, 1963).

² Emmanuel C. Onyeozili, "Obstacles to Effective Policing in Nigeria" *African Journal of Criminology and Justice Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2005), p.23.

³ For some information about major and minor political parties in Nigeria during this period, see J.P. Mackintosh, *Nigerian Government and Politics* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1966).

⁴ British National Archives (BNA), CO 554/1532 File Number WAF 16/3/040 - Draft Amendments to the Constitution Order to Give Effect to the Recommendations in Paragraph 9 of the Report of the Resumed Conference.

⁵ BNA, UK, POLCO (59) 1st Meeting 13th January 1959. Minutes of a Meeting of the Police Council of the Federation of Nigeria held in the Council Chamber, Council of Ministers' Office, Lagos, on Wednesday, the 7th of January, 1959.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See BNA, POLCO (59)1: Memorandum by the Inspector-General of Police: Review by the Inspector-General of Police.

¹⁰ It needs to be recalled that at the inception of his tenure on September 3 1957, Prime Minister A.T. Balewa appointed some members of the NCNC and Action Group (AG) into the Federal Cabinet. Prominent among these were NCNC chieftains like Chief Festus Okotie Eboh who was made Minister of Labour and Welfare and Chief Kolawole Balogun who became the Minister of Research and Information. From the Action Group were Mr. Ayo Rosiji and Chief S.L. Akintola who were made Ministers of Health and Minister of Communication and Aviation respectively.

¹¹ See Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, *Mr. Prime Minister: A Selection of Speeches Made by Alhaji the Right Honourable Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, K.B.E., M.P., Prime Minister of the Federal Republic of Nigeria* (Apapa, Lagos: Nigerian National Press Ltd., 1964).

¹² *Ibid.* See also "Parliament of Nigeria Meets" *Daily Telegraph*, September 3, 1957.

¹³ “Editorial: A Drag on Nigeria” *Ghana Times*, September 24, 1958.

¹⁴ Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963). See also R.T. Akinyele, “Ethnicity, Religion and Politics in Nigeria” in R.A. Olaniran (ed.), *The Amalgamation and Its Enemies: An Interpretive History of Modern Nigeria* (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2003), pp.152-153.

¹⁵ The whole essence of the long debates and discussions on police control and use at the various pre-independence constitutional conferences was to ensure that police did not come under control and use of political parties.

¹⁶ Bola Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria, 1940-1979* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1995). See also Henry L. Bretton, *Power and Stability in Nigeria: The Politics of Decolonisation* (New York: Praeger, 1962), p.130

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ See J.I. Tseayo, “The Emirate System and Tiv Reaction to ‘Pagan’ Status in Northern Nigeria” in Gavin Williams (ed.), *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London: Rex Collings Ltd., 1976), pp.76-89. See also, Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman*, pp.645-646.

¹⁹ James O. Ojiako, *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow....* (Onitsha: Africana Educational Publishers Ltd., 1981) pp.75-76.

²⁰ Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria*, p.140.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp.139-142.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Ojiako, *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow...* p. 73-76.

²⁴ Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria*, p.142.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.145

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ For details on how NCNC gained supports and membership in Yoruba cities as a result of communal crises and personality clashes between leaders of Action Group, see Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria*, pp.156-165.

²⁹ For some details on this, see Kemi Rotimi, *The Police in a Federal State* (Ibadan: College Press, 2001), pp.129-168.

³⁰ O.E. Udofia, “Nigerian Political Parties: Their Role in Modernizing the Political System, 1920-1966” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 4 (1981), pp.435-447

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria*, p.166.

³³ *Ibid.* See also J.I. Tseayo, “The Emirate System and Tiv Reaction to ‘Pagan’ Status in Northern Nigeria”, pp.85-89.

³⁴ For a detailed analysis of the NPC’s Northernisation Policy, see I.O. Albert, “Federalism, Inter-Ethnic Conflicts and the Northernisation Policy of the 1950s and 1960s” in Kunle Amuwo, et al. (eds.), *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum and IFRA, 1998).

³⁵ Ige, *People, Politics and Politicians of Nigeria*, p.167

³⁶ For details, see Rotimi, *The Police in a Federal State*.

³⁷ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 – Note of a Conversation with Dr. Azikiwe on 3rd April 1959, p.1 (Ref.G.236/II/397).

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ For a list of the Governors of Nigerian Regions before independence, see Daily Times, *The Nigeria Year Book, 1965* (Lagos: Times Press Ltd, 1965), pp.15-16

⁴⁶ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 - Secret and Personal Letter from Governor of Northern Region, Sir G.W. Bell to Governor-General, Sir James Robertson (Ref. 568/36).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number WAF 103/3/01 - Secret and Personal Letter from Governor of Northern Region, Sir G.W. Bell to Governor-General, Sir James Robertson.

⁵⁰ Rotimi, *The Police in a Federal State*, p.131. See also Alkasum Abba, *The Northern Elements Progressive Union and the Politics of Radical Nationalism in Nigeria, 1938-1960*. (Zaria: The Abdullahi Smith Centre for Historical Research, 2007).

⁵¹ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 - Secret and Personal Letter from Governor of Western Region, Sir J.D. Rankine to Governor-General, Sir James Robertson, dated April 13, 1959 (Ref. B22/9).

⁵² See BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 – Note on a Talk with Chief Awolowo, Premier of the Western Region, at Ibadan on April 24, 1959 (Ref. 257/II/246).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.* On this point, the Governor-General promised that this would be discussed at the meeting between him and all the Premiers on May 25 and 26, 1959.

⁵⁶ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 - Note on a Talk with Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the Western Region, on April 24, 1959 (Ref. 257/II/246).

⁵⁷ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 - Note on a Talk with Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the Western Region, on April 24, 1959 (Ref. 257/II/246).

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ See BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number 103/3/01 – Secret and Personal Letter from Governor of Western Region, Sir J.D. Rankine, to Governor-General of the Federation, Sir James Robertson, dated May 14, 1959 (Ref. B.21/8).

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ See Obafemi Awolowo, *My March through Prison* (Ibadan: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1985), pp.205-210; P. Whitaker, “The Western Region of Nigeria, May 1956” in W.J. Mackenzie and K. Robinson (eds.), *Five Elections in Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) pp.65-66 and Rotimi, *The Police in a Federal State*, p.135.

⁶⁵ B.J. Dudley, *Instability and Political Order: Politics and Crisis in Nigeria* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1973), p.59

⁶⁶ See BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Secret and Personal Letter from Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General of Nigeria to Sir Hilton Poynton of the Colonial Office, London, dated November 25, 1959.

⁶⁷ The North alone had greater number of seats possessed by the Western and Eastern Region and those of Lagos. The Eastern Region had 73, the Western Region had 62 and Lagos had 3. See Eghosa E. Osaghae, *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 1998), pp. 32-34. This obvious imbalanced allocation of seats at the Federal House of Representatives which gave the Northern Region greater number of seats more than Western and Eastern Regions combined had been a point of criticisms from the AG and the NCNC from inception without any amendment. See BNA, CO 554/1156 File Number WAF 236/237/01 – Nigerian Constitutional Talks: Minute of the 5th Meeting held in the Minister of State's Room at 4.30 p.m. on Friday, 7th October, 1955.

⁶⁸ John O. Mackintosh, *Nigerian Government and Politics* (Evanston: North Western University Press, 1966). See also, Alkasum Abba, *The Northern Elements Progressive Union and the Politics of Radical Nationalism in Nigeria, 1938-1960*.

⁶⁹ BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Joint Statement of Political Leaders on Conduct of Federal Elections made on August 20, 1959. See also “Governor Warns on Election Violence” *Scotsman*, November 5, 1959.

⁷⁰ “Nigeria Criticisms” *Daily Telegraph*, October 29, 1959.

⁷¹ BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number 103/3/01 – Text of Address to the Nation Broadcast by the Governor General of the Federation over the N.B.C. Network on Monday Evening, November 2, 1959, p.1. The press war became a point of concern because virtually all the political parties during this period had one or more Newspaper organ through which printed attacks were made against other political parties. Some of these include the *Daily Service* and *Tribune* by the Action Group, the *West African Pilot* and *The Comet* by the NCNC and so on. See BNA, CO 554/1030 File Number WAF 33/3/01 – Extract from Secret and Personal Despatch No. 2 dated 19th January 1955 from Western Region of Nigeria.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.2

⁷³ BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Letter from the Governor-General of the Federation of Nigeria to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated November 7, 1959 (Ref. G. 278).

⁷⁴ For some of these strategic meetings in preparation for the 1959 General Elections, see BNA, UK, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Political Situation and the Reorganisation of the Federal Government: Federation of Nigeria, 1957-1959.

⁷⁵ BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Report of Meeting of Governor-General, Prime Minister and Regional Premiers with the Inspector-General of Police, dated August 6, 1959.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Letter from the Governor General of the Federation of Nigeria to Secretary of State for the Colonies, dated November 29, 1959, p.3.

⁷⁹ See BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Federal Electoral Commission Speaks on Demands of Seventh Day Adventists ((Ref. F.1072).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ The Special Branch first appeared as the ‘Intelligence Section of the CID’ in the 1930s to acquire and develop intelligence usually of political nature and conduct investigations to protect the State from perceived political threats. See Anthony Clayton, “The Thin Blue Line: Studies in Law Enforcement in Late Colonial Africa” (Oxford Development Records Project, No. 1, 1985), p.54.

⁸² BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 193/3/01 – The Nigeria Police Special Branch Monthly Intelligence Report, August-September, 1959 (Ref. R.34/50), p.1

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.2

⁸⁴ BNA, CO 554/2123 File Number WAF 193/3/01- Force Instruction No. 3 on Disposition of Forces from the Office of the Inspector-General of Nigeria Police Force, dated November 5, 1959 (Ref. No. 3. 2003./1/166)

⁸⁵ *Ibid.* It needs to be recalled that Chief Awolowo had made similar suggestion for enlistment of Special Constables for the elections in his meeting with the Governor-General on April 24, 1959.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ Ojiako, *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and.....* p.73-74.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p.74

⁹¹ Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman*, p.405.

⁹² BNA, CO 554/2123, File Number WAF 103/3/01 – Secret and Personal Letter from Sir James Robertson, the Governor-General of Nigeria to Sir Hilton Poynton of the Colonial Office, London, dated November 25, 1959.

⁹³ See I.M. Okonjo, *British Administration in Nigeria, 1900-1950* (New York: NOK Publishers, 1974).

⁹⁴ See the perspectives of the NPC in these coalition moves as documented by the biographer of Tafawa Balewa in Trevor Clark, *A Right Honourable Gentleman*, pp.396-410.

⁹⁵ Olakunle A. Lawal “Decolonization and After: Britain’s Legacies on the Eve of Nigeria’s Independence” in Segun Johnson (ed.), *Readings in Selected Nigerian Problems* (Lagos: Okanlawon Publishers, 1990), pp. 9-26.

⁹⁶ Femi Otubanjo, “National Security” in T.N. Tamuno and J.A. Atanda (eds.), *Nigeria since Independence: The First 25 Years, Vol. IV: Government and Public Policy* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1989), p.49.

⁹⁷ Ojiako, *Nigeria: Yesterday, Today and....*, pp.73-74.

⁹⁸ See NAK. SNP 15/ACC.349 – Letter from Acting Resident of Kano Province to Governor of Northern Region July 1951. See also Special Branch Intelligence Summary No. 133 of July 28, 1951.

⁹⁹ Dr. Azikiwe attested to the fact that instances of using the Local Government to intimidate political opponents were milder in the Western Region compared to the situation in the Northern Region. See BNA, UK, CO 554/2123, File Number 103/3/01 – Note of a Conversation with Dr. Azikiwe on 3rd April 1959, p.1 (Ref.G.236/II/397).

¹⁰⁰ Rotimi, *The Police in a Federal State*.

¹⁰¹ The basic guiding principle for the departing British colonial government was that, as it was the case in the United Kingdom, the police should remain free of political control at any governmental level and they endeavoured to ensure that this was the situation in an independent Nigeria. See BNA, UK, CO 554/570 File Number WAF 166/3/01 – Letter from Philip Allen of the Home Office to Gorell Barnes of the Colonial Office, dated August 8, 1953. But the prevalent situation social, economic and political situations in Nigeria were radically different from those of the United Kingdom and this practically made it difficult for this to be achieved in Nigeria.

¹⁰² See BNA, CO 554/1532 File Number WAF 16/3/040 - Record of Plenary Meeting of the resumed 1958 Conference on the Police held on October 1, 1958 in London.

Stillbirth or Rebirth? Interrogating Biafran Agitations in Contemporary Nigeria

Mayowa Christopher Adeyeye

Abstract

Pro-Biafran agitations have become one of the major concerns of statecraft and nation-building in contemporary Nigeria. After the 1967 Aburi Accord, it became obvious that the secession of Eastern Nigeria had been conceived. The fault lines of the Aburi Accord, inverse interpretations, eventual disregard for the agreement and the pogrom heralded the birth of the agitations for Biafra. The end of the Civil War in 1970, however, signalled the premature death, perhaps stillbirth, of the Biafran agenda. This paper examines the nexus between the 1967 Biafran struggle and the resurgent separatist agenda of the postwar agitations of MASSOB and IPOB. Though deluge of scholarly works have emerged on the Biafran conflict, scanty attention has been paid to the nexus between the current struggles of IPOB and the 1967 War. This paper is, therefore, situated within the context of how postwar strategies of reconstruction, rehabilitation and reconciliation failed to address the concerns of the Igbos, which revived the 1967 agitations in this contemporary period. The paper interrogates the relevance of the neo-Biafran struggles of the IPOB to the myriad of socio-economic, political and security challenges facing the Nigerian state since the 1970 ceasefire. The foregoing is examined through the lens of the Social Identity Theory (SIT) which illuminates the agitations of the Igbo ethnic group, giving fillip to the outbreak of conflict based on the failure of other powerful groups to fairly and equitably distribute resources, address poverty, socio-economic and political inequalities. The paper concludes that the current Biafran agitation is a rebirth of the 1967 debacles.

Keywords: Biafra, conflict, IPOB, MASSOB, rebirth.

Introduction

After six decades of independence, Nigeria would appear to be more divided than ever. The Biafran agitations through the Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) have threatened the very foundation of the nation. Other separatist groups, such as, the Jama-atu Ahlis Sunna-Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad (JASDJ), popularly known as Boko Haram, the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), the Niger Delta militants and the Yoruba Nation agitators have equally reared their ugly heads. The implication is that the country is yet to be truly united. Discussing the multifarious nature of the country, Ade Ajayi and Alagoa have noted that Nigeria is a fusion of several ancient societies. The authors aver that diverse entities, kingdoms, chiefdoms, cities and communities, such as, the Kanem-Bornu, Oyo Empire, Hausa city states, the Benin and Ife kingdoms, Kwararafa Empire and other acephalous communities had existed within contiguous boundaries.¹

The 1914 amalgamation did not neatly result in the fusion of either the peoples or their institutions. The kingdoms, the chiefdoms, the communities and cities retained their distinct identities. This disparity manifested when, for instance, a Legislative Council was established in 1922 but could not, and did not, legislate for the North. Rather, the Governor-General in Lagos legislated for the North by means of Proclamations. This contradiction was obvious in the statement of Sir Ahmadu Bello in his book *My Life*, where he claimed that Lugard's amalgamation was not popular with the North.² Also, Pa Obafemi Awolowo, in his book *Path to Nigeria's Freedom* published in 1947, opines that Nigeria is not a nation but a mere geographical expression. He notes that there are no "Nigerians" in the same sense that there are "English" or "Welsh" or "French".³ In 1953, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa corroborated this assertion in his speech in the Legislative Council stating that since the amalgamation of 1914, Nigeria had existed as one country only on paper, citing obvious differences in religion, customs, traditions, tribes, languages and historical backgrounds.⁴ Adding to this view was another northern leader, Isa Keita, who described Nigeria as "the mistake of 1914" since the essence of the amalgamation was for economic exploitation and administrative convenience as the First World War (1914–1918) drew nearer.

A rich literature on the Nigerian Civil War has surfaced. Most writers on this subject have focused more on the causes, course, as well as the socio-political

and economic impacts of the War. Scanty attention has, however, been paid to the nexus between the 1967 Biafran agitation and contemporary discontents of the MASSOB and the IPOB. Ajibola's *Nigerian Civil War: The Harbinger of Insecurity*⁵ focuses on the Nigerian Civil War from the lens of the economic, ethnic, cultural and religious disparities as well as socio-political contradictions inherent in the 1914 merger. The author states that one major fallout of the War was the unabated marginalisation of the Igbo serving as a harbinger or springboard of insecurity and the activities of the MASSOB.⁶ However, Ajibola does not deeply focus on the nexus between the agitations leading to the Biafran War and the contemporary agitations of the Nnamdi Kanu-led IPOB, which have ushered in a new wave of disunity in the country and the belligerent situations only outweighed by the 1967–1970 hostilities. The current paper fills this gap by interrogating the nexus between Ojukwu's Biafranism, MASSOB's and IPOB's Biafranisation.

Conceptual Analysis and Prelude to the War

When Lt Colonel Ojukwu fled to Ivory Coast in 1970, it was construed that the conception of Biafra had become a stillbirth or simply put, dead on arrival. However, the resurgence of the agitation for Biafra through MASSOB and IPOB would appear to be a rebirth of the agenda. This is the aspect of the agitations the current paper interrogates. This paper employs the Social Identity Theory (SIT), which illuminates the agitations of the Igbo ethnic group, giving fillip to the outbreak of conflict based on the failure of other powerful groups to fairly and equitably distribute resources, and address poverty, socio-economic and political inequalities. The SIT was propounded by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in 1979 premised upon the proposition that in-group individuals define their own identities in relations to the out-group identities to protect and bolster their own identities and stakes in a mutually shared environment. In this regard, Biafranism was regarded as a construction of identity from the Nigerian entity giving distinction to the Igbo group to seek better bargain in the scheme of things.⁷

The honeymoon of Nigeria's independence was brief. The nationalists were still basking in the euphoria of the liquidation of colonial rule when series of cataclysmic events struck, leaving lasting impacts on the process of nation-building and development. The coup of January 15, 1966 frontally assaulted the unity of the country as it was construed to be ethnically motivated.⁸ The

Prime Minister of Northern Nigerian origin, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, was abducted and executed in Lagos. In Kaduna, the Premier of Northern Region and Sardauna of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello was murdered by a “bloodthirsty” group led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. In Ibadan, the Premier of the Western Region, Chief Ladoke Akintola was killed as well as the Minister of Finance, Festus Okotie-Eboh (of Itshekiri origin). Several senior army officers were equally murdered in a putsch that wore ethnic colouration. The fragile unity of the country was violently bruised and it snowballed into a counter-coup which ushered in the Civil War of 1967–1970.⁹

Even though the Nigerian Civil War ended in 1970, the smoke of the internecine crisis smoulders on in contemporary political landscape. The unity of the country was further threatened by the activities of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) which sprang up in 1999 after the transition to civil rule from the prolonged military era. On the ashes of the MASSOB’s “docility” also rose another violent Biafran secessionist group known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) founded in 2012 by a British Nigerian political activist, Nnamdi Kanu and Uche Mefor. This group was formed to restore the defunct Republic of Biafra. The group predicated its struggles on the ideologies of Biafran separatism, Igbo nationalism and nativism.¹⁰ Very pertinent, therefore, is an examination of the situations in the period preceding the Civil War and an understanding of the dynamics of fractured unity, occasioned by the Civil War. Arguably, the current agitations of the MASSOB and IPOB are a rebirth of the 1967 crisis led by Lt Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu given that the conditions that galvanised the Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria into conflict in 1967 and the deep-seated animosity among the various ethnic groups are still very much alive and have contributed immensely to the challenges of nation-building in contemporary Nigeria.

Aburi Accord, Biafran War and Matters Arising

The Aburi meeting was necessitated by various contradictions embedded in the Nigerian project. The seed of discord had been propagated in 1946 when the country was divided into three administrative units by Governor Arthur Richard. The northern region was larger than the combined sizes of the western and eastern regions.¹¹ The northern region was dominant in Northern People’s Congress (NPC), the Western Region and the Yoruba were predominant in

Action Group (AG), while the Igbo in the eastern region took NCNC. As of then, the structural imbalance had been clear.¹² The 1964 elections aggravated the existing disunity in the country as the polls were alleged to have been marred with massive rigging skewed in favour of the northern region. When Balewa called on President Nnamdi Azikiwe to reappoint him Prime Minister and form government, the President used his veto and there was a period of interregnum until compromise was reached with Azikiwe's NCNC as junior partner in the renewed coalition. The Action Group fell back into opposition. Similar conditions manifested in the 1965 elections where the Chief Ladoke Akintola-led Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) was rigged to power leading to the breakdown of law and order, massive chaos, kidnapping of opposition figures, civil disturbances and high proportion of violence.¹³

The January 15, 1966 coup took place under the pretext of the foregoing. This was greeted with internal dissension and bickering, opening the old ethnic wounds on the suspicion of Igbo domination. Worse still, the January coup conspirators were not tried for murder and mutiny. Rather they were treated like heroes in prison. Amidst all these, Ironsi promulgated Decree 34 of May 24, 1966 which was intended to unify the country under a unitary system of government¹⁴ without addressing the obvious lopsidedness in the Federal Civil Service and heads of Corporations.

The charge against the East was that they dominated the affairs of the country. This further fuelled the opposition against Decree No. 34, leading to the massacre of the Easterners in the North. The northern populace staged operation *araba*, meaning "let us part ways", which found expression in the July, 1966 counter coup when the northern military elements unleashed mayhem on the Igbos in the North and murdered General Aguiyi Ironsi with his host, Adekunle Fajuyi in Ibadan.¹⁵

General Yakubu Gowon, the then military Head of State, reversed his secessionist stance and quickly reversed Decree No. 34 setting the country on a centrifugal trajectory. This led to an upsurge of renewed violence against the Igbo in the North called the pogrom. Thousands of Easterners were killed in the mob actions. Igbo traders, artisans, clerks and labourers living in the North were affected by the pogrom while over one million abandoned their belongings and fled to the East. An account given by Ojukwu himself gave the estimated figure of the dead Igbo people as 50,000.¹⁶ The stalemate which followed led to the convoking of Aburi meeting between 4 and 5 January, 1967 in Ghana. The

main decisions at Aburi among others were that all the military leaders should solemnly renounce the use of force as a means of settling the problems confronting the country and re-affirm their faith in dialogue and negotiations as the only way of resolving the brewing conflict and avoiding escalation into open confrontation. Specifically, the Army should be governed by the Supreme Military Council under the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Government. Area Commands corresponding to existing regions under Area Commanders should be created with Military Governors having control over the Area Command within their jurisdiction to foster internal security.

In accordance with the decision of August 9, 1966, army personnel of Northern Nigeria should return to the North. All decrees or provisions of decrees passed since 15 January, 1966, which detracted from the previous powers and provisions of Regional Governments should be repealed with a view to promoting mutual confidence. Displaced civil servants and corporation staff should be paid their full salaries until 31st March, 1967, provided they have not secured alternative employment. The Military Governors of the East, West and Mid-West should send representatives (Police Commissioners) to meet and discuss the problems of recovery of property left behind by displaced persons.¹⁷

However, the flagrant breach of the Aburi Accord by the Gowon government and seemingly irreconcilable differences jeopardised the return to normalcy in the country. The Aburi Accord in terms of political and military implications amounted to the fact that the country should be governed as a confederation. The inverse interpretation of the Aburi Accord by the Permanent Secretaries and Civil Servants made them to advise the Military Head of State not to implement the agreement. The promulgation of Decree No. 8 by General Yakubu Gowon did not repeal other decrees in the pre-January 15, 1966 military takeover in which confederate arrangement would be pronounced. The proposed arrangement was meant to restore the region. The draft Decree No. 8 was a complete departure from what happened in Aburi and it was rejected by both the Western and Eastern Military Governors.

The second draft was not in consonance with the agreement reached in Benin on the 17th and 18th of January, 1967. Objection to this led to the convoking of a meeting of the Supreme Military Council in Benin on the 10th of March, 1967. Lt Col. Ojukwu refused to attend the meeting because first, the Northern troops were still present in the West and Lagos; second, the mutual trust and

confidence generated at Aburi had been eroded; and lastly, he, Ojukwu, was bent on passing the decree to repeal unitary arrangement.¹⁸

The meeting was held and Decree No. 8 was approved without having bearing with or any reference to the Aburi Accord. Lt Col. Ojukwu and the Eastern Nigeria objected to and rejected the Decree. Regardless of this, the Decree was officially published on the 19th of March, 1967, giving the Head of State veto power over the concurrence of the Military Governor, and with the Head of State having powers to declare State of Emergency on any Region against the wishes of the Governor. This had a semblance of unitary federation. Lt Col. Ojukwu declared the Decree as a Northern instrument to control and subjugate the South. He rejected the leadership of Gowon and wanted the Supreme Military Council to meet and select the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces and Head of the Federal Military Council. He stood on Aburi resolutions and threatened that if by March 31st 1967, there was no resolution, he would be left with no option but to unilaterally implement the agreement.¹⁹ This was the background that led to the declaration of the Biafran War in 1967.

Post-War Dynamics and Nation-Building

Two days before Biafran soldiers formally surrendered in January, 1970, Lt Col. Ojukwu fled into exile in Cote d'Ivoire declaring that "whilst I live, Biafra lives." It is within this context that one may construe the resurgence of agitation for Biafra in contemporary period as a rebirth of the Lt Col. Ojukwu's agitation. By the end of the War in 1970, there were clear indications that the country had not been well-knit. At the cessation of hostilities and the announcement of unconditional surrender of the Biafran fighters on 12 January, 1970, world leaders expressed concern on the post-war situation. The Pope, for instance, warned against renewed genocide against the Igbo people, while the French President offered humanitarian assistance to the Federal Government of Nigeria, which was rejected by General Gowon because of France's roles in the War. President Richard Nixon of the United States and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson also debated the attendant food crises and expressed deep concerns about the post-war situation.²⁰

To be sure, the "no victor, no vanquished" mantra and the 3Rs were failed efforts towards nation-building. For instance, majority of those who fought in the War on the side of Biafra were dismissed and barred from being employed

by any corporation. Some of them remained in detention until the ouster of General Gowon in 1975. It took President Olusegun Obasanjo to restore their ranks and converted their dismissals to retirement in the year 2000. The Igbo were treated as foreign nationals in their country of birth. The programme of reconstruction and reintegration of the Igbo people into the Nigerian State was an attempt to address the contested issues that led to the War and forestall the recurrence of the national carnage. However, it appeared that the process was later to encompass demeaning and demobilising the Igbo in such a way that they would not be capable of raising their voices in a future time. The social and economic infrastructures of the Igbo land were put on a backward trajectory with the economy in ruins and devastation. Education was affected as most schools had been razed and structures devastated. Most of the 3,750 primary schools and 297 post-primary schools operating in the East-Central State in the pre-War years were in total state of disrepair.²¹ UNICEF and UNESCO undertook to repair a good number of the schools. 858 school buildings at an estimated cost of 200,000 pounds were repaired by UNESCO/UNICEF, and within a year after the cessation of hostilities, 3,596 primary schools 209 grammar schools, 24 commercial schools and 9 trade schools had resumed operation.²² It would be noted that several other schools were built through self-help and the determination of the Igbo people for a “happy survival.” This was followed by the neglect of the public schools in spite of the Public Education Edict of 1970 that transferred schools in the Eastern region from the “collaborative” foreign missionaries to the government of the East-Central State headed by Ukpabi Asika.²³

After the War, marginalisation of the Igbo was rife and anti-Igbo sentiment grew. This was a negation of the “no victor, no vanquished” mantra of General Gowon. The Public Officers (Special Provision) Decree No. 46 of 1970, the detention of war veterans, the Abandoned Property Issues, the Indigenisation Decree of 1972, revenue allocation formula the banking decree, ban on importation of second-hand commodities, lack of federal presence, the renaming of Bight of Biafra to Bight of Bonny and the state creation exercise were all skewed against the Igbo people.²⁴ *The London Daily Telegraph* in its editorial warned General Gowon to be magnanimous in victory and take a cue from General Ulysses S. Grant of the United States who treated the secessionist South with respect and affection. The paper warned that anything otherwise would make the country uninhabitable for the oppressed and the oppressors. It advised the Federal Government to introduce policies that would help heal the

wound of the War. Traders should be able to move freely from State to State and a workable balance of power should be institutionalised.²⁵ In his address to the nation after the War, General Gowon stated that:

We must recommence at once, in greater earnest, the task of healing the nation's wounds. We have at various times repeated our desire for reconciliation in full equality, once the secessionists regime abandon secession. I solemnly repeat our guarantee of a general amnesty for those misled into rebellion. We guarantee the personal safety of everyone, who submitted to the Federal Authority. We guarantee the security of life and property of all citizens in all parts of Nigeria and equality in political rights. We also guarantee the rights of every Nigerian to reside and work wherever he chooses in the Federation, as equal citizens of one united country.... There is no question of second-class citizenship in Nigeria.²⁶

The Public Officers (Special Provisions) Decree no. 46 of 1970, ran contrary to the guarantee of a "general amnesty" promised by the Federal Government. The Decree selectively victimised the Igbo people working in the civil service, corporations and the Nigerian Military. The Decree provided summary dismissal, removal or compulsory retirement for public officers found to be involved in any hostile or subversive act or rebellion against any of the governments in the federation. Such officer must have been found counselling, aiding, abetting, or where it is found that the continued employment of an officer was such that was inimical to the public interest. The Igbo in government were affected and this sowed a renewed seed of dissension and acrimony. For instance, Mr Cyprian Ekwensi, a well-known author and pre-Civil War Director of the Federal Information Services turned to a petty trader dealing in plastic dolls, glass tumbler and water jugs after the end of the War. Chief Jim Nwobodo could not be re-engaged by Shell BP because it was difficult to employ Igbo people after the war as a result of the discriminatory decree.²⁷

The state creation exercise of 1967 balkanised the eastern region into East-Central (which housed the bulk of Igboland), Southeastern and Rivers States (comprising mainly of non-Igbo easterners). The abandoned properties of the Southeastern and Rivers States were not allowed to be reclaimed by the Igbo.²⁸ The Federal government maintained ambivalent stands on the issue of abandoned property. Property abandoned in Lagos and Mid-Western States were handed over back to the Igbo while the government was mute on the neighbouring Rivers and Southeastern States. In Lagos, about 250,000 pounds

was realised from over 3,000 properties managed by the State's Abandoned Properties Committee between December, 1968 and the end of the hostilities in January, 1970.²⁹ The then Governor of Lagos, Col. Mobolaji Johnson, gave succour to the Igbo by handing over more 340 abandoned properties to their owners and advised those who sold theirs at give-away prices before the War to seek legal redress. This gave benevolence to the Igbo who trooped more to Lagos than Port Harcourt. In the Mid-Western State, 400 Igbo people regained their properties at Agbor after showing proofs of ownership to the State's Reconstruction and Rehabilitation Committee.³⁰ Forty-two houses abandoned in parts of the Northcentral State in 1966 were returned to their owners by the State's Abandoned Property Committee. Twenty-Seven of the houses were located in Kaduna City, seven in Katsina and Daura, while eight were in Zaria.³¹

The renaming of Bight of Biafra to Bight of Bonny was described as an attempt to erase the memory of Biafra. A commentator, Mr Agwu Okpanku, had described the situation as "Killing Biafra", but argued that there was a possibility of resurrection of Biafra if injustices persist in Nigeria. He contended that Biafra as an active physical rebellion was dead; it died in 1970. But there is always Biafra. In other words, any group of Nigerians whether defined ethnically or in terms of their social class or profession or their geographical origin would revolt if they felt mistreated by their country.³² However, the columnist, Agwu Okpanku died on December 21, 1981 under mysterious circumstances after being allegedly knocked down by a train at Umuahia main railway station with his body intact.³³

Post-War Economic Marginalisation of the Igbo

The economic strangulation of the "Biafran Republic" in the inter-war years saw to the dismantling of the secessionist agenda. The sudden change in the country's currency to naira from the British Pounds stifled foreign exchange and international businesses. The seaports were blockaded to prevent importation of arms. This was responsible for the creation of states which excluded the Biafrans from territorial waters. The Banking Obligation (Eastern State) Decree 1970 cancelled all bank deposits operated in the old Eastern region apart from Calabar between May 31, 1967 and January 12, 1970. Calabar was exempted because it was the first town to be occupied by the federal forces in the early period of the War. The decree was punitive and could

not be challenged in the law court.³⁴ Chief Obafemi Awolowo was accused of initiating and implementing this obnoxious decree against the Igbo. This idea was dubbed de-Biafranisation. This included the declaration of the Biafran currency illegal and compelling the Igbo to deposit their currencies to the Central Bank of Nigeria at a point majority of the Igbo were in possession of the Biafra currency only. The Igbo who deposited their old Biafran Currency got a paltry sum of 20 pounds each regardless of the amount deposited. This sowed the seed of mutual suspicion and alienation. Most Igbo were demoralised, financially wrecked and with uncertain future.³⁵ Businesses suffered and recovery of the Igbo economy was prolonged. Businessmen could not access their funds to re-start their businesses while those who could not raise necessary fund resorted to apprenticeship with their already established colleagues. Commercial activities were crippled in hitherto large cities like Umuahia, Abakaliki, Onitsha, Aba, Enugu, etc.³⁶ Agriculture was devastated in places like Afikpo and Mbaise Divisions leading to abandonment and neglect. The desperation to start up again pushed the Igbo to fend for themselves. There was mass unemployment in Igboland while many others were driven into petty crime and informal living.

State Creation and Biafran Agitation for Restructuring and Referendum

State creation was one of the major sources of Biafran agitations. By May 27, 1967, the then military administration of Lt Col. Yakubu Gowon balkanised the country into 12 states aimed at weakening the powers of Lt Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu and addressing minority issues. This would empower the ethnic minorities in the Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers (COR) parts of the Eastern Region and make secession very less successful.³⁷ The state creation exercise carved out six states from the North while six states were equally created from the South. Lagos and Rivers States were created to weaken the powers of Lt Col. Ojukwu while other states such as Kwara, Benue-Plateau and Midwestern states were created to address the minority issues. The 1967 state creation exercise condemned the Igbo to a landlocked region without access to port and with some people of eastern origin severed to other regions. Subsequent state creation exercise did not address this lopsidedness.

The fear of minority domination and ethnic agitations were central to the state creation exercise of 1967 and 1976. The Irikefe Panel set up by General Muritala was tasked to look beyond the question of minority agitation but for

economic development in the post-war years. The state creation exercise basically unbundled the country and tuned to the centrifugal forces of regionalism.³⁸ By 1987, during the Ibrahim Babangida's military era, two more states, namely Katsina and Akwa Ibom, were created to tally the states to 21. It was an era in which rapid grassroots development was rather prioritised over finding solutions to the issues of ethnic minorities.³⁹

In 1991, the military administration of Ibrahim Babangida added nine new states to the existing autonomous states. They included, Osun, Abia, Anambra, Kebbi, Taraba, Jigawa, Yobe, Kogi and Delta. The creation of Anambra and Abia was in the quest for the partitioning of monocultural entities to engender development for neglected areas. The 1996 state creation exercise by General Sani Abacha reconfigured the entire country into six geo-political zones and created a state each from the zones. The new states created were Ekiti from the Southwest, Ebonyi from the Southeast, Gombe from the Northeast, Nasarawa from the Northcentral, Bayelsa from the South-south, and Zamfara from the Northwest. While the Northwest geo-political zone comprised seven states and 186 local government areas, the Southeast comprised five landlocked states (without access to international trades) and 95 local government areas. The Southwest had six states with 137 local government areas, the South-south which was hitherto within the enclave of Eastern region under the control of the Igbo, had 6 states, 122 local government areas with open access to the sea and international trade. It was equally the resident of over 70 per cent of Nigeria's revenue in oil. The Northeast had six states and 112 local government areas, the Northcentral had six states with 121 local government areas.⁴⁰

It is clear from the foregoing that state creation exercise was skewed against the Igbo. What makes it an injustice was the creation of states in Igboland whereby all the Igbo states were landlocked and cut off from the major resource-rich areas of Rivers and Delta States in spite of the high number of Igbo people living there. However, on the basis of equality and equity, the Southeastern states could have been increased to six too.⁴¹ Agitation for resource control and restructuring was born out of the perceived injustice, marginalisation and deprivation suffered by the minority in-groups in the hands of the majority out-groups.⁴²

Return of Ojukwu and Prelude to Neo-Biafran Agitations

The return of Lt Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu ushered in a new twist in the Biafran agitation. Ojukwu was granted state pardon on May 18, 1982 after diplomatic exchanges with Ivory Coast and in order to deepen national reconciliation. More so, since returning from exile, Ojukwu's body language had eloquently testified to the fact that he had abandoned the idea of Biafra for national integration. For instance, a group of wounded soldiers who sent delegation to Ojukwu in Nnewi was retorted to regard themselves as having motor accident and move on. These were people conscripted by Biafran authorities against their will! A number of them suffered spinal cord injuries and amputated legs. Lt Col. Ojukwu had devoted most of his time to his father's abandoned properties in Lagos. Lt Col. Ojukwu himself expressed that the dynamics of modern-day politics in Nigeria reveal an uncomfortable truth that the political power had been concentrated in the north while the bureaucratic and economic power had been vested in the West, leaving the East marginalised.⁴³

Meanwhile, the Igbo had made substantial progress by 1982, but Lt Col. Ojukwu felt unsatisfied and wished to re-integrate the Igbo into mainstream politics. The Igbo had the Vice President in person of Dr Alex Ekwueme and through the NPP/NPN accord, the Igbo produced the Speaker of the House of Representatives in person of Chief Edwin Ume Ezeoke with several ministers in the Shagari Administration.⁴⁴

Many disagreed with Ojukwu's assessment of the polity in 1983 and his decision to join the National Party of Nigeria was trailed by controversies. Mokuwugo Okoye opined that Ojukwu misinterpreted the reception he had when he got back to the country and felt he could retire all political leaders on ground. At the same time, Dr Michael I. Okpara joined the NPN. Ojukwu lost the Onitsha Senatorial Election in 1983 as a result of the reluctance of the Igbo to vote for a northern party. The NPP candidate Edwin Onwudiwe of the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) won.⁴⁵ The NPP was the dominant party in Igboland and would have expected Ojukwu to be father of all. Rather, Ojukwu was accused of invoking violence asking people to stake their life for him.

With Ojukwu's involvement in politics, paramilitary organisations sprang up in Anambra. There were the Ekwueme Movement, the Ikemba Front and Jim's Vanguard. It was this situation that gave rise to the infamous battle of Nkpor Junction near Onitsha where members of Ikemba Front confronted members of Jim's Vanguard. A number of people lost their lives and several others

injured. Ojukwu heated up the polity by promising to oust the Governor of Anambra State, Jim Nwobodo whose security details were frequently changed while the General Officer Commanding 82 Division, Major General Zamani Lekwot secretly provided the Governor with military guards at night. It was observed that Ojukwu wanted to weld the Igbo into national politics but the Igbo refused and stuck to regional identity.⁴⁶

The Rise of MASSOB, IPOB and the New Waves of Agitations for Biafra

The Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra was formed in 1999 by an Indian-trained lawyer of Eastern Origin, Ralph Uwazuruike with headquarters at Okwe, in Okigwe district of Imo State. The group was conceived as a peaceful one and advertised a 25-stage plan to achieve its goal of Biafran nation. It was a secessionist movement associated with Igbo nationalism against marginalisation in Nigeria.⁴⁷ The group asserted that there were two arms to the government namely Biafran Government in Exile and Biafran Shadow Government. It was claimed that the issue of inequalities in state had had far-reaching political and economic implications for the people of the Southeast geo-political zone. For instance, while other zones such as South-south, Southwest, Northcentral and Northeast had 18 Senators each, with Northwest having 21 Senators, South East had 15. The same went for federal appointments. This reopened the Nigerian Civil War wounds with Federal Government accusing MASSOB of violence and the leader, Ralph Uwazuruike was arrested in 2005. Even though he was released in 2007, the group launched Biafran International Passport in 2009, hoisted Biafran flags and re-introduced Biafran currency which was said to have exchanged for about two hundred and seventy naira at the border communities of Togo and Republic of Benin.⁴⁸

According to its spokesperson, about 2, 020 members of the group had been secretly executed by the Federal Government since 1999. Again in 2011, Uwazuruike and 280 other MASSOB members were arrested in Enugu while attending an occasion in honour of Ojukwu. But President Jonathan ordered his release and all other MASSOB members. However, in June 2012, 16 members of MASSOB were killed in Anambra which was condemned by a Human Right Watch. In February, 2013, MASSOB claimed that several corpses were found floating in the Ezu River on the boundary of Enugu and Anambra States which were the bodies of his members previously arrested by the police. The group claimed the police routinely executed its members

without proper trial.⁴⁹ By May 31, 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan had branded MASSOB as one of the three extremist groups threatening the security of Nigeria. He noted that Nigeria faced three fundamental security challenges posed by extremist groups like Boko Haram in the North, The Movement for the Actualisation of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the Southeast and the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) from the Southwest. In 2015, no fewer than 25 MASSOB members were arrested while one was shot at St. Charles Lwanga Catholic Church, Okpoko. 18 members were arrested and one shot at Iba Pope Catholic Church, 11 members were arrested at Awada, while two were arrested by the police at Awka. The movement was formed based on the travails of Ndigbo in Nigeria since the end of the Civil War. Unimplemented Aburi Accord, the laxity in the 3Rs jettisoned by the Federal Government and the refusal of then President Olusegun Obasanjo to appoint the Ndigbo as one of the Service Chiefs in 1999 (according Ralph Uwazuruike) led to the formation of MASSOB.⁵⁰

By the later part of year 2015, pro-Biafra agitations resurfaced shaking the very foundation of the country. The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) shut down major cities, such as, Aba and Onitsha in the Southeast and some select cities in the South-South seeking the actualisation of a sovereign state of Biafra. By December of that same year, hundreds of pro-Biafra groups staged protests in Lagos, the historic and commercial capital city of the country. The protests once more brought to the front burners the question of marginalisation of the people of the Southeast with regard to the state creation exercise that carved out five states for the Southeast zone while other zones had 6 or 7 states each.⁵¹ The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu, a native of Isikama Afara Ukwu, Umuahia in Abia State, rose from the rubbles of MASSOB. It rose as a radical breakaway group which would quickly deliver the State of Biafra.⁵² The reasons were the same but the tactics changed. The quests for the agitation for Biafra is undoubtedly a rebirth of the events that culminated in the 1967–1970 Civil War. Some commentators of Igbo origin, such as, the former Governor of Anambra State, Chukwuemeka Ezeife, blamed the lopsidedness in federal appointment in 2015 for the resurgence of Biafran agitations. He claimed that:

Anytime you beat somebody, the person is likely going to cry. The Southeast feels neglected and ignored. There are six principal political offices in the country as there are six geo-political zones. Each geo-political zone should get one of those offices. They include the President, Vice President, Senate

President, Chief Justice, Speaker and Secretary to the Government of the Federation (SGF).⁵³

Notably in 2015, the President, Muhammadu Buhari, was from the Northwest, Vice-President Professor Yemi Osibajo Southwest, Senate President Bukola Saraki Northcentral, Speaker Yakubu Dogara Northeast and Secretary to the Government of the Federation Babachir Lawal including the Chief of Staff, Abba Kyari, Northeast. Other important offices such as the Chief Justice and Attorney General of the Federation went to the North with Southeast exempted from the scheme of things.⁵⁴ The commentators had supported the new agitation as a product of lack of justice, fairness and equity as exclusion from power is exclusion from the benefits of power. On the other hand, other commentators described the resurgent pro-Biafran agitation as a smokescreen by the pro-Jonathan apologists who just lost elections and were hell-bent on stampeding the Buhari's administration. They contended that the current protest of agitation had no connection with the 1967–1970 imbroglios.

The other school of thought opined that the current crisis was a reflection of the previous administration in which the Southeast massively benefitted from the lopsidedness to the exclusion of the Southwest. Between 2011 and 2015, Dr Goodluck Jonathan was the President (South-south); Arch. Namadi Sambo, Vice President (Northwest); David Mark, Senate President (Northcentral); Aminu Tambuwal, Speaker (Northwest); Katsina Alu, Chief Justice (Northcentral); and Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Anyim Pius Anyim (Southeast). The Deputy Senate President and Deputy Speaker were both from Southeast as well as some “juicy” ministerial appointments.⁵⁵ This simply excluded the Southwest from the scheme of things. This underscores the assumption that if injustice is the pervasive reason for agitation for Biafra, then we are all Biafrans because everything the agitators were fighting for did not only find expression in Igbo society but across Nigeria.

The arrest of the Director of Radio Biafra and the leader of Indigenous People of Biafra, Nnamdi Kanu, precipitated series of other protests. Nnamdi Kanu alongside two others were arrested and arraigned at the Federal High Court in Abuja over six count charges of Treasonable Felony with the intention to enforce unconstitutional regime change punishable under Section 41 (c) of the Criminal Code Act CAP C 38 Laws of the Federation of Nigeria, 2004.⁵⁶ This was manifested in the accusation that the agitators wanted to carve out states in the Southeast geo-political zone, South-south geo-political zone, the Igala

Community of Kogi State, and Idoma/Egede Communities of Benue State in the Northcentral to secede from the Federal Republic of Nigeria and form the Sovereign State of Biafra. They were equally accused of managing an unlawful society with more than 10 members without registration with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) punishable under Section 63 of the Criminal Code Act, 2004. The three accused were charged also for concealing goods in a container on the suspicion of importing fire arms between the months of March and April, 2015 and kept in Ubulusiuzor in Ihiala Local Government Area of Anambra State.⁵⁷

However, the Federal High Court had released Nnamdi Kanu before the Federal Government slammed a fresh treasonable felony charge against him. This led to another round of protests where protesters resolved to celebrate Christmas on the streets of Aba in 2015.⁵⁸ The new leader of the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra, Uche Madu, flayed the Federal Government for the continued detention of the Director of Radio Biafra and Founder of the Indigenous people of Biafra. Some had started hailing him as the replacement of the late Chief Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu who fought the Biafra War between 1967 and 1970.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the Igbo in the northern part of Nigeria constantly disowned the renewed agitation for Biafra and instead called for unity and understanding. They noted that there could be no development under an atmosphere of disunity, violence and instability. For instance, Igbo in Gombe known as Ndigbo Gombe staged a solidarity walk for the unity and indivisibility of Nigeria stating that the Igbo anywhere were always industrious and enterprising. They claimed that the resurgent Biafran agitation lacked clarity of objectives and blurry on the quest for the common interests of the generality of the Ndigbo. They claimed the continued protest and agitation may lead to the gory situation of the 1967–1970.⁶⁰

As ethnic strife and insecurity deteriorated after the 2019 reelection of President Muhammadu Buhari, the Eastern Security Network (ESN) was formed in December 12, 2020 by the Indigenous People of Biafra as a paramilitary outfit of the separatist movement with more than 50,000 men.⁶¹ The IPOB group had earlier been proscribed and designated a terrorist organisation in 2017 after series of attacks on both military and civilian positions. The main reason advanced by the IPOB for the formation of ESN was to ensure the protection of the Southeast from the Fulani herdsmen and other criminal elements infiltrating and terrorising the region. They likened the ESN to the formation of Amotekun Vigilante Group in the Southwest and Miyetti Allah in the North.

They warned armed robbers and kidnappers to vacate the Southeast region where they have converted forests into slaughter grounds and raping fields.⁶²

The Federal Government viewed the outfit as representing “Biafran Army” and as such deployed combat helicopters, gun-trucks and soldiers to conduct search of some notable forests and jungle in the Southeast. This came amidst the fact that IPOB’s rhetoric has constantly described Nigeria as “zoo”. No doubt, the activities of ESN, unlike *Amotekun* which was formed by state governors in Southwest Nigeria compelled the Southeast Governors to form a regional security outfit called *Ebube Agu*.⁶³ In a bid to ventilate their grievances, the IPOB declared a perpetual sit-at-home order on every Monday until the leader of the group, Mazi Nnamdi Kanu who had been re-arrested after he fled the country in the heat of the attack on his home town of Isiama Afara-Ukwu, was released from detention. They contended that the sit-at-home order must be obeyed throughout “Biafraland” and ordered Nigerian flags to be removed:

This peaceful protest will continue once every week until our demands are met. We urge Biafrans to be prepared because we will no longer fold our arms while our leader who is fighting for the liberation of the oppressed indigenous nationalities in Nigeria is languishing in detention. We are going to cripple Nigerian economy until they free him.⁶⁴

Disruption of election processes, like voters’ registration, burning of police stations, killing police officers, joining in the EndSARs protest of October 20, 2020, request for referendum and restructuring, kidnapping, political assassination, and so on, were the recent manifestations of neo-Biafran agitations. Lack of fairness, injustice and lopsided appointments, Fulani invasions, killings, banditry and kidnapping were blamed to have peeled off the old wounds of ethnic agitations and have been responsible for agitation for secession in the Southeast. The activities of IPOB/ESN and Unknown Gunmen (UGM) variously disrupted political activities in the Southeastern region with the slogan “no referendum, no election”. The declaration of perpetual sit-at-home on Mondays has crippled daily life and economic activities leading to unwarranted shedding of Igbo blood on Igbo soil. Even though the Monday sit-at-home order was intermittently reviewed and later cancelled, it ushered in an atmosphere of fear, horror and uncertainty in Igboland. This would appear to be at variance with the ideals Ojukwu stood for.

In declaring Biafra, Ojukwu claimed that the Eastern Region was at the cross road and on the brink of collapse. He held firmly that the aim of the Eastern Nigeria was and remained that they "...should avoid further bloodshed even though it has been the innocent blood of Easterners that has been most wantonly shed." This is where one may wonder why the current agitations have disconnected from this ideal of avoiding the shedding of the blood of Easterners by IPOB and ESN. Ojukwu further claimed that the struggle was against all forms of injustice and for natural rights of every citizen to have and enjoy life and property in an atmosphere free from fear and molestation. He decried the utterances of threat of force against the Eastern Region from the North and Lagos. "May I take this opportunity to assure you all that there is no power in this country, or in Black Africa, to subdue us by force."⁶⁵ At any rate, the presence of injustice in the post-1967 Biafran period has encouraged the rebirth of MASSOB and the current IPOB agitations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Contemporary Nigeria faces existential threats to the very foundation of its nationhood. Internal contradictions and politics of identity have ensured that the most populous country in Africa is still groping for the constructive management of its diversity.⁶⁶ Tribalism, deep-seated animosity and ethnic chauvinism have become the rhetoric of public discourse after about 62 years of its independence. The end of the 30-month Civil War signalled the eventual termination of the Biafran agitation. The "no victor, no vanquished" mantra and the 3Rs were efforts towards a well-romanticised idea of nation-building. In spite of the horrific attacks and guerilla tactics employed by the IPOB/ESN group, one can safely agree that Biafra as an active physical rebellion is dead, it died in 1970. The best way to permanently address the Biafran question is to be vigilant and ensure that justice is served in the country regardless of the region, religion, ethnicity, social class or background of whomever is involved.⁶⁷

This paper recommends the institutionalisation of political offices according to geo-political zones rather than based on discretion of the political victors. This will ensure that no region dominates others by mere virtue of winning elections. Additionally, ethnic groups have to seek inclusion across political parties and not put all their eggs in one basket. In other words, each region should avoid political calculation or miscalculation that could box them into a tight corner. If it is considered appropriate, there should be creation of another state in the

Southeastern region to bring the troubled region at par with other regions and address the problem of fiscal and political imbalances. The country must restructure, operate fiscal federalism and dismantle the various ethnic militias. Arms proliferation is another issue that must be tackled and intra-ethnic strife must be addressed. A national peace conference should be convened to, once again, look into the problems causing agitation in Nigeria and address them with clarity and unity of purpose. If we cannot go back to Aburi, we should at least be able to remember the meeting.

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Indigenous Entrepreneurship: Examining the Roles of Iyalode of Ikorodu in the Socio-economic History of Lagos, 1929-1971

Omotayo K. Charles

Abstract

In Yoruba traditional society, the Iyalode was a powerful figure who coordinated the activities of women in all aspects, especially on trade and commerce. While notable Iyalode in Yoruba history, such as Efunroye Tinubu, the Iyalode of Egbaland and Lagos, Efunsetan Aniwura in Ibadan, and Alimotu Pelewura, the Iyalode of Lagos Market Women's Association, have been adequately studied by scholars, the Iyalode in the Ikorodu community of Lagos, have not received adequate scholarly attention in spite of their contributions to the economic development of Lagos. In the body of the literature on the economic history of Lagos, there has been no comprehensive study on Victoria Efundeinde Shonubi, the first Iyalode of Ikorodu and Iyalode Patricia Efun, her successor both of whom played critical roles that shaped the economic history of Ikorodu in particular and Lagos in general during and after the colonial administration. Based on this premise, this paper examines the contributions of Iyalode Shonubi and Iyalode Efun of Ikorodu to the economic dynamics of Ikorodu in particular and Lagos in general from 1929 to 1971. The paper adopts historical narrative as it relies essentially on archival records and field interviews.

Keywords: Iyalode, Ikorodu, Lagos, enterprise, economy

Introduction

The Yoruba like many other African societies is essentially patriarchal; hence, men are understood to be more privileged than women. Therefore, socially, politically and economically, women are, to a very large extent, disadvantaged since decisions affecting every facet of society are taken mostly by men rather than the women. It is in the religious sphere that Yoruba women “make their

most important contributions to the running of Yoruba society”.¹ This whole idea about women’s religious role is supported by Aina when she noted that: Women’s visibility in traditional Nigerian society has been largely associated with their role in traditional religious life.² From precolonial times to the early 21st century, the role and status of women in Nigeria have continuously evolved. However, the image of a helpless, oppressed and marginalised group often associated with women has undermined their proper study, and little recognition has been granted to the various integral functions that Nigerian women have performed throughout history. In the precolonial period, women played major roles in social and economic activities. Division of labour was along gender lines, and women controlled such occupations as food processing, mat weaving, pottery making and cooking. Moreover, land was communally owned, and women had access to it through their husbands or parents. Although a man was the head of the household in a patrilineal system, older women had control of the labour of younger family members. Nevertheless, the history of the Yoruba is replete with women who attained extraordinary feats in Yoruba society—feats which qualified them for the status of goddesses. Notable among these are Moremi who singlehandedly delivered her people (the Ife) from Ugbo oppression and sacrificed Oluorogbo, her only son, to achieve this;³ Osun, the wife of Sango, who became the Yoruba goddess of fertility;⁴ and Pupupu, the founder and first ruler of Ondo kingdom.⁵ Women were also central to trade. Among the Yoruba, they were the major figures in long-distance trade, with enormous opportunities for accumulating wealth and acquiring titles. The most successful among them rose to the prestigious chieftaincy title of *Iyalode*, a position of great privilege and power. Extant literature on the place and contributions of women in Yorubaland has shown that women were not inconsequential in the traditional scheme of things. Women were critical stakeholders in the socio-economic and political dynamics of the state. For instance, Bolanle Awe, examined the prominent roles women like the *Iyalode* played in traditional Yoruba politics,⁶ while Karanja, through her study of Yoruba market women, showed the economic strength that made them powerful.⁷ Furthermore, in drawing attention to the role of women as mothers and as occupiers of the innermost and sacrosanct space within Yoruba domains, Callaway demonstrated the importance of Yoruba women to many central features of Yoruba society.⁸ With the coming of the Europeans and subsequent penetration of European capital into the colonies, new economic opportunities were created for women. This, as Kristin Mann argued, helped women redefine their relationships with fathers, brothers and husbands in ways

that reduced male control of their labour and male authority over their lives.⁹ What this presupposes is the fact that despite the patriarchal nature of Yoruba society, women were critical stakeholders who shaped the trajectory of socio-economic and cultural developments in Yorubaland.

In the light of the above, this article examines the *Iyalode* institution in the coastal community of Ikorodu and how the Iyalode in Ikorodu influenced the economic development of Ikorodu community in particular and Lagos in general. This study focuses on the period between the years 1929 and 1971. The year 1929 is significant because it was the year Oba Adenaike Alagbe (1929–1951) was installed as the Oloja of Ikorodu and later installed as the Oba with the title Ayangburen of Ikorodu in 1950. Invariably, this implied that Oba Adenaike Alagbe was the last Oloja and first Oba of Ikorodu and it was during his reign that the office of the Iyalode was created and the first Iyalode of Ikorodu was appointed. On the other hand, 1971, the terminal year, was the year Oba Oyefusi Salaudeen Afolabi was installed as Ayangburen of Ikorodu after which he pronounced a new Iyalode of Ikorodu with authority given to her to install Iyalode in the various quarters of Ikorodu. This opened a new chapter in the Iyalode institution in the community.¹⁰

Ikorodu is a prominent town in Coastal Yorubaland. Coastal Yorubaland is a group of communities, with identifiable local peculiarities and sub-regions. Lying between Latitudes 6° and 6° 30'N and longitude 2° 3' and 6° E, it occupies an 800 kilometre stretch from Badagry in the west to the eastern extremity of Ilajeland to the east.¹¹ The Yoruba coast comprises the southern parts of modern Lagos, Ogun and Ondo States, insofar as it includes non-Yoruba migrants, a large hinterland of speakers of Ijaw, Urhobo, Bini and other languages, and eventually, Itsekiri territory in Delta State, it must actually be considered as multi-ethnic.¹² As part of Coastal Yorubaland, Ikorodu community is situated at a distance of approximately 36km North of Lagos. It is bound on the South by the Lagoon (Ebute) where a light terminal port of Nigerian Ports Authority is situated. The northern part of the town shares a common boundary with Ogun State, while the east part has common boundary with Agbowa: a town in Epe Division of Lagos State.¹³ Ikorodu is a gateway to the hinterland of Nigeria. It also serves as the western portion of the Ijebu country, a general area locally referred to as Remo. According to the body of oral tradition in the palace of the Ayangburen of Ikorodu, Ikorodu is said to have been founded by Olusoga, a warrior-hunter, and prominent trader with enormous wealth and followers. Olusoga left Orile Offin in Sagamu with his

brothers Lasuwon and Sekumade who were also hunters and his followers. While Lasuwon and Sekumade joined the journey as escorts, Olusoga never planned to return. His motive was to go far away from home. This was why he left with his followers including diviners, healers and slaves. On getting to a particular land with Odu plants, Olusoga was said to have exclaimed “*Oko Odu re*” meaning this is a land of Odu plants. As a result, he ordered his followers to settle and this was how they came to establish their settlement in “*Oko Odu*”, which was later corrupted to Ikorodu.¹⁴

The Iyalode in Yoruba History

The introduction of the Iyalode chieftaincy in Yorubaland is shrouded in antiquity. However, as Awe (1977) argued in *The Iyalode in the Traditional Yoruba Political System*, it is quite likely that the office was a mid-nineteenth century invention in Ibadan.¹⁵ Similar institutions existed in older Yoruba kingdoms such as Ilesa, Ondo and Ijebu. For example, in Ondo and some eastern Yoruba communities, it is known as Iyalaje (head of market women); while in Ilesha, it is regarded as Iyaloja (mother of the market). Although their nomenclature may differ from community to community, their core functions as leaders of the women and administrators of the market are, however, the same across Yorubaland. One key similarity is the fact that women who occupied these offices were able to achieve such positions through their economic activities and the wealth accumulated from these activities which enabled them to transcend the economic sphere and had substantial presence in the political sphere. These political positions were not possessed from birth or inherited, they were bestowed on Yoruba women solely because of the respect they earned within their society and the wealth they accumulated from their economic activities. These positions and the officeholders, therefore, represented the economic interest of their kinswomen and the socio-cultural and political interests of Yoruba women. As political figures, they had political roles and exerted political influence in the Oba's cabinet.¹⁶

The Iyalode, as the leader of women, had her own chiefs and lieutenants that she appointed and installed to work with her in the administration of women in the community. In some cases, she kept a private military or guards that were loyal to her. Samuel Johnson captures this aptly:

Iyalode is a title bestowed upon the most distinguished lady in the town. She has also her lieutenants: Otun, Osi, Ekerin, etc., as any of the other principal chiefs of the town. Some of these Iyalodes command a force of powerful warriors, and have a voice in the council of the chiefs. Through the Iyalode, the women of the town can make their voices heard in municipal and other affairs.¹⁷

Johnson's account further establishes the fact that the Iyalode was a powerful political figure who fought the cause of women in Yoruba society and sometimes, commanded a force of powerful warriors and controlled the market operations of the towns. Similarly, Anna Hinderer, wife of David Hinderer, one of the foremost British missionaries in Yorubaland, corroborates this in her memoir following her encounter with the Iyalode. She said:

These Yoruba people have some very nice arrangements about their form of government. I found out that there was an 'Iyalode' or mother of the town, to whom all the women's palaver (disputes) are brought before they are taken to the king. She is, in fact, a sort of queen, a person of much influence, and is looked up to with much respect.... I went with the children to visit her, and we found a most respectable motherly-looking person, surrounded by her attendants and people, in great order, and some measure of state.¹⁸

This report by Anna Hinderer explicitly gives an insight into the Iyalode institution in Yorubaland. The remark that she was "surrounded by her attendants, and people, in great order, and some measure of state" indicates her majesty and power in the state. The history of Yorubaland is characterised by a number of Iyalode who shaped the political and economic trajectory of their communities in particular and Yorubaland in general. Notable among these were Efunroye Tinubu, the Iyalode of Egbaland and Lagos, and Efunsetan Aniwura in Ibadan. Efunroye Tinubu (c. 1810–1887) was born Efunporoye Osuntinubu, a powerful Yoruba female aristocrat, merchant, and slave trader in precolonial and colonial Nigeria.¹⁹ She was a politically and economically influential figure in Lagos during the reigns of Oba Adele, Dosunmu, Oluwole and Akitoye, helping the latter two Oba gain political power. She was married to Oba Adele of Lagos and she used her connections to establish a successful trade network with European merchants in slaves, tobacco, salt, cotton, palm oil, coconut oil and firearms. She allegedly owned over 360 personal slaves.²⁰ Similarly, Efunsetan Aniwura (c. 1820s–June 30, 1874) was another notable Iyalode in Yoruba history. She was the second Iyalode of Ibadan and one of the preeminent slave traders in the 19th century Ibadan. Revered as a successful

merchant and trader, her impact encompassed the political, military, economic and religious spheres of Ibadan. She was famous for being arguably the most powerful, and certainly, one of the wealthiest Yoruba women that ever lived.²¹

As the head of the women folks in Yorubaland, the market is the theatre of the Iyalode's political power. Indeed, the undeniable importance of the marketplace in precolonial Yorubaland and the dominance of women within this space placed them in a position of advantage. Basically, it made them not only economically independent but also allowed them to transcend their influence into other spheres. As Marjorie McIntosh posits, "because most local traders were women and female officials controlled the market in many Yoruba communities, the physical location of the marketplace had symbolic importance in gendered terms." In precolonial Yoruba, the symbolism of the marketplace for women was similar to the palace for men. While the palace was a male domain where men exercised political authority with women having limited political presence, the marketplace was an arena where women flourished independently in their economic activities.²²

The Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde Shonubi and Iyalode Patricia Efun of Ikorodu

Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde Shonubi was the first Iyalode of Ikorodu who reigned during the time of Oba Adenaike Alagbe (1927–1951). She became the Iyalode after organising women into groups and providing leadership for them before Oba Alagbe became the Oba of Ikorodu. She was installed as the Iyalode in the early 1930s and upon her installation, she expanded her control of women's group to include other neighbouring communities such as Igbogbo and Imota.²³ When the Native Council was to be established and dominated by men in 1937, she was said to have pushed for an inclusion of women in the Ikorodu Native Council. E.J. Gibbons, the Assistant District Officer, in his official report captures this thus:

It was now necessary to work out in Ikorodu precisely what should be the Ikorodu contingent to balance the village representatives. By this time, something was known about women's organisation there and it seemed desirable that at least, the leading women chief, the Iyalode, should take her place in things: a suggestion which was approved by public opinion as, it is

pleasant to record, it was later welcomed by honourable members of the Legislative Council.²⁴

Two inferences can be drawn from the above extract. The first is that by the time the council was to be formed, in 1937, something was known about the women organisation in Ikorodu led by Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde. This invariably implies that by 1937, Ikorodu women had an organisation with a structured leadership and that the Iyalode was a force to be reckoned with and this leads to the second inference which is the fact that public opinion in Ikorodu at that time favoured the Iyalode. This accounted for her popularity and acceptance among the people. As a result of the activities and influence of Iyalode Efundeinde, three women chiefs were included in the council. Thus, the council, as composed in 1937, comprised the following:

Oloja Alagbe Adenaike	–	<i>Chairman</i>
The Olisa	–	<i>Yesufu Onofowokon</i>
The Oluwo	–	<i>Oshoberu</i>
The Odofin	–	<i>Suberu Ogunsanya</i>
The Apena	–	<i>Ogunkale</i>
The Limo	–	<i>Lawani Shonoiki</i>
The Iyalode	–	<i>Victoria Efun (female)</i>
The Leka	–	<i>Adenariwo (Female)</i>
The Otta	–	<i>Otularu (Female)</i>

The inclusion of three women in the Council can be said to be a testament to the vibrancy of the leadership of the Iyalode Efundeinde-led women's organisation in Ikorodu during this time.

Iyalode Efundeinde was an international trader who engaged with the colonial merchants. She was reputed to be the major dealer in textile and other important merchandise brought from Lagos to Ikorodu.²⁵ Within the Ikorodu axis in the late 1920s, she enjoyed a considerable monopoly over these merchandises. As a result, she became extremely wealthy and influential. Of note in particular was that Efundeinde's exploits in business were not limited to trading alone. She also engaged in manufacturing of finished goods, some of which were exported to Europe. Notable in this regard was the production of baskets and handwoven sacks used in packaging crops such as yam, maize, melon and cocoyam which were cultivated in large quantities within Ikorodu and exported to Lagos. Similarly, she was involved in food crop cultivation. In

this regard, she had large farms where hundreds of her workers were engaged in the cultivation of yams, cassava and others.

It is also important to state that Iyalode Efundeinde was a money lender, who operated an organised money lending service to traders in Ikorodu. She was the first commercial money lender in Ikorodu with numerous field agents who worked for her. Also, she organised and coordinated a contributory scheme known as Esusu in Yorubaland.²⁶ The Esusu, as Bascom posits, is one of the economic institutions of the Yoruba of Nigeria; it has elements which resemble a credit union, an insurance scheme and a savings club, but it is distinct from all of these. The Esusu is a fund to which a group of individuals make fixed contributions of money at fixed intervals, with the total amount contributed by entire group assigned to each member in rotation.²⁷ In the contributory scheme of Iyalode Efundeinde's Esusu, there were various categories of contributors depending on the financial capability of the contributors which could be divided into three: high, medium and low levels. The high-level contributors were mostly traders who imported goods and services from Lagos into Ikorodu community. Most of them were contemporaries and business associates of Iyalode Efundeinde. The medium level contributors were the big traders in Ikorodu who resold goods from the high-level contributors. Most of them at this level were subsidiaries to the high-level contributors. The low-level contributors were petty traders who contributed a portion of their profits on a daily basis.²⁸

Another enterprise Iyalode Efundeinde engaged in was transportation and this brought her some problems with the colonial authority in 1930 following the death of twenty persons on her "Motor Launch" —the designation for a long boat, labelled "Iyalode Ikorodu"—on the 23rd of February, 1930.²⁹ The "Motor Launch" left Lagos for Ikorodu with about fifty people who were all guests of the Iyalode of Ikorodu. On approaching the foreshore at Idumagbo, about twenty to thirty passengers of the Motor Launch climbed on the sun deck and began to dance and greet their friends on the shore. As a result, the Sun Deck collapsed and people were thrown into the water. Consequently, the Iyalode was charged by the colonial authority for contravening Cap 2 Section 344 and Cap 104 section 40.³⁰ R.A.H. Wortham, the Commissioner of Police of the Colony, gave the order for the Iyalode to be arrested and charged. She was, however, discharged and acquitted after investigations absolved her of any complicity. No doubt, this experience affected the morale and economic activities of Iyalode Efundeinde to the extent that she stayed away from

Ikorodu community for a while. Also, the women folks in Ikorodu in solidarity with their leader, operated partially while the issue lasted.³¹ In the midst of the above unpleasant scenario, it is significant to remark that the Iyalode bounced back and returned to Ikorodu where she continued all her economic enterprises except for the transportation enterprise that she left.



Figure 1: Chief Victoria Efundeinde Shonubi, the First Iyalode of Ikorodu. Source: Author's Photograph captured at the residence of present Iyalode

Another Iyalode of Ikorodu, who rose to fame and influenced the economic landscape of Ikorodu and by extension Lagos, was Iyalode Patricia Efun, the successor of Iyalode Efundeinde, a powerful Iyalode and a commercial colossus and transporter. By the early 1930s, the increased economic interdependence in terms of agricultural and commercial activities between Ikorodu and Lagos communities birthed a sort of revolution in the transportation sector within

Ikorodu. First was the introduction of motor launch boats which were more efficient in terms of speed and capacity than the initial paddled canoes. Though Lagos transporters led in this business, local indigenous entrepreneurs such as Iyalode Patricia Efun, the Rickets Brothers, owners of the Ikosi Industrial Company, and Chief Joseph Sonubi exhibited their business acumen in the realm of transportation.³² Over time, Iyalode Patricia Efun became a dominant stakeholder in this enterprise with a fleet of motor-driven mill. It was stated that “Patricia Efun, the Iyalode, overworks a motor-driven mill grinding farina for Lagos trade, as she does a fleet of motor boats competing with Ikosi Industries”.³³ The fact that the Iyalode operated a fleet of motor boats established her significant position in the transportation industry during the colonial period. She employed dozens of young men and women who worked as drivers, repairers, collectors and goods keepers. She had private stations at Ikorodu and Lagos where her workers operated from. Also, Iyalode Patricia Efun was a trader. She imported goods into Ikorodu from Lagos and distributed them all over Ijebuland. Although she was the Iyalode of Ikorodu, her enterprises and goods reached the Ijebu hinterlands where she had agents and sales representatives. These agents collated goods from various Ijebu communities and sent to Ikorodu for onward sale to Lagos markets.³⁴ This was what distinguished the trading enterprise of Iyalode Patricia Efun from her predecessor, Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde. Through her commercial link with the Ijebu hinterland, Patricia Efun was able to sustain and expand her commercial influence.

Victoria Efundeinde and Patricia Efun in the Economic Development of Ikorodu and Lagos

As Boge posits, the foundation of economic interactions and interdependence between Ikorodu community and the Lagos metropolis could be traced to the pre-colonial period.³⁵ However, during the colonial and post-independence periods, the relationship between both was stimulated and consolidated through the activities of individuals such as Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde and Iyalode Patricia Efun, especially through their economic enterprises which invariably opened up Ikorodu for economic development. One fundamental contribution of these women to the economic development of Ikorodu and metropolitan Lagos was that their transportation enterprise facilitated the exodus of Ikorodu indigenes to the metropolitan city of Lagos. Iyalode Patricia

Efun's fleet of motor boats provided affordable transport services for the people to the extent that her motor boats became the desired choice for travellers to Lagos on weekly bases. Invariably, the exodus of Ikorodu indigenes to Lagos yielded dividends as a number of them began to establish small and medium scale industries both at home and abroad. Apart from the home-based industries (for example Ikorodu Trading Company and Ikorodu Ceramic Industries), which survived colonial rule, some of these indigenous entrepreneurs established companies within the Lagos metropolis. For instance, Chief S. O. Kamson established a big industry where thread, tyre and underwear were produced, initially situated at the current site of the University of Lagos. In addition, Oba Salaudeen Oyefusi established his Button House Nigeria Limited at Dosumu Street in the heart of Lagos.³⁶

Equally important contributions of Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde to the economic development of Ikorodu and Lagos was that her money lending and contributory thrift enterprise provided soft loans and financial capitals for traders in Ikorodu. Ikorodu peoples' preference for Iyalode's money lending services was owed to the firmness and flexibility in sourcing for and repaying loans from her. The flexibility can be seen in the ability of prospective borrowers to access funds from her with ease within a couple of days without collateral and security. Furthermore, the cooperative and thrift societies she coordinated usually charged an interest for any amount of money they lend. Depending on the agreement by contributing members of such associations, interest rates were charged on monies borrowed by non-contributing members but not on monies borrowed by contributing members.³⁷ The implication of this was that funds were made available for traders to trade and this subsequently helped in boosting the economic fortunes of the traders in particular and the community in general. Through the commercial enterprises of these women and their contemporaries, Ikorodu was opened up for infrastructural amenities by the government. For instance, the birth of electric power supply in Ikorodu division in 1956, provided through the Rural Electrification programme of the western region government was informed by the government's realisation of the emergence of Ikorodu as a rising economic hub.³⁸ It is apparent that the government, especially in developing countries like Nigeria, provides amenities to communities with potentials for economic growth and development. Hence, the provision of social amenities by the government in Ikorodu community was necessitated by the budding economic activities within the Ikorodu region.

Furthermore, the Iyalode of Ikorodu were at the forefront of social transitions and the defense of women's rights in Ikorodu in particular and Lagos generally. In 1932, the British colonial government-initiated plans to start taxing women, a policy which had never been implemented before, although taxes for men had been introduced in 1927. The market women, under the Lagos Women Market Association (LMWA) led by Madam Alimotu Pelewura quickly organised other leaders from other markets and met with the colonial administrator.³⁹ The colonial administrator, seeing the force and resolve of the women, and to forestall a repeat of the Aba Women Protest of 1929, assured them that women would not be taxed but the women could not trust the words of the colonial officials. As a result, they demanded for a written agreement and they procured a written assurance of the guarantee, and the issue of taxation of women did not recur over the next eight years in Lagos.⁴⁰ Madam Victoria Efundeinde, the Iyalode of Ikorodu, was a close associate of Madam Alimotu Pelewura and a strong member of the Lagos Women Market Association (LMWA) representing Ikorodu division. She played a major role in the negotiations with the colonial administrator which led to the suspension of the policy. Upon her return to Ikorodu, she organised Ikorodu markets women and directed them not to pay taxes to the colonial government because the LMWA had secured a guarantee from the government. This action by LMWA invariably brought economic stability to Ikorodu division and metropolitan Lagos.

Conclusion

Studies of women's occupation during the colonial period often show that they lost power and economic autonomy with the arrival of cash crops and women's exclusion from the global marketplace.⁴¹ However, this was not the case in the coastal community of Ikorodu. Women in Ikorodu during the colonial period, led by Iyalode Victoria Efundeinde Shonubi, the first Iyalode, and Iyalode Patricia Efun, her successor, played critical roles that shaped the economic history of Ikorodu in particular and Lagos in general. Through the instrumentality of their office as the Iyalode of Ikorodu and the agency of their commercial conglomerates, these women influenced local and regional politics and paved way for the economic trajectory that characterised Ikorodu community from 1929 to 1971.

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²⁵ Interview with Iyalode of Ikorodu, Madam Afolake Adebimpe Shonubi, 5/11/2021

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Impact of British Colonialism on the *Odionwere* Institution in Benin Kingdom

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Abstract

Colonialism triggered changes in pre-colonial institutions in Benin Kingdom. When the British deposed the *Qba*, the *Odionwere*, a pristine gerontocratic institution was impacted by colonial domination. Its *Edion*, elders, were cloned for Indirect Rule. Though, colonial administrative systems were chaotic, scarce attempts associate the worsening socio-conflicts and diminution of the *Odionwere* with colonialism. This paper interrogates and unveils the impact of colonialism on the *Odionwere* through institutional reforms. It takes an in-depth assessment of its impact through empirical studies in 21 communities in Benin and with the use of secondary sources, data were content analysed using narrative styles. It calls attention to initiatives subordinating the *Odionwere* institution whose origin is traced to 600 AD. and which played key roles in village administration and communal integral development. The paper sheds lighter on social change and explicates the integral format that accommodates the *Odionwere* as a conflict management institution in Benin Kingdom.

Keywords: colonialism, *Odionwere*, Benin Kingdom, Nigeria

Introduction

The *Odionwere* (plural *Edionwere*), a gerontocratic institution of village headmanship that is based on rites and rituals sustained by an age grade system in which the oldest of the *Edion* (male elders) exercised both sacral and profane powers, was impacted by colonialism. This system which was well entrenched among the Benin was compromised by British judicial activism with its policy of recruiting non-initiates as vanguards of its Native Councils/Courts. The colonial attrition against Benin Kingdom, noticeable in its policy of liberalism, reverberated in its entire socio-cultural system with existential threat to the *Odionwere* as an administrative institution. The *Odionwere* institution has been key in the evolutionary processes of socio-political administration and the juristic system of Benin Kingdom; from a highly segmented society pivoted by

well-defined gerontocracies into a tribute collecting, redistributive and centralised economy, displaying an uncommon sense of adaptation. However, this has been affected by change occasioned by the establishment of modern structures of colonial government. Modernity affected the compound family system that underpinned the *Odionwere* institution that emerged c. 600 AD.

The gradual effacement of the functions and recognition of the *Odionwere* council, traceable to a colonial hiatus in the contours of Benin history which has witnessed unprecedented social conflicts. While some scholars, including Omozusi¹ and Osadolor², contend that the *Odionwere* institution is indigenous to Benin socio-cultural evolution and created the underpinnings for later political developments, others have argued that the advent of its monarchy was an alien intervention. For example, Bondereko and Roese³ and Bondereko⁴ argued that Igodo, the first Ogiso, was a product of alien adventure. This view has been jettisoned by Bradbury and Lloyd⁵ who averred that Igodo was a product of the *Odionwere* of Udo. Omoregie⁶ contends that the origin of the Oba title lies in the ancient name of its first ruler which translates to High King. He supports the view that the Edion elders formed the bulk of the administration of the people and treated early kings almost as *primus inter pares*.

However, the impact of colonialism on the *Odionwere* institution has been largely unexamined. This paper examines the impact of colonial political economy and its agents wielding arbitrary powers in Benin villages. Igbafe⁷ has argued that the most important aspect of the restoration was in what was not restored. The imperative is to examine the effects of modernity in village administration in the Benin Division. From the 1914 restoration of the monarchy and introduction of Indirect Rule to Nigeria's independence in 1960, the *Odionwere* institution, owing to its centrality in socio-political aggregation, played major roles in rural integration in Benin villages. Its integration into the modern political system assumed non-formal status, this has impacted on its roles and functions. These modernisations included emphasis on centralism and individualism as well as the implementation of local government laws and party politics. This study interrogates the origins of the *Odionwere* and changes that have affected its viability.

In this light, this paper examines the impact of colonialism on the *Odionwere* institution. This is important in understanding the transformation of the roles and functions of the Edion and its adaptation to change. It interrogates colonial reforms aimed at a diminution of traditional institutions including the

Odionwere, thereby threatening social stability in Benin Kingdom. It provides answers to questions that border on the impact of British colonialism on the *Odionwere* institution and its survival in Benin villages. It concludes that the government should establish an integral format that accommodates the *Odionwere* as a conflict management institution in the Benin Division. Specifically, the paper sets out to achieve the following objectives: examine the origins of the *Odionwere* as a means of understanding the evolution of traditional institutions in Benin Kingdom; examine the pre-colonial roles of the *Odionwere* institution to aid our understanding of its place in traditional administration in Benin Kingdom; and evaluate its adaptive capabilities under colonial rule and its prospects for more effective roles.

This study was carried out in Nigeria, specifically in Edo State. The study was conducted in the Benin speaking parts of Edo South Senatorial District which comprises seven local government administrative areas: Oredo, Egor, Ikpoba-Oka, Orhionmwon, Ovia-North East, Ovia-South West and Uhumwode. Purposive sampling and snowball techniques were used. The sample size is made up of the Edion village councils in 21 villages which is inclusive of about 210 villages with *Odionwere* Councils in Benin Kingdom. In-depth interviews were conducted with the Esogban of Benin Kingdom and five village headmen-in-council, one in each of the identified oldest villages in the seven local government areas. Primary data were gathered through key informant interviews, focused group discussions, in-depth interviews and participant observation. Archival materials and intelligence reports were sourced from the National Archives, Ibadan and the Palace Library, Oba's Palace, Benin City. Secondary data were derived from published books such as Omoregie's Great Benin series 1–4. Data were content analysed using descriptive and narrative styles.

Situating the *Odionwere* in the Context of Colonialism and Traditional Institutions

According to Horvath, colonialism is accepted as a form of domination or control by individuals or groups over the territory and behaviour of others.⁸ Colonialism as a culture change process provides grounds for examining the effect of alien rule on the *Odionwere* institution in Benin Kingdom. While Cooper⁹ acknowledges its modernising effects, Pels views colonialism as a

struggle that constantly renegotiates the balance of domination and resistance.¹⁰ This perception of its re-negotiating capabilities provides grounds to interrogate the drive to maintain relevance by the *Odionwere* within a system whose institutions eroded its functions.

According to Crowther, the period 1885–1906 witnessed the subjugation of African States to foreign rule by European colonialists.¹¹ However, there is the need to interrogate the role of religion in providing moral justification and a sense of superiority to the colonial masters. Curtin *et al.* (1982), asserts that the industrial revolution in Europe created disequilibrium in African-European relations and the partitioning of Africa was reinforced by racist theories placing Africa at the bottom of the racial pyramid.¹² Admittedly, one common item in the colonial conquest of West Africa by the British and the French was the conviction that the conquest was morally right, and that the invaders were bringing light to the “heart of darkness.”¹³ However, Ayyitey contends that the inability of European colonialists to understand African political institutions was a justification for their presumed non-existence. He observes that “in general, four basic units of government in African societies governed themselves; the chief (king), the central authority, the inner privy-council and the council of elders made up of lineage heads who preside at the village assembly for commoners or village meeting.”¹⁴ These institutions had internal mechanisms of checks and balances to limit despotism.

Coleman notes that several steps were taken by the British to secure authority over the territories constituting the Nigerian State.¹⁵ However, the paucity of westerners and the cost of running a full-fledged administration compelled the colonial policy of a Dual Mandate System or Indirect Rule. This policy witnessed the crafting of warrant chiefs in seemingly acephalous societies among the Igbo in Eastern Nigeria. However, with the deposition of the Oba, Benin Kingdom became acephalous¹⁶ and its subordinate villages came under British administration midwived by a colonial resident. Undoubtedly, there is the need to assess the impact of colonial administration on the *Odionwere* institution. This is important, as the criteria for selection into the Native Council were strictly loyalty to the British with no regards for hierarchy.

According to Igbafe, the introduction of Indirect Rule to Southern Nigeria as well as the quest for the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates served as external factors that necessitated the installation of an Oba in 1914.¹⁷ Undoubtedly, Indirect Rule forced up the authoritarian aspects

of chiefs in a way they could not have acted without the threat of deposition in a traditional society. Irrespective of the colonial structure, in practice, the only cases which came before Native Courts were tax and land disputes.¹⁸ This situation amounted, in effect, to a return to the indigenous system whereby justice was administered by the meetings of heads of kinship groups or village elders. However, there are distinctions in the British colonial policy in Nigeria between the British superstructure and the Native Administration, as what was enforced in the Nigerian territories was British laws over African laws. Igbofe agrees that what was called the Native Administration in Benin Kingdom was not native, rather it comprised of the *Ọba*, the *Iyase*, the *Ọba*'s judicial council, the Ward Chiefs, the Native Treasury, the District heads and the Native Council.¹⁹

Nonetheless, Coleman states that colonial policies fostered a sense of detachment from communal leanings to a competitive background in urban centres. This yielded two unintended results, "the growth of individualism and a sense of personal insecurity."²⁰ Nevertheless, the effects of the creation of Government Reservation Areas (GRA) on population displacement begs for further studies. Of further importance in this paper is the effect of missionary activities and the elite on traditional institutions. Edo notes that the most important factor that accelerated the re-organisation in Benin Kingdom was the emergence of the educated and commercial classes.²¹ Extrapolating from these scholarly works, the impact of colonial domination on the *Odionwere* institution in Benin Kingdom needs extensive studies.

Historical Origins of the Odionwere Institution

In the context of a historical examination of the *Odionwere*, it is important to re-examine the theories of the origin of Benin Kingdom. Here, two distinct accounts are popular, namely: its theory of migration and its mythology of creation. The myth of creation presents the Benin Kingdom as the centre of the world—*Edo o re isi agbon*—and its founder as the youngest son of *Osanobua* (God). This myth tries to project a sophisticated and established empire seeking to legitimise its claim to resource, power and authority, variables necessary for the projection of its imperial might. Osadolor agrees that the myth is an insufficient attempt at a historical reconstruction of the origin of the Benin people. This Benin myth may also be the worldview of the people as original inhabitants of their land.²² Omozusi contends that "this also gives precedence

to the Oba (King) of Benin in matters of land with other rulers as they are said to be given land to keep their wealth as well as to settle by the Oba. The above means that Benin was the centre from where people migrated all over the world.”²³ This is the popular view that reflects the Edo view of land and its rights over this economic resource. It is more convincing to examine these theories as the Benin view of power and authority directed at tracing to God (as its ultimate source) the right to the power of possession and authority to rule.

The Esogban of Benin Kingdom confirmed that the Benin see God as the bestower of power and from whom power devolves.²⁴ The Benin mythology of creation clearly supports this line of thought. It explains that God, acknowledged and revered as the oldest *Qdionwere* and ancestor, delegated powers to His children who became earthly elders and lineage heads as well as founders of eponymous communities devolving from a common ancestor.²⁵ The Benin mythology of creation clearly recognises other ancestors as leaders of their lineage, thus, emphasis is placed on seniority or old age as symbolising closeness to God, the source of all power. This is accepted as the most important prerequisite for leadership with its idea of power revolving around age. It also presents its view of an agnate society with social functions and rights to rule given to the male population. However, it attempts to limit this right to a ruling lineage with celestial patrilineal descent. The Benin mythology is a peace mechanism that nullifies rivalry within the ruling elite and serves to neutralise internal insurgency against it as epitomised by the Oba whose descendants and those he confers with titles become the rightful rulers of existing peoples.

Benin Kingdom is believed, as postulated by Omoregie on the theory of migration, to have emerged from 31 villages that were the descendants of Efa and Emehi who were brothers and migrants from Uhe. These original 31 villages known as the Ubini Nowa villages are Alaka, Itebite, Oroghotodin, Ugbague, Efa, Iguisi, Okhorho, Adaha, Eyaennugie, Uhunmwidunmwu, Errie, Ugboha, Iboyanyan, Utantan, Irhuasa, Ikpokpan, Ugbo, Idunmwivbioto, Ugbekun, Ihinmwirin, Emehi, Ebuya, Isekherhe, Uzebu, Ihogbe, Irre, Urubi, Uselu, Ukhegie, Aragua and Ogba.²⁶ The supreme ruler of each village was the *Qdionwere*, the oldest Owere (senior man) of the land. It is interesting to note that before the 7th century AD, the Idu migrant party, forefathers of Efa and Emehi, believed to be settlers at its metropolitan city, had realised the importance of land and sought to lay claim to and authority over it. The Benin people evolved from an admixture of diverse peoples and Benin language is classified under the Kwa linguistic sub-group. Bondareko and Roesé

contend that the split into proto-Yorùbá, proto-Edo and proto-Igbo languages occurred around 3000–6000 years ago with the penetration of the forests by the Southern Èdo occurring around 2000 years ago.²⁷

The location of Benin Kingdom in the tropics of the rainforest supports the view of a dominant male population seeking to cultivate arable crops with the felling of large trees. The establishment of eponymous communities sustained by kinship apparently was the political culture that emerged; one in which the family, made up of a man and his wife or wives and children, was its basic administrative unit. Bondarenko admits that “in the social sphere, this radical change was marked by the formation of the extended family community and its institutions of government.”²⁸ The dominance of the male population can be traced to its age grade system which is made up of seven grades: Emorhue (0–7), Eroghae (7–14), Igama (14–25), Èghele (25–45), Edion (45–60) and Owere (60–70). The Owere were the oldest among males, Okao-Èghele for instance as head of Èghele age grade and *Odionwere* or Okaevbo representing the collective ancestors of the community as the keeper of the *Òguedion* (elders’ shrine). The supreme ruler of each village was the *Òdionwere*, who was the oldest of the Edion-Owere in his village. The Edion-Owere were the elders of the village council and the *Òdionwere* was chosen from their midst, as the oldest of them all was considered to be proximate to the ancestors and God.²⁹ This council made them seasoned village administrators and eliminated succession struggles as the next *Òdionwere* was always known based on their age seniority. Where age seniority was difficult to determine, the first to be called-in among initiates into the Edion council is considered senior to the next person; therein lies the basis for seniority.³⁰ This position supports the maxim that “*Òdionwere gha sòmwan egbe ai bọ yọ.*” This implies that when it is someone’s turn to become an *Òdionwere*, you do not have to consult an oracle to assist you in appointing them.³¹ The elimination of succession dispute over the *Òdionwere* stool is a major factor for its longevity, adaptability and resilience, this political culture was premised on precedents. Thus, succession to the *Òdionwere* stool is based on existing rules that have been passed down by the Edion for generations.

Pre-Monarchical Roles and Functions of the *Òdionwere* Institution in Benin Kingdom

The *Òdionwere* institution served as a platform for the consultative resolution of communal disputes and family crises. It served as a foundation through which

the elders took charge of security, sanitation and supervised the activities of the Edion, the Ọka-Eghele (captain of the youth), Igbama (adolescents) as well as the Ọka-Iroghae (leader of the Iroghae). While communities that settled within others may have their own councils subject to the older community, a new title of Ọka-Idunmwun (the first settler in a quarter) emerged. The Ọka-Idunmwun, as the first male settler in a new frontier, constitutes a level of influence over recent settlers and may call an assembly of family heads to find solutions to shared challenges. However, he was deprived of an Ọguedion which subjects him to the host community.

Consequently, each *Ọdionwere* had its own Iko-evbo (village council) that assisted his Iko-Edionvbo (elders' council), made up of all village elders, lineage heads and Ọka-Idunmwun.³² It was at these meetings that matters affecting families that could not be settled at the Iko-wa (family council) and the Iko-Egbee (lineage council) were discussed. If a matter could not be resolved at the Iko-evbo, it was referred to the Iko-Edionvbo. This council may be made up of the *Ọdionwere* and the Edion nene (four most senior elders) or Edion nihiron (seven most senior elders); sometimes, all the elders may be requested to attend an enlarged meeting. Furthermore, the *Ọdionwere* institution with its headman as the priest of the communal ancestral shrine conducted witchcraft and criminal trials, regulated the building of markets and trading activities with the establishment of four-day interval market-days as well as appointed the Iyeki (mother of the market) and appointed her as the Orueru ya ẹki (owner of the market), the Ighia-eki (market masters) and installed the Osuneki shrine.³³

Accordingly, in its executive capacity, Omoregie affirms that it was from the *Ọdionwere* institution that Benin kingdom developed its earliest political features. Under this system, political offices and functions as well as the right to make chiefs out of the people (Ekhaevben), appoint market heads and market masters were done by deliberations of the village elders' council.³⁴ Undoubtedly, the *Ọdionwere* had begun to build a force of guards, Odibo; this was the earliest form of military and policing formation in Benin Kingdom. The *Ọdionwere*-in-council, as its supreme administrative and religious body, prescribed social norms, proscribed perceived reprobate acts and propitiated the ancestors, as well as the Osuneki (market deity), on behalf of the people. Accordingly, the right to become the council's headman remained an open franchise to every freeborn male with no history of criminality and signs of senility; its only criterion was advancement in age and the performance of rites of passage.³⁵

Owing to population growth, some communities merged to form Okpeevbo (towns) and with the merging villages becoming wards of towns, it became difficult for one *Odionwere* to preside over the numerous disputes and issues that arose in the town. As a result of population growth and urbanisation, the communities created a system of *Okao-evbo*, or the most senior or premier among the various *Edionwere* of the wards or villages that made the town. He could be likened to a super *Odionwere*. This system of *Okao-Evbo* remains in practice in the Iyekorhionmwon area, particularly in Urhonigbe town where the *Okao-evbo* presides. The *Oka-Evbo*'s most important function was resolving conflicts between various forest communities, particularly over boundary disputes and hunting and natural resource use rights.³⁶

At a point in time, the various *Edionwere* were confronted with the need to find a mechanism of resolving matters of collective interest and the need also to negate the isolated village system of independent communities. This paved the way for the emergence of a central committee of *Edionwere* known as *Iko-Edionwere* which was headed by an *Okao-Evbo*, who for purposes of convenience can be called Super *Okao-evbo*. The super *Okao-Evbo* had emerged with his council, the *Iko-Edionwere*, that was made up of all the *Edionwere* of the original 31 villages that made up Benin metropolis. In principle, it was the elders or *Edion* that were to attend these council sittings. However, Simpson noted that the family head could send his son who may be a junior *Edion* to represent him, such delegates are called “*Ẹdayi*” (singular *Qdayi*).³⁷

However, the title of Super *Okaevbuo* was rotational between all coalescing villages. As this system gained ascendancy, other Benin towns outside its metropolis referred to as Ubini Nurria or Ubini Nugue or distant Benin towns as different from the Ubini Nowa or metropolitan Benin began to send representatives to this grand council. It was from this evolutionary scheme that its kingship and all political offices emerged. Undoubtedly, with the emergence of kingship, Benin had evolved into a super-complex community and a multi-dimensional society. This was a marked departure from the linear-patriarchal order that was dominated by the *Qdionwere*. Assuredly, the evolution of monarchy and its structural order witnessed the subordination of the *Qdionwere* (as the head of his community) to the *Ẹnigie* (Dukes), *Ehen* (royal/communal deity priests) and representatives of central administration.

Functions of Family and Lineage Councils

The village council hears the petition of those that are to be elevated from a lower age grade to a higher one as well as confirms the headship of a family and ceremonially inducts him to his charge. Thus, the Ọkaegbẹe with his Iko-Ẹgbẹe as his administrative stool and the elders as Erha (fathers) had their house councils made up of adult male sons, this council was called the Iko-owa. The Erha or father was the lawgiver in his home, priest and administrative head of his family, and sat over dispute resolution between members of his household. It is believed that at the demise of an elder, he is co-opted into the council of elders in heaven from where he is re-engaged in mediating for the well-being of his children.³⁸

Undoubtedly, the authority of the Erha in his house was subject to the Ọkaegbẹe in his Iko-Ẹgbẹe where he settled conflicts that affected the lineage group. However, while the Ọkaegbẹe is the chief administrator of the ancestral land, he represents the lineage at the Iko-Ẹbvu. Being men of great age, it is general practice that their eldest sons would assume the authority to administer the deceased's estate with his staff becoming the symbol of authority of his lineage and kept as a sacred object called Ukhure. In same line, while the Ukhure of the founding family heads is preserved by the Ọkaegbẹe as his symbol of authority, the Ukhure of the founding lineage head and eponymous ancestors of the village is kept at the Ọguedion in custody of the *Ọdionwere*. This shrine is centrally located in all Benin villages with its sitting arrangement reflecting the Benin circle of life, death and authority.

In most villages, a section of the Ọguedion is set aside as the Arhuenikhao (Ancestral Presence); this holy-of-holy is the exclusive preserve of the Edion nene or Edion nihiro where matters of grave importance are resolved. According to the Esogban of Benin Kingdom, the staff of the founding elders of Benin is kept under his preserve at the Edion-edo.³⁹ It is clear that in pre-monarchical Benin, three appellate authorities existed; one was the family council, the other was the lineage council and the third was the village council.

Roles and Rites of Age Grades

The *Ọdionwere* is a necessary evolution from a gerontocratic system of patrilineal descent. Being the oldest of the Edion led by the Owere, the *Ọdionwere* is initiated at the Ọguedion shrine and installed as the *Ọdion-were*, meaning the

oldest among the Owere.⁴⁰ However, this installation can only be performed after two lunar years (Ikpiha) or three native years of the demise of his predecessor when the Ukhure lies horizontally in the Ọguedion; it is restored to its vertical position after this ceremony. Expectedly, he performs the nii (thanksgiving ceremony) after two native years of his installation.

The *Ọdionwere*-in-council conducted initiation rites into the age grades and saw to the elevation of its members. The stratification of the age grade necessitated the performance of several rites of initiation marking adulthood which served as a time instrument by the Owere, and adopted by the Ughoron and Ihogbe chroniclers. The first of these grades were Emorhue and Evbirrevbo. These were part of an infantile bracket that learnt the Benin language and ran errands during communal ceremonies; by extension, women were associated with this group. Every three years, boys who have attained puberty are initiated into the Ẹrogbae (singular Irogbae) and between nine to ten years later, they passed into the Ẹghele (singular Ighele) grade. The Ẹrogbae were messengers and “carriers,” and helped in cleaning the Ọguedion and in the clearing of farming and trading routes. However, while transition to this cadre was en masse, entrance into the Ẹghele grade involved the performance of an initiation ceremony (Iz’eki) that was accepted as a manhood test. The Iz’eki ceremony is marked with the symbolic shedding of the head-pad—Ukoki. This ceremony filtered the very best and productive males into higher social roles. Agreeably, the Ẹghele was a highly militarised group and its members could enroll into any of the Otu groups and be given a place to erect a dwelling house.

Nonetheless, an elevation to the Ẹdion cadre is preceded with a feast called Ugie-Ẹdion by the celebrant at the Ọguedion. However, the act of confirmation of the induction is called Akan-re-Ọdion, the ceremony performed at the Ọguedion shrine is called Irhi-Ọdion, promotion into this grade was largely individualised. At the installation of an *Ọdionwere*, he is given the prerogative of elevating two of his sons or two members of the Ẹghele to the Ẹdion grade. Additionally, after the performance of burial rites of an Ẹdion, his son could apply for an elevation into this cadre to represent his family in the elders’ council. The lucky applicant is notified of his selection for promotion by the *Ọdionwere*-in-council. The dead elders are propitiated at the Ọguedion and the celebrant performs the Igbeken ceremony at the feet of every elder present starting with the *Ọdionwere*. This rite involves kneeling on all fours by the applicant before the elders at the Ọguedion with the robbing of both palms as a plea for admission into the Ẹdion council. Admittedly, the celebrant is led to sit

in the Iba (mud seat) on which the elders sit which signified his admission into the elders' cadre. From this group, no rites of passage was required into the Owere regarded as policymakers, high judges and *Ọkaẹgbẹ*. They administered family lands, settled family feuds and also presided over marriage and naming ceremonies in their lineage. The position of an Owere is held for life, he acted as an *Ọdionwere* at the family level and assisted in the administration of the village.

Undoubtedly, the age grade system in Benin is intricately woven into several Otu or age groups which are seven in number, namely Akina, Oya Ighiru Ọba, Ehonsi, Oboighiromwen, Obokhae, Aiwan erhen ekpen and Izamete.⁴¹ Each of these groups was divided into three sets of seniority, Ikao, Ikadese and Ikiekie as the most junior. This system affords an Edion in any village the opportunity to take his place among elders by identifying with his Otu.

The Emergence and Impact of the Monarchy

The Ogiso or Sky kings were the first monarchs to rule Benin, the first of these kings was Igodo, an ironsmith (Ileme), accorded the position of an Okaiko which meant the captain of council and became known as the Chief of Council.⁴² Subsequently, Igodo won recognition as Ogiso and the right of his children to assume such role, the earliest four *Edionwere* to recognise the Ogiso became the Uzama nene. The Ogiso dynasty occasioned change in the physical structure, social roles and nomenclature of the budding kingdom. Thus, the emergence of the political entity called Igodomigodo, "town of towns," literally meaning the town of Igodo. Prior to this, Benin was called Ekolokolo.⁴³ The Ogiso dynasty-initiated changes leading to a process of centralisation. Omoregie agrees that the worship of the Sky god (Iso) was manipulated to establish a theocratic state. Igodo abolished the right of worship of Iso and Erinmwindu deities by all *Edionwere* and *Ọka-Edionwere*, and subsequently abolished the *Iko-Edionwere* or *Edionwere* council.⁴⁴ In its stead, appointed representatives were made the mouthpiece of their respective villages and accepted as chiefs (Uko).

A fundamental change was that the monarchy excised the rights of the people to question a few of its actions. However, the *Edionwere* institution retained the right of ex-communicating an abusive Ogiso considered as *primus inter pares*. This right was invoked in the reign of Ogiso Owodo⁴⁵ the last of 31 Sky kings.

An aftermath of the demise of Owodo was an interregnum⁴⁶ of republicanism, as kingship was in its nascent stages when his son Ekaladerhan was banished. While the Uzama was dissatisfied with creating a new line of kings under the title of Ogiamien, their quest to bringing back Ekaladerhan led to the adventure of Oranmiyan.⁴⁷ This political action was to re-unite the monarchy with the class of ruling nobles, and secure their privileged rights.

The Eweka dynasty adopted the title of Qba, this title possibly originated from the word “Qba-Uwa” that translates to mean “Provider of good things.” However, the breakaway of Qba Ewedo from the tutelage of the Uzama at Usama in 1255 AD marked a fundamental change in the political system. First, the Qba was not dependent on the right of the Uzama to recognise him as king. He threatened their political standing by creating new chiefs that he made Uzama (kingmakers), these chiefs exist as junior Uzama (Uzama Nibie). From this time the Qba made them stand in his presence reflecting his dominant power over the Uzama and the Edion. The exercise of the powers to create chiefs by the Qba spurred the rise of various chieftaincy titles. Qba Ewedo created the titles of Esogban who was made the *Qdionwere* of Benin kingdom and the Iyase variously described as prime minister or leader of the opposition. The Esogban, as political head and keeper of the Edion shrine of Benin, resonates the concept of a mega village society.

The powers to create chiefs gave the monarch an ambiance of independence as it created palace chiefs referred to as the Eghaevbo. The Eghaevbo were two separate chieftaincy institutions, namely, Eghaevbo n'Ogbe or palace chiefs and the Eghaevbo n'Ore or town chiefs with distinguished functions. The inclusion of the Iyase as head of the town chiefs and the joint state council that included the Uzama made it domineering and prominent. Furthermore, the Qba appointed provincial rulers as local administrators, namely, the Egie-isi (singular Igie-isi) and the Enigie (singular Enogie), subordinating the *Qdionwere* institution to royal rule through its representatives in some of the communities that came under the rule of Enigie. The Qba also constituted the Avbiogbe (royal informants), sent to the villages to secure information for the palace, this prevented sudden revolts that could threaten its establishments. Its monopoly of the guilds, such as, the Igun-emato iron workers, Ikpema royal drummers, and Ekhen-Ekhen nugbo, long distance forest traders, was quintessential of the Qba's prime status in the Kingdom. These guilds were integrated through several palace associations, namely, the Iwebo, Ibiwe and Iwegae.⁴⁸

Simpson agrees that royal tax (tribute) collectors and representatives known as *Enotuẹyẹvbo* (singular *Qnotuẹyẹvbo*) only visited the villages once in a year or in rare circumstances.⁴⁹ They were allotted several scattered villages considered as royal prerogative to oversee, though they could not inherit them. This prevented the balkanisation of the kingdom or a situation in which the nobles declared independence over a block of territory and forestalled an abuse of power by the *Qnotuẹyẹvbo* who were to take appeals from the villagers to the *Qba*. This made the system dependent on the local authority of the *Qdionwere*. A fundamental impact of monarchical rule was that the appointment of an *Enogie* was made by the *Qba* and the installation of an *Qdionwere* needed his approval to become the headman in effect.

Clearly, three cadres of power and authority emerged: the *Qba* and his chiefs, in charge of the central administration; the district or dukedom that was controlled by the *Enogie* or *Ogisi*; and the village administration that was dominated by the *Qdionwere*-in-council. Of note, the *Enogie*, where they exist, act as the head of the village and the *Qdionwere* presides over the *Qguedion* and supervised the age grades. However, the nobility-built farming settlements or camps (*Ago*) out of existing communities such as *Iguorhiaki Up-Hill* (an established farming-camp by a steward of Queen *Iheya*). There was the tendency for these farming settlements to create independent *Edionwere* institutions.

Impact of British Colonial Administration

The conquest of Benin Kingdom subjected its traditional institutions to British colonialism in 1897. A grand scheme of exploitation was initiated with Benin's political system modified as the exile of *Qba Ovonranmwun* and offered an opportunity for recruiting colonial loyalists. With the exile of the *Qba*, Native Councils were introduced. This council sitting with the British Resident as President exercised both administrative and judicial functions.⁵⁰ Its recruitment of willing chiefs to constitute the Native Council with no recourse to cultural practices and hierarchy was in violation of tradition. This represented an extreme case of centralisation of power in circumstances under which the elders in Benin villages were eclipsed.⁵¹ In 1902, it regulated the traditional tributes collected from the villages by chiefs. This triggered the revolt of several villages and its *Edionwere* who found no authority in the characters that sat in the Native

Councils, and in the exercise of authority without legitimacy as typified by Chief Agho Ọbaseki a native colonial agent.

The colonial situation was one of exclusion and it created a sense of greed and grievance among dissatisfied forces. In 1906, many dissatisfied elements acting as Aighuobasimmin's (Ovoranmwun's heir) agents mobilised the villagers for the displacement of Ọbaseki with the possible return of Ovonranmwun.⁵² This mobilisation which was coordinated with the *Edionwere* in the Sapoba (Sakponba)-Iyekorhiomwon axis was initially one of passive resistance. No carriers were sent to Benin City and no freeborn participated in public works, yet, it was scotched by a detachment of British troops led by Colonel Moorhouse.⁵³ The colonial option in achieving compliance was the application of brute force rather than dialogue. In restoring colonial authority, the villages of Igbekhue Ugbokoniro, Idunmowina, Iyanomo, Ugo, Idumeka, Ohegi and Ikpe were intimidated into submission.⁵⁴ These villages were compelled to pay the backlog of withheld services and heavy fines for the cost of British deployments. British colonialism also introduced Paramountcy in which a host of important personalities were sieved and made Paramount Chiefs over contiguous territories and consolidated villages. Paramountcy under British rule subjected several *Edionwere* institutions to chiefs who were made equivalents of feudal lords. Under these oppressive systems, the only available option in mediating the excesses of abusive Paramount chiefs was a revolt.

The *Edionwere* were to play traditional roles in an atmosphere of tyranny by colonial agents. So grave were the abuses of Paramountcy that Chiefs Igiehon, Imaran and Iyamu, all British agents, were notorious for illegal dealings and enforcement of slave labour for private gain. This colonial situation yielded a conflict outcome in 1906, 1909 and 1912 in the Urhonigbe area where a violent rebellion was coordinated by the Ọkao-Evbo against chiefs Imaran and Iyamu who became Paramount Chiefs. Accordingly, in the Ekehuan, Sakponba and Urhonigbe areas, the powers to bestow economic favours and patronage of Paramount Chiefs were enhanced with the award of contracts for the construction of police barracks and telegraphic lines, with the *Odionwere* becoming diminutive. The institution of Paramountcy proved an existential threat to colonial rule after the murder of Mr. Crewe-Read in Agbor in 1906 where Benin chiefs acted as Paramount Chiefs, gaining notoriety for abuses. In addition, the 1911–1913 uprising in Urhonigbe represented the general frustration of the village headmen (*Edionwere*) over the malpractices of British

colonialism and its agents and signalled that the system had to be reformed in 1914.⁵⁵

Impact of Indirect Rule in the Benin Division

Under British supervision, indirect rule as a colonial administrative system subordinated and, perhaps, cloned traditional institutions to maximise exploitation as far as possible. In the changes occasioned by colonialism, a central authority was put in place with the restoration in 1914 of the Qba that was assisted by a council of chiefs that exercised judicial and executive powers. This council operated on approved share of various revenue generated in division and kept in the Native Treasury. For the administration of its villages, the Benin Division was divided into four districts (Ibozo) in 1915 and was later restructured in 1921, leading to the creation of five districts. By 1933, the districts had grown into 9 and the Native Courts within them 13. The new districts were:

S/N	District	Native Court Area	District Head
1	Benin	Benin and Ebue	Osuma (Eghaevbo n'ore)
2	Ehor	Ehor	Ezomo (Uzama)
3	Udo	Udo and Usen	Ogie-Ego
4	Siluko	Siluko	Qbazuaye (Eghaevbo n'Ibiwe)
5	Ekiadolor	Ekiadolor	Oloton (Uzama)
6	Ekehuan	Ekehuan and Qbajere	Qbaseki (Eghaevbo n' Iwegue)
7	Ugboko	Ugboko	Qbabaefo (Eghaevbo n'Ore)
8	Urhonigbe	Urhonigbe	Aiyobahan (Eghaevbo n'Iwebo)
9	Oghada	Ogada and Igbanke	Ima (Eghaevbo n'Ore) ⁵⁶

Between 1928 and 1933, a Central Council was established consisting of the Qba, eight Judicial Council members, 10 Ward heads and nine District heads. Under this scheme, village heads that were either Enigie or *Edionwere* were also appointed as administrative and judicial heads and acted under the authority of district heads. The disquiet emanating from the reforms of the 1920s generated further calls for modernisation. Thus, based on proposals from intelligence reports, such as, Marshall (1938 and 1939), the permanency of district heads was abolished. The mid-western state intelligence reports note that from the 1940s to 1955, this modernisation remained unchanged.

However, the application of local government laws in the 1950s resulted in the creation of a two-tier system of local government, comprising the Benin Divisional Native Authority-Ikogbakha (Central Council) and six Districts (inclusive of the Benin City Council-Ikeredo). The Benin Central Council (Divisional Council) was made up of the *Ọba*, 60 elected members and 19 titleholders as follows: three Uzama, six *Eghaevbo n'Ore*, nine *Eghaevbo n'Ogbe* and the *Ihaza*. Two courts were established: one was for criminal cases while the other was for civil cases. While the *Ọba* was the president of both courts, its vice-presidency was rotational (monthly) among representatives from the City and District Councils. Its members were paid 40 per cent of the sitting fees of the court. This Council with the *Ọba-in-Council* had powers to hear cases from the Ward and Joint Village Group Councils, discipline chiefs, maintain peace and public order as well as supervise public works in the Benin Council Area. Its courts were both of original summons and an appellate court with powers to entertain cases from the village Councils and Wards. The districts were given Central Courts, a single permanent president was appointed where the group had a single head like the *Iyase* of Udo, however, its vice-presidency was taken in turns by its members.

The Central Council met four times a year and the day-to-day administration was carried out by a standing committee called the *Iguobazero* which formed its main executive body and met weekly. It was made up of 24 permanent titled members, representatives from the Benin City Council, the Ikeredo, and two members from the districts who were chosen monthly in rotation. Besides the *Iguobazero*, the central native authority had six other committees: Finance, Works, Health, Market, Town Planning (all of which met monthly) and a Citizens Advice Bureau, a complaint sub-committee, which met daily. This mediated the influence of the *Edionwere* as it took away control over these sectors and featured appointed nominees. Furthermore, these committees eliminated the mobilisation of the *Eghẹle* by the *Edionwere* for public works at the centre. The introduction of direct taxation eliminated *corvée* labour for public works and instigated the emergence of migrant gangs of professional workmen.

Impact of Colonial Socio-Economic Reforms

Colonialism was geared towards economic exploitation through liberalisation and export from the peripheral regions to manufacturing centres in Britain. To achieve this, several road networks were created to link the coastal areas and

open up the villages to British commerce. The collateral impact of the creation of new roads was that it altered settlement patterns. An instance was the forceful emigration of Okada village to its present site occasioned by the Benin-Utese-Ondo Road that diverted trade from its pristine abode.⁵⁷ Thus, instigating conflicts over scarce resources, the *Edionwere* in villages that harnessed profits from the sale of local foodstuff and gifts from migrant traders as viable points for the display of new and affordable products along traditional trade routes lost such privileged status.

While a traditional trade route had run from Egor-Ova through Iguoshodi, Unuame (Ovia River)-Udo-Lagos through Gbelegbu, the construction of the Oluku-Iyowa-Evbonika-Aihuobabekun via Owo-Akure road to Lagos made these new towns prominent. In its drive for economic exploitation, the British adopted a dual approach: first, armed expeditions were sent to secure trading routes with the interior villages; and second, efforts were made in encouraging and regulating rubber production with the introduction of rubber and gun licences. In its quest to secure steady supply of rubber for the production of the pneumatic tyre, the British introduced the Forestry Proclamation Act no. 28 of 1901 that made provision for forest reserves as well as rubber and timber exploitation.⁵⁸ Admittedly, rubber merchandising created a sense of economic relief in the villages, however, it instituted social conflicts.

These forest reserves and plantations denied access to forest exploitation, jeopardised local food cropping making the people dependent on imported food and medicines. Venal forest guards constituted themselves as *de facto Odionwere* receiving bribes from hunters. In Ekehuan, Iguobazuwa and Igue-Orhiaki Uphill, the loss of village lands to forest reserves and plantations limited lands for farming.⁵⁹ Colonial economic liberalism and its policy of plantation economy saw migrant rubber merchants from different parts of Benin as well as Urhobo tappers enrolled as Edion in host communities. Attempts to maintain hierarchy by this group in the age-grade in their ancestral villages, among Benin migrants, resulted in conflicts with those who had remained in the community marking-time for advancement, this conflict is now resolved with the payment of prescribed fees.⁶⁰

Another act of colonial land grabbing was its policy of creating Government Reserved Areas (GRA). In creating European exclusive areas, the British displaced the village of Ebuo-Evian with no compensation. This explains the absence of an *Odionwere* in this area. "Ikpokpan village is now remembered as

Ikpokpan road; Eguo-hon and Oko villages among others became encapsulated in the entrapment of a colonial city.”⁶¹ These policies forced an emigration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and the people susceptible to the vices of a modern city. Additionally, Christian missionary work enhanced by colonial rule foisted restrictions on converts in ritual performance at the Oguedion, reducing the number of initiates in the *Qdionwere* institution. Clearly, the colonial reality placed a number of villages and its *Qdionwere* institution in jeopardy of extinction with limited applications for upgrades.

Impact of Political Party Systems on Benin Villages

Political parties under colonialism were tailored in opposition to traditional institutions. The colonial situation created elitist identities such as the Benin Tax Payers Association that originated from the Benin Community Association as a pressure group. These groups armed with western education sought for more representational government that was inclusive of its members. However, in the aftermath of the Second World War and the calls for decolonisation, they had broader objectives of identifying with national parties calling for independence for Nigeria rather than administering village settlements.

British colonialism encouraged regional party politics with the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), the Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG) identified with the dominant ethnic nationalities in Eastern, Northern and Western regions, respectively. While Benin was administratively grouped in Western Nigeria, it was polarised between the Ogboni cult and the Otu-Edo with the tendency to associate Ogboni members with the AG, resented for its policy on taxing women and perceived scaly programmes for internal colonialism. This initiated an era of hooliganism that displaced villagers with attendant disruptions of village councils. The realisation that elected members were to become government representatives accentuated this conflict. The temporary deposition of the Olokunmwun (*Qdionwere*) of Okhunmwun by Otu-Edo/NCNC members betrays the excesses of this period.⁶² In many villages, houses belonging to political rivals were burnt, women sexually assaulted and farmlands destroyed.⁶³

Conclusion

Benin Kingdom was encapsulated by change and its *Qdionwere* institution impacted by colonialism; however, modernisation created new problems with the very issues it was made to resolve looming large. The majority of respondents blamed the British for recurrent disputes over the imposition of modern courts, expropriation of land such as in Ikpokpa village, forced migration, the demystification of the *Qdionwere* through its proliferation and liberalism. These policies were aimed at enhancing British exploitation of Benin and subordinating its traditional institutions.

Both oral and secondary sources of information traced the origins of the *Qdionwere* institution in Benin Kingdom to the compound family system c. 600 AD; however, with the advent of British colonialism it is no longer in its original form. Field studies showed that colonial socio-economic modernisation led to the relegation of traditional institutions in Benin Kingdom as elsewhere in Nigeria. Findings indicated that Christian missionary works drew distinctions on the participation of converts in the rites of the *Qdionwere* which impacted on the recruitment of practitioners. Colonialism initiated counter migrations that triggered rapid transformation of rural communities, compounded settlement patterns and established the concept of *City Qdionwere*.

The creation of GRAs displaced the villagers of Ebvo-Evian and Ikpokpan without compensation. Under colonial rule, the mediatory rights of Benin elders were circumscribed by paid lawyers and its courts were remotely located, this made the people re-engage the elders in dispute resolution. Additionally, party politics placed the Edion under perceived political influence. Undoubtedly, most colonial initiatives added conflicts to the issues they were established to resolve as British reforms demonstrated limits in civil administration without recourse to traditional institutions. Based on the aforesaid, it is needful to strengthen the *Qdionwere* institution as a means for rural integration and administration as it has shown resilience and adaptability as an alternative approach to dispute resolution.

From the findings, the colonial situation created the emergence of an elite who dwarfed the roles and functions of the *Qdionwere* creating the feeling of not residing authority in colonial agents but in elders to administer the villages. From this study, it is clear that the *Qdionwere* is a pristine political institution in Benin and the closest to its people. In sum, the *Qdionwere* should be

accommodated as a formal conflict management institution in the Benin Division.

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A Review Essay of the Career and Works of Professor Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju through *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy*

Saheed Balogun Amusa

The Book: The book, *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy* has 43 chapters, 918 pages and 12 pages of index. The book is a compendium of the leading publications of Professor Asiwaju and a collection of his wealth of academic, research and service experience spanning a period of over 40 years.

Authorship: One of the most important elements in textual criticism or source evaluation in historiography is authorship. A historical researcher wishes to know the author of any document or text that they have collected to execute a research or even for mere reading pleasure. Evaluating the authorship and date of production of a text is referred to as external criticism in historiography. In establishing the worth, appropriateness or suitability of a work, the historian wishes to know the author of the work *vis-à-vis* their pedigree, their personal, ethnic, religious, ideological and even religious background, their relationship and role in the topic matter of the book, as well as other personal credentials. The internal criticism, on the other hand, deals with evaluating the degree of possibility, probability and plausibility of events being described by an author.

¹In assessing the authorship of the work, it is affirmed that the author of this work, Professor Emeritus Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju, is the most accomplished African scholar based in Africa to have authored it. With all his degrees at the Ibadan School of History under the tutelage of Professors Kenneth Dike, Ade Ajayi, Saburi Biobaku and other foremost scholars, Professor A.I. Asiwaju has, over the years, carved a niche for himself as the pioneer of African borderland studies. Like his name suggests, Professor Asiwaju blazed the trails of African borderland studies in Nigeria with many seminal publications in African borderland studies like *Western Yorubaland under European Rule, 1889–1985: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (Longman, 1970); *Artificial*

Boundaries (UNILAG Inaugural Lecture, 1984); *Partitioned Africans: Ethnic Relations Across Africa's International Boundaries, 1884–1984* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1985); *West African Transformations: Comparative Impacts of French and British Colonialism* (Malthouse, 1991); *Borderlands in Africa: A Multidisciplinary and Comparative Focus on Nigeria and West Africa* (Co-edited with P.O. Adeniyi, UNILAG Press, 1991); *Boundaries and African Integration: Essays in Comparative History and Policy Analysis* (PANAF, 2003); and *Transfrontier Regionalism: The Revival of Regional Integration in Africa* (co-authored with D.C. Bach, 2013), among others.

Beyond the academia, Professor Asiwaju demonstrated the importance of town and gown relations as well as the significance of academic research for governance, public administration and policy directions. His public service records in the areas of his academic and research competence are unprecedented and have remained arguably unsurpassed. For instance, between 1987 and 1996, he was the pioneer Commissioner (International Boundaries) of Nigeria's National Boundary Commission, Consultant to Mali, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union (AU), the Regional Centre for Peace and Disarmament in Africa, Lomé, Togo; United Nations Centre for Regional Development, Africa Office, Nairobi, Kenya; and the United Nations Office for West Africa (UNOWA). In all these government and public service appointments, Professor Asiwaju brought his wealth of academic teaching and research to bear on the policy initiatives of these international agencies *vis-à-vis* African borders and borderlands-related issues.

The Publishers: The book was published by the Pan-African University Press (PAUP), Austin, Texas, USA. The Pan-African University Press is a product of collaboration among various universities and scholars based in three continents namely Africa, Europe and North America. The renowned historian and scholar, Professor Toyin Falola, is the Chairman of the Editorial Board of PAUP, while the members of the Editorial Team as well as the members of the Board of Directors of the Press are drawn from different parts of the world. Within its short period of existence, the PAUP has been able to fulfill and has continued to fulfill its goal of circulating publications in a global network that will benefit under-represented academic voices. Coming from the stable of PAUP, *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy* has been given an international splendour and has brought the over 40 years research and service exertions of

Professor A.I. Asiwaju to the international academic and research limelight. The success or otherwise of a publication will be largely determined by the publishing outlets. Therefore, it is incontestable that this invaluable book by Prof. Asiwaju has come out of the equally sterling publishing outlet of PAUP.

Year of Publication and Public Presentation: Even though the Book was published in 2021, its public presentation took place in July 2022. The year 2022 is very crucial in Nigeria's political history as the year preceding the general elections of 2023. The year witnessed new political terminologies and slogans including one of the most popular ones which is "Emi Lokan" popularised by Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. While I was surfing the internet to look for materials to prepare this presentation, whenever I searched for Professor A.I. Asiwaju's new book, I was provided with information about Professor Asiwaju and also information about Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Even though the word "Asiwaju" in Professor Asiwaju's name is his real surname and that of Asiwaju in Senator Bola Tinubu's name is a title, one cannot but be impressed and inspired by the power and prophecies in Yoruba names. While Professor Asiwaju is taking the lead in Nigeria as a scholar of African borderland studies, Asiwaju Bola Tinubu took the lead in the Nigerian political space in the buildup to the 2023 General Elections.

General Contents of the Book: From the title to the front pages, and from the chapters to the conclusion and index, *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy* is an excellent masterpiece in all key areas of a book. One could notice that Professor Asiwaju is in great love with the expression "Bridging Boundaries". These boundaries range from family boundary to marital boundary, ethnic boundary, community boundary, local boundary, national boundary, international boundary, continental boundary and even intercontinental boundary. No wonder then that his autobiography is titled *Bridging Boundaries: My History of Upliftment from the Margins*. With a Foreword by His Excellency Former President Olusegun Obasanjo, the book not only collects Professor Asiwaju's leading publications in African borderlands studies but also offers new insights into the dynamics of governmental and non-governmental policy directions and their implications for African development over the years.

Timeless Relevance of the Theme of Borderlands and the Contributions of Emeritus Professor A.I. Asiwaju

Through this Compendium and his other numerous publications, Emeritus Professor Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju has not only pioneered a new area of historical scholarship but he has also opened a new goldmine of relevance, recognition and promotion for historians in governance and development. Prior to Professor Asiwaju's pioneering interest, borderland studies were parts of the largely neglected areas of studies just like gender studies, family studies and other micro topics. Through his several years of scholarship, teaching, research and service, Prof. Asiwaju has contributed immensely to the development and explanation of major concepts in borderlands studies such as borders, boundaries, borderlands, frontiers, transitional zones, and so on. One of the most significant contributions of Prof. Asiwaju to borderlands studies is also the development of research strategies, models and theories in borderlands studies to aid current and potential researchers in this novel research area. Furthermore, Professor Asiwaju's pioneering role in borderland studies also showcased the importance and centrality of multidisciplinary approach to borderland studies. He worked in collaborations with scholars from the human sciences like geography, sociology, political sciences, law and even scholars from the biological sciences, physical sciences, engineering, and so on.

In his primary area of history and at the University of Lagos, Prof. Asiwaju has not only successfully pioneered a new field of study but he has succeeded in reproducing worthy successors and mentees who have continued to advance scholarship in this important area. One of these is Professor Rufus Taiwo Akinyele who obtained his PhD in 1990 at the University of Lagos with a thesis titled *States Creation and Boundary Adjustment in Nigeria, 1900–1987: A Study in the Approach to the Problems of Ethnic Minority Groups in Nigeria*. There was also the establishment of a special Centre for African Regional Integration and Border Studies (CARIBS) at the University of Lagos to serve as a leading base of research into issues relating to the prospects of African borderlands understanding in African developmental strategies.

The relevance of borderlands studies to African continental integration, unity and development cannot be overemphasised. In fact, it has been widely acknowledged that boundary dispute, be it local, communal, national and international, is one of the most fundamental challenges of development in modern Africa. From North to South and from East to West, examples of

boundary disputes abound in Africa such as Morocco and Mauritania, Libya and Algeria, Nigeria and Cameroon, Sudan and Kenya, Tanzania and Malawi, Kenya and Uganda, Eritrea and Ethiopia, Gabon and Equatorial Guinea, Burkina Faso and Niger, Algeria and Morocco, Congo and Angola, Swaziland and Angola, and numerous others. Even within these African countries, several internal boundary disputes exist between states, regions and towns with far-reaching consequences for national peace and harmony. In fact, scholars have established a nexus between boundary and borderlands issues in our understanding and appreciations of issues of citizenship, alienation, indigeneity, migrations, settlements and other topical national issues in contemporary Nigeria.²

Boundaries and borderlands discourse and resolutions rank among the top governance issues in contemporary Africa, particularly in Nigeria. In the words of Professor A.I. Asiwaju, “the issues of boundaries and governance are so intricately interwoven that one cannot be independently discussed without the other....”³ In the case of Nigeria, Professor Asiwaju has shown that the history of Nigeria is basically one of a continuous encounter with border problematics, and that the problems posed call for an ever-increasing creativeness and imagination in policy making. Boundaries and borderlands are so crucial in Nigerian governance that there is a National Boundary Commission (NBC) established as far back as 1987. The NBC is Nigeria’s flagship institution for governance in boundary matters just as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is responsible for organising national and state elections. Other governmental agencies and ministries which equally look after boundaries and borderlands matters include the Ministry of Inter-Governmental Relations and the Ministry of Cooperation and Integration in Africa.

Significantly, Professor Toyin Falola has rightly posited that *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy* is a blueprint for anyone interested in comparative African historical studies because the author, the enigmatic historian and emeritus Professor Asiwaju, occupies a prime position in comparative African history by comparing the British and French colonial policies and administrations.⁴

Without mincing words, one can boldly say that Professor A.I. Asiwaju’s pioneering exertions into borderlands studies are not misplaced or misdirected.

His exertions have been a successful blend of academic teaching and research in initially neglected but highly novel and relevant areas of study.

Borderlands Studies as a Field of History: The Challenge of Sustenance and Continuity

While it has been acknowledged and emphasised that Professor Asiwaju has made an indelible mark in borderland studies and has mentored a number of successors, one is, however, worried about the future of this field of studies within the historical scholarship and training in Nigerian universities. One will be interested in knowing the state of borderlands studies at the University of Lagos today, particularly its Department of History and Strategic Studies, and the fate of CARIBS today after the exit of Professor Asiwaju from active service, and also with the short movement of Professor Akinyele to Maranatha University as Vice-Chancellor. How are we going to make sure that borderlands studies is not left for the sociologists, political scientists, international relations scholars and so on while historians go back to their traditional cocoons of “rise and fall of empires”? These are questions for Nigerian professional historians to ponder.

Conclusion

Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy, from whatever viewpoint it is being looked at, and its author, Emeritus Professor Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju, stand tall in African historiography. Professor Asiwaju ranks among the first set of African scholars to venture into this largely neglected and understudied area, alongside others such as J.C. Anene who authored *The International Boundaries of Nigeria* (1970) and Omolade Adejuyigbe who authored *Boundary Politics in Western Nigeria* (1976).

Emeritus Professor Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju deserves a special place in Nigerian historiography as the African Samuel Wittmore Boggs when it comes to the question of pioneering boundary and borderlands studies.⁵ More importantly, we must not lose sight of Professor Asiwaju’s landmark and historic contributions to the history and culture, and society of the *Yewa* People hitherto known as the *Egbado* in Yoruba historiography. Professor Asiwaju himself

admits that this feat has a very great impact on his personal fulfilment as a professional historian from that region. He says:

One lasting impact we have had the grace to make relates to our producing the locally commissioned historical research in 1994/1995, which formed the basis for the change of the identity of a whole historic zone and of the hitherto dominant constituent sub-ethnic group in the Nigerian southwestern border region, the border area of Ogun State, from Egbado Division and Egbado to Yewaland and Yewa, respectively.... The reference here is to our smallest but most seminal publication, *The Birth of Yewaland: Studies and Documents Relating to the Change of a Yoruba Sub-Ethnic Name From Egbado to Yewa in Ogun State of Southwestern Nigeria* (1995), which formed the basis of the public proclamation of July 1, 1995 in Ilaro by the people of the entire border region in Ogun State, formally enacted in the Legal Notice published in the Ogun State Government Gazette, No. 51, Vol. 22, Abeokuta, 18th December 1997, Page 109. Nothing has pleased me more than the opportunity which this publication has offered us as historians to cast a permanent footprint, so to speak, on the sand of time of our homeland border region in Nigeria.⁶

This is to show and confirm that Professor Asiwaju has not only had a fulfilling academic career but that he has also fulfilled his social responsibility to his people and kinsmen. Finally, one cannot but agree with Professor Toyin Falola in describing Professor A.I. Asiwaju as a worthy “vanguard, forerunner and pathfinder” Nigerian historian from Yewaland.

This piece has attempted a scholarly celebration, through his work *Bridging African Boundaries: Cross-Border Areas and Regional Integration in Comparative History and Policy Advocacy*, of an Emeritus Professor of History at the University of Lagos, a teacher of teachers, a consummate administrator, a mentor par-excellence, a professor of over 40 years of post-professorial experience and a detribalised and dereligionised Nigerian, Professor Emeritus Anthony Ijaola Asiwaju. The book is commended to all professional historians as well as everyone who is interested in issues in boundaries and borderlands in African historical trajectory and it is a must for all public and private repositories across the globe.

Endnotes

¹ For details on textual criticism and source evaluation in history, see Arthur Marwick, *The Nature of History* (New York: Knopf: 1970)

² N. Roberts, *The State, Accumulation and Violence: The Politics of Environmental Security in Nigeria's Oil Producing Areas* (Lagos: NDDC, 1999) and R.L. Ricardo, *Borders, Nationalism and African State* (Rienna: 2005)

³ A.I. Asiwaju, "Boundaries and Governance in Nigeria" in R.T. Akinyele (ed.), *Contemporary Issues on Boundaries and Governance in Nigeria* (Lagos: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, 2005), p,1-17

⁴ Toyin Falola, "Anthony Asiwaju's Bridging African Boundaries: A Three-part Blueprint for Every Progress-driven African Leader" available online at <http://www.nigeriancurrent.com> (Accessed on November 7, 2022)

⁵ The author of *International Boundaries: A Study of Functions and Problems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940).

⁶ A.I. Asiwaju, *Bridging Boundaries: My History of Upliftment from the Margins* (Ibadan: University Press Plc., 2019).

H. Menke, J. Buckingham, F. Gounder, A. Kumar and M. HassanKhan (eds.). *Social Aspects of Health, Medicine and Disease in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era*, (New York: Routledge, 2021), 262pp

Social Aspects of Health, Medicine and Disease in the Colonial and Post-Colonial Era presents a detailed analysis of the health issues of enslaved people and indentured migrants, some of whom worked as labourers on plantations spanning from the period of colonial rule well into after these countries (Fiji, Suriname and India) gained independence. With cultural pluralism as its central theme, this book is divided into three parts, each with three chapters. While seven chapters focused on Suriname, two focused on India and Fiji.

The first part, titled "Cultural Encounters, Pluralism and Health Care," discusses how power relations between cultures, particularly that of the coloniser and colonised, resulted in the gradual eradication of alternative medicine among these non-Europeans. It examines the attitude of the colonisers towards Indian labourers who worked on sugar plantations during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries under the indenture contract, how attempts to Christianise the Maroons influenced healthcare in the interior part of Suriname and a re-evaluation of Kuhn's work on labourers who worked on plantations in Suriname. The consequences of colonial contact did not end with colonialism but have seeped into the postcolonial period, affecting several generations after. This perspective sheds light on why medical history remains underdeveloped in developing countries, citing Suriname as a perfect example of countries in such a category. The first article talks about the vast migrations of peasants from India to work on sugar plantations in the territories surrounding the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean. The indenture system practised in this period mandated the owners of these plantations to provide wages and healthcare for these indentured labourers until the employment contract expired. The author argues that the ship through which these labourers were conveyed was a unique "space" where Western medical practices and Indian alternative medicine intersected. In India, this intersection played a crucial role in shaping colonial health regimes and policies in the period under study. The second paper historicises the Moravian church's role in proselytising the Maroons. These efforts at evangelisation are crucial to understanding how medical services evolved and the existing state of health services in the remote areas of Suriname. The author argues that the colonising

mission was particularly concerned about the health of the colonisers in the tropical areas they inhabited. The conversion of the Maroons was a herculean task for the Moravians as the former were unhappy with the Christians and revolted against them. The Maroonian religion was a threat to the smooth running of the colonial government. Despite condemning the Maroonian's alternative medicine practice, the colonial physicians learned from the people's use of herbs to treat themselves. Over time, the colonial government backed these alternative health practices, and medical pluralism had come to stay. The third article discusses how the enslaved people who worked on the plantations were treated. They were seen as machines that were abandoned the moment their health failed. The working conditions of those who worked on the sugar plantations seemed the worst of the coffee, sugar, timber and cotton plantations. They ploughed in the scorching sun and were sleep-deprived, the food rationing was poor, and they had limited access to health services and potable water.

The second part, "Pluralism and Ethno-Health Practices," discusses the use of medicine made from plants as a legacy of slavery and indentured labour. It explains in detail the enslaved people's rich knowledge of medicinal plants and how they can be used to treat various illnesses and diseases. This knowledge they held in high esteem while they were away from their homes. The first paper gives an account of the perceptions of and the various treatments of cutaneous leishmaniasis (CL) among the Surinamese, particularly the Saramacca and Aucan Maroon communities. It discusses the cultural and social aspects of the disease. The people believed its cause was natural and had nothing to do with a biomedical one. That is, contact with insects, bacteria, dirty water or certain trees caused it. Just like leprosy, those living with CL are susceptible to the loss of phalanges and sometimes are at risk of amputation of the hand, arm or leg. The various treatment methods, particularly those involving self-medication, are elaborated upon extensively in this chapter. Chapter 5 addresses the use of medicinal plants and how the Surinamese have, over time, preserved their indigenous healthcare system. The author maintains that these treatments were arrived at through trial and error. These treatments, the author refers to as the implications of the ethnopharmacological legacy of slavery and indentured labour owing to their contacts with the Javanese and Hindustanis, among others. The sixth chapter talks about how enslaved Africans combined their knowledge of the use of plants as food and medicine with novel knowledge of the health benefits of medicinal plants they gained in their environment. It also discusses its relevance and significance in contemporary times.

The third part, “Leprosy in Plural Contexts,” discusses the fears and responses of the colonial regime to leprosy in Fiji and Suriname. While the seventh and ninth chapters focused on leprosy in Suriname, the eighth chapter analyses disability, leprosy and plantation health among Indian indentured labourers in Fiji. It examines how the colonisers transformed leprosy into a colonial disease. Their fear of contracting leprosy led to compulsory segregation policies as proclamations were issued to restrict the movement of those affected by leprosy. The colonisers were perturbed about contracting the disease and the reduction of affected enslaved people who worked on the plantations. The strict segregation policies, coupled with the poor living conditions of these asylums, made it difficult for those affected by the disease or something similar to report themselves at the segregation centres. Other contagious diseases were prevalent in Suriname apart from leprosy, some of which posed a more significant threat than leprosy did. Yet, none got the kind of attention that leprosy attracted. The Surinamese believed that leprosy was caused by breaking a taboo and the majority of these taboos were animal-related. Just as in Suriname, Indian indentured labourers were screened for leprosy before they were considered fit to work on the plantation in Fiji. This racialised colonial mechanism of exclusion had far-reaching social and economic impacts.

Overall, the book represents a significant contribution to slavery, indentured labour and the medical history of some colonised territories. The themes explored by the authors are relevant to have a deeper understanding of the rudimentary stage of medical history in some colonised territories. In a few instances, mentions were made of words that have been considered derogatory by the international community. These words include “slaves” in place of “enslaved people” and “leprosy sufferers” in place of “people affected by leprosy.”

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