

ELITE IDENTITY AND POWER: A STUDY OF SOCIAL CHANGE AND  
LEADERSHIP AMONG THE EGBA OF WESTERN NIGERIA 1860-1950

by

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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DALHOUSIE UNIVERSITY  
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Deservedly to Shade,  
and to Olumide, Oluwanifemi and OyeOluwa.

To the memory of Cornelius Olanrewaju Oduntan

In appreciation of the grace of God

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## ABSTRACT

By separating the local from the global, extant historiography fails to capture a total sense of how Africans engaged with change in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Existing approaches are Eurocentric in assuming that global forces like colonialism, racism, nationalism and capitalism were the only issues that Africans confronted and thought about. A more complete history of social change is one which integrates local concerns and ideas, expressed in local languages and cosmologies, with Atlantic discourses.

The history of Abeokuta in Western Nigeria had been written in a modernization model which interprets the Egba past as how a modern missionary-created elite tried to transform the society from a traditional one. By focusing on elite discourses in a wider scope than the modernization premise, a more complex history emerges in which European influence and colonial power were only part of many forces and resources which the Egba struggled over, modulated and coped with. Power in 19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta was invented by the construction of a national identity, history and traditions to legitimize a central monarchy. The interests of ruling elites converged with those of colonial power towards consolidating these innovations and political centralization. However, other displaced elites always contested such constructions. The crises and violence of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century were therefore not simply anti-colonial resistance. They were complicated expressions of political dissent against local, colonial and global forces of domination, and reactions to socio-economic challenges.

Public health discourse reveals that the Egba did not conceive of European medicine as a dichotomous binary to local medical practices. Rather, it represented an addition of choices to a corpus of medical options. Similarly, Atlantic ideas like democracy and modernization were reduced to local understanding such that they correlated to local knowledge. Modernity for the Egba was therefore not about becoming like Europe; but about pursuing life's best-options in the variety of free and forceful influences.

Egba society was shaped in the multiple struggles among elites advancing various claims and deploying instruments of power. This history transcends the colonial and renders Africans much more fully as actors in the making of their lives and society.

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED**

Abe. Dist.	Abeokuta District Files
Abe. Prof.	Abeokuta Provincial Files
AG	Action Group
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CO	Colonial Office
CSO	Colonial Secretary's Office
EA	Egba Archives
ENA	Egba Native Authority
EUBM	Egba United Board of Management
EUG	Egba United Government
J.A.H	Journal of African History
J.H.S.N.	Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
NAA	National Archives, Abeokuta
NAI	National Archives, Ibadan
NCNC	National Congress for Nigerian Citizens
NNDP	Nigerian National Democratic Party
PRO	Public Records Office
PWD	Public Works Department
SMA	Société des Missions Africaines
UNILAG	University of Lagos
WAFF	West African Frontier Force
WASU	West African Students Union

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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction and Overview

Since Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), historians have struggled to see past imposed categories in order to recover the histories of colonized peoples from distortion. The process by which Africa's political elite was formed calls for such a review. Most academic treatments of the African political elite see them as a modern elite with a definite historical origin, unambiguous identity, and special modern credentials with which they displaced chiefly elites over the course of the colonial period.<sup>1</sup> This displacement model generally posits that modern Africa was shaped by colonial rule and according to European ideals. Underlying it also is the notion that African society is in a teleological transition from a stable and immutable traditional past to an inevitable modern future by which a European-created elite progressively sidelines the traditional elite to wield power in the post-colonial state.

Such views which center Western modernity as the engine of modern African history distort in many ways. They measure African elites by standards set in the West, rendering African history not the history of Africans making themselves, but of European ideas in Africa. Furthermore, they do not provide for a history that can adequately explain the complexities in African politics and societies. For instance, they fail to explain the

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<sup>1</sup> Most studies of "modern" elites in Africa assume Western education and modernity to be key elements in elite formation and behaviour. Peter Lloyd, International African Institute and University of Ibadan, *The New Elites of Tropical Africa: Studies presented at the Sixth International African Seminar at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, July, 1964*; Robert Miller, "Elite Formation in Africa: Class, Culture and Coherence," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 12, 4 (1974). Mahmood Mamdani dichotomizes an urban "citizen" elite enjoying European type civil liberties and opportunities from a rural tribal elite subject to customary law and indirect rule. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); See also R. Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs: The Politics of Chieftaincy in Ghana, 1951-1960* (Oxford: Currey, 2000); Jean Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Harlow: Longman, 1993); Femi Kolapo, "The Political Impact of European Rule" in *Africa: Colonial Africa, 1885-1939*, ed. Toyin Falola (Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2002), 87-104.

reality that traditional authority is not withering away, but survives in spite of or alongside the modern state. Thus, explanations which impose a tradition to modernity teleology do not capture the identity, formation or behavior of modern African elites. We need to refigure the history of the modern African elite because we do not have a history for what exists.

The need to transcend the legacies of Western imperialism has been echoed by many generations of historians. In the past decade, scholars like Pieter Boele van Hensbroek, Anthony Appiah and Valentin Mudimbe have highlighted the faulted basis upon which African thought, identity and history have been conceived. As Hensbroek shows, existing knowledge of Africa reinforces its acclaimed “otherness” and narrows the lived experiences of the people to inversions or conversions of the West.<sup>2</sup> More recently, Kwaku Korang underscores the stranglehold by showing that current realities, including the nation-state (political identity), language and the very intellectual system are trapped in the epistemological protocols that constitute Western imperialism. This makes it virtually impossible to enounce a thought, history or identity outside the bounds of the rationality upon which European domination was built and sustained.<sup>3</sup>

This study seeks to overcome such faulted models to see the formation of an African elite in a more complete scope by being open to the ways in which the educated elite have roots deeper than the colonial period, engaged in rivalries as well as alliances with other elites, and were involved in matters that transcend a transition to a Western

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<sup>2</sup> Pietre Boele van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Political Thought* (Connecticut: Praegar, 1999); for similar thoughts see Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: African and the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992); V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>3</sup> K. L. Korang, *Writing Ghana, Imagining Africa: Nation and African Modernity* (Rochester NY: Rochester University Press, 2004).

modern. The primary object of this thesis is to produce a historically grounded study of the struggles and competition among a multiplicity of elite groups by which leadership was determined and power defined and configured.

Many accounts of African history assume that complex power-seeking rational behaviours among Africans as political actors began only with the advent of European influence and are valuable only as they correspond to or are opposed to European hegemony.<sup>4</sup> A self-reinforcing logic builds on the relative inaccessibility of knowledge about African elite structures and political rivalries before European contact to argue both their inadmissibility and historical irrelevance. This thesis makes the case for a historical continuity which connects political contestations of the colonial and post-colonial eras to pre-colonial times. In doing so, it argues that local political discourses and struggles were not always a conscious reaction to the European encounter but had local meanings and applications. I do not suggest that European power did not impose itself on Africa, or that European culture and lifestyles did not hold significant attraction to some Africans. Rather, European ideas became part of a larger constituency of ideas, resources and influences from which modern African society was built. In this way, modernity transcends change modelled on Europe and resides in the dynamic changes as African societies appropriate from whatever sources to explain the past, cope with the present and envision the future.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Arens and Karp's collection of essays is typical of descriptions of power in "traditional" African societies. The chapters center on royal incest (Shilluk, Sudan), caste and "culturally defined capabilities (Wolof, Senegal), maternal shrines and paternal deities (Twi, Ghana), ancestral spirits (Iteso, Kenya)—as the defining character of power in many African societies. W. Arens and Ivan Karp, eds. *Creativity of Power: Cosmology and Action in African Societies* (London and Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989).

<sup>5</sup> "Modernity" as a conceptual tool is problematic. As the encapsulation of what Europe represents, it has dominated the historicism of colonized people by presenting Europeans as first and others in a state of becoming. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 9. Many scholars recognize that it dominates African history



The risk inherent in the idea of limiting the influence of Europe is the tendency to promote African insularity; a move which Caroline Neale warns only ultimately mirrors Europe and does not make African history any more authentic or credible.<sup>6</sup> This tendency is reflected in many studies that particularize African culture, history, philosophy or personality as alternatives to a dominant paradigm from which Africans are absent or subordinate. However, such studies often only promote the tropes of difference and the assumption that, as Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow put it, “Africa is what the British [Europe] are not.”<sup>7</sup>

In another context, Frederick Cooper emphasizes that most accounts are predicated on a flawed premise of a “hyperreal” Europe and have not critically examined colonial rule as it operated.<sup>8</sup> For Cooper, the colonial experience must not be construed as a binary encounter but as a shared historical experience; a system of rule with a complex chain of command, but also one which permitted layers of authority, which opened up opportunities for some and constraints for others, and which was shaped as it strived to shape. That African peoples lived under colonial rule is a historical reality which cannot

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also. Neale, *Writing “Independent” History: African Historiography 1960-1980* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985); Korang, *Writing Ghana*. The challenge has been to overcome European modernity as the synonym of modernity in general. But the odds weigh heavily in favour of European modernity—in the archive, in the historiography – as a referent and standard for local developments, and even because local elites speak as though European modernity is the standard of change to which they aspire. I argue the contrary, that in spite of the rhetoric -- often statements and aspirations of location in or vis-à-vis colonial power – local conceptions of modernity and their futures were not always Western but included a wide variety of other options. Modernity must therefore be located in a scope wider than European civilization. In this I borrow from Chakrabarty’s articulation of the Indian problematique: How to envision being modern as something shared and engaged by historical subjects without justifying the violent impositions of triumphalist European enlightenment. Chakrabarty, *Habitations of Modernity: Essays in the Wake of Subaltern Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), xxi. I use modernity throughout this thesis as a depiction of the lived experiences of people and their imagination of their future which was shaped by contested ideas including Europe and other influences, such as Islam and local cultures.

<sup>6</sup> Neale, *Writing “Independent” History*, 14.

<sup>7</sup> Dorothy Hammond and Alta Jablow, *The Africa That Never Was* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), 17.

<sup>8</sup> Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 9.

be undone by denial. To revisit the history of Africa should not be to undo or negate all existing knowledge because it is tainted by the European ghost. Rather, colonial rule must be studied for its multiple layers of interaction in which Africans were shaping as they were being shaped.<sup>9</sup> While Cooper's interest in this context is the disaggregation of colonial power and an appreciation of its contradictions, he thereby affirms the multiple engagements and interactions that constitute European colonialism and its ideological derivatives and projections: culture, civilization and modernity. He makes this clear by noting that the separation between representations of an authentic African past and European representation of a subordinated African past is ultimately a self-reinforcing logic that perpetuates "western" claims to "universal truth."<sup>10</sup> For Cooper, depicting European modernity and African tradition as fixedly parallel makes it harder to get at the multiple ways different representational strategies interact.

It is important therefore to properly situate European power and ideas without automatically denying or discounting them and without assuming their overarching control. Many historians will argue that as real as colonial conquest and rule were they did not constitute a total and inescapable framework<sup>11</sup>; equally, the dominant ambition of most Africans was not how to be like Europe. Many local systems continued to operate

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<sup>9</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Conflict and Connection: Rethinking Colonial African History," *The American Historical Review* 99, 5, (1994); Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 3-4; Frederick Cooper, "Africa's Pasts and Africa's Historians," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 34, 2, (2000): 298-226.

<sup>10</sup> Cooper, "Africa's Past," 300-301. I sometimes interchange colonialism for "western" modernity interchangeably to capture the relationship between the power and ideology of European domination. Many other authors assume this connection: Jean and John Comaroff connect colonialism, capitalism and modernity as constituting and playing off one another, "manifesting themselves simultaneously as both political economy and culture. John L. and Jean Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier, Vol. 2* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 20; Olufemi Taiwo critiques the homogenization of the discourses of colonialism and modernity. He argues instead that colonialism veered Africa off modernity by equating modernity to Europe. Olufemi Taiwo, *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), 141.

<sup>11</sup> See for instance Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

independently of colonial power, or were only mildly influenced by that reality. Once we recognize the limited attraction of European modernity, retaining it as a foundationalist paradigm works only by forcing unconnected or mildly related data into the framework and by silencing those that do not fit as irrelevant. To resolve this, Stephanie Newell makes a case for the neologism “paracolonial” to denote those events and issues during the colonial era which are not directly connected to colonial rule or which are connected to issues that transcend colonialism but are no less constituent to the building of society and the understanding of the African past.<sup>12</sup>

Against this background, this thesis assumes the absence of a convincing foundationalist paradigm. Here, colonialism is not “the story,” but a part of it; the “traditional” is not pristine or immutable, it is contested, fluid and dynamic; the local, the colonized, the subject are not dichotomized inversions of, respectively, the global, the colonial or the citizen. Just as it is important to overcome an overarching Europe, it is equally important to get past assumptions of a hyper-real traditional Africa. Rather, I grant Africans agency in their history by exploring what modernity meant to them, by exploring how they construed their lives in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and how they thought of their society and its future. An important objective of this thesis is to advance the case for a study of African history based on empirical research in specific historical contexts rather than on generalized postulations.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Stephanie Newell, *Literary Culture in Colonial Ghana: 'How to Play the Game of Life'* (Bloomington; Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002). The concept “paracolonial” unleashes capacity for the study of previously silenced aspects of African history, yet I find it inadequate to resolve the problems this thesis is concerned with because for all its efforts, it still retains the spectre of the colonial by implying a measurement (mild, much or none) of control by West.

<sup>13</sup> I am well aware of the fallibility of aspiring to a continent-wide standard. However, apart from achieving a better understanding of elites in various contexts, I hope this study of Abeokuta can unleash the capacity for uncovering local discourses in other African societies.

Specifically, the thesis adopts Abeokuta as a case to highlight the fluidity and multiplicity of elite identities and the many resources an African society accessed during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Abeokuta comes with a rich history of competition among multiple elite groups apparent at its founding as a war refugee camp in about 1830. These were not quenched by colonial conquest in 1914 nor decolonization in 1960. As one of the earliest sites of reintegration of liberated slaves and Westernized returnees with indigenous communities, we are able to map the trajectory in which a political elite developed in the struggles and interactions of many interests and ideologies. Power here transcends any simple story of colonial rule using Western modernity to reshape African traditional structures and practices. Abeokuta's history stands astride the complex multiplicity of divides that make up its indigenous modernity, not just across a single, colonially-imposed one. We are thus able to move beyond the dichotomies of rural-urban, colony-protectorate, local-global, traditional-modern which dominate the study of Africa, to uncover the dynamic connections that derive from the flow and permeability of unlabeled ideas and social resources. The extant literature assumes European modernity as the driving force of Abeokuta's history; however, the archive generated by Abeokuta's rich historical tradition points to a history that confounds teleological narratives of Africa's engagement with European modernity, colonization and civilisation.

## 1.2 The Power Problematic in Africa

In a way, the study of Africa has not benefitted from the most innovative ideas and theories that propose to explain power in a modern society. For instance, despite their acclaimed support for the lower classes, Marxist historians mainly fitted African history

into the evolutionary and unidirectional model of progress.<sup>14</sup> I am not aware of many works that have explicitly applied Gramsci or Foucault to African political history except those which describe the nature of Western power and African reactions to it.<sup>15</sup> The paucity of relevant studies confirms the marginalization of the African experience in the global episteme. These theories ostensibly focus on modern and post-modern societies which, by prevailing notions, Africa is not. By this logic the individual subjectivities so central to Foucault cannot conceivably apply to Africa because colonial rule conceptualized Africans as groups. For example, Megan Vaughan argues that Foucault's notion of subjective power cannot be applied to colonial Africa's medical discourse because groups rather than individuals were thought to possess distinctive psychologies and bodies.<sup>16</sup> This idea that Foucault is too encapsulated in European life, where the circuits of power and knowledge run in different directions from the African is common in the literature.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, as Elizabeth Eldredge shows, political theoretisation

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<sup>14</sup> Caroline Neale, "The idea of Progress in the Revision of African History, 1960-1970", *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?* Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (eds) (London: Sage, 1986).

<sup>15</sup> One notable exception is Steven Feierman's *Peasant Intellectuals* which challenges Gramsci's "en-partying" (bourgeoisie) intellectuals by showing how intrinsic peasant ideas are to discourse even though regrettably, these may not be measurable or unambiguously depicted. African nationalists and middle-class intellectuals often appropriate or usurp the ideas of peasant intellectuals without acknowledging them. Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991). However, Feierman only sets up peasant intellectuals as pre-colonial agents for a colonial and nationalist discourse. There are of course many other applications of Foucault in other spheres of African life. For instance, Bogumil Jewsiewicki applies Foucault's theory of self and identity to engage Achille Mbembe's Africanity in "The Subject of Africa: In Foucault's Footsteps," *Public Culture*. 14. 3 (2002): 593-598; Foucault's subversion discourse runs through Mudimbe's "L'Odeur du Pere", Manthia Diawara, "Reading Africa through Foucault: V. Y. Mudimbe's Reaffirmation of the Subject," *Dangerous Liaisons: Gender, Nation and Postcolonial Perspectives*, Anne McClintock, Aamir Mufti and Ella Shohat (eds), (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 456-465.

<sup>16</sup> Megan Vaughan, 11. Foucault himself is virtually silent on non-European societies or even on colonialism. Yet his ideas have been central to post-colonial analysis since Edward Said. Robert Young, "Foucault and Colonialism", *New Formations*, 25 (1995), 57-65.

<sup>17</sup> The idea that applying "Foucault in Africa" is risky is expressed by many writers. See for instance Patricia Hayes, Jeremy Silvester and Wolfram Hartmann, "Photography, History and Memory" in *The Colonizing camera: Photographs in the making of Namibian History*, ed. W. Hartman, J. Silvester and P. Hayes (Athens OH: University of Ohio Press, 1998), 6; Homi Bhabha, "Of Mimicry and Man: The

(questions of power, political rule, knowledge, and discourse) progressed by using the colonized to reveal the apparent genius of Western culture, “to question our Western selves and our humanity and our way of life by putting them next to a non-Western culture and society.”<sup>18</sup> These views reaffirm J. F. Ajayi’s observation from forty years ago: contemporary historiography remains a history of colonisation rather than of Africa.<sup>19</sup> The implication of reading history through a colonial and Western cultural prism is that the culture of the colonized must be determined, and its political experience represented as a system of power in apparent distance from and contradistinction to the European mode. Such underlying prejudices have made it impossible to conceive of African political history in the rigorous complexities that Gramsci or Foucault project. It has also necessitated that more specified theories of ethnicity, identity, corruption, small wars and statelessness are designed to explain Africa’s difference.<sup>20</sup>

Thus we find very detailed descriptions of colonial authority, its rational use of coercive powers, its military and punitive exercises, its legal and bureaucratic institutions, its parliamentary (Colonial Department or white settler) checks, the intellectual, documentary and educational apparatuses and its administrative policies (including the use of local rulers in Indirect Rule) as the important means of social formation in Africa, in contradistinction to sparse readings of action by African authorities and structures.

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Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October* 38 (1984): 125-133; Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, “Between Metropole and Colony: rethinking a Research Agenda,” in *Tensions of Empire: colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Frederick Cooper and Ann Stoler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 3.

<sup>19</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, “Colonialism: An Episode in African History”, *Colonialism in Africa*, L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, eds. (Cambridge University press, 1969).

<sup>20</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993) challenges the *racialization* of the historiography, in which certain subjects like slavery are depicted as African and others like industrialization and liberalism are depicted as Western, by pointing out how inclusive and universal these human experiences were. I argue similarly against a move to depict irrationality, superstition and motionlessness as African peculiarities.

Within this framework, power in African societies is narrowly invested in a definite and immutable structure of power involving chiefs (rarely any elaborate administrative set-up) elders, priests and a generally dormant population overawed by magical deceptions among other forms of so-called traditional controls.<sup>21</sup>

The framework from which most extant literature is written belies the evidence of complexity in African political systems during both the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Far from hegemonically stable and unchanging hierarchical systems with power concentrated in a few hands, there is much to show that power was widely diffused, even in centralized societies. James Wade makes this case clearly in the specific context of communities in the Mandara Mountains of north-eastern Nigeria. Most studies described the Chadic speakers' worldview as revolving around water, drawing evidence from their symbolic and material cultures which depict concepts of power. They were thought to be ruled by a rain-chief, the custodian of the rain stones, who by divination to the ancestors ensured the regularity of the agricultural cycles. Social and political stability was thus contingent upon water. Wade argues that the literature conveyed an un-ambivalent Webberian meaning of power in which the control of the rain chief is "clearly demonstrated and unproblematic." However, his closer study of the Fali reveals that previous researchers conflate rain-makers with rain chiefs and in so doing ascribe political powers where there are only ritual processes. In contrast to the notion of a communitarian cohesion and dormant population, the Fali were found to project individualistic assertiveness, self-sufficiency, circumspection and privacy as treasured

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<sup>21</sup> This does not imply a lack of complexity such as McCaskey describes for Adebbeba; rather it reinforces the displacement model of African cultural forms representing a past not relevant to Asante (Ghana's) future. T. C. McCaskie, *Asante Identities: History and Modernity in an African Village, 1850-1951* (Bloomington, IN, Indiana University Press, 2002).

values in their ethos and implicit ideology, features which previous works had cast as irrelevant. Wade uncovers multiple discourses by separating the exigencies and semantics of rainmaking from those of the political and quasi-political domains -- which had been conflated. The Fali dictum “each man is a chief in his own world” shows that “power is as problematic in the Mandara Mountains as it has proved to be in anthropology.”<sup>22</sup> Such discourses were not obliterated but were further complicated by colonial conquest and Western culture.

There exists a valuable body of literature which pursues the challenge of transcending European meta-narrative to reach at the dynamic and complicated nature of power in African societies. For example, T. C. McCaskie narrows in on Adeebeba, an Asante village, to narrate the changing worldviews from pre-colonial society and Asante imperialism, to the advent of the British and missionaries, to colonial “modernity.” Such a *longue durée* view, in which colonialism does not constitute the rupture between “tradition” and “modernity” marks this study apart from the dominant historiography. McCaskie shows that Adeebeba community was shaped in the engagements of power within Adeebeba itself and the direction of imperial Asante politics. Another study by Andrew Apter shows how Yoruba rituals are located in conflicts between a multiplicity of identities and their engagements with dominant power. These rituals used to be seen as the hegemonic imposition of ruling classes; but Apter shows that subaltern voices are inscribed in them. Edna Bay’s study of the transformation of gender roles and access to power in the kingdom of Dahomey is similarly sensitive to complex political dynamics.

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<sup>22</sup> James H. Wade, “Rainmakers and the problematics of Power in Fali Society.” In another study of Fali technology, Wade uncovers misinterpretations of Fali past: James Wade, “The Context of adoption of brass technology in northeastern Nigeria and its effects on the elaboration of culture’, *Whats New? A Closer Look at the Process of innovation*, ed. S. van der Leeuw and R. Torrence (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989).



These studies are valuable in that they debunk the notion that pre-colonial African politics were simple and uncomplicated by pointing to complex political rivalries and the interplay of ideologies to affirm and challenge the terms of political legitimacy. However, the political rivalries and the ideological contestations which these studies affirm of African societies, break down when confronted by colonial power. For McCaskie, the extension of the railways, electricity, the introduction of colonial currency to the cash crop economy, the establishment of big European trading store and night clubs, urbanization and the influx of non-Asante persons had a transformative effect on relations in Adebeeba; and (implicitly) henceforth colonial power and European modernity drives the story of the Adebeeba “scrambling for money.”<sup>23</sup> A similar dynamic plays out in Bay’s account in which colonial rule completes the process of displacing women and rendering political authority patriarchal.<sup>24</sup>

This breakdown of political rivalries and the contestations of ideologies in the face of European intrusion, in which the construction of identity and traditions become explicable only as jostling for colonial position and privilege, still places “western modernity” at the center of the displacement (or transformation) model, and retains modernity as the defining end of the historical narrative. It implies that the pre-colonial is still read from the purview of the social and political conditions established by colonial power and European ideology. By assuming that European influence marked a total newness in contradistinction from old dynamics, these studies yet privilege the inversions of European ways from African forms.

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<sup>23</sup> McCaskie, *Asante Identities*; Edna Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998).

<sup>24</sup> Of these three only Apter depicts the dialectics of power as something that continues to reflect on modern Yoruba politics. Andrew Apter, *Apter, Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

What then was the nature of power in Africa? Antonio Gramsci argues for the need to see power not only in the violent capacities of the state but also in the persuasions of hegemony by which the ruler gains the consent of the ruled.<sup>25</sup> In so doing, he rescues governability from control and authority to an ongoing dialogue or discourse of ideologies. The study of Africa has been dominated by the control thesis. Closed, lineage-based, totalitarian and autocratic systems in 19<sup>th</sup> century Dahomey, Asante and Zulu societies are the more popular exemplifications of the pre-colonial African state.<sup>26</sup> Not only were these political developments specific to the peculiar circumstances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the undercurrents of discourses which created and sustained these empires still need to be unearthed.<sup>27</sup> Michel Foucault further de-centers power from the narrow ideology of domination to include all relevant discourses “which subject our bodies, govern our gestures, dictate our behaviors.” He thus finds power in the cumulative knowledge that networks the whole society. Both the dominant and the subaltern project the discourses that constitute this knowledge, which makes it dynamic—shaping and being shaped to sustain power relations and to promote and justify changes in power relations—and makes knowledge the locale of struggle, and history the struggles over discourses and knowledge. Such heterogeneity of power makes the dominated active participants in shaping power and in the terms of their domination, through discourse which may be counter-discourse, acquiescence or engaged indifference.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Paul Ransome, *Antonio Gramsci: A New Introduction* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Maquet, *Power and Society in Africa* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1991). This author argues that coercion, protection and pre-eminence are the key characters of power that run through African history from the ancient to the present.

<sup>27</sup> As McCaskie and Apter show. The trend needs to continue.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, “Questions on geography,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon. (Brighton, Sussex: The Harvester Press, 1980),

It is this discourse of the ruled that has conventionally been silenced or narrowed in the study of colonial power in Africa. Many writers have adopted a Eurocentric view of the encounter establishing the view of the numerically few and considerably limited colonizers without recognizing, as Elizabeth Eldredge puts it, the pre-colonial order with its own dominant and counter-discourses about the natural order. Writers thereby legitimize the ideology of otherness that promoted colonial conquest and rule in the first place in which a pre-colonial order is in neat distinction to the European modern.<sup>29</sup> However, the resilience of the pre-colonial order in spite of colonial denigration and subversion not only affirms its value in its era, it was also rigorous enough to vigorously contest the discursive space of the dominant colonial discourse. Cooper is thus spot-on in describing colonial power as layers of interconnections in which there were limits to the coercive and constructive capacity of the colonizer just as its very objectives and programs were determined to a considerable extent by what was possible and allowed by local realities. The first challenge of uncovering the discourse of the colonized is to overcome its conflation, i.e. the extent of its acquiescence or resistance to colonial power. Doing so makes it possible to read the multiple discourses and the struggles among the colonized and reach an understanding that the “pre-colonial order of things” was, in its time, tentative and dynamic, rather than immutable or fixed. So-called African traditions survived colonial power because they were never fixed but depict dynamic social forces adopting and adapting to new experiences, shaping and being shaped by new ideologies. Colonial power and Western modernity were, from the 19<sup>th</sup> century, only the newest forces superimposed on the existing order of things – which we now define as dynamic.

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<sup>29</sup> Eldredge, 12.

To the extent that the pre-colonial order of things survived, it is as much a candidate for historical engine as western modernity. Yet since I argue that the pre-colonial order had no known (definite and unchanging) form but was dynamic (which makes it not the “order of things”), it ceases to become one that is destroyed or hybridised by colonial power. It also ceases to be set as being in contest with or contradiction to Western modernity, which we also argue was shaped from multiple engagements. Both African traditions and Western modernity were multiple (and not inverted) inventions and were being shaped as they were shaping at the same time.

There is much evidence to sustain that “African tradition” (the idea that Africans had definite and unchanging identities and ways of doing things) was constructed on the basis of Western imperialism. Carola Lentz sums up the findings of the “invention of tradition” school by showing how what passes for African tradition -- chiefs and the power they exercise, customary law, tribes or ethnic identities and languages (through standardization) -- were either created by colonial rule or in the contemporary convergence of interests with chiefs, elders and educated Africans rearranging pre-existing conceptions of community and creating new ones to secure colonial domination and establish new (“African”) forms of power and control.<sup>30</sup> In the same vein, J. D. Y. Peel refers to 19<sup>th</sup> century Yorubaland as “a perfect religious market” to describe how the form of Yoruba religions was a construction of specific 19<sup>th</sup> century conditions, in this case, the public preaching of Christian missionaries ignited a concomitant display of religious wares and claims from competing local “cults.”<sup>31</sup> The extent to which identities and traditions have become rooted may in fact be symptomatic of the fluidity and

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<sup>30</sup> Carola Lentz, “Colonial Constructions and African Initiatives: The History of Ethnicity in North Western Ghana”, *Ethnos*, 65: 1 (2000)

<sup>31</sup> Peel. 228

dynamism of the pre-colonial than any recognizable form of immutability. Thus rather than conceive of the pre-colonial as being powerfully immutable, such that it is difficult for Western modernity to displace it, a better explanation is that there was nothing absolute, unchallengeable or unchanging in the pre-colonial. Rather a complex set of competing ideas and discourses -- some generated locally, some forcefully infiltrated -- provided an excellent setting for a history of ongoing discourses.

This thesis works from this perspective. It breaks down the idea of difference: that the Egbas had a definite and distinctive identity with a clear and unambiguous political or cosmological order, which is African and different from the Western. Created only around 1830, Abeokuta's culture and politics were being constructed in fits and starts, building upon a diversity of dynamic cultural forms that (only later in the century) came to be labelled Yoruba and open to a variety of other influences including local, regional, Western and global ones. While Abeokuta offers a specific (and convenient) case on account of its 19<sup>th</sup> century establishment, its dynamism suggests the value of viewing other African societies in this light -- if we can get past the tropes of difference and the displacement model.

### 1.3 Justification of Study

Refiguring African history in this manner enables us to focus attention on the local discourses of power in ways which existing frameworks have made difficult. Presumptions of European hegemony not only silence the voices and lived experiences of people, but also disable people by shifting attention away from the local sources of power. Assumptions of colonial hegemony have aided local dominant groups to

legitimize rule by presenting Africans as collectivised victims of external power, thereby obscuring local patterns of oppression, naturalizing elite status and limiting local intellectual discourses and political possibilities. Posturing European modernity as the historical standard legitimizes the claims of local dominant groups and enables ruling elites to silence alternative narratives. For instance, the tendency to ascribe Africa's problems to the historical experiences of the Atlantic Slave Trade, colonialism and neo-colonialism veils the culpability of complicit slave raiders, colonial apologists and corrupt politicians respectively. Similarly, as Bonny Ibhawoh has noted, notions of African values as traditionally communitarian have been advanced by Africa's ruling elites to deny individual (human) rights to their citizens.<sup>32</sup> Properly locating colonial power in its limited context and as part of a larger process sheds light on those other silenced factors and processes by which elite power is constructed and operates.

A more compelling reason for studying elite politics in Africa is the enduring necessity to provide a history that explains the contemporary society. The existing history does not provide the necessary scope to explain Africa's complex politics and society. Rather, it defines Africa's problematic as something that is too clear, too simple and too easily explained. It is my hope that the study of Abeokuta will ignite interest in revisiting assumptions about other parts of Africa to uncover the multiple traditions and discourses of power and thereby help provide a basis for better understanding the dynamic processes by which African peoples have managed their affairs and built their societies. By focusing on the multiplicity of discourses of Egba society and politics, we gain new insights into how these Africans perceived of themselves and others and how they

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<sup>32</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, "Beyond Power and Privilege: Discourses of Rights and Liberties in Western Nigeria 1900-1966," Unpublished PhD dissertation, Dalhousie University, Canada, 2003, 57.

conceived of their society, its past and futures in the context of colonial and other powerful influences of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

My interests conform to the points repeatedly made by many scholars on the need to transcend imperial histories, grant Africans agency in their history and uncover voices that have been muted by the designs of the powerful. To summarize the main scholarly concerns, there is a need to challenge the dominant master narrative of European modernity and colonialism, but this must be done in clear historical contexts and must aspire to a total account of the multiple tensions, ambiguities and connections that shaped African history. This study does more than pursue these concerns. Where studies such as Eldredge's uncover African voices in the multiple discourses of the colonial context, I find a train of political discourses that runs from the pre-colonial, through the colonial to the present. Where she finds the state of Lesotho and the nationhood of the BaSotho in the operational space created through colonial discourses, I find Egba "paracolonial" discourses, much less targeted at colonial power but no less constitutive of the social formation process. These discourses, spoken in local idioms, defining and expressing individual, sub-group and collective goals, operating within local cosmologies but conscious of wider connections and influences, were only partially related to colonial power. The difference is Elredge's is a colonial discourse; this thesis aspires to an Egba (African) discourse. I believe that a thematic approach, one that interprets the past in an inclusive way and from the perspective of the historical subjects, is a better way to recast African history.

One study that aspires to such a complex interpretation is Gaurav Desai's *Subject to Colonialism*. Using the biographies of colonial-era African writers like the Kenyan

Jomo Kenyatta and Akiga Sai, Desai shows that colonised Africans transcended the categories that scholars have stamped on their history. Far from being unambiguously a colonial subject engaging with colonialism or a traditionalist appropriating or resisting modernity, Akiga is pulled by these and other forces including his Christian conversion, incipient westernisation and a complicated form of tradition-induced nationalism. Here, modernity is not just a colonial imposition; it includes changes Akiga sees as the impact of incipient Westernization on Tiv youths and their disrespect for Tiv ways. Yet, it also includes how the youths seek elders' counsel and their thirst for Tiv history and culture. Akiga is both desirous of modernity and conscious of the destruction it brings. Akiga's account is neither unambiguously modern nor is it set in outright resistance against modernity by sticking to tradition. His fluid interactions within social forces enable him to criticize colonisation, modernisation, Tiv women, Tiv patriarchs and traditions, and migrant youth. His prejudices provide insights into the dynamic transformation of Tiv society. Here, the traditional society does not come out as pristine, and neither does colonial rule modernize Africans out of barbarity. Akiga does not concede himself to be a relic of a dying age, but defines his modernity in the cumulative forces at play in his time. His frustration with Tiv youngsters is as much generational as it is cultural. Modernity for him was a lived experience. Desai shows that to capture the African past, historians must "not just attempt to unearth these past voices, to render them audible, but just as importantly must attempt to understand the nature of their audibility within their own social contexts and the nature of their subsequent silencing in the written sources."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Gaurav Desai, *Subject to Colonialism: African Self-Fashioning and the Colonial Library* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2001), 11-14.



What Desai's study shows is that a complex and inclusive history of society that explores connections is feasible.

More specifically, revisiting Abeokuta's history assumes an added significance because the issues of this history continue to shape current Egba and Nigerian politics. The political struggles among Egba elites which had begun before colonial rule were further complicated by colonial administration which favoured the centralisation of power and the emergence of an Egba king against other claimants to power. However, contending claims were not thereby obliterated but have continued to form the basis of social struggles in contemporary society.<sup>34</sup>

A study such as this, which applies theoretical tools that are still being developed by scholars, risks certain pitfalls for which reason its scope and conceptual grounding must be made clear and its route through the intellectual minefield well-navigated. The study is located within two related core thematic concerns: power and modernity. I have argued the weakness of the historiography on power in Africa. The dichotomous framework which sees power in Africa as an engagement between pre-modern and modern has remained dominant in the analysis of power in Africa. In his famous thesis, Mahmood Mamdani refers to the bifurcated nature of power in colonial Africa which shaped Africans into either citizens or subjects: the former an urbanized community imbued with modernist privileges (as applies in Europe) and capable of democratisation, the latter the mass of African peasants encased in customs and traditions and fitted for the

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<sup>34</sup> Egba kings still contested "territory" leading to the conflicts at Ota and Ifo in 2009 in which many people were killed. See *The Guardian* (Lagos), October 7, 2009. For recent conflicts see Insa Nolte, "Chieftaincy and the State in Abacha's Nigeria: Kingship, Political Rivalry and Competing Histories in Abeokuta during the 1990s," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 72. 3 (2002) 368-390.

“clenched fists” of despotism. Mamdani is unapologetic in blaming Africa’s problems on this legacy of colonial rule.

Mamdani’s thesis has attracted considerable reaction not least for its hermetic categories.<sup>35</sup> By posing colonial rule as an encounter he reaffirms the constructivist capacity of colonial rule over a weak African subject. The historical evidence suggests the opposite; that colonial rule was not implemented from a blueprint for control which was then imposed without difficulty; rather, colonized subjects fought back to limit colonizers to the permissible extents of domination. The notion of a dichotomy between tradition and modernity reaffirms the idea of difference, labels Africans as inherently traditional, tied to customs and despotic among the many negative depictions. By implication, the modern, (i.e. democracy, human rights, the rule of law etc.) are foreign to Africa and need to be nurtured. Mamdani’s prescription for the solution to Africa’s problems is a curious affirmation of the rationales advanced for colonial conquest and rule. More importantly for this thesis, Mamdani implies that two different types of African elites operate the bifurcated nature of power in Africa: an urban, westernized elite and a rural traditional elite. As many other authors have pointed out, Mamdani theory is not supported by the historical and contemporary realities.

The other discursive context emerged with the publication of the Comaroffs’ books, *Of Revelation and Revolution* and the floodgates of debates that the two volumes ignited about the colonial encounter and social change in Africa. It relates to the Comaroffs locating the development of Tswana society in the constructivist power of European modernity. The Comaroffs’ objective was to blur the distinct binary that was prevalent in the literature and to show that the colonial encounter was not between a fully

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<sup>35</sup> See for instance Ralph Austen, “Review,” *Law and History Review* 17, 2 (1999).

modernized Europe subject and a pre-modern African object but rather a multifaceted symbolic and material experience involving masses in England and Africa, African chiefs, Afrikaners, African Christians, and colonial officials: a “population with divergent cultural perspectives, dissimilar intentions, dissonant notions of value and distinctly unequal capacities to control the terms of their unfolding relations.”<sup>36</sup> They depict the colonial encounter as a “long conversation” of mutual if unequal appropriations between the Southern Tswana and the “nonconformist” missionaries (and other colonial agents) which produced hybridized results and constituted a colonial identity. The Comaroffs have drawn significant criticism for their methodology and narratives.<sup>37</sup> In spite of their intentions, they ultimately reaffirm the notions of a dichotomous encounter between *Sekgoa* (European ways) and *Setswana* (African ways). More critically, they imply that all Africans were concerned with were matters of intruding European modernity. The African agency that they strive hard to promote is defined in terms of the extent of their appropriations of or resistance to *Sekgoa* (European) ways.

*Of Revelation and Revolution* raises issues that are pertinent to this thesis. First is the notion that modern-day African society is the hybridised outcome of a failed and incomplete project. By adopting a comparative approach, the study fails to pursue the promise that its premise of multiple cultural interactions announced. If the Europeans were not “fully modernized” then the conversation cannot be polarised. It fails to capture that society is shaped in complex and multifaceted ways by interconnected forces. The

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<sup>36</sup> Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa, Vol. I* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); *The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier Vol. II* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Les Switzer, “Review: Colonialism and the Post-Modern Project in South Africa: The Comaroffs Revisited”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (1998) 181-196; Paul Stuart Landau, “Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *Africa*, 70, 3 (2000)

Comaroffs' question -- "how did the missionaries change the consciousness of the Tswana?" -- could be better asked as "how was the Tswana world shaped?"<sup>38</sup> Reframing the question as such offers a more constitutive approach in which no side is pre-privileged. In studying the social changes that produced modern day Abeokuta, this thesis asks: How was Abeokuta society built? I do not close the question by asking, for example, "how did Abeokuta become modern?" and much less "how did colonial rule shape Abeokuta?" It goes further to ask: What roles did leadership play in this? How was that leadership constructed and constituted?

#### 1.4 Research Framework

The thesis makes a case for a contextual study of African history. However to give it a focus, it is guided by a number of geographical, chronological and methodological boundaries. First it focuses on the Egba polity with its capital and main city at Abeokuta. Formed around 1830 out of disparate Yoruba sub-groups escaping the dislocations of the Yoruba wars, the need to consolidate the new settlement against powerful enemies (Ibadan, Ijebu, Dahomey and the Lagos colony) served the immediate purpose of social cohesion and created a stability in which returnee liberated slaves and missionaries found it attractive to settle. However, Abeokuta's political constitution, identity, history and culture were always contested. Constituting many sections, Abeokuta did not have a single source or center of town power from which developments in the city proceeded. Reducing Egba politics to the town level runs the risk which Coquery-Vidrovitch warns

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<sup>38</sup> Bravman suggest a directly opposite way in which the question can be asked: "How did the Taita construct their world?" I find this as restrictive as the Comaroff's question because it limits the colonial impact. Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways: Communities and their Transformations in Taita, Kenya, 1800-1950* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1998).

against: of equating the city (urbanization) with modernity set against rural areas which have not been remade in the European image.<sup>39</sup> Abeokuta's politics transcend the confines of its geography as many Egba elites (chiefly, priestly, educated) claim powers derived from surrounding villages and other symbolic spatial identities. Therefore, the theme of urban or town history -- how the physical and demographic growth of a city affects or transforms ruling systems<sup>40</sup> -- does not neatly apply to Abeokuta because this history transcends its territory.

The thesis covers the period between 1860 and 1950. The opening date is designed to capture the point and the series of events by which all the constituent parties and elite categories became identifiable in Egba society. The significant events around this date include the Ijaye War (1859-1862) which as I show subsequently was the first "national" military engagement of an Egba army. The Egba joined in the defence of Ijaye against Ibadan in 1860 but withdrew in 1862 after which Ijaye was sacked and many of the residents resettled in Abeokuta. They mark the last significant resettlement to constitute a section of Abeokuta. Around this date therefore, the waves of settlement of Yoruba groups had defined Abeokuta as a federation of sorts. Returnee former slaves from Sierra Leone and European missionaries began settling in Abeokuta from 1839 and by 1860, they constituted an identifiable ideological bloc in Egba politics. Their increasing influence culminated in the 1865 formation of the Egba United Board of Management (EUBM).

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<sup>39</sup> Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, "The Process of Urbanisation in Africa (from the origins to the Beginning of Independence), *African Studies Review* 34 (1991).

<sup>40</sup> See for instance Earl Philips, "The Egba at Abeokuta: Acculturation and Political Change, 1830-1870," *Journal of African History* 10 (1969); John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford: John Currey, 2000).

Abeokuta did not become a British colony until 1914 and it therefore it does not conform to the conventional chronology of colonial rule. Rather, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was an African state “modernizing” or defining itself, on its own sovereign terms before colonial conquest and rule. The Egba tried to modify their government in line with the demands of the period. The EUBM (1865-1880) and the Egba United Government (1898-1914) were modelled after European forms. That process of definition did not stop until 1950 when the Macpherson constitution was drafted, which marked a shift in the attention of Egba elites from local Egba to Nigerian national issues. It marks the point at which the initiative for local constitutionality began to be overshadowed by national and regional policy-making processes.

The thesis is primarily a reading of public discourses among the Egba as documented in official records and public literature. However, given that the discourses predate the period of study, this thesis recognises the value of preliterate sources of Egba and Yoruba history. The non-written articulations of cosmology, identity and nationhood, political constitutions and social change continued through our period and they are not distinctly differentiated from written discourses. Therefore, the study strives at an aggregation of written and unwritten discourses which includes but transcends the “colonial archive.” I utilise unwritten discourses in many ways. First, I am aided by the incredible volume of studies that make the Yoruba one of the most researched ethnic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. The trove of observations and data collected on the Egba since the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been interpreted, evaluated and re-evaluated in many studies. This study is mostly a reinterpretation of ideas about Yoruba and Egba identity and their political system. Furthermore, Egba Council records include many verbatim recordings of

statements in political debates and court proceedings from which the ideas of nonliterate persons can be deduced.

### 1.5 Research Methodology

“Discourse” here refers to views and beliefs expressed orally and in written form, which underline existing worldviews and people’s interpretations of their experiences. While Sarah Berry has advised that the best way to study how Africans understood and reacted to the changes happening in their lives is through their self-conception of these changes and through the words they used to describe their roles and actions,<sup>41</sup> one must be conscious of the power of the dominant ideology in discourse. Dominant ideologies attempt to silence alternative narratives by becoming what Foucault termed “the naturalized expression of social formation:” an axiomatic representation of social identity and historical narratives.<sup>42</sup> Yet countervailing narratives are embedded within social discourses, making discourses the instruments of power as well as a hindrance to it. This is the consciousness Karin Barber applies to her study of Yoruba *Oriki*, by showing how embedded adulations and disdain, hegemonic ideologies and counter ideologies, are in the praise songs, cognomen and historical traditions of the Yoruba.<sup>43</sup> Such praise expressions and statements of conformity also abound in Egba political discourses, so much so that many British officials thought they were either perfidious or diplomatic.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Sara Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* (London: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*, 11.

<sup>43</sup> Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1991).

<sup>44</sup> Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising*, 29.

Reading many political statements requires that one goes beyond their simple lexical interpretations.

Therefore, speech and text must be situated within the contexts and conditions under which they were expressed and the thinking underlying them. Tools developed in critical discourse analysis underscore that speech and texts are social practices and are also terrains and means of political struggle.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, it is with circumspection that I read official documents, court records, transcripts council debates, pamphlets, petitions, books and newspapers and try to capture the contexts, the nuances and the underlying meanings in both the local language and English translations.

The thesis relies mainly on documentary sources. Missionary settlement in Abeokuta left records about early school education, mission activities and publishing ventures, including a weekly newspaper. Economic and political engagements with the British colony of Lagos also generated significant mention of Abeokuta in the colonial records. Early education and literacy made Abeokuta a pioneer of sorts in the production of new elites and a westernized commercial class. Their writings and personal papers add to the large stock of documents from which this thesis is written. These documents offer a window into the thoughts and experiences of the Western educated on the various forces that made up Egba society.

The Egbas also tried to modernize their politics and government. With inputs from educated elites, they organized governments that resembled the bureaucratic systems of Europe. These governments left behind considerable data in the forms of minutes of council meetings, petitions, native court cases and reports, and a gazette of

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<sup>45</sup> Discourse analysis has been reenergized by Edward Said's thesis that language is implicated in European imperialism and resistance to it. Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (1993).



edicts, court proceedings, enunciation of customary laws and values etc. Some of these documents are bilingual and they reflect commendable efforts at accuracy including capturing nuances (frowns, coughs etc.), proverbs and idioms. My facility in Yoruba and English affords a comparative analysis by which the interests and activities of the various elite groups can be studied.

I consulted archival sources consisting of missionary memoirs, private papers, and official government documents at the Nigerian National Archives in Abeokuta and Ibadan, the Africana pamphlet collections at Dalhousie University, and private papers at the Universities of Lagos and Ibadan. I consulted the collection of British newspapers on the World Wide Web and the microfiche collections of Nigerian documents and those of the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) at Dalhousie. I also studied newspapers published in Lagos and provincial newspapers published at Abeokuta. I find that these provincial newspapers, including the *Osumare Egba*, *Egbaland Echo*, *Abeokuta Weekly Herald*, were concerned with issues that transcend the colonial. These newspapers were lively media of local debates about Abeokuta society.

Conscious that council records and colonial files may not reflect the often-ignored voices of ordinary people and subaltern groups in the society, I devoted considerable attention to petitions, letters to newspaper editors and to the files of letter writers. Letter writers have been studied as intermediaries between the colonial state and African subjects.<sup>46</sup> However, they served in other roles which are not directly connected to the colonial state, including facilitating communications as familial and social connections widened. On one hand, letter writers aided colonial subjects to plead local grievances and

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<sup>46</sup> See Benjamin N. Lawrence, Emily Lynn Osborne and Richard Roberts, eds., *Intermediaries, Interpreters and Clerks: African Employees in the Making of Colonial Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006).

reflect social expectations and realities to the colonial state. On the other hand, they helped local citizens to argue about local constitutional issues, explicate social transformations and promote social identity. The files of letter writers must be read in this wider context, beyond assumptions that they were mainly for colonial consumption.

Depending on documentary sources as primary data poses significant challenges. Documents produced in largely illiterate societies may not be a perfect reflection of the experiences they enunciate. Indeed, many people depended on professional letter writers to write their petitions. The abuse of this system informed the promulgation of the Illiterate Protection Ordinance in 1910 in the Colony of Lagos, which became applicable to Abeokuta after 1914.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, court, council and colonial officials tended to write in a specific manner conforming to colonial bureaucratic procedures. Specifically, the minutes of the native councils and the proceedings of the native courts include transcriptions and translations of speeches made by illiterate members of council or illiterate litigants. It is necessary to read these documents with circumspection. For instance, I could find only very few explicit statements of critique or disagreement with major colonial policies even in cases where such policies were being actively resisted. Thus for instance, when Lord Lugard spoke to the Lagos Council in 1917 on how the “progressive” Egbas had accepted colonial taxation to replace what he interpreted as their traditional system of chiefly collection, he was only reading the minutes of the Egba council and the transcripts of town meetings in their explicit form; less than two weeks later, riots were led by some of the very chiefs who had ostensibly supported the move. I have tried to overcome these problems by reading for implicit meanings in the idioms and

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<sup>47</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperialism and Human Rights: Colonial Discourses of Right and Liberties in African History* (New York: University of New York Press, 2007), 59.

by corroborating the data and cross-checking with other sources. For instance, it is possible to find parallels of council debates in editorial comments and reader's contributions as was the case in the *Lagos Standard's* editorial response to Lugard's speech on taxation.<sup>48</sup> I am also guided by views that have called for more circumspection, rigour and "reading against the grain" in historical interpretation.<sup>49</sup>

I find the collective memory approach a particularly useful tool to explain the process by which a collective Egba identity was constructed, contested and sustained. Writing on the process by which the German nation was formed, Alon Confino argues that the notion of collective memory enables historians to "explore how people construct a past in which they did not take part individually, but which they share with other members of their group as a formative sense of cultural knowledge, tradition, and singularity." It also points to how a people internalize the nation.<sup>50</sup> The idea of a collective identity does not imply singularity or uniformity. Rather, it is a metaphor of wholes and parts, the process by which the significant parts constitute the visible whole. This thesis studies the process by which different identities (including Owu, Ibarapa, Ijaye etc.) which were not originally "Egba" forged a common if intensely contested Egba identity in spite of sectional peculiarities and proclivities.

Collective memory is therefore a story of power and the struggles over power. As Confino puts it, it is about "who wants whom to remember what and why."<sup>51</sup> Power is both a means and a terrain of determining the construction and imposition of the nation and its memory. As a terrain, it is the arena for the interplay of interests by different,

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<sup>48</sup> *Lagos Standard*, July 10, 1917.

<sup>49</sup> Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 9; Cooper, "Africa's Past and Africa's Historians"

<sup>50</sup> Alon Confino, *The Nation as a Metaphor: Wurttemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 8-9.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 12.

though not unconnected, elite groups advancing ideological justifications to secure and hold power. The terrain of Egba historiography and historical memory is thus one of ongoing struggle where different forms of power compete. The dominant academic historiography centers modernity as the rationale for actions in Egba history. A dominant narrative may favour the Alake with a pre-existent legitimacy, reaffirmed by colonial support, but other elite groups push various and contradictory claims of pre-existence and traditions to counter this dominance. What is remembered and what is pushing for remembrance are part of this intriguing interplay of elite interests and struggles for power.

Other methodological parameters are worth mentioning. First, the fact that Abeokuta is well mentioned in the archives and secondary literature implies that a significant part of this thesis is a re-examination and reinterpretation of existing knowledge and assumptions. The CMS papers and colonial records from the 19<sup>th</sup> century have been mined by earlier writers using the modernisation and nationalist frameworks. Among them, Agneta Pallinder-Law presents a chronological study of Abeokuta to show that colonial rule was not a precondition for the emergence of modern states.<sup>52</sup> However, the records that relate to local discourses in the 20<sup>th</sup> century have not attracted any comparable attention. I have tried to deal with this problem by dividing the thesis into two unequal parts. The earlier chapters focus on a reinterpretation of the historiography with a view to making a case for a more complex African history. Here, I adopt particular instances to show that current interpretations are flawed and to refigure a more accurate

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<sup>52</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa? The Case of Abeokuta?" *Journal of African History* 15, 1(1974) 65-82.

historical explanation. The latter chapters explain Egba politics and society in terms of local conceptions of change and the struggles to explicate it.

I also had to decide whether to present the thesis chronologically or thematically and whether to render the account through biographies or in a more socially holistic form. Both options have merits and weaknesses. A chronological approach favours highlighting the continuities and changes in this history but does not allow for a detailed examination of the dominant themes that a thematic approach can achieve. Similarly, biographies render the accounts through the lives of the principal actors, but tend to silence the larger social contexts and the voice of ordinary folk. The approach I have adopted here is to focus on specific themes and render them in rough chronological order. As such, although the chapters are chronological, the issues discussed in each overlap and are not neatly sequential. In the same vein, I have tried to situate the principal actors in the context of the multiple identities and interests that their personalities suggest and explore how these interests interact with those of others.

I cannot but concede that my findings and the accounts are no more than a reflection of the data at my disposal. It is my hope that this humble effort encourages further researches into the history of Abeokuta and indeed other societies and identities. I am confident that further enquiries will unearth documents and interpretations that have found no place in the conventional edifice of knowledge and the official archives.

#### 1.6 Power and Identity in Abeokuta: Review of Relevant Literature

The subject of elites and power is a fascinating one for a wide range of disciplines. Studies in philosophy, politics, literature, history, anthropology and sociology have

focused on questions about “what elites do, how they do it, what powers they have, how they got it, keep it, and pass it on.”<sup>53</sup> Indeed most accounts of political history discuss competition among the elites. Despite the variety of views, some assumptions are common to most studies of elites. First is that while the elite is a distinct minority with a comparatively inordinate amount of influence over the rest of society, it is not a stable homogenous category. Within this rubric, different elite groups emerge, mature and decline depending on their comparative capacity to secure and retain scarce resources and social legitimacy. While this applies universally, the patterns of elite formation and the routes to power are locally specific.<sup>54</sup> This thesis draws on the debates about concepts and theories of elites and power to provide a theoretical background. A more detailed examination of the literature on elites and power is provided in the next chapter.

The assumption that a society is best understood by studying who its leaders are have driven most studies on the elite in Nigeria and indeed in Africa. The rise of elite studies in Africa may therefore be traced to the urgent need to know who the leaders and policy makers of newly independent African countries were. This was the objective of the conference on “The New Elites of Tropical Africa” held at Ibadan, Nigeria in 1964. As the organization of the book published from the proceeding shows, this conference also targeted resolving how Africa fitted into the theory of elites and how the theories of elites were relevant to Africa. The introductory section contains articles of the leading theorists on elites including Bottomore, Lipset, Weber, Coleman and Smythe, and is followed by case-studies from different African countries. The overriding finding appears to be that it is difficult to fit Africa’s new elites into any established body of theory because they are

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<sup>53</sup> Ronald Cohen, “Elite Theory and the Formation of Elites Among the *Bura* Intellectuals of Nigeria,” *Elites*, ed. George E. Marcus, 63.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

not the products of any internal process of circulation. Yet, they are assumed to be the best that Africa has.<sup>55</sup> One commentator prescribed the book for American policy makers who were still “groping for an invigorating foreign policy for this pivotal region.”<sup>56</sup> Similar objectives reflect in Hughes and Mabel Smythe’s *The New Nigerian Elite* (1960) in which they prescribed the model of the American middle class to explain the Nigerian elite structure.<sup>57</sup>

These studies conceived of the African elite as leaders of post-colonial states and as agents of modernization. They were to be measured by the extent of their conformity to established theories and patterns of elite behaviour, just as the societies they led are measured by their pace on the modernist teleology. It is worth noting that by projecting Western models for the African state and its elite, they assume it unnecessary to study the actual nature of power in the new states or the actual nature of the elite in any complicated ways except as they conform to or digress from the models. From the Western perspective therefore, the African elite at this point were people who could speak our language and think like us in contradistinction to the mass of other Africans.

Creating a history for this elite was a motivation for the nationalist historiography of the 1960s. Studies such as J. F. Ade Ajayi’s *Christian Missions* (1965), E. A. Ayandele’s *Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria* (1966) and *Holy Johnson* (1970), and Robert July’s *The Origins of African Political Thought* narrated the rise and development of modern African elite by distancing them from a traditional one.<sup>58</sup> With other studies by

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<sup>55</sup> P. C. Lloyd ed. *The New Elites of Tropical Africa* (London: Oxford University Press and International African Institute, 1966, reprint 1977).

<sup>56</sup> Aubrey Bonnet, “Review: The New Elites of Tropical Africa,” *Journal of Contemporary Sociology* 8, 1 (1979) 88-91.

<sup>57</sup> Hugh Smythe and Mabel Smythe, *The New Nigerian Elite* (California: Stanford University Press, 1960).

<sup>58</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The Making of a New Elite* (London: Longmans, 1969); E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria, 1842-1914* (London:

Biobaku, Omer-Cooper and Robert Smith,<sup>59</sup> recasting the pre-colonial elite as nation builders, Africa's elite history amounted to the narrative of how the pre-colonial elite gave way to the modern elite. Yet other studies by James Coleman, Michael Crowder, Kristin Mann and Ronald Cohen<sup>60</sup> affirm the culmination of this process by describing the political and social characters of this elite and the process by which they acquired power in the post-colonial state.

However, most of these works tend to concentrate on the activities of the educated elite without any rigorous conceptual or theoretical foundation on the African elite, and on Africa's political history without a conceptualization of the nature of power in Africa. They worked within the conceptual models of the state and pushed common identities and unity where diversity and struggles hold, and centralized power where more fluid expressions of power were the norm.

The closest historical works to the themes of elite and power can be found in Ruth Watson's *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan*, Olufemi Vaughan's *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics*, Richard Rathbone's *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*, Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways*, Edna Bay, Elizabeth Eldredge and Tom McCaskie.<sup>61</sup>

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Longmans, 1966); \_\_\_\_, *Holy Johnson: Pioneer of African Nationalism, 1836-1917* (London: 1970); Robert July, *The Origins of African Thought: Its Development in West Africa during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1967, reprint 2004).

<sup>59</sup> J. D. Omer-Cooper, *The Zulu Aftermath: A 19<sup>th</sup> Century Revolution in Bantu Africa* (Essex: Longman, 1967); Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (London: James Currey, 1969); Saburi Biobaku, *Egbas and their Neighbours* (London: Clarendon Press, 1965).

<sup>60</sup> James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971); Michael Crowder, *A Short History of Nigeria* (New York: Praeger, 1962); Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Ronald Cohen, *Elite Theory*.

<sup>61</sup> Watson, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan': Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City*. (Ibadan: Heinemann, 2003); Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s-1990s* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000); R. Rathbone, *Nkrumah and the Chiefs*; Bill Bravman, *Making Ethnic Ways*; Edna Bay, *Wives of the Leopard: Gender, Politics and Culture in the Kingdom of Dahomey* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); E. Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa*; McCaskie, *Asante Identities*.



These studies stress that the culture and politics of pre-colonial African societies were not obliterated by colonial power, but continued to contest the discursive space. They thereby account for the continuing relevance of traditional practices and the survival of traditional elite structures.

A number of factors have promoted these more sophisticated and nuanced perspectives on the African elite and power. First is the reevaluation of the nature of colonial power, an awareness of its limited capacity for coercion or construction and a greater recognition of the need to factor African initiative and agency in the making of colonial rule. The limits of colonial power came to the fore in the critique of the “invention of traditions” thesis,<sup>62</sup> with writers such as Thomas Spear showing that inventions predate colonial rule and remain set within the parameters of African agency.<sup>63</sup> Secondly, deriving from the demonstration of African agency was the recognition of wider sources of the African discourse than the educated elite and nationalism. Steven Feierman’s *Peasant Intellectuals* set the nationalist discourse in pre-colonial contestations and in the continuing engagement of peasants with colonial power, the domination of which they bore, resisted, engaged and modulated. Finally, increasing interest in pre-colonial political discourses such as in Andrew Apter’s *Black Critics and Kings* (1992) and Karin Barber’s *Oriki* (1991) set the stage for a re-conceptualization of the African elite in a more complete scope than the concentration on the educated elite.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Terrence Ranger, “The Invention of Tradition Revisited: The Case of Colonial Africa,” in *Legitimacy and the State in Twentieth Century Africa: Essays in Honour of A.H.M. Greene* (Hampshire: Macmillan, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Thomas Spear, “Neo-Traditionalism and the Limits of Invention in British Colonial Africa,” *Journal of African History* 44 (2004).

<sup>64</sup> See for instance Paul de Lalouviere, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History* (Scottsville, SA: University of Natal Press, 2000).

However, while these studies are significant steps forward in the study of the African elite and the nature of power in Africa, they tend to concentrate on accounting for the survival of the traditional system in such a way that it remains peculiar and definable. They thereby are unable to transcend the difference between traditions and modernity. I try to argue in this thesis that the way out is to deconstruct the notion that there was a traditional or that the modern was a coherent set of principles. Showing that the essential characters which we label traditional or modern are themselves shifting and interconnected social forces helps to overcome the bifurcation of the African elite; it also helps to see power in a broader scope as the interplay of engaging social resources.

Abeokuta offers an excellent setting for understanding this scope of multiple inventions in which (the forces we tag modern) dynamic ideas intruded into equally dynamic societies in an ongoing process of social change and adaptation, and offered opportunities for many and informed shifting alliances among elites. However, extant studies on the political history of Abeokuta have run along a similar trajectory to the literature on the African elite and the form of power. The earlier works by Saburi Biobaku and Earl Philips largely treated Abeokuta as an undifferentiated category and do not speak to the local discourses that contribute to the shaping of Egba society. Biobaku describes the elite structure by the generalized notions of their larger Yoruba connections and as though traditional elite categories were fixed and unchanging. These earlier studies fail to interrogate the multiple tensions within the Egba polity. In some contrast, Ayandele's study, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria*, Harry Gailey's *Lugard*

*and the Abeokuta Uprising* and Agneta Pallinder-Law's "Government in Abeokuta"<sup>65</sup> provide considerable detail on the political differentiation among Egba elite groups. Ayandele focuses on the strategies of the Christian group as they contested for power in Abeokuta. The central theme of Gailey's study is the ignorance of the British of the complex politics of Abeokuta with officials interpreting diversity for chaos and contestation for rebellion.<sup>66</sup>

Pallinder-Law's impressive chronological study of Abeokuta's government up to 1914 observes the intense struggles among Abeokuta's elites. However, by highlighting the activities of the Christians and educated Egba as they used the secular arm of British imperialism to establish themselves, Ayandele sees them as the more powerful colonial agents and the real (if destructive) force driving events and activities in Abeokuta's history. Similarly, Pallinder-Law centers modernization (westernization) as the driving force of these struggles. Chiefly elites and other Egbas come across as helpless custodians of a dying era and resisters of change. As with the earlier works, the displacement model which explains Abeokuta's history as the march to be like Europe dominates.

Other works such as Judith Byfield's *Bluest Hands*<sup>67</sup> and Johnson-Odim and Mba's biography of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti<sup>68</sup> focus on women as a vibrant section of Egba politics. Byfield shows that Egba women were not an undifferentiated category but

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<sup>65</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*; Agneta Pallinder-Law, *Government in Abeokuta, with special reference to the Egba United Government, 1898-1914* (Britain, 1973); Harry Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta uprising: the demise of Egba independence* (London: Frank Cass, 1982).

<sup>66</sup> Harry Gailey, *Lugard*.

<sup>67</sup> Judith Byfield, "Women, Marriage, Divorce and the Emerging Colonial State in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1892-1904" *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 30, 1, (1996); *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1890-1940* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002)

<sup>68</sup> Johnson-Odim and Nina Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

expressed a wide range of identities and interests. Their struggles over local production, local and international trade, family and community issues and their reactions to governmental policies explain the variety of ways in which women responded to and initiated strategies to confront marginalisation.<sup>69</sup> Odim-Johnson and Mba's biography located women as the driving force in one of the most momentous events in Abeokuta's history. These accounts challenge the common depiction of educated elites and nationalists in masculine characters. They also challenge the notion that women were completely dominated by the dual patriarchies of colonial rule and traditional society.

That Egba politics was intensely contested by a multiplicity of undifferentiated interest groups and individuals comes across in Jenna Germaine's study of three Egba intellectuals around 1930. The thoughts of A.K. Ajisafe, Ladipo Solanke and Adebeshin Folarin highlight the multiplicity of identities that contested the meanings of Egba history and the contemporary social and political constitutions. The diversity is compounded because intellectual articulations sympathised with different local interests. Germaine analyses the connections and the differences between the ideas of what the centenary of Abeokuta's founding meant in local, imperial and colonial contexts. These intellectuals, like many other educated elites, argued about what it meant to be Egba, Saro, Nigerian, African and British subjects and citizens.<sup>70</sup>

In spite of the limitations of the framework from which most accounts of Abeokuta have been written, there is much to be gleaned from them to show that power was intensely contested in complex ways in Egba society during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 2002).

<sup>70</sup> Jenna K. Germaine, "Integrating Epistemologies with 'Purely Native Mind': Writing Historical Knowledge in Colonial Egbaland" *Unpub. M.A. Thesis*, Dalhousie University, 2007.

centuries. The key is to unveil the overarching paradigms to recover the multiple discourses embedded within conflating categories. This is what this thesis does. It recovers, from existing studies and from documents and other sources, a history of Abeokuta which includes the voices of formerly silenced individuals and groups, and the multiple possibilities of interpretations of a formerly narrowed history. It underscores that for the Egba, social change was not unilaterally about European presence or influence. Rather, European influence entered into and exacerbated ongoing processes of change. The thesis thereby demonstrates the practical limits of existing categories. It breaks down set assumptions and rather invites a contextual reconstruction of the various identities and ideas at play in Abeokuta's political history

The thesis is organised around thematic issues presented in a chronological form. Chapter two provides a description of the elite categories in Abeokuta. It critically examines the ideological basis upon which elites claim and justify power and the social and economic resources with which they sustain elite status. It challenges the idea that pre-colonial Egba society was stable and immutable by pointing to the struggles and contestations among elite identities as they struggled over power. It sees past the myths of royal absolutism to the ways in which power was fluid with elite structures challenging and complementing one another. That power was fluid accounts for the relative ease with which educated Africans found space to carve an ambiguous elite identity and to participate in power. Such complex engagements among elites better explain the political history of Abeokuta than a transition model which sees the modern displacing the traditional. The chapter serves as a necessary background for the elite categories and political system that are discussed throughout the thesis.

Chapter three (1860-1880) provides historical background to the origins and formation of Abeokuta society and the formation of the different elite groups who were actors in the process. It explores the history of Abeokuta from the context of its unsure origins and political constitution and how these were shaped in the claims and counter claims of elites during the later 19<sup>th</sup> century. It shows that Abeokuta was always a work in progress; its historical traditions were being constructed, its political structure regularly modified, and its social values struggled over. Such a setting aided the rise of the educated and their incorporation into Egba elite. Far from the assumptions that educated Africans became leaders by virtue of their modernist credentials, this chapter explores the complex process of their incorporation and the mechanisms by which they became recognised elites and how they challenged for power. This chapter challenges the notions that the educated elites were a class apart from other elite groups by analysing the ways they interacted and reacted to other elite groups. The *Ifole* crisis of 1867 is used to make the case for a more complex interpretation of elite politics in Abeokuta. Against previous studies which narrate the crisis as a traditional elite backlash against Christian and colonial intrusions into local politics, this chapter reveals how different layers of the elite were involved in a more complicated story.

Chapter four (1893-1920) discusses the key political issues over which Egba elites struggled about the shape of Egba society. In an era of change during which political identities were being defined, Abeokuta was a setting of intense struggles among elite groups. I trace the fashioning of a monarchy from a previous decentralised political system. Previous writings have credited the title and office of the Alake to British imperial interests which tried to create a hierarchical system that suited imperial

interference and colonial control. This thesis shows that British pressure was only one of a multitude of interests at play in the struggle over the direction of Egba politics between the fluid conceptualisation of power and centralisation. British power was as much an interested party as it was an instrument in the hands of local elites. Moreover, the outcome of the struggle, the enhancement of the Alake's position and power, did not cease to be contested. The events leading to the selection of Oba Ademola II (1920) are used to explore the contrasting interpretations of history, custom and identity as they were variously advanced as claims to power. Succession disputes were common during the period this thesis studies. The chapter analyzes the oral and written claims which various contenders to political offices advanced to justify their qualification. Central to these struggles were questions of citizenship and civic responsibility, governmental power and the limits of power. Rather than colonial rule creating centralized political structures and shaping identity on the basis of modernity, this chapter shows how Egba identity, culture and law were established in the course of struggles among elite groups.

Where the former chapter discusses the process towards centralization and common identity, Chapter five (1918-1940) discusses the counter discourses that were pursued by the elites favouring decentralization. The typical explanation is that counter elites protested change and the pace of modernization and tried to protect a dying way of life. In the binary framework such counter elites are assumed to be traditional stakeholders and chiefly elites. This chapter shows that elites transcended the categories. We find educated elites deploying traditional claims and chiefly elites lining up with supposedly modern ideas. The chapter shows how Egba identity and society were shaped in the course of struggles over the meanings of power and every day realities of

governance. The Adubi “War” of 1918 is recovered from its narrow scope as an anti-colonial resistance to one that reveals the multiple interests involved in this struggle for power.

Elites did not just struggle over political structures and positions. The making of Abeokuta also involved elite engagements and struggles over everyday issues. Partly in the Egba Native Council and in other public forums, Egba elites debated social and economic issues including land and property, money and wealth, marriage, family and divorce, local rituals, witchcraft and cosmology and the new meanings of wealth and crime. Chapter Six centers upon the discourses surrounding the explication and management of smallpox epidemics and examines how the various layers of power and elite interests used control over the individual and social bodies to push elite interests.

Chapter seven argues the breakdown of elite categories and the reshaping of Egba identity and nationhood. Organised around developments in Abeokuta as Nigeria prepared for independence, the chapter shows how the diverse elite categories entered into contemporary national elite. The Nigerian political elite at independence was neither a modern nor traditional elite, but reflected a wide range of influences across elite categories and interests. Through a Constitution Drafting Assembly (1949-1951) Egba elites attempted to define Egba identity within the Nigerian state. This was a significant shift from ideas of Egba sovereign nationhood that had driven the Egba discourse since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The debates at this assembly further show that in the pursuit of power and the retention of status, Egba elites of all types pursued the same goals. Their concerns over and defence of Egba identity and interests reveal how unsure was their conception of Egbanness, how uncertain were their claims to leadership and how exegetical elite identity



and power is. With independence looming and as opportunities opened up at the national level, the attractions to Egba power began to wane. The issues of identity and the nature of power that elites fought over so intensely transformed into new meanings, which are defined by their value to the national discourse.

Although the study is set in Abeokuta, this thesis aspires to insights that can be gleaned towards a better understanding of African and non-western societies. The cases set out here are not exhaustive but they point to possibilities for further research. While the Egba case contains many peculiar features, it invites the opening up of new perspectives on the meaning of the global modern.

## CHAPTER 2

### ELITES AND POWER IN AN AFRICAN CONTEXT: CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL ISSUES

#### 2.1 Introduction

The idea that the structure and behavior of society can be understood in terms of the thoughts and actions of its leaders has been central to social and political history. “Who has power” and what leaders do with power were the dominant premises in the long genealogy of political analysis and elite theories -- which is filled with descriptions and analyses of character and culture, elite composition, generation and regeneration, patterns, processes and strategies of power. Foucault’s interjections on the fluidity of identity and for the de-centering of power call for a review of conventional thought on power and on the definition of elites. Most studies of African political history have assumed definite identities and have focused on the thoughts and actions of rulers, nobles, nationalist leaders and intellectuals without an adequate examination of the nature of the power they aspire to and wield. It is often taken for granted that political offices and structures of power exist, without clarity about how they came to be and of the significant changes that shaped their formation. To achieve a more rigorous explanation of how the struggle for power among elite groups played out, it is expedient to clarify what constitutes the elite and the power they aspire to. This chapter reviews some of the dominant perspectives in the study of elites and their access to and use of power. The object is to develop an operational definition of the concepts and to delineate their use in this thesis.

## 2.2 Constraining Concepts: Rethinking Elite Identity in Africa

Foucault's redefinition of identity and power has necessitated a review of the major theoretical perspectives on elites. Older theories see identity as fixed and determinable and power as a graspable reality which belongs to the few and elite. Many writers since Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936) reduce the dynamics of any society to the behaviour of a cohesive and autonomous elite, a small group of the ablest and the most adept individuals in a society.<sup>1</sup> Their writings initiated an intellectual and political tradition which became forcefully reinforced by Wright Mills' power elite theory. Defining power as a compelling force over competition, Mills and others contend that only a small group, made up of the leaders in key sectors, make the important decisions in a political community.<sup>2</sup> Proceeding from this premise, scholars have been concerned with the empirical elaboration of elite organisations, the process and strategies of elite formation, recruitment and sustenance and other forms of power structure models.<sup>3</sup> According to Mills, the power elite, by virtue of its control of the strategic command posts of the social structure, is also an economic elite because power is wealth. This makes the power elite a hegemonic class, capable of and needing to deploy discourse and power to legitimize rule and retain status. It is in this understanding that Robert Fatton writes: "to make sense of the state is to decipher the relations of class power, the process of class formation and the

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<sup>1</sup> George Marcus, "'Elite' as a Concept, Theory, and Research Tradition," in *Elite: Ethnographic Issues*, ed. G. Marcus (Albuquerque: University of Mexico Press, 1983), 21.

<sup>2</sup> C. Wright Mill, *The Power Elite* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1956).

<sup>3</sup> G. William Domhoff, "'The Power Elite' 50 Years Later," *Contemporary Sociology* 35, 6 (2006): 547-550.

hegemonic propensity of the ruling class.”<sup>4</sup> The power elite theory has been the dominant framework from which African politics has been studied.

However, the power elite model tends to exaggerate the cohesion and power of elites and their roles in society. As an analytical tool, it offers only presumptive and tenuous claims and restricts the capacity for empiricism. As John Scott puts it, by assuming that some superior endowment marks the elite apart and by categorizing privileged persons of assumed endowment in that group, the term has become one of the most general and therefore one of the most meaningless terms in descriptive studies.<sup>5</sup> More critically, the idea of a power-elite gives power an ontological value and the capacity to build, form or change society to a few elite. Such a narrow view of elite power was challenged by Robert Dahl who favours a more dynamic view of widely diverse, fluid and informal elites in a political system. According to Dahl, power exists in different places, times and intensity and as such, a society’s elite is not limited to particular individuals, offices or groups, but amounts to a fluid convergence of interests, interspersing identities within and outside the structures of government and in official and informal influences on power.<sup>6</sup>

What remained common to the theories of elite-power is the notion that power is an entity: something to be grasped and used, often in a noxious manner. Implicit to them is also the idea that an elite exists (few for Mills and multiple for Dahl) which rises

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<sup>4</sup>Fatton writes on the failure of African elites to achieve hegemony for which reason power is Hobbesian rather than consensual. Robert Fatton Jr., “Bringing the Ruling Class Back,” *Comparative Politics*, 20, 3 (1988): 253-64.

<sup>5</sup> John Scott, “Modes of power and the re-conceptualization of elites,” in *Remembering Elites*, ed. Mike Savage and Karel Williams (Oxford: Blackwell and The Sociology Review, 2008).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Dahl, *Who Governs? Power and Democracy in an American City* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1961). Other pluralists go beyond the “decision-making” type of power to include “non-decision making” power—the manipulation of decision makers’ preferences even before decision is made. See Stephen Lukes, *Power: A Radical View* (London: Palgrave, 2005).

through its capacity to grasp power and exists by using it to dominate. This idea has deeper intellectual roots in Gramsci's invocation that power resided in hegemony: the capacity to make domination appear legitimate in the eyes of the dominated. For Gramsci, the power of ruling elites is derived, and depends more on the subtle means of social control than on violence and on a naturalised worldview which the dominated are persuaded to protect.

Perhaps Foucault's most significant contribution to political thought is his repudiation of centralized power and re-conceptualisation of power as a fluid social phenomenon in qualitative contrast to previous notions of power being possessed by the few and elite, over a large and powerless majority. According to Foucault, power is inherent in the social discourse in which a multitude of options and possibilities engage in a continuous process that determines how certain statements appear while others are not able to. Power thus exists not in decision-making but in the relations at every level of society, in the cumulative ideologies that constitute social knowledge. Existing social forms and political systems are thus not the creation of a power elite, they are a reflection of the relative visibility of the more dominant discourse over a wide variety of silenced but struggling alternative discourses. The relative advantage is achieved through micro-political techniques developed as the society's "arcane expert knowledge,"<sup>7</sup> from which project social conventions which shape actions, attitudes, language and socialization. In short, power exists because conversations that make social knowledge constitute it.

While Foucault's approach to power has influenced review of many aspects of social life, it bears particular relevance to African history in significant ways.

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<sup>7</sup> Carole Smith, "The Sovereign State v Foucault: Law and Disciplinary Power," *Sociology Review* 48, 2 (May, 2000): 283-307.

Specifically, he challenges the idea of power in a way that critiques notions of colonial power as universal and omnipotent. It thus becomes possible to conceive, as Elizabeth Eldredge does, of alternative non-western perspectives, not as the mirror of the Western but as constitutive with the Western of social knowledge.<sup>8</sup> Power in the colonial setting can thus be thought of as only partly colonial, and colonial ideology as only dominant in some spheres. It thus makes a case for the study of those subjected perspectives if only to explicate how the dominant narrative is heard at the expense of “subjugated knowledge.”<sup>9</sup> More importantly for this study, alternative perspectives are not limited to those that relate to the dominant colonial narrative or resist it. Foucault makes a clear case for evaluating the most minuscule social discourse even if it appears not to be directly connected to the dominant ideology. Therefore, the voice of the colonized transcends colonialism because colonial power is only one dimension of the variety and layers of power the subaltern grapples with and speaks to. Seeing power in a more diffused form helps overcome the sense of teleological inevitability that constrains the reading of colonial Africa.

Secondly, Foucault challenges the framework upon which African political history has been interpreted. The idea that an African elite exists with recognisable characters and qualities is common in African political history and contemporary politics. Many accounts assume that pre-colonial African societies were essentially well-structured hierarchical systems, with almost total acquiescence to the dominant hegemony by the population. Colonial rule is assumed to have complicated such well-run

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<sup>8</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge, *Power in Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 78-108.

if unsophisticated systems by creating a new elite and a new “modern” ideology. Such imagery drives Jean and John Comaroff’s treatment of the Tswana in southern Africa. They describe the colonial encounter between the Tswana and European missionaries beginning from a stable African hegemony under which conventions on cosmology, rituals and customs had changed only slightly when there were contestations over succession, rainmaking and lineage power. In the Comaroffs’ account, the stable *setswana* ways become complicated by the intrusion of European modernity (*sekgoa*) to create a colonial situation which the Africans engaged with, resisted and adapted to.<sup>10</sup> On the contrary, there is much to make a case for a fluid and complicated power system in Africa (of every milieu). Such possibilities have previously been silenced in the notion of the constructivist powers of the power-elite. Understanding power in the Foucauldian sense enables us to reveal discourses that had previously been hidden and to test how such statements help explain the constitution of power and knowledge and how they influence the shaping of society.

Finally, rethinking elite power in Africa draws a wider conceptualization of elites from the narrow scope that had been used in the study of power. By de-centering power, Foucault ultimately states that there are no power-elites in the conventional sense; rather, rulers (and the ruled alike) are themselves products of social knowledge. Rather than focus on political actors and what they do, we can concentrate on the processes of

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<sup>10</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “The Colonization of Consciousness in South Africa,” *Economy and Society* 18, 3(1989) 267-296; Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism, and Consciousness in South Africa*, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Jean Comaroff and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1997). For some critiques of the Comaroffs see Les Switzer, “Review: Colonialism and the Post-Modern Project in South Africa: The Comaroffs Revisited,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, 1 (1998): 181-196; Paul Stuart Landau, “Hegemony and History in Jean and John L. Comaroff’s *Of Revelation and Revolution*,” *Africa* 70, 3 (2000).

knowledge creation and sustenance that produce political actors and determine what they do. The formation of African elites thereby transcends the dichotomous binaries of traditional and modern elites to a more constitutive one which sees how social knowledge is made to produce the nature of society and its rulers. Social knowledge is constituted by much more than colonial and modernist discourses; it includes various local perspectives and other forms of foreign interjections. For colonial rule therefore, elite identity ceases to be defined by political actions of those involved with the colonial state: colonial officials, chiefs, nationalists, etc. with their characteristic labels as resisters or collaborators. Instead, we find elites in the shifting pursuit of interests, expressed in ambiguous ideological statements towards the shaping of the social structure. My goal in this chapter is to uncover a broader scope of elite identity and power by pursuing multiple discourses and how they shaped an African society over a historical period which included the colonial era.

There is much in the history of Abeokuta to substantiate the case for Foucauldian power as a process of social constitution. Throughout this history, ideological statements about the form of society and its rule were not limited to those enounced by a power elite. A wider scope of elites, including but not limited to the Obas, Ogboni, Parakoyi, and Ologun, representing different and yet connected political traditions and the multiple factions within each of them, operated in a structure that was partly hierarchical and partly pluralistic. Into this structure and the comparative stability it offered settled European missionaries, liberated slaves and African returnees from Sierra Leone. The educated elites did not turn an otherwise stable hierarchical elite structure upside down.



Rather they entered into ongoing struggles among elite groups about power and how it was used to shape society. They added their voices to an ongoing discourse.

### 2.3 Elite Types and Local Politics

Foucault's definition of power as socially constituted, challenges Egba traditions of identity and the ways they have been advanced to legitimize the elite structure. Such traditions need to be revised to reveal other subdued narratives and a wider scope of Egba discourse.

Not enough is known about the Egba before their settlement in Abeokuta to give an accurate depiction of their early society. Most commentaries have built on the fragmentary accounts of writers, missionaries and explorers and on local histories or oral traditions collected in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. From these, a synthesis of traditions appears to have been built which situates the Egba as one of the Yoruba subgroups.<sup>11</sup> Most accounts of the Egba past appear to be derived from the more generic material on Yoruba origins.<sup>12</sup> The Egba are assumed to have been organized in ways similar to other Yoruba groups deriving their political institutions from the Yoruba source, Ile-Ife. Thus Sabiru Biobaku notes that "in the organization of their communities the Egba did not differ from one another or from the Yoruba in general. The basis of their communal life was the town."<sup>13</sup> Citing Dr. E. C. Irvin, the Christian missionary who passed through the ruins of Egba towns in 1854, Biobaku calculated these towns to be very small indeed. He

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<sup>11</sup> Egba (or Ake) is not mentioned among the first wave of original Yoruba (sons of Oduduwa). Some other accounts fit the Egba into this connection: "Ejo" the mother of Yoruba kings died at Ake; "Ajalake", a descendant of Oduduwa founded Ake after separating from Alaketu, one of the original descendants of Oduduwa." See Saburi Biobaku, *Egbas and their Neighbours* (London: Oxford, 1957) 7; Samuel Johnson, *The History of the Yoruba* (Lagos: CMS, 1957) 19.

<sup>12</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 2001); M. R. Doortmont, "Samuel Johnson: Missionary, Diplomat and Historian" in *Yoruba Historiography*, ed. Toyin Falola (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991), 173.

<sup>13</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 5.

described the Egba as being organized in a federation of three monarchies: Ake, Oke-Ona and Gbagura, among which the *Alake* (of Ake) was the ultimate judge. Each of these provinces were comprised of ancestral-kinship towns or villages. The Gbagura were comprised of “144 towns in the Egba forest,” all ruled by a principal monarch, the *Agura* of Gbagura. Biobaku goes on to state that “the head of each town was an *Oba*, who was the ultimate source of justice in the town. He was also the High Priest, but never a despot.”<sup>14</sup>

The power of the *Oba* was checked by the *Ogboni*, an elite council of “the real rulers of the town.”<sup>15</sup> At least in nomenclature, the *Ogboni* appears to be a peculiar Egba institution. Other indigenous political structures include the *Parakoyi*, chiefs of the organized guilds of traders and craftsmen, and the *ode*, usually made up of hunters but also vested with the responsibilities of maintaining law and order. Women were also organized along guild lines and chiefly women were known to be power brokers.

However, 19<sup>th</sup> century Egba elites were not limited to those in customary public offices. As the missionary records show, the axes of power were much more widely diffused. Local chiefs retained their own militias and organized bands of slave raiders, called *Onisunmomi* in local parlance; these chiefs, many of them outside the official structures of power, exercised considerable influence. Local medicine-men, *Babalawos* or *onisegun*, and the guild of blacksmiths played leading social and political roles in the uncertain environment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A major weakness of oral tradition as a source of historical reconstruction is that it lacks chronology. Without chronology it becomes deceptively easy for the historians to

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<sup>14</sup> Irvin rode on horseback and traversed the towns of Orun and Ikereku, Idomapa and Ikija in ten, fifteen and twenty minutes respectively. Biobaku, *Egbas*, 8-15.

<sup>15</sup> Robert Smith, *The Lagos Consulate, 1851-1861* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 17.

describe things as traditional or customary. By depicting these political institutions as static and immutable, the process of their formation and transformation is obscured. Elite titles and the power they wield are thereby made to appear axiomatic and natural. Much of what passes for immutable traditions is not historicized. Far from being an unchanging political system, the elite structure of the Egba was as varied as it was amorphous. Olufemi Vaughan has correctly noted that the failure of existing knowledge to capture the transformative capacities of chiefly power and so-called traditional practices accounts for the dilemma over their survival and roles in modern African politics.<sup>16</sup> In the following section, I analyze the main elite categories with a view to laying the basis for a more open and inclusive approach to the study of elites and their roles in the making of Egba society.

#### 2.4 The Yoruba *Oba*: “A Power like that of the Gods”<sup>17</sup>

Despite the centrality of the *Oba* in the political history of the Yoruba, only a few studies have interrogated the nature of this sovereign office and the principles of law, politics and administration that surround the office and its functioning. For the most part, writers have focused on describing activities of particular kings and their roles in the historical process. The implication of this approach is that the institution of obaship is undifferentiated. Its complexities are largely ignored. Indeed, what is most known about Yoruba *Obas* are the commonalities which they share.

*Obas* trace their origins to Ile-Ife, the acclaimed ancestral source of the Yoruba and to the same ancestor. Writers such as Samuel Johnson cite the common bead-

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<sup>16</sup>Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs: Traditional Power in Modern Politics, 1890s-1990s* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2000), 10-11.

<sup>17</sup> Royal cognomen. Trans. “Alase ekeji Orisha.”

embroidered crowns, similar political institutions and Yoruba conceptions of sacred kingship and social kinship as evidence of the common stock from which the institution derive. However substantial disagreements exist in the literature on the Yoruba Oba. First, there has been no agreement over the number of the original Yoruba princes upon whom the primogenitor conferred crowns. Claims range from seven by Samuel Johnson to sixteen by Olatunji Ojo.<sup>18</sup> More significantly, the extent of authority of the Oba remains largely undefined, ranging from claims of semi-divinity to frailty caused by constitutional checks and balances. For instance, Biobaku describes the Oba as being next to the gods in power, and yet not a despot. The point here is that the traditions upon which the power of the Oba has been construed, including the very identity of the Yoruba, remain problematic. J. D. Y. Peel has shown that the Yoruba social and political identity only coalesced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Pemberton and Afolayan argue that the claims of a common ancestry and heritage appear to be 20<sup>th</sup> century traditions to legitimize political innovations. Political considerations made it expedient for communities to seek inclusion into the Yoruba heritage and construct their histories to conform to it.<sup>19</sup>

That there are significant disagreements among early Yoruba historians and intellectuals highlights the multiple perspectives and narratives that would later merge into a hegemonic account. Early European travelers and explorers documented many more traditions of origins and social accounts than the Ife tradition that became the dominant narrative. This period of Yoruba history can then be seen in the light of competing narratives narrowing down to produce a dominant one -- as mildly related

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<sup>18</sup> G. J. A. Ojo, *Yoruba Culture* (London: University of London Press, 1967).

<sup>19</sup> John Pemberton and Funso Afolayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship: "A Power Like That of the Gods"* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 28.

identities sought inclusion into a larger nationhood and competed to be more authentic members of the nation. Writers and political actors alike crafted a “national history” that took its cue from the 19<sup>th</sup> century writings of returnee Sierra Leonean, Aku or Saro, among which Samuel Johnson’s *History* became the national historical classic and authority. Many such town histories were written between 1910 and 1930 as a mark of progressivism by intellectuals vested in pan-Yoruba identities and Western modernity and who were for the most part excluded from the existing local structures and ideologies of power. Toyin Falola asserts that the dominant Yoruba narrative must be seen as a political manifesto, and an ideological and developmental charter as much as any true depiction of historical reality. Educated elites stressed unity, a common Yoruba heritage, sacred Obaships, immutable traditions etc., not because these were accurate historical realities but as expressions of their current identities and in pursuit of their interests.

There was no ambiguity among the educated elites over what modernity meant and how programmed towards change their writing [including history] was. In other words, they were writing to demand for change and not necessarily to express reality. Modernity was therefore not an extant state but an ideology to arrive at some future state; a state that guaranteed space, privilege and power to its ideologues. As with all ideologies, they castigated the extant conditions and invented their own forms.<sup>20</sup>

It is important to note therefore that the very literature on which the Oba dwells and which defines the office and powers of the Oba is an ideological construction, part of the struggle to define power and who was qualified to rule. This struggle must not be thought of as exclusive to the educated. Other elite types postured themselves in ideological

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<sup>20</sup> Toyin Falola, “Yoruba Town Histories,” *A Place in the World: New Local Historiographies from Africa and South-Asia*, ed. Axel Harneit-Sievers, (NI: Brill Publishing, 2002), 65-86.

struggles to shape power. This process was underway before colonial rule, and continues.

Notions of a pre-existent Yoruba prototype that presumes stasis obscures the significant variety in Yoruba kingships and the transformations of each over time. To study the Oba as an elite category requires more particularistic and socially contextual analysis than the generalized conceptions of sacred kingships and ancestral kinships. It is in this context that we must examine Egba Obas as an elite category by transcending the notion that Obas are undifferentiated and socially stable or that their conduct is predictable and their legitimacy unquestioned.

It is conceptually useful to revisit the historical accounts upon which the identity and powers of Egba Obas are founded. A number of gaps in these accounts make this worthwhile. First, the Egbas are not counted among the original descendants of the Yoruba primogenitor, Oduduwa. Samuel Johnson and other historians after him needed to account for the ascendancy of Abeokuta as a leading Yoruba state during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and fittingly accorded a second-generation descent to the Egbas. This does not suggest that the Egba were not Yoruba, it only indicates that their kingship was a later development. The tradition which posits that the mother of Yoruba kings resided at Ake is as implausible as the claim by Egba and their historians to an Ile-Ife heritage which makes them appear even more authentic and legitimate than the original seven or fourteen descendants of Oduduwa. In the same vein, the claim that Egba kingships had antecedents before the 19<sup>th</sup> century and that the Egbas had extensive kingdoms cannot be sustained in the light of available evidence. In the first instance, it is inconceivable that there were so many kings with the authority, rituals and paraphernalia of sacred kingship

in the Egba homeland, a cumulative territory of less than 100 square kilometers. If the Ife tradition holds, then Yoruba kingships always numbered a select few.

It is therefore more plausible that prior to settlement in Abeokuta, the Egbas lived in scattered settlements (more likely villages) north of Abeokuta. It is likely that the larger ones -- Iddo, Ake and Oko -- grew to become cultural centers and the centers from which collective resistance against imperial Oyo was organized in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and in which kingly institutions may have grown. Even then, there is little to sustain the claim that a significant Yoruba kingship prototype, one other Egba settlements recognized as sovereign, developed among the Egba prior to their settlement in Abeokuta.<sup>21</sup>

Events in 19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta suggest that the notions of pre-existent Egba Obas may well be constructions of many historical claims. What marked Abeokuta out in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and at the most momentous periods of its early history was the absence of an Oba. One tradition posits that the Egbas were always concerned about the need to reinstall a king but could not do so because the paraphernalia and the traditions connected to the preexisting monarchy had been lost in the flight from the ancestral homeland.<sup>22</sup> According to this account, reinstalling a new king had been impossible because the Egba were engaged in wars to secure their location against their neighbors. However, there is not much evidence to sustain that the new settlers in Abeokuta thought it abominable and unacceptable that there should be no king. This is considering that recreating a kingship would appear to be a more feasible course to

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<sup>21</sup> The controversy might be one over terms and degrees. However, noting the characters of these institutions and the limits of their power rather than taking for granted that they were always all kings, helps escape the stasis to account for the gradual and progressive growth in the power of the Yoruba Oba. P. C. Lloyd concedes the limitations of existing accounts and makes the case for the application of a theory of change to illuminate these structures. P. C. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government Among the Yoruba," *Africa* 30 (1960): 221-237.

<sup>22</sup> Biobaku, 51.

achieve integration within a disparate settlement and to consolidate national security. If such an institution was really preexistent, well-known and accepted by all, then it should conceivably occupy a more dominant position in the early identity discourses than is evident in the records. On the contrary, Egba elites appear to be vociferously against political centralization. The need for unity in the face of powerful enemies and to combat local fractiousness was the reason advanced by interested parties in mobilizing support for the creation of a monarchy in the 1850s. Among other claims, advocates for monarchy advanced that the Egbas confronted calamity because of their failure to properly bury their previous king in the homeland.<sup>23</sup> It speaks more to the politics of mobilizing support than a real sense of retributive loss that well over twenty years passed before Egba elites thought it was critical to rebury their dead king.<sup>24</sup>

It is evident that monarchy acquired increased importance in the 19<sup>th</sup> century owing to certain prevailing factors. First, in the environment of warfare and insecurity, scattered settlements sought inclusion into larger communities and the defensive and imperial political advantages such inclusions offered. Monarchies in other Yoruba towns like Ijesha, Ekiti and Ife were either created or strengthened in these war times. Similar consolidation of kingships in Lagos and Badagry was aided by the centralization of trade patterns. The collapse of Oyo following the Fulani invasion enhanced the stature of monarchy in two ways. First it resulted in the scattering of the Oyo who sought to recreate their visions of imperial kingship where they could and generally promoted the idea that a monarchy was the most prestigious political system. Also, the military

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<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> This tradition advances an ancient and pre-Abeokuta origin of Egba monarchies. However, the said deceased was at best the king over one section of the new settlement. I interpret turning a sectional concern into a national calamity to be a political construction to claim pre-eminence.



progress of the Fulani was construed as an alien attack on and domination of all the Yoruba. Resisting the Fulani became a Yoruba “national” cause for which the institutions of the Alaafin (king of Oyo) had to be enhanced because it was the only symbolic rallying point of a Yoruba identity. Smith records that the Alaafin gave titles to war generals, some of whom translated their offices into kingships.<sup>25</sup> We may also trace the ideas of absolutism to this merger of the political and military offices, especially against the background that in Old Oyo these offices were separated and the political structure was one of checks and struggles between the imperial monarchy, war chiefs and the *Oyo Mesi* (council of elders). By and large, it became important and prestigious to have kings in 19<sup>th</sup> century Yorubaland. These developments were not strange to the Egba in their nascent settlement and may have empowered local elites vested in these larger constructions of identity and of the relevance of the Oba.

However, it is simplistic to assume that the growth of absolutism was not intensely contested. Most existing accounts (especially oral traditions) highlight the powers of war-era monarchy and generalship without a corresponding attention to obvious evidence of the internal instabilities the enhanced powers of these rulers produced. The internal schisms between imperial monarchy and a growing commercial class, which Gareth Austin and Sara Berry describe in Asante,<sup>26</sup> is curiously absent in the Yoruba historiography where it is made to appear that a political order succeeded without contest despite growing transformations in social structure, the economic status of groups and individual. More believably, as Ruth Watson shows for Ibadan, a civic culture based

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<sup>25</sup> Robert Smith, *Kingdoms*, 58.

<sup>26</sup> Gareth Austin, “Capitalism and Chiefs in the Cocoa Hold-Ups in South Asante, 1927-1938,” *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 21, 1 (1998): 67; Sara Berry, “Unsettled Accounts: Stool Debts, Chieftaincy Disputes and the Question of Asante Constitutionalism,” *Journal of African History* 39 (1998):39-62.

on rancor, treachery and violence evolved out of the struggles to limit the growing powers of individual chiefs and over social and economic control. A similar case can be made for Abeokuta where for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a growing commercial and military class was not silent and uninterested in power and neither did they always conform to existing traditions. My study suggests that the title and powers of obaship were never uncontested. As an elite category, the terms were not as stable as existing studies suggest and their roles and conduct were not fixed. On the contrary, Egba kingship evolved in a historical process. Far from a definite custom, its roles, powers and claims to traditions were instruments and outcomes of complex struggles for power and control. An approach to a study of the Yoruba Oba in its changing and dynamic form promises a more interesting history than the old static approach.

## 2.5 “Darker than Nights:” The Ogboni as an elite category.

Where African monarchies can claim universal similarities, the Ogboni has been the quintessential depiction of what is peculiarly African in pre-colonial politics. Writers such as Jan Vansina, Martin Chanock, and Steven Feierman have promoted the ideas of pre-kingly (pre-dynastic) lineage heads as the “real rulers of the people” and the effective check to royal absolutism.<sup>27</sup> In similar ways, the notion of a mystical, dark, sinister, irrational and conceptually ungraspable yet ineluctable entity pervades the scholarly and public conceptions of the Ogboni. Much of what was considered repugnant to “modernity” -- including trial by ordeal, witchcraft, juju, etc. -- has been associated with

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<sup>27</sup> Martin Chanock, *Law, Custom and Social Order: The Colonial Experience in Malawi and Zambia*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1985); Jan Vansina, *How Societies are Born: Governance in West Central Africa before 1600* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Steven Feierman, *Peasant Intellectuals: Anthropology and History in Tanzania* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990).

the council.<sup>28</sup> Partly because of its acclaimed cultic secrecy and in spite of its looming presence in the socio-cultural worldview and political history of the Yoruba, the Ogboni has not been subjected to any rigorous research beyond accounts of its actions, religious roles and arts.<sup>29</sup>

Shed of its mysteries, the Ogboni was a political council responsible for law and order. A society of the most powerful, wealthy and influential men and women, its members met every seventeen days to adjudicate civil disputes, deal with criminal cases and conduct other such political and ritual functions as were necessary. According to Biobaku, the Ogboni constituted at once the civic court, the town council, and the electoral college for the selection of the Oba. They served as the intermediary between the king and his subjects to ensure the subordination of the latter and to prevent the former from becoming a despot. As a civic council, membership of the Ogboni included sectional and lineage heads, war leaders, leaders of trade and craft guilds, women chiefs and priests. Therefore, “the real rulers of the town were the Ogboni.”<sup>30</sup> However, it is for the powers and rituals of the inner caucus of six (or more), the *Iwarefa*, that the Ogboni was most feared and respected. Members were sworn to oaths of secrecy, *Wiwo lenu awo n wo*.<sup>31</sup> They met at night in secret and conducted communal rituals. The *Oro* (a policing agency) was the main instrument of the Ogboni to secure their secrecy and achieve social conformity.

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<sup>28</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperialism and Human Rights: Colonial Discourses of Rights and Liberties in African History*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007), 59.

<sup>29</sup> R. Akere, *Reformed Ogboni Fraternity (Incorporated)*, (Lagos: Memento, 1980); The religious roles and performance of the Ogboni and the ancient arts: carvings, iron works and sculptures associated with the Ogboni have been well studied. See Peter Morton-Williams, “The Yoruba Ogboni Cult in Oyo,” *Africa*, 30, 3 (1960); Gary Lynn Comstock, “The Yoruba and Religious Change,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 10, 1 (1979): 1-12; Christopher Slogar, “Carved Ogboni figures from Abeokuta, Nigeria,” *African Arts*, (2002); Henry Drewal et al., *Yoruba: Nine Centuries of African Art and Thought* (New York: 1990).

<sup>30</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 107.

<sup>31</sup> Lit. “an elder’s mouth is heavy.”

It is necessary to divest the Ogboni of some of its folkloric ascriptions before its identity and roles as an elite group can be understood. Not doing so allows this all-important structure of power to appear as a unified and undifferentiated entity, when the historical records suggest intense competition and rivalry among the members and ever-present limitations of its powers and privileges. Furthermore, failing to study the Ogboni secures the notion that people were historically subdued by its assumed veil of darkness and metaphysical presence when there is considerable evidence to show that the people of Abeokuta were never cowed or subdued but rather were willing to challenge such claims. Also, the notions of absolute secrecy need to be analysed. Tunde Onadeko likens the secrecy of the Ogboni to the Vatican idiom: “We don’t lie at the Vatican, but we don’t always tell.”<sup>32</sup> In the Yoruba case, there could only be a minute component of social discourse that was not already public knowledge. As a civic or town council, the Ogboni debated publicly; the leaders of the Council, including the *Iwarefa*, were publicly known; the meeting place, *Ita Ogboni*, was a public square; and the ritual sites, including the sacred places and groove, *Igbo Oro*, were known though inaccessible. The myths and mysteries of the Ogboni need to be re-evaluated as a construction of power by an elite category to secure their positions and promote their interests in the society. Those interests need to be analysed with the object of deciphering the interplay of political ideas upon which society is formed and operates.

Lloyds considers the Ogboni the principal organ of Egba government in Abeokuta. Indeed in the absence of a monarchy, governance was conducted by this council of leading influential members. However, it was a much more complex history than the assumption of a smoothly running traditional system in which roles were well

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<sup>32</sup> Tunde Onadeko, “Yoruba Adjudicatory Systems,” *African Studies Monographs*, 36 (2007).

respected suggests. In the first instance, given the patterns of settlement and the efforts at managing the complex federation, there had to have been councils for each of the settling groups. Early missionary accounts underscore that the hierarchy of authority was not well defined and that there were struggles among the leading persons. Bashorun Sodeke, the leader of the Egba Ogboni (c. 1830-1845), could only claim a moral leadership based on his age and military experience. Until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, power was so widely diffused beyond the Ogboni that one principal actor stated that “he who owns the power, rules the city,” underscoring that there was no absolute hegemonic stability or ideological unity.<sup>33</sup>

The case is sustainable that power was more diffused in the Yoruba world than the assumptions of stable political structures and peaceful lineage fraternity allow. The Yoruba worldview from which conceptions of a sacred kingship and notions of a mysterious Ogboni derive contained many facilities of power which could not be limited to a definitive elite structure and which were available to able and aspiring individuals and groups. The earth (*orisha*) cult, which acclaims the Oba as sacred and of which the Ogboni were leading worshippers, also had priests, mediums and other adherents with varying capacity to claim and deploy its power.<sup>34</sup> In other words, ecclesiastical authority cannot be singular or hierarchical in a polytheistic cosmology. A semblance of how widely diffused power was within polytheistic cosmologies can be found in Jeff Peires’ account of the Xhosa cattle-killing movement of 1856-7 in South Africa’s Cape Colony. In this case, a sixteen year old with no previous priestly or prophetic inclination tells a culturally plausible story and with her uncle exercises considerable influence on chiefs

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<sup>33</sup> Townsend to the Lay Secretary, CA2/085, Letters and Journals of Henry Townsend, CMS Papers, London, April 27, 1847.

<sup>34</sup> Ile-Ife is said to have more than a thousand local deities. Ojo, *Yoruba Culture*, 97.

and priests over a wide region.<sup>35</sup> In the Yoruba accounts, migrations, wars and heroic deeds are usually credited to some divination by local priests who are not necessarily Ogboni. Missionaries record the existence of powerful individuals, known for their charms and power who were not chiefs. Divination and priestly admonitions were very common in the political discourse in Abeokuta during this period. Therefore, to suggest that the Ogboni “six” was always the most ineluctably powerful and feared factor in the social system or that this institution constituted a cultic unity hides the variety of ideas that contested Ogboni issues. There was in fact a wide continuum of power; the council was only one axis of power relations in fluid collaboration and contestation with other power blocs. Part of the story of the Ogboni in Abeokuta was their struggle to retain power and social relevance against other contesting ideas and institutions. It needs be mentioned early on that in this struggle from the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Ogboni did not constitute a traditional alternative, but they deployed what may be termed modern resources including writing petitions and pursuing colonial legal options.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century was particularly turbulent for the region. Civil war in Oyo and a Fulani invasion led to the sacking of the empire, massive population displacements and internecine struggles among successor states to Oyo.<sup>36</sup> Smith has argued that improvisation and expedience, rather than customs or traditions, were the engines that drove Yoruba societies in this unstable time. It can be argued that the uncertainties of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rendered customary conventions inapplicable; it created new dynamics by which power would be defined. It was in this environment that Abeokuta was settled by

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<sup>35</sup> J. Peires, *The Dead will Rise: Nogquawuse and the Great Cattle-killing Movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg: Rowan Press, 1989).

<sup>36</sup> J. F. Ade Ajayi and Robert Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the nineteenth century* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1971), 11.

refugees from these conflicts. The new settlement soon engaged in its own wars, to secure itself against powerful enemies (notably Ibadan, Ijebu, Dahomey and the Lagos colony) and to assert enough influence to partake in and control a share of the Atlantic trade. Domestically, this led to the rise of a powerful military class and a struggle by a civil authority to control it.

As an elite category, the *Ologun* (war) chieftaincies may be a 19<sup>th</sup> century creation among the Egba. Traditions suggest that before this period there were no offices particularly devoted to war or those offices had become disused on account of the imperial rule of Oyo in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The rendition of Egba's most remembered "national war of independence" against Oyo rule supports the absence of any organised form of military activity. The Lisabi legend is the account of a farmer who mobilized, organized and led a successful resistance against Oyo. Biobaku has also noted that the Egbas may have adopted the military titles of other Yoruba armies at Ibadan.<sup>37</sup> More local variants and a refinement of titles were to occur in the 19<sup>th</sup> century as Abeokuta fought its own wars. Yet military titles and leadership were important forms of political power. Contrary to views that the Yoruba did not have a standing army but mobilized as required, that their wars were primitive forays for slaves and booty, and that they practiced neither strategy nor tactics, Ajayi and Smith show that by the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Yoruba had developed a complex and flexible military system which could adapt to the changes occasioned by available firearms.<sup>38</sup> Captain Arthur Jones, an officer of the British regiment stationed in Sierra Leone, wrote a report of the military capabilities of the Egba and an account of his visit to Egba war camps in May 1861. In this report, Jones

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<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 13.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

point to the roles of war chiefs in public decision making. According to him, the political constitution was a federation of sectional chiefs and influential citizens. The decision to go to war was taken at the convocation of the *Ogboni* in which leading chiefs and influential men and women could express their opinions. Once the decision had been taken in favour of war, chiefs enlarged their small band of warriors (which they kept in times of peace) by conscripting the farming population.<sup>39</sup> Military titles were therefore important because they generally overlapped with political roles. A war leader would conceivably also be a chief of sorts in his section, would be able to exercise control over traders and priests and be a member of the *Ogboni*. The leading chiefs in 19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta were also war leaders.

Important as war chiefs were in this era of confusion, they did not constitute an undifferentiated elite category and their control of social resources even in times of war was often tenuous. That a decision to go to war had to be taken at a public meeting of the *Ogboni* afforded anti-war interests an opportunity for dissent. Wars had to be justified as national and necessary to co-opt all the sections, especially because of the network of connections with other Yoruba groups that different sections of Abeokuta shared. Even in the event of a collectively agreed campaign, public support for and enlistment in the wars could not be taken for granted. Indeed, there is much evidence to show that mobilizing farmers and traders for war was a challenge for military and political leaders. For

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<sup>39</sup> Capt. A. T. Jones, "Constitution and Military Capability of the Abeokutan Army for carrying on an offensive war". Printed in Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Cambridge, 1971. Appendix 1, 129-140.



instance, the Egbas had to close down trade routes to Lagos to ensure adequate mobilization of forces during the Ijaye war in 1863.<sup>40</sup>

Given that there were many chiefs, many wealthy persons who kept their own guards and many *Onisunmomi* (bands of warriors who lived on slavery), this elite category had to have been fluid. The warrior as an elite category crossed a wide latitude in itself and it was deeply connected to other elite groups. In other words, not only was candidature to these offices open to many able individuals, the same individuals could circulate in all elite categories. In any case, as British intervention and colonialism put a stop to warfare in the region, military offices ran out of practical functions. It is a mark of its fluidity and adaptability as an elite category that local military offices retained their status into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the titles are still being filled to this date. Like the Ogboni or the monarchy, it is analytically obstructive to cast military chieftaincies as independent actors without an aggregation of the multiple and diverse identities and interests at play.

My assessment of the local politics and its elite actors is that elite categories were tenuous and interconnected. In the case of the monarchy, the conception of national kinship and widespread polygamy progressively widened the number of claimants to royalty; by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there were at least five monarchies in Abeokuta, each with at least four ruling houses from which the king could be chosen. The constant requirements for membership of the Ogboni or the Ologun appear to have been valour in war, wealth and influence, age and experience -- in that order. None of the offices was directly hereditary and there were no cases of pre-ordination, even though the rhetoric at coronation or installation to offices made it appear preordained. Elites were always

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<sup>40</sup>Agneta Pallinder-Law, *Government in Abeokuta, 1830-1914: With Special Reference to the Egba United Government, 1898-1914* (Ph.D. diss., Gotesborg University, 1973), 46.

contesting among themselves for political offices. It is in this sense that J. D. Y. Peel argues that the dominant pursuit of the average Yoruba in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was for power. If power was well-structured, as the view of stable pre-colonial hegemony suggests, then the terms of its acquisition would be very clear. Peel shows through missionary records that Yorubas were always searching for new resources to build social stability and mobility, and interpreting and reinventing existing ones. What defined the Egba elite was not just a place on the political hierarchy, but the skills and capacity to deploy resources in staking claims to pre-eminence.

## 2.6 From Slaves to Lords: The Educated as an Elite category

It was a diffused elite structure that educated Africans entered into and gradually acquired power within during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which partly accounts for their early rise as culture and power brokers in Abeokuta. The dominant writings on the African educated elite depict their entrance into supposedly stable African hegemonies as momentous and revolutionary, and their identity and creed as directly opposed to pre-existing African worldviews.<sup>41</sup> Much has been written within this framework of how educated elites were harbingers of modernity, helping to spread Christianity, challenging “obnoxious” traditional practices, and transforming Africans from the past towards a future. What has been lacking in many accounts is that sense of a process by which the “new” Africans invented their elite status and how they were so recognised by what has been tagged the traditional structure. From the purview of the local, how did new Christians, who often had been slaves, become elites? If African elite structures were static and inflexible this process should be more cataclysmic than the accounts suggest.

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<sup>41</sup> See for instance, Ajayi, *Christian Missions*; Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*,

On the contrary, a diffused elite structure of unsure hegemonic values, intensely contested ideologies and an open competitive political system is a better explanation for the entry and rise of educated elites in the complex political terrain.

Educated elites were themselves not a single undifferentiated unit and their interests and conduct were not altogether defined by their acquired western identities and aspirations. The influx into Abeokuta of liberated slaves from Sierra Leone, Brazil and Cuba from 1839 included many who had acquired a European-style education, Christianity and western ways. However, these acquisitions never fully displaced other cultural attributes. Missionary settlement in Abeokuta resulted by 1844 in the establishment of schools, churches, a printing press and a newspaper among many other western institutions. These were established to cater for the settlers lest they revert to heathen ways and as part of the evangelistic project of the Anglican Church Missionary Society (CMS). Three broad sub-groups of a very complicated educated Egba identity can be identified in the standard accounts: namely the “Aku,” their children (or Saro) and the native converts.<sup>42</sup> The Aku were former slaves or children of slaves, rescued by British naval anti-slavery patrols and resettled in Sierra Leone. It was in Sierra Leone that they became so named on account of their cultural peculiarities, especially their language and greeting style. Their return to Abeokuta was partly to re-establish themselves among their kith and kin. Those among them newly sold into slavery and not extensively de-cultured of their Yoruba worldview found it easy to integrate into the local structures. A

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<sup>42</sup> The educated as an identity is commonly used in the literature, but this concept is very complicated. It ascribes a “colonial” and Western identity of this cadre, conceives of the post-slavery without articulating the diversity of interests that preceded their pre-slavery existence –i.e. whether they were Egba (pre-slavery) or not, whether they were enslaved young or old and cultured and whether they were chiefs and elites before. Besides, those labelled educated acquired different levels and different types of education. While “educated elite” is commonly used in the literature, I strive to capture the concept in a more complicated form.

major concern of the missionaries was the number of resettlers who were going “native.” This group, then, contested the meanings of their new Christian faith against the expediencies of living as Yoruba in Abeokuta.<sup>43</sup> They tended more towards an indigenous strategy to transform Abeokuta toward their visions of modernity. On the other hand, those who were less instilled in the Egba ways found themselves critical of Egba politics and culture. Within this type, the “Saro” must be differentiated from their “Aku” parents. Mostly Protestant missionaries, clerks, teachers and traders, usually bearing “foreign” names like Johnson, Titcombe, Vaughan, Crowther, Lawson etc., they were culturally closer to the European missionaries and merchants and were soon to form the core of the critics who challenged the local elite system. As shifting categories, these identities were useful and convenient resources which individuals and groups adopted as necessary. Ayandele estimates that there may have been as many as 5000 Saros in Abeokuta by 1860. When the missionaries were expelled by a local uprising in 1867, many of the Saros moved to Ebute Metta, near Lagos. Because they had already acquired a measure of Egbaness, they retained claims to Egba citizenship. They also claimed Egbaness as a useful identity to give them strength in Lagos politics. They were deeply involved in the Victorian society that had developed in Lagos and soon became leading professionals and socialites. This corps of Egba played significant roles in using missionary resources and the colonial government to push the Egba towards their vision of modernity. They were particularly active through their associations including the Abeokuta Patriotic Association (1893), the Egba National Council (1898), and the Lisabi

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<sup>43</sup> CMS CA2/133, Letter: Rev. H. Townsend to Rev. Henry Venn, Jan 27, 1847.

Club (1934). They were usually disposed to being used by the Egba establishment in pursuit of national goals. They kept a foot each in Abeokuta and Lagos.

It was not long before an indigenous educated elite group developed as products of mission schools. These were initially recruited from among the children of chiefs and slaves who were redeemed by the missionaries, but their numbers grew as public consciousness of the social values of mission education grew. Lacking the wider connections of the Saro, this group sought careers in the local public service of the Egba governments. A significant number of them were local letter writers and interpreters. This group did not become significantly powerful until the 20<sup>th</sup> century when they constituted an opposition to the Lagos-based Egbas' visions of modernity. Unlike the Saros, they claimed more sectional identity than the Egba collective and were therefore in the heart of the discourse of what it meant to be Egba.

Therefore, while the educated constituted an elite category with clear differences from other groups and the wider society, this elite was not fixed or undifferentiated. Its members shared similar ideas of a modern society, but they differed on meanings of that modernity and the strategies to achieve it. Contrary to the dominant views that the educated elites were predominantly concerned with matters of Atlantic discourse -- racism, colonialism, nationalism and pan-Africanism -- a considerable part of the interests and activities of elites were devoted to more locally germane issues. These issues -- including chieftaincy, health, marriage, and witchcraft -- were critical to the definition of meanings and the resolution of confusions that pervaded Egba society in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Similarly, in sharp contrast to the assumption that the intellectual thought and production of the educated were in monolingual and monocultural forms,

usually in the colonizer's language and within a conception of European modernity, it will become obvious in this study that educated Africans thought and expressed themselves in local worldviews. They navigated multiple spatial and cultural terrains, expressed themselves in local languages and idioms and thought in terms of local cosmologies and convictions as they engaged in local discourses. This is discernible from their comments published in newspapers, some of which were in Yoruba language. Many of them sought and secured membership of traditional institutions such as the Ogboni or guilds and societies like the Parakoyi and Sopono. By 1935 virtually all the traditional monarchies had had an educated person as Oba or leading chief. Their entry into and development within these societies was significant and gradual but not earth-shaking and it took time within the complex inter-elite struggles and social contestations for meanings before they became recognized elites and power brokers.

## 2.7 Missions, Missionaries and the Elite.

Perhaps the greater marker of how fluid and flexible the Egba political system was can be found in the roles played by missionaries and European agents in the formation of Egba society. The conventional treatment of the missionary roles has focused on the constructivist capacities of European culture and power to transform Africans. In this framework, European missionaries are depicted as having created a new elite which colonial agents empowered to battle obnoxious African regimes and cultures. For the most part, missionaries are assumed to be agents external to the dynamic processes by which African societies were transformed by European cultural and colonial power. However, the historical evidence does not suggest that European missionaries

sought to be or were separated from these societies. They were conscious that evangelistic results could not be achieved by their very presence alone and generally sought to work within local systems to relay their message and the benefits of conversion. So involved were missionaries in the Egba case that they soon constituted a European sub-elite of an African power system.

A convergence of interests and exigencies made Abeokuta suitable for the goals of missionaries and abolitionists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The willingness of its leaders to accept European and Christian settlement where neighbouring kingdoms were very sceptical, its prospects for cotton production and its increasing Christian and “civilized” population, created for Abeokuta an image of a “Sunshine in the Tropics” which fitted well to the “Buxton principle:” the abolitionist idea of a Christian foothold from which the light of salvation and civilization could spread to the “dark continent.”<sup>44</sup> To achieve their goals, missionaries attempted to shape local politics. Indeed, Henry Townsend of the CMS exercised so considerable an influence over the Ogboni, that he was thought to have “gone native” by his fellow Europeans.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, missionary and European power became resources which were contested in the interplay of elite politics. Progressively, European missionaries with their Christian adherents constituted an elite group and a political party, the Christian Party, through which they tried to influence politics including succession, boundary delineation, and sectional advantages. It is partly due to the involvement of Europeans in Abeokuta that the Egba were able to secure their state until 1914, long after British colonial acquisition of the rest of what became Nigeria.

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<sup>44</sup> Mary Tucker, *Abbeokuta*, 26.

<sup>45</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 47.

Missions necessarily became involved in the sectional politics of Abeokuta. Where the CMS was the predominant mission of the Ake section, other sections attracted missions of their own: Baptists for the Owu and Catholics for the Gbagura. Therefore, there was considerable competition among the missions borne not only out of doctrinal differences but also from the political interests of their sectional hosts and benefactors. Missions competed to secure the patronage of leading Egba chiefs. It was advantageous to have a chief as a member (if not a convert) because this guaranteed security and a high turn-out at church services. As such while local chiefs contested over who should host a missionary or on whose land the mission should be located, missionaries struggled over which leading chiefs would attend their church or open-air services. Moreover, since church attendance was the only outward evidence of conversion, it was always difficult to determine genuine African converts. Some among the early settlers contested the doctrines with the missionaries especially on matters such as polygamy, slavery and pawnship. Leading Ogboni chiefs attended church regularly and the state itself soon created Christian chieftaincies. In 1890, missionaries and leading Christians formed the Reformed Ogboni movement with a view partly to parallel the social power and privileges of the more authentic organ and partly to create a cultural alternative for their members. Soon enough there was little difference between the “dark, evil Ogboni” and the “Christian and modern” one. Therefore, to suggest that missionaries and indeed every elite category acted in definite and independent ways obscures the complex interests and intricate processes by which Egba society was shaped.

A significant mark of the overbearing influence of Western scholarship on the history of elites in Abeokuta is the near silence on the presence of Islam and its roles in



elite formation and politics. The lopsided logic of modernity allows no space for Islam in the dichotomy between chiefly elites and Westernized ones. In most accounts, including missionary records and despite the fear and derision of *Islamized* Africa in 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary ambitions, the presence of Muslims in Abeokuta is accorded the most minimal mention as though there were only an inconsequential few. As late as the 1860s, the *Iwe Iroyin*, the pioneer newspaper published by the CMS, described the religious composition of Abeokuta as mainly heathen and Christian, with a “few Mohammedians.”<sup>46</sup>

A more than cursory study of the documents will reveal a more engaging presence of Muslims in Abeokuta, including with European missionaries. There is much to show that there were many practicing Muslims among early settlers at Abeokuta.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, the Islamic community had grown such that, by 1848, there were already two “central” mosques in the preponderantly Muslim Owu section alone and a widely recognized “Chief Imam.”<sup>48</sup> The missionary, Ajayi Crowther, lamented the influence of Islam and its constraints on Christian evangelism noting that the one Christian chapel in Owu was sandwiched between two mosques.<sup>49</sup> Muslims engaged missionaries and other interest groups in defining power and in shaping Egba society. Isaac Ogunbiyi has pointed out that the reduction of the Yoruba language to romanized script was a choice Ajayi Crowther and his team of philologists made over the more commonly used *Anjami*, using Arabic characters. Samuel Johnson describes the process in the following words: “After several fruitless efforts had been made to invent new characters or adapt the Arabic

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<sup>46</sup> *Iwe Iroyin*, 20<sup>th</sup> December 1861, National Archives, Ibadan

<sup>47</sup> T. G. O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba 1841-1908*. 17

<sup>48</sup> CMS CA2/031, Crowther’s Journal for quarter ending March 25, 1948; cited also in Saburi Biobaku, *Egbas and their Neighbours*, 205; Gbadamosi, 29.

<sup>49</sup> CMS CA2/031, Crowther’s Journal.

which was already known to Muslim Yoruba, the Roman character was naturally adopted.”<sup>50</sup> Egba Muslims alongside their Yoruba co-adherents have since this period not failed to express their disappointment and resentment at what they see as the displacement of the *Anjami* and the subsequently growing influence of Western ideological dominance of Yoruba society.<sup>51</sup>

The concern of Muslims involved more than what can be labelled the effect of the global hegemonic struggle with Western Christianity; and neither was Islam simply an alternative modernity. Until the 1840s, Muslims in Abeokuta confronted significant intolerance which was not unconnected with the persecutions of Islamic communities in other parts of Yorubaland. Muslims were associated with the rebellion that led to the conquest of Oyo and were held responsible for the devastation as jihadist forces subjugated several other Yoruba towns. Gbadamosi argues that the persecution and dispersal of Islamic communities aided the spread of Islam in Yorubaland;<sup>52</sup> a paradox which he ascribes to the long history of Islam in Yorubaland. In Abeokuta, Muslims were not any more welcome and were perceived as a threat by the authorities. Crowther records “pagan priests” and local authorities “troubled the Muslims sorely ... and tried to “pull down their mosques.”<sup>53</sup>

Islam grew in spite of these troubles because it offered resources valuable to social needs and because it offered desirable tools of power. The success of jihadist forces may have shown how cataclysmic Islam can be; it also pointed to its value for social cohesion, for military strategy and morale. Abeokuta’s leaders also found Islam

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<sup>50</sup> I. A. Ogunbiyi, “Arabic Loanwords in Yoruba in the Light of Arab/Yoruba Relations from Pre-Historica Times”, *Arab Journal of Languages*, iii, 1 (1984): 161-180.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, see also Ayo Bamgbose, *Yoruba Orthography* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1976), 27.

<sup>52</sup> Gbadamosi, 27.

<sup>53</sup> CMS CA/2/031”Crowther Journal for quarter ending 25 September, 1845.

useful for its charms, literacy and the wide reaches its cosmology implied. Islam was therefore a critical part of the multiple tensions by which power was defined, not only as Muslim elites struggled to pull society in their direction (which was not necessarily Islamic) but also because it offered tools available to other elites. By 1920, a Muslim Western educated elite had grown such that inspired by Edward Blyden's writings, they mounted pressure on the colonial government to provide facility for the annual pilgrimage to Mecca by sea.<sup>54</sup>

## 2.8 Conclusion

The multiple voices of power can be conceived over wider connections and contestations than the modernity-tradition nexus; it included inter-sectional, generational, religious, economic, gender and spatial struggles over contending worldviews, ideologies and counter-ideologies. To privilege colonial power distorts our understanding of power and social formation. Similarly, to center colonialism by depicting these other struggles as tangential undermines the potency of even the assumedly most latent forces in social formation. Elite categories are arenas of individual and subgroup interest and each represents the modicum of agreeable conditions around which its members cohere. A society's elite politics must be interpreted not as the performance of its political structures and representative elites, but as a complex interplay of interests, with actors

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<sup>54</sup> Blyden visited Lagos between 1890 and 1891. Extracts from his lectures were published regularly in the *Lagos Weekly Record*. *The Nigerian Pioneer*, January 23, 1920 reports that venture instigated by Blyden and Alfred Jones, during the early 1900 to ship Muslims from Lagos to Mecca was not successful because of low patronage. Muslims in Abeokuta encouraged higher patronage of the project. At that point only two batches of twenty each had left. Alfred Jones, a well-known British shipping magnate and philanthropist provided a vessel, "News Notes", *Crescent*, June 18, (1902): 394; also cited in "That Ye May Know Each Other": Late Victorian Interactions between British and West African Muslims", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 29, 3 (2009): 369-385; For Blyden's views on Islam see, Edward Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (Baltimore, MD: Black Classic Press, 1994).

claiming and appropriating diffused and undifferentiated identities and also appropriating and adapting social resources in fluid ways.

## CHAPTER 3

### SETTLERS AND RETURNEES: CONSTRUCTING POWER, MAKING THE NATION 1860-1880

“He who holds the power, rules the city”<sup>1</sup>

---Chief Ogundipe, 1867.

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a general background to the thesis by re-examining the processes through which power was defined during the formative years of Abeokuta. It does not concern itself with the origins and early history of Abeokuta, of which there are many studies.<sup>2</sup> Rather, it revisits the broad consensus on Egba history to point to gaps in the historiography, highlight the political influences on this history, and suggest alternative interpretations. The chapter argues that existing interpretations of Egba history are informed by the broad disciplinary perspectives of historians and are influenced by dominant local and colonial power, so that the historical data have been made to conform to particular interpretative frameworks and patterns at the expense of others. The first part summarises the historiography and points out why the existing frameworks stressing traditions, unity and a teleology of modernity fail to explicate the complex process by which Egba society was formed. The second part draws on the archive to highlight possible alternative interpretations, shedding light on the struggles among ruling elites and between elites and commoners in the negotiation of power and the formation of society. The third section focuses on the outbreak of 1867 to highlight the complex

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<sup>1</sup> Mentioned in “Extract of letter from the Rev. Matthew Grimmer, Lagos, November 4, 1867,” *The Wesleyan Missionary Notices* 3. 16 (1868).

<sup>2</sup> Key works include A. K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*, (Abeokuta: Fola Publishing Co., 1964, Revised edition, First published in 1918); S. O. Biobaku, *The Egba and their Neighbours* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957); Samuel Johnson, *History of the Yorubas* (Lagos: CMS, 1921); J. F. Ade-Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria: The Making of a new elite* (London: Longman, 1965).

interplay of interests and how these shaped power discourse. These early debates and articulations shaped Egba identity and culture, the history of which constitutes the concern of subsequent chapters.

### 3.2 Finding a Home and Re-Making the Nation in the Age of Confusion

What has become the official account of the settlement of the Egba in Abeokuta needs to be revisited in the light of more recent thought on the subject and the incongruities of the account. The broad synopsis is that the Egba migrated in three different waves from Ile-Ife, the Yoruba ancestral home, to settle in the Egba forests, a region described imprecisely as lying north of their present location but south of Oyo.<sup>3</sup> According to Saburi Biobaku these waves correspond to the three Egba sub-nationalities: Ake, Oke-Ona and Gbagura; each of which grew many townships, was ruled by a monarch in each capital, and shared a federal arrangement with the others. Ake was the leading kingdom, partly on account of some pre-ordained authority from Ife, and thus exercised judicial powers over the other two Egba kingdoms and the many towns they controlled. Gbagura, with their most important city at Iddo (present day Ibadan) ruled by the Agura, included over 400 towns. The Oshile ruled the Oke-Ona from Oko. National cohesion was achieved not only on account of ancestry, cultural similarities and contiguity, but also by a tradition of combined resistance against Oyo imperial rule during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The reasonable tranquility which this federal system secured for the Egba was disrupted following the devastation of the Egba homeland by marauding forces from the Owu War in 1820, during which Egba towns were sacked and the people

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<sup>3</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 3.

scattered or enslaved.<sup>4</sup> The warriors among them and a significant population of the displaced settled in Ibadan with the ravaging Yoruba army, but following attacks on their lives and nation, moved in about 1830 to the security which Abeokuta (lit. under the rock) offered.

This account of origin is based mainly on select oral traditions and a scattering of written records by European explorers. Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander, the first European travellers to record information about the Yoruba, make no mention of the Egba, but we gather from them the wide influence of the Oyo Empire over the Yoruba. Though this empire was in decline, they record that through their journey in 1825 from Badagry to Katunga, natives and chiefs recognized the authority of the *Alaafin*. Their accounts also capture a sense of the cohesion, common destiny and a common awareness of security in this region by mentioning the dread which people on their route had of the rebelling Ilorin and Hausa slaves.<sup>5</sup> The CMS missionary Dr. E. C. Irving leaves us with some detailed account of the devastation of the Egba homeland in the 1820s which he gathered by interviewing eyewitnesses in the 1850s. He also passed through some of the ruins while travelling from Ibadan to Ijebu in 1854.<sup>6</sup> Joseph Wright leaves perhaps the most valuable first hand narrative of growing up in an “Egba” city, of the conquest of his

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<sup>4</sup> Akin Mabogunje and J. D. Omer-Cooper, *Owu in Yoruba History* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1971).

<sup>5</sup> H. Clapperton, *Journal of Second Expedition into the Interior of Africa* (London: 1829); R. Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Lost Expedition to Africa*, vol. 1 (London: 1830) cited in R. C. Law, “Contemporary Written Sources,” in *Sources of Yoruba History*, ed. Saburi Biobaku (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), 9-23; also, Richard Lander, *Records of Captain Clapperton's Last Expedition to Africa* (London: Frank Cass, 1967), Vols. 1 and 2. The route through which Clapperton travelled (to Oyo from Badagry through Ilaro, Ijanna-- via Ipokia, Ihunmbo, Aibo and Saki) and the River Yewa is the heart of Egbado country. There is no particular mention of Egbado as a common identity. Rather, a state of insecurity persisted as Ilaro and Ijanna competed for control of the coastal trade route. See Jamie Lockhart and Paul Lovejoy, “An Expedition into the Interior of Africa under the Command of Captain Hugh Clapperton, R. N. (1825-1827)” ed. Lockhart and Lovejoy, *Hugh Clapperton into the Interior of Africa: Records of the Second Expedition* (Leiden: Brill Academic Publishers, 2005), 43.

<sup>6</sup> Cited in Biobaku, *Egbas*, 13.

city and his enslavement and travels.<sup>7</sup> Subsequently, missionaries who settled in Abeokuta and educated Africans have affirmed this account to be the classic sense of how the people of Abeokuta conceived of themselves and their history. This historiography took more definite form with the publication of Samuel Johnson's *History of the Yorubas* and subsequent historians have adopted it axiomatically, making it the official, substantive and dominant account of Egba origins and identity.<sup>8</sup>

More recent studies have pointed to the political influences upon this history. J. D. Y. Peel has argued that the idea of Yoruba nationality originated among *Aku* speaking liberated slaves in Sierra Leone and was promoted by a Christian intelligentsia who sought to create an identity based on their collective experience of estrangement and to promote their visions of modernity. From this "ethnogenesis," further layers of construction to fulfil colonial exigencies, to claim or solidify power bases, and promote individual and group interests further entrenched the idea of the Yoruba as a nation with a primordial heritage and a future destiny. Peel shows how different generations of Yoruba intelligentsia bought into this nationhood idea, promoted it and fitted it to suit their peculiar colonial conditions and political needs.<sup>9</sup> The history of the Yoruba therefore comes across much less as the actual historical reality, but as a selection of certain data, the silencing of others and the convergent appropriation of power and knowledge in pursuit of elite interests. The same may be said for the history of the Egba, in which

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<sup>7</sup> Philip Curtin, "Joseph Wright of the Egba," in *Africa Remembered: Narratives by Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade*, ed. Philip Curtin (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1967), 317-333. Wright does not mention Egba or express a consciousness of an Egba identity.

<sup>8</sup> For a survey of Yoruba historiography, see Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1999). Toyin Falola ed. *Yoruba Historiography* (Madison: University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1991).

<sup>9</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter and the Making of the Yoruba*, (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2000); J. D. Y. Peel, "The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis," E. Tonkin et. al., *History of Ethnicity*, (London: Routledge, 1989).



alternative possibilities are sacrificed on the altar of nationhood and in defence of power and the dominant ideology. As Alan Confino has pointed out, where historical memory is constructed by leading elites, dominant power is privileged.<sup>10</sup> There is much value in revisiting these historical axioms, traditions or dominant narratives, to engage what Elizabeth Eldredge calls the silenced voices of the past.<sup>11</sup>

A number of interconnected assumptions have dominated Egba historiography. These include claims of an eternal nationhood (pre-existent Egba identity), collective victimization, orderly migrations and settlement, and well-ordered traditions of hierarchical government. They make Egba history national and orderly. Such ideas of historical order promote the notion of the normal state of things, that traditions are longstanding and immutable. However, as with other oral histories, these accounts leave as many gaps as they explicate. It is valuable to examine them even on their own terms.

The notion of a pre-existent nation connects the Egba to the larger Yoruba identity. Claiming location in the Yoruba ancestry makes the ideological values of Yoruba cosmology available to Egba elites. It can be argued that Yoruba conventions of origins and ancestry, the pantheons of gods and heroes and extant social mores and regulations had assumed hegemonic status until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when the Fulani invasion turned their world upside down.<sup>12</sup> Yoruba notions of divine kingship (Alase, ekeji Orisa), of age, seniority and patriarchal authority, of gender relations, were all coordinated in Yoruba cosmology; backed by local laws, conventions, traditions and ancestors, these

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<sup>10</sup> Alan Confino, *The Nation as a Metaphor: Wurttemberg, Imperial Germany and National Memory* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

<sup>11</sup> Elizabeth Eldredge, *Power in Colonial Africa: Conflict and Discourse in Lesotho, 1870-1960* (Madison-Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007).

<sup>12</sup> The idea that the Fulani invasion initiated confusion to an otherwise stable society is common to Yoruba historiography. Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 47, calls it the age of confusion.

were tools of social control which the powerful could not pass by. Claiming connection to the Ife traditions made their resources available to elites.<sup>13</sup> The ideological value of the dominant Yoruba cosmology is also visible in its inclusiveness and universalistic claims. Not inflexible nor totally insular, it rather carries an elastic worldview which makes space for new ideas and inputs and tries to localise them. We find this in the efforts made by ruling elites at various times to appropriate Islam, Christianity and Western civilization into their ruling ideology. They did this by claiming conversion, employing clerics, deploying charms, explicating innovations as though they conformed to or justified conventions, and demanding that their subjects adopt the loyalty which new religions preached and the nationalistic passions and obedience sanctioned by these forms.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Egba connection to the larger Yoruba group was promoted for the utilitarian values of the ideology as much as for any ancestral homogeneity shared with the Yoruba.

Claiming eternal identity legitimizes the existing order of things in other ways. The whole process of historical construction, adaptation or fabrication, including accounts of origin, migrations and connection to some known ancient identity serve more purposes than satisfying curiosity. They affirm that the present order of things is not new rather, it has worked and is natural. The Comaroffs show that the aspiration of power is hegemony -- that state in which the patterns of domination are taken as human, as the culture and as the only way.<sup>15</sup> In spite of the consensus that the Egba had an ancient and pre-Abeokuta identity and in spite of claims that they were a cohesive nation with a long history for which they should share identifiable characteristics, there is no clarity on what

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<sup>13</sup> John Pemberton and Funso Afolayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship: "A Power Like That of the Gods"* (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996).

<sup>14</sup> T. G. O. Gbadamosi, *The Growth of Islam Among the Yoruba 1841-1908* (London: Longmans, 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 31.

constitutes these peculiarities. Since Samuel Johnson's goal was to affirm a common Yoruba heritage, his *History* predictably glosses over Egba peculiarities. Curiously, there is little in Biobaku's *Egba* or Ajisafe's *Abeokuta* to affirm Egba difference. Other than deducing that life in the Egba forest somehow produced an Egba dialect and some other peculiar cultural features, there does not appear to be any sense of the factors that separate the Egba from the rest of the Yoruba folk. In both the scholarly and public history versions, the Egba claim similar Oduduwa-era migrations into the "forest" with the Ijebu, Owu, Ijaye, and Ketu. They equally experienced domination by imperial Oyo as did other Yoruba peoples during the 18<sup>th</sup> century. How then do we account for an Egba identity in the ancestral homeland? What makes the Egba an ancestral nation? Not even their language or dialect was nationally peculiar. Rather, Biobaku notes that the "Egba Alake people ... tend to approximate their speech to that of the Ijebu Remo" and the Gbagura to the Oyo. He further notes that not even facial marks, the most prominent feature of ethnic identity, differentiated them from other Yoruba until the wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century forged a common Egba facial calligraphic identity.<sup>16</sup> Instructively, there is the relative absence of peculiar rituals or re-enactments of origins at coronations and ceremonies which scholars such as Ulli Beier, P.C. Lloyd and Andrew Apter have interpreted as the cultural terrain for the validation of peculiar historical identities elsewhere among the Yoruba.<sup>17</sup> According to these authors, oral traditions as official orthodoxies contain, embedded within their accounts, rituals and ceremonies, evidences

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<sup>16</sup> Biobaku, *Egba*, 4. In his account of his capture and enslavement, Joseph Wrights refers to the enemy being of his "own nation" and his language and not foreigners. He implies a consciousness of a Yoruba group but does not express any sense of Egba identity or collective victimization. He does not mention the name of his town which scholars deduce to be *Oba* and neither does he refer to Egba. Philip Curtin, *Joseph Wright*, 324.

<sup>17</sup> P. C. Lloyd, "Conflict Theory and Yoruba Kingdoms," *History and Social Anthropology*, ed. I. M. Lewis (London: Tavistock, 1968) 53; Andrew Apter, *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

of subaltern subversion. As will be shown, we find no such clear forms of antagonism in Egba ceremonies during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To the extent that there is no corroborative (whether inductive or deductive) evidence to Egba pre-existence than the oral traditions, the accounts fail to pass the critical test of corroboration as enounced by David Henige.<sup>18</sup>

Even if oral accounts are examined on their own terms and in their discursive content, there is much evidence to belie the claims of a definite pre-Abeokuta Egba federation or even of some collective national order. The most commonly cited case for any collective Egba national action is the legend of Lisabi. According to this tradition, this Igbehin youth organized fellow farmers to kill Ajeles, Oyo imperial agents who also served as Sango priests. The legend credits Lisabi with sending messages to other Egba towns to do the same, thus igniting a rebellion among fellow subjects of the Oyo Empire. The c.1775 “war of independence” was not fought by a centralized “national” army, but was an insurrection that succeeded because imperial Oyo had domestic and external distractions. The defeat of Oyo may have made collective defence against Oyo retribution necessary and Ajisafe affirms that Lisabi unsuccessfully tried to create a regular army where there never was one.<sup>19</sup> However, revolt against Oyo during the 18<sup>th</sup> century was rampant. Dahomey may also have secured its independence from Oyo at this point and subsequently launched its own imperial project.<sup>20</sup> Oyo’s interdict against the enslavement of Oyos could be flouted by Owu.<sup>21</sup> At best, this Lisabi era was a brief, mildly significant interval of pan-Egba identity in a longer period of independent existence in which

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<sup>18</sup> The coronation ceremonies of the current Alake, Oba Gbadebo II, on September 27, 2006 does not show such re-enactments; David Henige, “African History and the Rule of Evidence” in *African Historiographies: What History for Which Africa?*, ed. Bogumil Jewsiewicki and David Newbury (London: Sage, 1986).

<sup>19</sup> Ajisafe, *History*, 18; Biobaku, *Egbas*, 9-10.

<sup>20</sup> Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper, *Owu*, 45.

<sup>21</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 206.

Egbaness was less marked than Ake-ness, Gbagura-ness, Ijaye-ness or Ijemo-ness (if it was marked at all). Indeed, these disparate groups probably shared as much cultural similarity with other Yoruba groups as they shared with their so-called Egba kin.

It is also significant that the Lisabi legend is not mentioned in the earliest documents on Egba history as central to the conception of identity. Considering the deep interest which these authors had in the “Sunshine in the Tropics” none of Campbell and Delany (1859), Tucker (1859), Burton (1863) mention the legend as central to an Egba conception of nationality.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, Campbell and Burton visited Abeokuta and do not record any mention of Lisabi in their collection of Egba history and contemporary experience. The same may be said for the missionaries in their reports. The earliest mention of Lisabi (as far as I am aware) is Ajisafe’s *Abeokuta*.<sup>23</sup> Ajisafe, an Egba chief, has a tortuous history of his own<sup>24</sup> and would pass as one of Peel’s historical actors in the construction of the Yoruba ethnogenesis. This is not to suggest that the events retold in the legend are necessarily false; indeed there is little doubt that they may have happened. Rather it comes across as a sectional historical experience (probably of Ake alone) appropriated to create a basis for nationhood and to legitimate power. As Philip Zachernuk shows, such a process of historical construction to justify identity was widespread during the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>25</sup> In subsequent chapters we will see that the creation of national heroes went alongside other nation-building processes,

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<sup>22</sup> Mary Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise in the Tropics: An Outline of the Origin and Progress of the Yoruba Mission* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1859); Richard Burton, *Abeokuta and the Cameroon Mountains* (London: Tinsley Brothers, 1863); Martin Delany, *Official Report of the Niger Delta Exploring Party*, 1861; Robert Campbell, *A Pilgrimage to my Motherland: An Account of a Journey among the Egbas and Yorubas of Central Africa in 1850-60* (New York: Thomas Hamilton, 1861).

<sup>23</sup> A. K. Ajisafe, *History of Abeokuta*.

<sup>24</sup> The role of Egba intellectuals in constructing history is discussed in Chapter 5.

<sup>25</sup> Philip Zachernuk, *Colonial Subjects: An African Intelligentsia and Atlantic Ideas* (Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2000).

including the formation of a national anthem, the creation of a national flag, central churches and mosques, national constitutional conferences and the writing of national histories.

An alternative interpretation to the claims of a pre-existent order must recognize that those who settled in Abeokuta were previously organized in communities of various sizes in the central Yoruba region. Among them were the Ake, Gbagura, Owu, Ibarapa, etc., not any more or less related to one another than to other Yoruba. As Hugh Clapperton's account shows, this region was open to the widespread movement of peoples, news, and ideas, and the intermixing of identities. Intermarriages were common, as the multiple identities of many of the *dramatis personae* in this history reveal.<sup>26</sup> The spread of Islam and the employment of Muslim clerics as chiefly and merchant clerks show that these identities did not preclude the settlement and the integration of non-indigenes or the adoption of foreign ideas and resources. Until the demise of Oyo, its imperial domination and oppression was felt by these conquered peoples partly because the forest region served as a source of agricultural supply and access to the coast for the empire. Oyo's direct control from the capital and the system of *Ajeleship* tried to dominate conquered peoples politically and religiously. Therefore, anti-Oyo sentiments and revolt erupted once the opportunity presented itself. Relations among these communities were as cordial as they were fractious; belligerence, war or reconciliation were not necessarily ethnically determined.

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<sup>26</sup> An evidence of the spread of ideas can be found in Henry Townsend's Journal of 1846 in which he records his visit to a chief who produced an old New Testament bible, pieces of paper on which were drawn hieroglyphics and Arabic words all rolled in local charms suspended from the ceiling. See *Townsend Journal ending Dec. 25, 1846*; Lockhart and Lovejoy, *Hugh Clapperton*, 98; By Biobaku's account, most of the leading Egba leaders at Ibadan had mothers who were not Egba. *Egbas*, 12.

We may trace the origins of Egba identity, the earliest signs of national consciousness, to the aftermath of the Owu war (1820).<sup>27</sup> Although the immediate cause of the Owu war was a disagreement between Ijebu and Owu it was part of the general breakdown of the political order created by Oyo and the social dislocations that resulted from Fulani jihadist forays into Yorubaland. The missionary David Hinderer visited the ruins of Owu in 1851 and recorded as follows:

Owu was an old and very large town of the whole tribe of that name. It was destroyed about thirty years ago and is now converted into farms by the Ibadan, but many ruins still remain. It was made war upon for the space of seven years, chiefly by the Ijebu, who were several times repulsed until joined by the Yoruba (Oyo), especially the town of Ife, and even the Egba, the enemy entirely surrounded and hunger compelled them to surrender. It was not until this strong town was destroyed that the enemies swept off from the face of the earth town after town of the old Egba country until the whole country was ruined.<sup>28</sup>

Owing to the long siege of Owu, the original Ijebu-Ife alliance army, its number increased by a considerable number of displaced Oyo, developed a character of its own as a marauding army and turned to conquering other communities. This army first turned on “Egba” settlements, Ikija and Iporo, which (they claimed) aided Owu during the siege. Other settlements like Kesi, Erunwon, Emere, Oba, Itoku and Ijeun were to follow.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> The Owu war is recognized as a defining encounter in Yoruba history. Gunpowder was probably used in significant quantity for the first time in this war. Some fallouts of the war include the establishment of new towns; Ibadan and Abeokuta and the increased number of Yoruba slaves captured in this and the ensuing wars. Some among these captives were liberated by the British anti-Slavery Squadron and resettled in Sierra-Leone. See J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria* (London, 1966) 230-273.

<sup>28</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 14; CA2/049, Revd. D. Hinderer, CMS Archives, June 1851. It will appear that the use of “Egba” to describe that part of Southern Yoruba country was already popular in the 1850s. Note however that Abeokuta was already established then; and in gathering oral history, the tendency is there to label the past by current/ contemporary identities and designations. I argue here that “Egba” was an adaptation to describe the conglomeration at Abeokuta. It probably had no precise meaning before; does not appear in the traditions of origins; the *Akus* did not identify themselves as such. Samuel Crowther referred to himself as being from Osogun. Joseph Wright did not express a sense of Egba identity. The use of “Egba” was more likely a post-script than a pre-existent identity.

<sup>29</sup> Johnson, 223 records that in one night 14 Egba towns were destroyed; Biobaku, 13-14 accounts for the failure of the Egba towns to band together in collective defense to the breakdown of a loose federation from

Whatever collective defence was organized by conquered communities was not on the basis of federal defence, cultural fraternity or common Egbaness, further undermining claims for any sustained mechanism of political federation or kin fraternity. Rather resistance and defence took the forms of sub-national (i.e. Gbagura) cooperation, the convergence of contiguous victims, and reinforcements from those displaced. Furthermore, a significant number of so-called Egba were members of and party to the conquests. So-called Egba towns participated or aided in the conquest of their supposed kin. Biobaku presents this as symptomatic of the intense jealousies among them. It appears more likely that there was no existing framework of unity. Among the warriors and leaders in this marauding army and its devastations were Lamodi, Apati, Ogunbona, Oso, Gbewiri, Inakoju, Sodeke, Somoye and Ogundipe. Some of them would become leaders and champions of Egba identity, first in Ibadan and then Abeokuta.

Egba identity seems to have coalesced around these leaders in the fallout of their displacement by the more dominant Oyo in Ibadan. Far from being a pan-Yoruba army as some authors suggest, and much more than a collection of individual chiefs at the head of their militia, the character of early Ibadan took after the form of the military alliance that constituted it. Johnson writes of rivalry being so “rife among these various tribes (Ife, Oyo, Ijebu, Egba, Owu (Idomapa) etc.) that altercations were frequent and led to civil war.”<sup>30</sup> In other words, people who were neither Oyo nor Ife (two very distinct identities), but who shared similar experiences of the recent loss of their homes and

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jealousy and particularisms. In reality, this army did not discriminate which community it attacked as other Owu and Ijebu communities were also destroyed. Mabogunje, 49; Joseph Wright narrates that two other towns were sacked along with his on the same day. Curtin, *Joseph Wright*, 319.

<sup>30</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 13; see also Ruth Watson, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan’: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Ibadan: Heinemann, 2003).



exclusions in Ibadan banded together. This group did not live within the central camp, but on the outskirts of the settlement. The numerically superior and the more desperate Oyo (on account of having nowhere else to call home) soon established themselves over the other groups including displacing the Ife and their general, Maye. Other groups were thus excluded. According to Johnson, the Egba were “ill at ease” and were constantly harassed at Ibadan and thus chose to move farther away.<sup>31</sup> Some advance scouting suggested that the site of Abeokuta was suitable. If Yoruba identity was formed in the Aku diaspora, the seeds of Egbaness were planted and grew in Ibadan among similarly displaced Aku speakers, mainly as a counterpoise to Oyo.

There have been related questions over the etymological meaning and derivation of “Egba.” Many writers have pointed to the importance of names and cognomens among the Yoruba. Karin Barber asserts that the Yoruba believe that everything in existence has its own *Oriki* (cognomen or praise poetry).<sup>32</sup> As a non-literate society, town names, *Oriki* and the lyrics of songs relating to them are important means of recording the past and of identity or otherness. In Yoruba historical traditions, town names are not just descriptive of locations like *Abeokuta* (under the stone), *Okitipupa* (red/brown mould), Ibadan (eba-odan: near the savannah). Some others, like *Inalende* (“fire drove me here”), describe historical occurrences. The meanings of sub-national identities like Oyo and Ife are lost in time. Egba appears to fall into this category, which would support the case that it is an identity formed long before the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. However, there are

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<sup>31</sup> Johnson has been accused of being “Oyo-centric.” Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus*, 45; Johnson’s explanation for the displacement of the Egba from Abeokuta absolved the Oyo of any blame locating the cause in the conflict between the irascible Maye and his Ife army against the Egba. Johnson, *The History*, 226.

<sup>32</sup> Karin Barber, *I Could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town* (Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1991).

related words which suggest a more recent tag. Biobaku opines that Egba may be derived from the Yoruba term for the “open-handed generosity” and hospitality of the people so described, according to him a natural attribute expressed in their hospitality to other displaced Yoruba groups, Sierra-Leonean returnees and European missionaries. This etymology rather situates the name in the 19<sup>th</sup> century than earlier given that no prior instances of hospitality and “national” kindness have survived in the historical memory. Egba is also related to unity (*igba*) of multitudes. It is easy to see how a multitude of the displaced who were obviously not Oyo or Ife could be labelled Egba. It is significant also that the more southern Yoruba (south of Abeokuta to the coast) in Ilaro, Ota, Ijako etc., who exhibit varying dialectical differences among them, are collectively called Egbado (lit. Southern Egba) or *Egbaluwe* (coastal Egba). Biobaku suggests that they are of one stock with the Egba, a tributary of the original migration stream that proceeded further south, “wanderers towards the river.” On the other hand, Johnson describes a close relationship between the Egbado and imperial Oyo citing the prevalence of Oyo deities and that many of their “royal kings” were former *Ilaris* or direct vassals of the *Alaafin*.<sup>33</sup> Lovejoy contests that the coastal region was only populated during the 18<sup>th</sup> century as Oyo extended their presence to control the coastal trade.<sup>34</sup> It appears obvious from this collective labelling that peoples were named in terms of their relationship to Oyo and (later) Ibadan as that state grew into an empire to dominate 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba war and politics. It need not be the Oyo labelling people; it may well be self-appellation in similar ways peoples and societies called themselves *Isokan* (unity). By this interpretation, the mass of those displaced (a potpourri of Yoruba speakers from everywhere) who moved

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<sup>33</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 48.

<sup>34</sup> Lockheat and Lovejoy, *Hugh Clapperton*, 91.

south of Ibadan towards Abeokuta became Egba (collection); those who moved further south, Egbado (collection on the river).<sup>35</sup>

Much has been made in the literature of how the settlers in Abeokuta retained their prior identities, including political units, *Ogboni* and other political institutions. Johnson suggests that there were as many as 153 such “villages” in Abeokuta, each organized independently.<sup>36</sup> Ajisafe, Biobaku and other Yoruba historians have adopted this description. Mabogunje and Omer-Cooper explain their failure to fuse into a single community in spite of shared experiences by the depth of local particularism of the Egba.<sup>37</sup> The premise of a pre-existent Egba makes this notion of innate jealousies, particularism, cultural attachments (bordering on intra-Yoruba incompatibilities) appear plausible. Other scholars have pointed to this as evidence of Yoruba intense nationalistic commitment to their ancestral towns, such that they carried names and practices to new locations.<sup>38</sup> While this may be true, there are other incentives and expediencies for reclaiming old communities than a natural desire or character. Since the Yoruba wars were mostly sieges, the capture, enslavement, migration, and relocation of the conquered peoples was usually in significant numbers. Settlement patterns for displaced peoples would therefore be such that measures of kinship were retained. This claim is supported by the many incidents of searches and reunions following the establishment of the church in Abeokuta. Displaced peoples showed an incredible awareness of where their kin were

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<sup>35</sup> Virtually all studies of the Egba take it for granted that they existed in the hinterland before settlement in Abeokuta. I argue here that this view is promoted by reading the history backwards from Abeokuta. I am not aware of any mention of Egba in the contemporary record. Joseph Wright, Ajayi Crowther and Hugh Clapperton who travelled at this period did not show any consciousness of Egba as a collective identity.

<sup>36</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 93.

<sup>37</sup> Mabogunje and Cooper, *Owu*, 67.

<sup>38</sup> The curious example Biobaku presents is of an old chief who unsuccessfully tries to repopulate his father's town. How come his fellows were not so committed? Biobaku, *Egbas*, 27.

likely to have been driven to or enslaved.<sup>39</sup> Therefore, rather than the pattern of settlement being interpreted as a cultural attribute of Yoruba clannishness, an unchanging and immutable character of the Yoruba, it is critical to historicize this and other such cultural axioms. It appears to me that the pattern of settlement rather suggests the absence of pre-existent unity or feeling of kinship. People lived together because they shared the same experiences of estrangement and resettlement rather than for their intrinsic cultural sameness. Thus the logic in the extant literature is that well over 150 Egba townships or villages, forced together into the Abeokuta settlement, were so different they could not live together. This thesis argues that economic and security concerns forged only mildly related persons together; the struggles for power in which chiefly interests delineated control divided the city along indefinite and intensely contested lines.

The idea of a pre-existent nation is central to the form of power and domination among the Egba elite of the colonial and post colonial era. It privileged the Ake section with a pre-ordination to leadership and ownership over the other sections in a number of ways. This privilege is not so much because the leaders in Abeokuta were originally Ake and much less that they had a royal or noble heritage<sup>40</sup>; rather the myth of Ake, complete with its claims to primordial authority, was readily available for aspiring individuals to tap into in the struggle for power and privilege. Most of the Egba leaders were ordinary folk with no prior claim to chiefly power or traditional authority. They rose to importance by the new standards created at Ibadan, including adopting Oyo-Ibadan titles. Ogundipe, who would later become a leading chief in Abeokuta, had been an apprentice blacksmith before the displacements; he became a drifter and rose through the ranks as a private

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<sup>39</sup> CMS, CA2/259, "Reverend Townsend Journal for Quarter ending March 25, 1847."

<sup>40</sup> Sodeke claimed Iporo of the Alake section but certainly not of some pre-Abeokuta Ake. CA/2/89-127 Crowther Journal entry Oct 11, 1947.

soldier in Ibadan. Sodeke, who later became Egba leader, was captured in the Gbagura attacks and enslaved by Dekun, a principal of Ijana, in Egbado. Dekun had been an *Ilari*, a viceroy of the Alaafin, but had excised his Ijana kingdom from Oyo control, appropriating the *Isakole* (tribute). He lived as an itinerant warrior and was involved in many of the encounters including the devastation of the Egba towns and in Dahomey's forays into coastal Yorubaland. Sodeke served Dekun as his horse-boy for many years and participated in Dekun's travels and exploits across the region. His extensive travels and knowledge of the Yoruba country probably made him better placed to lead one of the bands of Ibadan displaced to Abeokuta, a region through which he may have passed in his forays. Johnson considers it providential that he became Egba leader.<sup>41</sup>

Furthermore, the notion of a pre-existent Egba identity establishes the new leaders as the "original" owners and indigenes of Abeokuta making other Yoruba subgroups aliens or settlers. In making this claim, Egba traditions stretch the territory of the ancestral Egba country to include Abeokuta. According to Biobaku, the hilly landscape served as farmland to some Itoko (Ake) farmers. By this interpretation, the flight from Ibadan was a movement to part of the homeland that had not been conquered, further affirming the legitimacy derived from pre-existence. Other accounts suggest that the Olumo rock served as a den for robbers and slavers,<sup>42</sup> which in Tucker's view makes the Egba settlement a providential reclamation of morality and peace. Here we find a convergence in which missionary dreams inject ecclesiastical authority to confirm an Egba self image. There have also been hushed claims that the land around Olumo may

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<sup>41</sup> Johnson, *The History* 228. Biobaku records Sodeke's experience in terms of his preparation and qualification for leadership. Neither of these authors factor that he was not previously an aristocrat.

<sup>42</sup> Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise*, 40.

have been part of Egbado or Remo.<sup>43</sup> According to the dominant tradition, the Ake as “original owners” graciously parceled out land to the other settlers.

Related to the claims of ownership is the myth of orderly migration. The accounts of Egba migration from Ibadan appear too orderly, unified and simple for this supposed significant population of Egba. It also appears illogical considering the assumed variety and intense jealousies among them, which were not mitigated by their shared victimization; and which led to their resettlement in 153 (or more) fiercely independent “townships” or villages in Abeokuta. Biobaku’s description resembles the biblical crossing of the Red Sea. By his account, evacuation was carefully planned: from the *Ifa* divination to choose Sodeke as leader, to the ordered march of the population and the existence of a rear-guard army to checkmate the pursuing Ibadan army. “Sodeke and the Egba Alake people constituted the vanguard; they were followed by Agbo, who led the Gbagura people. The Oke-Ona people brought up the rear” to enter Abeokuta in 1830.<sup>44</sup> Akin Mabogunje’s study of the spatial distributions of Abeokuta suggests that it is more likely that settlement was in a continuous stream of immigrants in varying sizes of groups and in which individuals and groups found residence among relatives or were recruited to populate existing communities.<sup>45</sup> That Egba traditions claim that land was parceled out to each new group of migrants under their leader by the Ake elite emphasizes how deeply involved traditions are in the construction, functioning and legitimization of power. This tradition of migration must therefore be valued in terms of the movement of leading Egba

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<sup>43</sup> G. Gbesan, B. Odetoyinbo and D. Oladosu, *Lipede: A Dove of Destiny* (Abeokuta, 1992).

<sup>44</sup> Biobaku *Egbas*, 13.

<sup>45</sup> Akin Mabogunje, “Some Comments on Land Tenure in Egba Division, Western Nigeria,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 31, 3 (1961): 258-269; Burton’s description of his first sight of Abeokuta writes that the habitation was closely packed like cells in a comb and then broken by bush probably separating the key towns which were so closely packed that it will “burn like tinder.” Burton, *Abeokuta*, 70.

warriors who escaped from Ibadan as they were pursued from there. This band was of course sufficiently capable of claiming leadership and being recognized as such by a growing population desperate for security.<sup>46</sup> It is significant that the initial governance was centered on a committee of military chiefs which constituted the *Ogboni* and operated a hierarchy and political system similar to Ibadan. Sodeke became the leader of this elite likely on account of his age, military experience and extensive travels. These were critical qualities that conferred respect, fear and admiration, and by these, Sodeke amounted to an oracle: the custodian and final arbiter on matters of local and regional histories and contemporary knowledge.<sup>47</sup>

One notable implication of Ake supremacy is the application of a sectional experience over this conglomeration. The “Ake version” became the “history of the Egbas” into which other histories sought inclusion or became silenced. The historical experiences of other settler groups both in pre-Abeokuta times and within Abeokuta history become sidelined. For instance, the process by which Owu, reportedly a small quarter of remnants of the Owu kingdom, established authority over much of southern Abeokuta including Ota, Ibogun etc. has been subsumed under the larger framework of Egba dominance over the Egbado area.<sup>48</sup> The situation has become compounded by the fact that efforts to write these histories now appear tendentiously revisionist. For instance, the *Olu* of Ibara’s claim in the 1980s that Abeokuta expanded during the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to encroach upon his otherwise independent state is viewed in the context of inter-party rivalry in Nigeria’s second republic. Iberekodo is well-mentioned in the

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<sup>46</sup> It conforms to other cases across Yorubaland, where warriors became rulers. Robert Smith, *Kingdoms of the Yoruba* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 100.

<sup>47</sup> Egba traditions and missionaries describe him as wise and calm.

<sup>48</sup> There is currently a struggle over which monarch is “sovereign” between Ota and Ilaro. For more on recent chieftaincy and politics in Abeokuta see Insa Nolte, “Chieftaincy” 369.

archive as a distinct polity outside Abeokuta; its people merged with Abeokuta only after its destruction by Dahomey. Yet, Iberekodo's identity and history are obscured in the inclusive Egba paradigm. Oba Tejuosho's recent claim to pre-dominance over the *Alake*, in his book *So far so Memorable*, underscores the existence and the silencing of other histories by the more dominant Egba version.<sup>49</sup> Such struggles over Egba identity, culture and political constitution have been common throughout its history in spite of the popularity of the dominant version.

At Abeokuta a new elite developed around military chiefs with very limited civil legitimacy, an unclear constitution and an unsure social structure.<sup>50</sup> Claims and counter claims over history and traditions are evident even in the early period. Sodeke's leadership was not unchallenged. Biobaku records that the *Ijemo* people contested the ownership of Abeokuta claiming that Sodeke and the Ake were immigrants and interlopers. Sodeke comes out in the literature as a capable sanguine leader who held unquestioned legitimacy and authority. In reality, his eminence was constantly contested by others. Civil strife was averted by what amounts to bribery, assassination and the absorption of the leading "rebels" into the ruling elite.<sup>51</sup> That the system allowed for the stratification of authority at various levels and for considerable independence of action by the able, widened the axis of power and diverted attention from the center. The need for security among hostile neighbours subordinated internal struggles to "national" defence. The series of wars of defence and aggression also provided needed distractions away from the key issues of internal constitution, and wealth in booty and slaves served to

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<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> This conforms to other parts of Yorubaland where warriors became monarchs during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. See Apter, *Black Critics and Kings*, 73; John Pemberton and Funso Afolayan, *Yoruba Sacred Kingship*. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), 28.

<sup>51</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 22



legitimize this evolving elite and its ideology. Social stability was achieved not because of a pre-existent order recreated, accepted and respected by all, but by complex political juggling including the selective use of history, traditions and often naked violence; it was a balance of politics and terror in which only the minimal and most expedient laws were agreed upon. Perhaps the most important edict was the prohibition of the use of guns within the town.<sup>52</sup> Yet even this was flagrantly disregarded. Other than this, poaching and kidnapping of slaves continued within and outside the town and *ija igboro* (lit. public disorder) was common. Chiefs kept their bands of slave raiders and individuals organized in small bands of *Onisunmomi* to poach strays and raid surrounding settlements. Far from the picture of a well-ordered government built on known customs and a respected hierarchy, power was tenuous, the access to it largely unstructured.

More importantly, Abeokuta at the point of its settlement was not a reproduction of a pre-existing ancient identity. Just as its political constitution was being shaped amidst contestations and power struggles so too were its identity and culture being configured. Leading chiefs tried to claim pre-existence for legitimacy, but they also had to contend with the imperfections and inappropriateness of their claims and the limits of their power. The next section dwells further on this theme, by highlighting the limitations on chiefly power and the historical claims of legitimacy. It does this by building scenarios around data from the archive. It must be noted that in spite of these weaknesses, Abeokuta developed a dynamic system that secured it from external attacks and internal combustion and which made it seem an oasis of peace to returnees and settlers from Sierra Leone and Christian missionaries. The next section accounts for this stability.

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<sup>52</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 18.

Figure 3.1 Map showing Abeokuta in Relation to British Possessions in West Africa

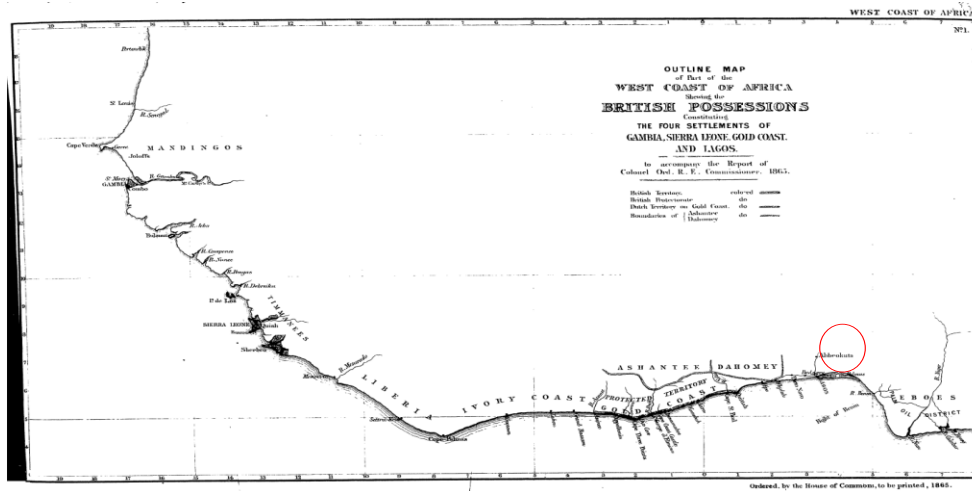
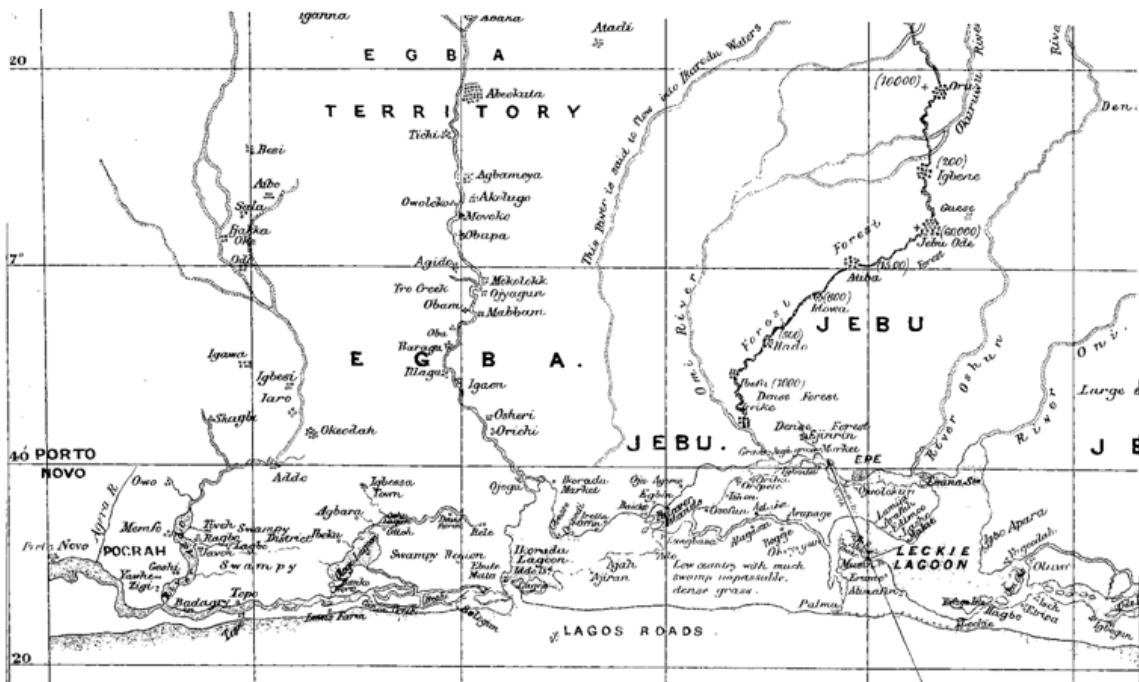


Figure 3.2 Map Showing the Egba Kingdom in 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba Country<sup>53</sup>



<sup>53</sup> C. 1865 (170) "Report of the conditions of British Settlements on the West Coast of African," *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, March 29, 1865; C. 4957, C. 5144, "Correspondence respecting the war between native tribes," *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, Feb. 1887.

### 3.3 Chiefly and Civic Power in the Age of Confusion

It was unusual for rain to fall at the very height of the harmattan season, but many unusual occurrences soon became the norm in 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba country. For the people of Abeokuta, when a tornado struck with thunder and heavy storms in the dry season, it could only be from one source. The first sparks of fire and the shout of alarm and anguish that followed signalled different fortunes for different people: the *Sango* priest woke up earlier than usual, the *Ifa* priest expanded his guest yard to cater for enquirers and the sellers of sacrificial animals began to line up their stock by size and colour. The fire that broke out after a lightning strike in Igbore on the 29<sup>th</sup> of January, 1847, was not a historic first, neither was it the most devastating for the Egba; it lasted only two hours, and yet left thousands of people homeless.<sup>54</sup> The heavy rains could not quieten the anger of the thunder, fire and the windstorm as *they* battled over who owned the next thatched roof. More people stood by and watched than those crying and running; all shouted “*kawo kawo*” (see) in fear and admiration for the god of thunder. It was every victim to himself. No one would step in the path of *Sango*’s fierce anger. The missionaries were baffled as only the day before a storm had blown open their newly installed thatched roof. On this day, a new convert had run all the way from the fires just to inform them. His report grossly underestimated the devastation they beheld. The chiefs were already there. Sagbua, the leading chief, looked on helplessly, unable to mobilize a subdued and yet obstinate population to combat the fire. Calamity was an everyday experience and from it developed a public mood of obstinacy. One victim shouted down

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<sup>54</sup> Burton’s first impression of Abeokuta was that it awaits a spark. “The town inside would burn like tinder. On a windy night five hundred men, taking the proper direction, and firing it skilfully, might do any amount of damage, and thoroughly demoralize its defenders,” even though the city was well defended by thick forest, granite, caves and rocks, against “attacks of Africans with their instinctive horror of wars.” *Abeokuta and the Cameroun Mountains*, 70.

the chiefs and another fought them off his house when on the instigation of the missionaries, they tried to demolish the next house in the line of fire. It appeared senseless and irrational to the Europeans that no one would accept personal loss or risk injury for the collective good and that victims wished the same calamity on their neighbours.<sup>55</sup> The Reverend Henry Townsend would afterwards review his prior impressions of communitarian Africans organized in deep heathen tribal and family bonds. In his next journal he wrote:

The grand idol of this country is self. To be esteemed the greatest in many respect but in things truly great, is what each one strives for, and money appears to be the readiest instrument to obtain the sought for greatness. Hence arises the great struggle to obtain wealth and the great disregard to the means by which it might be obtained.<sup>56</sup>

Other missionaries were soon to come to similar conclusions about Abeokuta: that the known chiefs were limited in their powers. Mary Tucker, reading from missionary journals, shows that although the leading Egba chiefs befriended missionaries and may have become “hidden” converts, they were often not able to protect the missionaries or converts. In many ways, the chiefs were powerless over their citizens. The formal structure of power may appear hierarchical; its functioning was much more diffused. To many missionaries, Abeokuta’s politics amounted to a state of confusion.

Missionaries witnessed other instances of civil defiance to chiefly authority. Their hopes in chiefly protection for them and their converts were often misplaced, with chiefs being incapable to secure the freedom of a convert restrained for converting to Christianity or of a bride seeking release from a ritual commitment or even a mob intent on closing down a church. Often, missionaries paid fines to secure the release of such

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<sup>55</sup> CA/2/227-265, “Reverend Townsend Journal for Quarter ending March 25, 1847.”

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, Townsend to Lay Sec., April 27, 1847; also Journal entry, Jan. 12, 1847.

converts or encouraged them to bear their cross. In a few instances, chiefs themselves had to pay fines to help missionaries secure a convert's release. In another, the convert had to serve terms of imprisonment and restrictions.<sup>57</sup>

The weakness of chiefly power can be accounted for in a number of ways. First they lacked civil legitimacy conferred by immutable traditions. Virtually none of the Egba elites could claim royalty of any sort—not of Ake or its *omo-iyá* (fraternal) towns, nor of any of over 150 Gbagura towns. Not only were the claimed paraphernalia of a pre-existent order lost, the knowledge of chiefly rituals, coronation rites etc. had to be reconstructed and took the shape more of the Oyo/Ibadan praetorian system than of a particular intrinsic Egba character. Peel notes how pervasive was the feeling that the world had been turned upside down, implying that whatever socio-cultural order existed before lost meaning and application.<sup>58</sup> If the figures of war casualties and the loss from disasters are anything to go by, violence and calamity in this era had become a way of life. Amidst despair, a marked sense of individuality developed from the knowledge that no one could save another from the consequences of siege, conquest and enslavement. The sense in which the era collapsed community and trust needs to be highlighted as significant effects of the slave trade on social relations. Chiefly authority, especially the sort of brigandage that chiefs were known for, could not have bred confidence. Therefore, individuality, intransigence, hot-headedness and fearlessness were the qualities required and celebrated in this era and context. This applied to women as to men. The records include references to women's roles in trade expeditions to Lagos, Badagry and other near-and long-distance markets and how women led or encouraged leaders to disregard

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<sup>57</sup> On various accounts of persecutions see Mary Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise*, 146-150, 166.

<sup>58</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, *Religious Encounter, and the Making of the Yoruba* (Indianapolis IN: Indiana University Press, 2001) 21.

fears and dangers.<sup>59</sup> During the Egba-Dahomey war of 1856, women not only provided necessary support to the warriors, but jeered deserters back to the front by calling them cowards and asking to take the weapons off the fearful. The story of Efunroye Tinubu not only reveals that women were visible as public actors and power players, but shows that the path to prominence for women in such an environment demanded skills and attitudes akin to stubbornness and individuality.<sup>60</sup>

It is this critical sense of individuality, the actions of ordinary citizens in Abeokuta (individually and in groups) in stubbornly shaping what was acceptable and not, that has gone largely unreported in the state-centric historiography. By clear forms of resistance, ordinary individuals defined the limits of chiefly power, resisted internal poaching, overcame and often disregarded constructed traditions, exiled chiefs and others perceived as wicked and forced the chiefly elite to conform to public interests. Many instances abound of the resistance to chiefly authority or perceived injustices. Biobaku refers to the case of the stray boy of Itoku, who was found enslaved by Somoye (the leading Egba chief) and how ordinary people banded together to secure his release.<sup>61</sup> Such public displays against chiefly excesses were not unusual across Yorubaland. The case reported by Tucker, of a group of young men who militarily challenged the dreaded Timi of Ede, shows this.<sup>62</sup> In this case, youths were angry at reports of Timi's wicked treatment of slaves and mobilized from far and wide to raise a force to challenge the tyrant and free his slaves. Such mass actions were so common during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and its rendition

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<sup>59</sup> Revds Gollmer and Marsh speak of a large Egba settlement in Badagry made up mostly of women and of many Egba traders in Badagry. CA2/67/4, Mr W. Marsh's Journal for the Quarter ending Dec. 25, 1846; CA2/95-136, C. Gollmer's Journal Dec 25/46.

<sup>60</sup> Yemitan Oladipo, *Madame Tinubu: Merchant and Kingmaker*, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1987).

<sup>61</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 21.

<sup>62</sup> Tucker, 31 credits Reverend Hinderer with this account.

make it appear as customary or tradition to organize the *kirikiri* against a tyrant. Ajisafe describes the process by which powerful men who acted against public interest were exiled, assassinated or forced to suicide as though it was ancient and traditional. The process usually starts with determining the home town of such a person and some case would always be made for his not being native to the country. One common method of eviction was to raze the house and adjoining property to the ground thus depriving such powerful persons access to their homes, chambers, shrines and charms. Ajisafe describes the process in the following words:

When a king or chief or a powerful or notable man of the country is no more wanted by the people, i.e., when they are tired of him because of his evil ways and his mischievous and tyrannical actions, a mob parades thorough the country or town, singing vituperative songs and loudly abusing the man, and when they get to his quarters they throw sand and stones into his palace or house, to show that he is no more wanted in the country. Such a parade usually takes place in the night and may continue for three consecutive months. Within the expiration of the three months, the man concerned must try to reconcile or vacate the country, or commit suicide (choosing which)... he is given a decent and honourable burial according to his rank and title. Should he ignore or slight the *Kirikiri* [by depending upon his power and might for the defence of his body and property] a select body of masked and powerful men shall suddenly rush into his house one night and kill him. If the party is not a king, then his house is razed to the ground and all his inmates are seized as prisoners... thus in order to save his family and property, and to prevent his [own] people turning on him, such an important man usually commits suicide [or goes into exile]<sup>63</sup>.

One such chief was encountered by a resident Catholic Priest in 1882. Solanke of Igbehin was feared for his accomplishments in war and more for his charms which he allegedly maintained by sacrificing people. He was soon estranged from his neighbourhood. Obviously too powerful to be directly confronted, less violent methods of alienation were adopted: no one visited his house, his wives were snubbed and songs were composed to deride him. His wife's family probably recalled her or encouraged her to escape and

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<sup>63</sup> A. K. Ajisafe, *Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People*, (Abeokuta, Fola Bookshops 1924), 34.

knowing this to be the beginning of a well-known process he moved his residence to Ogbe, in the outskirts of Owu, where he lived alone. His reputation followed him here such that whenever a person was declared missing, Solanke was invariably mentioned. The Catholic missionary and medic stationed at Ogbe describes how Solanke was attacked by a mob, his house burnt along with his dreaded medicines and himself decapitated.<sup>64</sup>

Such incidents as this appeared to European missionaries as public disorder. In reality, they were important means of social order and systemic balance in a context in which culture and social conventions were as yet not clearly defined. It was certainly possible for competing sections of the chiefly elite to mobilize mobs against one another. Indeed, some of the conflicts appeared to be sectional; however, the structure of chiefly power was so diffused that “townships” were themselves divided between competing chiefs. The political structure was not a neat federalism in which each section or “town” had its own chief representing it in the central *Ogboni* council. Rather, chiefly status and hierarchy were determined by the comparative capacity to control social resources. These resources included people (slaving was an incentive to wars and slave raids), control over tolls and trade and military accomplishments. As such, each section had to grapple with its own elite struggles. It must be noted that only a few Egba wars were “national.” In many cases, “federal” and sectional chiefs often claimed ignorance of the wars engaged in their names or of their sections.<sup>65</sup> The Egba system must be seen as a galaxy of

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<sup>64</sup> Father Coquard, quoted in *Les Missions Catholiques*, Janvier - Décembre 1892, 60.

<sup>65</sup> Townsend reports that not all the chiefs went to war. “Townsend Journal, ending Dec. 25 1846; Reverend Gollmer recounts that a chief asked that his visit be secret so it would not appear as though he was entertaining while others were at war. CA/2/131, Reverend Charles Gollmer Journal, January 2, 1847; A civil war was reportedly averted following Bashorun Ogundipe’s celebration of the defeat of Egba forces at Ketu in 1869. CMS CA2/ 070, “W. Moore to Sec. CMS,” 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1869.



struggles, not at the center only but also within the “towns” themselves. These struggles were mitigated by a complex dynamic derived from shared interests in basic public order and the critical role public opinion played. Indeed, it was in the arena of public discourse that conventions and culture were shaped. Missionaries described how the markets and other public places were centers at which gatherings of people debated what was permissible or unacceptable. There are many accounts of public debates between Christian missionaries and Mohammedans at places where “thousands congregated.”<sup>66</sup> Public gatherings and discussions were therefore very common. The pattern of daily life was such that breakfast was not had at home, but in public squares—one such central place, Sapon (lit. aid the bachelor) bears its name from where young men gathered to have breakfast. Such gatherings were also points of mobilization to execute what was deemed necessary to preserve public order, avenge some injustice or act on such dominant ideas. Of course the public gatherings were also the terrain of power interventions and contestation, for which reason it was not just enough for a chief to be rich or powerful. He also had to be a good orator or have a respected one as his aide.<sup>67</sup>

What appeared to the missionaries as patterns of social mischief hide significant details and complex social processes beyond their immediate grasp and understanding. For instance, the crowd that gathered to hear Henry Townsend and Ajayi Crowther at the courtyard of Chief Osho Ayikundu of Igbein on October 27, 1846 appeared to the missionaries as unruly and without control. However, it was hard to depict this as typical

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<sup>66</sup> William Marsh described his decision to “expose the deceptions of the priests and the delusions of the Mohammedans” by accusing them of all sins. CMS, CA2/16, “Mr W. Marsh's Journal for the Quarter ending Dec. 25, 1846.”

<sup>67</sup> According to Tucker, 142, 26, “None of the people take their first morning meal in their house, but all, both men and women, about seven o'clock in the morning, pay visits to a cook's shop and make their first breakfast of a bowl of gruel of Indian corn.”

of the Egba because they had preached at other places where the crowd had been orderly and attentive.<sup>68</sup> On this occasion as far as they could see, the crowd was noisy and uncontrollable because of the novelty of seeing a white man. However, much more was going on here. The occasion also coincided with the annual festivals to mark the end of the planting season. Missionaries would much later recognize the many activities of these festivals as *Oro Ile* or “town fashion.” Returning farmers, dwellers in the outskirts and traders from long distances usually filled the town at such periods. What appeared to Townsend as an unruly crowd was actually the shared felicitations of brethren celebrating reunion. Such occasions also served for public debates, the sharing of news and the resolution of collective concerns. Accordingly, it could not produce the kind of rapt attention that the missionaries expected and which they had enjoyed at smaller gatherings organized by the chiefs. It amazed the missionaries the more that not even the chiefs could enforce order on this occasion. To their consternation, the old and respected chief was himself shouted down and the missionaries were thus unable to preach. What was hidden to them was how inauspicious the occasion was. The end of the planting season also marked the beginning of preparation for the dry and its attendant concerns, not the least of which was national defence and warfare. Ordinary folks who had been away from the town would on this occasion demand the chiefs explain what plans were in place for their defence and justify their decisions, including the acceptance of white men to settle in their midst. Indeed, only a week earlier, the Hutton “trade expedition” had failed miserably (by missionary accounts) because Badagry had sent ahead to instigate the Egba

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<sup>68</sup> For instance at Ogunbona’s (Ikija) and Apati’s (Kemta). CA/2/89-127 Crowther Journal entry October 11, 1846;

against British enterprise and (by missionary accounts) to protect the slave trade.<sup>69</sup> An equally plausible reason can be found in the effrontery of Messrs Hutton, Roberts and Parsons to plant an English flag on the *Olumo* Rock before “numberless people in the streets all gazing at us and the flag.” The visitors then surveyed the iron smelting and weapon making factory—all these while the main body of the Egba army was at war against Ado and Porto Novo, areas which Mr. Hutton was known to have visited.<sup>70</sup> The Hutton expedition failed because none of the chiefs could deflect public concern that he was a spy. Such calls to account were marks of the weakness of chiefly power and the importance of civility or public power; and these were quite common through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it was as it relates to the *Ifole*, the outbreak of anger leading to the expulsion of the missionaries in 1867, that the fluid and intensely contested nature of local power in Abeokuta is revealed. Before then, however, some note needs to be made of returning liberated slaves from Sierra Leone and how they rose to constitute a faction of the power elite.

### 3.4 Locating Returnees in the Age of Confusion

Focusing attention on the *Saros*, as they came to be referred to, is important to my objective of opening up the vistas of Egba history beyond the narrow scopes of modernization and state-centric discourses. Except for a few dominant figures such as the Reverend Ajayi Crowther, the roles and activities of the *Saros* are depicted in terms of their relationship with the mission -- especially their retention or loss of Christianity – their roles in early modernization and as early nationalists. Existing studies capture the

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<sup>69</sup> CA2/85/227-265. Letter: Townsend to Venn, January 27, 1847;

<sup>70</sup> CA2/85/227-265. Townsend to Lay Secretary, April 27, 1847. Missionaries thought this was novel but Jihadist armies used flags extensively in their conquest of Yorubaland.

missionary's concern that returnee Saros had fallen into polygamy and other traditional lifestyles. E. A. Ayandele links them to the rise of a "Christian Party" and the activities of G. W. Johnson.<sup>71</sup> In reality, Saros exercised more substantial influence on Egba politics than has been recognized.

Saros are thought to have begun resettling in Abeokuta from about 1839 when a batch of them, supported by a letter of recommendation from the Sierra Leonean government to Wawu, the "English" chief of Badagry, sought resettlement in Yorubaland. This batch and another which set out for Lagos could not proceed on to Abeokuta on account of the insecure travel routes to the interior and neither did they wish to remain at Badagry or Lagos where they were despoiled of their properties and faced the risk of re-enslavement and sale. Thus, contrary to the image of group settlement, the earliest Saros who resettled in Abeokuta got there not as a group but as daring individuals. This is significant because it suggests the individual liberated slaves had to incorporate into existing Egba social and political formations. Thus rather than a distinct elite category marked by their "modernist" credentials, on account of their Sierra Leonean experience, the Saro settlers entered a variety of relationships beyond their relationship with Christian missionaries, including especially citizenship and subjecthood in local power structures. For instance, a few returnees were estranged children of chiefs. One such chief, the Olufoko of Igbore, had a son restored to him. Crowther credits this son among the people engaged in the subterranean movement of Christianisation and sensitisation that was already afoot before the CMS arrived.<sup>72</sup> Conceiving of returnees in this way explicates their roles in Egba politics and refigures them in more complex ways

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<sup>71</sup> E. A. Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact on Modern Nigeria 1842-1914* (London: Longmans, 1966) 11, 47.

<sup>72</sup> CA/2/89-127 Crowther Journal 25<sup>th</sup> Dec., 1846.

than the usual depiction. Beyond merely anti- or pro-mission policies, beyond being Europeanized Africans seeking to modernize a traditional system, they come across as citizens engaging with others in the pursuit of multiple interests and defining the emergent shape of their society.

By 1841, there were already about three thousand Saros in Abeokuta.<sup>73</sup> With the resources they had on account of their extensive travels, the Saros were the harbingers of news and of new ideas and skills. Some of them found vocation as traders, as commercial agents for local chiefs and coastal merchants. A few of them already created “industries” such as carpentry and lumber works.<sup>74</sup> Christian worship was already being conducted by Saros and a semblance of “market-place preaching,” more appropriately discussions, were already being undertaken.<sup>75</sup> It is to these earliest Sierra-Leonean resettlers that the credit must be accorded for planting the first seeds of Christianity in Abeokuta. More significantly, the acceptance by the leading chiefs of European settlement was not altogether on account of any clear appreciation of the security resources which missionaries offered. Domingo and other Portuguese slave merchants supplied guns and ammunition and, up to this point, Egbas were successful in their military campaigns. Rather, the groundwork to convince local chiefs and the population was undertaken by the Saros. Anglophile as they were and enamoured with the British for their deliverance and resettlement, they moved the focus of the Egba from the Portuguese merchants and their African agents who were active in the region towards English missionaries.

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<sup>73</sup> Letter Campbell to Clarendon cited in Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*, 15.

<sup>74</sup> The first mission house was built with planks sawed by Saro carpenters. Mary Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise*, 121.

<sup>75</sup> A native agent, G. W. had reportedly been active in preaching beyond Abeokuta and bringing the chiefs of Ajarra, Bedu and Itoun to visit with missionaries in Abeokuta. CA/2/130, 131, “Rev. C. A Gollmer's Journal Dec 25/26.”

The dominant account credits Sodeke and the chiefs with inviting European missionaries to settle in Abeokuta. By this account, missionaries sent an emissary ahead and Sodeke invited them to stay. After his death, chiefs continued the process of hospitality and accommodation. The role of ordinary returnees in raising the public profile of the British over the Portuguese and advancing them as valuable allies in a period of confusion is silenced. Returnee (Soros) spoke glowingly of European missionaries, creating an expectation among the common population of the material opportunities which appeared already to be manifest in the returnees. In reality therefore, the ordinary population was ahead of the chiefs, who had to key into public expectations to secure their bases. The dances of welcome may appear to have been organized by chiefs. In reality, it was spontaneous and a show of public excitement, expectation and curiosity. Indeed, most of the leading chiefs including Apati and Somoye were opposed to missionary settlement and activity.<sup>76</sup> It had not been easy to break an existing and effective commercial relationship with the Portuguese who supplied the Egba with necessary arms and ammunitions for missionaries who offered no immediate material benefits. Somoye had demanded gratification from the missionaries, Sagbua wanted a “loan” of four bags of cowries and Apati had not been reticent in declaring his anti-missionary stance.<sup>77</sup> Their roles in welcoming the missionaries was as much about harnessing them to retain control as elite—thus the competition to be identified with *Oyinbos* even though they offered no immediate material benefits to the chiefs or even the state.

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<sup>76</sup> See CA/2/89-127 Crowther Journal of 25<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1846; 11<sup>th</sup> Oct, 1847.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*; Revs. Townsend, Gollmer expressed similar impressions of the chiefs.

The spread of Christianity in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta is better explained in terms of the opportunities which returnees represented and their everyday conversations among the population of Abeokuta. The public preaching by missionaries was useful, but even they recognized how frustrating it was.<sup>78</sup> The visit to chiefs and the expectations that chiefs might be the medium through which their subjects could be converted was misplaced. Most converts were ordinary folks, some relatives of liberated slaves, who walked in to speak to the clergy on account of their encounters with the Saros. One such person expressly told Townsend that the returnees were responsible for his conversion. Townsends describes the case of another: “A man came to me today, wishing to join our class...I questioned him to learn his motives... It did not appear that he ever attended any of our public services, but was led from a consideration of the gracious manner which the Sierra Leone people had been treated and permitted to return to their home”<sup>79</sup> Similarly, the stubbornness with which new converts stuck to their new life in spite of persecution speaks to the very profound attachments which Saros had cultivated. Townsend mentions the case of a young woman who stubbornly refused to marry her heathen betrothed not because of any clear conviction of Christianity (she had not been baptised), but because she wanted to be like the Saro. Another youth attended church but would not be baptised, seeking only to learn what made the returnees tick.

The growing influence of the Saro was not on ordinary folks alone. Certainly, chiefs and local elites had to factor in their popularity and identify with the growing

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<sup>78</sup> “The people are still deaf to all that we say about God, for a few of them come voluntarily to hear the word of God. They are so given to superstitions.” CMS, CA2/16, “Mr W. Marsh's Journal for the Quarter ending Dec. 25, 1846.” Reports such as this were common.

<sup>79</sup> CA/2/227-265, Townsend Journal, Feb. 22. For the significant slave population in Abeokuta, for displaced peoples and free born who had relatives enslaved somewhere, it had to have been unprecedented to local populations that slaves would be allowed to return home not only for free but with provisions.

influence they had on the people. Indeed, Saros became important advisers to local power elites. We find this in the extent of their access to and influence on Akintoye, the exiled King of Lagos. On losing his crown to Kosoko in 1846, Akintoye had escaped and was granted refuge in Abeokuta. It was claimed that his mother was from there (meaning she was Egba). In reality, Abeokuta had been an Akintoye ally through his struggles with Kosoko and in the complex geo-strategic configurations in the coastal region. It is noteworthy that access to Akintoye could not be open, afraid as he was that Kosoko was on his heels and because certain Egba chiefs supported Kosoko.<sup>80</sup> In his petition seeking British assistance to regain his throne, Akintoye credits the Sierra Leonean returnees with his knowledge of British policy. Clearly, it was the Saros who advised this former slave-trading king to posture himself as an anti-slavery advocate and to define his struggles with Kosoko as one over the slave trade. This strategy worked to maximum effect with the bombardment of Lagos and the deposition of Kosoko in 1851.<sup>81</sup>

Saro influence increased such that in the 1850s they began to mount a challenge to chiefly power and privileges especially over tolls and duties. The organisation of customs was as diversified as the diffused power structure of Abeokuta. There may have been a limited number of “gates” into Abeokuta,<sup>82</sup> but custom posts were many. For one

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<sup>80</sup> Apati and Akingbogun wanted Akintoye’s head sent to Kosoko in Lagos, Biobaku, *Egbas*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> CA 2/071 Petition from ex-King Akintoye of Lagos to J. Beecroft, “Consul at Badagry asking for aid to regain his throne,” 6 Jan. 1851. Kosoko is depicted in the records as the arch-evil alongside Gezo of Dahomey and Akintoye in more mild forms as the King deposed for his anti-slavery and pro-English activities. A closer look at Lagos politics will show that neither of the belligerents was anti-slavery. The conflict was a succession dispute between a camp claiming to derive its preordination from Benin (settler) and another made of indigenous peoples.

<sup>82</sup> Richard Burton’s first impression was that there was one wall around the whole city with 5 main entry-points/toll gates. “The largest entrances, excluding those leading to farms are five in number; three to the north, viz., those of Abaka, Ibadan, Osyelle; and two southerly, viz., the gates of Aro and Agbameya.” He then noted that there were three walls facing the hostile Ibadan. Richard Burton, *Abeokuta*, 70; Each town was asked to repair its walls during the Dahomean attacks of 1851 and 1856. CA2/31/89-127, Letter, Samuel Crowther to Robert Stokers (Secretary to African native Agency Committee), Badagry, May, 1851.



the city wall was not one conjoined piece encompassing the townships; rather each township built an external wall at places of its assumed vulnerability. Traders passing on the trade routes therefore confronted multiple taxations and often contradictory customs policies. As trade became the most important segment of the Egba economy, conflicts over custom duties and taxation were common. Notably, trade was not just with the coast, but each township organised its own periodic market days. Taxation was therefore not just on goods entering into Abeokuta—which was massive considering the continuous flows of Egba trade expeditions to Badagry and Porto Novo--but also within Abeokuta and in each sectional market. The Saros were particularly affected not just on account of their trade but also on the restrictions on their travels. Much more than the missionaries, they had a greater stake in the reorganization of tolls and in the homogenization of Egba diversity. The earliest outreaches to the English to intervene in Abeokuta were by the Saros. In 1852, they wrote a petition to complain that the chiefs pocketed all the money without a consciousness of public service or the need to advance the town.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, Henry Townsend’s “advice” that the Egba adopt a monarchy was not without precedent. These ideas and struggles soon took firm shape in G. W. Johnson’s success at forming the EUBM as a central organ of Egba governance. It need be mentioned that the creation of an Egba monarchy, which is usually credited to Reverend Townsend’s advice, happened in the midst of these complex discourses and struggles involving the Saro and the chiefs and between competing chiefs.

The Saro estrangement from the main body of the CMS mission must be seen in this context of their indigenusness, their growing power and the failure of the CMS to

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<sup>83</sup> F.0.84/976, Campbell to Clarendon, 4 April 1855 in *An Introduction to Christian Missionary Society Manuscripts*, ed. Wale Oyemakinde (Ibadan: College Press, 2001) 56.

recognize their roles and profession of Christianity. Saros had facilitated the invitation extended to missionaries and their settlement in Abeokuta. They actively participated in building the mission house and in providing resources, skills and materials for its completion. They also preceded the CMS in missionary activities and had acquired considerable influence and some measure of success. Many of them continued to render missionary service as “native agents” of the CMS.<sup>84</sup> However, most of them were refused formal membership of the Ake church (CMS) on account of their allegedly falling into the sins of polygamy and other unchristian “vices.” According to Townsend, many more were “conscious that their manner of life would exclude them from us, many kept away from us...some thought the usages of the country would justify their departure from Christian principles.<sup>85</sup> While the missions thought of them as “backsliders,” Saros continued to affirm their Christian identity and to insist that the exigencies of life in Abeokuta demanded improvisation and adaptation. The controversy over polygamy and other “traditional” practices continued to rock the Yoruba church throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and has been the subject of many studies.<sup>86</sup> Suffice here that being marked as inferior both in their Christian profession and civilized posture, set the stage for the promotion of a Saro identity distinct from the missionaries and for the *Ifole*, the outbreak of anger against the missionaries.

Within the Yoruba mission there was considerable strain and controversy over the status of native agents in the CMS system. While the mission depended on native agents

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<sup>84</sup> For instance, in 1846, “GW, one of the native agents returned from visits to the Chiefs and people at Ajarra, Bedu and Itoun” all outside Abeokuta. CA2/43/1-10. Rev. C. A. Gollmer’s Journal, Dec. 25 1846.

<sup>85</sup> Townsend Journal for the Quarter ending Dec. 25/26 1846.

<sup>86</sup> Some studies of marriage and polygamy among the Yoruba can be found in K. Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985; J. B. Webster. *The African Churches Among the Yoruba, 1888-1922* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1964).

as teachers, catechists, scripture readers, messengers and agents, native agents always felt they were treated as inferior despite the more difficult conditions under which they worked. For one, they felt that the CMS was not doing enough to secure their release when their stations were sacked and they were captured and enslaved. They compared the reticence with which the mission dealt with native agent cases with the speed with which two white missionaries held at Ijaye were redeemed. Of courses their wages were lower than those of the white missionaries and considered grossly inadequate, thus necessitating that they engage in other vocational and commercial activities. Mr R. Crowther (the Reverend's son) requested that the terms of his service be well-defined if he was not to make charges for the medical services he rendered.<sup>87</sup> London decided instead that he cease to be a salaried agent of the CMS and should rather accept an annual fee to be offered as a commercial agent for treating CMS salaried personnel.<sup>88</sup> Native agents frowned that their status was not clearly defined and requested the Parent Committee to explain if they were excluded from the services of the medic.<sup>89</sup> They also wanted to clarify the statuses of their wives whether they were part of the mission or could do other work to supplement the family income since the CMS did not grant any subvention to cater for the wives of native agents.

In spite of these concerns, the mission did not compromise on its discipline of native agents. The recruitment process for the confirmation of native agents as employees of the CMS was stringent. In 1861, an examination body (headed at different times by Reverend King and Dr. Harrison) conducted tests and interviews with candidates. A

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<sup>87</sup> CA2/32/1-14, CMS London to Mr. Crowther, January 28, 1853.

<sup>88</sup> CA2/02/1-17, Minutes of Missionary Conferences, 1859-1879. "CMS to Yoruba Mission, Letter read at the Missionary Conference, April 28, 1859,"

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*

significant part of the process was the candidate's presentation before the congregation to determine their suitability to serve.<sup>90</sup> Intransigencies and misdemeanours met summary dismissal. Often the pastor in charge already dismissed the staff before the conference ratified it. Some of the reasons for which native agents were sacked included separation from (repudiation of) their wives, as in the case of Jacob Akintoye;<sup>91</sup> Johnson (Mr Leib's interpreter) was dismissed for teaching English in school which was deemed undesirable.<sup>92</sup> Another catechist was relieved of his position for his regular bouts of epilepsy which brought disrepute to the mission and another had the books he had published confiscated.<sup>93</sup> The case of Mr. Gerber symbolizes the narrow margin in which native agents (mostly Saros) tried to retain their jobs as CMS agents and the public respect and privileges that attended them. As Pastor of the Ikija church, Gerber had lied to protect his clerk who had allegedly defrauded someone while on a trading expedition to Badagry and had been forced to appear before a chiefly court. That he was so implicated was enough for his summary dismissal from the CMS.<sup>94</sup>

It was not only the CMS that native agents had conflicts with. There were instances of conflicts with the Wesleyan mission over land and converts. Like the CMS, the Wesleyan mission engaged unpaid native agents on their roll. In 1851, Methodism in

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<sup>90</sup> CA2/02/1-17. Minutes of the Conference of the Yoruba Mission held at Ikija, August 27th and 28th, 1863

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* Minutes of the Conference of Yoruba Missions held at the Rev G. P. Buhler's, Ake, Abkta on the 1st of May, 1862.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>93</sup> In the case of publishing by native agents see for instance Rev. A. Mann to Rev. H. Wright, Lagos, 21 Dec, 1874. CA2/066/100-112. Mann writes: "...The soundness of the books may be beyond doubt, but then, the language betrays the unidiomatic foreigner and then the fitness of the Sermons etc. for this country at the present social state is extremely doubtful. Thousands of Sermons have been printed in Yoruba and proved but waste... henceforth, nothing should be printed that has not gone through the hands of the review committee."

<sup>94</sup> In Townsend to Wright, Jan 6 1875. Also CA2/085/151, Letter from Christians at Isale Iporo re James Gerber. For more on the crisis within the CMS over Crowther's bishopric see J. F. Ajayi, *Christian Mission*.

Abeokuta was sustained by five Sunday school teachers and two native preachers.<sup>95</sup> The process for membership was not less stringent with as many as 51 persons granted “membership on trial” during the same year. In 1856, the Reverend Thomas King wrote in his journal of the extensive disagreement between native agents and the Wesleyan Mission over a piece of land.<sup>96</sup> Some natives complained that their converts were being enticed away. In all what might appear as internal struggles within the CMS were in fact an extension of wider discourses. As Henry Townsend found out, the debates within the Mission were being relayed to outside parties. At the 1859 conference, Townsend complained that “some decisions of the last conference and its proceedings were leaked to undesirable persons connected and unconnected with the Society with an injurious effect, so that a very unpleasant feeling was caused thereby.”<sup>97</sup> For many Saros, their excommunication from the church and the non-recognition of their Christian identity justified their connection (what the missionaries called relapse) to heathenism. Indeed, what the missionaries tagged heathen and un-Christianly was not unusual seeing that missionaries themselves appeared to acquiesce to some heathen rites—Townsend was rumoured to be a member of the *Ogboni*; many Christians were seen sponsoring *oro-ile* (country fashion) at the launch of their new homes.<sup>98</sup> Indeed Christianity and missionary conduct was not always directly opposed to local religions—there were interesting points of convergence such as the adaptation of the local deity, *Osse* with the Christian Sabbath. Missionary admonition of “Godly” silence and worship at Sabbath fit precisely with the patterns of *Osse* worship, in which local women walked to and from the streams in total

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<sup>95</sup> William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Mission on the Western Coast of Africa*. (London: Aylott and Jones, 1851).

<sup>96</sup> Secretary CMS London to Rev Thomas King, Abeokuta, 22nd of September 1856.

<sup>97</sup> CA2/02/1-13, Missionary Conference held at Ake, Abeokuta, April 28th to May 2, 1859.

<sup>98</sup> House warming, burials, birth, celebrations.

silence and on their return poured libations of water to the god/goddess Osse in gratitude for water and other provisions. Missionaries lamented that native Christians confused and undermined the Christian Sabbath by calling it *Ojo Isimi Osse* (lit. Osse rest day—Osse soon became interchangeable with week).<sup>99</sup>

We find in these struggles a contest which pitched Saros within and outside the church on one hand against white missionaries and the CMS establishment on the other over ecclesiastical matters, racism, and over what would constitute the more dominant idea and power to influence the direction of Egba politics. None of these identities were iron-caste: many Saros had indigenized “Egba values” and missionaries hosted and partook of local fashions, identified with and entertained leading heathenish chiefs. Resident Europeans internalized an Egba identity and expressed themselves as Egba—the Catholic priest Father Coquard lived in Abeokuta for over 35 years and it was always wondered if he was not more Egba than any. Similarly, the factories of Bernice Brothers were not attacked during the Ifole because they were seen as more Egba than the other Europeans; a Mr. Lynn was protected by a band of Itoko people.<sup>100</sup> Indeed, missionaries contested among themselves over who was better able to represent and protect Egba interests as the struggles between Townsend and the Crowthers over Dr. Delany and Mr Campbell’s African Aid Society’s treaty with the Egba reveal.<sup>101</sup> Some among the native Christians belonged to the war camps of the chiefs and Christians fought in Egba wars. If anything, only the Christian mission was exclusionary, defining who could belong or not. It may be said therefore that most Saros were rejects of the European missions and

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<sup>99</sup> Tucker, *Abbeokuta or Sunrise*, 37.

<sup>100</sup> CA2/96/50-57, Rev. J. B. Wood to Hon Lay Sec, Lagos, "Report of the Outbreak at Abeokuta", Jan 14 1868.

<sup>101</sup> For details of the conflict between the Henry Townsend and the Crowthers (Saros) see J. F. Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 190-194.

considered themselves hard-done by the Europeans. Therefore when in 1863 Henry Townsend announced his plans for a Native Church, complete with schools (boys and girls) and vocational centers, with himself as head and virtually independent of the Parent Committee of the CMS, the spectre of white domination had reached a point such that it had to be resisted. By his plan, the institutions were to be publicly funded; the method of taxation would be discussed in conjunction with the chiefs at a mass assembly. Considering how much Townsend had internalised an Egba identity, it had become obvious that such a move would make Townsend more powerful than many could accept. It is no coincidence therefore that the school along with the church was the first to be blockaded at the “outbreak.” The struggle between the missions and the Saros was played out in a competition over who would influence the chiefs. While Townsend insisted that his influence over the Alake was personal, the Crowthers played up their Africanness as the authentic authority over Egba matters and Johnson and the EUBM organized around other chiefs displaced from the monarchy (and dubbed war-chiefs). While these “foreign” elements sought to use the chiefs, they also played into the chiefly struggles and ambitions, being seen as resources to achieve ends. Add the contest between the Saro and the missionaries to the multiple sectional contestations, the inter-chiefly conflicts and actions of intransigencies by ordinary Egbas, and Abeokuta in the 1860s was set for a combustion of significant proportions.

### 3.5 The *Ifole* Revisited

There had been talk by 1860 of an attack on the church but the clergy dismissed such threats as the “talk of wild and foolish people.”<sup>102</sup> The influence of the church (particularly Townsend) on Egba politics (through the *Alake*) was so high that missionaries in their reports boasted that even though there were a few trouble makers, the church had come to stay in Abeokuta. Townsend had influenced the adoption of a monarchy in Abeokuta with the first *Alake* chosen in 1854, but the powers of this king never exceeded his quarter. The adoption of a monarchy might sound rational in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba country, but it was unprecedented for the Egba. There was no generally accepted process for the selection of an *Oba* and the conduct, privileges and authority of the monarchy were not defined. Moreover, it ran contrary to the existing system of many powerful chiefs who felt threatened by centralization. However by 1860 when the African American explorers Campbell and Delany visited Abeokuta, the necessary traditions and ceremonies had been constructed to legitimize the monarchy. Robert described the office of “His Royal Majesty,” *Alake* as follows:

The king of Abeokuta, whose person is considered too sacred for the popular gaze, is never permitted to leave the palace except on special occasions, and then only goes into the open space without the palace-gates, one of his wives being in attendance to screen his face with a fan, so with the King of Oyo, who once or twice only in the year exhibits himself to the public, decorated in his best robes and wearing a crown of coral.<sup>103</sup>

The equation of the *Alakeship* with the traditions and stature of the *Alaafin* of Oyo and the address “His Royal Majesty” reveal the ideals and influences to which Egba monarchy was modelled. However, it is in the exercise of the sovereign authority of

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<sup>102</sup> CA2/96/57, Rev J. B. Wood to Hon Lay Sec, Lagos, 5th 1867, "Report of the Outbreak at Abeokuta, Jan 14 1868.

<sup>103</sup> Campbell, *A Pilgrimage*, 31.



monarch that the unsure basis of *Alake* Okukenu's authority unravelled. Campbell wondered how real these powers were when seven chiefs signed the Egba-African Aid Society treaty without consultation with the *Alake*, and concluded that these chiefs "were of sufficient consequence to take part in such matter, or that they, by common consent were deemed the representatives of the rest."<sup>104</sup> The sovereign pretensions of the *Alake* were part of the configurations of power that burst out with the *Ifole*. For instance, in 1856 the *Alake* Okukenu created previously non-existent chieftaincy lines for Christians and Muslims. Thus Okenla was chosen as Balogun (War chief) of the Christians. While it was possible to easily adapt chieftaincies for the Ake-based Christians, the attempt to create chiefs for Muslims was difficult given the more widespread settlement of Muslims and the fact that a political-theological order already existed, which centered at the Owu section and which had adopted a semi-estranged—if not outrightly antagonistic stance --- against the Egba chiefly elite.<sup>105</sup> However, by creating parallel chiefs the monarchy was also crafting spaces of power and claiming legitimacy. The errors of the chiefs such as over the treaty signed by Egba chiefs with the African Aid Society served well to highlight the authority of the monarch. Missionaries criticised the treaty as implying that the Egba chiefs had not only signed away Egba land, but also Egba sovereignty. Henry Townsend argued that it amounted to creating an "*imperium in imperio*," a quasi-independent settlement of a "civilised heathenism under the form of Christianity" on Abeokuta land.<sup>106</sup> By repudiating the treaty, the *Alake* initiated a precedent of

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<sup>104</sup> Campbell, *A Pilgrimage*, 36.

<sup>105</sup> Gbadamosi, *Growth of Islam*, 116; Struggles over Owu identity and role in Egba politics continued to the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is treated in subsequent chapters.

<sup>106</sup> Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*, 48.

monarchical authority over Egbaland.<sup>107</sup> These political developments, key parts of the interplay of elite interests, have been largely silenced in the state-centric and missionary-focused perspectives of the existing histories of the *Ifole*.

Most accounts have relied on the substantial missionary reports and accounts and have accordingly seen the *Ifole* as a persecution of missionaries and Christians by the Egba led by their chiefs. The state-centric approach adopted by nationalist historians also makes it appear that the demonstration was a mass-based and collective Egba rejection of the missionaries and Christianity. Thus Ayandele traces the outburst to the cumulative and widespread rage, fear and distrust of the missionaries, Lagos colony and their encroachment on traditional values. Saburi Biobaku adopts a similar perspective of a struggle between indigenous politics and practices on one hand and Christian and imperial intrusions on the other. J. F Ajayi offers valuable details of the struggles in the CMS and between the Lagos colony and Egba authorities. He suggests that the *Ifole* was a measured response to shame the British on account of their perceived antagonism to Egba interests. The *Ifole* is therefore seen as the culmination of a series of events following Governor Glover's abrogation of the Abeokutan Policy and pursuit of an aggressive anti-Egba policy including the disagreements over boundaries and customs, the "seizure" of Egba lands and the arming of Ota against possible Egba attacks. Existing accounts displace the complex interplays of interests in favour of a dichotomized framework of Anglo-Egba confrontation. While there is no denying that European missionaries were targets of the outbursts, its rationales and outcome are much more complex than Anglo-Egba misunderstandings. The *Ifole* was as much about power struggles among elite groups, the implications of the formalization and centralisation of

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<sup>107</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 192.

power and the weakness of formal governmental institutions. Revisiting the history will reveal more complex engagements. Mapping the sequence of the encounter enables us to see the issues at play in a new light.

The *Ifole* started almost innocuously well after the 6:30 early morning service had ended on October 13, 1867, when messengers from unnamed chiefs set out to prevent all native Egba from entering into the church, mission houses or school at Ake, Ikija, Ogbe and Igbehin. At Ake, the confrontation started out peacefully with messages going back and forth from Reverend Moore, Christian Balogun Okenla and Shomoye, the leading Chief and regent. It appears at this point that the chiefly order was simply aimed at claiming authority over the Egba, as the messengers particularly announced that they had been sent not to disturb the missionaries or the Saro, but to prevent natives from attending “foreign” institutions. In Rev. Moore’s words, “The messengers merely informed any person who tried to enter that the chiefs commanded them not to do so.”<sup>108</sup> This was not the first attempt to affirm control over Christian natives. Rev. Maser recalls that the *Ifole* was the “Second Persecution of Abeokuta Missionaries.”<sup>109</sup> Other such attempts at control were commonly cited in missionary accounts in which they celebrated the commitment and strength of their converts at overcoming persecution. The confrontation first turned violent at Ikija (11:30am) where a church service was already on-going and where the messengers tried to force natives out of the church. The ensuing struggle (*ija igboro*) expanded with news that a person had been killed and many others injured in the

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<sup>108</sup> CA2/96/50-57, Rev J. B. Wood to Hon Lay Sec, Lagos, 5th 1867, "Report of the Outbreak at Abeokuta, Jan 14 1868.

<sup>109</sup> First was in 1848-9; Biobaku, *Egbas*, 35.

confrontation between the “Egba” and the Europeans.<sup>110</sup> Bands of young men moved from here to Igbehin (3:00 pm), Ogbe and thereafter around the city carrying their loot as trophies. At Ake, a small band of native Christians (ten in all) succeeded for long in holding back a substantial horde but was then overpowered as the attackers were reinforced by more looters. In all, no European was wounded, with the particular case of Moore standing askance while the looters moved around him to pick up what they wanted. One actually tried to force him to give up his umbrella.

Not surprisingly, the missionaries were convinced that the whole crisis was orchestrated by the chiefs. The missionaries argued that the triumvirate of leading chiefs - - Somoye, Solanke of Igbehin, and Akodu the Seriki -- represented a new generation of Egba rulers very much unlike the older generation which accommodated missionaries. This triumvirate was won over by G.W. Johnson and other Saros who formed the Egba United Board of Management, thus perfecting a convergence of estranged Sierra-Leonean immigrants and some of the leading chiefs who were opposed to the European mission. Indeed, on the death of the *Alake*, over whom Townsend claimed considerable personal influence, the regent Somoye and the leading chiefs did not hide their intention to expel Europeans. Therefore, the outbreak may have been spontaneous, but it was authorized by these chiefs.

Egba chiefs insisted that they had not authorized the *Ifole*, but had only instructed that natives should be prevented from going into the missions. As if speaking to the racialist debates in the CMS, they argued that 21 years had passed since the establishment of the mission in Abeokuta, enough time to plant the church and hand it over to locals.

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<sup>110</sup> This was later found to be rumour. No one was killed; one person was slightly injured. CA2/70/31-46, Statement of Rev. Moore (Oshielle) on the Outbreak at Abeokuta, Jan. 4, 1868.

They were also not unaware of the variance between the missionaries' puritanical attitudes and the adaptations of the Saros and sided with the latter's position that the missionaries were demanding more than God required. The main grouse however was the attitude of Governor Glover and Egba relations with Lagos.<sup>111</sup> The chiefs did not believe that there was any difference between the posture of Lagos and the friendliness of the missionaries. Both were "sent by the queen" and "the same queen cannot be friend and enemy at the same time." This inversion of missionary logic builds on CMS claims to have been sent by the Queen. Following the debacle at Ikorodu, when (as far as the Egba chiefs were concerned) Glover had invited them to lay siege on Ikorodu only to turn around and attack them, leading to the loss of many warriors, missionaries had assured the Egbas that Glover, who had been recalled to London on leave, was being reprimanded by the Queen. The reinstatement of Glover and his promotion as Governor of Lagos in 1866 meant that the missionaries lied and the Queen was culpable in the treacherous acts of Glover. As the chiefs saw it, white men were inconsistent and unreliable in what they proclaimed: Egbas had allowed them to settle in Abeokuta and had agreed to give up the slave trade, yet the British retained friendship with Dahomey, notorious for slave wars, human sacrifices and slave trading. In their words:

Dahomey took Ishagga, where they found a number of Christians, these they took captive, some of whom they have killed in sacrifice, and others they still hold in bondage; yet the English are the friends of Dahomey! The Ibadan took a white man --a missionary captive at Ijaye, for whose redemption they demanded 100 bags of cowries; notwithstanding this, the English are friends of Ibadan! Again, the Ijebus have ever refused to receive missionaries or merchants into their town--still the governor of Lagos does not trouble them as he troubles us.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> For details on the Anglo-Egba politics, see E. A Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, 14-22. I attempt here to present the Egba viewpoint.

<sup>112</sup> CMS, G3 A2/05, Rev J. B. Wood to Hon Lay Sec, Lagos.

The *Ifole* was an Egba reaction to Lagos policies, but its intensity went beyond that to everyday practices and political struggles in Abeokuta. That the chiefs pursued anti-British policies does not by itself explain the involvement of ordinary people in the attacks against the mission, especially considering how integrated the mission had become to Egba life and society over the twenty years of its establishment. Rather, the tensions played into normal patterns of social tensions in Abeokuta. Despoliation and plundering were normal strategies in dealing with an enemy or a perceived threat to social stability and peace. Social order in mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta was a curious balance of power between influential chiefs deploying age, materiel and claims of pre-eminence based on some tradition, between war chiefs, and between chiefs and ordinary citizens. It is ironic that European missionaries were attacked by the very (nascent) structures that Henry Townsend's ideas of political centralization had helped to create. Missionary protection and privilege had been predicated on a balance of power in which it was obvious to anti-European parties that they could not attack missionaries except at great and unacceptable costs. Centralization upended that balance and left the missionaries without sufficient or willing counterforce. Such a counterforce had preserved the life of Oba Akintoye of Lagos in the 1840s, who a significant number of chiefs wanted killed to maintain cordial relations with Kosoko. As will be shown in the next section, there were many chiefs and people opposed to the *Ifole* or the expulsion of Christians. This debunks the notion that it was a collective Egba action or even one to which most Egba acquiesced.

### 3.6 The *Ifole* Aftermath

Typical of missionary-centered perspectives, most accounts of the *Ifole* in Abeokuta end with the expulsion of the missionaries. From here, attention usually shifts to Ebute Metta and Lagos, where the expelled Christians converged and the headquarters of the Yoruba mission developed, respectively. Within Abeokuta, the politics of the *Ifole* highlight the ideological differences among contesting but shifting elite identities. These differences go beyond the tradition-modernity or Anglo-Egba paradigms common in the historiography to include sectional, gender, commercial and generational contestations.

That these identities were shifting manifests clearly in the career of Bashorun (Regent)<sup>113</sup> Somoye. Following the *Ifole*, for which the missionaries hold him responsible, he was described as the arch-enemy of missionaries. According to Rev. Wood, the Bashorun “had been head-chief for 4-5yrs. Weak and at the same time a most covetous man, there is no meanness he is not ready to descend to; being past shame. Hence it is that the members of the EUBM have gained so much power with him (by bribery).” However, Somoye’s disposition to missionary enterprise was ambivalent. Part of the original war camp displaced from Ibadan, he was the first Egba war commander to receive a white missionary in Birch Freeman and had allowed Freeman easy access into the camp and safe passage onto Abeokuta in 1842.<sup>114</sup> On the death of Sodeke, he was part of the war-triumvirate that received Townsend in 1846 and on that occasion had been upset that Townsend had not seen it fit to visit him ahead of the Sagbua on account of his earlier hospitality to the latter on his first visit to Abeokuta. Crowther had reported in his

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<sup>113</sup> The missionaries call him regent—an obvious misapplication of a title (Alake) that was newly created and which Somoye did not aspire to or recognize.

<sup>114</sup> T. B. Freeman, *Journal of Various Visits to the Interior of West Africa*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Journal, 216; also cited in Biobaku, 28.

journal of December, 1846, that Somoye's disposition towards the missionaries was cordial and "(he) and Ogunbona are pulling together in our favour though not free from interested motives. They came to us at one time, to acquaint us of their exertion on our account, and mentioned individuals who were opposed to our coming to Abeokuta." He had also been listed among the anti-slavery party that resisted the pro-Kosoko camp over the refuge granted Akintoye in the 1840s. Somoye's final disposition of antagonism to the missionaries goes beyond the nationalist call in the Anglo-Egba debacle. He was the most obvious victim of the Townsend-instigated centralisation of power in Abeokuta. Obviously related to Sodeke, and losing pre-eminence on the death of the high chief, Somoye had bid his time working his way up the ladder of the *Ologun*-war party. The monarchy was created at that critical moment of his ascension to the highest ranked status, following the deaths of Ayikundu of Igbehin and Apati of Kemta (Bashorun) who he succeeded to the Bashorun (War chief) title. Thus his title of Bashorun (which to that point was the most superior) became secondary to that of the monarch (Okukenu) with its paraphernalia of influence including a "palace" and public ceremonies. Little wonder then that Somoye refused the title of *Alake* even though he was not any less qualified than the deceased Okukenu. As regent, he lived as ceremoniously as any king. Burton leaves some details of his impression of Somoye's regency.<sup>115</sup> His support of the EUBM and his antagonism to the missionaries may be seen in this context of a need to create an alternative platform from the Alakeship, which he identified as being controlled by the missionaries and British power.

The *Ifole* unmasked the political configuration of Abeokuta as being between an old guard of chiefs trying to protect an existing power system on one hand, and a nascent

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<sup>115</sup> Burton, *Abeokuta*, 71.



evolving order marked by centralisation, formalisation and monarchism promoted by missionaries, the British colony in Lagos and Egba elites. Chiefs were divided across this spectrum in complex ways depending on interests. Thus there were those like Telelu, a younger brother of Sodeke, who “had often made professions of great friendship towards [missionaries],” forsook his pro-missionary heritage and antecedents to lead a band of warriors (on horseback) during the *Ifole*.<sup>116</sup> There were others like Ogundipe of Ikija, probably the youngest of the Ibadan-displaced vanguard, who against the odds stood out to protect the missionaries and earned their eternal gratitude as they praised him in their journals and reports. Yet the same Ogundipe had been ambivalent in his support of the missionaries. Crowther had earlier noted that his profession of support was not without self interest. Burton described him as the “waggish savage Ogodipe, war chief of Ikija, who had killed several Brazilian traders and had kidnapped a lot of people.”<sup>117</sup> Similarly, there were sections of Abeokuta that chose not to participate in the *Ifole*. Obviously, the Ake establishment considered the attack as being targeted at them as well as at the church. In contrast, the dominant Muslim community in Owu, while not directly implicated in the *Ifole*, wished that it be concluded to its logical end. They added their voice to ensure that white missionaries were not allowed to return to Abeokuta for another 15 years.<sup>118</sup> On the other hand, there were Muslims at other places who thought the missionaries were innocent victims—enough for Mr. King to report that the disposition of the Owu Muslims did not represent the general Muslim attitude to

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<sup>116</sup> CMS, G3 A2/05, Rev J. B. Wood to Hon Lay Sec, Lagos, 5th 1867, "Report of the Outbreak at Abeokuta, Jan 14 1868.

<sup>117</sup> Burton, *Abeokuta*, 144.

<sup>118</sup> Mr. King writes: “some Mohammedans asked us who gave us permission to ring the bell. Akodu was himself rebuked by his companions for allowing it. G3 A2/05 “Statement of Mr. J. King respecting the Outbreak at Abeokuta”. Owu station, Jan 4, 1868.

missionaries. Women were not left out of these expressions: some women stood up to the mob as in the case of an old woman who stood between Moore and an assailant saying she should be killed rather than the missionary. Other women added their voices to the calls for the protection of the missionaries and supplied materials for their refuge in displacement—all these in spite of chiefly instructions to have nothing to do with the missionaries. Therefore, the attempt by scholars to reduce this complex configuration to *Ologun* (warriors) vs. *Ogboni* (elders) does not fit neatly because the membership of both camps intersperse and because of the other identities at play. As older warriors retire from active engagement they almost automatically become *Ogboni* on account of their public influence and power. Similarly, members of the *Ogboni* retain control over their militia or warriors. The *Ifole* was not a rejection of Christianity or “western civilisation” or modernity. All the principal chiefs had children, relatives or slaves in mission schools. As J. F. Ajayi notes, a number of Egba (and Egba-born Saro) had graduated from the mission school and had received further education in the United Kingdom. The EUBM continued its programs of “civilization” including managing tolls and customs. Saros found their space on the spectrum based on their perceptions of missionary hostility and their aspirations to modernize Abeokuta. Johnson and the EUBM used the chiefs to achieve Saro ends; the chiefs were not ignorant or necessarily greedy (as the missionaries suppose), they used the Saros to reclaim power and privileges.

The series of chiefly meetings that followed the *Ifole* highlights the discursive struggles among the shifting political identities and interests. They also underline that the struggle transcended relations with Lagos and missionaries. On Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup>, the chiefs tried to pacify the missionaries by pointing out that Glover’s hostility made the war-boys

restless. They offered to return the properties that had been looted. Through that week, these chiefs were at pains to exonerate themselves, not just to the missionaries but to fellow Egbas and vested Yoruba enquirers. When the chiefs of Oshielle sent to enquire of the Bashorun why he did such, he affirmed "I did not send them to do what they did." Similar explanation was given to the visiting delegation from Ketu. The Bashorun was of course aware of the undercurrents which were hidden to the missionaries. One member of the *Ogboni* told Mr. Moore of the Oshielle mission that "many of the elders of Abeokuta have not slept the whole of last night; that they met to consult about having a good meeting of the *Ogboni* oldies of Abeokuta at Ake to bring those war chiefs to account; that they will put some of them to death and compel them to restore what they have plundered or make it good." That week also, the Bashorun and his camp commanded the looters to return all they had stolen from the missionaries. The *Ogboni* at a meeting on November 5<sup>th</sup> gave further edicts that all stolen goods must be returned.

Discussion of the crises was not restricted to chiefly circles. Gatherings of people at markets and other public places discussed the causes and implications of the outbreak. Opinions were diverse and in at least one case verbal engagement turned into fisticuffs. Reverend Moore who visited Abeokuta after the outbreak described what he saw as follows:

the whole city was in confusion...some said one thing and some another "away with them, away with them" said some; while others are cursing bitterly those who had so badly treated the innocent oyinbos. In asking what have the Oyinbos done, if one told me one thing as their fault, another would tell me another thing; some would say: they have written bad letters to Glover to show him what he should do to take Abeokuta by subtlety; some because the English government has sanctioned Glover's proceeding against them at Ikorodu because they sent him back to Lagos as administrator; that they could not have done so if they had not approved of his dealing with them...they want the missionaries to return home and tell the Queen to remove Glover

from Lagos...when Glover was called home, they believed what missionaries had told them that he was being reprimanded...Some cursed: "the Oyinbos (had) not eaten any native's bread for nought; neither have they injured anyone by words or deeds. Those who treated them badly shall not escape the fearful vengeance of God, for it is great evil for the innocent person to be badly treated"<sup>119</sup>

The confrontation among the chiefs came to a head at a meeting of the *Ogboni* at Ake on November 5<sup>th</sup> to which all the vested chiefs were invited. The meeting was the most commonly discussed topic among the public. Everyone had a sense of what was in the offing. Solanke and Akodu, who were the ringleaders, came to the meeting fully mobilized with their war-boys singing war songs. They refused to enter into the council and rather asked the *Ogboni* to interrogate them outside. This is symbolic. These chiefs knew that they could not enter the chambers armed and were very likely to be subjected to the ordeal or other forms of capitulation. Outside, Akodu made public speeches to the effect that Egbas should trust him to defend Abeokuta should the British dare to attack. He had not endangered Abeokuta but had rather made her more secure. Unable to force them into the chamber, the *Ogboni* tried to pacify them. Somoye, Akodu and Solanke, along with the culpable chiefs, knew how Abeokuta worked. Personal and group security was achieved not by the power of litigation but by the balance of deployable force, including military force, age, rhetoric, juju etc. Akodu and Somoye's public speeches were not just directed to the *Ogboni*, but also to forestalling the public treatment that would follow a chief deemed a liability to social order. The Christians were disappointed that nothing came out of this engagement.

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<sup>119</sup> CMS CA2/118, "Statement of Mr. J. King respecting the Outbreak at Abeokuta. Owu station, Jan 4/1868."

However, the *Ifole* consumed the chiefs who were culpable. It ultimately marked the demise of this corps of chiefs and power elite. Somoye, the head chief, did not survive a year of the *Ifole*; he died on the 24<sup>th</sup> of August, 1868.<sup>120</sup> We have mentioned how Solanke met his death. He became a public outcast to the outskirts of Owu where a mob burnt his house and decapitated him. It is not known what happened to Akodu, save that power shifted to new sets of chiefs. The Saro influence began to diminish. At the election of a new Alake in 1869, Oyekan, the EUBM's candidate, who was also supported by remnants of the Somoye camp, lost out to Ademola who received support from the *Ogboni* and *Parakoyi*. The struggle between these camps continued through the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It remained a contest between those who sought to centralize and formalize power in Abeokuta and those in favour of fluid widespread power. Ogundipe came out the hero of these crises. His particular strength was in astutely reading the practical realities of Egba politics, successfully posturing himself as a friend of the missionaries and at the same time slyly courting the Saro. Within Abeokuta he acquired the sobriquet *Alatishé*, the fixer. He was so respected that the sight of his staff was said to be enough to resolve any palaver. Despite affirming his favourable disposition to the missionaries, their expulsion suited him well. He deftly worked towards limiting missionary influence. He perfectly captures the source of the Egba crises by underscoring that there was no immutable system of power or a culturally defined process of authority; rather in his words "whoever holds the power, rules the city."

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<sup>120</sup> CMS CA2/070, W. Moore to CMS, 27<sup>th</sup> August 1868.

### 3. 7. Conclusion

In this chapter, I set out to show that it is possible to pursue a reconstruction of history in Africa outside the paradigmatic domination of colonial power and European modernity. Such a history need not be a negation of what Europe represents; it must articulate the realities of the European presence. The wealth of materials on Abeokuta has supported such a venture. In contrast to the notion that African identities and traditions are ancient and immutable, the chapter has advanced that the Egba were a 19<sup>th</sup> century creation and Egba society and culture were being shaped by contesting forces during the century. While claims over traditions were common, these amounted to resources -- not altogether different from claims of modernity -- which elites use to claim power or legitimise their authority. The chapter discussed the process by which identity and power were defined by shifting categories of elites as they struggled among themselves and in the course of periodic advancements and revisions that constituted the construction of power in Abeokuta. As Gramsci has advanced, the ultimate goal of ideology is in its naturalisation: that state in which it appears to be the order of things. The nascent path to naturalisation was set with attempts at centralisation and formalisation of an otherwise fluid power system and with attempts to ossify what it meant to be Egba. It is to these struggles (i.e. how power and identity became centralized) and the discourse around it that the next chapter is devoted.

## CHAPTER 4

### MAKING POWER: STRATEGIES OF INCORPORATION AND EXCLUSION 1893-1920

#### 4.1 Introduction

When in 1893 the British Governor of Lagos, Gilbert Carter, prepared to visit Abeokuta on the first leg of his Lagos Interior Expedition, he was sure that the greatest impediments to British interest in the Yoruba country were the Ijebu and the Egba. Both states had blockaded commercial travel between the Yoruba interior and Lagos and, in the exercise of their middleman positions, had imposed serious restrictions on trade which impacted negatively on Lagos trade and revenue. The Ijebu expedition of 1892 had somewhat resolved that context of the problem, but the Egba remained intransigent, a posture which Glover credited to deft skills at diplomatic negotiations, which they dragged to buy time rather than resolve the blockade. He had resumed as Governor of Lagos in September 1891. His understanding of the crisis was shaped by hand-over notes and instructions from Governor Moloney, deputations of educated Lagosians (principal among them being Mr. Bickersteth, “who had been very active in endeavoring to bringing about a good understanding between [Carter] and the Abeokuta authorities”), and some others who warned him of the treachery and duplicity of the Egba. His knowledge of Anglo-Egba disagreement was also informed by the massive volumes of correspondence which emanated from the Egba United Board of Management (EUBM), the newest of which was an invitation extended to him. All of these factors shaped his plan and proceedings. He obviously brushed up on his reading of Egba history, revisiting the accounts of Miss Tucker and Richard Burton. He then decided on a diplomatic entry gambit, a formal deputation including a prepared treaty, an official interpreter, and a

constabulary of 100 Hausas, led by their Inspector, Grant Bower. Messrs Hethersett and Harding, clerks in the Government of Lagos, provided the African colour to an imperialistic expedition.<sup>1</sup>

To Carter's gross disappointment, Abeokuta was not much like he had been led to believe. Contrary to his fears of the Egba's treacherous intentions, he could detect "no solitary instance" of hostility, but only good humour and pleasure at his presence. His expectation of aesthetic exhilaration at the sight of the Olumo rock was soon replaced by disregard for Mary Tucker's sense of beauty. More significantly, his image of an Egba government from which such clearly thought-out letters and *diplomatese* emanated proved to be misplaced. In his words, "the King was practically a nonentity and the government (was made up of) incongruous elements."<sup>2</sup>

Governor Carter was not the first observer to wonder at how the Egba political system operated such that some internal order prevailed and a unified foreign policy operated successfully in spite of what appeared to be chaos. All his predecessors had struggled with the multiplicity of representations shaping Egba policy. Missionaries and colonial agents in their reports on Abeokuta often depicted a political structure that should produce anarchy. Commodore Forbes wrote that the Egba have too many chiefs.

Abeokuta has four presidents. Each town has a warafa [Iwarefa] or council of six and on an average twenty Ogboni or magistrates. It has also according to its size, one, two or three Baloguns or military chiefs, a "House of Lords," 2,800 secondary civic chiefs or "House of Commons," 140 principal military chiefs and 280 secondary ones; I hold this to be the most extra-ordinary republic in the world.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. C.7227, "Dispatch from Sir Gilbert T. Carter, K. C. M. G., furnishing a general report of the Lagos Interior expedition, 1893" *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> F.O. 84/976 Campbell to Clarendon. In Biobaku's opinion, Forbes grossly underrepresented the number of chiefs because he left out the Parakoyi chiefs. Biobaku, "Historical Sketch", 48.



In reality, what appeared to the Europeans as chaos was a working system which helped preserve Abeokuta in the difficult circumstances of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. That the system worked in spite of the incredible challenges is well captured by a newspaper editorial which advised the Lagos government to step back from its Euro-centrism and search out the proper ways of dealing with Abeokuta.

...at present there is no known ruler; but it does not follow that they have no political machinery; for it will be remembered that in 1872, though they had no acknowledged king, they were able to effectively close the roads to trade against Lagos, and were able to get their allies, the Jebus to cooperate with them; and when the causes which led to that step were removed, they were also able without a king, to open the roads; the political ruling of the Egbas, it will by this be seen, is in the hands not of a King.<sup>4</sup>

Harry Gailey thinks British authorities foresaw chaos where there was complexity. “British administrators even after all their dealings with Abeokuta did not understand the complex and at times near-chaotic political situation at Abeokuta. They would in spite of evidence to the contrary, continue to insist that there was one civil ruler in Abeokuta.”<sup>5</sup>

Such contemporary thoughts on Egba government were twisted by the narrow application of European conceptions, titles and interests to fit Egba political situations. Convinced that what the Egbas lacked was an effective centralized government, Christian missionaries and the Lagos government allied with local centralist forces to promote the creation of a monarchy around a doubtfully pre-existent but sectional Obaship. In this way, governance in Abeokuta was being pushed in a direction which Christian missions, imperialists and colonialists understood. Indeed, Governor Glover and subsequent British governors in Lagos had made “the establishment of a strong and united government

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<sup>4</sup> *The Lagos Observer*, March 2, 1882; Editorial: "Our Interior Difficulties.: Egba interregnum since the death of the Alake, 1862".

<sup>5</sup> Harry Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising: The Demise of Egba Independence* (London: Frank Cass, 1982), 24.

under the authority of the *Alake*” central in British designs for the Yoruba country and the condition upon which any treaty would be entered into with the Egba.<sup>6</sup> However, these efforts at centralization of power in the Alakeship did not go unchallenged. Contestation over the new monarchy was not just from sub-ethnic sections and entrenched chiefly interests; ordinary citizens and evolving elites also responded to it in various ways. The struggles to affirm the authority of the *Alake* as king of Abeokuta against established procedures and patterns of power continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and into 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is important to emphasize that centralization was not a British innovation; struggles between centralists and sectionarlists predate British interference. It was not until the ascension of Oba Gbadebo as *Alake* in 1890 that the odds shifted in favour of political centralism. The Anglo-Egba treaty of 1898 therefore produced a system that was a convergence of two centralization processes: external and local. The entrenchment of the monarchy as the dominant political system in Abeokuta must be seen as a process pushed by many forces – the state’s reaction to British power and local political agendas.

The triumph of the monarchy is well-captured in the literature. Saburi Biobaku, whose *Egbas and their Neighbours* ends at 1872, forecasts the centralization of authority in the *Alake* as the fallout of internal instability and as the necessary outcome of increasing British power in Yorubaland. For Biobaku, the sequence of events which shaped Egba politics into the 20<sup>th</sup> century starts from the British conquest of the Ijebu in 1892.

In 1892 an expedition had been sent against the Ijebu and their resistance was broken. But in 1893, Carter guaranteed the independence of the Egba. In 1898 Governor Macallum [sic] dealt with the over-mighty *Ologun*, who had

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<sup>6</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 87.

eclipsed the reigning Alake, and suggested the reorganization of the Egba state as the Egba United Government.<sup>7</sup>

The themes of conflict generated by modernity and colonial intrusion similarly pervade Agneta Pallinder-Law's intricate rendition of Egba political history during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In her case, she centers G. W. Johnson and the Egba United Board of Management in the political struggles as the Egba reacted to British power. Ajisafe justifies the dominance of the *Alake* as deriving from primordial privileges and a willingness to embrace modernity. Ayandele accounts for the demise of African sovereignty in the *compradoral* activities of missionaries and educated elite. Most existing accounts predicate the changes in Egba politics as the consequence of European colonial intrusions into otherwise traditional systems. Political conflicts and developments are assumed to be outcomes of these struggles.<sup>8</sup>

However, by centering European (in this case British) colonial, missionary and modernizing influences as the driving force of Egba history, these accounts silence or narrow the complex historical rationales and processes that formed that history and which better explicate contemporary Egba society. By presuming that political actors acted either on the side of modernity or of tradition, and only in reaction to colonial power, the wider field of political motivation and behaviour is obscured. Significantly, by making the role of missionaries and the Lagos government central to the creation and consolidation of centralized authority and power of the Alake, the monarchy finds only a subordinate space in the history of its own creation and construction. The principal *dramatis personae* are the governors of Lagos, British missionaries and G.W. Johnson

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<sup>7</sup> Biobaku, *Egbas*, 92.

<sup>8</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa, The Case of Abeokuta" *Journal of African History*, xv, 1 (1974): 62-85; Earl Philips, "The Egba at Abeokuta: Acculturation and Political Change, 1830-1870" *Journal of African Studies* 10, 1 (1969): 171-131.

with his modern credentials. Other local elites and citizens are depicted as being in a rear-guard action of resistance to preserve ancient traditions. The previous chapter challenged the idea that Abeokuta struggled to retain its traditional system by showing that no such primordial or fixed traditions existed for the young state. On the contrary, imagined and contested claims of traditions and identity as well as other resources, including Christianity, Islam, modernity and local commercial and social exigencies all evolved as the state grew, and these were struggled over in Egba attempts to define identity and the terms of power. This chapter examines the strategies, tensions, struggles and contradictions of the centralization of power and of the process by which the structures of power became formalized in Abeokuta in the early colonial years.

#### 4.2 Interregnum, Crisis or Peculiar Order?

A hallmark of the inevitable modernization framework is that the period following the *Ifole* of 1867 is the most unstable in the history of Abeokuta. Neither the Lagos government nor the missionaries could conceive of political stability without a formal structure of government -- preferably a monarchy. Certainly the dominant view of nationality and power in Britain was tied to pride in its monarchy, paired with a disdain of American democracy and political liberalism. Early writers on the Egba differed in fundamental ways by their nationality. The Anglo-Irish explorer Burton was particularly critical of Campbell's celebration of Egba politics and society. The fluidity Campbell and Buxton celebrated as a promising condition for the resettlement of repatriate Americans blacks, British missionaries and colonial agents derided as lack of centralized order. Rather, British agents saw in the Alaafin of Oyo something akin to their conception of

political order. The appellation and respect accorded this king (often referred to as the “King of the Yoruba” when in reality that institution had lost whatever sovereign authority it arguably had well over a century before this period), must be understood in the context of the metaphorical expressions common to British colonial knowledge. As Philip Curtin has shown, British knowledge of Africans was shaped by the narrow purview of the British historical experience,<sup>9</sup> which had a strong monarchy at its core. Successive governors in Lagos complained that the Egba were difficult to deal with because of their perceived unstructured political system.<sup>10</sup>

The conception of a strong imperial monarchy as the normative and ideal form of state also derives from contemporary ideas that a monarchy was an evolutionary step ahead of chieftaincy or tribal democracy. Such thoughts were not restricted to European writers alone; educated Africans prescribed their visions of independent Africa in monarchical terms. Africanus Horton did not think the Gambia was qualified for self-rule because it was composed of small isolated villages lacking common interests and loyalties. The capacity for self-rule would come when these villages centralized under the most appropriate form of government: a monarchy with the king chosen by universal suffrage. Reading much promise for self-government in West Africa from the 1865 report of the Select Committee, Horton thought Abeokuta was qualified as the “natural capital of a united Yoruba land” if it was properly ordered politically under a monarch.<sup>11</sup>

Similar views of the monarchy as the ideal form influenced missionary views about Abeokuta. CMS agents celebrated the Egba patriarch, Sodeke, whom they initially

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<sup>9</sup>Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), 479.

<sup>10</sup>For Governors Freeman and Glover see Earl Philips, “The Egba at Ikorodu: Perfidious Lagos?” *African Historical Studies*, 3. 1 (1970): 27; PRO C.7227 (Lagos), “General Report of the Lagos Interior Expedition, 1893”, Despatch (sic) from Sir Gilbert Carter, 1893. *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*.

<sup>11</sup>Robert July, *Origins of African Thought* (London, Faber, 1968), 122-126.

assumed had to be the king of Abeokuta. With the demise of Sodeke, their subsequent quest was always to identify and deal with the leading chief. Arguably, the very idea of a political hierarchy in Abeokuta is more a reflection of European and missionary desires and need for identification than a reflection of political reality. Henry Townsend and other CMS missionaries and agents were deeply involved in pushing the Egba towards monarchical centralization, leading to the “coronation” of the first Alake in 1854. When the *Ifole* happened in 1867, they could not accept that it was an Egba push-back against this redefinition of power. As far as the CMS missionaries and the Lagos government were concerned, the *Ifole* amounted to a rejection of Christianity and civilization. It was sure evidence of disorder and instability.

Indeed, the series of events following the expulsion of missionaries make it appear that governance had broken down in Abeokuta. The death of Bashorun Somoye in August 1868 created an interregnum in two critical titles: the Alake and Bashorun. Somoye had been “regent” since the death of Alake Okukenu in 1862, but his influence and power had been predicated much less on his title than on his wealth, which was derived from his control of tolls and the activities of his *omo ogun*. His intransigence to Alake Okukenu and his running battles with the Ake-based Ogboni, which became more apparent after the *Ifole*, meant that he could not lead that body as a regent. Considering that the *Alakeship* was a recent creation still surrounded by considerable controversy over the terms of its power and access to them, a succession struggle became imminent. The succession rivalry between Ademola and Oyekan pitched the Ogboni against the Bashorun’s camp, including the EUBM Saros. That struggle continued well after Ademola was appointed Alake and beyond his demise in December 1877. Oyekan, now

an old man, became Alake but was subject to the triumvirate including the Onlado of Kemta, Ogundeyi of Iporo and the now aging Ogundipe.<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, Bashorun Somoye's power and influence, being predicated on his wealth as much as his constitutional title, opened up the political space for wealthy but untitled individuals, including Madame Efunroye Tinubu, to participate in politics at the highest levels. More significantly, it created a struggle for wealth and control over customs posts among those chiefs who had identified with Bashorun Somoye and the EUBM. The Asalu of Kemta, the leading Ake chief, succeeded Somoye to the headship of that camp and was recognized as the "regent." However, his identification with the Bashorun made his leadership of the Ogboni illusory. Moreover, he could not muster the necessary support because his caucus struggled among themselves for control of tolls. Solanke of Igbehin set up his own custom post, claiming traditional prerogatives as the "original" owner of the Ogun River. Other members of the caucus supported the Ogboni attempts at closing the EUBM-controlled posts. Asalu himself was soon overshadowed by the Onlado, a younger and more junior chief from his own quarter, and excluded from attending the Ogboni meetings, making his succession to Somoye's President-Generalship of the EUBM untenable. Johnson appointed Oyekan, who had lost out to Ademola in the Alake stool, as President-General in December of 1869.<sup>13</sup>

At Alake Oyekan's death in 1882, the Onlado was elected King, but was never installed. In 1885, a wealthy Ogboni chief was selected in his place and made Alake. Pallinder-Law suggests that Onlado's appointment had been delayed and finally prevented through the activities of Ogundipe, who preferred a puppet as Alake over the

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<sup>12</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law, "Government in Abeokuta 1830-1914: With Special reference to the Egba United Government, 1898-1914," PhD Dissertation, Historical Institute, Goteborg, 1973.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 46-48.

potentially powerful Onlado.<sup>14</sup> It could very well be that the Onlado lacked the wealth to exercise control in a system progressively taken over by wealthy chiefs.

These succession struggles continued alongside difficulties with the Lagos government. The conflict with Lagos had centered on the Egba control of the trade route between Lagos and the interior. On their part, the Egba complained against British treachery at Ikorodu,<sup>15</sup> their imperial activities in the Egbado country, especially Ota and Ilaro over which the Egba claimed suzerainty, and British rapport with Ibadan, whose imperial thrusts threatened the Egba. Many accounts interpret Egba activities against Britain as nationalist resistance to imperial control. This is only partly correct. British activities hit deep at the core of Egba politics, but not because of the threat of modernization or imperialism. Rather it limited the core resource of power, by which Egba politics was contested. Egba control over its satellites has been termed national; in reality it was control by particular chiefs “in trust” for the Egba. The greater resistance to British imperialism was much less for a national cause than it was about the loss of wealth and authority, the loss of control over material, people and land, with which the leading Egba elites countered one another in local politics. The prevarications in Egba policy which appeared to the British as simultaneously friendly and hostile were not necessarily a nationalist strategy, rather they sometimes reflected the local contestation of power as dominant chiefs desperately struggled with displaced or marginal ones over a core resource of local influence and power.

Following the *Ifole*, missionaries based in Abeokuta described a society in dire times. The native missionary, Rev. Allen, wrote in December 1874 that “the whole

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>15</sup> See, Earl Philips, “The Egba and Ikorodu, 1865: Perfidious Lagos?” *African Historical Studies*, Vol. 3, 1 (1970).



country is crying from want” and that “lots of prayer meetings for peace and the return of the missionaries... [were answered when God removed] those wicked leaders in the country who are averse to all that is good.”<sup>16</sup>

Of late all the great babalawos went to their sacred groves to consult their Ifas as to what steps they might take towards ameliorating the present conditions of the country because the mortality in this country since these two years has been very great from the smallpox, and even sudden deaths so often, scarcity of cowries etc. The babalawos returned from their groove [sic: grove] after consulting the Ifa by saying that the country cannot be better as formerly again if they do not send to call back Sodeke's Whiteman (meaning Mr. Townsend)... wish for a return to Townsend's era of peace, prosperity, happiness...against the present poverty, misery and all sorts of evils.

Another missionary wrote:

In regard to the political state of the town, change has taken place in some measure. No threat, no open dissension as the past few years; but it is in state of tranquility; Experience having taught people that instead of having been gainers, they have been the losers; since their refusal of white missionaries; disappointment on all sides and other internal troubles which so disturb the peace of their minds, that most of the people have been led to attribute their afflictions to their not having white men among them and an anxious desire for their return has mostly occupied the minds of many intelligent and well disposed among them...who have been sad at seeing the wicked practices of some of the leading men of the town, who's hands were strengthened to do wickedness because they had many allies to support them in it...the permission to white men visiting us, Messrs Maser and Roper ....and Mr Faulkner ...is a proof of this assertion

Henry Townsend wrote as follows: "The state of Abeokuta is quiet. There is sad demoralization, the chiefs are not obeyed, and there is not but one among them that possess any quality to let them to receive obedience."<sup>17</sup> The crisis appears to have lasted into the 1880s. Rev. J. B. Wood, the only other European to exercise as considerable an influence on the Egba as Townsend, reported:

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<sup>16</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, Rev W. Allen to Rev C. C. Femm (Igbore), December 9th 1874

<sup>17</sup> CMS G1 A2/05, Townsend to Wright, April 1 1875.

Abeokuta is going down every year. Its trade is growing less and less; complaints are hard on every side of the general depression. Traders are leaving the town in the hope of being able to do better elsewhere.<sup>18</sup>

These summations would appear to be spot-on in light of the developments in Egba politics and society. However, they also bear particular relevance because of the convergence of missionary, colonial, Saro and educated elites' ideas of political power and social stability. If we step back from these assumptions, they offer different meanings. They reveal instead something typical about Egba politics – a curious dialectic of power and intrigue in which actors know that their capabilities are countermanded by others in a widely diffused spectrum of power. Social stability is achieved in the deterrence of excessive power and through complex alliances between and among chiefs as well as ordinary citizens. The European idea of centralization was an intrusion and a threat to this system, and what appeared to be conflicts to the Westernized elites was the political elite's readjustment to what was apparently a new resource to be controlled for the purposes of power.

Indeed, rather than the collapse of society that the Europeans anticipated, Abeokuta was not any less stable in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century than previously. Missionaries had been blinded by their hopes and expectations of Abeokuta being a model city to the fact that intrigues among the chiefs were always part of the politics and a critical means of political balance and adjustment. Missionary enterprise itself had survived only because a balance existed between sections and interests for and against allowing missionary residence in Abeokuta. The *Ifole* was not the first persecution of Christians and missionaries either. Indeed, during this period, the Egba successfully

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<sup>18</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, J. B. Wood to Lang, Nov. 24, 1887.

managed the threat posed by successive Lagos governors, closing and opening the trade routes to Lagos at will. Egba armies conquered Imeko, re-established authority over Ilaro, and restored toll collection in Isheri, Ota and on the Ogun river. They kept Dahomey at bay, and successfully formed and managed an alliance with the Ijebu to limit Ibadan domination of Yorubaland during the Sixteen Years War (1877-93). Internally, these struggles did not produce anarchy or civil war, even though an imminent civil war was always present in missionary and colonial agent reports. On the contrary, Egba chiefs engaged in multiple alliances of power and when necessary suspended internal friction to attend to collective national security. Their rapprochement with the French shows that they sought alternative trade networks through Porto Novo as a solution to the difficulties posed by Lagos and tried to play Roman Catholicism against Protestant Christianity.

In the course of these struggles, successive Alakes remained weak, unable to muster any significant legitimacy or power and subject to the rule of the most powerful chiefs. When Governor Carter visited Abeokuta in 1893, he was left in no doubt as to who ruled the city. His visit to the Alake was an afterthought and not in the program as planned by the Egba triumvirate. The king was absent at the meetings during which the Anglo-Egba treaty of 1893 was thrashed out. Carter was assured that the king was irrelevant to the proceedings and that ultimate approval rested with the triumvirate. Carter's notes are instructive:

[I] judged it advisable to go and see the King, notwithstanding that he had not been permitted to visit me. As his residence was close to the Mission House I went to him first. The so-called palace is a very dilapidated mud house with no pretensions to comfort or cleanliness. I found the King surrounded by a few followers... and living in a simple way with no kind of state...He

apologized for his condition, but said he was a poor man and unable to compete with the lesser authorities who possessed greater [power] wealth.<sup>19</sup>

This may appear unusual and improper to the British Governor; but it makes sense in the peculiar dynamics of Egba politics during the 1890s. It is instructive, also, that while British and missionary pressures may have helped in creating the monarchy, they could not enforce its rule and legitimacy. The process by which Abeokuta became a monarchy and the peculiarities of its political system can be found in the ways elite actors legitimized the system, made it an Egba institution by locating it in Egba “traditions.” This is a more plausible explanation than the idea that it was simply imposed by British colonial power.

#### 4.3 The “triumph” of the monarchy

In spite of its fluidity and wide spectrum of power, governance in Abeokuta always centered on known individuals. A historical trajectory of the leading men of the town can be drawn from Sodeke (c.1830-1845), to Somoye (1854-1866), Ogundipe (1875-1880), Ogundeyi (1881-1897), and finally to Aboaba (1897-1904).<sup>20</sup> These leaders’ wide array of sources of power affirm that power had no definite historical form or structure, much less a traditional or immutable form, and challenge the clear bifurcation of Ogboni (civil) and Ologun (warrior) categories dominant in the literature. Sodeke’s prestige was more as a noble and elderly head of the Ogboni than as a war leader, even though he was also a warrior; Somoye’s role as depicted in the literature is coloured by the *Ifole*, which affixes upon him an *Ologun* headship. In reality, he was also the head of the Ogboni during this

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<sup>19</sup> P.R.O. C.7227, “Dispatch from Sir Gilbert T. Carter, K. C. M. G., furnishing a general report of the Lagos Interior expedition, 1893” *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*.

<sup>20</sup> Pallinder-Law, 27, 41, 90.

period. Ogundipe may not have had a civil title, but his ex-officio influence, symbolized by the account that just the presence of his staff was respected by all and sundry, combined well with his Balogun title and his being feared or revered for his *juju*. Ogundeyi (and after him Aboaba) succeeded to the prestige of Ogundipe more for his control of the tolls which made him very wealthy. In all cases, these chiefs exercised control over a core group (section, militia, age/vocational grade) from which they projected country-wide influence. A combination of age, war, wealth, title, and religion in varying degrees defined the capacity for mobilization and claims to elite status and power. These men were certainly not monarchs; they understood that their positions were neither fixed nor immutable nor traditionally sanctioned as to exclude challenges to their power. They retained power by a complex aggregation of claims and representations of which integrity, morality, prestige, nationalism and bravery were key components. These values were critical in the public space where legitimacy is derived, especially among an informed and discursively active population. If the Alakeship was to function legitimately, it was going to need more than British power. The Alake also had to develop considerable ability to succeed in the intrigues by which chiefly power was balanced. In other words, the Alakeship had to be more prestigious than all other forms of authority in Abeokuta; it had to become “Egba.”

Until 1898, no Alake had been able to command such visibility in Egba politics. The reasons for this are not hard to see. First, the title was obviously sectional to the Ake township and thus excluded the most powerful individuals who were unable or unwilling to affirm some connection with Ake; its identification with the Europeans and missionaries gave it a “foreign” element for which it could not be trusted with the core

“secrets” of national interests; a critical factor why meetings were held and decisions taken without consultation with the Alake. Thus, chiefly intrigues ensured that no Alake was ever the most powerful chief prior to selection and coronation. Since leadership was not just about staking claims on social resources, but also about expending acquired resources to maintain social status and power, most powerful chiefs would not put themselves forward to the Alakeship knowing the weakness of the institution and the high responsibility it entailed. Knowing that no special resource was axiomatically attached to the office, they worked towards retaining the institution in its weak form.

Yet, in the course of these intrigues and political developments, a path to prominence and monarchical centralization can be charted through which the Alake eventually triumphed. The changing dynamics of Egba society and politics in the context of regional developments and colonial intrusions progressively located the Alake as the Egba sovereign. The earliest signs of the relevance of the Alake as a pan-Egba authority relate to the conduct of the Ijaye War (1859-1862). In more ways than the Dahomean invasion of 1851, the Ijaye war was the first “national” military engagement of the Egba forces. Earlier wars had been engaged by selected “towns” on their fronts on behalf of the collective. Defense against Dahomey in 1851 had been predicted on each township repairing its walls and guarding its territory. The deployment of Egba forces reflected the power and authority of the sectional leaders and war chiefs rather than the newly installed Alake.

Although the Egba were not directly concerned with the issues that led to the Ijaye War,<sup>21</sup> it presented opportunities that they could not pass by. The Egba feared that an alliance was budding between Ibadan and Dahomey and suspected that Oyo (and

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<sup>21</sup> Biobaku, Egbas, 65-78.

Ibadan) wanted an opportunity to reassert imperial control over the Egbado country,<sup>22</sup> much of which was now under the control of Egba chiefs.<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Ibadan had always been the Egba's mortal enemy. The call for support from *Kakanfo* Kurunmi of Ijaye was particularly promising because Ilorin and Ijebu also joined the alliance against Ibadan.<sup>24</sup> Not a few Egba chiefs and warriors hoped to revenge their 1820s expulsion from Ibadan and to recover their "ancestral land," a tale that had now become legend.<sup>25</sup> The deployment of Egba forces reveals how serious and engaging a collective venture it was. While the Bashorun Somoye led the main body of the army to Ijaye, Ogunbona was stationed at Olokemeji, near Abeokuta, to secure the supply lines and watch Dahomey's movements.<sup>26</sup> The Alake Okukenu remained in Abeokuta charged with mobilizing home support for the war. As the war effort dragged on and needed reinforcement, it fell to the Alake to mobilize and enlist soldiers. In June 1861, the Alake decreed the forced conscription of every able-bodied Egba man. Those on their farms and the countryside were ordered to come back home and enlist in the army.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, Okukenu promulgated the closure of the Ogun River to trade, to effect complete mobilization. Only canoes carrying the staffs of the Alake or the Bashorun were allowed through.<sup>28</sup> This first experiment at national legislation was however not followed through because Somoye

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<sup>22</sup> Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare in the nineteenth century* (Institute of African Studies and University of Ibadan Press, 1971), 114-122.

<sup>23</sup> Philips, "The Egba"

<sup>24</sup> *Iwe Iroyin*, 30 December, 1861.

<sup>25</sup> The legend continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Samuel Johnson's concludes his justification of Oyo's take-over of Ibadan thus: "From this it will be seen that the current tale of the Egbas being driven out of Ibadan by the Oyos is lacking in accuracy". Johnson, *History*, 226. See also CMS CA2/071, Egba Christians to CMS. November, 1861.

<sup>26</sup> Jones Report in Ajayi and Smith, *Yoruba Warfare*, 214.

<sup>27</sup> *Iwe Iroyin* (Abeokuta) June 7, 1861

<sup>28</sup> Pallinder-Law, Government, 30.

blamed inadequate supply for the Egba loss at Ijaye.<sup>29</sup> Yet, it established an important precedent upon which recognition and legitimization progressively grew around the Alake.

Attention necessarily shifted to the Alake when leading chiefs failed by those values (nationalism, integrity and valor) upon which their public status was staked. Alake Okukenu's prestige derives from his contrasting mien to Somoye who had the reputation of being fiery and selfish, once incurring the wrath of a mob when a stray child was found enslaved in his house.<sup>30</sup> That power produces its own contradictions reflects well in the life of Bashorun Ogundipe, who became the leading chief of Abeokuta soon after the *Ifole*. The internal struggles that followed the expulsion of the Europeans obviously consumed the set of chiefs led by Somoye. Ogundipe had protected the missionaries and generally presented himself as pro-British. Townsend wrote of him:

Chief Ogundipe is the one who is in favor of change, open road, white residence and no war, he publicly advocates [peace]... he is supported by an influential majority. Those ....opposed to us have died... the great movers of the outbreak have gone to their final account, and it is noted by the public...Besides ... no public or national acts have prospered since then; their wars have not been successful and closing the roads have brought ruin upon them.<sup>31</sup>

A shrewd tactician, Ogundipe reportedly rejected being made the Alake, retaining the Bashorun title and a cognomen, *Alatise* (fixer); but he had his hand in every appointment. He supported Ademola (r. 1869-1877) against the more popular Oyekan. When the latter succeeded to the throne in 1879, he was definitely overshadowed by Ogundipe; a French visitor to Abeokuta wrote the following of the chief: "A vrai dire, le seul dictateur

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Burton, *Abeokuta*, 144.

<sup>31</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, Townsend to Wright, Abeokuta, Jan. 29, 1875.



d'Abeokuta est Ogundipe.”<sup>32</sup> When in 1882 the Onlado was selected king, Ogundipe manipulated a delay of the coronation process for three years until a more manageable individual, one who suited his need for a weak Alake, was found. He was the strategic mind in the Lagos crisis -- posturing himself as pro-missionary and agreeing to keep the Sabbath, yet refusing to be a church member. He posed as pro-British against the French rapprochement that some Egba chiefs pursued, yet he would not compromise on Egba independence or the control of tolls and dominated peoples. Until his death in 1887, Ogundipe was the controller of Egba affairs and the “dictator of its government.”<sup>33</sup>

However by the 1880s, even the missionaries were writing about the troubles Ogundipe posed for them. The Rev. Faulkner offered to resign his CMS commission when he realized that he was losing control of the church to Ogundipe’s interference, to the extent that his ministers and some in his congregation often threatened to summon him to the chiefs’ court.<sup>34</sup> He fell into further scandals in April 1882 when he accused the church of aiding the flight of his (Ogundipe’s) wife to Lagos.

Fresh disturbance of the church by Chief Ogundipe on account of Owode, the most confidential of his wife [sic] who ran away to Lagos began today. He gave the best lie to understand--that she had been advised and conducted to Lagos by a member of the Christian community. This disturbance put the church into great excitement for some weeks. He made many needless threatening [sic]. The whole of Abeokuta church was summoned before the heathen tribunal for about three times. Although chief Ogundipe endeavoured to obtain the support of the other Ogboni and war authorities, yet we are grateful to observe, that their eyes were more open; past experience during and after the outbreak of 1867 having enabled them to judge rightly what best to do at such crises. Chief Ogundipe has since completely lost his respect

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<sup>32</sup> M. Holley, *Voyage a Abeokuta*, Lyon, 1881, 23-31; cited in Ayandele, *The Missionary Impact*, 43.

<sup>33</sup> Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*, 49.

<sup>34</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, V. Faulkner to Hon. Sec. CMS, November 10, 1882. Ayandele considers it ironic that such a man: “dreaded as a plague, steeped in juju and believed to be allied to the ghosts” became the champion of the missionaries. Ayandele, 44.

among the Christian community of Abeokuta, except those of Ikija, who are to a certain degree bound to show him respect as they are in his township.<sup>35</sup>

Ogundipe's scandals were the more highlighted by the Lagos press. The chief's wife had arrived in Lagos with physical signs of mistreatment suggesting she was regularly molested by her husband. The *Lagos Standard* called on the Lagos colony to grant her official refuge, rehabilitate her and take the chief to task on her account.<sup>36</sup>

Earlier, in 1869, the chief had angered many in Abeokuta when he publicly celebrated the defeat of Egba forces by Meko, a Ketu town near Dahomey, by firing cannons. He had warned against and refused to participate in the undertaking. That he so publicly celebrated their defeat and loss angered many of the chiefs. A civil war had been barely averted.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, his conduct in the Onlado affair and his dictatorial tendencies and erratic rule made him more feared than loved. By the time he died, having been ill for a long time, his power was already being challenged by his adversaries, the Onlado and new leading chiefs Ogundeyi Magaji and the Jaguna of Igbehin; these constituted the triumvirate that signed the 1893 treaty with Governor Carter. This triumvirate was not a formally constituted arrangement, but a temporary truce among the most powerful chiefs.

Other leading chiefs suffered similar loss of prestige. The triumvirate -- Ogundeyi Magaji, the Onlado of Kemta and the Jaguna of Igbehin (1887-1893) -- lost face over the Viard affair. The Frenchman Eduard Viard visited Abeokuta in April 1887 and held consultations with the chiefs, after which a treaty was signed giving France a trade monopoly in Egbaland, the right to place a French resident in the town and other such

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<sup>35</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, Journal of Rev. Doherty of Igbore, Abeokuta for 1882

<sup>36</sup> *The Lagos Standard*, March 21, 1882.

<sup>37</sup> CMS CA2/ 070, W. Moore to Sec. CMS, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1869.

conditions establishing a protectorate relationship between France and Abeokuta.<sup>38</sup> These developments alarmed the Lagos colony government, educated Egbas resident in Lagos and the CMS.<sup>39</sup> The British government exerted pressure on the French such that the treaty was not ratified. Lagos-based Egbas wrote letters and sent deputations to the Alake and chiefs warning them not to pursue such relations with the French; the Protestants raised considerable alarm. So intense was the uproar that the Alake denied any knowledge of any treaty with the French. The Viard affair proved disastrous for the chiefs. The public rendition of the encounter was that they had received bribes to sell Abeokuta to the French.<sup>40</sup> More importantly, to forestall French expansion during this era of the Scramble, the Lagos government annexed Igbesa, Ado and Ilaro, which were to that point satellites of the Egba. The loss of these provinces was a critical blow to the very basis of chiefly power. It was a direct assault on the ability of the chiefs to control tolls and wage wars,<sup>41</sup> and on the Egba economy which had profited from the multiple points of access to the coast in a far-reaching trading network.<sup>42</sup> Worse for the chiefs was the heightened sense of incapacity: they could do nothing about it. Considering that chiefly power was mostly predicated on success in wars, the effects of such incapacity demanded a complete restructuring of political and social relations and of the path to power. Abeokuta was not isolated from the knowledge of British troop movements and colonial conquests happening all around them. Indeed, it was thought that the Egba

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<sup>38</sup> Other terms of the treaty include a grant of 3000 pounds to the triumvirate; the building of a railway station to link Ilaro, and Porto Novo with Abeokuta and the French recognition of domestic slavery.

<sup>39</sup> For more on the Viard Affair see, Ayandele, *The Missionary*, 49-52;

<sup>40</sup> C.M.S. G3A2/0, Wood to Lang, April 23, 1888.

<sup>41</sup> Much of the excuses for wars in the Egbado country have to do with securing the provinces and quelling rebellion. The French conquest of Dahomey in 1890 further removed the rationales for war and consequently demanded a restructuring of the basis of Egba chiefly power.

<sup>42</sup> Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: a social and economic history of women dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940*, (Oxford: James Currey, 2002).

capitulated to the 1898 treaty because they feared that the British wanted a pretext to bombard Abeokuta like they had Ijebu in 1892. Egba warriors who had participated in the French conquest of Dahomey appreciated European military superiority. Such knowledge impinged on Egba perceptions of the capacity of their system to survive or of their leaders to protect them. An important fall out of colonial conquests at the end of the century was a greater openness -- if not a despondency -- to the changes that were in the offing.

When the public reputation of leading chiefs suffered, successive Alakes were able to use their apparent weakness as a moral authority to inch into legitimacy. It helped, for instance, that public meetings continued to be held at the Ake palace and in the Ogboni house and that foreign dignitaries knew to pay homage at the Ake palace. In 1881, the Alake Oyekan received a boost to royal coffers when an "Alake gate" was created and the chiefs agreed that export duties charged on cotton be reserved for the Alake. This was an unprecedented arrangement and it only passed because the Owu chiefs who controlled the Aro post where it was to be located were allowed to retain control of all imports.<sup>43</sup> Yet the monarchy gathered strength as it was progressively looked upon as the center (if mostly symbolic) of Abeokuta.

#### 4.4 The Rise of Other Elites

It is intriguing to note the transformations in the bases of chiefly power in Abeokuta during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Sodeke's leadership had been predicated mostly on age, exposure, experience and in his ability to guide the conglomeration. The brief cotton

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<sup>43</sup> "A Political commotion of the 'Alake gate,'" *The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Colony Advertiser*, August 24, 1881.

boom (c. 1854-1860) saw chiefs with substantial farm holdings rise to the fore in Egba politics.<sup>44</sup> Okukenu edged Somoye to become Alake partly because of his more sedentary wealth and influence. During the 1860s, chiefly power became built upon success in war and the ability to maintain an army or militia; Somoye carved his niche by being a successful general and for his command of *omo ogun*. Through the 1870s, imperial control over conquered and dominated satellites, especially in the Egba country, put a more significant material value on wars than the capture and sale of slaves. As the opportunities for war diminished during the 1880s, chiefs fought over toll gates and locations. It underscores the flexibility of the chiefly power system it adapted and adjusted to these transformations. Chiefly power in Abeokuta was never of a definite form that could pass for tradition, against which a modern variant can be compared.

It was not only chiefly politics that adjusted to new conditions and new resources. The Ogboni was transformed from being an all-citizen public forum, to a parliament (of sorts) of permanent “senators,” to an exclusive body (holding regular meetings) with secrets and clandestine apparatuses and public dread. By the turn of the century, it had a formal structure in ways it previously did not.<sup>45</sup> Henry Townsend’s description of public life in Abeokuta in the 1840s referred to public meetings (usually at the *Ita Ogboni*) at which thousands of people participated. Campbell wrote in the 1860s that “almost every free man or woman is a member of the Ogboni Lodge, of which there is one in every

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<sup>44</sup> Mr. and Mrs. Townsend toured Egba farms and report of extensive cotton and perennial crop holdings. Recounted in Mary Tucker, *Abbeokuta*, 159-160.

<sup>45</sup> CO149/5 H. W. H. Cumming, *Annual Report for the Year 1904*.

township or chiefdom.”<sup>46</sup> Captain Jones’s Report of 1861 describes how public decisions were made thus:

The question of war was decided in public at what is called an “Oio” or an extraordinary meeting held in the open air for the purpose of obtaining an expression of public opinion and passing certain edicts in conformity with that opinion. At these meetings the Chiefs, Obonis (elders) and members of the Tribes collect in a circle, sometimes to the number of thousands and everyone is allowed the expression of his opinion thro’ the Elders or Chief of his Tribe.

The conception of chiefly parleys and an exclusive Ogboni developed as power became less and less fluid and in the context of elite rivalry which necessitated the exclusion of certain elements and the keeping of secrets from them. Progressively also and in the course of succession disputes, an inner core of the Ogboni developed with chains of command and a hierarchy to arrogate to itself the power to choose (and theoretically to depose) kings. As with the monarchy, an eternal immutable tradition largely borrowed from Oyo was applied to make these positions and institutions appear ancient and traditional. The necessary cloaks of secrecy in clandestine meetings, myths and ritualistic powers were applied. By the turn of the century, the Ogboni and its offices became centralized and formalized, not as a public medium for decision making anymore, but as a “house” of lords and chiefs, a restrictive elite. Needless to state, we notice a progressive disenfranchisement of ordinary citizens from decision making. As the arguments over the *Ifole* show, public gatherings turned from forums for public debates to contests of irreconcilable differences. Market places like Shapon ceased to be places of fellowship and community. This is only partly the consequence of political distrust and wrangling, the era was also marked by increasing public consciousness, materialist competition and

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<sup>46</sup> M. R. Delany & Robert Campbell, *Search for a Place: Black Separatism and Africa, 1860*, introduction by Howard H. Bell (University of Michigan Press, 1969. 67.

distrust, a part of what Ayandele describes as the “silent revolution.”<sup>47</sup> As such the progressive centralization of Egba politics in the monarchy and a “parliament” should be seen as part of a larger process of social transformations which impacted every layer of the society. It was only partly a colonial or missionary impact; the growth of the cash crop economy and of migrant labor and greater opportunities for slaves to escape or achieve freedom were other manifestations of social transformation. What appears constant in explaining change is not the impact of colonial power, but the diverse calculation of material interests across every segment of Egba society. Commentaries in Lagos newspapers lamented the impact of pecuniary interests on the Egba. Values of honesty, integrity, honour and morality which were the currencies of public debates and moral-economy became complicated by wealth and power which ordinary people lacked but desired. One commentator wrote a poem to depict the growing consciousness that money and wealth were the determinants of social status:

Aje ni igi awure	Money is the tree of luck;
Ope ni igi irada	The palm tree is the tree of fashion;
Agba to feni laife ki a lowo	But the elder who possesses love
Iwo ni o fun ni je <sup>48</sup>	Without money, administers poison

The rise of new elites made up of Christians, Lagos-based elite and educated Egba resident in Abeokuta further aided the legitimization of the monarchy. This group transcended the sectional divisiveness that characterized chiefly elites and were perhaps the first category of Egba elites to conceive of themselves as a national entity. Their conception of this nationality and their thoughts on how Abeokuta should be governed reflects the influence of the European missionaries and colonial ideology. To have the

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<sup>47</sup> Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*, 332.

<sup>48</sup> *The Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser*, June 13, 1883.

Egba “take their place among the nations of the world” was a commonly expressed interest of new elites. Predictably, they pushed the idea of a kingdom and a king in the European model.<sup>49</sup>

Egba Christian converts took to heart the command to “forsake their fathers and mothers.” The CMS and other missions organized their churches as close-knit paternalistic communities, with definite hierarchies of authority and involvement in the day-to-day lives of their members. This is reflected in members’ self description as children of their mission fathers rather than of their biological ones.<sup>50</sup> It is noteworthy that a significant number of converts were Saro children and preferred slaves of chiefs handed over “dead and alive”<sup>51</sup> to the missionaries, former slaves manumitted by mission programs including a Court of Redemption (1881),<sup>52</sup> and individuals who in spite of opposition and persecution from their families and communities chose to join the mission. Joining the church meant separation from family and residence in Christian villages that sprang up in different parts of the town. Some of these were Shuren, Wasimi, Ikija, Ijaye and Ogbe.<sup>53</sup> Because the CMS referred to its mission in Abeokuta as the Egba church, members adopted this identity. Successive waves of attacks and persecutions and the *Ifole* reinforced among them a sense of collective destiny. In 1854, Alake Okukenu installed Okenla as the Balogun of Egba Christians. Subsequent civil titles including the Seriki of Christians were later created. These appointments followed the heroic performance of a Christian contingent in the repulsion of the Dahomean

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<sup>49</sup> *Lagos Times and Gold Coast Advertiser*, June 13, 1883.

<sup>50</sup> See for instance, CMS G3 A2/05, Petition to CMS Church Council by John Akilola Sunday, Agent in charge of the Ikereku church. Journal of Rev Doherty of Igbore, Abeokuta for 1882.

<sup>51</sup> “t’oku, t’aiye”- common term to depict total relinquishing of authority over the child by the biological parents.

<sup>52</sup> CMS G3/A2/07 Woods to Baylis, June 1893, cited in Ayandele, *Missionary Impact*, 47.

<sup>53</sup> Ajayi, *Christian Missions*, 142.



invasion of 1851.<sup>54</sup> The Christian participation in this war was a significant marker of their Egbaness in spite of their conversion and in spite of the persecution and derision they attracted from the authorities and fellow Egba. Indeed, as the Christians prepared, a chief reportedly asked if they would stick to their pacifism and march to war with their books.<sup>55</sup> Tucker records the story of Kashi, the head of a local guild of artisans, who had appeared before chiefly courts and paid several fines on account of his conversion. He fought so gallantly that a war chief exclaimed, “Ah, Kashi, if all fought like you, they might follow what religion they liked!”<sup>56</sup> From this first engagement, a Christian contingent was a regular part of the Egba army.<sup>57</sup> With the question of their nationality never in doubt, Egba Christians were always an important factor in local politics. Indeed, the chiefs went to considerable extent to assure Egba Christians that they were not the target of the *Ifole*; some argued that they were actually helping the local Christians to take over because the white missionaries had stayed long enough. The chiefs allowed the Christians to continue their worship shortly after the crisis.<sup>58</sup> However, the *Ifole* was to serve as a means of mobilization by which Egba Christians became a powerful political bloc. They challenged chiefly decisions that they construed might threaten them and the mission. One such instance in 1887 is instructive:

a number of slaves made their escape from Abeokuta to Lagos. One of the Christians was charged with having taken them down into British territory...the incidence [sic] shows clearly that the charge was untrue, but notwithstanding, a powerful party among the chiefs professed to believe it

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<sup>54</sup> Even though these titles were reproductions of heathen titles, missionaries argued that their adoption was necessary lest converts be attracted back to Ogboni heathenism. This debate continued throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For a summary see CMS, CA 3/172, The Journal of Charles Phillips, June to August, 1887.

<sup>55</sup> Interview: Professor Saburi Biobaku, Abeokuta, 1990. I had conducted this interview as part of research for my Bachelor’s Long Essay.

<sup>56</sup> Tucker, 166.

<sup>57</sup> Ayandele records that Egba Christians were at the vanguard of those advocating for war against Ibadan during the Ijaye War, 1860.

<sup>58</sup> CMS CA2/ 070, W. Moore to Sec. CMS, 26<sup>th</sup> February, 1869

was true, and determined that he should be driven from Abeokuta. The Christians, believing that there was sufficient evidence to show that the intention of those acting in this manner was to aim a blow at the Christians as a body, decided to stand by him...it soon became known that it was determined that the Christians should be plundered and driven away from the town. On their part, the Christians decided to offer much resistance as they were able, to any hostile action by their enemies...and not to allow a repetition of the outrage of 1867.<sup>59</sup>

By 1880, the Christians had become a very powerful group in Egba politics.<sup>60</sup> It is partly on account of their challenge that the triumvirate lost prestige over the Vaird Affair. Their support of the Alake was critical to the survival and triumph of the monarchy.

If one person symbolizes the power and influence of Egba Christians it was John Owolatan, commonly called Okenla, the Egba Christian Balogun from 1852 to 1882. It is not clear if he had been a chief prior to his investiture as the Christian Balogun,<sup>61</sup> but at that point he was a distinguished general and was highly respected by the leading chiefs; indeed, he was reportedly the only one who could challenge the chiefs to their faces. He was usually the main bulwark against the chiefs' anti-mission designs.<sup>62</sup> Okenla was also a leader of the Parakoyi; he organized trade expeditions to Lagos and Badagry, organized security for Christian traders on the routes, and was central to the rise of the Christian bloc to power in Abeokuta. He established a farming village of his own at Shuren. Being an Ake chief, he was a staunch supporter of the Alake. Okenla's influence spread far beyond Abeokuta to Ebute Meta where Egba Christians resettled after the Ifole, and Lagos where a growing number of educated Egbas resided. He was known to hold civil

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<sup>59</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, J. B. Wood to Rev. R. Lang, Abeokuta, Nov. 24<sup>th</sup> 1887.

<sup>60</sup> Ayandele credits CMS's Rev. J. B. Wood with organizing Egba Christians as a Christian party. Doing so silences the contributions of individuals like Balogun Okenla. Such perspectives reveal how a colonial framework constrains data.

<sup>61</sup> Ayandele suggests he was already a chief. *Missionary Impact*, 47, 332.

<sup>62</sup> CMS, CA2/ 114, Faulkner to Lang, September 14, 1882.

courts to adjudicate matters between Christians and in 1882 hosted a meeting to resolve the estrangement between the Ijeun church and Reverend Faulkner, the CMS Superintendent.<sup>63</sup>

The stature of Christian chiefs was bolstered by their anti-slavery activities. Christians were often accused of encouraging and aiding slaves to escape to freedom in Lagos.<sup>64</sup> An important function of the mission since its inception had always been to buy the freedom of known converts, agents and their families. The 1881 Court of Redemption was only the latest of frameworks by which the Christians manumitted slaves. Christian chiefs were also known to have resisted the killing of war captives and the enslavement of displaced persons after wars with Dahomey and at Ilaro and Iberekodo. These activities of Egba Christians were widely known such that delegations from far into the Yoruba country visited the missions in the hope that they would help search for and secure the release of captives and slaves. These were not always poor supplicants, but sometimes princely delegations. Okenla and other Christian chiefs were central to these efforts of searching for and negotiating the release of slaves and of justifying and defending Egba Christians who were accused of aiding slave escape. Given that much of 19<sup>th</sup> century Yoruba wars relate to the kidnap of persons, Christian chiefs also became party to efforts at negotiating relations to prevent war. Rev. Wood wrote of one such instance:

Ibadan and Ijebu deputized the Christian Seriki to demand a return of five kidnapped Ibadan women; otherwise, they will retaliate by attacking all Egba farmers near them. They would have attacked but respected the Seriki because they knew he was not involved in such. Seriki secured the release of the women....seldom indeed has such a thing occurred in this country, it is cause for much thanks.

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<sup>63</sup> CMS G3 A2/05Journal of Rev. Doherty for 1882; entry Jan.23.

<sup>64</sup> This claim was central to the chiefs' case against the Lagos Colony.

Okenla died in September of 1882 and the grandness of his burial underscores his power and influence and the respect he was held in by many. The Rev. Faulkner was impressed at the display of affection at this burial and wrote: “It was a picture I shall never forget, to see many strong men holding their gun with one hand, and with the other wiping tears from their eyes. I should have asked some of our wise acres in England down here, who declare the African to be void of soul and feeling to have been present on this occasion...a veteran in the service of his country, a veteran in the service of Christ...he was held in high respects [sic] by all the Chiefs in the town and even those who feared and respected him.” In symbolic disregard to CMS doctrines, Egba Christians insisted that their chief be buried within the mission house and a memorial be erected for him. The burial crowd included heathens and Muslims. The army fired guns in salute and all the chiefs paraded in front of the corpse.<sup>65</sup>

The honour accorded Okenla and the dignity which he attracted as a marker of his impact among the Egba may be compared to that of Henry Townsend who died later in 1886 and is the acclaimed “Father of Christianity” in Abeokuta, or of Rev. J. B. Wood whose name (on account of his contributions to Christianity in Abeokuta) the CMS Minute Book writes “will never die.”<sup>66</sup> Successive meetings of the Abeokuta Native Church council could not get around to deciding on honouring Henry Townsend. The Rev. Harding lamented in 1888 that churches had not sent their subscriptions for the planned memorial to the revered missionary. All that had come in from Abeokuta for the project was 2 pounds. In response, Egba churches gave excuses: “Ake people had been

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<sup>65</sup> CMS G3 A2/05, Rev Faulkner (Ake) to Sec, CMS, Nov. 10, 1882.

<sup>66</sup> Entry 14<sup>th</sup> June, 1904; in contrast, he was derogatorily called an “Ajele” a viceroy in the mould of detested 18<sup>th</sup> century Oyo imperial overlord.

working on their church wall, and the scarcity of food had been a hindrance”; Doherty of Igbore said his people had been busy preparing for their new church; Rev. Cole said his people had suffered much from famine; and the people of Ikereku did not know who Townsend was.<sup>67</sup>

What chiefs like Okenla achieved was to bridge Christianity and nationality in such a way that one was not the inversion of the other. They also made chiefly office and politics accessible to Christians and educated Egba. They set the grounds for the participation of educated Egba in Abeokuta politics. The rise of educated elites may have begun at the mission schools and the technical institute, but the products of these were few; it was in Lagos that their population grew. Following the *Ifole*, many Egba Christians and their families fled to Ebute Meta on the Lagos mainland where they formed a new congregation called St. Jude’s under Rev. Faulkner. Their settlement here coincided with the resettlement of Ijaye refugees at the more eastwardly St. John’s, Aroloya. Also at about the same time, the main Breadfruit Church on Lagos Island was enlarged by repatriate Saros and Brazilians, to signal the exponential growth of the church in Lagos and what Peel describes as the efflorescence of “Victorian Lagos.”<sup>68</sup> This blossoming metropolitan culture included the growth in educational facilities, a vibrant newspaper media, intellectual discourses on church doctrines and public discourses on the meaning of civilization, and cultural nationalism leading to the formation of separatist churches. It also witnessed the increasing reliance on educated Africans as agents by the Lagos government in its bid to pacify the warring Yoruba hinterland and spread British influence. In many cases, these African agents canvassed

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<sup>67</sup> G3 A2/05, Meeting of the Abeokuta Native Church held at Ake, July 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1888.

<sup>68</sup> Peel. *Religious Encounter*, 141.

for British intervention in Yorubaland. Educated Egba were active participants in the British outreach to Abeokuta. We have met Mr. Bickersteth whom Glover credits with facilitating his expedition to Abeokuta. The Egba National Club (later renamed the Egba National and Deputation Club) was actively involved in Egba politics. It supported G.W. Johnson in his efforts at centralizing and “modernizing” Egba government. Johnson had himself vacillated between the Alake and the chiefs, siding with whoever held effective power, to enable him continue his experiment. On the other hand, other educated Egbas provided Egba chiefs with valuable information on the Lagos government and advice on the policy which should be pursued.<sup>69</sup> In this regard, mention must be made of the educated Egba who served as clerks and secretaries to the chiefs. One such was W. Tinney Somoye, the Magaji’s nephew and secretary, who effectively managed the negotiations between Carter and the triumvirate. This treaty is the acclaimed masterstroke that assured the independence of Abeokuta.

That the Carter treaty did not incorporate Abeokuta into the direct orbit of British colonial power was not for a lack of effort on the part of the Governor. In contrast to suggestions that Carter pursued the limited objective of securing peace in Yoruba land, Pallinder-Law describes a situation in which the Governor was outplayed by Egba diplomacy. That he needed to go from chief to chief defining and explaining the terms of his treaty before a council affirmed without ratifying it, not only wearied Glover, it limited the range of what would be conceded by the Egba authorities. The Chiefs agreed to open the roads and work towards peace, but they rejected the appointment of a British Resident in Abeokuta. They also rejected Carter’s prepared treaty and had him draw

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<sup>69</sup> “The Recent Deputation to Lagos”, *Lagos Weekly Record*, 24 December, 1892. This deputation of three advised the Alake and the chiefs to concede to Lagos and prevent Ijebu experience.

another in which the territorial integrity of Abeokuta was explicitly declared and Egba lordship over Otta reaffirmed. They also refused to authorize the construction of a railway through Egba territory. The impact of this treaty was that it bought Abeokuta and its political system a few more years for British pressures to bear and internal contradictions to play themselves out. The internal contradictions had become heightened through the 1890s with the rise of the Christians. Christians and missionaries became so powerful that the chiefs were left with no other option than to beg Reverend Wood and other white missionaries to leave Abeokuta. Wood declared that Christians were Egba too and that they had a right to participate in the government of the town. He challenged them to use force to drive them out if they could. The days of the *Ifole* were long past.<sup>70</sup> These local struggles preceded the imposition of colonial rule. While colonial power and influence from nearby Lagos was an engaging factor, the form of Egba politics derived from the contestations among elite groups, claiming, contesting and appropriating new and extant social resources.

The Onlado died in 1894 followed soon afterwards by the Jaguna of Igbehin, leaving the aged Bashorun Ogundeyi without support at this most critical time of British interference.<sup>71</sup> Ogundeyi passed away in 1897, the last of the titans and defenders of a peculiar Egba political system.<sup>72</sup> In the course of these developments, the Alake reached out to Governor McCallum through Egba elites in Lagos for support to elevate the Alake over the successors to chiefly power. McCallum offered British support for the Alake as head of state only in return for concessions, including the grant of land for a railway

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<sup>70</sup> C. M. S. G3/A2/06, Wood to Lang, June 11, 1890.

<sup>71</sup> The Onlado died precisely two weeks before the signing of the railway treaty. British pressures to have the chiefs sign and approve the construction of the railway.

<sup>72</sup> Probably one of the very last few who witnessed the origins Abeokuta and who understood the rationales of a system that served the community well..

through Egbaland and the settlement of a British Resident. In January 1898, the Governor convened a meeting of the sectional Obas (Alake, Agura, Olowu and Oshile) and a few other chiefs, lectured them on “the broad principles of government,” announced that they had been formed into a council, described each person’s portfolio, and photographed them together without their “crowns,”<sup>73</sup> Thus was the Egba central government inaugurated. In the event of any opposition, he assured that “the British government would be obliged to actively interfere.” A contingent of 50 soldiers was made available at the Alake’s call and was soon put to use in the arrest and exile of Aboaba, the new Bashorun. The Alake Osokalu did not live long enough to enjoy his new-found superiority over the Egba chiefs. He died in June of the same year, but by then power and government had (at least structurally) converged in the Alake. For the chiefs, it was no longer enough to just hold the power.

#### 4.5 The Egba United Government and the Making of a Constitutional Monarchy

The EUG is usually reported as a British creation. Gailey describes the government as an amalgam of the British Crown Colony system with Egba practices. Pallinder-Law writes that the Governor’s intervention secured for the Egba an opportunity to fashion and test a system of government which recognized the heterogeneity of the Egba state, giving representation to the four main sub-nationalities, but also to the three religious divisions. William Macgregor, who became Governor of Lagos, justified the Alake’s headship of the government thus: “The Alake’s title is thus an honourable, legitimate, and appropriate

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<sup>73</sup> Much has been made of McCullum’s assault on traditions for making Oba’s who should not see face to face meet. Gailey, 32; Biobaku, 61. The source of this “tradition” is difficult to reach and certainly does not apply to the historical realities of Abeokuta. There is no record to suggest that people (other than a few educated elites) protested or in any other way reacted to such “disrespect”.



distinction.”<sup>74</sup> However, the EUG was much less a Lagos creation than the outcome of struggles over interests and futures. The structure McCallum came up with was not novel, but had in fact been commonly discussed among the Egba since the 1870s. In 1870, G. W. Johnson had written to Glover asking his support for a planned reorganization of Egba government along a federal system of hierarchies of chiefly offices with himself the “Amono” (lit: pathfinder), the executive secretary.<sup>75</sup> Indeed, to the end of the century, the system of governance in Abeokuta had slowly gravitated towards sectional obaships, the culmination of which could not have been achieved in any other form than the McCallum model. That the Oba had become the preferred title reflects the fact that many chiefs began to call themselves obas, and more “princes” adopted the prefix “ade” (crown). In reaction to the increasing privileges and powers of the Alake, other sections coalesced to form (or revamp) their own monarchies. The Owu had chosen Pawu as Olowu in 1855 two years after the creation of the Ake title; the Gbagura and Oke-Ona were to follow in 1870 and 1897 respectively. Therefore, the McCallum model coincided with local thoughts and processes: the most powerful chiefs were dead; sectional struggles had resulted in the creation of sectional Obas and a delineation of territory, tolls and titles. This process had also enlarged the political space to cater for ever-present chiefly interests and thus address Commander Forbes’ concerns for the “most extra-ordinary republic in the world.”<sup>76</sup> The Governor’s brashness was visible for all to see and would have failed had these local processes not coalesced to give it a chance.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> William Macgregor, “Lagos, Abeokuta and the Alake” *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol.3, 2 (1904): 471.

<sup>75</sup> G. W. Johnson to Glover, 1 January, 1872. Cited in Agneta Pallinder-Law, “Government”, 44.

<sup>76</sup> *Christian Missionary Intelligencer*, IV, Oct. (1853) 237.

<sup>77</sup> *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 5, 1899.

The influence of the Lagos-based elite on the form of the government was critical. Indeed, the very ideas McCallum instituted had been debated in the Lagos media by Egba educated elite. It is significant that these elite (a curious amalgam of Saro and Egba) were also part of the cultural florescence ongoing in Lagos which included the ethonogenesis of the Yoruba, cultural inventions and a historiography of legitimization. It is thus understandable how the new Egba government fits precisely into the framework of Yoruba history—with the Oshile, Alake, Olowu, Agura etc. entering their different layers in the Oduduwa legend and refashioned to form a continuity of Yoruba identity, culture and destiny. The EUG was therefore a triumph for the educated elite, their inroad and a stamp of their incorporation into local political systems. Only now could they hope to effectively participate beyond being advisers to chiefs; only in a constitutional monarchy could they pursue their futures. The provision for a secretary of government necessitated the appointment of an educated person. Successive secretaries (Allen, Edun, Titcombe etc.) became the most important figures on account of their executive functions and because they headed a growing bureaucracy. Indeed, the membership of the council progressively enlarged to create space for educated elite.<sup>78</sup>

What the McCallum model introduced into Egba politics was an attempt to render the Alake an executive office, and the council a ministerial government. Pallinder-Law has suggested that this attempt failed because it runs counter to a more honorable semi-divine form of Yoruba monarchy in which the Oba does not sit in the Ogboni.<sup>79</sup> On the contrary, its failure has more to do with the very newness of the system, and its ministerial concept. The idea of centralized budgeting contrasted sharply against the

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<sup>78</sup> *Lagos Weekly Record*, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1898.

<sup>79</sup> Pallinder-Law, "Government," 67.

previous personalized holding and expenditures; public works which were formerly undertaken through conscripted and communized labor now had to be centrally organized. As will be shown below, legal and judicial forms were only being freshly constructed amidst struggles and contestation. The council itself had to establish itself in the public consciousness as legitimate and the Alake had to overcome suspicions that it was a colonial instrument of European domination of the Egba people. The Council was initially comprised of the Alake and other sectional Obas: Agura, Oshille, Olowu, the Seriki, Balogun; Olori Imale (head of Muslims), the Balogun of Christians, Olori Parakoyi (head of trade chiefs) and the Apena of Iporo township. Ministerial responsibilities were shared out to these titles: Oshile (justice), Olowu (finance), Agura (Roads and Works), Olori Parakoyi (Trade and Agriculture; the Seriki (Asst. Justice), and the Apena of Iporo (Government Secretary or spokesman). W. A. Allen, an Egba agent of the Lagos government, was superimposed as secretary of government.

How this government stabilized has been depicted in the literature in terms of the creation of order out of disorder. This view is reflected in Pallinder-Law's assumption that it was the best form of government that could have secured the participation and interest of all the sections and religions of Abeokuta, and Gailey's emphasis on the government being a consensus: "created by McCallum with the acquiescence of the Egba leaders, [it was] a curious amalgam of Egba practices and the British Crown Colony system."<sup>80</sup> That the EUG which developed out of the National Council went on to undertake significant strides in modernization appear to justify that McCallum's intervention was the best deal the Egba could have obtained out of their apparent disarray. However, if there was any significant disorder in Egba government during the

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<sup>80</sup> Gailey, 22-23.

1890s, it only pertained to the inability of the British to achieve their colonial objectives in Abeokuta. Indeed, Abeokuta's politics had stabilized in the triumvirate. That the Alake Osokalu (1891-1898) was a "nonentity"<sup>81</sup> was not an aberration in Egba political convention at this point, just as chiefly rule was not an anathema or a sign of disorder as the British claimed it was. Indeed, the Egba continued to assert their independence by refusing to allow a British resident in Abeokuta and, until 1899 the construction of a railway through Egbaland. At a domestic level therefore, Abeokuta functioned efficiently, even though the pressures from British imperial interest and from educated Egbas in Lagos who bought into British designs for Abeokuta meant that Egba chiefs had to carefully navigate a narrow terrain to secure Egba independence. Therefore, the government of 1898 may have secured British interests in pacifying the region and may have been the best the Egba could expect in the circumstance; it was not the making of order out of disorder.

Invariably, it served well those Egba elites vested in the centralization of Egba government. The Alake took advantage to establish his position as the dominant authority in Abeokuta. The toll points controlled by Balogun Aboaba were seized after his exile; the Olowu who should be the finance Minister complained that he was totally ignorant of EUG expenditure,<sup>82</sup> and the Oshile was soon deposed from Council because he sat in judgment over a capital offender when such a case should have been brought before the council. By the end of the century, the Alake formally held executive, parliamentary and judicial powers. Britain's immediate interest in Abeokuta was the extension of the railway through the Egba country. On the 21<sup>st</sup> of February, 1899, the Alake in council

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<sup>81</sup> Gailey, 29.

<sup>82</sup> P/R.O CO 147/141, 134, Denton to Chamberlain; cited in Pallinder-Law, 69.

granted the necessary lease and accepted a Resident British commissioner. The treaty was verified by W.A. Allen who certified that he had correctly interpreted the document to Egba chiefs. Another educated Egba, Ladapo Ademola, watched the proceedings.<sup>83</sup>

Setting up a government and backing it up with force against opposition could only achieve so much. British power was not targeted at enhancing the Alake's legitimacy. Indeed, imperial purposes were already well-served when a pliable ruler put his stamp on necessary documents. Among the Egba however, British power could not secure for the Alake and the EUG the necessary legitimacy to be so recognized, or to undertake effective administration. Indeed, opposition against the centralization of power in the Alake continued into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The sectional Obas often refused to yield to the Alake, considering themselves his equal. In 1900, the Olowu accused the Alake of usurping all the powers of the Egba government,<sup>84</sup> and had earlier denied any knowledge of government finance. The Oshile Karunwi was suspended from the council in 1898 for similar illegal adjudication, as was his successor in 1901. The structure of the government and its policies and reforms were always contested and often attracted opposition. The gradual legitimization of the Alake was therefore not just in its constitutional powers and British support, but also in more nuanced constructions of power: in the gradual invasion of public space through governmental performance, in the symbols of prestige, honour and rituals constructed for the office. It is much more this stature that set the Alake apart from other obas and other axes of power in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>83</sup> Text of the agreement and transcript of the meetings reported the *Lagos Weekly Record*, 4<sup>th</sup> March, 1899. Ademola, son of Alake Ademola (1869-1877), Lagos trader and intermediary between Lagos and Abeokuta became Gbadebo's chief adviser and succeeded Gbadebo to the Alake title. He participated in drafting the terms of the Anglo-Egba treaties and getting Abeokuta to agree to terms.

<sup>84</sup> *Lagos Weekly Record*, 22 December, 1900.

Gbadebo had not been the obvious candidate for Alakeship; his choice symbolizes the loss of power and influence by the succession of leading chiefs. Fears that the dictatorial tendencies exhibited by Somoye, Ogundipe, Ogundeyi, and other chiefs would be continued, and a need to select someone who would not complicate matters with Lagos, shifted the “king-makers” in favour of a less deeply connected candidate. Gbadebo had been a canoe-man, engaged in the Abeokuta-Lagos transport business, and had formed close relations with the repatriate business community there. He was not educated and may not have been well-known by the Lagos-based elite, for which reason their initial reactions to him were ambivalent. He had to earn their trust and qualify as a “civilized native.” His initial appointment of his friend and secretary, P. P. Martins, a Brazilian repatriate, and C. B. Moore, a well known Lagos-based trader, as secretary of the Council and treasurer respectively point to his limited involvement in the Lagos-Egba circles. It also bespoke an awareness of the need for more openness to the changes increasing engagements with Lagos implied. Invariably, educated elites soon dominated the Egba government. R. B. Blaize, unarguably the richest African in the Lagos colony, became one of his closest advisers. In 1902, the ENA adopted the recommendation of Governor MacGregor and appointed Rev. J. H. Johnson (who later changed his name to Ademoyega Edun) as Secretary to the Council. Johnson conceived of his role and power as the most important functionary of state after the constitutional monarchy headed by the Alake. In his first public statement in this office, he directed that all communications to the Alake as Head of State would have to go through him as Secretary of State. Edun headed the bureaucracy that undertook the massive reform of Abeokuta including the bureaucratization of the government, the building of roads to connect the rural areas to

Abeokuta, public offices, a Court House and inspectorate services over agriculture, trade and tolls.<sup>85</sup> The whole framework of change and the structural stability which the Alake enjoyed allowed him time and space to pay attention to his prestige and political stature, which was the surer means by which legitimacy was secured.

#### 4.6 The Ambience of a King, 1904.

The intensification of the EUG's roles in the everyday life of Egba citizens was a crucial part of the process by which the constitutional monarchy was further implanted. Every developmental project was an opportunity for the Alake to earn political capital by staking claims on his commitment to making the Egba people rich and prosperous.<sup>86</sup> The rituals necessary to achieve royal ambience soon took form in the purchase and use of a state carriage, the building of a new palace,<sup>87</sup> exquisite dresses and ornaments, ceremonies and other courtly procedures. The many opening ceremonies and royal inspections were a regular spectacle and soon overcame other issues in the public discourse. The *Lagos Standard's* rendition of the opening of the "Alake Bridge" over the Ogun River at Sokori graphically shows that the ceremony was taken to be as important as the project.

The Alake and Council were accompanied by a great concourse of people on horseback and on foot, all gaily attired and the horses richly caparisoned, and with innumerable chieftain umbrellas of many hues, the whole presenting a spectacular scene unrivalled in its picturesque. The Alake and council was in full state dress, the Agura leading (the procession) followed by the Olowu, both arrayed in gorgeous native dresses, and splendid head gear while their

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<sup>85</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law, "Aborted Modernization in West Africa: the case of Abeokuta," *Journal of African History* 15. 1 (1974) 65-82.

<sup>86</sup> For instance at the opening of the "Alake bridge" over the Sokori stream, *Lagos Standard*, August 26, 1903; or the distribution of American cotton seeds, *Lagos Weekly Record*, June 3, 1903.

<sup>87</sup> European type two-storey building complete with a tennis court. E. D. Morel, *Nigeria, Its Peoples and Problems* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968) 109.

horses were caparisoned with befitting elegance. The Alake who rode in his state carriage was dressed in rich silk gown figured black and gold with glittering silver braiding throughout and wore a circular cap of curiously worked beads from which was suspended behind a short train of gauze. The other chiefs, members of the council, were similarly attired in gorgeous native dresses, while Hon. J.H. Samuel, Government Secretary, Hon. C. B. Moore, Treasurer and Hon. And Reverend D. O. Williams donned European attire.<sup>88</sup>

This instance among many others shows how the Alake psychologically entrenched dominance. For one, the council's official name changed from "Alake, Oshile, Olowu, Agura and Elders"<sup>89</sup> to "Kings of Abeokuta in Council" to "Alake and the kings of Abeokuta in Council" and then to "Alake and Council."<sup>90</sup> It is noteworthy also that in the ceremonial processions, an order of precedence became established with the other kings making their public appearance before the grand entry of the Alake. The procession was the Alake's train and everyone on it became secondary. By this symbolism, the chiefs became "Alake's chiefs," and the educated staff on the EUG the Alake's aides, just as the projects that were commissioned bore the king's label. Songs were composed in honour of the king and school children and organized groups sang and waved at the Alake at such public appearances.<sup>91</sup>

The making of a royal image in the construction of power and legitimacy had many more symbolic values than securing dominance for the Alake. First it etched the monarchy in the public psyche as the embodiment of a national aspiration to wealth and progress. This idea that the wealth and aspirations of a nation must first reflect in its king was a novel introduction into Egba life and society, much as it might resemble older

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<sup>88</sup> *Lagos Standard*, June 18, 1904.

<sup>89</sup> See Council statement at the death of G. W. Johnson, *Lagos Weekly Record*, September 16, 1899.

<sup>90</sup> *Lagos Standard*, January 20, 1904.

<sup>91</sup> All school children formed a convoy to welcome the Alake from Britain. *Lagos Weekly Record*, August 6, 1904; The Secretary to the Government was called "Asoju Oba" (lit. the Oba's assistant). See Yoruba translations of the *Egba Gazette*.



practices in which chiefs had to display higher visibility than their following. Prior to this period, power was not necessarily measured in material wealth and ambiance alone. With centralization came the narrowing of national space and discourse, a central palace, a central bureaucracy, a central church and mosque etc.<sup>92</sup> To the educated elite, the Alake became a symbol of racial pride in the wealth and prestige of an indigenous African state, for them a response to colonial racism. It also represented a stamp of their own identity as new Africans, in response to thoughts that African culture and western modernity were incongruous. Pride in the Alake fitted well into the ongoing cultural “revival” in Victorian Lagos, in which educated elites redefined African culture, names, religion and Christianity on their own (if new) terms, fitting indigenous histories and culture in a developmental mode. Abeokuta soon became an extension of the fluorescence of “happy Lagos.” Symptomatic of the “opening-up” of Abeokuta, the convention of the Wesleyan mission was held in 1902 in which delegates from all over West Africa sojourned in Abeokuta for a three-day conference. Horse racing championships dubbed “Native Races” were first held in December 1903 and afterwards became regular.<sup>93</sup> The Abeokuta National Association began holding its ball, dances, concerts and public lectures here also. Various associations were formed and virtually all made the Alake their patron or honorary president. For the elite, the Alake as a modern African king and the developmental strides of the Egba state were not incongruities of modernity and Africanness, they were expressions of African capacity. A few were not glad that they had to celebrate an uneducated “aboriginal native,” the Alake soon qualified as a “civilized native.”

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<sup>92</sup> *Lagos Standard*, March 17, 1904.

<sup>93</sup> The Alake gave a grant of land to the Races and Sports Association. *Lagos Standard*, January 20, 1904.

The Alake's visit to London in 1904 has been variously interpreted by scholars. While Gailey describes the attitudes and actions of Gbadebo as reflective of the great changes wrought by Christianity and British influence on Egbaland, Ayandele describes the visit as the epitome of the destruction of a successful traditional state by Christianity and Westernization, the height of British informal power and the prelude to colonial conquest. For Ayandele, this process of degeneration was "internally" generated, not by British power but in the subversive activities of Christians, the educated, and a comprador Alake. Underlying these submissions is the assumption that the Alake was an ever-present and legitimate head of the Egba state, a monarchy which was transformed (Gailey, Pallinder-Law) or degraded (Ayandele). In this frame, scholars and commentators speak of traditions such as "kings must not see one another", or "the king must not cross the sea" as part of the conventions of a pre-existing order. In reality, the Alakeship was a 19<sup>th</sup> century creation; it had no fixed, firm or pre-existent ritual or order. Its title, powers and rituals were developed only in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and as part of an intense struggle for power and a contestation of forms and identity not just among Egba in Abeokuta but also a nascent Egba intelligentsia resident in Lagos and Abeokuta. Indeed, it had not taken any definite shape in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Alake's trip makes better sense in terms of its necessity to consolidate the Alake's power by prestige: that ingredient of power that was recognized as being more effective than abject force and formalized structure. The rationale of prestige partly explains why the trip was announced more than three months in advance of its date, and the steps taken to achieve maximum political effects from the trip.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Lagos Standard, March 16, 1904. One contributor described the media coverage as undue publicity. *Lagos Standard*, July 4, 1904.

Between the British and Lagos press we get a near-complete picture of the trip, from the Alake's departure from Abeokuta, his cabin and food on the *Nigeria*, to his "stop-over" in Sierra Leone and his interests and experiences in London.<sup>95</sup> The British rendition partly confirms Elazar Barkan's thesis that colonial rule was not a racial hierarchy.<sup>96</sup> Save for one incident when university students in Aberdeen attacked the Alake's carriage, tore his robe and removed his headwear,<sup>97</sup> the Alake appears to have been treated with the utmost respect. Accounts glossed over his diplomatic errors and the confusions that his royal attire and procession carpets caused in a few places.<sup>98</sup> For the Lagos-based elite, the scorecard would be on the king's impact, etiquette and credentials as a civilized native. That he prostrated flat before King Edward, found his extravagant robes uncomfortable in the London weather, would not give an adequate tip to carriers, was encumbered by the royal carpet that had to be rolled for him as he entered Madame Tussauds, failed to have Surrey-bred horses respond to his "Goo woo," and brandished the 1898 Anglo-Egba treaty and the newly published Egba United Government Gazette to declare to anyone who would listen that he is the King of a civilized and sovereign African state, all made news and commentaries in the Lagos press. On the whole, the trip was deemed a success and on return, the Alake had become a qualified "civilized native."<sup>99</sup>

It is difficult to measure the impacts that the trip to London and the larger context of modernization projects had on Egba politics at this time. The carnivals at every launch

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<sup>95</sup> *The Times* (London) Wednesday June 15, 19, 24, 1904; Lagos Standard, June 8, 15, 24;

<sup>96</sup> Elazar Barkan, "Post-anti-colonial histories: Representing the other in imperial Britain," *Journal of British Studies*, 33, 2 (1994.): 180-203.

<sup>97</sup> *Daily News*, (UK) July 9, 1904. The senate of the university fined the students.

<sup>98</sup> For more on the Alake's activities in Britain see Jeffrey Green, *Black Edwardians: Black People in Britain 1901-1914* (London: Frank Cass, 1998) 25-26.

<sup>99</sup> Statements of welcome to the Alake by the "Natives of Lagos and representatives of every section of the community" *Lagos Weekly Record*, July 23, 1904.

certainly were interesting to watch going by the large number of people who witnessed such occasions. For instance, the Alake returned to a grand reception in Abeokuta, in the prelude to which the city was decorated with palm fronds and emblazoned scripts: “King Gbadebo, All Abeokuta give you a loyal and hearty welcome.” A procession of chiefs sang “native odes or song to which everyone joined.” Drummers beat symbolic numbers to affirm his dominance:

<i>Iwo l’agba</i>	(you are the senior)
<i>Ediye funfun l’agba edie</i>	(the white cock is head over other chickens)
<i>Iwo l’a fi se</i>	(it is you we make head)
<i>B’enikan se langbalangba</i>	(even if some others pretend) <sup>100</sup>

Such renditions, rich in meaning, would not have been lost on the audience and not the least on the chiefs and sectional Obas. Beyond the lexical meanings of the renditions are nuanced expressions and practices carried over from the era of chiefly struggles. Christopher Waterman’s analysis of Yoruba drum types explains the innovative peculiarity of the hourglass-shaped pressure drum in its being the more “talkative” instrument capable of clearly and subtly reproducing Yoruba language and tonation. The beats of the talking drum have also been identified as significant to political manipulations and intrigues in Yorubaland since the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>101</sup> Their capacity to emit multiple meanings, proverbs and parables serve to protect the players despite the intended subject being well-informed. Karin Barber captures the same sense of enunciation in the complicated meanings of another poetic mode, the *Oriki*, which can depict praise and disdain at the same time but in such ways that the hearers appreciate its

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<sup>100</sup> The reception began with the singing of a composed “national anthem”, the inspection of a guard of honour mounted by the Lagos Police force; staff of the EUG adorned in uniform marched along the cavalcade of horses and the Roman Catholic band played all the way. *Lagos Weekly Record*, August 6, 1904.

<sup>101</sup> Christopher Waterman, *Juju: A Social History and Ethnomusicology*, (Chicago: 1990), 82.

true meanings and intent.<sup>102</sup> Other linguistic forms like *owe* and *aroko* are equally contingent on texts and contexts that are richer and more complex than basic speech.<sup>103</sup> In this case, given the context of on-going rivalry among the obas, the drummers would be interpreted to mean more than just praise singing the Alake.

Yet, it is not certain that these were enough to put to rest questions relating to the status of the Alake or that these developments enhanced greater nationality. The Alake himself was conscious of the realities of his power in spite of the regional and international recognition he now enjoyed. In an interview with the London *Morning Post*, the Alake was asked if he would consent to the removal of tolls for British traders in Abeokuta. He replied:

No...I am not as big as that. I can only act with the consent of my Council. And already my position has been made difficult by what I have induced the Council to do. The fathers of my people do not like it. They say I love change too much. I must pay attention to what the old men say. There will be trouble if you ask for more.<sup>104</sup>

In the same interview, he underscored his weakness when he stated his position on the toll crisis (see below). While he was not personally against the proposed arrangement, it would be construed by his people that he had sold their independence. He could not also grant substantial land holdings to British farmers for cotton plantations because “the land is sacred.”

This is significant because it reveals that for all his reliance on British power, the Alake actually crafted a space of independence for himself. The British did not create a compradoral chief that could be pushed towards the achievement of British interests.

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<sup>102</sup> Karin Barber, *Oriki*, 28.

<sup>103</sup> Oyekan Owomoyela, “A fractioned word in a muted mouth: the pointed subtlety of Yoruba proverbs,” paper presented at the twenty-second annual meeting of the African studies association, Los Angeles, California, October 31-November 3, 1979.

<sup>104</sup> *The Lagos Standard*, July 20, 1904.

Rather than conceiving of the Alake as a British creation, a better case would be to see how the monarchy and invested elites used British power, among other resources, to augment their power. In so doing they secured greater legitimacy, got more riches that they otherwise could have and moved Abeokuta towards the direction best suited to their interests.

Reading the development of the monarchy in this way makes space for the reaction of other Egbas as they challenged the Alake and other centralist forces. Furthermore, it makes it possible to conceive of the Alake beyond close relations to the British. Indeed, the Alake's journey had been in the midst of significant developments which underscore the narrow margins of the Alake's power between British government and the Egba. The toll crisis of 1903 proceeded from the lobby of the Lagos, Liverpool and Manchester Chambers of Commerce to have the tolls collected by the Egba government removed. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of June, Governor McGregor offered the Egba Council two options: to accept subsidies from the Lagos government in lieu of the tolls or to give some other concessions which impinged on their financial autonomy.<sup>105</sup> Sensing that the Alake was incapable of defending Egba interests in the matter, the Parakoyi organized a meeting attended by over 40,000 Egba to protest the proposed abolition of tolls. They resolved to bypass British traders stationed at Ibara and take their goods direct to Lagos. The *Standard* reported that speech after speech lamented that the bane of the Egba nation was the lack of unity which has made the British treat them like servants. Lagos demanded that the Alake take action as the merchants' resolution constituted a breach of the 1893 treaty stipulations.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Parrider-Law, *Government*, 100.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 102; *The Lagos Standard*, July 8, 1903. The tolls were reinstated.

The announcement of the Alake's travel just as this was being resolved and in the midst of other political discontent attracted local concerns. There were those who played the "tradition" card to claim that "Egba (Yoruba) culture" forbade that kings should travel outside their domain or that any Yoruba oba should cross the river. Some ancient figure was supposed to have laid down that injunction and attached commensurate punishment in ill-luck. One commentator was convinced that the "outstanding news will upset the foundations upon which Egba government rests. Is there none amongst the Egba councilors [sic] with sense enough to see the danger ahead? Who ever heard of a King moving to a foreign country with his cabinet? If the Egba Councilors as a whole are blind (to the looming danger) are there not children of Egba in Lagos with sufficient interests in Abeokuta to enable them to dissuade the Alake from this step?"<sup>107</sup> That reactions such as this found itself into the excited Lagos press underscores significant concern with the changing basis of the Egba political constitution.

Challenges to the authority of the Alake continued in various forms. In October of 1903, the Alake employed the Lagos police to quell an insurrection in Kemta township. The rest of the decade involved putting down no less cogent insurrections and challenges to the Alake's authority. From 1907, the Council became more and more concerned with disloyal and "seditious" meetings by sectional chiefs. There was a suggestion that Iporo and Kemta proposed to form their own government.<sup>108</sup> One such seditious camp met at *Ita Sodeke* (Sodeke's yard) and another was led by a Muslim chief whose Inhabitants Protection Association was deemed seditious. To contend with such "political disturbers" the government passed an order-in-Council to empower Egba courts to take action that

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<sup>107</sup> *The Lagos Standard*, June 4, 1904.

<sup>108</sup> *Lagos Weekly Record*, January 26, 1907.

would put a stop to political agitations against the government.<sup>109</sup> The state of tension continued with the Ariwo incident in which Edun, who since the trip to London was often referred to as the Prime Minister, sent the police to arrest an old man, Odugbemi Ariwo of Ikija, for seditious offences. Ariwo died while being arrested and the Lagos police were called in to quell the ensuing demonstrations. The very circumstances of the Ariwo incidence were replayed in the Ijemo crisis of 1914 when Chief Sobiyi Ponle died in EUG custody. In this instance, the Lagos police shot 20 protesters dead.

Increasing reliance on Lagos to retain his status saw the Alake making more concessions. In 1904 he signed the Mixed Court Agreement which subjected the Egba judicial system to the final adjudication of the Supreme Court in Lagos. On his return, he conceded to the cancellation of tolls and in 1909, the Alake surrendered to King Edward and his successors “power and jurisdiction over all persons whatsoever for the suppression and punishment of sedition against the Alake and Council or the Government established by law in Egbaland.”<sup>110</sup> Following the Ijemo crisis the Alake conceded Egba independence in a new treaty (September, 1914) abrogating previous treaties and placing the Alake and Council under Frederick Lugard’s Native Administration system.

#### 4.7 Modernity and Hermeneutics of Power in Abeokuta

The rhetoric of modernity has dominated the discourses of power in Abeokuta and consequently the scholarly interpretation of its history. The leading chiefs and the “old” system with them are assumed to have lost out to make way for change from an archaic system. In the same vein, Oba Gbadebo staked his authority on change, defining the

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<sup>109</sup> Pallinder-Law, *Government*, 128-129.

<sup>110</sup> Enclosure No. 3, C.O. 583/30. Lugard to Secretary of State, Colonies (secret), January 4, 1915, Cited in Gailey, 35-36.



chiefly opposition against him as intransigent elders. Modernity thus appears to have become the marker of elite identity with elites identified as either civilized, modern and forward looking or traditional and unwilling to change. The educated elites in Abeokuta and Lagos (and as Egba populations spread, in Nigeria and the Atlantic world) became the chief harbingers of these claims. It is necessary to step back from these claims and appraise the historical realities to determine whether modernity was the engine of this history, or struggles for power and control.

The irony of Oba Gbadebo's claim to being modern was not lost on the Egba during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. That he was not western-educated initially made the educated elites reticent to endorse him. Although he attended church regularly, the Egba church noted that he was never baptized and had never publicly renounced paganism. More significantly, it was not lost on observers that the paraphernalia which he donned, and rituals like the spread of a rug on his pathway and the assembly of courtiers before him which he defined as traditional to the title were actually new recent innovations. The *Liverpool Echo* carried a report, "Who is Alake[?]," which challenged the media attention showered on the Alake as royalty considering that (in the opinion of this report) his immediate predecessors had no palace but lived in mud houses with thatched roofs; never wore crowns and royal regalia but loin cloths.<sup>111</sup> Indeed, the adoption of a crown had to be recent if the description of courts by Campbell, Burton and Glover are anything to go by. Within Abeokuta, sectional Obas accused him of pride, aloofness and dictatorial tendencies. While his era witnessed many strides in public projects, these were not all sudden or revolutionary. Large stone structures and European type buildings were commonplace and the construction of public roads was not new either. Rich chiefs and

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<sup>111</sup> A rejoinder responded to these claims. *The Liverpool Echo* (Britain), July 12, 1904.

merchants built houses with “shiny roofs.” Moreover, proximity to Lagos would always make Abeokuta second-best in terms of modern infrastructure. The experimentation with a centralized government, a council and a bureaucracy had started with the EUBM in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. To claim that the Alake monarchy as an institution represented modernity against unbendable traditions was hardly tenable in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The rhetoric of modernity is more understandable as a strategy of power, and, in the Egba case, of incorporation and exclusion. Peace and free trade were commonly used justifications for the British imperial wars over the two decades until 1905 and the colonial system of taxes, duties and tariffs afterwards, an irony considering that British practices themselves obstructed peace and free trade.<sup>112</sup> In the internal struggles for power among Egba elites, missionaries, British traders and agents, and the educated elite became resources which elite groups struggled to control and appropriate. Sodeke and the Ake elite had used missionaries to establish themselves as the “owners of the land” who in their hospitality distributed it to every other group. Somoye had found the *Saro* useful to counter the Ake claims to eminence and to establish his dominance. Other chiefs had established rapport with the Roman Catholic mission and had reached out to France. In each of these cases, the rhetoric of change and modernity had been advanced as justification. To claim that the chiefs were not interested in change is therefore not historically accurate. The Alake Gbadebo used British power and educated elites in similar ways to secure and consolidate power in Abeokuta. Britain, France, missionaries and the educated elites were not available just to be used; they also aspired to create conditions of power conducive to their interests. Thus Abeokuta was a setting of a

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<sup>112</sup> Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperialism and Human Rights; Colonial Discourses of Rights and Liberties in African History*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2007) 58.

complex interplay of interests which produced only momentary victors in a process of exclusion, displacement and incorporation.

What was achieved by the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a centralization of the formal structures of power. The monarchy as the national form of rule became established with the Alake claiming eminence but with ever-present challenges to his power. A clearer sense of Egba nationality also began to take shape; growth in population and territorial mergers drastically reduced the many townships to four sections, which are not clearly demarcated from one another. More people could refer to themselves as Egba during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in ways that the conception would not have been understood in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Following the demise of independence in 1914, the Egba United Government (EUG) changed to the Egba Native Administration (ENA) but largely remained unchanged in its operations. The ENA and the Egba (or Alake's) Council thus became the centre from which power was projected and contested. A significant part of the history of the EUG and ENA was the almost continuous expansion of the Council. The centralization of power made the Council the venue for Egba discourses. It is with these discourses of identity, modernity and power that the following chapters are concerned.

## CHAPTER 5

### “BUILDERS AND DESTROYERS:” IDENTITY AND MODERNITY IN EGBA POLITICAL DISCOURSES 1918-1940

“Oba o serufu degan, oba o segan-derufu.”<sup>1</sup>

(One king turns the city to a waste land; another turns the waste land to a city).

#### 5.1 Introduction

If the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was a period of excitement in the ceremonies and modernizations of the Egba government, the 1920s was marked by introspection, concern and struggle about what these transformations implied and over the identity and future of the Egba. Developments in infrastructure, the consolidation of the monarchy and the existence of Lagos-type fluorescence in elite culture could not obscure the contradictions that attended these innovations. Rear-guard activities by displaced chiefs, latent and open rebellion against the monarchy and government, a breakdown in the solidarity among educated elites, and the activities of a generally indomitable population creating spaces of expression alongside and often in spite of ruling elites created in Abeokuta conditions which some observers compared poorly to the “the good old days”<sup>2</sup> of the preceding decade.

To my knowledge, no historian has explored Abeokuta’s political history in the decades between 1920 and 1950.<sup>3</sup> Most studies have ended their concerns at the demise of Egba independence in 1914 and related events. This is understandable given how

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<sup>1</sup> CSO 26/2 14605, “Misconduct of the Osile”, *Minutes of an extraordinary meeting of Council*, February 18, 1925.

<sup>2</sup> “Is Abeokuta Leaderless?” *Nigerian Pioneer*, January 23, 1920.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Byfield’s study of the dynamic ways in which Egba women engaged the colonial political economy discusses some of the major issues in Egba history of this period. See Byfield, *The Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* (London: Heinemann, 2002); also Byfield, “Innovation and Conflict: Cloth Dyers and the Interwar Depression in Abeokuta, Nigeria” *Journal of African History*, 38 (1997): 77-99; Johnson-Odim and Mba’s biography of Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, *For Women and the Nation* focuses on the organization of the 1948 women’s demonstration leading to the abdication of the Alake.

difficult it can be to ascribe any independent action to the Egba after 1914 when Abeokuta became one of the Western Provinces of Nigeria. Indeed, the notable events of the period are narrated as Egba reactions to colonial tax policies, modernization and the Indirect Rule system.<sup>4</sup> One implication of this limited view of Egba history is that the era of “sovereignty”-- that period until 1914 -- has become etched as the landmark and defining moment of Egba identity and history. Abeokuta is most remembered for its efforts at indigenous modernization “outside” of direct colonial control. In this way, the transition model of teleological progress from an African traditional past to a modern future has been etched as the engine of Egba history. By this model, the central theme of Egba history is how a British-inspired educated elite remade the Alake in the image of the British monarchy and attempted to make Abeokuta a (Western) modern city. However, developments in Abeokuta after the British annexation challenge these assumptions. Local processes of elite formation and contestation for power continued both in the form of pre-colonial politics and as they responded to colonial imposition. These developments speak to the central objectives of this thesis: that colonial rule or European type modernity was not the story, but part of it; that the Egba conceived of their nation in the interplay of struggles among elite groups, applying and deploying various resources of which colonial power was only one, albeit an important one. These elite groups were not located on either side of tradition or modernity but deployed and engaged in ambiguous discourses. With such a premise, it is possible to conceive of a history of power in Abeokuta not as a unilateral sequence of changes consequent upon European colonization, but as one in which Egba elites engaged social and economic

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<sup>4</sup> John Ausman, “The Disturbances in Abeokuta in 1918” *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 5, 1 (1971): 45-60; Agneta Pallinder-Law, “Aborted Modernization in West Africa? The case of Abeokuta” *Journal of African History* 15, 1 (1974): 65-82.

transformations to use available and crafted resources, pushing forward the 19<sup>th</sup> century process of defining Egba identity and the nature of its power.

Two conflicts exemplify that local discourses continued and were not unilaterally colonial. The Adubi “war” of 1918 has been studied as a resistance to colonial taxation and as a traditional resistance to modern forms. Such a reading narrows what was a complicated interplay of interests to the colonial framework. In other words, it tells a European story of an African experience. The other story has not yet found a place in the historiography. The tendency has been to subsume the series of succession disputes and the construction and manipulation of historical imagination and contemporary reality towards elite objectives, under the operations of the native authority system.<sup>5</sup> While this colonial structure was a political reality, elite struggles went beyond it to the creation of conditions conducive to their various interests. In Abeokuta, native authority implied the increasing centralization of previously fluid political expressions. Elites engaged one another in shaping its form and operation.

Determining the nature of centralization in relation to pre-existing diversity was just one form of this struggle. Considering that the Alake and central government became identified with colonial power, it appears that all political interests and activities subsequently dovetailed into support for or antagonism of the central Egba government.

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<sup>5</sup> It is in this sense that Roger Gocking narrates how “newcomers” constructed traditions to compete for office. Similarly, Sara Berry shows how such competitions for chiefly office resulted in multiple and overlapping claims over land, a debate that is still ongoing. While these studies and John Parker’s highlight African dialogue in the making of colonial power, I find that the “African dialogues” highlighted are those that relate to European modernization. It appears inconceivable that Africans could dialogue among themselves over issues that are local and are only mildly colonial. Roger Gocking, “Indirect Rule in the Gold Coast: Competition for Office and the Invention of Tradition” *Journal of African Studies* 28, 4 (1994): 421-446; John Parker, *Making the Town: Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000); Sara Berry, *Chiefs Know their Boundaries: Essays on Property, Power and the Past in Asante, 1896-1996* (Oxford: James Currey, 2001).

This makes it difficult to enounce intra-Egba discourses without it appearing as the impact or manifestation of colonial power and influence. In my view, the capacity of colonial power to be modern and different and at the same time be part of local traditions affirms its ideological and intellectual rigour. The way to overcome it is to see it for what it was (and not what it claimed to be): an ideology of power among other competing ones; a resource whose definition and use was not restricted to those claiming to own it.

Rather than think of the monarchy as a colonial agent serving colonial interests, we can conceive of it appropriating colonial power in its engagement with local antagonisms. We saw in the last chapter the interplay of interests which saw the Alake submitting to British control and yet trying to define the limits of this control, while expanding its capacity to dominate and control local antagonistic forces. The contestation by local elites was therefore not necessarily against colonial power but against the Alake's attempts to change the terms of Egba identity and power to that which suited him and a small but growing set of new elites vested in a centralized monarchy. Elite contestations were also over colonial power, which they recognized as the resource behind Alake's transformative agenda. The Alake's agenda affected the local relations of power and the terms of elite influence in more ways than the colonial power was interested in transforming local politics and cultures. In other words, while the colonial government was interested in retaining what it assumed to be local traditions as is, new elites pushed the colonial government towards rubberstamping and securing their programme of change, namely the creation of social conditions conducive to them. In short, the discourse of change to modernity was not necessarily colonial or western, it was local.

Besides, substantial power and power relations transcended the monarchy. A more comprehensive narrative of Egba power has to factor in the macro-social transformation of its meaning and what social and economic changes meant to elites. Transformations in the forms of wealth and social relations redefined social aspiration and the motives for which elites aspired to and contested for power. It also informed the nature of elite identity and association, such as to challenge the notion of a dichotomous difference between modern and traditional elites. Colonial power was certainly a factor in this, to the extent that it was a resource, a means to achieve the motives and ends of power. However, it must be properly contextualised. Social changes were not necessarily colonial because Abeokuta was already transforming before colonial conquest. Nor was social change necessarily modern simply because it was change; nor were social changes targeted towards Western forms or movement from a traditional order. Rather social change derived from a multiplicity of engagements with old resources and new ideas and as society reacted to transformative events and ideas. This chapter reads elite struggles for power in Abeokuta in the multiple transformations informed by colonial conquest and political centralization, the shifting meanings of Egba identity, the social and economic changes in the meanings and forms of wealth and influence, and the open and rear-guard activities of elites to acquire or hold on to the means of wealth and influence. The issues better explain the Adubi “war” and the conflicts of precedence in the Egba Central Council.



## 5.2. Connections between colonial and local power

Owing to the length of the close interaction between Abeokuta and the British which had informed changes in Egba politics and society, the annexation of Abeokuta in 1914 did not produce very drastic changes. The Alake was retained and further empowered as the “Chief of Abeokuta.”<sup>6</sup> To most Egba, the British take-over did not constitute any immediate transformation in their day-to-day existence or in their perception of the form of Egba government. Indeed, up to his demise in 1920, Alake Gbadebo explained the difficulties in implementing colonial policies by suggesting that Egbas still acted as though they were independent.<sup>7</sup> Besides, the colonial government was unclear in its public definition of what colonial rule meant in the Egba case. The Lugard annexation in 1914 was explained as necessary to strengthen the monarchy (and by implication Abeokuta). Lugard himself assured the Egba Council as follows:

Your court remains the same ....Your police remains the same ....Your Order in Council are to be used in your courts .... you will find no difference excepting that the Alake’s hand has been strengthened.<sup>8</sup>

In 1920 Lugard’s successor as Governor, Hugh Clifford, assured Egba rulers of limited colonial interference and in 1939, the government granted “internal self government” to Abeokuta.<sup>9</sup> In any case, the British Indirect Rule system was predicated on as little interference as necessary in the local running of provinces and districts. Therefore, political discourse in Abeokuta continued to be focused on the local meanings of power.

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<sup>6</sup> Gailey, 74 suggests that the Alake became more powerful following the annexation because the executive functions of the Secretary of the EUB were now merged with the Egba Native Authority (ENA) of which the Alake became sole head (SNA).

<sup>7</sup> *Lagos Standard*, July 24, 1918.

<sup>8</sup> Cmd 4681, "Report by Sir Frederick Lugard on the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria and Administration, 1912-1919" (1919); *Minutes of Council*, Egba United Government, September 21, 1914. In reality, Abeokuta was quickly subjected to the administration of the Southern Provinces and the Native Court Ordinance.

<sup>9</sup> *Nigerian Pioneer* (Lagos), April, 23, 1920; Letter: Ladipo Solanke to Rev. J. O. Ransome Kuti, Nov. 29, 1939, *Egba Affairs Letter Book*, LSP 46.

A normative transition model of colonial impact would read as follows: The chiefs were most affected by colonial rule. The exiling of Chief Aboaba in 1898 had signalled that the era of powerful chiefs was over. Their loss of control over the tolls deprived them of the most essential means and ends of power. Egba political structure became formalized in the appearance of a federation of four sections. Henceforth political struggles would appear largely as contests between the sections and their obas. Furthermore, the show of power by the colonial army at Ijemo in 1914, where thirty-two people were killed, made it clear that violent resistance against the British or the Alake was foolhardy. The end of the military option effectively signalled the irrelevance of *Ologun* chieftaincies in practical terms. The formalization and centralization of power in the Alake and the limited composition of the Egba Council made many chiefs politically redundant and compliant. The increasing involvement of educated Egbas and their loud claim of representing Abeokuta further subordinated the chiefs in matters of public definition of Egba identity and interests. Most of the old chiefs, deprived of power, would quietly live out their old age bitter but powerless. A few of them would be organized into the Council of Ogboni, a weak advisory body which existed on the goodwill and patronage of the Alake as an instrument of his legitimization. Similarly, ordinary Egbas were overawed by colonial power and enamoured by the display of opulence and ambience by the Alake and they bought into the notion that Abeokuta was wealthy, world renowned and modern even if they did not see any improvements in their lives as yet.

However, the historical reality does not fit this pattern. Colonial conquest and rule must be seen as a process rather than an incident. Far from a drastic transition in which Egba chiefs learned to live powerless and poor, chiefs continued to struggle for power

and influence. A key strategy was to empower sectional obas to constitute an opposition to the Alake. Rather than wither away in the face of colonial power, chiefs stuck to their control over the people and entrenched themselves as the backers of the sectional obas to contest the Alake's dominance. Clandestine meetings and public gossip were very effective means of ostracising the Alake from the general population. Alake Ademola (1920-1948) would be the more affected by scandals deriving partly from rumours and public gossip.<sup>10</sup> There was also a revival of township public meetings convened by chiefs. These meetings were used to mobilize for the Adubi "war" of 1918. Other steps the Alake took to secure legitimacy included integrating the chiefs into a centralized framework. This was the rationale for the creation of an All-Egba Ogboni Council and for the continuous expansion of the Egba Central Council.<sup>11</sup> However, the All Egba Ogboni Council which had been created in 1907 lacked any effective power and met only when invited for consultation by the Alake and council.<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, 5% of collected tax was allowed *Bales* and village heads as a reward for facilitating collection of taxes and tributes.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, the central Ogboni Council attracted and had space for only a few chiefs. Most chiefs moved into the background, but their influence in

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance "Atupa Palour," *Osumare Egba* (Abeokuta) May 16, 1936; "The Missing Girl of Ibadan", *Daily Times* (Lagos), May 12, 1935; For Alake's responses to these scandals see Abeprof. 162/323 *Minutes of the Egba Native Council*, May 25, 1939. For further accusations on financial impropriety see, Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation*, 81-84.

<sup>11</sup> The All-Egba Ogboni Council was to meet every 33 days to "inform the Alake and the Egba Council about the affairs in their townships." *Lagos Weekly Record*, Jan. 26, 1907.

<sup>12</sup> There are not many mentions of the meetings of the All-Egba Ogboni Council in the Council minutes. Minutes of Meeting, EUG Council, September 26, October 10, 1908; Egba Native Council (on the appointment of the President of the Ake Grade "A" Court October 11, 1923); (over the appointment of Adelani Gbogboade as the Olowu), *Minutes of private interviews had with the Owu chiefs and their candidate for the Olowu Chieftaincy, Mr. Adelani Gbogboade, at the Afin, Ake*, Thursday, the 9<sup>th</sup> of December, 1937. Sometimes groups of chiefs organized deputations of their own to the Alake and the Egba Council, ECR, *Minutes of Council Meeting*, August 28, 1922.

<sup>13</sup> CSO 26/3 24873, Letter: Resident, Abeokuta to Secretary, Southern Provinces, "Assessment Report on Owode District," July 12, 1929.

bolstering sectional identity and interests remained visible in the intransigence of the sectional obas against the domination of the Alake and in other forms.

For the chiefs, the struggles against the Alake achieved much more than limiting the monarch's legitimacy and authority. They provided the veil to satisfy colonial requirements underneath which more subterranean processes of power, accumulation and control continued. In what would count as "empire by other means," the chiefs continued to exercise and indeed extend control over the outer districts along old Egba forms. The process appears to be that powerful chiefs and capable individuals would stake claims over a territory by starting a farm there or by affirming some precedent connection with it. Such persons would then permit other farmers (sometimes former slaves or migrant farmers) to settle on the territory for a fee or service, and appoint a *Bale* from among the settlers if he (the chief) wished to remain resident in Abeokuta. In describing the role cocoa expansion played in the "founding" of villages between 1880 and 1925, Akin Mabogunje points to a dynamic in which individuals "legalized" their farm holdings by chiefly authority. As the value of land increased consequent upon the cultivation and export of cash crops like kola, cotton and cocoa, individuals secured chiefly title deeds over land. Thus control over large expanses replaced tolls as means of wealth and influence for displaced Egba chiefs.<sup>14</sup>

It was partly as a consequence of the conduct of chiefs that Abeokuta was able to retain control over much of its old empire and may have expanded its territory underneath the colonial gaze. By being effectively "on the ground" in such places such as Otta, Ilaro,

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<sup>14</sup> A Mabogunje, "Some Comments on Land tenure in Egba Division," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 31, 3 (1961): 258-269. A study of land cases supports such a supposition. See for instance Abeprof 1/052 ABP 816 *Native Court of Appeal, Egba Division, Ake Grade "A" Civil Suit no. 1125 of 1917 and 29/1919, Ajayi vs. Rolu.*

Isheri and Iju, chiefs retained influence over these non-Egba areas and created the conditions by which the colonial government formally recognized Egba authority over them. It was not as though Egba chiefs were newly conscious of retaining an empire. I have argued in the previous chapter that the Egba empire was actually an agglomeration of imperial holdings of individual chiefs rather than a centrally controlled one. However as chiefs struggled to retain control over their holdings and in the pursuit of such personal interests, they pushed the Alake towards securing British recognition for these territories as part of the Egba kingdom. Their interests merged with the Alake's claim to be head over a vast kingdom. In a deep sense therefore, the idea of an Egba kingdom with an affixed territory became more real during colonial rule than in the period before. Thus in 1913, the Lagos government recognized Egba "ownership" of Isheri and Iju and proceeded to negotiate with Abeokuta for land to build the public waterworks at Iju.<sup>15</sup> Iju was at best (if at all) an insignificant margin of the Egba kingdom during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is also significant that persons with Saro heritage moved to these margins, acquired significant landholdings (probably by purchase)<sup>16</sup> and declared themselves chiefs over these territories. They often started with claiming Christian titles as did J. K. Coker over Owode land.<sup>17</sup> The likes of Coker used such holdings to affirm their Egbaness and demand to sit on the Egba Council.<sup>18</sup> In similar ways an "Owu expansion" occurred

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<sup>15</sup> An Egba toll point had been located on the Iju River during the 19th century toll conflict with Glover's Lagos over Ota. NAI, CSO. 886, "EUG, 1895-1914: Records of", Map Plan No. ED/S7/1535. "Gbalefa: Egba Portion of Otta District; also CO 583/225/2. Petition: "Removal of Isheri from the jurisdiction of the Alake of Abeokuta" 1938-39.

<sup>16</sup> CSO 26/3/24873, Assessment Report on the Owode District, July 12, 1929 reports on how the rich in Owode received land on pawnship and in default of loans interests charged at between 30-60%.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, Coker owned a 2000 acre farm and employed more than 200 labourers. Babatunde Agiri, Kola in western Nigeria, 1850-1950: a history of the cultivation of cola nitida in Egba-Owode, Ijebu-Remo, Iwo and Olota areas. PhD Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1977.

<sup>18</sup> Sometimes through the Parakoyi Society which claimed to be the only official trading opinion and wanted a seat of the council for its leader, the *Olori* Parakoyi. See "Trade regulations passed by the

which saw Owu chiefs stake claims over villages and settlements like Wasimi, Ibogun, Ifo and Otta in the southeast. Egba retention of influence over Imala, Iberekodo, Imeko on the western front owe much to the activities of Egba chiefs.<sup>19</sup> These areas had been more in Dahomey's sphere during the 19<sup>th</sup> century than Egba.

That chiefs and many Egbas used the Alake, and by extension British power, to establish ownership of land and chiefly authority in non-Egba areas is evident in the *Opeji* boundary disputes of 1923. In 1912, a colonial boundary demarcation had marked Araromi as part of Ibadan territory. However, by March of 1923, the Resident of Oyo complained to his Egba counterpart that Egba farmers were trespassing on Ibadan territory. Apparently, an Egba chief, the Nlado of Itoko, was repopulating the area with Ibarapa farmers on the claim that the land was originally Iberekodo territory which they lost consequent to the Dahomean invasion of 1851. Ibiyemi, a resident of Araromi village, stated as follows: "This Araromi is an Egba village within Egbaland. We have never paid tribute to the Ibadan people. Here the Ibadan pay tribute to the Ibadan and Egba collectors collect from the Egba." In 1921 the Egba government established a court in Opeji headed by three Egba chiefs. The Alake justified Egba actions by claiming that the territory belonged to the Iberekodo who were resettled in Abeokuta following the Dahomean conquest and that Egba chiefs and farmers were still resident there. The 1912 delineation of boundaries had been done unilaterally by Mr. Cotton, the British Resident, without consulting the Egba.<sup>20</sup> The point of this account is to show that in spite of

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Parakoyi of Abeokuta", *Lagos Weekly Record*, October 23, 1907. Coker also claimed to be the *Olori* Parakoyi of all Christian Community of Egbaland. See Abeprof 4/4/C5/1920, letter: K. Coker to Fathers of Abeokuta, June 9, 1919. For Cokers' Saro heritage, see Odim and Mba, *For Women*, 8-12.

<sup>19</sup> By 1917 the southeast district was dominated by the Owu justifying the appointment of the Olowu as the District Head. NAI, C.S.O 26/3 21790, *Intelligence Report on Imala District*, 1939.

<sup>20</sup> CSO 26/1-09274, Annual Report, Abeokuta Province, 1926, 4.

colonial rule the march of territorial expansion continued. Controversy over land with Oyo province was common during the colonial period. In 1914, the Alake had to “seriously warn” Owu chiefs against their efforts to reclaim and resettle land at Ibadan, Irifin and Owu-Ipole which they claimed belonged to their ancestral Owu.<sup>21</sup> In another instance, four people were killed at Omi Adio in 1929 over claims to land ownership between the Egba and Ibadan.<sup>22</sup> The struggle over and delineation of territory were not always conducted by outright confrontations. Sometimes, individuals secured Egba government approval and recognition of the land they claimed and on demarcation agreements they had entered into. Such requests for government deeds often mentioned a chief as patron. One such letter by the *Bale* of Itesi (resident in Abeokuta) pointed the attention of the Egba Government to how two companies of Egba and Ijebu met to agree on tree marked “59” as the boundary between the Ipara (Ijebu) and Itesi (Egba).<sup>23</sup> The use of the Egba government and its preferential status with the colonial government to affirm individual and chiefly holding also reflects in the complaints by the Otta of Egbas appropriating land. In April of 1923, the Olota of Otta petitioned that Egba farmers were refusing to pay Otta land owners for the use of their land. In many cases, Egbas were selling such lands as they claimed it belonged to them. Egba chiefs in the council insisted that Otta was part of the Egba kingdom and ordered that all Egba farmers had to pay were native administration taxes.<sup>24</sup> In such manner, many chiefs retained their status and wealth by not only controlling land (and receiving modern and colonial stamps) but also

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<sup>21</sup> EUG Letter: 7/1914, Government Secretary, Ake to Senior District Commissioner.

<sup>22</sup> “Abeokuta News and Notes”, *Daily Times* (Nigeria), February 15, 1929; this is despite the Governor’s approval of the final settlement of boundaries between Abeokuta and Ibadan provinces in August of 1926. CO 657/20, *Annual Report of the Southern Provinces, 1927*.

<sup>23</sup> Letter, Isaac, Bale of Itesi to Secretary, Egba Government, January 2, 1909, Abeprof 4, EDC/3/1/205, *Miscellaneous Correspondence*.

<sup>24</sup> Minutes of Council July, 1923, found in Abeprof 4<sup>th</sup> Accession C.2/1920.

in controlling people. In his 1918 assessment report preparatory to instituting the direct tax system, British Resident Syer noted that most Egba lands belonged to “absentee lords.”<sup>25</sup>

### 5.3 The Ambivalence of Elite Rivalry: Contextualizing Native Authority.

If the convergence of interests saw Egba elites working together towards the goals of Egba empire – if for different reasons -- and using colonial power to achieve them, that convergence broke down when, in the pursuit of personal and group ambitions, elites responded to colonial power and the centralization of Egba politics. In this sense, elite struggles over colonial power operated in two rather contradictory forms: First, they recognized colonial rule and were willing to work within its structures. However, they also contested the meaning of colonial power and found ways to modulate it. In other words, they were willing to operate within a colonial framework as well as outside it.

Working with the colonial framework meant recognizing the Alake and the Egba Native Authority. Following the British annexation in 1914, the Lugard government was quick to incorporate Abeokuta into the Southern Provinces. A Resident, W. Chevallier Syer replaced Commissioner P. C. Young with (theoretically) greater powers over native government than the “advisory” roles of the latter. However, by the terms of the Indirect Rule system and because colonial Residents operated on an *ad hoc* basis, considerable power remained vested in the Alake and Council. For the most part, the government continued to function as before the annexation. Indeed, it became more powerful because not only were the executive functions of the Native Authority now under the Alake’s control, he was also the head of the Native (customary law) Court system, which Lugard

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<sup>25</sup> CO 583/66, Letter: Syer to Lugard, 18 March, 1918.



designed to preclude Western legal procedures.<sup>26</sup> In effect, the only space available to Egba elites in the constricting and powerful central government was the Egba Central Council, which in effect was the Alake's council.

The central council thus became the locus of Egba governmental power. On one hand, it was the legal instrument by which the Alake's rule was conducted and legitimized. Connecting it to the Ogboni as though it derived from the traditional practices of the Egba further legitimated it among Egba elites. It was also the law and policy making organ for the Egba. Control of the council by the Alake enabled him and vested elites to legislate on Egba traditions and laws in ways that best suited particular interests. Towards this purpose, Alake Ademola engaged intellectuals like Adebeshin Folarin and Oladipo Solanke to write Egba history and to codify traditions to laws.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, as will be shown, decisions on taxation, laws on lands and estates and appointments into political offices were determined at the council. Besides, by taking over the administrative functions of the former EUG, the council inherited the capacity to invade what was previously thought to be the private realms of Egba citizens. Legislation empowered the council to determine where houses could be built, or which house had to be demolished to make way for a road or other public project, to determine taxation and the punishment for failure to pay taxes. The council also continued to mobilize and use forced labour for roads and buildings. Such powers made the council attractive and critical to Egba elites.

It was also expedient for elites who were displaced from this direction of Egba politics to be involved or at least design ways of mitigating the implications of

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<sup>26</sup> Was actually designed to prevent Lagos lawyers from complicating (as Lugard saw it) native court process. Lugard, *Dual Mandate* (London, 1922) 207.

<sup>27</sup> Abeprof. 4, Annexure "B", Extract of Minutes of Council held on Monday the 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1923.

centralized power. Recognizing that the Alake's status was reliant on British power and that resistance outside of the colonial framework was foolhardy, elites found the council a necessary medium. It was only through the Council that they could access the British Resident.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, a protocol was established whereby it became an offense to write a petition to the Resident without first routing it through the Council.<sup>29</sup> Furthermore, the means of acquiring local power and influence gradually shifted in favour of the Council as colonial rule deprived chiefs of earnings from tolls and other taxes, their charges from judicial settlement and (progressively) their powers to appropriate and dispose of land. Meanwhile, the council was also the surest means by which educated elites could become indigenized into the local elite. Until the 1920s, chiefly titles generally excluded educated elites and there were few spaces in the government (EUG) for employment.<sup>30</sup> The Council became even more attractive to Lagos-based elites from 1922 when a seat was allocated to Abeokuta in the Nigerian Legislative Council. The decision over who represented Abeokuta in the Legislative Council had to be approved by the Egba Native Council. There are also obvious benefits and privileges that came along with being a member of Council. They were paid a monthly stipend from the government revenue. A monthly outlay of £1059 for stipends in 1900 rose to £2600 by 1910.

Therefore, there was always considerable pressure for the expansion of council to cater to otherwise excluded interests and identities. From an initial membership of ten in 1898, it grew to become 28 by 1925. The British Resident had to insist on the reduction

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<sup>28</sup> Much of the debate in council revolved around procedures. All cases were expected to have been presented at the Council before going to the Resident. A direct appeal to the Resident was usually faulted as a breach. See Resident's comments in CSO 26/2 14605, "Misconduct of the Osile," *Minutes of an Extraordinary meeting of Council*, February 18, 1925.

<sup>29</sup> Abeprof 4/4, ENA, Minutes of Council, February 5, 1925.

<sup>30</sup> Edun preferred to employ European professionals instead of Egba. Such spaces were further limited after 1914 as the British widened the scope of recruitment to other parts of Nigeria and indeed the empire.

of the size of the council to 20 non-permanent councillors, when Alake Ademola proposed another increase to the existing 28 councillors.<sup>31</sup> The Resident advised that should the Alake insist on enlarging the council, the total salary paid must not exceed the current £960 pounds which was being paid to 16 non-permanent members.<sup>32</sup> A further increase was debated following the publication of the Abeokuta Intelligence Report in 1937. Most of the claims Captain Blair had to deal with in the course of gathering data for the compilation of his Intelligence Report were over precedence and representation on the council. A further enlargement was debated by the 1945 constitutional Assembly. Indeed, as long as the Council remained the locus of power in Abeokuta, claims and counterclaims over its membership were a dominant feature of Abeokuta's politics.

The debate over the membership of the Egba Council was not just restricted to the size but also involved the terms and quality of members. There was always disagreement over the extent of the Alake's power in the council, especially vis-à-vis other sectional Obas. The sectional obas maintained that by the very logic of a federation the Alake was only *primus inters pares* which meant that other obas were entitled to the rights and privileges which the Alake enjoyed. Furthermore, the symbolism of a Yoruba Oba as "*alase ekeji Orisha*" (lit. all-powerful, next to the gods) meant that it was always going to be difficult to sustain that an Oba should claim anything less than his due as a sub-deity. Much of the friction among the obas in the Egba council, which will be discussed subsequently, derives from this contradiction: how to make the "all-powerful" function as

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<sup>31</sup> At this point many of the educated elites who were members of the council by virtue of their positions in the EUG ceased to be, not being so employed by the ENA. "Membership of the Alake's Council", Letter no 242/23/2925: Resident to Alake, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1925. ABEPROF 3/6/ 23-25.

<sup>32</sup> Letter no. 167/10/1925: Alake to Resident, 19<sup>th</sup> March, 1925; Letter no. 1425/23/1925: Resident to Alake, 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1925. ABEPROF 3/6/ 23-25. March 26, 1926, the Governor approved another expansion to the council from 13 elected members to twenty-one (with 7 permanent members) to ensure adequate representation. CO 657/17, *Annual Report of the Souther Provinces, 1926*. By 1929, two new members were added. *Annual Report of the Southern Provinces, 1929*, 6.

a subordinate of another sovereign. Successive Alakes tried without success to alter this symbolism, for instance by renaming the sectional obas' titles.<sup>33</sup> This thesis has argued for a historicity that shows the Egba oba as a political and social innovation and construction. These titles and privileges were part of the larger process of ethnogenesis and cultural revival which has been ascribed to educated elites, but which we have shown thus far to involve all sections of the Egba elite. With that background, it becomes more interesting to see how elites advanced (and at times apparently fabricated) traditions to justify their claims.

Until 1920, chiefs appointed into the Egba council served life terms. The justification for this was that monarchies and chieftaincies are ordained and are for life. The manner of appointment into the council being on the basis of chiefly representation meant that the leading chief in a township such as Iporo or positions such as the *Oba Imale*, or the Balogun of Christians, or the *Iyalode*, could not but be an appointment for life. The fact that chiefs were councillors for life partly accounts for the continuous enlargement of the Council to include those sections and interests that were not represented in Council. However, the life membership of councillors who appeared to render little or no service to the state other than sit at meetings was a drain on state funds. The *Nigerian Pioneer* expressed what it called the public mood that councillors were indolent and living off the public. The editorial recommended that only the 4 obas should be made permanent members and that twelve other Ogboni members be elected.<sup>34</sup> The need to justify emoluments was highlighted by the economic depression that followed the end of World War I and in which the Egba government found it difficult to raise capital

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<sup>33</sup> “petty obas”, “lesser obas” “lesser chiefs”. LSP 46 Vol. 1, 1 (1934), *Egba Affairs Letter Book*, Letter: Solanke to Ademola, 10<sup>th</sup> July, 1934.

<sup>34</sup> *The Nigerian Pioneer* (Lagos), February 6 1920.

to consolidate the infrastructural achievements and developmental projects of the previous decades. Some of the crises in the council rose over efforts at engaging councillors in more productive responsibilities to justify their membership and wages.

It is difficult to properly situate the Egba council because of its multiple manifestations: as a traditional institution, as a colonial apparatus, and as a political instrument of the Alake's power. One tendency has been to trace the historical antecedents of the council to the Ogboni, the Yoruba traditional political form deriving from ancient times and which the Egba are supposed to have carried over to reproduce at Abeokuta. In this view, Pallinder-Law, obviously reading from Samuel Johnson, opined that the idea of a council had to have been commonly known to the Egba as, indeed to the Yoruba as a whole, bearing its antecedents from the *Oyo Mesi* and the *Iwarefa* of the Oyo Kingdom.<sup>35</sup> Other historians have accounted for the "failure" of Indirect Rule to the fact that Yoruba Obas were traditionally well checked and balanced by the Ogboni Council. The assumption that it was similar to a pre-existing political form appears to legitimize it. Reading the council as the "order of things" made it attractive to all categories of Egba elites. However, as I have highlighted in the previous chapter, there does not appear to be much evidence that the Egba in Abeokuta practiced an Oyo-type council, the form of a regular policy-making body with unambiguous membership, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Rather, the Egba Ogboni appears to have evolved in the narrowing of mass public gatherings to a core military, commercial and gerontocratic elite and was often a public medium which convened only over matters of grave threats to the public.<sup>36</sup> Reading the Egba Council as a historical moment, relevant to the needs and imaginations of vested

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<sup>35</sup> Agneta Pallinder-Law 67. Similar connection is made by Ladipo Solanke, A. K. Ajisafe.

<sup>36</sup> Campbell, 21 writes that the Ogboni was open to all male adults.

elites, better accounts for its indefinite form, why it was amenable to control and use by certain elites, and why it was so deeply contested by other elites.

Similarly, the Egba Council does not neatly fit notions of it being a colonial council. In the first instance, indirect rule was predicated on as little interference in local politics as possible. As Frederick Lugard stated, “the consistent aim of British staff [is] to maintain and increase the prestige of the native ruler, to encourage his initiative and to support his authority.” The only restriction to the powers of local rulers was they could not raise an army or licence arms. Other reservations (on powers to legislate, tax, appropriate land) were crafted such that native rulers only needed the approval of the Resident if they had to transcend the boundaries of colonial ordinances. “Unfettered control” over the revenue and expenditure was only subject to “the preparation of annual estimates ... in a very simple form.”<sup>37</sup> It says much about Lugard’s naivety that deep in his anglophile preconception of Africans as tribal, childlike and simple, he could not imagine that local rulers could be anything but amenable to tutelage in responsible British government.

Therefore, the council neither had a pre-existent traditional form, nor a colonial one. By assuming that there were definite traditions of native law and custom to guide native rulers, British rule gave the Alake a social, economic and political *carte-blanche*. This was unprecedented for a deeply divided society like Abeokuta, where social forms and the terms of rulership were still being defined and intensely contested by a very vigilant population and elite. Existing studies correctly identify the enhanced status of the Alake by colonial rule as a factor for the social unrest in Abeokuta during this period. However, they read this as a measure of enhancement presuming that colonial rule only

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<sup>37</sup> Lugard, 209.

removed the traditional checks against a monarchy that always existed. They thereby do not capture the revolutionary implications of the fact that by 1898, the Alake was largely unknown to most Egba and until 1914, was better known in Lagos among the educated elites than in Abeokuta. By 1918, the Alake had become head of a very powerful government with the capacity (theoretically) to reshape Abeokuta at will. In this capacity, he could determine who was a builder and who was destroyer of Abeokuta. This transformation is beyond colonial design. In his mixed-up imagination of civilizing Africans, Lugard thought he was creating a pliant institution. Ake-based elites created a political behemoth.

#### 5.4 The Implications of Centralization: Shifting Meanings of Identity and Power

This centralization of power occurred in the midst of significant social and economic changes in Egba and Nigerian society. Some of these changes were directly informed by colonial rule and others were connected to social transformations ongoing since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scholars assume that the most significant of these was the introduction of direct taxation in 1917 by the colonial government. However, taxation was not a 20<sup>th</sup> century innovation. James Feske has analysed how political circumstances transformed the relations of production by reshaping the factors of production of Egba agricultural economy. From a situation of total abundance, land progressively became restricted following the extensive cultivation of cocoa and kola. Labour which had always been relatively scarce became scarcer from 1893 following the extension of British rule over Yorubaland, which increased the opportunities for slave desertion. Indeed, both the British and the EUG had to tacitly endorse slavery in a bid to minimize

the problem of labour scarcity.<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Egba farmers, craftsmen and merchants alike were constrained by the difficulties of raising capital. This was informed by the unpreparedness of European merchants to advance unsecured loans and by government regulations prohibiting the sale of property.<sup>39</sup> The high cost of capital, sometimes reaching between 60 and 100% affected production. The cumulateness of these conditions set the background upon which economic practices were conducted early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

These conditions persisted into the 1920s and were further compounded by the post WWI depression. Judith Byfield narrates how the global depression made women particularly vulnerable because they could not enjoy the class and gender privileges of the native authority or the colonial government.<sup>40</sup> In 1922, 800 Egba chiefs of different persuasions petitioned that the Alake should allow the use of property to secure loans.<sup>41</sup> The labour condition became even more stringent. Farmers complained about the scarcity of labour when Alake Gbadebo pressured them to grow cotton for export. As we shall see, the failure of the cotton project impoverished many farmers and became a factor in their agitation against the government. Needless to state, expanding educational opportunities and the attractions of nearby Lagos began drawing many youth away from agricultural pursuits or even to migrant labour in other regions.<sup>42</sup> The legacy of modernization of the Egba United Government also took its toll of the Egba, especially the rural populations. In obvious disregard to colonial regulations, the ENA continued

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<sup>38</sup> The EUG clarified its order forbidding slavery in Egba territories that it only prohibited slave-dealing and slave raiding, not slave-holding. EUG Gazette, August 10, 1901, cited in James Feske, "Land abundance and economic institutions: Egba land and slavery, 1830-1914, *MPRA* Paper No. 22959, May 2010, 19.

<sup>39</sup> CO 147/166, enc in 9 June, 1903: MacGregor to Chamberlain

<sup>40</sup> Byfield, "Innovation and Conflict."

<sup>41</sup> Abeprof 6/4, ABP 6/22B. Minutes of Council Meeting, August 14, 1922; also in Byfield, 86.

<sup>42</sup> ADO Royce hoped the drying up of capital with force many young men back to farming. NAI, ECR 1/1/37, Annual Report, Egba Division, 1926.



forced labour into the 1920s. Unable to secure funds from any other means than taxes and fines, the ENA pursued these options vigorously.

These developments had noteworthy implications on the nature of power in Abeokuta. First, it implied that the ENA was very powerful and had to be severe at the very critical point when it needed public support and understanding. Caught between a legacy of modernization and colonial pressures for tax and produce on one hand and a weak treasury on the other, the Alake appeared to many Egba people as more repressive than colonial rule. Secondly, these transformations signalled the changing motives for which elites sought power and ultimately the nature of power. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, chiefly power had been mostly based on the control of people from which they built military power and secured labour for agricultural production. Having lost control over tolls, I have described the strategy by which they retained control at the territorial margins and how they retained control over land. Difficulties with securing labour and the failure of agricultural production affected the fortunes of many chiefs negatively. For instance, inability to dispose of land and property resulted in Isaac Coker losing his rubber plantation to his creditors in a law suit.<sup>43</sup> According to Folarin, Abeokuta looked like it had been devastated by war and desolation in 1930 owing to the inability of many people to maintain or dispose of property.<sup>44</sup> In the light of these economic difficulties, the native administration and politics appeared to be the most thriving enterprise in Abeokuta. There was therefore a marked shift from agricultural wealth as a motive and source of power to a public service-orientated elite power. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century chiefs like Somoye and Ogundipe refused to accept royal titles and particular chieftaincies,

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<sup>43</sup> Feske, 24.

<sup>44</sup> Folarin, 1931, 81; Feske, 24.

preferring instead the informal but very public authority that came from their shared controls of the means of elite power. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, elites could not pursue those options. Deprived by colonial power, constrained by regional and global economic depression as well as a monarchy that tried to centralize the powers and privileges that were previously diversified, they found political office the only options of elite political expression.

The struggle for power among Egba elites was further complicated by the absence of clear convention based on long usage which identified who was qualified for what elite title or role. Indeed, Egba identity (i.e. who is Egba) was itself an unresolved question throughout this history. The issue had first come up forcefully in 1903/4 during negotiations with the British over judicial reforms. The ensuing treaty provided for a Mixed Court comprising a British-appointed president and two other members appointed by the Egba Council. It had jurisdiction over mixed civil cases with a lower limit of £50.<sup>45</sup> However, its definition of Egbanness attracted considerable controversy. The British claimed jurisdiction over all persons “not native of Egbaland” in the cases of murder and manslaughter.” Many members of the Egba Council sought clarification and generally objected to their implied loss of jurisdiction over anyone defined as not an Egbaland native. Potentially liable to be deemed non-Egba would be all persons of Saro heritage, all slaves, 19<sup>th</sup> century refugees from Ijaye, Owu, Ibara, Iberekodo and virtually everyone in such a freely moving population. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it would be virtually impossible to affirm a definite pre-1830 genealogy to more than a few people. The Council attempted a clarification by defining a native of Egbaland as “any person with both parents Egba or of Egba descent, a slave in Egbaland who redeemed himself and

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<sup>45</sup> Mixed court was designed to hear cases that involved Egba and British persons.

intends to settle permanently in Egbaland; and all persons of Yorubaland and not of Egba descent who have shown intention of permanently residing in Egbaland.”<sup>46</sup>

The elite structure was not any more stable but was much more complicated. The burden of a history that the Egba is comprised of four sections and over one hundred and fifty different entities attracted claims and counter-claims for titles and representation. Egba titles had unsure precedents to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This does not just apply to the Obas but also to most of the chieftaincies. Indeed, the earliest known titles were adoptions and adaptations of Oyo-Ibadan chieftaincies. It was always possible for individuals capable of sustaining the claim, to affirm that they had purchased or had been endowed with a title from wherever.<sup>47</sup> Chiefly titles continued to multiply during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Instructively, the *Ologun* (military) titles did not die out even though wars had all ceased; they continued to be installed. The possible number of chiefly offices was therefore open ended; there could be as many as 150 Baloguns, Serikis, Apenas, Oluwos etc. Besides, it appears that titles which were attributable to powerful personalities were replicated by other sections. It is thus possible to trace how the title *Nlado*, which was popularised by the powerful Nlado of Kemta in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, spread, such that by 1930 there were Nlado titles in Ake, Oko etc. Educated Egbas were not outdone in the adoption of chiefly titles. They not only contested to be Obas and chiefs, they also adapted social titles to make them appear as state titles. In one such case, “chief” J. K. Coker hosted an *Iwuye* (installation) in Abeokuta to mark his appointment as the *Agba Oye* (President) of the Lagos-based association of Egba Christians.<sup>48</sup> In short, just as during the 19<sup>th</sup> century,

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<sup>46</sup> NAI, APP 8/1, *Egba Government Gazette*, 27 Jan. 1913; reaffirmed in Adebisin Folarin, *The Laws and Customs of Egbaland* (Abeokuta, 1928) 15, 16.

<sup>47</sup> Biobaku mentions that some Egba chiefs bought their titles from Ibadan. Biobaku, 29.

<sup>48</sup> Abeprof 4/4, Letter: J. K. Coker (of Ifako, Agege) undated.

chiefly title could be acquired by anyone who could claim it and get the larger society to acknowledge it. These partly explain why there was always pressure for the enlargement of the Egba Council. Such a system of chieftaincy privileged the Alake to whom fell the power of determining which title warranted recognition as an all-Egba title. Moreover, the incorporation of the sectional Obas into the central council implied that the Alake had a say in who became a chief of the sections.<sup>49</sup> Indeed, many of the educated elites were gifted their titles by Alake Ademola, beginning another line of “honorary chieftaincies” such as Folarin’s *Bobajiro* (Oba’s adviser) or Akinsigbin Oshin’s *Omolasho*.<sup>50</sup> Obviously, the Alake could not monopolize the appointment and installation of chiefs. Sectional obas, the leading chiefs of townships, the Ogboni, Parakoyi, women and associations of educated elites took their cue from the centre and appointed chiefs of their own, such that the *Iyalode* could produce an *Otun Iyalode*, *Osi Iyalode* etc.

Such a confused elite structure implied a continuous renegotiation of power at local levels. First it produced claims and counter-claims over which community belonged to which section and over which of the plethora of chiefs legitimately led which local community. That many chiefs were not considered legitimate leaders by people they claimed authority over was revealed when chiefs were mandated to lead tax drives in those communities. The conflicts that attended the overlapping chiefly authorities dominated Egba discourses as reflected in the minutes of the Egba Council and in the number of cases filed in the courts. The “Adubi War” (or Abeokuta Disturbances) of

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<sup>49</sup> Abeprof 2/52 “Decision Extract from the Minutes of Council Meeting held on Thursday, the 25<sup>th</sup> of November, 1929” states that “... any title or titles held in Egbaland without the knowledge and consent of the Native Authority could not be recognised or taken notice of”

<sup>50</sup> Folarin was also made *Otunbaloye* of Igbore. The Alake justified making Folarin a chief as “the custom.” *Annual Report of the Southern Provinces, 1929*, 7. In so doing, the chief judge of the native authority becomes integrated into the customary system and under Alake’s authority.

1918, the expulsion of the Olowu in 1939, and the abdication of the Alake in 1949<sup>51</sup> have been studied within the framework of Egba resistance against colonial taxation. This thesis will show below that they are better explicated in their wider political-economy and inter-elite contexts.

The renegotiation of power at the villages and townships resulted in the multiplication of the structures of authority as newly privileged elites and newly appointed chiefs with their tax collectors and other instrumentalities of power had to struggle with the rear-guard actions of pre-existing (displaced) forms of authority. In December 1939, “the people” of Ewekoro petitioned the Resident over the Olowu’s long standing efforts to exercise control over them. They accused the Olowu of extortion, unlawful detention and forced labour. They claimed to be Iporo and Ika and definitely not Owu and challenged the right of the Olowu to exercise rule over them.<sup>52</sup> In another instance, one James Babatunde Adebboh, a public letter writer, affirmed that he secured judgement from the Olowu even though he was not Owu, Iporo or Ika but had secured judgement from where he was sure he could.<sup>53</sup> Similar situations of multiple taxation and overlapping controls were common and they underscore that in spite of colonial and local efforts, identity was never fixed but always contested.

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<sup>51</sup> The crisis leading to the abdication of the Alake is discussed in chapter 7.

<sup>52</sup> Letter (Petition), Bale of Ewekoro to Resident (through Alake), December 16<sup>th</sup>, 1939. Abeprof 4/1.

<sup>53</sup> Abeprof 4/1, Statement of Charge against James B. Adebboh filed at the Ake Grade “A” Court; mentioned in Letter ref. E. D. 534/102, Alake to Resident, December 23, 1939.

Figure 5.1 Diagram showing the regional distribution of control among Egba chiefs

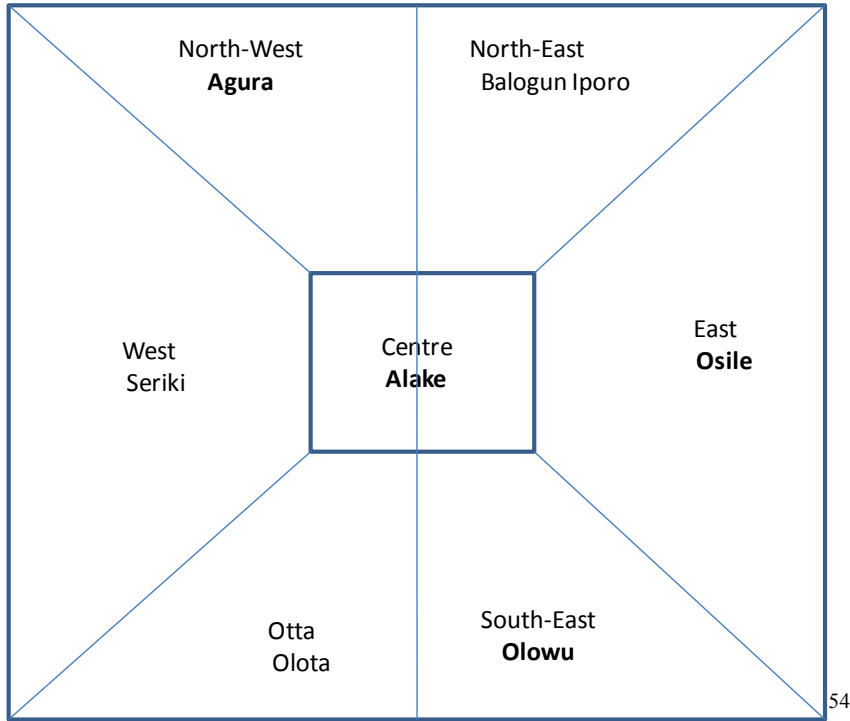


Figure 5.2 Map showing Egba districts.



<sup>54</sup> John Ausman. 54. boldface for the four principal Obas of Abeokuta.

## 5.5 Dual and Multiple Mandates: The “Adubi War” (1918) Revisited

The outbreak of violence in southeast Egbaland on June 12-13, 1918 was the culmination of the series of events which writers have connected to the introduction of Lord Frederick Lugard’s Indirect Rule system to Southern Nigeria. Most accounts find the cause of the crisis in colonial policy and African reaction to it. Harry Gailey explains the rebellion thus:

As later investigations indicated clearly, the British administration had managed to alienate almost every segment of Egba society.... The Ogboni and territory chiefs saw their authority slipping away.... The ordinary townspeople were required for the *first time to pay taxes and yet the former exactions of labour and high sanitary fees continued*. To add to these concrete grievances was a general feeling of loss of an old way of life and many remembered with humiliation Ijemo and subsequent annexation.... (A) very large minority, remembering their proud military heritage, decided to take advantage of what appeared to be British weakness and resorted to arms to solve their problems.<sup>55</sup>

John Ausman holds a similar view of the crisis being a consequence of Lugard’s Indirect Rule.

Lugard's system met with some initial success in Benin, where total conquest and the exile of the Oba had provided him with a relatively clean slate. But in Oyo and Iseyin there was friction; in Abeokuta nearly disaster. The process of creating a suitable traditional authority, followed by the institution of direct taxation and a means of collecting it caused growing discontent in Abeokuta Province. Soon violence broke out and the irate villagers cut the telegraph lines and railway track in several places. A District Head, one European, and a number of other people were killed in the uprising, and the inhabitants of Abeokuta were cut off from the outside world.<sup>56</sup>

The trigger of the violence was the June 7<sup>th</sup> arrest of 70 Egba chiefs (most of them Owu) on the order of the Resident, to forestall a breakdown of order, for refusing to pay tax and

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<sup>55</sup> Harry Gailey, *Lugard and the Abeokuta Uprising*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> John Ausman, “The Disturbances in Abeokuta, 1918”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 5. 1 (1971), 45-60.

“for disobeying the Alake.”<sup>57</sup> Resident Syer then issued an ultimatum that the dissidents should lay down their arms, accept to pay taxes and obey their African leaders. Failing this ultimatum a detachment of Nigerian troops just returning from service in East Africa was deployed on the 11<sup>th</sup> of June. On the 13<sup>th</sup> Egba rebels attacked the railway lines at Agbesi and derailed a train in which there were a few Britons. Some others attacked and destroyed the station at Wasimi where the British agent, Ashworth, was either killed in the engagement of fire or was captured and later killed. There were other attacks at the road work station at Oba. The dissidents exchanged fire with colonial forces at Otite, Tappona, Mokoloki and Lalako over a period of three weeks, but by the 10<sup>th</sup> of July, the rebellion had been quashed and its leaders killed or arrested. An estimated 600 people including the British agent and the Osile had been killed. Gailey deduces from the claims recognized as justified by the Commission of Enquiry that the uprising cost over £55000 in property damaged.<sup>58</sup> Egba losses from the scorched earth operations by colonial forces are not included in this figure.

The renditions of the events preceding the outbreak of violence make it appear that the Egba were reacting to the transformation of their way of life by the colonial order. In his 1917 speech to the Nigerian Council, the Governor-General had expressed the introduction of direct taxation in terms of a modernizing innovation. In his words, “an extremely interesting departure has been taken by the three progressive communities of Egba, Yoruba and Benin who have decided on their own free will to convert the traditional tributes and other levies paid to their chiefs by native customs into a properly

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<sup>57</sup> Harry Gailey, 86

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*



organized direct tax.”<sup>59</sup> That the Egba now resisted paying the taxes as (apparently) did Iseyin (1916) and Calabar (1925) implies that such an innovation as direct taxation was too painful to culturally rigid communities. Lagos-based educated elites actually thought in these terms and expressed concerns that Lugard’s innovations were too fast-paced for backward hinterland peoples. A Committee of Concerned Persons comprised of educated Egba met with the dissidents in April to hear their grievances and concluded that even though there were other factors, the crux of the crisis was the tax; they advised that the government should delay the implementation of the program for a little while.<sup>60</sup> All these underscore the assumption that the Adubi rebellion was a tax revolt by a traditional people resisting modern ways.

However, such accounts do not explain why the conflict was localized. If taxation was generally applied, why was it being resisted in only this district of Egbaland? The accounts also leave important facts unaccounted for which cannot be easily fit into the colonial paradigm. For instance, it does not explain the assassination of Oba Osile during the same period. Gailey assumes that he was killed “ostensibly because he opposed the rebel’s plans and would not lend his prestige and authority to the revolt.”<sup>61</sup> Much of the writing on the resistance depended on the Report of the Commission of Enquiry. Certainly, the commission conducted its investigations under specific prevailing circumstances. It was obvious that neither Lugard nor the Colonial Office was interested in anything that might embarrass the empire. Lugard was particularly warned by the Home Office and had only commissioned the enquiry because London demanded

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<sup>59</sup> CO 657/5 No. 2 of 1917, *Papers laid on the table of the Legislative Council on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 1917.*

<sup>60</sup> *Lagos Standard.* January 3, 1917.

<sup>61</sup> Harry Gailey, 89.

explanation for the huge expenses and personnel movements incurred.<sup>62</sup> Lugard himself doubted (indeed never accepted) that the violence was directly related to taxation. He pointed attention to other possibilities including what he thought of as Egba avariciousness and the accumulation of grievances which had been kept locked in their hearts. More significantly, the report is at best an overview in which the subtleties and nuances of petitioners and respondents are aggregated by people deeply invested in colonial ideology. Indeed, many of the respondents affirmed that they were not unwilling to pay tax, but their rebellion was thought of and expressed in more nuanced ways than was taken lexically by the commission.<sup>63</sup>

British annexation affected Abeokuta in many ways. First, the pace of modernization experienced earlier in the century either slowed down or was altogether suspended following the imposition of colonial rule. Colonial priority in 1914 was certainly not the prestige of a modernizing Egba but to establish the administration and mobilize support for the World War. This is significant because the Alake's status and prestige had been predicated upon service and his claims to be working for the "good of the country." The excitement among educated elites about the progress which Abeokuta was making and for which they celebrated the Alake had to have percolated down the social system. Therefore, while Indirect Rule is read as having enhanced the "natural rulers," it created the conditions that exposed the Alake to greater opprobrium without enhancing the basis of legitimacy. This was not just on account of the increase in the intensity of resistance to the Alake's powers but significant public anger over the social services which the government had arrogated as its responsibility and which residents of

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>63</sup> CSO 16/20/1, *Minutes of Evidence, Commission of Enquiry into Egba Disturbances*, Lagos, October 24, 1918.

Abeokuta had come to expect. In a sense therefore, the very means described in the last chapter by which the Alake tried to secure legitimacy had stimulated a critical population that measured government by performance. As social services increasingly deteriorated on account of colonial indifference or prioritisation, it led to increasing discontent and agitation within Abeokuta.<sup>64</sup> Thus an observer described how people were being made to suffer because of inadequate power supply and the “closing of the water fountains.” Another writer lamented that “Abeokuta town is very backward after all in the matter of roads in the town. The expenditure figures on the roads look so high and we wonder where these new roads are or were.”<sup>65</sup> Yet another contributor was sure that the “needs of progressive Abeokuta have outgrown the present system.” A *Lagos Standard* editorial lamented the deterioration in “all segments of Egba life as follows:

Is Egbaland a land of failures? ... We have no real leaders now-a-days? Our people will hold big meetings, talk big things and ultimately do [nothing]. As we write our thought goes back to the good old days of some 10 to 15 years ago. Hence we ask, why have we no leaders now-a-days?<sup>66</sup>

The inadequacy of public services rendered them important themes over which less privileged sections highlighted their estrangement. Many writers wondered why public services were restricted to certain sections only. For instance, to mark his third coronation anniversary in 1924, the Olowu and Lagos-based Owu elites demanded that Council provide funds to build him a befitting palace; had not the Ake palace been built by commonwealth funds?<sup>67</sup> A similar case was made for the expansion of power supply to other section. Secondly, this situation, combined with the difficulties of the World War I economy and incipient global depression had serious effects on both the colonial

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<sup>64</sup> ENA *Minutes of Council*, August 17, 1922.

<sup>65</sup> *The Nigerian Pioneer*, January 16, 1920.

<sup>66</sup> *The Nigerian Pioneer*, January 23, 1920.

<sup>67</sup> CSO 26/2, 14605, Letter: Adedamola, the Osile to Resident Abeokuta, March 11, 1925.

government and Egba Native Authority financially. Much has been made of Lugard's interest in direct taxation as a central component of the Indirect Rule system; the critical needs of the Egba government for funds at this period also need to be factored in.

Egba finances were in a critical condition by 1918. Lugard had used the high indebtedness of the EUG to justify British annexation in 1914. The colonial government took over those debts but Egba earnings from tolls and duties ceased. The native administration therefore had only taxes, levies and fines as earnings to depend on and half of whatever was collected was to be handed over to the colonial government as tribute.<sup>68</sup> Caught between high public expectation for performance and colonial tribute, the Egba administration pressured chiefs, *Bales* and local leaders to mobilize funds and labour. It is important to emphasize, therefore, that tax and levies<sup>69</sup> were not as novel as Lugard assumed at the introduction of colonial taxation in 1917. Indeed, Ademoyega Edun had prepared a draft on a new Egba tax scheme which was approved by the Egba Council in December 1914.<sup>70</sup> Thus the pressure to make taxation more efficient and more productive derived as much from native administration requirements as colonial policy. Indeed, long before the introduction of Lugard's taxes, Egba politics was already tense over increased taxes and many of the so-called seditious meetings were not unconnected with the issue.

The collection of taxes affected local relations of power in many ways. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Egba chiefs derived funds from control of tolls, their trade and from trading their agricultural products. They could mobilize labour for some public works and their control over their *omo'gun* brought in a steady stream of funds from slave raiding and

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<sup>68</sup> "Estimates 1924: Further Consideration of", ENA *Minutes of Council*, October 22, 1924

<sup>69</sup> List of EUG levies in ECR, 1/11, Egba Native Administration, Rules and Bye Laws, 1901-1933.

<sup>70</sup> *Minutes of Council*, Egba United Government, June 6, 1914.

brigandage. They also depended on tribute from conquered and dominated areas. It is with these funds that they sustained their leadership. Taxes were levied and labour was raised for specific purposes and not as a condition of citizenship. This system transformed somewhat in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The EUG and then the Egba Council may not have called it direct taxation, but the regularity with which funds and labour were demanded established a process in which most individuals accepted that they owed the state. One respondent at the commission described how public service (as tax) was considered a debt for which individuals pawned themselves in payment. They rendered years of service on Egba (and later colonial) roads, buildings and railways in the expectation that their service equalled their tax commitment to the state. In the particular case of the Papalanto people, they had “*singba*” (pawned themselves) for eight years.<sup>71</sup> From their perspective, it was an unacceptable injustice that they were neither paid for the services rendered nor did they discount their debt burdens by their their service.

If state demands constrained ordinary Egbas, the larger economic environment was stifling. The colonial administration’s dire financial straits are reflected in the Governor-General’s addresses to the Nigerian Council between 1916 and 1918. To shore up government finance, several proposals of taxation were presented to the advisory council. The *Lagos Standard* opined that the “Palm tax” was the most ludicrous of them all. It contradicted the government’s demand for increased production of commodities “for the empire’s war efforts.”<sup>72</sup> However, British war efforts had to be the least among the concerns of Egba farmers. Egba farmers were reeling from the failure of the massive cotton expansion program of the EUG and the British Chambers of Trade. Early in the

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<sup>71</sup> Respondent, Sogade, Bale of Afowowa, transcript of interview in *Minutes of Evidence, Commission of Enquiry in to Egba Disturbances*.

<sup>72</sup> *Lagos Standard*, January 3, 1917.

century, the Egba government had bought into the idea that Egba cotton could control a higher share of the world market and of a British Chamber of Trade project to expand cotton production in Egbaland.<sup>73</sup> The British Cotton Growers Association targeted Abeokuta as a source for cotton and may have partly sponsored Alake Gbadebo's visit to the UK in 1904.<sup>74</sup> Earlier in 1903, a Professor J. W. Hoffman was appointed as the Alake's adviser on cotton. The British interest in Egba cotton production obviously continued until 1920 because the British Cotton Growing Society maintained correspondence with the British Commissioner in Aro, Abeokuta for the expansion of facilities including that a road be built to link Abeokuta to Meko.<sup>75</sup> On their part, the Alake in Council undertook a tour of the cotton growing region to encourage farmers to plant cotton, assuring them of favourable returns.<sup>76</sup> On several occasions, the Alake sent "gong-men" to announce that the price of cotton had risen in the world market and announce that the planting season was at hand. Farmers associations were formed under the aegis of the Egba Farmers Association with Harry Coker as President. At Opelliffa in 1904, the association gathered over a thousand farmers from 24 villages and distributed 50 tons of cotton seed to them.<sup>77</sup> However, the world price of cotton only marginally increased between 1900 and 1913. It fell drastically in 1914 (from a high of \$12 in 1913 to \$7 per lb). Egba earnings from cotton progressively declined such that by 1917 it

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<sup>73</sup> *Journal of Commerce*, 14-06, 1904 compiled in *Liverpool: Newspaper Cuttings relating to Africa*, Holt, (John) and Company, UK.

<sup>74</sup> The British Cotton Growers Association (BGCA) had been formed in 1902 by cotton manufacturers in Liverpool to encourage cotton production through the distribution of enhanced cotton seeds and agricultural techniques. The association targeted native rulers to mobilize mass cultivation of cotton and worked with colonial administrators to redirect cotton output from local textile production to export. Montague Yudelman, "Imperialism and the Transfer of Agricultural Techniques", *Colonialism in Africa, 1870-1960*, eds. Peter Duignan and L. Gann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975) 340; Marion Johnson, "Cotton Imperialism in West Africa", *African Affairs*, 73, 291 (1974):183.

<sup>75</sup> Abeprof 2/1 13/1913. letter Ref: 9/13/1913, British Cotton Growing Association to Commissioner, Aro, February 16, 1919.

<sup>76</sup> "Abeokuta and the Cotton Industry", *The Lagos Standard*, March 4, April 8, 1903.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, June 23, 1903; "Professor Hoffman and Cotton Growing in Abeokuta, *Ibid*, May 6<sup>th</sup>, 1903

ceased to be factored among leading products in the ENA bulletin. Farmers complained about the loss of their slaves<sup>78</sup> and the unreliability of pawnage which made labour costs prohibitive. Having to provide labour for EUG and ENA projects further complicated the situation for the farmers. Other war-time policies of the colonial government created adverse macro-economic conditions. The British blockade of German merchants removed what was a very substantial share of the Egba export market. The centralization of war efforts also saw Britain resisting the sale of commodities from the colonies to its allies including the USA.<sup>79</sup> Not able to benefit from the opportunities that a global expansion of demand provided, many farmers were discouraged and pauperised. Increased demand did not correspond to higher prices. Therefore, farmers in this part of Egband were facing considerable economic challenges and the unabated colonial and ENA pressures amounted to insult on their injury.

Table 5.1 Value of Cotton (Lint) Exports to Britain, 1903 – 1919<sup>80</sup>

Year	Qty cwt	Value £
1903	2527	6271
1904	9961	14271
1905	12280	15835
1906	23940	41360
1907	36222	96226
1908	20485	53316
1909	44227	103160
1910	22128	78478

<sup>78</sup> Slavery had been abolished by the *Resolution of the Alake and Council of August 2, 1901*. Abeprof. District Office Papers, EDC/ 3/1/205; the system of *Iwofa* (pawning) became restricted to persons older than 16 years of age by the Public Notice issued by the Alake Ademola II 25<sup>th</sup>. Debts must be recovered only in the native or provincial courts.

<sup>79</sup> Up till 1914, Germany and Holland commanded a high percentage of the market share of Nigerian produce. "Report of British Trade in British West Africa" Furnished to the Board of Trade by the Intelligence Branch in those Colonies (London, His Majesty's stationery Office, 1913), 9.

<sup>80</sup> Compiled from "Annual Report(s) of the Audit Department," 1913 -1920. CSO 479/2.

Year	Qty cwt	Value £
1911	19984	66193
1912	39043	102,932
1913	56714	185992
1914	50368	150546
1915	24081	56922
1916	66555	234949
1917	47137	234336
1918	13214	97399
1919	60214	484744

We have shown earlier how the renegotiation of power at the local levels complicated the structure of power by multiplying chiefly offices. The transition in which one elite group replaces another is not always a smooth one. Newly created chiefs, pressured to justify their new authority by raising tax had to contend with displaced ones who were intent on retaining existing social and political control and influence. Owu chiefs appear have had more reasons to be resentful by the constraining of the political space and economic opportunities. Since their settlement in Abeokuta in the 1830s, the Owu had retained a comparatively deeper sense of community than other Egbas. That Islam and later Roman Catholicism was more established than in other parts of Abeokuta further separated them from an Egba establishment which was more sympathetic to the CMS mission. Thus while other settlers such as the Ijaye, Ibarapa, Ikereku found inclusion (assimilation) as Egba, the Owu were and often perceived themselves as alienated. By affirming Owu nationality, they fell into the Egba elite historical construction as non-indigenes and in the fourth realm of the political structure. In the Egba Council the Olowu (king of Owu) became the fourth king in ranking. Where there was no Olowu, as a result of an interregnum or some other political crisis, the Owu were



represented in Council by the leading Owu chief. This chieftaincy was appointed by the Alake and during the 1930s was occupied by Raheem Egberongbe, who was considered by some sections of the Owu community not to be pursuing their best interests. One such interregnum which followed the death of the Olowu in 1917 coincided with the appointment of district heads and the implementation of colonial taxation. Owu elites had other reasons apart from their limited representation in the central government to be upset. Owu chiefly expansion had been towards the southeast and Owu chiefs already claimed control of Wasimi, Ewekoro etc. While the chiefs of other sections could access the influence of the Alake to retain control of their holdings in the margins, Owu chiefs were largely at the receiving end of the colonial intrusion and the forays of Egba centralization.

The struggles came to a head when in 1917, as part of the tax drive, the colonial Resident sanctioned the Alake's appointment of district heads. It is noteworthy that although these were colonial appointees, they were selected on the recommendations (if not choice) of the Alake. This unprecedented move had significant political implications. First, it elevated the Alake from the king of Abeokuta to the king of all Egbaland. That his status over Abeokuta was still being contested did not help matters. It effectively brought the margins including non-Egba areas like Ilaro and Otta directly under Abeokuta's control. Subsequently, the Olu of Ilaro and the Olotu would be required to sit on the Abeokuta council with a status which was clearly subordinate to the Alake but undefined in relation to other Egba kings and chiefs. Secondly, it amounted to an intrusion on chiefly elite power at its new essence. Thirdly, this policy had the potential of redefining the pattern of relations between the districts and Abeokuta. This is

significant because many of the dissidents interviewed complained of double or multiple taxation. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Egbas thought of Abeokuta as home and the districts as farms. The prevailing system was such that people looked to the farms to raise funds for projects and communal purposes in the “home.” During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the farms provided necessary resources for Egba wars and farmers returned home when called upon to do so. The collection of taxes and levies up to this point (1917) was such that chiefs (usually bales) in the “farms” mobilized collections and paid these to leading chiefs in Abeokuta for onward transmission to the Alake or sectional obas or for whatever project such collections were needed for.

One of the newly appointed district heads was Chief *Seriki* Onatolu, also known as Obi. Respondents at the Commission attributed their anger to his exactions of free labour and his arrogance. Once, he informed the people that he was now the king of the district and that the Alake and other Egba kings were now slaves of the government which he represented. That he “like most of the other British appointees was a stranger in his district” appears to strengthen the thesis that the rebels were resisting new forms of governance. In reality, that Onatolu was the *Seriki* (a leading Egba war-chief) means he could not have been seen as anything more than the Alake’s appointee, even though his responsibility was to the Resident. Thus that many of the dissidents kept saying that “the white man had done them no evil”<sup>81</sup> and that they were not fighting the British, emphasizes that this was mostly seen as a struggle among Egbas. Indeed, a delegation of Lagos-based educated elites who met with the dissidents concluded that “it was a matter

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<sup>81</sup> Deposition by several chiefs (Sogade, Bale of Afowowa: “the white man had no problems with us; we had no problems with the white man”; Tunloye of Itori Odo village etc. etc.) CSO 16/20, *Minutes of Evidence, Commission of Enquiry into Egba Disturbances, October 24, 1918.*

between two Egba camps.”<sup>82</sup> Short of declaring it a civil war, it was clear to many that the Owu elite’s disenchantment with Egba politics was a factor in the crisis.

In the intense contestation that was Egba politics, new chiefs like Onatolu had to deploy whatever resources were at their disposal to be effective. Colonial capacity for violence was one such resource of which the Egbas were aware. Onatolu often mobilized compliance by reminding the people of the Ijemo killings of 1913. Should they refuse to render free labour, obey native court rulings and pay tax assessments, they would be treated the way Ijemo people were treated. Other meetings between the chiefs and Resident Syer, Lieutenant-Governor Boyde and the Alake in May of 1918 confirmed the willingness of the government to deploy force against them. Yet the fear of colonial violence needs to be properly defined. The colonial army, the West African Frontier Force (WAFF), developed around the Lagos Constabulary which was created in 1861 and was known as Glover’s Haussas. The force continued to be called “Hausa” and during the 20<sup>th</sup> century had acquired a very notorious reputation for unbridled violence. A newspaper editorial in 1902 lamented that the colonial police had instituted a “military regime in the hinterland.”

The Haoussaa soldier has become a widespread element of disturbance and terror throughout the country. That this is so is vouched for by Europeans who have travelled in the interior...so much so that whenever a native woman travelling on the road spies a Whiteman, believing him to be an officer accompanied by Haossas, she at once bolts into the bush for fear of violence...Hausas entering people's houses and forcibly taking away their goods and (were) committing outrages.

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<sup>82</sup> Abeprof. 4/3, 24/1919.

This colonial police force had been employed against the Ijemo in 1913 during which 17 defenceless people were killed at a public gathering. A detachment of the force was then stationed permanently at Lafenwa following the imposition of colonial rule. That the Haossa would be unleashed against the farmers was not a threat to take lightly. The surviving leader of the rebellion insisted to the commission that they prepared to defend themselves when it became obvious that they would be “massacred by the Haossa.”<sup>83</sup>

How then do we account for the Adubi revolt? Certainly, the introduction of colonial taxes created grievances among the Egba. However, the taxes people resisted were not necessarily colonial ones. The Egba Council was as committed (if not more so) as the colonial government at increasing tax revenue. Besides, the colonial taxation which began to be collected from 1917 was preceded by various forms of Egba taxes, licences, levies and conscripted labour. From the respondents, it is clear that the protesters did not consider paying tax to be unusual or improper.<sup>84</sup> Sectional obas and displaced chiefs were equally interested in shoring up their holdings by controlling the rural base. The increasing value of rural land and peasantry made these margins the target of chiefly competition. The *Lagos Pioneer*'s report in 1920 on the behaviour of the newly installed Oshile suggest that his predecessor was killed in the course of a land ownership struggle rather than as part of the Adubi uprising. Faced with these pressures, peasants also reacted to wider challenges that they confronted. Some of these challenges included the dire economic conditions attendant upon colonial war-time policies. Yet others had to do with the failure of cotton production, a project in which the Alake had invested much political capital and on which many farmers had staked their future. Self defence became

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<sup>83</sup> Respondent Lamiloye, Bale of Itori Odo Village, *Minutes of Evidence, Commission of Enquiry*.

<sup>84</sup> *Index to Egba Native Administration, Rules and Regulations* contains a list of Egba taxes and licenses from 1898 to 1934.

the only option, when it became obvious to the farmers that the Hausas would be unleashed on them. The Adubi revolt was also a reaction to the political realities of the day in which new elites (usually appointees of the Alake and the colonial government) struggled with not much older forms of chiefly elites over power among the Egba. These elites navigated the boundaries of colonial rule, chiefly authority and monarchical power, using all resources to achieve efficiency and secure control. Much less acknowledged is that the Adubi war was an Owu stand against the Egba push on their identity and power. As a member of Council would recall in another context: “It was such class of people [Lagos based elites] who instigated the Owu people to start Adubi war: you Owu people, were they not sending messages to you at the time, and did they sympathise with you when the punishment came seriously on your people and they were imprisoned?”<sup>85</sup>

#### 5.6 Conflicts of Precedence and Procedures of Power in Egba political discourses

It is an important mark of the fluidity of Egba identities that even though the dissident chiefs had Owu elites as patrons and received instructions from them, the rebellion could not be labelled an Owu insurrection. As the Ewekoro case shows, people shared multiple identities and appropriated whichever would best suit their particular needs. Try as he might, Alake Gbadebo could not deny responsibility for the fallout of the war. The series of letters asking him to intervene with the British for the release of arrested persons subtly implied his culpability.<sup>86</sup> The allegory one chief gave at the commission of enquiry underscores the public perception of the Alake’s culpability. Asked for the cause of the *Ifole*, the chief stated: “A witch was charged with killing children; an Egungun was sent

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<sup>85</sup> ENA, *Minutes of Council*, January 20, 1926.

to frighten the witch. The Egungun instead of frightening cut off the head of the witch. Who then is guilty?"<sup>87</sup> Such double-speak, common to the respondents, was taken literally by the commission in concluding that the conflict was no more than an anti-tax revolt. However the larger context and the complex symbolism of Yoruba proverbs suggest that the Alake (Egungun) was culpable for killing the dissidents and trouble makers.

Furthermore, the conflict had significant implications for the relations of power among Egba elites. First, it announced the reality of colonial power to those who acted as though the Egbas were still independent. While this did not just mean necessary submission to colonial policies (as challenges, resistance and indifference to colonial policies continued), it became obvious that colonial power was a determining force and adjudicator, a resource to be contested for. Secondly, although the colonial government suspended the collection of taxes, it reintroduced them without major incident in 1925. Thus a measure of financial centralization was successfully added to the political centralization in the Alake-led Egba Native Council. The spread of direct taxation further marginalized chiefs because it challenged their capacity to mobilize their sections or townships for funds and public service. These developments reinforced the council as the central medium of political discourses, and the Egba native government as the only instrument for public mobilization and service. The Adubi conflict thus foreshadowed other rebellions in Egba politics during our period but these were necessarily more civil.

One form of Egba crises relates to the refusal of the sectional obas to accept the superiority of the Alake. Virtually every sectional oba confronted the Alake at some point. In 1925, the Osile (king of Oke-Ona) led the other sectional obas to petition the

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<sup>87</sup> *Lagos Standard*, Wednesday, July 24<sup>th</sup>, 1918

Resident over the question of royal palaces. In this petition, the obas advanced reasons why they should have palaces built befitting them. First, they had conceded to having the Alake's palace built in 1901 only because they had been assured that theirs would follow. They had in fact been given \$300 each as a deposit and assurance of their right by the Egba Government. Secondly, it was the civilized thing to do: "then (in 1901) Abeokuta had not risen to the age of civilization [so] the three obas did not bother to build decent house. [But now,] civilization is existing, the four sections ...are doing their best for the benefit of Egbaland...." Thirdly, it is the tradition: "that anyone installed as oba should leave his own house and live in the palace (which is) supposed to have been built by the section over whom he is reigning and by the Egba Government." In any case, at £450 per annum, each oba earned only a 5<sup>th</sup> of what the Alake earned (£2400) apart from his allowances. "Would it not look fair if the Osile who is next to him (in hierarchy) is adequately paid?"

This petition, dated 5<sup>th</sup> February, 1925 began a sequence of events leading to the suspension of *Osile* Suberu Adedamola from the council and his eventual removal as a king. In presenting the petition to the Council, the Alake challenged that the petition was not just a gross misrepresentation of facts; it was irregular and a grave discourtesy to the Alake and Council, a position which the Osile openly challenged. In the Osile's words: "If anyone were to be charged with being discourteous to the Alake, it only means that the Alake caused it. We know how our ancestors came to establish this country, and every branch of the family knows his right." He went on to accuse the Alake of being "unstraightforward" and duplicitous with regard to the British Resident:

The political officers at the (Igbehin) Hill are here to watch the interests of the Egbas but you have made them your tools and use them as you like. "Oba

o serufu degan, oba o segan-derufu” (lit.) Here is a king who....destroy [s] a town to become bush, and (here’s) another whose duty is to destroy the bush to become as town.” You (Alake) are a destroyer, and you may treat us as you wish, we would not mind (we are helpless).<sup>88</sup>

In response, the Alake argued that the Osile’s action was targeted “to blindfold the new Resident” who did not know Egba history. The other Obas were not literate and it was therefore obvious that the Osile had conscripted them without their knowledge of the full facts and of history. The insult of the Osile was “the worst ever used against (any) Alake.” Ademola’s long relationship with Egba politics served him in good stead not only to affirm Egba history but also to claim expert knowledge of Anglo-Egba relations. The Alake argued that he was party to the creation of the title of Osile in 1897 which had been done because there were too many “kings” in Oke-Ona and the rest of Abeokuta.<sup>89</sup> The insistence of the then Alake in spite of opposition from Oke-Ona chiefs who were against the creation helped reduce the number of obas in Abeokuta to three. According to the Alake, such a role of creating kings began in the past history of the Egbas at *Orile* (the pre-Abeokuta homestead) where only the Alake’s palace was the collective responsibility of all Egba while those of the sectional obas were of their own subjects. Did they all not know that the Alake in the *Orile* was the King of the Egbas? The Osile’s actions and tirades were not only insubordination, they amounted to treason; they were a threat to peace because they were intended to “stir up fresh trouble in the town” and to disrupt the progress of Abeokuta, especially the “autonomy recently granted to us by His Excellency the Governor.” Members of the Council unanimously voted that the Osile be

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<sup>88</sup> ENA, Minutes of Council, 5<sup>th</sup> of February, 1925. Verbatim.

<sup>89</sup> This is usually credited to Governor McCullum.



suspended. By December of 1925, the Osile was deposed after having suffered the ignobility of being charged in court for corruption and for seducing another man's wife.<sup>90</sup>

Reading back from our historical perspective at how Egba elites contested power using the curious admixture of recent events and an unverifiable past, it is surprising that not once in the records did anyone challenge the historical validity of even the most preposterous claims. It appears that actors would not claim ignorance of such "common" knowledge because to do so reveals the [proverbial] emperor's nakedness. Certainly, all Egba elites derive their statuses from these constructions and were invested in them; to challenge the claim of one is to destroy the whole edifice.

The Osile crisis was not the only case in which the Alake had to deploy his political craftsmanship. Over our period the position of Owu within Egba politics continued to challenge the political structure. It became a tradition of sorts for successive Olowu (kings of Owu) to refuse to recognize the Alake. This included refusing to pay the Alake homage, visit him in a royal capacity or accept his jurisdiction over "Owu matters," Olowus often challenged the Alake openly in council. Such intransigence heightened in circumstances which required the Alake's approval. These included the election and installation of a new Olowu or when there was a financial request to be made to the Council. For instance, following the death of the Olowu Owookade in 1917, the Owu selected Adesina as the new Olowu and proceeded with the coronation proceedings, including keeping him in the *Ipebi* (Ogboni chamber), without the knowledge and sanction of Alake Gbadebo. This debacle coincided with the introduction of direct

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<sup>90</sup> Letter No. 648/3/1918B (Confidential), Alake to Resident, Southern Province, December 3, 1925; also in Minutes of the Meeting of Council of November 25, 1925. It is not clear if these were invented charges used to seal the case against the Osile. Certainly, it constituted part of the invention of and struggles over chiefly power and behaviour.

taxation and the appointment of a district head over the South-Western district. The Alake refused to accept Adesina as the new Olowu and using colonial forces, seized “all the paraphernalia...until all necessary customary procedures was [sic] observed.” They were then returned to him “after the Owu people had apologised to the Alake for their action.” In place of Adesina, *Seriki Onatolu* was appointed as head of the south-western district; this was a factor, as we have seen, in the *Adubi* war. A similar case followed the death of Adesina in 1937. The Owu nominated Gbogboade following a rancorous selection process.<sup>91</sup> Gbogboade was not acceptable to the Alake or the Resident on account of his Owu ultra nationalism. It took many delegations of Owu chiefs, affirming and conceding that they were strangers in Abeokuta and that the Alake owned the land before Ademola agreed to have the Olowu recognized. Gbogboade was made to publicly declare that the Alake was king over all of Egba. He also had to renounce the principle of *primus inters pares* which he had proclaimed while in Lagos because according to an Ake chief:

It had never existed and will never exist in the Abeokuta politics. The Alake is the head of the Egbas and all other sectional Obas and the chiefs have to submit to him. You have now to start from the bottom of the ladder to learn Abeokuta politics and do not in any way endeavour to introduce into Abeokuta politics your Lagos idea of politics or the dictates of your Owu society in Lagos; if you do that, you will bring trouble upon yourself.<sup>92</sup>

The Resident further pre-empted any rebellion by declaring that:

The history of Egbaland is well known and there can be no manner of doubt that the Alake is the head chief and the Oba to whom all persons in Egbaland, be they minor Obas or not, owe obedience and allegiance. This fact has been recognized by His Excellency the Governor who has created the Alake the Native Authority for the Egba people. I am now leaving the sphere where

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<sup>91</sup> See page 8 above.

<sup>92</sup> Abeprof 2/52, “Notes of further private interview had with Owu Chiefs and their Candidate for Olowu, Mr. Adelani Gbogboade”, December 9, 1937.

native customs prevails and coming to that where we have to deal with the laws of Nigeria. The native ordinance demands that all the subjects of a country shall obey its native authority. It follows therefore that, even though you may be selected following native custom to be the Olowu, Government will not recognize you... unless it is assured that you are prepared to subscribe to the present constitution and to obey your native Authority, the Alake. There must be no intrigue against his authority, but a loyal desire to remain in your sphere.

In spite of these restrictions, Gbogbade soon constituted the most stringent opposition to the Alake. At the mandatory pre-coronation visit to the Alake and Council following his coronation, he sent his state umbrella to precede him to the Alake's palace. The bearer of the umbrella stood in front of the Ake palace for about thirty minutes, while the Alake's court awaited the arrival of the visitor. The Olowu then rode his horse right into the palace. He refused to respond to the Alake's speech exhorting him to be respectful because he was still "young in politics Egba politics; and this is not Lagos" or to express thanks at the Alake's gift of a case of schnapps. At the end of the visit he refused to return to his section on the designated road ostensibly to fully announce himself to more people. His followers were singing allegorically:

Ma ran Baba n'Ifo	Do not send our father to Ifo
Ko ni lo	He will not go.
Ma ran Baba l'Otta ko ni lo	Do not send our father to Otta
Ko ni lo	he will not go
E ma fun Baba wa l'obi	Do not give our father Kola
Ko ni je.	he will not eat (poison). <sup>93</sup>

On his return to his palace, a reception was held at which a chief publicly declared: "For several years, we have been pursuing what we lost, that is, the position of our oba, the Olowu, but undoubtedly, the Owus have got it now, this our warfare is not with guns or

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<sup>93</sup> Refers to the appointment of sectional kings as district heads for tax collection. The obas considered the appointments demeaning. Similar songs had been sung at the coronation of Adesina in 1920.

cutlasses, but with pen and diplomacy, and we have conquered.” He wondered if the excited audience did not notice how the Olowu “saluted the Alake, ‘good morning.’”<sup>94</sup>

The Council considered these actions unprecedented. According to one councillor, “never in history [of the Egba] had any Oba displayed two different *royal umbrellas* in public apart from the Alake” nor had anyone publicly insulted the Alake like that.<sup>95</sup>

Olowu Gbogboade’s particular strength derived from his leadership of a group of Owu intellectuals and nationalists, having been the president of the Lagos-based Owu National Association. Using the medium of newspapers, this corps of elites whipped up Owu nationalist sentiments through critical articles challenging the authority of the Alake. Because Gbogboade was educated and had been a “newspaperman” he could respond to the Alake by the same means with which the Alake claimed authority. His responses to written queries were always detailed and in them he countered the Alake’s claims with claims of his own. Equally significant is that he befriended colonial officials thereby breaking what the *Osile* had called the Alake’s “use” of British officials. He could also stand up to the Alake’s claims of being a modernizer and by his professional antecedents he could claim to have been a “builder and not a destroyer” of Abeokuta. In these ways and with the efforts of other Owu elites, the Olowu secured a review of the colonial position on Egba history which had been officially sanctioned in the 1937 intelligence report. Perhaps the most popular among Owu elites was Akinshigbin Oshin who had been criticizing Ademola since he became Alake. While other newspapers were enamoured by Ademola’s progressive credentials, Oshin had frowned at the process by

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<sup>94</sup> “The Speech of Mr. Akin Oshin, Olowu’s Clerk, at Afin Owu, March 31, 1938.” Abeprof 2/52, Orders of Council and Miscellaneous Letters.

<sup>95</sup> Abeprof 2/52 *ENA Minutes*, February 16, 1938.

which Ademola was chosen king. At Ademola's coronation in 1920, he wrote in his *Nigerian Pioneer*:

The feverish ambition and anxiety to be an Alake has boiled and cooled down now, and the die is cast. The times demand firmness, calmness and downright commonsense...Gbadebo, the late Alake of Abeokuta was a man of sterling worth and of exceptional character. It remains to be seen, whether Ademola II will follow in his footsteps, the doing of which will be in the interest of the country, the disregard, his own ending.<sup>96</sup>

He went on to caution that the new Alake was "surrounded by men some of whom have made a hash of life and its opportunities and are now on the lookout to make up for their failures at the expense of others ...and to persecute their enemies. [Ademola's] close interactions would be a stamp of authority and sanction and he would never be able to check their extravagance." Akin Oshin was later appointed *Asoju Oba* (and personal adviser to the Olowu) and en-titled *Omokowajo* of Owu. In this capacity, he petitioned the council to request that the Public Works Department Engineer be made to undertake extensive repairs of the Olowu's palace, that light and water be supplied to the palace expeditiously, that prisoners be supplied to work for the Olowu and that two orderlies be provided. He thus set the stage for a repeat of the arguments we have seen in the Osile case.<sup>97</sup> That the Alake felt the stings of these criticisms and challenges is doubtless. In a letter to the Resident, he lamented that he was sick and tired of the Olowu's subterfuges and prevarications. In his correspondence with Ladipo Solanke, the President of the West African Student's Union (WASU), he lamented that educated Egbas were the worst breed

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<sup>96</sup> *The Nigerian Pioneer*, January 16, 1920.

<sup>97</sup> In a reply to this petition, the council asked that the Olowu should follow precedents. He should use his personal funds to provide for electricity and water in his palace just as his predecessor did. It was also "not deemed necessary or desirable to vary the practice of the past" by providing funds for repairs of the Olowu's palace. His request for labour was unprecedented and regretted and cannot be complied with. The Council will look into providing him with orderlies. Letters E. N. A. 112.72, Clerk, Egba Native Council to Olowu, February 5; March 1, 1938.

of humans and the main threat to the progress of the black race.<sup>98</sup> The struggle with the Olowu continued until the latter died in 1946. The District Officer wrote the following for a requiem: “Olowu Gbogboade was something of a ‘stormy petrel’ but I am sure he always had the best interest of his people at heart. I am sorry to think that I shall have no more interesting discussions with him.”<sup>99</sup>

## 5.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to show that the invention of Egba identity and elite power continued in spite of the imposition of colonial rule. In some departure to the dominant historiography which sees developments in Abeokuta as a reaction to European rule, it has argued that colonial rule was a super-structure underneath which local processes of power continued. The tendency has also been to line up political actors and Egba elites on either side of modernization. While the rhetoric of major actors might suggest this to be the case, the reality is that the conceptualization of modernity was never determinate. In line with the overall objectives of the thesis, this chapter has strived to show that traditions or rhetoric of modernity were not extant but constructed resources which elites deployed. Egba society and identity in its recent form began during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the environment of multiple forces, including the slave trade and its abolition, Islamic revivalism and jihadist expansion, missionary and colonial intrusions, the Yoruba and Dahomean wars and the locally-generated tensions as elites deployed these forces. The society continued to be built and the identity continued to be contested and resolved deep into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The terms of contestation were local as the Adubi war and the

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<sup>98</sup> LSP 46, Egba Affairs LB II, I (1935), Solanke to Alake, August, 24, 1935.

<sup>99</sup> D. O. (Abeokuta) to Alake, “Death of the Olowu of Owu”, August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1946.

struggle between the Alake and the Olowu shows, even though colonial power was a present reality.

## CHAPTER 6

ELITES KNOW THEIR BOUNDARIES: POWER IN MEDICAL DISCOURSES 1937-1950.

### 6.1 Introduction

By finding power in quotidian statements Foucault draws ruling elites and the ruled into an ongoing conversation over possibilities. In this encounter, the ruled take part in their own governing by engaging and imbibing the appropriate forms of the “technology of the self”<sup>1</sup> and also project messages about the acceptable form of their governance. On their part, rulers project statements to shape the discourse and limit the possibilities of challenges against their ideology. These statements include affirming not just elite wisdom and qualification to rule but also that it is in the best interest of the ruled to retain the socio-political system as is. Different elite interests jostle to determine who rules and under what conditions. However, medical discourse presents a conundrum that makes it different from other factors over which elites struggle. The reality of death makes it impossible for any particular elite to offer any assurance of infallibility as they would in affirming a religion, a political idea, a marriage or an educational form. This lack of certitude in elite ideology makes health the one area in which elites cannot claim an absolute knowledge gap over commoners. On the other hand, the experiences of dominated peoples and commoners appear to better prepare them to accept their mortality and cope with fatality than elites; this informs a certain measure of frustration, respect for and surprise at the integrity of dominated peoples by elites when commoners are confronted with life-threatening circumstances. There is thus a marked divergence in the

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<sup>1</sup> Foucault’s term for the process of knowledge creation and consolidation, by which individuals self-discipline themselves and others to conform to constructed norms. Michel Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, Luther Martin, Huck Gutman and Patrick Hutton eds. (Mass: University of Massachusetts Press: 1988), 16-18.



attitudes of elites and commoners to medical issues. This divergence makes medical discourse one sphere where the voice of the commoner cannot be silenced, where the subaltern speaks.<sup>2</sup>

In view of these limitations, elite contestation over medical discourse takes a different form. On one hand, because they share similar attitudes to well-being, elites tend to converge on health ideas. This convergence also derives from the ultimate uncertainty of medical knowledge which makes it necessary to keep medical options open. Should chemical tablets fail, other options including surgery, spiritual intervention, natural concoctions and exotic alternatives are rendered available. In this sense, elites may contest political decisions on health infrastructure, medical budgets etc. but medical policy is usually rendered flexible and inclusive to access many options. In a similar form, medical health is one terrain in which commoners struggle hard to retain their freedom to choose from an array of medical options, including death. Not able to affirm with any certainty that the knowledge of the commoners is absolutely wrong, elites often concede to commoners even if they think they pursue unintelligent choices. Perhaps the most unsuccessful of colonial interventions in Africa was the effort to enforce colonial medical policy by denigrating and proscribing African traditional health practices. African resistance in this context was not against Western medicine per se, but against the limiting of their choice of medical options.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> I hint here at Spivak's critique of Foucault's heterogeneity of power, for underestimating the role of ideology in the silencing of the subaltern. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313; for views on divergent medical attitudes between elites and commoners, see Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), xv.

<sup>3</sup> Megan Vaughan describes how African resistance was against enforced vaccination rather than vaccination; *Curing their Ills* (California: Stanford University Press, 1991), 25, 44. While it considered African medical practices obnoxious, administrative expediency and African resistance often limited the

Many medical historians agree that the distrust of medical policy was not restricted to the colonial situation only. The struggle over the legislation of compulsory vaccination against smallpox in Europe is well documented.<sup>4</sup> Attempts at imposing a medical system on Africans also predate the imposition of colonial rule. In Abeokuta, the EUG legislated smallpox vaccination in 1903. It has however become inconceivable that African societies before their exposure to Europeans could have had a medical discourse: a debate in which rulers and elites try to impose a medical worldview which African commoners might resist or disregard. By existing conception, the idea of a medical discourse described in the first paragraph cannot be African. The error in my opinion is in assuming that Africans have a traditional medical system; that African medicine is a coherent body of social knowledge which differs only in shades from place to place, but retains the essential character of African traditions. This axiom drives the extant historiography on African medical history to project African medical discourse only as it relates to European colonization. I daresay therefore, that many studies of African medical history are colonial medical histories. My interest in this chapter is driven by this absence of Africans in their own history and the representation of their medical experience by the very colonial ideology that wrongly depicts them as lacking one. This chapter explores a political history of medical health in Abeokuta against the shallowness of the dominant framework which privileges Western medical practice as the end (and engine) of African medical history. I try to read Abeokuta's medical history beyond the

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capacity of colonial rule to enforce laws against "obnoxious" medical practices. See David Baronov, *African Transformation of Western Medicine and the Dynamics of Global Cultural Exchange*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008), 120.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Shermer, *In Darwin's Shadow: The Life and Science of Alfred Russel Wallace* (London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 216; Michael Radetsky, "Smallpox: A History of Its Rise and Fall," *Paediatric Infectious Disease Journal* 18. 2 (1999): 85.

conventional account of medical service on African bodies, to include the diversity of medical ideas and how these have shaped social health discourse. Colonial medicine was only one of many ideas which the Egba engaged with to formulate their conception of illness and remedy. Egba elites were both subjects and drivers of medical discourse because of their self conceptions of and ascribed responsibility for public well-being. This chapter traces and accounts for the disposition of Egba elites to disease, and their ideological disposition to medical health. Because of the wide range of issues which constitute medical health, I have isolated smallpox as a salient theme to explore the divergent and complimentary reactions of political elites to disease.

Perhaps no other disease commanded as much attention as smallpox among the Egba and the Yoruba at large. It is significant that smallpox is the only disease that is deified among them. That *Sopono* is mentioned among the pantheon of Yoruba deities and in the traditions of origin not only affirms its prevalence and endemic nature; it suggests a *longue durée* engagement with the disease as well. There are significant mentions of smallpox and other diseases in the slave trade records and in the reports of missionaries and colonial agents to affirm its prevalence during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> Colonial medical reports including returns of vaccination also show that smallpox remained a major health concern all through colonial rule until its global eradication by the World Health Organization (WHO) program (1967-1971). However, smallpox was not just a medical reality; it was also an important theme in Egba political discourses as a measure of social health and concomitantly as a factor in the form of elite power. Accordingly, the history of smallpox and other diseases in Abeokuta as elsewhere in Africa is not just epidemiological -- it is also a story of power.

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<sup>5</sup> Eugenia Herbert, "Smallpox Inoculation in Africa," *Journal of African History* 16, 4 (1975): 539-559.

## 6.2 Reading Power in African Medical History

Despite being a common disease from before colonial rule, smallpox in Africa has not attracted significant attention among historians concerned with power. William Schneider suggests that the comparative lack of interest in smallpox derives partly from the comprehensive work of the WHO smallpox eradication programme and the magisterial book on the subject produced by its principal leaders. With a whole volume devoted to Africa, complete with a large amount of evidence, the impression has carried on that the subject is resolved and that there is not much else to learn about the disease and its eradication.<sup>6</sup> A related explanation is the respect in which medical science is held for its achievements in health care, disease eradication and cure. The tendency has been to ascribe to medical science a value-free rationality and to project back its contemporary effectiveness. Consequently, the eradication of smallpox appears to be the ultimate success of an unyielding humanistic colonial programme.<sup>7</sup> Such a reading of Western medicine which sees colonial doctors heroically battling superstitions and disease dominates many accounts health care in colonial Africa. Most studies adopt a colonial constructivist approach which posits that colonial rule had profound effects on the health

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<sup>6</sup> William Schneider, "Smallpox in Africa during Colonial Rule," *Medical History*, 53 (2009): 193-227. For the WHO publication see F. Fenner, D. A. Henderson, I. Arita, Z. Jeseck and I. D. Ladnyi, *Smallpox and its eradication* (Geneva: World Health Organization, 1988); see also William Foege, J. D. Millar and D. A. Henderson, "Smallpox Eradication in West and Central Africa," *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 75, 3 (1998) 219-232. There are studies on disease in colonial Africa which devotes some attention to smallpox. See for instance, Gerald Hartwig and David Patterson eds., *Disease in Africa: An Introductory Survey and Case Studies* (Durham: Duke University, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Watts, 119 describes how smallpox became labelled as the disease of the poor, the colonized and the subaltern. The eradication was advanced the "White Man's Burden", Rudyard Kipling's poet that depicts the racist underpinning of and justification for colonial conquest and rule.

of Africans by introducing modern preventative and curative medicine.<sup>8</sup> African medical knowledge and practices come off as traditional, as inversions of Western rationality, science and modernity.

More recently however, considerable scholarly attention has been focused on the role played by colonial medicine in justifying and legitimating colonial power and rule. Colonial medicine has been implicated in accentuating the “politics of difference” which built and sustained the colonial order. Megan Vaughan demonstrates that medical knowledge of Africa was socially constructed in a narrative of science, culture and power. African disease was ascribed to the pathologies of racial inferiority and a culture of ignorance and filth. Colonial medicine became what sanitarians and doctors did to promote the empire in similar ways to soldiers and officers.<sup>9</sup> Other writers such as Anna Crozier argue that the medical legitimization of colonial rule was built on tropes of difference in the Western imagination which implicated Africans and their environment in their own experience of illness and which painted the white doctor in heroic terms. William Schneider narrates how a French colonial officer described smallpox vaccination as “an appreciable agent of propaganda” and Ann Beck shows how the British medical service developed out of the Chamberlain government’s “constructive imperialism,” a resolve to deploy medicine as an instrument of colonial management.<sup>10</sup> By and large it has been shown that colonial medicine was an integral part of colonial power -- enough to shed its objectivistic pretensions and be revealed as a “complex set of ideas and

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<sup>8</sup> See for instance, Gerald Hartwig and David Patterson eds., *Disease in African History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1978), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Megan Vaughan, *Curing their Ills*, 13; colonial medicine was so attached to the idea of difference that in the face of evidence against biological race, it substituted culture for biology.

<sup>10</sup> Ann Beck, *A History of the British medical Administration of East Africa, 1900-1950* (Mass: Harvard University Press, 1970), 21; see also Anna Crozier, *Practising Colonial Medicine: The Colonial Service in British East Africa* (London: I. B. Taurius, 2007), 3.

narrative of interests, rituals and processes not altogether different from the way non-European healing practices have been depicted.”<sup>11</sup>

Yet for all the value of this rethinking of colonial medicine, the inversion model persists. The “colonial discourse” remains predicated on the idea that Western medicine transformed African health consciousness from an irrational and ineffective traditional system to a modern one. It retains old images of pre-colonial society as one held in a vice-grip of communitarian superstitions and undifferentiated cosmology by local chiefs and priests, and of colonial society as a struggle to overcome such heathenish attachments by Western science and goodwill. The displacement model which sees the African medical experience on a teleological march from the traditional past to a Western medical modernity remains dominant in the historiography. More specifically, by posing Africans as subjects and not as actors in medical knowledge, their political interests in medical discourse remain unexplored. As with other colonial narratives, an incomplete description of the historical experience passes for African history during the colonial period. Ultimately, Africa’s medical history has been reduced to the ideological and epidemiological discourse of its conquerors. Local epidemiological knowledge in its materialistic and ideological narratives of health is a necessary but neglected part of the colonial equation.

Fortunately, a growing awareness that narratives of pre-Western medical practices have embedded in them discourses of power informs studies like Anthony Buckley’s study of Yoruba medical systems. Such studies highlight the contested ideas that

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<sup>11</sup> See for instance Robert Borofsky, “Power, Authority and Disease: A Structural Analysis” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land-en Vowledge olkenkunde* 131, 1 (1975): 1-33; also Maryinez Lyons, “Sleeping Sickness, colonial medicine and imperialism: some connections in the Belgian Congo” in *Disease, Medicine and Empire: Perspectives on Western Medicine and the Experience of European Expansion*, ed. Roy MacLeod and Milton James (London: Routledge, 1988), 245.

constitute pre-colonial medical knowledge and help to rescue it from conflation as superstitious and unscientific. In his study, Buckley finds that as with the Western medical system, therapeutic practice makes sense and becomes rational in the context of cosmology. A close connection therefore exists between pre-colonial medical knowledge and the power ideology that sustains it.<sup>12</sup> In the same vein, Karin Barber finds that the Yoruba narratives of the deification of smallpox contain within them accounts of political struggles and the contested meanings of power and of disease.<sup>13</sup> Contrary to the undifferentiated categorization of African medical practices, they comprised of contested ideas of social health. Their diversity reflects public debates over the meanings and causes of diseases and their cures. Therefore, medical knowledge has always constituted an important part of social discourses through which elites claim authority to rule.

Such social discourses and medical ideas did not disappear with the introduction of Western and colonial medicine. Indeed as Megan Vaughan shows, they continued to contest the discursive space with European ideas. Besides, Western medicine was not a fully developed science at anytime during my period of study. Therefore, to invert colonial medicine to a supposedly traditional African system obscures the mutual sharings and interconnections which have been captured by authors such as Jean and John Comaroff, Peel and Vaughan. These authors have narrated the fascination of European missionaries with African medical practices, their use of African medicines and their appreciation of local cures of their illnesses.<sup>14</sup> To conceive of social health in Africa as a binary encounter between two cultures or two distinct medical systems as the

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<sup>12</sup> Anthony Buckley, *Yoruba Medicine* (London, Oxford University Press, 1985), 99.

<sup>13</sup> Karin Barber, "How Man Makes God in West Africa: Yoruba Attitudes towards the Orisa" *Africa*, 51 (1981): 733.

<sup>14</sup> Jean and John Comaroff, *Of Revelation* Vol. 1, 350; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 220.

conventional “colonial medical discourse” does, is to narrate only an unequal half of the story. A more complete scope sees the progressive discovery (and introduction) of new medical ideas and how these are used by different elite identities to advance or sustain claims to power. My interest in this chapter is to overcome the bounds of the “colonial discourse” as conventionally defined, to uncover a richer history of the multiple ways in which medicine was ideological. It was not only of use to colonial power to legitimate rule; medical ideas had local meanings and application to elite identity and power. I seek to push forward the agenda that Buckley, Barber and Apter initiated by showing that the power discourses which they uncovered for pre-colonial society did not disappear after colonial rule but continued to inform elite power. In spite of colonial rule, local elites still appropriated medical discourse to justify elite positions. I pursue this objective first by establishing that Western medical practice does not constitute a clear dichotomy to Egba medical knowledge; its entry into the Egba medical world was not earthshaking but was slow, gradual and complimentary to a host of other medical options. In the same vein, the political import of Western medicine did not constitute a revolutionary ideology dichotomous to a local medical discourse. Thus a historical continuity can be drawn of the ideological engagement with illness from the pre-colonial which includes the appropriation of western medical options during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and on to formal colonization. This helps to explain African health discourse as one in which Africans were engaged, about which they had and made choices, and by which they tried to shape the direction of their medical futures. I find it necessary to first establish that the Egba had a long engagement with smallpox which spans their political history; they also had a social discourse of smallpox.



### 6.3 “Of pitted faces and ‘the pains of every mother’s heart’.”<sup>15</sup> Egba Engagements with Smallpox

There were major smallpox outbreaks in Abeokuta in 1903, 1920, 1938 and 1949.<sup>16</sup> While these attracted the attention of the Egba and colonial governments, they were only more severe instances of what was an annual occurrence. The 1904 outbreak coincided with the modernization reforms of the Ademoyega Edun-led EUG and resulted in the promulgation of sanitation rules and regulations and in the Anglo-Egba judicial agreement of 1904. Those rules that relate to smallpox, including the vaccination edict and the creation of a medical department, were inspired by similar laws enacted in Lagos between 1899 and 1901. Therefore, there was significant discussion of public health issues as the Egba government took these initial steps towards taking executive responsibility for health management. The 1920 epidemic attracted greater commentary for a number of reasons. First, the public awareness of the government’s responsibility had increased, prompting more significant criticisms of the government’s performance. Public health became an issue in the struggles among elites and in the discussions in the Egba Council. Secondly, the epidemic coincided with the ongoing push of the colonial smallpox eradication programme: an empire-wide project to eradicate smallpox. Colonial administrators were accordingly hard-pressed to justify efforts towards this end.<sup>17</sup> The debate in the Egba Council over the 1920 epidemic was initiated by the colonial Resident. By 1938, smallpox eradication programmes had become centralized in the

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<sup>15</sup> Charles T. Pearce, M.D., M.R.C.S., *Vital Statistics: Small-Pox and Vaccination in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and Continental Countries and Cities* (The London Society for the Abolition of Compulsory Vaccination, Westminster, London, 1882): 11.

<sup>16</sup> *Lagos Standard*, April 8, 1903; *Nigerian Pioneer*, April 9, 1920; ECR 4/15, Extract of Minutes of the ENA Central Council Meeting No. 11/1949, August 25, 1949.

<sup>17</sup> William Foege, J. D. Miller and D. A. Henderson, “Retrospective: Smallpox eradication in West and Central Africa”, *Bulletin of the World Health Organization*, 52 (1975) 209-222. “Royal Commission on Vaccination Report, London, 1896”, *British Medical Journal*, 2, 1924 (1897): 1436-1437.

Nigerian government, complete with a vaccine production center in Lagos, many training schools across the country and the centralization of vaccination and medical personnel. Therefore, this epidemic attracted only mild attention in the Egba Council, mostly to challenge the colonial government on what was being done to improve health facilities in Abeokuta. In 1949, following the abdication of the Alake, the Egba Constitutional Assembly convened to draw up a constitution had to confront another outbreak of smallpox. Through the debates on these occasions, we are able to assess the diversity of views and interests not just on treating the disease but also on governmental, elite and commoner behaviours concerning public health.

That these 20<sup>th</sup> century instances had precedents during the 19<sup>th</sup> underscores that the disease was always present, that Egbas engaged it and that it constituted a part of political discourse. Nineteenth century missionary accounts contain much about squalor and disease infestations in Abeokuta. Many accounts refer to how intending converts related that they had spent all their fortunes on local priests and healers to no avail and how they wished to worship a God that would not take sacrifices from them.<sup>18</sup> Such accounts as this highlight the centrality of sickness and misfortune in the experience of the Egba people during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>19</sup>

Much has been written of West Africa being the “White man’s grave,” on account of tropical diseases including various fevers. The effects of these diseases on local populations are silenced partly because of the assumption that tropical diseases have limited impacts on immune Africans and partly because Africans have not been written

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<sup>18</sup> CMS, Samuel Crowther, Journal (entry Nov. 16) ending Dec. 25, 1846.

<sup>19</sup> Peel writes of a woman who had tried Islam at Ilorin and then married a Christian in Lagos all to no avail until she reverted back to her former religion “and all had gone well with her.” Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 106.

into the history.<sup>20</sup> The documentary evidence points to the contrary. Native missionaries did not appear any more immune than their European colleagues. The Reverend T. B. Macaulay died in the epidemic of 1854 along with some members of the families of CMS's African agents.<sup>21</sup> Rev. Allen's report on his illness in 1874 gives us an insight into the helplessness with which missionaries, European and African alike, engaged with disease. In his words: "During this suffering, I have to bow under the providential dispensation on the death of four grandchildren, one after the other. Two from the smallpox, one from clothes being caught in fire and the last died from a day's fever on the 17th of September."<sup>22</sup> There was obviously a smallpox epidemic between 1872 and 1874, going by Moore's report of high mortality from "smallpox and sudden deaths" and how public sacrifices were more common in the city. It obviously necessitated a notable parley of "the great *babalawos* [who] went to their sacred groves to consult their Ifas as to what steps they might take towards ameliorating the present conditions of the country because the mortality," and of Muslims gathering to pray that the disease be warded off.<sup>23</sup>

In 1893 Governor Carter of Lagos wrote of people in Abeokuta carrying goitres and other visible manifestations of illness about.

Almost every child one sees either had, or has had, small-pox. Mothers are seen carrying infants in all stages of the complaint, and mature children drag themselves about in spite of their suffering so long as they are able to do so. Of course numbers succumb, but many survive, often disfigured in various ways, but blindness, perhaps, is the commonest sequel to this distressing malady.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Philip Curtin, "White Man's Grave: Image and Reality, 1780-1850," *Journal of British Studies*, 1 (1964)94-110; Curtin, "The End of the 'White Man's Grave': Nineteenth-Century mortality in West Africa," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 21, 1 (1990): 63-88.

<sup>21</sup> Peel, 220.

<sup>22</sup> In CMS, CA 2/52, Rev. W. Allen to Rev. C. C. Femm (Igbore) December 9<sup>th</sup>, 1874.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> P.R.O. C.7227, "Dispatch from Sir Gilbert T. Carter, K. C. M. G., furnishing a general report of the Lagos Interior expedition, 1893" *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*.

Sickness was not any less visible among the ruling elite. Burton also wrote of his 1865 visit that Somoye, the regent, was obviously very ill and had to be supported on either side by assistants who kept chanting “*aiku*” (lit. don’t die) at the discomfiture of the leading chief.<sup>25</sup> Burton’s description of the regent’s potted face implies he had survived being infected by smallpox. It is obvious therefore, that smallpox was a common experience in Abeokuta for which there had to be some explanation and a desire for a remedy.

As a medical narrative, Abeokuta society was a complex market place of ideas and medical resources. The society confronted regular smallpox outbreaks among many other diseases for which various practitioners advanced the efficacy of a wide array of medical and other options. Over the 1878 smallpox epidemic, Egba chiefs organized a meeting of Babalawos and Onisegun with a view to finding remedies for the outbreak. The tendency has been to label such traditional practices irrational. However, it is necessary that they be understood in their time and context. It may be recalled that the Western medical understanding and treatment of smallpox during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not very effective either. Furthermore, the search for medical remedy was not limited to offering sacrifices, but included medicinal and surgical processes. Many colonial officials were surprised at practices which did not conform to their preconceptions of heathenish superstitions. One colonial medical personnel reported in 1898 as follows:

Strange that the natives recognise the absorptive properties of the skin and the endermic method, for some of the cuts seen on the face of infants [are] not made for beauty but as a media for administering medicine. This is invariably done in cases of children suffering from night horrors and convulsions.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Burton, *Abeokuta*, 146. It is significant also that King Gezo of Dahomey is known to have died of smallpox.

<sup>26</sup> PRO, 149/5, F. G. Hopkins, Acting CMO, “Medical Report for the Financial Year 1900-1901,” 140.

Another doctor described a local “surgeon” and his operation as follows:

He is not a great Surgeon, seldom indeed using the knife. He will not even open an abscess but applies external medication...scarification—small parallel incisions through the skin...over the painful area. Possibly at the same time he would draw off some blood by cupping. His mode of procedure is most ingenious. He procures a hollow bamboo about one and a half inches in diameter and cuts off a piece near one of the knots, contriving to make a cup with the septum at the knot as its floor. He now fastens a small piece of wood, previously saturated with oil to the bottom, inside. This wood is ignited and the instrument pressed tightly over the recently scarified surface. The flame inside exhausts the air and it acts by suction exactly as our instruments do.<sup>27</sup>

Yet another wrote that the customs of the Yorubas, including circumcision, burial (6 feet deep) and many remedy concoctions were remarkable and valuable methods of epidemic control. In significant contrast to the view of absolute western medical superiority during this period, the records contain significant references to concerns among European medical personnel about the limited effectiveness of “tropical medicine,” especially the celebrated quinine because European casualties continued to rise in spite of its usage.<sup>28</sup>

It is sufficient for my purpose however, to affirm that a medical and political discourse existed among Egba elites – regardless of whether these practices were effective or not -- the nature of which will be discussed subsequently. Besides, there were other medical options available to the Egba. Western medical services were already being offered in Lagos and Abeokuta as early as the 1859.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, Saro doctors predated the Lagos colonial administration’s 1897 smallpox vaccination edict. Furthermore, a number of itinerant Islamic clerics and Hausa medical practitioners practiced smallpox inoculation and prescribed medical remedies. Thus rather than see the introduction of western medicine as revolutionary, Peel’s description of Yoruba religions also applies to

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, 139.

<sup>28</sup> C. Jenkins Lumpkin, Medical Officer (Epe) to Chief Medical Officer, December 22, 1900

<sup>29</sup> *Lagos Standard*, April 8, 1903; CA2/02, *Minutes of the Missionary Conference*, April 28 – May 2, 1859.

medical discourse. Peel describes Yorubaland during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a market place of religions in which priests -- local, Islamic and missionary alike -- advertised the efficacy of their medical potions and the superiority of their deities. During our period, none of these remedies, including western medicine, could claim to be infallible. The medical records show that colonial vaccination was not always effective, just as malaria patients still died in spite of using quinine, the flagship of colonial medications. With such an array of medical and social options, it becomes unsustainable to argue that the Egba had a traditional form to which the introduction of a modern variant proved a disruption. As with its 19<sup>th</sup> century political system, Egba society was in a state of fluid formation; it was open to multiple options and forces. Such fluidity posed considerable challenges to Egba elites. That no social convention lasted immutably but that existing practices were challenged by new resources and possibilities, threatened the stability of elite status and of the political structure. And for this reason, elites had to be vigilant to respond to social needs and the potentialities of elite transformations and counter ideologies embedded in medical narratives. As a terrain of ideological contestation, it may be assumed that medical resources and new ideas constituted tools of social relevance which elites struggled over. However, because of the ambiguity of the medical options, we find a case in which ideological divergences were less clear. A consciousness of the multiplicity of meanings of illness and the uncertainty of remedy options shaped the manner in which elites used medical claims in power struggles.

#### 6.4 Elite Attitudes to Smallpox

This inability to guarantee health shows in the disposition of Egba elites to smallpox treatment. While they could make specific and unambiguous statements on government and religion, elites could not pursue a definite attitude to health and healing. The two instances of 1937 and 1948 show clearly that elites were not in conflict over ideas about health. Following the outbreak in 1937, the Resident queried the Alake Ademola over the outbreak and demanded to know what was being done to combat the widespread smallpox epidemic in Abeokuta. Part of the exchange is worth reproducing here:

Resident: What is being done to deal with the smallpox epidemic?

Alake: We are ringing the bell to warn the Sopona worshippers against the introduction of smallpox into the town.

Resident: Very well

Alake: We are also praying for rain (to fight the heat and because of the famine).

Mohammedan Chief: Muslims are also praying.

Resident: Where?

Chief: Lantoro praying ground.

Resident: Were there many people?

Alake: Yes

Resident: That is good. We shall soon have rain in abundance, I hope.<sup>30</sup>

Needless to state, the Christian churches also held prayer services to seek divine solution to the epidemic. At another meeting of council, the Alake mentioned that he had paid *babalawos* to make sacrifices in the different sections of Abeokuta with a view to warding off the smallpox epidemic. Towards the same effect, a colonial sanitation officer

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<sup>30</sup> ECR. 112/8, Minutes of the Egba Native Council meeting, August 17, 1922

had been invited to lecture Egbas on cleanliness.<sup>31</sup> In this way, the Alake employed multiple options underscoring the uncertainty of any single medical option.

Following another epidemic in 1949, a different kind of council discussed responsibility. At this point, the Alake Ademola had been forced to abdicate. The interregnum precipitated a constitutional crisis and rendered the Egba Central Council unable to make decisions. Discussion on the smallpox outbreak thus fell to the Egba Constitution Assembly which had been formed in 1948 to forge a suitable constitution. Opinions differed on who to blame for the outbreak. Many members blamed the colonial government for not providing adequate sanitary and medical infrastructure and services. One member wondered where all the power that Ogboni chiefs were known to flaunt was. Obviously these “old chiefs do not love their country.” How could they not share their knowledge when a whole village had been wiped out by smallpox?<sup>32</sup> Another member did not doubt that native solutions were available; the problem was that “people do not listen to their obas and Ogboni” anymore. Some of the chiefs attributed the epidemic to the current confusion which differs from the “olden days when there were real babalawos and those who knew how to call Sopono.” I found it very surprising that (going by the transcripts) not one Christian or Western-educated member challenged these theories. The comments of the only female member of the Assembly, Funmilayo Ransome Kuti, are worth restating here:

*Olola* Mrs. Kuti agreed to the prohibition of Sekere and Aro and Boli as the people superstitiously believed them as some of the causes of smallpox. In 1918, when there was influenza epidemic, Asofeiyeye leaves were boiled and drunk by sufferers and they were cured. During the Bubonic plague of 1924,

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<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, Minutes of Meeting August 28, 1922.

<sup>32</sup> *Extract from Minutes of Meeting No. 15/1949 of the ENA central Council, held on October 24, 1949.*



a boy invented some preparation which cured the sufferers. The boy charged 10/- for such medicine.<sup>33</sup>

Mrs Kuti went on to recommend “kerosene and oil mixed together for drinking and Sanitas and oil mixed together for rubbing.” According to her these were effective preparations to be used for sufferers of smallpox. She recommended “*Agbesi* leaves to be boiled for drinking and bathing along with Epson salt.” No member of council thought any of these ideas egregious.

These exchanges offer insights into how interwoven elite interests were in a colonial setting. First we find a colonial Resident caught between colonial definitions of African heathenishness and the expectation that heathenish chiefs would stamp out heathenism. The Resident’s hope that prayers for rain would be answered might appear astutely sarcastic, yet he had to be hard pressed to suggest that prayers (conflated and now undifferentiated Islamic, Christian, heathenish) would not work. This is because colonial rule itself was postured as a godly and prayerful order.<sup>34</sup> Next we see the Alake, who by colonial definition is the custodian of customs and traditions and is by the same authority expected to be the arrowhead of a colonial affront on traditions. To secure their position, native rulers had to carefully navigate the unsure terrain of traditions and modernity. The ambiguities of tradition and of how claims of modernity fit into claims of tradition, meant that rulers were located in the midst of forces which they had to carefully manage. Alake Ademola (and Gbadebo before him) secured his authority by trying to

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> For Jean and John Comaroff, Christianity is “part and parcel of the historical anthropology of colonialism,” 11; Christian prayer forms were also common in colonial correspondence. Empire days in 1918 and 1940 were declared national days of prayer. John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland, 1843-1945* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 250; In Nigeria, local chiefs encouraged their youths to join in the war effort and offered sacrifices at local shrines and deities. Bonny Ibhawoh, “Second World War Propaganda, imperial Idealism and Anti-Colonial Nationalism in British West Africa” *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16, 2 (2007): 236.

define the traditional and then to transcend it by claiming to be modern. Such a location permits wide latitude to manoeuvre between the colonial and the so-called traditional. The Resident is thereby able to affirm colonial respect for African traditions, shrewdly allude to African savagery, and promote colonial policy all at the same time. The Alake subtly implied disdain at traditional practices to the colonial authorities, but to fellow stakeholders in traditions, he offered sacrifices to Sopono.

The best location in a medical health discourse appeared to be one that was as all-encompassing and non-controversial as possible. Thus we find a curious convergence among members of council, as elites of different identities and persuasions pushed many assumedly contradictory solutions. Chiefs agreed with the educated elites and colonial authorities in making Sopono priests and local practices the scapegoats. Yet, they give Caesar (Sopono) what is Caesar's. It is however Mrs Kuti's account that reveals how inexact elite declarations on disease and healing had to be. Born in 1900, she became the first female high school graduate in Abeokuta, after which she studied further in the UK. In 1925, she married the Reverend Ransome-Kuti, who ran the Abeokuta Grammar School and founded the Nigerian Union of Teachers. Between 1944 and 1948 she successfully led women to achieve the abolition of separate taxes for women and became a leading Nigerian nationalist. Two of her children went on to become medical doctors and shapers of Nigerian's medical policy in the post-colonial era. In every way, Funmilayo Kuti was Abeokuta's face of the modern.<sup>35</sup> Accordingly she agreed that *Sekere* (music), *Aro* (dye) and *Boli* (food) should be prohibited during the epidemic not because they are in themselves harmful, but because elites had to conform to public

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<sup>35</sup> Cheryl Johnson-Odim and Nina Emma Mba, *For Women and the Nation: Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997).

expectations that these elements made Sopono angry. In Yoruba mythology these elements imply happiness and festivity which was thought to be abhorrent to Sopono, the smallpox deity, who was best left dormant and undisturbed and not angry. Funmilayo and other elites were unable to publicly declare popular conventions as improper or unfit to resolve an engaging problem. The similarity between her unwillingness to publicly affirm her conviction and the accusation that old chiefs “did not love their country” because they refused to divulge and share ancient and hidden knowledge is informative. She went on to prescribe local herbs (*asofeiyeje*, *agbesi*) and other (not-so-local) prescriptions like kerosene and Epsom Salt, a brand of magnesium sulphate.

That the very same elites who pushed and contested claims over gender rights, political direction and religion were ambivalent over medical policy further supports my case that Egba elites were not divided along modern and traditional forms. The elite disposition to public health was not for a lack of knowledge of modern medical alternatives. This was 1949, well over half a century since the introduction of European vaccination practices. By 1945, over 50 thousand vaccinations yearly were recorded for Abeokuta and the government had declared success in the containment of smallpox in Western Nigeria. Elite disregard for available resources confirms the theory that medical policy was often influenced by concerns for social stability as much as by the remedy of the health problem. It appears sufficient for elites to be seen to be concerned and acting even as they deepen ideological control over commoners. On the other hand, it was not as though Egba commoners were unaware of vaccination and other medical options as they retained so-called superstitions in the discursive space of public health. Rather, I argue here that commoners were obstinate as regards their freedom to make medical choice and

about the social cosmology which they wished to inhabit. Their medical worldview was neither traditional nor Western; it was one of multiple choices.

#### 6.5 Power of Myths and Myths of Power in Egba Medical Discourse

A worldview of diverse medical options predates colonial influence. The local understanding of smallpox is embedded in and is larger in scope than what has been labelled as the immutable traditional conception of smallpox among the Yoruba. In a critical sense, scholarly interventions have established the mythological personification of Sopono as the definitive (and by implication the only) way in which the Yoruba conceive of smallpox and its remedy. Accordingly, scholars may have mistaken a part for the whole. While I do not suggest an undermining of the role of Sopono in Yoruba worldview, it is clear that personifying the diseases in a deity already precludes the various other ways in which the Yoruba understood the illness and sought remedies for it. Peel shows, for instance, that Sopono was not the only deity worshipped at the outbreak of smallpox. People consulted *babalawos* as well as Sopono priests, just as they tried medicinal herb and dietary remedies. Moreover, writers like Barber and Buckley demonstrate that the myths have embedded in them narratives of diversity and contestation.

According to one myth, Sopono was expelled from the palace of *Obatala*, the head deity, when he tried to infect the gods because they laughed at his deformity (a withered leg). He thus became an outcast and lives in the wild, for which reason temples dedicated to him are usually far from human habitation.<sup>36</sup> Sopono is thus the cause of

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<sup>36</sup> Ajose, "Preventative Medicine and Superstition in Nigeria," *Africa*, 27, 2 (1957): 268-274.

smallpox and its remedy and anyone afflicted by it can only be attended to by a Sopono priest.

Three notable features define the nature of this deity among the Yoruba. First is the dread with which Sopono is held; so much so that they often dare not call it by name. A series of rules, including that the victims of smallpox and their family must not cry or lament lest the god become more angry, highlight such dread. The deity abhors dancing and drumming because it is old and lame. Secondly, Sopono is identified with “hot earth” and wind and is prevalent during the dry season. Finally, the deity is an outcast from the pantheon of Yoruba gods and has “lived in desolate and uninhabited tracts of the country.”<sup>37</sup> Many studies interpret the social referents of Sopono metaphors, rituals and symbols. Stephen Farrow considers it apparent that the rendering of a lonely and desolate deity provided for seclusion and secrecy of the sufferers and priests of smallpox.<sup>38</sup> The prohibition of games and celebrations might also be taboos designed to limit contact and public gathering. Ajose points to respect for elders and the weak as a moral of the mythology.<sup>39</sup> Most descriptions of Sopono in scholarly literature have focused on the religious and sociological narratives and impacts. Accordingly, the rituals, symbols, chants and folklore have dominated our understanding of smallpox. These features appear to confirm colonial depictions of African health practices as irrational and superstitious even though scholars like Buckley and Kola Abimbola have argued that Yoruba medicine exhibits coherence, logic and rationality if it is not viewed from a Western medical paradigm.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Buckley, *Yoruba Medicine*, 99.

<sup>38</sup> Farrow, 29.

<sup>39</sup> Ajose, 269.

<sup>40</sup> Buckley, 98-99; Kola Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Sociological Account* (Birmingham: Iroko, 2006) 28.

Sopona's justification for afflicting humans projects a moral admonition and the consolidation of a patriarchal order. Sopono is an old man in the company of the gods: they laughed at his dancing. The lesson: never laugh at the old. The myth also offers protection for the weak by admonishing that Sopono was lame or infirm, yet very powerful. Extending responsibility beyond the physical is targeted at conforming behaviour in definite ways. Thus embedded in those accounts which serve power and the maintenance of social order are possibilities and interjections of protection for the weak. Similar accounts of power and interests can be read into Buckley's thesis, even though this author does not specifically describe the narrative as such. To show that in spite of the diversity of and the appearance of illogicality in their thought, the Yoruba reveal an articulation of coherent paradigmatic ideas, Buckley finds in the complicated and sometimes inconsistent statements of the Sopono narrative a coherence that fits into Yoruba knowledge. In this paradigm, Sopono can be read consistently as the *ultra-vires* "Other" to Orunmila (Ifa), the divination deity. Ifa is seen as the embodiment of all that is safe, happy and healthy because he can by divination locate medicinal plants and animals to provide health and success. Sopono fights against this deity and is exiled. Thus while the former constitutes the social body and nourishes it, the latter is an outsider, living in desolate places and seeking to destroy. Other character contrasts include: black/red and white, secrecy/revelation, life/death, health/illness, dancing/inability to dance, order/disorder etc., for Ifa and Sopono respectively. Buckley implies, as do Karin Barber and Andrew Apter in other contexts, that the dominant narratives of Yoruba cosmology contain in them traces of counter discourses. Sopono is thus painted as a counter discourse to Ifa, the deity which Yoruba monarchs claim as the guardian of Yoruba social

health and order. As a narrative of dominant power, Sopono afflicts as a consequence of disregarding Ifa and of challenging ruling elites, but it is also indiscriminate in his choice of victims, afflicting the powerful and poor alike. In the hands of counter elites, the deity is a real and metaphysical presence, unloved and unlovable but potently useful. For commoners, Sopono's indiscrimination is a metaphor of equality, an interjection of their co-humanity with the wealthy and powerful. The deity is not their enemy, but their social leveller and means of challenging power. It also their means of social mobility because it promises power and protection should they survive an affliction. In all, Sopono's ambiguities make this deity a resource of power at every level of power discourse. Sopono's availability as an instrument is evidenced in accounts of how commonly Sopono was used to curse (i.e. wish evil on enemies) by the Yoruba, irrespective of class.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, its indiscrimination is evident in the fear by many Egba that they could easily be poisoned.<sup>42</sup>

It is sufficient for my argument that the Sopono myth served purposes of power. It was not just valuable as an ideological narrative, its flexibility and renewability allowed it to serve innovative power and resistance strategies by dominant and counter elites respectively. Karin Barber notes that in Okuku (a small town in Western Nigeria) alone, there are as many as 17 distinct cults that claim facets and interpretations of Sopono's personality and rituals.<sup>43</sup> Such impressive variety underscores that Yoruba religion, medicine and social life at large were not immutable; they had changing forms and adaptations. Buckley opines that Yoruba culture was a rich field of debate, and not at all

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<sup>41</sup> Buckley, *Yoruba Medicine*, 100.

<sup>42</sup> PRO. CO 149/5, *Annual Report of the Medical Department, 1899*.

<sup>43</sup> "Oruko metadinlogun ni orisa Sopotnon pin si" (lit. The Orisa Sopotnon divides into seventeen names). Karin Barber, "How Man Makes God: Yoruba Attitudes Towards the Orisa" *Africa*, 5.3 (1981) 372.

one for dogmatic unanimity.<sup>44</sup> His summation, that messy and chaotic as Yoruba ritual practices appear, they harbour pervasive and deep power brokerages and ideological discourses,<sup>45</sup> supports my thesis that power in Yorubaland was always intensely contested by a multiplicity of elite categories and interests and in a very fluid structure of power. Therefore, that the Egba ascribed smallpox to Sopono does not imply that the deity constituted an inescapable domination. Apart from Barber's affirmation that Sopono was a multiplicity of diverse rituals and practices, Peel describes various instances in which Sopono was not the only deity to receive sacrifices when there was a smallpox outbreak.<sup>46</sup> Such a multiplicity of ideas defines the medical discourse in which rulers and the ruled struggle over the meaning of smallpox and how society is organized by it.

In the light of the dread of smallpox and the attractions of the deity, it is granted that the worshippers and priests of Sopono constituted an important axis of power among the Egba. However, this could not be a closed guild, but was open to anyone who qualified.<sup>47</sup> Priests were usually those who had survived an affliction and bore evidence of its godly authority by the scars on their bodies. Sopono priests derived their awe or respect from the fact that they could touch and dispose of the remains and property of deceased victims without being infected.<sup>48</sup> Samuel Johnson wrote that Sopono priests often demanded about 10,000 cowries, a tortoise, a snail, a goat, an armadillo, a ground pig, cam-wood, Shea butter, palm oil and beads as payment to bury the dead. They also

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<sup>44</sup> Buckley, *Yoruba Medicine*, 105.

<sup>45</sup> Anthony Buckley, "Review of (Andrew Apter) *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society* and (Margaret Drewal) *Yoruba Ritual Performers, Play and Agency*" *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 28, 3(1994): 525-526.

<sup>46</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 98-99.

<sup>47</sup> Barber notes that membership appears open and initiates included women. Barber, "How Man Makes God," 740.

<sup>48</sup> *The Nigerian Chronicles*, February 25, 1910.



claimed the personal effects of the deceased as legitimately theirs because the victim had been “marked (claimed) by the gods.”<sup>49</sup>

It is into this world that European medicine was introduced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but that entry was not earthshaking. The *Nigerian Pioneer* reported that Saro doctors began offering vaccination in Lagos in 1861. There was medical service for CMS missionaries in Abeokuta and in 1859 the younger Crowther was permitted to begin private medical practice. The Catholic mission established its medical service in 1881. By 1898 smallpox vaccination became available in Abeokuta and in 1904 the EUG promulgated Abeokuta’s first compulsory vaccination regulations. Following colonial annexation, Abeokuta became a part of the Nigerian vaccination programme. The gradual expansion of Western medical service was not in edicts and service alone, there was similarly a progressive increase in the number of Africans who accessed the facilities as attested to in the missionary and colonial reports. Peel affirms that people were attracted to Western medicine to debunk the notion that Africans were so attached to traditional practices it was impossible to attach them to modern medicine.

Missionary medical practice, because it was targeted at evangelical conversion, was circumspect about openly despising traditional medical practices. Colonial practice in contrast, was predicated on destroying local practices it defined as barbaric. Thus where missionaries could cohabit with the smallpox deity, the “Sopono cult” acquired notoriety as a powerful hideous organization. In 1926, Stephen Farrow accused Sopono priests of abusing their religious power for pecuniary gains.

...these priests make it their business to spread the disease. The following material can be found in the house of every priest, or priestess, as emblems of this god, and (may we not say?) as stock-in-trade for spreading the disease. A

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<sup>49</sup> Johnson, *The History*, 28; Ajose, “Preventative Medicine” 300.

calabash containing some portions of the body of the victim of the disease, a pot of black liquid made with water from the body of such victim, a vessel of black powder compounded with dried scabs, etc. from the sufferer. This liquid, or the powder, is thrown at night into the entrance of dwellings of prospective victims.<sup>50</sup>

Colonial authorities attributed the spread of smallpox in spite of vaccination to the “menace of smallpox secret societies.” Vaccination agents complained of threats and resistance from Sopono priests in Abeokuta and colonial officials ascribed the reluctance of people to accept vaccination to the influence of smallpox priests.<sup>51</sup> The “cult” was proscribed in 1917, but its appeal continued despite colonial persecutions, with many of its adherents crossing into Dahomey to continue their worship.<sup>52</sup>

#### 6.6 Reconciling Elite Attitudes in Egba Medical Discourse

In spite of the proscription of the Sopono “cult” in 1917, it remained more dominant in the public view than colonial vaccination by 1949. There remained a public dread that when Sopono raged no one should celebrate. The rigour in the Sopono ideology can be analysed in the light of Abeokuta’s political experience. In the absence of a central government during most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the picture of Egba pre-colonial public health management is one in which individuals pursued a variety of available options. Egba medical knowledge was constituted by the awareness of common medicinal herbs and substances, and the skills and claims of local *Oniseguns*, *Babalawos*, and of a variety of priests and their deities. These cadres were part of a region-wide network of herbalists, “surgeons” and spiritualists. Peel marvels at their sense of professional connection and

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<sup>50</sup> Farrow, 29.

<sup>51</sup> PRO. CO 657/7, Annual Medical Report of the Medical Department, 1935; 17.

<sup>52</sup> Shapkana worship is also very popular in the Caribbean. Luis Nicolau Pares, “The ‘Nagoization’ Process in Bahian Candomble,” *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*, Toyin Falola and Matt D. Childs, eds., (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 188.

comradeship despite vast distances.<sup>53</sup> The Reverend Allen reported that many *Babalawos* from distant places met in Abeokuta to conduct sacrifices over the smallpox outbreak of 1874. There were also resident and itinerant Hausa health practitioners peddling cultural, herbal and Islamic remedies.<sup>54</sup> There is a possibility that some Chinese medical ideas may have found their way into the Egba world.<sup>55</sup> Individuals and groups travelled long distances if need be to access whichever medical resource promised a solution to their maladies. It was into this fluidity that Western medicine entered. Until colonial conquest in 1914, European medicine was only one more resource which individuals tried and used if they found it effective. We have seen how diverse meanings of *Sopono* precluded it being a constraining cosmology. Egba politics did not adopt a state religion, much less an exclusive medical culture. What changed from 1914 for the Egba specifically was that they had to respond to the enforcement of an exclusivist European medical attitude: the idea that European medicine was the only civilized form and that all others must cease to exist. Colonial medical discourse, as part of the larger colonial ideology, demanded of the Egba adjustment from existing political and medical fluidity to enforced centralization.

However, colonial medicine itself was not an exact science. According to Watt, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most sick Europeans relied on family care rather than hospitals or clinic. “If their situations worsened, they might call in healers from the village and perhaps supplement this by cures recommended by wandering peddlers.” The reason for this was not just the high cost and status considerations; it was also the perception that

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<sup>53</sup> Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 98.

<sup>54</sup> T. G. O. Gbadamosi, *The growth of Islam among the Yoruba* (London: Longman, 1976) 47; Peel, *Religious Encounter*, 106.

<sup>55</sup> Indian palm reading and Chinese balms were advertised in the *Lagos Standard*, April 18, 1903.

medical doctors were unable to cure any serious illness.<sup>56</sup> The scorecard of Egba experience of European medicine did not recommend it as more effective than local care. Indeed, the colonial medical department was learning and gathering data on tropical diseases and medicine alongside claiming ability to treat. Some of the African medical personnel wrote their medical theses on research which they conducted by studying from African herbalists and some declared preference for local herbs and practices.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, colonial medicine did not constitute a clearly superior option to local forms.

The path which elites had to tread in Egba medical discourse is depicted in the life and career of one African colonial medical doctor. Dr. Oguntola Sapara is most remembered for his outstanding role in the eradication of smallpox in Southern Nigeria. Born in Freetown in 1861 to a liberated slave father and Nancy, an Egba woman, Sapara was the first Nigerian appointed Assistant Colonial Surgeon in 1896. While at his posting at Epe, a town notorious for endemic smallpox epidemics, Sapara took the unorthodox step of joining a local smallpox cult with a view to understanding their operations and thereby stamping out their activities. In his words:

In 1897 when I took charge of Epe district, the town of Epe was known as the hotbed of small-pox epidemic. Finding that vaccination and other precautions seemed to fail, I joined the cult and having got into the mysteries I summoned the small-pox priests together, and threatened them with prosecution for disseminating the disease and used perchloride of mercury solutions. They left the town through disgust and since then, up till the time I left Epe, vaccination had scope for doing good work and then the town enjoyed immunity from small-pox, hitherto unknown.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Watts, *Introduction* xiii.

<sup>57</sup> Africanus Horton wrote "The Medical Topography of the West Coast of Africa", Obadiah Johnson wrote "West African Therapeutics, Leigh-Sodiye wrote "The Relationship between Nature and Medical Treatment with special referenced to Native West African Methods." Adelola Adeyoye, "Some Early Nigerian Doctors and Their Contribution to Modern Medicine in West Africa," *Medical History* 18 (1974): 275-293.

<sup>58</sup> O. Sapara, "Report to the Colonial Government on smallpox epidemic in Yoruba country," Lagos, September 1, 1909. Cited in Adeyoye, 288.

Sapara reported that the cult's *modus operandi* was to infect smallpox virus on persons or households who failed to yield to their blackmail, by applying scrapings from the skin rashes of actual smallpox cases.<sup>59</sup> It was on the basis of this report that the colonial government enacted the "Witchcraft and Juju Ordinance" in 1910 and made the worship of Sopono punishable by imprisonment.

Such accounts as this pose the educated African in the mould of the heroic colonial doctor battling against native health practitioners. It poses them in contestation against the dominant Yoruba worldview upon which local power was determined. Sapara's success at expelling the local priests fits well in this transition paradigm, a battle of the traditional African and the Western modern in which the former gives way. In reality, however educated elites had to tread carefully as they navigated this terrain because, their colonial statuses notwithstanding, they were also subject to the social and political environment in which smallpox and its deity were real. They knew that neither colonial medicine nor the local health practices ultimately secured one from affliction. The main colonial preventative regime was vaccination which did not provide absolute guarantee that the vaccinated would not be afflicted. Of the 65,000 people reportedly vaccinated in 1899, 21,214 reported negative results on the effects of the vaccination.<sup>60</sup> On the other hand and in much contrast to the "traditional," colonial medicine offered no promise of healing or remedy once a person was afflicted. Quarantine or admission into

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<sup>59</sup>Mentioned in PRO. CO 657/9, Federation of Nigeria, "Annual Report on the Medical Services for the Years 1953-1954." *Nigerian Pioneer*, October 8, 1926. An earlier instance of the claim is in *Nigerian Chronicle*, February 25, 1910. "The Small Pox God: How its Priests and Priestesses Ply Their Inhuman Trade"

<sup>60</sup> Number included those who were already immune because of earlier inoculation or affliction. At least 4,500 required re-vaccination. P.R.O., C/O. 149/5, Henry Strachan, Chief Medical Officer, Annual Medical Report for 1899, The rate of successful vaccination in Southern Nigeria never passed 75% through the 1930s in spite of vaunted achievements in vaccination. PRO. C/O 657/7, Medical Reports for 1935, 1936, 1937.

the Contagious Diseases Hospital amounted to social death for elites for many reasons. First, it was located near and was publicly undifferentiated from the lunacy asylum; insanity was considered a social stigma. Secondly, as newspapers reported, it was unkempt. It also implied sharing public wards with other sick people.<sup>61</sup> Local medicine promised a more total package that offered immunity at both the temporal and the unreachable realms—to which educated elites were no less exposed than other natives. Their Christian heritages as well as their aural and visual experiences were filled with accounts relating to spirits and demons.<sup>62</sup> Yoruba medicine also offered remedies upon affliction and a regime of treatments that involved people (at least Sopono adherents or family members) mingling around them (to provide portions, food and to clean them).<sup>63</sup> The afflicted know that should they survive smallpox, they could tap into a realm of power that was otherwise unavailable to the uninitiated. Dr. Sapara’s “discovery” of the nefarious activities of the Sopono cult therefore served more purposes than to simply promote Western medicine and colonial power or to advance his career and establish him as a culture broker. Identifying with the cult as an initiate, gaining their confidence and being known in the local environment as a “person of power” (on many fronts) would have served him well, secured as he was from retribution by colonial power. In this sense, Sapara located himself as a member of both worlds (and probably more). He would go on to become the leading authority on West African traditional medicine and the owner of many herbal patents. However, Leigh-Sodipe, his immediate successor at the Epe station, suddenly developed a malignant fever in 1901 and was rushed to the medical

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<sup>61</sup> The *Nigerian Pioneer*, Feb., 27, 1920 advised that the colonial government should create private wards if it was serious about making afflicted gentlemen attend hospitals.

<sup>62</sup> Peel, 96, 264.

<sup>63</sup> Raymond Prince, “The Problem of “Spirit Possession” as Treatment for Psychiatric Disorders,” *Ethos*, 2, 4 (1974) 315-333. Prince suggests that some initiates and cult leaders of Sopono were women, 319.

headquarters in Lagos, where he died on 15<sup>th</sup> April from a fulminating hepatic abscess.<sup>64</sup> His death appeared innocuous and the coincidence may have been lost on the colonial authorities; the symbolism of it would have crossed a few local minds. Educated elites may have disparaged local health practices in their colonial reports and at elite forums, but they were best advised to occupy a location in which they could access all medical opportunities, all professional advantages, and be secured on all fronts. Therefore when Macfarlane saw “the more enlightened among the natives” hanging strips of crocodile as jewellery around their necks to protect from smallpox, he assumed that it was symptomatic of African heathenish attachments<sup>65</sup> and he may have been further convinced of the ineffectualness of European saving graces. If he had investigated any further, he could have seen the “enlightened” praying at his reverend’s and/or imam’s, then visiting the hospital, and on his way buying Chinese balms which were already being advertised in Lagos newspapers. To Egba elites, Sopono was real, not only as a deity, but also as a social and political environment which must be negotiated wisely.

This sense of fluid and flexible attachment to multiple social identities typifies the disposition of most educated elites to the social realities of their age. They could not rely absolutely on colonial power for their security and future because colonial rule was itself very limited and lacked specificity. Besides, racism created conditions in which colonial rule tended to be very adverse to the educated while it appeared to favour chiefly elites as the more natural rulers and more credible cultural repositories. In any case such fluidity, characterized by the adaptation and use of resources from multiple sources, had been a regular feature of Egba politics and society since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Egba chiefs and

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<sup>64</sup> . E. Maguire, Medical Officer, Epe, Report of the Medical Department, 1901-1902.

<sup>65</sup> P.R.O., C/O. 149/5 W. F. Macfarlane (Abeokuta), Annual Report for the Medical Department, 1900.

individuals were known to have courted Christian missionaries, sponsored churches, kept Islamic clerics, hung the bible and tracts of the Quran, engaged in slavery, pursued humanitarian options like resettling dislocated peoples, traded in commodities etc. without evincing any coherent and unambiguous set of practices. Try as it might, colonial power achieved only limited success in narrowing social fluidity by centralizing the politics, by positioning Christianity as the main religion or Western medicine as the central medical discourse. Outside of this superstructure, it was much less successful in altering the subterranean but real discourses that defined power and lived experience among the Egba.

The disposition of chiefly elites to the intrusion of Western medicine was not any less ambiguous. Confronted with a colonial power that labelled them traditional and at the same time expected their cooperation in the ideological denigration of tradition, chiefs had a narrow space to navigate. On one hand, they must appear to please colonial authorities to retain colonial privileges and not risk their ire. In any case, colonial power had become part of the constituent resources upon which contemporary chiefly power prospered. On the other hand, they must not be locked into any rigid position that could produce substantial local antagonism. They knew that their power was tenuous and its basis contestable. The challenge to chiefly power was not just from colonial rule or an educated elite projecting a counter ideology such as Western medicine. Chiefs knew that the greatest threat to chiefly position always was the Egba population who would quickly shift allegiance if a better option became available. Therefore, elite ideology had to be flexible; they as much as possible had to be everything to everyone. Egba chiefs were not opposed to Western medical practice; indeed, they accepted and canvassed for the



expansion of colonial medical facilities in Abeokuta. Colonial doctors were often surprised that *babalawos* would send their uncured patients to colonial hospitals and were equally open to sharing their knowledge where colonial medicine failed.<sup>66</sup> Thus chiefly elites promoted local practices as though they were not incompatible with colonial medicine.

What was new from 1914 was that colonial rule tried to lock in a comparatively fluid system by projecting Western medicine as though it was strictly opposed to local practices and by criminalizing so-called traditional medicine with a view to eradicating it. This presented both a burden and an opportunity for the Egba monarchy. The power of the monarchy relied heavily on colonial rule and on claims to be aspiring to European-type modernity. The colonial agenda thus put the monarchy to task on its claim to being an executive government, further accentuating a discourse over governmental responsibility and civil rights. Where previously the search for medical solutions had been primarily the responsibility of the sick and their relations and chiefly roles had been to offer sacrifices (the unresponsiveness of the gods could always be explained away in the corpus of Obatala's struggles with Sopono and with the need for more sacrifices) and mobilize such public activities as were deemed necessary, the monarchy was now to be assessed on the outbreak and management of smallpox, with the ever-present threat of destoolment. Consequently the monarchy, which was surviving through a balancing act of simultaneously recognizing Egba diversity and multiplicity, could become further threatened by the bifurcation which the colonial segregation and criminalization of traditional practices implied.

Therefore, Egba elites responded to smallpox epidemics in every way possible.

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<sup>66</sup> Ajose, *Preventative Medicine*, 273.

Thus the monarchy permitted and financed sacrifices to local deities, encouraged Christians to pray in their churches and Muslims in their mosques. It announced the prohibition of dancing, music and feasting to ward off Sopono's anger. At the same time, the Egba government obeyed colonial medical directives. The Sopono cult remained proscribed even though ancestral worship continued. As part of its modernization drive, the government enacted vaccination and sanitary laws and regulations. The success rate of smallpox vaccination progressively rose to 58,000 in 1938 with increased colonial interventions in Abeokuta's medical affairs.<sup>67</sup> By 1930, the bulk of internally generated revenue for the Egba Native Council was from sanitary fines paid by the "breeders of mosquitoes" and people who failed to clean their gutters.<sup>68</sup> In 1936, the Alake proclaimed an annual "Dry Pot day," an environmental sanitation exercise.<sup>69</sup>

Such regulations as these made the presence of a central government more real in significant departure from 19<sup>th</sup> century Egba practices. It accordingly aided the authority of the Alake and the idea of Egba centralization. However, they also projected the image of an adversarial government, of fines and levies, arrests and imprisonments. That the modernization efforts of the government were not publicly supported meant that they were often viewed with scorn for their waste, inadequacy, intrusion or assumed irrelevance. For instance, the Council found it difficult to expand on the two public "Salga" latrines that were constructed in 1937 because people resisted that their land should be appropriated for that purpose or that latrines should be sited anywhere near their residence. The Council was inundated with petitions and requests that septic tanks,

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<sup>67</sup> Annual Reports, Abeokuta Province, 1940, para 30.

<sup>68</sup> Annual Report, Abeokuta Province, 1939, para. 29.

<sup>69</sup> Rufus Akinyele, "Health and Sanitation in Abeokuta," *Nigerian Cities*, Toyin Falola and Steven Salm eds., (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2004), 293-313.

public latrines and waste dumps should be removed from near them. The “*wole wole*” (lit. house searchers), as the sanitary inspectors were called, were particularly feared and hated. Their functions included inspecting household pots for mosquito larvae, ensuring that gutters running around houses were clean and that weeds were cleared and preventing the arbitrary disposal of waste. Often accompanied by scores of “*Akoda*” (Native Authority policemen), they arrested those found to have contravened health regulations. The image of the *wole-wole* was of predatory inspectors who arrested people only because they refused to pay bribes. *Wole-woles*, *Akodas* and unscrupulous persons dressed to impersonate government officials were also thought to be used to settle scores. It was common to hear of stampedes on the sight of a *wole-wole*.<sup>70</sup>

There were many other instances of public resistance to health policy. For instance, there was a public outcry over government measures against bubonic plague. There had been an outbreak of plague in 1924 during which 30 people died and the Alake was criticised for not being responsive. Another outbreak in Lagos in 1936 caused significant panic and informed colonial and Egba government efforts at limiting its spread. Among other measures, it was proposed that a house-to-house inspection and de-ratting exercise be conducted. However, many Egbas protested the infringement of their privacy. A public meeting convened by the Alake in April 1938 permitted the exercise on the condition that a week’s notice be publicly announced to enable people move their properties and valuables out of the inspectors’ way. In spite of these measures, not much success was achieved by the anti-plague exercise. The Council then employed rat-catchers, who killed 7000 rats which were tested and found to be plague free.<sup>71</sup> At other

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<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 301.

times, Egba citizens simply disregarded the government's regulations. Following fears of food poisoning in 1936, the Egba authorities adopted the Colonial Bakeries Ordinance stipulating that bakeries be registered. By December of 1937 however, not one bakery had applied for registration. The Council found that none of the 15 bakeries operating in Abeokuta would fulfil the legislated conditions of hygiene.<sup>72</sup>

Thus health legislation may have aided the centralization of power in the Egba monarchy; it also produced considerable challenges against the power and authority of the Alake. Specifically, not everyone bought into the idea that smallpox was caused by either Sopono, or unsanitary living. Many imputed responsibility on the Egba authorities for failure to provide necessary facilities. In 1936, the *Osumare Egba* found the ENA's vaccination service inefficient, stating "the medical authorities of old days had a (better) way of dealing with this epidemic."<sup>73</sup> The hospitals were not properly equipped to provide treatment and were in such condition that "no self-respecting gentleman will want to go there." Furthermore, increasing urbanization had resulted in overcrowding with 5 to 6 people sleeping cramped together in small rooms. Government regulations that infected peoples should display special flags were disregarded and infected persons were seen walking about the streets at night. According to the *Pioneer*, people preferred to conceal their infection rather than be quarantined in the unhealthy wards of the hospitals. The paper also pointed attention to the burial practices for chiefs who obviously died of smallpox. Contrary to the assumed prerogative of Sopono priests to dispose of the corpse of victims and seize their property, the paper lamented that Ogboni chiefs had adopted the Christian lying-in-state burial system, in which the corpse is

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<sup>72</sup> Annual Report, Abeokuta Province, 1939.

<sup>73</sup> *The Nigerian Pioneer*, March 19, 1920.

displayed for 5 days (without embalmment or fumigation) and until the early signs of decomposure. (The burial ceremonies of Chief Okenla, the prominent 19<sup>th</sup> century Christian chief, and of Oba Gbadebo in 1920, obviously established a precedent of the chiefly and honourable way to the grave.) The corpse is “swathed in large number of [his ceremonial] clothes and displayed before interment.” Also, in notable contrast to the depiction of priestly privileges and authority, the newspaper recorded that chiefly corpses were being buried inside compounds or in shallow graves dug in the room occupied by the deceased in his lifetime; and to mark their memory. Such practices, the paper noted, were responsible for the transmission of the pox and the spread of the epidemic.<sup>74</sup>

Others pointed to the failure of the government to provide adequate public facilities. At the very council meeting at which offering sacrifices and praying for rain was discussed, a petition written by Messrs Majekodunmi, Adeogun and Feyisetan was also read. These gentlemen wondered why public water supply to private residence was being rationed for Africans while it kept flowing to the European quarters. Indeed, there had been protests over the erratic supply of water at the public taps. The Resident responded that the petitioners should be satisfied with two hours daily provision of water to private residences because the cost of maintaining the water service had gone from £2000 to £3000 per annum. The Alake added that the complainants should use the public outlets. Only the petitioners connected the lack of water to public sanitation and the epidemic.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>75</sup> ECR. 112/8, Minutes of the Egba Native Council meeting, August 17, 1922.

## 6.7 The Limits of Elite Power.

The divergent explanations for the epidemics of smallpox, i.e. “*Sopono* myth” and the equally lopsided colonial narrative, underscore that the public enunciation of disease was much less about a verifiable reality; disease, medicine and social health are currencies and rationales of power. Sheldon Watts makes the case clearly that government health policy is shaped by constructs of religious and political ideology much more than by science. In a study of seven diseases including smallpox, Watts shows how empirical evidence was frequently displaced by abstract notions extracted from classical and religious sources, mythopoeia and pseudo-science. The latter were then applied out of sheer ignorance or in callous and calculating ways aimed at social control of non-ruling classes.<sup>76</sup> Thus, we find the colonial state implicating the colonized (their ignorance, traditions and self deceptions) in their own calamity and absolving itself of inefficiency (of failing in the very purpose of rulership). By this narrative also, colonial power and ideology become further entrenched by acquiring the power to legitimately proscribe the “*Sopono* cult” and by highlighting colonial civility, modernity and superiority in contrast to the assumed backwardness, ignorance, irrationality and inhumanity of the colonized.

As with colonial power, Egba conceptions of health, disease and medicine go beyond the simplicities of causality for which African medical experience has been deemed illogical, irrational and superstitious. African narratives of health -- often filled with symbols that appear esoteric and idioms which are not explicit -- are less illogical if viewed as referents of social control, ideological domination and hegemonic stability. Social health conceptions, conventions and practices are part of the struggle of

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<sup>76</sup> Sheldon Watts, *Epidemics and History: Disease, Power and Imperialism* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997).

ideological discourses, the extant form of which is deemed to be the traditional. As with Karin Barber's *Oriki* and Apter's *Black Critics and Kings*, these so-called traditions – claimed as they might be by dominant elites to be eternally derived and immutable– also have embedded in them the voices and the counter discourses of the commoners and the dominated. Robert Borofsky's study of the implications of power in the explication of sickness among the Oyo-Yoruba highlights two important dimensions of this struggle. First, the idea that sickness and disease are afflictions of the gods particularly favours the semi-divine monarchy to reinforce the Oduduwa legend and other narratives of divine derivation. The very essence of divine-kingship is to lay claims to and control the realm of the unknown. Since the unknown is beyond people's immediate experience or verifiability, it is a veritable ideological instrument to strengthen the power structure (by claiming the legitimacy that comes from superior –even esoteric-- knowledge) and to assert social control.<sup>77</sup>

Yet the commoner is not necessarily fooled or ignorant of these devices. Confronted with the wide array of the instruments of domination, ordinary peoples find space through resistance, indifference and/or acquiescence. They engage power in a debate over meanings and help define the limits of domination. As Peel shows, the Yoruba individual is not altogether bound in his belief in *Ori* (lit. head; destiny) as the divine unction and determinant of futures; but he/she also recognizes that this deity is insufficient, that hard-work trumps it. In the same vein, while the Yoruba may ascribe divine causes to sickness and well-being, they not only appease the deities concerned and sniff out witches; they also take concrete human protective, preventative and curative steps. As we have seen in earlier chapters, priests and chiefs deemed to be wicked and

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<sup>77</sup> Borofsky, *Power*, 13.

unacceptably immoral are also liable to public disdain, exile or mob assassination. Chiefs were themselves not immune to smallpox affliction, nor were Sopono priests totally protected from other afflictions even though they may be immune to smallpox. It is in this sense of its ideological treatment, and not in the comparative (European and African) narratives of causality and explication that the meaning of smallpox and its place in Egba society and history is better understood.

That disease was critical to the nature of power can be deduced from the importance of poisonous substances and their remedies in Egba society. A medical officer reported that “all natives, high and low evince a great dread of some day being poisoned.” Some of the well-known poisonous substances include the root of “epusere, (a) very deadly gastro intestinal irritant, poison drawn from the fang of *paramole*, (very poisonous snake). Sulphide of antimony, powdered *tale* and glass, seeds of *datura stramonium*.” Medical officers reported that many of their casualties did not die of known diseases but from the helplessness of medical personnel to provide remedies to poison. In a particular case, the doctor retrieved the substance which the deceased was said to have ingested and applied it to a chicken; it died within 30 minutes.<sup>78</sup> Colonial doctors thought that the knowledge of poisons was very widespread among Egba populations. A. C. Macdonald observed that the feeling of secrecy pervaded Yoruba society, such that many preferred to die holed up in their homes than face the ignominy that the public knowledge of their illness would bring. Such ignominy is thought to imply the victory of some enemy or the potency of poisonous charms. On the other hand, people celebrated deliverance from smallpox by wearing camwood dye as a public display of their victory. It is understandable how poisoning could be a common option for the resolution of

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<sup>78</sup> PRO. CO 149/7, Annual Report, 1902.



political interests and rivalry in the fluid and rancorous political system of pre-colonial Egbaland. However, poison and their remedies were also political statements and discourse, part of the social knowledge over which all elites struggled -- to master or navigate. As a resource of power, it was deployed by ruling elites as part of that knowledge stock: a (claimed) cosmology that defined the most powerful persons as those with access to and control over physical and esoteric social knowledge. Ultimately, political power was secured by more means than a constraining cosmology, or some pre-existent ordination, preordained authority or immutable identity and culture; these features held together in *realpolitik*.

Little wonder then that it appeared to missionaries and colonial officials that they could not totally wipe out the attachment of people to their “black arts” and juju. The framework this thesis adopts enables us to speak to this issue without the constraints of nationalist pride or colonial prejudice. A prideful historiography has generally undermined the reality of the horrible human experiences that Africans endured. A historical sequence including the challenges of a tropical environment, the domestic, Saharan and Atlantic slave trades, the devastations of wars, kidnapping and displacement, famine, drought and fires, colonial conquest and rule and continuing imperialism or neo-colonialism of the present era etc., constitute the historical bases upon which attitudes have been formed. None of these should be undermined in the historiography. Smallpox was only one of the calamities that confronted the Egba during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Going by the records, warfare, kidnapping and slavery, power struggles, storms and fires, droughts, famines and the loss of women were also major concerns. In such a challenging society, epidemics like the plague, cholera, smallpox, yellow fever and influenza may have

resulted in periodic high causality rates, but loss, pain and death were not strangers in this history. Indeed, smallpox may have become a dreaded annual nuisance in the public consciousness with individuals coping as best they could with their many afflictions.<sup>79</sup> The government may claim responsibility for social order and a healthy society, but the historical reality had taught distrust, self-effort and individuality. What appeared to be heathenish fear and helplessness may well have been vigilance. Little wonder that educated elites might publicly profess to sneer at these practices and yet be found participating in the rituals or at best not be seen to oppose them. They recognized what the colonial state could not grasp: that their society had perfected the arts and indeed the “science” of social balance. A history of kidnapping, slavery and war had not been in vain.

## 6.8 Conclusion

Curing epidemics was only one of the purposes of colonial medicine. It served other purposes including legitimizing imperial domination. The very same applies to African conceptions of disease. What appear to be myths and superstitions served purposes of power and control. Therefore, health and medical discourses were always terrains over which elites struggled to implant favourable views of social convention. An Egba conception of health was an admixture of various options including physical and spiritual ideas and practices. As with the political system, social health was not conceived in any fixed or immutable way, but was constituted by a fluid interaction of ideas and resources. It also became a resource which had to be wrestled over for its ideological implications.

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<sup>79</sup> Burton, 87 reports that although smallpox was endemic in mid 19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta, fatality was very low.

This chapter has made the case for a new historiography which does not categorise the African medical experience as a dichotomous opposite of the Western. The notion that an extant and unchanging form by which smallpox was understood and treated existed -- which European modernist conceptions and medicine had to overcome before smallpox could be controlled and eradicated -- is not supported in the historical evidence. This binary framework obscures the diversity of identities and the multiplicity of options available to African societies over an undivided (uncategorized) historical timeline. It also creates parallel discourse of colonial health such that it appears that Africans engaged colonial medicine only by resisting it or by being grateful for its introduction. Also, by obscuring the ideological components of local health discourses, we shield local applications of power and domination. In short, it does not capture the total African experience with sickness and the use to which power elites deploy it.

The Egba of Abeokuta engaged smallpox by a wide variety of means including variolation and supplications to various forms of *Sopono* and other deities. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century Western vaccination was practiced by Saro doctors and Islamic and Christian conceptions of health added to existing medical options and their ideological implications on power. This claim is supported by Peel's reading that Yoruba society was a market place of religions in which priests local, Islamic and missionary alike -- advertised the efficacy of their potions and the superiority of their deities. During our period, none of these remedies, including western medicine, could claim to be infallible. The medical records show that colonial vaccination was not always effective, just as malaria patients died in spite of using quinine. With such an array of medical and social options, it becomes unsustainable to argue that the Egba had a traditional form. The peculiarity of

colonial power, for which it drew considerable resistance, was in acting as though it was the only “true” option and in seeking the delisting of other options from people’s consciousness. In contrast to its 19<sup>th</sup> century image when it could be incorporated into this fluid interaction of options, Western medicine became colonial medicine, a cultural difference delimiting value and defining itself as white. Yet in spite of this the medical terrain retained a multiplicity of options and resources.

Political elites shifted their ideologies to cope with new medical ideas. Neither the so-called traditional elites nor the Western educated elites could declare unambiguously for either side. First they recognized the dangers of fixing identity in fluid settings. They therefore located themselves such that they could bridge what colonial rule defined as a binary, but what in the local setting was open-ended. Political elites learned to incorporate the various options into an Egba form of the type the Alake enounced; so also did individuals expand their range of solicitation and solution as new possibilities became available. Equally, priests, medical persons and other actors refined and redefined their claims and materials to retain relevance. Often this included borrowing, adopting and adapting to new forms or interpreting new forms as though they justify existing professions. Patton mentions that native healers often directed their patients to hospitals when their treatment failed,<sup>80</sup> just as those who were discharged uncured from the hospitals knew to go to local healers. There is always something in the “new” that matches the “old.”

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<sup>80</sup> Adell Patton, *Physicians*, 16.

## CHAPTER 7

### A NATION UNFULFILLED: GLOBAL IDEAS, NIGERIAN NATIONALISM AND THE REORIENTATION OF ELITE POWER IN ABEOKUTA, 1930-1950.

#### 7.1 Introduction

Up to the 1930s, the main questions in Egba politics were posed in terms of Egba identity and nationality. The dominant ideology was predicated on the claim (by the monarchy) that in spite of the diversity among them, the Egba were a distinct people. The plausibility of this claim had to be enhanced by the construction of suitable traditions, history and other features of nationality. If the Egba were one people, then they also had to have a common ruler. As such the progressive centralization of governmental structure went alongside the construction of national symbols and the hardening of previously fluid political expressions. Colonial rule fit into and promoted this centralization process but did not singularly shape its construction. Indeed, British interests only allied to pre-existent local forces committed to the idea of Egba nationality and centralisation. The convergence of interests reached its height with the promulgation of the Native Authority Ordinance which invested paramount rulers throughout Southern Nigeria as Sole Native Authority over their domain. The colonial ordinance provided a legal resource to an ongoing process in which successive Alakes were redefining the Egba central council as the Alake's council. One way in which Alake Ademola tried to establish Egba nationhood on his terms was the 1930 celebration of the centenary of Abeokuta's creation. With programmes and activities such as this, the ruling elite sustained a claim to sovereign independence and successfully articulated their colonial subordination in terms

of friendly tutelage from Britain. They thereby reinforced the idea of an Egba nation on course to take its place in the modern world.

However, this dominant perspective was always intensely contested by elites of various types. Chiefly elites deployed rear-guard strategies to resist loss of pre-colonial power and to contain the extent of their displacement and the intrusion of colonial power upon their privileges. They also pursued their integration into the very core of the centralized political structures. Some educated elites adopted and pushed sub-national interests to carve spaces of power and privilege just as they projected themselves as embodying the path to a modern Egbaland. Political centralization and the Sole Native Authority, were often interpreted as totalitarian power and this necessarily rendered the Alake the target of social disenchantment. Elites took advantage of this to highlight the *compradoral* implication of the Alake's role as SNA and to accuse the monarch of dictatorship and tyranny. These struggles came to a head such that by the late 1930s it was clear to the colonial government that to reduce the tensions, the powers of the Alake had to be curtailed. This was the main recommendation of the Intelligence Report of 1937, the implementation of which began with elections into a new Egba Central Council in 1941.<sup>1</sup> The Blair report claimed to have been written after wide consultation with all vested interests in Egba politics. To that extent, it claimed the first documented consensus among Egba elites in which all sides conceded to the Alake being the king of Abeokuta. Thus, the 1930s marked the height of that historical push towards the idea of Egba nationhood and the point that the Alake could most conceivably be said to be the legitimate king of Abeokuta.

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<sup>1</sup> J. H. Blair, *Abeokuta Intelligence Report* (Lagos, 1937); *Egbaland Echo*, February 21, 1941.

This success was short lived because the idea of Egba nationality with a king over a nation began to unravel in the 1940s. The unravelling can be traced to significant developments in Abeokuta where the contradictions of centralized monarchy and Sole Native Authority became more apparent under increasing pressures from a more politically aware population. Increased political awareness and involvement were not the outcomes of totalitarian intrusions of the monarchy and native government alone, they also derived from Nigeria-level political developments, the process of decolonization and the penetration of Atlantic ideas. These factors reshaped the meaning and dynamics of power in Abeokuta – with the effect that by 1950 political title in Abeokuta became less attractive -- and accordingly redefined the form of elite interest. The drastic transformation in Egba power, that at one point attracted elite struggles to control and wield it, and soon afterwards became comparatively less appealing to many elites, is my interest in this chapter. This chapter accounts for the waning attractions of Egba power from 1941.

Such an accounting speaks to the central objectives of this thesis. First, it affirms my hypothesis that Egba identity and traditions are not ancient or unchanging; rather, they are shifting innovations and dynamic resources which elites deploy in the pursuit of interests. I have argued thus far that there was no definite or definitive identity for the Egba. Whatever identity or tradition was claimed for the Egba was not without contestation. I have also pushed for the recasting of Egba history away from a teleological transition from African tradition to a Western modern by showing that neither the traditional nor the modern was unambiguous; rather, these were part of a network of resources and influences with which a dynamic society interacted. Identity,

traditions and modernity are therefore shifting paradigms of social explication and imagined futures. As ambiguous social resources, they are veritable instruments in elite identity and struggles for power. The transition from a point in the 1930s when Egba power was attractive and intensely contested and 1950 when more engaging attractions drew Egba elites away, push home my thesis: that identity, traditions and modernity are dynamic social resources and are malleable to changing circumstances.

## 7.2 “There is only one Egba:” A Centenary of Nationhood and the 1937 Intelligence Report

The British Indirect Rule system was built upon trusted local rulers under the supervision of British travelling commissioners or “Residents.” Such rulers were constituted as heads of Native Authorities (NA) over areas which roughly corresponded to the ruler’s claims of pre-colonial control. By maintaining a tenuous independence until 1914, Abeokuta escaped the coercive period of British administration that followed immediately after colonial conquest. As Asiwaju notes, the system in Lagos Colony which permitted considerable participation by indigenous political authorities was not extended to the protectorate until 1914. Colonial rule in the protectorate was marked by paramilitary coercion and official domination by the Travelling Commissioner or the colonial policeman who acted in his absence. Asiwaju reckons that this early phase initiated the damage of Yoruba kingship and set the stage for the oba’s transformation into a dictatorial monarch suited for indirect rule. Abeokuta was ushered into the native administration system upon the imposition of colonial rule in 1914, just in time to participate in the operations of the Native Authority Ordinances (NAO) of 1914 and



1916. Unlike other regions however, Abeokuta lagged behind in the implementation of the native court ordinance or of direct taxation under the NAO. Subsequent amendments to the ordinance in 1930, 1933 and 1943 aimed at strengthening native rulers to govern their territory under the supervision of the Resident. Some rulers like the Alake were specifically designated Sole Native Authority, a measure of their stature and the trust and confidence reposed in them by the colonial government. The 1945 ordinance claimed to “democratize” native authority by limiting the powers of the rulers in relation to their council. It was only at this point that the rulers ceased to be Sole Native Authorities.<sup>2</sup>

However, the centralization and personalization of power in the Alake as Sole Native Authority exposed the monarch to charges of dictatorship. Considering that power was fluid and diversified in pre-colonial Abeokuta, the operations of the SNA resulted in conflicts and challenges to the superior status of the Alake. The deposition of *Oshile Adedamola* in 1927<sup>3</sup> effectively abrogated the pretensions that the obas were brothers or equal with the Alake as *primus inters pares*. The Alake also successfully pursued a court action for libel against A.K. Ajisafe and J.K. Coker, two of the leading educated elite, and thereby secured legal protection and colonial sympathies.<sup>4</sup> In many ways, the native

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<sup>2</sup> The Native Authority System was a series of Indirect Rule laws and amendments including the 1914 Native Court Ordinance, 1914, 1930; The Native Authority Ordinance, 1916, 1933, 1943, 1945. Native Courts and Native Authorities were designed to differ from the legal system in the Lagos Colony of regular legal procedures and which allowed native legal practitioners. Frederick Lugard considered this “evil” and the source of complicated litigations. The native ordinances were designed to prevent such complications. See, CO 879/113, no. 1005, “Governor Sir F. D. Lugard to the Sec. of State: Nigerian Court Ordinances, 21 May, 1913.” The series of ordinances correspond to the public labels: “chiefs-and-Council”; “Chiefs-in-Council” and “oba-in-council” to underscore the scope of the powers of paramount chiefs. The latter amendments provided for greater consultation and consensus of council members than the 1914 “Sole Native Authority” Ordinance. Yet, paramount rulers continued to exercise considerable powers in the loopholes of the amendments. See. “Native Court Ordinance No. 12 of 1930” NAI, 35; Native Authority Ordinance of 1933”, NAI 52; Native Authority Ordinance, No. 3 of 1945, NAI 35; see also Olufemi Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 34; Bonny Ibhawoh, *Imperialism and Human Rights*, 143.

<sup>3</sup> Abeprof 2/52, ENA, Minutes of the Meeting of Council of November 25, 1925.

<sup>4</sup> Case lasted from 1924-1929. NAI, CO 657/18, Southern Provinces of Nigeria, Annual Report of the Year 1927; NAA, 4/1924. Letter No. 39/4/1924, Alake to Resident, “Libellous Statements in the ‘Nigerian

administration became increasingly totalitarian, extending control over the more private spaces of Egba life. As the Index of Egba Rules and Regulations reveals, there were laws across many spheres, including child care, marriage and sanitation. In the last case, Egba officials were empowered to invade private residences to check on their water pots as an anti-malaria measure. Perhaps more outlandish were the rules passed by Council in 1928 which provided for a two year imprisonment or a fine of £50 on persons deemed to have committed the offence of adultery against the Alake's wives and those of other obas and selected chiefs.<sup>5</sup> However, such political interference fostered increasing antagonism against the Alake and the council. Concerned individuals and groups challenged the government in the courts, the public media (especially in the newspapers and books), and in public (non-official) conversations. These further expanded public discourse beyond the political opposition of the obas, chiefs and the educated elite to involve women and youth in more organized forms than previously. It was in the midst of tensions which resulted from the struggles over the Alake's power that the centenary anniversary to mark the founding of Abeokuta was conceived and celebrated.

The celebration in 1930 of the centenary of the founding of Abeokuta was intended to foster unity; it became the occasion for intense debates over Egba history, contemporary politics and political direction. Alake Ademola's initial preference was for a celebration of the tenth anniversary of his 1920 coronation but he was swayed towards

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Spectator' Action in re." February 17: 1928. Judgement was given on October 4, 1927 in which Coker was fined 100 pounds and 75 pounds cost while Ajisafe was not found guilty on one count but was charged 40 pounds cost on another count. Certain reprimands and strictures were placed on the Alake for abuse of power. PRO, CO 657/20. Final resolution appears to have been achieved in 1929. Adebeshin Folarin, *Egba History and Life Review*, 59.

<sup>5</sup>"Draft of Rules Providing Punishment for Persons Committing the Offence of Adultery against the Alake's Wives as well as the Wives of the brother Obas and Egba Chiefs." Extract from the Minutes of council of 5<sup>th</sup> July 1928. E.C.R 1/11.

a national celebration by the need to manage centrifugal forces.<sup>6</sup> Recent events including the long-drawn libel court case against Ajisafe (1924-1929) among many petitions against the Alake made it expedient to pursue national reconciliation.<sup>7</sup> He may also have been advised by Ladipo Solanke, who visited and spoke to the Council in November of 1929.<sup>8</sup> Not everyone agreed that 1930 represented the correct centenary of the founding of Abeokuta. For instance, Adebeshin Folarin dated his short historical review from 1829. Such opposing voices were silenced by the elaborate preparations for the centenary. However, the course of the celebrations showed that not everyone was on the same page in respect of its historicity and the political currents that the centenary celebrations depicted.

As Jenna Germaine's study of Abeokuta's leading writers of the period shows, Egba intellectuals differed in substantial ways over what constituted Egba identity and its political futures, to the point of personal animosities. A. K. Ajisafe, Adebeshin Folarin and Ladipo Solanke were without doubt Abeokuta's leading intellectuals and most prodigious writers. Ajisafe, born Emmanuel Moore, was of Saro heritage which connected him to the broad Saro influence in Lagos, Abeokuta and Sierra Leone.<sup>9</sup> He had worked with the EUG until 1911 when he was convicted of fraud; his incarceration

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<sup>6</sup> Held between October 26 and November 2 1930. The Alake declared it to be the commemoration of his coronation as king and well as the centenary celebration of Egba settlement in Abeokuta. Ajisafe, *Abeokuta Centenary and its Celebrations* (Lagos: Ife-Olu Printing Works, 1931).

<sup>7</sup> 15 "Ogbonis" from different sections of Abeokuta petitioned the Governor against the Alake. They cited that the Alake had brought shame to the prestige of an Oba by being arraigned before a British court with uncovered head and being reprimanded by the judge for flagrant abuse of power—which has rendered his continued reign untenable. They (Ogboni) wished to fulfil their traditional function – viz - to depose him (He would traditionally have been asked to commit suicide). Egba Council Records, 1/1/45, Vol.1, Nos. 1-104, "Petition: Idowu Kinoshi, Seriki of Ijeun and others to the Secretary, Abeokuta Province, February 16, 1928."

<sup>8</sup> ECR, 1/1/45, Vol.1, Nos. 1-104, 21<sup>st</sup> November, 1929. The visit was part of Solanke's fundraising on behalf of WASU. Solanke became Ademola's adviser by correspondence from his base in London.

<sup>9</sup> Jenna Germaine, "Integrating Egba Epistemologies: Writing Historical Knowledge in colonial Nigeria," M.A Thesis, Dalhousie University, 2007.

would limit the publishing outlets for his prodigious intellectual productions.<sup>10</sup> In some contrast, Ladipo Solanke was related to several Egba chiefs and may have been the first winner of the Alake Gbadebo school essay competition. He passed his teacher's certificate class II while teaching at St. Peter's, Ake.<sup>11</sup> He however spent most of his life studying and practicing law in the UK and as the Warden of WASU; he was active in the colonial and Atlantic intellectual environment.<sup>12</sup> We have come across Folarin earlier in respect of the council's debate over his appointment as the President of Ake Grade "A" Court. According to Germaine, these intellectuals represent the complex expressions and interconnections of the colonial Egba world, a world of cultural multiplicity and confused identities. Whatever claims of Egba authenticity Solanke had over the Saro Ajisafe were countermanded by his residence in London. While Ajisafe accused Solanke of having lost "the Purely Native Mind" necessary to interpret local realities,<sup>13</sup> Solanke challenged Ajisafe's authority to write a *History of Abeokuta*, and its political future because Ajisafe was a "layman in the science of law."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> The CMS bookshop refused to publish his works on account of "the man's past history." Cited in Michel R. Doortmont, "Recapturing the Past: Samuel Johnson and the Construction of the History of the Yoruba" (Ph.D. dissertation, Rotterdam: Erasmus University, 1994), 47; In his debate with Solanke over the centenary lectures, he traced his trail and conviction to Oba Gbadebo's dictatorship and personal animosity at his critiques of the government. A. K. Ajisafe, *The Errors and Defeat of Ladipo Solanke, M.A., B.C.L., L.L.B.* (Lagos, The Hope Rising Press, 1930). In 1935, he wrote to Ladipo Solanke of his frustration at publishing his manuscripts. The latter advised him to write a less critical dramatisation of Alake's court for a London theatre. Mentioned in Letter: LSP 46, Egba Affairs Letter Book, 1.1 "Solanke to Ademola", 14<sup>th</sup> May, 1935. Falola suggests that Ajisafe produced over 50 books. Toyin Falola, *Yoruba Gurus: Indigenous Production of Knowledge in Africa* (New Jersey and Eritrea, Africa World Press, 1999), 13. His more popular works are *History of Abeokuta*, (Suffolk: Richard Clay & Sons, 1924) and *The Laws and Customs of the Yoruba People* (Lagos: Kash & Klare Bookshop, 1946).

<sup>11</sup> *Egba Government Gazette*, August 31, 1912. Appendix H: Result of Teachers for Certificate, Class II.

<sup>12</sup> Hakim Adi, *West Africans in Britain, 1900-1960: Nationalism, Pan-Africanism and Communism* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1998). Some of Solanke's publications are *United West Africa (or Africa) at the Bar of the Family of Nations* (1927; London: African Publication Society, 1969) and *Yoruba Problems and How to Solve Them* (Ibadan: The Lisabi Press, 1931). He also gave several lectures and published several articles in newspapers including the WASU journal.

<sup>13</sup> Ajisafe, *Errors and Defeat*, 2.

<sup>14</sup> Solanke, "A Special Lecture addressed to A. K. Ajisafe on Egba Constitutional Law and its Historical Development." Lagos, (1931):7.

The intellectual divergences and personal differences among the educated elites were played out in the lectures organized to mark the centenary. Solanke's lecture, "Yoruba Constitutional Law and its Historical Development," drew critical reactions from Ajisafe who shortly after published "Unrighteous and Iniquitous Decree." Solanke countered with "A Special Lecture Addressed to A. K. Ajisafe" which drew "The Errors and Defeat of Ladipo Solanke" from Ajisafe. Adebeshin Folarin entered the fray with his publication of *A Short Historical Review of the Life of the Egbas* in 1931. The disagreement between these intellectuals is not unconnected to the diversity of contending ideas about Egba. Not that any of them challenged the historical narratives in any fundamental way; Germaine surmises that their debate degenerated to personal attacks because it lacked substance.<sup>15</sup> Yet they differed as it concerns the authority and powers of the Alake. Solanke conceived of the Alake as a potential king of West Africa<sup>16</sup> and thought of his (and other educated elite's) role as producers of the legal and political instruments to make this possible. For Solanke, the Egba state should be modelled on the British constitutional monarchy which was for him the highest form of civilized modern government. On the contrary, Ajisafe had lived enough under the perceived excesses of the Alake to be wary of a totalitarian monarchy. The problems with Abeokuta as far as he was concerned related to the failing and corrupt monarchy. He accused the Alake of infidelity and adultery: "the Alake is not found wanting in the act of David to Uriah's wife."<sup>17</sup>

Solanke and Ajisafe argued on either side of political centralization and accordingly took their places in the ongoing disputes in Egba politics since the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Germaine, "Egba Epistemologies," 82.

<sup>16</sup> LSP 46, Egba Affairs Letter Book, 1.1 (1934). Letter, Solanke to Alake, July 18, 1934.

<sup>17</sup> Ajisafe, *Abeokuta Centenary*, 14.

century. This affirms that the concerns of the so-called traditional elites were not altogether different from those of the “modern” ones. As with the former, these intellectuals contested historical claims and “traditions,” recent histories and political developments and sometimes Christian injunctions and colonial apologetics to justify their positions. Since the Alake’s status was thought to be predicated on ancient origins, there had to be a determination of whether the Alake was the founder of Egbaland and thus his status in the original constitution “in its originality free from modification or abuse.”<sup>18</sup> In this sense, both intellectuals agreed to the Ile-Ife legend: of the Alake being a son of Oduduwa, and the Alake being chosen by *Ifa* divination to be the paramount ruler of the Egba. Where they differed was over whether the Alake was always *primus inters pares* in relation to other Obas. Solanke argued for a primordial paramountcy and Ajisafe contended the contrary. More recent history also drew different interpretations. Solanke argued that the Egba flag designed by G. W. Johnson’s EUBM affirmed the Alake’s sovereignty because the insignia was an Ake emblem; Ajisafe pointed to four hands holding the emblem as a sign of equality between and among the Obas. Where Solanke saw British recognition of the Alake in the Anglo-Egba treaties of 1898 and 1914, Ajisafe pointed out that the loss of independence produced an abuse of the traditional system. To Ajisafe’s claims that monarchical autocracy made the Egba worse off than in ancient times, Adebeshin Folarin countered by pointing to Ajisafe himself among many other modern developments as credits to the progress brought about by successive Alakes in contradistinction to the barbarities of old.

We must not lose sight of the irony that none of these writers were very directly connected to the historical traditions which they vociferously defended. At best, Ajisafe

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, 17.

was a third generation Saro and lived mostly in Lagos. Folarin had had his Egbaness challenged during deliberations over his suitability for employment as Egba chief judge and Solanke operated in more Atlantic terrain. Yet, they presented these accounts as though they are definite and uncontested. Furthermore, for all their modern (Western) credentials and affirmations of science, not one of these intellectuals critically interrogated these traditions (even if just to establish a discursive distance). Neither did they consider the propriety or validity of European imperialism as legitimizing tools for supposedly traditional institutions.

This thesis has argued that the monarchies and chiefly titles were 19<sup>th</sup> century creations and their legitimacy was fitted into traditions that were being constructed in the course of historical developments during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Such an understanding helps to contextualize the passions deployed in the promotion of elite identity and struggle for power. First, the Egba case shows that elites are not divided on either side of modernity and tradition. These educated Africans struggled over traditions they had no real knowledge of or authority to pontificate on. Similarly, we find that Ogboni chiefs wrote petitions to secure “traditional” claims to the power to depose kings. It reaffirms that modernity and tradition are resources deployed as necessary by elites. Secondly, intra-elite contestations do not challenge the fundamental bases of elite unity. Much as these intellectuals and their chiefly counterparts struggle over the meanings of traditions and colonial power, the broad ideology upon which they claim elite status and representation is not subjected to debate. Finally, elites are not differentiated in terms of their identity and aspirations. Apart from Folarin who was in the employ of the government for which he may be thought to be guided by the official position, both Solanke and Ajisafe

operated with considerable independence of thought. They both displayed conviction in their conflicting interpretations of the same historical data. Yet, except that they published books, their cases could very well have been made by the so-called traditional elites.

Yet this discourse so engaged Egba elites (political and intellectual alike), as to cause much social division and conflict. Struggles over Egba identity and power affected the form of social and business relations as Egbas positioned themselves on either side of the existing structure of government. The case of the *Osumare Egba* is instructive of how the deep ideological cleavages of Egba politics affected elite organizations. Between 1935 and 1945 three newspapers were established in Abeokuta with each of them representing their own version of the Egba national ambition to compete favourably with Lagos in modernization and at the same time promote sectional interests.<sup>19</sup> An earlier attempt at publishing the *Egba National Harper* by Adebeshin Folarin with Akin Adeshigbin as editor did not survive the few editions in March, 1926. The *Osumare Egba* (1935-1937) was published to redress the perceived shame among Lagos-based educated Egbas that their country was lagging behind in modernization. The Lagos-based elites were proud of their country (as they called Abeokuta) and much as they wanted progress and a collapse of chiefly (illiterate) politics, they were unwilling to upset the political structure of Abeokuta nor the symbolism of the Alake as a civilized king. For the *Osumare*, Alake Ademola was the best thing to happen to Egbaland, being the “first educated Oba in the whole of Yorubaland.” The problem with Abeokuta as the paper saw

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<sup>19</sup> *Osumare Egba* (lit. Egba Rainbow) Nov 14. 1925; Feb. 1935- Jan. 1937; *Egba National Harper*, 1926; *Egbaland Echo*, 1940-41-- published in Lagos, 1945; Abeokuta *Weekly Herald*, 1940-1941. I studied these newspapers for my Bachelor’s Long Essay. See also Babatunde Oduntan, “The Development of Newspapers in Abeokuta, 1900-1960,” *Babcock Journal of History and International Studies*, 1, 2(2002), 1-12.



it was from traditional, unpatriotic and un-progressive forces in the Egba Council and especially in the sections who could not appreciate the good things that were going on in Abeokuta. The solution could be found only when educated and civilized people took over. This was the task the paper committed itself to when the Agura stool became vacant. In a serialized article titled “So that Gbagura Shall Rise,” the editor noted that Gbagura was marginalized in educational opportunities because it had not produced an educated oba. Similarly, in its inaugural edition, the editor wrote: “we are now anxious to enter into journalistic career with a view to promote the literary activity in Gbagura section as far as we are concerned; the day is gone-by when education in Gbagura section is being considered as ‘*Rara Avis*’.”<sup>20</sup> To this extent therefore, the *Osumare Egba* committed itself to projecting silenced Gbagura views.<sup>21</sup>

That a newspaper could project both national patriotism and sectional sub-nationalism depicts the shifting disposition of educated Egba to Abeokuta. Unlike the early 1900 when they looked to Abeokuta and its centralized monarchy for pride and identity, in the 1930s, such common identity was being challenged by more sectarian interests. It was now not enough to be Egba, one also had to be Owu-Egba or Gbagura Egba, among many other sub-identities. In the case of the *Osumare* the publisher, D. A. Bangbose, was an Egba (Ake) chief and the editor, S. Adenekan was Gbagura and educated. The publisher’s interests were therefore at considerable variance with those of the editor. These dynamic pulls are evident in the *Osumare’s* reportage. Adenekan conceived of the paper as a “Lagos newspaper published in Abeokuta,” and was often critical of the Egba administration which according to the paper was run by

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<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* Many titles in the early editions focused on the Gbagura. For instance, “Gbagura Shall Rise by Neat-Boy,” *Osumare Egba*, Saturday 14-21, 1935.

<sup>21</sup> *Osumare Egba*, 17 May, 1936.

“unprogressive illiterates.” It referred to the Ogboni as “that conservative illiterate institution.” The paper pushed for reforms in Egba politics and infrastructure by making regular comparison with Lagos. Rather contradictorily, the *Osumare* found absolutely nothing wrong with the Alake or the British. It advanced that Egba should take pride in their Oba and that other Yoruba kings should learn from Ademola’s expertise in administration.<sup>22</sup> The paper defended the Alake in the many scandals that followed the monarchy. In one such scandal, in which an *Olori* (one of the Oba’s wives) got pregnant from another man, the *Osumare Egba* blamed the man entirely for trespassing his bounds. It reported that the man was lucky that Oba Ademola was educated and civilized; otherwise, he would have experienced the appropriate traditional judgement of decapitation. The paper was curiously silent on the fact that the *Olori* was in fact the accused’s betrothed abducted by the Alake.<sup>23</sup> Newspapers in Lagos were filled with accounts of the misdemeanours of the Alake including the finding of several escaped married women among his harem. In one such case, a young girl who had been declared missing in Ibadan in 1935 had become one of the wives of the Alake. The *Daily Times* report titled the “Missing Girl in Ibadan” ran for weeks with many readers writing to express their opprobrium at the abduction. The *Osumare Egba* pleaded for understanding the Alake’s defence.<sup>24</sup>

Such ambivalence did not endear the *Osumare* to many Egba elites. Celebrating the Alake ostracised a considerable population of elites who identified with other sections. Pointing to Lagos as the standard to which Abeokuta should compare was insulting to most Abeokuta-based Egba elites who still retained the image of Abeokuta as

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<sup>22</sup> *Osumare Egba*, 17 May, 1936.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, July 10, 1937.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, May 16, 1936.

the pioneer in “civilization.” Neither were the Lagos-based Egba endeared to the paper’s romance with British residents and its calls for the Resident to intervene in Egba customs, especially not at that critical period of stern anti-colonial and anti-racial agitations in Lagos. By December 1936, the *Osumare Egba* was in huge debt and it soon quit publishing. The paper never had a secure financial base. The one-pound per copy sale did not yield enough to cover the expenses incurred. Many of those who made financial and material promises at the launching in 1935 did not fulfil them. The *Alake* on his part was reluctant to be financially identified with the paper and contributed little more than an annual one pound as a New Year’s present.<sup>25</sup> When the paper could not meet its financial commitments promptly the printers began to decline credit. In December, the paper changed its printers from Nigeria Blessed Printers to Abeokuta Printing and Publishing Works.

Aside from financial difficulties, the *Osumare Egba* may have compromised itself by its posture to illiterates. The paper made enemies all around not the least being the influential illiterate chiefs. As Ruth Watson shows in her study of Ibadan, only a few educated persons could be counted among the moneyed class and many of the educated served in the employ of wealthy illiterates or kept them as patrons.<sup>26</sup> The ideological divide also affected relations among the staff and management of the paper with regular conflicts between the publisher and the editorial staff. The publisher wanted a more cautious posture in the reportage of the Egba Native Council. On the other hand, the

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<sup>25</sup> *Osumare Egba*, Jan 4, 1936 3; Jan 6, 1937.

<sup>26</sup> Ruth Watson, *Civil Disorder is the Disease of Ibadan: Chieftaincy and Civic Culture in a Yoruba City* (Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003). The Chapter “Indirect Rule, Native Gentlemen and Renowned Capitalists” is devoted to this kind of relationship.

younger Adenekan insisted on his creed to “speak the truth ...I will not be quiet.”<sup>27</sup> The *Egbaland Echo* which emerged in 1940 accounted for the demise of the *Osumare Egba* in the following words:

The *Osumare Egba* died a natural death when the proprietor tendered apology on a series of reports, which appeared in his newspaper without the knowledge, and consent of the editor.<sup>28</sup>

Of the three newspapers published in Abeokuta during the colonial period, none survived more than two years. The dynamic pulls between projecting a national and patriotic Egba identity on one hand and coping with the implications of centralized government in the light of pre-existing political fluidity and contemporary sub-national diversity on the other similarly affected the *Egbaland Echo*. Despite its more pro-establishment bent the *Echo* did not last that year until it was bought by Ayo Ajala who moved it to Lagos in 1948. One newspaper contributor opined that the rancorous politics and the social distrust made Abeokuta a “place that ate its own.”<sup>29</sup>

Even though the broad consensus among educated elites was on securing the Alake as king of Abeokuta, many of them were not comfortable with what they saw as the dictatorial tendencies of the present monarch. The many scandals that the Alake fell into did not help his case. Solanke advised the Alake on the need to be more consultative in his approach. He suggested that a body of four respected (by this he meant educated) Egba should be constituted as trustees to take decisions too urgent for the convocation of

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<sup>27</sup> *Osumare*, Oct. 24, 1936.

<sup>28</sup> *Egbaland News Echo*, Lagos, Jan. 17 1948.

<sup>29</sup> *Abeokuta Weekly Herald*, April 12, 1941. This palpable fear of being poisoned was common. Solanke advised Adetokunbo Ademola not to eat with anyone except trusted friends because he might be poisoned. LSP 46, Egba Affairs LB II, I (1935) Letter: Solanke (London) to Prince Adetokunbo Ademola (Lagos), August 8, 1936.

the larger Council. In this way it would appear that the government was more democratic. Other elites called for the reorganization of Egba to reflect “Alake in Council” rather than “Alake’s Council.” Under the aegis of the Abeokuta Society for Union and Progress, an umbrella body comprising the Lagos-based League of Literate Persons and the Abeokuta-based Educated Elements, the elites submitted that the way out of recurrent crises was the democratization of Abeokutan politics. They wanted a separation of the Native Authority from the Council, the election of councillors instead of life membership as it currently operated, and a representation by class instead of sectarian identities. By their proposal, the Alake would remain the head of the government, but in a ceremonial capacity. The running of the government would be undertaken by educated Egbas well-versed in administration and who had proved themselves successful in other endeavours.<sup>30</sup> However, there were other elites who read these proposals as affront on the Alake and the council. Centralists like I. O. Shodipo and Oladipo Somoye led other educated Egbas who had become chiefs to write petitions against those calling for the degrading of the Alake. They accused the Educated Elements of being instruments of use for their “Worshipful Master” -- the Reverend Ransome Kuti -- in his efforts to cause confusion in Abeokuta. In petitions to the Resident and the Archdeaconry, they accused Kuti of using his personage and “Principalship of Abeokuta Grammar School” which they likened to a “White Sepulchre” to cause confusion. They wanted the mission to call him to order and stop his interference on Egba politics.<sup>31</sup> Others engaged rumours that Lagos based elites had reached out to the colonial governor to abrogate the title and

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<sup>30</sup> Statement issued by Educated Elements in *Osumare Egba*, August 12, 1936.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Times* (Lagos), May 27, 1938.

office of the Alake, to excise Otta from Abeokuta's control and to add Abeokuta to the Lagos colony.

It was as part of this complicated environment that the colonial government found it necessary to research and publish Colonial Intelligence Reports. It is not clear what colonial policy decisions informed the Intelligence Reports which were produced during the 1930s. L. C. Gwan suggests that they evolved as part of the process of modifying native administration after the protests which followed the introduction of Indirect Rule and direct taxation in Southern Nigeria.<sup>32</sup> While there had always been official reports by colonial officials to the Home Office, parliamentary committees and a commercial intelligence reports, the intelligence reports of the 1930s were peculiar for their systematic form and assumed historical accuracy. Laid out in 5 to 6 chapters, each covers: the territory question; details of geography (population, boundaries, physical features, water supply sources, and mineral wealth); a historical narrative of origins and legends up to British colonization; the administrative structure; traditional judicial systems and the functioning of native courts; and finance with emphasis on the taxable potentials. The Intelligence Reports have become (rather unquestioningly) the most important documents in Nigerian Archive collections and are treated as authentic collections of pre-colonial histories of Nigerian peoples.<sup>33</sup>

The earliest Intelligence Report on the Egba people would probably be included in the collection on the Abeokuta Province (including Okeodan, Ilaro, Ilobi, Ajilete and

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<sup>32</sup> NAI: I. A. Gwan, "A Preliminary Index to the Intelligence Reports in the Nigerian Secretariat Group," 1961.

<sup>33</sup> Akin Alao and Gboyega Ajayi, *A Critique of Sources of Nigerian History* (Ibadan, 1990) 34; see also C. Law, "Traditional History," in Saburi Biobaku, *Sources of Yoruba History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 25-46.

Ilashe Divisions) by E. V. S. Thomas in 1933.<sup>34</sup> However, by the time District Officer J. H. Blair conducted his report in 1937, Egba elites already understood how critical it was to get a favourable mention in the official (colonial) history of the Egba people and their culture. This is also because reorganizations in native administration and native courts had often followed the publication of prior intelligence reports.<sup>35</sup> So great was the anticipation over the Blair Report that it practically dominated political discourse over the three years before it was published by the colonial government in 1940. On one hand, loyalists tried to checkmate the possibility of a dismemberment of the ENA and the reign of the Alake or the seizure of Otta from under Egba control. Rumours were floated that the British had conceded to the equality of the obas. To reduce tensions, the government announced in 1938 that it was not going to overturn the existing institutions or to change the status of the Alake as Head Chief of Abeokuta but would bring these institutions into line with modern politics.<sup>36</sup>

In that period an unofficial copy of “pretty near a hundred pages of closely typewritten matters,”<sup>37</sup> which had been made available to only a privileged few, became public knowledge and the subject of public analysis and protest. To commentators who wondered if the public was not being “kept in the dark by the Nigerian government in order to subvert the public good.” the District Officer Commander Pykennot responded that the government was being meticulous to ensure that there were many points to which all the four sections agreed. The substance of the Blair report was a chronological history

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<sup>34</sup> There may have been earlier reports for the province, such as CSO 26/2 (19862) Kirk, “Intelligence Records” for Ilaro District, 14<sup>th</sup> September, 1927; F. C. Royce, *Otta* (1927); A. C. Cooper, *Imala* (1928). Abeprof 2/908.

<sup>35</sup> A newspaper commentary details how successive colonial reorganizations and classification of townships and villages had resulted in the creation of “unhistorical obas” while the historically significant ones were being relegated. “Our British Connexion” *Akede Eko* (Lagos) March 7, 1936.

<sup>36</sup> E. A. Miller, Resident, Abeokuta Province, *Annual Report of the Southern Provinces, 1938*, 48-49.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

of Abeokuta compiled from missionary and colonial sources and also from interviews with leading chiefs. As we have seen, this narrative favoured the Ake and silenced the developments in other sections. Not surprisingly therefore and although the report recommended the reform of the Egba Council and native administration to curtail the powers of the Alake, it was attended by much criticism and challenge in the form of petitions and newspaper articles.

However, the government's adoption and implementation of the Blair Report shows that it was as yet unprepared for any major reorganization of Egba government that would run contrary to the existing sole native authority system. In a directive to Resident Hawkesworth, the Commissioner, Western Provinces wrote:

The existing organization therefore cannot in any sense be said to be representative of public opinion. The new organization aims at remedying the defect as far as is reasonably possible at this stage. Care has to be taken however to avoid too drastic action. His Honour endorses [the Resident's view] that in supporting these proposals the Alake will enhance his prestige and render his position even more secure than before, and considers the administrative officers concerned deserve commendation for the work they had done, often in the face of difficulties and discouragement, to bring about this important advance in Egba political progress.<sup>38</sup>

In the event of the colonial government's disposition, the reorganization of the Egba government amounted only to an enlargement of the membership of the council. The Ake section was allocated 29 representatives and Gbagura, Oke-Ona and Owu sections were to appoint 9, 9 and 4 respectively. Owu, from where the most rigorous opposition to the Alake came, had to plea for an added representative to the three to which the colonial administration thought it was entitled by virtue of its smaller population. The Olowu claimed that most Owu were resident in the districts rather than in metropolitan

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<sup>38</sup> Letter no. 14590/432, Secretary, Western Provinces, Ibadan, to The (Hon.) Chief Secretary to the Government, Lagos, 29<sup>th</sup> November, 1940.



Abeokuta. Apart from these appointed representatives, the new arrangement retained the 4 obas and the general titled chiefs as permanent members of the Egba Central Council. To defray demands for further expansion, the government proposed that sections, townships, and wards should create councils of their own from which representatives should be forwarded into the higher council. In this way, the colonial experiment which was projected as an expedient way at managing competition for power reproduced pre-existing Egba forms of multiplying chiefly positions and titles. By and large, the Council of 1941 increased the influence of the Alake. It significantly weakened Owu agitation by widening the political space while limiting Owu claims for greater representation in the central council. In so doing, this became the high point of the process of Egba centralization: the point at which the Egba could most conceivably be called one nation under a king. By conceding to the reorganization, Owu elites and other sub-national aspirations were thereby subdued. At the inauguration of the new Egba Central Council, colonial administrators and pro-Alake elites celebrated the process, the consensus and the final output of the reorganization that followed from the Blair Report as one that will “bring about the important advance in Egba political progress.”<sup>39</sup> The Alake came out of the process a stronger and more influential king, necessary credentials that launched his role in Yoruba and Nigeria’s politics.

### 7.3 Democracy in the Political Lexicon: Engaging National and Global Ideas

The reorganization of Egba government may have smothered sectional separatism, but other challenges to the structure of power and the form of Egba government developed to take its place. Developments in Nigerian politics and the global discourse surrounding the

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<sup>39</sup> *Egbaland Echo*, March 28, 1941.

Second World War influenced politics in Abeokuta and were significant factors over which groups of elites defined themselves as fitting to lead and their opponents as unworthy and incompetent. What is well known about the impact of the Second World War is how it transformed nationalist agitations from empire reforms to decolonization.<sup>40</sup> However, the war influenced politics in a society like Abeokuta in more ways than can be grasped by a colonial or nationalist framework.

Arguably the more enduring implication of WWII was the discourse of democracy that it generated and globalized. Whatever may have been Britain's strategic calculations for declaring war against Germany in 1939, British propaganda succeeded in presenting the war as a struggle for democracy against fascism and Nazism, with Winston Churchill cast as an ardent defender of democracy and freedom against a dreaded enemy bent on world domination. In colonial Nigeria, the government employed these slogans to mobilize military recruitment and resources, and to justify war-time policies.<sup>41</sup> In Abeokuta, the Alake's speech at the Empire Day celebration in 1941 encouraged Egbas on their sacrifice towards ensuring that the evils of fascism and Nazism were blotted out from the world.<sup>42</sup> He referred to the British Empire as a benevolent one which gave the best of British freedom, democracy, culture and civilization to other peoples. On the other hand, by construing democracy as freedom and justice, the war also provided Nigerian elites new grounds for challenging colonial power. Nationalists adopted "democracy" to challenge the idea of empire and to demand independence. In Abeokuta it also began to influence the form of political expression and the declaration of interests. Soon enough,

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<sup>40</sup> See Coleman. *Nigeria*; Gabriel Olusanya, *The Second World War and Politics in Nigeria* (Lagos: Evans, 1973), 49-51; Bonny Ibhawoh, "Second World War Propaganda, Imperial Idealism and Anti-Colonial Nationalism in British West Africa," *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 16, 2 (2007):221-243.

<sup>41</sup> Ibhawoh, "World War Two Propaganda" 238.

<sup>42</sup> Alake Ademola II, Address on Empire Day, *Egbaland Echo*, 24<sup>th</sup> May, 1942.

many political positions began to be articulated and advanced on the basis of contested meanings of democracy.

However, democracy in the 1940s needs to be properly contextualised to explain the terms of its adoption and influence in Abeokuta's politics. In the first instance, the very definition of democracy and the terms of its application to colonized peoples were still very ambiguous with Britain itself having achieved universal suffrage only in 1928. How much of the democratic principle could be applied to colonized territories was a subject engaged with by colonial administrators and African elites alike in very ambivalent ways. As Naomi Chazan has argued, democracy in the colonial context meant a form of rule rather than the right to self-rule. At its best, it involved the entrenchment of procedures and structures that would subject political leaders to the rule of law and be accountable to citizens. Such a conception that focused on rulers or leaders differed in fundamental ways from Western definitions of individual rights, participation, competition, pluralism and limited government.<sup>43</sup> In most parts of Africa therefore, the idea of Africans participating in their own governance was thought to mean the preparation or tutelage of their rulers or leaders to be responsible. Although limited participation in the colonial legislative councils had been granted to Nigerians since 1920 in Lagos and Calabar, election was limited to only a few elites. The Egba representative to the Nigeria parliament was never voted for, but appointed by the Alake and council.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Naomi Chazan, "Democratic Fragments: Africa's Quest for Democracy, in *Democracy and Modernity*, ed. S. N. Eisenstadt (Leiden: Brill, 1992) 118

<sup>44</sup> Lugard stated that self-government for Africans (not including educated elements) can be achieved by "the education of their rulers, and the gradual extension of their powers, (rather) than by the introduction of an alien system of rule by British educated and politically-minded progressives." *Nigerian Pioneer*, Feb. 4, 1921.

Egba Elites engaged in intense debates over the meaning of democracy and how it should apply to Egba politics. The more dominant view among educated elites appears to see democracy as an opportunity to reform the structure of government into such as would allow greater participation by the educated. In this sense, the British monarchical democracy (rather than a liberal representative democracy) was thought to be the model, such that the Alake becomes a near-ceremonial head of the state while accomplished elites ran the government and parliament. It is in this sense that the Educated Elements advocated for a government by class rather than by sub-national representation. However, there were obvious implications of democratisation for which educated elites were unprepared. Given that they were comparatively few in number and mostly resident in Lagos, the prospect of their winning local elections was narrow. The form of the Egba government in which the Alake and other obas propose and appoint councillors was their assured means of attaining governmental positions. The campaigns against “uneducated illiterate” members in the council which included calling them “sleeping donzes,” “I concur” and backbenchers,<sup>45</sup> and for sections to appoint educated persons into the Egba council or as obas, was aimed at achieving this end.

Yet in spite of their efforts, illiterate chiefly elites continued to dominate the Egba council, a testimony to the fact that they did not leave the discursive space to the educated elite. One newspaper columnist captured the disappointment of the educated elites with the outcome of the 1941 election into the Egba Central Council succinctly:

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<sup>45</sup> *Daily Times* (Lagos) August 18, 1938. Richard Sklar describes how elites who get displaced from power in Lagos move to become “big fish in small provincial waters”. The nationalist Bode Thomas, on losing to Azikiwe in Lagos accepted the title of Balogun of Oyo “not so much because he wanted to ...reform...” but because the road to back to the Nigerian legislature had to begin from a Native Authority area” Richard Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties: Power in an Emergent African Nation* (Trenton: NJ., Africa World Press, 2004) 110.

...It is unfortunate that the reverse [of expectation that educated Egbas would be “elected”] has been the case as almost ninety-nine percent of the members are chiefs of various grades and almost all of them are in advancing years with antiquated ideas. Even the mode of selection of these men leave much to be desired in some townships which suggested that the directions laid down by the Administrative Officer, that the election should be made by unanimous approval of the people themselves have been ignored...This council is expected to unify the whole sections of Egba land together and to extirpate the spirit of sectional clannishness. Unfortunately, it is alleged that already clandestine plans are on foot by which one section is expected by its majority number to vote solidly against another and display the spirit of domination and superiority complex which in the past has caused such a serious conflict.<sup>46</sup>

The disposition of chiefly elites to these reforms and to democracy appears to be well captured by a chief’s speech at the inauguration of the council.

Egbaland from the earliest beginning has embodied the germs of democracy in its form of government whether we speak of the days of Sodeke or the time of Oba Sokalu and Ogundeyi particularly referred to as the period of the triumvirate or that period in our national life when Christianity spread throughout the length and breadth of the land not to speak of the more recent times when sectional obas were brought into the EUG in order to take their due share therein.<sup>47</sup>

By such definitions as this, chiefly elites appropriated democracy into the local ideology such that it became part of Egba ways and the order of things rather than something new and requiring new practitioners. Therefore, colonial democracy and elections favoured the chiefly elites because they could modulate it to become Egba democracy. I have argued thus far that chiefly elites did not disappear in the face of colonial intrusion, educated elite forays or monarchical centralization. They retained influence and control over the population by subterranean and foundational processes which were beyond the view and control of a super-structural colonial state. Educated elites who aspired to the

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<sup>46</sup> “Egba Central Council: Some Observations” by Filikaja, *Egbaland Echo*, February 28, 1941.

<sup>47</sup> *Egbaland Echo*, Feb 14 1941.

form of the colonial power found it lacking in substance where local political realities were concerned. They may have envisioned democracy as a new potent resource better suited to their peculiar identity and skills, its meaning transformed beyond their control. Seeing that it was not ultimately profitable to claim difference, educated elites had to readjust their disposition to local politics.

One implication of these developments on local discourse was that it accentuated the transformation of elite identities. Specifically, it added to the social pressures on the unity of the educated elite. Up to the 1930s, educated elites had created and tried to sustain an exclusive elite identity by which they proclaimed themselves special and different from ordinary people and other elites. Elite clubs and media, with their West African and Atlantic networks marked, this elite apart. Indeed, as Kristin Mann shows, “Marrying Well” meant Christian marriages and other Western patterns to forge and sustain an exclusive identity.<sup>48</sup> However, elite peculiarities were at best uncertain. Wrangling and competition among them undermined their claims to superiority and it soon became obvious that they aspired to the very same things other humans wanted: wealth, power, many wives, church and political (Ogboni) positions, pawns, servants and maids. Colonial jobs were few and not well-paying and not many educated persons could muster the necessary funds to launch extensive business ventures. A few forayed into local businesses like *adire*, palm wine tapping, medicines and tailoring by claiming to “modernize” these crafts; but most were smothered by local guilds which also claimed to be “modernizing” their craft and which formalized membership to regulate entry and excise. The non-educated also improvised in other ways. They adopted English when and

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<sup>48</sup> Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status and Social Change among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 54.

if able and adapted it to local language. Soon, the English language became diluted in a public language that was a mix-up of various elements (Oyo-Yoruba, Lagos urban variations, Hausa, Egun, Ijebu, etc.). With an increasing number of students graduating from Abeokuta schools and colleges and those who acquired “modern” training from vocational institutes or by working for European firms, the core character of the Saro-related educated elite diluted. The elite’s complaints against quack schools, their promotion of “Queen’s English” and “authentic Yoruba,”<sup>49</sup> and the restrictions imposed on elite club membership obviously derive from the need to secure a shifting identity and privileges.

Thus Egba conceptions of democracy did not produce an outright transformation of its politics; democracy was not seen as something new or foreign. Rather it called for readjustments and a re-evaluation of elite identity in many ways. This conception developed alongside an ongoing process of social and economic levelling in which elite peculiarities were being subdued. That process was also connected to a growing cultural nationalism, Nigerian national consciousness, and the sentiment that the elite culture which Peel described as the fluorescence of Lagos was Saro, foreign and not indigenous to Nigeria.<sup>50</sup> With the formation of mass-based national political parties like the NNDP, NYM and the NCNC, it progressively ceased to be a thing of pride to project elite difference in the ways Cole and Mann described elite solidarity in Lagos.<sup>51</sup> Furthermore, it signified that the politically aspiring ones had to present their claims in the language of

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<sup>49</sup> In Abeokuta, elites complained that students could only write vernacular Yoruba. ECR 62/1, *Minutes of a Meeting of the Educated Elements held at the Court Hall and under the auspices of the Abeokuta Society for Unity and Progress, Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> of May, 1933*.

<sup>50</sup> Ehiedu Iweriebor, “Nationalism and the Struggle for Freedom, 1880-1960,” *Foundations of Nigeria*, ed. Adebayo Oyejide (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003): 84.

<sup>51</sup> Patrick Cole, *Modern and Traditional Elites in the Politics of Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1978); Mann, *Marrying Well*, 54-55.

the public. Acting on behalf of the masses overtook national sentiments. Acting on behalf of the country which was the common refrain during the early century was soon overcome by claims to advancing the popular will. The popular will was not always in tandem with the national will. To claim to represent the masses required that educated elites readjust their narrow identity and pursue closer connections with the local population. To this end, they had to contend with an established chiefly system which could very flexibly transform itself into the modern. The 1941 council reform was therefore a gross disappointment for most educated elite because they could not compete with other local elites. Expectedly, the new system began to be challenged as soon as it was adopted, by displaced elites of various shades, women, students and youth, etc. Many of these argued that the reforms were not democratic in terms of the selection of representatives, the enhancement of the Alake's powers and because it was not representative of the various interests in Abeokuta.<sup>52</sup>

Many political conflicts came to a head during the 1940s. Political centralization achieved contrasting effects. Greater awareness of and interest in the running of government appeared to British officials as evidence of the progress that the Egbas were making. Commissioner (Western Region) G. C. Whiteley justified the 1941 reforms on the view that "the Egba government had done a very good work in the past but with the spread of education and the increasing interest taken by all classes of Egbaland in the administration of their country, it became evident that a change in the direction of fuller representation was desirable." On the other hand, political awareness was also the product of the incursions of government into formerly private realms, the centralization

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<sup>52</sup> Many complaints over selection and representation: "Why ladies are disappointed," *Egbaland Echo*, March 28, 1941; "Whither Abeokuta: Democracy or Dictatorship", *Echo*, March 21, 1941; "Complaints and Clarifications of the Complaints Commission", *Echo* April 25, 1941.



of formerly fluid political expressions and the perceived attractiveness of political positions; all of this made being in government, or having a connection to it, the most attractive and the safest life option. Vigilance against a powerful Egba government and its king is a cogent explanation for the high spate of litigation, political mobilization and involvement. These were outcomes of the need to challenge the rights of the Alake to appropriate and dispose of land and efforts to determine the acceptable extent of the monarchy's authority.

The increase in political mobilization saw women and youth organizations being formed and multiplying during this decade. In 1943, Abeokuta youths protested the employment of Lagos people when unemployment was so high among graduates of Abeokuta-based secondary schools.<sup>53</sup> By 1947, there were more than a dozen organized women's groups compared to the form in the 1930s when women were organized under *Iyalodes*.<sup>54</sup> Most of these were involved with one reform agenda or another. The Alake's case was not helped by the many scandals that demeaned his public image.<sup>55</sup> Litigation

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<sup>53</sup> *Egbaland Echo*, March 7, 1941.

<sup>54</sup> Representatives of 17 different women's associations in Abeokuta attended the formal inauguration of the Peoples' Union on July 26, 1941. The Peoples Union became the Abeokuta branch of the Nigerian National Democratic Party. *Egbaland Echo*, August 22-29, 1941. Many women's associations were trade guilds and predate the current struggle to the Adire women's campaign to repeal the 1933 ban on systemic dye. See Byfield, *Bluest Hands: A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria) 1890-1940*. Johnson-Odim and Mba record that Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti led the Abeokuta Ladies Club to mobilize several women's associations to form the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) in 1946. *For Women*, 72.

<sup>55</sup> A. K. Ajisafe's deposition to the supreme court in REX VS. Ajayi Kolawole Ajisafe listed the Alake's excesses to include adultery with two uterine sisters, embezzlement of native court funds, extra-legal court holdings in his palace, illegal seizure of land and property. NAA 143, REX vs. Ajisafe, Supreme Court of Nigeria, September 17, 1928. In spite of the judgement these accusations and others continued to be mentioned in newspapers. For instance, the Daily Times (1936) story "The missing girl of Kano" traced to the Alake's palace in Abeokuta drew popular and national reactions and rejoinders expressing opprobrium at the Alake. The *Osumare Egba* pleaded for understanding in the Alake's defense. *Osumare Egba*, May 16, 1936. Excessive corruption and adultery were among the factors listed by women protesters leading to the abdication of the monarch. See Johnson-Odim and Mba, *For Women*, 81-84. The Alake's firm business interests can be gleaned from his correspondences with E. V. S. Thomas who apparently was a business partner and possible front. NNA, Ake 2/1/52, "Personal Letters by E.V.S. Thomas to Oba Ademola, the Alake, 1934.

and accusations of libel involving the Alake became common and created the context in which Egba women began the movement that led to the deposition and exile of Alake Ademola. This part of the history has been dealt with in Johnson-Odim and Mba's influential biography of Funmilayo Ransome Kuti and the Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU). By 1948, these factors generated broad consensus in which the Ogboni dealt the final blow of demanding the abdication of the king.

Women's agitations were not altogether different from the concerns of individuals and groups opposed to the Alake and the Egba government. These included excessive taxation, court fines and sanitation arrests, the inadequacy of medical, educational and sanitation facilities and a myriad of allegations against the Alake. As with other critics of the Egba government, the women charged that the Sole Native Authority (SNA) "was a great source of oppression and suppression of the Egba people... We are not happy under it. It is foreign to the custom of the Egba."<sup>56</sup> However, women also had peculiar grievances against the Alake and government policies. As Johnson-Odim and Mba show, they were against the flat-rate of taxation imposed on women considering that most women were smallholding trades-people. As we have seen, the flat-rate tax was not the only duty women paid. Fines for sanitary offences and legal convictions constituted significant portions of government earnings. The inability or unwillingness of the ENA to do anything about the system of *Ijeja* and the operations of market-masters was deemed culpable. Women's associations resisted the interference of the government in their trade and production and the seizure of their markets as the Alake excised land for public projects or (as the women claim) to sell to Europeans. Women also complained that the Alake abused his powers by having sexual relations with women who escaped from

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<sup>56</sup> Abeokuta Women's Union (AWU) list of grievances; quoted from Johnson-Odim, 74.

household violence and lived in the palace. Women had been protesting over these grievances since 1940 and earlier if we factor the long campaign (1933-1937) by *adire* women dyers to have the ban on synthetic dye repealed. However, the AWU campaign took the more serious turn from 1946 which resulted in the exiling of the king.

Meanwhile, developments in Abeokuta were not unconnected to the political discourse of colonial Nigeria. The Lagos Youth Movement (renamed Nigerian Youth Movement in 1936) had been formed in 1934 partly to challenge what was thought to be the soft attitudes of the older elite to colonial government. With Nnamdi Azikiwe joining the movement in 1937, the NYM transformed into a much more incisive and pungent nationalist and political movement, displacing Herbert Macaulay's Democratic Party during the 1938 Lagos Town Council Elections. By establishing branches in the major urban centres across the country, the NYM broadened the scope of nationalist and anti-colonial activism from Lagos and tried to establish a nationalist identity on the basis of inter-tribal amity.<sup>57</sup> In the same vein, it promoted a national discourse which transcended the limitations of native kingdoms and colonial provinces imposed by the divisiveness of the Indirect Rule System. Its "Youth Charter" described the goal of the NYM in terms such as "complete autonomy within the British empire," "equal partnership with other members of the British Commonwealth" and "complete independence in the management of our affairs."<sup>58</sup> However while it tried to promote a national outlook, the movement was troubled by disagreements among its members – over candidacy in the Legislative Council elections and over commercial and media competition among its leading members. Azikiwe resigned his membership of the NYM in 1941 and Samuel Akinsanya

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<sup>57</sup> O. Awolowo includes extracts of the Nigerian Youth Charter in *Awo: The Biography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960).

<sup>58</sup> Coleman, *Nigeria*, 225.

quit the NYM and ran as an independent candidate against Ernest Ikoli, the President of the NYM. The rancour generated by deteriorating relations among the leading members and their supporters also saw the rise of sub-national (tribal) claims and antagonisms, and led to the displacement of the NYM as the leading nationalist organization.<sup>59</sup>

Such expressions of political futures in national terms had significant impacts on elite identity and politics. In Abeokuta as with other societies, it demanded a shift from the idea that the Egba was a semi-autonomous polity pursuing its own futures to one that had to factor its place in Nigeria in relation to other entities.<sup>60</sup> As the NYM crisis took on more regional (especially Yoruba vs. Igbo colouration), it also led to a struggle to determine the leading figures of a pan-Yoruba identity. Ademola was certainly the leading Yoruba oba of the age in terms of political stature and influence. In the colonial classification of Yoruba obas, the Alake was rated second after the Alaafin of Oyo. The Ooni of Ife was rated fifth among First Class Chiefs.<sup>61</sup> From this point on, a struggle ensued among Yoruba obas to determine their location in the colonially designed hierarchy of Yoruba obaship.<sup>62</sup> As expected, the struggle was pursued with claims and counter claims over Yoruba history and culture. Thus, the Nigerian discourse gave further political impetus and urgency to the idea of a pan-Yoruba identity, over which the leading chiefs had to determine its head and leader. The 1940s witnessed increased attention to the role and powers of the oba in a pan-Yoruba context. Fights broke out between the Alaafin and the Olubadan in 1938 and between the Ooni of Ile-Ife and the

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<sup>59</sup> *Ibid*, 222-226.

<sup>60</sup> Peel makes a similar case for Ijesha citation

<sup>61</sup> NAA 52/2/1, *Oyo Affairs 1933-1952*. Alaafin Adeyemi lacked Western education making Ademola the leading Yoruba “progressive” oba. Vaughan, *Nigerian Chiefs*, 89;

<sup>62</sup> As part of the push for leadership, the Ooni of Ife pleaded with Ademola II to organize the designing, mobilization for and building of Oodua’s shrine in Ile-Ife in which all Yoruba tribes will have quarters. The subject was to have been tabled at the Conference of Obas, but for the “Oba of Benin’s attitude to every subject. NAA 52/2/1/9, Letter: Ooni of Ife to Ademola II, June 6, 1939.

Ogunsua in 1939. Following many petitions and court cases, the colonial administration decided to cancel the use of First class or Second Class in classifying Yoruba obas. Much of the third Annual Conference of Yoruba Obas 1939 was devoted to settling disputes among the obas.<sup>63</sup>

Egba elites were deeply involved in these developments. Alake Ademola's stature as the most progressive oba made him party to the political jostling in Lagos and elsewhere. In 1939, he helped resolve the conflict between the Alaafin of Oyo and the Olubadan of Ibadan. The successful resolution of this disagreement further launched Ademola into national prominence as the leading Yoruba oba. Letters of congratulations poured in from different parts of Nigeria. Among many other associations, the *Egbe Agbaotan of Yorubaland*, based in Ibadan, celebrated the coming of age of the Yoruba nation under such progressive kings as the Alake.<sup>64</sup> Ernest Ikoli wrote from Lagos to "hope that (this) great service will lead to recognition of superior authority."<sup>65</sup> The Ooni of Ife congratulated the Alake but noted that the work was not yet complete until the Alake ensures that the Olubadan goes to pay obeisance to the Alaafin at Oyo.<sup>66</sup> The prestige Ademola acquired from dealing with royal crises was further enhanced by his intervention in the NYM crisis and later an imbroglio involving Zik press and the *Daily Service*.<sup>67</sup>

The NYM crisis had degenerated into personal hostility between leading members of the NYM and Nnamdi Azikiwe, with the former holding him responsible for the 1941

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<sup>63</sup> NAA/52/2/12, Letter ENA 062/4: Alake to Resident, June 12, 1939,

<sup>64</sup> NAA 52/2/15. Letter, Egba Agbaotan of Yorubaland (Ibadan) to Ademola II, June 15, 1939.

<sup>65</sup> Telegram: Ikoli to Ademola, February 9, 1939.

<sup>66</sup> NAA 52/2/1/9, Letter, Ooni Aderemi to Alake Ademola, June 6, 1939.

<sup>67</sup> "'Zikist' and 'Zikism' Exposed: Cannot Lead the Country Anywhere: Truth from Akenzua II, Oba of Benin." *Daily Service*, December 9, 1946.

crisis. Many members of the NYM pointed to Azikiwe's political ambitions and tactics as reasons why they could not work with him in the same political organization. Thus when the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon was inaugurated on August 26, 1944, many members of the NYM stayed away. However, Azikiwe's mass appeal, militant journalism and nationalism secured his stature such that, by 1944, the initiative for nationalist organization was firmly in his hands. His *Pilot* newspaper generated and captured the post-WWII enthusiasm of Nigerian youths for urgency to end colonial rule.

The difference between the NYM and Azikiwe was played out on the pages of their respective newspapers: the *Daily Service* and *Pilot*. Through the *Daily Service*, the NYM questioned Azikiwe's strategy, integrity and capacity to rule. The height of the press war followed the assassination plot in 1945 in which Azikiwe had alleged that he was in hiding because the colonial government planned on assassinating him. The *Daily Service* thought this was typical of Azikiwe's melodramatic tactics. This controversy became a press war which many thought was a grave threat to the nationalist movement and the budding campaign for independence. Letters and deputations called on the Alake to intervene to prevent a national calamity. One letter from Onitsha appealed that the Alake should arrange a "secret meeting whereby Zik, Dr. Maja, S.L. Akintola, Oluwole Alakija, Rotimi Williams, Sir Adeyemo Alakija and Dr. Abayomi Cole can meet and bury everything."<sup>68</sup> A reconciliation meeting was hosted by the Alake at which the quarrelling parties (Maja, Akintola and Thomas of the Daily Service Press and Azikiwe, Mbanefo and Chimma, the Zik press) resolved to refrain mention in any journal or

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<sup>68</sup> NAA 52/2/2 *Oba Ademola II: Letters and Correspondences*, Letter, Adegboyega Shonekan (Marine Training Institute, Onitsha) to Ademola, 19<sup>th</sup> February, 1946; Also "Zik-Maja Case", letter from Concerned Nigerians (Yaba, Lagos) lists recommendations to resolve the crisis. April 6, 1946. Reply: Private Secretary to the Alake to Concerned Nigerians, April 21, 1946.

support attack under any circumstance that would be inimical to a free friendly atmosphere.<sup>69</sup> The Alake received many letters of commendation for “the successful resolution of this crisis.”<sup>70</sup>

The penetration of Yoruba and Nigerian national discourse had profound implications for politics in Abeokuta. First, it opened up Egba politics to the national discourse in such a way as to redefine the configurations of the struggles in Abeokuta. The NNDP had been the dominant party among Egba elites since 1941. The rise of the NCNC divided this elite and made it difficult for the Alake to identify with either of the parties. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti joined the NCNC and was included in the party’s delegation to lodge a protest with the Secretary of State for Colonies in London in August, 1947. NCNC overshadowed the NNDP and NYM partly because of its better organization and zeal but also because of the underlying tensions between the NNDP (which was dominated by Lagos-based elites) and Abeokuta progressives led by the Reverend Ransome Kuti. Many Abeokuta-based elites were opposed to the intrusion of Lagos-based Egbas into Abeokutan politics. Given that post-war politics in Nigeria was often very contentious, Nigerian discourse soon dominated Egba politics pushing previous inter-Egba engagement to a subordinate level. Nearness to Lagos meant easy access to nationalists who at this stage were recruiting allies to sustain their claims to be “champions of Nigerian masses.” The strategy of the political parties, especially the NCNC, was to table government policies and constitutional proposals before mass meetings in the major urban centres. One such mass meeting was held in Abeokuta in

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<sup>69</sup> NAA 52/2/2 *Oba Ademola II: Letters and Correspondences, Minutes of Conciliation between Daily Service and Zik Press held at the Ake Palace, Abeokuta on the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, 1946.*

<sup>70</sup> NAA 52/2/2 *Oba Ademola II: Letters and Correspondences*, For instance, Letter: Egba Progressive Union, Zaria to Alake Ademola II, April 27<sup>th</sup>, 1946. Many telegrams from and to Maja (Lagos), Azikiwe (Onitsha).

December 1946 to discuss the constitutional proposals of Governor Sir Arthur Richards. In March 1945, the Governor had presented to the Legislative Council his proposals for amending the 1923 constitution. Leading nationalists now organized in the NCNC criticised the reforms as falling short of the expectations and promises of post-war reforms. They also frowned at the cavalier and arbitrary manner in which the proposals were designed.<sup>71</sup> At the meeting in Abeokuta NCNC delegates including Nnamdi Azikiwe and their Egba hosts, termed the proposal “evil” and committed to resist it at all cost.<sup>72</sup> The Richards Constitution lasted until 1951 and was replaced by the Macpherson constitution which provided for regional legislatures responsible for a range of issues subject to a federal legislature. Before the Macpherson constitution took effect, it was subjected to local consultations, debates and constitutional conferences with a view to making it broad-based and to prevent the public opposition that had rendered the Richards constitution unworkable. In this way, from 1949 when Macpherson initiated the proposals to 1951 when the constitution took effect, elites in different part of Nigeria not only debated the Nigeria issues of the constitution, but also positioned themselves to participate in the political platforms and opportunities it created. In many ways therefore, the concentration on the Nigerian discourse and the understanding that it represented the future diverted much attention away from local contentions; it also informed a realignment of local interests and elite identities and the refocusing of elite energies and aspirations.

However, local concerns may have been muted, but they did not disappear. The feeling that the Alake was too powerful and had become unconcerned with the needs of

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<sup>71</sup> James Coleman, 267.

<sup>72</sup> NAA 54/2/1, *Political Parties in Abeokuta, 1946*, “Proceedings at the meeting of the NCNC held at the Centenary Hall, Abeokuta”, September 17, 1946.



the Egba added to the increasing accusations and scandals involving the Alake, and led to a convergence of agendas that resulted in his abdication in 1948. In the interregnum that followed the Alake's exile, the Egbas organized another constitutional conference. This time, they would not let the British dictate to them.

#### 7.4 "Now we go our different ways": An abdication, a constitution and the end of a dream

The popular accounts of Oba Ademola's abdication make it appear that the Alake left Abeokuta on a groundswell of public consensus organized by women. Johnson-Odim and Mba describe the women's demonstrations at the Ake palace as the crucial public display of rejection after which Ademola's obaship was untenable.<sup>73</sup> Such views do not capture the complex interplay of interests and shifting alliances that led to the abdication. Significant as the women's demonstrations were, they were part of a larger dynamic of power struggle which included the Ogboni and other displaced chiefs as well as British colonial interests. Certainly, Ademola had attracted considerable opposition in the course of his long reign of 28 years, for the totalitarian implications of the centralization of power in Abeokuta and because of his perceived personal misdemeanours and misuse of power; yet, there remained a powerful group of loyalists who remained committed to the Alake. This group launched a vigorous campaign against his abdication and then, against the selection of another monarch in his stead. They ultimately achieved the reinstatement of the monarch after two years in exile.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Johnson-Odim and Mba, 79.

<sup>74</sup> Chiefs Kusimo, the Oluwo of Ake, Adeliyi, the Asipa of Egba led other chiefs to disclaim the resolution of the Central Council that the government should not allow the return of the Alake. The chiefs did not accept a resolution reportedly signed by 10,000 citizens as authentic or credible. ENA/47/ 1301, *Extract from Minutes of Meeting no. 11/1949 of the ENA Central Council held on 25<sup>th</sup> August, 1949.*

It is significant that the final push for the Oba's abdication appears to have come from the Ogboni, to underscore that the issues in contention went beyond the women's agitation. The women's demonstrations intensified from October 1946 to July 1948 and their pressure led to the suspension of taxation for women and a concession that women should be represented in the central council. In June, the Alake began a vacation to Jos. In his absence Egba chiefs, the Ogboni and members of the ENA passed a resolution against the Sole Native Authority System in July. They also charged the Alake with corruption and abuse of power. They thereby rejected him as king and beat the "traditional drums" to that effect. These series of events, amidst continued women's protests, forced the Alake into exile in July 1948.<sup>75</sup>

The role of the Ogboni and other chiefly elites deserve some attention in the light of their claims of traditional prerogative to depose the Alake. It is also necessary to contextualise the dichotomies of tradition and modernity that are implied in the public rendering of the account as well as by Johnson-Odim and Mba. Understandably, chiefly roles leading to the abdication were accorded secondary and adjunct importance in their account which concentrated on the women. The impression appears that the Ogboni had supported the Alake, and only jumped on the women's programme after it had become obvious that the Alake would capitulate. Indeed, the authors suggest that the Ogboni resolution on July 4<sup>th</sup> rejecting the Alake lacked effect until the women continued their protest (July 27 and 28) and insisted on the Alake's abdication. However, they also make it appear that by "sounding the bell and beating drums, the traditional method of rejecting a king" was thereby put in effect; and that by boycotting the council, Ogboni were

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<sup>75</sup> ENA/ 47, Ademola: Temporary Abdication file.

“preventing any administrative decisions from being made.”<sup>76</sup> This makes it appear as though a traditional condition for the rejection of a king was fulfilled. Such a reading of the struggle fits well into the authors’ framework which located Funmilayo in the dual mode (as though “facing two ways”) of a nationalist deploying the language of European modernity and a traditional Egba woman (“Lioness of Lisabi”) adopting traditional opposition against the colonial adulteration of an otherwise stable and well-conceived system.

Without altogether faulting this interpretation, such nuanced ambivalence draws attention to specific concerns of this thesis. First, it is expedient to see the women’s struggle beyond a modernist transformation of an African traditional system. That the Alake claimed to be a traditional title is not confirmed by the historical evidence. This thesis has advanced that the Alake and indeed all obas in Egbaland were 19<sup>th</sup> century creations and that the powers they claimed were not traditional or ancient, but contemporaneous. Similarly, it is necessary to see Funmilayo’s leadership beyond the assumptions of her being a “modern woman” or that western education and other modern credentials conferred on her certain exclusive ability and legitimacy which were closed to non-modern women. Such a reading which implies that anti-colonialism and nationalism required certain modern skills which only modern actors possess is simplistic. On the contrary, the history of anti-colonial nationalism in Nigeria includes significant mention of women leaders like Madam Alimotu Pelewura who may not have been Western educated, but mobilized women using what may be termed modern tools.<sup>77</sup> In Abeokuta,

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<sup>76</sup> Johnson-Odim and Mba, 87.

<sup>77</sup> Pelewura began her political career as the *Alaga*, Head of Ereko market in Lagos. She reportedly “walked hand in hand” (as equals) with Herbert Macaulay. She was the spokeswoman for 84 different women associations. She led the inauguration of the NNDP in Abeokuta in 1942, during which she

the particular case of “Atupa Parlour” bears evidence of how women used social resources without discrimination. This illiterate woman successfully fought Raimi Egbeyemi, the leading Egba chief, to secure her title to land by writing petitions, engaging the support of journalists, pursuing legal options as well as organizing bands of women and youths to harass the leading chiefs, and reportedly using juju.<sup>78</sup> Furthermore, Funmilayo’s campaign was predated by similar successful resistance against unacceptable government policies by the Adire women traders most of whom were illiterates. To conceive of the 1948 struggles as nationalist in contradistinction to earlier “primary resistance” belies that the struggle was a contemporary necessity and not a means of transforming a society along a teleological path towards the modern.

Related to the foregoing, the assumption that a traditional form existed of which Funmilayo and the women were conscious and which the Alake’s conduct contradicted thus rendering his position untenable must be properly contextualised. Funmilayo herself in her campaign had argued that the Alake’s powers were foreign to the customs of the Egba.<sup>79</sup> It would thus appear that she was conscious of what the “custom of the Egba” obas were. It is of course difficult to find any regular model of the customary powers of Egba oba at any time. Obas come in different types. If anything, much of Ademola’s conduct was similar to those of his predecessor and the long precedents of governing chiefs in 19<sup>th</sup> century Abeokuta. Such appeals to tradition as well as her adoption of supposedly modern resources should therefore be understood as political statements.

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introduced herself thus: “I am she who is called Pelewura... We wonder why your womenfolk did not show up here today. Tell me of that thing which men can undertake without the help of the womenfolk.” Cheryl Johnson-Odim, “Action Louder than Words: The Historical Task of Defining Feminist Consciousness in Colonial West Africa,” *Nation, Empire and Colony: Historizing Gender and Race*, ed. Ruth Roach Pierson and Nupur Chaudhuri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 84.

<sup>78</sup> “The Case of Atupa Palo, Kiniun Egba (journalist) and Raimi Egbeyemi: Juju and Fraud,” *Osumare Egba*, Wednesday 12, 1936.

<sup>79</sup> Johnson-Odim and Mba, 86.

They sounded credible because they addressed a colonial authority that conceived of Africans as having definitive customs and traditions and by appealing to an elite construction of Egba traditions. What Funmilayo was imputing (rather ambiguously) was therefore that this particular Alake's tyranny was colonial, Western and modern.

It was not just women deploying historical inventions of the past and conceptions of the modern to claim and justify political interests. The Ogboni's claim to depose kings similarly lacks historical verifiability in Abeokuta's politics and history. In spite of this tradition being established in the public consciousness and in the literature also, there is no precedent of any oba being deposed by the Ogboni in Abeokuta. The source of this notion partly derives from Oyo traditions and arguably from the attachment of a parliamentary tradition to Yoruba pre-colonial political history by Yoruba intellectuals.<sup>80</sup> It is significant to note that there was no official body of the Ogboni in Abeokuta during the 1940s which could initiate the sacking of an Alake; the law-making and advisory organ was the Egba Central Council. We may conclude therefore that the abdication of the Alake was a consequence of the pressures which made it expedient for the Alake to abdicate in the interest of peace and stability. The claims to tradition, of his being expelled by the Ogboni etc. can only be interpreted as chiefly and other elites jumping on the success of the women to make a case for relevance. Similarly, the women's struggle was a contemporary necessity and reaction in which women organized to challenge oppression and unpopular policies. Funmilayo Ransome Kuti was certainly the heroine of the struggle, but she was neither exclusively imbued by "the few tricks (she learned) from

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<sup>80</sup> Ladipo Solanke, "The Ogboni Institution in Yoruba." *WASU* 1 (Dec. 1926): 28-34; A. Folarin, *The Ogboni and Other Chieftaincies in Abeokuta, Their Purports and Meanings* (Abeokuta, 1934).

England<sup>81</sup> as the colonial reports suggests and neither was she specially filled with the spirit of Lisabi.

Meanwhile, the Alake's exile created a vacuum of power that was difficult to fill. The Alakeship had become defined by Ademola's personality, such that it was difficult for anyone else – or any of the sectional obas -- to immediately fill in. Besides, the issues for which he was exiled, including dictatorship, scandals, corruption etc., were deeply connected to the constructed image of the traditional oba as sovereign. Educated elites successfully posed the debate in terms of the traditional monarchy being outdated and outlandish in a modern democracy. By implication therefore, none of the remaining Obas could succeed to the headship of the Egba Central Council or the native authority. The interregnum and assumed rudderless state of Egba government led to the convening of a constitution drafting committee (CDC) which first met August 29<sup>th</sup>, 1949.

The composition of the CDC shows how much educated elites thought 1949 to be the beginning of a new era. All the members were educated; none of them was a chief and most of them were resident in Lagos. Unlike the 1941 constitution which derived from the British, the CDC started from a mass meeting convened at Ake, to which “all Egbas were invited” but which only educated ones attended. The colonial government apparently went along with the elite programme in the general direction of constitutional developments in Nigeria and ostensibly, in the larger spirit of post-war colonial reform. Educated elites in Abeokuta saw these issues as part of the developments in Lagos, where educated elites were campaigning for and achieving a transition of power from chiefly elites. Speakers at the CDC meetings spoke of the need to rescue Abeokuta from the archaic system of monarchy not only because “times had changed” from the past, but also

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<sup>81</sup> CO 657/41, Annual Reports, Abeokuta Province, 1947.

because Egbaland was confronted by challenges which threatened to obliterate its nationhood and cherished image. Many lamented how backward the Egbas had become in comparison to other Yoruba towns like Ibadan and Lagos, when (as they saw it) Egbas were the pioneers of every good thing. The way out, according to Chief Lawani Odugbemi (representing Ibadan road), was to design a constitution that would not only show the world that the Egbas were a modern people, unchained from a backward tradition, but also that they could place credible and accomplished individuals, versed in knowledge of modern governance, law and traditions, to lead the Egba into the new world.<sup>82</sup>

This assumed coming of age for the educated was however not without its contradictions. First, the role of chiefly power in this new era should not be assumed to have disappeared. As it was following colonial conquest, chiefs mostly retreated to the background. It became apparent that they retained control over the people – constituents continued to refer to them as “the real rulers of the people” -- and just as well, many of the educated elites claimed to be representing their chiefs and sectional interests.<sup>83</sup> Therefore, the ascent of the educated was not an unambiguous eradication of chiefly authority and of local traditions. Members of the CDC spoke of the need to move forward to a modern future but also to retain the “customs of our people.” Such ambiguity only partly derives from a political strategy to locate themselves in a binary world; it also relates to how fluidly defined elite identity and interests were, such that the divergences were never clear.

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<sup>82</sup> ENA 1397/ED.69, Meeting 3 of 1950.

<sup>83</sup> Detunji Dedeke asked that the issue of responsibility for building and maintaining sectional palaces should be resolved, because “everyone now pays tax.” ENA/ET/G/67, *Extract from Minutes of Meeting of the ENA Executive Council held on 12<sup>th</sup> September, 1949*. Sectional cleavages were also revealed over which Oba should become chairman of the proposed new council. *Meeting 2/ 1949; Meeting 9/1950*.

In the light of the foregoing, this constitutional assembly was never able to transcend the dichotomies and contestations that plagued the pre-existing political arrangement nor did it constitute a new and coherent ideology to cope with contemporary challenges. Members were divided on the main issues. The responsibility for the building and maintenance of sectional palaces remained contested and the succession to the chairmanship of Council in the absence of the Alake remained unresolved, just as it had been throughout Abeokuta's political history.<sup>84</sup> Representatives from the more rural areas outside Abeokuta argued with their more urban colleagues over the equitable political representation from the Egba provinces. *Olola* Taylor, the representative for Owode, accused the Reverend Ransome Kuti and other Abeokuta-based elites of narrow-mindedness and for assuming that only Abeokuta was important for the Egbas. For one, no rural representative was present at the meeting at which the CDC leadership (even membership) was decided. Taylor claimed he had had to force himself to be recognized as a member of the CDC. He frowned at the situation in which Abeokuta, which represented less than one-ninth of the total Egba population, produce more than 50 percent of the Council. According to the representative, the bulk of government earnings were derived from the villages, because "townspeople don't pay tax." Nowhere else in Nigeria was council representation so lopsided as in the Egba case. Taylor challenged as ahistorical the claim that Abeokuta could not be compared with Benin or Ondo because of its peculiar history in which the districts were customarily adjunct to the town. In his words,

the people in the town do not know where they are going or where they are coming from. Those in the district wish to tell them that they [district people]

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<sup>84</sup> EDC 3/1/145, Constitution for Egbaland Meeting 2/1949, September 29, 1949.



are the real town people and should hold more power. Those who were resident in the town, if delved into history, would find that they were driven to the town [by] the tribal wars and it would be found that they were in the districts –their homestead.<sup>85</sup>

For those who argued that the village people were illiterate and that by their precedents in council, they were “yes men,” another rural representative, Chief Lawani Odugbemi of Ibadan Road, argued that literacy does not necessarily amount to wisdom or illiteracy to ignorance. They may be illiterate, but they are wiser than so-called towns people—not the least in matters that affect them. He recounted that in 1948 they refused to pay the tax increase of 8/- over the former rate. Neither the Obas nor any chief could make them pay it; but once the use to which the money would be put was explained to them, they agreed to pay 15/- more than was initially proposed.<sup>86</sup>

The Reverend Ransome Kuti thought the demands of the districts were subversive and were being promoted by the British to “cause a lot of havoc; [he] knew who they [the dissidents] were, but would not mention names just yet. They were sowing seeds of serious disturbance in their dear land which we are all proud of.” They were being sponsored to achieve a British design to excise Ota and Isheri from Egba control. The British Resident, who was at the meeting as an observer, noted that the elites who shouted democracy the most were the most unwilling to democratize. They need to be aware that democracy carried costs including the loss of power and influence to the people.<sup>87</sup> The CDC resolved to a progressive increase of rural membership in council as they increase their civilization -- so they will “not be blinded by a sudden flash of light” – just as colonial tutelage of Nigerians for self-government was slow and gradual.

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<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.* Meeting 3/1950.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Meeting 8/1950.

Perhaps the most noteworthy innovation of the CDC was that it increased the council seats allocated to women from one to four. As with previous reorganizations, it recommended an increase in the membership of the Council. It defeated an Owu proposal to have a rotational presidency of the Council among the four sections, but reverted back to Alake and Council rather than the Alake's council. The new constitution also provided for representation for members of Egba unions in Lagos.

The 1949/50 constitutional conference would be the last real expression of the idea of Egba sovereign nationhood. The 1950 Richards constitution for Nigeria provided for regional parliaments which led to the creation of regional and ethnicised political parties. In the 1951 elections into the Western Region House of Representatives, the Action Group displaced the NCNC -- which had become tagged a non-Yoruba party -- as the dominant party in Western Nigeria. Many writers trace the ethnicisation of Nigerian politics to developments that relate to the Richards constitution. The developments, including the enunciation of Yoruba nationalism, pushed Egba identity further to the background. J.D.Y. Peel has argued that the activities of the Action group (and before it, the Egba Omo Oduduwa) were crucial in the consolidation of a Yoruba identity because they merged previous divergences (including of previously non-Yoruba peoples) and depicted those who were not in the new mainstream as anti-Yoruba.<sup>88</sup> Elite groups and interests shifted their attention from the more narrow local concerns to stake claims to and find their locations in the larger Yoruba identity and Nigerian politics.

The activities of the Action Group affected Egba politics in other ways. In his autobiography, Chief Awolowo writes that as Commissioner for local government and

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<sup>88</sup> J. D. Y. Peel, "The Cultural Work of Yoruba Ethnogenesis" in *History and Ethnicity*, ed. E. Tonkin, M. McDonald and M. Chapman (London: Routledge, 1989), 201.

Head of Regional Government, he faced a dilemma between reconciling the idea of an all powerful Oba and a Sole Native Authority with the complex and challenging bureaucracy he headed. While the obas proved valuable for political mobilization, they lacked the essential ingredients for a modern public service. His strategy was therefore to tap the resource of obas and Yoruba rituals and ceremonies to secure legitimacy while rendering them ineffective in their executive capacities.<sup>89</sup> The leading Obas, including the Ooni of Ife and the Alake of Abeokuta, were made patrons of the Action Group and Ministers without Portfolio in the AG government. Progressively, the regional government began eroding the powers and role of the obas in government. With the promulgation in 1952 of Local Government Law, the government effectively transited from the colonial native authority system.<sup>90</sup> As a commentator termed it, this was a “bloodless revolution” which left the Obas reigning but not ruling. Former British District Officers (DO) were progressively replaced by educated Nigerians as Administrative Officers (AO) and these were made supervisors over the monarchs and over chiefly matters. Chieftaincy matters including succession and coronation became invested in the regional government, which promulgated the identification and documentation of all chiefly titles and the processes and terms of their succession and behaviour.<sup>91</sup> Similarly, the regional government codified laws and traditions relating to land, marriage etc. In 1952 a law introduced the elective principle to local government. Traditional rulers were left in ceremonial

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<sup>89</sup> Awolowo, *Awo: An Autobiography*, 219-222; 262.

<sup>90</sup> “Western Region Local Government Law, 1952 cited in CO Ayodele, “Awolowo and the Development of Local Government”, *Obafemi Awolowo: The End of an Era*, Olasope Oyediran et. al. (four authors) eds. (Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 1988) 665-679.

<sup>91</sup> See for instance, NAA 52/2/16, Declaration made under Section 4 (3) of the Chiefs Law, 1957, Setting out the Customary Law Regulating the Selection to the Seriki Egba Chieftaincy title.

capacities and in charge of customary courts which were now made voluntary and subordinate to the regional legal authority.

These developments posed different challenges for the various elite interests in Abeokuta. Alake Ademola had been in exile during much of this critical period. His return and reinstatement was by a negotiated settlement which rendered his stature and powers limited. Now an old man of 75 years, he died in 1962 at 88. So reduced was the power and prestige of the Alakeship that for the first time in Egba history, the succession to this title did not attract the most leading claimants and did not generate into any significant conflict. According to Saburi Biobaku, it appeared that his successor, Oba Gbadebo II (1962-1971) had in effect been groomed during Ademola's long and eventful reign.<sup>92</sup> Although his reign was equally eventful, he confronted more regional and national issues than those that engaged his predecessors.<sup>93</sup> Notably, many potential claimants, including Prince Adetokunbo Ademola, chose federal and regional appointments. The prince became the first Nigeria Chief Justice of Western Nigeria in 1955.

The local government reforms rendered obas subordinate to elected local government officials. Yet, they retained considerable power and influence. As Olufemi Vaughan has shown, obas continued to manipulate the democratic process, by influencing local agendas and by posturing themselves as repositories of local traditions. Chiefs retreated to their hold over the rural areas and over customary matters by claiming to be the traditional and natural rulers of the people. The democratic dispensation

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<sup>92</sup> Biobaku, *A Window on Nigeria* (Lagos: Nelson Publishers, 1994) 108.

<sup>93</sup> In the Western regions crisis of 1964, Gbadebo II ignored local disaffection to join the NNDP against the more popular Action Group led by Awolowo. He accepted a ministerial position from the Akintola-led government. Olufemi Vaughan, 116.

demanded that leading national and regional elites still respect and access these titles for electioneering and policy mobilization. Politicians secured chieftaincies to affirm their traditional qualifications for electioneering purposes, to prove that they are popular among an assumedly traditional people and to access the powers available to this nexus of local power. That they aspired to be chiefs empowered obas and chiefs in significant ways. Chiefly titles, the number of which could be increased at will, offered pecuniary returns<sup>94</sup> and secured close client relations with the politicians who are expected to champion the interests of the localities of which they are chief. Such a symbiotic relationship retained chiefly power and influences in spite of constitutional (national) restrictions. Bayart captures this relationship succinctly in noting that the modern African state does not exist in opposition to traditional authority, but as spaces for the assimilation, mediation and collaboration of elites.<sup>95</sup> According to Insa Nolte elites, whose social positions are legitimized by tradition, go beyond it to establish and widen their access to the state, while the “modern” politicians advance traditions for legitimacy.<sup>96</sup> Accordingly a conflation of elite identity occurs such that it becomes difficult to clearly demarcate the elite categories. This conflation is cemented by common elite interests, historical manipulations and cultural creativity, even as elites struggle within this framework by advancing sub-elite identities and ideologies.

For many of the educated, chiefly positions and the Egba native government ceased to be an attractive political and career target. The Western regional and Nigerian government opened up incredible opportunities and greater power and influence which

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<sup>94</sup> Statement of fee paid on chieftaincy conferment of 21/01/04 and 23/01/04. Copy obtained from Ake Palace, Abeokuta.

<sup>95</sup> Jean Bayart, *The State in Africa: the politics of the belly* (Harlow: Longman, 1993)

<sup>96</sup> Insa Nolte, “Chieftaincy and the State in Abacha’s Nigeria: Kingship, Political Rivalry and Competing Histories in Abeokuta During the 1990s, *Africa*, 72, 3 (2002) 368.

attracted the leading elites to Lagos for federal appointments and Ibadan for regional positions. The 1949 Egba constitution became *ultra-vires* and of no effect following the abrogation of the native authority system; decolonization proceeded along regional and national frameworks which rendered Egba issues to the back burners.

#### 7.5 Conclusion

The key issues of Egba nationhood, political centralization and dissident sectionalism which had shaped elite identity and power in Abeokuta over the course of the twentieth century began to command less attention from the 1950s because of contemporary Nigerian national and Yoruba regional engagements. Similarly, the attractions of Egba power for the leading elites diminished in the light of opportunities created at the national and regional levels. Certainly these local concerns did not disappear; they continued to rear their heads at significant periods. That the sovereignty and nationhood claims of the Egba became anachronistic in the face of Yoruba and Nigerian penetrations did not imply that they ceased to constitute resources that elites claimed and contested over. In many respects, local issues remained cannon fodder in elite struggles over the form and distribution of power. The ease with which elites adjusted their aspirations and claims from the local to the regional and the national supports the central theme of this thesis: that identities and traditions are constructions and are not immutable.

## CHAPTER 8 CONCLUSION

Until recently, when the so-called elite of the other sections of Egbaland “saw the light” and wanted to re-write history, there was total unity, affinity and respect for one another in Egbaland. Until recently, the whole of Egba nation was one.<sup>1</sup>

I shall accept the groupings that history suggests only to subject them at once to interrogation; to break them up and then to see whether they can be legitimately reformed; or whether other groupings should be made; to replace them in a more general space which, while dissipating their apparent familiarity, makes it possible to construct a theory of them. Once these immediate forms of continuity are suspended, an entire field is set free.<sup>2</sup>

In July 2008, seventeen people were reportedly killed at Ota, Nigeria, over the struggle among Egba monarchs over control of the Ota chieftaincy.<sup>3</sup> This was only the latest in a long series of conflicts over the control of traditional chieftaincies, which Insa Nolte interprets as a reflection of the rancorous assimilation and singularity of African elites regardless of whether they are state-based or “traditional.”<sup>4</sup> However, in locating traditional power, Nolte, as do many other investigators, premises the study on the axiom of historical legitimacy of traditional chiefs, thereby making current struggles an aberration caused by the appearance and attractions of the modern state.<sup>5</sup> Such a perspective which takes the pre-colonial as a given against which the modern is contrasted is common to many accounts. What has been lacking is to consider Africa’s pre-colonial past in its historicity, its dynamism and change, and to see the continuity of the dynamic discourses of this era into the colonial and post-colonial periods. Rather, by centering European modernity as the model by which African society is configured,

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<sup>1</sup>Interview: Nlado of Ake, “Egba Chiefs, Olowu on War Path,” *The Sun on Sunday*, November 11, 2007.

<sup>2</sup>Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>3</sup>*Nigerian Tribune*, July 18, 2008.

<sup>4</sup>Insa Nolte, “Chieftaincy and the State in Abacha’s Nigeria: Kingship, Political Rivalry and Competing Histories in Abeokuta during the 1990s” *Africa*, 72, 3 (2002): 368-390.

<sup>5</sup>Jean Francoise Bayart, *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly* (Harlow: Longman, 1993).

many studies fit African history in a displacement and transition mode between the dichotomies of a traditional past and a modern future. This makes it difficult to conceive of Africa's past in a discursive context, or to conceive of a continuity of African discourses from the pre-colonial to the present. Contemporary society is therefore not seen as being shaped by Africans engaging themselves in discourse over a *longue durée*, but by their locations vis-à-vis European culture. It is obvious that the displacement model does not provide a history that adequately accounts for Africa's complexities. Rather, it underscores the constraints of the West's imperialistic stranglehold on African history from which many historians have struggled to wriggle free.

This thesis has been inspired by the need to discern a broader pattern of historical ideas and developments by which a modern African society developed. The history of Abeokuta had been written in the displacement narrative to establish that a modern elite evolved during the 19<sup>th</sup> century from British anti-slavery and missionary activities. This elite is assumed to have launched Abeokuta on the path of European modernity, by displacing a traditional system, to create a British-type monarchical government. Such accounts have had significant implications for Egba society. It has constituted a dominant ideology upon which a structure of power and a pattern of domination is established. However, the displacement model is not hegemonic on the ground; the monarchy still strives for legitimacy and many point to the faulted premises of its existence. Many of the political crises among the Egba relate to the configuration of power on the basis of this historical paradigm. It is however apparent, both from the historical records and current social and political complexities, that Egba society is derived from deeper and more complicated roots than the existing accounts have presented.



In pursuing a more rigorous historical account, this thesis proceeded by critically evaluating the pillars and assumptions upon which existing accounts are predicated. Interrogating the “unities,”<sup>6</sup> even on their own terms, quickly revealed their structural inconsistencies and showed them to be multiple and often contradictory articulations of claims and statements. The terms of Egba identity and nationality were never unambiguous or explicit, but consisted of many statements, some of which were only tenuously sustained. Furthermore, these claims were never unilateral or uncontested. Debunking the notion that the Egba had definite and recognizable traditions, from which their institutions of chieftaincy derive, is a critical first step towards interpreting these institutions in their historical contexts. As with Egba identity, Egba monarchies are also 19<sup>th</sup> century creations; they developed in response to specific needs and influences that impinged on the nascent Egba community. The assumption that a pre-existent monarchy was carried over from an ancestral homeland is demonstrated to be a political claim advanced to legitimize political innovation. At best, these claims are the sectional experience of a small part of the agglomeration of settlers in the community. The Ake legend was valuable to establish a warrior elite, many of whom were never of Ake origin. It is thus valuable, at least from a scholarly point of view, to assess these institutions as constructions of power rather than as the natural, immutable and intrinsic character of the Egba. Therefore, Egba political history is not about the displacement of a recognized and immutable traditional form; rather, it is a history of *realpolitik* and the engagements of multiple discourses among political elites.

Just as traditions were mostly claims and political statements, Egba conceptions of modernity do not conform to the scholarly depictions of transformative European

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<sup>6</sup> Foucaudian term for the conventional.

agency. Although the rhetoric of modernity was widely deployed towards political objectives, the claims so advanced did not necessarily equate to European modernity. Rather modernity implied form and change and was a political instrument which elites contested regarding its meanings and application. I have argued that pre-colonial Egba society was not one to which European culture could be inverted. Egba elites were not neatly divided over modernity. It is a misrepresentation to depict educated elites as “modern” and chiefly elites as “traditional.” On the contrary, elites engaged in multiple- and cross-alliances over modernity and its meanings. In this way, the Egba appropriated European ideas to known Egba forms in ways that were not a replication of the European type. For instance, as democracy became an international political force, Egba elites conceived of Egba democracy in such a way that its revolutionary implication to the existing elite structure and authority was mitigated. Similarly, colonial rule was interpreted as friendly tutelage from a British empire that had only providentially gone ahead of the Egba in modernization, and had promised assistance to change Egba society to a better one.

Therefore, colonial conquest and rule did not constitute a revolutionary intervention that overturned life among the Egba. This was partly on account of it being annexed in 1914, well after the partition era. It was also partly because of the British Indirect Rule system and the preferred status which the Alake had acquired with the British. This thesis has argued, however that a more compelling reason was that the Egba had no unmitigated political form in 1914, the disruption of which could drastically have dislocated their world. British rule was through a monarchy that was still trying to establish itself as the legitimate head of the Egba. It had no definite traditions that could

make its subordination a dire experience for its subjects. It was only in the course of colonial intrusions into matters of local importance that Egbas began to react to colonial domination. Contrary to the notion that the Egba rebelled against the British in 1918 because they were traditionally averse to taxation, I have shown that taxation was not new at this date. The Adubi war was much more concerned with local issues of power and domination, even though the macro-economic conditions of the WWI era gave local issues more urgency.

Colonial rule attempted to ossify Egba life and politics into forms that were comprehensible to Europeans. It was singularly unsuccessful in its attempt to obliterate traditional medical practices. Egba social health discourse before European intrusion was not a coherent piece of idea and practice which could be termed “traditional medicine,” but was marked by the capacity of individuals to navigate the discursive spaces created as deities, *Oniseguns* and *Babalawos*, itinerant drug peddlers, Islamic clerics etc., fought, competed and collaborated among themselves. That such deities had their ambiguities implies that individuals could select the terms of their influence. Such multiplicity made it possible for Western (missionary) medicine to be accepted and to grow during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, colonial and racialist ideology consigned all African practices as irrational and colonial power attempted to proscribe local medical guilds and practices. This thesis demonstrates that the Egba, elites and commoners alike, engaged colonial medical ideology in many ways: by disregarding it, acquiescing to it, shifting their views on it and using it to negotiate for power and space. In so doing however, they insisted on their freedom to choose medical options, including death.

Colonial rule was much more successful in securing Egba production to the global economy. The railway, cash crop production and marketing further exposed the Egba to the vagaries of international trade and other international ideas and movements. Abeokuta also became fully incorporated into the European nation-state model, first as a protectorate, then a colonial province and later as a part of an independent Nigerian state. In the same vein, Christianity grew deep roots, such that only a few Egba still claim to be adherents of local deities. The Egbas were also deeply incorporated into the English linguistic world. Undoubtedly, there were many changes that can be traced to European colonization. This thesis has demonstrated however that these changes were not simply the outcome of European construction or imposition. Rather a dynamic of causes and effects operated in which Egbas had significant say in the form of the output. European ideas, including colonial regulations, are more appropriately seen as ideas over which Egba elites struggled, interpreted in different ways and thereby modulated their outcome in ways that often did not conform to colonial expectations. This explains why Egba Christianity, spoken English, the monarchical system and economic practices diverge from British models.

For instance in politics, colonial rule promoted a totalitarian monarchy, equipped with colonial regulations such as the native court ordinances, and the capacity to construct traditions and to document customary law. This attracted some shrewd elites who crafted legitimacy for the monarchy and attempted to use it to define Egba identity and society in such ways as would better legitimize their positions. These elites crafted necessary traditions fitting Egba origins into the larger Yoruba primogeniture; they also codified these traditions as customary laws to establish the Egba as one people.

Alongside a centralized monarchy and a central council, national laws, central church, central mosque, race course and a national day -- the centenary of which was celebrated in 1930 -- and intellectual production of a national history, Egba elites hoped to take their place “among the nations of the world.” It is from these Egba elites, who bought into the centralization idea – a process that predates colonial rule – that the idea of an Egba nation under a king took form. Colonial power shared a convergence of interests which made its power available to these centralist forces.

The centralization of politics often amounted to an attack on the freedoms and privileges which more fluid political expressions had guaranteed. Therefore, displaced chiefs, sectional elites and those who prospered under the old conditions resisted in many ways. Chiefs created alternative axes of power by redefining and reinforcing old forms of gossip, *kirikiri*, town meetings and Ogboni to challenge the monarchy and to limit the constriction of their power and influence. As the monarchy became more intrusive, Egba peasants, women, youths and elites alike deployed forms of resistance – including “war,” demonstrations, petitions, litigation, the media, scorn and jeers, etc., against the government. With the exception of the women’s demonstration of 1949, Egbas were certain to define the Alake and not the British as the target of their grievances. Even in the 1949 case, the British only got secondary mention in a movement targeted at the Egba king.

Thus the Egba shared a convergence on the need for change with British colonial interests. What was in contention was the form of change. This thesis demonstrates that for a society in the making and one in which there was no pre-existing immutable culture, the discourse of change predates colonial intervention and became a no-holds-barred

contest in which elites pushed ideas and used whatever was conceived of as the best instrument of power to establish it. The desire for modernity was often expressed, but its meaning was not restricted to any clear unambiguous form. What all elite actors shared apart from the contested definition of change, was self-promotion, the pursuit of social privileges and life's best options. This, in a critical sense, is a major objective of elite ideologies: the shaping or adaptation of society to forms which best favour elite views and aspirations. Thus while there were genuine nationalist (or sectional) motivations or even sacrificial and self-abnegating ideas, these are often undistinguishable in ideological pursuits from the aspirations to get ahead in life. These interests and motivations transcend and predate European modernity.

It is therefore possible to narrate a history of Egba politics in the local discourses of power among its elites and citizens. The continuum of such a history stretches from the pre-colonial to the present. From its inception in c.1830, the complex agglomeration of settlers in Abeokuta held different social and political orientations (rather than a pre-existing origin or unity). Consequently, power was necessarily diffused and only a modicum of centralized power was invested in a small military elite, upon which the society depended for security. It is only in a fluid system of power that former slaves could quickly be integrated and quickly become elites, as was the Saro experience. The struggle among Egba elites has been to determine the extent to which centralized authority will affect their diversity and freedom. Elites who favoured centralization found ready support in the missionaries who conceived of a nation under a king and under God as the ideal (modern) form of identity. Centralists could also ally with re-settlers from Sierra Leone who were crafting an identity of their own, based on a complex mix of their

gratitude to Christian missionaries, British style education and worldview, and their perception of racialist subordination by Europeans. A Lagos government which was always losing out to the effective diplomacy of the diversified Egba wanted a central authority with which they could make effective colonial arrangements. These influences favoured the small elite which was already advancing claims of pre-ordained authority and ownership over the Egba. The monarchy was further aided by colonial authority.

Yet, the consolidation and sustenance of centralization has remained a struggle. Political centralization has not succeeded in obliterating diversity for many reasons. The idea of an Egba nation continues to be contested by sectional identities, and by the difficulties of encasing people into categories. Furthermore, Egba identity has had to contend with a pan-Yoruba political movement and Nigerian nationalism. It is indeed a mark both of the uncertainty of Egba identity and of how adaptive elite claims are that as opportunity for political offices opened up at the regional and national levels, elites shifted their claims to the more attractive options.

The findings of this thesis make some important contributions to understanding the African elite. First, by capturing the dynamic forms of power during the pre-colonial era, we see new elites as innovations and developments upon existing forms. New (educated or westernized) elites can cease to be labelled as a bifurcated and confused lot: “facing two ways.” Rather, they with other elites were “facing the future” and fashioning society out of the diverse influences and challenges they confronted and with the diverse resources at their disposal. Furthermore, by capturing dynamism, European modernity is properly contextualised as a gradual introduction rather than a fixed cultural difference and revolution. As a progressive introduction it is revealed as a multiplicity of ideas,

some of which Africans could identify with, relate and adapt to. This is clearly demonstrated in the manner missionaries preached Christianity by showing its similitude to local cosmologies. Consequently, there was no modern elite in contradistinction to a traditional one. Given that Egba society was fluid and adaptive, it was not long before so-called traditional forms modernized. The attributes such as Christianity, education and foreign travel, which new elites could affirm as difference from other locals, were open to many. Wealthy chiefs were quick to put their children or slaves (*omo*, lit. child) through schools and many youths found space in the new opportunities that missionary activities and European colonialism offered. Local guilds and professionals “modernized” their practices and were often better able to advance claims to being modern than the educated elite.

On the other hand, these attributes were not sufficient for the educated elites to acquire power and secure social privileges. They were not allowed space in the colonial service which also favoured presumably traditional institutions in its indirect rule system. Aspiring educated elites therefore had to modulate their social difference such that they could fit into local power systems. To do so, they had to be involved in creating and adjusting local practices in such ways as would create spaces for them and legitimize their claims to belonging. With the colonial need for definite laws to ensure regularity in judicial practice and colonial administration, these social practices were documented and ossified as customary law and tradition. With the educated utilising tradition and the chiefly adopting modern practices, Egba elites cannot be differentiated along modern or traditional categories.



The thesis demonstrates that for the Egba, modernity transcended Europe, but it also included attractions to European forms. Moreover, some aspects of European culture were considered reprehensible. Therefore, modernity is more appropriately defined in terms of its everyday usages in which people determined, for instance, that Western liberal education was a better life option than local vocational guilds or even Western vocational disciplines. It may be noted in this regard that public demands for Western education outpaced the preparedness of colonialism to educate Africans; it indeed forced colonial administrations into expanding educational opportunities and contributed to shaping the form of colonial educational policy. Modernity is also in the choice of elite men and commoners alike to privilege polygamy and push the colonial government to affirm it as the African way, as though most Africans were polygamous. Modernity is the retention of a multiplicity of medical options in spite of colonial proscription of native medical guilds. *Sopono*, the smallpox deity, was neither traditional nor ancient. In pre-colonial times, its form was adaptive and transformative. It continued to exist past the colonial period in a modern form of religious and medical choice. Contemporary Africa is therefore not the incomplete work of European modernization or a half African, half European hybrid, or the failure of a colonial project, or even the disruption of some known and definite form of life. This thesis offers an insight into current African complexities. It is the picture of a dynamic history of a variety of local discourses, of foreign intrusions and penetrations and of ideas whose sources cannot be readily determined. Some of these were forced, some were invited, some were adapted and some were resisted. African society was not constructed on European terms and neither was it

built on some assumed African terms in relation to European power; it was constructed as a human society, of quotidian engagements, innovations, appropriations and adaptations.

These findings also make important contributions to the recovering of an African history in which Africans are actors in the shaping of their lives, and especially one which transcends European ideas in and about Africa. On the heels of concerns expressed by writers like Pieter Hensbroek and Kwame Appiah<sup>7</sup> about the European influence on the history, identity and thought ascribed to Africans, there has been an understanding that colonial power was a multiple engagement in which Africans were active participants in the shaping of their world.<sup>8</sup> Others like Stephanie Newell create space for historical experiences that could not be directly ascribed to colonial rule. Her coinage “paracolonial” demonstrates that colonial rule did not constitute an inescapable framework, but rather that Africans pursued their lives often outside of direct colonial control. This thesis demonstrates that valuable as these developments are, they yet fail to capture the possibility that indigenous discourses, which were not subordinated to colonial power, were constituent to shaping African societies even during the colonial era. To capture those discourses, this thesis shows that although colonial ideology might have claimed difference, many components of European culture were not opposed to African cultures and experiences; nor did it constitute a dichotomous binary. Flexible and adaptive local cultures appropriated elements of European culture including those the colonizers thought they were forcing on Africans. Thus a narrative in which Africans

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<sup>7</sup> Pietre Boele van Hensbroek, *Political Discourses in African Political Thought* (Connecticut: Praeger, 1999); Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: African and the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Oxford University Press, 1992)

<sup>8</sup> Fred Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge and History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

make affirmative choices from local and global resources is discernible. Colonial power and European modernity were social resources for the Egba; they did not constitute binaries which the Egba had to live with or be forced into.

The findings of this thesis about Egba discourses may not directly apply to all African societies. Egba historical particularities, including its 19<sup>th</sup> century origins, comparatively late experience of colonial conquest and its opportunity at indigenous modernization determined the kinds of political experience and discourse treated in this thesis. They also inform the methodological possibilities of uncovering Egba history. They may not apply to societies with more ancient origins or to settler colonies. Yet, who is to say what we might find once we overcome the displacement model and the assumption that all Africans were concerned with was coping with colonial power. This thesis may well be the tip of an iceberg of future historical enquiry. The unleashing of capacity that comes from deconstructing the notions of difference invites enquiry into the multiple forms of social behaviour in every society. This thesis has examined in some detail how the Egba struggled among themselves for the best ideas to shape their society. Such struggles existed in many other societies and they invite scholarly research.

There are other limitations to imagining an African discourse. It is obvious for instance that the notion of African traditions has existed long enough to constitute some form of social reality. In other words, although traditions and identities may have been constructed upon myths and imaginations they have survived long enough to be considered social and political realities. To affirm for instance that the Alakeship is a late 19<sup>th</sup> century creation rather than of ancient origins does not undo its present reality and the powers by which it enforces its historical imagination and legitimizes its authority.

Indeed, these conceptions have become the dominant underpinning of elite formation and current political organization. This brings to question the relevance and potency of historical enquiry and scholarship: What value is there in rocking the boat? -- is a question which many historians of minority groups and displaced identities have had to respond.<sup>9</sup>

However by showing that the underbelly of power is not divine, natural or immutable, we reveal that contemporary authority as a construction. This is particularly cogent for Africa where existing knowledge constitutes part of the ideological framework that preserves patterns of domination. To the extent of the broad consensus that Africans have and continue to experience multiple subalternity, a study of the terms of their domination appears justified. Furthermore, since much domination is predicated on ideology, challenging the hegemonic pretensions of power provides a level-playing field by which dominated peoples can redress their subordination. Much more, if current patterns are constructions, we show that they can be deconstructed and rebuilt to make a better society. Beyond the activist in the intellectual, the historian's calling is to uncover the past as best as is possible. The value of the intellectual, says Foucault, is not in standing beside or with the subaltern; but in creating the space whereby the voice of the subaltern and his/her counter-discourse is well heard.<sup>10</sup> Such a space makes it possible to capture discourse in a wider scope than the narrow concerns of dominant power, such as the conflation of subaltern concerns as resistance or the conflation of African history as the measure of Africa's progress towards Western modernity.

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<sup>9</sup> See for instance, Salo. W. Baron, *The Contemporary Relevance of History: A Study in Approaches and Methods* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Mario Moussa and Ron Scapp, "The Practical Theorizing of Michael Foucault: Politics and Counter-Discourse" *Cultural Critique*, 33 (1996): 87-112.

More than a few questions remain outstanding. This study has been more deconstructive than a narration of a new and different history. I have tried to reread existing accounts, and by making space for data that had found no space in the extant studies, have advanced alternative interpretations. The thesis has necessarily been episodic and will not pass for a complete political history of the Egba. It does not for instance sufficiently explain what political fluidity meant for the Egba during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, how this conception has changed, and if it continues to the present. It will be valuable to determine if the cultural and political tools with which they practiced fluidity and later struggled for and against centralization, remain the means of politics to date and what changing forms these have taken. I consider these questions the way forward, towards unravelling what has remained constant in Egba identity and politics.

APPENDIX A      Draft Constitution for the Egba nation, drafted and passed by the Association of Egbas based in Lagos 1920.

THE EGBA NATIONAL CHARTER

Whereas the Egba nation is a conglomeration of various townships and districts distinguished by their dialects each township and district in ancient times, managing its own local affairs by its elders.

And whereas all the townships and districts are again divided into four sections known as the Egba Alake, the Egba Oke Ona, the Egba Agurd and the Egba Owu, and each of these divisions has been accustomed to have ruler of its own designated the King.

Whereas the King of the Egba Alake has from their original homes (Or ila) been invariably acknowledged and recognised by the whole of the Egba nation as the supreme King over the other Egba Kings and continued so to be up to the present day, and the King of the Egba Alake becomes recognised therefore as the King of all the Egbas.

And whereas the Egba Alake have been the natural and lawful electors of their King and continue to exercise this right of election even when the King of the Egba Alake became the paramount King of all the Egbas, and have never at any time been interrupted by any or all of the other three sections of the Egba nation in the exercise of this right.

Whereas according to customary laws and practices the Alake rules over the Egba nation with the advice and assistance of the other Kings (hereinafter called brother-Kings) aforesaid and also

And whereas there had been during the late reign scandalous and multifarious violations of the peoples' rights, customs and privileges, by the dependency of the sovereign on the advice of favourites in lieu of Councillors, by systematic refusal to lend ears to the peoples' plaints against egregious disregard of their liberty and freedom in momentous and vital matters and by serious mismanagement of national affairs which had pernicious affect on the national manhood and status.

Whereas in order to ameliorate the present state of affairs, to restore the national tendency to democratical government, to uphold and maintain in an effective manner the standing relationship with the British Government and to promote measures against the recurrence of the oppressive and unconstitutional practices aforesaid it has been resolved to define the extent and limit of the power of the King that may now or in future rule over the Egba nation, and to secure a guaranty from the reigning King for the observance and preservation of the peoples' rights and freedom, now therefore it is agreed on between King Ademola II of the Egbanation of the one part and the undersigned representatives of the Egba Alake and also the other three brother-Kings as representatives of the other three sections of the Egba nation of the other part as follows:-

1. That the Alake of the Egbas shall rule over the whole of the Egba nation under the protection of the British Government with the advice and consent of the Council (hereinafter called

the Egba National Council) that is to say the Council that usually seat at the Alake's palace once a week, that the King shall have a seal of his own and the Council shall likewise have its own seal.

2. That the members of the National Council shall be elected according to customary practices and shall compose of the representatives of the various religions Confessions in the Community, namely the heathens, the Mahomedans and the Christians.

3. That the three brother-Kings shall be members of the Council.

4. That the Alake shall be the president of the National Council, the brother-King shall be Vice President, and in the absence of the Alake any of the brother-Kings shall preside at the Council meeting in order of rank, and no Council meeting shall be held without two of the Kings being present.

5. That there shall be one Clerk attached to the National Council merely for the purpose of recording the proceedings of the meeting.

6. That the deliberations of the Council shall be confined within the pale of the administrative powers agreed upon by the people with the British Government under the designation of the Native Administration or any other appellation by which the Administration may in future be designated, and Council meetings shall be held at a place that shall be determined by the Alake but not at the King's palace.

7. That all political matters with the British Government



shall be carried on by the Alake in Council, and any political transaction with the said British Government by the Alake alone or by the National Council alone shall be totally void and of no effect whatsoever.

8. That the Alake shall have the power to appoint from 3 to 5 men amongst whom shall be one or two Barristers as his private Councillors, and in the event of the Alake exercising this power, the Councillors so appointed shall be entitled to the audience of the National Council at the instance of the Alake if the necessity should arise.

9. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence that with the aid of the National Council they shall recognise and protect private family and communal right to properties real or personal, and no property private family or communal shall be sold, dealt with or in any way alienated against the will and consent of the owner or owners, and in case any property is required for public purposes by the administration adequate and reasonable compensation shall be paid to the owner or owners.

10. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence for the improvement of Commerce and adjustment of property laws in Abeokuta.

11. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence to preserve all public institutions such as the Ogboni and Oro worship and also all religious institutions in so far as their practices shall not be injurious to the state and in conflict

with the established laws.

12. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence to maintain and preserve the freedom and liberty of the people and to amend the laws with regard to forced and gratuitous labour.

13. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence to prevent the admission of foreigners or foreigners as member or members of any of the Councils in connection with the Egba Native Administration. By foreigner is meant non-Egba.

14. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence necessary measures for the improvement of the state of the Courts and suspension of Justice in Abeokuta.

15. That the Alake shall take steps and exercise his influence by summoning to Ake or any other place suitable for the occasion, representatives of the Egba nation, heathens, Mahomedans and Christians, wherever they may be, in number about 200 or more, to hold Council and discuss measures to prevent or stave off any danger and calamity that may be threatening the peace, order and good Government of the country, or for the solution of difficult and intricate national problems.

16. That the consent of the King and Council in all political transactions with the British Government shall be signified by the King's seal and the National Council's seal and their respective signatures.

17. That the Alake carrying out his obligations and exercising his influence for the happiness and prosperity of his people shall

be accorded by the Egba people all the respects, honour, dignity and reverence due to the Head of all the Egba nation and will be regarded as such.

And it is Hereby agreed and declared by the two parties to this Compact that in case of any dispute between them, such dispute shall be referred to the British Government for abitrament, and the decision of the said Government shall be final.

In Wintess whereof the parties hereto have hereunto set their hands and seals this                      day of                      in the year of Our Lord. 1920.

## APPENDIX B List of Contemporary Rulers and Leading Chiefs in Abeokuta

1. Sodeke, *Balogun* (war General) c. 1830 – 1845
2. Apati (*Seriki*), Ayikundu, (*Balogun of Igbehin*), Okukenu (*Sagbua*), Ogunbona (*Balogun of Ikija*).
3. Somoye, *Bashorun* 1862 – 1868
4. Ogundipe 1868 - 1887
5. The Triumverates:
  - a. Ogundeyi Magaji, the Nlado of Kemta, Jaguna of Igbehin 1887 – 1892
  - b. Balogun Aboaba, Alake Osokalu and the Seriki 1897 -1898
6. Alake of Abeokuta
  - a. Okukenu 1854 -1862
  - b. Ademola I 1869 – 1877
  - c. Oyekan 1879 – 1881
  - d. Luwaji 1885 – 1898
  - e. Osokalu 1891 – 1898
  - f. Gbadebo 1898 – 1920
  - g. Ademola II 1920 – 1962
  - h.
7. *Osiles* of Oke-Ona, Abeokuta
  - a. Karunwi 1897 – 1899
  - b. Adebare 1900 – 1902
  - c. Sokunbi 1904 – 1918
  - d. Adedamola 1918 – 1932
  - e. Adedotun 1932 – 1934
  - f. Adebare II 1934 – 1944
8. Olowu of Owu, Abeokuta
  - a. Pawu 1855 – 1867
  - b. Adefowote 1869 – 1872
  - c. Aderinmoye 1873 – 1890
  - d. Adepegba 1893 – 1905
  - e. Owookade 1906 – 1918
  - f. Dosunmu 1918 – 1924
  - g. Adesina 1924 – 1936
  - h. Adelani Gbogboade 1938 – 1946

9. Agura of Gbagura

- |             |             |
|-------------|-------------|
| a. Jamolu   | 1870 – 1877 |
| b. Ija-Ade  | 1887 – 1893 |
| c. Olubunmi | 1897 – 1910 |
| d. Abolade  | 1910 – 1915 |
| e. Adeosun  | 1915 – 1936 |
| f. Sobekun  | 1937 – 1960 |

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