

---

**COLONIALISM WITHIN COLONIALISM: BRITISH COLONIAL RULE  
AND EGBA SUB-IMPERIALISM IN YEWALAND, 1914 – 1960**

<sup>1</sup>ICHABA, ABIYE EMMANUEL (Ph.D.); <sup>2</sup>ANISERE, STEVEN CLAY (Ph.D.)

<sup>1</sup>DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY & INTERNATIONAL STUDIES,  
KOGI STATE UNIVERSITY, AYINGBA, NIGERIA.

<sup>2</sup>DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS, ESCAE UNIVERSITY,  
PORTO-NOVO, REPUBLIC OF BENIN.

**ABSTRACT**

The study examines the nature and administrative policy of the British colonial rule and the course of the developments in Yewaland between 1914 and 1960. The British rule in Yewaland actually started in 1851 as a result of the diplomatic moves by the people to terminate the existing Egba imperial ‘yoke’ on their land and people by their repeated invitations of the British for ‘Protection’ against the Egba’s exploitation in their land. But within a short space of three years (1891 and 1894), the assumed British ‘Protection’ had silently turned into the full-fledged British colonial rule in Yewaland. What was more, the British who ought to protect Yewaland against the power of the Egba, by themselves handed Yewaland, first in parts, and latter in whole back to their erstwhile colonial exploiters and oppressor (Egba) in another round of Egba ‘colonial’ rule within the larger British colonial regime from 1914 till independence in 1960. The significance of this paper hinges on the fact that, unlike many other societies in Africa, Nigeria and Yorubaland, Yewaland suffered the double tragedy of extreme exploitation, oppression and socio-economic marginalization under both the British and Egba in pari-pasu, or what can be aptly describe as; “colonialism within colonialism under the British colonial rule between 1914 and 1960”. Historical method of research, within the matrix of critical historiography is employed to unearth the truth of history on the subject of study in this paper. This paper is not directly interrogating the subject of morality in politics, rather, the projection of Yewaland into the Yoruba bordered history as a distinct Yoruba sub-region different in many ways from either the Egba, Oyo, Lagos or any of their other neighbouring community is the major contribution of this paper to the study of Yoruba socio-political history.

**Keywords:** British colonial rule, Colonialism, political, Yewaland.

## **Introduction**

This study is situated within the matrix of the colonial historical events experienced by Yewaland (formerly known as Egbado), in their relations with their immediate neighbours to the south, (the Lagos Crown Colony) and to the east (Egba) during the period under review. Colonialism or imperialism is interchangeably used in this study, and is conventionally defined as a tool of executing the expansionist foreign policy orientation of the strong against the sociological weaker societies, by the strong and for the sole benefits of the strong.

Yewaland is a Yoruba sub-ethnic group located at the western part of Yorubaland, west of the Niger. It is the west senatorial district of the present-day Ogun State. The territorial definition is from River Yewa at the international boundaries between Nigeria and the present-day Republic of Benin (former Dahomey), to the west and River Ogun to the east, on the Nigeria-side, it is between the adjacent States of Lagos to the south, and Oyo to the north. The land is an integral part of what Anthony Asiwaju describes as the "Western Provinces".<sup>1</sup> The term 'Western Provinces' was formally applied to the region comprising the present-day Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti, Edo and Delta States in 1939, when the administration of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, created in 1906, was reorganized into two main groups of provinces, with the 'eastern provinces' approximating to the areas of the present-day Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Cross-River and Akwa-Ibom States<sup>2</sup>. While the 'western provinces' remained as stated above, the re-organization of 1939 left seven constituent provinces within the Western area, *vis-a-vis*, the Colony of Lagos, Ijebu, Ibadan, Ondo, Benin, Warri/Delta, and Abeokuta Provinces, all of which evolved into what later became the Western Region of Nigeria by virtue of the Macpherson constitutional arrangements of 1951. From this date to 1963, when the Mid-Western Region (the area of present-day Edo and Delta States) was carved-out, the 'Western Provinces' remained a coherent administrative and political unit under the British colonial government.

While it is true that administrative convenience was the major reason for the British colonial administrators in the grouping of the Western Region into one of the three main regions into which Nigeria was divided, this grouping could not have been unaffected by the fact of a pre-existing web of local historical relationships. For instance, culturally, the defunct Western Region of Nigeria formed more or less a homogenous complex - The Yoruba-speaking people who constitute the bulk of the population in the present day Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Ekiti and Ogun states cherished the common claims of important genealogical affinity and interconnection with the Edo, Itsekiri and Ijaw, as well as the O'kun peoples who formed the dominant groups in Edo, Delta and Kogi States respectively. Kingship was also another common political institution to all of them and the Yoruba, Edo, Itsekiri, Agbor and O'kun people were organized into

Kingdoms centred on *Oba*, *Olu* or *Obi*. The origin of the Kingship institution in these various places was traced commonly to either Ile-Ife or Benin.<sup>3</sup>

Political, economic, and socio-cultural interactions are also some of the dominant features of the pre-colonial history of these peoples. Ife-Oyo influence on the establishment of the *Eweka* dynasty in Benin is widely acknowledged in Benin history. A more integrating force was the Yoruba linguistic dominance over most of the peoples in the greater part on the present-day Edo, Lagos and Delta states<sup>4</sup> and even over the eastern and coastal Yoruba chiefdoms in Ekiti, Owo, Ondo and Akoko areas as well as in the Awori and related Anago Chiefdoms such as Ado-Odo, Igbesa and Ipokia in Yewaland in the present-day Ogun State.<sup>5</sup> The integration of these areas, (which are located at the Southern part of Nigeria), into one colonial administrative unit simply confirmed the pre-existing or pre-colonial historical links of unity and relationships.

### **Establishment of British Rule in the Southern Provinces**

The events which culminated in the establishment of British colonial rule over the area under discussion results from the European imperial expansion into Africa since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which reached its climax in many places in the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. With reference to the Old Western Region of Nigeria, the imposition of British Rule was effective from two main bases, which were Lagos and the Niger-Delta. But the extension of British imperial control into and over Yewaland was mainly from the Lagos Colony. The analysis is as follows.

### **The British Penetration of Yorubaland, 1851-1894**

Anthony Asiwaju has stated implicitly that, “the establishment of British political control over Yorubaland took place in consequence of the extension of the Lagos colonial frontier”.<sup>6</sup> In the opinion of Steve Anisere, the indications of British imperial ambition in this region seems to have assumed a definite dimension long before 1851, because based on flimsy charges of intransigency against King (*Oba*) Kosoko of Lagos in respect of the abolition of the trans-Atlantic slave trade in his domain (Lagos), the British bombarded the Lagos Island in 1851 and by 1861, annexed it to the British Crown as a British property or colony.<sup>7</sup> However relevant the issue of slave-trade argument may be, its significance as a factor in the establishment of European colonial rule in the Lagos area must be related to the considerations of British economic interests and associated hostility against the African middlemen in the area.<sup>8</sup>

Admittedly, the establishment of the Crown Colony took place at a time when most European Governments in Europe, including Britain, were opposed to territorial acquisition or expansion in Africa. But the local socio-political milieu in the whole Yorubaland during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century could also be argued to have stimulated developments in a direction contrary to what

official policy indicated in the various archival and official documents on this event.<sup>9</sup> In addition to the local factors, it was also soon discovered by the British that the annexation of Lagos without the vast Yoruba hinterland was nothing but “a mere town upon a sandy Island, insignificant in itself...”<sup>10</sup>

Besides, considerations such as the presence of other rival European Powers, mainly the French in nearby Dahomey, constitute a major threat to the British interests in Badagry and from there in the Yoruba interior through the major trade-routes in Yewaland. Thus, the need for a stable public peace in the then war-torn Yoruba interior in order to facilitate smooth trade and so on, combined with other factors to compel the expansion of the Lagos frontier in the interest of a more complete domination of trade by the British.<sup>11</sup>

In her imperial quest which ultimately made Britain extend her colonial control over the entire Yorubaland, the crucial years were 1851 to 1894, (during the time when the various Christian Missions and the returnees had the ears of governors John Glover and Gilbert Carter of Lagos), cannot be wished away. In this bid for expansion, not only was the British merchants actively involved in commercial activities with the interior native traders on the coast, the colonial authorities were also spurred-on by the various Christian missionaries and the returnees who believed that the chances for the evangelization of the African tribes lay in the breakdown of the traditional systems and the imposition or substitution of it with Western civilization.<sup>12</sup>

As elsewhere in Nigeria and other parts of Africa, the two main methods of British imperial expansion into Yorubaland were treaty-making and military conquest. Outside imperial conquests occasioned in the bombardment of Lagos in 1851 and Ijebu expedition of 1892, it is very important to state that diplomatic means through signing of treaties with local African (Yoruba) rulers and a series of international agreements with France, more than outright military subjugation characterized the process of British imperial establishments in Yorubaland. Same method was employed in the establishment of British rule in Yewaland between 1891 and 1894.

### **Expansion of the Lagos Colony into Yewaland, 1891 – 1894**

With reference to the expansion of Lagos Colony by treaty, the beginning was made by Governor Birch Freeman, the predecessor of John Glover who said that, “...in order to avoid the inevitable diversion of trade from Lagos..., we must extend British sovereignty over the neighbouring ‘free ports’ of Badagry, Palma and Lekki between 1851 and 1861”.<sup>13</sup> Moving matters to the next-level of imperial domination, the expansion west and north-west of the Lagos Colony was actively pursued by John Glover whose ideas were especially affected by the presence of the French in Porto-Novo (now, Dahomey). In reaction to the British claims over

Badagry, the French in Dahomey extended their area of influence down east to as near as Apa, just a few kilometres west of Badagry.<sup>14</sup>

In swift reactions, Governor Glover did not only consolidated British hold on Badagry by signing a treaty in 1863, he also seized the opportunity offered by repeated and direct requests made by the authorities of some Yewa towns and chiefdoms in the south-western parts of Yewaland, (who in desperate bid to solve the security problems posed by Dahomey slave hunters on one hand, and Egba imperial exploitation on the other), urged the British to declare their chiefdoms as a Protectorate in 1891.<sup>15</sup> This phase of the British imperial expansion, which was strongly influenced by rivalry with the French or what Aderibigbe has aptly describes as “scramble-in-miniature.”<sup>16</sup> This activity (scramble-in-miniature) culminated in the August 1889 Anglo-French Convention, whereby River Yewa was agreed as the natural line of partition between the French and British spheres of influence in south-western Yorubaland. Although, these initial British protectorates, like those of the French were soon after abandoned in consequence of ultimate disapproval of the British and French home governments, however, local events in Yorubaland, and by extension in Yewaland, prepared the way for the eventual imposition of the British imperial rule over these areas in the era of official colonial expansion which, in the area under study, coincided with the governorship of Gilbert Carter in the 1890s in the Colony of Lagos.<sup>17</sup> This marked the beginning of the second phase of the British expansion in the Yoruba

In this second phase of expansion, the development of British colonial interests in Yorubaland was also favoured by both the contemporary European diplomacy and the catastrophic civil-war condition prevailing in the Yoruba interior. An important element in the Anglo-French Agreement of 10<sup>th</sup> August, 1889, was the delineation and demarcation of the present-day Nigeria and Republic of Benin boundary, using River Yewa as the natural demarcation line. Thus, the French on the west of the River left all the other parts of Yorubaland, (east of the line) to British initiatives.<sup>18</sup> From this point, it becomes clear that the British had the chance for effective occupation of Yewaland without firing a shot against either Egba, (the erstwhile imperial overlord over Yewaland) or Dahomeans, (who were invading the various Yewa Chiefdoms at will), but was still cautious of doing so.<sup>19</sup>

However, subsequent situations and events in the Yewa-Egba relations forced the Yewa people to make repeated requests for British ‘protection’ and that, led to the eventual declaration of a British Protectorate over Ilaro, Ado-Odo, Igbesa, Oke-Odan and Ipokia by the Acting Governor, G.L. Denton early in August 1891.<sup>20</sup> The British decision to honour the requests of Yewa’s representatives in 1891, ended with signing of series of treaties that lasted till mid-1894. In 1891, it was the British Union Jack that was hosted in Ilaro as mark of official termination of Egba rule

over all the affected Yewa towns concerned. The negotiations by Governor G. Carter with Abeokuta ended in the 1893 demarcation of boundary between Yewaland and the Egba.<sup>21</sup>

### **Developments and Nature of British Rule in Yewaland, 1891 - 1950**

As stated earlier, Yewaland is a sub-cultural part of Yorubaland but the piecemeal style of acquisition of the various parts of Nigeria, explains the variations in the administrative details in different parts of the country. It would appear that the British style of governance in Yewaland was not exactly the same with what was obtained in other parts of Yorubaland. In the first instance, Yewaland was plagued with series of incessant security problem from all sides and this compelled her leaders to invite the British for ‘Protection’ in 1891. The British occupation of the land was therefore, a peaceful one. To this extent, the colonial system of administration is bound to differ from the style of colonial administrative rule in a forcefully conquered territory.

In Yewaland, the Anglo-French Agreement of 1889 produced the immediate effect of stemming-up the tide of incessant invasions by the Dahomeans. When the French conquered Dahomey in 1892,<sup>22</sup> the Nigeria-Benin border became a major factor for peace and stability in Yewaland (the previously war-torn area of study). Next in importance for the positive effect on the restoration of peace and stability, was the Egba-Egbado Boundary of 1895, (which Britain unilaterally delineated and demarcated).<sup>23</sup> The boundary-mapping exercise terminated the pre-existing ‘internal’ (Egba) colonialism that had been imposed by the Egba military authorities on localities in the present-day Yewa South, North, and Ado-Odo/Otta Local Government Areas of the present-day Ogun state. In the words of A.I. Asiwaju, the localized liberation impact of the “Egba-Egbado Boundary” in Yewaland may be assessed from the expressed agonies of kindred-groups such as in Ibara, Isaga, Ilewo and, especially Imala in the northern part and Otta in the southern part of Yewaland.<sup>24</sup>

These Yewa areas were conceded to the Egba United Government (an indigenous and autonomous Egba Local Government within the British Colonial Government) mainly “to placate the Egba for their sense of greater territorial loss”,<sup>25</sup> occasioned by the declaration of a Protectorate over Yewaland by the British between 1891 and 1894. Similarly but less dramatic, the liberalizing effect on Yewa brought some temporary measure of relief and internal rest to Yewaland, because the Abeokuta-Oyo Provincial Boundary of 1914, (which anticipatorily curtailed the new Oyo imperialism in Yewaland), had the effect of check-mating what R.A. Atanda has aptly referred to as “The New Oyo Empire.”<sup>26</sup> In other words, Yewaland became independent from all her ‘internal’ oppressors, and was allowed some measure of political security and local autonomy/government under the British over-rule. This gave rise to the evolution of a short-lived colonial local council in Yewaland.

### **Evolution of Colonial Local Government in Yewaland Before 1914**

The territorial constitution and historical peculiarity of Yewaland explained her situation of comparative political decentralization and lack a coherent political organization. Absence of a commonly respected traditional power-centre within the region gave the British colonial authorities the needed pretence to indulge in the creation or recognition of multiple 'warrant' chiefdoms hitherto, subordinate to the Old Oyo and the Egba imperialists in the pre-literate periods. The internal restructuring of Ilaro Division into eleven Native Authorities in the era of British Indirect Rule had long been anticipated in the official recognition as 'District Headmen' that were conferred on the head chiefs of the same eleven 'warrant' chiefdoms in the preceding era of the history of Yewaland as the Western District of Lagos Protectorate.<sup>27</sup> From north to south, the chiefdoms in question were Imeko, Iboro, Ilaro, Eggua, Ajilete, Aiyetoro, Oke-Odan, Ilase, Idiroko, Ipokia and Igbesa.<sup>28</sup>

One significant feature of regional and local administrations in the British colonial era was the prevalence of the familiar type Warrant Chief system, widely practiced by the British in their application of Indirect Rule, ostensibly to 'democratise' (or rather, to further decentralize) the polities such as the Igbo, and even the eastern Yoruba such as Ekiti, whose numerous kingdoms and chiefdoms did not recognize a commonly regarded power-centre,<sup>29</sup> like is obtained in Yewaland. Thus, the head-chiefs of the eleven constituent administrative districts (Headmen), in the era of the Western District of Lagos Protectorate, as well as the Native Authorities in the succeeding era of Ilaro Division, were all appointed on the basis of the official "warranty",<sup>30</sup> something like today's 'instruments of office' issued by the State Government to a newly installed King (*Oba*) whose customary nominations is officially approved.

Since there was no centrally respected traditional ruler for the whole of Yewaland, the British further indulged in appointing of an equally 'warrant' paramount ruler for the whole area. The first person in this order was Seriki Abass, a prominent Yewa personage from Aibo town in the northern part of the region, but a successful merchant based in Badagry. In his dissertation, Steve Anisere mentioned him, as "...the Yewa man called upon by his kiths and kins in the northern 'core'-Yewa group to play the role of 'Lisabi or Sodeke of Egba for Yewaland' and the founder of Aiyetoro town in 1904, as an Egbado metropolis for the purpose of balance of power with Abeokuta".<sup>31</sup> When the Western District of Lagos Protectorate became the Ilaro Division of Abeokuta Province in 1914, Seriki Abass' appointment was upgraded into that of the Senior Chief of Ilaro Division (SCID), a position he held till his death in Badagry on 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1919.<sup>32</sup>

In 1920, following the demise of Seriki Abass and the abrogation of his office, (SCID), the eleven Native Authorities in Yewaland were re-constituted into a Confederacy of Native Authority called Association of Kings (*Egbe l'obal'oba*), exercising both political and judicial

powers much like in the aforementioned Ekiti part of the Eastern Yorubaland, with chairmanship rotating among the members and venue of the meetings moving round the Division in accordance to the location of the issues to be adjudicated.<sup>33</sup>

Previously before 1920, Nigeria was amalgamated in 1914 and it was in that year that the Headquarters of the British colonial administration in Yewaland was moved from Imeko to Ilaro mainly because of the centrality of the latter in the whole Division. The Amalgamation was based on the internal territorial administrative restructuring of the newly amalgamated territories in Yorubaland into Provinces of which Abeokuta Province was one. The Province was initially administered in two constituent units called Divisions namely, the Ilaro Division and the Egba Division.<sup>34</sup> At that time the local autonomy of Yewaland still intact, under the leadership of Seriki Abass, (the land's SCID), but after his death in 1920, the Yewa local autonomy slipped. Meanwhile, the divisional administration was headed by a District Officers (D.Os.) who was under the coordinating power of the Resident at the Provincial Headquarters in Abeokuta. In the case of this Abeokuta Province, the Resident had both his residence and office in Oke-Igbein, both of which were located in Abeokuta.<sup>35</sup> Thus, making the city of Abeokuta both the Divisional and Provincial Headquarters at Oke-Igbein, which is precisely the location of the present-day State House, where the Ogun State Governor officially resides.

The situation from 1920 onwards is that, the Provincial arrangement definitely made Yewaland (the Ilaro Division of Abeokuta Province) a subordinate partner and therefore, puts her at disadvantage or marginalized in the commonwealth of the Provincial equilibrium. It should be remembered that when Ilaro Division was newly acquired by the British, it was distinctly administered as the Western District of Lagos Protectorate in 1894 with Headquarters first at Badagry, and later in 1910, at Imeko and then in 1914, at Ilaro. But in all, the 1914 Luggardian administrative reforms was a reversal of the hard-won local autonomous status of Yewaland to the relegation and oppression she desperately tried to be freed from by inviting the British for 'Protection' in 1891, but that relegation back into subordinate of Egba once again was more apparent until the death of the Chief Seriki Abass, the region's SCID in 1920. Thus, the area (Yewaland) which was re-designated by the Egbado Union (an educated Yewa elite/pressure group) as "Egbado" Division in 1948, was though more appropriately re-named, but the region has lost its local autonomy since 1914.

The implication of returning this erstwhile 'independent' District under her former imperial overlord, exploiter and tormentor (the Egba), appears as a second round 'condemnation' or re-relegation of Yewaland into perpetual second-class colonial subjects, doubly marginalized and underdeveloped group of people. In another words, this can be described as 'Colonialism' within Colonialism. This seems to be one of the most grievous imperfections in the British



administrative policies in Yewaland, and it marked the beginning of the resistance of the Yewa educated elites/pressure group against the British rule in their land. We shall return to this aspect of the study later. For now, it is imperative to examine the impact of the British rule on Yewaland before independence was granted in 1960.

### **Impact of the British Rule in Yewaland**

In Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, the imposition of alien or colonial rule did produce some effects/impacts (some of which are positive, while others may be negative) on the pre-existing indigenous socio-political and economic orders. With particular reference to Yewaland, the first implication of the British hegemony was the displacement of Egba colonialism – this can be seen as a positive impact of the British rule in Yewaland. The conferment of British ‘protection’ on the region between 1891 and 1894, and the definition and demarcation of “Egba-Egbado Boundary” in the following year (1895), as well as the 1905/’06 Oyo-Egba boundary exercise spelt the definite end of Egba imperialism first, over the central and southern Yewa towns of Ilaro, Oke-Odan and Ipokia, to mention just a few. In order to extend the British ‘protection’ further into the Yewa interior, that is, the northern Yewa groups. The core-Yewa people of the northern area seized the opportunity of the presence of the British in the Yewa Southern areas to also invite the British for ‘protection’ as the most effective internal strategies to liquidate all vestiges of Egba imperialist oppression and exploitation in their area.<sup>36</sup> This broad spectrum of ‘nationalistic’ attitude across the length and breadth of Yewaland tend to suggest a good measure of unity among the people in spite of their internal disunity.

However, against all expectations the British rule further disintegrated and pushed Yewaland into subordinate relationship with the Egba Division within the framework of the Abeokuta Province of the 1914 Luggardian administrative reorganization. – This can be considered as one of the major defects of the British rule in the land. This was so largely because the 1914 Provincial arrangement indeed turned-out as a constitutional instrument that Egba used to lampoon and marginalized the Egbado Division within the context of the Province. Indeed, the newly re-constituted Egba Division in the Abeokuta Province was so constituted by the British as to make her retain direct control over her erstwhile Yewa colonial subjects, and even physically ruled over some northern Yewa’s towns such as Isaga, Ibara, Ilewo and Imala, as well as, Otta in the southern axis. This British act of ‘sell-out’ on Yewa group axis could not, but caused considerable bitter tastes, and therefore resentments among the people of Yewaland against both Egba and most especially the British regimes in their land. The Luggardian policy of Areas of Traditional Jurisdiction, which formed the corner-stone of his 1914 administrative re-organization, was considered by the Yewa people as a constant reminder of their almost slave-

status in the defunct Egba internal colonial regime in Yewaland between 1851 and 1891, when it was terminated by the same British.<sup>37</sup>

Unlike the case of the defunct Ondo Province, where the headquarters were located in Akure, rather than in Ode-Ondo, and the Oyo Province with headquarters initially in Oyo, but ultimately moved to Ibadan.<sup>38</sup> In the case of the Abeokuta Province, the same Egba Divisional Headquarters was also made the Provincial Headquarters and it remained so till the termination of the Provincial system of administration in Nigeria late in the 1940s. As stated earlier, this constitutional act of the British clearly gave Egba a legal backing (better still, pretence) needed to continue or re-new their practise of sub-imperialism through varied means of political, infrastructural and socio-economic marginalization of our area of study throughout the period under review.

On paper the British Provincial Administration did retain some measure of local autonomy for both the constituent local government units (referred to as 'Divisions' or 'Native Authorities') within the Province, but the contention is that, in practise, the Egba of Abeokuta, like in all other British controlled African groups whose homeland provided the base for the local administration, enjoyed some enhanced importance over and above all other constituent parts of their Province. This in a way could be seen as the fundamental in the retention and perpetuation of power by the Egba and the continued suffering, marginalization, and under-development of Yewaland since 1914, nay, since 1851. This contentious issue in this paper is what this study describes as "colonialism' within colonialism". As Kofi Busia has observed with respect to the Ashanti region under the British rule:

When a place is made the Headquarters of a District, its trade becomes brisker and it attracts immigrants from other places easily. It receives more attention from the District Commissioner, and its prestige rises higher in the estimation of the people.<sup>39</sup>

This was applicable to the Egba people of Abeokuta within the Abeokuta Provincial arrangement between 1914 and 1960. Not surprising therefore, much of the Yewa-Egba group relations and developmental patterns within the defunct Abeokuta Province, the Old Western Region and (if one may add, the present-day Ogun State) politics cannot be properly understood without adequate reference to the type of historical antecedent presented in this study. Part of our findings is that the group-relations and developments in the Province tilted clearly in favour of the Egba group over and above the Yewa constituent unit. This lopsided developmental regime is bound to throw-up issues of hatred and resistance from the group that felt cheated by the whole arrangement. Though there were other impacts of the British rule in the areas of infrastructural provisions and the dislocation of Yewa's economy and the re-direction of her economy to serve the external needs of the British metropolis, but these are subjects for another

paper. For now, it is suffice to examine the Yewa resistance to the political implications of the British rule as been examined above.

### **3.6: Yewa Resistance to Egba Hegemony**

All over Africa as elsewhere, the imposition of alien or colonial rule always produced shattering effect on the pre-existing indigenous or traditional structures, which in-turn trigger-off a sense of nationalism (indigenous people's reactions against foreign rule) in other to regain their political freedom. With particular reference to Yewaland, the first implication of the British imperial rule was the partial loss of local autonomy and group-identity by the Yewa people. Yewa nationalism/resistance should be seen to have been stimulated by the need to denounce external subjugation and domination. When the Bristish protectorate was formerly declared over the land, and her flag hoisted in Ilaro and Oke-Odan,<sup>40</sup> it was seen as an indication of ('freedom') or the British termination of Egba rule over the land. But the joy of freedom was short-circuited by the British herself.

#### **Nature and Style of Yewa Resistance to Foreign Rule**

According to A.I. Asiwaju in an interview, the imposition of British 'Protection' on Yewaland in 1891 and the definition or demarcation of the Egba-Yewa boundary to the east in 1895, as well as Yewa-Ibarapa (meaning Oyo) boundary to the north in 1905-1906, led to the definite end of Egba imperial rule over Ilaro, Oke-Odan, Ipokia in the south-western axis and the 'core'-Yewa groups in the north-central sections of Yewaland without firing a shot.<sup>41</sup> By implication, the nature and style of resistance in Yewaland was diplomatic rather than confrontational with astonishing results. For instance, the advent of the British administration in Yewaland was never through violence, yet the land was effectively emancipated from the much hated Egba imperialism. In fact, the initial British rule gives an indication of a distinct administrative unit free and different from the Old Oyo and Egba Yoruba powers. The principal dramatist personals in this first line of struggle for the emancipation of Yewaland from the Egba yoke are not the same people who fought the British rule in Yewaland. However, their tactics of fighting foreign domination and exploitation are very much similar. Just as the traditional leadership of the land checkmated the Egba and emancipated Yewaland between 1891 and 1894 through diplomatic manoeuvres, so also did the educated leaders of Yewaland between 1950 and 1960.

#### **The Rise of Yewa's Educated Elites and the Egbado Union**

Later in the 1940s and partly in reactions to the inferior status of Egbado Division (that is the Yewa people) in the Egba Division of the Abeokuta Province of Western Nigeria, there emerged a group of educated elites under the auspices of Egbado Union ostensibly to influence the British government for the liberation of their people from colonial rule, among other objectives of the

Union. Quintessentially, the Union was a pressure group formed by the few western educated elites, with membership drawn mainly from the 'core'-Yewa (or northern) group axis.<sup>42</sup> As an organisation of western educated elites and products of the Church Missionary Schools (CMS), the Union worked in collaboration with the Christian missions, especially the CMS to which most of them belonged, to change and enhance the socio-political status of Yewaland and its people from mid-1940s till 1960, when the country attained independence from the British.

At this juncture, it is important to note that the struggle of the Union to integrate the various Yewa groups and related sub-groups into a single ethnic identity could be seen as an extension of Yewa resistance or nationalism, mostly in peaceful reactions against the British imperialism on their father's land. It was discovered that the feeling of anti-British imperialism was especially strong among the people of 'core'-Yewa or those described as "Yewa-proper", by Kola Folayan, because such towns as Ibara, Ishaga, Ilewo, Ijale, Tibo, Keesan and Imala, as well as Otta in the southern axis of Yewaland were 'sacrificed' by the British to placate the Egba Division since 1914, rather than let them be in their own local 'area of traditional jurisdiction' (that is, the Egba Division of the Abeokuta Province), while the entire Yewaland were also placed under authority of the Egba Division of the same Province, using the 'Area of Traditional Jurisdiction' as justification for that excise by the same British colonial authorities. This type of British double-standard game, usually called the Luggardian administrative re-organizations of 1914 were not acceptable to the Yewa educated intelligentsias. However, the battles for total emancipation of Yewaland from the British colonial rule were fought mainly through party politics and general elections within the context of the Nigerian nationalism and decolonization struggles between 1951 and 1960.

### **Party Politics and Elections in Yewaland, 1951-1960**

The gradual march towards decolonization and transfer of power in Nigeria from mid-1940s increased the tempo of party politics in the country. The new political climate projected the local progressives and cultural organizations throughout the country into the mainstream of regional and national politics. Conversely, needs for electoral victories at the polls also gave parties the opportunity to be involved in local issues and politics. There were three major political parties in the country then: the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) formed in 1944, the Action Group (AG) in 1950 and the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) in 1951.<sup>43</sup> The process of formation and ethnic-colourations of these three political parties had been studied in details elsewhere, hence need not delayed us here.

Suffice to say here that the 1951 general election in Nigeria was a victory for regionalism and ethnicity per excellent. Thereafter, the peoples of Nigeria were rigidly casted into Northerners, Westerners and Easterners. Thus, it became virtually impossible for anybody to participate in

politics outside his/her area of ethnic and tribal background. Since then till independence in 1960, it was not likely that there was an Ijebu person resident in any part of Yewaland who won even the Local Government Chairmanship election in his area of residence, talk less of winning an election into the House of Assembly to represent any State Constituency in Yewaland or elsewhere in the same Abeokuta Province and *vice-versa*. This ethnic and tribal stratification was also reflected boldly in Yewa intra-group politics. For instance, the people of Ipokia (in the Southern part of the same Yewaland) rejected the candidacy of Chief J.F. Odunjo, (from the 'core'-Yewa part of the same Yewa sub-region), to represent their unit-group in the then Western House of Assembly in Ibadan in the 1951 general election. Their argument being that Chief J.F. Odunjo was more of an 'Egbado' to represent the 'Anago'-speaking people in the Assembly.<sup>44</sup> But then, both the Egbado and Anago dialects are lexicographically slightly different strands of the same broad spectrum of the Yoruba language; belonging to the same sub-cultural unit, with the same origin from the popular Yoruba cultural hero – Oduduwa.

In other words, the expected reforms in the old Richards Constitution of 1945 had turned out to become a spring-board for the emergence of another problem in Yewa group politics; rigid tribalism and ethnicity. Yet the Yewa intelligentsias were not detracted nor change tactics for emancipation. This was so because the leadership of the Egbado Union believed that, the 1951 election was the first attempt to accommodate large numbers of the rural electorates in the emerging national politics, the passion and need for the 'son-of-the-soil, (person that each tribe could relate and identify with in the corridor of power) notwithstanding.<sup>45</sup> Given the kinship and lineage system which characterized the traditional political system and culture, the easiest adaptation process to democratic system of government was to find a tribal person to be the link between the local area and the powerful new forces of power, wealth and modernized nationalist governments.

But the argument here is that the combination of personalities, power and patronage at both the regional and central power-centres, only served to make politicians very visible in the minds of the average rural voters and thus turned them new foci of political demands and rewards. For this reason, many writers like Okwudiba Nnoli, tend to argue that the areas of non-support for the regional or national leaderships invariably came from the 'micro' or minorities communities within the three main regions.<sup>46</sup> In this work, our observation and position is that the chronic underdevelopment problems suffered by such opposition breeding-communities became aggravated because of the unwholesome attitude of political patronage, vengeance, oppression and marginalization by the party in power. Yewaland as a whole falls within the minority group in both the Abeokuta Provincial and the Western Regional politics, curtesy of the British colonial policy of 1914.

The announcement of the impending elections in 1951 sets in-motion another phase of the progressives in the so-called 'micro' societies. Their attempt to participate in local, regional and national politics began to materialize. In Yewaland, the Egbado Union gradually began to make in-roads and impact on the political affairs of the Western Region or precisely, the Yorubaland, by educating their people on the danger of playing opposition and canvassing for votes for the party that identified with the Region, the Action Group (AG). In other to mobilize the people at the grass-root level for the on-going political development, members of the Union adopted several strategies. In situations where there were no motor-able roads, an informed source recalled that, members of the Union had to trek considerable distances or ride bicycles to most villages for political enlightenment program and at other times, representatives from nearby villages were invited to a central place where the leadership of the Union would educate them.<sup>47</sup> Such meetings enabled the leadership of the Union to educate the people and get their views and opinions over issues affecting them. By so doing, the local populace were prepared for the Divisional Conference at Ilaro, where elections would be held into the Electoral College, which in-turn becomes another electoral body for the Regional Legislature at Ibadan, which in-turn also constituted another electoral structure for other elective posts at the Federal level as provided by the 1951 Constitution.<sup>48</sup> In practice, each Division (basically in the East and West) was constituted as an electoral district and adult males suffrage was applied at the primary election stage (that is at the village level).<sup>49</sup>

As stated earlier, this was the first election that was fought on partisan lines, and also what Samuel Huntington describes as "ruralizing election",<sup>50</sup> in the sense that it did not only stimulated formation of parties, but also compelled them to link the rural areas with the urban politics. Moreover, in spite of the limited franchise and the cumbersome system of the electoral colleges, there was an incentive for the politically ambitious to try to capture and control political power in at least one's district and then work gradually towards controlling the region and the centre. Yewaland, in spite of its 'micro' community status could be described as a fairly politically prudent sub-region for it managed to have some elected representatives at both the Regional Assembly and Federal Legislature mostly on the ticket of AG through the activities of the Egbado Union.

Some of the personalities fielded for elections into the Western Region House of Assembly by the Union from Yewaland on the platform of AG included Chief J.F. Odunjo from Ibara, J.A.O. Odebiyi from Iboro and both E.A. Fadairo and D.O. Fafunmi from Ilaro. Out of these four, both Odebiyi and Fadairo won their elections to become Regional Ministers in the AG-controlled Western Regional Government and D.O. Fafunmi became a member of the Federal House of Representative also on the ticket of AG representing the whole of Yewaland. Chief Odunjo and

his party, AG was rejected in Ipokia, while Chief Bolarinwa Abioro (a son-of-the-soil) won the election into the Western Region on the ticket of NCNC.<sup>51</sup>

In the wake of the challenges of the 1954 elections which followed the 1951 Macpherson Constitution, the leadership of the people of Yewaland again had to struggle to represent their land in both the Regional and National politics. Elections into both the Western Region House of Assembly and Federal Legislature took place in December, 1954 and were based on universal adult suffrage.<sup>53</sup> In this election, one seat was allotted to the Egbado Division (Yewaland) in the Regional House of Assembly while two seats were allotted to Egba in the same Province,<sup>53</sup> ostensibly on the basis of population strength. It was at this point that the weakness of Egbado Union was clearly manifested because they fielded Chief E.O. Fadairo once again for the Regional election on the ticket of AG, though the people of Ipokia could not do anything about it, but their true party affiliation was manifested when Chief Bolarinwa Abioro, the NCNC's candidate won the district election to the Ibadan House of Assembly once again.<sup>54</sup> This was the political situation/stalemate in Yewa politics till independence was achieved in 1960.

The implication of this stalemate was the ascendancy of Bolarinwa Abioro in Ipokia-Yewa sub-regional politics, as well as politics of personality rather than party in the Yewaland, just as happened in the country as whole. More than that, for this show of 'affront' by the Ipokia sub-unit, the whole Yewaland suffered gross neglect and marginalization first from the Egba imperialists in the Abeokuta Province and at the same time, from the AG-controlled Western Regional Government in the consequent course of governance and distribution of political patronages from 1951 to 1960. What was worst, the Union had no answer for bad governance, marginalization and underdevelopment of Yewaland throughout the period under review. Undoubtedly, the twin-issue of marginalization and underdevelopment of Yewaland had a long historical root worthy of documentation.

### **Conclusion**

Yewaland should be considered as one of the exceptions to the general rule of imposition of European rule in Nigeria (in this case, Yorubaland). For example, when contrasted with the Egba in Abeokuta and Ijebu. In addition, unlike what was obtained in Egba and Ijebu, local response to the British rule in Yewaland at the initial phase can be considered as 'collaborationist' rather than 'confrontational', the type of the initial resistance that characterized the Egba and Ijebu responses to the imposition of the British colonial rule on their respective lands.<sup>55</sup>

Another fundamental point that must be quickly made here is that, the difference in the resistance against British colonial initial penetration between Yewaland on one hand, and the Egba and Ijebu on the other is one of degree and not of type. As elsewhere in Nigeria and wider Africa,

whether local response to colonialism was one of ‘confrontation’ or ‘collaboration’, the common concern was about the independence of their historic lands and the security of the inhabiting populations as well as their economic freedom. At the surface, these two other historic regions (Egba and Ijebu) contrasted sharply with Yewaland in the manner of their resistance to the British Colonial Rule in their lands.

The 19<sup>th</sup> century leaders of Yewaland chose to seek for the British protection in order to solve the fundamental and prolonged socio-political and security challenges faced in their land.<sup>56</sup> In their search for a liberating foreign power, it is important to note the discerning insight of the leaders of Yewaland in their purposeful and focused choice, commonly, of the British in Lagos and not the rival French who also showed active imperial interest in the trans-Yewa area from their nearby base in Porto-Novo. Yewaland is one area of Yorubaland, which suffered perhaps more than any other group in the western frontier from the armed conflicts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Yorubaland.

Besides, if the people of Yewa did not provide a spectacular or military resistance against the initial extension of the British rule into their land like their Egba and Ijebu neighbours did, this is not to suggest that the people surrendered their autonomy willingly and cheaply. The primary concern for their political independence and socio-economic security was clearly demonstrated in the questions raised by the signatories (Yewa leaders and chiefs) before thumb-printing the British Protectorate Treaty of 1888.<sup>57</sup> Thus, the coming of the British can be considered as a child of necessity and the collaborative attitude the leadership of Yewaland offered the British initially, was probably conditioned by their considerations for self-preservation. These objectives were therefore fundamental in the understanding of the initial responses of the people of Yewaland to the British imperial regime in their land between 1891 and 1894. However, the policy summersaults and double-standard of the British to the local autonomy of Yewaland within the broad spectrum of the defunct Abeokuta Province brought about the emergence of the Yewa educated elites/intelligentsias’ resistance against what some members of the Egba Union termed ‘Egba Sub-Imperialism within the British Colonialism’.

#### **ENDNOTES**

<sup>1</sup>- This title, “Western Province” was published as Chapter 23, in, O. Ikime (Ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, (Ibadan: Heinemann, 1980). Pp.429-445

<sup>2</sup>- A. Burns, *History of Nigeria*, (London: Longman, 1958). P.213

<sup>3</sup>- A. Burns, *History of Nigeria...*, P.210



4. S.C. Anisere, "Egba and British Imperialism in Yewaland, 1851-1960". (Text of a Ph.D. Dissertation, Department of History and International Studies, Kogi State University, February, 2018), Pp. 138-150. See also, O. Ikime, *Niger Delta Rivalry*. (London, Longman, 1969), See the whole Chapter 1.
5. A.I. Asiwaju, *West African Transformations: Comparative Impacts of French and British Colonialism*, (Ikeja; Malthouse Press Ltd, 2001). P.110
6. A.I. Asiwaju, *West African Transformations: Comparative Impacts...*, Pp. 115-117
7. For detailed analysis of this episode, see J.F. A. Ajayi, "The British Occupation of Lagos, 1851-1861: A Critical Review". In, *Nigeria*, Vol. 69, (August 1961). Pp.34-47
8. S.C. Anisere, *Lagos and Its Neighbours: Politics and Diplomacy on the Lagoon Kingdom from the Earliest Time till Mid-1980s*, (Ikeja; Tiding Productions, 2006), P.13.
9. For details see S.C. Anisere, "Egba and British Imperialism in Yewaland"..., Pp.118-119
10. Colonial Office (C.O) Document 147/4, Glover to New Castle, 6<sup>th</sup> November, 1963, quoted in A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate, 1863-1900". (Unpublished Ph. D. Theses, London, 1959).P.14
11. For a Full account, see A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate...". Pp.19-45. See also C.W. Newbury, *The Western Slave Coast and Its Rulers*, (Oxford, 1961). P.46
12. A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule...*, Pp.79-82
13. See details in A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate...", P.27
14. A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule...*, Pp.80
15. A.I. Asiwaju, *The Birth of Yewaland: Studies and Documents Relating to the Change of a Yoruba Sub-Ethnic Name from Egbado to Yewa in Ogun State of Nigeria*, (Ibadan: STATCO, 1996). P.24
16. A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate..." , P.30-31
17. S.C. Anisere, "Egba and British Imperialism in Yewaland"..., Pp.120-123
18. For details see A.I. Asiwaju, *The Birth of Yewaland...*, P.24
19. S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland*, (London, Longman, 1971); and J.A. Atanda, "Dahomean Raids on Oke-Ogun Towns, 1881-1890: An Episode in 19<sup>th</sup>

Century Yoruba Dahomey Relations". In, *Historia: Journal of the Historical Society of University of Ibadan*, Vol. III, (April, 1966). Pp.12-35

<sup>20</sup>. A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate..., Pp.30-40; See also, K. Folayan, "Egbado and Yoruba-Aja Power Politics, 1832-1894" (Unpublished M.A. History Dissertation, University of Ibadan, 1967), Chapter 3

<sup>21</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule...*, P.95

<sup>22</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *West African Transformations...*, P.112

<sup>23</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, "Symposium on Challenges and Contributions of the Yewa People to the Development of Ogun State in Particular and Nigeria in General Since 1914". (Unpublished paper Presented at Monalisa Park and Gardens, Area II Garki, Abuja, Nov. 4<sup>th</sup>, 2014). P.17

<sup>24</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, "Symposium on Challenges and Contribution of the Yewa People...", P.12

<sup>25</sup>. J.A. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire*, (London, Longman, 1973). Chapter 2

<sup>26</sup>. Colonial Office (C.O.) Document 147/4, Glover to New Castle, 6 November, 1963, as cited in A.B. Aderibigbe, "Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate, 1863-1900". (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, London, 1959).P.14

<sup>27</sup>. See T.N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase...*, Chapter 5; See also, S.A. Akintoye, *Revolution and Power Politics in Yorubaland*. (London, Longman 1971); and J.A. Atanda, "Dehomean Raids on Oke-Ogun Towns, 1881-1890: An Episode in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Yoruba-Dahomey Relations". In, *Historia, Journal of the Historical Society of University of Ibadan*, Vol. III, (April, 1966).Pp.13-16

<sup>28</sup>. See T.N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigerian State: The Southern Phase...*, P.56

<sup>29</sup>. K. Folayan, "Egado and Yoruba-Aja Power Politics, 1832-1894...", P.13

<sup>30</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju *The Birth of Yewaland...*, Pp.20-27

<sup>31</sup>. S.C. Anisere, "Egba and British Imperialism in Yewaland"..., Pp. 123-126

<sup>32</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, "Yewaland Since 1914..."', P.6

<sup>33</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *The Birth of Yewaland...*, P.25

- <sup>34</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under European Rule 1889-1945: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism*, (London: Longman, Ibadan History Series, 1976). P.94
- <sup>35</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *The Birth of Yewaland...*, P.26
- <sup>36</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, "Abeokuta 1830-1980; A History of the Growth and Development from an Egba Refugee Camp to a Nigerian State Capital". (A Commemorative Lecture on the 150<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Settlements of Egba in Abeokuta, 1980), P.21
- <sup>37</sup>. Interview with *Oba*J.A.S. Fase, 71years, the *Onihumbo* (King) of Ihumbo, at his Palace, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.
- <sup>38</sup>. A.A. Aderibigbe, "The Expansion of the Lagos Protectorate Frontier...", P.13
- <sup>39</sup>. K. Busia, *The Position of the Chiefs in the Modern System of Ashanti*, (London; Longman, 1963). Pp.104-110
- <sup>40</sup>. Interview with Alhaja Salamat Badru, 66years, Former Deputy-Governor, Ogun State, at her residence in Ipokia, 8<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.
- <sup>41</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, "YEWALAND SINCE 1914: Hundred Years of The Nigerian Border Region in Ogun State"..., Pp.18-19
- <sup>42</sup>. Interview with *Oba* J.A.S. Fase, 71years, the *Onihumbo* (King) of Ihumbo, at his Palace, 28<sup>th</sup> May, 2015.
- <sup>43</sup>. S.O. Arifalo, "Ethnic Political Consciousness in Nigeria, 1947-1951". In, *Geneva Afrique (Geneva Africa)*, Vol.xxiv, No.1, (1986), Pp.8-16 See also Arifalo, S.O., "The Egbe Omo Oduduwa: A Study in Ethnic and Cultural Nationalism". (Ph.D. Thesis, University of Ife, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, 1983)
- <sup>44</sup>. Interview with Hon. Adeyanju Safiat Abeke, 58years, Vice-Chairman, Yewa North Local Government, Aiyetoro, at her house in Agido, Igbogila, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 2015; and it was confirmed in a separate interview with Chief I.A. Aina, 60years, Community Leader and Farmer, at his Farm Office in Oke-Odan, 17<sup>th</sup> March, 2015.
- <sup>45</sup>. M. Fatona, "Egbados in Chains". In, *Egbado News: (The Annual Magazine of the Egbado Students' Association)*, 1956Edition. Pp.5-7
- <sup>46</sup>. J.B. Akinyede, *The Political and Constitutional Problems of Nigeria*, (Lagos: Longman, 1967).P.63

- <sup>47</sup>. O.I. Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution, History and Development*, (London Sweet & Maxwell, 1963).Pp.19-50, reports extensively on the 1950 Constitutional Conference and its outcome.
- <sup>48</sup>. O.I. Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution, History and Development...*, P.90
- <sup>47</sup>. S.P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1968). P.450
- <sup>49</sup>. O.I. Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution, History and Development...*, P.99
- <sup>50</sup>. See The Nigerian Government Gazette Extraordinary, No.46, Vol. 39, (September, 1958).
- <sup>51</sup>. A.I. Asiwaju, *The Birth of Yewaland: Studies and Documents Relating to the Change of Name from Egbado to Yewa in Ogun State of Nigeria...*, Pp.27-28
- <sup>52</sup>. O.I. Odumosu, *The Nigerian Constitution, History and Development...*, Pp.29-31
- <sup>53</sup>. B.O. Nwabueze, *A Constitutional History of Nigeria...*, P.65
- <sup>54</sup>. J.B.A. Akinyede, *The Political and Constitutional Problems of Nigeria...*, Pp.60
- <sup>55</sup>. S. Ojeniran, "Egbado and Its Relations with Egba, 1830-1875". (Text of an Unpublished B.A. History Project, Ogun State University, Ago-Iwoye, 1989), Pp.37-41