

## Colonial Rule and Political Relations between Ondo and its Neighbours, 1915-1951

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### Abstract:

This paper examines the impact of colonial rule on the political relations between Ondo and its neighbours between 1915 and 1951. This was a period between the First and the Second World Wars. The paper argues that the imposition of British colonial policy of administration greatly affected the precolonial peaceful coexistence and political relations between Ondo and its neighbours such as Ile-Oluji and Odigbo. Before the imposition of British colonial administration on the whole Nigeria in general, and Yorubaland in particular, each Yoruba community enjoyed political independent. It was the introduction of the so-called native administration (indirect rule) by the British that lead to the creation and imposition of Native Authority, one of the instruments of native administration over a considerable number of communities that were hitherto independent that eventually resulted in causing serious strains in the political relations among some communities in Yorubaland in general and Ondo Division in particular. The concentration of the British centralisation of political authority over the whole of Ondo districts through the use of *Osemawe* of Ondo, as the sole Native Authority brought an end to an interesting experiment of Native Administration in the districts as a result of various agitations.

**Keywords:** colonial rule, colonial policy, political relations, Ondo, neighbours

**Introduction:**

The British occupation of Nigeria began in 1851 with the bombardment of Lagos and its annexation in 1861 (Falola, et al, 1989, p.189). With this development, Lagos became the first part of Nigeria to be formally integrated into the British colonial empire. Thus, the British occupation of Lagos became the first phase of British conquest of Nigeria (Falola, et al, 1989, p.189). With the conquest of Lagos, and the subsequent establishment of a British Colony in the territory, the expansion of British interests and powers into the interior of Yorubaland became inevitable. The same motivation which stood behind the establishment of British dominance in Lagos, among which were the securing and protection of British commercial aims, also applied in their bid for control of the interior of Yorubaland (Falola, et al, 1989, pp.189-190).

Yorubaland during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century was seriously troubled by internal strife and warfare. This restless political climate was dates back to the early 1820s. With a strong military structure built up overtime, Ibadan became the centre of this political tension, which emerged after the collapse of the Old Oyo Empire, as the main new force to be reckoned with in the territory (Akintoye, 1971, p.48). The expansion of Ibadan power brought with it a new policy of war with Ijaye, led to the formation of military alliances in order to stop the rise of Ibadan military power base. One of such alliances was the Ekiti-parapo, formed between the kingdoms of Ekitiland and Ijesa. The outcome of these alliances resulted in confrontation which dragged on for sixteen years, thus becoming one of the longest Yoruba wars of the century. In the end, no side was able to win any conclusive victory. Each was anxious for the intervention of a third party which would relieve them of the burden of such long-lasting hostilities (Akintoye, 1971, p.48).

It was the invention of the British in the war that finally brought the war to an end. They succeeded in negotiating between the two sides by signing a peace treaty in 1886. In fact, both the letter and spirit of the treaty of 1886 were all the conditions and grounds upon which subsequent intervention or imposition of British rule could be achieved (Asiwaju, 1980, pp.430-435). Equally important was the attack on the **Ijebu** in 1892. The importance of the conquest and subsequent occupation came more as a result of the signals which the defeat of the Ijebu sent to the neighbouring Yoruba kingdoms than in the physical act of conquering the Ijebu itself (Asiwaju, 1980, pp.430-435). This trend continued until the whole of Yorubaland fell under the control of the British. It was during this period that Ondo too, was

one of the major kingdoms in Yorubaland was plagued into a civil disorder. The civil disorder which befell Ondo in 1871 affected the penetration of the British into the interior and thus necessitated their intervention as a means of achieving their economic interest (Ogunsakin, 1976, pp.69-72). The British succeeded in getting the belligerents to agree to a cessation of hostility in 1872 (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.145-149). With this development, the British were able to occupy Ondoland.

It is against this backdrop that this work tends to examine the impact of British colonial rule on the political relations between Ondo and her neighbours. The paper is divided into six parts. The first part is the introduction; second part takes a cursory look at relevant literature on British colonial administration; third part discusses the British occupation of Ondoland; fourth part focuses on the British administration of Ondoland; fifth part analyses the impact of British colonial rule on the political relations between Ondo and its neighbours; while the last part is the conclusion.

### **Literature Review**

There is no doubt that a lot of scholars have written on the British Native Administration in Nigeria. Therefore, a cursory look at the works that have emerged on the British Native Administration in Nigeria, the literature shows that there are three groups of writers on this subject matter. First, these are the early writers that tend to emphasise the legal framework of the local government system called indirect rule. Prominent among these writers is Perham, M (Kirk-Green, 1937; Kirk-Green, 1963 and Nicolson, 1969). Second, these are groups of scholars who have written on some aspects of the British Administration in Nigeria. A few of these writers focus attention on a global view of the British rule in Nigeria while others devote a few chapters of their works on some aspects of the British Administration. One of these scholars and his work is Tamuno T.N (Tamuno, 1972). The third category involves scholars who have examined in detail how the general ordinances promulgated by the British officials worked in particular localities. In their respective case studies, they emphasised the response of the indigenous people to the British system of Administration as well as its impact on their political, social and economic life. Among scholars who fall into this category and their works are Atanda; Igbafe; Ikime; Adeloye; and Adesote (Atanda, 1967; Igbafe, 1967; Ikime, 1965; Adeloye, 1996; and Adesote, 2011).

From the foregoing literature, this paper focuses on the third category of writers. This is because; this work also examines a specific locality, that is, Ondoland. There has not been any in-depth

work on the impact of colonial rule on the political relations between Ondo which was made the headquarters of Ondo Division, and its neighbours. The only work on the development of native administration in Ondoland centered on native courts alone and the work was restricted to Ondo town alone. This work was the work of Omojeje A.V and is cited in this work. Thus, this article is being carved out of my M.A dissertation. It is believed that it will contribute immensely to the historiography of Ondoland in particular.

### **The British Occupation of Ondoland, 1871-1915**

The word Ondoland in this discourse is used as a political term which deals with extent of the suzerainty of the *Osemawe* of Ondo during the colonial period. The capital of Ondoland (which was designated Ondo Division for administrative convenience by the British) was Ode-Ondo. Thus, with the creation of Ondo Division in 1915, Ode-Ondo became the headquarters of the division. Major communities that were brought together by the British to form Ondo Division included Ode-Ondo, Ile-Oluji, Okeigbo, Odigbo, Araromi, Ayesan, among others.

The incursion of the British into Ondoland started in Ondo in 1871. It is important to emphasize here that the relationship which developed between Ondo and the British, to a greater extent, opened up commercial activities that the British exploited and used as a leeway to the establishment of the Native Administration in the area. According to Akin Alao, administrative and economic motive was the centre –piece of what compelled the expansion of British English law in virtually all the communities in the South- Western part of Nigeria (Alao, 2003, pp.201-202).

A number of factors were said to have necessitated the coming of the British to Ondoland towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. First among these factors was the role played by the British in ending the inter-state war which pervaded the whole of Yorubaland in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This encouraged incessant incursion of the British into Ondoland in particular and much of the Yoruba states in general. Another factor was the propaganda of the missionaries, which the British used extensively in the expansion of their influence in Yorubaland. E.A Ayandele posits that the missionaries were the pacesetters and pathfinders of British incursion into Yorubaland and their role in spreading British influence was inescapable (Ayandele, 1974, p.29).

It should be clearly stated that there was no community that willingly consent to British rule and control during the British penetration/occupation of Nigeria. The British used coercion or naked

force to establish their influence in the whole of Nigeria. This explains the method adopted by the British in Ondoland and other parts of Yorubaland. The British occupation of Ondoland was made possible through diplomacy and coercion. Although there was no noticeable evidence of the use of naked force by the British in extending their judicial suzerainty over Ondoland, it became clear that the establishment of British influence in Ondoland was during the fratricidal wars which engulfed Yorubaland in the 19th century. It could, therefore, be said that the British would not have extended their influence to Ondoland if all the states in Yorubaland which were actively involved in the war were not properly put in control of the British (Adewoye, 1977, p.13).

Having briefly discussed the factors responsible for the British incursion into Ondoland, it is imperative to look at the genesis of British occupation of Ondoland. The beginning of British political intervention in Ondoland dates to the events of the civil war in Yorubaland in the 19th century. It was linked with the opening up of the road running through the eastern Lagoon, the Ilaje and Ikale areas, to Ondo and the interior. The strategic importance of this road arose from the fact that it was the only alternative route linking the Lagos traders with Eastern countries. This followed from the restrictions often imposed by the Ijebu and the Egba on trade passing through their areas. The Lagos Government wishing to avoid the Ijebu and the Egba, to find alternative routes to the interior. Thus, in 1869 when Captain John Glover learnt about the road through Ondo to the hinterland, he consulted the Ondo who were in Lagos and sent a certain Ijesa man known as Awobikun to negotiate with authorities of Ondo. By the time he came, the Ondo were already plunged into a war with the slaves of *Oba* Arilekolasi under Ago who in collaboration with some Ife invaded the capital from Okeigbo. This civil disorder made the people of the town to flee to south and east of Ishan towns of Igbado, Ajue, Erinla, Oke-opa among others. Hence, Awobikun could not reach the interior. Besides, it was clear that no trade could pass through the land under war conditions. In order to put an end to this hostility, Captain Glover had to send Awobikun and Obayomi, an Oyo man in 1871 to prepare grounds for the settlement of the war. This was accompanied by Roger Goldsworthy, District Magistrate and Acting collector of customs for the Lagos colony in 1872 (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.102-103).

Goldsworthy succeeded in getting the belligerents to agree to a cessation of hostilities and made it feasible for Ode-Ondo (which later became the capital of Ondoland) to be occupied. The return of peace

to Ondo town was followed three years later by the establishment of missionary stations at Ode-Ondo and at Ijebu on the Ilaje creeks by the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in 1875. This paved way for an influx of Lagos traders who wished to avail themselves of the opportunities of the road (Akinbinuade, 2004, pp.69-71). Thus, in 1880, the civil disorder which broke out in 1870 ended completely. Governor Glover later restored *Oba* Jimkun from Oke-Opa as the *Osemawe* of Ondo in 1881. The people of Ondo who had deserted the town following the outbreak of the hostility returned home on the intervention of Governor Glover. This development marked the genesis of the British involvement in the local politics of Ondo (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.102-103).

In 1899, the Lagos Government further made re-organisations. Thus, that part of the protectorate comprising Idanre, Ondo, Ikale and parts of Ilaje was constituted into the Eastern District and was placed under the charge of a Travelling Commissioner who was allowed to exercise wide military, administrative and judicial powers. This marked the genesis of the British interference into the local politics of the Ondo. But, following the amalgamation of the colony and the protectorate of Lagos with the protectorate of Southern Nigeria on May 1st 1906, Ondoland was included in the Western province. This continued until 1914 when the Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated by Lord Fredrick Lugard. In the re-organisation which followed, Ondo was placed in Ijebu province. Thus, following the creation of Ondo province in 1915 with its headquarters at Akure, Ondoland, including what became Okitipupa division was grouped with Ekiti and Owo in the newly created province. The implementation of the Native Administration Ordinance of 1916, and the Revenue Ordinance of 1917 to Ondo District, marked a turning point in the application of Indirect Rule to Ondoland (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.102-103). From the above analysis, the period 1871–1915 was the genesis of the British presence in Ondoland.

The Northern and Southern protectorates of Nigeria were amalgamated into the colony and protectorate of Nigeria on 1st January, 1914 by Lord Fredrick Lugard. This political development was followed by a complete reshuffle of the existing provincial arrangements in Southern Nigeria. As contained in Gazette No.4 volume 2 of 21st January, 1915, the Government Notice of No.11 of 1915 provided for the division of the Southern provinces (estimated area of 78,600 square miles) into seven provinces which were, Abeokuta, Benin, Calabar, Ibadan, Ijebu, Owerri and Warri. By this



notice, Ondo and Ekiti Divisions were included in Ijebu province (Adesote, 2011, pp.12-19).

With the Government notice No 99 published in Gazette No.67 volume 2 of 23<sup>rd</sup> December, 1915, the Ijebu and Ibadan provinces were abolished and renamed Ondo and Oyo provinces. The Ijebu Division of the former Ijebu Province was merged with the Abeokuta Province. Ondo and Ekiti Divisions were merged together to form the Ondo province (Adesote, 2011, pp.12-19). Akure, which was transferred to Ekiti in January 1915, was made the headquarters of the province. In 1917, indirect Administration was introduced into Ondoland. Thus, Ode-Ondo was recognised accordingly by the colonial authorities who constituted the *Osemawe* of Ondo into Native Authority (CSO 26/4/30014, 1934).

The British having gained control of Ondo established an administrative office there and other neighbouring towns like Ile-oluji, Okeigbo, Odigbo, which were hitherto independent. Other villages were also brought under Ondo to form Ondo Division. This was done as a result of their similar customs and traditions without due regard to the people's different historical background (Akinsemiwa, 1994, p.29). Like in other parts of Nigeria, the colonial government established the policy of Native Administration through the promulgation of ordinances. These ordinances were applied to Ondoland. These ordinances were (a) the Native Authority Ordinance. (b) the Native Courts Ordinance and (c) the Revenue Ordinance of 1900. The success of Native Administration in Ondoland was a function of three major components, namely, the Native Authority, the Native courts and the Native Treasury (Atanda, 1973, p.124). It is imperative to briefly expatiate on these three components of native administration because their application laid the foundation of the strain in the political relations between Ondo and its neighbours in particular.

#### **The Native Authority:**

This in particular constituted the charter of the Native Administration through the giving of Legal status to the recognised chiefs and vested in them powers to administer justice in the courts. As said earlier in this paper, the colonial administration faced a great scarcity of human and material resources. The shortage hampered a swift take-off of the administration. Consequently, it was not until 1918 that Ondoland was properly organised for administrative convenience. In that year, official approval was given to proposal by Mr. Hornby-Porter, the Resident to wield the towns and villages of Ondoland into administrative district under selected district heads.

This re-organisation was in line with Lugard's Native Authority Proclamation of 1910 (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935). The Native Authority proclamation empowered the High Commissioner to appoint a Chief to be the Native Authority. The Native Authority subject to the Resident's control and supervision undertook actual governance of the people. It was through him that administrative orders and other instructions from the protectorate government were communicated to his people. The law empowered him to maintain law and order, prevent crimes, arrest vagabonds, make and enforce orders relating to the public health and good sanitation of his district and recruit staff necessary to carry out his statutory functions. While he was empowered to uphold local customs, he could also modify them (Okonjo, 1977, p.44).

The creation of a centralised political authority in Ondoland with the *Osemawe* of Ondo as a sole Native Authority over areas like Okeigbo, Ile-Oluji, Odigbo, Aiyesan, Araromi and other *Ishan* towns and villages, enabled the British to consolidate their administration over Ondoland. The British took frantic steps to enhance the status of the *Osemawe* of Ondo. One of such steps was that, the British political officers made deliberate efforts to ensure that the *Osemawe* was obeyed by the *Oloja* and *Baale* of the neighbouring towns and villages (Akinsemiwa, 1994, p.129).

In furtherance of the objective of consolidating their administration in Ondoland, the British made use of the *Osemawe* of Ondo as political instrument of their administration. To begin with, the *Osemawe* which was constituted into Native Authority was placed on an annual salary of £350 or N750.00 or 10% of the native administrative share of tax revenue from his district (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935). Consequently, in the implementation of the Native Administration Ordinance of 1916, Ondoland was gazetted as a District with the *Osemawe* as the Sole Native Authority (Orewa, 1961, p.1).

The *Osemawe* had jurisdiction over the district (Ondo Division) and performed a number of functions in the administration of Ondoland during colonial rule. In the discharge of his functions, he was used as an instrument of political change in Ondoland by the British. First, he was responsible for the collection of taxes for a number of minor public works the granting of timber concessions and the signing of permits for timber felling. He recommended to the D.O candidates for appointment to vacant stools. The *Osemawe* was assisted by the remaining *Iwarafa* chiefs, each of whom was placed on a salary of £60 (N120.00) per annum (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172,



1935). As the Sole Native Authority, the powers of the *Osemawe* were vastly increased vis-à-vis the other chiefs. The *Osemawe* had the final decision making power within Ondo town and the district. His council was merely advisory and when the native authority council was constituted the *Osemawe* became the president of the council. In fact, in the true spirit of indirect rule, the *Osemawe* became too powerful in relation to the other chiefs and this was to be the cause of the incessant conflict between him and the other chiefs whose authority were generally eroded by the native authority system (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935).

### **The Native Courts System**

This was another important component of the Native Administration in Ondoland. The origins of these courts have been traced to the Courts of Equity, the Governing Councils and the Native Councils (Afigbo, 1992, pp.168-169). The Courts of Equity were set up to maintain law and order among the trading communities (both Europeans and Africans) of the Oil Rivers in the Niger Delta during the period of Consular jurisdiction after 1854. By an Order-in-Council of 1872, these courts were brought under Consular control. The Courts of Equity continued till the formal declaration of a protectorate over the Oil Rivers in 1885. These courts were succeeded by Governing Councils established by Consul H.H Johnston. Also, after the appointment of Claude Macdonald as commissioner and Consul – General of the Niger coast protectorate in 1891, Native courts and minor courts were inaugurated. While the former were presided over by the Consul-General himself, the later were presided over by the District Commissioners. These were later referred to as Native courts (Igbafe, 1967, p.182).

Sir Ralph Moor, the British High Commissioner Promulgated the Native courts proclamation in 1900 (Igbafe, 1967, p.182). By their nature, native courts were part of the process of the consolidation of British rule whose principal ingredients were patrols, escorts, and military expeditions. They were also regarded as the local executive arm of the central government. It has been argued that Native courts proclamation and the subsequent one in 1901 merely legalised the existing institutions which had hitherto existed since Europeans first began to build factories on land along the Niger Delta. There arose the need to have another authority apart from the traditional political authority to settle disputes not only among the Nigerian peoples, but also between them and the traders. This, however, necessitated the establishment of the courts of Equity first and later Governing Councils (Atanda, 1967, p.81).

It should be emphasised that by 1896, new courts which composed Nigerian peoples who sat as judges were set up. The courts were to administer native law and customs not opposed to natural morality and humanity and new laws or modifications of old laws sanctioned by the government. The courts had jurisdiction over such criminal and civil cases to which native law applied and in which the affected parties were natives (Atanda, 1967, p.81). In 1903, the Native Courts Amendment Proclamation (No 17 of 1903) was made. The District Commissioner became a member of all Native courts in his District by virtue of the proclamation (Omojeje, 2007, p.45). Essentially, the Native courts system was closely linked with the policy of Native Administration (Igbafe, 1967, p.183).

By virtue of the Native Court Proclamation of 1914, the Resident in charge of a province, with the approval of the High Commissioner, constituted by warrant, native courts within his province (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935). The Native courts were charged with the following responsibilities. They were entrusted with some administrative and executive powers covering a wide range of subjects. They could make rules for good order, peace and welfare of the inhabitants within their area of jurisdiction; provide for better sanitation of towns and villages (Wright, 1914). The courts made rules on such subjects as village tax, road clearing, forest royalties, the tapping of forest products like timber, and the felling of oil palm trees. Most of these rules originated in various courts but were adopted by others possibly through the influence of Administrative Officers who invariably signed them. However, these rules were made subject to the approval of the High Commissioner or the Governor –in-Council (Wright, 1914).

The court kept fairly elaborate written records. This development led to the appointment of court clerks who took charge of these records. The clerks served as both the link between the British Administrative Officers and the African Members of the court, and between British officers and the inhabitants of villages in the Native Court areas. The duties of the clerks were to receive complaints from members of the public seeking redress from courts over certain grievances; sending out messages on official duties and issuance of summons (Wright, 1914). There were four grades of courts in the administration of justice under Native Administration. Grade A courts had the powers to inflict death penalty on criminal cases (CSO 26/09493, 1917, p.18). Grade B courts had power to impose a prison sentence of two years or a fine of £50 or twenty four lashes in criminal jurisdiction and deal with civil cases where the claim was not in

excess of £50; Grade C courts had powers of six months imprisonment and civil jurisdiction in cases where the claim did not exceed £25 and Grade D courts had the powers to imprison criminals for only three months, administer twelve lashes or a fine of £5 and deal with civil claims not more than £15 (CSO 26/09493, 1917, p.18).

The ordinance set up two types of courts, namely, the Native courts and the judicial council (CSO, 1914). While Native courts were purely tribunals presided over either by a single judge aided by his colleagues who were assessors or by a panel of judges who presided in turn, judicial councils besides its judicial duties were a deliberative assembly of the most important chiefs in its area of jurisdiction. It served as an appeal court for the Native courts and it tried all criminal cases with the exception of murder cases (Ben Prof 7/6 1, pB2). Judicial Councils were often given executive powers by the Governor-General (Ben Prof 7/6 1, pB2). In keeping with the above proclamation, a provincial court was set up at Akure, headquarters of Ondo Province in 1914. The court had jurisdiction over Ondo province of which Ondo Division was a part. In order to formalise the Native Administration of Justice in Ondo division, the Ondo Native court was established in 1915 at Enu Owa in Ode- Ondo and was Grade B court (Fawehinmi, 1993, p.22). At inception, the court had six members on the bench. *Osemawe* of Ondo in person of *Oba* Tewogboye 1 was the president of the court and was there till 1917. The vice president of the court was the High Chief *Lisa*. Other chiefs such as Chief Shama Akinrele, Chief Bapaye Wiwo and Chief *Sashere* Akinbuli were ordinary members. T.S Kayode was appointed as the clerk to the Native court (Fawehinmi, 1993, p.22).

The Native court at Enu Owa originally handled all cases ranging from civil to land, matrimonial and criminal, as well as few debt cases brought before it. This court heard all important cases which were of special interest in all the areas controlled by the *Osemawe* of Ondo until when it was reconstituted into a Native Court of Appeal for the Ondo Division following the 1933 judicial re-organisation (Omojeje, 2007, p.46). As time went on, six other sessional courts were situated at subordinate towns and villages in the district. The Odigbo native court (Grade C) was started in 1917 as a sessional court to Ondo which comprised the *Oloja* of Odigbo and his six chiefs. The Okeigbo native court was also established as a sessional court to Ondo in 1922. Its president was the *Baale* of Okeigbo and the members of the court were his chiefs. Other sessional courts were those of Ile-Oluji (1924) Aiyesan (1924), Ajebandele (1928) and Agbabu (1928). All these Grade C courts had limited

powers. Salaries being paid to the presidents of these courts included, Ile-Oluji and Okeigbo, each £48 (N96.00) per annum, Ayesan, Agbabu and Ajebandele, each £24 (N48.00) per annum and Odigbo £12 (N24.00) per annum (C.S.O 26/ File No 03996, 1921).

### **The Native Treasury**

This was the third component of Native Administration. The Native Treasury was responsible for the revenue of the native administration. The Native Administration's revenue was derived from a variety of sources such as native court fees, fines, rents from aliens, palm produce and collection of permits. Other revenue of native administration was also derived from direct taxation (C.S.O 26/ File No 03996, 1921). It is not necessary to burden ourselves with the details of genesis of direct taxation in Nigeria here. In April 1921, direct taxation was introduced to Ondoland with the formation of the Ondo Native Administration (C.S.O 26/ File No 03996, 1921) and the *Osemawe* (in person of *Oba* Gbegbaje–Jisomasun II), as the Native Authority was responsible for the collection of taxes (Adeyemi, 1993, p.36). The implementation of the Native Revenue Ordinance of 1917, which was later amended in 1918 led to the establishment of the Ondo Native Treasury in Ondo town (headquarters of Ondo Division) (Akinsemiwa, 1994, p.132). A flate rate of six shillings (60k) was paid per male adult. This continued throughout the whole of Ondoland until in the 1929 / 1930 financial year when income tax was introduced (C.S.O 26/ File No 03996, 1921). Various kinds of taxes were paid by the people among which poll tax constituted the bulk of native administration revenue. Other sources of revenue were timber royalties, native court fines, fees, rents, permits among others. Although direct taxation regarded revenue for the payment of salaries of the *Osemawe*, the designated Native Authority as well, as for the provision of social services in Ondoland, the scheme later generated a lot of protests among the people on the District. With the introduction of direct taxation, the *Osemawe* began to receive a salary based on Twenty percent of all taxes collected in his district. Apart from the *Osemawe*, a few *Oloja*, *Baale* and chiefs who served in Council were paid paltry fees for their services (Adesote, 2011, pp.20-25).

### **The impact of British Colonial Rule on the Political Relations between Ondo and their Neighbours, 1915-1951**

The imposition of *Osemawe* of Ondo as a Sole Native Authority over the whole of Ondoland in order to minimize cost of administration as well as for administrative convenience resulted in the development of strain relations between Ondo and its neighbours most especially Okeigbo and Ile-Oluji that had evolved their own

independent political system of administration before the advent of the British. Thus, the period 1930-1951 witnessed problems of central administration and the re-organisation policy in Ondo Native Administration. The re-organisation was in response to agitations and petitions by the outlying towns for complete political autonomy from the *Osemawe*. Though the agitation had started since 1913 with the rebellion of the people of Odigbo against the people of Ondo town, it was not until 1930 that it became intense with the emergence of the new *Oloja* of Odigbo. (CSO 26/file 10254/1, 1930-1940) (known as Akintaju, a man described as a forced personality with a truculent manner). In the year 1913, the people of Odigbo protested against the way royalties were divided. Thus, they attacked the messengers of *Osemawe* who were stationed in the town. In addition to this, the *Oloja* of Odigbo stopped the payment of tributes to the *Osemawe* whom he renounced as his *Oba* and that he would only obey the British. This development was later followed by a petition to the Governor by the people of Odigbo. It was arranged that thirty three villages named by the *Osemawe* (including Odigbo) should be given an equal share of the royalties. In 1916, a coconut meeting was held between the *Osemawe* and his chiefs on the one hand and the *Oloja* of Odigbo and his chiefs on the other in which the *Osemawe* agreed to recognise Odigbo's right over land between the town and Agbabu in return for an acknowledgement by the Odigbo of the *Osemawe's* authority over them (CSO 26/14, 1916).

But the Odigbo who in their elation at the recognition of their right over land, proceeded to demand cash rents from those who wanted to farm on their land. They therefore regarded people from Ode-Ondo who were farming on their lands as strangers and sought to evict them. Thus, the Ondo people saw this development as a threat to their sovereignty. In 1917, a meeting of all *Oloja* and *Baale* including the *Oloja* of Odigbo was summoned at Ondo town to consider land issues in the district. Resulting from this meeting was a declaration signed by the *Osemawe* quoted below, it must be noted that in an attempt to maintain the statusquo and to deny Odigbo the right granted to her in 1916 (CSO 26/14, 1916).

We the *Osemawe* and the chiefs of Ondo people in view of the increasing relic of land in our country occasioned by the growth of the population, the increase of trade and the extension planting of cocoa, in order to prevent the possibility of invention ill-disposed person or persons some future date of claims to individual or collective rights overland and custom at present recognised by ourselves with regard to our land be were set forth and recorded as:



- (a) This our law and custom with regard to all land in the Ondo country which lie outside the walls of Ondo town
- (b) All land in the Ondo country belongs to the *Osemawe* of Ondo who hills it for the common benefits of all Ondo people.
- (c) No town or villages in the Ondo country can claim owners hip over any land to the exclusion of any member of Ondo people whatsoever,
- (d) There are no boundaries whatever between one town or village and any other town or village in the Ondo country.
- (e). Such provision applied to the Ondo towns of Okeigbo, Ile- Oluji, Odigbo, Ajue, Ajebandele, Igbowo, Igbindo and such other towns and villages as may in future be reecognized as such by the above declaration was witnessed by the Acting District Officer in person of G.H. Findlay (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935, p.15).

However, in 1930, another trouble broke out following the emergence of a new *Oloja* of Odigbo (in person of Akintaju). He repudiated the 1917 declaration claiming that they were tricked into signing the declaration. He demanded for a total break from Ondo and asked that a boundary be demarcated between them and Ondo. He also demanded for the payment of all rents, royalties' payable within his area including those paid in the past to him. In addition to these, the people of Odigbo openly declared that they would no longer attend both the Native Court and the Protectorate Court. The situation was further compounded by the grievance of other *Ishan* towns in 1932. These *Ishan* towns which initially stayed clear in the early dispute between the *Osemawe* and the Odigbo people were brought into the agitation by a well intentioned, but misguided attempt on the part of the *Osemawe* to count their cocoa trees for the purpose of tax assessment. They resented being singled out for this exercise and retorted that there was no reason why they should be specially assessed, while artisans like carpenters, blacksmiths and other traders were left out. They therefore served the opportunity to express their accumulated grievances such as nothing to show or return of the tax being paid, and demanded that some portion of the native administration be spent on them, they were not allowed to attend council meeting at the *Osemawe's* palace; they wanted their roads constructed and salaries paid to their *Oloja*; they wanted their own native court that the *Ashafurin* of Igbado should have his own crown restored to him. Besides, the people of Araromi also demanded that their *Oloja*, that is, *Ajobu* should have a crown restored to him and that the Native Court of Ayesan be transferred to Araromi on the ground that the land on which the court was built belong to them

(C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935, p.15). The persistence demand for independence by the Odigbo people coupled with the grievances of other *Ishan* towns forced the British to set up a one-man commission in 1933 to look into the grievances. The major task of the commission which was led by Mr. G. Williams was to inquire into the claims of Odigbo and Araromi over land demarcation for which they intended to charge rents from. In his report, he was able to identify two major causes of the crises, namely, land, rent and royalties. On the issue of land, he said that the land actually belong to them as at the time of British occupation of which if they sued for declaration, the court would probably have granted it. On the issue of rent and royalties, he said that the issue of land dispute would never have risen were it not for the very large sum produced by rents and royalties in Ondo District (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935, p.15).

Mr. Williams thus made a number of recommendations, to guide the proposed re-organisation of native administration in Ondoland. Some of these recommendations were:

First,

- To allow the claim of the subordinate towns to independence and to demarcate the boundary under inter-tribal boundaries settlement ordinance of 1932.
- To demarcate the boundaries suggested above and to revolve the area demarcated from the jurisdiction of Ondo Native Authority.
- To decline the demand of the subordinate towns for independence in any way and to inform them that provision would be made to safeguard their interest in the proposed re-organisation beyond which the government cannot go.

Second,

- It was proposed that the District Officer be appointed as the Native Authority (C.S.O. 26/14 File No: 30172, 1935, p.15).

In addition to all these, the *Osemawe* was to recognise the claims to all his subjects to equal treatment when making appointments of Native Administrative Staff. It was noted that the tax paid by the villages amounted to half the total revenue of the district but 95% of the Native Administration employees were from Ondo town. It was proposed that no further vacancies be filled by people from Ondo town until others had been fairly represented on the Native Administration staff. It was also proposed that Ondo and the outlying villages be improved by the provision of cycle paths. In this way, it was expected that the villages were to be brought into closer touch with Ondo town, both psychologically and administratively and that

the attendance of the village heads at council meeting be facilitated (CSO 26/14, 1934).

Under the judiciary it was proposed that:

- The present Ondo Native Court be abolished and be substituted with a minor court of Grade C powers and to be composed of the *Ologbosere* of Ondo as president, the *Ekule* chiefs and *Elegbe* chiefs as members.
- The present sessional courts should become independent native courts with a definite territorial jurisdiction.
- There should be an established Appeal Court with Grade B powers composed of the *Osemawe* as president, the chiefs of Ondo and the village heads and their chiefs as members of the court.
- A fresh court with D grade powers be started at a central site to be double later, to be called the *Ishan* Native Court and to have jurisdiction in the *Ishan* villages.
- The president of the Ondo Native courts and the vice president of the other Native courts should receive salaries as follows; Grade C £36 per annum and Grade D £24 per annum (Adeyemi, 1993, p.123).

It was proposed that the above area be removed from the jurisdiction of the *Osemawe* of Ondo. With regards to other areas of Ondo district, it was proposed that the *Osemawe-in-Council* which comprised the *Osemawe* as the president, the *Lisa* of Ondo as the vice president, the other *Iwarefa* chiefs, the *Oloja* and Council of other subordinate towns and villages in the district be the Native Authority. No separate Native Authority was to be created for the subordinate towns in view of the risk of further disintegration of the district. The villages outside Ondo town were to be divided into administrative areas under certain village heads that with the assistance of their chiefs should collect taxes in their area.

Also, rents on unoccupied land (land not owned by a family or an individual) be paid into the Native Administration Treasury. It was expatiated that this would reduce the anxiety for claiming rights to land. It was recommended that royalties from government revenues be paid into the Native Administration Treasury while those from outside government revenue be paid to the chiefs of land groups in specific proportions. These payments were to be made at the meetings of the full council and receipts obtained be attached to the payments voucher (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.121-122).

Mr. Williams's recommendations were accepted by the Lagos Government, except in two important areas where modifications were made. These were in the size and membership of the proposed council and the question of boundary delimitation for the creation of separate

Native Administration for Odigbo. The Governor pointed out that an Executive Council of about 150 members would be unwieldy. He advised that the Council as recommended be retained as an advisory body which would meet once or twice a year. He therefore said that a smaller Executive council which comprised the *Osemawe* of Ondo, the *Oloja* of Odigbo and their senior chiefs, and the village heads be carved out of the large Council and be appointed as the Native Authority. The Executive Council should sit regularly and the agenda of the meeting be sent to the Resident who should attend all important sittings. It was expected that with the Resident sitting at meetings, he would be able to effect reconciliation between the *Oloja* of Odigbo with his people and the *Osemawe* of Ondo (Adeyemi, 1993, pp.121-122).

In order to explain the decision of government to the chiefs and people of the district, the Lt. Governor for Southern province visited Ondo town on 4th July 1935. By the 1940s, signs of peace were beginning to manifest in the district. The event of late 1940s further remarked a step in the democratic management of Ondo affairs. In 1946, the Ondo Town Advisory Committee which was presided over by the *Osemawe* of Ondo (in person of *Oba* Rufus Adesokeji Tewogboye II) consisted of the five high chiefs of *Osemawe*, eighteen quarter chiefs, two literate Councillors, five literate members of the community, one Native Administrative detachment, one sanitary inspector and one engineering assistant. The formation of this committee was to some extent opposed to by a High chief who felt that as a result of this formation, their privileges might be interfered with. In 1948, the Ondo Federal Council was established. Its establishment, which was in line with the colonial policy, was meant to broaden the representation of areas and interest group. In this regard, elaborate attempts were made to give every village a measure of participation in local government (Ondo Prof 1/1, p.149).

In April 1950, Ile –Oluji under *Oloja Jegun* made request to the Ondo Division for a subordinate Native Authority Status under the Native Authority Ordinance. This request was opposed by the people of Ondo town. Thus, the period 1950 onward also witnessed an open confrontation between the two towns. It was characterised by bitter political rivalry between them. While the people of Ile-Oluji tried to assert their independence, the people of Ondo made efforts to subdue them. The rising pace and tempo of their conflictual interactions accelerated and escalated, and reached its peak on the 24<sup>th</sup> November, 1950, when a landmark and a milestone was made in the political history of Ile-Oluji. There erupted a heated and open confrontation

between the *Jegun* and the *Osemawe* that day, because the *Jegun* decided to wear abraded crown to a council meeting. The *Osemawe* considered this as an open affront and responded with characteristic objection and question. He felt that the wearing of that crown was a challenge to his Sole Authority. The *Jegun* boycotted future meetings which led to his suspension from the Council and withdrawal of his salary as ordered by the Resident of Ondo Province in 1951. The situation was so tensed that an Arbitration Committee was set up in 1952 and the *Jegun* was later restored that year (Ondo Prof 1/1 File No: 120c, 146, p.6).

The restoration of *Jegun* in 1952 was followed by a major development in the Colonial Administration of Ondoland in particular and Nigeria in general. The introduction of responsible government to Nigeria following the Constitutional Development had its impact on Ondo Division. The passage of the Local Government Law in 1952 vested power in the Regional Authority, who was the Lt. Governor-in-Council. This development led to the demise of the Ondo Native Authority. As a consequence, new councils were set up by instrument. In Ondo division, three new local councils were set up for Ile-Oluji, Okeigbo and Odigbo which were; Ondo Central District Council, Ondo Southern District Council and Ondo Western District Council. Thus, elections into these councils were so democratised that all the different parts of the newly created councils had fair representation (Lloyd, 1953:45). It could, therefore, be said that, the period of accommodation and partnership between the British and the Nigerian politicians began in 1952 following the passing of the local government law of 1952. With this development, political powers were now shared between them without the use of traditional rulers as intermediaries between the British and the people (Nigerians) (Tamuno, 1972, p.9).

### **Conclusion**

The above discourse has clearly revealed effort made by the British to practice ideal indirect rule (which centered on a chief heading a local government) in Ondoland between 1915 when Ondo Division was created with Ode-Ondo as the headquarters; and 1951 when sole Native Authority was abolished following the passing of Local Government Law in 1952. The centralisation of the political experiment of the British in Ondoland during this period resulted in the development of negative political relations between Ondo and its neighbours. The hitherto peaceful political relations that had existed (during the pre-colonial period) prior to the coercive imposition of British colonial rule among communities that made up of Ondo



Division in particular and Nigeria in general was thwarted through the policy of colonial administration. Each of the communities such as Ile-Oluji, Odigbo Okeigbo among others that were fused together by the British to form Ondo Division for the purpose of easy administration and to minimise cost, enjoyed political autonomy in their various domains. Besides, each of them like Ondo, had evolved its own political institutions. Lack of understanding of the pre-colonial institutions of the Nigerian peoples by the British as well as the selfish interest of the British, without considering the negative implication the policy would have on the people resulted in the creation of a centralised political authority. The flaw of the British policy of centralised system of Native Administration was what led various kinds of agitations were witnessed in Ondo division in particular and Nigeria in general especially as from the 1930s. This development was what led to the 1930s re-organization in Ondoland in particular and the whole of Southern Nigeria in general. It was this development that later contributed to the demise of the experiment of Native Administration in Ondoland in particular. This paper has been able to point out that the pre-colonial traditional institutions in Ondoland in particular and Nigeria in general was disrupted by the British policy of administration, thus resulting in the emergence of strains in the political relations between two or more communities.

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