

Sole Native Authority (SNA) and the People at War: A Historical Review of the 1948 Erunkoja Tax Riot in Ile-Ife

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Abstract

The establishment of the British colonial administration and the introduction of the Indirect Rule system attracted opposition and riots in some places in Southern Nigeria. Indeed, the British decentralized despotism, the introduction of some burdensome taxation policies, and other prevalent tax related considerations naturally engendered resistance, which manifested in protest movements, revolts and outright riots in some places in Yorubaland. The article adopts the frustration-aggression theory. Evidence gathered from primary and secondary sources, chief among them being archival sources, interviews, and the use of extant literature. The paper argues that the increase in taxes after World War II had a political underpinning to the protest that led to the Erunkoja riot of 1948. Put differently, the riot was a consequence of the overbearing impact that increased taxes from the Second World War had on the people

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Introduction

Taxation in British Nigeria, from the late nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century, was a source of finance and developmental endeavors in colonial Nigeria. While the obligation of direct taxation was already firmly established in Northern Nigeria by 1914, tax was not collected in the Western Provinces

before 1918.¹ The riots that followed the introduction of tax provided lessons on the relationship that existed between British colonialists and the peoples of Nigeria, and an insight on how the colonial subjects became governable because of the introduction of new policies by the British government.

The British taxation policy was fundamental to administration across the British Empire.² The period between 1914 and 1960 marked the era of amalgamation of protectorate and colony, and the state's achievement of formal independence under the administration of the British colonialist. Before 1914, the territory, which later became Nigeria, was divided into several protectorates including the Niger Coast Protectorate and the Lagos Colony. Lagos was bombarded in 1851 and annexed in 1861 and it became a Crown Colony in 1862.³ The Lagos Colony and the Niger Coast Protectorate, renamed the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, were amalgamated in 1906.⁴ Upon the conquest, occupation, and declaration of a protectorate on the Northern area of the territory, a formal amalgamation with the South was established in 1914.⁵

Afro-centric perspectives on Nigeria's socio-political and economic structures prior to colonial rule have revealed that the concept of taxation was not alien to the people of Africa. However, the British Indirect Rule system facilitated the process of tax collection in Nigeria. The Indirect Rule system centered on the use of traditional rulers, who were mainly colonial subjects, and the roles they played in the tax collection process. In colonial Ile-Ife and several other Yoruba societies, corruption, unaccountability, and non-transparency characterized the process of tax collection. Undoubtedly, taxation was a potent tool, which was applied by the British colonial government, with the support of the Native Authority, in coercing and incorporating the indigenous people into its taxing policy and consequently controlling them economically and politically.

The British colonial government instituted the Native Administration to assist them in the day-to-day running of the government in Yorubaland. The Native Authority was the decentralized arm of the colonial state and it comprised a hierarchy of chiefs. One of the chief sources of revenue for the Native Administration was the tax department, which was managed by competent

1 Tamuno. T. N. (1972), *The Evolution of the Nigerian state: the southern phase, 1898-1914*. P. 317.

2 See, for instance, Colonial Regulations, 1935.

3 Toyin Falola, (1999), *The History of Nigeria*, Greenwood Press, pp. 54 - 57.

4 Burns, A. (1929). *History of Nigerian*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd. P. 214.

5 Toyin Falola, (1999), *The History of Nigeria*, Greenwood Press, pp. 59 - 63.

a British officer,⁶ and which was often confronted with the task of sourcing money for several projects.

The Indirect Rule system was essentially a form of administration whereby the British governed the whole of Nigeria through what they themselves referred to as the Native Authority, a system that was adopted because the British did not have enough administrative personnel and knowledge of the people as would be suitable for direct rule. More importantly, the British needed to avoid a situation where an unnecessary financial burden would be heaped on the home government. One could say that one of the three essential ingredients on which the colonial government rested its Indirect Rule system was the Native Revenue.⁷

The direct and indirect rule actually evolved into complementary ways of native control. Direct rule was the form of urban civil power. It was about the barring of natives from civil freedoms pledged to citizens in civil society. Indirect Rule, however, signified a rural tribal authority, which meant incorporating the populace into a state-enforced customary order. It was Frederick Lugard, the first British High Commissioner of the Northern Protectorate of Nigeria, who introduced the idea of indirect taxation into the country. Lugard began by experimenting with the idea of Native Revenue Ordinance in the Northern Region,⁸ and with the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, he extended the Native Revenue Ordinance to the Western Province, which was still part of the Southern Protectorate between 1917 and 1920.⁹

The British introduction of Indirect Rule system in Ile-Ife and other colonial Yoruba towns brought about important changes in their administration. The 'decentralised arm of the colonial state was the Native Authority ... and it was the first step taken by Lord Lugard in building a regime of Indirect Rule'.¹⁰ The British government, through the instrumentality of the Sole Native Authority (SNA) system, created a sub-authority on which it depended in running its administration. The British Indirect Rule system, which was operative in Ile-Ife as in other places in Southern Nigeria invested too much power

6 NAI. Oyo Prof. 1. File No. 1026 Vol. IX (i) Assessment and Incidence of Taxation (ii) General Report on Taxes. (iii) Tax Collection Authorities and Tax Collectors.

7 The other three pillars of Indirect Rule were the Native Authority, Native Treasuries and Native Court.

8 Ben Naanen, (2006), "You are Demanding Tax from the Dead: The Introduction of Direct Taxation and its Aftermath in South-Eastern Nigeria, 1928-1939", *African Economic History*, Vol. 34. Pp. 69 - 102.

9 Michael Crowder, (1981), *The Story of Nigeria*, London: Faber and Faber Press, p. 83.

10 Mamdani, M. (2004), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 52 - 53.

in the office of Oṣoni Adesoji Aderemi, who was the ruling king and Sole Native Authority (SNA) during the Erunkoja crisis that erupted in Ile Ife in 1948. As in other British colonies, the SNA in Ife became the law, subject only to the white official stationed in his state as an advisor, and he served as the legislator, administrator, prosecutor, judge and police officer all combined.¹¹

Although scholars and commentators on tax-related riots in South-Western Nigeria have generally concluded that most of the protest movements or revolts, which occurred during British rule were against a backdrop of British colonial taxing policy. However, recent detailed investigations into cases of upheavals in such places as Ijemo in 1914, Isehin/Oke-Iho 1916, the Aba in 1929, and even the Erunkoja crisis of 1948, among others, could not be located in the opposition to the British tax policy alone; rather, other tax-related considerations were also responsible for the ignition of some of these uprisings. Significantly, the lack of public facilities such as good road network, and public toilets, the high-handedness and arbitrary use of power by the Sole Native Authority, etc. in Southern Nigeria, particularly after the Second World War, were fundamental reasons for the eruption of some of these risings.

The argument of this article is that the establishment of the Sole Native Authority system conflicted with the pre-existing social and political systems of the Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria. By implication, the British introduction of the Indirect Rule system, as epitomized by the Native Administration and Authority system, created the impression that they were still upholding the traditional system. This study, therefore, historicized the Erunkoja riot of 1948, one of the several tax-related riots that dotted the British Sole Administrative period in Southern Nigeria and found that the British colonial government vested too much power on the Native Authority.

Theoretical Framework

In 1939, researchers at the Yale University Institute of Human Relations published a small monograph that has had a tremendous impact, directly or indirectly, on almost all of the behavioral sciences. Led by John Dollard, Leonard Doob, Neal Miller, O. H. Mowrer, and Robert Sears (1939), the group attempted to account for virtually all of human aggression with a few basic ideas.¹² These researchers integrated ideas and findings from several disciplines, especially sociology, anthropology, and psychology.

Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, and Sears (1939: 1) noted that “the occurrence of aggressive behavior always presupposes the existence of frustration

11 Mamdani, M. (2004), *Citizen and Subject: ...*, p. 55.

12 Leonard Berkowitz, “Frustration-Aggression Hypothesis: Examination and Reformulation” *Psychological Bulletin* Vol. 106, No. 1, (1989): 59-73

and, contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression.”¹³ These researchers further suggested that the strongest aggressive reactions are those directed towards the perceived sources of the frustration. Their position has influenced many western thinking on aggression more profoundly than any other single publication. The aggressive response to frustration can also be directed toward individuals that are not directly responsible for the frustration.¹⁴

What amounts to frustration is any event that prevents or delays the attainment of a subject's desired objective/goal. Frustration may be overt, such as the deployment of armed personnel to thwart peaceful protests over civil matters such as taxation, government policies, state repression etc. Aggression is a behavioral response involving violence against the perceived or potential cause of frustration. Although frustration is an independent variable for aggression in a group and an individual is a behavior, intervening predictors such as environmental constraints and the subject's perception of the frustrating event determine the propensity to violence by the frustrated party.

When our drive to reach a goal is blocked by external factors, we experience frustration which, in turn, creates and propels an aggressive drive, and this can lead to aggressive conduct/behavior. When we express this aggression physically, verbally, or by fantasizing, we experience catharsis, and our emotional tension is reduced. However, our aggression not always expressed toward the legitimate target because it could be too dangerous and we risk punishment. And because this target is not available, so we displace our aggressive response towards a less dangerous target or one who just happens to be present. This is called displacement. This is often the case when a people or group of people decides to take on *elite* properties or government agencies and institutions rather than the authorizing institution responsible for the cause of the aggression and frustration.

Taxation in Pre and Colonial Yorubaland

An indigenous political administrative system that was operative in pre-colonial societies in the areas that later came to be referred to as Nigeria was not always a one-man show. Indeed, that was the prevalent political system in other parts of Africa prior to the advent of British rule. In the Yoruba - speaking areas such as Egba land, Ogbomoso, Oyo, Iseyin, and other Yoruba kingdoms that fell under British rule, the pre-existing administrative system was

13 J. Dollard, Miller, N. E., Doob, L. W., Mowrer, O. H., & Sears, R. R. *Frustration and aggression*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1939), 1

14 R. G Geen, R. G. Effects of frustration, attack, and prior training in aggressiveness upon aggressive behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 9, no 4. (1968): 316 - 321.

such that the Kings, chiefs, family heads, etc. operated an organized system. This accounted for important aspects of indigenous administration, for instance, the communal labor tax, adopted in the construction and maintenance of village roads, squares, Kings' palaces, and community water streams. Indigenous African societies had a tax system, which supported the administration and facilitated the provision of common facilities and services within the kingdoms.¹⁵ Indeed, the most striking feature of the Nigerian indigenous tax system was that it characterized a common humanity approach, which made revenue mobilization relatively easy and cost-effective. However, the involvement of the British colonial administration simply led to the consolidation of demands made upon the people's income into a single payment account, which was regularised into a definite system of direct taxation.¹⁶ The British alien contraptions; particularly the tax system, was not fully understood, it was too cumbersome, and not people friendly.

The British colonial government introduced four authorities namely- the Resident, who was an appointed public officer; the Native Authority, which was normally headed by a Chief; the Native Treasury and the Native Court. These sub-structures combined legislative, executive, and judicial functions. They not only maintained law and order but were also saddled with the responsibility of tax collection for the colonial government. Of utmost importance was the Native Administration, which assisted the British colonial government in the day-to-day running of the administration. The Native Authority was the decentralized arm of the colonial state, which comprised a hierarchy of chiefs, who symbolized the power of the British colonial government.¹⁷

The colonial administrator frequently needed to find money for several projects, and were determined that the 'uncivilized people... should be self-supporting'.¹⁸ During this period, the African cowry currencies was already replaced with British coin,¹⁹ and Lugard insisted that in all transactions, cash was to be insisted upon, even if it meant forcing Africans to the market in order to sell goods.²⁰ In fact, the British government was more focused on

15 Musonda, K. (2016), Principles of Taxation. Policy Paper, No. 5 of the Introduction to the project "Tax, justice and poverty." Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection, 1-121.

16 Mathew Forstater. (2005), Taxation and Primitive Accumulation: The Case of Colonial Africa, The Capitalist State its Economy: Democracy in Socialism, Research in Political Economy, Volume 22, pp. 51 - 65.

17 Mamdani, M. (2004), *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism*, Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

18 Perham, M. (1948), Mining, Commerce and Finance. London: Frank Cass, p. 226.

19 Marion Johnson, (1970), "The Cowry Currencies of West Africa" *The Journal of African History*, Vol. XI, p. 17.

20 Oakley, 1972, Sex, Gender and Society, London, Temple Smith Publishers, pp. 194 - 195.

distancing itself from any financial commitment. Lugard, therefore, created the tax department under the direction of an efficient British officer, and this became the chief source of revenue.²¹ During the British rule in Nigeria, the tax collection procedure required the Native Authority (NA) i.e. chiefs to play the role of a tax collector. This integral part of his duties required him to make regular contact between both the British, who were referred to as the 'men on the spot'²² and the indigenous population. The Native Authority was the link between the white overlord and the indigenes. Indeed, the British colonial taxation policy enforcement procedure was best captured by Obaro Ikime when he noted that:

The first step which Lugard took in building a regime of Indirect Rule was to endeavor to find a man of influence such as the chief and group under him as many villages or districts as possible.to teach him to delegate power and to take an interest in his 'Native Treasury,' to support his authority, and to inculcate a sense of responsibility.²³

By implication, the Native Authority system empowered the chiefs to become the pillar of strength on which the entire system stood (Sole Native Authority) - Native Court, Native Administration, and a Native Treasury- vested in the office of Native administration. Beyond the circles of the British officials, the chief also exercised a considerable amount of influence such as the power to make rules.²⁴ Padmore also considered chiefs in colonial Nigeria as the law, subject to only one higher authority, the white, who determined what direction to be followed. Among other things, the Indirect Rule system empowered the chief, who was often the prosecutor and judge combined, 'to hire his own police, and employ the jailer to hold his victims in custody at his pleasure. No oriental despot ever had greater power than these black tyrants' did, and thanks to the support, they received from the white officials who quietly remained in the background.²⁵

The chiefs in colonial Southern Nigeria wielded enormous power. For instance, in the eastern part, Warrant Chiefs that were created and imposed on the people by the colonial Authority not only went about their duties arbitrarily, but they also exhibited despotic tendencies and were thus labeled

21 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), Oyo Prof. 1. File No. 1026 Vol. IX (i) Assessment and Incidence of Taxation (ii) General Report on Taxes. (iii) Tax Collection Authorities and Tax Collectors.

22 Tamuno, T.N. (1972), *The Evolution of Nigeria State*: ... p. 106.

23 Obaro Ikime, (1977), *The Fall of Nigeria*, London: Heinemann, pp. 3, 15 - 35.

24 Michael Crowder, (1968), *West Africa Under Colonial Rule*, Hutchinson of London and Ethopie Publishing Corporation, Benin City, pp. 206-211.

25 See Jean Suret-Canale on *French Colonialism*, (1971), p. 252.

irresponsible, incompetent, opportunistic, and brutal.²⁶ The attitude and general conduct of the Native Authority led to distrust among the people, and this, in turn, fueled resentment and widespread discontent against the British colonial taxation system.

Confronting Constituted Authority: A Review of the 1948 Erunkoja Crisis in Ile-Ife

Ile-Ife, the cradle of the Yoruba speaking group, is located on the longitude 4.6°E and Latitude 7.5°N on an elevation of about 275 meters above the sea level. It is situated in the tropical zone where tropical temperature and Rainfall are obtained. Historically, Ife, founded between the seventh and tenth centuries A.D.,²⁷ is a Yoruba speaking area, and it is the home of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba people. The Yoruba predominate in Ekiti, Osun, Oyo, Ogun, Ondo and Lagos states. They can also be found in substantial proportion in both Kogi and Kwara states, and even in the Republic of Benin and Togo. Owing to its centrality in the social, cultural and political world of the

Yoruba, Ilé-Ifè earned a number of epithets such as *ibi ojùmó ti'ń mọ wa*, (the place where dawning occurs), *Olóri Ayé* Gbogbo (the head of the universe), *oòdáyé* (point of creation), *ilú aláde* (crowned city) and finally, *ilu òrun*, (heaven city). In the estimate of an eminent scholar, the town was already a flourishing urban center by the eleventh century.²⁸

By the twentieth century, the town enjoyed some level of development and population growth. The 1963 census recorded that Ife had a population of 135,050 people²⁹ who were predominantly farmers during the colonial period. Majority of the adult males depended on the land in a Cocoa growing area as they produced food crops such as yams, maize, cassava, beans and vegetables during the period. The people were not only traders but were also involved in industries such as blacksmithing, basket making, dyeing, weaving, pottery and palm oil extraction, which were, and are still popular among workers.³⁰ It is, however, necessary, at this point, to bring to the foreground those events vis-à-vis the Ife/Modakeke crisis, the Ife Forest Reserve dispute and the *Egbé*

26 Ben Naanen, (2006), "You are Demanding Tax From The Dead:... Vol. 34. 2006, pp. 69 - 102.

27 Biobaku S. (1955), *Origins of the Yoruba*, Lagos: Federal Information Service, p. 12 - 20.

28 Jeffrey M.D. (1958), "When was Ile Ife Founded?" *Nigeria Field*, Vol. Xxiii, No. 1, p. 21- 23.

29 Profile of a Legend: Late Oba Adesoji Aderemi I, Ministry of Internal Affairs and Information, Ibadan, p. 1.

30 Profile of a Legend: Late Oba Adesoji Aderemi I,.... , p. 1.

omọ Odùduwà issues that developed and fragmented into what later came to be known as the Erunkoja riot.

In 1941, the Ife Native Authority Forest Reserve Order created a forest reserve for Ife, which consisted of six forest areas, (F1 - F6), five of which were under the U.A.C. The sixth was allocated to the Aderawo Timber Trading Company, jointly owned by *Oba* Aderemi and one Mr. Awosiyan, a retired forest guard. This company was licensed by the Ife Native Authority to fell timbers and construct roads within the sixth reserve.³¹ At one of the meetings of the Ife District Council, Johnson Adeniyi moved a motion that unanimously passed a request for the regional government to vest in Ife District Council all and/or interests belonging to Ife Native Authority.³²

It is significant to note that the years preceding 1948 in Ile-Ife were characterized by two major conflicts, which gave impetus to the triggering of the Erunkoja tax crisis. The activities of the Sole Native Administrator in Ile Ife, and his poor management of the polity left a bitter taste in the mouth of political observers. Indeed, the preceding years of peace and progress in Ile-Ife was followed by a period of unending political instability, which started in 1947, just before the Qòni proceeded to the United Kingdom, and it lasted until 1970. The major contextual issues, which ravaged Ile-Ife at this period, centered on three main themes- The Ife/Modakeke crisis, the Ife Forest Reserve dispute and the *Egbẹ Omọ Ìbílẹ̀* / Erunkoja riot.

In 1947, the recurrent Ife/Modakeke issue resurfaced over the refusal of the Modakeke community, who had settled in Ile-Ife during the Jihadist's occupation of the Northern areas of Yorubaland, to pay rents that were known as *isákólẹ̀*, or *ifẹ̀* (Land Rents) to their Ife landlords. Prior to the period of conflict, in November 1946, the Lagos branch of Modakeke Progressive Union petitioned Qòni Aderemi concerning the excessive sums being demanded from Modakeke farmers by the Ife landlords.³³ Qòni Aderemi decided to discuss the matter with his chiefs. He thus invited his them and the Modakeke Progressive Union representatives to a meeting, an invitation that was declined by the latter. The matter was consequently kept pending and was not investigated by Qòni Aderemi.

If there had ever been any chance that the people of Modakeke would be reconciled to the dominion of the Ife Landlords, it was destroyed by the new step taken by the Modakekes. The period of informal complaints was soon

31 Olusola Akinmade and I. A. Akinjogbin, (1992), The Aderemi Era in I. A. Akinjogbin (ed). *The Cradle of Race*, Sun Ray Publications Port Harcourt, p.199 - 200.

32 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI). Comcol. CSO. File No. 23610/S988, E2: 3, NAI, Oyo Prof. 2/2, File 1514/1, Vol. 11, p. 16.

33 Olusola Akinmade and I. A. Akinjogbin, (1992), The Aderemi Era in I. A. Akinjogbin (ed). *The Cradle of Race*, Sun Ray Publications Port Harcourt, pp. 199 - 200.

abandoned for an era of formal processes; first, a letter, dated 5th April, 1947, from the *Baale* and Chief of Modakeke, was sent to Qòni Aderemi. This letter, which denounced the payment of *ìṣákólẹ̀* to the land-owning compound heads of Ile-Ife, also brought to the fore the history of their settlement, which was traced to the period of Qòni Ademiluyi, who recalled them after they had been scattered in 1909. The 1947 letter claimed that there were no oral or written evidences to show that they ever agreed to pay *ìṣákólẹ̀* to the Ife chiefs, but only promised to give annual tributes to the Qòni in the form of farm produce. However, the people of Modakeke considered Ife Landlord's demand for *ìṣákólẹ̀* on their cocoa as an exploitative agenda, and they therefore appealed to Qòni Aderemi in the letter to stop this exploitative position.³⁴

On 25 June, 1947, Oba Aderemi responded to the letter of 5th April, 1947 and noted that after having conducted a full inquiry into the grievances of the Modakeke people, he saw no ground for his intervention as the case was purely a private matter. Oba Aderemi considered that the agreement was between the chiefs and the Modakeke people, and that he was not privy to the matter. In other words, the Oba was never a party to the agreement.³⁵ He also took time to correct the impression that Oba Ademiluyi recalled the Modakekes to Ile-Ife, and noted that nothing was illegal about a tenant paying rent to the property owner. Qòni Aderemi actually felt that the Modakeke tenants were the guilty party since they had the right and opportunity to own land, but failed to exercise that right when they had the chance to do so. After dispatching the letter, Oba Aderemi went further to enlightened the Resident, to whom the Modakekes had also lodged their complaints that the Modakekes were 'attempting impossibility because the system is as old as the hills.'³⁶

From this period onward, the Modakekes began to see Oba Aderemi as a partial judge who already passed judgement against them on the dispute even before discussions commenced. Besides, the *Kabiesi* also had tenants from whom he was collecting rents on land, and was also regarded by many as an exploiter. Beyond the Modakeke matter, Qòni Aderemi did not enjoy the benefit of trust from the Ife landowners who felt that his Oyo connections were too inflexible and that he could not be counted on to embark on a pro-Ife policy in such a dispute. Ile-Ife Landlords, therefore, felt that the Oba would not support them against the Modakekes. There was a little readjustment on the part of the Qòni when, on October 1947, the people consequently forwarded a warning letter, advising him to stop interfering in the dispute as it was a private matter

34 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), Oyo Prof. 2/3, File 1926, Ife/Modakeke Matter, Vol. 11.

35 Palace Record, File No. 186, Vol. 11, *Aafin* Ile-Ife.

36 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), Ife Division 1/1, File No. 113.

between them (Ife Landlords) and their Modakeke tenants.³⁷ Qòni Aderemi thus decided to remain neutral in the crises.

There was, however, nothing in the Qòni's hands-off to end the escalating misunderstanding; the palaver went on, indeed, for a little more time, and there were records of violent altercations between both parties at intervals, but when all effort to achieve lasting peace failed, *Oba* Aderemi requested for government intervention in November 1947. The colonial government involvement did not help to resolve the mounting tension either as the government claimed that the dispute was purely a private matter that could be settled in the court of law. Although the *Oba* eventually managed to bring the warring sides to the reconciliation table, nothing concrete was achieved. Qòni Aderemi, however, offered the Modakeke the option of a new farmland, which would be rent-free, an offer rejected politely by the Modakeke spokesperson, who remarked that new farmlands would fuel new discontent.³⁸ Although the people of Modakeke appealed for gradual movements from Ife farms, the Ife property owners insisted that it was either continued payment of *ìsákòlẹ̀*. or an immediate evacuation.³⁹

Significantly, the efforts of Qòni Aderemi to prevent the issue from escalating and getting within the purview of the Native Court proved futile. On January 30th, 1948, the warring parties finally appeared before the Native Authority Officers in Ile-Ife. Prior to the hearing, the Modakekes were pessimistic about its outcome because the Ife Native Court and Authority, the accuser and the judges, were property owners, who were also 'receiving *ìsákòlẹ̀*.' Therefore, it would have been surprising if they had failed to rule in favor of Ile-Ife property owners. They expressed their fear and grievances to the Resident and pressed for the case to be tried outside Ife, a request that was not granted as the Native Authority and Court officers explained that they could always appeal if they were not satisfied with the verdict. Not too surprisingly, the court ruled that a contractual relationship existed between the Ife property owners (plaintiffs) and the Modakeke tenants (defendants), and therefore ordered the continuation of the payment of *ìsákòlẹ̀*.⁴⁰

37 Olaniyan, R. A., (1992), "The Modakeke Question in Ife Politics and Diplomacy", in *The Cradle of a Race: Ife from the Beginning to 1980*, p. 276; see also Alao, F. O., *Ile-Ife, 1830 -1983: The Dilemma of a Composite Town*, p. 35.

38 Dr. Ademola Aderemi on the 10th September 1997 at Ikeja in Lagos State.

39 Alao, F. O., (2004), *Ile-Ife 1830-1983: The Dilemma of a Composite Town*, Akure: Precious Pearls Communications, 2004, pp. 32 – 43.

40 Olaniyan, R. A., (1992), "The Modakeke Question in Ife Politics and Diplomacy", In I. A. Akinjogbin (ed). *The Cradle of a Race: Ife From the Beginning to 1980*, Port Harcourt, Sunray Publication, p. 274.

The Modakeke people were dissatisfied and they, therefore, appealed to the Supreme Court, which upheld the judgement of the lower court of the 13th October, 1948 but reduced the amount to be paid. Still dissatisfied with the ruling, they took the case to the West African Court of Appeal. At this time, a split was already becoming noticeable between the Modakeke Community, the *Baale* and the Chiefs, and also between the Ile-Ife community and Oba Aderemi who had been blamed by his people for what they considered an unfortunate 'predicament'. They felt that the Modakeke people would have yielded but for the support and encouragement, Modakeke received from the *Oba* whom they also accused of co-operating with the Baale of Modakeke, who undeservedly, allowed the benefit of sitting in council with him.

On March 27, 1949, the *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà* intervened in the crises on the invitation of *Oba* Aderemi. The *Egbe* proposed that the dispute could be solved on two conditions; first, through the 'immediate removal of the Urhobos (Ìsòbòs) and others from the farms, and second, that new deliberation on *ìsákólẹ̀*. Base payment on the number of cocoa trees.⁴¹ These proposals were followed by an order forbidding entry into Modakeke farms. But hardly had the *Egbe* left when hostility was resumed. There were riots in Modakeke on May 18th 1949, and in reporting the crisis to the Resident, the Baale in his letter of May 25th 1949, urged the arrest of some protest leaders. As a result of what some Modakeke people referred to as treacherous attitude of their Baale and chiefs, they decided to be more conciliatory in approach and agreed to meet with the Ifes' on September 29th 1949. The two parties met and decided to abide by the proposals of the *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà*. Unfortunately, this agreement was not adhered to as skirmishes soon broke out again.⁴²

The Forest Reserve dispute was another sensitive issue. The actual intention of Ife District Council was to take control of the Ife Forest Reserve transferred from the Divisional Council is being presided over by Oba Aderemi to the District Council under Remi Fani Kayode. This arrangement was bound to deprive other councils within Ife Division of their fair shares in the proceeds of the forest resources. The regional government did not act on the matter, a position that led to a serious faceoff between major stakeholders. The issue soon resurfaced at a meeting of the Divisional Council when D. A. Ademiluyi moved that the lease agreement in respect of the forest reserve, which was under the management of Aderawo Timber Trading Company, be reconsidered. He, indeed, moved that members of the Ife community incorporated to exploit the reserve.⁴³

41 Olusola Akinmade and I. A. Akinjogbin, (1992),... p. 199 - 200.

42 Alao, F. O., (2004), Ile-Ife 1830-1983: The Dilemma of a Composite Town, Akure: Precious Pearls Communications, pp. 44 - 48.

43 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), Oyo Prof. 2/2 File 1514, Vol. C. 11, p. 5 - 9.

Oba Aderemi's response to the unfolding scenario was very explicit; he disclosed his interest in the forest reserve business and appealed to the council to reconsider the matter in his favor. He noted that Ife had six forest reserves, five of which were in the hands of the U.A.C., and over which nobody raised eyebrows. The SNA introduced a conspiracy theory into the matter and submitted that only a feeling of hatred against him could have inspired such a motion, without raising any question on the involvement of U.A.C., a foreign company. His proposal, however, alarmed the groups whose interests seemed threatened and a powerful alliance in which Remi Fani Kayode played a prominent role was formed against him.

Fani Kayode noted that the motion by D. A. Ademiluyi was in line with the expressed wish of the people of Ife. He then suggested that an emergency meeting of the council to be presided over by someone, other than *Oba Aderemi*, be summoned. It was hoped that a trial decision on the matter would be taken. However, a meeting presided over by Councilor J. A. Odelena, which held on 28th December, 1950 did not reach a satisfactory agreement on the matter. In 1952, the local government reforms undertaken by the Western Regional Government swept off the Native Authority system. The powers of the traditional rulers, including those of the *Oṣoni*, were considerably reduced as new local councils were inaugurated. The Ife Native Authority was thus replaced by five new councils- Ife Divisional, Ife District, Ifetedo, Ipetumodu, and Edunabon / Moro local Government Councils, and these were controlled by elected representatives who were not directly accountable to the *Oba*.⁴⁴ Since an amicable resolution to the Forest Reserve dispute could not be reached by the opposing parties, the matter thus dragged uncontrollably until the end of 1959 when agitators led by Remi Fani kayode decided to settle the matter in court.

At this stage, the Modakeke people realized the futility of continuous struggle, especially as the West African Court of Appeal had ruled against them. The internal division and the weariness that came with the long tussle made the people to resolve to reconcile, and they were now ready to go to the new farmland earlier promised by Oba Aderemi. They were, however, dumbfounded to hear from the *Oṣoni* that the land had been acquired by the Native Authority. An attempt to find alternative land was followed by a series of fruitless meetings between Modakeke and the Minister of Land from 1954.⁴⁵ Oba Aderemi found himself in the middle of escalating disturbances; on one hand, the Modakeke people felt sad about the whole situation and blamed *Oba Aderemi* for their unfortunate predicament. On the other hand, the people of

44 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., Oyo Prof. 2/2, File 1514/1, Vol. 11, p. 7 - 15.

45 Alao, F. O., (2004), Ile-Ife 1830 - 1983: p. 44.

Ife also held that they needed not have gone through all the troubles if Oṣẹni Aderemi had not taken side with the Modakekes. In the face of these accusations and allegations, Oba Aderemi chose to adopt tact and tolerance. He felt that the two parties to the dispute were his subjects and saw no reason to favor one against the other. He opted to be silent on the subject as he intuitively knew that both parties could conveniently misinterpret any statement issued by him.⁴⁶

The issues arising from Ife Forest Reserve and the Aderawo Timber Trading Company, which took root in 1955, also threatened the position of Oba Aderemi. It resulted in a long-drawn tussle between Oba Aderemi and some powerful elements in the newly constituted Ife Divisional District Councils. By this period, Oba Aderemi had taken some steps to frustrate the youths. First, he sponsored an independent candidate, Micheal Omisade, to contest against Remi Fani Kayode, a party nominee, into the federal parliament, although the election date was close. In the election, Fani Kayode lost in all wards of Ife, except Modakeke. The Action Group (AG) took the second step shortly after the election. A caretaker committee in Ife dissolved and replaced all local councils,⁴⁷ but these steps only served to inflame the passion of the youths, now under the leadership of Mr. Oloyede, who, having won a seat in the elections on the platform of the AG, switched over to the N.C.N.C. Although Mr. Oloyede won three out of the four seats in the Western House of Assembly, the AG still had the overall majority in the House. Significantly, seven members of the Ife community led by Adedire Ogunleye, within the same year, took Oba Adesoji Aderemi to court over the Forest Reserve issue.⁴⁸

The contextual question was whether the *Oba* was holding the Ife Forest Reserve in trust for the community or it was his property. The High Court dismissed the case on the ground that Adedire Ogunleye had no locus standi. The appeal to the Supreme Court, however, went in favor of Adedire; the Court ruled that the Deed of Concession granted to the Aderawo Timber Trading Company be set aside. It also ordered that the company should pay to the treasury of the Divisional Council within ninety days all profits earned from the concession from January 6, 1954, to the date of judgment in January 28, 1963. Finally, the Court also ordered Oba Aderemi to pay the total cost of the case.⁴⁹

Again, the appeal to the Privy Council in London went in favor of Oba Aderemi, but by the time Council delivered its judgment the political situation in the region had taken a new turn. The crisis that engulfed the Action

46 Olusola Akinmade and I. A. Akinjogbin, (1992), ...p. 199 - 200.

47 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., Oyo Prof. 2/2, File 1514/1/2, p. 5 - 3, 10 - 15.

48 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., Oyo Prof. 2/24, Ife Forest Reserve, File 1514/1/2, p. 19.

49 All Nigeria Law Report, 1958, p. 49.

Group had finally led to the replacement of the party's administration in the Western Region by a coalition of the United People's Party of S.L. Akin-tola and the N.C.N.C. under Remi Fani-Kayode. Back in power, Fani-Kayode was determined to forestall the decision of the Privy Council. His first action was to dissolve the Ife Divisional Caretaker Committee and replace it with a new one headed by G.A. Adeleke Ademiluyi, which included four traditional chiefs- Obalufe, Obaloran, Akogun, and the Baale of Modakeke. Significantly, it was the first time since 1930 that *Oba* Aderemi was excluded from the Ife governing council. On August 12th 1964, four days after the Privy Council's judgment was delivered, during an emergency meeting of the new council, a motion calling for the removal of *Oba* Aderemi from office was unanimously passed. The council also requested the regional government to stop the payment of his salary and allowance with immediate effect.⁵⁰

With these unfolding events, and notwithstanding the intervention of regional premier and other Yoruba kings, *Oba* Aderemi decided not to surrender the Ife Forest Reserve to his people. By a deed dated 11th of August 1964, he held on to the reserve and paid an additional sum of thirteen thousand pounds (£13,000) to the treasury of the council. To further demonstrate his good will, he conferred on Remi Fani-Kayode, who had all along led the opposition against him, the title of 'Balogun of Ife', to appease him. The Divisional Council continued to collect revenue from the forest reserve until the military takeover in January 1966. After the military coup, however, the forest reserve was withdrawn from the custody of *Oba* Aderemi, and he speedily withdrew his thirteen thousand pounds (£13,000) from the treasury.⁵¹

Disputes surrounding the forest reserve remained dormant until 1968 when a committee was inaugurated by the military government to look into boundary disputes in the Western State. This committee made so much noise about the Aderawo Forest Reserve that had become a touchy issue. Finally, *Oba* Aderemi decided to give up the forest reserve and the deed of surrender was signed on the 19th of September, 1970.⁵² Since then, the issues surrounding the reserve as virtually remained latent. Indeed, all disturbances subsided, and *Oba* Aderemi was, again, saved from the debilitating challenges that had, unquestionably, menaced him. It is, however, difficult to assume that the subsequent restoration of peace and mutual trust after the *ìṣákòlẹ̀*. Crises and forest reserves issue was the direct result of *Qòni* Aderemi's tolerance and conciliatory attitude, which, unfortunately, not sufficiently appreciated by the warring sides. It is, however, significant to note that the *Oba* realised, more than any

50 Patrick Ogunsakin, (ed) *The End of an Epoch*, Sir Adesoji Aderemi, IKBE, KCMG, *Ooni of Ife, 1930 - 1980*, Lagos: Inway Publishers, p. 16.

51 *Daily Times*, April 17th 1969, p. 14.

52 *Daily Times*, April 9th 1969, p. 12.

of the parties involved in the dispute, that meaningful progress could only be achieved in an atmosphere of peace and mutual understanding.

The final crisis, which came closest to 'breaking the back of the *Kabiesi* was a major one; if the *isákólẹ̀*. The crisis placed Oba Aderemi in an impossible position, the issues he had with the *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà Ife* came close to costing him his crown. The formation of *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà Ife* society was a reaction to the new position of power and influence enjoyed by the *Ọ̀nì* under the Native Authority System as the Sole Native Authority. The group felt that the *Ọ̀nì's* authority far in excess of what kings enjoyed in pre-colonial Yorubaland and that he was abusing his new position through the non-provision of some basic social amenities and excessive tax demands. The people started this fresh agitation by complaining about the generally deplorable conditions of socio-economic infrastructures in Ile-Ife, which ranged from inadequate facilities, the non-competitive and biased appointment procedures to the position of Native Authority, inadequate supply of pipe-borne water, the unfriendly state of Ile-Ife township roads, to the need for health facilities such as hospitals, good roads, public toilets etc.⁵³ Prior to this period, *Egbé Ọmọ Ìbílẹ̀ Ife* had always attacked the Sole Native Authority system and indirectly condemned the Oba through certain scathing remarks and other insinuations. However, in 1948, while the *Ọ̀nì* was in United Kingdom, the bout of insults became even more cruel and vociferous; they began to attack publicly some of his actions indirectly.⁵⁴

Under the leadership of their Secretary-General, Mr. Adetunji Aderotimi Layode, they queried the rationale behind the 'Erinkoja *Oba* Fund', which was directly set up by the *Oba* for the reconstruction of the palace walls. Before 1948, the Ife '*Erunkoja*', that is, city wall, was built with mud. Oba Aderemi had visited Ilorin and discovered that the *Emir's* palace was surrounded by brick wall. He fancied it and decided to copy the Ilorin stone pattern in Ife. Raising the funds to implement this decision became a problem. As he was the Sole Native Authority representing the British government in Ife, the *Ọ̀nì* decided to levy a sum of six pence (6d.) per taxable adult along with income tax of that year,⁵⁵ a decision that consequently resulted in a resistance movement led by Aderotimi Layode.

Layode felt that there was no justifiable reason for the Native Authority's levy and demanded to know why an increase of six pence per taxable adult was necessary. This movement also demanded explanation on how money

53 Olusola Akinmade and I. A. Akinjogbin, (1992), The Aderemi Era in I. A. Akinjogbin (ed). *The Cradle of Race*, Sun Ray Publications Port Harcourt, p. 199 - 200.

54 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., File 1/1, Ife Division, *Egbé Ọmọ Ìbílẹ̀ Ife*, p. 14.

55 Oluyemi, O. 1980. *Oba Adesoji Aderemi: 50 years in the History of Ile-Ife*, Ogunbiyi Printing Work, p. 56.

generated from the sale of corrugated iron sheets, which were removed from the dilapidated walls, was spent. The Layode group believed that the money had been misappropriated, and the Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà Ife complained bitterly, noting that the contributions concerning the palace wall had continued for twelve more years, long after the palace walls had been completed. Significantly, the group observed that since the palace wall project was completed three years after the levy was initiated, they wondered why the contribution was not discontinued and, therefore, sought to know the reason behind the unending burdensome levy and how generated monies were expended. They believed that Kábièsí was surreptitiously diverting public monies into personal use and demanded that the burdensome contributions be stopped forthwith.⁵⁶

On 12th December 1948, the Egbé wrote to the Oba and his Council, pointing out the various abuses and maladministration within the Ife Native Authority system and suggested ways of correcting them. The Oba replied by asking them to direct their request to the District Officer and claimed their demands were beyond his powers to grant. The Egbé called for a meeting with the Oba and his chiefs on January 6, 1948, and there, the Egbé again aired their objections concerning the 'Erinkoja Oba Funds'. The general view among the Oba and his chiefs was that the Egbé was insolent and rude. The Egbé, however, saw the Oba as using his education and his position as the Sole Native Authority to further his own interests by appropriating the commonwealth of his people for personal use. The meeting ended in a deadlock and hence, the Egbé seized every opportunity to issue scathing verbal attacks Oba Aderemi. It issued a release titled *A Note of Warning* on January 7, 1949, and another one titled *warning*, which were both signed by Adetunji Aderotimi.⁵⁷

Aderotimi condemned the Kábièsí for attending various constitutional conferences and noted that 'we do not want the Oba and his chiefs to go outside the town until our matter is settled; he is the *Oba* to Ife people and not to the 'white men' (British). They further noted that if the 'white man' wished to see him, he could come to Ife and not the other way round. Before long, verbal altercations climaxed as the Egbé Ọmọ *Ìbilẹ̀*'s scornful remarks on Oba Adesoji Aderemi became more direct and confrontational thus leading to disturbances in the town in late January and early February, 1949.⁵⁸ It is important to note that Aderotimi initially enjoyed the support of disgruntled chiefs, Baales, heads of compounds, resource poor farmers and city crafts-men on whose shoulders fell the payment of the new income tax. During this period,

56 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., File 1/1, Ife Division, *Egbé Ọmọ Ìbilẹ̀ Ife*, p. 13 - 16.

57 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI)., File 1/1, Ife Division, *Egbé Ọmọ Ìbilẹ̀ Ife*, p. 13 - 16. See also *West African Pilot*, February 2nd 1949.

58 *West African Pilot*, February 2nd 1949.

Baales were also dissatisfied with the Sole Native Authority arrangement, which was operated by the British colonial government. The Baales whose responsibility it was to collect income tax in their compounds were, unfortunately, not remunerated for the services rendered.

The warnings issued by the *Egbe* led to tension in the land, and as the unfolding scenario gathered momentum and appeared to be getting out of hand, the Sole Native Authority, Oba Adesoji Aderemi, wasted no time in banning all forms of public meetings, rallies and demonstrations. These bans were however ignored by the *Egbé Ọmọ Íbílẹ̀*, as the group went ahead to organize another riot on March 2, 1949. On the same day, the Ọ̀nì placed another ban on all public meetings, which was again ignored by the *Egbe*. On the following day, a letter that was considered very insolent and rude from the society's Secretary-General was forwarded to the District Officer in charge of Ife Division, with a copy sent to the Ọ̀nì on March 3, 1949.⁵⁹ The consequence of this was the arrest of twenty members of the group (*Egbe*) and they were detained on the orders of Oba Aderemi.⁶⁰

Indeed, the arrest and detention of twenty people provided the needed spark for what followed; it triggered a mass demonstration against the Oba on March 5, 1949 around 8 pm in front of the palace, a demonstration that stridently, (throughout the night) demanded the abdication of Oba Aderemi from the throne. Many people took to the streets chanting war songs and on the 5th of March, 1949, the disorderly mobs demanded the crown of Oba Adesoji Aderemi. It is significant to note that whenever there was riot or any form of violence in any colonial establishment, the Native Authority usually called for help from the headquarters. The situation was not different in Ile-Ife in 1949. As a last resort, Oba Aderemi asked for military assistance and anti-riot police officers were, promptly, drafted from Ibadan to Ile-Ife with instruction to quell the riot by whatever means necessary. With this development, Aderotimi took to his heels, but some law enforcement agents soon arrested him and twenty of his supporters sentenced them to long terms of imprisonment without the option of a fine. Paradoxically, the Native Court that pronounced the sentence was presided over by the Ọ̀nì, Oba Adesoji Aderemi.⁶¹

At this stage, *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà* decided to wade into the matter, and at a peace meeting, held on March 8, 1949, frayed nerves of the *Egbé ọmọ Odùduwà* was assuaged as the Oba expressed his willingness to effect constitutional reforms.⁶² With this development, the spark was taken out of the *Egbé*

59 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), Ife Division, 1/1, File 1930, pp. 58 - 59, 67 - 68.

60 *Daily Service*, March 7th 1949.

61 Oluyemi, O. (1980), *Oba Adesoji*, p. 56. See also Suret-Canale, *French Colonialism*, p. 252.

62 National Archives Ibadan, (NAI), File 1930, Ife Victory, p. 4 - 18.

omọ Odùduwà Ife as an uneasy peace was restored, although the disputed issues were still lingering. Issues relating to the *Erunkoja* crisis again thrown up during the Ayoola Commission of enquiry, which sat on the *Agbekoya* peasant riots that took place in South-Western Nigeria in 1968/69.⁶³ At the sitting, a payment of forty six thousand pounds (£46,000) from the Aderawo Communal Forest Reserve to the Qòni of Ife, Oba Adesoji Aderemi, was alleged as a source of discontent within Ife Township.⁶⁴ Mr. Ayo Martins who made the claim in front of the panel at Ife noted that the people of Ife who were the owners of the reserve were annoyed that the Qòni was collecting money from the reserve. They, therefore, took the Qòni to court at a stage over the issue. The Qòni won at the Privy Council but was given an ultimatum to either retain his crown or the control of the reserve. He opted to retain his crown.⁶⁵

The '*Egbe-Omo-Ibile*' or *Erunkoja* movement, however, failed because it had no direction, ideological leadership, or focus. If it had, it might have succeeded in turning the Qòni Aderemi's palace into sand heaps. Significantly, the disturbing waves of the *Erunkoja* riot broke fiercely but vainly upon the rock of the Qòni Adesoji Aderemi's rule. Qòni Aderemi, the Native Authority representing the British colonial government in Ile-Ife, remained on the throne long after Aderotimi Layode, who provided leadership for the disturbance, had ceased to be relevant in the politics of Ile-Ife.

Conclusion

The establishment of the British colonial administration and the introduction of the Indirect Rule system attracted opposition and riots in some places in Southern Nigeria. Indeed, the British decentralized despotism, the introduction of some burdensome taxation policies, and other prevalent tax-related considerations naturally engendered opposition, which manifested in protest movements, revolts, and outright riots in some places in Yorubaland. This study historicized the *Erunkoja* riot of 1948, one of the several tax-related riots that doted British colonial Nigeria, and found that the British colonial government, through the instrumentality of the chief, vested too much power on the Native Authority, which only answerable to a white official advisor.

One could say without any fear of contradiction that the British taxation policies and tax-related considerations were significantly responsible for the ignition of the disturbances that enveloped Ile-Ife in 1948 during the reign of Oba Adesoji Aderemi, who doubled as the then Qòni of Ife and Sole Native

63 Ayoola Ebenezer Olufemi. (1968), Report of Commission of Enquiry into the civil disturbances in certain parts of Western Nigeria. Pp. 22 - 28.

64 *Daily Times*, 17th, 18th & 19th February 1969.

65 *Daily Times*, 17th, 18th & 19th February 1969.

Authority. The British unfriendly taxation policy led to frustration for the people, and this consequently led to aggressive reactions towards the perceived sources of the obstruction, the SNA, who was perceived as standing between them and their desired goal. The frustrated people did not vent their anger on the British officials, who could have been taken as the authorizing institution responsible for the cause of their frustration, but on a SNA, who was perceived as an insensitive land grabber.

Indeed, the deprivation and oppression experienced by the people moulded their discontent into specific grievances against a SNA who wielded excessive power and appropriated the people's common wealth for personal use during the British rule in Nigeria. It was the injustice perceived by the indigenous Ife people that consequently led to altercations between the ruled and a ruler, who was alleged to be surreptitiously depleting and converting public funds to personal use.

This study found that the Native Authority system was significantly responsible for the ignition of the disturbances that enveloped Ile-Ife in 1948 during the reign of *Oba* Adesoji Aderemi, who doubled as the then *Òni* of Ife and SNA representing the British colonial interests in his kingdom. The 1948 Erunkoja riot in Ile-Ife, just like other uprisings that came before it, such as the Adubi riot of 1914, Iseyin/Okeho riots of 1916, the Lagos Market Women Palaver of 1939, and the Egba women's riot of 1948 that occurred around the same time, to mention but a few, were triggered, not just because of the excessive tax demands of the British colonial government, but also as a result of the arbitrary nature of decision-making by the SNA and his mismanagement of public monies.

The moral lesson from the foregoing is that post-colonial African rulers should live above board and abstain from stealing from the public treasury. Leaders should avoid coercing the followership into complying with burdensome tax demands. And while not encouraging the followership to be unruly and disobedient to constituted authority, the civic public in Ife should be commended for standing up against an oppressive colonial regime.