

The Politics of the Ibadan Peasantry¹

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After the end of the Kiriji wars and the imposition of colonial rule on Ibadan in 1893, demobilized warriors and others sought land to farm in the hitherto uncultivated forest lands to the south of the city. The development of transport and marketing facilities stimulated farmers to adapt existing resources and institutions to meet the metropolitan demand for cocoa.²

Cocoa land was acquired from families of hunter-warriors who had camped beyond the outlying farmlands and now claimed the right to allocate forest lands and establish tenants on them. Despite the recurrent opposition of the Ibadan chiefs, sometimes along with the tenants, to their claims, the rights of the 'overlord' or 'landlord' (*Yor: oloko*, lit. he who owns the land) lineages were recognized by the colonial authorities whose main concern was to establish some kind of intermediate authority in the rural areas and stabilize claims to land. These 'overlord' lineages, notably the lineage of one Obisesan Aperin, were in a position to exploit the dependence of their 'tenants' for monetary rewards and labour services.³ Thus cocoa farmers in Ibadan division were subordinated to the authority of their 'overlords' which was derived in turn from the colonial State.

Prior to the First World War, the price paid to the cocoa *producer* was higher in real terms than it has ever been since.⁴ But the commitment of resources to cocoa (however profitable) has forced the farmer to bear the brunt of subsequent collapses in the world price and of the exactions of the

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- 1 This paper will be published in Gavin Williams, ed., *Nigeria: Economy and Society* (London: Rex Collins).
- 2 This process has been analysed by Sara Berry in (*inter alia*) "Cocoa and Economic Development in Western Nigeria," in C. K. Eicher and Carl Liedholm, *Growth and Development of the Nigerian Economy* (East Lansing, 1971); *Cocoa Custom and Socio-economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* (Oxford, 1975).
- 3 Diaries and papers of Chief Akinpelu Obisesan (University of Ibadan Library), *passim*, National Archives Ibadan (NAI), Oyopof 3, 1881. See also H. L. Ward-Price, *Land Tenure in the Yoruba Province* (Lagos, 1939), pp. 68-71; Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit., and "Cocoa and Economic Development in Western Nigeria," op. cit.
- 4 Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit.

intermediaries on whom the farmers are dependent for marketing their crops. The colonial administration subjected them to the power of the State and to manipulation by the possessors of a literate culture. In short, cocoa farmers were incorporated into the colonial political economy as a peasantry.⁵

Despite the low inter-war prices, cocoa cultivation remained a profitable investment in Ibadan division, and annual acreages planted expanded to a high point of 13,000 acres in 1928/29. It declined with the fall in prices and, more importantly, the scarcity of good cocoa land, to 4,500 acres by 1939, so that the centre of new development moved eastward to Ife and Ondo divisions. After 1945, the spread of swollen shoot disease, to which the Government responded by a massive cutting-out of infected plants, drastically cut the cocoa acreage of the division and new plantings fell to 600 acres a year.⁶

The post-war policies of the marketing boards⁷ have severely curtailed the farmers' return from cocoa and discouraged new investments in cocoa cultivation, especially in areas such as Ibadan where returns are marginal relative to the newer cocoa producing areas to the east. As cocoa trees have aged, soil fertility and yields have tended to decline, despite the use of modern chemicals, which have only temporarily reversed the trend.

Akanran and Araromi, in Ibadan South-East District, were once the most thriving produce markets in the country. Traders and craftsmen, such as barbers, weavers, shoemakers and bicycle repairers, plied their trades in these markets. The co-operative movement first developed along its present lines in the Ibadan villages. Today, only one major licensed buyer and a few undercapitalized licensed and scale buyers visit the Akanran Road markets. Ijebu and Ijesa traders have begun to leave for more profitable areas. Only a handful of craftsmen remain. Numerous primary co-operative marketing societies have collapsed for want of sufficient produce to sell. Most of the younger generation seek better opportunities elsewhere, leaving their aging fathers to cultivate their aging trees.

From the outset, cocoa holdings and incomes from cocoa have been unequally distributed. 'Overlords', chiefs, and, through purchase, wealthy merchants could acquire more land than the peasant farmers. The establishment and maintenance of cocoa plantations requires considerable 'working capital' to command the necessary labour power. Labour has always been relatively scarce in the cocoa belt. 'Overlord' lineages and wealthier men have always been able to gain access to labour on more favourable terms than the peasants could. While most farmers initially had to rely primarily on family labour, 'overlord' lineages were more likely to be able to employ

5 My use of the term "peasant" follows K. W. J. Post, "'Peasantisation' and Rural Political Movements in Western Africa," in *Archives Europeennes de Sociologie*, 13,2 (1972).

6 Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit.

7 Cf. Dupe Olatunbosum and S. O. Olayide, "Effects of the Marketing Board on the Output and Income of Primary Producers," Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER) international conference on the marketing board system, March-April 1971, and H. C. Kriesel, *Cocoa Marketing in Nigeria*, Consortium for Nigerian Rural Development, Michigan State University, 1969.

slaves or *iwofa* (persons required to provide labour services as interest on a debt), and to demand labour services and cash payments from their 'tenants'. In time, the pledging of cocoa trees replaced the pledging of labour services and hired labour replaced slave, *iwofa*, and, to a degree, even family labour. Wealthier farmers, and in particular the 'overlords', have prior access to the available supply of labour (especially migrant labour), and particularly to labour employed on an annual rather than a casual basis (which is cheaper per man-hour, but only feasible for wealthier farmers). Wealthier farmers have more ready access to credit facilities, extension services, and subsidized hybrid plants and chemical sprays.⁸

Despite the emergence of 'landlord-tenant' relations and unequal land-holdings and incomes, class divisions have not developed along clear-cut lines *within* the rural economy. From the outset, it was in the interests of the 'overlords' to settle as many 'tenants' as possible on 'their' land, as their own claims to the land depended on their tenants' beneficial occupation of it, and recognition of their overlordship. Although the uncertainty of tenure did provide lucrative opportunities for arbitrary exactions, the annual tribute (*isakole*) acknowledged the political authority of the 'overlord' over settlers, rather than realizing an economic rent. The *isakole* payable is limited and fixed in cash terms, so that its value has declined with inflation. Most villages pay something of the order of £2 per annum.

Ibadan farmers, unlike most tenant farmers in Ife division, are *omo Ibadan*, 'sons of the soil', whose membership of the community derives from their affiliation to urban Ibadan lineages and is thus independent of their relations with their landlord.⁹ The passing of time has consolidated the rights of farmers to the land which they and their fathers have cultivated. The prestige of the 'overlord' families, notably the Aperin (Obisesan), has declined from one generation to the next, with the passing of prominent individuals such as the late Chief Akinpelu Obisesan,¹⁰ and as new criteria and new definitions of social relations replace the old ones. As one farmer (aged about 60) explained: "Our fathers were willing to perform labour services (*owe*) and give money to the Obisesan. But my generation is no longer

8 R. Galetti, K. D. S. Baldwin and I. O. Dina, *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers* (London, 1956), pp. 144-53; S. M. Essang, "The Distribution of Earnings in the Cocoa Economy of Western Nigeria," (Ph.D. thesis, Michigan State University, 1970 [Ondo circle]); H. van den Driesen, "Patterns of Landholding and Land Distribution in the Ife Division of Western Nigeria," *Africa*, XXI, 1 (Jan. 1971), pp. 43-52; Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit.

9 In Ife division, migrant tenant farmers usually paid 1 cwt. of cocoa per person, or sometimes per acre. Nevertheless, they usually regard their landlords favourably, in sharp contrast to the Ibadan tenants. O. A. Famoriyo, "An Appraisal of Farm Tenancy Problems in Ife Division, Western State, Nigeria," (M.A. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1969), p. 37. See also Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit., on migrant farmers in Ife and Ondo divisions.

10 Chief Obisesan held numerous public offices at the local, regional and national levels, including (appointed) Member of the Legislative Council during the colonial period, and was duly awarded the O.B.E. But he is best remembered as President of the Co-operative Union of Western Nigeria and various other co-operative institutions. In the Akanran area, he is generally recognized as having sought to curb the avarice of other members of his family, a recurrent theme in his diaries.

willing to do so. Our fathers paid for the land. We owe the Obisesan nothing."¹¹

The end of colonial rule meant that local political authority, derived from the regional state government, was determined by the varying fortunes of competing political parties who sought to mobilize support from contending groups in each community, thereby placing the authority of the 'overlord' lineages at risk.

Inequalities have not led to the development of a distinct class of capitalist farmers, differing sharply from their neighbours in their organization of production and economic interests. Economies of scale in production are not significant beyond the size of peasant smallholdings. Wealthier farmers usually own several holdings, rather than large consolidated farms, and divide them among several sons.¹² Income realized from cocoa farming is likely to be invested in more lucrative, urban-oriented ways (trading, education). On the other hand, unsuccessful farmers with insufficient land to make an adequate living will seek new land elsewhere, or urban employment, or ensure that their sons do so, returning to the farm only at weekends, if at all, to meet a part of their needs. Farm labour is recruited from a variety of sources: Hausa, Igbirra and other migrants from the northern states, local farmers in need of ready cash, journeymen-craftsmen from the towns seeking the cash savings with which to buy their equipment. The relative scarcity of rural labour has enabled labourers to share in the proceeds of increasing cocoa prices, and to maintain their share, and even their wage levels, when prices fall. None of these groups of workers are landless proletarians, separated from control of their means of production. Rural wage labour supplements incomes from their own farms, or may even finance the establishment and expansion of their farms or businesses.¹³

Consequently, the backbone of rural society in Ibadan is the independent smallholding peasant. He is permanently resident in a rural hamlet or village. He employs labour on a seasonal basis to complement his own and his family's labour. His land will have been sufficient for him to make a living, but his cocoa acreage, and the yield of his trees, will have declined with his age and his labour power. For him agriculture "is a way of life, not a business for a profit," unlike that minority of 'capitalist' farmers, usually urban-based and often politically well connected, who are able to "carry on agriculture for reinvestment and business, looking on the land as capital and commodity",¹⁴ and to turn to the State for various forms of assistance.

11 Interview, 15 August 1971.

12 S. Berry, "Export Growth, Entrepreneurship and Class Formation in Rural Western Nigeria," in R. E. Dummett and L. Brainerd, eds., *Problems of Rural Development* (Leiden, 1975). Cf. T. Shanin, "Socio-economic Mobility and the Rural History of Russia 1905-30," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 23, 2 (October 1971), pp. 222-35, and *The Awkward Class* (Oxford, 1973); Polly Hill, *Rural Hausa* (Cambridge, 1972).

13 Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-economic Change*, op. cit.

14 R. Redfield, *Peasant Society and Culture*, p. 18 following Eric R. Wolf, "Types of Latin America Peasantry," *American Anthropologist*, LVII, 3, Part 1 (1955). Also see A. Chayanov, *Peasant Economy*, on the distinctive features of 'peasant' as against 'capitalist' farming.

In Mao's terms, as clarified by Alavi,¹⁵ the typical Ibadan farmer is a 'middle peasant'.

The primary basis of social stratification is not the process of economic differentiation among the farming community, but the terms on which individuals are incorporated into the wider political economy. Cocoa farmers, and with them the entire rural community, share a common dependence on the cocoa price for their livelihood. Consequently, they share the experience of exploitation by indigenous and expatriate merchants, and above all, by the marketing boards, of deprivation of amenities relative to urban areas, and of harassment and extortion by politicians, officials and their agents. They have seen the benefits from the cocoa accrue to urban residents, and especially to politicians and their (urban) clients. Within rural communities, the most important source of differentiation lies in turn in people's occupations (e.g., produce buying against farming) and in their relations to the urban sources of political and economic power.

Prior to the Second World War, cocoa farmers were forced to bear the brunt of several dramatic collapses in the cocoa price, in 1918, 1920, 1929 and again in 1937. During this period, Nigerian farmers contributed little to the agitation against the mercantile firms. Initiatives were limited to the produce-buyers and a few educated farmers, to whom the farmers tended to look for leadership, if at all.

Farmers' associations in Nigeria go back to the beginning of the century. J. K. Coker, the merchant-planter who had first developed cocoa cultivation in Nigeria on a large scale at Agege, founded the Agege Planters' Union in 1907. It sought to improve the quality of Nigerian cocoa and to organize the marketing of Agege cocoa independently of the expatriate merchants.¹⁶ In Ibadan, an Agricultural Society was established in 1904 under the sponsorship of the Resident, and made up primarily of educated men who developed an interest in farming (and trading) the new crop.¹⁷

In 1918, Egba farmers rebelled against the imposition of taxation and officialdom in a wartime situation of low produce prices and high import prices. The farmers participation in the Egba Revolt¹⁸ had similar origins and features to the Agbekoya rebellion half a century later.

15 "Analysis of Classes in Chinese Society," *Selected Works* (Peking, 1965), Vol. I; Hamza Alavi, "Peasants and Revolution," *Socialist Register*, 1965.

16 S. O. Adeyeye, "The Western Nigeria Co-operative Movement, 1935-64," (M.A. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1967); and J. B. Webster, "Agege: Plantations and the African Church," Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research (NISER), *Conference Proceedings*, March 1962.

17 C. H. Elgee, *The Evolution of Ibadan* (Lagos, 1914); George Jenkins Jr., "Politics in Ibadan," (Ph.D. thesis, Northwestern University, 1965), pp. 151-55.

18 See C. E. F. Beer, "The Farmer and the State in Western Nigeria," (Ph.D. thesis, University of Ibadan, 1971), p. 394, n. 1, to be published in a revised form by Ibadan University Press in 1975 as *The Politics of Peasant Groups in Western Nigeria*. During the revolt, railway stations and trains were looted, native courts and markets closed, and illegal courts tried those who did not lend their support to the revolt. The *Lagos Weekly Record* (13 July 1918), cited by Beer, pointed out that the farmers provided revenue and labour for the Government and chiefs and in return were fined in these courts, which they had built for "trivial sanitary offence". J. A. Atanda, "The Iseyin-Okeiho Rising of 1916," *Journal of the*

After the price collapse of 1920, with the Nigerian crop notorious on world markets for its poor quality, the Department of Agriculture itself finally took steps to improve quality by establishing co-operative fermentaries. In 1924-25, the Ife and Ilesa Agricultural Societies were reorganized to make collective sales of cocoa, properly fermented and dried by the farmers. The Ibadan society was unwilling to accept the Department's direction—and its insistence on excluding traders from membership.¹⁹

The renewed collapse of world prices in 1929 was met by the amalgamation of the major mercantile firms into the United Africa Company (UAC), who sought to severely curtail the profits and 'abuse' of credit facilities by the middlemen. The Ibadan Planters' Association, apparently an off-shoot of the Agricultural Society, formed the Ibadan Co-operative Planters' Association.²⁰ Its organizing secretary, A. B. Akinloye, was a produce buyer. Other leading figures were I. B. Akinyele, a former Treasurer of the Ibadan Native Authority (then farming), and Akinpelu Obisesan. The ICPA purchased cocoa from the growers to sell in bulk. An attempt to export directly to the USA through Winifried Tete-Ansa's West African Co-operative Producers Ltd.,²¹ ended in the loss of some £11,000 and non-payment for 400 tons of cocoa delivered by the farmers, when Tete-Ansa's companies failed in 1930.²²

In 1933 the Government again took the initiative, establishing village societies, initially in Ibadan division. In 1934 the societies were organized into the Ibadan Co-operative Produce Marketing Union, and in 1935, a Co-operative Ordinance was passed, and a Registrar of co-operatives appointed. Since that date the Registrar has been the key figure in the movement, which has remained dependent on Government regulation, advice, and support.²³ Among the members, leadership has remained in the hands of a small minority of educated farmers.²⁴

Not only does the organization and leadership of co-operatives require men of some education, but co-operative marketing is only economically advantageous to relatively better-off farmers producing a reasonable output of good quality cocoa. They are supplemented by petty buyers (often secretaries and committee members) who receive advances from the co-operative

Historical Society of Nigeria, IV, 4, points out that the colonial authorities always emphasized the single issue of taxation rather than the wider issues of subjection to the colonial State and its agents. This rising took place two years before taxation was introduced; as in the Agbekoya rebellion of 1968-69, native courts were burned, court officers and unpopular chiefs killed, and opposition expressed to the ubiquitous sanitary regulations. As we shall see, tax was the central issue in the Agbekoya rebellion, but not the decisive cause.

- 19 D. H. Brown, "The Development of Co-operative Cocoa Marketing Societies in Nigeria," Third West African Agricultural Conference, Lagos, 1938.
- 20 The Macaulay Papers (University of Ibadan library) have a copy of the ICPA memorandum of association.
- 21 On Tete-Ansa, see W. Tete-Ansa, *Africa at Work* (New York, 1930), and A. G. Hopkins, "Economic Aspects of Political Movements in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, 1918-39," *Journal of African History*, VII, 1 (1966).
- 22 The secretary of the ICPA was subsequently jailed for misappropriation of about £1,000.
- 23 See Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 95-6 on political intentions of subordinating co-operatives to Government control. Cf. pp. 58-108, 291-387, 514-23, for the development of the co-operative movement.
- 24 *Ibid.*, p. 291, Tables 8, 9.

societies. The records of societies are filled with a series of other abuses of office. Secretaries and committee members are also able to use the resources of the co-operatives, such as credit and chemicals, for their own advantage, at the expense of poorer and less active members.²⁵

Since the Second World War, the decline in cocoa output (coupled with serious irregularities and inefficiency) has led to the collapse of most of the smaller produce societies, leaving co-operative activities to the larger societies based in market towns such as Akanran and Araromi, and, in that particular area, to the Obisesan family and their close associates.²⁶

In 1937, after a short period of relatively high prices and intensive competition between the mercantile firms, the price fell again. The firms arranged a 'pool' to prevent competition amongst themselves, to increase profit margins and shift the costs of the fall in price onto the producers and, in particular, onto the middlemen. Whereas farmers in the Gold Coast organized a successful hold-up of cocoa,²⁷ in Nigeria they played little part in the anti-pool agitation. The lead was taken by the Nigerian Youth Movement in close association with the Nigerian Produce Traders' Union. The co-operatives were rather less vocal in their opposition, though they did send delegates to a joint conference of Nigerian and Gold Coast producers.²⁸

The establishment of the Nowell Commission²⁹ split the anti-pool opposition. The Registrar of Co-operative Societies (RCS), argued forcefully against both the 'pool' firms and the practices of the middlemen. The report recommended expansion of the co-operatives with Government support with a view to eliminating the middlemen and leaving the firms intact (albeit without the 'pool'). This was hotly and, in the event, successfully resisted by the produce traders and transporters, and the Nigerian Youth Movement.³⁰ The case of peasant farmers was only put by people, notably the (British) RCS, claiming to speak in their interests.

The wartime produce control scheme secured the expatriate firms' effective monopoly of cocoa marketing, and laid the basis for the post-war

- 25 *Ibid.*, pp. 305-09, 325-29.
- 26 In 1967-68, of 105 listed societies in Ibadan, only 27 marketed produce through the union, 22 of them selling less than 10 tons, and none meeting the officially recognized 'break-even' point of 40 tons; see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., p. 312. The present President of the I.C.P.M.U. is Oluremi Obisesan, a son of the late Chief Akinpelu Obisesan. In the Akanran area, many villagers regard the local co-operatives as a clique led by the Obisesan family.
- 27 One can only guess at the reasons for the different responses of farmers in Nigeria and the Gold Coast. Nigerian farmers explained to Gavin Williams that they were "too poor", and it may well be that the presence in the Gold Coast of a significant number of large farmers, especially chiefs, farming stool land and land on their own account made it easier to initiate action and impose discipline on those poorer farmers more likely to break the hold-up. cf. S. Rhodie, "The Gold Coast Cocoa Hold-up of 1930-31," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, IX (1965), pp. 105-118.
- 28 Obisesan, *Diaries*, 15-22 Jan. 1938. The Registrar had advised against attendance (*Diaries*, 10 Jan. 1938). See also entries for Sept. 1937 — May 1938.
- 29 United Kingdom Government, *Report of Commission of Inquiry on the Marketing of West African Cocoa* (William Nowell, Chairman), Cmnd. 5485, London, 1938.
- 30 On Nigerian opposition to the pool, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., Appendix I, pp. 544-560; Nowell Report, op. cit.; J. Mars, "Extra-territorial Enterprises," in M. Perham, ed., *Mining, Commerce and Finance in Nigeria* (London, 1948).

marketing board system, with its consistent exploitation of the producer. During the war, the co-operatives and non-co-operative farmers unions joined together briefly to oppose the low 1942 price (and Government profits from the control scheme). The post-war continuation of State marketing produced an ill-assorted alliance of American commercial interests, Liverpool firms, and Nigerian traders and nationalists, and the 'Farmers' Committee of British West Africa, (spoken for by the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Economist* on the one hand, and the *West African Pilot* and *Daily Service* on the other). The FCBWA was initiated by middlemen, though by the end of 1945 it did attract some peasant support (including Ibadan co-operators).³¹

The post-war spread of swollen shoot disease in Ibadan division was countered by a drastic policy of cutting-out affected trees. In February 1948, Akanran farmers resolved to resist cutting-out by force, and in March, cutting gangs were barred from Badeku. In July, farmers in the Lagun area attacked cutting gangs. The resistance was organized by the *Maiyegun* Society, which was founded as an urban social club by 1938.³² [Its most prominent leaders were active in urban affairs, Latorera as a popular socialite and Mustafa Alli (*Balogun* and Treasurer) as a trader and money-lender. F. P. Laosun, its secretary, was a clerk.] The farmers and the *Maiyegun* employed several politically prominent lawyers to put their case on various occasions. But although urban traders, clerks and politicians at times gave leadership to less wealthy and less educated farmers in the rural areas, the virulence of the protest depended on the passion of men who derived their entire income from growing cocoa and other crops.

In late 1948, the Government accepted Latorera's proposal that *Maiyegun* representatives should replace N.A. officials accompanying Agriculture Department teams to the farms, and oversee the process of cutting out and the payment of compensation, to the chagrin of the Ibadan N.A. whose customary authority over the villagers was thus threatened.

Cutting proceeded until the Society split in 1949, for obscure reasons. Latorera, deposed as Society president, formed the *Maiyegun* League. Post and Jenkins³³ suggest that "this represented a cleavage between the more wealthy leaders, often cocoa middlemen, who found co-operation with the Government lucrative, and those who identified themselves more closely with the farmers". But there is evidence³⁴ that the Society itself was willing to respond to farmers' criticisms of abuses by its representatives, did protect the interests of particular farmers, and commanded a significant organization in the rural areas.

31 See Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., Appendix II, pp. 561-73.

32 Ibid., pp. 144-75, and K. W. J. Post and George Jenkins, *The Price of Liberty* (Cambridge, 1973), pp. 56-58. During the same period, the Nigerian Farmers' Union, organized from Colony Province by Oladipo Akeredolu-Ale, operated with some success in all the kola and cocoa producing areas in Yorubaland, bar Ibadan. Akeredolu-Ale was closely associated with nationalist and commercial interests, though not at the expense of his farmer members. For a study of the Nigerian Farmers' Union, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 119-43, 174-82.

33 *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., p. 58.

34 Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 159-62.

After the split, resistance to cutting-out, both forcible and passive, resumed, and riots developed against the Society's representatives with 'cutting gangs' at Olojuoro and Asejire. The League recruited Fred Anyiam, and Ibo NCNC leader, as its political adviser and became drawn into the turbulent political conflicts in Ibadan at that time, which centred on popular agitation against Chief Salami Agbaje.³⁵ The Society, which supported Agbaje (partly in recognition of his previous support) rapidly declined in influence. In 1950, the authorities shifted from a policy of cutting out to one of containing the spread of swollen shoot within a 'cordon sanitaire'.

The process of decolonization required the dismantling of the apparatus of Indirect Rule, and the transfer of power to middle-class politicians at the regional level. Local government was reformed along electoral, territorial and bureaucratic lines, and the ancient Ibadan chiefs found themselves displaced, initially by literate members of a predominantly Christian elite. Not only were the chiefs and *mogajis* (family heads) deprived of their positions in local administration, customary courts and tax collection, but the illiterate craftsmen, petty traders and farmers found themselves *less* able than before to participate effectively in civic affairs.

The resentment of the *mekunnu*³⁶ (common people) was effectively exploited for electoral ends by Adegoke Adelabu. Adelabu was the founder, in 1953, of the Ibadan Tax Payers' Association, named in Yoruba, *Mabolaje*³⁷ (lit. don't spoil the honour—of Ibadan), which allied itself with the regional opposition party, the NCNC. Its founders included several men who had long been active in Ibadan's political associations, and four prominent members of the *Maiyegun* League, which during Adelabu's lifetime held 6 (of 10-15) places on the *Mabolaje* executive.³⁸

Adelabu succeeded in identifying himself as a man of the people by his flamboyant actions and oratory. The *mekunnu* looked to Adelabu to wrest favours for them away from what they regarded as a clique of educated and wealthy men who had come to dominate civic and regional affairs in the previous decade, and who wanted to preserve opportunities for themselves and keep the masses at arm's length.

The rationalizing reforms, to which Adelabu orchestrated popular opposition, subjected the *mekunnu* to increased direct taxation (to finance universal primary education), and to harassment and extortion by tax clerks, court officials, sanitary inspectors and town planning officials. These exactions

35 On the 'Agbaje' agitation, see Post and Jenkins, *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., pp. 54-101; H. L. M. Butcher, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Allegations . . . against Chief Salami Agbaje . . . and . . . the Ibadan and District Native Authority* (Lagos, 1951); Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 164-73.

36 For an analysis of the politics of the *mekunnu* and the use of the term, see Gavin Williams, "The Political Consciousness of the Ibadan Poor," in E. de Kadt and G. Williams, eds., *Sociology and Development* (London, 1974).

37 See Post and Jenkins' biography of Adelabu, *The Price of Liberty*, op. cit., which provides a detailed analysis of political events in Ibadan between 1950 and 1958 in the context of the process of decolonization. On the establishment of the *Mabolaje*, see pp. 165-79.

38 Post and Jenkins, *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., p. 170; Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., p. 167.

fell most heavily on the rural population. As a farmer pointed out to one of the authors in 1971, Adelabu opposed precisely those things against which the *Agbekoya* rebelled ten years after his death.

The *Mabolaje* had swept into power in Ibadan in March 1954, winning 51 out of 73 seats. They consolidated this domination at successive federal, regional and local elections up to 1958, when splits in the party leadership following Adelabu's death, and the systematic imposition of the superior powers of the regional government, eroded its domination of the Ibadan electorate.³⁹

The *Mabolaje's* success at the polls was even more marked in rural than in urban areas, except in 1954 in the case of several wards where they had not yet found suitable candidates. Thus in March 1954 Akinpelu Obisesan at Akanran was one of six unopposed Action Group candidates. But in July, at a by-election occasioned by Obisesan's taking up a customary court judgeship, his candidate was defeated by Adelabu's man. As Obisesan wrote in his diary on 30 July:

... All the villages under Aperin [i.e. Obisesan] and Elese-Erin and Amosun people also the Hausa community turned to his [Adelabu's] side—This is routing defeat to me...

The introduction of electoral politics enabled the despised *araoko* of the bush to cast their votes against their overlords, and allowed the small man to reject the assumption of leadership by "those big men who know the secrets of the government and want to keep them for themselves". But even in the rural areas, NCNC leadership, down to the nomination of councillors, remained firmly in urban (and specifically Adelabu's hands. In the Akanran area at least, the NCNC councillors and committee members were invariably men with some occupation (crafts, petty trading) in addition to farming.⁴⁰

On 25 March 1958, Adegoke Adelabu was killed in a car accident.⁴¹ More than 75,000 people are estimated to have gathered for his burial the next day. After the burial, a crowd of 'over 6,000' people paraded through the city, stoning public buildings and attacking prominent Action Groupers. The next day, violence began on a much wider scale in the rural villages. In the end at least 18 people had been killed and over 300 arrested. The confusion caused by the numbers arrested stretched the capacity of the courts to the limit, and many accused were discharged or acquitted for lack of identification. Nevertheless 18 men were eventually executed for the various murders.

39 *Mabolaje* electoral domination was achieved on a very low poll (18.1%). Even in 1958, the number of votes cast for the NCNC-*Mabolaje* Grand Alliance never reached 50% of registered votes. For details of election results in Ibadan between 1954 and 1961 see Post and Jenkins, *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., pp. 198, 239, 306; R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (Princeton, 1963), p. 314, n.61; J. P. Mackintosh, *Nigerian Government and Politics* (London, 1966), pp. 508-44.

40 Interviews, Akanran district, 1971.

41 This account of the aftermath of Adelabu's death is taken from the original typescript of *The Price of Liberty*, which Ken Post kindly showed to one of the authors. Unfortunately, the abridged version eventually published (pp. 428-49) leaves out much of the significant detail.

The attacks were instigated by local NCNC leaders, who blamed the Action Group for Adelabu's death, and were directed against the property and persons of the Action Group, tax clerks, and the Government (but not mission) schools.⁴² Attacks took place in towns and villages in different parts of the Division. In one case, farmers attacked Egbeda, intent on killing all Action Groupers. After they were repulsed, they killed one Adesina at a nearby village. Here it appears that Action Groupers were associated with a major market town, and home of the local *bale* and 'overlord' lineage.

Attacks on persons were clearly the result of specific grievances. After killing one Bello Aiki, member of a tax assessment committee, the mob dispersed shouting, "Bello, get up and assess me now", and, "Ade, Ade, Ade". Damage to property followed clear patterns which Post and Jenkins⁴³ suggest followed the forms of punishment for offences of a political nature of pre-colonial Ibadan.

After Adelabu's death, his political inheritance was contested for by several Ibadan lawyer politicians, notably Adeoye Adisa and Mojid Agbaje. Only a few weeks after his death, the central executive of the NCNC-*Mabolaje* Grand Alliance was enlarged from 14 to 38. The majority of the new members were lawyers, contractors and produce buyers.⁴⁴ The former *Mabolaje* stalwarts were divided among the contending factions: the *Maiyegun* finally lost all political significance.

Between 1958 and 1965 the farmers lacked effective political representation within the Ibadan political system. Within the wider regional arena, recognized farmers' unions were drawn from the wealthier, educated farmers, often urban residents engaged in non-farming occupations. The leaders have been part-time farmers at best, concerned to retain the goodwill and patronage of outside political leaders to secure and supplement their income and status.⁴⁵

Within the rural areas local power again derived directly from the regional government. In Adelabu's lifetime the ruling Action Group dissolved the NCNC-controlled council between 1956 and 1958, and used its jurisdiction over 'law and order' to harass its opponents. From the Action Group victory until 1965, the local council in Ibadan was in the same hands as the regional government. Six rural district councils were set up in 1961 to extend party patronage and political control, and came under Action Group control. The 'overlord' families, repudiated by the *Mabolaje* voters, began to recover much of their authority—albeit at the pleasure of the ruling party.

In 1965, farmers witnessed extravagant spending on party patronage (in the name of agricultural credit), followed by a vicious cut in the cocoa

42 Farmers were unhappy about universal primary education, which the AG had introduced, as schooling deprived them of the labour power of their children — to very little good, given the low standards of rural schools. More concretely they resented the capitation tax imposed to pay for schooling, the first in a series of increases in direct taxation.

43 *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., pp. 437-41.

44 Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties*, op. cit., pp. 308-09.

45 Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 184-256, 407-36, 523-33.

price subsequent to the elections. This contributed to the fury of the anti-Government rioting in parts of the Western State (but not rural Ibadan division) in late 1965.⁴⁶

Under military rule, local administration was placed in the care of Sole Administrators, who in due course appointed local leaders for the rural districts (rather than, in most cases, living in the rural districts). The four delegates for Ibadan South-East, for example, included two Obisesan, one of them a magistrate in Ondo, and a produce-buyer who had formerly been an M.P.

In late 1968, the military Government was confronted with agitation against tax payments and other exactions.⁴⁷ The riots which developed were preceded by a series of constitutional appeals to the Military Governor and the Olubadan and his chiefs. The authorities failed to recognize the determination and desperation of the farmers; the farmers lacked institutionalized channels through which they could communicate with the Government. Virtually through to the end of the conflict, and despite the findings of Justice Ayoola's report, commissioned by the Government itself, both the Government and 'informed opinion' continued to blame the agitation on the usual handful of agitators. In particular, suspicion was focused on the politicians, especially former NNDP leaders, who had been ousted by the military coup of 1966, regarded themselves as under-represented in the state government and put their hopes in agitation for an Oyo state (which would include Ibadan) and which they could expect to dominate.⁴⁸

Despite the unwillingness of the authorities and the press to recognize the farmers' capacity for autonomous action, a brief examination of the farmers' plight only too clearly explains the determination of their resistance. The cocoa price, which had already dropped from the plateau of the fifties (£160 per ton in 1960), was savagely slashed from £120 to £65 for the 1965-66 cocoa season. The consequent economic crisis was accentuated by the complete breakdown of law and order following the abortive regional elections

46 See. K. W. J. Post and Michael Vickers, *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria* (London, 1973), pp. 229-33.

47 The account of the *Agbekoya* rebellion which follows is taken from G. P. Williams, "Political Consciousness," and Beer, "Farmer and State," pp. 388-407, 438-506, 533-542. Appendix V, pp. 585-602 gives a chronology of main events, biographical information on *Agbekoya* members in Ibadan division and the text of a recorded apala song, "Tafa Adeoye". See also Nigeria, Western State, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Civil Disturbances which Occurred... in... December 1968...* (Ayoola Report), Ibadan, 1969. Newspapers consulted were *Daily Times*, *Nigerian Tribune*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Sketch*, *Sunday Star*. Baba Oluwide, *Agbe-koya*, pamphlet published in Lagos in 1970, contains the text of an interesting interview with *Agbekoya* leader, Tafa Adeoye, which is marred by the third last paragraph which is at least partly invention. Oluwide's introduction is interesting but thoroughly confused; the comments on the *Agbekoya* itself and mainly wishful thinking.

48 On post-coup Western Nigeria politics, see Billy J. Dudley, "Western Nigeria and the Nigerian Crisis," in S. K. Panter-Brick, ed., *Nigerian Politics and Military Rule: Prelude to the Civil War* (London, 1970), pp. 94-110. In Ibadan, NCNC politicians were also by-passed by the Sole Administrator, who looked to Chief Lanlehin and other former Action Group leaders for advice. Elsewhere, too, NCNCers felt themselves excluded from power.

in 1965. As the then Military Governor, the late Lt.-Col. F. A. Fajuyi, declared in his budget speech of 2 April 1966:⁴⁹

Reference must be made to the charged political atmosphere which was the aftermath of the general elections, to the fairly widespread destruction of lives and properties, and to the general breakdown of law and order everywhere until the situation was retrieved in January 1966. Nevertheless, considerable harm had been done to the general economy. There was a general recession in trading activity with serious consequences especially on distributive trade, and consequently, tax collection was disturbed. There was also reported cases of destruction of general merchandise and even of export trade...

We all know very well that in an agricultural country based principally on cocoa production demands for increased production requires a modicum of peace of mind and happiness on the part of farmers, which was certainly absent in the rural areas for a considerable part of last year. Added to this unfortunate situation was the unfavourable weather conditions, all of which culminated in a very low yield of about 160,000 tons of cocoa, the life-blood of the economy...

In fact it may be said that at no time in the history of cocoa production in Nigeria has the combination of adverse weather, low producer price and political crisis created such a depressing psychological effect on the minds of the cocoa farmers...

The farmers saw themselves exploited and oppressed by a Government which refused to pay fair prices for their cocoa, sent corrupt officials to persecute them, denied them the benefits and amenities which they had been promised, and now demanded higher taxes when the farmers simply could not earn enough to pay them. In 1968-69 agitation was concentrated in those areas where cocoa production had long been in decline, because farmers had lacked the incentives and resources to cut out and replant old trees, which leached away the soil fertility—to which must be added, in Ibadan, the ravages of swollen shoot.

Agitation first began in September 1968 in Oyo against the misuse of education rates. Increases in tax assessments and water rates provoked wider opposition, which spread rapidly into Ibadan, Egba, Remo, Ijebu and Osun divisions. The arrest of tax defaulters was the main spark for attacks on the authorities. Palaces were attacked and burnt where *oba's* were accused of calling for soldiers to assist tax collection and also misusing public funds. District council offices and officials were attacked. In several areas, these issues provided opportunities for paying off political scores, mainly against Action Group supporters.

In Ibadan, the state capital, and, in due course, the centre of the rebellion, farmers from Akanran met the Olubadan on 6 November to protest against taxes. After further marches of farmers, Governor Adebayo toured the Ibadan districts in an attempt to persuade farmers to pay taxes. At Akanran farmers interpreted his insistence that they pay taxes as requiring that they leave their dead unburied, their feet unshod, their children without schooling and their children unnamed if necessary to meet the taxes. Here and elsewhere farmers

49 Cited in the Ayoola Report, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.

declared that they were not afraid to fight the Government rather than pay taxes, and the Governor left Akanran to jeers of 'ole' (thief).⁵⁰

On 25 November, farmers attacked the staff and offices of the council at Iyana Offa (Ibadan East) and attacked rate clerks in the city itself. The next day armed columns converged on Ibadan from the south and south-west, and drove away council workers from the city council offices at Mapo Hall. Combined army/police units fired on them; ten men were killed, and eleven wounded. Council officials fled from the farms to the towns. At a meeting with the District Officer on 6 December, farmers' representatives declared that they could not pay more than 30 shillings per annum tax, objected to the method of selection of tax collectors and assessment committees, and complained that local leaders were 'playing politics' to the detriment of the people. Despite assurances on both sides, council officials who returned to the districts on the 9th were driven back, and could not even be reinstated with police support on the 19th. One official was killed at Idi-Ayunre (Ibadan South). For the moment, the farmers were free of taxes and officials.⁵¹

Despite the violence of the farmers', as well as the Government's, actions during this period, the movement aimed to secure concessions to its demands by agitation, as evidenced by the relative calm which ensued in January when the Government appointed Justice Ayoola to enquire into the rioting. The drafting and presentation of petitions and conduct of negotiations were central to these aims, and required experienced and literate assistance and guidance. Thus, on this as on other occasions, prominent lawyer-politicians acted as 'brokers' for and advisers to the farmers. From November 1968, an increasingly close relationship developed between Chief Mojid Agbaje, the former NCNC leader, and leaders of the farmers' protest movement. Farmers' representatives from Ibadan and, in time, other areas, came to meet regularly on Sundays in Agbaje's compound at Ayeye, Ibadan.⁵²

Although the Ayoola report accepted farmers' evidence of their grievances, it did not recommend reductions in the tax burden. The Government announced certain minor policy changes and promised some long-term benefits,

50 Interview, farmers at Akanran, August 1971.

51 Meanwhile unrest had spread to all the adjacent divisions. At Ede (Osun), Isara (Remo), Ijebu-Igbo (Ijebu), crowds (apparently from the towns) attacked the palaces of the *oba*, who were accused, *inter alia*, of calling for soldiers to ensure tax collection. In Egbo Obafemi and the surrounding villages of rural Egba division, agitation was initiated by the *Parakoyi* (market chiefs) against the payment of market fees to the local council, who had taken over their prerogatives. This produced eleven deaths, and large numbers of arrests, the burning of council offices and the attempted murder of Alhaji Adegbenro, former Action Group leader and a State Commissioner, and reputedly a bitter opponent of the Alake of Abeokuta.

52 It was this group which took the name *Egbe Agbekoya* (Yor: the farmers renounce suffering). Other names used by farmers' groups were *Mekunnu Parapo* (Yor: the people united), *Talaka Parapo* (Yor: the poor united), *Mekunnu Taku* (Yor: the people are adamant) and *Olorunkoya* (Yor: God rejects suffering). On the differences, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., p. 447. On Chief Agbaje, see Beer, "Farmer and State" pp. 440-447 and Post and Jenkins, *Price of Liberty*, op. cit., pp. 443-45. In 1968, Adeoye Adisa, Agbaje's long-standing rival for popular support in Ibadan, was a State Commissioner, and thus in no position to challenge Agbaje's influence on the farmers.

but did not meet the farmers' major demands. On 19 May, at a meeting with certain *Agbekoya* and *Mekunnu Parapo* leaders (others having refused to attend), the Governor reached a 'compromise' which would maintain the basic direct tax rate of £3.5.0. The next day Agbaje was detained, remaining in custody until 4 September. To the Governor's dismay, farmers did not accept the compromise agreement and pay their taxes, nor cease their meetings.

On 1 July,⁵³ tax collectors, accompanied by heavily-armed teams of riot police, were dispatched to at least four of the district council headquarters. At Moniya (Ibadan North), troops intercepted armed farmers who had sacked the council offices and set up roadblocks. There, over 300 farmers were arrested and some severely beaten. Rioters attacked police at Ogunmakin (Ibadan South-West). The major clash took place at Olorunda, near Akanran, where farmers from the surrounding villages mounted a road block and ambushed a force of some 200 police. *At least* three police and 13 farmers were killed. The troops sacked Akanran (whose inhabitants, by and large, had not supported the *Agbekoya*), and farmers fled into the bush, and through the bush to the city. On 4 July, a prominent chief was killed at Akufo (Ibadan West) for paying tax.

The farmers now withdrew to the rural hamlets, from where they survived mobile police and army unit searches and looting of the villages. In the villages, the *bale* bore the brunt of the farmers' anger, and the *bale* of most of the main market towns and villages, including Akanran, Araromi, Ijaiye, Moniya, Ikereku and Akufo, fled hurriedly to Ibadan. Farmers emerged to fire the council buildings at Omi-Adio (Ibadan West, 1 August), Akanran (4 August) and Iyana Offa (Ibadan East, 13 August).⁵⁴ In Ibadan itself, confusion reigned. Over 1,000 arrests had been made. The court trying 352 rioters arrested at Moniya could not even identify many of the accused, and separate them from numerous other people in custody, though they did succeed in dispatching 125 Moniya farmers to two years' hard labour. At least two Moniya defendants were reported to have died in custody.⁵⁵

On 16 September, the *Agbekoya* responded by attacking Agodi Federal prison adjoining Ibadan Garrison and within a hundred yards of State House, in broad daylight, and releasing 464 prisoners.⁵⁶ Ibadan villages were sealed to outsiders by the farmers and a series of pitched battles took place in various parts of the division between them and better-armed, but often terrified, police and army. At the same time, farmers attacked and burnt police posts and council offices in the district towns in Egba division.

53 Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 456-58, 577-78; *Daily Times*, 1-7, 12 July; *Nigerian Tribune*, 5, 8, 12, 17 July. On 1 July, Ogbomoso farmers murdered the Soun and three of his chiefs, cut off communications, and blockaded the roads until the next day. On the Ogbomoso *Agbekoya*, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., p. 406, n. 2, pp. 596-97. See also *Daily Times*, 12-15, 19 Feb., 4 March, 24 May, 2-4 July 1969; *Nigerian Tribune*, 5 July 1969.

54 *Nigerian Tribune*, 4, 6, 15 Aug. 1969. See also reports on 24 Aug. and 4 Sept. Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 458, 588.

55 *Daily Times*, 6, 9 Aug., 2, 13, 16 Sept., 1969.

56 See *Daily Times*, 17 Sept. 1962, for dramatic accounts of this incident.

For six days farmers held off police and troops in the villages surrounding Egbeda, and at least 24 people were killed when they ambushed a police patrol on the Ibadan-Ife road. On the 22nd, the Governor declared an 'Act of Rebellion' in the Ibadan area, and declared that he would 'crush' the rebellion. Government forces pressed on from Egbeda to Tafa Adeoye's hamlet, which they now knew to be the centre of the rebellion (but without capturing Adeoye).⁵⁷

Initially, the press⁵⁸ and the Government blamed the riots on what Governor Adebayo called the "evil machinations of a few individuals". But its inability to suppress resistance called this view into question. Following the lead of the *Daily Times*,⁵⁹ Chief Awolowo, former leader of the Action Group and Federal Commissioner for Finance, said on 8 August in Ibadan that the Government should probe the cause of the riots and suggested that the farmers might have reasons for their actions.⁶⁰ On 25 September, the Olubadan and chiefs, at the suggestion of two Ibadan-born State Commissioners, Dr. Olunloyo and Adeoye Adisa, called for a halt to police raids in Ibadan division.⁶¹

Chief Awolowo pre-empted rivals and arranged a secret meeting with Tafa Adeoye, Folarin Idowu and other *Agbekoya* leaders near Akanran.⁶² On 9 October, representatives of the farmers stated their grievances at a public meeting with the Olubadan.⁶³ Tax raids were halted and most of the farmers' demands were accepted in an announcement on 14 October. These were agreed to by the farmers in a subsequent meeting with Awolowo at Ajao village (Ibadan South-East) the next day.

Tax was reduced to £2 per annum. There was an amnesty for all farmers, except those charged with murder. All local government staff were to be withdrawn from the villages, and the rural district councils administered from Ibadan. Motor park and market fees would be suspended, and could only be introduced if councils showed evidence of capital expenditure on them. No special rates could be levied without the express permission of the people concerned. The jurisdiction of town planning authorities would be restricted to modern lay-outs. Non-farmers would be excluded from the farmers' union. The Government would appoint 'representative' advisory

57 *Daily Times*, 24 Sept. — 6 Oct.; *Nigerian Tribune*, 22 Sept. 1969; Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 588, 592, 593.

58 See, for example, *Nigerian Tribune*, identified with the views of the banned Action Group, for 3, 4, 5, 6, 8 July; *Daily Times* 3 July 1969.

59 For example, 8 July, 6 Aug., 18 Sept. 1969.

60 *Nigerian Tribune*, 8 Aug.; *Daily Times*, 9 Aug. 1969.

61 *Daily Times*, 26 Sept. 1969.

62 Awolowo gave a detailed account of his actions regarding the tax agitation since Nov. 1968 in the *Nigerian Tribune*, 14 October 1969. (Also *Daily Times*, 14 October.) The pro-Awolowo *Tribune* had opposed the conciliatory proposals of the Olubadan and Chiefs on 27 Sept., apparently continuing to identify the rebellion (and proposals for conciliation) with its political enemies. Awolowo went over the head of the Military Governor in arranging the meeting, and then informed him of the arrangement.

63 *Daily Times*, 10 Oct.; *Nigerian Tribune*, 11 Oct. 1969.

committees. The assets of local government staff would be investigated. There would be an end to tax raids and to army and police patrols.⁶⁴

Two significant demands were not met. The first was the demand for a Yoruba Central State, put to loud cheers at the meeting at the Olubadan's palace on 9 October by two farmers' representatives, but, according to Awolowo (whose political opponents were the major proponents of the idea) denounced by Adeoye as being of concern to politicians but not to farmers.⁶⁵ The second was the demand for an increase in the cocoa price to £250 per ton. Tafa had declared to Awolowo on 5 October that if this demand was not met, the farmers would organize a hold-up of cocoa.

At the outset, rural political leadership was not limited to the small farmers. The four men who signed an early petition from Olode (Ibadan South) included two former party thugs, one of whom was an occasional labourer with no farm of his own. In Akanran, farmers who got together to discuss what to do about the extortionate tax demands first approached leading figures in Akanran for advice, including a very wealthy farmer and a trader in kola nuts, who were among those who in December negotiated with the authorities for the return of the officials to the rural areas. But already small farmers without previous political experience or non-farm occupations had become active leaders in the agitation. Typical of them was Tafa Adeoye. He came from an undistinguished tenant lineage, had neither formal nor Koranic education, had a reasonable holding of cocoa, but could not be described as prosperous. He came to prominence when Governor Adebayo addressed the farmers, where he reportedly declared that they would have to kill him before he would pay his tax. He was a typical 'middle peasant' who articulated the farmers' determination to resist further exactions and displayed the courage necessary for such resistance.⁶⁶

Within the *Agbekoya*, leadership tended initially to be dispersed among the different district council areas. Overall leadership, to the extent that it existed, lay originally with Adegoke Akekueju (Ibadan West) and Folarin Idowu (Ibadan South-East), both small farmers, rather than with Adeoye.⁶⁷

The compromise agreed with the Governor in May 1969 discredited most of the established leadership. At this point, leadership fell to those willing and determined to resist the Government, rather than those concerned to negotiate the best possible compromise. The battle for Akanran on 1 July established the leadership of Tafa Adeoye who led the farmers in the ambush on that day.

64 *Daily Times*, 16 Oct. 1969.

65 Adeoye himself declared to the *Daily Times* (5 Nov. 1969):

State or no state, we are not interested. All we want is better prices for our cocoa. It is politicians who are crying for the creation of states and that has nothing to do with us.

This view was consistently repeated by farmers in 1970 and 1971. On this issue, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 491-92.

66 Interviews with farmers, Akanran division, 1971; Ayoola Report, op. cit., p. 49; Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 598-600.

67 On conflict among *Agbekoya* leaders, see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., pp. 447, 451-54, 460-76.

The ambushes were carried out largely by the hunters, who had the necessary skills and equipment (dane guns and *ju-ju* charms) and who are customarily organized in their own guilds. They were supported by farmers armed with cutlasses. Military units were organized separately in each area, with messengers linking farmers in each of the Ibadan districts. During the final stage of the rebellion, the march on Agodi prison and resistance to police attacks were organized from Tafa Adeoye's own village, near Fada, which lies between the Ife and Akanran roads. From here troops were deployed to various parts of Ibadan division, and contact maintained with *Agbekoya* elsewhere. Farmers from Osun division supported the resistance at Egbeda, while some Ibadan 'troops' were sent to Egba division to assist in the diversion of Government forces from Ibadan.

The basis of support for the *Agbekoya* lay in the independent small-holding farmers, permanently resident in the rural areas, and lacking the access of the wealthy to the urban sources of political and economic influence. They are overwhelmingly Muslim and illiterate, and drawn from the same class, and even the same villages, which had once resisted cutting-out under the *Maiyegun*, and had acclaimed Adelabu, and attacked the local Action Groupers at his death.⁶⁸

In Ibadan division at least, it was the 'tenants' who took part in the armed resistance, and the 'overlords' (including, of course, the *bale*) who, with some individual exceptions, did not. For example, few of the residents of Akanran (mainly Obisesan and their close followers) supported the rebellion, while support was almost universal in the surrounding hamlets. The *bale* and their families, and members of appointed Caretaker Committees were opposed for supporting the Government on whom their local authority ultimately depended. They either withdrew from the villages together with the wealthier farmers, or fled in fear of their lives. Many farmers report that, as a result of the rebellion, their oppressive 'landlords' have finally been put in their place, and can no longer attempt to exploit their 'tenants'. Similarly, at a more exalted level, the *oba* and chiefs were a major object of hostility. One *oba* and several chiefs were murdered; others had to flee for their lives. In Ibadan city itself, *Agbekoya* marchers sang war songs calling for the blood of several senior chiefs by name. Because they advised farmers to pay their taxes and supported the Government, they were seen by the farmers as betraying their people.

The rebellion arose out of, and also encouraged the development of, a specifically rural political consciousness, expressing ideas typical of an independent (middle) peasantry. Farmers emphasize that those who took part were 'real farmers' (*agbe gidi*). This concept implies rural residence and farming as one's sole, or at the least primary, occupation, but also a reasonable holding of land and cocoa trees. A man without sufficient land to support himself normally would be despised as 'riff-raff'. Together with

68 See map in *ibid.*, p. 480. Places mentioned in Post and Jenkins' account of the 1958 Adelabu riots include Omi-Adio, Egbeda and Olorunda, which featured prominently ten years later.

this goes an emphasis on the ultimate dependence of the whole society, indeed of all societies, on the farmer who provides people with their food. Farmers emphasize the virtues of hard work and backbreaking labour, especially their own, and refer contemptuously to the 'semi-literates who roam about the town doing nothing' (when they could be providing the farmers with much-needed labour).

Peasant consciousness includes an understanding of the appropriation of resources from the peasants through taxes, the exactions of corrupt officials, cheating by produce buyers and most particularly through the marketing board surpluses. In turn, these resources are seen to provide schooling, amenities (and graft) for urban residents, particularly the rich and the powerful. The resources which are specifically allocated to the farmers by the Government are seen to be appropriated by corrupt officials, politicians and the so-called representatives of the farmers. It is to distinguish themselves from the recipients of this assistance, "who claim to be farmers but are not", that the farmers emphasise that *they* are the *real* farmers, as can be seen by the fact that they live on the farm and not in the town.

After the Government had reached an agreement with the farmers, they incorporated the *Agbekoya* leadership into their own institutions. Under the 'legal' title of *Agbe Parapo* (United farmers), *Agbekoya* mounted road blocks to collect taxes on the Government's behalf. The *Agbekoya* leaders were incorporated into the Government-sponsored Farmers' Union, whose leaders regarded, and had condemned, the *Agbekoya* as 'hooligans'.

Adeoye's recognition by the Government threatened his position with his supporters. He was rumoured to have accepted large sums of money from the Government, and did begin building a storey-house in Ibadan, and acquired a decrepit Cadillac. The *Agbekoya* was riven by factionalism, and in November Adeoye was appealing to the Governor to deal ruthlessly with 'saboteurs' and 'gangsters', many of them former *Agbekoya* members who toured the villages denouncing his leadership and urging farmers to fight for their original demand of 30/- tax.

At least some *Agbekoya* leaders became a law unto themselves in the rural areas of Ibadan division, where they settled disputes (including marital cases) in defiance of the courts and village *bale* and saw to the collection of taxes. They allegedly seized women whom they returned to their former husbands, imposed tolls on motorists for bridges they built when the existing bridges were washed away, and demanded money from the *bale* and others who had paid their taxes or been forced by them to flee to the town during the rebellion, before they were allowed to harvest their crops or even return to their farms. One leader (*not* Tafa Adeoye) was accused of conspiring with forest guards to appropriate local timber resources.

Adeoye's position was weakened by the increasingly public rift between Chief Awolowo and Governor Adebayo, and the political rivalry between Chief Agbaie and Chief Awolowo, on whom he was increasingly dependent. In May 1970, a large number of *Agbekoya* leaders left the Farmers' Union. An 'Independent Farmers' Association' was set up by Agbaje, and although

Adeoye (apparently at Agbaje's instigation) became President, he did not remain so for long. He declared to the farmers, perhaps at Awolowo's bidding, that they should publicly support his patron, Chief Awolowo. This split the movement, and Adeoye's faction tried to regain lost ground by campaigning for an increase in the cocoa price to £250. There were rumours of plans to hold up cocoa and burn it in the stores, which failed to materialize, and 'Agbekoya' demonstrations spread to the prosperous cocoa-growing areas of Ondo (where the price was a more crucial issue than taxes). The Government failed to increase the cocoa price. Rumours of impending unrest (carried to the Governor by his rivals, notably Folarin Idowu) led to Adeoye's arrest and detention for six months. This evoked little response from the farmers, though some 40 were arrested when they marched to the city.

In his home ground (Ibadan South-East), Adeoye retains his prestige and authority. He is addressed by the traditional form of address to an *oba*, 'Kabiyesi', and settles disputes, domestic and political, among his followers—rivalling, and even displacing at times, the eroded authority of the *bale* at Akanran. He continues to seek the support of the farmers, in bitter competition with Agbaje's IFA (now affiliated to the United Labour Congress). But he lacks the literacy and the experience to operate effectively in the urban world of partisan politics.

'Agbekoya' agitation has revived sporadically. *West Africa* reported on 25 February 1972 the arrest of 75 farmers who, opposing the return of officials to the rural areas, attacked a police post at Egba Odeda. On 17 September 1973, *New Nigerian* reported heavily armed guards at Abeokuta Magistrates Court, where two farmers were charged with calling themselves *Agbekoya* members at the Alake's palace on 4 September, and demanding that the police post at Ogunmakin, closed down in 1969, should not be reopened, that sanitary inspectors should not return to the districts, that there should be no *bale* in Egba villages, and that the *bale* should not collect tax.

Thus, the farmers continue to resist the imposition of an exploitative officialdom. Taxes are limited to £2 a head in the rural areas. Some roads have been improved, notably the road running from Ibadan through Akanran and Araromi to Ago Owoye, though elsewhere the absence of adequate feeder roads gives rise to bitter complaints. Trade has declined still further. Traders and craftsmen who fled the villages during the fighting have found better opportunities in Ibadan and not returned. Only four tailors, all men who farm locally, remain in Akanran whose market once supported forty men. In late 1971, farmers were awaiting with hope and suspicion the Government's scheme (in association with the World Bank) to assist farmers to replant their trees. It seemed likely that farmers with large holdings and influence in the co-operatives (through whom the loan was being arranged) would benefit, and in the Akanran area that means the Obisesan and their close associates.

In 1973, the Federal Military Government took over responsibility for

fixing produce prices and taxes from state governments.⁶⁹ Henceforth prices would be fixed with no trading surpluses in view. The *Guidelines for the Third National Development Plan, 1975-80*⁷⁰ gave first priority to agricultural development. However, the *Guidelines* also regard State inputs (extension, credit and marketing facilities) as the major source of rural development. They plan an extension of State involvement in marketing and production, despite the proven inability of the State to execute these functions efficiently. The State plans to buy up large areas of land to lease to farmers as "Agricultural Estates", on which extension services and agricultural inputs will be "easier to provide".⁷¹

Recent State loans for agricultural development appear likely to provide a few individuals with opportunities for commercial profits.⁷² Producer prices for export crops have been increased. In September 1974 the price was raised to N550 per ton (£380)—but this remained well below current world prices (£720 in London, after the Nigerian price rise).⁷³ State policy seems to increase opportunities for the few to appropriate public resources committed to agriculture, while denying the farmer the full return on the price realized from the sale of his product.

The political effectiveness of grass-roots peasant movements is limited to circumstances where direct action is possible and appropriate. Although tax was the central issue in the conflict, several farmers have said that it was not so much tax that led to fighting as the tax collectors, town planning officials and sanitary inspectors. But tax had to be central, because tax collection "is the occasion when the all-powerful Government has for once to 'come down' to the people and ask for funds".⁷⁴ Thus taxes in the case of the *Agbekoya*, like resistance to cutting-out in the case of the *Maiyegun*, provided farmers with a clear issue and an effective sanction on which to confront the authorities and repudiate the legitimacy of their demands.

Like other populist movements,⁷⁵ the *Maiyegun* and the *Agbekoya* sought to correct abuses by using direct action. Their objectives did not extend beyond these, to a transformation of the social order, either by secular or by millennial means. Nor could they, because the peasantry lacks the means to administer, let alone transform, their society of their own accord. Once their immediate objectives have been achieved, the mass organization declines, and the leadership is all too easily co-opted by the ruling class. For its part the ruling class is all too willing to recruit them as a bridge

69 Cabinet Office, cited in the *Daily Times*, 13 January 1973.

70 Lagos, 1973.

71 *West Africa*, 14 Oct. 1974, p. 1302, reports that the Western State will pay about Naira 2 million compensation to landowners for compulsory acquisition of their landed properties for agricultural development.

72 The Nigerian Agricultural Bank made its "first loan of Naira 3.7 million to the Co-operative Union of the North Eastern State with a membership of 200,000 farmers. It also granted a loan of Naira 900,000 to 12 individual farmers from all over the country." (Gen. Gowon, 1974 budget speech, cited *Daily Times*, 2 April 1974.)

73 *West Africa*, 23 Sept. 1974, p. 176.

74 Kanmi Isola Osobu, *Nigerian Tribune*, 27 Sept. 1969.

75 On the use of the term "populist", see Beer, "Farmer and State," op. cit., p. 390, n.i; J. Saul, "Africa," in G. Ionecu and E. Gellner, eds., *Populism* (London, 1970).

to mass support, not realizing that incorporation itself weakens the bridge. Thus populist movements degenerate into appendages of Governments and political factions. The 'populism' of mass action is replaced by the manipulative 'populism'⁷³ of the political 'broker'.

Thus the Ibadan farmers remain dependent on the educated urban elites for access to and the provision of amenities. They know that the educated have failed them, and have used farmers' money and organizations to cheat the farmer. But they continue to look to educated people to turn the Government away from its evil ways and save the farmers from their suffering. The farmers have demonstrated their ability to resist unjust and arbitrary direct exactions. But on the key issue of the cocoa price, they remain at the mercy of their rulers and the foreign markets to which the development of the colonial political economy has subjected them.

Scale and other Determinants of Local Government Expenditure: A Case Study of Western Nigeria

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I. INTRODUCTION

There has been a strong and interesting debate, both in the form of academic writings and political statements, on the need for well thought-out reforms in the local government systems in Nigeria.¹ One such discussion led to the statement that "no Nigerian institutions are in greater need of review, reform, reorganization and revitalization than those of local government."² This call follows the recognition of the important role of local government units in promoting, co-ordinating and running community services, and thereby encouraging greater citizen involvement and participation in the running of their own affairs, and the use of local resources to the maximum extent possible. This role also derives its importance from the fact that a state government based primarily in the state capital faces difficulties in providing and directly administering various social services and public utilities for a wide variety of local communities, given the country's poor transportation and communications network. The inability of local government units to fulfil the functions expected of them constitutes the major reason for the call for reform.

II. DEFECTS OF THE EXISTING GOVERNMENT SYSTEM

The major weaknesses of the existing system of local government in the Western State arise from financial constraints. This leads directly to the inability to attract and hire suitably qualified staff and to provide them with the kind of atmosphere and financial rewards considered necessary to keep them in the service of the local government units.

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1 See, for example, M. W. Norris, "Some Aspects of Local Government Recurrent Revenue and their Relationship to State and Local Functions in the Northern States," *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, April 1969, pp. 221-234; Institute of Administration, University of Ife, *The Future of Local Government in Nigeria*, the Report of the National Conference on Local Government, 29 April—3 May 1969; O. Oyediran, "Local Government in Southern Nigeria: The Direction of Change," *The African Review*, Volume 4, No. 4 (1974).

2 Editorial Comment, "Need for Effective Local Government in Nigeria," *Quarterly Journal of Administration*, April 1969, p. 169.