

CHAPTER 5

BRITISH CONQUEST OF THE NIGERIAN AREA (1851-1914)

Objectives

After studying this chapter, students should be able to:

- discuss reasons for British occupation of Lagos.
- describe the details of British penetration into the interior.
- discuss the occupation of Sokoto caliphate, Bornu, the Middle belt and Igboland.
- examine the implications of these for subsequent political developments in Nigeria.

Introduction

The incursion and penetration of the European into the shores of Nigeria pre-dates the colonial period. In all this expeditions, Nigeria traditional chiefs have resorted such incursion through agitation and open battle yet, it was not enough to contain the hegemonic power of the European country, as many weak kingdoms fell easily to the British power.

5.1 Reasons for British Occupation of Lagos

Lagos is strategically located on a lagoon, its location made it a natural port of call for European ship since 1472 when the Portuguese just visited Lagos. British had always wanted to occupy Lagos in order to control or participate in the trade. To occupy Lagos, the British needed to have an Oba on the throne and they looked for an opportunity to come. However, the dispute between Adele and his brother, Esilogun in 1811 over the Lagos throne provided the opportunity which the British were long looking for. Adele fled to Badagry as a refugee and also lobbied the British to help to regain his lost throne in Lagos. As things might be, Adele never came back to Lagos until the death of his brother, Esilogun, that he staged a come back. Unfortunately, Adele was succeeded by his own son, Oluwole. In 1841, crisis ensued over the death of Oluwole.

Therefore Kosoko, Esilogun's son had earlier before now challenged Oluwole's succession to his father. With Oluwole's death, Kosoko felt that he can now realize his ambition, but unfortunately it was his cousin, Akitoye that was chosen for the throne. In 1845, Kosoko overthrew Akitoye and Akitoye fled to Abeokuta and then to Badagry where the Christian missionaries dominated; he got the sympathy of the missionaries with the chiefs at Abeokuta and they both joined to urge the British to restore him as the Oba of Lagos, in order to stop slave trade and get foothold at Lagos more strategically, more viable, and more economically than in Badagry. The missionaries and the traders all had their eye at Lagos which they regarded as a door to penetrating to the hinter land. They both

hoped that when they got to Lagos they would engage in missionary work and legitimate trade to the rest of Yorubaland.

While Akitoye got the support of the missionaries, Kosoko remained very hostile to them. Kosoko never allowed free slaves to settle in Lagos from Sierra Leone. He even expelled missionaries in Badagry. Surprisingly, all the people Kosoko denied access found a willing ally in the Consul, John Beecroft. Hence with Kosoko's refusal, John Beecroft was able to sign anti-slavery treaty as a reason to force Kosoko out. John Beecroft got to Lagos harbour in 1851 with ten sunboats, and was refused entry by Kosoko unless he reduced the sunboats to only two yet, refused to sign the anti-slavery treaty with John Beecroft. Five days later, Beecroft repeated his visit to Lagos, but this time Kosoko forced them back; he lost two of his men and seventeen others got injured. Beecroft saw it as an insult.

In 1851, Beecroft, Commodor Bruce and Captain Jones with four hundred men bombarded Lagos destroying Kosoko's armour, the next day he fled to Epe and in 1852, Akitoye was installed as the Oba of Lagos. He signed a treaty abolishing slave trade, put an end to human sacrifice and promised to protect the foreigners in his domain. At his reign, missionaries and traders relocated from Badagry to Lagos. Fraser, the Vice Consul at Quidah, joined and became the Consul in Lagos, and Benjamin Campbell in Lagos, in 1852.

With the death of Akitoye in 1852, his son, Dosunmu took over. By 1861, trade was not moving because of the Ijaye war which blocked the hinterland. In 1861, with the guns of HMS, Prometheus Dosunmu was forced to cede his kingdom to the British by signing a treaty. With the treaty signed, Dosunmu gave and ceded the Great Britain, the port and island of Lagos with all the rights, territories, profits in order for the territory to be fully protected by the Queen of England. Dosunmu was given a pension of \$1,030 per annum but allowed to retain his title as Oba. Kosoko was asked to return and put on pension too and by 1886, the Lagos territory became Lagos colony.

5.2 Subjugation of Yorubaland

Lagos colony made it easy for the British to penetrate into the Yoruba hinterland. The cost of maintaining the colony was much and so freeman decided that the only way to develop the colony was to impose duties. That means controlling commerce in the hinterland to generate funds by extending the boundaries of the colony of the hinterlands.

The reliance of Lagos on the hinterland trade involved the colony interacting and tapping the fortunes of the people of Egba, Ijebu and Ibadan. In 1864, during the Ijaye war, the Egba and their ally, the Ijebu blocked the roads that linked Ibadan with Lagos, the aim was to deny Ibadan access to firearms. Egba forces also blocked and laid siege on Ibadan at Ikorodu. This siege was just to stop trade in Lagos. To open up these blockades, Glover succeeded stopping the expansion of French from Porto Novo and later signed treaties with local chiefs that brought some of these local groups under Lagos. For example, the Ebute Metta, Badagry, Okeodan, Ipokia and Ado people.

In 1891, Carter started the major push into the hinterland, the blockage of the Egba/Ijebu was removed with the treaty he signed with Awujale but was later blocked because of the resumed

hostility with Ibadan. The British organized a military expedition to open the Ijebu road blockade; Awujale resisted it until they finally fell and submitted to Britain.

The consequences of the opening of Ijebu road is that within a short time, Egba made peace with Lagos, apart from few resistance from Oyo in 1895, the Yoruba posed no further threat to the extension of British colonialism.

5.3 The Fall of the Niger Delta Area

British warship patrolled the coastal areas of the West Africa in order to seize any ship carrying slaves. The presence of the British in this area resulted in the penetration of the imperial forces in the Niger Delta and subsequent destruction of the sovereignty of the Niger Delta as well as intervening in the local politics of the area. Along these coastal areas the British were in close contact with indigenous inhabitant who were also successful in their various business endeavours and relations.

5.3.1 King Jaja of Opobo and the British

Jaja of Opobo was one of the great and influential businessmen in the Niger Delta area. King Jaja of Opobo was an Igbo slave that lived in Bonny. He became a known and strong trader. The growing prosperity of the house he controlled became a source of envy and rivalry among his business partners and to avoid crises, he relocated to Opobo, a new settlement he found. The location of Opobo ensured that he had control over the palm oil markets within the Igbo and Ibibio hinterland and to a large extent, it caused the fall of Bonny as traders now diverted to Opobo. King Jaja became rich and powerful in the area where his business stretched.

However, in 1873, King Jaja made agreement with Britain which recognized and revealed the cordiality of his relationship with Britain. While, he related and supported the British in their military expeditions, he was careful not to allow the European traders penetrate the hinterland because he knew it was the source of his wealth and power. The British traders' attempt to penetrate into the hinterland was vehemently stopped. This angered the British traders. In 1886, he banished all trade with Europe and dealt directly with England. This angered the European firms who now informed Johnson, the acting Consul.

In 1887, Johnson intervened, insisting that Jaja must deal with the European firms directly and not London. Jaja refused and Johnson the acting Consul brought a warship, HMS Grosshawk to Opobo inviting Jaja to come on board. Jaja refused to go but when he was reassured that there is nothing to fear, King Jaja on board met a different situation, before him, were two options, if he refuse to allow the European traders to deal directly with the hinterland trades he should go and expect bombardment of Opobo or he should fire himself up and be carried to exile. Not wanting the destruction of Opobo, he chose to go on exile. King Jaja of Opobo was taken to Accra where he was tried, sentenced and sent on exile in the West Indies where he died in 1891.

5.4 The Conquest of Benin

Benin is not located in the coastal area like the Niger Delta and it was not easy for the Benin to have regular contact with the European traders. However, when the Itsekiri people complained to Gallway, the Benin River Vice – Consul that Oba Ovonaramwen made trading difficult because of his business policies with outsiders, Gallway visited Benin and got Benin to sign the protection treaty in 1892, which gave the Consul right to interfere in the affairs of Benin and that the Oba should accept the advice of the Consul when it was given. In all, the Benin trade was no longer for Benin alone but for the fact that everyone should have access. This treaty interfered with the monopolistic interest of the Oba and set the stage for conflict between the British and the Benin.

The Oba continued his business in disregard to the treaty. He controlled Benin trade, exacting trade tax from the Itsekiri traders who equally complained to the Consul. In 1896, Mr James R. Philips acting for Ralph Moor, visited Benin in company of some Itsekiri chiefs as intermediaries. On their arrival, they noticed that the market in the Oba's territories were closed. However, on his failure to persuade the Oba to open the market, he wrote the Britain on permission to send the Oba on exit. However in 1897, Mr Philip accompanied by nine other British and 240 "native carriers" left for Benin. When they got to Benin, it was not easy for them to see the Oba, who at the period was observing the "Ague" festival, a period when visitors are not allowed into Benin. In spite of this warning, Mr Philip insisted on entering Benin. The Oba sent delegation of chiefs led by Ologbosere to meet the acting Consul and his groups.

After their discussion, Mr Philip refused and insisted on seeing the Oba, confrontation ensued which led to the death of some white men including Mr Philip, leaving only two men.

In 1897, Britain sent a military expedition of 1,500 men who arrived Benin for retaliation. Seven days later, Benin was set ablaze. The British men carted away precious artifacts to Europe.

In August the same month, Oba surrendered with his chiefs to the Acting Resident, Captain E. S. Roupell. By September, the Oba and his chiefs were tried. The Oba was forced into exile in Calabar in 1814 where he died after his chiefs were executed.

5.5 The Conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate and Borno

The Berlin conference ceded the Sokoto caliphate to Britain on the account of presence and influence of George Golden in the area. This hegemony was supported by the 1858 treaty which were signed by Gwandu, Sokoto and the Royal Niger company. Lord Lugard hoisted the British flag in Lokoja, implying that the territory had become a British protectorate. In spite of the presence of the Union Jack at Lokoja, the caliphate claimed they were not aware of it. Lord Lugard did not take away military action to force them to accept. However, he waited a better time. In 1900, Lord Lugard sent a letter to caliphate in Arabic translation informing them on the proclamation of the territory as now a British protectorate.

Therefore, to show his disdain on the attitudes of the caliphs and the Emirs to his invitation, he attacked Bida and Kontagora in 1901, Bauchi in 1902. Lord Lugard reinforced his offensive to other area such as Yola, Zaria, Ilorin, Nassarawa and Bornu under his control. The Caliph reacted through a

letter to Lord Lugard, telling him that he had no intention to stay with a white man. To Lord Lugard, it was an invitation to war which he never reneged at.

In 1903, Kano city was attacked. The fall of Kano was not surprising; Lord Lugard attacked Kano with a force of 1,000 African troops, fifty European officers, non-commissioned officers and two medical doctors, left Zaria on 29th January, 1903. The resistance of Babeji could not prevent Kano from falling.

The British army under the commands of General Kemball, left Kaura for Sokoto. The Caliph organized his soldiers for attack after the afternoon prayers. In the heat of the battle, Sokoto was destroyed; the Caliph, Attahiru escaped to Gasau. His followers followed him in the Hijira. The British continued the attack and at Burmi, on the Borders of Bornu, the Caliph was killed. With the fall of Sokoto, other smaller groups like Kastina surrendered easily.

5.6 The Conquest of Middle Belt

The British contact with Northern Nigeria dates back to the years of exploration. They were more interested in development of the area in the 19th century especially with the Niger Benue territory. The National African Company dominated the regions traders. In the area of treaties with the local chiefs and traders the company got a charter to manage the territories business and claims. Therefore in 1886, the (RNC) Royal Niger Company used military activity to drive away other Europeans from trading with the local traders and also to control and dominate the region. The activities of the RNC marked the right and freedom of the various communities in the region.

For instance, in 1885, the chief of Ibi. Bula was forced by the RNC to enter a treaty with the company thereby, forfeiting his land, the same thing was meted to Chamba, the chief of Donga was brought under the control of the RNC. The land of Ibi was used by the company as his headquarter. It was through this means that the Niger Benue people were exploited, some lost their source of livelihood as a result of the companies' exploitative activities.

However, there are instances where the people resisted the antics of this companies, Suntai and Chief Porta are among local chiefs that resisted the exploitative manipulation of the company in their land. The company resorted to diplomacy, presenting Chief Porba with a sword of honour, thanked him for how Suntai was defended. Later, the company claimed that Porba accepted British friendship and Suntai became part of the companies' territory.

In the Northern region of Benue, the RNC is equally active. In Wase, a vassal state in Bauchi was conquered and occupied in 1889. It had been noted that the Royal Niger Company (RNC) used military might on smaller states but not with bigger states. When the RNC conquered Bida and Ilorin, the company did not do anything to control them due to their strength. The inability of the RNC to keep the Europeans away led to the revocation of its charter by the British administration. A protectorate was declared over the territory claimed by the company and Lord Lugard was made the High Commissioner.

5.7 The Conquest of Igboland (ARO)

The British colonial authorities and traders entered Igbo land through the Niger Delta region. The banishment King Jaja of Opobo paved way for the British traders to move towards the hinterland. In 1892, Macdonald's administration made frantic efforts to penetrate into the Igboland. Consul Campbell believed the Igbo would welcome them to the Niger Delta since the middlemen were removed. He also reported that the region was rich in oil palm. Their first attempts into the Igbo hinterland were highly resisted due to the influence of other ARO people.

It is important to note that the ARO people from the period of the slave trade to the trade in palm oil had proved to be strong middlemen between the hinterland and the coastal region.

The ARO through their long juju or Ubini Ukpabi wield influence beyond their territory. They used their oracle well in solving people's problems. They projected themselves as the only people who could interpret the divine saying of the oracle.

Another factor that made the ARO to be strong is as a result of their tight bond with their neighbours in the Ohafia, Abiriba and Abam people. The above factor has helped to give the ARO'S their prominence and dominance in Igboland. The ARO had strongly resisted and opposed the penetration of the British or any of their neighbor who are friends to the British.

The strength of the ARO people became much concern to the British. He wrote the colonial office in London in 1899 seeking for permission to invade ARO. In less than ten months, Secretary of State gave him his consent sent. In 1900, Colonel A. E. Montanaro marched into Igboland, invaded the ARO people from all corners; the ARO put up a good fight against the British. However, the defeat of ARO did not mean the defeat of the other Igbo speaking neighbours of the ARO. It is important to note that the defeat of the ARO did not mean the end of resistance of the people.

5.8 Aftermath of British Conquest

With the conquest of Nigeria completed, the colonial government settled down to form their colonial government. However, it is important to stress here that one cannot say vividly that they had strong control over the South Eastern region because events showed that up to the late 1920s, the regions were still resisting the obnoxious policies of the colonial government. However, what is obtained in the South Eastern region may be different in other parts of Nigeria. The events of the world wars and the education of the various groups which constitute Nigeria now, gave impetus so to say to nationalist movement which started to agitate for self-government.

Summary

- The British conquest and occupation of Lagos in 1861 led to the eventual extension of the British authority and occupation of the Yorubaland.

- The incursion and penetration of the British authority into the interior in search of trade and territory laid the foundation for the British colonial policy and monopolistic stronghold with much resistance.
- The Berlin conference ceded the Northern bregion to British through the influence and commercial activities of George Golden though ending the rivalry among imperialist powers without much opposition from the caliphate.
- The banishment of Jaja of Opobo laid the foundation for the eventual occupation and incursion into the hinterland for trade. The resistance of the two people could not overcome the incursion of the British power.
- The British occupation of Nigeria led to the establishment of colonial administration which brought great deprivation and socio-political exploitation of Nigerians.

Revision Questions

Objectives

1. In what year was Lagos bombarded?
 - A. 1851
 - B. 1951
 - C. 1351
 - D. 1751
2. What is the name of the Oba when Lagos was bombarded?
 - A. Dosunmu
 - B. Kosoko
 - C. Adele
 - D. Esilogun
3. Where did Jaja of Opobo die?
 - A. West Indies
 - B. Nigeria
 - C. In the gunboat
 - D. West Africa
4. Who hoisted the Union Jack in Lokoja?
 - A. Lord Lugard
 - B. George Golden
 - C. The Caliphate
 - D. Kosoko
5. In what year was Kano city attacked?
 - A. 1904
 - B. 1900

- C. 2004
 - D. 1903
6. In what year was Akintoye installed the Oba of Lagos?
- A. 1852
 - B. 1470
 - C. 1998
 - D. 2010
7. What is the full meaning of RNC?
- A. Regional Niger Compound
 - B. Royal Niger Company
 - C. Reactions of Nigerian Congress
 - D. Royal Nigerian Company
8. The Royal Niger Company presented Porba with _____
- A. sword of strength
 - B. horse
 - C. letter
 - D. sword of honour
9. The ARO people were feared because of their _____
- A. long Juju
 - B. houses
 - C. money
 - D. none of the above
10. The attack of the ARO people was in the year _____
- A. 1904
 - B. 1801
 - C. 1701
 - D. 1901

Essay Questions

1. What proof can you give to King Jaja as an African nationalist?
2. Examine the background to the British conquest of Benin.
3. Why was Lagos bombarded in 1851?
4. Would you agree with the view that without George Golden, British could not have acquired Northern Nigeria?
5. What are the reasons for the British occupation of Lagos?