

## COLLABORATION AND THE BRITISH CONQUEST OF BIDA IN 1897: THE ROLE AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INDIGENOUS INTEREST GROUPS<sup>(1)</sup>

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**ABSTRACT** The British conquest of parts of Africa in the nineteenth century has attracted a lot of studies. Yet, all scholars involved hold different views especially as to the role of the indigenous African groups in it. There are those who opined that the Africans who resisted the British were patriotic in spite of the futility of their actions, and the Africans who supported the British are portrayed as collaborators or saboteurs that facilitated imperialism. Other scholars are however of the opinion that those who took sides with the British were not necessarily collaborators or unpatriotic elements but that they merely reacted to the circumstances of the time.

Therefore, it is the contention of this paper that the ideas of collaboration or resistance in African history are less relevant because the two groups were concerned mainly with the protection of their socio-political and economic interests. The 1897 British conquest of Nupeland, which is situated in the central part of the present day Nigeria, provides a good example of the argument above. While the members of the Fulani ruling class of Bida dynasty organized a strong force to resist the British in order to maintain their own political and economic interest, significant sections of their subjects took sides with the British for similar reasons. The northeast Yoruba, the Kyadya and the Yissazhi gave their moral and material support to the British with the hope of bringing Bida domination to an end. It never mattered to them whether the British were imperialists or not. Their target was to get rid of the Fulani ruling dynasty.

Despite the stiff resistance by Bida army led by the members of the Fulani ruling class, it was overwhelmed not by the superior weaponry of the British but by the massive support given to the British by the interest groups who were expected to be on the sides of Bida. At the end of the war, these groups were handsomely rewarded even though short-lived.

**Key Words:** Collaborators; Resistance; Imperialism; Interest groups; Bida; Fulani.

### INTRODUCTION

In the various studies of African reaction to European conquests, there exist two schools of thought concerning the role of different indigenous interest groups. The first school is of the view that the Africans that cooperated with the Europeans against their traditional authorities or rivals, as the case might have been, were not essentially collaborators. For example, Obaro Ikime is of the opinion that though those Africans who sided with the Europeans facilitated colonialism, "it is important to appreciate the fact that they did not necessarily see themselves as saboteurs or collaborators... such groups or individuals were merely seeking to use the British as allies for the promotion of their own interests" (Ikime, 1977: 211). Similarly, Roland Oliver and J. D. Fage opined that the categorization of such Africans as saboteurs or collaborators "hardly fit the circumstances of eighty years ago" (Oliver & Fage, 1970: 49).

The second school of thought, however, views European factor in Africa with contempt. Scholars who belong to this group argue that those Africans who sided with Europeans were nothing but saboteurs, traitors, quislings and unpatriotic elements that aided colonialism. Agueta Pallinder who shares this view has bitterly dismissed Obaro Ikime's submission as "unhistorical and unnecessary apologies for those who fell short of patriotic ideas" (Pallinder, 1978: 468).

The difference between the two schools of thought is clear. The first school believes that those Africans who sided with the Europeans were merely reacting to the prevailing circumstances of inter and intra-group rivalries in which the weak groups tried to use the European factor to achieve their aims. On the other hand, the second school sees the interest groups as collaborators who aided imperialism not only by supporting the Europeans but also by refusing to fight alongside with the resisting African leaders. However, we are of the opinion that the ideas of collaborators or resisters in African history are less relevant because both groups were concerned primarily with the protection of their interests. Neither the collaborators nor the resisters realized the over-all imperialistic designs of the Europeans.

It is acknowledged that the theme of African reaction to European conquest has received a lot of attention from historians and undergone several reinterpretations. However, the episode in Nupeland which presents a clear situation where indigenous interest groups sided with the British against their leaders, has not been studied. The British conquest in 1897 of Bida, the largest and the most prosperous of the nineteenth century middle Niger Basin emirates of Sokoto, was made possible, to a great extent, by the roles played by three major interest groups. It is out of place to describe these groups as collaborators. Therefore, this paper examines the motives of their actions, their roles in the conquest, and highlights their achievements thereafter. The three interest groups involved were the northeast Yoruba, a non-Nupe speaking district of the emirate; the Kyadya, a small but powerful riverine Nupe subgroup; and the Yissazhi, descendant of the pre-Fulani Nupe ruling dynasty.

## BIDA EMIRATE BEFORE THE BRITISH CONQUEST

As we are aware, the emergence of Bida emirate was a consequence of the nineteenth century Sokoto Jihad (Mason, 1970). The scheming and execution of the plan to overthrow the ruling Nupe dynasty during the period was spearheaded by Mallam Dendo, a Fulani itinerant preacher. His descendants founded Bida emirate in 1857 after failing to achieve such a feat at Raba earlier in the 1830s. However, apart from Bida, there were other emirates in Nupe such as Agaie, Lapai, Lafiagi and Shonga. Under the Sokoto Caliphate system, these emirates were placed under the supervision of Gwandu (Balogun, 1970). Of the five Nupe emirates, Bida was by far the largest and most populous. Its territory covered areas far beyond Nupeland across the Niger to the northeast Yorubaland, Afemai in the present Bendel State and Akoko in Ondo State. Economically too, Bida was obviously the most prosperous, since taxes and tributes in cash and kind from its numerous dependencies enriched its treasury. The vastness of Bida's areas of jurisdiction and strong revenue base reduced other Nupe

emirates to the position of "pocket emirates" in the scheme of things of the caliphate system. They had to send their tributes to Gwandu through the Emirs of Bida.

Owing to the divergent cultural and language composition of the emirate, Bida adopted a complete administrative structure aimed at ensuring loyalty to the centre. The capital and its immediate environs were put directly under the supervision of the Emir himself. He often toured these areas. In the second category, Nupe speaking areas which were very far from the capital, such as Eggan and Lokoja, were placed under the royal delegates called *Egbazhi*.<sup>(2)</sup> The *Egbazhi* exercised power and authority in their districts on behalf of the Emir. The third category were those areas where the inhabitants' economic pursuits and their general way of life presented different features. Such areas were the northeast Yorubaland and the Kyadya. The indigenous political system here were retained but the appointments and installations of their political heads were subject to Bida's approval.

This kind of administrative system adopted by Bida was unique in the Sokoto Caliphate system. Apart from the extensive nature of the emirate, it was, unlike other emirates, not contiguous, as rivers Niger and Kaduna cut across its length and breadth. In addition to these, the emirate encompassed multi-ethnic and cultural groups. Though Nupe group appeared predominant, there were such groups as the Kakanda, the Oworo, the Kupa, the Yagba, the Owe and the Afemai. Each of these groups were politically independent before they were conquered or absorbed into Bida emirate system. Therefore, for the purpose of stability and continuous loyalty, it was imperative that Bida retained the existing indigenous political systems in these areas.

However, despite the apparent sagacious steps Bida took in the administration of the districts, resistance movements against it did not cease. There were many uprisings organized by the indigenous groups to throw off the yoke of what they considered as "alien" rule. Between 1868 and 1882, Bida had to contend with three great rebellions. First was the Kwenti war of 1868 against Emir Masaba (r. 1859-73) by the inhabitants of Lavun district on the banks of river Kaduna (Idrees, 1982). Secondly, there was the Fogbagba war of 1876 led against Bida by Prince Baba, a descendant of Etsu Majiya, one of the ousted factions of the Nupe ruling dynasty. Thirdly, there was the Kyadya rebellion of 1881-82 which culminated in the Ganigan War (Idrees, 1986).

Though threatening these uprisings were, Bida was able to control them and retained its suzerainty over the territories. A number of reasons may help to explain this. Since coming into contact with European merchants on the Niger during the second half of nineteenth century, Bida maintained the monopoly of acquisition of fire arms and amunitions (Mason, 1970). With this, it was able to equip its highly mobile section of the army, the cavalry, with European weaponry. Bida's cavalry became almost invincible. This was used not only to suppress rebellions but also to expand Bida's territories and raid for slaves that formed an essential part of its economy. Secondly, the experience of severe repression of the Kyadya revolt during 1881-82 was enough a deterrent to other would-be rebels. Hundreds of Kyadya settlements were razed, their canoes upon which they depended for their livelihood

were either destroyed or seized, their leaders were publicly executed at Bida and many of the Kyadya soldiers were carted away as slaves (Idrees, 1986). After the Kyadya revolt, except for the Owe protest against children levy of 1896, Bida did not experience any other major rebellion from its districts until the British conquest of 1897.

However, one thing was certain: notwithstanding the coercive nature of Bida's administration over the dissatisfied groups, hatred and disaffection for Bida persisted. There was general discontent against Bida amongst the northeast Yoruba not only because it imposed alien rule over them but also due to the exploitative and unpopular nature of its administrative policies. They thus awaited an opportunity by which to eliminate what can be considered as authoritarian administration. The Kyadya and the Yissazhi continued to see Bida as a historic enemy that had encroached upon their territories and subjugated them. While the Kyadya desired to break off the bonds of Bida domination, the Yissazhi wanted to regain its privileged position of ruling Nupeland, a position they had lost to the Fulani rulers of Bida and other Nupe emirates.

To understand the above, it would be necessary to explain the genesis of the strained relationship between Bida and the three indigenous groups in question. By so doing, we will be able to see the background of these groups' siding with the British against Bida in 1897.

## SEEDS OF DISCORD

From available evidence, the picture of Bida's policy in the northeast Yorubaland is that of unprecedented depredations. Long before the establishment of Bida emirate in 1897, Fulani-led Nupe armies had consistently raided the northeast Yorubaland. From Raba, Dendo's soldiers campaigned into Oweland for slaves and tributes (Bida, 1950). Similarly, when Masaba rebelled against his brothers and established himself as an independent sovereign at Lade in the 1830s, he raided Yorubaland also for slaves and tributes to sustain his administration (Bida, 1950). By the time the nascent Bida emirate, being created in 1857, had thus consolidated, more regular raiding activities into the northeast Yorubaland were resumed by the offspring of Dendo at Bida until the area was subjugated. The importance of this district to the economy of Bida, especially in terms of human resources, cannot be overemphasized. This was responsible for the eventual extension of the emirate's jurisdiction to this region.

Undoubtedly, the slave raiding activities of the Fulani-led Nupe armies created a lot of problems for the northeast Yoruba. Depopulation, relocation of settlements to barren and hilly terrains and disruption of indigenous industries are but a few examples of the effects of the Fulani-led Nupe activities in the area (Obayemi, 1978). But the subsequent administrative policies of Bida over the northeast Yorubaland created much more problems that made it very unpopular up till the 1897 British encounter. At the beginning, Bida authorities replaced the mini-state systems that proliferated in the area by a very highly centralized political set up. This system was alien to the people who had lived in clusters of independent political units and re-

publics over centuries. It appears that Bida was more concerned about the economic potentials of the area which it sought to exploit. To achieve this end, therefore, there was a need to bring together all the independent mini-states spread over the extensive territory under effective administration.

From indications, Bida was not short of manpower with which to administer the northeast Yorubaland but it decided to upgrade the *Obaro*<sup>(2)</sup> chieftaincy of the Owe (Kabba) to the status of paramount chief over all the distinct and independent communities of the northeast Yorubaland (Apatá, 1985). The *Obaro* was thus to implement the policies of Bida in the area under the supervision of the royal official delegate at Lokoja. Among his functions was to collect tributes for onward transmission to Bida.

The imposition of the *Obaro* was a political misadventure for Bida. It was not only the non-Owe groups of Ogidi, Gbedde, Yagba, Akoko and others that resented this but even some Owe clans who abhorred the transformation of their highly democratic institution into an absolutist monarchy propped up by an external aggressor. Perhaps if Bida had appointed official delegates to all the mini-states in the area and made them directly responsible to the Emir, the situation could have been different. We have no evidence to show why Bida decided otherwise. However, one may suggest that language and cultural differences must have been responsible for Bida's line of action. While Bida's officials were Nupes and Hausa of Islamic culture, the northeast Yorubas observed traditional religion.

In addition to the political centralization, evidence of Bida's misrule in the area abounds. For example, the excesses of Bida reached the climax when it demanded tributes in boys and girls from only the northeast Yoruba out of all its numerous districts. In 1895, the people protested against this to no avail. Later in the year, they complained of this to the British government in Lagos through Captain Bower, the British Resident at Ibadan (Perham & Bull, 1963). As soon as Bida got wind of the overtures of the northeast Yoruba with the British, it despatched the strongest detachment of its army, the cavalry, under the command of heir apparent, Prince Muhammad Makun to camp at Ogidi ostensibly to nip in the bud any possible rebellion (Obayemi, 1978). Even though the rebellion did not occur, the long occupation of the area by Bida army must have had adverse socioeconomic effects on the area. By the occupation, the freedom of movement of the people was impeded, a situation that could not have allowed for full economic pursuits and interaction of the people to exchange ideas. Secondly, during the occupation, the Bida army might have fed on the food products of the inhabitants thereby depleting their reserves.

However, it should be understood that Bida had not committed such a great number of its soldiers and nobility into this campaign only to suppress a non-violent revolt in the area. Other political and economic factors, very important to Bida's policy towards northeast Yorubaland, were responsible. As we are aware, the area had served as the main source of slaves and tributes for a long time. By the time slave trade was abolished, the members of Bida ruling class that had benefitted from it diverted the object of their investment to large scale agricultural production. Extensive plantations established around Bida to produce cotton, groundnuts and

grains required large and cheap labour force. Hence, if the subjects of Bida in north-east Yorubaland decided to halt the supply of human tributes and resist slave raids, the economic base of the ruling elite would be adversely affected. It was not surprising, therefore, that the nobility class was involved in the campaign. The second factor had to do with political instability at Bida, the seat of the emirate government itself.

The northeast troubles coincided with the installation of Emir Abubakar (1895–1901). It is evident that Abubakar was installed amidst objections from several popular princes and Ulema, and hence he had it tough consolidating his authority (Apata, 1985). It was therefore politically expedient for him to get rid of the rival princes temporarily or otherwise, by ordering them to join in the military campaign. In a nutshell, before the advent of the British, the northeast Yoruba viewed Bida policies in their area as inhuman, high-handed and inconsiderate. Though they did not embark on any serious resistance, which might have been due to their weak military position, they did not fail to show their discontent at Bida policies as exemplified in their protest to Ibadan.

The second interest group to be examined is the Kyadya, a riverine section of Nupeland. Of the various groups that opposed the establishment of emirate systems in Nupeland, the Kyadya gave the strongest challenge. As it was the case with the northeast Yoruba, economic and political issues formed the bone of contention between Bida and the Kyadya.

Until the emergence of Bida emirate, the Kyadya had enjoyed a large measure of autonomy arising not only from the peculiar nature of their habits but also from the specialized economic activities they pursued (Idrees, 1986). They constituted a distinct territorial and cultural unit whose means of livelihood depended on the resources of rivers Niger and Kaduna. The Kyadya specialized in piscatorial, canoe-ferrying and other water craft skills thereby putting trade and traffic on these rivers under effective control. Over a period of time, they evolved a highly centralized political system under the leadership of Kuta to manage and regulate the riverine economic activities. The Kyadya had jealously guarded the independence of their system even during the Pre-Jihad times of central Nupe administration (Idrees, 1985).

With the foundation of Bida emirate in 1857, the position of the Kyadya became threatened. For economic and political reasons, Bida authorities could not accept the situation whereby the riverine inhabitants would remain autonomous within the emirate system as it had been the case during the Pre-Jihad times. The Kyadya occupied strategically significant areas of Nupeland. Therefore they were in the position to aid any of the indigenous resistant groups which had by then not laid down their arms. Thus, the only alternative for the nascent emirate government was to incorporate the entire riverine area. Secondly, soon after its establishment, Bida embarked on territorial expansion. Having subdued with ease the immediate surrounding Nupe and Gbagyi (Gwari) settlements, it was attracted to areas across the Niger such as Lokoja, Oworo, Ebirra (Igbirra) and the northeast Yoruba for the prospects of slaves and tributes.

However, the only access and means of transport to such areas were in the hands of the Kyadya. Going by the Kyadya's strictly commercial oriented canoe-ferrying

service, all passengers and goods crossing the rivers Niger and Kaduna must be charged some fees and tolls (Idrees, 1985). Had Bida condoned these situations, its territorial aggrandizement and economic interests would have been jeopardized. At that period, Bida required free access to the slave markets on the Lagos Coast to dispose of their captives and to acquire firearms and ammunition (Mason, 1976).

Even though Bida was not prepared to tolerate an all-powerful Kyadya within its jurisdiction at that time, it had no wherewithal to subjugate them. As the result, Bida had to resort to the use of diplomacy. During the reign of Emir Masaba (1859–73), Bida tried to weaken the Kyadya political system by supporting the enthronement of a pro-Bida Kyadya Prince Zhiri as the *Kuta*<sup>(4)</sup> (Idrees, 1985). Hence, until he died in 1874, Kuta Zhiri used his position to favour Bida and perpetrate its influence on the Kyadya. For example, canoe-ferrying services were rendered free of charge to Bida. In addition to that, the Kyadya capital was shifted from Muregi, its traditional base, to Dokomba, a town not very far from Bida. But as soon as Kuta Zhiri died, the Kyadya reasserted their independence and resisted attempts by Emir Umaru Majigi (1873–82) to influence the appointment of another pro-Bida Kyadya Prince as the *Kuta*.

During his reign, the relationship between Bida and the Kyadya soured into hostility. Apparently, Umaru Majigi lacked the patience and diplomacy of Emir Masaba and was eager to subdue the Kyadya. The hostility between them thus climaxed into a war in 1881–82 called Ganigan war (Idrees, 1986). Because of the determination of the Kyadya to resist Bida's encroachment and the advantages of their naval power over Bida army, it took the alliance of European merchants and Bida with their sophisticated gunboats and cavalry many months to overpower the Kyadya forces. It was at the end of this war that the Kyadya lost their most cherished control of rivers Niger and Kaduna.

The consequences of the Ganigan war were so devastating that until the British conquest of Bida, the Kyadya remained dissatisfied and disorganized. Kuta Usuman, who had become the embodiment of Kyadya resistance during this crisis, and his indefatigable army commander, Kologba, were publicly executed at Bida for their roles in the war. In their stead were appointed pro-Bida officials to manage the affairs of the Kyadya on behalf of the Emir at Bida. Consequently, canoe-ferrying and fishing activities were henceforth controlled by Bida through their protégés. Those Kyadya Princes and other notables who detested the new social order went into exile in Lokoja. Many other Kyadya soldiers escaped across the Niger and constituted bands of highway robbers notoriously known as the Ganigans.

The Yissazhi, one of the factions of the Pre-Jihad Nupe ruling dynasty, also had a bone to pick with Bida. The grievance of this group against Bida had its roots in the Fulani taking over of power in the early part of the nineteenth century. The struggle for succession to the throne of the Central *Etsu*<sup>(6)</sup> Nupe between two cousins, Majiya and Jimada, in 1805 had split the dynasty into two warring factions. While Majiya led the Gwagbazhi, Jimada was at the head of the Yissazhi or the Agabizhi. This division facilitated the intervention of the Fulani adventures under the leadership of Mallam Dendo. Subsequently the overthrow of the Nupe dynasty was effected by

the Dendo-led Fulani adventures, a situation that pushed both the Yissazhi and the Gwagbazhi into the shadows.

Although several attempts were made by the two Nupe factions to displace the Fulani, they were handicapped by a number of factors. The two factions did not reconcile in order to present a formidable and united force against a common enemy, the Fulani. Secondly, even if they had come together, it would have been impossible for them to throw off the Fulani who had already sought and received the blessings of Sokoto and Gwandu, headquarters of the Jihad movement. The Fulani in Nupe-land only needed to ask for military support and Gwandu in particular, under whose jurisdiction Nupeland fell in the caliphate system, would readily supply them. Thirdly, knowing fully well that the two Nupe factions had no plan for reconciliation, the Fulani employed divide and rule tactics to further disunite them. This alone was enough to keep the rival factions apart.

Of the two factions, Gwagbazhi suffered untold hardships in the hands of the Fulani for their consistent attempts to dislodge the "alien" new rulers (Fulani). For this reason, the group and the remnants of its supporters were pushed into an obscure region in Zugurma, far removed from Nupeland. On the other hand, the Yissazhi, which gave the Fulani less trouble, was tolerated so long as they would not claim any right to the rulership of Nupeland.

Though not contended with their new position, the Yissazhi had no other option. They had to participate in various wars the Fulani waged to consolidate, especially those against the Gwagbazhi. Perhaps the most important support from the Yissazhi to the Fulani was in the suppression of Umar Bahaushe's revolt that culminated in the foundation of Bida as the new Fulani capital in central Nupeland in 1857 (Dupigny, 1970).

From indication, the Yissazhi had supported the Fulani with the hope of a certain political and territorial reward. Perhaps, they had learnt that the only way out was to cooperate with the Fulani knowing the fate of the Gwagbazhi who tried to use force. However, the Yissazhi underscored the fact that the Fulani were in Nupeland to carve out for themselves independent political units. The Fulani were not prepared to allow the Yissazhi rule over any part of Nupeland as *Etsu Nupe*. Hence the leader of the Yissazhi, Muazu Yissa, and his family quartered in Bida along with the Fulani. Although he was allowed to hold on to his ancestor's title of *Etsu Nupe*, this was without the appurtenances of office (Idrees, 1982). He became a leader whose subjects (if any) or sympathisers pay homage to in secret. His movements were watched and restricted to his farm. In a nutshell, the leaders of Yissazhi became more or less hostages in Bida with all hopes to regain their privileged position lost.

The three cases presented in the preceding paragraphs represent the general state of affairs in Bida emirate before the British onslaught of 1897. The policies of Bida towards the interest groups had created so many internal enemies that it could hardly rely on these groups in the event of any external aggression on the Emirate. Bida had done all it could to sustain its political and economic goals but this had not gone well with various components of the Emirate that had been coerced to abandon their claims of self-determination. The disaffection for Bida by the three groups did not manifest because of the coercion, militarist policies and high-handedness employed

to subdue the people as earlier explained. The advent of the British, therefore, provided the desired opportunity during which the interest groups openly expressed their dissatisfaction for Bida policies.

## BRITISH CONQUEST AND THE ROLES OF THE INTEREST GROUPS

Until the 1890s, the relationship that existed between Bida authorities and various European merchants on the banks of the Niger, particularly the British traders, was cordial. Bida derived a lot of material benefits as revenue in terms of taxes and tools from the merchants. Perhaps the greatest advantage to Bida was the regular supply of fire arms and ammunition which enhanced its military strength among the middle Niger Basin emirates of Sokoto Caliphate. During the violent Kyadya rebellion of 1881–82 against Bida, the European merchants supplied gunboats, the *Fulah*, the *Gando* and the *Nupe* in support of Bida to suppress it (Idrees, 1985). In addition to all these, Bida's ruling class also benefitted from the large scale trading activities with the foreign merchants. For example, Emir Maliki (1882–95) acquired enormous wealth from the profits of his trading activities with the foreigners (Adeleye, 1971).

The cordial relationship based on the spirit of give and take changed into hostility arising from what Bida might have considered over-ambitious and unwarranted designs of the British merchants. The root cause of this break down in relationship lay mainly in the desire of the British merchants to monopolize the middle Niger enterprise by eliminating other European merchants (Adeleye, 1971). Bida authorities did not favour the exit of the French and the German merchants ostensibly because of the material benefits derived from them. On the other hand, the British was more determined to leave no stone unturned in acquiring the monopoly. With the backing of London and the Emir of Gwandu, Bida's overlord, the British went ahead to achieve their aim. This development generated tensions between Bida and the British that culminated in the war of 1897. The monopoly issue may have been a catalyst for the British desire to acquire Sokoto Caliphate as part of their imperial possessions. It is well known that the British had been contesting some territories in Nigerian region with the French and the Germans since the 1886–87 European partition of African Conference.

On the 6th of January, 1897, the Royal Niger Company (RNC) Force comprising thirty European officers and five hundred and thirteen African rank and file left Lokoja for Ogidi via Kabba town (Perham & Bull, 1963). This manoeuvre was intended to route Bida army which had encamped there since 1896. However, by the time the Company Force got there, the army had vacated the camp. The news of an impending war must have been responsible for their departure.

The RNC Force had failed to hit Bida decisively as planned but succeeded in severing its most resourceful district. Notwithstanding its disappointment, the Company Force returned to Kabba township and declared the northeast Yoruba's independence of Bida hegemony. This singular action deprived Bida of its most important economic source. Hence, without making a war, the British began a gradual dismemberment of the Emirate, first with the Kabba declaration.

It is not clear whether the northeast Yoruba, especially the people of Kabba, were

aware of the purpose of the Company Force's movement to Ogidi. If they were, perhaps they might have been informed of the departure of Bida army. Therefore, one cannot say categorically whether or not they rendered any support during that manoeuvre. What we do know is the reaction of the people of Kabba in particular over the declaration of self-determination. The Jubilant Kabba Owe immediately set about to give necessary help to the Company Force on its way to Bida. Apart from the gifts of food items, the Owe supplied porters and guides that led the soldiers through bush paths to Kpatagbon, a port town on the west bank of the Niger (Idrees, 1985). Another source claims that a number of young men from Kabba had joined the services of the Company Force as volunteers and arrived at Kpatagbon with the Force.

The Kyadya on their part offered most invaluable material and moral support to the British. The Kyadya being the inhabitants of the banks of the river and those who handled the essential canoe-ferrying services were in a position to tilt the balance of power towards any of the warring parties. Whichever side they supported, therefore, was bound to have an advantage over the other.

Unlike the Owe who voluntarily cooperated with the British force, the Kyadya were courted for help by William Wallace, the RNC's agent-general (Idrees, 1985). Apart from the fact that the Company needed the Kyadya boats and canoe-men, it also needed their cooperation to be able to get to Bida through the marshy riverine areas. Wallace appears to be well informed of the sour relationship between the Kyadya and Bida. This is because he directed his search for Kyadya supporters to Lokoja where a self-exile Kyadya Prince, Yahaya Marike lived. It was this situation he explained.

Since the execution of Kuta Usman at the end of the Kyadya rebellion of 1881–82, Marike had become the leader of anti-Bida movement of the Kyadya in exile. He commanded considerable respect throughout the Kyadya territory and wielded enormous power and authority over the exiles that lived in Lokoja. This position accorded him favourable bargaining power with Wallace. With the promise of the coveted title of the *Kuta* and independence for the Kyadya, Marike mobilized his followers at Lokoja and other Kyadya towns around in support of the RNC against Bida. Under his instructions, the Kyadya inhabitants of Kpatagban cooperated with the Company Force that had arrived from Kabba on its way to Bida. They also refused to ferry the retreating Bida army across the Niger as expected of them. It had to make a long and unpleasant journey to Kusogi during which many soldiers either died or deserted (Dupigny, 1970). This deprived Bida of the much needed reinforcement in the course of the war. And following the Kpatagban experience and acting on the orders of Marike, all the other Kyadya along the banks of the Niger withdrew their services from Bida. They “manned their canoes, placed them at the disposal of the RNC and under the command of a gunboat, undertook to guard the river so that no reinforcements should reach the beleaguered capital” (Nadel, 1942: 82).

At the time, Bida was gripped with fever of imminent British conquest, and when it called for military aids from the neighbouring Lapai and Agaie emirates, the

Yissazhi, living inside Bida township, refused to go to the battle. The then leader of group, Idrisu Gana, merely retired to his farms with his family (Idrees, 1982). From there he issued instructions to stay out of the war to his supporters and those who had been paying him secret allegiance. Some of his riverine supporters withdrew their canoes to Gbaradogi on the west bank to disallow Bida army from using them.

With the cooperation of the interest groups, the Company Force marched unchallenged from Kabba, on the extreme end of the west bank of the Niger to the walls of Bida, the seat of the emirate government. The defence of Bida became the responsibility of the Emir himself and the remnants of the army at home. The brave and courageous military resistance Emir Abubakar put up was met with a formidable Company Force that had all the vital moral and material support of the interest groups.

The much needed reinforcement from the Makun-led Bida army did not arrive because the Kyadya had demobilized it on the west bank of the Niger. The resistance of the Emir was aimed at protesting the interests of the ruling class. However, the interest groups sided with the Company Force to see to the elimination of Bida authorities and the system they represented. By the time Bida authorities realized that the northeast Yoruba, the Kyadya and the Yissazhi were not on their side, the Company Force had almost entered the city of Bida. External reinforcement that came from Lapai and Agaie could not change the tide of the war. By the 27th of January, 1897, the Company Force under the command of Mr. William Wallace took Bida.

#### THE AFTERMATH: NEW DISPENSATION AND THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE INTEREST GROUPS

The victory of the RNC Force over Bida was more a victory for the interest groups. However, although the defeat of Bida meant the materialization of an age-long ambition of the indigenous groups, their immediate concern was the realization of self-determination. This may have arisen from the fact that Bida ruling lineage, the source of the groups dissatisfaction, was not after all expelled as they expected. The Company's agent-general, William Wallace, simply deposed Emir Abubakar who had led Bida resistance, and replaced him by Prince Makun Muhammad, a senior member of the lineage (Dupigny, 1970). There is no evidence to show that Wallace intended to back out of the promises to its allies (indigenous groups) nor did he wish to return the northeast Yoruba district to the new potentate, Emir Muhammad. The anxiety of the interest groups should not be a surprise because the emirate system under which they lost their independence was not abrogated. The retention of that system which symbolized oppression was enough a source of threat to the indigenous groups that had openly supported the Company Force.

However, one factor that seemed to have favoured the interest groups and strengthened their confidence in the Company was its (RNC) inability to set up a direct administration over the conquered emirate, and yet wanted Bida's suzerainty over the extensive middle Niger Valley curtailed. This weakness on the part of the Company may have been due to the shortage of suitable manpower and lean financial

resources at its disposal at that time. The deposed Emir Abubakar was later to exploit this situation to stage a successful comeback only to be re-deposed by Lugard after the Company's second conquest of Bida in 1901.

Be that as it may, it was the indigenous interest groups—the allies of the Company—that benefitted more from the prevailing post—conquest circumstances. The Company, being aware that Bida ruling elites might not stop raids into the northeast Yoruba for economic reasons, officially abolished the *Egba*<sup>(6)</sup> (delegate) system on the westbank (Dupigny, 1970). As earlier pointed out, the *Egba* stationed at Lokoja was the overseer of the non-Nupe subjects of the emirate of the northeast Yoruba. He was the sole authority of Bida in charge of all possessions on the westbank. The abolition of this system marked the end of Bida's domination of not only the northeast Yorubaland but all the erstwhile Bida's territorial possessions on the west bank.

As for the Kyadya, Prince Yahaya Marike, who had done so much in mobilizing the Kyadya both at home and in exile for the Company's course, was brought from Lokoja and installed as the *Kuta* at Muregi in place of the pro-Bida *Kuta* Isatakun (Idrees, 1985). Under *Kuta* Marike, the Kyadya were made independent of Bida, a position they were before 1857. To spite Bida authorities further, both *Kuta* Marike and Emir Muhammed of Bida, an appointee of the Company, were presented similar staff of offices and accorded equal status in the scheme of things under the new dispensation. Marike was later stripped of this privilege by Lugard in 1901 on the allegation that he mismanaged taxes. Nevertheless, after the 1897 conquest, all vestiges of Bida domination in the Kyadya territory were abrogated by the Company. For example, taxes collected from the Kyadya were shared between the Company and the *Kuta*, and not to be sent to Bida as the case had been before the conquest. The control of traffic and regulation of fishing activities were restored to the *Kuta*. In this case, it was not only the Kyadya that benefitted but the RNC's economic position was also enhanced.

Perhaps the groups that gained more was the Yissazhi. Though the exercise of power and authority over the whole of Nupeland, as desired by them was not achieved, the Company created an entirely new sphere of political influence for the group. The Yissazhi under the leadership of Idrisu Gana were ferried across the Niger to the westbank to found Patigi emirate (Idrees, 1982). After its establishment, Patigi emirate thus became a unique political unit in Nupeland which had a recognized Emir that was not of Fulani descent but a survivor of the Nupe ruling dynasty of the Pre-Jihad era. The Yissazhi thus resuscitated the *Etsu* title which their ancestors held, and revived all the Nupe traditional political offices.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that apart from rewarding the Yissazhi, Patigi emirate served as a buffer zone between Bida and the other emirates of Lafiagi, Shonga and Ilorin. The poor financial position in which the Company found itself after the conquest had prevented it from stationing a detachment of its soldiers at Bida city. Hence Patigi emirate which would readily cooperate with the Company was strengthened to prevent any possible reinforcement to Bida from its three friendly emirates of Lafiagi, Shonga and Ilorin. The company did not only cede part of Lafiagi territories to Patigi but also encouraged it to build up an army comparable to any other emirate's.

The social order under which the interest groups had gained appreciable degree of independence lasted from 1897 to 1901. Although the groups seemed satisfied with their achievements, by the time the Company was taken over by the British imperial government in London, the whole setup was overhauled in 1901 with Lugard's reconquest of Bida and his setting up of colonial administration (Dupigny, 1970). But even with the colonial structure, Bida never gained back what it had lost to William Wallace and his indigenous allies. For example, the northeast Yorubaland was never made part of the Nupe province. Patigi emirate and its ruling dynasty remained, and though the Kyadya were zoned into the new jurisdiction of Bida, they were allowed to be administered by their *Kuta*. This is to say, that no district head was appointed from Bida for the Kyadya as it was the case with other Nupe districts that remained with it such as Mokwa, Lemu and others.

## CONCLUSION

The state of affairs in Bida emirate before the British conquest alienated its authorities from a number of indigenous groups. At different times the groups attempted throwing off the yoke of Bida domination. This desire was a reaction to the unpopular administrative and economic policies pursued by Bida. Though such attempts were often met with severe reprisals, it did not appear that the groups involved relented in their efforts to overcome the prevailing unfavourable political, economic and military control of Bida. Therefore, the desire of the British to subdue Bida militarily provided the interest groups with the much needed opportunity to achieve their age-long goals. They did not see the British then as imperialists but useful allies to be exploited to their own advantage. Their significant achievements shortly after the conquest justify the groups' actions. Therefore, the indigenous interest groups cannot be blamed for their pro-British action or for not knowing then that they would only be exchanging one imperialist for another. The authorities of Bida emirate also resisted to protect the same interest as the indigenous groups did.

## NOTES

- (1) A revised version of a paper presented at the Departmental Staff Seminar, History Department, University of Ilorin, April 29, 1987.
- (2) *Egbazhi*: These were the district governors of the pre-Fulani Nupe political organization.
- (3) *Obaro*: The title of the indigenous ruler of the northeast Yoruba. He became a tool in the hands of the Bida rulers throughout the period of Nupe domination of the area.
- (4) *Kuta*: The title of the head of the Nupe riverine dwellers. They were independent until the Fulani incursion into Nupeland.
- (5) *Egba*: (singular) District governor.

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—Received *September 19, 1988*

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