THE NIGERIAN MEDIA AND THE GREAT WAR ECOLOGY OF WEST AFRICA

by

Philip Ademola OLAYOKU

Coordinator, The West African Transitional Justice Centre, Nigeria
philip.olayoku@outlook.com / +2348067342618

Abstract

This study details the Great War context in Africa by exploring the pulse of the West African Ecology during the mobilisation of economic resources to support Britain's war efforts. It situates the creation and disbursement of the Great War National Relief Fund (GWNRF) within the dynamics of racial relations, along with the resilience of Africans in asserting educational needs amidst the turbulent war economy. These racial dynamics were also reflected in the exploitative trajectory of trade policies that helped to define the stakes of Africans in the war. The methodology entails a hermeneutical analysis of extracts from narratives in two West African-based media outfits, *The Times of Nigeria* (ToN) and *The African Telegraph* (TAT), between 1913 and 1920. The study subsequently argues for a proper delineation of stakes amidst the ongoing projection of a 'Third World War,' so as to respect the stance of non-alignment and racial independence of neutral nations, and prevent the horizontal spread of crises. This would also prevent non-belligerent nations from incurring unmerited costs of war.

Keywords: Great War and West African Ecology, War Economy, First World War, Great War National Relief Fund, Education and War

Introduction

The Great War period remains a defining epoch within the historicisation of global political economy. The death of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, Sophie (Duchess of Hohenberg), in Saravejo on June 28, 1914, triggered the conquest ambition of Kaiser Wilhelm II, who led the Central Powers, against the resistance of the Allied powers (Dedijer 1966). While the war of aggression and resistance began in Europe, it had implications for international politics and economy, with the key actors already occupying territories regarded as possessions across different continents, and that included Africa. Within the African Continent, the West African Subregion was majorly under the occupation of Great Britain, France and Germany. These countries sought to consolidate their hold on occupied territories, even though the Allies eventually succeeded in displacing Germany from the corridor through various strategies that included control of trade relations within the occupied territories, also labelled colonies.

Between 1914 and 1918, for instance, the struggle for dominance at sea affected maritime transportation of goods, and thereby impeded external trade by the colonies. This had negative economic consequences, which not only included reduction in the quantity and quality of goods, but also unstable pricing regimes. More specifically, the export of goods such as kola nuts, cocoa, timber, palm produce, rubber and gold dust was affected; as the British dominated trade across West Africa by leveraging the export licensing system. This system, it should be reiterated, was put in place to sabotage Africans,

[1]The Allied Powers basically comprised Great Britain, France and Russia. They were later joined by Italy, Japan and the United States. The alliance was formed against the Central Powers that was constituted by Germany, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire

who were excluded from direct shipping to Europe, since they were not eligible to be licensed (Lawal 2018, 74). At the onset of the war, the welfare of Africans was also sacrificed in order to cripple the economic influence of Germany, which remained the priority for the Allies. They took over and auctioned German infrastructures and properties, including plantations, commercial houses and industries, after detaining and expelling their nationals from occupied territories. This was combined with the strategy to starve Germany of food supplies by seizing control of the sea. This strategy was to leverage the fact that Germany was not a food sufficient country at the time (Kwarteng 2018, 45; Milward 1977, 246). This also had a ripple effect on external trade since the Germans were major partners in bilateral trade relations with territories like The Gambia, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone regarding their palm kernel produce. This produce accounted for about 80% of export products from these territories. Germany was particularly noted for its industry in deriving more refined products from palm kernel than, for instance Britain, which resorted to the monopolisation of trade in the colonies as a coping strategy during the war years (Kwarteng 2018, 45). The West African economy was thus critical to the war efforts of the Allies, more so as they relied on it for 'essential wartime materials' that included groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, palm produce, rubber, minerals, cotton and other staples. These were weaponised by enforcing a blockade against Germany in order to win the war (Lawal 2018, 66).

In managing the war's impacts on the global economy, Britain redefined its operational structures within the colonies. Britain, on realising that Germany was intentional in monopolising trade in some raw materials that were essential for industrial production (especially kernels) and munitions, mobilised support from the Allies to neutralise Germany's economic influence in the occupied territories.

This led to the appropriation of the territories' resources to themselves during and after the war. In this regard, some British enthusiasts formed the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) that put forward a proposal purportedly to salvage Britain's economy by revamping relations with its 'dependencies' through trade monopoly. This included that the state took control of trade through the regulation of labour and goods that guaranteed a monopoly to generate money in repaying British war debts. The approach was one of 'imperial preference,' designed to harness economies across all parts of the empire (inclusive of its colonies and protectorates) in order to make it self-supporting through export tariffs (Lugard 1922, 267-8). Though their proposal was not adopted, as shown in a latter section of this article, its rejection was more due to undermining the self-interests of their countrymen that were administering the colonies. This reflected the subjugation of the interests of Africans to those of the colonialists. War time policies, including the recall of British colonial officers to participate in the war, therefore, not only put a strain on West African economies, but also halted their development. This was exemplified, for instance, by the suspension of the activities of the Department of Agriculture a year after it had been established in Nigeria between 1913 and 1921(Effoduh 2013).

What is more, these economic policies call to question the value attached to the contributions of Africans during the Great War. The debates continue to generate controversies as contained in postwar literature on memory initiatives of the war, and others revisiting narratives of Africa's participation in it. There is no gainsaying the fact that the conscription of West African citizens to participate in the Great War, through propaganda and enforced enlistment, has been well-documented by scholars. On the average, there were at least 25,000 enlistments from West Africa, out of which Nigeria accounted for 17,000 soldiers. Apart from the contribution of combatants, however, Nigeria also supplied an estimated 35,000 porters alongside 2,000 carriers who participated at the war fronts in Togoland, East

Africa and the Cameroons (Coates 2025, 156). Not only were the African war participants maltreated at the war fronts, a pre-war incident in Abakaliki showed the precarity that characterised the nature of enlistment. As the narrative went, an officer in the Southern Regiment, Gerald Adams, was recorded to have shot at one of the 20 carriers he impressed because he tried to escape during a 1910 expedition. This indicates that the valuation of African lives at the time equated that of beasts of burden, often dispensable for the preservation of colonial integrity. It is also important to mention that the carrier service was not economically attractive compared to that of soldiers, as they were not entitled to gratuity, pension or disability allowance (Killingray and Matthews 1979, 12- 14).

However, beyond the supply of human resources, there were several efforts at mobilising other economic resources to support Britain's war efforts. These included the creation of several charities, which were inflected by certain racial and ecological dynamics that determined the stakes of Africans in the war. This intervention is designed to interrogate the war ecology from an economic lens, while reflecting the administrative context of education to spotlight the low stakes of Africans in a war into which they were conscripted, albeit often disguised as volunteering. The methodology entails a hermeneutical analysis of extracts from narratives in two West African-based media outfits, *The Times of Nigeria* (ToN) and *The African Telegraph* (TAT) between 1913 and 1920.

The Great War National Relief Fund

According to Lugard (1922, 610), the colonies were economically independent of Britain during the war years, as they rather contributed to the war efforts through mass subscriptions to funds and charities in order to the help Britain cover the costs incurred during the war. One of such subscriptions was to the Great War National Relief Fund (GWNRF) that was created to support families of servicemen as major beneficiaries. Grant (2017, 4) noted that up to £7 million were raised for the fund, though the manner of its

disbursement was controversial. For instance, the moralisation of the scheme through conditions of good behaviour from working-class women, and stereotyping of 'unmarried wives,' drew resentment from women. Nonetheless, the Prince of Wales actively promoted subscription to the fund, not just in Britain, but within other occupied territories including Nigeria. At the time, a public meeting was convened on Wednesday September 9, 1914 at Enu Owa on Lagos Island for subscribing to the fund, and there were about 300 persons in attendance. Suffice to mention that beyond fundraising, these meetings also served as avenues for war propaganda by mobilising anti-German sentiments in order to canvass support for Britain (ToN Sept 22 1914, 253). This was evidenced in the speech of Dr Randle, a foremost Sierra Leonean physician who was active in Lagos politics. Along with Dr Obasa, he was a co-founder of the People's Union that was established in 1908 (Ubaku, Emeh and Anyikwa 2014, 58). At the meeting, he cited the need to end the maltreatment of indigenes within West African territories under German control as a legitimisation of British war efforts, and reason enough to subscribe to the funds (ToN Sept 22 1914, 253). As an aside, it is important to note that the mobilisation of anti-German sentiments continued through to the postwar years as a justification of British occupation of West African territories. This was captured in an article on 'West African Resources' by Robinson (1919, 190). In his words:

> Proof of this (popularity of the British colonial model) is provided by the extraordinary outburst of the inhabitants of German possessions and territory adjacent thereto. A census showed an enormous preponderance in favour of British rule. The cry was universal: "We want the British!" the reason is not far to seek. The African knows and trusts his British rulers. We have developed the latent resources of his country for him along the lines which are, in the main, sound.

> At all events, he has not been treated as a beast of burden, and he knows he can always demand and receive justice from our hands.

Another fundraising effort was recorded later in the year during an Organ Recital, under the patronage of Lt Col H C Moorhouse, on Dec 4 at St Paul's Church, Breadfruit. The event, which was directed by Mr T K E Phillips, incorporated a silver collection that was taken to support the GWNRF (ToN December 1-22 1914, 286).

The contributions of occupied territories (dominions, crown, colonies and protectorates) to the war efforts were acknowledged by the Secretary of State to the Colonies, Rt Hon Lewis Harcourt, MP, on Jan 26, 1915, during his speech in London titled 'A Free Empire in War Time.' The speech detailed their contributions during the first six months of the war, from August 2014 to January 2015. In terms of training, Egypt, which was the latest British protectorate before the war, served as host for Australians, Ceylon contingents and New Zealanders; while the Dominion of South Africa opted to take responsibility for defending the Union in order to allow British soldiers concentrate on the war in Europe and other parts. He commended the handling of the Boer rebellion by Generals Botha and Smuts (see Geyer 2014), which he claimed was instigated based on "personal jealousy than on racial animosity;" especially as the government's response reflected both the consideration for a British victory and retention of Dutch honour in the Union. Beyond military contributions, the Union of South Africa, which was considered a White Dominion within the British Empire, also donated wine, field ambulances and a red cross unit for the French forces. It likewise sent fruits and eggs to hospitals in support of ar casualties. Donations from other parts of the region included tobacco, maize, money contributions and volunteers from Rhodesia; money contributions from Basutos, Bechuanas, Barotse, British Bechuanaland, Bloemfontein and the Rand (ToN April 20-27 1915, 2).

The colonies, from the Caribbean to the Pacific, donated men combatants, volunteers, money, goods, produce, and airplanes. For instance, in addition to sending contingents, the Ceylon gave £25, 000 to the GWNRF along with two motor ambulances, while the Sultan of the Maldives Island donated £2, 000 to the fund. Mauritius donated two million pounds of sugar and Rs150, 000 to support Britain's military contingents. In West Africa, Sierra Leone sent £5, 000 in support of the war; The Gambia contributed £10, 000 and mobilised private contributions to support the red cross and the GWNRF; and the Gold Coast voted £60, 000 for expedition in Togoland, while also raising another £4, 000 in private subscriptions for the GWNRF, with the promise to make more contributions. For Nigeria, only the contribution of £39, 000 from the 'Mussulman Emirs' in the north was recognized by the secretary (ToN April 20-27 1915, 2 & 6). The omission of the contribution of Southern Nigeria, especially Lagos, to the war efforts from the secretary's speech met with criticism in the media. The British government was called out for undervaluing the contribution of at least £2, 200 pounds through the colonial administration to the GWNRF. The writer noted that Northern Nigeria could only have afforded to give £39, 000 due to the surplus from the native administration funds generated by excessive taxation that was resisted in the south (ToN April 20-27 1915, 4). A June 5, 1915 record showed the efforts towards public fundraising for the GWNRF with contributions from both Nigerian and European residents of Southern Nigeria. They numbered up to 48 subscribers and donated amounts ranging from £20 to 1s to raise a total of £202.17 (ToN June 22-29 1915, 3). The contrast between enforced and voluntary donation schemes thus reflected the characteristic difference in the disposition of Northern and Southern Nigeria to colonial administration, and particularly the war efforts.

The Governor-General of Nigeria at the time, Sir Frederick Lugard, later confirmed his support for the approach of the Northern Nigerian emirs in running the colonial economy. He noted that the re-

evaluation of tax through improved assessment and 'a more honest collection' led to prosperity. This was such that the emirates had more than enough to cater for the salaries of native officials, police and prison wardens. On the average, revenues increased from £28, 500 in 1906/7 to £536, 000 in 1919. This facilitated the construction of native court houses, treasuries, schools, and prisons. The surplus was kept in a reserve fund and amounted to £486, 654 after the emirs voted a significant sum in support of the war (Lugard 1922, 208). This mechanism of stifling the populace to generate public funds has an enduring legacy that continues to breed resistance till the present, with the latest effort of the current Nigerian administration on tax reforms generating its own controversies; ranging from the lack of accountability in an ineffective tax administration process, to multiple taxation, higher inflation rates, and widening inequality gap (Zubairu, 2024). The investment of Northern Nigeria in the war was thus arguably founded on a mutually reinforcing relationship between the colonial administrators and Northern elites, particularly on the shared interest of taxation.

According to Lugard's (1922, 223) account, the 'native treasury' devoted £50, 000 annually to the war efforts, while daily prayers were offered in the mosques for the success of 'British troops.' In 1918, the Sultan and his chiefs also donated £11, 000 to the Red Cross from their private funds. The history of conquest in Northern Nigeria provides an important rationale to contest the supposition of Meagher (2018, 7-8) that the introduction of colonial direct taxation in 1904 was without incidents. In leveraging the pre-colonial practice of taxation embedded[2] in the religious obligation of the 'Zakkat' by the 'Hausa-Fulani' led administration, she neglected the history of resistance by non-Hausa-Fulani/non-Muslim populations in

[2] It is important to note the complexities surrounding this appellation, which this author contests as the blurring of identity lines to navigate political legitimacy during conquest. The usage here is to retain the context implied by Meagher (2018).

Northern Nigeria, who still perceive the imposition of the Hausa-Fulani emirate system through indirect rule as an exploitative inter-ethnic relation, especially when taxation was deployed to violate their political and socioeconomic cultures (see Ugbem, Omobowale and Olutayo, 2019).

The procedure for fundraising within West African colonies was mainly by voting sums from public revenues and/or local subscriptions to support the British war expenditure. While the Raj and other dominions like South Africa were wealthier, as reflected in their support for the war, contributions by colonies in West Africa were also significant given the nature of their economies and stages of development at the time of the war. Local subscriptions were mobilised through intensifying the war propaganda that highlighted the dangers of a German victory. The West African press was particularly active in propagating loyalty to Britain and opposition to German occupation of the region (ToN December 29 1914, 4; Davies, 2018). Within the West African administrative context, the Governor of Sierra Leone, Sir Edward Marsh Merewether, during a legislative council meeting, admonished support for the GWNRF, which was also designed to cater to the needs of soldiers relieved of their duties, and those who are unable to access any other source of income for their families. The council thus voted a sum of £5, 000 for the fund, which followed a donation of £10, 000 from The Gambia as noted earlier. During legislative proceedings in the Gold Coast on November 17, 1914, a vote was also passed for the sum of £60, 000 to be allocated from the colony's revenue to offset the expenses of the August 1914 military expedition in Togoland. Another £80,000 was budgeted as an estimate for the colony's 1915 contribution to Britain's war efforts. This was included in the 1915 Supply Bill that was passed on Dec 1, 1914; while £3, 000 was voted as a monthly expenditure to defray administrative expenses in Togoland. In terms of private contributions to the GWNRF, an amount of £4, 000 had been raised

by December 1914, with more contributions expected. In total, the Gold Coast committed at least £180, 000 to the Great War expenditure in 1915 (ToN, December 29 1914, 292). The commitment of the Gold Coast went beyond contributions to Britain's war efforts to also include funding the welfare of members of the Gold Coast Regiment, even after the war. On March 1, 1919, for instance, the Gold Coast Red Cross Advisory Council devoted £3, 500 from its collections to the Fund for Wounded and Disabled Soldiers of the Gold Coast Regiment (TAT, April 1919, 178).

In Nigeria, mobilisation for support was done through a committee set up for raising subscriptions to the war funds. By December 1914, residents and commissioners had rallied kings, chiefs, and public servants through their heads of departments to raise £1, 200 and another estimate of £1, 759 was expected to be raised before the end of the year (ToN, December 29 1914, 292). The Nigerian Relief Fund for African Native Troops was also created for soldiers that suffered fatalities during the Cameroon expedition. This fund was championed by the Lagos Auxiliary of the Anti-Slavery and Aborigines Protection Society of London. However, the government restricted their fundraising activities by limiting them to their members within the Lagos Metropolis. Also, a cap of £200 was placed on the fund, while the excess was to be added to the GWNRF towards completing the deficit of the £2, 000 target. This reflects that priority was given to funds going to Britain at the expense of the welfare of Nigerian soldiers. The undermining of the welfare of Nigerian soldiers drew criticism from the press, especially considering that the new administration under Sir Lugard had downgraded the role of the legislative council to that of an advisory entity. To combat the challenge of low funds from the subscriptions in Southern Nigeria, nonetheless, the government was advised to forward a motion to the legislative council for votes on Nigeria's contributions to the GWNRF. This was based on the supposition that

the country could afford between £50, 000 and £100, 000 despite a drop in its revenue; especially with the country generating over £2, 750, 000 annually based on fiscal data from1913 (ToN, December 29 1914, 4).

The contributions from the colonies to the war efforts were thus critical to Britain's economic survival during the war years; especially as it grappled with policy measures to salvage its strained economy. One of such measures was the proposition of a loan resolution by Mr Mckenna at the parliament. This was to complement the move by the Bank of England (BoE) to issue a prospectus for replacing treasury bills in order to enable war success. The loan scheme was thus proposed as a better alternative, as it was thought to enable public fundraising and boost economic expansion through its potential to create a vibrant foreign exchange market. This measure was deemed important towards offsetting a total deficit of £518 million as of June 19, 1915. The loan attracted a 4.5% interest rate, which was to be repaid in 10 years, and compulsorily within 30 years. The minimum amount for subscription to the BoE was £100, while post offices were to sell bonds ranging from £5 to £25 along with vouchers at 5s with the interest rate of 5% per annum (ToN June 22-29 1915, 2).

The strain on Britain's economy also put the welfare of its troops at the war fronts in jeopardy. This was evidenced in a letter to the editor of ToN dated June 24, 1915, from Assistant Secretary F A Clinch. The letter detailed Captain Clave R Savile's plea that meat be gifted to soldiers under his command in Douala. He noted the importance of maintaining food culture in warfare as the health of some African men in his regiment was badly affected by the lack of meat, as opposed to others who were used to the rice staple being distributed by the supply department. On the whole, he lauded his soldiers' professionalism, and pleaded for subscriptions to a fund in support of the welfare of the troops. The poor feeding of soldiers was also confirmed by Crowder

(1985, 291) who wrote that Nigerian foot soldiers were fed half-a-pound of rice with no accompaniment, while most carriers were subjected to hardship with about 45,000 of them succumbing to diseases during the campaign in the Cameroons. In early 1917, for instance, carriers and troops were fed solely on depreciated maize meals with a ration that was below 1000 calories a day (see also Killingray and Matthews 1979, 18).

The neglect of Nigerian soldiers, especially those that were war casualties, led to an advocacy for fundraising tailored towards their families' welfare. The GWNRF catered basically for the British soldiers, and another fund was thus proposed to provide relief and assistance for the widows and orphans of Nigerian men who served in the troops. The specific targets were those who had either been lost in battle, or died from wounds and/or diseases during the war in the Cameroons. Nonetheless, this was not without its controversy as some members of the public showed discontent against the proposition of two fundraising projects among the Lagos public to support the war efforts. This was because they opposed the logic of fundraising by two distinct parties for what they considered to be the same cause, even after the colonial authorities had proposed a merger (ToN October 27 1914, 268). Nonetheless, though the funds may have had the same aim of welfare for soldiers and their families, the difference was in the beneficiaries of the funds; the widows and orphans of British soldiers in the former, and those of their Nigerian counterparts in the latter. The GWNRF scheme's purpose, from the Nigerian perspective, only endeared Nigeria as a responsive colony to the British public.

Similarly, the colonial administration had no provision for Nigerian soldiers since there was no allocation for them in the Annual Estimates. The government, as it was reported, paid a compensation of only 10s, and evicted their families from the barracks, with no proposition of recalling them after the war. By contrast, widows and

orphans of English soldiers received public allowances from the GWNRF. This discrepancy served as discouragement for potential contributors to the fund, contrary to the anticipation of those who argued in favour of a merger of funds (with a local relief fund) to encourage more donors (ToN October 27 1914, 268). There was also a challenge with proper record keeping and accountability. This reflected in the absence of public data from the government on the names of Nigerian soldiers that were killed, wounded and/or missing among the rank and file, as was obtainable for British soldiers. This was considered to be achievable through daily roll calls to keep tabs on the soldiers. In terms of public accountability, issues were also raised with respect to pre-war fundraising events for which cash inflows and expenditure were not published to legitimise the bulk sum total reported by the Bank of England (ToN, October 27 1914, 4). These reservations put the significantly low contributions from the critically engaging Southern Nigerian residents, in comparison to their Northern counterparts who weaponised the tax-driven economy to support the war, in a proper perspective.

The racial preference on display in the treatment of British soldiers compared to their Nigerian colleagues also became a topic of interest, in line with ensuring timely and appropriate medical care of the latter. This led Chief Oduntan Labintan to propose that two Nigerian private medical practitioners be sent with the Nigerian troops that were deployed to the Cameroons, so that they can help to treat both European and African war casualties. His reasoning was based on the fact that Europeans were wont to give priority treatments to their kind, and Africans are thus needed to provide equal attention to their brethren in order to reduce fatalities. He subsequently suggested that Dr Obasa be sent with a colleague, and their efforts be supported through public fundraising to compensate for their inability to practice while at the war front. This was also to be considered a contribution to the GWNRF (ToN September 22 1914, 253). The

contributions of medical doctors in Nigeria during the war were well documented by Lugard (1922, 151) while he advocated for support for their work through the provision of better transport infrastructure. In his words:

> The utility of the medical department can be greatly increased by providing motor-cars or cycles for the doctors, as we found in Nigeria during the war, when the bulk of our medical staff was lent for war work elsewhere. By thus covering long distances, even over the roughest of native roads, they are enabled to save many a life. The story of African development is full of deeds of self-devotion by doctors, who have travelled day and night under almost impossible conditions to save the life of a sick comrade in an isolated and distant post (Lugard 1922, 151).

It is important to also point out that women played critical roles during fundraising events in support of the war efforts, apart from helping with the provision of treatments to sick and wounded war contingents. Such efforts included the vocal solo performance of "Lord to Thee We Pray" by Mrs Augusta Spencer Savage at the aforementioned organ recital to support the GWNRF (Agunbiade 2024; ToN December 1-22 1914, 286). Her sister, Charlotte Obasa, also organised a Patriotic Concert in June 1915 to raise just above £21 for the GWNRF, while the Committee of Ladies at Ebute Meta in Lagos organised an evening of entertainment to support the 'Cameroons Meat Fund' in response to Captain Savile's plea in July 1915. The women not only supported the British Red Cross Society to sell merchandise, or work through the value chain of food production for war contingents, but also contributed to the Nigeria Aeroplane Fund, Nigerian Overseas Contingent Comforts Fund, and the Queen's

Star and Garter Homes Fund for Permanently Disabled Soldiers and Sailors (Agunbiade 2024). Suffice to mention that apart from fundraising to support the war, there were also subscriptions to funds designated for other purposes. This was evidenced in the visit of Bishop Samuel David Ferguson Jr, the first African American Episcopal Missionary Bishop of Liberia's Anglican Communion, to Lagos in November 1914. The purpose was to mobilise funds for building St. Marks Church, and he was supported by at least 59 subscribers (ToN December 1-22 1914, 2). From the foregoing, it could be asserted that the colonies were supportive of Britain's war efforts, and this partly accounted for the economic boom it enjoyed in the postwar decade of the 1920s, before it experienced another economic crisis from 1929 due to the Great Depression (see Coquery – Vidrovitch 1985, 351).

The War Economy and Education Administration

The war prevented substantial investment in education, as was with other sectors, since the colonial administration became financially stringent due to labour shortages, financial challenges in England, and disruption of transportation along the waterways (Crowder 1985, 283-4). This was not ideal within the perspective that the budget allocation for education in Nigeria, which was the lowest in West Africa as of 1913 at 1.5% of the total revenue, could not be increased. Sierra Leone, however, was able to allocate 3.5% in 1919, while the Gold Coast increased its allocation from 2% in 1917 to 2.9% in 1918 (Lugard 1922, 458). The low priority given to education of Africans by the colonial governments questions the rationale for colonial occupation, which was projected as the promotion of religion and education across West Africa, and beyond. This supposition was contained in the 31st Article of the Royal Instructions to Henry Stanhope Freeman, Esq, the first governor and commander-in-chief of Lagos Settlement and its dependencies. As the crown instructed:

> And it is our will and pleasure that you do, to the

> utmost of your power, promote religion and education among the native inhabitants of our said settlement, or of the lands thereto adjoining, and that you do especially take care to protect them in their persons and in the free enjoyment of their possessions, and that you do by all lawful means prevent and restrain all violence and injustice which may in any manner be practiced or attempted against them, and that you take such measures as may appear to you to be necessary for their conversion to the Christian faith, and for their advancement in civilization (ToN July 28 1914, 4).

Nonetheless, the enthusiasm for education in Nigeria during the war years remained unabated as recorded in the press. For instance, the advert placement by Ray College Lagos on its 'Evening Continuation Classes' stressed that activities continued during the war, and emphasised that its aim was to provide access to 'sound modern education.' Subjects taught included English, French, Latin, Greek, Mathematics, Science, Drawing, Music and Shorthand. These were to prepare candidates for both local and foreign examinations including the Cambridge Local Exams. The college also offered free lessons for candidates who failed their initial attempts to enable them retake the examinations (ToN June 22-29 1915, 3). Rathbone (1978, 8) confirmed the zeal for education during the war years when he asserted that the period from 1914 to1918 witnessed an increase in the demand for western education on the African Continent, and there was a rapid increase in the number of schools. He also aligned with the proposition that the creation of schools in West and East Africa at the time largely depended on African demands and initiatives, with Africans financing and running some of them.

The interest in education and its development at the time was

captured in the debates around the introduction of a new Education Code, which was meant to regulate primary and secondary education in Southern Nigeria. The 1908 Education Ordinance had initially been introduced in the Southern Nigeria Protectorate after its merger with the Lagos Colony, and it was used to create a Department of Education headed by the Director of Education (Bunting 2018, 397). After the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates to form the Nigerian Colony in 1914, Sir Lugard initiated some education reforms through the proposal of an Education Ordinance for the Nigerian Colony and the Education Code for Southern Nigeria, both of which came into force in 1916 (Muraina 2015, 14). Part of the reforms included the creation of two separate boards of education for Northern and Southern Nigeria respectively (ToN July 28 1914, 6).

Some provisions of the new code were, however, considered non-progressive as was reflected in earlier criticisms of proposed reforms by the Headmasters of Government Assisted Schools in Lagos. This was detailed in a letter dated October 17, 1910, but which resurfaced in mid-1914 as the proposal of the new code gained more momentum. The headmasters specifically expressed reservations against the usurpation of the decision-making powers of the Education Board, which were then exercised through the Governor-in-Council by the Director of Education; introduction of five additional compulsory subjects to the initial three obligatory subjects, which stretched the capacity of primary school students - thus sacrificing quality education for quantity; non-suitability of recommended textbooks; abrupt introduction of British standards to the Nigerian educational system through arbitrary insertion of some parts of the 1908 British code; broader definition of primary school education beyond the recommendation of the school managers; variation in the school year as against fixed terms; and interference of the Education Director in the choice of exam candidates. They, subsequently, recommended the retention of three obligatory subjects, and separation of Grammar

from Reading, which was to be taught alongside Geography and History. Sanitation was also proposed to be taught as a separate subject (ToN July 28 1914, 3). There was specifically another criticism against the provision that the government should register and inspect Unassisted Schools, as this was deemed to encourage dictatorial habits (ToN July 28 1914, 6).

It was, however, not all positive in terms of disposition to education as a notice served by the ToN indicated in 1915. According to the notice, the publication was to be discontinued for a season due to 'poverty of intellectual equipment arising out of the deficiencies in the educational attainments' of members of the printing profession. The reason given was that a number of students dropped out of school in search of money, which compounded the challenge of having fewer staff and subscriptions; especially with some of the readers relying on their friends to buy copies for them to read (ToN June 1-15 1915, 4). Nevertheless, this was not the first time the publication was delayed during the war years. There was another reported instance a year prior when the July 1914 edition was delayed due to the desertion of printers working with the printing department of the Nigerian Railway Administration, having been offered better remunerations by other employers (ToN July 28 1914, 4). The economy of the war thus led to the desperation for survival that affected both the quest for education and professional practice.

Trade and the War Economy

As earlier mentioned, the control of trade was very vital to Britain's strategy during the Great War, and it sought to recover trade dominance from Germany within occupied territories across West Africa. This was the logic behind the action of the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Right Honourable Lewis Harcourt, in collaboration with the Board of Trade, Board of Agriculture and Chambers of Commerce of the United Kingdom, to transfer the trade in palm kernel products, previously monopolised by Germany, to Britain.

According to the report, this was proposed to be an economic gamechanger for Britain, which had only two mills that could handle 70,000 tons of the products annually. However, political and economic challenges during the war affected productivity at the mills, such that the country was unable to handle 200,000 tons of supplies in palm kernel. This subsequently led to developing a project on erecting another mill in London, with the capacity to process 100,000 tons of supply in palm kernels annually (ToN December 1-22 1914, 2).

The West African territories were renowned for farming and trade in the palm oil tree and its produce, including palm kernel and palm oil. With an agrarian economy that boasted about 2, 100, 000 miles, it was considered as the most valuable territory occupied by Britain after India (Robinson 1919, 190). In 1912, for instance, British occupied territories such as The Gambia exported about 445 tons of palm kernel nuts, which amounted to £6, 518 in value; the Gold Coast externally traded 14, 629 tons valued at £205, 305; Nigeria sold 184, 624 tons valued at £2, 797, 411 to foreign traders; and Sierra Leone shipped 50, 751 tons that earned it £793, 178. In the neighbouring French colonies, Dahomey produced 37, 708 tons of palm kernel nuts that amounted to £535, 937; Gabon sold 354 tons that earned it £4, 671; Guinea traded 5, 054 tons valued at £41, 079; Ivory Coast cultivated 6, 692 tons sold at £70, 710; and Senegal shipped 1, 736 tons, which was £28, 221 in value (ToN December 1-22 1914, 282). In terms of trade with Europe before the war, the palm oil produce was considered more important by[3]Britain and palm kernel was mainly traded with Germany. In 1913, for instance, 241, 961 tons of palm kernel were reportedly imported into Hamburg with its[4] worth estimated to be £5, 233, 252 (ToN December 1-22 1914, 2). These were processed into cooking oil, soap, candles and feeding cakes.

[3] Germany and the Palm Kernel Trade. 1915, 193.
[4] Germany and the Palm Kernel Trade. 1915, 193.

They were also found useful for producing edible fats like margarine, vegetable butters, chocolate fats and even nitroglycerine explosives (ToN December 1-22 1914, 282). To curb the importation of these refined products into Britain from Germany, British merchants and manufacturers were encouraged to seize the opportunity presented by the war, and take over their production.

While the British sought to maximize their economic potentials during the war, West Africans grappled with the challenge of unstable economies and significant rise in inflation. The dire nature of the situation in Nigeria was expressed by a contributor in the ToN. He noted that: 'Never in history has this community, and I think West Africa, been threatened with the disaster and a probable failure of food supply as is likely to be the case in connection with the outbreak of war between the Powers that be…' (ToN August 4-18 1914, 4). Crowder (1985, 302) was more specific about the war impacts when he documented that the inflation challenge was more pronounced among wage earners and merchants within the export sector, even as government interventions such as 'price control, requisition of food crops, compulsory cultivation of crops, recruitment of labour for essential projects or allocation of shipping space' were not in favour of Africans but the colonialists and businesses affiliated with them. At the start of the war, mercantile shipping was suspended and people were admonished to stock up foodstuffs and provisions in order to avoid famine. This led to a scramble for goods, and the rush resulted in 'prohibitive' rise in prices by about up to 50% for some products. As documented, the price of Kerosine rose from 5s per tin to 7s. 6d; ¼ lb of Butter from 1s. 3d to 5s; 1cwt bag of rice from 30s to 60s; Garri rose from 3d per measure to 6d; a Salmon tin from 6d to 9d; and sugar packet from 3d to 6d (ToN August 4-18 1914, 4).

The colonial government, subsequently, intervened by setting up a commission of inquiry, and thereafter banned the sale of provisions and imported goods, with the exception of trade in gin, cotton, tobacco and soap, to control pricing. Consequently, restrictions on

import and export goods affected the movement of goods to the hinterlands due to scarcity. Areas like Forcados and Burutu in the South were deprived of supply in foodstuffs from Lagos, Niger and Warri (ToN August 4-18 1914, 4). The economic situation was worsened by attempts to punish dissent through deprivation of access to means of sustenance. For instance, the ToN editor was deprived of the delivery of a printing plant he had ordered due to his advocacy for municipality, water supply, and fair water rates; as well as insistence on citizens' integration into local administration (ToN March 23-30 1915, 4). Regarding the latter, it is important to note that the wartime policy of imperial trade control, with export produce like cocoa and oleaginous under the direct control and management of the imperialists, led to agitations across the West African territories. These policies of usurpation and appropriation were perceived as threats to the economic survival of Africans, who began to demand for representative governance systems (Killingray 1982, 203-205). However, though the war had negative impacts on local economies, Europeans, due to the privilege they enjoyed, preyed on the local cravings for British goods to boost their trade. A notice by T H Scott & Co, a tailoring outfit based in Bradford England, solicited for orders from Nigerians, and it read in part: 'WE ARE PLEASED TO SAY THAT THE WAR DOES NOT INTERFERE WITH MAIL SERVICE, so please send your orders as usual to an ALL BRITISH FIRM for Serges, Flannels, Suitings, Alpacas Vestings, SUNPROOF CLOTHS, T-Shirts, Collars, Boots, Hats, and anything else you may require... PRESENTS GIVEN WITH ORDERS' (ToN June 22-29 1915, 6).

Colonial relations with Africans and their welfare remained topical through the war years and in the early post-war period. For instance, controversies were generated by the economic propositions of the Empire Resources Development Committee (ERDC) as mentioned earlier. The committee, which was created in October 1916 through the initiative of Mr Moreton Frewen, MP and eighteen others,

developed schemes for the exploitation of resources in occupied territories within the empire. Its mission was to help offset British debts, curb domestic taxation and improve living standards (Killingray 1982, 195). In West Africa, war time policies were enough to encourage ERDC's aspiration for control of the region's palm produce, even though it did not have practical information on the geographies and realities of the region. This deficiency characterised its 'vague' proposals on the development of land, fisheries and petroleum, and subsequently lessened its influence (Killingray 1982, 197-198; Killingray 1978, 5). The colonial office, however, opposed ERDC's proposals because they undermined indigenous rights, especially the right to land ownership; since they were designed to be beneficial to only British citizens. They were also significantly opposed by Sir Frederick Lugard and Sir Hugh Charles Clifford, who were governors of Nigeria and the Gold Coast respectively. They noted that their implementation would undermine the trusteeship, as contained in the principle of political trust in line with the 1884 Berlin Act. This act had been designed to ensure that colonialists preserve indigenes of occupied territories by ensuring their 'moral and material well-being.' More importantly, Africans were also opposed to these proposals based on the suspicion that the provisions on the management of their resources were not for their good (Killingray 1982, 201-202; Killingray 1978, 5).[5]

Bishop Herbert Tugwell,[6] in an interview with *West Africa,*[7] a weekly that was edited by Albert Cartwright, corroborated the potential

[5]The Future of Colonial Trusteeship. 1934. *The Round Table,* 24 (96): 732-745.

[6] Bishop Tugwell was an Anglican Bishop of the Western Equatorial Africa Diocese who served as a missionary for the Church Mission Society (CMS) in Nigeria, and an Anglican church, Bishop Tugwell Memorial Anglican Church (BTM) is named after him in Lagos.

[7] Cartwright was also opposed to the economic propositions of the ERDC (Killingray 1982, 200).

violation of the economic rights of Nigerians as laid down by the principle of trusteeship, if the ERDC was allowed to have its way. As reproduced by *The African Telegraph*, he had this to say:

> …The Empire Resources Development Committee stands condemned in the minds of the people of Nigeria…We do not object to development, but we strongly object to exploitation, and the Empire Resources Development Committee's methods mean nothing more nor less than exploitation. We fail to see any resultant benefit to the African in the present scheme of development of the Committee…If, therefore, it can be demonstrated how Nigeria's resources can best be developed consistently with Nigeria's best interests, and consistently with the adherence to those fundamental principles which are the glory of British administration, and with regard to the maintenance of Nigeria's inherent rights, I am satisfied that the people will loyally cooperate in any legitimate endeavour which may be made to bring about such developments (TAT April 1919, 158).

It is important to note that, much as the ERDC's proposals were opposed on the ground of indigenous rights, the colonial economy under the pretext of trusteeship did not fare any better in terms of exploitation. This indicated that colonial officers were more about protecting their interests against emerging threats than those of West Africans. Bishop Tugwell made reference to this through these posers on the exploitation perpetrated by European merchants:

> Has Sir Frederick ever controlled the prices of raw products locally? Does he remember the

> prices paid locally to the producers by the large European firms, prices which hardly covered the cost of production? Profits there may be but the Nigerians do not have the benefit of them. They all find their way into the treasury of the Liverpool firms, and what little is left over into the colonial treasury (TAT April 1919, 161).

These European merchants followed a defective macroeconomic logic that was criticised by Robinson (1900, 620 - 621), whereby the valuation of regions was streamlined to their natural resources without taking the peoples' cultures and conditions into consideration. This, as he maintained, was an impractical economic exploitation model, where the pain of production exceeds the pleasure from its outputs, and was bound to demotivate workers. By 1920, nonetheless, with the dwindling prospects of colonial economic exploits within the empire, the ERDC succumbed to opposition and went extinct (Killingray 1982, 205).

Conclusion

> We cannot be too thankful, therefore, for the protection, the privileges and the blessings which we enjoy under the British Flag… our assistance is not needed in this struggle. Our simple duty is to invoke the aid of the Great Arbiter of the Universe and of the destiny of nations, in humble belief and confidence that our prayers may ascend up to the throne of the Almighty that success may attend the arms of the British forces and those of the Allies so that peace may return once more to those countries which are now the theatre of war and likewise our land (ToN August 4-18 1914, 4).

The above extract from a contribution in the *Times of Nigeria* captures the disposition of a number of Nigerian citizens to their

involvement in the Great War, which could be culturally understood as laden with sarcasm. This reflects that they would rather be passive observers sending prayerful wishes to the British troops, and were desirous of a condition in which their nation and territory was immune to war and its ravaging impacts. It follows that the costs of the Great War, in terms of human capital and economic resources (see Crowder 1985), with the benefit of hindsight, were not as beneficial to the continent as many historians and scholars are wont to project. For one, there was little stake for the continent in a European war that was triggered by the assassination of the Austro-Hungarian Crown Prince, Archduke Franz Ferdinand (Miller-Melamed, 2022), and the ambition of Kaiser Wilhem II to conquer Europe. The neglect of the welfare of Africans during and after the war, especially within British occupied territories, reflects the futility of their involvements resulting from war propaganda. Rather, the war years witnessed increase in the stakes of colonialists within occupied territories as they deployed the funnel of exploitation to siphon the resources of the continent. Not only were Africans excluded from fund disbursements despite massive contributions to the GWNRF, they were also confined to stringent economic conditions that undermined their standards of living. The eccentric colonial administrators were less concerned about the devastating impacts of the war on Africans, especially as they created and implemented policies of trade monopoly in favour of European corporations that excluded Africans from participating in exports.

Suffice to note that the evolution of the war nomenclature was already subjected to debate during the war as recorded in the 1917 writing of a war veteran called Appolinaire, and this is quite instructive. What began as the 'War of 1914,' was later called 'the European War' as it stretched to 1915, and then became the[8] Great War,' before it was

[8] Other appellations for war include 'The War of Nations', 'The War of the Races,' 'War of Alliances,' 'War of the Peoples', and 'War of Fronts.' (Becker 2015, 1031).

called the 'World War' or 'Universal War' in 1917, largely due to the involvement of the United States (Becker 2015, 1031). The lack of a proper definition for the war is testament to the war propaganda that was used to involve other peoples in a European war of attrition, especially those within occupied territories. This, of course, resulted in needless losses of human and economic capitals from which the African Continent, and other parts of the Global South, are yet to recover or get compensation. Within today's global framing of tensions, therefore, it is important that belligerent nations honestly and clearly define their motivations, alliances and territories of operations amidst the indications of a potential 'Third World War.' Not only would such a label negate the principle of, and disposition to, non-alignment as is characteristic of countries in the Global South, but also reinforce racial dichotomies that undermine the sovereign rights of non-belligerent nations.

References

"Germany and the Palm Kernel Trade." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 14, no. 54 (1915): 193 – 198.

"The Future of Colonial Trusteeship." *The Round Table* 24, no. 96 (1934): 732-745

Agunbiade, Tayo. "Nigerian Women and the World War One (1914-18)." *Premium Times,* May 23, 2024. https://www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/696772-nigerian-women-and-world-war-one-1914-18-by-tayo agunbiade.html?tztc=1.

Becker, Annette. "The Great War: World War, Total War." *International Review of the Red Cross* 97, no. 900 (2015): 1029-1045.

Bunting, Olejurulo. "Historical Analysis of Educational Policies in Colonial Nigeria from (1842-1959) and Its Implication to Nigerian Education Today." *International Journal of Scientific Research in Education* 11, no. 3 (2018): 392-410.

Coates, Oliver. "Beyond Anonymity: Nigerian Participation in World War One Commemoration: 1919–1939."

The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History 53, no. 1 (2025): 155-181, DOI: 10.1080/03086534.2025.2470291.

Crowder Michael. "The First World War and Its Consequences." In *General History of Africa. VII: Africa under Colonial Domination 1880-1935,* edited by Albert Boahen. UNESCO, 1985.

Davies, Nigel. "West Africa and the First World War." 2018.

https://media.nationalarchives.gov.uk/index.php/west-africa-first-world-war/.

Dedijer, Vladimir. *The Road to Saravejo.* Simon and Schuster, 1966.

Effoduh, Jake. "The Economic Development of Nigeria from 1914 to 2014." In *Nigeria: A Centenary of Constitutional Evolution 1914-2014,* edited by Epiphany Azinge. Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies, 2013.

Geyer, Rene. "The Union Defence Force and the 1914 Strike: The Dynamics of the Shadow of the Burgher." *Historia* 59, no. 2 (2014): 136-151.

Grant, Peter. "Philanthropy in Britain during the First World War." *La Revue Tocqueville* 38, no. 2 (2017): 37-51.

Killingray, David. "Repercussions of World War I in the Gold Coast." The Journal of African History 19, no. 1 (1978): 39-59.

Killingray, David. "The Empire Resources Development Committee and West Africa 1916–20." *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10, no. 2 (1982): 194-210.

Kwarteng, Kwame. "World War I: The Role of the Gold Coast and Asante towards the British Victory." In *Africa and the First World War: Remembrance, Memories and Representations*

After 100 Years, edited by Botchway, De-Valera and Kwame Kwarteng. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

Lawal, Adebayo. "African Mobilization of Agricultural Resources in British West Africa during the First World War." In *Africa and the First World War: Remembrance, Memories and Representations After 100 Years*, edited by Botchway, De-Valera and Kwame Kwarteng. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018.

Meagher, Kate. "Taxing Times: Taxation, Divided Societies and the Informal Economy in Northern Nigeria." *Journal of Development Studies* 54, no. 1 (2018): 1-17.

Miller-Melamed, Paul. *Misfire: The Saravejo Assassination and the Winding Road to World War I.* Oxford University Press, 2022.

Milward, Alan. *War, Economy and Society, 1939-1945.* Allen Lane, 1977.

Muraina, Monsuru. "Historical Antecedents of Development and Management of Educational Resources in Nigeria: 1882-2013." *Historical Research Letter* 23, (2015): 12-17.

Robinson, Edward. "War and Economics in History and in Theory." *Political Science Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1900): 581-628.

Robinson, Stanley. "West African Resources." *Journal of the Royal African Society* 18, no. 71 (1919): 190 -197.

Ubaku, Kelechi, Chikezie Emeh, and Chinenye Anyikwa. "Impact of Nationalist Movement on the Actualization of Nigerian Independence, 1914 – 1960." *International Journal of History and Philosophical Research* 2, no. 1 (2014.): 54-67.

Ugbem Erima, Ayokunle Omobowale, and Akinpelu Olutayo. "Racial Politics and Hausa-Fulani Dominant Identity in Colonial and Post-colonial Northern Nigeria." *The Nigerian*

Journal of Sociology and Anthropology 17, no. 1 (2019): 87-102.

Walker-Said, Charlotte. "Expanding Wealth and Expanding Inequality in the Economic History of Equatorial Africa After World War I." *Afriche e Orienti* 21, no. 3 (2019): 97-116.

Zubairu, Digma. "Nigeria's Tax Reform Bill: Advantages and Disadvantages of the Tax Reform Bill Regionally." *Yerwa Express News,* November 30, 2024. https://yen.ng/yen2/2024/11/nigerias-tax-reform-bill-advantages-and-disadvantages-of-the-tax-reform-bill-regionally-by-digma-zubairu.