

## Role Of Nigerian Educated Elites Towards Anti-Colonial Struggle In Nigeria, 1930s-1960

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### Abstract

*The introduction of western education in Nigeria, from the beginning of British colonialism has a historical origin arising from the rejection-acceptance dichotomy, by the north and south respectively. The subsequent western colonial domination led to the inevitable superimposition of western form of education upon the indigenous people of the country. The paper would also argue that the Nigeria educated elites have played a vital role towards anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria from 1930s- 1960. This article further examines that British induced educational model created a westernized elites of the country during the colonial and postcolonial periods occupied significant positions in the political and economic life. Those who did not took western education relegated and deprived of the benefits that comes with western education. Accordingly, those who did not took western education thereby were not permitted to obtain white color jobs in the colonial and post-colonial administration offices. Paradoxically, the same educational system also provided Nigerians with a modernist ideology with which to first imagine a unified nation and then mobilize Nigerians the colonial exploitation, which led to the accomplishment of political sovereignty, in 1960s.*

**Keywords:** Colonialism, Western Education, Nationalism, Cultural Hegemony and Decolonization.

### 1.1 Introduction

The first section of this paper will argue that the introduction of western education in Nigeria, from the beginning of British rule 1900-1960, has a historical origin arising from the rejection-acceptance dichotomy, by the north and south respectively, of the external influences and innovation process of modernization, this will later on examine in this article. For almost three centuries before the coming of the “western form of education in to Nigeria through the Christian missionaries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the “Quranic form “ of education with its Arabic culture- orientation and tenets of Islam had been imposed upon the “ Nigerian indigenous forms” of education, particularly in the northern parts of the

country. The subsequent western colonial domination led to the inevitable superimposition of western form of education upon both the indigenous and 'Quranic' forms of education (Abdurrahman 2012,p5). The article would briefly examine the historical antecedents of the educational imbalances between the Northern and southern part of Nigeria from the early period of British rule in Nigeria.

The paper would also examines that western education came to serve for two paradoxical functions: not only did it become the instrument of British colonialism for training the first generation of Nigerian elites to be employed in the colonial administrations, but also help the later generations about forging an ethical/ideological ground to resist British dominance in the country (John 2008, p43). The colonial elites saw themselves as nation-makers that a genuine decolonization meaning a process of ending colonial rule and dismantling colonial institutions in Nigeria has to be taken. Thus, the colonial elites in Nigeria in time became discontent with the imperialist grip by turned the ideals of modernity,

such as self-determination, into the tool of 'decolonizing' the minds of Nigerians from their cognitive submission to British as a culture that was allegedly superior to, thus entitled to, rule Nigerians (Falola and Heaton 2008, p.5). The article further argued that the 'anti-colonial' agitation in Nigeria, which led to the independence of the country in 1960, was pioneered by educated elites in Nigeria who had previously been couched by the British colonial administration in Nigeria (Falola 2003, 21). The paper has finally justify that it was the efforts made by the Nigerian educated elites towards anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria from 1920s, and 1930-1960, which finally led to dismantling of colonial rule and the independence of the country in 1960.

## **1.2 Introduction of Western Education in Southern and Northern Nigeria**

Prior to the colonial conquest and domination in the 19century, most of the northern states were Islamic in religious belief and education orientation. The Qur'an was by large a necessary derivation of Islam. The tenets of the Islam relied principally on

the Qur'an is the Muslims what the Bible is to the Christians (Okobiah 2012, p5). In order to effectively participate in prayer and perform religious rites, it was necessary to educate the converts with the rudiments of the Qur'an, which was initially written in Arabic language and form. Overtime, the Quranic education became a formal literacy form of education provided to the generality of the adherents. Thus education implies literacy (reading and writing); the Qur'anic education was by far more widespread in the provision of education to the masses of the people in the Islamic dominated areas of the northern part of the country (Falola and Heaton 2005, p.43).

The western formal education was introduced in to Nigeria through the evangelization activities of the Christian missionaries in the Middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The principal aim of the missionaries was to convert the Africans to Christianity. The major content of the teaching and learning was based on the Bible. From the same historical antecedents, Christianity, which was herald of western formal education, had its node of diffusion

and influences in the southern part of the country. Prior to the creation of the Southern and Northern protectorates in 1900 and their subsequent amalgamation in 1914, the colonial administration had directed the Christian missionaries to limit their evangelical activities to the South and the non-Muslims or 'pagan areas' of the north (Adewale 2005, p.5).

A number of fruitless efforts were made by the missionaries and the colonial administration to introduce schools with emphases on non-religious and moral instructions to replace the conventional religious instruction. Under the umbrella of the church missionary society (C.M.S.), the Sudan Interior Mission (SIM) The Sudan United Mission (S.U.M.) The Roman Catholic Mission and the Cambridge University Missionary Party, programs were designed to facilitate the enlistment of the children of the Moslems to western form of education without necessarily aiming to convert them to Christianity. For examples Dr. W.R. Miller of the party movement planned to establish schools where by moral instruction would replace religious instructions for the

children of the emirs and their chiefs. The emirs solicited to send two children of their recognized families in the provinces to the school under the supervision of Dr. Miller. The school was experimented for a period of one year subject to a review by the joint committee of Emirs (Okobiah 2012, p.20). The school was opened in 1907 in Zaria but none of the sons of the emirs from the provinces were present for enrolment. At the end, the emir of Zaria had to send only fifteen children from some families within the town of Zaria (Ajayi 2006, p.3). There several cases of non-response to the programed designed to enable the northerners' take advantage of the emergent western education.

An important characteristic of this period was the emergence of the Kano Native Administration as an agency for educational development. According to Sir Charles Orr, the educational requirement though necessary in the early phase of British over-rule fell under three heads. First, priority was to be given to intelligent natives of the Mallams class who would be taught Roman characters for writing Hausa, colloquial English, and finally reading

and writing English, Arithmetic, and geography, so that they might qualify for clerkships in Government and native Administration offices and gradually replace the native clerks who had hitherto been drawn from other west African colonies having western schools. Second, there was need for some sort of special training for the ruling class likely to become chiefs or emirs. Third, it was thought desirable to provide general elementary schools for children with the secular basis, with industrial teaching (Fika 1978, p.234). With this objectives in view, the first colonial educational experiments in the Northern emirates were begun at Kano in the course of 1909. Early in that year, a beginning was made with the inauguration of a school for the sons of native chiefs in the protectorate. All Kano dignitaries, including the emirs were persuaded to send their children. To aid British educational objectives, the emir of Kano was persuaded to make an annual grant 1000 pounds to these new institutions from the fund of the recently constituted Treasury. In the course of the following years, these schools were expanded on their curricular rationalized to fit

harmoniously with the existing political and social system (Fika 1978, p236).

The educational imbalances between the northern and southern parts of the country, it is important to note that it was the southern states under the Action Group (A.G.) parties in the western region that launched the first free primary education for its communities in 1955. In 1957, the Eastern region launched a similar programed. These "singular" educational polite of both the then western and Eastern regions created further impetus for increased primary enrolment, which in turn triggered massive increase in secondary schools enrolment of the 1960s and the chain effects of undergraduates enrolment of the 1970s to the advantage of the south. In fact by 1960 when the primary school enrolment in the north was only 282,849 pupils, the figure for the south about 2,629,770 accounting for 90.1 % of the national even the south had only 44.3% of the national total population (Okobiah 2012, p. 23).

Before the federal Government launched its own Universal Primary Education in 1976, all states in the

north and south were requested to submit their needs to ensure successful takeoff and sustenance of increased primary schools enrolment. It is therefore difficult puzzled at that after 22 years of the federal U.P.E. scheme, primary school enrolment in the north was still under 65% on the average with some states below 20% by 1998(Ajayi 2006, p.22).

At the time of independence in 1960, the situation had not changed in any demonstrable way. The primary school enrolment for the northern states was only 282,000(9.9%) as against 2,629,770 (90.1%) for the southern states. In 1942, secondary schools enrolment was 1,570 (25.9%) in the north as against 6,700 (74.1%) for the southern states. In 1960 the secondary school enrolled students in the north was 6,264 while in the southern states the enrollment rose to 48,971 (88.7%). In 1975, the number of enrollment students in the northern states was 105,500 as against 498,700 (82.5%) in the southern states of the country. In 1980 the number of enrollment students in the northern states was 247,527 as against 1,305,808 (84.1%)

in the southern states of the country (Okobiah 2012, p.52).

### **1.3 Role of Nigerian Educated Elites towards Anti-colonial Struggle in Nigeria, 1930s-1960**

This paper believes that during British Colonialism, which is the process of political economic and socio-cultural domination of Nigeria in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Colonial education was induced by British in Nigeria with aim to get the Nigerians to assist them in the process of colonial exploitation of Nigerian resources. The paper also believes that the westernized elites in Nigeria were the pioneers of Nigerian independence from the British rule, from 1909-1960. Education serves as the process of changing the external realm 'politics and economy' of British rule in Nigeria from Colonial to postcolonial rule 1900-1960 (John 2008, p15). The paper further argued that colonial rule had inspired anti-colonial resistance from the beginning, although, it had not organized around a pan-Nigerian consciousness, instead making appeals to race consciousness (Falola and Heaton 2008, p112).

The motivating factors which lead to anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria from

1930s-1960s will be examined briefly. Both of the educated elites from northern Nigeria and southern parts of Nigeria developed nationalist ideologies from 1914 to 1940s and 1950s, as a means of undermining Britain's ideational and imperialistic hold on Nigeria. The nationalist believed that one of the basic assumptions underlying the imposition of British cultural hegemony of colonialism in Nigeria's was the notion of white supremacy. Accordingly, the colonial structure of ruling was characterized by racial inequality and discrimination. A policy of separateness was maintained in all spheres of life (Nile L. 2008, p.10).

From the basis of the theory of cultural hegemony basically argues that, people change themselves when they can change the structure (external realm-politics and economies), but, for them to first transform outer reality, they need to first change their perception of reality. When the knowledge of outer reality becomes differed, because, reality it self becomes differed, their agency can change it self-according to this knowledge on self and outer reality. In other word, the colonial

elites in Nigeria's used the knowledge, which they have acquired during colonial rule to change the structure of colonial rule in Nigeria. The theory of cultural hegemony is also argue that the dominant social group in the capitalist society aim is how to maintain power the necessary degree of "ideological unity" to secure the consent of the governed (Gramsci, p 24).

Repeating the same point one more time, the role of education argues that, education is the principal method through which societies transmit knowledge from one generation to another, learn how to develop and accumulate knowledge, preserve certain values, and transform individual sense of perception about the world. It is through education that the westernize elites in Nigeria have learnt how to become more socially and politically conscious, and how to increase their ability to acquire and use knowledge to improve their lives for the socio-economic and political progress of their nation. Education also instilled the liberal and democratic ideologies to the citizens and liberates their people from the process of

decolonization (Comtassel 2012, P.25).

However, education set the process of political independence in Nigeria's and decolonization from the British rule. These processes of ending the colonial rule were spearheaded by the colonial elites in Nigeria (1900-1960). Therefore, education have instill the idea of nationalism in the minds of Nigerians which have assisted them to become politically independent in the 1960s and set-up new socio economic and political progress of the nation even after the post colonial period (Sinclair 2004,p 49-61).

The motivating factors, which lead to, the anti-colonial struggle in Nigeria from 1920s-1960s will be examine briefly. The new elites believed that one of the basic assumptions underlying the imposition of British cultural hegemony of colonialism in Nigeria's was the notion of white supremacy. Accordingly, the colonial structure of ruling was characterized by racial inequality and discrimination. A policy of separateness was maintained in all spheres of life. Colonialism resulted in, and fed from, not only political and economic

domination but also cultural and intellectual domination. During the opening decades of the twentieth century, the educated Nigerians were exposed to contemporary movements and literature, which championed the dignity and political emancipation of the Black people. Foremost, in this writings of such figures like Edward Wilmot Blyden (a Liberian; WEB Dubois and Booker T. Washington, both of whom were Africans-American; Marcus Garvey a Jamaican). The result was the enlightenment to the people on the impact of colonial domination on their country which had greatly assisted toward the decolonization and political independence in the 1960s (Mazrui 1978, p27).

Therefore, educated elites who instilled the idea of nationalism to their brethren during the post-war era sensed a close proximity between political/economic emancipation and that of emancipation from the sense of being secondary or trivial to the 'White' people (Nyerere 1968, p44-45). To them, the latter one was the real impediment to the materialization of the former. In other word, national was

born in Nigeria in the knowledge of that country would never become freed from the colonial influence until, and unless, it finds a way out of its readily given submission to western way of life.

The 'post-colonial' elites in Nigeria used education, by this token, to instill the idea of nationalism, in order to enable a sense of independence from external inferences, which, counter-productively, produces some other undesired outcomes. This new mode of nationalism came to contradict cultural groups with different ethnic and religious backgrounds. The version of nationalism brought by the post-colonial politics, in Nigeria, refers to African nationalism: a subjective feeling of kinship or affinity shared by people of African descent. The Africans and Nigerians have considered them selves as people who have the same shared cultural norms, traditional institutions, racial heritage, and a common historical experience shared by nearly all of the Africans (Mazrui 1978, p.40). While the imperialist was an external power who exploited the resources of Africans by imposing a system of colonialism



which means, the process of economic and political domination as well as socio-cultural domination by the British imperialism in Nigeria's during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Along with this sense, of Nigerian nationalism of shared identity is a collective desire to maintain one's own cultural, social, and political values independent from the external powers such as British rule in Nigeria (Rabie 2007,p 218).

According to the same argument, the educated colonial elites introduced the idea of 'decolonization 'to Nigerians in order to remove the structure of British colonial rule in Nigeria and to become independent from the external powers' manipulations) Boa hen 1987, p 23). Each one of the following was among their ambitions: the end of the colonial rules, dismantling of the colonial institutions and divorcing from those colonially inscribed values that aimed exploitation of the receiving/colonized culture. Precisely, decolonization in Nigeria was part of a wider process called nationalism, headed and assumed by the (Western-) educated elites and mostly worked to bring new social, economic and political

dimensions following the end of colonial rule in 1960 (Mazrui 1999,p 76).

The anticolonial 'agitation' was pioneered by educated elite who had previously been alienated by the British colonial administration in Nigeria and its introduced system of exploitative nature of colonialism in Nigeria which is the process of oppressing the 'native' Nigerians through the use of their traditional rulers during the colonial period. Thus, the educated elites found ways of challenging the imperial dominance, which presented itself in forms of British cultural hegemony. These nation-makers saw that a genuine decolonization from imperialistic grip took more than laying place certain material conditions in economic or political life of the newly independent country (Jeremia 2006,p 40-45). What was also needed, to them, was to 'decolonize' the minds of Nigerians from their cognitive submission to British as a culture that was allegedly superior to, thus entitled to rule, Nigerians (Falola and Heaton 2003,p 21-22).

It was as early as 1920 whereupon, these educated elites formed what came to known as the first political association with the view of protesting some of the colonial practices. The most popular of such associations was the National Congress of British West Africa (NCBWA), established in 1920, with members from three British Colonies in West Africa, namely the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia. They in tandem advocated the unity of the four British West African colonies. It also demanded, among other things, educated elites' participation in the colonial legislative councils, and put an end to racial discrimination in the civil service. In the congress were present some of the western-educated Nigerians such as Patrick Campbell, clergy man; Dr. Richard savage, a physician; Thomas Horacio Jackson, a news paper editor and so on. The nationalist leaders of the 1920s and 1930s also established political parties, which they hoped, would aid their access to participation in the colonial government. The Nigerian National Democratic party (NNDP) was founded in 1923 and become the first modern political party in Nigeria with

the aim to challenge the British imperialism in Nigeria (Falola 2003,p 21).

However, during the period of post-second world war (1945), the period saw the radicalization of role of educated elites and their nationalist ideologies. They began using a palpably sharper rhetoric in their advocacy of decolonization and political independence from the British colonialism. This period coincides with the Great Depression and briefly precedes the WWII (Jeremia 2006, p53). When this bloody conflict drew to an end, new institutions arrived in regards of colonialism within a new global setting defined by post-war international power reconfiguration (Freire 2005, p.15). As will be explained, these structural alterations were to spell great repercussion about nationalism. The slump in global trade that came with the said depression brought a lot of economic hardship to the colonized economic spheres, manifested in falling prices, slashed wages, and unemployment. The economic conditions led to tensions, which found expression in anti-colonial sentiment and activities. The

railway workers' strike of 1931 in pursues of better wages was a direct response to the depressed economic situation in Nigeria in order to liberate their people from the British system of colonization in Nigeria and to become politically independent from the imperialist. (Oyedele 1998,p 71).

The nationalists during this period became discontent with the heightened consequences of the economic depression. The Nigerians were drafted in large numbers to the British army, and many of them performed their duties in the Eastern and North African theatres of the war. The soldiers returned from active service to meet unemployment at home. During their service abroad they have imbibed the British war propaganda of an alleged struggle against Nazis; and that they were fighting for the cause of freedom, this as expected fueled nationalistic consciousness on their part. The ex-service men now started to inspire the application of these ideals to Nigerians. Emboldened by the wartime experience during which they saw the myth of white superiority exploded, they became move politically active as many of them joined the anticolonial

educated elites and other Nigerian-engineered movements in order to expel colonialist British (Oduwobi 2011, p.1).

The educated elites embraced nationalism with the aim of re-negotiating the structure of British colonialism as the war, changing nature of the global politics and economic tribulations brought a more convenient situation (Rodney 1973, P.19). The major European imperialist nations, Britain and France were now countered by the United States and the Soviet Union, two protagonists of the Cold War era with their own versions of anticolonial agenda. During the war, President Roosevelt of the United States made it clear to the British authorities that it was not fighting to uphold the British Empire (Jeremia 2006, p56). Nigerian nationalists derived massive inspiration and encouragement from American anticolonial sentiment, President Franklin Roosevelt's interpretation of the Atlantic Charter a 1941 Joint Anglo-American statement enjoying them to "respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live." It was a

major source of confidence for the elites and nationalists in Nigeria. Contrary to the belief of British Prime Minister Winston Churchill that “the proclamation was applicable only to Europe not to colonial dependencies (Falola and Heaton 2003, p23-24),” Roosevelt provided a broader interpretation that the Atlantic Charter was actually binding to the whole world. The Nigeria educated elite used this rare opportunity to set the radical process of decolonization to subsequently accomplish independence in 1960 (Falola and Heaton 2003, p23). On the basis of this new development, the new nationalist leaders or the educated elite leaders sought and enjoyed mass support in the anticolonial struggle. They incorporated the movement into diverse sectors of the society including organized labor, professional bodies, and socio-ethnic political associations with the same purpose of ending the British’s cultural hegemony and attendant colonialism. New leaders such as Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Aminu Kano and others emerged in the 1940s and 1950s. Unlike the nationalist movement of

1920s, this class of nationalists, proposed a self-determination agenda, and formed nationalist parties for the purpose of finalizing a decade-long subjugation of Nigerians in the hands of imperialistic states. Included in these parties were the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC), established in 1941 and led by Macaulay, and Azikiwe; the Action Group (AG), formed in 1951, and led by Awolowo; and the Northern peoples Congress (NPC), established in the 1940s under the leadership of Ahmadu Bello. The nationalist established newspapers such as the Lagos Daily News, for example, as one of the avenues to propagate radical nationalist ideas between both the Northern and southern Nigerian to resist the British colonial practices in Nigeria (Falola 2003,p23).

Political parties were ethnically and regionally based during the anticolonial movement. The NCNC with a strong hold on the eastern provinces was a party with Igbo dominance. The AG of the West arose out of Yoruba cultural groups, the Egba Omoduduwa, and become a strong stakeholder in the West. In the

same vein, the NPC was a Northern party dominated by the Hausa people in the Northern part of the Nigeria. However, the parties managed to work together to put up a common front against the colonial power. In line with this, the emergent unity of different peoples from both Northern and southern Nigeria was about finalizing the British's physical and cultural hegemony. Thus, the radical nationalist agitations compelled the political reforms and constitutional changes which propelled Nigerians towards internal autonomy and ultimate independence. After 1945, Nigerians experienced a number of constitutions. The Richard Constitution of 1947 was the beginning of the road to independence. It divided the country into three regions along ethnic/religious lines, the northern Nigerian region, Islamic in religious orientation, was the home of Hausa tribe and Fulani; the western region was peopled by the Yoruba, many of whom were Christians; and the Eastern region was inhabited by the Igbo, a predominant Christian people. Under the constitution, each region retained its own assembly, although a central

legislation was also established (Adebisi 2008, p.1).

The educated elites in Nigeria mounted pressure to the imperialist with aim to end the colonization in Nigeria led to constitutional reforms moved Nigeria's internal autonomy and provided politicians opportunities to compete for power. The educated elite and other nationalist leaders continued to clamor for progress toward political autonomy in Nigeria. To serve for this end came about yet another constitution, promulgated in 1951 as an improvement to the Richard constitution. As a result of this development of political decolonization from the educated elites in Nigeria so as to become politically independent from the imperialist, the political powers offered constitutional reforms triggered both the ethnic cleavages and the regional conflict to react for political participation. A new constitution came into being in 1954 and retained the three-region structure of Nigeria. It also made the country a federation and gave the regions the mandate to seek self-governance in 1956, and subsequently the Northern region in 1959 (Adewale 2005, p.7). The

final transfer of power to the indigenous educated elite occurred on October 1, 1960 when Nigerians obtained full independence (Dibua 2006,p 70). This final outcome should be directly read in reference to the role of education for the social transformation as it formed the most substantial piece towards uniting different ethnic groups around a common national identity. (Falola 2003,p 24-25).

Meanwhile, this catharsis found a wide array of popularity among Nigerians from different walks of life, such as professional groups including lawyers, and doctors who tended to align themselves. Bourgeoisie-who were impatient with the status quo and eager to have the system transformed so that they could better themselves and perhaps help others as well. Also the westernized Africans who were the immediate beneficiaries of the Africanization of the top government positions came about as a result of such reawakening to the self-realization; the urban workers became a part of this political discourse in search for improving their wages and working conditions through trade

unions and so on. The peasant who made the informal sector of colonial economies joined the ranks of nationalism with a strong interest in, one-day, forming national bourgeoisie. The cash crops farmers some of whom were wealthy, and all of whom constituted a powerful and important segment of Africans including Nigeria's, along with peasant farmers in the country sided up with the new elites with a view of obtaining extended guarantees to the access to the emerging national economy. Their basic concern had to do with agriculture; they protested policies that manipulated the market prices of their products in the city markets, restricted ownership of some properties by the colonial administration and charged them with the exorbitant fees for their business. The above explanation on the impact of British colonialism in Nigeria's made the educated elite to succeed when they had reorganized the anticolonial movement. Because all the aforementioned categories of individuals suffered from the consequences of foreign exploitation, thus, became ardent supporters of

nationalism as what they saw as a cure to it (Hull 1980,p 120).

#### **1.4 Conclusion**

This paper concludes that education was responsible in the process of instilling new ideas, values, skills and sense of perception among the peoples of Nigerians during the period of British cultural hegemony of colonialism. Behind the Britain's hold on the country's economic resources rested an ideology which somewhat legitimized the upper hand of colonialists vis a vis colonized during the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, the chapter has argued that the colonial educated elite used education to change the structure of British cultural hegemony of colonialism rather than the majority Nigerians by instilled the others Nigerians the ideological aspect of nationalism and other ways of challenging the British dominance by setting anticolonial movements in Nigeria.

Colonial education, therefore serve as the basis for the process of decolonization, nationalism in the minds of educated Nigerians which made them to instilled the impact of imperial rule to other Nigerians and

form anticolonial movements right from 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, 1950s and 1960s when they finally changed the structure of British cultural hegemony of colonialism. The paper based its argument from the basis of the theory of cultural hegemony that believed that individual could change the structure of the capitalist society external realm politics and economy, when they first transform their knowledge of reality and liberate themselves from the colonial oppression. The educated elite has finally continued to set-up new socio-economic and political progress of the modern Nigeria just as in other parts of the world in a modern form such as other capitalist society.

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