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Africa Resistance To European Imperialism

Friday Praise Osaretin

University of Benin, Benin City, Nigeria
osaretinpraisebooks@gmail.com/+2349076373711

ABSTRACT
This paper examined African resistance to European incursion into African territories. It explored the various strategies that African adopted in their struggle against European imperialism in Africa. The reasons African resistance proved abortive are discussed as well as the factors that contributed to the success of European quest are also considered. This paper adopted the qualitative research method in which existing literature in field and archival and internet sources were consulted, examined and analysed to arrive at an objective conclusion. The paper finds out that Africans did not give up their territories to the European invaders without putting forth a fight. The paper also finds out that African resistance, as fierce as it was did not succeed in resisting the European invaders as it was bedeviled by many factors such as disunity among African leaders, greed and betrayal among others. In addition, the paper finds out that European success is attributed to the outcome of the industrial revolution such as sophisticated weapons, military might and a sense of singleness of purpose and cooperation among the European powers.
Keywords: African resistance, European imperialism, African territories

INTRODUCTION

The 20 years between 1880 and 1900 in tropical Africa brought about a terrible and odd paradox. European occupation and conquest were irrevocable processes. However, it was highly resistible as well. Because of the technological revolution, it was irreversible. The railway, the cable, and the steamship gave the white people a clear advantage in terms of weapons, and for the first time, they could provide some sort of solution to the problem of communication both within Africa and between Africa and Europe. Due to Africa's immensity, the fortitude of its people, and the fact that Europe did not send a significant amount of manpower or technology, it was resisted. The white people indeed recruited African allies to make up for their lack of men. They were not, however, cunning manipulators of a divided and inferior black population. The Europeans were simply going through their arsenal of previous imperial strategies. They frequently had less in-depth knowledge of a situation than African leaders had. The advance tactic was implemented in a very haphazard and awkward manner. Numerous African resistances were encountered, sparked, and even invented by Europeans out of fear and ignorance. The outcome was inevitable, and the Europeans cleaned up the messy procedure afterward. Books were created about "pacification," giving the false impression that most Africans had gratefully accepted the so-called Pax Colonica and omitting the realities of African resistance. The Europeans' success, however, does not imply that African resistance was unimportant at the time or is not worth further research today. And over the years, there has been a lot of research done on it.

The majority of the research conducted over the years has been somber, in-depth, and academic, without skirting the complexities of many of the resistances. Although everything has been updated by more current research and analysis, the majority of it has been built on or used to prove, three dogmatic

assumptions that are believed to still be essentially true. First, it has been suggested that the existence of African resistance is important because it demonstrates that Africans did not passively accept European "pacification." Second, it has been suggested that this resistance was frequently propelled by rational and creative thinking rather than being hopeless or irrational. Thirdly, it has been maintained that these protests weren't in vain; rather, they had a big impact at the time they were made and continue to have a big impact now. Here, it is important to restate these three reasons along with the changes that have been suggested.[1]

Why Africans resisted European imperialism?

It is important to note that before the introduction of imperialism, Africans already have trade relations with the European which was on the mutual ground with reciprocal benefits. The European constructed their trading posts on the coast while the African middlemen were responsible for buying and bringing goods from the interior to the coast for the European merchant to buy, therefore creating Jobs for Africans, with various African states still maintaining their monopoly and retaining their independence.

The English merchants did not think it was necessary to construct castles on the delta coast, so they conducted their business with the coastal intermediaries on-board their ships. Typically, the English supercargoes would invite the middlemen-cum-chiefs to their ships with the intention of "breaking commerce" and collecting Comey, or customs duty. The chiefs were greeted with appropriate ceremony and spectacle, which included, among other things, a royal gun salute and an invitation to a lavish banquet. The chiefs' representatives and other notables were thereafter free to conduct business with the supercargoes[2]. Who will want to give up such privileges and prestige and become a servant in his territory, hence Africans have to fight to retain their glory?

Falola continued, "In fact, the supercargoes made an extra effort to acquire and keep the coastal chiefs' goodwill."[3] Giving gifts to the chiefs and higher authorities was one way this was accomplished. In addition to gifts, the supercargoes frequently distributed items to chiefs and their principals on "trust" or credit to support their trade with the hinterland and maintain their friendship. The intermediaries provide the supercargoes with virtual goods, such as yams, water, wood, rice, towels, and vegetables, in exchange for the European traders.[4] Such was the relationship between Africans and Europeans and when the Europeans changed the narrative, Africans and middlemen felt betrayed and deceived so they needed to fight the foreign betrayals.

The manner the Europeans gradually moved from the coast into the hinterland was a threat to African leaders, especially to the middlemen and the merchant chiefs.

To put it in the words of Mathew Basung Gwanfogbe: "Since the 15th century, Europeans have frequently been seen on African shores." Slave trading soon became the main focus of their activities. However, after the slave trade was outlawed and peaceful trade took its place in the 19th century, European traders tried to enter Africa's interior in search of raw resources for their businesses. Colonial plans and a heightened hunt for raw materials and markets for European manufactured goods were further pushed by the rise of industrialized and expansionist nation-states in Europe in the latter half of the 19th century. Europeans had to remove the middleman that the coastal Africans were acting to have access to raw materials in the interior of Africa,[5] thereby relieving the middlemen of their job and source of livelihood. Will it not be logical and rational if the middlemen protested? The signing of various treaties with African leaders which they did not know its implication at the initial stage and in most cases the treaties was crafty, manipulative, and deceptive met with serious reactions when the European country concerned came to occupy the territory. A good example is the case of Ethiopia. Roland Oliver, and Anthony Atmore said in a book titled Africa Since 1800; Menelik and the Italians signed the Treaty of Wichale in 1889, just after he was crowned emperor. Ethiopia and Italian Eritrea's border was established by this treaty. In its Amharic translation, it also mentioned that Menelik's government might, at its discretion, use Italian diplomatic channels for its communications with other countries. A little more specific phrase was included in the treaty's Italian translation, which suggested that Menelik had pledged to always handle his foreign affairs through Italian channels. It does not appear that the Italian negotiators tried to trick Menelik on purpose. They never planned to establish a protectorate. However, it was based on this

phrasing that the Italian Foreign Office informed the governments that had participated in the Berlin Conference of Italy's claim to a protectorate over Ethiopia. Italy now attempted to enforce this invalid treaty upon Menelik, and disputes between the two sides resulted in the war of 1896. The Italian's army was decisively defeated at Adowa, one of the first battles of modern times in which a non-European army beat one officered by, and partly consisting of Europeans.[6] These and many others were the reasons Africans resisted the European imperialists.

The Nature of African Resistance to European Imperialism

The response of African people to European exploitation varies from one region to another. Africans resisted the European intruders both directly and indirectly deploying various methods according to their abilities and weapons at their disposal to resist the foreign enemies that have come to rub them off their inheritance. Some of the methods deployed in various regions will be discussed in this section. Some of the methods of resistance adopted by the African rulers and the people in general include: the withdrawal method, confrontational method, diplomatic strategy, and magical or Africa religious strategy among others.

Some African leaders believed that they could stave off the invaders through diplomatic means. Many African rulers tried to avoid war having learned from the bitter experience of those defeated through sophisticated European war weapons. They, therefore, used diplomatic means to resist European incursions into their territories. African rulers like Khama, King of Ngwato, a small Kingdom in the Transvaal sought for British protection to retain his Kingdom.[7] Lesotho, formerly named Basutoland which is within the Republic of South Africa owes its consolidation and independence to the statesmanship and diplomacy of Mosheshe. The same thing applies to Swaziland whose ruler used diplomacy to retain its existence as a sovereign nation.[8] It should be pointed out that some African rulers initially used diplomacy but when it failed to achieve the desired goal, they took to armed conflicts with the Europeans.

For example, Ahmadu Seku, made every effort to avoid direct contact with the French, being aware of the danger involved in a confrontation with the French, partly due to disunity at home. In 1880, he made an agreement with the French, which made the French recognize Ahmadu Seku's trading privileges and also recognized his empire and any future conquests.[9] In 1887, Ahmadu Seku made another agreement with the French by which he accepted a nominal French protectorate in return for a French pledge not to invade his empire. Ahmadu Seku later resorted to war when diplomacy failed. He was finally defeated by the French in 1893.[10]

These also include the Prempeh 1 of Ghana and the Ndebele ruler under the reign of Lobengula. When Cecil Rhodes was planning to invade the Ndebele territory in 1889, Ndebele king, Lobengula, sent a delegation to London to meet Queen Victoria. Similarly, in 1896, as the British invasion army was advancing on Kumasi to capture Prempeh five years after he had rejected the British offer of protection, Menelik addressed a similar appeal to the same monarch as well as to other European leaders.[11] Another African leader that adopted the strategy of diplomacy was Jaja of Opobo when he formed an alliance with the British by signing a treaty with them in 1873 by which the British recognised his sovereignty and exclusive rights to the commercial hinterland.[12] To reciprocate the British gesture, he lent his troops to Britain for the Ashante expedition in 1874. Jaja himself was later stripped of his political, socio-economic power and he was finally exiled.[13]

Resistance through the withdrawal or migration method; some African leaders used migration to resist European invasion. Such leaders and their people withdrew from their territory and migrated to other areas not yet invaded by European as seen in the case of Mzilikazi as well as Adam Kok.[14]

Resistance through alliance; African leaders also formed alliance to resist European annexation of their territory as seen in the belated alliance between Samouri Your and Amadu Seku, the ruler of Sikasso, Tofa of Porto Novo (in what is now Benin) chose the strategy of alliance or cooperation, but not of collaboration.[15] However, these African leaders eventually resulted in arm confrontations when the alliance failed.

Resistance through armed confrontation became unavoidable when all non-violent means proved abortive and became the most common African reaction to the invasion of European powers. Numerous instances of armed conflict against the invader occurred in various parts of Africa. The Ashante people of the Gold Coast valiantly opposed British attempts to occupy their territory, overcoming the British troops in 1864.[15] This prompted Britain to establish the Parliamentary Select Committee to advise her on the direction British colonial policies should take in the future.[16]

The emirs of Northern Nigeria choose not to submit to British rule, preferring to die instead. As a result, they and their people fought the British machines and rifles with only bows, arrows, and spears. The strongest Dahomean Kings, Behanzin and Glele, opposed the French invasion of their nation. The 1897 Benin expedition was a direct reaction to the attack on the British soldiers slain at Oba Ovonramwen's command. As genuine as this excuse may seem, it only serves as a catalyst to their already concluded plan. It is important to note that the plan of invading Benin did not start with Philip but with his predecessor Sir Ralph Moor a few years back. Research has revealed that the expedition was not just a retaliation but an execution of a plan that began many years ago. The statement by James R. Philip in November 1896 attests to this:

I am certain that there is only one way out—ejecting the King of Benin from his throne. I am persuaded that using pacific tactics is currently completely pointless, and the time has come to remove the obstruction based on information that leaves no room for question as well as the experience of native characters. I thus request your Lordship's permission to travel to Benin City in February of the following year to depose and remove the King of Benin, install a local Council in his stead, and take whatever more steps may be necessary to advance the country's opening up.[17]

The statement above was the foundation upon which the invasion of Benin was laid. The reason for the conquest of the Benin kingdom is also captured in the statement of MacDonald few years after Gallwey signed a treaty of protection with the Oba of Benin:

However, the fetish government that regrettably rules the entire kingdom paralyses trade, business, and civilisation... I expect to be able to terminate this situation soon, and I see the treaty that Captain Gallwey so skilfully negotiated as the first step in achieving this much-desired goal.[18]

The Matabele-Mashona uprisings in 1896–1897 and the Bambata insurrection in Zululand in 1906–08 are other examples of how Africans waged a battle to fend against European invasion. Samouri Toure headed one of the most impressive African armed resistance movements against the invasion of Europe (1882-1898). Before his capture and banishment to Gabon in 1898, Samouri Toure launched a merciless armed resistance strategy against the French known as the "scorched earth policy".[19]

The religious approach was another strategy the Africans deployed against the Europeans. Magic or charms were employed by several African kings to protect their realms. Such kings sought protection from religion or magic instead of using physical force to resist. For instance, Ovonramwen, the Oba of Benin, experimented with extensive sacrifices to ward off any European invasion.[20] Many of the states in Igboland made attempts to ward off the British by hiring renowned diviners and experts in ritual and magic who conjured up diseases, snakes, insects, vermin, and other calamities.[21]

It is also believed among the Mossi, that the deposed Mogho Naba Wobogo offered sacrifices to earthen shrines when the French conquered Ouagadougou.[22] According to tradition, he is said to have offered the earth goddess sacrifices of a black cock, a black ram, a black donkey, and a black slave on a high hill near the White Volta River, pleading with her to drive the French out and kill the traitor Mazi whom they had installed on the throne.[23] According to E.A. Afigbo, who wrote about the tactics used by the Igbo people to resist British colonization said something very profound along this line:

some towns would not rely on local doctors alone but would travel great distances to invite widely renowned medicine men to strike the invading troops blind, or to scatter them with swarms of bees to make their guns backfire, or to make the Igbo warriors bulletproof.[24]

The Maji Maji uprising against the Germans in Tanganyika (Tanzania) is another form of resistance motivated by religion. Magic water was introduced and widely distributed to the populace by the priests of a religious sect known as Kelelo. Its purpose was to shield users from harm caused by enemy weapons. Elizabeth Isichei agreed with professor Afigbo's assessment of the role magic played in Igbo resistance to

the British when she said: "The modern reader is not likely to be impressed by this kind of technique (magic), but strangely enough, both the written records left by the British and Igbo oral tradition suggest that it was often effective."[25]

These are just but a few instances of how Africans protested against the foreign invaders who came to seize their lands and stripped them of their authority and independence and exploit their economic resources right before them.

European occupation of Africa

Despite the effort made by Africans to retain their independence, all attempts prove abortive except the case of Ethiopia and Liberia which successfully resisted the European intruders and drove them back.[26] There are a good number of factors that contributed to European effective occupation of Africa territories. European knowledge of the African environment was a major factor that aided their successes in the struggle against African African resistance. By 1880, Europeans had a far better understanding of Africa and its interior, including its physical features, geography, economics, resources, and other aspects, this was due to the work of European explorers and missionaries.

The European powers also have an understanding of the resilience and fragility of African populations and states better than Africans thought of Europe. Furthermore, loss of respect and reverence for Africans energized the Europeans to dare African rulers. Compared to the era before the middle of the nineteenth century when Europe and the rest of the world feared and respected African rulers and dreaded Africa's environment. But from the middle of the nineteenth century Europeans had less fear and reverence for the African rulers and the African environment. This state of things can be attributed to the revolutionary developments in medical science, particularly the discovery of the preventative use of quinine against malaria, the manufacture of weapons which Africans were not capable of manufacturing and African greed for the white man goods.

Furthermore, the material and financial resources accessible to Europe were more superior to those of Africa as a result of the unequal nature of commerce between Europe and Africa up to the 1870s, as well as the accelerating pace of the industrial revolution. Therefore, African states were unable to mount any sustained military conflict against European powers. While the European could afford to spend millions of pounds on abroad campaigns, Africans could not afford the same.[27] In addition, while the period following the Russo-Turkish war of 1877–1878 was characterized by a political equilibrium that led to peace and stability in Europe,[28] the same period in Africa was characterized by interstate and intrastate conflict and rivalry. With the Mandingo fighting the Tukulor, the Asante fighting the Fante, the Baganda fighting the Banyoro, the Batoro fighting the Banyoro, the Mashona fighting the Nde. Therefore, African governments and countries had their attention divided. While the European powers could concentrate their efforts militarily on their imperial activities abroad without any distractions at home, Africans were busy fighting one another. In addition to enjoying domestic peace, the European powers always managed to settle their differences over imperial and colonial matters during the period for the scramble for African territories up until 1914 without resorting to war. In light of this, the European engagement in the partition of Africa during the Berlin conference showed remarkable unity, which not only prevented wars between them but also prevented the African rulers and communities from effectively pitting one European power against the other. This was done despite the fierce competition and the numerous crises they had in the African territories.

Another reason European power effectively occupied Africa territories was the division that existed among the African populace. No African state was ever helped by one European power against another European power during the era under study as different European countries battled the African states one at a time. In contrast, the behavior of the African states was not only characterized by a lack of solidarity, unity, or cooperation, but also by the fact that some of them were willing to join forces with the occupying European armies to fight their neighbors, only to eventually succumb to the same fate. For example, the Bambara linked up with the French against the Tukulor, the Baganda with the British against the Banyoro, and the Barotse with the British against the Ndebele.[29] As a result of this weakness among African leaders, even at the regional level, majority of the Africans' brave and legendary defenses against

the European invaders were sometimes lone acts of unorganized resistance and eventually hit the rock. The overwhelming military and logistical advantages that Europe had over Africa were, of course, the final and indubitably most important element.

During this period of European scramble for African territories, very few African kingdoms had developed modern standing armies, and even fewer had professional armies, while Europe used professional, well-trained armies that could withstand the well trained European armies. Vandervort argued that the Europeans relied on African mercenaries, which gave them the numerical advantage they required in addition to their armies, giving them the advantage they needed.[30] In actuality, according to A. Laroui, only Europeans served as commanders and the majority of the armies were recruited from Africa.[31] What a state of irony and dilemma Africans found themselves! Above all, the Brussels Convention of 1890 stipulated that the imperial powers would refrain from selling weapons to Africans.[32] This meant that the majority of African armies lacked any kind of heavy artillery or naval force and were only equipped with flintlocks or muzzle-loading muskets, which were entirely obsolete, ancient, and frequently inoperatable weaponry. While on the hand the most modern heavy artillery, as well as weapons like the repeating rifle and, most importantly, the Gatling and Maxim guns, were supplied to the European troops. The European troops also made use of the naval force powerful artilleries. Even automobiles and airplanes, as Laroui has noted, were utilised in the later campaigns. The two African leaders who were successful in defeating certain Europeans were Samori Ture and Menelik who were able to obtain a few of the up-to-date weapons.[33] But in the end, even Samori also was overpowered and defeated by the French. It is not at all surprising that the Europeans could defeat Africans rulers with such relative ease given the economic, political, and, most importantly, military and technological advantages that had over Africans. In actuality, the time of the conquest could not have been worse for Africa than it was for Europe.

CONCLUSION

From the ongoing discussions, it has been clear that Africans were faced with a critical situation of losing their territory and independence, so they had to put forth a fight against the European invasion and in doing so they adopted different strategies depending on the disposition of the local rulers and its subjects. The strategy ranges from direct armed confrontation, alliance, migration, and magic among others. Africans' resistance proved abortive for some reasons already discussed, examples include European knowledge of the African environment, European military superiority, unity and cooperation among European powers, lack of cooperation among African leaders, and many others. Africans resisted for fear of losing their independence and felt betrayed relating their initial mutual relationships, and their sense of obligation to protect their ancestral heritage.

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