COCOA AGREEMENTS AND PROTEST MOVEMENTS IN COLONIAL WEST AFRICA, 1937-1938: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

OLISA GODSON MUOJAMA
University of Ibadan

Abstract

In 1937, the foreign trading firms in West Africa formed a cartel in cocoa trade in order to displace the middlemen whom they considered as 'the irrational elements' as well as eliminate competition among themselves. This 'cocoa buying agreement' led to protest by cocoa farmers and brokers in West Africa, typified by cocoa trade boycott. Available studies on the protest have focused on the Ghanaian situation, almost to the total exclusion of the Nigerian experience. Using archival materials, this study examines the Nigerian case study of the West African cocoa producers' protest movement against the cocoa trade pool by the foreign trading firms. It is a contribution to knowledge on power and resistance in colonial West Africa.

INTRODUCTION

AFRICAN REACTIONS AND RESISTANCE TO COLONIALISM has been a common theme in the historiography of African political economy. The resistance was in most places weakened by the European sophisticated fire power and diplomacy. With the eventual establishment of colonial authority in West Africa starting from the nineteenth century, new forms of reactions and resistance developed: against inequality, exploitation and oppression, characteristic of colonialism. This resistance took various forms and dimensions. Besides public disobedience and armed struggle induced by nationalistic drive for national independence, there were trade-induced social conflicts, most especially in agricultural sector, which was the mainstay of the colonial economy and one of the means by which West Africa was incorporated into

the orbit of global capitalism. For instance, social tensions within food chains (small farmers and middlemen versus big corporations) were common forms of these organized struggles against the inequalities of colonialism. According to Allen Isaacman, colonial history is replete with stories of collective opposition to forced cultivation, labor-intensive anti-erosion schemes, and the expropriation of rural lands.[1]

This study is about the revolt in 1937-8 by cocoa farmers and brokers in West Africa against the European firms' cocoa agreement. It focuses on the much neglected dimension in literature, namely, the Nigerian experience in the West African farmers' protest induced by the cocoa industry. Of all the export commodities of West Africa colonial economy, cocoa was the most volatile. This is partly because the industry was more subservient and responsive to the dynamics of colonialism and world economy. According to J. Chauveau, 'cocoa is not exactly comparable to other major export cash crops which have marked the economic history of West Africa since the nineteenth century, notably palm oil, groundnuts, rubber and coffee. Cocoa was not locally consumed.'[2] Therefore, cocoa planters in colonial West Africa depended on world market for sell of their commodity and were thus subordinated to the vagaries of the cycle and waves of the international economy. Thus, cocoa farmers in West Africa were more reactionary than the producers of other crops due to the gravity of the impact of the dynamics of the world political economy on the industry.

Given the significant contribution of cocoa to the political economy of the colonial West African countries, and considering the global reverberations of the West African cocoa hold-up of 1937-38, the searchlights of historians and economists have beamed on West African cocoa industry in general and on the West African cocoa crisis of the 1930s in particular, resulting in a huge body of literature on West African cocoa industry. For example, specialist studies on the West African cocoa industry

have focused on various themes, such as the beginnings of cocoa culture in Nigeria[3] and on the Gold Coast or Ghana.[4] Others have studied the cocoa production processes[5], curing and preparation[6], labour and migration[7] as well as organization of cocoa trade in West Africa.[8] Added to these are the narratives on the cocoa marketing board[9] and the impact of World War II (1939-1945) on the West African cocoa industry.[10] The impacts of the modern developments in the world economic system on cocoa industry such as the structural adjustment programme have also received attention.[11]

Specifically, in the historiography of cocoa-induced conflicts, Saheed Aderinto has recently examined the land conflict generated by cocoa in southwestern Nigeria, arguing that land was not the root of the crisis but cocoa.[12] However, concerning the organised struggles against cartel agreements and combines typified by cocoa holdups in West Africa, the Ghanaian experience has been a common theme in literature, almost to a total exclusion of the Nigerian case. For instance, the relationship between the fluctuations in the world cocoa price and Gold Coast 'cocoa protest' from 1890 to 1938 has been examined by Roger Southall: 'the heavy dependence of the local economy on an inherently unstable world cocoa price was directly responsible for polarising relations between expatriate cocoa-buying firms and African producers during the period 1890-1938.'[13] Similarly, Rod Alence has examined social conflict and the involvement of colonial state in Africa's open economies, stating that harsh global economic conditions had triggered a wave of colonial protests, including the West African cocoa holdups, and riots in the West Indies, arguing that government concern about trade-induced social conflict is crucial to understanding the shift from 1939 to state controlled cocoa marketing.[14] Rhoda Howard tries to define who exactly in African community was responsible for organizing and precipitating the movement, and who would benefit from it, with the Gold Coast as the focus.[15] Gareth Austin has examined the roles of capitalists and chiefs in the cocoa holdups in South Asante.[16]

In all these conversations, the Nigerian experience has been omitted. This is because the conventional wisdom has been that the cocoa hold-ups as happened in colonial Ghana (the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and British Togoland), in 1937-8, did not take place (or was limited) in Nigeria. However, A. Olukoju has argued that there was a hold-up in Nigeria 1934-35 and 1938-39, not by the cocoa producers, but 'by Urhobo oil palm producers in the Warri, Ondo, and Ijebu Provinces of Western Nigeria' linking it to the cocoa pool crisis in West Africa.[17] He notes that 'Compared to the Gold Coast, the produce hold-up [in Nigeria] was a non-event. But there was tension across the cocoa belt.' Apart from this oblique and tangential mention by Olukoju, no study has been devoted to explaining the role of the Nigerian cocoa producers in the West African cocoa hold-up in 1937. We are, therefore, left with the generalization that cocoa hold-up of 1937-8 did not happen in Nigeria. Yet, the reasons why it did not happen are still less apparent in literature.

This study, therefore, examines the Nigerian case study of the cocoa hold-up in West Africa between October 1937 and April 1938, with a view to determining the extent to which the Nigerian cocoa producers participated in the West African cocoa protests, and the reasons why the African reactions to the formation of the European cocoa-buyers' price-fixing cartel in 1937 was so muted in Nigeria compared to the famous 1937-8 hold-up in what is now Ghana (the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and British Togoland). The study tends to answer these overarching questions: Did farmers and brokers in Nigeria stop selling cocoa beans to European firms? And why was the cocoa trade boycott rhetorical in Nigeria compared to the famous hold-up in Ghana? It argues that although the Nigerian cocoa farmers paid solidarity to their Ghanaian counterparts, the structure of the cocoa industry in Nigeria, which was distinct from that of Ghana, militated against the success of cocoa boycott in Nigeria. Historical factors, peasant nature of production, neutrality of the traditional rulers, and

the absence of platform for mobilization all contributed to making it impossible for cocoa trade boycott to take place in colonial Nigeria.

This issue deserves our attention in part because it fills a significant gap in the body of knowledge on power and resistance in colonial West Africa. It also helps us to understand the disparities between the structural configuration of the colonial Nigerian cocoa industry and its Ghanaian counterpart. The study relies essentially on primary sources for its analysis. The primary archival documents include those generated by the Agricultural Departments during the colonial period. Documents deposited in National archives, Ibadan in Nigeria were utilized. Added to these were documents gathered from Public Records and Archives Administrations Department (PRAAD), Accra, Ghana. Such relevant sources as the Blue Books, Nigerian Handbooks, Official Gazettes, and files of the Colonial Secretary's Office (CSO) on cocoa matters and colonial economic policies provided data for the historical reconstruction.

The subsequent sections are divided into four. The first section deals with the cocoa buying agreement, its meaning and dynamics. The second section deals with African reaction to European cocoa buying agreement, namely, the cocoa hold up in West Africa. The third section examines the roles of the Nigerian farmers and activists in the West African cocoa hold-up, and why it was more rhetorical than apparent in Nigeria. This is followed by the conclusion.

DISPLACING 'THE IRRATIONAL' ELEMENTS: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF COCOA AGREEMENTS IN WEST AFRICA, 1937

In 1973, the International Cocoa Organisation (ICCO) composed of the cocoa producing and consuming countries was established in order to organize the first International Cocoa Agreement (ICA) negotiated in Geneva at a United Nations International Cocoa Conference. Since then,

there have been seven Agreements, the last of which was negotiated in 2010, and which came into force in October 2012. These post-colonial International Cocoa Agreements could be said to have stemmed from the Cocoa (buying) Agreements, experimented in colonial West Africa by the foreign trading firms.

Cocoa Agreement in colonial West Africa was a syndicate or pool, a group of organizations or companies combined to promote a common interest, such as sharing cost of a particular business operation. This involved a system of quota, the fixing of prices and the sharing of market information. The essence of trade combines is usually to reduce or eliminate competition among the firms, what has been described by Bauer as 'Confidential market sharing agreement.'[18] To appreciate the nature and function of the Cocoa Agreement, the understanding of the structure of cocoa trade before the Cocoa Buying Agreement is essential.

Prior to the Agreement, a system of selling which took the cocoa through many hands had existed. Cocoa passed from the farmers through African middlemen or brokers of various categories to the European trading firms which exported the produce to the consuming countries where they were transformed into chocolate, food, cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, among other derivatives of cocoa and brought back to the Africans through the same agency of merchant capital typified by the trading firms. This cocoa trade chain has been vividly captured in the Nowell Report of 1939 as follows:

"Direct selling by farmers is not usual, but some firms buy not inconsiderable quantities in this way through their depots at the various markets. The bulk of the crop is sold through African middlemen of various types...The smallest type of buyer is the 'pan-buyer' or 'basket-buyer', who purchases cocoa at the farm by measures—baskets, tin pans or kerosene tins being used for the purpose. The spring-balance is not used. Pan-buyers

usually buy only from a few regular 'customers'; those may be relatives, or be bound by loans to buyers, most of whom are also money-lenders...Pan-buyers operate chiefly on small advances made by a scaleman...The scaleman has a store at a fixed point, frequently in a market. He is either a petty buyer operating independently or with advances from a firm, or more often, like the sub-brokers of the Gold Coast, with advances from a larger buyer, he buys from pan-buyers and from regular farmer 'customers' to whom he gives advances....The larger buyers, collectively referred to as 'produce buyers', may be divided into two types, viz; the commission buyer who relies mainly for his capital on cash advances from a European firm, to which he is bound by cash security or bond; and the independent middleman who operates with his own capital and who is entitled to pursue a speculative policy unless he is under a special agreement with a firm...The exporting firms maintain a system of buying stations broadly similar in the Gold Coast. Some are directly controlled by Europeans; others are left in charge of salaried African produce clerks. Most of the cocoa is probably bought through produce buyers....The system of giving cash advances is undoubtedly far less developed, and the firms evidently consider that it presents a less serious problem than in the Gold Coast. Several firms buy almost exclusively on the basis of cash or day-to-day advances."[19]

Such in brief had been the structure of cocoa trade in West Africa before the trade combines of 1937, the aim of which was to boycott a good number of the hands through which cocoa passed, and thus render the middlemen redundant.

Concentration in West African import and export trade was certainly not a new phenomenon. Confidential market sharing agreement had been in operation in the purchase of the principal export crops for several decades before the outbreak of World War II in 1945. According to Southall, 'from the earliest days the expatriate firms sought to depress price

of cocoa by forming agreements among themselves.' During the 1890s these agreements (or 'pool') were informal and localized, but in 1903, Swanzy, Millers, the African Association and Basel Mission Trading company entered a formal agreement limiting competition amongst themselves in the purchase of cocoa, rubber and oil'.[20] According to Gunnarson, 'Subsequent agreements were made in 1904, 1905 and 1906 for a period of five years. From 1910 until 1917 several buying and selling agreements were operating. After the war, agreements became less common for some time, but a buying agreement was in force between 1925 and 1927. In 1929, a buying-selling agreement was organized by the UAC.[21] Put differently, between 1921 and 1929, 17 big trading firms which were previously independent were absorbed by the two parent firms of the U.A.C.[22] The formation of the combination of 1930-31 coincided with the sharp drop in world demand cocoa due to the Great Depression. Prices on the Gold Coast came tumbling down from those of the previous year, and producers, with one voice, denounced the pool as the cause of their distress; and in the wake of their cry followed the most determined resistance to their domination that the expatriate firms had yet to encounter. The pool was dissolved before the opening of the following cocoa season.

In the autumn of 1937, all the large European firms purchasing cocoa in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, with the exception of the English and Scottish Joint Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, entered into Agreements to operate for four years from the 1st of October, 1937, one in respect of the Gold Coast and a second in respect of Nigeria, and to control their cocoa buying operations.[23] These eighteen firms[24] agreed on quota system, to divide the total purchases of cocoa by all members and allocate to each an agreed proportion, based on past performance. The Agreements also involved price-fixing, such that uniform limit price should be paid by all members, based on world price ruling from time to time. Prices were to be fixed in London by a committee representing all the parties to the agreement and the merchant would be told each day what was regarded as

the fair and proper price for them to offer their brokers and middlemen.[25] In practice the Agreement removed the incentive of competition between the member firms and safeguarded the individual interests of the members concerned.

So many reasons have been given for the formation of the trade cartel. The trade fluctuation of the 1930s has been heavily cited by many. The unstable price development of the 1936/37 cocoa season when UK-prices after having reached a peak level of 55/- per cwt in January, compared to 25/8 the previous season, decreased to 37/11 per cwt at the close of the season in May, left many of the companies, which had made large purchases, with considerable losses. Since these losses could not be accurately compensated for by lower freight rates the companies were anxious to do something about the marketing situation.[26]

There was much noise about the abuses of cocoa buying in West Africa, which tilted the scale against the farmers. The chief complaints were against the abuses caused by the middlemen. In the reports given to the Nowel Commission, several firms accounted for severe losses during the depression of the 1930s, citing the presence of 'the irrational element' caused by the middlemen as the main factor behind those losses. By 1937, there had been dissatisfaction with the way cocoa marketing was organized in the Gold Coast and Nigeria. According to the firms, 'The farmers had been cheated wholesale by their more wily brethren in a multitude of ways...'[27] There was also the case of advance sale of crops, in which 25 per cent of the crop of 1937 had been sold in advance to many lenders and speculative buyers at prices averaging 5/2d per load as compared with the average price of 9/-d during the season. The actual return to the farmers was therefore estimated to be 11 per cent less than the local price level during the season.[28] This system of purchase was usually to the detriment of the farmers.

The firms also complained of the intensive competition which had existed for many years between cocoa-buying firms in the territories, which had resulted in cocoa prices being substantially higher than those justified by the fair market price ruling at the time. These excessive prices had been accompanied by constantly increasing abuses, which had resulted in the remuneration of brokers and middlemen in the form of varying commissions and allowances far in excess of the value of the services rendered by them. Put summarily, 'the West African cocoa business considered over the period of recent years has not been a profitable one.'[29]

The cocoa agreement of 1937 was unique and its effects far-reaching due to the fact that it involved much greater number of the trading firms than the earlier ones. It also tended, unlike other ones, to deal a serious blow on the time honoured structure of cocoa export trade in West Africa.

AFRICAN REACTIONS TO TRADE CONCENTRATIONS: THE WEST AFRICAN COCOA PROTEST OF 1937

Reactions of Africans to colonization and its concomitant exploitation has been a common theme in literature on the political economy of colonial Africa. There were also conflicts and protest generated by price fluctuation on the world market.

As has been seen, the cocoa agreements of 1937 were not the only ones in the history of cocoa trade in West Africa. In this way, reactions to the pool of 1937 were also not the only ones. African reactions to the inequality created by colonialism and to various attempts at cocoa pool were commonplace before World War I (1914-1918). According to Southall,

"Basel Mission records show that the first pool agreement was resisted by farmers in 1903. Similarly, in 1904, under the leadership of their chiefs, they reacted against the lower world market prices with a temporary but complete embargo of their produce. A few years later, in 1908, when prices slumped after a boom the year before, the Omanhene of New Juaben issued a proclamation forbidding growers in his division from selling their cocoa. The resulting hold-up was sufficiently serious for the Accra Chamber of Commerce to urge the Government to explain to farmers that the merchants could not afford to pay higher prices."[30]

The depressed conditions obtaining during the latter part of the First World War (1914-1918) led to the development of a sense of grievance amongst producers. An uneasy peace was maintained by the reduction of the export tax on cocoa by the Governor, Sir Hugh Clifford in 1917. As the war continued, there were increasingly explicit indications that farmers were considering resorting to militant protest. Chiefs in the Eastern Province warned in March 1918 that they would soon have to resort to direct action to defend their people against 'manifest exploitation' and early in season 1919-20, chiefs in Central Province issued orders to the effect that farmers should not sell cocoa for less than £2 a load. But the hold-up was short-lived, due to the cocoa boom that followed almost immediately.[31]

The first signs of active protest by West African cocoa producers appeared in the Akwapim District of the Eastern Province in the last two months of 1921, after prices had fallen to 11/- per load of 60 lb. The Akwapim farmers formed an Association which forbade the sale of cocoa under 15/- a load, and the Densu-Agya Planters Association, which was based at Asuboi, and chiefs and elders at Mangoase followed suit. Within a matter of days, merchants saw their supply of cocoa dry up. In 1921-22, the farmers were not able to sustain their resistance for long. With a loose organizational basis for the promotion of solidarity, and a lack of financial

reserves to advance to members with immediate needs, the hold-up was initially broken by the A & ETC, which temporarily offered a price of 17/6d to coax a supply of cocoa on to the market and this then was followed by a rise in the world price.

The sudden fall in the price level in the early months of 1930—which coincided with the formation of the 1930 pool—robbed these chiefs of any chance of immediate profit. They blamed the pool for the fall in price and then resolved on using their influence to promote a hold-up of cocoa so as to force the pool to offer a higher price. In contrast to the brief and localized affairs of 1921/22 and 1922/23, the hold-up of 1930-31 was longer lasting, better organized and effective over a much wider area. Whereas in earlier instances the core areas of support were around pioneer cocoa towns such as Tafo, Mangoase and Koforidua, in 1930-31 the hold-up was practically absolute in the whole of the Eastern Province and almost equally effective in the Western and Central Provinces of the Colony. The major weakness, however, was the failure of the hold-up to take root in Ashanti, despite attempts by the organizers to mobilize a wider support. The hold-up finally collapsed because the conflicting objectives of the groups allied together in the Federation pulled the movement apart. Southall has summarized these earlier cocoa induced conflicts as follows:

"Hold-up movements of significance occurred during four seasons in the inter-war period: 1921-22, 1922-23, 1930-31 and 1937-38. They were all a response to a large drop in the price of cocoa from previous seasons and represent successively stronger campaigns against monopoly domination of the economy by expatriate buying firms. The two hold-ups of the early 1920s lasted only for about two months and were confined mainly to the pioneering cocoa areas in Akwapim, such as Tafo, Mangoase and Koforidua; that of 1930-31 extended no longer in duration, but was more widespread, being practically absolute in the whole of the Eastern

Province and almost equally effective in the Western and Central Provinces of the Colony."[32]

All this resistance had been mounted by Africans cocoa producers before 1937 and they were eclipsed by that of 1937-38, which embraced the support of farmers not only in the older cocoa areas, but also throughout Ashanti. What made 1937 agreements and the concomitant protests different was the magnitude. In the case of the 1937 reaction, a complete hold-up of cocoa sales by producers began in the Gold Coast as soon as the season opened. It lasted from October 1937 to April 1938. It covered Eastern Province, Ashanti, and the northern part of the central Province, where cocoa was an important product, ing of all except the most essential European produce imported goods, sympathy strikes by market movements, lorry drivers and surf-boat workers, and ultimately burning of some 400 tons (6,400 bags).[34] 'The hold-up and boycott were so effective as to bring both the export and the internal trade in the Gold Coast practically to a standstill; only small quantity of cocoa were marketed, and imported merchandise accumulated unsold in the farms' store and in the Customs sheds.'[35] Troubles in the West African market arising out of the cocoa pool buying, affected the trade in luxury goods, especially textile trade.[36] The strength of the 1937-8 cocoa hold-up took many observers by surprise.

By early December, however, the Colonial Office was beginning to feel that it had underestimated the strength of opposition in the Gold Coast, and it floated the idea of an 'impartial enquiry into the whole position' in return for the merchants withdrawing the Agreement and the farmers ending the hold-up. The Nowell Commission of Inquiry[37] into the cocoa hold-up in the Gold Coast was appointed by Ormsby Gore, the Secretary of State for Colonies, on 14 February 1938 'to examine and report on the marketing of cocoa in the Gold Coast and Nigeria, with special reference to the situation which had arisen as a result of the Buying Agreement(s) entered into between certain firms, and to submit recommendations.'[38]

The 221-page report of the Commission was issued on Monday, 24 October 1938 at 12 midnight.[39] The report dealt with every aspect of a problem which developed into commercial crisis. It included a full account of the introduction of a Buying Agreement in October, 1937 by a group of European firms which normally purchase the bulk of the West African cocoa crop, and of the prolonged hold up of cocoa by Gold Coast farmers which ensued.[40] It dealt at some length with the provisions of the separate Buying Agreement, which were in force in the Gold Coast and Nigeria as well as the cases submitted for and against them by European firms and the Africans respectively. Middlemen and money-lenders were shown to be, for the most part, the villains and if not the cause of the farmers' hardships, they certainly had contributed a long way towards their misfortunes. West African merchants were completely exonerated from the charge that they controlled the market price of cocoa.[41] 'Unless and until the world markets are organized very differently, the merchant shippers who buy and sell most of the crop cannot get more for the cocoa they sell than the price determined in a more or less free market; it is obviously in their interest, as sellers of merchandise to the Africans, that the general level of prices for cocoa should be high.'[42]

The Report was, however, greeted with another set of reactions from various quarters, official and unofficial. With regard to the public reaction to the report, the local middlemen, although glad that the Commission recommended the withdrawal of the Agreement, resented the criticisms levelled against them as a class and were definitely hostile to any attempt to dislodge them from their position in the marketing of cocoa. One of their main contentions appeared to be that the Commission did not appear to have appreciated the extent and influence of their members, and the family and other ties which bound them with the farmers.[43] Another Committee (one on the Gold Coast, one in Nigeria) was set up to consider the report of the Cocoa Commission. On 14 December 1938, the Governor

of the Gold Coast, Arnold Hodson, appointed, in respect of the Colony, a Committee to, among other things 'examine the proposal for collective marketing scheme framed by the Commission on the Marketing of West African Cocoa and to report on its practicability and on the probable expenditure, which would be required to bring it into operation.[44] However, the recommendations of the report of these committees (in the Gold Coast and Nigeria) were yet to be implemented when the Second World War broke out in 1939.

COCOA HOLD-UP OF 1937-38: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

The Nigerian experience has been a neglected theme in the historiography of the West African Cocoa hold-up of 1937-8. As has been seen, literature is legion on the Ghanaian experience, with oblique and tangential mention of Nigeria. For instance, in discussing the establishment of the Nigeria Cocoa Marketing Board of 1947, Deutsch[45] examines the way the deteriorating relationship in Nigeria between producer and European firms in the late 1930s led to the latter's attempts to gain control over the market by creating a buying agreement in 1937. He notes that this generated protest (not by farmers but) by organizations representing farmers and by the nationalist groups such as the Nigerian Youth Movement. Similarly, newspaper reports show that among the Urhobo farmers of Okitipupa District of western Nigeria, more than 10, 000 produce dealers declared a holdup in palm oil, but not in cocoa:

"Among the Urhobo Farmers of Okitipupa District, more than 10,000 produce dealers had declared a hold-up. At Aba, some of the leading produce dealers organized themselves with a view to ameliorating conditions, but unfortunately they did not approach their problem in the right perspective. They went a-begging and so they were treated how beggars should be treated."[46]

It was this attempt that Olukoju described as 'confronting the combines'.[47] Thus, apart from this action by the palm oil producers, nothing is known in extant literature about the place of the Nigerian cocoa producers in the West African cocoa hold-up. Did farmers and brokers in Nigeria stop selling cocoa beans to European firms? Were cocoa purchases way down, as in the Gold Coast at the same time? And what were the roles of the Nigerian cocoa farmers in the West African cocoa protest of 1937-8?

Nigerian cocoa farmers played a role in the cocoa protest movement through various platforms. For instance, newspaper reports show that the Nigerian Youth Movement, a nationalist organization formed in 1935, pledged its support against the Cocoa Pool on the Gold Coast. By so doing, the Nigerian delegation was sent to Ghana to demonstrate support to the Ghanaian cocoa producers against the Cocoa Pool by the foreign trading firms. A mass meeting was held at the Glover Memorial Hall to welcome the Nigerian delegates on their return from Ghana.[48] However, it is pertinent to note that there is no evidence that the cocoa holdup of 1937-8, which took place in Ghana, occurred in Nigeria. There were noises about mounting one, but apparently it was purely rhetorical, leaving us with the question: why was it rhetorical in Nigeria compared to the famous hold-up in Ghana? So many reasons can be given to account for the unsuccessful takeoff of cocoa holdup in Nigeria as happened in the Gold Coast. These reasons are discussed consecutively:

A. The Absence of historical precedence. In defence of tradition, Edmund Burke shows that the history and traditions of nation's life have a utility not measured by their contribution merely to private convenience or the enjoyment of individual rights. They are the repository of civilization, the source of religion and morality, and the arbiter even of reason itself. This was the case in the cocoa hold-up in Ghana in 1937-8, for it drew from history and tradition. On the Gold Coast, there had been a history of protest movements by cocoa producers before 1937. The earlier holdups of 1903

and 1930-1 provided the background to the holdup of 1937. In the case of colonial Nigeria, such history of protest movements against the colonial authority of the resistance movements against the colonial authority came after the cocoa crisis of 1937. For instance, the national strike embarked upon by the labour union in colonial Nigeria and the revolt in Enugu colliery took place in the 1940s, years after the cocoa hold-up. Therefore, there was no historical precedence from which the Nigerian cocoa producers of the 1930s would draw inspiration for the protest.

B. The nature and structure of cocoa industry in Nigeria: In some parts of the Gold Coast, cocoa farms were established by migrant farmers who organized themselves in a capitalist nature with the aim of making profit from their enterprise. In this way, they bought land and labour hoping to recover the cost of their investment and make profit after the sale of their produce, what Polly Hill has described as 'rural capitalism'.[49] This risk-taking situation makes it necessary and mandatory for them to be reactionary and responsive to dynamics of the political economy of world cocoa trade. But in Nigeria, before the 1950s, cocoa farms were established mostly by peasants who inherited land from traditional practices and were not bound to sell the land. Community land could also be used by members for production process. In the same way, family labour was used and pawning also provided labour for cocoa farmers. This makes the rate of risk minimal. This situation could not produce radical farmers who would be ready to team up with the middlemen for a trade boycott. This position can be sustained with Southall's assertion that 'the nature of producer protest was intimately linked to the particular social formations associated with the cocoa economy. Superimposed upon this social structure were a variety of factors which made it considerably more complex.'[50]

C. Neutrality of the chiefs in the Nigerian Cocoa Trade: Having initially sold land to the migrants, many of the chiefs in the Gold Coast also became farmers themselves; and having access to 'social capital' provided by their

position as traditional leaders, they often utilized their resources to become influential brokers. However, although they had interests in common with the rest of the cocoa community, the spread of the capitalist, cash economy worked as a corrosive upon their political authority.[51] In this way, they were ready to team up with the capitalist cocoa producers against the European trade combines.[52] In the case of Nigeria, although there was evidence in the early period of cocoa industry that chiefs owned cocoa and coffee farms, there was no evidence that they were brokers, against whom the cocoa agreements were aimed. So the Nigerian chiefs did not consider it necessary to mobilize the farmers against the combines because they did not have direct interest which the agreement would jeopardize.

D. Absence of Platform for Mobilization: By the 1930s, there was no strong association holding the cocoa farmers and brokers of Nigeria together. Although farmers' unions and co-operative societies existed, they were not well organised and all-encompassing. The conflicting objectives of the groups created centrifugal tendencies. This was manifested in the reaction to the Nowell Commission's report of 1939. While there was enthusiasm in Lagos, Ilesha and Ondo for the Commission's findings, middlemen and producers in Abeokuta, and Ijebu-Ode were in opposition.[53] It was this lack of strong front among farmers that predisposed the nationalist organization, Nigerian Youth Movement, to occasionally champion the course of farmers as part of their activities.

E. The Exploitation of the Farmers by the Middlemen: Although this trend was common in Ghana, that of Nigeria appeared more excessive. This was one of the reasons cited by the trading firms for the cocoa agreement. 'The farmers had been cheated wholesale by their more wily brethren in a multitude of ways.'[54] There was also the case of advance sale of crops, in which 25 per cent of the crop of 1937 had been sold in advance to many lenders and speculative buyers at prices averaging 5/2d per load as compared with the average price of 9/-d during the season.[55] The actual

return to the farmers was therefore estimated to be 11 per cent less than the local price level during the season. This system of purchase was usually to the detriment of the farmers. This situation led to animosity of some farmers against the middlemen, making cohesion and unity of purpose difficult.

CONCLUSION

Africans did not accept colonialism with absolute docility. There were various kinds of reaction by the African people against the establishment of colonialism and against the inequality, oppression and exploitation which it brought with it. Social tensions within food chains were examples of these struggles. The West African cocoa protest of 1937-8 was an example of social tensions within food chains (small farmers and middlemen versus big corporations), and a form of African reactions and resistance to colonialism. The African reactions to the formation of the European cocoa-buyers' price-fixing cartel in 1937 was so muted in Nigeria compared to the famous 1937-8 hold-up in what is now Ghana (the Gold Coast Colony, Ashanti, and British Togoland). Although the Nigerian cocoa farmers paid solidarity to their Ghanaian counterparts, the structure of the cocoa industry in Nigeria, which was distinct from that of Ghana, militated against the success of cocoa boycott in Nigeria. Historical factors, peasant nature of production, neutrality of the traditional rulers, and the absence of platform for mobilization all contributed to making it impossible for cocoa trade boycott to take place in colonial Nigeria.

NOTES

1 A. Isaacman, 'Peasants and Rural Social Protest in Africa', African Studies Review, 33 (1990), 1.

2 J. Chauveau, 'Cocoa as Innovation: African Initiatives, Local Contexts and Agro-ecological Conditions in the History of Cocoa Cultivation in

West African Forest Lands (c. 1880-c. 1950)', Paideuma, 43 (1997).

3 A. McPhee, The Economic Revolution in British West Africa, (G. Rutledge & Sons, 1926); F. N. Howes, 'The Early Introduction of Cocoa to West Africa', African Affairs 45 (1946), 152; J. B. Webster, 'Agege Plantations and the African Church, 1901-1920', NISER Conference Proceedings, Ibadan, March 1963; S. Berry, Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria (Clarendon, 1975).

4 P. Hill, The Gold Coast Cocoa Farmer: A Preliminary Survey (Oxford University, 1956); G. Austin, Rural Capitalism and the Growth of Cocoa-farming in South Ashanti to 1914 (Centre of West African Studies, 1987).

5 R. Galletti, K. Baldwin and I. Dina, Nigerian Cocoa Farmers: An Economic Survey of Yoruba Cocoa Farming Families (Oxford, 1956); S. Berry, Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria (Clarendon, 1975).

6 L. Are and D. Gwynne-Jones, Cacao in West Africa, (Oxford University Press, 1974).

7 E. Walker, The Changing Patterns of Labor Relations in the Cocoa Farming Belt of Southwestern Nigeria, 1950s to 1990', African Economic History, 28 (2000).

8 P. Bauer, West African Trade: A Study of Competition, Oligopoly and Monopoly in a Changing Economy (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1963).

9 G. Williams, 'Marketing without Marketing Boards: The Origins of State Marketing Boards in Nigeria', Review of African Political Economy, 34, Market Forces (1985); E. Hawkins, 'Marketing Boards and Economic Development in Nigeria and Ghana', The Review of Economic Studies, 26:1 (1958); S. Adamu, 'On Stabilisation Policy of the Marketing Boards in Nigeria', Nigerian Journal of Economic and Social Studies, 12: 3, (1970); D. Meredith, 'The Colonial Office, British Business Interests and the Reform of Cocoa Marketing in West Africa, 1937-1945', The Journal of African History, 29:2 (1988), 285-300; J. Deutsch, Educating the Middlemen: Political and Economic History of Statutory Cocoa Marketing

in Nigeria, 1936-1947 (Berlin: Arabische Buch, 1995).
10 A. Olorunfemi, '1980. Effects of War-time Trade Controls on Nigerian Cocoa Traders and Producers, 1939-45: A Case Study of the Hazards of a Dependent Economy', The International Journal of African Historical Studies vol.13, No.4, (1980), 672-687.
11 H. Van der Laan and W. Haarem, African Marketing Boards under Structural Adjustment, The Experience of Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s (Leiden: African Studies Centre, Working Paper No. 13, 1990).
12 S. Aderinto, "Where is the Boundary? Cocoa Conflict, Land Tenure, and Politics in Western Nigeria, 1890s-1960," Journal of Social History, 47,1 (2013), 176-195.
13 R. Southall, 'Polarisation and Dependence in the Gold Coast Cocoa Trade 1890-1938', Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana, 16:1 (1975), 93.
14 R. Alence, 'Colonial Government, Social Conflict and State Involvement in Africa's Open Economies: The Origins of the Ghana Cocoa Marketing Board, 1939-46', The Journal of African History, 42:3 (2001); 397-416.
15 R. Howard, 'Differential Class Participation in an African Protest Movement: The Ghana Cocoa Boycott of 1937-38', Canadian Journal of African Studies, 10: 3 (1976): 469-480.
16 G. Austin, 'Capitalists and Chiefs in the Cocoa Hold-Ups in South Asante, 1927-1938', The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 21: 1 (1988): 63-95.
17 A. Olukoju, 'Confronting the Combines: Producers' and Traders' Militancy in Western Nigeria, 1934-1939', Nordic Journal of African Studies 9:1 (2000), 49.
18 P. Bauer, West African Trade: A Study of Competition, Oligopoly and Monopoly in a Changing Economy, (Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1963)
19 Ghana (GH)/Public Records and Archives Administration Department (PRAAD)/Administrative (ADM) file series—GH/PRAAD/ADM5/3/33 Cmd. 5845, 1938. Report of the commission on the marketing of West African cocoa. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office. 86-87.

20 Southall, 'Polarisation', 95.
21 C. Gunnarson, The Gold Coast Cocoa Industry, 1900-1939: Production, Prices and Structural Change (Sweden: Lund, 1978), 119.
22 J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises', in M. Perham (ed.), Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria. (Faber and Faber, 1948), 48.
23 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department (herein after referred to as (GH/PRAAD)/ Administrative Report series (hereinafter referred to as (ADM)/ 5/3/33 Cmd. 5845, 1938. Report of the commission on the marketing of West African cocoa. London: His Majesty's stationary office. p. 50 GH/PRAAD/ADM 5/3/33 Cmd. 5845, 1938. Report of the commission on the marketing of West African cocoa. London: His Majesty's stationary office. 1.
24 These firms included: W. Bartholomew & Company Limited, Busi & Stephenson Limited, Cadbury brothers Limited, J. S. Fry & Sons Limited, Compagnie Francaise de L'Afrique Occidentale, John Holt & Company (Liverpool) Limited, J. Lyons & Company Limited, G. B. Ollivant Limited, Paterson, Zochonis & Company Limited, Societe Commerciale de L'Ouest Africain, Swiss African Trading Company, Union Trading Company Limited, and The United African Company Limited. C. Zard subsequently withdrew with mutual consent. GH/PRAAD/ADM 5/3/33 Cmd. 5845, 1938. Report of the commission on the marketing of West African cocoa. London: His Majesty's stationary office, p.202, Appendix J, Part III of the Report.
25 NAI Oyo Prof. 1/53 Conf. No. 25807.
26 Gunnarson, The Gold Coast, 125.
27 The Nigerian Daily Times, Lagos, Friday, 28 October 1938.
28 Nowell's Report in Daily Times, 2 November 1938, 10.
29 The Nigerian Daily Times, Lagos, Wednesday, 26 October 1938.
30 Southall, 'Polarisation', 104.
31 Southall, 'Polarisation'.
32 R. Southall, 'Farmers, Traders and Brokers in the Gold Coast Cocoa Economy', Canadian Journal of African Studies, 12:2 (1978), 203

33 R. Howard, 'Differential Class Participation in an African Protest Movement: The Ghana Cocoa Boycott of 1937-38', Canadian Journal of African Studies, 10: 3 (1976), 470.
34 Howard, 'Differential'
35 Ghanaian Public Records and Archives Administration Department (GH/PRAAD)/Administrative File (ADM)/5/3/33 Cmd. 5845, 1938. Report of the commission on the marketing of West African cocoa. London: His Majesty's Stationary Office. 1.
36 National Archives Ibadan (NAI) 25807/S.10, Extract from official Report of 3 November 1938.
37 The Commission was composed of Mr. William Nowell (Chairman), Mr. Rupert S. Thompson, Mr. C.A.L. Irving. Mr. E. Melville of the Colonial Office (Secretary) See Nigerian Gazette Extraordinary, 25 October 1938, 772.
38 Nigerian Gazette Extraordinary, 25 October 1938, 772.
39 The West African Pilot, Lagos, Wednesday, 26 October 1938.
40 Nigerian Gazette Extraordinary, 25 October 1938.
41 The Nigerian Daily Times, Wednesday, 26 October 1938.
42 The Nigerian Daily Times, Wednesday, 26 October 1938.
43 NAI, Chief Secretary's Office (CSO) 26/34883/Vol. 1, From Acting Resident, Ijebu Province to Chief Secretary to the Government, Lagos, 3 November 1938.
44 NAI 34883/Vol. 1, The constitution of the Committee was as follows: The Director of Agriculture, Nana Sir Ofori Atta, Nana Tsibu Darku IX, F.G. Emery, Esq.; W.W. Barnhill, Esq, (Assistant Colonial Secretary) to act as the Secretary.
45 Deutsch, Educating the Middlemen.
46 The West African Pilot, Lagos, Friday, 28 October 1938.
47 Olukoju, 'Confronting the Combines'.
48 The West African Pilot, Lagos, Wednesday, 26 October 1938.
49 P. Hill, The Migrant Cocoa-Farmers of Southern Ghana: A Study in Rural Capitalism, (Cambridge University, 1970).

50 Southall, 'Polarisation', 103.
51 Ibid. 104.
52 G. Austin, 'Capitalists and Chiefs in the Cocoa Hold-Ups in South Asante, 1927-1938', The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 21: 1.
53 NAI 25807/S.10, From the Director of Agriculture, Ibadan to the Chief Secretary to the Government dated 18 November 1938.
54 The Nigerian Daily Times, Lagos, Friday, 28 October 1938, 4.
55 Nowell's Report in Daily Times, 2 November 1938, 10.