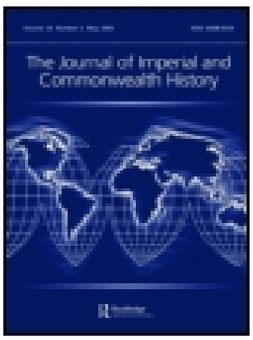

The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History

ISSN: 0308-6534 (Print) 1743-9329 (Online) Journal homepage: http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/fich20

# Empire Day in Africa: Patriotic Colonial Childhood, Imperial Spectacle and Nationalism in Nigeria, 1905–60

Saheed Aderinto

**To cite this article:** Saheed Aderinto (2018): Empire Day in Africa: Patriotic Colonial Childhood, Imperial Spectacle and Nationalism in Nigeria, 1905–60, The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History

**To link to this article:** https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1452538

Published online: 05 Apr 2018.

THE JOURNAL OF IMPERIAL AND COMMONWEALTH HISTORY, 2018
https://doi.org/10.1080/03086534.2018.1452538



# Empire Day in Africa: Patriotic Colonial Childhood, Imperial Spectacle and Nationalism in Nigeria, 1905–60

Saheed Aderinto

Western Carolina University, Cullowhee, NC, USA

**ABSTRACT**

Anyone born or raised in Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, after 1960 would remember Children's Day, observed every 27 May. However, few knew that it started as Empire Day in the first decade of the twentieth century—fewer are aware that it was a significant symbol of imperial domination, decolonised from the late 1950s to align with postcolonial ideals of self-determination and nation-building. African historical research has examined the sites and symbols (such as western biomedicine and education, police and prison, and indirect rule) through which British imperialism established and maintained itself in Africa. However, little is known about Empire Day, an invented tradition of ritualistic yearly veneration of the glory of the British Empire, which was first celebrated in Britain in 1904 and was immediately introduced to the African colonies. In this article, I examine the story of Empire Day as a significant colonial spectacle and performance of imperial authority in Nigeria, and how it assumed new meanings and functions among diverse groups of Nigerian children and adults. Empire Day, more than any other commemoration, placed children at the centre of imperialism and recognised them as a vital element in the sustenance of an imagined citizenship of the British Empire.

**KEYWORDS**

Empire Day; imperialism; children; patriotism; nationalism; Nigeria; decolonisation; British Empire

> Two other things stand out in my mind about that first Empire Day visit to Onitsha. Cut free from my village moorings and let loose in a big city with money in my pocket, I let myself go; go so far, in fact, as to consume a half penny worth of groundnuts. For many years afterwards the very mention of groundnuts would turn my stomach. My other memory is much happier. I saw with my own eyes, a man who was as legendary as Onitsha itself, an eccentric Englishman, Dr. J.M. Stuart Young, who had been living and trading in Onitsha since the beginning of the twentieth century. (Chinua Achebe, *The Education of British-Protected Child*, 2009, 14–15)

## Introduction

The above epigraph is from Chinua Achebe's childhood memory of his first Empire Day experience in May 1940, when he was only 10 years old. He

**CONTACT** Saheed Aderinto aderintosaheed@yahoo.co.uk Department of History, Western Carolina University, 286 Central Drive, Cullowhee, NC 28723 USA

walked to Onitsha, seven miles from his native village of Ogidi, to participate in an event he remembered for the splendid appearance of the British resident officer, 'who stood on a dais wearing a white ceremonial uniform with white gloves, plumed helmet, and sword'.[1] Achebe, like many autobiographers who documented their childhood under colonial rule, did not remember Empire Day beyond the opportunities it gave him to leave home for the provincial capital where the event took place, the competitive sports among schools and the colourful march-past of schoolchildren, the Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, and the military. Colonial children took a well-deserved holiday from school, dressed in their new and specially designed Empire Day uniform, and fought hard to win Empire Day shields, among other prizes. Most colonial children remembered Empire Day only for the stardom their school achieved for excellence in sports, the opulent appearance of robe-wearing traditional chiefs and the engrossing performance of the police and military band. Such patriotic songs and statements as, 'God Save the King', 'Rule Britannia' and 'On the 24th of May, the Day When Queen Victoria was born, We shall all rejoice', had an emotive effect and stayed with many colonial children several decades after alien rule.[2] So powerful were the images of Empire Day that it remains one of the most enduring episodes in childhood memory of colonialism.

But for the colonial government and its infrastructure of domination, Empire Day, held every 24 May transcended the spectacle of imperial power, which colonial children fancied most. Although it started as a celebration of the birthday of Queen Victoria, the monarch under whose leadership the British Empire attained an unprecedented global reach, it later became an avenue to reinforce the power of the British crown and secure the allegiance of the colonial subjects, especially schoolchildren. An integral component of colonial spectacle, the most important highlights of Empire Day for the colonial government and its 'collaborators' were not the school sports, which children admired, but the series of lectures advising children to be patriotic to the British Empire.[3] The Empire Day lectures, regardless of their quality, depth and manner of presentation had one common theme—colonial children owed a civic duty to the British Empire and must show appreciation for their imperial citizenship, or their privileged status as a 'British-protected' person.[4] 'There can be no privileges without responsibilities', G. Beresford Stooke, the officer administering the government of Nigeria, emphasised in his 1946 Empire Day speech.[5] Imperial obligations included accepting the legitimacy of British rule and defending the empire from collapse. Indeed, no other festivity placed children at the centre of colonialism except Empire Day.

The primary agenda of this article is three-fold. First, it examines how a practice originating from the metropole assumed a different meaning in the colonies, while also retaining its core imperial agenda. Second, this study connects imperialism and colonial childhood in a manner not found in existing Africanist scholarship. It highlights the ways in which the images and identity of Nigerian

children were mobilised to drum up paternalistic support for the imperial government. Third, this article makes a case for the integration of the story of Empire Day into the growing body of works on decolonisation and nationalism in Africa. I argue that the history of nationalism and decolonisation is incomplete without a critical engagement with Empire Day as one of the instruments and symbols of colonialism. To achieve all these objectives, I draw evidence from archival materials from the three main branches of the Nigerian National Archives located at Ibadan, Enugu and Kaduna. Other genres of sources such as newspapers (*West African Pilot*, *Daily Service*, *Lagos Weekly Record*, *Nigerian Pioneer* and *Lagos Standard*) gave significant coverage to Empire Day activities, including the speeches delivered by colonial administrators and chiefs.[6] This class of document remains the most vital source for understanding the connection between Empire Day and the politics of decolonisation from the early 1950s. Oral interviews and autobiographies of children born under colonial rule offer interesting information about the perspectives of minors on a colonial tradition that was designed entirely for them, but used to achieve a political purpose. Indeed, it is rare to read the autobiographies of colonial children without a reference to Empire Day.

This article stands at the crossroad of childhood, nationalism and imperialism studies. Recent historical research on Africa has unearthed the role of children in moulding diverse aspects of colonial culture.[7] The main idea that is shaping historical research on colonial children and childhood is clear—it is impossible to understand colonial Africa to the fullest without delving into the creation of 'modern' childhood: African colonial childhood manifested in the quest by the British government and educated Africans to raise a new generation of children in line with the 'modern' practices found in European medicine, education, politics, and society in general.[8] Indeed, the interesting scholarship on child labour, Boy Scouts and Girl Guides, the representation of children in the newspapers, child prostitution and abolition of domestic slavery, to mention but a few, is all influenced (in varying degrees) by the idea of modern colonial childhood—or the notion that African children cannot be left behind in the project of 'civilisation'.[9] The introduction of British-styled child-play culture and rehabilitation programmes for juvenile delinquency, the integration of children into colonial capitalism in such places as the mines and the transformation of children's attitudes towards the state and its infrastructure of political power, scholars have established, led to the rise of a new class of children in colonial Africa.[10]

With the exception of brief references in articles and books, virtually no scholarly attention has been paid to Empire Day in Africa.[11] Most of the existing works focus on Britain.[12] The dearth of African perspectives in British-centred works underrates the global cultural impact of Empire Day. But, beyond using Empire Day to highlight the intersection of colonialism and childhood in Nigeria, I extend the discussion to the bigger narrative of 'imagined global' childhood. As we shall see shortly, Empire Day was also conceived as

an avenue to shape the imperial consciousness of all the children of the empire (regardless of location, class, race, religion, political status), to uphold a set of common values and obligations to the British crown.

Similarly, scholars of African nationalism and decolonisation have completely overlooked the story of Empire Day.[13] Even James Coleman's classic, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, on which generation after generation of scholars of African politics, nationalism and decolonisation has relied, dedicates just one paragraph to Empire Day.[14] With particular reference to Nigeria, the story of Empire Day from the 1950s cannot be divorced from the politics of nationalism and decolonisation. In fact, decolonisation in Nigeria went beyond the well-known history of the constitutional conferences, which gradually transferred power to Nigerian educated elites from the early 1950s or the numerous political protests—both on the streets and the pages of the newspapers. I argue that Empire Day was one of the symbols of imperial domination which provided the vocabulary and tool for contesting the so-called legitimacy of British colonialism in Nigeria during the 1950s. Thus, inserting the story of Empire Day into the broader discourse of nationalism and decolonisation invites historians to revisit the significance of symbols and commemorations in upholding imperial order in Africa. For the Nigerian nationalists of the 1950s, it was counter-productive to raise a new generation of politically conscious children without decolonising Empire Day, which indoctrinated minors to believe in the sanctity of British rule. Here, we see a strong connection between childhood and decolonisation, a paradigm that is missing in existing Africanist scholarship.

## 'A Family of Nations': Imagined Global Childhood, Colonial Propaganda and Inter-group Relations

Britain celebrated its first Empire Day on 24 May 1904; Reginald Brabazon, the seventh earl of Meath, was its main instigator. A serious campaigner for the introduction of soldierly rituals into schools and an ardent imperialist who was inspired by Canadian Clementina Fessenden, Lord Meath's goal was to establish a patriotic ritual throughout schools in the British Empire. He conceived Empire Day as an opportunity to nurture imperial mentalities and collective identity among young citizens of the empire.[15] He believed that drawing 'the attention of the next generation to imperial questions' would promote knowledge about the British Empire among children and allow them to 'perceive the advantages of a closer federation'.[16] He wanted children of Britain and the empire to be reminded of their privileged mighty heritage and the common traits of an 'imagined community' of colonial subjects spread across the world.[17] Lord Meath was able to successfully sell his idea to the school system and mainstream British society. He founded the Empire Day Movement to coordinate the global celebration of the British Empire and released a yearly

statement emphasising its core mission.[18] During the early period of its life, the Empire Day Movement served the expansionist imperialistic agenda of bringing 'light' to many 'dark' corners of the world. But the growing resentment towards empire building in Britain after the First World War compelled it to revise its perspective on Britain's relations with the external world.[19] By the 1940s, the motto of the Empire Day Movement was emphasising its contradictory philosophy as a 'non-party, non-sectarian and non-racial' organisation.[20]

Nigeria observed its first Empire Day on Wednesday 24 May 1905. The *Lagos Weekly Record* described it as 'essentially a children's day', witnessed by about 4,000 schoolchildren who embarked on a procession from Tinubu Square to the racecourse in Lagos.[21] The children then listened to the address of the British governor of Lagos, sang the British National Anthem, gave three cheers to the British crown, tossed their caps into the air and 'indulged in sports until nightfall'.[22] The *Lagos Standard* commented that the 1907 edition of Empire Day saw an improvement on the previous editions in terms of the sporting activities. Schoolchildren and teachers, the newspaper noted, stood for 'an unconscionable time in the blazing sun' at the racecourse for the arrival of Governor Walter Egerton of the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria.[23] However, it offered the following critique: 'the singing of the National Anthem in unison was far from successful, two or three false starts having been made before the right time'.[24] With time, the planning and conduct of Empire Day improved. In 1914, the *Nigerian Pioneer* editorialised that Empire Day 'is now an established custom' in Lagos, which it described as the 'most progressive town in West Africa'.[25] The yearly coverage of Empire Day in the *Nigerian Pioneer* affirmed that it had become the largest assemblage of children (both school-enrolled and not) in any part of the country by the 1920s[26] (Figure 1). Indeed, with the exception of other notable gatherings such as the burial procession of important personalities and horse racing, it was the largest gathering of any class of colonial subject at a given time and place: 20,000 people, predominantly children, attended the 1949 Empire Day at the racecourse, Lagos's main event arena.[27] The popularity of Empire Day also grew as school enrolment soared. In southern Nigeria, the primary school enrolment of 1.1 million in the 1950s was in stark contrast to the 140,000 thirty years earlier.[28]

From the 1920s through the early 1950s, the activities of Empire Day commenced around 7.45 am, when children gathered at their clean and nicely decorated school playgrounds or local public arenas.[29] The Union Jack was unfurled and hoisted; followed by the singing of the national anthem, 'God Save the King or Queen' (depending on the gender of the reigning monarch). The march-past of schoolchildren and their teachers then took place, amid the saluting of the Union Jack and of colonial administrators. Both teachers and schoolchildren were required to remove their hats (in a show of respect) in saluting the colonial administrator who stood on a raised dais. Speeches from government officers (governor, and resident, district and education officials) preceded those of the


**Figure 1.** Empire Day Celebration in Lagos, 1928. Courtesy of the National Archives Ibadan, Nigeria.

chiefs.[30] After the speeches, the Empire Day sports commenced and ended with an elaborate children-centred feast. Money for Empire Day food came from many sources—government, big foreign merchant companies and the native authorities. In Emure Ekiti in 1943, S. O. Ajayi, the headmaster of St. Paul's School, made his students collect palm kernel (an important war-time commodity), which was then sold to raise money for Empire Day feast.[31] The commemoration ended with the presentation of Empire Day shields to the most successful school teams. Although the character of Empire Day (in terms of the ritual of glorification of imperialism) took a similar form across the country, each location blended imperial tradition with local cultural motifs, food, ceremonial dresses and folklore. The rendering of speeches of colonial officers in indigenous Nigerian languages and dance and performance by local artistes complemented other Empire Day activities, bringing a global event closer to the lived experience of the people.[32]

A content analysis of Empire Day speeches is important in order to come to terms with the role of colonial indoctrination and propaganda in shaping new ideals of imagined global childhood. Each Empire Day speech, regardless of the author, emphasised that the commemoration was essentially a 'children's day' celebrated all over the world. The emphasis on the global importance of Empire Day was meant to make Nigerian children imagine themselves as equal to their counterparts, either in Europe or in the Far East. Empire Day messages, which sought to 'remind children that they formed part of the British Empire, and that they might think with others in lands across the sea, what it meant to be sons and daughters of such a glorious Empire' emphasised parallel global childhood culture such as education and play, and respect for adults and constituted authorities.[33] They avoided statements on obvious

global inequalities shaped by race, class and religion.[34] Indeed, the idea of an imagined global childhood or being a member of a 'family of nations' conspicuously blurred the unequal political relations, especially between Britain the metropole and the colonies. During the Second World War, Empire Day speeches capitalised on the impact of violence in Europe and Asia on children to highlight the importance of the relative peace Nigerian children enjoyed at home.[35] Not only did they ask Nigerian children to donate money to fellow comrades in war-torn parts of the empire, they also encouraged them to write condolence letters regretting the impact of the destruction of public facilities on children's education and childhood.[36] In all, the British government used its Empire Day speeches to emphasise one strong element about imperial hegemony—the need not to question colonialism because it was advantageous to belong to a world-wide political force.[37]

One of the arguments of this article is that, as Empire Day travelled across the globe, it was domesticated into specific locations through a consideration of the prevailing cultural and political practices. In Nigeria, Empire Day was recognised as a performance of political authority across districts, provinces and communities. In Lagos, the seat of colonial government, the governor presided over the activities, gave the opening speech and read the messages from the British monarch and the Empire Day Movement. This was followed by speeches from notable colonial masters. Only the oba (king) of Lagos was allowed to make a speech among the class of the traditional elites. The nationalists were largely excluded from Empire Day because the government feared they could use the occasion to make 'unpatriotic' political statements. In the provinces and divisions, Empire Day was presided over by resident and district officers. The seating arrangements—a crucial show-of-power—conformed to the hierarchies of political power in each domain. The British head of each administrative unit occupied the centre seat on the front row. Seated beside him were other British colonial officers, such as the education secretary, and the most senior traditional chiefs in his domain. Junior chiefs sat on the back rows, in accordance with their hierarchies.

To the children of Nigeria, Empire Day was their important moment, but for the colonial government and the chiefs it was an adult affair. Some adults used Empire Day as an opportunity to express 'dissident' feelings towards the colonial establishment. If children willingly saluted the Union Jack and the colonial masters during the march-past, some adults would disrespect the tradition in order to register displeasure with colonialism. In 1952, the senior district officer of Owo lambasted six teachers of his division for not taking off and raising their hats to salute him during Empire Day march-past. He considered the improper arrangement of the children for the march-past and the inability of most of them to respond to the order 'eyes right' as a sign of disloyalty, encouraged by the teachers. The last paragraph of his stern letter tied the functions of teachers in a colonial society up with the common rhetoric of adult-

children relations in moulding 'acceptable' conduct towards the government: 'The future of Nigeria lies with the children and if their teachers cannot show greater efficiency than was displayed at this ceremony, it does not augur well for the future.'[38] Yet the teachers had a 'good' reason for their 'disrespectful' behaviour—they accused the government for cutting back on the annual school budget.

Beyond the superficial rhetoric of colonial pride, Empire Day highlighted inter-personal conflict over political agency and the ill-defined social hierarchy within the colonial system. In fact, the event (at least among adults) was not a socially cohesive occasion that transcended political and social boundaries. Conflict among the chiefs over seniority dated back to the pre-twentieth century era. However, as scholars including J. A. Atanda and Obaro Ikime have established, the creation of new political entities such as provinces and districts reconfigured pre-existing political tension, while adding new ones.[39] Some kings like the Alaafin of Oyo acquired extraordinary power, far above what they had in precolonial times, while the influence of others was drastically curtained. Traditional elites wrote petitions to their district officers protesting the seating arrangements at the occasion or querying why they were not invited.[40] Some asked for permission to sit on the front row or to establish an Empire Day venue within their immediate community in order to highlight their political relevance and conduct the highly revered task of accepting the children's salute and reading Empire Day messages of the governor and the British crown. Yet, this had some downsides. Fewer schools would participate in a local Empire Day; the district and resident officers would not attend. The police and army would perform only in the main district or provincial Empire Day held in big towns and cities, not the smaller ones in local communities hosted in villages. The success and elegance of Empire Day were based not only on the large number of schoolchildren participating and the competitiveness of the sports, but also on the presence of white colonial masters, among other agents of imperialism. Alternatively, some chiefs refused to attend the ceremony until the seating arrangements were restructured in their favour.[41]

In other instances, Empire Day-related conflict was between schoolteachers and the chiefs. Traditional elites criticised the Empire Day Organizing Committee, comprised essentially of schoolteachers and principals, for not inviting them to the ceremony.[42] Cases of this type, not only reveal the overt politicisation of Empire Day across social class, but also help us to further understand how the government internalised the power and relevance of each class in the colonial society. The government respected schoolteachers for serving as agents of modernity through the dissemination of western education. But the chiefs, the majority of whom were not literate in English, were more politically relevant than the teachers. In one instance, J. A. Adekoya, the principal of Iresi Baptist School, wrote a petition letter to his district officer against the local chief (the aresi) and his council members, for not attending or, in simple colonial parlance,

for not 'representing the Crown' at the 1945 Empire Day.[43] The aresi and his council had refused to attend three previous editions of Empire Day—1942, 1943 and 1944. The tone of the letter clearly suggested that an interpersonal conflict existed between the chiefs and the school principal. Not only did Adekoya consider the chiefs' behaviour as an 'awful blunder', he posed the following rhetorical questions that highlighted the pattern of relations between Nigerians and the British Empire in order to further establish his conviction that the traditional elites should be punished for disloyalty: 'Do they have another Empire? Are they loyal to the King? Is such a blunder made in other towns of the British Empire? What is their aim?'[44] It is easy to understand Adekoya's anger—Empire Day celebration held in the absence of important chiefs lacked legitimacy and honour.

Instead of rebuking the aresi and his council, District Officer R. P. Errington defended them, arguing that the chiefs did not attend Empire Day because the principal's letter of invitation arrived a day before the ceremony. The concluding paragraph of his letter clearly revealed the main issue at stake and affirmed the established colonial government's policy towards the different classes of elites: 'You must not think that the Aresi is at your beck and call—far from it. It is your duty to obey his call and work together for the progress of the town. Co-operation seems to be sadly lacking at present.'[45] This matter did not go away. Unsatisfied with Errington's defence of the chiefs, Adekoya wrote another letter describing the chiefs as 'disloyal' and 'ungrateful' colonial subjects, who had refused to salute the British flag for four years. 'I don't think your worship will allow such foolishness to continue in your jurisdiction. They need serious punishment and it will not be good to allow them to go free. They will do greater evils in future.' Adekoya pontificated.[46] Still, Errington refused to support Adekoya. Instead, he affirmed the superior power of the chiefs in local politics: 'You are advised', he insisted, 'to alter your attitude and improve your relations with those in authority in the town.'[47]

## Children's Perspectives on Empire Day

How did the colonial Nigerian children perceive a ceremony that exploited their image for the glorification of the empire? Did they internalise Empire Day speeches that admonished them to grow up to become dedicated members of the 'family of nations'? Put differently, did Empire Day messages and tradition have any impact on the children's attitude towards imperial paternalism? The answers to these questions can be found in the memory of childhood documented in autobiographies like Achebe's *The Education of a British-Protected Child*, in oral history, newspapers and archival materials. To state that children did not feel proud of their membership of the British Empire is to miss a significant element of minors' understanding of power, respect and obedience. Colonial children, as Ahmadu Bello's recollection of elementary school culture in northern Nigeria among other evidence clearly affirmed, were raised to respect and

accept the legitimacy of the instructions given by adults, whether African or European.[48] Achebe and his contemporaries proudly sang anti-German war songs and believed their headmaster's statement that every palm kernel they collected would be used to buy a nail for Hitler's coffin during the Second World War. 'I think we were loyal to Britain', he said about children's feeling towards the empire at war with the Nazis.[49] Like most children of her age, Buchi Emecheta believed in the popular wartime propaganda that Nigerians were mobilised to fight in the Second World War because Hitler said that 'all Africans had tails and should be killed'.[50] The idea of Europeans' invincibility (influenced by the notion of their racial superiority to Africans), which shaped obedient attitude towards colonialism, equally influenced children's imagination of the colonial masters' identity. 'I Had Thought That the White Man Was a superman', Obafemi Awolowo recalled his childhood impression of colonial administrators.[51]

Most colonial children definitely believed and respected everything they were told about the greatness of the British Empire. They were political beings—they absorbed and responded to ideas and symbols of imperialism with strong political implication. Empire Day songs and messages did have an emotive effect on them. But, as they transited from childhood to adulthood and went through life-changing rites of passage offered at home, school, community and other sites of socialisation, they realised the fallacies and inconsistencies of Empire Day and everything it stood for. As we shall see in the next section, the greatest critics of Empire Day from the early 1940s were adults who had proudly sung 'God Save the King' and waved and saluted the Union Jack 30 years earlier. As colonial children travelled within and outside Africa and acquired western education, they were able to rethink their relationship with the colonial state and fully understand their subjugated identity as colonial subjects.

Empire Day was popular among children, not for the political means it was supposed to serve, but for how it shaped their childhood. Colonial children remembered Empire Day mostly for how it defined different stages of their childhood; it was a marker of how they progressed in their mastery of the conundrums of their society and the expectations imposed on them by their parents, guardians, communities and teachers. Empire Day added a significant element to children's physical mobility and travelling culture, providing an opportunity for them to escape parental control as they travelled from their villages to the district or provincial towns where events were usually held. While some travelled with their school sports team, under the watch of teachers, others, especially those not participating in sports, went with fellow students. The travelling distance to Empire Day venues varied. Primary schoolchildren from Ogbese walked for five days, covering a distance of 23 miles to Owo, their divisional headquarter in 1948.[52] 'If you are lucky enough to be selected to witness the great ceremony, the distance to walk meant nothing to you.' Bisi Afonja, a

distinguished statistics professor, remarked about walking 15 miles from his native village of Jogo Orile to Ilaro, the Empire Day centre in his district.[53]

The long walk to the Empire Day venue increased children's knowledge of the cultural and physical geography of their community. It was a great opportunity for most rural children to encounter elements of colonial modernity (like modern architecture, hospitals, paved roads, electricity and beautiful cars) not available in their community, or to see famed traditional chiefs, colonial administrators and other personalities. Yet walking to the venue for Empire Day seemed inevitable—public transport, even in the 1950s, was poor in most rural communities. Most inter-village lorry services were expensive, irregular and incapable of meeting the needs of the children. Moreover, colonial children would prefer to walk and enjoy the adventure of engaging in activities like hunting small game and birds with their hand-held catapult and mobile traps, rather than pay for a truck fare to the Empire Day venue.[54]

If children loved to walk long distances, their teachers did not in many cases. For some headmasters like Ola Oyekan of Iragberi Baptist School—whose students walked six miles from Iragberi to Osogbo, the venue of Empire day in his division—it seemed that student athletes tended to perform badly because of exhaustion from long journey and lack of accommodation in the town.[55] He asked the government to allow him to organise local schools for the 1948 Empire Day in order to avoid long-distance travel. Schoolchildren disliked an Empire Day held locally because it would be less colourful; it would lack all the jingoism of a successful ceremony. Moreover, colonial administrators discouraged the creation of multiple Empire Day venues within their districts because they attributed the success of the event to the large number of children in attendance. This official attitude towards the politics of colonial crowd gathering is clear in the following statement by the acting district officer of Ijebu Province: 'The whole object of these Empire Day rallies is to get as many schoolchildren together as possible. The object is defeated if rallies are held in every town in the province/'[56]

Empire Day uniform, which varied in design from one school to another was another reason children looked forward to the celebration.[57] For many, the special Empire Day uniform was the only chance they had to successfully get new clothes from their parents, who were under a lot of pressure to ensure that their children looked 'clean' and 'smart'. After Empire Day, children could continue to wear their uniforms to important ceremonies, functions and festivals within their community. For instance, Awolowo wore his Empire Day uniform to church every Sunday.[58] Each school picked a special clothing colour and design to reflect the emblem of their founders, the fashion in vogue or simply an aesthetic preference. In Ilaro in 1951, the Anglican school pupils wore white and green clothes, while the Jehova Jireh African school put on blue blazers over white trousers.[59] Some schools adopted the Union Jack design as their uniform.[60] Colonial children also remembered Empire Day for

being prevented from participating in the march-past and sports because of the inability of their parents to pay for the uniform.[61] The awujale (king) of Ijebu Ode in his 1948 Empire Day address established a stark difference between the children's interest and the philosophy behind the commemoration: 'I know how a good many of you have to force your parents or guardians to make new dresses for you for this occasion. But I want to impress upon you that what is of far more significance than outward demonstration is devotion and loyalty to the lofty ideals of the Empire to which we are proud to belong.'[62]

For some parents and for the press, Empire Day uniform was essentially a fraud. In a 5 June 1951 open letter published in the *West African Pilot* and titled 'A Very Expensive Empire Day', one parent, S. O. S. Ajanlekoko, alleged that Ilaro school headmasters and their wives were exploiting schoolchildren by serving as agents for the buying and sewing of special Empire Day uniforms, which cost around £5.[63] He worried that the school authorities made the 'celebration of Empire Day by the schoolchildren a very expensive one to the parents'.[64] For the colonial government and the chiefs, the beautiful appearance of the children was more important than checking the alleged fraud of school administrators. The awujale's comment on the 'neat, smart, and presentable appearance' of schoolchildren at Empire Day of 1948 fed into the general colonial practice of using the commemoration to showcase good hygiene and cleanliness—some of the so-called gains of western civilisation.[65] Indeed, a similar statement by the governor of Nigeria in his 1951 Empire Day message placed parental obligation, children's appearance, and colonial agenda in a paradoxical manner: 'I also hope that your parents have not felt obliged to spend a lot of money on new clothes or school uniforms for you on this occasion', he said. He then went on to state that '[y]our march-past can be smart and impressive if you are all neat and tidy and if you step out with pride and with cheerful faces'.[66] Yet, schoolchildren wore a 'cheerful' face and marched delightfully partly because they were wearing new clothes, which also allowed them to participate in the much coveted sports.

Aside from the march-past, sports was another important reason children loved Empire Day. Indeed, many children enrolled in school because of the opportunity it provided to perform before the white colonial masters and popular traditional chiefs on Empire Day. Not every schoolchild was eligible to participate in the Empire Day sports—each school did some prescreening activities to identify potential Empire Day athletes. But both the student athletes and spectators held the sporting events in high esteem. Participation in the Empire Day sports was based, not on a pupil's age or class level, but on height. The following was the classification of the Empire Day sports and the height requirement: (1) infants—4 feet and under; (2) juniors—4 feet, 9 inches and under; (3) intermediates—5 feet, 3 inches and under; (4) seniors—5 feet and 3 inches and above. The core Empire Day sports included running, long jump, high jump, hurdle race, pole jump and relay race. Other activities

were military and physical drill.[67] The Empire Day sports directly complemented the activities of such organisations as the Boy Scouts, which emphasised proto-manliness, sportsmanship and physical culture activities. Not only did the performance of the Boy Scouts at the Empire Day attract many boys to the club, scout leaders looked forward to the day in order to recruit members who excelled in sports.

The Empire Day sports formed another site through which a salient notion of normative boyhood and girlhood manifested itself. In fact, it overtly extolled the male-centredness of the colonial state. Colonial practices, which viewed girls as weaker than boys, were reflected in the rigour of the sports each gender was allowed to participate in. Only boys competed in long races such as the 440 and 880 yards. The 100-yard race was the longest girls were permitted to run. Only girls participated in less herculean track events like the lime (or egg) and spoon race. Other sporting events, socially constructed as 'tough' (such as pole vault, high jump and long jump, hurdles and tug-of-war) were restricted to boys. Most school districts did not even score girls' events—hence they were not entitled to prizes and other rewards for excellence in sports. Indeed, the vexed debate in the newspapers over whether girls should engage in athletics and soccer, among other sports that were socially framed as 'manly' and 'tough,' was emblematic of the general discussion about the place of women in the rapidly modernising colonial society.[68] 'Unfortunately our CMS [Church Missionary Society] and other authorities cannot appreciate that our girls will not discover their better selves if their physique is neglected in sacrifice of Christian virtues and educational attainment', a *West African Pilot* editorial of 28 December 1944 criticised the practice of excluding girls from sports by mission schools.[69]

This prejudice towards girl's involvement in 'tough' sports at Empire Day did not change, even with the establishment of the Girl Guides in Nigeria in 1919. Although 'physical fitness' was one of the core principles of the Girl Guides, much of its activity centred on raising girls to be good Christian wives, mothers, community workers and 'women of substance'.[70] The Girl Guides' activities at Empire Day were restricted mainly to the march-past. The poor disposition of the colonial government and missionaries towards girl's education—the first government secondary school for girls in Nigeria's colonial capital of Lagos (Queen's College) was established in 1927—limited the opportunity of the Girl Guides to recruit members from formal educational institutions. The paucity of trainers also hindered the Girl Guides' activities.[71] In 1919, Oyinkan Abayomi was the only guider/trainer in Nigeria. This figure increased to 40 in 1930, but could not match the growth of Girl Guide companies, which stood at 20, nation-wide. Not only were the Girl Guides discriminatory towards Muslim girls because they recruited mainly from Christian missionaries' schools, the high cost of uniform and organised activities such as camping prevented girls from poor families from joining.[72] Yet such events as Thinking Day[73] shaped

girlhood culture in that it emphasised community service and selflessness.[74] The few girls from upper-class families who represented Nigeria at international Girl Guides events, such as the Windsor Centenary Camp in Berkshire, benefited from some of the ideal of global girlhood, like European education.[75]

Activities framed as 'feminine', such as cooking and cleaning, were reserved for the girls on Empire Day because they fitted the dominant colonial and missionary practice of raising modern girls to be good Christian housewives and mothers.[76] Beyond the politics of gender and the rearing of colonial children, one thing is certain—the opportunity to cook for Empire Day shaped girlhood experience. And what is important for a historian is not just an academic interpretation of the practice of the past, but the perspective of the people who experienced it. When the district officer of Epe decided to allow private food vendors to feed schoolchildren for the 1949 Empire Day (instead of the school administration) because of allegations of unequal distribution of meals, five school headmasters argued that the schoolgirls 'enjoy cooking food, so much that if they are not allowed to cook the food this year, half of the pleasure [of Empire Day] is gone, for they buy everything themselves, supervised by the teachers'.[77]

Aside from sports, schoolchildren also found the Empire Shield competition fascinating. Creative students were invited to design a shield that would be adopted as the 'Empire Day Shield' by the regional school district or division. The shield was the most coveted prize (trophy) of the Empire Day sports—children respected the schools that won it.[78] Thus, schoolchildren took both the design competition and winning the shield very seriously. The shields were expected to bear core signs and symbols of the British Empire such as the British crown, the Union Jack and sporting activities (see Figure 2). The criteria for judging the best shield were not cast in stone. But a careful reading of the justification for awarding the Empire Day Shield prize reveals that entries with colourful details and an elaborate rendition of the above-mentioned symbols of the British Empire won in most cases.[79] One should not minimise the importance of Empire Day Shield competition in raising creative children. Some colonial children like Lawal Omobolaji and Tirimisiyu Adisa who won Empire Day shields in Osogbo Division in 1948 and 1949 respectively were able to develop their skill beyond the elementary school experience—they later in life became respected arts teachers at Ibadan Grammar School during the 1960s and 1970s.[80] Yet competition for the shield also caused much of the post-Empire Day public disorder, in which pupils fought to repossess shields from their winning rivals.[81] A *West African Pilot* editorial of 2 June 1950 criticised primary schoolteachers for their inability to control their pupils during post-Empire Day hooliganism characterised by 'rowdyism' and 'abusive songs rendered in an uproarious manner', 'triumphal mob-march', 'indecent gesticulation' and 'stone-throwing'.[82]


**Figure 2.** Sample of Empire Day Shield designed by Atammua Kaladi of RCM School, Agbor, Nigeria, 1950. National Archives Ibadan, Agbor District 1016.

Colonial children did take advantage of the idea of global childhood propagated by Empire Day through pen- pal writing and a gift exchange relationship. For one thing, the pen-pal writing culture allowed them to retell common stories of jingoism of Empire Day shaped by the uniqueness of the environment in which they were raised. In his letter of 27 May 1941, Thomas Sutton of Britain asked his Nigerian friend, Adeloye Ibukun, to tell him how Nigerian children celebrated their own Empire Day.[83] Abuse of the pen-pal culture was common, especially in the big cities. In May 1950, the *West African Pilot* reported that a magistrates' court in Lagos was trying 50 pen-pal fraud cases.[84] During the Second World War, the call for Nigerian children to contribute towards the war and the gory stories of the experience of children in war-damaged Europe expressed in Empire Day messages led to a unique type of children's letter-writing. Nigerian children were encouraged to write letters to fellow children in the war-torn parts of the Empire regretting the impact of the global hostility on their education, playtime and well-being in general. At least two of these Second World War children's letters authored by R. Okonjo and Violetta

Kemmer, with headlines, 'The Children of Lagos Send Letter to British Children' and 'Girls in Nigeria Pray for Girls in the United Kingdom' were broadcast on the Lagos Radio Re-Diffusion Service and published in the *West African Pilot* in April 1941.[85] A portion of Kemmer's letter touched on the contributions of children to the prosecution of the war and expressed salient elements of global childhood of the Second World War era:

> Dear friends in Great Britain:
>
> Writing this letter to you even at this moment, we imagine your condition in England, especially the state of those of you in the capital. To say the least, we are very sorry for the trouble Hitler has brought on your country, and on ours, and we commiserate whole-heartedly with you, especially those of you who have already lost their relatives, and whose homes have been destroyed. We have a very high respect for your courage at this trying time … Here in Nigeria, we have our meals quietly as usual, without any fear of air raids, we enjoy ourselves much as we can, without the thought of being bombed the next minute, but this is not the case with you, our sisters over there … Although we cannot do very much financially to assist to win the war for the British Empire, yet you will be glad to hear that we are subscribing the few pennies given us for pocket money in our different schools, and meetings. We are knitting socks and sweaters for the soldiers. Most of us would like to be trained nurses or as ambulance drivers so that if very many our men are called up, we can continue their work … God be with you, sisters. From the girls in Nigeria.[86]

## From Empire Day to National Youth Day: Nigerian Nationalists and the Decolonisation of a Symbol of Imperial Domination

Jim English and Bernard Porter, among other scholars of British imperialism, have examined how liberals, trade unionists and Irish nationalists objected to state-sanctioned flag waving and glorification of empire for schoolchildren. They pointed out that many working-class children enjoyed the Empire Day holiday without absorbing anything tangible about the supposed glories of imperialism.[87] Regardless of the audibility of anti-imperialism voices, what is obvious is that Empire Day had its own serious critics, even in the metropole.

In Nigeria, although some anti-Empire Day sentiments were expressed in the newspapers in the 1920s and the 1930s, a combination of international and domestic developments during and after the Second World War increased the agitation against the event. Nigerian nationalists began to query the significance of observing a yearly ritual that was fast becoming unpopular in Britain, where it came from. The 'fading away' of Empire Day 'in the very heart of the British Empire' the *Daily Service*, a notable nationalist newspaper, asserted in May 1954 meant that it should no longer be celebrated in the colonies which adopted it.[88] But fighting to end Empire Day went beyond emphasising its dwindling fame in the metropole—it also fed into the call for political self-determination, which increased across the British Empire after the Second World

War. Editorials in the nationalist newspapers asked children to reflect over the meaning of independence as they celebrated imperial pomp.[89] Moreover, criticism of imperial atrocities, such as the 1949 Enugu colliery shooting which claimed the lives of 21 miners, among other violence against Nigerians, was inserted into the bigger struggle for decolonisation, which involved bringing down some of the potent and visible symbols of colonialism, like Empire Day.

The loudest critics of Empire Day were nationalists who had proudly associated with the event during their childhood. Others were teachers and government workers who felt that it glorified the racial superiority of the colonialists. As colonial children acquired western education, they were able to deconstruct imperial patriotism and give a self-reflective meaning to their subservient status as colonial subjects. Thus, as the colonial government was promoting global imperial childhood in the 1920s and 1930s (as we have seen in the preceding sections of this article), unknowingly, it was also raising a future generation of Nigerians who would challenge the justification for an event that glorified colonial domination.

Thus, what began as a show of honour and glorification of the British Empire was being interpreted as a strong tool of colonial violence, subjugation and blatant injustice. 'But if the celebration has done anything at all', a *Daily Service* editorial of 18 May 1951 established, 'it has only served to remind the people in the colonies of the presence of an imperialist government in their midst. It impresses on the colonial people the fact that they are not free.'[90] The editorial did not doubt the loyalty of Nigerians to the British monarchy, but felt that imperial patriotism could not be guaranteed with the refusal of the government to fulfil its promise to grant independence to Nigeria after the Second World War. 'Loyalty', the editorial continued, 'cannot be sustained by forcing the singing of the English National Anthem on colonial peoples and schoolchildren.'[91] Another *Daily Service* editorial described Empire Day as a 'national degradation of the worst type' and a painful re-enactment of the day Nigeria was subjugated.[92]

The Macpherson Constitution of 1951, which initiated internal autonomy in the three Nigerian administrative regions (Western, Eastern and Northern) with significant legislative and executive power, gave the nationalists the opportunity to debate whether they wanted to continue to observe Empire Day or not. The process of decolonising Empire Day officially began on 31 July 1952 when Honorable Ekwoyasi of the Action Group moved a motion for the discontinuation of the ceremony at the Western Region House of Assembly. His motion was seconded by Awolowo, the leader of the Action Group, the ruling party in the Western Region. The motion then went to a vote, and was passed unanimously.[93] Unlike many political issues, which generated controversies between the majority Action Group and the minority National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) parties in the Western Region House of Assembly, the decision to end Empire Day received bi-partisan approval.[94] The print media received this news with enthusiasm. The *Daily Service* rejoiced, claiming

exaggeratedly that the decision of the legislators reflected the 'valid expression of the people's revolt against oppression and foreign domination'.[95] The Action Group went on to intensify its plan to end Empire Day at its party's convention in Benin City in December 1952. The convention voted to replace Empire Day with the 'National Youth Day', to be celebrated on 28 April, the date of the first meeting of the Action Group in Owo in 1951.

Although the struggle to end Empire Day began in the Western Region, it was able to succeed only by persuading the NCNC and Northern People's Congress (NPC), which held power in the Eastern and Northern Regions, respectively to join. 'Whatever your party or your status', the secretary of the Lagos branch of Action Group's Youth Association, Akinbola Akintola, appealed to rival regional parties, 'if you want Nigeria to be free, join the Action Group Youth Association to observe the National Youth Day for its national significance'.[96] In 1954, the legislators in the Northern and Eastern Regions followed their Western counterparts by debating to end Empire Day. With these steps, the process of reinventing Empire Day for nationalist agenda was unleashed.

The first National Youth Day took place on 28 April 1953. Children were asked to wear a white uniform and Hausa cap in order to brand the ceremony as a 'pan-Nigerian' project. The National Youth Day, unlike Empire Day which took place in a public arena and school playground, involved a public procession. An estimated 40,000 people, according to the *Daily Service*, participated in the Ibadan and Lagos processions.[97] The Lagos procession started at the secretariat of the Action Group at Idumagbo and ended at Campos Square, where Awolowo addressed the gathering and received their salute—just like the colonial administrators and the local chiefs.[98] The crowd then observed a minute's silence for the victims of the Women's War of 1929, the Enugu colliery shooting of 1949 and the ongoing Mau Mau uprising in Kenya. Speeches by other members of the Action Group leaders took place in quick succession, amid the chanting of revolutionary slogans such as, 'Our demand is Simple. Self-Government in 1956 or Never'; 'Our Forefathers Were Born in Freedom, We Shall Die in Freedom'; 'Before We'll be Slaves, We'll be Buried in our Graves and go Home to our God and be Free'; and 'Long Live Awolowo'. In order to reach a wider audience, S. L. Akintola, another leading member of the Action Group translated Awolowo's speech into Yoruba, the most popular language in the Western Region. In addition, the Action Group realised the need to attack the symbols of imperialism. It prevented the display of the British flag and the chanting of 'Rule Britannia', substituting for them a flag and a badge, which bore the logo of its party.[99] It then directed all schoolchildren to recite the following 'Freedom Marching Song' composed by Remi Kayode, an executive member of Action Group's Youth Association:

(1) From the South to North
From East to West

Sons of the Niger Muster forth
With naked swords, and banner high
Proclaim our country's destiny

CHORUS
Nigeria
Nigeria
We hail your call, we rise to thee
In life, in death, we pledge our souls to thee
(2) From Cairo to the Cape we march
From Gambia to Nyasaland
With God, with right, with fire and steel
Create our racial liberty

CHORUS
Nigeria
Nigeria
We hail your call, we rise to thee
In life, in death, we pledge our souls to thee

(3) Blazoned with Crescent Moon and Cross
Our righteous standards proudly fly
Triumphant in God's struggle for Black rule throughout Black Africa

CHORUS
Nigeria
Nigeria
We hail your call, we rise to thee
In life, in death, we pledge our souls to thee.[100]

Yet, the Western House of Assembly could only establish the National Youth Day, it did not have the power to force the colonial government to stop celebrating Empire Day. Thus in 1953 and 1954, two parallel commemorations celebrated one colonial society. While the National Youth Day symbolised freedom from colonialism and a forward-looking agenda for nation-building after the anticipated demise of colonialism, Empire Day evoked the past glory of a rapidly collapsing British Empire. The Action Group not only sponsored news items and editorials to promote its National Youth Day, it also worked to belittle the achievement of its rival commemoration, Empire Day. An editorial in the *Daily Service* wrote sarcastically that 'no one' observed the 1953 edition of Empire Day and that the 'usual fanfare and pageantry was completely absent'. 'We believe that the indifference with which the Empire Day was treated yesterday', the editorial continued, 'was a fitting end to a most humiliating

ceremony.'[101] Yet so successful was the maiden edition of National Youth Day in achieving its political agenda that the NCNC and NPC, established parallel youth days in the Eastern and Northern Regions respectively in 1954.[102] However, this maiden edition of Nation Youth Day was not as successful as Empire Day partly because it did not feature sports and the march-past, which shaped childhood experience. None of the regional governments had the legitimacy and network to organise a commemoration as beautiful as Empire Day. The 1953 National Youth Day was essentially a political rally organised by adults, but executed by schoolchildren.

The granting of full internal self-rule to the three regional governments on 1 October 1954 would radically change the politics of Empire Day. Leading Nigerian nationalists, Awolowo, Bello and Azikiwe, became the premiers (the political and executive heads) of the regional governments of the Western, Northern and Eastern Regions of Nigeria, respectively. The firm establishment of regionalism in this crucial era of decolonisation reduced the role of the British government to a 'guide, philosopher, and friend', in Awolowo's words.[103] The new political arrangement gave the regions the power to override any colonial policy and practice, including Empire Day. The National Youth Day, which was celebrated in 1953 and 1954, was then substituted for by the Western Region Youth Day with the passage of another bill sponsored by Anthony Enahoro, the minister of home affairs, in March 1955.[104] In the Eastern and Northern Regions, Empire Day was replaced with 'Children's Day'. But in order to increase the participation of schoolchildren and absorb some of the 'progressive' traditions of Empire Day such as sports, the law establishing Western Region Youth Day declared 28 May (instead 24 May) as a public holiday for the commemoration. With this, the process of decolonising Empire Day for a nationalist agenda was complete. Unlike National Youth Day, which was predominantly a youth rally, the Western Region Youth Day and the Children's Day absorbed both the repertoire of nationalism and the fast-eroding colonial splendour of Empire Day. The police band played as schoolchildren and the military marched to salute the premiers, not the British resident officers and the governor as it used to be. The sporting events retained much of the tradition of Empire Day. The premier of each region, not the governor of Nigeria, prepared the commemorative speech, which was read by political heads of divisions and districts. The speech was also broadcast on the radio. For one thing, the difference between Empire Day and the Western Region Youth Day and Children's Day was symbolic. This symbolism was reflected in the speech about political freedom given by the nationalists and premiers, the display of the logos and emblems of regional parties and chanting of liberation songs.

On the surface, the struggle to end Empire Day appeared an altruistic nationalist project aimed at accelerating political independence. One cannot deny the

importance of removing one of the symbols of imperialism in the drive towards independence. However, a careful reading of sources presents other compelling motives for the campaign against Empire Day. Empire Day was totally biased against the nationalists who dominated the new political parties. It did not give them any public visibility or the opportunity to express their political agenda. By the early 1950s, nationalists in the Western Region discovered that they could appropriate the splendour of Empire Day to promote their parties and enhance their political status. They sought a yearly veneration of nationalism and their party by mobilising crowds, especially children, for a self-defined spectacle and a display of their newly acquired political power. Essentially, they wanted to imitate the colonial government, which had used Empire Day to successfully galvanise support for imperialism. So the establishment of the Western Region Youth Day and the Children's Day was part of the politics of crowd gathering for political parties, which fought one another for legitimacy. By the late 1950s, the youth or children's days in each region of the country were the largest political rallies held by the ruling parties to keep minority groups and parties at bay. The presence of large number of children gave political parties and politician-cum-nationalists (like the colonial government) feelings of acceptance by the people. In an editorial titled 'Appeal to Children' published on the eve of the 1953 National Youth Day, the *Daily Service*, wrote that 'it is the duty of all schoolchildren from kindergarten right up to secondary schools … to join in the celebration of the National Youth Day'.[105] However, information about free education and medical service for all primary schoolchildren contained in Awolowo's 1955 Western Region Youth Day message would have appealed to the sentiments of children.[106] To be sure, the colonial government, unlike the Western Region, did not have a free education programme.

## Conclusion

One of the core observations of this article is that Empire Day was a significant symbol of colonial domination and performance of imperial power, which historians of Africa have overlooked. It was created and sustained to promote the legitimacy of colonial rule. But, beyond this, Empire Day shaped the experience of children in a myriad of ways. Sporting activities, letter-writing, travelling and new uniforms, among other opportunities the day offered, added significant elements to the culture nurturing children under colonial rule. Indeed, Empire Day, more than any other commemoration, placed childhood at the centred of imperialism in Africa. During the 1950s Nigerian nationalists appropriated Empire Day to promote their political agenda by changing its hegemonic symbolism to a decolonisation project. Thus what began as a means of glorifying and legitimising imperialism went through significant changes and was turned into an important site of childhood culture and power relations by Nigerians across class.

## Notes

1. Achebe, *Education of a British-Protected Child*, 14.
2. Afonja, *In His Hands*, 13; Ejiogu, *A Nigerian Life*, 21; Bajowa, *Spring of a Life*, 54–55; Adeloye, *My Salad Days*, 50–54; Biobaku, *When We Were Young*, 31–32.
3. For more on imperial spectacle in Nigeria, see Apter, 'On Imperial Spectacle', 564–96.
4. From the *West African Pilot*: 'Viscount Bledisloe Sends Empire Day Message to Peoples of the Empire', 24 May 1941; 'Acting Governor Addresses Empire Day Messages to Youths', 25 May 1943; 'Governor's Deputy Urges Lagos School Boys and Girls to Discipline Themselves', 25 May 1944; 'Oba Akenzua II of Benin Stresses Inadequacy of Mere Words during Speech on Empire', 5 June 1945; 'Sir Gerard Will Address School Children in Empire Day Sports at Rowe Park Tomorrow', 23 May 1945; 'His Excellency Asks School Children to Help in Building New and Better Nigeria', 25 May 1946; 'A.D.O Reminds Oshogbo School Children of Responsibilities', 6 June 1946.
5. 'His Excellency Asks School Children to Help in Building New and Better Nigeria', *West African Pilot*, 25 May 1946
6. From the *Nigerian Pioneer*: 'Empire Day, 1915: Address by His Excellency, the Governor General to the School Children', 28 May 1915; 'Empire Day, 1916: Address by His Excellency, the Governor General to the School Children', 26 May1916; 'Empire Day: Speech by Colonel Moorhouse on May 24th 1917', 1 June 1917; 'The Governor-General's Speech on Empire Day, 1918', 31 May 1918.
7. Grier, *Invisible Hands*; White, *Children of the French Empire*; Fourchard, 'Lagos and the Invention'; Heap, 'Their Days Are Spent in Gambling'; Aderinto, 'Framing the Colonial Child'; Aderinto, 'O! Sir I Do Not Know'; George, *Making Modern Girls*; Duff, *Changing Childhoods*.
8. Aderinto, 'Introduction', 1–18.
9. Aderinto, 'Researching Colonial Childhoods', 241–66; Aderinto, *Children and Childhood*; Aderinto, *When Sex Threatened the State*, 73–92; Paddock, 'World of Good to Our Boys', 123–46; George, *Making Modern Girls*.
10. Aderinto, 'Introduction', 1–18; Aderinto, *Children and Childhood*.
11. Aderinto, 'Framing the Colonial Child', 188–89; Onifade, 'Historical Development of Amateur Sports,' 40–41.
12. English, 'Empire Day in Britain'; Bloomfield, 'Drill and Dance as Symbols'; Springhall, 'Lord Meath, Youth and Empire'; Hendley, *Organized Patriotism*; Brockner, 'The Meaning of Empire Day'; Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*; Mackenzie, *Propaganda and Empire*; Thompson, *The Empire Strikes Back?*; Thompson, 'The Language of Imperialism'; Mangan, 'The "Grit" of Our Forefathers'.
13. Callaway, *Gender, Culture, and Empire*; Coleman, *Nigeria*; Iweriebor, 'Radicalism'; Tijani, *Britain, Leftist Nationalists*.
14. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 326–27.
15. For more on imperial citizenship, see Gorman, *Imperial Citizenship*.
16. Quoted in English, 'Empire Day in Britain', 248.
17. For extensive analysis on imagined communities, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
18. 'Empire Day Message from the President, the Earl of Gowrie', 1946, Cal Prof 7/1/2520, National Archives Enugu (hereafter NAE).
19. 'The Development of the Empire Day Movement', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 3 July 1925.
20. 'Empire Day Message from the Earl of Gowrie', 1948, Ondist 12/1/404, NAE.
21. 'Victoria Day', *Lagos Weekly Record*, 27 May 1905.
22. 'Epitome of News', *Lagos Weekly Record*, 27 May 1905.

23. 'News, Notes, and Comments', *Lagos Standard*, 29 May 1907.
24. Ibid.
25. 'The Empire Day', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 29 May 1914.
26. 'Empire Day in Forcados', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 29 May 1914; 'Empire Day', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 26 May 1922; 'Empire Day Celebration, Abeokuta, 1924', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 30 May 1924; 'Empire Day Celebration', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 29 May 1925; 'Empire Day Celebration', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 28 May 1926.
27. 'Ahmadiyya School Wins Empire Day Shield Before 20,000 People', *West African Pilot*, 26 May 1949.
28. Coleman, *Nigeria*, 141.
29. 'Lagos Elementary Schools Will Hold Empire Day Sports in St. Gregory and Rowe Park', *West African Pilot*, 23 May 1943; 'Thousands Flocked to Ikoyi and Yaba to Watch Empire Day Sport', *West African Pilot*, 26 May 1943.
30. 'The Deputy Governor's Address', *Nigerian Pioneer*, 29 May 1914.
31. 'School Pupils Gathered Palm Nuts for Empire Day Efforts', *West African Pilot*, 15 June 1943.
32. For how West African culture was represented at the British Empire Exhibition in London in 1924, see Stephen, 'The White Man's Grave'.
33. 'Empire Day', http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/Empire-Day/, accessed 5 Aug. 2016.
34. 'A.D.O Reminds Oshogbo School Children of Responsibilities', *West African Pilot*, 6 June 1946.
35. 'Lord Swinton Pleads for More Productions in Empire Day Talk', *West African Pilot*, 24 May 1943.
36. 'Viscount Bledisloe Sends Empire Say Message to British Subject', *West African Pilot*, 23 May 1942.
37. 'Hon. Woolley Address Lagos Children on Empire Day', *West African Pilot*, 26 May 1941.
38. 'Senior District Officer of Owo to the Secretary of Empire Day Committee', 27 May 1953, Owo Div 221, National Archives Ibadan (hereafter NAI).
39. Atanda, *The New Oyo Empire*; Ikime, *In Search of Nigerians*.
40. 'Seating of Chiefs on Empire Day: Correspondence of', 1940–45, Min Prof 664, National Archives Kaduna (hereafter NAK).
41. 'Empire Day Invitation to Chiefs', 30 June 1937, Yola Prof 630, NAK.
42. 'Seating of Chiefs at the Empire Day', 3 Jan. 1941, Ondo Prof 3263, NAI.
43. 'J.F. Adekoya to the District Officer of Osogbo Division', 25 May 1945, Oshogbo Div 168, NAI.
44. Ibid.
45. 'R.P. Errington to J. F. Adekoya', 14 July 1945, Oshogbo Div 168, NAI.
46. 'J. F. Adekoya to the District Officer of Osogbo', 28 July 1945, Oshogbo Div 168, NAI.
47. 'R. P. Errington to J. F. Adekoya', 8 Aug. 1945, Oshogbo Div 168, NAI.
48. Bello, *My Life*, 20–34; Aderinto, 'Framing the Colonial Child', 169–99.
49. Achebe, *Education of a British-Protected Child*, 18.
50. Emecheta, *Head above Water*, 12.
51. Awolowo, *Awo*, 12.
52. 'J. O Ajogbo to the District Officer of Owo Division', 11 May 1948, Owo Div. 221, NAI.
53. Afonja, *In His Hands*, 12.
54. Interview with Mr Adeleke Ibukunolu, 20 May 2016.
55. 'Ola Oyekan to the District Officer of Osogbo', 27 April 1948, Oshogbo Div. 168, NAI.

56. 'Acting District Officer of Ijebu Division to the Awujale of Ijebuland', 2 April 1948, Ije Prof 322 Vol. VI, NAI.
57. Interview with Mr Arowolo Mustapha, 23 May 2016.
58. Awolowo, *Awo*, 47.
59. 'A Very Expensive Empire Day', *Daily Service*, 5 June 1951.
60. Interview with Mr Adeleke Ibukunolu, 20 May 2016.
61. Interview with Mr Orisaremi Jibowu, 22 May 2016.
62. 'Awujale's Empire Day Speech', *Ijebu Review Supplement*, May 1948, 2.
63. 'A Very Expensive Empire Day', *Daily Service*, 5 June 1951.
64. Ibid., 7.
65. 'Awujale's Empire Day Speech', *Ijebu Review Supplement*, May 1948, 2.
66. Ibid.
67. 'Principal of Islamic School to the District Officer of Epe', 15 May 1940, Epe Div 197/1, NAI.
68. 'Girls Should Participate in Sports', *West African Pilot*, 25 Nov. 1943; 'Our Women and Sports', *West African Pilot*, 1 Dec. 1943; 'Educating Girls in Football', *West African Pilot*, 16 Jan. 1948.
69. 'Sports in Our Girls' Schools', *West African Pilot*, 28 Dec. 1944.
70. Onadipe, 'History of the Girl Guide Movement', 54.
71. Ibid., 14–17.
72. Ibid., 50–56.
73. The Thinking Day featured quizzes and debates among girls across educational level.
74. 'Regional Commissioner of the Guides Guide to the Commissioner of the Colony', 29 Jan. 1953, Comcol 1, 3291, NAI.
75. 'Twelve Nigerian Girls for Windsor Centenary Camp', *West African Pilot*, 1 July 1959.
76. Denzer, 'Domestic Science Training', 116–39.
77. 'Headmasters to the District Officer of Epe Division', 21 May 1949, Epe Div 197 Vol. II, NAI.
78. See 'St. Paul's and Yaba Schools Win Empire Day Shields', *West African Pilot*, 27 May 1941.
79. 'Empire Day Shields: Matters Arising', 30 May 1940, Epe Div E.197, NAI.
80. Interview with MrAdeola Olufisayo, 23 May 2016.
81. 'Pupils of St. Jude's Wrest Two Shields from Comrades during Sports Held at Rowe Park', *West African Pilot*, 29 May 1945.
82. 'Empire Day Hooliganism', *West African Pilot*, 2 June 1950.
83. 'Thomas Sutton to Adeloye Ibukun', 27 May 1941, Oyo Prof 301, NAI.
84. '50 Pen Pals Cases Await Court Trial', *West African Pilot*, 21 May 1950; 'Nigerian Boy Writes American Pen Pal and Gets Nine Strokes', *West African Pilot*, 15 May 1952.
85. 'The Children of Lagos Send Letter to British Children', *West African Pilot*, 25 April 1941; 'Girls in Nigeria Pray for Girls in the United Kingdom', *West African Pilot*, 26 April 1941.
86. 'Girls in Nigeria Pray for Girls in the United Kingdom', *West African Pilot*, 26 April 1941.
87. Porter, *The Absent-Minded Imperialists*; English, 'Empire Day in Britain'.
88. 'Scrap the Empire Day', *Daily Service*, 24 May 1952.
89. 'Empire Day: Its Significance', *West African Pilot*, 23 May 1942; 'Empire Day', *West African Pilot*, 24 May 1943; 'Today is Empire Day', *West African Pilot*, 24 May 1944.
90. 'Whose Empire Day?' *Daily Service*, 18 May 1951.
91. Ibid.
92. 'The National Youth Day', *Daily Service*, 25 April 1953.

93. 'Empire Day Celebrations Will be Scrapped in West', *Daily Service*, 1 Aug. 1952; 'A. G. Substitutes Youth Day for Empire Day', *Daily Service*, 22 Dec. 1952.
94. 'New Look of Empire Day', *West African Pilot*, 4 Aug. 1952.
95. 'The End of Empire Day', *Daily Service*, 1 Aug. 1952.
96. 'Nationalist to Hold National Youth National Youths Day: Awolowo and Bode Will Receive Salute', *Daily Service*, 25 April 1953.
97. 'Thousands Observe 1st National Youth Day', *Daily Service*, 30 April 1953.
98. 'National Youths Day Procession Will End at Campos Square', *Daily Service*, 27 April 1953.
99. 'Nigeria Arrives', *Daily Service*, 30 April 1953.
100. 'Youth Will Sing Freedom Songs on National Day', *Daily Service*, 25 April 1953.
101. 'Going, Going, Gone!' *Daily Service*, 26 May 1953.
102. 'Empire Day in Eastern Region', 21 June 1954, OG Prof, 2/1/2064, NAE.
103. 'Youth Day Message by the Premier of the Western Region by Obafemi Awolowo', May 1955, Agbor Div 1016, NAI.
104. 'Empire Day to be Abolished', *Daily Service*, 8 March 1955.
105. 'Appeal to School Children', *Daily Service,* 27 April 1953.
106. 'School Children Celebrate West Youth Day', *Daily Service*, 30 May 1955.

## Acknowledgment

I would like to thank Sarah Duff, Simon Heap and David Hurlbut and the anonymous reviewers of the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* for their useful comments and suggestions on earlier versions of this paper.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## References

Achebe, Chinua. *The Education of a British-Protected Child: Essays*. New York: Knopf, 2009.
Adeloye, Adelola. *My Salad Days: The Primary School Years*. Ibadan: Book Builders, 2009.
Aderinto, Saheed, ed. *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Aderinto, Saheed. "Framing the Colonial Child: Childhood Memory and Self-Representation in Autobiographical Writings." In *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, edited by Saheed Aderinto, 169–199. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Aderinto, Saheed. "Introduction: Colonialism and the Invention of Modern Nigerian Childhood." In *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, edited by Saheed Aderinto, 1–18. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Aderinto, Saheed. "'O! Sir I Do Not Know Either to Kill Myself or to Stay': Childhood Emotion, Poverty, and Literary Culture in Nigeria, 1900–1960." *Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 8, no. 2 (2015): 273–294.
Aderinto, Saheed. "Researching Colonial Childhoods: Images and Representations of Children in Nigerian Newspaper Press, 1925–1950." *History in Africa* 39 (2012): 241–266.
Aderinto, Saheed. *When Sex Threatened the State: Illicit Sexuality, Nationalism, and Politics in Colonial Nigeria, 1900–1958*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015.

Afonja, Biyi. *In His Hands: The Autobiography of a Nigerian Village Boy*. Ibadan: Statco, 2005.
Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. New York: Verso, 1983.
Apter, Andrew. "On Imperial Spectacle: The Dialectics of Seeing in Colonial Nigeria." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 44, no. 3 (2002): 564–596.
Atanda, J.A. *The New Oyo Empire: Indirect Rule and Change in Western Nigeria, 1894–1934*. London: Longman, 1973.
Awolowo, Obafemi. *Awo: The Autobiography of Chief Obafemi Awolowo*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960.
Bajowa, Olu. *Spring of a Life: An Autobiography*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 1992.
Bello, Ahmadu. *My Life*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1962.
Biobaku, Saburi O. *When We Were Young*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1992.
Bloomfield, Anne. "Drill and Dance as Symbols of Imperialism." In *Making Imperial Mentalities: Socialization and the British Imperialism*, edited by J.A. Mangan, 74–95. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990.
Brockner, Dustin. "The Meaning of Empire Day: Imperial Citizenship and Youth in Edwardian England." *Unpublished BA thesis*, Wesleyan University, 2009.
Callaway, Helen. *Gender, Culture, and Empire: European Women in Colonial Nigeria*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.
Coleman, James S. *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1958.
Denzer, LaRay. "Domestic Science Training in Colonial Yorubaland, Nigeria." In *African Encounters with Domesticity*, edited by Karen Tranberg Hansen, 116–139. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
Duff, Sarah E. *Changing Childhoods in the Cape Colony: Dutch Reformed Church Evangelicalism and Colonial Childhood, 1860–1895*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.
Ejiogu, Onyemanze. *A Nigerian Life: An Autobiography*. Ibadan: Book Kraft, 1997.
Emecheta, Buchi. *Head above Water: An Autobiography*. London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1986.
English, Jim. "Empire Day in Britain, 1904–1958." *The Historical Journal* 49, no. 1 (2006): 247–276.
Fourchard, Laurent. "Lagos and the Invention of Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria, 1920–1960." *Journal of African History* 47, no. 1 (2006): 115–137.
George, Abosede. *Making Modern Girls: A History of Girlhood, Labor, and Social Development in Colonial Lagos*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014.
Gorman, Daniel. *Imperial Citizenship: Empire and the Question of Belonging*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007.
Grier, Beverly Carolease. *Invisible Hands: Child Labor and the State in Colonial Zimbabwe*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006.
Heap, Simon. "Their Days Are Spent in Gambling and Loafing, Pimping for Prostitutes, and Picking Pockets': Male Juvenile Delinquents on Lagos Island, 1920s–1960s." *Journal of Family History* 35, no. 1 (2010): 48–70.
Hendley, Matthew. *Organized Patriotism and the Crucible of War: Popular Imperialism in Britain, 1914–1932*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012.
Ikime, Obaro. *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Inter-Group Relations in an Evolving Nation State*. Lagos: Impact, 1985.
Iweriebor, Ehiedu. "Radicalism and the National Liberation Struggle, 1930–1950." In *The Foundations of Nigeria: Essays in Honor of Toyin Falola*, edited by Adebayo Oyebade, 107–125. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2003.

Mackenzie John M. *Propaganda and Empire: The Manipulation of British Public Opinion, 1880–1960*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984.

Mangan, J.A. "'The "Grit" of Our Forefathers': Invented Traditions, Propaganda, and Imperialism." In *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, edited by John M. Mackenzie, 113–139. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.

Onadipe, Adedunmola Mopelola. "A History of the Girl Guide Movement in Nigeria in the Colonial Period, 1930–1960." BA long essay, University of Ibadan, 1991.

Onifade, Ademola. "Historical Development of Amateur Sports and Their Administrative Agencies in Nigeria: 19th -20th Century." *Sport History Review* 16, no. 2 (1985): 33–43.

Paddock, Adam. "'The World of Good to Our Boys': Boy Scouts in Southern Nigeria, 1934–1951." In *Children and Childhood in Colonial Nigerian Histories*, edited by Saheed Aderinto, 123–146. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015.

Porter, Bernard. *The Absent-Minded Imperialists: Empire, Society, and Culture in Britain*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Springhall, J. O. "Lord Meath, Youth and Empire." *Journal of Contemporary History* 5, no. 4 (1970): 97–111.

Stephen, Daniel. "'The White Man's Grave': British West Africa and the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–1925." *Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 1 (2009): 102–128.

Thompson, Andrew S. *The Empire Strikes Back? The Impact of Imperialism on Britain from the Mid-Nineteenth Century*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005.

Thompson, Andrew S. "The Language of Imperialism and the Meanings of Empire: Imperial Discourse in British Politics, 1895–1914." *The Journal of British Studies* 36, no. 2 (1997): 147–177.

Tijani, Hakeem Ibikunle. *Britain, Leftist Nationalists, and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1945–1965*. New York: Routledge, 2005.

White, Owen. *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa, 1885–1960*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999.