H. C. BANKOLE-BRIGHT AND POLITICS IN COLONIAL SIERRA LEONE, 1919–1958

AFRICAN STUDIES SERIES 64

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Published in collaboration with
THE AFRICAN STUDIES CENTRE, CAMBRIDGE
AFRICAN STUDIES SERIES

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H. C. BANKOLE-BRIGHT AND POLITICS IN COLONIAL SIERRA LEONE, 1919–1958

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This work is dedicated to my parents, and family
(Fredrica, Ayodele, Adeyinka, Akintola and Abiola)
and to the Memory of
Lerina Bright-Taylor
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Preface

This book owes much to the promise I made to Dr Bankole-Bright’s sister, Lerina, in 1974 to tell the truth about her brother. My interest in the study was also sustained by the conviction that something ought to be done about Bankie, to repair the neglect with which history has treated this ‘ardent nationalist’. Further, the picture literature has portrayed of the Krios of Sierra Leone, as a loyal, conservative, elite conscious, privileged, and preferred segment, in the colonial society of Sierra Leone, needs a radical revision. This study challenges views which perceive the Krios as co-regents of the British colonial government and ‘maximum participants’ in the colonial system. Bright, too, is seen in a more positive light than that of an exclusive ultraconservative particularist opposed to the peoples of the then Protectorate of Sierra Leone. He was neither a man who was wholly obsessed with a determination to maintain the elitist structure in the Colony, nor was he indifferent to the sufferings and interests of ordinary folk. New interpretations are therefore offered on old themes.

In putting across my thesis, I have used the methodology suggested by Professor Hargreaves in the opening pages of Aberdeenshire to Africa (Aberdeen, 1981): ‘The political history of European relations with Africa – of imperialism … must be approached through capital cities.’ The approach is also apt for the study of colonial politics and the activities of the early nationalists through biographies. In this case, the life history and career of Bankole-Bright is a leitmotiv for an investigation into the realities of politics in colonial Sierra Leone, 1919–58.

I was first attracted to the subject of Bright by the near obscurity of the man in the literature in spite of his considerable contributions to such pan West African organisations as the National Congress of British West Africa and W.A.S.U. What little was said about him was presented in negative terms. History did not appear to have given him the credit he merited; and for me this neglect made him an intriguing subject for research.

I briefly looked at some records while I was in London in 1973, but actual research on the subject began in 1976. In that year, I visited the Public Records Office (P.R.O.) in London and studied the CO267 Series (Sierra Leone). These and other major documents indicated in the bibliography form the bulk of official sources. They are supplemented by oral evidence and newspaper reports.
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Bankie was not an easy subject to study because of strong prejudices connected with his name. Also he did not leave any private papers. Consequently, I had to depend on oral evidence to provide the background, the human angle, not obtainable from official records. Here, again, one encountered the problem of getting information from people who worked with him, fought with him, or knew him. Many appointments ended with frustrating results.

However, I was extremely lucky in getting the enthusiastic and empathic support of Bright’s sister, Lerina (deceased), who supplied much of the information on her brother’s family background. His niece, Hannah Neal, was no less supportive. Her critical support and help in procuring old pictures of her uncle, and her mother’s encouragement are gratefully acknowledged. I was also able to get a fairly representative group of informants who were contemporaries and opponents of Bright. They are identified in the list in the bibliography. Their co-operation was most appreciated.

Without the financial support of some academic bodies the study would not have been started. To this end, my sincere gratitude goes to the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission, Association of Commonwealth Universities, and to Dr Arthur Porter, then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone, who nominated me for the award of a Commonwealth Academic Staff Fellowship, 1976/7. This enabled me to do archival work in Britain for nine months. While there I was attached to S.O.A.S. London University, where I had the benefit of the research experience of some of its staff in the History Department: Dr Humphrey Fisher, the late D. H. Jones, and Professor Richard Gray. I acknowledge their individual help and the courtesy extended to me by the Head, Professor Roland Oliver, in allowing me to make use of the facilities of the school and take part in his famous seminar series at the Commonwealth Institute, London.

In Nigeria, the University of Calabar Senate Research Grants Committee generously awarded me a grant to visit archives at Enugu and Ibadan, in which latter place I consulted the Herbert Macaulay Papers. My sincere thanks go to them as well as all archival and library personnel in Britain, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, who helped in numerous ways to supply me with the required information.

I am greatly indebted to many people for their help and support in various ways: Ms Wurdle, who helped me find material on Bright’s medical student days; Professor G. Shepperson and Christopher Fyfe of the University of Edinburgh; Professor J. D. Hargreaves of Aberdeen University; Professor John D. Y. Peel of Liverpool University; Dr Paul Richards of London University; Professors Eldred Jones, A. D. Williams, C. P. Foray and other colleagues at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone.

Professors Okon F. Uya and G. N. Uzoigwe of the Department of History, University of Calabar, were both helpful and supportive. David Johnson of the same department and Emmanuel Quansah of the Law
Preface

Department were kind enough to read my scripts and to offer useful criticisms. To all of them, and others whose names I cannot list here, I give my sincere thanks.

My warmest appreciation and thanks go to my dear wife, Fredrica, and my children for putting up with my changing moods and for constantly reminding me of the benefits of family life.

Finally, I acknowledge with gratitude the efforts of a conscientious band of ladies who typed drafts of the manuscript and Mrs K. Yilla of the Department of English, Fourah Bay College who did the final version.

Akintola J. G. Wyse
Abbreviations

A.P.C. All People’s Congress
A.R.B. Africana Research Bulletin
C.O. Colonial Office
C.P.R. Colonial and Provincial Reporter
D.G. Daily Guardian
D.M. Daily Mail
E.B.I.M. Election Before Independence Movement
F.C.B.P. Fabian Colonial Bureau Papers
J.A.H. Journal of African History
J.H.H.S.N. Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
J.H.S.S.L. Journal of the Historical Society of Sierra Leone
M.S.S. Manuscripts
N.C.B.W.A. National Congress of British West Africa
N.C.S.L. National Council of Sierra Leone
P.E.P.U. Protectorate Educational Progressive Union
P.N.P. Peoples National Party
S.D.U. Settlers’ Descendants Union
S.L.A.S. Sierra Leone Aborigines Society
S.L.G.F.M. Sierra Leone Guardian and Foreign Mails
S.L.I.M. Sierra Leone Independence Movement
S.L.P.P. Sierra Leone People’s Party
S.L.S. Sierra Leone Studies
S.L.W.N. Sierra Leone Weekly News
S.O.S. Sierra Leone Organisation Society
U.P.P. United Progressive Party
W.A.Y.L. West African Youth League
W.J. Wallace-Johnson