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The Disposal of German Properties in the Cameroons Province of Nigeria in the Interwar Years

Muojama, Olisa Godson

Abstract

Certain proclamations and regulations govern the conduct and property of resident alien enemies. During World War I, nearly all countries imposed extensive temporary restrictions on enemy property and economic activity. This was the essence of the Trading with the Enemy Legislation put in place by some belligerent nations, such as Britain in 1914 and USA in 1917. Although the enemy's (German) colonial territories were invaded and occupied by the Allies, the enemy properties therein were not disposed of until after the war. Earlier studies on the treatment of enemy property in wartime have focused more on the metropolitan countries than on the colonial territories, most especially the West African experience. This study is, therefore, designed to examine the disposal of German properties in Cameroon under the British Mandate after World War I, with a view to analyzing the rationale, modus operandi, the controversies as well as the outcome of the disposal. Primary and secondary sources provide data for this historical reconstruction. It argues that the disposal of German properties in the Cameroons after World War I was not only an extension of the wartime treatment against the enemies, but was also against the principle of the inviolability of the enemy private property in the spirit of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.

Keywords: *wartime treatment of enemies, German properties in Cameroon, international law of war, Cameroon province of Nigeria, interwar history of Africa*

Introduction Cameroon (Cameroon) was a German colonial territory beginning from 1884. On 5 July 1884, Dr. S. Nachtigal, the German Imperial General and Commissioner for the West Coast of Africa, drafted a circular in which he informed the English gentlemen residing and trading in Cameroon that a treaty with the King and Chiefs of the River had been concluded and carefully legalized by the German

Council of Gabon, by Mr. Eduard Schmidt acting for Mr. C. Woermann and Mr. Fort Joh Vohs acting for Rufus Jantzen Thormahlen both of Hamburg (NAI CSO 6/3/5). Natchtigal noted that the character of the treaty had caused him to hoist the imperial German flag in that country and to put it under the sovereignty of his Majesty, the Emperor of Germany. This act, as indicated by the circular, affected in no way the English trade, full provisions having been made for the same. It expressed the hope that the same cordial relations which had always existed among the English and German firms in Kamerun would continue in the same friendly way (NAI CSO 6/3/5).

Unlike the British colonial territories in West, German colonial territories, such as Cameroons and Togoland, witnessed direct German involvement in the productive economic activities characterized by the establishment of plantations, legal estates, factories, among other means of direct exploitation and development. This was due to the nature of German colonialism, which has been described as plantation colonialism, different from administrative colonialism which was the British pattern in West Africa. This nature of colonial engagement had future implications for the Germans. It culminated in solid entrenchment in their colonial territories as well as proved a disadvantage to them in the time of the declaration of hostilities. For instance, in August 1914, the First World War broke out, creating hostile relations among the belligerent countries and their citizens, leading to the dispossession of Germany of her colonial territories in Africa and elsewhere by the Allied Powers, coupled with the confiscation and disposal of enemy official and private properties in the territories of the belligerents.

Thus, German properties in British West Africa were disposed of in line with Enemy Property Disposal Ordinance of 1917 (NAI CSO 19/3/819). However, the German properties in the erstwhile German colonial territories were not disposed of until after the war, when the former German colonial territories, liberated by the Allied Forces, had been ceded to the British and French as trust territories. Consequently, in 1919, the British colonial authorities in Nigeria began the process of the disposal of the German properties in Cameroons.

Extant literature on the German-African relations has focused mainly on the German official colonialism in Africa, which covered from the 1880s (when German colonial acquisition began), up to the period of World War I (1914-1918), when the German official colonial rule in Africa ended. This is the focus of the works of Rudin (1938), Cornevin (1960), Gifford and Smith (1967), Louis (1967), Bley and Ridley (1971), Gann and Duignan (1977), and Lindner (2011). Thus, not much has been done about the German presence in Africa after 1918, most especially the status of German properties in Africa during the inter-war years (1919-1939) and Second World War (1939-1945). Similarly, studies on colonial Nigeria have downplayed the place of Cameroon

under the British Mandate in the history of Nigeria. This is evident in the *Groundwork of Nigeria History* (Ikime 1980), a standard history book on colonial Nigeria, in which no chapter is devoted to the Cameroon province of Nigeria, apart from the analysis of one of the colonial political parties known as the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). Again, studies on the history of the Cameroons (Osuntokun 1975, Amazee 1993, Heinzen 1983, McPheeters 1960, Ardener 1962, Amazee 1994, Landis 1960) have paid scant attention to the impact of World War I on the German properties in Cameroons. R. A. Goodridge (1996) who attempted such an analysis focused only on the disposal of the plantations, omitting other German properties. What was the nature and scope of the German properties in the Cameroons before World War? What was the fate of these properties after the war? And what were the controversies and reactions that trailed the disposal of the German properties in the Cameroon Province of Nigeria?

This study deals with the political economy of the disposal of the German properties in the Cameroons after the First World War. By so doing, it examines the nature and dimensions of the German properties in the Cameroons before the outbreak of the First World War. It deals with the philosophy and historicity of the treatment of enemy properties in wartime, with a special emphasis on the disposal of German properties in Cameroon in the inter-war years. It explores the reactions of stakeholders to the process of enemy property disposal in Cameroon. This study focuses on the Cameroons Province of Nigeria because it harboured a good number of German factories and plantations, being a former German colonial territory in West Africa. It argues that the disposal of German properties in the Cameroons after World War I was not only an extension of the wartime treatment against the enemies occasioned by the Trading with the Enemy Act, 1914, but was also a violation of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. It was a reflection of the changed international environment engendered by the First World War.

The study relied essentially on the archival sources for its analysis. Files from the Central Secretary's Office (CSO) in the special list of records on inter-state affairs in the Nigerian secretariat record group deposited in the National Archives Ibadan (NAI) were consulted and utilized. The study is important because it helps us to rethink the impact of World War I on the West African sub-region.

German Properties in the Cameroons on the Eve of World War I

In the late 19th century, African continent was divided up among the imperial powers at the Berlin Conference of 1884/85. Germany had had no African areas at all before 1880, but by 1914 she had an African empire of nearly 1,000,000 square miles. This was made up of separate regions—Togoland, the

Cameroons, German South-West Africa (Namibia), and German East Africa (Tanzania).

German efforts to transform their new possession into a model colony (Musterkolonie) brought in its wake major economic advances. A plantation economy was developed that resulted in steadily increasing exports of coffee, cocoa, palm products, plantain, etc. Apart from plantations, the Cameroons harboured substantial amount of German subjects and properties, which included the legal estates, factories, companies, missions and privately-owned properties.

To appreciate the nature of these properties, the consecutive examination of their categorization is essential.

Plantations: The most important of these properties were the German Plantations, with a total area of about 246,000 acres and a total area under cultivation of about 50,000 acres and valued in 1917 very roughly at £853,500 (NAI 014351). The plantations included:

- a. Debundscha Plantation which was registered in Grundbuch covering an area 1681 hectares (4153 acres) and ownership was thus recognized by the German Government. There was a deed of additional 500 hectares (123 5-55 acres). It was Crownland bought from the Government (NAI 014351 Vol. I).
- b. Idenau plantation: Valid deed of sale of September 1898 for 2000 hectare (4942 acres). Property not registered in Grundhuch.
- c. Tobacco properties: The new Anglo-French boundary reduced the size of Essosung Plantation but from a report by Mr. Hunter, it would appear that Njombe, Ehinsi and Njongo plantations comprising some 13,000 acres were within the British spheres (NAI 014351 Vol. I).
- d. West African Plantation Company—Bibundi with the area 14,000 hectares.
- e. The Mukonjo (Cameroons Rubber Co.) Plantations consisted of (i) part of Jantzen and Thormaehlen property which was registered in Grundbuch. It had an area of 426 hectares or 1052.68 acres (ii) part of Dr. Scharlach properly with the area 1602 hectares or 3958.7 acres (iii) portion of land leased from Crown, for 20 years as from 1 January 1909 with option to purchase, joining the other two. It had an area 492 hectares or 1215 acres (NAI 014351 Vol. I).
- f. Company Farms: There were farms owned by some of the companies. For instance, C. Woermann with the acres of about 10,000 hectares or 24,711 acres contained Bimbia farms, one of the oldest plantations. There were also Victoria farms as well as farms in Malende, Missellele, Moliwe Plantations of area 15,000 hectares or 3 7.065 acres. There was also Oechelhaeuser plantation of area 2375 hectares (NAI 014351 Vol. I).

Factories: Apart from plantations and estates, there were factories belonging to various German firms situated in more or less remote and inaccessible

localities. It was anticipated that for many of these there would be no market, even if an attempt be made to sell them locally. These included Tiko Pier built by African Fruit Company. Under certain conditions it became property of German Government (NAI 014351 Vol. I).

Mission Properties: In addition to Engelberg, the Roman Catholic Mission own Linsiedeln, Ikassa and property at Victoria and Tiko, while Basel Mission had property at Bombe, Victoria and Buea (NAI 014351 Vol. I).

Privately-owned Properties/Campes: Large areas had been granted to companies upon which no work had yet been done. The enemy companies included German West African (Company (D. W.H) the majority of" the property of which was undeveloped land in the Bakundu and Balundo districts and they claim some 50,000 acres. African Fruit Company was Lease of Crown Land at Tiko for 25 years from 25 February 1912 (NAI 014351 Vol. I). It covered 5,000 hectares (12,355 acres).

Railway Lines: There was a light railway line from Bota to Soppo and from Soppo to Ekona and its monorail extension which ran for long distances through three of the principal estates. This light railway was eventually sold with the plantation of Pflanzungs Gesellschaft which it was built to serve (NAI 014351 Vol. I).

All these German properties in Cameroon were confiscated during the First World War and sold after the war ended in 1918.

Treatment of Enemy Property: Disposal of German Properties in the Cameroons after World War I

The treatment of the enemy property in wartime has varied over time. In the ancient world, there existed the right and practice of confiscating any and all commodities seized during battles (Harris 1961: 642). In the Middle Ages, declaring of hostility was accompanied by the brutal destruction of all the property of the defeated people, which the victorious invader could not carry away. Belligerent governments used every means at their disposal to impair their adversary's resources (Ellis 1895: 313). However, the expansion of international trade led to the modification of this ancient harsh rule of seizure and enslavement. For instance, Magna Carta provided that the enemy merchants and their goods should be unharmed until it was known how English merchants and their goods were being treated in the enemy country (Rubin 1945: 168). Later on, other countries also adopted the practice that allowed enemy merchants to depart with their goods in event of war. The attempts to "humanize warfare" (Best 1980) pursued through various conventions in the second half of the nineteenth century sought to reconcile conflicting views of war: namely, the Anglo-American theory that war

between nations was a war between their individual citizens and the Continental conviction rooted in Rousseau's thought that war was a confrontation between states, not between individuals who were only accidentally enemies. One of the outcomes of this effort was that private property had to be protected during warfare, and arbitrary pillage, looting, and confiscation were no longer acceptable. The Hague Convention of 1899, which was renewed in 1907, accepted by the United States along with twenty-two other nations, was clear in this regard (Caglioti 2014: 525-6).

During World War I (1914-1918), in nearly every belligerent country, vast amounts of property, real and personal, owned by persons of enemy nationality was found. Similarly, enemy persons were the owners or shareholders in many business and industrial enterprises, corporations and partnerships. In order to prevent such property from being used or such business from being conducted in a manner prejudicial to the national defense or for the benefit of the enemy, the governments of all the belligerent countries adopted measures for placing enemy-owned property and enemy business enterprises under the control or supervision of the public authorities (Garner 1918: 744-779). By the end of September 1914, Britain, France and Germany had already launched their attacks on enemy property (Caglioti 2014: 528).

In Nigeria, which was a British colonial territory, enemy properties were confiscated. For instance, on 5 August 1914, a day after the declaration of hostilities, the German factories at Calabar in Nigeria were closed down by the Police. Acting under instructions from Lagos, they took possession of all the keys of the factories. Thus, on 21 August 1914, 70 (28lbs) bags of rice and 6 (48 tins each) cases of salmon were taken from the stores of German West African Trading Company and Prospect Beach) in Ikang, Calabar (NAI, 1310/1915). Within the period of the war, all the German companies in Nigeria were liquidated and their properties sold in line with the Enemy Property Disposal Ordinance of 1917 (NAI CSO 19/3/819). In this way, German property both freehold and leasehold numbering about 112 across Nigeria owned by German firms were offered for sale on 15 November 1916 (NAI N. 1894). These properties were formerly in the occupation of L. Pagensteeher & Co.; GL. Gaiser; Witt and Busch. Woermann Linie, J.W. Jackel & Co., Ring & Company, Bey & Zimmer, Niger Benue Transport Company, Deutsche Kamerun Gesellschaft, German West African Trading Co., Mertens & Co., Bebens & Wehner. This was followed by the Immigration Restriction Ordinance 1917, prohibiting enemy subjects from entering Nigeria and other British territories in West Africa.

Similarly, German colonial territories were invaded by the Allied forces. The invasion of German colonial territories in Africa made the continent an extra-European theatre of the Great War (Koller 2008: 111-133). The West African Frontier Force (WAFF), which was the British colonial forces in West

Africa, and the French forces carried out the invasion of Cameroons. Thus, by February 1916, Anglo-French troops jointly defeated the German troops (Schutztruppe) in Cameroon. In March 1916, Brigadier-General Charles M. Dobell (British) and General Joseph Aymerich (French) partitioned the territory into British and French spheres (Osuntokun 1974, Muojama 2020). After the end of the Great War in 1918, the League of Nations (in 1919) upheld this arrangement and entrusted the Cameroons to Britain and France as Mandate or Trust Territory. Thus, from 1919 to 1961, the British sphere of the Cameroons was governed as a part of Southern Provinces of Nigeria.

Since 1915 when Cameroon was liberated from Germany by the Allied forces in West Africa, Mr. F. Evans had been placed in charge of all enemy-owned property in the British sphere of the Cameroons. In the first instance, he was appointed Director of Plantations by the Military Authorities, and was subsequently confirmed in the appointment (with the title of supervisor of plantations) by the Governor-General of Nigeria after the military commander-in-chief had handed over the Government to the Civil Authorities (NAI 014351). Mr. Evans kept the plantations and numerous others open and he maintained and controlled a labour force of over 10,000 labourers, with the aid of nine (9) European assistants. In German times, that was before the outbreak of the war, some 130 Europeans were employed upon purely plantation work in the Cameroons. It was after the war, when the German territories in West Africa (Cameroons and Togoland) were entrusted to the Allied powers of Britain and France that the floodgate for the discussions on what should happen to the properties in the Cameroons and Togoland under the British sphere opened.

Notwithstanding the “firmly established” rule of inviolability of enemy private property within the jurisdiction (Rubin 1945), the framers of the treaties of peace terminating the First World War made specific provision for the retention of such property, either directly as compensation for the claims of nationals of the Allied Nations, or as security for such claims. Article 297 of the Treaty of Versailles reserved to the Allied Powers “the right to retain and liquidate all the property rights and interests’ belonging to German nationals in Allied territory. The proceeds were to be applied to certain claims of the Allied nationals against Germany. The surplus, if any, could either be applied against the reparation account or turned back, at the discretion of the individual country. Germany was required to compensate her own nationals for this loss of their property. Although the United States did not ratify the Treaty of Versailles, the Treaty of Berlin, by which the United States ended her war against Germany, contained substantially similar provisions like in the British Empire, where the Custodian of the Enemy Properties was established during the war to take charge of the enemy properties, a proclamation No. 25 of 1920 was issued vesting in a Public Custodian all the property, rights and

interests belonging to German nationals at the date on which the Treaty of Peace with Germany came into force (on 10 January 1920), and charging such property, rights and interests and the proceeds of the sale thereof to reparation account as in the Treaty of Peace Order in Council of 18 August 1919.

Since the owners of these properties were not allowed to return due to the immigration restriction on the ex-enemy subjects, there were so many concerns about the fate of these properties, both privately-owned properties and legal estates of the enemy subjects. There appeared to be three courses open to the Government as to the future management of these plantations, namely, (1) to sell them to the highest bidder, (2) to hand them over to Native, excluding Europeans, (3) to retain them in part or in whole as a possession of the Crown or State. But there was the need to ascertain the enemy properties through inventory and deeds. Of all these courses of action, to sell the properties to the highest bidder became more popular.

However, no action could be taken until a complete list of and particulars concerning the titles to the various properties, most especially the legal estates, were discovered. No register of the land alienated to the Plantations had been so far discovered; and all that could be done was to piece together the information which could be obtained from the files dealing with the individual plantations. The only maps in existence which showed the position of the various plantations were not complete and were on a comparatively small scale. Owing to the loss of title-deeds, records, etc., it was uncertain whether a particular property was freehold or leasehold, or the exact terms of the freehold and it was not possible to give purchasers a title which they would accept. A clear title should be provided by a further proclamation on the lines of Section 3(1) and (2) of the Nigeria Enemy Property (Disposal) Ordinance of 1917.

Thus, Mr. Nichole of Agricultural Department, who knew a little German, was detailed for the work of examining the local records, and he had succeeded in sorting out a number of the files which dealt with the titles and affairs of a number of Plantations. Similarly, Mr. Evans was also asked to prepare a report on the plantations, with a complete list of the buildings, plants, etc, and with full description and photographs where possible, particulars as to acreage, the area under cultivation, the nature of the crops, their conditions, their water-supplies, and the character of the uncultivated areas; means of transport, etc. He was able to supply information of 2 out of 27 estates under his charge.

It was noted that German firms had their titles but failed to see what they could gain by producing them. Inquiries were made to ascertain whether the German Government would furnish full details of production together with copies of leases, title-deeds, etc. Thus, by 1921, no arrangement had been made for the sale of the privately-owned ex-enemy property. It was not until 1921 that substantial amount of the documents of the properties were

available. For instance, in April 1921, Mr Whiteman's report was presented showing the present position regarding the German documents available and in how far they were translated and completed. By so doing, 16 properties aggregating approximately 127,506 acres were now ready to be put up for sale, while there were 44 properties aggregating approximately 123,530 acres for which the titles were said to be doubtful or could not be traced. This provided the grounds for the commencement of the disposal, leading to the question of the procedure of the disposal of the properties to the public.

Although the issue of the weekly publication "West Africa" of May 1920 contained the information that the English Government intended to sell the German Plantations in the Cameroons, the notice concerning a schedule of the properties which were to be put up for sale was published in the Times' on 20th and 27th January and 3rd and 10th February 1921. The properties were to be sold through the principle of auction and tender. Auction was inappropriate in the case of important concessions, such as mineral rights, in which it was to the public interest that the position of the holders should be carefully examined, and in these cases sale might be by tender. However, whether the sale was by auction or by tender, at least three months' clear notice should be given both in Nigeria and in London.

Four courses of procedure were considered. (1) sell singly (2) sell in on Lot (3) sell in groups and singly (4) split up into small holdings for native farmers. The second procedure was ruled out by the Secretary of States. The third procedure was adopted over the fourth procedure due to certain objections to the fourth procedure. Notwithstanding, Bimbia Plantation was to be split up. This goes to show the place of the local farmers in all these equations. However, to appreciate the procedures of sales, there is need to examine the categories of German properties in the Cameroons consecutively.

Plantations: Different methods were however adopted in the sale of the different categories of properties. Larger plantations should be sold in England. Smaller plantations were to be sold locally or at Lagos. Officer with intimate knowledge of them must be detailed for the work in England. British firms which were likely to buy any of them had their headquarters in England and could effect their purchase in London more conveniently than at Lagos. Properties which had failed to find purchasers at the sale in London might subsequently be offered for sale locally.

Privately-owned properties: Arrangements were made for the disposal of the privately-owned properties in the Cameroons, as distinct from the Plantations (NAI 014351). A list of the private owned enemy properties available for sale in the Cameroons Province was prepared by the Resident. With the exception of that belonging to the C. Woemann at Victoria and factories at Nsanakang at Tali, these privately-owned properties were of very

little value. It was suggested that it should be put up for sale at the same time as the plantations.

Estates: Regarding the condition of sale of legal estates, the large areas were to be offered for sale in the same way as the cultivated plantations. In order not to reduce the working capacity of estates, the moveable and immovable property should in general be transferred to the same person, but a separate account should, if possible, and when necessary, be kept of the amounts received for the two. The transfer should convey all rights, privileges, and limitations conferred or imposed in the original grant by the German administration, and it would follow that any law or regulation of property by non-European or other classes, but no other limitation of the kind, would be applied.

In the case of land, the sale would be of the rights held by the present holder. eg. Freehold land would be sold as freehold and leasehold land would be sold as leasehold, subject to the same rent and other conditions as not to apply to it.

Light railways: The light railway should be sold with the Plantations of the West Afrikanische Pflanzungs Gesellschaft Victoria which it was built to serve; subject to the obligations to carry passengers and goods for the government and for the public at approved rates.

Mission properties: An exception to this decision was necessary in the case of the property of ex-enemy missions. Under the term of Peace Treaty, mission property must continue to be applied to missionary purposes and, in the case of an enemy mission, which on the ground of its enemy character, was to be debarred from further work, be transferred to trustees for the continuation of mission work, whether in German East Africa or elsewhere. Sales would also not apply to property in goodwill, patents, trademarks, and similar industrial property. Again, the decision to appropriate and sell the property of German nationals did not extend to the property of those nationals (such as Alsatians) who were in fact enemy subjects during the war but who by association and present states were to be regarded as of allied nationality. It did not also apply to persons, not being enemy subjects who were technically enemies by reason of the carrying on business or residing in an enemy country.

Beneficiaries: Right to acquire ex-enemy properties eligible for sale should be allowed to persons of any nationality other than ex-enemy subjects. Efforts were made to prevent dummying in favour of ex-enemy subjects by the property being held on their behalf during the period within which their entry into the country is prohibited. For instance, the French-English- German syndicate was not allowed.

However, it happened that by 1923 when the immigration restriction of the enemy subjects had been lifted, the properties could still not find market in Europe, which ultimately led to the purchase of those properties back by the

German subject. This was described by Daily Courier Correspondent as “German Recolonization” (NAI 01435 II: 150-155). It noted that the German delegation to the security pact would spring a surprise on the other delegations. Harr Stressemann would disclose that German Planters had already repurchased former possessions in the Cameroons, and he would contend that the League therefore was no longer justified in withholding the Cameroons from Germany. It was learned that German owners, and agents re-bought the Cameroon plantations during the London auctions of 1924-25 (British United Press, NAI 01435).

Controversies and Reactions to Disposal of German Properties in the Cameroons

Concerning the reactions to the disposal of German properties in Cameroon, there were issue surrounding the scope of the properties and place of registration. Added to these were the reactions by the stakeholders, such as the German Government; Association of West African Merchants (AWAM); and share-holders in some German firms whose properties were under consideration for disposal. These reactions will be dealt with consecutively.

Scope: There were some conceptual issues concerning the scope of the enemy properties. The first issue revolved around ownership: there were privately-owned properties and legal estates in the form of plantations and factories. There was the controversy as to whether to subject privately-owned property to the same treatment as legal estates. This controversy was due to the inviolability of private property, which had been enshrined in Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907.

Place of registration: Again, there was the issue revolving around place of registration. This was because some of the companies were registered in Germany, while others were registered in the colonial territory. Should the companies registered in Germany and those registered in the colonial territory be treated equally as enemy property? This controversy was necessitated by the case in German East Africa where a large proportion of the companies was registered in the Tanganyika territory and could not, therefore, be any longer regarded as German nationals. This created a problem for the Public Custodian in German East Africa in its attempt to liquidate the companies. In the case of the Cameroons, the majority of the properties were registered in Germany. Only a few small ones were apparently local companies. In the proclamation, German nationals were declined to include any company incorporated in Germany (NAI 014351). This would give the administration the authority to deal with the properties as enemy nationals. It was assumed that all companies which came within the definition of an enemy-controlled corporation under the Trading with the Enemy Acts and the Enemy Property (Disposal) Proclamation No. 3 of 1920

should be treated as enemy corporations and that their property should be liquidated by the Custodian under Article 297 (6) of the Treaty of Peace.

German government: In a memorandum dated 30 November 1920, the German Embassy cited the Times of 25 November 1920 in which it was contained that “the administration of the former German East African Protectorates is making all preparations for the sale, in the near future, of real property belonging to Germans. In connection with the content of the memorandum of 5 November 1920, which dealt with the question of liquidation of German property in New Guinea and the remaining mandatory territories formerly German, the German Embassy would be glad to know the news contained in the ‘times’ is in accordance with the facts.”

The memorandum noted that the German government had learned with regrets that the British Government adhered to the decision to proceed in general to the sale of German property, rights and interests in those parts of the former German possession in which Great Britain was to exercise administration as mandatory of the League of Nations. It was certainly the case that the Peace Treaty of Versailles in Article 121, in conjunction with Article 297b, gave to those Powers to whom the Mandate over these territories would finally be transferred by the League of Nations, the former rights, and interests thereof. The general exercise of this right was, however, not only contrary to the formerly recognized principle of the inviolability of private property and the claims of humanity, but was also prejudicial to the interests of the colonies themselves, as the expropriation would have as a consequence the destruction and diminution of much of the wealth created by the work of years. Any destruction of economic wealth moreover would contribute to the aggravation of the economic world-crisis and therefore could not correspond to the spirit of the Peace Treaty. It further constituted a severe injury to the interest of the natives, whose advancement Article 22 of the Pact of the League of Nations placed in the foreground. The spirit and text of the Peace Treaty of Versailles were opposed to the unlimited exercise of the right of liquidation in the mandated territories, the German Government felt obliged to enter a protest against such procedure in this case also.

There was a petition from the Victoria Plantation Company West Africa to the German Charge d’ Affaires against the procedure of sales of Ebeanja plantation. Citing of the weekly publication, “West Africa” of May 29, 1920, the Company noted that the report contained the information that the English Government intended to sell the German plantations in the Cameroons, and went ahead to mention the Company’s enterprises. The reports noted that “the sale will also include the buildings belonging to the Ebeanja Plantations Company and the rubber plantations belonging to it” (NAI 01435 Vol. I). The Company was worried that all its property including the Ebeanja Plantation, might be sold in one lot, thus rendering it impossible to ascertain exactly what

was realized by the Ebeanja plantation alone. The Company therefore begged the German Charge d' Affaires to inform the English Government that the Ebeanja plantation was a separate undertaking, in no way connected with the Company. Should the English Government really contemplate its sale together with the company's property, particular note would have to be taken of the price then paid for the Ebeanja plantation alone. If this were not done, there would subsequently be great difficulty in determining what part of the price would represent the proceeds payable to the Ebeanja Company.

Similarly, a court case was instituted by Mr. Knut Knutson, a Swedish subject, in regard to certain lands in the Cameroon Province of Nigeria, which he claimed were sold by the Nigerian Custodian of Enemy Property in 1924, in violation of his legal rights and in the face of his written protest (NAI 01435 Vol. VIII).

AWAM: There were rumours that preference should be given to French interests in the disposal of the enemy properties in the Cameroons and Togoland. The Association of West African Merchants (AWAM) wrote on 1 December 1919, asking the British Government to take such steps as were necessary to protect the interests of British commerce in these colonies. The merchants were strongly of the opinion that the properties should be put up for sale by public auction, and for obvious reasons, they objected to their being sold by tender. However, the Association did not specifically state that their letter refers to the disposal of enemy properties in the French spheres of the Cameroons and Togoland.

Shareholders and claims: Particular arrangements were made for the settlement of claims against enemy estates in Mandated Territories, and that in accordance with Proclamation No.28 of 1921 (Gazette No. 15 of 17 March 1921) such claims must be submitted by the 30 September 1921. By June 1921, about £10,000 in respect enemy properties in the Cameroons was in the account of the Public Custodian.

Mr. Walden, a Swedish subject, who was employed in the management of some of the estates, claimed to be a shareholder in one of the plantation companies, and raised the question of his indemnification. He was advised to seek indemnification from the German government.

Conclusion

The First World War ruptured the cooperation among the European powers at home and in the colonial territories. This led to the invasion of the German territories in Africa and the incorporation of the British sphere of the Cameroons into Nigeria. Although the liquidation of the German properties in Nigeria took place in 1917 in the midst of the Great War, it was not the case in the Cameroons. The disposal of the German properties in the Cameroons took place after the war, 1919-1925. The British businessmen could not

appreciate the importance and value of those German properties and therefore, did not make efforts at purchasing them. By 1923, the immigration restriction place on the German subjects were lifted. These properties were purchased again by their previous owners, only to be confiscated again during World War II (1939-45).

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