

**THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACT OF THE RUBBER PLANTATIONS IN COLONIAL
BENIN 1900-1960**

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**A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND
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CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this research work was carried out by **TESSY ISOKEN OMOREGIE** in the Department of History and International Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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DEDICATION

I specially dedicate this project to Almighty God, the creator of Heaven and Earth who made it possible for me to successfully complete this work and for the knowledge and understanding he gave me throughout the cause of my academic pursuit in the University of Benin.

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My acknowledgement goes to God my heavenly father and the only reason I made it this far. May his name alone be glorified.

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CHAPTER ONE

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

The work examines the operation of British economic policy in Benin specifically as it relates to rubber production. Before the emergence of the British colonizers, the people of Benin were engaged in cottage industries which included cloth weaving (textile), basket and rope weaving, wood carving (art and craft), blacksmithing, pottery, soap and palm oil processing, palm wine tapping and food processing. This work argues that a traditional industrial structure and practice in Benin had attained a level of sophistication prior to the emergence of British who sought to impose new demands on society. The people as well as their institutions were not receptive to the new demands. Rather, there was a conscious effort to meet colonial expectations while at the same time formulating strategies that would accommodate the traditional practices.¹

With the advent of imperialism and colonialism, in the late 19th century in West Africa, there was a great demand for raw materials from the periphery by the metropole. Esanland was no exception.

In this regard, colonial rule was motivated by the need to establish price control over production and market in Benin. The start of the First World War exacerbated Britain need for raw materials because Britain's involvement not only imposed increased obligations on her, but the loss of some of her colonies in Asia increased her need for cheaper raw materials and markets. This development made Britain more desperate and dependent on the remaining colonies resulting in increased demands on the resources of these newly acquired colonies. Benin was her rich rubber producing forest area in Nigeria and a source of other raw materials.¹ This manifested in the changes in agricultural and forest exploitation policies, practices as well as attitude towards massive expansion of production.

This research stands as an exposition of the socio-economic impact of the rubber plantations in colonial Benin. It is meant to enlighten the policy of British Administration impacted on the socio-economic and political of the colonial Benin society.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

This study examines the socio-economic impact of the rubber plantations in colonial Benin, while the objectives include:

- i. To examine the geography and tradition of origin of the ancient Benin kingdom.
- ii. To examine the early economic activities of the Benin before colonial rule.
- iii. To examine the nature of British economic activities in ancient Benin province.
- iv. To examine impact of rubber plantations on Benin socio-economic institutions.

Scope of the Study

This study covers the period of 1900-1960, a period of the rise of rubber production and the evolution of a capitalist Esan society.

Research Methodology

The credibility and authenticity of any research depends on the methods employed: the process of gathering, processing and analyzing data. The study has relied on data from both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include archival materials from the National Archives, Ibadan, publications and oral interviews. The secondary sources include journal, articles and books on British colonial economic activities Benin.

Literature Review

There are some existing literatures on British colonial rule in Nigeria, its people and culture, but very few focuses specifically on the impact of British imperialism and underdevelopment in Nigeria. However, Olusegun Adeyeri, in his book, *The Implications of British Colonial Economic Policies on Nigeria's Development*,¹⁰ The author argues that the

current state of development crisis in Nigeria can be traced to the antecedents of pre-independence economic policy as the root of Nigeria's current economic crises. The author further examines the British colonial agricultural policies and the colonial development plans for Nigeria. He therefore suggests that Nigeria needed a deliberate policy designed to transform the colonial economic structure towards an economy that is internally oriented. The author asserts that;

Colonial rule was not a benevolent political system. A look at the balance sheet of colonial rule in Nigeria shows that it left more negative heritages than positive ones. It left behind a functional bureaucracy, a rudimentary educational system, albeit externally oriented. The British colonial agricultural and industrial policies in Nigeria have implications for the country's economic advancement. The colonial economic policies in Nigeria, for instance, discouraged indigenous industrialization, but promoted export crop and mineral production to feed the British factories. The colonial territory of Nigeria served, not only as ready source of cheap raw materials to feed the growing industries in Britain and European states, but also as trading post for the British and European traders and merchants, and at the same time supported the importation of end-products because the British wanted an outlet for her own manufactured products in order to stave off declining domestic consumption, and falling rate of profit at home.¹¹

While this study was able to tell us about the Impact of British economic policies in the Nigeria state, It is silent on the influence of the impact of British imperial colonial rule on Rubber plantation in Benin. It will however be useful in examining the effect of the historical background of British colonial rule in Nigeria. This work will fill in the gap in the existing knowledge of British economic policy on rubber plantation in Benin.

Gita Subrahmanyam's book, *Ruling Continuities: Colonial Rule, Social Forces and Path Dependence in British India and Africa*,¹² In this book, the author that British imperialism, far from being benign, in most cases undermined colonial democratisation and development through its focus on maintaining physical order and control and sustaining economic extraction. This is

demonstrated by both the budgetary priorities and the political and institutional machinations of British colonial regimes. However, he however identify that different colonies experienced distinct post-independence trajectories, depending upon the character of indigenous social cleavages, elite strategies, the formation of political parties and movements, and the ability of indigenous leaders to manipulate limited opportunity structures. India's distinctive pathway to democracy would not have been possible had partition not fixed a potentially serious demography problem by making government institutions inherited from the British suitable to India's social structure. Pakistan's transition to democracy was impeded by partition, which deprived Pakistan of both its central state apparatus and its integrative national party. Transitions to democracy in Nigeria, Kenya and Tanzania were blocked by an entrenched history of autocracy, inappropriate government structures and a lack of well-trained political elites. Had British officials done more, earlier on, in these countries to modernise government structures and develop political capacities, they too may have successfully democratised. Despite the work talks on Ruling Continuities: Colonial Rule, Social Forces and Path Dependence in British India and Africa;¹³ the work however did not study in detail the various areas colonial rule tend to affect Nigeria and socio-economic impact of the rubber plantations in colonial Benin. This work will fill in the gap in the existing knowledge of the socio-economic impact of the rubber plantations in colonial Benin.

In the article titled, "*Colonialism and the Post- Colonial Nigeria: Complexities and Contradictions 1960 – 2015: A Post -Development Perspective*,"¹⁴ written by ImohImoh-Itah, This author re-engages in the post-colonial debate using a post-development theoretical framework to interrogate the post-colonial Nigeria in relation to economic development. He argues that the colonial state contrived an incongruous, entity called Nigeria and in particular, a

derisive developmentalism. A conceptualization of some of the salient issues associated with these complexities in the post-colonial Nigeria is revisited and argued as posing enormous challenges to the future of Nigeria's development notably persistent ethno-religious crisis, perverse rise in ethnic minority agitation and struggle for the control of the oil economy in the Niger Delta, the Boko Haram insurgency and terrorism in the northeast, structural inequality, fiscal federalism, census figure, public corruption etc. The author integrates Nigeria's colonial history in the larger picture of her political and economic (under)development and in the process suggests new explanation for underdevelopment and structural inequality in Nigeria linked to colonial legacy and makes some policy recommendations.¹⁵ The author was silent on other areas of British economic policy on rubber plantation in Benin; this makes this research very important.

In Efiog I. Utuk's work, titled, "*Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments, 1861-1960: An Analysis of Britain's Colonial Administrations and Developments in Nigeria*,"¹⁶ The author indicated the positive British role in developing Nigeria during the Colonial period to the point that effective self-government became possible. The author is approached analytically, utilizing information primarily from printed sources, but including conclusions from the author's experience and informal interviews from local chiefs who lived through much of the Colonial period. He identify that between 1849 and 1906, West African territories were occupied by several European powers who subjected the peoples to a new type of administration; and that in Nigeria, Britain was the Colonial master and the British unquestionably benefited economically from their control of Nigeria, but, to their credit, they also endeavored to create a colony in which the subject peoples would ultimately be able to take over the country's administration. Side by side with the British Government/commercial and religious groups with economic and religious motives, moved into Nigeria and introduced new

concepts and practices of the western world. Barriers to effective administration and rapid advancement of native authority during the initial stages of British control were due, not to the shortcomings of the British Administrators, but, rather, in large measure to the traditions and social structures of the various peoples. Moreover, sufficient revenue was not available due to the underdeveloped economic resources and because local taxation was not introduced in the early days of the British administration. Assistance in the form of revenue came from the British Government and commercial groups.¹⁷ Despite the work explain more of history of colonialism in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects, but the author was silent on the British economic policy on rubber plantation in Benin; this makes this research very important.

According to Uyilawa Usuanlele's article titled, "Poverty and Welfare in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1954,"¹⁸This author examines the interface of poverty and development of state welfare initiatives colonial Nigeria. He attempted to unravel the transformation and the nature and character of poverty afflicting majority of Nigerians since the period immediately preceding colonialism and under colonial rule. He looked at the causes and manifestations of poverty as well as the nature of social welfare in pre-colonial Nigerian societies in relation to the new forms of poverty that British Colonial policies visited on the society; And how Poverty in the colonial period is shown to have been caused by changes in power relations and accompanying administrative and economic reorganization of the society which facilitated the diversion of labour, resources and surplus produce from family and household use to the colonial state, firms and their agents. Usuanlele further explain that this new form of poverty was manifested in the loss of family and household self-sufficiency and the inability to meet personal survival needs and obligations, making the majority unable to participate fully in the affairs of their communities.

The author also looked at how the British Colonial State tried to achieve its objective of exploitation and deal with the problem of poverty in its various manifestations using indigenous institutions and practices and other nonindigenous strategies in the face of growing African resistance and declining productivity. He later argues that over-arching strategy of development represented by the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1940 and subsequent amendments and community development were designed to co-opt the emergent civil society into acquiescence with the social system and contain further resistance, and as such could not provide welfare nor alleviate the problem of poverty.¹⁹ The work does treat the negative impact of colonialism in Nigeria but failed to identify the various British economic policy on rubber plantation in Benin, thereby creating a vacuum which the study will fill.

S. O. Osoba's article "The Phenomenon of Labour Migration in the Era of British Colonial Rule; A Neglected Aspect of Nigeria's Social History",²⁰ the work examined the patterns and scope of labour migration, the sources and destinations of migration labour. The impact of colonial rule on the traditional Nigerian communities and motivation for labour migration was examined. The work identified how the advent of colonial rule impacted on the traditional land tenure system. Communal ownership of land was altered for individual possession of land which was sold and being used for cash crop plantations. The features of British colonial rule were brought to the fore in the work. The features were identified as the imposition of taxation; compulsory use of standard coin and currency, encouragement of export crops, among others. With these features in place, peasant farmers abandoned farming which became unrewarding for wage employment. Furthermore, the social and psychological implication of migration labour for the growth of Nigerian Nation was examined. The work shows that the development of the economy of Nigeria under colonial rule did not follow

development logic of modernizing economy. Therefore, the movement of people from rural to urban cities seeking wage employment created a situation in which those who could not get wage employment drifted into crimes such as armed robbery and prostitution.²¹

Although the work focused on migration labour, but it will be useful to this research as it provided information on how colonial policies led to farmers abandoning subsistence farming to seek wage employment.

S. A. Shokpeka and O.A. Nwaokocha's article, "*British Colonial Economy Policy in Nigeria; The Example of Benin Province 1914 – 1954*",²² examined colonial economic system and how colonial policies helped to discourage food production thereby encouraging cash crop production. The work brought to fore the three major cash crops such as timber, rubber and palm produce which the colonial rule encouraged in order to export these crops to feed their industries abroad.. The work discussed agricultural practices which mainly were the preoccupation of the people in Benin province and the policies of the British which encouraged the people to abandon food production for cash crop production.²³ This however, had its implications on the people as it brought about hunger as the people were short of food. The work discussed the major cash crops produced in Benin Province. The crops are Rubber, Timber and palm oil. Forest reserves as well as plantations were discussed.

J. I. Osagie, article entitled, "*British Colonial Rule and Land Tenure in Esan*,"²⁴ posits that "the article examines the impact of British colonial rule on land tenure in Esan (Anglicized Ishan), the second major ethnic group in Edo State of Nigeria. Land was very important to the social, political and economic wellbeing of Esan, just like other societies the world over. It was regarded as collective property which everyone could utilize for agriculture and building of houses. Although land was regarded as collective property, individuals owned the plots which

they either inherited or acquired. The laid down methods of acquisition and utilization eliminated land disputes throughout the pre-colonial period of Esan history. By the first decade of the twentieth century, Esan and elsewhere in what is today Nigeria, found themselves under British colonial domination. The British colonial authorities introduced the production rubber and other cash crops into Esan agricultural system in line with their policies of encouraging the production of raw materials for the industries in Europe. The introduction of rubber production especially in plantations thus necessitated the utilization of more land beyond what was hitherto required for the production of food crops. The introduction of plantation system thus altered the land tenure system in Esan as individuals began to lay permanent claims to their rubber plantations to the extent that they began to alienate such land in the guise of selling their rubber trees.²⁵ This article therefore examines the role played by British Colonial authorities in the gradual transformation of land from communal to individual ownership in Esan.

The work however did not study in detail the various areas on advantage policies on rubber production and the development of capitalism especially during the colonial times. This work will fill in the gap in the existing knowledge of colonial imperialism.

The history and activities of colonial rule in Nigeria have been treated by various scholars in various works, limited emphasis have been placed on the impact of rubber plantations in colonial Benin. Hence it is the aim of this work to examine the socio-economic impact of rubber plantations in Colonial Benin 1900-1960.

CHAPTERIZATION

Chapter One:

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

This chapter provides an introduction to the background to the study, stating the relevance of this study, with its aim and objectives, justification of this research, the methodology used in carrying out this research, the scope of the research and various literature reviewed in relation to this study.

Chapter Two

ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION IN BENIN

This chapter examines the formation of British colonial authority in Benin; it explores the significant roles British invasion in Benin kingdom, which entails the amalgamation of Southern and Northern protectorate. All these would be highlighted.

Chapter Three

THE RUBBER PLANTATION INDUSTRY IN COLONIAL BENIN DIVISION

This chapter explores and examines the advent of British economic policy in colonial Benin and how its impacted to the nature, operational mode and manifestations of Rubber Plantation in colonial Benin.

Chapter Four:

IMPACT OF RUBBER PLANTATION INDUSTRY ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF COLONIAL BENIN DIVISION

This chapter examines strictly the influence and impact of rubber plantation to the socio-economic gain of the Colonial Benin society.

Chapter Five

CONCLUSION

This is the concluding chapter which gives a general summary of the entire research.

Endnotes

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CHAPTER TWO

BRITISH CONQUEST AND RULE IN BENIN DIVISION

Introduction

European imperialist invaded and destroyed an African Kingdoms, oust its rulers, establish political control, and carried off its cultural treasures, causing the indigenous culture to slip into an irrevocable decline.¹ The Benin kingdom, like many other West African Kingdoms of the nineteenth century, was a victim of the European imperialism which was launched at the Berlin Conference of 1884 – 1885. Although, Benin had a long commercial contact with the Europeans prior to the Berlin conference, after the conference, the fall of Benin was expected as the desire for trade and commerce was the upper most in the British foreign relations objectives.² This chapter will examine the conquest of Benin kingdom, and the imposition of colonial rule.

Philip's Party to Benin

The appointment of James R. Philip as a Consul General and Deputy commissioner of the Niger Coast Protectorate, who took over duties from Captain Gallwey on 15th October 1896 gave the British principal firms the opportunity to launch their petition for a decisive action to be taken against Oba Ovonramwen whose policy was seen as an obstruction of trade and exploitation of the interior.³ In 16 November, 1896, one month after Philip resumed duty, he called a meeting of the British traders and officials to discuss the action to be taken against the Oba of Benin. This position was evident from the dispatch sent to the Marquis of Salisbury:

To sum up, the situation is this: - the king of Benin whose country is within a British protectorate and whose City lies within fifty miles of a Protectorate Customs station and who has signed a treaty with Her Majesty's representative, has deliberately stopped all trade and effectively blocked the way to all progress in that part of the protectorate. The Jakri (Itsekiri) traders, a most important and loyal tribe whose prosperity depends to a very great extent upon the produce they can get from Benin country, have appealed to the Government to give them such assistance as will enable to pursue their lawful trade. The whole of the English merchants represented on the River have petitioned the Government for aid to

enable them to keep their factories open and last but not perhaps least the revenues of this protectorate are suffering.⁴

I am certain that there is only one remedy that is to dispose the king of Benin from his stool. I am convinced from information, which leaves no room for doubt, as well as from experience of native character, that pacific measures are quite useless, and the time has come to remove the obstruction.⁵

I therefore ask his Lordship's permission to visit Benin City in February next, to depose and remove the king of Benin, and to establish a Native Council in his place and to take such further steps for the opening up of the country as the occasion may require.⁶

In view of the above dispatch, Acting Consul General Philip without waiting for a reply or approval from London, embarked on a military expedition under the guise of a political and trade mission with two Niger Coast Protectorate Force officers, a medical officer, two trading agents, 250 African soldiers masquerading in parts as porters, and in parts as a drum and pipe band. To disguise their true intent, the force's weapons were hidden in the baggage carried by the porters.⁷

J. U. Egharevba, posited that the Philip's mission to Benin Kingdom was to induce the Oba of Benin to carry out the terms of the treaty which had been made in 1892 with the British government which allowed the Europeans to trade freely with his people, a political and trade mission consisting of the acting Consul General (Mr. Philips) and eight other Europeans with two hundred and forty native carriers headed for Benin City on 1 January, 1897.⁸ At their arrival, the Oba was observing the ceremony called Igue, during which he must not be seen by strangers. The Oba therefore asked General Philips and his entourage to postpone their visit. But General Philip insisted that they have to see the Oba. The Oba then agreed to receive the mission. He sent Chiefs Ologbosere, Obakhavbye, Uso, Obadesagbon and Ugiagbe among others to escort the European visitors to Benin City. However, the Oba's order was flouted. There was an ambush at

Ughoton in which the members of the visiting team were shot including Captain Philip in January, 1897. All the Europeans, with the exception of Captain Boisragon and Mr. Locke, and only a few native carriers escaped to tell the story.⁹

The British Invasion and Conquest of Benin Kingdom 1897

On receiving the news of the routing of her Niger Coast Protectorate (N.C.P) administration agents and military personnels in Benin Kingdom. Britain hurriedly assembled arms, men and vessels in readiness to invade Benin kingdom. This was organised under the command of Admiral Sir Harry Rawson, the Commander –in- Chief of the British Naval Squadron. The invading army comprised of an elite force of 1,200 British soldiers brought to the Benin River from London, Cape Town and Malta. This elite force teamed up with several hundred African soldiers which were locally recruited.¹⁰

This invading army landed at Sapele, from where they moved to Ugharegin, the base for launching the invasion. They divided into three Columns for simultaneous advance through Ologbo Creek, on Benin City. This was to create a three front war for the Benin army. The Benin Kingdom seemed to have expected the invasion from Ughoton Creek only. To psychologically weaken the Benin people before the invasion commenced, Ologbo town was burnt down and a surveyed of Ologbo Creek was carried out by the Niger Coast Protectorate administration in order to ensure easy landing.¹¹

The British invasion started on 10 February, 1897, and the British military forces landed at Ughoton port town. Here they met the place heavily defended. They were held down for four days by Benin military forces led by Ebeikhimwin. Benin military contested every inch of the port town. The British military in frustration resorted to the use of rocket bombs, which the Benin military were unused to. This forced the Benin military to beat a retreat and resorted to

guerrilla tactics to defend the routes to Benin City.¹² In Sakponba and Ologbo fronts, which were not as heavily defended as Ughoton, the Benin military cleared spaces in the forest and made blind bush tracks on the sides of the roads. They hid behind bush tracks, where they could easily reload their guns and surprise the British invaders. However, this tactics was exposed by the Hausa and Yoruba scouts who were sent ahead and covered by the British fire power. The cleared spaces in the forests unfortunately turned out to be advantageous to the British invaders. This enabled them to rotate their maxim guns and launch their rockets, which were the main deciders of the war.¹³

In the face of these tactical and technological disadvantages, the Benin military adopted the tactical methods of the erection of barriers across the roads and evacuation of towns and villages along war path. They equally began to gradually retreat towards the stockade city for final defence. In spite of these, the three columns of the British invaders pushed on towards the city with their superior fire power and continuous shelling of both the front and flanks. This led to devastation, surprise and demoralization among the Benin military and people. The British invaders broke through the stockade surrounding Benin City on 19 February, 1897 and captured an almost deserted city.²⁸ Casualty figures on the British side seem low, with only five dead, twenty seriously wounded and seven slightly wounded. While casualty figures on the Benin side though accounted for in colonial sources, would have been considerably high considering the daringness of the Benin military in the face of blind, superior and continuous shelling by the invaders. The palace and other major cultural and political centres were ransacked and looted, and their contents carted away, including thousands of Benin royal arts and the paraphernalia of Benin Monarchy. The looted royal arts of Benin were later offered for sale and by the end of February 1897 over 800 pounds had been realised from such sales. Much of the bronze and

carved ivory and other antiquities were removed by the Niger Coast Protectorate Officials and those not sold were sent over to England to adorn British museum and enrich private collections.¹⁵ Sir Ralph Moor deposed Oba Ovonramwen and deported him to Calabar and six Benin chief who resisted the British after the invasion were executed.

Significantly, the capture of Benin City had its economic consequences. The invasion of Benin paved way for the economic exploitation of Benin forest and the expansion of trade in that portion of the Niger Coast Protectorate. Immediately after the occupation of Benin City, troops were sent to open up the Ughoton – Benin and Benin – Sapoba roads. Access to Benin forest products had been uppermost in the minds of the Europeans. Therefore, after the invasion, efforts were immediately intensified to exploit the rubber forests of Benin.¹⁸ Writing to the Consul – General Ralph Moor on 30th April, 1897, Alfred Turner revealed that ‘he had been encouraging Rubber trade to the utmost, even giving practical lessons in court having as yet not had the chance of going into the bush’. Also, Yoruba rubber tappers inundated Benin forests particularly in the region of Usen and carried out what Captain Uniacke called ‘a wholesale murder of rubber trees by Lagos and Accra men. By the invasion, Benin lost most of its valuable antiquities, its wealth in bronze and ivory, huge sums of money being realised by the government of the Niger Coast Protectorate from the collections initially disposed of, as curiously claimed, ‘for the benefit of the Protectorate’. The conquest of Benin City opened the way for European penetration of the interior. The military occupation of Benin and the subsequent establishment of civil administration provided a springboard for conquering other places and bring them under British rule. Thus, using Benin as a base, the British sent out many punitive expeditions and patrols to adjoining districts and in order to secure the control of a large hinterland.¹⁹

Imposition of Colonial Rule and British Administration in Benin

Before the conquest of Benin, the British had already carved out the area called Nigeria as its sphere of influence and established agencies for exercising state power in this area. The conquest of Benin paved way for one of its agencies, the Niger Coast Protectorates' administration over Benin area. The aim of which was to create conditions favourable for the operation of British interest in the area.²⁰ Thus, the imposition of colonial rule in Benin or what J.C. Anene aptly described as "the overthrow of indigenous authority" was launched before the Oba of Benin- Ovonramwen and his chiefs, who were all gathered at the consular court on 7 September 1897. The Consul- General, Sir Ralph Moor, made a very clear public declaration:

Now this is the white man's country. There is only one king in the country and that is the Whiteman... Overami (Oba Ovonramwen 1888 - 1914) is no longer king of this country. The Whiteman is the only man who is king in this country... who can demand from the villages in the form of chop, produce, service or anything... as we go on with the government of this country, we will show you the exact way you should carry on with farm and trade generally.²¹

The above declaration showed that the traditional political structure of Benin will be replaced with an administrative structure made up of the British officers and subsequently a few selected Benin chiefs who were perceived as loyal to the British. After the invasion, conquest, the imposition of British rule and the deportation of Oba Ovonramwen to Calabar, Britain were faced with the problem of how to rule the conquered Benin. The answer to this problem was found in the establishment of a Native Council.²²

The establishment of the Native Council was a problem to the British. How power was to be distributed in Benin became a problem. The problem was solved by selecting some chiefs as members of the Benin Native Council (B.N.C). The selection of chiefs did not follow the existing tradition of Benin chieftaincy hierarchy but only chiefs who made an early submission to British officers were selected. The Native Council was established in 1897 and consisted of

the following Chiefs: The Iyase, Oshodin, Obaseki, Ineh, Uwangwe, Ihaza, Ima, Obahiagbon, Osagwe, Ezomo, Ehondon, Ero and Ayabahan. They were given executive and judicial powers and later some of chiefs became paramount chiefs in charge of territories were specifically allotted to them. The Native Council was presided over by the British political Resident and most of the deliberations were directed and initiated by British officers. The council legislated for Benin Territories. For example, the council made rules such as that of November 1902, which regularised the informal tribute which Benin chiefs collected from their subordinate villages. The council disciplined and exercised control over all the chiefs. The council was the body that tried all cases of misdemeanour involving the chiefs.²³

The Native council remained as the administrative structure which assisted the British Political Officers from 1897 to 1914. However, by 1914, the British Officials realised that the government in Benin had become isolated and could not really identify itself with the people. Therefore, they decided to reinstate the monarchy for a number of reasons. First, the substitute of a Native Council to replace the Oba and perform his duties had not worked. Second, the Warrant Chiefs so created did not receive the favour of the people. Third, the British were faced with the difficulty of making the favoured chiefs acceptable to the people. This political reality, posits Igbafe, in many ways compelled a change in the administrative structure in Benin. The people demanded for a change of administration basically because the paramount chiefs were corrupt. For instance, some of the chiefs were accused of illegal exaction of tributes, financial mismanagement, abduction of women and the organisation of unauthorised courts which was hitherto not the case in the pre-British era where the Oba exercised traditional restraint.²⁴

In view of this, a Native Authority was created headed by Prince Aiguobasimwin, who has been restored as Oba of Benin with the name Oba Eweka II on 22 July, 1914. Benin under

the British was initially described as Benin Territory and formally constituted as the Western Districts of Niger Coast Protectorate from 1897 – 1899. From 1900 up till 1905, it was known as Benin City Districts of Western Division of Central Province. The area was later broken up into Benin City, Ishan (Esan) and Ifon District of Western Division of Central Province from 1906 – 1913. After further administrative adjustments of boundary, it was finally constituted as Benin and Ishan (Esan) Division of Benin Province and remained unchanged till 1960.²⁵

The political authority over the Benin division was vested in British Political Resident, the District officer (D.O) and Assistant District Officer (A.D.O). State apparatuses were also created to assist the political officers enforce their rule. Though the army was withdrawn from the area in the late 1900, they could however, be called upon from their various bases scattered over Nigeria whenever required. The police force that came with the conquering army remained throughout the colonial period and were later assisted by the Native Authority Police which was later set up.

The establishment of colonial rule in Benin division paved the way for the colonial state to function essentially in the interest of the British metropolitan economy. In pursuit of this, policies and legislations were formulated and implemented to achieve this objective. These policies and legislations helped to encourage the recruitment of forced labour for the provision of physical and social infrastructure to facilitate the evacuation of the cash crops, such as rubber, timber and cocoa from the point of production to where it would be exported to Britain. Also, the economy of Benin province was transformed from mainly subsistence economy to cash and export economy. This was made possible with the introduction of a monetised economy.²⁶

From the fore going, it is evident that the Gallwey Treaty of 1892, with a view to induce the Oba of Benin to carry out the terms of the treaty which centres on free trade with the people

resulted in conflict of interests with the Benin ruling aristocracy whose survival and existence depended on the control of trade. The failure of the British to win the demand for free trade through peaceful negotiation made her to resort to aggressive provocation of the Benin ruling aristocracy into the defence of its sovereignty.²⁷ This provided a reason for British imperialist invasion and conquest of Benin kingdom in 1897. However, Igbafe, posits that ‘though humanitarian considerations might have contributed to the fall of Benin but economic considerations provided the impetus for the British enterprise in Benin in the nineteenth century’. The invasion was aimed at establishing political control over the people in Benin Kingdom for better control and exploitation.²⁸

Therefore, with the submission of the people, it became possible for the British imperialist state agents to impose a colonial state with an administrative structure over the kingdom in order to help achieve the objectives of the British imperial desire.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE RUBBER PLANTATION INDUSTRY IN COLONIAL BENIN DIVISION

Introduction

Pre-Nigeria which was known for the production of food crop before colonial rule, due to colonialism was shifted from the production of simple commodity or food crops to cash crops such as Rubber, cocoa and palm produce to serve the need of British capitalist society.¹ The conquest of the various Nigeria kingdoms and empires enabled the British imperialists to establish a colonial state in both the southern and northern protectorate, for the proper execution of the exploitation of economy.² This resulted in the development of a colonial commodity production economy in the Benin division.

Capitalism and imperialism is a system based on the exploitation of labour, toil and resources of the poor. It places emphasis on very cheap labour and it pays wages in such a manner that the profit margin of the capitalist enterprise is not in any way affected.³

Capitalism as practised by colonial British Administrators had wealth concentrated only in the hands of a few as against the previous communal lifestyle. This therefore translates into a selected few who becomes owners of production, and this made them wealthier, why others became workers to the means of production. This, then established of a well stratified class in the Nigeria society,

Different Classes of Subsistence Farmers in Nigeria under Colonial Administration

The Rich Peasantry are owners of land, not just land but in large parcels of plantation. They are few in number, and depend entirely on wage labour from the minority class who are much in number. They bought and hired land from peasants, they formed themselves into cooperatives so as to buy agricultural production equipment jointly, since they could not buy singlehandedly.²³ One of such equipment is the rubber processing machines, palm oil presses and

palm kernel crackers. Although some could later purchase some of the production equipment individually, equipment's like cassava mills and cocoa drying sheds were established individually. They invested in other money making activities like building provision stores, and buying kerosene tanks for their wives. Patronised by other peasants, it brought money to the rich peasants. Their trade was further enhanced by investing in urban houses where they collected rent. In no distant time, social progressive unions sprang up but were basically savings and loans organisations, to aid themselves and lower peasantry class. From this social progressive unions, secret societies and political parties sprang up, and the education of their children became necessary.²⁴

Although some of them had worked in the lower ranks of native authority and colonial private enterprise, before returning back to the village, and upon return, their impact were felt in the agricultural crop producing areas. Towards the end of colonial rule, this rich peasantry class were becoming more powerful even to the hereditary class. The middle class constitute those who depended entirely on family labour, and occasionally wage labour. This class had no value for wage labour, probably because of the stigma attached to it. They were not interested in joining cooperatives as they could hardly sustain it. They most times accepted the job of maintaining the farms of absentee farmers, with the use of both family and hired labour. Although there was a huge tendency for them to move to the upper class either through their children or close relation. This helped to forestall their degradation into a lower strata. The poor peasantry class consisted of people who could hardly survive without engaging their own farming activities with regular wage labour. The ownership of a farm only enabled poor peasants to maintain subsistence and cheap labour for rural employment.²⁵

The wage labour class was a new social class in the division. It is a group of people who had to work for others, probably the farm of the middle and rich peasantry class in return to be paid, which was basically to maintain subsistence level. The various colonial policies initiated helped to create the wage labour class from the poor peasantry. One major factor which introduced wage labour into Nigerian society was forced labour policies of colonial states. These laws helped to expose the local populace to wage labour system, although it was not the whole colonial population that engaged in wage labour system. This was testified to by the political officer Mr. Widenham Fosberry who reported that:

The employment of carriers from the Benin territory for the Aro expeditions has had in more ways than one had a beneficial effect on the country at large chiefly in opening the mind of the natives engaged.²⁶

All I saw spoke in high terms of the treatment which they received and expressed their readiness to engage in similar work should their services be again required.²⁷ Another major factor which facilitated wage labour was colonial education. This had no link to pre-colonial occupation. This was a small group of people who after elementary school migrated to the urban centres in search of jobs such as clerks wanting to be paid. The wage labourers were mostly recruited through local contractors, who are paid either at the end of the contract or partly during and after the contract. It was only government, missionary agencies and private domestic employers who took exception to the above rule and employed based on individual request. Although allowances of various kinds were not introduced until the 1940s.

In no distant time, wage labourers started to agitate for better wage and to improve their working conditions so as to improve their standard of living. One immediate reaction of some of the wage workers was outright withdrawal to their farms and only return when highly pressed to take up temporary wage labour work. Igbo, the largest wage labourers which constituted over

39% of the total population, with Benin only 28% and those from other Western Provinces only 13%,²⁸ poses a major problem as it benefited more to the capitalist, because this stranger factor was a disadvantage in the plantations (paid less).²⁹

In spite of the above problem, wage labour class also responded to their working conditions by organising themselves into trade unions to struggle against their employers. The first unions emerged among the educated elite who were disposed because of their links with union headquarters. The semi-educated and illiterate class could not organise themselves appropriately into labour unions. The first unions like the Post and Telegraph Workers Union (P.T.W.U) and the Nigerian Union of Teachers (N.U.T) emerged in the 1930s were predominantly aristocratic in nature.³⁰

From this educated elite, the non-educated class learnt and could form themselves into agitational unions. One of such unions was the Ibo Timber Labourers Union (I.T.L.U) which emerged in 1944, and was later opened to non-Ibo speaking people. One major organisational problem that these unions faced was organising based on the employer and non-trading lines. Trading lines would have been better, because it would have enabled them to speak with one voice.

The Lumpen Proletariat Elements

This group consists of people who due to constant loss of job or inability to secure socially productive job are left unaided. Although they are physically fit, but they could not get a job to keep them engaged, and in no distant time, a large population of unemployed youth arose (both men and women) in Nigeria. Many of them hung around the markets, motor parks, and other places. For the men, most of them resulted to crime as a means of accumulating wealth while the female folks resulted to prostitution. This was a new phenomenon in Nigeria.³¹

Education as a Contributing Factor to Nigeria Dependency

It is worthy of note that the general activities that led to the coming/introduction of Western Education in Nigeria began as far back as 1842, with the arrival of the different missions into the area. Therefore, even before colonial rule began, there were already moves towards introducing Western Education to the indigenous people, and the missionaries played a very significant role in making this happen, as they usually in some cases established schools alongside churches. The Muslims also introduced their own education which basically teaches the Koran and was mostly in Northern Nigeria.

Missionary activities began in Nigeria with the coming of the Wesleyan Methodist Society into Badagry in 1842, where they opened up a Christian Mission station. Ferguson, an ex-slave of Yoruba origin who earlier returned to Badagry made the way easy for this mission group by persuading the local Yoruba chiefs to bring in the missionaries from Sierra Leone into Badagry.³² Thereafter, three missionaries of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) arrived between 1842 and 1843. The missionaries were Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther (later Bishop), Mr. Henry Townsend and Mr. G.A. Collman. They first arrived in Badagry from where they moved to Abeokuta in these places, as they built churches, they established schools alongside as an integral part of their missionary activities. For example, at Abeokuta, Rev. Samuel Ajayi Crowther and his wife built two schools, one for boys and the others for girls. That can be said to be the beginning of having separate schools for boys and girls.³³

In 1846, the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland arrived in Calabar under the leadership of Rev. Hope Masterton Waddel. They also made significant contribution in the development of formal Western Education, in 1895, they established the Hope Waddel Training

Institute where they provided basic pre-vocational courses for boys and then train out primary school teachers and evangelists to carry out their evangelical mission.

In 1853, the first non-British Christian Mission arrived, that is the Southern Baptist Convention (of the United States of America). This mission was led by Rev. T.J. Bowen. They established the Baptist Academy for boys in Lagos and a number of schools and colleges at Abeokuta and Ogbomosho. The Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M) arrived Whydah for the first time in the early 1860's and one of their earliest recorded activities was the establishment of St. Gregory's College, Lagos in 1876 under the leadership of an Irish Reverend Father. The Catholic Mission later spread to the east of the Niger and settled in Onitsha. The Roman Catholic Mission in Nigeria led to the explosion of educational institutions because they vigorously pursued education as their sole means of proselytisation.³⁴

According to Aloy M. Ejiogu, "Whereas, the Roman Catholic Mission (R.C.M) adopted a policy of *conversion through education*, the other Missions (the protestant missions) believed in *education through evangelism*."³⁵ The Missionary Societies and the colonial administration each saw education as a responsibility. However, this was only to the degree by which the education could foster their other aims which was priority to them. Educating their people in their colonies was a means to achieving their greater aim. For the missionaries it was a means for effective evangelism (raising/training interpreters) while for the colonial government, a means of getting man power (clerks). However, it is worthy of note that Western Education in the 19th century Southern Nigerian (which Benin Division is a part of) was entirely the monopoly of the missionary societies. Although, the need for introducing and establishing Western Education was not unimportant to them, the colonial administration did not have it at the top of their list of priorities.³⁶

The people of Nigeria embraced colonial education with great passion. Because many Nigeria people felt that what separated them from the white man was not his skin but knowledge (education). The only way to bridge this gap was to learn the white man's ways. Those who acquired colonial education in Nigeria were employed in colonial administration as interpreters, school teachers, court clerks, stewards and many others. This new educated elite were transformed into a new social class. Many became the voice of the voiceless. Many who gained colonial scholarships to study in King's College, Lagos, never returned home. Many gained employment into European companies as sales representatives. Those who benefited from colonial education such as Anthony Enahoro of Uromi, Siaka Momodu of Irrua, Obafemi Awolowo in South-West Amadu Bello in the North and Nnmidi Azikiwe of the Eastern Nigeria and others eventually formed the vanguard of political agitators in Nigeria.³⁷

Rubber Industry in Nigeria after the First and Second World War

Rubber was the regulator of the Nigeria economy during the Second World War years (1939–1945). Rubber plantations could be spotted in all parts of Nigeria, and earlier planted trees which were matured, were ready for tapping. In Benin as elsewhere in Nigeria, cash crops (except rubber) experienced a post-war boom, this was because unlike previous years, there was less government involvement in the production of cash crops, but 1946-1960 saw a change in the production of cash crops, as there was direct government involvement in agricultural development with the implementation of the colonial Development and Welfare Act, a five year development plan (1955 – 1960).³⁸ This plan encouraged the development of Agriculture in British territories through training of officials, research, improvement in the methods of production and storage.

Palm produce and cocoa industries largely benefitted from this new government involvement, cocoa was highly needed in Britain for the production of chocolate. Both industries saw the creation of their marketing Board, which regulated sale and price of the produce, the sale of seedlings to farmers were subsidized by government. With these various incentives in place, there was the desire from farmers to produce more.

Although palm produce and cocoa plantations experienced a positive drastic change in their industries, rubber production was left unaided after the war, according to Osagie, the end of the World War in 1945, saw the immediate slump in the price of rubber, and this adversely affected the production of rubber in Nigeria.³⁹ With the decline in the price of rubber, farmers who had invested on rubber plantation were affected, especially those who depended on hired labour could not afford to pay wages to the labourers.

Another factor that greatly affected the production of rubber was the opening of rubber production and market in far East Asia. While the war was on, Britain and Europe lost Malaya to Japan (An Axis Power) in 1942 and so could not trade with her, but after the war, there was less need for Africa's rubber, as Britain resumed trading with Malaya who had rubber of higher quality compared to that produced in Nigeria.

Ironically, rubber industry after Second World War shows that Britain did not encourage the cultivation of cash crops (Rubber) for the development of Nigeria economy, but for her economy, nothing was done to improve the cultivation of rubber after the war, no incentive given to encourage cultivation, and to worsen the production of rubber after the war, no marketing board was established to regulate sale and price, rather the industry was left to the vagaries of open market.

British Colonial Economic Policies and Its Impacts on the Labour force in Nigeria Province

The British economic interest in Nigeria was launched immediately after the capture of major territories in Nigeria as evident in the annual report on the Coast Protectorate for the year 1896 -1897 in which Sir Ralph Moor wrote ‘that the rich country has thus been opened up to the influence of civilisation and trade, containing extensive rubber forests, valuable gums, the usual products of palm oil and kernels, and possibly many other valuable economic products’.⁴⁰ Therefore, the maximum economic exploitation of the natural resources and forest wealth of Nigeria by British colonial officers became their primary concern and the quest for political control in the long run followed.

Since the main concern of the colonial administration in Nigeria was the maximum exploitation of her agricultural and natural resources, all other aspects of colonial policies were geared towards creating optimal conditions for the realization of his objective. Even Lord Lugard, arguably or perhaps the main architect of British colonial rule in Nigeria, writing in October 1926 about what by convention has been preposterously characterized as ‘Whiteman’s task in Tropical Africa’ had to admit that economic exploitation was the basis of colonial enterprise.⁴¹

The supplies of many of these raw materials; vegetables oils, fibres, cotton, hides and skins, rubber and various minerals were wholly insufficient, unless supplemented by the wealth of the tropics, while others were obtainable only from them nor was the demand for food and the minor luxuries now for the first time which were available to the working classes less insistent among others, sugar, rice, maize, tea, coffee, cocoa and edible oils.⁴⁵ In view of this therefore, the colonial administration in major province in Nigeria was essentially designed to function in the interest of the British metropolitan economy. In pursuant of this, various economic policies were formulated and implemented to ensure that there were adequate supply of agricultural and

natural resources required by the factories of Britain. This necessitated the recruitment of forced labour for the provision of physical and social infrastructures in the actualisation of the colonial objectives which was essentially geared towards the exploitation of the natural resources and forest wealth of Nigeria. Moreso, the economy of pre-colonial Southern Nigeria mainly a natural economy geared towards the production of food crops was transformed to a monetary economy that encouraged cash crop production.⁴²

Therefore, this transformation was essentially effected through two economic policies; the introduction of “standard coin and currency and the imposition of “systematic and universal taxation”. The withdrawal of indigenous currencies and the introduction of British currencies granted the British the control over currencies and exchange. Consequently, this made the people of Nigeria dependent on the colonial administration and its agents for the acquisition of the currencies required for the necessary payment of tax and other exchange relations. This dependence was effected and sustained through the imposition of taxation which facilitated the cash needs of the people. This took the form of levies, fines, fees and conversion of most exchange transactions into monetary payments. The use of direct taxation to pressurize the people of Nigeria into changing their production activities which was mainly food crop production, into cash earning activities in the cultivation of cash crops such as rubber, oil palm and timber was attested by Fredrick Lugard, the Governor – General who was the proponent of direct taxation and described it as “... a powerful stimulant of labour and industry”.⁴³ Consequently, to push the people out of their food crop economy that rest essentially on subsistence farming and draw them into British colonial cash economy, taxation in kind or agricultural produce was replaced by taxation in cash between 1916 and 1927.⁴⁴ Thus, direct

taxation increased the cash obligations and needs of the people as it was more discriminatory and heavier when compared to pre-colonial taxes.

Arising from the increasing cash obligations and needs, the people in order to meet these obligations and needs were forced to seek wage employment in the new colonial centres of commerce and administration as well as agricultural plantations established in the various districts and province in Nigeria. Initially, a colonial report has it that the people were selling their surplus food to obtain cash to meet their needs but oral evidence has it that owing to the fact that food crops were produced by virtually all households in the Nigeria, therefore, sufficient cash was not earned from such production.⁴⁵

Therefore, the people had to seek for a more lucrative means of earning cash. This meant that they had to work and produce goods and services to meet the needs of the colonial administration as well as colonial companies and their trading agents who essentially needed raw materials rubber, oil palm and timber to feed their industries in Britain. Thus, in meeting the needs of the colonial administration who were in possession of the British currency, the people would be paid in the currency thereby meeting their own cash obligations and needs. Hence, from 1920 when direct taxation was fully introduced, it was reported that the people sought paid employment in the timber concessions and were showing interest in cash crops and activities of the Agricultural Department.⁴⁶

In addition to the monetary and taxation policy of British colonial administration in some part Nigeria, they encouraged the production of cash crops such as rubber, timber, oil palm, cocoa and cotton. This policy led to the encouragement of plantation system and forest reserves especially in the Middle Belt. Great attention was given to rubber which the British regarded as the most valuable product in the Middle Belt forests. Thus, efforts were given to the preservation

of rubber forests, general control of the processing, transportation and marketing of rubber and the general development of rubber industry. There were numerous private plantations mostly around South West and Middle Belt and communal plantations in almost every village of any size was established for the cultivation of rubber in some part of the Middle Belt region. The private plantations are all the property of natives, most especially chiefs, with the exception of two private European owned plantations by W.B. McIver Company and Alexander Miller Brothers. These plantation were situated near Sapoba in the Usonigbe District is approximately 1,500 acres in area.⁴⁷ Timber was a very important cash crop which was exploited by the Europeans through the policy of concessions initiated by the colonial administration. Oil palm was also in high demand by the Europeans in most province in Nigeria and thus its cultivation was encouraged greatly. The collection of the fruits and the preparation of the oil and kernels for market were done entirely by Sabo labourers. These labourers are generally engaged by a headman, who obtained permission from the villagers to produce from communal land and are paid on commission. These Sabo labourers pay rent and fees for palm products to the Native Administration. The chief areas where oil and kernels was cultivated is from Warri, Benin and Esan. A certain amount of cocoa was cultivated also with a few private plantations and communal plantations. The Agricultural Department in conjunction with the Native Authority established Fermentaries at various Division headquarter in the Middle Belt.⁴⁸

Cotton cultivation was encouraged by Britain in most Division in Nigeria. In 1902, numerous reasons were adduced as to why the British revived their interest in the cultivation of cotton in the Middle Belt and other of colonies. First, was because of shortage in the world supply of cotton in which Lancashire experienced a period of violent fluctuations in the price of cotton. Secondly, the consequent American speculation in cotton helped to worsen the position

as far as Lancashire's manufacturers were concerned. Thirdly, the situation became so desperate that most of the Lancashire mills began to run short for long periods and this had a strong effect on the Lancashire industrial life-blood. Thus, Mr. Hitchens distributed about thirty-seven loads of about half a ton of American cotton seed among the Oba, Obi, chiefs and local village chiefs as well as prospective cultivators.⁴⁹ It's noteworthy to bring to the fore that the encouragement of cash crops in a great measure offered wage employment to the people in most province in Nigeria who the British used in the cultivation and exploitation of these crops.

The British colonial policies brought changes in the economy of Nigeria and made profound impacts on the labour force of the Nigeria province. Firstly, the introduction of British currency and several other policies brought about a transformation of pre-colonial economy that rested essentially on food crop cultivation to a monetary economy that encouraged the cultivation of cash crops provided wage employment for the people in Nigeria. Farmers came to appreciate the value of British money for the fulfilment of responsibilities newly imposed on them as the subjects of British Empire. For instance, in July 1899, there were only three Assistant Forestry inspectors but by July 1900 the number had increased to nine, reflecting the increasing activities for the Forestry Department. There were a host of ex-officio village rubber inspectors employed by the forestry Department as well as forest guards, who all benefited from the British colonial policies that created new economic opportunities. Court clerks were employed in the Native Courts established by the British. In addition to those on regular wage employment, numerous people in the Nigeria were employed in the rubber plantations. Timber concession also provided wage employment as well to numerous labourers.⁵⁰

Secondly, the destruction of old trades and the creation of new skills. The economy of pre-colonial rested on the cultivation of food crops which essentially served subsistence purposes

and the surpluses for trade. But with the introduction of monetary policies, old trades were distorted as most farmers saw their old trade in food production as unrewarding. Hence, they opted for the cultivation of cash crops and the trade in cash crops with the British merchants as their customers. Arising from this, oral evidence has it that, the indigenous people of Nigeria as a result of the change in their old trades essentially in food crop productions, labour was diverted to the cultivation of cash crops which they traded with British merchants. Hence, there was the problem of hunger as they were insufficient food to cater for the populace.⁵¹

Thirdly, the emergence of capitalism in Nigeria. The development of private plantations of rubber, oil palm, cocoa and other permanent crops opened new avenues of wealth for Nigeria aristocrats (chiefs). Private plantations were established by chiefs. These plantations provided wage employment for numerous Nigerians in the Division who were being paid by these chiefs. Capitalism as it were rested essentially on the maximization of profits. Hence, labour was being exploited by the owners of capital to the detriment of the labourers. This development afforded these Nigeria chiefs the opportunity to amass wealth which confirmed their leadership roles politically and economically.

Fourthly, the distortion of traditional land tenure system. This development enhanced the degree of differentiation among the peasantry in terms of their material prosperity came to be related to the amount of land acquired by them for the cultivation of cash crops that was exported to feed British industries. Traditional land tenure system in Nigeria owned by the family or communally and land could not be permanently alienated by individuals. However, consequent upon the introduction of cash crop economic policies, communal or family land was now permanently alienated by economically ambitious elements in the rural communities including a high number of chiefs and village heads. To show a strong trend away from traditional land

system in the direction of individualization of land holding and ownership, G.B.A Cokers observation read thus:

... the native laws and customs of the Nigerians have been modified from time to time, owing to the influence of various social and political agencies.

One of the most obvious of such motivations is the sale of land. Strict and Orthodox native law and custom does not recognise the sale of land... Almost everywhere, however, modern dealings compel a relation of the old systems and the sales of land are now a part of normal occurrences of everyday economic and legal activities.⁵²

As result of this, land became the exclusive preserve of those who were wealthy and farmers who were poor were denied their land and coupled with the policies of the British, farming was unrewarding and this created a situation that destroyed the growth of labour force in the rural communities. Hence, the migration of rural dwellers became inevitably as they moved to centres of colonial administration in search of wage employment as a means of survival.

Fifthly, introduction of British system of labour laws. The introduction of education into Southern division as elsewhere in Nigeria contributed in creating a professional labour force. The recruitment of people was now based on educational qualifications as stipulated by British labour laws. Age requirement and working conditions like holidays, annual leave system, and medical health care featured prominently in the labour force that became professionalised in colonial era. The missionaries provided the colonial administration with teachers that taught in schools. Some of the educated Nigeria could find reasonably paid jobs as clerks in the native courts established by the colonial regime. They could also work as clerks for the European trading firms that dominated the export trade particularly in the Middle-BeltProvince.⁵³The census of 1921 indicated there were approximately 32,000 European-educated southern Nigerians, in which Middle-Belt division falls under, roughly 0.5 percent of the population. Another 4 percent of the

population reported had attained what the colonial government called “imperfect” education, meaning they had begun but not completed primary schooling.⁵⁴ Although education opportunities were limited, those who took advantage of this limited opportunities at being educated improved their chances of finding wage employment with the colonial government and European trading firms.

Sixthly, the emergence of labour organisation. As a result of British policies which encouraged wage employment for the people of the Middle-Belt province, the labour force were been exploited with low wages and poor working conditions. This was evident in the findings of Colonial Labour Officer who wrote as follows:

“During the year under review this office dealt with 124 written and 180 oral complaints, varying from non-payment of wages to wrongful dismissals, and total of £1,351 was recovered for complainants. Apart from the benefits derived by the various complaints, opportunity was taken in each case to educate and advise the employers as to their rights and obligations under the Labour Code Ordinance and other Legislations. Considerable complaints came from workers in the timber industry”.⁵⁵ Thus, in order to protect workers from non-payment of salaries in the Middle-Belt province workers at Ogba and Oil Palm Research Station (Q.P.R.S) were assisted to form a properly organised trade union.

Finally, British colonial policies impacted on the of Nigeria people as it led to the creation of new urban centres in most Provinces. This situation brought about the migration of people from rural areas to urban centres in search of wage employment which eventually created problems for the urban centres, created great dependency on the colonial authority. For instance, according to the 1950/51 Annual Report of the Department of Labour: “a man or a woman is usually regarded as being unemployed if he is not working on his own account and wishes for

but unable to secure wage-earning employment. The populace in most southern province were regarded as being unemployed in 1952/53 Annual Labour Report and also in the 1956/57 Annual Report:

There exist, however, a serious problem of underemployment, particular in the villages. Only in the larger town and amongst skilled workers has a way of life been adopted which commits the worker to earn a regular income. At semi-skilled and unskilled levels in the rural areas, there is little compulsion or inducement for systematic and sustained effort. And much value is placed on leisure. The effect on production is serious.⁵⁶

The problem of unemployment and underemployment increased as many moved from the rural area to colonial urban centres in the Middle-Belt especially in the fifties when as a result of better educational opportunities and facilities, the gap between the number of school-leavers seeking wage employment and the available opportunities for wage employment has been widening in a manner that might not unfairly be, likened unto a geometric progression.⁵⁷

As a result of this problem of unemployment and underemployment, many of the would be wage earners in the Middle-Belt were frustrated and in order to survive, they drifted into crimes, ranging from thuggery, to armed robbery, prostitution and begging, all of which have become increasingly alarming features of urban life since colonial era.⁵⁸

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that from 1900 to 1960, the colonial state transformed the pre-colonial activities in Nigeria in which wage labour was did not exist into a monetary economy which facilitated wage employment. Although, this development in the early stage could not push enough people to seek wage employment but with the introduction British currency and taxation among other economic measures, it became inevitably for the people not to seek wage employment. British currency was the only currency used to meet the obligations

imposed on the people as well as the only means of exchange allowed for carrying out trading activities throughout the province. The British colonial policies encouraged cash crop economy as against the pre-colonial economy of food production in Nigeria. Hence, labour was diverted from food crop production to cash crop production which afforded the colonial government the opportunities to exploit the agricultural endowment of Nigeria province as well as the labour force. These policies impacted profoundly on the people of Nigeria.

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CHAPTER FOUR

IMPACT OF RUBBER PLANTATION ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES OF COLONIAL BENIN

Introduction

The structure of the economy of Benin Division economy was geared towards providing raw materials like Rubber palm oil and nuts for Britain. In this regard, colonial rule was motivated by the need to establish price control over production and market in villages in within Benin and beyond. These had only just started, when the World War broke out (First World War 1914 – 1919). Britain's involvement not only imposed increased obligations on her, but the loss of some of her colonies in Asia. This restricted her sources of rubber supplies and markets. This development made Britain more desperate and dependent on the remaining colonies resulting in increased demands on the resources of these colonies. Benin was her rich rubber producing forest in Nigeria became source of an important raw materials.¹ This manifested in the changes in agricultural and forest exploitation policies, practices as well as attitude towards massive expansion of production. This chapter discusses these developments especially the changes in production of food crop to permanent crop and its consequences.

The Great Demand for Cash Crops

The structure of the economy of most colonised African countries were structured towards the economy of their metropolitan powers.⁹ In this regard, all that was relevant was how the colonial powers (Britain), could benefit from her colonies with less attention on the populace. By this very act, most of the population of her colonies were employed as tools in achieving the main reason for colonisation: the domination and exploitation of the local population by the colonising power.¹⁰

As far as the production of cash crops and food crops were concerned. Every form of domination was visible in the colonised Nigerian economy. Using Benin district as a case study, this work focuses on cash crops production (Rubber) and the response of Benin people to this great call. It will be worthy of note to bring to limelight that pre-colonial Benin economy was mainly agrarian, most especially the production of food crops such as yam, pepper, okro and so on. This was made possible by the presence of good weather and soil as discussed in the immediate past chapter which yielded enough for consumption as well as trade (Barter system) in the open market. However, given the fact that why Britain's established her presence in Nigeria (Benin land) was not for food crops but to ensure a cheap and steady supply of cash crops, especially rubber which was in great demand in Britain during the war years (both First and Second World Wars).

Thus, because of the great demand for cash crops such as cotton for British textile factories, rubber for tyres and other products, palm oil and kernel for soap and margarine, groundnut for manufacturing oil, hides and skin for leather products, timber for furniture as well as tin, coal amongst others.¹¹ Although from the onset of colonialization of Nigeria populace with Benin in focus, British had no already economic policies with which they would maximise the exploitation of the people.¹² Local conditions therefore dictated the type of policies to be initiated for the exploitation of both human resources and cash crops. Some of the policies initiated include construction of roads for effective movement of raw materials to the coast or seaport from the various forest reserves or interior, monetising trade system unlike the usual trade by barter system, encouraging the establishment of forest reserves among other policies initiated. One of such examples could be seen in 1940, the Benin clan councils were also

encouraged to establish the reserves and a total area of 30.67 square miles were fully constituted in that year. Approval for a further nineteen clan reserve was obtained.¹³

The agricultural policies adopted in Benin land therefore were part and parcel of what was also adopted in other places in Nigeria, all was towards the exploitation of the available forest and agricultural resources of the people. Thus Igbafe stated that:

The collection of palm kernels, the production of palm oil, the attempt to develop palm plantation, the re-establishment of markets, the construction of access roads to raw material producing areas, the development of the timber industry, the cultivation of cocoa, cotton and other agricultural produce (such as rubber).¹⁴

While appreciating the encouragement and production of other cash crops, this research work will place more emphasis on the production of rubber.

Rubber a Cash Crop of Necessity

With the conquest of Benin in 1905, the British were set to effectively tap the economic resources of the area, and the first move was to encourage the people to produce cash crops such as rubber which was needed in Europe.¹⁵ But there arose a major problem, the colonial authorities was faced with getting the attention of the local populace into the production of rubber and other wild forest produce that was needed in Britain. Although certain factors necessitated the demand for cash crops such as rubber. Such factors include: manufacturers relied on bumpers and engine parts made by electrical industries in Europe for the insulation of cable, also the demand was necessitated by transport revolution of the late nineteenth century which in turn has a profound effect on the demand for natural rubber, therefore the demand for rubber in Europe had increased tremendously and this accentuated the search for natural rubber which were available in large quantities in Southern Nigeria (Benin land).¹⁶ What therefore was the response of the Benin people to the production of rubber.

The initial rubber industry in Benin relied on the tapping of indigenous rubber bearing plants namely the *funtumia elastica* (obadan) and the vine, *clitandra*, all of which grew wild in the forest. Although most of them grew wild in the forest in communally owned land that were being tapped until the introduction of para-rubber into Benin. Thus by 1906, there were more than forty-five communally owned rubber plantations comprising more than 38,415 transplanted seedlings in Esan¹⁷ Although these communal plantations were supervised by the various village heads also known as *Edionwele* with whom permission is granted before tapping can take place. Below is a table to highlight the number of plantations established by Benin and Ishan division, although communally owned.

Table 1: Communal Plantations Established in Benin and Ishan Divisions: 1903-1915

Year	No. Of Village Plantations Established
1903	126
1904	214
1906	284
1907	356
1910	84
1911	300
1912	350
1914	159
1915	107

Source: Igbafe, Benin under British Administration.¹⁸

Although there were some irregularities in communal plantations, colonial government therefore intensified the campaign for individual plantation system, thus in 1913, a new rubber seedling was introduced, the para rubber, *havea brasiliensis* in about 1908 upon which the world's natural rubber supply was to be based. Para rubber which was initially distributed to farmers free of charge later replaced the wild rubber locally found *funtumia elastica*.¹⁹ At the

early stage of rubber industry in colonial Southern Nigerian Province, local instruments were used for tapping of these rubber trees for rubber gum, such equipments includes knives, cutlasses, according to Miller Brothers to Benin in 1917, the method of tapping was the use of sharp objects such as cutlasses and knives to cut chips off the rubber trees and let the latex drop in small containers placed on the ground for that purpose, this applied also to the practice in Benin land.

To ensure maximum result from her colonies, steady supply of seedlings to the people was encouraged by establishing a rubber nursery in the training centre at Ogba. These efforts eventually yielded good dividends as a large number of farmers embraced the cultivation of rubber trees in plantations.²⁰

In light of the encouragement of cash crops production, food crop productions was neglected for cash crops, as well as land: private ownership was encouraged over the usual communal ownership of land. Although it was not as easy as it seemed. The Benin people were at first reluctant on the plantation of tree crops over food crops. There were stiff and fierce resistance on the part of the people. On the part of the British both persuasive and coercive measures through forced labour, heavy taxation which made the people to abandon their farms for rubber tapping. Although it was only 1924 after the communal rubber plantations were handed over to the native authorities, these authorities were instructed to pay for labour to prevent the villages from migrating elsewhere.²¹ The introduction of direct taxation in 1916 and payment on individual basis from 1920 undermined the practice of forced labour. But the poor prices and lack of market for rubber during this period, discouraged further rubber production. Henceforth, agricultural production was to be undertaken on individual basis.

The demand for natural rubber assumed unprecedented dimension in Europe in the early 1940s in the course of the Second World War when the allied powers lost Malaya and Sumatra, their major rubber supply centres to Japan. To meet the short-fall of natural rubber arising from the loss of these South East Asian countries, pressure was mounted on Benin people, as well as a higher specie was introduced to this region so as to get a pure and better latex from this region. Punishment was also ditched out to those who failed to tap trees within their vicinity, as well as those who failed to maintain these trees. Punishment which ranges from flogging to imprisonment or payment in cash to the British officials. A regulation was passed in effect of this;

In accordance with section 3(1) of the Nigeria Defence (rubber production) Regulation no. 35 of 1944, I hereby direct you being the owners or persons having control over a rubber plantation approximately at xxx trees to tap properly all trees capable of being tapped in the said plantation.²²

Thus on July 11th 1944, the names of those who failed in carrying out their duties on rubber production were submitted by the Agriculture Department at Ogbe to the District officer at palace. Below is the table that contains details of the farmers and their offences.

Rubber Production for Export

The Germans have said that if they win the war they will stop all education in Africa. I think your pupils, both boys and girls would like to do something to help to win the war so that they will remain free and go on with their education.²⁴ With these words rubber production and other cash crops production was encouraged during the war years. Experiment centres were built at Ologboshere, Uselu and others for training of farmers and nurseries while government forestry reserves were fully established at Arousa and Erie.²⁵ Although agreements had been signed for two more in Igun and Ogiso.

These developments in the economy and especially agriculture resulted in increased social differentiation and impoverishment of the mass of the people with adverse implications for

forest clearance. The colonial state and Agricultural Departments better positioned to take advantage (of free access to land) to acquire communal land for plantation agriculture. They had the additional advantage of having other sources of income. The peasants, who lacked additional means of income and could not muster labour outside their families and friends, could only establish small plantations. Their plantations were usually on the average of two acres.²⁷ They either left these plantations unworked during farming season or depend on share cropping. Only very few of them could mobilise enough resources to join co-operative societies for the purchase of processing facilities and marketing of their produce, although this did not guarantee high profit margin for members of co-operative society.

Those peasant farmers who could not join the co-operatives were worse, as they were at the mercy of middlemen who paid them only minute from the produce. Thus, deprived of the benefit derivable from plantation agriculture, majority of the peasants were poor and could hardly meet their cash obligations. This poor state compelled some to seek for wage employment in the big plantations especially rubber plantations. This was common in some villages in Beninland from where some of the initial wage labourers in Benin Division were recruited.²⁸

The result of these developments was that on the eve of the Second World War, private ownership and accumulation of land as well as cultivation of export crops had become the dominant features of the economy and agricultural system. Those who engaged themselves in acquiring tools for rubber tapping and employed more labour became more rich in the extent, some went as far as purchasing lorries for the shipping of rubber produce to the point of sale, while others engaged their wives in other businesses such as the sale of kerosene, provision shops and so on. With this new development, capitalism and class formation became viable in colonial Benin society.

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CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

The study has discussed a number of issues, one of the issues discussed is that pre-colonial Benin people had a well-entrenched economy which was built on Agriculture. Although other profession likes blacksmithing, hunting, carving existed, but they were secondary to agriculture. This is evident because every Benin man possessed a farmland either in large scale or as a garden at the back of his house.

This study also demonstrated that the labour needs of the pre-colonial people of Benin land was collectively provided for through sources like; family labour, obligatory labour, reciprocal labour and other forms of labour. At this period, labour was not capital intensive, and there was no remuneration, what existed was light refreshment by the host, and it was not mandatory.

This study also further showed that pre-colonial Benin Enigie (kings) received great patronage from their subjects which was exercised by the giving of yearly or seasonal tribute. This study further revealed that pre-colonial Benin society had in existence classes which were in the form of political institution, Enogie, Edion, and the various age-groups. Each group was highly respected by the lower group. This form of hierarchy shows that there was a well-organized system before the coming of the British into Benin land in the late nineteenth century.

This study also posited with the conquest of Beninland by the British in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the system of organization was disrupted and one of the consequences of this disruption was the imposition of Direct Taxation on the people. The reason behind the imposition of taxes was to make the people increase their agricultural output, and also to earn more British money.

This study further demonstrated that the people of Benin land responded to British imposition of colonial rule and taxes by using various measures. One of such notable measures

was the mass rally which was exhibited by the people of Urhonegbe and was instigated by King Oba of Benin. The Urhonegbe Movement just like a religious movement which was imported from Benin into Beninland also revolted against colonial taxes. In other cases, those considered by the Benin people as stooge to the British (tax collectors) were also tormented. Many of them had their farms burnt.

One of the effects of colonial tax on the Benin people was the commercialization of labour, labour became for sale, it was no longer for free. Labour had to be purchased in order to earn money for the payment of British taxes. Tax introduction also saw the change of the existing system of agriculture from subsistence agriculture to cash crop production. As a result of this new trend, the people began to cultivate not only for domestic consumption but also for export. Many who were seen as saboteur of the new order by failing to pay their taxes were sent to prison.

However, the people of Benin land which formally depended on subsistence economy were now introduced to various agricultural economy, that is the planting of economic trees such as cotton, cocoa, rubber. This new economic potentials brought more wealth to Benin land, because they were basically export produce.

This study further demonstrated that new classes emerged under the British officials. Classes such as the wage labour class, the new peasantry class which is sub-divided into the Rich peasantry, the middle peasantry and the poor peasantry class. This new class that existed is what is referred to as capitalism in Benin Division.

In conclusion, although the British have come and gone, but forces of capitalism, (commercialization of land, labour etc), are still very much feasible in Benin society, although to a large scale, capitalism did not help in the continuation on the production of cash crops such as

Rubber after Second World War. In essence it shows that everything the British did was for their own interest and not our benefits, all policies that were initiated were all geared towards exploitation and thus our political leaders could not develop policies to take this industry to the next level, basically because we were originally food producing people.

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Aigbokhan, Rose	62	Trader	Warri	20/06/2022
Aigbokhan, Sunday	69	Retired NNPC Staff	Warri	15/06/2022
Airoboman, Emmanuel	71	Retired Soldier	Irrua	12/06/2022
Akahomhen, Inokpoare	78	Retired Businessman	Warri	08/08/2022
Asuelinmhen, Itohan	65	Trader	Warri	09/08/2022
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