# BRITISH COLONIAL RULE AND THE EXPLOITATION OF FOREST RESOURCES IN BENIN PROVINCE, 1900-1960

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**JUNE, 2025**

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**BEING A PROJECT SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF ARTS, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN HISTORY**

**JUNE, 2025**

## CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by Friday Praise Osaretin in the Department of History and International Studies, University of Benin, Benin City, under my supervision.

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| **Project Supervisor** | |

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| **Prof. J. C. Nwaka** | **Date** |
| **Head of Department** | |

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God Almighty, by whose grace I was able to start and complete this programme.

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## Abstract

The study aimed to examine British economic activities with particular emphasis on forest resources exploitation and utilisation in the Benin Province of colonial Nigeria. The objectives of the study were, to examine the background to the British colonial forest exploitation in Benin, to examine the Pre-colonial Benin forest and utilisation, to examine colonial rule forest policy and exploitation in Benin Province. Furthermore, to elucidate the processes of forest exploitation and utilisation in colonial Benin, and to analyse the impacts of forest exploitation on the local people and their environment.

Both primary and secondary data were used in this study. The primary data included oral tradition, archival materials, and unpublished dissertation and thesis. The secondary data include published books, journals, newspapers, and magazines. The Internet was also sourced for materials and Internet sources. The primary data including oral interviews were obtained through unstructured interviews, visits to the national archive, Ibadan and the National Institute for Benin study. The secondary data were collected from different libraries such as the John Harris Library University of Benin, Department of Agricultural Science Library University of Benin, Kenneth Dike Library University of Ibadan, and online libraries such as the Jstor Library and Research Gate Library. The various data collected were subjected to critical analysis and interpretations to arrive at an objective conclusion. Qualitative analysis is the process of gathering, evaluating and interpreting non-numerical data such as interviews, raw documents like archival materials as well as textbooks and journal articles to create new research ideas or get a deeper understanding of concepts, views, experiences, or events.

The research found out from the background of the study that British interest in Benin territory was motivated by economic reasons. In addition, the study found out that before the British rule, the people of Benin had an effective management of their forest to the extent that it was beneficial to the overall interest of everyone. The work also found that consequent upon British rule, forest policy became an integral aspect of the British authorities in the province. Furthermore, the study established that complex techniques and strategies were adopted in the exploitation and utilisation of timber forest products. More so, the study found out that forest exploitation had economic, socio-political and environmental impacts on the local people

# CHAPTER ONE

## BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

### Introduction

Benin was one of the first kingdoms to be established in the rainforest region of West Africa.[1] The region's geography and population changed over time and included Benin and non-Benin speakers by the time of the British imperialist invasion and conquest in 1897.[2] James Boisragon, one of the two British that survived the Benin massacre, gave the geographical location of pre-colonial Benin as follows;

> The Benin Kingdom is situated between 5° and 6° north latitude and 5° and 6° east longitude. He added, "In the past, it reached the coastline, though, in recent times, (i.e., the time he was giving his report) Benin has remained untouched by the Benin River in the city and countryside but is bounded by the Gwatto and Ilogi Creek from the west and south Respectively.[3]

The region has a long history of human habitation and activities. The locals engaged in shifting cultivation, which nourished the environment of its forest after a long farming season.[4] Bacon, when narrating the Benin invasion of 1897, describing the environment of Benin as a bush country, aptly described the nature of the Benin forest. When viewing Benin from a distance one could see an area of 2,500 square miles of forest with no breaks except for occasional small clearings for farming and their compounds. A forest filled with trees that are around 200 feet tall, with thick foliage hanging overhead, and lesser trees strewn around to fill in the spaces. The city was surrounded by many trees and a dense jungle of palms, creepers, and rubber plants that the eye could not see more than twenty yards away, and usually not even up to ten yards. One could walk for an hour without seeing the sun overhead and just sometimes catching a glimpse of a sunbeam crossing one's path was an act of miracle.[5] In the same vein, James Boisragon vividly describes Benin Forest;

> Huge woodlands with beautiful trees, such as silk, cotton, mahogany, as well as false mahogany, Cane wood, and others,

> were a gorgeous sight to behold, especially when travelling to the high country... where one can enjoy breath-taking views of the countless miles of countryside in the area. Inside the forest, or bush as it is known, was not quite as enjoyable as it appears outside because there is no visibility and one has to keep to the natural trail.[6]

The descriptions above clearly show that pre-colonial Benin was highly rich in forests and these forests served various purposes. This was also one of the major reasons the British invaded and occupied the kingdom in 1897. Colonial Benin Province comprised four divisions, which were the Benin, Kukuruku, Ishan and Asaba Divisions.[7] It is located in the rainforest of southern Nigeria, which has rich vegetation and a forest consisting mainly of tall hardwood trees and dense undergrowth.[8] These features made the province a source of forest resources that were exploited by the Europeans. The study of forest resources and exploitation in the Benin Province during the period under consideration can best be understood against the background of the motives of British conquest and the subsequent imposition of colonial rule in particular. Some scholars such as Lenin, and Hobson, [9] have advocated different reasons for British imperialism in Africa. These reasons vary from economic which seems to be the most outstanding, to political and social reasons. In his pamphlet titled Imperialism 'The Highest Stage of Capitalism, Lenin argued that the primary reason for imperialism was the need for new outlets for investments beyond new markets.[10] The need for cheap raw materials, a market for the sale of European goods and services as well as the need to have good investments and fresh fields of exploitation according to Hobson necessitated the need for exploitation.[11] These motives played out in the manner they went after the various resources in their colonies, with particular reference to Benin Provinces, especially in timber exploitation and utilisation. Any region where such demand was abundant drew the attention of the Europeans and as such they were attracted to Benin

province where forest resources, both timber and non-timber forest products such as rubber trees[12] were abundant.

The term forestry has various definitions. Trent Harris defined forestry as the management of natural resources such as timber, water, and wildlife, with an emphasis on timber production.[13] This definition of forestry better captures the focus of this study as it emphasises timber production. Angela M. Williams defines forestry as the practice and policy of managing forests to reach certain objectives, through pruning.[14] According to Azeez and Olusike, "Forestry is the science and practice of managing forests and woodlands. It involves everything from planting to maintaining enormous coniferous forests to constructing and nurturing tiny broadleaved communal woods. It also involves cultivating young trees in nurseries and cutting and transporting timber to wood-using industries.[15] Azeez and Olusike used the Encarta Library's definition of forestry, thus as the science or skill of planting and growing trees or managing forests.[16] Furthermore, forestry is the management of forests for lucrative objectives. It involved lumber production and forest cultivation in particular that is planted and commercially managed rather than developing organically. The purpose of forestry includes timber production, conservation, forest reserves and providing shelter for animals and crops.[17] For this study, forestry is described as managing or administrating forest resources for the British intent. As a result, it is critical at this stage to consider forest and forest resources. Wood is a timber forest product that is utilise by a variety of industries such as sawmills, pulp and paper mills, plywood and veneer mills, and furniture companies.[18] Forests in Nigeria are considered a powerful basis for maintaining the country's economy and the lives of the inhabitants and were heavily exploited and utilized under colonial rule. Several people are employed by the forests, which also supply the raw materials for primary and secondary industries. The forest is a natural habitat for a wide range of living organisms,

including numerous plant species, numerous animal species as well as birds, insects, and lesser life forms. The early man subsisted by gathering food from the forest and hunting for meat before the age of farming was introduced to produce food.[19] Nigeria is home to the biggest mangrove forest in Africa and the third largest in the world, on a total area of 10,500 km2 along the West Atlantic coast of Africa.[20] According to Jimoh, forest resources refer to a wide range of products found in the forests (Egbo).[21]

Different authors and organisations have provided different definitions for the term Non-timber forest products. Okafor, Omorodion, and Amaja defined non-timber forest products as a large variety of edible and non-edible products used by rural and urban people for subsistence or local and international trade.[22] Medicinal plants, fibers, resins, latex, fruits, food, and construction materials other than timber are examples of non-timber forest products that are derived from the forest environment by forest users. Non-timber forest products is defined by Wickens as biological materials that can be extracted from natural ecosystems and matured plantations.[23] Non-timber forest products are marketable, have social, cultural and religious significance and can be used in the home.[24] According to the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO), non-timber forest products include objects of biological origin obtained from forests.[25] It should be noted that Benin's ecology was made up of forestland, which was part of the tropical woodland belt known as the rain forest or the moist tropical evergreen forest. Therefore the British needed to make use of this abundance of valuable trees such as mahoganies, walnuts, chilorophora excelsa (Iroko), Lovoa klaineana, wild rubber, and palm trees, among others.[26]

**Statement of Problems**

The statement of problems of this study includes, the importance of Benin forest to the colonial government and the different strategies or methods adopted in the exploitation of

forest resources. In addition, to ensuring effective control and management of the forest resources, some policies such as the timber license and forest reserves policies were enacted. Therefore, examining these policies constitutes a research problem that this study seeks to resolve. Furthermore, the place of the native authorities cannot be ruled out in the forest scheme seeing that they played significant roles in the execution of the colonial policies; as a result, it constitutes a problem that this study will respond to. Moreover, the impact of forest exploitation on the local people and their environment is a major problem that will be addressed in this study. Finally, the importance of forest reserve creation also constitutes a problem to be examined.

**Research Questions**

This study intends to answer the following questions:

i. Did pre-colonial Benin have any form of forest management practice? Moreover, what was the importance of the forest to the people?
ii. What was the Implication of British Colonial Rule for the Benin Economy?
iii. How was the Benin forest exploited and utilised in colonial Benin?
iv. To what extent did Forest Exploitation affect the local people and their environment?

**Aim and Objectives of Study**

This study aims to examine British economic activities with particular emphasis on forest exploitation and utilisation in the Benin Province of colonial Nigeria. In other to achieve the above aim, the thesis focuses on the following objectives:

i. To examine the background to the British colonial forest exploitation in Benin;
ii. To examine the Implication of British Colonial Rule for Benin Economy
iii. To examine British forest exploitation and utilisation in colonial Benin

iv. To analyse the impacts of forest exploitation on the local people and their environment.

**Significance of Study**

A few renowned researchers have worked on colonial administration in Benin province. Still, very few have carried out studies on forest resource exploitation during colonial rule, which is the British economic activities in the region. The available work on the colonial history of Benin focused mainly on the political dimension covering the conquest and eventual occupation of the region by the British. However, what constitutes their economic activities has not been sufficiently examined. In addition, extensive research has been conducted on the forestry of other regions in Nigeria but very little has been done on Benin forest. Studying the history of colonial Benin without studying Benin forestry, its resources, and its exploitation is incomplete. This study "Forestry, Forest Resources and Colonial Exploitation in Benin Province, 1900-1960" is significant as it examines the British economic operation as well as the dynamics surrounding the exploitation of Benin forests. A work of this nature has not been produced in the academic discourse. Therefore, this thesis shall among other things examine the colonial policies on forestry and timber exploitation in Benin Province from 1900 to 1960.

**Scope of Study**

This study covers British economic activities with particular emphasis on forest exploitation and utilisation in the Benin Province of colonial Nigeria from 1900-1960. The year 1900 officially marked the era of colonial rule in Nigeria and the year 1960 marked the end of colonial rule in Nigeria. The area of the study comprises the four divisions that make up the Benin province and they are Benin, Kukuruku, Ishan and Asaba Division.

## Research Methodology

In this study, both primary and secondary sources of data were consulted, examined, and analysed. These sources provided helpful information that addressed the research questions of this study.

## Primary Sources

This study relies heavily on primary sources such as Oral interviews with the local people who are knowledgeable in the colonial experience of the Benin people, and archival materials from the National Archive, Ibadan. These data were critically analysed and supplemented with secondary data. The primary data were collected through unstructured interviews and visits to the places mentioned above.

## Secondary Sources

The secondary sources used in this study include published materials such as textbooks, journal articles, online data and unpublished documents such as Ph.D. Dissertation and Master Thesis. These data were obtained from the John Harris Library of the University of Benin, the Faculty of Agricultural Library of the University of Benin, the Kenneth Dike Library of the University of Ibadan, and the Institute for Benin Studies, as well as websites such as Jstor and Research gate.

## Literature Review

Few works exist on colonial forest exploitation in Nigeria. These are generalisations, as just a handful focus on the Benin province of colonial Nigeria. In essence, the existing works adopted a macro approach to the study of forestry and forest exploitation in the colonial period. Different categories of literature are reviewed in this study, including those that deal with southern Nigeria and those that cover Nigeria as a whole. In studying colonial rule in Benin, the first that comes to mind is P.A. Igbafe. In his book *Benin under British*

*Administration: the Impact of Colonial Rule on an African Kingdom 1897-1938*.[27] He examined the colonial administration from both the social, economic and political dimensions. In his discussion on forest exploitation, he briefly touched on timber exploitation. He however, did not go into details on the dynamics surrounding the whole process of timber exploitation and its impact on the people. Nonetheless, his work serves a useful purpose for this study, as it lays the foundation for the study of colonial rule in Benin.

Usuanlele, in his PhD dissertation titled "Colonialism and the environment: The deforestation of the Rainforest of Benin and Ishan Division, 1897-1960'',[28] examined the processes of deforestation of the rainforest of Benin and Ishan Divisions in Benin province. He argued against the conventional belief that attributes the causes of deforestation in colonial Benin to the activities of the local farmers. He established that colonial economic activities were the principal cause of deforestation in colonial times. He, from a broad perspective, examined the impact of colonial economic activities on the Benins and their environment in the rainforest setting. This work however, focused on deforestation as the major impact of colonial economic activities on only two divisions out of the four divisions in the province. In addition, probable due to his scope of study did not discuss anything on the Asaba and Kukuruku divisions, as well as the preserved rights of the forest owners. The work is, however, useful in achieving the aim and objectives of this study.

H. V. Pauline and U. Usuanlele, in their article titled "The Owner of the Land: The Benin Obas and Colonial Forest Reservation in the Benin Division, Southern Nigeria,"[29], examine the historical context and implications of Forest Reservation in colonial Nigeria, with a focus on the Benin Division. They analyse the motivations behind forest reservations, the reactions of local communities, and the impact on land tenure and land use practices. At the same time, they criticise the forest reservation policy, highlighting the lack of

consultation with local communities and the alien nature of the concept of reserves to indigenous ideas about forests and land management practices. However, while the article briefly discusses the reasons for forest reservations, it does not go into great detail about how the colonial authority exploited the forest's resources. They also did not go into detail on the long-term impact on the people and the social implications of these policies, although they briefly mentioned protests and complaints from the local people affected by forest reserves. Nevertheless, this article serves a useful purpose in this thesis, especially when discussing forest reserve creation.

Another renowned author who has done work along this line is E. O. Egboh. In his book, *Forestry Policy in Nigeria 1897-1960*,[30] E. O. Egboh analyses the development of forest policy, the creation of the Nigeria Forestry Service, and the formation of a body of forestry law for the control and management of the forests of Nigeria. He related the development of forestry policy to two perceived functions, such as the protective and productive roles played by forestry in Nigeria's economy. He discussed the use of forests in enriching the soil for farmers and protecting the soil fertility against wind and water erosion. While he focuses on timber and rubber forest products, he also touches on the role of the forest in Nigeria's survival since the pre-colonial period. According to Egboh, the Nigerian population from time immemorial had relied on the forests and woodlands for firewood. Materials for house and canoe building and farming, and fishing. The people had directly secured part of their food from the forests and woodlands in the form of game, edible fruits, roots, and tubers. From the above, he demonstrated that forestry has been of great value to the people of Nigeria in general and Benin province in particular. He also touched on the various problems that the country's forestry service faced during the colonial era. Nevertheless, Egboh's work did not focus on a particular region in the country but on Nigeria as a whole.

He also did not emphasise the various proposals that were tendered before the native authorities by the colonial governments and the various meetings that were held to deliberate on the proposals. His article is, however, useful for this current study.

Furthermore, T. C. White More, in his book *An Introduction to Tropical Rainforests*[31] gave an overview of extraordinary ecosystems. He explains the structure and operation of rainforests in detail, as well as their enormous worth to humanity and the critical concerns affecting their protection. He expertly negotiated the complex web of animal and plant interdependence, providing light on the intriguing interactions that take place inside these ecosystems. He skilfully emphasizes the urgent need for conservation efforts by illustrating the historical and contemporary changes in the expanse of the rainforest. He explores the complex dynamics of rainforests, such as their species diversity and nutrient cycles. The focus on human implications and the significance of sustainable consumption are what distinguish this book from others. White emphasises the necessity for responsible decision-making by examining the numerous ways that humanity has impacted rainforests. He draws attention to the possibility of making more discoveries about how rainforests work and the advantages of making educated conservation decisions. This optimistic approach inspires readers and encourages them to take an active role in rainforest conservation initiatives. He, however, failed to discuss the social and economic impact of forest exploitation. The book is, however, useful in understanding the nature of the forest.

The work "Tropical African Timbers,''[32] edited by R. H. M. J. Lemmens, E. A. Onion, and C. H. Bosch. Addresses a portion of significant African timbers as it brings to mind the different species of timber. However, it did not discuss timber exploitation but brought to light the different species of timber in Africa. Closely related to the work above is a work edited by Julian Evans titled "Planted forests.''[33] The work gives a summary of the purposes,

effects, and sustainability of planted forests by examining the history, outlining the current situation, and highlighting the prospects and problems for the future. In the book, sustainable management of planted forests is exemplified using the fundamental ideas and important factors of voluntary recommendations for the responsible management of planted forests. While providing the origins of early planting and the evolution of planted forests in recent history, the role played by planted forests, their strengths, shortcomings, as well as their potential for the future, were also examined tentatively. The awareness of the effects of good silviculture, which is defined as the art and science of controlling the planting, growth, composition, health, and quality of forests and woodlands to meet the diverse needs and values of landowners and society. It also discusses further information on ownership, species, growth, rates, age class, rotation, and ultimate uses of planted forests. Additionally, it divided plantings into semi-natural and fully planted woods according to their protective and productive goals. While the book discusses forests and forest products generally with an emphasis on sustainable forest management, it pays little attention to natural forests. It did not examine specific forest products like timber in detail or discuss their exploitation. Instead, it focuses more on planted forests and their management. Thus, this strategy adheres to the principle of afforestation as a method of preserving forests while ignoring the role of shifting cultivation that was a common practice in pre-colonial Africa and a practice the colonial administration fought to replace with forest reserves in Nigeria generally and Benin province in particular.

H. E. Desch, in his book titled TIMBER: Its Structure, Properties and Utilisation,[34] gives a thorough overview of timber, concentrating on its composition, attributes, and range of applications. He talked about many parts of a tree, such as the roots, stems, and leaves, and emphasised how different trees are from other plants in that they only have one main stem or

trunk. Dr. Desch highlights the value of the trunk or bole to the user of wood and emphasizes the bark's role in sheltering the wood from changes in temperature, drought, and mechanical harm. The inner layers of the bark are in charge of transporting and easily storing food ingredients. Additionally, he mentions that the bark frequently includes chemicals like tannins and pigments that are produced during the metabolism of plants. He highlights the value of the trunk to the user of wood and emphasizes the bark's role in sheltering the wood from changes in temperature, drought, and mechanical harm. The inner layers of the bark are in charge of transporting and easily storing food ingredients. Additionally, he mentions that the bark frequently includes chemicals like tannins and pigments that are produced during the metabolism of plants. The book examines the divisions of the stem and explains that the woody cylinder with the pith at its center resides under the bark. Dr. Desch draws attention to the growth rings, which are concentric layers of tissue formed by the cambium throughout each growing season, which may be found in wood. More information about the wood structure may be seen by looking at the end surface of the trunk. Additionally, he examines the botanical notions of species and genus, outlining how plants can be grouped based on common characteristics. The first part of the botanical name designates the genus, and the second part designates the species, according to the binomial system of plant nomenclature. He agrees that errors and disputes might occur while naming plants, but these problems have been resolved by established, globally accepted norms. The colonial administration used Desch's concept for exploiting forest products (wood) in Benin between 1900 and 1960. At the time, they were classifying timbers based on their species and names because some of them had incorrect names. According to Dr. Desch, trees produced in parkland settings often have restricted height growth and branches close to the ground, but trees grown in high-forest conditions are tall, straight, and have distinct boles. He also discusses the importance of

competition between trees in generating high-quality lumber. Forest-grown trees are preferred from an economic perspective since they yield better-quality wood in a given volume. He spoke on the division of trees into softwoods and hardwoods, with softwoods denoting cone-bearing plants or gymnosperms and hardwoods denoting dicotyledons or angiosperms, and Desch's viewpoint tallied with Julian Evans in this regard. Dr. Desch points out that the distinction isn't always applied appropriately, especially in tropical areas where native softwoods are frequently broad-leaved species with soft wood, as was the case in the Benin province, therefore making it difficult to name various trees correctly. Even though Dr. Desch's work was tackled from physiological and anatomical dimensions, which provide a good grasp of the structure of timber, he did not examine the position of forest owners in the overall scheme. Additionally, he did not look at the economic and medicinal value of timber exploitation and other forest resources to humans.

George Ryle, in his book, Forest Service: The first Forty-five years of the Forestry Commission of Great Britain,[35] considers the expansion and evolution of the Forestry Commission during its first forty-five years of existence, from its founding until the time of his retirement. He made an effort to depict in graphic detail an institution that has always been unconventional in its practices. George placed a lot of emphasis on the Forestry Commission's professional and technical employees, emphasising how important they are to the organization's development. By responding to accusations of a possible Welsh bias and stating that the inclusion of incidents and instances is not meant to minimise the relevance of comparable occurrences and issues throughout Britain, he emphasised the focus on the Wales Forest Service. He also touches on the Forestry Commission's budgetary outlook. Overall, the book traces the development of the British Forestry Commission, stressing its expansion, difficulties, and unique approach to forest management. The book also makes an effort to

encourage present and future aforestation to uphold the values of purpose and individual initiative that are crucial for the continued success of any forest service by revealing details about the Commission's history and honouring the people who helped it succeed. Although it contains material that is relevant to the general Forestry Commission, the author's concentration on the Scottish Forestry Commission limits its relevance to other parts of the Forestry Commission in Africa. Additionally, the book simply provided a general overview without providing an in-depth examination of forestry methods; therefore, it did not go into detail about the challenges of managing resources, managing forest reserves, or the environmental effects of forest exploitation. Its application to other regions of the world is consequently limited by the use of the Welsh model to spread Britain's forestry.

J. Borota, in his book titled Tropical Forests: Some African and Asian Case Studies of Composition and Structure.[36] Conducted a thorough investigation into the make-up and structure of both naturally occurring and artificially created tropical forests. The book is a synthesis of his writings, both published and unpublished, from his twenty years of research and consulting work in both Asian and African nations. Borota emphasized the importance of tropical forest communities, which are predominantly situated between the tropics of Cancer and Capricorn, encompass a considerable amount of land, and are home to a sizable fraction of the world's inhabitants. While highlighting the need for the preservation of tropical forests as they are crucial for maintaining the original natural environment, he also explores the growing challenges that tropical forests face due to factors like rising human population, rising wood consumption, especially fuel wood, and shifting cultivation practices. While investigating the effects of deforestation, such as soil nutrient depletion, decreased agricultural yields, and land infertility, the ecological aspects of tropical forests, particularly the evergreen wet tropical forests, which are also noted for their luxuriant development, were

researched. Integrated rural development, raising living standards, and implementing agroforestry methods while respecting ecological viewpoints, he claimed, are ways that developing nations might achieve the conservation of their forest resources. He went on to discuss how crucial it is for developing nations to plan well and utilize their timber resources to understand the structure and composition of tropical forests. Assuring the conservation of ecological balance while highlighting the necessity of protecting the original forests from degradation and excessive deforestation. Even though he offers insightful information on the composition, structure, and management of tropical forests, the indigenous rights of the local population were not highlighted. He did not go into detail about the rights and participation of the residents and indigenous tribes in the exploration of their forest resources, many of whom have strong ties to tropical forests. Despite this, the book's primary concentration is on the production and exploitation of lumber, which is also the major focus of this thesis.

The long-term changes that have taken place in response to market pressures and changing consumers' needs for forest resources were examined in *Global Concerns for Forest Resource Utilisation*[37] edited by Atsushi Yoshimoto and Kiyoshi Yukutake. The book places a strong emphasis on how the forest products sector must change with the market, create new products, and find new applications for them to be successful. Additionally, it emphasizes how customers' tastes are changing and how there is a growing market for wood goods across a range of uses. Environmental issues, including deforestation, climate change, and the loss of biodiversity, were linked to forests and forest management, among others. The book also refutes the oversimplified claims on the availability of forest resources and makes the case for a more complex view of the interaction between management and the environment. Although the book addresses issues like deforestation, climate change, and biodiversity loss, it does not discuss the historical context of forest cultivation, forest reserves and forest exploitation. It is

more concerned with the shifting dynamics of the forest products industry, market focuses, changing consumer demands, and the difficulties and opportunities of sustainable forest management.

Peter Farb discusses the interaction between man and the forest in his book The Forest.[38] He examines how humanity and forests have evolved through time, from counting on them for supplies and nourishment to seeing them as a nuisance. He also talks about how woods were being rapidly destroyed by European immigrants on the newly found continent, as well as how forests were being destroyed in Europe and the British Isles even before America was discovered. He also investigated the current state of deforestation in several regions of the world, including the Philippines and southern Asia. Farb underlined the significance of protecting and effectively using the limited remaining forest lands since farming has mostly taken the place of the previous forests. Further highlighting the necessity of protecting forests and planting trees for future needs, he compares this to what happened in Europe several centuries ago and later in America. He underlines further the importance of forests as a supply of construction materials and as a huge reservoir from which contemporary technology may extract a variety of useful goods. The book highlights the forest's role as a soil and water conservator, a moderator of local climate, and extends beyond the material component of forests. It also recognizes the strain that parks and forests face on a national, state, and local level owing to an increase in visitation that exceeds earlier projections. Though the book discusses the relationship between man and forests throughout history, it did not go into detail about the specific issues relating to forest resources, forest reserves, and exploitation, nor did it talk about the role of the local people. In addition, the book lacks a comprehensive analysis of the complex factors involved in timber exploitation, such as the socio-economic factors and the indigenous perspective.

*The Conservation Atlas of Tropical Forests, 'AFRICA'*,[39] edited by A. S. Jeffrey, S. H. Carolinee and N. M. Collins, examines the continent's forests and different management and conservation issues. It draws attention to the severe loss of Africa's forests and the constant strain they experience. It talks about how the geography of Africa is made up of more open woods and grasslands than closed-canopy forests. Less than one-fifth of the remaining world resources comprise the African rainforest, which only covers 7% of the territory in Africa today. The book also discusses the high deforestation rates and the relationship between population expansion and the stresses on Africa's forests in the 1990s. It also highlights how the fast-growing population is driving up demand for natural resources such as fuelwood, water, and agricultural land. It also emphasises the difficulties that confront African forests because of widespread deforestation, fragmentation, and urban and agricultural growth. The book also discusses a variety of issues impacting Africa's forests, including the efficiency of conservation efforts, protected areas, and the future of tropical forests in Africa. The taxonomy of African forests according to White's research, which defines sixteen main vegetation types, is covered in the book. It offers information about the distribution of various forests over the African continent. However, the effects of colonial administration on forest resources, reserves, exploitation, and the status of the local population were not discussed in the book. The book disregarded colonial-era historical context, regulations, and practices that affected local participation in forest management.

In his book *Plantation Forestry in the Tropics*,[40] "Julian Evans investigates plantation forestry in tropical regions. He examines several kinds of plantations, such as those that are apart from savannahs or rainforests, those that are inserted into existing forests, and those that are planted in single rows. He stresses the growing significance of plantation forestry in the tropics, especially when it is done in conjunction with food crops (agroforestry), which helps

to increase the number of planted trees with economic value. He went on to examine the geographic definition of the tropics, which is loosely defined as the region between latitudes 2300 27' north and south of the equator. Julian explores the four major components of the tropical environment: temperature, rainfall, solar radiation, day length, and climate. He also describes how the tropical climate is distinguished by consistency and uniformity rather than by severe temperatures, and how the length of days and solar radiation in the tropics contribute to the vegetation's high production. He continued by talking about the importance of rainfall in the tropics, its variations, and the effects they have on plantation forestry. He also talked about land use and farming techniques in the tropics, including the under- and inadequate use of land, shifting cultivation, nomadic herding, and the possibility of better land use techniques to increase food and timber production. Julian recognizes the socioeconomic and developmental state of tropical nations, emphasizing the difficulties they confront due to their low incomes, reliance on a limited number of commodities, and trade restrictions. However, he only focuses on the tropical environment, climate, vegetation, and land use practices in the topics, and does not provide in-depth information on the forest activities in colonial Nigeria. This is because he skips over the specific historical context and practices related to these activities, such as timber exploitation, forest reserves, and the place of the local populace.

The concepts, procedures, and methods involved in managing forest properties efficiently were the subject of the writing by Kenneth P. Dike in his book titled *Forest Management: Regulation and Valuation*.[41] To create effective forest operations, he places a strong emphasis on the use of commercial techniques and technical forestry concepts. He focuses on the production of timber while also considering other factors involved in

efficiently managing forest resources. Nevertheless, he appears to disregard the significance of forest reserves and their effects on the local population.

In 1965, Titmuss, in his work titled *Commercial Timbers of the World*,[42] conducted research on the qualities and features of wood as well as the identification and categorization of various types of timber. He underlined how crucial it is to comprehend the actual nature of wood and its structure to use it for building, handicraft, and architectural design, among other things. He looks at the historical relevance of wood as a resource for sustaining human life. In addition, Titmuss examined how early man utilised wood for tools, housing, and transportation, as well as how understanding of and usage of wood changed as civilization advanced. He went further to talk about the dangers of utilizing subpar or incorrectly classified wood, as well as the difficulties in effectively recognizing and categorizing timber. He also noted that understanding wood requires a scientific method. He explains that hardwoods are obtained from angiosperm trees, which bear real flowers, while softwoods are obtained from gymnosperm trees, which include conifers. He makes the distinction between softwoods and hardwoods based on their structure rather than their weight or hardness. He, however, did not take into account any type of timber extraction, nor did he investigate forest reserves.

A very prominent work on the study of forestry in Nigeria is that of S. A. Kolade, which he did in 1975. Kolade, in a work titled *Forestry and the Nigerian Economy*,[43] performed a study on the Nigerian economy's forestry industry focusing on its potentialities. He examined the competitive ability of Nigerian firms in selling forest products in international markets. He also discussed the raw materials and the conditions for procuring, transporting and marketing them within existing internal and external economies. He also looked at the policies pursued in regenerating the resources and the process involved in the

production of timber as a raw material and its renewal. This, therefore, led him to explain the management of forestlands as the growing of trees in a long-term undertaking. He attempted to highlight the productive capability of the woods as well as the strategies implemented to increase timber output. However, Kolade appears to overlook the ecological or environmental consequences of forest exploitation, including forest resource conservation, biodiversity, and sustainable methods. While he emphasises timber extraction as a drain on the national economy, he did not go into detail on the social and economic implications on the local communities, and at the same time, he seems to ignore the necessity of the local people's involvement in timber extraction. Though he acknowledges that high-quality woods were exploited, leading to deforestation and other environmental hazards, he did not highlight the amount of resource depletion or the repercussions of unsustainable logging techniques.

Erhun Kula carried out a study on forestry economics, especially the unique issues and concerns involved with forestry as an investment in his book titled *The Economics of Forestry: Modern Theory and Practice*.[44] He discusses how forestry differs from other undertakings due to its extended developmental periods, which can last more than forty years for coniferous and more than 100 years for deciduous timbers, respectively. He emphasises the significance of discount rates and discounting methods in evaluating forestry investment projects. He explains how forestry redistributes revenue across generations, as the advantages of tree planting are mostly collected by future generations, but the benefits of tree felling arise from initiatives created by past generations. He also recognizes the challenge of projecting timber prices far into the future, making price estimates for long periods impossible. The primary goal of Kula is to give insights for economists, foresters, geographers, and environmental scientists. He addresses the historical damage and subsequent efforts in Western nations to reverse the trend of deforestation, emphasizing the

economic challenge of discounting in forestry operations. Kula Kolade wrote from distinct economic viewpoints on forestry, with Kula focusing on the Western continent and Kolade on Nigeria. Kula, like Kolade, does not go into great detail about ecological concerns, such as forest resource conservation and sustainable management techniques and deforestation.

Shokpeka and Nwaokocha examine the influence of British colonial economic policy on Nigeria, with a focus on the Benin province from 1914 to 1954 in the article, "British Colonial Economic Policy in Nigeria, the example of Benin province 1914-1954".[45] They successfully show the implications of the British colonial administration's implementation of the cash crops economy, which resulted in the neglect of the indigenous food crop economy. They investigate the role of local authorities in the implementation of economic policy. The British colonial authority effectively controlled and impacted the Nigerian economic landscape by utilizing local officials as agents to enforce the planting of cash crops required by British enterprises. They also investigate the creation of forest reserves for timber extraction and the effects on rural communities. Regardless of the merits attributed to Shokpeka and Nwaokocha, they primarily focus on the actions and policies of the British colonial administration and do not sufficiently examine the perspectives and experiences of the local people affected by the establishment of forest reserves and the exploitation of forest resources. They also did not adequately investigate the environmental repercussions of establishing forest reserves and the utilisation of forest resources. They do not address concerns such as deforestation, biodiversity loss, or the long-term viability of the forest ecosystem. Furthermore, while the article briefly covers the impact on the farming system of the Benins, it does not give a detailed examination of the socio-economic implications experienced by the local people because of the establishment of forest reserves and the transition to cash crops. Farming Communities were displaced, livelihoods were lost, and

traditional agricultural techniques changed overnight without better alternatives. Similarly, the article does not investigate the local people's resistance and agency in reaction to the creation of forest reserves and the exploitation of forest resources. It makes little mention of local opposition tactics, agreements, or how communities managed and reacted to these changes. From the works reviewed above, it is obvious that none has carried out a comprehensive and detailed analysis of timber exploitation in Benin province in the period under consideration (1900-1960). Though some of the work reviewed discusses forestry and timber in Nigeria, but not to the degree this study seeks to investigate it.

**Chapters Outline.** This thesis is divided into five chapters.

**Chapter one: Background to the study**. This chapter covers the background to the study and the introductory aspect of the study. It highlights the significance of the study, its aim and objectives, the scope of the study, the research problem, the literature review, the research methodology and the structure of the work.

**Chapter Two: Introduction of British Colonial Rule and Its Implications for the Benin Economy.** This chapter examines the nature of the Benin forest and its uses before the advent of colonial rule. The emphasis is on forest resources and control in pre-colonial Benin, Indigenous management of forest resources, methods of forest conservation, and lumbering. The chapter also examines the forest policies that guide forest exploitation and Timber species. It also looks at the incidents that led to the British occupation of the Benin forest.

**Chapter Three: British Forest Exploitation and Utilisation in Colonial Benin.**

This chapter discuss the nature of colonial rule in Benin province in connection with forest exploitation and the different forest policies that the forestry department enacted to have firm control of the Benin forest and ensure the creation of forest reserves in the four divisions. The chapter further examines the evolution of the forestry department in Benin province as well

as the creation and role of the Native Administration forest reserves. It also looks at the rights that were reserved for the forest owners. This chapter also deals with the nature of forest exploitation and its utilisation in colonial Benin. It focuses on the various techniques and strategies that were adopted in this exercise. It examines the methods used in transporting timber from one point to another as well as the emergence of sawmills that aid the conversion of logs into planks for effective transportation across the water to Europe. Timber licences as a means of securing access to a concession by timber contractors are also examined.

**Chapter Four: The Impact of British Forest Exploitation on Benin 1900-1960.**

This chapter focuses on the economic, socio-political and environmental impact of forest exploitation on the people and their land tenure and farming system.

**Chapter Five: Conclusion.** This is the concluding part of this thesis. Based on the foregoing discussion, this chapter summarises all that has been discussed in this work. The chapter highlights the findings from this study as well as the contributions to knowledge in the academy.

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## CHAPTER TWO

## INTRODUCTION OF BRITISH COLONIAL RULE AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR BENIN ECONOMY

European contacts with the Benin kingdom started in 1485 when the Portuguese, led by João Afonso de Aveiro, first visited the Kingdom.[1] They were later followed by other European nations such as Britain. At this early stage, their relationship remained mainly commercial and of mutual benefits until the late nineteenth century, when the tide turned and the kingdom came under British colonial rule. In 1888, the British traders negotiated trading arrangements with the Benin rulers, but in 1892, a protection treaty was imposed on the kingdom. This treaty was to grant the British and their agents free access to trade and exploit the Benin resources, especially the forest resources. This right to free access made possible by the treaty prompted the British traders to send their agents to exploit the forest of the kingdom.

To further British interests in the region, especially in the palm oil industry, Captain Gallwey tried to make his negotiation for a free trade with the Oba at the time a concrete one. Taking advantage of this treaty, Moor later advised the Foreign Office to employ all available means, even if it took the use of force to implement the signed treaty, which Gallwey has endorsed with the Oba and his chiefs[2] seeing the treaty provide Britain the legal grounds to expand its control in the area. While the treaty's terms indicated that the Oba had requested British protection, neither the Oba nor Gallwey could back this up. Even Gallwey said in his report that the Oba was reluctant to sign the agreement.[3] It should be noted that the terms of this treaty were ambiguous. As such, the ruling authorities did not seem to understand its importance, viewing the acts as violating their laws and sovereignty. Acting on this treaty, Philip and his men attempted to visit Benin to further with the Oba but were massacred when

they refused to heed the warnings from the Oba and his chiefs not to come to Benin at such a time, seeing that it was forbidden for the Oba to receive strangers at such a period. Following this incident, a Punitive Expedition was launched on Benin from the 10th to 18 February 1897 with a force of one hundred men under the command of Sir Harry Rawson. This expenditure led to the fall of the Benin kingdom that same year[4] and subsequent incorporation into the British colonial system.

To consolidate their hold on their newly acquired territories, some reforms and economic policies were made. To generate revenue within the community, the colonial government introduced a taxation system policy that required payment in cash and not in crops or kinds,[5] which was obtainable in the pre-colonial era. The cash system policy was also introduced, which turned the Benin economy into a cash economy.[6] This is because the tax required payment in cash, which was only found with the British; the local people, therefore, have to work for money to pay their tax. The British also introduced the cash crop system policy into the Benin economy, seeing that pre-colonial Benin only cultivated food crops and practiced subsistence farming.[7] This, therefore, means that the commercial farming system was introduced into the Benin region by the colonial government.

The Benin territory has many exploitable resources, which were not recognised until the advent of colonial rule. To exploit these resources, systems and policies were created to give order and organisation to the exploitation processes. First along this line was the creation of the plantation system, of which the rubber plantation was part.[8] In addition to this agricultural plantation with a new farming system was introduced, as well as a forestry system of which a timber plantation was part.[9] There was also the introduction of international trade and a market board to regulate the market system.[10] Forestry resources were just one out of the numerous resources in the Benin territories of which this study

focuses. It is therefore expedient at this point to discuss the Benin forest. Before the advent of colonial rule, everyone in the community participated in forest exploitation, which was not restricted to a certain class of people. The trees were used for both the manufacture of domestic goods and the supply of firewood. Different wild animals, including those that provided protein like deer, antelopes, elephants, monkeys, baboons, porcupines, grass-cutters, rodents, rabbits or giant hares, bush pigs, and birds, were hunted from the forests by the men through solitary and organised hunting. The women, on the other hand, collected snails, mushrooms, and insects from the forest to provide variety to their diet. The forests were communally owned, much like the land, and everyone in the community was free to use their resources. Because of the emergence of colonial rule, the hitherto liberty and free access the people had over their forest became restricted through various policies known as forestry policies and ordinances that the colonial government enacted. Forests in pre-colonial Benin had spiritual, cultural and Symbolic Significance as not all forests were easily accessible. Such forests were seen as sacred, usually dedicated to the worship of a deity. Trees in such a forest were not felled without permission from the community chief and performance of certain rituals to appease *Osun*, the forest gods. In addition, indigenous Benin forest management had a specialised land tenure system with a good structure of ownership of forest resources in which a family communally owned a parcel of land. Any member of the family could farm on the land when it had lain fallow for some time while other members of the family moved to another land, this is because there was enough land to go around. For strangers, allocations of land/forest resources attract some rites and royalty to be performed and paid respectively by such individuals who desire land before he/she is given access to the forest. In pre-colonial Benin, though timber products did not have trade and commercial value, it however had enormous domestic importance. One of the arguments along this line

could be because of the abundance of forests and the easy accessibility of any member of the community to the forest to get whatever they wanted. The exploitation of timber in pre-colonial Benin was followed up by conservative and sustainability practices through customary Laws and policies that guided forest/timber exploitation.

**Forest Resources Management in Pre-colonial Benin**

Land in Benin was communally owned, with ownership rights held by the Oba in the Kingdom (thus the proverb Oba O re yan oto, "Oba owns the land"). The Enigie (also known as Enogie or Onojie- singular) in Esan chiefdoms were in control of the land from the chiefdoms.[11] It is important to note that this Oba's ownership of land was more in theory than in reality, as he could not deprive any of his subjects (ovien oba) of the right to land arbitrarily. However, he authorised the grant of land through the Okao Avbiogbe, who is the leader of the city land allocation. In the earliest periods of Asaba's history, no single person possessed sole legal or personal claim over any parcel of land. The land belonged to the community, but over time, the descendants of "Nnebisi" started to increase in population and claim more property. Eventually, the population was invaded, and Asaba had to come up with a defence plan. More incursions originated from the town's western and northern flanks. Some of the intruders originated from the Eastern border. The Asaba people, therefore, determined that the "Ezenei" ("Umuezei") should guard and defend the eastern side due to their superior military prowess. The northern and western sides should both be protected by those of Agu (umuagu). "Umuaji" and "Ugbornanta" were to provide support for those two quarters, respectively. Since he was the youngest, "Onaje" was placed in the middle of the group, protected from the path of any intruders; however, he was not given this responsibility. With the defence of their territory secured, the people conferred the power of collective land ownership on the Diokpa of the various villages and sub-villages as the custodian.[12]

Meanwhile, in Benin City, the Okao Avbiogbe (head of the guild of town criers/land allotters) and the leaders of the wards/quarters were given the authority to issue rights of use of land.[13]

The process of acquiring land in Benin City was a little different from outside Benin. The people of Benin had the freedom to build, hunt, and farm anywhere in the realm, though it was done with the approval of the Enogie, who is the hereditary chief of a village or group of villages. The odionwere, or the okao-evbo, who is the gerontocracy village chief, were also granted such authority by the Oba in other regions outside of Benin. It is evident from the foregoing that an appropriate process was followed to obtain a piece of land within the city, but things were a little different outside. The locals were able to get land outside of Benin City for their use without having to pay a price or obtain permission, provided that the land was not already in use or had not been set aside for other use by another party. These disparities between the requirements for purchasing land inside and outside the city may be due to several variables, including the city's population density, security and defence, social hierarchy, and the impact of the Oba as the capital. How long a person can claim land depends on its use; for example, land utilised for residential purposes is owned indefinitely, but land used for agricultural purposes is only owned temporarily. According to Okojie, the person who originally cleared the land of its forest and his successors were granted perpetual ownership of the farmland during the farming and fallow periods.[14] Igbafe goes on to say that the man's eldest son inherited the land and that in the event of a family's extinction, it reverts to the village chief or Enogie, who was in charge of making new allocations or grants to interested individuals with or without the requirement of paying tribute.[15] On the other hand, the Oba was entitled to a portion of any foreign payments made for the exploitation of Benin land or forest. These arguments clarified that the Benins had common rights and unhindered access to their forest.

Forest resources, according to an interview with Obogie, were owned, controlled and managed by the village.[16] Although there were situations where an individual who cleared a virgin forest had the right over the resources within the scope of where he had cleared, these places were allocated to him. He further argues that one unique thing about this style of acquiring land is that an individual who first clears a particular portion of a virgin land continues to lay claim to that particular parcel of land in perpetuity.[17] Such an individual has the right to pass it on to his descendants, seeing that he was the first to clear it as a virgin land. Hence the Benin adage that says *no gbe egbe oregbo and mé gbe egbo nó owanvbere ya roe ogo*.[18] These sayings mean that he who cleared a forest first is the one who should reap the fruit of the forest, and I will not clear a forest for another to reap respectively. Thus, when an individual cleared a virgin land, somebody else can lay claim to it when the stumps and roots have all decayed. This is because it is the one who deforests a forest that has the right over it. Therefore, it is the clearing of virgin lands that gave members of a village or town the right to usufruct over the usage of this land, not personal ownership or possession through buying, as forests were not for sale in those days. When a man has cleared a virgin land, the man's family now has continued right to that land. However, this assertion is not supported by much evidence, and land in Benin was communally owned; any member of a community can farm on any land as long as it is not in use. The Benin adages (*no gbe egbe oregbe-*: he that cleared a forest is the one that should reap the fruit of the forest) (*mé gbe egbo nó owanvbere ya roe ogo-*: I will not clear a forest for another to reap), nonetheless, seem to support Obogie's argument. Seeing that it was probably used to defend an individual claim over a parcel of land. It can therefore be concluded that clearing a virgin forest is one way to lay claim to a plot of land, while communal ownership is another way that a member of a community or village could have a share of the forest.

**Forest Conservation in Pre-Colonial Benin**

The Benins had a special method of forest conservation, which began with their farming system. Being located in the high rain forest, bushes were cleared, and trees fell before the actual planting began. Despite the high level of agricultural practices, they were able to achieve a very high level of forest management, so much so that trees were managed to attain a maturity of up to about two hundred to three hundred feet tall.[19] This feat was possible with iron implements. Oral tradition has it that the Benins had access to the knowledge of iron as early as 500AD[20] the very early part of the Ogiso era. As such, they mastered the use of iron tools very early and were able to use it to achieve larger farms and manage their forest resources better. For example, when trees are clustered, they are trimmed and provided space, which allows them to grow. In this way, Benin trees were able to grow well owing to this horticultural practice, which was not common in other places. In Benin City, the usage and exploitation of streams, rivers, river beaches, and other forest products required the payment of royalties to the Oba. However, access to these resources in other locations outside of the city, yet within the kingdom, was under communal authority. Such control over locals and visitors alike contributed to the conservation of the forest resources from indiscriminate exploitation. Criminals were severely dealt with. For instance, men from European companies and other outsiders who entered the Benin forest before the advent of colonial rule to harvest wild rubber and kill elephants were apprehended and punished.[21] The protection and continued existence of the Benin forest were sustained by this land tenure system practiced by the Benins. Furthermore, farming requires some stages starting from choosing a suitable fertile land, then clearing the bush known as (*ifie*), to the felling of trees known as (*egbóe*), and then to the burning of the cleared grasses and felled trees locally known as Iyerhen. These activities have a destructive effect on trees, but to protect them,

farmers neatly clear and sweep under the trees to prevent them from being engulfed by fire. Farmers were also prohibited from felling some trees such as Iroko, *Uloko, Okhan*, silk cotton, *Ikhinmwin* and the palm tree for religious, social, and economic reasons.[22] Since the exempted trees were in the same parcel of the cleared land, the farmers adopted a system of clearing the base of the unfelled trees neatly to prevent them from being burnt by fire. Another way the Benins preserved their forest was the avoidance of indiscriminate possession of land and forest resources. This they did by charging a certain fee, especially to strangers before they were allowed access into the forest, and in a situation where they mismanage the forest resources or are found wanting in the use of forest resources, the land is withdrawn from them and in some cases, they are expelled from the community. More so, the forest was conserved in pre-colonial Benin according to Allison through the adoption of shifting cultivation accompanied by a lengthy fallow period. These practices promoted faster forest regeneration and preserved soil and vegetation quality. This is because when an already cultivated and harvested farmland is left uncultivated for a long period, a brand new vegetation springs up. The once cleared forest eventually regenerates naturally, fostering the development of secondary forest vegetation. These lush and diverse plant species eventually flourish and change, leading to the creation of a healthy high-forest ecosystem. Through this process, they were able to conserve their forest. The non-commercial character of forest resources contributed to the cultivation of small plots of land annually, which reduced pressure on forestland, therefore conserving the forest.

Though there was nothing like a forest guard in pre-colonial Benin, Forest conservation was the prerogative of the *Avbiogbe* guild, otherwise known as the palace society. These were more like land commissioners. They determined boundaries, handled land management, boundary adjustment, and settled boundary disputes.[23] Furthermore, Forest

management was also the priority of each community, but the youth group (*Ikpologhe, Eghele*) was the one that maintained the resources of the community. If one were to go to a community and desire to farm, the community would give them a grant for the land. This grant means permission to farm on a parcel of land and not a claim of ownership over the land. In other words, one could own the crops planted on the land but not own the land. Whereas a community member will be given a parcel of land, if he is the one or his ancestor who deforested it as discussed above, it becomes his property and his family will continue with the land after his death.[24] These are part of Benin forest management techniques that preserved the Benin forest before the Europeans took over. Furthermore, trees were also graded. Trees like Iroko were the preserve of the Oba, and trees like the *Okhan, Ukpekpe*, and Ikhinmwin were managed in such a way that no one could just go there and cut them down. Even to date, permission is sought from the elders of the land, and they could be referred back to the palace before this set of trees is felled because they were planted as shrines and altars, so access to them was restricted.[25] Timber was one of the centre points of the Benin economy, though, in pre-colonial Benin, it was not exported but was used in practically everything the Benin people did, ranging from household to everyday material requirements. Nevertheless, other trees were specifically reserved for royalty; as such, it was only those working for the Oba who had the prerogative to cut down such trees. For instance, the Iroko tree was used to make doors, beams, wooden pillars, rituals and functional objects in the palace. No one can just walk into the forest and cut down trees like the Iroko tree, seeing it as a serious crime, hence the saying *okha gha kha okuekue ghikueyo. Okhan* and *Okuekue* were also trees with both physical and spiritual functions, as every tree has its function. Before these trees are cut down, the forces must be propagated through the Osun priest.

An individual does not walk into a forest and cut down trees as if everything were programmed. For instance, Benin shrines, which serve as a means of forest conservation, had trees of about 600 to 700 years, and such shrines were called ugbo ebo, meaning idol forest farm. Areas such as these were left in their primordial stage and are conserved. And every community has an *Ugbo ebo* set aside for it. Exploiting such areas is highly prohibited, hence the saying that *Ovbokhan ifie ugbo ebo*,[26] meaning a child does not clear an idol farm. In addition, the ugbo ebo could also be referred to as an evil forest, which existed as *ekpekp*e, *akpekpe* in Edo North, and *Okpekpe* in Central Edo. It is a place where a man of no substance, whose people could not afford a burial ground in the cemetery (ite ), was buried, seeing that it was only a man of substance who was buried in his household.[27] Exploiting such an area was prohibited. In a nutshell, shrines (*Ugbo ebo*), *Ite* (cemetery), *Ikpekpe*, sacred woods and areas that contained specific woods for the palace use, as well as the bush fallow system, served as means of forest conservation for the Benin people. It is important to note that these methods of forest conservation were not intended for conservation purposes; it was only in the end that those areas became seen as conserved.

**Forest Policies and Utilisation in in Pre-colonial Benin**

Policies, according to Merriam Webster, are clear plans of action or paths chosen from a variety of options, based on specific circumstances, to guide and define current and future decisions.[28] The conservation law was very rigid, though there were no codified or written policies that guided the exploitation of forests in pre-colonial Benin, but conventional laws did exist. They were conventional in the sense that they were not statutory since the laws or policies were made as the need arose.[29] For instance, to avoid over-utilisation and destruction of certain species and to protect them from going into extinction, conventional laws were made to protect them. Examples of such trees include oil palm trees that have

multiple uses. There was a policy that vested the ownership of oil palm trees in the community, which protected it from being cut down during clearing. The law declared it abominable to cut down oil palm trees during clearing.[30] There was also the law that controlled its exploitation. Going by the law, it was only those who had the usufruct right that was eligible to harvest it. Some other trees, such as the kola nut (*Evbe*) and the Iroko tree (*Uloko*), had religious and spiritual significance. They were believed to be invested with some spiritual powers, which made them good sources of medicine. There were conventional laws that protected these forest products from being indiscriminately exploited. However, some trees naturally have laws that prohibit them from being cut due to their significance, for example *Ikhinmwin* tree (*Neubodia leavis*), which carried the symbol of the land deity and was believed to be the oldest tree on earth. Nobody dared to cut it down, and it was planted in every new site and farm because of its religious and spiritual significance.[31]

One other law that guided the Benin forest was the law that prohibited the cutting down of immature trees. When one fell an immature tree, it was equated to rape, (ogbovbigedu) and the punishment was fatal, as the offender could be executed for cutting down an immature tree.[32] Furthermore, there were some specific trees, such as *Okhan*, Iroko, *Okuekue*, that were reserved for the palace's use only, and there were also others that were strongly spiritual, like *aquobisi*. They were no-go areas (thus the saying goes: *aquobisi no gbe eran no ke*: the tree that kills nearby trees). But other soft wood like mahogany that was used for everyday living could be cut at will without permission. These laws were strongly adhered to for over a thousand years, which is why the British invaders met so many trees when they came.

**Forest Resources Exploitation and Utilisation in Pre-Colonial Benin**

The Benin forest was highly exploited and utilised for various purposes. One of the ways it was exploited was through agricultural practices and other related practices such as building houses and clearing them for market sites, roads, shrines, and village squares, including defence and ambush against external invaders and many others. Some of these activities required the complete clearance and cutting down of grasses and trees. This practice contributed to some extent to the deforestation of the forest. It is important to note that these were done according to need, and not in response to market pressures, which inferred economic value and not commercial value. In other words, though the Benin forest on the eve of colonial rule did not command commercial value, it did command economic value, contrary to the colonial claim that Benin forest was a wasteland and as such did not have any monetary value before British intervention.[33]

According to Obobaifo, timber was used for roofing, doors, pillars, windows, and furniture items like chairs, carving household utensils like mortars, pestles, plates, trays, boxes and knife handles.[34] In addition, timber was used to create religious artefacts like carving of ancestral heads, staves, and icons as well as military and hunting tools like clubs, bows, and handles for guns, arrows, spears, daggers, and shields. Of course, agricultural tools like wooden spades and handles for hoes, machetes, and axes were also made of timber. Modes of transportation, like canoes and paddles, as well as musical instruments like drums and harp boxes, were made of timber. Important to keep in mind that different types of wood were chosen and utilised for their suitability. Furthermore, the bark and leaves of some trees, as well as shrubs and herbs, were used for different medicinal purposes; some were used to produce dyes and Benin native clothes. More so, forest products were used to produce materials that were needed to make thatches, mats, baskets, and ropes. Forest was also used

as a means of defence against external invaders; examples of this can be seen during the Benin invasion. The Benin soldiers created blind trails on the sides of forest roads during the British invasion of 1897, tricking the enemy into an ambush, seeing they were not familiar with the Benin terrain. Bacon explained how useful the forest was to the Benins in their fight against the British, as it posed serious resistance to the British and defence to the Benins, as illustrated in the following lines:

> The enemies (Benins) had overwhelming advantages that they enjoyed from being able to set up ambushes in the underbrush. Because the underbrush is so deep, it is simple for a soldier to hide ten yards off the trail and be completely hidden. Again, the tree trunks provide good cover for the enemy's (Benins) sharpshooters, and well-concealed emplacements in the trees themselves provide very advantageous positions above the normal line of fire.[35]

The Benin forest was useful in the struggle against the British invasion, as well as the conquests of other great Benin leaders. From the ongoing analysis, it can be deduced that every aspect of people's lives revolved around the forest.

**Lumbering in Pre-Colonial Benin**

It is important to note that Benin, on the eve of colonial rule, had lumbering methods. Some good trees, like Iroko and other types of trees that were very good, could be felled by guilds that use them for carving. In the cause of construction of houses, they could go to any village head, Odionwere or enogie to request a particular wood and then they fell this tree, and if need be they compensate the villagers or farmers who own that parcel of land and if not they fell it and chunk it to usable parts. From an interview with Obogie and Obobaifo, three lumbering methods were identified, which include axing (use of axe), firing (use of fire) and wind.[36] More so, Prince Patrick added one more tool: the use of the Iron-Saw. However, Obobaifo and Obogie did not acknowledge the use of the iron saw as a pre-colonial method of lumbering timber. Still, Prince Patrick was able to prove beyond doubt that the Iron-saw

was a pre-colonial tool, hence the reason for adding it as a pre-colonial lumbering method. The Portuguese may have improved on it when they came. According to Prince Patrick;

> Benin had an iron saw that they used in sawing down massive trees, which was also used in trimming them to size. The Benins attained a high level of technology quite early enough to have been able to harvest massive wooden beams of almost 30 to 40 feet long and bring out large blocks of timber of almost 2 feet with over a foot in thickness across (*olila*) used in constructing palaces and the house of great chiefs.[37]

Furthermore, evidence of this ancient iron saw was found when Conan and his team carried out archaeological excavation at the museum area, what is now Airport Road, they found material evidence of a very strong iron culture, meaning Benin had saws that were strong enough to cut down matured Iroko trees by the 10th century.[38] Apart from the iron saw, there were cutlasses, an *asegie* (chisel-like object), and axes. The Benin axe was shaped like the Stone Age head axe, and it was embedded in a very straight and strong wood when the wood was still wet, and the axe dried up with it, making it very strong. With the axe, one could cut down big trees and cut them into usable parts. It should be noted that the Benin axes were imported from outside or were used by people who lived here before the Benins. In other words, the idea of the Benin axe did not evolve independently from the Benins; it was a foreign idea. Evidence of this is found in the axes that were stuck or glued to the roots of trees when uprooted, which means those axes were buried there before those trees grew or were planted, seeing some of these trees were over 600 years old.[39]According to oral tradition, the Axe was one of the tools used to fell trees, and a huge tree could require ten to twenty labourers, taking them twenty to forty hours to axe it down. For those that were too huge, they could axe them even though it takes them some time, days, weeks or even months to achieve. Any member of a village or town who could axe down a certain type of big wood was praised to be a great farmer. Of course, some people were given accolades for being able

to fell certain types of wood. Fire was another lumbering method in pre-colonial Benin. When an individual comes across massive trees, those massive trees by setting fire to the bottom of such trees. Over time, as the farmer controls the fire, it will continue to eat up the tree until it gets to a stage where the wind falls it down naturally.[40] It is evident from above that wind plays an auxiliary role in the felling of trees. However, these lumbering methods require patience and diligence. However, when clearing and felling trees, some species were protected against deforestation. Various timber species existed in pre-colonial Benin. Different species have different functions. According to an interview with one *Owina* at Igbesamwan, Obasohan Osayande, ebony was used for artistic works as it tends to be stronger, and was not used for roofing.[41] The people who worked with timber were generally known as Owina. Some specialised in artistic carving, and those who specialised in domestic utensils and those in house roofing. The artistic carvings were only done inside the palace by the Oba's slaves, and most of the carvings served as presents to royal visitors, as they were only done for the palace and not for sale. After many years of serving the Oba, he will free them to live independent lives and continue their careers.[42] For the roofing aspect, *Uloko* (Iroko), *Apa, Masonia,* mahogany, and *Obobo*, *Ovbekhe* (*Obesh*e) were the species used for roofing. The same species was used for making domestic utensils. It is imperative to note that the roofing method in pre-colonial Benin differed from the method used during the colonial era and in the present. In pre-colonial Benin, timber was not sawn into planks before they were used for roofing. The branches were cut with cutlasses or axes into cylindrical shapes and used wholly after trimming.[43]

**Conclusion**

From the ongoing discussion, it is obvious that pre-colonial Benin had an abundance of forest, which served as the centre point of her economy, as all aspects of the kingdom

revolved around it. Though they had a natural forest, they also had a unique way of maintaining it to maturity, so much that it attracted the attention of the Europeans, which eventually led to the conquest of the kingdom in 1897 during the reign of Oba Ovonranmwen Nogbaisi. There was a rigid system of conserving their forests, these were in the form of conventional laws that prohibited people from cutting down immature trees, sacred trees and the trees reserved for the palace's use. There was a penalty for cutting down immature trees. Some areas were out of bounds from exploitation, and these areas existed in the form of shrines (*Ugbo ebo*), ite (cemetery) and *ikpekpe* among others. People were not allowed to go into these areas to cut down trees except by strict instruction, and performance of certain rituals to appeal to the gods of the forest known as *Osun*. However, ownership was vested in the Oba in the entire Kingdom; thus, the expression "*Oba O' re yan oto*," which means Oba owns the land. In the villages that made up the kingdom, the Enogie, as it is called in the city and Enigie in Esan communities, controls the land on behalf of the Oba and the people. While the *Okao Avbiogbe*, who is the head of the guild of land allotters in the city and the heads of the ward were given the authority to issue rights of use to interested individuals. This *Okao Ovbiogbe* collected a fixed fee for the performances of customary ritual sacrifices to *Otoe* (the earth deity) and *Edion Idunmwun* (collective ancestors of the ward) and for planting the lkhinmwin, regarded as the symbol of the earth. Timber played a significant role in the life of the people, as it was used for varieties of functions, which ranges from roofing, artistic work for palace decoration to domestic utensils. Those who specialised in working with wood were called *Owinas,* the model day carpenters. To engage in the exploitation of timber, the Benis made use of specialised tools such as the axe (oghavan), Cutlass, Iron saw, fire, and wind, as they had early access to the knowledge of iron workings as early as 500 AD. Those who specialise in producing iron tools were called Ogiogun (iron smith).

The Benin forest also served as a means of defence against external invaders. According to Bacon, soldiers lay in ambush in the forest for an intruder. An example of such was during the Benin invasion by British soldiers.[44] The Benin soldiers hid in the forest to fight against their enemies. Asante also argued that the forest was useful to ancient Benin leaders in their wars of conquest,[45] further emphasising the importance of the forest to the Benin people. The process of acquiring a parcel of land by an indigene of a community was to clear a virgin forest, and any virgin forest he disvirginized and farmed on became his property, no matter how large it was, as long as he was able to clear it. Such land became his family heritage, which he could pass over to his first son. In the case of a stranger, he is required to pay a fixed fee to the community of his interest through the Okao Ovbiogbe, after which he is given the right to farm on the land. He is only given the right to farm on the land, but the land does not belong to him, as it is only an indigene that has usufruct of the land. Moreover, when the stranger leaves, dies, or commits an abomination, the land is retrieved and incorporated back into the community. Through these processes, the Benins were able to keep their land and forest in check; as a result, the forest became more abundant in the kingdom, and it eventually attracted the Europeans. Therefore, in 1897, the Benin territory became part of the British colonies, and the process of consolidation started. Different systems and policies were made. These policies and systems include taxation policy, cash policy, which turns the Benin economy into cash economy, among others. With the policies in place, other systems such as the cash crops system, new seedlings, plantation system, agricultural system, forestry system and new farming system, among others. The introduction of the cash system led to the introduction of an international trade and market board. All these were to ensure efficient exploitation of the Benin forest.

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## CHAPTER THREE

## BRITISH FOREST EXPLOITATION AND UTILISATION IN COLONIAL BENIN

The Benin invasion of 1897 led to a dramatic consolidation of colonial rule in Benin, which is now commonly referred to as the "fall of Benin." A deeper understanding of the British interest in Benin, particularly in its forest, requires further inquiry. In November 1896, James R. Philip wrote:

> I am certain that there is only one way out—ejecting the King of Benin from his throne. I am persuaded that using pacifist tactics is currently completely pointless, and the time has come to remove the obstruction based on information that leaves no room for question, as well as the experience of native characters. I thus request your Lordship's permission to travel to Benin City in February of the following year to depose and remove the King of Benin, install a local Council in his stead, and take whatever more steps may be necessary to advance the country's opening up.[1]

The statement above was the foundation upon which the invasion of Benin was laid. Though many have attempted to attribute it to the Benin massacre by the British, who went to the kingdom against the Oba's wish that he did not want to receive any strangers at the moment, due to an ongoing Igwe festival. As genuine as this excuse may seem, it only catalyses their already concluded plan. It is important to note that the plan of invading Benin did not start with Philip but with his predecessor, Sir Ralph Moore, a few years back.

An incident that would have significant impacts on Benin occurred in Britain during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, sparking British interest in the Benin forest. This was when the pneumatic rubber tire was rediscovered by a Scottish man, John Boyd Dunlop, who brought it to public awareness, as it was first invented by Robert William Thompson in 1845.[2] J. B. Dunlop invented a pneumatic tire for his child's bicycle in 1887, and on December 7, 1888,[3] the year of Oba Ovonramwen's accession, it was patented after being tested. The production of the pneumatic tyre on a large scale, starting in 1890, and its

subsequent adaptation for bicycles and then cars increased demand for crude rubber and timber, heightening the desire to enter the dense tropical forest where there were abundant Timber trees.[4] This undoubtedly fuelled the British willingness to communicate with Oba Ovonramwen of Benin to access the territory and forests that were effectively under his rule; however, the Oba strongly objected to this move, as he was not disposed at the time to receive strangers in his Kingdom. Before the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European activities were confined to the coast, though they had tried all means to penetrate the interior.[5] With the effort of John Beecroft, who pursued a policy of non-interference in the government of the coastal state, deposing African rulers with the use of gunboats to promote British interest and commerce,[6] the British were able to subject some towns on the Benin River through bombardment using the consular gunboats. However, Benin City itself and other territories under the direct control of the Oba remained untouched for a long time; as such, Benin's trading pattern continued to be substantially the same as it had been for generations. With some products, being organised under royal monopoly and trade through the Itsekiri intermediaries who had direct access to and interaction with Europeans.[7] Nevertheless, the Oba continued to be in charge of dictating the operations of the commercial groups, which were primarily composed of the higher palace nobility,[8] while at the same time forcing the intermediaries to pay what were known as customary royalties and he could close the markets for days if they did not pay on time. This practice made it difficult for European traders to conduct business along the coast and thwarted their attempts to monopolize the trade at the coast. As a result of this, the British soon demonstrated to the Oba that his economic policies were outdated for the modern world. Besides, the visit of Richard Burton in 1862[9] gave the wrong impression of Benin to the outside world. This he did by painting the Benin kingdom as a society of moral degeneracy, a low level of civilisation, as well as what he described as

their bloody customs.[10] This narrative, which was well publicised in Britain, increased pressure for the territory's incorporation into the British Empire.

From the surface, one will be tempted to believe that the British motive for wanting to integrate Benin into her empire was for humanitarian reason,[11] just as some scholars eventually argued. However, a critical evaluation will bring the truth to light, which can be seen from the events that occurred after Burton's visit. His visit revealed that British pressure on Benin in the 1890s was not motivated by humanitarian concerns but personal interest .[12] This argument can only be acknowledged as partially true at most. From reviewing reports and records of consular visits to Benin, it is evident that the rising effort to bring Benin under the consular authority was motivated by economic interests.[13]

For the British, it was essential to harness Benin's forest resources, which meant breaking into the country. Furthermore, to gain access to these forests, the Oba would need to cede his power, either voluntarily or through coercion, since using the forest freely would require the submission of a strong and obstinate ruler who would not willingly cede his power and allow Europeans to trade freely or enter his territories. Conversely, the consuls perceived the Oba's trade limitations as an instance of autocratic behaviour.[14] To make matters worse, H. L. Gallwey's visit to Benin in 1892 and the unclear treaty he persuaded the Oba to sign that same year played a key role in the Oba's eventual overthrow. This ambiguous treaty was so important to the British that they conferred an award on Gallwey in 1896. The same treaty was so detrimental to Benin that Igbafe tagged it "the beginning of the end of the independence of Benin."[15] This Gallwey’s treaty became the foundation upon which subsequent consuls built. Macdonald, in taking advantage of the Gallwey treaty, wrote in his letter to the foreign office, quoted by Igbafe as follows

> However, the fetish government that regrettably rules the entire kingdom paralyses trade, business, and civilisation... I expect to be able to terminate this situation soon, and I see the treaty that Captain Gallwey so skilfully negotiated as the first step in achieving this much-desired goal.[16]

Macdonald, realising that it was not going to be an easy task to cause the Oba and his chiefs to abolish what he termed barbarous practices, predicted that the solution would be the use of force. From the ongoing discussion, the stage was being set for the eventual overthrow of the Oba of Benin.

In November 1986, James Phillips, vice-consul of a trading post on the African coast, decided to meet with the Oba of Benin to coerce him to abide by the conditions of the treaty that had been negotiated in 1892 but had not been enforced. He formally requested approval from his superiors in London to travel to Benin City, convincing them that trading for ivory would cover the costs of the trip. He, however, did not wait for the response from the United Kingdom. Phillips set off on the expedition in late December 1896 in the company of acting Consul-General James Robert Phillips, Major Copland Crawford, the vice-council of the Benin and Warri districts, Capt. Major general of the Niger Coast Protectorate force. Dr Elliot, the medical officer for the districts of Sapele and Benin, and Alan Boisragon, the police commandant, were among the personnel of the Niger Coast Protectorate administration who participated in this expedition. Additionally, Mr Gordon, the trader for Africa Association, Mr Towey, a local interpreter, Mr Herbert Clarke, a local interpreter, Mr Basilli, a native Benin guide, Mr Baddoo (of Accra, Gold Coast), the chief clerk and photographer for the consul general, Mr Jumbo, the consul general's orderly and civil policeman, Mr Jim were part of Philip team. Kru's manservant under Boisragon all played a crucial role in this expedition. To transport their supplies, food, trade items, presents, cameras, and tents, 180 Jakri porters and 60 Kru labourers were recruited.[17] While on their way around 3 p.m.,

Phillips and his entire company were ambushed in Ugbine village near Gwato. Porters from Africa and British commanders were both killed. Alan Boisragon and Ralph Locke[18] were the only two British survivors. By the end of the week, information about the massacre had reached the United Kingdom. The British Foreign Office authorised military action in response to this incident, which resulted in the punitive expedition from February 10 to 18, 1897.[19] Resulting from this invasion, Benin, one of the most stable and centralised states in West Africa, was annexed into the British Empire and became one of its colonies.

**Evolution of the Forestry Department in Benin Province**

Nigeria, in its evolution as a nation, did not start as a single united country. It began as three separate entities, with each its separate colonial government, with its forest policies and services. After Benin was conquered in 1897, its rich forest became accessible for exploitation, luring a wave of African and European traders and agents. Sir Ralph Moor, being sensitive to the situation on the ground, took advantage of their unchecked exploitative activities and destruction of the forest resources to ask for funding approval to aid the creation of a Forestry Department, this was to support the growth and development of agriculture as well as the protection of the forest resources. After his initial estimate of £1500 was rejected, Moor revised it to between £300 and £400, which was quickly approved with immediate effect for the establishment of the forestry department. In 1899, it was established with the appointment of Mr Peter Hitchen, a former plantation employee of the Royal Niger Company.[20] In 1905, the forestry service or department of Lagos was merged with that of Southern Nigeria and Benin province in particular, which was established in 1899 under the leadership of the high commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor,[21] as mentioned above. However, the merging of the forestry industry was not very effective until after the political union of Lagos with Southern Nigeria in 1906. In 1914, the Northern and Southern protectorates were

amalgamated to form a unified nation. Thereafter, each protectorate was divided into provinces, and each province was made up of divisions, of which Benin province was made up of four divisions. The evolution of the forestry department was necessitated by the need to curtail the damages being done to forest resources such as timber, rubber trees and the like. The idea was a brainchild of the acting governor of the colony of Lagos in the 1890s, Governor George Denton, who saw it necessary to establish a forest department to select and administer government-controlled forest reserves.

Furthermore, the need to diversify the economy, seeing that the economy was hitherto dependent mainly on palm produce, also necessitated the evolution of forestry departments. The moment the colonial office came to terms that the development of the forest industry would boost the colony's economy, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, Chamberlain, was authorised to approve the establishment of a forest department in Lagos. Sir Ralph Moor took advantage of this to express the need for a forestry department in Benin province. With the forest department in Lagos established, the colonial office suggested to the Lagos government that a single forester should head both the forestry activities in Lagos and Southern Nigeria. This was to reduce the running cost of Lagos Forestry Services. On June 28th, 1905, the forestry department of Lagos was merged with that of southern Nigeria; the commissioner to the southern province, Ralph Moor, did not object to this arrangement, seeing that he was confronted with the same challenges as those of Lagos. Without hesitation, Ralph Moor recommended the appointment of Peter Hitchen with a salary of £300 per annum as the chief conservator of Forest.[22] Hitchens's appointment automatically marked the take-off of the Forest Department operation in Benin province.

**The Native Administration**

Establishing the Native Administration meant establishing the indirect rule system. It became necessary, as they needed a channel through which they could penetrate the local people and have easy access to their forest. The system of Native Administration was established in 1914 but did not go into full operation until 1916. The administration was made up of the Native Treasury, the Oba, the Iyase, the Oba's council, the district heads, the Benin ward chiefs, the village heads and the native courts.[23] At the commencement of the administration, the Oba was appointed the titular head of the new system, as he was hardly given real power.[24] During the interregnum, there was a strong contest between Obaseki and Aiguobasimwin over the succession to the throne; eventually, Aiguobasimwin prevailed and became the Oba and took the title of Oba Eweka II. In the same vein, his rival, Obaseki, was made to be his Iyase or adviser.[25] With the establishment of the Native Administration, the ground was set for the exploitation of the Benin forest, as it played a significant role in ensuring the success of forest reserve creation, among other things. The Oba became the head of the native Administration and was accorded recognition as the ruler and owner of all Benin land. As a way of recognising the place of the Oba, the senior conservator of forests, southern provinces, R. E. Dennett, in his memo to the Resident asking the district officer to forward a list of Chiefs to whom the areas they were surveying for reserves belonged expressly declared the Oba as the owner of all Benin land. The resident also concurred with this notion by emphatically stating that the Oba has now been recognised as the granter of land; he has therefore been given the authority to consent to the grant of license.[26] This statement by the residents revealed that with or without the consent of the people, the Oba has the right to approve of any concession. It was at this point that they recognised native law, which bestowed on the Oba the ruler and owner of all the land. Perceiving that the Oba may deprive

other chiefs of their royalties, which might hinder their course, ensured that the Oba consulted with other chiefs who may have been the custodians of many lands for centuries.[27] The irony of this is that it was only in the situation that the native law would be used to foster their agenda, they were acknowledged, while others were thrown away. With the forestry department and forest reserves in place, the ground was set to constitute the valuable parts of the Benin forest into reserves. This process was to be handled by the forestry department. This is because one of the main purposes of establishing the forest department was to create forest reserves. Forest reserves were created through an order known as the Forest Ordinance, which the governor-general must sign before implementation. The necessity to monitor and safeguard forest resources from harmful agricultural practices and unregulated exploitation, alongside the diversification of revenue sources for the colonial administration, prompted state intervention in Forest Management through the establishment of forest reserve policies.

**Creation of Forest Reserves**

Although the Proclamation of 1901 did not provide the government with the legal right to convert forests into reserves, it did set the groundwork for the creation of forest reserves. This forest proclamation gave the high commissioner, who subsequently became the governor, the authority to create forest reserves out of any land that was considered a waste area. They have this notion because of the shifting cultivation that was commonly practiced by the people. The colonial authorities see this practice as a waste of forest resources. H.N. Thompson advocated the need to ensure future supplies of timber as well as non-timber products and other services such as the production of firewood, oil seeds and nuts, fibres, domestic articles and medical plants and the provision of grazing land[28] to be the principal reason for the creation of forest reserves. The creation of forest reserves occurred in two phases. The first phase occurred in 1899 when the forestry department was established, in this

phase, reserves were created without consulting the forest owners, taking advantage of the right of conquest, which vested the right over land in the colonial government, an example of forest reserve, created in this first phase is the P.W.D. Timber Reserve that was created in 1908.[29] When this right of conquest was revoked in 1916, the colonial administration had to get the permission of the natives before establishing additional forest reserves. It is important to note that those whom the colonial government gave their consent and agreed with were the chiefs they installed and declared owners of land, and these lacked the popular support of the people. Creating forest reserves in the Southern protectorate, particularly in Benin Province, was not easy for the colonial government compared to other parts of the country, such as Ibadan, where the Bashorun forest reserve was created in 1899.[30] The enactment of the Southern 1901 Forest Ordinance complicated the process even more due to its inherent weakness of not making provision for the high commissioner or governor to obtain land and convert it to forest reserves. Even when the forest amalgamation of 1905 took place, there was still little or no forest reserve created in Benin province, except the four hundred square miles of forestland that were later constituted into reserves and became known as the Gilli-Gilli game forest reserves under Order No. 4 of 1907.[31] The Gilli-Gilli game and forest reserves were created in 1905 but became a reserve in 1907 under No. 4 of the 1907 Forest Ordinance. Following the Gilli-Gilli game and forest reserve was the Ore River game reserve created in 1908, followed closely by Okomu Forest Reserve created in 1911, and Ologbo Forest Reserve in 1911.[32]

The creation of forest reserves requires a complex process beginning with the survey, which is conducted with all its dimensions put in the right perspective to avoid boundary conflict. Ologbo forest reserve was created by an order made under the forestry ordinance, chapter 95, which started with a survey and was followed by the boundary description. The

Survey department was in charge of this process. After the completion of the survey and boundary description, it was thereafter established by a decree that states, “All that piece of land described in the schedule, shall thereby constitute a Forest Reserve within the meaning of the ordinance”.[33] The meaning of the ordinance was subject to the interpretation of the Resident and the Chief Conservator of the Forest, which the native authority had no choice but to endorse. Though they did not understand the full content of it, they refer to it from time to time for reference. Before the reserve was endorsed, a rough description was conducted, this was later replaced with the final description and published in the original order establishing the reserve in the province in the gazette of 6th September 1911.[34] The boundary of the Ologbo forest reserve commences at the junction of the Rivers Ossiomo and Ogba, it follows the left bank of the Ogba River to a point of 5,780 feet southwest of a cement pillar marked P.B.Q. 743.[35]

The creation of the Ologbo forest reserve was followed by the Jamieson River Forest, which was also created in 1911. Amaho Forest Reserve in Ishan Division was created in 1911, and Ogba River Forest Reserve in 1912,[36] which was the last in this first category. These first categories occurred during the period of interregnum, when the Benin throne was devoid of a king, which lasted for about seventeen years. Following the boom years in the timber trade in 1950 and 1951,[37] other categories of forest reserves were constituted, some of which include the Udo Clan Native Administration forest reserve created in 1940.

To create the Udo Clan Native Administration forest reserve, the necessary steps were taken by the forestry ordinance under section 22. While creating this reserve, the rights of the forest owners were taken into consideration to prevent any potential opposition from the local people. To further make the process opposition-free, the native authority was used by the forestry department to ensure the creation of this reserve and was ceremonially approved by

the governor. Such reserves were constituted as native administration forest reserves. At this time, the native authorities have been sold lies about the importance of creating forest reserves and what they stand to gain. They buy into the lies and, in turn, persuade their people to give up their forest for reserve creation. Those reserves influenced by the native authority were named after them, thus the name ‘’Udo Native Administration Forest Reserves’’ making them feel a sense of importance even though such importance did not exist in reality. This excerpt is the degree that affirms the creation of the Udo reserve by the native authority administration.

> It is hereby ordered under section 22 of the said Ordinance by the Udo Native Authority with the approval of the Governor as follows: All that piece of land, the situation and limits of which are outlined in the First Schedule hereto, subject to the rights affecting the same as set out in the Second Schedule hereto, shall constitute a Native Administration Forest Reserve within the meaning of the Ordinance.[38]

Below is a sketch survey map of the Udo Native Administration forest reserve.

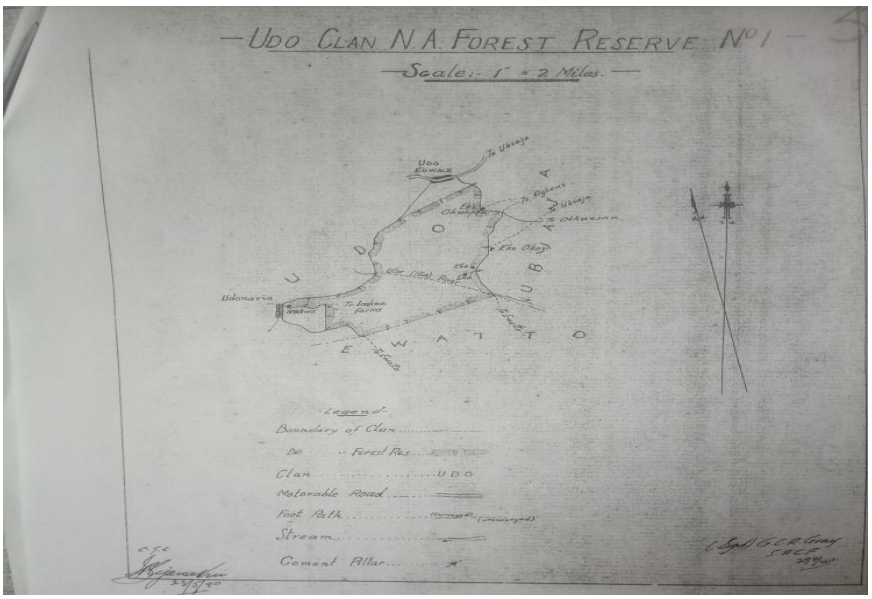


**Figure I: A Sketch Map of the Udo Clan**

**Source:** N. A. I. CSO 26/3, File No. 20790/S.187. Udo Clan Native Administration Forest Reserve.

Another significant forest reserve in the Benin province, located in Kukuruku division, was the Auchi forest reserve, which was created on the 2nd of June, 1942.[39] The native authority administration was once again used as an instrument to create the Auchi forest reserve. To create these reserves, the necessary steps were taken by section 22 of the Forestry Ordinance. It was brought into effect under section 23 of the said ordinance by the Auchi native authority and approved by the governor in 1942.[40] This process was done to caution any potential opposition and give it legitimacy. The degree that affirms the creation of this reserve states that "a forest reserve to be called the Auchi Native Administration Forest Reserve shall consist of all that piece of land situated in the Auchi Clan, land in the Kukuruku Division of the Benin Province containing 23 square miles or thereabouts".[41] It was drafted on a map as follows;

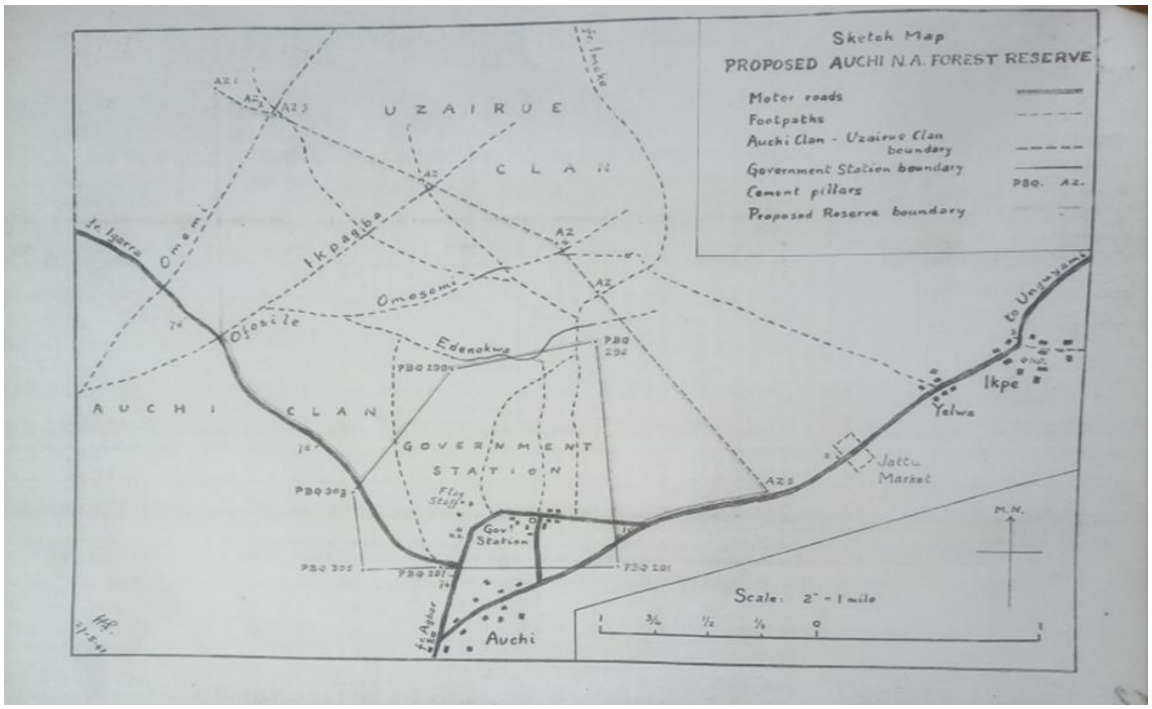


**Figure II: Sketch map of proposed Auchi Forest reserve.**

**Source**: N. A. I., CSO 26/3, file No. 20790/S. 237. Auchi Clan Native Authority Forest Reserve.

In addition to the above, other forest reserves were created, including Ebue Native Administration Forest Reserve, Ekiadolor Native Administration Forest Reserve, Usonigbe Native Administration Forest Reserve and Ekenwan Forest Reserve.[42] These sets of forest reserves were created in 1936. Furthermore, the Obaretin Extension Native Administration Forest Reserve was constituted under order No. 32 in 1937[43], the Ologbo Extension Native Administration Forest Reserve was constituted under order No. 36 in 1937,[44] Ehor Extension Native Administration, and Iguobazuwa Extension Native Administration were created in 1936.[45] Furthermore, Sapoba and Okomu forest reserves were created in 1912, Ogba River forest reserve in 1916, Obaretin forest reserve was created in 1923, Ohosu and Owan forest reserves were both created in 1928.[46]

Note that Extension Native Administration forest reserves are different from the usual Forest Reserves. The extensions were additional reserves that were given to the Native Administration. In addition, all those Forest Reserves named after the Native Administration were given to the Native Authority to oversee in 1937, but were later taken away from them in 1940.[47]

To convince the native authority to agree to the creation of more forest reserves, they were promised that to would hand over to them the already existing forest reserves to oversee. The native authority agreed to this, and in 1937, they were given the right to oversee the already created reserves with their intended benefits and challenges. However, this did not last beyond 1940, when the contract was terminated by another forestry ordinance stated in the section of the Forestry ordinance that ceased the right of the Native Administration over Forest Reserves. The excerpt below contains the ordinance that ceased the right to oversee forest reserve extensions from the Obaretin Native authority in 1940.

> Under section 28 of the Forestry Ordinance, 1937, it is hereby order by the Benin Authority with the approval of the Governor that those lands which were constituted as Obaretin Extension Native Administration Forest Reserve by Order No. 32 made in the Supplement to Gazette No. 80 of 1937 shall from the date hereof cease to be a Native Administration Forest Reserve.[48]

This same order applies to the Ologbo extension Native Administration Forest Reserve and every other extension forest, but under different order numbers. The ironic part of these orders was that the Oba (Oba Akenzua II), the traditional ruler of the people, was used to draft these ordinances.[49] As a result, the people had no option but to comply. However, this attitude exhibited by the Oba almost made him tyrannical and will eventually lead to great opposition in the years to come.

**Forest Policies in Benin Province**

The enactment of forest policies was not peculiar only to Benin province, as it was an extension of the policies governing the whole nation, with little variations from different provinces. During the early years of Nigerians' trade in timber, its exploitation was not subject to any form of government regulations, as timber dealers dealt directly with the chiefs by making agreements with them, since they were regarded as the custodians of these forests. In most cases, this was done through concessions with a written agreement from the chiefs that gave the dealers the right to obtain timber from any of the forest areas covered by the agreement, but unfortunately, both the European and the local chiefs abused this strategy.

On the part of the Europeans, the terms they presented were not clear to the chiefs, which invariably led to them being exploited unduly, while the chiefs, on the other hand, could sell one parcel of land more than two times to different people. In some cases, they also concealed lands from European dealers without the knowledge of the original owner; these eventually led to confusion and chaos when the rightful owners surfaced. In this case, the European traders always ran at a loss. The need for a government policy to establish order in

the timber business is highlighted by the haphazard manner in which the concessions were made, the issues that followed thereafter, the British interest in bureaucratic expansion and the desire for laws and order.[50] To handle the challenges, some policies were enacted, including forest protection policies/measures, Timber license policies, forest Reserve policies, and Revenue policies.

Forest protection policy, as expressly stated in a letter by the Director of Forest in Ibadan, dated November 6th, 1933, to the Secretary of Southern Provinces, and signed by A. C. Burns, the Acting Chief Secretary to the Government, was enacted to satisfy the interest of the Europeans. An excerpt of the letter:

> Concerning my letter No.28 619/35 of the 13th of September addressed to the Secretary, Southern Provinces, regarding forest protection, a copy of Which was forwarded to you under cover of my letter No.28759/10 of the 23rd of September, I am directed by the Governor to forward to you a copy of the reply which has been received. I am to request you to consider in the light of the views expressed therein, whether the original recommendations which you made in your Confidential letter No. 189/724 of the 24th of February as to the conditions to be attached to the protection of forest can in any way be modified to make the scheme less unattractive to the people without rendering it ineffective. It must be fully recognised that it is essential to secure the confidence and help of the native Administrations, and His Excellency commends the suggestion of negotiating a working arrangement with the Oba of Benin and the Oshemowe of Ondo in the first instance as an example to the other native Administrations. It is appreciated that satisfactory operation of an effective scheme will necessitate a material increase in the European Forestry staff.[51]

While the Europeans sought to protect the forests, they also sought a way to incorporate more European staff into the forest scheme, acknowledging that implementing an effective protection scheme would require an increase in the European Forestry staff. This, therefore, means that a limited number of Benins will be incorporated into the system. Knowing the resistance that such an arrangement can engender, they came in such a manner

as to secure the confidence and help of the native Administration, which they also filled with chiefs who are obedient to them. They try to make it attractive to the people so as not to attract resistance from them. It is therefore clear that the various forest policies, as will be discussed, were purposely and consciously enacted solely to serve the interests of the Europeans. The reply to the above letter explains in detail the dynamics of this forest protection policy.

> I consider that if 75% of the fees collected on all reserved, protected, or licenced timber areas which came into existence after the restrictions imposed by the forest ordinance were removed, Were given to the Native Administration concerned, there would be no great difficulty in inducing the Native Administration to agree willingly to the formation of further reserved and protected areas. I think that in most cases, they would be willing to accept our Supervision and technical control. Given the above considerations, it will, I fear, be extremely difficult to induce the native Administration to accept willingly both further restrictions and loss of revenue. I would therefore ask for authority to inform such native Administrations as have had the restrictions imposed by the forestry Ordinance removed, because off their having given up 25% of their land area as reserves, that in the case of such areas as are protected, reserved, or licensed after the removal of the restrictions imposed by the Forestry Ordinance, 75% of the revenue (fees) collected in such areas will be paid to them.[52]

From the above, it is clear that the forest protection policy was unappealing to the native authority, especially as they have already given up 25% of their land to forest reserves, and accepting this policy will mean accepting more restrictions and giving up the revenue they currently receive from the forests under their jurisdiction. This, coupled with the racial discrimination against the Benins, engendered strong resistance against the Europeans. Some significant aspects of this policy are that it enabled the creation of forest reserves, restricted the local people's access to their forest, and at the same time prohibited the cutting of high forest.[53]

The timber license policy, otherwise known as the concession policy[54] contained a monopolistic tendency, particularly as the High Commissioner alone issued licences and granted the concessions for the exploitation of forest products.[55] This policy was made to regulate the extraction and trade of timber resources. Its sole purpose was to control the exploitation of timber, ensure proper forest management, and generate revenue for the colonial government. This policy was targeted at timber companies operating in the region of Benin province, both European and local firms, as they were required by this policy to obtain a valid licence before having access to the forest to extract timber, without which they were denied access.

To make the application and granting of licences accessible, the divisions under the province were divided into timber areas in which licence applications attract certain fees. This policy was contained under the forestry regulation No. 10/1916.[56] In other words, it was enacted around 1916 when the Native Administration came into operation.[57] In addition, the timber license policy established guidelines for sustainable logging practices, including limitations on the quantity, size, and age of timber that could be harvested in a given season; therefore, the companies were instructed to adhere to these guidelines to guarantee reforestation or regeneration and conservation practices to prevent deforestation. The licence policy was enforced through the forest department, who were vested with the authority to monitor and regulate the process of timber extraction, and offenders were required to pay fines and, in some cases, the licence was withdrawn or revoked.

The forest reserves policy was an important policy that aided forest resource exploitation. This policy was enacted to regulate the exploitation of timber resources, create forest reserves, protect useful timbers, and conserve the environment, such as preventing deforestation and protecting biodiversity. It also restricted the people being colonised's access

to their forests. It was therefore painful that the colonial policies prevented the forest owners from liberal access to the inherited resources they had groomed for thousands of years. To make things worse, the local people were labelled thieves when caught in the act of felling trees from their farmland without authorisation from the forest department. They were punished by either paying a fine or replanting multiple trees in the place of one tree that was cut or burnt for farming purposes, and not even for sale.[58] By installing a specialised log control system in 1951 to oversee the transportation of timber, they were able to keep track of the trees felled illegally by the locals. The colonial government took this control system so seriously that it was reported in 1951 in the annual report of Benin Province,[59] The trade in illicit logs, both those that were taken illegally, meaning trees that were felled without permits and those that were stolen after being felled. The widespread log theft grew so problematic early in the year that the forest officers launched a special inquiry. To further curtail the situation, the Sapele department established a unique log control organisation with a Development Officer in Charge. It was, however, still difficult to stop the unlawful felling, particularly of Abure in the marsh area, and it could not be said that efforts to do so were successful. The forest reserve policies were enacted to control the above anomalies.

The Forest Revenue policy was enacted to foster the British agenda. This policy was channelled toward the generation of income by the colonial government for the metropolitan economy, thereby satisfying one of its main objectives in the region, and this took various forms and dimensions. Colonialism, according to Usuanlele, is the transformation of the pre-colonial economy, which is primarily a natural economy geared towards the production of household needs, into a money economy through monetary and fiscal policies.[60] This definition is rightly expressed in this policy. One of the ways this policy was executed was through direct taxation of forest or agricultural products, which was later changed to taxation

in cash. The Revenue policy also finds expression through royalties from timber licences, and other forest activities, and the use of forced labour to cut down costs. Furthermore, to maximise the generation of revenue, the forestry department was established primarily to ensure control over future Supplies of timber and other forest resources on profitable terms to both the colonial administration and capitalists' interests. These objectives of generating revenue and profit for the administration and colonial firms, respectively, became the major preoccupation of the Department, while the protective function was largely secondary.

**Rights of the Forest Owners**

Though the policies discussed above were meant to foster the agenda of the colonial government, there were instances where it recognised and accorded some rights to the local people, especially those who lived close to the forest areas and specialised in agricultural practices. Provisions were made for them to have access to certain forest resources, such as non-timber products, to meet their subsistence needs. It is also crucial to emphasise here that the wishes of the native owners of the land were put into consideration to some extent by consulting them before a licence was granted. The acting chief secretary to the government of Benin province, in his writing to the secretary of the southern province, acknowledged the need to consult the people before approving any licence application to contractors. The excerpt below athirst to this;

> I am directed by the office administering the Government to forward a copy of a letter received from the director of forests, and to ask for His Honour's comments regarding Messers MacNeil Scott & Company's application, and regarding the Director of Forests' recommendation as to the guarantee. It is observed that the Director of Forests does not mention the wishes of the native owners of the land, and I am to ask for an assurance that they have been consulted in this matter.[61]

Before approving any application, the forestry department makes sure that there are no any form of political objections and that the grantors are willing to grant the licence. This, therefore, means that the rights and will of the local people were not neglected, as some provisions, though limited, were made for them. The rights given or approved were determined by the location and occupation of the people. In the first instance, the locals who lived within the close range of the forest were given the right of way to move to and fro all the existing parts and roads. However, this right was limited only to the walkable paths. In addition, more rights were given to those who were adversely affected by the forest reserve policies and to some prominent chiefs. In Okhuesan in Esan division, some specific quarters and camps such as the Egwale, Idumukode, Eko Ayaya, Idumoka, Idumuogo, Ogbe and Olenokwa, whose major occupation was farming, were given the rights to collect tie-tie, palm oil produce (*Elaeis guineensis*), palm wine (*Raphia vinifera*), bamboos and the fruits of all cultivated trees and the native mango (Owi).[62] They were also given the right to cut roofing poles, yam sticks from the following trees: *Ohogo* (Trema), *Urawan*, *Asivin* (*Phyllanthus*), *Adama*, *Obidudu, Eranforhal* (*Scottellia*), *Uladin Utatan (Harungana*). Other rights include the right to collect grasses, the right to collect bush ropes, the right to hunt, the right to draw water, the right to collect all dead wood for firewood, and the right to cultivate.

The fishing right was given to Eguakide of Idoa, whose major occupation was fishing, though this right was limited to the Imafidon Stream, where he carried out most of his fishing expeditions. In other words, he was not allowed to fish in other streams not permitted by the law, subject to the provisions of Chapter 99, Laws of Nigeria.[63] In addition to the right to fish from Imafidon stream given to Eguakide of Idoa, he and his descendants were equally given the rights to reside and farm in a defined area, as stated in this excerpt:

> To Eguakide of Idoa and his descendants, the right to reside and farm an area of approximately 16 acres bounded as follows: From a beacon situated on the path leading to Eko Eguakide from the Okhuesan-Agbor motor road near mile 6 by a line cut on a true bearing of 29° 40' for 1,680 feet; thence by a line cut on a bearing of 119° 40 for 380 feet; thence by a line cut on a true bearing of 209° 40° for 1,840 feet; thence by a line cut on a true bearing of 299° 40′ for 380 feet: thence by a line cut on a true bearing of 29° 40' to the starting point.[64]

Moreover, the rights to farm and reside were given to Arebu, Ufua and Aziku of Eko Okuze and their descendants with a definite measurement of approximately 25.5 acres of land marked by a beacon situated on the Agbor-Ubiaja axis. Batiede of Okhuesan Egwale, Ayaya of Eko Ayaya and their descendants were also given the right to reside and farm an area of elephant grass (*Ogodogbo*) about 16 acres in extent at Batiede's camp near the Oria Stream.[65]

These ordinances may appear to be an act of benevolence to the local people, but a critical observation will show that this is purely an act of robbery of the local people by the colonial government. The people who once had unlimited access to farm and dwell in any part of their forest were now told where and where not to dwell and cultivate. The forest products to harvest were also dictated to them by strangers. It was like a case of a strong man imprisoning a weak man in his own house to spoil his goods. In addition, it will be observed that the rights ordinances were drafted not to affect the British interest in the region. The rights given to the people were limited to domestic and subsistence purposes only, as they were only allowed to take what they could use to meet their personal needs, prohibiting them from commercial purposes. However, the people were not left empty-handed. On second thought, was the colonial government expected to have done more than what they did? Michael Crowder's argument rightly addresses this question, as he strongly argued that the colonialists were not out for the interest of Africans in his statement.

> Whatever benefits the Africans gained from the colonialists were by coincidence.[66]

From this statement, it is therefore clear that what the people benefited from these ordinances was not intended to be an end in itself but a means to achieving their ends, as the ultimate aim of whatever they did was to foster their aims. They aimed to get the raw materials that the European industries needed. This need for raw materials became intense during the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century.

The Industrial Revolution in Europe in the 19th century, especially the discovery of tyres for both bicycles and vehicles by Robert William Thompson in 1845 and John Boyd Dunlop in 1887,[67] as well as the invention of the vehicle, played a significant role in stirring up the interest of the British in the Benin forest. This is because most vehicle bodies were made of timber products. This invention boosted European interest in Benin forest resources, especially in rubber and timber products. Therefore, the resources from Benin Forests played a pivotal role in Europe, especially in British economic and industrial development. Knowing the importance of the Benin forest to their economy and industrial development, they set up well-structured mechanisms such as timber concessions, forestry ordinances and forestry policies, which favoured the colonial government and private companies, but at the detriment of the indigenous people.

The transportation of timber from the Forest to the point of exportation was a very crucial aspect of timber exploitation. Because of the shortage of mechanised means of transport, rivers and streams became invaluable means of transporting timber from a point of harvest to a point of export. In the absence of mechanised transport in the early stage of the timber trade, man-hauling of logs was the common practice, especially for the timber areas not close to the river. However, for the areas close to the river and streams, Water transport was crucial to the extraction of lumber because of issues with overland transportation, besides

it was more efficient than man-hauling. Concessionaires, therefore, prefer to have their forest mill built near creeks and rivers. Nonetheless, a minimum amount of hand hauling was required before logs could be floated to the forest mill.[68] Before timber was floated, some preparations were required, starting from the felling. During this early period of timber exploitation, axes were still used to cut down timber because the massive girths of the trees made mechanised cutting nearly impossible. One positive outcome of this was that expert Benin tree-fellers like the Owinas[69] were in high demand due to the impracticability of adopting mechanical felling devices, which created jobs for them. According to Patrick Osafonwen, it required two men in two working days to fell a tree.[70] After felling the tree, another group of labourers were employed to cut it into logs, then followed by another set who squared the logs, which was done by cutting off a series of wedge-shaped blocks of wood from the log. This stage was followed by another group who smoothed the squared logs. Squaring of logs was important because it reduced the weight of the log, therefore making it more controllable by the push and shove methods employed in extracting it from the forest.[71] In addition, squaring eliminated the portion of the trunk most vulnerable to decay and insect infestations during its arduous journey from the forest to Europe's timber markets. It also provided improved ship hold storage.

That being said, squaring also had some disadvantages. It was less economical, seeing that it generated a lot of waste. Fragments recovered during squaring revealed that a significant amount of the material in each cut log was decaying. Nonetheless, even though it was wasteful, squaring seemed to have been the most practical way to remove wood from the forest at the time, given the mode of transportation. Moreover, logs' squaring had a further drawback beyond the one already described. The sapwood that would have protected the heartwood "from abrasions and scars which the logs are likely to sustain in floating many

miles down rocky rivers to the coast" was cut off since it took three to five weeks to float on a river that travelled slowly. However, a fast-moving river only takes a few days.[72] The logs were therefore prepared for hauling out of the forest along wooden tracks made into the forest from the nearest river capable of floating logs after they had been squared and adzed. It takes men of valour to haul the logs to the Riverside, where they are concentrated and made into rafts, and a raft contains forty to a hundred logs. While doing this, the men kept up their spirits by heaving and chanting in unison as they hauled the log to the riverside. To aid the dragging of the log, the roller was rubbed with poto-poto (wet mud) or crude palm oil.[73] Based on their skill and specialised knowledge of the waterways, the Ijaws dominated the log floating business.

There were certain drawbacks to these techniques of moving logs from the forests to the sawmill or the exporting location. For instance, logs could only float in shallow rivers during the rainy season when the rivers were flooded. If the rains stopped, a shallow river would not have enough water to support the logs. Therefore, the logs would simply have to wait until the next rainy season.[74] Occasionally, it might take up to three seasons before logs could be floated out. The wood's quality would decline as a result of such protracted delays. Furthermore, timber floating was a dangerous enterprise as logs could break away from the raft and drift down to the coast, and be lost. Moreover, if the logs remained afloat in water for too long, they were destroyed by worm-infested brackish water.[75] Furthermore, not all logs would float. Some that were called sinkers were too heavy to be floated, and therefore, most concessionaires were not interested in them. There were, however, some traders who exported them by floating them out by securing one to two buoyant logs. The floatable logs supported the unfloatable ones. However, where there were more sinkers than floaters, most of the former could not be exploited owing to the insufficient number of the latter. This crude

method of transporting timber from the forests followed some stages, including the axing down of the tree and cutting into logs. The squaring is followed by the smoothing, and then the hauling by the able-bodied men to the Riverside for floating. In 1907, a mechanised method of hauling timber was introduced in the Sapele area.[76] This mechanised method only replaced the hauling and not the movement across the river. By 1911, there was further improvement through the introduction of tramways and traction engines, which were used for hauling timber on the wagon to be taken to the Riverside for floating. Not too long after, caterpillars were seen everywhere, which further advanced timber exploitation into forest areas that were far away from Riverside.

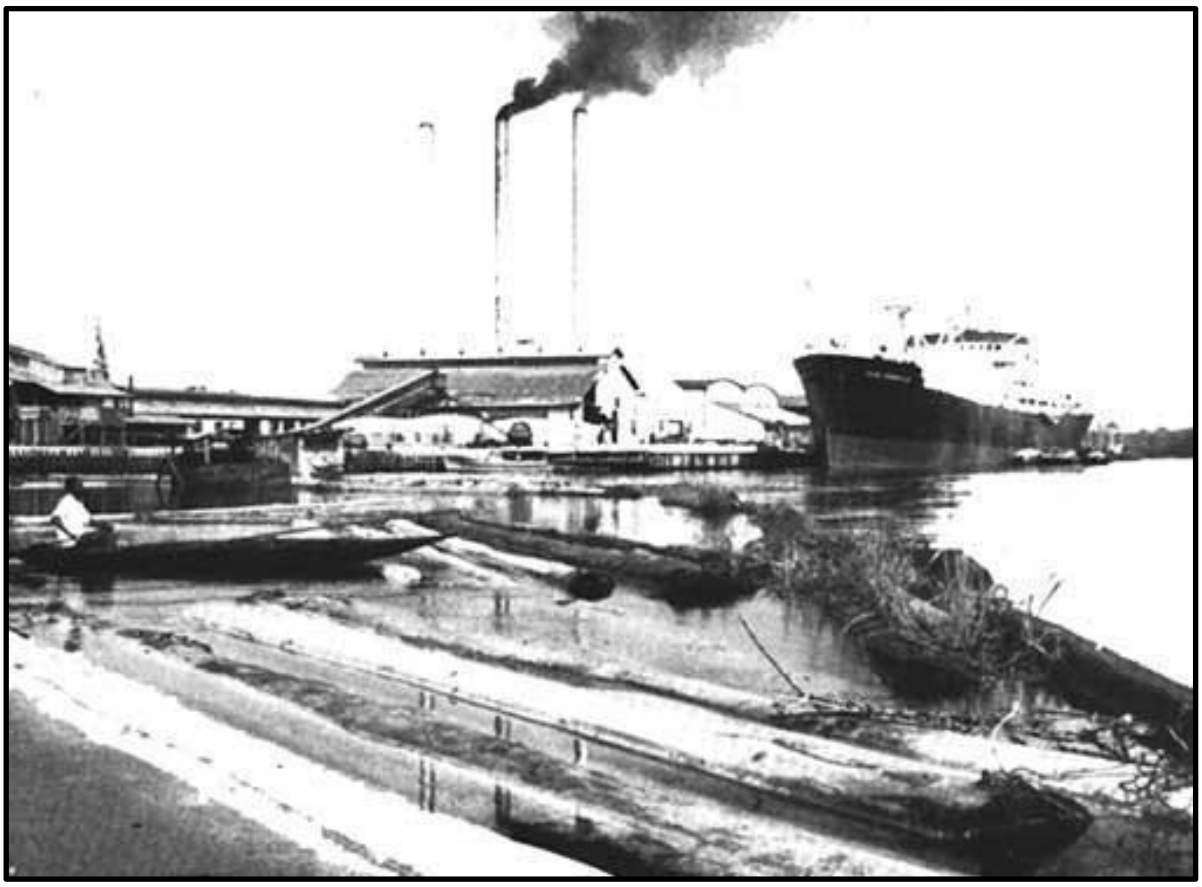

**Figure III: Floating of logs**
**Source:** Buckle, "Timber Operations in West Africa", 1958.

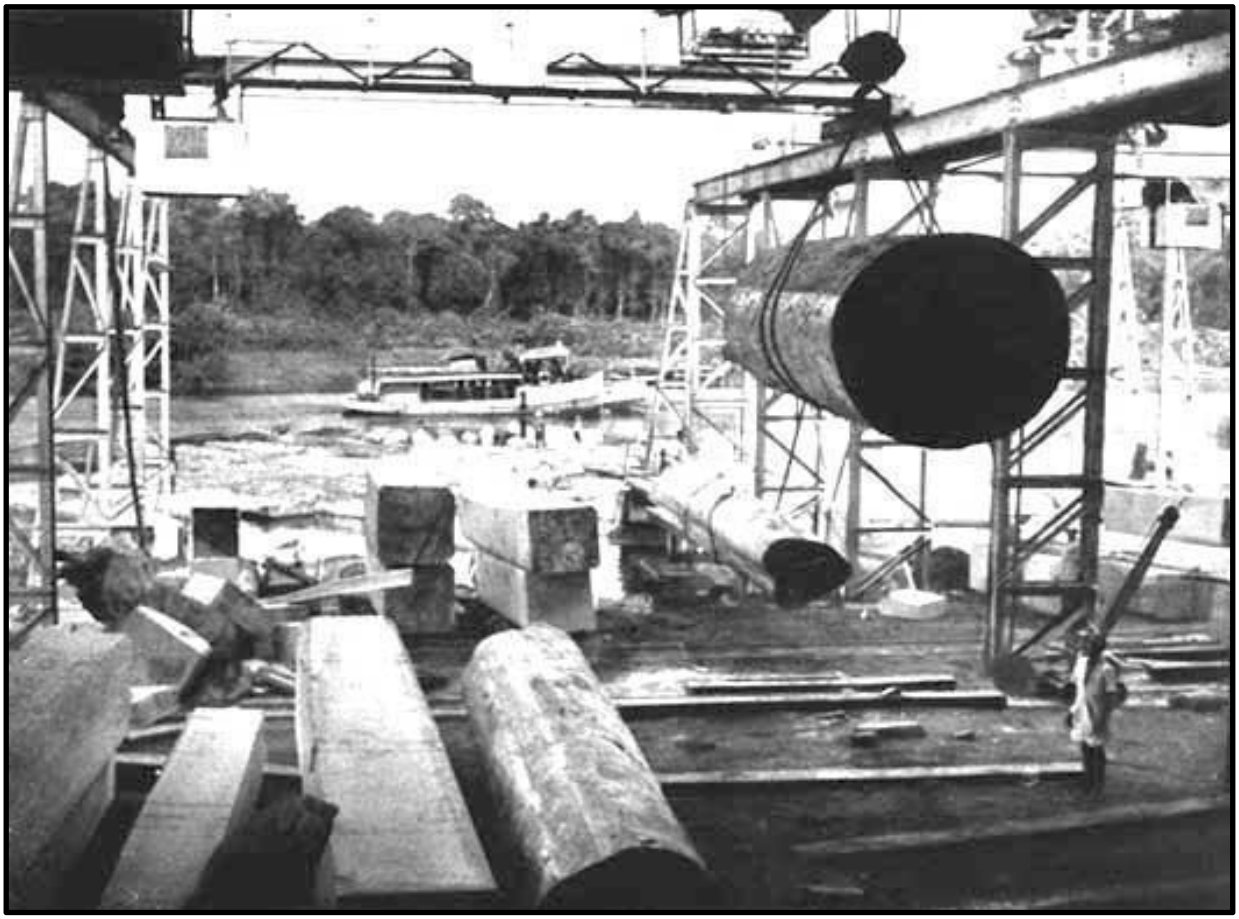

**Figure IV. Log taken into a sawmill from the river**
**Source:** Buckle, "Timber Operations in West Africa", 1958.

**Evolution of Sawmill and Timber Exploitation**

To ease the exploitation and trade in timber, some techniques and strategies were introduced into the system. Before the advent of colonial rule in Benin, the people made use of crude implements in exploiting their timber resources. Examples of such implements include the axe, the cutlass, the iron-saw, fire, and wind, as already discussed in chapter two. However, the colonial governments brought in technologies that were more sophisticated for the same purpose, as shall be discussed in this section.

Many factors contributed to the emergence of the sawmill in Benin. For example, many of the best woods found in the province were extremely heavy, which made it difficult for such woods to be floated; as such, the need for sawmills to be established in a forest

reserve or close to a forest reserve, to saw those logs into planks for easy movement. Before the 1930s, timber processing was mainly done by local sawmillers. But in 1937, some steps were taken to ensure the establishment of advanced sawmills to cater for the needs of the local market in the region.[77] It took a serious investigation to find out the best type and size suitable for the environment, as well as the required cost. The excerpt below is a portion of the report from the investigation

We consider that all possible steps should be taken by the Government to encourage a local sawmilling industry to supply the needs of the local market. The information presently available as to the size, the type and cost of the sawmill required is insufficient. The most satisfactory method of obtaining this information is, in our opinion, that Mr. MacGregor who is about to proceed on leave, should take with him all the information available regarding local market requirements and the size and type of timber to be used and that he should obtain advice in the United Kingdom and from Malaya as to the type of sawmill that is most suitable to conditions in Nigeria. On receipt of Mr. MacGregor's report, the Government should review the whole position and consider the establishment of one or more sawmills as demonstrations to the local saw-millers.[78]

The sawmills that came out of this investigation were portable or semi-portable plants operated by steam power. The main function was to convert large logs into sawn timber suitable for joinery, building, construction works and box making. While other woodworking, such as planning and grooving, was to be done outside the mill. Knowing very well the objectives of colonial administration, which were to maximise profit, is enough to explain why they came up with such a recommendation. The Mill was portable enough to be dismantled and reassembled without heavy expenditure. The mill was to remain on one site for a minimum of five years and must be operated in or near the forest to minimize the cost of

transportation of waste to the minimum. To distinguish these mills from others, they were called forest mills, as can be seen from the stress of transporting logs from the forest through hauling and floating. Forest mills were indeed helpful as they saved stress and cost. Amazingly enough, it was the first of its kind in Africa. At the time, there was no such African-owned mill in Nigeria that answered to the description of a forest mill.

About three conditions were considered to determine the type of forest mill suitable for the region. These conditions include market requirements, class and availability of timber resources.[79] Before the establishment of forest mills, pit-saw planks met the civil work's needs for sawn timber for carpentry, building and other purposes. Though pit-sawn products were not the best for the population, hence a need for other forest mill-saw timber products.

Exploitable forests were grouped into two broad classes, which include soft and hardwoods, and a forest mill was designed to saw and market both classes of timber, as mill-sawn timber was preferred to pit-sawn timber. The softwoods were suitable for box making, and if treated, for building and general utility purposes. While the hardwoods were suitable for constructional purposes and the railway. However, both soft and hardwoods are susceptible to destructive insect attacks. For instance, in the tropics, the softwood class is particularly susceptible to the attacks of destructive insects, while hardwoods are liable to split and fissure. Both types of damage occur before and after conversion. Before conversion, the remedy is to store logs in water between the time of felling and milling. After conversion, the timber may require some form of preservative treatment and careful stacking and seasoning in sheds. A Mill unit, therefore, will be incomplete without provision for water storage of logs, preservative treatment of certain timbers, and seasoning sheds.

It is important to note that the forest mills were not meant to saw timber for export but for local markets, except when it is properly equipped and organised for such a purpose,

which was rare in most cases. It was realised that the forest mills could not meet the demand of even the local people. Therefore, based on the advice obtained from the United Kingdom, when Mr MacGregor, the conservator of forests, went on leave in Malaya, two alternatives were proposed. First was the Scotch mill, and second was the Major Chipp's Standard Rack Bench Mill.[80] The cost of installing a forest mill from the report by the conservator of the forest was £2300,[81]. As a result, such outputs were expected to cover the costs within a short while. To make sales of timber easy in the market and attract a good sum, it was categorised into three classes in terms of economic value. The classification includes the Winners class, which was labelled as 'A'. The second was the field class labelled as 'B', and the final class was the non-starter class labelled 'C'.[82] To meet the demand for exportation, advanced sawmill facilities were installed with better-trained European operators and technicians, primarily to turn out sawn timber of the highest standard of manufacture for export and sale in the luxury markets. And the ones that did not turn up as expected to meet export standards were dumped at the local market, as their owners were not particularly concerned, to cater for local needs.

The first kind of sawmilling in Nigeria was the pit sawn, which came into existence as early as 1901 in the Lagos colony.[83] Its mode of operation was tedious and risky. It was a two-man operating system that involved the use of a long handsaw. The log being sawn is supported on a long frame at some distance off the ground. One man stands inside the pit (hence the name pitsaw) while the other man stands on the log. The sawing is done with successive up and down movements of the handsaw.[84] However, around 1907, the colonial administration brought into the system a more mechanised sawmilling system in Sapele.[85] In this early hour of timber exploitation, most of the sawn timber in the entire federation came

from these two mills. The Lagos mill was government-owned while the Sapele mill was a commercial undertaking.

To take full control of timber exploitation in the province, the colonial government introduced timber concessions. A timber concession is an area of forest allocated to an individual or firm to exploit the timber in it. This concession is secured through a licence, which is a legal agreement between the concessionaire, forest owners, the forestry department and a government representative, who is usually the governor-general. These concession policies were fashioned in a way as to give the colonial government officials power to control the timber exploitation and relegate the local chiefs and their customary structure of land ownership to the background. The concession policy was brought into effect through the proclamation, which is an official announcement to pass a decree into effect. The moment such an announcement was made, the policy became binding. The British government, through this official announcement, made its policy as well as its amendment known to the public.

In the first instance, under the Forest Proclamation of 1901, a concession was not to exceed seven years with an application fee of £3.[86] It was reduced to five years in 1903 when it was amended. According to Egboh, the first proclamation of 1901 was more favourable to both foreign timber traders and the local forest owners, as more stringent measures were introduced in the amendment.[87] For example, the height of timber to be cut was increased from nine feet to twelve feet, which was good for the timbers to mature, but on the other hand, the area for the concession was increased from 9 Square miles to 100 square miles,[88] which was detrimental to the local people. In addition, the concessionaires were not to leave the forest for more than four months without any exploitative activities going on in the

concession areas, and in a situation where any firm was found faulty, the concession licence was withdrawn from such a firm.

When the Proclamation of 1901 was released, over twenty concessions were applied for and approved.[89] Approximately 300 logs were exported from Benin province in that same year. In the southern province, a concession covering roughly 7,978 square miles was applied for between March and September of 1903. The Benin province provided the majority of these concessions. The rush for concessions was so great that by the end of 1904, the entire Benin province had been applied for two times over to the extent that applications overlapped, which resulted in a great deal of conflicts in an attempt to determine who should be given the concession. This whole saga resulted in a series of petitions as one firm petitioned another. The local Benin timber traders were not excluded from this race. In 1940, some Benin Timber contractors petitioned the District officer over area BC 4, which was granted to Mr. Jackson Ihama, who did nothing to make it exploitable, as it was one of the worst areas in the Benin division. Giving the area to those who did nothing to make it exploitable was the grievance of these local petitioners. Below is a part of this petition;

> We, the undersigned, Benin Timber Contractors Working under the “local Permit system", have the honour to petition Your Honour on the policy which obtains in the Benin Forestry Office as regards timber areas in the Benin Division and to request that arrangements be effected. Whereby the class of timber contractors like ourselves should be granted better opportunities for exploiting the timber forest in our country.[90]

The District officer was the commissioned representative of the British government overseeing the affairs of the colonies on her behalf. He might have granted the concession to Mr. Jackson for some reason. It was observed that there were more contentions for the timber areas concerned, as more than one person or group had already applied for the area. To resolve the issue, the District officer, through the Conservator of Forest, had to use his

discretion by considering some factors to grant the concession to a suitable contractor. In his reply, he indeed mentioned the reasons Mr. Jackson was granted the concession, seeing that he found fault with some of the petitioners. For example, he faulted Mr W. T. Obasiagbon for being unable to pay his timber labour. It was discovered that he had a case of ruthlessly exploiting his labourers.[91] For the remaining ten of the petitioners, only Oronsaye [92] was declared to be qualified to be involved in timber work. For the others, few seem to have had much experience in timber trading, and he therefore concluded that they were not qualified to work the timber plantation. The district officer also spoke in defence of Mr. Jackson Ihama while he was granted the concession. On the final note, the district officer made it clear that the natives who have European firms' financial backing are different from the natives who do not and with this, he made his point clear as he was talking in favour of Mr. Jackson Ihama, who was representing the interest of the British firm. For sure, Mr. Jackson had a European firm's financial backing being a contractor under the United Africa Company.[93] As it was in the character of the Europeans when it comes to dealing with African issues, they are, in most cases, biased. The district officer did not hesitate to adopt this biased stance in handling this issue, confirming the fears of the petitioners. One of the fears of the petitioners was that European firms are using native contractors to gain access to and exploit areas they have hitherto failed to secure. Through this approach, they were able to take over the formerly free area that was surrounded by a non-navigable river, so terrible that everyone ran away from it, as enumerated in paragraph six of the petition:

> We are here protesting against the grant of exclusive rights of areas to any applicant, a native-- who is being used by European Timber Merchants to obtain monopoly rights to which they are otherwise denied. Every Such application should be made public and opinions sought from the public and from native timber contractors who are not Servants of European Concerns. We make this suggestion to ensure fairness to the applicant and in our interest. On the other hand,

> we would strongly recommend that all timber areas - known as "free areas" be left in that condition for the use of enterprising natives working under the "local permit system.[94]

It is thus clear that big European firms used every means possible to secure timber areas for exploitation. Where they could not get it directly, they went for it indirectly through gullible natives. From the ongoing discussion, it is pertinent to discuss some of the Timber licences and concessions that ensued during the period under consideration and the different firms involved.

**Timber Firms/Contractors**

Liverpool Limited was a major European timber contractor in Benin province and on the sixth of December 1916, the firm through the Miller brothers applied for a timber licence for an area on the Osse' River and the Ologi Creek, also referred to as area No. 10.[95] Below is an excerpt of the application by the Miller Brothers of Liverpool Limited;

> We herewith beg to apply for a timber licence for an area on the Osse' River and the Ologi Creek in the Benin district of the southern provinces, known as the situation, boundaries and general limits of which are shown in the sketch attached to this application. The native owners of the land are Chief Ojumo of Benin City and Chief Osualele of Benin City. The area in question is less than 100 Square miles in extent. Stamps to the value of £3 in payment of application fees are enclosed herewith. This area was licensed to us before, but owing to our inability to fully comply with the Forestry regulations providing for the continuous Working of the area, the licence was cancelled. You were, however, good enough to inform us in your letter… that a re-application for the licence could be made, and we trust it will be restored to us in due course.[96]

By this application, the Miller brothers of Liverpool Limited on the 6th of December 1916 applied for a timber area of about 100 Square miles with a sum of £3. From the above application, one can see that before a licence is applied for, the licensee must have surveyed the interested area to have a good knowledge of the area, such as the native owners and the availability of the area. Figure III represents the map of the area the Miller Brothers of

Liverpool applied for in the area on the Osse River and the Ologi Creek, owned by one Chief Ojumo and Chief Usualele of Benin.

The licence application also created an avenue for generating royalties for the colonial administration, as the firms and contractors were required to pay some fees based on the volume and value of timber they wanted. This indicates that the timber licence was a source of revenue to the colonial government. It is Important to note that no licence was granted without the consent of the Oba, as he was recognised as the grantor of the licence.[97] The senior conservator of Forests, R. E. Dennett, when addressing the timber licence application of the Miller Brothers of Liverpool Limited, acknowledged this Oba position. In his Memo, the Resident asks the District officer to forward a list of Chiefs to whom the areas they were interested in belonged. The reply was that the Oba has now been recognised as the grantor of concessions and therefore has the legal power to consent to the licence grant.[98] The British government did this by acknowledging the native law that bestowed on the Oba the ruler and owner of all the land. This authority was recognised when the Benin Monarch was restored in 1914, seeing that it would enhance the British cause. The excerpt below is the statement that recognised the Oba as the owner of all lands;

> According to native Law, the Oba is the ruler and owner of all the land, but it is usual for an Oba to consult the actual Ogies who may have had the land for many centuries. This, of course, he may have done.[99]

The above may appear applaudable, but it is important to note that, looking at the circumstances that brought the Oba to the throne, he was a mere servant in the hands of the colonial government. Hence, the reason why he easily consented to their wish, recognising him as ruler and owner of all land, was to facilitate the colonial agenda and save the British officials the stress of moving from one forest owner to another. However, at least in theory, the Oba was recognised in the scheme of things.

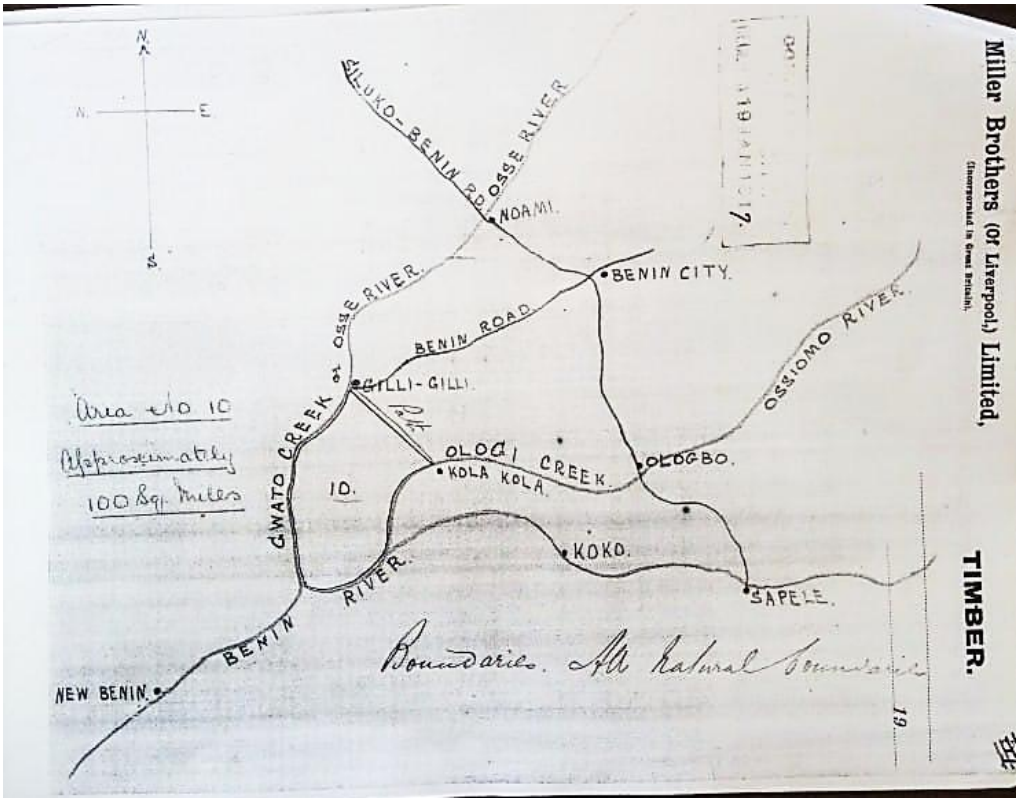


**Figure V: A map showing the boundaries and the position of the timber area licensed to the Miller Brothers of Liverpool Limited on 6th December, 1916.**

**Source:** N. A. I., WP/IbminAgric/1/200, file 29816. Miller Brothers of Liverpool Limited to the Chief Conservator of Forests. Sketched map. 6th December 1916

Another European firm that was a major dealer in timber in Benin province was W. B. MacIver & Company Limited. Messers. W. B., MacIver & Company Limited applied for a timber licence for area No. 155 in the Benin-Ishan District on July 28th, 1925. Below is an excerpt of the licence application,

> We have the honour to apply through you for a timber Licence in the Ishan District as per the attached plan marked in red. It is bounded as follows: NORTH. By a motor road from Amaho to a point where it joins the Ubiaja Agbor motor road near Ewosha. EAST. From a point near the Amaho motor road joins the Ubiaja Agbor motor road through Ekpon to a point where the Igbaki motor road joins the Igbaki motor road near Ologi. SOUTH. By a motor road from the town of Igbaki to a point where it joins the Ubiaja Agbor motor road near Ologi. WEST. By a bush path from Igbaki to AMAHO. Should you entertain

> our application and permit us, we intend to exploit Mahogany, Iroko, Walnut, and Obobo, and we agree to abide by the Forestry rules and regulations now in force for any amendments thereto. We enclose sketch maps in triplicate together with an application fee value of £3, and we shall be pleased to have your favourable reply. Bankers' guarantee will be forwarded immediately we hear that our application is being entertained.[100]

In 1933, Messrs. W. B. MacIver& Company Limited transferred this timber licence to the United Africa Company Limited through which he requested that Timber Licence No. 4 for Area No., 155 in the Ishan Division that was transferred by Messrs. W.B, MacIver& Company Limited to The United Africa Company Limited be approved for him. While sending the letter, he attached the original licence as proof that the Director of Forests has endorsed the area. He also attached a typed copy of the deed of the transfer for registration, with the registration fee of l0/-required by Ordinance No. 36 of 1924, which was paid into the treasury under the Sapele treasury. At the end of the day, the deed was signed and transferred to the original licensee.[101]

It was a common occurrence in the 1920s to 1951 when the timber trade experienced a boom for firms, especially the smaller ones, to either merge or transfer licences to larger firms. This is because the smaller firms may be unable to compete in the race. This was the situation that led to the formation of the United Africa Company in 1929101, as smaller companies merged to form a formidable force. The presence of the United Africa Company became a threat to local timber traders, and this became a concern to the Oba of Benin, as he pleaded with Major Oliphant to redistribute the concessions so that some may be apportioned to local timber traders. Because of the Oba intervention, the United Africa Company had to surrender some of its concessions for redistribution to both European and Benin timber traders from 1934 to 1936,[102] but still very little got to Benin traders. From the look of things, big companies with enough funds and instruments were more favoured than the smaller and

local timber traders with little or no funds. Going further, on 1 December 1903, Messrs. MacNeil Scott & Co. applied for a timber licence in area No. 7 in the Benin division for about 100 square miles in dimensions.[103] Different applications were made for different types of timbers as they were categorised into primary and secondary species.

**Conditions for Granting of Timber Licence**

Because of the overlapping of applications, some factors were considered to determine who should be given the right of concession. Banker's guarantee as a major factor was a means to secure a timber licence with little or no difficulty, as firms or individuals were most likely to be considered for the right of concession if they could provide a banker's guarantee. This was one of the points of argument presented by Messrs. W. T. Obasiagbon and ten others when they petitioned the District officer for granting Messrs. Jackson Ihama a full right of concession to area BC 4, instead of granting it to any of the aggrieved eleven contractors as stated in paragraph four of their petition below:

> Every person working under the "local permit system" pays the sum of £50 to £100 as a guarantee. Holders of licensed areas deposit £400, but the guarantee given by licensed owners is not necessarily on a cash basis. A banker's guarantee of the worth of the application is sufficient. Everyone working in timber areas pays the same fees for the class of wood exploited, but whereas licensed holders of areas are allowed a rebate for "bad" wood, the others are deprived of this privilege. After all the money deposited by either is to guarantee labour conditions of service in the areas, and has nothing to do with the amount of trees felled or logs manufactured. Rebates should be universal, as the value of permits for felling timber does not depend on the class of person exploiting the forest belt.[104]

Messrs McNeil Scott & Company's transferring of timber licence in 1910 from primary species to secondary species was only possible because of the Banker's guarantee of £400 made in 1903.[105] A banker' guarantee was powerful to the extent that, it withdrawal by

the bank can terminate the validity of the licence without a second thought by the forest department. The excerpt below attests to this:

> The application has been submitted to the Director of Forests who approves of it and the following special clauses being inserted;- (a) Provided that in the case where security is given by a Banker's Guarantee, should the Bank withdraw its guarantee at any time before the expiration of the term for which this licence is granted the licence shall cease. Unless the licensee shall produce a guarantee acceptable to the Governor or shall forthwith deposit in the Treasury the sum required by Regulation 24 Section (5) (d) 9f the Forestry Regulations, to be deposited by the size of the area over which this licence is granted.[106]

It is clear from the above that a banker's guarantee is one of the clauses that must be satisfied before a timber licence application is approved, and it attracts a standard fee of £400.[107]

Another factor that determines who should be granted the right of concession to timber areas is the willingness and readiness of the licensee to abide by the existing regulations and any new Forestry ordinance that may be enacted in the future. Therefore, before a licence is issued, the licensee will have to agree to abide by the existing regulations in Part V of the Forestry Regulations. In the event of the area or any part thereof being constituted a forest reserve, he will not claim damages. In addition, he will have to be willing to conform to any new forestry ordinance enacted or regulations passed in the future.[108] Another factor that determines the approval of a licence is securing the rights of the natives, which have been discussed in chapter three of this thesis. In other words, for a firm or company to be given a licence to a timber area, such a licensee must take into consideration the rights of the local people as defined by the acting Senior Conservator of Forests.[109] It was ensured that there was no room in the licence to interfere with the right of any native to take under permit such timber as they may require for their use, for sale or barter. However, this native right could only stand provided conversion was done by hand power only and that no

timber from the area was to be exported. From the above, though the natives were considered for some privileges, they were also disqualified from engaging in commercial and international trade in timber.

The capacity to pay labourers was another factor that determined who was given the concession right. The District officer used this to confront Messrs W. T. Obasiagbon and the ten others who petitioned him on Mr. Jackson Ihama's issue, that have been discussed above. Among the eleven petitioners, the District Officer knew few of them, and as such, he was able to evaluate them. According to his investigation, Mr. W.T. Obasiagbon was in difficulties over the payment of his timber labour and was therefore labelled to be in the habit of ruthlessly exploiting his workers. In the light of this accusation, several labourers obtained judgment against Mr. Obasiagbon for payment of wages overdue. The district officer further argued that Mr. W.T. Obasiagbon was not able to pay his debts despite making use of the deposit which he had in the N.A Treasury. He therefore concluded that such a man is not fit to employ labour and is better out of timber work.[110] The district officer succeeded in using this argument to disqualify the native contractors from securing the licence.

Furthermore, the inability to pay labour was a serious offence and could lead to automatic rejection or termination of licence or concession rights, and the colonial administration used this as a yardstick to deny Benin timber traders concession rights regularly. More so, when Mr. I. T. Palmer of Sapele and Mr Miller Brothers put in an application for a timber area that hitherto belonged to the late Mr Bartlett, the former was considered because he was willing and ready to pay the debt of the labourers that was incurred by the late Mr Bartlett. Mr. I.T. Palmer of Sapele put in his application on 30th November 1925, and Mr Miller Brothers also put in their application on 25th July l927 for the same area. Mr Miller Brothers have put in the ordinary application that is made by a firm

when an area is vacant, but they make no offer of any sort. On the other hand, Mr. I.T. Palmer makes an offer to pay the labourers whose wages were overdue, to pay Mr Challoner & Co.'s debt of about £3,000. He also offers to give the sum of £1,000 to the widow and daughter of the late Mr. Bartlett.[111] To decide on who to grant the licence, some comparisons and deductions were made, taking the payment of the labourers as a priority. Selling the estate, as was the common practice will not benefit that much seeing that the return from the sale will be divided amongst the creditors and the Government will call on the Bank to pay the banker's guarantee of £400, which sum it, is presumed will go towards settling the labour claims, which may not be paid in full. However, considering the proposition of Mr I.T. Palmer, the labourers will be paid in full, and the widow obtains a gratuity. The licence was therefore granted to Mr. I. T. Palmer of Sapele. As long as a firm is capable of working a timber area satisfactorily, there is no objection to the timber licence, nor was there a denial of renewal, as stated by the director of forests in the excerpt below;

> If they are prepared to do this merely to ensure having the area renewed in due course on the usual terms, then there seems no objection to giving them such an assurance as a renewal would never be refused by the Government if an area was being worked satisfactorily and the grantors agreed.[112]

In summary, the conquest of the Benin Kingdom in 1897 and immediate incorporation into the British Colonies opened up the vast Forests of Benin to the British for exploitation as they became in control of almost everything. Before the establishment of the Native Administration in 1914, they were ruled by the right of conquest. With the enactment of the forest ordinance of 1901 and the subsequent amendments in 1903 and 1908, respectively, provisions were made for the creation of Forest reserves that took about 65% of Benin's land. To make the creation of forest reserves meet with less resistance, give it legitimacy and make the negotiation process with the forest owners easy, they restored the

monarchy and created the native authority administration. To further promote their agenda, the native law that confirmed the Oba as the owner of all land was duly acknowledged, avoiding the headache of liaising with the local forest owners.

To make the exploitation of the forest and timber workable and Beneficial to their course, various policies were enacted, and these were backed up by the forest ordinance. Examples of such policies include forest protection policies, timber licence policies and forest reserve policies, among others. The creation of the Forestry Department in 1899 and its subsequent amalgamation with the Lagos Forestry Department in 1905, coupled with the outcome of the indiscriminate exploitation perpetuated by both the European firms and the local users, necessitated the enactment of forest reserves policies, which invariably created room to the creation of numerous forest reserves. Subsequently, the first forest reserve came into being under Order No. 4 of 1907, known as Gilli-Gilli game and forest reserves, P.W.D timber forest reserves,[113] followed by the Ore forest reserves in 1908, then came Ologbo, Okomu forest reserve, created by the right of conquest. Many others followed the restoration of the monarch in 1914 under the Forest Ordinance. The need to penetrate the local people through their local rulers arose as Benin was a central society in pre-British conquest. They decided to resolve through the constitution of Native Administration, which was a pure indirect rule system, of which the Oba (Oba Eweka II and later Oba Akenzua) was the head and recognised as the ruler of all the land, to be advised by the Iyase, who was Obaseki. The forest reserves that were created, coupled with other forest policies, were to ensure efficient management of the forest resources to achieve their aim. This therefore gives rise to the definition of forestry in this context as the management of forest resources through forest policies for British intent.

While it may seem that the colonial administration was liberal in its dealings with the Benins. It is important to note that all they did was to foster their objectives of exploiting Benin Forest products, as European firms dominated the timber trade. The best they could do was to employ the locals who were experienced in timberwork as contractors and overseers. To make the exploitation of timber efficient and effective, they introduced the use of a sawmill, otherwise known as a forest mill, which was the first of its kind in Nigeria. The movement of timber from the forest to the sawmill was through hauling by able-bodied men, who were mainly Benin natives. A timber licence was a legal document that granted access to individual contractors and firms to exploit a given forest area. To approve a licence to a licensee, some conditions, such as a banker's guarantee of about 400 pounds, were required. In addition, the licensee must show a willingness to accept the forestry regulation and the possible changes that might occur in the future. Furthermore, the licensee must show proof of financial capacity and integrity to pay labourers and settle any outstanding debts if need be. It was on the ground of this that Benin contractors were disqualified, and the licence was instead given to their counterpart, Mr. Jackson Ihama, who was an affiliate of a British firm. In the same vein, it was also on the ground of this that Mr. I.T. Palmer of Sapele was preferred over Mr. Miller Brothers when both sent an application over the same area. The manna with which the district officer handled the controversy between the native contractors and the British company affiliate, Mr. Jackson, revealed the biased nature they treated Benins in matters relating to the timber trade, as the locals were robbed of the international timber trade. The locals were mainly used as labourers in felling and hauling timber with little compensation. A proclamation was an official public announcement through which the British government passed a decree or policy. The moment this proclamation was made, the degree became binding on everyone.

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## CHAPTER FOUR

## THE IMPACT OF BRITISH FOREST EXPLOITATION ON BENIN 1900-1960

The activities of forest exploitation in Benin province had a far-reaching effect on every aspect of the people's lives, both positively and negatively. Beginning in 1897, the hitherto peaceful and flourishing kingdom never remained the same again. The economic, political, and social structures were distorted in a bid to meet the demands of the European economy. To the extent that the kingdom did not have a king for about seventeen years, from 1897 to 1914, a period known as the interregnum.[1] Even when the kingship was eventually restored in 1914, it was fashioned after the order of the colonialists to carry out their bidding, as the British elected king 'Aiguobasimwin' was nothing but a messenger in their hands.

Before Prince Aiguobasimwin ascended the throne, there was a serious political upheaval in the kingdom between him and Chief Agho Obaseki. In a situation like this, the final decision lies in the hands of the colonialists, and of course, they choose who they could easily control and that was found in the person of prince Aiguobasimwin though they would have preferred Chief Agho Obaseki who have been faithful to them and have rose to become the most prominent chief in Benin, but tradition and the tenacity of prince Aiguobasimwin and also being the rightful heir to the throne according to the law of primogeniture as the first son of Oba emerged as the new king with the title of Oba Eweka II on July 14th, 1914 while chief Agho Obaseki was appointed as the Iyase of Benin to be his adviser.[2] Economically, the colony was milked dry for the enrichment of the metropolis, while the indigenous industries were left to suffer neglect and relegation. Farmlands were converted to forest reserves, and as a result, farm output due to limited cultivable farmlands was greatly reduced, and most local farmers such as Mr. Jackson Ihama who became a contractor under a British firm and Mr.

Obasiagbon left their farming professions for timber exploitation and some became European agents, and this also affected the social relationships among family members.

**Economic Impact of Timber Exploitation**

One of the economic impacts of timber exploitation in Benin province was a shortage of food due to limited land that was left for farming, as larger portions of the forests were converted into reserves.[3] The colonial authorities were never satisfied with grabbing the people's forests. They always devised different means to create more forest reserves, which had advanced effect on the people's subsistence farming. The creation of forest reserves occurred in three different stages. The first stage was the use of the right of conquest.[4] This method did not take into consideration the consent of the forest owners. It was this right of conquest they used in the creation of the Provincial Work Department (P.W.D) forest reserve.[5] The second stage, which was the largest, started in 1901 when a forestry proclamation was made. By this proclamation, the consents of the forest owners were then sought and appealed before their forests were converted into reserves. The third stage started in the 1930s when the colonial government needed more forest reserves. This stage was highly manipulative and deceptive. The colonial authorities decided to adopt this manipulative method when the forest owners opposed further conversion of their forests into reserves. The forestry department, under the leadership of the chief conservator of the forest, then promised to transfer the existing forest reserves to the Native Administration if they would agree to the creation of more forest reserves of about 1000 Square miles.[6] The native authorities agreed, and Major Oliphant signed. Shortly after, the 1000 Square miles of forest reserves were created as follows,

> For the assumption by the Native Administration of responsibility for the Benin forests by taking over existing government forest resources (except a small area required for experimental purposes) and creating new reserves; funds for the

> payment of the European and African staff being found from the moiety of forestry fees which the native Administration will retain after handing the other moiety to the Government. Order No.26 of 1935 to give effect to the scheme, as far as the transfer of existing reserves is concerned.[7]

After achieving their aim, from 1940 onwards, all the forest reserves that were constituted as native forest reserves were taken away from the native administration and transferred back to the government.

One of the positive economic impacts of timber exploitation on the local people was employment. Many of the skilful Benin men were gainfully employed and in most cases, were preferred to people of other tribes, and sometimes were preferred to the Europeans, depending on the nature of work that needed to be done. Though the key positions were always given to the British experts, some important positions were equally given to Benin indigenes.[8] For instance, the Benins were employed as Rangers, Assistant Rangers, Foresters, and Forest Guards with annual salaries ranging from £27 to £170.[9] On the 19th of August 1935, about twenty-four Benin forest workers who were already in the government service were to be transferred to the Benin Native Administration circle when the latter was short of staff. This simply connotes that more than these twenty-four could be gainfully employed. These twenty-four workers were grouped into four categories according to their annual salary. The first category was the Forest Rangers, which were made up of two Benin men, and they included the following S. O. Osagie and A. G. Bazuaye. This group was the highest earner, and their annual salary was £170 each. The second category was the assistant forest rangers, and five Benin men were in this group, which included the following: R. I. Gbinosun, who earned £96 per annum, while the remaining four, R. E. Adams, E. Ologbosere, W. Idehen, and John Davis, earned £72 each per year.[10] Then came the foresters who were made up of six Benin men in the likes of Imafidon, Obey, Dennis Onaiwu, T. Obahiagbon, D. U. Eson,

and H. I. Eson with an annual salary of £36 each. The lowest category was the forest guards, which was composed of eleven Benin men. The men include Abudu, J. A. Bizugbe, G. N. Odiase, W. Uwangue, S. N. Imasuen, J. A. Omoregie, G. B. Osazuwa, A. Omoregie, O. Obanor, J. I. Aghimien and T. Obasohan. Out of these eleven workers, the first nine were paid £30 each per year, while the last two were paid £27 each per annum. Positions like Senior Conservator of Forests and Assistant Conservator of Forests were given to the British, who were R. A. Sykes, who was paid £880 plus £72 seniority pay annually, and R. H. Hide, who was also paid £480 annually,[11] respectively.

In preparation to hand over the existing forest reserves to the Native Administration forestry, seven 1st-grade forest guards were needed, and Benin-speaking persons were preferred and chosen for the job. However, there was a dispute regarding their salary to be between £36 and £42,[12] however, they eventually agreed to pay £42. In examining this supposed positive economic impact in terms of employment, one question that comes to mind is "Why the emphasis on Benin-speaking people?" This does not imply that they were looking out for the welfare of the Benins. Rather, they were looking out for their welfare, finding a medium to resolve the problem of the language barrier. To prove this point, while a pension was being considered for Mr. Sykes and Mr. Hide, who were both senior Conservators of forests and Assistant Conservators of forests, respectively and were both British. The Benin-speaking workers were not considered for the same benefit. Ironically, this pension was to be paid by the Benin Native Administration Forestry.[13] Further economic advantage was from the erection of sawmills. These not only give added employment but also offer excellent opportunities for the keen and intelligent man to learn a skilled trade with a good prospect of advancement. For instance, in the building industry, there was an ever-ready supply of timber in all sizes and at competitive prices. This was of great importance to the

province, especially to the *Owinas*, who were now experts in the timber industry, though not without a reverse effect on the local industries. Another impact of forest exploitation in Benin was the restoration of the Benin monarch and the consequent acknowledgement of the Oba as the custodian of Benin lands, according to Benin custom and tradition, as expressly stated in this memo:

> The Resident asks the District officer to forward a list of chiefs to whom the areas belonged; the reply being that, as the OBA has now been recognised, he becomes the grantor and, as such, he consents to the grant of a licence. According to Native Law, the OBA is the ruler and owner of all the land, but it is usual for an OBA to consult the actual Ogies who may have had the land for many centuries. This, of course, he may have done.[14]

The impact of timber exploitation in Benin was also felt on the international scene. In other words, it gave Benin and Nigeria in general International recognition. This was because the timber species in the region were in high demand in the global markets as they were listed among the best timbers of the world, and critical attention was given to their correct names, were had hitherto been named wrongly as highlighted in this excerpt.

> Forgive me for trespassing on your valuable time, but on going through the revised edition of that valuable book "A Manual of the Timber of the World", the following errors in the names of Nigerian timbers occurred, and I am sure you will not mind having them corrected for the future editions.[15]

Benin timbers were recognised as one of the finest timber trees in West Africa, which were sold in Europe. Mimusops or Djave, known as Aganokwi in Benin, was reckoned as one of the finest timbers in West Africa that was sold in Europe, though it was erroneously identified as African pear-wood.[16] Timber exploitation also serves as a source of revenue generation for the local people, that is, the native authorities and the forest owners, respectively. On this note, the forest owners receive payment for the exploitation of their Forest, though the royalties received are nothing comparable to the timber value. One area of

importance was the method adopted in dispersing the royalties to the local people by the forestry department. They adopted this method because the owners of some of the trees were not known. Therefore, the royalties in respect of trees, the owners are unknown, were paid to the Native Administration concerned, and no question arises in this respect. About royalties on trees where the owners are known, the issue was more difficult and treated differently. On this note, Forestry regulation of Nigerian law Volume III Chapter 95 page 635 states that royalty shall be transmitted to the district officer for payment to the grantors,[17] whoh are the owners of the trees being exploited. It was suggested that the money be paid into the deposit to the credit of the Native Administration concerned, which would withdraw the money and pay the amounts over to the owner. The problem with these methods was that the native authorities could not account for most of the royalties.

The procedure was supposed to be to remit the royalties to the District officer, who will, in return, make the payment to the grantors. The payments were often made directly to the owners by the Forest Guards. Sometimes, on the back of the permit appears a name, a mark, and a witness to avoid giving the royalty to the wrong individual. In other cases, no receipt was shown, indicating that the royalty was not paid to the owners. However, the District officer still went ahead to sign a statement that the amount has been paid over to the owners, seeing that it has been disbursed to those who were to pay the owners. At some stations, the District officer paid out directly to the owner the required amounts, but this was not shown on the receipt either.[18] The underlying theme from the above discussion is that forest owners do receive payment in the form of royalties for their forests that were being exploited by the colonial governments. To ensure the payment gets to the owners, different methods were exploited, of which some yield the desired result while others do not. As little as the royalty, it was shared between the native authorities and the owners of the trees. Two-

thirds of the forest royalties were paid to the Native Administration while one-third was paid to the owner, or owners, of the trees.[19] One of the reasons the forestry department adopted this sharing method was to avoid possible opposition from the locals. As long as the Native Administrations or forestry departments pay the owners' share of one-third of the royalty, no difficulties were anticipated, as they were pacified.

Timber exploitation in the Benin province also saw the creation and expansion of major and minor roads in the province. Various road channels were created to meet the need for transportation through the city, though the majority of the road channels were not a deliberate effort on the part of the colonial government, as they were not interested in developing any of their colonies for the good of the people. Every infrastructure and development they consciously sponsored was to aid their interest, and any benefits accrued to the local people from this infrastructural development, according to Michael Crowder, were accidental.[20] Besides, timber products played important roles in the construction and improvements of roads and railways.

While the above seems to be some positive impacts of timber exploitation on the economy of the people, it is important to note that the negative impacts far outweigh the positive impacts, as the economic benefits were usually disproportionately enjoyed by the colonial governments and the indigenous people, with limited local economic development. For instance, the Native Administration did not receive any form of revenue from the first sets of forest reserves that were created in the province,[21] which constituted about 29% of the Benin division up to 1933.[22] In the first instance, 29% of the division was Forest Reserve and the Native Administration did not receive revenue of any sort from it. In addition, Timber licences covered 51% of the forest besides the reserves, and the Native Administration still received none of the revenue in respect of first-class trees, and only part of the revenue from

other trees was paid to them. The remaining 20% was neither a forest reserve nor a timber area. Instead of finding a way to make the natives share the returns of the 29% and 51% of the forest already taken. The director went ahead to propose that in the event of any part of the remaining 20% being made a reserve or timber area in the future, the Native Administration would lose only 25% instead of 100% of the revenue, which it now receives from it. It was highly improbable that this 20% would be exploited during the lifetime of the present generation, since the cost of getting the timber to a port was too exorbitant. He added that if it were to be reserved, it would be done by the Native Administration, who would receive all the fees shortly.[23] This was a deceptive attempt to rob the people of their due royalty, seeing that this proposal was not feasible, as it might not be as relevant as it was.

The above discussion clearly explains the financial economic value that was accrued to the Native Administration from the exploitation of their forest. The best thing the colonial authorities could do was to place the Native Administration on probation so that it would start benefiting from their resources. Even the probation was still bound with a condition. Thus, the Benins were infinitely robbed of their forest products. Of the total 100% forest, the Benin Native Administration only had control over 20% which was neither even forest reserve nor a timber area. Though Finance matters to the native authorities, however, what the Oba and Council desired was to administer the forests in 71% of the division not yet been reserved. At present, their control was limited to 20% of the division, which was neither a forest reserve nor a timber area and to those trees in the timber areas which are not subject to the licences. The native authorities, however, realise that they cannot exercise control over the Europeans operating in the timber areas, but they could effectively police those areas and all the rest of the division outside the forest reserves if they had the revenue. The Oba and his council realised that the six forest guards in the native administration forest service were too

inefficient for such a task. To make their forest service efficient, the workforce in their service would have to increase in size and must have a certain number of superior African officers, and this can only be done if the Native Administration receives a much larger share of the revenue. It was discovered that, at any rate for the first few years, the whole of the extra revenue would have to be spent on forest protection. The Oba was, however, willing to do this if his Native Administration would be allowed to control their forests. It was also recognised that the technical supervision of the Forestry Department was essential, and this they were willing to accept in good faith.[24]

From the above, one could see that the colonial government handicapped the Benin Native Administration from being able to exercise control over the remaining 71% even after they had taken 29% of their forest, especially the area where Europeans worked. They did this by robbing them of the revenue needed to execute the needed control, thereby placing themselves in a position where they could dictate to the Native Administration. In 1934, to rescue his people from impending famine, the Oba had to accept a proposal of the Taungya farming system, which was alien to the Benin farming systems.[25]

On the 24th December 1933, the acting director of forests, at his request, had an interview with the Oba in the presence of the Resident. At this interview, the acting director of forests spoke at length about protected forests and of Taungya farming proposal. Though the Oba was initially against the proposal, he, however, changed his mind and said that he was willing to create extensive Native Administration forest reserves and encourage the taungya farming system among his people. The director seemed satisfied with this new development, but the Resident had many doubts about the practicality of the proposal. To expand on this position, Mr William, who was the acting Resident of Benin province at the time, went further to explain the scope and nature of the taungya farming. Designated areas

for Taungya farming were established within all reserves, ensuring accessibility for numerous villages. Annually, approximately 1000 acres will be allocated within the reserves for farming activities, and Farmers will be permitted to cultivate these areas under the condition that they plant young trees. In the subsequent year, farmers will relocate to a different area. The planted trees will eventually develop into a valuable forest. Once the trees reach maturity, they will be felled and logged, allowing the land to be utilised for farming once more.[26]

The economy became heavily dependent on timber trade leaving their subsistence economy to suffer a lack of attention, as the able-bodied men who used to cultivate the soil to fend for their families became employees to both foreign and local timber firms leaving their primary assignments of watching over their families and fending for them to the women. Benin's economy became heavily dependent on the timber trade, thereby exposing the economy to fluctuation as such when there was a boost in the timber market there was also a boost in the Benin economy and when there was a decline in timber trade there was likewise a decline in the economy which hitherto was not so. Their indigenous industries were neglected, and their men were paid peanuts in the colonial timber industry. The above situation was captured by H. Orishejolomi Thomas.

> Most Benin chiefs became timber-conscious, leaving their families to earn peanuts in the timber industry during the boom years in the timber trade in 1950 and I951.[27]

All over the Western and Eastern Regions during that time, heavily laden timber Lorries were seen moving rapidly and sometimes dangerously, towards the ports. Also along the rivers, creeks and lagoons, there were long rafts of Obeche, Abura and mahogany destined for Liverpool, London, Hull or the Continental ports. Europe, starved of buildings and furniture for so long during the war years, was starting to build again in earnest. Softwoods from Scandinavia, Russia and America, which had previously supplied most of

the requirements of the building and furniture trade, were difficult to buy because dollars were scarce, and the selling countries were insisting on payment in dollars or hard currency.[28] The United Kingdom, which was the largest buyer of Nigeria's timber, gladly turned to West Africa, where sterling was readily acceptable.[29] and Benin province became a major supply of timber. Semi-hard woods like obeche, which previously were in moderate demand, became extremely popular as soft wood substitutes. Demand rapidly outstripped supply, and prices rocketed. At the peak of the boom in I95I, timber that less than fifteen months previously fetched £7 a ton rose to nearly £21 a ton.[30] The reverse was the case when the rush subsided.

**Impact on Land Tenure System and Local Farming**

Timber exploitation had a significant impact on the people's land tenure and land use system since it involved land control. Before colonial control, Benin society was primarily rural and pre-industrial. Moreover, since agricultural production depended on land, the ownership and control of land were of primary importance to the people, as all aspects of their life depended on it; as such, land was communally owned. The Oba's traditional position as the guardian of Benin lands became more theoretical than practical, and the usufruct right to land that had previously been given to male adults in the society was distorted.[31]

Farming was the dominant production activity of the people, and this involved all adult members of the family, especially the male, practicing shifting cultivation practices where farmland that was previously cultivated was left to fallow for a period of ten to twenty years[32] to regain its nutrients. This farming system was altered by the colonial exploitation of the Benin forest. Agricultural production that was centred on the production of yam, which was regarded as the staple crop, was the primary responsibility of the males. While the production of plantains, maize, beans, cocoyam, melon, okra, pumpkin, garden eggs, pepper

and other vegetables was taken to be the responsibility of adult females. These were all hampered and mortgaged by the British greed for the Benin forest.

Hitherto, an average farm size varied from two to ten acres of land, but the introduction of forest reserves and licensed and protected forest areas made a caricature of it, as the Benins now have free access to only 20% of their entire forest.[33] What an aberration and abuse! Adult males who were capable of producing four hundred to one thousand tubers of yam in a farming season became second-class employees in the timber industry as tree fellers, log hauliers, log squaring, log smothers,[34] forest guards and forest rangers[35] and were paid peanuts compared to their achievement as independent farmers. What a high level of degradation! This not only affects food production in society, but it also affects the social relationships in families. Apart from the farming system that was abandoned, other game activities such as hunting (obafi), and rearing of animals (*Iri Aranmwen*)[36] were also abandoned. Even though fishing was not so organised in Benin, the little ones were also discouraged. The hitherto normal life of the people was turned upside down, as they practically became slaves in the hands of foreigners in their land. To attract local farmers and get the young men into their employee list, they introduced monetary and fiscal policies and direct taxation.[37] The use of pre-colonial currency was prohibited, and foreign currency. The only way the Benins could have access to money to pay their tax was to work for the British government. Besides, they became heavily dependent on the colonial government for the acquisition of the needed currencies to meet their daily needs and pay the imposed tax.

Furthermore, another aspect of the people's industry that was seriously affected by timber exploitation was the handicraft industry, otherwise known as the guild or cottage industry. These industries that hitherto focused on metal smiting to produce religious objects, guns, hoes, chains, knives, spears, swords[38] were sent out of business as the Europeans

discouraged the use of those objects, especially as related to religion. Most of these craftsmen became messengers to the timber traders. Another industry that was affected was the wood carving industry known as the *Owinas*. This industry worked for the Oba, though some worked independently, they specialised in carving household utensils such as pestles, mortars, doors, sculptures for the palaces and many others. However, the majority of them ended up becoming tree fellers and squarers of logs in the timber industry.[39]

**Social-Political Impacts**

The social-political impact was felt right from the monarchical structure to the household arena. After the conquest of the kingdom and reorganisation, the old order was replaced with the new order, where new paramount chiefs and district heads were appointed without considering the traditional significance of such a position. These and other social reforms weakened the authority of the Oba, as he became unpopular before the prominent chiefs in the kingdom. For instance, Oba Akenzua, in a bid to please the British government, made some adjustments, such as the abolition of district heads.[40] This did not go well with some older chiefs, the likes of Omokua, known as Okoro-utun, who was very loyal to Oba Eweka II and climbed to the position of Iyase in 1928.[41] This man became a nightmare that terrorised Oba Akenzua II. Even the way the Native Administration was constituted was done to serve the interests of the British government and British firms.

In the household arena, most of the local people became homeless and farmed less, as their farmlands were taken away from them. While those living in forested areas were required to relocate to distant places from their initial locations, and on a few occasions where they were allowed to stay, they were prevented from utilising the forest products for commercial purposes, especially those in the protected areas, licensed areas and forest reserve areas. However, when the pressure from the local people became unbearable for the colonial

government, they then gave some rights to those living around the protected areas and forest reserve areas. Such rights included the right of way to walk through all existing paths and roads. The right to collect tie-tie, the produce of the oil palm (Elaeis Guineensis) and wine palm (Raphia vinifera), bamboos and the fruits of all cultivated trees and the native mango (Owi).[42] The right to cut roofing poles and yam sticks from the following trees:-Ohogo (Trema), Urawan Asivin (Phyllanthus), Uladin Utatan (Harungana).[43] Furthermore, the right to collect grass as well as collect bush ropes and hunt. The need for water compelled the colonial government to approve the right to draw water from the stream around the forest reserves and to fish from some selected streams.[44] In addition, they were given the right to collect all dead wood for firewood and to cultivate in some specified areas.

From the above discussion, it is clear that every step to survive by the local people was dictated by the greedy forest exploiters. They took Benin territory as their personal property, except for development. Sir Ralph Moor clearly stated in 1897 that they were now in charge of the territory and could demand from the people anything in the form of crop produce or services as would be required. He publicly declared that they would show the Benins the exact way they should carry on with their farm and trade generally.[45] This was exactly what they did to the Benins. It was a pitiable experience. Even the so-called rights highlighted above were only excluded for personal uses and not for commercial purposes.[46] More so, the labour of the local people was exploited, and many were subjected to harsh working conditions with low wages. Despite all these, no attempt was made to encourage local industry.[47] That could have kept the people positively engaged in doing what they knew best, yet they took over the people's forests and destroyed their industries. Apart from the insignificant fees in the form of royalties, the timber firms paid to the Native Administration, they made little or no contributions to the development of the people whose forest they were

exploiting. Even the United Africa Company, which possessed the majority of the Benin forest, did not think it necessary to develop a wood-based economy in the region. Instead, they chose to open an Africa Timber and Plywood (A.T. &P) sawmill near Sapele[48] because of the economic benefits of being close to the exportation point, which was the Atlantic Ocean. Though sawmills were erected and road channels were created, they were all for their sole interest and benefit. Moreover, the Benins who were employed to work in the sawmills were underpaid compared to the effort they put into it.

Again, the local people who were interested in the timber industry were discouraged by the Forest Ordinance. This ordinance was drafted to grant British companies exclusive rights and access to the forest. The Forest Ordinance labelled some areas as protected areas and the timber in such forests as protected trees.[49] therefore, the people were no longer allowed to utilise their timber, whether reserved or unreserved, for their domestic needs without first getting a permit. In most cases, the permit was not granted. The few locals in the likes of Mr Obaseki, Yesufu Otokiti, Mr. W. T. Obasiagbon, Mr. Oronsaye, Chief Obazowa,[50] and many others who succeeded in becoming timber contractors were frustrated out of business by constantly denying their application to the point that the above persons have to petition the District officer.

**Environmental Impact of Timber Exploitation**

The environment was one aspect where the impact of timber exploitation was obvious. The rate of deforestation was high as the Benin forests were being leveled down. Many factors contributed to the high rate of Benin deforestation which including the following: the activities of foreign timber contractors and firms, the activities of local timber firms and contractors, as well as the activities of unauthorised forest exploiters and indiscriminate farming activities. These impacts began to be felt from the early 1910s, as the forest

department annual report of 1913 presented an increasing rate of forest clearance and destruction of commercial timbers for farming purposes, and the Forestry department blamed on shifting cultivation practised by the local people.[51] It is important to note that farmers were compelled to start cutting virgin forest to make way for new farms because the commercial timber plantations that were established on fallow land had taken away their access to fertile land and threatened their rotational bush fallow system. Furthermore, the concessionaires for timber areas created new forest areas, which made clearing forests easier and prompted farmers to start their farms in new areas. Douglas C. Fraser, one of the timber concessionaires, took note of this farmer's struggle in the 1920s.[52]

This uncontrolled clearing of the forest by both the local farmers for their farming activities and the activities of the timber concessionaires, both foreign and local timber firms and contractors, which manifested in the indiscriminate felling of both mature and immature trees, exposed the forest to a high level of deforestation. Even though laws were enacted to ensure the protection of the forest, little or no adherence was given to the proclamations, as the exploitation of the forests was further intensified, with more permits and concessions being obtained. By the time the colonial masters left the scene after the nation gained independence in 1960, the Benin forest was nothing to write home about anymore compared to what was obtainable on the eve of the invasion in 1897. From the ongoing discussion, it is expressly clear how timber exploitation affected both the political, social and economic life of the people as well as the environment and local industries. Despite the enormous benefits the colonial government derived from the exploitation of timber in the people's forest, no conscious steps were taken to contribute to the well-being of the local people, but they were left to wallow and struggle for survival. Moreover, the people did not recover from this impact even after many years of independence.

Whatever seems to be a development at any level in the province was done to aid the colonial interest, and any benefits the Benins derived from such development were accidental. The state of Benin forest has become a glory of the past, as there is almost no natural high forest in the region, except those that were replanted and nurtured after the colonial masters left the shores of Benin territory. Just as it happened in every other part of Nigeria, West Africa and Africa in general, Benin lost its natural heritage to the British government, which proved stronger through their Maxim guns.

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# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCLUSION

This study, "Forestry, Forest Resources and Colonial Exploitation in Benin Province, 1900-1960," examined the British economic activities with particular emphasis on forest resources exploitation and utilisation in the Benin Province of colonial Nigeria. The objectives of the study were, to examine the background to the British colonial forest exploitation in Benin, to examine the Pre-colonial Benin forest and utilisation, to examine colonial rule forest policy and exploitation in Benin Province, to elucidate the processes of forest exploitation and utilisation in colonial Benin and to analyse the impacts of forest exploitation on the local people and their environment. The advent of colonial rule in Benin introduced some reforms and policies that impacted the Benin economy and positioned it for exploitation.[1] Some of these reforms include the introduction of the plantation system, agriculture system, new farming system, introduction of cash crop system and seedlings, international trade and market board. The policies include taxation policy, cash policy,[2] among others. These various reforms and policies brought economic transformation to the region.

The Benin territory was captured and consequently became part of the British colonies in 1897 in a duel between the two forces, the Benin forces and the British forces, in which the former lost. With the annexation of Benin into the British colonies and the introduction of economic policies and reforms, the Benin forest was ready to be exploited by British officials.

This study examined the background of forest resources and exploitation in Benin province, identifying the Benin Division, Kukuruku Division, Ishan Division and Asaba Division as the four divisions that make up Benin province.[3] It established that it was the rich

forest of Benin that attracted the British to the Benin region. The European countries were always motivated by economic factors, among others, in determining their involvement in African territory, and this played out in the manner they handled their various colonies. In this case, it was the economic factors that motivated their invasion of the Benin kingdom, which was connected to the abundance of forest, especially timber products, as there were timber and non-timber forest products. Non-timber forest products include rubber trees and other forest products that are not timber.

The Benin forest and its utilisation were examined, making it clear that the Benin forest was not a waste expanse of land as promoted by some Eurocentric view. As the Benin forest was maximally utilised before the advent of colonial rule. It operated a good system of land ownership referred to as the communal system of ownership, with the Oba as the custodian of all lands, who authorised the granting of land to well behaved indigenes and strangers through the Okao Avbiogbe who is the leader of the community land allocation and through the Diokpa in Asaba division. Though the processes of acquiring land in Benin City were different from those of other divisions in the province. Every male adult had enough plots of land allotted to them to farm, as land was the main source of life sustenance in the province, being an agrarian community. However, this was undermined with the advent of colonial rule.

Despite the high level of farming activities, they still maintain a very high level of forest management such that trees are managed to attain a maturity of up to about two hundred to three hundred feet tall. Moreover, different natural methods were adopted to conserve and preserve the Benin. Various forest policies prohibited the exploitation of certain trees, such as Aquobisi, which was considered to be of high spiritual significance, while others, such as Okhan, Oluku, and Okuekue, were reserved for palace use only. The pre-

colonial Benin people also had unique ways of exploiting and utilising their timbers, which exceeded those of some other African communities. These methods of timber exploitation included fire, wind, iron-saw, axe, cutlasses and asegie (chisel-like object). The uses of timber in pre-colonial Benin include religious, domestic and military uses, with little or no commercial value.

With the Conquest of Benin in 1897,[4] which took place in the most dramatic way in the history of the kingdom, it was immediately incorporated into the British Colonies, and the vast Forests of Benin province were opened up to the British for exploitation as they became in control of almost everything. Before the establishment of the Native Administration in 1914, they were ruled by the right of conquest. However, with the enactment of the forest ordinance of 1901 and the subsequent amendments in 1903 and 1908, respectively, provisions were made for the creation of Forest reserves that took about 65% of Benin's land. To make the exploitation of the forest and timber workable and Beneficial to the colonial government, various policies were enacted. Examples of such policies include the forest protection policy, timber licence policy, forest reserve policy, and revenue policy. With the creation of the Forestry Department in 1899 and its subsequent amalgamation with the Lagos Forestry Department in 1905, the need to create forest reserves arose as a result of the indiscriminate exploitation by both European firms and the local users. Subsequently, the first forest reserve came into being under Order No. 4 of 1907, known as Gilli-Gilli game and forest reserves, followed by the Ore forest reserves in 1908, then came Ologbo, Okomu forest reserve and many others. The need to penetrate the local people through their Chiefs arose as Benin was a central kingdom in pre-British conquest. This they resolved through the constitution of Native Administration, which was a pure indirect rule system of which the Oba (Oba Eweka II) was the head and recognised as the ruler and owner of all the land, to be

advised by the Iyase, who was Obaseki. British interest in the Benin forest was informed by the Europeans' 19th-century industrial revolution, especially the discovery of tyres for both bicycles and vehicles by Robert William Thompson in 1845 and John Boyd Dunlop in 1887 and the invention of vehicles whose body parts were made up of timber products. The British, acknowledging the importance of the Benin forest to their economic and industrial development, set up good mechanisms such as timber concessions, forestry ordinances and forestry policies, which favoured the colonial government and private companies to the detriment of the indigenous people. Timbers were exploited through strategic methods beginning with the cutting, processing and transportation. Since a mechanised system of felling trees was not available at this early stage of timber exploitation in Benin, skilled Benin tree fellers known as the Owinas were in high demand. In addition, it took about two working days for two men to fell a tree, after which another group was required to cut it into logs. With the felling and other processes being completed, it was then prepared for hauling out of the forest across the water body to saw mills as mechanised transport was absent during the early stages of the timber trade.

Man-hauling of logs was also a common practice, especially for the timber areas that were not close to the river. But for the areas close to the river and streams, Water transport was crucial to the extraction of timber because of issues with overland transportation and was more efficient than man-hauling. It was therefore favoured by concessionaires to have their concessions near creeks and rivers. With the arrival of the logs at the sawmill, another process of preparing them for exportation or final use began. The introduction of the sawmill was a breakthrough in the timber industry. Before the 1930s, timber processing was mainly done by local sawmillers. However, in 1937, some steps were taken to ensure the establishment of advanced sawmills to cater for the needs of the local market in the region.

To ensure the smooth allocation of concessions to concessionaires, a timber license policy was introduced, which attracted an amount of fees depending on the size of the concession. These timber concession policies were fashioned in a way to give the colonial government officials power to control timber exploitation and relegated the local chiefs and their customary system of land ownership to the background. In the first instance, under the Forest Proclamation of 1901, a concession was not to exceed seven years with an application fee of £347. It was thereafter reduced to five years in 1903 when the proclamation was amended. With the colonial forestry policies, the voices of the local forest owners were silenced. For instance, if an Indigenous contractor and a European contractor applied for the same concession simultaneously, the forestry department would rather consider and grant the licence to the European contractor, even at the detriment of the Indigenous contractor or firm. This was the case between Mr Jackson Ihama, who was a contractor under the European firm, United Africa Company, and a team of eleven Benin contractors led by Mr. W. T. Obasigbon. Mr Jackson Ihama was favoured over the local contractors led by Mr Obasiagbon.

The whole dynamics of forest exploitation in Benin province had a far-reaching effect on every aspect of the people's lives, both economic, political, social, and environmental impacts.[5] One of the economic impacts of timber exploitation in Benin province was a shortage of food, which was due to limited land left for farming, as larger portions of the forests were converted into reserves. While the social-political impact was felt right from the monarchical structure to the household arena, seeing that the pre-colonial monarchical system was dissolved and reorganised in a different manner that favoured the colonial government. The social impact was so grievous to the extent that most of the local people became homeless and without land to farm, as their farmlands were taken away from them. Those living in forested areas were mandated to relocate to distant places from their initial locations

and in a few instances. However, they were given some rights to their forest when the pressure became unbearable for the colonial government.

The series of timber exploitation resulted in environmental degradation as the forest became deforested through the activities of foreign timber contractors and firms, the activities of local timber firms and contractors, as well as the activities of unauthorised forest exploiters and indiscriminate farming activities, resulting in a shortage of farmland. Timber exploitation activities affected both the political, social and economic life of the people as well as the environment and local industries.

Thus far, it has been established that the whole dynamic of forest exploitation in Benin province, with a special focus on timber products and their utilisation, followed a complex process. Beginning from the conquest of the kingdom by the British to the restoration of the monarchical system in 1914 and the final liberation of the whole nation of Nigeria in 1960, many forces came into play. This thesis has thus covered broad grey areas, which hitherto have not been sufficiently covered by previous studies, as it attempted to resolve the research problems through answering the research questions. The research problems included: the importance of the Benin forest to the colonial government, the different strategies or methods adopted in the exploitation of forest resources. In addition, the importance of forestry policies, the place of the native authorities in the execution of the colonial policies, the impact of forest exploitation on the local people and their environment, and finally, the reasons for forest reserve creation. These research problems were resolved by responding to the following research questions: What motivated the British to Benin territory? Did the pre-colonial Benin have any form of forest management practice? Moreover, what was the importance of the forest to the people? What was the nature of the pre-colonial Benin forest, and how was it harvested and utilised? Did it have any economic importance to the

people? What were the colonial rules and forest policies in Benin province? What roles did they play in the forest exploitation process? How was the Benin forest exploited and utilised in the colonial period? To what extent did forest exploitation affect the local people and their environment?

In the process of answering these research questions, the following findings were made: firstly, it was discovered that British interest in Benin territory was motivated by economic reasons. Pre-colonial Benin had a good system of forest management that was beneficial to every individual in the community. In addition, Forest policies were an integral aspect of colonial administration in the Benin division. Furthermore, the study found that complex techniques and strategies were adopted in the exploitation and Utilisation of timber forests. More so, the study also found that forest exploitation had both economic, socio-political and environmental impacts on the local people. It has been established that the creation of forest reserves in Benin province not only benefited the colonial masters but also benefited the local people concerned in several ways. For instance, it preserved the people's land and increased the economic value of timber. Though everyone in the province had free access to their forest to exploit timber in pre-colonial Benin, it had little or no commercial value, as timbers were not exploited for market purposes except for personal use. The forest was not preserved or protected except for some sacred areas that were perpetually prohibited from exploitation. However, the advent of colonial rule brought some new developments as it introduced a forest reserve scheme, and gave economic value to the forest timber products to the point of becoming one of the most valuable timbers in the world. It also saw the employment of Benin men as forest guards, timber contractors and forest mill owners.

At the same time, these supposed benefits had serious side effects on the local people, which outweighed the benefits, seeing that the reserves were intentionally established to

satisfy the needs of the colonial masters. In addition, the supposed benefits mentioned above were accidental and even more to the advantage of the colonial government. The people's land was rightly taken away from them, and only in a few cases were they given limited access to their forest. What a pathetic situation! The employment was lopsided, as it was done in a manner that the local people were exploited beyond measure, and their salary was nothing comparable to their European counterparts. In the case of the contractors, the European contractors and Benin contractors that were affiliated with them were given preference over local contractors when it came to the granting of concessions.

The process of securing land for forest reserves was a case of manipulation rather than being forced, as the people unwillingly gave their consent. The native authorities were used as a tool to get through to the people, taking advantage of the traditional right of the Oba being the custodian of land. Is it not pathetic, of all the traditional rights of the Oba, it was this very one that the British placed a premium on? This, therefore, explains the reason why they restored the monarchical system in 1914, being that Benin was a centralised system and the people were subject to their central ruler. Both the Obaship and the native authorities were restored and established, respectively, to carry out the dictates of the colonial masters. Though the local people did not willingly consent to the will of the British, but consented to that of their traditional rulers. Unfortunately, the traditional rulers were in the hands of the colonial government. Therefore, consenting to the native authority is consenting to the colonial government. The local people gave up their forests to their traditional rulers, not to the British, while the traditional rulers gave it up to the British. The local people were betrayed by their leaders.

The British government made different promises to the Native authorities to convince their people to give up their forests. At the end of the day, none of the promises were kept.

For instance, the native authority was made to accept a proposal to extend the forest reserve by 1000 km2 in 1937 with the promise of giving them charge over the already existing forest reserves. The native administration went into action to convince the local people parading the benefits in their faces. However, the moment this was achieved, the contract was terminated in 1940, and the whole forest reserve went back into the hands of British government control. Despite the enormous benefits the colonial government derived from the exploitation of timber in the people's forest, no conscious steps were taken to contribute to the well-being of the local people, but they were left to wallow and struggle for survival. The people did not recover from this experience even after many years of independence. Whatever seems to be development at any level in the province was done to aid the colonial interest, and any benefits the Benins derived from such development were accidental. The state of Benin forest has become a glory of the past, as there is almost no natural high forest in the region, except those that were planted and nurtured after the colonial master left the shores of the province. Just as it happened in every other part of the country and West Africa in general, the Beninis lost their rights and natural heritage to the British government, who proved stronger through their Maxim guns.

Though the people were denied access to their forest, there were instances where they were given rights such as the right to farm, tend and reap cultivated permanent crops, among others. Furthermore, policies were enacted that favoured the British government over the Benin people. Furthermore, the economic activities of the colonial government in Benin province were centred on the exploitation of the forest resources of the province, as it formed the base of their relationship and interaction. It is certain that without the forest and its resources, the British would not have had anything to do with the province, seeing that they

were primarily motivated by their economic interest, and timber products played a huge role in the colonial economic activities in Benin province.

In summary, the research found that British interest in Benin territory was motivated by economic reasons. In addition, the study found out that before the British rule, the people of Benin had an effective management of their forest to the extent that it was beneficial to the overall interest of everyone. The work also found that, consequent upon British rule, forest policy became an integral aspect of the British authorities in the province. Furthermore, the study established that complex techniques and strategies were adopted in the exploitation and utilisation of the timber forest products. More so, the study found out that forest exploitation had both economic, socio-political and environmental impacts on the local people. The study contributed to knowledge in establishing that British economic activities in the Benin division were centred on forest resource exploitation. Forest resource exploitation involved complex dynamics such as the timber licenses, forest reserves and the evolution of forest mills. In addition, the Native Authority played a significant role in the Benin forest scheme. Furthermore, forest reserves were created as a strategy for forest management for British intent and British-affiliated firms were favoured over local firms in the granting of timber licences.

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| Obasohan Osayande | 47 | Owina (woodworker) | September 21, 2023. Benin City. |
| Osaigbovo Obasohan | 50 | Owina (Woodworker) | September 21, 2023. Igbesanmwan. Benin City. |
| Osarodion Ogbemudia | 50 | Bronze worker | September 21, 2023. Benin City. |
| Osaigie Edo | 50 | Owina woodworker | September 21, 2023. Benin City. |
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| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
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| Patient Oriako Ukoh | 28 | Student at the department of agriculture, university of Benin | August 5, 2023. Benin City. |
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