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CHAPTER 5

That They Do Not Labour in Vain: British Colonial Exploitation and Expropriation of Cocoa Industry in Ibadan, Southwest Nigeria

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Introduction

In the pre-colonial period, agriculture was the backbone of the economy and the sector was the chief employer of labour for most of the people who later came to be called Nigerians. During the colonial period, however, the sector accounted for over 90% of the GDP and about 85% of the country's foreign exchange earnings throughout the period (Crowder, 1968: 151; 1970: 282).[1] There were two sides to agriculture during the latter period; export production and domestic productions. Agriculture was by far the most pervasive of the economic pursuit of the Nigerian people in the nineteenth century. It embraced three broad

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production types: crop production (food crops and non-food crops), animal rearing, hunting, fishing and gathering.

Politico-Economic Background of Yorubaland Focusing on Occupation

Ibadan, one of the leading Yoruba states, was founded in the 1830s by warriors and refugees from several other Yoruba communities who had been displaced during the breakup of the Oyo Empire. It began as a temporary settlement and war camp (*Budo Ogun*) for the allied army of Ijebu, Oyo and Ife who had gone to the Owu war, the first major war in southern Yorubaland in the nineteenth century. This war began in C. 1820 and dragged on protractedly until C. 1825 when the allied force succeeded in defeating and destroying it (Falola, c1984: 15).[2]

Many people in Yorubaland did not immediately take to any occupation with much seriousness after the war. While some were raiders and free-boaters, the clear majority were part-time farmers. Everybody had sufficient land, but little consideration was given to who should control it. The crop and not the land was jealously protected because their primary concern was to produce the few commodities which were needed for consumption. Then, there was no large-scale commercial farming and the settlements could not even provide sufficient food to feed its population. There were few, very light, markets mostly for food stuffs, salt and potash. Few traders went outside the settlement to neighbouring villages in Egba and Ife kingdom to buy yam and other crops to supplement food crops in Ibadan. This risky trade was carried on by 'women of those days who were as hardy as the men….' (Falola, c1984: 15).[3]

Although the foundation of state control of the economy and unequal access to wealth was laid in 1830, the 1890s witnessed the rising tide of imperialist aggression throughout West Africa. In Lagos, the British Colonial Office relied on the use of overt force to impose its political authority on the people, realizing, of course, that there can be no economic control without first establishing political domination. They, therefore, brought Yorubaland under the vortex of colonial hegemony. Indeed, the formalization of the British political authority in Nigeria between 1900 and 1913 was efficacious to the fulfilment of colonial economic objectives viz; monopolistic control of the purchase of cocoa, among other crops, for export. The British government's effective implementation of Pax Britannica drove home the fact that an alternative preoccupation had to be

sought in the tilling of the soil. Thus, popular refrain among the peoples in Ibadan after the 1893 war was: *Oko atada taa fi jagun ku, oko la o fi san*, which translates to: 'the hoes and cutlasses we had used in the wars shall now be used to till the soil' (Falola, c1984: 15).[4] Farming thus became the occupation of the warriors, chiefs and even the *Baales*. For example, Abass Alesinloye, the *Olubadan* of Ibadan from 1930, had a big yam plantation, and he was nicknamed '*Baale elelubo*', meaning 'the king of yam powder'. Oluyole, who had extensive yam and okro plantations, also derived a lot of revenue from farming and trading (NAI, CSO 26, 1885–1910. 2/2/4).[5]

That was the situation before cocoa was brought from Fernanda po in the late nineteenth century, and the people of the area which later came to be referred to as south-western Nigeria welcomed enthusiastically the cocoa cash crop economy, which turned out to be the most revolutionary of exchange culture in Nigeria, with a gestation period of 7 years and maturity at 15 years. Its cultivation involved substantial outlay in time, labour and money. It also required a preparedness, on the path of the farmers, to sacrifice immediate consumption in favour of future returns. Cocoa industry in Nigeria thus epitomizes a striking example of the responsiveness of Africa to economic opportunities/stimuli.

The Early Cocoa Planters and Cooperative Bodies in Ibadan

Some of the earliest cocoa farms in Nigeria were planted around Agege, near Lagos, in the 1880s and 1890s by African merchants whose businesses had suffered during the depression, and who had decided to try farming. Information about the new crop spread quickly into the hinterland, especially after the end of the Yoruba wars in 1893, and in time, a cocoa belt covering a total area of over 1,000,000 square miles, emerged. The principal producing areas were Ibadan, Ilesha division of Oyo Province, including parts of Ondo, Abeokuta and Ijebu Provinces. This general area accounted for about 90% of the cocoa export of the country while what was left came from the Eastern and Mid-western parts (Ayorinde, 1966: 18).[6]

Christian missionaries were as much part of the colonizing forces as were the explorers, traders and soldiers. Missionaries were in Ibadan, as in any other African state, as agents of colonialism whether or not they saw themselves in that light. It is only through the realization of this fact that

we can appreciate that colonialism was never intended to develop any part of Africa. Christian missionaries, including the Saros, converting natives and experimenting with the ideology of 'Bible and Plough', championed the new culture (Webster, 1968; Berry, 1968: Vol. 4, No. 3).[7] Agege planters and the African Church Superintendents helped to spread cocoa growing in Yoruba hinterland as they 'were very active in the early development of cocoa growing in Western Nigeria, both as farmers … and as advocates of cocoa growing by other Yoruba farmers' (Webster, 1968: 3).[8]

The new modes of wheeled transport expanded the export-import trade frontiers, thus webbing hitherto infra-marginal agricultural areas into the emerging capitalist nexus. Significantly, the colonial authorities concentrated infrastructural development on areas of export production. The net result of these was a dramatic increase in the principal agricultural exports (cocoa, palm oil and kernels, groundnuts, cotton) of Nigeria. Thus, from 1895 to 1905, revenue rose from £52.2 thousand pounds to £115.3 thousand pounds, and this was caused by the opening of the hinterland to unimpeded trade. This was accomplished by peaceful policing of the roads, which came before the construction of the railway that only began in December 1895, and was completed as far as Ibadan, (one hundred and twenty-two and half miles), by March 1901 (Ibok, 1968: 21).[9] The net result was the snowballing of cocoa export. The first export of only twenty-one (21 tons) in 1895 rose to 202 tons five years later, and this was valued at 9000 pounds. In 1920, the tonnage export moved up to 17,155 tons valued at 1.25 million pounds. In spite of the great depression of the late 1920s to the late 1930s, export, valued at 1.584 million pounds, jumped up to 880,143 million tons in 1935 (Ekundare, 1973: 80–82; Ahazuem & Falola, 1987: 87).[10]

During the early days of colonial rule, the prices paid for Nigeria cocoa were significantly low. However, the main reason for the comparatively low prices was that the quality was not sufficiently high to justify a higher price quite apart from the regular market fluctuations. Therefore, it was necessary for the farmers' association to improve cocoa quality without further delay. As soon as this improved, the exporting firms were able to pay a price for the Nigeria cocoa, which was satisfactory to all parties involved (NAI, CSO, 34,883, p. 188).[11] Exporting firms, in whose interest it was to pay top prices, opened stores for bulking of cocoa. They also opened buying stations to make the purchase of cocoa a more simplified and organized operation. And on a Saturday, 16 September

1929, the United Africa Company (UAC) opened a cocoa buying station at Ikereku market in a store owned by Bello Abasi, a son of Olubadan. Mr. Taiwo, a salaried Clerk of the UAC, was placed in charge of the store, having been brought there by Mr. Dina, a UAC Produce Manager in Ibadan, (NAI, CSO, 34,883, p. 188)[12] all to facilitate the cocoa trade. By the early 1930s, it was apparent from the export figures and exchange earnings that the cocoa industry had become a success story.

The UAC was determined to support the agricultural society, which was founded by President Elgee (NAI, CSO, 43/2)[13] because of the necessity to preserve the life of the Ibadan Agricultural Society. It was this need that prompted the body to write to the Resident, Oyo Province, through their committee members, a letter dated 17 February 1921. The farmer's therein asked to be 'educated on improved and scientific line of agriculture' (NAI, CSO, 3995/19033).[14] They realized that the cocoa cultivation was a premier industry that needed to be supported and sustained by the government. Other cooperative societies also made their own marks in improving the industry as they collected and bulked cocoa for the buying firms. In Ibadan, J.A. Obisesan was one of the leading figures in the agricultural society. He was forced to close his shop with the UAC in 1930 because of financial constraints. Soon after, he began to get more involved with his farms and became increasingly concerned with cocoa marketing from the farmer's point of view. From then, he began to organize what came to be called the 'Cooperative Produce Marketing Society of Nigeria' (CPMSN) (NAI. CSO, 34,883, Vol. 1, p. 11).[15]

Indeed, cocoa export did not grow solely in response to expanding market. On the part of Ibadan farmers, abortive attempts were made at cooperation to forestall exploitation by European firms and African middlemen. This attempt was set in motion at Agege on the 5 July 1907 by a group of producers who formed the farmers Union (Adeyeye, 1967: 19).[16] This move found practical expression among Ibadan farmers in the agricultural society, an organization which soon began to spearhead agitations for the economic advancement of farmers. The hallmark of their struggle was their attack on existing market system, which was largely controlled by expatriate firms at the detriment of Nigerian producers. They believed that it was only by bypassing both African and expatriate middlemen that exploitation of farmers could be halted (Jenkins, 1965: 134).[17]

The middlemen were making huge gains from both sides of cocoa transactions. The European firms, in reaction to the nefarious activities

of the produce buyers, attempted to extend their activities directly to the 'bush' and buy directly from the producers. At this point, all the agents believed that the farmer would get more for his cocoa if the firm opened buying centers near all important markets (NAI, CSO. 26/34883/S.4).[18] It would appear like foreign firms such as G. L. Gaiser with head offices in Hamburg/Lagos, who were the main agents of British colonial exploitation, possessed some benevolent streaks in their thrusts. They not only indicated that it was necessary for certain farmers associations to be established, but also noted that middlemen in Nigeria should be left a fair chance to deal as he usually took the risk of dealing out of the 'hands of the farmers' (NAI, CSO, 34,883/S4).[19]

Colonial Agricultural Policy, Export Production and the Development of Cocoa Industry

In 1914, the relevant separately administered Territories under British rule were amalgamated into what is now known as Nigeria with Sir Fredrick (later Lord) Lugard as its first Governor General (*Daily Express*: 26).[20] Since various Christian missions had been operating in those component Territories before the amalgamation of Nigeria, one could say that the history of Nigeria's educational development antedate the birth of Nigeria, and it was through the activities of these Christian missions that education and cocoa planting skills reached the hinterland.

During the British rule in Nigeria, cocoa, which was produced exclusively for the world market, accentuated and fostered latent class divisions. This cash crop, which for decades, brought affluence and prosperity to some people, turned out to be a fluctuating and unstable base for the economy of the entire Yorubaland. The British colonial government not only tried to facilitate the growth of cocoa production, it also, indirectly, tinkered with the rural\domestic economy by ensuring the extraction of small surplus through taxes\export duties for administrative finance. Although the British colonial economic policy spurred peasant production, her taxation drives engendered several crises (Falola, 2009).[21]

For instance, the government's attempt to impose heavy taxation in a period of falling producer prices led to a violent reaction in Yorubaland in 1918 (Atanda, 1969: 120–138).[22] Before this revolt, para-military *Egbe-Agbe* were reported to have been formed throughout Egbaland primarily to fight the encroaching bureaucracy of the British. British troops were,

however, able to establish their supremacy ultimately, though not before massacring over 200 'rebels', *(Nigeria Pioneer*, 1918)[23] and from then onward, British colonial officials began to benevolently observe the cocoa trade, while indirectly taxing the producers in order to cover the cost of administration. The major beneficiaries of the cocoa trade were the colonial trading companies, who soon reconciled themselves to peasant production since it ultimately turned out to be cheaper and more efficient than they had envisaged in Ibadan.

One of the institutional and structural developments that took place as a result of the cash crop industry was observed in the pattern of roads and rail lines constructed. The economic infrastructure of the Ibadan cocoa belt had a clear geographical distribution, and it was dependent on the extent to which areas needed to be opened to import/export activities.

But significantly, means of communication were not laid down to facilitate internal trade in other commodities. They were built to make business possible for European trading companies. This is best illustrated in the fact that greater emphasis was placed on roads that led to large cocoa growing areas in south-western Nigeria. The roads were simply intended to facilitate colonial exploitation through the evacuation of raw industrial materials that Britain needed.

Overall, the colonial period was characterized by stupendous growth in Nigeria's agricultural exports in spite of cyclical depression the era witnessed. This was the outcome of massive investments of Nigerian farmers in land, labour and capital. The expatriates, government and private firms, initiated various measures—direct and indirect—persuasive and coercive—to get the peasant farmers to produce more and more for export. The British colonial government and some firms such as Niger Company established plant nursery from where seedlings were distributed to farmers at subsidized rates or even free. The colonial taxation not only brought revenue to government coffers but also drove peasants to produce for the market while others sold their labour to farmers or toiled in the mines.

The path of progress was rough because without a local market to provide buffer, the industry was more susceptible to the vagaries of the international market for primary produce than any other export. During the great depression of World War II, cocoa prices fell to such low levels that many cocoa farmers abandoned their farms as cocoa pods rotted away on trees. Thus, pests such as black pods, capsids and swollen shoot took advantage of the neglect to devastate the farms. Government's lack of

investment in the agricultural sector showed in its inability to deal with the problem. It was not until 1944 that the government of British West Africa established at Tafo, in the Gold Coast, a joint venture, the West African Cocoa Institute, to deal with the problem. The Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG) was first called Tafo Station but its name was later changed to the West African Cocoa Research Institute (WACRI) in 1944 (https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/daily/agriculture/31641).[24]

The Cocoa Marketing Board (CMB), a successor to the West Africa Produce (WAP) Board, came into being during World War II, when administrative fiats were applied to restrict domestic trades in foodstuffs while export produce drive was adopted to coerce peasant farmers to produce aggressively for export (Njoku, 1981: 10–22). The CMB was given the sole right to purchase and export all cocoa produced in Nigeria. It fixed annually the prices paid to farmers for their produce. Under the pretext of price stabilization and equalization, the Board paid farmers far less than the international market price for their produce. The difference was why this and similar Boards have been criticized by many scholars; one scholar described them as 'tax gatherers' for government and 'an instrument of robbery' of farmers (Ake, 1981: 80).[26] The CMB, therefore, served as a disincentive to local farmers who invested in the cocoa industry in the 1950s when retuning bumper prices gave farmers good reasons to produce aggressively.

The British economic policy was basically targeted at incorporating Ibadan and the entire south-western Nigeria into her capitalist market. Thus, the cocoa export trade gave rise to a tripartite relationship which comprised the Ibadan farmer, who was the producer, the African middlemen represented by the scale man and produce buyers, and finally, the European firms whose presence was ratified and patronized by the colonial administration. Although there was no articulate documentation of local economic condition by the British colonial administration during this period, evidences abound to suggest that prices paid by firms in Lagos for cocoa in Ibadan in the 1920s ranged from £18 to £30 (c) ₦36.00 to ₦60.00 per bag of cocoa (NAI, CSO 26/34883).[27] This period also witnessed the gradual but steady influx of European firms and commercial houses into the area. Paterson and Zochonis were the first European merchants to establish themselves in Ibadan. They were soon followed by merchant firms like John-Holt, Lagos Stores Ltd., Anglo-Colonial Trading Corporation, J.D. Fairly and John Walken, etc., at different times.

The influx of these European firms led to a gradual and perceptible increase in cocoa exports (NAI, CSO. 34,883, p. 188).[28]

With the introduction of the fermentation process, the quality of cocoa improved and this elicited better prices in later years. No wonder then why the Resident in Ibadan noted in 1924 that the year was marked with small boom in trade, particularly cocoa, which attracted high prices towards the end of the year. The total money value of cocoa export grew markedly in the first two decades of the century (1900–1920), slumped briefly in the early 1920s, and then resumed the upward surge until the great depression of the 1930s. This, in turn, had the usual result of an increased import trade (NAI, File No. 41/1).[29] With the exception of a brief revival in 1936–1937, cocoa export remained stagnated at a level below the 1900–1920 periods until the end of World War II. From then on, the growth in the value of cocoa export was remarkable as shown in the table below:

Cocoa Money and Rear Producer Price and Income of Cocoa in Colonial Nigeria: 1914–1931

Year	*Producer price £/ton*	*Producer income*
1914	26.8(c) ₦53.6	£132(c) ₦264
1915	24.3(c) ₦88.6	£403(c) ₦806
1916	33.8(c) ₦67.6	£303(c) ₦606
1917	21.0(c) ₦42.00	£324(c) ₦648
1918		
1919		
1920		
1921		
1922	21.0(c) ₦42.00	£770(c) ₦1540
1923	23.7(c) ₦47.4	£776(c) ₦1552
1924	18.0(c) ₦36.0	£1247(c) ₦2494
1925	27.9(c) ₦55.8	£1200(c) ₦2400
1926	30.7(c) ₦6144	£2113(c) ₦4226
1927	53.9(c) ₦107.8	£2377(c) ₦4753
1928	48.4(c) ₦96.8	2866(c) ₦3832
1929	35.6(c) ₦71.2	1559(c) ₦3118
1930	29.9(c) ₦59.6	982(c) ₦1946
1931	18.6(c) ₦37.2	12,222(c) ₦22,443

Source NAI, 1978 (NAI, Lagos weekly record: Nigeria Fiscal Tangle, August, 1978)

Note The above was the gross price received by the farmer who had to pay a local produce price of £4 per ton and an average of £4 for transport.

However, the producer price notwithstanding, planting in Ibadan still rose as indicated below:

Acres Planted in Cocoa in Ibadan

1920	*6515.0 acres*
1921	5471.0
1922	6217.0

NAI, *Source* 1978 (NAI, Source: Lagos weekly record: Nigeria Fiscal Tangle, August, 1978)

Volume of Cocoa Exported from Western Nigeria

1920	*17,155 tons*
1921	17,944 tons
1922	31,271 ton

NAI, *Source* 1978 (NAI, Lagos weekly record: Nigeria Fiscal Tangle, August, 1978)

A British Royal Commission of Enquiry, the Nowell Commission, christened after the chairman, was set up in 1938 to review situation concerning the marketing of West Africa cocoa. The Commission, in the light of its insight into marketing, made certain recommendations and blamed most of the apparent ills of the marketing system upon large number of middlemen, among which was that marketing should be regulated and simplified, a recommendation which gained popular credence and significance for later developments in the British colonies (Blandford, 1977: 3).[30]

The Commission also voiced that a cooperative system of marketing should be adopted with full government moral and financial support, that government should assist the formation of new societies by making loans available to them on easy terms to provide good stores, and that

a cocoa export agency should be formed to negotiate and effect direct sale outside Nigeria, with members being confined to cooperative societies (NAI, CSO 26/34883, 1).[31] Indeed, the government took steps towards the development of cocoa cash crop industry by offering 'alternative price' to cocoa farmers and 'supplying chemicals to cooperative bodies', i.e. agricultural societies and marketing boards, etc.

However, the British government's aim at improving the quality of cocoa was most beneficial and fruitful for them; a number of key individuals were invited to be members of the committee that assisted in giving direction to the marketing of West Africa cocoa. The Resident, Oyo Province, was the chairman while the honourable Mr. D. D. Gibb and Captain E. J. C. Kelly were also invited to be a part of the committee. The honourable Captain J. R. Mackie, an appointed member of the committee, advised the government with regard to the recommendations made in the report, and according to the terms of reference, the committee was to consider recommendations of the report of the commission on the marketing of West Africa cocoa and make recommendations as to actions which should be taken to give effect to 'such of the commission's proposals as appear to be practicable and advisable in the in the interest of the cocoa industry' (NAI. CSO, File No. 34883/S4, p. 9).[32]

One could say without any fear of contradictions that the ultimate aim of the British colonial government for encouraging the establishment of cooperative bodies was exploitation. Although the peasant farmers had representatives within the cooperative bodies, the influence of these spokespersons was minimal because their positions were subject to the discretion of the British colonial government who approved the cooperative bodies in the first place. Marketing Boards were actually established to guarantee a steady flow of products to Britain. They were meant to give a guaranteed price to African producers whether the world price was high or low.

Produce marketing was already under government control as early as 1939. At the end of 1939/40 seasons, the first Marketing Board proper, the West Africa Cocoa Control Board (WACCB) was established to take over the Ministry of Foods whose responsibility it was to purchase cocoa and to dispose of it as was best possible. The idea was to save cocoa producers of British West Africa from the disastrous fluctuations in price which made planning impossible. The establishment of WACCB was justified on the altruistic ground of helping to protect the peasant farmers

from economic ruin by stabilizing the prices paid for their crops thereby protecting them from the vagaries of the world market price. In practice, the Board served the economic interests of Britain while it also covertly became an avenue for exploiting the peasant farmers by taxing them in support of World War IIefforts (Helleiner, 1966: 154).[33]

The Nigeria Cocoa Marketing Board (NCMB) was later established in 1947 to 'assist in the development of the cocoa industry for the benefit and prosperity of the producers' (Galleti et al., 1956: x–xvi).[34] The difference between world prices (less government export/produce duties, freight, etc.,) and prices guaranteed by the Board constituted its 'surplus', which, according to the terms of its establishment, was to be kept in trust for the producers (Galleti et al., 1956: xii).[35] Although the peasant farmers profited from the post-war prices of the colonial state through the Marketing Board, the latter was extracting a significant fraction of the actual world marketing prices, thereby shortchanging the local farmers. The actual source of the Marketing Board's 'surplus' came from the systematic upholding of a large percentage of the fruits of the farmers labour. The degree of exploitation was intense and the Board had subtly assumed the role of a tax collector (Olatunbosun, 1975: 53–75).[36] This consequently led to the massive destabilization of farmer's income, making private savings and investment by producers almost impossible (Bauer, 1956: 164–180).[37] The Ibadan cocoa farmers began to live on the 'brink' from season to season, high or low prices translating to brief prosperity, and in some cases, foreclosure and ruin.

However, the colonial administration also appeared to be inexorably committed to improving the quality of cocoa, and this commitment found overt manifestation in their produce inspection scheme, which was introduced early in the colonial era along with price differentials according to quality grades of export produce. The Marketing Board later engaged in the quality control of cocoa products through a policy of close produce inspection. Attempts were made to control the spread of cocoa diseases, particularly swollen shoot, but the Ibadan peasantry vigorously resisted the activities of the cutting gangs. 'Two hundred and forty five square miles were found to be infected with swollen shoot, … an estimated acreage of cocoa in areas of mass infection' showed 'a total of 50,000… of 1,548,236 cocoa trees were cut down up to April, 1952 and the sum of £197,370 went to farmers as compensation (*Southern Nigeria Defender*, 1952).[38] There were initially insufficient evidences to show whether government's sealing policy was completely effective or not. But it soon

became apparent that sealing and cutting were just a politically expedient approach to the problem. The details of the activities of the Ibadan '*Maiyegun* society' (set the world right) have been well documented in another work (Beer, 1976: 54–57).[39] The *Maiyegun* movement essentially epitomized protests by small peasant producers in the Ibadan area against government policies, (and her agents) which threatened to push them down from a precariously balanced precipice.

Cocoa Marketing Commission was set up to encourage the production, processing and marketing of West Africa cocoa. Significantly, with support from the C.O., the marketing of Nigeria export crops remained essentially under the control of a large-scale private enterprise, e.g. The Union Trading Company Limited (UTC), who ensured that their schemes favoured Britain. In fact, paragraph 263 of the Commission's report showed that the sum of 2/6 per ton was one of the scheduled marketing expenses deducted by the firm from the price paid to seller/producer (NAI. CSO. (26), 34,883, pp. 10 and 11).[40] Amazingly, at the same time too, the farmer paid the cost of produce inspection, which was considered a wasted cost in the report. I suppose the producers who paid the cost of inspections should have been allowed to exert more influence on the appointment of gazette stations. Since the cooperative societies and unions did the whole job of collecting and bulking of cocoa for buying firms, it would have been reasonable to expect that the latter would offer them some of the commission which was paid to their own buyers for doing similar work, but there was no evidence that the firms ever did this. Cooperative cocoa was frequently bought by Africans who resold to European firms, and sometimes, one found that the firm's African agent offered a better price, at the same sale, than did his principal.

After the issuance of the Cocoa Commission Report, which among other things, recommended that buying agents should be withdrawn, or in other words, that the 'pod' should be broken, it became necessary to take effective physical measures to break, the 'pool' immediately. Indeed, the pool firms took no notice of either the reports or the recommendations as contained, in so far as it affected the pool agreement. The firms continued to sabotage the recommendations of commission, and there soon arose the need for an immediate and definite action by the government to enforce that portion of the recommendation that compelled firms to withdraw the pool agreement and leave the produce market clean (NAI, CSO 26, 34,883).[41] These recommendations had not been

implemented by the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939.

The Cocoa Marketing Commission turned out to be a very thorough survey, admirable in its quality and comprehensiveness, of a difficult and complicative subject. The commission, despite its undoubted impartiality of judgement, showed a remarkable understanding of African mentality and African viewpoint. The report amply demonstrated that the establishment of the pool was detrimental to the cocoa industry among the indigenous people. It was necessary for the colonial government to advice or order that the pool be withdrawn or cancelled in connection with such indigenous industries such as palm oil, palm kernels and groundnut. It was hoped that, the commission's recommendation concerning the entire Nigeria would not be taken literally and applied only to cocoa; it was necessary to give cooperative marketing a trial in connection with cotton, palm produce and groundnut, and should welcome its gradual extension to all crops (NAI, CSO 26, 34,883, p. 19).[42]

This Cocoa Board, which was under the jurisdiction of the Colonial Office, was financed by the British colonial administration. Although the Board's goal was officially aimed at improving the condition of the Ibadan farmer through various measures, (NAI, CSO 26/34883, Vol. 1)[43] what ultimately unfolded was not a true representation of its original intentions as indicated below:

Year	*Producer price per metric ton/£ sterling*	*World mkt. price per metric ton/£ sterling*	*English Cocoa butter finished product per metric ton*
1938	£17.30(c) ₦34.60		£78.80(c) ₦157.60
1939	£12.29(c) ₦24.54		£78.80(c) ₦157.60
1940	£16.73(c) ₦33.46	£33.96(c) ₦67.92	£128.60(c) ₦157.20
1941	£13.78(c) ₦27.56	£44.29(c) ₦88.58	£161.04(c) ₦322.08
1942	£14.76(c) ₦29.52	£44.29(c) ₦88.58	£161.04(c) ₦322.08
1943	£12.76(c) ₦25.52	£44.29(c) ₦88.58	£161.04(c) ₦322.08
1944	£12.79(c) ₦25.58	£44.29(c) ₦88.58	£161.04(c) ₦322.08

NAI, CSO 34,883/S.4, Vol. 1, p. 7 (NAI, CSO 34,883/S.4, Vol. 1: Cocoa Commission Committee, Appointment of and Miscellaneous Correspondence Regarding, p. 7)

The above figures illustrate that the whole process of reorganization of cocoa marketing was a palliative, which was meant to soothe the feelings of the farmers on one hand and dispossess the African middlemen of

the scandalous high profits they realized through speculation on a world market that was badly affected by fluctuation. But from 1945 onwards, schools, hospitals, bridges and roads were built at a hitherto unknown speed. This rapidity in the area of provision of infrastructural facilities was possible because prices for West African products, especially cocoa, stayed high after the war because of world shortage, and thus, the reserves of the boards grew even greater (NAI, CSO, 3995. 19,033, Vol. 1, II and III).[44]

The Middlemen (Produce Buyers): Rating in the Produce Trade

The African middlemen formed an active class in the movements of produce from the interior to the coastal port of Lagos. The cocoa trade fostered and strengthened the economic position of the Ibadan middlemen, i.e. the produce buyers and scales men. The local middlemen enjoyed neither the support of the foreign firms nor the colonial government. The influence of the local middlemen was, indeed, unduly exaggerated and overemphasized *(The Nigeria Daily Times*, 1939).[45] The foreign firms resolve to drive the middlemen entirely out of the market did not solve the problems associated with trade. This was because there were myriad of brokers, dealers and other operators of all grades in the terminal markets, especially New York, where, for instance, speculators on cocoa ranged from 'shoemakers, barbers and dentist to the ordinary brokers causing the wild erratic and baffling movements so commonly experienced', giving nightmare to many exporters (NAI, CSO, 34,883/S4, Vol. 1; *The Nigeria Daily Times*, 1939).[46] The picture of the local middlemen as the bogey of the cocoa trade was a trick that was very much overworked. The African middleman had been used, too often, in arguments by interested parties to draw red-herring across the real issue. The unfavourable propaganda against middlemen was carried on with such persistence that otherwise quite honest people were completely taken in.

The Commission was prepared, on one hand, to humour the African traders by recommending against the Pool Agreement, which they realized could be carried on, secretly, by the firms, and turned around, on the other, to recommend a complete extermination of the African middlemen and larger brothers on the produce market to please the trading firms. They admitted this injustice quite frankly on page 164 paragraphs 523 of the report, which noted that one effect of the commission's proposal,

fully applied, 'deprived the middle and larger brokers of their function in the marketing of cocoa, and opposition from them was expected' (NAI, CSO 2,634,883, Vol. 1).[47]

Although the Commission admitted that the middlemen performed 'a useful and necessary function under the … system' of produce buying, either before or after the buying agreement, but, it still eliminated them in order to please the whims and caprices of the 'pool' firms. This was a Commission that knew too well that similar 'middlemen and brokers' existed both in 'London and New York produce markets' (NAI, CSO 2,634,883, Vol. 1).[48] The question to ask was: If brokers in London and New York had a place in their respective produce markets, why were middlemen prevented in Nigeria to hold a place in our produce market? The truth was that the African middlemen were not prepared to work as paid clerks as suggested by the Commission.

But these produce buyers were undoubtedly perturbed and felt that the Commission was unduly harsh on them. They nursed the fear that many of their friends and relative would be thrown out of job. They were however pleased that the agreement was withdrawn (NAI, CSO 2,634,883, Vol. 1).[49] Many were pleased that the cocoa commission had recommended the abolition of the cocoa agreement. The public had its own reaction to the Commission's report. Farmers did not immediately understand what the recommendations were, and only peddled the distorted versions heard from the middlemen. They were, however, pleased that the agreement was withdrawn, but displeased and disappointed that it did not cause an increase in the price of cocoa.

Significantly, however, oral evidences suggested that scale men and produce-buyers were also involved in various malpractices, the most common of which was the degrading of produce in order to appropriate surplus value. At the end of the day, the share of profit which went to the middlemen was even quite significant in comparison to those profits reaped by big British business interests and by the British government itself. In short, middlemen who were regarded as the international shippers of cocoa were held in high esteem among the Yoruba in south-western Nigeria, particularly because of the massive wealth they controlled.

Ibadan Cocoa Farmers

The question remains: how attractive were the prices offered by the peasant farmers during the period of colonial rule in Nigeria? In other words, did export production confer great profits on the producers? I do not think so. On the contrary, trading companies made huge fortunes on relatively small investments in the cocoa belt of Ibadan. The Ibadan producers were, indeed, suspicious that they were not receiving full value for their cocoa or the maximum figure which the world market price justified. They were victims of a pool which continued to exist despite assurances to the contrary. It was the pool which carried out the 'scalping' ('Scalping': Cocoa Board)[50] of farmers. The Yoruba farmers worked for long hours to produce cocoa, and the price of the product was not commensurate with the price of those long hours of toiling. Since primary produce on the average attracted low prices, it follows that the buyer and user of raw materials were engaged in a massive exploitation of the farmers (NAI, CSO 34,883/S.4, Vol. 1)[51] who were never paid real producer price.

Year	*Producer price per metric ton £/sterling*	*World market prices per metric ton S/sterling*	*English cocoa butter per metric ton £/sterling*
1938	17.30(c) ₦34.60		78.80(c) ₦157.60
1939	12.29(c) ₦24.58		78.80(c) ₦157.60
1940	16.73(c) ₦33.46	33.96	128.60(c) ₦257.20
1941	13.78(c) ₦27.56	44.29	161.04(c) ₦322.08
1942	14.76(c) ₦29.52	44.29	161.04(c) ₦322.08
1943	12.76(c) ₦25.52	44.29	161.04(c) ₦322.08
1944	12.79(c) ₦25.58	44.29	161.04(c) ₦322.08

NAI, CSO, 34,883, Vol. 1, p. 11 (NAI, CSO, 34,883, Vol. 1. Report of Commission of Enquiry into the Marketing of West Africa Cocoa, Paragraph 263, p. 10. See also Paragraph 270, p. 11)

The above table points to the fact that the Ibadan farmer who had to be paid produce price of £4.(c) ₦8 per ton and an average transport fare of (c) ₦8 received a price that was not commensurate with his production. In short, the Ibadan farmer was highly disadvantaged, especially in terms of price. An observer, E. Radcliff Lark Esq., had declared at an earlier date that there was too great a disparity between the prices of raw materials and those of the manufactured articles. The differences between the prices of cocoa export and the imported manufactured goods constituted

an instance of unequal exchange (NAI, CSO, 34,883, Vol. 1, p. 11).[52] Economists refer to this situation as one of deteriorating terms of trade. The prices paid to the Ibadan producers were discouraging. More so, the cocoa cash crop industry was sustained largely because the indigenous Ibadan farmers had long been acquainted with the structure related to the cash crop industry, and they demonstrated considerable sense of adaptation within the limit provided by the colonizer. The African farmers were really not geared towards export production by the 'attractive' price which the European firms and traders had to offer. The reality was that the new produce inspection scheme ensured higher price which in turn evoked greater export.

But in the final analysis, the Ibadan planter worked for long hours, and the price of their produce was not commensurate with the long hours of labour. The Ibadan cocoa farmer, who had to pay four shillings (40 kobo) cocoa tax, invest their labour and capital, pay produce price of four pounds per ton and pay transport was operating at a loss. The cocoa planter had become the victim in a tripartite relationship between the planters, the middlemen and the European firms because he was a conservative individual who had been accustomed, for years, to conducting his cocoa marketing transactions with the individual middleman and nothing, except an apparent and immediate advantage, would have turned them away from this long practice. For instance, a farmer who was cash strapped went to the middleman to obtain the required fund to provide himself or perhaps his son with a new bride, which was a matter of great importance to him. The cooperative society, on the other hand, may have had a different view, and he may not have got money for such purpose from that quarter. After all, farmers, who had doubled their cocoa output from 1934 to 1944, for example, could not have successfully done so if the story of their victimization by the wicked middleman was true. Anyone could have thought the farmer in the cocoa growing areas was a fool. Perhaps the peasantries in places like the Ekiti District and around the Ile-Ife were a little slow witted. But, I do not know of a shrewder, keener and more intelligent type of farmers than were found in Ibadan, Ilesha and Ijebu Ode (NAI, CSO, 34,883/S4, Vol. 1).[53]

The Real Beneficiaries of Cocoa Industry

Apologists of the British colonialism had frequently given the impression that colonial economic policy was beneficial to all indigenous people. They held that the colonial administration ushered the people into perpetual bliss, pretended not to know that colonial economic policies were inexorably geared towards incorporation and exploitation. They closed their eyes to the fact that the indigenous African producers suffered from the most pernicious and unfavourable terms of trade. Colonial apologist accounts have generally placated and misrepresented the roles of the British colonial government with such labels as 'development', 'change', etc. Conventional accounts have always taken the side of external agencies, and have regarded them as the 'prime mover' in all processes of economic changes. They presumed that the African were dormant and passive tools who lacked the initiative, drive and acumen to sustain an agricultural economy of such commercial magnitude, a position already debunked.

After the war, the British white paper exposed the huge profit that was being made on West Africa cocoa and revealed a new plan for its control. George Padmore, also reporting for a Nigeria Newspaper, *West African Pilot*, presented fully, for the first time, the method adopted in exploiting the indigenous cocoa producer in West Africa, and the fabulous profit derived therefore. The method employed by the colonial government in collaboration with the expatriate firms in exploiting the indigenous cocoa producer was brought to public notice and scrutiny; the *West African Pilot* sensational reportage revealed that Britain made a profit of £3,676,253 from 1939 to 1943 (NAI. 43/1).[54] While Nigeria and Gold Coast produced the world's greatest output of cocoa, America was the greatest consumer while Britain was the greatest profiteer because the head of the British Chocolate Firm was the Chairman of Control Board. While production was in the hands of the Africans, the marketing of cocoa in England, America and other countries was entirely in the few hands of the British Merchants who formed the pool. The pool consisted of all the leading English chocolate manufacturers as well as big monopolies that fixed the prices to be paid to African producers (*The Nigeria Daily Times*, 1939).[55]

One could aver that the close relationship between the C.O. and British firms such as the United Africa Company and Cadbury Bros. squeezed Nigerian and other non-British small cocoa-export firms, in

many cases, out of business. Indeed, the C.O. war-time scheme of fixed buying prices well below the world price during peacetime was desirable as a means of eradicating 'middleman abuses' and of building up large 'stabilization funds' to protect the cocoa farmers in future years when prices might fall. This scheme turned out to be attractive and favourable to the British Treasury as it maximized US dollar earnings for Britain from the sale of Nigeria cocoa.

The British economic policy, just like those of other western nations, was dominated by interest and extraction. The 'centre-periphery' theory, which holds that the centre's growth and development must always be at the expense of the periphery, dominated the relations between Britain and the colonized people. Resources were, thus, extracted from the periphery to meet the demands of the centre. British capitalism in south-western Nigeria was definitely not intended to transform Yorubaland into a capitalist society comparable to Britain. Rather, the tendency of British capitalism, right from the very beginning, was one of competition, elimination and monopoly (Rodney, 1972: 162–222).[56] Thus, we could argue that the institution of a colonial tax system was guided by the principle of self-sustainability on the part of the colonies and direct exploitation on the part of the British Government.

The way and manner the British colonial government went about the business of rulership left a lot of room for the economic exploitation of Yorubaland. Britain also guaranteed optimum conditions under which private companies could exploit the indigenous people maximally. That explains why the British colonial government was repeatedly speaking about the 'maintenance of law and order' (Rodney, 1972: 179),[57] which obviously meant ensuring that conditions which were favourable to the expansion of capitalism were maintained. It also explains why the British imposed various kinds of taxes on the people. However, one may add that there was no deliberate policy by the British to make the colony poor. The poverty of the people was an indirect result of the colonial economic system.

Indeed, the British administered Yorubaland as a field of exploitation as taxes were generated from virtually all-imaginable economic endeavours such as entertainment tax on public cinematograph performances, public race meetings-horse racing and public dance halls (NAI. Abe Prof. ABP. 2788).[58] Although colonial taxation was too burdensome on the resource poor farmers, some generated taxes were expended on the socio-economic development of Yorubaland. Indeed, the profits of the Nigeria

Marketing Board, which was supplemented by the colonial government, brought about a substantial expansion of public health, education services and of such public facilities as roads, ports and water supplies. They made possible the setting aside of considerable sums for financing development schemes, educational and research activities (The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, 1961: 14).[59] Even if the Ibadan cocoa producers too benefited from the British economic activities, their rewards and the 'development' that accrued to Nigeria was very insignificant when compared to what was taken out of the entire Western Region.

British officials and writers who were inclined to think like them have concentrated on the 'positive' impact of the economic changes that came with the involvement of colonial rule to the extent of eulogizing every new measure. The reality often ignored was that most of the changes were not originally conceived to serve the interest of the indigenous people. Rather, the benefit that accrued to the people was just incidental. Local industry was not even encouraged while the production of raw materials for the capitalist market was limitlessly encouraged, sometimes at the expense of food production to the extent that a number of people complained of starvation (Cf. *Lagos Weekly Record*, 1895).[60]

By 1960, export had moved further up to 154,176 tons valued at thirty six million seven hundred and seventy two thousand pounds (£36,772,000). By that year, Nigeria had become the third largest producer of cocoa, behind Brazil and Ghana (Ekundare, 1972: 80–82).[61] By 1965, Nigeria had exported cocoa to the value of forty two million pounds, the profit made by the British firms not inclusive. It is necessary to reevaluate the socio-economic benefits said to have been enjoyed by the indigenous Ibadan farmers as a result of their involvement in the cocoa industry. It should also be remembered, for the purpose of clarification, that the remote stimulus to the growth of cocoa on a commercial scale in West Africa in general, and Ibadan in particular, was the phenomenal increase in the consumption of chocolate, dairy products and chocolate butter in Britain. This naturally led to the introduction of such food items into Ibadan and other places in Nigeria. It will not be out of place to regard this innovation as part of social development in the country.

Conclusion

This study has shown that colonial rule did not lead to the economic development of Ibadan and Yorubaland in general. All the modifications put in place by the colonial government were targeted at overthrowing the indigenous economy and imposing a new exploitative colonial capitalist mode of production, which was intended to ensure the transfer of the substantial gains of the cocoa business to the metropolis. Yorubaland was gradually but systematically peripheralized. Generally speaking, the economy of Britain and Western Nigeria was merged into one in an exploitative order, which turned the Yorubaland into an agricultural arrangement, a countryside feeding Britain. The Yorubaland became an extension of the British capitalist market, dependent on what the British companies were prepared to buy or sell, using the tax instrument as the big tool in the implementation of its policies.

The study also revealed that although the south-western Nigeria farmer lacked power, they demonstrated considerable initiative, not only in farm management but also in their responses to economic and market conditions. This is best illustrated by the fact that in the face of price collapse of the depression years, the farmers still combined the best of these qualities to maintain a consistency in the volume of cocoa export. Even the immediate post-colonial period was, indeed, a period of challenges, particularly for the peasant farmer, who adamantly refused to meet the burdensome tax demands by the General Adeyinka Adebayo-led administration in Western Nigeria. The same period also presented an opportunity for Nigerians to right the wrongs of colonialism and put the economy back on the part of sustainable growth and development. But Nigeria has, unfortunately, remained in an economic quagmire since the 1970s, and the situation, sadly, continued to decline and degenerate by the day.

The roots of the country's economic crises can be traced historically to the perversion of indigenous economy from its natural growth path. This is the product of colonialism, a situation that has been compounded by attempts by the independent Nigerian leaders to climb the development ladder from the top rungs. Corruption in high and low places, enchantment of the political and economic *elites* with western industrialism, which has been accompanied by their increasing lack of faith in the viability of the indigenous economic system, has, unfortunately, remained the bane of total development in Nigeria. Many Nigerian had thought that the civilian government of Muhammadu Buhari will

help bring the much desired change to the populace, but the Nigeria economy has relentlessly been plagued by corruption in high and low places, compounded by recession that has continued to bite harder on the populace. Sadly, problems associated with insucurity and the apparent insensitivity of government has rendered farmers impotent as the Nigeria economy remained in stagnated in 2021.

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