

Continuity and Changes in Palm Oil Production in Ekiti Land

Dr. (Mrs.) Ajayi Adeyinka Theresa¹, Dr. Oyewale Peter Oluwaseun²,
Osadola Oluwaseun Samuel³

¹*Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti Ekiti State Nigeria*

²*Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti Ekiti State Nigeria.*

³*Post Graduate Student Department of History and International Studies, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti Ekiti State Nigeria.*

Abstract: The colonial Ekiti was rich in exportable commodities that enriched the colonial government through what was known as external trade; between the Ekiti people, the local businessmen, the middlemen, government and foreign nations like Britain, and the United States of America. As a sub-ethnic of the Yoruba derivation, the Ekiti people trade majority on Palm produce just like other settlement in Yoruba land. Before colonization, palm produce was also mainly for local consumption, without the people really knowing its industrial and economic value. However, during the colonial period, this product was aggressively sought after by foreign firms like John Holt, United African Company, G, B, Oliphant, A.G Leventis and Peterson, and Zochonis, among others. Trade in this commodity was controlled by agencies like Nigeria Oil Palm Produce Marketing Board (NOPPMB). In spite of the exploitative actions of the colonial government, palm production added growth to the economic life of the Ekiti people. Hence, this paper examines the developmental processes in palm oil production prior to the coming of British colonial administration up till the post colonial period in Ekiti land. It however derive its data from both primary and secondary sources.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ekiti land is one of the Yoruba speaking states in the southwestern Nigeria. The state is unique in nature being a homogenous state. The land of Ekiti is rich in agricultural production most especially production of cash crops and food crops like Yam, Tomatoes, Okro, Cassava etc. Oil palm (*Elaeis guineensis*) is one of the most important economic crops in Nigeria most especially among the Ekiti people¹ Nearly all the regions have their own benefits from its production, depending on the climatic condition. It is made of essential components, namely, the fronds, the leaves, the trunk, and the roots, which are used for economic purposes ranging from palm oil, palm kernel, palm wine, broom, and palm kernel cake. Notable European nations such as Portugal, Spain, France and England took active part in overseas exploration and colonization. As far back as 1347, journeys had been made to the southern tip of Africa and the eastern coast of Africa and trading stations had being established in important towns and cities of west Africa..

During the Portuguese earliest contact with the Benin people, palm oil served as a sub-commodity even when slaves were the main commodity for their trade.² However, relevant scholarly works have being able to argue the effectiveness of colonialism on the indigenous economy of the European gyhcolonies. Some critically examined the exploitative nature while some enunciated the growth and development derived by it.

Hence, this paper examines the continuity and changes in palm oil production among the Ekiti people. Its scope is not limited to only the colonial period but as well as the pre-colonial and post-colonial period. It however juxtaposes the different changes that occurred in the processes of palm oil production among the various periods under study as well as their similarities.

Pre-Colonial Palm oil Production

Among the pre-industrial Ekiti people, production of food was crucial for their economic survival. In such a case, farming was localized and an incidence of famine could lead to migrations and even death. Indeed, an essential factor for selecting a settlement was availability of rainfall and fertile land suitable for cultivation or

¹ O. Osadola, Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.14

² T. Dzeka & O. Osadola, Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti, Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC), Vol.13, 2015, pp. 215-225

grazing. Productions and distributions in pre-colonial times relied much on available natural and human resources in which Ekiti people had in much abundance not just for its traditional relevance among the people of Eastern Yoruba land, but also for its rich agricultural products in the traditional trade system.

During the pre-colonial period, there were notable fruit trees that were of various importances to the economic and social life of the people Of Ekiti. They could be classified into domesticated and wild trees. The two notable examples of these trees are Kolanut and Palm trees respectively.³

Wide fruit trees were public property and communally owned in pre-colonial Ekiti land. The fruits therefore, could be harvested by anyone who first came across them when they were ripe. The only exceptions were those located at the centre of a farm which could not be harvested by anyone except the owner of such farm-land to prevent the destruction of his farm produce. The domesticated fruit trees on the other hand were individually owned and could not be harvested by anyone, except the owner or with his expressed permission.

Seth La-Anyane in his work opines that the processing of oil palm fruits for edible oil has been practiced in Africa for thousands of years and the produce; highly coloured and flavoured is an essential ingredient in most of the traditional West Africa cuisine.⁴ This assertion further strengthen the claim that palm oil was the major substitute trade commodity aside slaves, used between the people of Benin and the Portuguese as far back as the 1645 during the reign of Ewuare known to the historians as the empire builder.⁵

Its production process in the pre-colonial times is manually done. The palm fruit when ripe is red in colour, soft and juicy. Inside the fruit is a big hard substance which in turn contains the palm kernel. The palm tree is so tall and spiky; to harvest the ripe fruits require climbing with a local belt called (*igbà*). The bunch of fruits is then cut down with cutlass and each fruit is painstakingly removed from the spiky bunch. The flesh of the palm fruit is soft and yellow and is used for making palm soup, pail oil, and palm kernel. In addition to using them for cooking, palm oil and palm kernel oils can be used for making soap either for washing or bathing, usually called *Ose dudu* (black soap) among the Ekiti people. Palm kernel oil is used for treating skin sores in most Ekiti villages. Even the rubbish obtained from the processing the palm fruit is useful. The husk and palm kernel shells are used for lightning fire in villages up till date; it is called *Oguso* (Fire-light lamp).

The branches of the palm trees were used for weaving baskets for carrying agricultural products from farm to market and the leaves were used for making brooms and weaving mats. In large quantities, the palm branches were used to cover the top of mud houses in the villages. After harvesting the fruits, the palm trees were used for brewing palm wine. The tree is cut down and holes are made in the trunk through which the wine drips into a big earthen pot or keg. The first collection of palm wine is very sweet and nutritious. However, since drinking is normally considered a male rather than female among the Ekiti people, palm wine is brewed mostly for men.

However, in pre-colonial times, the role of women cannot be over-emphasized in palm oil production. Men does the climbing and harvesting due to the strenuous process attached to it, it is however worthy of note that the picking, transportation and selling of the finished product is the sole duty of the women fold in Ekiti land. This explains why palm oil traders in Ekiti land are mainly women.⁶

After thorough pounding, palm kernel nuts would be automatically separated from the oily kernels' fibres and removed from the *eku*, leaving only the fibres that were already soaked with untreated or yet to be processed oil. As this was going on, more water would be poured into the *eku* until water reached the knees of the women who were now ready to start wading forcefully in the already oil soaked water. Depending on the size of the circular mound, which could be bigger than a moderate parlour, it could take not less than four to six women to perform this task. As a result, raw thick oil would start rising to the surface of the pool. The oil would then be skimmed off. Meanwhile, a large pot or tin drum would be placed on fire, ready for cooking or boiling the raw palm oil. With palms, the accumulated oil would be put inside bowls to be poured inside the tin drum on fire. The above oil and water pool process would be repeated many times until all the raw oil floating on the pool surface was transferred to the tin drum for boiling.

³ J. F. Oloidi, *Economic History of Ekiti People in Nigeria, 1900-1960*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Nsukka, 2011, pp.141-143

⁴ S. La-Anyane, *The Oil Palm Industries of Western Tropical Africa*. Food research institute, 1966,

⁵ T. Dzeka & O. Osadola, *Social-Cultural and Institutional Diffusion in Western Nigeria: An Assessment of Benin Influence on Ekiti*, *Makurdi Journal of Arts and Culture (MAJAC)*, Vol.13, 2015, pp. 215-225

⁶ According to Madam Oni, women are considered to be the best bargainer when it comes to buying and selling prior to the coming of the European merchants. The economic values and domestic usefulness attached to palm oil production is essentially one of the reasons why women are mainly involved in its sales during the pre-colonial era. Interview with Madam Oni, Palm oil plantation owner and trader in Erio Ekiti, 7/11/2017

It must be noted that while processing the oil inside the water-oil pool, certain leaves would be dropped inside the pool to help thicken the raw oil and make it accumulate more quickly. Information reveals that, things like these (leaves and shrubs) are also good to purify the boiled oil and make it finely thin on the surface".⁷ Also, information from Mrs. Deborah, a palm oil seller at Oja Oba market in Ado Ekiti, reveals that certain leaves, including the one known as witch catcher were put inside the water-oil pool to help ward off devilish hands which could affect the quality or the marketability of the finished palm oil".⁸ However, after the raw oil had been thoroughly boiled, for about three to four hours, depending on the quantity being boiled, it would be allowed to settle and cool. By this, all the impurities and dampish fibrous parts from which the final, purified oil had been released must have settled at the bottom of the drum, forming a mass of heavy rough pomade-like mixture. The oil finally produced would be transferred into containers like pots and gourds for transportation to urban centres..

Colonial Palm Oil Production

There is no need to emphasize the importance of palm oil during the period of the legitimate trade which ushered in the colonial administration in Africa. The threat to British economic interest in the world market for palm produce was rapidly checked through a number of colonial policies. Central to these policies was the aim of maximally exploiting the natural and human resources of Nigeria for the purpose of securing profitable trade to Britain.⁹ Thus, the colonial administration hoped to achieve their aims not by radically destroying the existing indigenous production methods, but through the modification of such. Hence, the government encouraged the introduction of demonstration plantations and the use of hand presses and crushing mills for boosting the quality of extracted oil.¹⁰

The African producers use some of the palm oil for their own personal use; majorly for local consumption. Information reveals that palm kernels were exported far more than palm oil in Ekiti land as a result of the consumption value attached to it.¹¹ A reasonable estimate of the ratio of oil to kernel (by weight) in the fruit of the wild palm is ten of oil to seven of kernel. The weight of kernels exported from Nigeria in 1949 was 376,000 tons.¹² A total oil content of the fruit from which the exported kernels were produced must have been in the rate of 537,000 tons.¹³ The implication of this statistic is that, there were a large sum of wild palm tree which the British colonial administration met amidst the Ekiti people, it is however noted that the creation of Palm plantations by the British government in the various regions were aimed at increasing the productivity level of the product and the only reason attached to this interest, is to enhance it export to the Metropolis for the service of its growing industry.

The oil pal products which were exported from Ekiti in the early part of colonial rule were those obtained from the palm trees that grew wild and luxuriantly in the forest. The quality of palm products produced at this time depended largely on the oil palm fruits harvested from the forest and the efforts which the people put in processing them. Communities like Ado, Ikere, Aramoko, Ikoru, Iyin, Erio, Oye, Erinmope, Igede, Erinmope, Ifaki, Afao, Agbado, Ayede, Ikole, Erinjiyan, and Aisegba Ekiti were actively involved in the production of palm kernel in Ekiti.¹⁴ These communities although engaged in palm oil production, it was mainly meant for consumption and not for export. The method of processing palm oil before the introduction of oil processing machines during the World War II was the one which the people had known from earliest time. Even when the machines were introduced, the people still continued with their traditional method without much alteration.¹⁵

The men did the climbing of the palm trees and cutting of the palm fruits while the women processed the fruits to obtain oil and kernels. Processing began by first having the fruits cooked. The soft fruits were then poured into a large wooden vat which the women entered and began to mash with their feet. When the fruits had been thoroughly mashed, water is poured on the mashed fruits in the vat to bring the oil to the top of the water

⁷ J. F. Oloidi, *Economic History of Ekiti People in Nigeria, 1900-1960*, Ph.D Thesis, University of Nsukka, 2011, pp.141-143

⁸ Interview with Mama Deborah, 62 years of age, Palm Oil trader and Oil palm plantation owner, Ikere Ekiti, 7/6/2014

⁹ J. Ihonvbere . & T. Falola., *The Illusions of Economic Development*, in Falola Toyin's (ed) *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development*, London: Zed Books Ltd, 1987

¹⁰ A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Longman, 1973

¹¹ N. A. I. Ekiti Div. 1/1, G. 56 Vol. ii, File No. 1427A/645, 20/4/949, pp.211-212

¹² *Ibid* p. 213

¹³ O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.61

¹⁴ *Ibid* p. 62

¹⁵ O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. Pp. 107-109

while the nuts remained at the bottom of the vat. The oil was then collected into a large pot and boiled over the fire until all the water had evaporated leaving only the oil. The surface was then skimmed off leaving impurities at the bottom of the pot. The oil is then boiled over the fire a second time until what was left was pure edible oil. The palm nuts on the other hand were collected and kept in the sun to dry before using strong objects or stones to crack the hard shell in order to harvest the nuts.

Trade in palm oil as an export commodity did not begin until 1923 in Ekiti land. Prior to this period, 1900-1920s, trade in palm oil was done locally.¹⁶ Palm oil was bought by the Nigerian middlemen in Ekiti and other areas of Ondo province like Okitipupa community. Some middlemen also came from the Benin province.¹⁷ These middlemen bought palm oil in “kerosene tin” which as at that period, was the largest measure sold, as there is no larger means of transport to transport it in bigger containers.¹⁸ The prices of kerosene tin varied from 5 shillings to 7 shillings or from £11 to £15 per ton.¹⁹ In the early 1930s, when the Ekiti farmers turned more attention to palm oil production, there was also increase in the number of middlemen who also made kerosene tins as their buying container.

Many Ekiti farmers also acquired these kerosene tins in quantity to store palm oil which had earlier been stored in traditional clay pots (Ikoko or Usa). The farmers’ wives and children used to transport on their head, tins of palm oil from the farm to the town. The tins of palm oil were sold to the middlemen who usually stored them in their shops before being transported by motor vehicles to the evacuation centres in Ado, Ikoro, Omuo and Ikere where they are sold to the European firms i.e. Messrs Mac Neil Scot Ltd. and Messrs Mac Liver.²⁰ Since 1920s, informed observers have unceasingly predicted the imminent loss of Nigeria’s native industry by efficient plantation producers. In the pre-war period, the Dutch plantations in Indonesia were going to ring the death knell on Nigeria’s native industry. Starting from scratch in the early 1920s, in little more than a decade, Indonesia has overtaken Nigeria as the world leading exporter of palm oil; however, after the Second World War, and the removal of the Dutch, expansion was replaced by decline and stagnation. In the post war years, Belgian and British plantations in the Congo (concessions granted to Lever in 1911) showed a similar rapid growth.²¹

In 1927, after a number of years of experimental breeding, the Department of Agriculture began to distribute free selected seedlings to farmers for the establishment of cultivated palm plantation groves; the experimental station for oil palm seedlings was opened at Okitipupa to serve Ondo province under which Ekiti was a division.²² In 1935, the cultivated Palm Ordinance provided financial incentive to farmers to undertake such planting by way of a rebate of the export duty. However, by 1938, only 5,530 farmers out of nearly a million had planted these seedlings, 9,213 acres in all.²³

Oil palm trade in Ekiti during the colonial period was majorly restricted to palm kernel exportation, while the palm oil was left alone for local consumption. It was only in the Eastern part of Nigeria that both Palm oil and Palm Kernel were subjected to rapid exportation. European firms also traded salt for kernels during this period in Ekiti district while bonuses of petrol were awarded to lorry owners who deliver over a certain target of kernels. Firms were instructed to also stipulate a certain production of kernels as a condition for delivery of certain proportion of kernels to the cocoa which it is prepared to buy, and firms to do the same with their buyers.²⁴

Colonial Oil Mill Scheme

Pioneer Oil Mills was established by the colonial government after the Second World War. It was established in Okitipupa to serve the Ondo province which included Ekiti District. The recommendations by the special oil palm policy committee were submitted to the government in 1945. In 1946, implantation began with slight modifications. This was influenced by a number of factors. The first was the need for government to study the recommendations thoroughly before accepting and implementing them. Secondly and importantly, the year 1946 created the best kind of economic atmosphere within which the government could implement a new

¹⁶ F. J. Oloidi, “External trade in Cocoa and Palm produce in colonial Ekiti of Western Nigeria”, *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 2014, pp. 299-309

¹⁷ N. A. I. Ondo Annual Report (Trade and Economic), Ondo Prof. 4/1, 1923, p.7

¹⁸ Ibid p.8

¹⁹ G. K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic growth in Nigeria*. Chicago: Illinois Publisher, 1966, p.97

²⁰ N. A. I. Ondo Annual Report (Miscellaneous), Ondo Prof. 4/1, 1923, p.24

²¹ N. A. I. Ondo Annual Report (Trade and Economic), Ondo Prof. 4/1, 1923, p. 7

²² Ibid p.8

²³ E. J. Usoro, *The Nigerian Oil Palm Industry*, Ibadan: University Press, 1974, p. 242

²⁴ O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.122

scheme. It was in 1946 that the government's new post WWII policy of restructuring the colonial economy of Nigeria came to effect. This was set in motion through the adoption of the first ten years plan of development and welfare for Nigeria.²⁵

At the initial stage, reaction to the mills was that of resentment, irregular patronage and boycott. In most cases, the capacity of the mills could not cope with the volume of production of palm produce because of the vastness of the province. This problem was general but more prominent at the Okitipupa mill.²⁶ Consequently, palm fruits were not crushed on time thereby leading to wastage. To the palm oil producers, this was more than they could bear because of the economic loss. As a result, some producers majorly from Ekiti district resorted to traditional method of palm oil extraction which the colonial administration had earlier discredited. The reason for this is majorly the distance of transporting their harvested palm produce to the mill. Adding to the resentment of the people; the fruits could be rejected by the staff of the mills alleging that the fruits were damaged in the process of harvesting and portage.²⁷

Another area which the people complained much about was the loss of palm kernel to the mills. This loss undermined the socio-economic arrangement of the family, which generally deprived the women of their income; as the sole owner of the kernel after the oil extraction. The income realized from the sale of palm kernel was integral to the economic wherewithal of the family. Furthermore, soap and pomade manufactured from the palm kernel meant for domestic use was no longer available. Thus, the household economy escalates inter-clan land disputes. Compensation paid for land acquired for the mills was sufficient for villages and clans to vie for the location of oil mills. In some places, however, the communities did not ask for compensation.²⁸

However, from the mid-1950s, the response to the mills shifted from resentment to acceptance. They became so popular that some people applied to the Western Nigeria Development Board for mills to be established in their communities without compensations from the government. This sudden change of attitude could be explained by the growing awareness of the need to produce high quality grade of oil and kernel. Moreso, mills became associated with progress and modernity which help to enhance the status of the communities where located. Lastly, those who witnessed the British conquest of some regions at the beginning of the twentieth century feared that any attempt to overtly frustrate the actualization of the pioneer mills scheme may ones again attract the wrath of British fire power. As it were, as the economic and military consequences came into calculation in time, cooperation with the colonial state became the norm.

What happened in Ekiti (1949-1955) was that the middlemen made sure that enough palm oil was bought from the local markets. This oil was sold to the Buying Agents who would sell to the big firms that would eventually transport them to Lagos either by creek through Agbabu in Ondo province or by road through Ilesha and Ibadan to Lagos. From Lagos, the Ekiti palm oil along with those from the major palm oil producers in the East and Midwestern Nigeria was shipped to the UK, USA, France and other European countries.²⁹ From these countries, palm oil were converted to various industrial products like soap, body cream, lubricants and margarine, among others. These were in turn exported back to Nigeria for sale.

Post-Colonial Palm Oil Production

Considering the long distance travel from Ekiti district to Okitipupa where the colonial Oil Mill was situated, the Ekiti people never hesitated to return back to their traditional ways of processing palm oil after the exit of the British colonial authority in 1960. According to Iya Elepo whose family was known for palm oil business in Aramoko Ekiti, the traditional ways of producing palm oil is more beneficial to the palm oil producers than the oil mill scheme. According to her, the lost of kernels to the oil mill workers as well as the huge payment for transporting the products are parts of the reasons why palm oil producers and traders prefer the traditional methods to the oil mill scheme.³⁰

²⁵ N.A.I. Ekiti Division. 1/1, File 1308, Vol. II, p. 207

²⁶ G. K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic growth in Nigeria*. Chicago: Illinois Publisher, 1966, p.98

²⁷ *Ibid* p. 99

²⁸ *Ibid* p. 116

²⁹ O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.122

³⁰ Iya Elepo, 74 years; palm oil seller in Aramoko Ekiti. Interview conducted with her in Aramoko Ekiti on October 4, 2014.

However, the oil mill scheme became so unpopular in the post colonial British Nigeria due to poor maintenance of the scheme. According to Osadola, corruption and favouritism reduced the quality of products and services rendered by the scheme whereby discouraging palm oil traders from patronizing it anymore.³¹

By tradition, harvesting palm nuts, or cutting down palm nuts from palm trees, was an exclusively male pre-occupation. But processing the palm nuts for palm oil was mainly the duty of women. As already stated, after the man had cut down the ripe nuts, women processed the fruits by boiling them in large containers until they were very soft. All palm oil processing or production usually took place in the farm, because of large quantity of kernel bunches, production method and long distance, from home, among others.

The Ekiti women did not use mortars and pestles, but legs and heavy, but easily handled, long sticks to pound the cooked nuts repeatedly in a very large circular mound called *eku*; usually constructed with clay and fibrous materials on a flat rocky ground. After thorough pounding, palm kernel nuts would be automatically separated from the oily kernels' fibres and removed from the *eku*, leaving only the fibres that were already soaked with untreated or yet to be processed oil. As this was going on, more water would be poured into the *eku* until water reached the knees of the women who were now ready to start wading forcefully in the already oil soaked water. Depending on the size of the circular mound, which could be bigger than a moderate parlour, it could take not less than four to six women to perform this task. As a result, raw thick oil would start rising to the surface of the pool. The oil would then be skimmed off.

Meanwhile, a large pot or tin drum, would be placed on fire, ready for cooking or boiling the raw palm oil. With palms, the accumulated oil would be put inside bowls to be poured inside the tin drum on fire. The above oil and water pool process would be repeated many times until all the raw oil floating on the pool surface was transferred to the tin drum for boiling.³²

It must be noted that while processing the oil inside the water-oil pool, certain leaves would be dropped inside the pool to help thicken the raw oil and make it accumulate more quickly. According to Mrs. Adediran, a palm oil seller in Ikoro Ekiti, "things like these (leaves and shrubs) are also good to purify the boiled oil and make it finely thin on the surface".³³ Also to Madam Fabian, a palm oil seller at Oke-Oja in Aramoko Ekiti, "certain leaves, including the one known as witch catcher were put inside the water-oil pool to help ward off devilish hands which could affect the quality or the marketability of the finished palm oil".³⁴ However, after the raw oil had been thoroughly boiled, for about three to four hours, depending on the quantity being boiled, it would be allowed to settle and cool. This way, all the impurities and dampish fibrous parts from which the final, purified oil had been released must have settled at the bottom of the drum, forming a mass of heavy rough pomade-like mixture. The oil finally produced would be transferred into containers like kegs for transportation to town for sale.

Changes and Continuity

It is clear that palm oil production based on plantations has very considerable advantages over an industry based on natural Palmaris. In addition to higher oil yields per tree, processing in large plantation mills gives greater extraction efficiency, better quality oil and owing to planned full-capacity operation lower processing costs than are obtainable under a peasant smallholder system. Despite these advantages, the colonial administration resisted the determined efforts of William Hesketh Lever in 1907, 1920, and 1925 to establish such plantations in Nigeria.³⁵ Lever was anxious to secure a raw material supply for the European soap industry. However, upholding the "dual mandate" the colonial government was even more determined that the agricultural resources of the West African dependencies be developed through the agency of their indigenous populations and that as a fundamental principle, no non-native would be allowed freehold land rights. Efforts of the Nigerian government since the late 1950s to attract foreign investments into the plantation field have been frustrated by the heavy export tax involved in compulsory sales to the marketing board; indeed most of the

³¹ O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.122, see also G. K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic growth in Nigeria*. Chicago: Illinois Publisher, 1966,

³² O. Osadola, *Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti*, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.122, see also G. K. Helleiner, *Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic growth in Nigeria*. Chicago: Illinois Publisher, 1966; F. J. Oloidi, "External trade in Cocoa and Palm produce in colonial Ekiti of Western Nigeria", *International Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, Vol. 2, Issue 3, 2014, pp. 299-309

³³ Mrs. Adediran, 84 years; former palm oil seller in Ikoro-Ekiti. Interview conducted with her in Ikoro on October 4, 2014.

³⁴ Madam Fabian, 87 years; former palm oil seller in Aramoko Ekiti. Interview conducted with her in Aramoko on March 4, 2015.

³⁵ W. K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, Vol. II, London, 1942, p.191

13,000 acres of palm oil plantation in the hands of expatriates is being replanted with rubber trees, a product not controlled by a marketing board.³⁶

The people of Ekiti found that the cultivation of oil palm trees was certainly going to have long lasting economic benefits for them because of the dual products derivable from the trees. For one, the oil derived from the trees has a constant and steady local market, and secondly, palm kernel was very much in high demands in Europe. The farmers therefore, relegated the production of food crops. Palm trees were capable of been inter-crop with other food crops for a number of years until the trees were fully grown. This therefore means that one of the major techniques – mixed cropping – which the people had practiced as far back as the pre-colonial days was not disrupted by the oil palm cultivation and the introduction of palm plantations during the colonial period.³⁷

The steady supply of oil palm produce (oil and kernels) to the market in Ekiti was the result of the abundance of oil palm trees both in the forest and in the plantations. Although it is important to note that the export market made greater use of palm kernel than palm oil due to the consumption of the former by the Ekiti people.³⁸

It is important at this junction to examine the impact of oil mills which was established during the British colonial administration. One major contribution of the mill scheme to the economy of the people of Ekiti was that, it provided employment opportunities for the able bodies to work at the plantation. Each mill employed an average of about twenty seven indigenous labour force. In some cases, some of the people were recruited from communities where mills were sited. Given the apparently low employment opportunities from mills, there is no doubt that most of the labours force at this time was engaged in agriculture, trade and manufacturing of crafts while others left the region to other parts of the country in search of greener pasture. Furthermore, as the plantation scheme, the established mills helped to boost the construction and development of feeder roads linking fruit processing areas with fruit buying stations. A road was constricted that linked Akure with Ikere during this period of time.³⁹

During the post colonial era, due to the busy nature of the people either with office jobs or other businesses, palm oil plantations in Ekiti land were sub-let to palm oil professional producers from Eastern Nigeria or Middle Belt Igede land who remit an agreed number of palm oil kegs at the end of the year or quarter, to the owner of the plantation. According to Chief Imi of Aramoko Ekiti, professional palm oil producer in recent times, usually fail to fulfill their own side of the bargain with various unnecessary excuses. He further stated that some of them even went as far as diluting kegs of palm oil with water in order to fulfill their own side of the bargain at the disadvantage of the plantation owner as well as sell out kegs of palm oil meant for them.⁴⁰

II. CONCLUSION

This research emphasized the fact that palm oil production constitutes a vital part of the agricultural and economic life of the Ekiti people. Naturally, in any colonial society, there must be changes that positively or negatively affect the lives of the people. Ekiti under the British colonial rule was not an exception. Colonialism in Ekiti had far reaching consequences on the political economy of this territory. For example, the colonial rule did not lead to any economic revolution and serious development, mainly because the economy was British centered; not satisfying the interest of Ekiti but that of Britain.

It however concludes that exportation of palm produce during the colonial period was limited to palm kernel, palm oil was exported at a very low quantity due to it local usage among the people of Ekiti.

Furthermore, the production process during the pre-colonial period was dictated by individual local methods unlike the colonial period when an oil mill scheme was introduced with more sophisticated machines that enhances the production process. However, the people of Ekiti returned to their local ways of palm oil production after 1960 due to the fact that; the colonial oil scheme wasn't profitable to them. Although they returned to their local method of production, but it was with newly invested tools that further help in the production process; a slight difference from the pre-colonial traditional method of palm oil production.

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³⁶ O. Osadola, Colonial Rule and Oil Palm Industry in Ekiti, M.A Thesis, University of Benin, Benin City, 2014. P.110

³⁷ W. K. Hancock, Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs, Vol. II, London, 1942, p.194

³⁸ Ibid p.195

³⁹ N.A.I, File 15, Vol. 7, 1941/51

⁴⁰ Chief Imi, 66 years; a traditional chief of Aramoko Ekiti as well as the owner of a vast palm oil plantation in Ajalu, in Aramoko-Ekiti. Interview conducted in Aramoko Ekiti on November 2, 2017.