



THE LAND HAS CHANGED History, Society and Gender in Colonial Eastern Nigeria Chima J. Korieh

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE SECOND WORLD WAR, THE RURAL ECONOMY, AND AFRICANS

We are in the midst of the most destructive war the world has yet seen, and it is the duty of every citizen of this country, as it is of every liberty-loving soul in every part of the world, to bear the greatest sacrifice ungrudgingly and contribute his maximum in every way possible, little or great to bring the success of the Allied forces nearer. – *West African Pilot*, 12 February 1942

... by the allocation of 4 bags monthly as compared to my previous shipment of 50 to 100 bags, my business will be very much crippled and the life of my entire family placed in jeopardy. – *Amos Okafor to District Officer, Aba*, 8 July 1943

We require 200 bags of gari to feed our selected laborers on the Tenti Dam Construction and shall be obliged if you will issue permit.... We certify that Tenti Dam is for our hydro-electric works generating power for the tin fields and can be justly described as a war effort. – *J.E.A. FitzGerald to Assistant Food Controller, Aba*, 10 July 1943

The advent of the Second World War and its immediate aftermath had an impact on several areas concerning the rural economy in colonial Africa. The war had “far greater local impact and indeed was to lead to far reaching changes,” according to F. B. Carr, who served as the Resident for Owerri Province and later as the Chief Commissioner in charge of the Eastern Provinces in 1943.¹ The conditions of rural life in the East were less than satisfactory on many fronts before the war began. The new Native Administration system, which was still on trial, had not improved local access to resources. Carr noted that there were “many problems of more material nature which had to be tackled” and many demands for “improved material conditions many of which though far beyond resources led to heightened interest in progress and highlighted the urgent need for development on a vast scale.”² This was the state of the local society when the war broke out. Still, there was the desire to pitch in, no matter how little, on the part of the local population. Carr recalled the desire to support the war effort by the African population:

At the outset raising money for war purposes became a dominant feature of daily life and the response was quite astonishing. “Win the War Fund” and “Spitfire Funds” were fully supported and even the poorest – and none was particularly well off in those days – gave their bit. The salaried classes, clerks and the like with a meager average of, say £50 a year volunteered a monthly deduction from their pay.... Indeed, a wave of loyalty seemed to sweep through the country and even in the remote villages all seemed to want to help.³

This chapter examines how the wartime mobilization of African labour affected Igbo villages, towns, and cities from 1938 when the mobilization began to the end of the war in 1945. It outlines the key changes in the colonial agricultural policy in relation to the production of much-needed raw materials such as palm oil and the increased mobilization of the local population for food production. It also examines the new regulations and laws introduced during the war to control the local agrarian economy and commerce. The chapter links the political and economic landscape of the war era and their impacts on African population to the unique forms of protest that occurred in

response to British wartime policies as reflected in the petitions they wrote to colonial officials during the war.

CHANGES IN AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Until the Second World War, the colonial department of agriculture focused on the expansion of palm oil production, improvement in the quality of produce, and the efficient marketing of agricultural produce.⁴ Progress was made in the export and commercial sectors of agriculture, but the government faltered on the development of the subsistence sector. Nigeria, like other colonial territories, experienced rising food prices and increased importation of food items during this time. The impact of past policies became evident toward the end of the 1930s and government became increasingly aware of the need to encourage the production of food. The government remarked in the 1938 report of the department of agriculture: “The production of export crops, important as this is to the wealth of the country and to the revenue of the government, must not be subordinated to the production of foodstuff for local consumption, for those who are underfed cannot do the maximum amount of work.”⁵ While the government recognized the need to improve local food production, it did not provide any direct incentive to farmers until the outbreak of the war. On the outbreak of war, colonial officials were asked by the imperial government to carry out the task necessary to secure the local resources needed from Nigeria to support the war effort. Thus, officials embarked on a double strategy of encouraging more export production and a more aggressive drive to increase local food production.

THE EXPORT SECTOR

The colonial government initiated a broad range of measures designed to increase the supply of palm oil and kernels and commodities such as wild rubber, which were desperately needed during the war. Palm oil was particularly

important in war production and the manufacture of cooking oil and margarine for British citizens. Indeed, Carr described the production of palm oil and kernels as “a matter of first priority.”⁶ The loss of the British Far Eastern colonies increased Nigeria’s strategic importance as a supplier of palm oil. The Ministry of Food in London was vested with the power to purchase Nigeria’s palm produce as part of the measures to ensure an efficient supply system. The prices of palm oil and kernels were raised to encourage production for export.⁷ In a dispatch to the colonial administration in Nigeria, the secretary of state for the colonies urged it to “exert every possible effort to obtain maximum production of export crops.”⁸ The war also exposed the need for new export crops independent of the market for oils and fats.⁹

The strategic importance of Eastern Nigerian peasants during the war is reflected in the reorganization of the colonial administrative personnel to ensure maximum mobilization of the local population. Despite their already depleted numbers, administrative officers were appointed, “for the sole duty of urging and supervising maximum production.”¹⁰ As a result, all of Eastern Nigeria witnessed an extensive demand for cash crops, exploitation of forest resources, and forced labour because of British demand during the war. Colonial officials campaigned through the press and placed posters at strategic locations, calling on farmers to harvest and process their palm produce. Schools and churches were incorporated into the campaign through the organization of palm kernel cracking competitions.¹¹ A palm produce drive team was formed in 1943 to stimulate production, collect information on production and marketing, and examine ways to improve both.¹² Additional produce buying centres were established at Owerri, Okigwe, and Oloko Item. Palm nut cracking machines were installed at various locations in the region.¹³ The export duty on rubber was abolished to encourage increased harvesting of wild rubber.¹⁴ The government also encouraged internal migration from Abaja in Udi Division, the migrants being hired in Awka Division to harvest oil palms. The deputy controller of palm produce, Mr. L. T. Chubb, advised the government to exempt these migrant villages from recruitment for the army and the coal-mines until the government achieved its objectives.¹⁵ Significant progress was made towards export production, but not always to the satisfaction of imperial officials like Lord Swinton, who was appointed Resident

Table 5.1. Palm produce export data, 1939–46.

YEARS	TOTAL PALM OIL EXPORT (TONS)	TOTAL PALM KERNELS EXPORT (TONS)	PRODUCER PRICE/ TON	PRODUCER PRICE/TON
			PALM OIL	PALM KERNELS
1939–40	157,970	342,580	£5:19s: 3d	£5: 2s: 9d
1940–41	141,703	262,575	6:3:4	4:11:6
1941–42	147,678	344,820	6:3:3	4:13:0
1942–43	153,537	323,555	9:4:6	5:14:4
1943–44	134,664	330,647	10:1:0	7:16:4
1944–45	139,464	320,764	12:6:6	8:14:0
1945–46	110,242	283,471	13:1:6	9:4:0

Source: Calculated from Report of the Mission Appointed to Enquire into the Production and Transport of Vegetable Oils and Oilseeds in West African Territories (London, 1947), 57.

Minister during the war. “With characteristic energy and drive he spurred on everybody and demanded greater and greater efforts,” wrote F. B. Carr.¹⁶

The demand for palm oil and kernels from the region helped to facilitate further developments in the rural economy; farmers responded positively and increased production.¹⁷ In 1941, for example, the department of agriculture acknowledged that the demand for all the principal crops and products of Nigeria had increased on an unprecedented scale and had led to an increased output from peasants.¹⁸ Nevertheless, export figures fluctuated, despite marginal increases in prices from 1942, due to the internal market for palm oil in Northern Nigeria.

The state did not always garner popular support from farmers, because the structural changes implemented were not always accompanied by higher prices for peasant produce. Additionally, some wartime and post-war developments affected the export of palm produce from Nigeria. These included a significant increase in the export of oil from the Belgian Congo, which rose from 60,000 metric tons during 1934–38 to 118,000 metric tons between 1948 and 1950. This trend would continue. Exports would rise to 140,000 metric tons by 1953.¹⁹

Measures adopted by different European nations to protect their own economies directly affected African farmers who depended on the export of primary produce. Germany, for example, was a major importer of Nigeria's palm kernels in the interwar period. Trade with Germany became impossible. When the Depression hit Germany, the country imposed very high tariffs on foreign sources of oil and subsidized domestically produced mustard seed and linseed. The country's importation of vegetable oil, which was valued at 70 million marks in 1929, fell to 27 million in 1935 and continued to slide thereafter.²⁰ Before the Second World War, the United States imported about 8 per cent of its oil from Nigeria. The imposition of high tariffs on imported oil raised domestic oil prices by approximately 100 per cent. This measure significantly reduced U.S. oil imports from 164,000 metric tons in 1936 to an annual average of 70,000 metric tons in the following years.²¹

In the United Kingdom, war hampered trade and supplies and led to a lower demand for imported goods, including palm produce, as the war progressed. The Ministry of Food in Britain called for a reduction of palm kernel production because of unfavourable conditions in Britain and the austerity measures implemented.²² Although the restriction was imposed on most parts of the western provinces in August 1940, Eastern Nigeria was spared because the region had no alternative export. To avoid what officials described as "undue hardship" for the people of eastern Nigeria, the department of agriculture allowed the region to produce kernels on a quota basis. The quota was based on the average quantity purchased in the previous three years.²³ The restriction on palm kernels was lifted in May 1941, when demand increased again in Europe.²⁴

Indeed, there was no consistent policy. By October 1940, considerable debate was going on between the department of agriculture and officials at the Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos, over the provision of the necessary fund required by the department to reorganize production to meet its objectives. J. R. Mackie's frustration was evident when he wrote on 19 October 1940:

In the course of the very frank discussion which I have had recently with you and your staff I have gathered that, as has so often happened in the past the instructions which I have received from the Government and the policy laid down by it for my Department

are incompatible with the financial resources of the country. As such a state of affairs is liable to misunderstanding between your branch of the Secretariat and myself and to cause a great deal of unnecessary work, before submitting to you further proposals and before preparing my estimates for 1941–42. I should be most grateful if you would be good enough to give me a frank and clear answer to the following questions:– (i) is the work of my Department still considered to be essential for the prosecution of the war? (ii) If so can I expect to be supported by sufficient funds to enable my officers to work to their absolute maximum?²⁵

While the government considered the work of the department of agriculture essential to the war effort, the desire of the government to maximize production in Nigeria was going to be based on increasing the level of peasant production with minimum additional resources.

The first response of the British was to increase palm oil production. As soon as it became clear that palm produce in particular was not required in the quantities originally anticipated, they tried to reduce or increase it depending on demand in Europe. But what actually determined local producers' response to demands was the price of produce. Many farmers were indifferent to the call for increased production of palm oil when produce prices were low. The production of kernels in Onitsha, Awka, and Agwu Divisions and Nnewi District fell from 14,359 tons in 1939 to 10,100 tons in 1942.²⁶ Eleazer Ihediwa recalls that "Low prices forced many people to abandon the harvest of oil palms."²⁷ An agent of the United African Company at Ogrugru in Onitsha Province reported in 1939 that "little produce was coming in."²⁸ After a meeting with middlemen and producers in 1939, the Resident for Onitsha Province agreed: "There is no doubt whatever that the people are holding up production – and if we are going to consider extended palm produce production the question of a guaranteed price must be answered." In his view, "even without increased production, something needs to be done and the guaranteed price or government 'subsidy' or other expedient should be adopted."²⁹ The government was willing to adopt measures to compel farmers to expand production.

COERCION AND RESTRICTIONS

The war was a catalyst for new forms of colonial control and major changes in imperial policy in Africa. The new forms of control – or what John Iliffe calls “new colonialism” – was marked by direct intervention in the local economy. In the words of Basil Davidson, the pressure brought on the local peasantry in the form of forced and selective production of crops and marketing reforms “upset rural stability,” and according to David Anderson and David Throup, this period marked an “important transition in British attitude to Africa.”³⁰ The Nigerian experience of this period supports this analysis. In Nigeria, officials restricted the movement of food items, especially gari (the most common local staple produced from cassava tuber) from one part of the country to another. They controlled prices on other local and imported food items and initiated an unprecedented mobilization and control of peasants for food and export production.

The colonial approach to extraction in this period is reflected in the laws and regulations implemented to control peasant production, marketing, and accumulation, and in the local reactions. Enforcement through Nigeria Defense (Oil Palm Production) Regulation No. 55 of 1943 began to chip away at peasant autonomy. This regulation made it compulsory for farmers to harvest and process their oil palms, or face incarceration. The regulation also empowered the deputy controller of oil palm production to order the harvesting, processing, and marketing of palm produce. Furthermore, Defense Regulation No. 89 of 1945 compelled native authorities to ensure the implementation of Regulation No. 55 or face possible prosecution. Through this regulation, the colonial state increased its pressure on the peasantry. In Owerri Province, where the regulation resulted in prosecutions, the palm production officer, P. L. Allpress, noted that: “Palm production has greatly fallen off, and from the unharvested areas I have found in the Aba Division one must conclude that this is to some extent due to the dilatoriness of the people. No amount of talk has any effect on the people unless one’s threats are backed by action now and then.”³¹

The colonial authorities doubled the tax rate as a penalty in areas where oil palm owners refused to harvest their crops. The government was com-

mitted to the recruitment of labour for the harvesting of oil palms where the rightful owners failed to do it. To increase its resource base further, the colonial government increased the exploitation of other forest products, such as wild rubber, wild silk, honey, beeswax, gum copal, charcoal fuel, Calabar ordeal beans, raffia, and bamboo. There was initial enthusiasm for wild rubber exploitation in parts of Ogoja, Onitsha, and Owerri Provinces, although the harvesting was discontinued in 1945 because of the high cost of extracting the rubber.³² And by this time, the war was essentially over.

The failure to meet official expectations led to the prosecution of many local farmers. Between 1943 and 1944, for example, available records show that over a thousand persons were prosecuted in Obudu District for failing to crack palm kernels or harvest oil palms.³³ The crackdown associated with the export drive in the period was widespread.³⁴ Fines ranged from £1 to £5 or terms of imprisonment of one month or more. The low price of export commodities and the forced labour policy imposed on rural peasants provided the context in which many rural dwellers shifted attention to food production, which attracted high returns.

FOOD SECTOR

The greatest problem facing the colonial administration was how to curb the rising cost of living that became more pronounced when the Second World War broke out in 1939. The British mounted a vigorous propaganda campaign, pointing out the importance of increasing the amounts of food and export products to support the British war effort. There was a tremendous outpouring of patriotic passion on the part of the British. They expected Africans to react in a similar way by producing more food and raw materials. This did happen sometimes, even though the local people had other interests and were more concerned with matters of immediate and practical nature – their own subsistence. The *West African Pilot* wrote in an editorial of 23 February 1942: “if we cannot produce munitions, we can certainly produce raw materials and food products which are equally important for the successful prosecution of the war.”³⁵

The war made the colonial authorities nervous about reliance on imported food. Furthermore, the constraints on world shipping made it extremely difficult to rely on imports.³⁶ As the war went on, it created an increasing number of immediate problems. These included low levels of imports and exports, shortage of food, and rising prices for locally produced food items, such as rice, yams, and pepper, as well as high prices of imported items. There was a perception that Nigeria was capable of producing enough food to feed the country's population and to meet Britain's import needs in wartime.³⁷ Indeed, Nigeria occupied a unique position among British colonial possessions in West Africa with its enormous agricultural potential and population.

Beginning in September 1939, the agricultural officers were fully occupied with the effort to mobilize human and material resources to achieve a level of local self-sufficiency and increase food production.³⁸ In a dispatch to the colonial administration in Nigeria, the secretary of state for the colonies urged it to "exert every possible effort to obtain maximum production of export crops."³⁹ Sir Frank Stockdale, who was appointed to inquire into the production and transportation of vegetable oils and oil seeds produced in the West African colonies, advised the director of the Agricultural Department, J. R. Mackie, after his visit to Nigeria in 1938, that Nigeria, like other colonial territories, should endeavour to be self-sufficient in food supplies.⁴⁰

The department of agriculture made plans to deal with the uncertainties of war. In a circular issued to all agricultural officers, the Agricultural Department summarized its goals to meet the needs of the war as follows:

- (a) To be ready to help the Imperial Government by producing such crops as it may ask;
- (b) To ensure that Nigeria is, as far as possible, self-sufficient in foodstuffs including those that are normally imported from elsewhere; and
- (c) To do what we can to make the West African colonies as a whole self-supporting.⁴¹

Officials pursued these goals with great zeal. The view of one such official, J.A.G. McCall, who was appointed the controller of palm oil production, perhaps summarizes the prevailing view: "The production business is our particular war effort, and surely that should come first, even if other duties of

Table 5.2. Imported foodstuffs for the year 1938 for African consumption.

COMMODITY	QUANTITY	VALUE (£)
Fish	212,000	396,000
Salt	1,000,000	267,000
Rice	186,000	96,000
Sugar	140,000	105,000
Bread and Biscuits	20,000	47,000
Flour	50,000	46,000

Source: L. Wale Oyemakinde, "The Pullen Marketing Scheme: A Trial in Food Price Control in Nigeria, 1941–1947," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 4 (1972): 414.

Table 5.3. Imported foodstuffs for the year 1938 (mainly for European consumption).

COMMODITY	QUANTITY (LBS)	VALUE (£)
Milk	1,205,000	35,000
Butter	256,000	15,000
Lard	153,000	4,700
Meat	12,000 ctw	47,000
Bread and Biscuit	20,000	47,000
Vegetables (fresh)	1,603,000	7,8000
Tea	226,000	14,000
Jam	220,000	7,2000
Confectionery	332,000	13,200
Fruit (dried)	97,000	1,500

Source: L. Wale Oyemakinde, "The Pullen Marketing Scheme: A Trial in Food Price Control in Nigeria, 1941–1947," *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 6, no. 4 (1972): 414.

administration have to suffer thereby."⁴² By 1941, the importation of rice into the country had virtually ceased, falling from 14,900 tons in 1936, thereby creating a food crisis during the war.⁴³ The frantic urgency of the food production drive contrasted with the laissez-faire pace of pre-war agricultural planning. The department intensified experimentation in wheat, potato, and rice production and established a fisheries section to replace the supplies formerly obtained from overseas.⁴⁴ The Agricultural Department was particularly anxious to introduce upland rice, a new and unknown crop in the area.⁴⁵ The

colonial administration increased the budget allocation to agriculture from £136,726 in the 1939–40 fiscal year to £397,260 in the 1945–46 fiscal years.⁴⁶ Although research continued to be an important item on the agenda for the Department of Agriculture, the war era marked the beginning of direct intervention in the local agrarian economy.

In further pursuit of its wartime goals, the colonial government set up a supplies department in September 1942 under Dr. Bryoe as chief supply officer and four administrative assistants. Earlier, in November 1939, the department of agriculture had appointed Mr. E. McL. Watson as marketing officer. The creation of this post anticipated increased production and the need to develop both the internal and international trades in foodstuffs. The duty of the supply unit was to organize grain supplies for the army, the mines, and government reserves. By the end of March 1943, the government had purchased 10,300 tons of millet, 2,700 tons of rice, 7,000 tons of yams, 18,200 tons of guinea corn, and 3,400 tons of maize.⁴⁷

The food scheme was not very successful. The government's effort to improve food sufficiency concentrated on the cultivation of rice, and the Department of Agriculture was directed to slow down or discontinue other lines of agricultural production, including the oil palm planting program.⁴⁸ The department asked for the authority to convert funds allocated for the palm oil program to food production and propaganda, although it was not clear if it received this authority. The cultivation of rice received a boost in some parts of Igboland, although local people preferred imported rice to locally produced rice because of its higher quality. In Onitsha Province, the acreage devoted to rice rose to 5,000 in 1943 due to the war.⁴⁹ However, a combination of drought and poor management led to a yield of only 2,000 tons in 1943. Ironically, the colonial emphasis on the production of exotic food crops, such as rice, potatoes, and various vegetables, did not improve food security. The emphasis on vegetable production, for example, catered to the needs of European residents and the army, while the production of rice was meant to reduce dependence upon imports. The failure of the production drive, however, led to increased control of locally produced food items, especially yams and gari, which were the most important food items for both the rural and the urban population.

Mobilization for the war created an opportunity for African entrepreneurship and facilitated the rise of an enterprising class of traders cashing in on the increasing demand for local foodstuffs, especially gari. By the 1930s, a lucrative market in locally produced food items had developed. Farmers expanded food production due to increased demand for gari and palm oil in Northern Nigeria. In the Ozuitem area, for example, farmers concentrated on growing yams and, partly or completely turned to palm produce when the European traders paid high prices.⁵⁰ Significant quantities of gari were railed to Northern Nigerian towns from the late 1930s. The quantity of gari railed to Northern Nigeria increased progressively from 1,414 tons in 1937, worth about £4,989, to about 5,428 tons, when the war began. In the first half of 1942, the quantity railed to the North had reached 6,804 tons, worth about £57,661.⁵¹ Growing concern over the threat of urban and rural food insecurity prompted the colonial authorities to regulate the distribution of both imported and locally produced foodstuffs.

FOOD RESTRICTIONS AND RATIONING

On 22 April 1941, S.A.S. Leslie, the colonial food controller, issued a circular that outlined the general scheme for food control in Nigeria. In a seemingly arbitrary manner, the food controller was empowered to direct the distribution of available supplies while deputy food controllers and their assistants initiated and administered rationing in local areas. Although the supply of food items in this period, except for milk and flour, which were already rationed in Lagos, were not seriously threatened by the war, the government was making plans to ensure that rationing would follow periods of severe shortfall.⁵² Importing firms in Lagos, Nigeria's largest city, were required to ensure that consumers purchased all of their supplies from a single source in order to regulate the distribution of essential commodities. Consumers were required to nominate the firm with which they wished to deal. This enabled the government to compile a list of customers, which would then be circulated among the firms.⁵³

Control was extended to the rural areas. By 1942, rural farmers and traders were cashing in on the increased demand for local foodstuff in Northern

Nigeria. Large quantities of yams, cocoyams, coconuts, and maize were being transported to the North for sale. The colonial administration imposed strict restrictions on the movement of food items, such as yams, cocoyams, and gari, within the Eastern Region. District officials, alarmed by the quantity of food items moving out of the region, began to implement restrictions in order to stave off crisis within their districts. Some district officers regulated the quantity of local food items, such as yams, cocoyams, and gari that could be moved from particular districts to other areas by invoking the Nigeria General Defense Regulations (Law No. 75 of 1941), which came into effect during the war.

In 1943, the transportation of these food items from the Aba railway station to the North had increased by a very large amount from the previous year (see Table 5.4). J.V. Dewhurst, district officer for Aba, was so alarmed at the rate of outward movement of these food items that he suggested the need to prohibit the movement of yams from the district. Writing to the Resident, he noted: "The increase in the export of yams is very great indeed and, in view of the fact that Aba normally imports yams, disquieting. So too is the increase in the export of maize and I am not certain that the export of this also ought not to be prohibited."⁵⁴ In June 1945, the acting district officer for Ikon Division issued a memorandum that stated: "no person shall export yams and cocoyam from the Ikom Division except under permit from the District Officer."⁵⁵ Farmers in most parts of Abakiliki Division faced difficulties in obtaining seed yams due to a combination of drought and the scarcity of seed yams in the market.⁵⁶ In a similar fashion, the Resident for Ogoja Province prohibited the movement of yams from the province. According to his order, "no person shall export yams by rail from the Ogoja Province except under permit from the district officer in Afikpo."⁵⁷ In Awgu Division, the resident, Dermot O'Connor, issued an order restricting the movement of yams outside the division.⁵⁸ In Onitsha Province, the colonial resident issued an order restricting the movement of gari and yams from Udi Division "except under permit signed by 'Competent Authority.'"⁵⁹

The intervention of the government and the controls imposed could be justified as food prices rose beyond the reach of the average household. Although many farmers and traders were unhappy with the regulations, the reaction of district officials made a certain kind of sense. The *West African*

Table 5.4. Quantities of food items railed from Aba Station in 1942 and 1943.

FOODSTUFF	NO OF BASKETS RAILED IN JULY 1942	NO OF BASKETS RAILED IN JULY 1943
Yams	35	573
Cocoyams	23	96
Coconuts	523	1589
Maize	3	143

Source: NAE, ABADIST,1/26/958.

Note: The weight of a basket varied between 1.5 and 2 cwts.

Pilot agreed that “war conditions and profiteering” caused a rise in the cost of essential goods, including food.⁶⁰ The district officers in the food-producing areas were reacting to potential tensions that could arise with severe food scarcity. They did not want food riots on their hands. But they were also interested in playing their part in the war effort by ensuring that local food products were fairly distributed, particularly in this period of low imports. Indeed, food producers and marketers were cashing in on the scarcity of imported food and increased demand for local products. By 1944, the price of gari had increased considerably from about 1/- 6d to about 9/- in urban markets. In a report to the district officer, Aba, in May 1944, the Nigerian Police wrote that gari producers “are making an exorbitant profit when one considers that they found it worth while to make gari up to 1940 and sell at 1/6d – 2/- a bag.” Prices were even higher in places such as Uyo, where it was suspected that large quantities of gari were being exported to Fernando Po, where a large number of Igbo and Ibibio migrant labourers were working in Spanish plantations.⁶¹ Such an escalation of food scarcity and high prices was considered a threat to political and social stability.

The restrictions imposed by officials had enormous effects on the local population. Restrictions disrupted food security arrangements and the internal trading network that linked the region into a form of economic commonwealth. Women farmers could not sell excess produce, such as cocoyams and cassava, to their traditional trading partners, and many Igbo men and women expressed concerns over the difficulties they faced in carry-

ing out local trading. Colonial officials were inundated with petitions, complaints, and requests, as local people faced increasing difficulty in meeting their subsistence needs.

The low prices of export produce, the high cost of imported goods, and the government-imposed restrictions exacerbated discontent and disillusionment. In particular, the government's control of locally produced foodstuffs and distribution implemented during the war left little room for dealing with mounting food scarcity. It also created an atmosphere of crisis and conflict. The records do not tell exactly the level of the food crisis in the region and the interruption of local and regional trade, but by 1943, several petitions and appeals from local traders to colonial officials had asked for permission to transport food items within the region or to the North. Yet the colonial officials provided few satisfying measures even as peasants were called upon to work much harder than before to support the colonial state.

The food supply problem remained the most pressing issue during the war. Both the imperial government and governments in the individual colonies provided some incentive for peasants to increase production, but the authorities also used coercion to ensure that peasants complied with their demands. Colonial officials, despite their attempt to encourage free trade and uninhibited access to the market for local people, were also noted for restrictions and intervention in production and marketing of local produce. The war helped to create barriers and officials enacted legislation, not only to prevent the free flow of local products such as gari and yams, but also to determine the price at which they could be sold.

CONTROLLED PRICE

By 1941, the colonial government was forced to impose price controls to deal with the looming food crisis. Shortages of food had been anticipated right from the outbreak of the war in 1939, which prompted the directive that provincial and district officers should watch food price trends and adopt measures to conserve available food.⁶² The purchase of locally produced food items by the government at a fixed price was common during this era. But colonial price controls extended to both imported and locally produced foodstuffs.⁶³

Although the agricultural department noted in its 1940 report that Nigerian peasants regarded the restriction and loss of income “as a contribution towards the prosecution of the war,”⁶⁴ many peasants were visibly discontented with the restrictions. Opposition to price controls and regulations was not confined to inter-regional traders and urban associations. The long-standing tradition of women’s opposition to state intervention in the rural economy arose again in the rural areas and markets. Their acts of protest gave women a voice. The opposition to price controls, championed by rural women, swept through most of southeastern Nigeria. The Omuma Native Court, Aba Division, reported women’s protests against the imposition of price controls on gari by government officials in November 1944. Some of the women who attended protest meetings, he wrote, “do not make gari,” but they followed others in these meetings.⁶⁵ As in previous protests, the participation of non-gari producers is a mark of the solidarity and consciousness that existed, and still exists, among Igbo women.

In Owerri Province and in the Bende Division in 1944, women protested against the colonial government’s attempt to control the price of gari, the most important staple in the area. The purchase of gari by officials at a controlled price threatened the income of the women who controlled the production and sale of the product.⁶⁶ To the women who produced the gari, the action of the government officials was seen as an attempt to take over their cassava farms. As in earlier years, women fought against this threat to their livelihood in an already precarious agricultural economy. On 1 July 1942, rice and bean traders in the city of Onitsha petitioned the resident for Onitsha Province regarding the imposition of price controls carried out in the market by the police on 16 June 1942. In a carefully detailed calculation, the traders estimated the losses they incurred due to the price controls.⁶⁷ On 17 July 1942, an Onitsha gari trader and twenty others petitioned the district officer for Onitsha, suggesting that the authorities reconsider the price control imposed on gari. In their petition, the traders noted that the recommended price of 1d for 5 cups and ten shillings per bag was below the estimated delivery price of twelve shillings per bag of gari from Aba, from which Onitsha traders got their goods.⁶⁸ Protests and petitions remained a means that peasants used to confront the intervention in the rural economy in this period.

Table 5.5. Price control of foodstuffs at Enugu Market, 16 February 1942 to 25 August 1942.

ITEM	PRICE NOT EXCEEDING	QUANTITY
South African salt	3 d	per lb.
Boneless beef steak	5 d	per lb.
Other beef cuts	4 1/2 d	per lb.
Shoulder or leg of mutton	6 d	per lb.
Shoulder or leg of pork	9 d	per lb.
Ox tongue	4 d	per lb.
Gari	1 d	6 cigarette tins
Eggs	1/2 d	Each
Yams	11/2 d	2 lb.
Cassava (prepared)	2 1/2 d	Per lump
Groundnuts	2 1/2 d	per lb.
Beans	1 1/2 d (or 3 d)	per lb. (2 lb.)
Millet	1 1/2 d	per lb.
Guinea corn	2 d	per lb.
Rice (Nigerian grown)	6 d	per lb.
Egusi	1 d	per lb.
Pepper (dried)	1 1/2 d	per cigarette tin
Chickens	8 d-1/- 2 d	according to size
Palm oil	2 1/2 d	per gin bottle
Potatoes	14/- 4 d	56 lb.

Sources: NAE, EP, OPC, 122, vol. vii, ONDIST, 13/1/2, "Public Notice," B. W. Walter, Local Authority, Enugu, 28 October 1942.

Table 5.6. Control of local foodstuffs in Abakaliki Division.

ARTICLES	QUANTITY	PRE-WAR PRICE	QUANTITY	PRES-ENT PRICE	QUANTITY	CON-TROLLED PRICE
Yams:	12 large	1/-	6 large	1/-	9 large	1/-
Septem-ber-March	15 medium 30 small	1/- 1/-	10 medium 20 small	1/- 1/-	12 medium 17 small	1/- 1/-
April-August	6 large 15 medium	1/- 1/-	3-4 large 8-9 medium	1/- 1/-	5 large 9 medium	1/- 1/-
Rice (local)	24	1/-	8 cups	1/-	10 cups	1/-
Gari	12	1 d	6 cups	1 d	8 cups	1 d
Egg (hen)	4	1 d	2	1 d	4	1 d
Egg (duck)	2	1 d	2	1 d	2	1 d
Pepper	2 Cigarette cups	1 d	1 Cigarette cup	1 d	2 Cigarette cups	1 d
Plantain	10	1/2 d	6	1/2 d	8	1/2 d
Banana (ripe)	12	1/2 d	8	1/2 d	12	1/2 d
Oranges	10	1/2 d	5	1/2 d	6	1/2 d
Okro	40 Capsules	1/2 d	15	1/2 d	20	1/2 d
Cassava	large basket	3 d	large basket	6 d	Large basket	5 d
Coco yam	8	1 d	8	1 d	8	1 d
Ground-nuts	24 cups	1 d	4 cups	1 d	6 cups	1 d
Palm oil	1 bottle	6 d	1 bottle	9 d	1 bottle	8 d
Palm wine	Calabash	2 d	Calabash	3 d-4 d	Calabash	2 d
Ideal Milk	6 oz tin	4 d	6 oz tin	8 d	6 oz tin	6 d

Source: NAE, CALPROF, 3/1/2329, District Officer Abakaliki, 9 November 1942.

AFRICAN RESPONSES TO COLONIAL CONTROL: PETITIONS AND SUPPLICATIONS

The power of the written word, the “book” juju, is taking a hold on Nigeria, a sad but inevitable consequence of the spread of education. – *A. E. Cooks, District officer, Owerri Province*

The restrictions imposed on food items were the most stressful of all the demands made from the local population. It was evident to the rural and urban population that they would have to adopt desperate measures to survive. But their strategies did not often succeed. The British, on their part, were even less successful in handling such hard times. For the societies of Eastern Nigeria, the dependency on palm produce and the vulnerability of the rural population to the slightest change in market prices created a much more hostile relationship between colonial officials and the indigenous people. This period was the beginning of the consolidation of peasant consciousness as well as a period of awakening political consciousness.⁶⁹

Petitions and supplications were Africans’ preferred method of appealing to colonial authorities regarding their conditions or protesting against policies.⁷⁰ The personal – and often intimate – letters of African traders and farmers paint a unique portrait of a rough-and-tumble time. The danger posed by the restrictions was made explicit in the lives of small traders, farmers, traders, and the urban population. On 11 July 1943, for example, a local trader, Mr. O. O. Muoma, wrote to the British district officer for Aba. In his petition titled “Injustice: Gari Railing to the North,” he told the district officer that his name had been deleted from the list of traders permitted by the government to export gari to Northern Nigeria. Muoma considered this development “abnormal” and an “injustice.” Cutting him out of the gari trade, he argued, deprived him of his livelihood and threatened the lives and subsistence of his two sons, who lived in the northern city of Kano.⁷¹ Another trader, J. O. Okorochoa of Mbawsi, wrote to the District Officer, protesting the allocation of a meagre quota of ten bags of gari to him. Mr. Okorochoa, who had exported 209 bags of gari to Northern Nigeria in 1942, stated: “my quota is too poor considering my intensive trade last year.... I beg of you to

remedy the situation and award me what is due.”⁷² For Muoma and Okorocho, like many others, the war economy was not only the cause of hardship and despair but also a time of opportunity and entrepreneurship that expanded as the scarcity of imported food items provided opportunities for the expansion of trade in locally produced foods. Still, the war revealed the reality of daily life for ordinary people in colonial Eastern Nigeria.

The case of a certain Mr. Udeh, who lived at Abalikiki, is typical of a problem that many farmers faced. Mr. Udeh had applied to the District Officer for Abakiliki Division on previous occasions for permission to transport seed yams to Awka for planting. On 19 May 1945, he wrote again, after his previous requests had been ignored: “I am still asking you about a permit which I will use in carrying down seed yams down to Nawfia[,] Awka. The reason why I say very much about it is that the time of planting is passing.... I beg your Honour that you may consider about it.”⁷³ With the farming season ending, Mr. Udeh wrote the District officer again. He had become desperate. “In my first and second letters that I wrote to you, I begged you to give a special permit to transport one trip of seed yam to Nawfia in Awka District. I told you that I have lived [in] Abakiliki for 25 years and I have not get any yam to plant in my town. Now this season of yams plantation is coming to end.... Yam plantation remains not more than 20 days now.”⁷⁴

While the outcome of Mr. Udeh’s petition is not known, his was not just an isolated case. J. E. Akajiofo of Mbawsi wrote to the district officer for Aba on 1 September 1943 requesting a permit to rail his yams to Northern Nigeria for sale. Mr. Akajiofo wrote:

Sir, I have the honour most respectfully to forward this humble application to your worship. My request is that your servant bought 16 tons of yams during the month of July. The yams should have been railed that month, but unfortunately for me, one of my sons died. Then I had to leave the yams in the railways station, and go to my town. I returned on the 11th of August, and on the 14th of the same month a consignment was issued me by the station master, Mbawsi. The next morning when I came to weigh the yams the station master informed me that he received a letter from the District officer, Aba restricting the exportation of yams to the north.

I respectfully pray that your worship may render me the necessary help to rail the yams.⁷⁵

An application written by an Umuahia trader shows that the effects of the restrictions on the movement of goods were widespread. Mr. Eze, who had been a long-time yam trader, wrote to the district officer, Aba, for permission to transport yams to Kano and Jos in northern Nigeria. He had yams ready to be railed up north but was unaware of the new requirement for a permit. He pleaded:

I humbly beg to state that on absent of the previous knowledge, that yams shall be under permit, I t[a]ke the liberty to ask your worship to grant me a special permit to rail out those baskets I have already got at the Station.... Therefore I humbly crave for your mercy consideration and attend to this matter immediately by granting me the permit as requested otherwise my said food stuff will rot due to long stay in the shed.⁷⁶

“I regret I cannot accede to your request,” the District Officer wrote to Mr. Eze.⁷⁷ This was a familiar response.

The appeal of an Aba trader, A. Jamola, to the District Officer, Aba, for a reconsideration of an earlier petition that was denied, like many others, is an excellent indication of the suffering of rural peasants. Jamola wrote asking for a sympathetic reconsideration of his humble request for permission to rail gari to the North. “I am a stranger in this community with a family of wife and children who are dependent upon me for subsistence.... Since the early part of this year I was engaged in gari trade with the north and our lives depended entirely upon the small profit occasionally derived therefrom.”⁷⁸

Like many others, Jamola was caught in the colonial attempt to manage the deteriorating economic conditions that confronted the imperial as well as the colonial governments. The tearful and emotional petitions by Akajiofo and others were striking evidence of the increased intervention of the colonial administration and the effect on their lives. David H. Kubiri, when he sought a permit to sell gari in the north, wrote:

I with all civility prostrate to ask earnestly, in the name of your families and home, in the name of British justice, which makes an Englishman superior to other races, in the name of all [unclear word], and in the name of your past honour and trust, which has designated his worship as a capable and able rule[r]. [T]hat the permit of gari might be rendered to your humbly servant the families may not die away for starvation.⁷⁹

These emotions were expressed in many petitions and reveal the levels of dissatisfaction within the local society, but the humble phrases used in these petitions remind one of the paternalistic structures of the colonial society. In the experiences of Udeh, Ajajiofo, Jamola, and others, one sees a persistent marginalization of local interests in this period and the intensified insecurity created by the colonial economy. In some ways, it seems to have been the traders who suffered the most.

Urban areas were not spared the agony and hardship of the war. Significantly, the rural areas played an important part in the supply of food to the urban areas. Urban households that depended on food supplies from the rural areas faced both physical food shortages and restricted access to food. The disruption of local trade was felt in areas such as Aba and Onitsha. *The West African Pilot's* editorial of 5 June 1942 wrote of the city of Aba: "Black market masters seem to have things all their own way and, of course, the people suffer." The paper, like the average person in the urban areas, was concerned about the rising cost of local food materials. The Aba Community League wrote to the District Officer in August 1943 regarding the effects of food restrictions on the residents of the town:

I am directed to bring to your notice the very grave danger of famine which is threatening this township consequent upon the present restriction of the railment [*sic*] of gari to the North which has led to the adversely affected traders seeking other avenues of business and have tapped the scanty resources of the township of yams, plantains, cocoyams, corn and other articles of food. Time was when these lines of foodstuffs came into the local market from Onitsha, Itu and other places which in addition to local resources barely met the requirements of the township.⁸⁰

While reliable data on urban employment and welfare during the colonial period are scarce, wages for non-agricultural labour were very low.⁸¹ In 1933, for instance, Native Administration road labourers received ten shillings per month. Railway track gangs received a wage of eight pennies per diem. Casual labourers received between three and four pennies per diem without food.⁸² The difficult economic situation that culminated in restrictions on food was felt in the cities in the form of dwindling food supplies and a rising cost of living.

The letter from the Aba Community League quoted above demonstrates that concerns about the regulations were not expressed by individuals alone. In a petition to the Resident, Owerri Province, the Aba Gari Traders Association expressed its dissatisfaction with the quota system implemented by the District Officer for Aba. The association argued that “the method will annihilate the gari trade, and undoubtedly impoverish the average trader involved and render life ‘not worth living.’”⁸³ The association further noted: “As free citizens of the Empire,” the association argued, “we have a right to live, and this right [*sic*] we pray for an amendment to the method or system of control of the railment of the commodity as advanced by the District Officer, Aba.”⁸⁴

Transportation also presented problems and restricted the ability of producers to move products. As the Aba Gari Traders Association indicated in its petition to the Resident for Owerri Province, the restrictions imposed on the gari trade created additional burdens for rural traders who already suffered from the restrictions on transportation because of the war. The petitioners noted: “We are ever willing to speculate on the produce trade, but transport forms a great barrier. During those days of unrestricted transport facilities, produce flowed into the township from Okpala, Ulakwo, Owerri, Nguru, Okigwi, Ife etc. Today, the damage of Owerri Bridge and motor transport restrictions have barred that trade.”⁸⁵

The efforts to implement colonial restrictions and control were not always successful. Archival records describe an informal market system that began to emerge because of government control. In August 1943, the secretary of the Aba Community League wrote to the district officer, Aba, regarding what he described as “unauthorized markets outside the township.”⁸⁶ In July 1944, the government estimated that about 200 tons of gari, more than the permitted quota, were exported to the North under illegal conditions.⁸⁷

Nevertheless, the war had some positive effects on the internal market for foodstuffs. The market for food items created an incentive for farmers to increase production. Despite the problems generated by the war, urban demands for food supply from the hinterland provided opportunities for African producers, most of whom had been supplying foodstuff from the time of the emergence of urban centres in the 1920s. The increased demand for gari and palm oil in northern Nigeria worked against external export. J. S. Harris, in his study of the local economy of the Ozuitem Igbo noted that farmers concentrated on yam production but turned to palm produce when prices were high.⁸⁸ Men and women reacted in many parts of Igboland, moving from export crop production to food production, depending on which attracted higher price.⁸⁹ Between June 1943 and May 1944, 5,825 tons of gari were railed to northern Nigeria from Ogwe, Aba, Omoba, Mbawsi, Umuahia and Uzuakoli railway stations.⁹⁰

Control was probably enforced on the railways because they could be policed. But traders were able to circumvent officially approved channels of trade. Some traders moved between different buying stations to maximize their profits and to increase the quota allocated to them. This prompted the Resident for Owerri Province, Mr. A.F.B. Bridges, colonial Resident for Owerri Province, to invoke the “Nigeria General Defense Regulation 1941 (Food Control).” Bridges was within the authority conferred by the Defense Regulations when he implemented the “(Gari – Owerri Province Non-Removal Order 1944),” which stated: “No person shall export Gari by rail from the Owerri Province to any station north of Enugu except under permit signed by the competent authority, or by a person authorized by the competent authority.”⁹¹ A personal allowance of 8 lbs. per person for travellers was allowed. The threat of famine and the breakdown of existing trading relationships forced the most vulnerable districts to introduce measures to preserve food.⁹²

In September 1944, Mr. H.L.M. Butcher, who had become the District Officer for Aba, introduced measures that were even more radical. In a circular directed to native councils and Courts Clerks, he directed that all gari permits granted to middlemen and traders be cancelled with effect from 1 September. Butcher regretted that: “traders have not adhered to the conditions of the permit issued to them, but have induced the Railway staff to send up far more than they were allowed.” He accused the local agents of gari dealers

in the North of selling gari there at “grossly excessive prices,” which resulted in shortages in the Aba Division and unduly high prices in the North.⁹³ He proposed that Mr. Bleasby, a European and manager of Gibbons Transport Aba, act as the government’s agent for buying gari at designated centres in the District and arrange for its distribution to Native Administrations in the Northern Provinces. He further proposed to set up a committee made of middlemen and producers who would sit monthly and fix the price of gari for the following month to ensure that gari was available and cheap locally.⁹⁴ Similar action had been taken in Calabar, where African traders were forced to supply gari to Mr. Nicholas, another European.

The responses of African traders were predictable. In a resolution passed at Aba on 23 August 1944, an association of gari traders noted that its members’ role as traders contributed toward “the defeat of Hitlerism and all that it stands for in order that Democracy will rule the world and all forms of man’s inhumanity to man be wiped off the face of the earth.” The association described the colonial government’s restrictions as “definite discrimination against the Africans.”⁹⁵ It appeared to the association’s members that the government failed to recognize African contribution to the war effort.

Although the petitions mostly came from men, suggesting their domination of the lucrative long distance trade between the eastern and northern Nigeria, some came from associations that may have included both men and women. Yet there were those written by women which brought their own perspective to the events of this period. Their letters shared the common concerns but also drew upon their femininity. Agnes Garuba opened her letter of petition with “Your maid servant humbly and respectfully begs to submit this my humble petition to you as a father.” Her unique perspective is worth quoting:

I am now as a widow, the Government only is my husband since my husband was transferred from Hausa down to Enugu and from Enugu now to overseas, I depend upon nothing than gari trading, buying from the natives and selling in the station, now many people had been stopped not to buy, and therefore I see no way of selling and maintain my life [sic] with my families which my husband left to me and sign soldiers work and went away. If [am] not

trading my former trade in gari then sure we must die for starvation.... May our heavenly father help my Lord the D.O. to put this my supplication in different consideration and to fulfill my wish, for we all are in the same flag that's why we don't care to send our husbands, brothers and young fathers to fight for the same flag.⁹⁶

These traders did not fit into a typical profile. There were those like S. O. Enyiomah of Aba who had been trading in gari since 1927. He and four other traders requested the District Officer for Aba to consider their longevity in the gari trade and grant them permits. They stated: "we, the said petitioners are the only first and original people who engaged in the railing of gari from Aba to Northern Nigeria since the year 1927 and 1928 respectively up to the present moment without any confusion and trouble in our own part."⁹⁷ Others like Ikebudu Nzekwe, who started his gari trade in 1942, had rushed into the trade on account of the crisis created by the war.⁹⁸ There were women who retailed gari in northern Nigeria and were increasingly making a profession out of it. Agnes Garuba, like other women, had taken up the gari trade because her husband, the family breadwinner, had gone to fight in the war.⁹⁹ Many young men were sent to the north to represent major traders who regularly railed gari to them from Aba and other railing stations such as Umuahia and Omoba. C. O. Muoma put it well when he argued that the restriction of the internal export trade was not just an injustice to him but would threaten his two boys in Kano who will "lack maintenance as they will not get any supply of even their own food."¹⁰⁰

Whether the petitioners were men or women, they worded their petitions or appeals in such a way as to gain as much sympathy or redress as possible. Still, the most vocal criticisms of colonial control in this period came from women, most of whom protested the imposition of price controls by local officials. The ability of Africans to write or to hire professional letter writers gave local people the ability and opportunity to speak back to power. It gave local people not only the opportunity to speak about their concerns but to establish a dialogue with colonial powers – a dialogue that received some level of acceptance because it fit into the structure of European habits of expression.

We can read beyond African voices in these letters and petitions. They offer a lens through which we can understand the broader attempts by colonial

administrators to control the colonized through the restriction of movement, through surveillance, and through the extraction of resources. Yet these letters and petitions also place people in the colonial context and present the diverse life-stories and points of view of African individuals. The letters and petitions of this lowly class of peasants and traders not only defy the perceived social and political order of the colonial state but show the unappreciated contribution of Africans to the Allied war effort. Indeed, the demand for local foodstuffs imposed a heavy burden on the local population due to the scarcity and high prices created by the war.

POST-SECOND WORLD WAR DEVELOPMENTS

The end of the war was followed by unparalleled social and economic transformations. The immediate impact was created by the demobilization of African soldiers in 1946. The returning soldiers brought significant amounts of money into the economy. One of the most significant social and economic impacts was on bride price. The cost of marrying a wife became so high that the government was forced to intervene and regulate the cost of bride-price.

The problem of post-war reconstruction in Europe led to changes in colonial policies. It was envisaged that the colonies would play a significant role in post-war reconstruction through a more efficient exploitation of local resources.¹⁰¹ The welfarist nature of development planning in this period was rationalized by the argument that greater expenditure on the welfare of colonists was a recognition of their contribution to the war effort.¹⁰² Government assistance under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945 provided funds for long-term economic development. An offshoot of the act was the Nigerian Ten-Year Plan for Development.¹⁰³

These innovations were introduced within the context of an economically weak British Empire, rising nationalism in the colonies, and a welfare-minded Labour government. The envisaged changes were often not reflected in the actions and opinions of the men on the spot. The government was not particularly enthusiastic about a proposal in September 1945 to grant credit facilities to farmers, peasant industries, and demobilized soldiers. L. T.

Chubb, secretary for the Eastern Provinces, argued that such schemes would likely fail in the Eastern Provinces. "With the difficult agricultural problems existing in the Eastern Provinces," acting assistant director of agriculture for the Eastern Provinces wrote in the *Report of the Mission Appointed to Enquire into the Production and Transport of Vegetable Oils and Oilseeds in West African Territories*, "I think that opportunities for constructive and economically sound assistance to peasant farmers in the form of credit facilities are likely to remain very limited until agricultural research has made more progress. We have no straightforward and proved system of agriculture such as mixed farming in the Northern Provinces."¹⁰⁴ On 1 November 1945, the government in the Eastern Provinces disbanded the palm production team, which was set up during the Second World War, and the Residents were requested to give a month's notice for the termination to the African staff.¹⁰⁵ Indeed the enthusiasm for agricultural development died down quickly after the war.

The most important structural change in the post-war period was the establishment of produce marketing boards. The origin of the marketing board system can be traced to the harsh global economic condition of the late 1930s, which had triggered a wave of anti-colonial protests.¹⁰⁶ These protests, it has been argued, led "British officials to consider greater state involvement in colonial economies."¹⁰⁷ With the outbreak of the Second World War, European businesses, including the United African Company (UAC), pressed for controlled marketing to "reduce the riskiness of the West African trade, and the Colonial Office acceded."¹⁰⁸ The West African Cocoa Control Board and the West African Produce Control Board, set up in 1940 and 1942 respectively, formed the roots of the marketing board system and the large surplus accumulated by the boards played an important part in the decision to continue statutory marketing of export products after the war.¹⁰⁹

The Oil Palm Marketing Boards was incorporated in 1949.¹¹⁰ The emergence of these boards led to greater colonial involvement in local economies. The boards were required to cater to palm produce and maintain an efficient organization of licensed buying agents to undertake the handling of produce and its delivery to the boards. Like other marketing boards, the Oil Palm Marketing Board was required to maintain legally prescribed grades and standards to improve the quality of export produce and allocate funds in the form of grants, loans, investments, and endowments for the purposes of eco-

conomic development and research.¹¹¹ The actual purchasing of produce was left to licensed buying agents.¹¹²

The Eastern Nigerian Marketing Board was charged with the task of ensuring the maximum production of palm oil and palm kernels.¹¹³ H. A. Oluwasanmi has described the system of licensing buying agents as a continuation of the “*status quo ante bellum*.”¹¹⁴ In the case of oil palms, prospective buying agents were required to show evidence that they could purchase, with reasonable regularity, at least 400 tons of palm kernels and 200 tons of palm oil in their first year of operation. In addition, licensed buying agents were required to produce “acceptable evidence of their ability to provide the necessary capital to finance their purchases.”¹¹⁵ This limited the ability of Nigerians to become licensed buying agents. Therefore, expatriate firms dominated the produce trade until the 1960s, when Nigerians became important players.¹¹⁶

Although the boards were supposed to ensure the stability of producer incomes and act as buffers for African peasants, they diverted a large portion of the gross income of farmers to finance development in infrastructure, plantations, farm settlements, and research.¹¹⁷ The differences between producer prices and market prices, P. T. Bauer noted, left the primary producers at roughly the same income level as they had been before the Second World War.¹¹⁸ Still, post-war conditions generated a certain measure of socio-economic progress and development. Higher prices introduced by the government as well as improved processing techniques accounted for the boom in peasant production in the 1950s.¹¹⁹ The period witnessed an increase in the role of indigenous entrepreneurs in the economy. Investments in transport and the distributive trade were also made in this period. This era also witnessed a remarkable number of co-operative societies catering to the interests of rural farmers.¹²⁰

SOCIOCULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

The Second World War accelerated the rate of social change, and this created uncertainties and reduced the motivation of young men in particular to remain in the villages. A young man, Gilbert Uzor, discouraged by the poverty

Table 5.7. Provincial details of palm oil target figures and actual tonnage passed for export, April 1945–46.

PROVINCE	PALM OIL TARGET (TONS)	TONNAGE FOR EXPORT	SHORTFALL
Onitsha	9,104	4,655	4,449
Ogoja	797	423	365
Calabar	41,451	32,014	9,437
Owerri	38,663	32,679	5,984
Total	90,015	69,771	20,235

Source: NAE, file no. 1642/vol. 11, ABADIST, 1/26/908, "Palm Produce Production," M. E. Broughton to Director of Supplies, Nigerian Secretariat Lagos, 6 March 1946.

of rural life in his village of Umunomo, was encouraged by the financial benefits that would accrue to him to join the army during the Second World War. Gilbert shared the view of many young men in the villages that the war created an opportunity to escape rural poverty. The army provided him the resources he needed to marry his wife Nwaeke and establish a home in Port Harcourt at the end of the war.¹²¹

The war changed the way people lived their lives. In fact, the war accelerated the increase in migration that had developed earlier, forcing more young people to leave their towns and villages. Linus Anabalam, who left his village with many other young men after the war, remarked:

After the war, the eye of the world was opened and people began to migrate out of the rural areas. Many of us wanted to copy the life style of the returning soldiers, including the way they dressed. This encouraged many young men and some women to leave the villages because there was money to be made outside the village and quickly too.¹²²

The implications of colonial policy for the people of Nigeria went beyond food security problems. Colonial policy also affected the people's everyday lives. Informants emphasized that many adult males could not fulfill social obligations, such as the payment of bride-wealth.¹²³ Young men were forced by such economic and social obligations to migrate from the villages as the monetiza-

tion of the local economy increased. Anex Ibeh, who migrated as a young man, notes: "When European money was introduced, one could not live on farming alone. I walked on foot to the mid-west and worked in the timber industry to accumulate enough money to start a family."¹²⁴ For many men in the Mbaise area, for example, wage labour and migration took them away from their own fields. Subsistence, marriage, and conformation to a new life style drove many to migrate out of Igboland.¹²⁵

In some parts of the region, however, the rural economy benefited from the growing expenditures on transportation and communication, rail and road development.¹²⁶ Between 1943 and 1946, the government allocated a substantial sum of money for the construction of rural roads to facilitate the evacuation of palm oil and kernels. The development of local feeder roads further integrated rural households into the colonial and war economy.¹²⁷ The development of roads and other forms of communication increased the ability of rural peasants to leave the villages. They migrated to the towns, taking advantage of the opportunities in the construction industry and in the expanding bureaucracy. Large numbers of Igbo labourers were attracted by the opportunities offered by plantations in the mid-western area of Nigeria and the timber industry in Benin. The increase in the migration of men and young boys tended to heighten frustration with the local economy, but migration provided a ready source of capital accumulation, a break from rural life, and opportunities that were absent from rural Igboland.

The Igbo formed the bulk of new migrants into the emerging cities throughout Nigeria in the post-war period. Their rate of migration was stimulated by the "increased income which migrants earned from abroad," Chief Eneremadu recalls.¹²⁸ The scarcity of agricultural land, the declining soil fertility, and the high population density of parts of the Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu, Awka, and Onitsha areas increased the rate of migration from these regions in the post-war period.¹²⁹

Still, the developments in Eastern Nigeria in this period must be analyzed in relation to the environmental and demographic conditions of the region. Unlike many other parts of the country, the extensive exploitation of natural resources and the expansion of cash crop production took place in an increasingly fragile environment overburdened with high population density. Eastern Nigeria, like many other parts of tropical Africa, experienced a dramatic

rate of deforestation during the colonial period. Although deforestation had a deep history, most of Igboland lost its forest cover in the first half of the twentieth century due to the expansion of cash cropping and agricultural intensification. An informant recalled the disappearance of different species of mushrooms, edible plants, and roots in the last fifty years.¹³⁰ Informants remember when people could make a meal out of collecting wild vegetables and tubers from the forest.¹³¹

Overall, colonial policies in this era demonstrated a serious anti-peasant bias and threw the burden of the war on the African population. Farmers did not have the capacity to meet the challenges imposed on them, and few colonial administrators had the capacity to relate production to local conditions or to peasant strategies. Intervention in the rural economy disturbed production and reduced the incomes of farmers.¹³² The contradictory policy of the colonial authorities created the reality faced by the indigenous farmers who produced according to the demands of the European market.

The need for food and raw materials was central to British policy during the Second World War and it significantly altered peasant-state relations. Some peasants withdrew from the local economy and many migrated out of the region, due in part to the drop in the prices of palm oil and kernels and in part to the coercive nature of colonial policy in this period. While the prices of food items rose in the 1940s, the prices of palm oil and kernels did not. The instability in farmers' incomes contributed to the rate of agricultural involution after the Second World War.

The Second World War was a major cause of change for men and women from Igbo societies as they sought to negotiate their livelihood within an increasingly intrusive colonial society. As farmers and traders, they came to witness the increased intervention of the colonial state in their affairs through new market regulations, restrictions, and price controls. With the demands of the war, rural peasants were called upon to contribute to the British war effort through the production of palm produce and other export goods in addition to food items. In some cases, Igbo peasants capitalized on the opportunities provided by the war to produce more palm oil and food to meet increased demands. At other times they resisted the intrusion of the colonial state and its regulatory powers. They did this by subtle and less subtle forms of resistance, including the use of petitions and supplication.

The post-war period witnessed major attempts by the colonial authority to transform the colonial economy and increase the welfare of colonial subjects. These reforms were not always successful as the policies were at times at odds with the realities in the colonies. Yet government policy under the Colonial Development and Welfare Act of 1945, which provided funds for long-term economic development, formed the foundation of the economic development policy of the Eastern Region of Nigeria after political independence. The nature of agricultural policy and peasant response in the post-colonial period is the focus of the next chapter.