

1. See, for example, Bourgi, A; 1979 *La Politique Francaise de Cooperation en Afrique: le Cas du Senegal* Editions LGDJ Paris; also, Joseph, R; 1976 "The Gaullist Legacy: Patterns of French Neo-colonialism" *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 6, May — August 1976, pp 4-13 Sheffield.
2. See, Nwokedi, E; 1982 "Franco-African Summits: A New Instrument for France's African Strategy?" *The World Today* Vol. 38 No. 12 December 1982 p. 482 London.
3. The ex-Belgian colonies (Zaire, Rwanda and Burundi), being French-speaking countries have been gradually but systematically absorbed into the co-operation ethic. For a fuller analysis of this concept, see, Nouille-Degorce B 1980 "La Politique Francaise de Cooperation avec les Etats Africains et Malgache au Sud du Sahara: 1958 — 1978" Unpublished Doctorat d'Etat Thesis University of Bordeaux pp 10 — 11
4. *Ibid* p 59
5. See, *Le Monde* 21 October 1981 p 3 Paris; also, *Jeune Afrique* 2 June 1982 p 24 Paris
6. President Mitterand's speech as reported in *Le Monde* 21 October 1981 p 3 Paris
7. According to the Minister, this means in essence, a restructuring of his ministry from one exclusively responsible for relations with France's former colonies to that responsible for relations with the Third World. See, interview in *Jeune Afrique* 4 August 1982 p 73 Paris.
8. See, "Rapport Abelin 1975" in *Europe Outremer* No. 543 April, 1975, Paris; also, Nouille-Degorce *op. cit.* pp 266-268.
9. Taton R 1977 "Refaire de la Cooperation une Grande Cause Nationale" "*Europe Outremer* No. 564 January, 1977 p. 11 Paris
10. For a list of the 31 states which attended the Paris Conference for the least developed countries (LDCs) in September, 1981 see, *Le Monde* 2 September, 1981 Paris, P. 3.
11. Moshe Amni-Oz 1977 "Les Imperatifs de la Politique Militaire Francaise en Afrique Noire a l'Epoque de la Decolonisation" *Revue Francaise d'Etudes Politiques Africaines*, No. 134, February, 1977, Paris, p. 80.

The Producer in the Palm Oil Export of South-Eastern Nigeria in the Era of 'Legitimate Commerce'

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By the 1840s, when the export of slaves from south-eastern Nigeria had, for all practical purposes, ceased, palm produce had emerged as the dominant export of the region. The new trade ultimately turned out to be far more lucrative and positive in its impact than its predecessor. And from very humble beginnings, within a matter of a few decades, Nigeria attained world leadership in the export of palm produce, more than three-fourths of it coming from south-eastern Nigeria. In the quinquennium 1865—69, for instance, Nigeria's export of palm oil and kernel stood at 5,288 and 11,871 tons, respectively. By the quinquennium 1906 — 1910, the figures had rocketed to 70,435 and 143,301 tons.¹

The problems posed by the transition from the old trade to the new and the strategies by which the problems were tackled have attracted considerable attention in the literature — as far as they affected the European supercargoes and firms and the African coastal middlemen of the Niger Delta and Old Calabar.² However, the same type of attention is yet to be extended to the farmers who did the primary production and without whose sweat the orchestrated 'achievements' of the Europeans and the African middlemen on the coast would have been impossible.

Two main reasons could be suggested for the omission or neglect. One is the absence of documentary evidence to encourage the attempt. The production of palm produce was done in the hinterland far out of the reach of the Europeans on the coast, who could have left written information on the producers. When the British colonial administration was established in the hinterland, it was soon embroiled with the trading firms in an idle debate about the *pros* and *cons* of mechanised means of palm produce production *vis-a-vis* the indigenous system. In the process, insufficient attention was paid to the farmers' actual modes of production.

The second, and perhaps more important reason, is that there was a general belief in influential European circles that the production of palm oil and palm kernel was easy and created no problems to the indigenous farmers. In 1926, Allan Mcphee, regarded as a pioneer authority on British West African economic history, asserted that only a small amount of labour was necessary to prepare palm oil and get it to waiting British ships.³ Twenty-three years later, the United Africa Company (U.A.C.) added to the matter the weight of its eminent position when, in its *Statistical and Economic Review*, it asserted that

the production of palm oil and palm kernels requires little or no labour other than that involved in gathering the fruit, expressing the oil and breaking the nuts to extract kernels.⁴

Although most writers these days no longer share the opinions of Mcphee and the U.A.C. on this matter, it does not appear that sufficient efforts are being made to investigate the strategies by which the indigenous farmers were able to effect such massive production of exports. This is the issue this paper intends to explore with focus on the adaptations and innovations which the producers made to increase production. It argues that in responding to the changing economy

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brought about by the inception of 'legitimate commerce', the indigenous palm oil producers made some important adjustments and innovations in their modes of production, which helped the growth in the export staples.

A successful innovation should accelerate growth in the total volume of output and perhaps also effect structural changes in an economy. But such structural changes need not involve a complete departure from the accumulated fund of empirical knowledge within the economy concerned. Economic activity has to be assessed in the historical context in which it occurs. Therefore, innovations in production techniques need not be seen in the context of changes in technology and business organisation and management characteristic of Western industrialised economies.

II

Current explanations of the growth of export figures, not only in Nigeria but in West Africa as a whole, appear to be amalgamated in the theory of vent-for-surplus. This theory goes back to Adam Smith, but it has been remodelled by Myint and applied to Nigeria by Helleiner.⁵ The theory is well known, but it is necessary to outline its salient points to facilitate subsequent discussion below. There was marked growth of staple exports in the era of 'legitimate trade'. Significantly, this increase was neither preceded nor accompanied by any known technological advancement or population increase. The production of staple foods is not known to have suffered, either. Myint has further suggested that increased export crop production did not require any capital, except that of the 'subsistence fund' to tide the farmer over the lean period in the agricultural cycle.⁶

Given these conditions, the conclusion becomes both plausible and inescapable that West Africa then had the potential capacity to increase the production of export crops without cutting down on staple foods. This suggests that a considerable amount of un-utilised and under-utilised land and labour must have existed. These could be exploited, if the need arose. But these potentials remained latent not because of any culturally-conditioned preference for idleness to economic pursuit. The problem was the absence of a 'vent' to dispose of any surpluses which would have resulted from increased utilisation of land and labour.

According to this theory, the principal functions of the colonial administration and foreign firms were to remove this constraint and provide the incentive for increasing production. To this end, the administration busied itself in maintaining law and order and in providing a modern, efficient transport and communication infrastructure. The foreign firms, on their part, performed dual functions: they bulked and transported 'peasant' produce to foreign markets and made imported goods available to the producers. They thus linked remote producers to the world markets, satisfied their wants and stimulated new ones.

The validity of the vent-for-surplus explanation can hardly be doubted. For one thing, the theory contains some assumptions which are in accord with some known facts about the development of 'legitimate commerce' in West Africa. For another, it places the roles of the colonial administration and foreign firms in their proper perspective. In this regard, it could be seen as a modification of the views of earlier economic historians, such as McPhee.

However, the vent-for-surplus theory does not provide all the answers to the issue and it is defective in some of its assumptions. Implicit in the theory is the assumption that the single critical factor which induced increased export production was the 'vent' for disposing of surplus which accrued from increased utilisation of land and labour. This implies that the producers did not effect any innovations in their modes of production to maximise production. This paper dissents, suggesting, on the contrary, that it was necessary to re-organise labour and mobilise capital. Some traditional institutions and values had also to be challenged, modified and, in some instances, discarded to meet the new demand.

To produce the thousands of tons of produce noted earlier certainly required considerable amount of labour in cutting, collecting, head-loading of palm fruits to the processing points and in processing the fruits. Also, the collection and transporting of processed produce from the scattered and remote islands of production to the 'beaches' of the coastal middlemen or the European trading firms, demanded enterprise and physical endurance. These functions involved not only the farmers but also a long chain of indigenous middlemen and petty traders.⁷ The petty traders bought palm oil in the local markets in pints and kernels in small 'cigarette cups' while the major middlemen bought oil in drums and casks, and kernel in tons, and dealt directly with the European import-export firms.

Casks of oil were rolled manually over considerable distances through narrow, tortuous bush paths. Produce was also transported by head portage and (occasionally on bicycles in 4-gallon kerosene tins through treacherous footpaths; and across swamps and dangling wooden bridges. In the riverain areas, drums and puncheons of oil were poled down the rivers in rafts. This was by no means a pleasant job. For example, rafting of oil from Oguta on the Orashi river down to the river Niger was a particularly arduous and hazardous job and took several weeks to accomplish. In the shallow portions of the river there was often not enough water to float the casks. The raft had to be undone and the puncheons of oil rolled manually through the shallows till deep waters were reached. The rafts were then remade and poling of the rafts resumed.⁸

As local information has it, the heavy demand thus made on labour encouraged the adoption of exotic crops, such as cassava (manioc), which did not make much demand on labour in cultivation and processing for food. The adoption of cassava was not achieved without initial hazards. Initially, the people did not know how best to process the tubers for food in order to remove its poisonous hydrocyanic acid content and, therefore, the new crop inflicted a heavy toll on the lives of its early adherents.⁹

Contrary to popular assumption, the palm oil industry required some capital investment by the farmer and the middleman trader, big or small. For the farmer, the capital input included machetes, climbing ropes (agbu) and long wicker baskets (abuo) for carrying palm fruits. The trader needed to have containers such as 4-gallon kerosene tins, casks, scales, sieves and, for the few who could afford them, even drums and bicycles. The monetary value of all these may amount to a trifle today, but did not to the farmers and traders concerned. Respondents indicate that quite often the acquisition of these basic equipments was beyond the financial capability of the average farmer or trader. And to overcome this handicap, the people adopted various devices.

The most popular strategy was the formation of the contribution clubs, *esusu*. The exact origins of *esusu* are shrouded in a web of conflicting traditions but its *modus operandi* is clear.¹⁰ Members of *esusu* agreed to contribute some amount of money ranging between 2d and 1/- a week, depending on the financial capabilities of the members. The total amount contributed at each meeting was given to a member according to an agreed roster until every member received his or her share. With the bulk money, the recipient could then go into trade or buy the necessary tools for the cutting and processing of palm fruits.

Traditional institutions such as the age grade, title and secret societies and the extended family system were also adapted to serve the same end. Field investigations indicate that among the Efik communities of Old Calabar, the *ekpe* secret society could sometimes loan money to its members in need. The same would appear to have been applicable to members of the *Ozo* title society in northern and western Igboland. The loan money in both instances was obtained from the fees of new entrants into the societies.¹¹ Among the Ibibio and the Cross River Igbo, where the age grade system was very strong, a member of an age grade could be advanced a loan from the grade's common fund. An age grade could even stand surety to one of its trusted and enterprising members who wanted to raise a loan, if the grade was at that point in time not in a position to make such a loan to its member.

It is not that these institutions were products of the 'legitimate trade' era. Most of them pre-dated the 19th century. Originally conceived as basically social institutions they were now being progressively adapted to perform new functions in the new, emerging economy. This is what Ehrensaft refers to as "the capitalisation of pre-capitalist social formations".¹² These changes were adaptive and creative, and, for this reason, evolved without significantly disrupting the smooth functioning of the society. Experience has tended to show that the failures of many an imported modernity in Africa have often arisen from the fact that the communities where they were applied invariably were treated as if they were a *tabula rasa*. But it is now generally accepted that for any innovation to take root, it has to evolve as an integral part of its milieu or, if it is imported, it must be grafted on to the traditions and experiences of the people concerned.

'A wide-spread intellectual curiosity about material things' and 'a willingness to accept change', it is said, are some of the important pre-conditions for economic growth. Willingness includes preparedness to re-examine any traditions, customs or beliefs which can obstruct growth.¹³ Scholars familiar with the southeastern Nigerian peoples agree that these attributes prevailed in the past as they do in the present among many of the ethnic groups in the region. Le Vine, in his *Dreams and Deeds* expressed the view that these traits are distinguishing characteristics of the Igbo and the Ibibio.¹⁴ In 1939, Ross was amazed, even to the point of disgust, at the pre-occupation of Igbo women with material things.¹⁵ And Harris, who spent many months of intensive research on the economic life of the Ozuiem Igbo, remarked on what he described as 'the money-mindedness of the Ibo'.¹⁶ Latham, Dike and Ikime have all shown that a high degree of the spirit of enterprise and a willingness to change were exhibited by the Efiki, Ibibio, the Ijo and the Itsekiri, during the era of legitimate trade.¹⁷ In the process of change, traditional values were assaulted, sometimes even at the risk of incurring the displeasure not just of the people but of the gods too. In the mid-9th century, for instance, when some European firms started trading at Onitsa, their first customers were all women,

who exchanged palm produce for European imports. This was in accord with the traditional norm of the Igbo which recognised local trade and marketing as the special preserve of the women. As time went on, and the women evidently began to make much wealth out of the trade, a handful of men joined them.¹⁸ But the community disapproved. The women resented the invasion by the men into an activity that was their traditional preserve. The more conservative men taunted them for doing a women's job while their families dissuaded them. At least one found it impossible for some years to procure a wife, as no young girl was willing to accept such a trader as husband. However, after the pioneers had demonstrated that trading could be a very lucrative occupation, social disapproval was overcome, and many more men joined in the trade. In the process, the women were pushed into the background.¹⁹

III

Although there is no factual evidence, it could be that there was no increase in the population, at least at the outset, to account for the growth of exports. However, in two senses, the labour force can be said to have technically increased. First, with the cessation of the Atlantic slave trade, the risks of long distance travel were greatly minimised, and the establishment of colonial rule from the end of the 19th century reduced incidents of inter-village conflicts which tended to absorb much of the attention and energy of the most virile segments of the population. The labour thus released could be diverted to more productive ends.

Furthermore, effective cessation of the external slave trade left some communities such as the Arochukwu and the Efik slave traders with a considerable number of slaves which they could no longer export. Although it is not absolutely certain how the services of all the slaves were utilised, there is little doubt that some of them were used for the production of domestic foods as well as palm produce for export. In the 19th century, some Efik ruling families such as Ntiero, Achibong and Duke, established plantations at Akpabuyo, about ten kilometres from their home town, Calabar. The Efiks deployed their slaves in these plantations for the production of both domestic food crops and palm produce for export. The Arochukwu people also established similar plantations at Ndi Ijoma about twenty kilometres from Arochukwu.²⁰

Secondly, there were human migrations induced by the search for new employment in the palm oil industry. There seems to have been three main types of migrants: those concerned directly with the processing of palm fruits; middlemen who mediated between producers and buying firms; and food specialist farmers. The role of human migration in the expansion of cash crop cultivation in West Africa still awaits detailed research. Nevertheless, some scholars who have worked along this line have indicated, that migrants played a crucial role in boosting cash crop production in some areas.²¹

In south-eastern Nigeria, such migrations were generally from zones of population concentration with limited agricultural resources to those with sparse population but with un-exploited or under-exploited agricultural resources. Migration was thus a mechanism to equilibrate human with natural resources.

The areas of population concentration included southern Onitsha, the Mbaise-Owerri, southern Okigwe, Orlu and the Annang-Ibibio districts. Population densities in these areas ranged from 260 per square mile to over 1,000 in Mbaise in Owerri and Afaha Obong in Annang district.²² Soil fertility in these areas appears to have declined considerably due to centuries of intensive cultivation. The less populated areas included Ahoada, at the head of the Niger delta, Ogoja, Ikom and Obubra districts on the upper Cross River, as well as the Akpabuyo and Ekoi districts of Calabar.

The Annang-Ibibio live in the Uyo, Abak and Ikot Ekpene areas of south-eastern Nigeria, one of the most thickly populated districts in Nigeria. In the late 19th century, a number of farmers started to migrate west from here to harvest palm fruits in the Azumini and Ikwere areas. The Azumini people had apparently taken to middlemen trade after Opobo traders had opened up trade at their water-side in 1870. A section of the Annang-Ibibio farmers went east to work in palm groves belonging to the Idua (Oron) clan. The Idua people seem to have taken to fishing, and the palm oil industry did not catch on among them early enough.²³

East of the Cross River, it was to the districts of Ekoi, Akpabuyo, and Okoyong areas north and east of Calabar that migration was most intense.²⁴ Here was one of the richest palm belt areas in Nigeria. Against the abundance of oil palms were populations too sparse to exploit fully the oil palm resources in the areas. To these areas came migrants from the Annang-Ibibio district, notably Uyo, Etinan and Ikot Ekpene as well as those from Ngwa, Ohafia, Nenwe and Mgbowo in Igboland.²⁵ The enterprising ones among the migrants in time saved enough money to rent palm groves of their own. When they secured an economic foothold some of them visited their homes and returned with their wives, and even recruited hired labour. In the process, they turned from being merely seasonal migrants to semi-permanent immigrants. In due course, they were able to enjoy economic and social influence in their new communities.

In his intelligence report on the Ezza in 1927, Chapman indicated that these people in the course of their expansion and search for land had founded, by the middle of the 19th century, three colonies — Ezzagu, Nkomoru and Effium.²⁶ Forde has also shown that these same people had spilled across the Cross River from the western side, their home base, to the eastern part by the beginning of the 20th century and that it was only the intervention of the British colonial administration that checked this movement.²⁷ The Ezza were not directly involved in palm oil production. They were specialist yam producers, and supplied the needs of their neighbours, including the Cross River communities of Itu and Calabar.

In the rich palm belt of Ahoada, the indigenous population was too scanty to exploit fully the oil palm in the area. Migrants were, therefore, welcomed to cut and process palm fruits. The majority of them were the Isu or Isuama who occupy the densely populated areas around Okigwe and Orlu. From their homeland, some migrated in their hundreds to the Orashi and Sombreiro rivers, and to the basins and tributaries of the Niger and the Imo rivers. Others went east to Arochukwu, where they came into competition with Edda and Afkikpo migrants. The Sobo from the old Warri province west of the Niger also came to the Ahoada area to harvest oil palms.²⁸

Through these migrant farmers some previously unused lands were colonised and developed and, in doing so, they effected changes in the settlement patterns, farming practices and land tenure system. In Mgbowo, for example, Abakaliki farmers, often referred to as *ndi ugu ukwu* (people who farm with huge hoes) introduced the making of yam mounds — *ugbo* — which rapidly replaced the ridges hitherto in use. According to local information, ridges were easier to make than mounds and the crop yield was higher.

It may be pertinent to remark that ability to climb the palm tree is not hereditary nor is the skill widespread. Climbing a palm tree is a very risky job. The climbing rope can snap under the weight of the climber; the climber can miss his step or grip. In either circumstances, the consequences can be fatal. Climbers have been known to rouse snakes or bees at the top of an oil palm while cutting the bunch of palm fruits. It was partly due to the risks involved and the dangers inherent that climbing the palm was a restricted profession.

The peoples of Ikwere, Ahoada and Ossomari for instance, did not climb the palm tree. They had apparently depended for their livelihood largely on fishing, staple food cropping as well as on their role as petty middlemen to coastal traders. In this regard, they exploited their locations on the Orashi, the Sombreiro and the Ndoni rivers.²⁹ In Arochukwu, a celebrated slave-owning community, a freeborn did not climb a palm tree. Hence they saying, *nwa amadi adighi ari enu* (a 'patrician' does not climb a tree). The same was true, among the Igbo, of *ozo* title holders and among the Efik and Ibibio of *ekpe* high ranking members. Thus, without these migrants, oil palms would not have been fully exploited in all these areas mentioned above.

Migration created its own problems for the migrants. Before departure from home, the seasonal migrant had to make arrangements for the welfare of his family and other dependants during his absence. Here again, the traditional social formations like the age grade, title society and extended family were adapted to perform this function.

The extended family system has often been condemned in some quarters as the bane of African development, a drag on the emergence of indigenous entrepreneurs and capitalists.³⁰ While this indictment may be true in some cases, it was not generally so in the situation under discussion. The extended family, far from being the bane, was the main home support of the migrant entrepreneurs.

Away from home, migrants faced quite serious difficulties, in particular those of adaptation. The adaptational problems of the individual may appear simple, conceptually: to find shelter and earn a living. But the social and cultural problems were not so simple in reality. The migrants in an unfamiliar environment became fair game for other people among whom they found themselves.

Their economic and social well-being often depended upon their ability to organise into groups to exert counter-pressures against those seeking to exploit them. In response, migrants especially those of the same ethnic group, formed associations for mutual aid. Interestingly enough, village and town 'progress unions' so characteristic of most ethnic groups in Nigeria today were formed, not in the home districts but in distant centres.³¹

Some scholars have written as if African land tenure is uniform and irrevocably static. In an attempt to compress all African societies into a single mould, undue stress has often been laid on a couple of common features at the expense of other differences. But, as Mair cautioned, the orthodox conception of an undifferentiated communism in which even the soul was common property has been found to be out of tune with the facts of any known human society, however primitive.³² In a similar vein, Chubb, a British political officer who worked in various parts of Igboland, early in this century warned that:

In a tribe such as the Ibo, with the yeast of ambition at work in such large sections of it, no custom, whether in regard to land or other social aspects, can be assumed to be static.³³

Generalisations have the advantages of clarity and brevity of presentation of an issue, but these advantages are usually achieved at the risk of smothering a complex of problems. The findings of the West African Land Committee of 1912 and the works of other scholars who have studied the subject, clearly show the folly of making blanket statements about land tenure in West Africa.³⁴

One effect of the new economic regime in south-eastern Nigeria was the conferment of recognisable commercial status to land. The theory of Igbo and Ibibio land tenure was that land could not be sold outright, and its ownership was generally collective. From the late 19th century, the rules and customs began to be relaxed, and evidence of incipient outright sale, individualisation, lease-hold and even permanent alienation began to emerge, albeit very grudgingly. Ritual sacrifices were usually made to the gods and ancestors as a means of propitiating them when the ancient traditions were relaxed or broken.

The Aboh people in the former Onitsha province had land in excess of their requirements and so they gave away some to strangers. In Onitsha itself, immigrants from Sierra Leone and Lagos, whom the colonial administration chose to daub as 'scallywags', had acquired very sizeable pieces of land, by the beginning of the 20th century.³⁵ Early in this century, Abam and Uzuakoli peoples still stoutly resisted permanent alienation of their land. But their Arochukwu guests circumvented this tradition by paying such inflated amount of money for land pledged to them that redemption, for all practical purposes, became impossible.³⁶ Individualisation of land may have helped in no small measure to raise productivity since occupiers could invest in and develop their land without fear of dispossession at a future date.

As in the case of land, so the new economic regime raised the commercial status of the oil palm to a level hitherto unknown in the economic calculations of the people. The merging economic importance of the oil palm effected changes in its ownership pattern. Before then, it was rarely deliberately planted and ownership, with minor exceptions, was collective. Interest in harvesting did not go beyond the point dictated by family consumption need. But with the change, indigenous attitudes towards the crop underwent a dramatic change. Interest in its ownership and cultivation was raised, and distinctions began to be drawn between palms growing on lands with different tenures.³⁷ Claims and counter-claims of ownership became rampant, and this led to a bewildering number of cases of litigation in the Native Courts set up by the colonial administration in the area.

Palms growing around the homestead belonged to the household. Those growing on lineage lands were collectively owned by all the members of the lineage while those on village community lands belonged to the entire members of the village. Generally, only members of the relevant land-owning unit had the right to cut palm fruits growing on their land. Apart from these loose, general guidelines, there were no strict laws regulating the cutting of palm fruits from communal lands. Such regulations were not necessary, of course, because demand for palm oil was virtually limited to subsistence need. However, the commercialisation of palm produce in the 19th century led to the formulation of new and stricter controls by the various land-owning units.³⁸

For instance, a palm grove or bush could be 'closed' by the unit owning it. This was symbolised by tying fresh, yellow palm fronds conspicuously round a few of the palms in the grove. This sign prohibited anybody from cutting palm fruits there until the embargo was lifted. At the end of the embargo, the cutting of fruits was then thrown open to all the male members of the unit owning it. The idea was to ensure that, as much as possible, every member of the unit was given an equal opportunity to enjoy the wealth of the community. It also helped to prevent indiscriminate cutting of palms by individuals which could ruin the resource. Some communities reserved some palm groves for the exclusive use of their elders. This was done partly because the elders could not be expected to compete favourably with the virile young men, and partly to meet their traditional obligations as heads of their lineages. The Efik-Ibibio peoples called such groves *mbak eyop* and the Igbo *nkwu ndi ichie*.³⁹

Occasionally, palms were harvested communally to raise funds for the community in order to meet a specific need. This would justify a law forbidding anybody to harvest fruits from any palm tree in the village or even lineage land for a prescribed period, usually a month. At the end of the period, selected age grades were detailed to cut the fruits while the women carried them home. The bunches were then auctioned away on the spot. This was a convenient and quicker method of raising funds for the community than by individual levy.

This practice did not amount to absolute communal control of oil palms. Individual and lineage ownerships were still recognised and respected, but the village community retained the right to tax, when the need arose, the oil palms of individual members and units of the village. On the whole, the system was flexible for, while not depriving the individual citizen of their right to private ownership of oil palms, the welfare of the whole community was balanced against the interest of the individual.

Indigenous palm oil producers made some innovations in the modes of production which economised on time and labour. Before palm oil became commercially important, in south-eastern Nigeria, its production was usually the affair of one man and his wives. The man was responsible for cutting the fruits and for pounding them in a wooden mortar. The wives were responsible for carrying the fruits home from the palm bush or grove and for processing after the man had pounded them. The increased demand for the export of the produce induced greater effort by both the men and the women.

In most parts of south-eastern Nigeria, large pits (called *ikwe akwu* in Igbo) dug in the ground replaced the wooden mortars. The walls and bottoms of the *ikwe akwu* were laid with stone slabs. These *ikwe akwu* were far more commodious than the mortars and, therefore, could hold much greater quantities of palm fruits. One of such *ikwe akwu* which the present writer saw at Okon Ohafia, Igboland, in 1979 measured roughly eight feet in diameter and three feet in depth. In the Ndi Ijoma plantations of the Arochukwu community, the *ikwe akwu* were even larger. Some were wide enough to enable up to ten men or even slightly more to stand round the edge to collectively pound palm fruits with long, wooden pestles. The tedium and monotony of repetitive pounding of fruits in small quantities by one man, which had been rendered inescapable by the small size of the mortars was thus eliminated. The men were then able to form reciprocal co-operative groups to help each member to pound their fruits as the occasion arose.

Among the Isoko and the Urhobo peoples of the Niger delta a similar innovation took place. Here the men had, in fact, gone to the extent of taking over from their women the latter's traditional function of processing palm fruits. In place of the mortar employed by the women, the men used unserviceable dug-out canoes placed in a pit in the ground. A large canoe could hold up to four times the quantity of fruits that a mortar could. To cope with increased production, these men, as in other parts of the south-eastern Nigeria, formed co-operative societies, *ifo*, by which they helped each member in turns to process their fruits.⁴¹

Another innovation which the producers evolved to economise on labour and time was to shift the processing point from their homes to as near as possible to the place where the fruits were cut. In fact, the location of the processing point was conditioned primarily by proximity to a source of water as the indigenous modes of palm oil production consumed large quantities of water. A second, though secondary, point of consideration in locating the processing point was the availability of firewood around the area, required to boil palm fruits before pounding and to heat the pulp to enable the oil to rise to the surface and be skimmed off into a container.

The new processing points were advantageous to the oil producer. Firstly, the problems of head portorage were substantially reduced. When processing was done at home, palm fruits had to be carried home in bunches or in spikelets, and this meant several rounds of journey. But with the change, it was possible to dispose of unwanted chaff at the point of processing. Thus many round trips were avoided as only the final products were carried home. Secondly, proximity to sources of water and firewood supply also reduced the number of round trips which used to be made to fetch them. In addition, it became possible and convenient to utilise the services of younger children to fetch water from the stream, and firewood from bushes nearby, functions which were beyond their capability when fruits were processed at home, far removed from the sources of water and firewood.

All these innovations no doubt contributed to increased palm oil production. But because these did not involve technological advancement, they very easily escaped the attention of the District Officers already overburdened by an overwhelming administrative workload. Nor did the agricultural officers appreciate these developments as they were inclined to favour an European-style, mechanical system of production through the introduction of oil mills.

The exact quantitative contribution, conjointly and individually, of the innovations and adaptations discussed in this paper to the growth of palm produce export in south-eastern Nigeria is difficult to determine. Neither the indigenous producers nor the middle-men kept records relating to these matters. Authenticating historical evidence from non-literate societies by applying the criteria used in literate societies can be frustrating and misleading. However this may be, it seems safe to suggest that these changes in the traditional techniques of production must have led to overall increase in production. Otherwise one would expect that the changes would have been discarded if they were found unrewarding.

VI

To conclude, it is clear that the African producer was a very active participant in the evolution of the new economic system of the 19th and early 20th centuries. In responding positively to the new economic opportunities, they made fruitful innovations and adaptations in their modes of production, which, given the limited resources at their disposal and the technical constraints facing them should be considered praiseworthy. True, these changes did not effect any economic revolution in the region; all the same, they made some contributions in boosting the palm oil industry. A fully satisfactory explanation of the growth in the export of palm produce from south-eastern Nigeria during the period under consideration has to take these innovations and adaptations into account.

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Review Article

Capitalism and Racism in South Africa*

Jan Kees van Donge**

These two books can highly recommended for various reasons. Firstly, because the information they provide is compelling reading. Both are studies of white South African nationalism. Their titles indicate that they are complementary in the periods they cover.

One would expect that a racial minority which oppresses a large majority would display a high degree of internal cohesion in order to face the threat of revolt. White South African politics appears, however, to be marked by intense internal strife, shifting alliances and seemingly inconsistent behaviour. A key Afrikaner politician like Verwoerd came into conflict with the Afrikaner Cape capitalist Hofmeyr, because the latter could not stand verwoerd's anti-semitism. But Verwoerd also destroyed the openly national-socialist, Brandwag. Yet all three - Hofmeyr, Verwoerd and Brandwag - are manifestations of Afrikaner nationalism pleading unity of the volk. The long political of J C Smuts symbolises continuity in the Boer war; the end of his career came in 1948 when he was ousted by Afrikaner nationalism. His name is associated with committing South Africa to the British side in the First World War. The people who would never forgive him that became his coalition partners and merged with his party after 1933. A large number of those left him again when he entered the Second World War. The South African Labour Party then became the coalition party of the man who had suppressed the white labour Rand revolt of 1922.

*Belinda Bozzoli 1981 *The Political Nature of a Ruling class: Capital and Ideology in South Africa 1980-1933* Routledge Kegan and Paul O'Meara 1933 *Volkskapitalisme: Class, Capital and Ideology in the Development of Afrikaner Nationalism 1934-1948* Cambridge University Press

These books make such seeming contradictions and ambiguities in South African nationalism intelligible by relating them to the development of the economic substructure. Bozzoli documents the development of local South African

These books make such seeming contradictions and ambiguities in South African nationalism intelligible by relating them to the development of the economic substructure. Bozzoli documents the development of an ideology of South Africanism as a concomitant of the development of local South African manufacturing. The emergence of this South African economic nationalism was embedded in struggles between commercial capital, agricultural capital and imperial mining capital. The white proletariat provides the complicating factor in these struggles. O'Meara shows behind the diverse and often fragmentary nature of Afrikaner nationalism the drive to mobilise Afrikaner savings. Amidst the mythology of Voortrekkers and the search for the true interpretation of Calvinism