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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY,
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY,
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS,
LAGOS, NIGERIA**

**A Socio-Economic History of Food Crop
Production in Igboland 1900-1980: a Study of
Yam, Cocoyam and Cassava**

OCTOBER, 1998



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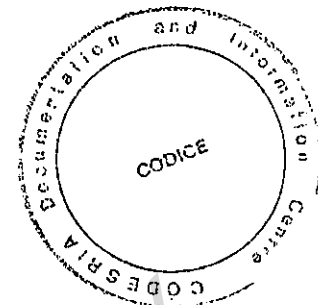
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**A SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF FOOD CROP
PRODUCTION IN IGBOLAND, 1900-1980: A STUDY OF
YAM, COCOYAM AND CASSAVA**

BY



**IWUAGWU, OBICHERE CHILAKA
B.A. (IMSU), M.A. (LAGOS)**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY, DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY,
UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS,
LAGOS, NIGERIA**

OCTOBER, 1998.

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS
SCHOOL OF POSTGRADUATE STUDIES

Certification

This is to certify that the thesis: "A SOCIO-ECONOMIC HISTORY OF FOOD CROP PRODUCTION IN IGBOLAND, 1900-1980: A STUDY OF YAM, COCOYAM AND CASSAVA"

Submitted in the
School of Postgraduate Studies
University of Lagos

for the award of the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D)
is a record of original research carried out by

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DEDICATION

To the Rural Dwellers:

*Who have given and still give so much,
but receive only a little in return;*

*That their cause may henceforth be handled with more
concern.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I thank God most sincerely for enabling me to conclude this work which at the beginning seemed insurmountable. His abundant grace, guidance and protection were the major things that saw me through.

However, I regret the fact that my father, Sir. A.C. Iwuagwu, did not live to see the end of this work. His demise a few months after I commenced this programme, was a major blow. Nevertheless, I am consoled by the fact that a sure way to immortalise his name would be, by furthering those ideals for which he was well known. And that exactly, is what I have resolved to do. In this wise, my nuclear family has been most supportive. I am particularly indebted to my mother, Mrs. R.C. Iwuagwu, for her unending prayers and wise counsel and my elder brother, Dr. Emeka Iwuagwu, for being very understanding. Likewise my other siblings; Mrs. Ada Chidume-Okoro, Mrs. Chiedu Obi-Anyanwu, Ugochi, Uchenna, Chioma and Nnamdi were supportive in several ways. In fact, I will ever count myself lucky to have come from such a loving family.

My Supervisor, Dr. Ayodeji Olukoju, deserves every commendation. For a start, he has remained a major inspirer to me. Again, not only was he generous with his time, his sound criticisms, personal interest in me and this work particularly, were the things that brought the research to this stage. My God will ever reward him. Also deserving of mention is my second supervisor, Dr. A.A. Lawal, who incidentally supervised my Masters Degree thesis. In actual sense, he means more to me than he may ever realise. It was indeed the discipline and training which I acquired under him during my Masters Degree research, that saw me through the Doctoral work.

Whereas I received a solid foundation for my academic pursuits at the former Imo State University (now Abia State University, Uturu), there is no doubt that I owe a lot to the Department of History, University of Lagos, where my current interest in Economic History was nurtured. I remember particularly Professor Babatunde Agiri, who provided the necessary guidance at the initial stage. Also for special mention are, Profs. Jide Osuntokun, A. I. Asiwaju and T.G.O. Gbadamosi; Drs. Yomi Akinyeye, E.K. Faluyi, R. T. Akinyele, J.G.N. Onyekpe and Paul Njemanze, as well as Messrs. L.C. Dioka, M.O. Junaid and M. Ogbeidi. In a special way, I thank Dr. Eno Ikpe for her kindness to me and Dr. Tunde Oduwobi, for generously allowing me to use his office in the final year of my study. This was of tremendous help and I will ever be appreciative of his kind gesture. The administrative staff of the Department were equally nice, especially Mrs. Aderiye, Mrs. Okoli and Mrs. Falola, who typed the work.

Similarly, I am indebted to the staff of the National Archives, Enugu, the National Root Crop Research Institute, Umudike Umuahia, and the IITA Library, Ibadan, for their assistance during my research. Mr. Onuora Nweke's assistance facilitated my field work in Abakiliki, while my cousin, Mr. Canice Nosike, willingly accommodated me all through the period of my archival research at Enugu. I am grateful to both of them.

The following persons have shown considerable interest in my academic pursuit. They include, Messrs. Kayode Momodu, Uche Igwe, Chukwudi Nwabuko, Ikechukwu Amaechi and Kevin Ihenetu. Others are Drs. Innocent Uzoechi, Chidiebere Nwubani, Isidore Diala and Dr. (Mrs.) Ngozi Osarenren. My gratitude to them may never be quantified. I also remember my friend and mentor, Prof. Geoffrey I. Nwaka, who, since

my undergraduate days, has remained a special source of inspiration, indeed a pillar of support.

I indeed thank the Almighty God, for giving me the opportunity to know the following people: Engr. Rogers Ibi, Messrs. Patrick Mbajekwe, Emma Abugu, Oscar Uluocha, Fidelis Ohaegbulem, Johncliff Nwadike, Vitalis Nwulu, Collins Nwoko, Peter Osuji, Austin Ogbu and Raphael Okoroigwe. They are friends for all seasons.

The financial support which I received from the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA) through their Small Grants for Thesis Writing Programme, helped immensely in the completion of this research. I also received support from Messrs. Sony Ajala and Jackson Agbai of Citizens Bank, Lagos. Their assistance indeed came in the nick of time.

This work may not be flawless. In this wise, I claim full responsibility for all judgements and errors of fact contained therein.

OBI IWUAGWU

Lagos,
October, 1998

ABSTRACT

Food is an essential ingredient for living organisms. The standard of living in any environment is determined more than anything else, by the level of food substances available to it. In Africa, a lot of substances are consumed. Using the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, these food substances range from crops to animals. Also, the peoples food customs are integrated into their socio-cultural framework so much so that it is even ritualized. However, what is produced is inherently determined by the environment. Hence, the important role of geographical factors in food production.

Prior to British colonial rule, cases of food shortages in Igboland were not common. They occurred mainly in times of drought and other natural disasters. But, colonialism not only introduced new wants among the Igbo, it also brought new crops, which were in great demand in Europe. Thence, it became more attractive to go into export crop production, resulting in an unnecessary neglect of food crops. In fact, the hallmark of colonial policy in Igboland, indeed Nigeria, was the almost total neglect of crops like yam, cocoyam and cassava, on which the people heavily depended. And with this, came the beginning of persistent food shortages.

The post-independence administration continued the policies of its colonial predecessors. This may have been for want of foreign revenue badly needed for development projects; more so, as the economy was agriculture based. Similarly, the 30-month Nigerian civil war, further worsened the food problem, since old policies were abandoned and the insecurity of the period was inauspicious for farming. Consequently, not a few people died from hunger and many more suffered from diseases arising from

Moreover, the over-centralisation of policies under the military and the introduction of unrealistic agricultural programmes, following the end of the Civil War further complicated the food problem. Therefore, policies like the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP), the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) and the Green Revolution, merely amounted to tackling the problem from the top, rather than from the root. Hence, it is argued that a more realistic way to tackle the food problem in Igboland, is by opening up the rural areas with more government infrastructure, introducing modern agricultural systems, reducing the prices of farm input and above all, by farmers being able to emphasise economic rather than socio-cultural factors in agricultural practice.

ABBREVIATIONS

ABADIST	-	Aba District.
ADA	-	Agricultural Development Authority.
ADP	-	Agricultural Development Project.
AFDIST	-	Afikpo District
AIDIST	-	Abakiliki District
ARODIV	-	Arochukwu Division.
COSCA	-	Collaborative Study of Cassava in Africa.
CSE	-	Chief Secretary Enugu.
ENADEP	-	Enugu State Agricultural Development Authority.
ENDC	-	Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation.
FAO	-	Food and Agriculture Organisation.
GDP	-	Gross Domestic Product.
IITA	-	International Institute of Tropical Agriculture.
JAH	-	Journal of African History.
MEN	-	Miscellaneous Publication on Eastern Nigeria.
MINLOC	-	Ministry of Local Government.
MISF	-	Miscellaneous File.
NAE	-	National Archives Enugu.
NAFPP	-	National Accelerated Food Production Programme.
NISER	-	Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research.

NORCAP	-	Norwegian Church Agricultural Project
NR	-	No Record.
NRCRI	-	National Root Crop Research Institute.
NSUDIV	-	Nsukka Division.
NWRF	-	Nigerian War Relief Fund.
OFN	-	Operation Feed the Nation.
OGPROF	-	Ogoja Province.
OKDIST	-	Okigwe District.
OUP	-	Oxford University Press.
OWDIST	-	Owerri District.
RBDA	-	River Basin Development Authority.
RIVPROF	-	Rivers Province.

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GLOSSARY

Ahijoku/Ifejioku	-	Yam deity
Ala	-	Land
Chukwu	-	God
Colocasia Esculenta	-	Old Cocoyam
Colocasia spp.	-	Cocoyam species
Dioscorea spp.	-	Yam species
Ede	-	Cocoyam
Eghu	-	Goat
Eresi (Osikapa)	-	Rice
Ezeji (Diji)	-	Yam king
Ezi n'ulo	-	Nuclear family
Igba onwe oru	-	Exchange of Labour
Ikwa ede	-	To take the cocoyam title
Irileri	-	One hundred
Ji	-	Yam
Ji Akpu	-	Cassava
Lolo ede	-	Cocoyam Queen
Ndi Okei	-	Elders
Nkwu (Akwu)	-	Oil palm
Nnu	-	Four hundred

Nte	-	Shrine
Oba	-	Barn
Oka	-	Corn
Ona	-	Three-leaved yam
Ozo	-	An important traditional title
Ugba	-	Oil been tree
Umunna	-	Extended Patrilineal family
Xanthosoma	-	New cocoyam

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

There is no doubt that it is becoming increasingly impossible for the various peoples of Africa to feed themselves. Since the late 1970s particularly, hunger and malnutrition have, in fact, become a recurrent issue. However, a variety of interpretations exist on the possible causes of this problem. Charles Guthrie, for instance, attributes it to the overall poverty of the African continent. Africa's standard of living, he says, is low by all indices: gross national product, gross domestic product, per capita income, literacy and per capita food production.¹ But against this background of a precarious food situation, many scholars believe that Africa is blessed with an abundant natural wealth which, if properly utilised, should be able to minimise the problem of hunger on the continent.

With the exception of a tiny fraction of wage-earners, traders, and craftsmen, most Africans south of the Sahara practice or subsist on arable farming. Murdock², estimates that Africa grows about nine-tenths (9/10) of all the cultivated plant varieties known to man. There is evidence³ also, that in the past, people produced enough to take care of their immediate food requirements. This was mainly in the pre-colonial period. Thus many scholars were deceived, and inappropriately termed the African environment a 'subsistence economy'. Many parts of the African continent were then able to produce enough to eat and even had surpluses for the market. So what went wrong? Is it that the people have suddenly become lazy or the land has simply refused to yield? Could it be

that the traditional implements are no longer sufficient to produce for the ever increasing population? Or, is it a result of some internal factors, for instance the peoples socio-cultural values or some policies of government? These are pertinent issues worthy of examination.

Hla Myint⁴ is of the opinion that the problems of underdeveloped countries (of which the African continent forms a part) have arisen not because these countries are in the traditional state of isolation, but because they have been linked to outside forces in the form of foreign trade, investment and colonial rule, and that the spread of money economy had disrupted the economic self-sufficiency of the pre-colonial subsistence economy. His argument is that, the introduction of an orderly framework of administration by the colonial governments and the provision of basic public services, especially public health, had reduced the death rates and caused a rapid growth of population, which disrupted the traditional balance between population, natural resources and technology. In essence, the present African food problem arose from the disruption of the 'subsistence economy'.

It is interesting to note, as Lofchie has pointed out, that this same continent, unable to produce sufficient food to provide for the majority of its citizens even a barely minimal diet, has continued to record sharp increases in its annual production of some agricultural goods destined for external markets⁵. This case of probable misplacement of priority is worth discussing.

In Africa, a variety of crops are cultivated. Grains and root crops, however, dominate the Nigeria agricultural economy. In Eastern Nigeria, for instance, where the Igbo people who form the subject of the present study reside, the standard food crops

produced in substantial quantities are the root crops of yam, cassava and cocoyam; grain crops like, maize, millet, rice and guinea corn; nuts such as groundnuts and bambara nuts; and other crops like beans, benniseed, sweet potatoes and sugar cane. The oil palm provides oil and kernels for domestic consumption⁶ as well as for the external market. Also, plantain, pepper, okro, melon, pear, breadfruit, oil bean, tomatoes, coconut, cashew, guava and different species of vegetables are in abundance. A peculiar factor to agricultural practice in the area is the fact that food crops grown for domestic consumption constitute over seventy-six (76%) per cent by value of the total agricultural production⁷.

The overwhelming importance of agricultural production in the traditional Igbo economy is thus an established fact. Writing in the 19th century, the Igbo ex-slave, Olauda Equiano, affirmed that agriculture was indeed the chief employment in an area where the land was uncommonly rich and produced all kinds of vegetables⁸. The establishment of formal government in the colonial period, as well as the growth of towns and cities reduced the number of hands in agriculture. Indeed, total dependence on food purchasing was usually frowned upon. In fact, this 'bond with the land' existed from the earliest times.

Igbo traditional method of agricultural cultivation involves fallowing and shifting cultivation while hoes and cutlasses are widely used. Floyd⁹ notes that shifting cultivation, bush fallowing, indiscriminate use of fire, excessive fragmentation of holdings resulting from a claim to the land on the part of every male, form part of what he called a 'tribal economy', which is incompatible with effective development of agricultural resources in Eastern Nigeria. Therefore, whereas 'ancient' practices are

continually adopted in agriculture, the soil fertility particularly in very high density areas is undoubtedly incapable of withstanding pressures due to constant usage.

Over the years, the production of yam, cocoyam and cassava has declined comparatively in Igboland except in areas with more fertile soil and smaller population concentration. To the extent that more people now depend on the market for their foodstuffs.

On the issue of rapid population growth and its influence on food production, Davis has noted that generally, African populations expanded at an increasing pace during the colonial period, perhaps by as much as 1.3 per cent per year between 1930 and 1950, and by another 30 per cent, over the decade 1950-1960. The colonial preference for cash-crops, and urbanisation came to worsen the food situation, each rural producer had to feed more and more people¹⁰. Even after independence, successive governments, in a bid to earn more foreign exchange, tended to facilitate the production of export crops to the detriment of foodstuffs.

In the same vein, whereas rural farmers could not afford most of the implements needed for food production, the confusion that was recorded in the Nigerian polity, particularly during the civil war, had very unsettling effects on food production, especially in Igboland.

Nevertheless, a major cause of food shortage in Igboland has to do with the issue of crop preference. Central to the life of the Igbo people, is the traditional practices that surround agricultural production. Even when this clashed with their economic interest, some of these practices often times took precedence over economic rationality. Thus, because the culture of the land declared yam the male crop, it is seen as the chief crop.

Consequently, other crops, even when they contribute more to the farmers' harvest assume subsidiary status. In other words the disproportionate allocation of human and material resources in farming in favour of yam cultivation, has had a linkage effect on the farmers' output.

Arising from the foregoing summation, some deductions could be made about the nature of the African agricultural economy, using the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria as an example:

1. Africans generally, and the Igbo in particular, are a hardworking people and hold agricultural production in high esteem.
2. In agricultural practice, emphasis was, and is still placed on 'ancient'/'traditional' implements.
3. A variety of food crops are cultivated in Igboland with yam, cocoyam and cassava as the chief crops.
4. Government policies from the colonial times have favoured cash crop production.
5. Cultural factors, however, influence the farmers' choice of crops.
6. Soil fertility is generally low and this has not been helped by constant exploitation caused by a high population density in several areas.
7. The unstable political situation in Nigeria has generally had its toll on food production.
8. Rapid increase in population has not been met by a corresponding increase in food production.
9. The food supply situation has therefore deteriorated considerably resulting in significant shortages.

1.2 OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF STUDY

This work is concerned primarily with the agricultural practices of Igbo rural farmers of Eastern Nigeria. It exposes the problems of agricultural production, especially the influence of traditional cultural practices on the production of yam, cocoyam and cassava. The aim is to show that the critical factor in the shortfall in the agricultural sector, particularly food production, is the undue prominence given to cultural factors at the expense of economic rationality. Also, the study highlights in historical perspective the efforts of the Igbo rural farmers in meeting the food requirements of the people in the face of such inhibiting factors as: depreciating soil fertility; land scarcity relative to rapid population growth; lack/inappropriate use of fertilizer and other agricultural inputs; hindrances inherent in the social system; and, a declining labour supply.

Although the Igbo farmer sometimes alternates crops to increase yield, even in such cases, the determining factors are mainly cultural. Thus, even when it is more difficult to cultivate yams, many farmers still prefer the crop due to its cultural uses¹¹. One's wealth of the yam crop, for instance, could enable him to take the **Ezeji** (yam king) title. And this goes with enormous prestige.

In spite of the factors enumerated above, which account for the fall in food supply in Igboland, there is evidence to show that for the period 1900-1980; particularly in the North-eastern Igboland, where land is more fertile and agricultural production more intensive; except in extreme cases of war, epidemic or drought, rural farmers always worked hard enough to meet the food demand. Against this background, this work analyses the problem of food production in Igboland in historical perspective, and makes

a case for a revolution in the sector that is inward-looking in orientation. It stresses that economic issues rather than socio-cultural factors be emphasised in agricultural production, if the food supply condition is to be improved.

The study covers the period 1900-1980, spanning the tenure of various colonial and post colonial administrations. It even delves into the period slightly before 1900 to make for a better understanding of all the issues involved. The origins of some of these crops particularly in Igboland are traced to the period before 1900 as a preview to understanding the events of the subsequent years. The year 1900 has been chosen, because by then traces of all the crops under study had been recorded in Igboland. Also, by 1900, European colonialism particularly of the Igbo area was still at its infancy, so it makes it easier to test the various hypotheses of African economic history, particularly the relationship between food production and export or cash crop cultivation. The war situations (the first and second world wars, as well as, the Nigerian civil war) and their impact on the food economy, particularly on the choice of crop for cultivation by the rural farmers of Igboland will be analysed. In all cases, emphasis is laid on the role of socio-cultural as well as economic factors in crop selection and the policies of the successive governments. The terminal date has been chosen to make the study relevant to contemporary times.

1.3 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS

It is necessary that we, at this stage, define some of the terminologies that have been frequently used in this study. The aim is to make for a clearer understanding of the entire work. Some of these concepts include, food crop, change, continuity and Igboland.

FOOD CROP

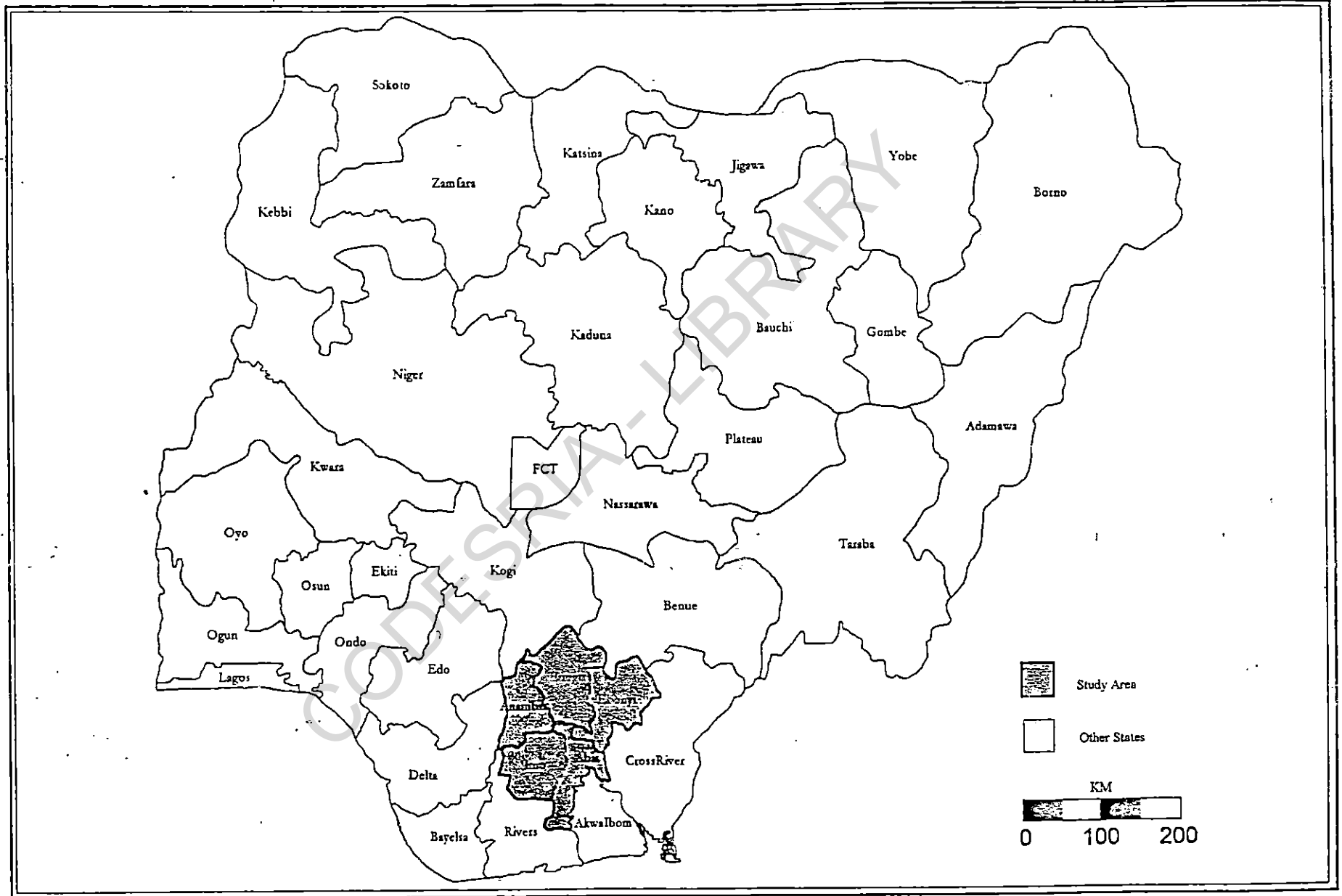
Food could generally be seen as any substance taken into the human body for any or all of the following purposes: to provide energy, to serve as a body-building material and to regulate body processes¹². The **Chambers Encyclopaedia** notes that whereas all living organisms take into themselves materials with which to build and maintain the functioning of their tissues, the term food is normally restricted to those solid materials swallowed by animals.¹³ It follows from the foregoing that food could be derived from both animals and plants.

This study is however interested in the food derived from plants. In this sense, food crop is here defined as crops grown primarily for human consumption.¹⁴ Several crops fall into this category, including both grains and root crops. However, the current effort concentrates on three root crops: yam (*Dioscorea spp.*), cocoyam (*Colocasia spp.*) and Cassava (*Manihot spp.*). It must be noted that the wide variation in human food derives mainly from custom, climate, geography and technological development. The afore-mentioned crops are predominant in Igboland and naturally form a sound basis for discussion in this work.

CHANGE

The idea of change, going by available definitions, could be seen from different dimensions. It could relate to the act of substituting something for another. Also, change may be applied to the process of making different, in form, quality or state: the fact of becoming different: introduction of novelty. In other words, a departure from a norm: a condition from established character, sequence or condition: a divergence from

Figure 1.1: MAP OF NIGERIA SHOWING THE STUDY AREA.



Source: Laboratory for Cartography and Remote Sensing (LABCARS),
Department of Geography, University of Lagos, Akoka.

uniformity or constancy in any quality, quantity or degree: alteration, modification, variation or mutation¹⁵.

The term “change” in the context of this work is used to express any act of replacement or substitution between one crop and another, for example, replacing yam with cassava or cocoyam. It is also used to express alteration or substitution among species of a particular crop such as white yam with yellow yam.

CONTINUITY

Continuity refers to the state or quality of being uninterrupted in extent or substance, of having no interstices or breaks; uninterrupted connection of parts; connectedness or unbrokenness.¹⁶ It is the quality of being continuous, of uninterrupted succession, cohesion or coherence.¹⁷

We, therefore, use ‘continuity’ in this study to refer to the act of prolonged occurrence without interruption. It is used to show the application of a particular crop or species of crop overtime, across Igboland or in any particular part of the area.

IGBOLAND

The Igbo form one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria. Like their neighbours, they belong to the Negro race in Africa and speak a language that belongs to the Kwa group of languages found in West and Central Africa. The language spoken is Igbo, though with many local dialects.¹⁸ The Igbo territory cuts across the equatorial forest in the South and the Savannah in the North, covering areas east and west of the River Niger. West of the Niger it includes parts of Aboh, Asaba and Agbor Divisions¹⁹

in present Delta State, while in the East, it includes the whole of Anambra, Enugu, Ebonyi, Imo and Abia States parts of Ogoja in the Cross River State as well as the Ikwerre of Rivers State. However, the majority of the people at present live in the five states of Imo, Abia, Ebonyi, Anambra and Enugu, considered to be the Igbo heartland.

For the purposes of this work, Igboland is limited to those parts of the former Eastern Region of Nigeria that later became East Central State in 1967. With a population put at over five million in 1963, and one of the highest population densities in Africa the area is made up of the aforementioned five states. Essentially a tropical rain forest environment, both root and grain crops are emphasised, with a greater percentage of the people in agricultural production. The area is a major food producing part of Nigeria the main crops being yam, cocoyam and cassava.

Specifically, the work concentrates partly on the North-eastern Igbo noted for their dexterity in agriculture and the use of a unique giant hoe, referred to as *Ogu-Ukwu*. They are favourably disposed to yam cultivation more than most other Igbo sub-groups. Northeast Igboland covers Ezza, Ikwo, Izzi, Ngwo and Agba in the Abakiliki area, and Isu, Onicha, Okposi, Uburu, etc. in the Afikpo area. It also covers the southern Igbo communities of Orlu, Mbano, Owerri, Mbaise, Obowo, Umuahia, Bende, Ngwa, Isukwuato, Okigwe, Item and Alayi, where cocoyam and cassava dominate the food economy. Although this work concentrates on these areas, its findings also have relevance for other parts of Igboland, since they equally fall within these two geographical units.

1.4 LITERATURE REVIEW

A considerable volume of literature exists on the agricultural practices of Nigerians of this period. However, many of these studies have been undertaken by non-historians, notably agriculturists, geographers, botanists, anthropologists and ethnographers. The historical dimension has not been fully explored. Most of these works appear as research findings mainly for a target audience. Their specialised nature make them almost irrelevant to the ordinary reader. Also, there currently exists a communication gap between the scientist, the peasant farmer and the policy maker. The present effort is out to bridge this gap, by emphasising the historical/human dimension, which has all the while been ignored.

Uzozie's work, though from the perspective of a geographer, is important to the economic historian.²⁰ His discussion of the 'contemporary spatial distribution and patterns of association of the staple food crops of Eastern Nigeria against their respective ecological and sociological backgrounds, makes the job of the economic historian simpler, particularly with regard to the present effort. In any case, limiting this important work to yam and cassava alone makes the people's food cycle incomplete and excludes the unique role of cocoyam in the food economy of Igbo people.

A more systematic analysis of the problem of poverty and agrarian change in contemporary Africa is presented in Martin's work.²¹ Focusing on the Ngwa region of Eastern Nigeria, she describes the constant interplay of new economic opportunities, local environment, social structure and external contact in determining the economic life of the people. The introduction of new crops, she says, was a natural process resulting

from culture contacts which, also introduced new social complexes, diversification in the production process, migrations of youths, changing role for the sexes, etc. This book has serious historical implications. Using historical evidence, the author has been able to shed light on the economic, nay agricultural history of Igboland. All the same, reducing this work to Ngwa region alone, and indeed using one cash crop (palm oil) limits the relative applicability of its conclusion.

Ohadike links the spread of cassava in Igboland to the “Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19”. According to him, the epidemic broke out at a time when foodstuffs were in desperately short supply and the strains of resisting imperialism had stretched the people of the Lower Niger to the limit.²² Therefore, the obvious advantage of this crop over existing ones (it needed little or no weeding; required no staking; could be left in the soil for longer periods; and, could be planted and harvested continuously throughout the year) made it attractive to the people. This work is laudable for explaining the process of change in the peoples’ food crop culture. However, the fact that it deals with cassava alone limits its usefulness, even as it has emphasised a monocausal approach in explaining the change from yam to cassava.

A study which actually establishes the crucial connection between agriculture and culture in Igboland is Afigbo’s “Economic Foundations of Pre-Colonial Igbo Society”²³, a chapter in a collection of seminal essays. While identifying agriculture, trade and manufacturing as the mainstay of pre-colonial Igbo economy, he categorically stated that agriculture is the primary activity, to the extent that “every Igbo man or woman was a farmer”. The importance of agriculture in the economy of the people has led to its ritualization. Evidently, this work, as the author noted, should best be seen as a ‘progress

report of an on-going research into related issues'. It did not discuss 'the extent to which economic factors determined the character of Igbo society and culture', as the author stated in the introduction. This, however, is an important aspect of the current effort.

Floyd's work is 'a systematic geographical appraisal of Eastern Nigeria prior to the outbreak of the Nigerian civil war in mid 1967'. Divided into three parts, each dealing with the people, their physical setting and the economic activities of the region, the book examines systematically though from a geographical perspective, those compound ingredients which together make up the geographical character of the region.²⁴ The book provides vital information on the localization of each of the three crops in the different parts of Igboland. Part two of the work specifically deals with the geology, landforms, soils, vegetation, erosion and the meteorology of the area as well as their effect on cultivation. An adequate analysis of the general agricultural situation of the area in the 1960s is presented in the third part of the book. The dominance of the yam crop is shown, 'contributing over 57 per cent by value of the total food crop production'. Also, the author identifies land tenure, environmental aspects and what he calls economic problems as factors militating against traditional agriculture in Eastern Nigeria. Floyd's book is indeed a source material on the geography and the economy of Igboland and Eastern Nigeria. While discussing the entire region, the author adopted a general approach in explanation. Also, the emphasis on yam rather reduced the rising economic importance of the other crops in the food crop economy of the Igbo people.

The agricultural development of Eastern Nigeria is the subject matter of Smock's book.²⁵ Of special interest is the second part of the work which deals with the socio-

cultural and psychological factors affecting agricultural development. Regrettably, he only highlighted some of the cultural issues in agricultural development in Eastern Nigeria. No doubt a proper understanding of the agricultural history of Eastern Nigeria must take into cognisance the central role of culture particularly in the food economy of the people.

Agboola,²⁶ has done an extensive research on food production in Western Nigeria. He revealed the relative importance of most of these crops in the economy of Western Nigeria and suggests that the main food crops which attain first class status in the area are yam, cassava, maize and cocoyam. The author traces the nativity of these crops to the region, though agreeing that some of them like cassava may have been introduced from outside. Also, the author identified poor fertility of the soil and introduction of the tree crop cultivation as inhibiting factors to food production in the area. There is no doubt that this work is a scholarly masterpiece, but its shortfall lies in the author's failure to show the role of socio-cultural factors in food production. Nevertheless, the scope covered in this work makes it of comparative relevance to the current effort.

Morgan's submission that the farmer of South Eastern Nigeria is essentially a hoe cultivator and that his work has the character of gardening rather than farming, since it is small scale and permits individual attention to the plants grown,²⁷ is obviously unacceptable to us. There is evidence to show the seriousness attached to farming in the region. Farming was a specialized occupation and success in it attracted both economic and social rewards. However, Morgan's work shows the role of the sexes in food

production and suggests reasons why more people now turn towards cassava cultivation. All these are relevant to the present work.

That the Igbo are great farmers is not in doubt. With a variety of food crops at their disposal, there have been situations when new crops have been adopted and old ones displaced. Hence, the central theme of Ikpe's work²⁸ is the various factors of transformations in the food habits of Nigerian peoples from 1900-1989. Of course, the Igbo form part of this work since they are Nigerians. Though the author made an effort to discuss the issues that determine the element of change and continuity in food behaviour, she failed to adequately highlight the factors involved and the complexities particularly in the inter-change of yam, cocoyam and cassava in the food habit of Igbo people.

Most of the early works on the economic practices of this period seem to agree to a particular pattern, treating the economic history of different peoples from a multi dimensional framework. In an effort to explain what constitutes the economic life of the people, many issues are usually muddled up. In other cases, some vital issues are even neglected. Ekundare's work falls into this category. The author makes no pretence to it, having only attempted to present 'a systematic account of the economic history of modern Nigeria, which can serve as an introduction to a vast subject which has remained largely unexplored.'²⁹ He agrees that agriculture was a major sector in the economy of pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria. However, his bias was for cash crops which were discussed exhaustively. In any case, it would be unrealistic to base the economic history of the period on one aspect of production alone. Arguably, a lot of cash accrued from the

sale of these crops, but people still depended on some other crops for feeding. These crops are part of the people's history and deserve attention.

Similarly, the colonial policy has been presented as central to the lopsided development of Nigerian agriculture. Udo believes that government decided to encourage and supervise the cultivation of export crops by providing local farmers with improved seed varieties and technical advice and as well by establishing demonstration plots in some villages.³⁰ Not only were research centres established, people were induced through propaganda to adopt new crops and subsidy provided in the form of fertilizers and free supervision and instruction, cropping, harvesting and initial processing for export. Obviously this was the highlight of colonial agricultural policy, but it is argued in the present work that this is only part of the reason for the persistent food shortages in Igboland. We must begin to look at the role of internal factors particularly the relationship between culture and food production in Igboland.

1.5 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Scholarly attempts to explain the various issues involved in African underdevelopment fall into two distinct classes. Raph Austen identifies a division between the market school and the structuralists.³¹ For the former, the writings of Curtin,³² Hopkins,³³ Helleiner,³⁴ Harts³⁵ and Schneider,³⁶ dominate. The thrust of their argument which has minor variations, is that, prior to European contact, Africa had surpluses of land and labour which were left untapped; contact saw the introduction of new crops which, therefore, led to the utilisation of hitherto idle resources.³⁷ Scholars of the market school further assert that contact saw the introduction of Africa to the world

market, and this has ultimately been to the continent's advantage. They argue that Africa's continued underdevelopment has resulted from poor technological skills and minimal saving ability (poor capital accumulation). They believe that Africa on the eve of colonialism, had substantially unused resources of both land and labour. It was as a result of this, that cash crops were grown on a substantial scale with minimal displacement of existing economic activities.³⁸ These resources only became meaningful when they entered the world market and that was what contact with Europe brought to Africa.

From the structuralists come three different schools of thought - the Substantivists, Marxists and Dependency theorists. The Substantivist opinion rests on the notion that precolonial African economy was static. Man depended on nature for his living. Economic activities therefore, were at a subsistence level. The Substantivists argue that in this static economy, land was not tilled for profit despite the fact that it was in abundance and had no commercial value. Szereszewski, in fact, writes that the bulk of human effort was deployed in the production of indigenous food stuffs and services or held in reserve as leisure.³⁹

Marxists believe that human society has passed through different phases of evolution, in what Hegel refers to as thesis, antithesis and synthesis. To him, a new idea always comes to challenge an existing one and through this interaction a new and better idea will emerge. Thus, the ancient economies of primitive commodity production, like that of ancient Greece were followed by the feudalism of the Middle Ages; next came the capitalist mode of economic production, which will then be followed by socialism and communism. It was the class struggle between the owners of the means of production

and the dispossessed that always provided the driving force at each stage and the dialectics of this class conflict moved history from one stage to the next.⁴⁰ Therefore, imperialism is seen as the climax of the capitalist formation which will ultimately lead to communism. The current trend of underdevelopment, they argue, merely represents a phase in this evolutionary process.⁴¹ These scholars believe that once the ancient or Asiatic mode of production has been eliminated, the forces of capitalist accumulation will be released to do their work of transforming the society and placing it on the track of historical evolution. In fact, Marx argued that although imperialism was immoral, it was also a progressive force since without it the less developed economies would remain in their state of torpor forever.⁴²

Caporaso and Zare have tried to differentiate between dependence and dependency. Dependence is conceived simply as external reliance while dependency is seen as the process by which less developed countries are incorporated into the global capitalist system. Whereas dependence emphasizes sectoral changes, dependency on the other hand advocates total reliance.⁴³

Dependency theorists, generally see dependency as a situation in which the economies of certain countries are conditioned by the development and expansion of another economy to which the former are subjected.⁴⁴ They group various underdeveloped economies as suffering from different levels of dependency. The integration of these economies into the world capitalist system, it is argued, has been at the root of their underdevelopment. Capitalism, they further argue, both world and national, has produced underdevelopment in the past and still generates underdevelopment in the present. Indeed the situation is said to be hopeless since no

country which has been firmly tied to the metropolis as a satellite through incorporation into the world capitalist system, has achieved the rank of an economically developed country, except by finally abandoning the capitalist system.⁴⁵ What this means, is that Africa is generally suffering from the yoke of capitalist exploitation, as her economy is continually tied to the capitalist economies of the developed world.⁴⁶

Because these countries have been forcefully linked with the international economy and made to be solely dependent on it, they now find it difficult to stand on their own. All trade and financial relations are based on the viewpoint of the dominant powers. And for the dependent countries, these relations represent an export of profits and interest which carries off part of the surplus generated domestically and leads to a loss of control over their productive resources.⁴⁷ Such dependence causes underdevelopment. The dependency theorists argue that, the genesis of underdevelopment could be traced to colonialism, and the phenomenon has remained even after the attainment of political independence, due to the operation of economic and technological forces that concentrate wealth in the metropolitan countries rather than diffusing it to the less developed nations.⁴⁸ To all intents and purposes, underdevelopment, therefore refers to formations whose process of transition has been blocked.⁴⁹ Development for African countries, Rodney believes, is possible only on the basis of a radical break with the international capitalist system, which has been the principal agency of underdevelopment of Africa over the last five centuries.⁵⁰

There is no doubt that these scholarly arguments have led to a better understanding of African economic history. They have also exposed hitherto neglected areas of African economic history for further research. However, for economic theories

to adequately explain the economic system of a period as well as the changes that have taken place over time, the historical dimension must be integrated into them.⁵¹ This is a major flaw in all these theories. While some of these theories have emphasised specific factors, many have generalised on a number of issues. And these generalisations have not been able to stand the test of time. Majority of the theories have lumped the so-called underdeveloped areas together, without taking into consideration the peculiarity of each case. When some of these societies are compared many of the issues raised in these theories contradict themselves.

For instance, granted that most parts of Africa are blessed with abundant land, it will be misleading to generalise on this basis for the entire continent. Again, to conclude, as the vent-for-surplus theorists suggest, that enormous land and labour in Africa were left untapped until contact was established with Europe would mean turning a blind eye to the agricultural activities that took place in this period. Of course, food was extensively produced and exchange of goods and services also took place. There is evidence to show that yam produced in certain parts of Igboland, for instance, were sometimes exchanged for other crops not available in the 'yam country'. And this happened years before colonial rule. In the same vein, the Substantivist argument of static economy does not hold water. With regard to food crops, there was a progressive increase in production over the years. Areas with substantial land and labour readily produced for the market. Also, there were changes in cultivation, as old crops were dropped and new ones adopted. In essence, an economy that was able to use its environment to its economic advantage cannot be described as static.

Perhaps, the greatest problem with the Marxist argument is on the issue of generalisation. To Marxist scholars, a revolution must occur to herald changes in the social system. Everything is interpreted to suit a pre-ordered framework. In so far as they actually emphasize internal factors operating dialectically, Marxists assume uniformity of resources and outcomes. But we know that the African environment is distinct from that of Europe. Therefore, Africans may not necessarily react to issues the same way as Europeans. Different factors can motivate change at a particular time. Recent global events seem to have even punctuated the views of the Marxists.

The Dependency theory simply banishes private initiative and internal dynamics to the background. Hence the colonial administration takes all the blame for the problem of underdeveloped countries, who now play the robot, and must wait to loose the grip of the metropole to achieve any meaningful development. But we cannot undermine the role of internal dynamics in economic development. Attributing the problems of underdeveloped countries to the colonial experience alone, is as risky and deceptive as (may be even more dangerous than) the colonial contact itself. It is necessary to highlight the role of internal factors, which, as the African experience has shown, greatly influence the process of growth and development.

The present study prefers to argue that fundamental to African underdevelopment is the socio-cultural system that is widely practised. The life of the African is principally determined more by socio-cultural than economic considerations. What quickly comes to mind, is the communal living to which the African is emotionally attached. Granted that it encourages problem-sharing, reduces poverty by making it possible for individuals to redistribute wealth, and, above all, serves as an important

source of labour supply in the traditional society, there is evidence to show, that most of the resources that accrued from such efforts usually went back to the participating individuals. A man's status in the society is judged by his wealth and the number of titles he is able to take. Thus, Okoye in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, is considered rich because, he had a large barn full of yams and he had three wives. In the same vein, Okonkwo is regarded as a great man, clearly cut out for great things because he was still young and had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages. He was a great farmer and had two barns full of yams and had just married his third wife. To crown it all, he had taken two titles and had shown incredible prowess in two wars. Age was respected among his people, but achievement is revered.⁵²

Indeed, among the Igbo people, a man's economic pursuits are essentially tied to the improvement of his social status. Such a society obviously encouraged hard work, but at a great price. For instance, of what economic value were the things the individual distributed in a bid to improve his/her status? Does this enable the individual to accumulate enough capital to reinvest in his business? Title taking for instance, enhances one's status in the society, but it also takes heavy toll on one's resources. Cases abound, where some individuals after taking these titles, were found unable to meet up to their former production standard. Many also believe, that because title is the ultimate ambition, once it is acquired the individual relaxed. Of course, we know, that numerous advantages accrued from these titles, but the challenge is to balance the economic cost of the title, with the benefits accruable. The society already had standards to which every individual must strive to attain. Thus, what the people thought or wanted from the individual was always paramount, and far above individual ambition. In some cases also,

in a bid to attain an acclaimed social status, both fair and foul means were adopted. Oftentimes, the society turned a blind eye to this, leaving it to individual initiative. In fact, in all circumstances, the Igboman represented not just himself but his people. And this was done at great cost to his economic well-being. In the face of very harsh economic realities, exemplified by drought, inadequate farmland, rudimentary implements, labour shortages, urbanisation and biased agricultural policies, it has become increasingly difficult, particularly in the face of such socio-cultural setting, for the farmer to continually meet the food demand. This is a major factor in the food shortage in Igboland.

To this should be added the cultural factor. The challenge of the twentieth century is the utilisation of all economic resources for effective production towards the common good. Culture plays a dominant role in the life of the Igbo. For instance, yam is taken as the man's crop "the Igbo staff of life", while other crops like cocoyam and cassava were relegated to a subsidiary status. Generally, yam stood for manliness and anyone who could feed his family on yams from one harvest to another was indeed accepted as a great man.⁵³ Changes may have occurred here and there over the years, but this tradition is still very strong. Hence, even when it was almost uneconomic to cultivate yams due to obvious problems, the Igbo farmer still persisted so as not to be seen to have lost his manhood. Therefore, there was often a bias in the allocation of farmlands in favour of the yam in any cropping season. No doubt, cassava may have made very significant inroads, but this had been checked considerably, due to the fact that the yam tradition is ritualised in Igbo culture. Therefore, the quest for economic survival has placed the people's culture at the cross-roads.

It is the view of this study, that the food situation in Igboland will greatly improve, immediately the farmer begins to emphasise more of economic than socio-cultural issues in his business and life style generally.

1.6 METHODOLOGY

A purely interdisciplinary approach has been adopted in this study. The disciplines of Agriculture, Sociology, Economics, Geography, Botany and Anthropology were particularly useful.

Agriculture, especially agricultural extension, provided explanation on the cultivation and behavioural patterns of these crops. This was particularly useful in understanding the scientific intricacies of food production. The discipline of geography provided information on the environmental conditions and their effect on food production in Igboland. It became clear, for example, why particular crops were favoured in different areas. Often times, this had to do with the soil texture, the water level, etc. Information on the scientific aspects of these crops and their food nutrients was also obtained from the botanist and the food technologist. While from Sociology and Anthropology came explanation on the human behaviour as well as the unique cultures of the different people, Economics understandably, provided the framework upon which the entire study is based. It need to be stated, however, that the research is based on strict historical tradition.

In this regard, both primary and secondary sources of information have been used. Archival documents, government papers, and oral interviews were particularly useful. Whereas oral interviews were conducted in the five Igbo states covered by the study,

archival documents were mainly sourced from the National Archives Enugu (NAE), where most of the documents on Eastern Nigeria are kept. Also, agricultural research Institutes like, the National Root Crop Research Institute, Umudike - Umuahia, International Institute for Tropical Agriculture, Ibadan, and the Moor Plantation, Ibadan, were visited for an on-the-spot assessment of the crops studied. While their Annual Reports were very useful, the scientists in these centres provided enormous support by helping to corroborate, disclaim and many times explain most of the information gathered in the field. As indicated in the bibliography, those interviewed include, farmers, elderly people, agriculturists, traders, teachers and other sources relevant to the aspects being discussed. These interviews were very useful to the work.

Both published works (books, journals, etc.) and unpublished ones, like theses and dissertation, were also examined. In all cases, the normal historical tradition of information gathering and verification has been followed. The outcome is an effort to reconstruct the agricultural, nay economic, history of Igboland (1900-1980), from the standpoint of food production, with a view to proffering workable solutions that could lead to the improvement of food production in the area, and may be Africa generally.

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CHAPTER TWO

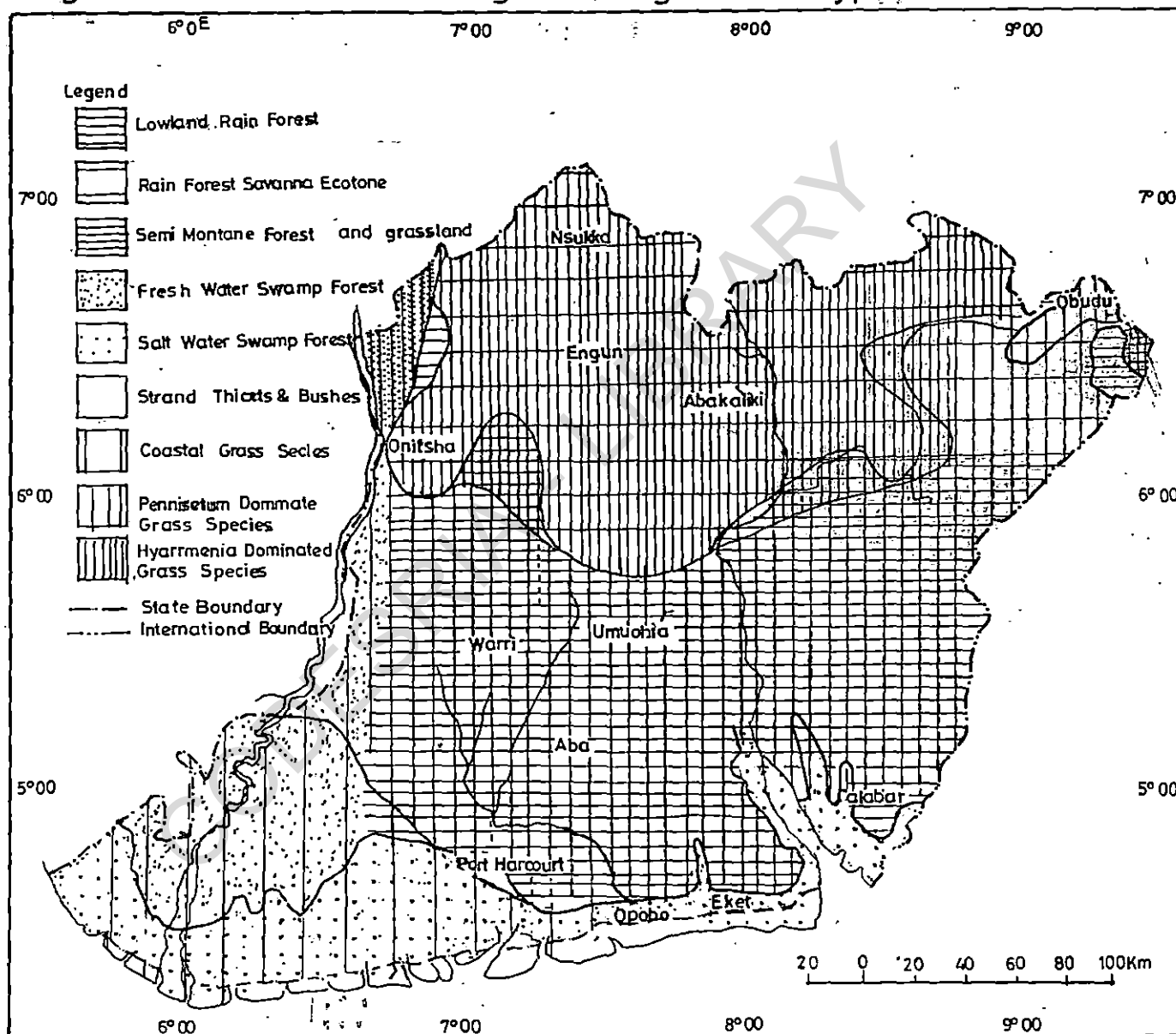
THE IGBO FOOD ECONOMY

The economy of an area is principally determined by both internal and external factors, though it could be said that the former rather than the latter usually plays the major role. The system of cultivation of a people, for instance, represents an equilibrium established by man, usually after many centuries of trial and error between himself, the physical environment (climate and soil) and what may be termed his biological auxiliaries (plants, animals and microfauna) and upon which his survival and progress depend.¹ A people's economic life has a lot to do with such factors as the environment, population, labour as well as the plants and animals domesticated. This chapter takes a critical look at what constitutes the Igbo food economy. Our emphasis will be on the geography of Igboland vis-a-vis its effect on cultivation, the occupational distribution of the people, the role of the sexes as well as the plants and animals domesticated. These issues would be considered in the context of the influence they have had on the food economy of the people generally.

2.1 POPULATION

The population density of Igboland is perhaps one of the highest in Nigeria and may be Africa. Because most parts of Igboland are thickly populated, many a time the people are faced with the shortage of arable land and poor soil fertility due to constant usage. Consequently, the people have adopted the cultivation of crops that fit into the

Fig 2.1: Eastern States of Nigeria: Vegetation Types



Source: After: G.E. Ofomata (ed), *Nigeria in Maps: Eastern States*,

Benin City: Ethiope Publishing Home, 1975, p.32.

available land. On the other hand, some parts are very sparsely populated, resulting in the production of large quantities of food crops, due to the availability of land and labour. The contrast, therefore, as Reuben Udo notes, is that whereas some areas have far too many people to live comfortably on the present land use system, others have too few to develop their land. The bulk of the Igbo population, is concentrated in the Onitsha, Orlu, Okigwi, Owerri, Mbaise, Mbano and Ngwa areas.

According to Uchendu, in the Onitsha-Mbaise axis, the density of population exceeds one thousand per square mile in many places, thus presenting one of the world's most densely populated rural areas. In all directions from this population axis, the density of population falls below the Igbo average of 350 per square mile, but remains well above Nigeria's average of 85 per square mile.²

Table 2.1: Area and Population Density of East Central State by Division, 1963

DIVISION	AREA KM. SQ	1963 POPULATION	DENSITY PER SQ. KM.
Enugu Urban	71.7	138,458	1,931.1
Aba Urban	25.6	131,003	5,117.3
Abakaliki	1,610.2	208,724	129.6
Afikpo	1,981.4	376,139	189.8
Aguata	665.6	257,938	387.5
Anambra	1,689.6	249,575	147.7
Arochukwu	460.0	69,888	109.2
Awgu	1,123.8	212,805	189.4

Bende	599.0	112,504	187.8
Etiti	245.8	237,907	967.9
Ezzikwo	1,164.8	227,120	195.0
Idemili	281.6	109,094	387.4
Igbo-eze	435.2	169,847	390.3
Ihiala	304.6	136,975	449.7
Ishielu	1,779.2	191,745	107.8
Isi-uzo	1,282.6	164,608	128.3
Mbaise	445.4	307,712	690.9
Mbano	284.2	256,025	900.9
Mbaitoli/Ikeduru	327.7	210,066	641.0
Mgbidi	314.9	229,137	727.7
Ngwa	1,313.3	314,840	239.7
Njikoka	885.8	436,458	492.7
Nkanu	1,495.0	190,812	127.6
Nkwerre	565.8	410,969	726.4
Nnewi	250.9	181,864	724.9
Nsukka	1,556.5	304,132	195.4
Ogbaru	476.2	33,171	69.7
Oguta	1,323.5	137,916	104.2
Ohafia	737.3	159,716	216.6
Okigwi	1,264.6	249,900	197.6
Onitsha Urban	84.5	163,032	1,929.4
Owerri	1,110.0	267,146	240.5
Udi	1,569.3	220,274	140.4

Umuahia	681.0	155,645	228.6
TOTAL	29,230.2	7,299,716	249.7

(This is the most widely accepted population census during the study period).

Source: *O. Okereke, "An Analysis of the Structure, Conduct and Performance of Wholesale Markets for Grain Distribution in the former East Central State of Nigeria", Ph.D Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1978, p. 62.*

Table 2.1 above shows the population density of Igboland in 1963. Places like Enugu, Aba, Etiti, Mbaise, Mbano, Mbaitoli/Ikeduru, Mgbidi, Nkwerre, Nnewi and Onitsha all have a population density rising above 500 per square kilometre. It is interesting to note that these places are not among the major food producing areas. The pressure on land in many of these places is such that with existing techniques of cultivation, it would be impossible to raise sufficient food to sustain the population, while the attempts to secure the greatest return of foodstuffs from the available land have in fact, led to a reduction in both quantity and quality of available food supplies. Therefore, the shortening of the period of bush fallow to the barest minimum has led to severe soil exhaustion.³

Writing in the early 1960s, Udo⁴ identified the density zones of Eastern Nigeria to include, the areas of urban density where population is as high as 14,700 to the square mile, as in Port Harcourt; the very high rural density areas recording up to 800 persons to the square mile like Onitsha, Owerri and Nsukka; the largely deforested and heavily farmed medium density areas like Bende, Ezza, Abakiliki and Udi with about 500 persons to the square mile; the low density fertile agricultural

lands where fallow periods are usually long, sometimes exceeding seven years, and the population density is between 50 and 150; and, the low density areas with adverse natural conditions like swamps, the population density of which is between 35 and 100.

In the high density areas, inadequate fallowing has produced, inter alia, the progressive degeneration of the land, the conversion of forest land to grassland, and serious gulleying (erosion). Also, because food production is insufficient to meet the needs of the rural population, these areas have witnessed considerable emigration to the cities and to other areas in search of livelihood. In Mbaise, for instance, the constant splitting of land among descendants of families had led to shortage of land, thereby forcing some families to have little or no land to cultivate. Hence, during the planting season, some young men usually travelled to Etche, Umunna and Nkwerre, where they worked for others.⁵ The Ezza of Abakiliki too cannot grow enough yams due to their small area and heavy population. This has forced them to constantly troop to other places where they work as migrant labourers.

The low population density areas could frequently boast of abundant foodstuffs. The Anambra flood plains is indeed an example. It comprises Nsugbe, Aguleri, Umuleri and Anam. Every year the Rivers Anambra and Niger overflow their banks during the rainy season, leaving behind alluvial deposits distributed over a wide area. As a result, the soil in these areas is generally fertile and support the growth of farm crops such as yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize, groundnut, okro, melon and tree crops like the oil palm⁶. It is therefore evident that because of their low density population, the inhabitants are able to make a realistic use of the agricultural

resources at their disposal. Also, it is in such areas that the excess labour from the high density areas usually find employment. Eze Anusionwu of Umunna Okigwe, in fact, believes that the small population of his area has made the available land adequate, and that this has encouraged the effective cultivation of the land and the production of numerous food stuffs.⁷

Other areas of low density include parts of Abakiliki, Arochukwu, Ogbaru, Oguta and Ohaji. Generally, in these areas a crop like yam found to be very demanding on the land, and which requires long years of fallow is popular. In fact, Abakiliki until recently, was primarily concerned with the cultivation of just the yam crop. The area is virtually self-sufficient in food production and indeed exports to other areas. Floyd informs that until the introduction of rice in the early 1940s, yam held an undisputed pride of place in the agricultural endeavours of the Abakiliki Igbo whose limited numbers gave them access to sufficient land for surplus production. Other Igbo and Ibibio areas particularly within the high density axis, with declining yields due to reduced fallow periods, provided an outlet for the surplus yams.⁸

This pressure of population in the high density areas has in many cases necessitated changes in crops cultivated. Writing on the Owerri province in 1945, L.T. Chubb, then Secretary of the Eastern Province, observed that, although the Province was a great producer of cassava, yams and cocoyams, the pressure of population and the poverty of the soil were such that there was no exportable surplus of foodstuffs other than gari.⁹ Even in the areas noted for substantial yam production like Abakiliki, Ohaji, etc., rising population pressure coupled with the demands of the emerging cities (as we will show in later chapters) resulted in the diversification of

cultivation. Based on the foregoing, it is evident that the population density of Igboland is a major factor in the food economy of the people. This can also be shown from the volume of food produced and the number of people involved in food production.

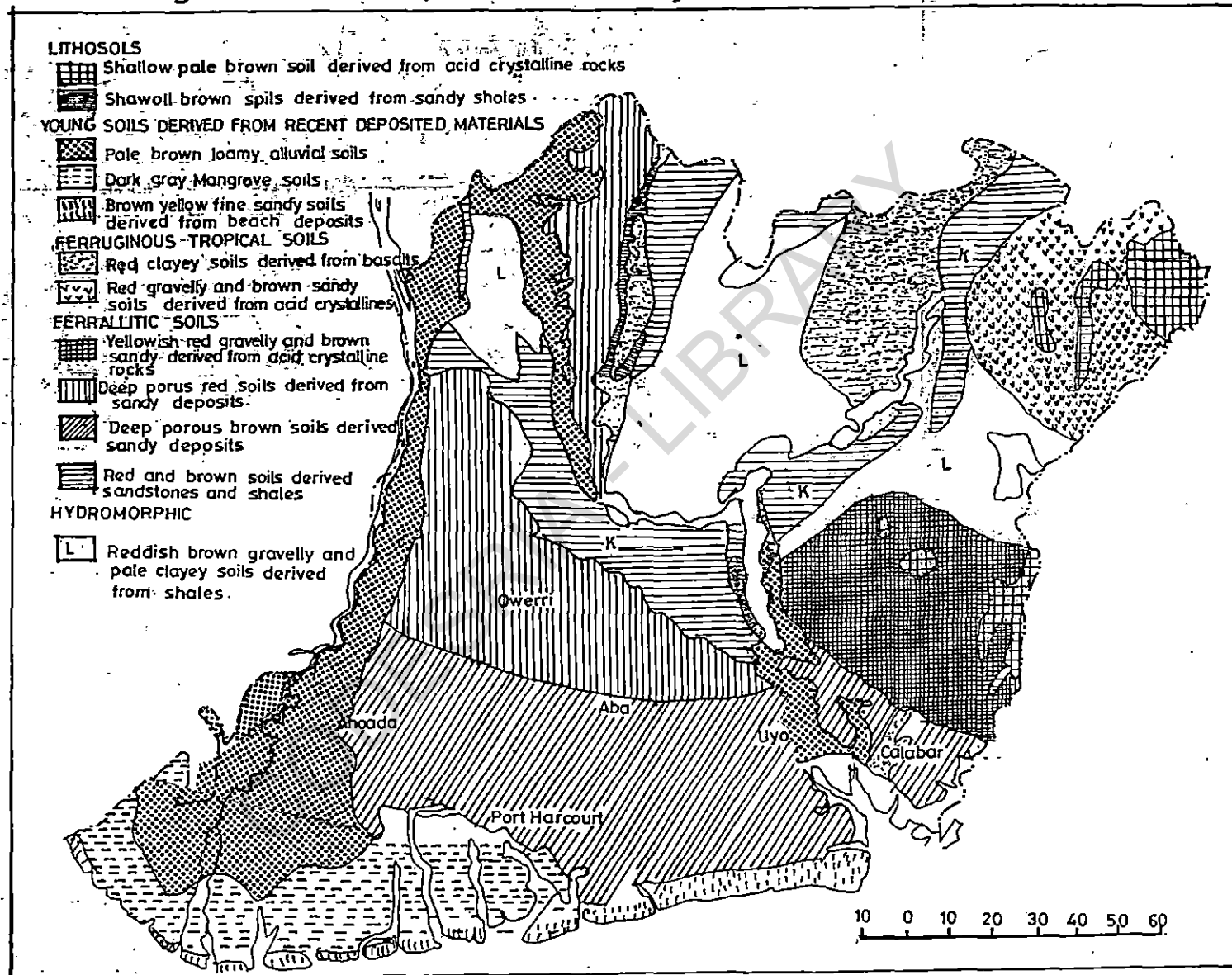
2.2 LAND AND SOIL FERTILITY

It is pertinent for us to equally consider the role of geography in the economic life of the people. Of paramount importance to the agricultural life of the Igbo are the issues of soil fertility, the use of land, rainfall and climate. Uzozie has rightly observed, that to understand the agricultural landscape of Eastern Nigeria, one needs a sound knowledge of its physical environment. In a region where the bulk of the population are small or mainly subsistence farmers, the patterns of cropping are very closely tied up with the physical environment as expressed in the geology, physical features, soil type, climate and vegetation.¹⁰ And perhaps, of the greatest importance is the issue of land. The average Igbo man is emotionally attached to the land. Land ordinarily means many things to him:

it is the domain of the earth goddess, a burial place for the ancestors, a place to live on and make a living. Land is therefore the most important asset to the people. It is a source of security which is emotionally protected from alienation. It is believed that a people cannot have too much land and that no opportunity to acquire rights in land should be lost.¹¹

The entire land in the Igbo area could be grouped into four major divisions: the swamp, under-farmed, heavily-farmed and over-farmed.¹² The swamp includes the

Fig. 2.2: Soil Map of Eastern States of Nigeria.



Source: After Ofomata Nigeria in Maps: Eastern States p. 42

narrow belts of the banks of the River Niger and its tributaries including places like Anam and Nzam between the River Niger and the Anambra River. The soil in these places is very fertile owing to the rich alluvial deposits from the rivers. Hence, it encourages the production of food crops in commercial quantities. The annual flood of the River Niger, for instance, covers a larger part of Anam land, and this annual inundation contributes to the fertility of the land. The people are therefore actively involved in agriculture, producing large quantities of yams and fishes yearly.¹³

In the under-farmed areas, the population density usually does not exceed 150 per square mile. Places like Abakiliki (particularly Izzi and Ikwo), Nsukka, parts of Udi and Bende fall into this category. In those places food production is quite high and the people could be said to have fertile land sometimes in excess of demand. Most of these areas, when compared with other parts of Igboland, have adequate land. Agricultural production is only inhibited by other factors.¹⁴

For the heavily-farmed lands, the population is high leading to a reduction in cultivable land. Years of fallowing have been reduced and sometimes not observed at all. Because of the apparent scarcity of land, labour is exported to other areas. The Ezza of Abakiliki, parts of Bende and Aba, Nkanu and parts of Afikpo, all fall into this category.

The very heavily populated areas of Igboland including Owerri, Mbaise, Mbano, Orlu, Okigwi, Umuahia, Awka, Nnewi and Aguata, all belong to the over-farmed areas. Here, the soil has been greatly eroded due to constant use. Fallow

periods have in most cases been abandoned while erosion is a recurring problem. Often times food is even imported to supplement local supplies.

This essentially is the geographical distribution of land and soil in Igboland. But it is to be noted that the soils of Eastern Nigeria, have one thing in common: an inability to withstand annual cropping under rudimentary sedentary techniques of cultivation. Even the intensive compound management system with regular additions of organic compost or manure, achieved only through large labour input, barely manages to maintain the productivity of the soil.¹⁵ For instance, chemical fertilizer was initially unpopular in many parts of Igboland, but with the constant use of the land, the fertility of the soil has been greatly eroded to the point that in many areas, hardly any harvest could be realised without recourse to chemical fertilizer.

The soil of Igboland, has been supported by the availability of Rivers and streams that continually drain the area. Prominent among them are the Rivers Niger, Anambra, Imo, Mamu, Idemili, Orashi, Adada, Njaba and the Cross River. The riverine and the Delta belts are served by the Niger and Anambra Rivers as well as their tributaries. They are low lying and heavily inundated during the rainy season and very fertile. The headwaters of Imo and Orashi rivers serve the central belt, a relatively high plain which gradually merges with the Okigwi-Awgu plateau. Although the Cross River does not flow through most Southeastern Igbo regions, it helps to drain Afikpo and Abakiliki areas.¹⁶ The Adada River drains the Nsukka plateau while Awgu area is drained by the Mamu river. The Idemili river serves most of Nanka, while the Njaba drains Orlu areas. Both the Otamiri and Aba rivers form

tributaries of the Imo river and help to fertilize Ngwa and Owerri areas. All these have contributed to the fertility of the Igbo soil needed for agricultural production.

2.3 LAND OWNERSHIP

Perhaps, the main obstacle to a radical change in agricultural methods is the tradition of land tenure, which results in the scattering of holdings and prevents the consolidation of lands which is a prerequisite for any modernisation of agriculture.¹⁷ In fact, this introduces the issue of land ownership and usage in Igboland and the attendant effect on food production. Whereas in many parts of Igboland, land is centrally owned and readily available to the farmer, in others, it is individually owned, extremely fragmented, and hardly available. Taking the case of Mbaise, land ownership was formerly vested in the village community, but later, as the population increased, it started to be split among the various lineages, and from the lineages it passed to the extended families (Umunna) and from there to individual families (Ezi n'ulo).

It seems that it was population pressure, and the fact that the land was naturally very poor, that led to this split. Some families had very little plots and this made them borrow some plots from their friends or in-laws which they returned after they had harvested the crops planted.¹⁸ Consequently, in Mbaise most lands are individually owned, a situation in which sons usually expect portions of land from their fathers. However, before the land is shared (possibly before the children attain adulthood) it is held collectively and each year all the sons get a portion to farm after

which it returns to collective ownership. Individuals could add to their stock by buying land, though this development may be traced to the colonial period when, following serious population increases, urbanisation and unemployment the economy became gradually monetised. In such cases, land could be leased or in rare cases sold outright. Nevertheless, communal lands still exist in Mbaise, especially lands inherited from dead relations who had no immediate relatives. Such lands were first held in trust by the extended family and later shared. All these, seem to confirm Floyd's conclusion that in Igboland, land belonged, as it still does to a kin, a family or a clan, the membership of which included not only the persons alive at any particular time, but persons dead and persons yet unborn. For generations, these mystical ideas about the land have dictated when, how and by whom it should be used for agricultural purposes.¹⁹

Strictly speaking, land may not be considered as an impediment to food production in Ezzeagu area of Enugu. Here, land is owned by families and this may be private, dual or joint. In the case of public lands, communities may share lands with others without apportioning them to individual families. On agreed days, the executive age grades gather all forest produce to a share in the community according to lineage seniority. Land is not sold but could be pawned or loaned.²⁰

In Abakiliki area, land ownership is mainly by inheritance. Therefore, whereas one man may have inherited large expanses of land some others may not be that lucky. However, there are still communal lands which had been acquired long ago through inter-communal conflicts. It is in such lands that the ancestral spirits and shrines of the people are kept. A woman does not own land in this area unless she is

a widow thereby enabling her to lay claims to old lands belonging to her husband. Generally outright sale of farmland is seriously frowned upon. This is also the case in Ohaji, another major food producing area. The only difference is that in Ohaji, whereas land could be leased, outright sales is also allowed. The communal lands are also shared annually by the oldest man in the kindred.

On the other hand, land may not be considered a constraint to food production in Afikpo. In this area, there is a dual system of land tenure because of the people's double descent practice, thus the Ikwu family (the matriarchal descent) and the Umunna family land (patriarchal descent). About 80 per cent of the farm land is held by the Ikwu as against 20 per cent by the Umunna. In both cases land is held in trust by the oldest man in any of the two families. People are assigned farmlands provided they show interest in it. Also, a father could bequeath a portion of his land to his son. Sale of land is not common in the area.²¹

There is a slightly different system in Ohaozara where both individual and communal ownerships obtain. However, land here is not evenly distributed among the communities. Whereas areas like Mgbom, Uburu, Ishiagu, Onicha, Aba-Omega and Isu have surplus land, Okposi on the other hand is not as endowed. May be because of this, the communal system is not common in Okposi. Here, land is individually owned. In the other communities, the head of the kindred usually shared the land at the beginning of any farming season. What remained could be given to anybody. In recent times, land can be sold or leased. Nevertheless, it must be noted that land is generally available to farmers in this area, the main problem rather is how to revamp the depreciating soil fertility.²²

On the whole, land ownership for agricultural production in Igboland may take place in three circumstances. First, it could be seasonal in which case a portion of land may be rented or donated for one farming season. Secondly, there could be a situation of temporary ownership that is for a period of time. In this system, land is pledged or used as a collateral for a loan and the land reverts back to the original owner once the loan is repaid. Thirdly, there can be a permanent or outright exchange, in which the land may be given out or sold or used as compensation. In this case, the original owner relinquishes ownership to the new buyer.²³ In all cases, it can be said that the main features of land tenure in Eastern Nigeria are the fractioning and fragmentation of holdings. While fractioning refers to the constant division and subdivision of plots over the years, which has consequently produced small parcels of land, fragmentation, on the other hand, refers to the scattering of plots, to the point where a farmer may control 15 to 20 pieces of farmland separated by distances in between.²⁴

It is important to note all the same that throughout Igboland agricultural land suitable for cultivation is not evenly distributed. Whereas some areas have an abundance, others are confronted with perennial scarcity. Again, land ownership revolves around the individual and the community. In either case, individuals farm portions that are not always together in terms of location. It can be argued that such fragmentation constitutes a formidable barrier to agricultural development, for it makes efficiency of production very difficult. We must hasten to reiterate, that the issue of land sale is a new phenomenon in Igboland, borne essentially out of changes introduced in the colonial period, because the Igbo believe that land (Ala) belongs to

the earth goddess and the ancestors, therefore it cannot be unilaterally transferred. In the same vein, while inadequacy and uneven distribution brings inefficiency of utilisation, the fact that women are in most cases deprived of land ownership is an impediment to food production.

2.4 LABOUR UTILISATION AND THE ROLES OF THE SEXES

A significant aspect of the Igbo food economy is the place of labour as well as the roles of the sexes in food production. In terms of occupational distribution, a greater percentage of the population is involved in agriculture. Afigbo asserts that in the pre-colonial Igbo society agriculture was the most important economic activity with regard to both the number of people engaged in it either on full time or part time basis and to the prestige it carried.²⁵ According to him, every Igbo man was a farmer and most families produced enough to last them all through the year. The labour resources of individual families were effectively mobilised for agricultural purposes. On the whole, labour was sourced from individuals, the family/extended family, age grades and migrants. In all cases, this labour could be exchanged or financially rewarded.

It was traditional among the people to get the entire family to work together. To this end, it was common-place, particularly in low density areas where agricultural practice was intensive, for men to marry more than one wife or even to marry early as a way to increase the size of the family in order to meet their labour requirements. It was largely because each family did its own farm work, that the Igbo came to value large families. A man who wanted to prosper as a farmer had to have many wives

and children.²⁶ In the Abakiliki and Ohaji areas, polygamy seems to have persisted over the years mainly for agricultural purposes. Indeed, one could not claim to be a big farmer with only one wife. Here, it was common for a man to have up to three or more wives to increase his source of labour.

Again, it was traditional where a farmer was the head of an extended family for the labour of all the able-bodied men and women of the unit to be given to him on one day of the eight-day week.²⁷ This happened mainly in the pre-colonial period. Among the Mbaise, the Orié Ukwu market days were set aside for the heads of families both at the nuclear (Ezi n'ulo) and extended family (Umunna) levels. On this day, the children, the young men as well as their mothers worked for the elders (Ndi Okei). To this end, all wine tapped on that day was surrendered to the head of the umunna.²⁸ This source of labour enabled the heads of families to have enough labour for their agricultural requirements largely unpaid for. They were only expected to feed the family and perhaps give each individual some presents ranging from tubers of yam to other food stuffs.

As was common with many communities in southern Nigeria, farm labour in Igboland was sometimes exchanged. Commonly called *Igba Onwe Oru* in Mbaise or *Ovu Oru* in the Aguleri area, this involved the exchange of labour among individuals in a group until everybody in the group had benefited:

What they did was that on an agreed day, all members of the group would work for one person. They would alternate work on individual members' farms, until every member benefited equally in the number of times they agreed to work for each member, or until work on every members farm had been completed. When this was done, they would disperse and dissolve the work-group.²⁹

In pre-colonial times, domestic slavery (Igba Ohu), was another important source of labour supply. Slaves were used in farm work alongside the free born. It was partly because of this that the trade in slaves became attractive during the period. The wealth of a man was then measured partly by the number of slaves he had. Hence a big farmer could keep a retinue of slaves which he used in his farm work.

There were also migrant labourers who worked for money. These were people mainly from the high population density areas, who, for lack of agricultural land moved into areas of low density to work on farms and earn a living. Before the colonial period, this labour was paid for in kind, mainly with seed yams and other agricultural produce, but from the colonial period, monetary payments were introduced. Ohaji, Ikwerre, Abakiliki, Ngwa, Ndoki, and Bende were among the receivers of this type of labour. This type of work is seasonal, as labour was mostly demanded during such farming operations as bush clearing, hoeing, planting and yam staking.³⁰ Worst hit by the phenomenon of migrant labour were the Ezza of Abakiliki, Mbaise, Mbano and parts of Okigwe and Owerri. Migrant labourers from Mbaise found employment in Etche (Rivers State), Umunna-Okigwe, Ohaji and Nkwerre. Numerous labourers moved into Ohaji each year from Agwa in Oguta, Okwelle, Mbieri, Akaeze and Ogoni.³¹ They were mainly involved in mound making and yam cultivation. Similarly, the Ezza were found all over Igboland, actively involved in agricultural work also as migrant labourers. An Aguleri farmer attested that his people had enough migrant labourers from Ezza, Omoo and Anaku.³² The prevalence of the phenomenon of labour migration in Igboland is corroborated by

Uchendu, who asserts that the mobility of the Igbo has been explained by land hunger, the poverty of the soil of Igboland and the high population density.³³ As we pointed out earlier, this problem escalated during colonial rule.

Ogbumuo has pointed out the usefulness of the clientage system, as an important source of labour supply in the Anambra River basin and flood plains. According to him, these were people indebted to big time farmers and who, due to their inability to pay, decided to work for them as a way to repay their debts. Also, one could undertake to borrow yams from those who had these in excess (Di ji) during the harvest time. The proceeds from such ventures were usually shared equally between the borrower and the owner of the yams. In essence, the clientage system was a symbiotic relationship between the big and the smaller farmers. The former used the system as a source of labour supply and the latter benefited by borrowing from the largesse of his more fortunate neighbour.

There is also the issue of the role of the sexes in agricultural production in Igboland. These ranges from the duties they performed in the farm to the crops they cultivated. Writing about the Ngwa, Morgan has argued that generally the men plant and tend those crops and trees needing most attention, leaving the remaining food production to the women. The men's crops include yams, pineapples, oil and raffia palms, coconut palms, plantains and bananas, oranges, African pear (Ube), kola, oil bean and vegetable leaf trees. The women's crops on the other hand are cassava, maize, cocoyams, beans, groundnuts, pumpkins, calabash, melons, okra, chillies and peppers.³⁴ What seem to have determined these roles is the amount of attention required by each crop. The lesser aspects of cultivation are left to the women as the

men undertook the more demanding/strenuous aspects. Yam cultivation, for instance, is demanding and it is argued that women might not have all the time and patience to meet the requirements of this crop. Also, the tree crops that demand climbing (coconut, palm/raffia trees, vegetable trees, oranges, etc.) are taken off women, who by their nature may not perform these tasks. The care of the less demanding crops like cassava, maize, cocoyam and groundnuts is thus left to the women. Consequently, many conclude that the Igboman to this extent is over-protective of his wife.

In fact, where women undertake the hoe culture, it is often superficial, but where the man takes part, it is intensified and the intensity of cultivation increases in proportion to the man's share in the hoe culture.³⁵ What this means is that food production is relatively higher and more intensified in areas where men partake more in agricultural practice than in areas where women do most of the work. This is true of the areas in Igboland where yam particularly is the main crop. It seems to be the norm that among the Igbo, women's activities only complement those of the men. Their crops for example, are planted only when those of the men had been finished. In fact, following the planting of yams, plots are usually allocated to the women individually. Each woman plants such crops as maize, melon and okra on the slopes of yam mounds; and, pumpkins, beans and sometimes, cassava and cocoyams between the spaces provided by the yam mounds.³⁶ The fact that these crops are planted more often at the slopes or the foot of the 'yam hills' is a clear indication of their relative importance in the people's food economy.

Division of roles among the sexes is rather not uniform in all parts of Igboland. It varies among the different agricultural areas. Among the Abakiliki, for

instance, whereas men are involved in mound making, women are mainly concerned with bush clearing, harvesting and food processing. Both sexes can take part in planting. Women undertake the weeding, while harvesting is done by both sexes. Here, unlike most parts of Igboland, women are principally engaged in bush clearing. The argument is that bush clearing is not a heavy task, and may not be compared to the more demanding task of tilling which involves the making of huge mounds.

Generally, in a yam culture area like the Abakiliki³⁷ region, cultivation starts with the clearing of bushes done by the women. Then follows the burning, of undertaken by both sexes believed traditionally to be a way of improving soil fertility. Clubbing, the beating down of the leaves of trees in the farms, was done by the men about three months before the actual bush clearing commenced. Tilling was done by the men after the first rain. Another one was done around the month of November usually for early harvesting crops in areas bordering the rivers and in the Anambra flood plains. Actual planting of seeds was done by both sexes. Weeding was done by the women and this could be carried out two to three times during the farming season. The Harvesting of the crops could be done by both sexes depending on the crop. Yam, for instance, was exclusively harvested by men. In storage, the women took the yam to the barn and helped to clean them, while the actual storing process which involved the tying on the stakes was undertaken by the men. Hence, it is argued that in the Abakiliki area, men did more work in food production. This essentially was determined by the type of equipment used. The women, for instance, cannot carry the big hoes required for the mound-making, and the size of the yams involved even made it difficult for the women to be actively involved in cultivation.³⁸

The trend in many parts of Igboland seems to be for the men to clear and prepare the land, plant their own yams, cut stakes and train the yam vines, build the yam barns and stack the barns. Women plant their own varieties of yam, weed the farm and carry yams from the farm.³⁹ The roles of both sexes are rather complementary and in many cases overlapping. Men could help their wives if they find the time and if the relationship is good. However, it was not unusual for a man who helped his wife too often to be taunted by members of his age grade.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, most of these roles have changed overtime, particularly in the high population density areas. In these areas, the scarcity of farm land has rendered a number of people unemployed; these people moved to other areas either as migrant agricultural labour or in search of alternative employment. This has only diminished the labour available on the land. In most cases, only the elderly, women and children are left behind, thereby forcing them to pick up those roles otherwise performed by men. This, Baumann attributes to European culture:

with its many industries and accompanying opportunities for earning and its impact upon an industrious tribe of farmers... The tempting chances of earning, had the effect of causing the men to abandon the work in the fields and, as in the ancient times, to leave it all to the women. Since the Europeans created so many lucrative occupations, agriculture is entirely in the weak hands of the women.⁴¹

In the areas where this has happened, women have come to acquire more powers as they suddenly became solely responsible for the provision of food in the family.

V CROPS, VEGETABLES, ANIMALS AND FRUITS IN THE IGBO FOOD ECONOMY

What constitutes the Igbo food economy ranges from crops, vegetables, fruits, oils to animals. The traditional Igbo food habits, in fact have evolved, over the years and constitute aspects of the people's socio-cultural and biological evolution. It is a result of the peoples interaction with their environment. These habits were based initially on hunting, gathering and fishing food procurement systems. But with the domestication of yams, supplemented by other crops, more stable food became assured. Thus was developed food habits and dietary patterns based on yams supplemented by a range of seasonally available starchy foods, vegetables, fruits, nuts and seeds in addition to edible insects, various animals and fish.⁴²

**Table 2.2: A Sample list of some of the Crops, Vegetables, Seasoning/
Beverages, Fruits and Animals consumed in Igboland.**

C R O P S		
NAME IN ENGLISH	IGBO NAME	BOTANICAL NAME
1. Yams	Ji	Dioscorea spp.
White Yam	Ji Ocha	D. rotundata
Yellow yam	Ji Oko	D. cayenensis
Water Yam	Ji Avala (Mbula)	D. Alata
Triofoliate yam	Ona	D. dumentorum
Aerial yam	Adu	D. bulbifera.
2. Cassava	Ji Akpu	Manihot spp.
Bitter cassava (White)	Ji akpu ocha	M. utilisissima

Sweet cassava (Red or Pink)	Ji akpu ojii	<i>M. esculenta</i>
3. Cocoyam	Ede	<i>Colocasia spp.</i>
Cocoyam (white)	Ede ocha	<i>C. esculenta</i>
Cocoyam (Pink)	Ede Uhie	<i>Xanthosoma Sagittifolium</i>
Rice	Osikapa (Eresi)	<i>Oryza Sativa</i>
Sweet Potato		<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>
Irish Potato		<i>Solanium tuberosum</i>
Maize	Oka	<i>Zea Mays</i>
Beans	Agwa	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>
Guinea Corn		<i>Sorghum spp.</i>
VEGETABLES		
Fluted pumpkin	Ugu	<i>Telfairia occidentalis</i>
Camwood	Oha	<i>Pterocarpus soyanxii</i>
	Nturukpa/Uturukpa	<i>Kigelia africana</i>
Bitter Leaf	Olugbu	<i>Venonia amygdalina</i>
Green	Inine	<i>Amaranthus spp.</i>
Okro	Okwuru	<i>Abelmoscus esculentas</i>
Guinea Pepper	Uziza	<i>Piper guineensis</i>
African pepper	Uda	<i>Xylopia aethiopicum</i>
	Okazi	<i>Gnetum africana</i>
Vegetable jute	Ahihiara	<i>Cochorus olitorius</i>
Fever plant	Nchuanwu	<i>Ocinum viridis</i>
	Ugbogiri	<i>Curcubita pepo</i>
Melon	Egusi	<i>Cucunus melo</i>
African mango	Ogbono	<i>Irvingia gabonensis</i>

	Utazi	<i>Gomphrena</i> spp.
African Egg Plant	Anara/Ofe	<i>Solanum melongena</i>
	Ogiri-ishi	<i>Ricinus communis</i>
	Nkiri-nkiri	
	Okro	
	Ibere	
	Nwakuko	
Water Leaf	Mgbolodi	<i>Talinum triangulare</i>
Elephant grass	Achara	<i>Pennisetum purpureum</i>
SEASONING/BEVERAGES		
Pepper (spiece)	Ose	<i>Caspicum annum</i>
Oil Palm	Nkwu	<i>Elaeisis guineensis</i>
Oil bean	Ugba	<i>Pentaclethra macrophylla</i>
Raffia palm	Ngwo	<i>Raffia hookeri</i>
	Achi	<i>Brachystegia</i> spp.
FRUITS		
Pawpaw/Papaya	Okwuru bekee	<i>Carica papaya</i>
Orange	Oroma/Epe	<i>Citrus sinensis</i>
Coconut	Aki bekee	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>
Kolanut	Oji igbo	<i>Cola acuminata</i>
	Oji Awusa/Gworo	<i>Cola nitida</i>
Native Pear	Ube	<i>Darcyodes edulis</i>
Plantain	Abirika	<i>Musa paradisiaca</i>
Banana	Unene/Ogede	<i>Musa sapientum</i>
	Mmimi	<i>Dennettia tripetala</i>

Tangerine	Tangarini	Citrusnobilis var deciliosa
Conophor	Ukpa	Tetracarpidium conophorum
Rubber Vine	Utu	Landalphia dulci
Bitter Kola	Aki Ilu	Gacinia cola
Guava	Gweva (gova)	Psidium guajava
Pineapples	Nkugbo	Ananas comosus
Cashew		Anacardium occidentale
Mango	Mangoro	Mangifera indica
Star Apple	Udara	Chrysophylum albidum
Groundnut	Ahuekere	Arachis hypogaea
Avocado Pear	Ube bekee	Persea americana
African Breadfruit	Ukwa	Treculia africana
Lime	Epenkiri	Citrus aurantifolia
Grape fruit	Gerepu	Citrus paradisi
	Ugiri	
ANIMALS		
Goat	Eghu	Capras spp.
Sheep	Aturu	Ovis longipes
Pig	Ezi	Sus domestic
Cattle	Nnama	Bos spp.
Native cow	Ehi/Muturu	
Domestic fowl	Okuko	Gallus domesticus
Fish	Azu	Tilapia spp.
Dog	Nkita	Canis spp.
Cat	Puusu	Felis spp.

Wild cat	Edi Abali	
Squirrel	Osa	Sciurus spp.
	Uze	
Snakes	Agwo	Python spp.
		Boa spp.
		Crotalus spp.
Rat	Oke	
Rabbit	Oke bekee	Oryctolagus cuniculus
Grass cutter	Nchi	
Hedge hog	Ebi ogwu/Ntu ebi	
Antelope	Ele	
Deer	Mgbada	
Guinea fowl	Ogazi	
	Okwa	
Kite	Egbe	
Birds	Nnunu ⁴³	

On the issue of agriculture in Igboland , Uzozie has observed that its most interesting feature is that crops grown for food consumption claim over 76 per cent by value of the total crop production.⁴⁴ In the list of crops cultivated as indicated above, food crops particularly yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize and rice dominate. These, crops as shown in table 2.3 below, constitute a major aspect of the peoples economic life. They are also the major food stuffs of the Igbo people.

Table 2.3: Value of Food Crop Production by Regions 1957 (£ million)

CROPS	EASTERN REGION	WESTERN REGION	NORTHERN REGION
Yams	49.2	34.8	56.7
Cassava	20.4	11.5	10.7
Cocoyams	6.0	2.4	-
Maize	3.6	8.0	10.9
Rice	1.3	0.7	15.5
Kolanuts	2.4	2.5	-
Beans	0.1	0.5	10.1
Guinea Corn	-	-	49.9
Millet	-	-	40.1
Other food crops	2.6	2.2	12.4
	85.6	62.6	206.3

Source: L.C. Uzozie, *"The Relative Importance of Yam and Cassava in the Staple Food Economies of Eastern Nigeria"*, M.A. Thesis, University of Ibadan, 1966, p.175.

The place of root crops in the food economy of Igbo people cannot be over-emphasised. Generally, root crops represent an estimated 53 per cent of the value of all food produced for domestic consumption. Yams and cassava are the most important accounting for over 90 per cent of total root crop production as against 5 per cent for cocoyams and 2.5 per cent for sweet potatoes.⁴⁵ This could further be explained by table 2.3 above which clearly shows the relative importance of these crops among the Igbo.

A. YAM

Yam is the number one crop of the Igbo. So important is the crop that to be deprived of it, many say, creates a condition of absolute distress. Whatever substitute may be offered, cannot satisfy the Igbo man's desire for his favourite food.⁴⁶ Virtually every Igbo farmer cultivates yam no matter how small. This may be attributed to the peoples culture which accords the crop a pride of place. Yam usually came first in the yearly allocation of available land in the farmer's budget. The quantity of a man's yam harvest determined his status as a farmer no matter the quantity of other crops produced. Achebe captured it all in *Things Fall Apart*, where he observed that yam stood for manliness and he who could feed his family from one harvest to another was a great man indeed. According to him:

Yam the king of crops was a very exerting king. It demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow till the chicken went back to roost. The yam tendrils were protected from earth-heat with rings of sisal leaves. As the rains became heavier the women planted maize, melons and beans between the yam mounds. The yams were then staked, first with little sticks and later with tall and big tree branches. The women weeded the farm three times at definite periods in the life of the yams.⁴⁷

In the Abakiliki area, for instance, where yam cultivation is particularly dominant, as soon as a male son attained puberty, he is given some tubers of yam, a hoe and a farmland with which it was expected that he would start life. The importance of yam in Igboland can best be substantiated by the fact that no other crop has a taboo and festival connected with the date when its harvesting may commence. Also, the fact that yam alone has several festivals attached to it indicates that it occupied a singular position in traditional agriculture of earlier times and that there is considerable sentimental attachment to it.⁴⁸ Again, yam is a major source of

carbohydrate for the people. It is estimated that until recently, about 55 to 60 per cent of the area under cultivation in Igboland was devoted to the growing of various species of yam.

G.I. Stockley in his "Intelligence Reports on the Ekwerazu and Ahiara clans of the former Owerri Division", indeed saw the yam crop as being synonymous with Njoku, which he called the "juju of yam". According to him, Njoku is everywhere in Igboland since yam is everywhere. Every man is a priest of Njoku and sacrifices straight to it since every man has yam. At the feast of the new yams, held at harvest time, Njoku is sacrificed to by everyone who has yams. The sacrifice is usually made at the door of the yam barn (Oba), where yams are stored. Many boys were also dedicated by their parents to Njoku. They were given such names as Njoku, Nwanjoku, Osuji, Okoro and Nwokoro.⁴⁹ This goes to show that yam is cultivated everywhere among the Igbo, and that all other crops were subsidiary to it.⁵⁰

It is almost certain that soil fertility could be the most important factor in the wide distribution of yams.⁵¹ This is because the crop flourishes in areas where there is little or no pressure of population on land and fallows are long enough to ensure adequate soil fertility for cultivation. Arising from this, Uzozie has identified five main physiographic regions that contribute the greater proportion in terms of acreage cultivation of yam in the whole of Eastern Nigeria: the slightly incised plain of the Cross River Basin covered by hydromorphic shale group of soils, (this covers most of the areas in the Abakiliki region;) the dissected plateau and lowlands of southern Onitsha and northern Owerri, with porous brown sandy soils; the alluvial and river flood plains of the Niger, including the areas known as the Niger flood plains, mainly

Aguleri, Nsugbe, Umuleri and Anam; the plateau and undulating lowlands to the Northwest; and, the rolling plateau and plains to the east.⁵² In all these areas, yam is extensively cultivated. However, in Igboland, the outstanding areas of yam cultivation are, Abakiliki, Udi, Nsukka, Ezzeagu, Nsugbe, Anam, Aguleri, Umuleri, Ohaji, Oguta, Afikpo, Ohaozara and Arondizogu. We must note, however, that in the case of the Igbo, aside from the issue of geography highlighted above, the wide spread of the yam, has a lot to do with the peoples culture. In fact, it could be said that the existence of the Igboman revolves around his emotional attachment to the yam crop.

Some of the important varieties of the yam cultivated in Igboland include:

I *Dioscorea Rotundata*

This is the white yam or white guinea yam. This specie is known by different names in Igboland depending on the geographical location. Some of these names are, *ji ocha, Ji Igwe, Apu ji, Akiri, Nnebinji* and *Agba*. Among the numerous cultivars of the white yam in Igboland the following are outstanding, *Nwopoko, Ji aga, Ito, Obiatorugo, Nwiboko, Abii, Igum, Amagi and Adaka*. The white yam, as the name indicates, has an inner flesh whitish in colour with usually large tubers. It is considered the most important variety in Igboland, and does best in rich soils.

II *Dioscorea Alata*

This is commonly referred to as the water yam due to its watery nature. The specie in Igboland called *Ji Abana* (Mbula or Nvula in Abakaliki) is characterised by

the extension of the stem, which twines clockwise into four membraneous wings so that it is four-sided in cross-section.⁵³ Some of its known cultivars in Igboland are *Nvula-eke* (has the figure of a python), *Nvula-ite* (a bit roundish like a pot), *Nne onwuka* and *Otutu*.

III *Dioscorea Cayenensis*

The *Dioscorea cayenensis* is commonly referred to as the yellow yam due to its yellowish flesh. It is called *Ji Oko* or *Ji Ayabe* in Igbo. In Abakiliki area, this particular specie is planted mainly by titled men. Some of its cultivars include, *Nka* and *Ngwere nti*.

IV *Dioscorea Dumetorum*

This is the trifoliolate or three-leaved yam. It is also called the bitter or cluster yam. The Igbo's call it *Ona*. In many parts of Igboland it is considered special due to its unique taste. It is not very common.

V *Dioscorea Bulbifera*

The *bulbifera* is characterised by a considerable number of aerial tubers or bulbils per plant. The leaf is rather simple and large. It is called Aerial yam. The Igbo's call it *Adu*.⁵⁴

Each of the species described above is unique in several respects. It is common to see a single farmer having a single, double or a little of all the species in his stock at any point in time.

B. CASSAVA

Perhaps next to yam in order of sentimental attachment⁵⁵ and cultivation in Igboland is the cassava crop. Cassava (*Ji Akpu* in Igbo) belongs to the *Manihot* Species and the two varieties widely cultivated in Igboland, are the *Manihot esculenta* or sweet cassava which usually has a red or pink colour called *Ji Akpu Ojii* in Igbo, and the *Manihot Utilissima* or bitter cassava with a white colour called *Ji Akpu Ocha* in Igbo.

Though introduced from the New World, cassava has won great acceptability in Africa mainly due to the ease with which it can be cultivated, its high yield and the possibility of storing its roots in the soil as a natural food reserve.⁵⁶ Also, cassava has the peculiar advantage of surviving under very poor soil conditions. This thus explains why it is evenly spread all over Igboland. In fact, the only areas where the crops is not popular are those having very wet and saline soil. There seems to be a causal relationship between population density in most cases resulting in poor fallow conditions and the relative importance of cassava, so much so that the importance of cassava seems to increase as population density increases.⁵⁷ Generally, the cultivation of cassava has witnessed a progressive increase in Igboland since the 1920s. Records show that in 1963/64 alone, a total of 167.8 thousand hectares of cassava were planted in the Eastern States alone. On the basis of total acreage therefore, cassava ranks second only to yam.⁵⁸ The process of introduction and diffusion of this crop in Igboland will be discussed in the next chapter.

The main cassava regions in Igboland are: the dissected plateau and lowlands of southern Onitsha and Northern Owerri districts with deep porous brown sandy soils; and, the eastern half of the rolling coastal plain.⁵⁹ More recently, the crop has made very significant in-roads into places like Abakiliki, Ohaji, Mbaise, Ngwa and Ndoki.

There are numerous cultivars of cassava in Igboland. Their names vary according to the communities where they are found. Some of them are: *Nwangoye*, an early maturing cultivar popular in the Onitsha area; *Igboagba* (Owerri, Onitsha); *Nwabuisi* (Umuahia); *Okpo ocha* (Owerri); *Avuru erie* (Okigwe); *Ji akpu ji* (Owerri, Onitsha); *Panya* (almost all over Igboland); *Nwa Owere*, *Nwanyi ocha*, *Nwa mgbogo*, *Nwame*, *Ere egorigwe*, *Nwanyi asha* and *Yoruba* (Abakiliki); *Santana*, *Duru ngwo*, *Nwanyi dioka*, *Nwa aghasa* (Okigwe); *Ohupon*, *Iwa*, *Congo*, *Nwa Ugo* (Umuahia); *Kwurukamkpa*, *Ogba alika* (Umunze); *Otoro Kwem*, *Nwanyi Ojii*, *Aba townhall*, *Nwam_bisi*, *Aguu egbughi*, *Nwanyi mkpe*, *Nwa ukazi* (Ngwa); *Penina*, *Olawururu*, *Akpalam aka*, *Nwajeni*, *Nwa Ibibio*, *Tebe ofe*, *Anyanwuru oku* (Umuahia); *Egbu uri*, *Nwa Okpuru Oju*, *Agwa*, *Nwunye dim bia lee* (Ohaji); *Nwa onu uhie*, *Otoboloko*, *Nwa geri*, *Nwankwo* (Ngor Okpala); *Otokarawom*, *Werente*, *Nwike ikpu*, *Nwa icha nke*, *Wa ibeku*, *Ovuru Orie*, *Odakara Nkwuru* (Mbaise), *Achinaka*, *Mbacha ekpe* (Ezzeagu); *Eliza*, *Raphael* and *Nwa Ogina* (Oguta). Also, the agricultural department through the Research Institutes has introduced numerous improved cultivars. These hybrid or generically varieties are generically called *Ji akpu agriculture* in most parts of Igboland.

C. COCOYAM

Cocoyam called *Ede* in Igboland is also important in the food economy of the people. Two species are cultivated, the *Colocasia esculenta* also known as taro and the *Xanthosoma sagittifolium* also called tania. The *Colocasia esculenta* is more popular in Igboland. The different cultivars of this species are known by several names including: *Isi misii, Ogbankpuru, Akonoke, Ede mkpe, Otiwa, Ede nwine, Akiri, Ede ukporo, Ede Aro, Nwanyi Akpi, Agbaghara, Ede gbanyim, Nwa Okorota, Anabe, Ede ofe, Ukpong, Koko India* and *Ghana*. Whereas the *Colocasia* predominates Southeastern Nigeria generally, it is quite obscure in the Southwest for instance, where *Xanthosoma* is the main cocoyam species grown.⁶⁰ Also called the new cocoyam because it is widely believed to be an introduced species, *Xanthosoma* also regarded as the male cocoyam has several cultivars known by different names in Igboland. They include, *Ede ocha, Okoriko, Ede buji, Ede bekee, Ede oku, Ede uhie* and *Akasi*.

Cocoyam is cultivated everywhere in Igboland. It is generally regarded as a patient and kind crop which gives its best even with very minimal attention. It is regarded as the poor man's food.⁶¹ More seriously, cocoyam is known to be a rain forest crop that does well in high rainfall areas. Like other root crops, it does best in deep well drained soils rich in organic matter.⁶² On the whole, Nigeria is acclaimed to be the world's largest producer of this crop with about 40 per cent of the total production.⁶³ Most of the country's cocoyam is grown in the Southeastern part of Nigeria which includes the Igbo territory.

Table 2.4: Production, Area and Productivity of Cocoyam in Nigeria**1960/61 to 1983/84**

PERIOD	PRODUCTION (000 TONNES)	AREA(000 HECTARE)	PRODUCTIVITY (TON PER HECTARE)
1960/61	652	170	3.835
1961/62	1,150	181	6.354
1962/63	1,549	294	5.269
1963/64	1,555	256	6.074
1964/65	1,625	283	5.742
1965/66	1,606	281	5.715
1966/67	1,437	246	5.841
1967/68	1,625	288	5.642
1968/69	1,308	243	5.383
1969/70	1,793	283	6.336
1970/71	1,359	202	6.724
1971/72	880	200	4.400
1972/73	1,357	266	5.102
1973/74	1,106	167	6.623
1974/75	480	108	4.444
1975/76	504	113	4.460
1976/77	523	102	5.216
1977/78	345	79	4.380
1978/79	182	37	4.919
1979/80	136	38	3.579
1980/81	250	49	5.102

1981/82	283	63	4.492
1982/83	224	49	4.571
1983/84	205	36	5.694

Source: C.E. Onyenwaku and N.O. Eze, "Trends in production, Area and Productivity of Cocoyam in Nigeria 1960/61 - 1983-84" in O.B. Arene et al (eds.), *Cocoyams in Nigeria, Production, Storage, Processing, Utilisation*, Proceedings of the first National Workshop on Cocoyams (Aug. 16-21, 1987), Umuahia: National Root Crop Research Institute, 1987, p.95.

Table 2.4 above shows a not too impressive growth in the cultivation/production of the cocoyam crop. At best it remains just one of those additions to the farmer's list of crops. Onwueme attributes this trend to the air of casualness surrounding cocoyam cultivation in Nigeria. In fact, cocoyam cultivation is not pursued with the same seriousness and vigour that other crops command. Consequently, holdings are invariably small and most of the crop is grown as an inter crop between stands of other more valued crops or in homestead gardens.⁶⁴

Cocoyam is evenly distributed in all Igboland. However, the areas of highest concentration are: Umuahia Okigwe, Idemili, Aguata, Njikoka, Orumba, Oguta and the Niger flood plains (Aguleri, Umuleri, Anam and Nsugbe). In the 1973/74 farming season alone, an area of 47,385 acres was planted with cocoyam in the former East Central State, and production stood at 153,767 tons with a yield of 3.25 per acre. Idemili, Aguata and Njikoka divisions accounted for over 30 per cent of the total production.⁶⁵

D. RICE

Rice was introduced into Igboland in the 1940s by the Colonial Department of Agriculture mainly in the swampy regions of Abakiliki, Afikpo and Ohaozara. Since then, the crop has been widely accepted as a major food crop in Igboland. Called *Osikapa* or *Eresi* in Igbo, the production of rice in Igboland is concentrated in places like Abakiliki, Afikpo, Bende, Ohaozara, and in the Adani-Umubo-Aguleri areas. Since its introduction, in Abakiliki for instance, the *Oryza Sativa* has come to challenge the status of yam as the dominant food crop. In 1959/60 agricultural sample survey, a total of 8,000 hectares were reported to be under rice in East Central State. At the same time, the annual production was estimated at 14,225 kilograms, giving an average yield of some 1,778 kilograms per hectare.⁶⁶

On the whole, rice production has a relatively bright feature in Igboland. For instance, with increasing population, rapid urbanisation and the scarcity of labour for agricultural purposes, it is possible that in the coming years, the crop already challenging yam and cassava in places like Abakiliki, Afikpo, Ohaozara and Bende, may well become the number one food crop not only in these places, but in the whole of Igboland.

E. MAIZE

Maize cultivation in Eastern Nigeria, Agboola has argued, is peripheral unlike the situation in the Western Region. He agrees that the crop is popular in the whole

country, citing the widespread nature of maize cultivation in all parts of the country.⁶⁷ Perhaps, to explain the situation in Eastern Nigeria, Okigbo says that cereals never really got fully adopted as major crops, simply because they would have made excessive demands on land for extensive cultivation in a forest zone, and because their mode of preparation as flour did not come till much later,⁶⁸ especially to a population whose main food is dominated by high starchy root crops. Both in terms of area under cultivation and productivity Western Nigeria ranks higher than the East in maize cultivation. All the same maize (Oka, in Igbo) has become an important crop in the people's food economy. This is because, of all the grains grown in the area, maize has the widest distribution in view of its importance as a hunger-breaking crop. Maize is usually the first crop harvested in the agricultural year.⁶⁹

Though an introduced crop⁷⁰, maize, as Table 2.5 below shows, has been cultivated in Nigeria for a long time, featuring in the country's export list since the beginning of the 20th century.

Table 2.5: Maize Exports from Nigeria 1903-1939

<i>PERIOD</i>	<i>MAIZE EXPORTS (METRIC TONS)</i>
1903-04	2,484
1905-09	11,794
1910-14	5,635
1915-19	520
1920-24	208
1925-29	47
1930-34	97
1935-39	48

Source: M.P. Miracle, *Maize in Tropical Africa*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1966,

p. 179.

In Table 2.5 above, maize exports rose from 2,484 metric tons in 1903/04 to an all-time high of 11,794 metric tons in the period 1905/09 before witnessing a sudden sharp fall in the subsequent years. This fall has been attributed to price fluctuations in the Nigerian market and the confusion that accompanied the first World War and after. From the end of the war until 1930, the price of maize in Nigeria (£4 per ton or even a little more) was too high to permit a profitable export.⁷¹

Maize generally has the advantage of not being too demanding in terms of labour requirements and its yield is comparatively higher than some other crops. It can be grown on a variety of soils although one major requirement is good drainage. The performance of maize in relation to soil type is as with all crops closely related to

climate, deeper soils with a higher moisture-holding capacity being required in areas of marginal rainfall.⁷² Perhaps it is these factors that have attracted the crop to the Igbo territory.

The highest density of maize cultivation is found mainly around the sandy soils of Onitsha, Owerri, Umuahia and the Western parts of Enugu. It could be said that maize cultivation has thrived in Igboland because it is relatively widespread and is harvested early. The crop can be either eaten green or dry. It is either roasted or cooked and eaten together with coconut, palm kernel, native pear or bread fruit. It may be cooked with different species of beans. Moreover, it can be inter-cropped with food crops such as yams, cassava, cocoyam and groundnuts. Since maize is usually planted between the mounds of earth and/or ridges and since it takes about three months to mature, it does not significantly interfere with the growth of other crops.⁷³ For these reasons, the crop is less demanding on the Igbo farmer, and this has dictated its wide acceptance. In the Anambra River Basin, maize is used in making *Igbagu* (a particularly heavy meal), *Ikpa kpa* (moi moi), *Nli oka* (particularly when combined with dried and ground cassava flour) and *Nli_ako* (regarded as a special delicacy). *Nli_ako*, was so important in the pre-colonial Anambra that it was served in all festivals and ceremonies along with pounded yam, their staple food.⁷⁴

F. *VEGETABLES*

A major aspect of the Igbo food economy is the range of vegetables cultivated by the people. These vegetables are used mainly in the preparation of various types of dishes from the crops discussed earlier. Among the popular vegetables cultivated

are, the fluted pumpkin (Ugu), Bitter leaf (Olugbu), Camwood leaves (Oha/Nturuks), Green (Inine), Okro (Okwuru), Vegetable jute (Ahihiara), Fever plant (Nchuanwu), African egg plant (Ofe/Anara), Water leaf (Mgbolodi), and the Elephant grass (Achara). The use of these vegetables vary among the different communities.

In Abakiliki for instance, vegetables like Ugu, *Nturuks/uturuks*, *Ikwo-Ogbu*, *Oha*, *Oko*, *Nkwo*, *Olugbu*, and *Ogbonu* are popular.⁷⁵ In Ohaozara and Afikpo areas, *Okwuru*, *ugu*, *Ofe*, *Ugbogiri*, *Oha*, *Uturuks*, *Ibere* and *Ewa* dominate. Vegetables like, *Ugu*, *Okazi*, *Oha* and *Anara* are prominent in Ngwaland, where they are cultivated in commercial quantities. In Umuahia and its environs, *Ugu*, *Okwuru*, *Uziza*, *Okazi* and *Oha* feature prominently. The Ohaji/Mbaise/Owerri areas plant more of *Oha*, *Ugu*, *Okazi*, *Nturuks*, *Nwakuko*, *Ofe*, *Okwuru*, *Ugbogiri*, *Akidi*, *Ahu*, *Ahihiara* and *Nchanwu*. Residents of the Anambra flood plains similarly prefer, *Ugu*, *Inine*, *Okwuru*, *Mgbolodi*, *Nkirinkiri*, *Eli-emionu*, *Nturuks* and *Akwukwo akpu*.

The fluted pumpkin seem to be the most popular vegetable among the Igbo. Interestingly, some of these vegetables are leaves of trees which in some cases are also used in the demarcation of farmlands. Such trees include the Camwood (Oha/Nturuks), Bitter leaf (Olugbu) and the *Ahu* tree. In recent times, many farmers, particularly those residing in the riverine areas, have adopted ways of producing all-year-round vegetables. For these communities the sale of these vegetables have become a major source of income.

G OIL PALM

The Oil Palm (Nkwu or Akwu, in Igbo), occupies a significant part of the Igbo food economy. It is believed that this crop is one of the indigenous food plants of the

Igbo. In fact, few wild trees are of as much economic and social value to Igbo farmers nay Nigerians as the oil palm tree. Aside from the oil, even the dead palm is a valuable source of timber for use as pillars and beams, fuel for cooking, and a breeding medium for such edible fungi as the mushroom⁷⁶ Its leaf-ribs are used in building, the leaves in thatching, the fibre in robe making, the palm wine obtained by tapping the tree is a pleasant drink, while the palm oil, is a valuable source of vitamins in the indigenous diets.⁷⁷ The palm tree grows luxuriantly in different parts of Igbo land. It is also an important revenue earner for the people.

Table 2.6: Palm Oil production in Nigeria 1965 and 1971

REGION	ESTIMATED GROSS PRODUCTION IN 1965 (000 TONNES)	ESTIMATED DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION IN 1965 (000 TONNES)	PURCHASES FOR EXPORT 1965 (000 TONNES)	EXPORT PURCHASES IN % OF GROSS PROD.	ESTIMATED EXPORTS IN 1971 (000 TONNES)
East	291.9	135.8	156.0	53.5	27.3
West	72.2	61.5	10.8	14.9	4.2
North	30.5	30.5	-	0.0	0.0
TOTAL	394.6	227.8	166.8	68.4	31.5

Source: S.A. Agboola *An Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 119.

Table 2.6 above, shows the position of Eastern Nigeria as a major palm oil producing area in the country. By far, a greater percentage of this production figure comes from Igboland. It was this singular factor that accounted for the boom in the palm oil trade with Europe from the 19th century. In fact, Hopkins says, the fact that

palm oil products were already being traded and consumed as food stuffs since the 19th century, helps to explain why the Atlantic slave trade did not cause a complete disruption of overseas commerce, though this does not indicate that the transition was entirely smooth.⁷⁸ The areas of high concentration of palm oil production in Igboland, also called the palm belt, include Ngwa, Ukwa, Bende, Orlu, Okigwe, Owerri, Mbaise and Mbano. These places are endowed with luxuriant groves of palm trees which produce palm oil both for local consumption and export.

H. *ANIMALS*

It has been argued that domesticated animals have traditionally formed only a minor part of the rural economy of Eastern Nigeria. According to Floyd, small animals such as fowls, goats and sheep are kept on almost all compounds but their economic value is small. They are reared mainly for slaughter and consumption on ceremonial and festive occasions. The main utility of the small livestock is in the manure they produce for intensive compound-type farming in and around the village.⁷⁹ Some of the animals kept include Goats (Eghu), Sheep (Aturu), Pig (Ezi), Fowl (Okuko), Dog (Nkita), Cat (Puusu) and Rabbit (Oke bekee). The essence of these domestic animals lie mainly in the fact that they are used to complement the food requirements of the people and to boost the status of the man in the society. A truly wealthy man is known by the number of goats, sheep, pigs, fowls, wives and children as well as the length of the yam barn he had.⁸⁰ These animals are found almost in every home in Igboland.

Although it is difficult to rear larger animals such as cattle, horses and other draft animals in Eastern Nigeria due to the prevalence of tsetse and the spread of trypanosomiasis,⁸¹ a special breed of cattle called *Ehi* or *Muturu* is found in many parts of Igboland. Usually associated with the wealthy (Ogaranya), this animal is often slaughtered on special occasions and is accorded more respect by the people than the common cattle (Nnama). The *Muturu* is found mainly in the Abakiliki area. It is also found in Afikpo, Ngwa, Ohaozara, Okigwe and parts of Owerri, where the grassland provides rich pasture in the rainy season while in the dry season their grazing is confined to the vicinity of streams.⁸²

A wide range of other animals yet not domesticated are eaten by the people. These animals constitute a major part of their game resources which is the preoccupation of the numerous hunters in Igbo land. They are mainly found in patches of forest located in different parts of Igboland. Some of these animals are, the wild pig (Ezi ohia), wild cat (Edi abali), Squirrel (Osa/Uze), several species of Snakes (Agwo), Grass cutter (Nchi), Hedge-hog (Ebi Ogwu/Ntu ebi), Antelope (Ele), Deer (Mgbada), Guinea fowl (Ogazi), Kite (Egbe) and different species of birds (Nnunu). Bigger animals like antelope, grass cutter, hedge-hog and the deer are still found mainly in areas where the forest cover has not been completely destroyed. These areas include Abakiliki, Afikpo and parts of Enugu. And in the grasslands of Ngwa and Owerri are found smaller animals like Squirrel, Guinea fowl, birds, and an insignificant number of the bigger varieties. These range of animals are constantly killed and highly prized as bush meat, mainly by the affluent in society.

There are numerous species of fish (Azụ) found mainly in the riverine parts of Igboland. In the Anambra flood plains, the annual floods, during which the land is covered with water from the Niger, not only contributes to the fertility of the land but also makes fishing the favoured occupation as scores of fish come to the surface with the flood. In the areas bordering the Njaba river, and among people who live along the banks of the Imo River and indeed all the numerous rivers and streams in Igboland fishing has become quite an attractive occupation.

I. *FRUITS*

Finally, a variety of fruits appear on the food list of the Igbo. Many of them were introduced particularly in the 20th century. We must note, however, that in the food economy of the Igbo, crops rather than fruits played a more significant role. These fruits are mainly consumed as dessert and appetisers, except in rare cases where the rural poor took them as food. Some of these fruits consumed in Igboland are, Pawpaw (Okwuru bekee), Orange (Oroma/epe), Coconut (Aki bekee), Banana (Unene/Ogede), Plantain (Abirika), Conophor (Ukpa), Rubber vine (Utu), Bitter kola (Aki ilu), Mango (Mangoro), Star apple (Udara), Groundnut (Ahuekere), Avacado pear (Ube bekee), Pear (Ube), African breadfruit (Ukwa) and Lime (Epe Nkiri).

However, as we mentioned earlier, some of these fruits are consumed both as fruits and food, depending on the method of preparation. The African breadfruit (ukwa) is especially popular in many parts of Igboland where it is considered a special delicacy when boiled. It is said to be highly nutritious and can compare only with beans in terms of its protein content. This is also the case with plantain (Abirika). These two crops are highly prized and occupy a position of significance in

the peoples food economy. Breadfruit is very popular in Mbaise, Obowo, Okigwe, Orlu, Umuahia, Ngwa and Enugu.

There is also the Oil bean (*Ugba*) which is a fruit of great resource in Igboland. Used mainly at ceremonial occasions, *Ugba* is very popular in Southern Igboland. *Ugba* can be used as a great dessert and could also be mixed with maize or cassava to produce very appetising delicacies. Many also use it as a seasoning especially in preparing okro soup.

We may conclude, based on the foregoing, that the Igbo food economy is a combination of crops, fruits, vegetables and animals, each playing a distinct role in the peoples food cycle. Again, this food economy has resulted from several years of evolution and adaptation leading to the domestication of both indigenous and foreign varieties. In the production of these food items, a whole lot of other factors are involved. These include, the population of the area, the geography and the environment, including the resources of the earth, labour and the role of the sexes as well as the ownership and use of the land. These factors, combined, in no small way influence the choice, cultivation and indeed the overall utilisation of these food items by the Igbo people. The coming chapter will, focus on the three major food crops of the Igbo (yam, cocoyam and cassava), tracing their history and spread as well as the factors that determined their acceptance as choice food crops of the people.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE ORIGINS AND DIFFUSION OF YAM, COCOYAM AND CASSAVA IN IGBOLAND

The importance of agricultural production in the economy of Igboland has been discussed in the preceding chapters, this chapter seeks to examine the origin and diffusion of yam, cocoyam and cassava in Igboland. It hopes to discuss the sources and methods of entry, including the reasons for the acceptance of these crops in the context of local and international developments.

In the same vein the preceding chapter has shown that the agricultural economy of Igboland is the result of centuries of experimentation with nature's resources. This experimental period could be subdivided into three stages. The first stage was characterised by the transition from vegeculture to agriculture, which resulted from experimentation with local crops such as species of yam and palm tree due to local initiative. The second, saw the introduction of Southeast Asian crops, which included species of yam, cocoyam and banana; while, the third and final stage witnessed the linking of Africa and the Americas, from where varieties of crops including maize, mango, breadfruit and cassava were introduced.¹

In the period under review, numerous food crops were cultivated, with each occupying an important aspect of the people's food economy. Some of these crops, many agree, are indigenous, while several others were introduced. Even among the indigenous crops, some of their species were said to have been borrowed from other places both within and outside the geographical area. The point to note therefore, is

that the series of crops cultivated in Igboland including yam, cocoyam and cassava fall into the three categories mentioned above. It is therefore the purpose of this chapter to throw more light on the evolution and diffusion of these crops in Igboland with a view to explaining the important positions which they attained over time.

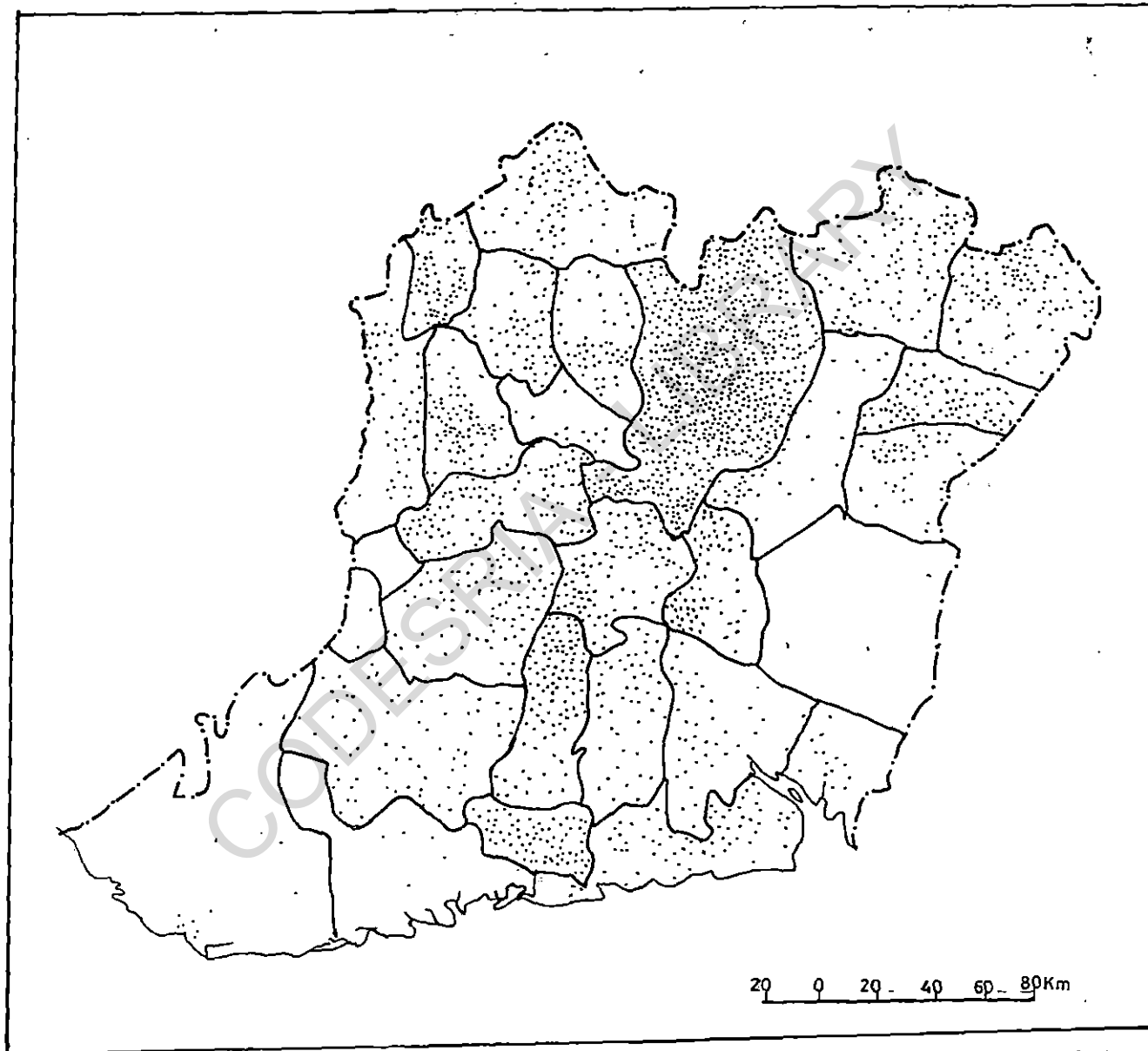
3.1 *YAM*

There is enough evidence on the origin of yam in Igboland. Most of the evidence derive from oral tradition, archaeology, ethnography, linguistics as well as written records. They substantiate the commonly held view that the yam is indigenous to West Africa.

We may group the available oral evidence into two: those claiming that the yam crop is as old as human existence in Igboland thus, that God presented yam as the first food to the Igbo man; and, the others who claim that yam consumption in the area though of relative antiquity was the result of experimentation or accident.

Oral traditions of the Aguleri, part of Anambra flood plains claim that yam had been created by Chukwu (God) at the same time as man. According to this tradition, Tshuku (Chukwu) sent down Eri and Namaku from the sky to an earth that was void. Ndri, the son of Eri later complained to Tshuku about the lack of food on earth. In response to this complaint:

Fig.3.1: Eastern States of Nigeria: Distribution of Yam.



Source: After Ofomata, Nigeria in Maps: Eastern States p107

Tshuku told him to kill and bury his eldest son and daughter. Ndri said this was too hard a thing for him to do and he would not do it. So Tshuku said he would send Dioka from the sky (they are now settled at Umidoka near Oreri) to put Itshi marks on the face of these two children and then to cut their throats and bury them in separate graves.²

Following this instruction, the two children were killed and buried:

three native weeks later, shoots appeared out of the graves of these children. From the grave of his son Ndri dug up a yam, cooked and ate it and found it most pleasing and fell into a deep sleep thereafter that his family thought he had died ... The next day, he dug up cocoyams from his daughters grave and ate them and slept also. That is why the yam is called the son of Ndri and the Cocoyam the daughter of Ndri.³

This tradition also indicates that the slaves of Ndri were equally buried and from their graves sprouted oil palm and breadfruit. It is interesting to note that these traditions identify yam and oil palm as having specifically emanated from the graves of the male and cocoyam and breadfruit from those of the female. This tradition therefore indicates that these crops are native to Igboland. Also, the so-called male crops reflect crop preference in a patrilineal/patriarchal society.

A similar story is recorded at Ohaji, one of the largest yam producing areas in Igboland. An indigene, Nze Azogu Ike, relates the tradition of the origin of yam as follows.⁴ In an Ohaji village called Umuoboke Obile, one Nde Asaa, who was dying of hunger with his children, consulted Chukwu who advised him to kill his son, and to eat whatever came out of his grave. On the fourth day, he killed his first son and buried the toes and fingers separately. The first plant that sprouted from where the toes and fingers were buried was *Ji Aga* (a specie of white yam). From the head came another specie called *Ji Ocha* and from the intestines came *Ji Avula* (Water yam) and *Ona* (three-leaved yam).

The Ohaji tradition is akin to that of Afikpo, where the indigenous specie of yam is called *Akiri*.⁵ This specie is regarded as superior to all the others and is used for the traditional New Yam Festival. In Ngwa, Southern Igboland, the tradition of origin of the people also show very close link with the yam crop. It is said that a party in search of new farm lands had settled down to eat by the bank of the river after the day's trek. According to the story, no sooner had the party settled down to eat than the river started to rise. The first three travellers who had boiled their yam, hurriedly swallowed them and made for safety across the Imo river. The other group who preferred to roast their yam delayed in the consumption. However, time was not on their side as the water level had risen so much, thereby making it impossible for them to cross over. Consequently, they:

were obliged to settle on the right bank of the river, which was thenceforth named Imo on account of its size and the rapidity of its growth. The three persons whose promptitude had enabled them to gain the left bank of the river are alleged to have been brothers, named Ngwa-Uku, Nwaoha and Avosi, in order of age. To them was given the name Ngwa on account of the expeditious manner of their crossing, while the stragglers on the right bank were called Ohuhu, literally "he who roasts", to commemorate the mode of cooking which was their downfall.⁶

Today, the Ngwa still regard many neighbouring communities as Ohuhu. Quite importantly, the linkage between the yam and the origin of the people shows that the crop perhaps even antedates human settlement in the area. Even if this were not possible, it does show all the same, that the yam crop among the Ngwa people is old indeed.

Similarly, in Ikenanzizi Obowo, also in Southern Igboland, the common tradition is that yams came with the beginning of the world. The popular belief here is that yam was given to the people by Chukwu.⁷ Among the Ikwo of Abakiliki, it is

widely held that yam has always been part and parcel of the people's culture. One source said they inherited the crop from their ancestors. According to him, as a son grew, once he attained puberty, he was given tubers of yam, hoe and farmland to start life.⁸

In Ohuhu and most parts of Umuahia, yam is accepted to be indigenous and such varieties of the crop as, *Oko Ocha, Igwe, Akokpo, Avula Ikoroto* and *Oko* are frequently mentioned as the earliest species.⁹ The people insist that they have always had this crop from the beginning of creation. Agriculture generally, is viewed by the Akokwa of Orlu, Southern Igboland, to have originated from their area. A popular saying of the people is "*Akokwa na oru ji*" (Akokwa, the famed yam farmers).¹⁰

On the other hand, some other traditions, buttress the notion that yam cultivation, just like the other crops in Igboland, may have resulted from the people's experimentation with the different plants in the area with a view to identifying the edible ones. The Ezza of Abakiliki, Northeast Igboland, for example, believe that their ancestor, Ezekona, stumbled upon yam while digging in his farm. He ate it and was able to quench his hunger. Following this, he took it home and planted it. From then, the eating of yam became part and parcel of the people's tradition.¹¹

A similar tradition, widely believed in Abakiliki, comprising the three clans of Izzi, Ikwo and Ezza, has it that:

One day, the father of Ezekuna, Nodo and Noyo called these boys and asked them to go and find food for the family. They obeyed their father and went to look for food. Nodo returned with wild yams and Noyo came back with

some fish and roots, while Ezekuna brought a human head. Each presented what he brought to their father as a trophy. Their father, Ekuma Enyi blessed each of them according to what he brought.¹²

According to this history, Nodo was blessed with yam production and Noyo with plenty of meat and food, while Ezekuna was blessed with gallantry in warfare and was given charge of their father's compound. Following from this, even till this day, Izzu clan is the greatest producer of yams in Abakiliki. The Ikwo are renowned for the production of all types of food stuffs and meat while the Ezza are noted for their militarism in the whole of Abakiliki and beyond.¹³

In Uturu Okigwe, there is a popular tradition about the origin of yam. This tradition, which links the discovery of yam to chance, says the earliest specie of the crop was called *Usuekpe* and it could still be found in the wild form in the area.¹⁴ According to this source, the people of Uturu copied the yam tradition from the Ukomi, a neighbouring community. However, the new crop still had to be tested to ascertain whether or not it was edible. Therefore, the people decided that:

Achara, being the most senior lineage had to eat the yam first. The entire Achara, similarly forced it upon their most junior sub-lineage called Onuzo to first taste the yam. Onuzo had to submit to the order of the entire Achara. They ate the yam. Four days passed, the period within which people thought that they would die. They rather waxed stronger. Onuzo people rejoiced over the successful outcome of the experiment... Today, the four days period is reflected in Uturu New Yam Festival.¹⁵

This village (Onuzo), still leads in the traditional ceremonies that accompany the New Yam Festival in Uturu, in recognition of the fact that at the beginning, they were the first to taste yam in Uturu.

A second version of this same story exists. The version has it that yam was first discovered in Amidi-Uturu. While agreeing that it was Onuzo village that first tasted the yam, this version rather says that:

the villages ordered Onuzo people to cook and eat the stuff first. The order was given to Onuzo village because they were of slave origin, and if they died after eating the yams, the people will not count that as great loss. Onuzo people in turn decided that they all would not take yams at the same time; so that in the event of yams being poisonous all of them will not perish. They transferred the burden to Ndi-Njoku (the people dedicated to the god of yam - Njoku) in Onuzo.¹⁶

According to this version, the agony of the people while waiting for the outcome of this experiment is what is now celebrated as the Izu (thought), which is celebrated four days before the New Yam Festival¹⁷ The potency of the Uturu story lies in the fact that the festivals connected with the origin of yam in the area are still celebrated till today. It could therefore be adduced that the history of yam in the area is as old as the history of man in the area nay, Igboland.

The annual Ofala festival in Onitsha is linked with the discovery of new yams in the area. The people say that at the beginning, nobody new anything about yam in the area. However, when the people finally discovered yam, which grew like any other plant in the area, many were scared of what to do with it. Some feared that it could be poisonous . The different villages therefore decided to experiment on the crop one after the other. The period of this test automatically became a time of meditation and supplication for the king who feared for the safety of his people. By the fourth day, when no life had been lost, the king came out to celebrate the survival of his people. The Ofala therefore, is essentially the Obi's royal festival for the survival of his people.¹⁸ Since it is difficult to say when the first Ofala was held in

Onitsha because Ofala has always been held by Obi's of Onitsha for centuries,¹⁹ it therefore follows that the antiquity of yam cultivation in the area is indisputable.

These oral sources go a long way to show the antiquity of yam in Igboland. Nevertheless, Okigbo has argued that, because the investigation about the origin and domestication of cultivated plants is an aspect of pre-history of agriculture, it is a multi-disciplinary activity which requires evidences from archaeologists, historians, botanists, physical anthropologists, cultural ecologists and geographers, anatomists, polynologists, geologists and aeronomists. This is because, domestication of plants is the result of experimentation during periods thousands of years for which written evidences is unavailable.²⁰ Hence, Anozie, an archaeologist, supports the claim that yam is indigenous to Igboland. He insists that not only has this been proved by archaeological evidence, many varieties of the crop still abound in their wild form all over Igboland. Some of these wild yams were dug up and eaten by the Ezza people during the civil war. Also in Nsukka, Adani and most of Abakiliki, many species of yam still exist in wild forms.²¹ This evidence is corroborated by another archaeologist, Agwu, who has recognised the presence of yam pollen in the samples he took from Opi lakes near Nsukka.²²

There is also ethnographic information in support of the view that yam is indigenous to Igboland. There are many taboos associated with the planting, harvesting, and storage of yams. Most feasts observed in Igboland involves the yam, kolanut and palm wine. In some communities, yams to be used in the celebration of the New Yam festival, for example, are never uprooted with any iron implement, symbolising the fact that the domestication of yam even predates the introduction of

iron in Igboland. The latest date for iron working in Igboland comes from Opi near Nsukka and it is believed to be the earliest in Sub-saharan Africa with a radio carbon (C 14) date of nearly 1000 B.C. This new piece of evidence shows that agricultural practice must have started in Igboland much earlier than this date.²³

Furthermore, not only was the yam to be used for the festival in parts of Igboland forbidden to be uprooted with iron, in most places, women were barred from planting yam or even planting vegetables on yam farms. It was also considered a taboo to stool in a yam farm, or to walk carelessly through it. No woman under menstruation would enter a yam barn (Obaji). Moreover, yams must not be kept in the room of a woman newly delivered of a child (Ulo Omugwo) until after twenty eight days.²⁴ In the Izzi area of Abakiliki, it is even regarded as an abomination to sit on the hoe, since it is used to cultivate yam. Also stealing of yams, particularly seed yams is frowned at, while anyone being chased by a masquerade obtains refuge, once he runs near the stem of a growing yam.²⁵ Several other taboos are associated with the yam. For instance, it is forbidden to: use a knife to cut a growing yam; hit someone with a tuber of yam; carry one tuber of yam on the head without using palm frond (Omu) to tie it; toss yam tubers carelessly; fight in a yam farm; die in the months of June - July (Onwu ji), that is at the peak of the farming season when all yams must have been planted, meaning that there is hardly enough to feed on; cook yam and cocoyam in the same pot; carry light in the night into the barn (particularly in Ngwaland, thus the popular saying "*Anaghi aga n'oba n'ichich*", meaning "you cannot enter the barn in the night"); give out only one tuber of yam at a time; allow women to untie yams at the stake in the barns; or even cross yam heaps. Some of

these traditions have changed particularly since the coming of Christianity in Igboland, but it must be noted that this kind of reverence could only be possible, for a crop which by virtue of its antiquity had effectively become part and parcel of the peoples culture. Similarly, yam is considered to be a male crop, a prestige crop and thus, a status symbol. Among the Edda of Afikpo, it is closely associated with the three different stages of male initiation - *Umurim*, *Isiji* and *Isi Ugu*. Hence, several yams are used in the initiation rites.²⁶ Since these initiation rites are as old as the peoples history, it could equally be adduced that the crop associated with them is also old in the area.

Practically in every part of Igboland, the evidence is the same. Yam is seen as the number one crop in the people's farm diary. In fact, only very few Igbo men could do without a small portion of the crop in their farms in a given farming season. Even when all other economic input did not favour its cultivation, the farmer still planted a small portion of the crop, insisting that not to plant yams would amount to losing one's manhood.²⁷ No doubt, a crop that has a recent history could not possibly have attained such importance. So much importance is attached to the crop that until the abolition of the slave trade, yam and slaves constituted the principal articles of trade from Eastern Nigeria. Far back in the sixteenth century yams had started to dominate the internal and external trade of the region. The principal lines of movement which then was the North-South line, still persists to the present day.²⁸

Contemporary European records buttress this assertion. For example, in *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, written in 1508, Pereira writing on the trade on the Rio

Real, which included Portuguese Guinea, Western Ghana and Eastern Nigeria, had noted *inter alia* that:

the (Aros) came from a hundred leagues or more, up this river bringing yams in large quantities. They also bring slaves, cows, goat and sheep. Sheep, they call 'Bozy'. They sell all these to the natives of the village for salt and our ships buy these things for copper bracelets which are greatly priced more than those of Brass, for eight or ten bracelets you can obtain one slave.²⁹

This further authenticates the claim that yam cultivation had been carried on in Igboland at least by the early sixteenth century. It also shows that long before colonial rule, the yam crop had already become a product in the exchange market.

Thurstan Shaw in fact, believes that the history of the yam crop in Igboland dates back to over 5,000 years ago. According to him, a long history of yam cultivation combined with the benefit of complementary food values from the nuts obtained protected or tended oil palms (together with some meat and fish) would help to account for the density of population in Southern Nigeria.³⁰ Obviously, it was only a flourishing economy supported by an efficient agricultural system that could sustain the high population density of Igboland. In the same vein, Murdock, has argued that agriculture was independently developed about the same time by the Negroes of West Africa. According to him, this was a genuine invention not a borrowing from outside. The assemblage of cultivated plants ennobled from wild forms in Negro Africa ranks as one of the four major agricultural complexes evolved in the entire course of human history.³¹ For him, the failure to recognise the contribution of Negro Africans in the introduction of crops arose from the fact that botanists, though long aware of the African origin of many important cultivated plants, have had no means of determining their antiquity, and pre-historic

archaeology, has been unable to supply the needed information because of paucity of research in precisely the most crucial areas.³² Hence, the yam, Murdock argues, together with the oil palm are therefore indigenous having first been found to be concentrated in the region between Senegal and Northern Nigeria, with the greatest concentration near the headwaters of the River Niger.

Arising from this, Uzozie then insists that yam, especially its white and yellow varieties, is the only one agreed to be indigenous to West Africa, since it has been in cultivation in the area much longer than any other staple food crop and may have produced a crop for the development of agriculture in most of the rain forest zone.³³

Hopkins agrees, and goes on to say that:

West African agriculture, besides being of pre-historic origin, did not lag far behind primary centres of origin, such as the Near East; ... at this early date the main staples were millet, rice and fonio in the savanna, and yams and the oil palm in the forest; ... while external contacts were of great importance, there is evidence to suggest that there was an indigenous West African neolithic agriculture; and ... the assumption that agriculture developed earlier in the Savanna than in the forest must be regarded as dubious.³⁴

It could be said therefore that the yam crop is of particular interest in West Africa because unlike many of the food crops now used, they are mostly indigenous to the area and were first brought into cultivation by Africans, some thousands of years ago.³⁵

In spite of the fact that both oral and written sources agree that yam is indigenous to the forest region of West Africa, research has shown that some species of the crop were introduced into Igboland from outside. They show that it is only the white, yellow and three-leafed yams that are truly indigenous to Igboland. In fact, six main species grown in the area are believed to have been introduced from Asia.

They include, the *Alata*, *Esculenta* and the *Bulbiferous* yams. It is said that these species as well as the cocoyam came from the East, but the actual route through which they came and the date of entry are still being contested.³⁶ A possible route of entry easily identified is Old Calabar, which is not far from St. Thome. Once adopted by the Eastern Ibibios, the water yam culture spread inland along the Cross River basin probably through the agency of Aro slave traders who at the time were middlemen of the hinterland – coast trade. In fact, the zone of high concentration of the species coincides with one of the main Aro slave routes and settlements running from Calabar, through Ikot Ekpene and Bende to Awgu.³⁷ It is no surprise therefore, that these species of yam are concentrated in the Afikpo and Bende axis, and outside these areas, they are generally regarded as part of the crops left to the women. In Abakiliki and Ohaji particularly, *Mvula* (water yam, *alata*) is mainly planted by women at the foot of yam heaps. It is possible that because they were borrowed species, people looked down on them, regarding them as inferior to the indigenous ones. This may therefore have influenced the idea of leaving them to the women.

Table 3.1: Edible Yams of the humid Tropics and their regions of origin

NO.	BOTANICAL NAME	COMMON NAMES	AREA OF ORIGIN
1.	<i>Dioscorea rotundata</i>	White yam, Guinea yam.	West Africa
2.	<i>Dioscorea alata</i>	Greater yam, Water, yam, Winged yam, Ten-month yam.	Southeast Asia
3.	<i>Dioscorea cayenensis</i>	Yellow yam, Yellow Guinea yam, Twelve month yam.	West Africa
4.	<i>Dioscorea esculenta</i>	Lesser yam, Asiatic yam, Chinese yam.	Indo-China
5.	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i>	Potato yam, Aerial yam, Bulbi-bearing yam.	West Africa/ Tropical Asia
6.	<i>Dioscorea dumetorum</i>	Bitter yam, Cluster yam.	Tropical Africa
7.	<i>Dioscorea hispida</i>		Tropical Africa
8.	<i>Dioscorea trifida</i>	Cush-cush yam, Aja, Yampi, Indian yam.	South America.

Source: C.N. Williams and W.Y. Chew, *Tree and Field Crops of the Wetter Regions of the Tropics*, London: Longman, 1979, p. 213.

The data above substantiates the evidence already presented. From Table 3.1, it could be seen that five of the eight species originated from Africa, and in fact, West/Tropical Africa. Therefore, that the yam crop is native to Igboland which is part of the forest region is no longer in doubt.

Linguistic evidence shows that the name yam is believed to be derived from the Mande *niam* or the Temne *enyame*; this was adopted into Portuguese as *ynhame*

thence into Spanish as *name*, French *igname* and English *yam*.³⁸ This further shows that the crop originated from Africa before the name was bastardised. In the different dialects of the Igbo language, the name for *Dioscorea rotundata* (Ji Igwe, Ji Ocha, Apu ji, or Nne binji) as opposed to other species indicates proper yam or a similar idea, while even the common English name of water yam for the Asiatic *Dioscorea alata*, indicates its importation in historical times by a seafaring people (the Portuguese).³⁹ It is probable therefore, that since Asiatic and later, African yams were extensively used for the victualling of ships, through this medium, *Dioscorea alata* was taken to West Africa, while the Atlantic slave trade resulted in the African *Dioscorea rotundata* and *Dioscorea cayenensis* being taken to the Caribbean.⁴⁰

In the light of the above, one can then conclude that the cultivation of yam is an indigenous development in the forest region of West Africa. It not only antedates European contact, but also the beginning of the use of iron tools in Africa around 2000 years ago.⁴¹ Both archaeological and linguistic evidence justify this fact. More importantly, among the Igbo, yam is a totem of manliness, and the ritual ceremony and superstition which surrounds the cultivation and utilization of the crop indicates the great antiquity of their use.⁴² In fact, it was in West Africa, that yam eating and culture have been accorded more than an economic value. The region accounts for over 75 per cent of world production of yams. Both *Dioscorea rotundata* and *Dioscorea cayenensis* complex are believed to have been domesticated in this area now called the yam zone - the region that stretches from central Ivory Coast, through Ghana, Togo, Benin and Nigeria to Western Cameroons and straddles both the forest and the Southern parts of the Savannah.⁴³ To all intents and

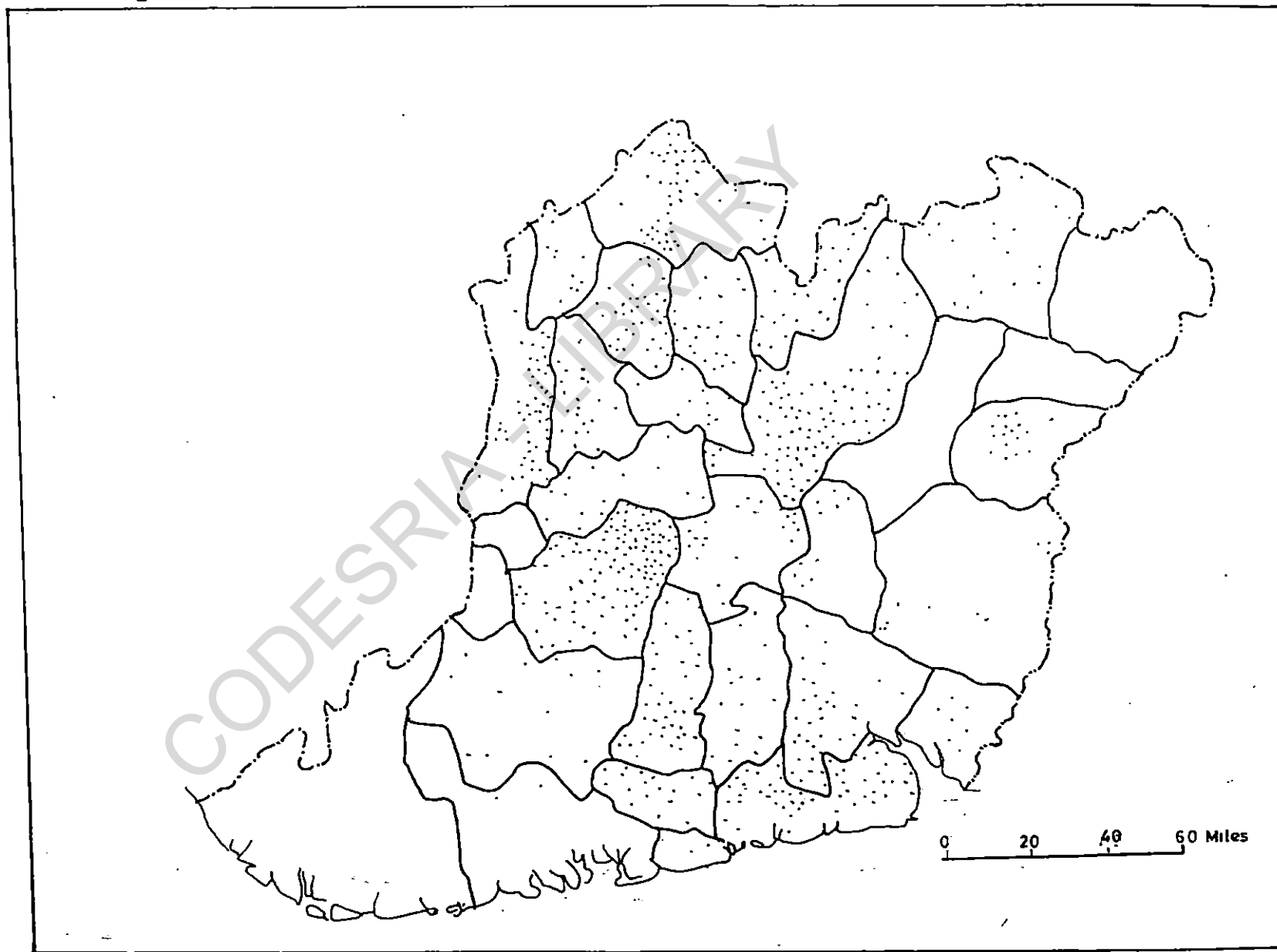
and purposes, therefore, what could reasonably be said is that, the evolutionary trend of the yam crop cannot be thought of as a sudden cultural change. Rather it should be seen as a gradual evolution taking place over centuries or perhaps millenia, during which the intensity of the symbiotic relationship between man and the crop plant gradually increased, until eventually a true agricultural complex emerged.⁴⁴

3.2 *COCOYAM*

Cocoyam is regarded as a secondary crop among the Igbo. The crop belongs to the family of Aoids, which Simmonds regards as ancient crops which owe their development to vegetative mutation or chance seed setting and selection by prehistoric man. According to him, all known varieties today were selected and propagated by subsistence farmers of Africa, Asia, Oceania and Latin America and modern science has played virtually no role in developing or improving their cultivars.⁴⁵ Perhaps, it may be because of this fact that the cocoyam crop is treated with levity in Igboland as in other cocoyam producing areas.

Oral traditions of most communities in Igboland link the evolution of cocoyam with that of yam. The argument is that cocoyam was created by Chukwu (God) as the female gender of the yam. The Nri legend, for instance, has it that cocoyam sprouted from the grave of the daughter of Nri after Chukwu had instructed him to kill and bury his first

Fig.3.2: Eastern States of Nigeria: Distribution of Cocoyam.



Source: After Ofomata, Nigeria in Maps: Eastern States p.109.

son and daughter to be able to get food to eat. Cocoyam is thus called the daughter of Nri.⁴⁶

The local specie of cocoyam in Uturu Okigwe, called *Okpeminambe* is believed to be indigenous. Its wild species *ede mumo* are still found in the area.⁴⁷ In Oboro Umuahia, whereas popular legend maintains that the crop is indigenous, some still believe that the specie called *ede aro* was brought into the area by Aro long distance traders prior to the 19th century.⁴⁸ Also in Ishiagu in the Okigwe area, it is asserted that the oldest cocoyam cultivated was the *Colocasia esculenta* (old cocoyam - *akasi* or *ede okporo* in Igbo). Later, another variant of cocoyam was introduced probably through Aro trading influence. Today in Ishiagu, the new species of cocoyam are grown along with the old species and they are progressively becoming more important than the latter, and as well, ranking high among the root and tuber crops.⁴⁹

However, Ezedinma notes that, according to legend, yam and cocoyam (*Colocasia*) were monarch and queen, respectively. They grew together and were the staple food of the people. They were also offered to the gods. Both reigned supreme in Southeastern Nigeria until banana and plantains arrived from distant lands, followed by maize and later by cassava, *Xanthosoma* cocoyam and sweet potato.⁵⁰ The new comers, he argues, were elegant and easier to grow and multiplied many times more than the yam and cocoyam. With time, they even gained acceptance as staple foods, but unlike yam and cocoyam, they have not yet made it to the portals of the gods. This indicate the importance of cocoyam in Igboland as well as the longevity of its domestication in the area.

On the whole, two types of cocoyam are planted in Igboland: the *Colocasia esculenta* called Taro, or Dashen; and, *Xanthosoma sagittifolium* also called Tania, Yautia, Ocumo or the new cocoyam. *Colocasia esculenta* is by far the older and the more popular. In the South Pacific countries, it is the most important common food and it is the staple food of most rain forest dwellers. The colocasia has been in cultivation in West Africa for many centuries,⁵¹ though it may have originated in Tropical Asia probably India or Malaysia. *Xanthosoma* or new cocoyam on the other hand, originated in the Caribbean region. In Ghana, it was introduced by Basel Missionaries and spread thence to Nigeria.⁵² The thrust of this argument is that the two varieties of cocoyam being cultivated in Igboland were introduced from outside. Coursey and Booths, in fact, admit that:

neither taro (*Colocasia esculenta*) nor tania (*Xanthosoma*) is indigenous to Africa, taro having been introduced with the banana, probably 1000 or more years ago, through the well known Southern Arabian route. It was originally domesticated in South East Asia, where it maybe one of man's oldest cultivated plants. Tania on the other hand, is an introduction of the mid 19th century, from tropical America, where it was cultivated and originally domesticated by the Amerindians.⁵³

Colocasia esculenta is said to have moved from Southeast Asia to China and then Japan. It got to the Eastern Mediterranean in classical times and from there passed into Italy and Spain, and subsequently to the New World and to all parts of Africa.⁵⁴ The crop has been grown in Egypt for many centuries so that it may probably be from Egypt that it was introduced in the distant past to West Africa.⁵⁵ Being the first specie of cocoyam to be adopted in Igboland and indeed the entire West Africa, the importance of *Colocasia* could therefore be better understood in the context of the recognition accorded to it in the legend lore and ceremony of many peoples.⁵⁶

Xanthosoma, as we noted earlier, is a tropical American plant. During the era of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, it was taken to Africa where it became known as new cocoyam. Today in West Africa, *Xanthosoma* has become more important than *Colocasia* ranking behind cassava and yams.⁵⁷

There is every likelihood therefore, of an alien introduction of the *Xanthosoma* or new cocoyam into Igboland. As Uzozie observed, their alien origin may be forgotten but they are still entrenched in their native names. For instance, the Igbo call the new cocoyam *Ede Bekee* (Dr. Bakie's cocoyam), a name which suggests introduction by Europeans during or after Dr. Bakie's visit to Igboland in 1854.⁵⁸ He further argues that the spread of cocoyam in the yam belt probably proceeded at a much faster rate than that of plantains as the latter is less tolerant of drought. Cocoyam was very readily integrated into the yam culture. The crop was usually grown on the previous year's yam plot after which the land was allowed to rest for between four and fifteen years.⁵⁹ As its cultivation did not require so much from the farmer in terms of land requirement and care, the crop was willingly accepted.

Nonetheless, cocoyam has remained a subordinate crop in the Igbo food economy. Certainly, a crop that should enjoy a ready market must invariably have multiple uses as food, feed and industrial purposes. Cocoyam does not as yet meet these conditions for a potentially high demand crop.⁶⁰ It did not on its own provide sufficient food even among the primeval population. This has therefore limited its acceptance among the people.

The competition from other crops has not helped cocoyam either. In fact:

the introduction and popularization of cassava, maize and rice led to a rapid decline in acceptability of cocoyam as food. The technical difficulties involved in growing cocoyam especially the post-harvest losses due to rot usually not encountered with maize, rice and cassava, have made the newer crops more attractive than cocoyam.⁶¹

Also, cocoyams are mostly grown by women even in areas where men do most of the agricultural work. This has thus reduced the crop to only a subsidiary position. Onwueme has presented a realistic overview of the state of cocoyam in Nigeria. According to him, the cultivation of cocoyam is characterised by a low total hectare, localization in the Southern humid zone, high labour requirement and yet a casual attitude by the farmers and low yields per hectare. He insists that the utilization of the crop, on the other hand, is characterised by a high incidence of storage rots, availability of the produce in only a few months of the year, lack of variety in the method of its consumption and a low per capita consumption.⁶² In fact, the Igbo farmer merely has a casual relationship with cocoyam. The result is that the crop is casually produced and casually consumed.⁶³

The arguments above notwithstanding, Africa still accounts for well over three quarters of the world production of cocoyam. But most of it are locally consumed.⁶⁴ Though quite popular in Igboland, it is rather unlikely that cocoyam will ever attain the status of a major food crop because it:

suffers very stiff competition from yam, which is preferred for consumption and from cassava which yields more heavily and requires less care. Cocoyams are therefore relegated to the role of an emergency food item - eaten only occasionally when conditions are normal, but attaining increasing importance when the preferred staple has failed or is exhausted. Cocoyams will probably remain in this position for the foreseeable future.⁶⁵

3.3 CASSAVA

The importance of cassava as the main food crop in Igboland is expressed in the popular reference to it as “*Ji akpu gara ogu gara igwe alaghi ala*” (The crop that came to help sustain life and became number one).⁶⁶ In Enugu area it is called “*Mbacha agadamgbo, Obiara igbo ogu buru isi ya*” (cassava which came as a hunger crop but eventually out fought others). Findings of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) show that cassava ranks as the seventh largest food staple in the world. It has been described as the ‘tropical staff of life’, because it is a major source of nourishment in large areas of the tropics. The crop is valued for its outstanding ecological adaptation, low labour requirements, ease of cultivation and high productivity. Also, cassava’s success story can be attributed to the fact that it can be grown successfully on poor soils, under conditions of marginal rainfalls.⁶⁷

Scholars and indeed oral evidence agree that cassava was introduced into Igboland. Domesticated in South or Central America, where it has been cultivated for several years, cassava has not been known to occur wild. Cogley states that the crop was taken to West Africa by the Portuguese in the 16th century, but its spread throughout all the tropical lands has been a relatively recent event and it is only during this century that cassava has achieved its present great importance as a food crop.⁶⁸ The main specie *Manihot esculenta*, may have had two centres of diversity in the New World - Brazil and Mexico. By Onwueme’s account, Brazil remains the world’s largest producer of cassava, producing more than double the amount from any other country. Indonesia, Zaire, Nigeria, Thailand, India, Columbia, Uganda and

Angola, follow in that order. He states that each of these countries has a smaller acreage devoted to cassava and a larger yield per hectare than does Brazil.⁶⁹

The cassava crop is known by several names in different parts of the world. Thus, *cassava* in English-speaking tropical areas, *Mandioca* or *Macacheria* in Brazil, *Manioc* among French-speaking peoples and by other less well known epithets in Indo-Malaya notably *tapioca*.⁷⁰ Jones says that Americans who encountered the crop in Brazil know it as *Mandioca* or *aipim* and may fail to recognise it when referred to by students of Spanish America as *yuca*. To anthropologists, it is likely to be most familiar as *Manioc* while in the English-speaking parts of Africa it is usually called *cassava* or sometimes *cassada* although fifty years ago it was *manioc*. In English-speaking Malaya (Malaysia), Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and India, the crop is called *tapioca*.⁷¹

Cassava did not become a widely established staple in Africa until the 19th and 20th centuries.⁷² Records show that the crop was introduced to Africa by the Portuguese who brought it from Brazil to their stations extending along the African coast from El Mina in present Ghana to Mogadishu in Somalia. Sources say that:

the earliest successful introduction was made in the area around the mouth of the Congo River and it was from here that Manioc spread over all of Central Africa. Manioc was probably brought to the Upper Guinea Coast at the same time it was brought to the Congo, but it became established in native agriculture much more slowly. It was almost certainly introduced to the Portuguese stations in East Africa at a later time than in West.⁷³

Similarly, Coursey and Booth, argue that cassava was first introduced into West Africa via the Gulf of Benin and the Congo River during the second half of the 16th century and secondly into East Africa via the Islands of Reunion, Madagascar and

Zanzibar towards the end of the 18th century.⁷⁴ They also agree that the Portuguese were in the vanguard of the spread of the crop throughout Africa. By and large, cassava by the end of the 19th century was already present at most of the Portuguese forts, trading posts and settlements on the mainland.

It is the view of Murdock, that all the cultivated plants of the new world found in Africa have arrived during the course of the last four and a half centuries.⁷⁵ He also says that the introduction of the Atlantic slave trade led to great exchanges between the areas involved since the ships engaged in the human commerce were naturally provisioned on either side of the Atlantic with goods and foods available there. The stores remaining were traded or even purposely planted on the opposite shore. The similarity in the environmental conditions of tropical Africa and tropical America all the more made it possible for the products from each continent to be readily established on the other. Thus, native African plants are today common in Brazil and the West Indies while American plants early gained footholds on the coasts of Africa.⁷⁶ Plants like tobacco, banana, pine apple, Irish potato, coconuts, cashew, maize, coffee, rubber, and most importantly, the manioc are among the various crops said to have been introduced to Africa from Brazil and the Americas through the aid of Brazilians. So much so that Orlando Ribeiro, writing on the relationship between Brazil and Africa noted that, this relationship was essentially complementary:

for it is true that Africa helped to build Brazil or rather to build America from the Southern states of the U.S.A. to the River Plate, by means of the black slaves she provided; it is also true that the products introduced from America, particularly maize and manioc, alleviated the traditional hunger of the African continent.⁷⁷

However, Africans could not have been dying of hunger prior to the introductions from Brazil, for records show that the continent was not only rich in roots like yam and cocoyam but also took the pumpkin, ginger, banana (early chroniclers in Brazil called it *placoba*) and cows to Brazil. Therefore, it can be asserted that the slave trade between the Brazilian and African coasts generated a process of intercommunication and transculturation between the various African and Luso-Brazilian races.⁷⁸

The diffusion of cassava into West Africa was rather slow; it took place mainly in the 19th and 20th centuries. Carter and others⁷⁹ say that this was principally due to the human geography and political organisation of West African kingdoms. According to them, the humid coastal belt was essentially uninhabited and formed a peripheral zone about inland capitals. With minimal contacts between the coast and the hinterland, the acceptance of the new crop first introduced at the coast by the hinterland population had to take some time. Jones however disagrees. According to him, the spread of cassava in Africa was not inhibited by geography or by the level of African farming skills. Rather, when its adoption was postponed, the reasons are to be sought elsewhere in the difficulties attendant on reducing its toxicity, in the relations between the native people and the Europeans, in the hostility between the ethnic groups, or in the character of competing crops.⁸⁰

Johnston, while admitting that the spread of manioc appears to have been influenced significantly by the spread of knowledge of its processing techniques, also opines that by 1700, the crop had become important in a few areas in Africa, including the Islands of Sao Tome, Principe and Fernando Po and at Owerri.⁸¹ Other

scholars rather argue, that it was the arrival of freed slaves from Brazil to West Africa from the 19th century, who brought with them many practices learnt in the New World, including knowledge of the preparation of cassava products, that actually led to the eventual spread of cassava in West Africa.⁸² Morgan and Pugh, for instance, contend that cassava did not become popular in West Africa until its reintroduction by former slaves from Brazil who also imported the culinary technique necessary for its preparation as a food stuff. Thus, cassava has spread as the knowledge of removing its prussic acid content and making cassava meal has spread.⁸³ In essence the knowledge of proper methods of cassava processing facilitated the process of its adoption.

In Western Nigeria, for instance, the returnee slaves from Brazil, the West Indies and Sierra Leone beginning from the 1850s, were the major catalysts in the acceptance of cassava in the area. Many of them were said to have settled in large numbers among the local people in Lagos, Badagry, Abeokuta and Ijebu, to whom they imparted their knowledge. Similarly in Eastern Nigeria, the knowledge was first introduced into towns along the coast, such as Yenagoa and Calabar, where the consumption of the products was initially well established.⁸⁴ Furthermore, cassava may have been introduced into Northern Nigeria through Central Africa. It is in fact, the view of some of the early travel accounts that:

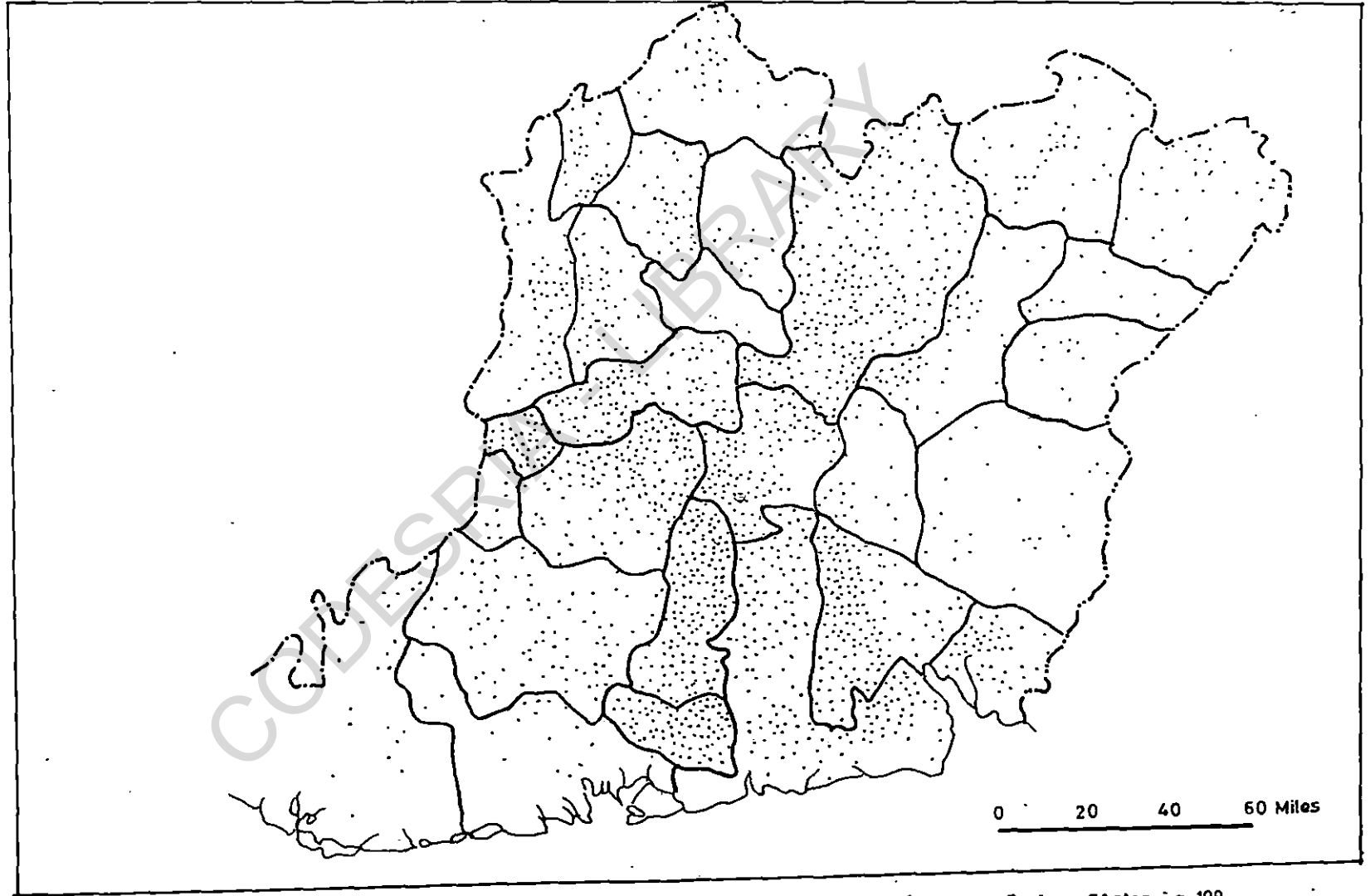
cassava was known in Northern Nigeria in 1850. In 1825, it had not been recorded by early European travellers, suggesting the entrance of cassava to about 1830-1840. It may well be that cassava reached Northern Nigeria via Central Africa, through the migrations of the Fulani, rather than from coastal West Africa. In any case, cassava was unimportant north of the Niger-Benue confluence until after World War I.⁸⁵

All we can say based on the foregoing, is that the history of cassava in Africa dates back to the 17th century. These were the years of Portuguese exploration, which facilitated the trade in slaves. Such contacts eventually led to the exchange of culture, including the borrowing of crops on both sides. Hence, by the end of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century, cassava was already present in different parts of Africa. The subsequent paragraphs will show how the crop came into Igboland, when and from where, the initial challenges which the crop faced, as well as the reasons why the people finally adopted the crop.

CASSAVA IN IGBOLAND

The record of frequent migration in and outside of Igboland, was indeed an important mechanism in the introduction and diffusion of cassava in the area. Going by the records presented above, it is likely that some parts of Igboland may have been cultivating the cassava crop since the 17th century after its introduction at Owerri.⁸⁶ Equally, once it was introduced on the coastal areas of Yenagoa, Warri and Calabar, the crop with time found its way into the Igbo hinterland, via the activities of long distance traders. Available evidence shows that cassava was introduced into Igboland through the coastal regions and via Igala. And in this process, Aro traders, who were particularly prominent in the business of long distance trading in Igboland, were the agents provocateur. Also, there is every indication that this may have happened at

Fig.3.3: Eastern States of Nigeria: Distribution of Cassava



Source: After Ofomata, Nigeria in Maps: Eastern States p. 109

different periods in Igboland between the dawn of the 20th century, the period after the first world war, and in fact up to the 1960s.

A source in Ohafia stated categorically that cassava was introduced in the area first in Akanu Ohafia about three years before the first world war, by one Isong of Calabar who was then Headmaster of Akanu Primary School.⁸⁷ However, the majority seems to agree that it was indeed Aro traders who, in the course of their long distance trading brought cassava to the area. Once introduced, it was also through the efforts of these traders, that many learnt how to prepare it and later adopted it as food. Among the Ngwa in Southern Igboland, cassava was probably introduced into their homeland by Kalabari traders in the last quarter of the 19th century. It spread rapidly with the construction of the Eastern railway which passed through the area in 1913.⁸⁸ In the same vein, Chuku identifies the Igala territory as another source for the introduction of cassava into some areas of Igboland. It is said that the crop came into Aguleri/Otuocha in the Anambra flood plains from there. The first species of cassava that came into the area were *Akpuji* (cassava that looks like yam) and *Ogbanku*, which was peeled and put in the sun to dry, pounded and filtered to produce cassava flour. Oral traditions claim that the women of the area started practising this method of cassava processing from the beginning of the 20th century.⁸⁹

An octogenarian, Okoroji Ine, specifically says that he was already ten years old before cassava reached Uturu Okigwe via the Aro long distance traders. He insists that this was before the women demonstration at Abangwa (Aba Women Riots).⁹⁰ Similarly, the initial specie of cassava introduced in Ohuhu Umuahia, was called *Acham*. Many say it was quite harmful to both human beings and domestic

animals. The crop had entered the area through long distance traders who brought the specimen stems at Abagwu market in Uzuakoli. Sources say the Abagwu market was notorious in the late 19th century as a slave market. Therefore, it is likely that the middlemen who operated between the coast and the interior must have brought it to this market from European explorers and traders of the 19th century.⁹¹ Once adopted in Ohuhu, the knowledge of cassava spread to all the neighbouring communities including Ibeku, especially once they learnt how to ferment it, to get rid of the prussic acid.

Aro traders also brought cassava to Akaeze in Ohaozara, and in fact most of Afikpo.⁹² According to an informant, cassava came from Panya (Fernando Pó); through Calabar and the Ibibio areas, and mainly through Aro traders, to Afikpo. He claimed that the crop originally came from *Potokiri* (Portugal),⁹³ before finding its way into West Africa.

Whereas there is greater consensus on the issue of the source and routes of entry of cassava into Igboland, the question of the timing is rather controversial. What is certain is that the crop registered its presence at different times in Igboland especially in the period between the dawn of the 20th century and the end of the Second World War. For instance, ninety-two year old Onigbo Ibeji says he is older than cassava in Umudike Umuahia. According to him, cassava was brought to his village by one Dee Onuoha, who had taken it from Ubani (Bonny) at about 1910. The crop which the people call *jigbo*, met with initial resistance, before it was adopted.⁹⁴ Another informant testified that he was already married by 1915 when the white man came to Umunze in Idemili and by this time cassava was not known in the

area. He said the crop was introduced in the 1920s as a supplement to yam⁹⁵. Equally, cassava may have been introduced to Isuikwuato Okigwe via Ugwueke and Ezeukwu in Bende. However, it began to make an impact only from 1946, when soldiers returned to the area from the Second World War. The hunger in the area in this period forced people to begin to explore alternative sources of food aside from yam⁹⁶.

An important contribution to the argument over the period during which cassava was introduced into Igboland is that by Ohadike. According to him, this crop made its entry into Igboland towards the end of the second decade of the 20th century. He insists that the shift from yam to cassava was the direct result of British imperial presence on the lower Niger as marked by the punitive expeditions of the first fifteen years of the 20th century, the First World War and the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1919. One effect of these developments, he argued, was the disruption of agricultural activities. Many people were displaced and farmland as well as crops suffered neglect.⁹⁷ What therefore resulted was hunger, which led to the search for viable alternatives.

There is every reason to believe that the Influenza pandemic of 1918-19 seriously affected the socio-economic life of the people. For instance, in Awka Division of Onitsha Province alone, within one year (1918-19) about 10,365 people died from the Influenza.

Table 3.2: Number of Deaths Resulting from the Influenza

Pandemic in Awka Division

COURT AREA	NUMBER OF DEATHS
Achalla	1,478
Agwulu	1,955
Abagana	1,038
Isuofia	2,196
Ajalli	2,093
Awka	1,605
TOTAL	10,365

Source: NAE, AW B5 Influenza Epidemic AWDIST 2/1/38.

To think that 10,365 lives were lost in this division alone, therefore adequately shows the degree of devastation which this influenza wrought in the entire Igboland. Also, it is noteworthy, as the District Officer for Awka Division minuted to the Resident, Onitsha Province, that this epidemic virtually destroyed the entire population. According to him:

the toll has been a heavy one. As far as I can gather, the deaths have occurred chiefly amongst the younger men and women. Also, women in pregnant condition. The elderly people in most cases seem to have recovered. The epidemic has had a very unsettling effect on the native generally simply because, it was something now that he could not understand. The rapidity with which the deaths occurred (practically all in the month of November) made him think they were all going to be wiped out.⁹⁸

Ohadike's argument therefore, is that whereas the cassava crop made its debut in Igboland towards the end of the second decade of the 20th century, the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19, which ravaged the working population in Igboland, made cassava a ready alternative. Moreso, as yam whose cultivation demanded a great deal of manual labour became adversely affected by the consequent mass withdrawal of labour from all sections of the economy. In any case, although the issue of why cassava was accepted in Igboland will be revisited later, it is worthy of note at this stage, even as Ohadike has suggested, that before 1920, cassava had made its debut in different parts of Igboland. This, however, does not implicitly suggest that it was the Influenza Pandemic alone, that led to the adoption of cassava in Igboland.

In the Abakiliki area, available evidence suggest that cassava did not become a major food crop until after the Second World War. An informant even insisted that cassava cultivation did not become rampant in Ikwo area particularly, until after the Nigerian Civil War; even then, it was planted in areas usually considered unsuitable for yam cultivation.⁹⁹ Another source said he was born about the end of the Second World War, a few days before his people knew the cassava crop. The crop, according to him, was constantly brought from Afikpo. But his townsmen rejected it initially because of its odour.¹⁰⁰ Also in nearby Ezzeagu, it was said that cassava first featured in the agricultural economy in the colonial period. However, it was hardly used for ceremonial occasions since it was seen as the food for the less privileged. These claims that cassava was not immediately popular in the Abakiliki area are indeed given credence by an Agricultural Officer, who said that the crop only became widely accepted in the area from the late 1970s. At a point the crop according to

him, was being planted only by non-indigenes.¹⁰¹ Most informants, however, admit that the crop was made popular in the area by officials of the Norwegian Church Agricultural Project (NORCAP), who arrived Ikwo in 1962. They introduced improved methods of agriculture, species of cassava and rice, as well as fertiliser on palm plantation. What is clear from the Abakiliki experience is that cassava arrived rather late to some parts of Igboland. This is understandable considering the fact that Abakiliki people, rank foremost among yam producers in Igboland. In an economy such as this, it was expected that there would be manifest resistance to the introduction of a new crop. Similar experiences were also recorded in places like Ohaji and indeed other major yam producing localities in Igboland.

Yet another issue in the introduction and diffusion of cassava in Igboland, was the resistance which the crop met prior to its adoption as an important food crop. To say that there were complaints, difficulties and bitter controversies over the adoption of the crop, will be to restate the obvious. In fact, the Igbo people initially viewed the crop with scepticism. The people who first accepted to even experiment with the crop, exercised a lot of caution. Against the backdrop that cassava was being introduced into an area where the yam culture had for ages reigned supreme, one would then appreciate, why not a few simply shied away from the crop. So serious was this problem, that even some informants were not willing to compare in economic terms, the place of yam and cassava in their agricultural economy. Many feared that this will amount to sacrilege against the yam god, *Ahianjoku*.

Again, as we noted earlier, to devise a proper method for the preparation of the new crop was also a major challenge. Hence, there were initial losses of life of

both man and animals. And this obviously scared more people away from the crop. In some areas, it even led to the outright banning of cassava, at least for sometime. By this period, the proper method of fermenting the tuber as well as the technique of gari making had not been known. It was believed, in fact, that the first species of cassava introduced into Igboland had a high percentage of hydrocyanic acid, which was harmful to both man and animals. And not a few lost their lives at this early stage. The testimony of Mrs. Oyidiya Uka of Ohafia will suffice. She had gone to Nne Nkwo's house to collect fire to cook on a particular day. There, she noticed that everybody in the house was vomiting to the point of unconsciousness. Hence:

I therefore raised an alarm which attracted other neighbours. Before the first person arrived, all of them had died except Udonsi, their last son. We took him to my house, where he recovered the following morning. People then gathered around him and asked the question: "What did you eat?" "We ate nothing except the cassava we took in the afternoon", he answered.¹⁰²

In the entire Ohafia, similar incidents resulting in the deaths of domestic animals such as sheep, goats, and pigs which ate cassava meal or its chaff were common. So much that men of prestige and high social status refused to adopt the new cassava crop, regarding it as an inferior food beneath the dignity of man. An indication of this inferior status was the crop being left in the hands of women as the main propagators or cultivators.¹⁰³ Dingba Iko, one of the first to adopt cassava in Ohafia, similarly had a bitter experience. Elders of his village accused him of having brought poison to his people. Amidst the heavy sanctions and restrictions imposed, he was forced by the village elders to swear before the various shrines in the villages of Ohafia to prove his innocence.¹⁰⁴ So much was the scare, that even the colonial administration in the area proposed to phase out the inadequate processing technique of the crop and

subsequently sent Sanitary Inspectors to the villages to teach the people the new method of processing cassava.

Also in Owerri District, there were widespread reports particularly in 1939 of food poisoning resulting from the consumption of cassava. A Medical Officer noted that the cases were common between April and August, at which time, he observed, more people ate mostly cassava as yams were just being planted. He identified the people's inadequate method of processing the crop as a likely reason for its toxicity. According to him, the people were ignorant of the fact that cassava contained some form of poison:

The general belief had been that some enemy in the neighbourhood managed to drop poison into their food. Great enmity (poison combat) existed between the families of those suspected to have taken part in this diabolical act and of course the families of the diseased ones are always ready to retaliate. But a close study of the frequency of the occurrence of the cases and the nature of their history and symptom tend to dismiss the idea that the administration of any poison was done by someone.¹⁰⁵

It was even reported that those sent to hospital early recovered while others died after three to four days. From the records, five of the eleven persons admitted to the hospital for cassava poisoning in the District in 1939 died.¹⁰⁶

In spite of all these problems, people still adopted the crop albeit gradually and cautiously. Owing essentially to the acute food shortages occasioned by the First World War and the Influenza Pandemic, highlighted earlier, there seems to have started a gradual reappraisal of the viability of the crop in Igboland. Moreover, the depression of the late 1920s and 1930s equally made the production of more food imperative. In this wise, cassava benefited tremendously. Hopkins has observed, for instance that, where new plants and seeds were adopted, it was not because they

caught the fancy of a primitive people, but because they were seen as useful additions to the existing range of foods, being worth more than the extra cost of producing them or alternatively because, they were regarded as good substitutes, yielding a higher return for the same input than the crops they displaced.¹⁰⁷ This was indeed the case with the adoption of cassava in Igboland.

Against the backdrop of Ohadike's thesis on the introduction and diffusion of cassava in Igboland, which emphasised the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-19 as the primary factor, not a few writers recognised the obvious economic advantage of cassava over and above the yam and indeed many other food crops in the area. Many came to the realisation that the labour requirements of cassava was merely half that of yam. Also, the crop yielded more, even as the entire crop (tuber, stem and leaves) unlike other crops could be put into effective use. Equally, they found out that cassava was less choosy in terms of soil. It in fact grew remarkably on poor soils. Many generally believe that cassava was quickly adopted by the Igbo because of its adaptability to traditional farming and food systems; relative ease of cultivation and processing; year-round availability as insurance against crop failure; low input of resource requirements; and, relatively high yield of food energy (calories) per calorie of labour input.¹⁰⁸ In view of these advantages and the fact that depleted male population could leave cassava to women and children, as the few available men concentrated on yam production and house roofing,¹⁰⁹ it was easy therefore for the population to embrace the new crop.

A new phase was opened in the diffusion of cassava in Igboland with the introduction of new methods of processing the crop beginning from the 1920s. For

instance, once a more efficient technique of cassava processing was introduced in parts of Ohafia, by a woman (Orie Kalu) who had copied it while staying in Bonny with her husband, very many people adopted the crop. It was actually the introduction of gari processing machines that revolutionised cassava cultivation in Igboland. This was particularly the case in Amiyi-Obilohia in Isuikwuato Okigwe, where the people initially prepared cassava by mixing it with cocoyam or unripe banana. By this time, fufu was prepared in a very rough way. Later, the people learnt how to sift fermented cassava as well as gari making. Gari making, was not very popular until the machines were introduced into the villages of Isuikwuato.¹¹⁰ Also, whereas the knowledge of gari making came about 1910 to Aguleri/Otuocho in the Anambra flood plains from Benin,¹¹¹ it was not until about 1928, that the system was adopted in Orlu.¹¹²

Arguably, the early recognition of the cassava food (gari) as the food of the urban masses and as a profitable crop to grow removed the cultural barriers to its acceptance. Similarly, the movement of population between the coast and the interior and improvement in communications also helped the spread of the crop inland.¹¹³ In fact, the establishment of railway stations led to the growth of urban centres which required a lot of food stuffs, and gari was found to be very effective in this regard. Although cassava could be found throughout Aba and Bende Districts by 1928, Martin states that its importance grew slowly in the 1920s. It was still a minor crop, planted on yam farms during or after the yam season itself. With the introduction of gari grating machines however, a full blown trade started between Ngwaland and the

neighbouring towns of Aba and Umuahia. So lucrative was this trade that by the eve of the Second World War even men were actively involved in it.¹¹⁴

The spread of cassava production received a major boost in Igboland as soon as the colonial government, mainly to encourage the war effort and to meet local demand for food stuffs, began to advocate an increase in the cultivation of the crop. To this end, in 1940, it initiated the "Plant More Cassava this year Campaign"¹¹⁵. According to an instruction from the Agricultural Officer to the District Officers in Owerri Province, the campaign was to be given the widest publicity as early as possible by whatever means. Personal explanation through local authorities was recommended. This was to be done by circulating the leaflet or an Igbo translation to local authorities and native courts or posting an Igbo translation in public places, like markets.¹¹⁶ The campaign stressed the need for local supplies, while emphasising the peculiar advantages of cassava over yam and cocoyams. Equally, the campaign was principally addressed to women since cassava was adjudged to be a woman's crop. The argument was that, since women were responsible for feeding the family all-year-round, the onus was on them to ensure that there was no hunger. To this end, the Health Department commenced a programme of sending trainees to the National Root Crop Research Institute (NRCRI) established at Umudike Umuahia in 1923, to learn modern techniques of cassava propagation and processing.

The result was tremendous. As the District Officer for Okigwe noted in his Annual Report for 1941, the "Plant More Cassava Campaign" resulted in a great increase in cassava planting. He observed that in many areas where the soil had become so impoverished by exhaustive cropping, good yam crops could no longer

be grown, cassava simply became the chief alternative.¹¹⁷ By 1942, he was confident enough to assert that because of their unrelenting effort in the campaign, there was an increase in cultivation and the District could then boast of an adequate area under cassava cultivation. The problems arising from the Second World War made the acceptance of cassava imperative. Hence, throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s many more people took to cassava cultivation.

The Agricultural Officer for the Eastern Region attributed this rise in the importance of cassava to the popularity of gari and fermented cassava, low cost of production and absence of storage problems, all of which encouraged more farmers to take to the cultivation of this crop. From his calculations, cassava grating machines in use in the region increased from 304 in 1962/63 to 381 in 1963/64.¹¹⁸ Similarly, numerous bags of gari were being sold in and outside the region. Demand from the Northern Region was high, and this was being met via the railway. At a point the gari trade became a booming business for many who joined the trade.

Following this development, cassava gradually started to challenge the domineering position of yam as the major food crop of the Igbo. So much that by the 1950s-1960s, it had become the main food crop in Ngwa district, though yams, cocoyams and maize were still important.¹¹⁹ An informant in Ngwa, warned: "*Onye adighi ima akpu aguru egbue ya*". (He who refuses to plant cassava would certainly die of hunger).¹²⁰ Although the crop made a late arrival in Abakiliki area, the situation was the same. In the same vein, what took place in Ohafia is better described as a revolution. Here, cassava simply became the most important crop. It was also integrated into the farming and dietary habits of the people, to the extent

that some people began to see it as one of the indigenous food crops of the area.¹²¹ In Ohaji, the displacement of yam in an economy which tended to be monocultural is accepted to be the first victory of cassava. This sudden change had major consequences on the socio-economic life of the people. For the women in particular, it brought liberation. It was a ready solution to their numerous economic problems, an end to the dominance of yam economy, which had kept them hostage to their husbands' purse. With cassava, the picture changed from an economy dominated and controlled by men to that in which women were more active. More importantly, cassava in Ohaji became the hope of survival for widows, although it led to the commercialisation of the peoples' land and the introduction of stranger elements to the community.¹²²

In sum, any discussion on the evolutionary trends of food crops particularly yam, cocoyam and cassava in Igboland, must take into account the entire socio-economic history of the people. For whereas some of these crops like yam and some species of cocoyam and indeed several other crops like the palm tree and breadfruit are believed to be indigenous, having been in the area for so long that no recorded or oral histories could contest this, a wide range of others including cassava and some species of the yam and cocoyam crop were introduced, especially since the voyages of discovery from the New World, via the Portuguese explorers. Some of these crops now form part and parcel of the people's cultural values. Again, it has to be noted that the introduction of new crops or species of crops was not in any way a one way process. It was a mutual process in which both Africa and the New World benefited. More importantly, that any crop was adopted was not because of a single factor, but

for a variety of reasons, which are closely linked with the people's socio-economic and cultural life. Some of these reasons particularly those dealing with the people's culture will form the subject of the next chapter.

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CHAPTER FOUR

TITLES, FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES: AN ASPECT OF IGBO FOOD CULTURE

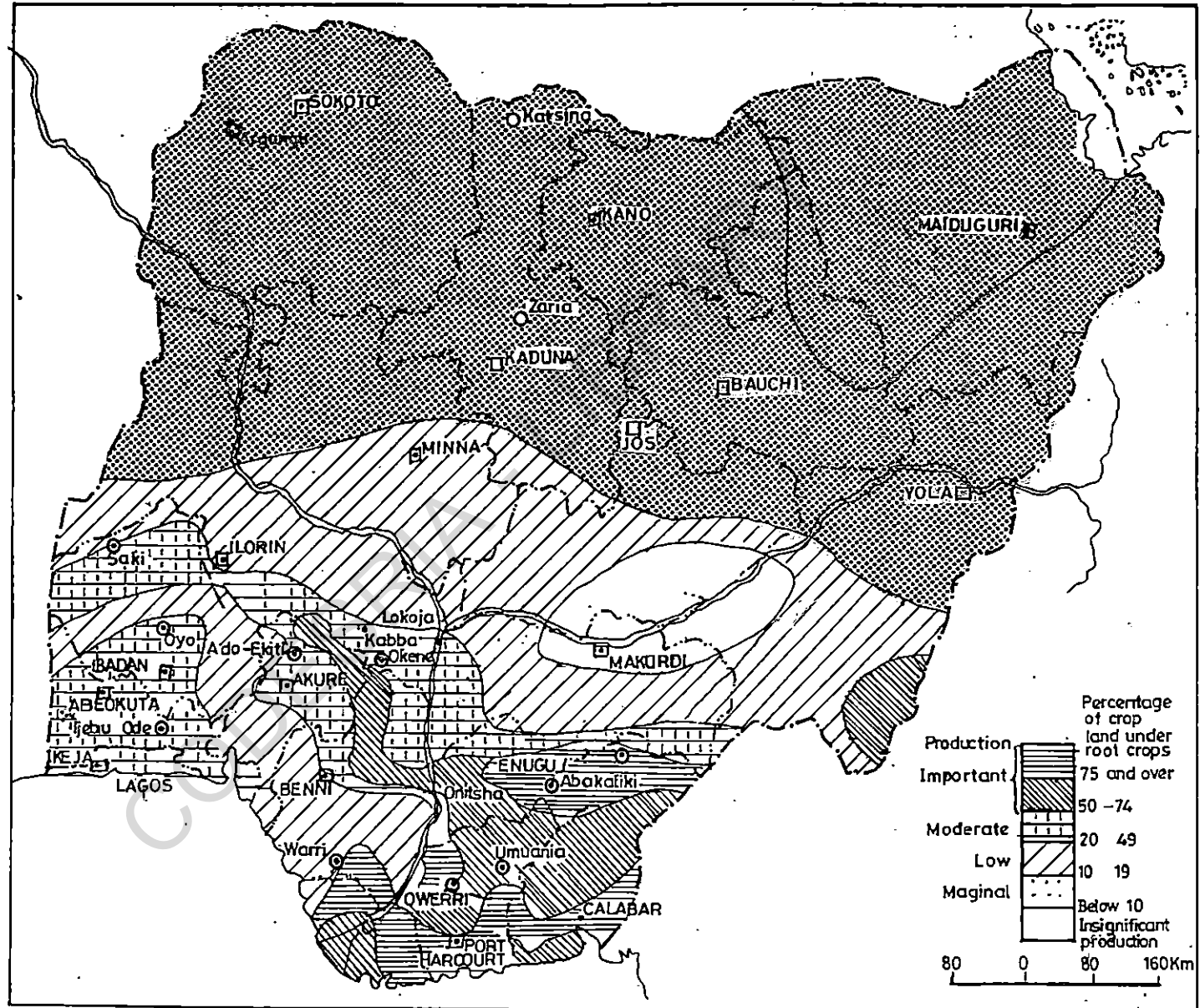
Titles, festivals and ceremonies form a significant aspect of the Igbo food culture. Many in fact, see them as the hallmark of the Igbo food economy. There is evidence to show that by the end of first millenium A.D or perhaps the beginning of the second, a social institution which indicated considerable measure of concentration of some authority and an attendant concentration of wealth, had been institutionalised in Igboland.¹ This was an important aspect of the people's prehistory. More importantly, it is obvious that man from the earliest times had always sought to express his awareness of a transcendental being outside himself.² Thus the individual who had power was the man of wealth, who at any point sought an opportunity to give thanks to the supreme being for his benefits.

There was need, for instance, to give thanks to the earth goddess as well as the ancestors of the people for boosting agricultural yields. This was also an opportunity to appeal to the ancestors and the gods for strength, good health, peace and prosperity in all endeavours.³ It was natural therefore that these events be held in high esteem by the people. The fact that yam and cocoyam had for long been cultivated in Igboland even made such festivals necessary. Lewicki opines that far back in the 14th century, yam was cultivated in the fields of West Africa and that its cultivation was associated with legal customs, possibly based on religious foundations.⁴ It is against this background that many now argue that Igbo successes in modern trade, industry, commerce, ethos of work and adaptability are rooted in their early food culture based on yam.⁵

Such a rich culture not only guaranteed the people economic success, but their security too. Hence, the Igbo, as if to show the importance of the yam crop, hold that “**ji buno**” (yam builds a home, a community and a town). Yam is money, it is wealth, it is also food.⁶ The Igbo food culture, therefore, may not be divested from the people’s economic life. The fact that some of these crops have been ritualised show how important they are to the general well-being of the people.

Arising from the previous chapter, which dealt with the evolution of yam, cocoyam and cassava in Igboland, the present one concentrates on the socio-cultural aspects of these crops in the area. It hopes to use titles, festivals and ceremonies to show the importance of food crops (especially yam and cocoyam) and the role they have played in the people’s economic life. However, we must note the fact that culture evolves over time. That no one can lay claim to the beginning of these cultural institutions in Igboland is enough evidence of the antiquity of yam and cocoyam in the area. Little wonder, the influence of these institutions on the Igbo has become a subject of debate among economic historians. The chapter hopes to discuss the place of these cultural institutions in the overall economic life of the Igbo. It will be largely a descriptive chapter although from the historical perspective emphasising the issue of continuity and change in these institutions in the period covered by the study.

Fig. 4.1: Nigeria: Patterns of Roots Crop Cultivation.



Source: After S. A. Agboola, *Agricultural Atlas of Nigeria*, London: Oxford University Press, 1979, p. 54

4.1 TITLES

It has been said that the precolonial Igbo society was largely open and competitive. Thus the socio-political organisation was basically gerontocratic in so far as age attracted respect, and leadership came from the elders. But, this respect did not amount to servitude, for every free born adult citizen, had and could exercise the right to take part in the political and judicial processes in his community.⁷ What this meant was that it was possible for an individual to distinguish himself in his community through an outstanding military or other heroic service, the possession of remarkable intelligence, combined with persuasive oratory and the accumulation of material wealth.⁸ Therefore, although age was respected, achievement was revered. Consequently, the Igbo from the earliest times could be said to have had a nobility not necessarily of heredity and ascription, but of achievement and merit, which was won through solid personal achievements. Thus, a successful man would, as it were, register and legitimise his success by a title.⁹ This was an important aspect of the people's culture.

Nevertheless, the accumulation of material wealth depended on one's skill in agriculture which incidentally was the primary occupation. Accordingly, a successful farmer celebrated his achievement through the acquisition of titles, which indicated wealth and nobility. But, the range of titles and conditions for admission varied from one community to another. It has to be noted though, that persons who achieved the highest titles did so after saving for a long time and often at great personal sacrifice.¹⁰ This may be the reason for the enormous prestige that usually went with these titles. In fact, Njoku has observed, that title and secret societies were elite clubs of the 'haves' from which the 'have-nots'

were excluded; hence, a means of institutionalising elitism.¹¹ However, it is debatable whether the benefits accruing from these titles could ever equate the squandermania, the opulence and the risk that were usually associated with them.

Although titles like, *Ezeji*, *Nji oke*, or *Di ji* (yam king) and *Lolo ede* (cocoyam queen) were principally related to success in agricultural produce, particularly yam and cocoyam (no titles yet exist for cassava, may be due to its late arrival in Igboland), hardly does there exist any title in Igbo traditional society that was conferred without a link to success in agricultural pursuits. This was so, given the fact that the Igbo from the precolonial times had depended on agriculture for their livelihood. Hence, proceeds from these crops were used either as a qualification for titles or for entertainment during title-taking ceremonies. It is germane particularly in the light of the foregoing for us to review the various titles in Igboland, especially those that had to do with yam and cocoyam in the period covered by this study, as well as their relevance to the people's economic life generally.

According to Basden, the controlling factors in title-taking generally were birthright and money, particularly the latter, for titles must be paid for. They were not free gifts bestowed as honours for service rendered to the community.¹² They were secured by payment of fees to the community or to an organisation of existing title holders and by performance of stipulated rites.¹³ These titles date back to the remote past. In fact, Olauda Equiano confirmed that his own father was:

One of those elders or chiefs stilled *Embrenche*; a term, as I remember importing the highest distinction and signifying in our language, a mark of grandeur. Those *Embrenche*, decided disputes and punished crimes; for which purpose they always assembled together.¹⁴

For clarity purposes, we shall further divide the discussion into three. The first part will concentrate on titles dealing exclusively with yam (Ezeji, Di ji and Nji oke); the second will consider titles that, though do not deal entirely with yam, all the same relate to considerable wealth acquisition, and ipso facto, had a lot to do with yam which was the mainstay of all agricultural efforts (Omume, Ozo and Ogbuzulu); while the final part will examine the titles associated with women.

4.1(i) THE YAM KING (EZEJI, DIJI, NJI OKE)

As the name implies, the **Ezeji** title is centred around the yam crop. Essentially a male title, it cuts across the entire Igboland. To be initiated into the yam title, according to Uchendu, the aspirant required a long period of indoctrination, resocialisation and motivation by the lineage elders. The aspirant was not only expected to work hard on the farm, but needed the labour of a large network of relatives with his extended family showing leadership dedication and devotion.¹⁵ This underscores the elevated status which holders of the title enjoyed in Igboland.

Among the Ngwa of Southern Igboland, to qualify for the **Ezeji** title, a man needed to pay a sum of money to the existing title holders, after it had been ascertained that he had the required quantity and quality of yams (about 100 stakes). Then, he proceeded to feed the entire village at a feast where numerous cows and goats were slaughtered and immense quantities of yams consumed. The ceremony lasted between four and five days with continuous singing and dancing. Also, during the celebration gifts of yams were distributed among the people.¹⁶ It was expected that an aspirant should have at least one hundred stakes of the approved yam type to take the first title.

Because the titles were in hierarchical order, the successful farmer who could boast of up to 400 stakes was qualified to take the highest yam title.¹⁷

However, the qualification for this title in Ngwaland has been lowered over the years perhaps due to the increasing difficulty in yam cultivation, which led to poor returns. An Ezeji title holder, Ohamu, said that since the post-colonial period, one needed from twenty stakes and above to acquire the title,¹⁸ based on the recommendation and sponsorship of another title holder. He also distinguished between the Ezeji title at the village level and the pan-Ngwa (Oha Ngwa title). In either case, on the day of the ceremony, the title holders as well as the entire village were sumptuously fed with yam food. Also, while the title holders took yams home from the aspirant's barn, they gave him gifts in return. On the whole, the ceremonies accompanying the taking of titles, illustrated the communistic tendencies of the ancient Ngwa society and the absolute dependence of an individual on the favour of the community. The mere possession of money meant little to the Ngwa, but a man who was capable of scattering largesse with careless liberality was one who commanded the respect of all.¹⁹

In Mbaise, also in Southern Igboland, an aspirant to the Ezeji title must be an acclaimed yam farmer. Equally, the title was open to all free born. During the title-taking ceremony, which usually lasted two days, only pounded yam was served. Also, the *Nkwaji* (special yam dance) was held. In the past none of the yams used for the ceremony was bought or borrowed. Before the title was conferred on the aspirant, sacrifices were made to *Ala* (the earth goddess) in gratitude for a successful farming season, since the yams were planted on the earth owned by *Ala*.²⁰ An informant claimed that to be admitted to the *Ezeji* title in Mbaise, the aspirant must have at least one

hundred stakes (Irileri) of yam in his barn.²¹ He then invited the title holders to a feast where he made known his intention to join their title association. The title holders followed with four routine inspections of his barn. The aim was to confirm whether he actually had the means or he borrowed the yams to acquire the title. Once they were satisfied, the barn was locked, pending the day of the title taking ceremony. On that day, the entire community was invited to the ceremony, at the end of which all title holders took home at least one tuber of yam each. A goat was slaughtered at the ceremony and everybody was feasted to the yam meal. Also, traditional dancers were invited (Nde nkwa ji). At the end, the last initiate formally admitted the aspirant to the fold by presenting him with a shirt, wrapper and towel which were his insignia of office. At the end of this, people danced to the market square with the head of the *Ezeji* title holders leading the trail. At the market place, the new member moved round to greet everybody present while a special tune “*elewe eze, elewe eze n’oba*” was played for him.

To take the *Ezeji* title in Ibeku Umuahia also in Southern Igboland in the pre-colonial times, not only was an aspirant expected to have a specified quantity of yams, he also presented two slaves, a male called *Njoku* and a female, *Nguma*. The two slaves carried the items needed for sacrifice (avo aja), which included a fowl, kaolin (nzu) and several other smaller items. All these were taken to the barn, where a yam priest conducted a sacrifice. A cow was however slaughtered to entertain the people who attended the ceremony. Significantly, the new member used the opportunity to compensate those who had provided voluntary labour on his farm by giving them yam presents.²²

The above is indeed given credence by scholars of Igbo history and culture. In fact, Afigbo admits that the *Ezeji* title was open only to such freeborn Igbo as were successful farmers, planted the specified type of yams and could boast of at least a certain quantity of yams (usually counted in units of 400-nnu). Each new entrant, he writes, would feed the members of the society for a fixed number of days with yams from his own barn and pay the prescribed fees.²³ In the Isuochi area of Okigwe in Northeastern Igboland, for example, the villages of Umuelem, Ihie, Ndiawa, Umudim, Ngodo, Achara and Umaku have land fertile enough for yam cultivation. This has made it possible for a lot of indigenes from these villages to take the yam title.

Similarly, to acquire the *Ezeji* title required that the individual put in enough time and energy. Since title taking is rather expensive in Igboland, no one is compelled to take one. For this reason, people who took title needed to be fully prepared, because, not only will they invite the entire community, all types of food and particularly yam was served in sufficient quantities. Also, traditional dances like, *Nkelebe*, *Abigbo*, and *Okombo* were invited, while at least seven cannon shots were released.²⁴

Nonetheless, it seems obvious that the desire to acquire the yam title was primary and came far above the need to feed the family or to accumulate wealth. Generally, men tended to place much greater premium on amassing a large amount of yams in their barns for social and prestige reasons, than on using them for the more realistic purpose of feeding their family. A man who had a large number of yams was considered ripe to buy the yam title *diji*. This meant that even when a man had enough yams to adequately feed his family, the *diji* title consideration could induce him to be illiberal in disbursing the yams to meet family requirements - a veritable symbol of manly achievement in those

days.²⁵ Therefore, whereas the man went out of his way to accumulate yams to enable him take this title, which was a sure way to raise his social status in the community, the economic consequences of such a decision at that point in time may rather seem immaterial.

In most of Abakiliki in Northeastern Igboland, the yam title is called **Nji oke** or *Ji oke*. For the Ikwo, because the title was quite expensive it was expected that a son would play a major role to enable his father take it first. The anticipation was that by so-doing, the gods will bless his farm in the coming seasons. In fact, no matter the level of one's wealth in Ikwo, a man was not regarded as complete until he had taken the yam title.²⁶ The title-taking ceremony usually involved neighbouring villages. Each group that attended took home a goat, food, drink and baskets of yam, while the title holders determined the quantity of yams they took home. The title could be taken more than once, since this will influence the level of the individual's right at related ceremonies. Indeed, a popular belief among the Ikwo is that **Nji oke** is a spirit. Hence, once an individual was ripe to take the title, he could not avoid it, otherwise it could bring disaster. In fact, some informants said that it could lead to the death of those who had earlier taken the title.²⁷

A great display of wealth was shown in a man's bid to acquire the **Nji oke** title. In some cases the aspirant led the title holders to his barn. There it was expected that he would spread his hands, and they took away as many yams that fell within that range.²⁸ Also, for one week, the aspirant was expected to feed the entire community. The Ikwo people, saw this as a show of economic power. In some reckless display of wealth, an aspirant may even open his barn for goats and other domestic animals to come and feed,

an action known in local parlance as “*Eghu taba ji*” (“let the goats eat yam”).²⁹ Such rare show offs, have largely diminished according to an Agricultural Officer in Enugu,³⁰ more so, given the fact that many people particularly in the post colonial period, now had to buy yams to enable them take the title. Also, in the past, guests to the title-taking ceremony compulsorily took home four tubers of yams while the title holders took up to twelve. Equally, such standards have been lowered, owing to the harsh economic realities that characterise the post colonial period.

In areas where yam production was concentrated very serious attention was paid to the yam titles than in other areas. An example is Ohaji in central Igboland, where yam is the dominant crop. An informant stated that in Awarra Ohaji, four main titles exist. All of them were taken in succession and were attached to the yam crop.³¹ There was, first, the *Ikpara* title, which was acquired for a son by a father. Obviously, he had to be rich enough to do this. Once he was ready, he paid to the title holders the required fee which was six pounds (£6) in the 1960s and up till the 1970s. Next, he feasted the people lavishly on yams and palm wine. Having acquired this title, the man was then qualified at death to be buried by the *Okoroha* masquerade. On the other hand, if a man died without taking the title, he was treated with scorn and disdain.

The second title was the *Ikowa isi*, which was strictly for people who had taken the *Ikpara*. This title was usually conferred on *Eke Ukwu* market day. Also the aspirant was expected to feed the village lavishly. On the day of the ceremony, he was given a white cloth and an eagle feather. He moved round the various shrines to pay homage, followed by his sons who carried matchets and his daughters who carried gong. This

signified a higher status in the community. He could now partake in decision making. The *Ikowa isi* title involved half of the nine villages in Awarra.

The next major title was the *Nze* (Onum onuoha). The title involved all the nine villages in the community. When one acquired this title, joined the ruling class of the community. The highest title was the *Iru Eze* (Eze Oba). As part of the ceremony, the aspirant fed the nine villages for nine successive market days. He also received presents in return from friends and well-wishers who attended the ceremony. He was enjoined to abide by the rules and regulations guiding the title.

It has been pointed out that the possession of numerous descendants and yam barns alone, did not qualify a man, as being wealthy. In fact, a man could only crown his wealth by taking a title. This was necessary because, if he died before taking one, he was as a consequence, seen as a disgrace to his age grade, his lineage and the village group.³² Ottenberg has given the example of a prosperous Afikpo trader, who, by 1952, had built himself a concrete blockhouse with a tin roof and filled it with carpentered furniture and the rare luxury of a gramophone. In spite of all these, he was still not highly esteemed by his neighbours, because he had not taken a title.³³

Whereas in many parts of Igboland, specific titles existed for the acclaimed yam farmer in others there were none. In parts of Ihittenansa Orlu, for instance, someone was merely recognised as *Di ji*, if he had a substantial number of yam tubers without any ceremony associated with the title.³⁴ According to an informant, people only decided to call themselves *di ji*, to show that their yams were successful in a particular year. This he attributed to the fact that the topography of his community, Isunjaba, did not allow for

serious cultivation to take place, at least not enough to compare with many other parts of Igboland, where the yam title was popular.³⁵

4.1(ii) THE OMUME, OZO AND OGBUZULU TITLES

These titles were associated with men of wealth in the society. Since yam was the principal agricultural product, hence a major source of livelihood and wealth, the accumulation of wealth through yam production became an important factor in the acquisition of these titles.

In Afikpo, Northeastern Igboland, the *Omume* title was popular and indeed greatly revered. Associated with success in agriculture, the title was however, exclusively the right of the freeborn. No doubt, success in farming which here meant yam production was a pre-requisite though not the sole criterion for the title. To show the high esteem which yam was accorded in *Omume* title-taking, a special yam called *Ezeji* (king of yams) was reverently exhibited during the celebration at the final solemnization called *Iga Ogo*, to show the man's affluence.³⁶ An *Omume* aspirant, it was said, will need more than just two barns of yams for the successful completion of the ceremony. This was at a time (pre-colonial period) when possession of more than one barnful was viewed with awe. The reason for such excess was that from the commencement of the ceremony in May till the end in November or early December, the celebrant was expected to feed all the villages of Afikpo with pounded yam.³⁷

Taking into consideration the fact that by May most yams would have been planted, it could then be seen that the title ceremony was quite tasking in terms of resource. Aside from other requirements, the aspirant was expected to feast *Nde eze*

mmemme (Omume title holders) on every Orie and Nkwo market days (two of the eight day market cycle) all through the duration of the ceremony. This feast consisted of three large basins of pounded yam (*utara mmemme*) and the ceremonial soup called *Ohe sarara* (Pepper soup) with plenty of dried fish. Other Afikpo indigenes were also feasted on Aho and Eke market days. Such was the importance of the *Omume* title to the Afikpo that it was said that:

to achieve that sacredness, that uniqueness, that elusive immortality, a right to be the custodian of the people's cultural values, the aspirant must be physically, economically, spiritually and morally above the ordinary man, his lineage impeccable, his character unquestionable. The criteria are stiff, the cost staggering, but the bequeaths are commensurate to both.³⁸

It was after taking this title and a series of others before it including, *Utara ulote, Utara ebia, Ewu anohia, Ugwu ezi, Ikwo eka ezi, Uhiechi, Ikwa ozu, Igbu iyaya*, that one qualified to take the most dignifying title called *Omezue* (the complete achiever).

It should be noted that, in spite of the obvious costs required for the taking of these titles, the average Afikpo man, nay the Igbo, still considered them an important aspect of their social life. Basden, in fact, argues that pride was one of the outstanding traits of the Igbo, indeed, in some cases, there were obvious signs of a superiority complex. This was expressed by men in their striving for titular rank and their arrogance when they had attained it.³⁹ In the case of the *Omume* title in Afikpo, it was seen as the essence of manhood and affluence. LeVine points out that the overall picture which emerges of the traditional Igbo status system is not only of an open system in which any freeman could attain high social status but of one that placed a premium on occupational skill, enterprise and initiative. The man more likely to rise socially was the one who was sufficiently self-motivated to work hard, and cleverly marshalled available resources in

the cause of increasing his wealth. He must have had social skills, but these involved manipulating others to allow him use of their resources without becoming bound in subservience to men.⁴⁰

Ozo title was similarly revered by the Igbo. It was the climax of individual wealth and power. Considering that in the pre-colonial period agriculture, especially wealth from farming, contributed over eighty per cent of an individual's wealth, then role of the yam crop in the acquisition of this title may not be over-emphasised. For instance, in Adazi-Nnukwu, Northeastern Igboland, the *Mgbasa ji* ceremony was an important aspect of the process towards acquiring the *Ozo* title. During the ceremony, the aspirant to the title, was required to line up the different species of yam in his barn according to their sizes for inspection by the title holders. Once they were satisfied, the title men took the yams to show that they had accepted the man's application. Of course, *Mgbasa ji* could not have existed in a society that did not produce yam in great abundance.⁴¹

Three important stages must be completed before one took *Ozo* title in Ngwo, Northeastern Igboland. First, an aspirant approached the title holders in his village, who were invited to his house. There, he presented them with a cow. They could even demand for two, if they were convinced he could afford it. However, once this was accepted, it was assumed that he had become an *Ama* titled man. On a second invitation, he gave them two cows. And on a third and final invitation, they came with their staff and another cow was slaughtered and sacrificed as both food and drinks were served ostensibly to commemorate the title-taking ceremony.⁴² Among the Ezza, also of Northeastern Igboland in pre-colonial times, a candidate for the *Ozo* title was required to have plenty of yams. Hence, such candidates were known to be great yam farmers. The

ceremony lasted eight days, and within this period everybody was allowed to feed from the candidate's racks which remained open to people and goats alike. Also, the candidate presented a total of twenty cows, goats and countless number of yams which only those who had taken the title shared. The title was so expensive that membership was very few.⁴³ Obviously respected, the *Ozo* title in pre-colonial Igboland only went to men of unquestionable character, widely known for their high degree of morality, versed in the customs and traditions of the land, affluent and polygamous.⁴⁴

Among the Nkanu of Northeastern Igboland, there exist three titles associated with yam. These are *Di ji*, *Ula* and *Ogbuzulu*, the highest title.⁴⁵ *Ogbuzulu*, according to an informant, was someone who was so wealthy in agricultural production that he had offered sacrifices to all institutions in terms of accepted values and practices. Such a man would kill goats, cows or horses, to farming groups, *Ozo* title holders and his *chi* (personal god). It was only a rich farmer that could probably meet these rigorous demands. Beginning from the colonial period, however, the wealth and ostentation associated with this title was reduced, due to the fact that it came to be associated with all kinds of negative appellations, especially on the part of the colonial masters who interpreted the title *Ogbuzulu*, literally to mean "one who had killed all types". All the same, we must restate the fact that in a society where such titles ranked high in the people's social life, individuals no doubt strove to acquire material wealth considered a prerequisite for these titles. Thus, even in conditions of geographical disadvantage, the urge to become rich was uppermost in the minds of these farmers who obviously desired these titles.

It has been argued that certain cultural factors have tended to encourage the growing of yams even in areas ecologically unsuitable for the crop. Prestige and title-taking for instance rank high among such factors. Hence, whereas the number of yam sticks was a measure of a man's social status, the desire to gain prestige or title was a powerful incentive for increasing the output of the crop not only for the immediate family but for the community as a whole.⁴⁶ What this meant was that even in areas of ecological disadvantage, the desire to take titles encouraged the farmer to go into large scale cultivation, more so, given the fact that the main objective for these titles was to enhance the man's social status in his immediate environment. Nevertheless, the respect given to the wealthy, *Aka ji aku*, had a more philosophical foundation than mere mundane considerations. In traditional Igbo philosophy:

material accumulation was believed to imply salvation; poverty damnation. Wealth enhanced and ennobled life, while poverty exposed the afflicted to temptations and indignities. Also, ability to accumulate wealth was deemed to demand sterling qualities such as drive, resourcefulness and shrewdness. It also implied that the affluent had equilibrated his relationship with the deities who bestowed wealth.⁴⁷

Therefore, anybody who had been so blessed was naturally expected to take a title. That way, he will not only be legitimizing his status, but also expressing his gratitude to his **chi** for such bounteous harvests.

4.1(iii) FEMALE TITLES

As in the case of the male, title-taking in Igboland was also associated with the women. This was the case especially in areas where cocoyam cultivation was popular. A celebrated cocoyam farmer was given the title *Lolo ede*. This title was given to an

accomplished woman who must be able to produce the required number and types of cocoyam.

Among the Ngwa of Southern Igboland, the cocoyam title went to the woman who was able to cultivate several heaps of cocoyam (Otutu mkpa). Such a person would have to feed the people and also thank the gods for the bountiful harvest. The cocoyam title was taken in two stages, usually determined by the heaps of cocoyam owned by the applicant. If the woman's harvest was up to fifteen heaps, she was qualified for the first stage of the title. But as soon as she was able to cultivate up to thirty heaps, then she had qualified for the second and final title. The cocoyam title was conferred in the second month of the year during the dry season.⁴⁸ The aspirant was expected to feed the people sumptuously with yam and cocoyam *fufu*, as well as assorted drinks. The process of taking this title actually commenced with the aspirant inviting her sponsor (a holder of the title) to come and inspect her harvest. Here, she made known her intention to take the cocoyam title. She fed her guest and gave her gifts. Next, she invited the title holders to inform them of her intention. During the visit she was expected to provide them with a goat, fowl, money, and dried fish. On the eve of the ceremony, she invited the group again and fed them. At the ceremony proper, people were feasted while the inspection of her cocoyam barn followed, to determine whether it was for the first stage called *Otuaka* or the final stage, *Ririlari*.

A week after taking the title, she performed her outing - an occasion which took her to the market square. This was after she must have visited the Ngwa deity at Okpuala Ngwa to pay obeisance. Then she took samples of her cocoyam to the market, where she received presents in return from friends and well wishers. Remarkably, the cocoyam title

could be taken up to four times by an individual in Ngwaland. The occasion entailed feasting and dancing, to very entertaining songs. Such songs as the one presented below, obviously revealed the joy and the excitement of celebrant:

Eze murum m-oo (I am born by a king)
Eze alu o m m-oo (I am married to a king)
Abalam n'ulo aku (I have entered the house of wealth)
M gakwa ite n'ura ngwa? (Can I again wake early from sleep?)⁴⁹

The fact that the owner of such a title will no longer wake up early from sleep as the song suggests, truly shows her new status, having joined the club of the affluent in her community.

In Awgu, Northern Igboland, taking the cocoyam title is referred to as *Ime ogo*. A woman could only do this when she was certain that she had produced enough to entertain the entire village. During the title-taking ceremony, the initiate was expected to fill a basket with cocoyam for every woman in the village, this was also accompanied with some money. To be able to take this title before the first two child births was indeed a rare accomplishment for a woman. Thus it was said that, “**O mere ogo n’agbogho**” (“She took the cocoyam title as a young lady”).⁵⁰

Among the Mbaise, taking the cocoyam title is called *Ikwa ede*. In the pre-colonial times, an aspirant was restricted to her cocoyam barn (Mkpuke ede) for eight days before the ceremony. During the period, gifts of cocoyam were freely distributed by the aspirant. On the day of the title-taking, she carried a basket of cocoyam, hoe and other farm implements and danced round the market square with her friends. This display actually preceded the formal conferment.⁵¹ However, it has been shown in a recent study that whereas members of the *Ezeji* could be counted in Ahiara-Mbaise, for instance, the *Lolo ede* title has completely fizzled out from the socio-political institutions of the

people, showing that the cultivation of cocoyam was no more highly regarded in Abiara today.⁵² However, it still has to be noted that up to the 1960s the *Lolo ede* title formed part of the socio-cultural institutions of the Mbaise people. As the pace of urbanisation increased, putting pressure on the land, which led to reduced output, some people began to change their farming habits, while others went to more rewarding occupations. It should be expected, therefore, that such a change would negatively influenced agricultural production.

Furthermore, in parts of Owerri, Southern Igboland, particularly in the Ulakwo area, the nature of the soil has determined the minimal emphasis on yam and cocoyam. Here, cassava is the dominant crop and since no titles yet exist for the cassava crop. It is therefore, no surprise that the type of titles we find in other areas were not common here.⁵³ An informant explained that the title-taking ceremony of the women called *Ikwa ede* in Ehime Mbano also in Southern Igboland, was akin to the *Ezeji* title ceremony.⁵⁴ In the case of *Ikwa ede*, holders of the title usually came to inspect the cocoyam barn of the aspirant before a formal acceptance into the society was made. They also took away baskets filled with cocoyams, while at the title-taking ceremony, it was mainly cocoyam food that was served. In any case, only an acclaimed cocoyam farmer could afford to host such a ceremony.

4.1(iv) SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF TITLES

On the whole, Igbo titles since the earliest times were for life. They also attracted benefits while conferring serious responsibilities. According to Uchendu, whereas the title-taker either male or female paid a heavy initiation fee which was usually distributed

among members following the order of initiation, such title associations served as insurance societies enabling the socially ambitious to invest his savings while guaranteeing him continued economic support in his old age. More importantly, it provided him with a pan-Igbo passport which he carried with him, a passport that guaranteed him all perquisites and accorded him a place of honour and dignity among 'foreign' associations which could otherwise give him a hostile reception. The associations exercised a form of social control by laying down certain rules and prescribing certain forms of behaviour which were considered unworthy of a titled man.⁵⁵

Also, title-taking was not only an expression of wealth but a means of exercising the power it conferred. Titled men in the past virtually monopolised authority in their village group. Often times, the initiative, including the formulation of policy and debate in public meetings, was directed by leading members of the title societies, who discussed affairs at their society meetings and secured the support of other title holders.⁵⁶ This was generally based on the idea of personal achievement or accomplishment by the individual taking the title. That a person taking a title was usually aided and supported by his kinsmen, age mates and friends, who shared in his honour and prestige, only meant that such a title would have wide social implications,⁵⁷ including enormous prestige. Basden, attests that in traditional Igbo society:

a titled man could bully a non-privileged one (that is one who cannot because of his abject poverty be admitted into the society), he could pour ridicule upon him as a nobody. He did so with impunity because no one was allowed to retaliate. If a commoner (non-member) should be so imprudent as to take the law into his hands and throw a titled man to the ground he would be severely punished.⁵⁸

The *Omezue* title in Amaseri (Northeastern Igboland), for instance, was the yardstick for measuring wealth, influence and manhood. It symbolised all that was

dignified and morally upright. It was the symbol of social justice, truth, hospitality and greatness. In fact, it personified all that the people believed in, in terms of religion, culture, tradition, politics and morality.⁵⁹ Also, writing on the *Ozo* title in Igboland, Afigbo opined that such title holders constituted, for the most part, the narrow aristocracy of intellect, wealth and political power in their societies. They were people, whose status as ancestors (Ndichie) was guaranteed after death.⁶⁰

However, this is not to say that many of these titles were not economically rewarding. The fact that each new member's fees were distributed to the old initiates was a form of investment against old age. Since title was for life, it therefore meant that such attributes that accompanied them were equally for life. Similarly, since agricultural wealth in traditional Igbo society was perishable, the only way to prevent such a huge waste was to mount entertainment for those who had attained the appropriate grade and thus secure, for the rest of the farmer's life, the right to share fully in entertainments mounted by all subsequent new entrants to that grade.⁶¹ In Afikpo, an *Omezue* got a share of the presentations of new entrants until death. In fact, until the death of the last male child of the *Omezue*, his family continued to receive half of whatever was due to the man at subsequent investitures. If for any reason an *Omezue* was in need, he was free to cut palm-fruit from the communal palm grove for his needs. He was also free to cut wood from the reserved forest.⁶² Indeed, such life time assurances were enough inducements for new aspirants to these titles. Also, this could engender the spirit of competition among the members. For instance, those who already had the title were expected to work harder to maintain their status, while those who were yet to take such titles strove to attain the same production which their mates had attained.⁶³ In the open

society of the Igbo, the desire to take titles was enough incentive to strive to attain great heights in agriculture. Thus, incentives to greater productivity were created and disseminated to encourage the accumulation of surplus. Therefore, *Ezeji* for men and *Lolo ede* (cocoyam queen) for women were institutions designed to lead to surplus, beyond the mere subsistence production.⁶⁴ Attainment of such a position elevated the status of the individual. And as would be expected, members of the title societies developed much expertise in the cultivation of various species of yam in different pieces of land, and so were generally consulted on matters pertaining to yam and land. Their opinions were also sought in disputes over yams and farmlands by young men, new in the farming business.⁶⁵ Of course, such a status was only reserved for people who had been able to distinguish themselves in farm work.

On the whole, the Igbo farmer aspired to title positions for several reasons. These include: the desire to show that one was rich or had accumulated a lot of wealth, to attract people's respect; so that the individual's funeral would be ostentatious; to be involved in community leadership since titled men took part in the settlement of disputes; and, to raise one's status in the community.⁶⁶ An additional consideration was that titled men were seen as the symbol of holiness. It was therefore assumed that they could not lie and so, had the final say on any disputed issue. Hence, their status was worth striving for.

Be that as it may, we had earlier highlighted the exorbitant cost of title-taking in Igboland. Let us quickly add that, contrary to widely held views, such titles also had some implications that perhaps helped to make them burdensome the holder. For instance, it is believed that yam production triggered a new era of property ownership

controlled by strong men who became big yam farmer's, *di ji*. Big yam farmers became powerful elites who took the *Ozo* title and thus emerged the early formation of agrarian communes in Igboland. Increased production of yam, was thus equal to increased surplus and increased surplus in the hands of a few meant increased social stratification.⁶⁷ Such stratification was rather a disservice to a largely rural agricultural population. Because of the quantity of yam tubers under the control of the *Ezeji*, for instance, the tendency was for them to monopolise the cultivable land. This had to be, since they required more space to cultivate their yams in order to maintain their control of many yam seeds after the year's harvest. At times, they could buy pieces of land from their neighbours while the greedy ones proceeded to extort land from widows and the helpless among the people.⁶⁸ Therefore, the price for the non-title holders was rather high as they were forced to a subservient status by the title holders. Oguwike, citing the example of Ahiara Mbaise in Southern Igboland, suggests that they could, through the planting of many yam seeds, retard the cultivation of other crops. This was borne out of the fact that most big time farmers do not allow the inter-planting of yam with any other crop in the farm. In a way, this could lead to inflation and famine, since yams were solely for the man and for the preservation of his social, economic and political status in the society. Aside from this, the *Ezeji* could also determine the mode of distribution of labour. They could for instance influence labour with their money thereby leaving the poor to depend on them for livelihood.⁶⁹ The negative implications of such developments could not be over-emphasised. First, it led to the concentration of wealth in the community in a few hands, since only they could afford enough to remain on top. Second, it led to the pauperisation

of the majority that may not be able to afford the costs of labour obviously an important input in farm work.

Furthermore, title-taking, despite its economic benefits, was to the individual an avoidable risk, since one may not live long enough to benefit from the investments of subsequent aspirants. Because of this, many youths, particularly those who had acquired Western education, criticised their parents for indulging in what they consider a frivolous ostentation. Even in areas where these titles were hereditary, it was still expected that any person who acquired any of them on the death of the original holder, may not receive equal recognition which should have ordinarily accrued to the original holder.

There were also cases where many men, after embarking on the squandermania usually associated with these titles, found themselves either bankrupt or unable to retain their exalted position as big time farmers. Although some argue, that before this could happen, it was either that the individual committed an abomination or that such a person may have planted the wrong type of yams,⁷⁰ the fact remains that the economic cost of title acquisition was rather on the high side, capable of having a negative influence on the individual's income shortly after. This is buttressed by the process of taking the *Nji oke* title in Abakiliki. There, the aspirant must have a polygamous home, while he was expected not only to feed the people, but to give away many tubers of yams. In some cases, he even kept his barn open for goats and sheep to feast on. Also, tradition demand that such title holders, be buried with several tubers of yams.⁷¹ All these constitute a terrible waste not only to the individual but to the society at large.

More importantly, most of these titles placed enormous demand and restrictions on the holder. In Oguta, central Igboland, once a person took the *Nze* title which, incidentally, was the highest title and which had to do with one's skill as an acclaimed farmer, the individual could no longer eat any food considered inferior, such as cassava. Also, he was not expected to do any type of job, since his role in farm work thence became strictly supervisory. In the face of considerable depletion of labour supply, such practices have become highly uneconomic for both the individual and the community.⁷² Also, the holder of the *Ozo n'mgbirichi* title, for instance, was not expected to eat in public. He was to eat only in his house (ufo). And, going by the people's tradition, only his first wife could cook his food. But in the event of the death of the first wife, one of the daughters cooked for him. Moreover, the man must be resident in the village and it was expected that on the day of the title-taking, he sold his yams at half the ruling price in the market even as he gave out many free.⁷³ Therefore, in a bid to demonstrate his wealth and financial competence, the title holder was subjected to a huge financial burden, which could in the long run affect his future performance as a farmer.

Another factor that relates to the cost of title-taking and its concomitant responsibilities in Igboland is the long time it took the yam farmer to accumulate enough yams to enable him take the title. This often amounted to enormous capital being tied down. It also impeded capital accumulation which is a necessary ingredient for economic growth and development. Many of the farmers interviewed agreed that in a bid to acquire enough yams to take title, only a few sold their yams. It required a lot of personal discipline also, to ensure that the stock was not eaten. Thus, even the family may be starved in the process. Such costs may never be adequately compensated. However, that

this aspect of the people's culture has subsisted is because the yam crop in Igboland is a revered, much prized and prestige staple. Thus, it commands a strong socio-religious significance in the traditional economy and culture.⁷⁴

Probably because of the issues raised above, the number of applicants for these titles has diminished over the years. This has also been linked to the fact that labour supply for the farms has diminished owing to the coming of Western education, which opened new economic opportunities for the people. Also, labour shortages resulted from the fact that it was no longer fashionable to marry many wives, possibly due to the advent of Christianity, which expressly forbids polygamy. Similarly, the fact that the fertility of the soil has diminished, may be due to population pressure, all the more made such ostentatious displays increasingly unattractive.⁷⁵

From the 1950s and 1960s it became fashionable for individuals to make their wealth through means other than farming alone. Thus, young men employed as clerks, interpreters, carpenters and so forth, seized the opportunity of making money which presented itself with the opening up of the country by the government and earning money quickly, immediately offered themselves as candidates for these titles.⁷⁶ On the changes which have occurred in the *Ozo* title institution in Awka Northwestern Igboland, Basden observed for instance, that:

the old chiefs (title holders) always willing to accept fees, have done so in the cases of these young men; they have reaped a monetary benefit; their original investment has turned out more profitable than they ever anticipated, but this greedy procedure led to the degradation of the whole system; with such a collection of irresponsible young men as members of the order, all right to exercise any real control over the affairs of the community has been forfeited.⁷⁷

All we can say, based on the foregoing, is that title-taking is an important socio-cultural institution in Igboland; though of some economic value, its relevance mainly, has been the elevation of the individual's social status. However, the institution has undergone changes particularly in the colonial and post-colonial periods with the establishment of formal government and monetisation of the economy, and such changes have led to the proliferation of the number of titles. This has further led to a depletion of the overall relevance of the title institution in Igboland. Ultimately, it is the economic cost of these titles that has necessitated the change in the *modus operandi* of these title institutions among the Igbo.

4.2 FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIES

The central place of food crops in the Igbo economy has earlier been stated. Yam and cocoyam particularly have over the years through cultural conditions, acquired tremendous social, economic and traditional values among the people, which have little to do with their nutritional value. Yam especially occupies an important place in any study of Igbo economy, traditional diet, magico-religious practices, food habits and taboos, values and beliefs, metaphors and idioms, festivals and ceremonies.⁷⁸ Arising from this, issues relating to these crops have become part and parcel of the people's daily activities. Often times, these issues have been ritualised. For instance, throughout Igboland, the feast of the New Yam marked the end of the year and the beginning of a new one. Hence, it was held to honour the earth goddess and the ancestral spirit of every community.

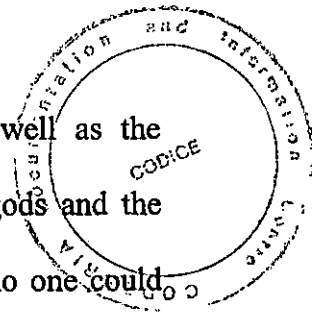
This is well represented in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Illustrating with the village of Umuofia, the author says that:

New Yams could not be eaten until some had first been offered to these powers. It began the feast of plenty. On the night before the festival, yams of the old year were all disposed of by those who had them. The new year must begin with tasty, fresh yams and not the shriveled and fibrous crop of the previous year. All cooking pots, calabashes and wooden bowls were thoroughly washed especially the wooden mortar in which yam was pounded. The New Yam festival, was thus an occasion for joy throughout Umuofia. And every man whose arm was strong as the Igbo people say, was expected to invite large numbers of guests from far and wide.⁷⁹

In other words, the New Yam festival marked the formal admission of the crop at the harvest period. Of so much importance was it held, that the consumption of new yam was forbidden until the community as a whole had given thanks to the gods for a successful harvest.

In his Intelligence Report on the Ekwerazu and Ahiara Clans of Mbaise Southern Igboland, G.I. Stockley in 1932, noted that at the feast of the New Yams, *Njoku* the yam deity, was sacrificed to by everyone who had yams. The sacrifice according to him, was made at the door of the yam barn (Oba), where the yams were stored. Each man brought a fowl which he circled round his head and across his chest in honour of Njoku. Then, the fowl, according to him, was allowed to go free. Both the women and children did this too. Perhaps, to show the importance of the yam deity among the Igbo, Stockley observed, many boys were dedicated by their parents to Njoku. They were given such names as Njoku, Nwanjoku, Osuji, Okoro, and Nwokoro.⁸⁰ In Mbutu-Ngwa, the yam festival is called *Ji Obasi*. It was usually preceded by sacrifices by *Ofo* holders (heads of families). No title holder ate New Yam until the festival was celebrated. The festival was held in high esteem, because the people believe that it was the god of yam that

regulated issues concerning cultivation, harvesting, storing, cooking as well as the eventual eating of yams. The festival therefore brought the people, the gods and the ancestors of the clan in a communion. It was also a period of purity as no one could afford to break the laws of the festival by either quarrelling or fighting.⁸¹



Ubesie has noted in his *Odinala Ndi Igbo*, that the New Yam festival was usually given many names by different people, ranging from *Otite*, *Oriri onwa Asato* to *Ikeji*. The feast, he argues, was held to thank the yam deity for its mercies, beginning from the period of cultivation, for ensuring that the crop had a good yield and for enabling the people to achieve a successful harvest. Generally, three reasons could be adduced why the yam festival was held: to thank the god of yam for a successful harvest; to regulate peoples appetite thereby ensuring that people had enough supplies all year round, since no one was allowed to eat new yams before the festival; and finally, to thank the god of yam for ensuring that the people transited peacefully from famine to the season of plenty.⁸²

The *Owuwaji* festival, which marked the eating of New Yams in Onitsha, western Igboland, usually held for 24 days, with each of the communities taking turns in the celebration. It reached a climax with the *Ofala* (the Obi's formal outing), and ended with the *Ifejioke*, which was accepted as a time when the remnants of the previous year's yams were eaten. It also heralded the beginning of the harvesting of cocoyam.⁸³ According to Leonard, *Ifejioke* was a general festival and holiday for all the people of Onitsha in which animal sacrifices and thanksgiving were offered direct to *Ifejioke* (god of the crops) as a token of gratitude on the part of the community for a fruitful and prosperous year. More than this, the termination of the festival not only marked the end

of the traditional year but also served as a form of public notice that farming had to recommence.⁸⁴ Also in the Anambra River Basin or flood plain, the *Ifejioku* festival which usually held for four days signified the beginning of the farming season, while the *Otite* festival marked the beginning of the harvest. Among the Ezza of Abakiliki, the *Obuji* festival, marked the eating of new yams. Some of the Ezza villages called it *Eke Okpoto* or *Oriji*. In both cases, the festival was held in September and lasted for four days amidst heavy feasting and dancing.

In all, the New Yam festival was and is still regarded as a solemn occasion among the Igbo. Such sacrifices to the god of yam as performed in the festival were necessary because the people believed that refusal to do so may bring evil consequences. However, the date for these festivals varied among Igbo communities due to local variations in custom and traditions.

The New Yam festival in Afikpo, Northeastern Igboland for instance, took four days and was celebrated with pomp and pageantry. The yam was harvested on Nkwo market day and was stored without washing. On that same day, old yams kept by the old men, were shared by the entire family and eaten. With the exception of the *Eleri ji* (custodians of the earth deity from Enohia Nkalu) who were allowed to harvest and eat yam about three weeks before other people, no one else was allowed to harvest yam until the day of the yam festival. Early on that day, the people threw away the dust from their kitchen used for cooking the old yam, thus, heralding the arrival of the new yams. All through the four-day event, only yam of different types were eaten.⁸⁵ A similar ceremony was held in Uturu Okigwe. There, the elders and leaders of thought determined the

starting date/day of the festival, which lasted for seven days, because it was rotated among the seven market days representing the seven villages in Uturu.

In many parts of Igboland, it was considered an abomination for anyone to eat the new yam prior to the yam festival. In Ikwo Abakiliki, such a person could be ostracised.⁸⁶ This was because the New Yam festival marked the beginning of the traditional year. During the festival, the people carried their yams to the *Nte* (shrine), while Ozo title holders performed the main rituals in their palaces. Okigbo affirms that when yams were eaten before the festival, special sacrifices had to be offered to the land (Ala) or a locally designated yam god such as *Njoku ji*. Thus, the crop was so revered that people who behaved contrary to accepted norms were punished. This is exemplified by the contents of a Minute from the District Officer, Abak Division to his counterpart in Aba on a related subject. The action arose following problems emanating from the display of yams before the Ika New Yam festival:

You recently referred a complaint to me concerning the seizure of a bicycle and some yams belonging to a man on his way from Aba Division to Etinam in Uyo Division. What happened was that the yams, which were freshly dug were being carried through Ika territory before the Ika New Yam festival. This in Ika eyes was a serious affront. Their action in seizing the yams and bicycle was of course indefensible but understandable. To avoid further cases of this nature, I suggest you inform the Ngwa and others, that the exhibition of new yams prematurely in Ika may arouse the passions of the people and that it would be good policy to keep them covered. The Ika New Yam festival is held in September.⁸⁷

However, underlying the religious significance of the New Yam festival was its social importance. It was a time of feasting and merriment, to show gratitude to all, who helped in any way during the farming season. Also from the colonial period, it became a time of get-together, when it was expected that the entire extended family would gather to celebrate and also deliberate on issues of interest. In many communities,

it became a time when meetings were held and decisions taken on communal matters, including the initiation of development projects.

In Egbu Owerri, Southern Igboland, nobody went to the market or farm on the day of the New Yam festival. It was considered that this could have an adverse effect on the individual. Visitors to the house on that day were entertained with only yam food. They were also given yams to take home. At the event, men and children entertained the public with masquerades, while the Eze Egbu (traditional ruler of Egbu) made sacrifices to the god of the land. The ceremony also had some theological significance. The slaughtering of animals for instance was seen as a way by which the people asked the gods to remember that both the soil and human beings had to continue to be fertile while the wearing of mask signified a way of achieving a reunion between the dead ancestors and the living.⁸⁸

Indeed, the agricultural process in Igboland, could be said to have culminated in the emergence of a ritual complex which has undergone significant changes due to contact with the outside world. This contact led to the partial adoption of institutionalised religion and of some foreign cultural ideas, which have altered the religious significance of the yam festival. Similarly, increased urbanisation has led to the devaluation of cherished customs and tradition by the urban dwellers, while the introduction of new crops like cassava and rice only threatened the hitherto dominant position of the yam,⁸⁹ in Igboland. Practices like human sacrifice and most of the other rituals have been jettisoned, hence many now say that the New Yam festival has been taken to the church. But this does not in any way foreclose the fact that the festival ranks high among the ceremonies celebrated in Igboland.

Having said that, we must also note that the festivities and various practices associated with the yam culture particularly in the pre-colonial period were not peculiar to Igboland. For instance, Arab travellers such as Ibn Batuta and Al-Omari, reported that in the medieval times, various yam preparations, festivals and customs were marked in Mali and Ghana.⁹⁰ Lewicki stated that:

the Ashanti held two annual festivals, one celebrating the planting of yam, the other its ripening. It is not until the second one is terminated that yam may be consumed. Formerly, the festival of yam-ripening was associated with the blood-sacrifice of a man. On the fifth day of the celebrations, a convict was offered as a messenger to the deceased king. It was only after this had been done, that the reigning king and his subjects could proceed to eat yam. The men destined for sacrifice were killed in the field, their blood flowing into a hole from which the tuber of a new yam had just been extracted.⁹¹

This suggests that from the earliest times, sacrifices and offerings were made to the yam god throughout the yam zone of Africa. Most of these rituals have either been dropped or modified since the colonial period.

Nevertheless, festivals and ceremonies were not restricted to yam alone. In many parts of Igboland, the cocoyam festival was celebrated for the women. It was an opportunity to thank God for granting the woman a bounteous harvest, for the good health granted her family all through the farming season and to ask for a better harvest in the coming year. In some parts of Okigwe, this festival was called *Nta ede*. On the day of the festival, husbands who should normally have finished planting and tending their yams, would work for their wives in the latter's cocoyam plots and be feasted.⁹²

The harvesting of cocoyam in the Anambra flood plain was marked by the *Ogelete* festival, which was celebrated on Nkwo market day. It was traditional for a particular specie of cocoyam, *ede uli*, to be cooked overnight and served the next day.

The ceremony continued throughout the day until the evening when young boys including children and non-initiates into the spirit mask, moved out on an expedition. They usually danced round the villages calling on their sisters married to these villages and neighbouring towns. Such visits were reciprocated with gifts of fish of varying quantities and sizes depending on how wealthy the individual was. The *Ogelete* festival ended at the midnight of that day.⁹³ In Mbagana (Abagana), cocoyam harvesting was followed with the *Ede aro* festival which was celebrated in December. This festival lasted for four days and started on Afo market day. The festival was heralded by the *Ayaka* masquerade with the singing of "death songs" in the night. The next day, cocoyam meal was served with a special vegetable soup. On the second day, the cocoyams were taken to the Aro shrine, where they were presented to the Aro priest by his assistants. Sacrifices were made as men came with gifts of yams, livestock, money and palm wine. Later a display of different masquerades followed to take part in *Opiato* (flogging).⁹⁴

The *Ifajioku* festival in Onitsha held while the previous year's yam must have been eaten up, heralded the beginning of the harvesting of cocoyam. After the major sacrifice, which involved the sprinkling of the blood of a cock on yams in the barn, cocoyam was prepared in sufficient quantities to entertain friends and relatives. Also, part of it was offered at the local shrine in thanksgiving for a successful harvest. At the end of the ceremonies, boiled cocoyams were sent to distant relatives, who, owing to other engagements, were not able to attend the festival⁹⁵. *Emume ede* (cocoyam festival) in Umunna Okigwe, as in the past, is still celebrated in the month of August.

During this festival, which is essentially for the women, only the specie of cocoyam called *Ede nkiri* is used.⁹⁶

Among the Aguleri of the Anambra flood plains, the *Ayaka* festival was associated with the cocoyam. This festival was celebrated between the months of November and December. The *Ayaka* is a night masquerade, which was by the people's tradition was expected to eat the cocoyam before every other person in the community. During the festival, women prepared cocoyam porridge which they placed in front of their houses at night. The masquerade then came around to eat the food, taking time to eulogise anyone who prepared a special delicacy. The people believed that to prepare a good meal and have the *Ayaka* sing one's praise was enough incentive to make any woman work harder in the next farming season.⁹⁷

On the whole, festivals and ceremonies in Igboland, were customary as a mark of esteem and gratitude to, and reverence for the ancestors but, especially to the protector and daily giver of food, to offer up a short prayer or petition, in addition to a certain amount of food and libations of water or liquor, in accordance with what (the people) may happen to be drinking at the time.⁹⁸ In essence, the principal aim of festivals was first and foremost religious. Often times, these sacrifices had to be undertaken because of the fear that unless they were offered the lives and interests of the people would be in jeopardy. Also, these festivals were important because of their symbolic roles as repositories of the people's cultural values, norms and aspirations.⁹⁹

Over time however, the economic cost of these festivals and ceremonies have come to threaten the people's well-being. More so, since they have become increasingly

expensive. Changes have therefore been introduced, as the society grew more complex and sophisticated and as there arose different gradations of success in farming with each grade of success being publicly marked with appropriate display of wealth and the purchase of the appropriate insignia and symbols.¹⁰⁰

Once the people began to realise how uneconomic these ceremonies and festivals had become, such changes became rapid. Perhaps, it was these issues that constituted what the Agricultural Officer for Afikpo called the inherent conservatism of the Igbo in agricultural matters and their concomitant reluctance to increase the amount of labour required for production of the necessaries of life, which militated against any progress being made in agricultural systems and methods.¹⁰¹ In the face of rapid socio-economic changes, particularly those associated with the colonial period as the next chapter will show, food crop production suffered appreciably and with it the esteemed importance attached to the cultural aspects of food production in Igboland.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE DAWN OF AN ERA: FOOD CROP PRODUCTION IN THE COLONIAL PERIOD

The establishment of formal colonial rule in Nigeria by 1900 led to great transformations in the political, social and economic life of the Igbo. This chapter will discuss the changes in the Igbo agricultural economy in the colonial period. It focuses on the various colonial policies and programmes especially as they affected the development or otherwise of food crop production; local and global events particularly the first and second world wars; and, the period from the end of World War II to 1960. The chapter is divided into three sections viz, Developments up to the First World War, the Inter-War Years and Post-World War II Developments.

5.1 DEVELOPMENTS UP TO THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The preceding chapters have shown that long before the advent of British colonial rule, crops like yam and cocoyam had been firmly established in Igboland. Though cassava was just being introduced, there is evidence to show that it had become fairly widespread among the Igbo.

In fact, far back in the 15th century, especially during the contact with the Portuguese via the slave trade, the Portuguese traders had regularly bought yams and livestock in addition to slaves in substantial quantities. This was necessary to feed both the slaves and the crew during the voyages. In 1699, for instance, James Barbot bought 50,000 tubers of yam at Bonny which had been brought down from the hinterland as well as livestock, palm wine, fire wood and water, which he paid for in

goods, equal to the value of at least 32 male slaves. By the time his ship-load of 583 slaves reached Sao Tome, the yams were gone.¹

Arguably, yam as the chief staple food of southern Nigeria, was desired by the slave captains for at least part of the middle passage on the grounds that a familiar diet would promote good health among their slaves. In fact, it was calculated that as much as 100,000 yams were needed to feed 500 slaves during the middle passage² This indicates that prior to colonial rule, the people had comparatively perfected the production of these food crops on which they depended. Thus, the agricultural system was well established and based on numerous crops. For, very rarely did the traditional farmer clear his plot just to raise a single crop. Usually, the farmer planted on each plot, a little of everything needed for his subsistence, ranging from tubers and grains to legumes.³

However, the introduction of colonial administration altered the people's traditional farming systems. Henceforth, farmers were induced to cultivate those crops that were needed in Europe. Nevertheless, this policy was not pursued with any consistency. Rather, the government's interest at any given time seemed to have been limited to the products needed overseas. Once such an emergency was over, the products and even the producers were left to their fate. Thus, a campaign was mounted for the production of cassava in the British empire because of the great demand for starch in the United Kingdom in 1904. As soon as people responded to the appeal and began to cultivate cassava, there was a fall in demand in the United Kingdom. Consequently, the colonial governments stopped accepting the product and

made no further attempt to find an alternative market for the cassava to which much investment had been devoted by the farmers.⁴

In all British colonial territories, what emerged was a systematic attempt aimed at discouraging farmers from producing food crops. It could be argued, in fact, that the first changes in African agriculture that followed the expansion of European interest in the region, were not so much changes in techniques of production as in the introduction of new crops.⁵ This transition from a food crop economy to an export oriented one has been described as an economic revolution. For, the transition was from the growth of subsistence crops and the collection of sylvan produce to the cultivation of export crops, with the necessary implication of a transition from a natural economy to a monetary economy and the innumerable important reactions from the later phase. A major aspect of this revolution involved the creation of wants amongst the colonial subjects which was intended to stir them to increased activity to produce increasing quantities for the European market.⁶ According to McPhee, the peasant farmers were first lured with cheap European goods like toys, tobacco, cloths, and gin. But with the advance of English administration and civilisation, more refined tastes began to replace old habits as the indigenous peoples now spent their surplus wealth on improved housing, better furniture, bicycles, tinned food and superior cotton garments.⁷

Beginning from 1893, British officials, mindful of the future of Eastern Nigeria's oil palm export industry, established botanical gardens first at Old Calabar. The aim was to initiate a search for new economic crops. And following this, coffee, cocoa, rice, rubber and other crops were cultivated experimentally. In fact, when he

assumed office in 1896 as Commissioner and Consul-General, Sir Ralph Moor undertook to have a survey of the forest resources of Southern Nigeria. Consequently, exploratory expeditions were sent into the hinterland of the Oil Rivers, for the purpose of reporting to him on the economic resources of the forests, charging them specifically to "keep your eyes open to see if there are any rubber trees or if you can discover any economic indigenous plants or products".⁸ Having established a Forestry Department in 1898, Moor's interest was in favour of experimenting with the cultivation of coffee and cotton, in particular the latter, but mainly by peasant enterprise.⁹ And as a follow up to this evolving interest, a Superintendent of Agriculture appointed for the British West African Colonies in 1906, visited Southeastern Nigeria, to assess the prospects of cotton and rubber cultivation. He noted that the palm oil industry was the major pre-occupation of the peoples of Southern Nigeria to such an extent as to render the introduction of other agricultural projects nearly impossible. Remarkably, little was done to influence the mix of crops actually cultivated or processed within the villages.¹⁰

A further step was taken by the colonial government in providing local farmers with improved seed varieties and technical advice and by establishing demonstration plots in some villages. Accordingly, a government Department of Agriculture was established in Southern Nigeria in 1910, and one of its principal tasks was to induce the people by constant propaganda to adopt the favoured crops (cotton, rubber and coffee). Later, the aim of the Department was broadened to include the stimulation of production for export by local farmers, increasing the quantity and improving the quality of local food crops, and tackling the agricultural shortcomings

of peasant producers of tree crops for export.¹¹ So far, the colonial administration favoured peasant production of export crops to generate revenue, but, apart from cotton and to a limited extent palm oil, encouragement did not extend much beyond work on experimental stations, the provision of marketing facilities and produce inspection.¹² However, the Moor Plantation was developed at Ibadan between 1912 and 1916, as an agricultural experimentation station. It was also to serve as a springboard from which other stations were to be established in later years.

Nonetheless, a more successful method adopted by the British colonial administrators in their bid to secure their long-term economic interests was through persuasion, coercion, taxation, the creation of new wants and by a sedulous appeal to the instincts of acquisition.¹³ With the introduction of direct taxation, for instance, the farmers had little option but to adopt the export/cash crops, which guaranteed them ready cash. On their own part, the administrators were instructed to make polite suggestions and to forward samples of promising crops to the Imperial Institute London (created to assist in the marketing of tropical products). It was considered desirable also, for Residents and, if possible, local officers to maintain gardens at their stations, where vegetables and seedling trees of economic value and fruit, as well as samples of improved crops could be planted.¹⁴

The pressure exerted by taxation cannot be over-emphasised. As Rodney puts it, where the farmers did not consider the monetary incentives great enough to justify changing their way of life so as to become labourers or cash crop farmers, the colonial state employed the law, taxation and outright force to make them pursue a line favourable to capitalist profits. Of course, the favourite technique was taxation.

Thus, money taxes were introduced on numerous items ranging from commodities like cattle, land and houses to the people themselves. The easiest way to get money to pay taxes was by growing cash crops or working on European farms or in their mines.¹⁵

Side by side with government's open encouragement of cash crop production for export, was the near-total neglect of food crop production. For a start, all the agricultural experimental stations, as well as plantations established in this period, were for the improvement of cash crops. The implicit assumption was that Africans would continue to grow sufficient food for themselves as they always did.¹⁶ Hence, the peasants were encouraged or coerced to produce cash crops to the detriment of food crops with the sad result that the money which they earned from the cash crops was immediately lost in buying expensive food crops.¹⁷ Similarly, some of the rural farmers living in areas where cash crops did not thrive well were forced, partly because of the need to pay tax, to migrate to cash crop-producing areas where they worked as labourers.¹⁸

In the case of Igboland, once it was identified that the oil palm tree was the main crop needed for export, the colonial masters stopped at nothing to make the people cultivate the crop. Even at this initial period, efforts were made to get the people to adopt the idea of palm plantations, particularly in the Owerri, Mbaise, Mbano, Ngwa and Okigwe areas, considered to be the palm belt. However, such fresh initiatives were not readily accepted by the people considering the fact that these palms hitherto grew on their own in the area. Nevertheless, the people were ready to pay more attention to the crop, in so far as it yielded the quick revenue

needed to meet the demands of the colonial economy. Also, the effort of the colonial officers to introduce cotton and rubber in the area prior to the First World War, met with little success, perhaps due to the nature of the soil which made such efforts less rewarding. All the same, some success was recorded in parts of Ngwaland where the rubber crop seemed to have done well comparatively.

In all, it could be said that the true significance of the economic history of Nigeria in this period lay in the growth of the cash economy, which had its foundation in the development of agricultural export products, usually referred to as cash crops.¹⁹ Having said that, we must quickly add that until the Second World War, direct intervention by the colonial state in agricultural production and marketing was rather limited. Agricultural officers spent more time on isolated experimental stations and had little contact with farmers. Also, the stations were mainly interested in finding out systems of permanent cultivation which would maintain soil fertility.²⁰

5.2 THE INTER WAR YEARS

The World Wars, in so far as food production in Igboland was concerned, came to aggravate the situation created by the initial neglect of the colonial administrators. This indeed buttresses the widely held view, that Nigeria on the whole was most intensively exploited by Britain during the two World Wars.²¹ First, it led to a total disruption of the people's internal production systems. Secondly, all production, more than ever before, became channelled to the satisfaction of war needs. In fact, it could be said that the wars to a large extent upset the gradual economic development of Nigeria and caused a great deal of dislocation in the

internal as well as external flow of trade of the country.²² Hence, farmers were totally discouraged from producing food crops. The idea was to get them to cut down palm nuts and process the oil. A popular war propaganda then had it that each bunch of palm nut that could be cut was equivalent to cutting down a German soldier, and each tin of oil and kernels produced could help to ruin a German gun or aeroplane on the battle field.²³

Guided by this initiative, more agricultural experimental stations were established at Benin, Zaria and Umuahia in 1923. It is significant to note that it was from the station at Umudike Umuahia, that many communities in Igboland were given basic training on the cultivation of export crops and knowledge of basic agricultural techniques. Similarly, in other parts of Nigeria, Agricultural Research Stations were established at Vom (Jos) in 1925, and an Agricultural School at Ibadan in 1927. In spite of all these, and not minding their bias for cash crops, it is necessary to point out that considering the population and size of Nigeria, these stations and schools were few and far between. For instance, in his 1929 Annual Report, the Agricultural Officer for Owerri Division regretted that there were yet no agricultural farms or experimental stations in the Division, even as the staple native crops, yams and cocoyams continued to do well.²⁴ Nevertheless, these institutions were of immense importance in the fight to entrench cash crops among the local population in the colonial period. They provided the basic agricultural research centres which offered the necessary training programmes among the farmers; they were also in the vanguard of the spread of new ideas and research techniques on almost all the cash crops. Therefore, we could say that the spread and adoption of cash crops in Nigeria

in the colonial period could be linked to the efforts and activities of the different agricultural schools, research institutes, experimental stations as well as demonstration farms, established by the colonial government.

Meanwhile, the consequences of the World Wars on the Igbo agricultural economy were noticeable in other areas. By popular accounts, thousands of people from the area were recruited into the allied army and many of them died in the process. Through a network of hinterland operations meticulously supervised by the colonial masters, many of the people were conscripted to fight in the wars. On the whole, Nigeria provided about 17,000 fighting men and 58,000 service personnel in the first World War. In the second, the country also provided about 90,000 soldiers, while up to 92,000 men were recruited into the mines.²⁵ This became necessary, because, as the horizon of the Second World War widened in a geographical sense to embrace regions of the world with differing climates and physical geography such as Eritrea, Sudan, India and Burma, Britain intensified recruitment of Nigerians into her fighting forces. This was because British soldiers were considered ill-equipped to fight effectively in these areas. Africans were considered the best materials to fight 'jungle' warfare including in areas with very harsh terrains and climate.²⁶ The executive recruitment led to great losses in labour, which could have been channelled to economic endeavours, particularly in the production of food crops for local consumption. The rise in the prices of foodstuffs throughout the period indicated that the available labour was unable to meet the local demand for these crops. Consequently, whereas the level of food production fell during the war years

as a result of loss of manpower in the rural sector, the decline in the earnings of the farmers only compounded this loss of manpower.

Meanwhile, the lopsided colonial agricultural policy coupled with the depression of the period, had resulted in severe food shortages in Igboland, as well as in other parts of Nigeria. Essentially, the Great Depression of the 1920s and 1930s which was a fall out of the collapse of the world commodity markets, brought severe reductions in Nigerian export prices and temporary stagnation in export volume. Thus was introduced a temporary halt in the growth of the Nigerian economy.²⁷ But the factor of food shortage must be stressed a little further. Against some claims that food deficits and food crisis were not phenomena which characterized the colonial period, since available supplies were supplemented by food stuffs importation from other regions of the country,²⁸ there is evidence to show the contrary in Igboland during the Second World War. For instance, the scarcity of the common staple food, gari, led many to massively troop out at various times, in search of the commodity which they desired desperately from other areas.

Although it could be stated that the attitude of the colonial administration towards agriculture, especially food crop production slightly changed after the Second World War, it was obvious that the centrepiece of colonial agricultural policy in the inter-war period was production for export. The policy of the Agricultural Department, for instance, was stated to include: the maintenance of soil fertility and the development of systems of farming which would achieve this object; the production and improvement of local foodstuffs and livestock; the production of export crops; the improvement of existing export crops and the investigation of

possible new crops; and, the efficient marketing of agricultural produce.²⁹ The policy statement noted that the production of export crops, important, as it was to the wealth of the country and to the revenue of the government, must be subordinated to the production of foodstuffs for local consumption, because as it observed, people who were underfed could not do the maximum amount of work.³⁰ The idea therefore was to make every province as self supporting as possible and where this was not possible to ensure that the surplus supplies from other areas were drawn upon and marketed regularly and at fair prices. This era therefore witnessed a great deal of exchange among the different communities in Igboland. However, we must note that this policy remained mainly on paper. Government efforts as the lines below would show, continued to be in the direction of export crop production.

However, as part of the drive to improve the quality of agricultural products, particularly those which formed major items of export, the colonial government paid attention to improving the fertility of the soil. From the early 1930s, agricultural extension workers were trained to teach farmers the use of natural manure.³¹ In the thickly populated Agbaja, Ahiara and Ezinihitte areas of Mbaise, Owerri Province, a few small scale trials of green manuring commenced in co-operation with local farmers in the late 1930s. The work, according to the Agricultural Officer, was purely experimental and was being carried out as a result of the urgent importance of attempting to devise some means of increasing or maintaining fertility in these areas.³² In fact, earlier in 1936, the Colonial Agricultural Department had admitted that its greatest problem in tropical Africa was the maintenance of soil fertility and that the solution to this problem must of necessity continue to be the chief object of

the experimental work for without it, there could be no real improvement in native agricultural methods.³³

In 1940, the stated policy of the Colonial Government was that, for the duration of the Second World War, the Agricultural Department would be charged with the production of foodstuffs, and this meant the responsibility for ensuring that there were adequate supplies of such foodstuffs as Nigeria could produce for both Europeans and Africans.³⁴ However, it became clear within a short time, that as before, emphasis was still to remain the production of crops needed specifically by the European markets. Similarly, the wartime food shortages in Britain and many European nations made recourse to the colonies necessary. Hence, the wartime exigency not only revealed the economic potentials of these colonies, it also made their exploitation expedient. Little wonder then, the labour of the colonies was targeted at the production of those goods necessary to sustain metropolitan European population.

In a sense, the conditions in Britain precipitated the need for proper planning of the affairs of the colonies. Efforts were made to strengthen relations with the colonies as a way to improve the situation in Britain. Thus, the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1940 was passed to encourage the development of the resources of the colonies and the welfare of its people. Under the Act each colony was to be given support in planning its social and economic development, especially in the areas of communication, improvement of general health and development of export crops. It was under this Act, for instance, that the West African Institute for Oil Palm Research was set up in Benin.³⁵ As we noted earlier, while the colonial

administration was trying to improve the condition in Britain, the food situation in Nigeria deteriorated considerably. The colonial administration tried to arrest the situation, by trying to regulate domestic trade in foodstuffs. But this only helped to drive up the prices of local foodstuffs. Government reacted by pegging down the prices of foodstuffs, but this still proved abortive, because the official prices reflected neither production nor handling costs. Besides, government could not control the source of supply, and the prosecution of price defaulters only drove the foodstuffs out of the open markets.³⁶

As indicated in an earlier discussion, the acceptance of cassava in Igboland is traceable to the hardship of this period. As there were many mouths to feed in the face of a fall in the production of traditional staples like yam, the need therefore arose for experimentation with a variety of exotic food crops if only to satisfy the immediate need. Another fallout of this development was rise in petty crime, such as the theft of food crops. Many of such cases particularly relating to the yam crop in Igboland were reported to the colonial officials by the people, who preferred instant justice as a sure way to eradicate such an ugly development.³⁷ Moreover, in a case of relative insufficiency any incidence of environmental changes like a fall in the volume of rainfall, or drought like the one experienced in 1932, easily created major upsets in food supply.³⁸ In such cases, the immediate consequence was the rise in the prices of such commodities, while massive importation from other areas to supplement local supplies was encouraged.

It was in response to the imminent food shortages which could have had ripple effects on the local economy, and more importantly to ensure an uninterrupted supply

of export produce abroad that the colonial government, as we noted in Chapter three, initiated the "Plant More Cassava This Year Campaign".³⁹ The campaign was vigorously pursued and all District Officers and Agricultural Officers in the Provinces in Igboland were involved. They were instructed to translate the message into local languages and to use personal contacts to get the information across - if possible. Cassava was specifically chosen for its variety of uses coupled with the fact that it cost less to produce and yielded more when compared to other crops.

Cassava's adaptability to relatively marginal soils and erratic rainfall conditions, its high productivity per unit of land/labour, the certainty of obtaining some yield even under the most adverse conditions, and the possibility of maintaining continuity of supply throughout the year made the crop a basic component of the Igbo farming system. More so, it was widely believed that famine rarely occurred in areas where cassava was extensively grown, since it provided a stable base to the food production system. Therefore, cassava, it was argued, had the potential of bridging the food gap.⁴⁰ The colonial administrators equally discovered that the local population had already adopted cassava and were willing to make allowances for the crop in their farming systems, though it was still regarded as a woman's crop. Women were therefore targeted in this campaign. The fact that they were more active in the farms was highlighted, more so, since the men were either fighting or more interested in yam production.

It must be stated that if one were to judge the involvement of the colonial government in agricultural development in Nigeria by the amount of speech-making and memoranda writing in the Department of Agriculture, the impression would be

given that agriculture took top priority.⁴¹ But this was not the case, because, as would be expected, the drive for the cultivation of food crops was never as serious as that of cash crops. May be, if agricultural development were to involve export production alone, that assumption would be valid. Even so, this was to the detriment of food crops. Nevertheless, the "Plant More Cassava Campaign" was pursued with great vigour and, in fact, it was the first time that the colonial government was coming out openly in support of a particular crop needed by the local population. The campaign to a large extent succeeded, as in a short time, many parts of Igboland were already producing cassava above local requirements with the excess being exported to other areas, notably the emerging towns.

To some extent, it could be argued that the expansion of the cultivation of cash crops for export did not necessarily retard the production of food crops. Rather, the growth of export production acted as an impetus for the expansion and growth of a market orientated production of food crops especially in those regions which could not take part in export production due to unfavourable conditions.⁴² For instance, following the rise of towns and cities in Igboland during the colonial period, a major food trade developed, first between the rural and urban centres and between the Eastern Region and other regions of Nigeria, particularly the Northern Region. A crop like cassava benefited due to the high demand for gari in the cities. Gari trade in the 1940s became big business, so lucrative that ordinary economic measures like the deliberate increase in the price of kernels by as much as two pounds (£2) per ton had no effect in reversing the prevailing trend.⁴³ The bulk of this trade was mainly with areas outside Igboland, by road and rail such as the Northern region and by

canoe to Obubra, Ogoja and other riverine locations. As a measure of the volume of this trade, the quantities of gari exported from Owerri Province alone to the North by rail were 6,000 tons in 1941, 21,000 tons in 1942, 27,000 tons in 1943, 8,000 tons in 1944 and 5,059 tons in 1945. The decline in volume from 1943, may have been caused by government trade restrictions in order to check shortages in local supplies. More than 85 per cent of this quantity came from the four stations of Aba Division(Imo River, Aba, Ogwe and Mbawsi).⁴⁴

Generally, the pressure of population and the poverty of the soil boosted the status of gari in Igboland. In fact, gari trade became so popular in the 1940s that, whereas substantial quantities of the product were being exported to places outside Igboland, yams were already being imported from Ogoja province to supplement local supplies. However, in the more fertile areas of Igboland suitable for yam cultivation, especially Abakiliki and its environs, yams were still being exported down river to the Calabar province (perhaps thence by smuggling to Fernando Po).⁴⁵

The role of the new towns in boosting agricultural trade particularly in yam, cassava and cocoyam in Igboland cannot be over emphasised. They made cultivation profitable, since there was always a market for the products. In fact, by the 1940's even men had already joined the gari trade between the Ngwa and the neighbouring towns hitherto dominated by the women.⁴⁶ According to an Agricultural Department Bulletin of Market Information published in 1941, total trade in gari for the Onitsha area during the period July to September 1941, stood at 451 tons. Towns east of the Niger obtained their supplies mostly from Owerri province, notably from Umuahia and Aba, these two towns supplying 69 per cent of the total. Prices ranged from

£1:12:1d per ton to £4:15s per ton. Also, the report said that of the 3,123 tons available in Port Harcourt, some 701 tons were railed North from Aba⁴⁷ This was indeed remarkable, considering the fact that a colonial report in 1914, had stated that foodstuffs were not exported, and with the other valuable products were not likely to be, so far as the greater part of Owerri Province was concerned.⁴⁸ To the contrary however, even as early as 1929, yams from Abakiliki District were being exported in substantial quantities by motor transport to Calabar and Enugu.⁴⁹

That local producers had ready markets for their crops particularly yam and cassava (gari) was enough incentive to produce. All available surpluses were readily purchased for sale in the towns especially Aba, Umuahia, Owerri, Enugu, Port Harcourt, Onitsha, Calabar, and the Northern provinces. Moreover, the attractive prices in the towns, as Table 5.1 below shows, was enough incentive for the local farmers to produce.

Table 5.1: Market Prices of Staple Commodities for Selected Towns in Igboland, 1944/45

TOWN	MONTH								
		1944	1945	1944	1945	1944	1945	1944	1945
ONITSHA	March	5s.	7s.	2s.	3s.	8/3	9/4	N.R.	N.R.
	April	6s.	7s.	2s.	3s.	8/3	16/7	N.R.	N.R.
	May	6s.	13s.	2s.	6/6	8/3	14/5	N.R.	N.R.
AWKA	March	5/4	7/9	8d.	1/6	4/7	7/8	3/7	N.R.
	April	6/2	N.R.	9d.	N.R.	5/9	N.R.	N.R.	N.R.
	May	6/5	13/8	8d.	2/8	5/9	23s.	N.R.	N.R.
ENUGU	March	4/8	28s.	2/6	9/4	4/3	4/8	N.R.	N.R.
	April	4/8	13/4	2/6	28s.	4/6	28s.	N.R.	N.R.
	May	4/8	37/4	2/6	28s.	4/8	28s.	N.R.	N.R.
NSUKKA	March	2/10	4/6	1/6	1/4	5/9	7/8	2/10	¼
	April	2/8	9/4	2s.	1/65/5	5/9	9/2	3s.	½
	May	6/3	8/9	2/2	5/2.	5/9	11/6	2/9	1/8
ABAKILIKI	March	3s.	3/9	8d.	¼	N.R.	5/7	1/3	1s.
	April	3s.	5s.	8d.	1/9	N.R.	11/2	1/3	1/3
	May	3/9	7s.	8d.	3s.	N.R.	15/4	1/3	2/3
AFIKPO	March	1s.	7/3	1/10	3/9	5/2	7/8	4/11	2/8
	April	4/8	7/3	4/9	5/2	7/8	9/5	4/11	3/6
	May	6/4	9s.	4/9	5/3	7/8	11/6	5/3	8s.

N.R. = No Record

Source: NAE, OG 1875, L.T.Chubb, Secretary, Eastern Provinces to the Director of Supplies Lagos, Crops and Native Foodstuffs Situation 1945, OGPROF 2/1/1860.

A considerably low level of rainfall in 1945, affected the food crop situation in Igboland. Therefore, prices of food stuffs rose sharply as Table 5.1 shows when compared with the preceding year. Also, the lifting of a ban on gari export to the North in 1945, earlier placed to check local shortages, led to a fall in local supplies which again resulted in rise in prices. The unavailability of records in most cases for cocoyam is attributed to its low attraction as a market product in the region. It would be convenient to assert, however, that the delayed rainfall of 1945 and the general inflation of the period contributed immensely to the high prices recorded at the time. Naturally, the prices of the foodstuffs varied from market to market, depending on the proximity to the cities. Because of the boom in gari trade in particular, very large areas of land were continually turned to cassava. In fact, the local price of gari at a point threatened to have adverse effect on kernel production.⁵⁰

The point had earlier been made that the two World Wars took a great toll on the manpower resources of Igboland. This manpower would have been better channelled to food production. In the same vein, it need be pointed out, that the contribution of Nigerians and the Igbo in particular in aid of the Nigerian War Relief Fund (NWRF) as well as the Win the War Fund (WWF), further led to the impoverishment of many. Records have it that the total contributions to the Relief Fund during the first three years were respectively £40, 253: 4s: 5d, £24,476:12:10d and £23,094: 2s: 9d. And by the time the accounts of the fund were finally closed on January 28, 1946, £210,999: 0s: 9d had been contributed to it.⁵¹ A closer look at the figures shows that a substantial amount came from Igboland.

Table 5.2: Funds Accruing from the War Relief Fund from the Eastern Provinces.

Province	Contribution (£)
Calabar	2, 981 : 10s : 0d
Cameroons	5, 456 : 2s : 1d
Ogoja	1, 122 : 14s : 8d
Onitsha	3, 139 : 6s : 1d
Owerri	5, 140 : 3s : 1d
Total	17, 839 : 15s : 11d

Source: O.N. Njoku, "Contributions to War Efforts" in T. Falola (ed.), **Britain and Nigeria : Exploitation or Development?** London: 2ed Books Ltd., 1987, p. 174.

The table above indicates the contribution of Eastern Provinces to the War Relief Fund. Remarkably, of the £17, 839: 15s : 11d that accrued from these provinces, £8,279 : 9s : 2d came from Igboland comprising Onitsha and Owerri Provinces. Most of these funds accrued from the sale of cash crops which the people, with government encouragement, were actively engaged in. That they had to focus attention on cash crops to raise these funds in this period is evident, going by the food shortages recorded by the middle of the 1940s. Therefore, aside from meeting the demands of the colonial metropole, Britain enforced the cultivation of cash crops at

the local level, as a way to generate revenue which was repatriated home through the War Relief Fund and the Win the War Funds.

5.3 POST WORLD WAR II DEVELOPMENTS

From the period of the Second World War, the British colonial government began to play a more definite role in the economic activities of the colonies. Thus, beginning with the Colonial Development and Welfare Act, 1940, which was highlighted above, meagre funds were released to promote commerce, relieve economic depression in the United Kingdom and to stimulate agricultural and industrial activity in the colonial territories. In Nigeria, the money was used to improve research in food crops, public health, railway construction and scholarships. Arising from this, specifically in the period following the end of the war, Britain began a process aimed at interfering more actively in the organisation of primary and other activities in the colonies to remedy the acute shortage of export crops badly needed by its home market.⁵²

Consequently, a major step was taken in 1946, with the release of the "Ten Year Plan of Development and Welfare for Nigeria 1946-1956". In the plan, funds for agriculture were classified under Primary Production. Under it, Research Institutes were established to study and improve the production of cocoa, palm oil, maize as well as other cash crops.

Table 5.3: The Ten-Year Plan for Development and Welfare for Nigeria 1946-1956

SECTOR	ALLOCATION (£)
Water - Rural	4,002,000
Water - Urban	4,060,000
Road Development	7,046,300
Electricity	1,544,200
Telecommunications	820,000
Marine	3,517,940
Medical and Health	6,730,237
Education	5,326,543
Primary Production	3,386,461
Commerce and Industry	260,685
Social Welfare	12,774,900
Loan Charges	3,854,983
TOTAL	£53,327,249

Source: NAE, MISF 12, *A Ten-Year Plan for Development and Welfare for Nigeria, 1946-1956*, Enugu: Government Printer, 1946.

That agriculture was given £3,386,461, when compared with the more generous allocations for Social Welfare, Water, Road Development, Medical and Health as well as Education, clearly shows the little importance which the colonial government attached to it. This is in spite of the fact that it was the primary occupation of the people. Although most of the funds were not disbursed, even the little released under primary production was essentially channelled to export crop production.

However, life in the urban centres received a boost in this period. Following generous government allocations, infrastructural facilities were effectively improved. Because of this, there began a wave of rural/urban migration throughout the country. In Igboland particularly, this was very noticeable. Enugu, Onitsha, Aba, Umuahia and Port Harcourt gradually became major urban centres. This development had a ripple effect on the agricultural economy of Igboland. First, as we noted earlier, it led to rural/urban migrations, which resulted in a shortage of labour for food production in the rural areas. Secondly, it enhanced trade between the rural and urban centres as the cities became collecting centres for all the rural produce. This sometimes resulted in temporary food shortages in the rural areas as the cities became more attractive for the marketing of rural produce. The movement of goods to the urban centres occasionally led to a glut, which often resulted in fall in prices. In fact, earlier in 1945, L.T. Chubb, then Secretary of the Eastern Provinces, had noted in a minute to the Director of Supplies Lagos, that Onitsha town, which used to be a large distributing centre, was now merely absorbing all the foodstuffs that it could get and indications showed that it was not getting enough. Enugu, on the other hand, remained to a large extent a distributing centre principally of Abakiliki and Agbani gari. He feared that Enugu was growing at such a rate as to impose greatly increased demands on the surpluses of contiguous areas.⁵³

This increased demand rested squarely on the rural areas, where production of food crops was intensified. It is worth noting, that there was always a considerable difference in the prices of these foodstuffs between the rural and the urban centres.

Table 5.4 below, which gives statistics for Aba Division in 1947, is representative of this trend.

Table 5.4: Prices of Foodstuffs in Aba Division - 1947

ARTICLE	ABA TOWNSHIP	OUTSIDE THE TOWNSHIP
Gari per bag	2s.	1/6
Yams: 10 Tubers	£1	20-25 tubers for £1
Cocoyams per basket	6d.	3-6d.
Maize (for 3d.)	-	18-24 cubs.

Source: NAE, 1445 Vol II Control of Foodstuffs in Markets 1940-1947, ABADIIST 14/1/776.

The better prices offered in the cities exerted positive influence on production in the rural areas, though they occasionally caused shortages even in the places of production. Also, gari shipments to the Northern Region in this period recorded an appreciable increase. In fact, shipments from Eastern to Northern Region generally, rose from 15,778 tons in 1948 to 16,992 tons per annum in 1950.⁵⁴

Perhaps, the greatest effort made by the colonial governments to ensure the protection and uninterrupted supply of export crops came in the form of the establishment of Marketing Boards. These Boards were established to handle the storage and marketing of export crops and to guarantee a stable income to the peasant farmers. First to be established, was the Nigerian Cocoa Marketing Board. By 1950, Boards had been set up for cotton, groundnut and palm oil. Helleiner, sees this as probably, the most significant occurrence in the period, arguing that these

Boards sought to assume orderly marketing and to protect supplies of raw materials to Britain.⁵⁵ The Marketing Boards were expected to guarantee stable seasonal crop prices to farmers, guarantee stable income to farmers and to use the funds to improve the living standards of the people. However, they were forbidden by law to improve the non-export crop producing sector. That way, the production of food crops recorded a major set back as they did not fall within the orbit of these Boards.

Moreover, the fact that neither the market nor the incentive to produce was available to the food crop cultivators made the production of these crops unattractive to the farmers. But this is not to say that the farmers totally abandoned food crop production. Many of them while devoting most of their farms to palm plantation also reserved some plots for food crops. It could be confidently asserted that had similar marketing facilities offered to the export crops been granted to the food crops, they might have fared better during the colonial period. Though the food crops were not necessarily within the ambit of the Marketing Boards, they still suffered from the inefficiency of these Boards. Most of the crops in Igboland were planted alongside the cash crops on which the farmers' income depended. Therefore, poor returns to the farmer from one sector directly or indirectly affected his overall performance. Even in this situation, the farmers were encouraged to produce more cash crops at least to enhance their income, and this in no way helped the lot of the food crops.

Nevertheless, evidence abounds that the Produce Marketing Boards as well as the Eastern Nigerian Development Corporation (ENDC) which was set up in 1954, enhanced the infrastructural development of Eastern Nigeria. The latter was established to undertake schemes of production in industry, commerce and

agriculture. To this end numerous feeder roads were built all over Igboland especially, to link the palm oil producing areas and the railway stations. Also, the campaign for the popularisation of fertilizer in Igboland, was intensified in this period. In the Okigwe District, for instance, the Agricultural Department had commenced a programme in which fertilizer was being distributed to farmers free. However, the reception was not enthusiastic save for a handful of well known men,⁵⁶ who accepted to experiment with the chemical. Nevertheless in 1954, improved yields were reported from the Arochukwu Division, particularly of yams following some fertilizer demonstration trials on farmers' plots and the sale of fertilizers to interested farmers.⁵⁷

The scepticism on the part of the farmers particularly on the long run effect of fertilizer on both the soil and their crops did not help the adoption of the chemical. In Isiala Ngwa, especially in Ama-Uha community where one Agricultural Officer, Mr. Ololo was said to have introduced fertilizer, only very few people initially adopted it as many complained that it was a poison capable of killing their animals. However, the bumper harvest that fertilizer usually produced was enough incentive to attract others.⁵⁸

Similarly, there is evidence to show that the Agricultural School at Umuahia contributed immensely in the drive to propagate fertilizer use in Igboland. Many farmers initially showed open rejection of the new product. In many cases several bags of fertilizer were left untouched. The fertilizers were later used by Biafran soldiers during the civil war to manufacture bombs.⁵⁹ The farmers preferred their local kitchen refuse as a more effective manure. For them, the natural fallow method

(which sometimes lasted up to seven years) and mulching, were considered as better ways of maintaining soil fertility. Therefore, from the 1950s when fertilizer was introduced many farmers in Igboland were wary of the new product. They argued that fertilizer grown crops tended to be insect-prone. Beetles fattened on the yams produced with fertilizer leaving pock-marks, thereby making the tubers less attractive in the barn and at the market place. The fact that agricultural information was imposed on the farming community and was, in any case badly demonstrated by the extension officers, who lacked local knowledge and lore, did not help matters either.⁶⁰

Following the proclamation of the territory of Nigeria as a federation under the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954, the need arose for independent Regional Development Plans. Thus, the first Eastern Nigeria Development Plan 1955-1960, was introduced. The aim of the plan was to increase agricultural and industrial production so as to bring about a steady rise in income and standard of living. The allocation for agriculture under this plan significantly rose from the £3,386,461 allocated to primary production under the 1946 plan to £11,021,998. This generous allocation, the government argued, was meant to facilitate the production of raw materials expected to provide the bulk of the region's wealth.

Table 5.5: The Eastern Nigeria Development Plan 1955-1960

SECTOR	ALLOCATION (£)
Agriculture	11,021,998
Community Development	500,000
Co-Operatives	161,537
Education	1,434,040
Fisheries	144,168
Forestry	298,520
Housing	1,000,000
Industrial Bank	698,250
Inland Waterways	359,668
Leprosy	173,500
Local Industries	623,016
Medical and Health	3,564,380
Preliminary Investigations	20,000
Roads	3,304,700
T.B. Pavillion	277,800
Veterinary	75,692
Water Supplies	5,519,360
TOTAL	£29,268,629

Source: NAE, M.E.N. 68, *The Eastern Nigeria Development Plan 1955-1960*,

Enugu: Government Printer, 1953.

Under the 1955-1960 plan, the colonial government continued the policy of investing in Research Institutes to facilitate rural agricultural production. In fact, it is noteworthy that the Research Institute at Umudike-Umuahia received generous government support to aid its operations particularly its fertilizer drive in Igboland. The colonial government now seemed to agree that agriculture, including both the production of crops and the raising of livestock large and small, was by far the most important industry in the colonial empire and that upon it depended the material well-being of colonial peoples. Thus, the government identified the preservation and improvement of the productive powers of the basic natural resources of the country; the social welfare and advancement of the peoples; and, the economic use of the land and labour available as the three main objectives, which must be taken into account in building a coherent agricultural policy.⁶¹ It was indicative that a more calculated and cohesive agricultural policy was beginning to emerge.

One major issue in this period, was the phenomenal rise in labour migration in Igboland. Though the trend may have started prior to the colonial period, however, the introduction of a money economy necessitated the quest for the acquisition of cash from any human endeavour, while the population growth evident in the period led to land hunger in many places. In the same vein, the urge to produce for the rising population of the cities made labour migration as well as wage labour a lucrative enterprise. The Ezza of Abakiliki were actively involved in this trend. Several young men and women ostensibly for want of land to cultivate went out mainly during the dry season to neighbouring clans, where they received wages of between one penny and two pence a day as well as free food.⁶² In parts of Orlu especially in Isunjiaba the

migrant wage labourers were called “Ndi Obowo”⁶³ (people from Obowo), but considering the distance between the area and Obowo, we do not have enough evidence to show that these workers actually came exclusively from Obowo. However, it is probable that some of them may have come from there since Obowo together with the Mbaise areas are part of the places seriously hit by scarcity of cultivable land.

People from Mbaise and some other parts of Owerri went to Etche in Rivers State as migrant labourers.⁶⁴ Similarly, labourers from Abakiliki (mainly the Ezza), Omoo and Anako migrated to the Aguleri area of the Anambra flood plain, where they worked as migrant labourers. An informant said that among the Ezzeagu prior to the colonial period, there was a sufficiency of labour, in that labour for farm work was internally generated. However, in the colonial period, because of the economic pull of the Colliery and the Railway, migrant labour developed especially in the off-season periods. Communities, in Ngwo for instance, because of their proximity to the Colliery and the Railway Stations tended to lose their youths to these industries. Surrounding communities, therefore, supplied farm labour to Ngwo and other areas around Enugu in the late 1940s and 1950s in a wage structure of between six pence and one shilling three pence a day.⁶⁵ Over the years, these migrant labourers have formed farming colonies in Nikeland (Agu-Nike), the Delta (Agu-Anam), Nsukka (Ukpatta) and some other locations around the Benue Valley. Similarly, many parts of Okigwe in the 1950s were serviced by migrant labourers from Ohaozara. Many have argued that the enormous demands of the colonial state in the context of the lack of proper economic planning only resulted in the pauperisation of the peasant farmers

who now transformed themselves into migrant labour as a means of survival. Hence, it is argued that labour migration was a feature of the poor. A migrant labourer was thus seen as a struggling man/woman. But this is not to say that they were despised in Igboland for their role in the agricultural economy could not be ignored.

Meanwhile, the government continued its efforts at teaching the rural farmers the basic agricultural techniques to ensure steady production. To this end, a practical farm school to train farmers was started at Achi under the 1955-1960 plan, while at Okwudor and Umuomaku, non-residential practical farm schools were run to give some training in the use of fertilizers, the establishment of crops and soil conservation.⁶⁶ At the level of food crops, yam exports from Akaeze and Ishiagu in Afikpo District to Orlu, Aba, Okigwe and Calabar which picked up by 1953, recorded a boost in the 1955-1960 period. Also, from the same area, gari was exported to Abakiliki and fermented cassava to Orlu and Okigwe.⁶⁷

The high point of the agricultural policy under the Eastern Nigeria Development Plan 1958-1962, was to investigate the best ways of growing crops, to demonstrate their use to farmers, and to follow up with assistance and advice. Consequently, the government made efforts to acquire sites for the establishment of farm settlements and demonstration plots. However, this move was resisted by majority of the villagers who thought it an unnecessary waste of their farmlands. Such resistance had precedent. For, back in the early 1920s, when land was being acquired for the agricultural station at Umudike Umuahia, the people fiercely resisted such forceful take over of their lands.

In that particular incident, over twelve people were incarcerated for refusing the government take-over of their land.⁶⁸ In spite of this problem, government made it clear that it attached great importance to the development of agriculture in order to ensure the maximum utilisation of land consonant with the maintenance of soil fertility; to increase the production of staple foods; to provide for an increase in consumption and to maintain and expand the cultivation of export crops.⁶⁹ Hence, the development of food crops wherever it occurred was aimed at keeping the people healthy enough to produce the export crops which were actually needed. Therefore, the boom recorded in Ngwaland and indeed many other parts of Southern Igboland particularly, especially in palm oil production could be attributed to the serious support and encouragement which the people received to enable them enhance their output. For those who agreed to undertake the extensive cultivation of oil palm trees were often times given free fertilizers as well as improved seedlings, while, as we had noted earlier, there was always a ready market for their product. In other words, the peripheral attention given to food production in this period was more a result of enlightened self-interest, since it was merely a means to an end for the colonial administrators. Equally, under the 1958-1962 plan, extension services were intensified by encouraging modern methods of farming and the dissemination of information on increased use of fertilizers, sprays and dusts against insects.

Another issue emanating from colonial agricultural policy particularly in the late 1950s was the idea of deliberately experimenting with new food crops, such as Irish potatoes, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, avocado pears, and citrus fruits. By concentrating so much on the transformation of the food economy and nutritional

habits of the people through the introduction of these new crops, the government failed to put sufficient money and efforts in the development of crops truly indigenous to the people, because it looked down on the nutritional qualities of these food crops. Thus, even those very nourishing vegetables and leguminous crops which were traditionally cultivated and eaten by the people, were not investigated for their nutritional qualities and with the view of improving cultivation and supply.⁷⁰ Similarly, the attempt to introduce plantation crops, created among the Igbo a new desire to acquire land on freehold terms. Hitherto, all land had been either family property (Ala ulo, compound land) or community property (Ala Agu or Ikpa), neither of which could be alienated in perpetuity from the unit in question. Afigbo opines that, under the economic and legal impact of colonialism, there came into being a growing class of African capitalists anxious to acquire secure tenure of land for plantation purposes.⁷¹ This happened in virtually all parts of Igboland, and from then, the available land for cultivation became either few or concentrated in a few hands. Also, in places like Owerri and other administrative centres, which came into being during the colonial period, government acquisition of lands deprived the people of their agricultural lands. From the late 1950s, this problem became so serious that one could hardly find any individual holding between 0.5-2 hectares alone.⁷² Since then, agricultural cultivation in these areas became only a part-time pursuit as the few who persisted had to cover long distances to acquire land for farming.

The traditional system of communal land ownership was thus seriously challenged by the colonial order. In Mbaise, for instance, the system of land ownership came to rest squarely in private hands. Even in places where land

ownership was by inheritance, the system still benefited only a few. Thus, people from smaller families tended to inherit bigger parcels of land than those from larger families. This placed the former at an advantage especially as the sale of land from then became big business. As a consequence, many of the poor farmers were deprived of lands for cultivation as they could not compete with the monied class in the purchase of lands. Also, squabbles over the sale and ownership of farmlands from the late 1950s became a constant feature of Igbo society both at individual and community levels. Boundary disputes especially between adjoining villages were rife. In essence, the monetisation of land ownership among the Igbo, deprived farmers of their farmlands and further led to food shortages as the actual farmers had little or no lands on which to cultivate.

It has been shown in the preceding chapter that the *Ezeji* title institution assumed a different dimension in the colonial period once a money economy was introduced. From the late 1950s this began to have more negative effects, particularly on land ownership in Igboland. This was because, with their enormous wealth these title holders were in a position to buy up very large expanses of land in their communities, thereby depriving the less privileged. In some cases, they even extorted land from widows and the helpless among them.⁷³ It is clear from the foregoing that the colonial establishment engendered the monetisation of the economy including land ownership and control. This development only succeeded in placing available land among the Igbo in the hands of a few. Hence the pauperisation of the peasant farmers and a further reduction in the production of food crops. The idea of palm plantation introduced in the late 1950s in Igboland further hijacked what was left of

the land. Such lands were marked out exclusively for that purpose, as it was argued that the introduction of food crops on such lands will only lead to the depletion of the soil nutrients. The encouragement which farmers who adopted the plantation schemes received, including free seedlings and fertilizer from the colonial Agricultural Department, was enough to attract more farmers to the system.

Colonial economic policies generally created an imbalance in the distribution of wealth. However, this was not peculiar to Igboland. In fact, Davis has argued that Africa's population expanded at an increasing pace during the colonial period, perhaps by as much as 1.3 per cent per year between 1930 and 1950 and by another 30 per cent over the decade 1950-1960. The emphasis on cash crop agriculture and the neglect of food crops, however, left Africa ill prepared to increase or even to maintain per capita food output, especially once urban growth became a factor. Thus, each rural producer, now had to feed more people and since the colonial infrastructure did not effectively link the urban with the rural area African farmers could not stop sufficient quantities of the food which they produced from going to the cities.⁷⁴ Thus, the rise in demand for food crops in the towns occasioned mainly by population pressure, naturally implied a more extensive cultivation in the rural areas. For instance, in the Izzi area of Abakiliki and in fact, in many parts of Igboland, the natural fallow period for farms was almost totally abandoned, as most farmlands came under continuous cropping. This affected the productivity of the rural dwellers, especially since the yam crop no longer had enough nutrients for its growth.⁷⁵ Cassava on the other hand benefited, because, as we noted earlier, the crop does not make enormous demands on the soil as other crops. Thus, from the late

1950s, more and more people undertook cassava production. Moreover, the fact that it could be made into gari, which could last for a longer period without spoiling and could be transported easily over longer distances made it more attractive. Consequently, cassava became a popular food in the towns. Hence, it is argued that urbanisation encouraged the growth of cassava on a commercial scale.⁷⁶

The importance of the agricultural sector to the economy of Igboland and Nigeria up till the time of the country's independence in 1960 has earlier been highlighted. Nevertheless, it is important to state that agriculture accounted for about 50 per cent of the total national income of Nigeria in 1960. In fact, by the first decade of the twentieth century, the dependence of the country's economy on agricultural exports was even greater. It accounted for as much as 90 per cent of the national income.⁷⁷ We must add however, that this success resulted from a biased colonial agricultural policy which favoured export crops to the detriment of food crops. Generally, the pattern of economic development that emerged after the colonial period was that of a peasant economy that was carrying the double burden of producing industrial-agricultural raw produce for sale and eventual export outside of its sector (even if a small fraction of the produce such as palm oil and groundnuts was consumed within it) and also producing food for domestic consumption within Nigeria's urban and rural sectors.⁷⁸

The colonialists preferred a mono-cultural economy. In Igboland for instance, the palm tree was the chosen crop. The overdependence on one crop as we have shown earlier often resulted in famines. Under the colonial administrations, food crop production suffered not only from land and labour shortages, but from general

neglect by research and extension workers and Marketing Boards. Cassava was a good example. Cash crops received more help, advice and credit than cassava, not only from governments but also from national and international development agencies. They also received more research funds toward improving varieties resistant to drought, diseases and insect pests.⁷⁹ Yam was able to survive the colonial neglect mainly because of the people's sentimental attachment to it. The crop, as we have noted, is deeply ingrained in the cultural framework of the Igbo people. Therefore, its continued cultivation for food has not depended on practical or economic factors alone.⁸⁰

This chapter has shown that the Igbo agricultural economy emerged from colonial rule with its soil totally exhausted due to constant use. Also, whereas persistent migrations to the townships made labour to become scarce and expensive in the rural areas, most of the thick forests disappeared in consequence of urbanisation. All these combined to frustrate the efforts of the peasant farmers who could not meet the demands of a growing population. Clearly, the colonial economy in Igboland left a legacy of cash cropping, an export-oriented economy, structural lopsidedness, a reliance on imported manufactured goods, a neglect of food production, a bias towards urbanisation and modernisation, a diversion of labour away from food production, and a steady rise in population.⁸¹ Hence, one may say that food crop production in Igboland survived the period 1900-1960, in spite of, not because of, the colonial economic policies.

The chapter therefore concludes that colonial agricultural policies in Igboland were characterised by exploitation and underdevelopment, what some scholars refer

to as growth without development. For whereas it recorded remarkable improvements in infrastructural development aimed at enhancing agricultural production, such facilities were tailored mainly to the production of export-oriented crops. Also, the overt and covert encouragement received by farmers involved in the production of these export crops were enough to dissuade them from going into the more demanding cultivation of food crops. Ultimately, the people's cherished traditional agricultural practices were truncated, as the various colonial initiatives made it increasingly uneconomic to indulge in such practices. What emerged was an unbalanced development, facilitated by colonial exploitation. The period, as the next chapter will show, led to a decline in food crop production and the beginning of an era of food shortages in Igboland.

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CHAPTER SIX

CHANGE AND CONTINUITY: THE POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD UP TO 1980

A striking feature of the food situation from the mid-1950s to the end of our period is the emergence of well defined government policies targeted towards the improvement of export crops and the coming of the period of food shortages, which resulted in the importation of foodstuffs to supplement local production. This contrasted sharply with the preceding period, when policies were mainly of an ad hoc type and the local production of foodstuffs was relatively adequate to meet local demands.

Writing in 1955, Pedler had observed that the shortage of foodstuffs was indeed a major problem in the whole of West Africa. He wondered why farmers did not produce more food crops, even when the demand for them was high and why the expansion of cash crops had not been matched by a sufficient expansion of food crops. Part of the reason, he suggested, was that whereas export or cash crops had been introduced in areas where soil and climate suited them, food crops on the other hand were often grown in some places under difficult conditions of soil and climate, and yields were consequently low.¹ Similarly, in his speech to the Legislative Council on March 1, 1951, the then Colonial Governor of Nigeria, Sir John Macpherson, identified the country's rising population, increasing urban population and, in some cases, the lack of adequate farm land for cultivation as problems requiring urgent attention. According to him, there was the need for an increase in the production of local foodstuffs, while maintaining or improving the fertility of the soil. To do this was necessary because high prices for export crops tended to divert attention and labour from food farming. He contended that

subsistence farming was inadequate, hence, the need for farmers to grow surpluses for those in less fortunate areas and to get good prices for such surpluses.²

The above indicate that the problem of inadequate food production had become apparent from the late colonial period. This problem seemed to have cut across the entire Sub-Saharan region. Africa is the only continent where food output per capita had declined in the past few decades. With a population growth of about 3 per cent, Africa's per capita agricultural production declined by 1.5 per cent annually in the 1970s and early 1980s. A total of approximately 150 million Africans are directly threatened by famine and malnutrition.³ Obviously, this major development had a definite historical antecedent. There is no doubt that the lack of adequate programmes and policies to cushion the effect of persistent population pressure was enough to neutralize any recorded increases in food production. This was the case in Nigeria and particularly Igboland, arguably one of the highest population densities in Africa.

This chapter is concerned with the post-independence period up to 1980. It analyses the dynamics and effects of post-independence official policies and the responses of the people; the impact of the civil war of 1967-1970, and of crude oil exploitation on food production in Igboland. With regard to policies, five major phases are principally highlighted: the period 1861-1950; the internal self-government era 1951-1960 when reorganisation led to the expansion of research and extension activities; the immediate post-independence period, 1960-1965 when a statement of definite agricultural policies, objectives and goals started; the military era 1966-1979, when the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) was introduced as well as the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) scheme, as part of the Second National

Development Plan (1970-1974) and Third National Development (1975-1980) respectively; and, the post-military era of 1980-1983, which featured the Green Revolution Programme.⁴

It is argued here that the food shortages of the 1960s and 1970s had precursor in the faulty agricultural policies of the colonial period, as well as the inability of post-independence administrators to formulate concrete policies aimed at an improved production of foodstuffs. Also, the discussion in this chapter will show that whereas some aspects of the people's cultures and traditions, especially those relating to agricultural practice underwent profound metamorphosis, others still remained unchanged. It was therefore the story of a people striving to protect their cherished values in the face of serious socio-cultural and economic influences. The chapter has been divided into three sections: the Post-Independence Administration and the First National Development Plan (1962-1968); the Challenge of the Civil War; and, the Post Civil War Decade. Each of these will consider the people's responses to official policies as well as other factors, that influenced food production in the period.

6.1 THE POST-INDEPENDENCE ADMINISTRATION AND THE FIRST NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN (1962-1968)

Beginning from independence in 1960, the government started to evolve definite policies aimed at improving agricultural production. In Eastern Nigeria, for instance, where over 75 per cent of the population depended on agriculture and about 50 per cent of the Region's output came from this sector, it became clear to policy makers that no serious improvement in the pace of overall progress could be made unless strenuous

efforts were made to raise agricultural productivity.⁵ Thus, the prime objective of the plan for Eastern Nigeria, which was part of the first National Development Plan, 1962-1968, was to achieve and maintain the highest possible rate of increase in the standard of living of the people. Efforts were to be made, therefore, to ensure the modernisation of agricultural methods through the adoption of improved techniques, intensified agricultural education and changes in land tenure.⁶

Table 6.1: Capital and Recurrent Outlays in the Development Plan for Eastern Nigeria, 1962-1968 (£000)

SECTOR	CAPITAL	% OF TOTAL	RECURRENT	TOTAL	% OF TOTAL
Primary Production (Agric, Forestry & Fishing)	30,361	40	6,450	36,821	34
Trade and Industry	12,930	17	588	13,518	12
Transport	8,850	12	1,350	10,200	9
Education	8,805	12	21,091	29,896	28
Water (Rural and Urban)	5,100	7	1,100	6,200	6
Town and Country Planning	3,306	4	275	3,581	3
General Government	2,067	3	382	2,449	2
Health	1,819	2	1,381	3,200	3
Electricity	600	1	-	600	1
Social Welfare	534	1	724	1,258	1
Information	450	1	190	640	1
Justice	250	Less than 0.5	190	440	Less than 0.5
Financial Obligations	120	"	-	120	"

Source: B. Floyd, *Eastern Nigeria: A Geographical Review*, London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 308.

It is significant to note, as shown in Table 6.1, that agriculture which in this case includes forestry, and fishing, was granted the lion's share of £36,821,000 which represented 34 per cent of the total outlay. However, because the policy emphasised mainly the rapid expansion of tree crops, this allocation was therefore to benefit mainly export production. It was expected, that the policy would lead to an early increase in

cash farm income, government revenues from purchase taxes and export duties, as well as Marketing Board profits. Consequently, government was to invest in tree crops through plantation development, by the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC), co-operative plantation (farm settlements), subsidized planting schemes for small holders and nucleus plantations.⁷

It has been argued that the focus of the first plan (1962-1968) made it simply a continuation of the colonial development policy in Nigeria. This is because the plan was basically export-oriented and agricultural exports continued to be the main sources of growth. In contrast to the colonial era, some of the resources from the rural sector were now being used to develop the urban sector instead of the metropolis, but the rural sector still remained neglected and the rate of growth of agriculture continued to decline relative to the rate of growth of the non-agricultural sector.⁸ The reason may not be far fetched. Government needed revenue for development projects and all hands were therefore on deck to encourage agricultural exports from which government revenue came.

Table 6.2: Planned Investment in Agriculture, 1962-1968 (Eastern Region)

SECTOR	CAPITAL	RECURRENT	TOTAL
Tree Crops (Primarily for Export)	22,784	-	22,784
Other Crops (Primarily for Food)	2,795	-	2,795
Animal Health and Husbandry	721	1,910	2,631
Extension, Research and Training	7,095	3,616	5,711
Fisheries and Forestry	306	97	403
Land Use	175	822	997
Supporting Use	1,485	15	1,500
TOTAL	30,361	6,460	36,821

Source: NAE, AR/EN/A217, Eastern Nigeria Development Plan, 1962-1968.

Table 6.2 above shows the disproportionately large sum allotted to tree crop production meant primarily for export. The £22,784,000 allotted to this sector sharply contrasts with the meagre £2,795,000 given to the production of other crops including those primarily meant for food. The aim was to enable the tree crop sector to produce export crops to earn external revenue. If we bring into view the fact that this investment would take a number of years to mature, since the trees would naturally take long before bearing fruit, one may then appreciate the volume of capital being tied down. Later the policy was changed to that of import substitution and once more the burden was placed on the agricultural sector to produce raw materials for local industries. Unfortunately, food production was neglected to such an extent that in the first decade of independence, food was already being imported to subsidize local supplies.⁹ In fact, the growth of food production virtually came to zero as food import assumed a permanent feature of external spending. The thinking in government was that the people only needed to be encouraged to produce export crops, since they had always produced enough for local consumption.

An informant recalled that all through the First Republic (1960-1966), food cultivation in Igboland was carried out on traditional lines. The traditional method of maintaining soil fertility through long fallow periods was continued. It was only in the schools that attempts were made to adopt the use of compost manure. Hence, compost pits were dug and left for sometime after which the contents were used on the farms.¹⁰ By then chemical fertilizer was still not popular.

Indeed, preference for export crops was characteristic of many post-independence African administrations. The new leaders were not in a position to depart radically from the agricultural strategies of their colonial predecessors even if they were so inclined.

so inclined. Many saw cash cropping as the main channel through which they could enter the world economy. Moreover, intent upon building 'modern' societies, which by the very definition of the time were oriented toward the urban sector, the new African leaders continued to emphasize export crops in order to generate the foreign exchange earnings which they considered necessary for modernising their countries. Those aspects of the infrastructure needed for exports received attention thus building further on the structural lopsidedness inherited from the colonial era.¹¹

In Eastern Nigeria between 1961 and 1966, the government set up community plantations, farm settlements and the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC) plantations to boost export development. The aim of setting up community plantations was to improve on the prevailing systems of land use, based on the traditional tenure and indigenous settlement patterns. Under the scheme, people were expected to release a sizeable portion of their land for development of plantations. The block was surveyed and the farmers who would work on the land were formed into a co-operative. Through a lease agreement, the co-operative was given use of the land for a period of time ranging from 60 to 99 years. Rent was paid either to the land owners or the community.¹² The Community Plantations did not place emphasis on the cultivation of a particular cash crop, rather food crops were allowed and each participant was entitled to his crops. The much publicised aim was to use these communities to teach better farming methods and new agricultural techniques to the rest of the population.¹³

The plantations were sited in different parts of Igboland, especially where substantial land could be acquired. The majority were however located in the medium - high population density zones. That way, they could be visited by farmers from many

surrounding villages, who were interested in hearing at first hand and seeing with their own eyes how other communities were coping with common problems of rural development.¹⁴ Oil palm and rubber were the main crops planted in these plantations, while the government assisted with seedlings and fertilizer.

Table 6.3: Community Plantations Sponsored by Rural Development Project in Igboland (1965)

LOCATIO N	DIVISION AND PROVINCE	SIZE (GROSS ACRES)	APPRO. NO. OF PARTICIP ANTS	PERIOD OF LEASE (YEARS)	CROPS	POPULAT ION DENSITY ZONE
Abia	Bende (Umuahia)	1500	170	99	Oil Palm	Low Medium
Ugwuaka	Okigwe (Owerri)	1500	30	-	Oil Palm	Medium
Akwete	Aba (Umuahia)	530	95	99	"	Medium
Agbaja	Okigwe (Owerri)	400	100	-	Oil Palm	Medium- High
Akoliufu	Bende (Umuahia)	400	100	99	"	Low Medium
Lekwesi	Okigwe (Owerri)	400	70	-	Oil palm	Medium
Umuogbo	Orlu (Owerri)	90	25	60	"	Very High
Affa	Udi (Enugu)	25	50	-	Vegetable	Medium

Source: Floyd, *Eastern Nigeria*, pp. 216-217

As shown in Table 6.3, the oil palm seems to have been the major crop cultivated on these plantations. Even where vegetables were added, they consisted mainly of tomatoes, onions and pepper. Thus, like the colonial government, the idea of community plantations of the independence administration sought to divert peasant labour from food to export crop cultivation. The policy makers erroneously believed that the food sub-sector could take care of itself without any external stimulus. And this confidence was reinforced by expert reports which suggested that in Nigeria, low level of demand for food rather than inadequate supply constituted the bottleneck to increased food

production.¹⁵ Therefore, although the policy, as we stated earlier, allowed the farmers to cultivate food crops on the plantations, the lure of cash was enough to divert their attention to the production of rubber and oil palm for which these plantations were in the first instance established.

The Eastern Nigerian Development Corporation (ENDC) similarly established plantations under the 1962-1968 development programme. Altogether, the Corporation had 22 plantations covering approximately 133,835 acres. These included eight 39,411 acres of cocoa, six 55,010 acres of oil palms, six 36,364 acres of rubber, one 970 acres of coconut palms and one 2,080 acres of cashew.¹⁶ The stated objective of government was to develop the rural communities and boost revenue through cash crop production. Crops for cultivation on these plantations were to be cash crops including cocoa, palm oil, rubber, coconut and cashew. The government assisted with the provision of infrastructural facilities on the sites to make life easier for the participants. Thus, internal roads, bridges and embankments were constructed to aid movement of labourers, vehicles and machinery from one block to another for planting, cultivating and harvesting operations.¹⁷ By 1965, many of these plantations, as the table below shows, were already in existence.

Table 6.4: ENDC Plantations in Owerri Province, 1965

LOCATION	DIVISION	CROP	SIZE (AREA)	AREA PLANTED 1965	STAFF	LABOURERS
Ameke-Abam	Bende	Rubber,	10,000	2,416	30	647
Obiti	Owerri	Rubber,	6,000	1,700	16	400
Emeabiam	Owerri	Rubber	3,153	2,800	33	520
Umuahia	Bende	Cocoa	3,050	3,050	30	496
Arochukwu	Bende	Cocoa	2,580	2,434	30	444

Source: Floyd, *Eastern Nigeria*, p. 220.

Table 6.4 above shows that the five ENDC plantations in existence in Owerri Province by 1965, were all planted with rubber and cocoa. The large expanse of land involved as well as the number of labourers engaged was indeed a further depletion of the resources committed to food cropping especially given the relative land scarcity in Igboland. Moreover, the envisaged positive influence of these plantations on the surrounding communities at a point became suspect, especially once it was revealed that their siting, had a lot more to do with politics than economic considerations. Similarly, that the system of land acquisition was antithetical to the people's cultures and tradition soon became apparent as boundary disputes were rife, due to the improper demarcation of the areas. In Ohaji, for instance, prolonged disputes were recorded between the Asa, Obile, Ohoba, Umunwaku and Agwa communities, over the ownership of land in the settlement. Earlier negotiations to acquire land for this site had been stalled in 1961 owing to opposition from the indigenes.¹⁸ Moreover, because planting was very often ill-timed or improperly executed, it in many cases led to poor yields or death of the tree crops. By and large, not only did the experiment negatively affect food production, its overall balance sheet may reveal only about 40 per cent success.

Many people believe that perhaps more than anything else, Dr. Michael Okpara's greatest achievement in agriculture during his tenure as Premier of Eastern Nigeria in the First Republic, may well be in the numerous farm settlement schemes which he established to encourage the formation of an enlightened and prosperous modern body of farmers. The farm settlements were modelled after the Israel Moshavim. That is, a plantation system of commercial agriculture in which the labour force or settlers, instead of being merely paid workers as on a traditional plantation, have secure title on holdings

of their own which they operate and from which they can draw an income as well as having a share in the processing factory and in the running of the scheme, including the marketing of the produce.¹⁹ Most of these farm settlements were set up between 1962 and 1966. The administration showed a serious commitment to implement the policy and, in fact, went ahead to provide infrastructure in the areas. As early as 1963, for instance, a number of access roads had been provided in the areas where they were located. An example was the road from Ohaji connecting the Owerri-Port Harcourt expressway at Avu junction. Also at the Ohaji farm settlement, a 19.25 horse power engine was installed with an electric pumping machine to alleviate the water supply problem in the area. Likewise, a 30-foot high 39,200 gallon water tank was installed to replace the small reservoir that hitherto served the villages while dispensaries and schools were also built in the settlements to serve the settler population.²⁰

Table 6.5: Farm Settlements in Owerri Province, Eastern Nigeria 1962-1966

SETTLEMENT	DIVISION	TOTAL AREA PLANTED (ACRE)	AREA PLANTED DEC. 1966	NO. OF SETTLERS	TYPE OF CROPS	DATE STARTED
Ulonna South	Bende	2,018	892	240	Oil Palm/Rubber	9/4/64
Ulonna North	Bende	5,780	623	120	Oil Palm/Rubber	23/1/65
Ohaji	Owerri	14,929	2,053	360	Oil Palm/Rubber	15/11/62

Source: H.I. Ajaegbu, *Urban and Rural Development in Nigeria*, London: Heinemann, 1976, p. 65.

Table 6.5 demonstrates that like the other agricultural initiatives of the period, the farm settlements were principally meant for cash crops. Oil palm was given special consideration since it was the major export crop of Eastern Nigeria during this period. On the whole, the idea of improving agricultural production through the setting up of farm settlements and plantations revealed a number of issues. First, the fact that such initiatives had an overt bias for export crops further worsened the food situation which apparently became noticeable by the mid-1960s when food importation began. Also, as in the past, peasant produced staples once more remained in relative obscurity without financial support. Secondly, the idea of creating model farming communities amounted to concentrating development in restricted areas. And since these areas were provided with basic modern amenities, there was a drift of people to them, thereby causing an imbalance in population distribution. Moreover, the determined effort to relocate families via farm settlements caused a disruption in traditional patterns. In the end, these policies rather than improving the food situation actually led to food shortages in many parts of Igboland even before the civil war. It is interesting to note that the areas in which these cash crops were concentrated persistently ran out of food. Their supplies often came from other parts of Igboland or were sometimes outrightly imported from areas outside Igboland. This may have indirectly encouraged the development of an internal and external trade in retail foodstuffs which metamorphosed into what was called "Ahia attack" (aggressive trading around the frontiers of war) during the civil war.

The post-independence administration in yet another way neglected farmers even more than the colonial authorities. Burgeoning cities claimed so great a share of the returns generated by exports of cash crops that producers were cheated in the end.²¹

Consequently, the rural farmers not only lost their right to produce the crops of their choice, but also the full benefit of the proceeds of the export crops. However, the policy favouring export crop production was in the government's interest at least during the period. It has been shown, for instance, that in the 1960s foodstuffs often highly subsidized by the exporting governments were steadily available on world markets as 'food aid' at low prices. Therefore African governments were able to increase staple food imports often without incurring large balance of payments deficit or domestic food shortages.²² In other words, the food which was imported was cheap or at least not so expensive as to make a serious impact on the revenue accruing from cash crop exports. However, this deception was not to last for too long. But when food aid was given, the food habits of the people change for when people eat the food they did not produce, dependence on food import and aid ensues, thereby worsening the African food crisis.²³

Nevertheless, it is to the credit of the pre-civil war Eastern Nigerian regional government that the use of chemical fertilizer became more popular. Even then, the introduction of fertilizer took place at various times in the different parts of Igboland during this period.²⁴ Perhaps an insight into the history of chemical fertilizer in Igboland may suffice. According to government sources, following experimental work which began in 1947, the Eastern Nigeria Ministry of Agriculture recommended the use of fertilizers on yams. Hence, a scheme of importation and sale of fertilizers to farmers commenced in earnest in 1949. This was carried out under the auspices of the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC) which acted as sole agent. The use of demonstration plots was adopted particularly on yams and farmers willing to use the

chemicals were given some quantity free. Anyone who made some purchases was given an additional bag free.²⁵

Responses were initially so slow, that the ENDC had to advertise the product in markets and public places. Some 220 tons were sold in 1953 and 290 in 1954 using trucks fitted with loud speakers. In 1956, extension work was extended to include cassava, cocoyams and vegetables which were generally considered to be women's crops.²⁶ Following the withdrawal of the ENDC in 1956, due to huge losses, the Ministry of Agriculture and the United African Company (UAC) continued the campaign in 1957 and 1958, respectively, and with the complete withdrawal of the latter, the Ministry once more picked up the campaign in 1960. It was this existing apparatus that the regional government of the First Republic assumed at inception of office. Meanwhile, the continued depletion of the soil owing to population pressure and over-cropping had made the use of fertilizers imperative. By 1960, many parts of Igboland particularly in Southern Igboland, had abandoned the traditional five to seven year fallow period as land was no longer enough for cultivation. Fertilizer therefore had a strong attraction to the people. Moreover, response from the product was usually strikingly visual - the difference in growth, colour of the plant and size of the crop or fruit was evident to the eye of even the untrained observer. Hence, the farmer could see fertilizer, handle it and know when he has applied it.²⁷ The government, therefore, argued that fertilizers must be used to correct the nutrient deficiencies since soil fertility was low, either inherently or as a result of many years of cropping. They would be required to maintain and increased productivity so as to raise yields rapidly and also to obtain

maximum results from the improved varieties and other practices the farmer would adopt over a period of time.²⁸

Beginning from 1960, therefore, a flurry of activities aimed at popularising the use of fertilizers commenced in Igboland with the government in the vanguard. Some of the people insisted that the new fertilizers often led to the rot of their yams, but many more adopted it once they were convinced of its efficacy. However, the point to note beyond the people's response is that other bodies apart from government were equally involved. For instance, modern chemical fertilizer was introduced in Ikwo and other parts of Abakiliki in the mid-1960s by the Norwegian missionaries who had firmly established in the area since 1962.²⁹ Similarly, an Agricultural Officer in Abakiliki confirmed that the acceptance of fertilizer in the area had a lot to do with the fertilizer campaign of the post-independence administration.³⁰

The fertilizer campaign was also carried out through the farmers' co-operatives. An informant from Awgu admitted seeing fertilizer first in 1962/1963. Members of the Young Farmers' Club were given fertilizers to distribute to their parents and other farmers in their localities. But the real acceptance of the product, he said, came only after the civil war.³¹ The Agricultural Institute at Umudike Umuahia, also featured prominently in this fertilizer campaign. It helped in experimental and demonstration works on the new product and also sent its staff into different parts of Igboland to teach farmers how to apply fertilizer.³²

We may note the zeal with which many parts of Igboland responded to the introduction of fertilizer. Having been frustrated for so long farming a soil that was not particularly fertile, it was possible that many saw the change from their old traditional

practices characterised by bush fallowing, mulching and the use of household manure to chemical fertilizer as indeed a welcome relief. More importantly, fertilizer seemed to have held out a lot of promises to them, since its experimental work was started with the yam crop which the people held in high esteem. At least for the first time, government was introducing a policy favourably disposed to the improvement of food production. In any case, although many adopted the new product, quite a number still held to the old practices at least till the mid-1970s.

In spite of the above and despite the biased agricultural policies of the post-independence administration which favoured export crops, we may be quick to highlight the fact that food production in some parts of Igboland competed favourably with other activities largely due to local initiatives. An informant said for instance, that among the Mbaise, many more people took the yam title. It was in this period that Timothy Ezeji, James Nwigwe and many more from Ekwerazu took the *Ezeji* title.³³ Cassava production equally received a boost. The youths who could not be accommodated in this agricultural economy found employment elsewhere as migrant labourers. For instance many of them from Mbaise between 1962 and 1964 found employment in Umuoye Owerri, Umuahuru Etche, and Ikwerre. They went in groups mainly in December and January. These youths needed the cash to solve other problems aside from food. They were paid two shillings and six pence (2/6s) daily and returned back to their own farms after two to three months.³⁴

It may then be said without equivocation that as far as Igboland was concerned, the policies of the pre-war independence administration were not intrinsically different from those of the preceding colonial regime. Both of them favoured the production of

export crops over and above food crops. But, credit must be given to the administration for the campaign on the use of fertilizer in Igboland especially for food production. It enhanced food production and many people became interested once more in farming since they were now favourably disposed to substantial yields, following the use of fertilizer. However, it will be seen in the following paragraphs, whether these policies were abandoned or consolidated upon in the periods following the overthrow of that administration in 1966 and during the civil war.

6.2 THE CHALLENGE OF THE CIVIL WAR

On January 15, 1966, Nigeria recorded her first military d'état coup, which ushered in a period of military rule. In the new dispensation, Colonel Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, was appointed the Military Governor of the Eastern Region. Later that year (July 29) a counter-coup took place which saw the coming to power of Colonel Yakubu Gowon as Head of State and Commander in Chief of the Nigerian Armed Forces. The country was rapidly engulfed in a major crisis, which culminated in a 30-month civil war.

The Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) had a lot of consequences for the Igbo and more especially on food production. First, it led to the suspension of the agricultural policies of the preceding civilian administration. Thus, the campaign for the propagation of fertilizer, for instance, was stalled. Secondly, the conscription of able-bodied men and women for war duties and the heavy casualties depleted or diverted labour required for food production. Other problems arising from the war include: the general insecurity in the period which was not conducive for agricultural pursuits; loss of farmlands following the evacuation of people from conquered territories and movement into lands hitherto

reserved for cultivation; looting of barns and farmlands by rampaging soldiers; hunger and malnutrition occasioned by the Federal Government's economic blockade, which saw to a further depletion of labour; and, the inadequacies of the interim agricultural plans of the 'Biafran' administration. These issues will be further discussed in this section.

The beginning of the war in 1967, marked the commencement of a period of confusion in governance in Igboland. As a way to break Colonel Ojukwu's power base in the Eastern Region, the Federal Government carved up the country into twelve states on May 30, 1967. With this the entire Igboland came under the East Central State with Mr. Ukpabi Asika as Sole Administrator. Ojukwu, however, refused to recognise this exercise and continued to hold sway as the de facto leader of Eastern Nigeria. In effect, this meant that there were two separate administrations in Igboland, thereby making the task of governance cumbersome. Meanwhile, most of the policies and programmes of the post independence administration were either temporarily halted or summarily dumped. Planning for war efforts topped the agenda of government. Hence, plantations and farm settlements were abandoned and the aggressive marketing of fertilizer as well as government agricultural extension services suffered severe neglect. More than ever before, food crop production came under maximum threat. Rather than encouraging more people to go into agriculture, government's attention was diverted to policies that would enhance the successful prosecution of the war. Hence, it could be said that the outbreak of the civil war in 1967, disrupted food production and led to food importation as the conducive environment for food production was lacking. Also, agricultural

infrastructure was destroyed and programmes initiated during the 1962-1968 plan period were disrupted.

Similarly, the conscription of able-bodied men and women into the Biafran force after an initial phase of voluntary enlistment, reduced the available hands engaged in agriculture. Despite the popular support for the war among the people, conscription at a point became so unpopular that many had to hide in the bush to evade it. So much so that Colonel Ojukwu had to warn that the “young man who sneaked about the village, avoiding service in his country’s armed forces was unpatriotic; that young able-bodied school teacher who preferred to distribute relief when he should be fighting his country’s war, was not only unpatriotic but was doing a woman’s work”. And that, those who helped these loafers to dodge their civic duties should henceforth re-examine themselves.³⁵ That was the only step to take in the circumstance and the economic implications were quick to manifest, as the hands hitherto engaged in farm work were now channelled to the war front.

The loss of labour was not helped by the massive return of the Igbos from other parts of Nigeria, which led to an astronomical rise in population and the concomitant increase in the demand for foodstuffs. According to the Nigerian Red Cross, more than one million people of Eastern Nigeria origins left the North and returned to their ethnic areas in the East between September and October 1966. By the time the civil war finally broke out in 1967, over 4 million Easterners had returned home from all parts of the country due to the tension and bad feelings against them.³⁶ Most of these returnees were Igbo. This sudden rise in population further led to more pressure on already over stretched resources. Ukpabi Asika, the Administrator of East Central State, opined that

the return of the immigrants, cut off a substantial source of transfer income which the migrants used to send back to the communities and which provided a significant proportion of the gross income of such communities. Thus, those who were hitherto dependent on the more affluent migrants were suddenly obliged to accommodate, feed and maintain the migrants who had returned in poverty or worse conditions.³⁷ In effect, not only did the ensuing war sap the area of its labour resources, the increased demands for food arose mainly from the several mouths that now had to be fed. Essentially, the burden of reintegration and resettlement was shouldered by the families who accommodated their returnee relations. The influx of the returnees, thus, put pressure on the food resources of the East and threatened the food security of the area. Until then, Eastern Nigeria had the highest population densities of about 420 persons per sq. kilometre as against 337 in the West, 170 in the Mid-West and 106 in the North.³⁸ Moreover, since the influx of population to the East took place from September 1966, which coincided with the beginning of yam harvest season and the cassava planting season was already over, production of these staple food crops could not be increased to accommodate the sudden demand caused by the sudden population increase.³⁹ Martin has observed that the population of the Ngwa and other Igbo regions had already increased before the war with the return of Igbos from the other regions, and with each city that fell, more refugees fled into the rural Biafran heartland thus increasing the pressure on local land resources thereby worsening the food situation.⁴⁰

A substantial percentage of the labour force died in combat. In all, about a million lives were lost. Death resulted from combat, starvation, disease and shock.⁴¹ There may not be any point reiterating the fact that the heavy death toll dealt a damaging

blow on food production by depleting labour resources and thus creating food shortages during and after the war. Furthermore, the general insecurity occasioned by the war was simply not conducive for any serious agricultural pursuits. Normal agricultural practice could not take place, as it became risky to engage in farming not knowing when next the enemy would strike. In fact, only few people farmed as air raids were frequent.

However, there seem to have been a slight variation in the different regions of Igboland. Among the Aguleri of the Anambra flood plains, for instance, in response to the peculiar geography of the area which has been highlighted in earlier chapters, the people simply withdrew from the right to the left hand side of the river where it was perceived that the Nigerian soldiers could not penetrate once the war started. Thus, agricultural practice therefore received a boost at least for sometime, as many returnees from the towns joined in food production. That way, it was possible for them to produce enough food even for the fighting soldiers.⁴² Also in Nsukka, the war rather forced many into farming as there was hardly any other business available. Moreover, since the prime targets of the 'enemy' fighters were the market areas and other public places, people avoided such places and concentrated on their farm lands.⁴³ In Ishiagu-Ohaozara, Northeast Igboland, the people recorded some of their bountiest harvests in the period, because many hands were once more engaged in agriculture, while the war did not adversely affect many parts of the area.⁴⁴ Many of the indigenes even say that they did not see a Nigerian soldier until the end of the war.

Also production of food crops particularly yam continued in Ezzeagu, Northeast of Igboland. Here, it was said that the presence of the Biafran Organisation of Freedom Fighters (BOFF) provided reasonable protection for the farmers. In spite of this, the

farmers organized themselves to protect their barns which were temporarily shifted to the soil, while trade in foodstuffs especially with the city (Enugu) continued and in fact, recorded a tremendous boost owing to the rise in demand. This brought a renewed interest in farming.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, places where real farming took place during the civil war in Igboland were few and far between. These were mainly areas in which the war did not adversely affect or in the major food producing areas, where, in spite of the raging hostilities, people still found it worthwhile to farm to earn an income or guarantee their own subsistence. In the latter case, this was done at great costs, in terms of human and material resources. In essence, the general insecurity engendered by the war, made agricultural pursuits virtually impossible in many parts of Igboland, and this in no small measure affected agricultural output.

This problem was made worse by the loss of farmlands following the evacuation of conquered areas and movement into hitherto reserved farmlands for abode. All through Igboland, as town after town fell, people retreated into villages and creeks where they built shanty houses, often times under tree shade to escape the onslaught of ravaging Nigerian soldiers. In most cases, these flights were undertaken before or after harvests. Thus, what resulted was not only the loss of their homes and farmlands but that of their crops. There is evidence to show that many of the communities whose harvests were eaten up by these soldiers did not recover from the loss several years after. The case of Owerri is evident. Sources say that because almost all their yams were either looted or eaten up in the war period following the fall of the town in September 1968, they have failed till now to regain their former status.⁴⁶ This is not to say that the people were

actually great yam farmers prior to the war, but even the little they had simply disappeared with the war.

By the end of 1968, virtually all the major food producing areas of Igboland had come under the federal troops. It is in fact suggested, that it was indeed the loss of major food producing areas like Ngwa, Arochukwu, Bende, Abakiliki, Nsukka and Onitsha to the federal troops, that more than any other factor led to the collapse of Biafra.⁴⁷ In many of the places, where the looting and vandalisation of farmlands took place, the people returned to their homes after the war only to begin life from the scratch. Some had to borrow seed yams and cassava stems from their more fortunate neighbours.⁴⁸ In the case of Ohaji, central Igboland, this rather disturbing trend restricted yam production to the villages of Ochia, Igburu, Ikwerede, Asaa, Obile, Obitti, Ihie, Mgbu Isii and Umuapu which have been able to pick up since the end of the civil war.⁴⁹ Some species of the yam crop like *ji oko*, *ji Ibibio* and *ji Iyaghiri* have either become extinct or now much reduced in circulation, owing to the devastating effects of the civil war, even as many attribute the reduced quantity of cocoyam being cultivated in Igboland at present to the civil war period, when most of the crop was eaten up.⁵⁰ It was also as a result of this that many began to adopt rice as a substitute crop in Edda, so much that it began to challenge the dominance of yam in the area.⁵¹

Likewise, the movement of population in Igboland had a distracting effect on food production. Whereas the forceful evacuation of people led to the looting of their farmlands and harvests, the movement of people into areas hitherto reserved exclusively for cultivation, led to the loss of farmlands which ultimately affected food production adversely. Hence, choice farmlands became places of abode for fleeing Igbo population.

Equally, with this movement came the complete abandonment of the traditional farming practice of fallows, bush burning, etc. All these led to the shortage of foodstuffs in the war period.

Another aspect of the civil war which adversely affected food production was the economic blockade placed on Biafra by the Federal Government at the inception of the war in 1967. The blockade was placed on June 1, 1967, to prevent the export of palm produce and crude oil so as to destroy the economic basis of the secessionist republic, seen as a very potent weapon for achieving a quick victory.⁵² With time the blockade became effective as hunger and starvation ravaged the Igbo territory. Diseases like 'Kwashiokor', which resulted from severe protein deficiency ravaged the population. Also, because of the blockade, the flow of livestock and leguminous food crops from Northern Nigeria into the East stopped, leading to rise in prices. Because the whole region lacked sufficient sources of conventional protein, the war created an imbalance in the people's diet.⁵³ The launching of an emergency food programme with the formation of the 'Land Army' in 1969 by the Biafran authorities did not help matters. Suddenly, many started to eat tree-bark, lizards, insects or any crawling or flying thing and drank mud water. Some even cooked their children while others just abandoned them. Not a few actually ate the flesh of dead soldiers including their own (Biafran soldiers) who fell in the front, all in a bid to stay alive.⁵⁴ Simply put, the economic blockade seriously hit the foundations of the Igbo economy. With nothing coming in from outside, the people were forced to produce everything they needed. In a situation where there were hardly any previous arrangements for such an emergency not a few were caught unawares. What resulted was large scale frustration, hardship and poverty, as the resources of the

food producing areas already under pressure due to insecurity, became over-stretched and obviously gave up in the face of grave challenges resulting in food shortages. It was in this circumstance that people ate up their barns of yams, while cocoyam and cassava were oftentimes harvested and eaten prior to the harvest period. Therefore, not only was the people's energy sapped due to hunger and malnutrition occasioned by the economic blockade, all the available foodstuffs were eaten up albeit prematurely and this was disastrous for the food situation both in the war period and directly after the war.

What therefore resulted from all these was massive hunger. Many indeed believe that more people died in the war due to hunger than by actual combat. However, the extent of hunger, starvation and malnutrition differed from place to place according to the extent of army operations, how long ago the area had been liberated, the degree of displacements of people, the natural ability of the area concerned to feed itself and the availability of relief food.⁵⁴

As an interim measure, the Biafran government initiated some moves with a view to tackling the food problem. The Biafran Information Service persistently advised the people to cultivate more food to avert imminent hunger. Starting in 1966, elders, village heads, schools and religious heads were instructed to educate their people on the benefits of maintaining self-sufficiency in food production. Also, in the famous Ahiara Declaration, the contributions made by the farmer, the craftsman and other toilers to the war effort were given adequate recognition. Therefore, a cardinal point of the Biafran economic policy was to keep their welfare constantly in view. The defined goal was to achieve self-sufficiency in food production. The Biafran Land Army was thus set up to mobilise people towards effective food production. Furthermore, farmers, craftsmen

and tradesmen were to form cooperatives and communes, so as to make them take pride in the work by according them the recognition and prestige they deserved.⁵⁵ In spite of these laudable programmes, the war situation made it virtually impossible for them to be realised. The Biafran Land Army actually took off, but the challenges before it were enormous, that it was overwhelmed within a short time. Under the war condition, it was also difficult to check the corruption that was associated with the officers. Cases of favouritism and nepotism were rife and this thereby led to the early demise of these interim policies. However, up till the end of the war, the Biafran Land Army maintained some farms essentially for the feeding of soldiers. In the same vein, the Biafran government set up a Food and Nutrition Directorate to cater for the feeding of the army and the populace. Because it was starved of the necessary funds, the Directorate depended solely on forced food donations from villages within Biafra.⁵⁶

In terms of food production, the civil war obviously introduced a change of a special kind in Igboland. For want of something to eat, many began to experiment with all kinds of plants. That way, new crops and new species of existing crops were discovered and incorporated in the Igbo food culture. For instance, *Uda* (a tree-bark) was discovered to contain a lot of salt and was cooked in soup as a veritable alternative to scarce processed salt. *Famiwa* (a specie of wild cassava) had its large dose of prussic acid reduced by thorough boiling before consumption. Leaves such as *Shrashra* and *Nturukpa* were discovered to be highly medicinal, especially as remedy for stomach upset and were widely consumed, while lizard meat, especially the broth was consumed with relish as a reliable prophylactic for kwashiokor.⁵⁷ Also, in addition to mushrooms and snails, every available animal was eaten. Even the vulture landed in the soup pots of some families from time to time. It was these people who broke the traditional taboos

concerning the types of food and meat eaten who survived the war without much injury to their physical health. Many others kept the fact that they ate these traditionally repugnant things secret from others due to shame,⁵⁸ a clash of traditional imposition and economic reality.

Again, the enforced movement of people due to the war, facilitated a process of culture exchange among the Igbo. While introducing new crops, people freely borrowed from their hosts. In many parts of Abakiliki, for instance, two species of yam *Obia-eturugo* and *Igum* were introduced by people who fled into the area during the war. It is also believed that it may have been people who fled from the war that brought these species back with them at the end of hostilities.⁵⁹ Also in Afikpo, it was the refugees who resided in the area that introduced the specie of yam called *Ona* (three-leaved yam), as well as consumption of *Ugba* (oil bean) and *Ukwa*. All these were not yet popular in the period before the war.⁶⁰

One crop that seriously benefited from the war, at least comparatively, was cassava. Earlier chapters have shown that cassava is principally seen as a female crop in Igboland. With the absence of men from the farm, women became the major food producers. In this case, cassava benefited tremendously. Moreover, as the yam barns were looted the only cassava products that faced similar experiences were those harvested or at least due for harvest. Thus, whereas, cassava could be replanted with the stem which was not edible, yam suffered as even the seed yams meant for planting were eaten up due to hunger. Though many attempted eating cassava leaves in the war period, but at least there was still the stem left for planting. Following the loss of seed yams and cocoyam in many parts of Owerri, for instance, cassava practically became the only

source of carbohydrate food. This was also a development that came with the war.⁶¹ Also in Ngwaland, the war marked the emergence of cassava as a staple food crop, finally displacing the yam, now cultivated only on a small scale in the Northern Ngwa region. Equally, gari became and has since remained the most popular form of cooked cassava among the villagers.⁶² The new emphasis on cassava, it may be argued, resulted in a gradual shift of power to the women in the family. Women practically became the main source of income in the family, as most men were away to the war fronts.

Moreover, men who did not enlist into the army were in constant hiding from conscription. That way, their livelihood and survival was completely dependent upon their wives and grown-up daughters. Hence, men lost respect as well as their biological and natural place as the head of the home, while women were elevated socially and economically.⁶³ With the introduction and spread of gari grating machines in many parts of Igboland, the demand for cassava and cassava products became virtually impossible to be met. With the increased pressure on gari, many now turned to cocoyam another of the “female” crops hitherto ignored by the people. Again, this was to the advantage of the women who primarily cultivated this crop.

No matter how one looks at it, the civil war had grave consequences for Igbo economic life in general and food production in particular. The enabling environment to produce was lacking, the brigandage exhibited by soldiers did not help matters, while the economic blockade placed by the federal government was the real factor that led to the eventual defeat of the Igbo in the civil war. The hunger and malnutrition which at a point took over Biafra encouraged inflation. Prices were intolerably high, with gari attracting the fantastic price of one Biafran pound or more to the cigarette cup. There

were times before the war when the same amount could buy from 240 to 720 cups.⁶⁴ By the first few days of 1970, the situation had almost gone out of hand, so much so that the Biafran leader, Colonel Ojukwu, once he left the territory appealed to the international community for urgent food aid to his kinsmen within 72 hours to avoid a major catastrophe.

6.3 THE POST-CIVIL WAR DECADE, 1970-1980

The point had been made that the civil war led to the devastation of major socio-economic infrastructure in Igboland. So much that the people had to start afresh once the war ended. This was in line with the Federal Government's new policy of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. Similarly, it could be said that apart from research and investment programmes started during the late colonial period and continued by the independence government to improve the production of high value foodstuffs with the aim of improving the supply of proteinous foods, there were hardly new policies or investments to foster the production of major indigenous staple food crops,⁶⁵ by the post-independence regime. The assumption was that Nigerians could always produce enough food for their sustenance. The Consortium for the Study of Nigerian Rural Development, based at the Michigan University (USA) confirmed that much when, after a comprehensive study of the Nigerian economy, it stated in 1969 that:

Since production of four major staples (sorghum, millet, cassava and yams) satisfies effective demand, there is little economic justification for Nigeria to launch major long-run food production campaigns in the 1970s to satisfy domestic market at the expense of export crop production.⁶⁶

Hence, the issue of food production was once more taken for granted.

Furthermore a new dimension had been introduced to Nigeria's socio-economic history generally with the commencement of oil exploration in the country in 1958. Crude oil deposits which had been struck in the Eastern Region started to enjoy government patronage and by 1965 the oil was already being exported. With time, it occupied a dominant position among the export items of the country. The proportion of crude oil in the country's Gross Domestic product (GDP) rose from 0.9 per cent in 1960 to 45.5 per cent in 1975. And by 1980, it accounted for about 98 per cent of total export earnings.⁶⁷

We must note however, that the stupendous revenue coming from oil was timely to enable the rebuilding of dilapidated and destroyed infrastructure owing to 30 months of warfare. In any case, just like other oil exporting states, the spectacular growth of oil revenues particularly in the 1970s in Nigeria was a powerful centralising force. As a result, the state came to occupy a strategic position in the national economy.⁶⁸ As against the federal structure adopted at independence, increased military presence which led to over-centralisation of polices and programmes was introduced. Therefore, under the different military administrations, especially after the civil war, majority of the government programmes and policies were centrally controlled.

The discovery and subsequent exploration of crude oil meant additional revenue for the government. Gradually, oil came to supersede agricultural exports as the major revenue earner of the country. For instance, whereas agriculture provided about 80 per cent of total exports of the country in 1960, by 1980, the figure had gone down to 2 per cent. Food production also, grew unevenly, but food imports rose by 700 per cent and real food output per capita over 1970-1980, fell by 1.5 per cent per annum.⁶⁹ Essentially,

to curb the effect of the resultant food shortages that occurred directly after the war and consequent upon the increased revenue from oil, government as from the early 1970s embarked on a programme of massive food importation. Also, beginning from 1973, the country started to experience an oil boom. Such increases in government revenue attracted a concomitant rise in government spending to the point of attracting inflation.

It did not take long for the effects to manifest. For a start, it introduced the era of overblown contract awards as government embarked on series of construction works mainly in the urban centres. Enugu, Umuahia, Owerri, Aba and Okigwe, the major urban centres of Igboland, were not left out. Also better living standards were attracted to these centres. As a result, the country began to witness a steady drift of people from the rural to the urban centres. Not a few Igbo trooped to the cities both in and outside the region in search of wage employment and easy means of economic recovery. Those left in the village were mostly old men and women who were rather too weak to farm. At best, they were able to produce just for subsistence. This was against the backdrop that the increased population of the cities led to a rise in demand for foodstuffs. Also with more money in circulation it became the desire of every parent to send his child to school. Ottenberg's conclusion that the educated Igbo were noted for their rejection of agriculture as a way of life, as many preferred poverty in an urban area to rural farm life at home⁷⁰, may indeed have applied to a greater percentage of the population by the mid-1970s. As more and more people either drifted to the towns or schools, the labour shortage in the rural areas became pronounced. In some cases, parents had virtually all their children either in the schools or in the towns.⁷¹ Even with their meagre resources it became the

dream of every farmer to send his child to school so that such a child could learn and may be, join the league of privileged classes and later be of assistance to the family.

This development further worsened the rate of monetisation of farm labour which started in the colonial period. The few hands left in the rural areas as well as the rural migrant farmers, began to charge exorbitant fees for their services. Ultimately food production was affected, as many could not afford these fees. In fact, the urban construction boom of the 1970s and the growth of the informal sector siphoned labour (particularly young men) from the rural economy thereby complicating existing patterns of seasonal labour shortage and wet season bottlenecks. This labour shortage was reflected in high rural-wage rates, which in conjunction with a more general price inflation of all farm inputs and low producer prices created the conditions for a short-term profit squeeze in agriculture.⁷²

It has been argued that the increase in food imports which topped the governments expenditure bill in this period may well, have been more in response to the demands of the urban population than the desire to meet a production deficit. What is more, many insist that the food which was imported was mainly for the middle and upper classes, resident in the towns.⁷³ This policy was similar to what obtained in the colonial era. For whereas, agricultural policy was biased against food production in the colonial period, it became worse particularly in the heyday of the oil boom, when massive food imports virtually crippled the domestic economy especially the locally produced agricultural foodstuffs. More so, because food imports were often subsidized in the country of origin, they competed effectively with local products and farmers usually switched out of these crops, thereby aggravating the conditions that in the first place gave

rise to the imports.⁷⁴ In any case, uncontrolled food importation was detrimental to the local food economy as some local foodstuffs partly lost their appeal, especially among the educated middle income class and the young people.⁷⁵

We have to note that even with the high level of food import by the government, not much was achieved in terms of improving the food situation. For instance, it was mainly grains that was imported. In Igboland therefore, where yam, cassava and cocoyam constituted the major food crops, the impact of this policy was hardly felt. As should be expected, it triggered a rise in the prices of local foodstuffs due to scarcity. The new thinking in government subsequently became how to evolve a strategy to increase agricultural output through the introduction of new technology supported by infrastructure and intensive management.⁷⁶ Hence, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) was designed under the Second National Development Plan 1970-1974, to accelerate the production of maize, rice, guinea corn, millet, wheat, cassava and cow peas, through the introduction of high yielding seeds, appropriate quantities of fertilizers, insecticides, herbicides, supporting credit, marketing, storage and processing, thereby producing an abundance of food at reasonable prices to the consumers and at reasonable profits to the farmers.⁷⁷ Over 500,000 farmers were mobilised in the NAFPP scheme which was launched in 1973. Also the Nigerian Grains Board was set up by government to purchase, store, process and market the anticipated surplus grains and to create a national grains reserve.⁷⁸ Under NAFPP, the distribution and demonstration of small farmer packages for these food crops were to be done through state ministries and agro-service centres, such as the East Central State Agricultural Development Authority (ADA), established after the civil war to undertake projects

involving direct agricultural production, such as farm settlement schemes, grain storage, feed production and distribution as well as poultry centres and hatchery units.⁷⁹

The emphasis of the NAFPP project was to mobilise the people so as to partake in food production. In fact, in the regime of Ukpabi Asika, a programme called *Otu Olu Obodo* was organized under the leadership of the wife of the Administrator to mobilise rural women to plant food crops. Under it, women leaders from all the Divisions in the state, were assembled for a short training, while the various Divisions were also encouraged to donate agricultural lands for demonstration farms. At the end, the women were given some improved seedlings as well as fertilizers to aid food production.⁸⁰ Similarly, the government sent Agricultural Extension Officers into the communities, to teach modern farming skills. The extension officers organized individuals and communities into farming units to plant mainly yam, cassava and maize. They also adopted the demonstration farm method and helped to popularise the use of fertilizer in many villages. The entire idea was novel and not a few of the villagers showed initial scepticism. Many admitted however that, it was actually these Agricultural Extension Officers, who introduced the use of fertilizer in Mbaise and several other parts of Southern Igboland.⁸¹ These Officers were rated high by the people for their diligence and efforts at improving food production. They not only distributed improved seedlings as well as fertilizers to farmers, but also regularly visited them to ensure proper application of the new farming techniques. As against the more common type of mound making for planting, they introduced the ridge system across the slope particularly in areas prone to erosion, and encouraged proper spacing of crops for better yields.

In a short while, the result started to show. For instance, in the 1973/74 planting season, 252,127 acres were planted with yam in East Central State, with a production of 1,323,677 tons and an estimated yield of 5.25 tons per acre. Also, 341,196 acres of land were planted with cassava with a production of 1,471,199 tons and an estimated yield of 4.31 tons per acre, while 47,385 acres were planted with cocoyam and the production stood at 153,767 tons with a yield at 3.25 tons per acre.⁸² This was a remarkable improvement on the past cropping seasons.

Nevertheless, many allege that most of the funds for the NAFPP especially at the state level were absorbed by the bureaucracy as only a fraction was spent on seeds and fertilizers for the farmers, let alone funds being invested into rural food processing at the household level.⁸³ What is probable is that the over-centralisation of the NAFPP was in itself a distracting force, since it encouraged the usual delays associated with government operations.

Realising the inadequacies of the NAFPP project and following a jump in food imports stimulated mainly by the public sector salary increases (Udoji Awards)⁸⁴ the government launched the Operation Feed the Nation Scheme (OFN) in 1976, to encourage Nigerians to grow more food. In fact, the Udoji salary review had increased workers' income by 100 per cent and back-dated the increases for a period of nine months on which arrears was paid. Increase in purchasing power obviously led to increases in daily consumption and promoted the articulation of new nutritional desires.⁸⁵ Hence, the major challenge of the OFN scheme was to remove the bottlenecks in the importing and unloading of fertilizer and food.⁸⁶ Due to alarming decline in agricultural production, increase in food import, concomitant rise in food prices as well as rising

rural-urban drift, the government's aim under the OFN scheme was, therefore, to provide agricultural inputs such as improved seeds, fertilizers and pesticides, as well as proper marketing and storage arrangements to improve food production. The Federal Government undertook to make available to all State Governments 50,000 tons of fertilizer for distribution to farmers. Farmers were henceforth, to pay a uniform price for each type of fertilizer they purchased which were largely subsidized by the government.⁸⁷ Thus, fertilizer procurement came under the Federal Government and a National Fertilizer Board was set up, to supervise the importation and distribution of the commodity.

The OFN programme was not credited with as much success as its predecessor. Critics contend that this was because the programme was initiated by a military regime that was anxious to secure support from urban groups and students. Moreover, the implementation of the programme was rather extravagant, characterised by heavy publicity and exhortation in urban areas through newspapers, radio and television to cultivate backyard gardens and keep poultry.⁸⁸ The programme was ruined by official corruption and ineptitude. Meanwhile, against the advertised solutions which the OFN scheme was to bring, prices of staple foodstuffs continued to soar, pests ate up crops, while the national food imports continued to rise. Inflation bit harder, as the drift of the youths to the urban centres remained unchecked.⁸⁹ Cocoyam root rot blight complex, which had been first noticed directly after the civil war, became stronger and, in fact, totally wiped out many fields of planted cocoyam.⁹⁰ The other root crops suffered a similar fate particularly in Igboland.

However, work at the different Research Institutes received better attention in this period. At the National Root Crop Research Institute, Umudike-Umuahia, for instance, researchers concentrated on getting new crop varieties, resistant to pests and diseases, finding agronomic ways of getting good yields as well as getting farmers to accept these varieties. Between 1976 and 1980, over 25 new varieties of cassava were introduced.⁹¹ Some improved varieties of white yam like *Abi*, *Obiaoturugo*, *Nwopoko* and *Okwocha*, known by various names in the different localities were also popularised in Igboland by the Institute.

On assumption of office in the last quarter of 1979, the civilian administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari, continued the fight against hunger. Hence, the Green Revolution programme, was introduced to achieve an accelerated increase in agricultural production by removing all known constraints to increased production. The objective once more was to make the country self-sufficient in respect of basic foods in five years and to rehabilitate her export produce in seven years from 1980.⁹² In reality, however, some of the fundamentals of the plan - the Agricultural Development Projects, River Basin Development Authorities and Irrigation, State Farms, tree crop programmes and tractor hire - were already in place and indeed predated the oil boom.⁹³

Nevertheless, government tried to encourage farmers by granting credits through commercial banks, including the Agricultural Development Bank and duty free access to all kinds of imported agricultural machinery. Some of these funds and facilities were often times hijacked or diverted by people who were not really farmers (mainly civil servants and emergency contractors) and all these further helped to worsen the food

situation as it ensured the failure of the Green Revolution Programme. In all, the Green Revolution Programme made little impact on food production in Igboland.

The post-colonial period up to 1980 was indeed a trying period for food production in Igboland and Nigeria. It was, to all intents and purposes, a period of continuity and change. It saw to the continuation of the agricultural policies of the colonial period, which were essentially biased against food production. This may have been done to shore up government revenue for development purposes. The civil war period was rather an emergency, which imposed changes on agricultural practice with particular reference to adoption of new crops and dietary habits. What happened after the war could be regarded as change of a different kind. That crude oil came to replace agricultural exports as the main source of the country's revenue indeed served to highlight the true nature of Nigeria's monocultural economy.

Relating to food production in Igboland, as was the case since the pre-colonial period, the method of cultivation still remained simple but outdated, with the basic implements comprising mainly hoes and cutlasses. The traditional social framework and value except in the plantation arrangements also prevailed on land ownership and land exploitation.⁹⁴ The people's cultural values particularly with regard to yam and cocoyam did not change drastically. The price of yam for instance, continued to be higher than that of cassava even when it looked as if the production of the two were nearly at par. This indicates the strong position of yams in the hierarchy of consumer preference.⁹⁵ Government's attempt to introduce mechanised agriculture via the River Basin Development Authorities (RBDA) and the Agricultural Development Authorities (ADA), met with minimal success. This was also the case with the introduction of fertilizer.

Hence, it could be concluded that owing to the inertia in the traditional social framework and values, it was not easy to establish technically advanced agricultural systems, extensive farms and plantation agriculture.⁹⁶ And this was in spite of the glaring inadequacies of the various post-independence governments, particularly in the area of policy implementation.

To all intents and purposes, therefore, it has to be noted that the policy favouring export crop production by the post independence administrations and the concomitant neglect of food production; the devastating effect of the civil war; the gradual transformation of the economy, which accelerated with the impact of the oil price increases during the 1970s; and the pace of industrialization, urbanisation and public works, all contributed to the severe food shortages, which became apparent from the 1980s.⁹⁷

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CONCLUSION

This work has dealt with the agricultural economy of Igboland, with particular reference to the production of yam, cocoyam and cassava between 1900 and 1980. It has revealed that Igboland essentially is an agricultural economy. In fact, up to the end of our period, over 60 per cent of the population were actively engaged in this sector.

The geography of Igboland, which places it in the rain-forest region had also made the area an important agricultural location. Hence, issues like population, land and climate had dictated the range of crops and animals domesticated in the area. Yam, cocoyam and cassava were and still are the major food crops cultivated in Igboland. Together, they contributed over 60 per cent of the food substances of the people. Furthermore, although most species of yam and cocoyam are widely accepted to be indigenous to the area; cassava, some species of yam and cocoyam, as well as a wide range of other crops were believed to have been introduced into Igboland since the voyages of discovery, mainly from Asia and the New World. That yam and cocoyam are indigenous was further buttressed by the fact that they had become part and parcel of the people's culture, manifested in the different titles, festivals and ceremonies associated with them.

However, colonial rule not only led to the introduction of new crops, but also to the diversion of the productive energies of the people in favour of cash/export crops. In the case of the Igbo, the palm tree, rubber, and cocoa were preferred by government and given prominence. This was to the detriment of yam, cocoyam and cassava on which the people depended for food. The colonial period led to rapid urbanisation, the monetisation of the economy and a boom in labour migration. All these in one way or

the other, frustrated the people's efforts at increased food production. This trend was carried into the post-independence period, when government policy which favoured the setting up of Farm Settlements, Community Plantations and Marketing Boards was ostensibly aimed at the production and effective marketing of agricultural exports. The advertised aim was to generate enough foreign revenue needed by government for development projects. Nevertheless, the infrastructural facilities provided in the period were concentrated in the urban centres, thus, heralding an era of rural neglect.

The 30-month Nigerian civil war further complicated these problems. For instance, the insecurity of the period led to an almost total abandonment of organized food production, while recruitment for war efforts, looting and devastation, dealt the final blow to food production in Igboland. From then, hunger and malnutrition took centre stage. To worsen matters, the excess revenue accruing to government coffers following the oil boom of the 1970s, introduced a period of uncontrolled government spending, manifested in excessive food importation, which led to the total neglect of local food production efforts. More so, as the imported food was better and often times cheaper, not a few deserted local foodstuffs. The introduction of some agricultural policies like, the National Accelerated Food Production Programme (NAFPP) in 1973, the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) in 1976 and the Green Revolution in 1979, were rather cosmetic considering the magnitude of the food problem. Hence, the food shortage which was officially noticed in the early 1960s, when food importation began albeit on a small scale, had become pronounced by 1980. Ever since government funds have increasingly been channelled to importation of food. In essence, the food shortages in Igboland which became pronounced by 1980 had a historical dimension.

Consequent upon the above, we therefore conclude that the food shortages in Igboland has persisted because of a number of reasons. To begin with, there is a clear evidence of improper handling of the food problem by the various administrations since the colonial period. Because there was the assumption that the people could always meet their food need, the colonial food policy was at best ad hoc, in which specific problems were attempted as they arose. Hence, the "Plant More Cassava Campaign" was undertaken in 1940 to forestall possible food shortages arising from the Second World War. Similarly, the incursion of the military in the affairs of the Nigerian State in the post-independence period, led to the over-centralisation of administration and uncontrolled government spending following the oil boom. What resulted was the over importation of food stuffs. However, policy makers were concerned more with the drain on foreign exchange resulting from such excessive importation. They therefore tried to put restrictions on imports of several food items. In the end, though the foreign exchange flight was checked, they were merely fighting the problem on its surface ignoring the roots. Obviously, the real problem was caused by the fact that farmers had abandoned their farms in large numbers owing to several unresolved issues.¹ The neglect of food production which began in the colonial period therefore resulted in frustration for the rural farmers, who then opted for more rewarding occupations. It is against this backdrop that we argue that, the only way to solve the food problem in Igboland is by proper planning which will eliminate those factors that make food production unrewarding.

There is also the issue of means of production adopted by rural farmers. It is evident from the study that Igbo farmers, several years after, still depended on such rudimentary implements as hoes and cutlasses in farm work. Also, processing, storage

and marketing facilities were not properly handled. In all cases, the principal beneficiaries of farmers' output were therefore the middlemen, as high consumer prices did not actually reflect farm incomes. It was not in doubt that with increase in population and rise in the demand for foodstuffs, it became virtually impossible for the Igbo farmers to meet such increases particularly due to the simple implements and practices widely used. And with poor processing, storage and marketing facilities, most of the food crops produced either rotted, or were sold-off at often times ridiculously low prices, to the detriment of the rural farmer. In fact, just as the prices paid to producers of food crops remained abysmally low compared to the prices fetched by export crops, the highly skewed distribution of marketing and storage facilities, agricultural extension services and technological input tended to put the food producing sector at a striking disadvantage.² Thus, we believe that the improvement of these facilities as well as the introduction of more efficient farm implements will in no small measure favourably enhance the food situation in Igboland.

Worse still, is the apparent information gap between the Agricultural Officers/Institutes and the rural farmers. In spite of the colonial preference for cash crops it was noticed that even the little done with regard to food production hardly made any impact on the rural farmers. In many instances, agricultural demonstration farms and gardens were set up ostensibly to teach farmers but not much was realised. Aside from the fact that these farms were few and far between, only very few farmers actually benefited from such initiatives. In the case of the National Root Crop Research Institute at Umudike Umuahia, established in 1923, it achieved very little in terms of training farmers to adopt new farming skills. Records of the Institute show the discovery of

several new cultivars of yam, cocoyam and cassava aimed at improving yield. Essentially, the Institute strives to discover new varieties resistant to pests and diseases, finding agronomic ways of getting good yields and getting the farmer's to accept these varieties. Several of such varieties have been discovered including TMS 30572, NR 8082 and NR 8083, TMS 30555 and NR 8208.³ However, most of these discoveries ended in the files of the Institute, since the average farmers, including the ones residing closest to the Institute, claimed to know little or nothing about them. Hence, it is argued that bureaucratic bottlenecks is an inhibiting factor in food crop production in Igboland. So long as the gap between the technical experts and the farmers remain, so long will food shortage persist in Igboland.

The rather outrageous high cost of farm implements has made it almost impossible for the rural farmers to reach their optimum. In spite of the fact that the cost of both land and labour within the period went beyond the reach of the average farmer, such other farm requirements like fertilizer and, in some cases, even seedlings became too expensive to procure. With a high population density, the soil of Igboland was already exhausted by 1980 due to persistent use. This made the use of fertilizer imperative. Mere importation of the commodity by the government did not suffice, as in most cases the wrong types were frequently applied. The result of course was poor yield. The argument by both the Government and the Agricultural Research Institutes that each soil was meant to be tested to determine the specific type of fertilizer required does not hold water, since considering the poverty level of these farmers, such a demand may never be attained. In essence, not until agricultural input is placed within the reach of the rural farmers in Igboland could any dream of attaining food sufficiency be realised.

Equally problematic is the poor attitude to farming among the Igbo. The study revealed that farming was essentially the affair of the illiterate, the poor, aged and those who had no opportunities of migrating to the urban centres. These people who resided in the rural areas were left with farming as their only source of income. Another group were those who on account of old age, had left service in the towns and retired to farming back home. In other words, only a few took to farming by choice. However, we must point out that this trend began in the colonial period and fully blossomed in the post-independence era, when government spending was concentrated on the urban centres, thereby leaving the rural areas where food was produced in near desolate conditions. What this implies is that any real effort at enhancing food crop production in Igboland must take into consideration the provision of basic infrastructural facilities in the rural areas. That way, living in these locations will be worthwhile and many more people would be attracted to farming by choice.

The apparent insufficiency of farmland in many parts of Igboland had resulted in constant boundary disputes among individuals, kindreds and communities over the ownership of farm lands; particularly during farming seasons. This arose from the monetisation of the Igbo economy in the colonial period, which led to the frequent purchase and sale of land mainly for agricultural purposes. In the post-independence period fraudulent practices were introduced by certain individuals, hence, disputes over land have been rife. Equally, rapid urbanisation and government acquisition of land mainly for infrastructural development, further depleted available farm land all to the detriment of the Igbo farmer. Therefore, one way to improve food crop production in Igboland is for the process of land acquisition to be streamlined and if possible liberalised

to reduce constant fracas. Similarly, better scientific systems could be introduced to ensure the efficient use of available land. That way, an individual may not necessarily require several plots of land to achieve optimal production.

Above all, perhaps, is the fact that food crop production in Igboland, particularly the cultivation of yam, cocoyam and cassava was and is still firmly tied to the people's culture and tradition. This has obviously had debilitating consequences. Changes may have occurred here and there, but such changes hardly suffice. While local custom and tradition determined the role of the sexes in production, it was evident all through the period, that the desire to take a title was prominent in the priority of the Igbo farmer. One could then say that the nature of contact situation between the Igbo and the Europeans made it possible for them to accept certain innovations, modify certain elements of their social, religious, economic and political structure, in order to accommodate the changes and retain other basic patterns, such as achievement-orientation, long term goals, hatred of autocracy and a strong communal spirit.⁴ It is to this achievement-orientation and strong communal spirit, the hall mark of which was the quest to improve one's social status, that agriculture in Igboland is intrinsically tied. We therefore submit that food crop production in Igboland will tremendously improve once farmers begin to consider more of economic factors than social obligations in agricultural practice. And this will entail the removal of all inhibitions surrounding yam cultivation in particular and agricultural practice in general.

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