



Colonial Transformation of Women's Economic Roles in Okpella, Edo State, 1904–1960

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Abstract

Nigerian colonial history vis-à-vis women's studies has attracted scholarly attention. These studies range from women's roles in the textile industry in Abeokuta, women's riots in Egbaland and the Aba women's riot. Historians and anthropologists have also interrogated women and taxation in Ijebu Province, as well as their leading roles in the decolonisation process. However, none of these studies has adequately addressed how colonialism transformed the economic role of women in Okpella from 1904, when Iddo-Okpella was designated as the administrative district of Etsako land by the British, to 1960, the year of Nigeria's independence. This neglect reduces our comprehensive understanding of the workings of the colonial economy, despite the monumental contributions of Okpella women. This study examines the colonial transformation of women's economic roles in Okpella, Edo State, Nigeria. Drawing on archival records from the National Archives, Ibadan, colonial correspondence, and oral interviews with women, which reveal women's participation and displacement in the mining industry, it traces the shift from pre-colonial subsistence agriculture, food crop production, and periodic market trading to broader proto-industrial activities under British rule. Key policies—monetisation, cash crop promotion, taxation, market stall rentals, and extractive industries—initially expanded opportunities in crafts, retail trade, and mining labour, particularly gold prospecting (1940s) and limestone extraction post-1955. However, patriarchal assumptions, mechanisation, and discriminatory labour practices marginalised women in mining by 1960, prompting a return to agriculture and crafts. The paper, in its conclusion, highlights how colonial exploitation, despite rhetorical development aims, ultimately positioned Okpella women to contribute significantly to the colonial economy in Nigeria, thereby intensifying the incorporation of the Nigerian economy into the global market.

Keywords: Colonial Economy, Women's Roles, Okpella, mining, taxation

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Introduction

Women play significant roles in human society, and their monumental contributions are evident in both the domestic front and the economy. This explains why their unique position serves as one of the important lubricants that oil the machine of any society. All over the world, women have made monumental contributions to the growth and development of their economies and are always ready to adjust to the economic realities that have confronted them throughout history for their survival and the overall survival of their societies. In the Philippines and other parts of Southeast Asia, women worked an average of 8.95 hours per day, while men worked an average of 8.50 hours per day, with women contributing significantly to planting, harvesting, and storage of cash crops, as well as to livestock production.¹

In the 19th-century United States, young, unmarried, married, and working-class women were known to have contributed significantly to the production of goods in factories.² In pre-colonial Ghana, Nyamekye and Mensah argue that women took up the herculean responsibility of catering for their families through commercial farming, which was also deployed for day-to-day feeding of their families, while their male counterparts focused more on the production of cash crops, which were sold to acquire income for other material needs of the family.³ In Nigeria, women played significant roles in sustaining the textile industry during the colonial period and defended the industry well when it was threatened by French traders.⁴

Many scholars have therefore examined the role of women in various societies all over the world while the study of the colonial economy in Nigeria which Okpella women made monumental contributions had not been undertaken by scholars. Asanda-Jonas Benya interrogates the gradual integration of women into the mining industry in South Africa and how the incorporation of women into this sector at the dawn of the millennium intensified competition in the mining sector.⁵ The study has also interrogated how the colonial economy was sustained through the production of coal in Enugu Province at the dawn of the 20th century, when lands with large coal deposits were transferred to the British Crown.⁶ Study on Nigeria's colonial economy has also been carried out on how currency was used as a potent economic policy of controlling trade in terms of importation of goods from one society into another.⁷ The systematic control of trade has also been interrogated when the British began the systematic penetration of the colonial territory to accelerate the

¹ Heyzer N, *Working Women in South East Asia* Philadelphia: Open University Education Enterprise Limited, 1986, p.12.

² Goldin C. 1986, 'The Economic Status of Women in the Early Republic: Quantitative Evidence' *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* Vol. 16 No. 3, p. 379.

³ S.A. Nyamekye and P.S. Mensah, 'The Spirit of Environmentalism: The Contribution of Ghanaian Women' In Ajayi S.A and Ayantayo K.J. Eds. *Women in Development* Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Limited, 2015, p.170

⁴ For further reading, see, Judith Byfield, *The Bluest Hands A Social and Economic History of Women Dyers in Abeokuta (Nigeria), 1890-1940* Oxford: James Currey Ltd.

⁵ Asanda-Jonas Benya, 'Quiet Rebels: Underground Women Miners and Refusal as Resistance' In Vishwas Satgar, Ruth Ntlokotse Eds. *Economic Transformation, Public Services and Transformative Women's Power in South Africa*. Wits University Press, 2023, p.127.S

⁶ Ihediwa Nkemjika Chimee, 'Coal and British Colonialism in Nigeria' *RCC Perspectives, No. 5, Energy (and) Colonialism, Energy (In)Dependence: Africa, Europe, Greenland, North America* 2014, p.21.

⁷ Ayodele Samuel Abolorunde, 'All in the Interests of the British': Import Control Policies in Nigeria during the Inter-war Years, 1919-1939' *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Vol 28, 2019, p.155.



extraction of its resources to benefit the metropolitan economy.⁸ This paper, therefore, focuses on how colonialism positioned Okpella women in transforming the economy of Okpella from 1904, when Iddo Okpella was selected as the administrative district of Etsako by the British, to 1960, when the country attained its independence.

The study notes that discussions on Nigeria's colonial history have centred on subjugation of various groups, currency issues, marketing boards, railway construction, amalgamation, and trade expansion. Consequently, scholars have paid adequate attention to economic reforms of the colonial regime, the political decisions behind them, and the reactions of colonial subjects to colonial rule. A study on the colonial economy after the Second World War had been carried out. This was because the end of the Second World War in 1945 necessitated the decolonisation of colonial territories, a process that assumed greater importance in global consciousness.⁹ However, there has not been a comprehensive interrogation of how colonial rule positioned the Okpella women in contributing their quota to the economic transformation of the town during the period, 1904-1960.

This exclusion makes this study important to us because one of the strategies through which the colonial economy was sustained was through the economic contribution of Okpella women to the colonial economy in Nigeria. The exclusion of Okpella women's contributions to the colonial economy limits our comprehensive understanding of the workings of the economy, a gap this study seeks to fill in the body of colonial historiography. Specifically, the study highlights the importance and monumental contributions of regional economic activities to the overall effectiveness of the colonial economy through the prism of women's roles. The study also highlights the adaptive capacity of colonial subjects, especially women, to the challenges inherent in colonial policies. The study helps to reveal the involvement and displacement of Okpella women in the mining industry. Lastly, the study calls on scholars to rethink the contributions of women and the Okpella region to Nigeria's wartime and post-war economy. The conventional wisdom on women's studies worldwide, as well as the colonial economy, centres on women's pivotal role in the mining sector in Africa,¹⁰ prison system in colonial northern Nigeria,¹¹ women mobilization for war efforts during the Second World War in Australia,¹² and quest for equality and women's right in mining industry globally.¹³

However, Mutiat Oladejo challenged the conventional wisdom by arguing that women assumed both political and economic powers in the frontier states of Yorubaland before and during the

⁸ Ayodele Samuel Abolorunde, 'The British Strategy of Dealing with National Sabotage and the Allies' Economic Interests through Wartime Import Control in Nigeria, 1939-1945' *Southern Journal for Contemporary History* 46 (2) 31 December, 2021, p. 49.

⁹ ABOLORUNDE, A.S. (2025), Blocking the Loopholes: Nigeria's Post-War Import Control through expansion of Industries, 1945-1954. Agidigbo: *ABUAD Journal of the Humanities*, 13 (2), p. 607

¹⁰ Lynda Lawson, 'Rice, sapphires and cattle: Work lives of women artisanal and small-scale miners in Madagascar' In Kuntala Lahiri-Dutt Ed. *Between the Plough and the Pick* Sidney: Published by: Australian National University (ANU) Press. 2018, pp.171-172.

¹¹ Mohammed Bashir Salau, 'Convict labour in early colonial Northern Nigeria: a preliminary study'. In Maja Kominko Ed. *From Dust to Digital* Open Book Publishers, 2015, p.294.

¹² Heather Goodall, Helen Randerson and Devleena Ghosh, *Teacher for Justice: Women and War*, Sidney: Australian National University (ANU) Press, 2019, pp.145-165.

¹³ Ege Tekinbas and Kalowatie Deonandan, Mining Governance: An annotated bibliography for large-scale mining *International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD)* 2021, p.2



colonial period.¹⁴ Olwaseun Soile corroborated this evidence when she postulates that the consolidation of Efunsetan Aniwura, the Iyalode of Ibadanland in the 19th century was forged a well calculated economic and political alliances and a deliberate projection of fearsome authority.¹⁵ Similarly, Ramona Vijeyarasa points out the undisputable power of women in the administration of justice and fairness in Bolivia by arguing that the protest of small scale women miners in the Siglo area against the imprisonment, exiling and unjust punishment of their husbands who were large scale miners drew the sympathy of other women and the entire nation as this compelled the government to yield to the their demands of fair treatment and freedom of their husbands.¹⁶

Furthermore, Bawa postulates on the religious, political and social roles of women among the Gobirawa people in the current Sabon Birni District of Sokoto State from pre-colonial times to the post-colonial period due to the resilience of these women in adapting to changing realities among the Gobirawa people.¹⁷ Seriki's work examines the socio-economic activities of the colonial state in Ijebu Province of western Nigeria.¹⁸ Similarly, Seriki's study has been corroborated with a study on socio-economic change in colonial Ikorodu in Lagos.¹⁹ Extant studies have not adequately addressed how colonialism transformed the economic role of women in Okpella and how this transformation contributed to the workings of the colonial economy in Nigeria. The main thesis is to demonstrate that the overall workings of the colonial economy in Nigeria were linked to the economic contributions of the colonial subjects in various districts and provinces, one of which was Okpella in Etsako District.

This study became imperative because the contributions of Okpella to the colonial economy were unique, shaped by Okpella women's adaptation to the changing realities brought by colonialism. It is a contribution to the study of colonial rule and opens new directions in Nigeria's colonial history. The study is divided into seven sections, the first deals with introduction, the second addresses British imperial economic presence in Nigeria, 1900-1904, the third, entrepreneurial contributions of women to the colonial economy of Okpella, 1904-1940, the fourth, The discovery of gold and establishment of mining industry/cement factory in Okpella 1940-1960, the fifth discusses, earliest involvement of Okpella women in the local mining industry at independence in 1960, the sixth interrogates, decline in the economic role of Okpella women in mining at independence in 1960 and the conclusion.

¹⁴ Mutiat Titilope Oladejo, 'Two Generations of Iyalode in Modern Egbaland: Dynamics of Entrepreneurship, 1916-2023' In Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh Ed. *Chance, Resistance, and Cultural Resilience in Yorubaland: Essays in Honour of Alake of Egbaland: Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2025, pp.157-158.*

¹⁵ Oluwaseun Igbagboyemi Soile, 'Women in a Man's World: Power and Precarity of Two Iyalode in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland' In Mufutau Oluwasegun Jimoh Ed. *Chance, Resistance, and Cultural Resilience in Yorubaland: Essays in Honour of Alake of Egbaland: Oba Adedotun Aremu Gbadebo Ile-Ife: Obafemi Awolowo University Press, 2025, p.178.*

¹⁶ Ramona Vijeyarasa, *Rewriting the Rules: Extractives: Regulating at the Margins to Formalize Artisanal and Small-Scale Mining for Women* California: University of California Press, 2026, p.5.

¹⁷ Bawa, Aisha Balarabe, 'Spirituality, Power and Feminism: Historical Narratives of Bori Practice among the Women in Sabon Birni District of Sokoto State' *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)* Vol. 8, (1), S/No 28, January, 2019, pp.47-52

¹⁸ Seriki, K.O. *Ethno-Cultural Associations as Shadow States: The Case of Ijebu Province in Western Nigeria, 1900-1960. Social Evolution & History*, Vol. 24 No.1 March 2025, pp.79.

¹⁹ F.I. Boge, 'Aspects of Socioeconomic Change in Ikorodu District of Lagos Colony' *Opanbata LASU Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 10, No.3, July 2022, pp. 177-193.



British Imperial Economic Presence in Nigeria, 1900-1904.

The roles associated with women began to take a new look with the coming of colonialism, their roles particularly in the economic sphere broadened an agriculture-based specialization and took a more proto-industrial outlook. The impact of the British administration policies in Okpella can be traced to the second half of nineteenth century this is because the collapse of the Nupe Empire at that period led to the emergence of British Colonial rule and administration in all the areas that the Nupe had a strong hold.²⁰ However, the effective pre-occupation and formulation of policies that began to affect the people of Okpella directly began in the 1900's. For a proper understanding of the nature and trends of the economy of Okpella clan during the colonial administration, a quick glance at the nature of colonial administration in Nigeria since 1900 is sacrosanct.

It is a well-known fact that with the imposition of colonial rule, important structural changes were implemented in the political, social, and economic life of the indigenes of Nigeria. Some of these changes include the introduction of monetary institutions and the introduction of cash crop economy.²¹ The African economy before colonization was based on barter system. However, to achieve the objective of colonialism which were to find market for the European manufactured goods and raw materials for their industries, European colonizers initiated a link between African economy and the international system which was controlled by the colonizers.²² The colonial imperialist encouraged the production of cash crops such as palm-oil, cocoa, rubber and groundnut for export as a result, incentives were given to producers for the sale of cash crops which were in demand abroad.²³

The colonialists used a range of methods and strategies to compel Africans to submit to colonial rule and its administration. Some of these strategies included conquest, forced labour, taxation, low wages, and the monetisation of the economy.²⁴ With the introduction of a money economy, trade by barter came to an end, and banks began to be introduced in West Africa. Ekundare notes that in 1900, Nigeria had no generally accepted currency because several currencies, such as foreign coins, gold, silver sterling, American Doubloons, French Franc Pieces, and some locally adopted commodity currencies like cowries, manilas and gold dust, were in use. The essence of this was the colonial regime's and its commercial agents' quest for profit in Nigeria.²⁵ There were also instances whereby gin was not used merely for drinking but was also used as a substitute for currency.²⁶

Scholars have put up the following argument that the reason for the displacement of the pre-colonial currencies was unfounded by pointing to the fact that although the British Administration claimed that the reason for the demonetization of the native currency was for easy mobility, the British silver

20 . Harunnah H.B. 1990. "The Impact of Nupe Invasion on Etsako Society 1860-1897: A socio-political and cultural analysis" Long Essay, Department of History, University of Lagos. p.15

21 . Ocheni S, Nwankwo B.C. 2012. "Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa" in *Journal of Cross Cultural Communication* Vol.8, No.3. p.48

22 . Ocheni S, Nwankwo B. C. 2012. "Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa" p.48

23 . Ofonagoro W.I. 1979. "From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria: Analysis of Currency Revolution, 1800-1948" in *Journal of Economic History* vol.39, No.3. p.653

24 . Ocheni S, Nwankwo B. C. 2012. "Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa" p.48

25 Ayodele Samuel Abolorunde (Formerly) Aborisode, Environmental and Legal Instruments of Import Control in Colonial Nigeria, 1904-1954' *Ibadan Journal of History (IJH)*. Vols 7&8 2019&2020 p. 158

26. Ekundare O.R. 1973. *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960*. London: Methuen and Co Ltd p.187



coins, which were introduced as a replacement, were equally not easy to transport.²⁷ Scholars like Ofonagoro argue that the aim of the British Administration in changing of the currency was profit oriented. The opinion of Ofonagoro originates from the statement of the following individuals: Mr Mercer of the Colonial Office who stated that “the British Mint realized a profit on the order of 56 percent on silver coins minted especially for the West African Colonies”²⁸ while Governor Lugard of Nigeria indicated that “on the average, the British Mint realized profit on the order of 50 percent on all silver coins supplied to West Africa and that the mint profit on the Nigerian coinage issues alone had been more than sufficient to offset all other costs incurred by the British Government in colonizing Nigeria.”²⁹

Land, as a major factor of production, was inexorably required by the colonial authorities to advance their economic, political, and social interests. Under colonial rule, the land ownership structure was designed to serve the British administration's interests. Likewise, the marketing strategy of the colonial administration was geared towards profit.³⁰ By taking a look at the sample of a memo dispatched during colonial administration in Nigeria the economic aim of the colonialists can be discovered.

“It is the intention of the Colonial Administration that the collection of articles to be sold should be confined to products that likely to be saleable in export markets or in local markets at a distance from their source of supply. This rule out bulky goods like bricks, tiles, etc. and heavy implements produced by local blacksmiths such as will not, as a rule, will not bear any transport charge”³¹

In the agricultural sphere, the colonial government intensified the production of cash crops, which had previously been promoted by trading companies and missionaries. This intensification of cash crop production was driven by the British interest in agricultural development in Nigeria, which was geared toward providing raw materials for British manufacturing industries. Despite this crucial interest, there was no real programme for agricultural development by the colonial period.³² This accounts for the non-enhancement of agricultural production in rural areas, including Okpella. A consistent element in colonial policy was the patriarchal assumption about African's political economy; this assumption about the appropriate roles of women and men dictated colonial policy relating to agricultural development and enabled men to dominate the cultivation of cash crops for the international market.³³ The colonial economic system-initiated cash crop economy which utilized female labour, however, their labour was restricted to subsistence or food crop production.

27 . Ocheni S, Nwankwo B. C. 2012. “Analysis of Colonialism and its Impact in Africa” p.4

28 . Ofonagoro W.I. 1979. “From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria: Analysis of Currency Revolution, 1800-1948” p.653

29 . Ofonagoro W.I. 1979. “From Traditional to British Currency in Southern Nigeria: Analysis of Currency Revolution, 1800-1948” p.653

30 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) K.D 995 Local Industries: Standing Reference Collection of the Craft

31 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) K.D 995 Local Industries: Standing Reference Collection of the Craft p.9

32 . Toyin Falola et al .1991. *History of Nigeria 3: Nigeria in the Nineteenth Century* (Lagos: Longman Publishers) p. 35

33 . Korieh C.J 2001. “The Invisible Farmer? Women, Gender, and Colonial Agricultural Policy in Region of Nigeria” *Journal of African Economic History* No. 29.p.124



³⁴ Scholars have concluded that the socio-economic status of African women were worse off in the colonial period.³⁵

In the area of taxation, colonial authorities no longer accepted taxation in kind but rather in cash; hence the need to participate in a business that could generate cash income to offset the taxes imposed, as well as to purchase new European goods. Bearing all this in mind, there was a need to search for a more viable alternative to the people's pre-existing subsistence lifestyle.³⁶

In other aspects of economic development, the colonial administration's industrial policy was aimed at serving Britain's economic interests. This intention can be deduced from the letter sent by the Acting Secretary of Western Province to the resident of Benin Province. In this letter, he indicated that with reference to the attached extracts from the minutes of the Central Development Board, "he was directed by the Acting Chief Commissioner to say that it was important any industry with a potential economic value either in local or export markets which would benefit by financial or other assistance should be investigated, and all available fact about such industries be put forward as early as possible in order that applications may be made for such assistance".³⁷ This is why the major type of production activity was based on the extractive industry, that is, industries that helped European companies and the government extract Nigerian products.

As a result of the successful conquest of all the Empires and Kingdoms in what is now known as Nigeria, by January 1900, the British had proclaimed the Northern and Southern Protectorates to be ruled separately and independently by British Colonial Administrators. Under this arrangement, the Auchi Kingdom, Okpella and its environs, which were part of the Etsako land, were part of the Northern Protectorate and were ruled from Idah, a town across the River Niger. During this period of British administration in the Auchi kingdom and Okpella and its environs, the core economic activities of Okpella women were based on agricultural production at the subsistence level, with the potential of enhancing local trade, and this was complemented with livestock production, which boosted local trade, as espoused by Okpella women.³⁸ By 1904, the British Imperial Patrols moved from their Idah station, to Etsako land which was carved out as a separate district from Esan District.³⁹ The separation of Etsako land from the Esan district was as a result of the fact that the British Colonial Administration discovered that Ubiaja was too far from Etsako land hence the administrative unit was moved to Iddo-Okpella town on the far Northern part of Etsako land. Although the headquarters was later moved from Iddo-Okpella to Fugar and later to Auchi, the presence of the British Administrators in Okpella marked the beginning of transformation for the land.

34 . Akyeampong, E. and Hippolyte F. 2012. "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications: The Pre-colonial and Colonial Periods". Policy Research Working Papers. p.3.

35 . Akyeampong, E. and Hippolyte F. 2012. "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications. p.4

36 . Interview with Mrs. Ide Oduwa, (76 years old Farmer) on the 17th of March 2023 at Iddo Okpella

37 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) K.D 995 Local Industries: Letter to the Residence Benin Province

38. Akyeampong, E & Hippolyte F. 2014. "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications" in *Journal of Economic History of Developing Regions* vol 29. 1 p.55

39 . Suleiman Y. (2021) "Colonial Rule in Nigeria: The Auchi Kingdom Encounter with the British Colonialists and the impacts" *Brazilian Journal of African Studies* vol 6, No12. p.62



Entrepreneurial Contributions of Women to the Colonial Economy of Okpella, 1904-1940

It is also worthy of note that the year 1904 in which the British Colonial Administration settled in Okpella coincide with the declaration of the colonial authorities commissioning of the mineral survey of the Northern and Southern Protectorate.⁴⁰ Several legacies established and left behind by the British Colonial Administration like the creation of Auchi Kingdom as the administrative headquarters of Etsakoland was still very much in place for a long time.

Most of the available literature on women's business ownership has focused on entrepreneurial development in industrialised countries, while very little is available on the role of women entrepreneurs in Nigeria. As Woldie A rightly noted, the contribution of women to the Nigerian economy is often overlooked, as female entrepreneurs in Nigeria have long been excluded from the formal sector, even during the colonial period. Precedence has shown that women in colonial Nigeria generally had less access to formal education; consequently, they had low participation in the formal sector. For that reason, many women took up self-employment.⁴¹ In addition, women had limited access to other critical resources such as land, technology and credit facilities. Hence even within the informal sector, they were confined to micro-enterprises. These include trading and small-scale manufacturing enterprises.⁴²

At the beginning of 1904, the economic role of women in Okpella remained considerably stable. They still maintained their roles in domestic production of food crops such as Cassava, Maize, groundnut Cowpea, Melon, Pepper, Okra, and Garden Eggs for the consumption of the family as well as local trade within the community. Agricultural activities that had to do with weeding, harvesting, threshing and storage continued among the women folk.⁴³ The nature of their livestock production as well continued at the same pace for a longtime. This explains why the position of Africa, including Nigeria, as a producer of raw materials such as palm oil, palm kernel, cocoa, etc., further emasculated its capacity to continue with its journey of industrialization.⁴⁴ In the production of Arts and crafts, the major articles, such as clothes, earthenware pots, carved works, traditional masks, and other items necessary for their survival, continued to be produced. In fact, the conduct of their trading activities, which involved periodic trading of goods and services on market days, remained. Some women set up small sheds to sell the carved works of their husbands. Evidence of carving in Okpella can be seen in the letter, dated 11th October 1904, from the District Officer, Kukuruku Division, to Mr Orhewereme. The content of the letter goes thus:

40. Dauda G, Baasi D, Moronkola O, 2020. "The Sustainability Question about Women, Youth, and other Vulnerable Group's in Nigeria's Mining Communities" *Impact of Mining on Women, Youth and Others in Selected Communities in Nigeria* Neiti Occasional Paper Series. Issue 7. p.10

41 . Woldie, A and Kitching, B. 2004. "Female Entrepreneurs in Transitional Economies: a comparative study of Businesswomen in Nigeria and China". A *Proceedings of Hawaii International Conference on Business*, Honolulu, Hawaii. p.9

42 . Woldie, A and Kitching, B. 2004. "Female Entrepreneurs in Transitional Economies: a comparative study of Businesswomen in Nigeria and China". p.9

43. Akyeampong, E & Hippolyte F. 2014. "The Contribution of African Women to Economic Growth and Development in the Pre-Colonial and Colonial Periods: Historical Perspectives and Policy Implications" in *Journal of Economic History of Developing Regions* vol 29. 1 p.55

44 Chris B.N. Ogbogbo and Ayodele Samuel Aborisade, 'Historiography of Industrialization in Nigeria, 1914-1960' *Journal of Education, Humanities and Sciences*, Volume 7 No.2, 2018, Dar es Salaam University College of Education University of Dar es Salaam, p. 6



“Please I convey my thanks to the carver for his work and to Chief Afegbua for arranging it. Herewith £1 in full payment for the four sticks. I will be pleased to see further examples of the carvers work when next I visit Ukpilla.⁴⁵

In addition to the conventional business of farming and trading in the markets, from the year 1904-1920, more women began to open different craft to showcase their talents as well as train apprentices whom were likely to carry on with such craft. Some of these crafts had to do with braiding, fabric weaving, mat and basket weaving, e.t.c.⁴⁶

It should be noted that irrespective of the business that was carried out in the land, every working-class citizen was expected to pay a certain amount as tax to the Native Administration. The initial amount fixed before 1923 was 3% income tax however, by 15th July, 1923, there was a proposal to raise the rate to 6% on all adult male.⁴⁷ This motion was supported by the District heads and Chiefs but careful study showed that the increment would affect the farmers and poorer people who would pay more hence the increment was postponed, notwithstanding the previous rate of 3% which was also considerably high remained.⁴⁸ The policy of taxation did not sit well with the women as many of them protested against this policy by persuading their husbands not to pay the required sum.⁴⁹ Although this measure did not last long as many of the men could not stand the pressure from the tax collectors, however, it has been suggested that this move played a great role in influencing the decision to reverse the new percentage (that is: 6%) to be paid back to the old percentage of 3%.⁵⁰ In fact, the women also showed their displeasure for the tax policy by directly boycotting the supplies of the local goods they supplied to the European traders for about five years starting from 1923 when the law was enacted till 1927.

This move pressured the colonial administration to grant the women a ‘tax holiday’ for several years to help them recover and grow their businesses, as well as adapt to the new economic system. Surprisingly, by 1928 -1930, the colonial authorities reintroduced the idea of taxation once again to the people.⁵¹

In order to strengthen security and to encourage trade relations, in the year 1931 the Kukuruku Native Authority under Cap 43 Section 8 (C) enacted a law prohibiting the carrying and possession of poisoned weapon within the Kukuruku Division.⁵² This decision was inspired by the “callous murder of an elderly woman by a poisoned arrow shot by an unknown assailant...”⁵³ consequently the fine placed for any breach of the order was twenty-five pounds or Six months imprisonment. This law as well met with little resistance from women particularly the wives of local hunters who made use of these weapons to make a living. In few instances, some women whose husbands were arrested and compelled to pay the required fines often times gathered a small group of women

45. National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) K.D 995/78 Local Industries p.4

46 . Interview with Mrs Tafamel Momoh (69 years old businesswoman) on the 17th of March 2023 at Okpella

47 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) CSO 26/2 Benin Province Annual Report 1923 p.6

48 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) CSO 26/2 Benin Province Annual Report 1923 p.7

49 . Interview with Mrs Tafamel Momoh (69 years old businesswoman) on the 17th of March 2023 at Okpella

50 . Interview with Mrs Tafamel Momoh (69 years old businesswoman) on the 17th of March 2023 at Okpella

51 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P 879 Rules Made by Native Authorities Kukuruku Division

52 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P 879 Rules Made by Native Authorities Kukuruku Division “prohibition of poisoned weapons”. (BenProf 1)

53 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P 879 Rules Made by Native Authorities Kukuruku Division (BenProf 1) p.2



majorly close friend and relatives they traded within the market to protest the release of their husband, son, or uncles as the case may be. This protest was sometimes taken to the colonial office where the offenders were kept hostage.⁵⁴

One of the economic programmes of the colonial administration that affected Okpella and its environs directly was the establishment of market stalls for trading activities which was mostly dominated by women. Record from the Native Administration Estimates under the Special Expenditure Programme for 1932/1933 showed that between 1933/1934, about sixteen sheds were established in the *Agenebode and Jattu* Markets as well as major markets in Okpella.⁵⁵ One may want to think that the establishment of these stalls were aimed at improving the economic welfare of the Okpella people in general and the Okpella women in particular since they were the major individuals to benefit directly from these projects. However, this was not the case as any individual who was privileged to have access to the stalls in the market was required to pay rent of 3d per stall.⁵⁶ Records in the Advance Proposals – Kukuruku Native Administration Estimates explained that “Each shed was divided into six stalls, it was proposed to charge a rent of 3d per stall, the council being of opinion that this amount could well be afforded by the better class traders who will probably hire individual stalls....”⁵⁷

Further studies into the memo released prior to the erection of these stalls showed at some point an undertone of sympathy for the local traders who could not afford to pay the required rent to own one of these stalls.⁵⁸ But in actual sense, the whole essence for the establishment of these stalls was mainly to serve the vested interest of the Colonial Empire which was to generate revenue within the colonies to run the colonial administration as well as enabling the colonial administrators to have access to the rich raw materials of the hinterland while giving the impression that the welfare of the indigenes was well taken care of. The quote below buttresses the point presented above.

“The amount of 3d will enable some of the poorer traders to join together and rent a stall communally. The money raised from the market stall rents will be used for the improvements and upkeep of the market and will be expended through the village heads in whose villages the buildings were erected. The sum £27 is expected to be realized in the full year of which £12 will be expended on upkeep.”⁵⁹

The quote above clearly indicates the clear interest of the colonial administration to use the proceeds from the rents of the stalls to run the administration of the market. It was a situation whereby the people were exploited through the payment of rents for stalls. This new development of compulsory payment of rents for stalls which was kind of alien to the women who were used to trading in the

54 . Interview with Mrs Tafamel Momoh (69 years old businesswoman) on the 17th of March 2023 at Okpella

55 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P. 392 Advance Proposals – Kukuruku Native Administration Estimates 1933/1934

56 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P. 392 Advance Proposals – Kukuruku Native Administration Estimates 1933/1934

57 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P. 392 Advance Proposals – Kukuruku Native Administration Estimates 1933/1934

58 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P. 592. Kukuruku N.A. Quarterly Abstracts of Revenue and Expenditure, 1935

59 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P. 592. Kukuruku N.A. Quarterly Abstracts of Revenue and Expenditure, 1935



open space mostly under the shed of big trees with wide leaves gradually began to affect the basic standards for trading in Okpella. One visible effect was that the periodic markets were affected. Hence, traders that had the opportunity to hire stalls were compelled to come to the market stalls provided by the Colonial Native Administration throughout the week in order to make enough income to pay the required rents to the Colonial Authorities, thereby disrupting the balance of pre-colonial market structure in Okpella Land (that is: rotational market).⁶⁰

In the year 1935-1937, an additional law was enacted which was binding on all indigenes this law had to do with the carrying of light after dark. This was a response to the complaint that burglaries were becoming increasingly common in the village invariably affecting the markets. In order to ensure compliance, a penalty of ten shillings, two weeks imprisonment or both were suggested for defaulters of this law.⁶¹

Despite this challenge by 1937 women still dominated local and retail trade in fact a good number of them increased the range of their articles of trade as a result of the influx of European imports into the hinterland.⁶² Records also show that different firms continued to send motor Lorries to fetch the products sold by the women such as oil, kernels, food crops as well as local fabrics also available resources such as gold, quartz etc, which had been purchased or extracted by middlemen acting on behalf of the firms at collecting stations situated on motor roads were bought alongside the products the women had to offer and in some cases exchanged for the different European goods that were imported.⁶³ The report also indicates that the expansion of the activities of the European Firms did not appear to cause any resentment among the local traders.⁶⁴ Further studies from the report indicate that cash sales in the stores shows a slight increase compared with previous years but they fell steadily during the last few months of the year. The prices of the Native foodstuff remained at the low level and the exchange of the manila was about 13 for one shilling. The report concluded that although the state of trade generally was not encouraging, the producers had to a certain extent accommodated themselves to the changed conditions and there was a feeling of confidence which was conspicuously lacking at the end of the years before the establishment of the market stalls.⁶⁵

Within the years 1937-1939, the district Head of *Ukpilla* was expected to collect about 10% tax from members of his village of which he was to remit to the Native Administration out of which he receives his salaries.⁶⁶ The systematic method of paying the district head from the proceeds of the tax he was able to obtain was to compel him to be proactive in its collection.

During the colonial administration, in cases whereby there was default in payment for goods and services, or taxes such a defaulter could be charged to the Ukpilla Clan Court or Native Court for due judgment. For instance, in 1940 there was a record of a court case between Ethame of Unguyami vs Megiabor, and Jologwiwa based on the charge that Megiabor, and Jologwiwa owed Ethame some cowries. In quote the court proceedings indicated that “both Megiabor, and Jologwiwa were carrying

60 . Interview with Mrs Ide Oduwa on the 17th of March 2023 at Iddo Okpella

61 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) B.P 879 Rules Made by Native Authorities Kukuruku Division (BenProf)1 p.12

62 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) CSO 26. 2399. Intel, Report on the Ekpeya Clan

63 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) CSO 26. 2399. p.63

64 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) CSO 26. 2399. Vol 11. p.48

65 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) CSO 26. 2399.

66 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 368 A Political Intelligence Report on the Aviele Clan (Kuku Div 2) p.215



out a conduct likely to cause breach of peace by seizing little cowries to the complainant contrary to Native laws and customs since seven days ago”.⁶⁷ Hence, finding Megiabor guilty, he was required to pay 5/- of cost to the complainant while Jologiwa was discharged.

Another noticeable change of the colonial administration that was felt within the Kukuru Division in general and Okpella in particular was the establishment of a Textile Centre at Auchu, the resultant effect was that the small scale or local producers were now forced to compete with the rising pressure at the textile centre as well as adapt to the increasing demand of the colonial administration.⁶⁸

The establishment of the Textile Centre can be traced to 2nd July 1946 when R.H Gretton the Acting Secretary Western Province sent a letter to the Resident of Benin Province stating that he was directed to inform Mr. Scallon A.V the Resident officer of Benin Province that ‘His Honour’ has discussed textile development in the Western Province with Mr. Young Deputy Director of Commerce and Industries, and that Mr. Young reports that Ado Ekiti had started very well and the women were very keen on improving the textile industry. Hence, the next area will be Auchu or thereabouts and Mr. Southern (probably an inspector) will be visiting Auchu, Ukpilla and its environs in the near future to look at possible sites for establishing a textile centre.”⁶⁹

When the textile centre was eventually established, efforts were made by the Colonial Administration to develop the production of loom woven mats. In pursuit of this goal, the Department of Commerce and Industry dispatched a letter to the District Officer Kukuru Division through Mr. Smith the Textile Officer of Auchu. The content of the letter revealed that there was previous correspondence between both offices regarding the usage of “loom woven mats” for the production of cotton carpets. The new letter sent was therefore a confirmation of the commencement of the production of cotton carpets which was already under review and the declaration of the intention of the textile officer of the centre to experiment with cotton carpets woven on both the present type of loom and also produce a new loom for weaving the new class of goods.”⁷⁰

The impression the colonialist had was that the establishment of the Textile Centre would benefit the weaving industries in the areas where the textile centres were established mainly because the primary aim of establishing the textile centre was to train spinners and weavers in new methods of work and in research suggested by the materials available locally for textile production.⁷¹ However this turned out not to be the case as most women were not able to adapt to the new production system that was introduced and soon some of these women ran out of business.

In response to this development, the women began to jettison the new methods which they were taught and return to the old methods which they were already accustomed to. In fact, considerable number of women dropped out of the training centres to find other solutions which suited their economic interest.⁷² Following the reduction of participants at the training centre, the conditions for

67 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) NAI. B.P. 808/vol. xvi Native Court Criminal Cases: Kukuru Division. Grade D Court

68 . . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995 Local Industries. Textiles p.16

69 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995 Local Industries: Textile Centres p.15

70 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995/72 Local Industries: Loom Woven Mats p. 72

71 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995/72 Local Industries: Textile Development p.47

72 . Interview with Mrs. Angela Musa (62 years old trader and local clothes weaver) on the 16th of march 2023 at Iddo-Okpella



accepting new trainees were reviewed. For instance, it was stated that the new duration for training would be based on the trainee's aptitude and ability. This implied that the more apt and able trainees would derive more benefit from a longer training while some will drop out after a few months.⁷³ In fact, it was categorically stated that trainees should come as volunteer workers but after two or three years the incentive of 'Earning Power' should be introduced if possible.⁷⁴

The leather making industry was as well affected by the colonial policies, one of such policies was the appointment of hide improvement officer and hide and skin instructors who went about inspecting the production of hides and making modifications to the existing methods which were used by the people. Any process of production which was deemed unfit for modern production process was discouraged, and "counterfeit" hides and skins were destroyed by the hide improvement officers.⁷⁵ Interestingly, the women opposed this policy as well by pointing out to the officers that they had no legal right to interfere in the local production process of the people which they had inherited from their forefathers. In response to the reaction of the women, Littlewood H.K the assistant director of veterinary services during that period wrote to the resident Benin Province informing him that the "hide officers" were handicapped in places where they had no legal support. Hence, he recommended that the whole of Benin Province be prescribed under the Hides and Skin Ordinance Cap. 85.⁷⁶

The continuous introduction of colonial policies in the different sectors of the economy gradually began to affect the women negatively consequently, with the improvement of the mining sector, the younger women ventured into the mining industry which became a more promising venture.

The Discovery of Gold and Establishment of Mining Industry/ Cement Factory in Okpella 1940-1960

Women have enormous economic impact in African societies during colonialism. Their contributions were notable in terms of labour. Family labour was well organized for economic activities. For instance, a man organized all his unmarried children, Wife or wives and relatives living with him for most economic endeavors ranging from agricultural production process as-well as mining purposes.⁷⁷ In the words of Ekundare, "Gold was first reported in Nigeria by Dr J.D Falconer while in charge of the mineral survey of Northern Nigeria instituted by the colonial office, however, the gold mining industry aroused little commercial interest until many years later".⁷⁸

Studies have shown that Okpella area is located in the eastern part of the Upper Proterozoic Igarra Schist Belt in the Southwestern Nigerian Basement Complex, which is made up of three major rock groups i. Migmatites, biotite and biotite-hornblende gneisses; ii. Low grade metasediments (schists, calc-silicate gneisses, marbles, polymict metaconglomerates and quartzites); and iii. Syn- to late-

73 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995 Local Industries. Textiles "Duration and Conditions of Training". p.30

74 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995 Local Industries. Textiles "Duration and Conditions of Training".

75 . Interview with Mrs Helena Omokhagbor (83 years old hides and skin manufacturer) 16th of march 2023 at Okpella

76 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) BP. 570/25. Local Industries. Hides and Skin Ordinance Prescribed areas.

77 . Gimba N.J. 2012. "The Economic Role of Women in Pre-Colonial or Traditional African Society" *Journal of Arts and Contemporary Society* vol.4 p.2

78 . Ekundare R.O. 1973. *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960* London: Methuen and Co Ltd p.179



tectonic porphyritic, biotite- and biotite-hornblende granites, granodiorites and adamellites, charnockites and gabbros; unmetamorphosed dolerite, pegmatite, aplite and syenite dykes.⁷⁹ These three major rock groups all occur around Okpella in Edo State, and the relevance of these rocks has made Okpella a hub for mining activities in Nigeria.

It should be noted that the first mining activities that took place in Okpella could be traced back to 1940 when gold was being mined in little quantities around Uza River. Evidence of initial mining activities that took place in Okpella has been traced back to the early 1940s when gold was being mined under the Colonial Authorities. Series of colonial correspondence which have been highlighted below gives a glimpse of the nature of gold mining in Okpella which was then in the Kukuruku Division.

Several steps were taken before the commencement of mining operation in Okpella. One of the major step was the inspection of the new gold field in Kukuruku Division of the Benin Province. This inspection was carried in the month of July by Mr. H.A Coahren, Senior Inspector of mines accompanied by N. Peterson Senior Inspector of Mines Area 11. After the investigation, Mr. Petterson wrote a Preliminary mineral Report in a file tagged 'Mines' with file Nos. 433.1935, 1936, 1940,⁸⁰ where he described the location of the mines.

The name of the mine that was inspected by Mr. N. Peterson and was called Passman Dagbala Mine. According to him, "the mine is situated approximately eight miles north-east of Igarra and three miles south-west of Dagbala and is served in the dry season by motor track from Igarra in the wet season by Oyele track from Igarra via Ojirami. The mine lies in a belt of Phyllites and nemblende schist which may be called the Dagbala schist belt. The schist has a strike of 18° -20°, the width of the belt appears to be at least three miles east-west".⁸¹

After proper inspection and analysis, mining operation commenced at the mine, but due to the unavailability of indigenous skilled workers, the initial miners that began operating in the region were mostly foreigners. Some of the miners were Lebanese foreigners who had travelled down to Nigeria to prospect for natural minerals. In a correspondence titled "The registration of Aliens" dated 25th March 1941 and addressed to the District officer Auchi, the names of two of such miners have been identified. One of them was Gamra Ohyban and the other was Ezzat Saab. From the correspondence that was exchanged, these miners reported at Minna that they were going to Auchi via Lokoja to prospect Gold after they had successfully obtained mining lease and exclusive prospecting rights.⁸² On arrival at Okpella, Gamra Ohyban, a male Lebanese was allowed to mine because he claimed to own mining lease and exclusive prospecting rights, alongside with his countryman, Ezzat Saab another male Lebanese whom was noted for holding prospectors license

79 . Ogunyele, A. C., Obaje, S. O., Akingboye, A. S. (2018) "Lithostructural Relationships And Petrogenetic Affinities Of The Basement Complex Rocks Around Okpella, Southwestern Nigeria" in *Journal of Earth Sciences Malaysia (Esmys)* 2(1),p.29

80 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155 vol 1 Prospect Mineral Report *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence*

81 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155. Vol. 1 Prospect Mineral Report *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.29

82 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155. Vol. 11 Register of Aliens: *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence*



and working for R. Makarrim of Ibadan.⁸³ Other individuals who have been recorded to have mining lease were; Mr J. Passman, with his mining lease dated 16/9/1940, Mr C. Camra, with mining lease dated 20/12/1940, Mr W.W. Reece with mining lease dated 23/3/1941, Mr J.O.E Ero with mining lease dated 28/4/1941. Also a letter dated 12th July 1941, indicates that GUSAU Nigerian Mining Syndicate began prospecting for Gold in Okpella and its environs.⁸⁴

By 1941, there was disagreement between the two neighbouring communities of *Ososo and Ukpilla* (now Okpella) on the actual spot their borders terminate. This disagreement degenerated into a serious argument to the extent that a commission of enquiry was set up to look into the case. The commission which was set up was headed by Mr H. Spottiswoode, the then ‘District Officer’ under the I.T.B.S ordinance 49.⁸⁵ The commission was charged with the responsibility of deciding the boundary between the Ukpilla Clan and Ososo village between the Ugyami-Ososo road and the Northern Province boundary.⁸⁶ The commission came to a conclusion that the boundary between Ukpilla clan and Ososo villages start from the heap of rocks known as Okumagbehe about 4 ½ miles from Unguyami on the Ososo path, in a straight line to the confluence of the Ikwomagbeshe and Uza (or Oda) streams; thence down the latter stream to its confluence with the Adogwu stream.⁸⁷

This new geographical divide is claimed to have been without prejudice to any rights held by other villages to land east of the Unguyami-Ososo path. One specific characteristics of mining during the colonial period was that the miners were also expected to pay rents to the existing clan council in the area to grant them licence to continue exploration of the solid minerals. The close proximity of Ukpilla clan to Ososo villages prompted the colonial administration to direct all payments of rents to the Ososo Clan council and these rents varied accordingly. The sample of one correspondence dated 11th November 1941 showed the various amount each miner had to pay. “The following rents were due to the Ososo Council on leases on the Uza River and therefore shared with Ukpilla (now Okpella).

Miner	No. of Lease	Rent
R.S Moukarim (E.S Saab & C.O Umerah)	?	3. 13. 9
Gusau Nigerian Syndicate	6456	2. 18. 3
Bouari & Shalhub	6458	1.17. 6

Source: N.A.I, K.D. 155. Vol. II *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence*

N.B: Each of the figures found in the third column in the table above, were the amounts expected to be paid by the various miners who had various mining lease. For easy recognition, each miner was

83 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155. Vol. 11 Register of Aliens: *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence*

84 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (NAI) K.D. 155 GUSAU Nigeria Mining Syndicate Miscellaneous Correspondence

85 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155 vol 11, Authority Residence Letter, *Mineral Ordinance: Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.32

86 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155 vol 11, Authority Residence Letter, *Mineral Ordinance: Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.32

87 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155 vol 11, Authority Residence Letter, *Mineral Ordinance: Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.32



given a number of leases which is used as a means of identification. The Number of leases has been indicated in the middle column.

At this time, Messrs Lee and Shields have not yet got permission to mine and so had not yet paid rent. However, Mrs Kahale who had been the most notable female miners as at that time had withdrawn her application hence had no need to renew her rents.”⁸⁸

The activity in gold mining did much to alleviate the unemployment in the mining industry arising from the restriction in the production and export of tin particularly within the years 1941-1942.⁸⁹

Apart from gold another solid mineral which was extracted from Okpella was Quartz Crystal. Quartz Crystal occurs in six-sided prisms and pyramids. The sides of the pyramids often appear as though engraved with fine transverse lines. Evidence points to the fact that Quartz Crystal which complied with the necessary critical and structural requirements were in great demand by the United Nations during the war.⁹⁰ The Director Geological Survey Department in 1943 sent a letter to the District Officer Kukuruku Division with the following instructions. “Quartz Crystal which complies with the necessary critical and structural requirements were in great demand by the United Nations for use in instruments of extreme importance in waging war. They can occur under a great variety of geological conditions and it is possible that they may be found in the area under your jurisdiction”. He further included that the Native Administration officials, District and Village heads and other responsible Africans especially hunters should be informed to keep watch for the quartz and bring any that they may find to the office?”⁹¹

The nature of mining at the time was such that only a few individuals and corporate bodies had mining lease to prospect mineral resources in Okpella, most of these mining leases were owned by foreigners. However, indigenes from Okpella and its environs were used as labourers to work in the mine fields. Mrs Ejordamen in an interview stated that while the men did the strenuous task of breaking the minerals to sizeable quantities, the women assisted as potters in moving them to the site of final processing.⁹² Very few women had access to mining lease, in fact when compared to the ratio of men the difference was really much. For instance, judging from the individuals who were eligible to mine as at 11th November 1941 only one woman in person of Mrs Kahale was allowed to own prospecting lease, more worrisome was the fact that due to circumstances beyond her control she was unable to renew her rents thereby interrupting her freedom to continue mining. The case of Mrs Kahale was just an example of one out of many women who were not empowered to carry out mining activities in full scale in the male dominated colonial administration.

There were also cases of transfer of ownership of mining rights between the miners either temporarily to be held in trust, or sometimes permanently. For instance, in a letter addressed to the Resident Officer Benin province dated 14th April 1945, showed an agreement between Mr

88 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) B.P. 2399; Kuku Div: Ukpilla N.A Forest reserve

89 . Ekundare O.R. 1973. *An Economic History of Nigeria 1860-1960* p.181

90 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155. Vol. II *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.34

91 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 156 Quartz Crystals *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.34

92 . Interview with Mrs Ejordamen Florentina (61 years old Teacher and Local Historian)Okpella Edo state 2023



Moukarim and the son of the Attah of Igbirra.⁹³ In the letter, Mr. Moukarim explained that “the statement that he had transferred his mining interest in the Kukuruku Division to the Attah of Igbirra was unfounded. He further pointed out that the real situation was that he was trying to engage one Sule Ibrahim, son of the Attah of Igbirra as an Attorney for his Kukuruku mining interest since the former clerk Gabriel A. Festus will be going to another area on account of shortage of staff. Therefore, Mr Sule Ibrahim was now representing his interest in Kukuruku mining fields”⁹⁴

Despite the fact that there was freedom to transfer mining rights to other individuals in case of emergency or need to leave the mining field for some time, there was rarely a case whereby these mining rights were transferred to women. When researching on what could have been the cause of such situation the readily available answer was that the mining industry was deemed to be the business of men therefore women were not allowed to hold exclusive mining rights except in extreme cases whereby forces beyond the control of the major actors is involved.⁹⁵ The transfer of mining right either temporarily or permanently had significant impact on the women. This is mainly due to the fact that different miners with prospecting lease had different philosophy towards the kind of workforce he want on the mine. Some of them retrenched women working on the mines by giving the excuse that women were physically not fit to undergo the rigour of the mining operation or that women had lesser working hours compared to the men. For example, the testimony given by Mrs. Loveth Alegbe an ex-miner in Okpella indicate that in the year 1946, she was employed as a porter in one of the gold field in the Dagbala mines where she helped the male miners transport the mined gold which had been cut into sizeable quantities to the collection zone where it was further processed or evacuated by waiting trucks.⁹⁶ She claimed that she carried on with this job till around 1949 when the man whom she worked for transferred his mining lease to a new individual who had a different opinion about women working on the mines in which he directs the operation.⁹⁷ Consequently, by 1950 she was relieved of her duties in the mines which once again returned her to the league of unemployed individuals as at that time.

In a related development, in cases whereby there was a protracted disagreement between two or more individuals who had prospecting lease, the situation most times had adverse effects on the mining workers who were usually at the receiving end of such crises. Mrs Ide Oduwa a female ex-miner also noted that she recalled in one of such situations, the money that was due to be paid to her as wages was withheld for close to six months until the matter was finally settled.⁹⁸

By 1951 the colonial Administration began making efforts to diversify the production of raw materials in the country. In addition, concerted efforts were put forward in addressing the issue of materials for building construction. This concern was aimed particularly to provide more residential apartment for the district heads and the divisional heads of various Native Authorities. To this effect, envoys were dispatched all over the country to make assessment on the possibility of the establishment of processing plants which could cater for the production of basic building materials

93 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155 vol 11 Register of Aliens: *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p. 75

94 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155. Vol. 11 Register of Aliens: *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p. 75

95 . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D. 155, vol. 11. *Mineral Ordinance Miscellaneous Correspondence* p.

96 . Interview with Mrs Loveth Alegbe, 87 years old ex-miner in Okpella.

97 . Interview with Mrs. Loveth Alegbe, 87 years old ex-miner in Okpella.

98 . Interview with Mrs. Ide Oduwa, 76 years old trader, 17th of March, 2023 at Iddo Okpella.



particularly cement. From 1952-1954, results and reports of the survey carried out throughout the country was returned to the Regional Production Development Board. It seems reasonably that that the delegation of power by the federal government to the regions by 1952 concerning restrictions on imports through the establishment of industries as domiciled in the Pioneer Industry Ordinance was unconventional.⁹⁹ One may argue that such a move was strategic because the federal government never allowed the implementation of the ordinance by the region through the instrumentality of complete devolution of power.¹⁰⁰

As a result, it has been said that the background to the establishment of cement industry in Okpella dates back to 1955 when Croft R.A the then chairman Western Regional Production Development Board sent a Letter to the Resident of Benin Province at the provincial office Benin City stating that the board was ready to establish a cement industry in the Western Region and Ukpilla was one of the areas picked for the establishment. He further noted that arrangements had been made for two experts from Associated Portland Cement Manufacturers Limited, London, to visit Benin Province from the 25th to 31st August. He also points out that the Experts Messrs Pollitt and Robinson, will be accompanied by Mr. Piper of the Geological Survey Department to examine the limestone deposit near Owan, Siluko, and Auchì, (Ukpilla).¹⁰¹ By the early 1960's, the establishment of the cement factory propelled the women once more into the mining industry to meet the demands of gravel and granite and partly processed limestone. Intense activities began with the discovery of limestone in Okpella and eventual establishment of a cement factory in Okpella.¹⁰²

Mining is a primary extractive activity which attractively practiced by some unskilled, semi-skilled and skilled miners of both genders. Most local and small-scale mines were mostly operated by the unskilled and semi-skilled miners while large quarries and mining were operated by the semi-skilled and skilled miners. It involves the extraction of the surface and subterranean minerals especially the open cast and shaft methods were adopted during small scale mining operations. Just as nationalist all over the world spearhead the drive for independence, Chief Ikhumetse Olowu a native of Okpella who championed the struggle for the establishment of the cement company in Okpella with the aid of the then Premier of the Mid-Western region and the finance minister Dennis Osadebe and Chief Festus Okotiebo opted for the plant to be established in their interested areas.¹⁰³ Eventually, the factory was established in Okpella to the credit of Chief Ikhumetse Olowu, The limestone mining industry in Okpella was a response to the establishment of Okpella cement factory. The demand for gravel and granite for building construction as well as partially processed limestone for the production of cement increased as a result, women became the main labour force in the industry, most of the women were employed in the cement factory as cleaners, messengers, and labourers, while others were self-employed in the local mining industry.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Abolorunde, Ayodele Samuel, 'Import Control under Regionalism in Colonial Nigeria, 1954-1960' *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)* Ethiopia Vol.8 (1), S/No 28, January, 2019, p. 119

¹⁰⁰ Abolorunde, Ayodele Samuel, 'Import Control under Regionalism in Colonial Nigeria, 1954-1960' *International Journal of Arts and Humanities (IJAH)* Ethiopia Vol.8 (1), S/No 28, January, 2019, p. 119.

¹⁰¹ . National Archives of Nigeria (Ibadan) (N.A.I) K.D 995 Local Industries p.83

¹⁰² . Abubakar A. Afegbua " The establishment of mining activities in Okpella 1960-1970, Long essay, Department of History University of Abuja, 2010.

¹⁰³. Interview with Mrs Mamunat Jimoh (A 79 years old trader) on the 16th of march 2023 at Iddo-Okpella

¹⁰⁴ . Interview with Mrs Tafamel Momoh (69 years old businesswoman) on the 17th of March 2023 at Okpella



Evidently the economic activities of the women began to change gradually, the women began abandoning farming for mining which became perceived as a lucrative business, which in turn affected negatively agricultural quality and quantity of food crops in Okpella market which propelled the people to rely on farm produce from the North.

Earliest Involvement of Okpella Women in the Local Mining Industry at Independence in 1960

By 1960, when Nigeria gained her independence, different efforts were put in place to develop different sectors of the economy. One of such sectors was the export sector. The country's export was anchored upon export items like groundnuts, cocoa and palm produce.¹⁰⁵ Mining has been seen as the extraction of valuable minerals or other geological materials from the earth usually from an ore body, lode, vein, seam, reef or placer deposit. These deposits form a mineralized package that is of economic interest to the miner. It can be operated by the unskilled, semi-skilled while large quarries and mining were operated by the semi-skilled miners and skilled miners. Consequently, it was seen as a reliable substitute to agriculture reason being that mining business became the only business that guaranteed profit more than any other business in Okpella.

The earliest instance of women involvement in the mining industry in Okpella cannot be categorically ascertained, this is because there were very few documentations of the contribution of women in the mining industry during the Colonial Administration. However, several other factors account for this: first, the mining occupation was deemed to be a very strenuous job that was reserved for men hence the first set of women that ventured into the business as labourers were not necessarily recognized.¹⁰⁶ Secondly, the inability for many women to own mining right particularly during the colonial administration made the documentation of the contributions of women in the mining sector very few. Thirdly domestic responsibilities also affected women by limiting the amount of time and effort they can spend in mining sites thus missing many financial, networking, mining knowledge gains and proper documentation.¹⁰⁷ Since women did not have the luxury of time to work on the mine fields as they had to take care of the home with the remaining time that was available to them, they were not classified under permanent workers rather they were seen as casual workers.

The most readily available blueprint of the earliest contributions of women in the mining industry has been traced to the 1960's when the cement industries and other post-colonial establishments sprang up. Although there have been arguments that women contribution to the mining industry predates 1960, however, insufficient documentation makes the study of their contribution in colonial period difficult. Consequently, for convenient sake, this work submits that there were two phases of women involvement in the mining industry. The first phase is categorized as the pre-independence phase, while the other is termed the independence phase. Judging from oral testimony of Mrs Ejordamen and Mrs Aliu, this research has been able to deduce that the contribution of women to the mining industry in the pre-independence period was relatively the same as the independence era.

¹⁰⁵ Ayodele Samuel Aborisade, Nigeria's Foreign Reserves and the Challenges of Development, 1960-2010' *West Bohemian Historical Review* VIII/2018 01, p..95.

¹⁰⁶ . Weldegiorgis F, Lawson L, Verbrugge H. 2018. *Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining: Challenges and Opportunities for Greater Participation*. Winnipeg: International Institute For Sustainable Development. p. 5

¹⁰⁷ . Weldegiorgis F, Lawson L, Verbrugge H. 2018. *Women in Artisanal and Small Scale Mining: Challenges and Opportunities for Greater Participation*. Winnipeg: International Institute For Sustainable Development. p. 5



Their major role was to help in transporting the mined resources such as gold and quartz away from its primary location on the mining field to the location where they can be further processed or transported. It should be noted however that the major means of transporting the solid minerals in the mines was through head portage. Other assistance had to do with breaking down of the extracted minerals from their large state to sizable portion which could either be bagged or transported.¹⁰⁸ While the contribution of women during the independence phase had to do with crushing and bagging. In fact, an article written by Abutudu M. notes that “typically, the crushing and bagging process was the dimension of the business where women were visible in the mining value chain”.¹⁰⁹ At a place called Junction in Okpella, some limestone crushing and bagging factories were established around 1960. Its main distinction was that it is a cluster with about eight small scale limestone crushing and bagging establishments that employed an average of about 10 workers at each of the factories of which women made up about 70 percent of the work force.¹¹⁰

Decline in the Economic Role of Okpella Women in Mining at Independence in 1960

It should be noted that globally the formal mining industry has always employed disproportionately more men than women. Women were excluded because it was assumed that they will not be able to do the physical work required.¹¹¹ The finite nature of mining means that mine decline and closure can have further implications for women. Strongman as cited in the writing of Cloete J, et al argues that mine closure was “often more traumatic for local communities especially in remote areas where non mining income were low and labour mobility is minimal.”¹¹² This implies that it is more difficult for women to find another mine to work if the mine they work for eventually declines or close down unlike their male counterparts who would be easily admitted into another mining industry easily.

The decline in the economic roles of women in mining as at 1960 was influenced by various factors. On one hand, the decline in the economic role of women in the mining industry in the 1960’s has been linked to the development of larger mining companies that made use of better equipment’s in the mines. Some of these companies include Germs Quarry Industry, Monitor Construction Company (M.C.C), Crushed Rock industry, Blue Stone Nigeria Limited, Freedom Group, Idinogie Nigeria Limited, Lime Chemical Limited, Salorog Nigerian Limited, West Africa fertilizer limited, Iyayi Group etc. The adoption of heavy-duty excavators for breaking down large rocks gradually replaced the crude method of blasting of the rocks a method which was adopted by the women, while mobile trucks for moving the broken rocks equally undermined the active role of women as porters of the solid minerals. Hence the inability for the women to compete favourably with their counterparts that made use of mechanized tools drastically reduced their participation in mining. This decline began around 1960 till about 1964 when the Edo Cement Factory was established.¹¹³

108. Interview with Mrs Ejordamen (61 years old Teacher and Local Historian) and Mrs Aliu (76 years Indigene of Okpella, and ex-miner). On 16th of March 2023, Okpella Edo state.

109 . Abutudu M. 2020. “Impact of Mining on Women, Youth and Others in Selected Communities in Nigeria: Case study in the Okpella Community in Edo State”. *NEITI Occasional Paper Series* p.57

110 . Abutudu M. 2020. “Impact of Mining on Women, Youth and Others in Selected Communities in Nigeria: Case study in the Okpella Community in Edo State”. p.57

¹¹¹ . Cloete J, Rooyen D, Marais L, Sesele K. 2020. “Mine Decline and Women: Reflection from Free State Gold Field” in *Journal of Extractive Industries and Society*. Vol. 8, Issue 1. p.1

¹¹² . Cloete J, Rooyen D, Marais L, Sesele K. 2020. “Mine Decline and Women: Reflection from Free State Gold Field” p.2

¹¹³ . Interview with Mrs Ejordamen (61 years old Teacher and Local Historian)



Furthermore, 1960 was characterized by series of events all over the country, particularly with the fact that the country was just stepping out of long years of colonialism. There were no ready-made structures put in place to sustain all the structures which had been inherited from colonial administration. Hence, there were several sectors of the economy which were neglected partially in the first half of 1960 to address the major political issues of unification and governance. The extractive industry of which mining was a major sector was largely neglected. The effect of this was that the mines operators had to fend for themselves with little or no support from the Federal government. Consequently, those mines which could no longer afford to be over staffed, took the drastic step of dismissing female workers whom they believed contributed very little to the daily running of the mines as compared to their male counterparts. In addition, during this period women began to experience discrimination in the mine workplace to the extent that employment and training opportunities were often prioritized for men while women were only allowed to work in the most menial, low paid positions.¹¹⁴ More worrisome was the fact that maternal leave in most cases was not provided due to the high rate of readily available workers who could easily take over the position of any excused worker. The resultant effect was that women returning from childbirth or caring for children struggled to regain employment.¹¹⁵

In addition, by 1960, the new country 'Nigeria' began to adopt several international policies, laws and conventions which were generally accepted by all independent nations of the world. It has been argued that Nigeria equally adopted laws that prohibit women working underground, working at night, or working in the extractive sector at all. And these laws to a large extent had adverse effect on the population of women in the mining sector thereby leading to considerable decline of women in the mining industry as at 1960.¹¹⁶

The question therefore is 'if these laws were in place, how come women were still found in the extractive industries? The answer is that though the laws were technically in force, as time progressed, they were not entirely followed in practice except in extreme cases where certain industries sought the disqualification the women working under them. In fact, studies have shown that some of these laws were repealed or amended.¹¹⁷

Following the decline of the position of women in the mining sector around 1960, women gradually began to diversify into other sectors of the economy. Most of them returned back to agriculture, trading and local crafts. Since Nigeria became independent in 1960, agriculture became one of the predominant sectors of the economy, contributing, together with forestry and fishing, 65.6 per cent of the GDP in the year 1960.¹¹⁸ On the other hand, the proportion of mining was rather small at the beginning of 1960 and contributed (only 1 per cent of the GDP). Hence, the women returned back to their initial economic occupation of farming and local crafts production.

¹¹⁴ . Scaife M. 2009. *Women, Communities and Mining: The gender impact of mining and the role of gender impact assessment*. Australia: Oxfam Australia. p.7

¹¹⁵ . Scaife M. 2009. *Women, Communities and Mining: The gender impact of mining and the role of gender impact assessment*. Australia: Oxfam Australia. p.7

¹¹⁶ . Mernard A. 2021. "Women in Mining: A History of Legal Invisibility and exclusion". In *Journal of National Resource Governance Institute*. Retrieved from www.resourcegovernance.org accessed on 21st May 2023

¹¹⁷ . Mernard A. 2021. "Women in Mining: A History of Legal Invisibility and exclusion". In *Journal of National Resource Governance Institute*. Retrieved from www.resourcegovernance.org accessed on 21st May 2023

¹¹⁸ . Stokke O. 1970. "The Nigerian Economy and the Natural Resources" *NIGERIA: An Introduction to the Politics, Economy and Social Setting of Modern Nigeria*. Sweden: Söderström & Finn Uppsala press. p.70



Conclusion

In conclusion, the colonial era from 1904 to 1960 profoundly reshaped the economic landscape for women in Okpella, transitioning their roles from predominantly subsistence-based agriculture and localised trade to a more diversified yet ultimately constrained participation in cash crop production, small-scale enterprise, and extractive industries. British policies—ranging from monetisation and taxation to the promotion of export commodities and the establishment of mining operations—initially broadened opportunities, enabling women to engage in crafts, market trading, and labour-intensive mining tasks such as portage and crushing. Acts of resistance, including tax boycotts and opposition to regulatory interventions in textiles and leather, underscored women's agency in navigating these changes. However, entrenched patriarchal biases, mechanisation in mining and discriminatory employment practices culminated in their marginalisation by 1960, compelling many to revert to traditional farming and crafts amid declining agricultural output and increased reliance on external food supplies. Ultimately, while colonial administration integrated Okpella into the global economy and ostensibly modernised its structures, it exacerbated gender inequalities and eroded women's socio-economic autonomy. This historical trajectory not only illuminates the exploitative underpinnings of colonial development but also offers critical insights into persistent gender disparities in Nigeria's informal and extractive sectors, urging contemporary policymakers to prioritise equitable access to resources and inclusive economic reforms.