

ARAROMI RUBBER PLANTATION AND THE GROWTH OF LABOUR MIGRATION IN ONDO DIVISION OF SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA, 1951-1986

ADESOTE Samson Adesola, PhD
Department of History & International Studies
Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria
Email: solaade2007@ymail.com

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Abstract:

This paper interrogates the effect of government-owned Araromi rubber plantation on labour migration in Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria between 1951 and 1986. It argues that prior to the emergence of government-owned plantations in 1951, plantation agriculture was mainly dominated by the peasant Nigerian farmers. This development was facilitated by the British colonial agricultural policy, which was characterised by classical *laissez-faire*. However, with the birth of Western Regional government in 1951, the long standing British agricultural policy was completely reversed by the indigenous Nigerian politicians. This paved way for the establishment of government-owned plantations in some major areas in Western Nigeria Ikenne, Okitipupa, Araromi, Lomiro and so on. In order to pursue this agricultural objective, the Western Regional Government created an agency known as the Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC), which acquired large tract of land in the region for the establishment of government-owned plantations such as rubber, citrus and oil palm. The acquisition of land in Araromi Area of Ondo Division was characterised by adequate consultation with and compensations to the landowners and the community. This helped to prevent the issue of land conflict between the government and the host communities of the plantation. It submitted that Araromi Rubber plantation attracted a large number of migrant labourers from Western, Mid-Western and Eastern Nigeria during this period. The methodological approach adopted in this paper is historical, qualitative, quantitative and analytical utilising materials from both primary and secondary sources of data collection such as archival documents, oral interview and extant literature.

Keywords: Agriculture, Labour Migration, Nigeria, Ondo Division and Rubber plantation

Introduction

Plantation agriculture is a major concept viewed from different perspectives by scholars. According to Udo, plantation is a highly capitalized system of agricultural production under which land, labor, and the produce for marketing are organized on lines similar to that of a modern industrial plant. He further explains that this form of agriculture requires a large tract of suitable land measured in hundreds or thousands of acres (Udo, 1969:356-357). Agboola identifies three main types of plantation in Nigeria. They are the peasant small-scale tree-crop holdings, the large scale tree plantations, and the non-tree crop large scale estates (Agboola, 1979:51). Plantation agriculture has some basic features. It is a highly capitalised system of agricultural production under which land, labour and the produce for marketing are organised on lines similar to that of a modern industrial plant (Udo, 1969:356). First and foremost, plantation agriculture requires a large tract of suitable land measured in hundreds or thousands of acres. Secondly, it requires a large reservoir of readily accessible labour. Thirdly, the plantation crops are essentially perennial crops such as cocoa, rubber, kola, coffee and oil palm (Morgan, 1959:138-150). The fourth feature of plantation agriculture is its sub-classifications namely the peasant small-scale tree crop holdings owned by individuals; large scale tree plantations owned by government, companies or corporations and rarely by individuals; and the non-tree crop large scale estates which involve the cultivation of crops such as rice, sugar cane and tobacco on annual basis onl (Agboola, 1979:51). In all, these three sub-classifications of plantations can be re-grouped into two, on the basis of ownership, namely plantations owned individually and the ones owned by government, companies or corporations. These two groups of plantations were promoted during the colonial period (Adesote, 2016:47).

The evolution of plantation system of farming in Nigeria began in 1841 (Dennett, 1919:268). In 1841, Prince Albert was aided and encouraged by MacGregor Laird expedition to set up the first model farm on the Niger. The land in which Albert founded the model farm was bought from the Atta of Eggara for the sum of £45, and about 20 acres were planted with cotton and corn from European seed. This early experiment was said to have failed due to some reasons (Dennett, 1919:268). The historical evolution of plantation agriculture in Southwestern Nigeria could be found in the doctrine of the Bible and the Plough created by T.F Buxton in his work titled, the African Slave Trade and Its Remedy, which was developed by Henry Venn through the Christian missions, most especially the African Church

(Ifemesia, 1980:82). The doctrine, which found immediate fulfilment in a number of places along the coast of West Africa such as Akropong in the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Joal in Senegal, was implemented in Nigeria between 1840 and 1888, beginning from Abeokuta and Agege areas (Webster, 1963:422). Adesina argues that the period 1840-1888 was a period when active steps were taken to change the economic and social life of Africa to provide a suitable ground for the germination of both Christianity and legitimate commerce. The first major model farm to be set up in Western Nigeria was established by Dr. Mojola Agbebi in Agbowa. Agbebi was said to have preached the gospel of coffee, cocoa, cotton and work as well as the scripture (Adesina, 2000/2004: 62). This early attempt recorded little success. However, his initial effort was later complemented by other early Yoruba planters (known as Agege planters). Some of these Agege planters were Jacob Kehinde Coker and Oguntolu (Berry, 1968:443).

The early efforts of these Agege planters were complemented by colonial government. Generally, the efforts of the early British colonial administrations in Nigeria were directed toward expanding the production of export crops to increase government revenue. This was to be achieved not through the plantation system, but by introducing improved seed varieties to local farmers and persuading them to adopt better cultivation practices (Udo, 1965:357). Faluyi argues that colonial government's role in agriculture during this early period was generally moved to advisory (Faluyi, 1994:82). This development was informed by the colonial policy pursued by the British in Nigeria up to 1950, which was characterised by the classical economic theory of *laissez faire* policy. In other words, the British involvement in agricultural development in Nigeria during this period, if any, was dictated by British industrial needs on one hand and the request by the commercial firms on the other (Levi and Havinden,1980:124). In the sphere of the production of the crops needed by the imperialists, the intention of the colonial government was to encourage in every way the development of other agricultural produce in the colonies and the cultivation of new ones, which were suitable to its soil and climate (Adesina, 1989). Since the exploitation of the agricultural and mineral resources of the colony was the most attractive and indeed the primary objective of the administration, initial efforts were concentrated on collecting all agricultural crops which could be sent to the Imperial Institute at Kew (Kew Garden), London for examination. For example, in 1900, the Imperial Institute at Kew reported that the exploitation of Shea butter commercially was profitable in Nigeria (Levi and Havinden,1980:124).

Several efforts were made by the colonial government towards encouraging the development of plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria. They were the establishment of Botanical Garden at Ebute Meta, Lagos in 1887, the creation of Department of Agriculture in 1910 in Southern Nigeria and the introduction of land legislation. In 1887, the First Botanical Garden at Ebute Meta, Lagos was created by Sir Alfred Maloney at a moderate cost of three hundred pounds a year (Denneth, 1919:267). The Botanical Garden was charged with the responsibility of breeding specimens of indigenous plants and trees which were of commercial value for the introduction to the indigenous people of the colony. It was also expected of the Botanical Garden to give practical instructions to Nigerian farmers on the growing and distribution of seedlings and serve as the centre for the introduction of new trees (Faluyi, 1994:84). This development was also facilitated through the establishment of nursery station at Olokemeji, Moor plantation and other parts of Southwestern Nigeria (Morgan and Pugh, 1969:501-502). For instance, in Olokemeji, series of experiments were carried out to ascertain the best varieties of cotton among other crops that could thrive well in the Southern Provinces, particularly, Southwestern Nigeria. These centres were to determine the suitability of the soil, the appropriate time for sowing as well as the best method for cultivating the crops (NAI: Despatch 99, 1904). The Botanical Garden and other experimental stations were very significant for nurturing and distributing plants, trees and seeds for the first few decades of British colonial rule in Nigeria, in general, and Western Nigeria, in particular. The stations equally served as demonstration centres where farmers were taught and educated on how to cultivate some of the newly introduced crops such as cocoa, rubber, and cotton into Southern Nigeria, in general (Faluyi, 1994: 84). For example, in Sapele, there was an estate for producing rubber (*Hevea Brasiliensis*) was first established (Agboola, 1979:111) by Miller Brothers, rubber was first introduced there in 1905 (Udo, 1965:362).

The Department of Agriculture was mainly revenue raising department, concentrating on increasing crop yields. But, as time went on, the department came to realise that getting local farmers to adopt improved methods was at least a significant part of their duties (Afolabi, 1996:53), it began to provide professional advice on agriculture (Faluyi, 1994:86). It was also the duty of the department to hold public lectures, issuing memoranda from time to time on most approved methods of cultivation and preparation of export products (Olorunfemi, 1972:71). The department was also pre-occupied with an attempt to encourage the growing of newly introduced crops such as cocoa and cotton. For example, through widespread campaign, the

department spread knowledge of the cultivation of cotton to many parts in Southwestern Nigeria like Aiyetoro and Meko in Egbado Division as well as Iseyin in Oyo Province (NAI, 1919:10). Also, under the encouragement of the Agricultural Department, seedlings were distributed from nurseries and over 2025 hectares of rubber were planted in the former Bendel State between 1909 and 1917 (Agboola, 1979:111). By distributing rubber seeds, the department also tried to encourage rubber cultivation and thus revive its production (NAI CSO the File No 14451, 1939). Agricultural station and farm had been established at Moore plantation, near Ibadan, as the headquarters of the Agricultural department in the Southern Provinces of Nigeria as well as very useful cocoa and rubber plantations at Agege. The Director of Agriculture together with his staff also established model agricultural plots and nurseries at Osogbo, Ijebu-Ode, Epe, Awka, Benin, Sapele, Ogwashi-uku and Aba (Denneth, 1919: 269).

Also, plantation agriculture was promoted by the British through land legislation. Land was the basis and almost the major means of plantation agriculture in the British dependencies in the period before 1945 (Kaniki, 1985:388). This was why Helleiner viewed plantation agriculture as “a land-surplus economy” (Helleiner, 1966). This view was also shared by Eicher when he said that surplus land played significant role in export-crop expansion during the colonial period (Eicher, 1970:24). Thus, the importance of land to the development of plantation system of agriculture necessitated the introduction of different land policies by the British. Generally, the British attitudes and policies towards land varied from region to region and even in each region, from colony to colony. In most of the British colonial territories in West Africa, the British attempted to establish direct control over land, to create forest reserves and to offer land as concessions to European planters and concessionaires (Lamb, 1931:121). Major land policies introduced were the Public Land Act of 1876 (Lagos), the Public Lands Acquisition of 1917 for Southern Nigeria and the Native Lands Acquisition Law of 1952. All these land legislations facilitated commercialization of rural land for the practice of plantation agriculture. For instance, the Public Land Act of 1876 empowered the State to exercise its powers of eminent domain in order to compulsorily acquire large areas of land for public purposes (Oluwasanmi, 1966) Also, while the Public Lands Acquisition Act of 1917 for Southern Nigeria states that the compulsory acquisition of land must be for a public and not commercial, the Native Lands Acquisition Law of 1952 emphasizes that such acquisition must take place with the agreement of landowners, with a clause of making provision for the payment of compensation. It is against this

background that this paper interrogates Araromi Rubber Plantation and the growth of labour migration in Ondo Division of Southwestern Nigeria, 1951-1986.

Literature Review

There are scholarly works on plantation agriculture and migration in Nigeria. They include Udo (1967), Udo (1965), Usoro (1974), Osoba (1969), Salami (2010), Oluwasanmi (1966), Ogen (2003), Jatula (2001), Kaniki (1985), Faluyi (1994), Helleiner (1966), Agboola (1979), Agiri (1990), Adepoju (1978) and Adesina (2000-2004). While some of the works interrogated the evolution of plantation agriculture like Oluwasanmi (1966), Kaniki (1985), Salami (2010), others like Udo (1967), Osoba (1969) and Ogen (2003) examine the nexus between plantation agriculture and labour migration. None of these works examine Araromi Rubber plantation and labour migration.

Materials and Methods

The methodological approach adopted in this paper is historical, qualitative, quantitative and analytical utilising materials from both primary and secondary sources of data collection such as archival documents, oral interview and extant literature.

Results and Discussions

a. Western Regional Government and the Development of Plantation Agriculture, 1951-1966

The development of government-owned plantation in Western Nigeria was facilitated by the Western Regional government. The involvement of indigenous Nigerian politicians in the development of plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria in particular during the last decade of colonial administration was traceable to the emergence of regional government in 1951 (Adesote, 2016). Up till 1951, the colonial government, which controlled agricultural policy did not establish any plantation in the whole of Southwestern Nigeria. Any improvements made towards agricultural development in the region were brought about by encouraging and modernising peasant-type of production (Udo, 1965:356). As argued by Udo, plantation agriculture failed to flourish in Nigeria before 1950 owing to the agricultural policy pursued by the colonial government (Udo, 1967:300). Based on the initial colonial agricultural policy of the British in Nigeria, which was characterised by classical *laissez-faire* in the period up to 1945, the British neither established plantations nor encouraged foreign capitalists to set up plantations in the Southwestern Nigeria (Udo, 1965:356). Their opposition was based on fears that farmers might be displaced from their farmlands and a desire to protect the local production from exploitation by foreign capitalists (Agboola,

1979:179). The situation was a little bit different in other parts of Southern Nigeria. For example, in the 1930s, a few plantations were established in Sapele and Calabar (Rubber and Oil palm plantations). These plantations were mainly managed by foreign interests, and government permission to establish them was granted owing to the remarkable successes achieved by plantation agriculture in other parts of the tropics. Despite this attempt, there were only eight plantations in Nigeria before 1950 and all of these plantations were located in the Warri and Calabar provinces (Agboola, 1979). Of these plantations, five of them were devoted to rubber cultivation, while the remaining three were devoted to oil palm (Udo, 1965:356).

However, the colonial agricultural policy of the British changed after the Second World War in 1945 from classical *laissez-faire* to one of positive development, which invariably laid the foundation for the involvement of the indigenous politicians from the 1950s. This could be corroborated with the words of the then Governor-General of Nigeria, Sir Bourdillion (1935-1943) who as far back as 1939 remarked that:

In the past the British public had viewed colonies matters with complacency and apathy, a situation which has given other European powers the impression that they would have succeeded in doing more than we have done for the development of Tropical Africa had they been in position to make the attempt (NAI Oyo Prof. 2/3 File No.217, 1939).

The change in the attitude of Britain towards economic development of their colonies from 1945 was mainly facilitated by the philosophy of decolonisation. From about 1945, the colonial government saw radical nationalism among the West African nationalists (Lawal, 2010:41). For example, in 1948, the politics of confrontation between Nigerian nationalists and the colonial government gave way to a more cooperative approach on both sides (Harneit-Severs, 1996:50). This development forced the British to offer a great hope for the improvement of plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria in particular during the first five years of the second phase of colonial administration (1945-1950). Among major economic developments witnessed in Nigeria during this period were: the creation of Department of Commerce and Industry (1946); the launching of the First Ten Year Development Plan (1946); the promulgation of the Second Colonial Welfare and Development Act; the emergence of new colonial agricultural policy (1946); the emergence of Cocoa Marketing Board (1947); establishment of new research stations and the establishment of Colonial Development Corporation (which initially metamorphosed into the Western

Regional Production Development Board, 1949). This was why Adesina argued that the first post 1945 British colonial agricultural policy was geared towards consolidating the gains already made by the British in the previous decades (Adesina, 1989:27).

The desire of the colonial government to boost export promotion and encourage rural industrialisation based on agriculture became a reality through the establishment of the Colonial Development Corporation (CDC) in 1940, which initially metamorphosed into the Western Regional Production Development Board in 1949, following regionalisation (NAI File No.1186, 1949). The CDC became the tool the colonial government used to implement its Ten-Year Plan of Development in Western Nigeria. The policy of the corporation was to initiate schemes of plantation development to increase the output of cash and food crops, introduce new cash crops as well as improve the quantities of palm products (NAI PX/B1, 1946:20). One major achievement of this corporation was the establishment of the Ijebu farming project (later known as Apoje Farming project), a large scale mixed plantation development, comprising an area of 13,000 acres (Adesina, 1989:37). Also, it led to the establishment of weaving centres at Ado Ekiti and Oyo and the Juice industry at Ibadan (NAI File No.1186, 1946).

The major factor in the political development of Nigeria during the period, 1951-1960 was the growth of the regional administrations as semi-autonomous planning and decision making units with substantial economic responsibilities (Adesina, 2000/2004:70). The progress, which began with the revision of Sir Arthur Richards Constitution of 1946 following the arrival of Sir John Stuart Macpherson as a new Governor of Nigeria in 1949 brought about the emergence of the Macpherson Constitution of 1951 (Lawal, 1994:95), which formally structured Nigerian nationalist movement into political parties. The birth of the new constitution, which was the first pre-independence constitution partly, written by Nigerians was as a result of the successful outcome of the March 1950 constitutional talks in Ibadan (Lawal, 1994:95). Between June 1951 and the end of the year, elections were held into the regional Houses of Assembly. For example, elections into the Western House of Assembly that were contested between two major political parties Action Group (AG) and National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC), which later became National Council of Nigerian Citizens, was held on 24th September, 1951, with the AG securing the majority seats (Falola, Uhomobhi, Anyanwu, 1991:88).

Although there was widespread dissatisfaction among the Nigerian politicians against the new system introduced by the colonial government between 1952 and 1953, the colonial government was forced to convene the London Conference of July 1953, that led to the birth of the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 that later granted internal self-rule/government for any region desiring it. While the Western and Eastern Regions attained full regional self-government in 1957, the Northern region opted for it in 1959 (Olusanya, 1980:518-544). Hence, between 1951 and 1962, the Western Region was under the administrative authority of the AG party with Chief Obafemi Awolowo as first, leader of the party and second, first Premier of the region (Adesote, 2016).

The involvement of the Western Regional government in the development of plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria could be noticed in the abandonment of long standing British agricultural policy and the pursuance of new agricultural policy; the launching of the First Five Year Development Plan, 1955-1960, the creation of Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC) in 1955; the establishment and development of government owned plantations; regionalisation of Cocoa Marketing Board; introduction of new improved seedlings; organisation and promotion of agricultural research and extension services, among others. A number of scholars have argued that economic, social, political and ideological considerations were the main factors that facilitated the involvement of government in plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria from the 1950s (Udo, 1965, Agboola, 1979, Ogen, 2003, Salami, 2010 and Onyekpe, 2010). An important explanation for the emergence and establishment of large estates and plantations by the regional government was the need to ensure adequate and regular supply of raw materials to the mills and factories (Onyekpe, 1996:362). By 1954, the government of the Western Region had already established pioneer oil mills to ensure that a substantial proportion of the oil content of fruits was extracted. Between 1952 and 1954, pioneer oil mills were built in strategic places (Onyekpe, 1996:362) like Ode-Irele and Araromi (Ogen, 2003:10).

Aside oil mill industries, rubber processing factories were equally established. These rubber processing factories were said to have been operated at a loss due to inadequate supply of raw materials. For example, the rubber processing factory which was established in Benin at the cost of £320,324 incurred a loss of £75,534 between 1955 and 1957 (Oluwasanmi, 1966:215). This loss was blamed on inadequate supply of latex by the WNDC. It was as a result of this development that the Western Regional government had to

establish rubber plantations and estates in the region during this period. The development of plantation agriculture by the Western Regional government was also facilitated to serve as a source of revenue for the development of the region. This option was vigorously pursued because of the promises made to the people by the AG government that eventually controlled the region during preparation for the Western House of Assembly elections in 1951. At the AG rally held at Glover Memorial Hall, Lagos on 26th August, 1951, Chief Awolowo, the leader of the party, in his address highlighted the programme of the party. One major aspect of the party's programme focused on the development of plantation agriculture (Adesote, 2016).

By implication, in order to achieve this objective, the government needed enough money and the only major source of revenue to the government during this period was agriculture. Major developments that took place in the Western Region between 1951 and 1966 were financed through revenue accruing from agriculture. There was also ideological propaganda (Onyekpe, 1996:366). This propaganda was hinged on the fact that there was abundant land available in Western Nigeria for the development of plantation agriculture. The contention was that, although the absence of large scale plantation farming during the first phase of colonial administration helped to protect communal lands, it, nevertheless, retarded economic growth (Onyekpe, 1996:366). It was further argued that large scale plantation system of agriculture would provide new opportunities for employment. This could be corroborated with the publication of the Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources in 1959 which stated that:

In making agriculture more attractive, the government would by providing young persons who had benefitted from free primary education as well as those who would in the future years enjoy benefits of this and other forms of education, with worthwhile opportunities for a healthy and rewarding life. The only alternative which may present itself to those young persons would be employment (NAI, MANR, 1959).

These arguments, no doubt, provided support for the Western Regional government to acquire large tracts of land (through leases) in some rural communities of Western Nigeria for the establishment of government-owned plantations (Adesote, 2016).

While the establishment of plantations in the early years of the last decade of the second phase of colonial administration by the Western Regional government was majorly facilitated by economic and social factors, it was politically motivated especially as the 1959 general elections (Salami, 2010:89) was drawing nearer. As argued by Salami,

late Chief Awolowo, who was the chief architect of the establishment of government-owned plantations in Southwestern Nigeria believed that the setting up of those plantations was a political issue. It was thought by Chief Awolowo that in order to oil his political machine so as to resist the incursion of another political party into the Southwestern Nigeria (especially the NCNC), and as well to woo more supporters from other parts of Nigeria as they prepare for the 1959 general elections, they needed to establish some plantations capable of providing jobs for the people ((Salami, 2010:89).

One of the plantations set up during this year was Remo Rubber plantation, Ikenne in 1959. This could also be corroborated with the interviews conducted by the researcher at Ago Alaye (one of the rural communities around Araromi Rubber estate, where migrant labourers reside). According to Mr. M.B Akpan:

The genesis of majority of Calabar people in this area of Yorubaland was as a result of the campaign of late Chief Awolowo in our area in 1959. He told us that there were jobs in Western Region. This was why we voted for him instead of our person (late Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC) and he eventually fulfilled his promise. He sent some people to our villages to come and bring us. We were initially taken to Ibadan and later distributed to various rubber plantations in Yorubaland (Akpan, 2013).

This statement was true because various rubber plantations that were set up in the Western Region by the regional government were established between 1954 and 1959.

One of the first steps taken by the Western Regional government was the abandonment of long standing British agricultural policy (Adesina, 2000/2004:70) and the pursuance of a new agricultural policy. In 1952, the first cabinet of indigenous politicians met at the Western Regional House of Assembly in Ibadan and completely reversed the plantation policy of the colonial regime. This change in plantation agricultural policy, which ushered-in the “plantations decade” (1952-1962) (Udo, 1965:356), was a watershed in the history of plantation agriculture in the Southwestern Nigeria. By this development, the regional government led the way in the process of plantation agriculture in the region, which was later complemented by private individuals. Following the structure created by the colonial administration, especially with respect to the 1946 agricultural policy, the maiden agricultural policy paper which was put forward in 1952 acknowledged the significance of agriculture to the development of the region (Adesina, 2000/2004:70). The objectives of the Western Regional government’s policy on agricultural development were summed up as follows:

- i. The achievement of a higher standard of living for the people, stability of farming and security of food supplies to town dwellers
- ii. Security of land tenure, assurance of a remunerative return for agricultural effort and greater stability of the family income
- iii. Efficiency in the operation of production, processing and marketing of agricultural products
- iv. Improvement and stability of rural living (NAI PR/B3, 1952:5).

In pursuance of these agricultural policy objectives, the Western Regional government renamed the Western Regional Production Development Board (WRPDB) as the Western Nigeria Development Corporation (WNDC) in 1955. The corporation became the chief agency of the government with the responsibility of planning and executing agricultural and industrial enterprise or development in the region. The Board's name was changed because the main emphasis of the original board was on agricultural development (Ekundare, 1973:246), but considering other activities, which it was saddled with and, which were wider in scope, Hon. Chief A.O Adeji (a member of Western House of Assembly) moved the motion at the Western House of Assembly Floor that it should be renamed WNDC. By the motion, which also had majority support of legislative members, the WRPDB became WNDC through the Western Region Law No.12 of 1955 (Adesote, 2016). The Board, which later became known as "Development Corporation" was created to achieve government aims of increasing production of export crops and the efficiency in the operations of production (Adesina, 2000/2004:71). Thus, before 1955, it was initially financed by grants from the marketing Boards (Ekundare, 1973:246). After 1955, the WNDC was financed by the Western Nigerian government (Oluwasanmi, 1966:180-183). Under its development programme of 1955-1960, the Western Nigeria government set aside a capital provision of £4.5 million for the corporation (Ekundare, 1973:246). The WNDC directed the bulk of its expenditure to the development of cash and industrial crops such as cocoa, rubber, oil palm, citrus and cashew (Adesina, 2000/2004:71).

Between 1952, when the Western Regional government reversed the British colonial agricultural policy and 1954, the government through WRPDB acquired large tracts of land through leasehold (Ogen, 2003:8) for ninety-nine years from rural communities for the establishment of plantations (Adesalu, 2014). In East Bendel (initially under Western region, but later under Midwest from 1963), between 1952 and 1953, about four square miles of land (or 1,040 hectares) was acquired between Umutu and Urhonigbe for rubber plantation by the Board (Onyekpe, 1996:367). During the same period, while about 3000 acres (or 1,300 hectares) were acquired at Utagba Unor also for

rubber, at Umutu, an area of fifteen acres was acquired for the rubber factory, and Ubulu Uku and Akwukwu Atuma, some expanse of land were acquired for oil palm plantations (Onyekpe, 1996:367). In the Southwestern Nigeria, the Board acquired large areas of land, especially in Ondo and Ijebu Provinces for the establishment of rubber, oil palm and cocoa plantations. Some lands were also acquired in Ibadan Province.

With the coming of the WNDC, more lands were acquired for the establishment of government-owned plantations between 1955 and 1960 in different parts of Western Region. For example, at Usonigba (which later came under Midwest in 1963), about four thousand acres were acquired by the corporation for rubber planting. By the end of 1955, some two thousand acres had already been planted (Adesote, 2016). For example, the WNDC planted a total of 10,820 acres of oil palms prior to the 1962-1968 development plans. Furthermore, 4,100 acres were equally planted between 1962 and 1966 on its three Estate at Apoje (Ijebuland), Araromi (Ondo Division) and Irele (Okitipupa Division) (Ogen, 2003:8). Also, large expanse of land was acquired in Ijebu Province for the establishment of Remo Rubber plantation at Ikenne in 1959 through leasehold system for a period of ninety-nine years (Jatula, 2001:29). By 1960, the WNDC had developed eleven plantation estates and farming projects in the region, namely, Ijebu Farming projects, Urhonigbe Rubber Estate, Upper Ogun State, Araromi Rubber Estate, Ibokun Cocoa plantation, Oda Akure Cocoa plantation, partnership projects, Ikenne plantations, Lomiro/Araromi Oil plantations, Eruwa pineapple, and Eleiyele citrus nursery (Oluwasanmi, 1966:102).

b. The Establishment of Araromi Rubber Plantation and Labour Migration in Ondo Division of Western Nigeria, 1955-1986

Araromi area was one of the major communities in the defunct Ondo Division where the Western Regional government set up rubber plantation in the region. The government-owned rubber plantation was set up in 1955. The plantation remained government's control until it was privatised by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida following the introduction of Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in 1986. Between 1955 and 1986, the plantation attracted large number of agrarian labourers both within and outside Western Nigeria. As argued by Udo, the plantation system has been one of the chief causes of labor migration. In many cases long-distance travel is involved (Udo, 1965:357). The establishment of the plantation was facilitated by the acquisition of land from the indigenous people of the area by the Western Regional government. By 1954, the regional government acquired more land in Ijebu and Ondo Provinces for the

establishment of rubber and oil palm plantations. For example, about two thousand acres of land were leased to the Okitipupa and Ondo Native Administrative Palm Partnership Plantations for the development of oil palm plantations. During the same year, additional five thousand hectares of land were acquired around Araromi, Aiyesan (in Ondo Division) and Lomiro (in Ijebuland) for oil palm plantation (Jatula, 2001:33). In Araromi, more than six thousand acres were acquired by the WNDC for rubber plantation (Adesote, 2016). In 1954, a team of soil scientists were dispatched to Araromi community and its environs by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources to carry out soil survey. This was aimed at ascertaining the suitability of the land for rubber and oil palm plantations. The requirements for establishing rubber plantation in Araromi satisfied the soil scientists (Akinmeji, 1994:44). After the survey had been successfully carried out, the Western Regional government decided to set up rubber plantation in Araromi and its environs, while Oil palm plantations were set up in Aiyesan and Lomiro (in Ijebuland). Although the decision to establish the plantations had been taken since 1954, the actual planting did not start until mid-1955 (Salami, 2010: 89). Thus, the year 1955 marked the commencement of government-owned rubber plantation in Ondo Division. The acquisition of large expanse of land at Araromi and other neighbouring communities, which was through the Ondo Native Authority was carried out by the WNDC. More than six thousand (6,000) acres were initially acquired for the establishment of rubber nursery (Adesote, 2016). The planting of high yielding *clonal* material was imported from Malaya (Boedt, L. 2001: 1106) (one of the largest world rubber producer in the late 20th century). About 150,000 Malayan and 25,000 *palmol* rubber seeds were planted in the WNDC's nursery of the Araromi six thousand acres rubber estate. Initially, two acres of nurseries containing 150,000 Malayan and 25,000 *palmol* rubber seeds were developed for the 1955 planting (Adesote, 2016). The rubber estate was later expanded by subsequent post-independence governments.

The gradual development system of planting in the estate was divided into two phases. The first phase, which started in 1955 was planned to span ten years, that is, 1955/1956 to 1965/1966 season. At the end of the first phase of its development, a total area of about 1,271.65 hectares, that is, almost 3,000 acres, half of the initial acquired land had been planted with seedlings. The second planting development plan, that is, phase two, that was billed to span five (5) years (1977-1982) did not commence before the creation of states in 1976 (Akinmeji, 1994:33). The implementation of the planting development plan was left in the hand of the new military government

of the former Ondo State. It is quite unfortunate that there is no more available documented record on Araromi Rubber plantation since fire outbreak that burnt the whole building of the former Ondo State Investment Corporation (now known as Ondo State Investment (holding) Company, at Akure in early December 2004, which also affected the documents of Araromi Rubber estate. As a result, it is difficult to provide statistics on the actual volume of rubber produced from the plantation. Efforts would only be made to provide computed figures for rubber production and export in Nigeria in general and Western Nigeria in particular. The information was provided by the General Manager of the Ondo State Investment (holding) Company as at the time the researcher visited the General Manager's Office at Akure (Olisa, 2013). The researcher was able to gather some relevant information from both the migrant labourers (who had worked in the plantation, now retired but still reside in the communities where the plantation was set up) and the indigenous people of the communities (including traditional chiefs/rulers like *baale*, *oloja* and *Oba* and those who had worked in the plantation as labourers but now retired).

Since 1955, when the Western Regional government involved in rubber plantation in Western Nigeria, rubber exports have doubled, thus, becoming one of Nigeria's fastest growing agricultural exports. Government-owned rubber plantations in Western region had continued to contribute significantly to Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings, tax revenue, income and employment. For instance, from 1964, rubber production increased from 50, 810 tonnes to 73,170 tonnes in 1973 (Agboola, 1979:111). Besides, there was a three-fold increase in rubber production in the country between 1954 and 1964 (Anschel, 1965:28). During the decade of 1953-1963, the volume of rubber exports doubled and the value almost quadrupled. The production of high quality rubber sheets of the B-2 type increased from 11,117 tonnes in 1958 to 22, 256 tonnes in 1963 (Anschel, 1965:28). While in 1962/1963 the former Bendel State accounted for about 91% of the country's total production of the crop, and 85% in 1973, the Eastern and Western States produced the rest (Agboola, 1979:113). Also, while 86% of the Bendel State production came from peasant holders, the greater part of the output in the Western State in particular came from the government-owned plantations (Araromi Rubber plantation inclusive) (Anschel, 1965:28-29).

Araromi rubber plantation attracted migrant labourers largely from the defunct Midwestern and Eastern parts of Nigeria, with very few from Western Nigeria. The effect of the establishment of rubber plantation on labour migration was put by I.A Asiwaju in this way:

The establishment of rubber plantation led to the popularisation of wage labour. It was a gigantic concern employing hundreds of labourers in its various services. Apart from the clearing, planting, watering and later the tapping of the rubber plants, such labourers were employed in erecting the various buildings of both the factory and residential quarters adjoined to the plantation (Asiwaju, 1976:168).

The evolution and development of wage labour in agriculture in Nigeria was facilitated by colonial economic policy, which was largely based on the production for export of industrial crops, minerals and forestry products for use in the factories of Britain (Udo, 1977:5). As a result of the British emphasis on export crops such as rubber, cocoa, oil palm, palm kernels, among others, Nigerian smallholder farmers were encouraged to cultivate large farms for export production. This development resulted in labour shortage as indigenous people of those areas could not provide needed labourers required in those farms (Agiri, 1990:29). This led to recruitment of paid labourers from within and outside Western Region in general and Ondo Division in particular. In Ondo Division, for example, paid labourers in cocoa, rubber and timber industry included the Ebir, Agatu, Ibo, Urhobo, Edo and Osun people. This could be corroborated with the Annual Report on Ondo Division of 1946 which states that:

Ibo labourers still continue to provide most of the manual labour for timber, cocoa and public works. Indeed, it is difficult to know how trade and industry could possibly carry on without them (NAI Ondo Prof. 1/120C, 1946:12).

Aside agriculture, wage labour was also used in road construction as well as by the native administration as clerks, political agents, mail runners, carriers among others (Adesote, 2011:63).

The growth and development of labour migration in Araromi area of Ondo Division during this period of study was as a result of the establishment of government-owned rubber plantation in the area. At the time the rubber plantation was established in 1955, the indigenous people and few immigrants who were labourers in the farms of the indigenous people provided the initial labour. They were used for bush clearing, land preparation and construction of buildings (Eniaye, 2013). During the stage of planting rubber seedlings in the nursery, the WNDP recruited experienced wage labour from Benin, Sapele (formerly in the Western Region) and Calabar where rubber plantations had developed and flourished for a very long time (Ogande, 2013). Also, according to Edem Francis,

the people that started the plantation like Pa Okonovia (from Esan in the present Edo State) and others were brought from Urhonigbe Rubber Plantation, Benin (Edema, 2013).

At a time, especially before 1959, the Western Regional government had to enter into partnership with privately-foreign owned rubber estates in the Midwest and Eastern parts of Nigeria for the development of Araromi Rubber Estate (first to be set up in the Southwestern Nigeria (William, 1964:214). Between 1955 and 1959, all the labourers used in Araromi Rubber plantation were still of small population. Although there is no available statistics to justify this argument, it was confirmed through oral interview with Pa Ume Stephen (who started working in the plantation since 1959 through the help of late Pa. Moyebi, one of the earliest first indigenous labourers to work in the plantation) (Ume, 2013).

The establishment of Araromi Rubber plantation in 1955 provided the growth of two major trends of internal labour migration in Araromi area of Ondo Division. The first was the movement of people from rural areas of less economic activity to those of greater economic activity within the same region. A good example of this was the movement of labourers from their places in Ijebu Province, Ekiti, Okitipupa Divisions to Ondo Division within the Southwestern region in search of gainful employment in the plantations. The second trend in the category of internal migration deals with the movement of migrant labourers whether on a seasonal or permanent basis across regional frontiers. This trend of internal migration deals with the movement of migrant labourers from the Midwestern (the Edo people, the Urhobo people, the Isoko people) and Eastern region (such as the Ibo, the Calabar, the Ogoja people)) to Western Region (Osoba, 1969:517-518). The movement of these migrant labourers, which was voluntary, was principally caused by many factors among which were: dualistic economic model of Lewis, news from friends and relatives (those who had already being employed in the plantation), request by the management of the plantation and political factor.

The dualistic economic model of W.A Lewis (Lewis, 1954) is relevant to the main causes of the two major trends in the movement of migrant labourers from within and outside Southwestern Nigeria into Araromi area of Ondo Division during this period of study. Of these assumptions of Lewis, the first, third and sixth assumptions are relevant to the situation of labour migration in Araromi rubber plantation in Ondo Division during this period. This was because the Araromi rubber plantation was a government-owned rubber plantation, which had to depend on unproductive labour in the agricultural sector from within and outside the Western Region of

Nigeria. Since the country's economy during this period was wholly depended on agricultural economy, the labour required for the plantation was the agrarian labour found mostly in the subsistence sector (Adesote, 2016).

In respect of the first trend of internal labour migration in Araromi Rubber plantation, the movement of migrant labourers from other parts of Yorubaland (Southwestern Nigeria) such as Ijebuland, Ikaleland, Ekiti Division and some parts of Ondo Division was facilitated by the proximity of the plantation to other Yoruba areas (which made the news of the plantation to spread) and the granting of internal self-government to the Western region in 1954 (the Action Group government that controlled the region had made it known to the people of the region their programme for them since 1951). Thus, following the granting of internal self-rule by the Lyttleton constitution of 1954, late Chief Obafemi Awolowo was elected as the first Premier of Western region that year (Adesote, 2016). Prior to the election of Chief Awolowo as the Premier of the region, the AG, which had the majority in the Western House of Assembly had since 1952 took frantic steps toward developing the region's agriculture. A good example of this was the reversal of the long standing British colonial agricultural policy in 1952. This move was in line with the manifesto, which the party under the leadership of Chief Awolowo presented to the people at the headquarters of each province in Western Nigeria among, which was the provision of employment opportunities in industries and government-owned plantations (Adesote, 2016). This, however, became a reality with the granting of internal self-government in 1954 and subsequent emergence of Chief Awolowo as the Premier of the region. That year marked the genesis of the establishment of government-owned plantations in the region. Majority of Western regional government plantations emerged between 1954 and 1960. The table below shows some of the notable indigenous Yoruba people that served as both labourers and migrant labourers in Araromi rubber plantation.

Table 1: Indigenous Labourers/Migrant Yoruba Labourers in Araromi Rubber Plantation (Selected Migrants)

S/N	Name of Labourers	Places of Origin	Probable Year of Starting
1	Late Pa. Moyebi	Ilutitun	1956
2	Late Chief Eniaye Timothy	Okitipupa	1956
3	Late Pa. Akinnewo J	Araromi	1956
4	Late Pa. Oloto	Okitipupa	1958
5	Late Chief Monilari	Ago Alaye	1958
6	Late Pa. Oluwasola	Ekiti	1960
7	Late Pa. Akinsuyi	Ago Alaye	1956
8	Late Pa. Alade	Ekiti	1960
9	Pa. Elijah	Ekiti	1960
10	Chief Ilemoboye	Ayila	1960
11	Pa. Isaac Omosekeji	Ayila	1965

Source: Field work, 29th-31st July, 2013

The above table shows names of migrant Yoruba labourers that worked in Araromi rubber plantation. Evidences from the oral interviews conducted by the researcher at Araromi and Ago-Alaye (the two major host communities of the plantation) with some residents in the communities revealed that these identified migrant labourers were all farmers in their different places of origin before they left (Omosekeji, 2013).

The second trend of internal labour migration in Araromi Rubber plantation, which was massive especially since 1959, was mainly caused by political consideration. This argument could be corroborated with what O.B Salami said about Chief Awolowo's reason for setting up plantations. He puts it succinctly thus:

The architect of the establishment of some of the plantations in Ijebuland, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, believed that the establishment of plantations was political. In other words, Chief Awolowo believed that in order to woo more supporters especially from other regions, they needed to promise them jobs. And since part of the AG programme was to provide employment opportunities to people, they decided to set up more plantations in a bid up to the 1959 general elections. The promise of employment opportunities in agriculture was seriously intensified during campaign (Salami, 2010:89).

This second trend of labour migration was the movement of migrant labourers from the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The movement of migrant labourers from the Eastern Region into Ondo Division during this period occurred as a result of the successful campaign of

Chief Obafemi Awolowo and his party supporters in the region in a bid up to the 1959 general elections. According to the information obtained from the former migrant labourers in the plantation through intensive oral interviews at Araromi, Ago Alaye, Ago Paul and Ago Igbo, the researcher confirmed that large number of Easterners that came to Araromi rubber plantation during this period was as a result of the 1959 campaign tour.

The population of migrant labourers in Araromi Rubber plantation began to increase from the 1960. Before the management of the plantation became fully involved in the recruitment of labourers in the plantation system, some of the earliest people that were brought in 1960 by Chief Awolowo began to send messages to their people at home about availability of employment opportunities in Yorubaland (Akpan, 2013). Through this medium, some migrant labourers were recruited in the plantation. This was testified to by Mr. Samuel Edward (migrant labourer from Akwa Ibom) (Edward, 2013). After sometime, especially in the early 1970s, due to the Nigerian Civil War and expansion of the estate, there were lot of works in the plantation and thus, there was need for more labourers (Edem, 2013). For instance, the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) affected majority of migrant labourers (who were Igbos) in Araromi plantation. Pa. Francis Edem explains that during the Nigerian Civil War, soldiers came to Araromi plantation and took away some Ibo workers (including tappers). About sixty-one Ibos were taken away. The day they came, one Ibo man, named Ope (a security man) at the gate was killed. Two of us were at the gate when they came, but I narrowly escaped. Some of the Ibos who were not met at the plantation when they came ran away and never came back again. Only two among the majority of Ibo labourers that were employed at the plantation came back, among who was Pa. Ume Stephen (now retired, but still reside at Ago-Alaye) (Edem, 2013). After the war, the management of the plantation was in dire need of labourers that would work in the plantation. Some of the old labourers were consulted. Arrangement was made by the management on how to get labourers. The leaders of each ethnic group in the plantation with the help of one or two administrative officers of the estate were provided with vehicles for the conveyance of men from their various areas. The adoption of this method eventually led to the increase in the number of migrant labourers in the plantation (Edem, 2013).

Migrant labourers in Araromi rubber plantation worked in different sections of the plantation. In other words, there was no section where migrant labourers were not recruited in the plantation. Some of the sections of the plantation included seed planting;

processing and manufacturing (factory work); farming (includes weeding, collection of latex and bush clearing); tapping; marketing; and security. At a time, both men and women were involved in tapping and collection of latex. However, around about 1966, due to the hard nature of tapping and collection of latex, women were stopped from these activities. Their work was restricted to hanging of cups and wire in farm as well as other works in the factory such as sweeping, administrative work and security issues (Edem, 2013). Although there was no available statistics to ascertain the number of migrant labourers that were employed in the various sections of the Araromi Rubber plantation, the information obtained through oral interviews showed that they worked in different sub-sector of the plantation such as plantation, processing and manufacturing; farming; tapping and marketing (Adesote, 2016).

Conclusion

Araromi Rubber plantation was a government-owned plantation set up by the Western Regional Government in 1955 under Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the Premier of the region. Its establishment became possible as a result of the birth of Western Regional Government in 1951. With this development, the colonial agricultural policy of the British was reversed. The 1952 complete revision of the plantation policy of the colonial regime led to the direct involvement of government in the development of plantation agriculture in Western Nigeria. WNDC was the major agency of the Western Regional Government responsible for the acquisition of land in the region for the establishment of government-owned plantations. Several plantations such as rubber, citrus, cocoa and oil palm were establishment in different of Western Nigeria. One of them was Araromi Rubber Plantation, which was set up in 1955. Between 1955 and 1986, the plantation attracted migrant labourers from Western, Mid-Western and Eastern Nigeria. The setting up of Araromi rubber plantation led to the growth of new migrant settlements in Ondo Division. Aside Araromi where migrants initially settled, other areas that experienced influx of migrant labourers included Ago Alaye, Ago Paul, Sigidi, Olorunredo, Ago-Igbo and Surulere. Up till now, these rural communities are mainly inhabited by migrants. For example, the Ago-Igbo community (meaning, the camp of Igbo people) was a migrant community set up by the Igbo migrant labourers who were employed in the plantation. In 1986, the plantation was privatised by the military regime of General Ibrahim Babangida leading to its management and control by a private company known as Michelin Plc.

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- Interview with Mr. M.B Akpan (a retired migrant labourer at Araromi Rubber Estate) at Ago Alaye on 30th July, 2013, Aged 73 years
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