

THE FEATURES OF ILORIN ECONOMY DURING COLONIAL RULE, 1900-1960

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Abstract

The location of the Ilorin as a frontier Emirate gave it ample opportunity to mediate between the North and South of Nigeria. The town is a mixed grill of both Yoruba and Northern Nigerian ethnic groups who were generally refer to as "Hausa" even though, there are others like; Nupe, Kanuri, Kembari, Baruba, Arewa among others who settled in Gambari Quarters of Ilorin. The vegetation also provided another advantage for the people of Ilorin Emirate in terms of agricultural practices. It is a mixture of both forest and savannah vegetations. Geographically, it is located in Guinea savannah. The major characteristic of the Guinea Savannah is moderate rainfalls that occur from March to October. This allows for extensive agriculture activities in both crop production and animal husbandry. These identified features of Ilorin Emirate (Location, Multiple ethnicity and vegetation) contributed to its economic growth, transformation especially agricultural boom under the colonial rule. It is as a result of the foregoing that this paper intends to historicize the process of economic transformation during the colonial period using agriculture as a case study. This is to further demonstrate the agricultural endowment of Ilorin Emirate which can be explored by the governments at all levels to address food insecurity.

Keywords: colonial rule, economy transformation, Ilorin Emirate, agriculture

Introduction

The geographical location of Ilorin Emirate played a significant role in determining her economic system. The Ilorin economy was hinged on three sectors; agriculture, trade and indigenous industry. The Ilorin economic system pre-dated the establishment of the Ilorin Emirate in 1823. The people were industrious with specialization in crop production, animal husbandry, trade, bead making, cloth weaving, pottery, leather works and so on. These occupations played a significant role especially in their earning power, exchange (goods and service) and wealth creation of the people. This fact was supported by Balogun (1978) that the people in the area (Ilorin) had engaged and they still engage, in some economic activities including agriculture, certain industries and trade. Danmole (2012) asserts that Historians and scholars in related studies who have paid some attention to the Ilorin economy in the pre-colonial era agreed that the most important source of revenue for Ilorin

Emirate in the 19th Century was trade, agriculture and indigenous industries. The features of Ilorin Emirate economy as was the case in most of the societies in pre-colonial Nigeria was characterised by series of economic activities. These included trade and commerce, manufacturing in various forms, agriculture, bead making, cloth weaving, and dyeing pottery, craft works, iron smelting etc. These diverse forms of economic activities in pre-colonial Ilorin certainly empowered the citizenry, and its survival as a state was based on the strength of its economy.

The pre-colonial Ilorin Emirate Economy

The Ilorin Historians have done extensive works in documenting various economic activities of the people since the pre-emirate system of government in Ilorin. There are divergent accounts on historical origin of the town as well as the founders. *Omoiya* (2011) argued on two distinct theories on the history of Ilorin. The first was an 'individual founding' and the secondly

'group founding'. The two theories concluded that, Ilorin was founded by the Yoruba hunters who individually settled in different hunter's camp but have a common rendezvous at a rocky stone where they sharp their hunting tools. Prominent among these hunters were Ojo isekuse, Eminla, *Laderin* among others. The rendezvous is known as *Okuta Ilorin* situated at *Ile Bamidele Idi-Ape* area. Also, some families like "Asaju" of *Oja-oba* area who were also Yoruba claimed to be the early settlers of the town, hence their name Asaju (the pioneer). However as the town grew, there were influx of people from both Northern and Southern part of the river Niger. Adisa (1992) described the pattern of settlement in pre-Ilorin emirate system to be a semi-autonomous settlement in four areas. The first group of settlers was the Yoruba who were descendants of *Emila*, *Laderin* and others that occupied the area from *Idi-Ape- Okelele –Oloje* axis. The second group was Fulani who occupied the premises of the present Emirs palace and Ago-market. The third was made up of a mixed grill of *Hausa*, *Nupe*, *Kanuri* occupied *Gambari* Quarters and the fourth group comprised of puritanical Muslim at *Okesuna* under *Solagberu*.

The heterogeneous nature of Ilorin people provided for viable and diversified economic opportunities. However with the establishment of Ilorin Emirate and the ascension of Abdulsalami as the Emir in 1823, it became the window through which other Emirates of the Sokoto Caliphate transacted business with territories south of Ilorin. This position enjoyed by the Emirate boosted her economy, and to a large extent gave her leverage to influence events in the neighboring territories. Agriculture has been acknowledged as the main stay of economy in African societies across ages which Ilorin was not an exemption. Oyermakinde (2003) argued that whereas by the first half of the 18th Century all the countries of the world relied on agricultural pursuits for bread winning. Hopkins (1973) corroborated that throughout their history; most West Africans have earned their living from the land. Agriculture was the chief activities in the greater part of the region, as it was in other pre-industrial societies. However, foodstuff accounted for the largest share of value of the goods and services produced each year by West African Countries.

Ilorin Emirate both in the metropolitan and non-metropolitan districts engaged in agriculture

aided by good vegetation that favoured Crop production and animal husbandry. The intermediate climatic condition of Ilorin Emirate which is the mixture of rain and dry season enabled crop cultivations like; Yam, Maize, Sorghum, Melon Vegetables, Tree Crops (fruits), locus tree. Also, the absence of tse-tse fly and availability of grazing land favored animal rearing like; Cattle, Ram, Sheep, Goat and poultry keeping. Balogun (1978) explained that Agriculture in Ilorin includes both crop production and animal husbandry. By the nature of its climate and vegetation, Ilorin is blessed with fertile arable land which her population has always put to good use for cultivation. A large number of the male population has been generally involved in farming by nineteenth century; at least the stage has been reached of crop production for a market economy.

However, the political re-organization owing to the emergence of the emirate system gave rise to feudalism which affected its agricultural prosperity. The Ilorin aristocrats were the feudal lords because fief holding and land tenure system featured prominently in the political-economy of Ilorin Emirate. The Emir, *Baloguns*, *Magajis*, *Daudus* and other member of the aristocrats allocated land to people of their choice for settlement and farming. Certain percentages on farm produce were collected from the peasant farmers on yearly basis in forms of food stuff by the Fief holders to maintain their families and dependants in the metropolis. This was coordinated by the agent of the fief holders who may be living or not living with the farmers in their settled villages. This subinfeudation of the land created wealth for the Emirs, *Baloguns* and their agents called *Babakekere* (intermediary) at the expense of the farmers. The *Babakekere* collected the percentages of the crops (*Isakole*) from the farmers, took their own share and transmitted the rest to the Emir or any title holders in charge of the fief. The number of the peasant farmers on the lands (fief) determined the wealth of Feudal lords and their *Babakekere*.

Ilorin Emirate Districts with number of villages under them are contained in the Table below:

S/N	DISTRICTS	NO OF VILLAGES
1	AKANBI	8
2	AFON	9
3	OWODE	10
4	AJAASE	16
5	IGBAJA	7
6	OFFA	11
7	AWTUN(OTUN EKITI)	7
8	OMU	7
9	OSI	5
10	SHONGA	17
11	SHARE	24
12	IPONRIN	8
13	LANWA	13
14	EJIDANGARI	14
15	OLORU	17
16	PAIYE	5
17	MALETE	7
18	ONIRI/ONIRE	9

Source: Kirk-Greene A.H.M. (1972), *Gazeteeres of Northern Province of Nigeria*,

It is worthy of note that each of these villages have their village head who are the agents of the Ilorin fief holders and all paid tribute on their farm produce. This feudal system was a means of exploitation as can be seen in a monarchical society even in pre-industrial European countries like: France and Russia. The case was not different with the Ilorin aristocrats because the masses were groaning as their input informs of labour and resources yielded little returns which did not improve their standard of living. The Feudal system remains the status quo until the conquest of the Ilorin Emirate by the forces of Royal Niger Company (RNC) in 1897.

Agricultural Production in Ilorin Emirate during Colonial Rule

The treaty between the Royal Niger Company (RNC) and Emir of Ilorin (Suleiman) in 1897 did not come to effect until 1898. With the appointment of Lieutenant F.H. Rueton and his arrival in November, 1898, the permanent occupation and administration of Ilorin province took off. Although the Emir was allow the continuation of rulership of his people but the Emirs powers were subjected to the overall authority of the company. It may be interesting to

note that indirect rule policy adopted by the colonial government under Lord Lugard which was later formalized as its policy of governance in Nigeria between 1900 and 1960 actually germinated in Ilorin around February 1897. The main purpose of having colonies in West Africa was to secure a profitable trade for the mother country and at the same time some gain from International trade accrued to Africa because, in the last resort, if Africans remained poor, they could not afford to buy manufactured goods. Colonies as argued by Rodney (1972) were the generators of the capital rather than the countries into which foreign capital was ploughed.

Generally, colonial economic policies were tailored towards oppression, exploitation and relegation of African human and material resources. The main features of the colonial economy were:

1. Economic exploitation of the agricultural and mineral resources of the colonies by the imperial powers.
2. Direction of the trade of the colonies in the interest of the imperial power not the colonies.
3. An almost total absence of modern manufacturing industrial development

until the Second World War.

4. A policy of financing piecemeal development in the colonies. Limited revenues.
5. The development of the new forms transport based especially on railways and motor vehicles.
6. Considerable initiative by African farmers and traders in the continued development of export crops.
7. Domination of the export trade by great European monopoly combines at the expense of African farmers and traders.

In view of the highlighted features above as conceived by Webster (1967), one can infer that colonial economic policies centered around agriculture as an aspect of Africa economy which was capable of yielding maximum profit for the mother countries. This exploitative mission was pursued in virtually all colonies in Africa which Ilorin Emirate was later became part of Nigeria a colony of Britain

The colonial government vigorously pursued cash crop production as against food production, thus, cash crops such as cotton, rubber, groundnut, cocoa, coffee were given the necessary support to boost its production. However, with the outbreak of the Second World War (1938-1945), there was the need for food to feed the soldiers in the war front. The colonial government as a matter of necessity began to encourage food production especially in the areas that were unable to practice cash cropping. Ilorin emirate was among the areas that were unable to engage in cash cropping, therefore, it occupied a remarkable position in the food production during and after the Second World War. One can assume that Ilorin was a food basket of southern part of the Nigeria. Banwo (1988) explained that, the sale of food produce to other provinces became a prominent feature of Ilorins' economy as from around 1908. Food items such as Guinea corn, maize, yams, Yam flour, cassava, beans, locus beans and sweet potatoes were amongst the produce involved in the inter-territorial trade from Ilorin region.

There are other reasons apart from the world war for the encouragement of food crops production in Ilorin Emirate. Part of the reasons

was to allow Ilorin Peasant Farmers earn enough income to pay taxes and also to have the ability to produce food stuff for cash crop producing areas of the southern provinces Nigeria. Food production for the inter-territorial trade led to the development of produce stations in *Ilorin, Offa, Lanwa, Jebba, Illa and Bode Saadu*. The movement of the food produce was made easy with the construction of railways which reached Ilorin in 1908.

Records from these stations showed that food produce were railed to markets in the Southern provinces. For instance, from *Bode Saadu alone*, two hundred and eleven (211) tons of Yams were exported to Southern Nigeria in the month of April and June, 1912. This increased to about nine hundred and eighty five (985) tons in the end the year (1912). The demand for Guinea-corn increased, statistics shows that in 1914 about one thousand and seventy-three (1073) tons of Guinea-corn was railed out of the area between May and June of the year. The table below shows the tonnage of food crops railed from Ilorin Emirate stations to other parts of Nigeria.

GROSS TONNAGE OF CROPS RAILED IN ILORIN EMIRATE

Year	Yams	Yam flour	Maize	Guinea Corn	Beans	Maiwa (wheat)	Rice	Peppers	Onions	Palm Oil	Palm Wine	Egusi	Locust Beans	Okra	Groundnut
1935	819	195	43	16	443	5	10	7	334	4	23	17	20	28	2
1936	1356	295	42	52	542	06	21	08	53	08	56	08	327	31	345
1938	969	228	12	27	291	02	03	21	314	03	24	20	195	41	
1939	1110	229	19	34	472	13	13	08	189	06	02	19	217	57	

It should be noted that onions was not planted in Ilorin but in *Kebbi* and other villages in *Gwandu* Emirate but transited from Ilorin stations to their destinations. This may be applicable to palm wine, ground nuts, palm oil that were not produced in commercial quantity in the farms within the Ilorin Emirate. Furthermore, there was an increasing demand for inland poultry produce such as: Turkeys, fowls, as well as dried fish and melon (*Egusi*) in

Ilorin Emirate. Ilorin town and surrounding settlements became the major breeding areas for Turkey. It was estimated that more than one thousand eight hundred (1800) hampers containing an average of five birds' each were railed from Ilorin annually. In 1939, the value of Turkey from internal exports was estimated at about twelve thousand (12,000) pounds annually. See the table below:

CRATES OF BIRDS RAILED FROM ILORIN EMIRATE STATIONS

STATON	TURKEYS			GUINEA FOWLS			FOWLS		
	1933	1934	1935	1933	1934	1935	1933	1934	1935
Ilorin	23	390	1961	7	37	351	62	190	290
Ganmo	2171 2	695	234	1	1	-	58	111	48
Offa	5	8	27	-	3	-	3	31	29
Bode Saadu	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	1
Biri Biri	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ila Market	9	1	23	-	-	-	17	46	28
Elebu	-	-	-	-	-	-	5	11	4
Lanwa	4	4	7	-	-	-	10	5	3
Jodomo	-	3	4	-	-	1	-	-	-
Jebba	5	4	2	26	17	11	16	5	2
Oyun River	5	2	3	-	-	-	-	-	1
Totals	2681 2	1107	2263	34	58	363	171	399	406

There was a further evidence of Turkey breeding and trading among the people of Ilorin as some families were named as "*Ile Onitoloto*". For instance the family of *Kaa toloto* (Turkey quarters) in *Ile Yita Okelele Ilorin* together with the *Ogundele* family of *Ojuekun* area were prominent Turkey merchants plying Ilorin to Lagos. They have their Turkey shed (*Iso toloto*) around *Agoro Street, Idumota Lagos*. The patriarch of *Yitta* family named *Alhaji Soliu Ayinla Onitoloto* was believed to have been in Turkey business around *Idumota Lagos* since

1920s. The descendants of these Turkey merchants can still be found in *Idumota* area till date. However, urbanization in Lagos Island has led to the demolition of Turkey shed and extinction of the business in the area as plastic traders, film makers/marketers have taken over the area now. One can infer from the above that, as a result of the increasing amount of food which continued to leave Ilorin for other provinces in the Colonial period, Ilorin Emirate began to be referred to as "*Market Garden of Nigeria*".

Conclusion

Colonialism in the philosophy of the Marxists was more of the exploitative, capital accumulation which culminated into imperialism. However, Ilorin Emirate was able to benefit from the colonial rule in terms of food crops production, Turkey breeding, trading and also as a centre for exchange of goods and services. The area was able to explore its agricultural strength to create wealth for the people. Although, it was not known for cash crop production but a buffer zone for production and clearing of food stuff. This is a departure from the pre-colonial economic system that centered more on slave and entre-pot trading activities. Kwara State can take clue from history and look inward by investing in agriculture so as to ameliorate food shortage, create employment, generate employment and boost her internal generated revenue (IGR).

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