

YORUBA WOMEN, CASH CROP PRODUCTION AND THE COLONIAL STATE, C.1920-1957¹

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Presented at the conference on "Atlantic Crossings: Women's Voices, Women's Stories from the Caribbean and the Nigerian Hinterland", Dartmouth College, May 18-20, 2001

Introduction:

The participation of Yoruba women in agriculture in the period before 1970 remains a big debate among historians. In analyzing their economic roles, scholars have described them variously as 'traders', 'wives', 'homemakers', and 'farm assistants', farmers 'wives' but never as farmers. This thesis commonly holds the assumption that Yoruba men farm while the women trade. The fault from the thesis stems from the fact that scholarship on Yoruba women's economic activity has focused on urban areas where there are large market towns, and not in the rural areas. The colonial authorities, also urban-based seemed to have shared this view. From available literature farming is often interpreted as activities connected to visible land ownership and rituals or what is often called heavy 'tasks'--- land clearing, hoeing, planting and harvesting. Therefore the fact that men were more visible on the farms conferred on them the name farmer. The definition also stress exclusive sexual division of labor with little or no room for joint activities.²

This paper on Ekiti, wants to counter this assumption. It starts by asking what do we mean when we use the term "farming"; what did the administrators mean when they used it; and what do scholars mean? Even within this narrow framework since scholars readily concede that women "help" with the weeding, harvesting, and transporting, does these not fall within the description of "farming"? Do they not spend many hours on these activities and do they not constitute "real farm work"? For this paper farming is interpreted to mean the entire process of cultivation--clearing the fields, planting, weeding, harvesting, marketing, provision of credits, transport, processing among others. It also argues that the invisibility of women in farming stems from the fact that farms are not located in the cities but in the countryside; and that in these cities, it was often possible to hire male labor such as slaves and pawns or junior wives to take up jobs that would have been carried out by women or senior wives. Even at that, urban trade should be seen as an extension of farming activities since many of the female traders had only returned from the farms hours earlier to sell crops from their own farms or that of their husbands. With these in mind, the paper suggests that Yoruba female farming should be examined from the perspectives of city/country divide, task, time allocation, decision-making and resource control and other factors such as ecological and socio-economic changes These perspectives have been in popular use for several decades only that

¹ . I owe a special debt to Dr Laray Denzer, whose suggestions sharpened my thought, Prof Paul Lovejoy [Zaki] and Dr Femi Kolapo for their encouragement and Judith Byfield for beleiving in me.

² . For a full review and critic of of literature on the economic roles of Yoruba women, see Olatunji Ojo, 'Ekiti women in agricultural production,1890-1960', M.A. dissertation , University of Ibadan, December 1996.

scholars sometime refuse to adopt them. The Yoruba term for farmer is 'agbe' and farming as 'ise agbe' and that for trade and trader is 'owo' and 'onisowo'. These terms are gender neutral, suggesting that Yoruba do not see either as a gendered vocation. Secondly, everybody in the countryside tend to see themselves as 'agbe' but this did not preclude them from engaging in trade whenever convenient, and those in the cities moved easily from farming to trading or trading to farming. The demarcation of Yorubaland into Western and Eastern districts and cities and villages respectively explains some issues about the differences in gender and regional economic activities. The west, with its kingdoms and cities, gave birth to administrative centers whose functions led to new patterns of production and demand. These affected the existing patterns of production and supply, bringing about profound economic differences between country and city.³

Catechist Charles N. Young of Ondo regularly pointed to this city/country peculiarity as back as the 1870s. In 1875 he observed that in no other part of Yoruba is farming as popular as among Ondo women who not only farmed in their own right but also hired slaves to do so. In his words, "a good many...men and children have gone away to the farms and the women too as their women also cultivate lands" More significant was his assertion that "slave-holding appears to have been particularly common practice among Ondo women, many of them being cultivators of land like their men folk, and a woman possessing ten slaves was considered rich." In 1878, he added that "it is common with the women to go to farm for cultivation and the men remain at home".⁴ Only a few studies have examined the regional disparities identified by Young. Galletti, Dina and Baldwin's study of cocoa farmers suggest rightly that "in Ondo Province and other areas where the women do not engage much in trade and industry, they devote more of their time to their husbands' farms and help not only in the harvest but also in planting and weeding of the food farms".⁵ Sara Berry's *Cocoa, Customs and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* reveals that women in villages with fewer males and a poor capital base worked harder on the farms than in those with more men and a strong capital base. Putting it in a more precise form was Adeniyi Osuntogun, whose 1974 farm survey showed that women's farm work increased as one moved further into Eastern Yorubaland.⁶ By the 1980s a consensus seemed to have been reached that women in Northern and Eastern Yoruba put in more hours of labor into farm work than their counterparts in Western Yorubaland.

For a very long time the colonial authorities also had to engage in intellectual work as to defining who was a farmer. Their description ranged from officials who denied women of any involvement in farming to those who restricted such to planting and harvesting through those who wanted a comprehensive interpretation. In 1952, when the

³. Akin L. Mabogunje, *Urbanization in Nigeria* (London: University of London Press, 1968), p. 78.

⁴. CMS CA2/098, Extracts from Charles N. Young's journal for the third quarter ending September 1875 and first quarter 1876, CMS CA2/098/11, Journal entry for 11 July 1875 and CMS CA2/098/22: Entries for 9 Aug 78 and 12 Sept. 1878.

⁵ Galletti, Baldwin, Dina, *Nigerian Cocoa Farmers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956), p. 76.

⁶. Sara Berry, *Cocoa, Custom and Socio-Economic Change in Rural Western Nigeria* (London: Clarendon Press, 1975), 45; C. A. Osuntogun, "Rural Women in Agricultural Development: Nigerian Case Study" in *Nigerian Women and Development* (eds.) F. Ogunseye, C. Domenico, K. Awosika and A. Akinkoye (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1988), pp. 242-250. S. O. Babalola and C. Dennis, "The Returns to Women Labor in Cash Crops Production: Tobacco in Igbobo, Oyo State Nigeria" in *Agriculture, Women and Land: The African Experience* (ed.) Jean Davison (Boulder and Longon: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 78-89.

administration made its preparations for conducting the census, R. Bromage, the District Officer of Ekiti Division, pointed out to enumerators that "a woman who markets her own or her husband's produce should be regarded as engaged in agriculture".⁷ With that the 1952 census for Ekiti showed a preponderance of women agriculturalists, numbering 55,617 as against 35,301 engaged in trading or clerical work. This showed a better understanding of the structural organization of the agricultural sector than the definition used ten years later. In 1962 the Nigerian Federal Office of Statistics described a farmer as a man who worked for himself and that "whoever works on another man's farm or pledges his labor to another farm is not a farmer."⁸ Not only did this definition rule out all women but also every male farm laborer. It is curious that it did not define somebody who works for himself for some months of the year and for wages on another man's farm in other months.

TABLE I: OCCUPATIONS IN EKITI BY GENDER, DECEMBER 1952

Occupation	Male	Female
Agriculture and Fishing	62317	55617
Trading and Clerical	41890	35301
Others (under age)	72340	84741
Crafts	6729	NA
Administration and other	1951	NA
Other occupations	3477	NA

Source: Western Region of Nigeria, Population Census of the Western Region of Nigeria 1952 (Ibadan: Government Printers, 1953), p.16. Women engaged in crafts (weaving, spinning, etc) were counted as traders. The table shows the occupations of adults, but the majority of children would have also been engaged in farming.

Women and cash crop production:

Cocoa cultivation in Ekiti appears to have started about 1895, introduced by returning Ekiti freed slaves from Ilesa, Ondo, Ibadan, and Lagos.⁹ Some of them had become Christians and belonged to CMS missions established by Saro (Sierra Leoneans) and Yoruba missionaries who developed in their own way the concept 'the bible and the plough'. Perhaps the most remarkable of these missionaries was Phillips who was in all probability the leading Yoruba missionary in crop experimentation. In Ondo and Ikale, he tried with cocoa, rice, coffee, rubber and it was no coincidence that cocoa was introduced to Ekiti after his 1895 pastoral tour of the region. This proposition is plausible especially that the first Ijesa cocoa planters got their seedlings from Phillips and these group had several enslaved Ekiti on their farms.

Until the 1920s, Ekiti remained primarily a food-producing district with special emphasis on yam, maize, guinea corn and vegetables but it also produced some cotton and tobacco. The introduction of colonialism made cultivation of cash crops more

⁷ . NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/1/918F: Census, towns villages and quarters etc. Hints for enumerators, 1952.

⁸ Federal Government of Nigeria, Office of National Statistics: Report on national development, Lagos: Government Press, 1962), 25.

⁹ . J. D. Y. Peel, Ijeshas and Nigerians: The incorporation of a Yoruba kingdom, 1890s-1970s (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983),122; Sara Berry, Cocoa custom and socio-economic change in rural western Nigeria (Oxford: Clarendon Press,1975), chapter V; R.Galletti, K.D.S.Baldwin and I.O.Dina, Nigerian Cocoa Farmers (London: Oxford University Press, 1956), 206; National Archives Ibadan (NAI) CSO 26/06027, Annual Report, Oyo Province, 1921.

attractive but because of the transition that was expected Ekiti farmers continued to concentrate on food crop production until they had garnered enough experience in the techniques of cocoa to grow successfully these new crops. The Ekiti, which made the changeover, were those in the Southern and western districts that had better soil fertility. Coincidentally, these were communities that suffered more from Ibadan and Ijesa slave raids between the 1840s and 1870s and therefore had more returnees who came back as Christian and slightly more educated. Profit from cocoa and the status it conferred on the cultivators encouraged more people to take to it even in areas where the land could support cocoa cultivation, even though not as successfully as in Ondo or Ibadan, when market prices were high, it paid off. The change of attitude was partly a response to the introduction of British currency and colonial taxation in 1919 and 1920 respectively and the profit it was expected to generate. Aware of the potential income, a significant number of Ekiti youth traveled to Ijesa, Ibadan and Ondo where they worked as laborers on cocoa farms.

Cocoa cultivation was distinctly gendered. Men initiated cultivation and took responsibility for bush clearing, tree felling, bush burning, and heaping and because of their labor obligations to their fathers and husbands, women participated in their usual roles of weeding, harvesting, transporting, processing from the very beginning. More importantly, the planting of cocoa rested heavily on the labor of women and their children either as wives or hired workers. The entire family might take part in planting the cocoa seedlings, but it was not uncommon for men to leave the actual planting to their wives and children. Pa Samuel Adebayo told me that he cleared his farm in 1935, which his family then planted in cocoa in April and May of 1936. To his surprise he later discovered that the seedlings planted by himself had failed to germinate while those planted by his wife thrived. When he replanted his seedlings, they failed to grow again. But when his wife helped him plant this portion of the farm again, the seedlings grew very well. Investigating the situation, he found that his wife dug deeper holes and made sure that the soil around the seedlings was firmly pressed, making it difficult for rodents to dig them up. His own planting method had been less thorough.¹⁰

At various times in its growth cycle, the new crop demanded intensive attention that exceeded the nurturing required by root crops. Moreover, as male farmers expanded the amount of land devoted to cocoa, they began making demands for labor and transport that far exceeded those associated with traditional agriculture. Women found that they no longer had time for their personal farming, weaving, work in other crafts, and trading, all of which had yielded income, which they controlled. If their husbands were well off, migrant laborers would be hired to do these tasks, leaving women in the household free to engage in their own endeavors as before. But less well-off husbands were compelled to ask their wives to increase the amount of time spent on cocoa-related duties.

Another way by which women supplied labor was through betrothal of daughters to prospective hardworking husbands. Such acts involved regular labor obligations of intending husbands on their in-laws' farms. Since girls were often betrothed while still young, the fiancé was obliged to labor for many years. He would invite *owe* (bridal labor) of his relations and friends, the size depending on the extent and type of work to be done and his ability to mobilize people. The advantage in *owe* was that it provided labor whose quantity; timeliness, effectiveness and relative cheapness would otherwise have been

¹⁰. Interview with Pa Samuel Adebayo, 80+ years, 37 Ereguru Street, Ado-Ekiti, 9 October, 1995.

unmanageable. On the other hand the prospective husband's parents put a premium on visible qualities of hard-working girls as prospective in-laws; and prospective bride's parents now exacted more onerous and lengthy labor service from prospective sons-in-law? There was an interesting symmetry here. After the marriage, the husband felt that he has earned through his labor service the right to increased labor service from his wife. Women realized that the switch to cash crops eroded their traditional rights, and sought compensation from their husbands for the increase in their workload on the farms. Cash crop production did improve the status of women in certain respects. Not only did they receive from their husbands cash remuneration and gifts for services rendered, but the commercialization of land enabled significant numbers of women to gain access to or to buy or to inherit land which they could deploy in their own right.

Expansion of cocoa cultivation in Ekiti coincided with the economic depression of the early 1930s. Again, women were called upon to work longer on cocoa farms, because their husbands could not afford to hire migrant laborers. Yet, the family now depended more on women's incomes from their trade and food processing. Taxation added to farmers' burdens, resulting in resentment against the colonial administration. In 1931, the administration cut taxes (then one-fortieth) on income, which ranged between six shillings and fifteen shillings. Despite the cut, tax riots broke out in Ido Ekiti and Akure.¹¹ On the domestic front some women revolted against their husbands' assertion of traditional prerogatives of labor obligations, obedience and deference.

¹¹. Between 1927 and 1929, an assessment report on income was compiled which put the income of weavers and dyers at three pounds on each industry yearly. The poll tax forced many young men, often dependent or young farmers to become wage laborers, porters and sawyers while some emigrated to the cocoa regions of Ibadan, Ondo, Ife and Ilesa. Furthermore, tax defaulters were rounded up and fined four years tax three times over, just as people were also conscripted to do public works like road construction. The hardships imposed by taxation and forced labors were compounded by the economic depression of 1929-1933. The objective of the 1929-1930 Assessment Report was "to introduce, justify and to obtain approval for an increased tax based on individual assessment."³² In essence, it abolished the 1920 six shillings (flat rate) poll tax and in its place fixed tax at two and a half percentage of annual income. By this, tax rose to between six shillings and fifteen shillings. With the economic depression came a rapid fall in produce prices such that the people began to demand for tax reduction. When this failed, tax raid broke out in Ido and Akure and were narrowly avoided at Owo and Ondo. In the case of Ido, the Oba (Olojudo) had earlier informed the District Officer that he was unable to collect tax from his citizens. This warranted the District Officer, G. G. Harris, to travel to Ido where a hostile crowd who demanded an end to the 2½% income tax and preferred a poll tax of three shillings received him. Some in fact demanded a total abolition of tax. Similarly, demonstrators at Akure accused the Oba (Deji) of being hostile to his subjects. At a meeting to settle differences, the house in which the District Officer and the Deji stayed was stoned by the angry mob. In the two places, force was resorted to as twelve and fifty policemen were drafted in to disperse the crowd at Ido and Akure respectively. Although women were actually taxed, the fact that they were assessed and the fate of male taxpayers were enough to spur them into action as it happened in the Igbo women's war of 1829. In mid 1930, a religious group called the Aladura sect emerged under the leadership of Joseph Babalola. The sect preached faith healing, and at a time when poverty and misery reigned, it was no surprise that thousands of people from all over Nigeria flocked to him with bottles of water. To the adherents, it was sincerely believed that their water, blessed by Babalola, would cure all ills. When the collection of tax began in 1931, several of his disciples openly preached against colonialism and the payment of tax. One such disciples was a woman, Abigail, who ties "there was little doubt that what she said helped considerably in stirring up the trouble (tax riot) at Akure" and the one narrowly averted in Owo where she had also preached. She was arrested, tried and jailed for six months. See NAI, CSO, 26/5/51597: Assessment Report of Ekiti Division, 1929/20, p. 5; NAI, CSO, 26/2/11874, vol. II: Annual Report on Ondo Province, 1931, para. 6-11 and 19

On the domestic front some women were in a better position to assert their autonomy vis a vis their husbands, particularly if they were old or had junior wives in the household over whom they (the senior wives) exercised the right to assign labor duties. Many of these older women were not only spared daily routines on their husbands farms, thereby allowing them to devote more time to working personal farms and crafts. They began to export the cotton grown on their farms to Osogbo, rather than weave it at home.¹² Others sought new opportunities in palm kernel cracking and retail trading. Both occupations followed patterns established earlier. Though cracking palm kernels was not necessarily highly remunerative, during the depression, it provided sorely needed income.

Table 2: PALM KERNEL PRICES, 1931-1937 [per ton]

Year	£	s	d
1931 (Average)	6	10	5
1932 (February)	8	7	6
1932 (June)	5	2	6
1933 (Average)	6	6	3
1936 (Average)	4	12	6
1937 (Average)	6		

Source: NAI, CSO 26/1/11874, vols IX-XIV: Annual Reports Ondo Province 1931-1937.

Cocoa prices fared much better than those for palm kernel. Cocoa opened at £17.5s in 1931, averaged £19.36 throughout 1936, and plummeted to £14.10s in 1937.¹³ Difference between the prices of cocoa and palm kernel accentuated social cleavages that had become apparent as cocoa expanded. Cocoa farmers were perceived as socially more important than non-cocoa producers. Since few women engaged in cocoa farming in their own right, this exacerbated gender disparities. This is not to suggest that women were not interested in cocoa farming but the labor demands of such a task and the already diversified nature of women agricultural activities made this difficult. Instead they concentrated more on food crops and the production of palm products. The differentiation

¹². The incidence of polygamy created a sense of competition and healthy rivalry between wives who relied less and less on their husbands for their maintenance and the maintenance of their children. Hence women engaged in independent vocations such as trading, pottery, weaving, household production and cottage farming. The case of late Madam Ayodele Arotimale is a good illustration. She married a popular farmer in 1923 as the third wife. Contrary to the wishes of her husband, who wanted his wives to work on his farms, she engaged in onion production and petty trading. The divergence of aspiration led to disputes, which came to a head in 1932 when the husband stopped her food allowance. Two of her six children, Chief David Ajibade and Samuel Ojo, blamed their mother for not assisting her husband but a close scrutiny of the story provides another dimension. Chief Arotimole showed more love to his second wife, the late Janet Fayoyin, and this annoyed the other wives. Madam Ayodele's real offence was that she took the lead in condemning her husband's unfair attitude. For instance, Janet's room was the family store and this gave her the discretion to decide how much food should be released to the other wives. Also, the favorite wife, she allocated farm duties to the two junior wives – Ayodele and Oni. On the stoppage of her food allowance, Madam Ayodele converted her about 5000 sq. meter plot, earlier allocated to her by her husband, to plant vegetable and onion to a cocoyam plot, which she worked partly through hired labor. Although her income remained low, she fed her children from the farm and her trader profits.

¹³. NAI, CSO. 26/1/11874, vol. IX: Annual reports, Ondo Province, 1931, 663 and volume XIV Annual Reports 1936 and 1937, 778 and 838.

between male preferences in farming and female farming widened and male and female opportunities diverged; and with women's emphasis on palm products [a less remunerative crops], they increased their ability to negotiate how much labor they would willing provide and for this they exacted higher payments. When husbands and men refused to pay adequately the women had several means of expressing their dissatisfaction. Such expressions also extended to the public realm whenever government showed little interest in the welfare of women or under priced their products. Unfortunately, like the husbands the colonial government often failed to understand fully how female farming such as the palm trade worked - like the market trade in southern Nigeria, they only noticed it when it did not work. Women farmers and traders had developed an efficient production/marketing system that worked so well that only when they decided to boycott or demonstrate did men become aware of it. For example because of low price paid for palm products, the women apparently boycotted its production or smuggled these outside the district. Official reports accepted that the Ondo palm kernel trade was controlled by women but constantly complained about the perceived apathy shown by the Ekiti to gathering palm fruit.¹⁴ In 1934 an agent of John Holt in Ekiti observed that "a large export of palm kernel and palm oil from Ikole area in northern Ekiti to Lokoja"¹⁵ and four years later the Provincial Resident Officer reported on the large amount of palm oil supplied to Owena village from as far away as Ado Ekiti, sixty three miles (some 90 kilometers) away.¹⁶ These were developments caused by poor pricing. From 1933 towards the end of the Second World War, the price for palm kernel stood at £3.10s. To crack a half penny worth of palm kernel, a woman required three pence worth of food to supply the necessary energy and a woman's head load of palm kernel only fetched four pence. Suggestions by some administrators in 1934 to raise price to between £7 and £7.10s¹⁷ per ton was rejected. Even when the administration embarked on 'compulsory measures' or the 'Win-the-war campaign' many women still objected to the forced production of palm products citing transport difficulties as constraint but the major concern was the impossibility of realizing any profit.¹⁸ Production figures for Ekiti between 1939 and 1950 showed a sharp rise between 1943 and 1946, followed by a gradual decline. The increase was due to an increase in price in 1943 and 1944 concurrent with a fall in the demand for and cultivation of cocoa; hence more women, who were released from duties connected to cocoa shifted to palm kernel production. This however did not stop the 'smuggling' of palm kernel to Ilesa, Osogbo, Ilorin, Lokoja and Akure as observed by the police in 1943 that "empty vehicles were going to Ekiti for produce."¹⁹ Cocoa bounced back after the war and prompted many families to return to their

¹⁴. NAI, Ib. Min. Agric. 1/285, 2-11: E.V. S. Thomas, Senior District Officer to Secretary Southern Provinces, Enugu, 6 July, 1938.

¹⁵. NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/2/236, 7-8: Superintendent of Agriculture, Akure to District Officer, Ekiti, 21 April, 1934.

¹⁶. NAI, Ib. Min. Agric. 1/285, 6: Report on Palm Oil Survey, 1938-1940.

¹⁷. NAI, Ib. Min. Agric. 1/208: Resident, Ondo province to Secretary, Western Provinces, 19 January, 1934.

¹⁸. NAI, Ondo Prof. 1/4/O.C. 29, 3-5: Production and trading of palm kernel, 1943-1946.

¹⁹. NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/655A, vol. 1, 17: Police Post Erinmo to Assistant Transport Control Officer, Ado-Ekiti, 18 July, 1943.

abandoned cocoa farms. From palm kernel figures, we may infer that the production of palm oil must have been quite substantial since the ratio of oil weight to palm kernel was 10:7.²⁰

Table 3: PRODUCTION OF PALM KERNEL IN EKITI, 1939-1957 (Tons)

1939----- 226	1944-----2222	1949-----1829
1939/40-----609	1945-----2002	1950-----2560
1941/42-----499	1946-----1699	1955/56-----2171
1942/43-----980	1947-----773	1956/57-----1054
1943-----1423	1948-----1226	

Source: Official records gave monthly production for some years. This table is a summary of entries in NAI, Ib. Min. Agric. 1/324, p. 3; NAI, Ib. Min. Agric. 1/358, vol. II, p.280; NAI, Ekiti Div.1/655A,vol. I; NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/102, vol. XI, p.30; NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/102, vol. XII, p. 22. These figures were not exclusive as they did not include unrecorded products that were both smuggled and sold outside Ekiti or those processed locally into adin. Although we do not have figures for these, we can reasonably assume that a substantial amount would be involved. This we may adduce from the fact that a good number of Ekiti used adin as a body cream.

To assess the role of women in the production of palm oil, we must examine the gender division of labor. Men did the initial harvesting as it was considered a taboo for women to climb palm trees in most places. With expanded production professional male climbers especially migrant laborers from Urhobo (called Isobo), Igbo and Igbomina were hired to do this. Both male and female farmers hired Usually, the children and wives of the farmers followed the harvesters to gather the cut bunches of palm fruit to a nearby collection place. Although stripping the fruit from bunches was usually done by men, women assisted in the case of a small harvest. After that women took over the rest of the processing tasks. They sorted out the fruit, transported it, pounded it, mashed it, pressed the fruit into oil, and further processed the oil for use in the household or for sale in the market. When women farmers had a large harvest, they would hire female processors who were paid either in cash or given a stipulated percentage of the oil. In the 1950s, the going rate for this work was between a half kongo (a unit of measurement) and a full kongo.

Another important cash crop was kola nut. In the early days, farmers' wives sold kola nuts to traders who resold the produce in the markets or their homes. After the introduction in the 1920s of a new variety of kola nut, Gbanja (*kola acuminata*) the kola trade expanded, for the new type of kola nut did not have the same ritual value as the Ekiti abata (*kola nitida*). Gbanja was cultivated purposely for its commercial value at home and abroad. Women dominated all aspects of the kola trade. The processing of kolanut was a laborious task which male producers refused to do. Hence, they sold the kolanut to women at relatively low prices. Initially, Ekiti farmers did not know the technology involved in preparing Gbanja for marketing. They merely removed the testa, often scarring the nuts in the process, washed them, and took them to market for sale. A

²⁰ . NAI, Ondo Prof. 2/1/D28, 109: Palm oil industry in Nigeria, development of, 1946-1953.

large amount of spoilage occurred. Such poor processing resulted in a fall of kolanut prices in the 1930s. But women traders soon learned the necessary techniques required for fermenting the kolanut, and then removing the testa, decorticating the nuts and preparing them for dry storage. To facilitate the marketing of Ekiti kolanut, associations of kolanut traders were organized in Ekiti and Lagos. A particularly noteworthy one was that founded in Ado-Ekiti by Madam Emily Patience Fayemi, a daughter of the nineteenth century warrior, Chief Sajowa.²¹ Through these associational networks, Ekiti kolanut was traded to Lagos, where Ekiti women migrants often sold them. An obituary published in 1948 recorded the death of Madam Ayisatu Fajobi Labinjo, the mother of the editor of the Daily Service, 'an active kolanut trader', who was the head of the Labinjo family of Lagos an Aramoko²². These Ekiti women had brokers in Lagos such as the popular Madam Rabiātu Iyalode, also of Ekiti descent. In the 1940s and 1950s, Madam Iyalode was the head of Lagos market women. For the assistance rendered to Lagos Ekiti, the Ewi of Ado, the paramount chief of Ekiti, gave her an honorary chieftaincy title in 1948.

Women and Land Reforms:

In the pre-colonial era the several responsibilities carried out by Ekiti women and the scarcity of labor to relieve some of these duties often prevented them from making claims to land ownership. It is this development that has misled scholars to argue that Yoruba women had no right to inherit of own land. Successful Yoruba women who were not subject to similar responsibilities had made claims to land ownership as evident in the histories of Madams Efunsetan Aniwura, Subuola, Iyalaje, Iyaola, Rukayat, Ajisomo and Lanlatu of Ibadan, Tinubu and the Mummies of Lagos and Abeokuta, Yeyenirewu and Aye of Ado-Ekiti and most women in Ondo. With colonial innovations, changes imposed on the existing system freed women of some obligations so it was not surprising that the production of cash crops (palm oil, cocoa, tobacco, etc) set in motion a process of land reform which benefited Ekiti women. The earliest Ekiti women to engage in cash crop farming were widows, who after the death of their husbands, took over their farms alongside their children. Before, the tradition was for the relations of a deceased man to inherit his properties including wives and young children. After the introduction of colonialism, divorce became legal, and this allowed women the opportunity to leave men if they wanted. In selecting new husbands, women were guided by their personal aspirations, economic and social needs. Closely related to the growing popularity of divorce among women was the growing tendency to reject traditional ideas concerning widow inheritance, particularly among those who converted to Christianity. Previously, young wives (and even older ones) of a deceased man were expected to be inherited by his brothers and children, subject to the condition that a woman's son could not inherit his mother. From 1940 onwards, widows who had children in school could no longer tolerate a situation whereby they would be inherited by a brother in-law who was unwilling to sponsor their children's education. Such widows would persuade their children to refuse the inheritance of their father's farm by any of his brothers. Instead, the widows and their children would manage the farm themselves. In such instances, the bereaved family usually became cash crop farmers, with the woman as the household or

²¹. Daily Service, 27 June, 1949, p.3

²². "Editor Daily Service Loses Mother", Daily Service, 22 January, 1948, p.1

family head. In many cases, women who engaged in both trade and farming preferred to concentrate on their trading activities while hiring a farm manager (alagbase, alagbaro or onise odun) to oversee their farm(s). They compensated the manager in one of two ways. Either they shared the profits or harvest on an equal basis, or the owner received two-thirds of the profits or harvest and the hired manager one-third.²³ Other male laborers would be hired on a contract basis to carry out specific work such as weeding, spraying and harvesting. Children would also assist in these tasks on Saturdays and during school holidays. During the harvest season, the farm took precedence over trade, and everyone pitched in, especially if the farm was small or only a small number of pods were to be harvested.²⁴

Apart from widows, older married women and divorcees (omo osu) preferred to remain close to their fathers in order to secure land to plant their own cocoa or to inherit a part, or the whole, of his farm should he have no son. In 1944, one Victoria Bola of Ikere Ekiti sued her husband, Samuel Ojo, for divorce.²⁵ She told the court that she inherited a cocoa farm from her late brother, Komolafe. From the money she realized from the sale of the cocoa harvest, she kept £33.10, which she gave to her husband for safekeeping. Without her knowledge or permission, Ojo then spent £6 of this amount on a new wife. Infuriated, Bola broke into Ojo's room and removed £14, and sued her husband in court to get the remaining balance of £8.10. She won her case. Another case involved Mrs. Kolade, who was sued by her brother, Gabriel Ojo, who objected to her inheriting her father's farm at Ogotun. He accused Mrs. Kolade and her husband, along with the Ologotun-in-council for wrongfully sharing the property of his father, who had died in 1945. He claimed that a woman should not inherit land. The Ologotun-in-council who presided over the original sharing, however, justified their action on the grounds that only Mrs. Kolade had financed the burial and the clearing of her father's debts, amounting to £22.11.²⁶ Although, the case file did not contain the view of the District Officer who tried the case, the fact that the oba-in-council accepted Mrs. Kolade's right to inherit her father's farm showed a distinct change in Ekiti society.

Women's increased assertion of rights over land enhanced their role in agriculture. They assumed more responsibilities in their natal and marital homes. Besides performing the usual duties expected by their husbands, friends and children, they now managed their personal farms, marketed crops, provided credit, subsidized the family food supply, and generated income from other sources. Such changes began to affect the formulation of government policy as shown in the 1952 census report.

In Ekiti, the lack of adequate credit facilities posed a serious problem for farmers. Many had such low incomes that it was practically impossible for them to hire wage laborers, buy new farming implements, modern seedlings, herbicides, insecticides or meet other social obligations. For farmers who had little or no surplus, the situation was even worse. For cash strapped farmers they resorted to traditional credit schemes arranged with produce merchants and traders, some of them women. How these arrangements worked varied. Some traders provided credit facilities on the condition that

²³. Galletti, *Nigerian cocoa farmers*, p. 211-214.

²⁴. Interviews with Madams Ola, Ogundare and Comfort Olaoba all of Omu Ekiti, 10-12 May, 1995.

²⁵. NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/1/153/1: Ikere native court suit number 14/1944, Victoria Bola (F) Vs. Sam Ojo (M), court sitting of 20 January, 1944.

²⁶. NAI, Ekiti Div. 1/1/77, vol. II: Ogotun district, matters arising, 83, 84, 93 and 97.

the debtor would pay the loan during the following harvest period. Others pawned their farms and children as collateral for the amount of credit advanced. Sometimes female betrothal was in real sense child pawning, disguised as formal marriage transactions. Parents pawned their daughters to creditors and the credit converted into dowries. When farms were pledged, the creditors had a lien on the cocoa harvest until the full debt was redeemed. The profit thus realized was considered as interest paid on the original amount of credit. An example of such an agreement is the one made in 1957 between one J. A. and E. O. [Possibly Elizabeth Oguntubi] of Ado Ekiti. The agreement read:

Know all ye men that I, J. A. of Igbehin Street, Ado do hereby receive the sum of £50 (fifty pounds) on loan from Madam E. O. of [I] joka Street, Ado and I do hereby pledge my cocoa farm which is situated at Oke Epa farm and, which is lying between Y.F.'s cocoa farm on the right and S.O's cocoa farm on the left as a security against the above sum for a period of three years. That she, Madam E. would hold the cocoa farm...for a period of three years as from 1/3/57 to 28/2/60. She...will be reaping the cocoa crops of the said...farm and make sales of it for her own purpose, and if I fail to refund the said £50 at the expiration of the time, she would call for a fresh document to be made.²⁷

As shown in this document, the creditor possessed the right to harvest the cocoa crop on the pledged farm but did not gain the right to harvest other cash crops, such as kolanut, oil palm, cocoyam and oranges, grown on the farm. However, a badly pressed debtor might also pawn these crops as well. Should the debtor fail to pay at the stipulated time, his or her farm might pass into the possession of the creditor, but local practices often counteracted such alienation of land. The ability of women to offer credit facilities depended on their capacity to accumulate capital, the bulk of which derived from their trading enterprises. Through trading, women were able to muster enough capital to enable them serve as moneylenders or creditors. Thus, they advanced credit to friends and prospective customers for both trade and farming. Successful traders like Madam Comfort Oguntubi and Madam Tinubu Egbeyemi,²⁸ were prominent figures in this practice at Ado Ekiti. This system counters the assumption that women had no access to agricultural credit. In the absence of formal credit given by banks and other 'formal'

²⁷ . cf. Peter Lloyd, *Yoruba land law*, p.311.

²⁸ . Interviews with Chief Elizabeth Oguntubi, age about 85 at Erekesan market, Ado Ekiti, 17 January 1993 and 22 May, 1995 and Madam Egbeyemi, about 80 years, at Ogbon Oba street, 16 January, 1993. (Chief Oguntubi died in 1997). Aged about eighty-five, Madam Oguntubi was the Iyaloja (titled market leader) of Ado Ekiti and the town's most popular woman. As a young girl, she learned weaving and trading -from her parents. In the 1920s, she started out as an itinerant trader traveling the route between Ado Ekiti and Ile-Ife. In the mid-1930s, she had accumulated enough capital to specialize in imported textiles. Between 1960 and the late 1980s, she owned the biggest textile shop in the town. A progressive woman, she co-founded the Egbe Ifelodun, an elite women's organization dedicated to fashion and 'modernization'. She played a leading role in the town's political crisis of 1940-1942. Between then and her death in 1997, she was often been consulted on community issues. Equally committed to modern development is Madam Egbeyemi, who also played an important part in the Egbe Ifelodun. Early in her life, she engaged in weaving and selling akara (a type of bean cake), but by the 1930s, she was one of the leaders in the palm oil trade. These two women controlled the textile and palm oil trades from 1945 to 1980, keeping close touch with farmers engaged in cocoa and oil palm cultivation.

credit institutions women themselves developed credit institutions according to traditional arrangements that had long been in place and proved capable of expanding to meet new needs in new times.

Unlike many male produce buyers or scale owners, women produce merchants and farmers went directly to the source of their supplies where they purchased harvested crops and arranged for porters (often women) to transport them to the markets from which they operated. Thus, they were able to assess the size of the harvest and the quality of the produce, using this knowledge to set market prices. They could also monitor the movement of labor on the farms. In addition, they sometimes advised farmers on market trends and suitable crops. Some of my male informants confessed that they were often guided by such advice when deciding what crops to plant. Possibly, a factor in making their decision was their need for credit facilities from these women. Such loans were used to educate their children, hire farm laborers, and purchase insecticides and fertilizer. In essence some of these women became the 'second'/'informal' agricultural extension officers.

The above discussion has demonstrated the adaptability of women to changing economic circumstances. This ability facilitated women's participation in the development of cash crop production and marketing in Ekiti. They provided labor on the farm, organized marketing, and processed the harvests into marketable products. Since the Yoruba inheritance system was flexible, women were able to extend the boundaries of acceptable custom, making it possible for them to gain greater access and control over land. The paper questions our understanding of 'farming' and suggests that such understanding requires a better grasp of all facets of farming, starting from the decision to own a farm to the final stage of marketing. This is against the common notion that farming is not more than the so-called heavy tasks. In other words farming should be disaggregated to pave way for the study of individual crops, tasks involved and time allocated to specific duties. Secondly, it argues that the misunderstanding of female farming is a conscious development on the part of men and the political authorities since they were only noticed when there were crises. As soon as a crisis was resolved those concerned reverted to the status quo. The experiences demonstrated above synchronize with that experienced by women in the Caribbean. For several decades, the received 'gospel' was that Atlantic slave traders were more interested in African men because the women were not suitable for fieldwork. New research has refuted this claim and show evidence of centuries of Caribbean women working the field alongside their men. Even when African women were taken away from regions of non-female farming the realities in the Americas dictated otherwise, denied them the luxury of farm holidays and through the years these women were forced to adapt to the realities of the day.