

THREATS TO ORON-SOUTHWEST CAMEROON TRADE, 1900-1961

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ABSTRACT

The article examined the challenges and obstacles to trade between Oron and Southwest Cameroon through a utilization of primary and secondary evidence with the causal approach of historical interpretation. On the eve of colonialism, Oron and Southwest Cameroon engaged in exchange of goods and services through the barter system and the use of locally made currencies. Oron, a coastal trading town drained by three major river systems - Mbo, Uya Oron and Okobo - was easily accessible to other neighbouring coastal towns for fishing and trading. Southwest Cameroon groups such as the Duala and Kwe traded with their Oron neighbours by accessing these rivers with canoes and fishing boats. Agricultural products such as food crops and cash crops were also extensively traded in these markets. However, there existed many challenges to trade between Oron and Southwest Cameroon that sought to decrease the benefits and impact of the trade on the economies of both regions. This period was characterized by European and foreign domination of indigenous markets across Oron and Southwest Cameroon. European manufactured products dominated indigenous markets and European firms controlled prices for these products as well as indigenous goods. Trade malpractices by foreign firms, price fluctuations and high rate of taxation threatened the benefits of the trade. Restrictions on movement, insecurity and smuggling activities in trade areas also hampered on the development of trade. Notwithstanding, trade relations between Oron and Southwest Cameroon continued to flourish.

INTRODUCTION

Oron during the colonial era, was part of Old Calabar in the Cross River region and traded with Southwest Cameroon² on seafoods, agricultural products as well as clothing items. Oron beach, Ibaka beach, Udesi beach and trade points in Jamestown were some of the locations of trade between these two regions.³ Prominent articles of trade prior to the colonial era in Oron and Southwest Cameroon included articles such as kolanuts, slaves, ivory, pearls, cowries, raffia bags, spear heads, salt, meat and tobacco. Fishing was also majorly practiced, and the people of Oron and Southwest Cameroon region engaged in fish trading with other groups in the region. Fishing and fish trading was a major item of trade and a means of livelihood for Oron. Boats loaded agricultural, seafood and manufactured products sourced from Oron and transported them to Southwest Cameroon in towns like Daula, Limbe, Kumba and beyond.⁴ In the Colonial era, Southwest Cameroon was administered as part of Nigeria which allowed for free trade activities between Oron and Southwest Cameroon.⁵

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²Between 1900 and 1961 the South-West region of Cameroon was made up of six divisions; Fako, Koupee-Manengouba, Lebialem, Manyu, Meme and Ndian.

³Eyo Archibong Akaniyene, 40 years+, Trader at Plaza, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, 18 April, 2023.

⁴Ojong Echum Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule: A Study of Socio Economic and Political Changes, 1891-1961*(Kaduna: Prudent Printing & Publishing, 2008), pp. 113-114.

⁵Chris Abasi Eyo, 56 years, Media Consultant, Ewet Housing Estate, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, 26 April, 2024.

The Canoe Trade, Middlemen and the European Entry

Canoes were one major means of carrying out domestic or local trade during and also served as an article of trade on the eve of colonial consolidation. Oron produced canoes of different sizes that were used to transport goods from Oron to Southwest Cameroon and vice versa and to other regions

to be sold. The canoe trade business flourished more in the 1920s. Trade in canoes went side by side with trade in foodstuffs as these canoes were also used to transport foodstuffs such as yam, cocoyam and fish from markets to consumers in other areas of the Cross River region. Profits made from sales were used to purchase imported goods such as soap, textile and salt. Export trade prior to the colonial period was based on a trust system. This system was carried out between the indigenes and European firms where these European firms gave out more of their goods to the African middlemen than they could immediately pay for, trusting that the middlemen would supply it with palm produce to the value of goods delivered. These middlemen took these European products such as mirror, guns, copper rods, tobacco, rum and gin then sold them to other traders who in turn sold to various communities in the hinterland. On the coast of Cameroon where the ports of Duala and Victoria were situated, European traders such as the English, Germans and French traded with Duala middlemen based on trust and these middlemen in turn traded with communities in the hinterland also on the trust system.⁶

Middlemen served as a link between the European traders at the Calabar port and the people of the hinterland of the Cross River region. The flow of export was carried out not only through land routes but also through the Cross River and its tributaries. Traders were made to pay tolls to communities whose territories went through these trade routes and nonpayment of toll fees could lead to community clashes therefore in order to prevent this, traders joined traditional societies that granted them immunity in areas outside their own.⁷ However, the determination of European traders to move into the hinterland and trade directly with the people backed by the British Consular Authority and their gunboats brought an end to the middleman system and led to the introduction of colonial rule in these region.

Oron and Southwest Cameroon groups also traded with their Igbo counterparts. For instance, a Mamfe trader would sail in his canoe to Osiza, a riverine Igbo community and travel overland to Uburu market through Amasiri where he would sell his wares. On his journey back, he bought clothing items, salt and so on with the profits. Igbo traders were very active participants in the indigenous, local trade between Oron and Southwest Cameroon and they dominated the Cross River region. However, they mainly participated in buying goods brought from Southwest Cameroon and selling them to other parts of Nigeria. It was mostly the Oron who went to Southwest Cameroon to trade.⁸ Hausa traders were also active participants in the trade. They dealt mainly on trade in livestock and ornaments. They settled in urban and semi-urban areas where they attended weekly market sessions in neighbouring villages and trade there.⁹

With the coming of European traders into Oron and Southwest Cameroon, European traders attempt to extend their trade to the hinterland were met with some difficulties. Thus, the British Consular Authority was used to establish their trade activities in the region by the establishment of colonial rule thereby making the indigenous people take second seats in the control of the pattern of trade and investments by being suppliers of raw materials and labour needed to fuel European industries and markets and as sales outlet for manufactured goods from the capitalist world. Colonial

⁶Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule*, pp. 113-114.

⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

⁸Chris Abasi Eyo, 26 April, 2024.

⁹Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule*, pp. 195-197.

rule brought changes to trade relations between the people of Oron and Southwest Cameroon. Oron and Southwest Cameroon participation in domestic trade consisted of mostly trade in food crops such as yam, cassava, cocoyam, plantain and seafood such as crayfish, prawns, periwinkle, fish, snipers, oysters and many others. Oron traded her agricultural products at local markets to her Cameroonian counterparts and the Southwest Cameroonians traded their agricultural products in their markets in Buea, Tiko and Muyuka to their Oron neighbours. Fish farming is majorly practiced in the region and the people engaged in fish trading with other regions.

The Colonial Economy and the Trade in Palm Oil

The colonial economy was dominated by trade in palm oil, palm kernel and timber which provided Oron, Southwest Cameroonians as well as others such as Igbo and Ibibio enterprising traders opportunities to trade. Southwest Cameroon, Igbo and Ibibio traders dominated Oron markets. Through these markets, the Europeans traded and transported African resources for their industries in Europe. Trade was the heartbeat of colonial rule in Oron and Southwest Cameroon, the reason for colonial rule itself was predicated on trade more so why the German and British colonial administrations pursued free trade policies that eliminated indigenous trade monopolies. They also created viable infrastructure such as roads, construction of schools, electricity, introduction of currency into the Southwest Cameroon and Oron trade as well as other parts of their colonies. Oron people and Southwest Cameroonians participated in both local and foreign trade in the colonial era.¹

British rule in Oron and Southwest Cameroon created a monetized system of economy with the introduction of British currencies and production of cash crops such as cocoa, palm oil and kernel, coffee, rubber for trade in European markets. This shifted the focus of trade from food crops to trade in cash crops production. Oron and Southwest Cameroon trade was thus also dominated by European and foreign merchants who determined the price of both import and export commodities. The introduction of cash crops led to a social revolution among traders as a new means of wealth was established. In these markets, goods such as ivory, rubber, and cash crops like cocoa, palm oil were sold in exchange for European goods such as mirrors, textile and liquor.¹¹ Colonial rule brought about the development of infrastructure and urbanization of areas such as Ibaka, Limbe and Buea.

Aspects of Trade Hiccups Foreign Dominance

The presence of colonial rule in Nigeria and Cameroon brought about an influx of European and Asian traders and firms to dominate trade activities in those areas. European traders flooded the local markets with products from their industries and set the prices for those products. Prior to colonial rule in Oron, European traders were dealing with indigenous middlemen at the coast in order to trade with the people but with the coming of colonial rule they began direct trade with the people in the hinterlands.

In the 1920s, Lebanese business middlemen challenged the indigenous middlemen in retail business in the Cross River region. A businessman, John Khuri was the first Lebanese to reach the Old Calabar

region in 1900. His success attracted more Lebanese that by the 1930s, there were about eighty Lebanese living in the region. As their numbers increased, they began to gradually replace the indigenous middlemen in the lower Cross River region including Oron. Their business skills in thrift and itinerant trading and their principle of lower profits for higher turnover aided in outsmarting the indigenous middlemen. They also bought their wares directly from European firms at wholesale price and enjoyed great credit facilities unlike the indigenous traders.¹² This led to the marginalization of indigenous traders in foreign trade by European firms and Lebanese traders. They were gradually squeezed out of their precolonial middlemen positions.

With the establishment of colonial rule, European firms and expatriates confined to the coast were now able to encroach into the hinterlands to trade, establish warehouses and trading stations. Oron, Duala, Ejagham middlemen and those from other ethnic groups bought consumer goods such as textiles, soap and gin from European traders to stock up their local trading stores. Before 1920 in Oron, Ediba and Bansara regions, trading firms such as Miller Bros. (Liverpool), African Eastern Trading Corporations had established their stores to sell consumer products to the people of the region. Retail trade which was handled by the indigenous middlemen before the colonial period were

¹ *ibid.*, p. 188.

¹¹ Joseph B. Ebune, "Colonial Rule and Bakundu Traditonal Authority," *International Journal of History and Cultural Studies (IJHCS)*, Vol. 1, Iss. 2 (2015), p. 13.

now being taken over by the Europeans and other foreigners with the establishment of colonial rule. By the 1920s, indigenous middlemen had their roles threatened by Lebanese businessmen.¹³

Creation of Boundaries

The independence of Nigeria and Cameroon in 1960 marked a new era in the history of both countries. During this period, the political future of Northern Cameroon was undecided until a plebiscite was conducted in February 11 and 12, 1961 under the supervision of the United Nations to determine whether the north would like to remain in Nigeria or join Cameroon. The North voted to stay in Nigeria while Southwest Cameroon voted to join Cameroon. This plebiscite reaffirmed and redefined the borders between the two countries.¹⁴

However, people living around border areas such as people from Oron and Southwest Cameroon rejected these borders as they were impediments to their economic activities and impeded the free flow of trade between the regions. Ignoring these boundaries, they continued to trade with one another. The Bakassi Peninsula, an area populated by fishermen of Oron and Efik descent located in Nigeria's border with Cameroon, was an area of conflict of ownership between the two regions. Since independence, the two countries continued to fight over ownership of the Peninsula until 2008 when it was officially made a part of Cameroon.

During the colonial era, the Anglo-German boundaries in Cameroon had also impeded on trade and social relations between ethnic groups. When these frontiers ceased to function as an international divide, formerly split populations were reunited and resumed intercourse thus strengthening traditional bonds and intergroup relations once restricted by the development of frontiers. Groups such as Oron, Efiks, Ijaws, Balundo,

12D. M. Mistra, "The Colonial Economy: The Lebanese Role in the Cross River Region," cited in Ojong Echum Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule*, p. 190.

13Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule*, pp. 188-189.

14Julie Sanda and Aishatu Yanet, "Bilateral and Inter State Relations between Nigeria and Cameroon", *Journal of International Relations Security and Economic Studies (JIRSES)*, Vol. 2, No 1 (2022), p. 4.

Ejaghams were once again reunited and able to trade in Southern Cameroon and the region was considered a haven for small business enterprises.¹⁵

Restriction of Movement

The activities of European colonial powers and their institution of borders was drawn out of interest in the economies of the African continent. From 1884 when Anglo German boundaries were formed in Cameroon, ethnic groups became divided across borderlines. These separated related groups were thus restricted from relating with each other and these restrictions on movement of people and goods from one side of the border to the other created a barrier towards trading activities between these groups. The colonial governments adopted fiscal and physical policies to ensure compliance from both sides of the border. Related ethnic groups who had always interacted and traded with each other were now restricted from further relations leading to protests by the indigenous people against these restrictions.¹⁶

These constituted boundaries eventually led to cooperation among the divided ethnic groups and conflicts between them and the Europeans. In spite of the restrictions imposed by the colonialists, the people continued to resist the imposition of these boundaries. Harsh German colonial policies saw the divided people in German Cameroon migrating to the Nigerian side of the border. During tax collection seasons, they exchanged tax receipts and moved to areas that were better suited for them and those who were tired of the forced labour in the German plantations were gladly accommodated by their kinsmen in Nigeria. This network of kinship relations which endured artificial boundary lines formed the structure of the enduring pattern of cross border relations and trade activities during the colonial era.¹⁷

During British colonization of Southwest Cameroon however, restrictions on movement between Oron and Southwest Cameroon were removed as both regions were ruled as one under

British rule until 1961 when Southwest Cameroon was united to form part of the Republic of Cameroon.

Smuggling, Piracy and Trafficking

Smuggling became a practice in Oron and Southwest Cameroon markets because of trade restrictions caused by the institution of the Anglo- German borders. Traders in Southwest Cameroon and Oron engaged in the smuggling of contraband goods across borders in order to earn their means of survival. In the colonial era in the Cross River region, activities of smuggling and high rate of insecurity in colonial markets across Oron and Southwest Cameroon. Insecurity in the Cross River region prevailed as activities of pirates in the waters increased the risk of trade. Traders faced high risk of robbery while going through trade illegal trade routes. These pirates seized ferries, goods and people demanding for ransom upon release. European traders and sailors were not left behind in operations of pirates as they were also harassed and goods smuggled from their ships.¹⁸ In Oron however, piratical activities were on a lower level and were not as rampant

¹⁵Njeuma M. Z., "Cameroon-Nigeria Frontier: Model for Culture of Peace, 1890-1991", *Journal of the Cameroon Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 2, No. 3 (2002), p. 190.

¹⁶R. T. Akinyele (ed.), *Borderlands and African Integration* (Abuja: Panaf Publishing Inc., 2008), p. 80.

¹⁷M. O. Bonchuk, "International Boundaries and Divided Peoples: Focus on the Boki and Ejagham Communities in the Cross River Borderlands, 1884-1994" (PhD Thesis, University of Calabar, 1997), p. 140

¹⁸Okon Johnson, 55years+, Trader, Oron Town Beach, Oron, Akwa Ibom State, 7 March, 2024.

in other areas. They made use of local weapons and mostly attacked smaller boats. Piracy in Oron waters during the colonial era was not a major occurrence and their activities arose from the need to be recognized by foreign traders of their ownership of trade routes. For instance, in 1821 before full-fledged colonialism, Effiat warlords engaged European vessels in a battle because they were against the recognition given to the Efik by the Europeans as a major trading partner even as they passed through Effiat waters into Calabar. The Efik in partnership with the Europeans traders also mobilized arms to fight back the Effiat.¹⁹ The thick nature of the mangroves and forests served as camouflage for all kinds of criminal activity and served as routes for smuggling of contrabands across regions. Accidents were also a common occurrence in trade routes and lives were lost in transit.

Human trafficking during the colonial era was also a cause for security concerns in the Cross River region. People were trafficked through Oron waters into Cameroon into other African regions. Women and children were also trafficked from Cameroon to Nigeria for labour services in plantations, brothels, hotels and bars. Southwest Cameroon after the end of German rule was administered under Britain and ruled under a joint administration with Nigeria with no clearly constituted boundaries which allowed for easy operations of human traffickers across Southern Cameroon and Nigeria and vice versa. According to Henry Kah,

on 29 January 1942 concerning Mamfe Division, the District Officer acknowledged that women and child trafficking took place in Banyang, Kembong, Takamanda and Boki areas. Again, in memo No. 796/38 of 14 July 1943 from the Secretary of Eastern Provinces D. A. F. Shute to the Residents of Calabar, Cameroons, Ogoja, Onitsha and Owerri administrative units he decried child prostitution in Lagos as a result of the trafficking of young girls for prostitution. Most of these girls were about 12 years and among them were the Ibos, Efiks and Sobos.²⁰

Children were also trafficked in French Cameroon from Babuti, Bamum, Yaounde and Sanaga into British Cameroon where they were eventually taken to Lagos and other places in the Calabar region for sex work.²

Poor Quality of Traded Goods

This was mainly common during the inter-war years. Goods that were imported and sold in indigenous markets in Oron and Southwest Cameroon lacked standard and quality. The indigenous people also produced poor quality products for sale to European markets. These poor quality or adulterated exports produced were blamed on the nonmechanization of production by producers in the region. Efforts were made to check this problem by the institution of an inspection committee to check the quality of produce being sold to foreign markets. This legislation failed however to achieve its purpose and increase the standard of products in local markets.³ African countries were also seen as dumping ground for European goods. Surplus goods that were not consumed in Europe were sent down to the continent to be sold at ridiculous prices to Africans. Some of these goods were also of inferior quality which had been rejected by European consumers and thus sent down to Africa to be sold.²³

¹⁹Chris Abasi Eyo, 26 April, 2024.

²⁰Henry Kam Kah, "Child Trafficking Across the Cameroon/Nigeria Border: A Historical Perspective", *Covenant University Journal of Politics & International Affairs (CUJPIA)*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2016), p. 6.

Trade Malpractice

Trade malpractices existed in the colonial era as long as trade existed. People did not get the exact value of what they paid for because there were no well-established regulations to checkmate trade malpractices and many were short changed.²⁴ This was common among foreign firms in their bid to manipulate markets for higher profits. Colonial authority's response to these issues in Oron and Southwest Cameroon were rather mild stemming from their lack of political will to execute offenders. However, trade malpractices by these foreign firms produced a similar reaction from producers of export produce who in turn sold low quality produce for European industries.²⁵

Fluctuation of Export Prices

Similar with the problem of poor quality of import and export goods was the issue of low and consistent price fluctuations on export products relative to import produce. In Oron and Southwest Cameroon, major exports such as palm oil underwent series of price fluctuations and reductions while import prices such as clothing items fell at a considerably slower pace within the same time frame. Producer prices of palm oil fluctuated faster and dropped faster than imported products thus while income and profits of indigenous producers continued to drop, the prices of imported goods and services on which the indigenes spent most of their income remained relatively high to the benefit of European traders and firms. These price fluctuations were because of the activities of European firms in controlling and manipulating local and international market prices of goods and services in Oron and Southwest Cameroon markets in Ibaka, Oron, Buea as well as many others. These firms had the official backing of the colonial government and so the indigenous traders, producers and consumers had no other choice but to follow their lead.

The volatility of the international market system also had a hand in price fluctuations that occurred during this period. It was sequel to the great economic depression in Europe from 1929 to 1939 which resulted in the prices of goods traded in world markets to fall drastically because of a decline in spending or decline in aggregate demand for products which also led to a decline in production as manufacturers were left with more products unsold. The European colonists who

² *ibid.*, p. 10.

³ *ibid.*, p. 191.

²³Ifeanyi Chukwu, 55years+, Trader, Ibaka Beach, Oron, Akwa Ibom State, 7 April, 2023.

relied on export production and its contribution to the revenue of the colonial government were greatly affected by the depression. Manipulation of prices by foreign firms and world market volatility were responsible for the low and fluctuating prices of exports from these African regions.²⁶

High Rate of Taxation

The British colonial government came up with a system of taxation imposed on the indigenous people of Oron and Southwest Cameroon. The colonial authority placed tax on the people as a source of revenue for the colonial administration. Colonial states enjoyed metropolitan backing especially on territorial defence. When revenue was insufficient, they relied on the metropole especially during wars and conflict but still the colonial states forced taxes on the indigenous people in order to avoid burdening taxpayers in the metropolises. The push for self-sufficiency in British colonies meant that they had to tax effectively. One element that consumed tax revenue was the high public wage bill which allowed for colonial officers to be paid high salaries. Africans were thus made to foot this bill that instituted their suppression. Colonial taxation sparked resistance from Africans who were forced to submission as colonial masters used traditional

²⁴Chris Abasi Eyo, 26 April, 2024.

²⁵Tangban, *The Ejagham Under Colonial Rule*, p. 191. ²⁶*ibid.*, p. 192.

rulers and chiefs as a means of tax collection. Refusal to pay meant confiscation of one's property, and sometimes properties were burnt. Those who failed to pay were also forced to cultivate the chiefs' lands something which was unheard of before colonial rule.²⁷

Direct taxation forced many indigenous male adults to move out of their communities to raise money to pay tax or avoid payment of tax. Such movements lasted long thus causing social and economic strains on the family members left behind. The involvement of chiefs and traditional rulers in the collection of taxes led to a further debasement of the institution of chieftaincy and African traditional society. Although the indigenous people were forced to pay heavy taxes, some of these communities still lacked access to basic social amenities such as healthcare, good roads, clean water.

Inadequate Credit Facilities

The domination of foreign firms and traders in the trade in Oron and Southwest Cameroon increased competition among traders in these regions. Indigenous traders were faced with serious competition from European firms who had the backing of the colonial government. From the first decade of the twentieth century, non-indigenous middlemen had become more dominant than the indigenous middlemen in the trading network because participation in trade required a sizeable amount of investment and capital which many of the indigenous traders lacked or could afford. Many of these foreign traders such as the Lebanese traders and businessmen were allowed access to credit facilities that the indigenous traders could not access. They also adopted profit making strategies such as price reductions for a lower profit but in the long-run a higher turnover to ensure their domination of markets of which their counterpart indigenous traders were unable to compete with. The credit loans also aided in increasing their capital investments in the trade business.

Cash Crop Economy

Agriculture was the backbone of the colonial economy, the main purpose of colonial rule was to gain control of trade and agriculture in indigenous areas this is why agricultural practices favoured the cultivation of cash crops to the cultivation of food crops for its European industries. There was greater attention in cultivation of cash crops such as palm oil, palm kernel, coffee and rubber for production in European industries because of its economic yield than in the growing of food crops with lower profit yield.

In Oron and British Southwest Cameroon, the response to the growing concerns of the economic depression of 1929-1933 was the crucial need to invest in agriculture in order to save the colonial economy. The administration officer who was in charge of the Ndian and Kumba Divisions

in Southern Cameroon saw the need for the domination of the agricultural sector in plantations. He also saw the need for a review of the Hugh Clifford land policy to allow for the cultivation of plantations which he believed will bring about a speedier economic recovery than investment in peasant production. In order to achieve this feat, he advocated for a scheme of immigrant workers from Nigeria to provide cheap labour for the plantations.²⁸ Colonial trade encouraged migrations of workers from Nigeria to Southwest Cameroon to work in former German plantations. The success of the cash crop exportation industry therefore owed its success to the indigenous men and women who were employed as cheap labour to work

²⁷Abel Gwaindepi, "Taxation in Africa since Colonial Times, The History of African Development" (2024), www.aehnetwork.org/texbook/ (accessed and retrieved, 8 April 2024).

²⁸Akinyele (ed.), *Borderlands and African Integration*, pp. 81-82.

in these plantations. Cash crops such as palm oil, kernel, plantain, banana and coffee from Oron and Southwest Cameroon were exported to European industries while consumer goods from Europe were imported and sold in Oron- Southwest Cameroon markets and beyond.

Inter- Ethnic Domination

From the 1940s, places in Oron witnessed an increase in immigration of Igbo, Ibibio and Ijaw traders into the region to trade. These immigrations were encouraged by the motor service transport system created by the colonial government. These trader emigrants first settled in urban areas and semi urban areas before moving into the villages. They competed with indigenous traders by undercutting prices of imported consumer goods to get firm standing in the markets. This led to their domination of trade in Oron and other parts of the Cross River region.

In Cameroon during the First World War (1939-1945) when AngloFrench forces formed allies, captured German Cameroon and took ownership of the plantations in the region, they were faced with the challenge of supply of labour. In order to solve this problem, they adopted a policy of immigration of Nigerian groups into Cameroon. The supply of labour was insufficient to meet the demands of the former German plantations. Thus, to get cheap supply of labour, the British government allowed for immigration of Nigerians into Southern Cameroon to work in those plantations.⁴

Southwest Cameroon saw a massive migration of Nigerians into the region to work in German abandoned plantations, colonial civil service, trading firms, work as smugglers, petty traders, fishermen, cash crop cultivators and so on. They were known as "Cam-Gerians" (both Nigerians and Cameroonians) by their host communities. Although this group of people were often faced with constant fear of harassment, deportation and administrative levies, they controlled the informal sector of Southwest Cameroon. They engaged in trading activities in Duala markets, they participated in fish mongering in the creeks of Ekondo-Titi, and some also engaged in the cultivation of crops such as yam, coffee, cocoyam, banana and plantain in Mamfe, Muyika and Mboge. They were also seen hawking and selling fish in Buea and Molyko. These Nigerians occupied and dominated the region of Southwest Cameroon engaging in trade and smuggling across the borders.³⁰

CONCLUSION

Trade relations between Oron and Southwest Cameroon from 1900-1961 comprised of both local and foreign trade. Colonial rule in Oron and Southwest Cameroon impacted a lot on the economies of both regions. The construction and provision of infrastructural facilities such as roads, warehouses and ports facilitated trade, brought about urbanization of these regions and attracted the immigration of other ethnic groups to participate in trade in those regions. However, trade relations within this period was also characterised by numerous challenges and threats that sought to hinder the development of the trade. Some of these challenges were the domination of trade by foreign firms and traders and problems with insecurity in trade activities. Smuggling and human

⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 80-81. ³⁰*ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

trafficking posed a serious threat to the development of trade in Oron and Southwest Cameroon because of restrictions imposed by boundaries. The colonial era also encouraged a shift in the agricultural sector to a cash crop economy because of its financial benefits to the colonial economy. Trade malpractices from European and foreign traders were a major challenge. Their monopoly of trade and control of price fixings was detrimental to the benefits of the trade

to the indigenous people and traders. Fluctuation of prices brought about an unstable market economy thus affecting profits and business flow. Inadequate trading and credit facilities especially for indigenous traders and small business enterprises crippled the performance of these entities in trade activities. German imposed boundaries in Southwest Cameroon prevented traders from accessing those areas without restrictions which led to problems of smuggling and insecurity in border areas. However, the end of German rule in Southwest Cameroon brought an end to those restrictions on trade as Southwest Cameroon was brought under joint administration with Nigeria under British rule. Oron and Southwest Cameroon thus continued to engage in trade activities with each other until the end of colonial rule.