

**THE 1942 ANGLO-SPANISH AGREEMENT AND THE NIGERIA-EQUATORIAL GUINEA  
COLONIAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS: IMPACTS ASSESSMENT.**

**Inyang, Samuel U.**  
**Department of History and International Studies,**  
**University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria**  
*Email: [samuelyang382@gmail.com](mailto:samuelyang382@gmail.com)*

**Abstract**

This article tries to review the 1942 Anglo-Spanish Agreement and assess its impacts on the socio-cultural and colonial economic relations of Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. The study discovered that the agreement institutionalised and regulated labour migration by ensuring a continuous supply of labour for agriculture and commerce. It reinforced trade continuity, strengthened the foundation of hybrid communities, linguistic exchange and cultural diffusion. Nigerian migrant families and local intermediaries formed networks that transmitted not only economic knowledge but also religious, linguistic and familial practices, which facilitated economic cooperation, ease labour mobility and contributed to the resilience of regional trade system. The agreement was immense for both countries, it increases their colonial tax revenue, forged cultural ties and daily contact, which resulted in intermarriages and cultural amalgamation, producing a generation of mixed-heritage who grew up bilingual with a developed form of communication known as "Pichinglis." Marriage ceremonies, festivals and naming traditions reflected their dual heritage. Intermarriage and linguistic exchanges thus turned Fernando Po into one of the most cultural hybrid space in colonial Africa. Nigerians not only worked the land, they transformed the cultural landscape of the island, leaving traces of their culture and family life that persist long after the end of colonialism.

**Introduction**

The cumulative effects of the 1942 Agreement and post-war adjustments laid the groundwork for enduring postcolonial labour and trade patterns between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. The legal frameworks, administrative procedures, and migration networks established during this period persisted long after Spanish Guinea gained independence in 1968, creating channels of economic and social interaction that shaped bilateral relations for decades (Martino, 2016:91).

One key legacy was the institutionalisation of regulated labour migration. Even as colonial administrations receded, the practices introduced under the agreement documentation of workers, contractual obligations, repatriation protocols continued to influence labour markets. Nigerian migrants and their descendants retained connections to Fernando Po, ensuring a continuous supply of labour for agricultural, commercial, and industrial activities (Martino, 2020:21). These linkages became part of the broader transnational economy of the Bight of Biafra, integrating local production into regional and global markets (Ugarte, 2006:1426).

Trade continuity was similarly reinforced. The agreements and administrative practices developed under British and Spanish cooperation created predictable shipping routes, pricing structures, and commercial norms that facilitated cross-border trade even after the decline of formal colonial oversight (Martino, 2017:54). Nigerian traders, often returning from plantation work, became important actors in maintaining trade flows, bringing knowledge of European markets, agricultural techniques, and financial systems to both colonies (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:13).

Socially and culturally, the post-agreement period strengthened the foundation for hybrid communities, linguistic exchange, and cultural diffusion. Nigerian migrants, their families, and local intermediaries formed networks that persisted into the postcolonial era, transmitting not only economic knowledge but also religious, linguistic, and familial practices (Jerónimo, 2018:35). These enduring networks facilitated economic cooperation, eased labour mobility, and contributed to the resilience of regional trade systems.

Politically, the post-war adjustments highlighted the limits of colonial authority and the growing role of local agency in economic affairs. The partial decline of British oversight, combined with the autonomy of Spanish administrators and the influence of independent agents, created a system in which local actors could negotiate terms, assert rights, and shape outcomes within the broader framework of bilateral economic relations (Martino, 2016:92). This dynamic foreshadowed the postcolonial period, when newly independent states had to manage inherited labour and trade networks while balancing domestic and foreign interests (Martino, 2020:26).

### **Legacy of the Agreement**

The 1942 Anglo–Spanish Labour Agreement remained in effect until the late 1950s, when rising nationalist movements and international scrutiny of colonial labour systems began to erode its legitimacy. Nevertheless, its legacy endured. It entrenched the transnational labour corridor between southeastern Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea and normalised the exploitation of African workers under legal guise.

Historians have since debated whether the agreement represented progress or regression. Some, like Ugarte (2006:427), view it as a pragmatic attempt to humanise an already brutal system. Others, such as Martino (2020:27), argue that it merely replaced the whip with paperwork, a bureaucratic disguise for forced labour.

Whatever its interpretation, the treaty stands as a symbol of how colonial powers manipulated legal frameworks to sustain their economic ambitions while maintaining the appearance of humanitarian governance. It also illustrates the complex entanglement of British and Spanish colonial interests in West Africa, where competition often gave way to cooperation when mutual benefit was at stake.

### **Impacts of the Agreement on Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea Economy Relations**

The 1942 Anglo–Spanish Labour Agreement left deep and long-lasting footprints on both British Nigeria and Spanish Guinea. Though it was crafted as a wartime arrangement to regulate labour flow, its effects far exceeded its immediate purpose. The treaty reshaped economic structures, deepened colonial collaboration, and transformed the socio-economic realities of thousands of Nigerian workers and their families. For Spain, the agreement secured the survival of its plantation economy on Fernando Po, while Britain benefited indirectly through the maintenance of regional stability and the continued expansion of export networks in the Bight of Biafra (Martino, 2012:39). What appeared on paper as a bilateral labour accord turned out to be a cornerstone in the economic interdependence between the two colonies (Ugarte, 2006:427).

The economic advantages that flowed from the 1942 Anglo–Spanish Labour Agreement were immense for both Spain and Britain, although the gains were unevenly distributed. Spain's most direct benefit lay in its ability to secure a stable and cheap labour supply for its plantations in Fernando Po. Before the agreement, the Spanish colonial economy was near collapse due to labour shortages and international isolation during World War II (Martino, 2016:93). With the formal recruitment of Nigerian workers under the agreement, production levels in cocoa, coffee, and palm kernel plantations surged, restoring Fernando Po's central role in Spain's African colonial enterprise (Martino, 2017:55).

The treaty revitalised Spain's colonial finances. Taxes, export duties, and licence fees paid by plantation owners and recruiting agents flowed into the coffers of the colonial administration, strengthening Madrid's control over the territory (Ugarte, 2006:429). Spanish officials could now justify the costs of maintaining their African colony, as the island's exports began to generate revenue once again. The economic boost was particularly vital during the 1940s when Spain was recovering from civil war and facing economic isolation from much of Europe (Guajardo, 2023:5).

Britain's economic gains, though indirect, were equally significant. The treaty allowed the British to maintain political calm and economic productivity in southeastern Nigeria, particularly in Calabar, Oron, and Opobo, where the recruitment centres were based (Martino, 2020:27). By

regularising migration, the British administration minimised the disruptive effects of illegal recruitment and human trafficking, which had previously caused social unrest and administrative embarrassment (Martino, 2012:40). Moreover, the wages and goods brought back by returning labourers fuelled the local economies of the Cross River and Akwa Ibom regions, indirectly increasing Britain's colonial tax revenue (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:15).

Beyond the economic sphere, Britain also saw the agreement as a strategic move to maintain influence in the Bight of Biafra region. By cooperating with Spain, the British government prevented other European powers particularly France, from expanding their influence in the Gulf of Guinea (Craven, 2015:9). Thus, the treaty helped preserve the balance of power in West Africa while simultaneously supporting the war-time economic goals of the British Empire.

At a broader level, the agreement underscored the hypocrisy of colonial morality. While both Spain and Britain publicly denounced slavery and forced labour, they effectively institutionalised a system that relied on debt bondage and restricted mobility (Martino, 2017:57). The two colonial powers benefited immensely from the productivity of African workers, yet offered little in terms of genuine welfare or development. In the end, the economic benefits to Spain and Britain were derived from the sustained exploitation of African labour, concealed beneath the rhetoric of legal contracts and mutual cooperation (Martino, 2016:93).

### **Development of Plantation Agriculture in Fernando Po**

The most visible impact of the 1942 Anglo-Spanish Labour Agreement was the rapid expansion of plantation agriculture in Fernando Po. The treaty brought order to labour recruitment and ensured a consistent supply of Nigerian workers, which allowed Spanish plantation owners to increase production and open new agricultural estates across the island (Martino, 2020:28). Between 1942 and 1955, Fernando Po experienced a major agricultural boom, with cocoa production alone accounting for nearly 80% of the colony exports (Ugarte, 2006: 428).

The island's plantations, previously struggling due to labour scarcity, suddenly gained access to thousands of experienced farm workers from southeastern Nigeria. These migrants were known for their skill in clearing forest land, cultivating tropical crops, and maintaining plantation systems inherited from earlier European enterprises (Martino, 2016:95). As a result, Spanish planters intensified land acquisition and mechanised parts of their operations, transforming Fernando Po into one of the most productive colonial agricultural zones in West Africa (Guajardo, 2023:2).

The expansion of plantations also brought new waves of investment. Spanish trading companies such as Sociedad Agrícola Colonial and Compañía de Guinea Española increased their capital, imported new machinery, and extended their trade networks into Europe (Ugarte, 2006:12). Meanwhile, local intermediaries, African foremen and recruiters became indispensable to the plantation system, managing labour relations and bridging cultural gaps between Nigerian workers and Spanish overseers (Martino, 2012:41).

However, the growth of plantation agriculture came at a high human cost. The new legal framework under the 1942 agreement disguised exploitative labour practices under bureaucratic procedures. Many Nigerian workers found themselves trapped in systems of "dash-peonage," where debts incurred during recruitment were used to bind them to plantations indefinitely (Martino, 2017:56). The Spanish administration justified this system as a necessary discipline to ensure productivity, but it effectively replicated the conditions of slavery in all but name (Martino, 2016:96).

The expansion of agriculture also altered the ecological and social landscape of Fernando Po. Large tracts of forest were cleared for cocoa and coffee estates, displacing indigenous Bubi communities and marginalising their traditional farming practices (Jerónimo, 2018:34). This process deepened the racial and social divisions on the island, as indigenous people were increasingly confined to the highlands while Nigerian migrants dominated the lowland plantations. The Spanish authorities used these divisions strategically, playing local groups against each other to maintain control (Ugarte, 2006:429).

Nevertheless, the plantation boom transformed Fernando Po into a vital node in Spain's global trade network. Cocoa and coffee exports were shipped to European markets, while palm kernels and timber supported domestic industries. The success of these plantations became a point of colonial pride for Spain, demonstrating its ability to maintain a "productive empire" even after the decline of other European colonial powers (Martino, 2020:31).

In essence, the 1942 labour agreement gave Spanish Guinea the workforce it needed to turn economic potential into tangible profit. The boom in plantation agriculture sustained the colony for decades, well into the late 1950s, when nationalist movements and international criticism of forced labour began to undermine the colonial order (Martino, 2017:59).

### **Transmittal Flow and Labour–Trade Linkages in Southeastern Nigeria**

While Fernando Po thrived on plantation productivity, southeastern Nigeria experienced a parallel economic transformation driven by remittances from migrant labourers. The return of thousands of Nigerian workers after their contracts brought a steady inflow of money, goods, and cultural influence into the Cross River and Akwa Ibom regions (Martino, 2012:42). This circulation of income became a key feature of local economies, reshaping trade patterns, social mobility, and family structures.

Remittances sent by workers in Fernando Po were often used to build houses, pay dowries, and invest in small-scale trade. Local traders in Calabar and Oron became middlemen in the exchange of Spanish goods such as fabrics, alcohol, tobacco, and household items, which returning migrants brought back or sent through intermediaries (Ugarte, 2006:430). These imported items quickly gained prestige value and became symbols of prosperity, further motivating younger men to seek employment across the sea (Martino, 2016:94).

The remittance economy also stimulated the growth of local markets. Towns such as Itu, Uyo, and Ikot Abasi became centres of redistribution for foreign goods, linking rural communities to international trade routes via Calabar port (Lovejoy et al, 2004:20). The circulation of Spanish and British manufactured goods through Nigerian markets blurred the economic boundaries between the two colonies, fostering what Martino (2020:33) describes as a "shared colonial marketplace."

Beyond material gains, labour migration forged emotional and cultural ties between communities in southeastern Nigeria and Fernando Po. Returning workers brought back new languages, religious practices, and social attitudes acquired during their time on the island. The adoption of Spanish phrases, Catholic rituals, and European styles of dress became visible markers of this trans-colonial exchange (Jerónimo, 2018:37).

At the same time, remittance flows altered traditional family dynamics. Many households became economically dependent on absent male relatives, creating new patterns of female-headed homes and community networks of financial support (Martino, 2017:63). Women increasingly took over farming and petty trading, using the cash remitted from men abroad to expand their economic roles. This unplanned shift contributed to the diversification of southeastern Nigeria's local economy during the late colonial period (Martino, 2016:95).

However, the remittance-driven prosperity was uneven. While some communities flourished, others suffered from labour shortages as able-bodied men migrated in large numbers. Local agriculture declined in certain districts, forcing increased reliance on imported food from other parts of Nigeria (Martino, 2012:44). In addition, the circulation of wealth also deepened social inequality, as those connected to the Fernando Po labour circuit gained status and influence at the expense of poorer, non-migrant families (Ugarte, 2006:427).

From a broader perspective, the labour–trade linkages created by the Anglo–Spanish Labour Agreement tied southeastern Nigeria more closely to global capitalism. The region's economy became dependent on the export of labour as much as on palm oil or palm kernels. In this sense, the agreement did not merely regulate migration, it reshaped the economic logic of the region (Martino, 2020:28).

By the 1950s, the pattern of seasonal migration and remittance exchange had become deeply entrenched. Even after the gradual abolition of the labour treaty, informal migration continued, sustained by personal networks and shared economic interests between coastal Nigerian towns and Spanish Guinea (Martino, 2017:61). This enduring connection became a defining feature of the Nigeria–Equatorial Guinea relationship, surviving well into the post-independence era.

### **The Impacts of Nigerian Labour Migration in Fernando Po**

The movement of thousands of Nigerian workers to Fernando Po under both informal and formal recruitment systems during the colonial era produced not only economic outcomes but also profound social and cultural consequences. What began as a labour arrangement between Britain and Spain soon evolved into one of the most dynamic cultural exchanges in West Africa. Migration created new forms of community life, transformed social relationships, and reshaped the identity of entire groups across both sides of the Bight of Biafra (Martino, 2016:96). On the plantations, in the markets, and within the towns of Fernando Po, Nigerians built lives that merged elements of their homeland traditions with the Spanish colonial culture they encountered. Over time, this process gave rise to hybrid identities that continue to shape relations between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea to this day (Ugarte, 2006:437).

The socio-cultural effects of this migration were complex, reflecting both the resilience and adaptability of Nigerian migrants in a foreign yet familiar space. While many faced harsh working conditions and discrimination, they also carved out spaces of belonging, solidarity, and self-expression. From the emergence of migrant settlements to the intermingling of languages and faiths, these transformations reflected the deep interdependence that characterised the colonial encounter between the two territories (Martino, 2012:41).

### **The Formation of Nigerian Migrant Communities in Fernando Po**

One of the most visible outcomes of the mass migration from southeastern Nigeria to Fernando Po was the formation of distinct Nigerian migrant communities across the island. By the 1930s and 1940s, the entire neighbourhoods and plantation camps were inhabited almost exclusively by Nigerians, especially the Ibibio, Efik, and Igbo migrants (Martino, 2012). These groups often settled together based on kinship, ethnic origin, or recruitment route, creating enclaves that mirrored their home villages. This pattern of settlement provided migrants with a sense of security in a foreign land, helping them maintain cultural cohesion while adapting to colonial life (Martino, 2017:59).

Many of these communities developed around plantation zones such as Moka, Basile, and Baney, as well as in the colonial capital, Santa Isabel (now Malabo). In these towns, Nigerian traders and artisans established small businesses supplying goods and services to fellow workers, plantation owners, and colonial officials (Ugarte, 2006:429). Informal markets grew rapidly, becoming economic lifelines for both the migrants and the local population. These spaces functioned as social hubs where information circulated freely, and collective decisions about work, remittance, and community welfare were made.

In several plantation regions, Nigerian migrants formed mutual aid societies to support members in times of sickness, death, or contractual disputes. These associations sometimes modelled after hometown unions in Nigeria, were crucial in maintaining solidarity and negotiating with Spanish authorities (Martino, 2020:34). The societies also acted as informal governments, organising religious activities, festivals, and dispute settlements. They became a central feature of Nigerian migrant life on the island, representing an adaptation of traditional governance systems to the realities of colonial displacement (Martino, 2016:97).

The existence of these migrant enclaves altered the demographic balance of Fernando Po. By the 1940s, Nigerians formed a significant proportion of the island's labour force and population, at times outnumbering the indigenous Bubi people (Guajardo, 2023:10). The Spanish administration saw this demographic shift as both beneficial and risky: Nigerian workers sustained the economy,

but their growing numbers also posed potential political challenges. Spanish officials therefore encouraged the spatial segregation of Nigerians into plantation quarters, where they could be controlled and taxed easily (Ugarte, 2006:432).

Despite these restrictions, the migrant communities flourished. Nigerians introduced new cultural practices, such as masquerades, drumming styles, and culinary habits, which soon became part of the island's daily life. They built churches, schools, and communal halls where they taught children both Spanish and indigenous languages, ensuring the survival of their identity even within a foreign colonial system (Jerónimo, 2018:41). Over time, these communities evolved from transient labour camps into semi-permanent settlements that anchored Nigerian presence on the island for generations.

The experience of community formation in Fernando Po thus reflected the dual nature of colonial migration: forced yet creative, constrained yet adaptive. Nigerian migrants transformed their marginal status into a foundation for collective strength, crafting an identity that was neither fully Spanish nor entirely Nigerian but something uniquely in between (Martino, 2016:97).

### **Intermarriages, Language Influence, and Cultural Assimilation**

Labour migration inevitably brought people of different linguistic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds into daily contact, resulting in significant intermarriage and cultural blending. On Fernando Po, Nigerian workers frequently intermarried with local Bubi women, as well as with other West Africans who had been recruited from Cameroon or Liberia (Martino, 2017:60). These unions were often both romantic and strategic, offering Nigerian men local social ties that eased their integration into the island's social structure.

Intermarriage produced a generation of mixed-heritage children who often grew up bilingual, speaking both indigenous Nigerian languages such as; Efik, Ibibio, or Igbo and Spanish or Pidgin English (Ugarte, 2006:433). This linguistic diversity became a hallmark of Fernando Po's labour society. In markets, on plantations, and in the streets of Santa Isabel, a creolised form of communication developed, blending Spanish, Pidgin, and African dialects. This language, known locally as "Pichinglis," became the lingua franca of the island and remains widely spoken in Equatorial Guinea today (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:21).

The linguistic influence went both ways. Nigerian migrants who returned home after years of work in Fernando Po brought back Spanish words and phrases, which entered local speech in parts of southeastern Nigeria (Martino, 2012:44). In Calabar and Oron, certain Spanish-derived expressions became markers of prestige among returned labourers, symbolising their exposure to foreign lands and their economic success (Martino, 2016:99).

Cultural assimilation was not a one-way process. While many Nigerians adopted aspects of Spanish culture such as Catholicism, Western dress, and European forms of social etiquette. They also introduced their own traditions into Fernando Po's colonial environment. Nigerian-style churches began to appear across the island, often blending Catholic rituals with African modes of worship, music, and dance (Jerónimo, 2018:42). The result was a vibrant hybrid religious culture that combined European theology with African spirituality.

Marriage ceremonies, festivals, and naming traditions reflected this dual heritage. For example, the practice of giving children both Spanish and African names became common, symbolising the coexistence of two identities. Similarly, Nigerian cuisine, particularly the use of palm oil, yams, and pepper-based stews was adopted by local communities, influencing the island's food culture (Ugarte, 2006:435).

Yet assimilation also came with challenges. Spanish authorities often viewed intermarriages and the growing Nigerian influence with suspicion, fearing that cultural fusion could undermine colonial control. They imposed restrictions on the movement and social activities of Nigerian migrants, and in some cases, refused to recognise mixed marriages officially (Martino, 2020:36). Despite these efforts, cultural blending continued, driven by everyday human contact and the shared struggles of plantation life.

Over time, the children of these unions became a bridge between different worlds. Many of them attended mission schools where they learned Spanish literacy, enabling them to work as clerks, teachers, or translators in the colonial administration. Their dual heritage allowed them to navigate both the African and European spheres with ease, symbolising the deep cultural integration that migration had produced (Guajardo, 2023:19).

Thus, intermarriage and linguistic exchange turned Fernando Po into one of the most culturally hybrid spaces in colonial Africa. Nigerians not only worked the land, they also transformed the cultural landscape of the island, leaving traces of their language, faith, and family life that persist long after the end of colonial rule (Martino, 2017:59).

### **The Emergence of Hybrid Identities and Religious Dissemination**

The sustained interaction between Nigerian migrants, local populations, and Spanish colonial authorities led to the creation of new, hybrid identities that transcended traditional ethnic and national boundaries. Over decades, Fernando Po evolved into a microcosm of transnational African identity shaped by migration, work, and cultural negotiation. These hybrid identities were neither purely African nor European but an amalgam that reflected shared experiences of colonialism and adaptation (Martino, 2016:89).

Nigerians on the island developed what Ugarte (2006:438) describes as a “plantation cosmopolitanism,” a sense of belonging that combined attachment to their homeland with an awareness of their new social environment. They were fluent in multiple languages, familiar with both African and Spanish customs, and adaptable to various social roles. This versatility was a survival strategy but also a cultural innovation that enriched both colonies.

Religious diffusion was central to this process. Catholicism spread rapidly through the migrant population, largely through the influence of Spanish missionaries and the Catholic education system (Jerónimo, 2018:39). However, Nigerians did not merely adopt Catholicism passively. They reinterpreted it through the lens of their traditional beliefs, creating forms of worship that incorporated African music, drumming, and spirit invocation. The result was a hybrid Christianity that blurred the line between imported faith and indigenous spirituality (Martino, 2020:43).

In parallel, Protestantism especially from Baptist and Methodist missions in southeastern Nigeria, also found its way to the island through migrant evangelists (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:19). Nigerian workers built makeshift churches in plantation camps, conducting services in Pidgin and local dialects. These spaces offered both spiritual comfort and social solidarity, becoming centres of community life for the migrants. The coexistence of Catholic and Protestant practices within the same colonial territory reflected the religious pluralism that migration fostered (Martino, 2012:46).

This religious blending also had political undertones. Churches often served as informal centres of resistance and communication, where workers discussed labour conditions and collective grievances under the cover of worship (Martino, 2017:61). Through sermons and hymns, ideas of freedom, equality, and divine justice circulated among migrants, subtly challenging the moral legitimacy of colonial exploitation.

Cultural hybridity was equally visible in other aspects of life. Migrant fashion blended African fabrics with European styles, while music fused Spanish guitar melodies with Nigerian rhythms. Social ceremonies became cultural melting pots where Spanish dances such as the paso doble mixed with traditional Efik and Ibibio performances. Fernando Po thus became a living experiment in cultural fusion, where colonial hierarchies were negotiated daily through music, language, and religion (Ugarte, 2006:437).

Back in southeastern Nigeria, the return of migrants accelerated the diffusion of these hybrid identities. Returnees brought with them Catholic icons, Spanish-style clothing, and European manners, which soon became markers of modernity and sophistication in local communities (Martino, 2016:100). At the same time, they shared stories of plantation life and cultural exchange, shaping local perceptions of the outside world. Over time, entire generations of southeastern

Nigerians began to view Fernando Po as an extension of their cultural geography, a distant but familiar land connected by blood, faith, and memory (Martino, 2017:57).

The hybrid identities that emerged from these migrations had long-term consequences. They blurred the rigid boundaries that colonialism sought to impose between “British” and “Spanish” Africans, creating instead a continuum of shared experience and cultural interdependence. Even after the end of colonial rule, the descendants of Nigerian migrants in Equatorial Guinea continued to identify with both worlds, maintaining cross-border kinship ties that survive to this day (Guajardo, 2023:20).

In essence, labour migration between Nigeria and Fernando Po did more than sustaining economic production, it produced new forms of humanity. Through the blending of languages, religions and customs, migrants forged an identity that transcended the colonial divide. Their lives illustrated the power of culture to adapt, resist, and transform under the pressures of empire (Martino, 2020:33).

### **The Patterns of Trade and Production System**

The colonial economic relations of Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea was characterised by highly structured patterns of trade and production, which were shaped by European economic objectives, local labour migration, and regional interdependence. While early pre-colonial trade had relied on barter systems and diversified exchanges, the colonial economy introduced monetisation, formal export channels, and cash-crop monocultures. Nigerian labour, European plantation owners, and local intermediaries became integral to a system designed to maximise resource extraction, revenue, and integration into global markets (Martino, 2016:102). Understanding the patterns of trade and production during this period requires examining key commodities, food supply networks, and the structural dependence created by cash-crop economies (Martino, 2016).

The organisation of trade and production during the colonial era reflects both continuity and transformation. Traditional trading networks, particularly those linking southeastern Nigeria and Fernando Po, persisted, but they were increasingly channeled through regulated colonial ports, documented labour flows, and formalised contracts (Martino, 2020:39). Economic policies enforced by Britain and Spain ensured that commodities such as palm oil, cocoa, and coffee were prioritised for export, while other goods particularly local foodstuffs were directed to sustain plantation communities and urban centres. This dual system illustrates how colonial administrations balanced extraction with subsistence needs, creating a complex pattern of internal and external trade flows (Ugarte, 2006:435).

### **Export Commodities and the Emergence of a Monoculture System of Production**

The colonial economic system between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea was structured around a limited set of high-value commodities, which became the backbone of export-oriented production. Palm oil, cocoa, and coffee were central to this system, forming the primary sources of revenue for both Spanish plantations and Nigerian intermediaries (Martino, 2017:58). These commodities were in high demand in European markets, where industrialisation and growing consumer demand had created lucrative opportunities for colonial producers.

Palm oil, produced primarily on plantations in southeastern Nigeria and Fernando Po, served as both a staple export and a strategic industrial commodity. It was used extensively in Europe for soap production, lubricants, and food processing (Northrup, 1976:590). Nigerian traders were often responsible for transporting palm oil to Fernando Po, where it was processed or shipped directly to Spanish ports, creating an interlinked production-export system that relied on trans-colonial labour and logistics networks (Martino, 2012:47).

Cocoa emerged as a highly profitable cash crop in Fernando Po, cultivated primarily by Spanish-owned plantations with Nigerian labourers as the workforce (Martino, 2020:26). The crop's cultivation required skilled labour and careful management of planting cycles, which further entrenched the reliance on Nigerian migrant labour. Cocoa exports were meticulously tracked

through colonial records, with customs duties and shipping schedules designed to maximise revenue while maintaining consistent supply to European markets (Martino, 2016:105).

Coffee, although less dominant than cocoa or palm oil, played a supplementary role in export revenue. Plantations on Fernando Po allocated portions of land to coffee cultivation, leveraging Nigerian labour during peak planting and harvesting seasons (Martino, 2017:65). Coffee exports were coordinated through the same maritime networks as other cash crops, illustrating the interconnected nature of colonial trade and the reliance on regulated shipping and labour systems (Ugarte, 2006:441).

The focus on these three commodities illustrates the emergence of a monoculture export system. While pre-colonial trade had been more diversified, colonial administrations prioritised high-value crops to satisfy European demand. This created economic dependency on global markets and on the seasonal availability of migrant labour, embedding structural vulnerabilities into the regional economy (Martino, 2016:107).

The emphasis on palm oil, cocoa, and coffee fostered a monoculture economic model that generated significant revenue but created systemic vulnerabilities. Both Fernando Po and Nigerian agricultural regions increasingly specialised in cash crops at the expense of local subsistence agriculture, creating dependence on global commodity prices and colonial administrative structures (Martino, 2016:112).

Monoculture also reinforced labour dependency. Plantation productivity relied on the continuous importation of Nigerian labour, particularly from the Cross River Basin and Niger Delta regions (Martino, 2020:38). Disruptions in labour supply whether due to seasonal migration patterns, desertion, or policy changes had immediate repercussions for output and export revenue. Consequently, colonial administrations invested heavily in regulatory frameworks, maritime logistics, and recruitment mechanisms to mitigate these risks (Martino, 2016:113).

Economic dependency extended to trade routes and market access. Nigerian traders and Spanish plantation owners were integrated into European trading systems, making local economies highly sensitive to fluctuations in demand and international market conditions (Ugarte, 2006:442). Price volatility, shipping delays, and wartime disruptions could jeopardise plantation profitability and affect the livelihoods of migrant workers. This dependency created a feedback loop: cash-crop monoculture required structured labour migration, which in turn necessitated robust administrative and trade systems, reinforcing the overall colonial economic framework (Martino, 2017:49).

The social consequences of monoculture were equally significant. Communities in Nigeria and Fernando Po became heavily oriented around export production, with cultural, labour, and migration patterns shaped by plantation demands (Jerónimo, 2018:57). Education, local governance, and social hierarchies were influenced by the economic imperatives of the cash-crop system, embedding structural features that persisted into the postcolonial era. These patterns illustrate how colonial trade and production were not merely economic phenomena but also drivers of social transformation and regional interdependence (Martino, 2020:47).

### **Food Trade and Supply Chains between Nigeria and Fernando Po**

While cash crops drove export revenue, food trade between Nigeria and Fernando Po was essential to sustain labourers and urban populations. Nigerian farmers supplied staples such as yams, cassava, maize, and plantains, which were transported to plantation communities and Spanish towns (Martino, 2020:47). This internal supply chain ensured that workers could survive and remain productive in a tropical environment where local production on the island was insufficient to meet demand.

Food trade also created additional commercial opportunities for Nigerian traders, who acted as intermediaries between rural producers and plantation administrators (Martino, 2016:109). These traders facilitated price negotiation, transport, and storage, while integrating local markets into the broader colonial economic framework (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:37). The reliability of these

supply chains depended on seasonal planning, labour availability, and the maintenance of maritime routes, underscoring the interconnectedness of production, migration, and trade (Martino, 2017:55).

Furthermore, food trade highlighted the social dimension of economic interdependence. Nigerian labourers often sent remittances or surplus produce to family members, reinforcing familial and communal networks across borders (Chapdelaine, 2020:14). This practice not only supplemented household income but also fostered cultural continuity, as migrants maintained connections to their home communities while contributing to the colonial economy abroad (Jerónimo, 2018:56).

The importance of food supply also created tension in economic planning. Plantation administrators had to balance export priorities with subsistence needs, occasionally diverting cash crops to feed labourers during shortages (Martino, 2020:42). These logistical and policy decisions demonstrate the complex trade-offs inherent in colonial economic systems, where human welfare, productivity, and profit were continually negotiated (Martino, 2016:110).

### **The Contributions of Indigenous and European Entrepreneurs in the Development of Nigeria-Equatorial Guinea Colonial Economic Relations**

Colonial economic relations between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea were not solely dictated by European administrations or formal treaties. Indigenous and European entrepreneurs played a pivotal role in shaping cross-border commerce, structuring trade networks, and ensuring the profitability of plantations and export systems. These actors operated within a complex web of colonial regulations, labour migration flows, and international market demands, often negotiating between local customs, European expectations, and economic opportunity (Martino, 2016:115). Understanding their role requires a careful examination of Efik and Fernandino intermediaries, Spanish planters, British firms, and African middlemen, as well as the broader processes of capital accumulation and unequal exchange inherent in colonial trade (Martino, 2016:116).

The interaction between indigenous and European entrepreneurs was highly symbiotic, albeit unequal. Indigenous intermediaries, particularly Efik traders in southeastern Nigeria and Fernandino elites on Fernando Po, leveraged their knowledge of local markets, customs, and languages to facilitate the movement of commodities and labour. Their networks were critical for linking rural producers with plantation owners, ensuring both the supply of cash crops and the deployment of Nigerian labour to Spanish plantations (Martino, 2020:47). Meanwhile, European entrepreneurs, operating through firms or as plantation owners, controlled access to international markets, capital, and shipping infrastructure, creating a hierarchical but interdependent economic system (Lovejoy and Richardson, 2004:26).

### **The role of the Efik and Fernandino Intermediaries in the maritime Commerce**

Efik traders from Calabar and surrounding areas had long-established commercial traditions predating formal colonial rule. During the colonial period, they adapted these practices to the new economic realities, acting as intermediaries in the movement of palm oil, cocoa, coffee, and foodstuffs between Nigeria and Fernando Po (Martino, 2017:64). Their extensive kinship and communal networks allowed them to recruit labour, coordinate transport, and negotiate prices with both local producers and European plantation owners. This positioned them as indispensable brokers within the colonial economy (Martino, 2016:116).

The Fernandinos, descendants of freed slaves and settlers on Fernando Po played a complementary role. With strong ties to both Spanish administrators and Nigerian traders, they mediated labour recruitment, supervised plantation work, and facilitated commercial transactions. Their bilingual and bicultural knowledge enabled them to navigate the complex social and administrative hierarchies of the colony (Jerónimo, 2018:54). Fernandino elites also invested in land and commercial ventures, consolidating wealth that derived both from European capital and indigenous labour networks.

Cross-border commerce orchestrated by Efik and Fernandino intermediaries extended beyond commodity trade. These actors facilitated remittance flows, ensured the transport of agricultural surplus, and even provided credit and logistical support to small-scale producers. Their commercial strategies combined traditional market knowledge with the opportunities and constraints imposed by colonial policy, creating hybrid forms of economic agency that bridged local and global systems (Martino, 2016:117).

However, their intermediary role was not without tension. European firms often sought to limit indigenous control over trade, enforcing licensing, taxes, and monopolistic practices to maximise profit. Efik and Fernandino traders, in response, leveraged their social networks, mobility, and intimate knowledge of production cycles to negotiate favourable terms and retain influence within the colonial economy (Martino, 2020:49). This interplay reflects the dynamic negotiation of power and agency the within the colonial trading environment.

### **Conclusion**

The 1942 Anglo–Spanish Agreement represented a watershed in the colonial economic relations between Nigeria and Spanish Guinea, creating a formal framework for labour migration, trade coordination, and administrative oversight. Unlike earlier treaties, which primarily concerned territorial claims or maritime rights, this agreement directly regulated human and economic resources across colonial boundaries. Its formulation was heavily influenced by the exigencies of World War II, shifting power dynamics in West Africa, and the pressing need to sustain plantation economies on Fernando Po. The agreement formalised recruitment procedures, standardised labour conditions, and established mechanisms for administrative collaboration between British and Spanish officials, while simultaneously highlighting the persistent challenges of enforcing equitable labour policies in a colonial context.

The 1942 Agreement arose from both economic necessity and political calculation. Spain, with its relatively small colonial administration on Fernando Po and Rio Muni, faced chronic labour shortages, exacerbated by wartime disruptions to European shipping and migration. British Nigeria, on the other hand, had a surplus of willing labourers in the Niger Delta and southeastern regions, driven by population pressures and limited local employment opportunities. The agreement therefore addressed a mutually beneficial but asymmetric relationship: Spain secured a reliable workforce for its plantations, while Britain gained control over the conditions of its subjects abroad and strengthened economic ties with its neighbour.

The Labour Agreement represented a defining moment in the long history of colonial economic relations between Nigeria and Equatorial Guinea. It was more than just a diplomatic treaty, it was a calculated response to decades of exploitation, unregulated labour flows, and colonial rivalry in the Bight of Biafra. By the early 1940s, Fernando Po had become deeply reliant on Nigerian labour to sustain its cocoa, coffee, and palm kernel plantations. The Spanish administration, unable to maintain productivity without these workers, sought a formal framework to secure continuous and legalised labour importation from British-controlled Nigeria.

However, this treaty did not emerge out of humanitarian concern for the welfare of Nigerian workers. Instead, it arose from geopolitical and economic pressures brought about by World War II, when European empires faced severe manpower shortages and logistical constraints. The British, despite being aware of Spain’s record of exploitation, found it expedient to cooperate with the Spanish authorities to maintain regional stability and to prevent mass illegal recruitment that might lead to unrest in southeastern Nigeria. The result was a treaty that sought to regularise what had long been an informal and clandestine system of labour migration.

The Labour Agreement thus became the official mechanism through which the colonial economies of Nigeria and Spanish Guinea were tied together. It represented the formalisation of an already entrenched system of dependency, where Nigerian manpower became the lifeblood of Fernando Po’s plantation economy, and Spain’s colonial ambitions were sustained through Britain’s administrative cooperation.

The agreement institutionalised and regulated labour migration by ensuring a continuous supply of labour for agriculture and commerce. It reinforced trade continuity, strengthened the foundation of hybrid communities, linguistic exchange and cultural diffusion. Nigerian migrant families and local intermediaries formed networks that transmitted not only economic knowledge but also religious, linguistic and familial practices, which facilitated economic cooperation, ease labour mobility and contributed to the resilience of regional trade system. The agreement was immense for both countries, it increases their colonial tax revenue, forged cultural ties and daily contact, which resulted in intermarriages and cultural amalgamation, producing a generation of mixed-heritage who grew up bilingual with a developed form of communication known as "Pichinglis." Marriage ceremonies, festivals and naming traditions reflected their dual heritage. Intermarriage and linguistic exchanges thus turned Fernando Po into one of the most cultural hybrid space in colonial Africa. Nigerians not only worked the land, they transformed the cultural landscape of the island, leaving traces of their culture and family life that persist long after the end of colonialism.

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