

## **FOOD CONTROL IN NIGERIA DURING WORLD WAR II, 1939-45**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines food shortage and its management in Nigeria during World War II, 1939-1945. Using primary archival sources, it argues that the 'policy' of food control was one of the preparatory steps taken months before the outbreak of the war, and that the actual practice of food control (namely, price-fixing, restriction on the movement of foodstuffs, and rationing) did not end with the war, but was extended into the post-war period due to the World Food Crisis (1946-48) that followed immediately after the Second World War was over, leading to hardship, black market, and editorials against this extension.

### **Introduction**

Food is just as important an instrument of war as guns. Food blockades and scorched-earth tactics have been used by war parties to destabilize and de-provision the army of their enemies. During the Second World War, the control, production, and access to food were used as a weapon by protagonists in the conflict.<sup>1</sup> Both the Axis and the Allies invested resources in denying their enemies access to food. The Japanese imposed a blockade on Nationalist China, while the United States in turn gradually tightened a net of submarines and mines around Japan; the British blockade of occupied Europe was matched by the German U-boat war on Allied shipping. Consequently, the prewar global food economy was thrown into disarray as demands for imports of bulky foods such as fruits dried up. Thus, securing a food supply became a central preoccupation for the governments of all the countries drawn into the conflict.<sup>2</sup> Beyond the search for new sources of supply, policies for the management and distribution of the available foodstuffs became very essential. For instance, food policy in Britain during the Second World War was characterized by extensive rationing and fair shares.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, the experience of the First World War had taught the National Socialist leadership that an adequate food supply was crucial to the maintenance of military and civilian morale. Food shortages among the soldiers on the front and the civilians at home had pushed Germany towards capitulating in 1918. It was both fear of a repeat of the disastrous decline in civilian morale and a powerful sense of the German peoples' superior entitlement to food which made the National Socialist determined that the German population would not go hungry during the war. Instead others had to go without food, leading to deliberate extermination by starvation of targeted groups.<sup>4</sup> In the Soviet Union, following the German invasion of 22 June 1941 (code-named Operation Barbarossa), the Soviet State committed the country to 'total war': it converted the entire economy to war production, rechanneled consumption into defense, and took control of the food supply. The state shuttered its retail food stores and established an elaborate rationing system to serve soldiers and civilians.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Collinson and Helen Macbeth (eds.), *Food in Zones of Conflict: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives* (New York, 2014)

<sup>2</sup> Lizzie Collingham. *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food* (New York, 2012), 8

<sup>3</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, 'Fair share? the limits of food policy in Britain during the Second World War', in Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, Rachel Duffett and Alain Drouard (eds.) *Food and War in Twentieth century Europe*. London: 2012)

<sup>4</sup> Collingham. *The taste of war*, 4-5

<sup>5</sup> Donald A. Filtzer and Wndy Z. Goldman. 'Introduction', in Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald A. Filtzer (eds.) *Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II* (Indiana, 2015), 2

In Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent, the war led to trade dislocations and scarcity of essential goods including foodstuffs. Measures to address war-time scarcity also led to wide-ranging changes in the local economy, such as the rapid development of alternative local resources and a slight shift to new products for external market.<sup>6</sup> It also accentuated the establishment of a central control system in production and circulation of goods, including foodstuffs. For instance, shortly before the outbreak of World War II, ‘military measures to be taken in peace, during the precautionary period and on the outbreak of war’ was the title of Chapter four of the Defence Scheme. Section G of the said document dealt with ‘supplies, stores, transport and barracks.’ Local resources and food supply were also discussed. In practice, a Central Food Control Committee was formed in Lagos (in July 1939) to consider ways and means of ensuring the control and maintenance of adequate supplies of foodstuffs in Nigeria in the event of the outbreak of war.<sup>7</sup> Thus, shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War in September 1939, the Central Food Control Committee was reconstituted, with Public Notice No. 13 of 1940. Wartime food control is the management of food scarcity through control and organization of food supplies and distribution to ensure that a smooth flow of provision reaches the consumers on a daily basis. This is on the assumption that the maintenance of high level of morale of the people is dependent largely on the adequacy and quality of food. Wartime food control system involved price-fixing, restriction on the movement of foodstuffs, and rationing.

Similarly, in October 1940 the West African Cocoa Control Board (WACCB) was established, and was expanded in 1942 to include other commodities (groundnuts, palm oil, palm kernel, cotton, etc) and thus crystalized into West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB). Although the use of marketing boards as instruments of control of trade in agricultural produce had been a common practice in the British Empire since the Great Depression of the 1930s (Zimbabwe in 1931 and Kenya in 1933, Colonial Empire Marketing Board in 1937), the emergence of marketing boards in West Africa was a result of the outbreak of World War II.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, this war-time control of the agricultural produce by WAPCB has been the dominant theme in literature on the impact of the Second World War on West African economy. Other aspects of control, most especially food control which was an important and the earliest component of the war-time control scheme in West Africa, have been omitted or downplayed in the historiography of war-time control in Nigeria. In what ways did the war affect food resources and their allocation in Nigeria? How did the colonial administration manage food shortage and mobilize food for the armed forces and civilian population in Nigeria? And what were the nature and effects of food control in Nigeria during the Second World War?

This study hopes to address these overarching questions as well as the lopsidedness in the historiography of the impact of the war on West Africa, using Nigeria as a case study. By so doing, it examines the impact of the Second World War on the Nigerian economy, with a

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<sup>6</sup> T. Falola, ‘“Salt is Gold”: the management of salt scarcity in Nigeria during World War II’, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 26:3 (1992), 412-436

<sup>7</sup> National Archives Ibadan (NAI)/ Department of Commerce and Industry (DCI)/1/1/4037/S.1, ‘Central Food Control Committee’, A memo from F.E. Stafford for Acting Financial Secretary, dated 2 July 1939.

<sup>8</sup> O. G. Muojama. ‘Cocoa marketing board and sustainable cocoa economy in colonial Nigeria.’ *African Economic History*, 47:1 (2019), 2; P. T. Bauer, ‘Origins of statutory export monopolies of British West Africa’, *Business History Review* 28:3 (1954), 197-213; Rod Alence, ‘Colonial government, social conflict and state involvement in Africa’s open economies: the origins of the Ghana cocoa marketing board, 1939-46’, *The Journal of African History*, 42:3 (2001), 397-416; Gavin Williams, ‘Marketing without and with marketing boards: the origins of state marketing boards in Nigeria’, *Review of African Political Economy*, 34, Market Forces (1985), 4-15; D. M. Williams, ‘West African marketing boards’, *African Affairs*, 52: 206 (1953), 47

special focus on food scarcity and its management. It explores how the Second World War orchestrated the establishment of food control in Nigeria as well as its impact on the Nigerian populace. It deals with the restriction on the movement of foodstuffs, the food rationing, and price-fixing of local foodstuffs in Nigeria during World War II, with a view to analyzing the policy and practice. The history of food situation in Nigeria before World War II is provided as a background.

The paper argues that the policy of trade control and regulation during the Second World War, of which food control blazed the trail, was a reflection of economic nationalism occasioned by the Great Depression of the 1930s. The theoretical basis for much of this was laid down by John Maynard Keynes in *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money* (1936), in which he argued that free markets, left to themselves, do not always deliver the optimal good to society, and that when employment stagnated, as it did disastrously in the Great Depression, government has to step in. However, the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944 marked what Henry Morgenthau called 'the end of economic nationalism', as the leaders of the Western World agreed that if world prosperity was to be sustained, it had to be shared, and it was the responsibility of the industrial nations to ensure that barriers were lowered in trade and finance<sup>9</sup>. Notwithstanding, in Nigeria, just like in Britain, some aspects of food control, most especially food rationing, did not end with the war in 1945, but were extended into the postwar period due to balance of payment difficulties and the World Food Crisis<sup>10</sup> (1946-48) that followed immediately after the Second World War was over, leading to hardship and some outcry from the general Nigerian public, black market and smuggling of foodstuffs, as well as reportorial and editorials by the Nigerian press against this extension of food control policy and the inconvenience associated with it.

The significance of the contribution of this study lies in expanding the historiography on the impacts of World War II on Nigeria. Extant studies on Africa and World War II have focused more on military matters, Africa's contribution to the war efforts<sup>11</sup>, as well as the war's role in instigating nationalism<sup>12</sup> and decolonization<sup>13</sup> processes in Africa. In the specific case of Nigeria, the literature is yet to move beyond general works on state intervention on the economy and the Nigeria's contributions to the war efforts.<sup>14</sup> Few studies that exist on the subject of war-time restriction scheme in Nigeria focus more on import and export control,<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Alan Greenspan. *The Age of Turbulence*. London: Penguin Books, 2007, p. 30

<sup>10</sup> NAI DCI 1-5/4037/S.65, 'World Food Crisis 1946'

<sup>11</sup> O. Njoku, 'Contributions to war efforts', in T. Falola (ed.), *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development?* (London, 1987)

<sup>12</sup> J.S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1958)

<sup>13</sup> M. Crowther, 'The Second World War'; O. A. Lawal. 'British commercial interests and the decolonization process in Nigeria, 1950-60', *African Economic History*, 22 (1994), 93-110

<sup>14</sup> R.O. Ekundare, *An Economic History of Nigeria* (London, 1973), Chapter 3; A.G. Hopkins. *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973), Chapter 7; R.E. Dumett, 'Africa's strategic minerals during the Second World War', *Journal of African History*, 26:4 (1985), 381-408; O. Njoku, 'Contributions to war efforts', in T. Falola (ed.), *Britain and Nigeria: Exploitation or Development?* (London, 1987)

<sup>15</sup> A. Olukoju, 'Buy British, sell foreign: external trade control policies in Nigeria during World War II and its aftermath, 1939-1950', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35:2-3 (2002), 364-365; O. G. Muojama, 'Buried, burnt and dumped in the sea: the untold story of cocoa destruction scheme in British West Africa during World War II', *Journal of Intra-African Studies*, 6 (2012) 68-92; O. G. Muojama. 'Cocoa export permit and quota system in Nigeria during World War II, 1939-45', *UJAH: Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities* 15:2 (2014), 53-70; O. G. Muojama, 'Cocoa co-operative societies and trade control scheme in Colonial Nigeria during World War II, 1939-1945', *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, 26: 2 (2016), 61-79

omitting or downplaying food control. Apart from Toyin Falola's works on salt and starch,<sup>16</sup> Wale Oyemakinde's brief treatment of food price control in Lagos<sup>17</sup>, and Judith Byfield's work on feeding the troops<sup>18</sup>, the impact of the war on the Nigeria's food economy, most especially, food control has not received a corresponding attention.

This study aims to shift the debate from the war effort, to the effects of the war on the economy, with a special concentration on food control. The focus on food is not to exclude other interpretations but rather to add an often overlooked dimension of the Second World War as it relates to Nigeria. It will also enable us to rethink the place of West Africa within the international political economy of the Second World War.

By so doing, the study relies essentially on primary sources for its analysis. The primary archival documents included those generated by the colonial Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Commerce and Industry (DCI), and reports of the Commissioner of Colony (COMCOL). Files of the Central Secretaries Office (CSO) as well as provincial files on food control and price fixing deposited in the National Archives Ibadan (NAI) also provided data for the historical reconstruction. Added to these were such colonial documents as the Blue Books, Annual Reports, and newspapers. The primary sources were examined not only from a historical perspective in order to identify the dynamics at play, but also from the perspective of political economy for a holistic picture.

### **Food Situation in Nigeria to the Eve of World War II**

To appreciate the wartime policy of food control in colonial Nigeria, the understanding of the state of food supply and market in the country before World War II is essential. From the available records, the situation of food had been precarious in Nigeria to the eve of the Second World War. The over-concentration of the peasantry on cash crop production was to the detriment of food crop production, leading to the shortage of food and the import of some essential commodities into Nigeria, such as rice, biscuits, bread, cake, confectionery, cheese, rice, corn meal tea, sugar, egg, fish, milk, butter, among others. For instance, the archival materials of July 1914, a month before the outbreak of World War I, contain evidence that there had been a great shortage of food in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, such that it was cheaper to import rice than to attempt to buy Guinea Corn locally.<sup>19</sup> What this means is that before the outbreak of the Great War in 1914, rice in Nigeria had been derived through coordinated import from the British Empire, most especially from Burma.

The First World War also contributed to the acute situation of food shortage. The prioritization of the military food provisioning during World War I led to the shortage of food for the civilian population. This shortage was experienced throughout the war period and partly in the post-war period. By 1914, there had been a great shortage of food in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria, while in 1918, the food situation was very acute. Rice was unobtainable except in small quantities. The food shortage of 1918 also affected the corn. It was difficult to obtain and forward corn rapidly in the then existent conditions. Corn was practicably untouchable at the

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<sup>16</sup> T. Falola, 'Cassava starch for export in Nigeria during the Second World War', *African Economic History*, 18 (1989) 73-98; Toyin Falola, 'Lebanese traders in colonial Nigeria during the Second World War', *African Affairs* 89 (1990), 523-553; Falola, '“Salt is Gold”', 412-436

<sup>17</sup> Wale Oyemakinde. 'The Pullen marketing scheme: a trial in food control in Nigeria, 1941-1947. *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 7:4 (1973), 413-423

<sup>18</sup> J. Byfield. 'Feeding the Troops: Abeokuta (Nigeria) and World War II', *African Economic History* 35 (2007), 77-87

<sup>19</sup> NAI N.1930/CSO 19/2/1414, '1. 16 Tons of Rice Required for Headquarters Kaduna, 2. Monthly supply of 16 tons rice to Kaduna, 3. Enquiring if procurable at Lagos', letter dated 14-7-1914

time. The local population was asked to economize in every way in the use of wheat flour, in order to assist in a small way in the conduct of the War.<sup>20</sup> There were indications that the wartime food shortage resulted in adulteration of food, which necessitated the enactment of “An Ordinance to make provision for the Sale of Food and Drink in a pure state.”<sup>21</sup> The wartime food shortage in Nigeria also contributed to the ‘disaffection and revolt in Southern Nigeria’<sup>22</sup>.

Shortly after the end of the First World War, the shortage of food lingered on<sup>23</sup> accentuated by the post-war economic recession, culminating in the rise in prices of commodities. Thus, the White-Capped Chiefs in Lagos expressed a wish that Government should control the price. What this means is that price-fixing which later became a component of food control during the Second World War had already been envisaged and called for even before its implementation. Similarly, the rise in price of commodities also led to the restriction of the movement of foodstuffs, which was also a component of food control during World War II. For instance, due to this high cost of Gari, its export and transportation into French Territories was prohibited.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, rules were made by Oyo Native Authority preventing the exportation of Yams and foodstuffs from Oyo (a policy which would also be reenacted during World War II). The offenders were liable to £5 fine or three months imprisonment.<sup>25</sup> As a result, permissions were required to take foodstuffs out of Nigeria. Archival materials contain such requests for permission to take certain foodstuffs (beans, corn, egwusi, garri, sheep, rams) to Accra, Ghana, and other parts of West Africa.<sup>26</sup> The difference between this interwar policy of restriction of the movement of foodstuffs and that of the Second World War was in its scope: the interwar restriction was across borders, which the wartime restriction was both internal and external.

In the 1930s, drought also contributed to the shortage of food in Nigeria. For instance, in 1936, some parts of Nigeria especially the Southern Provinces witnessed shortage of food due to poor rainfall (drought). In Onitsha Province, for instance, there was an estimation of low harvest. Yam crop was adversely affected. This situation was the same in Abakaliki Division, Owerri, Ogoja and Calabar. The same was the situation in Oyo and Abeokuta provinces. The residents of Ijebu province also experienced food shortage with exorbitant prices as a result of lack of rainfall. This brought about poor production of maize, rice and yams with 50 to 100 per cent price increase. In Ondo and Benin Provinces, rain shortage generally caused crops backwardness. The poor rain negatively affected crop yields and caused increase in prices of food.

In the Northern Provinces, there was severe drought in 1935 and 1936 between the early rains and general rains. This affected crops yield in some areas. The drought, however, broke in good time and some food crops yielded very satisfactory as far as one could envisage. This was

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<sup>20</sup> NAI N.1428/1918, ‘Maize Flour: Arrangements for the Supply of. For European Crew of Vessels—requirements’

<sup>21</sup> NAI CSO N276/1917, “The Sale of Food Ordinance.”

<sup>22</sup> Akinjide Osuntoku. *Nigeria in the First World War* (London, 1979), 100-138

<sup>23</sup> NAI B.1969/19, ‘Shortage of Local Foodstuffs re—’

<sup>24</sup> NAI B.561/1920, ‘Gari (a) Fixing of the price of, at 1/- a pan (b) Non-transportation of, to the French Territory.’

<sup>25</sup> NAI A 1695/1919, ‘Rules made by Oyo Native Authority preventing the Exportation of Yams and Foodstuffs from Oyo.’

<sup>26</sup> NAI A 198/1921, ‘Application for the permissions to ship Foodstuffs, etc to British Ports and the Cameroons, 1921’; NAI A 176/1920, ‘Application for Permission to ship petrol, Kerosene, Foodstuffs to British Ports & the Cameroons—1920’; NAI A. 1184, ‘Applications for Permission to Ship Foodstuffs, etc to Foreign Countries. 1921’

witnessed in Zaria, Sokoto, Ilorin, Bauchi, and Kano Provinces. Thus, in 1936, 1937 and 1938 Nigeria imported several foodstuffs from various countries. It was not until the 1930s when investigation into the possibility of growing rice in Nigeria began.<sup>27</sup> As a result of these efforts the rate of imports of rice continued to drop from 14, 942 tons 1936 to 7, 264 in 1939:<sup>28</sup> This in brief was the situation of food market in Nigeria when the World War II broke out in September 1939, leading to the policy of food control.

### **World War II and Control Scheme in the British Empire: the West African Experience**

Food control was a part of a central control system in production and circulation of goods. Thus, to situate the discussion within proper context, the exploration of the theory and practice of restriction and control scheme in the British Colonial Empire is essential. Theoretically, trade restriction or control is one of the means by which the volatility of primary commodity prices is stabilized. At the global level, this include the commodity agreements, while at the domestic level it include the taxonomizing stabilization scheme, the export marketing boards, and the trade taxes or quantitative restrictions.<sup>29</sup> In practice, restriction and control schemes have been ubiquitous interventions in the world economic system. Although it runs counter to the principle of free trade upon which capitalism and world economy rest, there has been occasional resort to these mechanisms by various national governments, most especially during the World Wars and the Great Depression, underpinned by Keynesian economic theory, which advocated state intervention in the economy to offset depression and unemployment in a capitalist system. Hurstfield puts it differently and arrives at the same conclusion: 'The dominant feature of British commercial life on the eve of the First World War was free trade. In attempting, therefore, to plan the supply and distribution of raw materials after the outbreak of hostilities, the government was obliged to create piecemeal, and under the stress of war, control policy and control machinery diametrically opposed to the traditional methods and organization of British trade.'<sup>30</sup> However, this was relaxed as soon as the war ended, as attempts were made to return broadly to the unregulated distribution of supplies. This attempt was quickly abandoned under the impact of the economic depression of the period. Thus, the interval between the two World Wars did not, in general, witness the resuscitation of free-trade principles and methods, but the constantly renewed efforts and experiments on the part of the traders themselves to regulate the production and sale of their commodities.<sup>31</sup> This was the essence of market-sharing agreement or pool system among firms which created some frictions between the middlemen and the firms leading to cocoa hold-up in the Gold Coast in 1937-8.<sup>32</sup> The Norwell Committee set up to investigate the matter suggested the establishment of marketing board, which was again resisted by the African middlemen in Ghana and Nigeria.

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<sup>27</sup> NAI CSO 26/28214/I/15-16, 'Rice Growing in Nigeria', by F.A Stockdale

<sup>28</sup> NAI 36378/S.24/I/26, "Food Production in the Colonial Empire during World War" Report on Food Production by J.R. Mackie, Director of Food Production and Supply dated 8 March 1941

<sup>29</sup> Odin Knudsen and John Nash. 'Domestic Price Stabilization Schemes in Developing Countries,' *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 38:3 (1990): 539; Olisa Godson Muojama. 'The international commodity restrictions and the West Africa cocoa industry during the Great Depression, 1929-1933.' *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science* 8:2 (2018): 82

<sup>30</sup> J. Hurstfield. The Control of British Raw Material Supplies, 1919-1939. *The Economic History Review*, XIV (1944):1

<sup>31</sup> Hurstfield. 'The Control'

<sup>32</sup> R. Howard. 'Differential Class participation in an African protest movement: the Ghana cocoa boycott of 1937-38,' *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 10:3 (1976), 469-480; G. Austin, 'Capitalists and Chiefs in the Cocoa hold-ups in south Asante, 1927-1938, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 21:1 (1988), 63-95; Olisa Godson Muojama, Cocoa Agreements and protest movements in colonial West Africa, 1937-1938: the Nigerian experience. *Nsukka Journal of History*, 3 (2016), 39-57; A. Olujoju. 'Confronting the combines: producers' and traders' militancy in Western Nigeria, 1934-1939,' *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 9:1 (2000), 49

However, the contingencies of the Second World War made the establishment of the marketing boards in West Africa inevitable.

Thus, following the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939, the Government introduced a scheme of trade control, which was announced by the Secretary of State for the Colonies, the aims of which were: (1) to save West African producers of export commodities (such as cocoa, palm oil, groundnuts, cotton, etc.) any possible inconvenience that might arise from the closure of some of the markets formerly open to them,<sup>33</sup> (2) to further the economic interest of the British Empire and (3) to minimize the dangers of price inflation.<sup>34</sup> A communiqué from the Nigerian Secretariat containing the text of this announcement dated 13 November 1939 stated that the British Government had undertaken, as a war measure, to purchase the whole 1939/40 crop of British West African cocoa.<sup>35</sup> In October, 1940, the Secretary of State approved the constitution of West African Cocoa Control Board (WACCB). The functions of the Board included supervising, in consultation with the Colonial Governments concerned, the purchase and marketing of the 1940/41 cocoa crop in the Gold Coast (Ghana), Nigeria and French Cameroons. It would employ, as its agents, firms and individuals normally engaged in the West African cocoa trade and would sell through them to the Ministry of Food (MF) cocoa requirements in the United Kingdom.

In this way, the crop would be handled by European and other shippers already established in the trade, who would act as agents for Government and would be paid on agreed remuneration for their services. The control scheme also included the fixing of cocoa price by the government. This removed the competitive nature of cocoa in the pre-war era to the detriment of local farmers and cooperative societies, as they were no longer able to put their cocoa out to tender. License and quota were granted to exporting firms on application. License was granted without restriction to all American countries, to Portugal, Turkey, France, French colonies and protectorates, Egypt and to Iraq; it was also granted at the discretion of the Governor to other non-European countries with the exception of Japan, Russia and China. License was refused for any substantial consignments to European destinations other than to France and Portugal. In the case of quota system, each shipper was allotted a share of the total purchase based, broadly speaking, in case of larger shippers, on purchase over the last three seasons and in case of smaller shippers, many of whom have only recently entered the trade, on last season purchases.<sup>36</sup> In 1942, WACCB was expanded to include other produce (groundnuts, palm oil, palm kernel, cotton, etc), leading to its metamorphosis into West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB).<sup>37</sup>

Beyond the wartime produce control, characterized by the West African Produce Control Board (WAPCB), which has been the dominant theme in literature, there was also the much-neglected food control scheme, the experiment of which preceded the wartime produce control scheme in West Africa.

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<sup>33</sup>*The Nigerian Daily Times*, Thursday, 30 May 1940, 12

<sup>34</sup>*The Nigerian Daily Times*, Thursday, 16 November, 1939, 8

<sup>35</sup> See Press Notice from Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos dated 14 February 1940, NAI 36148/S.24/18

<sup>36</sup>*West African Pilot*, Lagos Wednesday, 15 November 1939, p.6; Olisa Godson Muojama. 'Cocoa Co-operative societies' 73-75

<sup>37</sup> O. G. Muojama, 'Cocoa marketing board and Sustainable Cocoa Economy in Colonial Nigeria', *African Economic History* Vol.47. No.1 (2019)1-31

## **Food Control in Nigeria during World War II**

Food control was a component of the Defence Regulations of 1939, a compendium of war-time control systems, comprising Import Control, Export Control, Price Control, Motor Transport and Allied Control, Petrol and Oil Control.<sup>38</sup> The preparatory steps for food control in Nigeria were based on the following assumptions: (i) that war would break out in a year when there was a partial famine in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria caused by either drought or locust or both; (ii) that shipping would be dislocated for some months and that there would, therefore, be little possibility of obtaining large quantities of foodstuffs from elsewhere with any degree of rapidity; (iii) that the Mediterranean Sea route might be closed and that there might, therefore, be urgent demand for Nigeria's surplus products at short notice.<sup>39</sup>

The significance of the foregoing assumptions is that Nigeria itself should be self-supporting, and have the greatest possible quantity of produce for the provisioning of the Allied Forces in West Africa and the civilian population as well as for export and 'for bumper reserves in anticipation of emergencies like drought, locust invasion, or army demand'.<sup>40</sup> It also suggests that throughout Nigeria, there should be a properly organized reserve of foodstuffs and that this should be arranged before war broke out. Thus, before the outbreak of the war, the Governor of Nigeria had appointed a Central Advisory Committee on Food Control to consider ways and means of ensuring the control and maintenance of adequate supplies of food in Nigeria in the event of the outbreak of war.<sup>41</sup> Besides, a Central Food Control Committee<sup>42</sup> was formed in Lagos to consider ways and means of ensuring the control and maintenance of adequate supplies of foodstuffs in Nigeria in the event of the outbreak of war.<sup>43</sup> The committee considered firstly stimulating the production of food in Nigeria and recommended especially increasing the cultivation of rice, sugar, wheat, milk, butter and green vegetables. The committee also recommended encouraging increased production of salt in Nigeria. Before the Committee was able to proceed to consideration of methods of control of the prices and distribution of food, the war broke out in September 1939.<sup>44</sup>

According to the Defense (Control of Imports) Regulations, No.67 of 29 December 1939, the importation of foodstuffs from foreign countries was prohibited, with the following exceptions: beer, beef, fish (dried), fish (canned), flour, meat (canned), oil (edible), spirits (potable) other than rum and whisky, Sugar, tea, vegetables. The Regulation also noted it was essential that the public should recognize the urgent need for increasing local production of foodstuffs, and of vegetables in particular; and that each individual who reduced their demands for imported foodstuffs by the substitution of local produce was materially assisting to relieve the increasing

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<sup>38</sup> 'Memorandum on the Organization and Control of War Time Trade and Production,' Nigeria Supply Board Lagos, 31 December 1942. In NAI CSO 26 DCI 38674/S.64, 'Bulking: Control Legislations: General'.

<sup>39</sup> NAI DCI 1/1/4037, Vol.II, 'Maintenance of Food Supplies'

<sup>40</sup> Wale Oyemakinde, 'The Pullen market scheme: a trial in food price control in Nigeria, 1941-1947', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, 6:4 (1973), 414

<sup>41</sup> NAI DCI 1/1/4037, Vol.II, 'Maintenance of Food Supplies'

<sup>42</sup> The Committee was to be composed of The Attorney-General (Chairman); the Legislative Council Member for Shipping; the Legislative Council Member for Lagos [Also the General Manager of the United African Company Limited, should he not be the Commercial member]; the Director of Agriculture; The Deputy Financial Secretary; the Commissioner of the Colony; One Syrian and one African member who should be selected on the advice of the Commissioner of the Colony. NAI DCI/1/1/4037/S.1, 'Central Food Control Committee', A memo signed by F.F. Wilkinson, Clerk, Executive Council. Also see Public Notice 44 of 1939

<sup>43</sup> NAI DCI/1/1/4037/S.1, 'Central Food Control Committee', A memo from F.E. Stafford for Acting Financial Secretary, dated 2 July 1939.

<sup>44</sup> 'Memorandum on the Organization and Control of War Time Trade and Production,' Nigeria Supply Board Lagos, 31 December 1942. In NAI CSO 26 DCI 38674/S.64, 'Bulking: Control Legislations: General'.



burden which, under wartime conditions, the British government, British shipping and the British community generally were called upon to bear.<sup>45</sup>

With Public Notice No. 13 of 1940, the Central Food Control Committee of the pre-war period was reconstituted.<sup>46</sup> The food control was an integral part of the organization and control of war time trade and production, effected through a special war time department known as the West African Supply Centre<sup>47</sup>, domesticated in Nigeria as the Nigeria Supply Board.<sup>48</sup> The duties of the Control were:

- (a) To draw up the import quotas for such foodstuffs as were still obtained from the United Kingdom or outside sources.
- (b) The rationing of food.
- (c) The supervision and, where necessary, organizing the flow of native foodstuffs to the main consumption centres.
- (d) The provision of the requirements in locally produced foodstuffs for the Army, Royal Air Force and the American Forces.<sup>49</sup>

In terms of organization, the Food Controller (Lagos) was responsible for supervising and, where necessary, organizing, in conjunction with the Residents in charge of Provinces and the Chief Marketing Officer of the Agricultural Department, the flow of native foodstuffs to the main consumption centres. The Residents were Deputy Food Controllers acting under the direction of the Food Controller. Where normal channels of supply fail to function adequately, bulk purchases were made on Government account for distribution through the retail markets. The war time food control manifested in various ways, namely, price-fixing/regulations, restrictions on the movement of foodstuffs, registration and rationing, with tremendous effects on the local communities. These components of food control and their effects on the population will be examined consecutively.

### ***Control of the Prices of Foodstuffs***

In theory, all Colonial Governments had found it necessary in wartime to regulate prices and to try to control in various other ways the ordinary commercial processes of distributing goods. In British West Africa, the philosophy of control of prices during wartime was outlined in the memorandum by the West African Supply Centre.<sup>50</sup> The aim of price control was to compensate the African for their contribution to the British war effort in produce and labour. If the goods were underpriced at sale by the importer, the Supply Centre would not be getting the full benefit from them. If they were overpriced they might be doing harm. It would, therefore, seem that the prices of goods to the producer should be as high as he was prepared to pay for them so that the minimum quantity of goods was employed in relieving him of the money he had earned.

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<sup>45</sup> NAI DCI/ 4036, 'Imports of Foodstuff Control of', Gazette 85, Govt. Notice No.176, 'Importation of Foodstuffs from the UK'. J.J. Emberton, Food Controller, 27/2/1940

<sup>46</sup> Membership included: Mr. C.W.W. Greenidge Esq. (Chairman). Food Controller; G.H. Avezatthe, Shipping Member of Legislative Council; A.E.V. Barton, Comptroller of Customs; Dr. G. Bryce, Acting Director of Agriculture; Mr. Jubril Martin Esq., Barrister at Law; F.J. Nabham, Merchant; C.H.L. Richardson, Acting General Manager, United African Company; F.E. Stafford, Acting Deputy Financial Secretary; E.M.L. Watson Esq., Chief Inspector of Produce; J.F. Winter, Commercial Member for Lagos Legislative Council; H.S.A. Thomas, First Lagos Member; O.A. Alakija, Third Lagos Member. Mr. J.F. Winter was appointed Honourable Commercial Adviser to the Food Controller

<sup>47</sup> NAI CSO DCI 4031/IV/369, 'Control of Merchandise Prices'

<sup>48</sup> 'Memorandum on the Organization and Control of War Time Trade and Production,' printed by the Government Printer Lagos, 1943. In NAI CSO DCI 38674/S. 64, 'Bulking: Control Legislation: General'

<sup>49</sup> 'Memorandum on the Organization'

<sup>50</sup> NAI CSO DCI 4031/IV/369, 'Control of Merchandise Prices'

This was on the understanding that his effort would decline with an increase in the money he retained.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand if the employee's cost of living increased, agitation for increased wages would follow naturally. But if the consumer, whether independent producer or employee, had in fact to pay a black-market price for price controlled lines or a price which gave the middlemen an excessive profit in the case of non-controlled lines, there was waste: the goods were not being used to the utmost extent in mopping up spending power since the black market profits were left in African hands to help inflation and to hinder production. In the case of real necessities there would seem to be only one possible policy, namely, to make them available at the cheapest price and to concentrate price control efforts on them.<sup>52</sup> Thus, in order to ensure the maintenance of adequate supplies and stores in Nigeria, prices and consumption would be controlled.<sup>53</sup> The manipulation of price control of imported goods was also as an aid to absorbing surplus spending power,<sup>54</sup> and to allow a fair and reasonable profit.

Discussion with officials and non-officials reveal a wide divergence of views. All Chief Commissioners and the Commissioner of the Colony expressed themselves in favour of control of prices, arguing that firms should be compelled, as in the case of foodstuffs, to sell off their prewar stocks of certain articles at prewar prices and that it was permissible by ordinary rules of commerce to relate prices to the cost of replacing present stocks.<sup>55</sup> The Lagos Chamber of Commerce was naturally opposed to such action and was supported by the Comptroller of Customs. Their argument against control were that there was sufficient competition to ensure the maintenance of reasonable prices; that an efficient system of control could not be imposed without incurring expense which would be disproportionate to the result achieved; that the fixing of maximum profits would in some cases have the effect of raising prices; that stocks would be immediately exhausted if prewar prices for prewar goods became obligatory, with the result that establishments would have to be closed down and staffs dismissed; and that increased profits were essential to cover the reduced turn-over which would result from curtailment of supplies.

In the specific case of foodstuffs, it was noted that famine in the grain areas might necessitate a special organization at the later stage of a war. In this event, the Government would initiate such portions of the Famine Relief Scheme of 1927, as might be necessary to meet the case. The basis of this scheme was that the supply of foodstuffs to the civil population was best assured by regulating prices rather than by attempting to move food in large quantity from one area to another.<sup>56</sup> Supply to the European population would be controlled by legislation regulating the prices at which articles might be sold and authorizing the confiscation of all or any foodstuffs held to the prejudice or detriment of the public. The regular supply of foodstuffs to the civil population could best be ensured by fixing a price at which foodstuffs would be sold. This price, while not being too excessive for the purchaser, should be sufficient to encourage producers to cultivate large areas.<sup>57</sup> Prices of foodstuffs were to be fixed by the Food Controller in accordance with Regulation 80 of regulations 32 of 1939, published in the Supplement to Gazette No. 48 of 1939, and in exercise of the powers conferred upon him by regulation No. 140 of the Nigeria General Defence Regulations, 1941, in accordance with a

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<sup>51</sup> NAI CSO DCI 4031/IV/369, 'Control of Merchandise Prices,' From the Deputy Chairman West African Supply Centre dated 3.2.43

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> NAI DCI 1/1/ 4037 Vol. I, 'Maintenance of Supplies: Foodstuffs'

<sup>54</sup> NAI CSO DCI 4031/IV/369, "Control of Merchandise Prices"

<sup>55</sup> NAI CSO 26 DCI 4031/I/49, "Control of Merchandise Prices"

<sup>56</sup> NAI DCI 1/1/ 4037 Vol. I, 'Maintenance of Supplies: Foodstuffs'

<sup>57</sup> NAI DCI 1/1/ 4037 Vol. I, 'Maintenance of Supplies: Foodstuffs' p.4

percentual fomula, which was a percentage yield on turnover. It applied both to Head Office expenses and Coast profit margins. The great majority charges were fixed monthly recurrent things. The prices of other merchandise were controlled in accordance with Regulations No. 5 of 1940, published in the Supplement to Gazette No. 5 of 1940.

The food price control scheme itself began in 1941 under the direction of Captain A. P. Pullen whose name was promptly attached to the operation which soon became the focus of press and public attack. The initial device was the publication of orders stipulating maximum selling prices for foodstuffs in Lagos.<sup>58</sup>In Lagos Colony, the price of salt was controlled by the “(Lagos) Price Control (No.2) Order, 1942, and was applied to the Township of Lagos from 15 April 1942.<sup>59</sup> Other commodities whose prices were controlled in Lagos Colony included wheat flour<sup>60</sup> and sugar<sup>61</sup>, among other local foodstuffs, such as gari, maize, beans, rice, melon seed (egusi), coconuts, eggs, dried fish, palm oil, meat, and vegetable.<sup>62</sup> Similarly, starting from 27 February 1941 Edward Gerald Hawkesworth, Resident and Deputy Food Controller for the Abeokuta Province fixed the following maximum retail prices for the sale of the Gari, Palm Oil, meat, melon seed (egwuai), yam flour, native rice, cowpeas, maize, coconut oil, egusi oil, and shea butter.<sup>63</sup>

In Oyo division the prices of salt, yams, yam flour, gari, corn, and beans were also regulated<sup>64</sup> As a result, the salt sellers started to profiteer on salt and there were some case awaiting issue of criminal summons. There were also a few cases where, it was noticed, passengers transporting a huge number of bags of salt via Oyo to Ogbomosho road and some to Iseyin and Oyo to sell privately.<sup>65</sup>The prices of grain had been controlled by Residents concerned, and most provinces had a controlled price list of the more important local foodstuffs, which was amended from time to time. Four price Inspectors were appointed in Lagos and, it was expected that there would be further such appointments in other parts of the country.<sup>66</sup>Price fixtures were not static over seasons, but were revised by Pullen and his team from time to time.

The wartime price control was attended by some challenges, thus rendering it largely ineffective. For instance, there were insufficient means to effect the official orders which would have taken an enormous bureaucracy to enforce.<sup>67</sup>There were also reactions from various sections of the population. The market women refused to cooperate with the scheme which for all practical purposes would have cut the ground under their feet. The prospective buyers felt that the officialdom was unrealistic in its price legislation, coupled with arbitrariness that featured in price-fixing without taking into account the issues involved such as transportation. There was the suspicion that food price control reduced the volume of supplies by discouraging the farmers from further production.<sup>68</sup> The West African Pilot condemned the policy of price-

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<sup>58</sup> Oyemakinde. ‘The Pullen’, 416

<sup>59</sup> NAI COMCOL 2283/S.10 Vol. II, ‘Salt Rationing.’

<sup>60</sup> NAI COMCOL 2283/S.24, ‘Prices of Flour’

<sup>61</sup> NAI COMCOL 2283/S.25, ‘Sugar Prices.’

<sup>62</sup> NAI COMCOL 2516/p.6, ‘Price of Local Foodstuffs,’ Public Notice by Assistant Food Controller dated 17 February 1941.

<sup>63</sup> NAI COMCOL 2516/p.10, “Price of Local Foodstuffs”

<sup>64</sup> NAI OD 767/Vol. 5, ‘Native Foodstuffs: Control of’

<sup>65</sup> NAI OD 767/Vol.6/p.532, “Native Foodstuffs: Control of”

<sup>66</sup> NAI 37909/S.14/C.1, ‘Food Control: West African War Council’, Memorandum Submitted by the Supply Centre to the Resident Minister on the Subject of Military Food Requirements. Appendix C

<sup>67</sup> NAI 37909/S.14/C.1, ‘Food Control: West African War Council’, Memorandum Submitted by the Supply Centre to the Resident Minister on the Subject of Military Food Requirements. P.2

<sup>68</sup>NAI DCI 1/1/ 4037 Vol. I, ‘Maintenance of Supplies: Foodstuffs’

fixing in its editorial of 16 October 1942, describing it as an unrealistic approach to addressing food shortage. The Oyingbo Market Women Association condemned food price control in Lagos as a useless scheme which should be abrogated, arguing that seasonal variations in supplies determined price fluctuation and that the price structure operating in Lagos was a reflection of the cost at the producing areas which government had not dared to influence.<sup>69</sup>In a letter to the Inspector of Prices dated 13 August 1942, Ernest Ikoli noted that the whole system before price control was so nicely balanced that prices adjusted themselves by the laws of supply and demand, arguing that the only possible effect of a prolongation of control would be eventual restriction of supplies to the disadvantage of all.<sup>70</sup>The Lagos Women's League also petitioned the Governor asking for his protection against food price control which sought to remove the basis of their livelihood, arguing that farmers were selling above pre-war prices and that they must add rising transport cost and some profit margin before arriving at the selling price in Lagos.<sup>71</sup>

In effect, instead of solving the problem created by the scarcity of foodstuffs, the price control scheme complicated the situation. It reduced the volume of supplies by discouraging the farmers from further production of foodstuff and diversion to cash crop production. It affected non-food items by way of externalities. It also introduced an element of panic into the crisis, leading to proliferation of legislation which prohibited private sale and movement of foodstuffs outside local administrative frontiers.

### ***Restrictions on the movement of foodstuffs***

The restriction of the movement of foodstuffs was one of the effects of the wartime price control. In order to appreciate the implications of food control for foodstuff movement, a brief analysis of production of space is essential. The staple food supplies of colonial Nigeria might be divided into the following categories:

- a. Grain: Grown throughout the Northern Provinces, the chief area being north of the Rivers Niger and Benue, but small quantities of maize were raised in the Southern Provinces.
- b. Root crops: Yams, cocoyam, sweet potatoes and cassava (Gari) were grown throughout the Southern Provinces and as far North as Zungeru in the Northern Provinces.
- c. Tree-crops: oil palm, banana, plantain, etc. were grown in southern Nigeria
- d. Leafy plants: Various families of leafy plants, legumes and bulbs, such as pepper, pumpkin, okro, beans and vegetables were also planted in southern Nigeria. However, beans and vegetables were also grown in the north.
- e. Cattle: These were available in Northern Provinces, chiefly in Sokoto Province, Borno Province, Adamawa Province, and in transit through Kano Province.<sup>72</sup>
- f. Rice: Investigation into the possibility of growing rice in Nigeria began in the 1930s. The rice work at Sokoto, northern Nigeria, made progress.<sup>73</sup> Kworre grew rice as a wet season crop. Baro-Pategi Area was already an important rice growing area and

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<sup>69</sup> NAI Com. Col. 1, 2516/1

<sup>70</sup> NAI, Com. Col. 1, 2516 Vol. 1, Ernest Ikoli to the Inspector of Prices, 13 August 1942, 231

<sup>71</sup> *Daily Times*, 6 June 1943, Also see Oyemakinde. 'The Pullen', 420

<sup>72</sup> NAI DCI 1/1 4037 Vol. I, "Maintenance of Supplies: Foodstuffs" p.2

<sup>73</sup> NAI CSO 26/28214/I/15-16, "Rice Growing in Nigeria", by F.A Stockdale

comprised the rice growing district of Niger Province in Bida Emirate (Bida and Agaie flats, the River Kaduna banks) and the Lafiagi-Pategi area of Ilorin Province. Upland Rice was also grown in various parts of Nigeria for example in Abeokuta Province, in the Agede area of Benin Province and in Hadeji Emirate in Kano Province.<sup>74</sup>

In line with food control scheme, there were restrictions on the movement of foodstuffs. This was a repeat of what transpired in the 1920s, shortly after the First World War when the movement of foodstuffs outside Nigeria was prohibited. But following the outbreak of World War II, the prohibition of movement of foodstuffs was reenacted and extended to 'within' the country. This was to make sure that the country would be self-sufficient in foodstuffs and be able to supply both the troops and the civilian public.

A public notice of the Regulations and Proclamation governing the sale of Foodstuffs and Exports was released by P. V. Young, Chairman of Control Committee, station the following:

1. No sale of European imported Food-stuffs is to be made by the European firms at Ibara or Lafenwa, except by retail.
2. Sale of European imported Food-Stuffs could not be made without a Permit from the Commissioner of Abeokuta.
3. Price of European imported Food-stuffs are fixed at 7 ½ per cent above the current prices as from the 1<sup>st</sup> day of August, 1914, and sale of European imported foodstuffs by Native Traders is fixed at 10 per cent above the European prices at Ibara or Lafenwa.
4. The retail price of a case of Kerosine by European Firms at Ibara or Lafenwa shall not exceed 14/- and not exceeding 15/- by Native Traders.
5. Trade of Spirits and Tobacco can be sold without any restriction.
6. The exportation of all stock and native foodstuffs such as Cattle, Sheep, Goats, Fowls, & c., alive or dead; yams, Farina, Maize, Beans, (differnet kinds), Pepper, Onions, Coco Yams, Sweet Potatoes, & c., is prohibited from Egband and the price of such animals and commodities should not rise higher that the ordinary market price was on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of August, 1914.
7. All applications for purchase of European Food-stuffs are to be made, in the first instance, to the European Firm concerned, and if such Food-stuffs are available they will certify the Commissioner to that effect, who will, upon such certificate, issue a Permit.
8. All applications for permits shall be made to the Commissioner at his Office, Igbein Hill, from 8 to 11 a.m., and 2 to 3 p.m. each day.<sup>75</sup>

For instance, in June 1941, in exercise of the powers vested in the competent Authority by Regulations 80 of the Nigeria Defence Regulations 1939 (No. 32 of 1939), the Farina (Gari), Maize and Yams Movement Control Order 1941 was made. By so doing, the export of Farina (Gari), Maize and Yams from Abeokuta Province was prohibited except under permit signed by the Competent Authority. This Order signed by A.P. Pullen, Resident Abeokuta Province, was to take effect on 11 June 1941.<sup>76</sup> This was followed by the Paddy and Clean Rice Movement and Control Order 1941, prohibiting the export of Paddy and Clean rice from Abeokuta Province.

As a result of these prohibitions, on 11 April 1942, the Resident, Abeokuta Province wrote to the Food Controller, Lagos, requesting him to speak to the Commissioner of Police, Lagos, and

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<sup>74</sup> NAI 36378/S.10/I/6, "Increased Local Production of Rice", Agricultural Department, War Organisation production of Rice, Agricultural Department dated 12 September 1939

<sup>75</sup> NAI W/48/14, "Trading By Enemy Subjects –to be stopped."

<sup>76</sup> DCI/1/1/4038/Vol. I, 'Restrictions on Movement of Foodstuffs'

urge the necessity of police posts being so arranged as to examine permits for export of foodstuffs, especially, Colony/Abeokuta Boundary—Ijebu-Ode/Abeokuta Boundary, Abeokuta/Ibadan Boundary, against only a post proposed to be erected within a mile of Abeokuta.

In his letter to the Commissioner of Police, Lagos, dated 15 April 1942, the Food Controller, R.J. Hook, noted that the Resident, Abeokuta was requesting grain (rice and maize) to meet Military and other requirements outside the Province, and was naturally anxious that there should be no exports in defiance of the ‘Prohibition of Movement’ Orders. In his response, dated 17 April 1942, the Commissioner of Police noted that while he appreciated the anxiety of the Resident to prevent export of grain in defiance of the order, he must point out that he could not suddenly produce ‘police posts’ at the request of individual Residents, maintaining that he had received instructions from Government (Nigeria Supply Board) to establish eight traffic control posts in the Western Provinces as soon as possible on sites selected by the Transport Control Officer appointed by the Board. This involved the selection of 16 trained non-commissioned officers and 48 men, the building of quarters, posts, etc, erection of barriers and many other aspects not readily apparent to those who did not deal with these matters. He considered it a waste of trained Nigerian Police personnel to establish posts merely for the purpose of examining permits. In his opinion, the work could equally be done by Native Authority Police, with some supervision.<sup>77</sup>

From Abeokuta, the wave of prohibition of the movement of foodstuffs spread like a wild fire across other provinces of Nigeria, such as in Oyo Division,<sup>78</sup> Sokoto and Kano Provinces, among others, as depicted in Fig. 1 below:

**Fig. 1: Restriction of movement of foodstuffs**

Province	Foodstuff	Order	Officer	Date of Effect
Abeokuta	Farina (Gari), Maize and Yams		A.P. Pullen, Resident Abeokuta Province	11 June 1941
Abeokuta	Paddy and Clean rice	the Paddy and Clean Rice Movement and Control Order 1941		23 September 1941
Sokoto	Rice	Public Notice No. 83 of 1942, Gazette No. 22 of 16/4/1942	John H. Carrow, Residen, Sokoto Province	1 April 1942
Kano Province	Maize			May 1942
Oyo Province	Maize		A. R. A. Dickins, Acting Resident, Oyo Province	1 September 1942

<sup>77</sup> DCI/1/1/4038/Vol. I, ‘Restrictions on Movement of Foodstuffs’

<sup>78</sup> NAI OD 767 Vol. 1-6, ‘Native Foodstuffs: Control of’

Sokoto Province	Guinea Corn and Millet	Public Notice No. 227 Gazette No 51 of 3.9.42, the Guinea Corn and Millet (Prohibition of Removal from Sokoto Province) Order 1942	John H. Carrow, Resident, Sokoto Province	1 August 1942
Oyo Province	Yam, Yam Flour, Rice and Guinea Corn	Public Notice No. 246 of 1942 Gazette No. 54 of 17.9.42, the Yam, Yam Flour, Rice and Guinea Corn (Prohibition of Removal from Oyo Province) Order 1942		15 September 1942
Sokoto Province	Dried fish and Onions			
Ondo Province	maize, yams, rice and Guinea Corn			
Kabba	Corn			
Adamawa	Guinea Corn and Rice			
Onitsha Province	Yam		D.P.J O'Conner, the Resident of Onitsha Province	

One of the effects of the restriction of the flow of foodstuffs was a rise in price of maize at Badagry from 2 ½ d to 9d per Olodu. It also affected adversely the income of the local farmers, leading to reaction by the local population. For instance, in Oyo Division, the Bale in Council of Igbeti petitioned the District Officer, Oyo Division, requesting for the exemption of their people in respect of the Order which they received through Court Clerk, namely, that no foodstuffs of any kind should be sold to Ilorin. According to the petition:

We have a market every fifth day and Lorries come out from Ilorin bringing traders who buy up food here and sold it in Ilorin. Some of our people also take their own foodstuffs to Ilorin for sale. The road through Igbeti must need go through Ilorin Province and part of Ilorin town before it joined any road to other parts of Oyo Province. The only other alternative is the long way round Kishi, Igboho, Isehin, Oyo road. If our produce may not be sold in Ilorin, then our people may not be able to raise their tax money this year: for, if our food must

be transported to other large centres in Oyo Province for sale, the cost of transportation will make it impossible for us to sell our produce at a profit.<sup>79</sup>

Added to these was the practice of smuggling of foodstuffs from one part of the country to another, which the policy of restriction of the movement of foodstuffs engendered. Worried by the frenzy with which the issue of restriction was pursued by various provinces, the Food Controller, Lagos, R.J. Hook wrote a letter, dated 10 June 1942, to the Assistant Food Controllers of Northern, Eastern, and Western Provinces as well as the Colony of Lagos, requesting that before the issue of any Order restricting the movement of foodstuffs from their provinces, Residents of other Provinces which might possibly be affected by such an Order might be notified of the intention.<sup>80</sup>

Thus, on 16 June 1942 the Food Controller wrote to the Resident, Abeokuta Province, directing that all export restriction be removed temporarily in Abeokuta Province. Also on 20 June 1942, the Food Controller wrote to the Resident, Oyo Province, stating that there had been a rise in price of maize at Badagry from 2 ½ d to 9d per Olodu, and, therefore, asked the Resident to suspend the Order prohibiting the movement of grain, most especially maize.<sup>81</sup>

The suspension order had no effect. The suspension of prohibition which took place in the South did not affect the Northern Provinces.

### ***Registration and Rationing***

Another component of the food control scheme was the rationing of commodities. Owing to the fact that production of articles in ordinary use in peacetime had to be strictly restricted in order to give freer scope for the production of essential articles, especially those necessary for the prosecution of the war, it necessarily followed that some system of rationing should be instituted in order to ensure fair distribution of available supplies.<sup>82</sup> The rationale for rationing was outlined by Geoffrey J. Amachree in his article, "The Economics of Price Control" published in *The Nigerian Daily Times* of Friday, 15 May 1942:

....There is the risk that where the supply is inadequate at the existing maximum price, some buyers will resell the commodity to other buyers who are willing to pay the higher price. Some buyers will buy more than they want in order to sell at a profit, and other would-be buyers in dire need of the article may, therefore, be deprived of supplies. To avoid such a state of affairs, the government usually resorts to rationing, as was done last year when there was shortage of salt throughout Nigeria.<sup>83</sup>

Lizzie Collingham puts it differently and arrived at the same conclusion: 'In theory, rationing systems were designed to prevent hoarding and to ensure that fair and equal distribution of food, in other words, to protect the entitlement to food of all sections of the population. In practice, a more passive process of exclusion and denial could be observed at work.'<sup>84</sup>

Under local conditions, the rationing of individual consumption could be carried out only in the case of Europeans and those Africans who had adopted European standard of life, namely,

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<sup>79</sup> NAI OD 767/Vol.6/576, 'Native Foodstuffs: Control of'

<sup>80</sup> DCI/1/1/4038/Vol. I, 'Restrictions on Movement of Foodstuffs'

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> NAI DCI 4037/S.32/C.5, 'Food Control: Registration and Rationed Commodities, Exemptions Form'

<sup>83</sup> Geoffrey J. Amachree, 'The Economics of Price Control,' *The Nigerian Daily Times*, Friday, 15 May 1942.

Also see NAI CSO DCI 4031 Vol. III, "Control of Merchandise Prices" p.302

<sup>84</sup> Collingham. *The taste of war*, 11



the African educated elites.<sup>85</sup> A Certificate of Registration was issued to Market Sellers. Except a market seller obtained a certificate of registration from the Competent Authority, no person should deal in rationed commodities.<sup>86</sup>

The items subject to rationing included Whisky (4 bottles per person monthly, 6 bottles per married couple monthly), Gin (5 bottles per person monthly, 7 bottles per married couple monthly), Butter (½ lb per person every ten days), Milk (7 tins per person per week, 10 tins per household of two), Flour (10 lb imported flour per person monthly and 5 lb local flour per person monthly).<sup>87</sup> In the case of local salt produced in Nigeria, the country could not even supply internal demand<sup>88</sup>, leading to the rationing of salt, most especially in Lagos Colony. The ration was based on the approved diet for prisoners. They were allowed 1 lb for 80 prisoners each day. When salt rationing was first started a miscalculation was made with the result that 591 “Market Sellers” certificates were issued instead of 221. These certificates were valid for six months unless the holder committed an offence. In fact 103 were cancelled on account of offences. The remaining 486 were allowed to run the full six months.<sup>89</sup> In Oyo Division, salt was rationed, and the ration was one tin level for each tax payer.<sup>90</sup>

The operation of rationing in Nigeria was similar to what obtained in the United Kingdom. For instance, the British flat-rate rationing system made insufficient allowances for differential needs and food shortages hit some social groups harder than others. Sacrifice was not equally shared between classes or between men and women and official distribution channels were bypassed in the black market.<sup>91</sup> In the case of Nigeria, individuals were issued ration cards which would enable them to obtain the specified quantity of the rationed commodities, with the exception of the Chief Secretary and Chief Commissioners who were not subject to rationing. The manager of the Kingsway Stores was advised that supplies of rationed commodities should be made available to the mentioned officers without producing ration cards or permits. A record was kept of the supplies issued and forwarded periodically to the Commissioner of the Colony in order to obviate difficulties when stocks were being checked.<sup>92</sup>

Just like in Britain, after the war ended, rationing continued. According to Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘after the war, most people could not understand why rationing could not at least be relaxed. The world food crisis, balance of payments difficulties, and the need to feed the starving Germans were used by ministers as justification not only for the retention of controls, but for the introduction of bread rationing which had not been considered necessary during the war itself.’<sup>93</sup> In Nigeria, some commodities like gin were taken off the ration list, while others such as milk, flour, and whisky remained rigidly rationed, leading to some outcry from the general public for the suspension of rationing. This outcry was encapsulated in the editorial of *The Nigerian Daily Times* of Tuesday January 29, 1946. According to the article, although this rationing system gave rise to a certain amount of inconvenience, it was generally admitted that it could not be helped, and all concerned accepted it as unavoidable and therefore loyally and

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<sup>85</sup> Appendix C to the ‘Memorandum on the Organization’

<sup>86</sup> NAI COMCOL 2283/s.10 Vol. II, ‘Salt Rationing.’

<sup>87</sup> Appendix C to the ‘Memorandum on the Organization’

<sup>88</sup> NAI 37909/S.14/II, ‘Military Requirements of Local Foodstuffs: 1944 Requirements.’

<sup>89</sup> NAI COMCOL 2283/s.10 Vol. II, ‘Salt Rationing.’

<sup>90</sup> NAI OD 767/Vol.5, ‘Native Foodstuffs: Control of’

<sup>91</sup> Zweiniger-Bargielowska, ‘Fair share?’, 125

<sup>92</sup> NAI DCI 4037/S.32/C.5, ‘Food Control: Registration and Rationed Commodities, Exemptions Form’, From Director of Supplies to the General Manager, United Africa Company Ltd., Lagos dated 16 June 1945

<sup>93</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska. *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls, and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford and New York, 2000)

dutifully submitted to it. The general expectation, however, was that immediately after the war was over, all these restrictions would be lifted and free scope would once again be restored for everyone to purchase their requirements just as they desired. Unfortunately, the effect of the prolonged occupation by Nazi Germany of the defeated countries in Europe and the systematic process of fleecing which accompanied that occupation (resulting in the denudation of these countries of practically all the essential amenities of life) had made it necessary that the peoples of the areas concerned should be provided, as far as the circumstances permit, of comforts and amenities of which they had been deprived during the Nazi occupation.

### **Conclusion**

The effects and changes associated with the Second World War II were far-reaching. In West Africa, and in any case in Nigeria, it led to revolutionary changes in certain sectors of social and economic structure. It accelerated changes that were foreshadowed in the preceding years, and gave major impetus to new ones. For instance, it transformed the role of government in mediating the market and organizing production. From the nineteenth century, the West African export trade was characterized by oligopolistic forms of competition: there had been recurrent phases of intense competition followed by market sharing arrangement as well as occasional attempts to keep out or destroy particular competitors.<sup>94</sup> However, for the first time in its history, a regional machinery for administration, control and direction of economic affairs directly associated with His Majesty's Government in Great Britain came into being in West Africa, typified by statutory marketing in agricultural produce, namely, the Marketing Board.

Beyond the wartime produce control in West Africa, which has been the dominant theme in existing literature on World War II's impact in the region, there was also the much-neglected food control scheme, the experiment of which preceded the former, being one of the preparatory steps taken months before the outbreak of the war. Food control in Nigeria was three-pronged, namely, the restriction on the movement of foodstuffs, rationing and price-fixing. However, restriction on the movement of foodstuffs and price-fixing fall within the category of the changes that were foreshadowed in the preceding years which the war accelerated, having been experimented in the 1920s, shortly after the First World War, due to the shortage in local foodstuffs and rise in the prices of commodities. The operation of rationing in Nigeria was akin to what obtained in the United Kingdom. For instance, the British flat-rate rationing system made insufficient allowances for differential needs and food shortages hit some social groups harder than others. Sacrifice was not equally shared between classes or between men and women and official distribution channels were bypassed in the black market.

The wartime system of government control of produce buying and selling in British West Africa continued even after the cessation of hostilities. For instance, the West African Produce Control Board was retained but decentralized in 1947. The Nigerian marketing boards continued until the 1980s when they were dismantled due to corruption and the sweeping neoliberal ideology such as the Structural Adjustment Programme. Similarly, and just like in Great Britain, the wartime food control in Nigeria did not end with the war, but was extended into the post-war period due to the World Food Crisis<sup>95</sup> (1946-48) that followed immediately after the Second World War was over, leading to hardship, black market, and editorials against this extension.

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<sup>94</sup> Gavin Williams. 'Marketing without and with Marketing Boards', 4

<sup>95</sup> National Archives Ibadan (NAI) DCI 1-5/4037/S.65, 'World Food Crisis 1946'