

“IFEDINOBA”: HISTORICAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF PALM WINE INDUSTRY TO THE ECONOMY OF OBA PEOPLE IN IDEMMILI AREA OF IGBOLAND SINCE 1900

Mbalisi, Chinedu N. Ph.D

Department of History and International Relations
Paul University, Awka
chinedumbalisi@gmail.com; 08035079592

&

Vincent-Anene, Prince Okwy

Department of History and International Relations
Paul University, Awka

Abstract

Humans in their struggle for survival has over time developed diverse forms of economic activities and institutions. Hence, man has developed diverse industries around the world in time and space. One of such industries is the palm wine industry among the people of Oba in Idemmili area of Igboland. From the ancient times, the people of Oba have engaged in several economic activities that has provided the people with sources of livelihood. Neighbouring communities and people from far flung Igboland have come to know trade and cement relationships through contact provided by palm wine business. It has been the nexus for social, political, economic and cultural relations between Oba, their contiguous neighbours and other parts of Igboland. In fact, the palm wine industry has survived in Oba and has remained a source of employment to several people within and outside Oba. This study examines the impact of palm wine industry to the economic development of Oba. The paper postulates that the palm wine industry has been beneficial to several Oba indigenes and non-indigenes. Apart from those who ply their trade in palm wine industry, it serves as a veritable source of employment to such category of people as the wood carvers, motorcyclists, tricycle (keke) riders, and blacksmiths among many others. The study is of the view that the Oba people probably would not have been as popular as they are in Igboland today but for the palm wine industry. The approached to the study is interdisciplinary and presentation is thematic. Resources came largely from primary sources in the form of oral interviews and a few secondary sources where available, were consulted. The historical narrative and analytical methods were used. The conclusion is laced with helpful recommendations.

Keywords: Ifedinoba, Palm wine, Economic Development, Industry.

Introduction

Man in all ages and in all times have been a hard worker. He works to eat and eats to survive. While it is a biblical fact that man must not live by bread alone, unarguably, it is also a fact of life that man cannot live without food. Hence, economic activities provide satisfaction to man's quest for survival. Arising from the above, every society has evolved one or several economic activities in order to survive. This includes the Oba people who alongside farming and fishing engage in palm wine tapping as a major source of economic activity.

The palm wine industry in Oba has been a major source of income among the Oba people. It is produced in *Mgbo*¹ and then brought out to the *Ose* where it is sold. The palm wine industry is believed by the Oba people to be as old as Oba itself. This stems from the belief by the people that their father, *Okpoko*² gave it to them as a source of survival. The rich natural resources gotten from the *Mgbo* are pointers to this claim. These resources include several games, vegetables, fertile land, fish, and other things needed to sustenance life. One of the most very important resources the Oba man has gotten from the *Mgbo* is the palm wine. The abundance of palm wine in Oba cannot be overemphasized.

The abundance of palm wine in Oba has made people to refer to Oba as the biblical Galilee, where the biblical Jesus Christ turned water into wine³. Mr. Godwin supports this view further, "the *Mgbo* is surrounded by water that is from the water that Jesus Christ turned part into wine, as a result of this, and one may hear among the elderly men in Oba such statements like "Oba Galilee or Oba Obodo Jesus"⁴. Hence, the high premium placed on Oba palm wine provides the vent for the valuable income it brings to Oba indigenes and to none indigenes alike. From the foregoing, the present study considers the economic impact of the Palm Wine Industry in Oba since 1900.

Conceptual Clarifications/Theoretical Framework

Some basic concepts are here defined for ease of understanding and convenience of readers. One such concept is "**Ifedinoba**", this is an Igbo expression which simply means there are invaluable economic and natural resources in Oba which

¹Mgbo is the marshy part of Oba town around the Beach (Ose), where farming and a lot of economic activities is done. It is in Mgbo that the palm wine trees are standing. The palm wine tappers tap in the Mgbo and bring it out to the Ose for sale.

² The Oba man has traced his origin to a bird called Okpoko.

³ Godwin Madueke, a 76 years old palm wine tapper. Oral tradition gathered in Oba on 5/6/2017.

⁴ Ibid.

the palm wine is one of the major natural resources. The term economy connects directly to economics. Economic activity remains a basic activity of human on earth as they struggle for survival. Hence, Ake avers that “economic need is man’s most fundamental need”⁵. He further argues that humans must eat before they can do anything else⁶. To Ake, economic activities are as important as economic needs, hence, he gave primacy to work as the most important economic factor. Generally, economy deals with production and distribution of goods and services. It deals with how people go about to satisfy their basic needs in life. Palm wine tapping among the people of Oba is one major traditional means to satisfy their economic needs among numerous other concerns.

Palm Wine, is another concept that needs clarification. It is a white alcoholic beverage produced from the palm tree. The Oba people produce this beverage in large quantities. There are several kinds of palm wine. For the purpose of this study, Palm wine -*Nkwu-enu* and Raffia wine - *manya- Ngwo* will be examined. There are some differences in both, however for the purpose of our analysis here both of them shall be referred to as one. Both serve the same purpose in traditional Oba society and economic sector and the major difference being that they are from two different trees; Raffia and Palm trees respectively. In Oba, the bulk of the Palm wine is found in the Mgbo. The Mgbo is a vast territory or expanse of land which provides most of the economic needs of the Oba people. There, the palm wine tappers tap for free.

Economic development is a concept used daily by people of different classes and pedigree. For our purpose here, we would adopt the meaning that sees economic development as an overall process, which is dependent upon man’s effort to deal with his natural environment. It is a many-sided process in human society viewed from the individual level according to Walter Rodney to mean “increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self reliance, responsibility and material well being.”⁶ Viewed from the social group level, it raises the standard of living of the masses of the people and to provide all human beings with opportunity to develop their potentials. These needs transcend material needs such as adequate livelihood, safe water, employment, provision of adequate medical service, shelter, affordable transportation, among others. It also includes such issues as security, traditional and cultural identity, access to power, self

⁵ C. Ake, ‘Methods and Theoretical Foundations’, in C. Ake (ed.) *A Political Economy of Africa*, Longman Group Limited, Nig. 1988, 1.

⁶ Ibid.

reliance which guarantees a sense of purpose in life. The above explanations seemingly are identified in Oba society as shown in this expose.

The Oba People in Historical Perspective

Just like many other Igbo groups, the origin of the Oba people has remained contentious. Unarguably, the Oba people has been in their present location for a very long time, this accounts for the reason why they could not say how they came to their present location. Hence, they have traced their decent from *Okpoko*, a legendary bird. It is widely held in Oba that the mythical bird, *Okpoko*, is the father of Oba. The man, Oba, then begot nine children which founded the nine villages in Oba. This is why the kingship institution in Oba till date is known as the *Eze-Okpoko* institution.

The *Okpoko* legend to the present writers could be subjected to further historical hermeneutics. Viewed from a different perspective, it would appear that the mythical bird had protected the man, Oba from danger, probably at primitive times when this part of the world was sparingly populated. It may be safe to suggest that the bird had drawn the attention of an approaching wild animal away from the man and his people. As a result of that, Oba and his descendants decided to adopt or ascribe to the mystical *Okpoko* bird a protector figure or seen a saviour or a god.

According to V. A. O. Obi, there are other towns and communities in Anambra state which bear similar names with Oba and some of the villages in it⁷. Such town as Oba Ofe Mmilli in Awka North has some similarity with the Oba Idemmilli people. Could they be of the same origin? This will be a topic to unearth in another study. There are other towns in Anambra state that have similar village names as found in Oba. An example is Uruagu in Nnewi. It is suspected that due to some similarities in culture and tradition, Uruagu and Abidi in Nnewi and Umuoji respectively all migrated from Oba. In Uke, there is also a village known as Oba.

The present writer is also of the view that the Oba people may have been the same with other Oba around Anambra state, but due to one reason or the other, have migrated to their present location several centuries ago. It would appear that over the years, they had lost their history of migration and have decided to

⁷ V.A.O. Obi, 'Origin of Oba' in V.A.O. Obi (ed.) *The Groundwork of Oba History*, 2010, 6-15.

settle for the legendary bird as their ancestors, one of the dangers of oral tradition.

As stated earlier, Oba is composed of nine villages. These nine villages are the nine sons of Oba the “son” of *Okpoko*, their progenitor. The people of Oba are spread across these villages which include Urueze, Umuogali, Isu, Okuzu, Abime, Ogbenwe, Ogwugwu, Aboji and Ezele. The villages are arranged in order of seniority. Within these villages, it is further divided into kindred otherwise known as *Umunna*. Oba is made up of a total of 100 kindred as at September 1999⁸. The people of Oba are generally dark skinned like other peoples found in the West African region. The people speak Oba dialect of Igbo which is not difficult for any other Igbo person to understand. The Oba man is said to be generally generous and does not attach much importance to consumables like food⁹, according to V.C.I. Anene. He is hardworking and so ambitious, he however has the tendency to emulate or copy good things around him, especially when it is from a fellow Oba man¹⁰. The Oba man however, is known for his honesty and integrity; he is mindful of acts capable of dragging his name to the mud¹¹.

The main occupation of Oba people in the earliest time is farming. They produced staple crops such as cocoyam and yam, vegetables and also engaged in hunting activities¹². These natural resources, palm wine, games among many others are found in abundance in the Mgbor¹³. However, with the advent of Christianity, the Oba people embraced white collar job and Western education. Nonetheless, the Mgbor still provides the people with employment and income for solving different financial challenges including paying of school fees.¹⁴

⁸ This is from the Constitution and Bye-Laws of The Oba Patriotic Union and Constitution of the Igwe and Eze Okpoko of Oba 1999. The Oba Patriotic Union, otherwise known as the OPU which is the town’s general assembly of the entire adult male in Oba. The major decisions in Oba are taken by the OPU. It meets twice a year, but can summon an emergency meeting. The OPU is headed by the President General elected every two years.

⁹ V.C.I. Anene, *Oba Town: Achievements and Failures*, 1981, 44.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid*, 47-8

¹² V.A.O. Obi, 2010.

¹³ The Mgbor is a fertile marshy area surrounded by water. The Oba people engage in diverse forms of economic activities there. They believe that it is their father, *Okpoko* that gave them the place for survival.

¹⁴ V.C.I. Anene, 1981.

In terms of religious life, the people like every other group in Igboland are religious. They worshiped the *Udo, Idemili and Ani*¹⁵. The first two deities are in Ezele village, which is the last child of Oba. The last deity is found at Nkwo. Oba people have several religious and cultural ceremonies celebrated in the honour of their gods and goddess, the most important is *Iwa Ji* and *Ufala Mmuo*¹⁶. After the advent of Christianity, nonetheless, some faction of the Oba people still maintained the traditional religion of their forefathers. As a consequence, most of these institutions and festivals are still extant in Oba. The shrines of the three main deities, still stands in Oba at present with modern houses covered with aluminum roofing sheets.

Geographically, Oba is a town located in Idemili South Local Government Area of Anambra State, Nigeria. Oba occupies a land space of about forty kilometers¹⁷. It is bounded on the east by the Idemili River and Ojoto Obofia town, on the west by Ekulo rivulet and the Mgbo swamps and River Niger. Oba could have been a compact island but for the narrow strip of land between Oba and Ojoto Obofia. Oba lies five kilometers on the road running from Onitsha to Owerri. A clay landscape forms a boundary between Oba and Ichi on the south-eastern part. Oba is said to have been naturally protected from boarder disputes.

Oba consists of dry lands, highlands and riverine areas. The riverine areas are swampy and marshy with several rivulets inter-crossing one another before emptying themselves into the River Niger. The swamps favour the growth of forest trees and raffia palms, which provide the Oba people with palm wine and floras and faunas. The rivulets contain great varieties of aquatic animals including fresh water fish. The cultivable areas within the swamp are very fertile and good for agricultural production. The dry and highland areas of the town also contain good arable lands. The tree crops in this area include the palm trees, coconut trees, oil bean plants, mangoes, kola nut trees, breadfruit trees and

¹⁵ These were the three main deities in Oba, *Udo* is the god of peace, *Idemili* is the river gods and the owner of eke-Idemili, the sacred python. Finally, the *Ani* is the earth goddess and the goddess of fertility.

¹⁶ *Iwa Ji* is the celebration of *Ani*, in the name of New Yam Festival. Here, the goddess of fertility is glorified and praised for the abundance of harvest. It is done after farming season. The *Ufala Mmuo* is the celebration of all the gods and goddess in Oba. Here all the Masquerades are in display. It is usually done in the third month of the year in the Nkwo market square.

¹⁷ V.A.O. Obi, 2010

various types of woodlands. The highlands of *Ogbenwe*, provides for hunting of wild animals and games.

The Palm Wine Industry in Oba Since 1900

As stated earlier, the Oba people are reputed for the production and sale of palm wine. There are two types of wine in Oba which are listed as palm wine. They are the palm wine commonly known as *Nkwu-enu* or *Nkwu-Igbo* and raffia wine known as *Ngwo* or *Nmachu*. While the palm wine is found on the dry lands and the highlands, the raffia wine is found mainly in the Mgbo. The palm wine in Oba has gone down in history to be known as *Ifedin'Oba*.

The people of Oba have engaged in Palm Wine production even before the dawn of the colonial rule. At the wake of the colonial rule, which is around 1900, the people intensified on palm wine production. This was because people trained themselves in Western education with the money realized from the sales of palm wine which V.C.I. Anene captioned *Ije-German*¹⁸. Palm wine tapping has been an exclusive occupation for men. Anene further observed that at the end of Nigeria-Biafra war, women joined in the business as a result of the financial difficulty of the post war years in Igboland. In Oba, the production of palm wine is done by only the Oba people until about the 1980s, when foreigners began to join in the palm wine production in Oba. However, they were restricted to the production of *Nkwu -Igbo*. The foreigners are not allowed access into the Mgbo.

The Mgbo and the Palm Wine Industry in Oba

The main part of production of this wine is the Mgbo, that is, the marshy area around the *Ose* beach. In the Mgbo, several raffia palm trees are seen standing in the middle of the water, it is there the tedious and painstaking work of wine production is done. Here wine is produced in large quantities. The tappers move into the Mgbo in a paddle canoe to tap the wine, and bring same to dry land using their canoe. It is at this point that people come to buy for retailing. Business men around Oba come to the *Ose* to purchase the palm wine. Oba has three palm wine production sites namely, *Ose Umu-afa*, *Ose Abosi*, *Ose Abosi Isi Odu*. It is important to mention at this juncture that not all villages in Oba has access to the Mgbo, it is only Aboji and Umuogali that accesses the Mgbo. Others depend on

¹⁸ This according to V.C.I. Anene is the tedious job of palm wine selling. People purchased palm wine from the tappers and carried it head on to Onitsha where day sell them off and returned in the evening. Money realized from the sale can be used to pay school fees 1981, 37.

products from the main land¹⁹. By extension, it means only the Aboji and the Umuogali people produced palm wine in the Mgbo. Nonetheless, people from other villages tap palm wine in the main lands. Also, foreigners who engaged in palm wine tapping also tap palm located in the main lands of the town. The popularity of Oba presumably owes much to this booming Palm wine industry. People from the neighbouring villages who most times find it difficult to sale their own wine because their wine appears not to be as good as the Oba palm wine. Thus they often times label their drink after Oba as “Oba wine” so as to make quick sales²⁰.

None Indigenes and Palm Wine Industry in Oba

Starting from the last three decades none Oba indigenes became integral part of the Palm Wine Industry in Oba. These were people from Nsukka, Abakiliki, and Afikpo etc. These people tapped palm wine in Oba and made a lot of money from the job. There are about 76 members of none Oba indigenes in the palm wine industry in Oba²¹.

The non indigenes in the industry do not have access to the Mgbo. They only tap wine from the palm trees in the dry lands. According to those who were interviewed, they pay a particular amount of money to the owners of the palm tree which they tap wine from. The reason is that they do not have their own palm trees to tap wine from.

Aside from those who tap directly, there are some none indigenes who are not into the production of the palm wine but are retailers. These people are both women and men who have bars for the sale of palm wine and accoutrements taken with palm wine. Hence, every evening, people from within and around Oba are seen in these relaxation joints treating themselves to some fresh palm wine and pepper soup. Some other none indigenes partake in the distribution of palm wine as transporters. Other people also travel from neighbouring towns to Oba in order to buy the Oba wine for sale at different towns as barkeepers and restaurants.

Interconnectedness with other Sectors of the Economy

¹⁹ V.C.I. Anene, 1981

²⁰ V.A.O. Obi, 2010, 30.

²¹ Echendu Emeka said this to the researcher during his field work. He is a 47yrs old palm wine tapper of non Oba extraction. He is from Enugu state.

The Palm wine industry in Oba, in order to flourish very well, employed the assistance of other sectors of the economy. For instance, the palm wine tapper cannot produce the canoe which he uses for transportation on the waters of the *Ose*, hence, he employs the canoe builder.

Additionally, they also employ the services of the transporters who carry them from the exterior to the interior part of Oba from *Ose*. This is because the *Ose* is very far from the *Afor Uzo-Oba*²² market where it is sold. People also go to the *Ose* to buy the fresh one at a cheaper rate. To this end, taxi drivers, motorcyclist (okada) riders, tricycle (keke) drivers are involved in the Palm wine industry business.

Furthermore, the blacksmith are also involved in the industry because they produce the knife and machetes use for tapping of the palm wine. In ancient times, they employed the services of potters who made the containers and jars for the palm wine. In recent times, they buy plastic containers from the market for the same purpose. From the fore going, one could state that the Palm wine industry in Oba is a multi-sector enterprise that transcends Igboland.

Economic Impact of the Palm Wine Industry in Oba since 1900

The economic impact of the Palm Wine Industry in Oba would not be overemphasized. It has unarguably contributed to both economic growth and development in Oba. Firstly, it is apt to note that the economy of Oba rests principally on various products from the *Mgbo* chief among them is the palm wine. The palm wine business has proven to be lucrative enough. Most people who engage in any sort of palm wine business have been so comfortable in life that he or she hardly borrow money. For instance, a wine tapper, Victoria Ukwueze in an interview informed thus "... I have never borrowed money from anyone since I started this business. *Ngwo* gives money very well; it provides me with all I need to settle financial challenges."²³

²² *Afor Uzo Oba* is the name of the market in Oba where the Palm wine is being sold. It is the largest market in Oba and functions every day. There are others which are *Eke* in *Ezele*, *Oye* in *Ezele* and *Nkwo*.

²³ Victoria Ukwueze is a 51 years old woman who sales palm wine in her joint in Oba. She has been in the business for 19years.

Additionally, Ejike Chukwueloka avers that, “*ngwo* is a daily business, no one who sales *ngwo* ever lacks money. I have never borrowed money”²⁴. It is generally held among the people who were interviewed by the present researchers that palm wine has great economic impact in their lives; they have remained economically viable and have been able to meet up with other needs, especially man’s basic need of shelter, feeding and clothing. Hence, Augustine Anene Ejikeme states,

Palm wine helps us very well. Most people who tap palm wine are very comfortable. They do not borrow money from anybody. When it is their turn to host village meetings or any other meeting, they do it very well, they pay their dues early enough even before some civil servants.²⁵

Today, many Oba indigenes are highly educated and amongst the ranks and file of Oba indigenes, there are several professors in their different fields, lawyers, doctors, architects, clergy men and bishops. Most of these men have been sent to school through the money realized from the palm wine business by their parents. During the fieldwork by the researchers, we came across several palm wine tappers or sellers who affirmed that their children’s school fees were paid through cash realized from palm wine. Hence, V.C.I. Anene writes, “as early as when payment of school fees were introduced, several scholars (of Oba extraction) trained themselves in elementary schools with profits made from *tombo* palm wine...”²⁶

Additionally, Augustine Anene Ejikeme a contemporary palm wine tapper added his view about palm wine tapping and education. He remembers thus,

I trained all my children with it (palm wine), not just in primary and secondary school. I trained them up to the university level. My children are so proud of me because I trained them to the highest level...²⁷.

²⁴ Ejike Chukwueleoka, he is a 29 year old Oba indigene. He took over his father’s palm wine business and runs his father’s shop. He made the statement to the present writer during an oral interview in Oba.

²⁵ Augustine Anene Ejikeme has this to say in an oral interview with the present writer at Oba on the 6/06/2017. The interview was held in Afor Oba market where they were selling the palm wine.

²⁶ V.C.I. Anene, 1981.

Many of these Oba sons and daughters who were trained through the money realized from the palm wine industry are presently the economic pillars of Oba town. They are doing well in the diaspora and they return to contribute to develop Oba. Palm wine industry has also brought in several developments in Oba. It helped many Oba people to build zinc houses in the modern time. In his words, Godwin Madueke says, "I have been able to build houses in my place through money realized from palm wine. I have also bought cars through sales made from palm wine"²⁷

It is noteworthy here that there are some non Oba indigenes who engage in palm wine business and they live in Oba. Most of them came into Oba because of the palm wine business and of a truth, they have been doing well in the industry. To confirm this, Cyprian Edeh, a fifty-one year old Oba man from Enugu State has this to say:

I have tapped palm wine for fifteen years. Palm wine has been so useful to us. I have built a bungalow and a duplex in my place through the money realized from palm wine sales.²⁸

The interest of the present writers is not on how much these non indigenes have been able to develop their own place, just as Cyprian Edeh has averred, but on how these non indigenes has contributed to the economic well being of the Oba people. In the first place, it is apt to recall that these non indigenes do not have their personal houses in Oba, hence, in order to stay in Oba and do their businesses, they rent houses built by Oba indigenes. These non Oba indigenes pay house rents to Oba people thereby increasing the income of their Oba host. Secondly, they do not have their own land and by extension palm trees, consequently, they rent palm trees to the indigenes to tap and pay the hosts monthly. Thirdly, when they carry their products to the markets to sale, since they are not indigenes, the Oba people require specific amount of tax from them in the market. These taxes are used in the OPU developmental projects within the town. The money realized from such taxes also helps to pay OPU workers who are mainly Oba indigenes. Fourthly, the non Oba indigenes who keep palm wine relaxation bar joints also rent shops where they do their business which

²⁷ Godwin Mmadueke is both a palm wine tapper and a palm wine bar keeper. He has been in the business for thirty seven years and has been doing fine.

²⁸ Cyprian Edeh is a Palm wine tapper that lives in Ezele village Oba. He is known as one of the best non indigene in the business. He said this to the researcher in his house.

serves as income to the indigenous owners of the shops. Finally, the non indigenes also visit the Afor Oba market to buy goods for their house keeping. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the activities of non indigenous people have been so useful to the economic growth and development of Oba.

Further on the economic impacts of palm wine industry in Oba, it is worthy of note that palm wine has also drawn the wealth of people from other communities to Oba. For instance, people from neighbouring communities come to Oba to buy palm wine. Ugochukwu Udeze from Nnewi is into the palm wine business, according to him, his father has been doing the business. His father started the business in the early seventies after the war, when his father became weak, he took over the business. He asserts thus, "my father has been coming to Oba to buy the wine he sales in Nnewi until he became weak to continue. Since he became weak due to old age, I took over the enterprise"²⁹.

The palm wine industry has in one way or the other affected positively the economic life of most people in Oba. This is because of the interconnectedness with other businesses. For instance, those who keep the palm wine bar also sell pepper soup produced with cow and goat meat of bush meat. The pepper soup and the palm wine are also better enjoyed with *Agidi*- a delicacy made from maize floor. Hence, the local women who produce the *agidi* are able to have quick turnovers in their business. Further, the Palm wine industry, as stated earlier engages the services of other people like the transporters, wood workers and blacksmith. They are paid for their services which continue to keep food on their table and enable them send their children to school.

Despite all the mouthwatering and juicy economic impacts, there are some negative economic impacts. The taste of the palm wine is so sweet that one may hardly overcome the temptation of drinking as much bottle as whatever he could afford. Hence, people drink so much alcohol and get drunk. This has landed several people in the hospital and money for projects is channeled to pay hospital bills for the treatment of the patient who sustained great injuries as a result of drunkenness.

Challenges of the Palm Wine Industry in Oba

There are some challenges which the ancient industry is faced with in Oba. Chief among which is the fact that the youths appear not to be interested in palm wine

²⁹ Ugochukwu Udeze, told the researcher in an oral interview in Ose Abosi on the 06/06/2017.

tapping and also the old generation who are into the business get weaker. The tedious work of palm wine tapping requires the younger people who are strong enough to climb the trees, paddle the canoe among other activities in the industry. Pitiably, the youths prefer to go to the cities in pursuit of white collar jobs thereby abandoning the lucrative business of palm wine tapping. Most of them prefer to travel to unknown countries for greener pastures. The economic preference and focus of the youths threaten the survival of the palm wine industry.

Another big challenge is the risk associated with palm wine tapping. Climbing the palm and raffia trees is very dangerous. Many people have died as a result of that. Hence, Tobenna Nwokolo has this to say:

I will not doubt the fact that palm wine tapping is very lucrative; my father was able to build a zinc house early in life due to palm wine tapping. But I and my children will never do that. Today where is our father? He died tapping palm wine, he fell from the palm tree and that was the end of his life³⁰.

From the words of Tobenna, it is obvious that the risk associated with palm wine tapping has scared several people away from palm wine tapping. They are mostly guided by the saying, “when you keep life aside to pursue wealth, your enemy will enjoy your wealth”.³¹ In the raining season, climbing the palm tree is risky after the rains as the tree trunks become slippery and the risk of one falling off is high.

In the raining season also, the palm wine bar keepers are faced with low sales as a result of the rain³². As a result, some of the sellers are unable to sale all they bought for the day. This challenge, to the writers is not a major challenge since it appears to be a seasonal issue. Other challenges include the fact of nature which controls the palm wine and decides the quantity at a giving time.

³⁰ Tobenna Nwokolo whose father died in 2003 tapping palm wine said this to the researcher in an oral interview on 05/06/2017

³¹ Igbo adage that talks about the importance of life even in economic pursuit, if one pursue wealth at the expense of his life, he may not live to enjoy such wealth.

³² Victoria Ukwueze, a young woman from Nsukka in Enugu state, she keeps palm wine bar in Aboji Oba.

Summary and Conclusion

This paper, although centered on the economic impact of palm wine industry in Oba, undertook a brief historical excursion of Oba. This was to aid the understanding of Oba people and also to understand the issues surrounding the production of palm wine in Oba. In the course of analysis, the work inquired into the origin of Oba people. The writers were able to interpret the myth surrounding the origin of Oba people in their own perspective. The interpretation of the present writers is by no means almighty. The work studied the people and the geography of Oba and how it has affected her economy most with the Mgbo as one of the most important blessing which God has bestowed on the Oba people.

The study further uncovers the relevance of the palm wine industry to the popularity of Oba. It discovered how this industry has blossomed from the earliest time and how other communities tend to associate their wine with that of Oba people. The study went further to buttress the importance of the Mgbo to the Palm Wine Industry in Oba; this is because most of the activities concerning palm wine tapping in Oba revolve around the Mgbo. In studying the Mgbo, the work discovered that not only non indigenes are denied access into the Mgbo, but only two villages of Aboji and Umuogali are allowed to use the Mgbo in Oba. Foreigners are an important aspect in the Palm Wine Industry in Oba. It unearthed how the non indigenes got the palm tree they tapped. It further revealed that the industry depends on other sector of the economy to thrive.

Economically, the study reveals the myriads of contribution which the palm wine industry has made to the economy of Oba. The economic impact of this industry cannot be overemphasized as it is an invaluable part in the general development of Oba society. Finally, the teething challenges and risks of the Palm Wine industry notwithstanding, the industry continues to thrive and remains in existence.

Having studied the economic importance of the Palm Wine industry, the work suggests that the people of Oba should do everything necessary to promote this industry beyond their community. Youths should be encouraged to understand the importance of this industry and how much wealth lies therein. The community should strive to mechanise the processing of palm wine used to produce spirits, ethanol and other chemicals used in the laboratory. The study has reconstructed economic life of Oba which appears to have been forgotten by

scholars of Oba history in relation to its importance. It forms the basis for future analysis on other economic life of Oba people.