A STUDY ON COLONIALISM AND CHANGE IN IGBOLAND: A CASE STUDY OF THE MBAISE AREA OF OWERRI DIVISION 1902-1934

BY

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MA/ART/49017/05-06

THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF MASTER IN ARTS (M.A) HISTORY

AUGUST, 2011

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my late father Nze, E.U.D Nwosu (LLB Hon BL)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Supervisor of this work, Dr, J.O Agi and my minor supervisor Dr, I.S. Jimada for their kind assistance and pains taken supervision. I am also indebted to Dr, George Kwemashie, Dr, Sule Bello, Dr, E. Oyedule and Dr M. Gwadabe for their unflinching academic advice and assistance before, and during this research work.

Same thanks go to my late father Nze E.U.D Nwosu (LLB Hon BL) who did not only initiate this idea but took the responsibility of financing it till his death. Equal thanks go to my mother, Lady J.I. Nwosu, who supported me through prayer, and above all made financial and moral contribution to the success of this study.

I owe my obligation to the following persons, Mr. Amamze .C. Nwosu, Mr. chijoke .I.Nwosu, Mr. Ugochukwu .N. Nwosu, and Mr. Ikemefule .C. Nwosu (my brothers) Mrs. Ada .C. Ukegbu,(Adanem) Miss Uchechi .O. Nwosu(my sisters) Mr. Ndabueze Nwosu Mr. P.E. Ukegwu, Mr. Ahamba Ameche who provide all manners of support to me. My appreciation goes to Mr. Benson U.Nwogwugwu, Miss Helen .J. Musa, Mr & Mrs. Emmanuel Onwuegbuche, Mr.& Mrs. Benjamin Isaac, Mr & Mrs. Eze Nwokocha, Mr & Mrs. Okwudire

Nwokocha, Mr. Dike Nwokocha,Mr &Mrs. Chidiebere Oneyenwe, who stood by me and afforded me the necessary encouragements.

I am grateful to Mrs. Oguike, Mrs Inyang (none academic staff) in Ahmadu Bello University, Nze and Lolo Ahaiwe, Mr & Mrs. Chilak Nwosu for all their contribution. My profound thanks go to all the people that have directly or indirectly affected me positively during the programmed. I wish every one of you God’s favour.

ABSTRACT

This is the study of colonialism and change in Igboland, Southeastern Nigeria with a special focus on the Mbaise area of Owerri Division from 1902 to 1934. This study seeks to explain the nature of the changes that occurred in this area within the elected period. The study discovered that the pre-colonial socio-political and economic organizations in this area stood as an obstacle to the British expanding imperialist interest (exploitation of human and material resources). Consequently, these institutions were supplanted by the colonial state. The study revealed that the imposition of the Warrant Chief System on Igboland was to maintain those laws and order which at least ensured the protection of the British imperialist interests. By so doing, the colonial state solved the problem of inadequate numbers of staff and more significantly, insufficient funds, which would have prevented the realization of the main objective of colonialism.

The major finding of this work is that the development of the Warrant Chief system of political administration benefited the British economically because it reduced the cost imperialism. Therefore, colonialism proved to be dysfunctional to the African societies in Mbaise area of Owerri division. The

study revealed that imposition of British colonial rule led to many long-term social, economic, and political consequences on Mbaise area.

PREFACE

This is a study on colonialism and the change in Igboland: A case study of Mbaise Area of Owerri Division from 1902 to 1934. To make this work comprehensive, we have carried out enquiry into areas concerning the location of Mbaise, since history is not studied in vacuum.

As the study seeks to explain how the imposition of British colonial rule on the Mbaise brought about political changes, which in turn served as a harbinger to new economic order in the area. It demonstrates that the system of administration practiced by the Mbaise before the imposition of British rule was subjected to a serious dislocation when the British imposed the individual warrant chiefs on the various communities in the area. This, no doubt evoked reaction from the indigenous society of Mbaise, whose traditional institution were being castrated.

To achieve the aims of this study, the work has been structured in five chapters. The first chapter concerns itself with the study of the people and their environment. This is principally aimed at locating the present Mbaise area and to give an insight on the origin of the people, settlement pattern and inter-clan

relationship as we have mentioned above. The physical features are very important to understand the nature of the settlement and relationships as well.

Chapter two deals with the pre-colonial political and socio- economic situation in Mbaise. The political institutions in Mbaise were examined. It was discovered that the pattern of political institutions were democratic and gerontocracy especially that there was no single person or persons that exercised despotic influence over the area or even over the fragmented villages that made it up. The supreme political authority in the area was the (Amala) the village assembly, which take decision through the popular consent of the people and for the common good of their society.

The chapter also examined the socio-economic situation in Mbaise before the imposition British rule. By this period the economy of the area stood on a tripod: agriculture, trade, and manufacture. It is then argued, based on the relationship between labour and capital, that the mode of production in the area was the social mode of production hence law was the means of production (capital). The major constraint to trade as it was shown in this chapter include transportation and the peril of the trade route. It demonstrated that the problem caused by the perils of the trade routes were overcome through the convoy system.

Chapter three looks at the colonial military activities in the Mbaise area from 1902 to 1916. Although the British succeeded in occupying Mbaise and indeed the whole of Igboland, it was not an easy task. It was shown that the Mbaise put a gallant resistance to the British occupation of their area. It was equally revealed that the conquest of Mbaise transcends the level of mere effort geared toward political domination. There is hardly any aspect of the people's life the conquest did not affect. The conquest of Mbaise was more of economic than political war. It was the foundation stone for the new political order which created conducive environment for the subordination of the economy of the area to that of the colonizing power.

Chapter four discussed Mbaise under colonial administration from 1903 to 1930. It showed the nature of socio-political and economic changes that occurred in the area as consequence of colonialism. The chapter demonstrates that the institution of the Warrant Chiefs, which was created by the colonial states in the Eastern Provinces, was a veritable tool, which the colonial state as an organ of imperial Britain used to make the area conducive for their super exploitation. It is argued that the level of economic difficulties witnessed under this new political order became so high that women in the region had to vent their discontent through a revolt that spread across the two provinces of Owerri

and Calabar. This revolt forced the colonial administration to begin the process of reform which finally brought the Warrant chiefs system to an end

We equally revealed in this chapter that the difficulties experienced by the colonial administration in the cultivation of the local arm of their government in the Owerri District area led to the invitation of the missionaries into the area by the government. Therefore it is argued that while the missionaries were the front runners of the colonial government in some areas, the reverse was the case in the Owerri District area and Mbaise in particular. The relationship between the missionaries and government became dialectical. While the mission were busy clearing those aspects of the people socio-political behavior which the British considered repugnant to their idea of good government through evangelism, and mission schools the government asked their agents the warrant chiefs to protect the missionaries in their various localities. Thus, the missionaries contributed tremendously to the increased burden which the local society came to bear under colonial administration.

It is also revealed that the reforms which came after the women riot was the basis of clan polities in the area, hence court area were made to conform with clan boundaries it did not change the nature of extortion that characterized the court in the era of the Warrant chiefs.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.U.	Ahmadu Bello University
C.M.S	Church Missionary Society
C.O.	Colonial Office
C.S.O	Colonial Secretaries Office
RIVPROF	Rivers Province
E.P	Eastern Provinces
OWDIST	Owerri District
ZAPROF	Zaria Province
N.A.E	National Archives Enugu
N.A.K	National Archives Kaduna
R.C.M	Roman Catholic Mission
J.H.S.N.	Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria
A.I.C.E.	Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri

GLOSSARY

IGBO	ENGLISH
Ahajioku	The spirit force of yam
Akidi	Native beans
Akwukwo	Fictitious summons
Ala	Earth
Amala	Village Assembly
Amadioha	God of thunder
Asusu	Live stick
Avuvu	pulp
Chi	Fortune (special providence of God
Chineke	God the creator
Edmani	Corrupt way of headman
Eghu-ukw	Ceremony marking the tenth child from a woman
Egbe	Gum
Ego-iri	Sixty cowries
Ego –isi-nwanyi	Dowries
Enwe	Monkey
Ese	Cultural music for the burial of a full fledged man
Eze-ala	The priest of earth goddess
Ezeji	The yam king

Eze-ego	Cowries
Elu-aku	Cream made from palm kennels
Ezi	Compound
Ekwe	Gong
Ibini ukpabi	The Aro oracle
Ihu ala ezi	The compound earth goddess
Ikpa –aku	Animal rearing or husbandry
Ihu muo	Deity
Ikwa-ala	Cleansing or purification of the earth
Ikwo-aka	To undergo purification
Ikwa –iko	Adultery
Imaru aka	To commit abomination
Iriji	New yam festival
Iro –ofo	Festival marking the beginning of planting season mainly for the ofor holders
Ivu Mbambe	Traditional punishment that involves striping one naked ,flogging and parading him around the village squares mainly for stealing
Iwu Mkwu	Communal harvest of palm trees for the funding of community projects
Ohuhu	Name used by the Ngwa to identify the Mbaise (meaning rosters)originated from the tradition of migration of Ngwa and Mbaise
Ohu	Slave
Ojonma	Manilla

Ofo	Staff symbolizing sanction of social justice from the ancestors
Oji-ofo	Ofo holders
Ogo	In law
Ogodo iri	One thousand cowries
Omugwo	Maternity leave
Onwa Nkwu	Monthly harvest of palm trees
Oriko	Reconciliation rituals
Okuko	Fowl
Okonko	The secret society which its members were identified with their long staff clipped with silver ring it was part of the executive arm of the village council or assembly
Okochi	Dry season
Onye nwe-ala	The owner of the land
Onye nwe ezi	The owner of compound
Otu ebiri	Age grade
Okwukwu	The second burial of full fledge Man or Woman
Mkpe	Morning of the dead
Ogwe	Pit toilet
Ogwuma biri	Daily market
Otu umuagbogho	Association of young girls
Otu Ndom	Association of married women

Ogu Ndom	The women revolt
Opara	The first male child
Ovu	Compound hall
Mfunala	Free born, son of the soil (All implies legitimate citizen)
Mkpuke	House used for extensive rearing of fowl usually attached to the kitchen
Nkwu	Palm tree
Ngwo	Raffia palm tree
Ori mgbe ahia loro	One who depends on market
Dinita	Hunter
Ichu ohia	Hunting
Kotima	The corrupt use of court messenger
Nso ala	Abomination
Ngwa-ngwa	The term which the name Ngwa was said to been derived in the traditions of origin of the Ezinihitte clan in Mbaise meaning to make haste
Nna	Father
Ukpo agugu	A tree that is used to designate land boundaries
Uguru	Harmatan
Udumiri	Raining season
Ugburu ocha	Tapioca
Uko	The cultural music use in the burial of an old

	woman
Ukwu ego iri or ogodo iri	Six hundred cowries
Uta	Bow

NOTES ON SOURCES

INTRODUCTION

There is need to make brief comments on the major sources used for this research. A research on colonialism and the creation of Warrant Chiefs cannot be studied, without making reference to different sources. These sources are two categories: primary and secondary sources. The former are subdivided into two classes, consisting of colonial document preserved in the Nigeria National Archives and oral information. The secondary sources consists of publish work such as text books written on various topics relating to our research topic, and unpublished works such as thesis and other research works carried on the related area.

PRIMARY SOURCES

The primary sources relevant to this research work are classified into two categories as we have said above. These two categories, consists of (a) the written document dealing on colonial activities in Southern Nigeria. Following the regionalization of the Nigeria National archives, those documents dealing on the Eastern Province, are kept in the National archives in Enugu. These include the period of Oil River Protectorate and later Niger-Coast Protectorate, with

headquarters at Calabar. And the records dealing on the Eastern provinces, including the district areas. This comprises of intelligence reports, provincial annual reports, letters and petitions from individuals and the chiefs to the Resident Commissioners (provincial) and District Commissioners. Most unfortunately, we were unable to lay our hands on most of these documents referred to the previous scholars in the related area of study. More especially, those scholars who carried out their research works in the 1950s and early 1960s. The problem underpinning our ability to access these materials being that most of them were destroyed by aerial bombardment during the Nigeria civil War. This is coupled with the fact that some of the files in national archives have been mutilated.

Another problem that hindered us from accessing these material was the attitude of the staff of the National Archives at Enugu whose corrupt tendencies caused all manners of bottleneck to our research. These officers would seek material inducement before they provide access to some of the materials relevant to our work. This caused a lot of difficulties and unnecessary delay to this research work. (B). oral information were obtained to filled the vacuum created by unavailability of some of the archival materials relevant to this work. All the people interviewed in the course of this research were resident in the

area under study. The information collected was thoroughly analyzed and corroborated to archive objectivity in the work. However, we encountered some kind of difficulties in the process of collection of this oral information. Some of these difficulties were similar to those encountered in the National Archives at Enugu. Some individuals refused to respond to our questions until we have to reduce them materially. Some of them deliberately coloured their information. Although with careful analysis we were able to overcome the difficulty of coloration. As oral information has proved dependable, the materials from written sources were supplemented with the oral evidences we have collected.

SECONDARY SOURCES

This class of material is written, and it is categorized into two, the published and unpublished. The published being text books which we have considered very relevant to this research work. Some of these books are briefly reviewed:

HARRY A. GAILEY

Gailey studied the British administrative policy in Eastern Nigeria. The author paid a particular attention to the Igbo and Ibibio. The reason given for this particular attention given to the Igbo and Ibibio was that stresses occasioned

by European imperialism in an African society could be examined most clearly when the system imposed by the powers does not conform to the traditional political form. For this reason, the choice of the author the Igbo and Ibibio was apt.

Gailey primarily concerned himself with three important aspects of this work. These were establishment of British rule, the imposition of a type of local government on the people, and finally, the people's rejection of the system. The overall focus of academic piece was on the British administration in Eastern Nigeria and the attempts made to rule a vast, nearly incomprehensive area[1]. In doing this, Gailey was able to reveal how the compliance of the people to this new political order changed their society and ushered the area into a socio-economic difficulties, leading a segment of the society revolt against the system and demanded the removal of the Warrant Chiefs from the office.

The author made a painstaking research to unveil the process of political transformation of Eastern Nigeria. This he did by examining the colonial records and other secondary sources. This work did not only reveal the nature of political changes that occurred in the region, but also it has been added to the pool of relevant literature in this subject. The weakness of this work is located in the fact that this was done from the European perspective hence Gailey did

not make use of oral sources. This would have given him the opportunity to understand more of what imperialism meant, from the point of view of the colonized. However, this work is relevant to our present research.

S. N. NWABARA

In his book titled Iboland, A Century of Contact with Britain, Nwabara examined the nature of contact between the Igbo and British from 1860 to 1960. After the beginning of this work, the author made an impressing statement that the British had a little knowledge about the people before their direct contact with them. However, the first contact with the British was done through trade. But before he went on to discuss how the trading contact between the Igbo and British was transformed to political domination; the author threw light on the nature of the socio-political organization of the Igbo before their domination by the British. In doing this, he earmarked one major characteristic of the Igbo. This was the fact that they were not ruled by any one man styled a king[2].

He further revealed that religion was another means of contact between the Igbo and the British. According to him, it was difficult for the early missionaries because the missionaries, particularly the church missionary lovely

[1] H.A. Gailey, Road to Aba, A Study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria, University of London Press, New York, 1971, p. v

allied themselves with traders. But at the turn of the twentieth century, the Igbo changed their hearth towards the missionaries, not because of the love nor because they abandoned their traditional faith, but because many parents had begun to appreciate the value of education which the missionaries provided[3]. By 1930 Christianity had been rooted in Igboland.

When the British began the process of political domination of the area, two things accounted for the failure. One was lack of symbol of Igbo unity, and the other was the military encounter[4]. It should have been proper if the author had that heard that the defeat of the Igbos by the British military expedition was due to their lack of centralized authority rather than unity. However, he cannot be adjudged completely wrong because the military encounter was apt to create mutual suspicion in the minds of the people[5].

The author did a detailed analysis of the series of military encounters that threw the Igbo area open to the British. This is relevant to our work, though he failed to attempt to examine what was the social cost of these military encounters, to know how they impacted on the Igbos. However, his analysis of the British creation of political institution to manage the affairs of the Igbos was based on the contemptuous reservation which they had for the people. According to the author, the unsophisticated, savage natives who did not

imagine that murder, cannibalism, trial-by-ordeal, slave raiding, pawning children for debt, raiding neighbouring farms, high way robbery, stealing or any other crimes were but legitimate occupation. This was the basis for the establishment of "Native Courts" whose members according to the author were handpicked and given government Warrant as formal authority. These appointees, called 'Warrant Chiefs' became ipso facto government representatives.

He was apt when he said that though taxation was the ember that sparked the women's revolt in 1929, the fundamental cause was a combination of factors which added up to sentiment for foreign rule[6]. In further clarification, he advanced that the administrative and judicial reforms that resulted from the revolt, though belated, were experiments on a trial-by-error basis. He described the Igbos as resilient by nature and adaptable to changes and new conditions.

This work, though with its own kind of weakness, has thrown sufficient light into our area of study.

A. E. AFIGBO

Afigbo is among the scholars that have paid serious attention to the study of Igbo History. In his work, the Warrant Chiefs, Indirect Rule in Southern

Nigeria, he examined the imposition of the British pattern of local government on Eastern Nigeria from 1891 to 1929. He aptly emphasized that the term Warrant Chief System is synonymous to "Native Court." To enhance the reader's understanding, the creation of warrant chief system was a dramatic change in the political history of Southern Nigeria; he gave a detailed analysis of the pre-colonial political situation under colonialism. In doing so, he revealed that the Igbo political system was classified into what he referred to as democratic village republics. He further explained that at the time of imposition of British rule on the Igbos and their neighbours, no community east of the Niger had a leader who could be made without doing violence to the traditional constitution, to fulfill the role of a chief under Indirect Rule as the system was then interpreted.

He further threw light on the origin and structure of the Warrant Chief System of administration[7]. This led to his conclusion that the new political order was a modification of the pre-colonial institutions. This is not acceptable because the Warrant Chief System was a new phenomenon in Igbo politics. A remarkable attempt was made by Afigbo to show how the high handedness and corrupt practices of newly appointed chiefs became a good combination to

taxation and triggered off the women revolt[8] which brought the Warrant Chiefs System to an end.

In the course of this study, the author cited numerous colonial records. This he complemented with oral information which implies that the study was carried out, having the knowledge of the thought of the British about the colonized, and that of the colonized about the colonizers. However, it is discovered that some of his oral sources cannot be relied on. And this affected some of his assertions. This work is relevant to our present study, not only because it revealed some salient issue, but also because he made reference to some other important works primary and secondary which the present researcher has benefited from. Add he spent much time arguing that the Warrant Chiefs System was indirect rule, the earlier scholar who argued that indirect rule began in Eastern Nigeria after 1929.

[7] Afigbo, op cit, see chapter one and two; see also Afigbo: The Warrant Chiefs System in Eastern Nigeria, Direct or Indirect Rule in J.H.S.N., Vol. III, No. 4, June 1967. The whole of this work was dedicated to proofing that the Warrant Chief System is Indirect Rule.

[8] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs op cit, p. 238

F. K. EKECHI

This author wrote on the Christian Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland. The work covers a period from 1857 to 1914. The missionary activities in Igboland though became intensive by the middle of nineteenth century, there was hardly any other work which had paid such attention to this

subject. Ekechi took it upon himself to examine the nature of importation of the European missionary rivalry into Igboland, and how this rivalry affected Igboland.

Most important to our area of study was his revelation about the dialectic relationship that existed between the colonial administrative class and the missionaries. This dialectical relationship was decisive to the consolidation of the British rule in the interior of Igboland, particularly in the area that became Owerri District. One other important finding made in this work was that as the missionaries were the front runner of the colonizing power in other places, the case was different in the Owerri District area, where the colonial administration at Owerri made official invitation to the missionaries. The strength of this work lies in the critical analysis of events and intensive use of missionary, colonial administrative, and secondary sources. The weakness of the work is located in the fact that the author was hindered from getting information from the people involved, due to the Nigerian civil war. Therefore, the work was concluded in England and France. The absence of oral information has been considered a very essential ingredient in the writing of African history is a weakness indeed. However, the work has succeeded in broadening our knowledge about the role

of the missionaries in the consolidation of British rule and cultivation of their idea.

CLOUD AKE

Ake is a renowned scholar in the field of economics. He had made enormous contribution in the age of African situations in the analysis of Africa which we have considered relevant to understanding the aims and objectives of colonialism. Ake carefully analyzed how the European power extended the political control over African societies, so as to control what to produce, how and what quantity to produce. He illuminated the fact that before colonization the European countries were contented to leave the production and delivery of whatever product they wanted to local entrepreneurs and middlemen. However, with colonization the situation changed. They began to take interest in the development of an infrastructure; at least to the extent it would serve their interest.

Although he did not make mention of the Warrant Chiefs System in his work, he has succeeded in making us to grapple with fact that the major objective of colonialism was to restructure the nature of the demand and supply in the colonies in a manner that there should be a large market for the products

of their capitalist industries. And at the same time encourage the colonies to concentrate on the production of agro based tropical raw materials. The result of this according to the author was the complementarity that began to exist between the metropolitan economy and that of the colonies. This academic contribution by Ake has created for us the opportunity to understand the economic aspect of the Warrant Chiefs System.

C.A.C. NJOKU

The author has taken pain to study the history and culture of Mbaise from the earliest times to AD 2001. He revealed that before the emergence of Mbaise, the area that became Mbaise had had some kind of cultural and economic relationship. He emphasized that economic activities such as trade was one major means of relationship among the clans that became Mbaise. The author argued firmly that there were cross-clans relationship meant that the coming together of these clans into a larger society called Mbaise under colonial was determined partly because of the existing relationships before the advent of British rule.

He did not only limit himself to the study of the socio-cultural relationship of the Mbaise societies. He examined the process of imposition of

British rule in the area. Dealing on the colonial conquest of the area, he was able to bring to limelight the kind of atrocities which the British expeditionary forces caused in the area. He revealed how the District Officer of Owerri summoned the Mbaise first at Nkwo Otulu and secondly at Know-Ogwu and deliberately decimated them what he aptly referred to "deceitful truce"[9]. This according to him was one of the consequences of the killing of the British Doctor, Rogers Stewart who was part of the expeditionary force that was sent to pacify the area. This work is very important to understand the political transformation of Mbaise area through the colonial establishment of native court and appointment of Warrant Chiefs from the area. Njoku revealed how our indigenous technology was destroyed by colonialism. He stated that most of the people in the craft industry were banned from engaging further in their passionate occupation.

Although the author made use of secondary records, he relied extensively on oral interviews, which he conducted virtually all over Mbaise. This work was useful to us not only in its analysis of the pre-colonial and colonial socio-political situation in Mbaise, but its importance can further be explained in the fact that it helped us to locate some resource persons who we interviewed in the process of the present research. One significant problem of this work is that it

covers a long period of time from the earliest time to AD 2001. This has the tendency of reducing the depth of his analysis and affect the general outlook of the work.

J. C. ANENE

This scholar attempted to examine the political transformation in Southern Nigeria from 1885-1906. Although he drew attention to the political structure of the indigenous societies in the area, the main focus of his work was on how the British influence was transformed from the stage of "paper protectorate"[10] to the formal colonization of the Southern Nigeria area. He designated the period 1885 to 1890 a period of "paper protectorate" because the London Gazette announced to the world in June that year that the Niger District has been placed under the protection of Her Majesty (the Queen). He further explained that while the London Gazette spoke of measures in course of preparation for the administration of the Niger District Protectorate, there was no reference to the wishes of the indigenous ruler[11].

[10] J. C. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition: 1885-1906, Theory and Practice in a Colonial Protectorate, Cambridge University Press, London, 1960, p. 61.

The author has critically analyzed how the British transcended beyond the paper protectorate and overthrew the indigenous authorities. The term overthrew is very informative. It goes a long way to show the violent manner

which the British took over the affairs of government in Southern Nigeria. According to Anene, the overthrow of indigenous authority first phase began in 1891 up to 1895, while the second phase began from 1896 to 1906. He emphasized that the first phase of the overthrow falls under Macdonald's administration who believed in using the diplomacy, to overthrow the indigenous[12]. While the second phase of the overthrow falls under the period when Sir Ralph Moor was in the helm of affairs of the Niger Coast Protectorate. According to him Moor was an ardent believer of the use of force to extend both political and commercial interest of Britain[13].

Anene was apt when he said that a great deal has indeed been written in praise of what came to be called "Indirect Rule" in Nigeria and elsewhere. In furthering his explanation, he added that in Southern Nigeria, the administrators might easily have claim some of the virtues of indirect rule for the system they were developing. Illusion and expediency, therefore joined hands to lay the foundation of an alien system of local government which effectively undermined the tribal system[14]. What is interesting here is his scholarly assertion that "theoretically the 'Native' organs constituted a vital link between the imperial rule and native peoples. In reality, the local institutions were from the first artificial bodies used by the British officials for their own purpose. He

[11] Ibid, p. 67
[12] Ibid, p. 136
[13] Ibid, p. 178-250

strongly affirmed in his conclusion that the aim of British presence in the area that became Nigeria was due to their commercial interest. He buttressed this by quoting E.D. Morel, who asserted that "Commerce took us to West Africa; commerce kept and will keep us in West Africa. It is the *fons et origo* of our presence in West Africa. The day it ceases to be so, West Africa ceases to be useful to the empire. It will become a costly plaything and the British people are too essentially a people to care long for toys of that kind[15]."

The relevance of this work to our current research work is great. It has created a good opportunity for us to understand the main purpose of the British colonialism in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

[14] Ibid, p. 250
[15] Anene quoting E.D. Morel, p. 320.

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CHAPTER *ONE*
INTRODUCTION

It is a common place that the study of environment is very vital to the study of human history. Man does not exist in vacuum. Therefore, this chapter shows how man's physical environment affected his activities within the area under enquiry. Ignoring the nature of the land, climate and vegetation, would amount to negating the fundamental basis, which the understanding of the economic, cultural and socio-political development of an area relies upon.

We have seen from various studies and researches that environment play an important role in human culture, settlement patterns and economic activities[1]. The study of the man's past include their progress, growth, stagnations and decline therefore it is proper to understand that the relationship between man and his environment is dialectic[2]. As the environment influences the nature of man, so too man cultures the environment to ensure his own continued existence and safety.

Furthermore, where and how the people came to this present location is another interesting area examined in the chapter. This will deal critically with the traditions of origin of the peoples of Mbaise. This is divided into two: the

[1] I.S. Jimada, The Establishment of Patigi Emirate: The Historical Background C1810-1898 p
[2] M.A. Thesis submitted to the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, p. 2

migration myths and creation myths. Most elders in Mbaise believe they do not come from anywhere and anybody claims otherwise is a liar[3]. The study of the people demonstrated the relationship between the clans.

GEOGRAPHICAL BACKGROUND: LOCATION OF MBAISE

The Mbaise area became a British colonial administrative unit in the early years of the twentieth century[4]. It is situated in the very heartland ofIgboland[5]. The area could also be said to occupy the central part of what much later became Imo State[6]. The area lies between 5-6 degrees latitude and 7-7.30 degrees east longitude[7].

Another description shows that Mbaise area is found within the palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria[8] in what became the Owerri Division. The area lies in the Equatorial rain forest[9]. In terms of land coverage, Mbaise covers an area of land measured about one hundred and eighty five (185) square miles[10]. The Imo River separates the eastern part of Mbaise from Ngwaland[11] of the Ayaba Court area of the former Bende Division. Mbaise formed the southern

[3] E.Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, Macmillan Press Limited, London, 1972, p.3
[4] T.U. Nwala (ed), Mbaise in Contemporary Nigeria, Gold and Maestro, New York, p. 14
[5] L. E. Njoku in Nwala (ed) Ibid p 36
[6] Ibid p. 36
[7] E. C. Agulanna, Mbaiseness of Mbaise, 1-0 Publishers Owerri, 1978, p. 28
[8] R.K. Udo, Geographical Regions of Nigeria, Heinemann London, 1970, p. 66
[9] Nwala (ed) op cit p. 36, see Map 1
[10] Ibid p. 36
[11] Nwala (ed) op cit p. 36

bounded in the north by Obowo Court Area in the former Okigwe Division[12]. The southern part is bounded by the Okpala Court Area in the same Owerri Division. The village groups of Ezinihitte clan were situated nearest to the Imo River. While the village groups of Ahiara and Ekwereazu clans formed the boundary area to the north and partly to the west near Ikeduru. The southern boundary villages were those of the Okovoro and Agbaja clans.

PHYSICAL FEATURES AND DRAINAGE

The Imo River which carries surface drainage around the eastern part of Mbaise formed the boundary between the area and Ngwaland. It has some tributaries, which serve the towns living around the western bank as source of water supply. Towns such as Onicha, Udo, Eziudo, Itu, Amumara, and Ife, of the Ezinihitte and Amuzu, Ogbo, Uvuru of the Okovoro clan are good examples of the towns that derive the greater proportion of the water supplies from minor streams that derive their supply from the Imo River.

The Imo River stretched from the eastern boundary to the southern boundary of Mbaise. A small river called Oramiriukwa is found towards the western boundary of the area separating the Ekwereazu and Ahiara clans from

[12] C.A.C. Njoku, History and Calture of Mbaise from the Earliest Time to AD 2001, p. 1

Ikeuru[14] Court area of the same Owerri Division. It is a very sluggish river[15]. Another stream found around the northern part of Mbaise is very small, flowing from the west to the east of Ekwereazu clan into the "Abadaba Lake" in Obowo of the Okigwe Division[16].

TOPOGRAPHY AND SOILS

Mbaise is comparatively a flat land, but around the eastern boundary of the area, towards the Imo River the land slopped to the Imo River with about two or three hundred (200 or 300) feet below sea level[17].

The topography around the area, mainly in the area occupied by the people of Onicha town of the Ezinihitte clan is undulating[18]. The land at the extreme north of the Ekwereazu clan is also gently undulating[19]. There are no rich alluvial or volcanic soils in the area[17]. Rather, the area is floored by washed-out sands that cover much of the central Igbo belt and which rank

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[13]N.E.A., MNLOC 6/1/195 An Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans Owerri Division p. 2
[14] Ibid p. 2
[15] Ibid p.2
[16] N.A.E. C.S.O. 279337 An Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division, Owerri Province
[17] M.N. Eluwa, The Origin and Organization of Egwu Onicha, A Research Project presented to the Department of History, Alvan Ikoku College of Deduction, Owerri, 1991, p. 2
[18] N.A.E., MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit, p. 2
[19]Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 36

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the above classification of the soil in Mbaise area is that the area is not suitable for crop production.

Mineral deposit suchas coal and iron were found in the area. Mr. G. I. Shockley, Assistant District Officer of Owerri Division reported in 1932 that Mr. Falk in 1919 found coal in a deep revine at Ihitte-Afukwu, the most northerly part of the Ekwereazu clan in Mbaise though he (Stockley) did not see the coal, he proved that there was presence of some quantity of iron in the same area[23]. The areas have not been further explored to ascertain these reports.

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[20] Ibid p. 36
[21] Udo, op cit, p. 66
[22] Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 36
[23] MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit, p. 3

CLIMATE AND VEGETATION

The climate conditions in the Mbaise area are those of the tropical rainforest. The temperature conditions are similar all over the place. They belong to the palm belt of south eastern Nigeria which experience similar

temperature all over the regions[24]. The hottest months in the area are February and March, when the mean annual temperature is above 80°F[25].

The influence of the harmattan (*Uguru*) is not severe and lasts for only a few weeks in December and January[26]. The harmattan in this area is classified into two, that of the hot dry wind (*Uguru Nwayakaya*), usually harsh, and that which is cold dry with little or no wind which withers green leaves, known to the people of the area as *otakwukwondu* meaning, "eater of green or fresh leaves." The harmattan was brought by the Northeast trade winds. It is a general belief amongst the people of Mbaise that the severer the harmattan, the abundant the yield of such fruits as kola nut (*orji*), the African pear (*ube*) and so on. It is also the people's belief that the harmattan makes the thick bushes permeable; hence it becomes easy for clearing. But when the

[24] Udo op cit, p.67

[25] Ibid p 67

[26] Ibid p 67

The two major seasons witnessed by the people of Mbaise are the wet season (*udumiri*) and the dry season (*Okochi*). The wet season begins in March

and reaches its terminal point in the month of October[27]. The wet season lasts for about eight months in a year. The wet season is divided into two by a slight break of about two weeks which occurs in the month of August[28], popularly known as August Break. During this period of break, the yam farmers in the place embark on the first phase of their yam harvest, *Ike-ji*. Yams harvested during this period were used for the new yam festival, which was and is still celebrated in the month of August.

Furthermore, the break ushers in a period of about two-maximal regime in which the rainiest periods are around June, July and September. Around the month of March, April and May the rains come in violent storms, destroying crops, especially maize plants and roof of houses[29]. Within the period, there is a heavy downpour of short duration when several inches may be recorded within an hour. As in other parts of West Africa, the sudden and torrential run-

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[27]Ibid p 67

[28] Ibid p 67

[29]Ibid p 67

eastern part of Mbaise in the areas close to the Imo River and around the northern boundary towards the Okigwe Division where the topography is

undulating. The average annual rainfall in Mbaise is measured at about one hundred (100) inches[31].

The dry season (*Okochi*) begins from November and lasts until February. In the light of the dry season, the Imo River becomes the remedy for water supply, particularly for the villages of Ezinihitte and Oke clans where the river crossed. Many villages from Ekwereazu and Ihiara clans depended on the small (*Oramiriukwa*) stream. Those areas far from the Imo River or the other steams as we had earlier mentioned, depended on their ponds (what the colonial administrators called catch pits[3]. These ponds drained surface water from rain storm. They were very useful, although they lasted for a short time into the season before they dry up, making the people walk for more than five miles in search of natural water[32]. The harmattan which was discussed above occurs

[30] Ibid, p. 67

[31] C.S.O. 27937 op cit p. 5

[32] MINLOC 6/1/195 op cit p. 2

As equatorial rain forest, (see Map 1)the area was characterized with tropical woodland. The forests were overgrown with tall trees such as Iroko *Oji* which was often called *Oke Osisi* meaning huge tree shrubs such as *Ububa, Icheku* and *Nkwa* as called by the people were found under the deep rooted

tall trees, oil bean and the African pear were also in abundance in the area, though they were found mainly around the settled areas.

The forests were further characterized with heavy climbers, which made them very thick and very difficult to slash or clear. Such climbers include what the people called *Utu* which produces a round edible juicy fruit and *Okazi* plant which was and still widely consumed as vegetable among the people. As stated earlier, the area is located within the palm belt of southern Nigeria[33]. The trees in the area were and still to a great extent dominated by the palm trees (*nkwu*). The palm trees grow wild or semi wild in compound lands, farmlands or in special groves around the village[34]. Partly as a result of abundance of palm trees in the area and the economic importance of the oil extracted from

[33] Ibid, p. 2

[34] Udo, op cit, p. 66

palm oil, kernel and their economic importance to the people.[35]

Raffia palm trees (*Ngwo*) was and is still a popular tree, commonly found within the Mbaise area just like other Igbo areas. Just like the other palm tree, the raffia palm grows in the compound lands, farmlands, but they grow in far

greater number on the swamps (*mpata*). In those areas, the raffia palm trees area almost over crowded, dominating every other plant or trees, giving rise to the name *avor* or *ogbor ngwo* which could imply raffia palm grove. The swamps (*mpata*) are found mainly in the areas around the Imo River bank such as theOnicha, Udo, Obizi, Eziudo, Utu, Amumara, Ife, Amuzu, and Ogbouvuru. During the rainy season, most of these palm trees were tapped through the use of canoe. The main products of this tree are palm wine (*mmanya ngwo*) and roofing sheets or mat (*Akrika*).

The high temperature and high humidity favour quick plant growth but although the natural climate is the tropical rainforest, the area has been so farmed that traces of the true vegetation are only to be found in juju groves or forbidden bush. In the whole of Mbaise today, these kinds of juju groves or forbidden bushes are rarely more than one or two plots.

POPULATION

Mbaise was (and is still) a densely populated area. Probably because of how densely populated the area was, it was divided under the jurisdiction of two courts in 1909 when the British colonial court system was imposed on the

area[36]. About 100,000 people were said to have attended the native court at Nguru[37]. This was a period when the whole of Oke Clan and the Southern part of Ezinihitte Clan were under the jurisdiction of Okpala Court. Therefore it is possible that the population of Mbaise by 1909 reached 140,000 to 150,000 mark.

The 1921 population census solved the problem of speculation about the population figure of the area, but a critical examination of the record revealed that many village groups were omitted in the enumeration. This could probably be due to the reasons given by the District Commissioner of Owerri

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[36] A.R. Chapman, Political Development in Eastern Nigeria: The Role of the Ethnic. Ph.D Thesis, Columbia, 1976, p. 156.

[37] A.C. Smock, Ibo Politics: the Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria, Harvard University, Massachusetts, 1971, p. 70.

> *local superstition of misfortune following enumeration, explanation by the political officers failed to remove suspicion that the real motive of the government was to obtain information for a levy for war purposes and taxation[38].*

It was further stated that the enumeration was accurate in some area, such as Owerri town and Nekede. But in other areas, the women and children

ran away on the day of enumeration[39]. To further illustrate how inaccurate the 1921 census was, it is important to outline the list of village groups in Mbaise, so as to identify those that were excluded in the enumeration. Mbaise is made up of five clans namely: Agbaja, Ahiara, Ekwereazu, Ezinihitte and Oke.

Table 1: The List of Village Groups in Mbaise 1934

[38] Census Report, Owerri Division, 1921.

[39] Ibid

	Inyogwugwu
	Isuobiangwu
	Lagwa
	Nguru
	Umulu
	Umuohiagu

AHIARA	Aguneze Akabo Amuzi Lude Nnarambia Obodo Obodo Ujadim Ogbe Ogwuana Oru Otulu
EKWEREAZU	Ekwereazu town Ihitteagukwu Mpan Obohia Oparandim Umuokrika
EZINIHITTE	Akpokwe

	Amaumara Ezegbogu Ezuido Ife Ihitte Itu Oboama Obizi Okpofie Onicha Udo Umuchoko Umudim Umueze Umunama
Oke	Amuzu Lorji Mbulu

	Uvuru

Source: Mbaise P. Elugwenaonu, Mbaise at a Glance, 1st Gate Communication Owerri, 1999, p. 8-9

Among these 43 village groups that made up the Mbaise area, only about 19 of them appeared in the 1921 census record. Ahiara was recorded as a clan, with the names of its component village groups not included. However, the figure of the Mbaise village groups that appeared in the record was about 77,434[40].

The assessment that was carried out in preparation for direct taxation in 1927 in the area was not only haphazard, but revealed only the population of the adult males[41]. Attention was not paid to women and children which constituted the greater proportion of the population in the 1927 tax assessment report. Consequently, the total population of the area cannot rely on the mare assessment of adult males.

However, between 1930 and 1933 series of anthropological researches were carried out in Mbaise by the colonial officers. The intelligence reports produced from these anthropological inquiries revealed that the population of

Ezinihitte Clan was about 43,264[42]. This was also said to be based on appromixation. The report states that:

> *The Ezinihitte Clan occupied approximately 56 square miles and include 11,537 assessed adult males. Tax collection has shown this assessment to be reasonably accurate. The calculation of total population can only be approximated. The adult male are people per square mile[43].*

[40] Census Report, op cit.

[41] N.A.E, Owerri District Register of Warrant Chiefs, 1927.

[42] N.A.E., C.S.O., 27937, An Intelligence Report on the Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division, 1932.

If we examine this approximation in line with the culture in which the birth of the tenth child from a single woman was celebrated with fanfare, and in a society in which the most convenient source of labour was polygamy, the approximation cannot stand. Mbaise was known for their love for many children and wives. We will come to that later in this work. The same process was used to arrive at the figure of 20,500 for Ekwereazu Clan, and 15,750 for the Ahiara Clan[44].

In the same vein, the population of the Oke Clan was approximately 17,000 and 700 people to a square mile[45]. The inaccuracy observed in most of these records have made it difficult to arrive at a given figure for Mbaise between 1909 and 1934. However, these intelligence reports as we have shown revealed that the Nguru Court exercised jurisdiction over 100,000

[43] Ibid.

[44] N.A.E., E.P. 8840, An Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, Owerri Division.

[45] N.A.E., C.S.E. 1/85/5118, Intelligence Report on Okpala Native Court Area.

Mbaise reached between 140,000 and 150,000. Having the area coverage of about 185 square miles using these figures shows that the area had by 1930 the population density of between 757 and 811 people per square mile. And this goes a long way to suggest that the assertion of Njoku that the population density in Mbaise approaches those of the Nile Valley and the fertile lands of Monsoon Asia[1].

THE PEOPLE

The study of the peoples of Mbaise would not ignore an attempt to providing answer to the questions who are they? Where do they come from?

Where did they occupy during the period under study? And finally what do they do?

The historical questions, who are the Mbaise people, would among other historical questions arouse more interest among the present day scholars of history. The absence of archaeological and conventional records concerning the area would no doubt pose difficulty in providing answers to the above questions which have excited the inquiring minds.

Nevertheless studies carried out by some scholars of repute concerning the origin of Igbo people as a whole would provide a base to answering the above outlined questions about Mbaise. The Nri-Awka Orlu areas have been designated by scholars as the area from which the Igbo communities dispersed to their present locations. Talbote and Mulhall opined as follows:

The Ibo have no tradition of migration from elsewhere and appear to have settled in the thickly populated part of Nri-Awka and Isuama areas for a very long period and to have spread from there[46].

The implication of this finding is that the component units of the Igbo community migrated from no other place to their present location than the

Nri-Awka and Isuama. The Igbo tradition of origin, when analyzed in conjunction with other demographic, geographical, structural and cultural features, suggests an Igbo centre or core in what is now known as Orlu and Awka Divsions[47]. By so doing, G. I. Jones is supportive to the findings of Talbot and Mulhall, hence Orlu and Awka Divisions as mentioned by Jones encompassed the Nri-wka and Isuama areas previously mentioned by Talbot and Mulhall. This reinforced the claims that different Igbo communities, including Mbaise, migrated from the same area.

This argument gained more ground when in her study, Isichei observed that, as time went on, the proto-Igbo dispersed more widely into the forest of Igboland, they concentrated especially in what much later became Owerri, Okigwe, Orlu and Awka Divisions[48]. The arguments of these scholars are pointing to the direction that Mbaise migrated from the Nri-Awka area. But Afigbo contended that for the time being this argument would appear to provide sufficient ground for this Nri-Awka-Isuama hypothesis but the matter cannot yet be regarded as proven beyond argument[49]. Before this state could be recurred, it would be necessary for the linguistic research to demonstrate that the Nri-Awka and Isuama areas was the region in which the Igbo language

[48] See Isichei op cit, p. 4

[49] A. E. Afigbo in Obaro Ikime (ed), Ground Work of Nigerian History, Heinemann Edu Books, 1980, p. 77

started developing as a distinct form of speech, or in the alternative, archeologists will have to establish that the so-called "Igbo core" is the most ancient region of Igbo settlement in southern Nigeria[50].

Afigbo further suggested that an attempt to reconstruct how Igbo villages or village groups and clans came into being as coherent socio-cultural and at times political units, will have to concern itself with the critical analysis of what social anthropologist have probably aptly described as the "ideological charter" validating existing unities and relationships[51]. This charter is what may be called traditions of origins of various autonomous or sub-cultural units[52].

After his critical analysis of the ideological charter, or what may be called tradition of origin, Afigbo came to conclusion that in any case, the traditions of Isuama Igbo, (meaning *isu* who had gone abroad) made up of Mbama, Mbieri, Ikeduru, Osu, Ehime, Mbaise of the Ohuhu Ngwa and many other Cross River Igbos indicated that they migrated eastward from the general area of Orlu[53]. This observation reinforced the positions of the previous contributors. Not only that, it unveiled that Mbaise is among the Igbo groups which migrated eastward into their present place of abode from the central Igbo area of Nri-Awka and Isuama.

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[50] Ibid
[51] Ibid
[52] Ibid
[53] A. E. Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, Study in Igbo History and Culture, University Press Ltd,Nsukka, 1981, p. 12

In a similar vein Jones said that one can more positively distinguish a later and more massive dispersion which tradition do refer to and which was mainly south eastward into the Aba Division to form the Ngwa group of tribes and movements east into the Umuahia area[54]. A close look at Afigbo and Jones views, one would say that Mbaise people migrated from Isuama into their present location. Another reason is that although Jones was silent about Mbaise, he mentioned the Ngwa group who through tradition of migration of some Mbaise group such as Ezinihitte claim that they were the migrating people who made haste, and crossed the Imo River into their present area of occupation, when the other group rested to roast their yams because they were hungry. Giving this reason, the group who were enclosed by the Imo River because they wasted their time roasting yam occupied the western part of the Imo River, and was called *Ohuhu* meaning "roasters." While the other group who made haste and crossed before the river enclosed, the *Ngwa*, which is a derivative from *ngwa ngwa* meaning "fast fast).

Mbaise people belong to one of the oldest surviving groups found in the forest belt of southern Nigeria[55]. As Igbos, they were unlike the groups found among the Yoruba of Southeastern Nigeria or among the Hausa of the

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[54]Jones op cit p. 30

[55]This means that Mbaise being part of the Igbo group, belongs to one of the oldest surviving groups found in the forest belt of Southern Nigeria. Their language is Igbo, their politics and administration is the typical.

Northern Nigeria who were organized into large and centralized communities. There was absence of kingdoms or centralized authorities of whom power was vested with, to rule over others as professionals. Rather, the largest political unit was the village or village groups which had the population of a few thousands[56]. Being a typical Igbo group, there was no ruling aristocracy which wields authority as a specialized fulltime occupation[57]. The details about political organization of Mbaise people are dealt with in chapter two of this study. Mbaise people were predominantly farmers who lived in their rural settlement. Crop production was their main occupation though they were also traders. See chapter two of this work for details about the economic activities of the people.

Large family made up of many children was one common feature among the Mbaise peoples. This was evidenced in what was known as *Egbu Ukwu* the direct meaning of this is "waist goat". It means the ceremony marking the arrival of the tent child from a single woman. It was a thing of honour for Mbaise woman to give birth to ten or more children. The quest for *Egbu Ukwu* among the Mbaise people was described by Njoku as infectious enthusiasm,

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[56]R. K Udo. Environment and People of Nigeria: An Introduction to the History of Nigeria in Obaro Ikime (ed) op cit, p. 17
[57] Ibid, p. 18

farmland, resulting to the degradation of the soil, shortage of food and hunger which finally led to the migration of labour from the area into other parts of the eastern region whose lands were very fertile. Such areas included Ohaji, Etche and Ngwa lands.

Mbaise is made up of five towns or clans namely: Ahiara, Agbaja, Ekwereazu, Ezinihitte and Oke. A lot of arguments have been made on whether or not the five areas that made up Mbaise were clans. Some scholars argued that only two of the clans that formed Mbaise were qualified to be clans namely, Ahiara and Oke. This was because it has been said elsewhere that these two societies are close to maximal lineage group. From the views of Njoku, Audrey Smock and some other scholars of Mbaise history, the other so-called clans were not maximal linage group. This is because there is nothing to show that the component units are agnatical descendants. There is the absence of genealogical tree. But some anthropologists have made it clear that clan has a definitive problem. John Lewis described clans as a larger kinship group in which actual lineal relationship with the ancestors is lost but all the members are supposed to be descended from one man[58]. This creates a serious problem on what is actually a clan. It is not possible to understand if a

society is a clan since the people had lost memory of all actual lineal relationship with ancestors. In a similar vein, John Beattie contended that the central principles is all the people who believed themselves to have descended in one of the line (either through man or through woman) from a common ancestor a certain numbers of generation back, regard themselves and are regarded by others forming a distinct group or association. They form such association for a specific purpose. For example, the performance of a religious cult, or their mutual dependency and attachment may cover practically every of their existence. The term clan is sometimes applied to grouping of this kind, though in some societies, clan members form a category of people rather than any kind of closely-knit cooperating groups. Often they are widely dispersed and engage in no corporate activity on a clan wide seal side[59]. He further explained that sometimes they are unaware of their genealogical connection if any which links them with their presumed common ancestor and with each other[60]. The implication of this is that a people may lose the memory of the lineal connection, disperse widely and consequently formulate different traditions of origin. Many claim that they are created in their present location. This is the basis upon which we rely to designate some groups that made of

[58] L. John, Anthropology made Simply, W.H. Allen and Company, London, 1969, p. 98
[59] J. Beattie, Other Cultures, Aims, Methods and Achievement in Social Anthropology, Chem and West Limited, London, 1964, p. 98
[60] Ibid 30

Mbaise as clans. For instance, in one version of the tradition of origin of the Ezinihitte clan, they said that they were created at *Orie-Ukwu*, being their centre of creation[61]. *Orie-Ukwu* as it can be seen above refers to Igbo Market Day. The Igbo week is designated with the four market days of *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afor* and *Nkwo*. That is to say that originally, the Igbo week had only four days but eventually the week was extended to an eight day period[62]. The market took place daily, but there were four main or large ones based on the original four day week[63]. Therefore *Orie-Ukwu* is one of the large market days as there is *Afor-Ukwu* and *Afor-Nta*,*Orie-Ukwu* and *Orie-Nta*, *Nkwo-Ukwu* and *Nkwo-Nta*, *Eke-Ukwu* and *Eke-Nta* (*Ukwu* means large or big while *Nta* means small or little). This explanation would help one to understand that the deity called *Chineke Orie Ukwu* means god the creator which dwells at Orie Ukwu location in Obama and Umunama.

Village groups suchas Ekwereazu and Ahiara claimed to have descended from one man respectively[664]. Tradition had it that the members of Oke clan had genealogical relations, though there are groups who reject this claim. To

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[61]C.A.C. Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, from Earlier Time to AD 2001, p. 3

[62] S.N. Nwabara, Iboland: A Century of Contact with the British, 1860-1960, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1977, p. 20

[63] Ibid, p. 20

[64] MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit, p. 6

the Mbaise area will only come to an end if there is a new archeological discovery, to suffice either claim.

However, the Mbaise area is made up of five clans. These five clans were divided into what could be regarded as village groups. The village groups have entities sizable enough to be called villages, while the village embraced other small entities as kindred. At the same time, these kindred encompass large extended families, while the family remained the lowest and smallest in size. For example, the Ezinihitte clan in Mbaise is made up of sixteen village groups such as Akpokwu, Amaumara and Onicha just, to mention but three. First of these village groups mentioned above had four villages, the second one has 12 villages, and the third has 10 villages. These villages were made up of kindred. For example, Umuanuma is a village in Akpokwu having 3 large kindred such as Umu Oma, Umu Ndilobi and Umanuma Ocha. *Umu* means the descendants or in the direct meaning, the children. Um Oma as a kindred in Umuanuma begot Umu Udala and so on. (See appendix for illustration). As said above, the family in the area was made up of a man, his wife or wives and children.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN

As said elsewhere, Mbaise is one of the densest communities occupying the forest belt of south-eastern Nigeria or what Udo referred to as the palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria[65]. According to the 1953 population census, the area was inhabited by 185,274 (one hundred and eighty six thousand, two hundred and seventy four) persons[66]. The people occupied a stretched area of land covering about 185 (one hundred and eighty five) square miles, having a population of about 1,006 persons per square mile.

The population density of the place is said to exceed the critical optimum mark in the tropics, given the low level of scientific and technological advancement[67]. The general conception that land belongs to the community no longer applies to the people due to ever increasing population density in the area. Apart from the juju groves, market squares and few palm groves in some part of the area, land belongs to individual families. Acquisition is

[65]Udo op cit
[66]Chapman op cit p. 164
[67]L. E. Njoku in Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 37

The high density population of the area affected their settlement pattern. This dispersed settlement was the dominant pattern of settlement in the Mbaise area[69]. The people were predominantly farmers, and were by no

means urbanized groups. In this area, a number of related families lived in one large compound *Ezi*, usually fenced round with mud walls, or palm leaf mats[70]. Those fences were in other situations made with live sticks that survive easily and are propagated by stem *asusu*. The mud fence was known as *Mgbidi*, while the others were called *Ogba*.

It would be apt to say that the fences were erected to protect the lives and properties of individual members of the families from external threats. For example, they were rearers of domestic animals such as goats and sheep though not on a large scale. They employ semi-intensive system of rearing animals. Therefore the fence served as protection to those animals. It also gave the people opportunity to know when people from outside enters the compound.

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[68]R. K. Udo, op cit, p. 68

[69] Ibid 7th Heading this book do not have pages. It is arranged in headings, that is why the present writer is referring to the "Headings."

[70] MINLOC 6/1/195 op cit

facing the entrance. While those of his brother's wives and sons were located on the two wings of the compound sometimes in an order of seniority. The

family hall *Ovu* was situated at the center of the compound toward the entrance. Most often, the front side of family hall formed the gate of the compound, such that anybody going into the compound passes through it[71].

About three, four or more compounds collectively formed the kindred. These families or compounds usually settled somewhat apart from the other, covering a large area[72]. Those extended families which in most cases live in one compound, contained above 100 adult males[73]. This included the senior or the oldest man in the compound, who was often referred to as *Onye-nwe-ezi* the owner of the compound.

A number usually three or four of the extended families who claim common descent from one ancestor formed a kindred. The name of the kindred was called after their ancestor, for example, *Umu Oma*. This implies the children or descendants of Oma. More often, the paths leading to different

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[71]MINLOC 6/1/195 op cit p. 6

[72]MINLOC 6/1/195 op cit p. 6

[73] Ibid p. 6

of

Ezi,

the earth deity. For example *Mbara Uhie*, *Mbara Uku*.Both *Uhie* and *Uku* are trees while *Mbara* is the centre where they are situated. It was an open and

wide area constantly and well-kept by the collective effort of the members of the kindred. The kindred ponds were situated around such areas. The place served as assembly ground for the members of the kindred when there were important issues or emergencies.

In Mbaise, settlement was said to be on the order of seniority of the brothers and sons of the founder of the village area. This was mostly evident among the Ezinihitte group in Mbaise. For example the Ocha Community of the Ezinihitte was said to have settled last in the area, and as a result, they occupied the area with the worst topography. Onicha is hilly and undulating[74]. As a result it was very prone to erosion.

One of the major reasons for the settlement pattern in the Mbaise area is attributed to the breakdown of traditional land tenure system in the area[75]. With the spread of individual tenure and continued fragmentation of farmland,

[74]Eluwa, op cit, p. 2

in the area. Furthermore, the people of Mbaise were predominantly farmers and depended on land (soil) for their living. Therefore, it is possible to suggest

that the families or extended families settle some distance away from the other, in order to secure farmland around the compound areas.

Another reason considered to have influenced the settlement pattern in the area is the Mbaise man's lust for more children. Much values were attached to having many children. This was evident in the *Eghu Ukwu* tradition which gloried the arrival of the tenth child in a single woman[76]. To this background it becomes apt to suggest that there was need enough for landed space to accommodate such a large family and their future expansion. The autonomous nature of the Igbo families was evident in the Mbaise area. The family was governed by the head whose influence was not extended across his family. In this case, it is safe to postulate tat in a bid to prevent the excess interference of one family-head in the affairs of another family resulted to

[75]Eluwa, op cit, p. 2
[76]L.E. Njoku in Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 38

to 300 feet below the sea level as stated above, the other parts of Mbaise is comparatively flat and inhabited. There is no evidence of settlement around the river bank. This could be as a result of the general Igbo believe as

demonstrated by Isichei, that the Igbo communities regarded settlement near water with definite apprehension. She further contended that the ancestors believed that these streams were meant to quench thirst but not to serve them as homes. The streams and rivers are the homes of gods and other spirits[77].

It has been stated above that one of the reasons that led to dispersion the overcrowded area is connected to the breakdown of the traditional land tenure system. In the same vein, it is worthy to note that people who dispersed from the overcrowded area did not only settle within Mbaise, but migrated and settled across the frontiers of the area into such places as Ngwaland and Etche. For example, it is said that the people of Umuoghuru in Ngwaland migrated from Umuoghuru village in Ife, Umuagom Ngwa left Umuagom Ife for their present location, while the Ofe-Ama in Ngwa came to

[77]Isichei, op cit, p. 6

their present location from Umuneyo in Ife, so as the Amapu Ife people of Ngwa. This movement was said to have taken a gradual process. Trees planted along the paths through which they moved were there[78].

Not only from the Ife area, some group left their settlement in Isiala Mbutu in the Oke clan for their present location in Isiala Ngwa[79]. One of the groups was known as Umuigba. The signs and relics of their settlement is still evident in Mbutu today.[80] Another group known as *Mbuta Ama iri na Isii* in Ngwaland moved to their present location from Mbutu of the Oke clan in Mbaise through a village called Umunanwiri in Ife of the Ezinihitte clan[81]. It will be safe to assert that the bedrock of this movement outside Mbaise area was their dispersal settlement pattern, which created spaces around the compound land for farming; hence there was no enoughland to enhance it.

A REVIEW OF LEGENDS OF ORIGINS AND IN INTER-CLAN RELATIONSHIP

to

[78]J. Nnajiaku, 95, Oral Interview, Owutu, 02/05/07
[79]Nnajiaku as in No. 1
[80]C. A. C. Njoku 75, Oral Information, 05/05/07
[81]Ibid

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without some levels of connection.

The largest of the clans in Mbaise was the Ezinihitte[82]. Although the Ezinihitte people said not to have a common ancestor, they share a common tradition of origin associated with the legendary site at *Orie Ukwu Obama na*

Umunama (the large Orie Market of Obama and Umunama). The Ezinihitte people claimed that they are the aborigine of the area they presently occupy. They stated that their forefathers from "the beginning" have always lived on the land which they themselves now occupy[83]. Their traditions state that they were created in a place called *Orie-Ukwu Obama na Umunama* as mentioned above and all the sons of Ezinihitte left the point for their place of occupation in accordance to seniority.

Ezinihitte people were culturally and religiously unified. This was, no doubt, sufficed by anthropological surveys carried out in the area. Common cultural characteristics mentioned in the anthropological report and affirmed by the elders of Ezinihitte included the presence of *Okonko* society, a title society of wealthy and influential men; the worship of the same god *Chineke* and the use of manila coins as the same rate of exchange for shillings[84].

Ezinihitte as a people was qualified to be designated as a clan. This argument is so because anthropology sees clan as a large kinship group in which all actual lineal relationship with the ancestor is lost but all the members are supposed to be descended from one man[85]. Clan can also be seen as an

association formed for a specific purpose. For example, the performance of religious or their mutual dependency and attachment may cover every aspect of their existence[86]. In some societies, clan members form a category of people rather than any kind of closely-knit cooperating group.

Not only the presence of *Okonko* society, the belief in *Chieke* (Orie-Ukwu) called the Creator or the exchange of the manila coins at the same rate with shillings. There was another cultural festival which fraternized the people of Ezinihitte. This cultural festival was known as *Orji Ezinihitte* cultural festival.

[84] Ibid p55
[85] J. Lewis, Anthropology Made Simple, W.A. Allen, London, p. 98
[86] Beattie, op cit, p. 98

presentation of cola nut was rotated from the most senior to the youngest. During the ceremony, the people of Amachi in Apokwu performed the function of *Itu aka,* that is to outline their successes in the last year and thank *Chineke* and implore him to continue to ensure their success. Their failures were also outlined and a call was made to *Chineke*, their god to prevent such occurrence in the future.

Other cultural feature of Ezinihitte was the practice of *Awka Nkwa-Otile* rump dance. It will excite the inquiring minds to know the relationship

between the Ezinihitte clan and Agbaja. But before this is done, it is not to consider Agbaja as a clan, though the British designated it so. Before imposition of British rule in the Mbaise area, there was nothing in common among the component units that became Agbaja.

A report on the Nguru Court Area stated that Agbajas were distinct sub-tribe because all of them worshipped *Ndichie* Juju[87]. Agabaja was made up of Nguru, Enyogwugwu and the Okwuato towns of Ibeku, Lagwa and Umuhu. The reason given above that Agbaja was a distinct sub-tribe because they worship *Ndichie* is unfounded. *Ndichie* means ancestors[88]. Ancestral worship is not restricted to the Agbaja peoples of Mbaise. It is a part of the Igbo world view, the living, the dead, and the unborn form part of a continuum[89]. The ancestors being those who lived well-spent lives, die in a socially-approved ways and are given correct burial rites, live in one of those worlds of the dead which mirrored the world of the living. The living honour them with sacrifices, the ancestors watch over the living.[90]

The Okwuato village groups of Ibeku, Lagwa and Umuhu together with Nguru which formed the greater part of the supposed Agbaja clan are part of

the Ezinihitte clan. Tradition had it that the Okwuato towns ceased to cooperate with the rest of the Ezinihitte when they were asked to pay fine for misrepresentation of cola nut during an *orji* festival which they refused[91]. There is no precise date to mark the time of this event. Both the Ezinihitte people and Okwuato confirmed that they are one and the same. Nguru which was also made to be in the Agbaja and the Onicha village group of the Ezinihitte were said to be related as two segments of a lineage agnatically descended from a common ancestor[92]. Njoku observed that the two segments ceased to participate in any common activities due to lack of geographical continuity[93]. Nguru performed a traditional festival known as *Itu Aka*. The festival is performed annually; it is rotated among the villages which Nguru is composed of[94]. The *Itu Aka* festival of Nguru people is typical of the *Orji* festival of the Ezinihitte people.

According to tradition, the Oke clan, located south of the Mbaise territory[95], comprising Amuzu Mbuta, Lorji and Ovoro is a lineage group. These communities mentioned are said to be the sons of Oke[96]. Village groups like Mbuta, Lorji and Amuzu reject descent from Oke, who they refer to as *Okeosisi* the founding father of Uvuru. Lorji on their own believe that they are the

descendants of Orji and that Lorji mean *Ala Orji*, the land of Orji. They further claimed that Orji was an *Aro* merchant who came to settle in that area[97] though no precise date was given. *Orji* in its real meaning is iroko tree; it is also called*Okeosis* because it grows very huge and domineering. Most tall huge men were identified by such names as *Okeosis.* Based on this, one may deduce that the same man who was called Orji, the founding father of Lorji is the same man who was called Ovuru are agnatically contiguous. The Amuzu town claimed to have migrated from Awka area. Their name *Amuzu* means the home of the blacksmiths. And of all the Igbo communities which engaged in smithery, the most famed and the best organized were the Awka and Abriba[98]. Among the smiting communities, Awka was the most widely traveled. The Awka smiths organized themselves in a guild, one half only of whose members were allowed to travel in any one year, while the others stayed back to guard the home[99]. Among the Nkwere and Abiriba, there does not appear to have been any such organization and arrangement[100]. At this juncture it would be right to say that it is either the Amuzu came from Awka as claimed or they learned smiting from those traveling Awka smiters. If they learned this craft from the traveling smiths, it means there is greater tendency of their

genealogically connected with the Lorji people as said in the Lorji tradition. The tradition of Amuzu further strengthen the view that a later and more massive dispersal south-eastward from the Nri-Awka and Isuama[101] which tradition claimed to have halted at the site *Chineke orie Ukwu* (Ihu Chineke Orie Ukwu)[102] Obomana Umunama. To this background, it is safe to say that probably Amazu was among the massive southeastward movement which halted at *Orie Ukwu Oboama na Umunama* to rest.

One important thing to note in the tradition of origin of the Mbutu people in the supposed Oke clan is the claim that the Mbutu had relations who parted away from him at Ihu Chineke Orie-Ukwu Oboama na Umunama. These relations of Mbutu were Orji which is the founding father of Lorji Uboma, which Nguru and Onicha towns claimed to have descended from, Oriagu and Ehikemakola who is the founder of Obiangwu (Obiangwu is one of the village groups that seceded from Mbaise in 1956). The tradition further stated that Mbutu and Lorji are matrilineal related. According to Onwuzuruike as cited by Njoku, the village of Umosike in Lorji migrated from Ogbo Uvuru and does not intermarry with them, while the village of Ezigmanta in the same Lorji migrated

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[998] G.I. Elugwaraonu, 86, Oral Interview, Amauzu, 15/11/07
[99] A.E. Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, op cit, pp. 140, 141
[100] Ibid p.140
[101] Jones, op cit, p. 30

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[102] See N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit, p. 11

from Ndigbo Uvuru and as a result do not intermarry with a particular kindred in Ndigbo Uvuru.

The people of Ekwereazu clan claimed that they were created in the area they presently occupy. It is believed by the people that the founding father of Ekwereazu is *Dim* and as a result, the most senior town in Ekwereazu clan is Oparanadim[103]. Oparanadim was the direct descendant of Ekwereazu while other village groups in the clan are said by some to have descended from his brother, others to be descended from his sons. There is no evidence yet to prove whether or not people from elsewhere to settle among the Ekwereazu people.

The Ahiara clan is also said to have been created in the area of their present occupation. According to Onyekere as cited by Njoku Nfunala, was the father of their ancestor called*Akpukakpu* who gave birth to Osuachara, Odujuanunu, and Avuvu. Tradition claimed that Avuvu migrated with his children to settle in an area called Ikeduru where they developed the Avuvu community. This area which much later became Ikeduru court area at the inception of Owerri Division, while Osuachara and Odajuanuru remained in the

same area which became the present location of Ahiara clan today. Though they are said to be ancestors of Ahiara, tradition has it that the descendants of Odujuanunu were absorbed by Ahiara, who may have descended from Osuachara. The place today is known as Ahiara.

Scholars have demonstrated that Mbaise is a conglomeration of different peoples or what could aptly be described as people from different cultural background. For instance, Smock contended that three Igbo cultural linguistic areas – the Oratta, the Ngwa and the Isu met in Mbaise blending into one another at the boundaries[104]. Among the three Igbo cultures the most dominant was the Ngwa culture, of which the Ezinihitte clan was known. The Ngwa culture covers the whole of Ezinihitte clan, the major part of Oke and Okwuato part of Agbaja and the eastern part of Ahiara. The Isu culture is said to have been dominant in Ekwereazu, some parts of Ahiara. Some parts of Enyogwugwu and Nguru were dominated by the Oratta culture. While the remaining part of Nguru and Enyogwugwu were a blend of Isuama and Oratta cultures. The Isuama cultural area of Mbaise was generally called Isoma by the other Mbaise peoples. The major problem remains that studies in cultural history, linguistics and anthropology have not been able to prove whether or

[104]Smock op cit, p. 75; see also Chapman op cit, p. 161, Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 21

not their cultures diffused into the area from somewhere across the boundaries of Mbaise. However, the Mbaise man is recognized among the other Igbo groups through his dialect[105].

CONCLUSION

This chapter gave a description of the area where Mbaise is located. History cannot take place in a vacuum. Therefore, this chapter has availed us the opportunity to understand where the place called Mbaise was located. Not only that, we have used this opportunity to give a brief description of the nature of physical environment in the area. A good understanding of a people's physical environment is very important in the study of man's past.

It has also been shown here that the Mbaise area did not exist in isolation. This we did by pointing out to those areas that shared boundaries with the Mbaise area. This implies that there was interaction between the Mbaise area and other areas that shared boundaries with them. This chapter is very fundamental to the understanding of the whole research work because we have shown some of the features of the area. For example it said in this chapter that the Mbaise area belongs to the forest belt or on the other hand

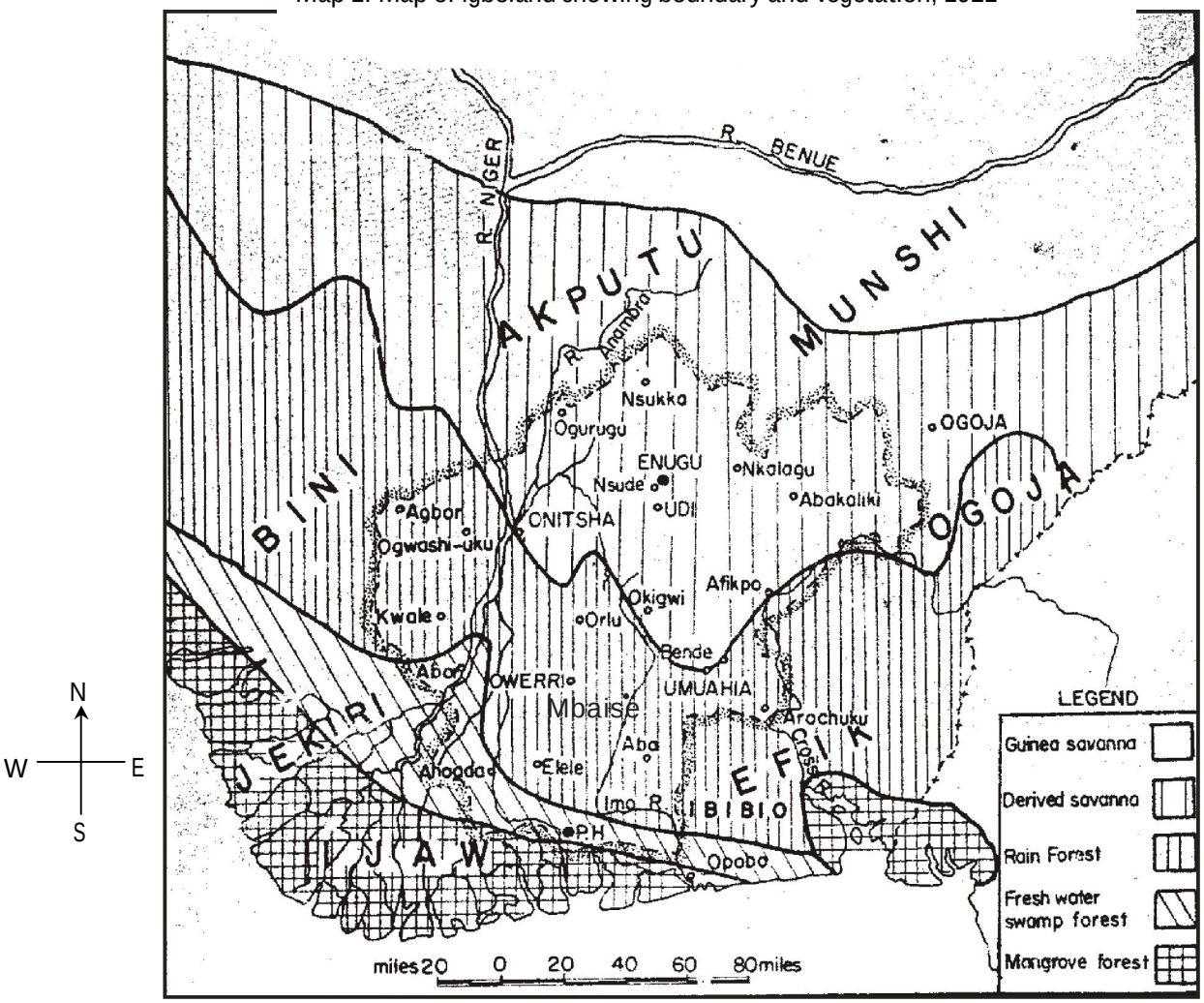
[105]Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 21

the palm belt of Southeastern Nigeria. And this influences the occupation and culture of the area.

Without the knowledge derived from the study of this chapter, it would be very difficult to comprehend the nature of political and economic activities that took place in the area.

The examination of their settlement pattern, their population, their traditions of origin and migration showed that they are part of the large Igbo group. One of the most important thing that had been revealed in this chapter is the fact that though the area was said to be constituted with different clans, there were some cultures that were pervasive in the area. What is so clear here is that the different clans that made up the area are Igbo groups. And that the history of a people cannot be understood without knowing who they are, where they are and where they came from.

Map 1: Map of Igboland, showing boundary and vegetation, 1921



Source: Nwaba S.N, Iboland: A Century of contact with the British 1860-1960

CHAPTER TWO

THE PRE-COLONIAL MBAISE SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is meant to explain the nature of the Mbaise community before its subjection to British rule, which began by the visit of the Aro-field Force in 1901[1]. Nothing is more repugnant to an historian than to describe a society as if it were a temporal vacuum[2]. Every society has been and is still in a state of flux, hence they undergo constant changes. According to Isichei, historians focus on changes rather than continuity[3]. But we cannot neatly separate continuities from change because change itself is a continuous phenomenon in human society.

A critical study of the Mbaise area prior to the advent of colonial rule would help us to establish the historical and successfully come again the claims that the African societies became part of the capital system at the instance of their contact with Europeans. It is pertinent to exemplify such historical misrepresentations which the present writer wishes to debunk. Such historical deconstruction is that of Nwala who considered it safe to postulate that:

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[1] N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, An Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division Province, p. 11
[2] Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, op cit, p. 20
[3] Ibid, p. 20

In 1909 two Native Courts were established at Nguru and Okpala. The Okpala Court had jurisdiction over part of what is now Mbaise. Warrant Chiefs were appointed to these courts. All these were part of colonial attempts to control the people and administer the territory. From that time our people became colonial subjects of the British, whose main interest was in our palm oil and kernel and other resources, which they need in Britain. From that time too, we became part of the "World History" or part of the worldwide imperialist movement[4].

This chapter would enable us to prove that while is right to assert that Mbaise became part of the worldwide imperialist movement following the establishment of British control through the Native Courts and Warrant Chiefs, it is wrong to say that from that time Mbaise became part of the world history.

Furthermore, such opinion strengthened the Hegelian idea that Africa is no historical part of the world; it had no movement or development to exhibit[5]. In a similar vein, Professor Trevor-Roper claimed that his observation of the African past, is only the unrewarding gyration of barbarous tribes in picturesque but irrelevant corner of the world[6]. Therefore, this chapter is another opportunity to further demonstrate the inadequacies of the imperial

[4]Nwala T.U. (ed) op cit p.15
[5] J.D. Fage, Africa Discover Her Past, Oxford University Press, London, 1970, p7

pre-supposition that Africa was inactive and outside the historical part of the world[7].

To achieve this objective, the present writer embarked on an inquiry into the politics and administration in the Mbaise area prior to the imposition of British rule. Formulation of policies and making of law to regulate the conduct of these rules, interpretation and dispensation of justice are included in their art of governance. Therefore, it is considered safe to identify these functions though they were seriously fussed and cannot be neatly separated, the writer attempts to look at these governmental functions in separate manner. Whether or not these functions were carried out by different individuals or group forms part of this inquest.

The study of Mbaise in the pre-colonial era would not be complete without a thorough investigation about their economic life. By so doing, the nature of material relationship that existed would be made known for us to understand the changes they subsequently underwent under colonial administration. Since the mainstay of the people's economy was agriculture supplemented with hunting, smiting and trade, there is the need to

[6]Ibid, p. 7
[7] Ibid p.7

understand the importance of these occupations, their products and how they were organized and carried out.

Land was considered the major source of wealth to the people. Therefore, it becomes very necessary to examine the land tenure system and the different means of acquiring lands. The Mbaise area having been designated by scholars as a highly populated area with one of the poorest among the Nigerian soils[8] the impact of poor soil fertility form an interesting part of the discuss.

Mbaise was very rich in culture in Igboland[9]. It is important to emphasize this, so that the real picture of the Mbaise community before the advent of British rule would be presented in the clear historical terms. The social institutions such as family, age group system and other associations or groupings played very important role in socializing the individual members of the society. For instance, the Association of the Oparas, *Ndi Opara*, the Association of the Young Males, *Umu Ama*, Association of Young Females, *Out Umu Agbogho*, the group of married women, *Otu Ndom*, professional groups, the Society of the Glorified Farmers, *Ezeji*.

[8]Nwala (ed), Njoku in Nwala (ed) op cit p.36
[9] Ibid p 32

Marriage institution is virtually universal in human societies. This institution contributes immensely to holding societies together and giving the stability, particularly simple and non-literate societies[10]. It is important to cast light on the nature of marriage institution that was practiced by the people in order to understand the kind of social interaction it created in the area.

The worship of the earth deity *Ala* and the ancestors formed the basis of the people's belief. Their religion was surrounded by the belief that everything came out of the earth, and will still go back to the earth and that there is a relationship between the dead, the living and the unborn. The dead live in the world of the dead from where they mirror the world of the living. Therefore, the living honours the dead with sacrifices.

[10]E.A. Oke, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Macmillan, London, 1984, p. 94

THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN MBAISE PRIOR TO 1903

Before the British intervention in the political affairs of the Igbo, the communities that transformed into what much later became known as Mbaise, the people had evolved their own method of governance, just like other Igbo communities. This pattern of government was said to be democratic and gerontocratic[11]. "Democratic" implies that all the families within the village were duly represented in the process of policy formulation, or making of law which regulate the conduct of the individuals within the society. It was said to be gerontocratic, because it placed much emphasis on the elderly or adult members of the society. There were five stages of governance in the area. To understand this, it is proper to examine the major characteristics of power in Mbaise. Therefore we turn to fusion of power.

FUSION OF POWER

There was fusion of governmental powers at every stage of governance. The legislative, judicial and executive functions were performed by the same persons. All the same, the legislative, judicial and executive matters stood on their own.

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[11] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 8

The basic structure of Igbo political administration required that the principal and most vital unit of government starts from the family head of each household[12]. This was the case in Mbaise area. There was no single ruler in the area, yet the people never lacked the essential norms of government. Sovereignty of families existed to a certain level. The family head makes laws that regulated the conduct of individual in his family. For example, he decided on matters such as relocation of the family house, what portion of land to be farmed sold or leased during a given farming period. He also had powers to order his family members to cut off their association with any other family. This was more often in time of dispute. The family head was saddled with the powers to resolve dispute between two or more members of the family. In this case, any disputes between the family members were first of all reported to him. The influence of one family head did not extend across the bounds of his family. Two family heads could jointly resolve dispute between them. Laws made within the family were most times enforced by him. For example, the young members of the family who flouted the family rules were disciplined by flogging them. The power to enforce the family rules and regulation were also delegated to other members of the family, for instance the wife or wives.

[12] Ezeanykika, op cit, p. 9

Another measure applied to discipline young members of the family was the application of pepper all over the person's body or denying the person a certain meal.

(i) **The Family:** The lowest political unit in the area, was the family. At this stage, the head of household or father of the family, *Nna* exercised executive, legislative and judicial powers. He exercised pseudo despotic powers over the family. He made laws for the family; punishes the offenders of these laws, or in some occasions delegates powers to the adult members of the family to punish the errant ones. He settled disputes between two or more members of the family. Family heads wielded more influence than the heads of other levels of governance. In the cases where a man, one family head married two or more wives, disputes among his wives was first reported to him for settlement. The decision to take the matter to another quarter for settlement was his. He has power to prohibit any of his wives from reporting the matter to any other person or persons. The powers of family head began to decline, as the family began to transform into extended family. That is when the sons of the man had formed their own families, with wives and children.

EXTENDED FAMILY

Governance was not a one man affair at the extended family level. The extended families were so organized that even though the most elderly person could not act alone in questions concerning the family. He was highly respected and honoured. He was looked upon as embodiment of knowledge concerning the past of the family, but the independent nature of the component families of the extended family never allowed the development of despotic powers, or emergence of a man whose words became laws within the extended family, the *Oney-new-ezi* or *Onye-new-ala*[13]. The owner of the compound or the owner of the land as the case may be summons the elderly or adult members of the extended family to discuss matters of common interest. He enjoys the privilege of beating the *Ekwe* (gong) or sending emissaries to summon the members whenever there was important matter. The assembly of the elderly male members of the extended family was referred to as *ndi-new-ezi* meaning the owners of the compound.

Their legislative functions included decisions concerning the sharing of

[13]N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit, p. 7

component families *onwa nkwu*, the days to carry out environmental sanitation within and around the compound, security issues such as fencing

the compound with either mud walls *ngbidi* or live sticks, *ogba*, the building of the family hall *Ovu* and how to organize labour for the most elderly member of the family, which was often one the *Orie-Ukwu* (Big Orie) market day[14]. Most time they took their stand on a pending general kindred matter during the extended family meetings. Whatever decision made in this forum was binding on all family members.

Enforcement or implementation of formulated rules was carried out by the same body of persons. For example, a family member was made to participate in the agreed activities by stipulation of fine. It was agreed in most time that any member who fails to take part in jointly agreed family venture would pay fine of one foul and one jar of palm wine. In the case where the defaulter refused to comply, the young men were ordered by *ndi-new-ezi* to

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[14] Njoku, History and Culsture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 8

and cooked openly, and every family received a share of it. This served as a deterrent to other family members. Another means through which they punished individual members of the extended family was denying him whenever he finds himself in a critical situation that requires a concerted effort of the family to remedy. In a situation where the dispute between two

[1]Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 8

extended families could only be settled by administration of oath before the juju *Ihu mou* the elders of the family came back to proclaim a cut in any kind of interrelationship with the other family. This proclamation was enforced seriously to avoid what was known as *Oriko* (eating together) which was believed to attract the anger of the gods. In such critical periods where all sorts of interactions were cut off between the two families in dispute *iso ochu* any family member who refuses to abide by this rules was severely dealt with. Such person(s) were most often ostracized by other members of the family if he was an adult. This lasted for over one year. If no one member died during that period, it means they have been vindicated by the gods. Before their defiant family member begin to take part in any common activity with them, he was made to purify himself by sponsoring *Isu Oriko* traditional reconciliation[15].

Judicial functions of *ndi-new-ezi* the elders of the extended family included settlement of dispute between one household and others within the family. For example, quarrel over land, trespass, boundary disputes (encroachment) assault. In such cases, matters were brought to *onye-new-ezi* being the most elderly man in the family who in response summons the *ndi-new-ezi*, other elderly members of the family. His means of communicating the

members of the family was through *Iku ekwu*, beating of the gong or by sending emissary (a young member of the family) to his fellow elders. Most often the house of the most elderly person or the family hall, *Ovu* was used as the court room while *ndi-new-ezi* formed the panel of judges. The petition *itu omu* was oral and free. The young men were given the opportunity to make contributions but their contributions were merely advice unless in a situation where he testified as an eye witness of an event. In cases like trespass, the trespasser was sanctioned by the assembly of *ndi-new-ezi* not to do so again. Boundary dispute over farmland, were sometimes resolved by the elders moving to the locus to rectify the boundary and designate it with a symbolic plant called *ukpo ogugu*. Till today, the *ukpo ogugu* which grow like palm tree is used to mark boundaries of farmlands[16]. It was very common to inject religion sanction on the boundaries.

Assault included situation where one family member tells another that he or she smells. This was common among the women. After proving this before the assembly of *ndi-new-ezi* the person who made such statement was said to have made a statement bigger than his or her mouth. The punishment stated in such judgment may include fine of one foul, a jar of palm wine, soap

and pomade with which they would wash up the person. Another type of assault was a situation where one member called another a thief without proving it. He was said to have made fallacious statement *ikwu chaachaa*. The elders treat this kind of matter with serious contempt and accuse the person of trying to deceive them. He was fined one goat, one jar of palm wine, kola nut and yam with which they cook the meat, and an open apology to the accused person[17]. In a case such as stealing, the person may be granted pardon for the first time, if he or she persists, the family decided to sell the person away to avoid bringing shame over them[18]. Fine was one of the most widely used disciplinary measures employed by Mbaise people[19.] The judgments were in most times enforced not by the use of force but by such measures as ostracism and denial of right as stated above. Finally, the jurisdiction of one extended family was limited within the bounds of the family. Two extended families, joined to arbitrate over cases affecting them. Where they were unable to resolve it, it became a kindred matter.

KINDRED

Political administration at the kindred level was to a great extent similar to that at the extended family level. As noted above the oldest man in the

most senior extended family was recognized as the senior man in the kindred. His position was that of primus inter pares[20]. This man was sometimes referred to as *opera-nna-anyi*, the oldest son of our father[21]. The *Opara* or the oldest man of the kindred did not act alone as earlier said. He was always together with the elders from his own and other extended families. Together they formed the *Amala* of the kindred, a council that exercised the authority to formulation policies, issuing of executive orders and settlement of disputes.

The executive function of the *Amala* of the kindred include such matters as relocating the whole or part of the kindred to a new site owing to outbreak of disease or war, cleaning of the assembly ground of the kindred *Mbara-ama* construction and maintenance of roads between the different kindred and finally decision about which piece of the kindred land to clear at the beginning of the farming season[22]. In the period when money was introduced to the area as a medium of exchange, for example the cowries and manila, the *Amala* of the kindred decided how much to be contributed to the kindred fund. Notably, there were few occasions during which the *Amala* of kindred sat for purely executive purposes. This was because most factors in a man's life were governed by tradition. For instance, the laws governing the inheritance of land

and other properties and conventions of farming and marriage were undisputed and rarely broken.

The judicial functions of the *Amala* of a kindred came mostly when two extended families in the kindred could not settle their dispute. Land and boundary disputes were among the matters that appeared strongly in the kindred. The *Amala* of kindred constituted the jury using the assembly ground of the kindred as court venue. In land matters, witnesses could come from

[22]N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/195 op cit, p. 8

Izu ohi, stealing was also under the jurisdiction of the *Amala* "jury of the kindred". This was mainly when it involved two extended families. Just like the extended family, the panel after deliberation may grant pardon to the thief though he was made to pay back what he or she stole from the other party. The person who committed such offence was warned not to do it again in the presence of the public. Persistence may attract such dehumanizing punishment such as *Ivu-mbembe*. Ivu mbembe implied stripping the person naked and tying the item he or she stole on his or her neck and everybody both old and young men and women flogging him or her to all nook and corner of the area. If the person continues, he or she was either sold or killed by the kindred.

Persons who were convicted for stealing by the *Amala* of kindred was said to have stained his or her hands *imaru-aka*. He was asked to clean his hands *ikwo-aka* before he was allowed to eat together with the *Amala* again.

Implementation of rules by the *Amala* of a kindred differed slightly with that of the *Amala* of the village area. At the kindred level, able bodied men from the kindred may be appointed to go and sequestrate any of the offender's valuable property, pending when he paid the fine charged him by the *Amala*. In other occasion, the person may be ostracized. In this case, no member of the kindred would go to his house or buy from him. Anybody found doing so suffered the same fate[23].

THE VILLAGE

Political organization at the village level differed from those of the extended family and kindred, giving the fact that there were more bodies that

[1]Nwachukwu, op cit

delegation of powers. Having stated above that there was no single person vested with despotic powers to rule over the people of the area. In Mbaise, just like in other Igbo societies there was no ruling aristocracy which wielded

authority as a specialized full-time occupation[24]. Having demonstrated earlier that the village area was a conglomeration of kindreds. The oldest man from the most senior kindred was recognized as the village head, though he wielded no authority[25]. An intelligence report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara clans contained that there was no evidence to show that the *Opara*, the most elderly person of the senior kindred was in any way recognized as the head of the village area nor was he able, even when acting with the *Amala*the Assembly of the most senior kindred issue orders direct to another kindred. If in a meeting of kindred any decision was arrived at, affecting all the kindred, it would be communicated to them by the *Amala* of the kindred. The attempt made as it was explained in the above intelligence report was aimed at seeing a man with full political authority. In the absence of that the British officials concluded that there was no village heads. There were village heads who were accorded respect not because of the political power or influence but for their age. Their position was nominal.

There was council of elders,*ndi-new-ala,* of the village. This was an assemblage of the elderly men from the different kindreds that formed the village. This body did not single handedly make laws or policies for the entire

village, though they were so much respected for their age and life experiences. They were also the *Oji-ofos*. *Ofo* bearers of the kindred or the village[26]. This group sat often on matters bordering on sacrifice and the ancestors than executive questions.

The major political authority in the area was vested on village assembly which was composed of all the responsible male adults of the village. The village assembly was known as the *Amala* of the village area[27]. The members of the council of elders were also members of the *Amala* (village assembly). This signified that governmental powers were fused to a greater extent. The village assembly was saddled with tripartite governmental functions. For example formulation of policies and making of law, to regulate the conduct of the individual members and maintenance of peace. To carry out judicial function which included settlement of disputes and dispensation of justice between and among families and kindred. They also constitute a part of joint judicial body when there was a dispute between one of the families or kindred in their own village and another family or kindred from any other village. The third responsibility of the village assembly in the area was the implementation or

enforcement of the laws and policies they formulated and the judgment they issued over a matter.

Executive functions of the *Amala* at the village level of governance included policies bordering on social works, such as building of markets, making and maintenance of the inter-village footpaths, policies of external relations and security of the village area. The *Amala* decides whether or not a village should embark on wars. Whenever the people resolved to construct

[27] Ibid p 23

square, mainly the market. Invitation to such meeting was by sounding the village *Uhie*or *Ikoro*, the two names implied very large gong which was made from log of wood. The sound used to be so loud that it reached all nooks and cranny of the village area. Every male was attracted to the sound of these gongs. Failing to honour the call of the gong attracted fines and was seen as not honouring the *Amala*.

This carried minor punishments. Another means was through announcement by the village information disseminator (town crier)[28]. In his own case, he made known the time and venue of the meeting. The agenda was not made known for it was only disclosed in the meeting[29]. Opinions on how to

carry out work were entertained from both old and young. They determine during meeting what road to build or clear. If it is a market, where it would be sited, day and time. They also stipulated the punishment that would be given to any person that would fail to comply. This punishment ranges from one foul mainly cock, to one goat, or sometimes a large lump of meat prepared with pepper, *ihe oso*, meaning something eaten with pepper, cola nuts *orji* which must be on even number, ranging from four and hard drink gin, *nmanya ukwu* or *nmanya oku*. But during the era of money economy, they had the alternative of making the defaulter to pay in cash[30]. When the agenda of the meeting bordered on war, they decided whether to be on defence or attack. They also decided the strategies of the war. The membership of the *Amala* was not through election or selection; they had no elected speaker, chairman or secretary. As soon as they decided on any issue, it becomes binding on every individual member of the village[31]. They tried to prevent crime and also punish the offenders of the law. Women participated in activities like road making indirectly by providing the worker with edible things such as *ugburuocha, tapioca,* the local beans *akidi*, potage yam, *agworoagwo ji* oil bean salad *ugba*,

and potage cocoyam *agworoagwo ede*. They were not mandated to do so, but out of their own kind gesture.

The *Amala* was also saddled with judicial responsibilities. *Amala* of a village area acted as panel of judges, when there was a dispute between and among the different components of the village. More especially a dispute between or among the kindreds.

In some cases, an individual may petition the village assembly. The *Amala* would gather in their normal way and one elderly man was asked to present the matter before the *Amala*. Usually speeches began by salutation, *Amala unu abiala* (you are welcome), *ndewonu*, (you have done well). After the presentation of the matter, the two parties in dispute were called out to testify before the *Amala*. Based on the testimonies of the parties in dispute and their witnesses, the *Amala* gave their judgment or verdict, *iwa ikpe*. Both parties in dispute brought foul or goat, palm wine, oil bean salad, cola nut to be shared among the attendants of the meeting. If the matter was adjourned to another date, the date was made known to members there and then, the parties were also asked to present same things to be shared among those

[30]Ibid pp 9,10, N.A.E, C.S.O 27937 op cit p 17
[31] Ibid p 10

[32]N.A.E. C.S.O 27397,op cit, p. 17

present in the arbitration. After the verdict, the loser paid the victorious party the cost they have incurred in the process of pursuing the case[32].

There was no distinction between civil or criminal cases. All matters were attended to by the *Amala* and the punishment went according to the gravity of the offence. Some of the cases that were settled by the *Amala* included murder and manslaughter. Punishment for this was mainly on the principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,[33] although it was not always the case. There were occasions when the culprits or offenders were allowed to pay with another thing other than his life. For example land was accepted as payment for committing murder or manslaughter. This must be done with the consent of the other party.

The killing of a thief in the act of stealing was not regarded as murder or manslaughter by the *Amala*. In fact, it was a justified killing. In that respect, the *Amala* never demanded any penalty[34]. Another kind of offence that required the dispensation of justice in the area was stealing. Stealing was considered as a very serious offence, although for the first time, the culprit was only made to make restitution, but was warned seriously to abstain. Should he continue to

[33]Ibid, p. 7
[34]

steal, he would be sold[35]. It was said that there was no classification made on stealing. This meant that stealing farm produce and other kinds of properties were looked upon as the same, and treated in the same manner.

Adultery, *Ikwa Iko* was only regarded as an offence when it was done without the consent of the husband, and the husband petitioned the *Amala*. In this situation, the *Amala* in their judicial capacity determined what compensation to be paid to the woman's husband. But in a situation where the husband of the woman is aware and chose not to make case, it was never an offence. Even if a woman was caught having extra marital sex with a man, it was the duty of the husband to bring the case before the *Amala*. If not the *Amala* would not extend their jurisdiction over the matter. When a woman was caught having sex with a man in the bush, whether with or without the consent of the husband, it was a case for the *Amala*. It was considered a sacrilege, *iru ala or nso ala*, taboo and the *Amala* demanded purification of the land and appeasement of the ancestors. This type of matter was often referred to the council of elders who carried out the purification processes[36].

In cases of debt, if the debtor was convicted, and was unable to pay, the *Amala* may decide that he should be sold[37]. Although this was more often

[36]Samuel Amadi Odu, 83, Oral Interview, Umudero Enyogwugwu, 29/04/010
[37] N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit, p. 18

during the era of transatlantic slave trade. Before that time, the person was pawned. If the debtor ran away, his son, daughter or any close relative was seized and sold or pawned.

The judicial panel of the village decided whether to unilaterally abnegate from a conflict between their village area and another village. This came when the *Amala* was convinced that the continuation of the conflict would do them more harm than good. They may also decide to adopt bilateral passiveness[38]. This is a situation where the *Amala* formed a part of a joint judicial panel with another *Amala* of different village. In such matters the resolution of the *Amala* was supreme.

In the internal affairs of the village area, the *Amala* was not the highest judicial body. The implication of this is that judgment over a complicated matter was not imposed on a person or persons rather any person(s) who did not accept the *Amala's* judgment was allowed to proceed to deity or juju, *ihu muo* or *ala*. Here an oath was administered by the Chief Priest. If he died within one year of taking the oath, his guilt was therefore accepted, but if he did not die and no member of his nuclear family died within the year, he was declared innocent, hence he had been vindicated by the gods. This was celebrated with fanfare in the traditional society[39]. This means that the oracle or juju was the highest or appellate court.

[38]The terms unilateral self abnegation and bilateral passiveness were used by Dr. Owunwa in explaining the various means through which international conflict could be resolved in one of his classroom lectures on international law and politics in Alvan Ikoku College of Education. It is save to use the terms here because of the sovereign nature of the village areas in Mbaise in the pre-colonial time.

[39] Njoku, op cit, p. 10

Implementation of laws and policies were categorized as the executive functions of the village assembly in the Mbaise area before the imposition of what the colonial administrative officials referred to as "modern" system of government. In the Mbaise area before the dislocation of its administrative system by colonialism in 1903-4[40] there existed agencies of government which formulated and implemented policies and laws. These agencies may not have made policies that affected the generality of the members of the village or village groups directly, but their rules may be binding on all their members or particularly groups in the village or villages. Apart from their own rules, they enforced the policies and rules of the village assembly (*Amala*) or council of elders. These agencies include the *Okonko* Society. *Okonko* was a society of wealthy and influential men who took vows of brotherhood and enforces the orders of the town elders[41]. It was contended that the *Okonko* society had immense power and prestige so that no one could attempts to resist them. If any member of the society was injure, the wrath of all the other member was directed against the offender[42]. All the members of the *Okonko* society were identified with their staff of long stick clipped with a copper ring. They carried

[40]N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit, p. 11
[41]Njoku in Nwala (ed) op cit, p. 22
[42]N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit, p. 18; see also Njoku op cit, p. 10

the long staff with them whenever a member moved outside his home town. This identity protected them from being molested.

Another agency considered village had numerous age groups which made immense contribution in achieving peace and stability. The age groups often acted on the delegation of powers by the *Amala* of the village area. The groups were most active when their member was involved in a dispute. For example in matters bordering on recovery of debt for their member or any other person. Their action always come after the verdict of the village panel of judges (the *Amala*). Apart from the injunction given to an age grade to carry out certain action by the *Amala* at the instance of judgment or decision, the age grade acted on the request of their members. Individual person(s) enforced the decision of the *Amala*. This was most common on matters pertaining to land dispute. After the verdict of the *Amala* on a disputed portion of land, the victorious person in the dispute employed the assistance of his brother, sisters, children and sometimes friends to force the loser out of the land. The victor's age grade can equally assist. They can in the same manner recover debts[43].

[43]Amadi Odu, op cit

Furthermore, laws were also implementation by injecting a religious aura of the *Ofo* on the decision of *Amala*. To the people *Ofo* Staff symbolized sanctions for social justice from the ancestors evoked compliance from the individual members of the village to the decisions of the *Amala*. People were made to comply to the decision of the village assembly or council of elders by injecting a religious aura. This was done through the use of*Ofo*. *Ofo* was a religious instrument, but was used in both political administration and administration of justice. It helped to effect compliance to rules and establish innocence in cases. Every extended family had an *Ofo* which was passed on to them from their ancestors. Therefore in a matter concerning the village or village group, every head of extended family came with *Ofo* of the family. It was symbol of social justice from their ancestors. It was believed that its presence evoked the presence of the ancestors. Therefore in order not to incur the anger of the ancestors everybody must abide by agreements sealed with the *Ofo* or say the truth during judicial arbitration.

THE VILLAGE GROUP

The village group was another category in which the people exercised political authority. The only difference in the exercise of executive, legislative and judicial powers at this level of governance was located in the process of formation of the government. At other levels of governance, the membership of *ndi-new-ala* council of elder was free and open to every elderly person.

While at the village group the component villages appointed and sent their representatives. Collectively they formed the general council of elders.

In the same manner, the members of the village group assembly *Amala* was constituted. It is said that member at this level was indirect[1]. The general council of elders and the village group assembly were also vested with powers to carry out the tripartite functions of the government. They made decision on issues bordering on the common interest of the village group, settled disputes between the member villages, while implementation or enforcement were carried out by the same agencies as in the village level. The system of government in the area showed the extent to which the people organized themselves without necessarily handing their sovereignty to one single individual or family. Even in the absence of chiefs in the area, there was no ruling aristocracy which wielded authority as a specialized full time occupation. Yet they lacked no essential norms of government. The village democracy as practiced in Mbaise before the colonial subjugation demonstrated how democratic the people of the area appeared and it represented what the 6th president of the United State defined as government of the people by the people and for the people. At this juncture, it is safe to assert that political

[44]Njoku, op cit, p. 8

power was equitably distributed in the area before they were alienated from participating in decision making process by colonial reign of terror. With this study, one can freely assert that the political institutions in Mbaise were designed to combine popular participation with the weighting for experience and ability.

PRE-COLONIAL ECONOMY OF MBAISE

The history of Mbaise before the imposition of colonial rule which began in 1903-4 can be more than just a collection of their political history. It should also be possible to have a historical perspective embracing the economic aspect of the people's history.

Agriculture was the mainstay of the Mbaise people. Studies in the area signified that agriculture was the most important economic activity of the people of Mbaise. This was due to the number of people who engaged in it on part or full time basis and honour attached to it. People or families which did not engage in agriculture were scorned by others with such statements as *Ori mgbe ahia loro*[45]. The implication of this statement is that you can only eat after the market holds. To the people, it is humiliating. One major

consequences of the attitude to agriculture was that every Mbaise person, man and woman was a farmer.

CROP PRODUCTION

The staples produced in the area include yam, cocoyam, cassava and vegetables. The soil in Mbaise was not so fertile as to enhance surplus production, coupled with the fact that preservation mechanisms were still not developed. Consequently, they produced enough to take them through the year. Apart from the tuba crops and vegetable mentioned above, palm products were produced in the area beyond subsistent level. It has been argued that some of the crops cultivated in the area around the late pre-colonial times were not indigenous to the entire Igbo society. For instance, Afigbo contended that some of the species of yam, cocoyam, banana etc. came from south-east Asia[46]. According to Isichei, more intensive research has shown that West African yams are indigenous. Discorea cayanesnsis still grow wild in West African forests especially in Igbo land[47]. Whether or not these species of yam are indigenous to the Mbaise area would be better determined by botanists. In the study of agriculture in the Igbo area, Isichei was confident

[45]V.C. Uchendu, The Igbos of Southern Nigeria, Hold Reimehart and Wiston, 1965, p. 30
[46] A.E. Afigbo, Rope of Sand, Studies, op cit, p. 126

few, among them yams, okra, egusi, oil palm, some varieties of rice, cola nut (which she described as stimulant rather than food)[48].

Among the food crops outlined by Isichei, the ones that were not produced in the Mbaise area were rice and cassava. But cassava, which later became the staple food in the Mbaise area was said to be native to America and was brought by the Portuguese from the late fifteenth century. It was well established in the Delta by the late seventeenth century[49]. The processes through which it (cassava) came to the Mbaise area, is not yet known to the present writer.

Agriculture was highly ritualized in the whole of Igbo land[50]. The beginning of farming seasons was marked by a festival or ritual. These rituals or sacrifices were carried out by different people at different categories of social units. For instance, the head of the family made the sacrifice to *Ala* on behalf of his family, while the most senior person in the extended family did it for the extended family. The most elderly person in the kindred did it[51].

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[47] Isichei, op cit, p. 8
[48] Ibid
[49] Ibid, p 8
[50] Afigbo, Rope of Sand op cit, p. 126

was marked by the very important New Yam Festival, *Iri ji*. The New Yam Festival was a celebration of the first fruit of the farm particularly tuba crop, and an occasion to thank their god immensely for protecting their lives to behold and eat the new yam[53]. During this cultural festival, invitations were extended to friends and relatives, majority of them participated in the cultivation of the yam.

The people of Mbaise shared the general Igbo belief that each crop have a spirit force, *Arusi* or *muo*, which laid down the specific code of conduct for cultivating, harvesting, cooking and eating[54]. Yam was not of such crops. Its spirit force was *Ahanjoku*, which was believed to be very powerful. It was said to forbid fighting or killing, defecating in a yam farm. There was also the believe that in the beginning of the farming season, if a man die without planting his yams, they would no longer be planted, rather it would be eaten or sold, if not there would be no yield. In both rituals marking the beginning of

[51] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit
[52] Iro Ofo is the ritual ceremony marking the beginning of the farmining season
[53] T.E. Ihuoma, A Brief History of the Origin of Ezeji (Yam Lord) in an unpublished paper of the Iri-ji Mbaise Cultural Festival, 2005, p. 25
[54] Afigbo, op cit, p. 127

The Mbaise people shared the general Igbo believe that yam, which was the most valued crop is a male. While cocoyam, *ede* which ranked second in

importance is a female. It was believed that *ahiajiok* the spirit was worshipped by *Njoku* while the spirit force of cocoyam was worshipped by *Mmaji*. It was a common place in the area that every *Njoku* married an *Mmaji*, that is the feminine gender of *Njoku*. The glorified yam farmers in the place were known as*Ezeji*, yam lord or yam king while that of cocoyam was known as *Omerede*, that is, the glorified cocoyam farmer. Although the yam was collectively farmed by both men and women, the honour went to the men[56] while the honour for cocoyam farming went to the women, even though the men participated.

Yam and cocoyam were among the oldest staples in the area. They were eaten through different means. For example, they were eaten cooked, boiled, roasted and pounded. The importance of these, *Ezeji* or *Omerede* titles was that they acted as a motivation to high productivity, though soil infertility and short supply of land were very great hindrances.

[55]Ibid, p. 127
[56] Ihuoma, op cit, p. 25

Furthermore, Mbaise occupies a place in the palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria having very numerous palm trees. It would be proper to suggest that

the people of the area became producers of palm oil and kernel due to the interplay between them and their environment. Udo asserted that the importance of the palm oil in the local economy increased with the increasing pressure of population on available farmland[57]. Mbaise was one of the most densely populated areas in the palm belt of south-eastern Nigeria[58]. (See Map 2) Their soil was said to be heavily leached, extremely acidic and erodes very rapidly under conditions of over-croping[59]. Over-cropping or continuous cropping became the people's pattern of farming due to increased population, short supply of land and soil infertility. According to Njoku, because the yearly strenuous labour of the people on the land was rewarded with a lean harvest of cassava, maize, cocoyam and yams[60] probably as a result of the above mentioned problems associated with crop production, the people recourse to oil palm.

Oil palm tree, *nkwu* played a very vital role in the people's economy. In all the things extracted from the palm tree the most valued was the oil, *manu*. During the nineteenth century, palm oil was the most important commodity of trade from the Nigerian area[61]. Palm oil attracted a large market to the area before the coming of the British rule. It was the major article of trade. People

from as far as Okrika, Umuahia, Isu and Oguta came to buy palm oil from the area[62]. Not only was it an article of trade, palm oil was used as raw material by the local soap industry. Before the influx of European goods into the area, the soap commonly used wasthe black soap, *Ncha shi nwugo* or *Ncha ojii*, produced of palm oil and fibrous object from which the palm fruits were separated. This served the local need of soap and was highly medicinal.

Palm oil was and is still used in the preparation of dishes such as soup, *ofe*, porridge yam, *agworoagwo ji*, making cocoyam porridge, tapioca, *ughuru ucha* or *akpu miri*. Palm oil was used virtually for every dish apart from those that was prepared as medicine, *ogwu*. This was because the people looked at palm oil as antidote, *aju ogwu* and that when one eats anything poisonous, if

[60]Ibid p 36
[61] Udo, op cit, p. 71
[62] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/195, An Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, Owerri Division, p. 24

Furthermore, before the era of money economy in the area, palm oil was used to exchange other goods, but this was solely dependent on the need of the parties involved in the transaction. It was believed that anyone who has palm oil has a valuable thing. Though it was not as valuable as yams which were highly honoured with festivals and title taking as demonstrated above. In the nineteenth century, from 1807 to 1833 the British abolished both the

trans-Atlantic slave trade and slavery throughout the British empire, and got other European powers and their African collaborators to cooperate in the abolition effort[64], the value of palm oil as a commercial good superseded any other agricultural produce in the area.

PALM KERNEL PRODUCTION

Another product from the palm tree was the palm kernel. This was also very essential to the people of the area. Palm kernel was of two categories: the wild palm kernel, *aku ohia*. This type was picked in the palm groves where the ripped palm heads were not harvested. The difference is that it is usually sweeter and softer to eat than the home type, *aku ulo*. The *aku ohia*, wild palm kernel was free for everybody, despite the ownership of the grove or the palm trees. People who gathered the wild palm kernel were mainly extreme poor people who had no farmlands where the palm trees grow or who could not purchase or lease the palm groves.

The other type of palm kernel, which was separated from the pulp during the process of palm oil extraction known as home kernel was the most abundant in the area. Compared to the wild one, the home kernel is less sweet due to the fact that it has been steamed on the fire. Generally, both the wild and home kernels were edible, and were used as fine combination to such foods as tapioca, breadfruit and maize.

Palm kernel was also used to produce a cream, *elu aku* which was very useful to the people. *Elu aku* cream was extracted by frying the palm kernel. And they were used for medical purposes. For instance, it was used to treat a circumcised child. It was also used to treat convulsion, cough, and as a pomade, mainly during the harmattan. Not only for domestic use, the palm kernel, just like palm oil was also an article of trade needed by the European merchants on the coast.

When you ask a person from the area about the importance of palm tree to them, he would tell you that "it is very important to us and that nothing from the tree is useless.[66]" The palm fronds were used to produce broom, *aziza* for sweeping both the house and the outside environment. The palm fronds were used to make canopies during ceremonies and a food for domestic

animals such as goats and sheep. Shades were built over the yams in the yam ban with palm fronds to protect them from the hot sun, which causes decomposition[67]. Very tender palm fronds, *omu* is used as a symbol of danger or dispute by the people of Mbaise. They used it to designate a piece of land in dispute. The people were also surrounded by the belief that if a dead human body is carried across the surface pond, it causes the pond to dry up, but if an *omu*, a tender palm frond is placed in the front of the pond, it would be safe. The stem of the palm tree was used to make pit toilet, *ogwe* while the pulp (the fibrous particles) *avuvu* and palm kernel shell *nkpekereaku* were used to fuel fire during cooking.

The method employed by the people in the extraction of palm oil, was broken into different stages, the first stage included climbing and cutting of the palm heads. This was and is still strictly men's work, *igbu akwu* followed by the dismembering of the palm head, *ike nkwu* which was also mainly done by the men, though women also took part at this stage. After a day or two, the processes of picking or selection commenced, *itutu nkwu.* This was also mainly done by virtually every member of the family both old and young. The palm fruits after been picked was steamed on the fire and pounded, *isu nkwo*[68], to

make it easy to separate the pulp from the kernel. The pounding was often done by the males, but not to say that the female did not. The final stage was the separation of the kernel from the pulp and squeezing of the pulps to extract the oil. Special grade oil was produced, if the fruits were processed much sooner it was harvested. The major handicap was that it was time consuming and only about fifty percent of the oil was extracted through this traditional method[69].

Ownership and harvest of oil palm trees was determined by the ownership of the land[70] on which they are found. For example, in the Mbaise area, palm trees which grow on compound land belonged to the owner of the compound and there was no restriction as to when and how he exploits such trees. Palm trees growing on farmlands under cultivation belonged to the owner of the farmland.

There were cases when farmers rented farm lands for growing of crops on temporary basis. In this situation, he was not allowed by the original owners of the land to harvest the palm trees. But he was allowed to trim or prone the trees to avoid unnecessary shade over his crops. Again, when a land is on lease, the farmer may be allowed to harvest the palm trees if there was a

specific term to that effect. There were areas regarded as special communal lands to the kindred or villages occupying the location. Palm trees that grow in such places could be exploited by any member of the kindred or village.

Those communally owned palm trees were known as *nkwu elu ohia*. They were more commonly found around the riverine. For instance, around Onicha, Eziudo, Itu, Amumara, Amuzu and Ogbor. It does not mean that there were no communally owned groves around other parts of Mbaise, only that it was found on a larger scale on the river banks.

Apart from the free and individual harvest, there was a restrictive method of harvest. In this method, palm tree harvest was declared closed for a period ranging from one to three months, *iwu nkwu* and an arrangement was made for a harvest day. This method was employed to enable the individual villages to carry out joint projects. It was a fund raising method more common in the era of money economy. Every individual member of the village who wished to participate in this exercise paid a certain amount of money. The palm oil processed within the compound belonged to the man, while the kernel belonged to his wife or wives in the case of polygamous family. Sources of labour for the processing of the palm oil were from family, the family

members, friends and relatives. They were rewarded with kernels, which was shared among them and little quantity of palm oil. The process of pounding the palm fruits was referred to as *isu nkwa nelu* mainly for them men, while other activities that followed were regarded as *isu nkwu nala* mainly for women and children.

The other types of palm tree in area is the raffia palm *ngwo*. The raffia palm tree grows wide along the stream beds or in the swampy areas all over southern Nigeria. It was and still cultivated on compound or nearby farmlands. It may appear strange that more people plant the raffia than the oil palm trees. The reason for this as suggested by Udo is connected with the fact that the productive life of the raffia palm tree is short. Indeed after a harvest of the palm wine, *iku ngwo* lasting about two months, the palm withers and dries.

THE RAFFIA PALM PRODUCTION

The raffia palm tree played very important role in the economy of the Mbaise people. The major product from the tree is palm wine. Palm wine was the most common wine enjoyed by the people of Mbaise and indeed in most parts of Igboland before the period towards the end of 15th and the beginning

of the 16th century when the inhuman trade on slave between the European countries and West African states began. It was used for entertainment in virtually all the ceremonies and social gatherings. For example, during the family, extended family, kindred and village meetings[71]. It was used for funeral, naming ceremonies; palm wine was an essential part in the payment of dowries. Other social importance of palm wine would be discussed later in the social life of the people. In addition, the raffia palm provided most of the indigenous building materials. The leaves were made into mats, *akrika* which was the only roofing sheet in the area. The ribs *ogugu* were used as rafters on the roof of a house. The twines *akwara* or *ekere* and piassava, *nkpishi* were used as nails.

The palm wine was used to produce hard drink gin *manya ukwu*. It was also referred to as *manya oku* hot drink. The gin, served as drink as well as chemical used in the preservation of dead bodies (corpse) for some weeks before his burial[72]. Palm wine was not only a drink rich with yeast[73], it was used for the treatment of measles.

The tapping of palm wine and mat making were not major occupation in the area; they were done as one of the complementary occupations to

[71]Nnjiaku, op cit

[72] Manya oku or manya ukwu could be used interchangeably, they refer to the same kind of drink. It was and

farming. They were mainly man's work, particularly tapping of palm wine. No woman was allowed to do it, probably due to their fragile nature, coupled with the fact that education of the child was mainly on the gender line.

ANIMAL REARING

Farming was not limited to crop production. Animals such as goats*eghu*, sheep *aturu*, cow *ehi*, fowl *okuko* were common in the area and they were of the West African dwarf species. Methods of rearing those animals included the intensive, semi intensive, extensive methods of animal farming. Animal farming (rearing) is referred to as*ikpa aku*. *Ikpa* means rearing while *aku* means animals. In the intensive system, a house, *ulo aku*was built where these animals were enclosed. This method was mainly used for the rearing of goats. Goats were kept in such houses and were fed with different leaves and some other domestic wastes such as yams and cocoyam pills. Goats and sheep were also allowed to move around within the compound surrounded by walls (fence) but this was mainly during the dry season when there was no crop planted on the compound land. Both sheep and cows were tied with ropes and taken out to areas where fresh leaves were found. Cows were not allowed to move freely or wander around like other animals because of their capacity to

destroy economic crops. A provision was made in every kitchen *usokwu* where fowls were made to stay during the night. These provisions were designed with a dwarf wall within the kitchen and with a round outlet measuring about a foot in diameter. The outlets were closed in the night against dangerous animals such as snakes. The people referred to this provision as *nkpuke.* The extensive method of animal rearing was adopted mainly for the fowls[74].

Animal rearing was an important aspect of the people's economy. Although it was a complementary occupation, men with a lot of animals were looked upon as wealthy men, hence the people referred to wealth as *aku na uba*. Those animals served the people as meat and source of prestige. A man who has flocks was reputed as a very wealthy man.

Although virtually every family was engaged in animal husbandry, it was in a very low scale, unlike the Hausa/Fulani herds' men who do it as their main occupation. In Mbaise, animal husbandry was a complementary occupation to crop production and trade. Those animals serve the people's meat for consumption and as commodity for trade. Other important reason for which animal husbandry was an essential and integral part of the economy of the Mbaise society include the fact that animals such as fowl, goat *ewu*, sheep,

[74]A.N. Oguzie, 85, Oral Interview, Amauzu, Mbaise, 02/11/07

cow served as medium of exchange. They were used in payment of dowries (see social organizations) and for performing burial rites of a full fledge man or woman[75]. Animal rearing was also very important because those animals were very essential in ritual and sacrifices (see religious life of the Mbaise people) consequent upon the above mentioned uses and other, animals were very important commodities for trade. Not only that, animals such as dogs were used by the hunters to locate the hiding places of the wild animal during hunting expedition (sniffer-dogs).

Furthermore, these animals were acquired through trade, which took the form of barter and later through monetized trade. An example of the money used was *eze-ego* or *ego kirikiri* (cowries) introduced by the Portuguese. Another means through which individuals got herds for rearing was aggistment *iliwe aku*[76]. This is a situation where a person who has some domestic animals places one or more under the custody or care of another so that the offspring are shared between the owner and custodian.

HUNTING

[75] Ibid
[76] www.encyclo.co.uk/define/agistment

Hunting, *ichu ohia* or *ichu nta,* was among the complementary occupation which the people of Mbaise engaged in during their early years before the penetration of the Europeans into the areas. Unlike crop production, animal husbandry and trade, hunting was exclusively man's occupation. Dogs were trained to locate the hiding places of the animals in the bushes, while the hunters wait at strategic location to kill the animals. Among the hunters, the person that directs the dogs was called *di nkita*. The major implements were stones, clubs, machetes, bows and arrow *uta*.

During the early days of contact between the people and European traders on the coasts, guns were acquired mainly through trade on slaves and palm oil organized by the middle men. The infusion of such European products as guns revolutionized the hunting occupation. The word *ndi nta* is the corruption of the English word 'hunter'. Hunters were formerly referred to as *ndi ohia anu* while the singular of it was *onye ohia anu*, and the act itself was *ichu ohia*.

The name *di-nta*, which was the corruption of the word hunter resulted to another name *ichu-nta*; this also implied hunting. When gun was introduced into hunting the people began to call hunters *ndi-egbe-ohia*[77]. According to

Anyanwu, there were hunters who hunted with guns in Mbaise before the coming of the Whiteman. Buttressing his opinion, he added that the people of Ezeagbogu town in Mbaise produced gun before their contact with the European[78]. It is possible that the people had begun to produce gun before the coming of the British in the Mbaise because European made items had been made available in the trading activities which took people from the area to the coast. So they may have imitated the imported guns. The Ezeagbogu being the most prominent in smithery in Mbaise today may have been among the first group to begin imitating the imported guns.

Games killed during hunting expedition provided the people with meat. This was shared among the hunters irrespective of their age differences. Both the young and old took part in the art of hunting. Most times men acquired honour with the kind of game they killed during hunting. For example, hunters who killed lion *agu* where named *ogbu-agu* meaning killer of lion, while those who killed leopard *edi-abali*were named*ogbu edi* meaning killer of leopard.

[77]Nnajiaku, op cit
[78] Mr. Livinus Anyanwu, 05, Oral Interview, Ezeagbogu Mbaise, 30/11/07

society reckoned on them in times of emergency such as war. Children were taught hunting by making them to participate in the act. The skin of most

games were used for decorations, clothing and for the production of different kinds of drums used for entertainment during ceremonies.

MANUFACTURE

Few areas within Mbaise practiced smithery, but they were not as prominent as the Akwa, Nkwere and Abriba, who were the most prominent in the art of smithery in the whole of Igbo land[79]. To an agricultural people like the Mbaise people, smiting was very important. This may have been considered so because it produced those wares which encouraged agriculture. It was said that Amuzu people in Mbaise learned the art of smithery from their Awka masters,hence they migrated from the Awka areas into the area where they are presently occupying[80]. Through the name Amauzu which implies the place of smither, it is possible to suggest that the Amuzu people came into the

[79]Afigbo explained that the most tamed and the best organized were the Awka, and Abriba. The Awka dominated the industry in the Northern and Western Igbo land. Ropes of Sand op cit, p. 140

Apart from the Amuzu people the Ezeagbogu people were also very prominent in smithery within the Mbaise area. According to Anyanwu, smithery was the occupation of our forefathers[81]. Smithery was so important in Mbaise that children were named after one of the instruments used by the

blacksmiths in shaping iron into objects *nwonu*. People answered the name *Nwonu* and *Iwunwonu*[82]. He further stated that there was an annual feast, (the feast of *nwonu*). This feast was celebrated by the blacksmiths during which they thank their gods for protecting them throughout the year working without any accident. Friends and relatives were invited to come and celebrate with them.

Smithing was particularly difficult profession, requiring artistic ingenuity and physical strength. It was also believed to be a mystical profession which established special link between the smith and the spirit world. Consequently, it was hedged by many taboos and required a long period of apprenticeship[83]. The importance of smithery would not be over emphasized; very few people engaged in it, and it was the hub on which other productions for instance farming, hunting and woodwork during the pre-colonial times revolved.[84]

[80] Elugwaraonu, oral interview op cit
[81] Anyanwu, oral interview op cit
[82] Ibid as in No. 81

The economic life of Mbaise people before the advent of colonial administration was determined by the interaction between the people and their natural environment. It has been said that in production, men not only

act on nature, but also one another[85]. They produced only by cooperating in certain ways and mutually exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into a definite connection and relations with one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their action on nature take place.[86]

As much as it is acceptable that collective actions of two or more individuals on nature can result to production, this idea or belief may be erroneous if there is no pointer to the particular epoch or stage of historical development in which it is possible. Whether or not the Mbaise society in the pre-colonial epoch fits in this situation is yet to be established. The relationship of production are the principal determinant of the structure of mode of

[83] Afigbo, Ropes of Sand op ci p 124t
[84] Pre-Colonial time in this context refers to the period beginning from the earliest time in Mbaise to 1902, the year which Aro field visited the area.
[85] K. Marx, F. Engels, V. Lenin, Historical Materialism, A collection of Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1972, p. 103
[86] Ibid p 103

these social relations into which the producers enter with one another, the conditions under which they exchange their activities and participate in the whole art of production will naturally vary according to the character of the means of production[88]. Means of production in this historical contest is the land. And the question here is aimed at identifying who owned and controlled the means of production? Were the owners of labour separated from the

owners of the means of production? To provide answer to these questions, we must first of all turn our attention to the nature and ownership of land (land tenure system) in the Mbaise area before the British occupation. Land as a means of production in Mbaise before the colonial epoch belonged to the families rather than towns and villages[89]. Although there were geographical areas referred to as village land, this was so because the different portions of land forming the whole village was owned by people from the same village or town. This is not an attempt to repeat was said earlier. It is to make clear our analysis of the ownership and control of the means of production.

Ownership of an entire area of land by a given village was made possible by what Nwabara carefully described as "right of first occupation." He stated that for a not always specified reason, village might migrate to an entirely new site occupying a tract of land which soon took on the name of the ancestral father[90]. This does not suggest that lands were used in a communal manner. Village or village group may be said to own land in general but in particular the lands belonged to the families. According to hereditary tradition governing the ownership of land in the area, every male child is entitled to a piece of his father's land. A father can transfer the ownership of land to individual who

enjoy unlimited rights of utilization. Inheritance as mentioned above was one of the sources through which the means of production (land) was acquired. Other sources include purchase and gifts. Land was used for payment of dowries as stated earlier on this work. Land was also given to daughters as a marriage gift. Some families have more land than others; this may be as a result of the fact that they inherited some of their lands from their relatives who died extinct.

This type of tradition made the means of production accessible to the owners of labour power. And this prevented the existence of a social division of labour between labourers and non-labourers. Since land or what Eric Harsbown described as condition of labour was also owned by the same provider of labour. The description of the mode of appropriation of surplus labour become very difficult.

Production was never dependent on slaves. Though slave labour was said to have been exploited, it supplemented rather than supplanting the labour of the freeborn. According to Afigbo who cited the interesting narratives of Olauda Equiano, the slave “Ohu” probably did not do much work

than the freeborn? And that only a foolish man would leave the fate of his yam or as the Igbo would put it the stomach of his family in the hands of slaves[91].

Apart from the labour of the freeborn, *mfunala*, who were members of the family, there were other sources of labour or what Afigbo aptly referred to as the clientage labour. These were people who had either taken money or agricultural products from the farmer on loan and could not pay back or were required to pay back in labour provided on designated days of the week for a given period of time or until the loan was repaid[1]. People who enjoyed the support and protection of the rich farmer most times in return gave their labour to him. Another source of labour was the trading of labour *ofe oru* which occurred among different age grades or what could be better described as reciprocal exchange of labour among an organized group of people (man or woman).

[91] Afigbo, op cit, p. 130

Commenting on these sources of labour as regards the mode of production that existed in the Mbaise area prior to the British occupation, it is problematic to articulate the mode of appropriation of surplus labour from the work force constituted by the family members including the head of the family, who may not even be the sole owner of all the products of a given harvest.

This is consequent upon the fact that the wife or wives of the farmer may still use the same workforce which included the man to produce their own crops which include varieties of vegetables some species of yams, but mainly cocoyam.

In the clientage system, some individuals pay back the loans collected from the farmer with labour and this is not enough to suggest that surplus labour was appropriated; hence there are no evidence to prove that the labour with which they paid was not in proportion with the loan. Furthermore, there was no quantification of the support and protection they receive from the farmer who they pay back with their labour, to enable us place whether there was surplus labour. While in the reciprocal exchange of labour, if surplus labour was appropriated, it was equally reciprocal.

My argument does not suggest that there was no appropriation of surplus value in the pre-colonial economy of Mbaise. In all case, the appropriation of surplus labour is necessary to secure reproduction of the economy and of its condition of existence in totality of social relations[93]. Eric Hobsbown contended that surplus labour of members of a community can be appropriated in form of military service[94]. If this is true, it is supportive to the

contention of Hindess and Hirst that surplus labour can be collectively appropriated. The marriage of these views would create a space to accommodate such collective economic activities as collective harvest of oil palm, which was the major source of realizing public projects in the Mbaise area before the colonial period.

According to Equiano, Igboland was a society which lacked extremes of wealth and poverty. We are habituated to labour from our earliest years, everyone contributes something to the common stock, and as we are unacquainted with idleness, we have no beggers[95]. No one except the very young and very old was exempted from manual work. Young children who could not embark on manual labour were used as showers of animals. Mbaise society did not encourage accumulation of wealth. The technological limits of the Mbaise society provided little or no luxuries wealth could buy. They most popular forms of accumulation, was the well-stocked yam bans or cocoyam bans, and they were perishable and were very prone to environmental hazard such as prolonged dry seasons. This meant that there was no social division of labour.

From the foregoing discussion, it can be seen that men can be distinguished from animals by their consciousness, religion, ideas and so on, but they themselves make the distinction when they began to produce this means of subsistence. In the cause of production, men make not only material products but their own selves. And it is in the course of production that people develop their own consciousness. Work is therefore central to the

[95] Isichei, op cit, p. 34

ial time of Mbaise for people to embark on the type of work that gave them joy. Labour was external to worker satisfaction and happiness. There were combinations of various modes of appropriation which can only fit in, in social mode of production[97]. Social mode of production not in the sense of scientific socialism. This was a social situation where exploitation was not the basis of social relation.

TRADE

Trade was a very important aspect of the Igbo economic activity, though it was subsidiary to agriculture. Trade was subsidiary to agriculture because of the fact that the number of people engaged in agriculture in both full and part time basis was

greater than any other economic activity. There were also lots of prestige attached to it. According to Uchendu:

> *To remind an Igbo that he is "ori mgbe ahia loro," one who eats only when the market holds is to humiliate him.*
>
> *This does not imply that traders are not respected; all it means is that the Igbo see farming as their chief occupation*

[96]A. Temu and B. Swai, Historians and Africanist History: A Critique, Zed Press, London, 1981, p. 44

[97] Social mode of production as used is not the same thing as the socialist mode of production as propounded by the Western scholars. Social mode of production is derived from the fact that the more fortunate in the area helped their poorer relations and were repaid by the gratitude or by their help if they fell on evil days.

Another statement that may have informed the attitude of the Igbo people toward these occupations is one which reminds a person that *usokwu ya di n'ahia*, meaning that his or her kitchen is in the market. Trade was very important because just as Chukwu is believed to have instituted agriculture, so is he believed to have institutionalized trade and marketing, by heavenly fish mongers. Each of them went round Igbo land establishing market bearing his name[1]. Without going into much detail about the legendary stories concerning trade in Igboland, we have to turn to how trade was organized and carried out. Mbaise area was and still part of the Igbo community. The trading activities that went on in Igboland did not exclude them. Although they were not as prominent as the Aro, Aboh and other areas around the northern Igbo zone in

the early stages of trade. They became somewhat important during the second half of the nineteenth century. This was the period during which the lower part of the Imo River became navigable. In such a historical discuss, it would be a misnomer to ascribe importance to sellers of commodities and wares alone. Trade is sustained by demand and supply. Therefore those parts of Igbo land that did not have enough to sustain themselves depended on the market to complement what they had. It is noted elsewhere that Mbaise was one of the areas in Igbo land that depended on agriculture, but the low level of the soil fertility in the area was discouraging[99]. Consequently many people recourse to trade.

Mbaise, just like in other parts of Igboland, the establishment of market was for the exchange of commodities either by barter or by money[100]. The Igbo market is an institution which marries the dimension of space and time; its name combines a place and a day[101] such as *Afo-Enyiogwugwu, Afo-Akpokwu, Nkwo-ogwu, Eke-Amumara, Eke-Ngwuru, Orie-Ngwuru* and others. The entire area was covered by a network of markets, carefully arranged in time and space to avoid overlap. It was said that the four days of *Eke, Orie, Nkwo* and *Afo* which formed the Igbo week were insufficient to accommodate them; and

they were fitted into eight day cycle,[102] through the replication of the original market days, with the adjectives big and small (*ukwu* and *nta)*. Consequent upon this, there came the Big week, *Izu-ukwu* and the small week, *Izu-nnta*. The *Izu-ukwu* (big market week) comprised the big market days. Each market was therefore held once every eight day[103].

Before, during and after the trans-Atlantic slave trade, the area that became Mbaise[104] witnessed trading activities in which traders from different part of the territory made customership with those they buy from and sell to[105]. Merchandise was plentiful and various, but common to all markets were yams, cocoyam, meat, fish, salt, maize cobs, beans, vegetable (leaves), chicken, goats, dogs, palm oil and palm wine. Wares such as baskets and iron works were also sold in various markets. Some of the goods sold were produced within Mbaise, while some were brought into the area from other areas outside Mbaise by long distant traders. It was evidenced in the intelligence report on Ahiara and Ekwereazu clans that these clans could not sufficiently support themselves in foodstuffs and that certain amount of yams and cassava were brought from outside, principally from Urata and Ngwa[106]. Palm produce were taken to the coast and such areas as Umuahia and Oguta.

[103] Nwala, op cit, p. 32
[104] A.C. Smock, Ibo Politics, The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria, op cit, p. 17; A.R. Chapman, Political Development in Eastern Nigeria, The Role of Ethnic Unions, PhD Thesis, Columbian University, 1967, p. 154; Njoku, op cit, p. 7
[105] Njoku, op cit, p. 7

Another important factor that helped to illuminate the fact that Mbaise people engaged in long distance trade is that they engaged in smithing, but there was no evidence of iron ore deposit in the area. To this background, it is safe to say that the smithers acquired their raw materials from the areas located around the northern Igbo plateau, which was rich in iron ore deposit[107]. Although Stockley, Assistant District Officer of Owerri in his report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara clans contended that there was a quantity of iron deposited in a deep ravine in Ihitte-Afoukwu, the northernmost part of Ekwereazu clan.[108] The People did not used or even noticed this mineral prior to the invasion of the area by the British.

To further illustrate this claim is that products like salt and some other items were produced and obtained from Uburu and Okposi in Ohaozara. Afigbo contended that from the Igbo town of Uburu northwards into Ogoja there are brine lakes from which salt was made by evaporation. It was from here that most of Igbo land got its salt popularly known as *nnu okposi* or *nnu uburu*[109]. This item has been mentioned earlier as one of the common articles of trade in the markets located within the Mbaise area. As a result, it is possible that the people from Mbaise were engaged in the trade that took

[107] Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, op cit, p. 132
[108] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/195, An Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans
[109] Afigbo, op cit, p. 133

them to such places as Uburu and Okposi from where they obtained salt which was very commonly sold and used among them. Although slaves were among the goods sold during this period in Igboland, the evidence available to the present writer could not point any market or centre for slave trading in Mbaise, like those of Nike, Uzoakolu, Bende or *Ogobende* as it was locally called, and finally Arochukwu, from whose part slaves were taken to the unknown[110].

Slave trading was also said to be uncommon among the people, hence any person caught in the act of kidnap was prosecuted and convicted by the *Ama-ala* (village assembly) of the place. The punishment for such crime was also selling the person away into slavery[111] or ordered to be killed. The attention given to slave trade by the Igbo merchants before 1472 or slightly after was not high in Igboland. This may be because the demand was not high. Isichei posited that the first Europeans (Portuguese) visitors who in 1472 came to the area which later became eastern Nigeria bought pepper, ivory and locally made textile which they sold elsewhere in West Africa. Few slaves were bought because the Portuguese had little use for slaves[112]. She further described as unfortunate the Columbus discovery of some islands off the coast

[110] See Nwabara, op cit, p. 20
[111] N.A.E., C.S.O. 27937, An Intelligence Report on the Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division
[112] Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, op cit, p. 42

of America, soon after the Portuguese had reached south-eastern Nigeria. The continuous exploration of the new world resulted to the discovery of vast potential wealth, both in mineral resources and land. Both sources of wealth needed ample labour for their exploitation which the native inhabitants of the place (Indians could not survive, therefore they turned to West Africa) which ushered in over three centuries of infamous triangular trade[114].

Although this trade was said to reach its climax in the eighteenth century in Igboland, it was dominated by the Europeans[115]. Nwabara also reinforced this opinion by observing that few Igbo traders engaged in this inhuman trade. There is no statistical evidence yet to show the level of participation by the numerous communities in Igboland. However, the evidence within our reach, showed that there was no centre or market for this human goods within the areas which later became Mbaise, and that the major sources of this human goods included kidnap, punishment for crime, inter-village wars, and persons who sold their children or other relatives willingly for one problem or the other[116]. Procurement of slaves for sale during wars was illuminated by Isichei when she stated as follows: The Nguru Mbaise had been at war with Ahiara, so

[114] Ibid, p. 42
[115] Ibid, p. 43
[116] Onwuzirike, op cit, pp. 39-60

[1]Ibid, p. 42

when British attacked Ahiara "we helped the white men in the fight against Ahiara and captured many people which we sold immediately[117]".

If this statement is critically analyzed, two things would be observed. One is that the people were in the habit of selling their captives or prisoners of war POW) into slavery. Secondly, the statement was with excitement which could imply that the level of sophistication of British war of conquest was the first of its kind in the area, and that it created opportunity for them to capture more prisoners of war than ever.

Trade, particularly long distance one was a perilous activity in the pre-colonial times[118]. In the absence of a single ruler[119] or what Afigbo perfectly described as large-scale state system, in pre-colonial Igboland[120], people have often wondered how the perils of the trade routes were overcome by traders. The answer to this question is located in the fact that the Igbo people generally invoked techniques to come over the danger associated with the trade route. The most obvious of these techniques according to Isichei was the convoy system. This was a situation where a school of traders traveled at the same

[117] Ibid, p. 32
[118] Ibid, p. 137
[119] Isichei, op cit, p. 64
[120] Nwabara, op cit, p. 22
[121] Afigbo, op cit, p. 135
[122] The Igbo people believed that when you are numerous in number, it becomes difficult to defeat or conquer

Another means of guaranteeing the safety of travelers and traders included laws, customs and morality of the Igbo people, which forbids the molestation, wounding, killing, kidnapping and enslavement of a fellow clansman[125]. This suggests that clansmen looked upon themselves as relatives and therefore could not harm each other. Blood bond, *Igbandu*, what Isichei perfectly referred to as blood covenant[126] or what Afigbo also described as blood pact was another method universal in Igboland, through which artificial bond of kinship was created and expanded. Under this arrangement, the leading representatives of the clans or village-groups concerned met at their common boundary and after performing the prescribed ritual, drew blood from their vein and mixed it in a container, then they would dip pieces of kola nut in the blood and eat. This ceremony was believed to constitute the groups concerned into a blood union whose members were bound to treat each other as clansmen[127]. This guaranteed each other's safety when they were within their

[123] Afigbo, op cit, p. 135
[124] The Igbo people believed that when you are numerous in number, it becomes difficult to defeat or conquer you.
[125] Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, op cit, p. 135
[126] Isichei, History of Igbo People, op cit, p. 65
[127] Afigbo, op cit, p. 135-6

and traveling which reduced the peril of the trade routes. One of the institutions was judicious marriage. Most long distant traders were polygamist

and usually took care to choose their wives from important and strategically placed towns along their normal route of business[128]. Marriages were ways of creating good relations with other towns and extending the protecting bond of kinship over wide geographical area[129]. By virtue of marriage a man was accepted as a member of his father-in-law's clan[130] and can move freely without molestation, most especially when the father-in-law belonged to an influential family. This was further encouraged by the fact that individuals were allowed to live in their maternal homes as long as they wanted, provided they are not troublesome. In this case the trader passes freely by mere mentioning of the family name of his father-in-law *Ogo-nwoko*. Furthermore, a provision was made for the trader which served him as ware house and hostel. In most cases, other traders benefited from the connection built by one single trader through marriage, resulting to the convoy system of traveling mentioned above. This method was not limited to long distance trading alone, as mentioned by Afigbo, but also to regional trade in which the Mbaise people were very active. And this could be the reason for blood relationship between many families in Mbaise and those of Ngwaland and Umuahia.

In a similar vein, membership of a secret or title society such as the *Okonko* was also of great significance to the safety of traders and travelers. The description of *Okonko* society has always been situated, being secret society and society of titled men by many writers. This society was said to possess immense powers. Its members were identified by their possessions of a long wooden staff with a copper rings on it. And it was said that every member of the *Okonko* proceeding outside his town must carry his staff which proved complete safe guard against any molestation[131]. The society encouraged trade not only in Mbaise but in the whole of Igboland. And that the Aro traders most of whom were executive members of the society used their position to enlist the cooperation of influential men in other villages and towns to boost their commercial interest[132]. The *Okonko* members who were traders were opportune to stop in any *Okonko* house situated along or near the trade routes. They did not only enjoy the accommodation at the *Okonko* houses located along or near the trade routes, they also enjoyed free accommodation in the house of their fellow members who lived along the

[131]N.A.E., C.S.O. 27937, An Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division, p. 18
[132] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 112

Ngwland and Mbaise areas[134], which suggests a good trade relationship

between and among these areas before the inception of the European traders in the areas.

Just like the Aro and Awka who traded with the protection *Ibini Ukpabi* of Arochukwu and *Agbala* of Awka,some traders from the Mbaise areas protected themselves along the route by the *Amadioha* whose presence was represented by the skull of a male sheep *ishi evule*[135]. This was surrounded by the believe that the *Amadioha* only accepts the male sheep as sacrifice. Therefore priests of *Amadioha* used it to designate the presence of the spirit. Traders who wanted protection went to the priests to collect one of the skulls of those male sheep to place on their goods. Anybody who sees it acknowledged that they were the servants of *Amadioha*, the Igbo god that strikes with thunder. Though the spirit force of *Amadioha* was significant, it was not as influential as those of Awka and Arochukwu. However, it helped to facilitate trade.

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[133] Ibid, p. 112-3
[134] Afigbo, op cit, p. 139
[135] D.I.O. Nwogu, 81, Oral Interview, Eziala Akpodim, 20/04/09, Matthew Nwogu, 84, Oral Interview Umuakam Akpodim, 18/04/09

precisely when money economy was introduced into Igboland[136]. He further stated that it would appear that by the eighteenth century and early in this

century much of the commercial transactions in Igboland were done in money[137]. Information available to the present writer is a pointer to the fact that the trading activities that went on in Igboland did not include salt, umunu, cowrieseze-*ego* or *ego kirikiri*, manila, brass rod, and copper wire[138]. The little evidence available to the present writer showed that cowries *eze-ego* and manila *ojonma*, were more in the Mbaise area than every other currencies. This is not an attempt like that of Jones, to demarcate Igboland into different currency zones[139]. But a demonstration that as a well sophisticated, developed and wide-ranging as the Igbo trade was, it is not possible that there was any part of Igboland where any currency was not recognized and used though they may be dominant in one part.

Scholars affirmed that the use of cowries in Igboland predates the coming of the Europeans[140]. The cowries were available in small units and were extremely useful for small purposes. Six pieces of the cowries was tied together as a single denomination called *isi ego*.

[136] Afigbo, op cit, p. 139
[137] Ibid, p. 139
[138] Ibid, p. 139
[139] Ibid, p. 139
[140] Ibid, p. 139; see also Isichei, op cit, p. 32-3

Six hundred cowries (600) = *ukwu iri* or *ogodo*.

One thousand two hundred cowries (1,200) = *Ogodo abuo*[141]. (See Appendix 4 for some pre-colonial currencies).

The manila coins in the area were two types. The genuine manila coin *ojomma* and counterfeit manila coin *abii* which was minted locally in the area, and accepted as currency for the exchange. (See appendix for the shapes and sizes of these currencies).

FISHING

Fish was among the commodities of long distance trade. The main bulk of it was brought from areas outside Mbaise such as Ikwere, the Niger-Anambra valley, and Cross River Igbo. There was also fish production in the Mbaise area, particularly from those areas around the Imo River. But this was insufficient to the need of the people[142]. Therefore, it is believed that fish brought through long distance trade from Niger Anambra valley or those of the Cross River supplemented the lean harvest from the few rivers in Mbaise.

[141] The Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, op cit

Trade in palm produce was another economic activity that took people of Mbaise far away from their area. This trade took the people to the coast and

later to Umuahia and Oguta. Traders from Calabar attracted a settlement of both Okrika and Akwete traders at Ife in Ezinihitte[143]. Apart from the settler middle-men, traders came from Calabar, Bony and Nembe to participate in the trade on palm produce on the Imo River bank in Mbaise. The produce were brought from all parts of Mbaise to the market at Ife where they were finally taken by canoe through the waterway to the coast[144]. The settlements and the thriving trade on palm produce gave rise to a market in Ife which attracted petty traders from all over Mbaise. The market was at about one mile apart from the riverside settlement. The patronage it enjoyed from people who came from all corners of Mbaise to dispose off their palm oil turned this market into a daily market *Ogwuma-biri*, crowded with petty traders. Such European goods as clothes, stock fish, tobacco and other minor luxuries brought in by the middlemen were bought by the Mbaise traders which they resold at small profit in other smaller markets.

TRANSPORTATION

Consumer goods and wares were moved from one location to another through the land routes, and later through the waterways. There were numerous track routes linking different communities in the area that much

later became Mbaise[145]. There were no wide and major roads as they had in the colonial days. The roads leading to the markets were swept by the people of the village in which the market was situated[146]. There were roads linking each village to the village group centre of the market. Apart from the internal road network in Mbaise, there were roads linking the area with places like Umuahia, Oguta, Okpala and Owerri[147].

The state of transportation in the area was extremely poor. To explain what the means of transportation looked like, Afigbo aptly described the state of transportation in Igboland as follow: sophisticated, developed and wide-ranging as it was the trade of pre-colonial Igboland depend on the least efficient form of transportation – human head porterage[148]. This observation is significant and cold be further reinforced by the fact that the few streams in

[145]Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 7
[146]Ibid, p. 7
[147] MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit

And that the Imo River which separate Mbaise from Ngwaland and passes through the heart of Igboland was less navigable before the second half of the nineteenth century. Furthermore, the Imo River and its tributaries were crossed by a series of brilliantly executed suspension bridges[149] locally called *ogwe* by the riverine communities in Mbaise. This trade across the Imo River

emphasized the exchange of local agricultural products, consisting of corn, fish, palm wine, yams, palm oil, pepper, country pots, bowls and mortar, plantain, fowls, eggs, snails, cocoyam, palm nuts, ropes, mats and many other products[150]. All the goods mentioned were carried by canoes or through head porterage across the Imo River. And it was made possible by a locally made bridges.

Not only in Mbaise, the Igbo like the other forest people of West Africa, did not use animal transport because, it has been argued, the tsetse fly made it impossible for such animals to thrive in the forest zones[151]. The horse, according to Afigbo, was brought in for ritual and ceremonial purposes only. The donkey was probably not known to the Igbo before the colonial era. Today, their

[148] Afigbo, op cit, p. 137
[149] Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, op cit, p. 65
[150] Ibid, p. 66
[151] Afigbo, op cit, p. 137

or slaves, they may be used to carry other wares to the market. In addition to this, the prosperous trader could always raise young men from his community to carry his wares to and from the market. This was the practice all over Igboland.

PRE-COLONIAL SOCIO-CULTURAL LIFE IN MBAISE

Mbaise was, and remains a federation of many villages and village groups. Apart from the activities discussed under the political and economic provinces, there were human activities that cannot be ignored, which underline their socio-cultural aspect of life.

MARRIAGE

The institution of marriage is virtually universal in all human societies. This institution contributes immensely to holding societies together and giving them stability[153]. Man and woman must come together and have children if human society must continue. Unlike the young of most animal species human children must depend on adult care for many years, and this usually involves

[152] Afigbo, op cit, p. 135
[153] E.A. Oke, An Introduction to Social Anthropology, Macmillan Publishers, London, 1984, p. 94

before initiating marriage, certain factors came into play. For instance, when a bride or groom is identified, both families were interested to know the genealogical record of each other. This was done mainly to prevent their son or daughter from getting married to *osu*[155] the sacred slave to the deities or an outcast when they are not one. Not only that, there was need to ascertain that their son or daughter did not marry from a family of thieves or social misfits. It was based on these circumstances that the issue of *ajuju nwanyi* came into

being. *Ajuju nwanyi* was a process through which the families concerned elicited information about each other. No direct relatives of the concerned families were questioned during this process, else their information would be falsified.

Prior to this stage, the intending male spouse, his parents in the company of other elders from the extended families, would embark on official enquiry about the bride or what is known even today as *manya-ajuju* to the family of the woman. Palm wine and cola nuts were offered the parents of the woman. *Manya-ajuju* was mainly to find out whether or not the woman they saw was a member of the family, whether or not she is engaged to another

[154] J. Beattie, Other Cultures, Aims, Methods and Achievements in Social Anthropology, Rutledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1964, p. 117

[155] Njoku, op cit, p. 136

marriages took the form of exchange, girl being exchanged between the two families[156]. Apart from the exchange type of marriage, some families gave their daughter to a man without necessarily charging anything[157] apart from palm wine and cola nut which were often the fashion of social gathering in the area.

Before the completion of payment of dowry, the girl (woman) was brought to stay for some days in the family of her would be husband. This was

[1] N.A.E., MINLOC 6/1/195, op cit

[2] Anyanwu, op cit

aimed at creating opportunity for the experienced elderly members of the man's family, mainly the women, to observe her character[158]. This explains the peoples believe of *agwa bun ma nwanyi* good character is the beauty of a woman. Payment of dowries was formerly with items produced locally, but when European goods began to penetrate the area, they started to include them in the payment. For example, basin was one of the items that began to feature prominently in the list of items for dowries. The bride price was received based on gender. Those items meant for the men, were received by the adult members of the girls kindred, the *Amala* while those for the women called *ivu-efere* were loaded in a very big basin which was included in the list of items and were received by women of the same kindred. During these occasions, women were separated from the men. One other interesting thing about this occasion is that members of the girl's kindred were categorized into groups, such as the family heads of the kindred (the *amala*) the wives *ndom,* the boys *umu ama,* the girl s*umuagbogho*, and all received part of the bride price.

What is more important here is that whatever a man demanded for bride price or *ihe-isi-nwanyi* would be accepted, but the husband pays with

what he has[159]. Just as I noted above, bride price in some cases took the form of barter. Cows, yams and land were accepted as bride price.

The culture of Mbaise people allowed for what could be best described as infant marriage. This was common among two friendly families, who did not need to make further enquiries about each other. Such early marriage according to Njoku was contracted by putting money in the drinking receptacle or plate of the baby girl *itinye ego na oba miri*[160]. From the time this was done, the parents of the baby girl would begin to regard her as somebody's wife, and would not accept any other offer for the girl. But if the boy grows and rejects

[159]Ibid, p. 137

the girl, then the girl was free to make substitute. After settling with the process of marriage, a new family was formed. This family was patrilocal[161]. The daughter leaved the parent's house (family) for the husband's parent's house. This suffices the claim that Mbaise is a pratilineal society.

A conjugal or monogamous family existed in Mbaise[162]. That is the type of family consisting of a man and woman and children. Sometimes, the conjugal family extends its limits so that more than one woman feels a direct

[1]Ibid, p. 137
[2] Ibid, p. 136

father. But this did not supplant the special relationship and responsibilities of

the actual parents. This no doubt gave birth to what is referred to as extended family system in the area which became a common cultural feature[163]. The conjugal family system was made strong by the cultural practice of *eghu ukwu* which means the ceremony marking the arrival of the tenth (10th) child to a single woman[164]. I am not trying to advance that conjugal family was the only system that existed in the area.

Mbaise cultural and religious believes allowed more than one wife to a man. Polygny or what according to John Lewis is generally but inaccurately called polygamy[165]. The culture of marrying two or more wives explains their belief of *igwe-bu-ike*, multitude is strength, as explained earlier. Again large families with many wives and children were a source of labour.

One major cause of polygamy in Mbaise can be associated to the levirate[166] custom that was acceptable in the area. This type of custom permits a man to marry his deceased (elder) brother's widow (wife). At times, a man may marry his father's widow(s) other than his mother. Those widows may even be senior to his mother. But most of such marriages often involves the younger wife or wives of his deceased father. In Mbaise, it was not unusual for

a man to marry a girl of the same age as his children or grandchildren. Thus, this made it easier for his wives to be transferred to his older son(s) at death.

Furthermore, the custom of the Mbaise people allowed the inheritance of a woman by her late husband's agnates (son or brother). This is different from the levirate custom. The difference is that in the levirate custom a widow can still beget a child in the name of her late husband who died childless or at least without a son to continue his line while that of the widow inheritance, the widow was taken over by the dead man's agnates, usually the brother or son, who was accepted by the widow as her new spouse. Any children she bears afterwards belonged to the new spouse and not her deceased husband[167]. The act of taking over the wife or wives of a man's deceased agnate was known to the people as *ikete-nwanyi* in the case of his father's wife or wives. While in the case of his brother was known as *ikuru-nwanyi*. Although these culture or custom can still be found fragmentally in some areas in Mbaise today, it is no longer possible without the consent and support of the woman, probably due to the influence of the Christian belief and the existence of fundamental human rights entrenched in the constitution.

MARRIAGE AND DIVORCE IN MBAISE BEFORE COLONIAL ERA

An ideal marriage is any one that is permanent. My concern here is the stability of marriage based on the in frequency of divorce in the Mbaise. It has been said that there were rare cases of divorce in the area, even though it was in the powers of a woman to decide whether or not to continue with her marriage. Although option of divorce was open to Mbaise woman, but only possible when restitution of the bride price is sure[168]. This implied that

[167]Oke, op cit, p. 101

man. In a situation where this was not done, and the woman proceeded to abandon her husband for another, the former husband had the right to claim any child or children she may begot with her new spouse.

Some authors have attributed marriage stability to high bride price that was common in the area[169]. According to Agulanna, a comparative study of the

[1]See J. Beattie, op cit, p. 119; A.U. Ogazie, 75, Oral Interview, Amauza 29/11/08

anthropologists have suggested that the failure of a man to live up to expected role in the provision of the family needs causes divorce[171]. If this is true, one can then confidently postulate that one major cause of low frequency of divorce or marriage stability in Mbaise was the hard work nature of their

[168] See J. Beattie, op cit, p. 119; A.U. Ogazie, 75, Oral Interview, Amauza 29/11/08
[169]A.C. Agulanna, The Mbaiseness of Mbaise, O-I Publishers, Owerri, 1998, p. 20
[170] Ibid, p. 20

women. It is said that married women in the area did not rely solely on the husbands who may be a polygamist for the provision of social needs.

Agulanna further contended that to Mbaise woman, divorce is an anathema which should not be imagined, and that to her, marriage is a lifelong affair. She stays in marriage no matter how brutalized so as to train her children, who, she believed, would reward her for whatever maltreatment or deprivation she may have suffered in the hands of her husband[172]. It has also been said that Mbaise culture did not encourage people to marry a woman that has once been divorced. Such a woman was looked upon as a problem[173].

Furthermore, concubine was not forbidden in Mbaiseland. A married woman who was caught having sex with another man committed no crime unless the husband said so. And no other person has the power to prosecute her before the *Amala* for doing so[174]. Sometimes, men allowed their wives to have another sex partner (concubine) by accepting a gift of chicken *okuko-som-anya* and of palm wine *manya-pafu-ihu*. Such gifts made it legal for a man to have a sexual affair with another man's wife. This was mostly for the polygamists though not to all his wives. In most cases, such men were almost turned to slave to the woman's husband[175]. This state of affair may have

[172] Agulanna, op cit, p. 21
[173] Ibid, p. 21
[174] See the Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, C.S.O., 27937
[175] Nze Andrew, N. Oguzie, op cit

provided a good opportunity for some women who would have ordinarily sought divorce, to stay back in marriage.

Mbaise cannot be said to be endogamous or exogamous. The most important thing is that Mbaise covers a vast area comprising five clans, numerous village groups and villages. The villages in the area were exogamous; hence they married from some of their neighbouring villages. Mbaise being a conglomeration of five clans can be said to be both endogamous and exogamous. At the clan level, they married from both within and outside the clan. This was the case at the village group level. But at the village level, they are purely exogamous.

OTHER SOCIO-CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS

Okonko Society

To ignore this aspect of the people means to agree with the European paradigm of African history which had tried to portray Africa as having no movements or development to exhibit[176]. These institutions or societies were very important to the life of people in Mbaiseland. They were instrumental to the regula*tion* of the social conduct of the individual members of the society.

[176] Ivor Wilks, African Histographical Tradition, Old and New, in T.D. Fage (ed) 1970, Africa Discovers Her Past, Oxford University Press, London, p. 7

This was one of the most significant social cultural institutors in the Mbaise area prior to the advent of colonialism[177]. According to Njoku, *Okonko* society was seen as a secret organization or society, although he declined to take affirm his position on it, by adding that whether it qualified to be a secret society or not is open to a debate[178]. No precise date had been designated to mark the origin of this society. The testimonies of some renowned authors of Igbo history showed that not only in Mbaise, the *Okonko* society was an Igbo affair particularly the southern Igbo groups[179]. *Okonko* was said to have played a prominent role in political and social matters[180].

Members of this society were often identified by their wooden staff which had copper rings on them. In the pre-colonial epoch, the *Okonko* society served as an agency of local administration, principally on issues concerning the implementation of the rules of the *Amala*, the village assembly. The rules of the organization were seriously adhered to by its members. Defaulters were made to pay fines as stipulated in their rules and any member who disobeyed this rule was sold to the Aro slave traders[181]. As any agency of the *Amala*,

[177] The term colonialism is considered the most proper here hence it covers the destruction of all aspects of the indigenous culture by the alien culture.
[178] Njoku, op cit, p. 112
[179] Isichei E. op cit, p. 23
[180] Afigbo, Ropes of Sand, Studies in Igbo History and Culture, University Press Limited, Ibadan, 1981, p. 2

probably be based on the powers delegated to them by the *Amala* of the village. If a conclusion was reached during arbitration between two or more village within a village group, the *Okonko* society was directed to implement it, by so doing, it contributed a lot in the maintenance of peace in the area. Not only in the domain of politics, the economic importance of the *Okonko* society in the area, and indeed in Igboland had been discussed earlier under the economic life of the people. The *Okonko* society as a militant organ of the village government openly and stoutly but unsuccessfully resisted the imposition of British rule in the area[182]. It is possible that so many of the members died during the colonial conquest of the area which began by the visit of the Aro Field Force to the area in 1902. Following the successful imposition of British colonial rule and the infiltration of the Christian faith, the *Okonko* society declined and almost completely disappeared in Mbaiseland. The *Okonko* members who survived the demonstration of British fire power in the area lost their powers and influence.

THE EZEJI SOCIETY (THE YAM LORDS)

In pre-colonial Igbo society, agriculture was the most important

[181] Afigbo, op cit, p. 127
[182] Ibid, p. 127

people engaged in it either on full or part-time basis, and to the prestige attached to it. Professor Afigbo rightly observed that agriculture in Igboland was highly ritualized and that they would point to the importance of the occupation and its antiquity among the people. He further explained that beginning of farming season, of which the date varied from one part of Igbo to another for ecological reasons, was marked by a festival and a ritual. It was the same with the beginning of the harvest season which was marked by the very important new yam festival. The occasion marking the beginning of the farming season in Mbaise was known as *Iro-ofo* while that of the harvest season was *Iri-ji*.

Another observation pointed out that it was not only the practice of agriculture that was ritualized, but those crops especially yam and cocoyam, which constitute the backbone of Igbo agriculture were also ritualized[183]. We are more concerned here about the yam, hence the *Ezeji* the yam king or lord. Yam having been regarded as the king of Igbo crops, its cultivation in such patrilineal society as Mbaiseland, was exclusively man's work. Our argument here is not to prove that women did not participate in the cultivation of yam, but the glory and honour that were associated to it, were given to men.

Farmers who farmed yam extensively rose to what Ihuoma referred to as barons and lords of the manor[184]. These yam kings or lords formed a society or club which was subsequently referred as*Ndi ezeji* the yam kings. Membership of the society became an honour to the most serious-minded and successful yam farmers who wanted it. As time went on, the requirement for becoming a member of the glorified yam farmers' club were laid down by its members. These requirements were certified by a farmer, before he was bestowed with honour of membership.

According to Njoku, to qualify for the title, the yam farmers had to own a ban, rich with racks tied in a conventional fashion with yams covering all the flour sides of the stick to which the yams were tied. This type was described as *Ekwuruekwu ekwe-ji*. While the other type tied on the two sides of the stick alone was described as *Ekwe-ihu-aturu* and cannot qualify a farmer for the

[183]Ihuoma, op cit, p. 24
[184] Ibid, p. 24

The yam ban must be inspected and approved by the members of the society before their request to become a member was granted[185].

It is believed that the spirit force of yam *muo-ji* called *Ahiajioku* laid down specific code of conduct governing the cultivation, harvesting, cooking

and eating of it. For example, fighting, killing and defecating in a yam farm, was forbidden. Breaking these rules was believed to attract the wrath of *Ahiajioku*, which strikes with swollen stomach *afo-otuto* and diarrhea *afo-osisa*. These rules were strictly kept by the *Ezejis*. The *Ezeji* title was one of the oldest and most significant titles in Mbaiseland and some other neighbouring communities.

The importance of *Ezeji*cannot be over emphasized. The *Ezeji* title is an honour symbolizing success in farming therefore it served as a motivator which inspired others to get involved in agriculture, particularly yam crop production.

Because of the severe screening conducted on a new member before he was admitted into the society, the *Ezeji* was an outstanding personality sound and upright in character. Any individual who has been caught in the act of stealing or committing any abominable offence was not admitted into the guild of celebrated farmers[186]. In this case, one can positively assert that the *Ezeji* society was an instrument of moral sanity in Mbaiseland.

Furthermore, the *Ezeji* society in various villages were saddled with the responsibility to settle dispute over farmlands, most especially when one party cleared the farm and another went and planted his crops particularly among

yam farmers. The society equally prevented fighting in a yam farm and avoided any kind of violence that could cause bloodshed in the farm[187]. This was aimed at adhering to the specific code believed to have laid down by the spirit force of yam *Ahiajioku* and to ensure a rift free farming season. It is important to note that the role of settlement of dispute as performed by the *Ezeji* society was complementary top that of the *Amala* the village assembly.

The *Ezeji* yam lords forbade eating yam until the feast of *Ahiajioku* the new yam festival was marked. The feast was marked around the period of the year which was later designed as the month of August, owing to the intrusion of the western civilization. The new yam festival was celebrated with a lot of fanfare both titled and non-titled yam farmers took part. This was so because of t economy of the area. Yam was the major staple, it was used in the payment of such things as dowry and purchasing of land, it constituted one of the means of preserving wealth. According to Njoku, it served as a medium of payment or exchange in the pre-cash economy era[188]. Even after the introduction of Christianity in the area, the new yam festival was still practiced. But rituals and sacrifices were reduced by the Christian participants.

[186]Njoku, op cit, p. 115
[187]Ibid, p. 111

THE AGE GRADE/GROUP (*OUT-EBIRI*)

Age grade was one of the instruments of social control in the area before the imposition of the imperialist rule over the area. These groups comprised of persons born in the same period. In the pre-Christian era, when events were used to measure time, parents, mainly women used some events that happened shortly before, during and shortly after the birth of their child to remember when that child was born. Sometimes those events were used to identify those who were mates. Those who were identified as mates subsequently began to identify with each other. They referred to themselves

[188] Nwabara, op cit, p. 32

ther whenever there was a work to do within extended family, kindred or village. Constant interaction of people of the same age, transformed into organizational state where aims and objectives bind people together. The following measures were used to control the conduct and behavior of members, fines, but if fines proved counter-productive, they applied suspension, expulsion, ostracism[189] or physical torture in the case of young ones. The village government *Amala* used some active age grade, to implement their resolutions. This is in consonance with the findings made by Nwabara on the study of Igbo tradition, that "when

an offender was fined by the *Amala*, an age grade or an *Okonko* was sent to collect the fine"[190]. Furthermore, the age grade was a source of labour for members. The age grades were engaged in reciprocal exchange of labour as discussed earlier. In this case members worked in the farms of their members until everyone will get a share of the labour[191]. Some members who were in debt and wishes to pay back with labour sometimes did so with the labour provided by his age grade.

Young age grades were saddled with responsibilities that bothered on environmental sanitation and public works. For instance, the clearing of the village path and squares, they were the vigilante groups of the villages. The age grade system was one of the cultural heritages that survived the mission of western civilization into the area, though most of the functions they performed have been replaced with that of the state agents such as the police. The present day age grade in the area is only bothered with the issue concerning community development, in the area of infrastructural development.

IMPORTANT CEREMONIES IN MBAISELAND BEFORE THE COLONIAL

[189]See Afigbo, op cit, p. 130
[190] Njoku, op cit, p. 120
[191] Ibid, p. 120

The ceremonies to be considered here are the very first and very last in the life of man and they included both naming and burial ceremonies.

NAMING CEREMONY

Naming ceremony of a new born baby was a remarkable and very important occasion in the family. A child born in the area was given a name after period of 32 days or four eight day weeks. This period was known as *Omugwo*, when a nursing mother was made to refrain from hard works. She stayed in the house, where she was attended to by her mother, elder sister or her mother-in-law. During *Omugwo* period, a nursing mother was properly fed and allowed full rest in reward of her success in delivering the child[192]. The father of the new baby in a welcome mood provided enough fish and meat for the preparation of woman's soup, which was often garnished with a lot of pepper. The reason surrounded the well-nourished meals served nursing mothers in the area is that there was a belief that a woman lose a lot of blood during child birth and desire to regain it by means of nutritious foods. Secondly, the people believed that there would not be breast milk if the woman was not properly fed.

[1]Anyanwu, op cit

The terminal point of the *Omugwo* period, *nfuta-omugwo* meaning coming out of maternity leave, members of the extended family were made to gather and feast. After eating, drinking and singing, the new born baby was brought out and presented to the most elderly member of the extended family who welcomes him or her into the family by giving him or her a name. Njoku contended that though the father, mother and grandmother of the child may have given him or her name, and such names were not official unless the members of the extended family witnessed it[193]. Names were given to people in Mbaise based on the experiences or the expectation of the family, kindred [illegible] still name their children based on their

[192]Anyanwu, oral interview op cit

past experiences, future wishes, occupation.For example, families that had witnessed a lot of death can name a new born male child *Onwubiko* or *Onwuchekwa*. Those who wished to live long gave their sons *Onwuegbachulam*, the blacksmiths gave their sons *Nwonu*. This was one of the most vital implements used by the blacksmiths in sharpening the iron. The glorified yam farmers gave such names as *Ezeji, Nzeji* and *Osuji*. The importance as regards the naming of a new born child in Mbaise cannot be over emphasized. The acknowledgement of the presence of God manifested in

[1]Njoku, op cit, p. 121

such names as *Chukwuezi* (God of the compound or family), *Chikadibia* (God is greater than the herbalist), *Nwaigwe* (the child of the sky), *Nwosuchukwu* (the servant of God). Such names as *Ezedianu* came during the colonial times following the introduction of warrant chiefs, and it was used to express the uneasiness associated with the crown. The evidence available shows that the most elderly person in the extended family may decide to adopt the name already given to the child by his direct father, or ask them which name they would want to give the child.

The culture allows the nursing mother to go to her parents to spend at least two market weeks. During this period, the father of the girl was responsible for her needs (feeding). This period she spent with her parents was referred to as *Ngbafu Omugwo*. Toward the end of her stay in her father's house, the parents provided her with a helper, probably one of her younger sisters or any younger female relatives who would help in nursing the child.

BURIAL CEREMONY

This was another interesting aspect of Mbaise people's culture. Burial ceremony was classified into categories based on age and circumstances that

[193]Njoku, op cit, p. 121

surrounded the death of the person, the social status and occupation of the individual. Another factor that marked distinction in burial ceremonies was gender that is to say that the burial ceremony of a man whose life was well spent(fulfilled man) was different from those of the fulfilled woman.

The death of very young children was looked upon as ill luck to the family. They were buried with grief. They were also not mourned by any relative. But those people who died of the wrath of the gods whether old or young, were not buried at all, their corpse were thrown into the evil forest *Nkpa* or *Nda*[194]. In the case of a young man, there were no sacrifice, but one honour that was inevitable was that his maternal relatives were informed to come and make a mark where his grave would be made[195].

The burial of a man whose life was fulfilled and well spent was an honour to the family. They were said to have died well and were befittingly buried according to their status. This type of elaborate burial may be the consequence of the general belief of the Igbo that the living, the dead and unborn form part of a continuum and that the ancestors, those who lived well-spent lives died in socially approved ways and are given correct burial rites to live in one of those worlds of the dead which mirror the world of the living. In

this case, the living honour them with sacrifices. The ancestors watch over the living and are periodically reincarnated among them[196].

Further explanation made by Isichei to this regard is that those unhappy spirits who died bad deaths and lacked correct burial rites cannot return to the world of the living or enter that of the dead. They wander homeless and dispossessed, expressing their grieves by causing harm among the living[197]. The first step towards the burial of a full grown man in the area began by notifying the other members of the family. This was followed by the notification of the members of the kindred, who were presented with cola nuts, palm wine, and *okwa* or *ihe oso* usually meat. The kindred in turn notified the village who were also presented with similar items on arrival. During this meeting, they were intimated with what happened and requested to outline the requirement of burial. The maternal relatives were notified whose first visit was aimed at confirming whether or not their uncle or cousin died a natural death.

Another delegation was sent to the maternal home of the deceased man, this time with cola nuts *oji* and palm wine *manya ngwo*. The people referred to this as *iga ncho* during which his maternal uncles were officially invited to come and bless the grave site *itinye ogu na ala*[198]. *Igbago uzo* does

[197] Ibid
[198] Njoku, op cit, p. 122

not mean that the body of the dead man would not be committed to mother earth but the burial rites would be temporarily suspended pending when the children were ready to do them. A man whose burial rites have not been performed was said not to have been buried even though he has been committed to mother earth.

Njoku pointed out that one of those rituals performed during burial ceremonies was *Inishi arisi* which meant a ritual performed to protect the spirit of a man whose life was well-spent from evil influence during reincarnation. During this ritual, a life chicken was used to touch the corpse, recounting his misfortune if any, and wishing that such misfortune would not follow him in his next life to come[199].

Another ritual was the sacrifice of a he-goat or the male sheep *eghu-obi* or *evule-obi*. This was believed to give the man power of endurance in his next world *uwa-ozo*. The miniature form of occupation was performed as burial rite for example, trading, buying and selling, *izu ahia* was mocked in the compound of the deceased if he was a trader. If he was a farmer, a wrestler, the same thing was done. *Iwa nkita anya* the sacrifice made with dog was another important burial rite. This was carried out by brave persons from the kindred

or village. Dog being a watchful and fearless animal was killed and the blood sprinkled on the corpse to encourage the watchfulness of the man in the spirit world and in the new life.

Breaking the wine cup *igbuwa ipi*. This particular rite was performed by the members of the kindred or village palm wine club *manya-orie* or *awuruawu* as the case may be. *Igbuwa ipi* was performed to bring to an end the association of the deceased member to the club. Some prominent persons in the area during the period under discussion lived charm life. Such charms were made to prevent deaths other than their natural death *ike-isi*. When such people die, a strong medicine man was invited to neutralize the charm since no other person can use it. The processes involved in neutralizing such charms were referred to as *idoda ikenga*[200] or *ituru madu*. It was part of making the man to rest.

The wife or wives of the deceased were made to perform the rite of lamenting the good qualities of their husband in cry, almost at the arrival of every sympathizer. They were not allowed to cook or sweep. The food they ate was cooked by widows. After committing the dead man to mother earth, his widows were shaved with *aguwa* the indigenous kind of blade or broken

[200]Oguzie, oral interview op cit

bottles, which came into the area during the period of European trading activities on the coast. Shaving the hairs of the widows was surrounded by the people's believe that the spirit of their dead husband can still come to mate them, therefore shaving their hairs would make them unattractive to the spirit of their husband. The widows were prevented by culture from having sexual intercourse until the end of one year mourning period. Black clothes were often used to make mourning dresses. This may have been made possible by the coming of the *Akwete* cloth which came through the trade along the Imo River in the second half of nineteenth century. There is no evidence available to the present writer to show what the people used as mourning cloths before the era of trade between the people of the area and Akwete people.

Igbashi-mkpe, meaning the end of the mourning period, was often marked with festivity. During this process, all the materials used in mourning the dead man by his wives were gathered and burnt, and the women were allowed again to dress in the fashion they wished. Final or second burial, *Okwukwu* marks the end of all the rites given to a man whose life was well-spent. Njoku described this as a social debt, which sons and daughters of deceased man in Mbaise had to pay, not only to their late father, but the

community. The burial of a man was not complete until the final burial was performed. Sometimes the second or final burial of a man was done immediately after the first burial. But it all depended on how wealthy the family was. Sometimes it was performed after one or many years. This was due mainly to lack of resources and commitment. Mbaise people saw it and still see it as a dangerous thing for one who has not given his late father his final burial rite to participate, eat and drink when another person is performing his father's own. Another danger believed to be associated to this was that the spirit of the dead man can easily strike his children in demand of the final burial rite. There was also the belief that enemies of the family can invoke and remind the spirit of the ancestors who were not given final burial rites to strike his children. It was not uncommon for people to sponsor the final burial of his great-grandfather, grandfather and father the same time.

The final burial in the area began by the consultation made to association of first sons, *Ndi opera* whose members consist of the first sons who had performed their own fathers' last burial rites. Owing to the experience they had acquired during their own time, they directed the

activities. Notices were given to the in-laws of the deceased to enable them prepare for the hiring of cultural dance groups.

The major cultural dance music (orchestra) used during *Okwukwu* was the *ese*. There were two types of *ese* music, the soft-one *ese alulo*, which was open to every fulfilled man and free for all to dance, and *ese ike* the hard type which was played for a very great men who did great things[201]. I was told that *eseike* the hard *ese* was played to honour my great grandfather during his final burial. And the reason for this was that he was a great fighter who fought so many wars for his village group Akpokwu and as mercenary, to the extent that he was nicknamed *ota akprikpa-ogu* meaning the eater of the legs of war. Only people who had done very great things were allowed to dance this tune which was only played on top of a platform.

On the central market day of the village, the sons and daughter of the dead man embarked on *ifu ahia* during which the first son in the company of his other brothers, sisters and other relatives parade themselves around the market with a cow directed by the first son and the musical group hired by the first daughter. In my own village group, it was done on *Afo-Akpokwu* day.

[201]Nnajiaku, op cit and Oguzie, op cit (oral interview)

The ceremony was finally raped up with *itu-aka*, which was performed by the first son *opera*. During this particular stage, the *opera* responded to rhythms of the *ese* music. He recounts the achievements made by the man whose final burial was being performed. These activities differ in the case of the death of a full fledge woman. The burial ceremony of a woman began with the husband's relatives going to the natal home of the woman to inform them that their daughter or sister is critically ill and that they should come and see her before she is dead. They were not told directly that their daughter or sister was dead but they were informed through a non-verbal communication, which was in form of weeping and sorrowful mood.

The corpse of a dead woman was sometimes sent back to her natal home where she was buried. The burial of a woman was always characterized by fighting and destruction of property, more importantly when the circumstances surrounding her death were complicated by disputes. According to Anoka, as cited by Njoku, even when the relationship was cordial, there was still the chance of venting the anger of her death on economic crops and houses. Just like the *ese* for the men, the burial ceremony of the woman was performed with *uko* music the feminine type of the *ese* music. The *uko* was

played at specific morning hours and evening hours. The daughters of the woman, just like the men in the burial of a man responded to the rhythms of the *uko*, recounting the achievement of their mother. While the men danced the *ese* with their father's machete and walking stick, the daughters danced the *uko* with *eku* the big cooking spoon of their mother. On the day of burial the relatives of the husband carried the corpse to the boundary of the woman's natal village where it was handed over to her relatives. This was a way of demonstrating love and say the final goodbye to the parted wife, mother, sister, cousin and daughter who parted[202].

The people from her marital home, the husband's relatives and sympathizers, followed the corpse to the natal home of the woman where she was committed to mother earth. The culture required that the children take birth in the maternal home before returning to their home (father's compound).

[202]Oguzie, oral interview op cit

and expensive.

The burial of a full-fledged man consumed as much as sixteen goats, sixteen fowls, one or more cow, lots of cola nuts, several jars of palm wine, one dog,

about two sheep and occasional explosion of cannons shots[203]. The gun or cannon can be attributed to European influence on the people's culture.

RELIGION AND CONCEPT OF GOD IN MBAISELAND BEFORE THE COMING OF CHRISTIANITY

The Mbaise people just like other Igbo people are in their way religious people. Everybody recognized the existence of supreme God. The religious life of Mbaise people was intertwined with every other aspect of their life. This was explained in their notion of the attributes of the Supreme Being. There was the belief that God is supreme and the maker of everything. The people called the supreme God *Chukwu, Chi* or *Chineke*, God of creation. *Chineke* (the supreme God) was believed to be very high that people could not approach him directly but through intermediaries or the less gods believed to be his messengers. Those lesser gods include *Amadioha*, the Igbo god who was believed to dwell in the sky and strikes with thunder. *Amadioha* was seen as

[203] This observation was made in Njoku, op cit, p. 108

kwu was the earth goddess *Ala*. These messengers were believed to carry out the directives of *Chukwu*. It was through them that *Chukwu* provided man with means of existence and punishment of the offenders.

Mbaise people had the belief that *Chukwu* when aggrieved withheld rainfall to make the soil unproductive. Njoku stated that the people believed that the earth goddess *Ala*, was the most benevolent of all the gods serving the most high God and therefore in charge of protecting public morality. The earth goddess dislikes such offences as murdering an innocent person, stealing, willful destruction of properties such as crops in the farm, eating totemic animals and crops, having a sexual intercourse in the bush, having carnal knowledge of your sister[204] (members of your kindred).

Whenever there was a problem that required appeasement or purification *ikwa ala* the earth goddess usually directed the village or village group through the mouth of the pries or a diviner on what to do to appease her, to prevent her wrath on the village. Ignoring any bit of her instruction was nifested in such problems as infertility of the soil and small pox. The importance of the earth goddess lied in the fact that every kindred had their own shrine, sacrificed to by the most elderly member of the family *Onye-new-ala*. The location of the shrines were often identified by grove of tall trees. It was called *Ihu-ala*[205].

[204]Ibid, p. 109

Apart from *Amadioha* and *Ala* there were other minor gods such as *Ogwugwu*, the spirit that accepts dogs as sacrifice, *Ahiajioku*, the spirit force of yam. All were believed to carry out the injunctions of the Almighty God. Another concept of *Chi* which partly formed the basis of their religion is that *Chi* is a personalized providence which comes from God and reverts to him at the demise of the man. Mbaise people had and still have the belief that every person has his own *Chi* which may be well or ill disposed. More fortunate people were referred to as *ndi chioma*, people of good God or spirit while those who always encounter evil days were referred to as *chi-ojo*. In this case, the term *Chi* was also seen as god of fortune and misfortune. *Chi* as a personalized providence meant that whatever happened to any individual is what his God has prepared for him. So the people believed that the per[205] See N.A.E., MINLOC 6/1/174, op cit ch is *Chukwu* or *Chineke*. This belief which the Mbaise people share and adhered to was also acceptable to other parts of Igboland[206].

Another issue that cannot be ignored in this discussion is the belief in the relationship between the living, the dead and the unborn. Those who lived their lives in a societal accepted manner died and were given a correct burial

rites occupied one part of the spirit world which reflects the world of the living. These were and are still referred to as ancestors. Therefore to enable them to watch over the living and reincarnate periodically the living honour them with sacrifice. Some of the sacrifices bestowed on the ancestors *Ndi-iche*, were aimed at making them to acquire good potentials from the spirit world which they must return with during reincarnation. Such sacrifices or rituals include *iwa nkita-anya*. As earlier stated, this made fearless, honest and courageous men who died, to come back with similar potentials in the next life. Similar to this was *Eghu* or *Evule-obi*. This was also aimed at giving the dead man enduring spirit.

Mbaise people, just like other Igbo societies regarded their religion with great seriousness. Most of the animals they sacrificed were very much valued in terms of wealth. This religion was taken so serious that some towns deprived themselves of palatable and nutritious foods, among them cow *ehi*, forbidden by the Umudim, monkey *enwe,* meat forbidden by Amumara, Owutu and Lagwa towns. Three leafed yams were forbidden by the whole of Ahiara and Ekwereazu clans. I would concur with the postulation of Isichei that the desire to offer the most precious possible sacrifice led to human sacrifice.

CONCLUSION

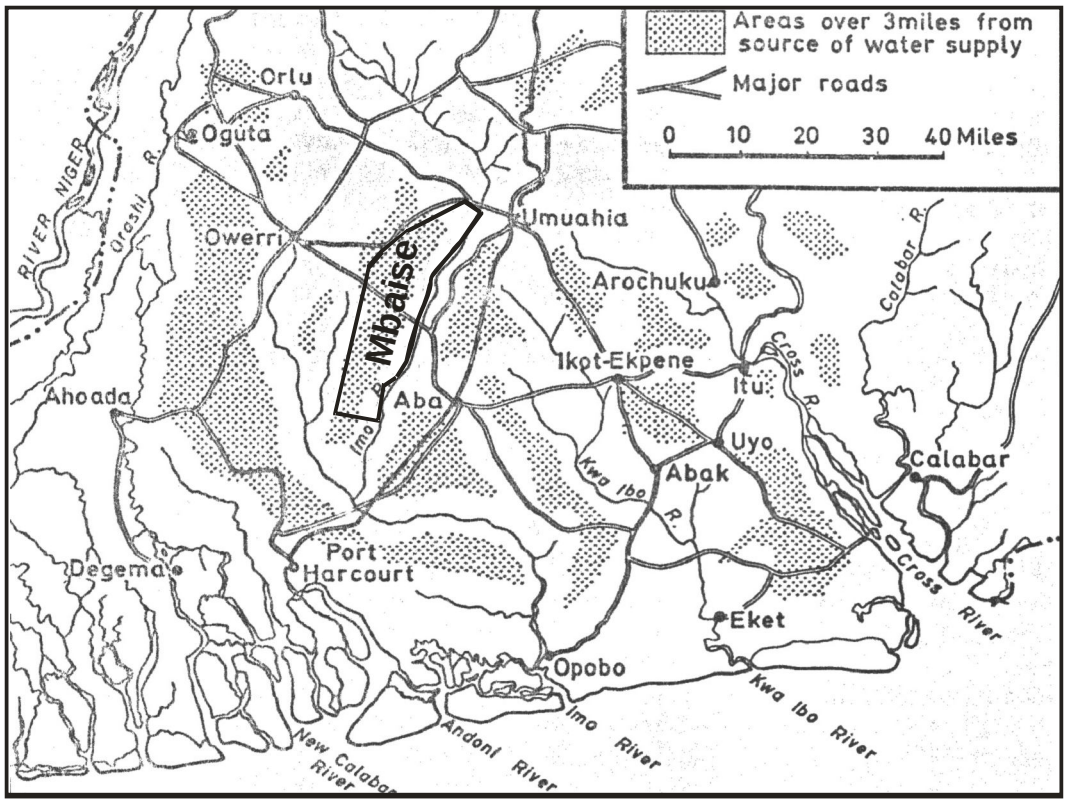
Political organization in Mbaiseland was the type that allowed the collective will of the people to prevail. Powers of policy formulation, implementation and adjudication were vested in the collective will of the people. No person, family or group of persons exercised power over the people as professional ruler(s). The emergence of people with despotic powers in the area is a product of colonialism.

The economy of the area rested on three legs: agriculture, trade and manufacture. But in all economic activities, agriculture was the most prominent and honoured. Trade distributed the product of agriculture and manufacture, while manufacture provided the technological hub upon which agriculture relied. Though there were rich and poor, there was no extreme rich and extreme poor. Short supply and low fertility of the soil in the area could not pave way for the production of food in commercial quantity, thereby hindering the emergence of very rich and domineering class.

The expansion of trade in the area cannot be discussed properly without mentioning the European, whose varieties of goods penetrated the Mbaise

society prior to the imposition of colonial rule. Both political and economic activities of the Mbaise people were surrounded by religious sanctions. Therefore, the conduct of individuals in the area was more regulated by taboos and customs.

Map 2: Showing Mbaise in the Palm Belt of Southeastern Nigeria, 1902



Source: R.K. Udo, 1970

CHAPTER THREE

ESTABLISHMENT OF BRITISH RULE IN MBAISE 1902–1916

INTRODUCTION

The area designated as the Eastern Provinces in colonial Nigeria became part of the British Empire on June 5, 1885, when the London Gazette announced to the world that Her Majesty the Queen has placed the Niger District under her "gracious" protection. This protectorate was defined to include the territories on the line of the coast between the British protectorate of Lagos and on the right or western bank of Rio-del-Rey. So were the territories on both banks of the Niger, from its confluence at Benue to Lokoja to the sea, as well as the territories on both banks of River Benue from the confluence up and including Ibi[1].

A good knowledge of the geography of the Nigerian area shows that Mbaise area and entire Owerri Division fall within the area defined in the Gazette. Before this time, the British political influence had only been felt in the societies along the coastal region of Eastern Nigeria, while the interior inhabited by mainly the Igbo and Ibibio were still under their indigenous political organizations. This chapter examines the various expeditions that rooted out these indigenous institutions in the interior.

[1]A.E. Afigbo, Eastern Provinces Under Colonial Rule, in Obaro Ikimi (ed) Groundwork of Nigerian History, Heinemann Educational Book, Ibadan, 1980, p. 410.

This would reveal to us the socio-economic and political impact these expeditions on the indigenous societies. The nature of the conquest of these areas and the various expeditions were determined by some international changes that occurred in Europe between 1884 and 1890.

BRITISH MILITARY OCCUPATION OF MBAISE 1902-1916

This pronouncement made in the Gazette was a brainchild of what can properly be referred to as politico-economic agreement entered into by the colonizing powers of Europe, during a historic conference convened in Berlin in 1885. The conference was convened by the colonizing powers of Europe to prevent major conflicts, which were most likely to occur from the aggressive acquisition of African territories. The general act of this epoch-making conference provided that the navigation of the Niger was to be free for the ships of all nations. Britain assumed a very cumbersome obligation of ensuring a hitch free movement of foreign merchants by indorsing this act.

Another international issue that was decisive to the conquest of interiors of the area, which became eastern provinces was the Brussels Conference. This conference was most significant for providing the basis for the overthrow of the indigenous system of government across the frontiers of the coastal area, into

the interior. Article I of the conference became a very strong impulse to whatever action that followed it, hence it provided as follows:

1. The progressive organization of the administrative, judicial, religious and military service of the African territories under the sovereignty, or protection of 'civilized' nations
2. The gradual establishment in the interior of strongly fortified stations in such a way as to make their protective or responsive actions effectively felt in the territories devastated by slave raiding
3. The building of roads and railways, so as to substitute economically and speedy means for porridge by man
4. The use of steamboat on their inland waters, on lakes, in addition to fortified posts on the banks.
5. The establishment of telegraph lines
6. The dispatch of flying columns into the interiors
7. The restriction of the importation of firearms and ammunitions which provided instrument for both slaving and tribal wars[2].

This act provided a framework for political and economic exploitation of the Nigerian area. Although the European powers had paged out the African territories and laid claim of ownership, and Britain had begun to make their

[2]J.C. Anene, op cit, p. 114

administrative, judicial, religious and military services a practical reality in the territories defined as their protectorate, it was yet to be extend into the interior where Mbaise of Owerri Division was located.

As earlier said, the Berlin and Brussels conferences were very decisive to the conquest and establishment of British domination across the frontiers of the coast of southern Nigerian area, where Mbaise situated. It was in the pursuit of the above listed provisions that the area was conquered by the British imperialist forces. These acts dictated that the narrow legislative view of protectorate should be sufficiently modified to make it possible for the imperial powers to assume within the territories of the protected state, powers which in time, come to be almost equal to these exercised in crown colonies[3].

The assumption of such powers by aliens in a 'protected' state, meant the elimination of the existing power structure in those indigenous societies. Therefore, we have examined how the British pursued this objective in this chapter. In an attempt to grapple with the reality of how the British pursued their imperialist objectives in the area under study, we must analyze those strategies which they adopted in order to penetrate into the interiors particularly the Mbaise area, and other parts of Owerri Division.

[3] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, Indirect rule in Southeastern Nigeria Op cit p. 45.

As we have said, the British presence had been consolidated in the coastal areas, while there was still the absence of a regular machinery of their choice which is able to manage the public life of the people in the interior. And it was to this background that Anene aptly described the period from 1885 – 1890 as a period of "paper protection"[4]. This description covered both the coastal and interiors areas of what was known as southern Nigeria. But in the case of the Owerri Division areas, and Mbaise area in particular, the era of paper protectorate extended from 1885, following the formal declaration of the protectorate to 1909 when a native court was established in Mbaise and Okpala[5]. While the greater number of communities in Mbaise were placed under the jurisdiction of NguruCourt the rest were placed under the Okpala court[6].

It is not enough to say that 'native' court were established over the Mbaise people in 1909, this would make the work meaningless. Therefore, it is pertinent to show how the people reacted to the encroachment of the British into their area. Having introduced the 'native' court, it does appear that whatever that was the people's opposition, the British crashed. Joseph Chamberlain an ardent British imperialist often said that you cannot have an Omelette without breaking eggs[7]. He was saying this without any consideration whether or not the

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[4] Anene op cit, p. 61.

[5] N.A.E C.S.O 27937 An Intelligence Report on the Ezimihitte Clan Owerri. Division Owerri Province see also N.A.E

[6] N.A.E Owerri District Register of Warrant Chiefs 1927 see also A.C. Smock, Ibo Politics, the Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Massachusetts, 1971, P. 74.

[7] J.C. Anene opcit p. 222

eggs he wants to breaking to make the Omellete was his or not. Breaking eggs in this case meant to conquer the indigenous people and dominate them politically and economically.

Another issue that received the attention of the present writer in this chapter is the fact that wherever there is war, there must be destruction and this destruction cannot be equal on both sides of the belligerents. Consequently, we have examined the cost of this colonial expectation and patrols on the Mbaise society.

By 1900, many parts of what became southern protectorate had been brought under the political influence of the British. But the entire area of what later became Owerri Division was still largely independent of any external political influence. The peoples were still organized under the indigenous authority of (Amala) the village assembly. Under this type of political arrangement, the supreme political power and authority were located in the collective voice of the people[8]. The implication of this fact was that what was known as the British colonial authority was not more than a theory in this area hence it did not exist in historical reality.

However, the cloud of colonial subjugation began to gather over the Owerri Division areas as far back as 1896. This was when the plan to attack the

[8]Nze John Nnajiaku 95, Oral Information, Umuagom kOwuta Ezinihitte Mbaise 02/05/07. See also M.M. Green, quoted in Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, op cit, p. 16

Aro people with a view to destroying the famous oracle (Ibini-Ukpabia) or what the British called the long juju had been concluded by the High Commissioner, Sir Ralph Moor. It was the final decision to invade Arochukwu made based on the successful visit of the British vice consul Leonard in 1896[9].

The visit was very monumental not only because it was the first official visit by the British to Arochukwu, but also because it was aimed at getting some vital information needed to forge the military strategies for a success expedition into Arochukwu and its surrounding areas. This was so important that it would have been very precipitous for Moor to act without obtaining some intelligence of the land and the people.[10]

The intelligence obtained from the Aro area by the British, formed the linking rod connecting the inversion of Arochukwu to other areas in southeastern Nigeria, including the Mbaise area and the entire Owerri Division. This intelligence threw the British into illusion. Two things were unvailed to the British through this intelligence. The first was the absence of paramount chiefs in the area. The other was the fact that before the British rule would be established in the area, it would require the occupation of innumerable autonomous villages in and around Arochukwu. However, the British could not get themselves out of the illusion that the Aro exercised political control over

[9] N.A.E. C.0444/4 Dispatch from George Tuabman Goldie to Under Secretary of State 20 November, 1899. See also H.A. Gailey, Road to Aba, A Study of the British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigerian, University Press, London, 1971, p46, Anene, op cit, p. 209

[10] Gailey op, cit, p. 46

the rest of the communities in the interiors of southern Nigeria. The conclusion made out of this mistaken believe was that the defeat of the Aro means to subdue the rest of the peoples of the interiors[11] It was based on this that Gailey argued that:

> *Moor and his staff knew very little of the Aro and their peculiar position among the Igbo. They considered the Aro a militaristic people who held the Igbo in subjection, in much the same fashion as the Ashanti of the Gold Coast controlled less powerful native tribes. This erroneous assumption ascribed to the Aro a power that they never possessed. More importantly, it meant that all Moor's plans for British hegemony over Igboland were predicted on the necessity of crushing the Aro military power*[12].

The British colonial officials failed to realize the fact that though the Aro occupied a peculiar position among the communities, which together became eastern provinces, they did not achieve or retain it through military prowess or the centralization of government. It is safe to say that if the Aro were able to make the independent local groups to pick up arms against the British, it was

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[11] Anene op cit, p. 222

[12] M.M. Green, Igbo Village Afairs, Seconded. Frank Cass, London, 1964, pp 10-11

not because they have power of compulsion over them, rather, they (the British) became a common enemy to the people owing their activities.

Having deceived themselves into believing that it is only through the defeat of the Aro that they could achieve the political and economic control of the hinterland, large military campaign was launched against the Aro in 1901[13]

Although this was designated Aro expedition, it was projected as a war to end all wars in the Igbo and Ibibio interior (see Map No. 3). Outlined under were the aims of the war:

- To stop slave raiding and slave trade which is actually carried on throughout the entire territory belonging and dominated by the Aro tribe.
- To abolish the fetish of the Aro known as long juju which by superstition and fraud causes many evils among the Igbo tribe generally and all the outlying tribes of the entire protectorate who continually appeal to it. While this juju exist, it is impossible to establish effective government in the territories.
- To open up the whole Igbo country lying between the Cross River and the Niger to civilization, and trade, and to influence the natives to

[13] J.C Anne Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885-1906 Theory and practice in colonial protectorate, Cambridge University press, London, 1966, p12

engage in legitimate trade of collecting natural products of their country and developing it to the best of their knowledge.

- To introduce currency in lieu of slaves, brass rod, and other forms of 'native' currency.
- Finally to establish throughout the territories a labour market to take the place of slavery[14].

A careful study of the aims of this war would reveal that it was more of economic than political war. It is for this reason that Ekechi advanced to that "the concern to extend trade into the hinterland dominated the British trader and their colonial compatriots. As commers was usually dependent upon political security"[15].

Lieutenant Colonel A. F. Montanaro of the British Royal Artillery was appointed the Commanding Officer, Aro Field Force (AFF). He organized the troops into four columns. The first consisted of (16) Europeans, 300 'native' rank and file (1) (mm) gun (1) Maxim gun (35) gun carriers (584) general carriers, was placed under the command of A.T. Jackson of the WorcesterRegiment. The Jackson's column was ordered to station at Oguta on the 1st of December with the instruction to advance to Owerri.

[14] Aneneop cit, p. 229 – 230
[15] F.K. Ezechi, Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland, 1857 – 1914, Frank Cass, London, 1971 p 115.

Column (2) comprising of (19) Europeans (450) 'native' rank and file armed with (2) maxim gun (1) mm guns (126) gun carriers (350) general carriers commanded by (local major) A.M.N Markanzie of the British Royal Artillery was to concentrate at Uwana[16]. The third column made up of (20) Europeans (499) 'native' rank and file (375) general carriers under the command of Brevet Major (Local Lieutenant) A Festing of D.S.O. Royal Irish Regiment, was camped at Akwete with an instruction to move to Owerri where they would join forces with the (1) column. The instruction was to proceed to Bende after the forces had been joined under the command of Festing.

The fourth column was made up of (19) Europeans (1) 'native' officer (479) 'native' rank and file, armed with (1) mm gun (17) precision guns (1) rocket tube, (2) maxim guns (13) gun carriers (225) general carriers and was commanded by captain (Local major) W. G.C Heneker of the Connaught Rangers. This particular group were made to camp at Itu, to make gradual advancement to Arochukwu[17].

Among these columns mentioned, the first and the third deserve more attention, if the British military activities in the Mbaise area and indeed the entire Owerri Division area were to be discussed in details. This is not because the combined column quartered at Owerri, which later became the Divisional

[16] S.N. Nwabara Iboland: A century of Contact with the British 1860 – 1960 Holder and Stoughton Kront 1977 p 100, see also J.C. Anene Op cit p 229 – 230.
[17] Ibid p 101–3

Headquarter of Owerri Division, before they proceeded to Bende, but due partly to the fact that the people from the area participated in the expedition. People from the Division were recruited as carriers, advance party, and local guide. It was on this note that professor Afigbo contended that.

> *During the Aro expedition of 1901-3 when the two military columns heading to Arochukwu passed through Owerri, Njamanze helped to provide local guide to Bende. After the expedition, he was made use of in gathering the chiefs of the neighbouring villages groups like Akabo, Nekede, Naze, Emekuku, Orji, Egbu and Nguru*[18].

Another significant issue is that the combined column, after their meeting at Owerri, had to match to Arochukwu through the Owerri Bende road, which cut across several communities in the Mbaise area. The forces had to cross such communities in Mbaise as Enyiogwugwu, Nguru, Ahiara Onicha, Obizi, and Udo. During this monumental match to Arochukwu, the forces visited some communities as part of their military strategy to pacify the peoples of the area.

The Mbaise people, whose land was being crossed by this colonial force, did not know what was the actual motive of the movement. But before 1902, the news was everywhere in the air, that the famous Arochukwu oracle (Ibimi

[18] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, op cit, p. 64

Ukpabi or Chukwu Obaima) had been destroyed by (Nwa-beke) the Whiteman. And that Arochukwu had been taken over by the Whiteman. This information no doubt sent a wrong signal to the Mbaise people. There came strong feeling of insecurity owing to the activities of the British. There was also the feeling that the Whiteman would definitely deal with various oracles in the Mbaise area, since they were able to destroy the Chukwu Abioma.

The movement across Mbaise by the whiteman between 1901 – 1902 was said to have coincided with an era of high infant mortality. Although this was said to have been associated with the spirit known as (Iyi – afo) consequently there was a strong feeling that the death of children was brought about by the Whiteman, hence their colour was (Whiteman) was just like that of the newborn baby. Consequent upon this reason, pregnant women were warned not to see the whiteman[19]. Although it was a superstitious belief, it contributed in evoking hatred for the whiteman (British).

Before the commencement of actual colonial war in the Mbaise area, the British military actions outside Mbaise had already created a feeling of war in the minds of the peoples. For example, one of the columns that went to Arochukwu camped at Akwete before they matched to Owerri, where they joined issues with another column. During this match to Owerri, they

[19] Nze E.N.J Nwokocha, 79, Oral Interview Conducted in his troues at Udo 15/11/08

encountered a violent resistance from the Ngwa groups, which took nine (9) days from 1st to 9th of December 1901. This resistance left many casualties[20]. This information got to the Mbaise people before the colonial army arrived. One would wonder how the news about the soldiers camped at Akwete got to the Mbaise area very fast. This was because before this time information were carried mostly by traders. And for a very long time before the beginning of British occupation of the area, trading activities had been going on between the Mbaise and Akwete peoples, such that there was Akwete settlement on the Imo river bank at Ife[21].

Another incidence that brought the activities of the colonial forces closer to the door step of the people, was when Okereke who later became a colonial chief was banished by his people, for kidnapping people on Nkwala market day. Consequently, he sent an emissary from Ohekele where he was hiding to his friend chief Ananaba of Obegu to come and assist him to return to his house. Chief Ananaba happened to convince the colonial troops who were already settled their to assist him carryout this duty. The military detachment that was sent to go and do this job was said to have encroached into Uvuru area[22]. Although no date is ascribed to this, it is possible that it was the same detachment that raked havoc at Ogbo Uvuru in 1902 destroying five quarters of

[20] Nwabara op cit, p. 103
[21] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/174 Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans Owerri Division, p. 24. See also N.A.E. 27937, An Intelligence Report on the Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division Province.
[22] E. Onwuzuruike, Nguma Uvuru, As Survey of Uvuru History and Culture, Enhance Publishers Aba, 1991, p. 77

Umuekengo Ogbo[23]. The manner in which the British carried out their expeditionary activities around the Mbaise area created a kind of consciousness in the minds of the people, and this called out the type of resistance which they encountered in the area. The news about the brutal actions of the troops became a common place, and the mind of the people became pre-occupied with war. Consequent upon this, the presence of any Whiteman began to create an atmosphere of war. This was what led to the death of Doctor Stewart in Mbaise.

THE DEATH OF DOCTOR STEWART 1905

The death of this British doctor Rogers Stewart was one of the events that occurred in the Mbaise area, during the British military occupation of the area, which required a good attention from the present writer. This attention is not only because of the draconian punishment which it brought on Mbaise people[24]. It will also give us the opportunity to re-examine the circumstances that surrounded his death. By so doing, we would locate the fact that most writers, Europeans and Africans alike have mutilated and misrepresented the history of Mbaise.

Doctor Steward was appointed to the West African Medical Staff on 4th September 1902. And was attached to the Southern Nigerian Expeditionary Force[25].

[23] W. Ofonagoro, quoted in Njoku, op cit, p. 14
[24] E. Isichei A History of the Igbo People, Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1966, p 130.
[25] Nwabara Op cit p 103

On arrival, he was asked to proceed to Owerri where he arrived on 13 November, 1905. On the issue of his death, Nwabara contended that

> *Stewart was instructed to proceed to Calabar. Because he had a bicycle he sent his boy and kit in advance to a point some thirty kilometers from Owerri on the Imo River. He left Owerri at about 1pm and no more was heard of him until 19 November.*[26]

The evidence available to us contradicts this claim. It is possible that this story was a make-up by the British administrative officers at Owerri then, to evoke the anger of the colonial officers, make it sound pathetic and to justify their claims that Mbaise people were cannibals, barbarous and uncivilized. Just like their counterparts did among the non-Muslim communities in Northern Nigeria. An Intelligence Report on Ezinihithe clan Owerri Division made it categorically clear by saying that

> *On this expedition of 1905, Doctor Steward who was following the patrol lost his way in Onicha and was seized and brutally murdered by the 'native'*[27].

It is safe to state here that if actually Dr. Stewart was going to Calabar from Owerri, he would not have left by 1pm as stated by Nwabara. This was

[26] N.A.K Zaprof Kauru District Accessment Report 1919
[27] N.A.E C.S.O 27937 op cit, p. 12

owing to the fact that the road from Owerri to Calabar was very lonely and perilous, particularly along Itu road. Seven years after this incidence, the Divisional Commissioner attempted to reduce the perils of this road by allowing the people of the District area to take their petitions to Calabar so as to keep the lonely roads busy. It was for this reason that the Divisional commissioner in Owerri in 1913 stated as follows:

> *There is great tendency to prefer petition and appeals by letters or telegram to H.P.C at Calabar instead of to the District Commissioner directly as it is the proper course. In many cases petitioner goes down to Calabar in person with his friends and submits his partition. While there must be a fairly steady stream of persons and message passing to and from along the Itu roads*[28].

This alone is enough to say that it was not possible for Dr. Stewart to have left Owerri by 1pm for Calabar. The information was one of those colonial pretexts. Instead, Dr. Stewart was tracing the movement of the patrol team that was pacifying the Ezinibitte area, when he ran into people in Umuosisi village in Obizi, who had just finished their social service work of road maintenance, and were discussing matters of common interest[29] Just as we have said, the

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[28] N.A.E Report 3/7/343 Quarterly report Owerri District July – September 1913.
[29] N.A.E C.S.O 27937 Op cit p 12. Sir Alphecus Adiakwu, 73, Oral Interview, Umuosisi Obizi 30/10/08, C.O. 520/42 Report of the District Commissioner H.M. Douglas Op cit

activities of the British in and around the area gave birth to a very strong feeling of resentment, so that the presence of the doctor ushered in an atmosphere of war when he was seized and taken to Afo-Onicha market square, where he was killed[30].

The body of this British doctor was allegedly dismembered and shared among different village group in Mbaise, particularly the Onicha, Ahiara, Obizi and Umunama[31]. This was a figment of imagination; hence there was no evidence to support this claim. In the first place, there is no evidence to show that there was collective action against the troops beyond the village group level. The expeditionary forces encountered the village groups one after the other. Therefore it is not possible that they shared the proceed of the war with those who did not fight for them.

Secondly, there was no case of actual physical confrontation between the British and the people from the Umumama area, as such that took place in the Onicha and Ahiara areas. So one cannot imagine the Umunerma which was not geographically contiguous to any of the Onicha, Aharca or Obizi as mentioned in the report to get a share of Dr. Stewart meat. For these reasons, it is possible that the British made this false accusation on these communities in order to extend their politics to their territories through a violent means.

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[30] Nwabara op cit, p. 124; See also Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 13, Njoku, 95, Oral Information, Onicha 24/10/08

[31] C.O. 520/30, Report of the District Commissioner, H.M. Douglas to the Parent of Dr. Stewart, 30 November, 1965, quoted in Nwabara op cit, 124

Upon the death of Dr. Stewart, the Divisional Commissioner of Owerri set a panel of enquiry, to establish what was the cause of his death. The outcome of the enquiry was that he was riding in the wrong direction on his bicycle when he was killed at Obizi, a village in Mbaise[32]. Oral information showed that Stewart was captured at Obizi and was murdered at Onicha. In response to this report, a telegram was sent to the colonial secretary stating as follows:

> *Report with regret murder of Dr. Stewart at Atriara on Bende – Owerri Road 16 November. He lost his way and was shot twice, and on taking refuge in a compound was cut down. Ahiara is being dealt with in dry season operation*[33].

A careful study of the finding of the panel of enquiry and the content of the telegram sent to the Colonial Secretary, one would understand that even if the Mbaise did not kill Dr. Stewart, the colonial government was bent on bringing the entire area under their control through the use of force. That is the main reason for which Atriara which not mention by the panel of enquiry was mapped out to be dealt with in the dry season's operation.

A quick reaction to this incident, showed how distorting, misrepresenting and mutilating an imperialist journal can be on issues concerning Africa. The

[32] N.A.E CO520/36 Band/Onicha Interland Expedition Report.

[33] The Time (London) March 1906 Cited in Nwabara Op cit P. 124.

London Times wrote nothing short of propaganda by publishing an article captioned "Cannibalism in West Africa"[34].

It further explained that the body of Dr. Stewart was eaten by the 'natives' of Mbaise and the remains sent to different deities as offering alleging that they had killed a great enemy[35].

Nwabara rejected this claim by saying that

> *The killing of Dr. Stewart could be regarded neither as an act of cannibalism nor as motivated by sheer love of eating human meat as the Time was wont to write*[36].

This statement is apt because the presence of Dr. Stewart at Umuosisi village in Obizi during that period of mutual suspicion was one that created a war scenario. Furthermore, the claims that the remains of Dr. Stewart meat were sent to several juju, cannot hold waters, hence it was not a common place for the Mbaise people to offer the remains of what they had already eaten to their deities. Some of this treatment he received was given to enemies captured in war and, were meant to prevent the person from getting a place in the spirit world, from where they mirror the life of the living. Or in another case, to prevent the person from re-incarnating into their society[37].

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[34] Ibid p 124
[35] Ibid p 124
[36] See also Chapter Two of this work for Details about the Belief in hereafter.
[37] Isichei: A History of Igbo people, op cit, p. 130.

The death of British official in the Mbaise area brought about unimaginable destruction of lives and properties in the area. Although there had been a plan by the colonial government to root out the stubborn resistance which the people of the area posed to the establishment of their rule, military actions were intensified when the news about the death of the medical officer came.

It is said that the protectorate government had desired to conquer this area because no sooner was the Aro Expedition over than Moor, the High Commissioner began to draft proposal for the conquest of the area further North[38]. In addition to this, there was also a plan to conquest the area laying south latitude 6^0 30N, on the east, by a line joining Bonde Road[39]. A good knowledge of the geography of Mbaise would only reveal that a remarkable portion of the Mbaise area falls within this area designated to bring under the colonial government control through military action.

The implementation of this policy was meant to be carried out by a large expeditionary force made up of seven hundred (700) rank and file. This force was divided into two to set out from Akwa and Bende, and to meet at a point coded Z[40] Before the commencement of this military operation, the news about the death of Dr. Stewart had reached the camp, and attention was refocused on

[38] Nwabara Op cit p. 123.
[39] E. Isichei Op cit p 130
[40] Ibid

Mbaise area alone, which according to Isichei received a draconian punishment from the expeditionary force[42]. In a bid to carry out a successful operation, military camps were located in various strategic locations in the Mbaise area. For example, the camp that was hitherto situated at a point in Bende near the Imo river was re-located to Onicha a town in the Mbaise area. To make their actions justified, they (British) claimed that slave raiding and human sacrifice existed in the area. And that the area was still unexplored, and as a result closed to trading[43].

This was just a colonial pretext, a statement devoid of historical facts. Although the intelligent report on the Ezinihitte clan went close to supporting this view, it showed to some extent that the area had profited from external trade. The intelligence report stated as follows:

> *Prior to 1900 it is unlikely that the Ezinilittle were affected to any extent by European influence, indirectly they may have profited slightly from external trade[44].*

Prior to the advent of colonial rule in the Mbaise area, trade on European made goods had began. The major trade rout then was the Imo river. Again, it is also pertinent to note that before the advent of British expeditionary force in the area, the Aro merchants and the agents of the royal Niger company had made

[42] Nwabara op cit, p. 123
[43] Ibid
[44] Report on the First Diocesans' Women Conference held at St. Thomas Anglican Church Udo, 1st-3rd October, 1993, p.

several visit to the Udo town in Mbaise, in a search to establish a trading out post[45]. The column which was instructed to begin the attack on the Mbaise area from Bende was headed by Major Transchard while the other from Awka was headed by captain Mair. These two columns met at a place close to the Imo River on 30th of November and joined issues together under the command of Major Tranchard, who had moved his base from the Bende area to Onicha and began his operation trying to locate Ahiana and probably to know the strength of their resistance. While captain Fox who left with for sections was thrown back to his base. But on December 8, 1905, he began to make advances through Udo[46], all the officers met at Udo on December 10, these include captain Mair, Major Trenchard, and lieutenant Moor[47].

However, by 10 December a bitter fight had begun between the Ahiara people and the government force led by captain Mair. In this battle, the Ahiaras displayed brevity throwing assault from different directions, and Trenches. But the superiority of arms enjoyed by the government forces proved the effort of the Ahairas abortive. It was during the time of this operation that an object purported to be Doctor Stewart's leg was found. This object was said to be wrapped up in an English newspaper hidden in a juju house. After an examination, it was reported that the leg belong to a man who was dead, for

[45] Nwabara op cit
[46] C.O. 520/32, Memorandum of Instruction issued to the Officer Comanding the Bende-Onicha Interland Patrol. Cited in Nwabara op cit, p. 125.
[47] Ibid

more than one week, the leg had been cooked and eaten only the bone remained[48]. This examination could not explain weather or not the bone belonged to a Whiteman. However, this finding led to the intensification of the government military action. Though the Ahiara continued to fight gallantly before captain Mairs column, on the arrival of the columns led by major Trenchard and Captain Fox, the defence of the Ahiara people was broken and the area witness the worst massacre in their life.

Military operation was not limited to areas lying close to the Owerri-Bende road. Before 1905, proposals had been made to subdue and bring under control the whole area which became Mbaise. But one of the issues that made the government to throw its military weight on the part of Mbaise which occupy the area lying close to Okpala and Nnorie was the killing of a friendly chief from Ngo by Nnorie people in January 1905, and firing on the government escort by Uvuru people, assaults on court messenger, and driving away of the Assistant District officer of Owerri Division Mr. C.T. 'O' Connell by threatening to kill him.

Reacting to this, the government sent 9 company of eighty six) soldiers with one maxim gun, under the command of lieutenant Halfpenny, assisted by colour-sergeant Theker, Thumblson, together with the District Commissioners

[48] C.O 52/8, Moor to C.O. no 181 of 25 June 1901 cited in Anene op cit, p. 230

Harold Mordey Douglas as the Political officer on 21st of April 1905. During the match to Nnorie, the company camped at Mbaise town of Enyiogwugwu at night fall. This movement could not be said to be uneventful, hence they were resisted by the various towns along the route to Nnorie and Okpala. Examples of these towns were Umuohiaga Mbaise, Umuokpo, Ihiteoha, Egbelu and Akpuru from Ngo area. The resistance began from 23rd to 29th April. But when the Maxim gun was put into use, their defences were broken.

On the 2nd of May the people of Ibeku Okwuato in Mbaise threw a surprising attack on the advancing company. Having heard about the kind of havoc the government was raking, the people gathered in their market square pretending to welcome the advancing colonial officials and their army. As soon as they drew closer, assault fire was opened on them. But inaccuracy in shooting coast the natives their victory. In response to this, the government troops employed the use of the Maxim gun, dispersed the people leaving many of them dead. The subsequent match from Ibeku to Uvuru was said to be uneventful. Although no reason was given for this, a considered reason for this in action was as a result of the earlier encounter in 1902 which left five quarters of Umuekeugo Ogbo in ruins.

The activities of Nneorie-Uvuru patrol was extended to towns like Amuza, Lorji Umuchoko, Umueze, Akpokwu, Umudim, Ife and Owuta. But no meaningful resistance was posed by the people of these towns. Consequently, they were referred to as friendly towns. But this cannot stand the test of the present analysis. Before the commencement of Aro expedition, the protectorate government made clear what in their own definition what constitute friendly and hostile towns. This was contained in the subsidiary memorandum issued by the High Commissioner sir Ralph Moor. In this memorandum, a hostile town was one whose inhabitants resisted the passage of the troops or which was evacuated by its people on the approach of the British troops. In any case, the government had made up its mind to overawe the hinterland communities and establish British control over one and all[49].

To this background, we cannot consider these communities from the Okeovoro and Ezinihitte clans who evacuated their homes as friendly towns. Having leant their lessons from other communities, the people of the above mentioned areas did not want to confront the government troops with Maxim and other assault rifles which could render their defenses useless. Those communities could not imagine themselves being friends to the British. They

[49] Njoku History and culture of Mbaise Op cit p. 15

fled their homes because they knew that they could not bear the consequences of the British assault rifles.

Given the long period of bloody resistance and series of punitive patrols, the District Commissioner called for what nearly appeared like an armistice. But in reality, it was a colonial camouflage. It was so unwholesome that Njoku referred to it as a deceitful truce[50] H.M. Douglas the District Commissioner of Owerri Division deceived himself into believing that there was no other means of bringing the people under control rather than decimating them, therefore, he sent his emissaries Onyekwere of Ahiara and Nwaterocho of Nguru to summon the Mbaise people to the Nkwo-Otulu market square in Ahiara for them to negotiate peace. People were asked to be in attendance with their weapons. The district Commissioner summoned this meeting, undermining the fact that the general atmosphere of the period was thickly charged with mutual suspecions[51], this was the reason for the absence of a good number of the virile young men. While those who showed up left their weapons at home. Rather they were holding palm fronds (Omurnkwu) signifying peace. The district commissioner became angry for two reasons. The first was the turn-up of the able bodied young men was too low. And those who showed their presence came without their weapons to surrender. Disappointingly, the troops opened their maxim gun

[50] Afigbo, The Warrant Chief 1972 Op cit p. 66

[51] Njoku, History and culture of Mbaise op cit, p. 15

on the crowd and raked havoc[52]. Although there is no statistical data to represent the number of lives lost in this ugly incident. It is one event of the colonial times that would be difficult to escape the memory of the people of the area. In the words of chief L.U. chilaka, the day of that massacre is not worthy to be remembered, but definitely cannot be forgoten[53].

Another attempt was made by the colonial administration under the auspices of H.M. Douglas to summon the people now at Nkwo Ogwu market. This time a venue was chosen by the government with the view that Nkwo-Ogwu was a neutral ground for both the government and the people. The fact that Nkwo-Ogwu was military camp was totally ignored by the government[54]. This time, those who heeded to the call were armed as much as they could. But the same ugly incident repeated itself. Some of these heroes fled, abandoning their arms, while some were killed on the spot. The district commissioner ordered that the gun and other kinds of arms abandoned by the natives of the area be collected and destroyed. Not only that he demanded that more guns be surrendered but a reparation of one hundred pounds (£100) be paid. According to Njoku, the payment of this money marked the end of hostility in the area[55]. But the evidence available showed that the area continued to pose problem to government until 1910.

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[52] Njoku Oral Interview Op cit

[53] Chief L.U. Chrilaka 75 Oral Information, Umunama Ezinihitte Mbaise 14/10/08

[54] N.A.E MINLOC 6/1/174 An Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu Ahiara Clans Oweri Division p 5.

[55] N.A.E Rivprof 8/2/182 Memorandum no B538/0w 117/14 from Commissioner Owerri province to the District Officer Owerri 14 August 1914.

The struggle against British control of Mbaise transcended the period between 1905 – 06. An uncompromising struggle was evident in the area, even after the establishment of a "native" court in the area (Nguru Mbaise) in 1909. Given the attacks on government official and a clear disregard of the new ways of doing thing as introduced by the British. The government resolved to close the 'native court' of Nguru shortly after it was opened in 1909. And the court premises were used for military operations aimed at cultivating British rule in the area. The Nguru court remained closed until 1911[56]. This military patrol team continued to battle from 1909 – 1911.

Another interesting case was when chief Nwataruoeha of Nguru (The first Mbaise man to receive warrant from the government of Owerri Division as a member of "native court" was accused of allowing his compound to be used by the people of the area for juju practice. On this account military expedition was sent to Nguru on the orders of Mr. Tew who was the divisional commissioner of Owerri Division[57]. During this military operation nine members of Nwaturuocha's family were killed, thirty three (33) houses were burnt in his compound alone[58]. No account was given about the destruction done by the team in other areas adjoining Nwaturracha's compound. It is most possible that they suffered the same fate.

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[56] N.A.E Rivprof 8/1/182 Petition of Nwaturuocha of Nguru – Owerri District for Restoration of "native Court" Warrant 14/4/14.

[57] N.A.E Rivprof 3/7/237 No E 1776/13 Quarterly Report on the Owerri District for Period 1st April to 30th June 1913.

[58] N.A.E Rivprof 2/7/328 Afo Onicha Market Owerri District re-Opening 1/10/13

If hostilities were over by the time the war indemnity was paid, there would not have been any reason for the District Commissioner to make such pronouncement in 1913. He stated as follows.

> *The more remote natives such as those in the extreme northeast and southwest parts are still timid, and inclined to avoid the European and his method as much as possible by relying on their chiefs to settle their disputes which if justly done, would be great help, but I fear the chiefs are too avaricious for this. There has been no escort required anywhere, still at the same time, I think it is essential that the natives should be kept aware that soldiers are still available if required. I have known them since early 1911. I feel certain that otherwise, they will rapidly develop into passive hesitance and become lazy*[59].

This showed that the British did not fully exercise control over these areas until 1913.

Before this time, in April, 1912 a punitive patrol was sent to the Onicha area. Onicha people refused to pledge their loyalty to the British colonial government, and as a result they were regarded as enemies of government. This

[59] N.A.E Rivprof 8/5/98 Report on case Rex versus Ihejirika, Wosuji Ihuoma for the Murder of One Odemena of Ahiara 1917.

patrol inflicted a draconian punishment on the people of the area. Killing a lot of people burning houses and looted properties. This punishment was so unprecedented that the elders of the area had to write to the government pledging their loyalty and begged that no more expedition be sent. They further asked the District Commissioner to come and open a "native court" in their area[60]. The "native court" was the outpost of new order of things which the British represented. Therefore, accepting it in reality meant the acceptance of the British overlord.

Furthermore, when World War I began the people of Mbaise area who had not really pledged their loyalty to the British colonial authority, renewed their resistance. This was not as if they were fighting for the Germans, but they were convinced that the British were also in struggle and as a result be too busy to control them. They began to refuse instructions passed through the chiefs when this became too much to bear by the colonial authorities, the district commissioner of Owerri District has this to say:

> *The towns of Ahiara and Onicha live in valley midway between Owerri and Bende. They have long been notorious as disturbers of the peace and although nominally under control are apt periodically to get out of hand. The opportunity of the German*

[60] Njoku, Oral Interview,op cit

war was seized by them to ignore all government orders which are perfectly well known, together with a general reversion to the old customs and habit of pre-government days. Some of the chiefs realizing the inevitable result, tried to hold the Youngman on check but with partial success. Finally, a patrol was sanctioned which operated in this neighbourhood from November 1916 to February 1917[61].

One of these orders which the district commissioner claimed to have been ignored, particularly in the Onicha areas, was the order by the government to keep the (Afo-Onicha) market closed. This order was issued by H.M Douglas who was the district Commissioner of Owerri District from 1902 to about 1905. Afo-Onicha market squares was the center in which the British colonial doctor Rogers Stewart was murdered by the Mbaise people. But the most unfortunate thing was that the government patrol team acted on false information brought to the government by those individuals who were seeking the government recognition through issuance of a warrant. Principle among them was a man who was known as Okpokoro from the Onicha area. He was said to be a social misfit who was sold into slavery to the coastal area. Unfortunately for the Onicha people this man Okpokoro came back when the government was

[61] E. Isichei, A History of people Op cit p.137

looking for every avenue to subdue the area and bring them under control. Having gained the ability to communicate to the Whiteman with his poor English, he began to send information in pretext to the government. One of that information was given when he went to Owerri to report to the district commissioner that the Onicha people have reopened the Afo-Onicha market which Mr. H.M. Douglas the then district commissioner ordered closed, as a punishment for the death of Dr. Stewart. And that when he (Okpokoro) refused, they threatened to kill him in the same manner they did to Dr. Stewart[62]. It was for this reason the people of the Onicha area designated the struggle between them and the government over the control of their area from 1916 to 1917 (Ogu Okpokoro) meaning (Okpokoro war).

After this, there was no other case of physical confrontation between any community and government until 1929 when the women of Owerri and Calabar provinces challenged the authority of the government representatives (warrant Chiefs). We have resolved to examine in details the issues concerning the women's revolution of 1929. Later in this chapter this is because it is examined here as a reaction to the policies of the colonial administration.

These colonial punitive expedition and patrols cannot be properly understood without an attempt to examine what price was paid to get the

[62] Thomas Spear, Mountain Farmers: Moral Economies land Agricultural Development in Arusha and Meru, Berkeley, 1997, P. 11.

objectives of the government in the area achieved, more importantly as it affects the indigenous society. To this end it becomes imperative to examine the social cost of the war.

THE SOCIAL COST OF COLONIAL COLONIAL MILITARY EXPENDITION MBAISE AREA OF OWERRI, DIVISION 1902 – 1916.

It is imperative to note from the ongoing discussion that the conquest of the interiors of the Niger coast protectorate or what later became southern protectorate was done for a very great price. Isichei in her own words contended that

> *The colonial conquest of Igboland was accomplished at a great cast, both in human lives, and in property. The many deaths, the looted farms and livestock's, the house raised the trees cut down are adequately documented even in British records and remembered with poignant emphasis in the tradition of the Igbo community concerned*[63].

While we agree with Isichei here that the conquest of Igboland was accomplished at a great cost we disagree with her that the level of distraction caused by this conquest was adequately documented in the British records. It would have been easy to understand if the British officials had attempted to

[63] C. Korieh and N.L. Njoku, Culture, Gender and Peasant Intellectual Protest in Colonial Eastern Nigeria in Mbari, The International Journal of Igbo Studies Vol. I, No. 1, January 2008, p. 116.

document to an extent the number of people the expeditionary forces or patrol killed in direct combat. Or the number of house they razed in the villages they visited with brute force. Thomas spear has drawn attention to the importance of understanding the colonial situation from the perspectives of both the colonial and colonized[64]. But this had been made more difficult where the colonial official deliberately failed to document most of their action in the colonized territories. Even in the areas where you can lay your hands on some documents, the documents were compiled by colonial men who were largely concerned with protecting their jobs[65]. Most of them were afraid of public opinion in their home country.

The people of Mbaise particularly the Ogbo people still remember the year 1902, when the British nekade force brutally destroyed five quarters of Umuekeugo. If we consider how densely populated the Mbaise area is, containing about seven hundred and fifty (750) to one thousand persons per square mile[66]. One would not escape the conclusion that the colonial government caused a diverstating blow to the social-economic life of the people of the area. The destruction of five quarters of a town may have led to the deaths of about five hundred people in this single action by the British expeditionary forces. One would not rule out possibility of the loss of about two hundred or

[64]Onuha Duru of Nguru 90, Transcribed in Nwahiri as Cited in Isichei A History of the Igbo People. Op cit p 125.
[65]See N.A.E Rivprof 8/2/182 op cit
[66]Onuha Duru of Nguru 90, Transcribed in Nwahiri as Cited in Isichei A History of the Igbo People. Op cit p 125.

(200) or three hundred (300) houses. This no doubt represent a very colossal lose to the community affected and to the Mbaise area as a whole.

Another interesting case was in about 1907 when an expedition was sent into the Onicha area of Mbaise. During this expedition the colonial government of Owerri lost the medical doctor who was attached to the expeditionary force and the British did not in any way equate the life of one African to that of British. Resultantly, the life of Doctor Stewart was equaled to that of so many towns in Mbaise. It was on this account that another expedition was sent to Onicha. And the whole villages were bunt down[2.] Onicha was made up of term (10) villages one would imagine how huge the loss caused by the burning of their villages would be.

Furthermore, it is very important to note that in other to bring the people of Mbaise area under their British control, a lot of harm was done to their socio-economic life. When an expedition was sent into the Nguru area of Mbaise to stop the people from consulting juju, nine people were recorded dead in Nwaturuocha family alone, while thirty three houses were burnt down[67]. It is important to note that the use of juju to settle dispute was customary in the area, and a war against it by the British, meant a war to make the peoples accept the new order of things which the British represents (the court).

[67] Alphansus Adiakwu 73 Interview at Umuosisi Obizi 30/10/08

The year 1905 cannot be erased in the memories of the people. The history of the massacre at Ahiara and Nkwo-Ogwu was unimaginable. These killing came during what Njoku described as deceitful truce. We are not trying to repeat the story of what happened during the event, but to demonstrate that those individual summoned and murdered at (Nkwo-Otulu) and (Nkwo-Ogwu) markets represent a heavy lose which the people incurred in the process of protecting their land from being taking over by aliens (British).

Before the commencement of this struggle in the Mbaise area, even before the war on Arochukwu was declared, the objectives of this war were outlined by the protectorate government. The first of this objective was to stop slave raiding and slave trade. But in the Mbaise area, the wars created more opportunity than ever for one town to kidnap people from another and sale them into slavery or kill them. The expeditionary teams aided some town to raid another and loot their properties and took people who they sold into slavery. The people of Nguru Mbaise were said to be in dispute with Ahiara before the beginning of colonial struggle in the area. But when the colonial struggle began, the Nguru people allied themselves with the Whiteman and attacked Ahiara. "We helped the Whiteman in the fight against Ahiara and captured many people whom we sold immediately[68].

[68] This Information was collected from my grandfather who was an eye witness to the event.

This was exactly the case between the Umuosisi, a village in Obinzi town and Udo town all from the Ezinihitte clan in Mbaise Two Families, from the above mentioned towns were in a very serious dispute before the British came into the area. This dispute degenerated into a conflict between the Umuosisi village and Udo town, or village group.

Unfortunately to the Umuosisi village the colonial military column sent to pacify the area after the death of Doctor Stewart began the first successful operation from the Udo area. And the Udo people explored the opportunity to the fullest. They allied themselves with the expeditionary forces and dealt with the Umuosisi people. During this operation, such person Adiukwu, Ebika, Evuleukwu, Njoku, Anyanwu and Ochoyo were among the many people that were taken away by the Udo people backed by the government forces,

> *Not only these men, the fourth wife of my grandfather was captured with her four children and taken away slavery by Onyewuhi of Udo a lot of young ladies fled while many were also cought*[69].

The colonial struggle brought about untold hardship on the generality of the people of Mbaise and beyond. In the areas that were wrongly regarded as friendly communities, such as Akpkwu, Umudike, Owutu, Ife, Umuchoko

[69] N.A.E Rivprof 8/4/560 No ON 595/16 Nguru Native Court 12/10/16

Umueze, people fled into the bush at the instance of the troops. In these areas, many people lost the properties they left to looters who were following the troops. Those who fled to the bush with their livestock lost many of them their

> *We fled to the bush to avoid confrontation with the government troops. We used leaves to block the mouth of our sheep's and goats so that they would not make any noise to drown the attention of those killers. But unfortunately, we lost most of these animals in the bush because they could neither, feed nor breathe well. Even before we came back, most people's yam ban had been seriously looted by some unscrupulous elements who were following the troops behind*[70.]

This is pointing at the fact that even in those parts of Mbaise where the struggle was devoid of physical confrontation, the economic lose was still colossal. The British conquest of Mbaise area was pursued with such cruelty that opportunity was opened for those who had been made chiefs to extort money from communities, pretending to prevent the 1916 expedition from visiting them[71]. There are two important things to note here. The first is that the British fire power had already created fear in the minds of the people secondly, although the amount collected from these communities were not recorded in this

[70] See Chapter two for details on the Economic Activities
[71] Isichei A History of the Igbo people Op cit p 138

report, it is however important to note that they were not invested. They represent monies invested to appease the terror which the colonial conquest created. These moneys would have been invested in other productive areas of the economy.

In chapter two, we dealt with the economy of the Mbaise people, and discovered that farming was the most important occupation in the area. People engaged in it in full and part time basis. Although, the economy rested on a triple stand, comprising farming, trading and manufacture, farming received more, attention from the people than any other occupation[72]. But colonial military campaigns disrupted it.

> *All these campaigns were waged in a dry season, in the early years of colonial rule the effectiveness of the British authority depended on the weather. But the late dry season was also the planting season. One can only surmise what effect the looting, the war, the uncertainty and disorder had upon agricultural production. The price of food sky-rocketed. Contemporaries attributed to the inflationary effect to the purchases of cash-paid groups such as the soldiers. It may well have reflected also the cost of the war[73].*

[72] C052/36, Bende – Onicha Interlard Expedition Report cited in Nwabara op cit p 124
[73] Nwokocha 79 Oral Interview Op cit N. Njoku op cit

Although there was inflationary effect, it was not caused by increase in demand of goods, but decrease in the production of goods. Isichei observation was apt. the effectiveness of the British authorities depended on the weather. This was evident in Bende Onicha hinterland expedition report. Part of this report that is relevant to our present discuss, state that "Ahiara is being dealt with" dry season operation[74]. The war in the Mbaise area caused serious economic hardship to the people, yam bans and livestock were looted, while some were burnt[75].

The high level of disorder and uncertainty could not allow individual to go about their normal activities. Many fled to the bush while some fled to neighbouring areas[76]. Both the people who lost their lives and those who fled their homes were part of labour force that participated in agriculture (farming) either in full or part-time basis. This brought about a severe famine. It is obvious that disorder and uncertainty as it was obtainable during the conquest of the area by the British cannot affect one section of the economy alone. Other areas such as (trade) and (manufacture) were also affected. Majority of trade commodities in the area were agricultural produce. They were sold some time for the European made goods such as soaps and kerosene. Or in most cases for cash which they used to purchase whatever that was their need. The inability to

[74] Njoku, History and culture of Mbaise op cit, p. 16
[75] N.A.E Rivprof 2/7/328 No E2346/13 Onicha Market Owerri District re-opening 1/10/13
[76] See Chapter two of this work for details

produce their own goods resulted to their not being able to obtain items that were not produced locally, consequently, petty-trading on European goods collapsed.

Another reason that led to the collapse of trade in the area within the period under discuss was as it has been said, fear of the unknown, mutual suspicion. One other important issue that cannot be forgotten by the people of the area is the closure of some of the major markets in the area. Between 1905 to 1916, the (Nkwo-Ogwu) market which used to be a busy place for economic and special transaction was often occupied by the colonial expeditionary forces[77]. Among the markets closed as a result of the reprisal wars was (Nkwo-Otulu) Ahiara. In the Onicha area, (Afo Onicha) market which was designated as the point where the British doctor Stewart was murdered, was permanently closed by the instruction of the district commissioner H.M. Douglas[78]. The closure of these markets alone represented a colossal loss in the economy of the area. Market in Igbo land and in other part of the area that became Nigeria, was not only venue for exchange of goods. In Igboland particularly in the Mbaise area, market created an avenue for the development and growth of savings and loans[79]. It was also a point of contact through which ideas and new development were shared by individuals and groups from different communities in the area.

[77] See chapter three of this work for details of the military expeditions

[78] Roberts Aspects of Economic History in A Roberts (ed), The Colonial Moment in Africa. Essays on Movement of the Minds and Materials, 1900 – 1940. Cambridge University Press, 1990, p 78

[79] Nwokocha oral interview op cit

It is in this light that we have concluded that the closure of these markets in the Mbaise area by the District Administration did not only bring economic difficulties, but also caused the communication gap between one individual and the other, and one community and other to broaden. A people which had hitherto interacted and exchanged goods services and ideas were prevented from doing so, hence the markets which were and still the most common centre's, "free for all", were closed.

The conquest of Mbaise and other Nigerian areas by the British was a crucial condition necessary for the British to expand their oversea trade. Andrew Roberts advanced that

> *For Africa however, none of the innovation of the early middle colonial periods apart from the spread of literary compared in importance with the advance of overseas trade, to which most other economic changes were directly related either as a condition or as consequence. The most crucial of the conditions was conquest itself, that is to say the incorporation of African societies into larger and soldier systems of political order than had existed before*[80].

One of the most important consequences' of conquest as a condition for the spread of oversea trade is that it undermined the development of the conquered

[80] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise,op cit, P. 15

areas. Apart from the looting of properties, burning of houses, and farms, closing or destruction of markets, the population of the conquered areas were disseminated. In the case of the Owerri Division and in the Mbaise area in particular, it was a horrifying thing. Although there are no statistical data to represent the number of human lives lost through physical confrontation of the colonial government troops, hunger and starvation occasioned by the conquest, out-break of diseases such as smallpox and chicken pox which occurred within the period,[81] and those who were murdered during the two occasions of deceitful truce called by the district administration of Owerri, at Nkwo-Otulu Ahiara and Nkwo-Ogwu market square[82]. There is enough evidence that colonial conquest all over the Nigerian area was characterized with such activities that resulted to a significant decrease in population of the invaded peoples in his study of the colonial state and European companies in Northern Nigeria Modibo contended that one emirate or area fell after the other, towns and villages were burnt, their property looted, its population maimed and dislocated[83]. The impact of colonial conquest on population was very significant in Owerri Division, particularly in the Mbaise area, or what became popularly known as Nguru court area[84].

[81] M.A. Modibo, The Colonial State and European Trading Companies in Northern Nigeria C. 1900 – C 19191. A Postgraduate seminar Presented to the department of History, A.B.U zaria 12th May 1979 p 5.
[82] NAE Owdist 9/6/2 Southern Provinces 1921 Census Report.
[83] M Hamman, The Consolidation of Under Development in Colonial Nigeria 1900-1960. A Paper Presented at the 30th Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria. Nsukka 1st – 4th May 1985 p7.
[84] Njoku A History and Culture of Mbaise opcit p. 16

The implication of the foregoing dissuasion is that colonial conquest actually reduced the population of the area understudy, and the Nigerian area as a whole. Therefore, the significance of the conquest on the development of the area and other parts of Nigeria is located in its disruption or distortion of the dialectical relationship between human needs and the exploitation of natural resources which among other things involves the innovation or changing the method of production

> *Population growth in any given area necessarily exerts pressure on existing resources and leads to changes in the techniques of production, to meet the increased human needs by raising productivity*[85].

This means that development occurs from the interplay between the need to sustain a large population and exploitation of natural resources. It calls for improved technologies which increases productivity. The need to improve production techniques becomes a necessity when the population exerts pressure on the resources available. The colonial conquest of the Mbaise area and indeed the entire Nigerian area was carried out with high coast of human lives, and therefore caused decrease or stagnation in the growth of the population of the areas. This no doubt had prevented the exertion of population pressure which

[85] See Chapter two of this work for information about the production of guns in the area

normally leads to the development of human ability to solve his problems by putting his environment into proper use.

Another important means through which the colonial conquest of Mbaise and other Nigerian areas discouraged technological development was through the prohibition of the production of the indigenous weapons as Njoku stated,

> *The war discouraged the production of traditional military weapons, because not only that these weapons were surrendered and burnt, the makers were killed during the war, and those who survived the war became afraid of the colonial officers and chiefs representing them. Consequently, we lost the technology which had developed before the Douglas war*[86].

Oral evidence had shown that not only that guns were used by the people of the Mbaise before the colonial conquest of their area, but that guns were being produced locally, particularly by the Eziagbogu people who were predominantly simitters[87] the question here is not whether or not the gun production was borrowed from elsewhere. The people may have copied the technology through the use of the ones bought from the European traders on the coastal regions of southern Nigeria. One cannot rule out that some peoples of the Nigerian area began to produce guns before the formal colonization of their

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[86] Roberts, op cit, pp. 78, 79

[87] N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit, p. 11, Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 11, T.U. Nwala, An Era of Self-Awareness in T.U. Nwala (ed), Mbaise in Contemporary Nigeria. Gold & Mestro New York, 1978, p. 15

territory. The implementation of the general art of the Brussels' conferences, which imposed restriction on the importation of fire arms, may have produced the necessity which led the people to copy the technology from the already imported ones. Whether this crafts was imported into the Mbaise area or not, the main issue is that its advancement was extirpated by the colonial conquest of the area, and restriction to its production. It is equally important to highlight the fact that those gun makers were also the makers of other iron implements used in the production of some other commodities such as agricultural produce. A restriction on them means a reduction in their chances of practice, innovate, or change their techniques to improve productivity. This no doubt undermines development. From the foregoing, one would understand that colonial conquest of the different towns and villages in the Nigeria area was a veritable instrument, very decisive for the economic and technological retardation which the Nigerian area and indeed the whole of Africa still surfers today.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF THE MILITARY EXPEDITIONS

The political impact of colonial conquest of Mbaise area of the Owerri Division is part of the general political changes that occurred in the area in the colonial times. Although we have elected to examine the general political changes which occurred in the area within the period 1902 to 1933 in the next

chapter, there is the need to examine here the aspect of it that was the direct consequences of the conquest. As Roberts said

> *The conquest meant that the function of protection was specialized, taken away from the general body of adult males and assigned to a very small number of soldiers and policemen, whose organization and weapons gave them an unchallengeable monopoly of force. For others, there was a loss of autonomy, even of sense of manhood*[88].

Roberts is apt in his contention. What he said was a commonplace in the whole of African territory. For the Mbaise area of Owerri Division it took the following forms

APPOINTMENT OF HEADMEN 1903

As we have shown earlier in this chapter, the protectorate expeditionary force or what was popularly known as Aro Field Force assigned with the responsibility of bringing Arochukwu and its environs,, under the British colonial administration, passed through the Owerri–Bende road cut Arochukwu. The Owerri – Bende road, cult across the length of the Mbaise area, beginning from its border town of Enyiogwu to Udo in the Ezinihitte clan. During this monumental match to Arochukwu in 1902, the Aro field force

[88] Afigbo, Eastern Province Under Colonial Rule in Ikime (ed), op cit, p. 414

visited Mbaise and other areas along the route[89]. As it was in the logic of the situation that the establishment of viable colonial administration should go hand in hand with military conquest[90]. Therefore, the High Commissioner Ralph Moor set out on a political tour of the conquered areas,[91] as soon as the dust of the war on the Aro people was settled. On May 11th 1902, the High Commissioner, created Owerri District headquarters. And appointed Messrs Harold Mordey Douglas and D.E Price district and assistant district commissioner respectively9[92].

In 9103-4, Messrs H.M. Douglas came with a patrol to the Mbaise area and laid the foundation of government by appointing headmen. These headmen were made responsible for reporting any serious breaches of peace. They were also saddled with the responsibility of turning out their people for public work (road making)[93]. This was the first attempt to delegation of colonial authority in the area. This event took place a year after the destruction of Umaekeugo Ogbo in the Oke Ovoro clan. The successful appointment of headmen in the area, was significant in different ways. It signified the success of the conquest of the area. Not only that, it marked the beginning of the change of the political landscape of the area. It was a journey towards the end of corporate existence of the towns and villages in the area. This is located in the fact that autonomous

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[89] Anene, op cit, p. 234

[90] Ekechi, op cit, p. 206

[91] N.A.E. C. 50, 27937, op cit, p. 12

[92] Address of Welcome presented by Akpodina Community, Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area, on Occasion of the Installation of Col. David Sunday Ogunewa, "Okenze" of Akpodin on the 5th day of March, 1997, 02.

[93] Isichei, op cit, p. 124

towns, villages and occupational groups began to lose their authority to resolve their differences from within, hence the headmen were made responsible to report any matter liable to cause a breach of peace. These reports went to alien authority imposed through conquest (Divisional Commissioner). The mode of distribution of political authority was disrupted. The appointment of headmen by District Commissioner in the company of a patrol team was part of the conquest of the area on its own. Therefore, it is positive to say that the era of these headmen was a preparatory ground for the actual loss of manhood by the societies, which came to maturity when "native court" and warrant chiefs were created in the area.

However, the appointment of headman was not an assurance that the Mbaise area had been brought under actual colonial control. But it was a signal to successful imposition of colonial type of government, which seeks to regulate the conduct of individuals in the area.

By virtue of the appointment, the headmen became part of the colonial government. The implication of this was that they began to provide local guides to the colonial forces in the area. This no doubt was a major and decisive to success of colonial conquest. Individuals like Nwaturuocha of Nguru, Onyekwere of Ahiara, Onyewuchi of Udo, Iroapali of Obizi, Nwigwe Akanwa

of Ife, Nwachukwu Mbutu, were known to have provided local guide for the invading force. As time went on, these headmen were rewarded with the position of Warrant Chief. As part of the effort to consolidate the gains of the conquest, a "native court" was opened at Owerri the districtheadquarters. These chiefs became members of the court. These chiefs were also important tools for the colonial government to complete the conquest of the entire district and provincial areas and bring them under the government of the protectorate which they had for long been declared on paper. Thus the appointment of headmen and chiefs in a system that had been plunged into chaos by the activities of the colonial expeditionary forces and punitive patrols was not an end on its own, but a means to an end. At the early stage of colonial domination of the area, these creations were aimed at assisting the military expedition and patrols to break the spine of the people's resistance. As we have shown in chapter two of this work, the Okonko society which was one of the most effective instrument of the (Ama-ala) (village assembly) in the implementation of their rule, was completely erased from existence. They were very active in political administration of the Mbaise area prior to the imposition of alien rule (colonial). And also in the resistance to the political domination of their area by the British[94]. Some of these agents appointed by the British official were in the

[94] Alpheaus Adukwu, 73, Umuosisi Obizi, Ezinihitte Mbaise Oral Interview 50/10/08

habit of giving them (the British) information about the activities of their own people. As Isichei observed,

> *The British waged a relentless war on the Okonko society of southern Igboland, raiding for slave and offering human sacrifice. By accusing their local enemies of some, or all of this malpractice, they manipulated the British into fighting their local wars for them*[95].

The implication of this observation is that those who became collaborators or local guide to the British manipulated the British into causing an unprecedented damage to their political landscape and culture. Although there were Okonko societies in the Mbaise area, they were not known for slave raiding. But opportunity to raid for slaves came in the time of the colonial conquest some communities and individual manipulated the British into fighting for them accusing their neighbours of committing some of this crime which the British claimed to frown at. This was the case between the Umuosisi villages of obizi, who were raided by the people from Udo, in the company of the expeditionary force sent to pacify the area[96]. Another case in point was that of Nguru. They seized the opportunity created by the colonial military operations to raid the Ahiara area.

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[95] Isichei,op cit, p. 125

[96] Ibid

The Nguru Mbaise, had been at war with Ahiara, so when the British attacked Ahiara, "We helped the white man in the fight against Ahiara and capture many people whom we sold immeditely[97].

It was in this manner that the back bone of the Mbaise peoples resistance to colonial conquest was broken. And the Okonko society, whose resistance to the imposition of colonial domination of their area was remarkable, went underground. As one of the most influential pre-colonial government apparatus in Mbais, and indeed some other parts of Igboland, particularly, the southern Igboland[1]. Its (Okonko) disappearance was a strong indicator that the pre-colonial mode of political administration which was based on the popular consent of the people had come to an end. The (Ama-ala) village assembly which comprised of all the adhoc groups in the area, had been overthrown by the aliens (the British).

CONCLUSION

Colonial conquest of Mbaise area and the entire African territory meant more than effort geared toward political domination. There was hardly any aspect of the people life the conquest did not affect. As we have noted earlier in this chapter, in economic terms, the conquest meant that the function of

[97] Ekechi,op cit, p. 115

protection was specialized, taken away from the general body of adult males and assigned to very small numbers of soldiers and policemen, whose organization and weapon gave them an unchallengeable monopoly of force.

> *This was in consonance with the British imperialist beliefs that, when manufacturing firm competed for raw materials, it was obviously profitable to control their sources*[98].

This means that the conquest itself was one of the boldest steps taken by the British manufacturers' traders and their colonial compatriots towards the control of the sources, of raw materials. As commerce was usually based upon a political security, the colonial administrators in the already conquered area became preoccupied with expanding political frontiers to the extent that political organizations were treated with utter disregard.

It has been shown elsewhere that the process of underdevelopment of the Nigerian area, and indeed the entire African territory is traceable to the period between 1500 – 1850. And that its consolidation began with the formal colonization of the area[99]. The conquest of Mbaise and the entire Nigerian area formed the foundation upon which the formal colonization stands. Therefore, the conquest itself was the first step towards the consolidation of the imperialist gains and hold of the entire area of Nigeria and Africa.

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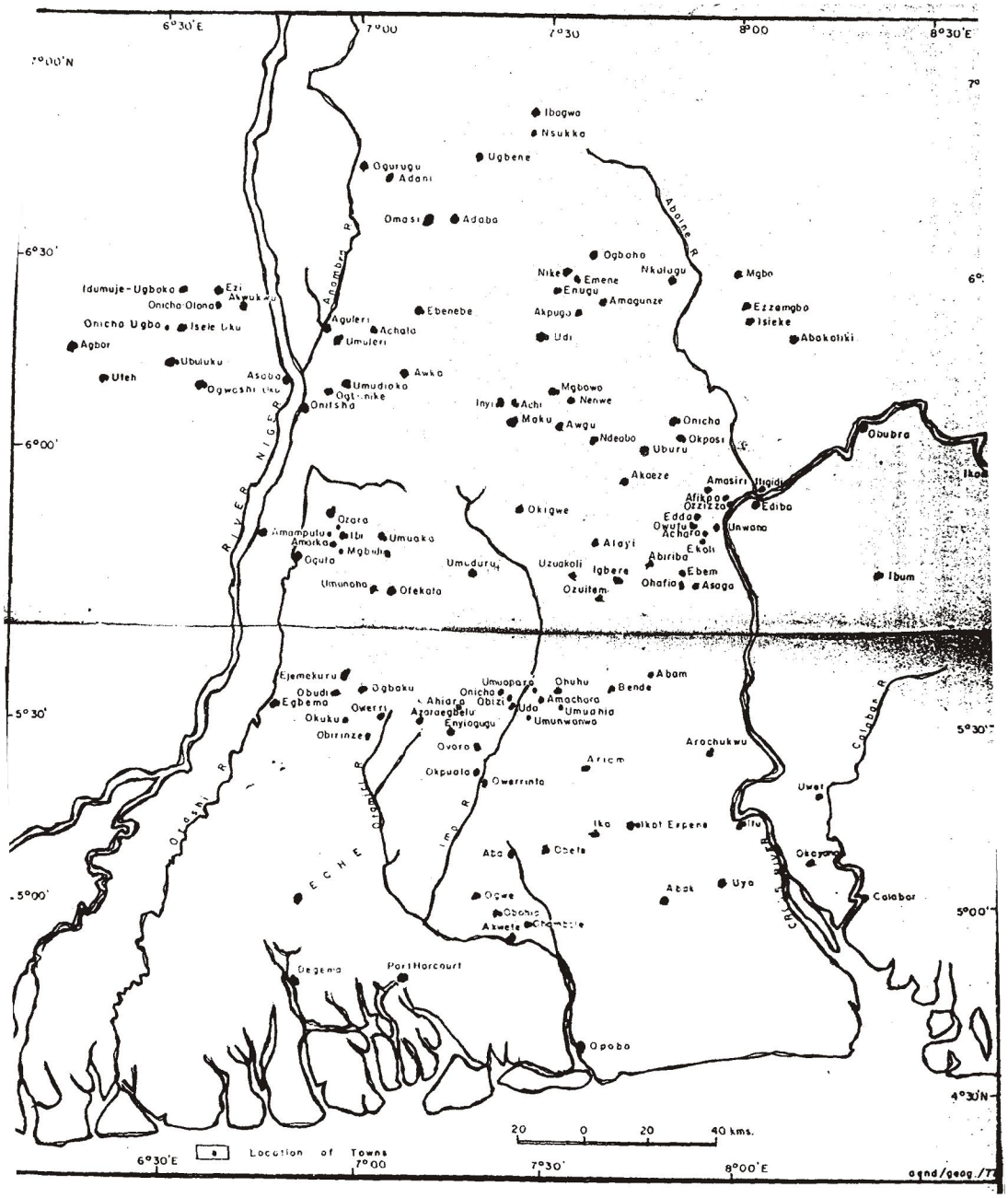
[98] Ekechi, op cit, p. 115

[99] Harman, op cit, pp. 3-15

Map 3: Map of Igboland, Showing some towns visited by the Expeditionary Forces, Patrols and Escorts, 1901-1919



Source: Nwabara, S.N: Iboland: A Century of contact with British, 1860-1960 pp 98, 99

CHAPTER FOUR

MBAISE UNDER COLONIAL ADMINISTRATION 1903-1929

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to show the nature of socio-political and economic changes that occurred in the Mbaise area of what became Owerri Division in the colonial era. This task requires a critical examination of the origin and imposition of the warrant chiefs systems in southeast Nigeria and in the Mbaise area in particular. The imposition of this alien system of administration on the peoples of southeastern Nigeria was not an easy task. It's an easiness is located in the fact that it was strength to the people's political environment consequently, the mobility of the newly created chiefs to exerts control over then areas became so promoted.

However, in order to make the newly created institution efficient, there was the need to give the peoples a new orientation. And this would make them to welcome the changes that were about to come. It was to this effect that some of the western agencies of socialization were brought, particularly, into the Owerri Division area, by the colonial administration. The most important was the Christian missionaries, who used the introduction of western education as one of the strategies towards the re-orientation of the people.

The warrant chief system and the "native court" system had been identified to mean the same thing by scholars on the same subject. Therefore a thorough analysis of the structure of the "native court" would bring out the salient issues concerning the functions of the warrant chiefs in the "native court" system in comparison to the other functionaries of the court. This will help us to understand that the term indirect rule was more a paper work than an historical reality. Further efforts made by the protectorate government to increase the efficiency of the system are evident in their policies. The most essential to the primary objectives of this chapter, and of the entire work is the protectorate policy of direct taxation in the Eastern provinces. A careful analysis of this particular issue would reveal how the women's revolt of 1929 was triggered off, and how it finally brought the warrant chief system to an end.

ORIGIN OF THE WARRANT CHIEF SYSTEM 1902-1929

When the term warrant chiefs is used, it means those indigenous element appointed by the British to carry out the functions of government at the local level of colonial administration. In the words of Afigbo:

> *Whatever position of influence, responsibility, and power which the warrant chiefs enjoyed in this era derived from the*

possession of the warrant which made them members of the native court.[1]

This implies that the British Colonial Administrators chose some indigenous elements and issued them with certificate knows as warrant, and a symbol of authority to carry out the colonial functions at the local level of colonial administration. Scholars have shown that before its introduction in the area that became Owerri district, it had been put into practice elsewhere. Afjgbo had this to say:

On the question of how the system came into existence, there is reason to agree with Mr. S. M. Grier, the secretary for native affairs, who in 1922 said that the warrant chiefs system was fathered by the court of equity.[2]

This means that idea of warrant chief system was given birth to by the court of equity which was instituted in Bonny around 1854. The court of equity came into being through the initiative of European and African merchants.[3] Major characteristic are bound in both the court of 'Equity' and native courts, as it was instituted under the warrant chiefs system. For instance, the principle of associating the natives with European administrative rudiments was a major

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[1] A.E Afigbo the Warrant chief, indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria, Longman ltd, London, 1972 p.37

[2] Ibid, P. 37; See also G.I Jones, The Trading State of the Oil Rivers. A Study of Political Development in Eastern Nigeria. Oxford University Press ltd, London, 1970, P 80.

[3] Afigbo op cit P.38

ingredient of both court of Equity and native courts under the warrant chiefs system[4] supercargoes as members of the court.

Furthermore, it signified the feeling among the British then that the indigenous African systems of government had to be reinvigorated by injecting European ideas and practices, before they can yield to the growing demands caused by the presence of European economic interest. One, other feature of the court of 'Equity' which was identifiable in the warrant chiefs system is the fact that it showed that a cheap administration can equally be instituted in the conquered territories. This was among the major reason for which the British elected to impose the warrant chief systems. These courts served the purpose of local administration in the oil rivers until the declaration of formal protectorate by British in 1885[5].

Following the abolition of the court 'equity' in 1885, and a civil war, which almost resulted from the animosity between the two leading house heads Oko Jumbo and Warribo Manilla Pepple, Consul. Hewett cashed in and set up a council of five chiefs, in which he vested legislative and executive powers, and thus the right to govern Bonny[6]. Although this council was given the authority to govern Bonny, Hewett reserved for himself the authority to veto the decision of the council when he find himself in opposition. This particular characteristic

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[4] Ibid

[5] Ibid P.40

[6] A.E. Afigbo The Warrant Chiefs System in Eastern Nigeria, Direct or Indirect Rule, Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria vol. II No. 4 June 1969 P.685

of the council was almost similar to that of the warrant chiefs system between 1914 and 1929, in which the district commission had the right to change the decision of the court through review of cases. Another feature of the council, which made it different from the court of 'equity', but similar to the warrant chief system from 1914 upward, was its exclusion of Europeans as members. Afigbo opined that

> *The experiment is remarkable for its exclusion of European merchants, but has only limited significance as no attempt was made to extend it to other states*[7].

As the British commercial interest continued to grow, more ardent imperialist were sent to the oil rivers, or what became the Niger coast protectorate, to impose political control, which in turn ensured the safety of British commerce. A good example of this was H.H. Johnston, who became an acting consul at the end of 1886[8]. Dike described Johnston as a 'zealous and clear-headed imperialist, religiously dedicated to the service of Great Britain in West Africa[9]. Imperialists city who came to Africa never left any stones unturned in their attempt to break the backbone of African resistance to their penetration.

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[7] Ibid

[8] J.C. Anene, Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906, Theory and practice in a colonial Protectorate. Cambridge university press, Cambridge, 1966, P.82

[9] K.O Dike, trade and politics in Niger Delta 1880-1885, An Introduction to Economic and Political History of Nigeria, Oxford University press, London, 1956, P 127

Johnston's first preoccupation was the organization of the organs of administration to take over the rule of coastal city states. He advanced that "the native chiefs do not seem competent to administer the affairs of their country in a wise and just manner"[10]. After very serious wrangling with the coastal chief, particularly Jaja, the Opobo King, Johnston succeeded in convincing the foreign office, and arrested, tried and convicted Jaja and final deported him. The ousting of Jaja from his position in the coast created a vacuum which took the city state of Opobo to the brink of collapse. Or what Afigbo aptly referred to as political paralysis[11]. Following this incident, he was therefore faced with an uphill and urgent task of creating a system of local government which would help to calm the situation, and prepare the ground for a stable administration. It was this necessity that brought Johnston's governing council into existence.

The governing council was made up of ten members. The president who was Her Majesty's Consul, the Vice President and Secretary, who were also Europeans, three African chiefs, four European traders, and an ex-officio who was to be a senior naval officer[12]. By virtue of the rank of the ex-officio member, he must be a European. The council was saddled with the responsibility of keeping the peace, maintaining the highways and other means of communication, regulating commerce, hearing minor disputes and raising

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[10] F.O 84/1828 No 18, Johnson to F.O; 24 September 1881 cited in Anene opcit p 92.

[11] Afigbo, in journal of historical society of Nigeria 685. See also Afigbo Warrant Chiefs Afigbo. The Warrant Chiefs Rule in Southern Nigeria op cit P 41.

[12] Afigbo in Journal of Historical society of Nigeria Op cit Pp 685, 686 see also Afigbo, Warrant chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria op cit Pp 41, 42, Anene Op cit P 92, 93

taxes for local development. The appeal of this council went to the supreme consular authority. The constitution of the council was a true picture of imperialist construct. There were therefore only three African chiefs in a council of ten members in an African territory. Its constitution is a significant of the fact that it lacked equity through representation. And that it was meant to enable the advancement of British imperial interests (economic exploitation of the African territory).

After it has been instituted in Opobo, Johnston attempted to extend it to other city-state. But this was aborted by the foreign Office which vetoed it on the ground that the acting consul had exceeded his powers. And that brought the entire scheme to an end[13]. Any change made at the helm of consular administration had its remarkable political land marks. Before the decision to establish an efficient and effective administration in the oil rivers or what came to be known as Niger coast protectorate, there had already been the zeal to associate the rulers of each local community with the management of its own affairs[14]. Consequent upon this need, a system of local administration was instituted by Cloude MacDonald who was appointed a consul general in 1891. This system of administration later came to be known as the warrant chiefs system. One of the basic features of MacDonald's administrative system was

[13] J.C Anene, Establishment and consolidation of Imperial Government in Southern Nigeria 1891-1906 Quoted in Afigbo, in the Journal of Historical society of Nigeria Op cit P 686.
[14] Ibid

the fact that the states of the courts were subject to change, based on the states of the presiding officer and the location. For example, whenever the court sat at district or divisional headquarters, and were presided over by European political officer, they were 'native councils'. While in the contrary, whenever the courts hold at locations far way from administrative headquarter, and were presided over by persons other than the European officers, they were referred to as minor courts.

By February 13th 1892, what was known as the high court of old Calabar had been put inplace. This was presided over by the Consul General himself, Sir Cloude MacDonald. This was not just a court, but an appellate courts for all the Minor courts in the cross River valley[15].

From 1854 to 1900, vigorous attempts were made to put an efficient administrative system of local government, over the oil rivers or what later came to be known as Niger coast protectorate. But these efforts were limited to the coastal communities. His attempt to penetrate beyond the coastal area into the interior was thwarted by the attack on the Royal Niger company headquarters at Akassa, by men of Brass. And before the trouble was over, Mac Donald's time as the consul general was up[16]. However, before Mac Donald left the Niger coast protectorate, he created a lasting legacy in the area of local

[15] Ibid, see also H.A. Gailey, Road to Aba: A study of British administrative policy in Eastern Nigeria, University Press, London, 1970, P. 53.
[16] Anene, op cit, P. 165

administration. It is not disputable that local arms of government which he created were already functioning in places such as Calabar, Bonny, Degema, Akpayafe, Tom Sholt, Adiabo, and Itu. Each of these courts meet twice a week[17] There was no legal framework or any enactment upon which the proceedings of these court was derived. The proceedings of the native council and minor courts were reliant upon the instructions of the vice consuls while the high court at old Calabar was manipulated by the Consul General, or what became High Commissioner in era Ralph Moor.[18]

MacDonald's colonial policy was governed by the principle of penetrating into the interior particularly the Igbo land through diplomacy. He was knowledgeable to some extent about the fragmented nature of Igbo communities. And this helped him to form his colonial policy towards the Igbo's. This was evident in the strategy, which he had mapped out to penetrate the large Igbo groups of the hinterlands. In a bid to demonstrate his approach towards the extension of British rule to the Igbo hinterland. He (MacDonald) asked the British, foreign office for 500 treaty forms. According to Anene,

> *Sir, Cloude proposed to enter into negotiation with the Igbo groups with the view of establishing friendly relations with them. The consul general recognized that the Igbo were not*

[17] Afigbo in Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria,op cit, p. 686
[18] Gailey op cit, P. 53

organized into a large comprehensive state. For this reason, he asked the British foreign office for 500 treaty forms[19].

Anene appeared to have been in sympathy with MacDonald's idea, forgetting that the peoples of the Igbo hinterland would not have willingly handed out their sovereignty to the British without resistance. Anene further stated, that the Consul General, however believed that the extension and consolidation of British rule should be by right of treaty[20].

In my own opinion, the consul-General, wanted to appear like a swine to shoot a lion. His less radical approach was also directed toward the extension of British political boundaries in order to guarantee protection of British commercial and industrial interest. However, MacDonald was succeeded in 1896 by Ralph Moor. Moor was a more radical imperialist than his predecessor, MacDonald. From 1896 to 1903, Moor was occupied with the expansion of the British Empire into the interiors, including the areas that were formerly under the control of Royal Niger Company[21]. Moor's extension of the British political frontiers was mainly through unbroken chains of wars[22]. As the conquest was going on, he was busy establishing 'Native Courts' and 'Native councils' in the conquered areas. He did not only cause the spread of MacDonald's' type of court, or what was seen as local administration, but he indeed added flavor to it.

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[19] Anene op cit, P. 162

[20] Ibid

[21] S.N. Nwabara, Iboland: A country of contact with the British, 1860. 1960, Holder and Stoughton, 1977, P. 161

[22] Details about the conquest of the interior is found in chapter three of the work

As we have noted earlier, there was no legal backing or enactment upon which the proceedings of these courts relied. Following the handover of the territories of the Royal Niger Company to the protectorate government on the 1 January 1900, effort was geared towards formulating a legal framework to guide the operation of the local administration (Native Courts and Native Councils). This necessity led the protectorate government under Moor, to come out with a body of rule known as 'Native Court proclamation in 1900[23].

The proclamation which came into effect on May 1 1900, provided a legal basis to the already existing two levels of 'Native Courts' each of this levels of courts were made up of chiefs who were warranted by the High commissioner or his representatives. For the lowest level of court (minor court) to function, there must be president, vice president, three other chiefs and a special member invited to represent the village in which the dispute occurred. The president of the minor court was elected to preside over cases for three month by the members[24]. While 'Native councils' were often situated at the district headquarters. For example, the 'Native council' for Owerri Division was located at Owerri which was made divisional headquarter by the high commissioner of the southern protectorate, Sir Ralph Moor on 11 May 1902[25].

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[23] N.A.E. Laws of Southern Nigeria 1900 and 1901, P. 430. See also N.A.E Calprof Native Court Proclamation No. of 1900, and Nwabara Op cit P 165.

[24] Afigbo in Journal of Historical society of Nigeria Op cit P 687

[25] F.K. Ekechi, Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igbo land 1857-1914, P. 206

Matters involving up to twenty-five pounds (£25) in case of debt, and fifty pounds (£50) in case of inheritance were placed under the jurisdiction of the minor courts. While the 'Native Councils' were bound only to entertain cases involving not more than two hundred pounds (£200). According to Gailey,

> *Although native laws were supposed to guide the actions of the courts, the district commissioner had the real power. He could intervene at any stage of the proceedings to transfer a case to a higher level, to annul the decision, or to order a new trial*[26].

This means that the British officers were the ones wielding the real powers under the 'Native administration (native courts). The warrant chief system of administration as it has been called was not made up of the warrant chiefs alone. The 1900 proclamation provided for the employment of court clerks whose functions were to prepare list of cases, call members for court sitting, issue summonses, keep record of the sittings make sure the judgment book was signed, and keep a record of intake and disbursement of all moneys by the courts. As Gailey had written,

> *The clerk's duties were specialized and tedious, but they demanded that he be able to read and write some English at a*

[26] Gailey op cit P 57

time when writing carried overtones of magic for most natives. Many of the illiterate warrant chiefs were overawed by the clerks' functions and ability. Because of their skills in English the clerk very early were transformed from mere servants of the court to the de facto masters[27].

This is a pointer to the fact that the British rather than creating a warrant chief system ended up creating a court clerk system of administration. This was the kind of local administrative system which was imported into the Owerri district area in 1902 and finally into the Mbaise area in 1909[28]. The appointment of warrant chiefs from the Mbaise area predates the establishment of the courts as an outpost of what the British represented in the area. Some native elements had been appointed to the Owerri court at its inspection. Afigbo stated as follows.

During the Aro Expedition of 1901-2 when two columns heading to Arochukwu passed through Owerri, Njamanze helped to provide them with local guide to Bande. After the expedition, he was made use of in gathering the chiefs of neighboring village groups like Akabo, Nekede, Naze, Emekuku Oji, Egbu, Nguru, Irete and so on[29].

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[27] Ibid

[28] Y.O Elugwaraonu, Mbaise at a Glanue first Gate communication ltd, Owerri 1992 P 8, G, Njoku, Mbaise in pre-colonial and colonial Nigeria in Nwala (ed) Mbaise in contemporary Nigeria, Gold and Mastro, New York, P 24

[29] Afigbo, in Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria Op cit P

Nguru which was mentioned above was and is still in the Mbaise area. Evidence have shown that chief Nwaturuocha of Nguru, was the first person from the Mbaise area to receive warrant from the protectorate government to sit as a member of the 'native court' at Owerri, at its inception on 11 May 1902. As time went on, other chief were made in the Mbaise area to attend the new 'native court' at Owerri. The second persons to be made warrant chief from the Mbaise area were Mr. Onyekwere Njoku of Ahiara and Chilaka Ukpo of Umunama in 1905-6[30]. Between 1906 and 1908. Other chiefs were appointed from the area. For instance chief Nwachukwu, of Mbutu was appointed members of the 'native court' at Owerri in 1907[31]. The appointment of these men from various communities in Mbaise and other areas to the Owerri court was part of the effort of the colonial administrators to bring to life what had already been claimed on paper as protectorate from the time of Niger Coast to the early years of protectorate southern Nigeria. As we have shown here, Moor continued to advance the political frontier of the British Empire into the interiors of Igbo land until when he left southern Nigeria in 1903, and was succeeded by Sir Walter Edgerton in 1904. It is therefore right to say that a radical imperialist like Moor could not complete the task of colonial conquest of the interiors of Igbo land. So, when Edgerton took over, he was also confronted

[30] C.A.C Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, from the Earliest Time A.D; 2001, Foundation Press ltd, Aba, 2003, P. 18, see also N.A.E Rivprof 8/4/6 petition of Chilaka of Umunama 12/1/16

[31] Njoka History, History and culture of Mbaise,op cit, P. 19

with the task of subduing, the areas which were yet to be conquered. This means that most of the punitive patrols and expeditions that took place in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division came under Edgerton as a high commissioner of the protectorate.

Before 1909, it had become very difficult for the British officials to administer the entire Owerri Division areas from the Divisional headquarter. Consequently, the division was divided into smaller administrative units called court areas. These court areas were Owerri, Oguta, Nguru, Ngor, and Okpala native court areas[32] The Mbaise area fell under the jurisdiction of Nguru and Okpala Courts[33]. The jurisdiction of Nguru and Okpala courts encompassed large area, and this led to the increase in the appointment of the newmen (the warrant chiefs) such chiefs as Iwuala Nwichri of Akpoku, Osuagwu Oloko of umudin Nwaigwe Akanwa Ife, Okala of Owatu, and a host of others were appointed and issued with warrant to sit in the these native courts in 1909. The whole of Oke clam and southern part of Ezinihitte clan made up of Akpokwu, Umudim, Ife, Owuta, Umuchoko, and Umueze were placed under the jurisdiction of Okpala court, while the Agbaja, Ahiara, Ekwereazu, and the remaining part of Ezinihitte clan were under the jurisdiction of Nguru court. There is no document to show the reason for which the colonial administrators

[32] N.A.E Rivprof 3/4/63 Owerri District Half Yearly Report 1910

[33] A.R. Chapman, Political Development in Eastern Nigeria, The Role of the Ethnic Chions, A Ph.D Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of Political Science, Columbia University, 1967,p. 156; see A.C. Smock, Ibo Politic, The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1971, p. 70

merged. Some parts of Mbaise to the Okpala area, even when there was no trace of any connection.

However it is imperative to point at the fact that most of the administrative actions were based on the intelligence collected by the expeditionary forces that conquered the areas. For instance, the Okpala area was conquered alongside with the Oke clan and the southern portion of Ezinihitte clan, by the Uvaru-Nneorie patrol[34]. Therefore it is possible that the intelligence provided by this team made the British to deceive themselves into believing that Oke clan and the communities of the southern Ezinihitte were the same.

It was said the natural organization of the Okpala towns does not differ materially from that which was found to exist in the neigbouring Agbaja Ezinihitte and Ekwereazu areas[35]. These information were the type upon which the creation of courts and appointment of chiefs from the Owerri division area was relied upon. The warrant chief system of administration, as it was called had commenced in the protectorate before the British conquest of the Owerri Division area. The truth of the matter was the absence of convenient natural groupings, and the government had to make artificial ones, throwing large number of small political units into court areas which, embraced about as many as hundred thousand 100,000 people. This sometimes cut across the much larger

[34] See Chapter Three of this work for the details about the conquest of Mbaise area

[35] N.A.E. C S E 1/85/5118, An Intelligence Report on the Okpala Native Court Area, 1/9/33

affinities, which however faintly, the people did recognize, entailed a work of twenty or thirty miles to the court [36]. This was the case when the people from the Mbaise area attended the Owerri court. Even when new court areas were created in the district in 1909, across affinities, the communities of southern Ezinihitte were placed order the Okpala court. The idea of the 'native courts' as it was later known, came into existence in the era of Niger coast protectorate, precisely under cloud MacDonald as High Commissioner. Its foundation was based on the combination of little intelligence about the indigenous society and the imagination of the British. To understand how it worked will entail the study the structure.

THE STRUCTURE OF THE WARRANT CHIEF SYSTEM

Without a proper understanding of the structure of the Warrant Chief System in Southeastern Nigeria, it would not be possible to understand the extent to which the "native administration" was native, and how indirect was the indirect rule in some parts of the area that became Southeastern Nigeria. This would help us to understand the nature of power distribution beyond theoretical work. Many assumptions have been made on the exercise of power by the warrant chiefs through the court but by the time we are through with our analysis, one would come to understand that most of the powers reserved for the

[36] M. Perham, Native Administration in Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, P 234

chiefs to exercise were usurped by the court clerks. When Sir Cloud MacDonald arrived in the Oil Rivers, he had few British officials with him. Consequently, he organized the Oil Rivers area into administrative units called the Vice consulates. These Vice consulates were placed under the charge of an officer called the vice consul. In 1895 an attempt was made towards re-organizing the protectorate. The former vice consulates were regrouped into large districts namely the eastern, Western central districts[37]. As we have earlier stated, the consul general established two levels of courts the "native council" and "native court" or (minor courts) these court operated on the instruction of the vice consuls under which they existed. From the arrival of MacDonald in 1891 to the 1898, there was no attempt to provide a legal basis, upon which the operation of these courts will rely.

The year 1900 became a turning point. The British realized that the success of their administration would depend on their ability to put the indigenous institution into use at the local level of government. But before then, in June 1899 the Southern territories controlled by the royal Niger Company passed to the crown, thereby causing a tremendous enlargement to the area under the charge of Sir Ralph Moor[38]. Gailey explained that 'this addition made imperative the rationalization of the mechanism of British rule in the enlarged protectorate[39]. Because of the additional territories, Niger coast protectorate became the protectorate of Southern Nigeria[40]. Until 1900, there was no provision for executive or legislative council, but one thing was significant. The

[37] Gailey, Op cit P 52, Afigbo, Eastern Nigeria under colonial in Obaro Ikune, (ed) Groundwork of Nigeria History, Heinemann Educational Books ltd, 1980, P 414.
[38] Gailey op cit,p. 54
[39] Ibid
[40] Circular No 30, Consular General Old Calabar, 24 February 1896, cited by Nwabara op cit, p. 163

total responsibility to administer the area was transferred from foreign office to colonial office.

In spite of inadequate number of European staff Moor believed that British rule should be absolute and distinct from that of the traditional rulers. He highlighted that 'in minor administrative work the native system could be utilized subject always to revision and "control[41]".

In dealing with this subject, Gailey regularly said that,

> *Moors assumption was in variance with what later was supposed to be the basis of British rule- the use of traditional institutions to govern the subject peoples. Moor would utilize native authorities as he understood them, but only in subordinate capacities and always subject to management and veto by the British administrator[42].*

It was to this background that Afigbo totally agreed with Michael Crowder who had earlier studied the same subject in West Africa. According to him, Crowder has correctly pointed out that:

> *The use of indigenous political institution for the purpose of local government was contingent on certain modification of these institutions, and he distinguished two kinds of modifications.*

[41] .O 520/10 Moor to colonial Office 1901 cited in Gailey op cit, p. 55

[42] Michael Crowder, West Africa under Colonial Rule, Quoted in Afigbo, the Warrant Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria op cit, p. 82

In the first category were modifications designed to rid the supposed indigenous institutions of those aspect of traditional government that were repugnant to the European idea of what constitute good government. Among these was the abolition of human sacrifices and of certain forms of punishment like maiming, which were considered barbarous. In the second category of modification were those designed to ensure the achievement of the main purpose of colonial rule, the economic exploitation of the colonized country. An example of the later was the introduction of taxation designed to stimulate the production of cash crops for export[43].

Afigbo concurred to this opinion by adding that there was a third aspect which Crowder failed to mention, even though it loomed very large in the policies at all indirect rule[44] in explaining this, he stated that;

The very fact of colonial conquest, European presence, missionary propaganda, as well as the intrusion of new economic forces were apt to act as solvent to indigenous institutions and authority. Of this fact the administrators were immensely aware. And it was this fact that created the need for

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[43] Ibid p 82

[44] Ibid p 82

the third category of modification which were designed to shore up indigenous institution in the face of disintegrating forces just enumerated.[45]

These scholars who have dealt on the theory of indirect rule suffered from the same illusion which many colonial administrators could not escape from. The manner with which they have obscured the term modification in their analysis of how the British administrators attempted to carry out the functions of government at the local level is capable of taken unscholarship too far. By the application of the term modification the picture they create in the minds of oncoming scholars is that a little change was made on the existing political institutions to enable them cope with the demand made on them by the new political order.

The case is somewhat different in the coastal areas where the new economic order had led to the emergence of men who were capable of exercising control over the rest of his people. These men were capable of making and implementing rules with penalties. A good example of such man was Jaja of Opobo. Unlike in the coastal area the political administration in the Mbaise area, or in most part of what became Owerri Division was still very much in the hands of the **Amala**. The difficulties involved in maneuvering or

[45] Anene op cit, p. 217

manipulating the Am-alas (the village assembly) brought about the saying **Ama-ala** wu Ike nkwu anaghi entinye ha n'akap) meaning that the village assembly is a palm head, you cannot put them in a bag. Although professor Afigbo later accepted that the colonial administration brought a total change of the old political order, the approach to this conclusion was problematic. The approach employed in the penetration of the interiors was not that of modification Britain was engulfed in a serious rivalry with other European countries for the territory of Africa, therefore, there were the feelings that the process of gradual advancement would cause them the territory at the tip of their nose. Then the British engaged the natives of various communities in the interior in an unbroken chain of wars. This was more common from the period when Ralph Moor became the consul general of Niger coast protectorate. He had nothing to be afraid of, because the man in charge of the colonial territories in Britain was ardent imperialist. It should be recalled that Joseph chamberlain who was the head of colonial office, made a famous but inhuman speech at the annual dinner of the colonial institute in 1897 that the use of punitive expedition was necessary against the indigenous African group. He justified this by saying that

You cannot have Omelettes without breaking eggs; you destroy the practice of barbarism of slavery, of superstition which for countries have desolated the interior of Africa without the use of force[46].

Moor and those who came after him treated the peoples of the interior with the idea of breaking the egg to make Omelettes. While the indigenous institution was broken as eggs in the conquest raw materials from the region were the Omelettes. The colonial conquest throws the indigenous institutions into disarray. And afterwards, a new one, completely strange was imposed. Contrary to what most of our establish historian have written. What happened to the indigenous institutions in most part of Igbo land was replacement, not modification of the indigenous institutions. The question is what aspect of the native's institution was preserved? Afigbo said that "this belief in preservation through transformation is the characteristic of all indirect rule, if this is true, how do we justify the case where the entire adult males of a society were put aside, and one man appointed to transmit the government rules to them. As Margery Perham had aptly put it

General innovations of a kind have been accompanied by attempts on our part to destroy those of their custom which are

[46] M. Perham, Native Administration in Nigeria Oxford University Press London, 1962, P 236

offensive to our moral conceptions. These customs are, as I have attempted to show no mere excrescencies to be pared way, but the expression of basic beliefs. Thus it comes about that the elders as protectors of the spiritual and physical well-being of their people, may feel it their duty to maintain custom which under our rule have become serious and even capital crimes. Among such duties was the administration of poison ordeal and destruction of dangerous abominations of twins, one at least of which is believed to be the result of conception by a devil[47].

This confession by a colonial administrator is a pointer to the fact that what the colonial administration imposed on the people was quite unethical to the practical politics of the people. In giving further explanation, Perham advanced as follows

The practice of slavery, though hardly yet altogether eradicated, appear to be less deeply founded, but the selling of thieves and undesirable characters was a convenience for which our temporary imprisonment is a very unpopular substitute. The existence of these and other customs repugnant to our culture has a two-fold effect upon the administrative

[47] Ibid

position. The attempt to suppress it arouses the deepest indignation among the guardians of the old order, the very men whose cooperation is most necessary to us[48].

Perham was trying to identify those aspects of the people's culture that appeared criminal before the British. Our interest here is not whether what was seen as morality by Africans was seen in different way by a European, but to bring to fore those essential ingredients of the British local administration which Crowder's and his contemporaries referred to as modification. What came into the area of Eastern Nigeria before 1930 was pure British rule with new institutions created. The indigenous institutions were supplanted with those based on European ideas of government. It was as a result of this radical change in political administration of the communities in Eastern Nigeria that such writers as Jones concluded that one major defect of administration through the warrant chiefs was that while the Igbo form of government was democratic, the British system was not[49] To properly position these new institution, the 1900 proclamation was enacted by the protectorate government. The proclamation categorized the political institutions (the courts) into two. It did not only categorize the court, it spelt out the mode of distribution of authority and power within and between the two levels of courts. The first category of these courts

[48] G.I. Jones, From Direct to Indirect Rule in Eastern Nigeria Quoted in Chapman op cit,p. 157

[49] Afigbo, Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule op cit,p. 85

was known as minor courts. They were presided over by one of those indigenous elements warranted to be chief. Afigbo referred to them as 'native authority'[50] But looking at the source of their authority they are considered here as British authorities. It would be wrong to label a man whose exercise of authority depended on his possession of certificate (warrant) issued by the high commissioner, to carry out some function on behalf of the government a native authority. Later in this chapter, we are going to show how the authority provided for the chiefs was usurped by the partially educated elements, (the court clerks). The president, vice president of the Mino courts was elected by its members, with term of office lasting for three months.

Above the Minor courts were the 'native councils' presided over by a political officer which was mainly the district commissioner or his assistant, all British. Both levels of courts were constituted by men who were made chiefs by the High commissioner or his representatives, as we have mentioned in passim. For a sitting, the 'native' 'court' was made up of the president vice president, three member, and another member(s) special, to be summoned from the area where the dispute emanated. This means that if there were ten cases from different areas in the same court and, the same day, there must be ten special members from the different areas where the disputes emanated. Although the

[50] N.A.E Calprof, 8/10/2 proclamation No of 1900

two levels of courts were made up of warrant chiefs of equal standing, they differed in their jurisdiction.

The jurisdiction of Minor court was meant to be exercised only on civil matters of debt not beyond twenty five pounds (25) and fifty pounds (50) on the matter of inheritance. While the "native council's jurisdiction was limited to case in which claim did not exceed two hundred pound (200). The two levels of courts exercised unlimited jurisdiction over land case. While in criminal matters the Minor court dealt with such minor cases concerning disobedience to lawful older. The "Native council performed a supervisory function over the minor courts. It examined the records of the Minor courts and enforce on them any order given by the governor. Lawyers were not allowed to practice in both levels of courts[51]. Both "Native council" and Minor courts were systematically placed under the control of European natives. This was aimed at achieving efficiency. But how far was that realized

A divisional or district commissioner could at any stage in the trial of a case transfer it from a Minor court to a "Native council" or from the "Native council" to the district court. When a defendant is not satisfied with the way the "native court" is handling his case, he can appeal to the district commissioner. The same applied to the litigant. If the litigant is not pleased with the findings of

[51] N.A.E Calprof, 8/10/2 proclamation No of 1900

the "native court" he can as well apply to the district commissioner, who was empowered by the proclamation to order a retrial, annul or change the decision of the court[52].

Apart from the control exercised by the European political officer at district level, the High Commissioner retain for himself the authority to withdraw the warrant of establishment of any "native court" found wanting of abuse of power. Furthermore, he could equally withdraw the warrant of an individual member of the court. The High Commissioner was empowered by the proclamation to exercise the right of issuing regulation concerning the fees of the court, execution of the court's judgment and keeping of court records[2]. Although the courts were meant to be used as a local government with judicial legislative and executive powers, the judicial functions became more predominant over all other function. Afigbo advanced that:

> *This was derived from the belief of the administration that the greatest need of peoples of this region was some institution which enables them to settle the numerous inter-village palavers, which were believed to arise among them and which they were supposed to have no means of settling except by recourse to war and bloodshed*[53].

[52] N.A.E Calprof, 8/10/2 proclamation No of 1900
[53] Afigbo, Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule op cit, p. 86

This was among the illusions which the colonial administrators suffered, which consequently led them astray. There were several means of settling disputes between individuals, villages and village groups before the imposition of colonial rule[54] the main reason was that the British needed to take over the political control of the areas, so as to protect their economic interests. If actually the peoples had no means of settling dispute among themselves, why were they looking for the leaders of the people when they came. The people's ways of resolving problems for themselves was considered repugnant to the British ideas. And in order to feel the gaps created by their condemnation of the people's practices, the court came into existence. The first obligation of the courts should be to help them (the British) to achieve that for which they came to the interior. In doing this, the High Commissioner Ralph Moor issued an to instruction to district commissioners asking them

> *To take immediate action to form "Native courts for the settlement of individual and inter-tribal disputes, which is really the surest method of inducing the natives to take up the produce trade, for by it, a means is provided for settling all disputes and the lives of individuals are rendered safe and property secure. So that there is no seizing of either person or*

[54] See chapter two of this work for details

property on the roads, and the man who works to obtain produce is ensured of a return for his labour in that he can take his goods to the market and return safetly[55].

The desire to obtain those sylvan produce at a very cheap rate blinded the sight of the colonial administrators from seeing any good in the people's activities. One of those activities which they tagged obstacle to trade was that of the *Okonko*. Isichei eruditely advanced that:

Long-distance traders overcame natural, as well as social barriers. In some parts of Southern Igbo land, the Okonko society levied tolls in return for the maintenance of roads, a system of financing public work which obtain in England for countries. The important commercial centres of Obegu was approached through 'a broad, well-kept, beautiful avenue of trees[56].

These were the functions of the native institutions which the British could not preserved because they were blindfolded by their chauvinistic and imperialist interest. This practice was also Obtainable in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division. Consequently, Onwuzuruike in his survey of Uvuru history and culture, said

[55] C.S.O. 1/13, Despatch to F.O. and C.O. 1891-1906, quoted in Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs, op cit, p. 86

[56] Leonard, A Journey to Bende, quoted in Isichei: A History of the Igbo People, the Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1976, p.65.

The (Okonko) also tried to widen the foot paths that formed the high ways, to make them look neat and less dangerous. For these functions the (Okonko) charged fees[57].

The British came and took over these responsibilities performed by such institution as Okonko, with the aim of gaining the people's loyalty. This was out of their ignorance about the relationship between the (Okonko) and *Ama-ala*, the supreme organ of government. Their ill-intelligence led them to undermine the people's ability to understand the fact that social work, which was formerly meant for the welfare and progress of their communities is now meant to make their areas accessible to government agents and the agents of European merchant companies. They formerly took part in the debates concerning the welfare of their land. But when it became the sole responsibility of the government, and the people having been alienated in the debate concerning their affairs, they chose to be indifferent in the affairs of the government. Refusing to perform those functions, which they hitherto did under the *Ama-ala*, type of government, was considered as disobedience to the rules of colonial administration and must be dealt with through the courts. This was one of the reasons for which the judicial functions of the 'Native courts' overshadowed the executive and legislatives functions.

[57] E. Onwuzirike, A Survey of Uvru History and Culture, Enhance Publishers Ltd, Aba, 1991, p. 55

It is also important to note that the procedures of the court should be guarded by a detailed regulation, to enable the European political officer to understand it while presiding over it, and even reading through records made in his absence if there was no detailed regulation, he would not understand whether the decision made conformed with the rules. For this, more attention was paid to judicial functions of the court include the Warrant Chief System at the expense of other function such as legislative and executive. The outcome of this was that warrant chiefs enjoyed the judicial powers more than legislative and executive.

Each 'native court' had at least one clerk whose functions were to prepare list of cases, call members for sitting, make sure that the judgment book was signed, and keep a record of intake and disbursement of money. Every proceeding in the court begins with clerks filling the summons, and keeping the duplicate[58]. The duties of a clerk were highly specialized and tedious, but they demanded that he be able to read and write some English, at a time when writing carried overtones of magic for most natives[59]. The court clerks were the mediators between the illiterate chiefs and the district commissioner. Apart from the district commissioner, he understood at least some degree better than anyone else, the elaborates procedure of the courts.

[58] Laws of Southern Nigeria, 1900 and 1901.
[59] Gailey op cit, p. 87

He was always in the court, while the warrant chiefs only met for adjudication which was not often. He was also in charge of the uniform court messengers *Kotima* "Some of the chiefs even address him as master"[60] What it means was that the chiefs come and go but the court clerks remained. There had been court messengers in the court, before 1900, but the absence of a legal framework guiding the proceedings of the courts made it difficult to understand the true definition of their duties. They were mainly workers in the prison departments as warders. During this period, the process of serving summons was very dangerous. The policy was that the plaintiff should serve the summons to the defendant.

> *This ways of serving native court summonses which entails the parties to a quarrel confronting each other before it was settled, especially, in those early days when summons were novel and dreaded, often led to collisions between litigants and to actual or further breaches of the peace*[61].

The practice of the plaintiff serving the "Native court" summons was said to have furthered breaches of peace. Consequently, it was decided that summons be served by the court messengers. By virtue of their new responsibility, the messenger became another instrument of the court dreaded even more than the

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[60] Perham op cit, p. 202

Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 92

warrant chiefs. “In those day the worst thing one could do to his kinsman was to summon him to the Whiteman’s court”[62] Because of the role of the court messengers, they became known to the people as *Kotima* meaning court man. The responsibilities of the court clerks and those of the court messenger undermined the influence of the chiefs. Since the court, clerks sit permanently in the court whenever a messenger came; the assumption was that he had come to deliver a message from the clerk. Consequently, the clerks and messengers were more respected than the chiefs in the early years of the “Warrant chiefs” system. Because of this, Moor made it a rule in 1902 that any messenger serving court process or carrying executive messages from the court should go first to the warrant chief in the area[63].

The functions of the messengers as we have mentioned were defined in the new proclamation of 1902. This was known as native House Rule Proclamation of 1902. The British were filled with the thought that the house system which was obtainable in coastal areas was operative in the interior. The provisions of the House Rule proclamation can be summarized in the statement “any house member was restricted from doing anything without the consent of the house head”. This was considered disobedience. It carried a penalty, fine not exceeding fifty pounds (£50) or prison term not longer than one year. The same

[62] John Nnajiaku, 95 Oral Information, Umuagom Owatu, in Ezinihitte Mbaise, 02/05/07
[63] Afigbo, op cit, p. 92

proclamation provided that if the head of a house should neglect his customary responsibilities to his house members, he should face court charge.

The enactments of the House Rule, casted a serious doubt on whether the protectorate government under Moor really meant the business of abolishing slavery. The House Rule provided that any member of a house who was found wandering abroad without means of subsistence could be arrested and sent to the district commissioner for forcible return to the house head[64] in defence of the actions of Ralph Moor, Afigbo contended that:

> *Moor was no less opposed the slave trade and slavery than any other administrator before or after him. Largely out of a desire to eradicate these evils he had enacted the slavery proclamation of 1901-2. But he would not therefore watch with unconcern the dissolution of what he thought was responsible for the maintenance of law and order in the protectorate of southern Nigeria, the rock which he intended to anchor his ship of indirect rule*[65].

This defence was necessary more especially to those who believed so much, that Moor was in the right track. The view in this work is that whatever the British condemned in the African tradition was because it may not help to

[64] Laws of Southern Nigeria, op cit, p. 435-9
[65] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit

achieve their immediate objective. Slavery and slave trade was totally condemned by this enactment in the protectorate of the 1901-2 slavery proclamation, because the British needed to over-throw the commercial leadership of the Aro and consolidate their claim through the establishment of their rule. The House Rule proclamation was a pro-slavery rule. It came when the house system in the coastal areas were in the verge of disintegration.

Further steps were taken by Ralph Moor to strengthen the structure of the warrant chief system. This was by the enactment in 1903 of the road and creek (river) proclamation. The enactment of this law was rooted in the belief that prior to the advent of British rule, the people of this region engaged in communal labour for the up keep of their country, and that they should continue to do so under the British administration. It was yet another occasion of great illusion. The administrators argued that:

> *Throughout southern Nigeria, the inhabitants of each town were subject to control of a chief, and by tradition were liable to be called out by him for the purpose of maintaining roads linking them with neighboring villages, as well as for the construction and maintenance of their defence walls and trenches. The establishment of the British rule had removed the necessity for*

building and maintaining defence works, and the labour or part of the labour thereby saved was to be used in providing the need for the new era. For instance in better roads[66].

As we have said, this was part of the illusion that misled the British administrators in the formation and implementation of wrong policies in the protectorate. In the coastal area, where contact between the Nigerians (Africans) and the Europeans had earlier started centralize leadership had emerged. For instance, the reign of Opobu the Great in Bonny began in 1792[67]. But this was not the case across the frontiers of coastal areas, particularly in the area of Owerri Division. This showed that the government of the protectorate of Southern Nigeria relied on wrong intelligence in the enactment of road, creek (river) proclamation of 1903.

This proclamation conferred on the High commissioner, the power to declare that a waterway or road was to be maintained by the chief of the village through which the river, creek, or road crossed. In paper this information was transmitted to the chiefs through the district commissioners. While in practical reality, the information gets to the court clerk who would either send the court messenger to inform the chiefs or summon the chiefs. Once the information get to the warrant chief, he has the right to call out any man between fifteen and

[66] N.E.A. Calprof 9/2 Out-later from the high Commissioner No. 14 and 23 of 1902

[67] K.O. Dike, Trade and Politics in Niger Delta, 1830-1883, An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1956, p. 68

fifty years old or any woman between fifteen to forty years old, residing within his area of jurisdiction, to work on the road or waterway, for a length of time not exceeding six days in a quarter. Any chief who disobeyed this order as provided in this proclamation was liable to a fine of fifty pounds, or prison term not more than six months. While any individual who failed to adhere to this instruction as provided by the proclamation, was liable on conviction to fine of one pounds, or one month prison term[1] the execution of such orders as mentioned above, was part, if not all the executive functions of the warrant chiefs.

It was during the period when the road and creek (River) proclamation was in force that the colonial Native court was established at Owerri at a place which later became the divisional headquarters. Though the boundary of Owerri Division continued to expand as the Punitive expedition continued. The political officers continued to dominate the political landscape of Owerri Division; hence the area was served with the only one court. It is good however, to note that the duties of those headmen who were appointed from the Mbaise area by Mr. H.M. Douglas, the divisional commissioner of Owerri Division in 1903[68]. Were based on the provisions of the road and River proclamation.

[68] Laws of Southern Nigeria, 1908, p. 1226-8

There was also "Native Treasuries" as professor Afigbo had called it[69]. But this was no more than accounts department of the court. It has been discussed by Afigbo as if it was a separate institution from the court.

> *By means of these local treasuries native court houses were built, good roads were made linking village to village, rest houses were put up and maintained and chiefs and their headmen were rewarded for good work done. In general court clerks, messengers depended on this local treasuries for their pay, each official being a charge on the court he served. The chiefs too got their sitting fees from the same source*[70].

Whatever the name of the accounts section of the courts was called, the truth of the matter is that provision was made for the revenue expenditure of the court. But while we accept that the payment of any officer of the court depended on the revenue of the court, we consider it illusory to say that good roads linking villages to village were made from the same source. Most of the roads linking one village to the other in the Mbaise area were made through community self-help. And many others were built through the compulsory unpaid labour, which was made possible through implementation of the Road

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[69] N.A.E. Owdist 9/18/43, Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division

[70] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 97

and River Proclamation (Ordinance). It was said that when a decision was concluded to link Owerri with Umuahia through road, the chiefs of the areas through which the road would cross, divided the labour into geographical proportions, corresponding with their respective boundaries. For instance, chief Njamanze and his people had constructed the road up to Egbu, the boundary of his authority. And from there, Egbukole the chiefs of Egbu and his people took over, and continued up to their boundary with Emekeuku. From Emekeuku, chief Obi of Emekeuku constructed the road up to Azaraegbelu from there Chief Nwaturuocha and his people continued work to Ahiara. From where Chief Onyekwere, and his people, undertook labour on the road up to Avatu in Obowo. While the chief of Avutu took over and extended the road to Umuahia[71].

Though we cannot dispute the fact that the above mentioned colonial chiefs undertook work on the Owerri-Bende road as it was called, but it should be realized that before the appointment of these men as warrant chiefs, the combined column of Aro Filed Force which matched from Akwete and Oguta to Owerri, had to proceed to bend in December 1901 through this road[72]. This implies that what they did on this roads was expansion of the road. It is also important to note that it was through this route that palm produce was taken to

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[71] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 81

[72] See Chapter Three for details about Military activities in the area. See also Nwabara op cit, p. 103

the Royal Niger trading post at Oguta from the Mbaise area[73]. However, the application of Road and creek (River) proclamation had led to the success of this venture by the chiefs.

The structure of the court was such that treasuries were under the control of the divisional commissioner. Sometime the spending of the court fund was made only if approval was given by the High Commissioner. Though courts were empowered to take on any improvement work that would not cost beyond five pounds, it was done with the approval of the political officer, who ascertains that the spending would not have negative effect on the financial position of the court. If a court want to do any work that would cost more than five pounds, it has to seek the sanction of the High Commisioner[74]. From the explanations made here, it should be noted that the control of revenue of the courts were not in the hands of the chiefs.

The only way through which the chiefs were involved in the control of finance of the court was, that the consent of the court member were sought before any money was spent on any other issue other than on the clerical staff. What this meant in reality was that the clerical staff were not under the control of the chief who may as the case may be, be the president of the court. Changes continued to take place in the structure of the 'Native courts'. In 1906, the

[73] See Chapter Two of this work for the details about the economic activities (trade) in the area

[74] C.S.O. 1/3, Dispatch to F.O. and C.O. op cit

Southern Nigerian protectorate and colony of Lagos, and protectorate were amalgamated and was placed under a Governor. In the same year, new political units were created to enhance administration. These were namely Westerns, central, and Eastern provinces. Provincial commissioners were appointed to take change of these provinces. The desire to give new appointees extensive responsibilities, brought about the increase in their control over the 'native courts'[75]. This was provided for by the 'Native court' Ordinance of 1906. The ordinance, provided for ex-officio members of the court. The provincial commissioner and assistant district commissioners were made ex-officio members of the 'native court'. Whenever the provincial commissioner, district commissioner and assistant, district commissioner presided over the 'Minor court', the status of the court at the point of their sitting becomes that of the 'Native council'. This simply means that whenever the provincial commissioners, the district commissioner or the assistant district commissioner sit as the president of a minor court, the court exercised. The jurisdiction of a 'Native council'. This was a slight departure in the structure of the warrant chief system, as provided by the previous proclamation and ordinances before 1906[76].

> *The right of review, of and interference into court activities and decisions by the British officials remained, and every*

[75] Nwabara op cit, p. 168. Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule op cit, p. 100-1. See also Gailey op cit, pp. 60, 61
[76] Ibid

'Native court' became subject to the orders of the supreme court[77].

All the decisions taken on criminal matters, which attracted above twenty pounds of fine or three months imprisonment, were listed by the court clerk and sent to the Supreme Court on monthly basis. The judges could without argument amend or annul the decision hitherto taken by the minor court.

As Gailey aptly put it, native court thus became after 1906 not just customary court, but the lowest level of a British court[78].

The structural organization of the executive aspect of the warrant chief system or what was called 'Native court' system requires more attention than the judicial aspect. By virtue of the provisions of road and river Ordinance, the warrant chiefs were more or less messenger used to transmit the orders of the High Commission to the people of his area.

All messages from the government to Warrant Chiefs passed from the District Officer to the court Clerk. Then the later either sent for the chiefs or sent a court messenger to convey the message or instruction to him. Theoretically, the warrant chief then carried out the order. In practice, however each warrant chiefs pracelled out the area under his control and appointed a headman or messenger known among the Ibo as Edimami. It was these

[77] Ibid
[78] Ibid, p. 62

headmen who in fact formed the ultimate agents of carrying out orders of the government[79].

To say that the warrant chiefs appointed headmen may be an attempt to exaggerate the role of the warrant chief to make them fit in what was called indirect rule. The history of the headmen in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division predated that of the warrant chiefs. Evidence available to us shows that between 1903 and 1904 H.M. Douglas the district commissioner of the new Owerri Division went with a patrol to the Mbaise area and laid the foundation of a system of government. He appointed headmen and made them responsible for reporting any serious breaches of the peace. And to turn out his people to make roads[80]. This goes to a great extent to show that messages were passing from the court clerks through the court messengers to the headmen. While those messages received by the warrant chiefs were further transmitted to the headmen for execution.

Court messenger's presence was one of the things that brought the aura of government to the people and not that of the chiefs. When the people see the *Kotima* court messengers, there was this conclusion in their minds that *Nwa-beke* the white man had sent message. Who knows what? Some people who

[79] Afigbo, Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 104

[80] N.A.E., C.S.O. 27937, Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division; See also EP 8840, Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans

knew that they committed offense immediately disappeared into the bush[81]. Afigbo was apt in stating that;

> *The headmen, in cooperation with these court messengers, arrested criminals against whom warrant had been issued, served summonses, recruited force labour under the Road and creek Ordinance, gathered in carriers, saw to the maintenance of the rest houses, and ensured that a touring government officer was provided with water firewood and the like*[2].

He further stated that it was the duty of the headmen to follow their warrant chiefs to court whenever it was his turn to sit[83]. This was based on personal willingness of the headman, he was not under any obligation to do so, and as such cannot be referred to as duty.

The colonial administrators were very much aware that without the uniformed court messengers, there was little the warrant chiefs could achieve in terms of carrying out their executives functions as provided by the various proclamation before 1914. The influence of the warrant chiefs was based mainly on their participation in the arbitration of cases in the 'Native court'. When the court was the most dreaded of the British institutions after the conquest. But the increased control of the supreme court over the 'Native courts', as provided by

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[81] Nnajiaku, op cit

[82] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 104

[83] Ibid

the 1906 ordinance, drastically reduced the influence of the chiefs whose source of influence was the 'Native court'. It became certain to people that they can proceed to the supreme court through the help of a lawyer who was hitherto not allowed to practice in the 'Native court[84].'

Between the period 1906 and 1914, the court clerks had taken over the helm of affairs in the "native courts'. Within this period, the district areas were still expanding. For example, the Owerri District area had a system that made it difficult for the political officer to be present in all the meetings of the court. In 1909, Owerri District area was divided into administrative units called court area. These courts were Owerri 'Native council' which had been there Okpala Minor court, Nguru Minor court, Oguta Minor court, Ngor Minor court and Omokpo Minor Court as shown in Map 6. As we have noted earlier, the Mbaise area fell under the jurisdiction of the Nguru and Okpala Minor courts. The Owerri 'Native Council' which the whole district area formerly attended became a district court.

By the provisions of the 1906 ordinance, appeal from the above mentioned courts rested with the supreme court in criminal matter involving about or more than twenty pounds of fine[85]. However, the Owerri Native council was yet a court of higher jurisdiction over these minor courts, Evidence

[84] Laws of the Colony of Southern Nigeira, 1908, p. 1272
[85] Ibid

available to us showed that the 'Native council' at Owerri also functioned as an appellate court to these minor court. The 'Native council' at Owerri lacked equitable representation of the district area, in 1909, non of the members of the minor court areas as mentioned above was a member of the 'Native Council'. For instance, the people of Mbaise under the Nguru and Okpala court were not represented in the 'Native council' at Owerri,[86] The Nguru court which was established to serve the people of the area was immediately closed, and the premises given to the patrol theme that ravaged the area from 1909 to 1911[87]. This became a problem for those who had been prohibited by laws of the protectorate government to settle their disputes through traditional means.

> *The only means of administering justice in these territories are through a commissioners court or by "native courts" and though in an unsettled territories. The district officers are allowed to assist and advice chiefs in cases brought before them as it must be understood that this is an unauthorized method. It is not one to be encouraged, but should be done away with a soon as practicable*[88].

Between 1909 and 1911 when the Nguru court was not in operation, the chiefs from the area began to impersonate the district commissioner holding court

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[86] N.A.E., Rivprof Owerri Native Council Re-organization 3/4/9

[87] The Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara op cit

[88] Calprof 9/2, quoted in Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 91

sessions in their houses[89]. While some of them were busy extorting money from ignorant natives[90].

Given to the institutionalization of these minor courts in the Owerri district area, more chiefs were made to carry out the decision of the colonial government. And from 1901 to 1912, the 'Native courts were said to have done well by those who instituted them. This was consequent upon the number of cases most of these courts had handled. But this only exposed the fact that most officers who were involved in the establishment of these courts were not only ignorant but unintelligent. They undermined the fact that those cases that were coming to 'Native courts' such as Nguru or Okpala which covers a very large area would have been settled by the *Ama-ala* or other adhoc agencies in those communities that made up the court area. Furthermore, the people were bound by pain of penalty to resolve their disputes in the 'Native Court'.Some of these cases that were recorded in the 'Native Court' were those instituted by some ambitious chiefs for just no cause. There is no statistics to show the number of cases that were settled by those indigenous institutions in these various areas that made up a court area before the advent of the British. Therefore large number of recorded cases is not a yardstick, for measuring the people's acceptance of 'Native courts.'

[89] N.A.E., Rivprof 8/4/6, Petition of Chief Unlaka of Umunama, Nguru Court, 1916; See also N.A.E. Rivprof 8/2/182, Petition of Chief Nwaturuocha of Nguru, 14/4/14

[90] N.A.E., Rivprof 8/2/182, Petition of Chief Ojeru of Nguru for restoration of warrant, 12/10/16

The outcomes of these experiments were almost a total failure. The people who received warrant of authority from the British to exercise control over their people were seen often incarcerated for one crime or the other, making the people to disassociate themselves from them. Because of the prison custody which came together with the 'Native court' at Owerri, Owerri was christened *Ama-muo* the place of spirit and not worthy to be. There was a popular saying that (Onye akpola nwanne ya eje Owerri, Owerri bu ama muo) meaning that nobody should arrange for the arrest of his brother to Owerri, that Owerri is the place of spirit (evil). The real weakness of the British lower court before 1912 was the same issue central in the formation of their idea of indirect rule. There was the presupposition that the system of chiefs was universally applicable to eastern provinces. In the Mbaise area of Owerri division there was hardly a man you can call a chief in the British sense.

The failure of the warrant chief system started from the beginning of its conception, hence it has relied on the erroneous belief which we have already mentioned. Perham observed that:

> *In the absence of proper executive authority, the court was used in this improper capacity and administrative officer naturally communicated their orders to the one permanent and literate*

individual within it, the clerk, some of the chiefs even addressed him as m'master'[91].

This was one of the most important ingredients in the structure of the warrant chief system that helped to bring it down. Later in this chapter, we are going to show how the idea of warrant chiefs system came to be the court clerk system. This should be more comprehensive if examined in a review of the theory and practice of the indirect rule system in some part of Eastern Nigeria. However before 1913, the system had been doomed to fail. Most administrators blamed it on the indigenous lawyers who were according to the provisions of the 1906 ordinance, allowed to practice in the district courts. Many scholars who wrote years after colonial rule concurred to this conclusion. Okonjo stated that

By 1910-11 therefore, the southern Nigeria government's credibility or legitimacy had received severe knock from the strange combination of hostiles forces. Lawyers, their touts, and their lordship of the supreme court had, acting not in concert but for their own varying reasons, combines to arrest the initiative completely from the government and its political officers and to reduce it to importance[92.]

[91] Perham op cit, p. 202

[92] I.M. Okonjo, British Administration in Nigeria, 1900-1950, A Nigerian View, Nok Publishers Ltd, New York

In a similar vein, Gailey advanced that:

> *The system, despite the stated opposition of the government to term trained lawyers operating in native courts, allowed such lawyers to represent clients appealing to the Supreme Court. This ran the litigants deeper into debt to the money lenders, many of whom were clerks of Native courts* [93.]

Both the administrators and the scholars that supported them, ignored the fact that the protracted litigation which was witnessed after the 1900 ordinance, was caused by the peoples quest to establish their innocence in cases. However, it is important to note that in the pre-British days, people had enough liberty to establish their innocence regardless of its cost. For example, a case which was lost by a party in dispute at the kindred level may be taken to the village for review, while that of the villages was taken to the Juju or deities. The Supreme Court under colonial administration came and assumed the role of the deities and oracles and the lawyer's assumed that of the deities' priests.

However, it is not an overstatement to say that the practice was heading towards undermining the British interest in tropical Africa, which led to the introduction of the deceitful system of administration called warrant chief system (indirect rule). To prevent this, there had to be a reform. This reform

[93] Gailey, op cit, p. 65

which affected the foundation of the structure of the system came after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates in January 1 1914[94] (as shown in Map 5). A lot of changes followed amalgamation, but we are only interested on those that affected the structure of the warrant chiefs system.

One of these reforms that came in 1914 was the introduction of a new native court ordinance. According to the new ordinance, the District Commissioner was no longer a member of the native court let alone presiding over it. This was backed by the argument that it would enable the institution to evolve into independent tribunal, and the members to acquire a source of responsibility. These ends would not be attained if the native court continues to be dominated by the presence of a European[95]. In the views of Afigbo, this change was for the Eastern provinces, probably the most radical departure from the pre 1914 arrangement[96]. The radical nature of this change seems to have appeared only in the paper containing the ordinance. In the Eastern provinces particularly in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division where the presence of the political officers (the district commissioner) in the court before 1914 was rare,

There was no much difference from the pre 1914 days of the warrant chiefs system, when the district commissioners deliberate neglected their duties for fear of being found wanting by the officials of higher echelon.

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[94] Ibid, p. 67

[95] N.A.E., OW 225/14, Native Courts in Southern Nigeria

[96] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 132

It tended to incapacitate the divisional commissioner, who feared that his intervention in a case might be set aside by the puisne judge on the grounds of some observe legal technicalities. They believe of certain political officers that the Supreme Court would scrutinize all cases tended to make them neglect their duties[97.]

It is considered here that the restriction of the political officers from the native court had already been desired by them; hence their conspicuous absence from the courts. To this effect Afigbo added that

The failure of the political officers to attend meetings of the court regularly had also given the constitution of the warrant chiefs an unforeseen twist. It had led to a situation in which the court and its proceedings were dominated by the court-clerks-an evil which was to grow from strength to strength and, in spite of all checks, was to attain alarming height after 1914[98.]

The twist of the warrant chiefs system to court clerk system would be examined later.

In Owerri Division, there were about eighty nine sitting of the court in the first quarter of 1914, the district commission was present only in twelve occasions[99.] What was funny about the reform was that both district and resident

[97] N.A.E. OW 122/16, Memorandum on Native Courts
[98] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 109
[99] N.A.E, OW 122/16 op cit

commissioners who were restrained from being a member or of presiding over a 'native court' were made to attend the sittings. As we have noted earlier, they were not striped of the total right to intervene in the proceedings.

For instance, the ordinance ended the Supreme Court's jurisdiction over the 'Native courts' after 1914, the realm of the Supreme Court was restricted to the urban areas. Although 'native courts' were still required to execute supreme court decision, and there could still be appeal through channels to the supreme court. Or even to the District Commissioners court. The 1914 ordinance did not prevent officers from visiting these courts. On his visit to these courts, he sat down and carries out a review of cases where he believed that justice was not done; this could also be on the request of the litigant. One of such visit was the one that took the district officer to the Okpala court of Owerri Division on the 7th of March 1927[100]. Another visit of the district officer took place on the 22nd of August 1927[101]. There was in fact nothing to show that the district commissioners did not interfere in the affairs of the native court.

Our view in this work is that it was a mere theoretical work to say that the district commissioners were restricted from interfering in the proceedings of the "Native Court" when the power to set aside the decisions and review cases in the native courts was still retained. From what Mr. Nwoko of the Okpala court

[100] N.A.E. Owdist 9/13/31, Letter from Mr. Nwoko to the District Commissioner, Owerri Division 8/3/27

[101] N.A.E. Owdist 9/13/31, Memorandum from District Officers, Owerri to Native Court Clerk of Okpala No. 095/51/1927, 12/8/27

area stated in his letter to district officer, it does appeared that there was always crowd of people when the district officer sat for review of cases[102]. This shows that it was a common practice. And also it revealed the people's dissatisfaction on the decisions made in the court presided over by the (new men) warrant chiefs.

Another aspect of the reform that had adverse effect on the native courts was the abolition of the position of travelling supervisors, who formerly served as check to corrupt courts. Not only that, the warrant chiefs used the opportunity to exhibit their ineffectiveness in the assignment given to them by the government, some of the chiefs showed lack of interest in the work they were given. The district commissioner who toured the court areas of Owerri Division in the last quarter of 1916 stated as follows in his report.

> *All the native courts have been visited during the quarter. I have referred to the slackness exhibited by many of the chiefs. I find that after their time of sitting as members, of court has come to an end, they are apt to lose interest in the court until their turn of drowing fees come round again*[103].

The implication of this is that in spite of all the reforms, the people of the area even the warrant chiefs were still seeing it as akin and strange.

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[102] Ibid

[103] A.D. Roberts (ed), The Colonial Moment in Africa, Essay on the Movement of Minds and Materials, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1990, p. 79

Furthermore, people of the areas, particularly those under the jurisdiction of resorted to settling their disputes out of court. This reflected in the court revenue of the last quarter of 1916.

This reflected in the court revenue of the last quarter of 1916. The district commissioner stated that the 'native court' of Okpala showed a decrease of £98 which later facts tend to confirm my opinion that cases in this area are being tried out court[104]. The need to bring the administration of the Eastern provinces in line with what was put in place in Northern Nigeria by Lugard, led to the introduction of the native authority ordinance. This revealed that Lugard could not escape from the same illusion which his counterparts who laid the foundation of the administration in Southern Nigeria suffered from. He deceived himself to believe that in the absence of chiefs of equal standing with those in the north, the administration, could create them and confer on them native authority. But the difficulty was manifest in the fact that by 1918, all the native courts in Owerri province were constituted native authorities. These include the Nguru and Okpala courts which exercised jurisdiction over Mbaise. While the Nguru court was the "native authority" over the major portion of Mbaise area, the Okpala court was the native authority over the Oke clan and Southern part of Ezinihitte clan. It is important to note that one of the aims of

[104] Ibid

introducing the "native authority" ordinance in the Eastern provinces was to create institutions such as district chiefs. In his figment of imagination called political memorandum Lugard strongly stated as follows.

> *If there is no chief who exercises authority beyond his own village, he (the D.O) will encourage any chief of influence and character to control a group of village, with a view of making him chief of a district later, if he shows ability for the charge*[106].

What it meant was that a chief would be made from any of the villages or village group as the case may be to exercise overriding influence over the entire Owerri district area, made up of 137 Village groups[107] those from the Mbaise area were about 44 village group[108]. By 1914, all these village groups had been given a chief by the colonial administration. Before 1918, most of these village groups had more than one chief Nguru for example had about four or more chiefs who were all members of the court. And the major characteristic of the warrant chiefs system was that it conferred on the chiefs, old and young equal right in the court.

The influence of the first three chiefs appointed from the Mbaise area, namely Nweturuoeha of Nguru, Onyekwere of Ahiara, and Chilaka of Umunama could not be extend beyond their immediate village, or village group

[106] F.D. Lugard, Political Memorandum No. 1, 1918, p. 11

[107] There is a confussion on the Colonial useage of the term village. For our own use we have designated an area constituted by few kindreds a village while an area made up of more than two of the described units is referred to as village-group

[108] N.A.E. Owelist 9/0/2 Southern Provinces, 1921 Census; See also A.K. Chapman, Political Development in Eastern Nigeria, The Role of Ethnic Unions, Ph.D Thesis submitted to the Department of Political Science, Columbia University, 1976, p. 161

as the case may be. The only exception to this rule was the case of Iwuala Nwichi of Akpokwu and Osuagwu Oloko of Umudim. At the demise of Osuagwu, chief Iwuala became the representative of both areas[108]. Therefore, the appointment of these chiefs or others to rule over these large areas would mean the withdrawal of the warrants of some other members of the court. This was not possible in the Mbaise area and indeed in the whole of Owerri province. Therefore another provision was made. The statement read:

> *It will be noticed that a native tribunal may be constituted as a native authority. This however is only done in those areas that have not reached the tribal stage at which the authority of single paramount chief is recognized. The native authority is the executive power as distinct from the native court, the judicial powers, and it is only in unorganized communities that the native court in its collective capacity is also the native Authoority[110].*

By 1918, the political officers in Owerri and Ogoja provinces had ignored Lugard ideas of separate 'Native Authority' and "Native Court" and gazetted all the "Native courts" in the areas Native Authority. There was no much difference observable in the Mbaise area in terms of the influence of the chief following

[109] Address of welcome presented by the Akpodim Community Aboh Mbaise, on the occasion of the installation of Colonel D.S. Ounewe "Okonze of Akpodim, 5/3/77

[110] N.A.E. EP 3759, Native Authority Ordinance, 1966

the change from what was known as Minor Court of Okpala and Nguru to the status of "Native Authority." The efforts to realize this was further thwarted by the exclusion of the political officers from the "Native court" membership or presidentship. The court was a British institution and was seen so by the indigenous Mbaise person. Partly also because the chiefs could not meet the primary requirement which had practically placed them permanently under the more literate and more technically opportuned staff (court clerk) the chief could not exercise more power than that which was provided by Road, creek and river ordinance. These orders loomed very loud on papers than in practical reality. Issues like the maintenance of roads creeks market areas were not new to the people. They were among the social responsibilities of the *Ama-ala*, which individuals participated in with fear of pain of penalties. Even under the colonial administration the *Ama-ala* in the Mbaise area organized the weeding of their markets, cleaning of their ponds, which was mainly annual. In most cases where the chiefs try to exhibit the level of political influence expected of them by those who instituted them, they did it arbitrarily, making them to appear very corrupt. This would be examined later in this works. The structure of the warrant chief system remained partly the same from its introduction until when it was brought down in 1929 following the women's revolts. The structure

of the Warrant Chief System, which was of course the structure of the native court system was influenced by the believe of the British officers on the spot. They thought the greatest need of the people of the region was adjudication. This plays down the executive, legislative, and administration ramifications. Consequently, the Warrant Chiefs became just a means of conveying government orders.

As we noted earlier, the Warrant Chief System structured as a native court system. Therefore, from the early days of the system until 1914, the D.O. or the A.D.O. was at the upper echelon of the system by virtue of the position in the court. But from 1914 upward, these officers were theoretically removed from presiding over the affairs of the native courts, yet power was reserved for them to do so when necessary.

THE MAKING OF WARRANT CHIEFS IN MBAISE

The method through which the British selected their local agents, the (warrant chiefs) was one important factor that helped to undermine the actualization of the idea of indirect rule into a practical reality in the area.

> *It has often been asserted that the warrant chiefs system was established because the British discovered that there were no chiefs in Eastern Nigeria. This view is incorrect. The system*

was established precisely because at the time of its inception and for many years after the British thought that chieftaincy was, or could be made, the cornerstone of Eastern Nigeria social organization[111].

The above statement is seriously ambiguous. If the British thought that chieftaincy was the cornerstone of the Eastern Nigeria's social organization as one part of the statement conveys, would there be any need of creating the new men? The last part of the statement, which stated that chieftaincy could be made the cornerstone of the Eastern Nigeria social organization tended to be supportive to the assertion Afigbo had himself vehemently rejected. However, a clear examination of the mode of selection, which the British used in their selection of these chiefs in the Mbaise area would go a long way to illuminate what constitute their understanding of the indigenous social organization of the area.

There are no good records on the selection of the warrant chiefs. We know that after 1914, the method used were quite arbitrary with each political officer establishing his criteria. Not until 1923 was there an order from higher echelons, asking

[111] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs System in Southeastern Nigeria, Direct or Indirect, op cit, p. 690

District Commissioners to enquire into the traditional status of the Warrant Chiefs[112].

There would be no need for this type of instruction if the warrant chiefs so appointed had appeared to be representative. Or if the institution had been in existence before the imposition of colonial rule. The first warrant chief to be appointed from the Mbaise area was chief Nwaturuocha of Nguru. The evidence available showed that he was made a warrant chief not based on the consent of the Nguru people, but on the recommendation of his friend chief Njamanze of Owerri[113].

Like chief Njamanze, some of these chiefs were said to have provided a local guide to the expeditionary forces on their way to Arochukwu[114]. In the wake of brutal war to avenge the death of the British doctor who was killed by the Mbaise people during the pacification of their area, some men were identified to have provided local guide to the colonial forces. Prominent among these were Onyekwere of Ahiara and Chilaka of Umunama. Njoku contended that Onyekwere Njoku followed the colonial soldiers to any destination they desired[115]. In the case of Chilaka Ukpo of Umumama, he was said to have aided the colonial soldiers in the neighboring communities particularly the Oboamo

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[112] Gailey, op cit, p. 63

[113] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 64

[114] Progress Report on Nguru Nwekeoha Community Aboh Mbaise LGA to the Speaker, Imo State House of Assembly, 6/2/2008

[115] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 13

area[116]. And it was on this account that the colonial administration in Owerri rewarded both with warrants.

Another chief who gained recognition through this means was Chief Nwigwe Akwanwa of Ife. Nwigwe was said to have been recommended to the colonial officials by his friend and trading partner, chief Okereke of Okpala. Consequently, he was the one who conducted the patrol theme round his area. His appointment was in no way through the popular consent of his people. And Umoruo village in Ife (the village of chief Nwigwe) was not the most senior village in the traditional order of senority[117].

Social relationship which had been in existence before the imposition of British over the Mbaise area was among the factors that led to the arbitrary choice of warrant chiefs in the early days of colonial administration in Mbaise. For example, Umuchigbu family in Oboma Nguru was the maternal home of both chief Onyekwere and chief Nwaturnocha of Nguru. Therefore, when the administrative officers at Owerri were looking for an able bodied young man who would provide a guide to gather intelligence on the killing of the colonial doctor, Nwaturuocha who was already in the good book of Mr. Douglas, (the District Commissioner) recommended his cousin chief Onyekwere, a youth of about thirty years old[118]. This responsibility given to Onyekwere by the colonial

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[116] Rivprof 8/4/6 op cit

[117] George Nwigwe, 91, Oral Interview, Umuoruo, Ife, 19/01/09

[118] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 13

administrator, through his cousin, Nwaturuocha was the one of betraying his indigenous society. However, it earned him the position of being colonial chief in the area.

Chief William Obasi of Okeohia Amaumara was another good example of those chiefs who gained the favour of colonial administrative officers in the same manner as Onyekwere. William Obasi was said to have married three out of his thirty five wives from the families of three different warrant chiefs in the Mbaise area. One of them Oyiridiya was a sister to chief Nwaturuocha of Nguru. The second one came from the family of chief Onyekwere of Ahiaira, and the other from the family of chief Abii of Eziudo[119]. Through chief Nweturuocha, chief Obasi was able to gain the favour of the District Commissioner at Owerri consequently, Obasi became one of those colonial apologists, pointing out the hiding places of the resistant groups and clamping down on them[120].

The colonial administrators played down the issue of whether or not these individuals were popular among their people. Scholars who wrote many years after the warrant chiefs painted the issue as if the British were searching for men of integrity, who enjoy good working relationship and respect for the ethic of their societies. This is far from the truth. Most of the warrant chiefs from the

[119] Prince Iron Ucheakolam Obasi, 64, the son of Chief William Obasi of Amaumara, Oral Internview, Okohia Amumara 21/01/09.
[120] Ibid

Mbaise area were appointed in the period when resentment to the British and their activities was still high. As it has been shown in chapter three of this work, struggle continued in the Mbaise area uptill 1916. The British were then looking for warrior-like men who were ready to dump their traditional beliefs for the new order of things.

In the Akpokwu area in 1909, when the people were asked to put forward a man that would represent the government, the people gathered on the appointed day and proclaimed Nwole as their choice. But Nwole declined and immediately recommended Iwuala Nwichi, whose physical appearance matched the desire of the District Commissioner. He (the district commissioner) did not ask question on the status of Iwuala. The only reason for accepting him was that chief Iwuala had very sharp eyes[121]. The clever behavior of Chief Iwuala was said to be due to his experience as an ex-slave. Iwuala was said to have been sold into slavery through one Ogudoro who was a friend to Aro slave merchants to Abakiliki. Nobody knew whether he bought his freedom or escaped from those that bought him. But the magnitude with which he embarked in the slave trading after his comeback, would compel one to suggest that he was sent back by the slave dealers, to be their agent, and this he did unequivocally[122]. In about the same time, chief Madugba of Uvuru was selected to be a warrant chief

[121] R.O. Nwachukwu, 84, Oral Interview, Umunumu 17/01/09
[122] Deumso Nwachukwu, 84, Oral Interview, Eziala, 19/02/09

simply because he was the chief priest of their village deity. He was neither the oldest person nor his village the most senior among the groups that were brought under his authority[123]. Chief Okpkoro of Onicha was not different. Immediately after his return from the coastal area, where he was sold as slave, he began to demand that his people present him to the District Commissioner for warrant. The refusal of Onicha people to heed to his call, led to series of problems. With the little knowledge he acquired from the coastal area on broken English, he was able to send information in pretext to Owerri against his people. One of such information led to what was known to the people of Mbaise as (Ogu-Okpokoro) that is Okpokoro's war. Okpokoro reported to the District Commissioner that the Afo-onicha market, which was closed in respect to the killing of Doctor Stewart had been reopened by the Onicha people without the permission of the government. And that when he advised them not to do so, they threatened to kill him (Okpokoro) in the same way they killed the British Doctor. Without inquiry, the district commissioner concluded that the Onicha people had prepared to disrupt the activities of government, consequently, a punitive patrol should be sent into Onicha in 1916. The patrol dealt a devastating blow to the area[124]. By 1924, Okpokoro had not only become a warrant chief, but had reached the height of the president of the court at Nguru[125].

[123] Madugba, 60, Oral Interview, Egbelu Uvuru, 21/02/09, The grandson of Warrant Chief Madgba

[124] V.U. Njoku, 96, Oral Interview, Onicha, 24/10/08; E.N.J. Nwokocha, 79, Oral Interview, Udo, 15/11/08

[125] N.A.E., Owdist Register of the Warrant Chiefs, 1921-25

Another chief from the Mbaise area who was rewarded with warrant for the services he rendered to the government during the war of pacification in the area, was chief Onyewuchi of Udo. Because of the role he made the Udo people to play in the government's struggle against the Umuosisi village in Obizi, Udo was recognized as friendly town to the government. Udo people used the colonial forces as their shield in their rift with the people of Umuosisi in Obizi. During this struggle, the Udos joined the British in their battle against the Obizi, during which people were killed and many captured. One of the wives of Adiukwa of Umuosisi was forcefully taken by chief Onyewechi. While in the Obizi area,[126] Mr. Iroapali an indigene of Obizi was assisting the government forces, and in return he was made a warrant chief over the Obizi area. To the colonial officers those men played noble role and they were rewarded. But to the indigenous societies, these men were no more than saboteurs. In the words of Njoku,

> *The chiefs in Mbaise without exception played the noble role of intimating the colonial officers of all the events and situations in the various communities in the interior of Mbaise*[127].

Inspite of all the changes provided for by the different ordinance and proclamations, these men continued to occupy their positions, until 1929 when

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[126] Sir Alphoeus Adinkwu, 73, Oral Interview, Umuosisi Obizi, 30/10/08

[127] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 80

the women's revolt forced the government to remove them. Some reasons have been given on why it was difficult for the administrative officers to choose warrant chiefs who had at least some sanction to rule. Most scholars have attributed it to the atmosphere of the conquest.

> *The general atmosphere of the early years of the colonial regime was thickly charged with mutual suspicious mutual ignorance and fear on the side of the people and government*[128].

The question to ask here is, does it mean that there would have been chiefs, if there was no war. And the answer is that there was no man of such status who could manage the political affairs of the people in Mbaise area. If the British did not want to charge the atmosphere with mutual suspicious, there would have been no need to remove Sir Cloude MacDonald as a consul General, and replaced him with a man like Ralph Moor, who was so much convinced that the success of the British in Igboland relies on brute force. MacDonald believed that the extension and consolidation of British should be by right of treaty. And that the Igbo did not acknowledge any paramount chief. It was to this effect that he requested for 500 treaty forms from the foreign officer in 1895. MacDonald proposed to enter into negotiations with the Igbo group with the view of establishing friendly relationship with them[129].

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[128] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 66

[129] Anene, op cit, p. 162

Therefore it is our opinion here that when the British policy of peaceful penetration by treaty was changed, by the removal of MacDonald, the choice of their local agents also change from men of honor who enjoyed the general acceptance from their people to those who did what they want. The manner with which the colonial officials selected their local representatives was an important factor, which made the loyalty of the people to remain in doubt from the inception of the warrant chiefs system to the radical charge that occurred after the women's revolt in 1929.

CONSOLIDATION OF BRITISH RULE, 1904-1930

After the creation of Owerri District Headquarter on 11 May 1902, 'Native court' was established, and warrant chiefs were appointed. But as the chiefs appointed did not in any way wield any measure of traditional authority over the people, the government decided to booster their powers by artificial means[130] knowing this, the Higher commissioner said that "the chiefs requires strong support from the government, as I fear they have no control over their boys"[131].

Having failed to convince the colonial officer on this sphere, he turned to religious strategy. He decided to use the Christian Missionaries to fine-tune their warrant chiefs system.

[130] Ekechi, op cit, p. 206
[131] Ibid p. 206

The invitation and movement of the Christian missionaries from Onicha to Owerri District area is an interesting history. But before we go into the discussion, it would be better to cast a little light on penetration of the Christian missionaries into Igbo land.

THE COMING OF THE CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES INTO IGBO LAND

Altruistic and philanthropic claims apart, it must be recognized that the Christian missionary enterprise in Igbo land, as well as elsewhere in West Africa, was not unrelated to political and economic charges that had taken place in Europe before the formation of the church missionary society in England in 1799[132]. There had been significant economic and political charges. For instance, by 1970, the British textile industries had been revolutionized and output increased. This led to the fall of the cotton yarn price up to 90 percent, and the British exporters were able to flood the world with their product[133]. Before this period too, the slaves of Igbo extract who had bought their freedom had began to clamor for the abolition of slave trading and slavery. This took the form of intellectual war. The leaders among them were Ottaboh Cuguano, and Olanda Eguiano who was known as Gustavus Vassa the African.

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[132] B.C. Nwankiti, The Growth and Development of the Church of Nigeria, Anglican Communion, Ihem Davis Press, Owerri, 1998, p. 1

[133] S. Modell, The History of Western World, Prentice Hall, California, 1975, p. 321

Cugoano's work "Thoughts and sentiments on evils of slavery" was the first contribution of an African in the debate about slave trade. This work was published in 1787[134]. Two years after Cuguano had published his work, Egiuano wrote his biography by himself in 1789. According to Acholonu,

> *Equianno presented himself not only as a victim of slavery, but more importantly, he gave the first detailed description of socio-economic, cultural and political life in an African village from the point of view of an African and an ex-slave*[135].

His voice became an effective instrument in the anti-slavery campaign. For example, in 1781 when Luke Collingwood captain of the slave ship Zong ordered the drowning of 133 sick slave, so as to claim insurance benefit, Eqiuano humiliated, and made it open to the British public as an eye witness. As Acholonu had put it. This gave teeth to the abolitionists movement in Great Britain[136]. The most notable abolitionists who were invigorated by Eqiuano's comments include, Thomas Clerkson a college student in Cambridge, the prolific reverend James Ramsay and William Wilberforce, the powerful orator and parliamentarian[137].

This anti-slave campaign continued until when it was officially abolished in 1804 in Britain. Most African who had gained their freedom was deported to

[134] C.O. Acholonu, Igbo Origin of Olaudah Equaino, the Facts and Falacies, Vol. I, No. 1, January, 2008, p. 97
[135] Ibid
[136] Ibid
[137] Ibid

the Sierra Leone. These ex-slaves had all been converted to Christians. The purpose of bringing the freed Africans back to Africa was for them to come and participate in the production of those agricultural produce required by the British firms as suggested by Olaudah Eqiuano earlier before the abolition of slave trade[138]. This idea was supported by other individuals like Thomas Fowell Buxton, the humanitarian who claimed that the best way to stop the slave trade and regenerate Africa was through the establishment of legitimate commerce with Africa rulers. "by introduction commerce, civilization and Christianity a blow would be struck at the nefarious traffic in human beings from which it could not recover[139].

Following the declaration of Sierra Leone a British protectorate in 1808, the British anti-slave squadron landed their receptive from London Jamaica and Novo-Scotia who had been converted to Christians took the missionary work to a water shade point in 1883. By that year, Freetown had 23 clergy men, 500 children in school and about 20,000 Christian converts of different denomination[140]. Following the failure of the portages to cultivate Christian faith in Benin and Warri areas in the 16th century, the Negro missionaries took the bull by the horn. In April 1st 1839, they headed for Badegry to undertake the missionary work. Prominent among these Negro missionaries was James

[138] The Interesting Narratives of Olaudah Equiono, or Gastarus Vassa the African, written by himself, Introduction, Apendix 1 and Notes written by Paul Edward, Heinemann Edu Books, London, 1976, p. 306

[139] G.F. Baxton, The African Slave Trade and its Remedy, reprinted, Frank Cass, London, 1976, p. 306

[140] Nwankiti, op cit, p. 4

Ferguson, a Wesleyan convert, whose request to the Wesley Mission Society in London resulted to the sending of Thomas Birch Freeman. Freeman arrived Badegry on the 24th of September 1842. In that same year, missionary work began in Badagry a former slave port.

Towards the end of 1842 precisely in December another group headed by the member of the church Missionary Society, Reverend Henry Townsend, arrived Badagry. After spending the Christmas day in Badagry he proceeded to Abeokuta on the 29th of December. Through the relentless effort of these missionaries, by 9th of March 1845, the Missionary station of the church missionary society had been ready at Badagry. While at Abeokuta four small congregations had already started by 1847.

The return of the emigrants helped to facilitate the spread of Missionary work in other Yoruba towns, such as Lagos, Ibadan, Ijaye, Ede and Illorin[141]. In the area that became southeastern Nigeria, the pioneering mission came from Scotland. The Scottish Methodist Mission of Reverend Hope Waddell arrived in Calabar in 1846. Owing to his conservative approach, the mission was limited to Duke and Greek Towns. The development of this church was said to be very slow. The first baptism was conducted after seven years of the beginning of the missionary work in the area. The school system which was introduced by

[141] G.O. Gbadamosi and J.P. Ade Ajayi, Islam and Christianity in Nigeria, in Obaro Ikime (ed) Groundwork of Nigerian History, Heinmann Edu Books, Ibadan, 1980, p. 350

Waddell in Calabar was the type where instruction were given to pupils in various compounds houses. This was because there was no church.Preaching was in open air, until in 1857 and in the same year he departed from Clabar[142].

Consequent upon the discovery of the course and mouth of river Niger, in 1830 by the Lander Brothers, there was an attempt to exploit the advantages of the discovery. Therefore in 1841 an expedition was embarked upon by different interest groups. The church Missionary society was represented by a German Missionary J.F Schon, Samuel Ajayi Crowther and Simon Jonas, a freed slave of Igbo origin from Sierra Leone. This expedition was tripartite in nature. It was a fusion of missionary, commercial and political interest. Scholars have argued that from the political and commercial point of view the expedition was a failure, while the missionaries were said to have achieve a partial success[143] Schon and Crowther managed to open a relationship with the ruler of Abo, Obi, Osai before the proceeded to Lokoja. It was said that Obi Osai and his people were more interested in the economic values than any other value of Christianity. This was partly because the trade commissioner associated material prosperity with the adoption of Christian reigion[144]. But the most interesting aspect of the story was the fact that the people of Abo were able to hear the gospel in Igbo language through. Simon Jonas who was left behind

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[142] Ibid

[143] C.C. Ifemesia, British Enterprise on the Niger, cited in Ekechi op cit, p. 2. Like Ifemesia, Ekechi referred the expedition as a fiasco, from political and commercial point of view.

[144] J.D. Plessis, The Evangelization of Pagans, quoted in Ekechi op cit, p. 1

when Crowther Schon proceeded to Lokoja. This was their first time of seeing an Igbo person who could read and write the Whiteman's language, so they were excited to see Jonas preach to them.

However, the actual C.M.S. mission on the Niger began in 1857. As it has been said that Christian religion was inseparable with politics and commerce[145]. This time, it was under the sponsorship of the Liverpool Merchant who had sponsored an earlier expedition in 1854. The Liverpool Merchant appointed Dr. Baikie as his agent, while the C.M.S appointed Crowther as the head of the Niger Mission. They decided to make do with the Igbo emigrants in Sierra Leone, who had imbibed the western culture both in religion and in commerce. Before this time, the liberated slaves of Igbo extraction had shown the keen interest to return to their fatherland with their new found religion, just like the Yorubas did.

John Christopher Taylor a pastor in the Bathurst Church and of Igbo parentage was appointed as Crowther associate and the titular head of the volunteer native Missionary group. This mission arrived Onisha waterside on 26 July 1857 after a brief stop at Abo. On their arrival, people were filled with mutual suspicion. But Barkie and Crowther actually exhibited the zeal to make their mission a success. Therefore, after some persuasion the young men

[145] Ekechi, op cit, p. 7

accepted to take them to the ruler of Onisha Obi Akazua. Before the king and his councilors Dr baikie explained that his interest is to trade with the people of Onisha, and that he would erect a trading factory at the waterside. Crowther told them that his own interest is to build a church in their town, one and half miles away from Barkies trading factory. These ideas were welcomed by Akazue and his councilors[146].

One may wonder why the people accepted these offer without much difficulties. The view in this work is that the people were already trade oriented. And for the fact that the group were intelligent enough to present the case of trade before that of evangelism. According to Flint, the riverian city States were intensely competitive in the pursuit of wealth and power[147]. The implication of this is that Onisha accepted the trade and missionary proposals in order to age out their neighbours. But this is not to suggest that the people were fully aware of the implication of the Missionary Propaganda particularly on their culture. The warm reception the missionaries received at Onisha strengthened them

> *Taylor found himself busy preaching, teaching visiting, building settling quarrels, studying the language and writing his journals*[148].

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[146] J.E Flint, Sir, George Goldie and The Making of Nigeria, London, 1960, p. 14

[147] Ibid

[148] K.O. Dike, Origin of Niger Mission, cited in Nwankiti, op cit, p. 13

Taylor opened a school after one week of his arrival at Onisha with twelve children. By 1860, the missionaries were able to translate four books of the bible into Igbo language. These include the Acts of the Apostles, first and second Corinthians and Philemon. However, the work of the missionaries in the Igbo area was not rosy, hence it was reported that Taylor had to go back to Sierra Leon out of frustration[149]. By 1864, tremendous progress had been made by the missionaries in and around Onisha that invitations were constantly coming from communities located far away from Onisha. A good example was the one that come from Bonny in 1864, which subsequently led the church missionary society to open a mission station there in 1865.

For nearly thirty years, the church missionary society remained unchallenged by any other mission in the lower Niger area. But this was broken in 1885 following the arrival of the Roman Catholic Missionaries. These missionaries were seen as opposition by the church missionary society and Royal Niger Company. One major reason for the (C.M.C) opposition was due to their rivalry abroad, while that of the company was because the missionaries were French men[150]. The coming of the Roman Catholic Missionaries to the lower Niger was the beginning of Missionary rivalry in Igbo area.

[149] Ekechi, op cit, p. 75

[150] Ibid, p. 205

In a bid to catch up with the pioneer missionaries being the church missionary society, the Roman Catholic Mission adopted a charity approach to their missionary. Gifts of cloths and food were promised the school children. And this led to eating down the fabrics of the church missionary society in the lower Niger area.

By 1890s, the Onisha and its neighbours had been fully captured by the two rival missionaries, and attention was then directed to drive into the interior of Igboland.

THE COMING OF THE MISSIONARIES INTO OWERRI DISTRICT AREA

The Christians Missionaries did not come to the Owerri area until about 1905. Part of the reason given by Ekechi for the delay of the missionaries to extend their activities to the area was that "the British Government did not establish their imperial rule in Owerri, until 1902[151]. Does this imply that the British colonial government was the fore runner of the missionaries? This cannot be true, because there was no imperial government in Badagry before 1842 when the Wesley Methodist Church was opened there. Again, there was no form of imperial government at Abeokuta in 1845 when reverend Town Send began his missionary activities there. The Calabar area was still largely

[151] Ibid

under the indigenous administrative system when reverend Hope Waddell began his mission work in 1846. Therefore, the late coming of the Christian Missionaries into the Owerri area can be attributed to other factors than the absence of British imperial government. The major factors that delayed the coming of the Missionaries into the Owerri area were inadequate human and material resources. The missionaries adopted the strategy of enticing both the rulers and their people with material gifts. At a time, it became obvious that they could not ignore this approach because of the rivalry that had been ensured between the two major denominations in the area, the church Missionary Society and Roman Catholic Mission. This approach ran deep into their finances, from 1880, for instance, the church Missionary Society complained about a serious and persistent financial crisis[152].

However, between 1902 and 1905 most areas in the Owerri District area had been subdued and colonial administration established. But the ineffectiveness of those appointed by the colonial officer to regulate the conduct of their people, led the government to seek for the means of making their administration effective. One of this means was by allowing the missionaries to come into the area. It should be noted that most of these characteristics of the Igbo traditional government which the British considered repugnant to their idea

[152] C.M.S., G3/A3/0 Tugwell to baylis, 6 December, 1981, quoted in Ekechi, p. 207

of what constitute good government, were the same things missionaries wanted to get rid of.

Therefore in 1904 the acting High Commissioner at Calabar suggested to Bishop Tugwell of the Church Missionary Society, that Owerri might prove a possible centre for mission work. He added that the purest Igbo was probably spoken in the Owerri area, and the people seemed to be above average in intelligence[153]. This invitation by the High Commissioner came at the time when the church missionary was in serious need to produce what they referred to as Union version of Igbo Bible[154]. To this effect, Archdeacon T.J. Dennis a noted classicist and the most prolific in the Igbo language study was sent in the company of Alfonsus Onyeabo to Owerri. They arrived Owerri in April 1905, and were received by the district Commission H.M. Douglas.Whenroom was offered to the visitors in the district headquarters they refused and proceeded to the house of one warrant Chief Igwe, where they stayed for 6 days. Within the period, the missionaries visited the neighboring town.

Reporting on this visit, Dennis admitted that Owerri town was well positioned, owing to its surrounding dense population accessible by good roads which had been made in all direction. These were roads constructed through Mr. Douglas ignoble forced labour[155] consequently on 7 November 1905 Bishop

[153] Union Version of the Igbo Bible, implied the Bible that would be written with a more central ascent of Igbo Language, so that it would be easy for all Igbos to read and understand

[154] E. Isichei, A History of the Igbo People, the Macmillan Press Ltd, London, 1976, p. 138

[155] C.O. 320/31, Report by H.M. Douglas dated 30 July 1905, enclosure in Egerton to C.O. 31 August, 1985, cited in Ekechi, op cit, p. 213

Tugwell, Alfonsus Onyeabo and other members left Onisha, and arrived at Owerri on 10 November, they were received by the district commissioner who convened a meeting of the chiefs of Owerri and neighbouring towns. The Bishop explained to them the purpose of their visit. After series of visitation by the missionaries, Egbu town was chosen for the location of the mission station. Owerri and Nekede were among the areas proposed to the missionaries to build the church, but they were rejected on the ground that both Nekeda and Owerri were all military garrison used in the pacification of the people. And that Owerri was the seat of the government. The choice of Egbu was because it was a neutral ground, while the other towns were said to be dominated by soldiers and government. When the Royal Niger Company bombarded the town of Onisha, the natives accused the missionaries of being their collaborator consequently, their church was burnt down.

Therefore, in Owerri, they pretended as if they had nothing to do with the governments, where as they came to Owerri on the invitation of the acting High Commissioner. They wanted to avoid a repeat of the Onisha incident that cost them their church. H.M. Douglas acknowledged the fact that most people in Owerri were decidedly hostile to the government and refused to accept its rule[156]. But evidence available showed that H.M. Douglass was a paternalist,

[156] Isichei, op cit, p. 138

whose high handedness was unprecedented. Bishop Tugwell himself gathered intelligence about the government during their visit which compelled him to write a later to Mr. Douglas.

> *From what I hear from people as I passed through your district, and from what I heard subsequently from those who accompany me, you administration appears to be well high unbearable. The people complained bitterly of your hash treatment of them*[157].

In spite of the reluctance of the C.M.S. authority in London, T.J. Dennis and his co-translator T.D Anyaeybulem and catechist A.C Onyeabo arrived Egbu on the 27 September 1906. They were housed temporarily by the warrant chief of Egbu chief Egbukole[158].

When the C.M.S had been firmly rooted in Egbu in 1907, it begn to spread into other areas of the Owerri District. Mbaise was one of the areas which the missionaries extended their evangelical work from Egbu. Other towns were Awaka 1907, Emii 1907, Owerri 1909, Obazu, Amawo, Atta 1912, Orodo 1912, Obazu Mbieri 1910[159]. As Ekechi Observed the growth of influence of the church missionary society in Owerri between 1905 and 1914 was phenomenal[160].

The Roman Catholic Mission which had been an arch-rivals to church missionary did not let up in their effort to catch up with them, therefore, they

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[157] Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, ,p. 61, Ekechi op cit, p. 214

[158] A. Orisakwe, Egbu: The Centre of C.M.S. Activities in Igboland, in the Silver Jubilee Commemorative Album of the Owerri Ecclesiastical Province, 2004, p. 26

[159] Ekechi, op cit, p. 215

[160] Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 16

arrived Owerri in 1912, and made contact with a famous warrant chief, Njamanze who offered them an unpleasant potion of land to built their. Church consequently upon their dissatisfaction, they made another contact now with Chief Oparaocha Ekwe and his people who exhibited hospitable reception to the missionaries. Unfortunately, two years after the opening of the mission station and school, at Ulakwu, the house of the missionaries was burgled by thieves. Then the missionaries considered it a threat to their lives and missionary work. Consequently, they left Ulakwu for Emekuku, where they were received by the warrant chief Obi. This warrant chief demonstrated his interest in the missionaries' activities by erecting a small house, where they used for both religious instruction and school. Between 1912 and 1916 the Roman Catholic mission had been strongly rooted in Emekuku, from where they started spreading into the areas of Owerri Division[161].

THE COMING OF CHRISTIAN MISSIONARIES INTO MBAISE: THE ROLE OF THE WARRANT CHIEFS

The first missionaries to come into the Mbaise area were those of the Niger Delta Pastorate. One may wonder which mission is the Niger Delta pastorate (N.D.P). This was a branch of the Church Missionary Society, which was opened in Bonny in 1865 by Bishop Crowder himself. This was in response

[161] Nwankiti op cit, p. 16

to the application made by Dappa Peppel of Bonny to Reverend George H. McGill of Christ Church Watney Middlesex[162]. The Church Missionary Society known in the Niger Delta area as Niger Delta Pastorate spread from Bonny to Brass in 1868 and into Kalabari in 1874[163].

But before then, a rift had already developed between the European Missionaries and the African Missionaries. It was a clear manifestation of the claims of racial superiority of the white Europeans over Africans. When Reverend John Robinson who became the Secretary of the Niger Mission in 1887 wanted to undermine the effort put by Crowder and other African Missionaries towards the development of the Church Missionary, he made a chauvinistic statement that the "negro race shows almost no signs of ruling power[164]."

In describing the relationship between Crowther and the European Missionaries Nwakiti said:

> *If anything, some in the ranks of the C.M.S. especially after the death of Henry Vern, were ready to pick holes in his work, and did so, thus frustrating Crowther to the grave he died on December 31st 1891[165].*

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[162] Ibid
[163] E.P.T. Crampton, Christian Missionary in Northern Nigeria, Geoffrey Chapman, London, 1976, p.27
[164] Nwankiti, op cit, p. 17
[165] C. Fyfe, Rave as a Control Over Slaves and subject peoples, A paper presented to the World Conference at Arewa Ouse, 26th-30th March, 1990, p. 2

This was similar to the initial claim of racial superiority over blacks in the new world[166]. After the death of Crowther his son the Venerable (Archelocom) Dandeson Crowther, who according to Nwankiti was "his father's adjutant", concluded that his father died out of the frustration caused him by the young European Missionaries, who showed no sign of respect to him. Consequently, he declared the church missionary society in the Niger Delta area a self supporting and self governing mission on April 29 1892. That became the origin of N.D.P.

Using Bonny, Opobo and Kalabari converts who were mainly merchants, the mission began to spread to the interior through the inland waterways. These converts reached Azumiri in 1878 from where it spread to Akwete, Nkpunkpu Ebule, Aba, Ohuru waterside, and Abayi waterside before 1890. The gospel through N.D.P had followed the channels of Imo River to Okpala, Ife waterside, Amumara along the Imo River and Udo[167].

Apart from Okpala which is still a close neighbor, the other towns mentioned are Mbaise towns. The phenomenal growth of the N.D.P from Bonny into the Mbaise area can be attributed to its converts being mainly produce merchants whose main rout was the waterway. Evidence have shown that Ife waterside was the port from which palm produce was exported from the Mbaise

[166] See Nwankiti, op cit, p. 16
[167] N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937 op cit

area to the coast, and through that means, the European made goods were received. The trade at Ife on the Imo river bank attracted settlement from Okrika and Akwete[168]. Although there were no mission stations, these merchant missionaries were using their shades and stores as Church on Sundays[169]. Virtually all the towns of Ezinihitte clan were dominated by the N.D.P before the arrival of the C.M.S from Egbu. Trade was an effective instrument used by the (N.D.P) missionaries to attract the natives of Mbaise to their faith. Since they were produce buyers and harbinger of European made goods, their customers were in steady contact with them and this created opportunity for them to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Niger Delta pastorate missionaries had been at work in the Mbaise area between 1905 and 1910. The relics of the church building at Ife waterside is still evident[170]. While the punitive expedition waged by the government to avenge the death of Dr. Stewart prevented the opening of the mission station at Udo in 1906. But this later took place in 1911. The (N.D.P) mission at Udo was attended by converts from Onicha and Obizi from 1911 to 1918[171]. Between 1906 to 1918 the (N.D.P mission had a large portion of Mbaise area covering the Ezinihitte and Oke clans. While the N.D.P was making great progress from the riverine areas, the

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[168] V.U. Njoku, 96, Oral Interview Conducted in his house of Ife, Ezinihitte, 24/10/08

[169] George Nwigwe, Oral Interview conducted in his house at Ife, Ezinihitte, Mbaise, 19/01/09

[170] Njoku, Oral Interview, op cit, see also Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 65

[171] Pius Onyekwere, quoted in Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 62

church Missionary Society and Roman Catholic were coming through the land rout from Egbu and Emekuku respectively.

One important issue worthy of note is that while the N.D.P was being supported by the produce merchants and ordinary individual converts, the Church Missionary Society and the Roman Catholic were aided by the government agents. It should be recalled that when the missionaries of the C.M.S first arrived at Owerri, the District Commission convened the chiefs of the district for Bishop Tugwell to address them. The impact of this call to the progress of the mission cannot be undermined. The chiefs who were the servants and employees of the District Commissioner took it as part of their responsibility to bring the missionaries into their various area.

In 1908, the C.M.S missionaries arrived the Mbaise area, and made contact with Chief Oneyekwere of Ahiara. It is not yet clear whether this visit was on invitation or not. However, Onyekwere who had been a British collaborator received the missionaries and summoned his people in his father's family hall. When the missionaries began to address the people, the hall collapsed on them and wounded one of the missionaries. Out of fear, the people of Ahiara deserted. And their reason was that chief Onyekwere should ask the missionaries to go, that they cannot suffer what they had suffered for the death

of Dr. Stewart if another Whiteman should die in Ahiara[172]. This mishap, aborted the C.MS missionaries effort to plant their religion in Ahiara in 1908.

Following the steps of Chief Egbukole of Egbu, Chief Nwaturocha, the foremost warrant chief from the Nguru area applied to the C.M.S at Egbu for a mission station to be opened in his area in 1910. By them, it was the policy of the C.M.S. that communities demanding mission stations and a teacher should pay 12 pounds, ten shillings to cover for the salaries of the teacher. This was paid by chief Nwaturuocha and CM.S sent a teacher. The church operated temporarily in Nwaturuocha's compound, until 1911, when a permanent station was built at Umuamuma Nguru[173].

According to Bishop J.E Ogu the former Bishop of Anglican Diocese of Mbaise:

> *The mission became another source of firm and the chiefs began to dominate the churches as if it was a personal property. Therefore some other chiefs from the Nguru area opted out from the church brought by Nwaturuocha and embarked on a journey to Egbu, the seat of the C.M.S in Owerri District. Unfortunately the missionary officials were away to Onitsha. These men filled with disappointment, met with the Roman Catholic Missionaries at Emekuka on their way back from Egbu, and agreement was reached to open a catholic mission station at Nguru [174].*

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[172] Omenka, quoted in Njoku, op cit, pp. 62, 63

[173] Njoku, Oral Interview op cit, see also Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 65

[174] Bishop J.E. Ogu, 69 Oral Interview at Diocesan office Ife 14/12/09

These Warrant Chiefs were mostly the class of people that could afford the salary advance of the church and school teacher as it was demanded by the Missionaries then, because they had amassed wealth (see appendix 1, 2 and 3). This delegation was headed by chief Anyamele of Nguru Nwenkwo. In response to their request, a twelve year old teacher Mr. Peter Anamelechi was sent by father D. Wash[175]. But the warrant chief Anyamele took the church as a personal property and arrogated to himself an undue high place. In one occasion there were no enough seats to accommodate him and his numerous wives when suddenly he became annoyed and insulted the young missionary. This resulted to a rift between him and the catholic missionaries. This growing rift compelled the missionary authorities at Emekuku to make contact with chief Onyekwere of Ahiara. Subsequently, the mission was transferred from the original site, of Nwafor Oboama in Nguru to Ahiara.Thus, Ahiara became the seat of Roman Catholic in Mbaise[176].

Prominent chiefs such as Chilak Ukpo of Umunama, Okpokoro of Onicha and Abii of Eziudo, were among those who appealed to the catholic missionary authorities for mission stations in their area[177].

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[175] Njoku, op cit, p. 67
[176] Ibid, p. 68
[177] Ibid, p. 68

Mr. Akalanna Isigwe and Chief Obasi were instrumental to the coming of the church missionary society into the Amaumara area. The first and second instalments of salary deposit for a church teacher was paid by these two men in 1919[178]. Inspite of the presence of the Niger Delta pastorate church at Ife waterise, Chief Nwaigwe Akanwa showed the zeal to bring the presence of the church missionary soceity's station to Ife. In 1911 He appointed some individuals and sent them to Egbu the headquarters of the CMS in Owerri Division to ask pastor Onyeabo for a church teacher, and also pay the required salary deposit of ten pounds ten shillings[179].

The case was the same for Akpokwu people, when they met the requirement of ten pounds ten shillings demanded by Reverend Onyeabo, the delegates were accompanied by a prominent Warrant Chief Iwuala Nwichi of Akpokwu. The Akpokwu delegation consists of Mr. Ezekiel Ahunanya, Mr. Nwachukwu Nwoko, Mr. Nwimo Nwosu and few others. In 1921 Mr. Elija Okwunasoanya from Ogbunike was posted by Venerable Willson to Akpokwu as a church teacher[180].

Posting of a missionary (teacher) was not done until certain amount of money was paid by the community that demanded for him, and his security guaranteed. However, between 1913 and 1920, Christian missionary activities had reached many communities in the Mbaise area[181]. Chief Iroapali of Obizi

[178] Extract from the C.M.S. Biannual Women's Conference of the Diocese of Mbaise Anglican Communion, 2001.
[179] Nwaigwe op cit
[180] S.O. Ahaiwe, History of Akpodim Parish Churches, Prime Iyk Press, Aba 1992, p. 3
[181] Nioku, The history and Culture of Mbaise, op cit p. 63

did not only make financial contribution, but had to go further to guarantee the safety of the young missionary posted to Obizi[182].

At the inception of the missionary activities in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division, the missionaries were not too hard in the implementation of some of their doctrines. For instance, the Christian doctrine forbids polygamy, but they did not press had on their new converts to abandon the tradition of multiple wives. Though Chief Iwuala Nwaichi later pulled out from his new found faith, he had about 16 wives[183]. In the same manner, Chief Nnaigew Akanwa who was the harbinger of the church missionary society in Ife, was known for his large family which comprised of many wives[184].

Marriage was one of the life wire of the economy of Mbaise area and indeed Igbo land as a whole. It was the major source of labour force to the families. We have earlier said that agriculture was the main stay of the Igbo economy, even in the colonial times. And the Igbo preferred to rely on the labour power of his family more than any. The Igbo adage which says that numeriousity is strength was so pervasive, and was believed to be possible, through polygamy alone[185].

The missionaries did not lay much emphasis on polygamy, unlike the Sudan Interior Mission in the Northern part of Nigeria. [4] Particularly the Roman

[182] Adiukwu op cit
[183] Nwachukwu Oral Interview op cit
[184] Nwaigwe Oral Interview op cit
[185] See Marriage in Chapter two of this work

Catholic Mission in the area were not too hard in their preaching against such cultural practices as polygamy.

The missionary influence had grown in 1918 that there was a consensus among them to route out the juju worship in the area. This campaign or crusade against the traditional religion was known to the people of the area as *ichu muo* or *ichu ekwnsu*. During this epoch making event, many juju shrines were burnt and destroyed[186]. This was a very high score for the Christian missionaries against the traditional religion. We have earlier shown in chapter two of this work that deities and jujus were part of the judicial system in the Mbaise area before the imposition of British rule, and that they served as the highest appellate court. Rulings or judgment got from them were final. The people believed in this type of judgment and respected it. For example, there was a land dispute between Umuadiri family and Umungele of Amaisi village in Uvuru. This dispute led to a lot of bloodshed. After exhausting every judicial avenue to establish their claim of ownership, the Umungele family went to Ozuzu the seat of the influential *Amadioha* juju and brought it to the portion of land in dispute, and that marked the end of the disputes and killings which had cost them some of their family members[187]. The actions of the missionaries in 1918 though a religious one was in line with the judicial and administrative policy of the protectorate government as was proclaimed by Moor in the early days of the

[186] Echeweodo Amedi, 75, Oral Interview, Ndokwu Lorji, 4/05/010, Mark Nnachukwu, 92, Oral Interview, 6/05/010

[187] Israel Nwachukwu, 81, Oral Interview, Amaisii Uvuru, 30/4/010

warrant chiefs system. This policy states that the only means of administering justice in these territories were through a commissioner's council or by Native Councils. The growth of missionary influence was so enormous that Mr. G.I. Sockley, the Assistant District Officer of Owerri Division acknowledge it in 1932[188].

It is worthy to note that after the Christian crusade of *ichu ekwensu*, so many deities still survived. Therefore, missionaries made it clear that none of their members is allowed to consult or have anything to do with them. This was the reason why my own grand father, Mr. David Nwosu, who was among the foundation members of the C.M.S. Akpokwu abandoned his Christian faith to appease the earth goddess of *Ala-ukwu*, whose wrath was said to have been incurred by some members of their family. When he was suspended for this action by the C.M.S. authorities he never became a Christian again till his death[189].

Another way through which the missionaries had fine tuned the new administration was by introducing missionary schools. These schools, no doubt, helped to prevent the young people from following the footsteps of their fathers, hence western ideologies were cultivated in them. The job which the earlier court clerks were doing in this area was used as stimuli. The arrival of the C.M.S. mission at Ife in 1911 was at the same time the arrival of the first

[188] N.A.E. Riuprof EP 8840, Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu
[189] Mr. David N. Nwosu (my Grandfather)

mission school in Mbaise. This was followed by the Catholic missionary school at Ogbo Nguru, Ahiara, and Ekwereazu between 1915 and 191917[190]. The major content of the curriculum of these mission schools were religious instruction and morality, reading, writing and arithmetic. The view of this work is that the school curriculum was patterned to conform to the manpower requirement of the government. For instance, the skill of reading and writing was enough for one to occupy the influential office of the court, clerk or other clerks, messenger, cook, steward and interpreter. But a careful investigation proved that in spite of the effort of the missionaries to produce the required manpower, no single court clerk was produced from the Mbaise area under the warrant chiefs system[191]. This was a major reason that hindered the actualization of indirect rule system.

Although the missionaries could not eradicate the traditional religion totally, they made a tremendous contribution in the fight against those practices which the colonial government considered to be repugnant to their idea of what constitute good government. While the missionaries were busy preaching salvation through Jesus Christ, the warrant chiefs who made great contribution to their coming were also busy abusing the powers given to them. Consequently, in 1929 when the women rose against them, neither the missionaries nor the British officers could prevent the revolt which brought the

[190]G.N. Onukogu, The Role of Government, Agencies, Organizations, Individuals and Town Unions, 1960-1977 in Nwale (ed) Mbaise in Contemporary Nigeria, Gold and Maestro, New York, 1978, p. 63

[191] All the people interviewed said that there was nobody from their area that attained the position of the Court Clerk

system to its knee. The education of the people of the district was not the priority of the government under the warrant chiefs system. In a district that contained between 550,000-600,000 people[192] there was only one school owned by the government. This school was located at Owerri the district headquarters far from different parts of the district. It was patterned as a boarding school, where the pupils lived within the school premises. The idea of boarding school was conceived by the administrative officers at Owerri, not because the distance from where people attended was far, but because they wanted to re-orient the young people by separating them from their old ones, who would want to cultivate in them the traditional ways of their society.

The number of registered pupils in 1910 was 158, the boys were 154 in number while the girls were 4 in number. The evidence available showed that in the same year, the parents of the students could not meet up with the sponsorship requirement of their children in that school, consequently, many of them left[192]. Apart from English Language and Arithmetic, which formed the central theme of the curriculum, there was an attempt to teach them crop production by using demonstration garden. The boys were especially made to take interest in this. Though the girls were few[193] they must be made to learn how to produce agricultural produce needed in Britain.

Lugard said that:

[191] N.A.E. 9/6/2 Southern Provinces 1921 Census Report
[192] N.A.E. Rivprof 3/4/63 Owerri District Hall; Yearly Report, 1910
[193] Ibid

The profit to be made by the production of raw materials and food stuff are so large, the majority of people are so little advanced, and the means of transport and fuel supplies for industrial undertaking so little developed that we are not as yet called upon to consider the question from Indian standpoint, and may regard the future of Africa for decades to come as chiefly concerned with the development of her agricultural, pastoral, and mineral resources[194].

The aim of introducing demonstration garden in the school was to teach the children an improved system of crop production so as to actualize the making of the large profit, which the colonizers expected to make in the tropical Africa. Apart from the invitation given to the missionaries to come and evangelize and educate the people of Owerri District areas, other measures were introduced to make sure that the area was fully under the control of the government. A good example was the formulation of the policy of direct taxation and its implementation in the southeastern Nigeria.

TAXATION

The history of taxation in southeastern Nigeria is traceable to 1914. This was the year when Northern and Southern Protectorates of Nigeria were

[194] F.D. Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, Frank Cases London, 1956, p. 510

amalgamated. Lugard, who became the Governor General of Nigeria the instance of amalgamation, was the Governor of the Northern Protectorate. Therefore it was his desire to institute the administrative system, which he introduced in the North into the Southern portion of the newly amalgamated Nigerian state. This desire did not go unsupported by prominent scholars in the subject of political and administrative history of Nigeria. For instance, A.H.M. Kirk-Green, I.F. Nicoleson, and Professor J.E. Flinct all concord to Magery Peharm who advocated that:

> *The amalgamation of Nigeria meant the extension to the south of principle of Native Administration which had been worked out in the north*[195].

For the people of southeastern Nigeria, this reform involved the inauguration of Native Administration with a regular system of direct taxation and fixed salaries for the chiefs and other officials.[196] This was due to the existence of a semi centralized system of local administration that was prevalent in the southwestern Nigeria before the imposition of colonial rule. In spite of this fact, it took over six years from 1914 to 1920 before the chief on the western side of the Niger (excepting the Warri and Asaba chiefs) became convinced on the essence of the reform and therefore accepted it[197].

[195] D.M. Perham Native Administration in Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p. 201
[196] N.A.E. Report of the Aba Commission of Inquiry, Lagos Government Printers, 1930, p. 2
[197] S.N. Nwabara, Ibo Land: A Study in British Perpetration and the Problems of Administration 1860-1950, A Doctoral Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School, Northwestern University, Illinois, 1965, p. 223

While the provinces to the east and the Delta area were regarded as too immature for indirect rule since they had "no cohesion" and no cultural authority. In other words, direct taxation could not be introduced and so in the government's opinion, no progress could be made in the government policy of educating these tribes in the art of self-government unless funds to establish were forthcoming in the shape of direct taxation[198].

It is important to note that Lugard was restrained by the foreign office because Lord Harcourt who was the Colonial Secretary expected nothing short of violent disturbances from the various districts in the eastern provinces, in a period when the British soldiers were committed to the British struggle in Word War I[199]. If not Lugard would have applied force to make the people comply with the payment of tax. When in 1918 A.G. Boyle was appointed to enquire into the possibilities of introducing direct taxation in southeast, the information he elicited from the district commissioners was negative, and this ended lugard's ambition of inaugurating the sole Native Authority and direct taxation.

Sir Hugh Clifford who took over from Lugard in 1920 was also bothered with the issue of extending taxation to the five provinces of Warri, Onitsha, Owerri, Ogoja and Calabar. Against this backdrop, he appointed S.M. Grier, the Secretary for native affairs. Grier was asked to investigate the function of the native administration and its functional system in eastern Nigeria. In his report

[198] Memorandum submitted by the Lieutenant Governor, Southern Provinces, quoted in Nwabara op cit, p 223
[199] Gailey op cit, p. 76

he said that those chiefs who were saddled with the responsibility of carrying out judicial administration were unrepresentative and unpopular. On the issue of taxation, the officers in the eastern provinces preferred the unpaid labour which was provided for by the Road and River Ordinance. Grier described these native courts as the principal disintegrating forces in those provinces and noted that in the view of most political officers they were very corrupt and were doing a great deal of harm[200]. This means that the introduction of direct taxation, should be after the major administrative problems had been dealt with. As if the Governor General was well convinced with Grier's report, he appointed G.J.F. Tomlinson, who after his investigation came out with almost a photocopy of the previous report on the issue of taxation. But unfortunately, Clifford could not solve the administration problems in the eastern provinces.And as a result he could not introduce taxation until when he was relieved by Graem Thomson in 1924.

Without much delay, Thomson began the attempt to introduce taxation into the five eastern provinces. He adopted the proposal made by Colonel Moorhouse to impose a poll tax on all adult males in the provinces where direct taxation was not operative. The income derived from this would among other things eliminate forced labour and help establish local administration. He proposed that the rate should be fixed according to the ability of the poorest class to pay[201].

[200] I. M. Okonjo, British Administration in Nigeria 1900-1950, A Nigerian View, Nok Publishers, p. 173
[201] Quoted in Nwabara op cit, p. 223

But when the district officers were communicated, they were pessimistic. In reaction, one of the district officers from Owerri Province remarked that it would be useless to consider any amount larger than the term for purposes of collection.[202] This is a pointer that the native court areas were not yet strong to be referred to as political units on which the collection should be based. Therefore, the district officer recommended that a long period of three years should be allowed to disseminate the tax propaganda and assessment of the area before the tax was instituted.

After a protracted debate on the form of taxation and the amount to be paid, government came to agreement that a flat rate of 7 shillings should be levied from all adult male of over 16 years. This proposal became a law in April 1927, and Mr. W.E. Hunt was appointed by the central government to visit the affected provinces to assist the district officers in the campaign for the introduction of taxation. The central issue in the tax propaganda was that the payment of this tax would relieve the people from the forced labour imposed on them by Road and River Ordinance.

No matter what the content of the propaganda was, the officers who conducted it at the level of ordinary people had unpleasant experience. In the Owerri area, when people heard that the assessment that was going was committed with the proposed taxation, they refused to offer the required

[202] Ibid

information, deserted their compounds and assaulted chiefs who were inclined to cooperate with the assessment officers. The issue took a different dimension at Olakwo and in the Okpala Court area, when even policemen were assaulted and molested. In the Ezinihitte area people fled across the Imo River each time the assessment officers came round[203]. In Owerri Division, when Hunt arrived, he was advised not to hold a meeting with the chiefs, since the initial attempt by the resident officer to hold such meeting was stopped halfway owing to the reluctance of the chiefs which nearly led to incidents[204]. In his persuasive statement, Hunt opined that

> *No people in the era before money was invented, paid a tax but every society of persons must have had a system of contribution in services or kind to a common fund for common good and in essence this was tantamount to a tax*[205].

It is true that people made different forms of contributions to execute projects of common interest before the imposition of the British rule. The difference was that in the pre-colonial period in the Mbaise area if not in the whole of Igboland, it was very open for people to take part on issues of general interest. For instance if there was a project to carry out, the people determined what project it should be, the importance to their general wellbeing, the fund for it. As we have shown in the chapter two of this work, the collective harvest of

[203] Nnajiaku, op cit

[205] N.A.E. C.S.O. 26/2 No. 18417, Memo by W.E. Hurnt

[206] N.A.E. EP Memo SP 4002/Vol ii/90 29/2/27

palm fruits was one means through which the people of the Mbaise area made contribution to the general fund.

Again, there was also public works for the up keep of their villages and village groups. The decision on how to and when to carry it out depended on the general opinion of the people. These issues were decided by the public and in the open places. And whenever work was done, the effect was directly felt by the people themselves, hence they paid attention to matters of utmost importance to them. For the clearing of their market, the annual clearing of their water pond, making of connecting roads that served their needs.

While under the colonial administration, the government assumed the control of these activities and prohibited the people from participating in the debate, examining the problems of common interest, through the arbitrary appointment of the warrant chiefs. We have also shown how it became the duty of the High Commissioner to decide when and which road to be cleared, as it was provided for by the Road and River Ordinance. This was usually communicated to those in whose area of jurisdiction the road or river crosses. The people were forced to do these jobs including building court houses, rest houses, prisons and other dehumanizing works under the pain of fear of punishment (fines or imprisonment).

From 1903 when the District Commissioner of Owerri Division made the first visit to Mbaise and appointed headmen till the date of the tax assessment (1927), there was no meaningful thing to serve as stimuli for the people to believe that payment of tax to the Whiteman would bring development. Thus the underlying situation resulted to a kind of anti-tax protest in the Mbaise area and indeed Owerri Division. Apart from Ulakwo and some part of the Okpala Court area where policemen were molested, as we have shown earlier, the other areas in the district were careful, particularly in the Mbaise where resentment to the British advancement resulted to the death of a British doctor Stewart[207].

The sharp decrease in the adult male population of some Mbaise towns was seen as a mark of resentment to the taxation. For example, the town of Enyogwugwu which had an adult male population of 25,229 in 1921, was about 2,166 in 1927, Mpam town had 845 adult males in 1921 and 200 in 1927, Ihite Afoakwu had 1,312 in 1921 and 1,034 in 1927, Obaoma with 333 in 1921 and 326, Udo 2,970 in 1921 and 941 in 1927[208]. Although some scholars have referred to the 1921 population census as hopelessly inacurate[209].

As soon as the assessment figure was in, collection commenced. Collection of tax commenced immediately after the Ordinance came into effect in April 1928 and was almost completed by the end of June. The important issue to note here is that method of collection varied from district to district. In

[207] See Chapter Three of this work for the details concerning the death of Stewart and its aftermath.
[208] N.A.E. Owerri District Register of Warrant Chiefs, 1927
[209] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 229

some areas, "Native Courts" areas were used as administrative centres for gathering taxes from the villages. In some places warrant chiefs acted under the administrative officers as chief collectors. While in other districts, the people paid money directly to the district officer[210]. That later was the case in the Owerri District, particularly in the Mbaise area. After they had aided the assessment officers, the warrant chiefs were not used in the collection of the tax. According to the intelligence report on the Ezinihitte Clan:

> *On the introduction of taxation in 1928 the chiefs were not asked to assist. Each family head was made responsible for collecting from his family, but the names of Headmen where such existed were also entered on the Demand Notices, and they were expected to assist the family heads*[211].

This was a clean form of direct administration as it existed in the Mbaise area during the period under discussion. No problem erupted from the Mbaise area during collection. This may be attributed to the fact that the district commissioner was wise to do away with the warrant chiefs. The fifty percent of the tax collected was sent to the central government, while the other fifty percent was sent to Owerri Native Administration[212].

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[210] Gailey, op cit, p. 94

[211] N.A.E. Owdist 52/32 No. 9/18/43, An Intelligence Report on the Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division. Oral information have also suggested that on the day of collection of which meant the day the money was handed over to the District Commissioner, the family heads gathered in their village centres.

[212] Ibid

The first collection loomed very loud as a success for the government. The Lieutenant Governor showered a resounding praises on his officers, particularly to Mr. Hunt who was by that time regarded as the leader of government tax propaganda, and instructor in Native Administration methods[213]. in Owerri Province, the amount collected was said to be higher than the estimated amount in all the districts apart from Bende District. But this was not an indication that the political atmosphere was completely free from trouble. The cloud of women's revolution had begun to gather over the area, even before the commencement of the first phase of tax collection.

From April to October 1929, which was the second year of collection, there was no sign of any perturbation in the area particularly in the Mbaise area. Therefore, the colonial officers were already expecting the success of the first year to repeat itself. The markets were well attended by both sexes. The courts were also well attended as usual. As Major C.T. Lawrence, the Secretary of Southern Provinces, observed, both men and women looked cheerful and friendly, that there was nothing by the mid 1929 that pointed to the possibility of an explotion[214]. As the 1929 collection was going on fairly well, the government introduced an approach of reassessing the areas at the same time. This time everything that belonged to a man apart from his house was included in the enumeration details, including their wives and children. This actually

[213] N.A.E. Ow 30/1928, A Circular instructions to the DOS

[214] C.T. Lawrence, quoted in Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule, op cit, p. 236-7

began in the Bende District area under Captain John Cook, the Assistant District Officer[215].

However, it was the news of inclusion of the women and children in the population enumeration details, which spread across the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar that finally led to the Women Riot in December 1929. Thus, Lugard's idea that:

> *Among unorganized communities not previously subjected to tax, where native ruler cannot be said to exist, the tax afforded a means of threatening and enforcing native authority, of curbing lawlessness, and assisting in tribal evolution*[216].

One common mistake that repeated itself in the different administration was the fact that the peoples of the Eastern Provinces were continually referred to as unorganized. The absence of centralized administration compounded the British illusion that they were unorganized and primitive. But the riot which erupted at the end of 1929 showed the British authorities how organized the people could be when it comes to a matter of general interest.

THE WOMEN'S REVOLUTION OF 1929

Many scholars who wrote on this subject have concurred with the British administrators that what took place in the two provinces of Calabar and Owerri

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[215] Ibid

[216] Ekechi, op cit, p. 127

in 1929 was a riot, and since then, it has been treated so. The view in this work is that it was a revolution. Our intention is to reveal some salient factors that culminated and finally led to the outbreak of the revolution, and its aftermath. The study of the women's revolution is a revelation of the material condition which was brought by the warrant chiefs system in the Eastern Provinces. The women's revolution was an offspring of the socio-economic problems that became commonplace in the era of warrant chiefs system. We have considered the women's movement a revolution because of the changes which it brought about. And because riot has been seen as the use of force or violence against persons or property, an attempt or threat to use force or violence or to do any unlawful act, coupled with the power of immediate execution and a resulting disturbance[217]. The free online dictionary further explained that riot is the act of creating an uproar and displaying weapons, wildly marching on public meeting, threatening bystanders with display of force or forcibly destroying property along the way[218].

The Free Marian Webster Dictionary also defines riot as a violent public disorder; specifically a tumultuous disturbance of the public peace by three or more persons assembled together, acting with a common intent[219]. These definitions show that riot is a less complex phenomenon than revolution. On the other hand, a revolution has been referred to as a drastic political or social

[217] WWW.Wikipedia.com
[218] Ibid
[219] WWW.Mariam-Wester.com/../revolution

change that usually occurs relatively quickly[220]. The Marian Free Online Dictionary threw more light by advancing that revolution implies "an fundamental change in the organization structure that occurs in relatively short period of time[221].

What is central in revolution is either an outright change of a system or a drastic change in the organizational structure of a system (political or social). The central objective of the women was to remove the Warrant Chiefs from the position they occupied in the colonial political structure. The relatively short period in which this revolt was articulated and carried out, the speed of the spread covering two large provinces, were all major features of revolution. The fact that the women were able to force the colonial authorities to oust the Warrant Chiefs, and restructure the native court, which was the lowest arm of the British colonial government, the 1929 event was much more than a riot.

The warrant chiefs system was a product of an expanding economic order. It was designed to reduce cost of human and material resources, and more importantly to guarantee the commercial and economic progress of Britain. Before its imposition as we have earlier noted, traditional Igbo society was predominantly agricultural society with subsistence farming in all corners of the society. The main crops grown include yam, cassava, maize, rice and cocoyam. As a result of soil fertility, some areas were more productive than others in

[222] Wikipedia op cit
[223] WWW.Mariam-Wester.com/../revolution

certain produce. This means that there was also trade between areas with comparative advantage in certain produce and those who do not have. During this period, palm oil and kernel were also important factors. Among these crops that were grown in the eastern Nigeria area palm tree was the most important to the British government whose duty in the colonies was to protect the commercial interest of their merchants. This can be summarized in the statement made by the British officers that "indeed, whichever policy guaranteed the defence of our market and the protection of our commerce seemed quite acceptable[224].

Therefore, it was the British policy to institute the warrant chiefs system in the Eastern Nigeria area to guarantee the do not have enough manpower and the resources to embark on this colossal project. The manpower resources was lacking. It was against this backdrop that the colonial government under the warrant chiefs system embarked on a massive expansion and making of roads in the area. These roads according to them were to make the area accessible, possible to control, so as to encourage trade. In the Mbaise area of Owerri Division many roads were made to enhance the movement of goods (palm oil and kernel) to the European firms at Aba, Umuahia and Oguta. The warrant chiefs system came with other non political activities that required the people to

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increase their participation in the production of cash crops to enable them cope with the pace of social changes.

We have shown in chapter two of this work that in the pre-colonial time, the communities in the Mbaise area had use the means of collective harvest of palm fruit, *iwu nkwu*, to fund their public projects; an order was placed after deliberation, by the village assembly or the council of elders, that nobody should harvest his or her palm fruits for given period of time, which ranges from three weeks to one month. On the agreed day of harvest, all the palm trees belonging to the people of that village or community concerned would be harvested, and the proceed was used to fund the particular project which it was meant for. One important point to note is that there were not as many community projects as they began to occur during the era of the warrant chiefs. For instance, all the mission station and schools that were erected in the Mbaise area was built through this means.

Where the palm trees were not harvested collectively by the village or village group, individuals were asked to harvest and make contribution of certain quantity of palm oil and kernels. This was put together and sold. Money realized from it was used for the execution of the village or village group projects. In the era of the warrant chiefs, these projects include church

buildings, school buildings, scholarship funding. It was in respect to the later that professor Ibe said that:

> *The laudable achievement of Mbaise people in this respect was largely due to scheme of financial support given in the past by communities to their sons and daughters for higher studies, irrespective of whose children they were*[225].

Hiring of lawyers by villages or village group when there was need for a collective legal action was another important issue that required such funding. A good example was when the services of Clinton a Calabar based lawyer was needed by the people of Onicha village group in 1913, in respect to the reopening of Afo-Onicha market which was closed by the government in 1906 following the death of doctor Stewart[226].

Chief Iwuala Nwaichi of Akpokwu was said to have made the Akpokwu people to buy a motorcycle for him in pretext that the District Commissioner made it a point of duty for the people to buy motorcycle for their chiefs. This was done through the proceed of collective harvest, *iwu nkwu*. But the information was just a pretext, because he became the only chief from the Mbaise area who was riding on a motorcycle[227].

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[225] S.N. Ibe, Being Mbaise: The Past, Present and Future, in Ugwu Mbaise

[226] N.A.E. Rivprof 2/7/328, Onicha Market Reopening

[227] Nwachukwu 17/01/09 op cit

The high demand of these sylvan products by the British firms became a stimuli for the people. They became dependent upon it to acquaint themselves to the rapidly changing socio-economic situation. This must have diverted the energies of substantial proportion of the labour force of the people of the area and indeed the entire area referred to as the palm belt of the southern Nigeria, from other important productive activities relating to agriculture and handcraft in response to local demand to the extraction of palm produce, and their distribution for export, Dr. Hamman argued that this state of affairs informed the economic culture of the people, by advancing as follows:

> *In areas like Igboland where the situation led to the development of monoculture which relied on oil trade, the economies became dependent on foreign markets and therefore vulnerable to price fluctuation in the world market*[228].

It is therefore important to note that rather than market forces; the people were drawn to the production of the palm produce by the pressure of the social economic changes that followed the advent of the warrant chiefs system in Eastern Nigeria. The need to settle their disputes in the Native Courts, the need to build mission stations, school houses, pay for the salaries of church and school teacher, pay the school fees of the children, buy the European made goods which had become part of the market commodity, all compounded the

[228] Hamman, op cit, p. 14

people's choice to engage in other activities than the production of palm oil and kernels.

In 1920, the price of these sylvan products crashed. By April 1920 in Owerri Division area, the price of palm oil per cask was between 30 and 40 pounds. But in May however, the price of this commodity had crashed to an alarming rate, from between 30 and 40 pounds to 15 pounds per cask. A price of which even the divisional officer acknowledge that the traders cannot make profit[229]. But changes began to occur from 1922. The prices of these palm produce began to increase slowly but steadily. Price of these produce in the Opopo area, where some of the produce from the Mbaise area were sent to, are shown in Table 1 and 2 bellow:

Table 2: Palm price at Opobo 1922[230]

Year	**Per Cask**			**Per Ton**		
	£	S	D	£	S	D
1926	15	1	2	23	8	6
1927	13	13	0	21	4	3
1928	15	10	0	24	2	3
1929	13	19	0	21	15	3

Source: Afigbo, The Warrant Chief, op cit, p. 239

[229] N.A.E., Owdist 9/6/3, Report on Owerri Division for half-year, January-June 1922. See the extract from Report on trade received from the Niger Company at Oguta

[230] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, op cit, p. 239

Table 3: Palm Kernel price at Opobo 1922

Year	Per Measure			Per Ton		
	£	S	D	£	S	D
1926	8	12	10	13	17	16
1927	8	8	0	13	10	0
1928	9	7	0	13	0	0
1929	7	7	0	11	10	3

Source: Ibid

These tables showed a general decline in the prices of the palm produce. It is possible that these prices were lower in the Mbaise area from where most of the Opobo middle men get their supplies. According to Gailey, this downward movement of the prices of palm produce was caused by a world wide depression which had reached Eastern Nigeria area at that time[231]. This observation was apt. The European powers were still not recovered from the economic losses caused by the World War I from 1914 to 1919.

When the tax rate was fixed in 1927, the government officials bore in their mind not only what a man made from farming, but also the proceed on his trade on palm oil. The imposition of taxation on the peoples of Eastern Nigeria became an additional burden on the shoulder of a people who had been almost overburdened with the pressure created by the fast changing socio-economic

[231] Gailey op cit, p. 99

situation under the warrant chiefs system. Some colonial officers were apt in their observation in the Owerri Province, that the tax rate was too high. For instance, Mr. Ferguson reported in 1928, while Mr. Royce reported in 1929 that the rate of tax per head in Nguru area was too high. But nothing was done to remedy this situation[232]. This no doubt was why the anti-tax grievance was high in the Mbaise area.

Dependence on the palm produce and drastic decline in its prices in those years was the major issue that led to the outbreak of the women revolution in 1929. The tax burden on men had increased the yoke of women in the provision of food for the family. The wealth upon which the tax rate was fixed, did not belong to the man alone though it may seem so, it was only in theory, in practical reality the wealth of a man was the product of the family including wives and children. Therefore, when the news about the tax on women filled the air in 1929, the women did not see it as a new burden, but an increase in the existing one. Korieh and Njoku described the 1928 tax as tax on households which impose some burden on women. In reacting to this, a woman from Obowo, Akulehula said, how do we pay tax? Tax paid by men already affects us[233].

What cannot be forgotten in this discourse is the fact that when the prices of the local products were dwindling, the prices of the imported goods were

[232] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs op cit, p. 238-9

[233] Korieh and Njoku in Mbari, op cit

going higher. For instance, the price of four-gallon tin of palm oil had fallen from 8 shillings and 5 pens to 5 shillings. The women rejected a situation where a four-gallon tin of palm oil will be sold at 5 shillings while kerosene of the same quantity was sold at 9 shillings[234]. This was a decisive fact to the women's revolution.

Scholars have attributed the grievances against the warrant chiefs as political factors that led to this revolt. Afigbo advocated that:

The economic grievance was important only in so far as it helped to make the burden of direct taxation more evenly felt[235].

This statement tends to complement the economic grievances to that of direct taxation and other forms of grievances. Our view in this work is that imposition of direct taxation made the burden of general socio-economic development of that area more keenly felt. We have earlier stated the choice of the warrant chiefs system in Eastern Nigeria, particularly in the Mbaise area was motivated by lack of human and material resources on the side of the British. Secondly, it was meant to ensure the exploitation of the human and material resources in the area. The warrant chiefs system as a political institution was entirely an instrument of economic exploitation.

[234] Notes of Evidence on Aba Women Riot, p. 82

[235] More prominent among these scholars is Professor Afigbo, who could only see the importance of the economic grievances of the women from the point of view of its relationship with direct taxation.

To further buttress his political reason for the women's revolution, Afigbo added that "the attack on the chiefs and their courts derives partly from the old grudge which many people bore them for past oppression and partly from the fact that the chiefs were regarded as having secretly agreed with the government on the introduction of taxation[236]. It should be understood that both old and new grudges were only important for the effects of the material conditions of the people. The warrant chief's oppression can be better explained in the manner through which they exploited the people's labour and material resources under the Road and River Ordinance as we have earlier said. The main issue was that the chiefs used oppressive means to enrich themselves such chiefs as Okpokoro of Onicha was referred to as radical of the worst nature[237]. It was said that when a new yam was harvested by the people some would be taken to Okpoko before an attempt was made by the owner to take them to the market, if not he would send some of his messengers to seize the items[238].

Not only that, most warrant chiefs from the Mbaise area were engaged in the dubious act of coveting other people's wives. It was said that the fourth wife of one Adiukwu of Umuosis in Obizi was seized and taken away by Chief Onyewuchi of Udo around 1906, when the area was being pacified by the colonial forces[239]. This was the same case with Chief Okpokoro of Onicha. It was said that during the women's revolt, a man whose name was not revealed to

[236] Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria, op cit, p. 242
[237] E.N.J. Nwokocha, 79, Oral Interview, Udo, 15/11/087
[238] Njoku, 24/10/08, op cit
[239] Adiukwu, op cit

me by my informant, went to Okpokoro's house with his arms to release his wife from Okpokoro's bondage[240].

Chief Iwuala Nwichi of Akpokwu was said to have married about sixteen (16) wives through this dubious means. But when the women's revolt started in 1929, most of those women were freed, and allowed to return to their various places[241]. This practice was a common place among the warrant chiefs in the area before the women's revolt. It is important to remark that forceful separation of a wife from her husband had economic importance. As we have shown in the chapter two of this work that the major source of labour was the family. And that the family was made up of the man wife or wives, children and host of other relatives. As we earlier stated, this may be the reason behind the polygamous type of family that was prevalent in the area.

What is important here is that the act of collecting people's wives with force, as the warrant chiefs were doing had a direct consequence on the economic and social affair of those individuals affected. To take a man's wife meant denying him of his source of labour and children. Therefore, there were more of socio-economic problem than political. The evils of the warrant chiefs before 1929 was not limited to those stated above. There were other acts which are considered here to be targeted towards impoverishing the people.

[240]Njoku, 24/10/08, op cit
[241] Nwachukwu 19/01/09 op cit

The warrant chiefs in their triple alliance with the court clerks and court messengers were in the criminal act of issuing fictitious summons to individuals whose wealth were considered a threat to them. This fictitious summons were known as *Akwukow Nwannunu*.

> *It was under the warrant chiefs system that the terrible thing called* ***akwukwo nwannunu*** *came into being. It was a system by which a chief could continue to bring tocourt a man whose only offense was that he was forceful and progressive. Chiefs regarded such a man as a threat to their position, and used the court to liquidate them. Once such a man was dragged to court, the cases against them which were often groundless ended only after they had spent in defending themselves all the wealth that made them proud*[241].

The term *akwukwo nwannunu* as it was used to describe this ugly innovation of the warrant chiefs' era is still used to describe a groundless case in the present day.

Isichei explained that *akwukwo nwannunu* was a summons as baseless as the air which made some innocent people to go to prison without guilt[242]. This explaination is apt only in one aspect while it is agreeable that *akwukwo*

[241] F.J. Onyeneho, quoted in Afigbo, The Warrant Chiefs Indirect Rule in Southern Nigeria, op cit, p. 274
[242] Isichei, op cit, p. 143

nwannunu was a baseless summon, the purpose was not to send people to prison, rather to liquidate the person. Nze John Nnajiaku opined that *akwukwo nwanunnu* was that summons served by the *kotima* (court messenger) under the warrant chiefs system, which do not bear the name of the plaintiff[243]. In the warrant chiefs' era, summons were dreaded as if they were equal to death[244]. This fictitious cases were used by the warrant chiefs, the court clerks and court messengers to strip people of their wealth. My grandfather was a victim of this circumstance in the time of Chief Iwuala Nwichi as the Warrant Chief of Akpokwu. After series of adjournments, he (my grandfather) was asked to pay five (5) shillings to dismiss each of the 18 count charges against him.

Some other people who became victim of this circumstance under Chief Iwuala, but could not redeem themselves, became slaves to the Chief. For instance Achara, and George Ukpara of Umuada (now Akoli) Jombo Nwobilo Eke and Nwogu Ohaja of Eziala were resident servants (slaves) in the house of Chief Iwuala[245]. These criminal acts were not designed and executed by the illiterate warrant chiefs alone. The summons were written in English, and the only man who had the mastery of reading and writing was the court clerk. He alone knows how to issue summons. He was responsible for collecting and recording of court fees.

[243] Nnajiaku, op cit
[244] Ibid
[245] Nwachukwu, 17/01/09, op cit

According to Ndubuisi, the court clerk was in charge of pen and paper, therefore he was regarded as the origin of the summons which could mean doom to a man and his family[246]. It was this type of conspiracy to undo the people that led to serious grievances against the system.

However, the women's revolt began in Olokoro, in Bende Division and spread across the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar Provinces. The narrative of this movement is not going to be repeated hear hence some scholars have written extensively on it[247]. Our focus here is to illuminate some salient factors concerning the revolt particularly in the Mbaise area. Women from the Mbaise area took active part in this revolt particularly in their own area. There is no evidence whether they were part of the actions in the Bende area. But Bende women traveled to the different regions of the affected provinces to educate their fellow women on the issue of taxation. Nwanyereuwa, Ikonnia, Nwannedie, Nwugo and Nwada and other women leaders traveled around the provinces to meet the colonial officials on the tax issue[248].

The meeting of women with the colonial officials were part of the effort to resolve the issue of women's taxation without violence. But the British officers and their warrant chiefs lacked the convincing words to avert the violence. Yet Perharm regarded the women as:

[246] Nwachukwu, 19/01/09, op cit
[247] S.C. Ndubuisi, Colonial Rule and Corruption in Igbo Political Life: A Case Study of the Isiakwuato Clan, Paper presented to the Department of History, Abdullahi Bayero University College, 20/01/76, p. 6
[248] Korieh and Njoku in Mbaise op cit, p. 136

People who do not know how to communicate or even to formulate their sense of grievance in constitutional terms, and may resort to violence as the only effective way in which they can show their dissatisfaction with their conditions[249].

This expression meant that violence was the only means through which the people of the two provinces expressed their dissatisfaction. If this was true, there would not have been a delegation of fifty women to the provincial headquarters in Port Harcourt to register their protest with the Resident of Owerri Province[250]. The women from Bende Division, particularly the Olokoro women provided effective leadership to this revolt. And in recognition of this leadership, the women from Owerri Division made monetary contribution of 10 to 15 shillings per village, which amounted to about 17 pounds to support the Olokoro leadership.

The activities of Olokoro women leaders set precedence for the women from the Owerri District area. Women from this division began to demonstrate such leadership quality as the Olokoro women. In Umuokirika, Ekwereazu Clan of Owerri Division, Ihejilemebi Ibe emerged as a significant women leader. Her significant role in her community began earlier before the women's revolt. She had served as the head of women's spy team during local wars, and was a member of the war council. Her leadership role became of immense

[249] M. Perham, Native Administration in Nigeria, Oxford University Press, London, 1962, p. 206
[250] Ibid

contribution during the revolt, as she led women to sit on warrant chiefs who refused to resign their position by handing over their caps. During this occasion, houses belonging to these chiefs were burnt. The influence of this women and others made the warrant chief of Obohia, Chief Anyanwuagwu to abdicate and secretly negotiated his resignation and handing over of cap to the women[251].

In Onicha of Ezinihitte Clan, Owerri Division, Madam Mary took the leadership responsibility of championing the anti-taxation cause[252]. Nwudaku Aguekpe of Amumara was among the influential women who mobilized her fellow women to rise up against the policy of taxation on women and the position of the warrant chiefs from the Mbaise area[253]. The two influential women from Nguru were Madam Nwachi Esoh Eke and Madam Nwachi Njoka Egwuawuru[254]. The tension was so high in Owerri Division. Women from different parts of the division had mobilized themselves for the revolt, particularly from the Okpala, and Nguru Court areas. We have noted earlier that Mbaise fell under the jurisdiction of Nguru and Okpala Courts. On the 13th of December 1929, Mr. Ferguson went round the Nguru, Okpala, and Ngor areas, stopping and talking to every band of women, and arranging to have a big meeting on the 14th. This report stated that "at Nguru, people did not look at all happy[255]."

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[251] John Oriji, quoted in Korieh and Njoku, op cit, p. 135
[252] Ibid
[253] Nwigwe, oip cit
[254] E.C. Agulana, The Mbaiseness of Mbaise, I-O Publishers, Owerri, 1998, pp. 41, 42
[255] The Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces

On the 14th being the day slated for a big meeting between Mr. Ferguson and the women, about 3.00 a.m., the messengers from the Nguru area had escaped to Owerri to inform Mr. Ferguson that the women from the Nguru area were numbering about 2,000 to 3,000. But Mr. Ferguson with a few policemen and court messengers stopped them, and for more than four hours tried to dialogue with their spokeswomen. The women demanded a written assurance from Mr. Ferguson that there should be no tax on women, that tax on men should be abolished. But Ferguson replied that "he has been authorized by the Resident to state that full inquiry would be made into any case where it was alleged the assessment was too heavy, provided that women return to their homes and were ready to give information[256]. Ferguson's response to the demand of the women was not diplomatic enough. While the women were making demand of total abolition of taxation, he was only interested in the reduction of the rate, though he had prior to the riot indicated that the rate was too high in the Nguru Court area of Owerri Division.

At this juncture, the women reiterated that the question of the price of produce and finally demanded the removal from office the existing court members (warrant chiefs):

We said that even District Officers were changed periodically;

we said that we wished the relationship between us and the

[256] Ibid

government to be as cordial as those existing between us and reverend fathers. If there is cooperation between us and government, we shall be able to select new men to take the place of those chiefs who have been oppressing us[257].

According to the report, their main grievance against the chiefs at the time was in connection with the payment of dowries and exorbitant fees unofficially exacted[258]. As we have shown earlier, the demand of the women was a significant fact that they were witnessing worsening material condition under the warrant chiefs. The Divisional Officer, Mr. Ferguson made promises that any specific instance of illegality on the part of any court member would be investigated, if the women would disperse quietly[259]. These promises were just oral rather than the written assurance demanded by the women. Consequently, they refused to disperse. But Mr. Ferguson employed the use of force on the women. Through the support of twenty policemen, Mr. Ferguson was able to prevent the women from the Nguru area from entering Owerri, the divisional headquarter[260].

Before their attempt to carry their protest to the divisional headquarters, the women had earlier on the 10th of December destroyed the Nguru Court and Ngor rest house[261]. The house of various warrant chiefs in the Nguru and Okpala Court areas had been brought to ruin. The inability of the women to

[257] Ibid
[258] Ibid
[259] Ibid
[260] Ibid
[261] Ibid

enter the district headquarters due to police presence made them to direct their angry attention to the less protected areas such as the Nguru Court and Okpala Court areas. The Mbaise women who came from the areas under the jurisdiction of Okpala Court took their protest to Okpala. On the 20th December, the disturbance became too much at Okpala, and a detachment of troops under Captain McCullough was employed to scatter a mob of women. During this incident, one of the women was injured[262].

The warrant chiefs from Amaumara, Chief William Obasi ran across the Imo River with some of his headmen to escape the anger of the women[263]. At Ife, the women sat on Chief Nwigwe Akanwa, until he handed his cap to them[264]. Oral information showed that Chief Iwuala was tried and sentenced to jail on the insistence of the women. Not only that, those women who he had held in forced marriage were released by a mob of women[265]. This was the case with the notorious Chief Okpokoro of Onicha[266]. The anger of the women was not only on the warrant chiefs, as we have earlier noted. During the fray at Nguru Court, the group of demonstrating women who attacked the court clerk of Nguru Mr. William were shouting kill him, his (the court house) was the house where all the government money was stored and where all the tax money was kept[267].

[262] Gailey, op cit, p. 121
[263] Obasi, op cit
[264] Nwigwe, op cit
[265] Nwachukwu, 17/01/09 op cit
Nwachukwu, 19/02/09 op cit
[266] Njoku, Oral Interview op cit
[267] N.A.E., Aba Commission of Inquiry, Note on Evidence, paragraph 8030

Many scholars of this subject have always ignored one and a very important feature of the revolt. The revolt was attributed to women because of the fact that it began at the instance of the attempt by the government to include women in taxation. And that the revolt was predominantly by women. But in such a critical analysis, we cannot undermine the fact that men were part of the revolt. To create the required aura, and exact the actual force, men were dressed in old women's cloth and smeared their faces and bodies with clay. Just like the women did, and it became difficult to identify who was a man in the crowd of women numbering about two to three thousand per group.[268]

> *Men occasionally make a flickering appearance in the background, but they seem, with a few exceptions, to have stood completely one side, passive, if consenting parties, to the extra-ordinary behavior of their wives.*[269]

This statement is supportive to some extent, but the later part of it may have been motivated by the situation which Mr. Ferguson Reported on the 14th of December in the Nguru area. He reported that every man he saw on the road had a matchet, and he interpreted this as a sing that the country was not settled.[270] Those men who appeared in women's dress to take part in the revolt may have possibly been influenced by the general belief shared by the people that women were never killed in war or that the government would not harm women.[271]

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[268] Samuel Amadi Odu, 83, Oral Interview, Umueleru Emjogwugwu, 29/04/2010

[269] Note of Evidence, p. 517, paragraph 9769

[270] Report of Commission of Inquiry, p. 57, paragraph 3534

[271] Perham, op cit, p. 131

Following the killing of women by soldiers in Abak and Opobo areas, the myths of invincibility which had governed the conduct of the women during the revolt was brought to an end. The optimism that government would not harm a woman was erased from their minds. No woman could comfort herself any more that she was protected or immune from the brute force of the colonial government. This new idea of insecurity coupled with the ever increasing number of police and military presence in the region, the revolt came to a halt.

THE GOVERNMENT'S REACTION TO THE REVOLT

The colonial authorities in reaction evoked the harmer of the collective Punishment Ordinance in the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar. Under the collective Punishment Ordinance the authorities had power to levy fines for the suspected misdeeds or previous actions on collective rather than individual basis. Collective Punishment Ordinance provided that fines could be imposed on a village or an entire district, in consideration with the amount of damage done by the people of the area. Under this rule properties could be confiscated to effect compliance. The District Commissioner can as well order the burning of a compound or number of compounds as a punishment or an object lesson to the people and others.[272]

[272] N.A.E. Collective Punishment Ordinance No. 20 of 1915

In the company of police and troops which had been adequately supplied in the provinces to quench any sign of resistance, the district officers went about collecting fines from the disturbed areas. Although the ordinance provided that fines to be collected in such regards should be in consonance with the amount of damage caused, there was no attempt to correlate the fines collected with the damage done in these areas.

In the Owerri provincial area, the fines were very high. For instance, in Owerrinta Court area of Aba Division, the fine was ten shillings per adult male or £2,355 collectively, while in the Nguru Court area (Mbaise) of Owerri Division, each adult male was made to pay five shillings three pence[273].

It is important to note that the imposition of fines on the adult males of the provinces after the women revolt is a pointer to the fact that the colonial authorities were aware that when they were imposing taxation on men they were doing so to the women. If the fines collected from the adult males was an object lesson to the women, it means that the women were right in their claim that they bore part of the burden of the tax imposed on the men. Therefore, the women were not wrong when they said that taxation on them was not a new burden but additional burden.

[273] Cessional Paper quoted in Gailey, op cit, p. 137

Apart form the collective punishment carried out by the government, Sir Graeme Thomson's administration, and the entire fabric of colonial administration in the Eastern Provinces had been shaken to foundation by the women's revolt. Therefore, there was urgent need to locate the cause of this revolt and proffer solution to it. Consequently, on January 2, 1930 Governor Thomson inaugurated a commission of inquiry comprising of two members namely, Major William Gray, Mr. Henry Blackall. This commission was limited to Opobo, Aback, and Uta-Elim-Ekpo. These areas fell within Calabar Province to which we are not much concerned here.

On the 7th of February 1930 another and broader Commission of Inquiry was inaugurated by His Excellency, Sir Graeme Thomson, Governor of the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. This second Commission was made up of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Mr. Donald Kingdom, Chairman, Sir Akiloyi Ajasa (barrister at law) Nigerian, William Edgar Hurt (Resident) George Graham Paul, (advocate) Eric Olahola More (barrister at law) Nigerian, and Valentine Ronald Osborne, Agent General of John Holt and Company.[274] The duties of this Commission were:

> *To enquire into the origin and cause of and responsibility for the recent disturbances in the Calabar and Owerri Provinces*

[274] N.A.E., Aba Commission of Inquiry, p. 1

and the measures taken to restore order and to make such recommendations as may seem fit.

To inquire into the responsibility (if any) of any person or persons for failing to take in anticipation of such disturbances adequate measures to safeguard life and property.[275]

The Commission started work on 10th of March and concluded on the 26th of May 1930. During their inquiry, evidence was collected from 485 persons in the Owerri and Calabar Provinces, coupled with other numerous reports and documents from officers and private persons which were received and examined.[276] In brief, the findings of the commission showed that the women's revolt was occasioned by the introduction of direct taxation and the precipitated actions of the administrative officers. The concealment of the reason for assessment from the people in 1926 and 1927, created a basis for mutual suspicion in 1929. For this, Resident Ingles was held responsible by the commission. This was one of the major reasons given by the women in evidence.[277] The Commission further stated that the immediate cause of the revolt was the indiscriminate counting of women, children, and livestock. And the Acting District officer of Bende Division, Mr Cook was blamed for this.[278]

The submission of the warrant chiefs cap of chief Okago to the women, the hasty trail of the warrant chief Okugo and the assessment officer Emeruwa,

[275] Ibid
[276] Ibid, Appendices II-IV, pp 137-153
[277] Note of Evidence, op cit, p. 21
[278] Note of Evidence, op cit, p. 2

portrayed the government's weakness, and created in the women the image of a victor[279]. This victory of Olokoro became a stimuli to the women from other part of the province affected. But more fundamental was the remark made by Graham Paul. Paul, a member of the commission of inquiry, condemned in the strongest term, the implementation of the government policy of taxation in the Eastern Nigeria. In his opinion, the "fundamental mistake was taxation itself." He noted "I think that in fact that taxation was introduced long before work had been completed. It is not yet completed."[280] In furthering his critique:

> *The so-called "intelligence side of the assessment had been almost completely ignored. The central government had paid little attention to the problem of discovering the natural rulers of the people upon whose authority the entire system of indirect rule and taxation ultimately depended. Instead, it had adopted without question certain assumption inherited from Lord Lugard, the most damaging being the decision about the need for taxation as a preliminary for education in the art of self-government.*[281].

Paul believed that this political education could and should have been made before the introduction of direct taxation. This particular factor raised by Graham Paul was deliberately or ignorantly played down by the other members

[279] C.O. 583/169/2, Telegram from Governor of Colonial Nigeria to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on January 1930, quoted in Korieh and Njoku, op cit, p. 123
[280] Sessional Paper No. 28, 128, quoted in Gailey, op cit, p. 141
[281] Gailey, op cit, p. 141

of the Commission. Although taxation made a significant contribution to the cause of revolt, it was not the sole cause of the revolt as Paul was wont to say. However, Paul's observation was noted by the Secretary of State for the colonies, Lord Passifield and the man who succeeded Graem Thomson as the Governor of Nigeria in 1931, Sir Donald Cameron.

To make it clearer, the introduction of direct taxation in the Eastern Provinces by the protectorate government came at a time when there was no enough knowledge about the institution it was going to be relied upon.

THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE COMMISSION OF INQUIRY ON THE WOMEN'S REVOLT

Apart from the recommendation to release Chief Okugo and Emeruwa who were tried and imprisoned, the commission made a general recommendation. It recommended that the government should de-emphasize the revenue aspect of taxation, end the practice of assessing the number of men by ratio to house, doors, most importantly, reevaluate taxation in the light of the fall in the price of palm produce. The commission recommended that a special commission be set to investigate the "Native Court" system, which was said to be faulty. And that the warrant chiefs whose appointment did not reflect their role in traditional society.

This was another important issue in the political administration of the Eastern Provinces. The British occupied themselves with the search of something that never existed in these provinces, particularly in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division. Our study in the chapter two of this work revealed that there was no one person whose traditional role fitted in what the warrant chiefs were required to do in the colonial era. Rather, the traditional role of village council in pre-colonial days was closer to the functions of the colonial chiefs.

ATTEMPT ON REFORM

In a bid to carry out a reform of the local administration in the Eastern Provinces, C.T. Lawrence, the Secretary of the Southern Provinces, after his observation of the faulty policies of the protectorate government on local administration, put forward a more positive advice in his memorandum dated 16th January, 1930 that:

> *The only remedy to cure the evil (abuse in the system) completely would be the entire removal of these opportunities (for graft) and probably the abolition of the Native Court and a reversion to some crude form of local village council, would be the only way to attain this end.*[282]

[282] Ibid, p. 144

These documents provided the protectorate government still under the control of Thomson a basis for reforming the local administration. It is however important to note that from the 10th of December 1929 when the women's revolt became serious to July 1930 when the commission of inquiry submitted their findings and recommendations, there was no court for the Mbaise people formerly under the jurisdiction of Nguru Court.[283]

As part of the effort of Thomson's administration to rebuild the courts destroyed during the revolt, and carry out a reform of the local administration, new court areas were created in the Owerri Division. Upon the advise of an Assistant District Officer, who after conducting two months of surveys concluded that there were three distinct tribes in the Nguru Court area, the Ekwereazu, the Agbaja, three separate native authority area each with its own court, were created.[284]

The women's revolt forced the officers in the two affected provinces to facilitate the reform that had been on in the Eastern Provinces before 1929. Between 1922 and 1923, Mr. Grier the Secretary of Native Affairs advised that "Native Courts" should be in consonant with clan boundaries. And steps towards this direction had begun, though it was yet to achieve a far-reaching effect when the revolt occurred[285].

[283] The Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, op cit

[284] N.A.E., Report on the Nguru Court Area with Reference to the formation of New Native Courts at Obohia and it, 1929

[285] N.A.E., Annual Report, Southern Provinces for 1929, pp 3, 12, 23-4

As part of the reform that followed the creation of new "native courts" areas in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division, government appointed new members known as *Ezeala*, to the new native courts. After the women's revolt in the Mbaise area, a certain amount of unrest continued for a time, and it became necessary to bring in a number of village areas men who could be trusted to do his best to keep the village area in peace, and who was at the same time, a man of standing according to native custom. Meetings were held and people were asked to produce the *Ezealas* of their village area. In the Obohia Court area, eleven of the so-called *Ezealas* were brought forward, six from the Ekwereazu area, five from the Ahiara area. These *Ezealas* and the members of the former Nguru Court from the villages attending the Obohia Court formed the panel of judges of the new Obohia Court.[1] Consequently, this period became known as a period of Mass Bench Chieftancy (Eze Agha, Gbururu). The Native Court Ordinance number 12 of 1930 empowered the Residents of a Province, subject to the approval of the Governor, to establish 'at such places as he shall in his discretion select, Native Court as may be defined by the Warrant establishing same[286]. This enactment was the basis of the change that occurred in the political landscape in the Eastern Provinces, particularly in the Mbaise area from 1930 to 1934. The Residents having been empowered to do so, proceeded to establish 'Native Courts' which unlike the old courts, served

[286] Nwabara, op cit, p. 203

smaller area. Between 1930 and 1934, Mbaise which was hitherto under the jurisdiction of the two courts of Okpala and Nguru, were divided into five units. The first of these courts came in June 1930, and these were the Agbaja, Ekwereazu and Ezinihitte courts[287]. The Ekwereazu court exercised jurisdiction over the Ahiara Clan, while the Oke Clan was still at Okpala Court. By the 2nd July 1932, a court has been approved for Ahiara Clan. The report reads:

> *With reference to your letter No. 27521/26 of the 20th May 1922, I am directed by the Lieutenant-Governor to inform you that His Honour has sanctioned a court for the Ahiara group on the same line as that of the Ekwereazu group[288].*

Similarly, by 17th of March, 1934, the Oke Court had become a fait-acompli[289.] And Mbaise had been divided into five court areas as shown in Map 4.

While the Itu Court was reflecting a clan boundary, the Obohia Court was not. The Ekwereazu and Ahiara clans were yet to be separated from the jurisdiction of the Obohia Court, while the Okpala Court still exercises its jurisdiction over the Oke Clan. The only group which the government could readjust during the 1930 reform were the Ezinihitte and Agbaja groups. While the Obohia and Okpala Courts still cut across clan boundaries.

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[287] Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, op cit

[288] N.A.E., S.P. 88440/67, Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu Clan, Owerri Division, 2nd July, 1932.

[289] Onwuzirike, op cit, p. 79

The view in this work is that though creation of more courts created opportunity for more people to be employed by the government, particularly the chiefs. It was not the solution to the problem that erupted in 1929. As we have earlier noted, the introduction of the western style of social development, which followed the establishment of the warrant chiefs system created a very heavy burden on the shoulders of the people. Before the women's revolt prices of produce had fallen considerably. And it was realized after the revolt that a thickly populated areas around Nguru could not continue to pay tax at the former rate of seven shillings per adult male.

Following the recommendation of the commission of inquiry, a brief investigation was again made into the wealth of the Nguru area. And it was discovered that the area depended almost entirely on farm and palm produce, and on petty trading. A simple calculation revealed that the area contained less than one acre per head of population, and approximately three acres per adult male. It was then made clear that crop production in this area was barely sufficient for the people's subsistence. And that they depended on palm oil and kernel for any monetary income with which they met their other needs. Considering these reasons, the rate of tax was reduced for the area from seven shillings to five shillings. This was further reviewed in 1931 to two shillings.[290]

[290] Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan, op cit

The reduction of the tax rate was one of the reactions of the government that had a direct impact on the people, though it was aimed at averting more crisis.

The reforms that came in the Eastern Provinces after the women's revolt as we have said above, brought new court areas into existence in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division; there were the courts at Itu for the Ezinihitte clan and at Obohia for the Ahiara and Ekwereazu clans, and another at Enyogwugwu for the Agbaja clan. As we earlier said they meant partly to bring the local administration closer to the people, and to conform to clan boundaries. But in the end, these new courts appeared to have cut across clan boundaries. The Oke clan in Mbaise was still part of the Okpala Court, while the Ekwereazu and Ahiara clans were still under the jurisdiction of the Obohia Court in Ekewereazu. Mbata which was naturally part of the Oke clan was still under the jurisdiction of the Agbaja clan. This suggested that the reform failed to accomplish one of its objectives, the one of creating 'Native Court' boundaries to be in line with the clan boundaries.

The establishment of these new courts was one of the means meant to give chance for the traditional or natural heads of the various groups in the affected provinces to become part of the government. But this remained an illusion hence the men who were appointed, displayed no remarkable sign of traditional headship or influence.[291] It has been seen that the British were

[291] Ibid, see also the Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, op cit, N.A.E. C.S.E. 1/85/5118, Intelligence Report on the Okpala Court Area, Owerri Division.

dragged into the reform by the revolt. But the outcome of the reform showed that the British did not locate what was the problem of the administration. The search for natural heads in the area would yield nothing, hence there was no such leader, as to what constituted leadership in the British idea.

On the appointment of Sir Donald Cameron as the Governor General of the Nigeria, new changes occurred in the administrative sphere of the government. But the economic spheres continued to look bleak. Cameron's reform was not limited to the Eastern Provinces, where there had been problem, but to the whole of the territory of Nigeria. He was dissatisfied with the state of affair as illustrated in his statement:

> *Emphasis must first be laid on the necessity in seeking for the authority which according to tribal tradition and usage has regulated the affairs of the tribal units, with which we may be concerned, of assuring ourselves that the authority does in fact exist and genuinely accepted by the people affected.…the native authority that is not acceptable to the people, and is maintained because we impose it on them is therefore almost certainly bound to fail.*[292]

[292] D. Cameron, The Principles of and Their Application, Lagos Government Printers, 1934, p. 6, par. 10

It was on this note that Cameron ordered the officers on the spot, to carry out a deep investigation into the political system of the areas. Prominent anthropologist like Dr. Meek who was drafted into the Eastern Provinces for this work, came out with some fact that:

If individual's autocratic authority was unknown within the small recognized group, how much less could an individual exercise any legitimate authority.[293] These difficulties were acknowledged by the officers in the Owerri Division whose duty was to carry out this investigation in the Mbaise area of the division. The problem of locating the traditional heads from the area compelled the Resident in 1932 to order for the search of the *Okonko* members. In his memorandum to the district officer, he stated as follows, "I wish to be assure that all members of the court will be members of *Okonko*, and that no member will be an *Osu*."[294] We have shown in chapter three of this work, how a bitter war was waged against the members of the *Okonko* during the period of conquest, not only in the Mbaise area, but in most part of Igboland. It is equally important to note that being a member of the *Okonko* does not suggest that the individual possessed autocratic authority.[295]

Osu as mentioned by the Resident was an outcast. The demand for the *Okonko* members as members of the court made the search for those who could

[293] Perham, op cit, p. 234

[294] Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan op cit, see Memorandum No. OW 623/21 of 26th May, 1932

[295] See Chapter Two for details about the Okonko Society

approximate the traditional heads in the area more difficult. However, in response to his demand, the District Commissioner stated that:

> *I have to report that I have made enquiries from the Ezinihitte people as to the proportion of Okonko members among the heads of extended families. It has not yet been possible for me to see the heads of the senior extended family in every kindred. But I have seen a number of them, and of these about half are members of Okonko. I have not yet found one who is an Osu… Of the thirteen Ezealas and old court members, not one is Osu. The power of Okonko started warning over twenty years ago, and today as all members admit, the society exists in name only.*[296]

As we have shown earlier in this work, *Okonko* was not the supreme authority in the Mbaise area before the imposition of British rule. Rather they carried out the decision of the *Amala* and on the other hand, exercised jurisdiction over dispute between tow of its members. Therefore, the result would have been almost the same with what they had if all the new members of the court were *Okonko* members. In terms of political and judicial administration, the *Okonko* did not function alone neither did they dictate for and entire village area in the whole of Igboland. Therefore, these reforms were

[296] Intelligence Report on Ezinihitte Clan op cit, see Memorandum No. 10/1931 from the District Commissioner of Owerri Division to the Resident Commissioner, Owerri Province, 27th June, 1932

not aimed at preventing the realization of the aims and objectives of colonialism.

Colonialism as it is well known was not interested or aimed at developing the African societies.[297] Rather, it was aimed at plundering the human and material resources of these societies. In order to do this, the colonial powers employed the use of brute force to overcome one and all societies in the Nigerian area and Africa as a whole. As Isichei had put it, "Colonialism, throughout the world, has always been an essentially violent phenomenon. It was imposed by violence, and maintained by its potential capacity for violence."[298] The use of violent force to take over the sovereignty of the various societies which later became Nigeria was what was called conquest.

During the conquest, some villages or village groups were made to fight against others either by coercive violence or by psychological violence of threat and severe punishment. In this sense colonialism became a phenomenon which used what we have to destroy us. In the words of Afigbo, "It made no difference whether a village resisted openly or passively. In either case, the elders were manhandled and the houses set ablaze."[299] The coercive violence were in form physical brutality which forced some individual villages or village groups to either take up arms against their neighbours, or to provide intelligence to overcome their resistance. Record have shown how Njamanze of Owerri was

[297] C. Ake Explanatory Notes on the Political Economy of Africa, in Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1976, p. 5
[298] Isichei, op cit, p. 119
[299] Afigbo, Eastern Province Under Colonial Rule in Ikime (ed) op cit, p. 414

bullied and bamboozled by Major Gallway, the political officer attached to the two military columns that camped at Owerri, into alienating a portion of the village land[300]. During the Aro Expedition Njamannze helped to provide local guides for the military columns to Bende[301]. Although it was not made clear whether he did that to satisfy himself or not. But it is possible that he did it out of coercion or fear of it.

In the same manner, Nwaturuocha of Nguru was placed under house arrest until he provided guide on how to overcome the killers of Dr. Stewat, and break the resistance in the Mbaise area[302]. We have noted earlier in chapter three of this work how several villages in Onicha, Obizi, Umuekeugo Ogbor were burn down by the colonialforces. The significance of this is show that colonial rule in the Mbaise area of Owerri Division, like elsewhere in Africa was imposed with force. And the use of force to make the colonized people to accept the British overlord was a deliberate attempt and not a mistake. This was evident in the memorandum issued in December in 1901. It was stated there that "the government had made up its mind to overawe the interland communities and establish British rule over one and all[303]."

The most important aspect of these operations, which is the major concern of this discuss is that the people were forced to fuel the fire of conquest against themselves[304]. The conquered villages or village groups were made to

[300] Ibid, p. 70
Anene op cit, p. 234-5
Isichei op cit, p. 147
[301] Afigbo, op cit, p. 64
[303] Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 14
[304] Anene, op cit, p. 230

provide food, water and firewood and other needs for the conquerors who may in most cases garrison a place for over a week before they depart. This depended on how long the resistance or resentment may last. To this effect, it is apt to advance that the economic sovereignty of these societies disappeared together with the political and cultural sovereignty at the instance of the colonial forces.

Forceful taking of lands, occupation of market centres by the soldiers, looting of people's yam barns even in their presence, were all good signals that political and socio-economic control of these societies had been taken over from the indigenous authorities. According to Chief Njamannze, "there was little he cold do, confronted by troops who had for some time occupied themselves with looting yam barns[305]."

Apart from wives and children, there was nothing as important to the families in the Igbo societies as the yam barn because it was the reservoir of the family wealth, the importance of yam barn brought about the popular statement that "if you see what is more profitable than farming, you sale your yam barn." Land on its own was the major means of production in the pre-colonial and even under the colonial administration. At the instance of the colonial forces, the people had lost control of their land, as we can see in the case of Njamannze

[305] Anene, op cit, p. 235

and his village land. These resources formed a great part of the funding of the colonial conquest.

Another means through which the colonial powers pressed their plunder was through indemnities or what can aptly be referred to as reparation. After the conquest of any particular area, the next action was to demand a certain condition, to ensure that the people have pledged their loyalty to their new masters (the British). These were in line with the official policy of the protectorate government. After the draconian punishment which the Mbaise received from the colonial forces, an indemnity of £100 was demanded from the various villages and village groups in the area[306]. The demand of this reparation was in consonance with the official policy of the protectorate. The officers were instructed to keep the leaders of the people hostage until guns had been handed in, food provided for the troops and roads made.[307] However, difficult, these reparations were collected from the adult males of the various villages and paid to the colonial government.

It was the logic of the situation that the establishment of government should go hand in hand with the conquest. As Afigbo had put it:

> *The British in the Eastern Provinces were convinced that the greatest need of the Igbo and their neighbours was how to maintain that law and order which would ensure the most*

[306] Njoku, The History and Culture of Mbaise, op cit, p. 15
[307] N.A.E. C.S.O. 1/13/, Dispatches to F.O., 1902

effective exploitation of the natural resources which they believed abounded in the area.[308]

This is very important, hence the colonial powers were not in Africa for nation building or development of their victims. In response to this need, the warrant chiefs system of administration was deemed fit for the job. Appointment of these indigenous elements to sit in these courts was part of the effort by the colonial state to tear the corporate societies in Eastern Provinces apart. These societies for the first time in their history took the posture of the ruler and rule. This posture was necessary to enhance exploitation.

According to Ake, "The European powers saw that resistances to their exploitation would be less effective if the colonized were kept divided[309]. However, the establishment of government in the conquered areas while the conquest was still on became a reality in the Owerri District area following the establishment of the "Native Council" at Owerri on 11 May 1902 and in Nguru Mbaise and Okpola in 1909. As we had mentioned earlier, these courts were to maintain the colonial violence which was introduced in the area during the conquest.

The court (Native) was the outpost of what the British represented (imperialism). In the first place, the court provided the basis for the

[308] Afigbo, Eastern Province Under Colonial Rule in Ikime, (ed) op cit, p. 414

[309] C. Ake, Explanatory Note on the Political Economy of Africa, in the Journal of Modern African Studies, Vol. 14, No. 1, 1976, p. 5

implementation of the obnoxious Road and River Ordinance. We have shown how the British colonial officials used native elements (the warrant) to exploit the people's human resources. This is not a repeat of the provision of the road and river ordinance, but attempt to show how the transportation demands of the new economic order brought about by colonial rule, was met through forced labour. The people took part in the building of colonial infrastructure for fear of penalty.

The court equally played a significant role in the economies of the Nigerian area, particularly the Eastern Provinces. At the instance of colonial domination, the process of annihilating the pre-colonial currencies began. Among the currencies in the area before the imposition of colonial rule were cowries and manilas.[310] Apart from these currencies, there were also the barter system. In the early years of colonial administration in the Owerri Division areas payments were made even to the government with items other than money. Payment of chicken or goat was allowed in the courts. As time went on, the British traders and colonial compatriots began the process of annihilating these media of exchange. A strict warning was issued to the district officers in 1925 against the collection of any other item other the British currencies. This instruction read:

[310] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/124, Intelligence Report on Ekwereazu and Ahiara Clans, Owerri Division

I am directed to inform you that it has come to the notice of the Lieateant Government's knowledge that in certain Native Courts fowls are accepted as part of payment of Native Courts. His Honour directed that the practice must cease forthwith[311].

As the only institution with the legal right to settle dispute within the area under its jurisdiction, the people were left with only one option of engaging in any activity that would make them earn the British pounds and shillings. In the Mbaise area, and indeed the most part of the Eastern Provinces the major source of these British currencies was through the production and sale of palm produce. The compulsory use of the British pound and shillings was not only to generate revenue for the government, it was also a means of engaging the vast majority of the people in the production of cash crops for export. The existence of different currencies was considered as an obstacle to trade.

Another means through which the economies of these African societies were monetized was by the application of collective punishment. The Collective Punishment Ordinance gave the authorities the right to assess fines for suspected wrongdoing, or past actions on collective or communal rather than individual basis. Under the provision of collective punishment, fines could be imposed on a village, village group or district up to the amount of the damage caused by the people in the area[312]. Under the protection of this law, the

[311] N.A.E., Rivprof 18/2 No. C 138/1925, Confidential Circular from the Secretary, Southern Provinces, to the Resident, Owerri Province, 18/2/25

[312] N.A.E. Collective Ordinance No. 20 of 1915

government could also confiscate people's property to drive home its demands. In the same way, a District Officer could order one or more compounds burnt, either as an object lesson to others or as a punishment. This was a common feature in the British colonies. Thomas showed how the colonial police in the colonial Jamaica resorted to exemplary communal punishment to overawe majority of population with little or no vested interest[313].

The collective punishment was evoked in Onicha Mbaise, after the crushing of the resistance that broke out in the are in 1916. This was what we had already identified as *Okpokoro's* war[314]. The wrath of collective punishment ordinance was again incurred in 1929, following the women's revolt. This time it was indeed a collective punishment. Fine was imposed on the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar, where the revolt occurred. As if the colonial government was waiting for such opportunity to come. No effort was made to rationalize this punishment from one area to another to correlate with the damage done.

However, the fines assessed where much higher in Owerri Province than elsewhere, with the officials in Aba Division demanding highest payment. The rate of the fines at Owerrinta in Aba Division was put at ten shillings per adult male. While at Nogor and Nguru all of Owerri Division, the rate was put at three shillings and five shillings, three pence per adult male. In the Obohia

[313] M. Thomas, The Political Economy of Colonial Violence in interwar Jamaica, Paper for 'Terror and Making of Modern Europe' Conference, Stanford University, April, 2008, p. 1
[314] See Chapter Three of this work

native court area where a court was burned, the fine was assessed at £2,847 or one pound per every adult male. According to Gailey, "this amounted to three times the tax rate, and five times as much as that imposed on the people of Umuaturu Native Court area, who had caused about the same damage[315]. This goes a long way to show that the colonial officials were not only ill-informed about what happened, but were much more interested in squeezing out fines from the subjected people.

These fines were only to be paid in the British currency and the government mustered a lot of strength to coerce the people into compliance. Most of the troops of the Fourth Battalion of the West Africa Frontier Force in the Western Nigeria joined forces with the Third Battalion. There was also a bulk special police force recruited for such an outbreak in 1928. This augmented the regular police force in the two affected provinces[316]. Both the police and the troops that accompanied the District Officers were primarily concerned about putting down any sign of resistance, overawing the people with a display of strength and collecting the fines.

Payment of fees taxes, collective punishment and indemnities in British currency, particularly as it was carried out in the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar where the women's revolt took place helped to make the currency more pervasive. What is important to note here is that this currency was tied to that of

[315] Gailey, op cit, p. 136
[316] Ibid

the colonizing power and its flow was dependent of the social and economic forces in the metropolis, particularly the demand for the colony's primary products. In a bid to fulfill these obligatory tasks required by the government, the people recourse to that product that earned them the colonial currency. In the Mbaise area and virtually in the whole of the area which became Eastern Nigeria, the people pursued the production of palm produce with vigor.

COLONIAL ECONOMIC POLICIES

The cardinal objective of the British economic policy in Nigeria and elsewhere which reflected the strategies of imperialism, was on one hand to harness the human and material resources of the country in order to meet the needs of the metropolis in terms of primary commodities, and transfer surplus to other centers of industrial capitalism in Europe and north America. And on the other hand, to create expanding market for metropolitan manufacturers.[317] To achieve this objective there must be availability of labour. Although there was abundant human resources, their energies were directed towards solving their immediate needs, which existed within subsistence farming and petty trading.

In the absence of large plantation of the type that existed in East and Central Africa, the production of the primary products needed by the metropolitan industries, the protectorate government took certain steps towards

[317] M. Hamman, Consolidation of Underdevelopment in Colonial Nigeria, 1900-1960. Paper presented at the 30th Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1st-4th March, 1985, p. 16

ensuring the steady flow of these products. In the first instance, the government was preoccupied with the problem of making the newly conquered areas more accessible to both the colonial officials and their trading compatriots. This would require pool of labour force from the conquered areas. It became yet another opportunity to demonstrate to the dominated that the British has imposed its authority and control.

In 1903, the protectorate government imposed the Road and River Proclamation. Under the proclamation the High Commissioner could at his will order the making or maintenance of any road or water. These orders were conveyed through the hierarchy of the court, from the High Commissioner who is the originator to the District Commissioners, and from the District Commissioner to the defacto head of the court (the court clerks) who would either summon the chiefs for instruction or send his emissaries (the court messengers). Non compliance to this order by any warrant chief attracted a penalty of fine not more than fifty pounds (£50) or six months imprisonment. While any individual who fails to heed the instruction of the High Commissioner which came through the chiefs was liable on conviction of a penalty of fine amounting to one pound (£1).

The warrant chiefs were in no way the originators of these order. Both the warrant chiefs and the people were participating in this work for fears of

punishment or penalty. The difference was that while the people responded for the fear of being maltreated by the notorious court agents (the court messengers) or the fear of spending one month in prison, where they cannot afford the fine of one pound, the chiefs worked for two things. The first being that they want to avoid the penalty that follows non-compliance. While the second reason was that the chiefs were gratified for having done well in the public works in their area. This was evident in the Nguru Court, where the chiefs were given the gifts of money and other items for turning out a good number of people to work[318]. During the construction of the court house at Nguru all the chiefs that turned out their people received a cash reward for doing so[319].

However, the Road and River Ordinance provided the authorities the legal right to exert forced labour for the building of the colonial infrastructures which were decisive to achieve their imperialist objectives. Having seen it in this light, Isichei posited that:

> *The building of roads obviously facilitated both the preservation of British authority – for movement of troops becomes easier, and extraction of the country's products which was of course, the reason for instituting the rule in the first place*[320].

[318] N.A.E. Rivprof 8/4/560, Petition of Chief Ajero of Ngur for the restoration of his Warrant, 12/10/16
[319] N.A.E., Rivprof 8/2/182, op cit
[320] Isichei op cit, p. 138

The extensive work done by the colonial officers in Owerri District attracted the comment of Sir Walter Egerton, High Commissioner and later Governor General. Egerton commended Mr. H.M. Douglas who was the District Commissioner of Owerri Division saying "Douglas has now constructed over 200 miles of road in his district. These roads are nearly all 40 feet wide….Douglas has done wonderfully good work in his District[321]."

Most of the major roads in the District were named after Douglas. Even today credit for constructing most of roads in the Mbaise area still goes to H.M. Douglas. At the same time they tell about his paternal and high handed treatment of the chiefs and their people still live in the memories of the people of the district area particularly in Mbaise where a white doctor was killed.

The "Native Court" was instrumental to the government enforcement of forced labour policy of the protectorate.

Conscription for public purposes, such as road building and carrying of officers' loads was taken for granted before and during the World War I, and was often justified as an extension of traditionally sanctioned communal service, the colonial states being deemed to have inherited the right of the tribal authorities[322]. Although this method of exploitation was condemned in principle by the international conventions of the post war period, loop holes were allowed

[321] Egerton, quoted in Isichei, p. 138

[322] C.C. Wrigley, Aspects of Economic History in Robertson (ed) op cit, p. 125

here and there for what these colonial administrations referred to as special need.

In the same manner, labourers were provided for the construction of rail ways. We have earlier indicated in this work that railway was an effective instrument of colonial economic exploitation. It was vital for both transportation of large troops high caliber arm from one location to a troubled area. In that case it was instrumental to the maintenance of those laws and order which encouraged the evacuation of the colonies' primary products to the metropolis. Secondly, it was decisive for the conveying of these primary products in thousands of tons. Its construction was carried out with compulsory labour. The difference between the labour for road making and that of the railway was that the road work was compulsory and free while that of the railway was compulsory but paid for, though what the people were paid did not commensurate with the labour they offer.

On 19th September 1914, the government of the protectorate of Nigeria received an instruction from the colonial office asking for the suspension of work on the railway north of Udi, and that more attention should be paid to the southern section of the rail. The reason for this was beyond that previously given by the Commercial Intelligence Officer, Mr. C.A. Birtwistle who in his report laid much emphasis on the population or high density of palm three in

southern Nigeria[323]. This decision was motivated by the economic pressure which was beginning to weigh heavily on the shoulder of the colonial power (Britain) as a result of the World War I.

Prior to the war time, the major source of coal to Britain was from Wales. During the war, the activities of the belligerents could not allow the movement of ships bringing coal to power the Nigerian railway system. This posed a severe problem to the exportation of tin from the tin field in Plateau, and other oleaginous products need from which Britain had engaged in. for tin to go to Britain, the Western section of the railway must be operational and for this to happen, there must be coal. Consequent upon this reason the colonial power resolved to tap the coal deposit in Udi, to supply the Western railway. The possibility of this venture relied so much on the completion of the Southern section of the Eastern railroad. To this effect work commenced on the rail in earnest section, and by 1916 train had conveyed coal to the seashore, while the ship had started steady delivery in Lagos[324].

The most salient thing to note at this juncture is how the labour which led to the success of this super exploitation was organized. As part of the preparation to begin this colossal project, District Officers were expected to provide the engineering corps with labour. According to Anyanwu, "which ever

[323] N.A.E. C.C.O. 1/34 Lugard to E.O. Conf, 9/5/13, See Appendix to dispatch

[324] C.N. Anyanwu, Port Harcourt, 1912-1955: A Study in the Rise and Development of a Nigerian Municipality, A PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of History, University of Ibadan, 1971, p. 124-5

district the work party reached, an officer was stationed to help supply the engineering with corps labour[325]."

While this could not be referred to as lies, there is still need to illuminate the fact that the railway line did not cross the Owerri District area, but there was evidence to show that labour was supplied from the district. According to Nwokocha, the warrant chiefs from the Mbaise area were asked to provide labourers to work on the rail line and this they did with vigour because of the reward was often received for good job done[326]. The quarter report on railway in 1916 classified the labourers from the Owerri Division who worked on the way as voluntary labourers[327]. This cannot be true, considering the fact that they were provided by the chiefs. Oyemakinde was equally of the opinion that "in the construction of the Southern section of the Eastern railway voluntary labour were recruited while the Northern section political labourers were in vogue as usual[3]." Our argument here is not that there were no labourers who could be referred to as voluntary, but we are yet to understand how voluntary the labour provided by the warrant chiefs would be.

There is no doubt that the heavy migration of people into Port Harcourt may have resulted into voluntary labour. As we have noted earlier, monetization of the economy through compulsory charges and other social pressure which characterized the new economic order cannot be separated from the nature of

[325] Ibid, p. 126

[326] Nwokocha, Oral Interview, op cit

[327] W. Onyuemakinde, Railway Construction and Operation in Nigeria, 1895-1991, Labour Problem and Socio-economic Impact, in Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria, Vol. 2, June 1972, p. 318

labour supply, as it was evident in Port Harcourt. The opinion of scholars have been divided on the factors affecting the nature of labour supply in the colonial period. Some scholars contend that the indigenous peoples voluntarily migrated to areas of colonial activities because it offered a better social and economic rewards than their previous environments. Prominent among these scholars was Helleiner, who although acknowledged the British use of forced labour for building the railways and mines, contended that in general, the colonialists presented sufficiently attractive prizes before the producers' noses to persuade them to convert their potential into actual surpluses by increasing their output.[328]

Nnoli accepted this view for such products as palm oil, but differed in cocoa.[329] Although we are going to turn to this issue later, it is important to state here that the increase recorded in the production of palm produce in the colonial times was not the result of pure market forces of demand and supply, but that of monoculture introduced into the economy of the Nigerian societies by colonialism.

The transformation of the subsistence economy into commodity economy is never a spontaneous consequence of the introduction of new manufactured goods causing the subsistence farmers to produce agricultural products for export in order to satisfy their wants as said by Simir Amin.[340]

[328] G.K. Helleiner, Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria, Irvin Inc, Illionois, 1966, p. 12.
[329] O. Nnoli, Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Pub, Enugu, 1977, p. 51.
[340] Amin, Unequal Development, New York Monthly Review, 1976, p. 204

It was majorly to meet with the monetary demand of the political and economic order that led most of the people from Owerri District, particularly the Mbaise area into Port Harcourt where they unwillingly made themselves available for the railway and harbor engineers. Some of the scholars who argue that the nature of labour on the construction of Southern section of the Eastern railway was voluntary did not take into cognizance the circumstances that surrounded the project. The Southern section of the Eastern railway was carried out urgently in emergency situation (during the World War I). As a project designed to help Britain survive and come out of the World War I. one would not undermine the fact that people were made to provide their labour without much option. This compulsory labour on railways and harbor in Port Harcourt led to the migration of a lot of Mbaise people. This boosted the population of Mbaise people and the people of Owerri Division in the area. This large population of Mbaise people and the people of Owerri Division in Port Harcourt was translated into election victory for an Mbaise man, Mr. D.D.U. Okey to Port Harcourt Federal Constituency in 1957.[341] From the foregoing, one would understand that the warrant chiefs system was a veritable instrument for the perpetrators of economic exploitation in the area.

The paid labourers who were provided to the protectorate government by the warrant chiefs and the headmen were not paid their full wages. The District

[341]Chapman, op cit, p. 262

Commissioner not considering the fact that these wages were low, paid some fraction of the labourers' wages to the warrant chiefs or the headman that provided them. This dehumanizing treatment drew the attention of the Secretary of Southern Provinces, H.C. Moorhouse in 1914 and he issued what we considered here as a pretentious warning:

> *I have the honour to inform you that the method of payment of labourers and carriers engaged on timber concession and other sub-work has recently been under discussion. It is understood that in many cases the individual labourers receives only a portion of the wage due to him, the other portion being distributed between village headmen or middlemen of sort. The question had been referred to His Excellency, who states that pending institution of taxation, Commissioners must do their best to see that each labourer receives fair pay.*[342]

This meant that this ugly trend continued in the area up to 1928 when the direct taxation was introduced. The British colonial officials were using the sweat of the people to water the flowers of economic exploitation.

LAND POLICY

The British assumed the ownership of the Nigeria at the declaration of "protectorate." Lugard argued that:

[342] N.A.E., Rivprof 8/2/525, No. A4444/1914, Instruction from the Secretary, Southern Provinces, H.C. Moorhouse to the Provincial Commissioner, Owerri Privince, 13/9/1914.

The whole of the protectorate was either conquered by British arms, or had submitted to a threat of force, and that African peoples – whether Muslims or pagans – recognized that all lands is at the disposal of the conqueror. They accordingly assert that the whole of the land, whether occupied or unoccupied, is subject to the control of the government[343].

This was the basis on which the colonial authorities formulated their land policy in Nigeria. The aim of the British in Nigeria was not of acquisition of land, but to exert control over the land in the manner that the supply of those primary products required by their home industries would be in a steady stream. In an honest confession, Lugard stated that:

The tropics produce in abundance, a class of raw materials and foodstuff which cannot be grown in temperate zones, and are so vital to the needs of civilized man that they have in very truth become essential to civilization. It was the realization of this fact which led the nations of Europe to compete for the control of African tropics[344].

As Hamman had put it, "the mechanism of realization of these imperialist objectives were located in the land, agricultural, mining and transport policies[345].

[343] F.D. Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, Frank Cass, London, 1965, p. 287-8
[344] Ibid, p. 43
[345] Hamman, op cit, p. 16

The colonial land policy in Nigeria implied the preservation of the right of ownership on the basis of the pre-existing tenure system. In the Southern Provinces, areas like Enugu, Onitsha, Calabar and including Lagos, land was alienated from the people[346]. The major reason for not alienating land from the indigenous peoples was to maintain the peasant production of the needed primary products without necessarily giving way for the emergence of the proletarian class. This however, made the simple the mechanism of competition that played a determining role in the transformation from feudalism to capitalism in Europe ineffective[347].

Hugh Clifford who succeeded Lugard as Governor General argued that the maintenance of the indigenous native land tenure system was more firmly rooted than the plantation system. And that it was cheaper for the large-scale production of agricultural products. It was also capable of rapid expansion and increase in output. Other considerations were that the persistence of the right of all villagers to use the village land would minimize land disputes and other related problems which would arise if, for instance, the plantation system of colonial exploitation were to be introduced. And that the plantation system would have caused the displacement of large population and the proletariansation of the peasantry[348]. All these being the strategy of the colonial

[346] A. McPhee, The Economic Revolution in British West Africa, London, 1971, p. 162
[347] Nnoli, op cit, p. 52
[348] E.J. Usoro, The Nigerian Oil Palm Industry, Ibadan, pp. 37-38

state to sustain economic exploitation of the dominated areas for a long period without resistance from the dominated.

While this system was successful in maintaining the steady supply of agricultural products (Palm oil and kernel) it did not prevent dispute over land. This was evident in the colonial half annual report of 1912. The Nguru and Okpala Courts under whose jurisdiction the Mbaise areas belonged, had records of 638 and 646 cases related to land respectively, between 1 January to 30 June 1912[349]. It was based on the constant land dispute in the area that the District Officer Owerri Division in 1920 commented that land dispute was usual and customary in the district[350].

It is also important to note that while the steady supply of primary products were ensured through the maintenance of the traditional land tenure system. It could not prevent resistance from the dominated, which was only thought to be possible by the emergence of the proletarian class. Contrary to the colonial government's assumption, the peasant women of the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar, assumed the responsibility of the proletarian class, and forced the colonial administration to a radical reform through revolt.

The Land Policy of the colonial state which implied the maintenance of the traditional status quo of land tenure system, made the warrant chiefs

[349] N.A.E. 3/6/143, No. E/1971/12, Half Annual Administrative and Political Report on Owerri District, January, to June, 1912
[350] N.A.E. Owdist 9/6/3 Report: Owerri Division for Half-year January to June, 1920

irrelevant in the control of means of production. In the Mbaise area, warrant chiefs had no control over land, rather they were instruments to the implementation of those policies that rubbed the people of the little surpluses accruing from the production and sale of these primary products (palm oil and kernel). Chief Okpokoro of Onicha was responsible for causing the Onicha people to take resistant posture when he brought a trumped up charge against them to the District Commissioner, which led to a bloody encounter in 1916.

After this incident, and subject to the collective Punishment Ordinance, the Onichas were force to pay £100. Onyekwere of Ahiara and other chiefs from the Mbaise area were instrumental to the organization and collection of the indemnity paid by the Mbaise people after the deceitful truce in which many Mbaise men were massacred in 1906. The rate in which the warrant chiefs had imposed fines on offenders in the native court became unprecedented between 1914 and 1928. This became a serious issue of discussion during the Conference on Administrative subjects held in Lagos from 17th to 22nd March, 1928. Extract from the proceedings of the meeting reads:

> *That when imposing fines, the Native Courts should take into consideration the circumstances of the offender as well as the gravity of his offence. In this latter connection, His Honour had for some time been under the impression that sentences passed*

by the Native Courts were in many cases unnecessarily severe and given without due regards to offence committed[351].

The native court was to a greater extent a vent to the wealth of the people. While the land policy did not allow the chiefs a direct control of the land, it had the effect of peasantizing the economy of the Nigerian societies. Palm produce which became the major source of the acceptable money became the major occupation of the people in the Mbaise area, and indeed in the whole of Eastern Province.

TRANSPORT POLICY

It was part of the colonial policy to develop those infrastructures decisive to the achievement of the colonial objectives. The colonial transport policy having been linked with the land policy, was mainly concerned with focusing the attention of the peasant population on the production of primary products[352]. The railways as we have noted earlier played two importance in the successful economic exploitation by the colonial power. The first was that it was instrumental to the maintenance of that law and order which permitted the plunder of the colonies, by making the movement of the colonial military force easier. Secondly, it was very vital in the process of evacuating the primary product from the interiors to the coast[353]. As important as the railway can be,

[351] N.A.E. Owdist 9/14/35, no. OW 659/1923, Memorandum from the Resident Owerri Province to the District Officer, Owerri, 6/6/1928
[352] Hamman, op cit, p. 19
[353] Ibid, See also Wrigley in Roberts (ed) op cit, p. 83

the request made by the High Commissioner at the Calabar Leslie Probyn for the construction of a rail from Owerri to Isiokpo, the landing space from Bonny was turned down by the colonial office. The High Commissioner emphasized that:

> *It is important that this work should be put in hand at once; at present produce cannot be brought out in quantity neither can trade goods be introduced; the district is rich but not accessible by waterway. Apart from the saving in government stores – the line would be self-supporting as the native traders would rent the cars. The existing road is largely used by native traders; for the most part they bring down oil to Nsokpo and only take back native dried fish! The monorail required is the same as that shipped to the crown agents at old Calabar.*[354]

The colonial office turned down this request not because the situation was not as Probyn said, but because there would not be enough money for the administration of the Northern Nigeria, if such a colossal project was embarked on. The colonial office though avid of expending the frontiers of British trade, decided to make do with motor roads in the Owerri District area. It was probably because of this reason that the making and maintaining of roads in the District area was pursued very vigorously. In the Mbaise area of the district,

[354] Probyn, quoted in Ekechi, op cit, p. 206

there were no public works department roads. All the roads were made by the native authority[355]. Native Authority roads were made from both Ife and Itu to Nguru, joining up the Ezinihitte area of Mbaise with the Agbajas and Ahiara, up till Ekwereazu. Another road was made through the Northern part of the Ezinihitte Clan, form Ezeagbogu and Onicha up till Udo, where canoes were used to ferry people and articles of trade across the Imo River to Bende District area[356]. The road that connected the Nguru and the rest of the Mbaise country to the west was a major trade route. Through this road, many Mbaise communities sent their palm produce to the Okrika and Akwete middlemen at Ife waterside[357]. Another important road was the one that led to Udo on the bank of Imo River. This was so because the road in Bende Division immediately after the Imo River led to Umuahia, supplying the Eastern railway[358].

There were no European firms in Mbaise, but these primary products were taken to an European trading firm at Umuahia or the branch of the United African Company at Owrrinta. The Owerrinta firm was reached either through the Imo River or through a native authority road which connected the Oke Ovoro Clan with the Okpala Court area. It was through this road that the Mbaise people who were placed under the Okpala Native Court went to the Court. Chief Iwuala of Akpokwu was prominent along this route, as the only chief in the Mbaise area who was moving on motorcycle[359]. As we have earlier

[355] N.A.E. C.S.O. 27937, op cit
[356] Ibid
[357] Ibid
[358] Ibid
[359] R.O. Nwachukwu, op cit, D. Nwachukwu, op cit

noted, these “Native Authority” roads, as the name portray were all made and maintained with free and forced labour, as provided under the road and river ordinance between 1906 and 1930. The roads leading to the location of the European firms became the major trade routes. And a number of collection centres for palm produce had been established along these trade routes. These collection centres were managed by agents of European firms.[360] What is important is that the better the native roads the nearer the European trading company’s agents. The responsibility of making the interiors accessible and governable, for trade to thrive was left for the warrant chiefs and the headmen. In a clear analysis, they were carrying out these duties with the fear of coercion, which made their duty more or less a forced labour. As long as you have been made headman or warrant chief, your duty as provided by the road and river ordinance was with compulsion. While the railways were supplying the large merchant ships, the motor roads were supplying the railway. These roads and railway network made the conquered area accessible by the agents of the British trading companies and their colonial compatriots. And this, no doubt, led to increase in the demand and also increase in volume of production.

There was no rail road in the Owerri District area as we have shown above, but the road transport entered a new era under colonial administration in the area. The middlemen and the trading company’s agents began to use bicycles in the collection of the primary products and distribution of

[360] N.A.E. MINLOC 6/1/174, op cit

commodities from the metropolitan industries. Much of the surpluses created by this revolution was appropriated by the colonial official through the exercise of political power, by foreign traders through the exploitation of monopoly advantage and by the foreign consumers through unequal exchange.[361]

Table 4: Quantity of Produce Exported from Nigeria 1906-1934

Year	Palm oil (Tons)	Palm Kernels (Tons)
1906	57,260	113,347
1907	65,473	133,630
1908	65,460	136,558
1909	82,130	158,849
1910	76,851	172,997
1911	79,337	176,390
1912	76,994	184,625
1913	83,090	174,718
1914	72,531	162,452
1915	72,991	153,319
1916	67,422	161,439
1917	74,619	185,998
1918	86,425	205,167
1919	100,967	216,913
1920	84,856	207,010
1921	52,771	153,354
1922	87,609	178,723
1923	99,439	223,172
1924	127,083	252,847
1925	128,113	272,923
1926	113,267	249,100
1927	113,240	257,206
1928	127,110	246,537
1929	131,786	251,368
1930	135,801	260,022
1931	118,133	254,454
1932	116,061	309,060
1933	128,696	259,945
1934	112,773	284,447

Source: E.J. Usoro, Nigerian Oil Industry, Government Policy and Export Production, 1906-1965, 1974, p. 26

[361] Wrigley in Robert (ed) op cit, p. 87

Table 5: **Value of Palm Produce for Export 1906-1934**

Year	Palm oil (£)	Palm Kernels (£)
1906	1,001,648	1,193,939
1907	1,313,960	1,658,295
1908	1,154,933	1,424,595
1909	1,447,163	1,813,967
1910	1,742,234	2,450,814
1911	1,696,876	2,574,405
1912	1,654,384	2,797,411
1913	1,854,384	3,109,818
1914	1,571,691	2,541,150
1915	1,462,162	1,692,811
1916	1,402,799	1,379,706
1917	1,882,997	2,581,702
1918	2,704,446	3,226,306
1919	4,245,893	4,947,995
1920	4,677,445	5,717,981
1921	1,655,914	2,831,688
1922	2,676,241	2,809,655
1923	2,982,488	3,740,852
1924	3,944,340	4,461,482
1925	3,166,096	4,937,450
1926	3,616,159	4,044,452
1927	3,617,332	4,594,191
1928	3,751,484	4,323,114
1929	3,767,301	4,264,850
1930	3,250,413	3,679,166
1931	1,841,478	2,132,162
1932	1,384,431	2,696,068
1933	1,384,431	1,898,522
1934	885,400	1,590,646

Source: E.J. Usoro, Nigerian Oil Industry, Government Policy and Export Production, 1906-1965, 1974, p. 26

A careful analysis of these tables will show that movement of price had little or no impact on the quantity produced for export. For example, between 1919 and 1920, there was 21.16% drop in the price of palm oil, but there was about 9% increase in quantity produced. Between 1921 and 1922 there was 4.79% drop in price, while 61.63% increased was witnessed in quantity produced. Between 1923 and 1924, 8.7% increase was evidenced in price, but there was a disproportionate increase of the quantity of the commodity. Between 1929 and 1930 the price of palm oil dropped with about 44.54%. This meant almost a cut of about half the price of the commodity. The quantity produced had a decrease of just 13.9%. If 13.9% decrease in price had equal proportion of decease in the quantity produced, it means that there were other factors that sustained production to avoid further reduction. A careful analysis shows that about 28.64% of production was sustained in the face of a heavy drop in price.

If the women's revolt would have been much distraction to production, the Collective Punishment Ordinance which empowered the administration to collect fines from the areas affected became a cushioning effect, hence it exerted the required pressure on the people to sustain their production to a certain extent. Another interesting figure occurred between 1930 and 1931

where 35.5% drop in price, and in the production was as much as 110.95 drop in quantity produced.

This analysis shows that the view of such scholars as Helleiner Nnoli that the producers of palm produce in the Eastern Provinces responded to high prices which were placed for these commodities is problematic and cannot hold water.

The data above showed that the more effective the colonial control of the dominated becomes the more the increase in the volume of production of the primary product. The colonial transport policy was decisive to the achievement of that type of control that ensured the increase in the production of those sylvan products.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the origin and structure of the warrant chiefs system of colonial rule which was imposed on the area that became Owerri Division in 1902. Through the examination of the origin and structure of the warrant chiefs system, we have shown how the powers meant for the warrant chiefs in the "native courts" were usurped by non native elements who were made court clerks. We have done this by arguing that those who came from elsewhere to take the position of the court clerks cannot be referred to be natives of the area under the jurisdiction of such courts.

The warrant chiefs system which was said to be the modified form of the pre-British system of administration was a misnomer. We have shown in this chapter that the warrant chiefs system was purely a British creation, and lacked the essential features of government of the Owerri District areas in the pre-British days. The creation of this system of administration in the Eastern Provinces was surrounded by the myth that the people had no means of resolving their disputes. The appointment of native elements was the cheapest way of carrying out the economic exploitation which was the main objective of the colonizing power.

The missionaries who were invited to come and cultivate their doctrines and ideologies in the Owerri District played significant roles which helped the colonial administration to achieve the set objective. In the pursuance of the new goals which both the government and missionaries set for the people, they assumed new burdens which could only be reduced by making more of the colonial accepted legal tender (the colonial currency). To achieve these ends, the people had to increase the production of those commodities that were exchanged with the pounds and shillings (palm oil and palm kernels).

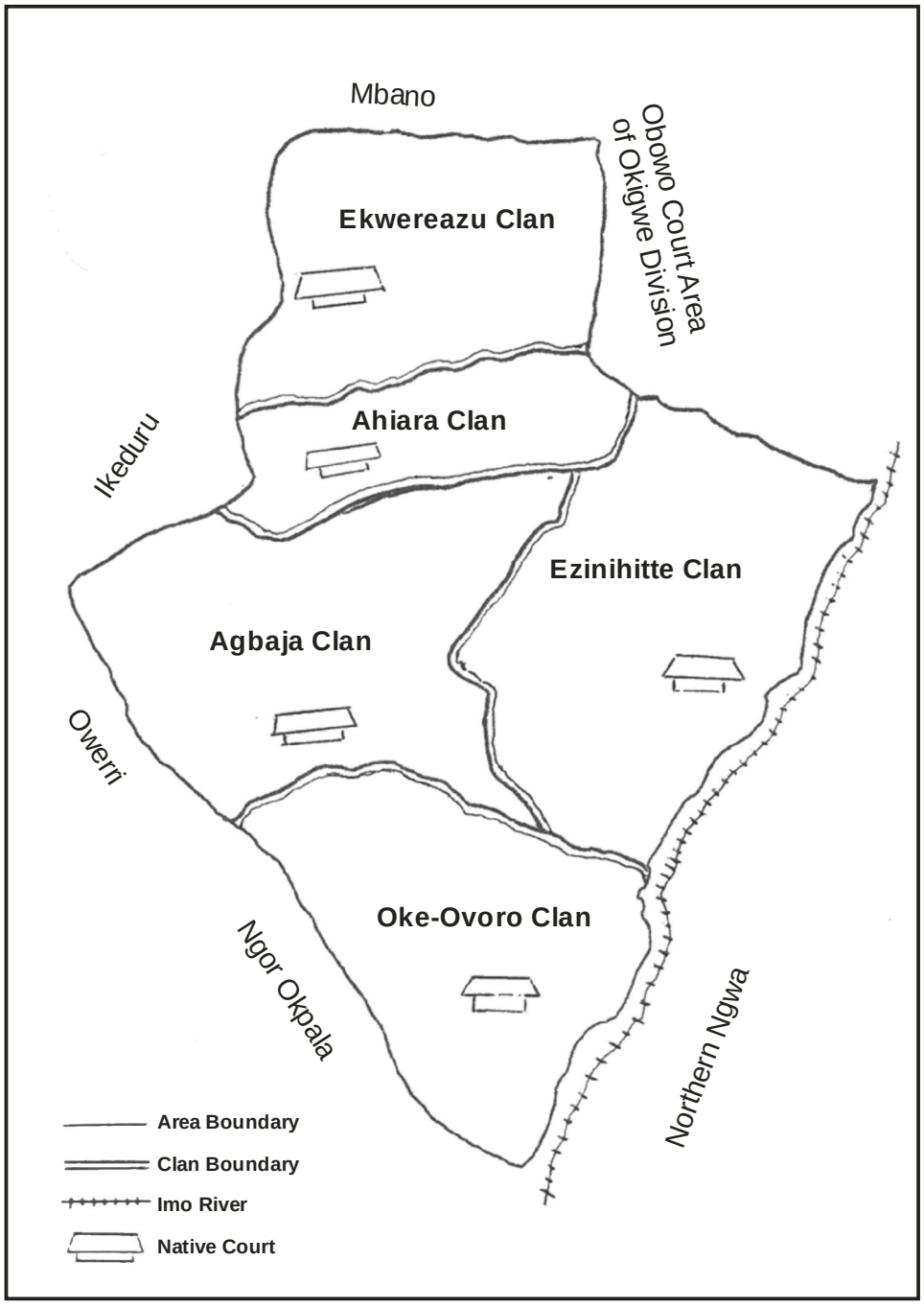
The process of peasntization of the economy of the colony was achieved through the policies of taxation, collective punishment, labour, land, and that of transport. These policies were aimed at increasing the colony's' capacity to

produce primary products which were in high demand in the metropolis. The other policies were made effective by the collective punishment, which as we had said implied the payment of certain amount either as a punishment or as an object lesson to other group who may want to challenge the colonial status quo. These strategies of peasantization were aimed at preventing the emergence of the proletarian population, which was believed to be a problem to the sustenance of colonialism and plunder that accompanied it.

It is our view that the assumption that only the proletarian class could challenge the colonial status quo was wrong. The role of the peasant women of the two provinces of Owerri and Calabar revealed that the peasants can as well articulate and carry out a revolt that brought the warrant chiefs system to its logical end. The introduction of monoculture of the production of palm produce in the region and pervasiveness of colonial policies created uniformity in the people's occupation and similarity of burden. The yarning of every peasant against the colonial administration became the same. In 1929 things fell apart. Above all, the warrant chiefs system of British local government in the colony was a veritable instrument for the expansion of British commerce. The system financed itself through forced labour, exploitation through collective punishment and indemnities, abnormal charges of fees and fines imposition of direct taxation, and above all the violent means through which the local agents

of colonial state pressed down the policies and orders of the government had the tendencies of sustaining production in the face of low prices, and this was responsible for preventing a total collapse when the prices of these commodities were discouragingly low.

Map 4: Map of Mbaise showing Court Areas and Clan boundaries, 1934



Source: C.A.C Njoku, History and Culture of Mbaise from the earliest time to AD 2001

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In conclusion we will identify some of the major findings of the research. It is evident that all aspects our work points to the direction that the creation of warrant chiefs in Mbaise and indeed the whole of Igboland can be summarized as the systematic I imposition of British control for the purpose of subordinating the production and distribution systems of the colony to that of the metropolitan capitalist firms. The critical process of dependency was carried out through the agency of the colonial state which was a useful tool of the capitalist state of Britain.

We noted in the chapter two of this work that the economy of the Mbaise area and indeed Igbo land rested on tripples stand, agriculture, trade and manufacture. Through this means the area was self sufficient particularly in food production which carried the greatest priority. The internal needs of the people were supplemented when it was very necessary through regional trade. Although European made good had started to make in rode into the area prior to the Imposition of British rule, the main articles of trade as we noted constituted local products. This to a greater extent kept the local producers independent of the British Trading companies.

The socio-economic system in the Mbaise area was an obstacles to the establishment of British Capitalism in terms of availability of wage labour. The most prevallent form of labour in the Mbaise area was the independent labour of the producer, supplemented in rare cases with the slave labour, which was almost non- existent, or at most insignificant. This was a constraint to the introduction of capitalist condition, for which wage labour was an essential part, Not only that, the method of distribution of goods was based on traditional means. We now in chapter two of this work that some trader move from place to place buying and selling with some traditional means of protection. This brought the Aro people to fore of trade in the whole of Igboland .The Aro had become prominent prior to the British rule in the interiors, and in the early years of British contact with the Coast. This was consequent upon the middle manship role which they played between one part of the Igbo society and another and between the Igbo societies and the European merchants on the coast.

The significant role which the Aro played in the economy of the Igbo societies was a bulwark to the up surging British capitalist economy into the colony. The role of the Aro as middlemen, promoted independent farmers' production in agriculture and manufacture. It kept the British apart from the control or sources of those sylvan products that attracted them into the area. However it was evident in chapter three of this work that it was the attempt to

root out the Aro in this prominent position that led to the conquest of what was known as the interiors of Igboland. The conflict of interest (commercial) between the Aro and the British was responsible for the brutal colonial conquest which overthrew the indigenous political system in Igbo land.

The conquest was the beginning of the direct economic exploitation of the colony. It is also evident that the conquest laid the foundation of the colonial State which was an organ of the imperialist state of Britain.

As commerce was usually based on political security, the overthrow of the indigenous political system through conquest was a process of expanding the British commercial interest. It was the means through which the British manufacturers and traders gained the control of the raw materials which were very essential to their industries. The provision of political security for the protection of the British commercial interest was not limited to the conquest, hence there was need to create a system that would maintain that law and order which would ensure the realization of the above objectives. That implication of this was the transplantation of the political system which they had imposed on the coastal people. The process of replacing the old and indigenous political structure began with the transplantation of the political structure which has already been in existence in the coastal area into the Mbaise area and the rest of Owerri District. We revealed in chapter four of this work that this took the form

of appointment of headmen and more importantly the creation of the warrants Chiefs. This implies that the creation of the warrant chief in the Mbaise area was to maintain that colonial law and order necessary for economic exploitation of the area. It is evident in Chapter four of the work that the first attempt to maintain law and order through court was in 1854 following the creation of 'Count OF Equity" in Bony, from 1854 to 1900 attempts were made to put in place that system of local administration that would ensure the maximum protection of British commercial interest. From the time of the" Count of Equity" in 1854 to 1901 when the Native court' Proclamation made by Ralph Moor came into force, the colonial officers were occupied with problems of structuring the Native count so as to carryout the functions of the colonial state as an organ of capitalist state of Britain.

The structure of the British local government as it was imported into the Mbaise area of Owerri Division in 1902 was such that limited the policy of "indirect rule" to its theoretical State. One major reason for

this as we have noted is that the court clerks who were none natives of the areas under the jurisdiction of these courts usurped the powers of the newly created Native Chiefs therefore while indirect rule was based on the principle of administration through the native chiefs, the case was different in practice in the Owerri Division where the court clerks became the *defacto* lords over the

warrant chiefs. Another reason is that contrary to the argument made by some scholars in this subject that the warrant system was the modification of the existing traditional institution; the Warrant Chiefs System was an entirely new creation.

The effectiveness of the warrant chiefs system as a colonial mechanics of exploitation was sharpened by the activities of the missionaries. The missionaries' gospel in the Mbaise area was to be used in rooting out those traditional socio-political pactices which the British Colonial officer had already considered repugnant to their idea of what constituted good government. While the colonial officers were waging war against the indigenous political structure from the legal front, the social structure of the indigenous society in Mbaise was being attacked through the spread of the Christian missionary activities (gospel and education). We noted in chapter four of this work that the missionaries were the harbinger of western education in Mbaise and indeed Owerri Division. The dialecticaal relationship which existed between the missionaries and colonial state made particularly in Owerri Division immense contribution to the rise of dependency posture which the former colonies had taken and still maintaining. The missionaries complemented the colonial state in the creation of capitalist conditions necessary for the exploitation of the colonies resources. As the

colonial state was an organ of the capitalist state of Britain, the missionaries were effective collaborators.

Apart from compulsory payment of fines, collective punishment indemnities court fees and charges in the currency of the colonial state (pounds and shillings) the missionaries opened more avenues through which the economy of the area was monetized. We have shown how the various communities in the Mbaise area and Owerri District began to pay for the salaries of the missionary teacher (ten pounds, ten shillings) build church and school houses. This encouraged the production of palm produce which was the main, if not the only means of earning foreign exchange. The other way through which the missionaries had help in the creation of capitalist condition was that trade was used as a stimuli to converting member to adhere the Christian gospel. This was a common picture among the N.D.P. missionaries. They were the first to arrive the Mbaise area through the Imo River, and it is evident in chapter four of this work how they gave preference to their new convert. The construction of court houses, prisons, rest houses, Court Clerks' quarters, church and school houses. Church and school teacher residences, introduction of school uniforms and writing materials, created new demands for the products of the metropolitans' capitalist industries. They did not only increase the demand on foreign made goods but it also increases the production of the only cash crop in

the area, (palm oil and kernel) which were used to exchange for colonial currency.The missionaries helped in building the super structure of the colonial state which determined the new economic order in the colony and the colonies relationship with the colonizing power. This relationship was a critical mechanism for the integration of African economies "into the European capitalist system".[1]

The economic policies of the colonial state as we have examined, were aimed as sustaining colonialism and capitalist exploitation by the metropolis. It enhanced the peasantization of the colonies economy and discouraged the emergence of the proleterian strata which was believed to posses the ability to challenge and change the colonial status quo. However these economic policies brought about uniformity of occupation and similarity of burden. The mono-culture of palm produce which was encouraged under the warrant chiefs system and maintained through the mechanics of violence and collective punishment gave rise to the development of that consciousness of the peasant farmers, which found vent in the women's Revolt of 1929.

The warrant chiefs as it was known were the colonial mechanics of economic exploitation. It laid the foundation of political and economics dependency in the areas where it existed. Tamu and Swai were apt, when they said that:

[1] Coud Ake, Political Economy of Africa, Longman, 1981, p. 35

It is in the course of production that people develop their own consciousness. Work is therefore central in the development of men, depending on the work they do; men derive satisfaction from it, and also develop their creation. However, work become painful when its end is to ensure the extraction of surplus labour. Here it is no longer the worker who matters but surplus labour.[2]

We have revealed that the work which the people of Mbaise area, and indeed Owerri Division were meant to carry out under the warrant chiefs system, particularly, as provided by the road and river ordination was not for the best interest of the people, but for the expropriation of their labour. Therefore while the worker wanted to do as little work as possible, to enable them to take care of themselves, the expropriators being the colonial state coerced them to do as much as they can extract through the enforcement of various economic policies. This prevented the people from deriving satisfaction from the work they did. Consequently, the development of their creativity was marred. The chiefs were fought to be politically dependent by placing them practically on the lowest web of influence, under the court clerks, who were non natives; of the area under the jurisdiction of these courts. We showed in this work that no Mbaise person was a court clerk from 1902 to 1929. This was the period when

[2] Temu A. and B. Swai, Historian and Africanist History, A Critique, Zed Press, London, 1981, pp. 44, 45

the court clerk was the master of the court from 1902 to 1914, the D.Os (a white men were the president of these courts. After the Lugardian reform of 1914, the D.Os or A.D.Os were restrained from presiding over the native court, although there was continued regular intervention in the proceding of the court by the D.Os and A.D.Os This particular state of affair created doubt in the minds of the people about the warrant chiefs, and even in the minds of the chiefs about themselves. The people were filled with the belief that everything about the new political order was by the British and for the British. The chiefs themselves believed that they were working for the British and not their people. The implication of this was negative, hence it cultivated politics of alienation in the area, and in most part African societies Where artificial chiefs were created and imposed on the people by the colonial state. It is therefore safe to say that political development in the Mbaise are and in most African societies was based on a faulty foundation laid by the colonial state.In economic terms, the policies of the colonial state, gave the economy of the African colonies a dependency posture. In the Eastern provinces, it led to a mono- culture of production in palm produce (palm oil and kernel).

Our findings and conclusion is contrary to such assertion as made by G.K Helleiner that the colonialists merely dangled sufficiently attractive prize before

the producers' noses to pressuade them to convert potentials into actual surpluses by increasing their output.[3]

This view was supported by Nmoli who opined that 'while this may have been true about palm oil, palm kernel and groundnut, which were consumed locally, it certainly was different from cocoa which was introduced fromoutside the country.[4] These confessions were wrong, and can take unscholarship too far. These scholars did not consider the fact that imposition ofdirect taxation was a means of making the people of the colony to put more energy into work and also make those who were considered idle persons to engage in production.[5] It is evident in this work that even during the great slum in the prizes of palm produce, which was witnessed in the Eastern provinces between1920 and 1930 the tonnage of palm produce were still on the increase. Thissuggests that it was not the attractive prizes that was causing the increase in the volume of production of these palm produce. The people were coerced through economic policies of the colonial state and the increased burden of the new political order. All these put together, led to the backwardness of the Mbaise area and relevel the African societies. The warrant chiefs system was a colonial mechanics of exploitation which laid ajolly foundation for the political and economic development in the areas where they were practiced.

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[3]G.K. Halleines, Peasant Agriculture, Government and Economic Growth in Nigeria, Irwin Ine, Illinois, 1966
[4] O. Nnoli, Ethnic Politics in Nigeria, Fourth Dimension Pub, Enugu, 1977, p. 51
[5]F.D. Lugard, The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa, Franck Cass, London, 1956, pp. 234, 235

RECOMMENDATION

Having shown that the creation of the Warrant Chiefs System in Eastern Nigeria was a systematic imposition of colonial rule in the area for the purpose of economic expoitation of the human and natural resources, and that colonial violence played significant role in increasing production. More attention should be paid to the study of colonial violence in these areas, to ascertain its actual impact on these societies that were placed under the colonial Warrant Chiefs. This would reduce the rate of exportation of raw material and dependent on the commodities of the industrialized nations of the world.

The provision of the necessary infrastructure will allow the citizen the liberty to choose the vocations that would give them satisfaction and enhance the development of their creativity development should n longer be a narrow issue. There should be a clear departure from the colonial context of development, which was focused on the increase of the out pat of the colonies primary products for export. Development should be seen in the lights of many sided process, which at the level of individuals implies increased skill and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, and material well being[1]. To achieve this, the government should pat more effort, toward eradicating polities of alienation, which was part of colonial legacy. The people should be given the chance ofparticipating in the debate on how they should be governed by extending

beyond theoretical work the basic principles of democracy which was destroyed by the authoritative tendencies of the colonial state the African societies particularly the Nigerian society still suffers from lack of interaction between the representatives and represented.[2]Concerning the common good of the society. This was the nature of organization in the eastern provinces under the warrant chiefs. Even where the people were asked to elect their chief, the so appointed became the agent of the government and not the people'srepresentative. Thereby, making the people none partisan in their affairs. Democracy as it is practiced should transcend the purported choice made in theelection, which has always produced democratic aberration. Democratic development should take a liberal posture; this would allow the development of individual potentials which collectively would transform the society from the colonial back water to an economic giant. The development of individual through a liberal democratic principles, and the deviation from the colonial type of infrastructural provision would reduced the proposition of our population that are unproductively in the Mbaise area, provision of infrastructure still follow the pattern of colonial administration under the warrant chiefs where the communities suffer help projects was the major source of infrastructure. If the attention of our leaders is directed toward the provision of the necessary economic infrastructure, it would curb rural unban migration.

The population concentration on the rural area would create the necessity for innovation on the existing methods of production. This will not only cause growth in the volume of commerce, and the rise of some positive side-effects, it will increase the capacity to achieve economic independencies and self sustaining social progress. In this circumstance, the venerability of our society to the price fluctuation in the world market would be reduced.

The colonial land policy which allowed the existing pre-colonial tenure system was sustained in the Mbaise area since the attainment of independence. This made actually everybody a farmer but just little is produced, a critical orientation should be given to the farmers through the education institution and government extension services, to enable them realize the essence of engaging just a small portion of the population in farming. This would not only increase the size of holds but also allow the use of mechanized equipment in farming, for maximum output. The traditional land tenure system as sustained cannot be the right part to development home it engages more than necessary the population of the people in farming with little output.

The need to achieve real economic development educational institutions should be more practical oriented, like the pre-colonial guild system, where individual learn skill with less emphasis on theories. Effort should be made through our educational institution to recover the manufacturing skills of the

pre-colonial times which were extinct by the imperialists' economic policies. This, if nurtured to the passage of time would help to reduce the complementarily and interdependence of our economy to those of the industrialized nations.

More attention should be drowning to the economic history of the various societies, where colonial policies were used to destroy the people manufacturing capacity. In the Mbaise area, Amauzu community was said to be a community of black smiths. Even its name (Ama uzu) meaning the place of the black smiths is a depiction of this fact, but there is no trace of that occupation today. In the Ezeagbogu community where smithing was ritualized, there exists just an insignificant remnant of it. More energy should be devoted towards the study of economic history of such societies for the purpose of realizing concrete development.

In general, the African leaders should from henceforth ignore these colonial imparts, and overcome the trauma of the lost of their manhood, and look inward to the recovery of their past beyond colonial times. This will help to realized self reliance.

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NOTE ON INFORMANTS

Mr. John Nnajiku was a blacksmith. He holds a traditional title of Nze in his community Owutu in Ezinihitte local government Area. He is aged 95 years old. During my interview with him on the 2nd may 2007, he made contribution on the issues concerning the traditions of origin of the Mbaise. More importantly on the area dealing with the migration of people from the Mbaise area into other areas.

Mr. Eluweraonu, G.I. was the first chairman of the National Council of Nigeria Citizen (N.C.N.C) Portharcourt Division. The traditional ruler, Eze of Amauzu Autonomous community in Aboh Mbaise Local Government Area of Imo State, Chairman Aboh Mbaise council of traditional Rulers. He is a retired staff of the Tropical Testing Establishment in Portharcourt. During my interview with him, he provided me with very useful information about the tradition of migration and inter-group relationship in Mbaise. He was interviewed in his house at Amauzu on the 15th November 2007. He is aged 86 years.

Mr. Osuagwu, E.O. is aged 90 years. He is a retired teacher at St, Charles College Onicha. He is the traditional Ruler. (Eze) of Nguru nweke Autonomous community in Aboh Mbaise. In the course of my interview with him, he

revealed the connection between some groups in Agbaja clan and the Ezinihitte clan in Mbaise. He was equally resourceful on the information concerning secession of the two village groups of Umuohiagu and Isuobiomgwu who joined the Ngor court area from Mbaise in 1956 through a Plebiscite. This interview was conducted in his house at Nguru-Nweke on the 24ht day of April 2007.

Mr. Njoku, V.U, is aged 96 years. He was the manager Roman Catholic Schools at Uli in what became Anambara state. A retied Education secretary, ministry of Education Owerri. I interviewed him on the issues concerning the colonial activities in the Mbaise area. Particularly on issues bordering on the conquest of the area and attitude of the people who became warrant chiefs after the conquest. We discussed the economic difficulties that were occasioned by the conquest and other colonial activities. The interview was held in his residence at Onicha in Ezinihitte L.G.A. on the 24th day of October 2008.

Mr. Ahiawe Eugin, N.C, aged 81 is a retired Tax Assessment Officers. He was resourceful on issues pertaining to the colonial economic activities, particular those dealing with the role the warrant chiefs. The interview was granted to me on the 24 may 2008.

Mr. George Nwaiwgwe is a retired civil servant in the Ministry of education. He is the son of the popular warrant chiefs, Nwaigwe Akanwa of Ife. my discussion with during the interview was centered on the method of the selection of the Warrant chiefs by the colonial officers. In reaction to this, he revealed that most of the warrant chiefs were rewarded with chieftaincy for the aid they gave to the British during the conquest of the area. He also threw light on the role of the warrant chiefs in the coming of the missionaries. He is aged 91 years, and resides in hiss private residence in Umuoruo-ife in Ezinihitte L.G.A. This interview was conducted in his residence on 19/01/2009.

Sir Adiukwu Alpheus(K.S.C) is a retired Principalof a School. He is aged 75 years. He granted me interview in his house at Umuosisi village in Obizi-Ezinihitte L.G.A on the 30th day of October 2008. During the interview I asked him question on the colonial military expedition into the Mbaise area. In reaction, he revealed that the Mbaise people paid dealy for their reaction which led to the death of the British doctor. He stated that the success of the expedition relied partly on the contributions made by villages and individuals towards assisting the government forces. And that the governments were deceived by some village groups to involve themselves in their old conflict.

Sir Nwokocha, E.N.J. is a retired civil servant. He is an accredited custodian of Igbo culture by the University of Nigeria Nsuka. He has a vast knowledge of

Igbo traditions and culture. During this interview, he displayed a good knowledge of the impact of colonial rule on the social economic relationship in the area. In reaction to my question which was centered on the economic effect of the colonial war in Mbaise, he advanced that people become refuges over-night, due to the activities of the colonial forces. People hide under the guise of the war of conquest to deal with their old enemies. He equally pointed out that the wrong attitude of the colonial chief contributed to the cause of the women's riot which broke out in 1929. His response to my questions were very relevant to the understanding of socio-economic change that were caused by the colonial rule. Sir Nwokocha is aged 79 years and holds a traditional title of (Nze) in his community. This interview took place in his residence at Udo in Ezinihitte L.G.A of Imo state on 15/11/2008

Chief Chilaka, L.U. is retired Headmaster, and the son of one of the foremost warrant chiefs in Mbaise, (Chief Chilaka Ukpo) his father was very notorious in the colonial time that he was imprisoned two time for criminal acts. Chief chilaka was very informative during my discussion with him. He gave a narrative of the deceitful truce called by H.M. Douglas, the District Commissioner of Owerri in 1905-06, where the people of Mbaise were brutally massacred. He revealed that rather than resistance, some native elements aided the colonial forces in the brutal killing of their people. He further advanced that

the warrant chiefs were not allowed to collect taxes when the policy of direct taxation was introduced, due to their corruption. Chief Chilaka is aged 75 years and lived in his home town in Umunuma in Ezinihitte LG.A. Where this interview took place on the 14th day of October 2008.

Mr. Nwachukwu Iseal is a retired civil servant. He is the Chief Priest if Ala and the Nnemiri Oracles. His information is very comprehensive. He revealed to us the importance of these orales in the administration of justices in the whole of Igboland. He further stressed that oracles were also important in trading because traders used them to protect themselves along the trade routs against Criminals and kidnappers. Nwachukwu Israel is aged 81 years, and resides in his village at Amaissi in Uvuru- Aboh Mbaise L.G.A. This interview was carried out in his house on 30th day of April 2010.

Mr. Samuel Amadi Odu was interview in his house at Umuelem Enyogwugwu in Aboh Mbaise L.G.A He is a retired Civil Servant and presently a farmer. His narrative about the colonial activities in the Mbaise area was very informative. In the course of our discussion, he revealed how the warrant chiefs were using the labour meant public works for their personal used. And that the headmen were demanding matts from people for the maintenance of the court houses. In an attempt to illustrate how forceful and dubious the warrant chiefs were, he stated Nwaudoli was an influential chiefs in the Agaja area. And that he was in

the habit of collecting people's belongings through force. He added that the government did not allow the production of certain local products. When I asked him to give an example, he mentioned the local gin. He said that some producers such as Adibe Opara Amadi and Maduleme were all producers of this gin but were force to abandon it because of the threat of punishment in the native court. Another important issue raised in his discussion was that men took part in the women's revolt. They were dressed in the women's cloths and helped in carrying out the revolt. Amadi is aged 81 years, and was interviewed on 29/04/2010.

Mr. Nwachukwu, R.O. is a retired Construction Company Worker. He is 84 years old, and resides in his residence at Umanuma Akpokwu in the present Akpodin Ezinihitte Mbaise. When I asked him about how the area was governed under the Warrant chiefs system, he took a particular interest on the issue of Akwukwo Nwannunu. He described it as a summons emanating from the conspiracy of a warrant chief, the court clerk and the kotima to undo an individual. He added that the people did not understand the procedure of the court and therefore dreaded it. Consequently, these warrant chiefs used it as an instrument of oppression. When he was asked about the quality of education these chiefs had;

He stated that they were all illiterate none of them could read or write. In the course of this our discussion he noted that in most cases, the warrant chief initiated the Akwukwo Nwannunu while the court clerks and the messenger carried it out. His reason being that the court clerks were not from the Mbaise area, and had little or no contact with people outside the court. It is the warrant chief who is always in land and other kinds of disputes with his kinsmen. It was because of the threat of this type of summons that Iwuala Mmaju went for self exile to Etche and did not return for many years. Akwukwo Nwannunu force people to borrow money they may not be able to pay back as agreed and this led to another litigation which may cause the victim to be imprisoned, therefore making chance for the covation of the very land, tree, or woman that has led to the Akwukwo Nwannunu. This interview was conducted on 17/10/2009.

Nze Linus Onyemobi is a Farmer and Chief Priest of Amdlioha Ariam. He is aged 81 years. When I discussed the impact of colonial rule the area with him, he advanced that the Whiteman came to sopoil the peace that had been in existence through their war which was fought with heavy guns. He did not say much but he laid emphasis on the issue of the protection given to the people by chukwu through these oracles which the Christians came to destroy. He added that if the Whiteman did not impose their government the Christians would not

have been able to root out these traditions. This interview was granted to me in his residence at Umuariam Ekwereazu on Ahiazu Mbaise L.G.A on 29/04/2010.

Nze Mark Nwachukwu.Was a Produce Buyer. He is aged 92 years. He holds a traditional tittle of Nze in his community. When he was asked what he considered as the impact of colonial rule in the area, he began by summarizing that virtually every thing changed as soon as the Douglas war was over. The white man appointed some people to be chiefs. This was quickly followed by the missionaries. The missionaries began to build hostels for the training of women, on how to keep the house and read the bible. The missionaries condemned marriages that involve multiple wives. In 1918, many juju house were destroyed .The missionaries were supported by the government to stop some activities in our culture while the government itself prevented the people from doing some of things they did before the time. The blacksmiths were said to be producers of local weapons. The government agents continued to spy on them, this made one Nwachukwu to migrate from Umuchoke to Uvuru. Nkwa-Otile rump dance which was used for the celebration of the new yam festival was regarded as fetish. The people can no longer determine the price of goods. In short everything changed. He said it would have been better if the white-men

did not come. They should have stayed at Opobo and Obani (Borni). This information was obtained from him, in his house at Umuajala in Umuchoko Ezinihitte L.G.A. on the 29th April 2010.

Prince Iron Ucheakolan Obasi is retired Civil Servant, he is the son of a notable warrant chief from the Amumara Area. Chief William Obasi his father was said to be one of the victims of the women's revolt of 1929. Mr. Ucheakolam said that some of his father's slaves were granted their freedom after his death. Chief William Obasi made a tremendous contribution to the coming of the C.M.S Church to Amaumara prince Ucheakolam Obasi is aged 64 years, and resides in his home at Okiohia Amaumara Ezinihitte L.G.A, where I conduted this interview on 21/01/2009.

Nze Echeweodo Amadi aged 75 years is a carpenter and a farmer. He explain in the course of the interview that those who were appointed warrant chiefs were not village Heads. This interview was conducted in his house at Ndokwu Lorji in Aboh Mbaise L.G.A, on the 4th day of may 2010.

Mr. Nwogu D.I.O is aged 81 years. He is the chief priest of Aliliele deity. He has a knowledge about the pre-colonial religious life in the area, hence he still

adhere to it in the present time. Question directed to him were aimed at getting information about the religious life of the people, but he went beyond this to say that deities were very important factor on the issue of security of life and property more especially as it concern trade. He was questioned in his home at Eziala Akpodim in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A, on 11/04/2010.

Nze Andrew, N. Oguzie hold a traditional title of Nze in his village. He has a vast knowledge of Igbo tradition. He is a former produce buyer. This gave him the opportunity to understand the nature of economic situation in the region in the colonial time more importantly when it comes to the trade in palm produce, (palm oil and palm kernel,) which were very important, if not the only export product from the Mbaise area. Nze Andrew Oguzie was interviewed in his house at Umuogu-Amauuzu in Aboh Mbaise L.G.A. on the 29th day of November 2007.

Anganwu Livinus, E. is a retired Teacher. He is well known in his village for his vast knowledge of the culture of the area. During my interview with him, he threw light on the importance of the blacksmith in the Mbaise society and Igbo land in general. He further revealed to me that smiting was a ritualized occupation and that the people of Ezeagbogu hold it with esteem. Mr. Anyanwu

Livinus is aged 65 years, and live in his home town in Ezeagbogu in Ezinihitte Mbaise L.G.A. This interview was carried out on 30/11/2007 information obtained from this interview was very resourceful, particularly in the area of pre-colonial occupations of the people of the area.

Lady Julia Ikoma Nnosu is well knowledgeable in the local history of her area. Her father was among the Mbaise persons that were taking palm produce to Opobo and some other coastal town through the water ways. By so doing, he was among the first people in the Amaumara to get in contact with the Christian Missionaries. Her mother was among the few women that benefited from the teaching of the missionaries in the hostels. She revealed to me that the knowledge she has about the past activities in the area was handed down to her from her parents who witnessed some of the these event and participated in them. Lolo Julia is a farmer. She is aged 80 years, and live in her home town in Umuanuma-Akpadium in Ezinihette Mbaise L.G.A. This interview was done on 20th/ 11/2007.