

*The Ultimate Account: A History of Amesi People from the Earliest Times to the Present*

# *The* **Ultimate** **Account**

*A History of Amesi People  
from the Earliest Times to the Present*

By

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**Ezeonwuka Franklyn.**

## **DEDICATION**

This book is dedicated to the following:

**My Family** - Dad, Mum, Chike, Pat, Chinwe (Your help and assistance is unquantifiable).

**All the people of Amesi.** (Dead and Alive)  
(May your endeavours bring forth Peace, Love and Progress in the town).

## **PREFACE**

Research and work into the unrecorded history of Amaeshi (Amaeri) is never a show piece of an hour, but an intertwined and tangled undertaking, which calls for hardwork, intelligent analysis, objectivity, perseverance, sympathy and common sense, especially where information about the people's past life is scanty and patchy. I am very much aware of numerous write-ups, all in an attempt to decode the Amesi past, acted on a town wide almost limitless panorama.

In the face of extant information, cloudy documents and some biased informants and uncooperative analysts, I faced a dilemma. The slow, tedious culling of facts from fables is of course essential towards the forming of reliable generalisations, otherwise one's hypotheses will forever remain, guesses. Though tagged the ultimate account, this work cannot perfectly claim to be the exhaustive and final summation of Amesi, nevertheless a very deep step has been initiated. One cannot divorce easily the use of conceptual approach in relation to the emergence of the main body of this work.

The "ultimate account" has been divided into two parts: Having applied the tools of oral tradition, archival and written facts, towards digesting the various materials collected, a coherent analysis emerged finally, as part one of this piece. Consequently, an opportunity is provided for any keen observer, for a retreat to the earliest days of the town. The scenery emerging

from this cast is so clearly projected that one could easily visualise the town's ancestors, as they mutually moved about and organised their lives.

The town's unstatic political institution, in the precolonial times was explicitly explained as a follow up. All in all, it was neither strictly placed in a hierarchical base, nor controlled by a controversial conservative minority. A long but solid immersion into organised and detailed socio-religious forces, provided for a stable intra homogeneity.

Economically, Amesi was not bankrupt. In order to obtain a somewhat concise elaboration in this field, the people's productive and distributive approaches, aimed towards economic advancement and livelihood, was researched thoroughly. What a beautiful revelation that resulted!

The machineries of inter-group relations, tried to unravel the town's relation and association with other peoples far and near. Undoubtedly, this write-up tried to reflect the town's flamboyant patriotism in the face of externally - related aggression. However, before the light went off, the town was forcefully exposed to the violent influences of British imperialism.

In the face of forced re-adjustments, left with no alternative, the town's institutions, wobbled drunkenly, under the mercy of westernization and its allying socializing influences.

Hardly did the people enjoy their so-much demanded independence, before hail was let loose for thirty long months. Hunger, malnutrition, ill

health, fear and death took its toll from the town's populace. Remarkably, in the face of all these, undaunted and determined to survive, Amesians struggled ahead.

The town unexpectedly was later exposed to the machinations of some hardened relatively alien political transformations, after the so-called reconciliation, rehabilitation and reconstructions of the 70s.

Amesi professionally scaled this hundle.

Lastly, this 'magnum opus' tried to weight and tabulate the town's progressive strides; Amesians proved that they had no empty testicles.

All in all, Amesians, it appears, have lived up to their expectations, and it is in consideration of this that 'the Ultimate Account becomes an exciting amalgam of a peoples' history.

I wish to express my sincere gratitude and appreciation to my family, the Obi Akalabo I of Amesi, Rev, Dr. I. Ozigbo, Mr. J., O. Ahazuem, for their innumerable support and guidance throughout the duration of this work.

I wouldn't of course forget the immeasurable, healthy and intellectual brilliance with which some of my comrades and colleagues spurred me. I thank them abundantly.

However, contrary to a somewhat preface fashion, I can never agree that all mistakes and short comings are entirely my responsibility. I believe that responsibilities in matters of this sort, is always collective, especially with regard to remedying the short comings. Criticisms are very

well welcomed, only when they are constructive and in good faith.

My purpose has been to try to reach interested researchers who have for long wished to explore further, the nature and condiments of Amesi past, rather than merely to satisfy the standards set by others. In trying to provide this 'missing link', the ultimate Account evolved as a *vaude-ville* of numerous treasured traditions of the envious past.

**Ezeonwuka I. Franklyn  
1991.**

**LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

B A.	Bachelor of Arts
Contd.	Continued
C	(Circa) about
etc.	et cetera
ed/eds	edition/editor, editors
J.H.S.N	Journal of Historical Society of Nigeria
I.U.P.	Ibadan University Press
L.G.A.	Local Government Area
N.A.E.	National Archives, Enugu
OP. Cit.	(Opus citoto) work already cited
P., pp.	page, pages
On proof	Onitsha province
Reg No.	Registration Number
Spp.	Species
unpub.	Unpublished
Ltd.	Limited
pubs,	Publishers
A.I.U	Amesi Improvement Union
CARITAS	Catholic Relief Agencies in Europe/ America.



## **MY MODUS OPERANDI**

The stone will bow in shame when an egg cracks palm kernel.

History is best remembered by the scare it leaves in its trail, secrets are good, but often hard to keep; Mortals should remember that information and knowledge are not static and can never be; we can only and ought to pass onto another that which we know, lest transition overtake us; Yes, it is realistic that the rose bud opens at the cost of its life; if not so, how can humanity progress?

Damn the fear, for transition is for all destined. I have to forget injuries; to store them up would be hard to bear; I never encourage hate; it is consuming and weakening; Hateful thinking breeds negativism and retards all positivism in me.

In trying to hate back all those who plot against me, I would have little time for good constructive thoughts and actions.

One can never know the importance of an old basket, until the day of sacrifice.

## **FOREWORD**

When Alex Haley, the celebrated author of 'ROOTS' went out in search of his roots he not only succeeded in bringing to light a past that was almost eclipsed but also he gave a leaning pad to a future that would be brighter and better to all those whose roots he dug. As no tree can live and stand without roots, so no people can exist and uniquely so without a past.

Thus, the need for the emergence of a truly progressive, peaceful and united Amesi is realised most assuredly by an objective recourse to the roots. For when we do not know what we are and how we came to be what we are, we cannot make any meaningful forge ahead.

Ezeonwuka in this book challenges us to look well before we take a necessary leap to the future. He very carefully goes through the rigorous and winding road of reaching a people's beginning right from the possible imaginable past to the present.

A necessary and compelling result from this journey into the roots is a clarion call to the faculties and sensibilities to grapple with the realities of this necessary move to the future.

When Christopher Columbus set on his expedition of discovering the new world, he was not sure what he was going to see but he nonetheless, had a vision of a future very promising. If he came back after few miles, the new world could have remained an illusion, atleast not as early as it was founded.

Some people who are at lethargic and so have refused to work for a better tomorrow based on the past, have blamed the present state of things on

Western and Christian influences. They either say that the imperialist West came and destroyed all we valued at the flimsiest reason of not understanding them, or they point blunt accusing finger to the Christian heralds for abolishing their had to live on. The result is a situation where neither the western views Christian teaching nor authentic African cultures thrives but a confusion of all with nothing positive. They may be correct in their arguments. But suffice it to say that such blames make no impressions. The present and past big world powers had pasts that devastated them. The great Babylonian power was once under Assyria, so was Rome by the Greeks and the Greeks in turn under Roman powers. Nothing of the conquered was left. Everything peculiar to them was destroyed.

But today, they all have cultures, civilisations, educations and technologies uniquely theirs - a smilarge of what was, what remain, and what was gained.

Ours have been tampered with, no doubt, but it is ours also to build from our "ruins". A fierce bull, when wounded retreats and charges back on its object of attack with ever greater ferocity. Okwudili Ezeonwuka has said it all. We must begin where he stopped.

**Nikolas O Abazie (Fr.)**  
Asst. Secretary  
**Bishop's House, Awka**  
**1991**

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## **PROLOGUE**

According to Professor J.C. Anene; “there is no doubt that the history of an area is written clearly in its geographical features”. One of these papers geographically is a comparatively small town South of Aguata Local Government Area, South-West of Igboland. Today, Amesi is grouped into what Professor A. E. Afigbo termed “Awka-Orlu upland area and Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta”,<sup>2</sup> “the supposed epicenter from which Igbo migrants settled the rest of Igboland. Amasi, one of towns that comprised the Mbalaolie group of towns”<sup>3</sup>, “lies on latitude 50.06. East of the Greenwich Meridian”.<sup>4</sup> of special importance, is the undulating road that stretches to about 27 kilometers from Awka to the town. “The town is bounded on the East by Akpo and Achina towns, on the West by Uga, on the North by Nkpologwu, on the South by Umuchu and Uga towns respectively”.<sup>5</sup> the relief is relatively low, being 750 feet above sea level. Amasi covers an area of about 11.2 kilometers and has an average population density of between 700 and 800 people per square kilometer. Being situated in the rain forest zone, it has nevertheless lost much of its primordial dense forest vegetation to derived savanna and palm bush, resulting from prolonged human activities.

# CHAPTER

## One

### *Introduction*

#### **THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE**

##### ***Geographical Location***

**A**ccording to Professor J.C. Anene; “there is no doubt that the history of an area is written clearly in its geographical features”.<sup>1</sup> Amesi, the subject of this paper, geographically is a comparatively small town South of Aguata Local Government Area, South-West of Igboland. Today, Amesi is grouped into what Professor A. E. Afigbo termed “Awka-Orlu upland area and Nsukka-Okigwe cuesta”,<sup>2</sup> “the supposed epicenter from which Igbo migrants settled the rest of Igboland. Amesi, one of towns that comprised the *Mbalaolie* group of towns”<sup>3</sup>, “lies on latitude 5<sup>o</sup>.06. East of the Greenwich Meridian”.<sup>4</sup> Of special importance, is the undulating road that stretches to about 27 kilometers from Awka to the town.

“The town is bounded on the East by Akpo and Achina towns, on the West by Uga, on the North by Nkpologwu, on the South by Umuchu and Uga towns respectively”.<sup>5</sup> The relief is

relatively low, being 750 feet above sea level. Amesi covers an area of about 11.2 kilometers and has an average population density of between 700 and 800 people per square kilometer. Situated in the rain forest zone, it has nevertheless lost much of its primordial dense forest vegetation to derived savanna and palm bush, resulting from prolonged and extensive human activity. One can still see scattered here and there, palm groves, orchards, and clusters of economic trees. There are no streams, rivers or natural water-supply depot in the town and this has for long led the inhabitants to depend largely on either sinking individually, deep wells or on the streams located in neighboring towns. The towns soil contains a very small degree of acid, more of humus content than clay, leading to both high decomposition rate, and average loss of water to the atmosphere, auguring well “for the provision of soil nutrients for plants which very much need nonorganic matter”.<sup>6</sup> In her experience of annual high temperature (Above 85 F)”, generally mornings, evenings and nights are cooler than noon periods.

Amesi like other towns in the tropical rainforest zone, has two seasons:- the rainy and dry. The rainy season is brought about by the south west trade winds between the months of April and October, but this is normally interrupted by a short dry spell, known as the “August’ break’.<sup>7</sup> By the same token, the dry season is caused by the North-East trade winds, and lasts from November till March, and this is known locally by the people as *Uguru* (Harmattan).



Amesi has a mean annual rainfall of between “60 to 80 inches”.<sup>8</sup>

Patches of forest could still be found in Amesi, in such places as sacred groves or around the home steads. Some of the economic trees found within peoples’ habitational zones include; ‘*Ukwa* (Bread fruit), *Ube* (African pear), *Udara* (African star-apple), *Ogbu* (ficus spp.), *Nkwu* (palm tree), *Uhie* (Camwood), *Oji* (Kolanut), *oji* (Chlorophra escadesa) ’’.<sup>9</sup> etc.

## **THE PEOPLE**

Amesi lies within the Igbo Core area’, and the people speak mainly Igbo, with no disparity in dialect. Agriculture has for long been the main occupation of the people. Supporting the view, Grey in his intelligence report on *Mbalaolie*, to which Amesi belonged, stated that, “The natives of the group earn their living chiefly by farming and trading in farm produces and to a minor extent by the rearing of livestock”.<sup>10</sup> Principal crops grown were and still are yams, Cocoyam’s, Cassava, maize, palm produce, vegetables and fruits. The precolonial house – type of Amesi was generally rounded in shape and provided with only one door and no windows.

Their door types metamorphosed through the ages from log of wood to artistically made wooden doors that bear *ichi* (Carved lines). The walls of houses were made of mud, and this was normally well scrubbed. The floor was also scrubbed with a special stone that resembles

‘quartz and quarzites’ called *Okwute Mmiri* (water stone), which was usually obtained or picked from water courses. The people roofed their houses with *Atari* and *Ayo* respectively. The former was got from raffia palm, while the latter was obtained as hay, from overgrown grassland areas.

Wealth was measured in pre-colonial Amesi by the number of titles an individual has taken, the extent of his farmland, the size of his yam barns and the number of livestock kept. Such individuals were known, and honoured as *Ogaranya* (wealthymen). However, the disabled and poor were not left to wallow in misery as they were given succor by their relatives. In as much as many people engaged in trading, others kept the different parlances of the traditional industry throbbing and thriving progressively.

Justice in-pre-colonial Amesi was inextricably bound up with politics, religion and law. This assertion was re-enforced by J.C. Anene’s observation that; “no study of the Igbo is intelligible without a close appreciation of the pervasive reality of the supernatural world, and no community is complete without a shrine for the gods of the land”<sup>11</sup>. Social organizations like the masquerade, secret societies and age grades, helped in the maintenance of order, form and recreational activities in the town. The basic socio-political unit, headed by the father (*dinweulo*), is the nuclear family.

This included the wife/wives, children and the slaves, if he had any. The father, in as much as he holds the Ofo (symbol of power and

authority), is also regarded as the representative of the dead ancestors, controlled religious, judicial and political activities of the family. The extended family followed suit, comprising man, wife/wives, brothers, children, unmarried sisters and other very close relatives. The *Umunna* (Lineage) in its structural make-up, settled disputes within its jurisdiction, such as that between couples or even the one based on land. Matters beyond its arbitration were sent to the village assembly; made up of all adult males, lineage heads, elders, titledmen and men of extraordinary capabilities. As “Subtlety, complexity and stability characterized the manner in which all Igbo communities organized their political life”,<sup>12</sup> decisions arrived at in the various assemblies, towards the smooth running of the town’s affairs, based wholly on concensus, consultation and compromise.

Land which is believed to be the abode of ancestors and earth goddess (*ani*), was highly revered, propitiated and appeased when desecrated. Seen as a common instrument and property of the living, the dead and generations unborn; it was then regarded as a moralistic symbol. For the pre-colonial Amesi people, the principal object of belief is the ultimate reality, which is referred to as Chi-ukwu (great spirit). The large number of ancilliary gods which lead up to this supreme being, suggests the people’s belief in the unfathomable nature of the high and lofty one who inhabits eternity.

‘Amesi, just like other Igbo towns, as against the previous allegation, did not at anytime spend the past centuries in ‘great isolation’, neither were they ‘cut off’ by their allegedly impenetrable environment’.

Just as the forest zone did not initially hinder settlement, it clearly did not prevent Amesi from wallowing and perfecting in various instruments of inter-group relations: wrestling, warfare, marriages, festivities etc. in the light of this, Green observed that; ‘inter-marriage Creates a network of ties by which the cells of Ibo Society though not unified by any central authority, nor arranged in any political hierarchy are nonetheless interlinked horizontally each with its neighbours”.

Amesi possessed no organized army, and its weapons of war included bows, arrows, sheated swords, spears, matchets, clubs, stones, guns etc. These weapons when in the hands of brave warriors, could be very effective at close range.

## **1.2 Origin, Migration, Settlement.**

The history of Amesi is largely un-written, and as a result much of the reconstruction would depend on oral tradition, however mindful of the fact that existing ones are both extant and patchy, and so capable of leading to a ... steep and slippery road whose end would appear invisible”.<sup>14</sup>

The origin of the name ‘Amesi’, and the people who bear it are both wrapped in myths and legends. A popular account traces Amesi’s migration from Oraeri. Despite the popularity of the assertion, some caution has to be applied as

J.C. Anene pointed out that among the Igbo; ‘nothing very definite is known about their earlier migration’.<sup>15</sup>

To suggest a date when man started living in Amesi is a difficult task, but using indirect archaeological evidence, it would appear that, “between the period 1000-500 B.C., man had already settled on the land”.<sup>16</sup>

The story of Amesi’s foundation revolves around a putative father called *Eshi* or *Ozo-Akalabo*. Oraeri and Eshi were two children of the same father, but not of the same mother, with Oraeri being the elder son<sup>17</sup>. Oraeri later married many wives and was blessed with many children, while Eshi, who was famed as not only a brave hunter, but a powerful herbalist, spent most of his time in adventurous pursuits as both a hunter and herbalist. Legend has it that Eshi, during one of his expeditions, discovered an area with large expanse of palm trees, monkeys and medicinal herbs. Having stayed few days mentally absorbing what the area had in stock, he killed some monkeys, collected enough wild fruits and herbs, and then journeyed home with the ultimate aim of getting married and migrating with his family to the new site.



Ukpo Obu (This is located in front of Akalabo's residence. This spot binds Amesi, Akpo and Achina, being their purported original sacrificial spot during the pre-colonial days).

He later not only married, but also took the Ozo title, and consequently was named *Akalabo*. “Eshi was reputed to have married “Nwamgbafo’ the daughter of ‘Nwaugwu’ from Nri”,<sup>18</sup> who got only an issue for him before her death. This first son allegedly was ‘Amaeshi’. With his marriage to another woman later, Eshi got two more sons – ‘Akpo’ and ‘Achina’. He then decided to embark upon his proposed migration, accompanied by Oraeri and his family, although the latter dropped and settled on the way. Consequently, this early migration must have got a lot to do with the present Nri spot and environment.

However, it is the view of Anadi that ‘Evo’, - the putative father of Oraeri people migrated from Nri to the present Oraeri environment with many of his relatives and aides as a result of an injunction (reference to the sacred Exodus) from his father –Ezenri Nnamoko, who according to tradition, was the last major king that ruled Nri

and all the towns under her hegemony. The probable date of this migration has been put at about 279 AD<sup>19</sup>.

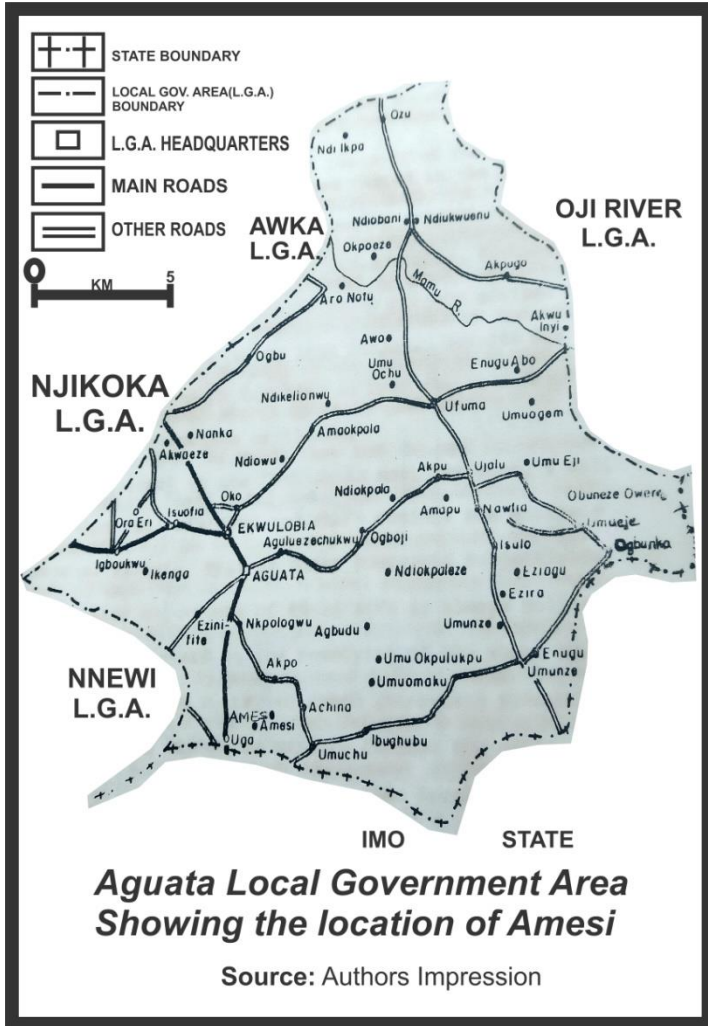
As Amesi tradition claims that ‘Oraeri’ and ‘Eshi’ (Eri) are brothers, it would then appear that ‘Evo (Father of Oraeri) and Eshi were sons of Ezenri Namoko, and that both probably left Nri at the same time. After Evo had settled at Oraeri present environment, Eshi (ri) later moved due to circumstances, in search of a more suitable place to settle, which happened to be the present location of Amesi.

On the ‘Nri’ genealogical validity of Amesi, Boston had this to say:

*“..... referred to as the Anambra group of towns. These towns are Aguleri, Nteje, Amanuke Igbariam, Nri, Oraeri, Amaesi and Nnokwa”.*

*These towns have identical culture and traditional pattern coming from one ancestor. They are all Nri towns and each like Oraeri can lay claims to the Bronzes of Igbo\_Ukwu...”<sup>20</sup>*

Migration however, could be caused by a number of factors including war, over population, drought, fire, flood and other elemental catastrophes. According to Isichei, “when population pressure becomes too great, or when towns were divided by serious disputes, a section would migrate and established a new house preserving the memory of its origin”.<sup>21</sup>



Before “Eshi” died, he divided his estate amongst his sons. Amesi being the eldest, as a



matter of tradition had to retain *OBU-ESHI* (their father's compound), with the large expanse of palm trees, hence the appellation *Umuakalabonkwu* usually added to his name.

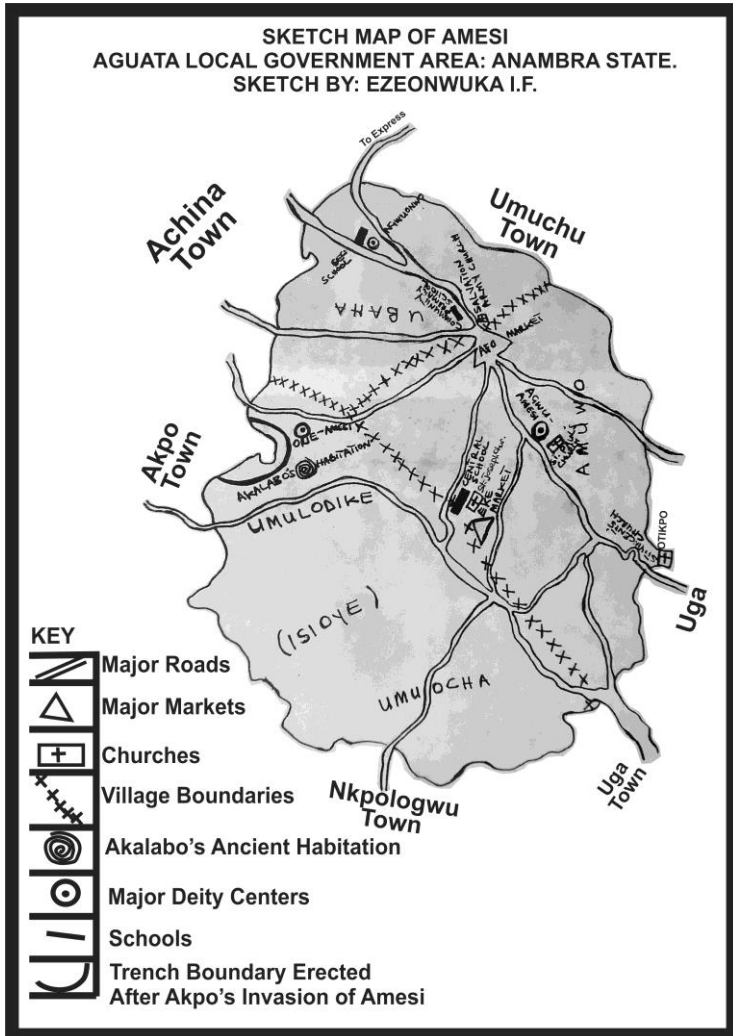
Inclusive in Amesi's share was a wealth of medicinal herbs, which helped him to perfect his progress in traditional medicine.

Because of Achina's likeness for water and fishing, he was given the strip of land that haboured many streams, while Akpo was given a very fertile land due to his farming ability. Akpo and Achina then broke away from *Obu-Eshi* and settled with their families in their respective lands.

The name 'Amesi', is a corruption of the original name 'Amaeshi, or 'Amaeri' (the gate-way to the domain of Eshi). With the migration over, Amaeshi later got four sons - *Umunlobedike, Amuwo, Umuocha* and *Ubaha*, in order of seniority.

It is significant to note that these four sons later produced issues which made up the four villages of Amesi. Umuocha however decided to adopt his mother's name rather than his father's. Obinato and Umuocha are so interwoven geographically, that there is no clear-cut demarcation between them. Both are referred to as *Isioye*.

Atonement for any defilement (*Ikwuala*), belongs to Oraeri people as of right, but in the absence of Oraeri, Amesi could preside.



# CHAPTER

## TWO

### INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

#### 2.1 *Political Institutions:*

The struggle for power and influence in any society or community takes place within the context of social and political structures, which involved the arrangement of persons in institutionally controlled or defined relationships.

The basic political unit in precolonial Amesi is the *Ezi'nuno* (nuclear family). This normally comprised a father, his wife/wives, children, his servants and in some cases slaves. The father was and is still regarded and acknowledged with great honour as the head of the family. On his death, the first son replaced him automatically. The father of the family was an embodiment of authority and his words were respected without question.

The submission of other family members to his authority with powerless resignation, conditions their future relations with those in various authority base of the town. Moreover, with a spectrum of family socialization, there are other ranges of orientation which the nuclear family takes charge of. The indoctrination and moulding of the child's character here, follows strict and programmed path, all aimed towards positively

directing his actions to fall in line with what obtained in the community.



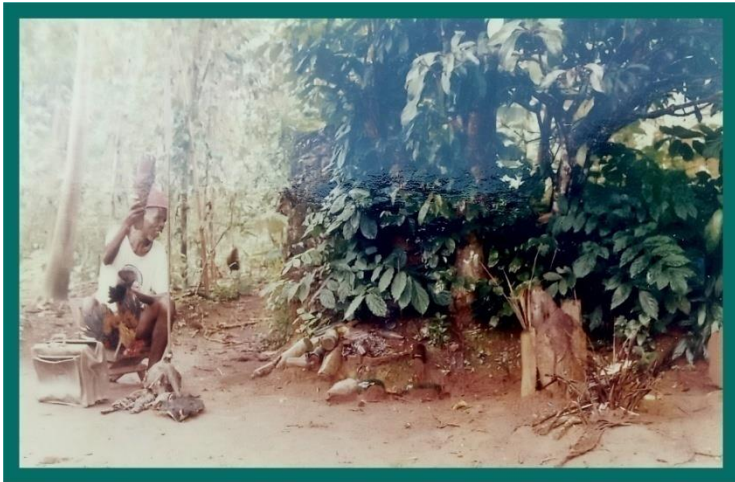
**One of my informants - Igwe Umeonankume,  
Obi Akalabo I of Amesi.**

After the nuclear family, the next social unit is the extended family. This usually comprised upwards of about four to eight families. A typical example in Amesi is the Egbuacho families. According to Horton's analysis, "this is founded not upon the conjugal relationship of husband and wife, but upon blood relationship of a large number of kin persons".<sup>22</sup> This extended family comprises wife/wives, brothers, children, unmarried sisters etc. In pre-colonial Amesi, members of nuclear families were found with their families inhabiting often a relatively large compound, called (Obu). However, nowadays, the eldest member occupies the Obu, in the event of others stepping out far off or closeby to erect their houses, and his duty it was to show leadership before the other members, which undoubtedly goes along way towards promoting group solidarity. Moreover, there is tendency towards communalism, especially if they live either in one large compound or very close to one another, although this is strongly being threatened presently both by the rising cost of living and western capitalism, with its emphasis on individualism.

In Amesi traditional society, political power and authority were exercised at various levels. The extended family in Gailey's view, is the "first formal division in village politics",<sup>23</sup> in that here the authority of the eldest male was absolute though he was by no means a dictator.

Expantiating further on this, Olisa opined that; "The Okpara's leadership is essentially a

moral one, for he cannot take any decision alone, and cannot enforce the decision taken by his people with any form of coercion. Government in all levels of social structure is thus based on consensus of the members of the group concerned”.<sup>24</sup>



**One of my reliable informants - Maraihie Emenike, a traditional religionist, going through his daily sacrifice at the particular spot of Akalabo's residence. (Evidence of earlier habitation could be seen from the soil texture and colour).**

Decision-making at all levels of the social structure followed a democratic pattern. Members were permitted dissenting opinions during deliberations, but once a decision was arrived at, it becomes binding on the whole community. The *diokpara* was responsible for offering sacrifice to the ancestors, and it was from this that he derived his legitimacy. “At his death, succession to the

office follows the adelpic principle, passing from the incumbent to his next brother in line, rather than from father to son".<sup>25</sup>

The next politico-social level in Amesi is the Umunna (minimal lineage). This consists of a single and extended families, claiming descent from a patrilineal ancestor. This unit was and is still strictly exogamous, and members usually lived together within a chosen area. Amesi today consists of seventeen minimal lineages (Quarters), namely: Umunlodike village (Umu-umeoha, Umu-Umebigholo, Umu-ofeke and Umu-Ibelaka), Amuwo village (Umudibie, Umu-aro, Onunaku, Umu-Umeanosike and Anyaji), Umuocha village (Umu-Okpalaibekwe, Umu-ojihie, Umu-ogbaighe and Umu-Umeonaku), Ubaha village (Umu-Ezemeny, Umuduru, Umumeoka and Umugologo).

Sexual relationship between members was regarded with horror. The eldest son was the head of the unit, and so had charge of the unit's sacred symbol of *Ofo*. His custody of *Ofo* made him the go-between of the living and the dead. It became his duty to sacrifice periodically to the ancestors of the lineage during festivals.

He also represented the lineage in any meeting of the maximal lineage (village council). Through the exertion of moral pressure, he maintained peace, justice and concord among members of his unit. He also listened to complaints and arbitrated in disputes between members.

In complaints of a serious nature, the Diokpora summoned the lineage because while



imbued with authority as the eldest male, he was conscious of the fact that his authority derived from the *Umunna*, hence the saying *Umunna buike* (strength derives from the lineage group). Just like the *Nzuko ime bara* (council of the extended family), the lineage possess the *Nzuko Umunna* (Council of the minimal lineage), which comprised all heads of the house holds of the unit, men of ripe age, members with considerable wealth and influence, titled and of course intelligent individuals.

It was sacrilegious for the Council to converge for meeting in another place other than at the house of the *Diokpara*. In the event of any case or misunderstanding between members, settlement was obtained after all sides had been heard, questions asked, and decisions finally reached through consensus.

This was shown either by general acclamation or rejected by shouts of derision. Blame was apportioned, while punishment followed. The *Umunna* appears to be an intermediary between the extended family and the village. It is infact a structure of coordination and form, for maintaining the link between official decision-making (output) and public feedback (input).

However, when all the powers of a specific level of government have been applied in trying to solve a particular problem, and no success was recorded the case was transferred to the next higher level which was usually more powerful and had more influence and authority to ensure peace.

The village level (miximal lineage) is the zenith of political organization in traditional Amesi society. The existing component maximal lineages were complementary to one another. The unit comprised all heads of the different minimal lineages, elders, titled men, men of opulence, wisdom and wealth, including chief Priests of important deities in the village. The village square (Ama), was taken as the rendezvous of the village assembly. Cases that appeared before the village council included that of incest, murder, stealing (goat and yam), arson, poisoning, disputes between one Umunna and another or cases that cannot be handled by the lineage (minimal) government. The village is made up of related kindred, and it varied in sizes, depending on the compound units that made it up. Each individual village is autonomous in its affairs. This agrees with Uchendu's view that; "Each village is autonomous and sovereign in most matters affecting it. What modifies this sovereignty is the 'charter', the myth from which the village group derives its solidarity".<sup>26</sup>

A maximal lineage possesses *Ofo* according to the number of minimal lineages it harbours and each holder of this insignia was the representative of his minimal lineage (*Umunna*), in all outside relations. It does appear that Amesi practiced much the same direct and representative democracy for which the western writers themselves often look back with appreciation and gratitude to the city-states of ancient Greece as the *focus et origo* of their civilization.

But it must be noted that the practice of Amesi, in representatives of the people, did not however isolate other citizens, from contributing to debates during village meetings. Despite its shortcomings, the political system of Amesi at least ensured for her people, justice, peace and security from fear.

However, any case that defied adjudication and settlement at the village level, instantly proved its seriousness, and so no time was wasted in drawing the attention of the supreme and final system to it. This based on much weird and supernatural parlance. “The services of a great herbalist accompanied with those of the chief priest of Orie and Ani deities, were arranged for in a sacred grove referred to as *ala di uji*<sup>27</sup> (land, bottomlessly deep). After the alleged invocation of the superhuman forces, any accused who didn’t disappear, after having trespassed through that ground, automatically proved his innocence.

However in the light of present historical research, the ‘disappearance’ of some of the accused may have something to do with the Atlantic slave trading connections.

Above the village council, stood the town council (Oha na Eze) This was an assembly of all males in Amesi, although women were also invited depending on the subject matter under discussion. The council met sparingly, and only when important matters concerning the entire people were to be discussed, such as issues of war, peace settlement etc. Usually, such an assembly is purposive, and as membership was based on

representation, the views of every one present was needed. One could then see the assembly breaking up into different caucusing groups, with each caucus having a leader who would give the entire assembly; the views of his members on the issue. Under this platform, decision-making becomes a mass affair, as much as that of the individual also.

In pre-colonial Amesi, there existed a hierarchy of titles which successful individuals were expected to pay for and be initiated into.

A rich and prosperous man who had a large family would normally be required to take a traditional title. The higher the title, the more money the recipient spent. On titles, Meek has this to say; “The system of title-taking is one of the most characteristics features of Ibo society ... there are those who confer a political as well as social status ... the taking of title was a costly and elaborate affair ...”<sup>28</sup> There were three important titles in pre-colonial Amesi – the heroic, ozo and yam titles.

An individual was given a heroic title when he had exhibited several acts of bravery.

People famed in, and others who were able to come back with at least a human head during an external war, usually received such title like *Dike, Ikuku ama na onya* etc., hence individuals with this type of title, were respected in Amesi, as their usefulness was not challenged during emergency and dangerous situations.

There were also several titles reserved for successful yam farmers, as a token for their farming prowess. Intending *di ji* were rated by

individuals who already possess such title. The yam barn of the prospective title-taker was examined to ensure he had enough standard yams. In the event of satisfying the conditions, he was then directed to perform the ceremony associated with this title. After this, the successful farmer received the title of either of the following- *Ezeudu ji* (Yam professional), *Ezeji* (reputed yam farmer).

The institution of *ozo* title in Amesi, introduced a new and important basis of social and political relationship. The *ozo* institution was and is still characterized by the rule of the wealthy (*ogaranya*), and this has gradually undermined the rule by the elders. The status of an elder consequently became enhanced by the taking of *ozo* title. In pre-colonial Amesi, *ozo* titles were exceptionally conferred on men of good reputation and integrity. The holder of that title was normally known as *Nze*, while the most senior *ozo* holder was called – *Isi nze na ozo*. This conferred on the holder, a measure of esteem and respect. As a unit, *ozo* title holders played important roles in the government of pre-colonial Amesi. Towards expatiating further, Isichei asserted that:

“A title was a guarantee of character and success. The entrant went through protracted and arduous rituals, and his later life was surrounded by religious restrictions, which became more onerous, as he rose in the title structure”.<sup>29</sup>



**Ozo Ezebioha in his full title outfit**



Ozo Umeanikwu Umenduka, can be seen, holding the aro okenji; a specification of a man's status as Isi nze na ozo in pre-colonial Amesi.

However, many privileges and obligations, made titles worth taking. It was a visible way of displaying one's wealth, and a calculated challenge to the lazy and prodigal youths.

To the title taker, it acted as a saving and a pension against old age. Although the ozo title holders played very important roles in the government of precolonial Amesi, they did not use their influence and wealth to the detriment of the community. Their presence did not in any way militate against the running of the village councils, hence C.K. Meek noted that; "An Igbo village was governed by the whole body of people, the head of the families and the rich or titled or noble men, 'forming a kind senate in the miniature republic'.<sup>30</sup> An ozo aspirant, was required to go through many clearly-ritualistic stages, before finally being conferred with the status. Available information point to a difference in stages with regards to the four different villages of the town. Umulodike village, as the eldest recipient of this social institution in the town, operated such stages like *odoro mmuo*, *ozo – tiwaragaa*, *ozo-trokpu*<sub>2</sub> and *isa – ire*, while Amuwo village had – *ichi*, *ozo-oziza*, *igba mmanya*, *odorommuo* or *isupu okwu* and *otoonu*.

However, if an aspirant died under the *okpuruozo* (ozo incubation period), his death was simply taken as an abomination, hence his funeral was done only by whistling.

Sequel to the many stages which an aspirant must go through before fully becoming an ozo-titled person, on the whole, it was not often



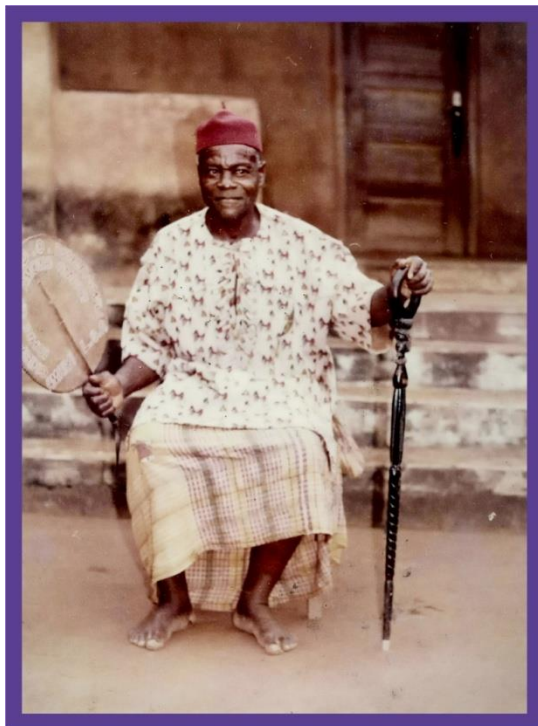
rare to find the overall estimated expenses totaling upwards of six hundred naira worth of yams, meat etc.

Apart from the titled societies, another group that wielded influence and power, though a latent force in Amesi, was the *Umuada* (association of freeborn daughters of Amesi). They helped to ensure good behavior, and unity among the women folk of the town.

The age-grade system played very important roles in pre-colonial Amesi. Its origin could be traced to the days when Amesi fought wars with her neighbours. An age-sect in Amesi, was made up of individuals who were born within an interval of three years. The age-grade system was and still is an effective instrument of local administration. It also acted as an efficient medium for community organization and development in the town. It provided a definite forum through which the *oha na eze* (town council), communicated with the people.

In Uchendu's view:

*“The executive function of the village is vested in the youth through their age grade organization. Besides serving as a social indicator which separates the senior from the juniors. The age-grade association is a means of allocating public duties, guarding public morality through the censorship of member's behaviour and providing companionships and mutual assistance for members. It is to them that the police functions of the village are delegated”.*<sup>31</sup>



**A very reliable informant -  
Chief Bernard Ezeagwu.**

They exert social control through evolving the *Mmonwu* (masquerade) and other secret societies. The *Mmonwu* apart from entertainment, maintained peace, stability and implemented the decisions of the village councils. There were many types of masquerades, noted with the performance of different functions. *Achikwu*, *Onyekulum* (both were night masquerades which specialized in revealing unhealthy secrets, while moving about in

the night.) Other types of masquerade included, *Okpa-nna ya*, *mgbadike*, *ogbuoturugo* and *odudu Ibariba*.

It could then be asserted that Amesi pre-colonial set-up exhibited detailed attributes of harmony and concensus, no sharp contest for political power, as status was ascribed rather than achieved.

## **2.2 Socio-Cultural Institutions**

Apart from political institutions, Amesi also had other social and cultural organizations that assisted in the cohesion of the people.

The marriage system played an important role in pre-colonial Amesi society. It was more than simply a legalized sexual union between a man and a woman. Intra-group marriages, served as effective band in strengthening human relations and association amongst the different families of the town. According to Ottenberg; “marriages created important links between independent units”.<sup>32</sup> As one informant pointed out; “In Amesi, as in other parts of Igboland, marriage was and still is regarded as something very important which everybody practiced in the town. Polygamy was practiced widely as a mark of wealth and prestige, in that a man, in proving his worth paid the bride wealth of many wives, thus exhibiting his affluence and ability to look after a large household.

It is not unusual to note that; “In traditional Amesi society, girls were usually bethroated in their infancy, even on the very day they were born”.<sup>34</sup>

Although the boy-suitor may still be young, his family took charge of affairs, by reassuring the girls' family of their determination in marrying the girl. This they manifested and sealed up through the traditional presentation of special firewoods – *Okwe, Ogbu*, and palm wine to the girls' parents.

But a youngman who out of his own volition, wanted a girl for marriage, easily did so by presenting her a coconut. The girl was by tradition expected to show the coconut to her parents. Such marriage overtures were rarely rejected. Moreover a youngman of good behaviour and proven ability, who wanted to get married to a girl, but lacked the finance, could still be allowed to marry, provided he rendered an agreed amount of work to his in-laws.

In normal circumstances, a man paid the sum of forty cowries (two bags of money) as bride wealth, and in addition presented three kegs of palm wine to his father-in-law as stipulated by tradition. During the ceremonies that accompanied a marriage, relations of both the bride and bride groom will be invited. It was for this reason that Arinze noted thus; "The Ibos have great respect for marriage, and the family.

Family ties are strong. Marriage is not just the affair of a youngman and his fiancée, but a long process between both families".<sup>35</sup>

Childless couples in Amesi, were likened to a tree without fruit, and bareness amongst women was abhorred. Sexual promiscuity such as adultery, incest, homosexuality etc., were also regarded with horror.

A typical Amesi traditional marriage underwent and involved a detailed investigation by the suitor about the bride's character and family upbringing, as this went a long way towards determining the smoothness of the marriage. A particular Amesi saying states that, *Ezi omume bum ma\_nwanyi* (good manners make a beautiful lady). Amesi tradition therefore places high premium on the good behaviour of a bride. A good wife was expected to be sociable, clean, hardworking, respectful and obedient to her husband and the elders. "Previously, a new bride is expected to be a virgin, and this was insisted upon; this social requirement is no longer being insisted upon".<sup>36</sup> After the payment of the bride wealth, merry-making and a sum-ptous banquet follows:

Amesi consequently held in high esteem the word *ogo* (in-law), and whom soever it was used in addressing. Furthermore, when a child visits his mother's original home, he is addressed as *Nwadiana* (child of the soil) and treated with care, as this place is not only his second home, but a usual place of refuge. He is expected to bow or genuflect while greeting them.

Mothers whose married daughters gave birth, often spent about four weeks with them, during which time she looked after the baby and mother. This act was known as *ile omugwo*.

When embarking on the visit, they normally carried with them enough food stuffs, with which to prepare delicious and nutrition's dishes for their daughters, in order to enable them recover quickly

from the strains of child birth. By the same token, the other married women in the village fetched fire-wood, water and weeded farms for the newly delivered mother.

Such friendly assistance was given until the latter was able and strong to cope with these chores.

Recreational entertainments were and still are a strong part of Amesi social life.

Wrestling contests were periodically undertaken in Amesi, under diverse circles. This not only promoted intra-town friendly relations, social homogeneity, but also encouraged the spirit of sportsmanship, recreation and tolerance amongst the people. By the same token, Uchendu stated that:

“Wrestling is a popular Igbo sports shared by all. The Igbo are extremely boastful of their skill in wrestling present or past. The thrilling bouts are inter-village group wrestling competitions, where the characteristic tricks and twists of each group are demonstrated. Wrestling is done to the accompaniment of music ..., wrestling leads to life-long friendship between equally matched partners”.<sup>37</sup>

Interestingly, wrestling in pre-colonial Amesi was practiced by both men and girls (*Mgba Okorobia*, *Mgba Umuagbogho*). However, the different sexes engaged members of their sex in wrestling matches. Such contests were organized on the eighth month of each year, on a particular day, in honour of orie-Amesi god.

Each village of Amesi sent its best wrestlers who on the appointed day would assemble at the Orie-Amesi square. The atmosphere at the square then, resembled that of a big carnival, as people thronged to the place, to watch their star wrestlers, and to see which village would win the tournament.

Good wrestlers often won the hearts of many girls, and this bred several friendship and courtship alliances, which often ended in marriage.

A typical wrestling match was proceeded with the announcement of the contestants by the talking drums. Their villages were mentioned together with their previous exploits. As the drums beat faster, the contestants danced into the arena, each stepping and flexing his muscles in sequence with the music. In this mood, they danced around the square for a while, and with the instant change in the music's rhythm and crescendo, they quickly went for each other. Having been gingered up, fear was replaced by pride and courage, resulting in a show of class, wit and mastery.

At the end of the day, winners were rewarded with praisenames and glory. According to the wrestling rule, an opponent was defeated when his back touched the ground. But this was sometimes flouted, as defeated contestants could resort to fighting out of shame. However, the elders normally intervened and stopped such a situation.

Dancing was an important form of recreational activity among pre-colonial Amesi society. Most of the dances were associated with

important religious-social events and festivals. Among the important traditional dance forms are – *egwu-okibi* (funeral dance), *egwu-oriri*, *egwu-abia*, *egwu-ntiri* (diety/market dance), *oziza* (performed during marriage ceremonies), and *egede* dance. “*Egede oziza* dances were also usually performed by adolescent girls during moonlight plays”.<sup>38</sup>

During full moon, people usually converged at the different squares, located in the various villages, and at these places, young men and girls engaged in moonlight plays. As the elders watched protectively at the goings on at the square, the girls danced, while the men wrestled. The nostalgia raised by such occasion on the minds of elders and aged, has led to the saying that – *onwa tibe, ijegaguba agadi nwanyi* (the old woman develops the longing to travel under the moon light).

Moreover, there was also the famous herbal exhibition, which promoted competitiveness, progress in the field of herbal cure and recreational base to pre-colonial Amesi society.

People were treated to new findings, entertained with weird, mysterious and unbelievable feats.

The Mmonwu (masquerade) secret society as previously mentioned was another important instrument that fostered social discipline and intra-group harmony in pre-colonial Amesi. Initiated members not only regard themselves as ‘brothers’, but shared their secrets together, irrespective of their different families and villages, while the uninitiated were regarded as *Ogbodu* (the untutored). The best in masquerade entertainment



often occurred during the annual *Igbammonwu* (the masquerade dancing competition) which was always awaited with great expectation. They constituted objects of attraction and enjoyment during festivities. Amongst the many important masquerades, the activities and social functions of the Achikwu and Onyekulue, cannot be easily overlooked. Both were night masquerades; Onyekulue appeared in a female form (in relation to its social function), while Achikwu, of course manly type was the more dangerous. Onyekulue as mentioned earlier, broadcast openly all the bad behaviour that people partook in secretly. She always carried her mission in the night when everybody was expected to be at home. No name was too great for her to mention, and no sin' shameful for her to expose. She descended more on talkative women, gossipers and incorrigible social misfits. "while she roared her denunciations, cold silence descended on that section of the town. When she had thrashed that section to her satisfaction, she announced her flight to another. The next moment, her voice confirmed her arrival there".

In the same form, Achikwu came and went on a separate night, in a lime light of dramatic display. As it approached, all lights went out in the town, followed by a quick succession of thunder from unknown directions; blood-cuddling, nerve-wrecking, and heart-rending roars deafened the ears miles around. With the warning completed, the town went silent within an hour, it announced its emergence from the earth through loud songs

that struck fear into the hearts of children. With the stage set, it embarked upon its mission of social criticism.

There were also the dancing masquerades (Mgbadike, Ojionu) and the singing masquerades of the night (Achikwu, Onyekulue). The Night masquerades judged aright in their behaviour, can be regarded as a, “choral club whose principal objective was to entertain with music, jokes and humourous satire, one club against another as politicians do today”.<sup>40</sup>

A lot of regulations and rules, prevent the people, girls in particular from bringing the masquerade’s honour to the dust. Offences against them, were not private matters, but public issues, which attracted the attention of other masquerades from the different villages of the town, and even beyond. They collectively punished the offender.

From the foregoing, it would be seen that, apart from the personal satisfaction and enhancement of social status which ceremonies, masquerades, dances etc accorded and still accord to individuals in Amesi society, they provided occasions for peaceful intercourse, mutual regard, entertainment, recreation and friendly exchanges between male and female, rich and poor, young and the aged.

### **2.3 Religious Institutions**

The history of any pre-literate people is undoubtedly best studied through their religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, pre-colonial

Amesi maintained through various ways, the traditional bonds between the dead ancestors, the gods and the living. The importance of this act can more clearly be seen from the idea that “the spiritual is as much as part of reality as the material, and there is complimentary relationship between the two, more powerful than the material”.<sup>41</sup>

With this in mind, the necessity to propitiate and manipulate the powers that operate outside the sphere of human control, became a dominant feature in the life of ancient Amesi.

These religious beliefs, although enshrined into a very complex system, unequivocally rests on *Chi-ukwu* (the supreme God, the creator of the universe), to whom is attributed all supreme powers, including that of life and death. This supreme force is known and referred to through many names, but there is the firm belief that a community of the dead (ancestors), and an ancillary of gods (deities), exists alongside the community of the living, and that there is a mutual beneficial partnership between them. The core of this traditional religion is the, “polarity between *Chi-ukwu* and *Ani* (earth goddess), between the transcendent and the visible”.<sup>42</sup>



Some of the instruments used and still being used by Amesi herbalists, diviners etc.



In the photograph, one can see *Omaks* and *Ikenga* (on top). Sprinkled on them is fowl blood. Every elderly Amesi indigene had this in the pre-colonial days. They are traditional instruments of worship.

The ancestral cult was associated with *Ani* – the source and judge of human morality.

Homicide, kidnapping, poisoning, stealing farm products, adultery and giving birth to twins or abnormal children are offences against *Ani*. As shrines for this goddess existed in every compound in Amesi, her powerful integrating nature amongst the people cannot be easily denied.

Although no dualism existed in this traditional religion, but the people accordingly believe that all human evils emanated through the diabolical works of *ekwensu* (devil).

Yet the peoples' spirituality generated the practice of trying to penetrate into the being of this mysterious *Chi-ukwu* through prayers, invocations, incantations, sacrifice, and annual celebrations, in the pleasing of the constituents of this Godhead. *Igo-ofo*, - marks the invocation start of this sacrifice, whereby other sub-spirits are invited.

Associated with everyone's personality, according to the religious thoughts of the people, is a genius or spiritual double, known as *Chi*. According to Ilogu. "The magnamity or ignominy of (everyone's) actions, as well as his successes and failures, are due to his *Chi*."<sup>43</sup>

It could be understood that the particular minor deities, given place of prominence, reverence and worship in Amesi, are really the ones out of many the people have chosen, for the purpose of obtaining instant solutions to their problems and needs. Such gods included – "*Oye (orie), Eke, Agwu, Nkwo, Ezeogwugwu, Isigwu, Mpamoru* etc.

The Chief deities – *orie* (the god that gives life), and (earth goddess of fertility), and *Agwu* (god of healing and protector of life) were worshipped by the whole town, while others received the attention of particular villages and lineages. Amesi is still famous in the art of traditional medicine, particularly the healing fame and power of her *Agwu* is still highly regarded even today.

However, one cannot help admitting the unifying aspect of this common worship and traditional religious feeling amongst the different families/villages of Amesi.

Moreover, ancient Amesi society possessed a lot of taboos, which they dreaded to go against, for fear of inviting the wrath of these gods; that of *Ani* in particular in her capacity as goddess of morality; hence “incest, adultery, climbing of palm trees by women, willful destruction of yam tendrils, murder, poisoning, stealing (Yams and goat in particular) and manslaughter etc. were abhorred”.<sup>45</sup>

A lot of taboos guided Amesi society, and failure to observe them attracted severe penalties like death, banishment, fine, and sale of the defiant into slavery. Robbers or burglars killed in action, twins, those who died of oedema of the testicle, distended stomach, dysentery, smallpox, leprosy and other diseases considered to be caused by wickedness were all buried in *Ajo ohia* (evil forest).

Towards the perfection of the peoples’ religious institution, a lot of signs and symbolisms were evolved, for example – the *Omunkwu* (Young

palm frond), connotes the sign of danger, whenever it is seen or placed on anything. It was also placed as signs especially where traps are hidden; thus signifying danger. If placed beside a tree, with some food items, it shows nothing but a sacrifice. The elders and titled men could place it on a disputed land, while a masquerade can also place it on a place, tree or thing. In all of these cases, it reminded the public that an embargo has been placed on those particular things.

The *Nzu* (white local chalk), connotes peace and warm affection. As soon as a stranger entered into an Amesi man's house, than he was presented with *Nzu*, and then perhaps kolanut. This meant that the visitor was welcomed.

Lastly, the people's mode of worship is also shown on the *ekwena-ano* or *Ikoru* (a giant wooden drum). This is still placed in the *Orie-Amesi* square. On the walls of the little house harbouring it, are many fowl feathers, while the entrance to the house is surrounded with palm fronds, which added a lot to its mystery. The drum, six feet high and four feet wide, carved from hard wood, is a traditional socio-religious emblem used for extolling gallantry and bravery, burial ceremonies of important personalities and used on the eve of important festivals. It was also beaten during emergency to summon all the four villages of Amesi, hence the name – *Ekwena ano* (four drums in one).

Amesi based her traditional calendar upon her religious practices, as the different seasons were marked with many different religious

festivals. The people marked the following important festivals such as *Igbandichie* (feast of the wealthy and titled). *Agwu* feast (marked during the fifth month), while *Onwaisii* (sixth month) was honoured as a time of peace, and a moratorium was placed on both funerals, marriages and child birth celebrations. The seventh month (*Onwa isaa*) was marked by the commemoration of the new yam festival, while the eighth month marked the period of sacrifice to *Orie* and *Okwunehie* deities, by the whole town. During the ninth month, preparations for the veneration of *Ani* would start and end in the tenth month.

“Ezeogwugwu deity, is honoured in the eleventh month”<sup>46</sup> etc.

In Mrs. Exeuduji’s view, “one of the most important festivals which we never failed to mark, was the new yam feast (*iri ji ohuu*)”<sup>47</sup>.

Before the planting of yam, some rituals were done, beckoning *Ani*, including the ancestors to prevent locust, ants and scavengers from eating or destroying the planted crops.

Similar to that of a newly born baby, the onset of new yams was heralded with a festival. This was done in perpetuation of the dignity of labour, while appreciation went to the gods for keeping the labourer alive, to enjoy the fruit of his labour.

The festival was started with the traditional sacrifice with a particular specie of yam (*ji mkpisi*) to *Ani* goddess of fertility and good harvest. Nobody was allowed to eat this sacrificial yam, but after the second sacrifice with (*ji ichie*) yam,



people were then free to eat new yams. On the actual feast day, the people were free to use their biggest yam tubers, fat fowls or goats, in the festival and merry-making. The pre-colonial Amesi beliefs and practices, embodied in her religion, provide a good example of the discrepancy between theory and practice.

Below is a list of some of the deities existent in Amesi, including their location.

**OBINATO VILLAGE**

- |                 |   |
|-----------------|---|
| Orie-Amesi      | - Owned by Amesi Town   |
| Isigwu-obinato  | - Owned by Umeononakume family  |
| Ubanano         | - Owned by Umeononankwume family  |
| Oda Obinato     | - Owned by (once served Amesi Akpo & Achina)  |
| Isigwu-Nwoyeike | - Owned by Nwoye Ike  |
| Agwu-Madinka    | - Owned by Agwughi dike Umeohukwu family – which gave them the knowledge of bone-setting. (Umumeoha family)   |
| Agwu-Umuagwo    | - Umuagwo family (incidentally This deity has stayed for long uncared for, due to the decimation of some Amesians amongst whom were the Umuagwo family by Akpo people). |
| Ezeogwugwu      | - Ikpe-Akutekwe Obenoke (from this family, we had people who were not only very powerful herbalists, but could use rope to climb to the sky.                            |

They were also victims of Akpo invasion. Since then, the ofeke and Ezeliora families have taken charge of this deity. The above mentioned feat cannot be continued due to the seemingly impossible requirement that must be met with before success could be assured – (3) three heads of foreigners, accompanied with abstinence from alcohol for four months etc.

**AMUWO VILLAGE**

- Agwu-Amesi - Umudibie family, (but serves the generality of Amesi)
- Agwu-Adiala - - -
- Isigwu - Umudibie family
- Ikenaejeogu - Umeojirinnaka Ezeashilaa family
- Ngwo-obodo - Osudegwu
- Nkwo - Ezenduka
- Agwu-Adiala - Okorongwu
- Uziowerri - Dimanushionwu (Umoocha villages)
- Ojukwu - Akarue
- Oda-Agu - (A very strong Ala messenger located in front of Ezeagwu's house, near the Agwu Amesi forest. Herbalists use it and Ngwonwo deity in their warelion – secret art.
- Nkwo-Amuwo - Ezenduka (for ozo titleship and Ichi)

## **UMUOCHA VILLAGE**

- Okwunehie -Owned by Amesi (formerly, a river was there, as we were made to understand. However, due to a childless widow's carelessness, the stream annoyed, moved down to Uga town and formed what later came to be known as Obizi river).
- Ohia-Aboeze -It is without any priest now, due to the fact that it continuously killed all its propitiators. This wicked act has been turned into an adage in Amesi – Aboeze na egbu onye na enye ya nni. (Aboese that kills him who feeds it).
- Isigwu-Umuocha - Ezeakabekwe family.  
Nwudo - Umuojihie family  
Isigwu Ezenwosu - Ezenwaosu family  
Nwaogwugwu - Ezenwere family  
Udo - Anukwa (Umuojihie people)  
Nne-Agu - Ezeohuaku  
Agwu-Umuokwadinihu- Umuokwadinihu  
Agwu-agba - Umuagba Agwu-Nwebe  
Umeonaku/  
Umuokwanawuzie/  
Okwaraibekwe.
- Agwu-Mgboko - Umuogbaghi (here, every individual who carried any 'strong' masquerade must first be washed in readiness for the task).
- Nwgu Ogbaegbe -Umulodike (emergency and protective deity, evolved during Uga-Amesi hostilities.

**UBAHA VILLAGE**

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| Mpamoru       | - Akamikpu, Ezenizugbe,<br>Okwaralekwe (but in service of<br>Amesi). |
| Isigwu-Nnagha | - Ikeako Ezekekwe  |
| Ezeogwugwu    | - Umuaro-Ezeanyanaso   |
| Ngwonwo       | - Owned by Ubaha.  |

**Information Supplied by** – Umenduka Umealaukwu Umechukwu Umenwaliri, Ezebioha Ezeabasili, Akamikpu Okwara Okerue, Ezeodimegwu Okpara Uzoegwu, Egbuacho Silvanus and Ezeahurukwe Abazie.

# CHAPTER

## Three

### ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES

#### **3.1 *Agricultural – Labour Organization***

**I**t has previously been stated that Amesi is geographically very small, with regards to her landmass. As a result of this land scarcity, Amesi people were forced to evolve different approaches towards achieving and obtaining their required needs. In pre-colonial Amesi, “Agriculture was the matrix in which economic activity was set”,<sup>48</sup> and one can still argue that generally, it still “... remains as in the past the matrix in which all other and genous economic activity is set”.<sup>49</sup> As land was and still is the principal resource, the individual’s relationship to it has been regulated by a highly developed land tenure system.

Before the commencement of each farming season, the land was divided according to age (the older the man, the larger his share), and the more willingness to use land. Helping in the clearing of the farm land, not only reflected an individual’s willingness, but certified his claim to a portion of land.

In Otternberg’s views; “during the sharing exercises, certain provisions were made to account for increased age, death, illness, and the presence of new farmers”.<sup>50</sup>

However, no woman had direct right and authority over land as such, even if she inherited the land through a deceased brother or husband. The nearest male relative, or even her son, in the case of inheritance through her husband, has to claim control of the land. But a man could allow some of his lands to his wife, thereby giving her the chance to plant cassava, cocoyam and vegetables, among his yams in the farm. In pre-colonial Amesi, land was jointly owned and never sold by any community. In repayment of debts, land can be pledged rather than sold. Due to the scarcity of land, the people mostly practiced migrant farming, while some other people took to trading and complimented it with subsistence farming. Ezeuchwgbu further opined that; “Amesi farmers hired virgin lands for cultivation from such places like Achina, Umuchu, Isiokpu, Agbudu, Akokwa, Uga and Enugu-Umuonyia”. 51 This practice is still prevalent up till today.

Diverse systems were adopted by the people, towards enhancing detailed crop yield in Amesi. The farmers took up rotational bush fallow system, landed bush fallow, mixed farming and permanent cultivation. The reason should by now be obvious why the bush fallow and permanent cultivation systems were mostly adopted.

However, those farmers who succeeded in getting enough land externally, easily practiced the rotational bush fallow system. Some farmers who had the capital, engaged in animal husbandry, while women generally kept a relatively small poultry.

Livestock (cattle, sheep, goat) in pre-colonial Amesi society were not simply for domestic consumption but were also kept as capital stock. Returns on this capital, took the forms of sales of milk and manure to cultivators. Cattles, sheep and goats were indeed highly priced, but their function as a status-symbol, derives from society's appreciation of their economic worth. The man who possessed a large number of cattles, was respected not for his unthinking devotion to ascribed values, but for his skill in controlling a major resource.

Amongst the implements used in farm work, *Ikeagwu* (sickle) was used for weeding, while *Mbazu* (iron rod) was deployed for harvesting yam. Many crops like yam, cocoyam, cassava, maize, melon, and beans were produced. The palm tree was exploited fully for food, fuel, broom, rope, oil and wine.

The household, was the basic unit of labour organization and recruitment. Some times, relatives in-laws and committee of farmers could help one another. This enhanced speedy progress. Internal and external hunting activities were also undertaken in the dry season.

### **3.2 Crafts and Industry**

Amesi engaged in weaving, pottery, carving and other artistic works: These crafts were evolved to meet the practical domestic needs of the people. Some of the products were sold outside Amesi-at Uga and Igboukwu markets. According to one informant; "Most Amesi women learnt the art of

weaving from the Uga women married into Amesi, but it is a simple fact that we taught all our neighbours, the art of bag weaving”.<sup>52</sup>

Teenage girl’s specialized in the making of *agbarada* (a special long basket). The most basic standardized industries in Amesi were the arts of mat and pottery-making; both of which Amesi indigenes claimed and still clam to have taught others. The raw materials needed for the pottery were got from *Umuomaku* town, while those for mat-making were obtained from *Enugu-Umuonyia* town.

These arts were highly developed in Amesi. “Our women made many pot forms – ite Mkpukpa (for storing waste oils from palm nuts), ite Ugbugba (for soup-cooking), ite Akpu (for cassava fermentation), while basket types include *Ngiga*, *Abo*, *Nkata* and *Atari*”.<sup>53</sup> Some of these artistic products when surveyed, reflect an astonishing level of technical virtuosity and a delight in intricate craftsmanship. They appear naturalistic in style and humanistic in emphasis.

### **3.3 Trade**

Although agriculture was the premier economic activity in pre-colonial Amesi, trading occupied the second place. As already mentioned, scarcity of land in the town, made those who were not interested in migrant farming to engage in trading. This has resulted in the emergence of many professional traders within the town. Trade was seen as the mechanism by which the products of agriculture and manufacturing sector were



brought within reach of the consumers. In its complexity of organization, individuals, families, villages, towns, and regions were involved. As markets were the main venue for commercial exchanges, the major local markets that existed, and are still existing in Amesi are-*Orie*, *Afo* and *Eke*. These markets were sacrificed and ministered to. Besides, an early periodic morning market, called *Ozuru* was usually held on non market days, as a help to those who needed urgently particular food items, but could not wait for the next market day.



**Some proof of Amesi's originality and versatility pottery. In the picture are clay drinking pot, water-storing pot, plate etc.**

The above mentioned markets, supplemented one another, as none was exceptionally larger or more influential. It could

well be that the establishment of the local markets was an attempt to minimize inconveniencies inherent in the centralized markets that held only once every four days.



**The Famous Orie - Amesi Square**

In the heydays of Orie Amesi market, it maintained three big routes through which Amesi Akpo and Achina indigenes maintained their fortnight presence. These routes, classified as *Ama-Amesi*, *Ama-Achina*, and *Ama-Akpo*, though not anymore in use, still defy physical extinction.

Articles sold and bought at local markets included agricultural products;

“...very little fish, plenty of palm wine, raw and cooked yams, clay pots,...”<sup>54</sup> and industrial articles (hoes, mat, basket set etc). The medium of exchange was previously by barter; very much

based on use value rather than on exchange value. However, prices of articles fluctuated seasonally.

Both women and men engaged in trading, but women would appear to have dominated the marketing scene, hence Ekejiuba opined that; ".Igbomen generally took no part in the actual buying and selling of goods in local market".<sup>55</sup> In women's professionalism in local trading, madam Egbuacho pinpointed that; "Many local women traders, were known to have become very wealthy, even to the extent of financing their husbands into taking the Ozo titleship".<sup>56</sup>

Local markets, also served as centres for the dissemination of news, making of new friends, and strengthening of the towns bond of unity, hence any action which caused commotion in the market *Imesu ahia*, was abhorred by the community. The guilty were severely punished.

### **3.4 Traditional Medicine**

"Amesi people also made their living greatly as herbalists. Everybody in the town, was a herbalist, specializing in different field".<sup>57</sup> As has been mentioned earlier, most people became medicine men in order to off set the constraints placed on them by land scarcity. Many people, especially men, reverted to being full time traditional herbalists. Areas covered include- psychiatry, gynaecology, orthopaedics, pediatrics, general medicine, antidotes against poison, surgery and metaphysical aspects of medicine such as soothsaying and rain-making. Women

specialized mainly in the gynaecology and pediatrics branch.

Agwu-Amesi deity, was and is still perceived to be the main force behind these curative measures. Thus people who live within and outside Amesi, often bring their problems indirectly to the deity for solution through its herbalists.

At times, these problems are solved through the direct invocation and appeal to *Agwu*.

Apart from being consulted at home by people, most of the herbalists often travelled to other places for the purpose of administering medical cure. Occasionally, some built local hospitals, where they admitted and treated their patients. Consequent upon the fact that different lineages, villages and people specialized in different aspects of herbal cure, trade monopoly was discouraged, and progress enhanced amongst the inhabitants. "The town's fame in traditional medicine had spread so much that our medicine are always eagerly sought after by many communities".<sup>58</sup>



**Basket Holding Water has remained in the the past,  
an exhibit of Amesi professional identity.**

As a result of many years of practice, these herbalists have succeeded in preparing a widely-accepted medical concoction antidote which people now use effectively against snake, dog, insect and scorpion bites and stings (*Ogwuojii*). Apart from providing relief to pain and curing diseases, most of the herbalists in Amesi, have equally been materially rewarded through their practice of medicine. A little detail is infact needed at this juncture, to illustrate further –



Madam Ezeobinwa Oriema (A reliable informant who participated very well in the long distance trading activities of pre-colonial Amesi).

### **3.5 Rain-Making**

A highly metaphysical aspect of herbalism was very popular in Amesi town. All investigations, point to the town's father (Akalabo), as the originator. Amuwo and Ubaha villages were specialists in this field. In Amuwo, Ezeugokwe Muotolo of Umuanyaji family stood out as one of the best, including the already deceased obiakor Nwele of Onunuaku family. They employed diverse instruments and forces towards achieving this feat, like *Nkuku*, snail, pot etc. However, condiments varied depending on the sort of rain one wanted to 'make' (thunderous, lightening sort, dew or windy type). This rain-making ability is often accompanied with the capability of

preventing or withholding rain from falling. Consequently, this art can be advantageously and disadvantageously applied. Economically, it can be used towards irrigating farmlands. As a lucrative venture, (in that they were often consulted and payed towards obtaining any of the above needs) the trade was also most exacting, demanding and difficult. Rainmaking is easier done during the rainy season, than during the dry season, due to the scorch atmosphere. At this point, one cannot help agreeing to the originality of this art, to the town, for the palace of Igwe *Umeononankume* is located on top of the mysterious Akalabo's water stone.

**Informants** - Igwe Umeononankume  
- Chief Obidigbo Ezeagwu.

**ANTIDOTES:**

This branch of medicinal herbal preparation was in the portfolio of the Amuwo people. Almost all herbalists in the village participated in the mixing of this concoction, as a result of many years of experience and hardwork. This widely – accepted mix-up is tagged *Ogwu-ojii* (Black medicine). Such substances and materials used in making the preparation included – palm kernel oil, dried bodies of many dangerous animals and insects, herbs, millipedes (male specie), tortoise etc. This curative is effective against snake, dog, insects and scorpion bites/ stings, including protection from enemy machinations.

**Informant** – Chief Obidigbo Ezeagwu.

## **WAR AMULETS AND FORTUNE-TELLING**

Amuwo village specialized in the above branches, really due to the location of Agwu deity shrine in that place. War charms were prepared even during peace times, and stored in a big pit, situated formally behind the present Anglican church site at Amuwo village.

These amulets were called into play, during any emergency situation. There existed four big amulets, representing the town's four villages. Some people who were experts in this branch included Ezeonwurie Umegesi, Ikeotuonye Ejobionu (Chief priest of Agwu oracle), Umeokwuegbu Ndimuta Ndiukwu etc.

However, some available facts proved that two veritable oracles of aggression and vengeance (the Ngwo onwo and Oda-Agu oracles located at Amuwo and Ubaha villages), respectively played vital roles. Besides, the town engaged in Iwu Agwu (the deployment of Agwu against enemies). A lot of damages could be done wherever this is applied – unexpected stampede in the enemy's market places at the peak of commercial activities, mysterious deaths and sights etc. this was carried through against Akpo, Ntueke and Abam warriors.

**Informant** – Ezeobioha Ezeabasili.

## **PSYCHIATRY AND BONE SETTING**

Ubaha and Amuwo villages are specialists in this field. Various types of mental disorders can be efficiently treated by those herbalists



professionalizing in this branch. The treatment and materials needed for the treatment of any mental problem, highly depended upon the type the patient is suffering. Traditional psychological cure, largely accounts for the treatment. In Amesi, experts in this field include -Edward Ezenduka, Azubogu, Ezennamaka Ezeananyanaso, Jonathan Umeora etc.

Moreover, the popularity of Amesi is never challenged in the field of orthopaedics. Cases abound, where accident victims, that, couldn't be successfully treated in westernized hospitals, were effectively handled in the many localized orthopaedic houses in the town. These traditional doctors have gone a long way in proving the efficiency of local herbs and medication.

**Informant** – Chief Umechukwu Umenwaliri.

## **GYNAECOLOGY**

In Amesi, all the four villages are reputed to have traditional gynaecologists, who were versed in the use of local herbs in solving birth and perdiatric problems. They know when and how to apply each medication, all in relation to the type of problems their patient has. Before the advent of the alien maternity hospitals, Amesians have been having it easy and smooth in child birth and child care. It is significant to note that though the localized gynaecological method in childbirth is simply a shorter system, it has not much

meticulous application like the present existent in the many maternities.

**Informant** – Mrs. Ezeobinwa Oricoma

### **METAPHYSICAL**

This field of traditional herbal practice in Amesi can be truly tagged – the adverttishment medium. It accords a seal of recognition and exhibition, while maintaining at the same time, a mastery of the act. No particular village can claim superiority in this branch, over the others though individual herbalists may through this medium prove or maintain their progress in their knowledge of the herbs. Different scenes are usually presented during Akaiabo festivity. Many of them tend to make the impossible, possible, the unthinkable, thinkable. The borders of impossibility are infact reduced to the barest minimum, whenever Amesi herbalists are in action. Professionalism in herbalism has more than anything, promoted the popularity of Amesi to far and near places. Infact, that is the macus symbol of Amesi.

**Informants** – Herbalists in Amesi.

## **C H A P T E R**

### Four

#### **4.1 INTER-GROUP RELATIONS**

**A**vailable historical information has shown that pre-colonial Amesi was not an Island unto itself. Apart from interacting amongst them-selves, the people also associated with other people outside their borders. Just like other autonomous entities in Igboland, Amesi engaged in external relations, with not only her immediate neighbours, but also those other communities that settled relatively further off. This relationship has rested on several factors, such as ancestry, social, religious, economic and military. A precise investigation of these factors will perhaps aid our understanding of Amesi's external relations.

#### **ANCESTRAL CONNECTION**

The myth of origin if looked at critically, would reflect greatly the existence of certain historical affinity binding Amesi, oraeri, Achina and Akpo towns. Regardless however, of how authentic this local tradition could be, it has gone a long way in normalizing the town's relationship with themselves. Even at the present moment, efforts are still being made to maintain the links. Commenting on the role common traditions of origin could play towards the upkeep of inter-group relations, Arinze had this to say; "wide areas were often united by ... the traditions of descent

from a common ancestor ....”<sup>59</sup> Based on this historical piece, Amesi from the earliest times, associated with Oraeri town, regardless of the problems of distance (with that town). Supporting this tradition of origin, and the uniting part it is still playing between Amesi and Oraeri towns, Chief Umeononankume has this to say; “Oraeri and Eshi were two children born of the same father. Eshi later married and got Amaeshi, Akpo and Achina as children”.<sup>60</sup> Capitalising on this tradition of Origin, Amesi people have for long, and on continuous basis, interacted in different ways with Akpo, Oraeri, and Achina peoples.

### **SOCIAL CONNECTION**

Inter-group marriages have constituted a big visible factor in the external relations of Amesi. About this, Afigbo pointed out that “village was linked to village, village-group to village-group, tribe to tribe and so on by ----- Matrimonial and social ties”.<sup>61</sup> Amesi people have always intermarried with the people of Akpo, Achina, Umuchu, Akokwa, Arondizuogu and Uga towns. Marriage between Amesi and other nearby towns have really unified them. Relationship between Amesi and these other towns have been sustained through the married daughters (Umuada), and their children (Nwdiana). They have in times of emergency and crisis, acted as peace agents between their home town and that of their mother. Today, Amesi and Uga maintain very cordial relationship because of marriage ties.

Supporting this view, Pa Ezenkwele asserted that, “Uga people do not usually refuse their daughters to Amesi men when it came to marriage. This decision was borne out of the Abam invasion of Amesi, which depopulated them.

To help increase their number, we stopped charging them high bride price....”<sup>62</sup> This sustained inter-group marriage between Amesi and the other nearby communities has given rise to intimate and intricate personal relationships, which have bound her with several other peoples. As Green has contended; “This fact of inter marriage between different and potentially hostile groups have contributed in no small degree to the survival of the Ibo people”.<sup>63</sup> Marriage in precolonial Amesi, engendered reciprocal visits amongst in-laws, thereby fostering mutual protective feelings and co-existence.

Wrestling was amongst the different forces which Amesi employed towards extending her external relations. Wrestling was so developed in the town in pre-colonial times, that girls even participated. Wrestling contests in the town usually started with the normal preliminaries. The best wrestlers were then selected from all the four villages, and through the process of elimination, the best male and female wrestlers were chosen.

On an approved date and venue, wrestling matches were then organized on town levels, specifically between the various champions from the various towns. Through this sporting and recreational activities, Amesi succeeded in developing closer ties with Akpo, Achina, Umuchu

towns. As Amesi wrestlers visited the above mentioned towns for competitions, so also did other people from these towns come to Amesi. A general wrestling carnival normally came up every three years, which involved Amesi and a majority of her neighbours. This was not only usually very well attended, but acted as a binding cement for town and town, towards unity and friendship.

The masquerade secret society has for long, tightened the bond between Amesi and her neighbours. Quite unlike many other Igbo communities, Amesi had for long shared the same tradition, custom, dialect and way of life, with the Akpo, Achina, Uga and even Umuchu people. As a result, such masquerades that exist at Amesi could still be found in the neighbouring towns. Membership of the masquerade society in any of the above mentioned towns, infact conferred on the individual freedom of movement, whether at Amesi or within the neighbouring clans, that posses similar masquerades. On this, Ifemesia has noted that.

“The Igbo secret society (Mmonwu), provided a bond of union which transcended kinship affiliations not only within the community, but also between it and others in which similar institutions obtained”.<sup>64</sup>

Offences against an Amesi masquerade, were taken not as private or internal matters only, but public issues also, as the attentions of other masquerades from the different villages of the town and beyond are attracted, in seeking redress on the offender.

Music it appears, cannot be separated from the life of Amesi and her neighbours. In Amesi, there existed dance groups, numerous in dance and forms. Some of the dances were borrowed from towns, just as these towns borrowed from Amesi also. Amesi borrowed from her neighbours such dances as – *Kokoma, Ericoo, Igba-eze* etc. The neighbouring towns learnt from Amesi such dance forms like *Igba Mmonwu, Egedege, and Oziza*. It is well known that to learn a new dance from a different town, requires either associating very closely with them or inviting them to teach it, while living in the town. Amesi fully associated with her neighbours in the pre-colonial times.

### **RELIGIOUS RELATIONSHIP**

To pre-colonial Amesi, religious issues was in all its ramifications an effective moral booster to the establishment of both internal and external relations. Commenting on its role in inter-group relations, Arinze stated that “wide areas were often united by religious ties, ..hence the communal worship of Ani, the earth spirit”.<sup>65</sup> Amesi just like other Igbo communities believed in the overlordship of *Chi-ukwu* (Almighty God), *Ani* (earth deity), *Agwu* (god of medicine), and a host of other deities, who of course carry out different functions in the daily life of the people. In the belief of Amesi people, *Chi-ukwu* is the supreme God that should be propitiated through other intermediaries.

Fortunately, amongst these minor gods and deities, each community chose or decided which she needed. This could account for the existence of

Agwu deity only in Amesi, and not in the other towns. Sequel to this, many neighbouring people, especially herbalists, diviners and ardent religionists, visited, and still visit Amesi, just to have a closer, encounter with *Agwu*. By the same vein, many Amesi indigenes frequented other neighbouring towns, just to consult also, some deities that are non existent in the town, as Amesi was not self sufficient with regards to all her Religious needs, Anadi explained further that;

“Amesi in those pre-colonial days, obtained some religious services from our people .... Our people never failed or refused any call from Amesi towards the amelioration of any aru (abomination) ... committed by anybody”.<sup>66</sup>

### **ECONOMIC CONNECTION**

Pre-colonial inter-group relations in Amesi was sustained also by economic factors. As was previously mentioned, the primary occupation of the people at the earliest stage of their settlement, was agriculture. Almost every family practiced full-time farming. With the population of the town increased, land scarcity consequently resulted. As there was no room for agricultural (farming) expansion, most people began to engage in migrant farming. This however required the friendship, intimacy and co-operation of Amesi and her larger neighbouring towns. In showcasing this, Mr. Ezeaku stated thus; “Akpo people easily leased out their lands to Amesi citizens during the farming season, as a form of economic help, in that Amesi generally lacked land”.<sup>67</sup>



In enjoying this help, Amesi got lands from Achina, Akpo, Umuchu, Akokwa, Uga and even such other farther towns as Ezira and Umuomaku. During the farming season, due to the relative distance of some of these towns, Amesi farmers usually migrated and camped in those towns. This move really promoted relationship between Amesi farmers and those they did visit.

Amesi farmers cultivated such crops as yams, cocoyam's, cassava, *anyu* (pumpkin), *inine* (amaranthus), *onugbu* (piper guineese). These migrant farmers being mainly males, the chief crop which they planted was and still is yam, with such varieties as *adu* (discorea), (bulbitera), *ji abi* (d. odorotissima), *Ona* (d. dumentorum), *jiocha* (d. rotundata), *ji anunu* (d. cayenensis), *ji abala* etc. Their basic labour force during both planting and harvesting seasons included family relatives and friends.

Hunting was another viable economic endeavour to which Amesi retreated in her attempt at solving her food problem. To the town, hunting supplemented the meager meat supply, and was not really undertaken for the sake of making money. Since Amesi lacked extensive forest, her hunters hunted in towns like Akokwa, Uga, Isuokpu, Umuchu and Arondizuogu. Supporting this fact, madam orieoma said;

“... some hunters killed by setting traps, while professionals amongst them, went to the extent of going on hunting expeditions which took them as far as *Ikpa Umunze* (Umunze wilderness)”<sup>68</sup> as a matter of fact, Amesi hunters,

usually spent many days in the forest in trail and pursuit of their game.

Amesi also interacted effectively with her neighbours in the industrial aspects. The principal carvers, blacksmiths and cloth weavers, in those days, filtered into Amesi, due to the fact that these crafts wasn't indigenous to the people. A very notable Uga carver that lived at Amesi is Ikemudu.

Smiths came from towns like Awka, Nkwerre, Agulu, and Akokwa towns. For the same reason, many Amesi people moved over to neighbouring towns practicing their own art also, including traditional medicine. Moreover, foreign apprentices were easily welcomed into Amesi, and adequate knowledge and education imparted to them, in relation to their need and objective.

A very popular pathetic local tradition amongst the people, recounts how a childless widow involuntarily caused the drying up of the only natural source of water supply in Amesi. The validity of this story is infact not the main concern, but that of how the people did re-adjust towards the provision of their water need. For a very long time ad even up till now, to an extent the town have been using the streams located in the nearby towns. All these above mentioned factors have really gone a long way towards simulating and providing peace and good relationship between Amesi and her neighbours.

On trade rested the core of Amesi pre-colonial external relations. The town attained more professionals in trading than in farming. Perhaps, it needs to be re-emphasized that this change from

the agricultural occupation, to trading, was due to scarcity of land in Amesi. The need for exchange should be seen as a secondary factor. People engaged in regional or long distance in addition to local trading. Local trading was and is still dominated by women.

In the regional trading, Amesi traded with Uga, Achina, Akpo, Umuchu, Nkpologwu and Akokwa towns etc. (specifically her immediate neighbours). Inhabitants of these towns usually met in border markets, mainly on bigger market days. In these markets, agricultural, industrial and house hold materials were bought and sold, including fruits and vegetables.

On their usual days, these market commenced very early in the morning, and traders from neighbouring towns came as early as the first cock crow. Unlike local traders who exchanged mainly subsistence commodities, relay traders who attended these markets, sold specialized products such as barrels of palm oil, bagged kernels, goats etc. as Meilasoux put it, "... they did not acquire goods for their use value, but for their exchange value".<sup>69</sup>

Long distance trade was developed in Amesi, out of the need to make up for the economic deficiencies of the local and regional trade. Men were mainly involved in this, due to the farness of the markets. Such markets include – *Nkwo-Igboukwu*, *Afo-Ufuma*, *Oye-Ajali*, *Afo-ogboji*, *Eke-Agbaja*, and even Otu Nkwo Onitsha market, which started later. According to one informant.

“On moving from Amesi, we usually passed through Akpo, Nkpologwu, Isuofia, Neni, Ogidi, Nkpor and finally to Onitsha ..., some did divert to Ogoji, Arondizuogu and Oguta”.<sup>70</sup>

Earlier, the transaction was by barter, but later cowries and iron currencies were adopted. To overcome the dangers posed by marauders, kidnappers, head-hunters etc., traders travelled in convoys of caravans, carrying their goods and employed armed escorts and spies. They also engaged in *Igba ndu* (bloodbond) with different influential people or communities inhabiting the trade routes. Strong marriage and friendship ties were also entered into to ensure security and commercial gains.

The traders purchase items like dane guns, stock and dried fish, blankets, tobacco, hot drinks, salt, while sold off articles like palm oil, kernel, yams, pots and domestic animals.

Slave trading was not previously known and practiced by Amesi traders. None-theless, with its later introduction, “considerable labour and capital’, hindered majority of the traders from engaging in it. In Davidson’s view; “Slaving was the business of kings, richmen and merchants”.<sup>71</sup> However, some Amesi wealthy traders did engage to a small degree in internal slave trade.

## **MILITARY CONNECTION**

Many communities in Igboland, as a matter of fact fought with their neighbours. These wars were caused by a variety of factors, such as petty jealousy, land hunger etc. land was to the Igbo,

the dominant factor of production; suffice it to say that the slightest encroachment on their land, whether community or individual land, tantamount to tampering with the livelihood of the people and as such was usually seriously resisted. Afigbo expatiated on this when he said;

“wars were usually waged by communities whose lives and livelihood were interlocked to an almost inextricable degree. And they went to war simply because these interlocked interest could not be sorted out to the satisfaction of all concerned by other means”.<sup>72</sup>

Amesi had no organized and specially trained army; and initially the selection of youngmen for defensive purposes was on ad hoc basis. Sometimes people were recruited and selected during emergency situations from one lineage, and occasionally all of them were killed thus wiping out such lineage. In order to prevent such from continuing, a system of proper selection of guards and forces through age-grades was started, some age-grades became famous for their daring and panache in war. Among the noted age-grades were *Ada*, *Oganikpa*, *Agbaji*, *Ajanku*, *Mbakwerike*, *Oputaoka* and *Ogbajirigwe*.

Different tactics and plans were applied by Amesi warriors towards the achievement of victory. Sometimes, they crawled stealthly in the dead of the night to the enemy's rear, and laid in wait with the idea of springing surprise from their positions once dawn sets in, causing confusion and disorder

in the enemy ranks, which Amesi exploited to its advantage.

Amesi engaged in two basic categories of war – *Ogu-Okpiri* and *Ogu-egbe*. In the former, loss of life was forbidden to an extent, but in particular that of killing of women, children and burning of markets and houses. As no formal declaration of war was needed, sticks, stones and machetes were used, although those wielding machetes took pains to avoid striking fatal blows. In the later, which can be described as a full scale war, the opposing sides strove to burn properties, kill their enemies, and carry their skulls home as trophies. Isichei remarked that; “the skull was valued as a souvenir, and as a concrete and unequivocal proof of personal valour, which brought different types of honour”.<sup>73</sup>

To pre-colonial Amesi, religion-magical protection was at least as important as conventional weaponry, in the preparation of war.

No war preparation was complete without the *dibia* (herbalist) who gave out charms, arranged supernatural protection both for individuals and for the whole town. The warriors thereafter camouflaged themselves with leaves, while tying up their waist with *aji* (loin cloth made out from tree bark).

However, many reasons have been attributed to the cause of war between Amesi and towns like Akpo, Umuchu, Ohafia, Nkpologwu, Uga and Achina.

But it is now a historical fact that, “the major cause of most of the wars in pre-twentieth

century Awka – nri Zome, was the land question”.<sup>74</sup> The geographical smallness of Amesi today, relative to her neighbours can easily be seen as the long-term result of the series of land disputes and other problems between her and the neighbouring towns.

### **AMESI-AKPO HOSTILITIES**

Many incidents culminated in Akpo invasion of Amesi, although both towns have been working peacefully together. It happened that a man from Umuanum family of Amesi, due to his wicked and evil plans, murdered an Akpo indigene, who paid him a visit. He then hid the body of the deceased in a cocoyambarn. After two days, the dead man’s relative being worried due to his absence, organized a search party. With detailed investigation on their part, accompanied by the extra part played by the deceased’s dog, the body was later traced to where it was hidden. Consequently, Akpo became greatly agitated and enraged. In answer then to Akpo’s expectation for an answer for the killing, Amesi had no option than to pacify them with some of the culprit’s relatives, who are now members of Ezenwobodo’s family in Akpo. After this incident, peace returned between the two towns.

Within long however, a very serious land dispute resulted between Amesi and Akpo. Events that finally led to this emanated originally from the incident that took place between a particular funeral ceremony then, at Umuaro’s family in Amesi. It happened that an Akpo indigene who

also attended the funeral, frenzied with the prevailing situation involuntarily cut down Umuaro family's age-long totem banana tree. The owner shot and killed him instantly, while the other Akpo people having witnessed that, all quickly fled home. Within long, the news of this ugly incident filtered through Akpo, leading to a planned vengeance against Amesi.

However, after an elapse of about seven months, the planting season came up, and as was usual then, Amesi got some lands leased out to them. Following the format of their plan, Akpo land owners instructed these Amesi farmers to harvest their crops on a particular day. During the course of doing so, ignorant of Akpo's plan, Akpo warriors descended upon and massacred them, including Umuagwo families of Amesi who inhabited on Akpo-Amesi disputed borderland. One Echeta-ibe of Akpo was however indicted, with the invention of this plan.

Amesi infuriated, replied by invoking *Agwu* (iwa-agwu) against Akpo town. Sequel to the aforementioned, many people died mysteriously, while a good number of Akpo women turned barren. Echeta-ibe having witnessed the death of many of his family members, quickly evacuated the disputed land.

On consultation, and covertly assisted by Amuwo village herbalists upon the payment of penalty, forgiveness and consequent amelioration of *Agwu*, Akpo's predicament later stopped, though not without Amesi's intercession on their behalf in relation to *Agwu*. A boundary trench was later



erected between Akpo and Amesi, and peace soon resulted.

### **AMESI-UMUCHU HOSTILITIES**

There was no direct hostility between Amesi and Umuchi, but there was between Umuchu and Achina. It can easily be understood that Amesi, Akpo and Achina had a peace treaty and alliance, hence their name *onu ogunato* (three fighting fronts.) Umuchu and Achina allowed their minor differences to degenerate into war.

An Achina indigene it was alleged, went to Ogwugwu village (Umuchu), after much drinking and prolonged dialogue, the friendly overtures degenerated into an open confrontation and assault. The Achina man was killed in the process, and this later led to war. Achina fought against only Ogwugwu village initially, but other sections of Umuchu villages later, allied with Ogwugwu against Achina.

Overwhelmed by the more populous Umuchu warriors, Achina then sent an appeal to other members of the *Onu ogu nato* (Tripple alliance), who came to her aid. Amesi once again appealed to their herbalists, who helped to defeat Umuchu. Umuchu before long, sued for peace, and in the settlement that followed, a man from Ogwugwu village, (Umuchu) was given to Amesi, Akpo and Achina as replacement for the Achina man that was previously killed. Later, representatives of the triple alliance, converged at *Obu-Akalabo* (Akalabo's residence) in Amesi, killed

and used the victim's body (Ogwugwuekwe) in offering for the cleansing of the land.

### **AMESI-ABAM HOSTILITIES**

An encounter, which is still very fresh in the minds of many people in Amesi, was that which involved Ohaofia-Abam warriors or Umuchukwu. Amesi's war with the Ohafia warriors was accidental and not pre-planned. Ohafia warriors planned an invasion of Agbaja (nnewi); but to get to their destination, they had to pass through Amesi. Amesi's permission, to allow these warriors to pass through her territory was obtained, and Amesi people were advised to steer clear of the invasionary force's route.

Unfortunately, the plan fell on the same date that one Umeojiako of Umuaro (Ubaha village) was celebrating the second funeral ceremony of his dead mother. Umejiako was then advised not to fire any gun or cannon shots on that day. This he refused to do. The Ohafia warriors, who were still in Amesi's borders, felt they were being shot at, and mistook the gunshots as warning signals to Nnewi people. They felt betrayed by Amesi; whom they henceforth descended upon.

About forty Amesi people were killed, and the neighboring Uga town also suffered some casualties. However, the combined forces of Amesi, Uga, Achina and Akpo, quickly rallied round, and dispatched the enemy. Many were killed while some were caught alive and sold into slavery. Amesi was not satisfied with this victory, but also invoked *Agwu* against Ohafia town.

However peace returned with the later appeasement of Agwu deity.

In addition, Amesi also fought briefly with Ntueke and Arondizuogu people who were on different occasions, purported to have sold some Amesi indigenes into slavery. On each occasion, *Agwu* was invoked against them, although they later appeased it. (Ntueke did so in 1972).

### **AMESI-NKPOLOGWU SKIRMISH**

Some Nkpologwu people took it upon themselves to continuously deny some Amesi farmers of their hard-earned yield, by conducting raids on farmlands owned by Amesi. The culprits were later caught and killed as of tradition. Nkpologwu however felt challenged, and the end result was the *Ogu okpiri* (club and stick war), between Amesi and Nkpologwu. However this did not last long, before the British invaded Amesi. The skirmish was stopped. "This took place around 1916".<sup>75</sup>

#### **4.2 *Eclipse of the Old Order***

The twentieth century dawned on Amesi and most other Igbo communities with a lot of drastic changes, in their political, social, cultural, religious and economic organization. The underlying factor in these changes, was the 'whiteman' who came with colonialism, westernization and Christianity. According to Isichei; "...Igboland was surrounded by an inexorably rising tide of alien encroachment".<sup>76</sup> as a matter of fact this encroachment was done

through organized coercion, and in the face of overwhelming odds, Amesi and her neighbours finally succumbed to British rule.

Amesi's resistance could be likened to that of Uzuakoli people who were aware of the fact that they were militarily inferior and weak, compared to the Aro, Awka and even among stronger neighbours who had been subjugated, decided, "... just before the (british led) troops entered the town .. not to offer any resistance".<sup>77</sup>

Having conquered Amesi, the British chose a chief and invested him with a warrant. This undoubtedly proved a watershed in Amesi's subsequent history. Thus, the genesis of British paramountcy, the eclipse of the old order, and the subsequent superimposition of British imperial rule, marked the inception of a new era.

This was a people who knew nothing, about rulers and kings, but forced now to accept undemocratically chosen rulers.

Many revolutionary changes in the people's way of life took place. The machineries of colonialism – education and Christianity accompanied with western architectural designs, brought a lot of changes to the traditional lives of Amesi people. The same urge to excel in all areas of human endeavours was now transferred to the opportunities made available by the whiteman. Education invariably came to be seen as the open sesame.

## **P A R T   T W O**

**1900 - 1991**

# CHAPTER

## Five

### **EMERGENCE OF NEW 'AMESI'-1900 TO 1991**

#### **5.1 *The Colonial Government***

The years after 1906, marked the take off of the pre-planned British forced colonization of Igboland. The danger signal echoing through to Amesians from the various Igbo communities located far and near, visited the corridors of the town as from 1916, though, not before detailed sacrifices and rituals have strategically been offered aimed towards a possible aversion of this alien encroachment.

Amesi, relatively a small town, unquestionably from all intents and purposes resisted this external aggression not for months, but for decades with such bravado and tenacity of purpose that was unmarred by disaster. The resistance was never lethal, for the people needed no prophets to forecast to them how suicidal any attempt at armed resistance would be, in the face of the destructive diversified British maximum guns. However, Prof. Afigbo's researches have shown that "many groups in the Onitsha, Awka and Orlu areas, which apparently did not resist the British physically ... were infact, relying on the agency of the dibia".<sup>78</sup> The author was reliably made to understand that "the British armed

detachment entered into Amesi during the dry season of 1917, and settled in the vicinity of *Agwu Oracle groove*".<sup>79</sup> Their mission was to subdue Amesi and environs. Nevertheless, continuous rays of stiff diplomatic and armed defiance continued to emit from Achina town, against these colonialists. In order to meet up with this organised opposition, they decided to move over their base to Achina, in a swift move, devoid of anything compassionate, fully equipped with willful burnings, destructions intimidations of all sorts, and massacre, Achina's dauntless daftness was violently brought to submission. Like Uga town, many of their elders were incarcerated in the notorious Aguata make-shift prison.

While the smoke of resistance was clearing, the colonialists instantly checked Amesi's solidarity with the introduction of some divisive machineries, under the umbrella of 'a total new freedom'. The cult of individualism was created and haboured amongst the people; accountability became personal, decisions came not from a general concensus anymore, but from the minority above, while status previously achieved, became ascribed. Infact, Amesi and her neighbours were thrown into a time of ordered anarchy.

To many, in particular the aged, this new dimension was too bitter to swallow. In dormancy, they moped speechless, whishing that this rather turnout to be a nightmare than solid reality. The whiteman's new wealth and power offered promising platforms. These attractions though facial, hilariously allured the town's gentry. The

traditional building core was exposed to continuous institutionalized attack and weakness. Order was over-taken by disorderliness, peace by troubles, security by insecurity, while the supposed verdicts and valedictions of the oracles and deities were handled by the gradual but powerful wind of aspersion and disregard.

The British government official while stationed at Achina, embarked upon the construction of roads that criss-crossed Amesi and environs. Warrant chiefs were appointed all over these areas, though against the people's wish. These two above mentioned projects, appearing good-intentioned outwardly ended up as a running sore to Amesi and her neighbours.

After a thorough investigation, the British authority noticed that out of the seventeen minial lineages existent in the four villages of Amesi, that of *Umu-Umeoha* is the eldest. Following the rites and processes involved, "elder Umeonankume was summoned later, to take up the leadership of the town, as a warrant Chief. This offer, he unequivocally refused".<sup>80</sup> Having failed in this 'legalised' approach, the colonialists resorted to choice by appointment, backed with force. Mr. Umealadi (father of warrant Chief Ezechukwu) from Onunaku quarter of Amowo village, became the first Amesian to assume the warrant Chieftaincy position.

Chief Okoloigwe later took over from him. Warranted to rule, as the case may be, they personified the British government, in the execution of the indirect rule policy in Nigeria. At



any material time, their decisions were final in the town. Equiped moreover with intoxicating absolute power, one should not wonder long why their records are usually full of cultural dreadry. No one dared challenge them in anything, for that would clearly tantamount to being charged and convicted for acts classified under 'opposition to British colonial governance' They were the law.

Customary courts simultaneously replaced the traditional system of dispute settlement. Amesi at no time housed any customary court but, "Depending on the type of cases involved, the British district officer at Awka, might entertain some court sessions in the town. Such cases include that which was held between Onunuaku people and Amowo village, held at Ezendu's compound in Amowo".<sup>81</sup>

To many, such opportunities were rare. This goes a long way in explaining the preparation and expectation fever that grips the town whenever a white district officer is to visit. This was so for various reasons far from clear understanding and knowledge. To some, this was the much awaited opportunity to see for the first time, the 'wonderful whiteman, who talks with the nose, while for others, it is a blessing and an attainment of political recognition by the colonialist government. Large crowds of people witnessed such sessions, even under harsh weather conditions; consequently, all social-economic activities stays still for such day to pass.

According to elder Umenduka Umealaukwu, “The warrant Chief always seized such opportunities to prove his efficiency to his alien boss. Compulsory contributions of food items was often undertaken from amongst Amesians, under the excuse of providing for the needs of the visiting colonial officer”.<sup>82</sup> This undoubtedly, is a daylight act of extortion and exploitation against the people.

There was the *Okachanma* Court, held at Orie-Achina square, which Amesians attended also. This court held intermittently,” entertained cases external and internal concerning Amesi, Akpo and Achina towns, while that involving Uga, Ekwulobia, Ezinifite, Umuomaku and Nkpologwu was handled at the (infamous) Mbamisi court”.<sup>83</sup> A reflection of how customary these customary courts were and operated, would portray an institution full of euphoric and ‘high sounding nothing’. The indigenous custom was rather than protected, stamped upon. Traditional patterns of dispute settlement was cast aside, while convoluted westernised esoteric mysteries, termed court procedure was adopted. In answer to the problem of language barrier the colonialists employed the services of court messengers and clerks, who acted as interpreters. Two Amesians – Court messenger Umeonaribe and Court Clerk Edward Ezeabasili, all from Umulodike village, at different times, were recruited, trained and served in the *Okachanma* Courts at Achina.

The colonial government showed its presence in Amesi with remarkable tenacity.

Forced unpaid labour, usually bitterly resented by the indigenous population, was often enunciated by the warrant Chiefs during road constructions and for personal labour. The roads aided not only the swift movement of the West African frontier Force, but the extraction easily of agricultural products from Amesi area.

Law Courts served as altars where legal and traditional lambs were mercilessly sacrificed. The people's cultured behaviour was scaled and judged according to the stipulations of the Western system of law, which needs, curves and contours they were ignorant of. It maintained a parlance where the outcome of a case depended wholly upon ones ability, wit and persuasion in argueing his way through on the one hand, or how far the individual could go in bribing the court interpreter.

Traditional Amaeshi suffered and decayed progressively. The colonial regime however, brought some developmental projects into the town. Inter-town raids, coupled with periods of insecurity vanished. Harsh customs and behavioural patterns were abolished. In this atmosphere of relative peace, economic and social endeavours progressed. Western education sprang up and grew continuously amidst the people's suspicious stare at it.

Amesians were really suspended between two ideas- the intentions of the whiteman for introducing it, and the assured advantages if any. Many then shunned the call to enroll children, while some felt much better gambling with their female issues. The gains of agriculture and other

commercial activities haboured clearer gains to the people, than this idea of 'education'.

Well, to prove this, the British imperialists needed the determined services of their brotherly 'pathfinders' – the missionaries.

This feat, they primarily embarked upon later, hiding under the façade of proselytizing Christianity, all in the move towards bringing 'light' to Amesi – the devilish cesspit of smelling darkness.

## **5.2      *The Growth of Christianity***

The objectives of the religion – Christianity in Africa as a whole, have for long been and to a larger extent, still retains the attention of many historical analysts.

Its vigorous evangelization and preselytisation peaked with the forceful jetlike depredations of colonialism in Nigeria.

Consequently, Christian missionaries became not only mere 'path finders' but complete 'collaborators, with the British Government in imperialism.

In as much as the history of Christianity in Igboland dates back to 1841 (with the evangelism of Simon Jonas – an Igbo ex-slave at Aboh), the first permanent mission in Igbo land was however established at Onitsha by the Church Missionary Society, under the leadership of another Igbo ex-slave, Rev. Christopher Taylor. Following the settlement of the Holy Ghost Missionary Fathers at Onitsha in the year 1885, detailed energy, vigour and determined Catholic Missionary zeal was

added to the previous efforts of the Christian Missionary society's attempts at missionizing. Before long, this speedy growing cobweb of Christianity engulfed almost the whole towns and settlements within Onisha environs. Long distant traders and travelers from Amesi area easily acted as harbingers of 'tall tales' about this new faith by 1900. This white man's religion was however to be introduced into adjacent communities, thereby creating a good opportunity for Amesians to see and hear with their eyes and ears, what appeared to them before, a far cry in the wilderness. Just as Christianity came into Igboland through Onitsha, the heritage of Amesi's Christianity could indirectly be traced to towns like Aguleri, Adazi, Nteje etc.

The story of early Christianity in Amesi vicinity is largely that of the Catholic Church. From all intents and purposes, the R.C.M right from the beginning showed clearer signs of dynamic preparadness for a competitive Christian evangelization, as against the Church Missionary Society, who were relatively tepid.

Before the formal introduction of Roman Catholicism into Amesi by the ending months of 1912, the town could already boast of a handful of staunch catechumenate, amongst whom were – Mr. Benedict Umeozulu, Messrs Albert Umeozulu, David Unije, Francis Egesimba, Paul Obidiegwu, Mathew Okpalanya and Juvaniel Okwaraji, all of blessed memory.

The beginning was not at all easy for these men, for Christianity was introduced into Amesi

not without the practicalisation of the belligerent indifference of the Igbo people. Amidst total ostracism from the traditional religious adherents, threats of the calamitous impending danger emanating from the thunderous powers of the anger-charged gods and the awesome punishments awaiting their perpetuated abominations against the land, the devotion of these early Christians to the cause of the new religion was undoubtedly adamant; faithwise dogged; and actionwise, full of bravado. However, one should not forget that the visible arm of British colonialism, as typified then in the warrant Chief was present to shade them. They made use of Umeozulu's compound at various times, for meeting or prayer sessions, and once in a while, a reverend father would come from either Adazi of Agulueri to strengthen them. By 1915, with the gradual increase in the number of Amesi Christians, a small thatch roofed clay house was erected. Mr. Umeozulu could rightly pass for a rare gem in the early christianisation of the town, for he single handedly gave up his portion of land, (about half a kilometer from his residence) for the execution of this project.

As time went on, because of the continued relatively small number of Catholic Christians in Uga, Amesi, Akpo and other nearby towns, moreso to make it easier for the visiting pastors, Rev. Father Grace suggested the erection of a bigger church house, at a site still known as Ikpanwaowere, bordering Amesi, Uga and Akokwa towns. This religious merger plan of Amesi and

Uga adherents, received the blessing and support of Late Chief Ezechukwu of Amesi and Okpalaozigbo of Oka-Uga. When arrangements were fully completed, this took off as from 1916. Significantly, it should be noted that this fulfilled merger plan, came when it was very much needed. Unified now, these early converts enjoyed a viable populous stand, and like one zealous and charismatic family, maintained an unshakable front to the depredations of the traditional gods and their messengers.

Nonetheless, Amesi traditional society suffered greatly from this spreading new religion. Obtrusively and imperceptibly, Christianity went on adding more and more adherents daily through its captivating catechism and magnetic dogmatism. In those days, it was not hard to identify a Catholic in the town. Usually, they wore their blessed chaplets hanging and dangling from their necks, as a depiction of their inward sanctity and piety, and a weapon to ward off devilish attacks.

As time went on, more new catholic converts from Achina, Umuchu, Enugu-Umuonyia, Umuomaku, Nkpologwu, Akokwa etc. joined Amesi and Uga Christians. This warranted the setting up of a mat-roofed church building. At this juncture, the alien spiritual assistant saw the need towards educating the converts, thereby enabling them towards understanding the messages of the bible well. This brought forward, the need for a resident delegated catechist. Before long, a catechist's domain was erected, and Mr. Philip Otutu, from

Onitsha was sent to open classes for the converts. Sunday schools and catechism sessions provided remarkable platforms for restructuring these devotees.

Rev. father Bubendoff after taking over from Fr. Treich, visited the Uga-Amesi Catholic station. On seeing the eagerness exhibited by the people there, he was impressed. To show his appreciation and unwavering support, he later fulfilled his promise of sending teachers for the take off of infant classes. Inwardly convinced about the people's understanding of the gospel, Fr. Bubendoff went on further to suggest the building of a permanent concrete church house. Everyone welcomed this idea, and the collection of stones, wood and other building materials took off in earnest. Truly, this task proved very tedious from the on start.

The Catechist then needed a little religious psychology to muster totally their determination and hardwork. In convincing them, a beautiful picture was painted for them, on how big their rewards would be in heaven, for helping to put up a house for God. This building which was started in the last days of 1924, was finished by early 1929. With glory to God and on earth peace to men of goodwill', Late Archbishop Heerey Triumphantly marched, and formally opened it not only with a baptismal name – St. Vincent's Catholic Mission, Uga – Amesi, but also with a tag – “The Gate of Heaven”. The local Christians rejoiced in their accomplished task, while the missionaries heartily counted another area for



Christ. Within a space of two months, a rest house for the mobile Rev. Father was built, and a Christian cemetery was added as the final rest ground for Christians from Uga and Amesi.

Thus within a very limited time, viable departments of Catholicism and Western education were instituted in Amesi. Suffice it then to emphatically state that the town became set towards witnessing an unprecedented bazaar of Christiansation, under the strict regrimented life of British Colonial government.

Initially, Amesians didn't actually understand the meaning and purpose of the school. To most of them, it was simply a waste of time and energy. Subsequently, in their vacouse imagination, almost all denounced the programme as that meant for lazy men and society's indolent loafers. The message of the missionaries and the colonial officials appeared going directly contrary to the natural tenets of the people's agelong tradition. The rythmn of the early morning school bell was interpreted as that which demanded of all able bodied youths and children to forgo farmwork and all house hold chores and go to the school. A great number of Amesi elders passed this as an abomination, hence it was nothing of amazement to find in the school then, only the children of poor converts, while the sons of wealthy and noblemen were carefully and meticulously guarded, lest they go there and end up in their life time being the towns social misfits and unproductive.

Nevertheless, Catholicism and Western education, in their unquestionable, romance with the stones', thrived and throbbed on.

In the school, emphasis was laid on the teaching of the three R's and latin, while the Catechist spent detailed time holding sessions of Sunday schools where the twists and messages hidden in the bible parables were unraveled to the adults.

From the inception of this school in 1912, many catechists and teachers, all of whom have the reputation of being foreigners, were recruited to assist in seeing that the manpower need is met. They include – Mr. Philip Otutu (Onitsha), Richard Nwakobi and Mathias Odife (Nkwelle), Anselem Obiamalu (Nnewi), Mathew Eke (Ozubulu), Vincent Ekwedike (Adondizuogu), George Onuorah and Josiah Okoli (Agbudu), Julius Amasiani (Nteje), Benjamin Ilozumba (Obeledu) and David Okpalajesi (Uga).

The progress of St. Vincent's Church school Uga-Amesi could easily be measured, when one considers the fact that by 1935, the school had grown up to standard three in strength. That same year, the parish Priest – Late Fr. Liddane, following Bishop Anyaogu's earlier advice, added with the support of both Uga and Amesi adherents, transferred the school totally to Oye-Uga compound.

As at this time, Christianity, considering its devotees and number in the town, portrayed practical signs of a religion which never came to play the second fiddle. Many new converts seemingly intoxicated by the aroma and gingering

fumes of this new faith, set out to create a base for this religion not in the outskirts but at the heart of Amesi town. This idea solidified into action, by July, 1942, when a delegation was sent on behalf of Amesi Catholics to father Liddane, with a formal request for a new church station to be sited in Amesi. Although this request was turned down, undaunted and unperturbed this idea went on like a smoldering fire.

In any case, by 1943, Catholicism appeared to be advancing faster in Achina than in her neighbouring Amesi town. Consequently, the church found it convenient to formalize its stand in that vicinity by instituting in 1945 what became known as “Achina parish”. Rev. Fr. Oniel was hitherto appointed the first parish priest. It is important to note that as from this time, all Amesi Catholics, including those of Oka-Uka, came under the care and directives of Fr. Oniel.

During the ending months of the second half of 1948, a very serious controversy fell out between Uga and Amesi members of St. Vincent's Catholic Church, Uga-Amesi. Preceding events however proved that the parish priest, Fr. Oniel was at the core of this problem. From the above-mentioned date, for reasons best known to him, he professionally started to omit the name “Amesi” from all records pertaining St. Vincent's Catholic mission. He found it more convenient to refer to the church house as Uga-Otikpo-Uga or simply St. Vincent's Otikpo. At first, Amesi Catholics thought that this was as a result of either ignorant

omission or a case of perennial slip of tongue on the part of the reverend father.

However, as this persisted, they wisely and openly called his attention at it, but to their utter consternation and disbelief, he not only blatantly rejected the correction, but made no move to effect any visible change in the matter. Uga Catholic Counterparts, as the case may be, selfishly-oriented, soon saw and took this as a shorter cut towards laying absolute claims to the ownership of the mission station and its properties. This marked the actual beginning of discord and land controversy between Uga and Amesi Christians.

Another dimension was added to this case, when indigenes of both towns resorted to either writing whatever they wished on the sign post in front of the church house or even uprooting each others signposts. In this daylight war of inscription, Amesi stood for a joint name tag, while Uga members rather supported that omitting Amesi. Uga adherents went forward to institute legal actions against Amesi. This rather than helping, worsened the situation. Amesi on her own part, forwarded an emergency appeal to his Grace, latter Archbishop Heerey, who was in charge of the vast Onitsha Archdiocese. He subsequently delegated the Eastern Nigerian Catholic Council to investigate this matter. Later, two members of the Council, Hon. J.M. Nwosu and P. Chukwurah submitted documents in support of joint ownership of the church house and its properties by both Uga and Amesi.

Time truly proved the council's findings and investigations as inefficacious and theoretical, in that the situation was allowed to decay the more. Disappointed in the impotency of the 'religious', Amesians eager to obtain justice in its true sense, took the matter to court.

From the above evidence and records at hand presently, imperatively it does appear that Rev. Fr. Oniel's general behaviour in relation to this case, typified a personality manipulated by conspiracy, negativism and carefree debauchery. To an uninfluenced analyst, the Revered must be far from uprightness and truth, for allowing such little wound to develop into a running sore.

Unfortunately, as fate would have it, the Nigerian/Biafran war took the stage before the case could come up in court for hearing, and Rev. Oniel had to travel home. The distractions, disturbances and insecure atmosphere of the war period, undoubtedly postponed indefinitely all hopes of possible immediate settlement. During this pandamionious three years (1967-1970), and their adjoining inferno, the matter obviously decayed greatly.

Nevertheless, the chapters of history can never fail to recollect the dynamism of Rev. Fr. Raphael Ikenga Ozigbo, Uga Parish Priest from 1967-1971. He vehemently applied his youthful energy in attempting to restore peace in St. Vincent's Uga-Amesi mission station. In his unrelenting urge for progress, he in 1971, set up a social centre in St. Vincent's church premises for the training, education and preparation of Catholic

girl's for married life. By October 1973, this social centre was carried over to the premises of Immaculate Heart Church compound, Uga, during the tenureship of Rev. Fr. A Anyi-Chie as parish priest. A bold step was however taken in obtaining peace in the on-going rift between Amesi and Uga members of St. Vincent's mission between 1974 and 1980.

Rev. Fr. Ignatius Ughonu (the Parish Priest), narrowly instituted a period of unsettled peace which even lasted up till 1985. This interregnum was ushered in with a holy mass of peace offering, celebrated by Rev. Msgr. M. Obiukwu on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1974.

This mass was held at the controversial mission compound. At this juncture, one would not fail to comment that lasting peace has continued to elude Uga/Amesi members of St. Vincent's all these years because the totality of attempts made towards settlement have been devoid of adequate tact, diplomacy, dedication and untainted will power, on the part of the arbiters.

A promising light rose from the horizon by 1993, with the in-coming of the astute Rt. Rev. Dr. A.K. Obiefuna on the plat-form of the newly created Awka Bishopric. Zeal, admantness, positivism and the spirit of God with which he enunciated his leadership mission, saw him as a real 'Daniel come to judgment' in this St. Vincent's issue. He quickly instituted an enquiry panel under the chairmanship of his chancellor – Rev. Fr. Solomon Amatu. Acting on the recommendations of the panel, Bishop Obiefuna

proceeded to divide the mission compound into two. This he cemented with the peace agreement which he made both Uga and Amesi members of St. Vincent's Church to sign.

This agreement empowered both parties to develop their individual portions of the mission compound. With this, came the end of a turbulent era.

The pill cannot to totally written off as bitter to Amesi Catholicism. It does however appear that the period though disturbing facially, ended up later in mixed blessing. This incident seemingly diabolic, truly slowed down catholic evangelization in Amesi during the morning hours of this dispute, and at the same time resulted positively in the full scale planning and subsequent erection of two different Catholic mission centres in the two towns - St. Joseph's Catholic Mission in Amesi, and the Immaculate Heart Catholic Mission in Uga.

The admirable account of this missionary in-road into Amesi would appear incomplete if the transformations witnessed before this autonomous mission house was built, is not traced.

As has earlier on been pointed out, Amesi's dream of a separate church house dated back to 1942. Never ready to take 'no' for an answer, the town sent delegation after delegation to Rev. Fr. Liddane on this issue. Rather than buy the spiritual directors explanations as to why the town would not be granted such as at then, Amesians (both Catholics and non Christians), invented many interpretations as to this situation. Many saw it as a clear case of favouritism against Amesi

in relation to her other neighbours. This idea (whether true or not), in a day light flashlight of clashing thunder and lightening, emitted rays which infected men of thoughts, words and action. This resulted in a flame like patriotism which cut across religious demarcations in the town.

Amesi calling diplomacy into play, decided to exploit the existing circumstances. A balanced delegation, comprising men of rare qualities like – Chief Ezeanyanaso Ezeudeogu, Ezeibekwe Okpalla, Ezeonyejekwe Okpalla, Ezeonyejekwe Nwokediugwu, Chief Ochiaka Umeakuka etc. were selected to meet Fr. Liddane once again, on behalf of the town. They again failed to carry through their mission due to Fr. Liddane's unyielding posture. Amesi delegates instantly resorted to the lucrative 'dance of the beautiful bride'. This they did by threatening to grant to the Church Missionary Society missionaries, their age-long evangelization approaches to the town, if their wish is not met. To this, the Reverend was answerless. He was left with no alternative than to recant. Thence forth, he enumerated some conditionalities which Amesi Catholics would fulfil. He demanded that Amesi Catholic must count up to a reasonable number, so as to sustain an autonomous new church.

The town's Catholic population instantly moved all out to provide for the new church. The problem of site and land for the erection of this mission house was solved through arrangement with Mr. Ekeka Onwuharaonye (the chief Priest of Okwunehie deity then), not after the Catholics



agreed to train one of his sons up to standard six. Permission then granted, a part of the Okwunehie forest was cleared in readiness for this project by both the Aladinma and Okikadigbo age-groups from Obinato and Umuocha villages. A makeshift mission house/school and structure was then erected on this site, on time before Fr. Liddane's fact-finding visit.

Specifically, on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1942, Rev. Fr. Liddane with his entourage, finally visited Amesi town. The mission house was practically filled with an over-whelming population of children, women and men. Over-joyed and convinced erroneously though, towards believing that all present at the church were altogether new Amesi Catholic converts, he praised the town's progressive growth in faith. Moreover, he placed an embargo on the allowance and involvement of Amesi members of St. Vincent's Church Uga-Amesi in this new church. He even empowered Mr. Patrick Okoye (the Headmaster of St. Charles Catholic school (Achina), and John Anowai (a teacher in the same school) to ensure that this directive is implemented. Fr. Liddane consequently presented an Uga indigene, Mr. Victor Umeobieri, as the first station teacher of this new station. Liddane's stipulation before long, survived ideally than in reality, in that most of those banned old converts, later meandered into this as new pioneer members of the new church included Eugene Egbunihie, Pius Okpalanwa, Elias Umeoduagu, Jacob Umechukwu and Moses Aletuo.

In the final analysis, glowing tributes should be paid to the members of the Eburunabo age groups and the old Amesi Christian converts of St. Vincent's Uga-Amesi, for the successful erection and stabilization of this new church centre for the town. While the age groups provided the labour and the much needed catechumenate population when it was needed, the old catholic converts acted as a bedrock of morale booster towards the eventual existence of what is today a separate parish station St. Joseph's Catholic Church.

Presently, Amesi Catholicism could boast of many indigenous priests and religious amongst whom are – Rev. Fr. M. Ezeabasili (Cool and calculated) 20<sup>th</sup> July 1962. Rev. Fr. Pantaleon Umehukwu (Visionary), 1<sup>st</sup> July, 1983.

Rev. Fr. B. Umenwanne (witty, wise and sound), 12<sup>th</sup> August, 1987

Rev. Fr. N. Abazie (Innovator and Charismatic), 5<sup>th</sup> August, 1989.

Mr. Peter Okpalaeke – Deacon

Mr. Victor Egbuocho – Deacon Etc.

Sr. Mary Trinitas Umeh first professed – 1972 (I.H.S.)

Sr. Mary B.A. Ezeliora first professed 1976 (D.D.L.)

Sr. M.M. Ozigbo first professed – 1977 (I.H.S.)

Sr. M.C. Umeozulu first professed – 1977 (D.D.L.)

Sr. M.B. Ezeabasili first professed – 1982 (H.R.S)

Sr. B. Onwuka first professed – 1983 (I.H.S)

Sr. C. Ezenwuba first professed – 1984 (H.H.C.J)

Sr. P. Ezechukwu first professed – 1985 (I.H.S.)

Sr. D. Ezeanuna first professed – 1985 (D.D. L.) etc.

There are a host of senior seminarians, novices, postulants and junior seminarians.

**Informants:** Messers Philip Onwuka, Jacob Umehukwu, Jeremaial Ezeanyanaso etc.

### **THE SALVATION ARMY**

The above mentioned sect was generally the second Christian group that penetrated the strong – holds of Amesi those early days. However, one could notice after detailed investigation, that the salvation army Christian faith was actually the first of its kind wholly established in the town, independent of any foreign assistance, In the words of one of the surviving founding members elder Christopher Ezeonyebuchi, “The salvation army church officially came into Amesi, by June, 1940 from Achina town, after many years of emigrational spiritual allegiance by some dedicated Amesi converts”.<sup>84</sup> Those early Salvationists included Crprain Okorugo, late Simon Nwokekwe, Elias Onyeka and late James Uju etc.

It is significant to note that this Christian formation came with her own sets of policy and doctrine, which openly threatened some existing traditional beliefs and deeds. Though their progress appeared outwardly minimized in comparison with the speed of Catholicism in that area, baptized with daft determination even in their few number, they stabilized the dawn to

dawn creeping of their mission in the town. Like soldiers, the early catechumen trugged on, undeterred by the rugged terrain of proselytization, while seemingly armed with the total conviction that the town's' salvation was destined to come from none rather than them. Harder, they prayed and worked.

They later resolved to erect a permanent salvation army mission station in the town. To procure land for this project infact proved a hard nut to crack. After sometimes, bored by a long list of problems, needs, and difficulties, these foundation members, numbering about ten, finally started to entertain the fear that their dreams might never be oportuned to leave the drawing board. All moves that were made to purchase land, ended negatively. More and more, the fate of the faith became shaky. As a last alternative, they succumbed to clearing and using the dreaded Ezeogwugwu forest. Accordingly, "Salvationists converged on an appointed day, armed with matchets, and having said some prayers, embarked on accomplishing this task, of course not without the fearful denunciations and specified repercussions voiced by some of the town's traditional religionists".<sup>85</sup> Two of their members (Enemuo Udokoro – Amowo village, Allonye Onwukoha – Ubaha village), later helped the more, by giving piece of lands which were added to the former.

In the tasks of building, the church drew her manpower from Amesi and Achina adherents.

After the completion of the structure, the mission embarked upon increasing their population in the town, through the employment of various approaches. At one time, they tried to mirror the gap between the traditional religious formula and the Salvation Army Group, when they even resorted to inviting and allowing Amesians to attend the church with their Ofo emblems and Ozo title anklets. To this call, many answered but before long, this boom turned to doom, when the rules of the game; in order words, these sources of hilarious inspiration and attraction were withdrawn.

However, the town cannot easily forget the Salvationists for infact one Christian formality which they single handedly started. Popularly but, notoriously, they were derided as Uka Akumaka' – congregation of the hand clappers, by the people.

The other Christian sects and local inhabitants within and around Amesi, largely measured and gauged their unseriousness in prayer and worship with their childlike clapping, drumming and dancing, infront of God' when they suppose to adopt a turgid air of calm, meditation and ferventness.

Many years have passed, and what do we see? The Salvationists, though presently boasting of a little above a hundred and fifty members, are still there in the town, while her worship style have totally been copied by virtually all her accusers.

## **THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY**

The Amesi C.M.S. was not only a child of circumstance, but the total brain child of elder Christopher Ezeonyebuchi. It should be recalled that he was one of the founding members of the Amesi Salvation Army Mission. During the early days of Christianity in the town, rudimentary knowledge in the acquisition of Western education lay in the hands of officials of the different Christian Congregations, meant specifically for their personal converts and Catechumens.

As earlier on pointed out, the Amesi catholic had the advantage of utilizing the school set up at St. Vincent's Uga- Amesi, and the later one at Eke market square, while the salvation army mission had no such advantage to its reckon. Consequently, it lost many of its education-hungry followers to the Catholic fold, while some others like Christopher Ezeonyebuchi taking the bull by the horns, went all out and tried to find either a solution or an alternative, rather than succumbing to the Catholics without a fight. In order to accomplish this task, he needed the help of seasoned supporters and a concrete idea and connection with another preferable faith that has got good provisions for imparting Western education. In the search, he met Mr. Ezekwe from Umuchu (Ezinifite village), who led him into a promising future in the Church Missionary Society.

Before anything could be done, Mr. Ezekwe ultimately saw to it that elder Ezeonyebuchi cross-carpeted from the Salvationist mission to the

C.M.S. In so doing moreover, many Amesi followed him. "It happened that at this time, the town pursued a blanket scholarship policy with regards to all Amesi schooling within the premises of Amesi", According to elder Ezeonyebuchi. "We subsequently swung into action under the umbrella of the C.M.S., towards seeing that we did not miss this bonus".<sup>86</sup>

After sometime, the C.M.S. faithful continued to grow in number and strength. For certain unidentified reasons, the mission later decided to shift over all her student population into the government established country school Amesi, at least run independent of any mission's control.

Nevertheless, due to a litany of versatile grievances and problems under the headmastership of one Mr. Ezeuko from Achina town, added with organized open attacks and proven ostracism meted out by the town's Catholic population against the relatively smaller C.M.S. adherents, their stay in the county-school was short lived.

Under the leadership of elder Ezeonyebuchi, about ten Amesi C.M.S. members sent for the immediate help and support of Nkpologwu, Uga and Achina C.M.S. mission stations, towards the establishment of a permanent C.M.S. Church-School in the town. In the same way the initiative for this action evolved, the financial and land needs towards its final execution went. It was generally an Ezeonyebuchi affair. (Christopher and his wealthy brother).

At this stage, it is important to note that while the structures were being put up, academic and catechism classes simultaneously went on in the two make shift mud houses located in the same compound. Adult and children's education were basically handled; some of the pioneer member who worked relentlessly include – Jeremiah Agbagwo, Samuel Umeakuta, Catherine Umeakuta, Susana Ezeana etc. The contributions of Mr. Wilson IHEMEJE (from Owerri) as the school's first teacher cannot easily be overlooked.

Be that as it may, the C.M.S zinc-roofed Church house was finally commissioned in 1975, while the congregations scanty population of thirteen on 1<sup>st</sup> take off in the town, presently could tender more than three hundred faithful on the whole.

A clear evaluation of what transpired during the church's earliest days in Amesi would easily prove that the C.M.S. has come to stay, having weathered what may be referred to as detailed Amesi Catholic enmity, rancor and selfishness. Prolonged tribulations infact has toughened the Amesi C.M.S. It is a sad sequence to note that this melodrama at Amesi stage was and still is a clear reflection and presentation of the unhealthy competitive spiritual colonization of Igbo land. Factually, the R.C.M. – C.M.S. evangelistic rivalry cum scramble, sowed some seeds of discord amongst the Christianized. Without mincing words, a faith handed down in an unpeaceful atmosphere of this nature, would thrive in nothing



less than gyroscopized suspiciousness and turmoil.

“It is no more unity in diversity, but the clear cut dichotomized opposition and disunity noticeable in the diversity”.<sup>87</sup>

It is somewhat zany to note that Christ really prayed “may they be one”, but to assume that this has been attained, one must need a large doze of salt.

Historical annals are never silent on the drunken drama witnessed in Europe, that culminated in the emergence of splitter Christian groups. This happened when Africans South of the Sahara stayed and lived ignorant of Christ. With such preceding situation, it is very disheartening for one to notice the fearful chasm existing between the different Amesi Christian sects. Amesians were taught to abhor any dealings with one another on account of religious differences, by some arch-conservative missionaries and catechists. This divided and dis-socialized the town.

However, with the emergence of younger and wiser Christians in the town presently, added to a better understanding of the philosophy of Christ – love of all alike, Amesians have started fraternizing, thereby stimulating the town’s progress in different fields.

## **CONSEQUENCES**

“I came, I saw, I conquered”, veni, vini, vici.

With due apologies to Julius Caesar, this analysis truly and summarily depicts what Christianity did in Amesi traditional society in particular and Igboland in general. The missionaries saw themselves not only as ordinary proselytizers and evangelists, but from all ramifications as daft ‘soldiers of Christ, teleguided by the ever-echoing order of destroying and over throwing all African customary inheritance. To them, Lucifer and his agents have been drinking and dining with the people for long. In order then to save these souls from the devil’s manipulation, all links with the past must be severed. The ‘black air’ which Amesi and her neighbors have been swimming, rolling and rollicking in for hundreds of years, must be replaced. Their mission never knew caution. Igbo traditional practices and cache that took time to evolve was mercilessly subjected to instant, spontaneous and systematic death blows—indeed a destructive macabre. Regardless of how religious Amesians were, just like any other Igbo, iconoclastic and spiritually revolutionary Christianity was ever determined against any dialogue.

Most elders took the cautionary road, while some youngmen swam and even bathed in this alien teaching disregarding prescription. Frenzied and spiritually drunk, the towns religious, social, political and economic institutions were exposed to the full swings of their matchet cuts. In the face of

overwhelming and confusing odds, many Amesi then accepted Christianity.

In enunciating the Christian dogma, the people were made to see the difference (if any) that existed between the Chi-ukwu they worshiped and the Jesus Christ which the missionaries talked about. The town's religious taboos, as natural as some of them were, was out rightly rejected and replaced by the more important Ten Commandments and church laws. Rev. Fathers and Catechists, took over the functions of the traditional Chief Priest, with their attendant sacrifices and consultations. The Catholic Church was referred to as Uka FADA (the priest's church). When studied intently, this localized corruption would appear ideal for according to Fr. I. Ozigbo, "he governed his mission like a benevolent and paternal monarch".<sup>89</sup>

Amesians were christened 'idol worshippers'. Their different many deities were de-godded and written off as mere woods and clay artistic masterpieces, while replacing them with the Christian signs and status. The town's enviable and heroic ancestors were relegated, while tales about the powers and exemplary lives of uncountable alien saints occupy the peoples daily thoughts. Various Christian sacramentals (holy water, medallion, scapular, stickers) quickly replaced the traditional charms, amulets and medicines in the arena of protectiveness. Largely unintelligible esoteric latinised séances took the stage in place of localized songs and dances.

Christianity having gained a very strong ground in the town, with its attendant Catholic majority, the catechists and missionaries enjoyed unequalled political control amongst the people. A clear division was established between the converts and the so-called heathens, thereby setting disunity in motion. Ordered Amesi was then disordered. Christians should have nothing to do with either the pagans or else, one stood the risk of being suspended from receiving Holy Communion. The town was subjected to the heat of a faith whose primary material was gathered from the vast field of Palestine; industrially manufactured in Europe, while cut and thailored in Rome.

The consequences of the in-coming of Christianity into Amesi were enormous. The town's traditional theodicy was over-turned, the various valued instruments that aided cohesion and total allegiance amongst the people was systematically anathemised. In the eyes of the missionaries, nothing practically appeared good or seemingly manageable in the people's cultural cum religious armoury, as to warrant co-option.

Since the advent of Christianity into Amesi its growth in all ramifications, has been largely perepherial. The alien theological formulae catechetically and doctrinally had found it hard to stablise because of the evangelization style and its lack of real inculturation. The people's feelings and ways of life must be taken into account, if real progress is to be witnessed. In as much as this is so, Amesians cannot forever be passive recipients.

Christianity in Amesi should not in total be the same with Christianity in Turin (Rome), due to the unquestionable difference in people, culture and environment, though the major substance of the faith must remain the same.

Infact, it is a holy “white mail” forbidding or dismissing every innovation African in essentials, under the pain of deviation from orthodoxy. According to menirad Hegba, “For Africans to perpetually forgo all their evolved traditions in the face of that of the alien, would place them succinctly in a ‘state of eternal juniority. Suffice it then to say that is not a question of making Christianity acceptable to Amesi, but rather of making the town’s values acceptable to Christianity. This has been a great incubus upon the advancement and emergence of Christianity-originaire in Amesi, and Igboland in general.

### ***5.3 The Growth of Western Education/ Patterns of Social and Economic Change***

Western education, could be said to be the very first strong vestige of Christianity and colonization in the Igbocore area. The history of scholarcism in Amesi is traceable first to the Catholic Church. However, all the Christian sects that later operated in the town, employed the academic rudiments of reading, writing and interpreting during their missionizing task. The importance and use of Sunday schools and catechism sessions towards enlightening these devotees of Christ cannot be underestimated.

Though the art of reading and writing did not come to Amesi on time, when it finally came, the people viewed it with putation suspicion and controversy. Many saw it simply as falling into a vicious darkhole, though mention was constantly made of its abundant promising delicacies and advantages. Examples were even cited of certain known few, from nearby towns, who have succeeded in life, after gulping some of this Western knowledge. This was done to convince Amesians to change their adamant posture.

Having been converted to Christianity, the Amesi Adherents under the St. Vincent's Catholic Mission Uga-Amesi, were the first in the town to start off the act of reading and writing. However, some amongst them not fully convinced, wisely decided to embark upon this 'risk', by allowing either their daughter or any of their unfavoured sons to enroll in this programme. Though classes went on, generally, early-morning school bells were interpreted as officialised invitation for training of people into professional loafers and unproductive, otherwise how can one explain the visible gains of the daily farm works as against that of this everyday school. It was normal to witness scholars cajoled in songs as guided misfits.

At this stage, it is important to point out that the work of the early African Missionary Catechists and school teachers, none of whom came from Amesi, was very dynamic.

They bore the tedious brunt of convincing the people as to the future advantages of Western education. In some cases, they even took the pains

of staging uninvited evening visits to different families. During such call, they took time convincing dogged elders and parents, on the destined lofty and alluring rewards of befitting white-collar jobs, obtainable through this alien academic pursuit. Many of these school teachers were even poorly paid, though usually of humble beginnings, equipped with little education. From their numerous needs, pupils seldom gathered firewood, and fetched water for them.

However, Amesi did not stay long in the opposition. This resulted from the fact that they were advantaged to seeing practical gains attained by some nearby town's indigenes who have gone through some rudimentary Western education.

Moreover, some of the town's long distant travelers and traders, witnessing how fashionable this new thought has become in places like Onitsha, did not stop at only advising their relatives at home, but returned and quickly enrolled at least one of their children. Many lucid thinkers at home, having viewed this idea and its expected prospects with equanimity, also gave in. Right from the smoldering piece of coal, the fire finally took off, and the race for the Golden Fleece started.

The school house located at St. Vincent's mission, Uga-Amesi, served the town's needs in this direction, until the beginning of 1936, when through the application of the colonial governments' universal free primary education policy, the County Primary School Amesi was

erected, on the piece of land which was mainly procured from one Akamikpu (Ubaha village).

Be that as it may, the enterprising Catholic members, succeeded after weathering several difficulties in setting up St. Joseph's Primary School (the present central school) at Eke Amesi vicinity in 1942. Being a full fledged missionary school, it was placed under the care of Achina Parish from its inception, up till 1945, when it became autonomous.

According to my informat, "To take on and shoulder such a project, demands dedicated, determined and seasoned academics. Such was the qualities embeeded in the first school teacher of the school – Mr. Innocent Uwakwe, from Ndi-Okpalaeze town".<sup>90</sup> Before long, some other pioneer teachers and headmasters came to his assistance, amongst whom were Mr. Victor Umeobieri (Uga, the first headmaster of the school, Mr. Augustine Okpalla) (Akpo, the second Headmaster and Mr. Sylvester Dim, the third Headmaster).

Now that the old and the young appeared to have understood the advantages of Western education, and the consequent scramble for its acquisition resulting, all policies that formerly projected its freshness and openness, were gradually dropped. The payment of school fees by the pupils started. This threw many determined pupils into embarking on various money yielding ventures, while some parents and wards had to guarantee their children's academic pursuit, by even selling off their lands, domestic animals and



economic trees. What a sacrifice in quest of the Golden Fleece.

After acquiring the rudimentary part of this alien education, many ambitious and determined Amesians, went for the commanding height. Henceforth, teachers training colleges in Adazi, Agulu and even Onitsha contributed in no small way to the eventual production of the trained elites from the town.

It should however be noted that both Christianity and western education never made their fruitful inroad into Amesi, without some negative effects.

The traditional environment, and the normalcy of the peoples' life pattern were the worst affected. It was in recognition of this factor, though critically, that V.C. Uchendu unreservedly opined that, "Religiously, the planting of Christianity (and western education) hit at the very soul of the Igbo society, and invariably caused problems of varying magnitude in Igbo life and culture".<sup>91</sup>

It is abnormal infact to contest at this juncture, whether there really emanated any visible changes, rather it does appear better to reflect on the magnitude.

It was tempestuously revolutionary, thereby leading to the submergence of certain existing social order and the town's cultural nationalism. Amesi witnessed, "a sudden and regrettable break with a glorious past, as a result of which things began to fall apart".<sup>92</sup>

This above stance does not mean to say that the emergence of westernization and Christianity

in the town, is devoid of all attributes of positivism.

Ancient Amesi was not an abode of *laissezfaire* morality. Its pre-Christian guide was firmly based on religion, strict moral principles, determined code of conducts, established penalties and denunciations against malefactors, tested taboos, all summed up in the mechanism of control, classified as the people's custom. Due to the tangled and intertwined nature of custom and religion in the town, tabulated moral sanctions were mainly religious sanctions. The people's belief in this divine moral code, and the ability of the gods to punish any deviant instantly, was never in question or isolation. This became the most powerful and effective mechanism of social control in Amesi society. Values like truthfulness, hospitality, kindness, love and respect for elders, built an unshaken honour, integrity and a promising longevity for one in the town.

However, in contemporary Amesi society, beaten left and right by westernization, the scope of morality has begun to dull down. "Foreign cultures have begun to teach morality, as that which is based not on religion and its sanctions, but on that complex which suits men in their present circumstances or in the concensus of human opinion".<sup>93</sup> Deliberately, morality is being portrayed as a pragmatically relative element or a sort of utilitarianism. The validity of morality in any social concensus is thereby highly questioned.

Amesi cultural peculiarity, simultaneous with the generality of the core Igbo area, the fruits

and determinant of the people's history, at the face of this present danger, proved a giant with a clay feet. A lot in the indigenous life system was extirpated, while the few that survived this inundation, before long merged with the imperialist culture, giving rise to a totally new and different arrangement. Some daft Amesians nevertheless, stuck to the past, while watching this drama with cynicism.

Probably, the colonialists, with their cultural bankruptcy wouldn't have succeeded easily in distabilising the indigenous social and religious platforms, if not for the initial vital roles played by the missionaries with their schools and bibles, and the imperialist government with their instruments of power. Law courts became perfected squares where the people's tradition was constantly cajoled, skeletised and scattered as mere testaments of barbaric chaos emanant from untamed heathens.

In their myopism, they strove to sweep clean this Augean stable evidenced in the indigenous heritage. All Christian covertes must first be purged of all attributes of traditional socialization. This gave rise to a handfull of covertes in and around the town, who went around attacking and writing off existent organs of the traditional society as inferior and ungodly. Local names and even dances were dismissed as paganistic. This way, the Devil Theory was applied in the cruxification of a people's identity.

Nonetheless, one must note that western education was introduced, not for the total

advantage of the indigenes, than it was for the total efficiency of colonial exploitation. Rather than applying their newly acquired knowledge towards defending the old, many Amesi educated elites ended up becoming “a poor imitation of Europeans. Respect and honour previously accorded to age, wisdom and experience, was overnight transferred to them.

#### **5.4 *Patterns of Social and Economic Change***

Economically and socially, Amesi found it hard to hold onto her ways tightly. The influence and attraction of education on the Youths, and the massive way they succumbed to it, dealt a deafening blow to agrarian endeavours, thereby relegating it to a mere subsistence.

Long distance trading subsequently degenerated, giving way to petty local trading largely in the town. The need and urge on the part of the colonialists, to exploit the important agricultural products of the Igboland interior, however led to the building of new roads. To embark and fully carry through such project, forced labour was applied on the people, through the co-operation of the warrant Chiefs, though this was bitterly and whole heartedly resented by the indigenes.

The greatest impact of colonialism on the town, surfaced in the indigenous social catharsis. Christianity and Westernization after their byrial vault into the town, presented academics as ultimate, infact the “summon Bonum” of this new era. The position of the educated elites thus

elevated, social inequality was magnified, and accountability became personal.

Decisions rather than filter from consensus, was dropped from above. Kangaroo courts were set up in the name of colonial law courts, where purposeful oppositions were expertly nipped from the bud. Western traditions were applied in determining the positivity of Igbo ways of living. One has to really bribe his way through the court clerk, or smartly apply sheer witticism, common sense and persuasion, to win a case.

Western system of dressing, foods and beverages, new mannerisms and etiquette were adopted as valued symbols of social prestige. Immorality was largely adopted as a necessary pattern of living, under the name of civilization. Western medication as opposed to herbalism took off from utter rejection, putation and controversy, back to high wonder and admiration, when certain ailments like the dreaded leprosy appeared easy to handle.

Amesians followed the wind's current in pursuance of industry, progress and livelihood in the big cities and towns in the country; and before long, zinc-roofed houses started to replace thatched ones.

It would totally be wrong to assume that everything that had to do with pre-colonial Amesi was annihilated. Rather, it does appear that much of these new concepts co-existed with the old as the case may be. In this vein, V.C. Uchendu had this to say – "igbo is a society in which the old and new co-exist, and the one modifies the other, in

order to make the co-existence possible, the church, the school, the city, the politics have all created new status”.

A new social order has emerged in the town, bringing with its diversity, flaming and consuming geocentricism and divisiveness. Amesi based at home feel somehow different from those abroad. Nonetheless, the town must not be allowed to decay, hence the rural masses and the educated few must close the gap between them, and in so doing, have opened the way to the new synthesis. This is natural, for it is they who would make what cabral suggestively defined as a, “forced march on the road to cultural progress, on the road to a new comity consciousness, fruits of the past as well as of the present, a national unity of work and struggle”,<sup>95</sup> in the town.

## CHAPTER

### Six

#### **THE NIGERIA/BIAFRA WAR YEARS**

##### ***The Game of Death/Survival***

**D**etailed dancing and hilarious celebration marked the country's attainment of independence in 1960. Nevertheless, that year, unknown to the generality of Nigerians, the colonial time bomb was set into motion. Overnight, many Nigerians became drunk with only a little of the freedom wine, which was gulped without caution. This resulted in unhealthy ethnic rivalry, parochialism, provocative favouritism and unbridled profligacy amongst the people. Fearing that the situation might degenerate into something terrible, some khaki boys, under the leadership of Major C. Nzeogwu flashed a lightning *coup de' etat*, on January, 15<sup>th</sup> 1966. A strong air of uncertainty and numbness came with this coup, having been interpreted in certain circles as a clear 'Igbo coup'. Major General Ironsi, an Igbo who took over power had to pay with his life the price of a supposed Igbo domination. This coup became the final arbiter of separation and the eclipse of fraternal confidence. This incident turned the country into a basilica of confusion. Unprecedented killings both in the North and the East, added more colour to the gathering clouds. Hot exchanges went on between the Easterns and the Federal government.

The handshake has in fact passed the elbow. This culminated in the secession and declaration of the republic of Biafra, as a separate entity from Nigeria, on May 30<sup>th</sup>, 1967, by Lt. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu. General Gowon however vehemently opposed this, hence the cataclysmic Nigerian-Biafran War (1967-1970).

This war was welcomed in Amesi, just like in any other autonomous Igbo community with dogged natural pride, backed by convincing bravado, resourcefulness and jealously-guarded patriotism to the baby-BIAFRA. Consequently, right from the on start, many sons of the town, serving with the Nigerian armed forces, swiftly changed baton and fought on the Biafran side.

Moreover the many fresh volunteers were not left out. When the war took off, the initial vigour with which Biafrans fought was unequalled. Solid military battalions under the able leadership of foresighted commanders, were strategically stationed here and there, while the Biafran propaganda machinery never failed to psyche all and sundry up in the need to defend the East with iron and blood. With foreign assistance, two military air bases were set up at Uga and Uli towns respectively.

At the initial stages of the war, the Biafran successes were tremendous, hence one analyst reflected that 'soldiers fought like Biafrans'. In the first months of 1968, a crack unit of Biafran troops in a dazzling move, ran through the Midwest, bursting at Ore, in the present Ondo State. At this, the enemy commanders started



entertaining some fears at the security risks posed by the continued harbouring of the seat of the federalist government in Lagos. However, their headache was short lived, as sabotage and divisiveness came to their rescue against the Biafrans.

The Ore setback should never be underated. The Scenario staged at Ore undoubtedly placed the Biafran march into that of forward never, backward ever, till the lights went off.

Previously, the ongoing war was told like folk tales in Amesi, but from the middle of 1968, when the Biafrans were helplessly beaten back from almost all sectors, the picture became clearer, disheartening and bitter. The initial enthusiasms in the town was henceforth frustrated by the frightening fear of defeat.

Enugu fell into the hands of federalist troops; Onitsha fell, Port Harcourt, and then Owerri. Fear enveloped sleep in the eyes of the people, and the real drama of the war was witnessed live in the corridors of Amesi and the surrounding towns.

Sequel to the proximity of Amesi to the Uga air base, not all the Lyricism of this civil war missed the notice of the town's people. When the enemy war planes started to appear on the town's skies, Amesians were initially caught up by their evasive acrobatic numbness. Some ignorant men and women, even openly hailed them vocally as Biafran's Amesi and other surrounding towns were victims of this erroneous idea. The stage was excellently set up at Uga, one Oye market-day,

when two federalist planes visited the town. Believed to be Biafran war-planes, traders in the market came all out, shouting and waving at them in welcome. It was pandemonium galore when these planes divide in and poured in their bombs in the market. Foreigners who attended the market that day, and who were lucky to have escaped with their lives (Amesians inclusive), needed no further details in relation to the awesome destructive capability of bombs. This incident, like wild fire spread to the hearing of towns around. Consequently, whenever any war plane was spotted in the skies, Amesians never waited to confirm its identity before fleeing into the nearest available under ground bunker.

Once in a while, the unhealthy atmosphere of peace in the town was disturbed by the rhythmic staccato of machine guns, interspersed with anti air-craft coughing and oozing out from Uga air base. Anti-air craft security measures were even taught to children in the town, when the visits of these messengers of death became rampant. Houses with glittering corrugated iron roofs were well disguised with coats of palm leaves to blind the notice of the enemy pilots.

The African toad, so it is said, does not run in a broad daylight for nothing. This adage best explains the continued visits of Biafran soldiers to the town, while the war theatre was boiling. Army conscriptors raided the town to capture able-bodied up-to-age males for enlistment into the Biafran army, now it has become clear that volunteering has become a dead issue, moreso in

the face of continued Nigerian offensives. Those soldiers who meandered away from the consuming inferno of the war fronts into the relatively peaceful air of the towns and villages, were also trailed after. The hunt for able-bodied youngmen for fresh enlistment, presented a funny drama in Amesi and its environs. Due to the fact that these conscriptors carried out their assignment day and night, these youngmen who were afraid of joining the army, operated a twin plan hiding.

During the day time, they usually meandered into the bushes, while hibernating in the barns (yam or cocoyam) or climbing into the rooftop at night. However, unlucky ones were seldom caught after long period of hiding. Houses that had asbestos ceiling, really harboured weights more than it could carry. In one incident, while the five Biafran conscriptors were still around in the house, the roof creaked, the wood broke and the three young men staying in it, instantly found themselves hitting hard on top of their conscriptors, who mercilessly handled them. In another incident, the youngman being the only child of the mother has hid for long. Duly informed about this youngman's smart moves, these conscriptors later visited the pyramidal elephant grass roofed house with dry pepper. They poured this pepper into the little fire that they made on the floor inside this house. Before long the young man was out smarted, when the surging choking peppirish smoke caught up with him. Unable to hold on any longer, he hurriedly climbed down, coughing profusely.

The war raged on, with the federalist running past Awka to Agulu. By 25<sup>th</sup> November 1968, they were stationed at Adazi junction. Starting from the capture of Biafran strategic towns like Onitsha, Enugu, and Port Harcourt, the hardship debacle which people witnessed can never be quantified. The real blockade of Biafra in air, land and sea was achieved. Hunger, malnutrition, the towering refugee problem, added with the federalist genocidal approach, saw Amesi and other potential Biafra towns, a promising mass grave. Some people even started doubting or questioning the existence of God, while others took solace and lay belief in the eventual hopeful realities of the priest's Sunday homilies. Attendance to church sessions in the town, even appeared risky, while many withdrew their children from school. Marriages and funeral ceremonies, coupled with moonlight plays were conducted with minimum noise. Families even resorted to preparing their supper during the day time, when the reality of night raids dawned on Amesians.

News about Amesians who had lost their lives in patriotic service to their cherished Biafra, was usually swallowed with painful resignation of faith and confidence in the almighty. The continuous chatter of machine guns and the heart rending sounds of mortar shells in the near distance, became frightful lullabies of night. In this confusion, scarcity of food resulted. Some people though tried to ease things up by engaging in the nefarious and dangerous 'affia attack' (Smuggling)

Amesi in all totality, showed resilience and adaptability even at the point of death. Though in hardship, refugees were welcomed and accommodated, while some were quartered in the school areas. Pupils resorted to taking their lessons under tree shades.

Amesi did not suffer the lack of drug syndrome, like some other communities in Igbo land. This could be traced from the fact that as basic originators and professionals in the tradico – medicinal practice, they had no alternative than to make do with the bird at hand. Towns nearby brought in their patients to the treatments of Amesi herbalists, in the face of continued scarcity of foreign drugs.

The self reliance which this war stimulated, also affected the agricultural circles. The people utilized all available pieces of land for planting yam, cassava cocoyam and vegetables.

Nevertheless, all these adjustments never prevented the indomitable Kwashiokor from striking, though the casualty figure was very low. Children with distended stomachs, falling cheeks, yellowish cornea, swollen feet, and general anaemia were seen in some families.

Much thanks and appreciation should go to the Amesi relief materials committee (Ichie I.A. Ezeonwuka, amongst others, who worked hand in hand with the nationally based group- CARITAS, (Bishop A.K. Obiefuna, Dr. Ikenga Ozigbo, and the leader – Fr. Anthony Byrne) who took it upon themselves to distribute in a fair and judicious manner the cornmeal, garrigabon, salt, stock fish,

powdered milk, canned beef and drugs that were allotted to the town. Some Amesiians prayed to pass the Kwashiokor test at the hands of the CARITAS officials, so as to attract or obtain some of these materials, while really not wishing or ready to suffer from the ailment.

The town witnessed generally, no decadence in morality and crime control during this war, though some incidents present mere dotted spots. The culprits were later forgiven because everybody saw their acts as mere unconscious attempts to make ends meet, rather than out of real criminal rectivism.

Just like a spark to a keg of gunpower, the Biafran offensive took off at the dawn of 27<sup>th</sup> November, 1968. According to Gen. Madiebo, it started with the deadly bombardment of the Ugwu-Ugoro enemy's sector at Agulu with, "one 105mm artillery gun firing 100 rounds, and two 81mm mortars that fired 150 bombs",<sup>97</sup>

The deadly Umuahia commando brigade took up the fight, and after about six hours of heavy fighting, liberated Agulu. While this incident was cooling off, Biafran troops again recorded significant successes at Abagana on December, 24<sup>th</sup> 1968. Owerri was recaptured on 15<sup>th</sup> January, 1969, while Aba was liberated in June 1969. The war dragged on like this, till Biafra finally decided to throw in the towel, though gallantly on January 12<sup>th</sup>, 1970.

## **6.2 The Aftermath**

With the Biafran imbroglio over, Amesi finally heaved a sigh of relief. Spontaneous celebrations, interspersed by drinking and eating moments, and masquerade displays added towards welcoming the news about the eventual stoppage of hostilities. People exchanged greetings and congratulatory messages with one another, for at least surviving this war, though some how painfully without their darling Biafra. Lucky as the town was, it never entertained any bullet-hit or bomb-drop. Many illustrious sons of the town who fought and survived the war, were heroically received, while chicken-hearted roof cats, left roof-tops alone and finally appeared in public. However, some Amesians due to one reason or the other never returned from the war. Though they may be dead, the town can ever forget their patriotism. They are infact remembered as agents of Biafran future germination.

Family, village and town meetings were easily fixed and had without the slightest fear of either what may happen next or the unexpected deadly visits of enemy supersonic jets. The dynamics of conviviality in the town was once more fully stimulated, as markets and schools re-opened. The war came and went, not without some hard lessons on Amesians.

At the beginning of the war, many of the town's indigenes, just like some other Igbos, hurriedly ran back home from their various places of habitation, many without their household properties. This situation placed them

emphatically in beggary and trying condition throughout the hell-like three years period of the war. Some who were opportuned to get some of their properties, ended up suffering the problem of lack of shelter, back home. They turned to professional strangers and wanderers in their own town.

Immediately the war ended, many Amesians who possessed landed properties in various parts of the country, hopefully went to reclaim them. The luck ones got theirs unscathed, some met theirs bombed out, while other lost theirs under the hazy 'abandoned property' term especially in the present Rivers state area.

A popular adage has it that 'a bird in hand worths more than two' in the bush, hence those Amesians who previously had even a thatch roofed mud house in the town before the war felt more at home during this grueling three years of death wish, and became even surer of a base to start off from whenever the war ended. North, South, East or West, home is home. The experiences of this war was normous. Those who even stacked money in the banks, had to start life afresh with the officially granted twenty pounds. Life at this stage, appeared to many Igbos, a mission impossible. Be that as it may, astuteness, determination mixed with natural enterprise and industry encouraged all towards the survival road.

Amesi recorded a glorious revolution, right from the end of the war in 1970, up to the present. An important break with the past was witnessed in the people's life patterns, though care was taken in



tailoring elements of the indigenous tradition for the better.

Thatched roof mud houses gave way to western related architectural edifices, comparable to the ones obtainable in the big cities, thereby transforming the town from its typical rural stature to that of a full-fledged urban. While embarking on this, Amesians stationed abroad, saw the need in visiting home at least once in a week. This is quite unlike before the war. This culminated in unequalled community progress. Communal approach was applied towards solving the town's perennial water problem. Large asbestos water pipes was procured and laid along the three major triangular roads traversing the town, thereby making it easier for people to connect or tap water to their houses, using steel pipes. After due consultations and settlements with the Obizi-Uga water authorities, the pipeline was connected, and the town started enjoying daily water supply, though two and half years hardly elapsed before the story turned far to the opposite. Today, Amesians could be said to have wisely married the best alternative. Some households have resorted to setting up strong cemented water reservoirs, into which rain water channeled from zinc-roofed houses pours in, during the rainy season.

Infrastructural advancement was not the only feature of Amesi after Baifra. Masquerade displays and dancing groups which nearly died out during the war, was once more awakened to their fullest heights. The magnetic excitement emanating

from all these social stratas, did not however steal the people's mind from organizing progressive forums like youth organizations, women leagues, herbalist associations and co-operative groups.

The story of Amesi after the civil war can never be complete if the fatherly role played by the Amesi improvement Union, under the able chairmanship of Chief Elias Egbuacho, is not recorded. The Union in its benevolence, saw Amesi in tears, and unhesistantly caressed and soothed her. Lack of finance only limited their moves.

# CHAPTER

## Seven

### **CENTRALIZED POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS**

#### **7.1 Emergence of the 'Igwe'/Ichie':**

**T**he changing dynamics of every society usually reflects its progressive advancing nature, or its distablising approach. While Amesians were still busy nursing the deep wounds of the three year civil war, hardly did they ever suspect what the year 1975 had in stock for them and their age long custom.

It happened that the then military governor of the East central state (Anambra/Imo states)-colonal Atom Kpera, allying to the demands of his government, detailed every autonomous Igbo community to present an individual each, who would be looked upon as the traditional chief of that entity. This demand initially sounded plastic and indigestible to the peoples' constitution. Some Amesians saw it as an ordinary make-believe, while those who spared time to even think about it for a while, dismissed the idea as that which has to go as it came. As months rolled by, the government's stance on this policy proved stubborn. It even went further to draw the criteria for the selection of any such individual.

It was initially hard for most Igbo communities to conjecture, understandably due to the alien-nature of such a centralized status in relation to Igbo traditional statusquo. Centralised

chiefdoms could only be traced to such communities like Nri, Onitsha and Arochukwu areas in the pre-colonial era. Though another order relating to that, which obtained during the colonial depredations was the warrant chief status, which received the people's total resentment.

For the towns who already had traditional rulers, as formality and officialdom would require, the government had not problem in handing over to their rulers staffs of office and recognition. However, communities like Amesi, which lacked such, resorted to doing one thing or the other in other to meet up to the government's deadline.

At this juncture, it will not be anachronistic to remark that this chieftaincy race really threw Igboland into the furnace of anarchy, disunity and confusion, in that almost all communities concerned harboured more than one aspirant. Over-ambitions contestants applied various ammunitions in their arsenal. Thugery, naira-power, personal influence and lobbying all contributed to the eventual distablisation of such communities. Peace vanished with progress. While this was going on in different towns far and near, the scenery witnessed in Amesi was completely different.

It would nonetheless appear a simple tall story, if in recounting the incidents that finally culminated in the choosing and making of the Amesi chief, all acrimony entertained is divorced in toto, so as to present an undented account.

The Amesi Improvement Union under the able chairmanship of Chief L.M. Ezeofor, after

series of executive meetings, finally decided to act with the final consensus of the generality of Amesians. After several consultations, the people democratically decided that the would-be chief should be chosen traditionally. Hence out of the four villages, Obinato the eldest was chosen, with Umu-Umeoha as the ancestral kindred which produces the town's father and founder-Akalabo. It was however not difficult at this stage to pick the family of Umeononankume Ekwunihe as the eldest and first household in that kindred. Yes, at this stage, almost everyone in the town found it easy to spot the one whose head the revered cap would rest.

Though this was so, amongst the town's populace, pockets of the dissenting feelings lay like small kegs of gun powder. Some Amesians felt that the town's chief should be one of wealthy background and resources, while others selfishly aggrieved, felt that some 'colonial parameter' should be adopted towards maintaining what appeared to them a reasonable continuity. These feelings, lacking merit and popularity, quickly fizzled out.

It henceforth went down in the annals of Amesi past that Mr. Emmanuel Ikechukwu Umeonankume, has been nominated to rule the town. The year was 1976.

While this drama was busy going on, the chief-to-be was away in Aba engaging seriously in his commercial endeavors. It was not long before news filtered to him about the town's final

decision. Besides, his identity was hardly known by one-quarter of the town's population.

An official delegation was dispatched to inform and confer with him, by the A.I.U. executive members. The delegates went with exalted expectations, at least as honored albatross of this happy news. Mr. Emmanuel surprisingly stunned them by receiving the message coldly. He was unyielding in his refusal towards assuming such a position, though with pointed reasons. Calling natural humility into play, he stated thus,

*“I really cannot accept this chieftaincy offer from you, neither now nor in the future, for that is above my present status. I am not the oldest, most educated or wisest Person in Amesi. Where is the wealth and affluence to withstand such a position? Besides, I am just a 30 year old bachelor”.*<sup>97</sup>

The delegates were left with no option than to resort to convincing him, in order to obtain the needed positive answer. Mr. Emmanuel knew the importance of any final decision he would take; such would factually prove whether the town has finally got a would be ruler or not. When this thought appeared too hot to handle momentarily, and fearing a haphazard decision, he finally agreed with the messengers, to meet and collect the answer on a new date.

He vacillated from one idea to another, finding it still hard to visualize himself ruling the town. Knowing on the other hand, what a difficult

scene that would be entertained, to give the messengers 'No' as an answer, he decided to hide away on the appointed day.

The day saw Mr. Emmanuel hiding at the house of one Mr. Nwagwu at Ngwa in Imo State. As the delegates couldn't locate him, they dejectedly left. The game has now resorted to a hide and seek one. Indeed, unknown to Mr. Emma, the fruits of the same seed he sowed was to be harvested and served back to him.

Trickishly, the chief-to be was informed through his younger brother about his urgently needed presence at home on an arranged day, to sign a document recognizing another supposed later nominee as the chief of the town, taking cognisance of the fact that he Mr. Emma has refused bluntly to assume that position. This plan went smoothly. Mr. Emmanuel, accompanied by his brother, returned home and only learnt about the plan then. Left with only one option, he signed the expected government official documents, that saw him accepting the leadership of Amesi town. This accomplished, Amesi ancestors heaved a sigh of relief from their resting places.

A day was fixed during the town's mass return of December 1976, on which to formally present the chief to the generality of Amesians. At this juncture, according to the Chief, "I was praying that the people should refuse me, but God never heard my prayers".<sup>98</sup> Amesians could hardly wait for that day, as many people still lack the identity of this new chief.

Finally, the day came, and in the presence of indigenes, old and young, at home and abroad, and some government delegated representatives, Mr. Emmanuel Ikechukwu Umeonankume was officially presented as the leader of Amesi town. In a tingling show of honour, acceptance, faith and solidarity, the people showed their submission to his suzerainty. The signing of some important documents followed thus by volunteered representatives from the various villages of the town. –

Obinato to village	–	Umechukwu Umenwali
Amowo village	–	Umeozulu Basil
Umuocha village	–	Okpalla Alexander
Ubaha village	–	Abazie Simeon
A.I.U.	–	L.M.E. Ezeofor
Government	–	M.U. Mgbodile

Mr. Emmanuel later received his certificate of recognition and staff of office from the then governor – Col. Atom kpera.

This piece would appear incomplete if it maintain silence on the personality and character of this new chief.

Without mincing words, Chief E. Umeonankume is a person of unquestionable integrity, massively and impressively built. He never finds it difficult to smile. Removing all traces of exaggeration, he is an embodiment of honesty, sincerity, justice, unity and fair play. Though typified by these jealously-guarded virtues, this does not practically canonize him a saint. Young at heart and in body, he is elderly wise in the



tradition of the ancients. He never finds it hard to learn, or to put his sense of equity to work, hence his command of the people's approval, likeness and unalloyed followership. Rather than to rule, he really came to lead, to serve rather than be served. Amesi is lucky to have in the personality of their first traditional ruler, Christianity humbly personified.

Moving speedily according to the dictates of unassuming tradition, an ubiquitous search was launched for one to occupy the position of the chiefs' better half. Like terms in this case attracted each other, when a lady graduate of mathematics, was spotted in the family of one Ezeoba at Enugu Ukwu.



**Oda Omumu (messenger of ani goddess).  
A symbol of fertility, morality and procreation.  
Still existent in many compounds in Amesi**

Imbued with all attributes expected from one who should occupy the exalted position of the town's first lady, the Chief had no problem in taking her to the alter in 1979 with the support of the Almighty, this union had been knotted with purposeful issues.

The town's traditional ruler although chosen cannot govern alone. Consultations were made amongst the town's elders as to possible parameter that should be employed towards choosing the needed lieutenants. The line of cultured tradition and history was chosen. Consequently four people were selected from the head families of the four villages, and regarded as the town's Prime Ministers (Ichie Akalabo), incharge of the four villages at Amesi.

**These four Ichie Akalabo are:-**

Obineto village – Chief Umechukwu Umenwairi (late)

Amuwo village – Chief Anasonye Ezeonwuka

Umuocha village – Chief Ezeuko Okpalaeke

Ubaha village – Chief Ezeakonobi Nwoke

Chief Ezenwegbu later replaced Umechukwu.

Directly following the Ichie Akalabo in the cadre of administration is a council of ordinary Chiefs. According to the number of families in the town, they were supposed to be seventeen in number. Some people were also meritoriously capped Chiefs an account on certain contributions they have bequeathed to the town in the recent past.

The list went like this:-

**OBINATO VILLAGE:**

Umu – Umeoha family – None

Umu – Umebighdo family–Chief Cajetan Obidiegwu  
(late)

Umu – Ofeke family - Chief Mark, Ezeuchegbu

Umu – Ibelaka family – Chief Samuel Ibeanu

**AMUWO VILLAGE:**

Umu – Dibie family – None

Umu – Aro family – Chief Samuel Ezemba

Onunuaku family – Chief Bernard, Ezeagwu

Umu – Umeanosike family – Chief Wilfred,  
Umerika

Umu – Anyaji family – Chief Aloysius, Ezeunachukwu

**UMUOCHA VILLAGE:**

Umu – Okpalaibekwe family – Chief Cosmas,  
Okpalla

Umu – Ojihe family – Chief Alex., Okpalauzuegbu

Umu – Ogbaghe family – Chief Peter, Umeakuana

Umu – Umeonaku family – Chief Anthony Anya

**UBAHA VILLAGE:**

Umu – Ezemenyi family – Chief Mathew

Umu – Duru family – Chief Oliver, Ezeanya

Umu – Umeoka family – Chief Svlvanus, Ezeibenne

Umugologo family – Chief Nathaniel Ezeaso

One cannot help pointing out that certain unexplained discrepancies still exist in the fulfillment of this expectation.

...Meritoriously, the following joined the above council:

Chief E. Egbuacho (Ex. A.L.U. President)  
Chief L.M. Ezeofor (Ex. A.I.U. President)  
Chief C. Osondu (Ex. A.I.U. Official)  
Chief A. Ozigbo (Ex. A.I.U. Official)  
Chief D. Ezeliora (Ex. A.I.U. Official)

Monday, April 20<sup>th</sup> 1982, has gone down in the tabulated history of Amesi as a memorable day. The town victoriously passed an important milestone. It happened that on this date, Chief E. Umeononankume and his cabinet were officially crowned and capped. Though the ceremony fell into the Easter period, all preparations in the town, were virtually for this coronation.

Trying to recreate fully the colourful scene that was witnessed that day is simply as hard as one trying to recount everything that went on in the market on a busy day.

Before the day arrived, towns far and near, personalities big and small were all formally invited.

A royal pontifical mass held at St. Joseph's Catholic Mission Amesi, blazed the trail on April 19<sup>th</sup>. Being the eve of this all important day, well articulated cultural displays transfixed the people's attention in the Chief's palace.

The day was finally ushered in with several cannon shots, by the Obi Akalabo, and his four Ichie Akalabo, in their various villages. Thus the event was officially announced.

Visitors in their thousands, thronged the town, *en route* to the palace square. Dr. Alex. Ekwueme (the then vice president of Nigeria), Chief Jim Nwobodo (the then Governor) etc were

amongst the dignitaries that graced this great occasion. In line with the cultural tradition of Amesi town, the four prime ministers of the town, crowned the Obi Akalabo I of Amesi. However, the highlight of this occasion was when the Oraeri traditional ruler (on account of their traditional historical affinity with Amesi) J.M.C. Obiako, Ezenri XVIII, stepped on top of the rostrum and handed the Igwe, his *Ofo*- the paraphernalia of adjudication. This act was meticulously dramatized, moreso under the curtain of the symmetrical barrage of twenty-one cannon-gun shots. Having successfully crowned the first traditional ruler of the town, the golden past materialized in the present. Amaeshi metamorphosed into Amesi with nothing lost politically. The traditional ear of collective responsibility thus gave way to that of individual captainship in administration.

The Igwe was later invested with the full condiments that created the aura and royal antecedence of his royal highness – the Obi Akalabo I of Amesi.

Amesians in groups and families, added with the town's well wishers greeted the Igwe with numerous significant gifts. A myriad of masquerades and cultural dancing groups added fun and grandeur to this occasion. All activities relating to this coronation were rounded up in the evening with the blessing of rainfall which was successfully 'prevented' from posing a threat to this event.

All in all, it could very well be said that Amesi has never before witnessed such magnitude of celebrations that ushered in the existence of chieftaincy status in the town.

In all its ramifications, the chieftaincy experiment in the town had yielded positive results, thereby passing well as a veritable culture-based democracy. It has adopted stabilized avenues of social communication and relationship towards averting stands of possible deadly schisms, in so doing, obtaining purposeful unity for the town.

Eleven years after, the Igwe and his cabinet, thought it wise to create and institute another chieftaincy-based group the OTUGO GROUP. The members include – Chiefs B. Obiakor, Lawrance Ezeliore, Paulinus Ezeibekwe, Reuben Ozigbo and Bede Ekwo-mmadu.

Their choice was meritorious and supportive at the same time. In their elevated platform, they were expected to be philanthropic as to the progressive needs of the town, material and immaterial. Such status also exposes one towards actively participating in the community's aspirations. In categorizing and re-organising Amesi Chieftaincy status for the better, one would rightly feel that the former five meritorious Chiefs that served under the A.I.U. executive, should be made to officially stay and perform under this present Otugo group.

As events would have it, the Otugo members were capped on 23<sup>rd</sup> of December, 1987.

## **TRADITIONALISM VS WESTERNIZATION IN AMESI**

### **7.2 Traditional Egaltarianism/ Western Constitutionalism – A Reconsideration**

Like any other Igbo town, Amesi forcedly witnessed colonialism and its attendant Christianity and Westernization. Having been immersed into the depth of these foreign waters, what surfaced in all expositions, begs for a case study. The power play between what constitutes the original and that which is foreign and alien still rages on. All fabrics of the town's life pattern appears to be under siege.

Before the coming of Christianity into Amesi, the people jollied in all tenets of the traditional religion. The people thought; laughed, talked, lived and died religiously, hence hanging the pivot of their life on religion. People were careful to the barest minimum not to go against the laid down principles, so as not to attract the anger of the gods. A child was cultured towards – keeping to the many taboos lying left and right.

More importantly, the judicature of Ani goddess was never overlooked. Though the intricate services of the various deities in the town was recognized, the omniscient and unquestionable fatherhood of chukwu was never underrated.

It is really an eyesore to glance at the moral condition of the town from the colonial period up to this time. One cannot help stating that the

success of Christianity was the down fall of traditional religion in the town. This operation though appearing reasonable, should not have been allowed to be as catastrophic and detrimental as it has been. In as much as this does not portray one's ingratitude to the many advantages of Christianity in the town, no right thinking individual would on the other hand be a party to the dangerous trend of forcefully, stifling of a people's treasured indigenous legacy. Both religions posses what is good and negative somehow, sequel to their human dictates.

A chance should have been accorded them to try out a conscious dialogue and understanding. Infact, one cannot doubt that much of the atrocities and immorality presently bedeviling the town, are traceable to some iconoclastic, and fanatic Christians.

Not up to one-quarter of Amesians are currently traditional religionist, while the rest are Christians, with Catholics in the majority. With this picture, one would expect a small town like Amesi to be a haven of unadulterated peace, order and understanding. Amongst practicing Christians, suspiciousness, fear, hatred, mudslinging and acrimony however thrive at their best.

How can the town witness constructive progress and unity in the face of all these? People should decide to instantly do away with "Churchianity" and embrace Christianity.

Furthermore, there is a need for a healthy incarnation and enculturation of 'Christ's body in



the locality of Amesi and environs. Real Christianity must not destroy nature, and should be at home in every culture. As the second Vatican council remarked in paragraph thirteen of its major document on the church, “Every nation should come to Christ bringing its gifts”<sup>99</sup>.

Moreover, Pope Paul VI during his address to Catholic Bishops of Africa in Uganda, remarked thus “... Africans can and should be African in their Christianity”.<sup>100</sup> All that is contained in the town’s traditional religion should not be written off as paganistic and heathenistic. Such abundant values in the indigenous religion which can enrich Christianity include – sense of the sacred, emphasis in human relations, respect for elders, love for life, celebrating the joy of living and for sacred ceremonies, live and let live philosophy, altruism, hospitality and sense of community spirit. All these need to be purified, elevated and universalized, “lest we forget, all religions seek answers to the ultimate questions concerning human existence on earth”.<sup>101</sup>

The same that is decimating the traditional religion, has never spared even an atom of mercy on the towns customary profession. The town’s medico – herbal institution, previously known and acclaimed far and wide have been facing systematic British destruction, since its exposure to the machinations of the dangerous devils’ theory. Today, Amesi is just managing to hold on to the shadows of a glorious past. Applying a blanket condemnation on a people’s heritage doesn’t appear a good approach.

Culture is the distinctive mark which sets off mankind from the rest of the animal kingdom. Furthermore, it can be seen as, “All that one learns to do as a member of his society, including all the knowledge, common understanding and expectations that the people of a group share and that their children learn”.<sup>102</sup> Amesi indigenous socio-cultural engagements has undergone a tumultuous reorganization, starting from the colonial period. Childbirth, marriage, funeral and recreational ceremonies, have taken different dimensions, in the face of alien influences. One is forced to wonder where the town is heading to, under these circumstances.

Take the example of a poor household that is bereaved nowadays. Its lamentations and bewails would have much to do with the difficulty and hopelessness of exposing them towards entertaining, providing for the food needs and hospitality of the numerous mourners and well wishers, than for the heart-rending feeling of loss of their cherished one. It is even fashionable nowadays for the bereaved to collect loan or sell some valuables or landed properties, just to withstand this sapping ordeal. Sympathizers troop in and out, weeping more than the bereaved. It is simply a ‘hell let loose’. Once the last shovel of sand is placed on the tomb of the dead. A day light struggle and scramble for practically everything consumable results. This is foolishness and exploitation at their best. Food items are even packaged, hidden, and smuggled away by ‘mourners’ for later consumption with their

families at home. One tried to consume in consonance with how long he cried for the individual that died, or in relation to how much money he is to hand over to the bereaved. Needless relating the atrocities of the Umu-ada group. This is simply madness.

Even if these acts has any thing to do with the indigenous custom, one feels that such a way of life which cannot constructively help anyone, if not purged, should be completely abolished.

Amesi is blessed with abundant educated and wise individuals. The town's numerical smallness can be harnessed towards its full advantage and development. A lot is therefore being expected from the numerous educated and traditional elites in this direction.

Truthfully, education is an instrument of raising society to a higher moral level, but can Amesi stubbornly say so in its own case? Almost every single family in the town can boast of even more than two averagely educated individuals.

If this is so then, one is bound to wonder why the town's developmental speed is moribund. Modern education should be oriented towards bolstering and underpinning the framework of the best and the most genuine element in the tradition of the town. Amesi common folks are in dire need of the assistance of these people more advanced and experienced in the skills necessary for progress in the modern world and for escape from the drab world of illiteracy, ignorance, egocentrism, superstition and squalid existence into the brave new world of better living

conditions, coo-operation and a higher standard of moral and spiritual well-being.

Amesi is lucky at this time to have a visionary and purposeful Igwe and A.I.U. executives, who constantly draw from the abundance of the past, mixes with the present, in readiness for the future.

No leader can ever satisfy all her subjects, but those that hold the mantle in Amesi, should never forget that it is a two-way street; respect and loyalty, on the one side, balanced by service and obligation, on the other.

Consequently, the legitimacy and credibility of any system of leadership are not guaranteed by such a claim to an abstract title alone; what matters above all else are the character of the purpose and the richness of the visions, to the realization of which the leadership has committed itself as a dedicated vanguard.

The traditional egalitarian system of decision-making should synthesize with modern constitutionalism to produce a lively and productive whole. Echoes of a fast coming evolutionary Amesi constitution undoubtedly would spring lots and lots surprises. To talk about the proposed rotation of the chieftaincy in Amesi (With reference to the town's constitution waiting for adoption), is only a tip of the iceberg.

# CHAPTER

## Eight

### **THE RACE FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

#### **8.1 *Amesi Improvement Union***

**T**he urge to develop Amesi has been in the minds of Amesians, starting from when the town started. Community related exemplary works and achievements of the town's numerous ancestors are today milestones in the people's history, which defy the vicissitudinous night and day.

Nonetheless, efforts towards concretizing the town's machinery of progress started materializing during the colonial period. As should be noticed, the advent and stabilization of Christianity in Igbo land, later brought in her needed additives of church meeting and organizations, which helped to indoctrinate members all the more. This was witnessed more in the big cities and towns. It was not hard then, for the different indigenes of the various towns, residentially based in these various cities, to borrow a leaf in this direction, when they embarked upon the formation of town-based improvement union. Moreover, such other reasons like, the need for companionship, social security, attraction of amenities into the home town and the

preservance of culture and unity, all added up to pull together these urban dwellers.

Available information has it that Amesi started settling at Onitsha as from 1920. They were mainly engaged in numerous menial jobs like tailoring, carpentry, load carrying, driving etc. temporarily though, just to raise enough capital towards starting more lucrative commercial ventures. Amongst them includes – Marius Umeh, Fredrich Umegesi, Paulinus Ezenduka, Christopher Odimegwu, Daniel Mba, Peter Dim, Samuel Okpalanyia, Jeremiah Ezeanyanaso, Obed Chibuzor etc. (All of blessed memory).

The decimating influence of the 1920s, culminated in the general inoculation of the 1930s, and the resultant death saga witnessed during that period. Indigenes of Amesi and nearby towns resident abroad, were not left out. Amesi based at Onitsha, came together, and resolved to contribute a compulsory levy of £1.00 each, towards helping the families of the deceased members. Mr. Obed Chibuzor acted as the clerk, but later Samuel Okpalanyia took over from him. The fund collected was even used towards helping the Onitsha-based Achina indigenes affected by this incident.

What remained however, as the balance from the fund, was used in starting up an inaugural meeting of Amesi in 1936 in Mr. Fredric Umeh's house. With Marius Umeh and Obed Chibuzor as chairman and secretary respectively. The association of Amesi, Onitsha branch, by 1943 had grown so strong as to exert

strong influence on issues at home. A group made up by representatives of the four villages of Amesi was later formed, under the leadership of Mr. Marius Umeh, with a view aimed towards the formation of a full-fledged association that would embrace Amesians at home and abroad. After summoning the towns two market committee of Afo and Eke in 1944 successfully, what is today known as the Amesi improvement union was born. It should be remarked that the processes leading to the formation of this union wasn't as smooth as it has appeared in black and white.

Until the present moment, with the association under the mantle of Mr. P. Ezeuchegbu (chairman), and chief E. Ezenwegbu (secretary), numerous sons of the town have given in their bests, in seeing that Amesi marches on towards joining the comity of other progressive towns.

Amesi improvement union, has to its advantage, many achievements, which may be too numerous as to be contained in this piece. It successfully laid a water pipe line from Obizi stream (Uga) to Amesi, aimed towards solving the perennial water problem affecting the town. Though this project did not live long to tell its tale, plans appear to have reached advanced stages in relation to its resuscitation. Christ the Redeemer's College Amesi, starting from its foundation till it was handed over to the government authorities, was a bona fide achievement of A.I.U. Besides, that the town is presently enjoying electricity, emanates totally from the arch-determination of the A.I.U; needless talking about the union's mature

captainship, that led to the smooth chieftaincy selection in the town.

Moreover, land has been acquired for the establishment of a community hall for the town and a health center. The union also embarks upon roads maintenance usually, while imposing a useful ban on the unnecessary exploitation of existing forests in the town. This is aimed towards environmental protection, and also towards evolving a properly planned town in the near future.

The A.I.U. has never relented in its efforts aimed at the town's development and progress, hence its constant arousing of leadership awareness in the town's youth and women. As a step further in this direction, the A.I.U women branch is no more a plan, but a reality in the town's affairs.

The A.I.U. has also set up a committee for the systematic development and preplanning of the town's Afo market square. The Amesi community bank scheme which is another ambitious project which the A.I.U. has initiated, in seeing that the indigenes of the town, financially are not left out.

Be that as it may, one may be forced to remark that Amesians should tread softly, wisely and truthfully, though dynamically in all dealings concerning this bank project, especially now that the Nigerian society is bedeviled with squandermania, dog eat dog morality, and dupery.

All in all, the A.I.U. starting from its humble beginnings, to this present time, is a veritable edifice even in the face of a labyrinth of odds.



**INFORMANT** – Chief B. Obiako 28 June, 1991.

### **8.2 The Age Grades: A New Dimension**

Reintroducing this topic at this stage of tracing the Amesi past is never an unforeseen repetition. This is infact so simply because of a dire need to gather all the scattered piece of the town's transitional march, and shower them into limelight.

Amesi is currently blessed with ten Age groups: Egboteghi, Mbakweluike, Ogba jiligwe, Oputaoka, Aladimma, Okikadigboo, Ifeadijo, Oganiru, Ifedioranma and Ojurumbuo, the above listed are not the only age-groups in the town, but the ones that are still lively.

According to Maraihe Emenike.;

*“In the Pre-colonial times, Amesi had Age-groups like Ada, Oganikpa, Agbajji, Ajanku, Mbakwelike, Oputaoka, and Ogbajiligwe. The members of Ajanku and Ogbajiligwe age sects were notable famous warriors and heroes, who excelled in executing warfares”.<sup>103</sup>*

There is however lots of disparity between the activities of age groups in pre-colonial Amesi, and what obtains today. Almost the same maxim is still being adopted in the selection of members. Both women and men are grouped according to their parity; those in each group must either be people of the same age or with maximum of three years gap. Circumstances have indeed changed the work of the age groups from largely seeing to external and internal security arrangements, to the present day constructive community

development and welfarism. Simply put, “They are (now) a prop to buttress the society, a fountain to replenish it with new life materially and socially, a beacon of hope and encouragement in times of need, a force to enrich it with practical and progressive ideals and a link between the old and the new (Amesi) generations”.<sup>104</sup>

It is significant to remark that most of the present age groups in the town metamorphosed from what appeared like a mere family association in either a village or two.

Ifeadigo age group as one of the agents of convivial and socializing dynamism in the town, was inaugurated in 1948. As their name depicts, they set out in full force to attract and really prove that ‘light’ has come to Amesi. Apart from setting up different machineries towards stimulating unadulterated unity in the town, they came all out to promote and uphold Amesi’s past heritage for the advantage of posterity. In the words of Chief Dennis Ezeliora, “Ifeadigo age group practically set various standards, which other groups copied”.<sup>105</sup> In order to harness their activities smoothly, they set up four different but homogenous executive parliaments in-charge of the four villages of the town. Apart from their various achievements, available information reveal that the age group did not disappoint Amesians during the tedious process of setting up the Christ Redeemer’s College.

Though Amesi thrived under the caress of Ifeadigo age grade, the Oganiru group unquestionably towed the same line in drawing the

town along the corridors of development. Running like a trickle or water by 1960, the Oganiru age group was finally launched into prominence in 1962, with the formal amalgamation of their members from the different villages of Umuocha and Obinato. Before long, the group became strong as to start granting financial loans to its members. In the words of Mr. Patrick Ezeuchegbu,

*Oganiru Age Group did not die with the civil war. Instead, it was greatly reviewed, revised and revitalized after the war, when all the four villages of Amesi were inculcated into its membership base, before the end of 1971. A general record of dead members was taken, and befitting funeral accorded them on town level".<sup>106</sup>*

Acting in line with the needs of Amesi community, Oganiru Age Group wisely provided cassava grating and palm cracking machines in the early 1970's. However, largely due to poor management, these two machines stayed not long to recount their stay in Amesi. Hence they were sold off. Amongst other achievements that cannot be easily overlooked were – a vehicle gift to their member, the Obi Akalabo I of Amesi, a three thousand naira worth of five classroom blockhouse, erected at Christ the Redeemer's Collage Amesi, the revival of the famed Egede dance, and numerous donations to the A.I.U. and the different religious institutions in the town towards the accomplishment of versatile projects.

The annals of the Ifedioranma age group Amesi, is pregnant with achievements. Infact, their

progress can in all respects qualify to that of the Oganiru group. As the instructive adage requesting an ignorant blacksmith who is not versed on the ways of fashioning an iron gong to learn from the kites' tail, by the same token, the youngest age group in Amesi – (*O juru Mbubo*), shouldn't hesitate to copy from the older ones.

Having been inaugurated, they should aspire towards meeting up to the expectations of the community, while divorcing all traces of Youthful exuberance, unnecessary rancor and bitterness. This is their time and turn.

### **8.3 Amesi Co-Operative Union**

Co-operative ventures and organizations have for long occupied the attention of Amesians since the end of the civil war, all aimed towards survival and progress. This search for individual and community advancement have led the citizens in experimenting various commercial ventures and departments. Different groups of Amesians have at various times, formed several commercial enterprises, companies and corporations.

Nevertheless, a notable advancement was made in the town, when in the dying months of 1966, specifically on December 26<sup>th</sup>, some Amesians concluded concrete arrangements in relation to the formal establishment of a co-operative society in the town. The need and the idea has survived for long, but these indigenes stubbornly took the bull by the horn, and so on February 27<sup>th</sup>, 1967, Amesi co-operative society

was inaugurated, in order to serve its expected purposes.

Co-operative societies are the most effective means by which socio-economic development is made possible in the rural areas, an avenue for distributing scarce commodities to a rural population. Groups and individual co-operators raise specified capitals for individual and group projects, and this promotes social cohesion amongst the members. As a wholesale and retailing forum, the Amesi co-operative society usually stocks many house need essentials, for sale to the towns folk at relatively reduced prices, in comparison with the open market rate.

The initial attempts variously applied towards convincing the populace on the need and advantages inherent from such a society, all hit the rocks. The glorious founding members intensified campaigns and visible progress of the society later paid off. According to the society's secretary, "... At first, the foundation members were only twenty-eight, while today, the membership number is about six hundred".<sup>107</sup>

In accordance with its establishment motive, one has to qualify exclusively as an indigene. The executive members of this society are undertaking a herculean task in seeing that the organization is strengthened. With the availability of capital and necessary education on co-operative principles and advantages, tomorrow would be brighter throughout the town, in relation to the provision of the people's consumption needs.

Co-operative approaches should also be diverted to other enterprises non existent at present in the town. At this juncture, one cannot overcome the urge to comment about the ready-to-be born Amesi Community Bank project.

Though a right step in the correct direction, Amesians should be cautious of wolves in sheep's skin.

The quality of life of an ordinary Amesian would be greatly improved, when adequate provision is made for the provision of common needs at cheap rate. The town would thence-forth wallow in development, when capitals are pulled together, and self help projects radicalize and revolutionize progress in Amesi.

Infact, one cannot at this stage over look the indefatigable strides of the Akalabo Women Social Club, and the gradual growth of the Akalabo training institute Amesi. These practical facts, have gone a long way in proving the efficiency of the Amesi woman in general community development.

# CHAPTER

## Nine

### **PLANNED INSTITUTIONALIZED UNITY**

#### **9.1 *Intra-Social/Cultural Evolutions***

**H**istory has factually proved that any cataclysmic incident never goes without some immediate, later and remote effects, on the human and his environment. Time may very well affect the development and materialization of an effect.

Having said that, it is a proved fact that the Nigerian civil war came and went with certain seismic force. Leaving on its trail, wholesome destruction of lives and properties. Igboland really managed to withstand those agonizing three years. Significant enough, that imbroglio, taught the Igbo among other things, that home is home. Needless recounting the unforgettable heart breaking Northern Nigeria pogrom on the Igbo, the merciless bombing runs of the enemy pilots on all that moved in Igbo territory, and the unbelievable day light property-robbery saga tagged 'abandoned property issue'.

All these and many more, taught Amesians as a reasonable part of Igboland, that much truth lies in the adage which states that the enjoyment and practice of brotherhood lay in the constant physical contacts with one another. Consequently,

upon the end of the war, Amesi saw the crystal need to tabulate, modify and synthesize her unity.

Amesi improvement union, acting in accordance with the expectations and dictates of the people, made home – coming compulsory to every Amesi indigene living anywhere, once every three years. This was planned in such a way as to suite the itinery of most indigenes, hence the December Christmas holiday period was chosen. Different meetings were often staged, where important issues and deliberations were looked at.

Moreover, the A.I.U. in trying to immortalize the fatherhood of Akalabo, and in keeping alive some customary resorts of the town's ancestors, marked the 27<sup>th</sup> day of December as the AKALABO DAY. Though an annual festival, its magic and weight is more felt internally and externally, during the town's mass return year. As an annual festival, the unity binding all Amesians is protected and assured under its umbrella.

A typical Akalabo day held during a return-year period, is better witnessed than imagined. Activities ranging from group meetings, traditional dances, masquerade displays, wrestling matches, soccer engagements, held during such period, always climaxed with the almighty Akalabo herebal displays. The Obi Akalabo's Ofalla festival, though unique, can once in a while bring a minor date adjustment.

All the above-mentioned festivities, are as social as they are traditional, and as unifying as they are educative. The town has a litany of dances, masquerades and traditional



performances that often blessed the mass-return period. Can one talk only about the lyrical crescendo of the famous Egedege music or the added cacophony of the dignifying Igba-Eze Music? Even then, what of the thrilling Igba-mmonwu displays, and the guttural howls of the many elderly masquerades?

Perharps, the greatest event that has publicized Akalabo festival to even beyond the boundaries of Igboland, is the herbal display. The act in its entirety, tries to present Amesi past and present to the world. It is not only a clearer reflection of what the town has been known with, but also a forum for medico-herbal advertisement. Some of these displays which shatter the borders of impossibility include breaking of palm kernel with an egg, climbing into the sky with a rope, collecting and holding water with a basket, etc.

These various avenues of intra-social communications have planted viable seeds of unity, where there was discord.



Otikpo Catholic Church Completed in 1929.  
One of the earliest visible signs of European  
Colonialism in Amesi and her surroundings.

## **9.2 Summary - Conclusion**

From the study, it has been shown that Amesi historically, has common origin, through *Eshi* or *Eri* (Ozo Akalabo): The migration of *Eshi* from his original home at Nri, was as a result of many factors; the most important being-land scarcity, petty quarrels etc. it was the need to solve this problem that led to the eventual settlement at Amesi present environment. It is however indisputable that Amesi harbours an aged artery of communication and affinity with Oraeri, Akpo and Achina towns. Moreover, constant threat of war from larger and stronger neighbours, unified Amesi, Akpo and Achina towns, into an effective military triple alliance (Onu Ogunato). With settlement over, some Amesi indigenes from Ubaha village, due to some unidentified reasons, left the town, and settled in Arondizuogu, under the name of *Ndi Ejezie*.

There existed in pre-colonial Amesi various instruments that promoted social cohesion, common religious beliefs and practices, and political stability. In her essential fluidity, a noted orator could influence debate, while a warrior of proven courage and wisdom would have a leading role in warfare. This exceptional accordance of status was however temporal. Elders, titledmen and chief priests, manipulated the activities of the town, strictly based on *Omenani* (tradition).

The people's religious faculty was and is continuously being dominated by the needs and directives of *Chi-ukwu* (Supreme God), of course through his messengers. In Amesi, the living, the dead and the unborn, form part of a continuum.

Economic mobility in pre-colonial Amesi, helped the people towards keeping body and soul together. Labour was smoothly organized, while different farming methods were adopted towards obtaining bountiful harvest. There existed a great deal of internal healthy competition amongst the people, which on the whole put the town on the progressive path. In the field of traditional medicine, Amesi's professionalism and superiority was acclaimed far and near.

Scarcity of land really proved a serious endemic problem, although diversionary avenues were later stimulated – trade and industrial endeavours – to the full advantage of the indigenes. It does appear that the works of Amesi women in pottery specialists were determined mostly by excellence and utility, though in execution they did not ignore proportion,

originality and beauty. Limited patronage for decorative objects must have to some extent circumscribed their economic horizon.

Pre-colonial Amesi, through various parlances, strengthened and tightened her relationship with near and far people. Undefined relationships were at various times settled and solved through ordinary hostilities, and on rare cases war.

Nonetheless, the British invaders and imperialists, revolutionaized Amesi traditional society after their advent. The democratic and egalitarian institutions of the town were replaced with the alien warrant Chief autocracy, while Christianity, western education and other aspects of foreign socialization, replaced the indigenous fabrics. In reality, the gains of colonialism and Christianization in Amesi and environs, appear checked.

The town participated actively in all endeavours warranting the granting of independence to the generality of the country, hence they like other citizens, on October 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960's eve, went haywire with celebrations. Scarcely did Nigerians know that this little freedom will intoxicatingly land them into a thirty-months macabre war. From the on start, Amesi saw survival as an unnegotiable task, and instantly worked towards it. As traffics of time are simply troubled marches through history, the story of Amesi during and after the war is from all angles thrasonical.

Amidst seemingly insoluble odds, the town wobbled into the '70s' a determined people. The government policy of instituting centralized political institutions, a new wine in all its contents, was however consumed with meticulous caution. This drama, starring peaceful Amesians in action, was generally marvelous; to the admiration and commendation of the state government and lest one forgets, to the added jealousy of the many surrounding communities.

Under the atmosphere of peace, the town pursued development, under the captainship of the A.I.U. The age groups, the Amesi Co-operative Union, and even the women, were not left out in the modernization and modification.

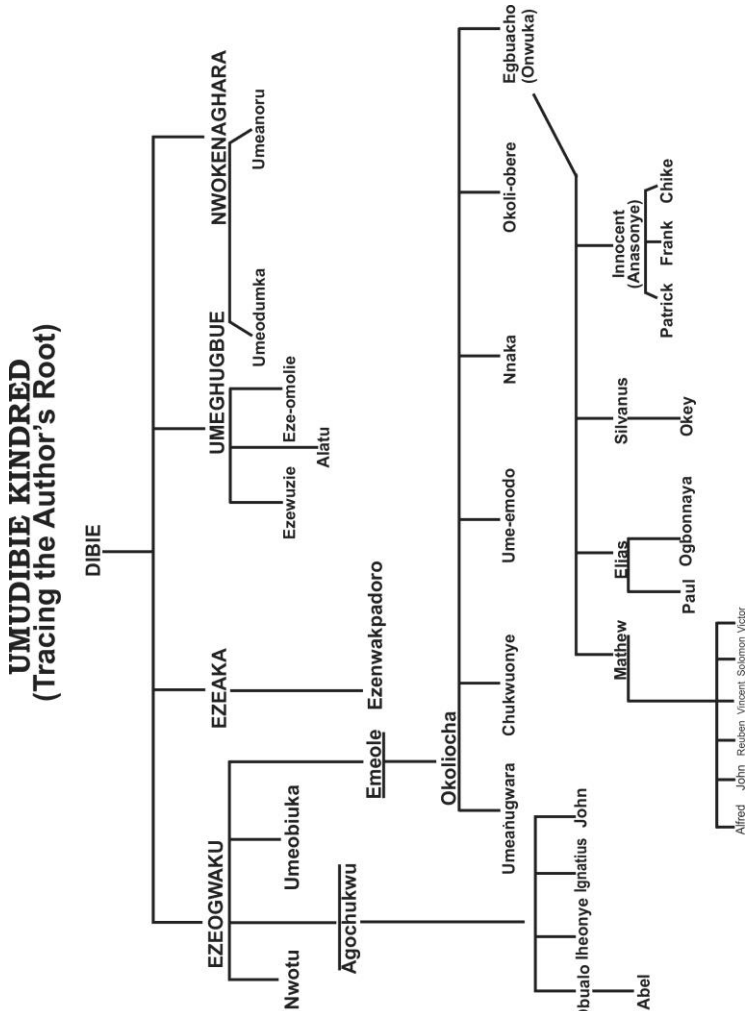
Nevertheless, in introducing modernity, it should be noted that peace, cultural plenitude and traditional aesthetics were never kept in vista.

### **NAMES OF INFORMANTS/DATE OF INTERVIEW**

<b>S/N</b>	<b>NAMES</b>	<b>TOWN/VILLAGE</b>	<b>DATE</b>
1.	Igwe E. Umuononankume	Amesi (Obinato)	29/7/86
2.	Maraihie Emenike	“ “	“
3.	Obidigbo, Ezeagwu	“ (Amuwo)	30/7/86
4.	Ume Nduka, Umueaniukwu	Amesi	28/7/86
5.	Ezeobioha, Ezeabasili	Amesi	5/8/86
6.	Ezeuchegbu, Ezeaku	“	6/8/86
7.	Sylvanus, Egbunacho	Amesi (Amuwo)	10/8/86
8.	Mrs. J. Egbuacho	Amesi “	15/8/86
9.	Edward, Ezenkwele	Uga (Umueze)	20/8/85
10.	Umechukwu, Umenwaliri	Amesi (Obinato)	12/8/86
11.	Ezeanyim Thomas	Achina	13/8/86
12.	Ezenduka, Ekeruike	(Umuezeiyi	14/8/86
13.	O. Ezeaka	Umuchu,	12/8/86
14.	I.C.K. Anadi	Oraeri	10/8/86
15.	Mrs. B. Orioma	Amesi (Amuwo)	15/12/68
16.	Mrs. Ezenduji M.	“ “	18/12/86
17.	Moneke John	Akokwa (Akwu)	16/12/86

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18.	Akamikpu Okereue	Amesi	(Ubaha)	10/11/86
19.	Elebeke, Ezeagwu	Amesi		29/7/86
20.	Ezenduka, Edward	Amesi	(Ubaha)	16/12/86
21.	Festus O. Okpalaeké	Amesi		12/13/87
22.	Patrick, Ezeuchegbu	Amesi		10/8/88
23.	Dennis, Ezeliora	Amesi		12/12/88
24.	Philip, Onwuka	"		6/6/86
25.	Jacob, Umechukwu	Amesi	(Amuwo)	7/6/86
26.	Jeremiah, Ezeanyanaso	"	"	10/6/86
27.	Innocent A. Ezeonwuka	Amesi	(Amuwo)	10/7/91
28.	Ben. Obiakor	Amesi		28/6/91
29.	Christopher Ezeonyebuchi	Amesi	(Amuwo)	12/5/87



- ❖ Nwotu first married Ereanma, died, then Agochukwu took over traditionally
- ❖ Okoli - Ocha married Uzo-alua from Nkpologwu
- ❖ Okoli - Obere married Ahia - Nwka, died, then Onwuka (Egbuacho) took over His first wife was Adaume.

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