

COLONIAL REORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN AFRICA: PERSPECTIVES FROM MBANO IGBOLAND, SOUTHEAST NIGERIA, 1906 TO 1960

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Abstract

Colonial incursion into Africa and indeed Igboland brought with it numerous implications on the political, social, and economic relations of the people. In most parts, it imposed new names and loyalties on the society. The original political cum economic structures were reorganized. The introduction of the Western systems challenged and in fact, disrupted the free flow of relations between people and their communities. Western education and the introduction of new infrastructure caused noticeable shifts in the nature and dynamics of relations extant among the people. Some original names of communities were changed or anglicized or adjusted with controversies and or otherwise. These changes had divergent implications on the nature of relations prevalent in most communities. The old Mbasaa, made up of seven clans was re-organized into different communities and political alignments which ‘Mbano’ is one of the new creations that resulted from colonial reorganisations. This paper discusses the impact of colonial reorganisations on Mbano society with regards to aspects of relations between the people and their proximate neighbours. It adopts the orthodox historical method of narrative and analyses. It adopts the qualitative method of writing history. Primary and secondary sources were used in the study, however, majority of the sources were from the primary sources.

Keywords: Colonialism, Reorganisation, Community Relations, Southeast

Introduction

The British conquest and occupation of Africa affected relations in many Communities which included the then Mbasaa Clan (now Mbano), an integral part of what is now Nigeria and Igboland was obviously not achieved in a day. It followed a gradual albeit a forceful process. The earliest attempt at British penetration into the Igbo hinterland was in 1887, with the banishment of king Jaja of Opobo; the subsequent war against Nana and the Ishekiri in 1894; the Akasa Raid by the Brass people and the punitive expedition against them in 1895; the Major Leonard journey to Bende; the Arochukwu Expedition and the destruction of the “Long Juju” in 1901-02; the Onitsha Expedition under Colonel Morehouse; the killing of Dr. Stewart in Ahiara in 1904-05 and subsequent Ahiara Expedition of 1905-1906,¹ brought the British closer to the Mbasaa and the area now known as Mbano and its neighbours. To state the obvious, the establishment of British station at Onu Oyibo near Umuduru marked the official occupation of what was then called Mbasaa clan up to 1906. British incursion into the area brought enormous challenges on the nature of relations between the people/communities and their socio-economic and political systems. This paper

¹ A.E. Afigbo, (ed.), Historical Events List of Local, Regional and National Significance, Enugu: Government Printer, 1973, p. 3.

attempts to show how British colonial rule, administrative re-organisation and infrastructural development affected people's lives and the contours and dynamics of group relations among the Mbanjo people and their proximate neighbours in the years 1906 to 1960.

Mbanjo, the fulcrum of this study is located in Imo state. As a community in Old Okigwe zone it shares boundaries with communities in Orlu, and Owerri that constitute the three Geo-political Zones of the state. Mbanjo occupies the center of Imo state, the Igbo heart land. The area embraces two local governments namely; Isiala Mbanjo and Ehime Mbanjo respectively. Geographically, Mbanjo occupies an expanse of land of more than 205.30 kilometers. It is located approximately between Latitude 5 and 7°N, of the equator and longitude 7 and 8°N of the Greenwich Meridian. The people are predominantly farmers. They are known for the production of palm wine, (Mmanya Ngwo from the Rafia tree and in small quantity, Mmanya Nkwu), Palm oil, kernel, Cassava, yam, three leaved yam- *una*, cocoyam, local plantain and so on. The people also rear live stocks such as, goat, dogs, fowl, etc, which provided them with livelihood. Agriculture in the area fluctuates between subsistence and commercial levels. Besides, Mbanjo people have been adherents to Igbo traditional religion or ancestral worship until Christianity had a way on the people. As part of Igbo society, their belief system tallies with those of the Igbo in general. That is, the belief and respect for deities and pantheon of gods. The name Mbanjo like Nigeria is a colonial creation. The area was originally known as "MBASAA". Before the British colonial rule and the consequent boundary creation, it comprised, Ehime, Osu, Ugiri and Mbama, and three other clans namely; Isu, Agbaja and Obowo.

Historically, the name Mbanjo, was coined during the British administration of Umuduru Native Court created in 1908, when it was decided that a separate Native Court be established for the other clans such as Obowo, Onicha Uboma, Isu, Agbaja and their neighbours, which were hitherto served by the same Umuduru Native Court. After the exclusion of these towns, from Umuduru Native Court Jurisdiction in the 1920s, the Court had only four clans to serve Viz, Osu, Ehime, Ugiri and Mbama. Thus, during the next sitting of the Court at Umuduru, the name Mbanjo, meaning-four Clans, naturally emerged and began to be commonly employed by the warrant chiefs in reference to be court's Jurisdiction. Mbanjo had appeared extensively in British Colonial records before it was recognized as Mbanjo Federated Native Authority in 1945. From available records, Mbanjo was carved out for easy administration by the British and most probably, for the fact that the people are closely related in history. The work is structured into six segments starting with the introduction. This is followed by threshold of British colonial conquest and occupation of Mbasaa, British administrative re-organisation and infrastructural developments, British administrative infrastructural development and community relations, road transportation and inter-community relations and then the conclusion. This structural arrangement provides the reader with easy understanding of the work and for proper organisation of the study.

Threshold of British Colonial Conquest and Occupation of Mbasaa

By the early 1900s, the British had penetrated, conquered, occupied and set up their administrative systems in Igboland. It could arguably be stated that the occupation process began in 1885, when the Oil Rivers Protectorate was proclaimed by the British.

The ultimate aim of the colonizing power was to extend their political sway to the rich agricultural and palm producing region of the hinterland occupied mainly by the Igbo.² Mbano and its neighbours are indeed an integral part of this area. Consequently, in 1891, a general instruction issued by the British Foreign Office (BFO), warned Major (later Sir) Claude Macdonald, the first British High Commissioner and Consul-General to the Oil Rivers (later Niger Coast) Protectorate, of the dangers of interference with the people's government. Macdonald was faced with acute shortage of personnel and funds with which to carry out his assignment. As a result, in February 1892, he established the High Court of Native Council of Old Calabar (HCNC), which also was projected to act as the Court of Appeal for a number of minor courts that were in operation in the coastal area of the Cross River region. The establishment of courts in parts of Igboland, no doubt formed the basis for British administration in communities in Igboland. R.I. Ozigbo writes that the military operations by which the Eastern Nigerian hinterland was opened up to British commerce began in earnest in 1895- the year Joseph Chamberlain became British Colonial Secretary with like-minded Lord Salisbury as the Foreign Secretary. They championed a forward policy with Ralph Moor, the High Commissioner at Calabar avidly pursued during his consulship, 1896-1903.³

It would be recalled that British agents had signed treaties of protection with some Igbo communities. However, it does appear that the treaties failed to produce the much needed breakdown and overthrow of the local authorities. The British resorted to the use of complete military force in achieving the conquest of Igboland. Ozigbo thinks that the "treaties of protection" through which British consular agents sought to overthrow the authority and independence of some Igbo communities were largely farcical.⁴ Therefore, for the British, a territory was regarded as a "protectorate" with the assumption that its inhabitants placed their sovereignty in their hands. This had formed largely the legal thrust of the treaties. The exposure of the hypocritical nature of the so called treaties of protection, and following refusal by the Igbo to be so protected, Britain adopted the paradoxical policy of according protection by force of arms. As the prevailing tendencies appeared, the easiest and most economic way of doing so became their only concern. In the end, the British settled for war as the quickest and surest way of subduing the Igbo.⁵ The prime targets of the British were evidentially, the Aro.

The British believed the Aro ruled the Igbo interior and had been the master-minds of every strong opposition to British efforts into the interior. Hence, they planned the expedition which they thought would be "a war to end all wars" in Igboland and Ibibioland.⁶ The Aro Expedition arguably was aimed at disarming the natives. Consequently, by 1900, as S.N. Nwabara contended, "the logistics of the war against

²H.U. B. Kaghala, "Local Government at Oratta: 1950-1960." M. A. Dissertation, Department of History, U. N.N. 1981, p.37.

³Ikenga, R.I. Ozigboh, *A History of Igboland in the 20th Century*, Enugu: Snap Press Ltd., 1999, pp.34-35

⁴Ozigboh, p. 33

⁵Ozigboh, p.33.

⁶S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland: A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960*, London: 1977, p. 144

the Aro have been worked out. The Aro Expedition was the handwork of Sir Ralph Moor, who had a firm belief in the efficacy of military expeditions".⁷ The Expedition took off in November 1901 and lasted till March 1902. The Expedition as it were, secured most of Igboland for the British.⁸ However, all parts of Igboland, especially our area of study, did not fall to the British in 1902. It took the Ahiara Expedition of 1904-05 to bring Mbasaa and its neighbours under British colonial rule. In fact, it seems the years 1900 to 1911 or even 1914 marked the pinnacle of British conquest and occupation of almost all parts of Igboland. Available evidence shows that, to their chagrin, the British,

discovered that one round of conquest was not enough to keep most Igbo communities submissive to the new colonial order. Many punitive campaigns had to be continued right till the end of the First World War. There were the military operation against Uli and Umuneoha (July 1903); the Bende-Onitsha Expedition (1905-1906), the Udi District Patrol (November 1909); the Owerri-Bend-Okigwe Operation (August 1911) and the Orlu Patrol which eventually touched on Okigwe, Owerri and Onitsha districts.⁹

The British visited Mbasaa (Mbano) in 1905, during a punitive expedition against Ahiara in present day Mbaise. The expedition was adjudged to be necessary as a result of the killing at Obizi in 1905 of Dr. Stewart, who was posted to the protectorate of southern Nigeria. In their search for Ahiara, the British Commander, Captain Fox, and four sections of the Bende-Onitsha Hinterland Expedition, visited Umunumo on December 8, 1905.¹⁰ In 1906, the British set up a station at Onu Oyibo, near Umuduru where the first British political official, the then Commissioner of Umuduru, A.E. Healthcole, resided.¹¹ The presence of the District Officer (DO) symbolised the British occupation of the area, though not without pockets of opposition and resistance. Following rumours that the British had entered the area in search of Dr. Stewart, the people of Mbano were afraid and villages had organised themselves and took up arms to resist the invaders. The result of their resistance struggle between machetes, logs of wood and "charm" as against the maxim guns is better imagined than explained. According to Johnson Ezeji, in Nsu area, the people lined up the roads in companies and marched against the British. In Ugiri area, the people for the most part reportedly ran into the bush without giving any strong resistance. However, Chief Ihemeje of Agbaja was said to have organised his people and fought the British at Ikpa Agbaja later Umuduru.¹² The result of the match is again, our guess!

⁷For these see, S.N. Nwabara, *Iboland; A Century of Contact with Britain, 1860-1960*, London: 1977, J. C. Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition, 1885-1906*, London: 1966, T.N. Tamuno, *The Evolution of the Nigeria State, 1898-1914*, London: 1972, A.E Afigbo, "The Aro Expedition: An Episode in the British Occupation of Igboland" . *Odu New Series No. 7*, 1972.

⁸I.R. Ozigboh, *A History of Igboland...*, pp.35-36

⁹ PRO, CO520/31 "Onitsha Hinterland Patrol" June, 190 Co 520/03, "Orlu Patrol" May, 1911, in Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland...*, pp.36-37

¹⁰ Nwabara, *Iboland...*p.145

¹¹ S.N. Egerue, "Mbano Under Warrant Chiefs", B.A Project, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N 1984, p.9

¹² Johnson Ezeji, *Sketch History of Mbano Communal Life*, Ehime: 1924, p.2

Table 1: British expeditions that lead to the conquest and occupation of Mbasaa and its neighbours

S/N	List of expeditions	Year
1.	Ahiara Edition	1904/1905
2.	Bende Onitsha hinterland expedition	1905/1906
3.	Umunumo patrol	1905
4.	Mbaise –Ehime Expedition	1906
5.	Ikpa-Agbaja-Umuduru expedition	1906
6.	Owerri –Bende Okigwe expedition	1911

The subjugation of Ehime near Mbaise, according to Christopher Ajaegbu, took two phases. The first phase was in 1906, when British troops came to Agbaja and declared war on the people. But in the face of sophisticated modern weapons, the people of Agbaja gave up the struggle. As P.A Talbot wrote, “in April a military post was stationed at Umuduru and the pacification of the surrounding territory began.”¹³ This view was corroborated by Ajaegbu thus, a military post was consequently set up at Ikpa-Agbaja-Umuduru in order to consolidate British control of the area.¹⁴

The second phase of the subjugation came later when as John Ezeji put it, the Royal Artillery under the command of Douglas arrived at Dikenafai from Orlu, and moved to Nwalolo in Umueze I. From here the troops linked up with those already stationed at Ikpa-Agbaja and declared war on Umueze people.¹⁵ Umueze courageously resisted them, and according to Ogu Onyirimba, pursued them towards Eziamma-Mbaise and Ihiteafoukwu. Following the initial success, the Okwenaduru composed and sang a popular song thus “*Ekwereazu melaanu nwa bekee, anyi emelala nke anyi*” (Ekwereazu chase away the Whiteman, we have chased away those in our place). But on their second visit, the British defeated Umueze II and erected their symbol of authority, the British flag, to declare the place a British territory. The iron rod used to hoist the British flag was removed in 2004, when the Afor Oru road which passed through Orié Owerre market was tarred.¹⁶ However, with the use of the maxim guns, one would expect Umueze II like Agbaja to be utterly humiliated. From Umueze II, British troops moved inland to Umunakanu, Umuezeala and other villages. Aware of the fate of their brothers and neighbours, these villages surrendered to the British without a fight. The news of the British humiliation of Ehime, Etiti, and Agbaja close to their Mbaise neighbours spread into other areas. The British marched without restriction into Ugiri area. The Ugiri group of towns and their Inyishi, Amaimo-Ikeduru, Umudim and Atta

¹³ . P.A. Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeria Vol. I*, London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1967, p.274

¹⁴ Christopher Ajaegbu, interview cited in J. Ogu, “War and Society in pre-Colonial Ehime Mbano” B.A Project, Department of History, U.N.N, 1977, p.5

¹⁵ John, Columba, “Some Aspects of Cultural and political History of Ehime up to the Colonial Period”, B A. Project Department of History, 1986, p.35.

¹⁶ Ogu Onyirimba, 76 years, retired teacher, interviewed at Umunkaro Umuduruegwéle Umueze II, Ehime Mbano, 23/8/2010

faced similar subjugation. For instance, C.T.C. Annals' intelligence Report on Ugiri clan noted that Oka people, like most Ugiri towns, drawing from their experience of what happened to other resisters like Ibeme, became afraid and simply surrendered their cap guns to the new government. The (British) camped at Ochasi, going down the slope of Nkwoda (Nkwo Mbaa) stream, around 1906 and Oka was used as a spring-board from where other recalcitrant towns like Inyishi were brought to submission.¹⁷ Pockets of resistance by Mbasaa and its neighbours were not enough for the people to avoid defeated by the British and hence brought under effective control.

Generally, after British conquest of Igboland and indeed Mbanda, the British made efforts to rule the people through what they thought to be their indigenous political organisation. They introduced the system of indirect rule which brought the Native Courts (NCs) into existence. Most individuals who were either loyal to the British Officers or who were believed to be 'chiefs' of their various communities were hand-picked and given government warrants. These warrants were given to those who had not opposed or resisted British penetration. The British tried to maintain peace as a basis for their administration. Thus, they set out to introduce some changes in the area. These changes, no doubt, affected and influenced the character and nature of relations between Mbanda and its neighbours. The British began with administrative re-organisation of the entire area which had enormous implications for the politico-economic and cultural relationship of the people.

British Administrative Re-organisation and Infrastructural Developments

Before colonial rule, Mbasaa and its neighbours conducted their political affairs in their various clans that constituted the then Mbasaa clan groups. It was during colonial rule that these groups were balkanised into different political units. The British superimposed their administrative system on the people through the native court system. A.E Afigbo observed that the British saw the establishment of Native Courts as the logical follow-up to the annexation of any group whether by treaty or by conquest.¹⁸ Consequently, a Native Court system was imposed on Igboland. However, British administrative officers and personnel were too few on the ground to administer the vast territories. It became necessary to utilise the services of indigenes in the new administration. The Supreme Court Proclamation Ordinance of 1900 (SCPO) and the Native Court and Native Councils Proclamation of 1903 (NCNCP) made provisions for Native Councils and Native Courts. Local agents were selected (often arbitrarily) to serve as members of Native Councils and Native Courts. Such members obtained official letters (warrants) from the High Commissioner or the Provincial Commissioner (after 1906), appointing them to their respective Native Councils and Native Courts. The recipients came to be known as Warrant Chiefs.¹⁹

¹⁷ C.T.C Annals, Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan, Okigwe Division, 1932, Ep. 9394 CSE 1/85/4850, p.7, N. A. E

¹⁸ A.E Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*, Nsukka: University Press Ltd, 1981, p. 315.

¹⁹ See M.C Okanyi, *The Role of Customary Courts in Nigeria*, Enugu: Snaap Publishers Ltd., 1984, G.C. Eze, "A Political History of Nsukka, 1900-1960," B.A. Project, Department of History, U. N.N., 1995, I.R.A Ozigbo, *A. History of Igboland...*, p.43

The warrant chiefs were the direct appointees of the colonial government. By implication, the administration of various Igbo communities which had been under the people came to be controlled by the Colonial Officers. The institution of the warrant chiefs answerable to the District Officers (DOs) and District Commissioners (DCs) saw most community leaders, village heads and clan heads replaced with these new Warrant Chiefs. The duties and functions of the warrant chiefs (WCs) were basically to assist the British in their administration of Igboland. According to Afigbo, The Native Courts comprised the traditional chiefs of the communities which fell within their jurisdiction. It was also a multi-purpose governmental institution in the sense that it exercised judicial, legislative and executive powers.²⁰

This system was not in tandem with the prevailing Igbo traditional political system, it differed significantly in its processes of selection, operation, application and supervision. In fact, it lacked legitimacy as the holders of the warrants were neither selected by the people, nor were the people consulted. They were arbitrarily selected and imposed on the people by the British Colonial Officials. What is more, the selection of the chiefs was not only problematic, but seemed a hard nut for the British officers to crack. This as it appeared, was because the real traditional or natural rulers were seemingly unwilling to come forward for appointment.

This new political unit differed significantly from the village-group which hitherto had been the highest administrative unit known to the people. Moreover, the traditional political institutions, as Elizabeth Isichei opined, “were designed to obtain maximum participation by all the people in decision making with due right to wisdom and experience.”²¹ However, F. Obi has suggested that “it was the imposing physical appearance of the so-called warrant chiefs that qualified and influenced choice of them over the natural rulers by the colonial rulers.”²² In fact, only few recognized traditional heads received warrants during the period, 1900-1929.

According to Afigbo, “under the warrant chief system, men saw people who were neither title holders, nor heads of the secret societies, nor of age grades, nor heads of distinguished professional groups of hunters, traders or smiths attain power simply because they enjoyed the confidence of the central government.”²³ This arbitrary appointment without consultation with the people “shook the old idea of political leadership based on gerontocracy, with most of the leaders being lineage heads.”²⁴ Following the insensitivity and naivety of the British colonial officers to the prevailing political structure in the area, they created their new administrative system in Igboland. Mbanasa and its neighbours were victims of this ineptitude of British politico-economic construct by it being balkanised.

The British set up their first station at Ikpa-Agbaja-Umuduru in 1906. Consequently, the first Native Court, designated as Umuduru Native Court (UNC), was established in

²⁰ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand*... , 314

²¹ Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans*, London: Faber and Faber Ltd., 1975, p.120

²² Fabian, Obi interview cited in Ugo Columba, “Some Aspects of Cultural and Political History...p.37

²³ A. E . Afigbo, “Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria: The Era of Warrant Chiefs 1871-1929”, *Tarikh*, Vol. 4No. 4, London: Longman, 1974, p.23.

²⁴ Afigbo, p.23

1906.²⁵ It was located at Umuduru, which they considered central for Osu, Mbama, Ugiri and Ehime and other constituent communities which the court was intended to serve. The court was established and it operated in consonance with the amended Native Court Proclamation of 1903, which later became known as the Native Court Ordinance of 1906.²⁶ The Native Court at Umuduru was the headquarters of the then Okigwe District. The court was attended by all the Warrant Chiefs of the integral towns. These, *inter-alia*, include Ehime, Ugiri, Osu, Mbama, Onicha Uboma, Isu, Obowo, Otanchara, Otanzu and Isukwuato.²⁷ However, in 1909, the headquarters of Okigwe Division was moved to Okigwe North from Umuduru,²⁸ apparently because of the prevalence of mosquitoes in Umuduru. Another factor could be the closeness of Okigwe to the major road that connected the area to Calabar route.

Afigbo discerned two methods adopted in the appointment of warrant chiefs in the interior of Southern Nigeria. One was arbitrary appointment. Those so appointed had no backing of the people they represented. Such persons most probably had obtained their warrant to sit in the native courts from British political officers either because they assisted the British during the various expeditions, or because they were pushed forward by the traditional rulers who wanted to avoid the invaders. The second method was appointment of warrant holders after consultation with the people they were intended to represent in the courts. This category of warrant chiefs enjoyed the traditional right to rule their people.²⁹

British appointments of warrant chiefs were by two processes between 1907 and 1930. The British Officer, A.E Heathcoat, who resided at Umuduru, appointed all his guards as headmen for their various communities to assist him with initial administration of the area. Njoku Nwokeiwu, who guided the British Officials in Ehime, became the warrant chief of Ehime clan. Likewise, Ihemeje of Umuebie became the warrant chief of Agbaja. Elsewhere, Agbugba Okereke became the warrant chief for Osu-ama because he prevented Anara people from engaging the invaders in battle during their expedition. Ukachu, who was part of the search team that led the punitive patrol to Ahiara to avenge the murder of Dr. Stewart, was appointed warrant chief for Osu Owerre. Duruagbazie was picked for Umunumu, while Onwudiwe Onumaku introduced by Njoku Nwokeiwu of Umuakagu became the warrant chief for Nsu group of villages.³⁰ At the time, the British Officials were still settled at Onu Oyibo.

C.T.C. Annals' Intelligence Report stated that, "upon the establishment of Umuduru Native Court in 1906, there was need to constitute its membership with dispatch in order to ensure a prompt take off. Without hesitation therefore, all the headman were

²⁵ C.T.C Annals, "Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan...", p.8

²⁶ H.U.B. Kagbaha, "Local Government at Oratta"...p.53

²⁷ C.T. Nwoko, "The Impact of Colonial Administration on the Traditional System of Governance in Igbo land: A case study of Isiala Mbano" B.A. project, Department of History and International Studies Imo State University, 1994, pp.3032

²⁸ Talbot, *The People of Southern Nigeria*...p.275

²⁹ Afigbo, "Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria..."pp.23-25

³⁰ S.N. Egerue, "Mbano Under the Warrant Chiefs," B.A Project, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N, 1984, p.9

designated warrant Chiefs.³¹ Chief Agbugba Okereke of Anara was issued with a warrant certificate by Captain H.S. Burrough in 1911.³² Between 1916 and 1917, many people including new headmen, were raised to the status of warrant chiefs. They include, among others, Chief Ekejiuba of Umuduru, Chief Ofoaro for Obiohuru, Chief Ibegbulam for Umuelemai, Chief Osunwa for Ezihe and Chief Njokuduruozo for Umualumaku. In 1919, at the end of the World War I, Chief Ohanyerem of Umueze, Chief Nwaeme of Okohia, and Chief Obiechefu of Mbeke received warrants as members of Native Court at Umuduru.³³ Other warrant chiefs include Chief Nwachukwu of Ezeoke Nsu, Chief Ike of Ugiri, and Chief Mbamara of Amaraku. Court clerks included, Mazi Unnoka, Thomas Ugoji from Umuelemai, and Adolphus Ebizie from Umuanunu Nsu.³⁴ See table 2.

Table 2: warrant chiefs and their areas jurisdiction

S/N	Villages	Warrants chiefs	Year	Areas of Jurisdiction
1.	Anara	Chief Agbugba Okere	1911	Umuduru Native Court
2.	Umuduru	Chief Ekejiuba	1916	Umuduru Native Court
3.	Obiohuru	Chief Ofoaro	1915	Umuduru Native Court
4.	Umuelemai	Chief Ibegbulam	1916	Umuduru Native Court
5.	Ezihie	Chief Osunwa	1916	Umuduru Native Court
6.	Umualumaku	Chief Njokuduruozo	1916	Ehime court
7.	Umueze	Chief Ohanyerem	1919	Ehime court
8.	Okohia	Chief Nwaeme	1918	Ehime court
9.	Mbeke	Chief Obiechefu	1919	Umuduru Native Court
10.	Ezeoke/ Nsu	Chief Nwachukwu	1918	Ehime court
11.	Ugiri	Chief Ike	1919	Umuduru Native Court
12.	Amaraku	Chief Mbamara	1912	Umuduru Native Court

Source: Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan 1900-1950*, 95-97

Warrant chiefs from Ugiri clan and Mbama attended court at Umuduru until 1932. Following Mr. Annal’s Intelligence Report on Ugiri clan, there was a meeting with the Ag. Resident of Owerri Province, Mr. K.A.B Cochrane for discussions. Consequently, on September 19, 1932, the Native Court Warrant establishing Ugiri Native Court at

³¹C. T.C Annals, District officer, Okigwe Division, Annual Report. N.A.E. Ok/DIST. 3/1/189, p.17

³²Mr. Fox-Strangeways, Intelligence report on Mbama Clan, Okigwe. Dist. Ep. 116 A 5/7/5803.p.27.

³³S.N. Egerue, “Mbano Under the Warrant Chiefs..” 10-12.

³⁴Gabriel Abanaonu interview cited in Cecilia Ugochi, Duru, “Intergroup Relations in Mbano from Earliest Times,” B.A. Project, Department of History and International Studies, UNN, 1984, p.32.

Nkwo Mbaa was signed by the same Ag. Resident of Old Owerri Province, Mr. Kenneth Alexander Basil Cochrane.³⁵ It would be recalled that in 1912, Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard became the Governor-General of Nigeria. He was said to have viewed with contempt Macdonald, Moor and Egerton's political practices, whereby political officers sat as presidents of Native Courts. After what was perceived as a careful observation of the Native Court proceedings, Dr. J. Crawford Maxwell expressed the view that the District Commissioner was the court and the Native members were merely figure heads. He took evidence when he was present. He gave judgment without consulting the native members.³⁶

He introduced a reform which removed the CDO from presiding over the proceedings in the native courts. Lugard recommended for the establishment of Native Authorities and the imposition of direct taxation to boost the Native Authority Treasury. Lugard's desire was to apply to the Southern Provinces, the indirect rule system of administration already existent in the North. To implement this, the Native Court Ordinance of 1914, Native Revenue Ordinance 1914 and Native Authority Ordinance 1916 were introduced.³⁷ But the system was less successful than Lugard had envisaged. The Native Authority Ordinance (NAO) was designed to establish Native Authorities by appointing "traditional rulers" for communities as Native Authority.³⁸ Political participation at the time was to be limited to such rulers who wielded executive, legislative and judicial powers over all communities within their area of jurisdiction.³⁹

Afigbo observed that as time went on, the warrant chiefs and the native court staff proved to be corrupt and oppressive.⁴⁰ By 1922, the administration had realized that all had not been well with the system under which they governed the people. In 1925, it was decided that direct taxation was to be imposed on all male adults. The colonial authorities had hoped that the process of assessing and collecting the tax would encourage the traditional leaders of the people to come forward and assert their authority.⁴¹

The chiefs performed a number of functions both as members of native court and in their traditional roles and individual capacities. Despite their arbitrary appointments, there was initially, hardly any opposition during the period. This was most probably to avoid the risk of indignation of the colonial government. Thus, any information that came from the government was readily obeyed. There were probably no educated persons at the time that could at least write and articulate the grievances of the people and forward same to the government.

³⁵ C.O.B. Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan, 1900-1950*, Owerri; Luton Press Ltd., 1992, pp.9-10

³⁶ J. Crawford, Maxwell, cited in F. Lugard, *Political Memoranda, Revision of Instruction to Political Officers on Subject* Chiefly on Politics and Administration, London: Frank Cass and Company Ltd., 1970, p. 266.

³⁷ A.E. Afigbo, "Warrant Chief System in Eastern Nigeria". Ph.D thesis, Department of History, University of Ibadan, 1964, p.418

³⁸ S.O. Okafor, *Indirect Rule*, Lagos; Thomas Nelson, 1981, p. 61

³⁹ Okafor, p.62

⁴⁰ Afigbo, "Warrant Chiefs..." p.320

⁴¹ Afigbo, 321

The Native Authority Ordinance gave the chiefs the power to arrest without warrant any person who committed, or was charged with committing a breach of traditional or protectorate law.⁴² Also, by the Roads and Creeks Proclamation of 1903 and 1925, the Chiefs were empowered to recruit able bodied men and women to clear roads, rivers and creeks.⁴³ However, with time, the high handedness of the chiefs irritated the people, who felt the chiefs were exploiting them. The chiefs were said to have used their powers to encroach into people's farmlands. There were disturbances between some villages in Mbano and their neighbours. For instance, the Obollo Town Disturbances of 1926 between Umuoruoma and Umuozu villages, led to the deposition of Chief Ogoke. The matter was investigated and the culpable villages were fined. According to Bones Ojiah, from the findings of the investigation, Umuoruoma and Umuozu paid two different fines as contained in paragraph 5 vide Okigwe Treasury Receipt No. 35 (A240804) 90 1 of 30th October, 1926.⁴⁴

There were also disturbances between Umuneke and Mbeke in 1926 caused by boundary creation, and a land dispute between Ugiri town and Ibeme caused by Njoku Edede, a warrant chief. These disturbances, as Bones Ojiah stated, were occasioned by the actions of the chiefs. However, some chiefs used their position to settle crises in their areas of jurisdiction. For instance, Chief Agbugba Okereke settled a boundary dispute between Okwelle in Onuimo and Umunachi in Mbano. The settlement was reached when he, Agbugba, with the help of the D.O. Okigwe District in 1926, divided the said land amicably between Umunachi and Okwelle.⁴⁵ That singular action was said to have attracted the attention of the British officials who commended the wisdom of Chief Agbugba.

Within the trajectory of colonial balkanization, Ugiri towns of Umudim and Atta were ceded to Owerri Division during the colonial administrative re-organisation. The creation of Native Courts and Native Authority was quite controversial. The people were divided on the issue of whether to attend courts at Ugiri in Okigwe Division or Ikeduru in Owerri Division. However, it did appear as though the majority of the leaders of the communities favoured the choice of Owerri Division. The reason was the proximity of Owerri to the people when compared to the distance of Otanzu-Otanchara headquarters at Okigwe to the people. The colonial situation caused some groups of towns in formerly under Ugiri that had hitherto been brothers to become neighbours due to boundary adjustments and reorganisations. Following the colonial transition, Umudim and Atta formerly under Ugiri were faced with the challenge of appointing warrant chiefs. Bones Ojiah explains the situation vividly, stating that,

Umudim that transferred to Owerri Division was the junior quarter of Oka in Okigwe Division. Seniority in the town was in dispute, between the families of Umuduruonyeoma and Umudimodu. The heads of who were Igboejeshi and Okoroego. Igboejeshi was the senior *ozo* member and the recognized head by the new government. Okoroego, however, possessed the senior *ofo*. As a natural outcome of

⁴² Laws of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, Vol. II, 1908, p. 1277

⁴³ T.N. Tamunno, *The Evolution of Modern Nigeria State*, Essex: Longman Group Ltd., 1982, p.319.

⁴⁴ C.O. B. Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan*, ..p.51

⁴⁵ A.E. Afigbo, *Historical Events Lists of Local, Regional ad National Significance....*, p.51

this internal dispute, the town was divided as to whether to join the rest of Oka their brothers in Ugiri. Igboejeshi had possibly thought that he would strengthen his position by going over to Okigwe. As an influential man, he was already in terms with most of *Ndiisiala* in Ugiri, who had promised him their support. Igboejeshi attended most of the meetings held in Okigwe Division. Though Igboejeshi and the majority favoured Oka, the colonial officials grouped them under Ikeduru courts in Owerri Division.⁴⁶

In a similar vein, Atta community, which belonged to Ugiri group of towns under Okigwe Division, was also regrouped under Ikeduru in Owerri Division. According to Ojiah, the other Ugiri town in Owerri Division was hostile to the idea of attending Ugiri clan court at Nkwo Mbaa in Okigwe Division. The chief reason given was the distance of Atta to Okigwe Provincial Headquarters. Okereke, the man recognized as head by the colonial government, probably feared his position in Okigwe might not be recognized. When asked by the DO of Owerri, on what he based his claims to leadership, Okereke answered that he was *EzeAla* (i.e. priest of earth deity), senior *ozo* member and a member of the senior family. But when asked who he considered to be the first man in Amaiboeze quarter, he said it was Amaechi Ejiogu because he takes the first share in Atta.

Following Okereke's answer, the DO of Owerri Division, Mr. K.A. B Cochrane, suggested that since Amaechi takes the first share in Okereke's quarter, Amaechi, not Okereke, was the head of Atta town. Perhaps, Okereke realized that in Okigwe, the *OnyeIsiAla* always takes the first share and that Amaechi by Okigwe standards stood a better chance than him. But it did appear Amaechi was deficient because he had no significant influence at the time. Amaechi failed to express any strong opinion in the meeting held at Atta. Although he takes the first share in the town, Amaechi made no strong claim to the headship and had rather admitted that the man who was the senior *ozo* member was regarded as the senior man in the town. Besides, at the time, Atta's popularity with the Okigwe-Ugiri towns was shaky. Nevertheless, Ugiri still wanted Atta to join them as their brothers. But since the creation of Owerri-Okigwe boundary, Atta had been drawn into Owerri and Atta had put forward a counter-proposal for a separate native court comprising Atta, Umudim, Inyishi and Mbieri in Owerri Division.⁴⁷ Consequently, the Okigwe-Ugiri towns attended the Umuduru Native Court with the Osu, Isu, Mbama and Ehime clans. Umudim and Atta attended the Owerri Native Court at Ikeduru.⁴⁸ It was at this point that Atta and Umudim, who had hitherto been part of Ugiri town in Mbano, became neighbours having been grouped under Ikeduru in Owerri District since the colonial period.

This singular action exemplified the extent to which colonial administrative reorganization distorted the existing aspects of political and cultural grouping in the area. The new boundaries created by colonial administrators caused increased land

⁴⁶ Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan...*, pp.35.36

⁴⁷ For this see C.T.C Annals, "Intelligence Report on Ugiri Clan...", pp.8-20, Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan...*, pp.35-37.

⁴⁸ Ojiah, p.40

disputes between communities. Atta and Umudim were said to have had disagreements with Umunkwo over boundaries because they were transferred to Ikeduru while Umunkwo remained in Mbama in Mbano. The activities of the warrant chiefs, who used their new and exalted positions to exploit the people caused social disharmony. Some of them were corrupt and biased in their settlements of disagreements between people, a situation that caused disaffection and occasional violent reactions in the area. Besides, the transfer of some communities reduced the population and number of communities that comprised Ugiri clan in Okigwe Division and increased those in Ikeduru in Owerri Division. Atta community lost her traditional rite to host *nta* feast. Hence, the regrouping by colonial administration of Atta and Umudim communities under Ikeduru, and Abajah to Isu conferred on them, the status of neighbours rather than brothers. Atta and Umudim attended court at Ikeduru rather than in Ugiri. The interactions they had through community gathering with Mbano people discontinued. The known forms and processes of relations in the area were altered. The allegiance of Atta and Umudim communities, shifted from Ugiri Mbano to Ikeduru. Relations became a bit tense rather than peaceful as they were in pre-colonial times.

In the Ehime area, it was after the reform of the old Native Court system that the Ehime Native Court was established. The people nominated their traditional leaders to represent them in the council and the courts. Under the new political arrangement, Nathaniel Ugwoegbu of Umuihim emerged as the clan head of Ehime. He presided over the proceedings in the new court popularly called “Court Ehime” in 1907 and was assisted by chiefs from other villages. Expectedly, during Ugwoegbu’s tenure in office, Onicha Uboma attended the Ehime Court. The same scenario that saw Ugiri towns of Umudim and Atta regrouped under Ikeduru in Owerri Division played out in Ehime. Uboma people had argued that the Ehime Court, located at Umuezealama, was far away from Uboma. Hence, Uboma people led by Chief Osuji declined to attend the Ehime Court. Consequently, Uboma Native Court was built for Uboma people at Isinweke.⁴⁹ See table 3,

Table 3: Group of towns according to Native court jurisdiction

S/N	Committee /Towns	Native Court Jurisdiction
1.	Otanzu, Otanchara , Isuochi, Nneato, Umuchieze	Okigwe Native Court- Okigwe
2.	Umudim, Atta Inyishi, Amaimo, Ogwa	Ikeduru Native court
3.	Etiti, Uboma, Ihite, Umuihim, Isinweke, Onicha	Uboma Native Court-Isinweke
4.	Umueze I, Ezeoke, Umuezeala, Umueze II, Nsu Umunakanu,	Ehime Native Court (Court Ehime)- Umuezeala
5.	Ugiri, Obollo, Mbano, Ogor, Umuneke, Ibeme, Oka, Umuozu-ama, Umuozu-owerre	Ugiri Native Court –Nkwo Mbaa

Source: Bones Ojiah, Early History of Ugiri Clan 1900-1950, 111-114

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Ugwoegbu interview cited in Ugo, Columba, “Some Aspects of Cultural and Political History of Ehime up to the Colonial Period”..., pp.39-40

Uboma was administratively grouped under a new court unit, though it remained in Okigwe Division, but was placed alongside Etiti and Obowo. At this point it could be stated that colonial officials succeeded in disintegrating the Mbasaa political unit. Hence, each group was subsequently administered under different Native Court from 1914. Afigbo in describing the level of administrative reorganisation argued that,

Just as the provinces did not correspond with linguistic or ethnic groups, the smaller sub-divisions did not correspond with clans. Each Division comprised a large number of clans and most Native Courts served more than one clan. Thus Okigwe Native Court served the Otanchara, Otanzu, Isuochi, Nneato and Umuchieze clans.⁵⁰

Audrey C.S Smoke also stated that Mbaise in Owerri Division was an artificial creation, going by the Native Authority formed in 1941.⁵¹ The system saw the imposition of direct tax which only served the economic interest of the British and their hand-picked, corrupt and exploitative warrant chiefs who grew rich as they fed fat on their people. Afigbo observed that nearly every warrant chief of the time was guilty of corruption, extortion and oppression.⁵² Isichei in the same vein writes that;

The chiefs...made much money by sending their subjects in great numbers to work for the whitemen on the roads and bridge constructions... The chiefs were the worst set of people who defrauded the labourers from their wages and got supreme control over them. In this way and by slavery too X accumulated much wealth and became the greatest man who lived in those days. He had the most famous zinc house by then and could entertain all classes of big men with food, palm wine and some imported drinks. He married over forty wives...⁵³

It was not long before the excesses of the warrant chiefs and the attempt to impose tax on women caused a major uproar in Igboland. In 1927/28, the tax imposed on the male adults was successfully collected. But when it was rumored that women were to be taxed, the women took to the streets. This movement was the popular Aba Women War of 1929/30 in which many women were shot dead and many more others wounded. The DO at Okigwe in a letter dated February 10, 1930, and addressed to the Resident at Owerri explained that,

The movement in the Division started about 9th December, but prior to that date, the women from Obowo and Umuduru Court areas appear to have been attending meetings in the Bende Division. They were, I think, first called in there when it was alleged that Chief Okugo (Bende Division) has stated that women were to be taxed.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ A.E. Afigbo, *The Warrant Chiefs: Indirect Rule in Southeastern Nigeria 1891-1929*, London: 1972, p. 202.

⁵¹ Audrey C. Smock, *Ibo Politics: The Role of Ethnic Unions in Eastern Nigeria*, Cambridge: Mash, 1971, pp71-72

⁵² A.E. Afigbo, "Chief Igwegbe Odum: The Omenuko of History", *Nigeria Magazine*, 90, 1960, p.228.

⁵³ "Aba Commission of Inquiry Notes of Evidence", cited in Elizabeth Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*, London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1977, 145-146.

⁵⁴ Memoranda from District Officer, Okigwe to the Resident, Owerri Province, N.A.E. OKDIST., 1/12, No.C. 122 /1929

Notes of Evidence explained further on the women's movement thus;

The Women's War of 1929-30 broke out when a young man was conducting a local census, under the aegis of a local warrant Chief, Okugo of Oloko. In the investigation which followed complaints were made about his illegitimate exactions of cash and kind. Then Okugo was asked what his position had been before he obtained a warrant. I was, he replied, an ordinary young man.⁵⁵

However, at the end of the women's rising, the effectiveness and activities of the warrant chief system was undermined. No new warrant chiefs were created after that, but the surviving ones were to remain and be absorbed into the new Native Administrative system.⁵⁶ The people selected their traditional rulers in the new system. In Mbano, some of the warrant chiefs became traditional rulers after the reorganization, while some lost their position. Some of the traditional rulers, who were selected by the people, were former warrant chiefs. For instance, Chief Agbugba Okereke became the traditional ruler of Anara in Osu-ama. I Obollo community, Edwin Mbeyi became the traditional ruler while Chief Ogoke was dropped. I.R.A Ozigbo correctly summarized the events of 1930-1950 on Native Authorities in Igboland thus, in effect, the "traditional rulers" replaced the former warrant chiefs only in some localities where they were weak or totally unwanted by their people. In many places, the former warrant chiefs manipulated themselves back to power as traditional rulers. Many of the warrant chiefs lost their position. They resented the re-organisation which resulted in the diminution of the power.⁵⁷

The system of choosing elders as councilors or court members was abandoned when youths were chosen to represent their people at the courts. Afigbo noted that this system was called the "Best Man Policy", *Eze Oka-cha-nma* instituted in 1948. But in the late forties, the educated elite in Mbano and indeed Igboland saw the indirect rule system as "a special device for slowing down the political evolution of the African colonies."⁵⁸ In response to their demand, a simplified form of the British system of government through county and local councils was introduced throughout Igboland. The DO at Okigwe created the Mbano County Council. In the new county council, members were elected and as a result of the innovation, in the political system, the Native Administrative System was abolished in Igboland. The Native Authority lasted till 1951, when the District Council, which succeeded it, took effect in Old Owerri Province including Mbano and its neighbours.

Besides the overbearing excesses of the warrant chiefs, the court clerks constituted another thorn in the people's flesh. The court clerks lived in the same vicinity with the DO at Umuduru. This gave the feeling among the chiefs that they were very important. They determined whether a case was criminal or civil and whether the accused was to be arrested and detained or not.⁵⁹ According to Afigbo in the period after 1914, there

⁵⁵ "Aba Commission of Inquiry, Notes of Evidence", p.32, Para. 500, in E. Isichei, *A History of the Igbo People*...p.145.

⁵⁶ I.R.I Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland in the 20th century*..., p.56-57.

⁵⁷ Ozigbo, *A History of Igboland*...p. 57.

⁵⁸ A.E. Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand: Studies in Igbo History and Culture*..., p.323.

⁵⁹ Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs*..., p.241.

was hardly any Annual Report that was complete without a reference to the menace of court clerks. In fact, the years from 1914 to about 1930 could be properly designated as the ‘golden age’ of court clerks in Eastern Nigeria, the era during which the clerk sitting at his table commanded and he was obeyed.⁶⁰ According to Emmanuel Onyenze, in the late 1920s one Daniel Okorie, a court clerk in Ugiri Native Court, was dismissed for malpractices. He was replaced by Jupurueze.⁶¹ Similarly, one Mr. Ukanwa, a court clerk at Umuduru Native Court, was on several occasions warned and even punished for exercising powers considered extraneous to his office. Chief Ehirim, a former court clerk confirmed that there was widespread evidence of corruption against court clerks, in Mbano after 1914. In his words, “the situation became worse because even where one wanted to steer clear of the trend, litigants lured one into it by their material gifts and persuasion.”⁶² From the foregoing, it seems that most of the court clerks at the time lacked integrity. Due to their greed, they easily gave in to corruption.

It is instructive that though the Umuduru Native Court was fully operational, in parts of Ugiri, Osu, Mbama and Ehime, the traditional patriarchal system was still practiced, especially in places where the appointments of Warrant Chiefs were controversial or not made in consultation with the indigenes. Afigbo also alluded to this when he stated, “these institutions continued to operate in some form in those areas of the people’s life outside the gaze of the colonial authority.”⁶³ But with the local council reforms of the 1930s the British Officials had consolidated their administration of Mbano local affairs as in other Igbo areas till 1951 when the idea of Native Administration was abandoned.

Apart from Chieftaincy Reform of 1932, there was another reform in 1946 which embraced all the clans in the then Otanzu-Otanchara in Okigwe Division of Owerri Province. In some parts of Mbano, for instance in Ugiri and Ehime clans, the reform affected most Warrant Chiefs. The colonial government had put up some sort of advertisement, inviting applications from eligible candidates. Many people applied, including the traditional rulers and town heads. Out of the 84 applicants, only 23 of them were selected,⁶⁴ (see table 4).

Table 4: List of selected candidates as Warrant Chiefs

		Name of Candidate Selected
SN	Villages	1946
1	Umuneke	1. Daniel Egwim 2. Obialor Ike 3. Stephen Ike 4. Duru Anyanwu 5. Peter Ejionwu
2	Ogbor	1. John Onweni (later traditional ruler) 2. Thomas Agunnanne 3. Joseph Egbuziem 4. Njoku Duruoha

⁶⁰Afigbo, *WarrantChiefs...*, p.225.

⁶¹ Emmanuel Onyenze, c.79 years Judicial Secretary, interview at Umukam Obollo-Ugiri, 20/01/2011.

⁶²A.O. Ebirim, 81years, former council treasurer, interviewed at Umuelemai, 03/08/2011

⁶³Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand...*p.349

⁶⁴ Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan...*p.117

		5. Mr. Enwerem
3	Ugiri	1. Dennis Ekeanyanwu 2. Mr. Durumbaa
4	Obollo	1. Timothy Onyelike 2. Julius Ogoke 3. Mbeyi Ndukwe (later the traditional ruler) 4. Michael Mbalisi 5. Josiah Ejiogu. 6. Samuel Adim 7. Christopher Nwachukwu.
5	Oka	1. Azubuike Akudorobi
6	Ibeme	1. James Ijezie 2. Stephen Igwe 3. Christopher Ohiaeriaku. ⁶⁵

Source: Bones Ojiah, *Early History of Ugiri Clan 1900-1950*, 117-118

Representatives from Osu, Ugiri, Mbama and Ehime were elected to constitute the new Mbanaso County Council. The Native Authority was one bold attempt to revive the people's traditional system of government and administration by a council whose members, mostly elders and titled men, were the true delegates of the different lineage segments. It has to be added however, that although oppressive corrupt practices and abuse of power characterized the warrant chief system, the warrant chiefs were not altogether a total failure. Among Mbanaso and its neighbours, they made modernization efforts which have not always been appreciated. They were at least instrumental to laying the foundation of modern infrastructure in the area and Igboland in general. By so doing as Afigbo pointed out, they engaged in petty blackmail, which tended to clash with the traditional customs and laws,⁶⁶ a situation that affected relations between people and communities.

British Administrative Infrastructural Development and Community Relations

Expectedly, the new political development had some implications for community relations between Mbanaso towns and its neighbours. First, the known Mbanaso traditional political unit, which formed the nucleus of communal interactions, was disintegrated. The usual converging and interactions of people from different communities and clans to discuss issues of common interest disappeared. The new Native Court and warrant chief system, usurped the processes of administration known to the people. New administrative headquarters were created to administer the area without the consent of the people, a situation that caused disturbances between people and communities. The boundaries brought by the reorganisations, created conflict in the form of relationships between Mbanaso communities and their neighbours. This stemmed from the fact that in the pre-colonial days, positions of responsibility were followed by duties and expectations which commanded popular support and respect. When these duties and obligations were not met, they attracted popular disapproval and sanctions. These warrant chiefs called out villagers for purposes of building and maintaining roads through forced labour. The new situation was against the culture of communalism and village democracy known to the people.

⁶⁵ Ojiah, pp.117-118

⁶⁶Afigbo, *Warrant Chiefs...*p.373

Obviously, relations and interactions between the colonizers, their agents and the colonized became conflictual. The roles of age grades and masquerades, to ensure the cooperation and the maintenance of law, order and peaceful co-existence between peoples, were taken over by fierce looking and armed colonial police. Also people were forced against their will, to obey the laws enacted by the colonial administrators to govern newly created native authorities. In the face of the numerous colonial creations, which did not recognise existing traditional order, the age-long form of mutual relations between the people and their leaders turned aggressive.

In the new administration, land disputes were settled at the native courts and the litigants often sent gifts of yam and goats as a form of inducement to influence their cases. At their homes, some of these chiefs held private courts where they settled civil cases, land disputes, kidnapping and even murder cases. Their powers were more than ever feared. As Afigbo observed, the duties of these warrant chiefs were incompatible with their traditional status.⁶⁷ The very fact that they had British authority with the police and the army behind them, made them to coerce their fellow men without traditional reprisals. This harsh method of governance was new to the people, and led to violent resistance against oppressive warrant chiefs.

Not surprisingly, many a time their authority was not readily accepted by the communities which they administered. The position of the chiefs created a kind of wealthy and influential class of individuals in the society who were above the village council of elders. Consequently, the traditional sanctions, coercion and rural democracy which held the people together lost their sway in the British colonial era. The stage was set for the application of Western type democratic ideology in Igboland and Nigeria at large. The warrant chiefs were at the disposal of the colonial officers, and helped them in achieving their goals. The responsibility of recruiting the necessary labour for road and railway construction was implemented by the warrant chiefs. They helped to spread literacy and missionary activities and construction of markets. Colonial infrastructure advanced inter-group relations. A consideration of these infrastructures would suffice at this point.

Road Transportation and Inter - Community Relations

One important aspect of infrastructure that helped quicken socio- cultural, and economic relations was the revolution in road transportation and communication. This had direct impact on trade and the movement of people. Prior to the colonial times, the major means of transportation was on foot. People had to trek to very distant places to carry out their socio-political and economic activities. There was no motor transport in Mbanasa until about the 1930s. Movement of goods and services were by human portorage. Human portorage was, as O.N. Njoku posited, “the least efficient and most expensive mode of transportation. It was also hazardous.”⁶⁸ The introduction of motor transport system during the colonial era reduced trekking and human portorage considerably. The use of trucks to convey goods started and increased significantly over time.

⁶⁷Afigbo, 70

⁶⁸O.N. Njoku, *EconomicHistoryofNigeria, 19thand20thCenturies*, Enugu: Magnet Business Enterprises, 2001, p.104.

Before the introduction of motor transport system in Mbanasa and its neighbouring towns, bicycles were largely used to transport goods from one destination to another. The people and those from Inyishi, Mbaise, Ogwa and Okwelle used bicycles to travel to Umuahia, Obowo, Okigwe, Uburu, Uzuakoli, and Ikwere to buy and sell goods. There were no motor roads at the time. The roads were opened later by the colonial officials and the native administrators. They brought lorries that came through Umuahia, Owerri, Port-Harcourt and Okigwe into Mbasaa to carry palm oil and kernel to the railway station at Umuahia. The use of these roads helped reduce the burden of trekking long distances with heavy loads.⁶⁹

It is instructive that the early British administrators in Mbasaa encouraged the construction of motorable roads. Arguably, the roads provided for easy access to agricultural produce from the area, and to move them to the coast for export to Europe. Ukwu I. Ukwu noted that from the 1930s roads and bridges were constructed which cut across Igboland, linking the different communities and clans together.⁷⁰

The first major road that ran through Mbasaa was the Umuahia-Etiti to Nsu-Umuezeala-Umuelemai -Mbano headquarters. From the headquarters the road moved to Umuduru through Mbeke to Anara in Osu connecting the Orié Amaraku market and from there through Eke Atta in Ikeduru to Owerri. Another road ran from Anara, Eke Ego market in Okwelle through Umuna to Okigwe. There was also the Amaraku-Agbaja-Nkwerre-Orlu road.⁷¹ Apart from these major trunk roads, there were other minor roads connected to different bush paths and village markets that were widened. These include the Umunumo-Nzerem, Nsu and Onicha Uboma in Etiti. Others moved from Umuelemai through Umueze I to Obollo, connecting Ogbor-Ibeme-Oka, Amaimo and Inyishi in Ikeduru. There was the Obollo-Ugiri-Amaraku road which extended to Amuzari and stretching to Ogwa. Another road also connected Obollo to Umueze II-to Eziana and Ihiteafoukwu in Ekwereazu Mbaise. These roads served as links connecting various Mbasaa communities with their neighbours.⁷² Many of these roads were expanded later in the 1940s and 1950s. The use of bicycles for transporting goods by many traders lasted beyond 1960. But with the construction of more roads, a number of vehicles moved into the interior parts of Mbasaa. Two lorries nick named “*UgboNkwerre*” and “Mbano Go Town,” respectively, were among the first that came into the area to evacuate palm oil and kernel. These lorries visited twice in a fortnight or even in a month to carry produce.⁷³

The new transportation system became *desideratum* for the improvement in movement, communication and the development of trade and markets. It enhanced mobility among the people and quickened their movement beyond Igboland. A.G. Hopkins argues that transport development enables man to harness existing and new

⁶⁹Chief L.E Opara, c.80 years, retired civil servant, interviewed Umueze I, Ehime Mbano, 21/02/2011.

⁷⁰Ukwu .I. Ukwu, “The Development of Trade and Marketing in Igboland,” J.H.S.N. Vol. 3 No. 4, 1967, p.660.

⁷¹Lazarus Nwabugo. C. 95 years, farmer/trader, interview at Amaraku, 11/02/2011.

⁷²C.N. Mbalisi, “Change and Continuity in Isiala Mbano, An Igbo Society, 1906-2007,” M.A. Dissertation, Department of History and International Studies, U.N.N 2008, pp.71-72.

⁷³Lazarus Nwabugo interview cited

resources and to release labour and capital previously tied up in less productive enterprise or isolated by distance.⁷⁴ This perspective supports Lord Lugard's view "that the material development of Africa may be summed up in one word-transport."⁷⁵ More roads were built and expanded in Mbasaa communities, linking them with their neighbours. Interaction and movement between people from different communities became faster. Trade and other economic and social activities improved. There was some sort of transformation in the movement of goods and services in and out of the area. The people's ways of life began tilting towards the Western innovations introduced by the colonial people. New articles of trade and materials reached the interior through the new roads. The network of roads and trade routes allowed for easy movement of people. The distances between various towns and villages which they linked were easily bridged. For instance, trade and movement from Mbasaa to Owerri, Okigwe, Oru, Umuahia and Ikwere or Igirinta speeded up.

Furthermore, the use of Lorries increased the safety of travelers and traders for these roads were said to be frequently patrolled by the police and army. Afigbo pointed out that the margin of safety increased as the colonial regime got more deeply entrenched.⁷⁶ The improvement in safety had massive consequences on trade; it increased the flow of trade from the interior areas of surplus production to areas of want. The articles newly introduced by the British included cosmetics, clothes, stock-fish, soap, enamel wares, drinks, and knives. However, the new development undermined the activities of traditional long distance specialist traders such as blacksmiths, potters, and weavers that used to trek together with their products. The long distances covered by traders reduced because more local markets were improved upon, for instance, Eke Atta, Orié Agu, Nkwo Umuezeala, Eke Mbeke, Nkwo Imo in Amaimo, Eke Ego in Okwelle, and Orié Amaraku markets among others. Most of these markets are located along the new motor ways. The foreign or imported goods challenged the locally made ones in these markets. The impact of the new roads on inter-community relations was quite palpable.

These new roads brought about faster movements and greater interactions. People were able to get in contact with friends and relations, which was difficult because of the distance to be trekked. Traders from different communities were able to bring their goods to markets in Mbasaa and in return bought from the people. New contacts were made and new relationships established. These new contacts helped to expand and enhance relations between Mbasaa people, their neighbours and people from other Igbo communities. These markets served as a melting pot for all forms of socio-cultural interactions. Besides, the development and enlargement of markets brought people from far and near to live closely together. People from different cultural background came to trade with Mbasaa. Some settled in communities in the area and became integrated into the society. For instance, Lazarus Nwabugo narrated people from neighbouring Mbaise built abattoir houses and settled in the communities to do their businesses in the Orié Amaraku, Afor Ibeme, Nkwo Obollo, and Eke Atta markets.

⁷⁴See. A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa*, London: Macmillan, 1975, pp.192-193.

⁷⁵F.D. Lugard, "The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa". In G.O. Ogunremi and E.K. Faluyi (eds.), *An Economic History of West Africa Since 1750*, Lagos: First Academic Publishers, 2005, p.151.

⁷⁶ Afigbo, *Ropes of Sand...*

The many agricultural products like yam, cassava, maize, cocoyam, palm oil and kernel and crafts like brooms, baskets, and pottery products by farmers and craftsmen were easily moved from one market to the other. The farmers and craftsmen had customers who were in constant contact to buy their produce and wares from them. Such trade activities brought people from different communities together. Movement of people from parts of Mbasaa, like Ugiri, Osu and Mbama to Mbaise and/or Okwelle, helped enhance relations because those that could not have done so previously, were able to do so. People interacted as they bargained over the prices of goods⁷⁷. However, the usual mutual relations that existed between long distance traders as they trekked along trade routes with their neighbours disappeared. In their place, were found new individual business peoples driven by capitalist tendencies of profit maximization.

Conclusion

Mbasaa political entity and proximate communities was seemingly reorganized during the British colonial rule in the period 1906 to 1960. This had enormous and holistic implication on the society and system of life prevalent in the area. There were changes in social, economic and political structure of Mbasaa as the balkanization begat the present Mbano society, resulting to changes in the contours and dynamics of inter community relations in the polity. In spite of the nature of relations between the people under the new structure occasioned by colonial systems, the people's claim to common ancestry and numerous cultural festivals, helped ensure mutual relations. Improved transportation helped mobility and enabled more people to attend cultural celebrations like new yam festival, *okorsha*, *iwaakwa*, and marriage ceremonies in distant communities. These cultural ceremonies were avenues of contact and interaction between people from different communities and those of their neighbours. The establishment of colonial infrastructure affected the nature of inter community relations between the people and its proximate communities in two fold. On the one hand, the balkanization of Mbasaa, out of which Mbano emerged, resulted to the re-grouping of the communities in the area, as well wrought marked changes in the extant political and economic allegiance as exemplified in the area at present. Secondly, the balkanization also helped general developments in the area and enhanced corporation among the communities. People continued their constant contact through their movements in and out of the markets, schools, churches among other institutions located in different communities. As these movements became easier, meeting people, making new friends and building relationships improved. The impact resulting from the new systems notwithstanding, interactions remained mutual and improved continuously. Indeed, Mbasaa and the communities that emerged therein, like Mbano as a colonial creation, appear to have changed the least why changing the most and had largely retained as well maintained their traditional ethnic essence even in the face of global changes.

⁷⁷Lazarus Nwabugo interview cited.