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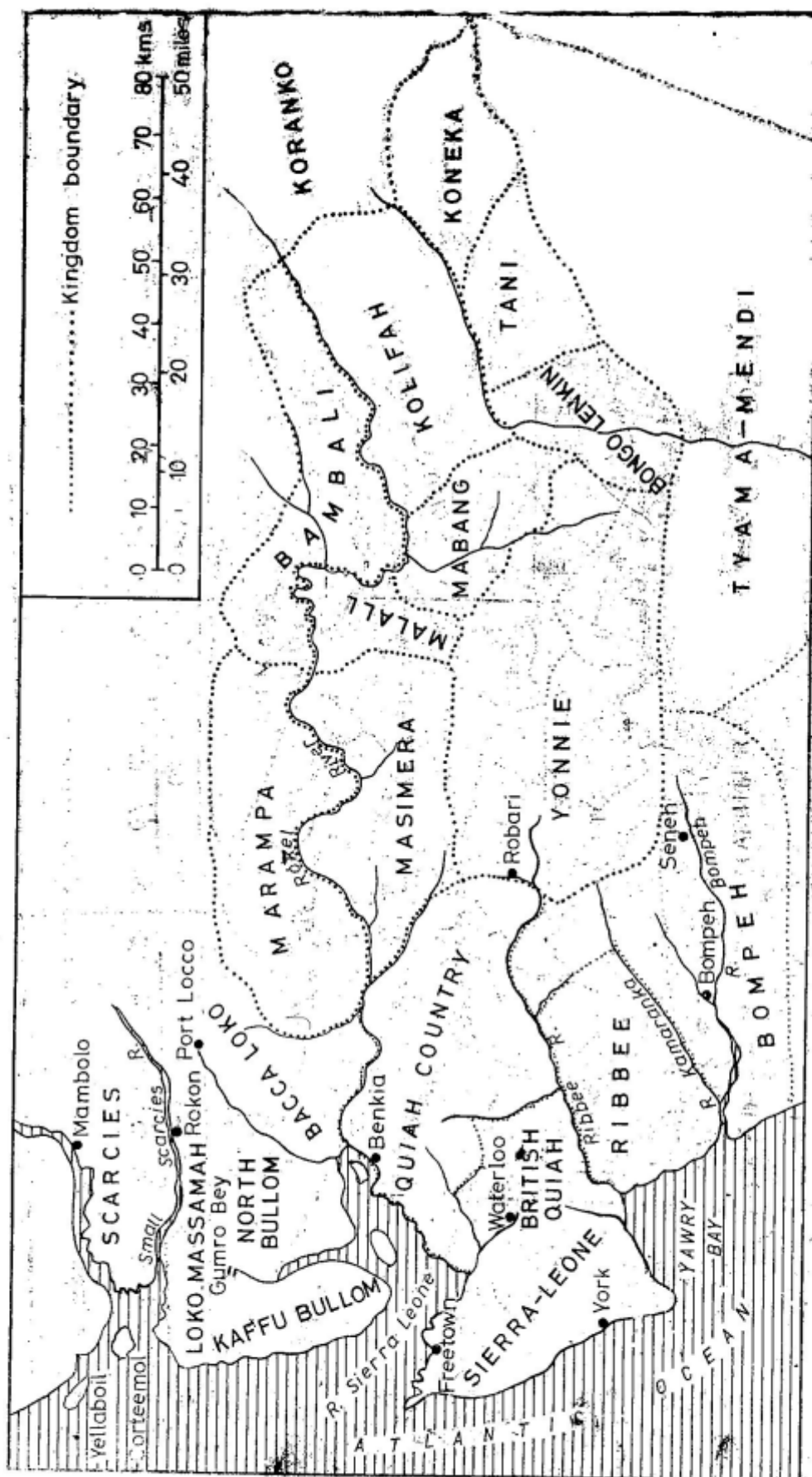
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The Rokel River Region in the second half of the 19th century

(Reproduced from P. P. 1886 Vol. XLVII)



## TRADE AND POLITICS IN THE ROKEL IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

By  
ADELEYE IJAGBEMI

### Introduction

For the purpose of this article the Rokel River region shall comprise that portion of Sierra Leone bordering the Rokel River and its important tributaries. In this region is situated the Sierra Leone peninsula on which Freetown stands. Particular attention will be paid to that portion of the river — the 135 mile stretch from the coast inland — which is navigable. The region shall extend as far north as the Small Scarcies River and as far south as the Bumpe and Ribbi districts. The tide-water trading centres in the region, like Kambia, Mange Bure, Port Loko, Magbeli, Senehun and others are of particular interest as centres of trade, politics and other activities. Freetown, of course, is in a class by itself. The major Sierra Leone peoples involved in the trade and politics of the Rokel region during the period under review were the Temne (the most important), the Loko, the Susu, the Mende, the Bulom-Sherbro and the Freetown settlers. These peoples competed and fought one another, and among themselves for the economic and political control of this important strategic region.

The eighteenth century, particularly the latter half, was, for the Rokel River region a period of important developments. At a time when the slave trade was at its peak the region, which did not seem to have been adversely affected by that trade<sup>1</sup> found itself "invaded" by traders from other parts of West Africa and Europe. In Port Loko area the Susu ousted its Temne and Loko rulers and seized control of its trade as well as of its politics. In Yoni country the Fula, who, tradition says had settled in that area originally as traders, since the time of Bai Farma Tami, assumed a dominant role which has lasted till today.

European traders on the coast (the English and the French in particular) sent agents, some non-natives, to various inland centres in the country to tap the trade in those areas for them. Gumbu Smart, a Loko man, and an agent of the English slave traders on the Bunce Island, located at the mouth of the River Rokel, built a formidable Loko community at Rokon and dominated the commercial and political lives of the area until the early nineteenth century. Also along the Rokel River and the Port Loko Creek, the Bunduka, Fula aristocrats (so called from St. Louis in Senegal, agents of the French slave traders on the Gambia Island, dispersed) in small numbers to channel the trade in those regions to their employers. These Bundukas were to play a very important role in the lives of the Temne among whom they settled both politically, economically and militarily.

The booming trade attracted other peoples. The Mende, hitherto an inland people, were migrating towards the coast in the eighteenth century. In Gbonkolenken (Yele) area they clashed with the Temne whom they drove from their lands and forced to seek refuge in less productive regions. Further south-westwards they encountered the Banta people who, it would appear, were a group of the Temne people originally,<sup>2</sup> swamped large sections of them, but failed to subdue the present Yoni country, which formed part of the northern Banta country owing to Fula intervention.

In various other parts of the Rokel River region, there were signs of socio-political change. Internal strife in Kunike country followed by a civil war (The Baba War), forced many of its inhabitants into exile. And the return of these exiles to their land of birth, probably in the latter half of the eighteenth century, provides one of the most moving episodes in the eighteenth century history of the Temne people. The "Ground-pig War" which arose out of border dispute between Marampa and Ro-Mendi peoples involved the Masimera, Port Loko, and Bombali groups, raged for many years, and threw sections of the Rokel region into chaos. These wars received the full blessing of the slave traders and their agents who, by supplying the arms and supporting one section against another, made good business. Political instability consequent upon the wars, created a state of confusion. Established slave traders, local as well as foreign and alien muslim mallams exploited the situation and entrenched themselves. There was hardly any area of the Rokel region in the eighteenth century where there were no



substantial alien populations who exerted major social, economic and political influences. Viewed against this general background, the establishment, in 1789, of Freetown Colony immediately assumes a less revolutionary character than it has often been made to appear.

### Organisation of Trade

Trade in the Rokel River region in the late eighteenth century was essentially slave-centred, although, the Upper Guinea Coast of which Sierra Leone is a part, never acquired the sort of notoriety associated with certain other parts of the West Coast — notably the Slave Coast. The slave raiding wars uprooted sections of the communities who were kept constantly on the move in order to escape capture and enslavement. The Rokel trade however consisted of far more than slaves during the late eighteenth century; many local articles and products were also asked for by the traders from both Europe and other parts of West Africa.

Basic to the popularity and importance of the Rokel river region is the unique navigability of the middle reaches of this most important river.<sup>3</sup> From Benkia, a distance of about 135 miles from Freetown, the river becomes navigable, first to small canoes, and further down from Magbeli, a distance of about 40 miles from Freetown, to large vessels. The route thus provided in the 18th century a convenient outlet for the groundnuts, palm-kernels, rice, palm-oil, camwood, and so on produced by the peoples of Marampa/Masimera, Malal, Kolifa, Bombali, Kunike and Yoni (to a lesser extent). It also provided an outlet for the Kono further to the east, for the Kpa Mende to the southeast, and for the Koranko to the north-east. The success of the Rokel trade depended not only on the peace and political stability of the navigable portion of the river, but also on the peace and security of the areas of supply. From the very early days trade and politics had become inextricably intertwined in the Rokel River region.

The greatest asset of the region, which gave it an edge over the other trading areas in Sierra Leone (e.g. Sherbro) was the magnificent anchorage afforded by the estuary at the mouth of the river, where it is known as the Sierra Leone River. The area of the anchorage is in itself sufficient to entitle the estuary to a prominent place among the natural harbours of the world. In fact Freetown harbour is reckoned the third largest natural harbour in the world; only Sydney and Rio de Janeiro are larger.<sup>4</sup>

Trade in eighteenth-century Sierra Leone was carried out mainly by river routes. The rivers, when they were not made impassable by falls and rapids, provided the most convenient means of transporting bulky and heavy trade goods. Another means of transportation was by human portage through narrow, and sometimes dangerous, bush paths. The Rokel River, because of the qualities enumerated above, was by far one of the most popular river routes in Sierra Leone in the eighteenth century. The excellent port facilities at its mouth, and the hilly and thickly wooded peninsula which provided an abundant supply of wood and fresh water made European ships trading along the coast of West Africa stop at this natural harbour, at a point appropriately named the Watering Place. Here they would take on fresh water, buy food (mostly fruits) from the local inhabitants, and barter their European goods for the local commodities they desired.

Organisation of trade followed closely the pattern in the other parts of the West coast. The key men in the trading arrangements were a group of people known variously as factors, agents, or (more correctly) as middlemen. These were intermediaries between the coastal/European merchants and the hinterland peoples, who were the principal producers. Three centuries of association and trading contact with Europeans on the coast had gradually produced by the eighteenth century a code of conduct designed to govern and regulate the trading relationships on the coast. This code of conduct, popularly known as the landlord/stranger relationship, centred on mutual trust and reciprocal duties.<sup>5</sup> In return for the regular customary present (or dash) from a stranger to his landlord (the local headman), and the stranger's observance of certain agreed standards of conduct, the landlord undertook not only to protect him and his property, but also to be held responsible for his actions.

The stranger recognised the sovereign authority of his landlord who retained absolute control over the land on which he was allowed to build his "factory" or to settle. The local headman had the power to refuse to become the landlord of any particular stranger or to

terminate the mutual relationship that existed between them. The present (or dash) which a stranger gave to his landlord depended upon the status of the particular landlord. The arrangement however had to be renewed when a chief died and a successor was installed. If a stranger had more than one landlord (as often happened in those days) then he would owe (depending on the number of landlords he had) two or more sets of obligations, and would be expected to keep all his landlords informed of his movements and activities.

Because of the difficulties of transportation and perhaps the danger to health (quinine was not available until the middle of the nineteenth century), most of the actual trading had to be done through these agents to whom the firms and individual merchants on the coast "trusted" trade goods on the promise of exchanging these for a stipulated quantity of local produce desired by the suppliers. These agents located themselves at strategic trading points mainly along the river routes like Port Loko, Mange Bure, Kambia, Senehun, and Magbeli — all on or near river-heads, beyond which the rivers are no longer navigable, where the various peoples of the hinterland brought their produce for exchange for such European manufactured articles and other commodities as they desired.

These agents made considerable gains from their activities as middlemen. Whenever the European employer advanced (or trusted) goods to an agent, the former always reckoned the amount of produce (or number of slaves) he expected such goods to fetch him. Very often, however, the middleman was able to procure the goods (or slaves) with much less than the articles "trusted" for their purchase. The goods saved this way formed the profit of the middleman. In addition, the middleman was paid a commission for his work, reckoned in relation to the amount of goods trusted to him, and promptness in his discharge of the obligation. He could become very rich within a short time. It was in the interest of the landlord to ensure that his stranger was not swindled by less scrupulous members of his community. If it happened that a middleman proved unco-operative in meeting the obligations he entered into with the European merchant on the coast, it would be the responsibility of the merchant's landlord to help bring the defaulting middleman to book.

There were, broadly speaking, two major categories of middlemen in the Rokel in the eighteenth century: those appointed by the landlords for their strangers, and those directly recruited by the merchants themselves. There were more of the latter category than the former. They were made up of both local inhabitants and non-native African settlers, who were sometimes brought into the country by the European merchants themselves. Very often it was the local inhabitant himself who offered his services to the European merchant, and was accepted under certain conditions. Both categories of middlemen, however, came under the control and protection of the landlord while under the employ of the coastal merchant.

Some of the European traders provided arms and ammunition for their agents so as to augment the protection offered by their landlords.<sup>7</sup> The local African rulers did not seem particularly worried about this; what they objected to was the building of any sort of fortification by the strangers, European as well as non-Europeans, in their midst. The Sierra Leone rulers seemed apprehensive of the possible use to which such fortifications might be put in the future.

This is not to say however that no fortifications of any sort were ever allowed. On the Sierra Leone coast, although nothing as elaborate as the Elmina or Christianborg Castle on the Gold Coast were ever built, a few were actually constructed.<sup>8</sup> On the Bunce Island and in the Sherbro area the English put up structures that have sometimes been described as fortifications. European traders, anxious to protect their merchandise and themselves, had to erect fairly strong and durable structures, and it is a matter of opinion when such structures ceased being "factories" and became "fortifications." It would appear, also, that "Sierra Leone" trade was never of sufficient volume to call for the erection of major fortifications, which would have been very expensive to maintain.

The first fort to be built anywhere in Sierra Leone was erected by the Dutch in 1664 at Robaga, the sacred Koya town at the mouth of the Rokel River.<sup>9</sup> The "fortification" consisted of two wooden houses occupied by eight or ten Flemings and their launches. The English built a fort on the Bunce Island in 1672, and another at Sherbro soon after. The French had no fortification at their base on the Gambia Island, and the Portuguese had by the



1670s abandoned Port Loko area where they had settled in the 16th century.<sup>10</sup>

European trade to and from West Africa radiated round these forts (popularly known as factories). For trade to prosper the European adventurer had to keep abreast of the changing tastes of the various inhabitants of the different parts of West Africa. It was in his interest to come to the West Coast with a suitable cargo as the tastes and desires of the peoples of the various parts of the region varied considerably. The articles considered highly valuable by the local communities of a particular region would be stacked in the factories in that locality.<sup>11</sup> They would thence be despatched in small boats placed in the charge of agents, properly equipped and protected, to the different river-heads. On arrival at his destination the agent would immediately present himself to the headman, inform him of his business, and request his protection.<sup>12</sup> As soon as the negotiations were concluded the landlord became responsible for the safety of the person and of the goods of the stranger. He also assumed responsibility for the recovery of all debts owed him, provided that all transactions were concluded with his approval or knowledge. The agent did not commence trading until every arrangement with the landlord had been properly concluded. With the landlord's approval he would then give out his goods to local agents who would carry them farther to the interior if necessary in order to barter them for the local produce (including slaves) desired by the middleman; or the latter might decide to wait till those commodities were brought to him at the riverhead trading centre.<sup>13</sup> The former was the most expeditious way of conducting the business, particularly if the goods fell into good hands; but the latter was by far the safest.

The local inhabitants of the areas where the factories were located and at the river-heads, benefited by the way they were able to exploit both the European merchants and their agents. They acted as intermediaries between both and the indigenous peoples in the interior. They studiously discouraged the peoples of the hinterland from coming to the trading areas, for that would ruin their business. The European merchants asked for many local items like camwood, ivory and so on. By the late eighteenth century however the trade in slaves had gradually come to supersede trade in all other commodities.

In spite of the fact that salt was in great demand locally on the Rokel, particularly by those in the immediate hinterland, whose needs the local manufacturing centres mainly in Koya could not adequately meet, the local rulers strictly forbade the importation of this commodity by the European merchants. This was because such importation would have interfered with the local manufacture.<sup>14</sup> The protection given to salt manufacture against foreign competition was one of the earliest examples of the efforts by West African peoples to protect a home-made product.

The most popular currency in use on the Rokel, as in most other parts of West Africa at this time, was the iron bar. The price of each article was reckoned in so many bars of iron. The iron bar was not a circulating currency, it was merely a standard medium for reckoning trade articles.<sup>15</sup> The bar varied in value from place to place. After the bargain had been struck the buyer handed over to the dealer so many pices of stone to represent the number of bars agreed upon. Then the equivalent of bars in goods would be delivered to the dealer piece by piece for which he returned so many stones for each to the buyer as represented by the number of bars for each item. It was a fairly complicated system of bargaining. By the eighteenth century however the coastal peoples, and even some inland groups had become so thoroughly conversant with the system, that they often outwitted their European strangers.

The landlord/stranger relationship was thus an important aspect of the social and economic life of the Rokel River region in the eighteenth century. As trade prospered the number of strangers increased, and the local rulers (as landlords) benefited. Some of the latter became extremely wealthy, partly from the presents and other payments from their strangers, and partly from their own trading activities. In some areas, like Koya, the number of strangers became so large that they came to outnumber the indigenous group. But in spite of the large number of strangers, some of whom were wealthy and influential, the local rulers and headmen apparently remained in most areas and for the most part of the eighteenth century in control of the affairs of their territories, and were treated with respect and deference by their many strangers — European as well as non-European.

## Impact of the Freetown Colony

The establishment of the Freetown settlement in 1787 revolutionized the landlord/stranger relationship that had existed hitherto on the coast of West Africa. The treaty which King Tom, the sub-chief in charge of the Watering Place signed supposedly on behalf of all the Koya Temne, in May, 1787 made him "for ever quit claim" to the strip of land (20 by 12 miles) which he was granting to the "free community of settlers."<sup>16</sup> It is open to doubt if King Tom really understood the meaning of the treaty he signed. As a Temne chief, and a sub-chief at that, he was not permitted to sign away the right of his people over a piece of Temne territory. Such an action would tantamount to high treason. It is probable that he regarded the arrangement as in no way different from the customary landlord/stranger relationship. It is noteworthy that Naimbana, Tom's overlord, raised no objection to the granting of the land.<sup>17</sup> It is hardly contestable that he could have regarded the arrangement as committing him in any way than was involved in the customary landlord/stranger relationship. Naimbana and some of his important chiefs could not have realised in full at that time the extent to which Temne sovereignty and way of life would be affected by the establishment of the new colony. In fact Naimbana was all for the settlement, and did everything possible to help during the difficult early years.<sup>18</sup> However, some of his sub-chiefs and people proved less readily co-operative. "Several of the neighbouring chiefs" said one of the early governors, commenting on the difficulties of the settlement, "viewed it [the Colony] with suspicious solitude... extremely jealous of any attempt at forming a permanent settlement protected by any sort of fortification among them... and the Europeans engaged in the slave trade did not fail to take advantage of this... to instill in their minds the strongest and most unfavourable prejudices respecting the intentions of the Sierra Leone Company in forming the settlement."<sup>19</sup> During the early difficult years the settlers had no choice but to cower to their Temne hosts.

In November 1789 the colonists offended their Temne landlords and were given three days to vacate the Colony which was subsequently completely destroyed. The Colony had to be virtually re-founded in 1790, strengthened in 1792 by the arrival of the Nova Scotians. The new proprietors of the settlement, the Sierra Leone Company, chartered in 1791, engaged in extensive commercial activities in order to finance the secondary motive of the company which was philanthropy. John Clarkson, who had accompanied the Nova Scotians from North America and was later appointed governor by the Directors of the Company, was extremely ingratiating towards the Temne chiefs, particularly Naimbana. The regent gave him full support in return, but many of his sub-chiefs remained rather lukewarm towards the settlement.

But in spite of their lukewarm attitude towards the Colony generally, the various chiefs and headmen seemed very anxious to send their children to the Colony schools, to acquire the "white man's education" which was so very useful for commercial transactions. Clarkson received several applications from them for the admission of their children to the schools. Naimbana expressed disappointment at the inability of the Directors of the Company to send a schoolmaster to live among his people.<sup>20</sup>

But Clarkson soon ran into difficulties with the local people. Pepys, the Colony's surveyor, started cutting roads through Temne farms and villages which were still scattered throughout the territory ceded to the settlers. The villagers resisted what they regarded as an infringement and tried to stop him. It was believed by the Temne, many of whom had no idea that their lands had been ceded to the settlers, that the surveying was in preparation for a war the Colony was planning to launch on them for the purpose of taking their lands away from them. Pepys complained to Clarkson who invited Naimbana and his chiefs to a "palaver" to discuss the problem.<sup>21</sup>

The chiefs, after giving full expression to their fears regarding Pepy's activities proposed, as a solution, that the Colony give up the sea coast from "Fora" Bay, from which a new line of division was to be drawn up the country, as far inland as the colonists wished. This, Clarkson rejected, on the ground that first, he was not authorised to alter the Colony's boundary, and secondly, that such an alteration would drastically reduce the settlers' access to, and enjoyment of, the coast, which was more fertile than the inland areas. The Temne had, as early as 1792 begun to regret the land grant made only in 1787.



The palaver lasted two days, and ended with Naimbana promising to do everything possible to get all the chiefs more favourably disposed towards the Colony in future. But these promises never materialised. In February, 1793, he died. Two months later, John Clarkson, the conciliatory governor of the Colony, who had sacrificed some of the interests of the settlers in order to win the co-operation of the local chiefs, was dismissed for promising the colonists more than the Directors authorised him to do. The removal of these two people marked a turning point in Temne/Colony relations. William Dawes, Clarkson's successor, lacked the latter's patience and personal appeal and drove the colonists to desperation so that some of them in cooperation with the Temne began to plot against the Colony's authority.

When the French destroyed the settlement in 1794, the new ruler of Koya and successor to Naimbana, Bai Farma, met them on a friendly visit. For a time the Colony authorities were apprehensive of a Temne attack with French assistance, but it did not come. Bai Farma, acting in accordance with Temne custom, demanded of his strangers the customary "dash" due to a new landlord. But Zachary Macaulay, now governor, regarding this as a demand for the land to be negotiated for all over again, told the Temne leader that the land had been alienated, and refused to give him any presents.

Bai Farma sent to Macaulay warning him of the serious consequences that might follow his non-observance of the customs of the land. He, in addition, levelled all sorts of charges against him, and accused him of bad faith.<sup>22</sup> Macaulay, he said, had failed to report himself formally to the landlord as demanded by custom; that he (the Bai) had heard very many bad things about Macaulay and about his intentions towards the Koya Kingdom and the Temne people. He had been informed, for example, that Macaulay had sent for soldiers to come and drive the Temne people away from their lands. He had heard also that Macaulay intended to gather all Koya headmen together in his house and blow them up with gun-powder. He was aware that Macaulay had begun to acquire land in the mountains, which area was not included in the ceded territory. He had also been informed that the Sierra Leone Company sent some items of clothing to him and his chiefs which Macaulay had appropriated. And worse still, information had reached him that Macaulay had given the Temne people a bad name in England, and had shown his disrespect for the Koya leaders by his refusal to make "feasts for the headmen in the country, and played with them as he ought to do."<sup>23</sup>

"Tell Macaulay" Bai Farma went on, "to pay King Tom 600 bars for all the bad he has done, and that he must pay the same every year. The mountains were not in our bargain before; he must pay for them too." He then ran up a charge of nearly 1,000 bars and ended, "Tell Macaulay to take care of my devil; tell him to do me good, or my devil must do him bad."<sup>24</sup> Macaulay refused to be intimidated by these threats. However, an agreement was eventually drawn up to which all the names of the important Koya chiefs were placed stipulating that the King should receive a sum of 100 dollars<sup>25</sup> because of all the troubles caused him by the Colony; and he in turn "expressly relinquished every other claim."

Gradually, the Temne became aware of what must have appeared to them to be the real intentions of the Freetown settlers — to take their country away from them. They adopted a highly provocative attitude towards the Colony authorities. They taunted and harassed the colonists in every way. They ignored the boundary line drawn in 1792 by Clarkson marking the western limit of the colony, and drove the settlers resident in the area away from their farms. The settlers added fuel to the fire by giving refuge to runaway slaves whom they refused to hand over to their Temne owners. The attitude of the Colony authorities also changed dramatically towards their Temne neighbours. They began to see them as "indolent, faithless and ferocious," and their chiefs as "rapacious, drunken and deceitful."<sup>26</sup>

In 1801, Dawes, back as governor, told Bai Farma that he must either depose King Tom, the sub-chief of the Watering Place, or settle the western boundary dispute at once. This was the last straw to break the camel's back. As an ultimatum and a challenge to the king's authority it amounted to a declaration of war. The Colony had paid no rent for the land it was founded on; it had refused to observe the customary tribute due to a landlord. The arrogant settlers had given refuge to Temne runaway slaves, and refused to give them up, and ever since its establishment the settlement had engaged in building fortifications and other

defence works. The Koya Temne, encouraged by the European slave traders among them, and some disgruntled Colony settlers, decided to destroy the Colony before it became too strong for them to handle.

The attack, which came early in the morning of November 18, 1801, was well planned.<sup>27</sup> The attacking Temne force killed three soldiers and thirty civilians, including women and children, before they were beaten off. Some friendly chiefs, sent forces to assist Colony defenders, but were sent back because of the expense of maintaining them. A second Temne attack in April of the following year proved less successful. King Tom was driven away from the west of the Colony, and his attempts to secure assistance from Bulom Shore chiefs, among whom he had taken refuge, were foiled. The Koya Temne accepted defeat, and a peace treaty was concluded with them in 1807.

The peace treaty of 1807,<sup>28</sup> by which Colony's right through cession was superseded by right through conquest, ushered in a new phase in Temne-Colony relations. Temne territory to the west of the settlement, as far as False Cape, was added to the original grant, purely by right of conquest. Signior Domingo's Town to the east was also incorporated into the Colony in return for a "reasonable compensation." However, the Colony continued the payment of the 100 dollars agreed upon in 1794 as an annual present to Bai Farma, and guaranteed his continued collection of the customary dues at the Watering Place (from which Colony vessels were exempted).

In the same year (1807) Britain made the slave trade illegal for her subjects, took over from the Sierra Leone Company the administration of the Colony in Freetown, and made it the base for the suppression of the slave trade in West Africa. The growing Colony encroached further and further upon Temne territory throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, and the weak and leaderless Temne of Koya had no alternative but to give way. By their defeat of the Temne forces in 1802 followed by the peace treaty of 1807<sup>29</sup> the colonists had demonstrated, in a sharp manner, to the peoples in their neighbourhood, and to their Koya Temne landlords in particular, that the Colony had come to stay.

### **Susu domination of Port Loko**

Situated strategically at the head of a navigable creek (particularly at high tide), and lying along probably the most important route to the interior — to Futa Jalon in particular — Port Loko area of the Rokel had become very important long before the eighteenth century. The original Loko inhabitants had been swamped by the pushful Temne who moved into that region perhaps in the fifteenth century and entrenched themselves. However, the relationship between the communities did not seem ever cordial.<sup>30</sup>

As trade with Europeans on the coast increased, so did Port Loko rise in importance, and did the area assume a more cosmopolitan outlook. The Portuguese had recognised its importance commercially since about the sixteenth century when they set up a trading depot there<sup>31</sup>. Many Mande-speaking peoples also settled in the area primarily to trade. Prominent among these were the Susu, who inhabit the mountainous country northwards of the Sierra Leone peninsula today.

The Susu had traded regularly with the coastal peoples long before the eighteenth century bartering cloths woven by the Fula, and iron worked from the ferrous rocks in their country, for salt. They also supplied a little gold.<sup>32</sup> They were primarily agriculturists in their own country where they came into frequent conflict with the pastoral Fula.<sup>33</sup> However when they and the Fulas were threatened by a common enemy about the middle of the sixteenth century, the two peoples united for their defence. The Susu, however, thenceforth re-routed their trade northwards to the Rio Nuncz for fear, no doubt, that the unfriendly coastal communities would be tempted to take reprisals on their traders.

But by the beginning of the eighteenth century, the Susu had started once again carrying trade to the Sierra Leone peninsula, this time from their base on the Port Loko Creek,<sup>34</sup> where they competed with the Temne, Loko and other traders in the area as middlemen. The most important Susu family to settle in Port Loko area was the Sanko family who came from Melakuri. Muslims, the Susu called their leader Alimami, meaning chief. They built their

own town and called it Sendugu, after one of their own towns in Susu country. (Sendugu now forms part of the present town of Port Loko). The settlement at Sendugu grew rapidly as more Susu immigrants found their way to the area. Some were attracted by the booming trade, particularly in slaves. Others were invited by the local inhabitants to assist in the various conflicts that broke out from time to time.<sup>35</sup>

Many of the Susu who were forced out of their home as a result of the Futa Jalon jihad earlier in the century found new homes in Port Loko area among their kinsmen. The population of Sendugu increased, and later another town was established called Robat. Many of the itinerant Mande Muslim scholars who carried the faith to Port Loko area also settled among the Susu in Sendugu and Robat. The Islamic school opened at Sendugu became very popular and many local Temne and Loko chiefs and other dignitaries in the area sent their sons to that school for the highly prized Islamic education.

Gradually the Susu, immensely successful in trade, highly respected by the local populace for their Islamic learning and their claimed power over the supernatural — witchcraft in particular — and often dreaded because of the outstanding qualities (and brutality) of their warriors, came to supersede the other groups both economically and politically. They placed the traditional chieftain — the Bai Seborá — under a curse for allegedly refusing to compensate some Susu Muslim traders whose properties were plundered by the Bai's people.<sup>36</sup>

The first Susu leader of Port Loko was Alimami Namina Modu, a Sanko who came to the territory in the 1760s.<sup>37</sup> He was succeeded at his death by Alimami Amara. The Sanko rule of Port Loko however did not seem destined to last very long, even-though they tried to secure their position by taking daughters of important Temne and Loko chiefs as wives. For during the reign of Namina Modu, a young man, also of Susu origin, Moruba Kindo Bangura by name arrived in Port Loko from Sanda country. He attached himself to the Sanko rulers, and rose rapidly to the position of a Santigi (the Alimami's second in command). He was said to have been thoroughly grounded in the Islamic religion, and was highly regarded by the Temne, with whom he was very friendly. Moruba Kindo Bangura was to become, during the second decade of the nineteenth century, the leader of the political revolution which ended Susu domination of Port Loko.

The Susu domination of Port Loko represents an interesting example of *African* imperialism before its European counterpart. It also bears some striking resemblances to it. Like the European colonisation of Africa, its motive force was economic exploitation. The Islamic religion and culture, which many Susu had acquired before coming to the region, gave them an air of superiority over the "pagan" indigenous inhabitants. It was not surprising therefore that the Susu rulers who recognised the dangers to their own position inherent in the establishment of the Colony in Freetown, were the loudest in its condemnation, and the foremost in the abortive plans hatched by the Rokel communities to destroy the Colony.<sup>38</sup>

### Yoni and Gbonkolenken

According to oral tradition <sup>39</sup> the Fulas of Yoni came to the Rokel with the legendary Bai Farma Tami. At that time Yoni, was part of Banta territory. Its capital Gbangbatok, situated at the head of navigable Gbangbatok Creek, linked the territory up with the Bagru River and so with Sherbro trade, and had become one of the leading trading towns in the area long before the eighteenth century.

It was Bai Farma Tami, tradition states, who gave the Banta people their first Fula chief — Masa Kele. Masa Kele divided his domain into sections and placed the present Yoni area under two of his followers: Araba and Amadu Jalloh, who were both Muslim Fulas. Amadu Jalloh became the first Alimami of the Yoni area of the country, and was succeeded at his death by Araba, his second in command. After Araba, Kajoro, his eldest son, became the Alimami because at that time Amadu's eldest son who ought to have succeeded Araba was still too young.

It was during the time of Alimami Kajoro that the Kpa Mende began to arrive in Yoni territory. War broke out between them and the Temne (Banta) inhabitants. The latter appealed



to the Fula strangers for support. The Fulas, anxious to protect and promote their own interests, rallied to the aid of the Temne. With this help the Temne succeeded in keeping the present Yoni territory free from Mende domination. In appreciation of the assistance rendered by the Fulas, the Temne formally recognised the Fula leader — the Alimami — as their own head as well, and called him Fula Mansa, meaning Fula chief. The first two Fula Mansas were Bibinkoro and Gbanshankoro, who were brothers, sons of Alimami Amadu Jalloh. The Fulas entrenched themselves by marrying the daughters of important Temne leaders, and by bringing in the Poro Society from Sherbro which gave them greater authority and security by making the person of the Fula Mansa sacred and inviolable. The first Poro Fula Mansa was Kayito, the grandson of Araba.<sup>40</sup>

But renewed Kpa Mende attacks during Kayito's reign once again threw the Yoni territory into confusion. Fula Mansa Kayito, reputedly a very incompetent ruler, failed to rally sufficient force to counter the Kpa Mende challenge in spite of his Poro connections. He was forced into exile to a small Masimera town called Masawurr. Here he died with all the sacred accoutrements of the chieftaincy with him. Because of his death in exile the customary Poro ceremonies following the death of a Poro-installed chief could not be performed. So, for more than fifty years there was no Fula Mansa in Yoni territory. During this period the Bai Seboras of Yonibana ruled the whole territory.

The effects of the Mende "invasion" of the Temne in certain areas of the Rokel region were not limited to Yoniland. The present Gbokolenken (Yele) area, where the people call themselves Temne Mabanta, strongly suggesting a Banta origin, also seems to have suffered considerably. According to local tradition,<sup>41</sup> the territory now called Gbonkolenken Yele originally extended much further southwards than it is today. But when the Mende came in the eighteenth century, and wanted land for their own use, they attacked the original inhabitants, and forced them to move northwards. The defenders sought refuge on a small island formed by the Teye River a tributary of the famous Taia River. Here they invited a famous Moriman (a Muslim charm maker) to help them meet this Mende challenge. Their small island home quickly proved inadequate for the needs of the Temne refugees whose number swelled rapidly by the addition of more people from the Mende-held regions of their land. Large areas of the island also became flooded<sup>42</sup> during the rainy season thereby making life difficult for the people. However, with the help of the Mori-man they were able to drive away the Mende, and recover some of their land south of the Teye River. But when they felt safe enough to move from their island home to a better location — the present Yele town — they established their settlement on the northern rather than on the southern side of the river, which subsequently became a useful defence barrier. Mende attacks, however, continued well into the nineteenth century, when peace was finally established by the local rulers themselves.

### **Gumbu Smart and the Rokel Politics**

The most outstanding individual in the Rokel trade and politics in late 18th century was Gumbu Smart. Smart was a Loko who found his way to the Rokel region about the middle of the eighteenth century. The various aspects of this remarkable man's life<sup>43</sup> illustrates, very strikingly, many aspects of life in general in the Rokel River region during the second half of the eighteenth century. His life is like a mirror through which one might observe aspects of the social, economic and political life of the region during the period under review. He began his journey to fame as a fugitive from his father's anger for being the cause of the death of one of his brothers. He ran into the net of the slave raiders in the Port Loko area, was captured and sold to the European slave traders on the Rokel.

His physical fitness and efficiency impressed his masters so much that they decided to retain him to work for them. He was later employed as a factor, and sent to various parts of the Rokel region and beyond, in search of trade goods — particularly slaves. He developed very close relations with many of the Rokel rulers of the period who were only too glad to have him as their stranger. Smart became wealthy and influential as a result of a successful trading career. He assisted some of his landlords in their wars, tapping his European connec-

tions to advantage. One of these landlords — Bai Simera of Masimera — was so impressed with Smart's assistance that he, in gratitude, compensated him by conferring a chieftaincy title on him. The conferment of a chieftaincy title ended the landlord/stranger relationship that had existed between Smart and the Masimera ruler. Smart thereafter became one of the "owners" of the land, and settled down permanently in the territory. The formidable Loko community which he subsequently built in the area dominated its commercial and political lives until the early nineteenth century. In the end Smart became a bitter opponent of slave trading and threw his considerable weight behind its total abolition on the Rokel. He worked hand in hand with the authorities in Freetown in this regard.

Smart welcomed the establishment of the Freetown Colony. He visited the Colony on several occasions and was very impressed by what he saw. He welcomed the opportunity to be associated with the Colony; he adored European culture. During his long association with Europeans on the coast he had gradually acquired a good deal of European taste. He spoke the English language fairly well and understood it better still. His house at Rokon though built of mud, was finished in a very handsome style, furnished with beds, bed hangings, tables and chairs quite in the European style. The whole massive building was divided into three comfortable and airy apartments.<sup>44</sup> The only house that could compare this on the Rokel at that time both in comfort and elegance was Mori Bundu's at Foredugu. This latter house was described as over one hundred feet in length, very wide and spacious, and was divided into about five comfortable apartments. The walls were over twelve feet high, with many windows and surrounded with verandas. The rooms were cool, and well ventilated. A Colony official admitted that he was struck by the extreme neatness and cleanliness of everything about that house.<sup>45</sup> Successful middlemen lived elegantly and comfortably in the late eighteenth century on the West African coast.

Smart was never seen without being properly dressed, in the European fashion, complete with jacket and shoes. It was not for no reason that the Colony officials and settlers always referred to him with the dignifying appellation of "Mr" — the only African in the vicinity of the Colony ever so addressed in those early years of the settlement. Smart's commitment to the European ways and ideas was very deep. He valued European education and welcomed the Christian teachings offered by the Colony Missionaries. He was extremely well disposed towards the Colony's civilising enterprise, and expressed a strong wish for the youth of his own place to get a means of attaining western education.<sup>46</sup> He welcomed enthusiastically the stationing of two missionaries in his town, where they opened a small school attended by local children.<sup>47</sup>

Smart's acceptance of the two missionaries, Campbell and Henderson — both from Scotland — was without any reservations whatsoever. He took them as his own sons, and readily undertook to patronize them; to give them houses to live in; and guides and every assistance if they wished to go beyond Rokon on their proselytizing activities.<sup>48</sup> The missionaries were however not the right persons for pioneering Christianity on the Rokel. They failed to accomplish their task. One fell ill and returned home to Scotland; the other lost his wife a few months after arrival, abandoned the mission a year or two later, married a local woman, and turned a slave trader.<sup>49</sup>

In choosing Gumbu Smart as their ally in their humanitarian work, the Freetown authorities had chosen wisely. Smart shared their views. But Freetown also had other reasons for selecting him. Smart, by the time the Freetown Colony was in a position to pursue its civilizing activities vigorously, had become a wealthy, powerful and influential man on the Rokel. Colony authorities certainly regarded his friendship as a great blessing.<sup>50</sup> They saw it as no mean point gained, considering the weight of Smart's influence not only in the Rokel where he lived but also in the Loko country — his own home area — and even among the other peoples of the adjoining territories. In addition, by the 1790's Smart's following had run into several thousands. Rokon, his town, contained well over 1,000 inhabitants, and was one of the major population centres on the Rokel during the period.<sup>51</sup> It was regarded in the Colony as the most populous town in the region.

A town of this description could not but have attracted the attention of the Freetown

Colony authorities as a possible centre for the work of Euro-Christian civilization. In addition to all these considerations was Smart's own friendship and concern for the Colony. Smart needed the Colony's friendship in order to counter the growing hostility of his employers on the coast, who were themselves not friendly towards the Colony because they felt, rightly that the Colony would in future undermine their business. After the death of Naimbana in 1793 and with the worsening of relations thereafter between Koya and the Colony,<sup>52</sup> Smart became the most important local ruler of substance that the colonists could rely upon for support. Bai Farma II who became the ruler of Koya in 1794 was, as already pointed out openly hostile towards the Colony.<sup>53</sup>

Smart constantly reminded the colonists that they might depend upon him; that as long as he lived the Colony would come to no harm from the neighbouring peoples; that before war reached the Colony his own people must be defeated and himself slain.<sup>54</sup> So the Colony relied heavily on Smart both for the security of the settlement and the spreading of civilization and enlightenment among the neighbouring peoples. They saw him as a means of bringing to fruition their plans of civilization in this part of Africa. Smart, to them was a central figure in Rokel politics, for "all important matters depended on him as he possessed about as much power as all the other chiefs with their kings at their head possessed and a far better understanding and clearer and juster views than any of them."<sup>55</sup> The Freetown authorities thought very highly of Gumbu Smart.

Another stranger of note on the Rokel River, both in terms of wealth and of political power and influence, was Mori Bundu of Foredugu.<sup>56</sup> Mori Bundu was a Bunduka Fula. Smart had met him during his visit to his country in 1770 and had invited him to make charms for him. Mori Bundu stayed at Foredugu and married a daughter of Naimbana, and became the wealthiest man in Koya during the closing years of the eighteenth century. As an outstanding Mori-man his personal prestige and influence were great over the surrounding chiefs, including Smart. It was his presence at Foredugu that turned that town into the leading Koya town not only in the eighteenth but also in the nineteenth century, long after his death

Later in the nineteenth century, particularly with the development of trade, other than in slaves, the family of Mori Bundu was to grow even more powerful and influential for maintaining in their own area of Koya the peace and order necessary for trade to prosper, which peace and order the weak and leaderless Koya Temne people were incapable of maintaining. But their success roused the envy and jealousy of the indigenous population who aimed at destroying them; just as the success of the Smart family excited the hatred of the Temne of Masimera who sought to drive them away completely from the Rokel.

Mori Bundu was not the only Bunduka of importance on the Rokel in the late eighteenth century. Another group of Bundukas, described as "aristocratic Fulas", "reliable sons of Chiefs," from St. Louis in Senegal, came to Sierra Leone — to the Rokel — during the last quarter of the century.<sup>57</sup> They were agents of the French slave traders on the Gambia Island. The French who had been trading on this Island since 1772 and which was formally ceded to them by Naimbana in 1785, despatched these Bundukas along the Rokel River and the Port Loko Creek to exchange "money, guns, powder" and other French manufactures for ivory, gold, and slaves. They did not seem to have relied exclusively on the protection of their landlords in their respective trading areas, for they were reportedly "guarded... by well-armed mercenaries recruited in Senegal and French Guinea".<sup>58</sup> A group of the Bundukas went beyond Port Loko Creek to Sanda Magbolonto (a Limba/Temne chiefdom) and settled there to trade.

In 1793 heavy mortality forced the French to abandon the Gambia Island. Their Bunduka agents who apparently were not informed of the evacuation of the Island, learnt about it later and decided to "settle down and make homes in their new sphere of life",<sup>59</sup> trading on their own. Because of their wealth and military know-how the native population feared and respected them. And to secure their positions further they married daughters of the principal men in their new homes.



## Conclusion

The Rokel River region was in a state of flux during the latter years of the eighteenth century. Far-reaching social, economic and political developments were taking place. The coming of the strangers helped to transform the socio-cultural configuration of the region in a very thorough and lasting manner. Stranger elements feature prominently in the trade and politics of the region during this crucial period. The Freetown colonists, the "Mande" immigrants in various parts of the area, and the European traders among the communities all qualify in the category of strangers. These stranger elements revolutionized the trade and politics of the Rokel region. They all effected major social, economic and political changes in the areas of the Rokel they occupied. In fact the late eighteenth century in the Rokel River region can, with some justification, be called the era of strangers. However, the dominating influence of alien settlers which very easily gives the impression of weakness and insecurity on the part of the indigenous local communities can very often be exaggerated. Wars loom very large in the oral traditions of the Rokel communities, but the destructive and incapacitating effects of the wars are very often grossly exaggerated. The scene was set for the emergence of a new social pattern.

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## **SOME OBSERVATIONS BEARING ON VITAL REGISTRATION IN ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES OF NIGERIA**

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

It is generally recognised that "national statistical services should provide adequate statistics, including vital statistics, which can be the basis for informed national decisions on economic and social matters..." [U.N., 1964, p. 1]. Included in the field of vital statistics are such vital events as live births, deaths, foetal deaths, marriages, divorces, adoptions, legitimations, recognitions, annulments and legal separations. However, in establishing or developing a vital statistics system, the recommendation by the United Nations is that first priority should be given to setting up procedures for the registration and reporting of live births and deaths. [U.N., 1964, p.6].

On the uses of vital statistics, the United Nations observe that systematic recording of births and deaths was initially a procedure for establishing a record solely for its legal value and that the recognition of the value of these records as a source of statistics developed much later as the potential uses of vital statistics as administrative and research tools became evident.

#### **Legal Uses**

The events of birth and death constitute two major land-marks in a person's life as they mark the beginning and the end of the individual's existence in human society. In this respect, registration records relating to the occurrence and characteristics of these events are the most authentic legal documents for establishing proof of facts about the individual and also for establishing a host of claims, rights, obligations and disabilities incidental to the individual's membership of the human society. Birth and death registration records can therefore be used in establishing proof of age, parentage and nationality in various situations such as in applications for admission into school, employment, passport and registration as a voter in parliamentary and local government elections.

#### **Economic and Social Uses:**

One of the most important uses of vital statistics is their function in the demographic analysis of population for economic and social purposes. An analysis of the present demographic status of a population as well as its potential growth in terms of size, characteristics, geographic distribution and health status is of paramount importance in determining the economic and social life of a population, and must be based on a study of the natality, nuptiality and mortality rates effective in that population [U.N., 1964, p. 3].

### **Administrative Uses:**

In the field of public health, vital statistics are needed in connection with the development, planning, operation and evaluation of public health and medical programmes. Vital statistics are also employed for determining administrative action in respect of the programme of governmental agencies other than those concerned with public health and also in relation to numerous professional, private and commercial activities. Examples include (a) planning and production of public and private housing and educational facilities; (b) planning and operating social security programmes and private insurance enterprises; (c) production of consumer goods such as medicines, food, clothing, furniture and equipment for infants and mothers, as well as household equipment in general and (d) provision of medical care facilities for deliveries, services for interment, etc.

### **The Nigerian Situation:**

As in most underdeveloped countries there is as yet no vital registration system with national coverage in Nigeria. Although registration areas exist, the only one with any claims to effectiveness is that of metropolitan Lagos.

Recognizing the importance of vital statistics for planning purposes, the government of the former East Central State (E.C.S.) of Nigeria (now Anambra and Imo States of Nigeria) issued an edict in 1972 providing for the compulsory registration of all live births, deaths and marriages in the State. This law is the East Central State of Nigeria Edict No. 7 of 1972 and is published in the E.C.S. Official Gazette No. 19 of May 4, 1972. The aim of this paper is (1) to examine the effectiveness of this law and (2) to suggest ways of improving upon the current level of birth and death registration in these States.

## **II. THE REGISTRATION OF LIVE BIRTHS AND DEATHS IN ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES**

As we noted above, the edict providing for the compulsory registration of all live births, deaths and marriages in Anambra and Imo States (then E.C.S.) came into force in May, 1972. For purposes of implementing this registration scheme, the urban centres and community council areas were constituted into registration units. In the urban areas, the town clerks were to act as registrars of births and deaths and they were to submit their registration returns to the Permanent Secretary of the then Divisional Administration Department (D.A.D.), Enugu. In the rural areas, the community council secretaries were to assume the role of registrars and they were also to be responsible (through the Divisional Officers in charge of their divisions) to the Permanent Secretary, D.A.D., Enugu. Both the town clerks and the community council secretaries were required, among other things, (1) to ensure that all live births and deaths occurring in their areas of authority were registered, (2) to collect the necessary registration fees and (3) to render returns at the end of every month to the Permanent Secretary, D.A.D., Enugu. (In the case of community councils, these returns were to be sent through the respective Divisional Officers).

To determine the degree of effectiveness of the registration scheme in Anambra and Imo States we carried out a comparison between the registered and the "expected" births in these States between 1973 and 1975. These were the only complete years for which information on registered births could be had because (1) the edict establishing the registration scheme was enacted in 1972 and (2) the data for this analysis were collected between 1974 and 1976. (It should be noted, in this connection, that the same objective could equally be achieved by a comparison between the registered and expected deaths.)

Information was not available on the actual numbers of live births that occurred between 1973 and 1975 in these States. Estimates of these births (here termed "expected births") were made as follows: The mid-1962 population figures for Anambra and Imo States as estimated by Okonjo (1968, pp. 94-95) were projected to 1973, 1974 and 1975 respectively,

assuming a rate of growth of 2.5 per cent per annum. Having obtained the estimated populations for these years, their expected births were calculated on the assumption of a crude birth rate (CBR) of 50 per thousand population per annum. The estimated populations, as well as the expected births, are shown in Table 1. The table also shows a comparison between the registered and the expected births.

TABLE 1

**COMPARISON OF THE REGISTERED BIRTHS WITH THE EXPECTED BIRTHS  
(ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES, 1973-75)**

<i>State</i>	1973	1974	1975	<i>Total</i>
<b>Anambra</b>				
Estimated population ('000)	4,542	4,655	4,771	13,968
Expected births (EB)	227,100	232,750	238,550	698,400
Registered births (RB)	5,802	6,753	5,236	17,791
RB as a percentage of EB	2.6	2.9	2.2	2.5
<b>Imo</b>				
Estimated population ('000)	4,945	5,069	5,195	15,209
Expected births (EB)	247,250	253,450	259,750	760,450
Registered births (RB)	4,967	4,283	920	10,170
RB as a percentage of EB	2.0	1.7	0.4	1.3
<b>Anambra and Imo</b>				
Estimated population ('000)	9,487	9,724	9,966	29,177
Expected births (EB)	474,350	486,200	498,300	1,458,850
Registered births (RB)	10,769	11,036	6,156	27,961
RB as a percentage of EB	2.3	2.3	1.2	1.9

*Source:* (for the 1962 mid-year population): Okonjo, 1968, pp. 94-95.

- Notes:* (1) Population estimates for 1973, 1974 and 1975 were based on Okonjo's 1962 mid-year estimates which implied figures of 3,461,585 and 3,768,766 for Anambra and Imo States, respectively, as at mid 1962. These figures were then projected on the basis of the officially assumed rate of growth of the Nigerian population of 2.5 per cent per annum.
- (2) The expected births were obtained on the assumption of 50 births per 1000 population per annum.
- (3) Owing to the gross inadequacy of demographic statistics in Nigeria the above assumptions cannot be rigorously defended. However, even a drastic modification of these assumptions is unlikely to change the picture of extremely low level of birth registration.

The table shows that in 1973 only 2.3 per cent of the live births expected in the two States were registered. The level of registration was slightly higher in Anambra State (2.6 per cent) than in Imo State (2.0 per cent). Throughout the period under consideration registered births, as a proportion of expected births, did not reach 3.0 per cent in any year. At any rate, there is a noticeable drop in the level of registration in Imo State from 2.0 per cent in 1973 to 0.4



per cent in 1975. A plausible explanation for this is the creation of the State itself. Since there is usually a time lag between the occurrence of a live birth and its registration as well as between the latter and the receipt of the returns at Enugu, it would appear that both the anticipation and the actual creation of Imo State acted as a disincentive for sending returns to Enugu from divisions within Imo State.

### **Deficiencies in the Registration Scheme:**

It is evident from the above comparison that even if our assumptions regarding (1) the base population, (2) the annual rate of growth of the population and (3) the CBR of 50 live births per thousand population per annum are only remotely correct, the registration scheme in these States was far from effective during the period under consideration. (We can note here immediately that a similar comparison between registered and expected deaths would have revealed a lower level of registration than the above since the incentive to register must necessarily be higher for births than for deaths.)

Under normal circumstances, it could be argued that the launching of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) scheme in the country in 1976 may have acted as an incentive to raise the level of birth registration in these States. But the circumstances have not been normal and so it is doubtful that the level of birth registration since 1976 would have exceeded that of the 1973-75 period. The grounds for doubt include the following: First, for a child to be registered for the UPE, his/her parents are required to produce his/her birth registration certificate or, in lieu of that, an age declaration. Now it costs 75 kobo to register a birth within the first month of its occurrence whereas an age declaration costs 50 kobo. There is therefore no reason to suppose that parents would prefer birth registration to age declaration.

Second, prior to the introduction of the new system of local government administration in the country about four years ago community council secretaries acted as registrars of birth and deaths in the rural areas. Under the current system, community councils are yet to start functioning. The result is that those who may wish to register births and deaths have to travel to their respective local government head-quarters which are usually far away. Besides, there is no guarantee that if the journey to the headquarters is undertaken, registration will be completed without a number of call-backs. One of the reasons for this is that the registration of births and deaths is only secondary to the main job of the responsible local government official.

The poor performance of the scheme can be traced to a number of deficiencies in the organizational set-up of the scheme itself. Some of the major deficiencies relate to (1) the absence of full-time staff, (2) the unit of registration and (3) the lack of incentives to register births and deaths.

### **Absence of full-time Staff:**

The edict establishing the registration scheme merely charged town clerks and secretaries of community councils with the responsibility of ensuring the registration of vital events within their areas of authority. What these "registrars" did was simply to assign the registration exercise to one member of their staff in addition to some other duties assigned to him/her. From the point of view of economy in resource allocation this is justifiable because the number of events brought up for registration probably did not warrant the appointment of full-time personnel in each registration unit.

Be that as it may, it is rather inconceivable that a viable registration system can function without a government agency or agencies charged with the responsibility for its establishment or development. Furthermore, such an agency must have a number of full-time personnel with "clear designation of duties and responsibilities with respect to registration, recording, reporting, collection, compilation, analysis, presentation and distribution of data, and the critical evaluation of the system" [U.N., 1964, 4]. This has not been the case with respect to the system in Anambra and Imo States.



### **The unit of registration:**

The United Nations recommend that (1) the size of the primary registration unit should be such that the registrar in charge can give to that unit the attention required to produce good registration and (2) local registration offices should be established in adequate numbers and in such locations as will ensure that they are easily accessible to the public. Besides, these offices should be kept open for business during convenient hours, so that the informant may comply with the registration requirements within the time allowed for current registration [U.N., 1964, 8].

As we have already noted, in Anambra and Imo States urban areas and community council areas constitute primary registration units. The situation is worse now that the community councils are not yet functioning again, which means in effect that the Local Government Areas (LGA's) are now the primary registration units. Clearly then the registration offices are not easily accessible to the majority of the public and they are not open during convenient hours, say between 4-6 p.m.

### **Incentive to register:**

Quite apart from the fact that as of now no government agency or authority has assumed responsibility for ensuring compliance with the registration edict, there is no strong incentive to stimulate and encourage the public to comply with this law. The current practice is to charge the informant 75 kobo if an event is registered within the first month of occurrence; ₦1.00 after the first month but within the first year and ₦1.25 after one year. But as an incentive to registration, it is desirable that events registered within a certain prescribed period of time should be free of charge to the person making the registration. In Ghana, for example, births and deaths registered within the first month of occurrence attract no charge to the informant.

## **III. SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING THE REGISTRATION SCHEME:**

### **Organizational set-up:**

As a first step towards the improvement of the registration system, not only in Anambra and Imo States but also in Nigeria as a whole, the National Population Bureau should be charged with the responsibility of establishing and developing a national vital statistics system. While the head of the Population Bureau could be the national registrar (of vital events) there should be fulltime registrars at the State and Local Government Area levels. In line with the recommendations of the United Nations, these registrars should be responsible for ensuring (1) compliance with the registration law and (2) the accuracy and completeness of each record. They should also have the obligation to adopt appropriate measures to inform the public of the necessity, procedures and requirements for effecting registration, and the value of vital statistics. In view of these responsibilities the registrars should be remunerated sufficiently well to attract competent personnel and to vest their position with prestige.

### **Registration units:**

In the urban areas, the establishment of registration centres should be guided by the following two considerations: (1) easy accessibility to the public and (2) the probable volume of registration. The number of centres to be established in each urban area will therefore be determined by its size in terms of both population and land area. The registration offices in these areas should be open till 6 p.m. to enable those who close from work at 3.30 p.m. to register after their own office hours. In this respect, the assistant registrars who are expected to man these offices should start work at 10 a.m. and close at 6 p.m. Needless to say, other variants of this suggestion could be adopted depending on the circumstances of each area.

It is clear that in the rural areas, to establish registration centres in adequate numbers

and in such locations as will ensure easy accessibility to the public will require the employment of several hundred registration officers in each State of the Federation. This cannot be economically justifiable in view of the fact that each officer will necessarily have a very small work-load. What is being suggested therefore is that in these areas a few assistant registrars or supervisors should be appointed at the LGA level while headmasters of primary schools are made part-time assistant registrars. These headmasters should be given allowances of between ₦5.00 and ₦10.00 per month depending on the size of the unit they cover and the distance between their locality and the LGA Headquarters.

In view of the importance the Government attaches to them as units of administration and development, it is strongly recommended that the LGA's should constitute *supervision areas* for the vital registration exercise. Also, since the LGA's are now to have full control over primary education it should be easy to tag the registration scheme on to the primary school system. Another advantage of this is that primary school pupils can be made to play a vital role in this exercise by (1) informing their parents and others of the necessity and usefulness of registering births and deaths and (2) reporting any vital events that occur in their villages to the headmaster who, in turn, will take steps to have such events registered. Since every locality not only belongs to an LGA but is also served by a primary school, effective supervision and co-ordination at this (LGA) level is certain to result in a high rate of registration throughout the country. In this regard, the LGA's should be made to recognise the registration exercise as one of their priority functions, especially as they themselves will need these records for purposes of planning for social and economic development.

### **Incentives:**

As pointed out earlier, it is desirable that, as an incentive to register, informants should not be charged any fee within, say the first month of the occurrence of a vital event. Thereafter, graduated fees could be imposed.

It is also necessary that the public should be made to appreciate the value of birth and death registration by making the enjoyment of such rights as admission into school, being allowed to vote in elections, etc. dependent on the production of birth certificates. This is not to say that these rights will absolutely be denied those without birth certificates; it means that they will first have to register under the provision for the registration of "declared events" and here the declaration may be made subject to an appropriate fee and substantiation by judicial procedures, documentary evidence and/or affidavits.

### **The reporting of vital events:**

Another source of information on vital events is the routine reporting of births and deaths by health institutions to the Ministry of Health. These health institutions include hospitals, maternity homes and rural health centres. Our analysis shows that reported births constituted 18.7 per cent of expected births in Anambra and Imo States combined in 1971. The corresponding percentages for 1972, 1973 and 1974 were 15.6, 14.9 and 13.3, respectively. However, not all the health institutions make the required returns to the Ministry of Health. In 1971, for example, the total number of institutions in the two States was 526. Of these, only 334 (or 63.5 per cent) made any kind of returns to the Ministry of Health; there was also no way of checking on the completeness of the returns made. The reporting rate was higher for maternity homes (62.3 per cent) and rural health centres (83.3 per cent) than for hospitals (45.6 per cent). These results are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2

**REPORTING RATES OF HEALTH INSTITUTIONS IN ANAMBRA AND IMO STATES  
IN 1971**

	<i>Hospitals</i>	<i>Maternity Homes</i>	<i>Rural Health Centres</i>	<i>All Institutions</i>
Number of existing Institutions	90	334	102	526
Number reporting .. ..	41	208	85	334
Reporting rate (%) .. ..	45.6	62.3	83.3	63.5

*Source:* Unpublished reports from the Statistics Unit, Ministry of Health, Enugu.

While recognizing that not all births at present occur in health institutions, we believe that there is a clear need to improve upon the level of reporting by these institutions as data obtained from them will serve not only to provide a check on the registration exercise but also to direct attention to some specific events that may not have been registered. In this regard, it is suggested that governments in the Federation should make it mandatory for all health institutions to report on a regular basis all births and deaths occurring in them to the Ministry of Health. Such reporting should be tied in with any expected government financial aid, recognition, etc. Besides, the institutions themselves should be educated on the need for them to have these records for purposes of their own planning in respect of mother care, expected deliveries and paediatric requirements.

#### IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The paper started with a brief review of the uses of vital statistics. It then went on to examine the effectiveness of the 1972 registration edict in Anambra and Imo States. This was done by comparing the number of live births registered in these States from 1973 to 1975 inclusive with the expected births based on assumed rates of growth of population and a crude birth rate of 50 births per thousand population per annum (also assumed). The analysis indicated a very low level of registration — not reaching 3.0 per cent in any one year.

Some of the factors responsible for the low degree of registration were identified as (1) absence of full-time registrars, (2) unwieldy registration units and (3) lack of incentives to register. Suggestions for improving the registration scheme therefore included among other things (1) charging a specific Federal agency with the responsibility for vital registration; (2) staffing such an agency with competent personnel who are to be adequately remunerated; (3) establishing registration centres in such numbers and locations as will ensure their easy accessibility to the public; (4) using headmasters of primary schools as part-time assistant registrars in the rural areas and (5) abolishing the payment of fees for events which are registered within the first month of their occurrence.

In making the above suggestions it is recognized that the scheme is not meant to be self financing for, if most of the vital events are registered within the first month of their occurrence, (i.e. during the period when no fees will be charged) the sum to be realized through fines for late registration will not amount to much. In other words, budgetary allocations will have to be made specifically for the vital registration exercise and the adequacy of such allocations will be taken as a measure of the importance government attaches to the use of vital statistics for economic and social planning.

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## TRANSFORMATIONS IN TRADITIONAL NGWA SOCIETY

By

DR J. N. ORIJI

The topic of this paper is of particular interest to Igbo specialists. The Igbo are said to be very receptive to change and it is likely that their society has been undergoing a more rapid pace of transformation in modern times than those of other major ethnic groups in Nigeria. In spite of this development, we know little about the forces which are chiefly associated with the dynamics of Igbo society. Some of the problems which have militated against our understanding of the dynamics of Igbo society are methodological. Until recently, some researchers adopted the synchronic approach in their analysis of Igbo history and culture.<sup>1</sup> They usually studied the present institutions of the people and established some models of their past history from such a study. As will be shown shortly, this approach is unsatisfactory because it ignores the fact that Igbo society is not static but has been undergoing many changes over time.

Horton is a typical example of one of those researchers who have applied the synchronic approach in his interpretation of cultural change amongst the Igbo.<sup>2</sup> Although the outdated "conflict and equilibrium" model which was probably formulated by E. Evans-Pritchard in 1940 has been criticised by many social scientists, Horton used it in his study of Igbo society and argued that the dynamics of that society was shaped by lineage conflicts.<sup>3</sup> Without revealing the origins and nature of the conflicts Horton described, it will be difficult for one to determine the pattern of alliances in an Igbo community because as we shall see later, the Igbo have a complex system of jurisprudence.

Since little is known about the history of most Igbo groups before the 19th and 20th centuries, researchers should be cautious in making generalisations about earlier periods. What is urgently needed is an inductive or micro-study of the various groups in order to establish a comparative and deductive hypotheses of their history. As the Ngwa example will demonstrate, the view that the history of Igbo groups cannot be studied diachronically ought to be re-examined critically.

A diachronist is primarily concerned with understanding the forces which have transformed the society he is studying. He cannot do this successfully if he presumes that an equilibrium exists in that society. Admittedly, the diachronic or evolutionary (developmental) approach has been misinterpreted by some writers who have argued that there is a unilinear evolutionary process which every society must undergo. But as Cohen and others have pointed out, each society has its own peculiarities and patterns of adaptation to its environment.<sup>4</sup> This is a fundamental assumption of the evolutionary theory and it implies that there are multilinear processes of human adaptation. It is then the responsibility of each researcher to discover the evolutionary patterns of the society he is studying.

This work will be related to four dimensions of cultural change in Ngwaland. These are the time-dimension, the external and internal forces of transformation (the external and internal dimensions respectively) and the emerging changes within the internal environment.

### Time - Dimension

Time - dimension is important in a diachronic research. Unless a researcher specifies the period of history he is analysing, he is prone to create the misleading impression that the society he is studying is static. For example, there are different periods of Ngwa history. These include the pre-historic period which is associated with the traditional society, the proto-historic period dealing with the trans-Atlantic trade and the modern period which is concerned with colonial rule and self-government. Although this paper will examine the factors which led to the transformation of the Ngwa society during the pre-historic period, it has been shown that that society underwent further changes during subsequent periods.<sup>5</sup>



## **The External Forces of Transformation**

It is a myth to presume that there is a "pure society" which has not been influenced by its external environment. Changes could occur in a society as a result of military invasions, trade, emigration and other factors. The important thing is for a diachronist to identify those factors within the external environment that are crucial for understanding the transformations which took place in the society he is analysing.

## **The Internal Forces of Transformation**

It must not be imagined that external factors alone could transform a society. External factors are like an innovation and their impact on a society will depend on the structure of that society. Thus as will be shown later, due to the rivalry amongst the members of the dominant lineage of the early Ngwa, some of them who exploited the population movements into their clan, were able to found new communities. Change can then be seen as an internal development which is stimulated by external factors.

## **The Emerging Changes within the Internal Environment**

As a result of the interaction between the internal and external environment of a society, many changes could occur. Pre-existing institutions might be strengthened or weakened and new social structures could emerge. As an example, the establishment of new communities tended to weaken the central authority of the early Ngwa but when the conflicts amongst them were resolved, they were able to establish centralised polities embracing different sections of their clan. It is therefore important to recognise the nature, pattern and consequences of the transformations which have taken place in a society within specific periods of its history.

These dimensions of cultural change are helpful in establishing some hypotheses for a diachronic study of Ngwa history. For example, instead of claiming that the dynamics of the Ngwa society was shaped by "lineage conflicts", it will be shown that demographic and economic factors were associated with the changes which occurred in that society within the period under study. In addition, it will be demonstrated that it is misleading to characterize the Ngwa as a people who lived in "an acephalous society" because they evolved different political systems over time.

## **Cultural and Ecological Background**

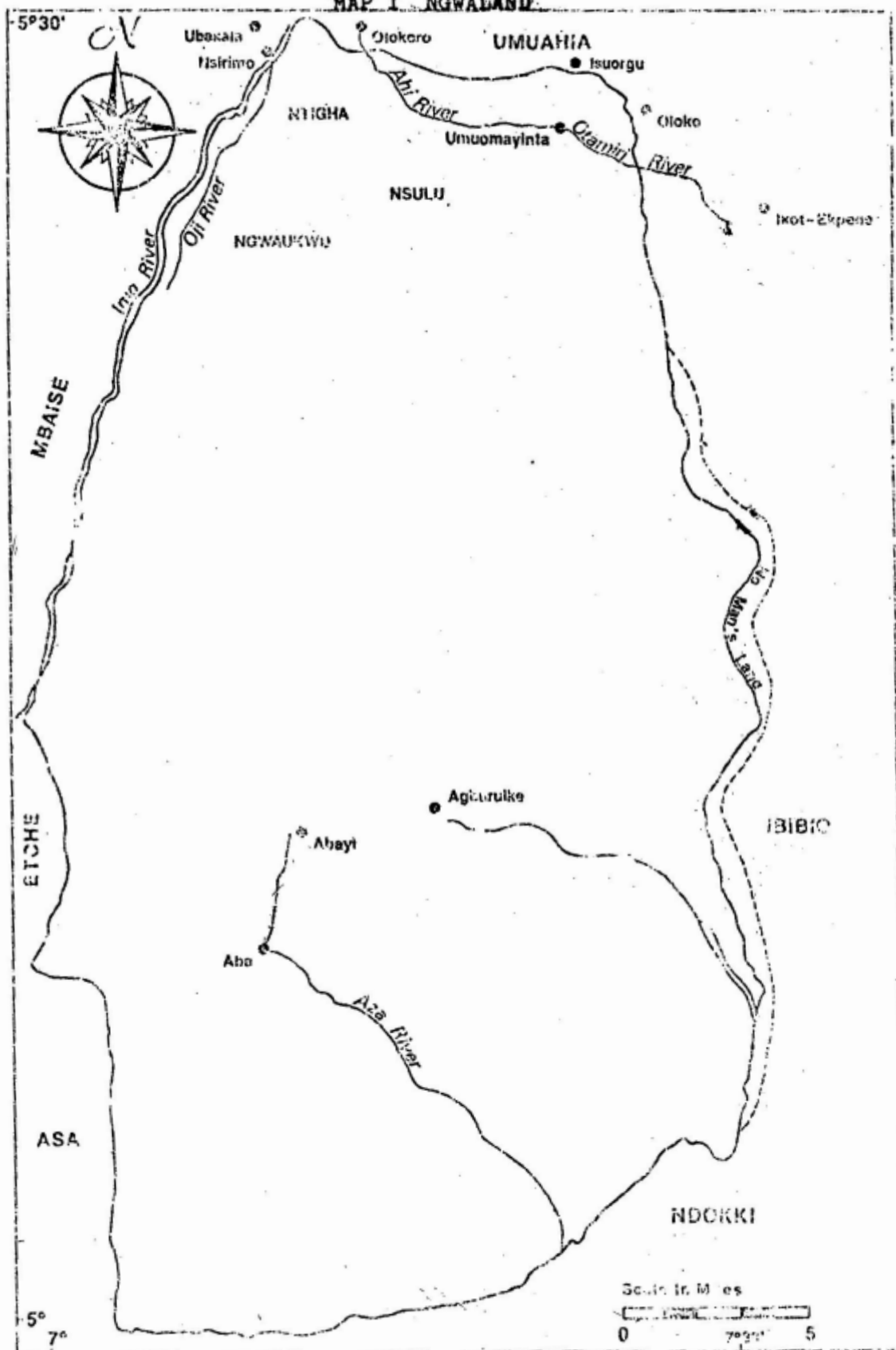
The Ngwa are said to constitute the largest clan in South-eastern Nigeria. They occupy an area of about 1312.768 square kilometres and their population in 1963 was estimated to be 314,840 people. Ngwaland is enclosed by latitude 5°30'N. and longitude 7°0' and 7°30'E. (see Map 1)<sup>6</sup>. It is bounded on the west by the Imo River and from that river, the northern section now known as Isiala Ngwa stretches to the eastern part of Ngwaland until it joins the Ahi river about two miles east of the Oloko-Umuahia road. The eastern boundary runs roughly north-eastwards and joins the "no-man's land" which separates the Ngwa and the Annang (Ibibio).<sup>7</sup>

Northwards and adjacent to the Ntigha and Nsulu village-groups are the Ubakala and Olokoru clans. The northeastern neighbours of the Ngwa are the Isuorgu and westwards, the Imo which separates them from the Mbaise serves as a boundary between them and the Omuma-Etche clans. The Asa and Ndokki clans share a common border with the Ngwa in the south.<sup>8</sup>

Oral traditions which were collected by Allen and confirmed by this writer show that although the area in which the Ngwa live at the present time was mostly covered by virgin forests, they were not the first group to settle there.<sup>9</sup> "Bands of pioneers from different parts of Igboland" appear to have crossed the Imo river and settled in small pockets near it and its



# MAP I. NGWALAND



tributaries before the arrival of the Ngwa.<sup>10</sup> Presumably, the pioneers who lived primarily in the eastern and southern parts of Ngwaland were the manufacturers of the Aba-Ngwa Chert hand-axe which is said to be the earliest evidence of human activity in Igboland.<sup>11</sup>

As Jones has pointed out, the movement of people who are called Ngwa into their present location, was one of the major and latest pre-historic population movements in Igboland.<sup>12</sup> Tradition states that the early Ngwa migrated from the town of Umunneoha of Agbaja group in Owerri area and from other parts of the Igbo heartland and settled in the northern section of their present location.<sup>13</sup> Even though nobody knows the exact time these population movements into Ngwaland took place, some inferences on the chronology of early Ngwa history can be made from a few sources.<sup>14</sup> Alagoa and Fombo have postulated that Ngwa-Igbo immigrants who settled in Bonny probably in the 14th century, were amongst the founders of the earliest dynasties which ruled that town.<sup>15</sup>

The fact that the Ngwa are associated with the origin of kingship in Bonny around the 14th century, is noteworthy. It shows that they might have settled in their present territory before then. However until archeological work is carried out in Ngwaland, we have to rely mainly on recorded traditions for reconstructing a tentative prehistory of the clan before the 14th century.<sup>16</sup> From these traditions, seven phases of the movement of the early Ngwa to various parts of their clan and neighbouring territories have been differentiated. These are, the northern or nuclear area of the clan, the north-western, eastern and southern sections. Subsequently, they settled in the present territory occupied by the people of Asa and Ndokki. The movement of the Ngwa from Umuagbai in Ndokki clan to Bonny appears to have marked the last phase of their expansion southwards.<sup>17</sup> This piece-meal and fairly orderly occupation of different parts of Igboland has been noted by Jones.<sup>18</sup>

However, a tradition which was collected in the Igbo heartland claims that the Ngwa, Asa, Ikwerre-Etche and some other groups moved from the heartland to their present location.<sup>19</sup> People from these areas have been having cultural and commercial ties with the eastern Delta states from time immemorial. Perhaps as in Bonny, many of them joined the Ijo who migrated from the ancestral home in central Delta via Igboland to the eastern Delta at the inception of these states. In fact, the king-lists of eastern Delta towns show that some of their earliest rulers bore Igbo names.<sup>20</sup> There is then a possibility that the Ijo intrusion into parts of Igboland increased the local population and precipitated further movements southwards. Alagoa has stated that Delta settlements like Elem Kalabari were founded between 1200—1400 A.D.<sup>21</sup> His chronology suggests that the Ngwa and some other Igbo groups might have started to migrate southwards to the coastal region by the 13th century.<sup>22</sup>

More importantly, the introduction of iron technology in the forest region of West Africa between 500 B.C. and 1000 A.D. is significant for understanding Igbo origins. It has been suggested that the Igbo initially lived in the fringes of the forest region. But due to the discovery of iron technology, they began to settle in large numbers in different parts of that region.<sup>23</sup>

Recent studies have not only shown that agriculture was indigenous to the forest region but have also indicated that the Igbo were amongst its pioneer Iron Age cultivators.<sup>24</sup> These views are re-inforced by archeological evidence which suggests that Neolithic Man had settled in parts of Igboland such as Nsukka and Afikpo areas by 3,000 B.C.<sup>25</sup> Although the crops Neolithic Man cultivated have not been identified, it is significant that the "white yam", (*D. rotundata*) is said to be indigenous to West Africa.<sup>26</sup> This yam is also known as "Eboe yam"<sup>27</sup> and until recently, the word "Igbo" was spelt as "Eboe" by many writers.<sup>28</sup> Presumably, the Igbo whom Coursey described as the most enthusiastic yam cultivators in the world, were amongst the earliest group to domesticate the white yam which bears their name.<sup>29</sup>

It is then necessary to see the transformations in the Ngwa society in a larger context. They are the results of a gradual but more complex and ancient development which began in Igboland at the time Neolithic Man invented agriculture and learnt how to master his environment with iron tools. As the Ngwa case will illustrate, it is likely that the cosmology of other Igbo people and their socio-political organisation were closely linked with their agricultural milieu. This may be why as Talbot and Jones have noted, they recognized the earth-deity, the goddess of fertility and agriculture as their most beloved deity.<sup>30</sup>

## Evolution of the Ngwa Society

After migrating from Igbo heartland, the early Ngwa are said to have established settlements which evolved into larger social and territorial groups over time (see Fig 1). In fact, as early as 1933, Allen had noted that the Ngwa clan had an "internal outgrowth."<sup>31</sup> The pyramidal structure of the clan is associated with many factors.<sup>32</sup> As will be shown later, traditional authority holders of different groups owed ritual and religious allegiances to their ancestral settlements where they derived their common symbols of authority. This form of relationship was institutionalised after some generations and it explains why there was a hierarchy of cultural centres in Ngwaland. As an example, village-groups and their off-shoot settlements which usually bear the same name, recognized their senior village (Okpuala) as the most important cultural centre in their area. Similarly Okpuala-Ngwa which is the legendary home of Ngwa people, emerged as the leading cultural centre of the clan.

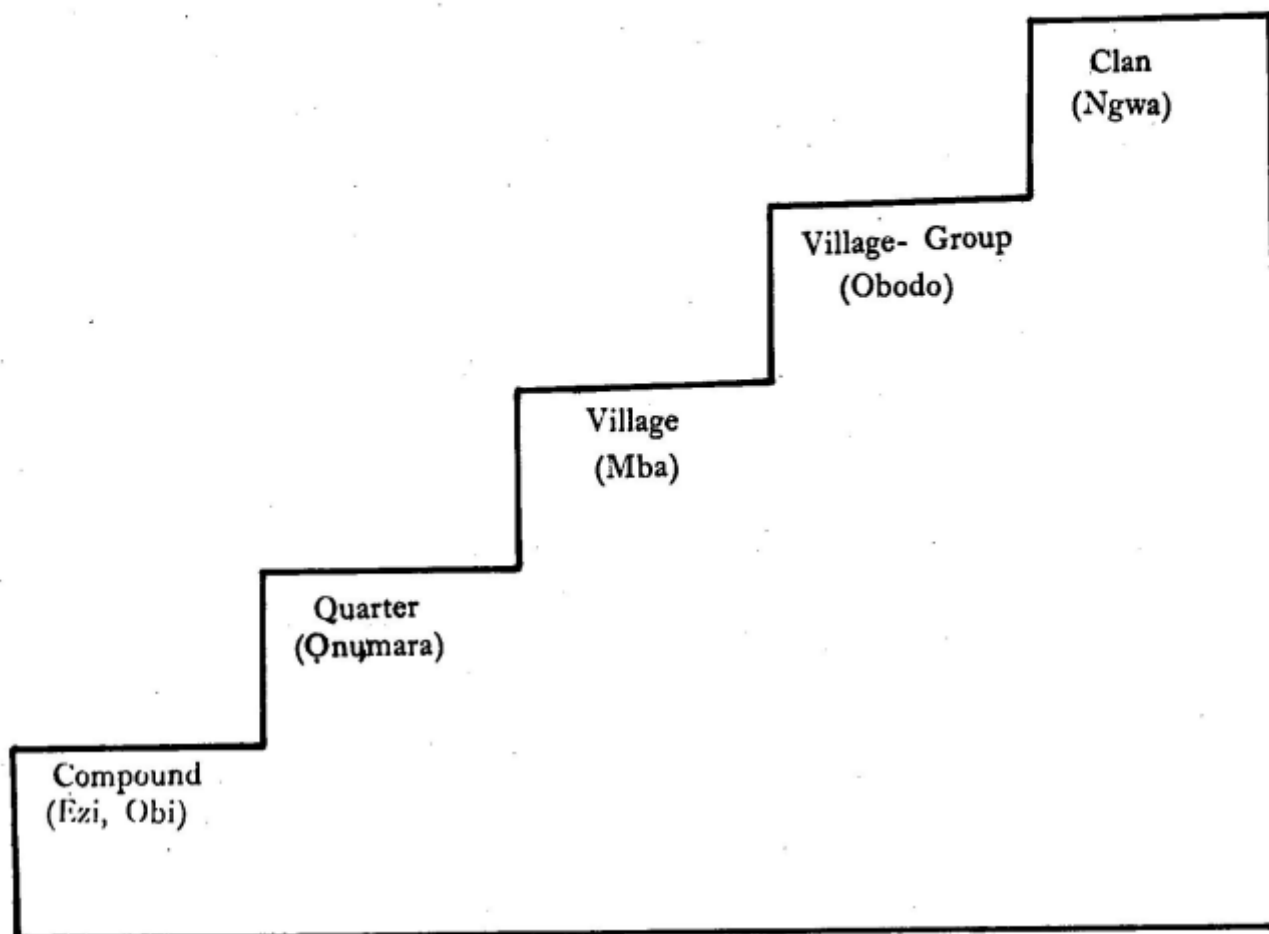
The hierarchy which existed amongst the various cultural centres was re-inforced by the expansion of the Ngwa to the eastern and southern sections of their clan. Since parts of these areas were already occupied by the Ngboko and Asa respectively, the Ngwa intrusion often led to bloody conflicts. Those who lived in the peripheral regions of Ngwaland then had to unite not only amongst themselves but with their kith and kin in their parental settlements against a "common foe".<sup>33</sup>

Five stages of evolution of the early Ngwa society can be distinguished, (See Fig. 1). During the first stage, pioneer settlers like Ukwu (Onye-ukwu), Nwaoha, Avosi, Nte, Nsulu, Okwu, Ngwu and Ntu are said to have established their compounds (Ezi, Obi) at Eke-la-Afo (now a sacred forest in Okpuala-Ngwa) and its environs. Each of these compounds comprised households whose members traced common descent to a patrilineal ancestor (Umunna). A household which was the basic unit of socialisation and production was headed by its father (Nna) while the compound was administered by its oldest member (Okpara) who held its ancestral staff of office (Qfọ).<sup>34</sup>

However, even though the compound was the minimal political community of the early Ngwa, it is said that heads of various compounds recognized Ukwu, the founder of the earliest settlement at Eke-la-Afo and the oldest member of their community as the leader (Okpara-Ukwu) of their corporate patrilineal group or quarter (Onumara). Thus while his staff of office was called "Qfọ-Ukwu" (the great ancestral staff of office), those of heads of compounds were simply known as "Qfọ" (ancestral staff of office).<sup>35</sup>

Ngwa cosmology emphasizes the crucial role Qfọ-holders played in the administration of their community. It claims that even though the ancestors were dead, they were living in the world of spirits (Ala-muo) and were concerned with the affairs of the living members of their lineage. Since Qfọ-holders were regarded as the representatives of the ancestors on earth, people believed that those who obeyed them would be rewarded with rich harvests and many children while those who flagrantly abused the traditions and customs of their society would be punished with poverty, sudden death and other calamities. So, besides serving as a means of social control, Qfọ conferred special privileges on its holders who constituted the council of elders of the quarter (Umuokpara).

FIG. 1. *Stages of Evolution of Ngwa Society.*



Ofo-holders could make laws on marriage, birth and death ceremonies in their lineage and settle disputes arising from feuds, inheritance and succession. More importantly, the head of Ofo-holders (Okpara-Ukwu) regulated many religious and economic activities within the quarter. As an example, he was expected to preside over the annual communal worship of the ancestors and since it was believed that he was in constant contact with them, he decided when it would be propitious for people to cultivate their land and harvest their yams. He administered the lineage land and during the farming season, he determined the section that would be cultivated and shared it to his kinsmen according to their ranks and needs.<sup>36</sup>

While the Umuokpara and other elders constituted the heads of the politico-religious, judicial and legislative organs of their community, agents of the god of yam (Njoku) were recognized as their administrative organ. Before the introduction of cassava in Ngwa land some species of yams which are probably indigenous to this area had been their staple food crop.<sup>37</sup> This was why the Njoku were greatly respected because it was believed that their curse could lead to a sharp decline in the quantity of yams a man would produce during the harvesting season. People then feared to arouse the displeasure of the Njoku so that they would not be threatened with starvation.

The authority holders of the quarter were rewarded for their services. For example, a large portion of the ancestral land (ohia ofo-ukwu) was attached to the office of the Okpara-Ukwu. Although he could not alienate it, he had usufructuary rights over it. During the farming season, members of his community were expected to work for him on each Orie-day of the four-day Igbo week. They harvested his palm trees, built his houses and carried out any other tasks he might assign to them during that period. In addition, he received various forms of tribute (ihu) from his kinsmen. As an example, each of them who had raffia trees



which were being tapped, were obliged to give him the entire wine their trees would yield on every orie-day (Ngwọ orie). When they killed some animals during festivals or while hunting, they reserved special parts of these animals like the heart, neck, liver and gizzard for him and whenever kolanuts, palm wine, meat and food were shared publicly, the first share was given to him. Furthermore, during the annual communal worship of the ancestors, his people brought different types of gifts like yams, chickens and goats to him as sacrificial offerings.<sup>38</sup>

Because of the numerous rewards he received, the Okpara-Ukwu was not only the richest member of a quarter but also the major centre for the redistribution of the material resources of his community. Besides giving periodic gifts to his subordinate Qfọ holders and the Njoku, he was expected to be generous to every member of the quarter. Thus when people visited him, they ate and drank freely at his expense in his out-house and meeting place (ovu). He helped the needy members of his "lineage" and could buy farming equipment like knives and hoes for them so that they might improve their social status.

The distribution of roles and the development of the redistributive system amongst the early Ngwa have been emphasized to show that there was a hierarchy of authority in the quarter. The Okpara-Ukwu and other qfọ-holders were at the apex of central organs of authority and the Njoku were in charge of their administrative system (See Fig 2). While the former occupied hereditary positions, the latter were usually ailing children who were dedicated to the yam-deity by their parents so that they might be cured. When such children grew up, they were expected to express their gratitude to the deity and act as its agents. Thus even though the lineage and political organisation of the quarter tended to coincide, some synchronists appear to have emphasized mainly its kinship elements.<sup>39</sup> It will be shown that during the next stages of evolution of the Ngwa society, kinship was no longer an important idiom of political organisation amongst the early Ngwa. Instead, they established polities which were primarily territorial groupings.

### **The Transformation of the quarter (Onumara) into a village (Mba)**

Inferences from oral traditions and written sources indicate that the transformation of the quarter into a village (Mba) was occasioned by demographic and economic factors.<sup>40</sup> As more immigrants from the Igbo heartland were arriving in Ngwaland while the internal population continued to grow, people began to establish new settlements in order to obtain cultivable land and exploit their natural resources. But it must not be imagined that Ngwaland and other parts of Igboland were settled at random or haphazardly as has been the case in modern times. People tended to live in nucleated settlements and according to Jones:

All expansion of a maximal lineage has to be contained within a lineage territory... it was and still is, by normal Igbo standards uneconomic to farm more than a few miles from the household... Thus members of a [village] lived reasonably close together in a zone reserved for habitation, they associated constantly together, and had a large number of institutions reinforcing the solidarity of the group.<sup>41</sup>

Immigrants appeared to have strengthened rather than upset this settlement pattern. Ngwa tradition states that when a wave of immigrants arrived in an area, they often preferred to live in a village which had already been settled to founding new compounds in a distant and isolated virgin forest where they would be exposed to hardships. It further claims that it was during the period when many immigrants had arrived at Eke-la-Afo that Ukwu moved from there to establish Okpuala-Ngwa, the eldest village in Ngwaland.<sup>42</sup>

The founding of Okpuala-Ngwa is crucial for understanding the history of the early Ngwa. It is likely that later immigrants into Ngwaland who had different family and lineage backgrounds would not have given their loyalty to a parochial leader who was particularly attached to a lineage or quarter. Since the movement of Ukwu from Eke-la-Afo to Okpuala-Ngwa freed him from the daily obligations of an "Okpara-Ukwu", he was seen as a symbol of unity of the new community. This was probably why his "Qfọ-Ukwu" was supplemented with "Qfọ-ala" (staff of office of priest of the earth-deity) as an instrument of legitimization

of authority within the village. Unlike the former which enabled him to mobilize members of the quarter by appealing to their "common kinship" or "blood" ties, the latter served as a means of social control in a larger and more complex community.

The adoption of *Qfọ-ala* as a means of social control in the village indicated that the early Ngwa were versed in political philosophy. It was an important component of the earth-deity (*ala*) which symbolized "the land" or territorial area (also known as *ala*) which people occupied and cultivated. Furthermore, markets which were important centres of exchange were located on it. Since land was fundamental to the economic life of the village, its mystical values were appropriated by Ukwu. As the agent of the earth-goddess, the most dominant and revered deity of the Ngwa, he was associated with fertility and man's material blessings. Thus as in the quarter, it was believed that those who obeyed him would be fully rewarded while those who were disloyal to him would be punished with starvation and other forms of misfortune. To reflect the new status which Ukwu occupied, tradition maintains that he was as from then no longer addressed as "Okpara-Ukwu" but as "Eze-Ala-Ngwa" (lit. King of Ngwaland or High priest of the earth-deity of Ngwaland) or "Onye-Nwe-ala" (the owner of the land).<sup>43</sup>

As Ezeala-Ngwa, Ukwu is said to have lived a mystical life. He was bound to observe certain rituals and taboos which were associated with his office. For example, since he was sacred, the behaviour of the Ezeala was jealously guarded so that his humanity would not be betrayed. Thus when he ate, drank and slept, he did so secretly. He was forbidden to eat certain animals which were described as unholy and these included snakes, rabbits, hyenas and other tailed carnivores. Every part of his body, the dresses he wore and his paraphernalia of office like his staff of office (*Nkpara-muo*), red cap (*Okpu*), sword (*Nma*) and iron bangles (*Ola*) were regarded as sacred and ordinary people were prohibited from touching them. In order that his sanctity might not be violated, the Ezeala was not allowed to touch a dead body and for the same reason, corpses and menstruating women were banned from the temple of his deity. He was expected to live in seclusion with his senior wife (*Nnekwu*) around the temple and was bound to propitiate the earth-deity on each market day of his community (*ize-muo*). Elaborate coronation and burial ceremonies further emphasized the sanctity of the Ezeala and since it was believed that he possessed some mystical forces, people feared to arouse his anger.<sup>44</sup>

In spite of the special status he occupied, the Ezeala administered the political, judicial and legislative organs of the village with the "Amala" (the village council) which comprised heads of compounds, quarters, Eze-ji title holders and professional doctors and diviners (*Dibia*).<sup>45</sup> He presided over its court of appeal and controversial cases which heads of lineages were unable to settle, were referred to him for arbitration. The large open space adjacent to his temple (*Ama-ukwu*) was the meeting place for the village and the area where its laws were ratified and sanctified with *Qfọ-ala*. Even though all the customary laws which were said to have been sanctified with *Qfọ-ala* cannot be catalogued in this paper, it is noteworthy that these laws were almost all-embracing. They extended to the "land" or "earth" itself, man, animals and other forms of life that existed on it. For example, boundaries of land within a community were determined by mounds (*Nkpunkpu*) where perennial trees symbolising the earth-goddess were planted. People were forbidden to level these mounds or cut down the trees. Also, *Qfọ-ala* was said to have been used in sanctioning the division of labour among the sexes. As an example, women were forbidden to climb trees and the roof of houses. Animals and crops were not left out. Cocks that crew at odd hours and a he-goat which had sexual intercourse with a sheep were all killed for violating the taboos of the earth-deity. In addition, it was a serious crime to steal or destroy yams, coco-yams and other farm crops after they had been planted.<sup>46</sup>

Ngwa tradition maintains that even though the lineages and the village had different corpus of laws, when they overlapped offenders might be asked to make double restitution. Thus for example, minor disputes such as a controversy between two brothers on the inheritance of their late father's property or over the site of a new building were usually settled by members of their lineage. On the other hand, serious ones like those involving murder and

incest came under the jurisdiction of the Amala. These crimes were not only regarded as a violation of the "ancestral laws" (ida iwu Ndiche) but an act of abomination against the earth-goddess. The offender would be accused of upsetting the "ritual equilibrium" in the village which was vital to the fertility and growth of man, animals and crops.

Because of the ritualisation of laws and the fear of the calamities which would befall the village whenever the taboos of the earth-goddess were violated, offences against her which were regarded as the most serious crime an individual could commit, were of general concern and did not arouse partisan debates. Thus as Gluckman noted amongst the Barotse, there was no difficulty in determining if an individual who had violated the taboos of his community was guilty. As an example, when murder is committed, it was regarded as:

a heinous breach of moral duty for a man to conceal that he had killed another, since killing set up a spiritual barrier between the two set of kins..... The killer himself had to be cleansed from his spilling of blood. Hence there was no problem of fixing guilt.<sup>47</sup>

It then seems that Horton and Green examined only a dimension of the Igbo system of jurisprudence which is based on kinship.<sup>48</sup> It is necessary to distinguish between the "secular laws" of the Igbo such as those that are related to the maintenance of markets and roads from the "sacred" ones which were sanctified with "Ofọ" or "Ofọ-ala". If the former are violated, members of the lineage of the offender might take sides with him in order to protect his interests. But a violation of the latter constituted an abomination (iru-ala) which could threaten the very existence of a community if the offender was not punished according to native law and custom. The offender was therefore usually held liable and responsible for his crime and asked to propitiate the gods whose taboos he had violated.

However, if the village was to survive as a political entity, the laws and the decisions of the Amala had to be enforced. This responsibility was carried out by the "Osu" or "Ndi oga ozi muo" (messengers of the earth-deity) who lived around Okpuala. As Leith-Ross has pointed out, the Osu seem to have occupied different status in Igbo society. Whereas they were treated like social outcasts in Owerri and Onitsha areas, they were not stigmatized in Ngwaland. She then claimed that in traditional Igbo society, the Osu occupied high status which began to decline during the trans-Atlantic trade when they were associated with slavery.<sup>49</sup> Her proposition gives some insight into the important role the Osu played amongst the early Ngwa. They were responsible for the daily maintenance of the temple of the earth-deity and the central meeting place of the village (Ama-Ukwu). They assisted the Ezeala when he was offering sacrifices to his deity and on his directives, they invited elders of the village (Amala) to a meeting. Because of their status, the Osu were venerated. Consequently, it was regarded as a sacrilege for anyone to obstruct them while they were carrying out their functions.<sup>50</sup> Furthermore, they acted as the policemen of their community and whenever there was a serious breach of the peace such as a bloody fighting over a piece of land, they reported it to the Ezeala immediately. As Allen has noted, on such occasion, the Ezeala simply rushed to the scene of fighting with palm fronds (omu) in his hands and once he arrived, the feud stopped automatically.<sup>51</sup> He subsequently summoned the combatants to his Ama-Ukwu where their disputes would be arbitrated by the Amala.

It is noteworthy that the Ezeala occupied an ascribed status like other heads of politico-religious authorities such as Okpara and Okpara-ukwu. His office was hereditary and only the oldest member of the lineage of the founding fathers of a community could succeed him. In fact, while the Ezeala was alive, his successor was expected to act as his deputy (Osota-Eze). Thus by the time he would be crowned as the Ezeala, the Osota-Eze must have mastered his functions adequately.

On the other hand, there were three methods of recruiting the Osu. The Osu were associated with the agricultural environment of the Ngwa which was dominated by the earth-deity. Since the earth-goddess was believed to be responsible for the fertility of crops and animals and for man's material welfare, wealthy members of a community dedicated their sons to her in gratitude for the high status they enjoyed in this world. In addition:

A man who had had a persistent run of ill-luck, whose children died, whose crops



failed, whose household was constantly sick, would consult a diviner who would tell him that... [the spirit of the earth-deity or any other deity wanted him to dedicate someone to the Osu cult].<sup>52</sup>

Finally, some of the Osu were men who were alleged to have committed acts of abomination like murder, incest and witch-craft in their localities. Since such people feared that their lives would be in danger, they often took refuge in the temple of the priest of the earth-deity. Because the temple was regarded as a holy place, people who took refuge there were free from molestation and prosecution. As from henceforth, they automatically became Osu and were forbidden to return to their homes.<sup>53</sup>

For their services, the Ezeala and his subordinate office holders were rewarded by members of their community. Leeming who was one of the earliest colonial administrators to study ancient Ngwa socio-political organisation, has given some insight into the privileges enjoyed by the Ezeala.<sup>54</sup> For example, he was free from manual labour and had many sources of income. As "Onye-Nwe-ala" (the owner of the land) he received periodic gifts like kolanuts, jars of palm wine and goats from heads of lineages of later immigrants whom he gave land to settle. During the farming season, young men from different sections of the village were expected to work for him. When he adjudicated disputes at Okpuala, a substantial part of the "court fees" was given to him. A few weeks before the annual communal worship of the earth-goddess, youths of different age grades danced around their locality with masquerades (Nmanwu) symbolizing the goddess. They collected gifts for that occasion and for the upkeep of the temple. More importantly, on the day when the earth-deity would be worshipped, every wealthy member of each area was expected to offer sacrifices to the goddess. These sacrifices included yams, coco-yams, chickens, goats and even cows. Numerous sacrificial offerings were also made to the deity not only by people who were in distress but those who wanted to improve their fortune. Gifts were given to the Ezeala by parents of a young girl who was about to be married after her pre-marital feast (Ngbede). The Ezeala blessed her and prayed for her fertility as she stood on a large piece of rock (Ajarata), a symbol of fertility of the goddess. Lastly, it is important to note that the goddess could ask for sacrifices from any member of the community whenever the need arose (ida-aja).<sup>55</sup>

But the Ezeala was not interested in acquiring wealth for its sake. Like the head of the quarter, he was the redistributive centre of the village. He entertained leading elders and other members of the village council and maintained the Osu with his resources. People in want approached his messengers who attended to their needs. The Ezeala acted as a consultant to those in distress and aided any of them who could not afford his sacrificial gifts. He was seen as the "economic anchor" of his area particularly during periods of crop failure or poor harvests when members of his community were threatened with famine, (Unwu).<sup>56</sup> Although many researchers have stressed the republican traits of modern Igbo society, the Ngwa example suggests that a cliental or reciprocal relationship existed between their dominant authority holders and members of their community in the past.

### Formation of Village-groups

In a society such as that of the early Ngwa which was based on reciprocal relations, political and economic power was interwoven. A man's material advancement often led to the acquisition of supporters and followers who readily mystified his status. But to be at the centre of the re-distributive system, one had to be either the head of a compound, or a quarter or especially an Ezeala. Since these status were ascribed, potential leaders had to accept subordinate positions or found new settlements where they would be recognized as dominant authority holders. These two factors operated simultaneously at Okpuala-Ngwa. While later settlers seemed to have been satisfied with the status quo, those who were said to be Ukwu's kinsmen, pioneered the founding of new villages outside their original home.

Owing to the balancing of authority between the founders of the earliest settlements in Ngwaland and later immigrants, some heads of the original compounds appeared to have been dissatisfied with the subordinate positions they occupied at Okpuala-Ngwa.<sup>57</sup> According



to tradition, Nwaoha, Ukwu's immediate younger brother, was the leader of the "separatists" and the first person to found a new village at Orié-Afo (see Map 2). Nwaoha who was known for his youthful vigour and assertiveness, exploited the population movements into Okpuala-Ngwa, attracted his own supporters and successfully rebelled against Ukwu while at Orié-Afo.<sup>58</sup>

The success of Nwaoha might have convinced other members of Ukwu's "lineage" to follow his example. Thus within a short period, eight villages were established in Ngwaland (see Map 2). These villages were located within a radius of about three miles and subsequently, each of them had offshoot settlements which surrounded it. The parental village and its offshoots constituted a village-group (Obodo) which was named after the founder of their original settlement.<sup>59</sup> Each parental village patterned its administration on that of Okpuala-Ngwa (see fig. 2). It was called "Okpuala" and its priest of the earth-deity who also lived in seclusion was known as an Ezeala. Similarly, founders of offshoot villages within a group were equally known as Ezeala. The administration of their respective village was based on that of their parental village. However since their earth-deities were consecrated by the priest of the original settlement, they recognized him as their chief-priest. They were obliged to join him in the annual communal worship of their central earth-goddess. But the chief priest was not a mere religious head, he settled inter-village disputes with his subordinate Ezeala and other titled men who sought his advice on complex customary laws. It then appears that before the formation of the clan, village-groups constituted the maximum political community of the early Ngwa.

### Formation of the Ngwa Clan

It is likely that the Ukwu-Nwaoha conflict was resolved by their successors.<sup>60</sup> Tradition maintains that an Assembly of Ngwa leaders was summoned at Okpuala-Ngwa to settle the "constitutional crisis" which had arisen amongst their founding fathers. From the composition of the Assembly, it seems that several leading authorities in Ngwaland attended it. They included the Eze-ala of villages and village-groups and agents of other deities such as Njoku and Osu. Others were, titled men like Eze-ji and members of the Dibia cult as some individuals who were versed in customary laws.<sup>61</sup>

At last, the Assembly set up a constitution (Nkpe) which was ratified and sanctified with *Qfo* Ala-Ngwa. Amongst other things, Nkpe recognised the primacy of Eze-Ala-Ngwa as the religious and legislative head of the clan. He was authorized to hand over seven staffs of office of the earth-deity (*Qfo*-ala) to the heads of village-groups. Furthermore, he was expected to summon them and other elders to an annual communal worship of the earth-deity of the clan (Ala-Ngwa). Subsequently, he led them to their original settlement at Eke-la-Afo. While there, each of them held his *qfo*-ala and the Eze-Ala-Ngwa stood before them and recounted the constitution of the clan for them. Nkpe embraced the customary laws of the clan which were said to have been handed over to the authority holders of Ngwaland by their ancestors. Since they were ratified and sanctified with *Qfo*-Ala-Ngwa, it was regarded as an act of abomination for anyone to violate them. For example, due to the cardinal roles they played in a family, Nkpe protected those who were believed to be its pillars such as a man's first son, daughter and wife against any form of social violence. Thus it was sacrilegious for an individual to kidnap, harm and enslave them.<sup>62</sup>

After attending the Ala-Ngwa and Nkpe feasts at Okpuala-Ngwa, the Ezeala of each village-group returned to his capital. He then invited the Ezeala, Okpara-Ukwu, Dibia and other title holders of their offshoot villages to a similar ceremony they had attended at their clan capital. Because of the close cultural ties which existed amongst these capitals, leading authority holders of Ngwaland were well-informed on its customary laws which they transmitted from one generation to the other.<sup>63</sup>

MAP 2.

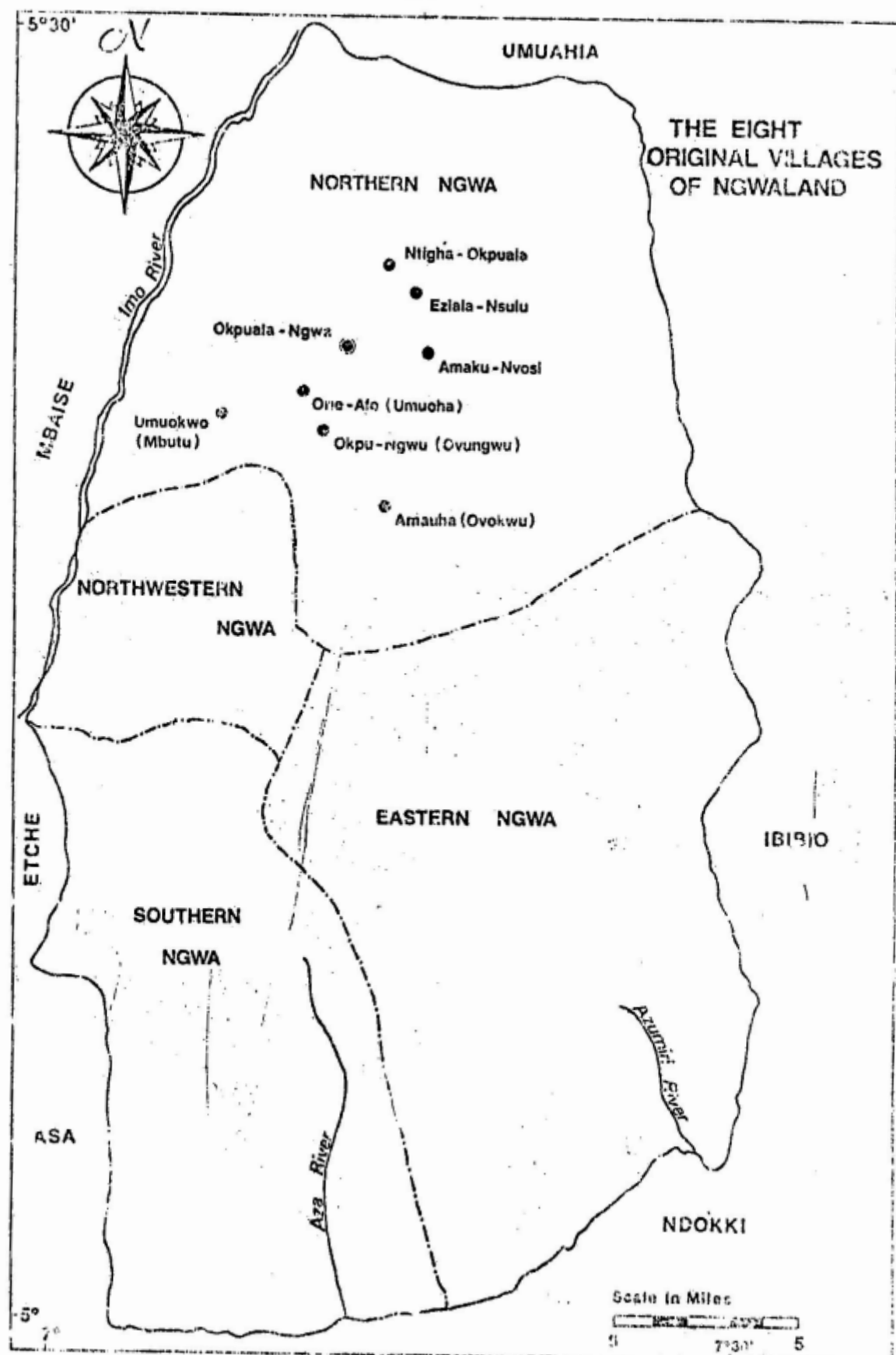
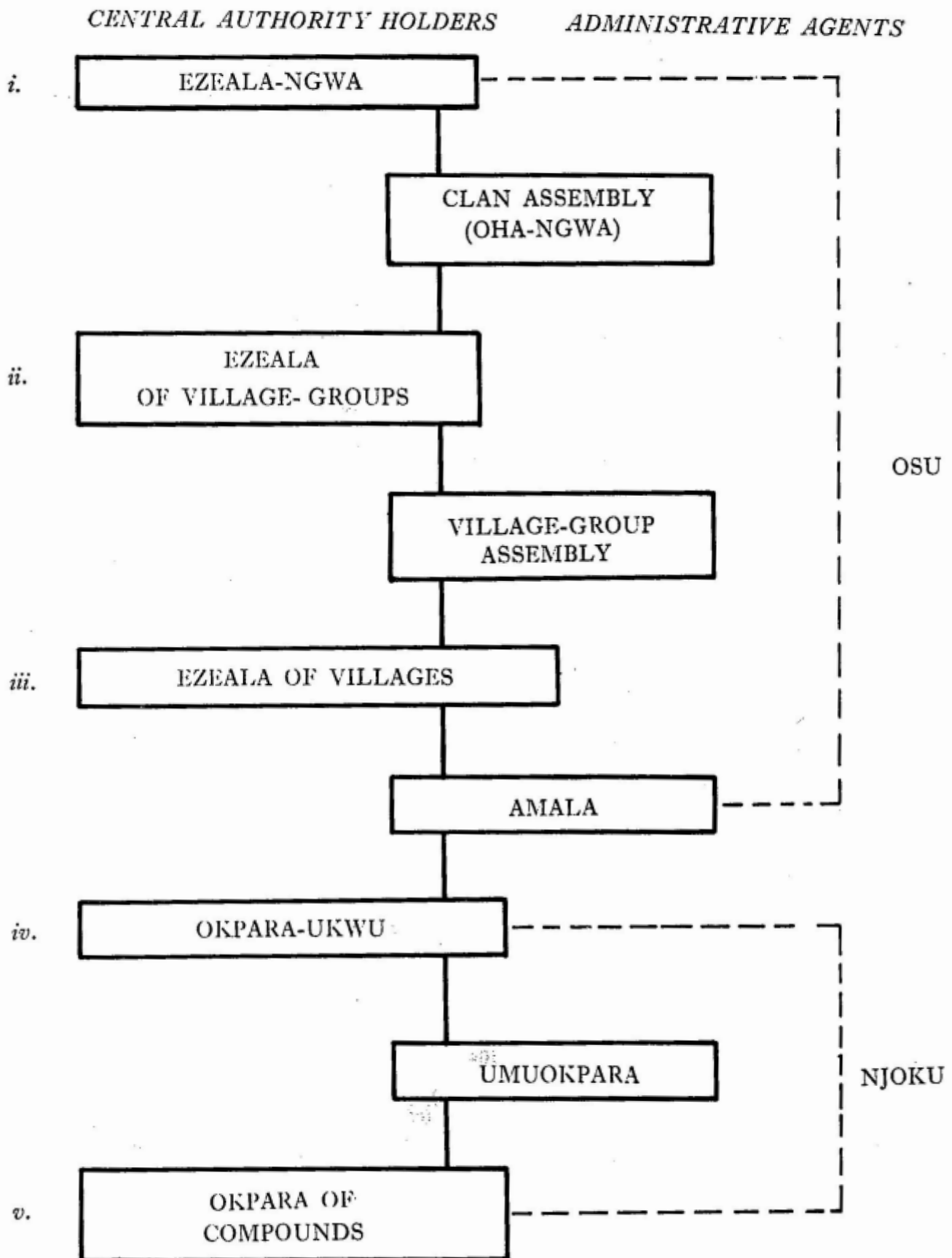


FIG. 2

HIERARCHY OF AUTHORITY HOLDERS AMONGST THE EARLY NGWA



The foregoing shows that demographic and economic forces were associated with the complex socio-political organisations which the Ngwa evolved over time. Because earlier political anthropologists like Fortes and Evans — Pritchard focused their study only on the state and stateless polarities, chiefdoms or middle-level political systems like those of the Ngwa have been largely ignored or misinterpreted by some researchers.<sup>64</sup> The nucleated settlements in the clan, the concentration of population around these settlements and their capitals show that centralised polities existed in Ngwaland. This proposition is further strengthened by the hereditary and hierarchical positions of the central authority holders of the clan.<sup>65</sup> This writer then wishes to confirm the views of Jones, Ottenberg and a few others who had earlier noted that:

All Ibo... societies that have been studied can be said to possess the requirements of a... state, in that they have some centralised administrative and judicial institutions and cleavages of wealth and status corresponding to the distribution of power and authority.<sup>66</sup>

Like some other Africans who lived in a traditional society, the Ngwa did not differentiate between the religious, political legislative and judicial organs of authority. The Okpara, Okpara-ukwu and Ezeala headed these organs of authority within their areas of jurisdiction while the Njoku and Osu constituted their administrative agents (see Fig. 2).

The Constitution of Ngwaland (Nkpe), its earth-deity (Ala-Ngwa) and the eight staff of office of that deity (Ofọ-Ala-Asato) are seen by the people as the greatest legacies their ancestors have left for them. In fact, Meek was right when he stated that:

The common possession of a shrine of Ala (was).....  
one of the strongest integrating forces in Ibo society.<sup>67</sup>

The goddess enabled the Ngwa to form territorial or political communities which transcended lineage groupings. It was also used as an instrument for sanctioning the Ngwa Constitution. Since this constitution which is rooted in the people's traditions is said to be well known in all the village-groups, it heightened clan consciousness among the Ngwa. Up till the present time, the Ngwa have continued to see themselves as a people who speak a common dialect, occupy a single territory, worship a central deity (Ala-Ngwa) and have a common constitution (Nkpe).

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34. Information obtained from the late Chief Emereole Ubani, Eze-Ala-Ngwa (1971) and confirmed by Chief H. Ama, Eze-ala- Obikabia and Chief priest of the war-god of Ngwaland (Ikeoha). (1971). See also J. Allen, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan (Vol. 1—2) op.cit., and ABADIST 16/1/1 No. 105, Aba Native Administration, Intelligence Report (1930), by J. Jackson.
35. Chiefs Ubani and Ama (1971), op.cit.
36. Ibid., This information was confirmed by many interviewees such as Nnanna Oriji (Ofo-Ukwu holder) in Eziaman-Nvosi (1976) and A. Agomuo (Ofo-Ukwu holder) of Umele, in Umuoha village-group (1976).

37. Coursey, (1967), pp. 58, 198 and 201, has not only shown that some species of yams are indigenous to West Africa but has pointed out that the cult of the yam-deity is highly institutionalized in Igbo-land.
38. G. Jones, "Olauda Equiano of the Niger Ibo, in P. Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered*, (Wisconsin, 1967), p. 65, has noted that cassava was introduced in some parts of Igboland in recent times.
39. Ubani and Ama (1971), *op.cit.*, Oriji and Agomuo (1976) *op.cit.* V. Uchendu, (1965), pp. 40 | 41, has equally noted some of these elements of Igbo socio-political organisation.
40. For example, Horton (1972), pp. 89—93 and Green (1936), pp. 14—22 and pp. 139—145.
41. Ubani and Ama (1971), *op.cit.* and Ep. 7021 No. 68, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan (Vols. 1—3) *op.cit.*
42. Jones (1969), p. 311.
43. Ubani and Ama (1971), *op.cit.*
44. Ibid., See also ABADIST 1/7/1360 No. OW. 7095, Assessment Report, Aba Division, (1929) by A. Leeming.
45. Ibid., and Ep. 7021 No. 68, Allen, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan, Vol. 1, *op.cit.* The Ezeala occupied a position which was similar to those of some African rulers whom earlier Anthropologists called "Divine Rulers", for example, see C. Seligman, *Egypt and Negro Africa, A Study in Divine Kingship*, (London, 1933), pp. 4—60, C. Meek, *A Sudanese Kingdom*, (London, 1931), pp. 120—77, and P. C. Lloyd, "Sacred Kingship and Government Among the Yoruba" *Africa xxx*, 4 (1960), pp. 22—237.
46. The Eze-ji were distinguished farmers who had acquired the yam-title.
47. Ubani and Ama (1971), *op.cit.* This was confirmed by other informants like Chief A. Nwaicho, the Ezeala of Ovokwu (1971) and A. Emetara, Ezeala Ntigha (1971). C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*, (New York, 1937), p. 25, had earlier noted some of the customary laws which were associated with the earth-deity amongst the Igbo.
48. M. Gluckman, *The Ideas in Barotse Jurisprudence*, (Manchester, 1972), p. 208.
49. See Horton (1971), pp. 80—93, Green (1936), pp. 134—145.
50. S. Leith-Ross, "Notes on the Osu-system Among the Ibo of Owerri Province" *Nigeria, Africa*, 2 x (1973), pp. 207—220.
51. Ubani, Ama and Emetara (1971) *op.cit.*
52. Ep. 7021 No. 68, Allen, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan, Vol. 1, *op.cit.*
53. S. Leith-Ross, (1937), p. 211.
54. Ama and Emetara, (1971) *op.cit.* The names of some of the Osu who were recruited by this system before the colonial period were listed to me by my informants.
55. ABADIST 1/7/1360 No. OW. 7095, Assessment Report, Aba Division (1929), by A. Leeming.
56. These pieces of information were confirmed by Ubani, Ama, Emetara (1971), *op.cit.*
57. Ibid.
58. Although the specific positions which each of the founders of the clan held is yet unknown, this appears to be a plausible proposition because of subsequent developments amongst them.
59. Ep. 7021 No. 68, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa Clan (Vol. 1), by J. Allen, *op.cit.* Although Allen tended to see the dispute within the "ruling family" as a rivalry between Ukwu and Nwaoha over their earth-deities, its origins are more complex than he has indicated. Tradition maintains the Ukwu sent warriors to invade Ori-Afo but Nwaoha who mysteriously escaped from the invaders, left Ori-Afor and secretly founded a new settlement at Ama-uha in Ovokwu.
60. For example, tradition states that Ukwu founded Ngwa-Ukwu; Nwaoha, Umuoha; Avosi, Nvosi; Nte, Ntigha; Nsulu, Nsulu; Ngwu, Ovungwu; Okwu, Ovokwu; Ntu, Mbutu.
61. For a critique of Ngwa traditions see J. Oriji (1977), pp. 323—332. Ngwa traditions link the origins of the Assembly with the founders of the clan. But it is unlikely that all the events which are associated with them took place within their life-time. It seems that the traditions of the clan have been compressed to enhance the prestige of its founders who are regarded as heroes.
62. Admittedly, the composition of the Assembly might have changed over time. But the writer was able to obtain the list of those who attended it from oral traditions and from the reports of Allen (1933), *op.cit.*
63. Ubani and Ama (1971), *op.cit.* The writer has on two occasions attended the Ala-Ngwa and Nkpe ceremonies at Okpuala-Ngwa. For further discussions on Nkpe see Ep. 7021 No. 68, Intelligence Report on the Ngwa clan (Vol. 1), by J. Allen, *Op. cit.*
64. It is important to emphasize that the Ezeala of Ngwaland were the judicial heads of their groups. Disputes which were of common concern to the clan were settled at Okpuala-Ngwa while those that arose amongst villages were arbitrated at their village-group capitals. The Ezeala of a village, the Okpara-Ukwu and other titled men (Amala) resolved inter-lineage conflicts. But disputes which arose within a quarter were arbitrated by Okpara-Ukwu and other Ofo holders. In controversial cases, elders often went to their village-group or clan capital to seek advice and suggestions in order to ensure that their decisions were in keeping with their traditions.
65. M. Fortes and E. Evans-Pritchard, *African Political Systems*, (London, 1940).
66. Although they did not offer detailed explanations, earlier writers who had noted that the Ngwa formed centralised polities which transcended the level of the village-group include, J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria, Background to Nationalism*, (Berkley and Los Angels, 1963), pp. 30—31 and P.E.B. Inyang, *Language Groups of Eastern Nigeria*, (Unpublished Monograph, Department of Geography, (Uni-

versity of Nigeria, Nsukka, 1963), pp. 29—30. See also Government of Nigeria, *Report of Aba Commission of Inquiry*, (Lagos, 1930), p. 31.

66. Jones (1963:5), quoted by R. Stevenson, *Population and Political Systems in Tropical Africa*, (New York, 1968), p. 202 and Ottenberg, (1971), pp. 307—313. See also Meek, quoted by Stevenson (1968), p. 201.

67. Meek (1977), p. 25.

## THE 'INDIRECT' ELECTIONS AT KANO, 1951

By  
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The first parliamentary elections ever held in the Northern Provinces of Nigeria were those of 1951 conducted under the Macpherson Constitution. Sir Arthur Richards Constitution of 1946 did in fact introduce the idea of representation in a Regional House of Assembly, but the parliamentarians from each province were simply nominees of the bureaucratic machine known as the Native Administration (NA).<sup>1</sup> In 1947 three prominent Kano citizens were admitted into the Regional House of Assembly at Kaduna to represent the emirate under the 1946 Constitution. The first of these, Mallan Bello, was a senior member of the Education Department and came from one of the most influential families in Kano. The second, the Wali Abubakar, was a member of the emir's council, and the third was Alhaji Taju Deen, a prominent trader from Kano city.<sup>2</sup> The Constitution of 1951 abandoned this arbitrary method of representation in favour of the indirect system.<sup>3</sup> Though this system fell far short of the principle of democratic elections as understood in Western Societies it was a step in the right direction. The indirect elections were held at a crucial stage in Nigeria's political development when British colonial officials were obsessed with the idea that the true leaders of the country were to be found in the Native Administrations rather than among nationalist politicians.

The background to these elections have been described and analysed elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> The present paper aims at describing in detail the way the candidates for the elections were selected at the various stages in the emirate of Kano, a major political and economic centre in what was then known as the Northern Provinces of Nigeria. It also attempts to analyse the factors which, especially in the case of the final electoral college, determined the electoral fortunes of the candidates.

With an area of over 12,000 square miles and a population of about 2,000,000 people Kano was by far the largest of the four emirates that made up Kano province and was also the richest Native Administration in the Northern Provinces. The chief executive authority was the Emir of Kano, assisted and advised by a Council consisting of some of the leading men in the Kano Native Administration. Kano town was the focal point of the various activities connected with the elections, being the headquarters of the Kano NA and the seat of the Resident of the province. For purposes of these elections each of the northern provinces was known as an electoral district. Each electoral district was sub-divided into three: primary electoral areas, made up of a combination of villages and towns; intermediate electoral sub-areas, made up of districts; and intermediate electoral areas, made up of emirates or administrative divisions.<sup>5</sup> Kano emirate had as many as 4,754 primary electoral areas; the territory had for many years earlier been divided into twenty-five administrative districts each of which now became an intermediate electoral sub-area. The emirate was allowed to return to the final electoral college 102 delegates out of a total of 119 allocated to the whole province.<sup>6</sup>

The electoral regulations required that a voter must be a British subject or a British protected person, should not be younger than twenty-one, should be a tax payer or should otherwise be exempted from taxation, and he must be resident in the district in which the primary election was being held or he should be a native of that district.<sup>7</sup> In Kano, a voters' list in each ward and village was compiled from the tax register and every tax payer was considered qualified to vote. Available statistics show that 709,477 persons were on the voters' register. The primary stage of the elections were held throughout Kano in the month of October. Because of the paucity of administrative staff, management of the election in each primary electoral area was made the responsibility of the village and ward heads who presided over the meetings. On the election day voters assembled and a number not exceeding 10% of the total was elected to represent them at the higher stage. Nominations were made on the spot, and if the number exceeded the figure authorized for the particular area voting then commenced. In many electoral areas, there was no voting as all the candidates were nominated unopposed and many in fact had to be begged to accept nomination.



In the places where voting actually took place there were no ballot boxes, voters signalling their preferences by show of hands. This electoral practice which allowed for no secrecy at all ensured that those in authority who wanted to be elected actually got to the next stage. The earliest stage saw the election of people who represented practically all the professions in Kano: NA officials, farming, weaving, dyeing, blacksmithing, traders, Muslim intelligentsia, and so on. Farmers predominated, agriculture being the dominant occupation. Age was no barrier. Some of those elected were in their early twenties; some were in their sixties and seventies; but the vast majority were in their thirties and forties. Village and wardheads functioned as Returning Officers,<sup>8</sup> and as the local representatives of the government they commanded a level of respect or fear high enough to make their selection absolutely certain if they were interested. There appears to be no doubt, however, that most of the village and hamlet heads who passed through the local primaries owed their success to their popularity as community leaders.

The electoral procedure outlined in the preceding paragraph applied not only to the rural districts but also to the various quarters within Kano city. It also applied to parts of the settlements outside the city known as *Waje*. These were: Gwagwarwa, Tarauni, Tudun Wada, and Fagge, all of which were inhabited exclusively by Northerners. These settlements returned at their primaries 27 out of 94 representatives allowed for the whole of *Waje*. The remaining parts of *Waje* were *sabon gari* and the township,<sup>9</sup> inhabited mostly by Southerners. Both the *sabon gari* and the township were placed under a different arrangement and were collectively referred to as 'registration areas.'<sup>10</sup> In the 'registration areas' a system was devised to enable voters record their votes secretly and not by show of hands because it was presumed that here the electorate was fairly literate. With a total male adult tax paying population of 6,759, these areas were entitled to elect 67 candidates, fifty-six from the *Sabon gari* and eleven from the township. Registration figures were very low in the thirteen registration areas arranged for the purpose: in *sabon gari* which had ten of these areas only 1,529 people actually registered, and in the township there were only 110 registered voters.<sup>11</sup> It is an interesting paradox that registration was thus extremely low in places where the population was literate and presumably better informed on national issues. This was due to the floating nature of much of the population of *sabon gari* and to the indifference in this matter of many Southerners who thought that it was safer to steer clear of Kano politics.

The electoral procedure for the primaries was adopted in the various stages of the election throughout Kano city and the countryside until the selection of delegates to the final electoral college. In the township and *sabon gari* areas, the secret ballot system was also maintained. Election of candidates for the electoral area colleges was held at the various centres early in December. In the Birnin Kano and some of the rural districts selections were made on 3 December, and by the 10th of the month the process was completed throughout Kano. The membership of these intermediate electoral area colleges was relatively small, and so also was the number of deputies to be elected. In fact, only 707 deputies had elected 102 of their number in a total of 113 intermediate area colleges. In the intermediate electoral area elections at Dawakin Tofa, only eight representatives were elected by fifty-eight deputies who had been previously selected in nine intermediate electoral areas.<sup>12</sup> The membership of the intermediate area college in the Birnin Kano district was only twenty-six who were empowered to select only four representatives for the final electoral college.<sup>13</sup>

The membership of this particular intermediate area college is of special interest and calls for a detailed analysis. It was the only area where modern political parties had sprung up and where consequently there were serious, and quite often acrimonious, electioneering campaigns. It was here, much more than elsewhere, that the enemies of the NA system and the traditionalists were brought face to face. The anti-NA elements were of two types. The first were Southern Nigerians and other West Africans educated in schools established by Christian missions, who stood aloof from Islamic Kano society. The others were critics of their own society, who regarded the Native Administration system as a shameful anachronism. The traditionalists, on the other hand, saw the preservation of the *status quo* as the only guarantee of law and order. The two political parties referred to were the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU).

The NCNC which had been formed in Lagos in 1944 had a very active branch in Kano, while the NEPU, which had come into existence in 1950 as a cultural organization, declared itself a political party in 1951.<sup>14</sup> The NCNC had a strong following in the *Waje* area, especially in *Sabon gari* and the township. The NEPU had supporters in *Waje* and within Kano city. During the elections, both parties teamed up to fight the traditionalists who in the last days of the elections found a Northern-wide leadership in the Northern People's Congress (NPC) which lately emerged as a political party out of a cultural body, the *Jamiyyar Mutanem Arewa*, formed as far back as 1949. The fact that NEPU was co-operating with what was generally seen in Kano as a Southern (and hence 'alien') political party gravely embittered the Kano Native Administration and most of the traditionally oriented masses.

One question which seriously worried the NCNC and the NEPU right from the beginning was whether the elections were, in their own words, 'going to be free and fair' in the Northern Provinces. When Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, then second Lagos Member of the Legislative Council, actually raised this issue during the Council's debates on 25 August 1951, the Chief Commissioner of the Northern provinces gave the House an assurance that 'all will be fair and free.'<sup>15</sup> Before this question was raised during the Council's debates, the NCNC and the NEPU had bitterly complained of what they regarded as bewildering and frustrating experiences in Kano. The Resident had in June promised that the two parties would be allowed to hold political rallies subject to an undertaking that there would be no breaches of the peace. Only a week later the Kano NA refused to grant permission to NEPU members who had asked to be allowed to hold a campaign in the city. It was alleged that early in July some people described as 'NA hooligans' attacked NEPU leaders in their homes, looting their property in the presence of NA police. The NA police boss was said to have told pressmen that his men could not intervene because they had no instructions from the Kano Native Administration, while the Senior Superintendent of the Nigeria Police declared that his force had no authority to interfere in the areas under the NA except on definite orders.<sup>16</sup> At a subsequent party meeting, the Kano branch of the NCNC took up the case of the alleged victimization of NEPU leadership and supporters, calling for an impartial committee of inquiry to investigate the allegations. Another resolution adopted was that as the NA had failed in the primary function of maintaining law and order, that machinery should be 'drastically reformed along democratic lines.'<sup>17</sup> News reaching him from Kano caused Dr Azikiwe so much concern that he sent a cablegram to Britain's Secretary of State for the Colonies, requesting his personal action to ensure that the pledge given to the Legislative Council by the Chief Commissioner, Northern Provinces, was honoured.<sup>18</sup> Dr Azikiwe alleged in the same cablegram that the local branch of his party at Kano was refused permission on 30 August to hold a rally in Kano city on which occasion it was intended that eminent personalities attending the party's national convention in Kano would address the masses.

The elections in the metropolitan area of Kano were thus held in an atmosphere of fear and distrust between the opposing groups. Oral information collected in *sabon gari* was emphatic that though the Kano Native Administration was not itself interested in mass political rallies to ask for votes until very late in the elections it was always disturbed when NCNC members held their rallies and often sent 'trouble makers' to attempt to cause disorder.<sup>19</sup> The NCNC and the NEPU were aware that their chances in the elections depended on how much of their ideas (for instance drastic reforms, if not the dismantling, of the NA system) had been accepted by the masses in this highly stratified society. To put these ideas across they needed intensive electioneering, which, as far as possible, the NA through its various agencies, sought to prevent.

The two parties avoided putting up rival candidates in the various electoral areas so as not to split their votes to the advantage of NA candidates. This strategy paid off handsomely: at the conclusion of the primaries, the two parties were strongly represented among the twenty-six deputies who were to elect four of their numbers for the final electoral college.

These twenty-six candidates were selected in five electoral areas, representing *Waje* and the four administrative divisions within Kano city. The four wards elected a total of seventeen representatives, while *Waje* selected nine. All the three successful candidates from the Northern ward were traders, as were three of the five representatives of the eastern ward. In the southern

section of the city, two of the successful candidates were well known names in Kano: the *Wakilin Waje*,<sup>20</sup> Mallam Bello Dandago, and Mallam Aminu Kano, who was at the time the Vice-President of the NEPU. Mallam Dandago came from a family which had been bound to the ruling house of Kano by ties of clientage. He had passed out of the Katsina Training College in 1932 and had held various positions (both teaching and administrative) before his appointment as *Wakilin Waje* in 1948.<sup>21</sup> Mallam Aminu Kano, on the other hand, was ideologically opposed to the ruling class and had resigned his position as a school headmaster to devote the whole of his time to active politics. All but one of the five representatives of the western ward were NA clerks,<sup>22</sup> including Mallam Waje, a son of the emir; Mallam Garba Karaye, son of the district head of Karaye; and Mallam Maikano Dutse, son of the district head of Dutse. The *Waje* area was also strongly represented by workers and businessmen. *Waje* had selected ninety-four candidates at the primaries; only nine of these were elected at the intermediate stage. These included Mallam Abba Maikwaru, the President of the NEPU; the party's Secretary, Mallam J. K. Bello Ijumu; the Secretary of the local branch of the NCNC, Mr J. O. Okeiyi; the editor of the Hausa column of the *Daily Comet*, Magaji Danbatta dan Shehu Usuman; and two businessmen, Mr P. E. Okoronkwo and Mr R. A. Fadina. The NCNC-NEPU alliance won all the nine seats for *Waje* as well as ten of the seventeen seats contested in the city. On 3 December elections were held to select four candidates that would represent the Birnin Kano district at the final electoral college later in the month. The four men elected were all NEPU candidates: Mallam Aminu Kano, Mallam Abba Maikwaru, Magaji Danbatta, and Mallam Bello Ijumu. The NCNC had agreed, in the interest of victory for the alliance, to the sponsoring of NEPU candidates. That not a single NA candidate managed to get in shocked the authorities not only in Kano but also at Kaduna.

Even at the Primary stage the NCNC-NEPU successes had caused a scare, and must have been a major factor in the panic-stricken secret circular from the Chief Commissioner's office in Kaduna to all the Residents:

In the Primary Elections in certain areas there have been outstanding examples of the ability of political parties commanding a minority of popular support succeeding, by organised voting arrangements, in securing a disproportionate degree of representation. It is apparent... that this aspect of electoral practice is becoming more widely realized.

...His Honour feels that it is important that adequate steps should be taken to ensure that... preelection discussion and agreement takes place where the majority of candidates and electorate are faced by well organized opponents, although those opponents may be in the minority.<sup>23</sup>

This was a clear instruction that something should be done to aid the efforts of the Native Administrations in the remaining rounds of the elections.

But neither the NEPU nor the NCNC had any hold on the rural districts, though both claimed to have campaigned hard in parts of the countryside. The rest of the districts had remained fervently traditionalist, and in the intermediate stage of the elections they selected ninety-eight candidates all of whom were committed to the Kano Native Administration. This number included many heads of the district and village administrations, as the following table shows.<sup>24</sup>



Occupation	Number	Percentage
District heads	10	10.20
Village heads	21	21.41
Clerks	11	11.22
Alkalis	1	1.02
Limams	2	2.04
Messenger	1	1.02
Farmers	20	20.04
Traders	8	8.16
Teachers and Students	11	11.22
Tailors	6	3.06
Apprentices	3	3.06
Others	4	4.08
Total	98 approx.	99.95 100%

The district representatives were truly representative of their people. Territorial administrators, religious leaders, farmers, traders and so on found places in the final electoral college. It is not possible to establish the ethnic affiliation of each of the delegates. However, an examination of the cases in which information was available shows that the majority of the candidates were Fulani, who constituted the ruling minority in Kano. But there is nothing which strongly suggests that ethnicity was the major force in the elections. In fact there are strong reasons for believing that the representatives had been chosen on their own merits. If ethnic considerations had been the dominant factor, a Hausa majority would have been elected since there was hardly any district in which the Fulani were not outnumbered. A few months before the elections the *Chiroma* acting on the advice of the District Officer had told the district heads that 'In the forthcoming elections we do not want to be represented in Kaduna and Lagos by any but the most capable and sensible men that we have.'<sup>25</sup> The district heads were advised to encourage all those who had the necessary character and ability to put forward their candidature from the primaries to the final electoral college. There is no doubt, however, that the prestige which the politically dominant ethnic group enjoyed generally made it possible for them to be strongly represented at all stages of the elections.

Of the ten district heads who reached the final electoral college five were members of the royal Sullebawa family and of this number two were sons of the incumbent emir.<sup>26</sup> These ten district heads were descended from important Fulani clans which had combined to bring about the fall of the Hausa administration at the beginning of the past century.

In pre-British days three territorial chiefs—*Sarkin Rano*, *Sarkin Dutse*, and *Sarkin Karaye*—for various reasons occupied positions of distinction among the rural *sarakuna* or chiefs.<sup>27</sup> Both *Sarkin Rano* and *Sarkin Dutse* were members of the final electoral college. *Sarkin Karaye* was not a candidate for the election, but his son, Mallam Garba, contested in Kano city but was eliminated at the intermediate level. Another group who were strongly represented were those families whose function it was to elect a successor whenever there was a vacancy in the emirship. These were the families which traditionally held the titles of *Madaki*, *Makama*, *Sarkin Dawaki Maituta*, and *Sarkin Bai*. The *Madaki*, who was the district head of Dawakin Tofa, did not contest but one of his sons, Mallam Bello, contested and won. The role of the *Makama's* family in these elections is somewhat obscure. The *Sarkin Dawaki Maituta*, head of Gwarzo, did not contest, but his son, Alhaji Maikano, was one of the district's representatives. Both the *Sarkin Bai*, Alhaji Muhammad Adananu and his son, Mallam Muhtari, who was also his chief clerk, represented their district of Danbatta.



All this appears to suggest that many of the ruling houses of Kano attempted, when the issue of elections arose, to have their leadership roles formally ratified by the people by subjecting themselves to the electoral process. All the district heads who showed interest as candidates were duly elected to the final electoral college. Fourteen of them did not contest, and this may have been due to a number of disabilities.<sup>28</sup>

We now come to the final electoral college itself. The composition of this college was as follows. Kano emirate had elected, on the whole, 102 representatives who were now joined by seventeen delegates elected in the same way to represent three other emirates of the Province: Hadejia (9), Gumel (5), and Kazaure (3). Apart from these elected members, others who were by regulation allowed to sit at the final electoral college were the nominees of the Native Authorities. According to the rule laid down, these nominees should not exceed ten per cent of the total membership of the college. In exercise of the powers conferred on him under this rule, the Resident on 9 December authorized the Native Administrations in the province to inject thirteen nominees into the electoral college—nine for Kano, two for Hadejia, and one each for Gumel and Kazaure.<sup>29</sup> The members thus brought in by the Kano Native Administration were as follows:<sup>30</sup>

<i>Name</i>	<i>Position</i>
Muhammad Sanusi	Chiroman Kano and member of emir's council
Mallam Ahmadu	Sarkin Shanu and member of emir's council
Ibrahim Musa Ghashash	Merchant
Bello Kano	Education Officer and member of emir's council
Maikano Dutse	NA Clerk and son of Sarkin Dutse
Bello Dandago	<i>Wa'kilin Waje</i>
Mallam Munir	<i>Wakilin Sana'a</i>
Mallam Maje	NA Development Secretary
Wada Kano	Adult Education organiser

From the very beginning the first four people on this list must have been assured of membership of this college because they did not contest the election at the earlier stages. As already pointed out, Mallam Bello Kano was a member of the old House of Assembly. Given his level of education in a society where educational standards in the Western sense of the word were generally low his services must have been considered indispensable. It was obvious that the *Chiroma*, the virtual head of the Native Administration as the emir's health declined, should be given a place in the college, and so was the case of the *Sarkin Shanu* who was responsible for the administration of the whole of the metropolitan area. As for Musa Ghashash, it was clear that somebody in his position should be nominated to represent a special interest—that of the commercial community. The rest of the nominees had been rejected by the electorate at the intermediate stage in the metropolitan area.

The final electoral college had a membership of 132 which met on 17 December and elected twenty people to represent the province in the House of Assembly at Kaduna. In this last round, the secret ballot system was followed. Sir Bryan Sharwood Smith who apart from being the Resident in charge of the province at that time was also its chief electoral officer has described how this happened,<sup>31</sup> and it needs no recapitulation here. After twelve hours of voting and counting, the NPC, a late comer in the political scene, was declared winner of all the twenty seats allowed for the province. Of the 102 candidates who had qualified for membership of the college from the emirate only two—the district heads of Dawakin Kudu and Ungogo—were elected. Of those injected by the Native Authority only one, Maikano Dutse, was rejected at this final polling.

Before the elections started at the primary stage, the NCNC and the NEPU, as already observed, had expressed strong fears that the elections would not be 'free and fair'. At the

end of the elections the two parties claimed that the elections had not been free and fair and blamed their failure on what was regarded as 'undue influence and even pressure' assumed to have been exercised on the electorate by British and NA officials. In a post-election petition to the chief electoral officer, Mallam Aminu Kano pointed out that he was aware of a secret meeting of district heads 'presided over by the *Chiroma* of Kano and advised by the District Officer Kano' at which the people to be voted for at the final electoral college were discussed.<sup>32</sup> He alleged that the names of the twenty candidates finally agreed upon were revealed to him, that he made this information public on 15 December at a mass rally, and that the names he mentioned were those who were declared elected two days later. Mallam Aminu Kano then declared the election 'null and void', and threatened that unless investigations were immediately ordered into the conduct of the elections he would be compelled to take the matter to a court of law.<sup>33</sup>

In his reply the Resident stated that the so-called 'secret meeting' was a routine exercise in which various matters including those relating to the elections were discussed. He categorically denied that anybody was advised to vote or to influence others to vote in a particular way: 'District Heads were informed by the D.O. that, while in their private capacity they were entitled to exercise their political rights as individuals, they were not, as District Heads, to bring pressure on others to vote otherwise than in accordance with their individual wishes'.<sup>34</sup> He added that voting was conducted under conditions of complete secrecy, and that on the day of the elections members of the electoral college were clearly told that everybody should vote according to the dictates of his conscience.

An important question is whether the authors of the idea of the indirect system of elections as applied in the Northern Provinces at that stage of political transition ever intended that the elections should be 'free and fair'. There is some ground for believing that the answer to this question is in the negative. It is well known that British officials in the Northern Provinces were very much in sympathy with the Native Administrations which they themselves had done so much to bring about. There was a widespread feeling among them that these Administrations would not be able to protect themselves and the masses from what was seen as the demagogic rhetoric of radical nationalists. The system of electoral colleges was designed so that, as one colonial official put it, 'a handful of volatile, politically conscious urban dwellers do not swamp the vast mass of rural voters'.<sup>35</sup> Therefore, while the existing political parties at the beginning of the elections should be allowed to play some part, it should not be 'in such a way that they could dominate the proceedings by skilful and unscrupulous electioneering tactics'.<sup>36</sup> Only the electoral college system could ensure that the bulk of the non-politically active illiterate voters had a substantial say in the final choice of candidates for the Northern House of Assembly.

In the end things went according to plan. It was the largely uniformed representatives of the districts in the final electoral college who decided who should go to Kaduna. With only four votes in the college the metropolitan area was at the mercy of the countryside, which could muster ninety-eight votes. Whoever controlled this solid block was sure to win the election, and there was no doubt as to where that control lay. The NA had obvious interest in the election of particular candidates and the ten per cent rule<sup>37</sup> was a way out of some difficulties since people already rejected by the electorate could still find their way into the final college. It was an easy task for the Kano Native Administration to tell the district heads to instruct their delegates as to the manner of voting. The Resident's denial that at the meeting between the *Chiroma* and the district heads no such instruction was discussed does not sound convincing. The Resident did not even make any attempt to refute Aminu Kano's claim that the names divulged to him before the election as the candidates being sponsored by the NA were those actually declared elected on 17 December. It was certainly not an accident that only one of the nine people injected by the Kano NA was not elected. The other two people who went through successfully stood high in the NA power structure: the *Dokaji* Abubakar, district head of Ungogo, and the Galadima, who was the emir's brother and who held the headship of Dawakin Kudu district. The *Dokaji* was literate in Arabic, English and Hausa;<sup>38</sup> the *Galadima* could read and write Hausa only. By birth and education both

men were qualified to speak for Kano, and there is no doubt that their candidature had the blessing of the Native Administration.

One major significance of the elections and the regulations which governed them is that directly or indirectly the Native Administration was taught how to manage and control elections. Even after the electoral regulations had changed, the lessons already learnt were not lost. Thenceforth the political kingdom belonged almost entirely to those who had identified themselves entirely with the hopes and fears of the Native Administration.

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5. *The New Constitution*, pp. 11—12.
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8. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 666/S.6, Radio Talk by the Resident of Kano.
9. The Kano township was at the time made up of three sections: Nassarawa, Bompai, and the commercial areas.
10. Other 'Registration' areas in the Northern Provinces were Zaria, Jos, and Bukuru.
11. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 666/S. 15 — 'Figures of Registration and Returns from Returning Officers for Primary and Registration Areas'.
12. Compare these figures of eight elected by fifty-eight delegates with 580 delegates who elected fifty-eight deputies at the intermediate electoral college of Dawakin Tofa.
13. See Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S. 19, 'Members of Electoral Area colleges, Kano province'.
14. A lot of information about these parties has been assembled by J. S. Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism* (Bakeley, 1958), and R. L. Sklar, *Nigerian Political Parties* (Princeton, 1963).
15. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.4, Extracts from the Chief Commissioner's speech in the Legislative Council.
16. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.9, preamble to the resolution passed by a general meeting of the NCNC on 7 July 1951. The Native Administrations were allowed to keep their own police force for duties within the areas under their jurisdiction.
17. *Ibid.* Copies of these resolutions were sent *inter alia* to the Press, the Governor, the Chief Commissioner of the Northern provinces, the Emir of Kano, and the Federal President of the NCNC.
18. *Ibid.*
19. Many people interviewed in *sabon gari* in August 1974 were unanimous in this view.
20. The *Wakilin Waje* was the emir's deputy charged with responsibility for the administration of *Waje*.
21. Mallam Bello Dandago, personal interview, 29 June, 1974. By the time of this interview Dandago was the substantive holder of the important title of *Sarkin Dawaki Maituta* which traditionally had a vote in Kano's electoral council.
22. The single exception, Mallam Munir, held the position of *Wakilin Sana'a* or forestry officer under the NA.
23. N.A.K. Zar Prof. 4/16, No. C 19/1946, S.N.P. to all Residents.
24. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S. 18, 'Intermediate Electoral Area Colleges — Returns from Returning officers'.
25. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.6, D.O. to the *Chiroma*, 23 June 1951 and the *Chiroma's* minute of 10 July 1951.
26. These were: The *Galadima* of Kano and head of Dawakin Kudu district, Alhaji Muhammad Inuwa; the *Dan Buram*, Faruku, son of the ruling emir and district head of Gwaram; the *Wambai* of Kano and district head of Kura; the *Sarkin Dawaki Tsakar Gida*, Yusuf, head of Sumaila district and another son of the ruling emir; and the *Dan Iya*, district head of Bichi. People bearing the above titles were very influential men in pre-colonial Kano society: the titles were retained but the functions were no longer the same.

27. For example, Sarkin Rano was highly respected as *Autan Bawo*, the last of the sons of Bawo who, according to a well-known legend, founded the seven Hausa states. Rano seems to have been incorporated in Kano during the past century.
28. One such disability was illiteracy. It is not being suggested here that all those who reached the final electoral college were literate, but it is significant that according to the records the ten district heads who sat in the college could read and write in at least one of the following languages: Hausa, Arabic, English.
29. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.10 Vol. II, 'Nomination by Native Authorities to final electoral college'.
30. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.23, 'Kano Electoral College: Membership'.
31. Sir Bryan Sharwood Smith, *But always as Friends* (London, 1969) pp. 223—225.
32. Kano Prof. 5/1, No. 6661/S.20, Aminu Kano to Chief Electoral Officer, 23 December, 1951.
33. *Ibid.* No court action actually followed, but it is known that Mallam Aminu Kano later travelled to London to protest directly to the Colonial Office.
34. *Ibid.* Chief Electoral Officer to Mallam Aminu Kano, 24 December, 1951.
35. H.G. Gelf, 'The Northerner goes to the Polls', *Corona* vol. 5 No. 5 1953, p. 186.
36. *Ibid.*
37. That is, that provision in the electoral regulation which made it possible for the Native Authorities to bring into the final electoral college a number not exceeding ten per cent of the entire membership of the college.
38. *Dokaji*, the author of *Kano ta Dabo Cigari* (Zaria, 1958) was by the time of his death in 1972 occupying the important post of *Wariri* of Kano and was a leading figure in the writing of Kano history.



## SLANGS AND COLLOQUIALISMS IN MODERN IGBO — A PRELIMINARY SOCIO-LINGUISTIC STUDY

By  
E. NOLUE EMENANJO

- 0.0 In this paper, we shall attempt a socio-linguistic appraisal of what should be called slangs and colloquialisms (SACS) in Igbo. The Pre-occupation of modern Igbo language studies with other matters — like orthography, standardized writing conventions, evolution of Standard Igbo, technical vocabulary, pedagogical grammars and graded texts for use in schools, and sufficient creative literature, etc., etc., have prevented people from focusing attention on this interesting phenomenon of modern or contemporary Igbo usage and evolution.
- 0.1 This paper is in three parts. In the first part, we attempt a definition of the Igbo SACS. In the second part, we give a sample word-list of some SACS, and of some slang and colloquial expressions. In the third and final part, we make some general comments about SACS and lexical evolution in the Igbo language.
- 1.0 The division of the nations of the world into 'developed' and 'developing' can in some sense, be fruitfully applied to the languages of the world. Among other things, a developed language can be said to be one with a settled orthography, universally accepted spelling practices and conventions, a long tradition of writing, a large corpus of all types of literature and a large, flexible, creative and ever-expanding lexicon which can cope with the multifarious needs of the modern world. A developing language, on the other hand, is one that still has to develop the above-mentioned features of the developed languages.
- 1.1 With regard to developed languages, it is possible and useful to talk about Conventional and Unconventional language. Unlike Unconventional language, Conventional language is that which is used in 'polite' and 'polished' spheres of society, and also in serious creative literature. Partridge (1936)<sup>2</sup> has distinguished six forms of Unconventional language. Slang and Cant, Colloquialisms, Solecisms and Catachreses, Catchphrases; Nicknames, and Vulgarisms.
- 1.2 According to Shorter O.E.D.<sup>3</sup>, Slang is defined as:  
 '—the special vocabulary used by any sets of persons of a low or disreputable character  
 '—the cant or jargon of a certain class or period;  
 '—the language of a low and vulgar type;  
 '—the language of a highly colloquial type considered as below the level of standard, educated speech consisting either of new words or of current words employed in some special sense'.
- The implication of the O.E.D. definition is that, unlike the partridge one, there is no distinct difference between Slang and Colloquialisms. This, for us, is a 'good working proposition.
- 1.3 Igbo is a developing language. Among the things that can be said to have been settled in Igbo are the questions of the letters<sup>4</sup> of the orthography and of aspects of spelling conventions. Until fairly recently<sup>5</sup>, spelling practices and conventions were as varied as there were institutions, authors and publishers. There is, however, now a variety of Igbo that is fast evolving into standard Igbo. Since the end of the war there has been a formidable repertoire of texts of all descriptions and on all subjects.
- 1.4 The Igbo language is spoken in various dialects by some twelve million highly 'receptive people who live, by and large, in classless and democratic if not republican societies which span across four southern States in Nigeria: Anambra, Imo, Bendel and Rivers.
- 1.5 Anyone who is conversant with the history of the development of the Igbo language spearheaded by the SPILC<sup>7</sup> will come away with the bitter conclusion that the protagonists of the use of the language as a vehicle for literature, as a medium of instruction in schools, as an examinable subject up to the Advanced Level of the

General Certificate of Education, as an academic subject in tertiary institutions, and as the language of popular workaday life, at least, in the Igbo-speaking areas, are not by and large the 'elite' of the Igbo Society.

- 2.0 In view of the points made so far, especially in 1.3 — 1.5, above, sceptics may doubt very much whether one can really talk about SACS in Igbo. Since elsewhere SACS are deviations from standard, educated and conventional forms of speech, can we really talk about SACS in Igbo as there is still as some would hold, no standard, educated and conventional Igbo? Again underlying the origin and definition of SACS seems to be the existence of a stratified and aristocratic society, with a developed language which has strong literary traditions and with 'polished tastes and values'. Can we really talk about SACS in the developing language of a people in whose life — as a good deal of the folk-tales and proverbs reveal — the sublime and the ridiculous, the profane and the sacred, even slaves/outcasts and freeborns co-exist cheek by jowl? (One great paradox of modern Igbo history is that it was the slaves and outcasts who first embraced Christianity and Western Education, and later christianized and educated the 'free-borns'!)
- 2.1 In spite, however, of the above observations it has to be accepted by any serious student of Igbo linguistics, especially of contemporary times, that there are some words, phrases and idiomatic expressions that can be truly said to constitute SACS in the language. The highly colloquial nature of these words and phrases, the very high frequency with which these occur in the speech of certain 'lowly' members of the Igbo Society, the infrequency with which they occur in the discourse of the 'high brows', (who always use these with caution and/or with some apologia) and the fact that these have not occurred much in serious contemporary literature, suggest that there is something sub-standard or unconventional or even anathema about these words and phrases to justify their being called SACS. Thus, even though the Igbo do not live in stratified societies, these people are serious 'puritans' who court elitism in fashion and taste, as in other things in life. Especially now that in the contemporary Igbo society, Christianity, Western Education, party-politics and naira-power have combined to superimpose an aristocracy of achievements and tastes on the traditional society.
- 3.0 Below is a sample of the expressions we regard as Igbo SACS. This list contains some of the most popular ones heard in Igboland, especially in the urban areas. Each SAC is accompanied by a number of known or accepted explanations. Where we can, we offer something about their origins. It seems to us that a given SAC can have a very wide semantic field, with the meaning from place to place, occasion to occasion, and in-group to in-group. We were able to find this out because when compiling this list and their explanations we had contacts with very many different types of peoples: traders, road-side mechanics, motor tauts and their fellow travellers; men, women and girls said to belong to 'doubtful' professions, students, musicians, broadcasters, publishers and authors, the most useful of whom is T. Uchenna Ubesie<sup>8</sup>, who already has some five Igbo novels to his name. Finally, it must be stated that my many students these three years at Owerri, have helped me in various ways in collecting, compiling and in some cases, analyzing these SACS.
- 3.1 These SACS are arranged in alphabetical order. Other names or pronunciations of some SACS are given in parenthesis. The fullest forms usually pronounced for each SAC are written and correctly tone-marked, differently from what may be seen in the literature or in other forms of writing that may be found elsewhere in inscriptions on sign-boards or motor-lorries or advertisements. In some places the components of some SACS are written separately after the SACS, to indicate origin. These are placed in square brackets and follow the parentheses where these are found.

## A

1. Abaadĩnso [Aba dī nso: Aba is near.]

One of the names for fast-moving taxi-cabs of the Peugeot brand. This name was originally used for the Estate type of the Peugeot 404 model, popularly known as 'station-wagon'. This SAC gets its meaning and significance from the fact that because these Peugeot cars are so fast and their drivers so confident, they could reduce the distance between Aba — a hub of commercial activities in Nigeria — and any other Nigerian town, to nothingness.

2. Abanaanya [Aba na anya: Aba and eyes]

(i) A poor imitation type of textile material used mostly by women, notorious for losing most of its dyes at the first laundry.

(ii) Anything which is fake.

The words of this SAC were first used by a mad man who stayed along School Road, Aba. This mad man was fond of picking up, roasting and eating any fowl killed by passing vehicles in his vicinity. So on one occasion while he was roasting one such fowl, the curious Aba people gathered around him, watching. And on looking up he exclaimed 'Aba na anya'. Aba people and their curiosity to watch anything! The words of this SAC can also be found in a two-line sung by children in places like Aba and Enugu:

Aba na anya                      Aba and eyes

Enugu na njọ ahja      Enugu and bad sales

In other words as far as people, especially traders are concerned, Aba, a commercial town, is characterized by people always wanting to watch everything while Enugu, a civil service town with per mensem people, is characterized by bad sales.

3. Abangwu

People of the underworld i.e. rogues, robbers etc. This SAC derives from the fact that a place known as Abangwu, close to Enugu, the capital of Anambra state was occupied mostly by people who were believed to belong to the underworld.

4. Abakpa

(i) a cheap prostitute

(ii) Hausa people

This derives from the fact that Abakpa is the area in which most Hausa people live in Enugu. And a good number of the cheap prostitutes in Enugu are believed to be found around this area.

5. Agbatakee [A gbata, e kee: If we get, we share. Anyj gbata, anyj ekee]

Taxi-drivers who drive other peoples' cars.

6. Afanjko (Wahala)

Trouble, head-ache, worries

This word comes from the Efik word (Afaniko) of about the same meaning.

7. Agaracha [A gagharichaa, a lɔta: After being away (wandering) for long, one must return to one's home (or base).]

(i) name of an age-group in parts of the Owerri Local Government Area.

(ii) woman of expensive ways but easy means and easier morals, often but not always unmarried especially during the Nigerian Civil War when they were also known as the 'win-the-war girls'. The girls in Achebe's *Girls The War*, Ada in Ubesie's *Isi-Akwu Dara n'ala* and Vic in Ekwensi's *Survive The Peace* are good examples of agaracha.

(iii) any high-class prostitute.

8. Agbaanummiri [A gba a n̄u mmiri: It runs and drinks water.]

One who is easily tired.

This SAC derives its meaning and significance from those old and decrepit vehicles which always require water to be put in their radiators if they are not to break down completely or go up in flames.

9. Ahja Ataakj [Ahja attack: Attack trade]

A system of trading behind enemy lines during the last civil war.

10. Ahja Kotonu [Ahja Cotonou: Cotonou trade]

Smuggling and illegal over-land trade especially in textiles and expensive foreign wines and cigarettes from Cotonou.

11. Ahja Panya [Ahja Espanol: Fernando Po trade]  
Smuggling and illegal riverine trade especially in foreign wines, cigarettes and fire-arms from Fernando Po and Sao Tome.
12. Ahjhja (Leaves)  
Marijuana or any such intoxicating stuff which can be smoked.
13. Ajasko (Ajasiko)  
A weird-dressed man or woman (travelling around with itinerant advertisers of drugs) who can perform intricate and unusual dancing and endurance feats peculiar to themselves.  
The central character of Munonye's latest novel *A Dancer of Fortune* is a typical ajasko. This SAC seems to be made up of two morphemes jaz(z) and the suffix—sko of obscure meaning which, sometime in the fifties and sixties was popularly used by men-about-town attached to their names: Wasko; Udesko; Jonisko, Babisko.
14. Ajilo  
— name for a once popular type of hair-cut popular in the fifties and early sixties. It is believed that a certain Aba barber whose name was Ajilo, was the first to cut and wear the style.
15. Akaamere [Aka mere: The hands have made or produced.]  
— name for locally distilled gin, once called 'illicit wine'.
16. Akanaakpa [Aka n'akpa: Hands in the pocket]  
pick-pocket.
17. Akawo  
(i) pen-pushing civil/public servant  
(ii) any salaried person.  
This word has come from Yoruba 'akowe'; which means 'pen-pushing worker'.
18. Akjrika (Akijika)  
(i) tough, strong, rugged  
(ii) unconventional behaviour  
This SAC may be an extended meaning of akjrika (akijika) thatch, or roofing materials, usually thorny used in traditional houses.
19. Akula [Akula: Don't hit]  
A mad man.  
This SAC derives from the fact that at the end of the Civil War, there used to be a mad man in Enugu, who was armed with a stick with which he hit young girls and women, who put on abnormally short dresses or did not tie their wrappers properly. One day as this mad man was about to hit one woman with his stick, people around shouted "akula, akula". "Don't hit, don't hit". Since that time, therefore, it has become a slang to call mad people 'akula'.
20. Akpola  
Name for a brand of hard-soled shoes that were very popular in the late fifties, notorious for making resounding crouching noise as its waerer moves. The noise came from the fact that the shoes were usually hobnailed.
21. Akwulakwula [Akwunakwuna]  
A prostitute  
This SAC has its meaning and significance from the fact that there is a town of that name somewhere in the Cross-River State. When Europeans first landed in those parts, women from that town were notorious for going after them.
22. Alaha  
Cheap: within reach  
This SAC probably derives from Alahambra, which used to be the name of a small market in the upper part of Onitsha, now replaced by Ochanja, famous for cheap articles.
23. Amakaekwu [A ma ka e kwu: No matter what people may say.]  
(i) name of a dance troupe in Onitsha Inland Town made up of stubborn and 'outlawed'



- young men and women.  
 (ii) any stubborn, unconventional and incorrigible person or group.  
 (iii) (armed) robbers.
24. Anikirija (Alikirija)  
 (i) old, rickety bicycle  
 (ii) any old, rickety vehicle  
 This SAC gets its name and significance from the onomatopoeic sound inherent in that word.
25. Apiriko (Apiriko)  
 A trader go-between between a prospective buyer and an article which he does not have but which he gets from another trader to sell for a commission.  
 This SAC seems to be derived from English 'applicant' — 'a job-seeker'.
26. Asampete [Asa mpete: Asa with a glittering body]  
 A very beautiful, tall and well-built woman. This SAC is made up of two morphemes viz: asa: a very beautiful and delicious fish whose body glitters.  
 mpete: a noun derived from the ideophone petepete — describing the glitter and succulence of very well-developed feminine physique.
27. Ashawo  
 A prostitute.  
 This word is a direct borrowing of the same word from Yoruba.
28. Awalawala (Awarawara)  
 (i) any elegant fast-moving motor-car originally of the Peugeot family, used as taxi.  
 See Abaadinso.  
 (ii) name used by traders of building materials for a very inferior and cheap brand of corrugated iron sheets.  
 This SAC is clearly derived from the ideophone walawala which describes the movement of any stream-lined object or vehicle through land or air.
29. Awantirɔ (Pɛmpirɔ; pɛmpirɔ)  
 (i) used originally for get-togethers or dances organized by students in which gramophones or turn-tables were used.  
 (ii) any noisy musical get-together patronized by young boys and girls like modern Discos.
30. Awolowo  
 Name for a new species of grass which was first noticed in parts of Igboland around 1964 when Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of the banned Action Group party, first visited that area with his 'famous' helicopter during an electioneering campaign.
31. Awuufu (Fosa)  
 Anything got free of charge.
32. Ayakata (Gbóm; Igba; Ọkpọnkù)  
 (i) very beautiful  
 (ii) the best of everything.
33. Azuanuuka (Azụ anughị uka: The back (of the body) never hears any comments.)  
 Used in referring to unmarried mothers who take great pride in this status and achievement (especially in the Owerri area of Igboland).

## B

34. Baso  
 (i) I-care-less; mind-your-business  
 Of unknown origin, possibly from Pidgin English.
35. Bọbọ  
 Boy friend  
 This SAC is probably derived from Sierra Leone via Pidgin English.
36. Bọyọyọ (Gayooyo)  
 Behaving like a boy in dress, hair-cut behaviour, etc.

This SAC is usually used in a derogatory sense by elders for men, especially young men, who are psychedelically or skantly dressed in high-healed platform shoes, bell-bottomed trousers, weird shirts and unusual hair-cuts or hair-dos.

## C

37. Chandu(m) (Wayo)  
Double-faced; trickery.  
This SAC derives from the belief that there is a district known as Chandu(m) in the Cameroons, whose people were believed to be tricky, double-faced.
38. Chawuta  
One who takes tips.  
The origin of this SAC is unknown to us.
39. Cherewere (Chere were: wait (and) take)  
(Obioma; Duoduo; Guzowere)  
Name for a class of itinerant tailors who go about with their old, hand-sewing machines. These tailors specialise in stitching old clothes. This SAC gets its meaning from the fact that you wait on these tailors and take back your clothes, on the same stop and within a very short time.
40. Chieji [Chi eji: Night does not come]  
Shoes which are very white.  
The meaning of this SAC comes from the fact that because these shoes are so white, one can see them even in darkness?!

## E

41. Elekere  
Clock; any time piece.  
This SAC gets its meaning from the fact that the user is very often looking at it to know the time.

## F

42. Feelele  
Cheap and light textile material  
This SAC has its meaning from a song in a dance-tune called 'Feelele' which originated from Ghana in the early fifties. In that song Feelele and 'obey-the-wind' were used synonymously.
43. Fosa (Awuufu)  
Anything that is got free; gratis.  
This SAC derives from English 'Free of charge' also referred to as Fijjqsijj, from which this SAC more correctly comes.

## G

44. Gagwo  
A tough, rugged, stubborn, frequently huge person who often achieves his ends through unconventional methods.  
This SAC seems to be an extended meaning of the ideophone gagwo 'to pieces'.
45. Gbom  
Very good; excellent.  
This SAC was popularized or possibly started by Herbert Udemba, in a popular dance tune called 'African Baby'.

46. **Gragra** (garagara; guragura)  
Pretentious; posing, behaving as if one can do more than one is able to, usually used in ime gragra.  
This SAC is possibly an extended meaning of the ideophone of the same name used for describing a type of grating noise.
47. **Gwuragwura**  
Originally used for an old car but now used for any old vehicle.  
This SAC derives from an ideophone whose meaning is not so obvious.
48. **Gwomniisiahja** (Qkirjka) (Gwom n'isi ahja: A bang at the outskirts of the market.)  
Imported second-hand clothing.  
This SAC gets its meaning and significance from the fact that when these bundles of second-hand clothing first started coming to Nigeria, when the bundle was let to fall at the market-side, it fell with a bang gwom at 'the head of the market' (n'isi ahja).
49. **Gwongworo** (Gwongwolo)  
(i) name used for any old goods' motor lorry  
(ii) name used for any old vehicle especially motor vehicles  
(iii) name used for any old, over-used thing including women!  
This SAC derives from the ideophone of the same name used for describing the sort of noise made by empty goods' lorries.

## H

50. **Hooha**  
Straight and unequivocal or unpretentious talk as in  
(i) ikwu hooha— to say everything without fear or equivocation  
(ii) igwa mmadu hooha — to tell one everything without fear.  
This SAC is of obscure origin.

## I

51. **Igedu**  
(i) any work connected with sawing, lumbering  
(ii) any very difficult assignment or undertaking.  
This SAC derives from what happened when Europeans first came and started looking for people to help them in the lumbering industry. These Europeans used to ask people the question 'You go do'. The listeners who did not understand English, picked up the sound (I ge du) going with the utterance and started associating it with the lumbering industry which was a very enervating and tough one.
52. **igba**  
The best in everything, excellent.  
This SAC is of obscure origin. Is it related to the generic name of a traditional Igbo musical instrument known as igba?
53. **Igbuchafa**  
Sleight-of-hand; dexterity, cheating.  
This SAC gets its meaning from the practice of sellers of edible grains like rice, beans and garri using the back of the cup to sell such things to unwary and not very observant buyers. The origin of this SAC is obscure.
54. **Ija** (Ijalijja)  
Money; cash, wealth as in inwe/iji jja 'to be rich'.  
This SAC derives from the ideophone ja which describes the metallic sound produced by metal money.
55. **Ijebu**  
Counterfeit money  
This SAC gets its meaning from the allegation that the Ijebu Yoruba people, who are

a very prosperous group, printed fake money.

56. *Ikwojirjkwọ*  
 (i) a popular dance tune or pattern which has come from East Africa  
 (ii) a euphemism for the sexual act. (The inherent tone pattern of the word is very suggestive: LHLH).
57. *Imirimios* [Imerime - ous]  
 Full of dept; inscrutable, very difficult and profound; many faceted as in *jdj imirimios*  
 This SAC is made up of two morphemes; the Igbo noun *imerime* 'many' and - ous, the adjective-forming English suffix which has the sense of 'abounding in', 'full of', 'characterized by', 'of the nature of'.
58. *Itiboljbo* (occasionally shortened as *iti*)  
 A big fool.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
59. *Iyanga* (Yanga)  
 Pride; Arrogance  
 This SAC is derived from the same word, of the same meaning in Yoruba.
60. *Jeetj*  
 Money, wealth as in *iji jeetj* 'to be rich'  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.

## K

20

61. *Kabukabuu*  
 An unregistered taxi-cab which plies as a taxi.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
62. *Kimbom* [*Kuiri m, bo m*: Put for me and help place on my head]  
 Daily-paid workers who carry mixed concrete on their heads at building sites.  
 This SAC derives from the fuller form of the sentence given above.
63. *Kwokiya*  
 (i) a barber who uses blunt instruments.  
 (ii) any artisan who produces a poor job.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
64. *Kqbq* (*kqbq*)  
 Wealthy in terms of money as in  
     *inwe kqbq* } 'To be rich'  
     *iji kqbq* }  
 This SAC was long in use before *Naira* and *Kqbq* were introduced as currency in Nigeria. The *kqbq* of this SAC comes from the corruption of 'copper', which was the name used for metallic money pieces.
65. *Makakwu* (*Onukwu*)  
 A very big fool  
 This SAC derives from Hausa where a blind man is called 'mekakwu'. As he goes about with his stick he places it here and there. When therefore one starts fooling about he is called a 'makakwu'.

## M

66. *Mbarama*  
 A prostitute  
 This SAC is possibly a corruption from *mgba n'ama* 'one who runs about in the open square'.
67. *Mgbagbu ijiji* [Drowner of flies]  
 Name used for palm wine or raffia palm-wine which has stayed 'over-night' (i.e. has become stale)  
 The SAC derives from the fact that because it has stayed so long, flies are usually found in it, since flies invariably get drowned when they too go to sip the wine when



it is still fresh.

68. Mgbuka [the act of cutting up anything to pieces]
    - (i) the market or dump for second-hand motor vehicles and motor parts. It is in this market that all odds-and-ends called by the SAC *akpakara tɪngwom* are found.
    - (ii) the act of selling anything at a give-away price.
  69. Mgbodoume [Holder of strength]
    - (i) a type of bread-like biscuit, one of which can satisfy one
    - (ii) any edible which can easily satisfy one or hold hunger in reins for a long time.

This SAC derives its meaning and significance from inherent meaning of the words that make it up.
  70. Mpɪrɪmpɪ  
 A mean-minded prospective buyer who haggles from stall to stall touching the commodities as he moves about.  
 This SAC gets its meaning from the idea of pressing *ɪpɪ* 'to press with the hand' which is central in the word.
  71. Muchimuchi  
 One who enjoys or specializes in confusing people as magicians do. One who is very secretive. This SAC is of unknown origin.
  72. Mugwu (Makakwu)  
 Fool.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
- N
73. Njakɪrɪ (Njakɪlɪ)  
 Careless, empty talk meant to devalue or degrade something or somebody, inciting in content but not meant to be taken seriously, as in *ɪma njakɪlɪ*: to indulge in empty talk.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
  74. Ngwɔŋgwɔ  
    - (i) name for a delicious type of appetizer in the form of pepper-soup made usually of the entrails of goat meat and other spices.
    - (ii) any poor mixture of things of different qualities, types, grades and backgrounds. For example, oil traders have a type they call *ngwɔŋgwɔ* which is a mixture containing oils of different grades resulting in poor quality. There used to be a popular radio programme in the former ECBS, Enugu, called *ngwɔŋgwɔ*. In this musical programme assorted types of dance tunes were played — high-life, reggae, Congo, Afro beat, Juju, etc.
    - (iii) very dirty, over-used and tattered paper money.
  75. Njenje  
 Any imported spirit or gin.  
 This SAC derives from the corruption of the name J.J. Peters, which was the first brand of foreign gins or spirits imported into Igboland through Onitsha.
  76. Nwa ada  
 Any young unmarried woman, who is a possible bed-mate.
  77. Nwa maazɪ  
 Money.
  78. Nwanchɔlɔm (Nwanchɔlɔŋwɔ)  
    - (i) a very suggestive type of dance-pattern which was popular in the late fifties and early sixties.
    - (ii) sex as in *iri nwanchɔlɔm* 'to have sex'.

The SAC derives its name from the corrupted pronunciation of the most outstanding Efik/Ibibio phrase of a popular hit-tune of the late fifties and early sixties, played by Emmanuel Ntia and the Eastern Star Dance Band known as 'Solo Hit'.
  79. Nkɪ [Fire-wood]  
 Money; wealth, as in *iji nkɪ* 'to be wealthy'

This SAC possibly derives from an extended meaning of Nkụ Fire-wood i.e. anything that can give power to fire, as one with money can do practically anything and everything.

## O

80. **Qchanja**  
 Anything which is fake or inferior.  
 This SAC is possibly derived from a word of the same name with two different meanings.  
 (i) the name of a market in Onitsha originally called Alahambra, notorious for cheap articles.  
 (ii) the name of a type of lantern powered by palm-oil dregs and cloth-wick, believed to be commonly used in the Qchanja market which used to hold late in the night.
81. **Qgacha**  
 Beautiful seductive unmarried woman; prostitute.  
 This SAC is of probably derived from the sentence.  
 Q ga-acha? Will it be alright; end well?
82. **Qgomabaala** [Qgō m abaala: my in-law has now become wealthy]  
 A helmet  
 This SAC derives its meaning and significance from the fact that at a time in Igboland, especially in the twenties, thirties, and forties, the possession of a helmet or the ability to buy one was regarded as a sign of wealth and prosperity.
83. **Qgbaala** [Q gbaala: It is now played]  
 (i) It is time-up.  
 (ii) What we have been expecting has now come, reached, etc.  
 This SAC derives from the language of Pool's stakers who always say this after the results of the week have been announced on Saturday evenings.
84. **Qgbambu**  
 A woman of low morals who is always looking for men.  
 This SAC is of unknown origin.
85. **Ogbuigbo** [Ogbu Igbo: killer of people]  
 The act of cheating somebody in a bargain.  
 This SAC was used by other people for Igbo traders who were notorious for cheating others in the Onitsha market.
86. **Ogbuniigwe** [Ogbu n'igwe: killer of crowds]  
 (i) any deadly mass-killer  
 (ii) a euphemism for the phallus  
 This SAC is clearly derived from the home-made Biafran mine which could kill many people at the same time.
87. **Ogbunnuoya** [Ogbu nnu oya: Killer (cure) of a thousand diseases]  
 (i) any fake drug peddled by itinerant motor-car advertisers.  
 This SAC gets its meaning from the literal meaning of the phrase from which it derives.
88. **Ofemmanu** [Ofe mmanu: Oily soup]  
 The Yoruba people  
 This SAC gets its meaning and significance from the fact that the Yoruba people usually take oily soup.
89. **Ojiotuleebu** [Oji otule ebu: it carries with its buttocks/back]  
 Bicyclists who function as taxis.  
 This SAC gets its meaning from the literal meaning of the phrase from which it is derived.
90. **Ojiukwujeaba** [Oji ukwu eje Aba: It goes to Aba on foot.]  
 (i) Truck-pushers  
 (ii) Pedestrians who refuse to use, or cannot afford to go by, taxi.  
 This SAC is usually used by taxi-drivers for truck-pushers and/or pedestrians who carry heavy loads on their trunks or on their heads.

91. **Ọjọnjọ** [Ọjọ njọ: The ugly one]  
A man who wears very long hair on his head.  
This SAC gets its import from the fact that men are not expected to wear long hair on their head. Any man who does this is regarded as ọjọnjọ — the ugly one.
92. **Ọkırjka**  
(i) imported second-hand clothing  
(ii) any second-hand material, object.  
This SAC gets its meaning and significance from the fact that the first second-hand clothing which came to Nigeria after the second world war first landed in the town of Okirika, in the Rivers State, from where it found its way inland.
93. **Okongwu**  
(i) Originally the name used by secondary school students for any elderly, old-fashioned teacher.  
(ii) Any old-fashioned person, usually male.  
This SAC may be derived from any of the following three sources:  
(i) Okongwu — Oko — ngwu  
Oko: 'person' abbreviated from okoro  
Ngwu, is a type of tree in Igboland that is known to be very tough. It cannot be eaten by termites and thus stays for very long indeed.  
(ii) Okongwu — oke — ngwu  
Oke is a name Igbo people use for anyone senior to them. Ngwu is a mispronunciation of ngwu i.e. 'finished'. Thus Okongwu is one whose strength is completely finished i.e. a very old man.  
(iii) Okongwu is the name of a famous family in Nnewi. A member of this family founded a well-known secondary school in Nnewi. The founder of this school was said to be fairly elderly and rather old-fashioned in his dress. The students of this school then started calling any of the elderly and old-fashioned teachers 'Okongwu' and from here the word spread to the other schools.
94. **Ọkumkpa** (Feelele) [Ọkụ mkpa: it flaps in the breeze]  
Any light and poor quality textile material which the wind can blow about.  
This SAC gets its meaning from the literal meaning of the two words that make it up.
95. **Ọkupajđ**  
Any poor quality imported goods.  
This SAC derives from the fact that Japan was defeated and occupied by the Allied Forces at the end of World War I.  
During this occupation, goods of very poor quality were manufactured in and exported from Occupied Japan to the British Colonies. Some of these goods got to Nigeria.
96. **Ọkpasjam**  
Matches.  
The origin of the SAC is probably the ideophone of the sound made by a match when struck — 'sham'. Ọkpa/Ọgba sham — a thing which produces 'sham' noise.
97. **Ọkpọ**, possibly abbreviated from Ọtụmọkpọ charms; supernatural means, power.  
The origin of this SAC is unknown to me.  
Is it from Pidgin English, where this word is very well-known?
98. **Ọkpọchanja**  
A very well thought-out lie or falsehood.  
The origin of this SAC is obscure.
99. **Ọkpọka**  
Anyone or anything that is very strong or tough.  
This SAC gets its meaning and significance from a masquerade called Ọkpọka which is known to care very little about other masquerades or human beings.
100. **Ọkpọkija**  
Anything that is so tough or well-made that it rarely goes bad.  
The origin of this SAC is obscure.

101. **Qkpokiri**  
A big fool.  
This SAC derives from an animal called **Qkpokiri** which is known to behave rather foolishly.
102. **Qkpōnkū** (Gbom: Igba, Sambeya) [**Qkpō nkū**: very dry wood]  
Very good; excellent; the best quality possible in anything.  
The relationship between the original meaning and this SAC is not very clear.
103. **Qkpū**  
Goal.  
This SAC, whose origin is obscure, is used in the context of soccer by secondary school students.
104. **Qkpūisieriego** [**Qkpū isi erila ego**: it cuts hair without payment]  
Ring-worm.  
This disease is also jocosely called 'free barber' in the sense that usually we pay the barber to cut our hair but ring-worm is not paid for cutting people's hair. It is from this context that this SAC has its meaning and significance.
105. **Qkwata** [He has collected for himself]  
One who loots and keeps other people's property in his house.  
This SAC was used mostly in the Abakaliki area after the civil war for people who looted and kept their neighbour's properties.
106. **Qmaburu** [**Q maburu**: It seizes and knocks one down]  
Rocket or any such deadly projectile.  
This SAC was used extensively during the civil war.
107. **Qnaagwūagwū** [**Q na-agwū agwū**: it is getting exhausted]  
Any cheap, poor quality or worn-out material.  
This SAC gets its meaning from the fact that such materials were usually sold at the way-side by bell-clinging traders shouting **q na-agwū agwū**; **q na-agwū agwū**: "it is running out; it is running out".
108. **Onukwu** (Makakwu; Mugwu)  
(i) a fool.  
(ii) any unsophisticated person; a novice.  
This SAC comes from Igala where **Onukwu** means 'friend'. The point is that when Igala people first came to Onitsha to buy and sell, they called themselves **onukwu mi** 'my friend'. Now, because as a group they could be easily out-witted by the more crafty Igbo traders, these Igbo traders started calling any unsophisticated person, 'onukwu'.
109. **Qnyupa** [**Qnyū pa**: it smokes and emits papapa noise]  
Any old vehicle which smokes heavily, emits horrible exhaust noise and frequently breaks down.  
This SAC gets its significance from the literal meaning of the phrase which makes it up.
110. **Opiachara** [**Opi Achara**: Flute made from achara grass]  
Originally used for fast-moving taxi-cabs of the Peugeot family, now used for any fast-moving motor-car used especially as a taxi.  
This SAC gets its meaning and significance from the fact that children usually make flutes from Achara or Indian Bamboo. When they blow this their flute, the sound is very shrill and sharp, and like that of long distance taxi-cabs which are notorious for their sharp and noisy horns.
111. **Oringwōngwō** [**Ori ngwōngwō**: Eater of ngwōngwō]  
Commercial drivers especially of town-service taxi-cabs.  
This SAC derives from the fact that these drivers more than any other group, are known to frequent the spots where **ngwōngwō** is sold.
112. **Qtaakpū** [**Qta akpū**: Chewer of cassava]  
The Yoruba people  
The Yoruba were believed to take cassava products more than any other ethnic group



in Nigeria.

113. Qtaqji [Qta oji: Chewer of kola-nuts]

The Hausa people.

The Hausas are known to take kola-nuts more than any other ethnic group in Nigeria.

114. Otungaozi [Otu nga ozi: Going on errand only once]

Saturday.

This SAC gets its meaning and significance from probably two sources (i) In the past, before the five-day working week was introduced in Nigeria in 1972, people used to go to work on Saturdays. While on the other days of the week people went to work "twice" with the lunch break in-between, on Saturday there was no lunch break since it was a half-day.

(ii) Saturday is the only day in the week when school children assist their parents with farm/domestic work.

## P

115. Pimpilo (pimpirɔ)

See (29) Awantirɔ

## S

116. Sambeya (Gbom; Igba, Qkpɔnkɔ)

(i) very fast movement especially of motor lorries.

(ii) very good quality, especially of motor vehicles. Sambe is believed to be the name of a town which is very far away. But fast-moving and vehicle lorries can get there in time. It is from this that this SAC gets its meaning.

117. Santa

Sanctimonious, prudish, hypocritical

This SAC clearly derives from Sanctus 'holy', or more correctly sanctimonious from which it is abbreviated.

118. Sopido

A pin-pointed type of shoes worn mostly by men especially in the early sixties.

This SAC gets its meaning from 'torpedo tube' from which a warship fires torpedoes.

## U

119. Uɔqakpuenyi (Uɔq akpu enyi: A rope cannot pull an elephant.)

Fried ground-nuts and corn.

There used to be a beggar somewhere whose name was Okereke. This beggar was fond of fried groundnuts and corn, which he called 'Uɔqakpuenyi'.

## W

120. Wahala (Afanjko)

Trouble.

This word is from a similar Yoruba word of the same meaning.

121. Wayo

Tricky

This SAC is of obscure origin. I know, however, that wayo is used in Pidgin English with the same meaning.

122. Wuruwuru(wuluwulu)

Corrupt; not straight-forward.

This SAC is of obscure origin. I know, however, that wuruwuru is used in Pidgin English with the same meaning.

## SLANGY VERB PHRASES

123. Ibu nwaanyi  
To court a woman with the design of sex on her.
124. Idoga — To keep trying.
125. Igba isi akwala  
To persevere in an assignment, task, undertaking.
126. Igbari ego  
To spend usually another's money in a prodigal manner.
127. Igbatu nwaanyi  
To impregnate a woman usually not one's wife.
128. Iku ahja  
To undersell other traders dealing on the same commodity; to sustain a loss in business transactions.  
(It seems this phrase has been coined on the analogy of *ikū isi* 'to knock heads together' 'to instigate people to quarrel').
129. Iku njin  
The state of a mechanical device (an engine) grinding to a halt as a result of age or poor maintenance.
130. Iku taya n'ala  
To drive very fast and very well.
131. Ikwa mgbọ  
To be a good shot
132. Ikwu hooha  
To say without mincing words.
133. Ikponye aja na garị  
To mess up another's chance, luck, lot.
134. Moto jzochi/jwuchi  
The arrival of a motor vehicle.
135. Ino n'udj  
Itachi n'udj  
To be dressed up in very good attire.
136. Itinye ukwu n'otu turqusa  
To struggle grimly with another person for something.
137. Iwucha  
To arrive, get to a destination.

3.0 A close study of the above Igbo SACS and slangy expressions reveals that these share the following features, among others, with SACS elsewhere:

- (i) Each of them expresses either something new e.g.  
(9) — (11), (13), (14), (29), (41), (62), (75), (86), (114) or something old in a new way e.g.  
(6), (21), (28) — (29), (56), (65), (78) — (93), (98) — (102), (104) etc.
- (ii) They can be 'flippant, irreverent, indecorous, ... may be indecent or obscene' like a good number of SACS with sexual under tones (4), (65), (76), (78), etc.
- (iii) Each of them is a colourful metaphor which encapsulates a powerful image or sets of images or word-pictures reminiscent of proverbs. Take (86) 'the mass killer, or (56) for its graphic suggestiveness of the sexual act which is portrayed even in the lexical tone pattern of this word LHLH.
- (iv) They are all succinct, sometimes witty words and expressions used in special ways or in peculiar social contexts.
- (v) They can be used to express the attitudes, occasionally derogatory, of one group or class towards the values or behavioural patterns of another. For example, (36) and (93), the Okongwu Vs the Boyoyo.
- (vi) As lexical items, they involve the giving of new and special meanings to established

terms, e.g. (3), (7), (18), (22), (23), (30), (52), (76), (83), (88), etc.

It is normal that some expressions which are now regarded as 'conventional' 'acceptable' or 'good' Igbo started as SACS. e.g. (15), (41), (73), (75), (86), (93), (108), (126), (129).

- (vii) With regard to the linguistic processes for forming slang, those in Igbo are not very different from those noticed in other languages. And, in fact, these are the same as those by which other words in the language change their form or meaning or both. Some of these are the employment of metaphor (26), generalization, (29), specialization (37), (41), (46), elevation and degeneration, (56) metonymy (64), synecdoche (80), hyperbole (87) borrowings from other languages (6) (17), (108), the play of euphemism against taboo (56) and hybridization (57) or new coinages (26), (90). A few explanations would be in order. The expression *ahia panya* is an example of a term that has undergone both specialization and generalization. It first became specialized to mean any illicit trade with Fernando Po. Subsequently, it generalized to mean any illicit trade with any place and beyond that to any type of illicit trade. *Okpọ nkụ* probably once a very low term for 'poor, rough quality' has undergone elevation among advertisers as 'the best; *ogbuniigwe*, on the other hand, meant a mass-killer has now degenerated in some circles as a euphemism for the male genitalia. It is possible that those slang which are now acceptable as conventional expressions have undergone 'elevation' e.g. *akaamere*, 'home-made gin'; *elekere* 'time piece'; *njakjri*, 'careless talk'.

- (viii) Each SAC has its own history and reasons for popularity. When conditions change, it may change in meaning or be adopted into the standard language or continue to be used as slang within certain enclaves in the community. All these are true of *Ogbuniigwe* (86), which came with the Civil War, and has since changed its meaning with the end of the war.

- 3.1 Considered as lexical items, the Igbo SACS are nouns (1) — (8), (21), (41), (65), (73), noun phrases of different structures (2), (9) — (11), (67), (69), (76), (77), (114) verb phrases (123) — (137) whole sentences (15), (19), (40), (83), (89) — (90). It is significant to note that some of the nominal SACS are ideophones<sup>8</sup> whose effect rest on their being able to combine both sound and imagery. See (47), (49), (54), (115).

- 3.2 Considered from the point of view of Igbo society, it seems that the places where SACS are most frequently used include public places like motor-parks, market-places, rowdy low-brow night clubs/hotels (euphemisms for brothels!), schools and working places. In fact, if our sample is anything to go by, one could hazard the view that traders, motor-park touts, passenger motor drivers and their fellow travellers, post-primary school pupils, pimps and prostitutes, popular dance/pop musicians, and mobile advertisers are the popularizers where they are not the originators of SACS. Notice the preponderance of words used for fast-moving taxi cars, money, sex, clothes and clothing. The word '*agaracha*' for example has been popularized by the Peacocks International Guitar Band of Aba, in one of their popular songs entitled 'This Girl'; the Funkees Rock Group of Aba popularized '*Akula*' in a post-war record entitled '*Akula: Onye Ara*'; the Ikenga Super Stars of Africa popularized *ikwọkrijkwọ* in their smash hit '*Ikenga Go Marry Me*' or *Asampete* in a record of that name; *Ayakata* was popularized by the now forgotten hit-tune of the same title played in the late fifties by the late 'Baby-Face' Paul Isamade and his Top Toppers Band while the Abraka Guitar Band popularized *Azuanụka* in a record of that name, etc.

- 3.3 The Radio and TV as well as the Igbo weeklies '*Ogene*' and '*Anyanwụ*' are media for the popularization of SACS. In the NTV Channel 6, Aba, the following terms are now being used thus:

Ndị oji ego achọ ego	— Businessmen, Contractors
Ndị oji ụgbọ ala achọ ego	— Transporters, motor magnates.
Ndị oji ụkwụ achọ di	— Spinsters, Husband-hunters.

- 3.4 It is significant to point out that in spite of the 'unconventionality' of these SACS, some of them are already finding their way into serious Igbo literature. Williamson has entered quite a number of these SACS in her dictionary. Williamson correctly enters some of these as SACS. Some others are entered though not called SACS while there are certain

items like ideophones which she 'incorrectly' calls SACS. Expressions like *iwunye aja na garj* are also in *Onye Oma Emeka* (p. 67). The word *iwucha* 'arrive at' can be found 'also in *Onye Oma Emeka* pp. 58; 64.

- 4.0 Some of the SACS entered here do raise a number of problems for the serious Igbo lexicographer. Some of these problems are:

- 4.1 The etymologically-minded lexicographer will have to draw a line between what are true SACS and what are ideophones<sup>9</sup>. This problem is noticeable in some of Williamson's entries, e.g. Williamson enters *Sam* (slang) 'beauty' p. 462.

Etymologically *sam* is an ideophone and not a slang. Of course ideophones, can like other lexical verbal and nominal items in the language be used as slang. But first and foremost these items are ideophones before they are slang.

- 4.2 Again the etymologically-minded lexicographer will have to decide when a word ceases to be a corrupted loan and becomes a SAC. Notice that some of the SACS entered are clearly corrupted loan words (17), (51), (75), (78). By the same argument, corrupted loans like *bekee*<sup>10</sup> for European, *abada* for 'good quality foreign (Dutch) print' (possibly corrupted from 'haberdashery'); *titi* — 'little girl' (possibly from French *petite*); *utaba* 'tabacco' (possibly from tobacco) or French tobacco which are now almost regarded as part and parcel of the Igbo lexicon started as slang which were corrupted forms from their originals. However, over the years they have 'become' elevated to the extent that they are only a few people who do know now that those words were not native to the language.

- 4.3 The lexicographer will have the problem of deciding which of those SACS which are ideophones<sup>9</sup> or ideophonic origin are not indigenous to Igbo. This is a tricky problem because by their nature, (inherent) tone patterns and meanings, identical ideophones have the potential of co-existing in different languages with same segmental features as well as meanings. However, it is possible that in the lexicon of the travelled Igbo, some of these ideophones are known to have taken more concrete meanings in languages other than Igbo. So that when the travelled Igbo hear such ideophones in other languages they associate these with those languages even though such ideophones exist or could exist in Igbo. After all who can claim to know all the lexical items in his language more so with elusive linguistic phenomena like ideophones? The following ideophonic slang have, however, been known to be popularized in Yoruba.

*gwongworo* (21); *gragra* (o), *nyamunyamu* (mosquitoes), *berekete* (full) from Yoruba *oberekete* (full, succulent!)

The question is: Are these ideophonic SACS derived from Yoruba or are they potentially present in Igbo?

- 4.4 Again the lexicographer will have to decide where to draw the line between nonce words and phrases, and SACS. It seems to me that certain words and expressions now accepted as 'respectable' started as nonce words and expressions. E.g. *akaamere* 'home-made gin' (once regarded as illicit) was a nonce expression which has now become elevated to the extent that practically everybody knows and uses this word for that home-made spirit. It seems to me that a number of nonce words and expressions now being used, like the following, are SACS already finding their way into the lexicon:

<i>Oji ego achọ ego</i>	—	Businessmen
<i>Oji ugbo ala achọ ego</i>	—	Transporters; Lorry magnates
<i>Oji okpo etigbu jba</i>	—	Effective malarial drug (now extended to any effective drug, etc.)

Some of these nonce words also include words and expressions from other languages: e.g. *fosa* 'free of charge' (f.o.c.) (English) *awuufu* 'gratis' get something without paying for it (from Yoruba); *kongosa* 'busy body' (from pidgin English); *kasa* 'in plentiful supply' (from Hausa); *afanjko* (trouble, disturbance (from Efik).

- 4.5 Finally the lexicographer will have the problem of deciding whether some SACS belong more to a discussion of Igbo than to that of English or English-Igbo or of English 11. The reason for this is that among the Igbo, English is a very strong second language



perhaps more so than in other parts of Nigeria — a fact which until fairly recently made it rather difficult for Igbo to take off as a serious subject for study especially in post-primary institutions. Now are SACS like (36) (43) (51) (60) and words like 'bebi (from English babe/baby) 'good-time fashionable girl with a lot of sex appeal' really Igbo SACS even with their assimilation and peculiar word shapes etc?

We would like to conclude that in spite of the observations made in 4 — 4.5 above, the acephalous and the classless nature of Igbo society, the picturesqueness and succinctness of these words and expressions (1) — (57) and, most significantly, the fact that these are used frequently in speech but cautiously in writing, determine that these Igbo Slang and colloquialisms should be allowed a respectable place in Igbo dictionaries as well as, perhaps, in serious creative Igbo literature. For a good number of these expressions have an aptness which no other expressions in the language can equal or surpass. There does not seem to be any other word in the language which can express the ideas in *njakirj*; *okongwu*; *kabukabuu*, better and more universally than these SACS.

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1. We use 'Modern Igbo' to refer to that variety (or varieties) of Igbo spoken (and understood) by travelled Igbo people, mostly but not exclusively in the urban centres. It is the Igbo that is spoken on radio and TV. It is interesting to note that Thomas, N.W. 1914 did two articles entitled 'Slang in Southern Nigeria' *MAN* 3—4, and 'On slang expression in Onitsha—Asaba Ibo' *MAN*.
2. Partridge, E (1915) *Slang: Today and Yesterday: A Study and a History*. (1936) *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English* Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.
3. *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*.
4. This was settled in 1961 after a protracted and sterile orthography controversy. For a little history of this controversy see Ogbalu, F. C. 'Igbo Spelling in *Igbo Language and Culture* O.U.P. pp. 140—146.
5. There is a standing 'Standardization Committee' preoccupied with handling some of the problems highlighted in this paragraph. This Committee set up in 1973 has just recently put out a set of recommendations on writing practices. These recommendations were ratified and made common property to be enforced in schools, in popular materials etc. at the recent Seminar in Igbo Art and Music, held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in August 1976.
6. Igbo is now being taught at varying levels and to varying degrees at the Universities of Ibadan, Lagos and Nsukka. It is also been creditably taught to NCE level at the Alvan Ikoku College of Education.
7. SPILC — Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture. Founded in 1949, this non-ethnic, non-religious, organisation has spearheaded and sustained interest in Igbo language and culture. Until quite recently the SPILC drew most of its members from school teachers only, even though it has always had 'elites' as its 'nominal' patrons and, in a few cases, as officers.
8. See the *New Encyclopaedia Britannica* Vol. 16 pp. 850—853.
9. See Emenanjo, E. N. 'Some preliminary notes on Igbo Ideophones' *Ikenga* 3 1975.
10. See Williamson, Kay 'A note on the word bekee' (1976) *Odenigbo* 1, 30—33.
11. See Note 1 above.
12. S. E. B. U. Nwafor 'Engligbo' *Ibadan*

## SOME REFLECTIONS ON RESEARCH METHODOLOGY IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

By  
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The discipline of ethnomusicology has come a long way in the search for a definition of its scope and content. Early definitions recommended that it should be concerned with the study of 'non-Western music'. This thinking has not changed much judging from ethnomusicological literature. Although the methodology continues to strive for more objective and empirical directives, the results quite often show evidence of subjective and extraneous observations and prescriptions. Merriam, in his book, *The Anthropology of Music* (1964), has adequately covered the attitudinal developments in the field of ethnomusicology from the time of Hornbostel who by 1905 had called attention to the affinity between ethnomusicological and anthropological studies. Merriam then argues that ethnomusicology should be 'the study of music in culture', and that the field should cover the musicological as well as the ethnological implications of music in a particular culture (1964:6). A significant recommendation is that by Gilbert Chase who advocated the 'musical study of contemporary man, to whatever society he may belong' (Chase 1958:7). Nettl, in summarising what he assesses as a consensus of research approach to ethnomusicology by 1964 defines ethnomusicology as 'in fact as well as theory, the field which pursues knowledge of the world's music, with emphasis on that music outside the researcher's own culture from a descriptive and comparative view-point (Nettl 1964:11). Such a view, Nettl posits, stems from a fairly common argument among ethnomusicologists that 'by studying his own culture [the ethnomusicologist] may be conditioned to too many prejudices and personal associations to be properly objective' (ibid: 8). By 1975, however, Nettl had modified his perspective considerably when, in his appraisal of the various definitions about ethnomusicology, he argues that in recognizing 'the usefulness of the contributions of the outsider, who may see things that the insider of the culture does not readily see, we would have to admit that in most ways the insider's view is bound to be far more significant' (Nettl 1975:11-12). Not only did Nettl recognize the importance of a knowledgeable insider to the study of his musical heritage, he (Nettl) further renounces some of his earlier prejudices (1964, 1973) and accepts that 'the concept of folk and primitive music is really no longer viable' (1975:14).

The linguistic mode of communication is no doubt very inadequate for conveying the facts of music communication. And yet a recourse to verbal language is inevitable whether in a research situation or in any discourse about music. Coupled to the fundamental inadequacy of translating musical language into verbal language is the additional handicap of being unable to perceive the cognitive subtleties of a given musical and language culture in a research situation. And yet most ethnomusicologists assume that given a conversational knowledge of a language, the friendliness of the inhabitants as well as of the exponents of the music, maybe a 'knowledgeable' interpreter or guide, and a mastery of Western musical as well as social anthropological theories and models they are equipped to understand with perspicuity the musical culture of other peoples. Quite often some researchers have tended to indulge in the mental arrogance that presumes to patronize, or prescribe about, cultural and artistic practices very much beyond their sensibilities. Thus most of the literature on the music and other cultural systems of, especially, the non-western societies by the so called authorities are full of authoritatively-sounding, but glossily applied and misleading theories, analysis and conclusions. It is most lamentable that modern scholars, especially from the third world cultures, have blindly presumed such literature as standard and authoritative models, and have, therefore, been unable to investigate or reason beyond their seemingly 'scientific'/empirical facade.

My main concern here is to underscore the very much underrated problem of verbal language as the 'crutch' for data-collection in field research which precedes scientific or philosophical analysis. For this exercise the research realities and attitudes in the very specialized creative discipline of traditional music-making and music-using will be examined. An awareness of the enormity of the cognitive processes in verbal language communication will

be a cautionary principle in a research situation, and more so in appraising the factuality and authenticity of some of the analytical literature in ethnomusicology and the related ethno-cultural disciplines.

Ability to speak or understand the syntax of a given language is not synonymous with ability to reason according to the style of thought of the society that speaks it. Recent studies in paralinguistics (Crystal 1975) support this contention. The metaphors or conundrums, colloquialisms and intonations peculiar to the English are not automatically understood by a visiting American or English-speaking Nigerian by virtue of ability to communicate in the English language. So, quite often a researcher who is 'fluent' in a language asks a question and gets an answer in the field. He concludes he has gotten *the* answer. He forgets that in some non-Euro-American societies a verbal expression is not always what it seems. It would be arrogant, therefore, not to expect that one could unwittingly be wrong about his 'facts' or conclusions. On the other hand, it is exceptional to find literature on non-European music, especially of African peoples, by Euro-American ethnomusicologists and circumstantial musical commentators which does not discriminate about 'them' and 'us'; 'theirs' and 'ours'. The 'them' and 'us' relational categorization is a formidable mental barrier in understanding the cultural sensibilities and practices of others, and results in ethnocentric non-perception. There can be no perspicacious understanding, and no objective analysis or assessment, unless ethnocentric arrogance and its retroactive resentment/tolerance are sufficiently chastened by the researcher and the researched respectively. These observations are without prejudice to the cultural or geographical distance between the researcher and the researched. A culturally alienated indigene could be as intolerant and unperceptive as an ethnocentric foreigner. Conversely, a foreigner could be most perceptive and acceptable in a research environment depending on his mental and interactional attitudes.

The following paradigm gives a hypothetical evaluation of the role of interpreters and guides in the field as well as of the whimsicality of the verbal language in field research. In the first instance no guide or interpreter is a reliable index for establishing a fact. No communication passing through an intermediary is as authentic as the original, not to talk of when the intermediary has a further handicap of commuting through a language in which he does not intuitively intellectualize.

Let me illustrate using English language, X, and Igbo language, Y, a British or American researcher, A, an Igbo interpreter, B, and an Igbo musician, C, all in an Igbo traditional music situation.

- Stage 1: A asks for information P, from C, in X, through B.
- Stage 2: B translates P from X to Y for the benefit of C.
- Stage 3: C gives an answer Q to the question P in Y through B.
- Stage 4: B translates Q from Y to X for the benefit of A.

It is important to note that in the above transaction B, the interpreter, is not a music-maker but is English-speaking. He, therefore, translates as much as he *understands* English language, as well as the language of verbalizing music-making in both his culture and in English.

C, the traditional musician is, of course, non-English speaking or understanding. So his answers are based on whatever he thinks the interpreted version of P implies.

A, the researcher, may or may not be Igbo-speaking, but he does not intellectualize in Igbo and has to decipher from B's English, or his superficial knowledge of Igbo, whatever he presumes are the implications of the encoded version of the answer, Q.

If we examine what has happened we notice that:

- (i) A, as a musician, knows the musical implications of the information, P, he desires in Stage 1.
- (ii) B as a non-music-maker, and for whom English is not a mode of cognition, formulates his own impression of P which now has an implication P<sub>1</sub>, a variation of P.
- (iii) Assuming that B and C share the same cognitive thought system, C gets version P<sub>1</sub> of the question P. If P<sub>1</sub> is ambiguous in terms of the theorization of his ethnic musical system, he adjusts its implications to P<sub>2</sub>. He then gives an answer Q based



on P<sub>2</sub>.

- (iv) B as a non-music-maker translates the answer Q into English as Q<sub>1</sub>, making allowances for his non-musician's understanding of the musical implications as furnished by C.
- (v) A gets the answer Q<sub>1</sub> to his question P depending on how accurately B encodes Q<sub>1</sub> into English.
- (vi) A proceeds to cogitate and interpret the implications of Q<sub>1</sub> according to his European musical thoughts and standards or knowledge. So that what he finally documents is not even Q<sub>1</sub> but Q<sub>2</sub>.

What has transpired is that the question P has been communicated to C at a third degree of cognitive deficiency. The answer Q which he gives is therefore merely relative to the information required. Then again the answer received by A is interpreted at a third degree of cognitive deficiency thus giving a cumulative unintelligibility of six degrees of cognitive deficiency on a fact. And this is often recorded as the fact 'according to the folk informant interviewed in the field!'

Given a researcher who speaks the language but does not think in the language, which means that he understands the mechanics of the language but not the transactional mechanism of the language in social interaction, he dispenses with stages 2 and 4, and records his 'facts' at a fourth degree of cognitive deficiency. In other words, given a zero ethnocentric factor, which is virtually unattainable in view of the 'us and them' human situation, and all other ideals of a perfect research condition prevailing, the chances are that what gets published is, at the best, often fact at a fourth degree of misinterpretation when a researcher works outside his cultural cognitive system.

Given an equipped researcher in his own society, and all the ideals of a perfect research condition:— research orientation, research training and experience, an analytical mind, reliable field equipment, acceptability in a research location, cognition in language behaviour, uninhibited social interactional conditions, and freedom or frankness of expression — such a researcher would at the best come out with a second degree of cognitive deficiency. If he plays the music with some degree of proficiency, the degree of cognitive deficiency could be less than the second degree but not completely eliminated for the reason of change of mode of expression from music to language.

A zero degree of cognitive deficiency is difficult to achieve when a non-verbal system of communication is represented in a verbalized medium even by the master musician himself. A contextual music-making occasion is always more expressive and complete than a music-talking occasion even in a music-contextual setting.

Further to the above argument, it is a truism that the moment you ask 'What did he say?', there is a loss in factuality in the answer you get. If it is not a loss in the sense of what is said, then it is a loss in the implication of how it was said: the paralinguistic factor in verbal communication. What you then get is your informant's own interpretation or perception of the original version. In spite of the problems of communication and perception, however, there is no gainsaying the fact that the published research literatures by ethnomusicologists working in cultures other than their own quite often portray remarkable insight and perception.

A preliminary observation about approach to analysis and presentation of data is now pertinent. Various approaches to analysis and presentation have been offered and argued by leading ethnomusicologists like Merriam (1964), Nettl (1964), Alan Lomax in his rather ambitious cantometrical compendium (1968), Hood (1971), Blacking (1974) among other contemporary ethnomusicological scholars. Each scholar's advocated approach is informed by his academic orientation and humanistic attitude towards the music and the people respectively of the society he has studied. It is not my intention here to examine the nature and merits or demerits of various approaches. My view is that an analytical approach should, as much as possible, be descriptive and expository. Prescriptions (about music of other cultures) that are not derived from, or cannot be supported with evidence of, personal practising knowledge (through practical and creative experiences) of a society's system of musical ideation should be eschewed as much as possible. When the sound of an Igbo mystical masquerade ensemble receives a comparative analysis informed only by a musical background enculturated in the sounds of Verdi's operas, and vice versa, there would be ethnocentric imperceptibility and



bias in analysis and assessment depending on which cultural background one stands. By this I do not intend to detract from speculations about music universals (McAllester 1971, Wachsmann 1971, List, 1971, Nettl 1977, Blacking 1977, Hood 1977, Nattiez 1977, Harrison 1977, Kurat 1977). A comparative approach implicates ethnocentric bias, even if not intended. In the traditional music situation where musical ideation is very much informed by extra-musical considerations attempts at comparative evaluation of the musical artefacts and conventions which do not take cognizance of the operative cultural-normative foundations for creativity and presentation could be very misleading. The more the distance between the cultures involved, the more difficult it is to achieve an objective comparison. But a descriptive and expository study helps in appreciating a particular music and its cultural relevance.

Some scholars have advocated music as 'a means of communication which can be used to further world understanding' (Merriam 1964:10). Mantle Hood emphasizes this diplomatic potentiality of music when he observes that 'Today, as never before, governmental agencies of the nations of the world are recognizing the fact that international understanding and goodwill is possible only when the cultural expressions of the peoples involved are comprehended' (Hood 1957:8). It is not necessary here to examine the merits and demerits of the intentions and attitudes of governments when they use cultural expressions for so-called international understanding and goodwill. Nettl, whose earlier stance seemed more concerned about what the Western world should always gain from the 'non-literate' worlds, and not particularly about what human beings, whether 'primitive', 'literate' or 'non-literate', could gain from mutual respect through open-minded cultural interaction, reminds us that 'the ethnomusicologist's main potential contribution to the study of Western music is, then, the techniques which he has developed in the study of other musical cultures'. (Nettl 1964:12). (The emphasis is mine.) Such a statement comments on the degree of reciprocity and objectivity or otherwise that could motivate some researchers. If, instead of 'the study of Western music', he had said 'the study of [his society's] music', I would have been persuaded to believe that the motivation for most of such studies is not exploitative: to take what 'they' have in order to develop 'our' systems without bothering about the human fate or needs of the 'under-developed' friendly folks who supply us the raw materials to advance our systems and techniques. This of course raises the fundamental but often overlooked issues about motivations and ethics in field research by social scientists and Humanities scholars vis-a-vis informants, researched human situations or communities, and presentation of research results. The ethical import of research procedure raises a wide range of weighty issues about conscience: conformity with a society's norms of behaviour, hospitality, and mutuality; respect for esoteric cultural practices and people's privacy; researcher-informant relationship; sincerity in interaction; perfidy and abuse of trust reposed on a researcher by informants; acknowledgement, and feedback on utilization of field data for the benefit of informants or community studied; and a host of other moral and human issues. It does not appear that some research scholars are remotely ruffled about these issues of ethics and morality as long as their selfish motivations, or those of their sponsors or patrons, who may have vested interests in the content or couching of research reports, are gratified, albeit without respect for factuality. Nettl has also called attention to the issue of ethics and researcher-informant relationship in his reflections on 'Ethnomusicology Today' (Nettl 1975). Ethnomusicology as a study of the role of music in social interaction, thereby involving fellow human feelings, *Man and Fellow Man* (Blacking 1972), should be concerned at all stages with the above ramifications of ethics. On a purely musical level, Western literary musical traditions and non-Western non-literary musical traditions have a lot to offer to and gain from each other if those involved in musical promotion, usage and discussion would lay aside ethnocentric prejudices and vain cultural airs, and approach their studies with a genuine spirit of reciprocity and respect. And whether one works within or outside his musical culture or community, the problems of ethics and morality do arise.

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