The Ibo People and the Europeans

by the same author

POLITICAL THINKING AND SOCIAL EXPERIENCE: SOME CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATIONS OF THE ROMAN EMPIRE
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The Ibo People and the Europeans

The Genesis of a Relationship—to 1906

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To my husband, Uche
and to our children
Uche, [redacted] Emeka, [redacted] Nkem, and Chinye
with all love

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MAPS

Illustrations

Plates 2, 3 and 4 are from Thurston Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu*, London 1970, and are reproduced by courtesy of the author.

Preface

This book is the first volume of a trilogy. A second volume, it is hoped, will continue the story through the period of colonial rule. A final one will deal with the history of a single Ibo community through the period covered by both books.

It is based primarily, though not exclusively, on archival sources in four countries. These have been supplemented by oral traditions collected in Asaba, and, to a lesser extent, in Western Iboland generally. For the rest, I have depended on written versions of oral traditions, such as those preserved in the voluminous Intelligence Reports in the National Archives, Ibadan. It would not be possible for any individual to collect traditions scientifically in even a significant proportion of Iboland's many communities. The book as it stands represents five years' work. To attempt a more extensive collection of oral traditions seemed impracticable.

Because of the nature of the available sources, this book concentrates on the theme of Iboland's changing relationship with a wider world—with the impact of international trade, and of missionary work, and later, with the experience of colonial conquest and rule. It is open to the criticism that too much space is devoted to the Niger area, which was, together with the Delta, the main frontier of alien influence in the nineteenth century. I can only plead in extenuation that this reflects, less the predilections of one who is, at least by marriage, a Niger Ibo, than the historical information at present at our disposal. Our knowledge of history proceeds largely through a dialectic between general syntheses and particular case studies. It is hoped that this book will provoke more local studies, based predominantly on oral traditions, which will, in their turn, provide a groundwork for new and better syntheses.

Preface

A Preface is the most pleasant part of a book to write, and compensates, to some extent, for the labours which precede it. I am happy to acknowledge my gratitude for the privilege of five years at Nuffield College, Oxford, first as a Research Student, and later as a postdoctoral Research Fellow. My election to the latter position made the research for this book possible. I am grateful to the Warden and Fellows, not only for my election, but for the generous leaves of absence which enabled me to carry out research in widely scattered archives.

Part of this book was written in intervals snatched from my teaching duties when I was a member of the History Department of the University of Dar es Salaam. I have learnt much from conversations with my former colleagues there, and from their writings, and from the experience of teaching, among other things, West African history to East African students.

I am grateful to the Holy Ghost Fathers, and to the Fathers of the Society of African Missions, for the valuable privilege of access to their archives. In particular, I would like to thank their respective archivists, Father Noël, C.S.Sp., and Father Eerden, S.M.A., for their help. Father Raymond Arazu, C.S.Sp., introduced me to the Holy Ghost Fathers, and generously shared with me his materials on Dahomi. I would also like to thank the Church Missionary Society archivist, Miss Rosemary Keen, for whom my researches created a great deal of work. I am also grateful to the archivist and staff of the National Archives, Ibadan, for their co-operation. I could not have written this book without the help of the staffs of the following institutions, whom I am unfortunately unable to thank by name: the Public Record Office, the British Museum, the Foreign Office and Colonial Office Library (all in London), Rhodes House and the Bodleian Library, Oxford, and the Staatsbibliothek, Munich.

I am glad of an opportunity to thank a number of scholars who have answered my inquiries on specific points, or, more generally, discussed with me matters treated in this book. My thanks are due to the following: Professor J. F. A. Ajayi, Dr. J. S. Boston, the late Dr. R. E. Bradbury, Professor J. D. Fage, Professor J. E. Flint, Professor D. D. Hamlo, Dr. J. Iliffe, Mr. G. I. Jones, Dr. W. Rodney, Professor A. F. C. Ryder, and Professor T. Shaw. None of them, of course, has the slightest responsibility for its contents.

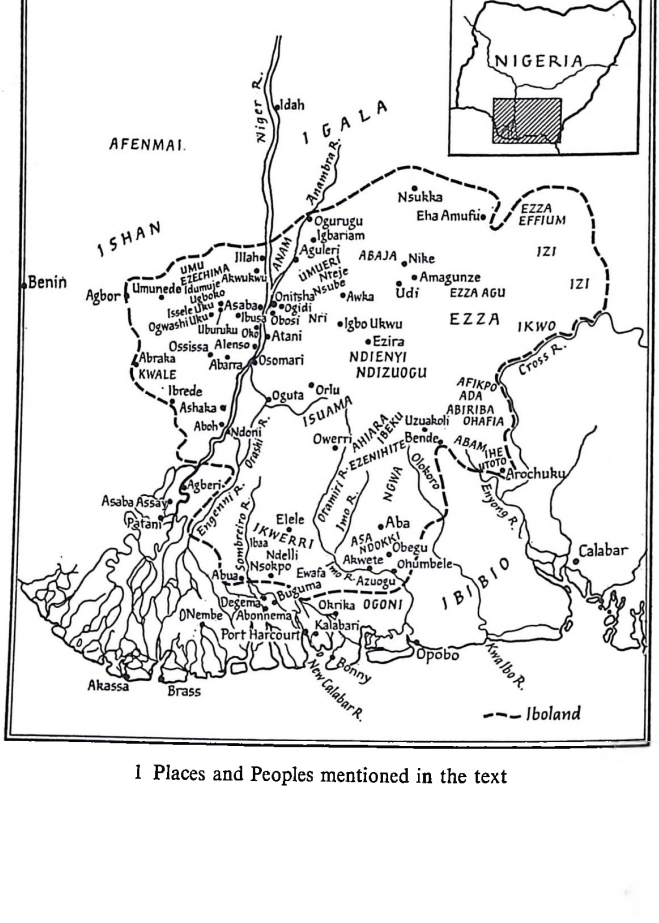
In writing this study I have accumulated many debts to my

extended family. I am particularly grateful to Mr. F. O. Isichei for his invaluable assistance in collecting Western Ibo oral traditions, and for his encouragement. Had he had my opportunities, he would have written more and better books. Father Patrick Isichei shared with me some materials on Asaba, and has encouraged this work throughout. Dr. Veronica Isichei cared for my eldest child, then a baby, while I did research in Paris, at much inconvenience to herself. My dear friend Frau Karola Marchner sacrificed part of her annual leave to do likewise. I am glad of an opportunity to thank Mr. Innocent Isichei, whose help made so much difference to my stay in Rome. Nor must I forget to thank my own dear father and step-mother, Mr. and Mrs. A. V. Allo, for their unfailing moral support, as well as for their material help in my undergraduate days.

My greatest debt is to my beloved husband, Dr. Uche Peter Isichei. It was he who first suggested that I write this book, and his belief in it has given me courage to finish it, in the face of many difficulties, and despite the pressure of other work. He has done far more than cheerfully accept the many trials and inconveniences which research and the writing of books impose on family life. When time for research in London was running out, he interrupted his own work to help me in note taking, in a library which lacks both typing and xerox facilities. As for an earlier book, he has drawn the maps. This book has benefited greatly from his long continued knowledge of those parts of Iboland with which it is mainly concerned. The ideas it expresses are our ideas, and in a very real sense, it is our book. And like everything I do in history, it has benefited greatly from the example of his scholarly dedication and integrity in a completely different field of academic inquiry.

I would like to thank my elder son, Uche, who was born at the time I began this work, and whose happy and loving nature has made its own contribution to its completion. Nor can I refrain from an affectionate mention of Emeka and Nkem, who were born half-way through the final draft, and watched with interest while I finished it.

17 Umuaji King St.,
Umuaji Quarter,
Asaba.
Christmas, 1971.



1 Places and Peoples mentioned in the text

1 · The Beginnings

'. . . the groups of the south-east have no history before the coming of the Europeans . . .'
—Margery Perham, *Lugard, The Years of Authority, 1898–1945*, p. 459.

The traditional homeland of the Ibo people of south-eastern Nigeria lies between the Niger and the Cross Rivers, though a substantial minority lives to the west of the Niger. Like other groups whose limits are not defined by obvious natural boundaries, they tend to merge into neighbouring peoples. Some western Ibo communities have much in common with their Ishan neighbours. Northern Iboland merges into the kingdom of Igala, and a number of border towns, such as Ogurugu, are equally at home in both languages. In the south-east, Arochuku, historically one of the most important of Ibo states, forms a peninsula in Ibibioland. In the Delta, no simple generalizations are possible. The general pattern is one of ever increasing Ibo infiltration, a process expanded, though probably not begun, under the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The trading cities of the Delta drew much of their population from the Ibo hinterland, and one of the most important of them, Bonny, gradually adopted the Ibo language. The history of the Ibo people is inextricably entwined with that of the Delta, though because the Delta has already been the subject of intensive historical study, its history forms but a subordinate theme of this book.

This study is primarily concerned with those of the Ibo people who remained in their ancestral homeland. Nevertheless, we must not forget the Ibos of the Diaspora, the thousands of men and women who went as involuntary emigrants to the New World in the era of the slave trade. A few of these victims were recaptured from the slave ships and resettled in Sierra Leone, where they formed, in the nineteenth century, a flourishing community with a strong sense of its Ibo identity. Those who reached the Americas were soon cut off, of

necessity, from the memory of their origins, and their history becomes one with that of the Afro-Americans.

Like many African peoples, the Ibo lived in a difficult and unpromising natural environment. The Delta is an infertile waste of tortuous creeks and mangrove swamps. Much of the Ibo interior consisted originally of dense tropical rainforest, making both agriculture and communications difficult. Its soils are highly leached and acid—'among the poorest of Nigerian soils'.[1] To the north, the forest merges into orchard bush—a region of rolling hills, grasslands and scattered trees, which homesick Englishmen have sometimes compared with the Downs of southern England. In the long years of their history, the Ibo people were to cultivate the whole of the forest, and, with the other peoples of the Delta, transform a watery and unproductive wilderness into a network of wealthy entrepôt city states.

It was not until 1830 that Europeans discovered the course of the lower Niger, and thus set eyes for the first time on a few of the states of the Ibo interior. From then on, we have a gradually increasing knowledge of Iboland, and an increasing amount of documentation for its history, though it was not until the end of the century that they penetrated beyond the immediate hinterlands of the Delta and the Niger, and in 1906—the concluding date for this study—there were still parts of Iboland which no European had ever seen.

Most of this book deals with less than a hundred years of Ibo history. The history of the Ibo and their forbears goes back four thousand years or more. But unfortunately most of this history is shrouded in obscurity, and is likely to remain so.

We have three main sources of information about the Ibo past before the nineteenth century—the findings of archaeology, the oral traditions of the Ibo people themselves, and the observations of European visitors to the Delta. Each of these deals with a different time scale, and provides different kinds of information, so that it is difficult to combine them in a satisfactory synthesis.

Archaeological findings in Iboland go back as far as four thousand years. But archaeology in the area is still in its infancy, and its flourishing growth was sadly disrupted by the events of recent years, one of the lesser casualties of war. Only a few sites have been

[1] K. M. Buchanan and J. C. Pugh, *Land and People in Nigeria* (London, 1964 reprint), p. 60.

excavated, but these have yielded material of enormous significance, which has, in some respects, transformed our knowledge of the Ibo past. It seems likely that systematic archaeological work in Iboland in the future will add greatly to our understanding of its history, though there are, of course, major limitations to the kind of information which the remains of material cultures can supply.

Europeans began to visit the Delta towards the end of the fifteenth century. Their accounts are invaluable for the history of the Delta, and thus relevant to Ibo history, but they never visited the Ibo interior, and whatever they say about it is generalized hearsay.

The use of oral traditions presents special difficulties in the Ibo context, which are described more fully in the next chapter. These spring largely from the fact that Iboland was not a centralized state, but consisted of a very large number of independent and relatively small polities. Their number makes the scientific study and collation of their traditions difficult, and their complicated and democratic systems of government were not particularly conducive to the systematic preservation of knowledge about the past. Perhaps the key difficulty is the near-impossibility of establishing a reliable chronology for each set of traditions—a necessary prelude to understanding their mutual relationship, and their relationship to external influences, such as the impact of the slave trade. Moreover, like all oral traditions they tend to preserve certain kinds of information only—such as that relating to the town's foundation, and its major wars.

Information based on these three types of source forms the basis of the first three chapters of this book. Inevitably, the evidence is less ample and precise, and there is greater room for hypothesis and conjecture than in the rest of the book. But it is essential to attempt the task, because if we ignore those long and largely hidden centuries, and confine our attention to what is well documented, beginning our study in the nineteenth century, we impose much more serious distortions on our historical perspectives.

The history of many peoples begins with a migration, and a founding father. But the available evidence suggests that the Ibo and their forbears have lived in much their present homes from the dawn of human history. The fact that they and their neighbours speak very different but related languages points to this conclusion. Any attempt

to derive absolute time scales from patterns of linguistic change involves us in great methodological difficulties, which were first pointed out by the critics of glottochronology, but the linguistic evidence certainly suggests ancient and continuous settlement. A scholar who has studied it states, 'Rough basic vocabulary counts suggest that Yoruba, Edo, and Ibo may have started to diverge not much less than 4,000 years ago . . . There is no reason to suppose that the divergence of these languages from a parent stock has not taken place side by side more or less *in situ*. Any theory which would derive the carriers of one of them, *en masse*, from far afield, when the others were already established in the area, would raise historico-linguistic difficulties of great magnitude.'[1]

The botanical evidence confirms this picture of long settlement. The Southern Nigeria Conservator of Forests was surprised to discover, some sixty years ago, that the area was not covered with its original rainforest. This survived only on disputed or agriculturally worthless land, or on the verges of paths—this last giving travellers a false impression of its extent. For the rest, the forest was secondary growth: 'The country is literally honeycombed with farms and their overgrown abandoned sites.'[2]

Iboland's high population densities, which have often been remarked on, point to the same conclusion. The Owerri area has a population density of over four hundred per square mile, rising in places to over a thousand per square mile, one of the greatest densities of a rural population in the world.[3] This again suggests a long period of continuous settlement. Archaeological fieldwork confirms this picture: 'We now have enticing evidence of a cultural continuum from the lithic periods to the present, some employing highly sophisticated techniques.'[4]

The beginnings of the history of what later became Iboland lie, like the pre-history of the rest of West Africa, in an area which is still surrounded by many uncertainties. Scholars have constructed certain hypotheses on the basis of archaeological, linguistic, botanical

[1] R. E. Bradbury, 'The Historical Uses of Comparative Ethnography with special reference to Benin and the Yoruba', in Jan Vansina, Raymond Mauny and L. V. Thomas (eds.), *The Historian in Tropical Africa* (London, 1964), p. 150.

[2] H. N. Thompson, in *Journal of the African Society* (1910–11), X, p. 130.

[3] Buchanan and Pugh, p. 60.

[4] D. Hartle, 'Bronze Objects from Ezira, Eastern Nigeria', *The West African Archaeological Newsletter* (1966), no. 4, p. 28.

and anthro-biological evidence—but it is essentially a period where conjecture still reigns supreme.

It was the great pre-historian Childe who first drew attention to the fundamental importance of the invention of agriculture in the history of human development.[1] Neolithic man—as the man of this revolutionary period is known—advanced from the precarious and wandering life of the hunter and gatherer to the more stable and comfortable life of the farmer. This in its turn made other developments possible, and neolithic man made pottery, and a wide range of wooden and stone tools.

It is thought that agriculture developed in West Africa about five thousand years ago, on the southern fringe of the Sahara—which was, of course, much moister and more fertile than it is today. Scholars disagree as to whether it was invented independently, or spread there from elsewhere, by diffusion.[2]

It seems probable that the first settlement of Iboland was on the northern edge of the rainforest, and the savanna to its north. This would have been easier to cultivate with wooden and stone tools. It was once thought that the rainforests could not be settled until the invention of iron tools and the introduction of a number of Asian food crops,[3] but recent archaeological work has shown the extent of Stone Age forest penetration.[4] Excavations at Nsukka, in the most northerly part of Iboland, and at Afikpo, near the present rainforest savanna border, show that neolithic men were living there as early as 3000 B.C., and were making stone tools, including ground stone axes, and pottery.[5]

Their subjugation of a forest environment was to be greatly helped by the introduction of iron working. Radio-carbon dates from the Nok complex, further north, suggest that this knowledge may have

[1] Gordon Childe, *What Happened in History* (Harmondsworth, first pub. 1942). His views have been much modified by scholars since.

[2] Cf. J. Desmond Clark, 'The spread of food production in sub-Saharan Africa' and Roland Porteres, 'Primary cradles of agriculture in the African continent', in J. D. Fage and R. A. Oliver (eds.), *Papers in African Prehistory* (Cambridge, 1970).

[3] J. Desmond Clark, 'Prehistoric Origins of African Culture', *ibid.*, p. 21.

[4] Cf. Frank Willet, 'Nigeria', in P. L. Shinnie (ed.), *The African Iron Age* (Oxford, 1971), p. 19.

[5] D. Hartle, 'Archaeology in Eastern Nigeria', *The West African Archaeological Newsletter* (1966), no. 5, pp. 13 ff.; also (1969), no. 11, p. 35.

reached Nigeria by 300 B.C., or even earlier[1]—though scholars disagree as to whether it came from Meroe, or from the Maghreb, via the trans-Saharan trade routes.[2]

After more than a thousand years of iron age civilization, in the ninth century A.D., our knowledge of Ibo history emerges suddenly from the realm of conjecture and inference to that of positive knowledge.[3] We know that the Ibos of the ninth century were making iron swords, and bronze and copper vases and ornaments, whose intricate forms reveal great technical virtuosity. They made pottery which was to astonish those who found it later by its wealth of form and vitality. They wore beads imported from as far afield as Venice and India. They were part of a major complex of international trade, importing, certainly beads and copper, and probably other metals, from far afield. No one would have suspected the existence of this Ibo bronze age, had it not been revealed by sheer chance in 1938.

In that year, a man was digging a hole for a water cistern near his home in Igbo-Ukwu, a small village twenty-five miles south of Onitsha, when he came upon a number of bronze objects. These later found their way into various museums, but it was not until 1959 that systematic excavation of the site began, and not until 1970 that the results were published in full.

When the first bronzes were discovered, the general reaction was much the same as it has been to similar finds elsewhere in Africa. They were thought to be amazing and improbable, and probably imported from elsewhere, and were assigned a date much later than the one which has now become accepted. The method of radiocarbon dating has yielded four ninth-century dates. The other evidence—such as that based on a study of the beads and pottery excavated—has been meticulously sifted by Professor Thurstan Shaw, who excavated the site, and seems compatible with this dating. In the absence of further evidence, it seems reasonable to assume that the

[1] Willett, p. 14.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 17.

[3] The account which follows of the Igbo-Ukwu investigations, and of their significance, is based on Thurstan Shaw, *Igbo-Ukwu, An account of archaeological discoveries in eastern Nigeria* (2 vols., London, 1970). When this book had reached page proof stage, an article appeared arguing for the possibility, or likelihood, of a fifteenth-century date. (B. Lawal, 'Dating Problems at Igbo-Ukwu', *Journal of African History* (1973), XIV, pp. 1 ff.) At the time of going to press, the question seems to stand open.

Igbo-Ukwu discoveries are about a thousand years old. What do they tell us about Ibo society at that time?

It is almost certain that the finds are to be linked with the divine kings of Nri, the Eze Nri. Nri is an ancient religious and cultural centre, historically linked with the kingdom of Igala, which is discussed more fully in the next chapter. Igbo-Ukwu is very close to both the towns which have an Eze Nri in modern times. One of the sites excavated was the tomb of a man buried in a sitting position, dressed in ceremonial regalia, with a bronze rod supporting a bronze leopard skull at his side. The chamber was roofed in, and five individuals—perhaps slaves—buried above it. The system of burial has many parallels with the modern burial of an Eze Nri.

The excavations reveal the antiquity of the institution, and the treasures they uncovered, the bronzes and beads, reflect the wealth of the economy, and the great artistic skill of the makers of the bronzes. They show the extent to which the area was part of the network of international trade. Some of the beads may have come from Venice, but most were probably imported from India, via North Africa. The raw materials for the bronzes were certainly imported. Some are made of copper, and some of leaded bronze, but there was no copper in the area that later became Nigeria. The nearest anciently worked copper mines were at Takedda, near the modern borders of Niger and Mali, though there were others further afield in the Sahara. One can only surmise what was exported in return. Ivory was probably a major export. Some of the bronzes depict elephants, and the buried ruler had one foot resting on an elephant's tusk. Perhaps slaves and kola nuts were exported as well—this last important as a stimulant acceptable to the Islamic world.

One obvious question which suggests itself is, who made the bronzes, and what is their relationship to other ancient Nigerian centres of metal working. There is as yet no real agreement about the relationship between the Igbo-Ukwu discoveries and a complex which has been tentatively labelled 'the Lower Niger bronze industry'. Hoards of bronzes have been discovered in many parts of the Delta,[1] and the Nupe people to the north possess a set of bronzes which are supposed to have been brought to Nupe from Idah by their founding father, Tsoede, in the sixteenth century. William Fagg has

[1] Described by Robin Horton, 'A Note on Recent Finds of Brasswork in the Niger Delta', *Odu* (1965), II, pp. 76 ff.

suggested that Idah was an ancient centre of bronze production, but the evidence is tenuous. Horton, in his account of the Delta bronzes, suggests that they were made elsewhere to the specifications of the local people, but there is no evidence to this effect, and the hypothesis, perhaps, raises more problems than it answers. There is no obvious connection between the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes and the more famous works from Ife and Benin, further afield, which are completely different in style and metallic content, and which were made up to five hundred years later.

In the absence of evidence to the contrary, it seems reasonable to assume that the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes were made by Ibos, either in Igbo-Ukwu itself, or elsewhere in Iboland—there are traditions of brass working at Abiriba.[1] Just as the raw materials were imported, it is almost certain that their techniques were learnt from elsewhere. The cire perdue technique of bronze casting used is a complicated one, but was practised in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. Its knowledge was widespread in West Africa—bronzes cast by this method were produced by the 'Sao' culture south of Lake Chad, and gold was cast in Ghana by the same techniques.

All who have studied the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes are struck by their technical brilliance. This can be seen from the plates which illustrate this chapter, and, like all visual art, is better seen than described. William Fagg has compared it with the rococo period in Europe, and observes: 'Many of these finely cast works show an extreme addiction to virtuosity, unparalleled in Africa, which reminds us . . . of Fabergé.'[2]

Much of the world's art is court art, and that of Igbo-Ukwu, of course, is no exception. It represents the wealth of a great religious leader, and the talents of the artists who worked for him. In that sense the findings are not 'typical', and can tell us relatively little about the ordinary life of the Ibo men and women of the time. Again, there are limits to what we can learn about a society from archaeological findings alone, in the absence of other sources of information. One could not know, for instance, from the objects themselves, that the function of a rosary was purely utilitarian, of a mace, purely

[1] F. Ekejiuba, 'Preliminary notes on Brasswork of Eastern Nigeria', *African Notes* (1967), IV, no. 2, pp. 11–15.
[2] William Fagg and Margaret Plass, *African Sculpture* (revised edn., London, 1966), p. 120.

1. An Ibo image of Ibo family life. A terracotta sculpture, from Kwale, for the cult of the yam spirit. *British Museum.*

2. Pottery from Igbo-Ukwu

3. Bronze altar stand, from Igbo-Ukwu

4. Bronze shell surmounted by an animal, from Igbo-Ukwu

ceremonial. This is particularly true of religion. The findings, naturally, reveal a situation which was primarily religious in nature. But religion is so much concerned with the immaterial, that we can learn little about its nature from the artefacts used in religious practices.

But if the Igbo-Ukwu findings are atypical, they are not unique in Iboland. Several years ago, similar discoveries were made at Ezira, not far from Igbo-Ukwu. The objects excavated were similar to those found at Igbo-Ukwu—iron gongs and a sword, bronze anklets, bracelets, bells and ceremonial objects, cast by the cire perdue method, and covered with exquisite lace-like designs.[1] It seems likely that further investigations elsewhere in Iboland will reveal comparable artefacts. A government Intelligence Report describes 'various brass objects now ancient with decay' in the western Ibo village of Ibrede, which were brought there six generations before from Aboh[2]—though of course one cannot know the provenance or age of these bronzes in the absence of further information.

In modern times, Ibo metallurgy has been mainly concerned with iron working, though brass working is not unknown.[3] But the technical and artistic achievements of the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes[4] have not been repeated in this medium. The grave site was forgotten, the buried treasures cached nearby were abandoned, in circumstances one can only conjecture, the techniques forgotten, and the very memory of the bronzes entirely lost. We have a parallel in the superb achievements of the apparently short-lived school of brass casting at Ife, in Yorubaland. We can only speculate as to how some unknown catastrophe cut off these traditions in full flower.

But it would be a mistake to look on these discoveries as evidence that Ibo society reached a kind of cultural peak a thousand years ago, and then declined. Bronze was only one of many means of cultural and artistic expression, an especially durable one. But Ibo art was basically directed to transcendental ends, and durability was not the most important consideration. Like other forest peoples, the Ibo chose wood as their most usual sculptural medium—a short-lived

[1] Described in Hartle, 'Bronze Objects'.

[2] N.A.I. C.S.O.26/11 (File 28903), Main Report on Aboh-Sobo Village Groups (1933), p. 9.

[3] Shaw, I, 272.

[4] I have used the word 'bronze' throughout this chapter in its more general sense, to refer to any object made of copper or copper alloy.

one, in a tropical environment. Much outstanding Ibo sculpture is in unbaked clay, the most ephemeral of all sculptural media, for it is in honour of Ala,[1] the divine Earth, and durability is less important than its symbolic meaning. Other equally characteristic Ibo art forms—oral literature, rhetoric, the dance—are of their nature even more subject to time's oblivion. It is only rarely in Africa that a thing of beauty remains a joy forever.

[1] Ala, Ana, or Ani, among different Ibo groups.

2 · Patterns of Internal Migrations and State Formation

'Toutes les histoires anciens, comme le disait un de nos beaux esprits, ne son que des fables convenus.'

—Voltaire, *Jeannot et Colin.*

Historians have begun recently to develop a healthy scepticism about traditions of origin, migrations, and state formation. In the words of a recent persuasive statement, in the northern Nigeria context, one must relinquish 'the pursuit of the phantom of the strange invader, the héros civilisateur from the east . . . Political institutions, like the other institutions of human culture, are devised and developed because they offer solutions to the problems which arise for mankind out of the conditions in which it has to live.'[1]

These caveats apply with redoubled force to Iboland. If one takes the traditions of her polities at their face value, one must conclude that many of them were founded within the last three hundred years, and that the lives of their peoples have been marked by frequent migrations. Indeed one can discern a general pattern of migrations, moving anti-clockwise around Iboland. There are a number of migrations to the south, among which the movements of the Ndokki and Ngwa are especially well documented. Further east, one has the northward migrations of the Ada, the Ezza, the Ikwo and their neighbours, which is followed by the general expansion of the north-eastern Ibo. A group of the Ezza move westward, until their advance is blocked by the expansion of the peoples of the densely populated Udi-Nsukka plateau. A further pattern consists of migrations to the Niger, from various directions.

But a general pattern such as this—which is distilled from the copious data in the National Archives, Ibadan—is inherently

[1] Abdullahi Smith, 'Some Considerations relating to the Formation of States in Hausaland', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (December 1970), pp. 345–6.

unconvincing. The picture of frequent migrations accords ill with the evidence of ancient and continuous settlement. Where migrations did occur, they often affected only a minority, who joined a pre-existing Ibo community—as is often enough attested by the traditions themselves. Stories of migration from elsewhere may, as elsewhere, loom larger in the traditions than the historical reality justifies. Perhaps the myth of migration from elsewhere has a special function in a small face-to-face society—providing a reinforcement for an always precarious unity.

As elsewhere, the constant tendency to elision in oral tradition tends to suggest an inaccurately recent date. This has been interestingly attested by combined archaeological field work and collection of oral traditions in East Africa recently.[1] Not all Ibo traditions in Iboland contain chronological data. Where this exists, whether in family genealogies, in the king lists of her few kingdoms, or in other forms, one must often suspect the workings of some iron law of elision. And where chronological data is so often absent or suspect, it is impossible to be certain of the relationship which different traditions bear to each other, or to external events such as the impact of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Chronology is the skeleton of all historical inquiry. In its absence, we are in a realm of surmise and conjecture.

Some of these difficulties may be solved through a more extensive and scientific collection of Iboland's historical traditions. No single individual can hope to record the traditions of more than a few of Iboland's many polities in person. At the moment, the written compilations of oral traditions are numerous and full,[2] but not many of them have been recorded by historians trained in modern techniques of historical inquiry. It is likely that in the future, the collection of traditions of origin will need to concentrate on particular themes—such as the movements of the north-eastern Ibo—

[1] Researches of Dr. P. Schmidt described by Dr. J. E. G. Sutton at a University of Dar es Salaam History Research Seminar, 16 February 1971.

[2] The largest single collection of traditions is to be found in Intelligence Reports compiled by government officials in the 1930s. Most of these are in the National Archives, Ibadan. There are a number of compilations by anthropologists, whose interest, generally, was not primarily in history, by government officials working on their own initiative, and by missionaries. The traditions of some states, such as Aboh, have been recorded by a number of individuals over a considerable time period.

and that it will add greatly to our knowledge of the Ibo past. But it is likely to remain true that Ibo traditions of origin have intrinsic limitations which reflect the nature of Ibo political life. They lack the plenitude and precision of traditions preserved in large centralized kingdoms, where the society can maintain, for instance, professional remembrancers, and where the records of the past are a dimension of the state's collective identity, and a cherished proof of a dynasty's right to rule.

Having begun with these caveats, we must beware of neglecting important facts about the past in the name of an excessive historical sophistication. Where oral tradition is our main source of knowledge of the past, to reject it is a counsel of despair, and may lead, and sometimes does, to areas of pure conjecture. The rest of this chapter uses Ibo oral traditions to glean at least fragments of the lineaments of those lost centuries which lie between the ninth century, revealed by archaeological researches, and the relatively well-documented nineteenth.

Most fundamentally, these traditions reveal a way of life, a geographical mobility which enabled the Ibo to balance the constantly shifting equation between population pressures and the resources of the environment. When population pressures became too great, or when towns were divided by serious disputes, a section would migrate and establish a new home, preserving the memory of its origins. Other towns would expand to accommodate new quarters of immigrants, who would become part of the town, but preserve the memory of their first identity. This kind of migration was a safety valve, both against overpopulation and against internal wars. The imposition of colonial rule, by freezing settlement permanently in the patterns which existed at that point in time, ended this mobility, and in doing so created pockets of great discontent and hardship.

The traditions contain much information about the formation of states, and relationships between them.

One set of traditions deal with Iboland's relationship to its northern neighbour, the ancient kingdom of Igala, with its capital at Idah. These traditions in their turn have three main themes.

The first set of these relate to Nri, and the group of related towns known collectively as the Umueri clan. There are several versions of the story of their origins. According to one, Idah, Nri, and the other

Umueri towns were all founded by the children of Eri, a sky being.[1] According to another, Eri was an Igala warrior who settled in northern Iboland, and Nri, and the other Umueri towns, were founded by his sons, who married Ibo wives.[2] The traditions by themselves give little indication of how long ago these events took place, but their great antiquity is clearly revealed by the Igbo-Ukwu excavations described in the last chapter. The ancient connection between Igala and the Umueri towns is revealed in other ways. There were many similarities between the sacred kingship of the Igala and that of Nri.[3] It is likely, indeed, that Igala and Nri were the gateways through which a number of important discoveries reached Iboland. It is noteworthy that Nri, alone among Ibo towns, has traditions which describe the invention of agriculture, and of iron working.[4] Awka, whose travelling blacksmiths served much of Iboland with their skills, is situated very close to Nri. Nri was to remain an important religious centre. Its priests attended the ceremonies which conferred major titles in many towns both east and west of the Niger, and specialized in purifying towns from offences against the divine Earth.[5]

A second set of traditions described Igala military expeditions in northern Iboland, especially in the Anambra valley and the Nsukka-Udi plateau. The events to which they refer have probably extended over a very long time period, beginning before the fifteenth century.[6] Some of them refer to the exploits of a semi-legendary Igala hero, Onoja Oboni, who made his capital at Ogurugu, and whose death was as spectacular as the events of his life.[7] Many of the clans north of Enugu preserve memories of Igala raids, which have probably

[1] M. D. W. Jeffreys, 'The Umundri Tradition of Origin,' *African Studies* (1956), XV, pp. 119 ff. This is part of a longer unpublished work, *The Divine Umundri Kings of Igboland* (University of London Ph.D. thesis, 1934).

[2] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/325 (File 28323), Stone, 'Report on the Umueri Villages' (1932).

[3] Jeffries, *The Divine Umundri Kings*, ch. 2.

[4] Jeffries, 'The Umundri Tradition', p. 126. Cf. Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on the Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part I, Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Awka Neighbourhood, S. Nigeria*, (London, 1913), pp. 50–1.

[5] A. G. Leonard, *The Lower Niger and its Tribes* (London, 1906), pp. 34 ff.

[6] Communication from Dr. J. Boston, 14 October 1970.

[7] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/240 (File 29380), Milne, 'Report on Ogboli Group of Nsukka Division', p. 7.

extended over a period of at least five hundred years. Similarly, the impact of the Igala is mirrored in their political institutions.[1]

A third set of traditions relate to Igala influence on the lower Niger. In the 1830s—when we have our first eyewitness accounts of the area—the lower Niger was dominated by two naval powers, the Ibo kingdom of Aboh, at the apex of the Delta, and Igala. Igala canoes would travel down-river to trade. Often the Igala would establish a temporary encampment on the river bank or on a sand-bank, for trading purposes. In this way they came to found a number of towns, or quarters of towns. The most important of these was Osomari. According to the earliest version of its traditions, 'It is said to have been peopled by the Igaras originally as a trading station or market.'[2] The Igala immigrants joined with the original Ibo inhabitants to create a new state, the title of whose ruler, the Atamanya, doubtless echoes that of the Atta of Igala (the Atta 'Gala). The people of Osomari have preserved no king list, but believe that they have had nine Atamanya, their reigns separated by long regencies.[3] The data is too fragile to support an estimate of the date of its foundation, but it seems quite likely that Osomari was founded, like other Niger Ibo states, in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century.[4] Other Igala foundations on the lower Niger include the Oko villages, south of Asaba, and two quarters of Illah, the most northerly Niger Ibo town.[5]

Another complex of traditions deals with various movements southwards, and with the foundations of the Delta states. An early southward movement seems to have taken place from the Awka and Orlu area, to what is now the homeland of the eastern Isuama.[6]

As we have already seen, the Ngwa migrated further to the south from an area to the north of their present home, which is now

[1] J. S. Boston, 'Notes on Contact between the Igala and the Ibo', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1960), II, no. 1, pp. 56–8.

[2] Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1876), p. 536.

[3] F. Ikenna Nzimiro, 'Chieftaincy and Politics in Four Niger States' (University of Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1966), p. 207.

[4] Cf. pp. 38–42 below.

[5] Daryll Forde and G. I. Jones, *The Ibo and Ibibio-speaking Peoples of South-eastern Nigeria* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, London, first pub. 1950), pp. 48 and 50. There is a discrepancy between Igala and Ibo traditions in a number of cases, the Igala claiming Igala origins for a number of towns (cf. Boston, p. 54), whose own traditions do not confirm this claim.

[6] Cf. G. I. Jones, *The Trading States of the Oil Rivers* (London, first pub. 1963) p. 30.

occupied by the Ezenihite clan. Some of the Ibo peoples whom their migration displaced preserved a separate identity as the Asa clan.[1] The Ndokki Ibo, still further to the south, have the same tradition of origin as the island kingdom of Bonny. Both Bonny and Kalabari—its great economic rival from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries—were founded, probably in the fifteenth century, as part of a general movement of Ijaw peoples. The history of Kalabari—founded, according to tradition, a generation earlier than Bonny—lies beyond the scope of this book. But that of Bonny is a major dimension of Ibo history.

Many nineteenth-century visitors to Bonny believed that the town had been founded by Ibos from the interior.[2] The impression shows the extent to which Ibo influences had come to dominate Bonny, as the result of continual importations of Ibo slaves, but traditions collected later, and more carefully, show that Bonny was Ijo in origins, founded after a migration from the west, from 'Otuburu Toro or Abatoro part of Ijo, on the River Niger'.[3] Some of the migrants settled in the Delta, near Akassa. Others went north, to Oguta. Some went as far north as Ndizuogu, and then moved south again. One section settled in what is now the homeland of the Ndokki. Others continued on to found the state of Bonny. At what date did this take place? Talbot and Webber assign it to the fifteenth century, on the basis of Bonny's king lists, which show that Opobo the Great, who ruled from 1790 to *c.* 1830 was either the fifteenth or the sixteenth ruler of Bonny. Jones questions the chronological value of this king list,[4] but a fifteenth-century date fits in well with the evidence that Bonny was already 'a very large village' at the beginning of the sixteenth century,[5] and with the tradition that the Portuguese came to Bonny in the lifetime of its founders.[6]

The first eyewitness account of the area—the oddly entitled *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis*, written, probably, between 1505 and 1508—

[1] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/207 (File 29033/II), Allen, 'Report on the Ngwa Clan' (1934).
[2] James Johnson, 'An African Clergyman's Visit to Bonny', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1897), pp. 27–8.
[3] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/202 (File 29281), Ennals, 'Report on the Ndoki Clan' (1933). Cf. N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/73 (File 27226), Webber, 'Report on Bonny District' (1931), and P. Amaury Talbot, *The Peoples of Southern Nigeria* (London, 1926), I, p. 238.
[4] Jones, *The Trading States*, pp. 24–8.
[5] Duarte Pacheco Pereira, *Esmeraldo de Situ Orbis* (trans. and ed. George H. T. Kimble, Hakluyt Society, 2nd series, LXXIX, 1937), p. 132.
[6] Webber, p. 8.

shows that Bonny had already overcome the problems of economic viability in the Delta environment. She manufactured salt, which she exported to the Ibo hinterland, importing in return the foodstuffs she could not grow for herself. She was already using the vast canoes, holding eighty men or more, which solved the problem of transport, and transformed the Delta's myriad creeks from obstacles into roads.[1]

The advent of the Portuguese, and the subsequent development of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, were to revolutionize the economic and political role of Bonny. These developments form part of the subject-matter of the next chapter.

Like the Delta states, Arochuku grew up at a meeting place between two cultures. The Delta states were a fusion of Ijaw and Ibo elements, which came to create a unique civilization, with its own distinctive political institutions—the *ndi mili nmu* (people of the salt water)—comparable, at least in certain respects, with Swahili civilization in the coastal regions of East Africa. Arochuku grew out of the fusion of Ibo and Ibibio elements, and the present shape of its political institutions dates from a clash between the two peoples. Like the peoples of the Delta, the Aro transformed the crisis of the trans-Atlantic slave trade into an opportunity, a source of economic wealth and political power. By the nineteenth century, Arochuku possessed the greatest of Iboland's oracles, fulfilling both religious and political functions for much of Iboland. The Aro played a unique role on Iboland's inland trade routes, and had established a far-flung network of trading colonies throughout Iboland. We will discuss these aspects of the Aro achievement more fully in later sections of this study. We are here concerned with what tradition tells us about their historical development.

As is so often the case in Ibo tradition, the oral histories of Arochuku[2] give much circumstantial detail about its foundation, but little information about its later history, or the length of time which

[1] Pereira, p. 132.

[2] These have been recorded on a number of occasions. Cf. Talbot, I, 182–3; R.H. MSS. Afr. s. 783, Box 3/4 ff., 30 fol., H. F. Matthews, 'Discussion of Aro origins' (Matthews was a government anthropologist in the area in *c.* 1928). N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/51 (File 29017), Shankland, 'Aro Clan' (1933). There are also later accounts of Aro traditions, apparently based on these sources, in G.I. Jones, 'Who are the Aro?', *The Nigerian Field* (1939), espec. pp. 102–3, and an anonymous article, 'Inside Arochuku' in *The Nigeria Magazine* (1957), no. 53, pp. 100ff.

has since elapsed. It was formed after a conflict between the Ibo and the Ibibio. Traditions vary in their account of the causes for this. Some describe it as a revolt of Ibo slaves against Ibibio overlords, others as the result of the pressure of an expanding Ibo population on the original Ibibio settlers. In the war which followed, the Ibo called in 'Akpa' mercenaries, who have not been identified with certainty. The allied Ibo and Akpa were victorious. Shankland records that their victory was due to the use of firearms, and that the Aro still preserved, in the 1930s, two 'blunderbusses of a primitive type' allegedly used by the two Akpa leaders.[1] The nineteen villages of Aro still preserve the memory of their tribal origins. Six claim Akpa, five Ibo and two Ibibio ancestry. The rest were founded through later Ibo accessions.[2]

At what date did these events occur, and when did the Aro establish the prestige of their oracle and their trading network? We have a hint that the latter was of considerable antiquity in the Bonny tradition that the son of the first king of Bonny was called Kamalu. Kamalu is the name used by the Aro and Cross River Ibo for the god of lightning and the sky. This has been taken as an indication of the early development of the trading relationship between the Aro and the Delta states.[3] One version of Bonny tradition, too, states that a Bonny representative was sent to Arochuku at the time of the former's foundation.[4]

We have, however, some less tenuous information about the date when Arochuku was founded. The government anthropologist, Matthews, working in the late 1920s, collected a number of family genealogies going back to that time, which have an average time depth of eight generations. He also collected genealogies from the Ada, further north, who believe that they left their former homeland, near the present Arochuku, at the time the latter was founded.[5] Again, he found a time depth of eight generations. If we allot thirty years to a generation, this suggests that Arochuku was founded some 240 years before Matthews collected his data, that is, in the late seventeenth century.

[1] Shankland, p. 10.
[2] Matthews, fo. 37.
[3] Jones, *The Trading States*, p. 28.
[4] Fombo papers, Ibadan University Library, fo. 4.
[5] Matthews, folios 38–41 and fo. 45v; fo. 65 ff., 'Supplementary Report on the Aro'.

The fact that these genealogies are mutually consistent does not mean that they are complete—they may all be examples of the working of some iron law of elision. The references to the role of firearms would again confirm a fairly late date, for their importation did not become extensive until the eighteenth century.[1] But again, this is not conclusive. A few pieces were imported earlier, and in any case, two separate traditions may have been fused.

Although we cannot be certain, it seems reasonable to assume that Arochuku was founded in the seventeenth century, though the Ibos and Ibibios of the area doubtless traded with the Delta long before. The famous oracle grew out of a local Ibibio shrine, Ibritam. The generation which followed the foundation of the state expanded its influence.[2] The oracle had reached the apogee of its fame and prestige by the nineteenth century—a rise which apparently took place within the short time span of a hundred years. To these years also belong the elaboration of the Aro trading network. Each village of Arochuku had its own sphere of influence in Iboland—or Ibibioland—an arrangement which drew full advantage from the diversity of their origins.[3] Aro influence was augmented by the practice of establishing Aro colonies at strategic points in Iboland, a process which was still going on at the time of the imposition of colonial rule.[4] The Aro concentrated on trade, and on the manipulation of their oracle, purchasing their food from their neighbours, the Ututo and Ihe,[5] and employing other neighbours, the warlike Ohafia and Abam, as mercenaries.

It is not easy to evaluate the role of the Arochuku oracle in Ibo society. On the one hand, the Aros' manipulation of their oracle to serve their own economic and political ends, and especially to obtain slaves,[6] seems the classic case of the exploitation of religious beliefs

[1] Cf. pp. 51–2 below. A few pieces were imported in the seventeenth century.

[2] Shankland, p. 13; 'Inside Arochuku', p. 107.

[3] Matthews, folios 37 and 45; Shankland, pp. 12–14.

[4] Forde and Jones, p. 28, state that the important colonies of Ndienyi and Ndizuogu were founded 'during the last fifty to a hundred years' but give no evidence for this. Cf. Mary Easterfield and E. K. Uku, 'Seeds in the Palm of your Hand', *West African Review* (December 1952), p. 1367; and N.A.E., E.P. 6810, Ross, 'Intelligence Report on Native Administration, Awka Division' (1930), fo. 30.

[5] Shankland, p. 12.

[6] It is well established that the Aro did not believe in their oracle personally, but manipulated it for material purposes. Cf. Shankland, pp. 14–15, and Mbonu Ojike, *My Africa* (New York, 1946), pp. 14–15.

for material ends. On the other hand, the oracle served valuable functions in Iboland, acting as a definitive court of appeal to solve disputes, and prevent their developing into wars. The Aro themselves used the apologia common to slave-owning societies everywhere: '. . . the wealth we derived from slaves gave us leisure to cultivate a less material side of life with institutions and a religion which other tribes were not unwilling to participate in.'[1]

A further complex of traditions deals with the migrations and wars of the north-eastern Ibo, especially the three related clans, the Ezza, the Ikwo and the Izi. Their traditions affirm that their founders were related through a common ancestor, Akumenyi. They migrated from a region to the south, perhaps in the Arochuku area. Chapman, in his report on the Ikwo clan, written in 1930,[2] estimated on the basis of genealogies that this had taken place twelve generations earlier. If we allot thirty years to a generation, the migration would have occurred in the second half of the sixteenth century. North-eastern Iboland, where they settled, was particularly well suited to yam cultivation. Their splendid farms greatly impressed the first European visitors to the region,[3] and continued to export food through the colonial era, and beyond.[4]

An expanding population, and the need for more land for farming, inevitably led to wars. The Ezza, Ikwo and Izi had settled in land which was already sparsely populated by some small tribal groups, whom they assimilated or displaced without difficulty. Further expansion to the north was made impracticable by the decreasing rainfall. The desire for land led to internal disputes, and, in particular, a state of endemic warfare between the Ikwo and the Ezza.[5] The Ezza in their turn attempted to expand to the west. In the nineteenth century, they founded several colonies—including Ezza-Effium and Ezza-Agu—which are separated from the Ezza homeland by the territories of other clans.[6] As the Ezza, and other groups of

[1] Easterfield and Uku, *West African Review* (December 1952), p. 1369.
[2] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/147 (File 26804), Chapman, 'Report on the Ikwo Clan' (1930).
[3] C.O. 520/31, 'Political Report on the Ezza Patrol', encl. in Egerton to C.O., Confidential, 16 July 1905.
[4] G. I. Jones, 'Ecology and Social Structure among the North Eastern Ibo', *Africa* (1961), XXXI, pp. 119–20.
[5] Chapman, 'Ikwo Clan', p. 9.
[6] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/116 (File 28179), Chapman, 'Report on the Ezza Clan' (1932), p. 2.

north-eastern Ibo, attempted to expand still further to the west, they came into conflict with another pattern of expansion. The peoples of the densely populated Nsukka-Udi plateau were suffering acutely from land shortage—especially serious in the Abaja area—which led them to expand towards the sparsely populated Anambra valley on the one hand, and in an eastward direction on the other. The traditions of many of the intervening peoples mirror the conflicts which resulted. Thus, a section of the Amagunze clan consists of refugees from Ezza expansion, in the late nineteenth century.[1] The villages of the Eha Amufu clan are not related to each other but were founded by various settlers, some from the Nsukka area and others from north-eastern Iboland.[2] After the imposition of colonial rule, these territorial conflicts were ended, by freezing settlement in the state in which it was thought to be at the time when colonial rule was introduced[3]—a process which involved, in the opinion of one observer, 'an awful injustice on the part of the Government against the Ezza tribes'.[4]

A further complex of historical traditions relates to the foundation of a number of important trading states on the Niger and its tributaries, which probably occurred in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries. It seems likely that before this period, the riverain area was very sparsely populated. There were several reasons for this. Below Onitsha and Asaba, the land is low lying, so that riverside towns such as Aboh and Osomari were regularly flooded, as the river rose. Again, the crucial role of water transport, while it gave economic advantages to a riverside town, had a military as well as a commercial significance. Accessibility to war canoes could endanger a town's safety. This is why Onitsha was sited several miles inland. In the nineteenth century, even the oil marketing towns behind the Delta, which relied so heavily on water transport, were often situated

[1] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/45 (File 29457), Beaumont, 'Report on Amagunze Group of Udi Division' (1934), p. 5.

[2] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/85 (File 29387), Dixon, 'Report on the Eha Amufu and Umualao Village Areas of Nsukka Division' (1933).

[3] C.O. 520/47, 'Annual Report on the Eastern Province for the Year 1906', encl. in Thorburn to Elgin, no. 425, 22 July 1907.

[4] Robert Cudjoe, 'Some Reminiscences of a Senior Interpreter', *The Nigerian Field* (1953), p. 153.

at a distance from the river, for security reasons.[1] Even today, the Niger and Anambra river valleys are less densely populated than adjacent areas.[2]

In the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, an important change occurred. A number of new states were founded, on the banks of the Niger and its tributaries. These have a number of characteristics in common. They were founded through a migration from elsewhere, and, in a number of cases, from outside Iboland. Some, though not all, have kings, and therefore king lists, and a more reliable source of chronological information than is usual in the Ibo interior. They were not founded in uninhabited areas, but in places where small settlements already existed. These earlier inhabitants were usually assimilated in the new state, though occasionally they were expelled from it.

Obviously a change in circumstances had occurred, so that the disadvantages of a riverain situation were now outweighed by its economic advantages. The change was due to the expansion in the volume of trade caused by the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Some, though not all, of these riverain states were destined to rise rapidly to a position of wealth and power. Like the states of the Delta and like Aro Chuku, they turned the basically destructive situation of the centuries of the slave trade into an opportunity. When the Landers travelled down the lower Niger in 1830, they found that it was a major artery of trade, with the relationships between its wealthy naval states carefully governed by diplomatic and marketing conventions. What does tradition tell us about the origins of these states?

We have already seen the role of the Igala in the area, and the way in which an Igala trading station developed into the state of Osomari. We must now look at Benin, and the traditions of those states which claim that they migrated from a homeland at or near Benin in the sixteenth or early seventeenth centuries.

The Niger was the furthest eastern boundary of the Benin kingdom, and many of the states of western Iboland were at least nominally

[1] F.O. 84/1882, 'A Report on the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers', Section C, 'Towns and Trading Centres', encl. in Johnston to Salisbury, 1 December, 1888.

[2] Cf. Floyd, pp. 51–3, for a discussion of why population density is low in river valleys, and high on infertile uplands where water is scarce.

subject to its Oba. Benin traditions relate that the area was first conquered by Ewuare, in the mid-fifteenth century.[1] Occasionally a warlike Oba fought a compaign in the area, but for most of the time Benin's sovereignty there was nominal, and Obas were content with such ritual tokens of sovereignty as the annual expedition they sent to the Niger, to bring back some of its water to their court.[2] Equiano, the eighteenth-century western Ibo who was sold into slavery, and became the author of a famous autobiography, described matters thus: '. . . our subjection to the king of Benin was little more than nominal; for every transaction of the government, as far as my slender observation extended, was conducted by the chiefs or elders of the place.'[3]

In the sixteenth or early seventeenth century, there was some kind of political upheaval at Benin,[4] which led to a migration, led by Chima, in the course of which a number of Ibo states were founded. Chima and his followers may well have been Ibos, as Chima's own name suggests. Various versions of tradition suggest either that they were Ibos brought as slaves or hostages to the Benin court, or coming from a homeland in western Iboland.[5] This migration moved through western Iboland towards the Niger, founding, *en route*, the towns known collectively as *Umuezechima*. When the Niger was reached, Chima died and the group divided. One section, led by Oreze, crossed the Niger and founded the state of Onitsha, several miles inland from the river, expelling the indigenous people, the Oze, in the process.[6] The other section, led by Esumai,[7] went south.

[1] Jacob U. Egharevba, *A Short History of Benin* (Lagos, 1936), p. 21. Cf. R. E. Bradbury, *The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria* (Ethnographic Survey of Africa, London, 1959), p. 22.

[2] Julius Spencer, 'The History of Asaba and its Kings', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1901), p. 21.

[3] *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano* (abridged and ed. Paul Edward, London, 1967), p. 1. For the location of Equiano's home, cf. G. I. Jones, in Philip D. Curtin (ed.), *Africa Remembered: Narratives by West Africans from the Era of the Slave Trade* (Wisconsin, 1967), p. 61.

[4] Most versions say that this was caused by Chima's dispute with the Oba's mother, which induced the Oba to send his general, Gbunwala, against him.

[5] Northcote W. Thomas, *Anthropological Report on Ibo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria, Part IV, Law and Custom of the Ibo of the Asaba District, S. Nigeria* (London, 1914), p. 3; John Waddington Hubbard, *The Sobo of the Niger Delta* (Zaria, 1948), p. 198.

[6] Ben N. Azikiwe, 'Fragments of Onitsha History', *The Journal of Negro History* (1930), XV, p. 476. Cf. also G. T. Basden, *Niger Ibos* (London, 1966, first pub. 1938), pp. 121–2; C. K. Meek, *Law and Authority in a Nigerian Tribe*

Several bands of settlers stopped on the way, founding a number of towns such as Ossissa and Ashaka. The main body continued on to found the state of Aboh. For a time they lived peacefully with the original inhabitants, the Akra, but after a time they were expelled. Some fled north to found Atani and Ogidi; a few returned after a time, to settle in a village near Aboh.[1]

Onitsha and Aboh had many similarities. Both were Ibo states in language and custom, which retained elements of Benin influence—most evident in the institution of Obi, or king. Their fortunes, however, were destined to be very different. Aboh profited by its strategic position at the apex of the Delta, and by the early nineteenth century had reached a position of great wealth and power, with fleets of heavily armed trade canoes. In the nineteenth century it was destined to decline, because neither missionaries nor European traders were prepared to endure the endless inconveniences of periodic flooding. Onitsha, with its inland site, attained neither naval nor commercial power. In the middle of the nineteenth century it was impoverished and surrounded by enemies. Its selection as a missionary and trading centre were destined to transform it—or, more precisely, the new town which sprang up at the waterside—into a major economic and educational centre.

How long ago were these states founded? We have two kinds of evidence—that provided by the names of the Benin obas in the traditions, and that provided by the Onitsha and Aboh king lists.

A number of traditions state that Onitsha was founded in the reign of Esigie.[2] A tradition recorded by Nzimiro states that both Chima and Esumai were sons of the Oba Ozolua, Esigie's father.[3] If this is reliable, it at once solves the problem of dating, for Ozolua is thought

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(London, 1937), pp. 11–12; R. W. Harding, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Dispute over the Obiship of Onitsha* (Enugu, 1963), pp. 12–13.

[1] There are two versions of the tradition. One is that the migration was led by Esumai, who was later succeeded by his son, Ogwezi. (N.A.O. C.S.O. 26/10 (File 26769), Williams and Miller, 'Aboh-Benin Clans' (1930–1), p. 7; Nzimiro, pp. 9–11). The second is that Ogwezi led the migration. (Hubbard, pp. 199 ff.) Hubbard's information was collected from well-placed local informants from 1929 on, and published many years later.

[1] Hubbard, p. 202; Williams and Miller, pp. 7–8.

[2] Egharevba, p. 34; Talbot, I, p. 158 (but cf. p. 168). A number of other sources which attribute the migration to Esigie's reign, do so on their authority. (Meek, p. 12; Hubbard, p. 198.) Egharevba had also consulted Talbot.

[3] Nzimiro, p. 9.

to have reigned from *c.* 1481 to *c.* 1504, and Esigie, his successor, to have reigned until *c.* 1550.[1] A Government Intelligence Report compiled in 1930–1, states that the migration was led by the sons 'of the Obba Ozenwe'[2]—a name which does not appear in any of the Benin king lists.

If we accept the tradition that these towns were founded in the reign of Esigie, we need look no further for information about the date of their foundation. But the traditions which affirm this are not independent—they may all, indeed, be based on Talbot. If we attempt to ascertain the date when these Niger states were founded by analysing their king lists, we are led to a rather different conclusion. Leonard, who recorded the first version of Onitsha's king list in *c.* 1895, concluded that it had been founded fourteen generations earlier.[3] Subsequent research has shown that he made the mistake of assuming that each successive ruler represented a generation. While the king list was slightly longer than Leonard supposed—Anazonwu, who died in 1899, was the sixteenth Obi—he represented only the eighth generation, for a number of Obis were brothers or cousins.[4] The first of these rulers we can date with certainty was Udogwu, the thirteenth Obi (the sixth generation), who reigned in the 1830s.[5] If we allot thirty years to a generation, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Onitsha was founded in the mid-seventeenth century.

The Aboh king list provides a similar picture. Obi Ossai, who was reigning at the time of the expeditions of 1830, 1832 and 1841 was the eleventh Obi, but each succession did not represent a generation, for after the death of each Obi his successor was elected after a contest between the different quarters of the town.[6] It is not clear from the king list how many generations had elapsed—but it seems unlikely that it would support a date earlier than the seventeenth century.

It fairly seems clear, then, that Aboh and Onitsha were founded either in the sixteenth or in the seventeenth centuries. Where the

[1] R. E. Bradbury, 'Chronological Problems in the Study of Benin History', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1959), I, no. 4, pp. 266, 279–80. (Ozolua may have died in 1516, or 1517.)

[2] Williams and Miller, p. 7.

[3] Leonard, pp. 35–6.

[4] Harding, pp. 15–18; Nzimiro, p. 157.

[5] William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring Voyage up the Rivers Kwora and Binue . . . in 1854* (London, 1856), p. 297.

[6] Nzimiro, king list facing p. 192.

evidence conflicts, one cannot hope for a much greater degree of certainty than this. But since there is a large element of conjecture in allocating a number of years to a generation, or a king's reign, it seems reasonable to prefer the dating suggested by the name of Esigie, and conclude that they were founded in the sixteenth century. A possible solution for the difficulty may lie in the time which elapsed between the time the emigrants left Benin, and the time their new states were founded.

Oguta is another state which was founded after a migration from Benin.[1] This is believed to have taken place at the same time—as the result of the same political upheavals. Some traditions identify their leader, Ogwuara, with the war leader, Gbunwala, who is associated with the flight of Chima and his followers.[2] They settled successively at several points on the Niger, but left it after a war with Igala, during which Ogwuara was deposed for betraying his people. His successor, Eroa, led them to the beautiful lake which now bears their name, connected by water both to the Niger and the Delta, a circumstance which was to lead to great prosperity after the development of the palm oil trade in the nineteenth century. Like the founders of Onitsha and Aboh, they did not settle in an unoccupied area. Instead, they united with the original inhabitants.

Oguta's unusual political system makes the compilation of chronological estimates particularly difficult. It is ruled by three Obis, who are replaced only after the death of the last survivor. There are a number of different versions of the Oguta king lists. One informant allocated dates to each reign, suggesting that Eroa led his people to Oguta in 1600.[3] Another version states that Oguta has been ruled by nineteen succession units.[4] The data seems compatible with a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century dating—but it is clear that Oguta traditions are not of a kind to solve these problems of chronology.

As well as these migrations from Idah and Benin, there were others from eastern Iboland, at the time when the Niger was becoming a frontier of economic opportunity. The travels of Awka

[1] The fullest account of Oguta traditions is to be found in H. N. Harcourt, 'Report of the Inquiry into Oguta Chieftaincy Dispute', 1959 (Nigeria, Official Document no. 19 of 1961). Cf. also Nzimiro, pp. 11–12, and 198 ff.
[2] Harcourt, p. 6.
[3] S. B. C. Obiora, in Harcourt, p. 78. For another list, cf. pp. 62–3.
[4] Nzimiro, pp. 198 ff.

blacksmiths and Nri ritual specialists led to the foundation of some new towns, or quarters of towns. The western Ibo towns, Ibusa and Ogwashi-Uku, are among those which claim Nri origins.[1] A number of riverain settlements claim a founder from Nteje, which belongs, like Nri, to the Umueri clan. The Anam people on the eastern bank of the Niger, above Onitsha, claim that their area was uninhabited until a man from Nteje settled there in the eighteenth century.[2] Some sections of Illah claim a founder from Nteje, and Asaba was founded by a man from Nteje, on the site of a small existing settlement, in the sixteenth or early seventeenth century.[3] Nteje traditions confirm these Anam and Asaba histories of their origins.[4]

From all these various traditions, a significant pattern emerges. They describe a process of state formation which went on during the centuries of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Many of these states—those in the Delta, Arochuku, and Aboh, in particular—rose in these centuries to positions of great wealth and power. Nearly all historical experiences have a destructive and a creative aspect. We shall see, much later in this study, that this was to be true of colonialism. But although the slave trade made it possible for certain states to prosper—in Iboland and the Delta, as elsewhere in Africa—to concentrate on this aspect alone would be to distort the whole significance of its impact. It is the belief of the present writer that the effects of the slave trade, both in Iboland and elsewhere, were overwhelmingly destructive, and retarded and distorted the historical development of African societies. We shall look at the evidence for this in the chapter that follows.

[1] Forde and Jones, pp. 47–8.

[2] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/48 (File 29576), Stone, 'Report on the Anam Villages', p. 5.

[3] For a detailed attempt to establish the date of the foundation of Asaba, see Isichei, 'Asaba to 1885', pp. 428–32. My calculations were based on the allocation of twenty years to a generation. I now think that a longer estimate of a generation (thirty years) fits the available evidence better, and have used this in all calculations in this book.

[4] Stone, 'Anam Villages', p. 5; Isichei, 'Asaba to 1885', p. 427.

3 · The Slave Trade and Society

> 'The discerning Natives account it their greatest Unhappiness, that they were ever visited by the *Europeans*. They say, that we Christians introduced the Traffick of Slaves, and that before our coming they lived in Peace.'
>
> —William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (1744), p. 266.

The Portuguese probably reached the Niger delta soon after 1470. Their arrival was to have revolutionary consequences both for the Delta and for Iboland. These changes were not, however, due to the impact of the Portuguese themselves. Their impact on West Africa was to be short-lived and marginal. Soon they discovered Asia, and the Indies of their dreams, and it was there they established a far-flung commercial empire. In the Delta, they bought ivory, pepper, and slaves—some of these last the western Ibo victims of Benin's wars of expansion.[1] But since the Portuguese economy could not absorb large numbers of slaves, the numbers they purchased were low—destined either to be exchanged for gold on the Gold Coast,[2] or to work on the newly established plantations of San Thomé.[3]

The long-term significance of the advent of the Portuguese was two-fold. West Africa had lived in relative isolation, separated from Asia and Europe by two oceans—an ocean of sand to the north, and the Atlantic to the south. Until the fifteenth century, it was the Sahara which was the easier to cross. West Africa's contacts with the outside world took place across the desert, and it was on the southern fringes of the desert that her splendid empires developed, Ghana, Mali and Songhai. But the arrival of the Portuguese transformed the situation of the coastal peoples. From a subsistence economy,

[1] Pereira, p. 126; Egharevba, p. 21.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] Curtin estimates San Thomé imported 76,100 slaves between 1450 and 1600, many of whom came from Angola. Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade, A Census* (Wisconsin, 1969), p. 116.

remote from the mainstreams of trade, they moved to a position in the forefront of trade. They were offered, and seized, new opportunities for acquiring wealth and power. In the long run, as the importance of the trans-Sahara trade routes dwindled, it was the regions to the north which were to become backwaters.

It was the tragedy of the coastal peoples that this new opportunity was to take the form of a trade in slaves. Although the Portuguese had at first only limited uses for slaves, the situation was soon transformed by developments in the New World. In 1492, Columbus discovered the Americas. In the early sixteenth century, the true nature of his discoveries gradually became apparent. The potential value of the Americas to Europe lay first in their bullion, and later in their tropical crops. Both of these needed an abundant labour force, inured to tropical conditions, for their exploitation. And thus, from about 1530, the infamous triangular trade developed, which sent countless thousands of West Africans into slavery in the New World.

Iboland was one of the areas of West Africa most seriously affected by the slave trade. Ibos were exported as slaves throughout the whole period of the trade, from the first recorded Ibo slave—one Caterina Ybou, sent to San Thomé[1]—until the slave trade came to an end in the middle years of the nineteenth century. To understand its impact on Iboland it is obviously important to know how many people were involved.

It is clear that the number of Ibos puchased by European slavers varied considerably at different periods. In the sixteenth century, it was probably quite low. In the seventeenth century, the total number of West Africans enslaved expanded considerably, especially after 1640, when sugar was introduced to the West Indies.[2] In this period, most slaves from the part of West Africa which became known as the Slave Coast came from Whydah,[3] but a substantial number came from the Delta. The Royal African Company purchased 6,000 slaves from the area between 1673 and 1689[4]—and this was only one trading body in an area where French and Dutch slavers and inter-

[1] Communication from Professor A. F. C. Ryder.

[2] K. G. Davies, *The Royal African Company* (London, 1957), pp. 14–15.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 228; Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America* (Washington, 1930–35), II, 280, 288 and 342.

[4] Curtin, p. 122. This figure includes Benin.

lopers abounded. The Royal African Company's records described it, in 1672, as 'the Bite [i.e. the Bight of Biafra], whither many ships are sent to trade at New and Old Calabar for slaves and teeth [ivory], which are there to be had in *great plenty* . . .'.[1] The Frenchman, Barbot, who visited the area twice between 1678 and 1682, wrote of 'that vast number of slaves which the *Calabar Blacks* sell to all *European* nations . . .'.[2]

The eighteenth century was the period when the largest number of slaves were exported. During this period, the trade was dominated by the English, who drew the bulk of their slaves from the Bight of Biafra. Probably the years 1730 to 1810 covered the period of the slave trade's most serious impact on Iboland.[3] As for the seventeenth century, we have no adequate statistical data, but only a number of estimates. Captain Adams, who made ten slaving voyages to Africa between 1786 and 1800, stated that 20,000 slaves were sold annually at Bonny, 16,000 of them Ibo. Over a twenty-year period, he estimated that 320,000 Ibos had been sold to European slavers at Bonny, and 50,000 at Old and New Calabar.[4]

We know that in the nineteenth century a certain number of slaves were passed down the Niger trade route from countries further to the north,[5] but it is clear that throughout the period of the slave trade the vast majority of the slaves purchased at the Delta ports were Ibos, though some were Ibibios, and those sold in the western Delta were mainly Urhobos.[6] Adams stated expressly that none of the slaves purchased at Bonny in the late eighteenth century came through Iboland from the north, avowing that he knew nothing about Iboland's northern neighbour, 'but it is certain that there are not any slaves sold at Bonny, that pass from the interior through it'.[7] Indeed, Iboland, with its dense population and many small independent states, was particularly susceptible to exploitation of this kind.

[1] Donnan, I, 152–3.

[2] John Barbot, *A Description of the Coasts of North and South Guinea* (Vol. V in Churchill's Voyages and Travels, London, 1746), p. 381.

[3] Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade*, p. 221.

[4] Captain John Adams, *Remarks on the Country extending from Cape Palmas to the River Congo* (London, 1823), p. 129. For other estimates, cf. Donnan, II, [illegible] and 645.

[5] [illegible] p. 52 below.

[6] Dike, Onwuka, *Niger Delta Rivalry, Itsekiri–Urhobo Relations and the European Presence 1884–1958* (London, 1969), pp. 48 ff.

[7] Adams, p. 116.

It lacked the strong centralized government which enabled some African states to defend their own citizens, and obtain wealth by raiding those of others. The essentially local nature of their loyalties led the little Ibo states to make war on each other, frequently kidnapping each other's members.

Over the centuries of the slave trade, Iboland lost large numbers of its strongest members, in their prime. Their homeland was deprived not only of their labour—which, expended on the plantations, helped Europe accumulate the capital for her subsequent industrialization. It was deprived of the new skills they might have developed, and the children they would have had. Nor was that all, for the centuries of the slave trade had many grave effects on the quality of life for those left behind, and had a corrupting and brutalizing effect both on the Delta and on the Ibo interior.

It is necessary to make an estimate of the numbers involved in the slave trade, but this should not lead us into the error of assuming that the social effects of the trade were always in direct proportion to the number of slaves exported, and that in periods when the numbers enslaved were few, the social consequences were necessarily slight. Brutalities and injustices which affect only a minority can have a profoundly corrupting effect on any human society. The social history of the kingdom of Benin may well be an example of this. Something transformed Benin from the impressive and harmonious society described by the first European visitors in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, to the 'City of Blood', its streets filled with human sacrifices, which the British conquered in the late nineteenth. It has been claimed that the slave trade cannot have caused this change, because Benin was only marginally involved in it.[1] But perhaps Benin history is only a particularly striking illustration of the way the trade in slaves corrupted every society it touched.

Accounts of the Delta slave trade show that its organization remained much the same over the centuries. When the Barbot brothers visited the Delta in the late seventeenth century, they described how Bonny and Kalabari had become the main centres of the trade. Their people would go to the inland markets in their great trade canoes, exchanging European goods and fish for slaves, and a

[1] Cf. A. F. C. Ryder, *Benin and the Europeans* (London, 1969), pp. 197–8, 232 ff. and 247 ff.

certain amount of ivory.[1] In the second half of the eighteenth century, the basic pattern was much the same.

> The Black Traders of Bonny and Calabar . . . come down about once a Fortnight with Slaves; Thursday or Friday is generally their Trading Day. Twenty or Thirty Canoes, sometimes more and sometimes less, come down at a Time. In each Canoe may be Twenty or Thirty Slaves. The Arms of some of them are tied behind their Backs with Twigs, Canes, Grass Rope, or other Ligaments of the Country; and if they happen to be stronger than common, they are pinioned above the Knee also. In this Situation they are thrown into the Bottom of the Canoe, where they lie in great Pain, and often almost covered with Water. On their landing, they are taken to the Traders Houses, where they are oiled, fed, and made up for Sale. . . . No sickly Slave is ever purchased; . . . When the Bargain is made they are brought away . . . They appear to be very dejected when brought on board. The Men are put into Irons, in which Situation they remain during the whole of the Middle Passage, unless when they are sick; . . .[2]

The social effects of the slave trade on Iboland depended very largely on the methods by which slaves were obtained. Dike believed that the majority were obtained via the Arochuku oracle.[3] The majority may well have passed through the Aro trade network, but it seems that the oracle, of its nature, was unsuited to supply slaves on the massive scale required by the trans-Atlantic trade, since each individual case required careful prior preparation, and an elaborate ritual.

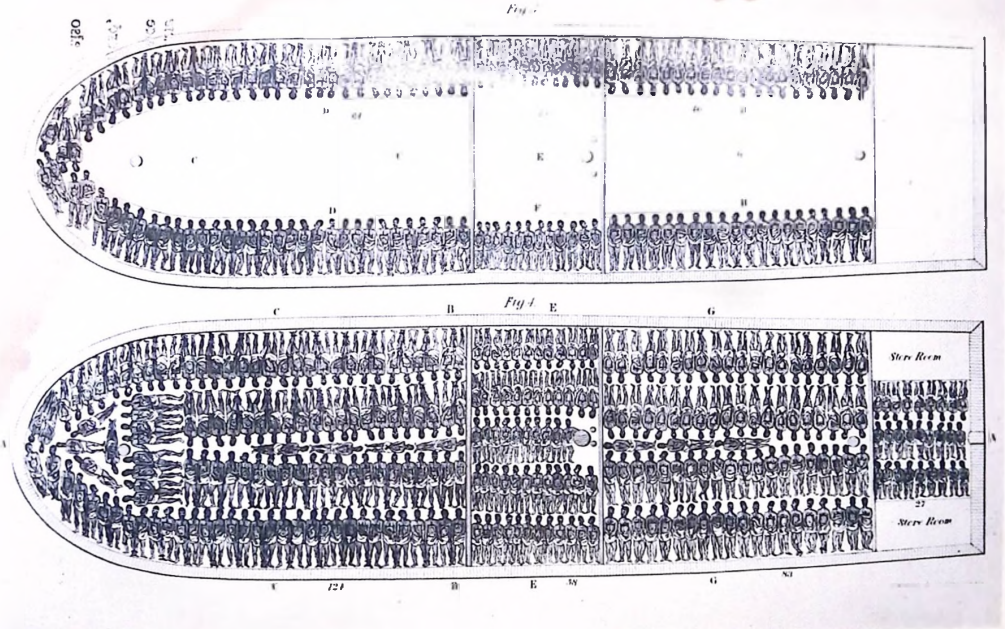
The evidence suggests that most Ibo slaves were obtained by kidnapping. The Delta traders told an English slaver in the 1760s that 'The great Bulk of them were such as had been taken in piratical Excursions, or by Treachery and Surprise.'[4] Olaudah Equiano was

[1] John Barbot, p. 381; James Barbot, *An Abstract of a Voyage to New Calabar River . . . in the Year 1699* (Vol. V in Churchill's Voyages and Travels, London, 1746), p. 461.

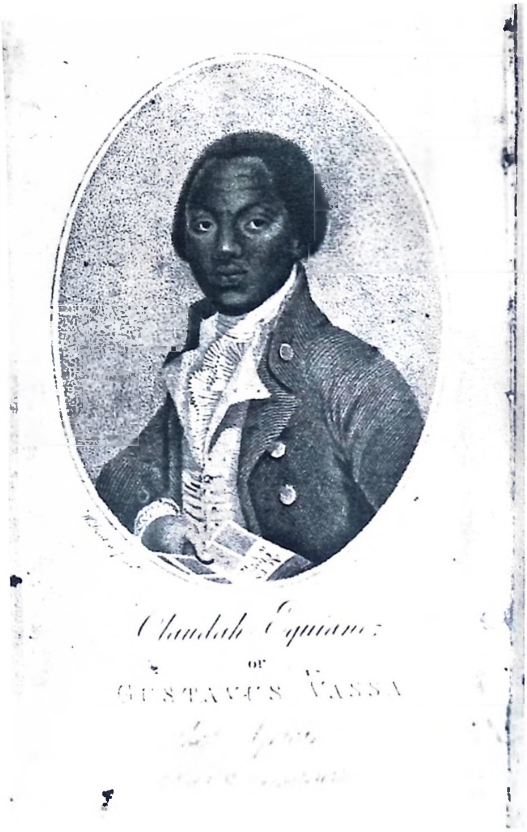
[2] *Report of the Lords of the Committee of Council concerning the present state of the Trade to Africa, and particularly the Trade in Slaves* (1789), Part I, Evidence of William James.

[3] K. Onwuka Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta 1830–1885* (Oxford, 1956), pp. 40–41.

[4] *Report of the Lords of the Council*, Part I, William James' Evidence. Cf. also Falconbridge's Evidence.



5. The realities of the eighteenth-century slave trade: a contemporary diagram of an English slaver, the *Brookes*.



6. Eighteenth-century Ibo. Olaudah Equiano, autobiographer and merchant seaman

kidnapped at the age of ten, in 1755, and his autobiography gives a vivid account of the prevalence of kidnapping at the time.[1] Another boy, kidnapped elsewhere in Iboland a century later, who was to end life as an Anglican deacon, again bore witness to the prevalence of the practice.[2]

When the linguist, Koelle, was collecting material in Sierra Leone from Africans who had been sold into slavery, rescued by the British naval squadron, and resettled in Sierra Leone, he found that three of his five Ibo informants had been kidnapped.[3] The trader, de Cardi, whose experience of the Delta extended from 1862 to 1896, made a practice of asking slaves how they had fallen into slavery, and was almost always told they had been kidnapped.[4]

Even if we make allowance for the likelihood that some informants who were sold into slavery for their crimes were understandably reluctant to divulge the fact, the overwhelming impression one obtains is of the prevalence of kidnapping. But if this was the most usual means of enslavement, it was not, of course, the only one. Some were captured in war, and others enslaved by their own community as a punishment for their crimes. In this respect, as Africans often pointed out, enslavement filled the role which capital punishment and transportation supplied in the England of the day,[5] and was not in itself, less humane. A society which lacks prisons has no alternative but to exile, enslave or execute its offenders. But the great weakness of enslavement as a punishment for crime is that any system which makes an economic profit in this way must almost inevitably lead to the multiplication of offences and conviction of the innocent.[6]

Some Ibos became slaves through economic necessity. Debt could force a man to pawn himself or his child. Famine could have the same result—a situation which apparently became endemic among

[1] Equiano, pp. 9, 15–16.

[2] 'Autobiography of David Okparabietoa Pepple', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1898), p. 13.

[3] S. W. Koelle, *Polyglotta Africana* (London, 1854), Part V, 'Niger-Delta Languages', A, First Group, 1, Ibo Dialects.

[4] C. N. de Cardi, 'A Short Description of the Natives of the Niger Coast Protectorate', Appendix I in Mary Kingsley, *West African Studies* (London, 1899), p. 480.

[5] Cf. the arguments of King Holiday of Bonny, in *Memoirs of Captain Hugh Crow* (London, 1830), p. 137.

[6] Thomas Clarkson, *The Substance of the Evidence of Sundry Persons on the Slave Trade* (London, 1789), p. 120, Baggs' Evidence.

the overpopulated, land-starved Abaja.[1] A missionary wrote in the 1860s, how wars produce famines, and famines produce 'the painful sight of infants and sucklings, children and young men, passing by our gate as slaves, to be sold in order to procure food to support the rest of their family'.[2]

The Europeans came in search of African labour, supplemented by ivory as an insurance policy, 'seeing in that Commodity there's no Mortality to be feared'.[3] What goods did they bring to the Delta and Iboland in return? The records suggest that these remained fairly similar during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

When James Barbot went to the Delta, the price of an adult male slave was thirteen iron bars. Women and children cost much less, and a Bonny ruler apologized for the prevailing high prices. What was an iron bar worth? Barbot tells us that it was equivalent to 'one bunch of beads' or 'one piece of narrow Guinea stuff'.[4]

There could be, of course, no 'just price' in a trade in human beings, but anyone studying the records of what was imported into the Delta and Iboland in return[5] cannot but be struck by the extraordinary inequality of the exchange. When the Europeans first reached the Delta, Iboland was a self-sufficient society. She imported salt and fish from the Delta, and luxury goods, including copper and beads, from further afield. Many of the goods the slave traders brought were already being produced by the Ibo, and the other peoples of southern Nigeria. They brought textiles, at first from India, until the Indian textile industry was undermined by colonial rule, and Manchester became rich by exporting cotton goods to the rest of the world. They imported iron bars, and copper. But Iboland had already met her copper needs from African sources, and had her own textile and iron production. These imports did not increase her productivity, they rivalled her indigenous industries. Salt was another import which rivalled, and ultimately superseded, the local product.

[1] W. R. G. Horton, 'The Ohu System of Slavery in a Northern Ibo Village-Group', *Africa* (1954), XXIV, pp. 311–12.

[2] J. C. Taylor, Journal entry for 27 May 1865, in *The Church Missionary Record* (1866), p. 205.

[3] Donnan, II, 327.

[4] James Barbot, pp. 459–60.

[5] For imports to the Delta area in the late seventeenth century, see John Barbot, pp. 361 (Benin), 371 (Warri) and 383 (Old Calabar). He does not give detailed trade lists for Bonny and Kalabari. See also James Barbot, pp. 459 ff. For imports in the eighteenth century see Adams, pp. 243 ff.

A major import took the form of currency. There were a number of currencies already circulating in the area. Pereira, writing at the beginning of the sixteenth century, describes the use of cowries from the Indian ocean,[1] Barbot describes the brass rings, wrought 'with much art' at Old Calabar,[2] and the iron currency, shaped like a sting-ray, made by the southern Ibos of 'Moko'.[3] The Europeans imported large quantities of cowries, and other local currencies. This probably stimulated trade, but had the effect of devaluing them to a point where they became useless for major transactions.[4]

Other goods imported were of no value to their recipients at all. Spirits were imported[5]—and came to be used as a form of currency—but since the Ibo people traditionally extracted palatable palm wine, and later began to manufacture gin, the import again, supplemented or replaced an indigenous product. Many of the goods imported were simply rubbish—trinkets, and items of obsolete or ridiculous finery which were sold to Africans as the emblems of rank and authority in Europe. For centuries, European traders sold these things to the Delta people, and then despised them for wearing them.

In recent years, African historians have given much attention to the role played by firearms in the growth of states, and in their changing relationship to each other. In the seventeenth century, firearms were not imported systematically, though they were given as presents to rulers, and the great trade canoes were armed only with their paddlers' spears.[6] During the eighteenth century, the use of arms became general in the Delta. It was a period of intense warfare between the Delta states.[7] Firearms were used in these wars, but did not in themselves create them. Probably, they were economic in origin. The demand for slaves was expanding more rapidly than the available supplies, and each state fought to maintain and increase its own positions in the trade.

Did their earlier access to firearms give the Delta states a significant

[1] *Op. cit.*, p. 145.
[2] John Barbot, p. 382.
[3] *Ibid.*, p. 380. Moko has not been identified with certainty. Jones suggests Isiokpo, or Okpo-mbu-tolu (*The Trading States*, p. 36).
[4] Marion Johnson, 'The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa, Part II', *The Journal of African History* (1970), XI, no. 3, pp. 331 ff.
[5] A. F. C. Ryder, 'Dutch Trade on the Nigerian Coast during the Seventeenth Century', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1965), III, no. 2, p. 208.
[6] John Barbot, p. 382; James Barbot, p. 460.
[7] Described in Jones, *The Trading States*, pp. 46–8.

advantage over the Ibos of the interior? This may have been so for a time. Köler wrote of Bonny in 1840, that 'The chief weapon is now the flintlock, the use of which has now become so general that even the people of Iboland are beginning to lose their respect for them.'[1] We have seen that the possession of arms may have played a decisive role in the wars which preceded the founding of Arochuku.[2]

But it seems likely that the advantages of the possession of arms have been overestimated, and that their effect may have been largely psychological. The cannon which armed the trade canoes were lashed fast, and could not be trained without manœuvring the whole canoe.[3] The practical effect of the guns imported was reduced by the fact that the Bonnymen had not learnt how to aim them properly, using them like pistols.[4] Their effectiveness was further reduced by the practice—universal in trade with Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—of importing only arms of poor quality, and, often enough, those which were already obsolete in Europe. Adams recorded the poor quality of both the muskets and the gunpowder exported to the Delta.[5]

Iboland's most dreaded warriors, the Abams, did not use firearms, preferring to rely on their matchets.[6] Many of the arms purchased by the Ibo interior were valued for their ritual as much as for their practical significance, because they were used ceremonially, at celebrations and funerals.

The inferior quality of the firearms imported was characteristic of the imports to the area generally. The spirits sold at Bonny were adulterated with water and pepper.[7] The textiles were cheap and shoddy, and the poor quality of the goods imported was to be characteristic of the area's trade with Europe long after the abolition of the slave trade.[8]

What was the impact of the slave trade on the societies concerned? Superficially, the Delta states appeared to benefit, for their middleman role gave them a wealth and power they could never have

[1] Hermann Köler, *Einige Notizen über Bonny* (Göttingen, 1848), p. 111.
[2] Cf. p. 34 above.
[3] Köler, p. 111; F.O. 84/1343, Hopkins to Granville, 27 November 1871.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] Adams, p. 261.
[6] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 385.
[7] Adams, p. 260.
[8] Cf. p. 168 below.

attained by catching fish and making salt. All visitors to the Delta paid tribute to their traders' brilliant business acumen, which European traders overlooked at their peril. Frequently, they gained a working knowledge of several European languages. The Efik of Old Calabar not only learnt to speak and write English, but perpetuated the knowledge in their own schools.[1]

Yet even in the Delta, the losses were probably greater than the gains. After centuries of trade, Bonny had nothing to show for it, even in the basic comforts and decencies of human life. Hutchinson called it, in words many others echoed, '... the *ne plus ultra* of abomination and filthiness ... a fitting Pandemonium for that vile traffic in human flesh.'[2] Like the other Delta states, she could not maintain her own population, which was replenished by constant accessions of Ibo slaves.[3] A few of these slaves rose to positions of wealth and power, but the majority, like slave populations everywhere, were held in subjection only by brutality and terror. Europeans, describing the cruelty of the punishments used, attributed it to the innate depravity of the African,[4] but the European masters of slave ships used equally savage punishments, which were an inevitable concomitant of slavery. Human life was cheapened. The Barbots, at the end of the seventeenth century, found human skulls displayed in Andoni, but not in Bonny.[5] By the nineteenth century, a temple constructed entirely of skulls had become Bonny's most prominent landmark.

The Delta traders often accumulated great wealth, but their wealth remained unproductive. Duke Ephraim of Calabar imported a house from Europe. He did not live in it, but filled it with assorted European objects which were soon in a state of confusion and decay.[6] King Perekule of Bonny 'accumulated and buried enormous manillas, silver and brass wares, demijohns of rum, arms and ammunitions, copper rods for war canoes and numerous coral and glass beads'.[7] Often their wealth was lost in the fires which periodically ravaged the

[1] Adams, p. 144. Cf. Crow, pp. 285–6.
[2] T. J. Hutchinson, *Impressions of West Africa* (London, 1858), p. 103.
[3] James Johnson, 'An African Clergyman's Visit to Bonny', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1897), p. 28.
[4] [Richard Burton], *Wanderings in West Africa by a F.R.G.S.* (London, 1863), II, pp. 280 ff.
[5] John Barbot, pp. 380–1; James Barbot, pp. 259–462.
[6] Crow, pp. 272–3.
[7] Fombo Papers, Ibadan University Library, fo. 34. Cf. Adams, p. 140.

[illegible] was dispersed in holocausts of hapless [illegible] clinical, a combination of brutality and waste [illegible] death agony of the Roman empire.

[illegible] accumulated capital put to so little productive use? [illegible] in the nature of the slave trade itself. It has [illegible] recent years to analyse the slave trade in [illegible], as a pattern whereby labour was exported, [illegible] which that labour might have produced. [illegible] distortion of the historical reality. Neither [illegible] sophistication should dull our minds to one [illegible] of human history, based entirely on human grief [illegible] we analyse it in purely economic terms, it seems [illegible] hindered the economic growth of the West [illegible] influenced.

[illegible] commodity they could produce on a large scale [illegible]. The capture and sale of slaves gave no scope for the [illegible] skill and inventiveness. Rather it undermined [illegible] which is a commonly accepted precondition for [illegible] growth. The goods they imported were, with the exception [illegible], either useless rubbish, or products they could make or [illegible] themselves. What the rulers of the Delta repeatedly asked [illegible] Europe was never prepared to sell. This was basically know-[illegible] which could help them span the ever-widening technological [illegible] between Africa and Europe. They needed knowledge of the [illegible] of production, and a market for its products. A letter from an [illegible] after the abolition of the slave trade, put the dilemma [illegible]:

> [illegible] sell slaves again, we must have too many men for [illegible] and want something for make work and trade. And if we [illegible] cotton and coffee, we could make trade, [illegible] live here; and if some man would come teach [illegible] plenty sugar too; and then some man must [illegible] proper.[1]

[illegible] Bonny made the same point more elegantly, [illegible] kernel cracking machinery, to obviate the [illegible] of cracking them by hand. 'It is . . .

[illegible] Consul of Calabar, 1 December 1842, encl. in [illegible]

incumbent upon all intelligent educated Africans to use every cogent means in their power to develop or devise some means of developing the resources of their country.'[1] But unanswered requests of this kind are a recurrent leitmotif in West African history.[2]

If the slave trade brought more loss than gain to the Delta states, who played the middleman role, this was doubly true of the Ibo interior, which supplied its victims.

As in the Delta, the exchange of the most energetic sections of her population in return for European manufactures was basically disadvantageous, even from a narrowly economic point of view. In return for their energies and skills she gained, in the main, goods which she could have produced for herself. Indeed, the exchange was even less advantageous than in the Delta, for the middlemen took their profit and the goods which finally reached Iboland were often second-hand, or damaged by exposure.[3]

By increasing the amount of currency and goods in circulation, the slave trade probably stimulated the growth of internal trade in Iboland. As against this must be set the general insecurity which the practice of kidnapping engendered, which was both an evil in itself and productive of many others. It discouraged long-distance trade, because long journeys were impossible except for those who travelled in convoy or were protected by special religious sanctions. Basden, in a book published in 1921, bore witness to the dangers of travelling alone, and the prevalence of kidnapping.[4] In the nineteenth century, an Ibo ex-slave bore eloquent witness to the corroding effects of the slave trade on Ibo society:

> Of this he could speak, not merely as an eye-witness, but like one who had felt what it means . . . He commenced by describing the miseries which the slave-trade produced in the Ibo Country; mentioned the continual wars carried on for the purpose of capturing slaves; how many parents became bereaved of their children, and children for ever separated from their parents; how the whole population was continually in a state of excitement and fear, and what an injurious effect this condition had on their own

[1] Fombo Papers, Ibadan University Library, fo. 236, King George Pepple to Lilley and Wheeler, Liverpool 3 April 1875 (transcript).

[2] Cf. Basil Davidson, *Black Mother, Africa the Years of Trial* (London, 1961), pp. 122 ff.; William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea* (London, 1744), p. 176.

[3] C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 10 September 1902.

[4] G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London, 1921), pp. 105–6.

> temporal concerns; how their fields were neglected, and their houses left without inhabitants; how every one was afraid of his own neighbour, and none could place confidence in his own brother; . . .[1]

The slave trade of its nature discouraged the arts of peace. We shall never know precisely to how great an extent the economic development of Iboland was hindered by it—by the lost capacities and energies of her exiled sons and their descendants, and by the economic consequences of the insecurity it engendered. But it is clear that even from a purely economic standpoint, Iboland lost greatly by it.

We have seen that the Delta had no productive outlet for its surplus wealth, which was therefore either hoarded or wasted in various forms of conspicuous consumption. What was the effect of the importation of many additional consumer goods into Iboland, which had been, with minor exceptions, a self-sufficient society? Basically, the results were the same—the development of various forms of wasteful consumption. As in the Delta, these sometimes took ritual and ceremonial forms—as in the practice of human sacrifice, which we shall consider soon. Another form was in the political sphere—the development of the practice of acquiring titles by purchase.

The link between economic and political power is found in one form or another in most human societies, and the purchase of political offices and of titles is a familiar spectacle to, for instance, the historian of eighteenth-century England. Ibo communities were in practice ruled by titled men of mature age. These titles were purchased, not inherited—though the recipient of a title had to satisfy other conditions as well, and be of good character.

It seems that many Ibo states went through a political evolution whereby the rule of a single 'natural leader' gave way to a situation where political prestige and authority were shared by those who had acquired it by purchase. These formed societies to protect their rights, and to guarantee a profit from their investment by securing payments from new members. There is a well documented case of this development in the case of Asaba. This was originally ruled by a single Eze, than by half a dozen. By the late nineteenth century, five hundred men held the title, and their number was still growing.[2] The

[1] *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr Samuel Crowther, who . . . accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841* (London, 1842), p. 68.

[2] Isichei, 'Asaba to 1885', p. 423.

same tendency existed in areas of Iboland which lacked a title system. Areas which had secret societies, tended to stratify them into grades and exact high payments for admission to the upper grades.[1] And those Ibo groups which had neither title systems nor secret societies showed signs of developing in the same direction.[2] One of the ways in which the slave trade affected Iboland, then, was by altering her political institutions.

Political changes of this kind were, in themselves, not necessarily good or bad. Much graver in its implications was the disregard for human life which the slave trade engendered, and which in its turn led to the corruption and distortion of religious custom. This is seen most clearly in the area of human sacrifice. We have seen how the slave trade created Bonny's temple of skulls, and turned Benin into a 'City of Blood'. The same change seems to have taken place in Iboland.

Human sacrifice was, of course, the most serious of religious rituals. Sometimes a victim was sacrificed to expiate the collective trespasses of a community. A missionary called the practice 'fiend-like'[3]—happily oblivious to its strong family resemblance to the central doctrine of the Christian religion. Another, and more frequent form of human sacrifice, was to accompany the death of a great man.

Human sacrifice almost certainly existed in Iboland before the era of the slave trade—as the bodies buried with the Eze Nri in the Igbo-Ukwu excavations bear witness.[4] But in their original form, these practices were not necessarily a matter of horror and dread.[5] The concept of an expiatory sacrifice, while repugnant to modern humanitarianism, would not have been so to the centuries of Christians who found a religious meaning in the story of Abraham's readiness to sacrifice Isaac, and the evidence suggests that even in the nineteenth century, these victims did not always meet their deaths reluctantly. Similarly, when a great man died, the more devoted of

[1] G. I. Jones, *Report on the Status of Chiefs* (Enugu, 1958), par. 75.

[2] *Ibid.*, par. 77.

[3] Bishop Crowther, 'Report of a Visit to the Stations on the Niger in the Year 1870', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (April 1871), p. 128. This passage describes an expiatory sacrifice at Onitsha.

[4] Cf. p. 23 above.

[5] Cf. on this whole question the perceptive account in Davidson, *Black Mother*, pp. 196–7.

his wives and slaves were probably not unwilling to accompany him to that world of the dead which, in Ibo religion, mirrors the world we know. Their numbers were probably few—perhaps half a dozen were buried with the Eze Nri at Igbo-Ukwu—and the spirit voluntary. We have no records for Iboland, but can perhaps extrapolate from a Portuguese description of the burial of a Benin king, when 'those who are judged to have been most dear to and favoured by the king (this includes not a few, as all are anxious for the honour) voluntarily go down to keep him company'.[1]

In the centuries of the slave trade, the practice was enormously expanded and distorted. Each of the five hundred Ezes in nineteenth-century Asaba had sacrified two slaves at his accession, and would have two more sacrificed on his behalf at his funeral. They were kept for the purpose in a separate village, and captured when required for sacrifice, 'greatly against their will'.[2] When Delta rulers died in the first half of the nineteenth century, the numbers of those sacrificed ran into hundreds.[3] The original institution had degenerated into a source of terror and oppression. We have an exact parallel in the degeneration of the institution of suttee—the burning of widows in India—as the original proud and joyful oblation of the heroic age of the Rajputs became, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries a source of horrifying cruelty and oppression, which sacrificed thousands of terrified victims on the altars of family pride.[4]

Another religious institution which was corrupted by the influence of the slave trade was that of osu, or cult slavery. This is found only in certain areas of Iboland, and not at all west of the Niger. By the time when colonial rule was established, the osu—dedicated to a god—were both feared and despised. They were outcasts from the life of the community, and in some areas so numerous that they formed communities of their own. The institution has proved tenacious enough to create problems for their descendants even in present-day Nigeria—a situation movingly depicted in Chinua Achebe's novel,

[1] Extract in Thomas Hodgkin, *Nigerian Perspectives, An Historical Anthology* (London, 1960), pp. 100–1.

[2] Asaba oral tradition. Informant, F.O. Isichei.

[3] Cf., for instance, the account of the death of Duke Ephraim of Old Calabar in 1834, in Hope Masterton Waddell, *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa* (London, 1863), p. 497.

[4] Philip Woodruff, *The Men Who Ruled India*, Vol. I, *The Founders* (London, 1953), pp. 253 ff.

No Longer at Ease. Yet traditions recorded by Basden suggest that originally, osu formed a privileged and highly respected group, leading a life of pious dedication, as befitted the servants of a god. 'The "osu" held an honourable position until the slave trade brought it into degradation, and caused it to degenerate to its present unhappy condition.'[1]

The expansion and distortion of ancient customs, the disregard for human life, can be traced in other areas of Ibo life as well as in witchcraft accusations, and trial by ordeal, which reached epidemic proportions at times in the Niger states in the nineteenth century, as they did, at earlier periods, in Europe.

For Iboland, as for the Delta, the total impact of the slave trade was overwhelmingly destructive. Few historical experiences are entirely without positive aspects. Some communities, as we saw in the last chapter, benefited by the expansion in trade, and carved out positions of wealth and power. But the losses were far greater than the gains.

Iboland did not experience the widespread depopulation which the slave trade created in some parts of Africa. Although many of her people were enslaved, her population remained dense. Despite the chronic insecurity which developed, her people retained the capacity to adjust to and profit by new economic opportunities. The first European visitors to the Ibo interior were, as we shall see in a later chapter, impressed by the beauty of their towns, the volume of their internal trade, and the productivity of their farms. This does not mean that in some mysterious ways the effects of the slave trade were more beneficial than all the evidence and all the probabilities lead us to suppose. Rather, they reflect the prior density and continuing fertility of the Ibo population, and that remarkable resilience and adaptability which history has repeatedly required of them. But the losses were evident in the texture of Ibo life.

The picture of Ibo life which one gains from a book such as Basden's *Niger Ibos*, still widely regarded as authoritative, and recently reprinted, is a grim one. This is partly due to the prejudices of the observer, who despite his long acquaintance with Iboland tended always to describe the outward face of institutions while misrepresenting their animating spirit. But the darker element was certainly there—in the human sacrifices, the trials by ordeal, the

[1] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 249.

prevalence of kidnapping, and so on. The mistake which is often made—and is often an assumption rather than directly affirmed—is to think that these elements had been there from time immemorial, whereas they were largely, if not wholly, due to the trade in slaves. We have no eyewitness accounts, as in Benin, of Ibo life as it existed previously—only the mute testimony of the findings of archaeologists, of the products of the arts of peace. But the fact that, for all its darker side, traditional Ibo society during and after the slave trade still provided a way of life to which modern Ibo intellectuals, having mastered all the skills of alien worlds, can and do look back to with nostalgia, is an impressive tribute to its quality earlier.

4 · Economic Change in the Nineteenth Century: The Last Phase of the Slave Trade and the Growth of the Palm Oil Trade

Onya na-a apa ya ada ana.
(A wound heals and a scar remains.)
—Ibo proverb.

For much of the nineteenth century, two separate though related economic systems existed in Iboland—a trade in slaves, and a trade in palm oil. Historians have sometimes written as though the slave trade came to an end when the European nations ceased buying slaves, and as if the trade in palm oil was a providentially provided substitute. In fact, the death agony of the slave trade was more complicated and protracted.

There are few episodes of their own history which British historians regard with more complacency than Britain's decision to prohibit her own citizens from trading in slaves, in 1807, and her subsequent efforts to prevent other nations from doing so, through diplomatic means, and through the policing activities of the naval squadron she maintained off the coast of West Africa—one of 'the few totally unselfish international operations'.[1] One may be permitted to question whether the discontinuance of a crime is a matter for self-congratulation—but it is not the purpose of the present work to pass judgment on the corporate moral virtue or obliquity of nations—if, indeed, such a thing exists. Since Eric Williams published his pioneering if controversial study, *Capitalism and Slavery*, historians have become more aware of the economic changes which made it possible, and probably profitable, for Britain to act in this way. This awareness need not make us forget the resolution and dedication of the abolitionists, nor, indeed, is this in danger of being forgotten. Our concern here, however, is not with the background of the abolition movement in England, but with the significance of these

[1] A review of W. E. F. Ward, *The Royal Navy and the Slavers*, in *West Africa*, 15 March 1969.

changes for Iboland. We will see that although it was the Europeans who were responsible for the ending of the export of slaves, it was the Africans who paid the price, in economic and social dislocation. The ending of the trans-Atlantic slave trade created a crisis which could only be surmounted by a major adaptation.

The export of slaves from Iboland continued for many years after 1807. It was in the late 1830s, when the British naval blockade became effective, that most Delta ports ceased exporting slaves.[1] The trade lingered longest in Nembe-Brass, for its relatively inaccessible location made it possible for it to continue the trade clandestinely. But by the middle 1850s, the export of slaves had ceased here as well. A visitor reported in 1857 that the last slave ship had called three years earlier, and that the only memorial of the slave trade was an old barracoon, 'so dilapidated as not to afford shelter even for a lizard'.[2]

Unfortunately, the memorials of the slave trade were in reality more enduring. The mechanisms which it had called into existence—the practice of capturing slaves, the slave routes and the slave markets—did not cease to exist when the export of slaves ended. The internal trade in slaves lasted until this century, and in some ways the lot of domestic slaves became worse.

The end of the trans-Atlantic slave trade meant that slaves became cheaper, and sometimes, indeed, super-abundant.[3] This was particularly evident on the slave trade routes, such as the Niger, where in the nineteenth century, an increasing number of slaves were transported from the north.[4] Between five and six hundred slaves a year were sold at Igara Bank, the slave market situated on a sandbank in the Niger, between Asaba and Onitsha.[5] Similarly, slaves were accumulated in large numbers at places on the main overland slave trade routes, such as Nike and Uzuakoli.[6]

[1] Dike, pp. 97–9.

[2] F.O. 84/1030, Hutchinson to Clarendon, 20 February 1857.

[3] Samuel Crowther and John Christopher Taylor, *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger. Journals and Notices of the Native Missionaries accompanying the Niger Expedition of 1857–1859* (London, 1859), p. 438.

[4] For data re Nupe, Hausa, Kakanda and Igala slaves, cf. C.M.S. F 4/7, Journal of G. Wilmot Brooke, 28 June 1889, fo. 106; C.S.Sp. 191/A/1, Lutz to Assoc. for Propagation of the Faith, 6 February 1889; Schön and Crowther, *Journals, 1841*, p. 232.

[5] J. C. Taylor, Journal, 24 February 1865, in *The Church Missionary Record* (1866), pp. 203–4; C.S.Sp. *Bulletin de la Congregation*, II (March 1890), p. 540.

[6] Cf. Horton, 'The Ohu System of Slavery', *passim*, and A. J. Fox, *Uzuakoli, A Short History* (London, 1964), pp. 22 ff.

The continuation of the internal trade in slaves, at the time when it became no longer possible to export them, had several consequences. It encouraged the sacrifice of unsaleable slaves in religious ceremonies—it appears that the expansion of the practice of human sacrifice, which we noted in the last chapter, became ever more marked in these years. Alternatively, the states of the Ibo interior could employ them in collecting palm oil—the new export industry—or in agriculture.[1] Osomari was estimated to have a population of six to eight thousand—or of twenty thousand, if the slaves on the surrounding farms were included.[2]

In the Delta, the continuing influx of Ibo slaves meant that its population became ever increasingly Ibo in character. The first C.M.S. representative to the Efik state of Old Calabar was told that more than half the population were Ibos.[3] In both Okrika and Bonny, in the nineteenth century, it was Ibo which was commonly spoken, though Ubani and Okrikan retained a certain social cachet, as the language of the freeborn.[4] Most Brass slaves were obtained from Iboland,[5] and Bishop Crowther wrote that 'the Ibo language is more or less spoken . . . in New Calabar, Brass, and Akassa'.[6] Another missionary referred to 'the members of the Ibo tribe, who form the chief inhabitants of the Niger Delta'.[7]

The existence of this large and continually increasing slave population created several problems for the Delta states, when the trans-Atlantic slave trade came to an end. It created a crisis of authority—how could this vast slave population be kept in a state of servitude, in the absence of the sanction of sale abroad? It created an economic crisis, for while in the Ibo interior, slaves were self-supporting, growing their own food on their own farms, in the Delta, most food had to be imported.

The first difficulty was overcome in various ways. We have already noted the effect of the terrifying punishments used against the

[1] Fox, p. 25; Asaba oral tradition (informant, F. O. Isichei).
[2] C.S.Sp. 191/B/II, Lejeune, Report, 1902.
[3] E. Jones, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1853), p. 258.
[4] Köler, p. 2; C.M.S. G 3/A3/1882/58, Archdeacon D. C. Crowther, 'The 3rd visit to Okrika', February 1882; James Johnson, 'An African Clergyman's Visit to Bonny', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1897), p. 28.
[5] F.O. 403/217, Sir John Kirk's Report after the Brass Inquiry.
[6] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Venn, 13 March 1865.
[7] J. Pratt, 'African Town or Village Life in the Niger Delta', *Western Equatorial Africa Diocesan Magazine* (1905), p. 147.

recalcitrant. A number of social mechanisms existed to develop the vertical loyalties of the House system, rather than the horizontal loyalties of class, and to attach the slaves to the various Delta states.[1] For the rest, there was sufficient chance of social mobility for the Delta slave classes to reconcile them to their lot. The occasional slave who rose to power and affluence gave his fellows the hope that they might do likewise—just as so many of the urban poor in nineteenth-century Europe were cheered by the ideology of Self Help, the mirage of ascending the social scale to affluence.

The economic problem was largely solved by the growth of the palm oil trade. The slaves who would have been sold now enriched their masters in other ways, by performingt he laborious tasks involved in collecting the oil from the inland markets. Old Calabar employed its slaves rather differently—in the plantation cultivation of oil palms, which was also undertaken in Dahomey. After Ja Ja established his new state of Opobo, and in doing so cut Bonny off from much of her economic hinterland, the Bonny chiefs in their turn turned increasingly to plantation agriculture.[2]

A few slaves, like Ja Ja, became wealthy and powerful men, but the vast majority—the 'pullaboys' who paddled the great trade canoes, or the plantation labourers, who had no chance of prospering through trade,[3] could look forward to at best, a life of laborious servitude, and at the worst, a terrifying death as a sacrifice to dignify a great man's funeral.

The Ibo slaves of the Delta responded to their predicament in one of two ways. One was the path of individual mobility. This in its turn could take one of two forms. The first was that of rising to traditional goals, the accumulation of wealth, through trade, and the rule of a House. Oko Epelle was an example of this process. Brought as a child from the Ibo interior, he began as a paddler on the trade canoes, and worked his way up until he was the wealthy master of a House.[4]

[1] For a case study, see Robin Horton, 'From Fishing Village to City-State, A Social History of New Calabar', in Mary Douglas and Phyllis M. Kaberry (eds.), *Man in Africa* (London, 1969), pp. 37 ff.

[2] Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1876), p. 473; *Inquiry into the Southern Nigeria Liquor Trade* (1909), Minutes question 13366.

[3] F.O. 84/858, Beecroft to Palmerston, 27 October 1851.

[4] F.O. 84/1343, 'Protest' of Oko Epelle, encl. in Hopkins to Granville, 27 November 1871.

7a, b. Europe's images of Iboland: life on the Niger in the 1830's

annual subsidy—though this was small enough in comparison with the profits of the slave trade. But the British did not ratify or honour any of these treaties.[1] In 1841, the personnel of the Niger Expedition made an agreement with the Obi of Aboh, whereby he undertook to give up trading in slaves, and the British promised to send regular trading vessels for legitimate trade. The years went by, the Obi died, and it was not until 1857 that the first of these trading vessels ascended the Niger. The economic and social costs of the abolition of the slave trade were born by the African peoples concerned.

Some parts of West Africa found that the abolition of the slave trade destroyed the whole basis of their overseas trade, for they had no other commodity which the Europeans required in large quantities. In the Delta, an alternative export commodity was ready to hand in palm oil, which traders had begun purchasing in the late eighteenth century.[2] In the first three decades of the nineteenth century, the export of slaves and of palm oil went on simultaneously—'The staple trade of Eboe [Aboh] consists of slaves and palm oil'[3]—and after the export of slaves came to an end, palm oil became Iboland's staple export commodity.

This change introduced a fundamentally new kind of economic relationship between Europe and Iboland, which was destined to last until the end of the colonial period, and beyond. Iboland became an economic satellite of the European industrial economy—what is sometimes called a dependent monoculture. It provided one of the many raw materials required by Europe's growing industries, and imported manufactured products in return.

Regarded from the viewpoint of the West African historian, it is easy to overemphasize the importance of palm oil to the European economy. Despite its manifold uses, it was essentially only one of a vast number of primary products which Europe imported. The uses to which it was put changed as time went on.[4] In the first half of the nineteenth century, it was used as a lubricant, a fuel, and for the

[1] Dike, p. 85.

[2] Adams, pp. 143, 172 and 245; Donnan, II, 651.

[3] MacGregor Laird and R. A. K. Oldfield, *Narrative of an Expedition into the Interior of Africa by the River Niger* (London, 1837), I, 102.

[4] For a contemporary account of the uses of palm oil, cf. 'Palm Oil and Cotton', *The African Times* (23 January 1863), pp. 78–9. See also Charles Wilson, *The History of Unilever. A Study in Economic Growth and Social Change* (London, 1954), I, 10, 72–3 and 117.

manufacture of candles. After the 1860s, mineral oils superseded it in these fields, but new uses were found for palm oil in processing tin plate and in the vast expansion of the soap industry. Yet even in the soap industry, it was only one of a large number of alternative raw materials (the others included tallow, linseed oil, copra and whale oil). From the 1870s on, palm kernels were processed. They were used at first for soap, but later they made an important contribution to European nutrition, for kernel oil was used in margarine manufacture, and the residue for cattle food.

A society whose whole external trade depends on a single primary product is at many disadvantages—this has, indeed, been the central problem of many independent African states in recent times. A primary product may be rendered obsolete by technical change—as African dyewoods were ousted by synthetic dyes. It may be undersold by a cheaper product from elsewhere—a glut of Australian tallow in 1895–6 caused an immediate crisis in the West African palm oil industry.[1] Since most primary producers are only one of a number of alternative sources of a product, they have little if any control over the prices they receive.

The palm oil industry was not as grossly and destructively exploitative as the slave trade. Nevertheless, the new economic relationship it established was basically disadvantageous to Iboland—and was destined to govern her economic life throughout the colonial period. In the nineteenth century, the disadvantageous effects were masked while palm oil prices remained high, while Iboland retained her political independence, and while external trade was valued only as a source of non-essential goods. But from the 1860s onwards, palm oil prices fell, and in the 1880s began the long process of the establishment of colonial rule.

To what extent was the palm oil trade a true substitute for the slave trade? Many of the European firms made a successful transition from the slave trade to the palm oil trade, which utilized their shipping, and their special commercial knowledge of West Africa. But it is important to realize that for much of Iboland it was not an economic substitute, because limitation of transport and geography meant that only a small area of Iboland could participate in it.

Only half of Iboland—the area lying south of a line between

[1] Wilson, I, 63; cf. F.O. 2/180, Niger Coast Protectorate Annual Report, 1897–1898.

Afikpo and Onitsha—lay in the palm oil belt.[1] Even in the palm oil belt, many areas had only sufficient oil palms to supply their domestic needs.[2] Yet the areas which were able to sell palm oil for export were much more narrowly circumscribed by the available transport. Palm oil is a bulky commodity, and in nineteenth-century Iboland, could only be transported by canoe. Whereas slaves, of course, had provided their own transport, and the slave trade routes had been able to develop independently of river transport, the palm oil trade was confined to those parts of Iboland connected with the Delta ports by navigable rivers. In the nineteenth century, apart from the Niger and Cross Rivers, Iboland's waterways were generally navigable only in their lower reaches. It was these areas which served as collecting centres for palm oil, carried to the riverside in calabashes by individual producers, and then purchased in bulk by the Delta traders. Economic rivalry had always been characteristic of the relations between the Delta states, but in the nineteenth century, the need for exclusive access to these limited palm oil markets imbued it with a new bitterness, and led, on occasion, to 'complicated and universal War'.[3]

These limitations had important consequences for Ibo economic history. They gave, for a time, a role of key importance to the southern Ibo towns, such as Ohumbele, which collected oil for the Delta traders. But the problem of transport made it impossible for older economic centres, such as Bende or Uzuakoli, to make this kind of transition. Their continued prosperity depended on the existence of the internal trade in slaves. And the geographic limitations of the palm oil trade inevitably caused discontent in those parts of Iboland which could not participate in it.[4]

To understand the social impact of the palm oil trade on those areas of Iboland which took part in it, it is necessary to look briefly at the way in which the oil was produced. First it was necessary to climb the oil palm and cut down the cluster of nuts. It was a dangerous task: 'Occasionally, the rope breaks or slips, or the climber

[1] R.H. MSS. Afr. s. 697, A. F. B. Bridges, 'Report on the Oil Palm Survey, Ibo, Ibibio and Cross River areas', 1938.

[2] E. A. Steel, 'Exploration in Southern Nigeria', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* (April 1910), pp. 439 and 446. (This article is to be found in a bound volume of pamphlets, 'Nigeria', I, in the F.O. and C.O. Library, London.)

[3] F.O. 84/1343, New Calabar supercargoes to Hopkins, 20 July 1871.

[4] C.M.S. CA 3/04, Bishop Crowther to Venn, 18 October 1867.

misses his grip, and the result is always horribly painful, if not fatal.'[1] The methods of extracting the oil from the nuts varied, but all were laborious. In southern Iboland the nuts were pounded, the pulp mixed with water and the whole mixed continuously, until the oil rose to the surface and could be skimmed off. In Onitsha and western Iboland the nuts were first boiled, then pounded, and then the oil was squeezed out by hand.[2] A single cask of palm oil represented an enormous expenditure of time and energy, and Iboland's oil production was measured, not in casks, but in thousands of tons. In 1855, it was estimated that the Delta exported 22,495 tons of palm oil annually, over 16,000 of them from Bonny and Kalabari.[3] In 1871, the Delta's annual exports were put at between 25,000 and 30,000 tons.[4]

Once Europe had developed techniques for utilizing the kernel of the palm nut, the preparation and export of kernels developed rapidly. The kernel was obtained by cracking the tough outer casing, a skilled, if tedious task, as the kernel needed to remain intact. It was estimated that to produce a single pound of kernels, it was necessary to crack four hundred nuts.

Early in the twentieth century, E. D. Morel reflected on the fact that in 1910, southern Nigeria had exported 172,998 tons of kernels, and 76,850 tons of oil. He commented with justice: 'In . . . realizing . . . the truly enormous sum of African labour which it represents . . . one cannot but reflect upon the foolish generalities which ascribe "idleness" to the West African negro . . .'[5]

At the end of the first third of the nineteenth century, the relationship between Iboland and the Europeans was essentially paradoxical. Their economic links were centuries old. Iboland had contributed in the era of the slave trade to the process of capital formation in Europe, and later, produced both a raw material and a market for Europe's industrial revolution. In its turn, Ibo society had been

[1] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 403.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 404–5.
[3] Hutchinson, p. 252.
[4] F.O. 84/1343, memo. by Livingstone, n.d., received by F.O. 8 December 1871.
[5] E. D. Morel, *Nigeria, Its Peoples and Its Problems* (first pub. 1911, 3rd edn. London, 1968), pp. 53–4. For another comment to the same effect, cf. John H. Harris, *Dawn in Darkest Africa* (first pub. 1912, reprinted London, 1968), pp. 125–6.

profoundly affected by the direct and indirect consequences of this external trade. And yet this long continued trading relationship took place only through intermediaries—the Delta middlemen. No Europeans had set foot in the Ibo interior, and they did not even realize that the many rivers with which they were familiar on the coast formed the Delta of the River Niger.

In the middle years of the nineteenth century, the pattern changes, and we have the beginnings of European penetration of the interior. The process begins in 1830, when the Lander brothers made their gallant canoe journey down the Niger. It continues with the steady development of European—and Sierra Leonian—activity on the Niger, and with the gradual penetration of eastern Iboland, a process which begins in the 1890s, and is still not complete in 1906. The rest of this book is concerned, in the main, with this pattern of moving frontiers, with Iboland's gradual confrontation with various forms of alien culture, and ultimately, with alien rule. But in order to understand the significance of this impact, it is necessary to depict at least the most salient characteristics of the society which experienced it. This forms the theme of the next chapter of this study.

5 · A People in a Landscape: Iboland on the Eve of Alien Rule

> 'Our main grievance is that we are not so happy as we were before . . . Our grievance is that the land is changed.'
>
> —Women rioters in Owerrinta, in 1929.[1]

This chapter seeks to describe Ibo society as it existed in the middle years of the nineteenth century. Such a survey must be necessarily brief and impressionistic, and is no substitute for the patient intuitive understanding and description of particular communities which is the special province of the anthropologist. But if a social history is not to move on a level of unreal abstraction, it is necessary to isolate the major characteristics of a given society, at a particular period in time.

The classic difficulty in reconstructing African social history is that the observers whose writings mirror a society's characteristics are, at the same time, changing it. From 1830 on, we have many descriptions of the Niger Ibo states. From the 1880s on—and, occasionally, earlier—we have eyewitness descriptions of other areas of eastern and western Iboland, from missionaries, soldiers and administrators. But these were, of course, themselves the agents of change. Nevertheless their descriptions, supplemented by studies of Ibo society made by anthropologists and others in the twentieth century, do show us the lineaments of Ibo society, before it was subjected to the revolutionary experience of alien conquest and rule.

Since Iboland had no single centralized government, we must look for unifying institutions in other spheres. It had the broad cultural unity which came from a common language—albeit with marked differences of dialect—and similar political and social institutions. Although the details of government, and of social customs, differed considerably from place to place, the broad underlying similarities are ultimately more significant than the differences. The typical Ibo

[1] Quoted in Margery Perham, *Native Administration in Nigeria* (London, 1962 reprint), p. 219.

...way, as we have seen, a small, democratic society, with an ... of political institutions where the voice of elders ... and with much scope for individual mobility. ... observer who wrote that he had found true liberty in ... although its name was not inscribed on any monument.[1]

Iboland was more, however, than a large collection of independent and unrelated polities. Her states were interrelated in a number of different ways. Many were grouped into clans, or tribes, united by the ... of a common ancestor. More rarely, groups of unrelated towns occasionally united for mutual defence against a common enemy. Thus several leagues, such as the Amakwam confederation, were formed to resist attacks from the Abam.[2]

The economic links created by trade routes and by Iboland's network of markets were much more far-flung. In the last two chapters we saw how the development of trade with Europe led to the successive forms of export trade—in slaves, and in palm oil, and how these forms of trade co-existed throughout the nineteenth century, although the export of slaves ceased, and the slave trade became purely internal. These two forms of trade required two different patterns of trade route.

The palm oil trade routes linked specific Delta ports by water with specific palm oil producing areas. Since the economic life of each Delta state depended on its monopoly of its routes and markets, it was prepared to resort to war if necessary to defend them. It is an occupational vice of the historian to think that whatever is best documented is most important, but in the middle years of the nineteenth century it was the Niger which undoubtedly carried the greatest volume of trade. The trade of the lower Niger was dominated, as we have seen, by the Ibo state of Aboh and the Igala capital, Idah. Their relationship was carefully regulated to avoid destructive rivalries. Occasionally, Igala canoes visited Aboh, or Aboh canoes visited Idah, but usually the trading fleets of the two kingdoms met at the boundary of their respective spheres of influence, at a market which was held, in the dry season, on a sandbank between Asaba and Onitsha.[3] In the middle years of the nineteenth century, the

[1] ... *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1907), p. 18.

[2] ... 'The Iwenu Umunri Kings', ch. 2 (n.p.). For another example, see ... (File 28583), Fox-Strangways, 'Isuochi, Nneato and ... Clans' (1912).

[3] ... *and Trade*, p. 385.

people of Brass made a determined and successful attempt to challenge Aboh's practical monopoly of trade between the Delta and the lower Niger. In the 1830s, they were paying tribute to Aboh for the privilege of access to the Niger,[1] but in later years the privilege became a right—a change doubtless connected with the decline of Aboh's power in those years. For some years the Brassmen prospered, exporting large quantities of oil from the Niger markets, until their trade was destroyed, first by European competition, and later by a new power, the Royal Niger Company, which successfully defended a monopoly more unqualified than that to which any African power had laid claim, and in doing so reduced the people of Brass to destitution.[2]

The Kalabari markets were on the lower reaches of the Sombreiro River, and to the immediate east of the Niger, on the Engenni River, and in Oguta, which is connected by navigable waterways both to the Niger and to the Delta.[3] In later years, the expansion of European traders to the interior was to shed a vivid light on the bonds of friendship and loyalty which linked the Kalabari middlemen with the Ibo oil producers. The men of the Oguta area told an inquirer 'that they did not wish to trade with the Niger Company but with the Calabar men who were their friends'.[4] The people of Ewafa, when asked if they would welcome direct trade with Europeans, affirmed their loyalty to the Kalabari trader prince, Will Braid. 'Whatever Will Braid says they say, for they would never leave him, but are ready to support him at all times.'[5]

The economic history of Bonny in the nineteenth century shows the steady contraction of her trading empire. In the era of the slave trade, Bonnymen traded as far afield as the lower Niger, and shared the trade of the Engenni and Oguta with the Kalabari.[6] For a time, they

[1] Laird and Oldfield, I, 97.

[2] For the rise of Brass trade in the Niger, and its destruction by European competition, cf. F.O. 84/1498, Letter from King and Chiefs of Brass, 21 February 1877.

[3] F.O. 84/1881, Hewett to Salisbury, 26 December 1888.

[4] F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald, 'Report on the Administration of the Niger Company's Territories', received at F.O. 9 January 1890, ch. 5.

[5] C.M.S. G3/A3/1880, Buck, Journal, 20–26 May 1880 (this journal describes a journey with Consul Hewett to the Kalabari markets in 1880, when Buck acted as interpreter).

[6] F.O. 84/1087, Bonny regents to Hutchinson, 2 December 1858, encl. in Hutchinson to Malmesbury, 24 February 1859. F.O. 84/1881, Hewett to Salisbury, 26 December 1888.

continued to trade for palm oil in these areas—Bonnymen were purchasing palm oil at Aboh in 1841[1]—but they gradually withdrew or were expelled and came to depend entirely on oil from the markets on the lower Imo River. When Ja Ja broke away from Bonny, in 1869, and established a new state at the mouth of the Imo River, he at a stroke cut Bonny off from her main markets. Henceforth Bonny depended on oil from her northern neighbours, the Okrikans, who in their turn obtained it from their Ibo hinterland.[2] But it was no substitute for the trading empire they had lost, and a few years later, Bonny was 'a ruined and impoverished Country'.[3]

Ja Ja in his turn was destined to enjoy less than twenty years of autonomy before he was treacherously kidnapped by a British consul and destined to die in a distant exile. During his years of power, he developed his trading empire both in the Ibo markets on the Imo River and in Ibibioland. Far more than a cash nexus linked him to his partners. Their bonds were cemented by diplomacy and judicious marriages and by Ja Ja's skilful use of traditional religious symbolism.[4]

The trading system of the Cross River resembled, in miniature, that of the lower Niger: through it was one in which Ibos were only marginally involved, and trade on the river in the nineteenth century was destined to be frequently disrupted by disputes between the riverain states.

These trade routes were a vehicle, not only for the exchange of goods, but for cultural contacts. This was seen very clearly in the late nineteenth century when a number of Bonny slaves, converts to Christianity, began a work of evangelization in the Ibo oil markets.[5]

In addition to the water routes by which palm oil was transported, there was another system of trade routes, dealing in slaves and luxury goods, for which water transport was not required. Certain of these routes did in fact follow the pattern of the palm oil routes—notably,

[1] William Allen and T. R. H. Thomson, *A Narrative of the Expedition . . . to the River Niger, in 1841* (London, 1848), I, 237.

[2] For descriptions of Okrika's economic role, see C.M.S. G3/A3/1882/58, C. C. Crowther, '. . . the 3rd visit to Okrika', February 1882, and G3/A3/1886, S. C. Crowther, 'Bakana and Ewaffa', 4 December 1885.

[3] F.O. 84/1508, Hopkins to F.O., 24 November 1878.

[4] F.O. 84/1508, Memorandum by Ja Ja to Salisbury, 5 May 1887.

[5] Cf. p. 89 below. For the similar impact of Opobo traders in Ibibioland later on, see *Inquiry into the Southern Nigeria Liquor Trade* (1909), Minutes of Evidence, questions 12421 and 12422.

on the lower Niger—but many of them were overland. Two scholars have mapped some of the major trade routes in nineteenth-century Iboland,[1] but the study of the many references to particular routes in the contemporary archival sources suggests the conclusion that they were both more numerous and individually less important than such depictions might suggest.

The crucial questions are: who travelled along these trade routes and what type and quantity of goods were transported. The type of goods transported is fairly easily established. Both slaves, and cattle and horses were imported from the north, along at least three separate routes,[2] the latter intended not for utilitarian purposes but for sacrifice in religious ceremonies. Slaves and luxury goods were transported along these routes—especially along the central route between Awka and Bende. But the evidence suggests that the crucial economic institution in Iboland was not the trade route, but the market. Many markets served a dual purpose—some of the goods exchanged were luxuries transmitted along the long-distance trade routes, but the vast bulk of goods which changed hands were produced locally. This is evident from almost any contemporary description of a major market, such as the following account of a market in the Ndokki area, in 1866:

> Their market consists of articles of native produce of every sort. Provisions in abundance. It abounds in corn, palm-wine, rum, fish, deer's flesh, dog's flesh, cats, fowls, tobacco, yam, eggs, spices, pine-apple, palm-oil, bananas, and plantains, cassada, cloths, guns, powder, pipes, and things which I could not number.[3]

The people of Ewafa, on the New Calabar River, explained to inquirers the patterns of distant trade routes, along which they themselves did not travel, terminating in north-eastern Iboland, where 'they buy elephants tusks, and some of the people do not know

[1] Simon Ottenberg, 'Ibo Oracles and Intergroup Relations', *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* (1958), XIV, p. 300; Ukwu I. Ukwu, 'The Development of Trade and Marketing in Iboland', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (1967), III, no. 4, p. 652.

[2] For the Ibo-Igala market at Ogurugu, cf. *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1867), p. 63; for Ezza imports from the north, cf. C.O. 520/31, 'Political Report on the Ezza Patrol', encl. in Egerton to Lyttelton, Confidential, 16 July 1905; for the Idoma-Afikpo route, cf. N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/240 (File 28298), Helbert, 'Report on Ikem, Eleke and Mbu area' (1932).

[3] Account by W. E. Carew in *The Church Missionary Record* (July 1866), p. 210.

cloth there we are told'.[1] The people of Ndelli, on the Sombreiro River, gave an unmistakable description of Oguta. The Orashi River emerges, they stated, into 'an open river like a sea with large towns on the banks—women are said to be the palm oil traders there, & the rich ones among them wear ivory on their legs & brass bracelets on their arms. They have a King & many district chiefs'.[2]

If one compares Iboland with other parts of Africa, it is the activity of its economic life and the vast number of its markets, carefully timed to avoid clashing with each other, which is perhaps its most striking characteristic. It was, of course, the density of its population which made it possible. But the recognition of the role of both external and internal trade in Iboland should not blind us to the fact that the economy of the states of the Ibo interior was still primarily a subsistence one, and depended on agriculture.

Descriptions of Iboland in the nineteenth century always emphasize how much the landscape had been modified by the human presence, almost covered with orderly and productive farms, where the yam was the central crop. In the extreme south-east of Iboland, near Arochuku, an observer wrote:

> As far as I could see, it had been cleared entirely of the original forest, only a few of the larger trees being left here and there around the villages or in plantations. The absence of forest was compensated for by the numbers of palm trees extending in all directions round the villages . . . The fields seemed to be almost entirely devoted to yam cultivation, although maize was scattered in patches between some of the yams; and in the small gardens around each house and compound in the villages themselves cocos and eddo yams were grown, as well as pumpkins.[3]

One can find this description echoed, almost word for word, throughout eastern Iboland. The sources are full of lyrical accounts of Ibo agriculture—from 'the famous Asaba farms' which extended over thousands of acres, west of the Niger,[4] to the 'thrifty and excellent farmers' of the Ezza clan, in the extreme north-east.[5]

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1886, D. C. Crowther, 'Bakana and Ewaffa', 4 December 1885.

[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1890/142, D. C. Crowther, 'Journal of a visit to Abonnema and Ndele', 12 August 1890.

[3] F.O. 2/63, Casement to MacDonald, 10 April 1894.

[4] *H. H. Dobinson, 'New Openings on the Niger', The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (August 1891), p. 573.

[5] C.O. 520/31, 'Political Report on the Ezza Patrol', encl. in Egerton to Lyttelton, Confidential, 16 July 1905.

Observers were equally impressed by the comfort and beauty of Ibo towns. Their layout varied from area to area, but certain features were universal. The houses had thatched roofs and clay walls—the latter acquired, by dint of daily polishing, the gloss and hardness of marble. 'The houses are kept beautifully rubbed with mud till they shine like stone, patterns being painted in bright red, yellow and black.'[1] It was a type of house construction more adapted to the climate than houses made of imported materials—as the missionaries were to learn by painful experience. Typically, they were surrounded by vegetable gardens, and shaded by ancient trees. The towns of western Iboland were notable for their broad and well-planned streets. Thus Ubulu—'Their streets and roads are well-planned and laid, as if under the supervision of a civilised surveyor . . . There are constructed several porches at the corners of the principal streets, where royal guards, armed with swords and muskets, are kept during the day, to see that order is established in the town.'[2]

Descriptions of nineteenth-century Iboland emphasize the beauty and excellence of her manufactures. The members of Baikie's expedition, in 1854, described the elaborately woven cloths which were made in the eastern Ibo interior, by some groups of the Eloqu Ibo, and exported via Onitsha to the north.[3] A later description of cloth manufacture in the small western Ibo town of Idumuje Ugboko shows the way in which Ibo industries were gradually eroded by the importation of foreign products:

> Every woman here weaves cloth from the cotton which grows on the trees in abundance, and they do it beautifully, working patterns in, but foreign cloth is much coveted, and their own cloth despised.

Metallurgy, especially iron working, was another highly skilled industry. The most famous blacksmiths were those of Awka, who worked raw iron from the Abaja towns, and travelled through Iboland plying their trade.[5] Their pride in their ancient craft was

[1] Wilson, 'Village Life in the Ibo Country', *Western Equatorial* [illegible] *Magazine* (1904), p. 44.

[2] J. Spencer, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (April 18[illegible]), p. [illegible].

[3] William Balfour Baikie, *Narrative of an Exploring* [illegible] *Kwora and Binue . . . in 1854* (London, 1856), pp. 28[illegible]; Samuel [illegible] *Journal of an Expedition up the Niger and Tshadda Rivers* [illegible] 1855), p. 179.

[4] F. M. Dennis, 'The "Wild West" ', *Niger and* [illegible]

[5] Jeffries, 'The Divine Umundri Kings', ch. IX; Sadawa R[illegible] People' (Cambridge Ph.D. thesis, 1929), p. 142.

vividly reflected in their first response to missionary teachings: 'Some . . . said they did not wish to learn anything else as they had learnt blacksmithing and that was quite enough for them.'[1] Pottery was made throughout Iboland, often combining utility with great beauty of form and design.[2] This industry again was to be gravely weakened by the importation of less attractive but more durable European substitutes—iron cooking pots, and, later, kerosene cans for water storage—just as the traditional thatch was to give way to the ubiquitous rusting corrugated iron roofs.

We have seen that although Iboland consisted of a large number of small independent states, these states were united in various ways—by language, and similarities of custom and life style, and by internal economic exchanges, which were developed to a degree unusual in Africa. Another major institution, which was superimposed over Iboland's political fragmentation, was the oracle.

Oracles were widespread in West Africa;[3] what was peculiar to Iboland was their number and importance, in a relatively small area. We saw in an earlier chapter how the most famous and influential of these oracles—that of Arochuku—developed. Like another major oracle—that of the Agbala, which spread its influence through African travelling smiths—its success depended largely on the services of Aro's widely scattered sons, who could lead clients to the oracle, and ascertain the true facts of a case. These oracles filled a number of psychological and social needs. Iboland probably gained more than it lost by the possession of a number of final courts of appeal, whose decisions bore the imprint of divine infallibility, and whose reputations depended, in the long run, on the justice of their decisions. Their authority was recognized well beyond the borders of Iboland. Visitors to the Delta were impressed by the readiness of its people to submit disputes to the arbitration of Chukwu's oracle—'all the tribes of this country beleive [*sic*] that the truth must come out there, as instant death by an incensed Deity is the fate of the liar in that sacred place'.[4] After the British established their administration in the Delta, and with it a supposedly more efficient system of

[1] E. Warner, 'Onitsha to Oka', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1899), p. 95.

[2] Jeanne, *Niger Ibos*, p. 328. Cf. Plate 2.

[3] Cf. Boniface I. Obichere, 'A Contribution to the Study of West African Oracles', paper presented to a Conference on the History of African Religions, Dar es Salaam, June 1970, p. 5.

[4] F.O. 84 1277, Livingstone to Stanley, 25 April 1867.

justice, the Delta people still showed a 'curious' preference for the decisions of the oracle at Arochuku.[1]

Warfare, between the various Ibo states, was regulated by a number of conventions. In conflicts between related groups, the use of firearms and the killing of women and children were forbidden.[2] Even when unrelated groups fought, the loss of life was usually very small.[3] Different factors could provoke wars. Often a kidnapping would set off a chain reaction of reprisals, part of the evil legacy of the slave trade. Some local skirmishes were essentially a form of dangerous sport, which gave young men a chance to prove their courage to themselves and others. Since yam cultivation requires short periods of intensive labour, interspersed by long slack periods, these conflicts were usually restricted to the agricultural off season.

A more serious form of warfare was occasioned by the attacks of various Ibo warrior groups from near the Cross River—the Abam, Ada and Ohafia. We have seen that these were often hired as mercenaries by the Aro. Frequently, they were hired by other Ibo groups as well[4]—though not infrequently their employers found that they had acquired a two-edged sword. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they made regular raids in north-western Iboland, in the Elugu and Nri-Awka areas, often going as far as the Niger. Unlike local wars, these attacks were accompanied by widespread destruction and bloodshed. The towns affected evolved various forms of defence, such as moats with removable bridges, high earthen walls, or concealed pits filled with stakes.[5] In the Awka area, towers thirty feet high were constructed.[6] In a town near the Niger, missionaries discovered 'in the trees gigantic cradles, which were reached by swinging ladders . . . These, they told us, were places of refuge when they were attacked by the Abams.'[7] A more positive form of self-defence lay in the formation of military federations[8]—

[1] C.O. 520/14, Moor, 'Memorandum concerning the Aro Expedition', 24 April 1902, pp. 21–2.

[2] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, pp. 377–81.

[3] *Ibid.* Cf. William Cole, *Life on the Niger, or the Journal of an African Trader* (London, 1862), pp. 10 ff.; *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, III, 27 ff. and 60 ff.

[4] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, p. 382.

[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 386–7.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 387. Cf. E. Warner, 'Onitsha to Oka', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1899), p. 95.

[7] P. A. Bennett, 'A Visit to Opoto', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1894), p. 24.

[8] Cf. p. 72 above.

which might, in time, have led to the creation of larger-scale political units, had not colonial rule intervened. When missionaries first visited the area, they were profoundly impressed by the fear these lands created. On occasion, they were forced to flee from them.[1]

In traditional Ibo society there was no clear dividing line between work and recreation, or between art and utility. Attendance at markets, or participation in political meetings had—and have—a marked recreational element. The stories told in the evenings had a serious moral purpose—to instil in the young the values of their society. Many of Iboland's most attractive products, such as pottery, were purely utilitarian in purpose.

This was, however, not always the case. Iboland's recreations included music and dancing. Here as elsewhere in Africa, few Europeans can appreciate, let alone emulate, their intricate complexities. 'Okwe' is an Ibo version of chess. Most present-day adult Ibos look back with nostalgia on their childhood—on the satisfactions of playing in the moonlight, denied to most European children—on its many opportunities both for work and for creative play. Some of the finest Ibo art was purely religious in intention. An outstanding example of this are the mbari houses of the Owerri area, whose wall paintings and unbaked clay sculptures have attracted much well-merited attention from art scholars in recent years.[2]

No aspect of the African past is more difficult to recapture than the history of ideas. How did the Ibo people view the world, in the middle years of the nineteenth century, and how did they interpret the European presence on the coast and on the Niger?

All observers agreed that the Ibo world view was overwhelmingly a religious one. The basic structure of Ibo religion is similar to that of many other African religions. There is a supreme God, known under different names in different parts of Iboland, whose goodness, wisdom and power are described in many Ibo personal names. He is, however, remote. More concerned with the daily affairs of men were a host of lesser divinities and spirits. The Ibo landscape was pervaded with the numinous. It was full of sacred groves, streams, rocks

[1] C.S.Sp. *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XVI (March 1892). (The missionary who had returned at the risk of his life to baptize a dying woman, and in the following year the missionaries participated in a successful defence of the town.)

[2] Ulli Beier, *African Mud Sculpture* (London, 1963). Cf. a superbly illustrated article by Herbert M. Cole, '*Mbari* is Life', *African Arts/Arts d'Afrique* (Spring, 1969). See also Plate 8.

and caves. Every village had its shrine, every shrine was honoured with sacrifices. There was no caste of priests, but rather, a number of categories of individual particularly concerned with religion. These included the devotees or priests of particular gods, who reached their status after passing through a succession of ascetic and mystical experiences. There were also *dibia*, who were essentially diviners and specialists in herbal remedies.

The religious quality of life was not, of course, peculiar to Iboland, but has been described in many African societies. Where relatively few natural explanations of the world are known—as in medieval Europe—supernatural explanations become particularly important. Religion was a powerful support of the social order. Many crimes, for instance, were abhorrent abominations, because they were offences against Ala, the Divine Earth. The belief in witchcraft which was found only in limited areas of Iboland, fulfilled both these functions. It explained disaster, by giving it a concrete cause, personified in a particular individual. It served as a mode of reprobating certain forms of anti-social behaviour. But to the present writer, there is more than this in Ibo religion. In at least many of its manifestations, it reflects the *anima naturaliter christiana*, its intimations of the supernatural, its restless search to communicate with divinity.

We have little direct evidence about Ibo attitudes to the European presence, in the period before direct contact with Europe began. In the era of the slave trade, both the Ibo and their neighbours thought that the Europeans bought slaves in order to eat them, and to use their blood for dyeing cloth.[1] The Europeans in their turn regularly attributed cannibalism to unfamiliar peoples, both in Africa and elsewhere—an interesting minor leitmotif in the history of ideas.

We know that some at least of the peoples of the Delta, in the nineteenth century, had a remarkable understanding of the long-term significance of the European presence in Africa. An Efik ruler told the members of a British expedition, rather grimly, in 1841, 'I hear your countryman done spoil West Indies. I think he want come spoil we country all same.'[2] A Bonny chief, with remarkable

[1] Schön and Crowther, p. 42. Cf. Laird and Oldfield, II, 76 and 106 for the same view in regions further north.

[2] J. B. King, 'Details of Explorations of the Old Calabar River, in 1841 and 1842', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* (1844), p. 260. Cf. Waddell, pp. 456 and 612.

prescience, expressed his misgivings to a British consul, in 1860. He 'expressed to me his dread of our government doing what he said the French had done at Gaboon—namely induce the Chiefs to sign a treaty whose meaning they did not understand, and then seize upon their country'.[1]

It is difficult to know to what extent the Ibos of the interior shared these apprehensions. Their reactions are recorded only after the penetration of Iboland had begun. Then, indeed, we have a number of intellectual and tactical responses to the various forms of alien presence—to missions, traders, and later, to alien conquest and rule. These will be discussed in later chapters of this book.

This then, in its broadest outlines, was the kind of society which the Ibo people had achieved by the mid-nineteenth century. It had, of course, its darker side. This is seen in the practice of human sacrifice, in the perpetual bondage of the osu or cult slave, in the penalties inflicted on those who infringed, often unwittingly, one of a variety of religious taboos. As we saw in an earlier chapter, these institutions betray the corrupting touch of the trade in slaves. And in order to see these darker elements in perspective, we need to remember that all human societies create, in one way or another, their victims. Victorian England had its victims, in the many individuals judicially murdered for trivial offences,[2] and in the children who laboured and died in the factories and mines on which her prosperity was based. But just as Britain, in time, came to understand and change these abuses, so, one may reasonably expect, would have Iboland. Indeed, in some areas we have hints that such a change of heart was taking place.[3] But these changes had no opportunity to occur by developments within the society. Abruptly, there intervened the revolutionary experience of alien rule. For the rest of this book we shall consider the gradual extension of alien influence in Iboland, which culminated in its incorporation into a British colony.

[1] F.O. 84/1117, Hutchinson to Russell, 12 February 1860.

[2] For the large number of capital offences in Victorian England, and attempts to change this, cf. Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (London, 1970), pp. 250–1.

[3] C.M.S. CA3/031, Phillips to Bishop Crowther, 30 September 1878.

6 · Patterns of Moving Frontiers, 1830-1885

'. . . the Whiteman was a fish who would die if it left the Niger.'
—The Emir of Kontagora.[1]

One may take 1830—the year of the Landers' journey down the Niger—as a symbolic turning point between two successive phases of historical experience. A period when European trade exercised a great but indirect influence on Iboland is succeeded by one when the frontiers of direct contact with outside influences gradually extend on the borders of Iboland. It is a time of missionary and trading activity, which is most important in the Niger area, which therefore forms the main subject matter of this chapter. It can be said to end in the middle 1880s, with the establishment and subsequent extension of British political authority—in the Royal Niger Company, on the Niger, and the Oil Rivers Protectorate, in the Delta.[2]

One can discern three separate frontiers of alien advance during this half century. Of these, the least important was the Cross River. An expedition travelled up the Cross River in 1841–2,[3] but it was not a prelude to significant advances in this area. The Presbyterian mission established at Old Calabar did not seek to expand to the interior, penetrating no further than some outposts in Ibibioland,[4] and it was not until the twentieth century that British trading firms were reluctantly persuaded to establish factories on the river.[5]

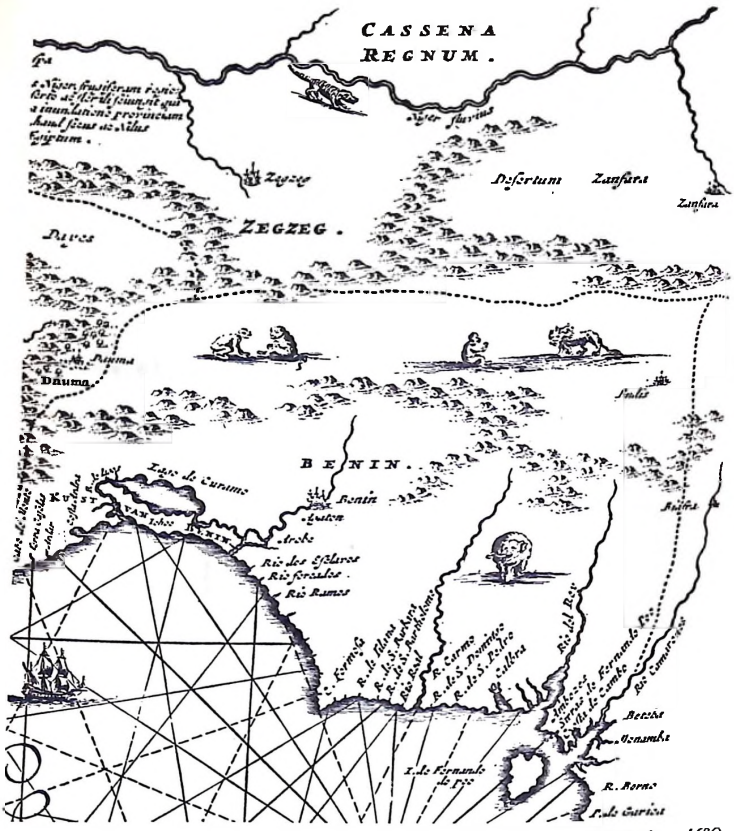
[1] R.H. MS. Afr. r. 81, R. P. Nicholson, 'Northern Nigeria Notes, 1900–1905'.

[2] The Royal Niger Company received a Charter to govern in July 1886. The instruction to establish a Protectorate in the Delta was issued in 1885, but a form of quasi-colonial rule was not established until 1891—the year when the name Oil Rivers Protectorate was first used.

[3] J. B. King, 'Details of Explorations of the Old Calabar River', *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society* (1844), pp. 260 ff.

[4] Cf. J. F. Ade Ajayi, *Christian Missions in Nigeria 1841–1891, The Making of a New Elite* (London, 1965), pp. 94–5.

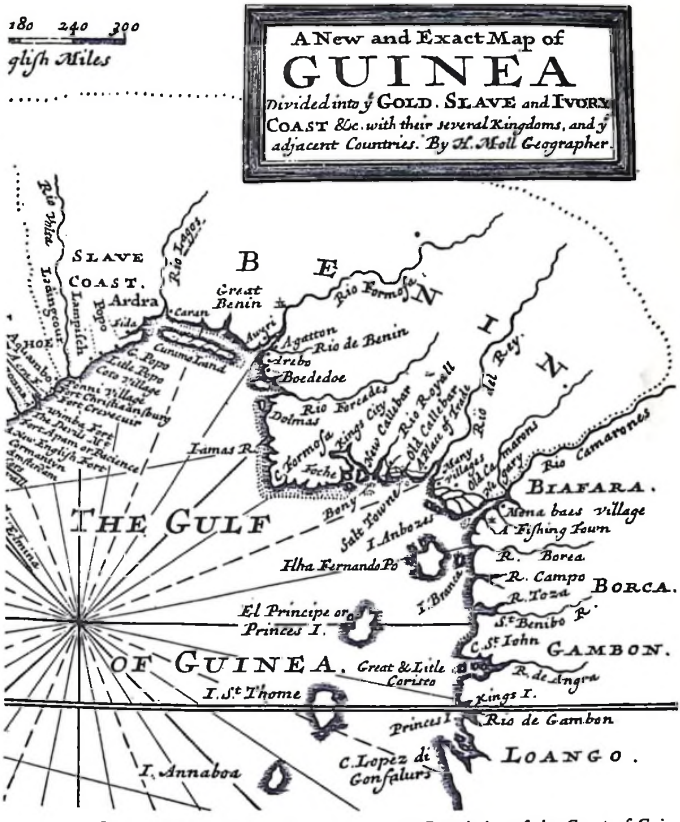
[5] Cf. pp. 125–6 below.



Source: O. Dapper, *Description de l'Afrique* (French trans., Amsterdam, 1686)

2,3 Europe's knowledge of Iboland—the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries

> 'Geographers in Afric-Maps
> with Savage-Pictures fill their Gaps,
> And o'er inhabitable Downs
> Place Elephants for want of Towns.'
> —Swift, *On Poetry*



Source: W. Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea* (Eng. trans., London, 1705)

Source: W… *native of* … *Bini* … *London* …

4 Europe's knowled…

The second frontier of advance was the Delta. In 1849, the British appointed a consul to an area which at first extended from the Cameroons to Dahomey,[1] but which was later reduced to the Cameroons and the Delta. This consul was stationed on the island of Fernando Po, separated from the Delta by over sixty miles of sea. He was not, of course, a colonial ruler, but a diplomatic representative among sovereign states. Interestingly enough, in view of later developments, the draft of the letter appointing the first consul contains a clause which is crossed out, stating that the British government 'have no intention to seek to gain Possession, either by purchase or otherwise, of any portion of the African Continent in those parts . . .'.[2] The way in which successive consuls used internal political crises in the Delta states—and the intermittent assistance of a man-of-war—to erode much of their autonomy has been studied by others,[3] and need not detain us here. The Niger was beyond their jurisdiction, though occasionally one of the more energetic consuls paid a visit there.[4] They made no attempt to penetrate beyond the Delta into southern Iboland. As one of them stated frankly to the European trading community, 'I know nothing of the geography or size of the oil markets; you know as little.'[5]

In the 1880s, the …te of political action in the Delta changed. It became a ma… …ious debate as to whether Britain should annex the Del… …, what form the annexation should take. These chang… …ere full of momentous implications for Iboland, are… …a latter chapter of this book. Yet even by the mid 18… …nsuls had not penetrated beyond the oil markets in… …uth of Iboland. Hewett visited Ewafa in 1880, and… …bele in 1887.[6] But in the years covered by …s cha… …al influence was effectively confined to the …

… similarly, had no great desire to visit the … of them managed to penetrate as far as …

… Beecroft's appointment as Consul, 30 June 1849 …

… ecroft's appointment, 30 June 1849.
… Anene, *Southern Nigeria in Transition 1885–1906* …

… to F.O., 18 November 1878.
… ne to Granville, 25 August 1870.
… rnal, 20–26 May 1880.

Source: W… *native of* … *Bini* … *London* …

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Ohumbele, and were greatly impressed by it, but on their return to Bonny they were greeted by a total trade stoppage which did not favour a repetition of the experiment.[1] The Delta rulers were careful to protect the middleman role on which the economic life of their states depended, and the colossal profits of the palm oil trade left the Europeans with no pressing incentives to break the established pattern of trade relations. When palm oil profits declined, in the 1880s, they began to think seriously of eliminating the middleman profits of the Delta traders—but they were to have little success in this direction, as we shall see.

The most effective moving frontier of cultural penetration was in the sphere of missionary work—and here the agents of change were neither Europeans, nor the Sierra Leonians who staffed the Niger Mission until the 1880s, but the peoples of southern Nigeria themselves. Missionary work in the Delta began in 1865, when the Niger Mission established a station at Bonny, despite the initial opposition of some European traders, who feared the consequences of literacy among their oil suppliers.[2] Missionary work in the Delta prospered. Soon there were flourishing congregations in Bonny and Brass, though the Brass Christians were destined to be alienated from their new-found faith by their long-continued experience of European injustice.[3] In Bonny, most converts were made among the slave population.

The Sierra Leonian mission agents always hoped to use the Delta as a spring-board to the Ibo interior, but were prevented by the hostility of the Delta rulers, who feared the undermining of their middleman role. In 1866, a Sierra Leonian catechist was able to visit the Ibo oil markets on the lower Imo River,[4] but it did not lead to any permanent results. Missionary work in the interior was to be the result of the initiatives of the local people themselves. In 1878, missionary work was begun in Okrika, a bi-lingual state on the southern fringe of Iboland, through the initiative of an Okrikan.

> About the end of 1878, news reached us in Bonny about a very religious man, a convert, in Okrika, by name Atoridibo, who was

[1] Waddell, p. 418.

[2] CA3/04(b), Bishop Crowther, 'The Bonny Mission', April 1865.

[3] F.O. 403/216 (F.O.C.P.), 'Statement made by Chiefs after the Meeting of June 10, 1895.'

[4] *The Church Missionary Record* (July 1866), pp. 210–12.

> in the habit of conducting morning and evening prayers for his household. He came to embrace his Christian mode of worship from his intercourse with the people of Bonny. . . . In spite of many difficulties and persecutions, he was able to spread the gospel to many of his people.[1]

With the help of a mission-educated carpenter from Brass, he built up a regular congregation. C.M.S. representatives were invited, and later it was made into a catechist's post.

Mission work in the Ibo oil markets on the lower Imo River, and in the Ndelli area, had a different genesis. In the late 1870s, the slaves who were sent there by their masters to buy palm oil, began an independent work of evangelization. When they found themselves in the oil markets on a Sunday, they held religious services, despite the opposition of their masters—'They never sent their boys to be "Bishops" in Ibo, but to "Trade"...'[2] At first they erected rough 'preaching sheds', but later these were replaced by chapels.[3] In 1894, two European missionaries visiting Bonny were warned that their sermon would be repeated word for word at six or seven chapels, up to eighty miles in the Ibo interior, by these Bonny trader-evangelists.[4]

It is difficult to know how much this missionary activity affected the societies concerned. In any case, this was the only significant form of cultural impact brought from the Delta to southern Iboland in the period. In other respects, the relationship between the Delta and the Ibo interior was essentially the same in the mid 1830s and the mid 1880s. Southern Iboland had been greatly influenced by trade, but all its contacts with the outside world took place through the medium of the Delta middlemen.

For the Ibo states on the banks of the Niger, however, the same half century was to see more significant changes. For the Niger Ibos, 1830 was the beginning of the *enu oyibo*—the era of the European. More precisely, the years from 1830 to 1880 were the *enu oyibo oji*—the era of the black European, as the Onitsha people perceptively called traders and missionaries from Sierra Leone.[5]

[1] G3/A3/1883/102, 'An Indigenous African Mission. Notes on the Rise and Progress of Christianity at Okrika'.
[2] G3/A3/1884/129, D. C. Crowther to Lang, 30 June 1884.
[3] G3/A3/1890/142, D. C. Crowther, 'Journal of a visit to Abonnema and Ndele', 12 August 1890.
[4] *Letters of Henry Hughes Dobinson* (London, 1899), pp. 183–4.
[5] Crowther and Taylor, p. 262.

In 1830, the brothers Richard and John Lander travelled inland from Badagry until they reached the Niger at Bussa. There they obtained a canoe, and travelled down the great river. On 5 November, they were taken captive at the Asaba market, and brought to the ruler of Aboh. At Aboh they were ransomed by a Brass prince, Ammaikunno, who delivered them to an English ship's captain, but was disappointed in his reasonable expectation that the ransom price would be refunded. This was the unpropitious beginning of European enterprise on the Niger.

Twenty-seven years were to elapse, however, before missions or foreign trading posts were established on the lower Niger. There were a number of expeditions in those years—among them the celebrated and disastrous expedition of 1841—but the high death rates among the Europeans involved had a deterrent effect. In 1854 came the breakthrough in Europe's attempt to establish direct trading relations with the lower Niger, when an expedition was made under the leadership of Baikie, a naval physician, without a single death caused by sickness, thanks to the prophylactic use of quinine. This exploring venture—which like its predecessors, depended largely on the services of African sailors from Liberia[1]—was followed by a further one, again under Baikie's leadership, in 1857. This voyage was to end in disaster, in shipwreck near Rabba, but it achieved the foundation of the first mission and trading posts in the Ibo interior, as well as the establishment of the first form of British political representation on the Niger.

This political representation was destined to be short-lived. Baikie established a consulate at Lokoja on his own initiative, which the British government confirmed, after much initial reluctance, in 1861. Baikie died in late 1864, and the consulate was given up in 1869. During its brief existence, it exercised no real influence on Iboland, for the attention of Baikie and his successors was directed north, to the furthering of the Anglo-Nupe alliance. Nevertheless, Baikie became something of a legend on the lower Niger. His name added a new word to the Ibo language—*beké*, European—and his reputation went much further than his actual influence. He wrote in 1860 that, 'owing to the chiefs at Aboh hearing much of me from above but seldom seeing me, they begin to look on me as a kind of mythical

[1] Baikie's ship's complement consisted of twelve Europeans and fifty-three Africans. Baikie, p. 30.

being, and to regard me with a certain degree of dread'.[1] But effective outside influences on the Niger Ibo polities were to come, not from this distant and short-lived consulate, but from missions, trade, and the conflicts which trade engendered.

In both missionary and trading activity, the Niger Ibo states were but part of a larger enterprise. Since our concern is with Ibo history, our narrative must necessarily concentrate on those aspects which affected Iboland.

Until the middle 1880s, the Church Missionary Society had a monopoly of missionary activity in Iboland. An Anglican body, one of the many fruits of the evangelical revival, it was founded in 1799, and administered by a combination of lay and clerical agency. One of its earliest and most successful missions was established in Sierra Leone, where it found a fruitful field for work among the Liberated Africans, who had been sold into slavery, captured from the slave ships, and resettled there. The way in which these Sierra Leonians not only survived their traumatic experiences, but in a single generation mastered the language and skills of Europe so successfully that they became a prosperous professional and merchant élite, is a major triumph of the human spirit. The Niger Mission was destined to be the spiritual child of that in Sierra Leone—an impressive chapter in the wider story of Sierra Leonian enterprise throughout West Africa and beyond.

Two C.M.S. representatives accompanied the Niger expedition of 1841, one a European, and one a Sierra Leonian, Samuel Ajayi Crowther, who had been enslaved in Yorubaland as a boy, and who was destined to become the first bishop of the Niger Mission. In 1853, as a result of a petition from a hundred Ibos in Sierra Leone, the C.M.S. sent a party to explore the possibility of missionary work and Ibo resettlement in Iboland, but the transport problem defeated them, and they got no further than Calabar.[2] In 1854, Crowther again ascended the Niger, with Baikie's expedition, and in 1857 the first mission post was established in Iboland, at Onitsha.

The distinctive characteristic of this mission was to be the fact that it was run entirely by Africans, under an African bishop. The

[1] F.O. 2/34, Baikie to Russell, 29 February 1860, quoted in C. C. Ifemesia, 'British enterprise on the Niger, 1830–1869' (London Ph.D., 1959), p. 489. This study gives a full account of Baikie's expeditions, and of the Lokoja consulate.

[2] *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1853), pp. 253 ff.

decision to operate it in this way was originally due to the health problems which confronted European missionaries in the area,[1] but it soon acquired the status of an experiment of momentous symbolic significance, with Crowther himself, 'the symbol of a race of trial'.[2]

The first mission in Iboland was staffed mainly by men of Ibo origin. Crowther went on to Rabba, in the north, and the Onitsha mission was headed by John Christopher Taylor, a clergyman born in Sierra Leone of Ibo parents. His missionary career ended under a cloud,[3] which need not obscure his earlier labours and sacrifices in Onitsha, where he buried two sons. He was accompanied by Simon Jonas, a veteran of the 1841 and 1854 expeditions, whose missionary work at Aboh in 1841 entitles him to be called the first apostle of the Ibo. This former Ibo slave was destined to die in Fernando Po. Taylor described his death and dying message:

> He then told me, 'I call on you, and beg you to say to the *Church Missionary Society* in England, that this is the third time I have gone up the Niger with their agents, and the last was the best I have spent in my fatherland.' As we were going to our family prayers, a messenger came to inform me of his death. I went there to close his eyes, but was broken down with tears.[4]

Thomas Samuel was another former Ibo slave who was at first employed by the new trading post at Onitsha, but later joined the mission, which he served until his death in 1878. It is recorded of him that he had no education but the Bible.[5] Another Ibo Christian Recaptive employed at the trading post was a Baptist deacon, Augustine Radillo, who aided the mission and on one occasion risked his life in an attempt to prevent a human sacrifice. He died soon afterwards at Fernando Po. Like his colleagues, he was the prototype of generations of Ibo Christians who would adopt a meaningless foreign name to replace one with deep religious significance—in his own case, Chukwuma, God knows.

[1] Schön and Crowther, pp. 216 ff. It was originally intended to run the mission by a combination of European and African agency, but no Europeans reached the mission, and by 1864 it was decided to make the mission purely African.

[2] Ajayi, p. 208. For the general history of the Niger Mission, cf. Ajayi, chs. 7 and 8.

[3] He left the mission in 1868, accused of harshness to his fellow missionaries. C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther's letters of October 1868, and Crowther to Venn, 27 November 1868.

[4] Crowther and Taylor, p. 382.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 276. C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther, Report, 1878.

As in the oil markets behind the Delta, the evangelization of the Ibo was pioneered by the Ibo people themselves.

What sort of men left the settled life of Sierra Leone for the uncertainties and hardships of missionary life on the Niger? Until the 1870s, the mission was staffed by middle-aged men of little education.[1] Crowther always emphasized the value of their work, and the solidity of their Christian life.[2] In the 1870s, some more highly educated missionaries came, who had been to secondary school, and in some cases to Fourah Bay College. They were nearly all of Ibo descent.[3] Some came from a sense of missionary vocation, which often went back to childhood. For others, it was part of a general movement of expansion, in search of opportunities which did not exist in the tiny area round Freetown which then comprised the Colony of Sierra Leone.

There were certain weaknesses in the Niger Mission, which, combined with the rising tide of European racism later in the century, were to lead to its destruction. One of these was an absentee bishop, for Crowther spent most of each year in Lagos. This has been defended in terms of the extent of his titular diocese.[4] It may be defended more plausibly as the natural desire of an ageing man to spend his last years in scholarly pursuits, after a lifetime unusually filled with dangers and hardships. Nevertheless, the habitual absence of the mission's leader was a source of great weakness.

A second weakness was the failure to recruit local personnel. Crowther made efforts in this direction,[5] but was hampered by the lack of a special training institution—which also made recruitment of personnel in Sierra Leone 'Uncertain and unsatisfactory'.[6] The first Niger Ibo agent, the outstanding Isaac Okechukwu Mba, was forced to resign by European prejudice in 1890,[7] and the long-awaited training institution for local youths was to be sold, again by white

[1] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther, 'Suggestions for the Parent Committee', 30 March 1870.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hutchinson, 3 November 1876, and Smart to Crowther, 9 October 1876.

[4] Ajayi, pp. 206–7.

[5] G3/A3/1885/111, Bishop Crowther, 'A Brief Review of the Niger Mission since 1857'.

[6] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther to Hutchinson, 14 February 1879.

[7] C.M.S. G3/A3/1890/132, memo by Mba.

missionaries, to the Royal Niger Company at a bargain price, for use as an army barracks.[1]

Another source of weakness arose from the parsimony of the C.M.S. towards its servants. The mission agents had to support large families on meagre salaries—as little as £24 a year in some cases. They earned less than they would have done in Sierra Leone, but had additional expenses, such as sending their children away from home for education. For many years, the C.M.S. did not subsidize their children's education, and made no provision for their families if they died, or for their own old age. Help with medical expenses, or a visit to Sierra Leone after many years' service, had to be begged as a favour, not claimed as a right.[2] These conditions discouraged potential recruits, and forced many agents to supplement their income by trading. There is nothing, of course, inherently unspiritual in trading, and missionary self-support has the authority of St. Paul, but this kind of activity tended to deflect their energies, and provided an opening, later, for their critics.

The fourth source of weakness is one which is common to all missionaries, but which was exacerbated in this instance by their isolation, their lack of formal training, of leadership and of encouragement, and by their lack of regular leave. This lies in the difficulty of maintaining the fervent practice of a religion in an alien and unsympathetic environment, lacking the support and stimulus of an established congregational life. It was a European missionary who described the experience most honestly: 'Alone a man soon feels a deadly temptation stealing over him to acquiesce in, or consent to, a low standard of Christian faith and practice.'[3]

This is not, of course, to say that the Niger Mission was a total failure. As we shall see, it was those who were to destroy it who ultimately paid the most unequivocal tribute to its achievements.

The destruction of the Niger Mission in its original form began in 1877, when a European layman was appointed to take charge of the mission's 'temporalities', and was complete by 1891, when Crowther died and was replaced by a white successor. The story of its destruction has been told by others,[4] and need only be mentioned briefly

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1893/66, Dobinson to Baylis, 21 June 1893.
[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1885/57, Johnson to Lang, 22 June 1885.
[3] *Letters of Henry Hughes Dobinson*, p. 121.
[4] Ajayi, pp. 238–55; James Bertin Webster, *The African Churches among the Yoruba, 1888–1922* (Oxford, 1964), pp. 7–41.

here. It is a tragic and bizarre one—the undermining of a whole mission, by missionaries, in the name of religion.

To some extent the conflicts between European and African missionaries was a conflict between two ideals of missionary action. The young English evangelicals clung to an ideal of preaching, and spiritual conversion. To Crowther, with his long years of experience, the best was the enemy of the good, and it was necessary to infiltrate a mission into society, when necessary, by appealing to secular motivations.[1] The English missionaries had a praiseworthy desire to Africanize Christianity. Unfortunately this meant in practice a romantic attachment to the language, dress and customs of Hausaland, and a vitriolic hatred of Christian Africans from Sierra Leone. This is basically a manifestation of that almost pathological dislike of Sierra Leonians and Liberians which recurs repeatedly in European writings on West Africa in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Sometimes, indeed, it had the imprint of hysteria—as when Brooke wrote that Archdeacon Johnson 'was of his father the devil'.[2] They accused the Sierra Leonians of love of money, yet themselves received much larger salaries.[3]

By 1883, the mission was in ruins—'nearly a total clearance of its members . . . by *disconnection*, *dismissal* and *resignation*'.[4] Too late, its critics discovered that it is more difficult to build than to destroy. Some died, and others left the mission. By the early 'nineties, their sole survivor, Archdeacon Dobinson, a man of rare integrity and humility, was besieging London with requests for more Sierra Leonian missionaries, and lamenting the errors of the past in a touching *retractatio*.

> I greatly long to see an African Diocese formed . . . I do rejoice to think Archn Hy Johnson is again established. I burn with shame & horror now at the awful charges made against him in 1890 . . . May God forgive us the bitter slanderous & lying thoughts we had against him & others in those dark days of 1890 . . . We have suffered, no one knows how much, by those rash & hasty actions.

[1] C.M.S. F4/7, Journal of G. Wilmot Brooke, 28 June 1889, fo. 106; G3/A3/1889/118, Brooke to Lang, 10 July 1889.

[2] G3/A3/1890/93, Brooke to Touch, 5 June 1890.

[3] C.M.S. Precis Book, Niger Mission, 1887–97, 'Extracts from the Minutes of the General Committee', 9 December 1889; G3/A3/1891/209, Dobinson to Lang, 6 August 1891.

[4] C.M.S. G3/A3/1884/20, Bishop Crowther to Lang, 15 December 1883.

> We condemned others, & we ourselves have done less than they did.[1]

The painful construction, in the 1890s, of what was in effect a new mission, relying on a combination of English, West Indian and Ibo agency, forms one of the themes of a later chapter of this study.

Iboland was, of course, only part of a wider missionary strategy, to Crowther and his fellow missionaries. By 1880, the Niger Mission had eleven stations, four of them in the Delta, extending from the sea to Egga, far to the north of Iboland. The oldest mission station was Onitsha, worked continuously since 1857. There were also stations at three Niger Ibo towns—Osomari, Asaba and Alenso, all founded in the 1870s. There was no post in the Ibo interior, and none at many important Niger Ibo towns, such as Aboh, Ndoni and Atani. Before we examine the nature of the missionary impact in the few places where it existed, it is necessary to examine the other moving frontier of alien influence, that of trade.

Looked at with the advantage of hindsight, the expansion of trade on the Niger seems inevitable, the obvious way to eliminate the profits of the coastal middlemen. 'To the merchant it offered a boundless field for enterprise; to the manufacturer, an extensive market for his goods; . . .'[2] But in fact, its beginnings were small, and its progress slow and full of difficulties.

The expedition of 1857 established three trading posts, two of which were in Iboland—at Aboh and Onitsha. The station at Aboh was given up after it was plundered by the local people in 1860. The following year, the sponsor of these ventures, the Birkenhead ship-builder, MacGregor Laird, died,[3] and with his death, the subsidy promised by the British government for annual expeditions to the Niger came to an end. The fate of trading enterprise on the Niger lay in the balance—and with it that of the Niger Mission, which depended on traders for transport facilities. Trading ventures on a river which was only navigable by steamer four months a year, which presented many health hazards to Europeans, and which could only be pursued in the teeth of the hostility of the Delta middlemen and their European trading partners, did not seem a particularly

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1896/54, Dobinson to Baylis, 30 March 1896.

[2] Laird and Oldfield, I, 3.

[3] For details about Laird's contributions to Niger exploration, see Dike, p. 61 n. 2 and pp. 169 ff.

attractive proposition. What saved it were not the repeated pleas of missionaries, but the American Civil War. British cotton textile manufacturers, cut off from their raw material supplies in the southern states, were forced to look elsewhere. One of the places they looked to was the Niger, where trade promised that combination of economic advantage and humanitarian self-congratulation so beloved of the Victorian middle-class mind. 'The mills of Manchester and Stockport, of Ashton and Preston, will yet shout for joy through the cotton wealth of the Niger districts.'[1]

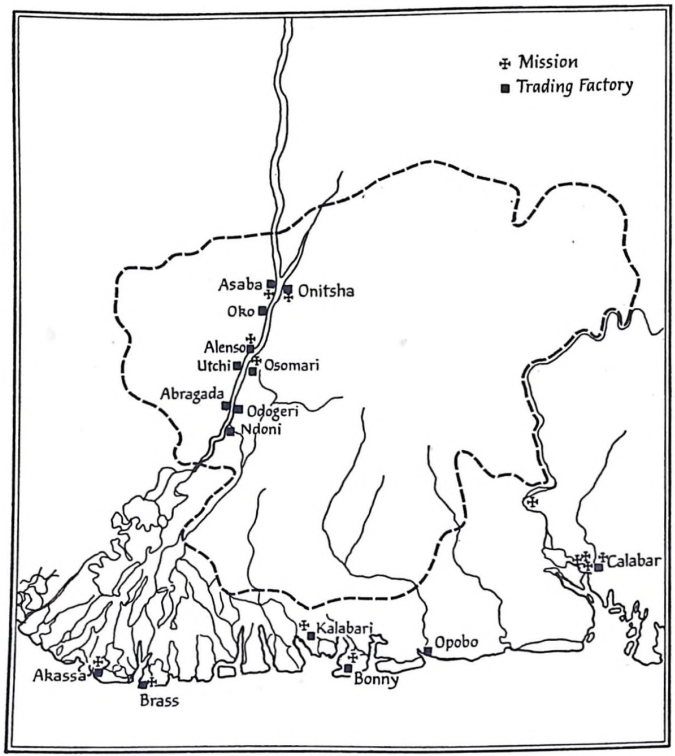
Two new companies entered the field, only one of which, the Manchester based West African Company, remained in it. It enjoyed the backing of the C.M.S., and at first hoped to export a wide variety of products, including cotton. The missionaries encouraged this, hoping for the development of a Christian peasantry engaged in cash crop agriculture. But the Company's fortunes languished until it was on the verge of bankruptcy, and contemplating withdrawal from the Niger.[2] A good year turned the balance, but when a British government representative visited the Niger in 1871, he stated that in no part of the world had British 'life and treasure' been expended to so little advantage, apart from the Arctic![3]

The failures of the 'sixties had made two facts abundantly clear—the failure of Niger trade under European agents,[4] and the way in which, on the Niger as in the Delta, palm oil was the only really profitable product.[5] In the 1870s, Niger trade began to expand rapidly, but it did so by concentrating on palm oil, and relying on Sierra Leonian agents.[6] The Chief Agent of the West African Company was Bishop Crowther's son, Josiah.

The number of firms engaged in the Niger trade increased rapidly, and they embarked on a competition which benefited the Niger people, but was disastrous from their own point of view.

> . . . factories have been established down the banks sometimes within 100 yards of one another, and it is almost impossible to

[1] *The African Times* (23 January 1863), p. 79.
[2] CA3/04/314, Crowther to Venn, 3 July 1869, and 318, Crowther to Venn, 30 October 1869.
[3] F.O. 84/1351, Simpson to Granville, 21 November 1871.
[4] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther to Venn, 30 January 1867, and Crowther to Hutchinson, 18 June 1879.
[5] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther to Hutchinson, 12 January 1875.
[6] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther to Venn, 30 October 1871.



5 Patterns of Moving Frontiers—1878

describe the constant bickerings and heart burnings between these rival factories. Nearly always they are left in charge of Sierra Leonian clerks, . . .[1]

But soon the nature of trading enterprise on the Niger was to change once again. Sierra Leonians, in trade as in the missions, were supplanted by Europeans in the higher echelons. Crowther noted the way the wind was blowing as early as 1875.[2] This tendency was to reach its apotheosis when the Niger came under the rule of a man who disliked and despised all Africans, and educated Africans most of all.[3]

The era of free trade and competition was likewise destined to end abruptly. The man who later became Sir George Goldie entered the Niger trade as a shareholder in the smallest of the companies involved.[4] He had a genius for commercial and political manipulation, and embarked on a series of ambitious amalgamations which ultimately created a single monolithic entity, the United African Company, which enjoyed an effective monopoly on the Niger. In order to protect this monopoly, Goldie then embarked on a quest for political power, a quest which was crowned with success in 1886, when the company was granted a Charter to govern.

What was the impact of the trading companies on life on the Niger in these years? In one sense, it was more extensive than that of the missionaries, if measured by the number of towns affected, and the number of personnel involved. By 1878, there were trading 'factories' in nine Niger Ibo towns, each of which employed over forty-five expatriate personnel, mainly from Sierra Leone.[5] The Niger Mission had fewer stations and a much smaller personnel, but, unlike the trading firms, who simply sought to extract a product for export, they were dedicated to the proposition of change. Indeed, their whole *raison d'être* was to change the lives, both of individuals, and of the societies of which they were members.

Much to missionary displeasure, the Niger peoples persisted in

[1] F.O. 84/1508, Hopkins to F.O., 18 November 1878.

[2] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther to Edgar, 3 September 1875.

[3] Goldie's correspondence contains many examples of his negrophobia. Cf. for instance, F.O. 403/71 (F.O.C.P.), Goldie to Salisbury, 8 August 1885.

[4] For the definitive account of Goldie's amalgamations and quest for a Charter, see J. E. Flint, *Sir George Goldie and the Making of Nigeria* (London, 1960).

[5] F.O. 84/1498, Hewett, 'Journal of the Niger Expedition, 1876' and encls. (F.O.C.P.) F.O. 84/1508, Hopkins to F.O., 18 November 1878.

viewing both traders and missionaries as one. 'To them as we are all book people and come from the whitemen's country, we have the same interest one with another.'[1] The most important question for the historian of Iboland remains, what changes did this alien presence actually effect in Ibo societies. It is this question which forms the theme of the next chapter.

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1880, Crowther, Annual Report, 1880.

7 · Moving Frontiers: The Impact on Ibo Society, 1830–1885

> 'We cannot help feeling that you are come to break down rather than to build up.'
>
> —Onitsha Christians to C.M.S. missionaries, 1890.[1]

The advancing frontiers of missionary and trading enterprise created situations of new difficulties and opportunities, both for individuals and for Ibo states. This chapter analyses the way in which the Ibo people responded to these situations, and the way in which the life of their communities was affected.

Initially, the rulers of Ibo states always welcomed the advent of trade and missions. Onitsha, in 1857, was a poor state, surrounded by enemies, and welcomed trade and missions in the hope of increased prosperity, an assured arms supply, and an escape from her dangerous diplomatic isolation.[2] Onitsha's rapid rise to affluence in subsequent years seemed to justify these expectations, and provided an object lesson which was not lost on the rulers of other Ibo states. As a missionary wrote to Bishop Crowther in 1879:

> This earnest desire for missionaries which many of the chiefs I visited showed was in a great measure owing to a belief current that missionaries will bring merchants with them, or if they are there already they will not easily remove should missionaries be there also. Onitsha was always brought as an example to prove this.[3]

Even in the late 1850s, other Ibo states were quick to recognize the long-term significance of the new developments on the Niger. The rulers of the great trading state of Aboh were in a particularly difficult position, for they recognized the threat to their middleman

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1890/131, Onitsha converts to missionaries, 30 August 1890.
[2] Crowther and Taylor, I, 32–3, 270 and 428 ff.
[3] C.M.S. CA3/04, John to Crowther, 22 March 1879.

role.[1] They had to decide whether to ally with the Europeans—the policy chosen by the statesmanlike Obi Ossai—or to oppose them. In the event, they had little freedom of choice. Their repeated requests for a mission were refused, and trade passed them by, and they experienced a catastrophic decline in their economic and political power. As the Aboh people told a missionary in 1879:

> A long time ago the Abohs were regarded as the most powerful amongst their neighbours, both for riches and strength, and as such were feared by all: but now such places as Onitsha and Alenso—once their slave grounds are lifting up their heads against them: . . . they could not describe their feelings to me whenever they saw ships laden with merchandise passing away from them to villages further up; . . .[2]

They responded to this situation, at first by an unsuccessful policy of armed resistance, and later by a return to the policy of Obi Ossai—the pursuit of trading and missionary establishments.[3] The people of Asaba and Osomari, similarly, recognized the significance of trading and missionary posts, and sought them.[4]

The rulers of Bonny invited the C.M.S. to establish a mission, and paid half the cost, because their long relationship with European traders had taught them the uses of literacy. They hoped for western education, 'to insure their ability of gauging the oil casks, square up their accounts, read and write their letters, and . . . prevent their being made the best of by the merchants and traders of the River . . .'[5] The people of Okrika seem to have sought a mission in the hope that this would pave the way to direct trade with the Europeans, bypassing the middleman role of Bonny.[6] The Bonny chiefs opposed the Okrika mission for the same reason.[7]

But if rulers initially welcomed missions and trade—which they saw as inseparable—experience often taught them to distrust the Greeks bearing gifts. Typically, the initial welcome given to a mission

[1] Crowther and Taylor, I, 17.

[2] C.M.S. CA3/04, John to Crowther, 22 March 1879.

[3] Cole, pp. 95 ff.; John Whitford, *Trading Life in Western and Central Africa* (Liverpool, 1877), p. 158.

[4] For Asaba, see Crowther and Taylor, I, 40. For Osomari, see Crowther, *Journal* (1854), pp. 181–2, and Crowther and Taylor I, 22.

[5] C.M.S. G3/A3/1884/166, Pratt to Crowther, 9 September 1884.

[6] D. C. Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (July 1881), p. 423.

[7] C.M.S. G3/A3/1883/80, D. C. Crowther to C.M.S., 10 May 1883.

was succeeded by a period of persecution, as traditional rulers gradually realized that missionary teachings tended to undermine the customs of their society, and perhaps challenge their own authority. The Bonny chiefs repeatedly persecuted their Christian slaves, in the fear that 'the Christians being numerically superior will declare their freedom temporal'.[1] It was one of these persecutions which led to the cruel death of the martyr, the youthful Joshua Hart.[2] In Okrika, an initial welcome was similarly succeeded by persecution.[3] In Onitsha, after eleven years of mission work, a period of hostility towards it developed. This had a number of causes,[4] but predominant among them seems to have been the sense that Christianity was creating an *imperium in imperio*, and undermining traditional customs and authority. The king requested that converts should avoid gratuitous attacks on traditional religion—such as catching the sacred fish of a local stream—and should eschew European dress. Sierra Leonian settlers should be encouraged to marry local people, 'or else they could not see how we could profess to be their friends without such arrangements'.[5]

Such anxieties were understandable, and, in the long run, well grounded, but the main impression which emerges from a study of mission work in the Niger Ibo towns in the middle decades of the nineteenth century is of the small size of the congregations established, and its limited impact on the society as a whole. By the middle 1880s, after nearly thirty years of mission work in Onitsha, the C.M.S. had gathered a congregation of about four hundred, in a state with a population of perhaps ten to fifteen thousand.[6] And if we except the flourishing congregations of the Delta, Onitsha was where missionary work was most successful. The mission at Obosi, pioneered by Onitsha Christians in the 1880s, attracted 'a mere handful of men and women who are looked upon as the offscourings

[1] *Ibid.*

[2] Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (August 1876), p. 474.

[3] James Johnson, 'An African Clergyman's Visit to Bonny', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (January 1897), p. 30.

[4] i.e., anxiety about numerous inexplicable deaths in the town, and trade disputes with the West African Company.

[5] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther, Journal of a visit to the Niger Mission, 1868, entries for 10 and 12 August 1868.

[6] C.M.S. G3/A3/1885/23, Niger Mission statistics, 1883. The congregation is estimated at 300 in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1882), p. 544.

of the land'.[1] The mission at Asaba baptized twenty adults and children in the first six years of its existence.[2] Its tiny Christian congregation consisted of strangers from other places.[3] At Osomari, the first ten years of mission work produced ten adult baptisms.[4] In all the Niger mission stations, Sunday congregations were drawn almost entirely from Sierra Leonian traders and clerks.[5]

Often, though not always, converts were drawn from the lowest strata of society. This was certainly the case at Obosi, and at Asaba, where aliens were despised and excluded from the political life of the community. The composition of the Onitsha congregation was more complex—it was drawn partly from stranger elements, such as the Igala, partly from slaves, and partly from freeborn Onitsha people—plus, of course, the employees of the trading factories.[6] Nearly all Onitsha Christians lived, not in the traditional town, but in the new commercial *entrepôt*, Onitsha Wharf, springing up on the river bank.[7] It was noted that freeborn Onitsha converts showed the greatest tendency to backslide—they were more susceptible to the concomitants of affluence, polygamy, and the taking of traditional titles. This tendency for missions to draw their first converts from the rejects of society has been noted in many parts of Africa. Every human society creates its marginal men, who have little to hope for from existing structures, and can only gain from a new system of values and ideals. Conversely, the well-established member of an Ibo society found his needs satisfied by the world, and the religion, he had inherited, and could only lose by change.

Just as congregations remained small, the missionaries and their flock made little attempt to transform the institutions of traditional society. They recognized that they were aliens, living on sufferance in sovereign states, and behaved accordingly. Thus, in Onitsha, the practice of human sacrifice continued unchecked. Christians were

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1889/35, Spencer to Lang, 31 December 1888.

[2] C.M.S. CA3/043, Wood, 'Report of a Visit to the Niger Mission', 1 January–24 March 1880.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Henry Johnson, 'The Mission on the Upper Niger', *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1882), p. 549.

[5] Cf. CA3/04, John to Crowther, 22 March 1879 (re Ndoni); CA3/043, Wood, 'Report of a Visit' (re Alenso).

[6] CA3/030, Perry to Crowther, 16 September 1872; G3/A3/1897/109, Battersby, 'Report of a Visit to the Niger Mission'.

[7] G3/A3/1890/97, Eden to Lang, 9 July 1890.

divided in their attitude to title taking, but it was observed that those who took titles usually embraced polygamy as well.[1] Similarly, they were divided in their attitude to Onitsha's powerful secret society. The first attempt to attack this was not made until 1892, when English evangelicals did so, to the consternation of some of their flock.[2] Previously, the missions had usually avoided a frontal attack on traditional institutions. In 1879, after a missionary attack on the practice of abandoning twins, Archdeacon Crowther reported:

> This is the [first] year that a direct attack has ever been made against heathenish superstition.[3]

Oral traditions confirm that when practices such as human sacrifice were finally given up, in the various Ibo states, it was due, not to missionary persuasion, but to the coercion of the colonial government.

There is some evidence, indeed, that the hold of traditional religion was actually strengthened in the 1880s and 1890s. The change is mirrored, not only in missionary laments about 'backsliding' but in the spectacular increase in witchcraft scares. The latter phenomenon is a typical manifestation of an era of insecurity and rapid change, a characteristic product of the Age of Anxiety.[4] In 1890, Bishop Crowther, then nearing the end of a long life, summed up the net result of over forty years of missionary work in Onitsha: 'The inhabitants are entirely in the hand and control of the priests of the gods and medicine men, the King not excepted.'[5]

Education has been, characteristically, the missionary's chief means of effecting social transformation, and it was to be so, later among the Ibo, but educational work had made little progress by the 1880s. This was partly due to the lack of trained personnel, but mainly due to the fact that the Ibo people themselves had no incentive, at this time, to welcome European education for their children. Their own society provided amply for the moral and vocational

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1888/24, Johnson, 'Report', 1887.

[2] G3/A3/1892/189, Harford Battersby to Wigram, 12 September 1892.

[3] CA3/04, D. C. Crowther to Bishop Crowther, 6 September 1879 (copy).

[4] *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1885), p. 657; G3/A3/1888/46, Johnson to Lang, 4 April 1888. For the same phenomenon elsewhere, cf. T. O. Ranger, 'The movement of ideas 1850–1939', in I. N. Kimambo and A. J. Temu (eds.), *A History of Tanzania* (Nairobi, 1969), p. 169.

[5] C.M.S. G3/A3/1890/140, Crowther, 'Difficulties in the Way of Missionary Work on the West Coast of Africa', August 1890.

training of the young, and they had no reason for seeking European-type skills until these skills became saleable. This was not the case until the beginning of colonial rule.

By the 1880s, the only viable schools[1] attended by Ibo pupils were those in Bonny and Onitsha. In Bonny, where literacy had a practical value, some forty-nine children were attending school regularly by the early 'eighties.[2] They studied a wide range of subjects, but the standard was low—the wide gap between aspiration and reality was typical of nineteenth-century mission education. In Onitsha there were between eighty and a hundred school children. Foreign observers criticized the use of English as a medium of instruction, and the concentration on English themes—these were the first of generations of Ibo children to establish a literary acquaintance with Autumn, Snow and Daffodils. They achieved, at most, a modicum of literacy. Only Isaac Okechukwu Mba, who received further education in Lagos, before entering the service, first of the C.M.S. and then of the Niger Coast Protectorate, had received an education in any way comparable to that of the élites of Sierra Leone and Lagos.

The advent of European trade and missions affected the balance of power both between separate states, and within them. As we have seen, some states such as Aboh declined, while others, such as Onitsha, attained a new affluence and importance. Within Onitsha, the new settlement on the river bank became increasingly important, while the original town, with its inland site, steadily declined into insignificance.[3] The power and authority of the Obi declined *pari passu* with that of his capital. His ritual seclusion cut him off from participation in the new developments. His essentially religious pre-eminence was undermined by the influx of new ideas. By the 1880s, he had become almost a nonentity.[4]

If some traditional rulers declined, others made use of the new constellation of circumstances to win a power which they could never have attained in traditional society. Rarely, men such as Mba

[1] There were minuscule and short-lived schools at other places, such as Asaba, Osomari and Alenso.

[2] For the state of mission education in the Niger Mission in the 1880s, see C.M.S. G3/A3/1882/76, Pratt, 'Report on St. Stephen's School, Bonny, for the year ending Apr. 1882'; G3/A3/1885/23, Niger Mission Statistics, 1883; CA3/043, Wood, 'Report of a Visit to the Niger Mission', 1 January–24 March 1880.

[3] Whitford, p. 279; C.C.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XXI, p. 519.

[4] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hopkins, 22 August 1878; A. F. Mockler-Ferryman, *Up the Niger* (London, 1892), p. 24.

mastered European skills and used them in European-type roles, as mission or trading agents. But more typically, in the early period of the *enu oyibo*, the New Men were those who used their insight into the new patterns of events to win for themselves positions which, although new, were basically traditional in kind. A case in point was Obi Igweli, an Asaba notable who, because of his alien descent—his father came from Ishan—could not have hoped for a position of influence in traditional Asaba society. Both oral traditions and contemporary sources relate how it was Igweli who first realized the importance of missions and trade for the future of the town, and who was responsible for the introduction of a mission there in 1875, though he himself never became a Christian. Igweli built up for himself a position of such wealth and informal influence, that contemporary sources always describe him as Asaba's king.[1] Chief Opia played a very similar role in Aboh at this time—his 'greatest boast was, he is the only one who is bringing back white men into their country—that he had succeeded in bringing trade, and would succeed also to bring again the missionary'.[2] The most successful career of this kind was perhaps that of Idigo, a titled man of Aguleri, who rose to eminence in the 1880s, by welcoming the advent, both of trade, and of Catholic missions. He became a Christian and founded a Christian village—on a well chosen site at the waterside—and succeeded in founding a new royal dynasty.[3]

The impact of trade on Ibo societies had a number of facets. On the one hand, the multiplication of European factories on the Niger led to a great increase in the volume of trade and in consumer goods. The increase in affluence was most dramatic in Onitsha. The missionaries probably exaggerated the initial misery of Onitsha, which in their accounts recalls the Hobbesian state of nature—'very poor, filthy, and rude'[4]—but the town's subsequent increase in prosperity was unmistakable. An observer in 1871 described the trappings of affluence 'in clean, new and decent clothes . . . Some of these were

[1] This account of Igweli's career is based on Asaba oral traditions and scattered references in the C.M.S. archives. See also Adolphe Burdo, *The Niger and the Benueh, Travels in Central Africa* (trans. Mrs. George Sturge, London, 1880), p. 193, and Julius Spencer, 'The History of Asaba and its Kings', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (September 1901), pp. 20–1.

[2] C.M.S. CA3/04, John to Bishop Crowther, 22 March 1879.

[3] Onuora Nzekwu, 'Gloria Ibo', *Nigeria Magazine* (1960), pp. 75–87.

[4] Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (1866), p. 63; cf C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther, 'Report of Visit to the Niger Mission', 1877

costly silk velvets and damasks, in addition to which the females wore rows of costly pipe-corals around their necks.'[1]

But trading relationships were marked by a chronic conflict of interest between the foreign firms and the Ibo states. As the price of palm oil fell in Europe, the foreign firms attempted to retain their profit margins by cutting prices. The Ibo states in their turn defended their interests by collective action—especially trade stoppages[2]—the technique which the Delta traders had long used with brilliant success *vis-à-vis* a chronically disunited European trading community. By the late 1870s, the foreign firms on the Niger were forced to adopt the technique of collective action, embarking on the series of amalgamations which ultimately produced the Royal Niger Company.

Increasingly, however, as time went on, differences of economic interest were resolved, not by bargaining, but by violence. Violence had always characterized Ibo–European relations on the lower Niger—as it had so often marred trading relations in the Delta states—from the time of the kidnapping of the Lander brothers. Richard Lander, indeed, was to be killed in a later expedition, several years later, and subsequent vessels sent to the Niger were heavily armed. The first trading factories established at Aboh and Onitsha were sacked by the local people soon after their foundation, and the subsequent development of European trade on the Niger took place in the teeth of the embattled hostility of the Delta peoples whose livelihood it endangered.

In the 1870s, however, these sporadic outbreaks of violence gave way to a deep-seated and endemic hostility between the trading firms and the states they traded with, which sometimes amounted to a state of war. The 'hostile villages' of the Delta continued their vigilance. In 1876, they ambushed a heavily armed steamer, with brilliant success—and were subsequently razed to the ground by a fleet of two gunboats and four steamers.[3] The perils of making war on the British had been made abundantly clear to the lower Niger:

> Agberri I have no fear of, they caught it so thoroughly. The villages have not been touched and looked in the rain very

[1] Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (April 1871), p. 125.

[2] Cf. for instance Bishop Crowther, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (May 1874), p. 156.

[3] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hutchinson, 7 August 1876; F.O. 84/1455, McKellar to F.O., 14 September 1876, and encls.

> wretched . . . all the houses tumbling down in the rain . . . At Ndoni they report our having killed a great number [in] the trenches.[1]

The following year another naval expedition again razed the 'hostile villages' and intervened in the trade relationships of the Niger Ibo states.[2]

But in the late 1870s, relationships between the trading firms and the Ibo states continued to deteriorate. Missionaries complained of the growing insecurity of life on the Niger, and the 'difficulties, trials and oppositions' they met.[3] Trading factories were attacked at Oko, Alenso and Osomari,[4] and the people of Asaba, while not going to these lengths, felt equally dissatisfied with their newly established factory, which they felt treated them unfairly.[5]

In late 1879, the Niger firms amalgamated, and the United African Company which resulted, with David McIntosh as its chief agent, was soon in a state of undeclared war with the states it traded with. As a missionary wrote of McIntosh,

> He is at war with the people of Atani . . . because they did not like to trade with him—He has also killed a cow belonging to the Asaba people, and . . . if they do not take it easily he might also blockade the place as I have heard he *has* threatened . . . The violence on the river is awful—and where it will all end I do not know.[6]

Just as it was Onitsha which had profited most from European trade, it was Onitsha which was to suffer most severely by European violence. The sack of Onitsha in 1879, and the blockade which followed it, followed a familiar pattern. The object of the attack was explicitly stated—to coerce the people of the state, and through the spectacle of their coercion, the other peoples on the river. As so often in the history of the conquest of Iboland—and of the rest of Africa—the use of violence affected diplomatic relations in ever widening ripples. It was intended that 'salutary displays of superior force'

[1] F.O. 84/1455, Croft to MacKellar, 24 August 1876 (copied extracts), encl. in McKellar to F.O., 14 September 1876.
[2] F.O. 84/1487, Tait to Derby, 27 August 1877.
[3] C.M.S. CA3/04, Buck to Crowther, 23 December 1878.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] C.M.S. G3/A3/1881/103, ii. Deposition by Phillips.
[6] C.M.S. G3/A3/1880, Perry to D. C. Crowther, 3 December 1880.

should coerce other states, by showing them the irresistible nature of European military technology, and the uselessness of resistance. And, as before and after on the river, the British government gave its military support to British traders. As a Foreign Office official minuted:

> Where there is money to be made our Merchants will be certain to intrude themselves, and it is all very well to say that they will not be protected, but the fact is that if they establish a lucrative trade Public Opinion in this Country practically compells us to protect them.[1]

Protection being, of course, a euphemism for aggression.

In 1879, in response to traders requests, Acting Consul Easton—'a very young man'—bombarded Onitsha Wharf from a gunboat, the gunboat standing off safely in mid-stream. Then both the waterside and the inland town were razed, together with the king's palace and its defending walls, by a party armed with a Gatling and with rocket equipment. It destroyed 'property in palm oil, crops, etc to a very large amount'.[2] The sack was only a beginning, for the United African Company manned a blockade, and continued making unofficial attacks on the town—duly concealed from the authorities at home—until the missionaries, who had originally supported both the traders and the sack, were moved to indignant protest.[3] The state of hostility thus created, with its intermittent blockades, was to last until the end of the Royal Niger Company's rule. In the long run, Onitsha was to have a great future as a market centre. In the short run, the gains of the *enu oyibo* had proved illusory.

Aboh, which had waited so long for its trading post, was soon to have the same experience. In 1883, after a trade dispute which led to an attack on a European trader, the town was razed. Again, the intention was to coerce other polities by example: 'The late expedition . . . appears to have had a salutary effect in the river—in plainer English, to have established a funk.'[4]

By 1885, the missionary and trading presence on the Niger was

[1] F.O. 84/1455, memo by W. H. W(ylde), 14 November 1876, on McKellar to F.O., 14 September 1876.

[2] The documents relating to the sack of Onitsha can be found in F.O. 403/16 (F.O.C.P.).

[3] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hutchinson, 5 January 1880.

[4] F.O. 403/31 (F.O.C.P.), Rear-Admiral Salmon to Admiralty, 10 March 1884.

nearly thirty years old. As we have seen, the missionary impact had proved negligible, whether judged by the number of converts, or by the impact on Ibo societies in their totality. The advent of traders had brought an increase in consumer goods, but the gains were outweighed by the violence and destruction which so often accompanied them. For the Niger Ibo peoples, the middle years of the nineteenth century were an Age of Anxiety, a time of social malaise reflected in many aspects of life, such as the increase in witchcraft trials, and human sacrifice. Some individuals, and, temporarily, some states, profited by the changes, but taken collectively, the riverain peoples would have echoed the summing up of their northern neighbour, the ruler of Igala:

> He . . . complains bitterly that when he commenced dealings with the white men he had hoped to 'become fat' but now he had 'shrunk up and become dry'.[1]

The last two chapters of this study have dealt with the advance of alien influences on the frontiers of Iboland. How much, if at all, did these developments affect the Ibo peoples of the interior? Members of the northern Ibo groups, such as the Elugu and Abaja, often visited Onitsha for purposes of trade, and carried back reports of the new developments to their inland homes. In the first year of missionary work at Onitsha, a missionary visited Nsube, where he was told that 'They had long *heard* of *Oibo*, but to-day they were satisfied with what they have *seen*.' Here he met people from further in the interior, who were asked to tell their neighbours 'of British love to them'.[2] In the years that followed, people from the Nri-Awka area often visited Onitsha, and, more rarely, so did men from as far afield as Aro and Isuama.[3] But these periodic visits did not influence their way of life. Similarly, craftsmen and specialists from the Nri-Awka area sometimes travelled as far as the Delta.[4] Waddell met one of these itinerant blacksmiths on the Cross River in 1850.[5]

The peoples of the Ibo interior knew, probably with some precision, the nature of the alien presence on their borders. But with the

[1] F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald, 'Report on the Administration of the Niger Company's Territories', received at F.O. 9 January 1890, ch. I.
[2] *The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger*, III, 304.
[3] *Ibid.*, 259. C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hutchinson, 1 June 1880.
[4] C.M.S. CA3/04, Crowther, 'A charge delivered at Onitsha', 1874.
[5] Waddell, p. 468.

exception of the palm oil trade, and the influx of consumer goods it brought, their lives were unaffected.[1] We can only surmise as to whether they shared the prescience of the northern Emirs who warned the Anglophile ruler of Nupe in 1859 that the British are 'a very dangerous and encroaching nation'.[2] The spread of alien influence, and later, authority, was a slowly moving tide. A few years later, this tide was to engulf them.

[1] Cf. C.M.S. CA3/030, Perry to [Crowther], 16 September 1872.
[2] Quoted in Ifemesia, p. 480.

8 · Alien Government: The Niger under Chartered Company Rule, 1886–1899

> 'We should naturally fear, at least a temptation to unjust dealing, if a cat were called in as adjudicator and ruler over a community of mice.'
>
> —Anon. pamphlet, *A West African Monopoly* (n.d., but 1888).

From 1886 to the end of 1899, the Niger regions were ruled by a company of merchants, the system which Adam Smith, thinking of the experience of another continent, called 'the worst of all governments for any country whatever'.[1] Chartered Company rule is the type of government which reveals most clearly the economic face of imperialism. Goldie sought and obtained a Charter for his company so that he could exclude commercial rivals, by the manipulation of tariffs, and force the Niger peoples to trade on his own terms, by the exercise of the illegal but highly effective monopoly he obtained in this way. The British government granted the Charter, because it offered a classic solution to its problems in the area in the mid 1880s. It enabled them to exclude other European colonizing powers, by creating at least a façade of effective administration, and did this at the minimum responsibility and cost to the British tax payer. So well did it serve their purposes, that Foreign Office officials defended Goldie's régime, in the face of a rising tide of criticism at home and abroad, so that it survived unscathed for thirteen and a half years.

There is a lack of adequate documentation on the Company's rule in those years. Its servants bound themselves to silence, with a bond of a thousand pounds, a bond which, quite rightly, troubled Lugard by its sinister overtones.[2] Members of the C.M.S. were silenced by a network of common interests and benefits received, though their

[1] Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (5th edn., London, 1930), II, 72.
[2] R. H. Lugard Papers, MSS. Br. Emp. s. 57, fo. 32, Lugard to Goldie, 3 July 1894.

silence became increasingly troubled as the years went by.[1] Of the two Catholic missions which established themselves on the Niger in the 'eighties, one, the Society of African Missions, invited to Asaba by Company officials, was similarly inhibited. The Holy Ghost Fathers, on the other hand, had a history of disagreements with the Company, and described it with a rancour which is equally unconducive to the recovery of historical truth. Much of the other material on the Company comes either from its commercial rivals, both African and European, or from the officials of the neighbouring Oil Rivers Protectorate—the latter exasperated by the squabbles over boundaries and jurisdiction so typical of the early phases of colonial rule. Nevertheless, from these biased and sometimes conflicting sources, it is possible to distil the answers to the key questions—how much authority did the Company really exercise on the lower Niger, and how did this authority affect the lives of the African peoples concerned?

As with any colonial government, the answer lies partly in a consideration of the type of men involved. Goldie himself ruled policies from London with an iron hand. He wrote much later, 'I evidently had no notion how afraid of *me* (G.T.G.) they all were out there.'[2] Goldie always displayed a contempt for Africans, and disregard for their interests or even lives, which were, as the Foreign Office pointed out on one occasion, the worst possible qualification for ruling a region of Africa.[3]

The administration on the Niger combined commercial and political functions in the same individuals. There were two Agents General in the period. The first was McIntosh, whose 'war' on the lower Niger we have noted, who retired in 1888, and the second Flint, 'as *hard* as his name'—who succeeded him.[4] In all, the Company employed about forty Europeans. British soldiers and Protectorate officials tended to despise them for their low social origins and lack

[1] Dobinson, *Letters*, pp. 51 and 68–9; C.M.S. G3/A3/1889/50, Robinson to C.M.S., 17 May 1889 (original missing, summary in Precis Book), and G3/A3/1897/79, Proctor to Baylis, 25 June 1897.

[2] R.H. Royal Niger Company Papers, Vol. 18, MSS. Afr. s. 100*, Goldie to Scarbrough, 3 December 1924.

[3] F.O. 403/122 (F.O.C.P.), F.O. to Royal Niger Company, 26 July 1889.

[4] R.H., Royal Niger Company Papers, Vol. 18, MSS. Afr. s. 100*, Goldie to Scarbrough, 3 December 1924. Cf. G. L. Baker, 'Research Notes on the Royal Niger Company—Its Predecessors and Successors', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (December 1960), p. 156.

of formal education.[1] One does not need to subscribe to the nineteenth-century delusion that a middle-class origin and education were qualifications for ruling whole peoples in other lands, to recognize their peculiar inadequacies. Goldie admitted few criticisms of his Company, but he was always ready to accept the shortcomings of his staff. 'It is difficult to obtain the highest class of men to serve for any length of time in such unhealthy regions.'[2]

Despite Goldie's dislike of Africans, the vast bulk of the Company's work was performed by them. There were only forty Europeans in a total staff of fifteen hundred.[3] The trading operations were carried out by Africans—by men from Sierra Leone in the main—who were forbidden to bring their wives and families with them.[4] The manual labour of loading and unloading casks was performed by men from Brass, Liberia or the Gold Coast.[5] Chartered Company rule offered almost no employment opportunities to the local people themselves, except for a few who worked as domestic servants or gardeners.[6]

The Company's army, which played a vital role in maintaining the authority of an increasingly unpopular régime, depended equally on African agency. Of a total of 421 soldiers in 1889, five were Europeans, and the rest Africans from Hausaland, Yorubaland and the Gold Coast. Asaba oral traditions preserve the memory of their depredations, and a contemporary called them 'quite a scallywag brigade'.[7]

Despite its numerous personnel and its standing army, the main impression one has of the Company's régime is of the limitations of its power. Its influence was confined to the borders of the river. A missionary wrote in 1897:

[1] F.O. 403/76 (F.O.C.P.), P. Anderson, 'Notes and Considerations respecting the Present Position of the Royal Niger Company'; *Diary of Captain the Hon. Richard Fitzroy Somerset . . . Feb. 5, 1898–Feb. 19, 1899* (privately printed), p. 162.

[2] R.H., MS. Br. Emp. s. 58, Transcript of interview with Goldie by L. Darwin, 15 March 1899. But for exceptions, cf. p. 119 below.

[3] F.O. 403/76 (F.O.C.P.), memo. encl. in Goldie to F.O., 20 August 1888; F.O. 84/1879, Aberdare to Granville, 13 February 1885.

[4] F.O. 403/76 (F.O.C.P.), memo. encl. in Goldie to F.O., 20 August 1888; C.M.S. G3/A3/1893/52, memo. of interview between Goldie and C.M.S. officials, 26 May 1893.

[5] F.O. 403/76 (F.O.C.P.), memo. encl. in Goldie to F.O., 20 August 1888.

[6] Asaba oral tradition. Cf. 'A Remarkable Conversion', *The African Missionary* (1925), p. 13.

[7] F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald Report, ch. XI; C.O. 520/3, Moor to Antrobus (private), 17 November 1900.

> It is hardly realised in England how very slight the control of the RNC is over the interior districts. Practically so far as we are concerned, it is nil five miles from the river. The local officials of the RNC do not as a rule attempt any interference with the customs & laws of the people situated on the R. bank.[1]

Even on the lower Niger, some areas, such as Anam, were never visited by Company officials,[2] and most states experienced its influence only in the sphere of trade relations, and in the bouts of periodic violence which these relations engendered. It was probably only in Asaba that the Company's rule made a major impact on daily life.

The Company's practical monopoly had an immediate impact on the balance of trade. Inevitably, Goldie used the power he thus acquired to reduce the price paid to the Niger peoples for their products, and to adulterate the quality of what was imported in exchange. As the Liverpool Chamber of Commerce put it in 1897:

> There is no competition amongst buyers for export on the river. The Company is the only such buyer, and pays its own price for produce, . . . The natives of Nigeria are further subject to the will of the Company in respect of the goods received against produce. The Company import what manufactured goods they choose, and practically impose them upon the native, who has a very limited and inferior class of articles from which to select, . . .[3]

This is the voice of Goldie's rivals, but there is much corrobatory evidence, and Goldie himself admitted the charge. He regarded it, however, as trivial, for those affected were Africans, whose difficulties were unlikely to trouble 'the most earnest negrophile'.[4]

The evidence suggests that the Niger peoples responded to the iron hand of monopoly by producing less for export, and by devoting themselves to agricultural production for their own needs.[5] This

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1897/82, Bennett to Baylis, 20 July 1897; cf. *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1900), p. 93, and F.O. 2/122, Moor to Hill (private), 13 June 1897.

[2] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/48 (File 29576), Stone, 'Report on Anam Villages', 1934.

[3] F.O. 403/249 (F.O.C.P.), Liverpool Chamber of Commerce to Salisbury, 12 August 1897.

[4] F.O. 403/71 (F.O.C.P.), Goldie to Salisbury, 8 August 1885.

[5] Cf. F.O. 403/122, Merchants of Lagos to Moloney, 12 March 1889. F.O. 2/83, MacDonald to Hill, 26 March 1895. But cf. F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald Report, ch. 8, for a different view.

accords well with experience elsewhere in Africa in the colonial period, when the readiness of the people to grow cash crops and produce other goods for export has been always directly proportionate to the profits of the enterprise. A more important question than the total volume of exports, at least to the historian of the Ibo people, however, is the effect which this deteriorating balance of trade had on the African states concerned.

A number of observers claimed that the Niger Ibo states were ruined by the change. MacDonald wrote that their people 'must either take it [the Company's prices] or starve'. A Holy Ghost Father, writing in retrospect in 1902, claimed that the Company had ruined the Niger, drained away its products, and destroyed the first shoots of civilization. Chiefs in the Oguta area are reported to have opposed the establishment of a Company factory there, with the words, 'We have heard you trade in the Niger at Egue [Aboh] and other places, and that those countries are now ruined and so we fear.'[1]

But the extent to which a state could be 'ruined' in this way depended on the extent to which it relied on trade for its livelihood. The people of Brass, surrounded by unproductive swamps, were ruined indeed, and driven by their destitution to a gallant if hopeless war. On the Niger, changes in trade could lead to a relative economic decline. But the Niger Ibo states were still basically self-sufficient. Even Onitsha, where trade was most developed, responded with equanimity to the Company's long blockade. When a missionary was asked if the people had made many complaints, 'he said not from the mass of the people who had quietly gone back to their original occupation viz: Agriculture'.[2]

The changing terms of trade affected the Niger Ibo states much less than the violence by which the Company maintained its rule, and its economic interests. Onitsha suffered less from its blockades—even when these cut her off from trade with other African states[3]—than from violence of this kind.[4] And in the face of the enormous disparity in military resources, no real reprisals were possible—except, for a

[1] F.O. 2/83, MacDonald to Hill, 26 March 1895; C.S.Sp. 191/5/II, account by Lejeune, 1902; F.O. 84/1881, Hewett, 'Substance of statement made by Idu Chiefs', 26 December 1886.

[2] F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald Report, ch. I.

[3] C.M.S. F4/7, Journal of G. Wilmot Brooke, 1 July 1889, fo. 110.

[4] See, for example, C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XVIII, p. 416, Report, September 1894–November 1896.

time, the symbolic rejection of all things European.[1] A missionary left a graphic description of the consequences which ensued when the people of Aguleri attacked a factory in the course of a trade dispute—three villages were sacked, and twelve leading citizens taken as hostages.[2] And the Niger peoples were coerced not only in their own persons, but in those of their children. It was standard practice to take the sons of 'obnoxious chiefs' as hostages, the boys concerned being made to work as domestic servants.[3]

When the Company began its second blockade of Onitsha, in 1885, it shifted its installations a little further to the south, creating a commercial headquarters on the banks of the Niger, near the inland town of Obosi. The change brought little profit to its people. In 1889, the town, which had been described by an Englishman several months earlier as 'the most lovely paradise I have ever seen' was sacked, and its farms destroyed. The yams in the ground—necessary for food and seed—were dug up. The Obosi were offered peace, but refused the concessions demanded of them, and continued to resist. They were, said a missionary, 'brave but ignorant savages'.[4]

But it was the little state of Asaba, selected as the site for the Company's administrative headquarters, which experienced the most traumatic changes. In 1882, an observer, enchanted with the beauty of Asaba's urban landscape, had paid tribute to the quality of her life: 'one feels . . . he is in the midst of a free people in a free country'.[5] Suddenly she was invaded by what was in effect an army of occupation. The Company created a town within a town, surrounded by an iron railing nine feet high. 'The whole establishment (not counting "Soldier town") covers an area of 40 acres . . .' Soldiers' town itself comprised three hundred houses.[6] Asaba oral tradition vividly mirrors the trials of life in a garrison town:

> They constituted a great menace to Asaba people, catching goats, fowls and cows at will for their food and pleasure, molesting the

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1887/101, Bishop Crowther to C.M.S., 5 August 1887.

[2] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XVII, p. 425, Report, March 1892–September 1894.

[3] Mockler-Ferryman, p. 251.

[4] C.M.S. F4/7, Journal of G. Wilmot Brooke, 2 July 1889, fo. 112; G3/A3/1889/170, Johnson to Lang, 16 November 1889; G3/A3/1890/44, Johnson to Lang, 10 February 1890.

[5] *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1882), p. 547.

[6] F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald Report, ch. 10. Cf. Mockler-Ferryman, pp. 26–7.

> inhabitants by invading their farms and stealing their property and sometimes going to the extent of violating by force the chastity of a woman going to the river Niger for water. . . . The people of Asaba were constantly molested and earned no rest both night and day until the soldiers . . . moved away from Asaba.[1]

In 1888, the Company attacked Asaba, destroying half of it. The overt reason for this—as for the attack on Obosi—was to abolish human sacrifice. In Asaba, at least, this may well have been true. The attack was due to the initiative of Sir James Marshall, the Company's Chief Justice, a devout convert to Catholicism, and of Captain Harper, the head of the Constabulary and the son of a Manchester canon—both of whom displayed that religious and humanitarian zeal in which Goldie was so signally lacking.[2] The results, indeed, were good—it abolished a practice which had for some time past been becoming increasingly distasteful to the people of Asaba themselves,[3] and released her large slave community from the shadow under which they had lived for so long.

But the Company's actions elsewhere show little trace of motivation of this kind. The attack on Obosi was clearly designed to protect its commercial installations, and, when some years later, a missionary urged the Company to send an expedition to the town to discourage the practice of abandoning certain babies, whose births infringed taboos, he learnt that 'The R.N.C. are not willing to do anything that might possibly lead to an expedition, on the ground that being a commercial venture, nothing that might prejudice their dividend must be at all attempted.' Consequently, 'Mr. Flint on his arrival felt unable to do anything further than offer the Obosi people good advice.'[4] The wars that the Company fought were designed to strengthen her power, and further her economic interests.

The Company did nothing to develop the areas which it ruled. Its general policy was to leave the existing society unchanged, unless its economic interests were directly involved. It built no schools or hospitals, no railways or roads. It did attempt, by establishing

[1] Asaba oral tradition: informant, F. O. Isichei.

[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1887/117, Johnson to Lang, 20 September 1887, and 1888/77, Johnson to Lang, 5 July 1888.

[3] C.M.S. CA3/031, Phillips to Bishop Crowther, 10 September 1879. *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* (September 1882), p. 547.

[4] C.M.S. G3/A3/1899/52, Bennett to Bayliss, 8 February 1899; and 1899/53, memo. by Bennett on Obosi.

botanical gardens, to extend the range of products available for export. But the attempt failed, partly because the Company's employees lacked the local people's expert knowledge of tropical agriculture, and partly because the latter sabotaged these schemes, because they feared, with considerable insight, that the development of new cash crops would lead to the creation of a plantation economy, where they would be cast for the role of labourers.[1]

The first encounter of the Niger peoples with colonialism was an inauspicious one. It meant the systematic subordination of their interests to the economic interests of a foreign power. It meant the repeated experience of the violence by which this foreign power maintained its authority. And if the Company's total impact was limited, by the nature of its own economic purposes, and by the extent of its power, where it existed, it was a destructive one. Nor was there a positive side, in education, or any other form of 'development'.

At its worst, Company rule displayed a barbaric brutality. Bishop Crowther described its personnel as 'Cruel and overbearing to the Natives; cruel to their native clerks.'[2] When a party of labourers were massacred by two of the Company's European employees, they not only escaped punishment, but continued on in its service. One, at least, went on to a highly successful career.[3] The Brassmen, who unlike the other Niger peoples, speak in the records in their own voice, complained:

> The ill treatments of the Niger Company is very bad . . . Our boys fired, killed, and plundered, and even the innocent provisions sellers were captured and killed likewise . . . They fired, kill and plundered the fishermen, and even the innocent women were caught, stripped naked, and painted with coal tar.[4]

Officials in the nearby Oil Rivers Protectorate claimed that these things were peculiar to the Company, and that there was a difference between 'Queen man' and 'Mackintosh man' of which the Niger

[1] Isichei, 'Asaba to 1885', p. 425. Cf. F.O. 84/2109, MacDonald Report, chs. 9 and 10; Mockler-Ferryman, pp. 17 and 26. Cf. Dobinson, *Letters*, pp. 216–17.

[2] C.M.S. CA3/04, Bishop Crowther to Hutchinson, 18 June 1879.

[3] Cf. Flint, pp. 147–9.

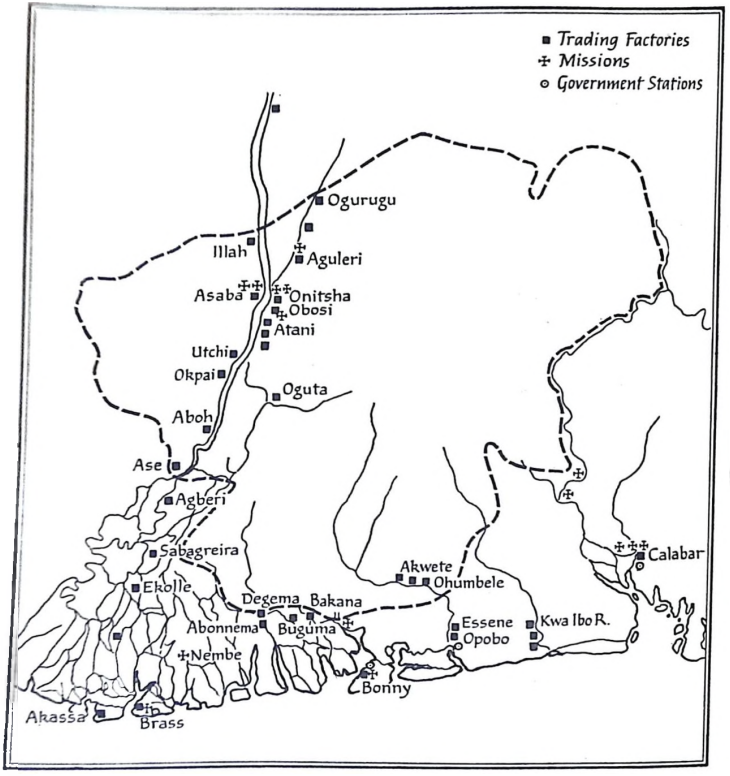
[4] F.O. 403/215 (F.O.C.P.), King and Chiefs of Brass to MacDonald, 4 February 1895.

peoples were well aware.[1] The worst of the Company's atrocities have few parallels in neighbouring administrations. Yet its amalgam of violence, economic exploitation and *immobilisme* perhaps reveal, albeit with the exaggerations of caricature, the face of colonial government everywhere.

There is no question as to how the Niger peoples regarded the experience. Their 'unrest' and 'discontent' are constantly recurring leitmotifs in the records of these years. As a missionary noted:

> ... how fully they believe that the White Traders are untrustworthy and that their country would be richer if all the white men were banished.[2]

[1] F.O. 84/1882, memo. by Johnson on the British Protectorate of the Oil Rivers, 26 July 1888.
[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1887/109, Robinson to Lang, 14 September 1887.



6 Patterns of Moving Frontiers—1891

9 · Moving Frontiers: The Invasion of Iboland, to 1901

Azu kalia, azu oweli, azu nue.
(When a fish is larger than another fish, it swallows it.)
—Ibo proverb.

In the last three chapters we have studied the changes which affected the Niger area of Iboland in the last two-thirds of the nineteenth century. One aspect of these changes—missionary activity in the period of Chartered Company rule—forms a theme of a later chapter. Now we must turn to the process of foreign encroachment on another frontier of Iboland—the spread of British political power from the Delta.

The British established a Protectorate in the Niger Delta for the same reason that they granted a Charter to the Royal Niger Company. They needed to establish some form of government there, to prevent other European powers from doing so. It was, as Granville put it in 1884, '. . . the scheme . . . for keeping the French away from the Niger & Oil Rivers'.[1] This was felt to be necessary, because it was feared that another colonial power would wreck British trading interests in the area by imposing differential tariffs. The unquestioned postulate behind the voluminous Foreign Office and Colonial Office correspondence on the subject is that 'trade is our sole object in West Africa'.[2]

Considerations of this kind conflicted with a reluctance to assume the expense and responsibility of West African colonies—a reluctance well summed up in Kimberley's well-known memorandum on the proposal to annex the Cameroons.[3] The ideal solution might seem to have been, as on the Niger, Chartered Company rule. This proved impossible, because of the dissensions of the merchants concerned,

[1] F.O. 84/1682, Draft, G[ranville] to Aberdare, 6 February 1884.
[2] F.O. 2/178, memo. by F.B.[ertie], 25 March 1898.
[3] F.O. 84/1654, memo. by K[imberley], 6 April 1882.

and the Niger Company's growing unpopularity. Instead, the area was declared and for some years remained a Protectorate, under the Foreign Office.

In 1884, the then Consul, Hewett, reached the Delta with quantities of treaty forms. These treaties, signed by the local rulers, were thought to give a legal justification for British power there. This legal justification was constructed on a basis of duplicity and deceit. One example of this must suffice—the assurance given to Ja Ja, two years before he was kidnapped and deported, that

> . . . with reference to the word 'Protectorate' as used in the proposed Treaty, the Queen does not want to take your country or your markets; but at the same time she undertakes to extend her gracious power and protection, which will leave your country still under your Government.[1]

Until 1890, however, the nature of the British presence in the Delta remained essentially as it had been before—a Consul, supported from time to time by 'the moral authority of a man of war'. But if the Consul's resources remained the same, his policies changed dramatically. Johnston, who served as Vice Consul and Acting Consul in the area from 1885 to 1888, was a young man, who hoped to advance his career by a dramatic achievement. He found an ally in the trader community, who, faced with the decline of palm oil prices in Europe, hoped to recoup themselves by cutting out the middlemen profits in the Delta. Johnston and the traders soon developed an attitude of embattled hostility to the great middleman king, Ja Ja. The overthrow of Ja Ja seemed to offer Johnston the spectacular achievement he sought, and a gateway to the Ibo interior. To the traders, his fall seemed to presage an era of direct trade with Iboland, and consequently of greater profits.

Ja Ja, like other African kings, placed an excessive confidence in the readiness of the British to abide by their own legal forms. He sent letters and a deputation to London, pointing out the rights guaranteed him by successive treaties. He fell, not in combat, but through treachery. In September, 1887, Johnston lured him on to a gunboat with a promise of safe conduct, then kidnapped and deported him.

[1] F.O. 403/74 (F.O.C.P.), Hewett to Ja Ja, 1 July 1885, encl. in C.O. to F.O., 19 March 1888. For a similar promise to Brass, see F.O. 2/100, Hewett to Furlonger, 17 July 1884 (copy).

The greatest Ibo of his time was to die in a distant exile. It is only just to record that Salisbury recognized the injustice of the action, though he did not remedy it, and that Johnston effectively ruined his own career by it.

The kidnapping of Ja Ja had a profound effect on the British image in the Ibo interior. It seemed a damning demonstration of British perfidy. Nine years later, its psychological effects remained:

> The 'Consul' [wrote a later Commissioner and Consul General] has been so grossly misrepresented in the past by European traders, native middlemen, and others, to serve their own ends, that his coming is greatly feared by the natives of the interior . . . On all the waterways the Consul has been distrusted . . . for the story of King Ja-Ja's capture, as told by the Opobo-men, spread all over the country . . .[1]

One can only surmise the pattern which events would have followed if Ja Ja had retained his freedom. He had already shown his ability to create a state *ex nihilo*, and to unite small disunited polities by the use of religious symbolism—

> We have a very old custom of sending our war canoes up to Eboe for the purpose of making 'Ju Ju', which is simply the celebration of our forefathers' lives and deaths.[2]

At the time of his capture he was in the process of transferring part of his resources to the Ibo interior. Johnston, with justice, feared the role he might have played there, as a focus of opposition to the spread of British rule.[3] He continued to fear his influence when he was a distant prisoner on the Gold Coast.[4] The British presence in the Delta was not thought to be secure from Ja Ja until he was exiled to the West Indies—like so many of his Ibo fellow countrymen in the past.

For the European traders, the dream of enrichment through direct trade with Iboland proved a mirage. In an initial access of optimism, they rushed to Ja Ja's markets,[5] but in the trade war with Opobo

[1] F.O. 2/101, Moor to F.O., 14 June 1896.
[2] F.O. 403/73 (F.O.C.P.), Ja Ja to Salisbury, 5 May 1887.
[3] F.O. 84/1828, Johnston to Salisbury, 24 September 1887.
[4] F.O. 403/74 (F.O.C.P.), Johnston to Salisbury, 2 December 1887.
[5] This short-lived advance is marked on the map, 'Patterns of Moving Frontiers 1891'.

which followed, they proved ineffective competitors. Their inexperienced European personnel could not match African traders' accumulated commercial expertise, their knowledge of local customs and languages, and their goodwill. As early as 1890 it was admitted that 'The merchants made a great mistake in going to the markets' and by 1893, the attempt had been given up.[1] They had burnt their fingers severely, and after 1900 we have the curious spectacle of a colonial government exhorting a reluctant trader community to seize the new opportunities created by the extension of colonial rule.[2]

In 1891, the nature of the British presence in the Delta changed. In 1889, Major Claude MacDonald had made two separate trips to Nigeria to report on, respectively, the best form of government for the Delta, and the impact of the Niger Company's rule. In the Delta, the local rulers, offered a Hobson's choice between colonial government and Chartered Company rule, chose the former. MacDonald was selected to implement his own report. He was to be the only nineteenth-century Consul to make service in the Delta a stepping-stone to a successful subsequent career.

In July, 1891, he returned to the Delta as 'Commissioner and Consul General' over a unit called the Oil Rivers Protectorate—rechristened the Niger Coast Protectorate in 1893. It was in fact, though not in name, a colonial administration, possessing the essential elements of government—a regular staff, a regular source of income (derived from customs) and a standing army. The European staff numbered thirteen at first, but expanded rapidly, numbering a hundred by 1897, when permanent African staff numbered two hundred.

The Protectorate staff came from backgrounds euphemistically described as varied. Some, like MacDonald himself, were soldiers, discontented with the slow promotion of a peace-time army. Others came from service in various African campaigns—the end of the Boer War was to mean a large accession. Cattle ranching in Queensland, and tea planting in Ceylon, were other backgrounds thought

[1] F.O. 2/51, Armstrong to MacDonald, 10 July 1893, encl. in MacDonald to F.O., 2 September 1893. F.O. 403/149 (F.O.C.P.), Neville to Elder Dempster & Co., 4 January 1891.

[2] C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 25 August 1902. Cf. *The West African Mail* (11 September 1903), p. 648.

suitable for ruling whole peoples, at least in Africa.[1] Some were friends and relatives of MacDonald, or of Jephson, for a time his representative in London. Others were recommended by army friends, or serving members of staff.[2] The idea of selection by examination was entertained and discarded because 'in S. Nigeria . . . the number of *possible* candidates does not greatly exceed the number of vacancies'.[3] Those who joined the service of the Protectorate were attracted by the pay, and the prospect of six months' leave after every year's service, and the hope, seldom realized, of making it a stepping-stone to a career elsewhere.[4] Once there, under MacDonald's leadership, they rapidly developed a sense of enthusiasm and esprit de corps. Unfortunately this was rooted in a sense of infinite superiority to the peoples they sought to rule. As one astute observer wrote, the various groups who came to West Africa 'share little in common, but that of an indefinable dislike and contempt for that black man they come out to govern or exploit'.[5]

Like other colonial governments, they depended heavily on African agency. Their fewness of numbers, and their inability to speak the languages of the local people, gave their African collaborators a position of great importance. We shall discuss their role in a later section of this study. The military spread of British power in Iboland, depended, like the other facets of their rule, on Africans. The Protectorate's armed forces consisted of Hausas, Yorubas, and men from Lagos and the Gold Coast, armed with machine guns, rockets, and specially constructed rifles for bush fighting.[6]

MacDonald left the Protectorate for a diplomatic post in China, in 1896. During his period in Nigeria, the steady erosion of the

[1] C.O. 520/29, folios 107 ff., data on 1907 appointments. F.O. 84/2111, MacDonald to Anderson (private), 15 December 1891. W. R. Crocker, *Nigeria, A Critique of British Colonial Administration* (London, 1936), p. 199. Frank Hives and Gascoigne Lumley, *Ju-Ju and Justice in Nigeria* (Middlesex, 1940), p. 5 and cover.

[2] 'Nemo' [A. C. Douglas], *Niger Memories* (privately printed, n.d.), pp. 1 and 15. F.O. 2/51, MacDonald to F.O., 24 April 1893. C.O. 444/1, Moor to C.O., 23 June 1899.

[3] C.O. 520/45, memo. by C. S[trachey], 28 June 1904.

[4] Douglas, pp. 1–2. F.O. 403/171 (F.O.C.P.), 'Rules and Regulations for leave of absence and pensions'. Cf. C.O. 520/26, Egerton to Antrobus (private), 5 November 1904.

[5] Harris, pp. 122–3.

[6] F.O. 2/64, 'Report on the Administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate', 16 August 1894. Cf. F.O. 84/2194, Moor to MacDonald, 9 August 1892.

autonomy of the Delta peoples, begun under his predecessors, was continued—most spectacularly, in the overthrow of the Itsekiri trader prince Nana, in 1895—but there was little impact on Iboland. His officials made some exploring journeys in the interior, including some exploration of the southern fringes of Iboland. In 1892, Campbell, the Vice Consul at Bonny, went as far as Elele, some twenty-three miles inland from the cluster of villages into which Kalabari had divided.[1] But the ignorance of Iboland remained profound—as he put it, 'The regions north of Okrika, from whence the waters of the Bonny River come are as yet totally unknown . . . The part of this district which can be called *known* to the white man consists almost entirely of mangrove swamp.'[2] The reactions of the inland peoples, insofar as they are recorded, show a mixture of apprehension, and confidence that the British would not move far from the Delta. As the gifted Roger Casement observed of the Ibibio, 'The people . . . fear our coming and dislike it even more than they fear it.'[3]

Ralph Moor succeeded MacDonald, until his retirement in 1903. Moor's career in the Protectorate began and ended in mystery. He joined the Protectorate, from the Royal Irish Constabulary, at his own expense, in 1891,[4] and committed suicide a few years after his retirement. Moor's period of power coincided with a new expansionist military policy. This was only secondarily the result of differences of personality. It was necessary to consolidate the base in the Delta before expansion was possible. But all colonial polities tend to expand, until they reach the boundary of another colonial jurisdiction. In neither Africa nor India were colonial rulers content to retain a common boundary with a free people. Moor stated this explicitly:

> The movement of administration in this country must, to render it effective, be always forward. It is impossible to remain stationary, and any attempt to do so without advance, must . . . result in a gradual drifting back.[5]

[1] F.O. 84/2194, Campbell to MacDonald, 22 February 1892, encl. in MacDonald to Salisbury, 15 March 1892. Cf. the similar journeys made by Gallwey to Benin and in Urhoboland, and by Casement in Ibibioland.
[2] F.O. 2/51, Campbell, 'Report on the Bonny District', 5 July 1892.
[3] F.O. 2/64, Casement to Acting Consul General, 4 July 1894.
[4] F.O. 84/2111, MacDonald to F.O., 22 May 1891.
[5] F.O. 403/267 (F.O.C.P.), Moor to F.O., 30 November 1898.

The foundations for this forward movement were laid towards the end of MacDonald's régime, in 1894, when a government station was established at Akwete, on the Imo River,[1] and when Moor, as Acting Consul General, startled the Foreign Office with a request for five hundred blank treaty forms, for the benefit of 'the large Ibo tribe'.[2]

The expeditions of the mid nineties took place in two main areas—the Cross River, and the Imo River. The Cross River expeditions—not unconnected with the fact that the Consul General headquarters were at Calabar, near the river's mouth—affected the Ibo people only marginally.[3] A Foreign Office official minuted grimly—though official disquiet never led to official action—'It is unfortunate that most of the Expeditions are marked by shelling and burning.'[4]

The other main areas involved were the Ibo oil markets on the lower, navigable stretches of the Imo River. In 1896, a number of small Ibo towns in the area were attacked and sacked. The incident—trivial in the whole context of Ibo history—illustrates several characteristics of the wars of expansion of these years. The towns were raided in conjunction with traders from Opobo and Bonny, who by depicting their trade rivals as 'disaffected' persuaded the British to deal them a crushing blow. This manipulation of the colonial power, by parties in internal African conflicts, which were not understood by colonial officials, has many parallels both in West and East Africa. On this occasion, the Opobo and Bonny men went further—they succeeded in raiding for slaves under the eyes of the British, and with their acquiescence.[5] This attack, too, shows us the gulf in communication which lies at the heart of the colonial situation, and occasions many of its injustices. After their town had been burnt and looted, the people concerned complained: 'The white man, much less the Consul, has never visited us . . . We seize for debt like all the other towns. We have never been told that it was wrong to harbour slaves.' And their neighbours made exactly the same point in

[1] It was, however, visited only occasionally. F.O. 403/200 (F.O.C.P.), Report on the Administration of the Niger Coast Protectorate, 16 August 1894. F.O. 2/180, Niger Coast Protectorate Annual Report, 1897–8, 'Civil Establishment'.

[2] F.O. 2/64, Moor to F.O., 20 October 1894, and memo. by C.H.H.[ill], 19 November 1894.

[3] F.O. 2/84, Moor to F.O., 11 September 1895.

[4] F.O. 2/85, memo. by C.H.H.[ill] on MacDonald to F.O., 26 November 1895.

[5] F.O. 2/101, Moor to F.O., 6 May 1896, and encl. 2, Gallwey, 'Report on the Punitory Expedition to Obohia', 25 April 1896.

different words: '. . . the King wished to know what he and his people had done that the Government had made war on them.'[1]

But by the late 1890s, Europeans had still not set eyes on most of the towns of Iboland. Effectively, they were confined to the Delta and the Niger. Their 'punitive expeditions' in the Delta's immediate hinterland, and on the Cross River, did not establish any real control over the lives of the peoples concerned.[2] The weakness of the colonial power was convincingly demonstrated by the continued recalcitrance of Okrika, which was only twenty miles from the Vice Consulate at Bonny, and easily accessible by water.[3] Another case in point was the defiance of the people of Ibaa, who were reported as 'boasting publicly of the fact that they care nought for Government—and . . . say[ing] that if the whiteman goes there they will show him what they think of him'.[4]

In those years, these obscure wars in Iboland were overshadowed by more spectacular campaigns elsewhere—notably, by the overthrow of the ancient kingdom of Benin. But by 1897, it was evident that Moor had a systematic strategy for the conquest of southern Nigeria. He planned a pincer movement, beginning with campaigns on the Cross River, in the east, and in the areas to the west of the Niger Company's jurisdiction, so that Iboland could be invaded from three sides—the south, as before, and the west and the east.[5]

But the conquest of Iboland involved peculiar tactical difficulties. Its small polities could be overthrown with relative ease, but their conquest did not necessarily have significant effects. A town was defeated and sacked. It signed a treaty, paid a fine, rebuilt its houses, replanted its crops—and continued life as before. And there was still another score of similar towns to conquer, within a twenty-mile radius.

And there was another difficulty. The European officers of the Protectorate forces, and its officials—largely drawn from the army—came to Nigeria in search of wars, as a path to honours and

[1] *Ibid.*

[2] F.O. 2/180, Annual Report, Niger Coast Protectorate, 1897–8. Cf. C.O. 520/25 Egerton to C.O., 21 January 1905.

[3] F.O. 2/151, Moor to F.O., 24 June 1896.

[4] F.O. 2/185, Report by Acting District Commissioner, Degema, 12 December 1899.

[5] F.O. 2/187, Moor to Hill, 19 February 1899, and F.O. 2/179, memo. by Moor, 17 July 1898, on Gallwey to F.O., 2 June 1898.

promotion. Perhaps not all positively enjoyed active service, but it was obligatory to pretend they did—'These military displays naturally added to the interest of service on the Coast in those early days.'[1] But the glory to be obtained in war was naturally dependent on the power and resistance of the enemy, and the burning of villages was more likely to produce anxious memoranda from the Foreign Office than the desired medals and promotions. It was necessary therefore to discover a renowned and powerful enemy. Where none existed, it was necessary to invent one. Such were the origins of the Aro expedition of 1901–2.[2]

Europeans had known of the existence of the Arochuku oracle for at least half a century. As the British came into increasing contact with the states of Ibibioland and southern Iboland, they became increasingly aware of the importance of the Aro network—though they consistently misunderstood it. In the dispatches of the 'nineties, one can see the gradual evolution of an image of the Aro as the collective *eminence grise* of Iboland, as sinister 'jujumen' and slave dealers, indelibly opposed to European advance.[3] A myth developed, which described them as superior to all other Ibo, 'over whom they domineer with an iron hand concealed under the silken meshes of deep diplomacy'.[4] Sometimes we even have the suggestions that the British conquest of Iboland would deliver her people from Aro tyranny![5] By the late 'nineties, every act in Iboland and Ibibioland which was inimical to British interests was confidently ascribed to the nefarious influence of the Aro. They were even blamed for diminished oil production at distant Oguta, and the lack of palm kernels at Atani![6] It is difficult to know how far Moor and his officials believed all this, and how far it was fabricated for the benefit of the Foreign Office, to win approval for an elaborate and expensive expedition, and to enhance the glory of the subsequent victory.

Moor urged such an expedition from 1899 on, but it was not under-

[1] H. L. Gallwey, 'West Africa Fifty Years Ago', *Journal of the African Society* (1942), XL, p. 98.

[2] For another account of this expedition, cf. Anene, pp. 222 ff.

[3] Cf., for instance, A. G. Leonard, 'Notes of a Journey to Bende', *Journal of the Manchester Geographical Society* (1898), XIV, pp. 190–207.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 207.

[5] Cf. F.O. 2/123, Niger Coast Protectorate Annual Report, 1896–7.

[6] C.O. 444/2, Moor to C.O., 9 September 1899. There are other examples in this dispatch.

taken until late 1901. In 1899, the Protectorate was transferred from the Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, and rechristened once more—this time, the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. At the end of the year, the Niger Company's Charter was revoked, and its territories south of Idah incorporated into the Protectorate. In consequence, this was no longer bisected by another colonial jurisdiction. After the delays these administrative changes imposed, a further one was occasioned by the absence of troops in the Gold Coast, for the Ashanti campaign.[1]

Like other African wars, the campaign against the Aro, which finally took place between November 1901 and March 1902, depended on the assistance of Africans. The invading forces consisted of 74 European officers and 3,464 African soldiers and carriers.[2] In the casualty lists, though some Europeans were wounded, it was only Africans who died[3]—and the much larger numbers of Ibo dead are not, of course, recorded. The invaders were well armed, their equipment including the invariable and invaluable Maxims, which Hilaire Belloc, in an often quoted couplet, correctly diagnosed as the sovereign determinant of African affairs.

The campaign began with an attack on Arochuku itself, by four converging columns, and the oracle was destroyed by early December.[4] The main part of the campaign was still to come—for Arochuku, for all its ritual significance, was of no real strategic importance, and is situated in fact on the edge of Iboland. The main part of the campaign took place in the southern areas of Iboland, and in Ibibioland. Those of the Ibo people who bore its brunt—the southern Ngwa and Ikwerri—were those who had already come into contact with Europe, both indirectly, in their role of oil suppliers, and directly, in earlier campaigns. Some new areas of Iboland were visited—notably Owerri, previously unknown to the Europeans, but destined soon to be transformed in consequence of its selection as an administrative centre. But the original plan of traversing the more

[1] C.O. 520/14, Moor, 'Memo. concerning the Aro Expedition . . .', 24 April 1902.

[2] These figures are calculated from C.O. 520/14, Montanaro, 'Military Report on the Aro Expedition', p. 7. But for different figures, cf. p. 14 of this document, and C.O. 520/14, Montanaro to Moor, 5 April 1902.

[3] *Ibid.*, Montanaro, 'Military Report', p. 13.

[4] This brief account of the campaign is distilled from the detailed reports and dispatches in C.O. 520/10 and C.O. 520/14.

northerly areas of Iboland was not followed, and most of Iboland's polities remained unvisited, and, *a fortiori*, unconquered.

An Ibo historian has stated his conviction that the Aro expedition met with little resistance.[1] The Aro themselves were unaware of the role they had assumed in British eyes, and of the intended attack, and what resistance took place was local, and ineffective. This is a view which has some evidence to support it,[2] yet it seems that resistance, although small scale, was more resolute than has hitherto been acknowledged.

It is clear that the resistance which occurred was local and unpremeditated, and inspired not by the destruction of the oracle, or any sense of loyalty to the Aro, but from the threat to the immediate vicinity. Perhaps the southern Ibo were outraged, less by the threat to life, than by the destruction of property, by the destroyed villages and the looted yam barns, and especially by the destruction of guns. Twenty-five thousand rifles and cap guns were collected and destroyed during the campaign. They represented not only a means of self-defence, but one of Iboland's most important forms of capital accumulation. Their destruction showed in concrete and unequivocal terms, the meaning of invasion, and of the loss of sovereignty.[3]

Not all areas, of course, responded to invasion in the same way. Some warned by the fate of their neighbours, surrendered—or postponed their resistance to a more propitious time.[4] The external threat did not succeed in uniting these small states in a common resistance. Apart from the intrinsic difficulties of such an action, it must have seemed impossible to organize a strategy against well armed and fast moving columns, moving rapidly and apparently at random through the country, and imposing their obscurely understood and unreasonable imperatives. Yet resistance occurred, and its pattern illustrates the local nature, in Iboland, of the heart's affections. It seems that resistance was fiercest and most prolonged in the area north of Akwete—with its prior knowledge of the enemy. To preserve the memory of a moment of the campaign:

[1] Anene, pp. 232–3.

[2] Cf. Hives and Lumley, p. 22, and A. C. Douglas, pp. 79 ff.

[3] For gun destruction, cf. C.O. 520/14, Montanaro, 'Military Report', p. 13. The policy followed with regard to property is outlined in C.O. 520/13, Report no. 13 by the Commandant, Aro Field Force, 3 January 1902, encl. in Moor to C.O., 14 January 1902.

[4] Cf. pp. 138–142 below.

> The enemy had prepared elaborate entrenchments parallel to the road and stockades across it. These trenches were from three to four feet deep, with head-cover provided by logs. Dense bush grew on either side of the path, but good scouting to the front and flanks discovered the trenches, and the enemy were invariably outflanked. The millimetre gun played on the stockades rendering them untenable. As the column advanced the enemy retired into walled compounds lying off the road, and these had to be assaulted in turn and taken at the point of the bayonet.[1]

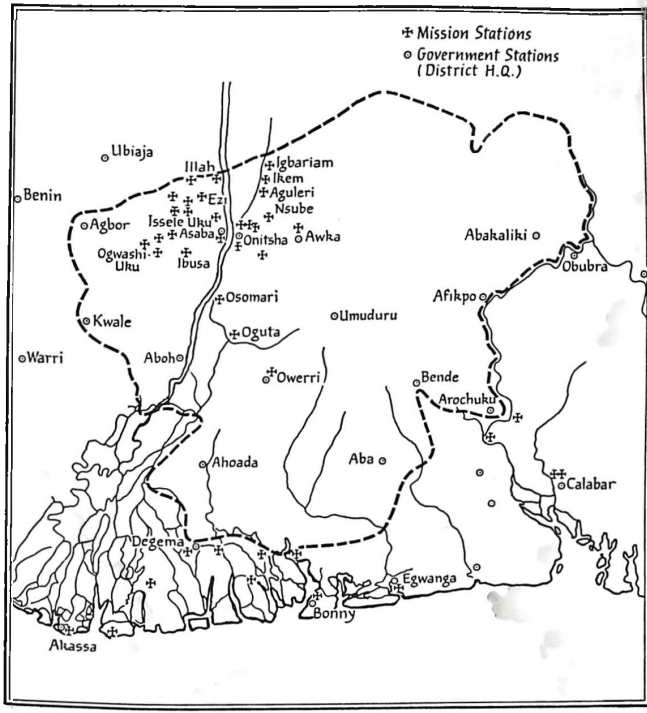
And later in the war, in another part of Iboland further west:

> The enemy as a rule employed sniping tactics only, but on the 12th February, when the column was marching from Elele to Ubele, the enemy made a determined effort to oppose the column's advance. On approaching the town of Ubele, both the Advance and the Rear Guards were simultaneously engaged, the former in fighting its way into the town whilst the latter was engaged in beating off the enemy pressing on the rear of the column. A large market place was eventually occupied, and the troops formed [a] square . . . The enemy made a determined attack on all sides of the square, advancing with great bravery, but were repulsed with heavy loss, suffering principally from the effect of Maxim and M/m gun fires.[2]

Nor should the fierce resistance of the neighbouring Ibibio—which did much to create the reputation for savagery and ferocity they enjoyed for a time—be forgotten.

But as in other wars at other times, 'great bravery' was unequally matched with a machine gun.

[1] C.O. 520/14, Montanaro, 'Military Report', p. 13.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 11.



7 Patterns of Moving Frontiers—1906

10 · The Invasion of Iboland, 1902–1906

> 'The district that has been described . . . is really quite a small portion of Nigeria; . . . but it has been the most troublesome section of any, as well as the richest.'
>
> —Colonel Kemball on Iboland, in 1909.[1]

Neither 1901–2, the years of the Aro expedition, nor 1906, the terminal year of this study, represents any real turning point in the history of the conquest of Iboland. This was a long continued process, which was still incomplete a decade later. In 1906, as in 1901, there were parts of Iboland which no European had ever seen, and British control, even in regions theoretically 'pacified', remained insecure and incomplete. One of the soldiers concerned later recalled the situation as it existed in 1904. 'Our authority only extended inland from the coast to a distance of about 50 miles, and a few miles inland only from the Niger and Cross Rivers (about 100 miles apart).'[2]

It would be wearisome to describe in detail the many patrols and conflicts of these years, and it must suffice to depict the broad pattern of British advance, and Ibo resistance. By far the largest number of patrols took place in areas already 'pacified', sometimes in response to an act of Ibo resistance, and sometimes in consequence of the colonial officials' awareness of the limits of their real control. The two processes were not necessarily distinct, for often an act of Ibo resistance provided an excuse for a campaign which had been decided on anyway—an excuse made the most of for the benefit of the Colonial Office officials in London.[3] A number of wars were fought in the Cross River area—a major field of British military

[1] E. A. Steel, 'Exploration in Southern Nigeria', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institution* (April 1910), p. 446.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 434.

[3] Cf. C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 22 August 1902, and the campaigns which followed.

expansion in the 1890s—especially against the Ikwo and the Ezza. The Ikwo came into conflict with the British in 1902, and again in 1905. They 'offered stubborn resistance and lost many men', but the experience did not discourage them in their resistance to alien rule. The years from 1905 to 1914 were 'crowded with incidents of individual hostility'. In 1914, the First World War broke out, and the sight of corpses floating down the Cross River, after a battle in the Cameroons, suggested to the Ikwo, as to another colonized people, that England's difficulty was freedom's opportunity. Their resistance was not crushed until 1918, after a gallant and sacrificial struggle.[1]

Their neighbours, the Ezza, offered little resistance in 1905, but, like other colonized peoples, did so later on, when the real significance of colonial rule became more clearly understood.[2]

Another area of obdurate resistance and repeated patrols was south-eastern Iboland—the region, roughly, lying between Owerri, Port Harcourt and Abiriba—and especially, the areas bordering the Owerri–Bende road. Often peoples who had not resisted the Aro expedition, resisted when British forces were weaker, and there was some prospect of success, or when some particular aspect of colonial rule impinged on their lives in a way which seemed intolerable. Thus in 1902, a small town south-east of Owerri attacked a District Commissioner and his escort, and forced them to flee, in a spontaneous protest against 'intrusion into their town' and thefts perpetrated by the Commissioner's party. As a result the town was first burnt, and then systematically sacked.[3] The practice of attacking convoys travelling between Owerri and Bende, punished by repeated patrols from 1902 on, continued, to such good effect that convoys were forced to make a wide detour to the south, and the Ahiara, who were responsible, sent mocking messages 'to ask when the Government intends visiting them again'.[4] In 1905, a doctor, travelling by

[1] C.O. 520/16, Moor to C.O., 18 November 1902; N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/147 (File 26804), Chapman, 'Intelligence Report on the Ikwo Clan' (1930), pp. 11–12. Cudjoe, pp. 154–8.

[2] C.O. 520/31, 'Political Report on the Ezza Patrol', encl. in Egerton to C.O., 16 July 1905. N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/116 (File 28179), Chapman, 'Intelligence Report on the Ezza Clan' (1932), p. 3. Cudjoe, p. 153.

[3] C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 13 August 1902, and encl., H. M. Douglas, 'Report on Operations in Ngor Country'.

[4] C.O. 520/31, 'Extract of Report on the Owerri District for the Quarter ending 30th June, 1905', encl. in Thorburn to C.O. (Confidential), 31 August 1905.

bicycle in the Ahiara area, was put to death, and his death, as always, was expiated in numerous, though uncounted, Ibo lives.[1]

One may pause to comment on the language in which colonial records are written—language from which important areas of the African past must be distilled. The death of a single European, at the hands of those whose country was being conquered by his compatriots, is 'a brutal murder'. The death of scores of Ibos, defending their native land with matchets and muzzle loaders in the face of machine guns, is 'a good bag of the enemy'.

The peoples of western Iboland—also, in theory, 'pacified'—have their own record of heroic resistance in these years. The Kwale people were visited in 1902 by Widenham Fosbery—one of the rare officials who genuinely preferred the methods of peace to the excitements and glories of war. Aided by the moral suasion of a force of seventy men and a machine gun, he negotiated agreements with their many small polities. In 1904, another patrol visited the area, and in the following year, a District Commissioner was established in their midst.

As elsewhere, resistance occurred when colonial rule became an experienced reality, rather than a dimly comprehended possibility. The people of the little town of Ijonnema (Ezionum), with a total estimated population of between two and three thousand, attacked the District Commissioner and his escort, and forced them to flee. The inevitable patrol followed, only to meet with one of the very few reverses suffered by British arms in the conquest of Iboland.

> The patrol attacked Ezionum on 12th October, 1905. The people stoutly defended their town and the patrol suffered a severe reverse. All three Europeans were wounded and of the rank and file one was killed and thirteen severely wounded. The patrol fell back on Abraka and then on Sapele. Two companies of the Lagos Battalion were then sent from Lagos . . . and were joined by one company of the Southern Nigeria Regiment . . . with three maxims and a 'millimetre gun'.

The usual draconian penalties followed, for the town was sacked and fined, and its population deported *en masse* to Urhoboland for some

[1] Steel, *loc. cit.*, pp. 437–8, and C.O. 520/35, Trenchard to Deputy High Commissioner, 22 December 1905, encl. in Thorburn to C.O. (Confidential), 5 January 1906.

years. But when the First World War broke out, the Kwale drew the same conclusions as the Ikwo, and broke into a general insurrection.[1]

The experience of Ezionum showed the futility of resistance by a single Ibo polity. Elsewhere in Africa, the threat of colonial aggression was sometimes sufficient to force hitherto disunited peoples to create new unities, often with the help of religious symbolism. Thus the Shona and Ndebele peoples of Southern Rhodesia united against their invaders in 1896–7, and the peoples of southern Tanzania fought the Maji Maji War against the Germans in 1905. Although both risings were ultimately unsuccessful, they shook the colonial power to its foundations.

Ibo history does not reveal any combinations of this scale and effectiveness, though on occasion former enemies united together to fight the British.[2] But the Ekumeku risings in the hinterland of Asaba, though on a smaller scale, have much in common with them. They show a determined attempt to rise above the particular loyalties of each little independent state, and create a new unity to oppose the colonial enemy. They attempted to do this by adapting traditional institutions.

'Ekumeku' is an archaic Ibo word with the sense of 'breathing' or 'dispersal'.[3] It was the name of a secret society which existed independently in many towns of the western Ibo interior, and among the neighbouring Afenmai.[4] The missionary, Strub, gives us what is probably the best account of it, derived from an informant who was a former member. He describes it as a secret police force-cum-guerilla band, which placed itself at the service of the rulers of a town. 'One cannot deny that the Ekumeku formed the élite of the most capable of the young people.'[5] It was to these secret societies, created to meet

[1] C.O. 520/32, 'Disturbances in Kwale Country', 8 September 1905, encl. in Thorburn to C.O. (Confidential), 7 October 1905, and Thorburn to C.O. (Confidential), 18 November 1905. N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/10 (File 26769), Williams and Miller, 'Intelligence Report on Aboh-Benin Clans of Warri Province' (1930–1), pp. 29–30.

[2] Cf. C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 13 October 1902, and encl., for the way in which the Ibeku and Olokoro people overcame their traditional mutual antipathy to attack Bende-Owerri convoys.

[3] For various interpretations, see G. T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria* (London, 1921), pp. 205–6, and S.M.A. 14/80404/15794, Strub, 'Le Vicariat Apostolique de la Nigerie Occidentale depuis sa fondation jusqu'à nos jours' (1928), fo. 13 (henceforward, Strub).

[4] Strub, fo. 13.

[5] *Ibid.* Cf. the more hostile account in Basden, *Among the Ibos*, pp. 205–8.

needs in traditional society, that western Ibo states looked to meet a new challenge—the spread of colonial rule.

In the mid 1890s, the rulers of the states of the western Ibo interior gradually came to a resolve to unite in an effort to expel the Royal Niger Company, using the Ekumeku societies as their instruments. Several years of negotiation were necessary to resolve the problems created by the need for united action, and the jealously guarded autonomy of each little state, and even when agreement was reached, each Ekumeku band fought independently, under its own commander, though side by side.[1] In 1898, they rose in an insurrection 'for the express purpose of . . . driving out of the country all foreigners and everything foreign'.[2] Both missionaries and Company officials fled to the relative safety of Asaba, and soon the Ekumeku controlled the whole Asaba hinterland, except for Asaba itself, the village of Okpanam, some four miles distant, and Issele-Uku, garrisoned by the Company's troops. They used guerilla tactics, attacking, and then disappearing along a maze of forest paths. They sacked the deserted mission stations, and news of their success reached the neighbouring Ishan peoples, who sent reinforcements for the struggle. After suffering several reverses, the forces of the Royal Niger Company succeeded in crushing the rising, with much bloodshed. Strub considered that if it had been united under a single capable leader, the movement could have taken over the whole west bank of the Niger, and threatened the European presence there.[3]

This was not, as was thought at the time, the end of the Ekumeku. Gradually, the societies regrouped, and recouped their strength. In 1900, the Royal Niger Company gave way to the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In 1902, in response to the fears of traders and missionaries that another rising was imminent, a patrol was sent against the Ekumeku, capturing many of its leaders and imprisoning them in distant Calabar.[4]

But the Ekumeku survived, and in 1904, despite their memories of the failures of the past, they broke out in another major rising. The

[1] Strub, fo. 13.

[2] E. Dennis, 'The Rising of the Ekwumekwu', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1904), p. 83.

[3] This paragraph is based on *ibid.* and on Strub, folios 14–15.

[4] C.O. 520/18, Fosbery to High Commissioner, Southern Nigeria, 2 January 1903.

immediate occasion was dissatisfaction with the workings of the recently established Native Courts, and the abuses and corruption they manifested.[1] Mission property was unharmed, but 'Native Christians and others suspected of foreign sympathies have been made to suffer equally with the foreigners themselves.'[2] None lost their lives, but many lost their property and were forced to flee.

In 1904, the Ekumeku changed their tactics. They abandoned the guerilla warfare, which had enjoyed much success in 1898, and concentrated on the separate defence of each town[3]—a decision which reflected the continuing paramountcy of local loyalties. The change of tactics was disastrous, for it was relatively easy to isolate and conquer the little states, one by one, and their defences—clay walls and ditches—offered no protection against machine guns. The turning point of the rising was the siege of Uburuku, a town which, unlike its allies, had excellent natural defences. After several days of gallant resistance, the town fell. It was the end of the rising, for 'the others in the league understood that they could not resist an enemy who had conquered the bravest of their number, and returned to their homes'.[4]

At least three hundred of those involved in the movement were imprisoned in Calabar, and many died there.[5] A missionary in western Iboland described the consequences of failure in war. 'Result: many towns destroyed, four to five hundred killed; four hundred prisoners. On the British side, one European killed, another wounded, a dozen soldiers killed. All the farms are devastated, and yams, banana groves and cassava, all destroyed.'[6] But it was still not the end of the Ekumeku, and in 1909, resistance broke out again in the Ogwashi area, which was only suppressed after five months of

[1] C.O. 520/24, W. E. B. Copland-Crawford, 'Report on the Rising of the Ekumeku Society in Asaba Hinterland, 1904', 25 April 1904; encl. in Egerton to C.O., 22 May 1904. Cf. E. Dennis, *loc. cit.*, p. 84.

[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1904/27, Dennis to Baylis, 19 January 1904. Paul O. Emecete, 'Story of My Life', *The African Missionary* (November–December 1919), p. 3.

[3] Strub, fo. 21.

[4] Strub, fo. 22. C.O. 520/24, 'Report on Asaba Hinterland Operations', 14 March 1904, encl. in Egerton to C.O., 7 May 1904.

[5] C.O. 520/24, Copland-Crawford, 'Report on the Rising of the Ekumeku Society in Asaba Hinterland, 1904', encl. in Egerton to C.O., 22 May 1904. Non-official sources put the number higher. Cf. C.S.Sp. 191/A/II, cutting from Depêche Coloniale, 13 June 1905, annotated 'C'est très vrai dit le P. Lejeune'.

[6] C.S.Sp. 192/B/III, Lejeune to Superior General, 17 March 1904.

guerilla warfare.[1] And the western Ibo continue to cherish the memory of the Ekumeku, of those 'select men, brave, courageous, with military prowess', such as Dunkwu Isusu of Onicha-Olona, and Nwadiaju, of Issele Mkpitima.[2]

By 1906, the conquest of Iboland was in no sense completed. A missionary wrote in 1910 that 'Almost continual expeditions, which the newspapers never mention, take place in the interior of the country.'[3] This resistance continued through the period of the First World War and beyond. The Women's Riots of 1929, with their tragic sequel, were not an isolated protest, but were an affirmation of a continuing tradition of resistance.

The conquest of Iboland showed clearly that small states are no match in war for large states. Many responses to colonial invasion were possible. In this chapter we have studied Ibo resistance. In subsequent chapters we shall analyse the gamut of other possible responses.

The Ibo people resisted colonial conquest with courage, and sometimes with temporary success. But the enormous disparity in armaments and in state resources meant that the contest was a hopelessly unequal one, and the colonial presence was first known as a source of fear, bewilderment and despair. A British official analysed the history of a northern Ibo village group in the 1930s. Their history emerged as 'a series of public disasters of the greatest magnitude', beginning with raids by neighbour states, and continuing to 'the coming of Government in the person of a white man nicknamed Otikpo, the destroyer'.[4] The officer responsible for the 'pacification' of much of northern Iboland has the doubtful honour of being remembered as 'the Destroyer' in a whole series of Ibo towns.[5]

[1] Ferrieux, letter of 1 October 1910, in *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* (1911), pp. 72 ff.

[2] Asaba oral tradition.

[3] C.S.Sp. 192/B/VI, Léna to Superior General, 21 December 1910.

[4] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/211 (File 29180), Clark, Intelligence Report on Nkanu (North) Villages of Udi Division (1933), p. 5.

[5] N.A.I. C.S.O. 26/211 (File 29180), Clark, Report on Nkanu (North) Villages of Udi Division, fo. 5; C.S.O. 26/19 (File 30752), Stone and Milne, Report on Adaba, Nkume, Okpata and Umulokpa Villages of Onitsha Division, fo. 7; C.S.O. 26/42 (File 29881), Barmby, Report on Akwegbe, Ohodo, Ozalla, Lejja Ede and Opi Villages, of Nsukka Division, fo. 5; C.S.O. 26/49 (File 30537), Barmby, Report on Ani, Eror, Nsukka and Ibeagwa Villages of Nsukka Division, fo. 6.

The conquerors of Iboland believed that the end justified the means, and that the sufferings inflicted by the imposition of British rule were outweighed by the blessings that rule would introduce. They believed that they were rescuing the Ibo people from a dark world of cruel barbarism and savagery. It is now obvious that this view rested on a mistaken and distorted stereotype of Ibo society. It remains, however, true, that our final verdict on the process of colonial conquest must depend in large part on our assessment of the colonial experience which followed, and its impact on the lives of the people concerned. This is a theme to which we shall return. Meanwhile we must analyse another dimension of Ibo history—the work of the missionaries, in the era of the Royal Niger Company, and of colonial rule.

11 · The Missionary Presence, 1885–1906

'We came but for souls, that was all our commission.'
—Edmund Campion at his trial, in 1581.

The middle 1880s saw a radical change in the character and context of missionary activity in Iboland. For the past thirty years, it had been the preserve of Sierra Leonian agents of the Church Missionary Society, working within the framework, not of colonialism, but of autonomous African states. Now both the agents of missionary work and the context of their endeavours was to change. Two new missionary societies began work in Iboland, both of them Catholic—the Congregation of the Holy Ghost and the Society of African Missions, while the C.M.S. Niger Mission was so changed by the troubles which afflicted it that it became to all intents and purposes a new mission. Only the C.M.S. churches in the Delta, which responded to these trials by creating an independent Pastorate, carried on the old tradition of Sierra Leonian missionary work. They were to consolidate the pioneering work of Ibo trader-missionaries, establishing catechists and churches in the southern Ibo oil markets.[1]

The history of the C.M.S. Niger Mission in the 'nineties is one of slow and painful reconstruction from a state of utter ruin. We have seen how it was destroyed by Europeans, in the name of a higher missionary ideal. But the critics themselves soon left the mission. Some died or were invalided home, others were dismissed, or resigned in pique or disillusion, and for a time Archdeacon Dobinson was their only survivor on the Niger. More agents were sent from England, many of them women, but their high rate of turnover and frequent home leaves inevitably introduced 'an element of change and instability'.[2] As before, the mission was weakened by the

[1] Cf. pp. 88–9 above.
[2] *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1900), p. 79.

absence of its bishop, for the European who succeeded Crowther,[1] Bishop Tugwell, was based in Lagos, and his energies were deflected by the twin chimeras of Prohibition and the Conversion of Hausaland.

The tragedies and injustices of the 'eighties have tended to obscure the achievements of those who came afterwards. This should not be so. They included Dobinson himself, 'a marvel of self control, patience, & love' who won the confidence of the Ibo people to a singular degree,[2] and Archdeacon Dennis, who continued the work of translation which Dobinson began, and whose achievements, affectionately embroidered with legend, are well preserved in oral tradition. Sidney Smith and George Basden, who also came at this time, were both destined to crown long years of work in Iboland by writing substantial studies of Ibo life.

But although Europeans had assumed control of the mission, its day-to-day work continued to depend on Africans. Sierra Leonians were now understandably reluctant to join it, though the Reverend Julius Spencer, a solitary survivor of the purges of the 'eighties, survived to give many years of service to Iboland. Several West Indians of African descent also joined the mission—just as they had played a major role in the Presbyterian mission in Calabar. Most African agents were, however, Ibos, who, paradoxically, played a much more important role in the era of European leadership. Typically, they were men of little education, who had worked for the Royal Niger Company as gardeners, carpenters, or servants.[3] But carpenters-turned-evangelists could point to the best of all possible Precedents, and some were men of piety and devotion. Joseph Obimgbo Egbola, a former gardener, may stand for their number. His life's work was the building up of a Christian congregation in Akwukwu, a work he furthered greatly by his knowledge of herbal remedies. When he died, a church holding 600 was necessary to contain his flock. 'He was a spiritually minded man, very unassuming, but exercising a remarkable influence over his people . . . He said, "I did not get much teaching from the C.M.S., all I know I learned

[1] After Bishop Hill, who died as soon as he reached Nigeria.

[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1895, Tugwell to Baylis, 18 November 1894; Basden, *Among the Ibos*, p. 298.

[3] C.M.S. G3/A3/1897/109, Battersby, 'Report of a Visit to the Niger Mission'.

from God's word." "[1] By 1907, there were seventy such Ibo agents in the mission.

The troubles which beset it meant that the extent of C.M.S. missionary work actually shrank in the last two decades of the century. Crowther had been criticized for his failure to evangelize certain large Niger Ibo towns, such as Atani. But now the old stations of Alenso and Osomari were either given up or worked spasmodically, and in the 1890s, C.M.S. work was confined to Asaba, Onitsha, and nearby Obosi—this last, a station pioneered by Onitsha Christians. It was said in 1899, that 'Onitsha and Asaba have been overworked while the rest of the Ibo country has been almost totally neglected except for spasmodic or ill-sustained efforts'.[2]

Within these centres, the success obtained was very limited, as before. Like their predecessors, the missionaries complained of a tendency to eclecticism. Their Catholic rivals claimed, doubtless with some exaggeration, that eight out of ten Protestant converts became polygamists.[3] After a short period of expansion, the Onitsha congregation dwindled in the 1890s—a change doubtless connected with the great unpopularity of the Royal Niger Company.[4] In Asaba, the mission gained accessions from the freed slaves, who gladly attended church 'merely to please the Oyibos . . . who had delivered them from death'.[5] But in Asaba, too, the congregation remained a tiny minority—perhaps two hundred, in 1897, in a town with a population of over ten thousand.[6] And in Obosi, a disillusioned missionary gave a summary which can stand for the whole history of C.M.S. endeavour on the Niger in the nineteenth century:

> In a small district we perhaps touch one percent of the people, the remainder are indifferent or hostile to our work. While it is true that compared with the Mohammedan zone, we have made some progress, yet progress is painfully slow & the great mass of heathenism around is still untouched . . . At first they receive us gladly, but as soon as there are any converts & the inevitable

[1] Julius Spencer and others, 'Joseph Obimgbo Egbola and his Witness for Christ', *Western Equatorial Diocesan Magazine* (1904), pp. 15 ff.
[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1899/112, T. J. Dennis to Baylis, 17 July 1899.
[3] C.S.Sp. 191/B/IX, Report by Lejeune, Onitsha, 24 November 1901.
[4] Dobinson, *Letters*, p. 52.
[5] C.M.S. G3/A3/1892/52, Spencer, Asaba Annual Report, 1891.
[6] *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1897), p. 256.

collision between heathen customs and heathen principles takes place, this cordiality is replaced by coldness and suspicion.[1]

1884 brought an end to the C.M.S.'s long monopoly of mission work on the lower Niger. The Society of African Missions decided to establish a station there when the river was still an arena of Anglo-French commercial rivalry. They went there at the invitation of a French company, but when the first band of three reached Lokoja, towards the end of 1884, they found the French on the point of leaving.[2] Years of difficulty and discouragement followed. Naturally, the missionaries lamented the French withdrawal—it was said of the Lokoja mission that it flew the tricolor, and was known as the French, rather than as the Catholic mission.[3] The more fundamental difficulty was the inherent one of obtaining converts to Christianity in a Muslim area. A more promising beginning came in 1888, when Sir James Marshall, the Royal Niger Company's Chief Justice, invited the Fathers to Asaba. A young Milanese priest, Carlo Zappa, accepted, and soon afterwards the Lokoja post was given up. The mission, now centred on Asaba, was destined to be ruled by Zappa until his death in 1917.

The Holy Ghost Fathers, coming to the lower Niger a little later, in 1885, established the first Catholic mission in Iboland. They, too, did so at the invitation of a French trading company. It was originally intended to settle at the Confluence, but transport difficulties, created by the Royal Niger Company's hostility, defeated them, and they went no further than Onitsha.[4] There they obtained land through the good offices of the aged Bishop Crowther, to whom it was already ceded. 'I acquired this land for God's cause, take it.'[5] This pleasantly amicable relationship was to continue, though the C.M.S. might well have resented their settlement at a well-established centre of Protestant mission work, when so many towns lacked missionary

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1897, Bennett to Baylis, 27 March 1897.

[2] Holley, 'A travers les pays du Niger', fo. 6 of typed copy in S.M.A. Archives. (Also printed in *Les Missions Catholiques* (1884). S.M.A. 14/80302, Poirier to Superior General, 9 November 1884.)

[3] C.S.Sp. 191/B/I, Folder labelled 'R. P. Lutz, 1889–1896'. Marshall to Barthet, 19 June 1889 (French trans. of English original).

[4] C.S.Sp. 191/A/5, letter from Leroy (C.S.Sp. Superior General) in *Echo de l'Art* (3 April 1904) (cutting); 191/B/II, historical account by Lejeune, based on community journals, 1902.

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[5] C.S.Sp. 191/B/II, Lejeune, historical account.

activity altogether. The hostility of the Royal Niger Company, similarly, was to persist and deepen, as the Fathers espoused the grievances of the Onitsha people, which endeared them to the Onitshas, but scarcely to the Company.

Both the Society of African Missions and the Congregation of the Holy Ghost were founded in France in the middle years of the nineteenth century, part of a sudden upsurge of interest in foreign missions, which has often been explained in terms of the growth of interest in colonies abroad, but which was in reality, like the Evangelical revival, a complex social phenomenon deserving more searching analysis from historians. It produced a large number of missionary societies, large and small, supported in part by a number of independent fund-raising organizations, the most important of which was the Association for the Propagation of the Faith. France supplied the lion's share both of finance—collected in small amounts from many humbly circumstanced members—and of personnel.

Both the Catholic missions on the Niger were staffed predominantly by Alsatians—reflecting the long continued importance of Alsace and Brittany as sources of Catholic missionary vocations. They were young—like their equivalents in the C.M.S.—often in their late twenties or early thirties. Many were to die young, either on the Niger or in other mission fields.[1] Both missions grappled with a degree of grinding poverty unknown to the C.M.S. The small sums they received from fund-raising organizations were inadequate to their needs, and were largely dispensed in charity. The Holy Ghost Fathers mission had been established for fifteen years when its two main centres were described in these terms:

> All the *houses* are built in wood & mud. The wood is rotten, the walls are split, and the tatched [*sic*] roofs pierced in thirty or forty places, let in by turn both rain and sunshine. The *Church* is a wreck, its mud walls, likewise split in many places threaten to fall upon us . . . The *School Buildings* are mere ruins . . . Aguleri is still worse than Onitsha.[2]

The S.M.A. mission was to retain this 'special cachet of poverty' well into the twentieth century.[3]

[1] For details re personnel, see the annual publications, *État de la Société* (S.M.A.) and *État du Personnel* (C.S.Sp.).

[2] C.S.Sp. 191/A/3, General Report on the Lower Niger (anon. but Lejeune, 1900).

[3] S.M.A. 11/200/40542, Chabert to Lacquerie (transcript), 1921–2.

Partly because of this poverty—which government subsidies to Catholic schools and the contributions of Ibo Christians were ultimately to alleviate—the Fathers shared to a large extent the standard of living of their flock. They mastered their language to a degree which few of their successors have been able to emulate and to which Zappa's *Essai de Dictionnaire Français–Ibo* is a permanent memorial.[1] It is a paradox, which is equally true of the C.M.S., that these nineteenth-century missionaries, for all their mastery of Ibo language and customs, had a basically dark view of Ibo society, and believed that the souls of the unconverted were likely to be lost.[2] In a later day, when, largely through the work of anthropologists, the many excellences of Ibo religion and custom had become generally accepted, Ibo congregations took it for granted that they should hear missionary sermons through an interpreter.

The many similarities between the two Catholic missions, included, fortuitously, some parallels in their leadership. The Holy Ghost mission was founded by an Alsatian, Father Lutz, whose career on the Niger was overshadowed by troubles with the Royal Niger Company. After his death, and that of several short-lived successors, Father Léon Lejeune assumed the leadership, in 1900. He was a fiery idealist, whose zeal led to conflicts both with his colleagues and his flock, but in his five years on the Niger he transformed the mission's policies, beginning the wholehearted adoption of education as the primary means of evangelization, which is often credited to his Irish successor, Bishop Shanahan, whose career lies beyond the time limits of this book. After five years, Lejeune was forced by mortal illness to leave the Niger. He died in France of cancer of the throat, displaying not merely equanimity, but gaiety. He had spent twenty of his forty-five years in Africa.[3]

The personality of Father Carlo Zappa moulded the history of the S.M.A. mission until his death in 1917. He was a man cast in a heroic mould, of iron strength and energy, called Ozokpokpo, in reference to his incessant journeys on foot. He showed an equal severity towards his colleagues, his catechumens, and himself. His

[1] C. Zappa, *Essai de Dictionnaire Français–Ibo ou Français–Ika* (Lyon, 1904) (written in collaboration with an Ibo catechist, Jacob Nwaokobia).

[2] Cf. Strub, in *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1922), p. 61. C.S.Sp. 191/A/5, biography of Lutz, by Ebenrecht, folios 34–6.

[3] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XXIII, pp. 491–502.

ideal of missionary action was pastoral, and indeed, paternalist. 'To show authority, to command instead of to ask, seems to the Prefect the only good method for the two districts.'[1] He was a man widely regarded as a saint, and he formed some saintly Ibo converts. Descriptions of the congregations of western Iboland in his time are often more reminiscent of a monastery than of a parish. But he weakened the mission by delaying the adoption of educational work, and it was not, in the long run, the way to form an adult, self-aware and self-perpetuating Christianity.

Both missions depended heavily on the work of Ibo catechists. It was regarded as a special vocation, chosen, in the colonial period, in preference to better paid posts elsewhere—'il restera toujours pauvre'.[2] In 1906, the Holy Ghost mission had ten priests, five lay brothers, and thirty-three African catechists.[3] One of the most outstanding of the S.M.A. catechists was Thaddeus, originally a slave from Afenmai, who ran a number of catechists' posts before working in catechists' formation. He was probably the anonymous catechist of Okpanam, who when living on a salary of 7*s.* 6*d.* a month, which he had to supplement by farm work, voluntarily supported several lepers.[4]

Both laid great emphasis on works of charity. The S.M.A., like the C.M.S., found a ready-made congregation in the gratitude and necessities of Asaba's liberated slaves. They assisted them so effectively that it became a proverb, that 'when one is destitute or hopeless of life he goes to Romani'. This kind of work—amateur medical care, the support of lepers, of the aged and of abandoned infants—was carried out largely by nuns. A favourite activity among both missions was baptizing the dying. This work alone was thought to justify a mission's existence, peopling heaven with 'a magnificent phalanx of angels'.[5] The same combination of personal poverty and practical charity was strikingly characteristic of the Holy Ghost Fathers across the Niger. A Protestant missionary paid tribute to

[1] S.M.A. 2E.30, Pellet, Journals (volume re Western Nigeria), fo. 134.
[2] *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1922), p. 9.
[3] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XXIV, p. 144.
[4] S.M.A., Pellet, Journals (volume re Western Nigeria), folios 154–7. *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1922), p. 19. Oral tradition adds more details.
[5] *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1904), p. 27.

their 'active charity, devotions and self abasements' and many traders and officials echoed the theme.[1]

Both sought to effect conversions by the individual visitation of adults. This was a slow and difficult process, largely because of the stipulation that a convert renounce all but one of his wives. As we have seen, congregations gathered in this way showed great fervour. Catholic missionaries, like Protestants, complained of eclecticism among their flock, but as I have tried to show elsewhere, piety and eclecticism are not necessarily irreconcilable.[2] But like the C.M.S., they touched only a tiny part of Ibo society. In 1898, when the S.M.A. had eleven stations, eight of them in Iboland, it had only fifty indigenous adult converts.[3] In the 1920s, a Father reflecting on a long missionary experience concluded:

> A large part of the population, sometimes the immense majority, and with it all the youth, is untouched by it . . . It has been observed everywhere that in spite of the regularity of house to house visits, the number of catechumens diminishes gradually, even to zero, so that a post is threatened with extinction in the more or less distant future.[4]

And the practice of charity meant inevitably that many, though not all converts were drawn from the poor and needy.[5] Mission congregations acquired a reputation for poverty and helplessness which boded ill for the Christianization of Iboland.

Like the C.M.S., their impact was further limited by the small number of their stations. Both missions tended to cluster round a central station on the Niger. When they moved further afield, it was often in response to Ibo initiatives. The Holy Ghost Fathers' second station, at Aguleri, was founded in response to insistent requests from Idigo, a titled man of the town, who founded a Christian village by the waterside. Hoping that they had found a Constantine, the Fathers actually procured a horse for him to

[1] C.M.S. G3/A3/1887, Annual Report, Onitsha, 1886. Cf. *West Africa* (September 1900); Morel, p. 27; A. C. G. Hastings, *Nigerian Days* (London, 1925), p. 11; Langa Langa, *Up Against it in Nigeria* (London, 1922), p. 16.

[2] Elizabeth Isichei, 'Seven Varieties of Ambiguity: Some Patterns of Igbo Response to Christian Missions', *The Journal of Religion in Africa* (1970), III, 3.

[3] Strub, folios 11–12.

[4] *Ibid.*, fo. 25. It should be noted that mission registers give an exaggerated idea of congregations, for they include many baptized in articulo mortis, who later recovered.

[5] C.S.Sp. 191/A/3, [Lejeune], General Report . . . on the Lower Niger.

sacrifice, to obtain the town's highest title.[1] Several other stations in the Anambra Valley followed, with little success. The next advance came when the C.M.S. congregation at Osomari adopted Catholicism *en masse*, under the leadership of Jacob Akubeze.[2] He was also responsible for the next advance—to the wealthy and strategically sited town of Oguta.[3] The work was not confined to Iboland. There was a gallant though unsuccessful venture on the Benue, and a highly successful establishment at Calabar. But the mission's main work was in a small area of Iboland, and complaints were made that Onitsha and Aguleri absorbed the lion's share of finance and personnel.[4]

The history of the S.M.A.'s mission was shaped by the dialectic between Zappa's passionate desire to expand, on the one hand, and the limits of finance and personnel on the other. Half a dozen stations in the western Ibo interior were established. But just as the lack of results at Lokoja had led to the move to Asaba, the slow rate of progress in Iboland led the Fathers to seek a more promising field among the neighbouring Afenmai. But progress here proved equally slow. Gradually the mission expanded, embracing an increasing number of the many peoples and languages of what is now the Mid West State. It was most successful among the Ibo, who by 1911, comprised 1,553 of the 2,086 Catholics on the registers.[5]

By the end of the nineteenth century, missionary activity had made little progress in Iboland. It was confined to a few stations on or near the Niger and its tributaries, and even within these centres affected only a minority of the population. The Catholics, in particular, had succeeded in gathering congregations which were fervent, though small. But even there fervour depended largely on creating and maintaining an artificially protected environment. The missionary ideal was the Christian village of Aguleri, with its members drawn largely from 'poor & castoff creatures',[6] which led a corporate religious life of almost monastic regularity. ('Our Christians follow the holy offices exactly, even during the week, and when night has

[1] C.S.Sp. 191/A/I,3, Lutz, 'Les Agouleris', 2 January 1892.
[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1899/26, T. J. Dennis, Annual Letter. C.S.Sp. 191/B/II, Lejeune, Historical Account, 1902.
[3] Lejeune, Historical Account, 1902.
[4] C.S.Sp. 192/B/IV, Shanahan to Superior General, 28 August 1907.
[5] Strub, folios 9–10 and 22–3.
[6] C.S.Sp. 191/A/3, [Lejeune], General Report . . . on the Lower Niger.

fallen one hears the voice of men addressing to heaven the beautiful prayer of the rosary.')[1] In the more cosmopolitan environment of Onitsha, where Christians came into contact with men of many religions or none, both Catholics and Protestants lamented a very different state of affairs. 'A thankless task among a thankless people . . . Religion is only wanted for material purposes.'[2] Despite the sacrifices of many missionaries, both black and white, Catholic and Protestant, who had laboured and died in Iboland, the missionary enterprise had on the whole achieved singularly little success.

In 1899, the Royal Niger Company lost its charter, and the area became part of the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. The development of colonial rule, and its gradual extension over Iboland, were destined to transform the missionary situation.

It helped the spread of mission work by improving communications and creating a context of 'law and order', which, unlike the traditional one, could be relied on to defend missionary interests. The Catholic missions took little advantage of this, in the period covered by this study, for both were temporarily preoccupied with foundations outside Iboland. The C.M.S. profited by developments to open up a large number of small stations on either side of the Niger. But they went no further than Awka—and even that was heralded as a great leap to the interior. But the spread of colonial rule was to lead to missionary penetration of the whole Ibo interior in years to come.

The spread of colonial rule gave missions a new prestige and authority, for now towns invited them in the hope of obtaining friends and advocates *vis-à-vis* their new rulers. A C.M.S. missionary observed of Awka, that 'The motives which prompted such church-building zeal were undoubtedly mixed, and the rumour that British troops were in the vicinity probably helped to induce the chiefs to declare themselves in this way as friends of the Oyibo.'[3]

But the main change in the missionary situation was that under colonial rule the Ibo people had a real incentive to seek Western type education. The Delta peoples had long appreciated the value of education, and some rich men had sought it for their children in

[1] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XVII, p. 430.
[2] C.S.Sp. 191/B/IV, Shanahan, Visite Provinciale, 1912.
[3] Sidney, Smith, 'Oka', *Western Equatorial Africa Diocesan Magazine* (1906), p. 4.

other West African colonies, or even in England.[1] On the Niger, under Company rule, when local people were employed only as servants, there was no such incentive.

The incentive which colonialism brought was twofold. On the one hand, the people needed to communicate with their new masters, especially since the channels of communication tended to fall into the hands of corrupt intermediaries. On the other hand, the government needed Africans who were educated—albeit to a low level—to fill the posts in its lower echelons which had otherwise to be filled by Africans imported from elsewhere. The commercial firms, similarly, needed clerks and artisans, and were prepared, on occasion, to subsidize the schools which would supply them.[2] For the first time, education was seen as the gateway to economic opportunity by the Ibo people themselves. 'They realise as they never did before that knowledge is power, and that it can command a good salary.'[3] A missionary who went to Owerri in 1905 recorded 'that if he had accepted all the lads offered him for training on this journey he could have brought home a small army to Asaba'.[4]

The level of education available was low, but the range of occupations then available to Africans was limited—'they had the choice of becoming policemen, clerks, or teachers'—and it rapidly created a new élite. The question of why the Ibo people responded so eagerly to these opportunities is in itself an interesting historical question. It may perhaps be explained by the substantial mobility and freedom of choice in traditional Ibo society, and the way in which status and rank were achieved, rather than inherited.[5]

The educational system which resulted sprang from a marriage of convenience. The government was eager to use the missions' personnel and expertise in running the schools, and provided subsidies accordingly. To the missions, the new state of affairs offered both a solution to their financial problems, and the opportunity to exercise

[1] F.O. 2/123, Annual Report, Niger Coast Protectorate, 1896–7, 'Education'.

[2] *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1898), p. 15. C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 29 October 1902.

[3] J. N. Cheetham, 'Work in the Ibo Country', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1901), p. 28.

[4] *Western Equatorial Africa Diocesan Magazine* (1906), p. 43.

[5] Cf. Simon Ottenberg, 'Ibo Receptivity to Change', in William R. Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (eds.), *Continuity and Change in African Cultures* (Chicago, 1959), pp. 130 ff.

a real influence on Iboland, which they had sought in vain for so long.

The Holy Ghost Fathers, under the leadership of Lejeune, and subsequently of Shanahan, seized the opportunity. By 1906, their educational work was well established, with 24 schools and approximately 3,000 pupils.[1] 'All our prestige in this country comes from the fact that we are considered great educators.'[2] By 1910, they had already begun to create a new élite: 'Our children are throughout the Colonies of Northern and Southern Nigeria. They occupy excellent posts, mainly with the Government.'[3] To strengthen this work, Alsatians were gradually replaced by Irishmen, and in the years that followed, the Fathers' school system continued its expansion.

The C.M.S. and the S.M.A. Fathers responded to the new situation more slowly, for basically similar reasons. We have seen Zappa's commitment to a different pattern of missionary action. At first he showed little enthusiasm for schools, believing that children who attended mission schools for material reasons were unlikely to become devout Christians.[4] Some of his colleagues agreed with him; others became increasingly restive as they observed the successes of the Holy Ghost Fathers across the Niger. 'Both Christians and pagans want some schools directed by us, in the absence of which the children will go elsewhere, and since our chapels are frequented by scarcely any but the old, I ask myself what we are going to do.'[5] By 1911, Zappa himself had become convinced of the necessity of an educational programme,[6] but was handicapped by the lack of English-speaking personnel. Then the war intervened, and it was not until after 1918 that the mission, under an Irish bishop, made a serious entry into this field.

The C.M.S. responded equally slowly, for the evangelicals who ran its Niger Mission had a deep emotional commitment to preaching and missionary journeys. In 1900, one of them asked, 'What method of missionary effort is most suited to the type and condition of the Ibo people?' He answered his own question, 'Simple evangelical preaching', claiming that education 'must . . . take a secondary

[1] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XXIV, p. 144.
[2] C.S.Sp. 192/B/III, Shanahan to Superior General, 13 November 1905.
[3] C.S.Sp., *Bulletin de la Congregation*, XXVI, p. 864.
[4] Strub, folios 26–7.
[5] S.M.A. 14/80303/16285, Cermenati to [Pellet], 14 June 1907.
[6] S.M.A. 14/80405/15791, Zappa to Pellet, 12 February 1911.

place'.[1] This was precisely the attitude of Zappa, though probably neither party would have admitted the resemblance.

This is not to say that the C.M.S. neglected education entirely. Its resources were greater, both in finance and in personnel, and it did not, of course, cope with the peculiar difficulty of the Catholic missions, staffed with French-speaking members, in an English-speaking colony. The Delta Pastorate ran eight schools, with a total, at the end of our period, of 764 pupils—not all, of course, in Iboland. An Industrial School was established, first in Brass, and later in Onitsha, and a training centre for catechists led a similarly peripatetic existence. There were several elementary schools on the Niger, and Edith Warner, then near the beginning of a long missionary career, founded a boarding school for girls at Onitsha, which was financed largely by the pupils' manual labour. Archdeacon Dennis, with great foresight, urged the creation of a boys' secondary school, as 'one of the most crying needs of Nigeria'.[2] But the project came to nothing, though it was realized in later years in the school which perpetuates his memory, the Dennis Memorial Grammar School.

In the period covered by this book, the missionaries were probably the only Europeans who came to Iboland with the primary intention of seeking Iboland's good, however narrowly that good was defined. But mission records have their own form of myopia, which easily communicates itself to the historian. Inevitably, they emphasize the progress made, and however great this was, in comparison with the past, one easily forgets how small their impact was, and how few and insufficient their schools, in terms of the whole context and needs of Ibo society. By 1906, there were probably, at the outside, 6,000 Ibo children at school. The numbers are large in comparison with the nineteenth century, but represent only a tiny minority of Iboland's children.

We have examined the pattern of moving frontiers, by which colonial rule was established in Iboland, and the important variable of missionary influence. In the closing chapters of this book we must turn to the crucial question—to what extent did these actually affect the lives of the Ibo people?

[1] A. E. Clayton, 'The Parting of the Ways', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1900), pp. 22–3.

[2] C.M.S. G3/A3/1901/9, Dennis to Baylis, 9 January 1901.

12 · The Colonial Impact on Society: The Scope of Government

'The main point in all practical governments is the revenue & taxes.'
—Turner to Moor, 18 May 1897.[1]

The position of the colonial government in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was essentially paradoxical. On the one hand, as we have seen, its military strength was far greater than that of any Ibo polity, a discrepancy due partly to the disparity between their military technologies, but far more to the difference in political scale, a theme to which we shall return. But although the government's resources were sufficient to win any specific conflict, and an 'outrage' was always punished with draconian severity, it was shown repeatedly that although it could punish risings it could not prevent them in the first place, and its resources were insufficient to effect major changes in the lives of the people under its rule. The memoirs of Iboland's early administrators always stress the basically precarious nature of their situation. The man who was District Commissioner at Bende in 1905 wrote, 'To the north and north-east the limits of my District were undefined, and also I could go only about eight miles or so in that direction, unless I had a numerous escort, and that was just then not available.'[2]

The colonial administration was limited in its personnel and in its financial resources. The revenue was raised entirely from customs, and fluctuated from year to year, with the state of trade. Moreover, customs were kept low to avoid protests from traders' pressure groups in England. Economy was a prime virtue in a Governor, and when Egerton succeeded Moor in 1904, and added to his predecessor's passion for military campaigns an equally expensive passion for

[1] N.A.I. Calprof 6/1/3, Turner to Moor, 18 May 1897.
[2] Hives and Lumley, pp. 22–3.

railways and telegraphs, he incurred stringent criticism from the Foreign Office.[1]

The numbers of its European staff were limited. Political Officers (District Commissioners, as distinct from Marine and Forestry Officers, and so on), numbered sixty-nine in 1904–5, and the Colonial Office frowned on Egerton's pleas for an increase.[2] The number was further limited in practice by annual leaves in England and frequent sick leave, and inevitably reduced the Government's real impact on the areas it theoretically controlled. As Egerton complained:

> Past experience has proved that law and order cannot be maintained in territories newly brought under control; unless they are frequently visited by European Officers. The present districts are too large to allow of this being done—especially in the absence of roads; this has been proved over and over again by the necessity of sending military forces time after time into the same district.[3]

Partly because of their limited resources, these early colonial administrators had limited aims. Their primary aim was to expand the area under their jurisdiction until it reached the boundary of another colonial jurisdiction. In areas already conquered, they sought to extend trade, and to maintain 'law and order'. They sought to extend trade—the source of their income, and the fundamental reason for the colony's existence—in many ways, ranging from exhortation to the improving of communications. But the total economic impact of colonialism had many facets, and was different in many ways from administrators' intentions. It forms the theme of a subsequent chapter.

The preservation of 'law and order' had two main aspects. The first of these was the suppression of conflicts between Ibo groups. The nature of colonial apologetic—which suggests that pre-colonial Iboland was in a state of bloody anarchy—need not blind us to the real benefits that were conferred here. Some Ibo groups probably suffered more from Abam raids than they did from British military expeditions. The second facet lay in the suppression of practices which the British considered inhuman—human sacrifice, infanticide, and, more hesitantly, slavery.

[1] C.O. 520/43, memo. by C. S[trachey] on Egerton's estimates in Egerton to Elgin, 5 January 1905.
[2] C.O. 520/29, memos. on Egerton to Lyttelton, 21 January 1905.
[3] C.O. 520/29, Egerton to Lyttelton, 21 January 1905.

The abolition of these practices necessarily imposed some temporary injustices—in the sudden change of values which transferred a man offering the highest sacrifice to God he knew, into a murderer. But the results were incontestably good. British rule came as a liberation to whole classes of unfortunates who had long lived in the shadow of death—old women accused of witchcraft, or slaves, waiting for the day when they would be sacrificed. (But to keep our perspectives accurate we need to remember that in the sixteenth century, English Catholics and Protestants calmly butchered each other, that the last trial of an English witch was in 1702, and that even Victorian England, with its many capital offences and its martyred child factory hands and chimney sweeps did not lack its human sacrifices.)

The government's attitude to the institution of domestic slavery was half-hearted and ambiguous. Hesitation over the slavery issue was one of the reasons why the area was declared a Protectorate, rather than a Colony. It was reluctant to abolish slavery, as it existed in the House system, partly because it feared the spectre of social dislocation, and partly because the Delta chiefs were among its most staunch collaborators. Both MacDonald and Moor praised the system, and the joys of slavery, in terms which could scarcely have been bettered by a slave owner. In 1901 a piece of legislation abolished the formal status of slavery, but was notable mainly for the concern it manifested to maintain the reality of the *status quo* and the privileges of chiefs as much as possible.[1] The Government's first act after passing the Proclamation was to suppress a rising among nine hundred slaves at Calabar. Moor rejoiced that the Proclamation gave him the legal power to do so, for otherwise 'no doubt the disease would have spread and thousands upon thousands of boys of all the coast tribes would have run away calling themselves free'.[2] But the love of freedom was a disease too contagious to be suppressed by government action, and the attempt to preserve the fossilized forms of inequality when the social situation which produced them had gone was foredoomed.

The shortage of European staff, and the lack of finance to recruit more, led the Protectorate officials to rely very heavily on African

[1] C.O. 520/14, Moor, 'Memorandum concerning the Aro Expedition', 24 April 1902, folios 371–3.
[2] *Ibid.*, folio 373.

agency. Iboland's new rulers in no instance spoke the language of those they sought to rule. Egerton, whose previous experience was in Asia, was struck by the fact that 'European Government Officers are almost entirely ignorant of the native languages' and by its consequence—'all communication with the natives governed having to be carried on through the medium of Interpreters'.[1]

African agency was employed in a number of different institutional forms. As elsewhere in Africa, a system of Indirect Rule was adopted (to retain the capitals acquired in the decades when the concept became canonical). Indirect Rule did not necessarily mean the retention of traditional institutions of government. All African forms of government were changed to a greater or lesser extent by colonial rule. They had evolved to fulfil needs and purposes which were not those of colonialism. Even those which apparently suited its purposes best—such as the great Emirates of northern Nigeria—were changed by the colonial context, where ultimate authority lay with the colonial master.

The many small polities of Iboland were singularly ill-adapted to the needs of colonialism, or of any modern bureaucratic state, both because of their large number and their small scale, and because of the nature of their political institutions. These were designed to obtain the maximum participation of all citizens in decision-making, while giving due weight to wisdom and experience. This is one of the central preoccupations of the European political tradition, but one remote from the concerns of Iboland's colonial rulers. So Indirect Rule, in Iboland, took the form of new institutions—Native Courts. Their personnel, Warrant Chiefs, had no equivalent in traditional society.

The prototype of the Native Courts can be found in the Governing Councils established by Johnston in 1887.[2] They fell into disuse when he left the Delta, but were revived by MacDonald. MacDonald originally intended that these institutions of colonial rule should apply only to foreigners, and that the local people should continue to govern themselves in traditional ways.[3] His successor, Moor, at first regarded them as a rationalized form of traditional government,

[1] C.O. 520/24, Egerton to C.O., 14 April 1904.
[2] F.O. 84/1881, Johnston to Salisbury, 16 March 1888.
[3] F.O. 84/2111, MacDonald to F.O., 21 May 1891.

where the local people could be taught the art of self-government[1]—as if this was a skill lacking among the Ibo and their neighbours! But before his term of office came to an end, he had realized that the Native Court system was in fact a radical departure from traditional forms of government:

> Practically all the systems of the natives have to be done away with. I call them systems for want of another word, but it would be more accurate to say that their want of system and method has been done away with and native Government organised among them.[2]

Often, though not invariably, the Warrant Chiefs were not the traditional elders of a town. These tended to suspect the Greeks bearing gifts, and put forward junior members of the community, or even slaves.[3] Thus the elders of Onicha-Olona politely declined, when the office of Warrant Chief was offered to them.

Yet their abuse of office, which was to become legendary in the colonial period, was perhaps due less to their inexperience than to the novelty of their roles. Positions of responsibility of traditional society were surrounded by a network of duties, expectations and obligations. These were known both to the incumbent and to society as a whole. If he failed to fulfil them, he would feel the weight of popular disapproval, and the community could apply various sanctions against him. The Warrant Chief filled a new role, upon which traditional practices could shed no light. He was responsible, less to the community he served, than to the colonial master, who alone had power to dismiss him. It was perhaps inevitable that the Warrant Chiefs tended to use their positions for personal aggrandizement. In a world of rapid change, of conflicting values and of manifold uncertainties, perhaps personal prosperity seemed the one thing certain.

These abuses were becoming apparent even in the period covered by this study. In 1899 it was reported that 'The Native Courts are not in a satisfactory condition. The money is unaccounted for and I have

[1] F.O. 2/85, Moor to F.O., 25 December 1895.

[2] C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 8 August 1902.

[3] There is much evidence of this. Cf., for instance, R.H., MS. Afr. s. 1152, Bain, note on Warrant Chiefs interleaved after diary entry for 25 February 1924; MS. Afr. s. 1068, R. A. Stevens, 'Preface', folios 12–13.

strong reasons to suspect that justic is sold to the highest bidder.'[1] The 1904 rising of the Ekumeku was occasioned by the malpractices of these courts.[2]

Because European officials did not speak Ibo, and few Ibo spoke English, those who controlled the channels of communication came to wield great power. The most important agents of communication were the Government Interpreters, whose role was self-explanatory, and the Court Clerks. The power of the Court Clerks arose from the fact that they were usually the only members of a Native Court who spoke and wrote English, and from being the servants of the Courts, and the recorders of their proceedings, they easily became their masters. These and other clerical staff were originally recruited from Lagos, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone, but the proportion of local personnel increased rapidly. By 1904, 129 out of 409 Africans employed by the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria as Court Clerks, clerks, interpreters and copyists were natives of it.[3]

The rulers of Southern Nigeria were well aware of the power in the hands of these intermediaries, and their often corrupt use of it. Egerton wrote in 1905 'that great injustice frequently occurs owing to the ignorance of European officers of the native languages and the consequent blackmailing of natives by the official Interpreters and Police who are the sole medium of communication between European and native'.[4] But frequent changes of posting, and the intrinsic difficulty of mastering a complex and little studied tonal language, continued to dissuade all Europeans but missionaries from learning Ibo.

The response of the Ibo people to this impasse was to learn English, in the persons of some, at least, of their children. The autobiography of Eke Kalu gives an interesting case study of this process:

> There was in Ohafia one Vincent, a Seirea [*sic*] Leonean, who was the Native Court Clerk. He was extremely wicked in his dealings

[1] C.O. 444/1, Roupell to Moor, 20 May 1899, encl. in Moor to C.O., 14 June 1899.

[2] C.O. 520/24, 'Report on the Rising of the Ekumeku Society', encl. in Egerton to C.O., 22 May 1904.

[3] C.O. 520/16, Moor to C.O., 28 November 1902, and encl.; C.O. 520/24, Minute from H. Bedwell to Egerton, 3 May 1904, encl. in Egerton to C.O. 7 May 1904.

[4] C.O. 520/30, Egerton to C.O., 4 May 1905.

with Ohafia people . . . My people wanted a way out of such persecution and my advice to them was to open a school, educate their children who, knowing what the clerk knew, could better challenge him and his successors.[1]

Another group of powerful intermediaries were the police and Court Messengers. The latter had the duty of serving court summonses, but had many of the characteristics of military police. In 1907, there were 222 police in the Central Division, 75 of them Ibo.[2] These groups, too, were accused of corruption and extortion. As one Divisional Commissioner wrote:

I regret to have to state that I fear Police and Court Messengers are themselves the primary cause inmost [*sic*] instances of the mal-treatment they have received on more than one occasion at the hands of the natives . . . they demand women and interfere with plays etc. During my journeys through the country constant, I may say incessant complaints are brought to me of the way Police and Court Messengers behave in a town when on Government service.[3]

Those who did not succeed in obtaining these privileged posts, turned, on occasion, to creating them for themselves. In the early years of colonial rule, Iboland was overrun with impostors, who claimed to be government officials, and used their alleged authority as a basis for extortion.[4]

It is only just to note that corruption was not confined to Africans. One of the most senior British officials in the Protectorate, who later became a well-known writer on African affairs, was dismissed in 1902 for his depredations. 'Towns round Asaba now make it a custom, when they hear Major Leonard is coming, to lock up their goats.'[5] But this was exceptional. British officials were usually protected by their substantial salaries and the relative poverty of their subjects

[1] *Autobiography of an Illustrious Son, Chief Eke Kalu of Elu Ohafia, Owerri Province* (Lagos, 1954), p. 8.

[2] C.O. 520/47, Thorburn to Elgin, 15 July 1907.

[3] C.O. 520/24, Annual Report, Cross River Division, year ending 31 March 1904.

[4] Hives and Lumley, p. 111. F.O. 2/179, Lewes to Resident, Benin City, 28 March 1898 (copy). C.O. 520/47, Annual Report on the Eastern Province for the Year 1906, pp. 2–3.

[5] C.O. 520/13, Moor to C.O. (Confidential), 18 March 1902, encls.

from such temptations, and their characteristic failings lay in other directions.[1]

Since no direct taxes were levied, many Ibo first experienced the direct impact of colonialism in the form of a tax levied as labour. No aspect of colonial rule was more resented than forced labour in road-making, or as carriers on military expeditions. Asaba oral traditions relate how men would flee into the bush to escape duty as carriers—often in patrols against their neighbours and allies, and at risk of their lives. An official described how the first coal samples were brought to the Niger from Udi. 'Personally, I cannot imagine anything more inconvenient than a fifty-six pound bag of coal on one's head, on a hundred mile walk.'[2]

The use of forced labour to construct roads was often justified in terms of the Ibo traditional practice of entrusting public works to age groups. But there was a great difference between carrying out projects discussed and approved by the community, in traditional ways, and the often arbitrary and excessive demands of the new régime. H. M. Douglas won praises for his road-making achievements around Owerri—but he also won the name 'Black Douglas' and the reputation of 'a hard man'.[3] A District Officer in western Iboland so exasperated the local people by his excessive exactions of forced labour that he was put to death. A Colonial Office official summed up the incident:

> It is clear that Mr Crewe Read both flogged the Chief of Agbor and other persons ('the flogging,' says Sir W. Egerton, 'is absolutely indefensible') and oppressed the natives of his district by exacting (in the foreman's words) 'a great deal of absolutely unnecessary and even useless work. Thereby he provoked a rebellion —nothing else could be expected—and brought about his own death and the death of a number of those who rebelled and attacked him.[4]

This was doubtless an extreme case—but his superiors had had nothing but praise for the officer concerned until his death provoked an inquiry.

[1] But for British corruption when these conditions were lacking, cf. the plunder of Bengal by the East India Company in the eighteenth century.

[2] R.H. MSS. Afr. s. 375, G. Adams, 'Five Nigerian Tales', fol. 7.

[3] C.O. 520/31, Egerton to C.O., 16 July 1905; Cudjoe, p. 150.

[4] C.O. 520/37, memo. by S.O.[livier], 4 Dec., on Egerton to Elgin (Confidential), 3 November 1906.

The roads built brought much benefit to Iboland—a theme to which we shall return—but the first observable impact of colonialism was often that of forced and hated labour.

We have seen how the combination of government needs, missionary interests, and the demand of the Ibo people themselves led to the rapid growth of a mission-run educational system, but that by 1906 it was still geographically limited, touching only a tiny minority of Iboland's children. The number of schools and scholars was to grow rapidly in the future, but throughout the colonial period it remained true that only a minority of the Ibo children attended school, only a few primary school-leavers won secondary school places, and only exceptionally did secondary school graduates win their way to any further form of education. Nationalist movements sprang in part from the frustrations this engendered—the bitter consciousness of wasted talents and unattainable opportunities. And the characteristics of Nigerian education in the colonial period remained fixed in the pattern they had formed by 1906—the near monopoly of the mission societies, the inadequate involvement of the colonial government, which ran too few schools itself, and gave insufficient subsidies to the mission schools, and the low level of the latter—due largely to inadequate funds.[1]

In some parts of Africa, educators, by concentrating on the sons of chiefs, helped to perpetuate the inequalities of traditional society. This was not the case in the more egalitarian societies of Iboland. Sometimes indeed the reverse was the case—the wealthy were contented with their position in life, and with a similar role for their children, and it was the unfortunate, with little to lose, who embraced Western education most enthusiastically. Even when it was recognized that a town's welfare demanded the education of some of its members, it happened on occasion that 'it at once became important that all places should be filled by the children of those who mattered least'.[2] Sometimes it was the young who recognized the significance of the new developments most clearly, creating something of a conflict of generations.[3]

[1] For the subject matter of this paragraph, cf. Otonti Nduka, *Western Education and the Nigerian Cultural Background* (Ibadan, 1964); James S. Coleman, *Nigeria Background to Nationalism* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1965, reprint), ch. 5.

[2] Easterfield and Uku, *West African Review* (January 1953), p. 50.

[3] C.S.Sp. 192/B/VI, Shanahan to Neville, 20 September 1912. Cf. Ojike, pp. 40–44, 62–6.

But although the schools did not perpetuate old inequalities, they laid the foundations of new ones. Within Iboland, as within Nigeria, some towns acquired better schools, and some acquired them earlier. Since education was the main, though not the only[1] highway to wealth, security and influence, it created new and damaging discrepancies both between communities and within them. These inequalities, on a national scale, remain an enduring problem of independent Nigeria—in the persons of the countless individuals and the whole regions which the lack of Western education has condemned to poverty.

A Nigerian historian has said with justice that the most enduring and significant legacy of colonialism in Africa are its boundaries.[2] The small scale of Iboland's face-to-face democracies has many advantages for their members, but it placed them at a hopeless disadvantage *vis-à-vis* a modern bureaucratic state. The threat of foreign invasion was not sufficient to overcome the incorrigible locality of the heart's affections, but the experience of colonial rule, and the spread of education, was to lead to the creation of large-scale political organizations which were in their turn to overthrow it.[3] In a sense, the problem of scale has been the central problem of modern Nigeria, and despite the tragic and devastating conflict it gave rise to, it is true that one dimension of its history in this century is that of emancipation from the limitations of small-scale polities.

[1] Cf. the great wealth of some illiterate women traders.

[2] J. F. Ade Ajayi, 'The Colonial Episode', in L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *The History and Politics of Colonialism 1870–1914* (Cambridge, 1969).

[3] The question as to how far nationalist movements were in fact responsible for the overthrow of colonialism is an interesting one which lies beyond the scope of this book.

13 · The Colonial Impact on Society: The Economy

> 'There are few I find who want really to do anything for Africa but many who want poor Africa to do much for them.'
>
> —Moor, in 1898.[1]

Historians differ greatly in their economic interpretations of colonialism. To some, the colonial era was an Age of Improvement. It increased the volume of a colony's international trade, and established the infrastructure for economic growth. It involved 'A vast transfer of human and physical capital to Africa . . . a host of new economic, medical, social, and administrative techniques.'[2]

Others regard colonialism as primarily a vehicle of economic exploitation. They emphasize the colony's dependence on the metropolis, its powerlessness to alter terms of trade in its own favour, its characteristic and dangerous dependence on one or two major exports—typically raw materials. They point to the continued drain of capital from the underdeveloped world, which is thought to condemn it to a vicious circle of continued poverty and exploitation.[3]

Which of these models is true of the Ibo experience? It is a question which cannot be fully answered in this study. The colonial impact had scarcely begun in 1906, and a full examination of its many ramifications must await a subsequent volume. Nor can it be realistically divorced from the twentieth-century economic history of Nigeria as a whole. But despite these caveats, certain characteristic patterns can be already seen emerging by 1906.

[1] F.O. 2/179, Moor to Farnall, 16 May 1898.

[2] L. H. Gann and Peter Duignan, *Burden of Empire. An Assessment of Western Colonialism South of the Sahara* (London, 1968), p. 371.

[3] For a typical model, cf. A. G. Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America* (New York, 1967). For a summary of the theory, with full bibliographical notes, cf. Gavin Williams, 'Social Stratification of a neo-colonial economy: Western Nigeria', in Christopher Allen and R. W. Johnson (eds.), *African Perspectives. Papers . . . Presented to Thomas Hodgkin* (Cambridge, 1970).

The basic pattern of Iboland's economic relationship with Britain had been established, as we have seen, in the nineteenth century. Iboland exported a narrow range of raw materials—mainly palm products—in return for various manufactured consumer goods. This was to remain their characteristic relationship through the colonial period.

Another typical aspect of Nigeria's economic history in the colonial period had nineteenth-century roots—the tendency of European firms to combine in ever larger and more powerful amalgamations which exercised enormous influence over Nigeria's economic life. We have seen the various amalgamations which led to the creation of the Royal Niger Company. In 1889 a number of firms trading in the Delta combined to form the African Association. In 1900, both these giants signed a price-fixing agreement with the two other major companies in the area. The African and Eastern Trade Corporation was formed by the amalgamation of the African Association, Miller Brothers, and other firms, and in the 1920s, both the Niger Company and the African and Eastern were absorbed in the giant Unilever complex.[1]

This process of amalgamation and monopoly meant that the economic life of a colony was effectively controlled, not by officials, whether in Lagos or in London, but by a huge international combine, with financial resources greater than the typical colonial government. By 1907, the basic pattern of Nigeria's economic life was well established, and was described by an astute observer:

> It must be noted that Imports to this part of Africa are not regulated by ordinary laws. There are big 'Combinations' in the trade, and expansion in the accepted sense is hardly admitted. The imports are comprised principally of the same class of goods year after year. If prices rule high for produce in European Markets this does not tend as in most countries to further development of the country that the produce comes from.[2]

Government officials often commented on the poor quality and range of the goods imported[3]—a feature which had always been characteristic of the West African trade. More seriously, these imports tended to undermine traditional manufactures, and inhibit

[1] Wilson, I, 180; '40 Years of UAC', *West Africa* (26 April 1969).
[2] C.O. 520/47, Annual Report on the Eastern Province for the Year 1906.
[3] F.O. 2/180, Niger Coast Protectorate Annual Report, 1897–8.

their development. This was explicitly recognized and sought after. 'Part of the problem . . . is to divert the supply of cotton from the Nigerian hand-looms to the power-looms of Lancashire.'[1] And then as later, observers noted the firms' reluctance to make more than the minimum investment in the country. 'The tendency in the past', wrote Moor in 1902, 'has certainly been to "suck the orange", employing the minimum of capital, putting nothing into the development of the country . . . and taking everything possible out of it.'[2] He pointed out that this tendency was intensified by the way trade was conducted. Agents were appointed for one or two years, and drew their income largely from commission. Inevitably, they showed little interest in the development of the country, or even in the long-term expansion of their own trade.

The peasant collector of palm products had no bargaining power against these economic giants, and little defence against the fluctuations of international trade. Nor did the government intervene to redress the balance. Scholars have often commented on the remarkable degree of economic freedom permitted to these combines. In the Depression years, an Awka palm oil middleman 'enquired whether it would not be possible for the firms to give longer notice to bush producers about [price] fluctuations. He was informed that the control of price fluctuations was scarcely within the province of Government . . .'[3]

But to see these external economic forces in perspective, we must remember that Iboland remained an overwhelmingly subsistence economy. In 1906, one could have removed all European trade and all European products without seriously affecting the people's way of life. This remained true through the colonial period, though the role of the cash economy grew progressively larger. Habit turns luxuries into necessities, and social change created new necessities, such as the payment of school fees. Cash for these purposes was obtained by the sale of palm products, by internal trade, or by migration to the towns in search of work. But even in the 1940s, Iboland remained essentially a self-sufficient agricultural economy.

We have seen that in traditional Ibo society there was a high

[1] Alan McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1926), p. 49.

[2] C.O. 520/15, Moor to C.O., 21 September 1902.

[3] N.A.E. Awdist, 2/1/42, Deposition of David Nwume before John Ross, 9 April 1931.

degree of geographic mobility, and that internal migrations had the effect of maintaining the ecological balance between population and resources. The imposition of colonial rule, in Iboland as elsewhere, froze settlement into the patterns which existed at that moment. This created pockets of great discontent and hardship.[1] In some areas, intense population pressures, which could no longer be relieved by internal migration, forced many to leave the land and settle in towns.[2] This is one of the causes of that Ibo Diaspora, both to other parts of Nigeria and to other African countries, which is so striking a feature of their twentieth-century history.

The economic impact of colonialism was never, of course, uniform. In any colonized country, one finds internal patterns of underdevelopment and development. It creates new regional inequalities. The crucial determinants of a particular area's fortunes lay only partly in its natural resources of climate, soil and mineral wealth. They lay also in administrative decisions—especially in the choice of administrative centres and communications routes—and in the pattern of the expansion of European trading firms to the interior. Despite their initial hesitations, this last was an inevitable and irreversible process. It rendered the middleman role of the Delta states obsolete and ruined them, as their peoples had always known they would. The men of Arochuku, similarly, with their oracle destroyed and their trade routes falling into desuetude, faced the same unpalatable alternative—to emigrate in search of work, or to stay home, to face increasing economic stagnation.[3]

For some towns, on the other hand, colonialism led to new economic opportunities. This was especially true of towns such as Owerri and Aba, which were chosen as administrative centres, for commercial firms tended to concentrate near government stations, and they often became nodal points in the communications network.

The sites chosen by the commercial firms for their factories also became the focus for new economic opportunities. The change has been well described by an Ibo historical geographer:

> For the inland peoples the European factories represented a new experience. They were permanent centres and offered daily

[1] Cudjoe, p. 153.

[2] Cf., for instance, R.H., MS. Afr. s. 699. Bridges, Intelligence Report on the Uguawkpu Group, Awka Division, 24 March 1934.

[3] Easterfield and Uku, *West African Review* (December 1952), p. 1365.

> opportunities for exchange. . . . With their great advantages of opportunity and frequency these centres and their associated markets grew rapidly at the expense of the traditional markets.[1]

The function of bulking oil for these inland factories created a new type of middleman role. These new middlemen acted not as the rivals of the expatriate firms, but as their subsidiaries. On the Niger, the role was typically filled by women until the Depression years.[2]

One of the most truly revolutionary changes lay in the improvement of communications, which did much to rewrite the economic geography of Southern Nigeria. As in other colonies, the key decisions were often made rapidly and arbitrarily, despite their momentous long-term implications.

The Selborne Committee, appointed in 1898 to report on various schemes for the amalgamation of Nigeria, assumed that the Niger would remain the main artery of Nigeria's trade, and recommended that it should be linked by rail to Kaduna in the north.[3] But already the construction of a railway north from Lagos had begun, which, although it was not realized for a time, committed the government to its further extension, to the reconstruction of Lagos harbour, and to the choice of Lagos as the political and commercial capital.[4] Both Moor and Egerton advocated a railway through Iboland, and Egerton went as far as having the route surveyed, but the Colonial Office vetoed the plan on grounds of expense. 'Southern Nigeria simply cannot afford to build this railway as well as the extension to Oshogbo and beyond.'[5] There was truth in the sentiment often expressed by officials working in eastern Nigeria, that its amalgamation with Lagos in 1906 meant its subordination to the latter's economic interests.[6] Finally, during the First World War, the need

[1] Ukwu I. Ukwu, 'The Development of Trade and Marketing in Iboland', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (June 1967), pp. 658–9.

[2] Basden, *Among the Ibos*, p. 194; F. Ekejiuba, 'Omu Okwei, The Merchant Queen of Ossomari, A Biographical Sketch', *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* (June 1967), p. 634.

[3] F.O. 403/269 (F.O.C.P.), Selborne, Report of the Niger Committee, 4 August 1898. Alternative southern termini suggested were Lagos, Warri, Sapele and Asaba.

[4] Cf. Antony Gerald Hopkins, 'An Economic History of Lagos 1880–1914' (London Ph.D. thesis, 1964), pp. 374–5.

[5] C.O. 520/7, Moor to C.O., 25 April 1901; C.O. 520/43, Egerton to Elgin, 26 February 1907, and C.O. memos.

[6] C.S.Sp. 192/B/V, Shanahan to Superior General, 21 January 1908.

to exploit the Enugu coal fields gave Iboland its railway. The stations along its route were known locally as 'beaches'—an interesting and significant metaphor.

By 1906, much had been done to clear Iboland's rivers, which were often blocked by snags and fallen trees. The Enyong Creek was cleared, and at once became a flourishing commercial waterway,[1] and similar operations followed on the Imo River, its tributary the Otamiri, and on the Sombreiro River.[2]

Road-making was an activity beloved of Governors and District Officers. To the former it offered a greater measure of political and military control, and an expansion in trade. To the latter it promised more tangible results than their other main responsibility, 'the maintenance of law and order'. By 1905, so much progress had been made that it was possible for Egerton to travel from Lagos to Calabar by bicycle.[3]

These roads brought many advantages to Iboland. They vastly expanded the volume of her internal trade. They helped break down the particularism which divided her polities. As early as 1905 it was noted that improved communications were breaking down the differences in dialect which mirrored this.[4] It emancipated the carriers who had transported goods along the trade routes on their heads, and the pullaboys who had paddled the great trade canoes, with little hope of improvement in the laborious conditions of their lives. On the other hand, as we have seen, they were built by exactions of forced labour which bitterly offended many of the peoples concerned.

The colonial government was anxious to reform Iboland's traditional currencies. The various forms of these—manillas, brass rods and cowries, had the disadvantage of bulk, which made them unsuitable for large-scale transactions. The problem had been greatly exacerbated by the gross inflation caused by unrestricted imports of cowries by European traders in the nineteenth century.[5] Great

[1] C.O. 520/14, 'Political Report in connection with the Aro Field Force Operations'. C.O. 520/24, Annual Report on the Cross River Division for the Year ended 31 March 1904.

[2] C.O. 520/25, Fosbery to Egerton, 27 May 1904, encl. in Egerton to C.O., 27 May 1904.

[3] C.O. 520/31, Egerton to C.O., 16 July 1905.

[4] 'Report of Ibo Language Conference held at Asaba, 14 Aug., 1905', in *Western Equatorial Africa Diocesan Magazine* (1906), p. 75.

[5] Marion Johnson, 'The Cowrie Currencies of West Africa: Part II', *The Journal of African History* (1970), pp. 337 ff.

efforts were made to replace traditional currencies by British coinage, but there was much resistance to the change, and the use of traditional currencies survived in local transactions for many years to come.[1]

The critics of colonialism tend to dislike the word 'infrastructure' because it implies a creative element they are reluctant to recognize in the colonial experience. Yet it seems to the present writer that colonialism had both a creative and destructive face. To neglect either, may facilitate the construction of theories of persuasive brilliance and internal coherence. It does not necessarily facilitate the recovery of historical truth.

> Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
> Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.
> Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact.[2]

The basic pattern of Iboland's economic relationship with Europe was fixed by 1906. The dependence on a single primary product for export, the excessive power of large commercial combines were already manifest. As usually though not always the case in West Africa, the basis of all production remained the peasant, engaged in subsistence agriculture and collecting and processing palm products for export. Iboland's climate, geography and dense population saved her from the fate of a country like Kenya. Though the occasional European, enchanted by a particularly pleasant upland prospect, sometimes envisaged it covered by European farms, there was no serious threat from potential white settlers. The Ibo suffered in some ways from colonialism. They did not, like the Kikuyu, become trespassers on their own land.

The real danger to Iboland was not white settlement, but the establishment of large-scale commercial plantations, on the south-east Asian model, where the Ibo would have played the role of labourers. This was prevented by the colonial government's refusal to grant these firms freehold or long leases. In 1898, a timber and rubber company sought territorial concessions, and Moor, then on leave, opposed it vehemently, with the words which form the epigraph of this chapter: 'There are few I find who want really to do anything for Africa but many who want poor Africa to do much for

[1] Basden, *Niger Ibos*, pp. 336–7.
[2] Robert Graves, *Broken Images*.

them.'[1] Some years later, William Lever, the architect of a gigantic manufacturing empire, tried to obtain territorial concessions to establish palm plantations in Nigeria. He was unsuccessful, and had to turn to the Belgian Congo to obtain the concessions he wanted.[2]

[1] F.O. 2/179, Moor to Farnall, 16 May 1898.
[2] Wilson, I, 165 ff.

14 · Colonialism: Some Patterns of Ibo Responses and Initiatives

'But I tell you my lord fool, out of this nettle, danger, we pluck this flower, safety.'

—Shakespeare, *Henry IV Part One*, II, 3.

It has been one of the major achievements of African historiography in recent years to recognize that colonial conquest and colonial rule were not simply experiences imposed from without, which the African peoples passively accepted. As we have seen in this book, both the conquest and colonial rule of Africa, as well as much missionary and trading activity, were carried out largely by the agency of Africans. Both colonial conquest and colonial rule were experiences to which a great variety of response was possible. The nature of these responses formed a dialectic with the colonial presence, to determine much of its actual impact on the lives of Africans.

Ibo resistance to the spread of colonial rule was never a uniform phenomenon. Different societies—and individuals within societies—made different decisions at different times. Some did not resist when colonial rule was first imposed, but did so after a time, when its true significance was more apparent. Some wished to resist, but were dissuaded by the fate of their neighbours. As the ruler of the small western Ibo state of Issele-Uku put it, if Benin could not resist the British successfully, it would be madness for him to attempt to do so.[1] Others were dissuaded by some spectacular demonstration of British military technology.[2]

Others decided that their interests—as individuals or as communities—were best served, not by resisting the new power, but by

[1] J. Spencer, 'A missionary tour to the towns west of Asaba', *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1898), p. 97.

[2] Steel, p. 443. Cf. Dilim Okafor-Omali, *A Nigerian Villager in Two Worlds* (London, 1965), pp. 73–4.

co-operating with it. Historians tend to call those who responded in this way 'collaborators', though the term has pejorative overtones which are inappropriate.

Most towns, and most individuals, were at times resisters, and at times collaborators. The full gamut of responses possible within a single town will only become fully documented after the completion of more local case studies. And the attitudes of individuals were not, of course, immutable, but were themselves the product of experience, and modified, sometimes profoundly, by subsequent experience. Time could and did turn the resister into a collaborator, the collaborator into a resister.

The basic postulate of the collaborator was that colonialism was irremovable. In 1904, a missionary made an interesting comparison between the hopeless risings of the western Ibo and the attitude of the neighbouring Afenmai, who were equally hostile to colonial rule, but realized that they could not overthrow it, so 'seek to extract from it all possible profit'.[1] Some years later, an Ezza chief asked an interpreter if there was any way of getting rid of the white man. The reply was, 'Impossible, the white man has come to stay as long as men lived.'[2]

Some scholars have made a fruitful distinction between two types of positive response to the colonial situation.[3] The first may be called that of the manipulators. They did not welcome colonialism as a source of change, and they did not master the skills it brought, such as those inculcated in Western education. They recognized that the colonial government had become incomparably the most important element in the new power equation, and allied themselves with it, either to strengthen their position in their own community, or to strengthen their own town *vis-à-vis* others. 'The use of schools as weapons for the chiefs to fight with among themselves'[4] was a phenomenon colonial officials regularly recognized and deplored.

Often, in the period with which we are concerned, the manipulators came from the frontiers of Iboland. Although colonial rule was to ruin the Delta states, some of their rulers drew a temporary advantage from it. The classic instance was the Efik, Chief Coco Bassey,

[1] Strub, in *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1905), pp. 42–3.
[2] Cudjoe, p. 159.
[3] Cf. John Iliffe, *Tanganyika under German Rule* (Cambridge, 1969), pp. 146–9.
[4] N.A.E. Aw. 20, D. O. Awka to Bubendorff, 30 June 1917.

who guided British policies on the Cross River so effectively that when he was ill, a British official confessed his astonishment that he could manage without him! When he died, the British paid him unreserved tribute:

> The late Chief Coco Bassey during his lifetime kept these troublesome tribes in order with a tact and wisdom unusual in an African—to appreciate the work he did one need only glance at the terrible state of disorganisation consequent on his death.[1]

The Warrant Chiefs, too, were essentially manipulators, seeking power and influence in the traditional community, albeit by new means.

Another type of manipulator can be found among men who were either themselves the products of Western education, or who were its strong supporters, but who sought traditional positions and goals. Samuel Okosi, who became Obi of Onitsha in 1900, and reigned until 1931, was a man of this type. In the late nineteenth century, he was one of the few Ibos who were literate in English. He was at first an adherent of the C.M.S., but joined the Catholic Church in 1895 and became a catechist. He then became a candidate for the Obiship, and was elected after a long dispute, as a result of government intervention. His reign, though long, was a troubled one. He disappointed the missionaries by adopting polygamy. He antagonized many Onitsha by the irregularity of his election—for another candidate had a much stronger claim. 'The fact of his Catholic religion greatly reduced his traditional prestige. In the later years of his reign he destroyed some of the essential regalia of his cult and his sovereignty.'[2]

By co-operating with the colonial power, the manipulators sought to control and direct its impact. They fulfilled its requirements—supplying labourers for public works and avoiding, at least in public, practices known to offend British susceptibilities. For the rest, they continued much as before. We have studied this response as personified in those of positions of authority. But it was the response of the great majority of the Ibo people throughout the colonial period, though the careers of those who welcomed change have overshadowed their obscure and unrecorded lives.

[1] F.O. 2/180, Gallwey to F.O., 10 October 1898; C.O. 444/1, Roupell to Moor, 20 May 1899, encl. in Moor to C.O., 14 June 1899.

[2] R. W. Harding, 'Report on the Onitsha Obiship Dispute' (Enugu, 1963), p. 24. This report gives the best summary of Okosi's career. There is also much contemporary material in the C.M.S. and C.S.Sp. archives.

The other positive response has been called that of the 'improvers' —though the phrase incorporates a good many value judgments. To the improvers, colonialism was a source of new opportunities. They were determined to master the skills which were the basis of the white man's power, and ultimately used these skills to overthrow him. This response 'implies the belief, unquestioned at this time but later to be challenged by radical nationalists, that there was no conflict between personal and social improvement, that the man who won advancement for himself thereby won a victory for his people'.[1]

Later nationalists undervalued the improvers for a time largely because they tended to be divorced from their own cultural heritage. The very process of mastering Western education, with its concomitant of adopting, in various degrees of sincerity and zeal, the Christian religion, inevitably involved some divorce from traditional society. These early pastors, catechists, clerks and teachers often symbolized the divorce by the enthusiastic adoption of European dress and baptismal names. Later when the passage of time made both education and Christianity into a secure inheritance, new possibilities of creative synthesis became possible. But even at the time of greatest cultural estrangement, many traditional African values continued to flourish—especially, perhaps, in that generous and self-sacrificing concern for the welfare of the extended family and of the whole town which financed the education of so many Ibo children, and underpinned the activity of so many community development associations.

By 1906, the age of improvement was still in its infancy in Iboland. There was no equivalent to the educated Yoruba community in Lagos—whose prior access to education was to be evident for several decades more. There were, however, some pioneer Ibo 'improvers'—who usually came from the frontiers of Iboland. The early catechists, studied in a former chapter, belong to this category, as do the C.M.S.' first ordained Ibo clergymen, George Nicholas Anyegbunam and David Okparabietoa Pepple. An outstanding example was Isaac Okechuku Mba, educated in Onitsha and Lagos. He was a loyal and able C.M.S. agent, in charge of the station at Alenso, until they had the folly to dispense with his services. He then joined the service of the Niger Coast Protectorate, where he was

[1] Iliffe, p. 166.

criticized only for his zeal in continuing, on a voluntary basis, his missionary work.[1]

We can find a prototype of the later innumerable improvement associations as early as 1905. When Egerton visited Onitsha, he noted:

> Met the Youngmen's Association—they ask for a Government school—they only have a membership of 14 youngmen of Onitsha at present. They have been educated in the various Mission schools. Many of them are small traders . . .[2]

What circumstances led certain Ibo to join the ranks of the improvers? Opportunity was an important factor—Onitsha had had fifty years of missionary and educational work when other Ibo towns had never set eyes on a European. Often the young responded eagerly to change, while the old remained indifferent. But often it was an unpredictable result of an individual's predilections and personality. Uku of Arochuku, whose father died young, observed that 'I have sometimes wondered whether my father would have decided to make use of new opportunities, perhaps becoming a warrant chief, or whether he would have resisted change.'[3]

The reasons that led men to become Christians were similarly complex and various. To the missionaries, there was no problem of explanation—it was simply a case of light shining in darkness. Many early conversions, as we have seen, resulted from the missions' charity to the needy. Later, the missionary monopoly of education gave them an opportunity to influence many of Iboland's children at a crucially impressional age. To many, education and Westernization were aspects of the same phenomenon. This is not to say that their adoption of Christianity was insincere. And the eclecticism which often characterized them—many became polygamists, and consulted diviners in time of trial—marks, less the superficiality of their conversion, than their profoundly religious outlook, suspended as they were between two possible world views.

There were many converts who were neither indigents nor improvers. An outstanding example was Alexander Ubuechi of Issele,

[1] For the circumstances of his resignation, see C.M.S. G3/A3/1890/132. Cf. F.O. 2/63, MacDonald to C.M.S., 10 March 1894.

[2] C.O. 520/31, Egerton to C.O., 16 July 1905.

[3] Easterfield and Oku, pp. 1365–6.

a man who has attained most of the leading roles available in traditional society. He was a skilled craftsman, a diviner, and a titled man. One day he attended a Catholic church casually, and was electrified by a sermon on hell. He became a Christian, dismissing three of his four wives, and enduring much petty persecution. He attended church twice daily, succoured the sick and destitute, and held a class for catechumens. When he died in 1903, the missionaries acclaimed him as a saint.[1]

Iboland's confrontation with an alien culture, its conquest, and the experience of alien rule, created a spiritual and intellectual crisis—a phase of that history of thought in Africa which still awaits its historian. The missionary presence—and the success of British arms, with which they were inevitably associated—challenged the inherited certainties of traditional religion—

> Government is teaching now
> Saying that Chukwu
> Is not fixed to a spot;
> That where we go to consult Chukwu
> Is a fake . . .
> And we cannot tell
> Whether they are telling the truth
> Or deceiving us.[2]

In a recent brilliant essay, the spread of Christianity—and, elsewhere, of Islam—has been explained as a dimension of that enlargement of scale we have already had occasion to refer to. The remoteness of the traditional High God, and the active role of lesser spirits, reflected the essentially local nature of traditional life. As the walls protecting the microcosm dissolve, local spirits lose their validity.[3] Only the High God remains

> Eterne in mutabilitie.

The presence of mutually antagonistic missionary societies created its own problems. An individual's denominational loyalties were usually decided by chance—the denomination of the school he

[1] *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1905), pp. 21–9.

[2] Reflections of Ezenwadeyi of Ihembosi, recorded by Fr. Raymond Arazu. C.S.Sp., September–October 1966 (MS. in his possession).

[3] Robin Horton, 'African Conversion' *Africa* (April 1971), pp. 85–108.

attended, or the mission established in his area. Some were seriously troubled by their respective claims. We have a record of one village schoolmaster's adventures in comparative religion:

> When I was taking up my scholars in lesson there we read in history about Henry the VIII. How he on account of wife established a new church on earth which was known to be the C.M.S. After school I call the scholars to my house—that I think we have found out the true Church.[1]

Angst and religious uncertainties were not necessarily resolved by adherence to a Christian denomination. Many concluded that in a time of change it was safest to keep to the traditions of the past. In 1904, we read of a revival of traditional religion in one area, the reconstruction of its long neglected groves and shrines.[2] The most common solution was perhaps that of eclecticism—a personal synthesis of elements of the old and new.

Religion was of course only one dimension of these uncertainties. The overthrow of Iboland's polities, the power of the Oyibo with his different values and irresistible technology, the rapid rise of those with skills which could be utilized in the new system—all these seemed to throw the entire inherited order into question. Traditional society was based on a network of commonly accepted values, duties and expectations. Now the fabric was threatened. The first major novel by an Ibo—Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*—derived both its title and its epigraph from the imagery of a European poet.

> Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
> Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.

And if these intangibles of inner experience are more readily captured in the poet's or the novelist's imagery, they belong, nevertheless, as much as palm oil exports or road construction, to the realities of the historical past.

[1] *The African Missionary* (November–December 1921), p. 116.
[2] *Niger and Yoruba Notes* (1904), p. 53.

Epilogue:
The Colonial Balance Sheet

'. . . there is nothing either good or bad, but thinking makes it so.'
Hamlet, II, 2.

We have reached the date chosen, arbitrarily enough, as the terminal one for this study. It might well end there, but it seems appropriate to consider briefly the total significance of the story it has related in detail.

It is now unfashionable for historians to construct balance sheets. The historical relativism which is a widespread orthodoxy among non-Marxist historians precludes this. The past, it is claimed, must be understood in terms of the values current at the time. To pass moral judgments on it is thought to show the absence—to the point of naïveté—of historical understanding.

But historical relativism is never uniform or absolute. No one feels precluded from passing moral judgments on Belsen. If we avoid passing moral judgments on the more remote past, we are in danger of becoming unwitting apologists for its vices, follies and crimes. This is seen clearly in some recent studies of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. It is seen, equally, in any study of the industrial growth of Britain or America, which ignores or minimizes the colossal suffering and injustice which accompanied it.

It seems to the present writer that historical relativism leads to a kind of moral and intellectual bankruptcy. The historian must condemn every manifestation of man's inhumanity to man, both as it existed in the past, and as it continues among us in the present.

If we attempt to evaluate the gain and loss of Iboland's relationship with Europe in the period covered by this study we are confronted at once with the colossal debit of the trans-Atlantic slave trade. We must consider the countless Ibos who died during capture, or during the Middle Passage, and the countless others forced into

slavery and exile in the New World. We must consider, as well, its corrupting effect on Ibo society, and on the lives of those who remained. No historical experience is totally destructive. Some states, especially in the Delta, rose through the slave trade to wealth and power, though their rise, perhaps, contributed little to the happiness of their inhabitants. But a society which can gain foreign exchange only through enslaving and selling its inhabitants is doomed. Nor, as we have seen, were the goods imported in return of a kind to offer new possibilities of economic growth.

In the middle of the nineteenth century, the picture changes. The external slave trade dies, although parts of its evil heritage continue. Iboland, through her exports of palm products, becomes essentially a dependent monoculture, contributing one of the many commodities needed by industrial Europe. Much has been written on the dangers of this dependence, on the economic insecurity it engenders, on the threat it poses for the state's ultimate political autonomy, on the obstacles it creates for development, and on the basically unfavourable character of the exchange. Having said this it is essential to emphasize that the power of external economic relations to aid or injure Iboland were limited. The export sector remained an enclave in an overwhelmingly subsistence economy.

Many historians have no difficulty in assessing the total significance of the colonial experience. To Marxists, and others on the left, colonialism was purely and simply the vehicle for economic exploitation. Apparently creative aspects—such as education and the construction of communications—are dismissed, either because of their inadequacy, or because of their subordination to the political and economic needs of the colonial power. To others, the benefits brought by colonialism are so evident that to ignore them seems a curious and wilful doctrinaire blindness.

It seems to the present writer that colonialism, as it affected the Ibo people, had both creative and destructive elements. Its total impact on them, in the period under discussion, was limited—both by limitations of personnel and resources, and by administrators' essentially conservative aims. It was mediated largely through the agency of Africans. There is no way in which we can counterbalance the violence with which it was imposed, and the internal violence which it often ended. There is no way to compare the injustices it ended—the fate of slaves and witches—with the new injustices it

created. The vast polarity between rich and poor, between the man in a Mercedes, and the man who trudges in the roadside dust, is essentially the artefact of colonial rule. The communications revolution emancipated the pullaboys. But the roads were built by forced labour in an atmosphere of bitter resentment. For some, colonialism proved the pathway to glittering educational and economic opportunities. Some live much as their fathers did, but with a new sense of their poverty, for deprivation, as the sociologists remind us, is a relative concept.

Both for the prosperous and the poor, colonialism undoubtedly meant an Age of Anxiety, a period of *angst*, when values were wrenched and dislocated. The period of witchcraft trials is gone. But belief in witchcraft continues, and perhaps increases.

'I do not know the method of drawing up an indictment against a whole people.' It seems necessary to apply Burke's salutary agnosticism to the whole institution of colonialism.

One must apply it, equally, to the individuals who came to Iboland, whether from Britain or from Sierra Leone. We have lingered over the struggles of the missionaries, whose endeavours loom large in this study. Some condemn them for their undoubted paternalism. I have chosen to emphasize their equally undoubted altruism and self-sacrifice. But in any case, their impact on Iboland was slight—a few small congregations in a handful of centres.

No generalization can be wholly true of the trading companies and the traders. Sometimes—both in the Delta and on the Niger—the main impression is one of corporate rapacity and individual brutality. But the profits of the oil trade were made in England, and the local agents, as a genre, deserve neither praise nor blame, in their efforts to wrest a livelihood from tedious work in an unhealthy country. Most of them are now forgotten, though Charles de Cardi, the author of a celebrated ethnographic monograph, and Captain Boler, who managed to win the esteem both of Mary Kingsley and the missionaries, have escaped, justly enough, from time's oblivion.

Iboland's administrators came to Africa in search of change and adventure, or in pursuit of a career they had been unable to make elsewhere. Their writings mirror their inflexible sense of caste, their incomprehension and disdain for the people they ruled—sometimes, indeed, to the point of Kipling's imagery—'half devil and half child'. But if one speaks to their collaborators from the colonial

period—the policemen, clerks and school-teachers, who are now elderly pensioners—one finds, both the recognition of this sense of hierarchy, and generous admiration for their pursuit of justice, and hatred for corruption. Whatever the limitations of their outlook, it is not a bad memorial.

In 1906, the colonial experience was just beginning. It was destined to last less long than a single lifetime. To understand its true significance for Iboland, it is necessary to take the story further, and study the decades which remained until Nigeria regained her independence, in 1960. This, it is hoped, will form the subject matter of another book.

A Note on Archival Sources

London

THE PUBLIC RECORD OFFICE

Until the 1880s, the voluminous material in the relevant volumes of the series F.O. 84 is concerned mainly with the Delta, and to a lesser extent, with the Niger. Thereafter, there is more material on Iboland. From 1899, the series C.O. 444 and C.O. 520 contain much material on Ibo history.

There is much material, especially on the Royal Niger Company, which survives only in Confidential Print. Confidential Prints are cited under their Public Record Office volume numbers (F.O. 403).

The following volumes were consulted:

F.O. 84
Volumes, 775, 816, 858, 920, 950, 975, 1001, 1030, 1061, 1087, 1117, 1161, 1163, 1164, 1249, 1277, 1278, 1290, 1308, 1326, 1343, 1351, 1356, 1377, 1401, 1418, 1455, 1487, 1498, 1508, 1541, 1569, 1593, 1617, 1634, 1654, 1655, 1659, 1660, 1661, 1682, 1683, 1685, 1692, 1697, 1698, 1701, 1702, 1748, 1749, 1828, 1880, 1881, 1882, 1939, 1940, 1941, 2019, 2020, 2110, 2111, 2112, 2193, 2194.

F.O. 2
Volumes 50, 51, 62, 63, 64, 83, 84, 85, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 121, 122, 123, 177, 178, 179, 180.

F.O. 403
16, 18, 19, 20, 31, 32, 33, 34, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 122, 131, 132, 133,

149, 171, 178, 187, 200, 215, 216, 217, 233, 234, 248, 249, 250, 267, 268, 269.

C.O. 444
Volumes 1, 2.

C.O. 520
Volumes 1, 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 24, 25, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 35, 36, 37, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50.

THE CHURCH MISSIONARY SOCIETY ARCHIVES (C.M.S.)

From the foundation of the Niger Mission until 1881, outgoing letters and journals are filed under the names of individual missionaries, under the general classification CA3. The largest and most valuable series is that filed under the name of Bishop Samuel Crowther, CA3/04. Some of the material is available, with minor emendations, in printed form, in *The Church Missionary Intelligencer* and *The Church Missionary Record.*

From 1881 onwards, the entire outward correspondence of the mission is filed year by year, the letters of each year being numbered consecutively, under the general classification G3/A3. A series of Precis Books provide useful summaries, and, on occasion, the gist of a missing original.

The journal *Niger and Yoruba Notes*, begun in July 1894, and its successor (from July 1904), *Western Equatorial Africa Diocesan Magazine*, contain much valuable additional material.

Oxford

RHODES HOUSE (R.H.)

Material relevant to this study is to be found scattered through a number of manuscript collections.

(1) The archives contains a large collection of letters, memoirs, reports, etc., by colonial administrators in Africa. I consulted the files of all those who worked in Iboland, but have made little use of them in this study, because most date from a much later period.

Their practical value to historians is also lessened by the fact that many documents cannot be quoted without permission. The following are cited in this study:

MS. Afr. s. 783, Box 3, H. F. Mathews, 'Discussion of Aro Origins'.
MS. Afr. s. 697, A. F. B. Bridges, 'Report on the Oil Palm Survey'.
MS. Afr. 87, vols. 4, 10 and 18 (re Royal Niger Company).

(2) *The Lugard Papers*

These refer mainly to northern Nigeria and to East Africa. The following volumes, however, contain valuable data on the Royal Niger Company: MS. Br. Emp. s. 57, 58.

There is a little material on Southern Nigeria in MS. Br. Emp. s. 73–7.

(3) *British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society and Aborigines Protection Society Papers*

There is some relevant material in MS. Br. Emp. s. 22 G 18.

Paris

THE ARCHIVES OF THE HOLY GHOST FATHERS (C.S.SP.)
(consulted by permission)

There is very full material on Ibo history in the sections 191/A, 191/B and 192/B, each of which comprises numerous files.

The society's own journal, *Bulletin de la Congregation*, written by hand until 1888, also contains much valuable material.

Rome

THE ARCHIVES OF THE SOCIETY OF AFRICAN MISSIONS (S.M.A.)
(consulted by permission)

The following files proved a valuable source for the history of the western Ibo (the Niger Mission was called, rather misleadingly, 'Haut Niger'):

14/80302, Letters, mainly from Head of Mission to the Superior General.

14/80303, Letters and Reports from the missionary holding the office of Visitor in the mission.
14/80404/15794, Strub, 'Le Vicariat Apostolique . . . jusqu'à nos jours' (1928).
14/80306 mainly concerns the mission's finances.
14/80307, Reports to Association de la Propagation de la Foi.
2.E.30, Pellet's journals of visits to S.M.A. missions, 1904–5.

These should be supplemented by *L'Echo des Missions Africaines de Lyon* (1902 on) and *The African Missionary* (1914 on) (Irish province). Further material on Catholic mission work can be found in the general periodicals *Annals of the Propagation of the Faith* and *Les Missions Catholiques* (English version, *Illustrated Catholic Missions*).

Ibadan

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (N.A.I.)

(1) *Calprof* (*Calabar Provincial Office papers*)
Official correspondence to and from Consuls, High Commissioners, District Officers, etc., from the 1840s to 1906. A much less complete collection than the dispatches in the Public Record Office, with their numerous enclosures. Part of the material duplicates that in the Public Record Office, in which case I quote from the Public Record Office document. There is a considerable amount of additional material in the Calprof series—e.g. correspondence with commercial firms, and neighbouring colonial jurisdictions—but it proved of little value for this study.

(2) *C.S.O.* (*Records of the Nigerian Secretariat, Lagos*)
A very large collection, of great value for the colonial period, but containing little that is relevant to this study. C.S.O. 1/13–16 comprises dispatches to and from the Foreign Office and Colonial Office, from this period, but is much less complete than the material in the Public Record Office. The Intelligence Reports on various Ibo groups, compiled by British District Officers in the 1930s, and filed under C.S.O. 26, proved of the greatest value for this study, both for a group's traditions of origin, and for the events of its later

history. Copies of some of these Reports are also found in the National Archives, Enugu—in which case I quote from the Ibadan version of a document. A few are also to be found elsewhere—e.g. the reports on the Aro in Rhodes House Library, Oxford. They are indexed in L. C. Gwam, 'A Preliminary Index to the Intelligence Reports in the Nigerian Secretarian Record Group' (1961).

IBADAN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

The Fombo Papers

These comprise a typescript history of Bonny, based on oral tradition, and typed transcripts of a number of valuable documents preserved locally in Bonny and elsewhere, plus several photograph albums. The photographs are largely the work of J. A. Green of Bonny, who died in 1904, and are a most valuable record of social history.

Enugu

THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES (N.A.E.)

These also contain a number of Intelligence Reports, some of which are indexed in Mbah, 'A Preliminary Index to the Intelligence Reports in the Enugu Secretariat Record Group' (1962). Others are listed in the handlist to the Records of the Provincial Office, Onitsha. The other categories of record in these archives are valuable mainly for a later period than that covered by this book. They include the Records of the Secretariat, Enugu (C.S.E.), the Records of the Provincial Office, Onitsha, and papers from the District Offices of Awka, Udi and Okigwe. C.S.E./1/86 contains a few earlier documents.

A List of Books Cited

This is not intended as a full bibliography. It facilitates the identification of works referred to in footnotes, which, after the first reference, as listed under the author's name only (plus a contracted title in the case of several works by the one author). With one exception, it excludes the voluminous material cited from nineteenth-century periodicals and newspapers, to which each reference is given in full.

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